

Levenhagen Update

October 2023

Thoughts from Aaron

Fearless

Recently I was curious about some of the most common fears or phobias. A quick search yielded a list of the top ten fears held by adults. There were all the usual suspects: spiders, snakes, public speaking, death. We all have fears, and, in many ways, they can dog our lives. It was once said that "Fear is a phoenix. You can watch it burn a thousand times and still it will return." And yet, to every single fear...every single time they rear their ugly heads, Jesus says: "*Do not be afraid.*" Unbelievably, it's the most common command in all of Scripture, spoken more than any other. I counted over 100 times that some version of the command, "Don't be afraid" appears in the pages of Scripture. In Matthew 10, Jesus told His disciples not to be afraid 3 times in just 6 verses (Matt. 10: 26, 28, 31).

To put this in context, Jesus called His twelve disciples together and made them His official representatives by giving them "*authority*" to heal the sick, cast out demons, and even to raise the dead (Matt. 10:1). He told them that He was sending them into the world like sheep among wolves (Matt. 10:16). The message for the disciples—and for us—is clear: persecution is not merely possible, it is inevitable.

They're going to be put on trial, flogged in synagogues, and dragged before government leaders (Matt. 10:16-17). The Gospel is going to cause friction, strife, rejection, and betrayal in families—brother against brother, parents against children, and children against parents (Matt. 10:21). And just to leave no doubt on this point, Jesus says, "*You will be hated by everyone because of Me*" (Matt 10:22a NIV). Why? Because the Gospel tells people that they're stuck in a sin-soaked mess of their own making, that they're helpless and need rescue and Jesus is the only an-



Above: Faculty processing into the Chapel of St. Timothy and St. Titus for the Opening Service for the 2023/2024 Academic Year

Prayer Requests

- **Aaron & Jill** – leading the family well during this season of so many transitions. For wisdom and patience as the placement process begins. For Aaron's preparation for the four weeks of certification exams beginning in late October.
- **Nathan** – for God's peace and companionship to be with him as he deals with the loneliness of being away at college while trying to make friends.
- **Faith** – that her first year of high school will continue to go well, and that God will prepare and protect her in the midst of the transitions that lie ahead.

"The LORD is with me; I will not be afraid. What can mere mortals do to me?"

(Psalm 118:6 NIV)

Thoughts From Aaron (con.)

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swer. People aren't going to be happy to hear that. Apart from the work of the Holy Spirit, we want to live according to our own desires and wisdom (LC II 38; John 6:65; Rom. 8:7; Eph. 2:8-9; 1 Cor. 2:14; 12:3). Isn't that what we see all around us these days? Everyone chasing their own desires and doing whatever seems right in their own eyes. The world is always going to resist the Gospel and hate those who bear it because it shines a light in the darkness, and they don't like what that light reveals.

Faced with that kind of response, Jesus urged His disciples to develop endurance. He said, *"The one who endures to the end will be saved"* (Matt. 10:22b ESV). That statement lands a little funny on our Lutheran ears, doesn't it? Enduring to the end is not a means to earn salvation; it is, however, a byproduct of a truly devoted life.

So, what did Jesus identify as the key to enduring until the end? You guessed it: *"Do not be afraid"* (Matt. 10:26, 28, 31). Jesus gave the answer not once, but 3 times along with 3 reasons why we should be fearless: (1) the truth will come out; (2) our eternal destiny is secure; and (3) we are valuable to God.

First, Jesus said not to be afraid because the truth will come out in the end. *"The time is coming,"* Jesus said, *"when everything that is covered will be revealed, and all that is secret will be made known to all"* (Matt. 10:26 NLT). Eventually the opposition to Christ will be revealed as false. The truth will be broadcast universally. One day as the prophet said, *"the glory of the LORD will be revealed, and all people will see it together"* (Isa. 40:5 NIV) when *"at the name of Jesus every knee [will] bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father"* (Phil. 2:10-11 NIV84).

The second reason Jesus gave to not be afraid is related to the first. We can be fearless because our

eternal destiny is secure. If persecution puts our lives at risk (Matt. 10:21), we might be tempted to abandon our mission out of fear. But Jesus called us to show courage in the face of persecution, saying: *"Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell"* (Matt. 10:28 NIV). Our Heavenly Father has power over both our physical lives and spiritual lives. When He placed His name upon you in Baptism, it was an announcement to all of earth, heaven, and hell, "This one is Mine. I claim him as My own. I claim her as My own." For that reason, no matter what this present life holds, there is always a promise of resurrection to eternal life lying before us in the world to come. It's as King David wrote in the Psalms: *"The LORD is with me; I will not be afraid. What can mere mortals do to me?"* (Ps. 118:6 NIV).

The third and best reasons to be fearless is because you are valuable to God. *"Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father's will. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows"* (Matt. 10:29-31 NKJV). In Jesus' day, sparrows were the cheapest living things used for food—two for a copper coin—insignificant and basically worthless. And yet God takes note of the death of every single one. Even beyond that, at any given moment, our Heavenly Father knows the number of hairs on your head. (For some that may offer more comfort than for others!) but the point stands: God is aware of the intimate and perfect details that He Himself created and you are of tremendous value to Him. Nothing is happening to you or those you love apart from His knowledge and sovereign will. You do not need to be afraid—even if you are persecuted, suffer, and die. God sees. God knows. And He says, "Do not be afraid."

There is one more reason to press on without fear

Thoughts From Aaron (con.)

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that I haven't mentioned yet. Jesus said, *"Whoever acknowledges Me before others, I will also acknowledge before my Father in heaven"* (Matt. 10:32 NIV). Try to imagine the scene on that great Last Day as Jesus stands before His Father saying: "I know her" ... "He belongs to Me." The same One who commanded us not to be afraid is the same One to whom all authority in heaven and on earth has been given (Matt. 28:18). His promises stand no matter what may come. He will never leave us or forsake us (Heb. 13:5). Christ is at our side to strengthen us, to encourage us, to bind our wounds, and to cast out all fear.

CLASSROOM CORNER

Academic & Field Work Update

Here's a quick update on my current coursework and the placement process:

The Seven Ecumenical Councils – this full-semester course is taught by Rev. Dr. Joel Elowsky and is a study of the disciplinary canons, creeds, figures, and doctrines of the seven ecumenical councils from Nicaea I (A.D. 325) to Nicaea II (A.D. 787). We give special focus to how the decisions of these councils shaped the doctrine of the church. It's fascinating to learn about how the key doctrines of the Trinity and the creeds themselves were developed.

The Roman Catholic Reformation – this half-semester course is taught by Rev. Dr. Gerhard Bode and is a review of reform movements in the Roman Catholic Church before the 16th century culminating in the Council of Trent. It is a unique opportunity to look at what was going on behind the scenes in the Roman Catholic Church at the same time that Evangelical/

Protestant Reformation was underway. We're reading a lot of primary source documents, such as *Spiritual Exercises* by Ignatius of Loyola.

Leading by Preaching – this post-vicarage homiletics elective explores how pastors might use the sermon to lead Christ's people for mission, developing new ministries, financial stewardship, healing after turmoil, or other situations in the life of the congregation. This class is taught by Rev. Dr. Benjamin Haupt. The seminar format where we talk through issues in a roundtable format is a useful way to workshop both sermon ideas but also to hear different perspectives on how one might be an effective servant leader through different congregational challenges.

The Gospel of John – the name kind of gives away the surprise...this class is a full-semester study of the Gospel of John with Rev. Dr. Jeffrey Oschwald. This class is linked to our weekly Greek Lab. In addition to studying the Gospel account, we're preparing for our fourth-year certification exams in Greek vocabulary and grammar/syntax required for certification for ministry.

Psalms – taught by Rev. Dr. Adam Hensley (a new professor recently arrived from Australia), this class both the literary, textual, and devotional aspects of the psalms. This class is linked to the weekly Hebrew Lab where we are doing a deep dive on a text from 1 Kings and preparing for our fourth-year Hebrew exams required for certification for ministry.

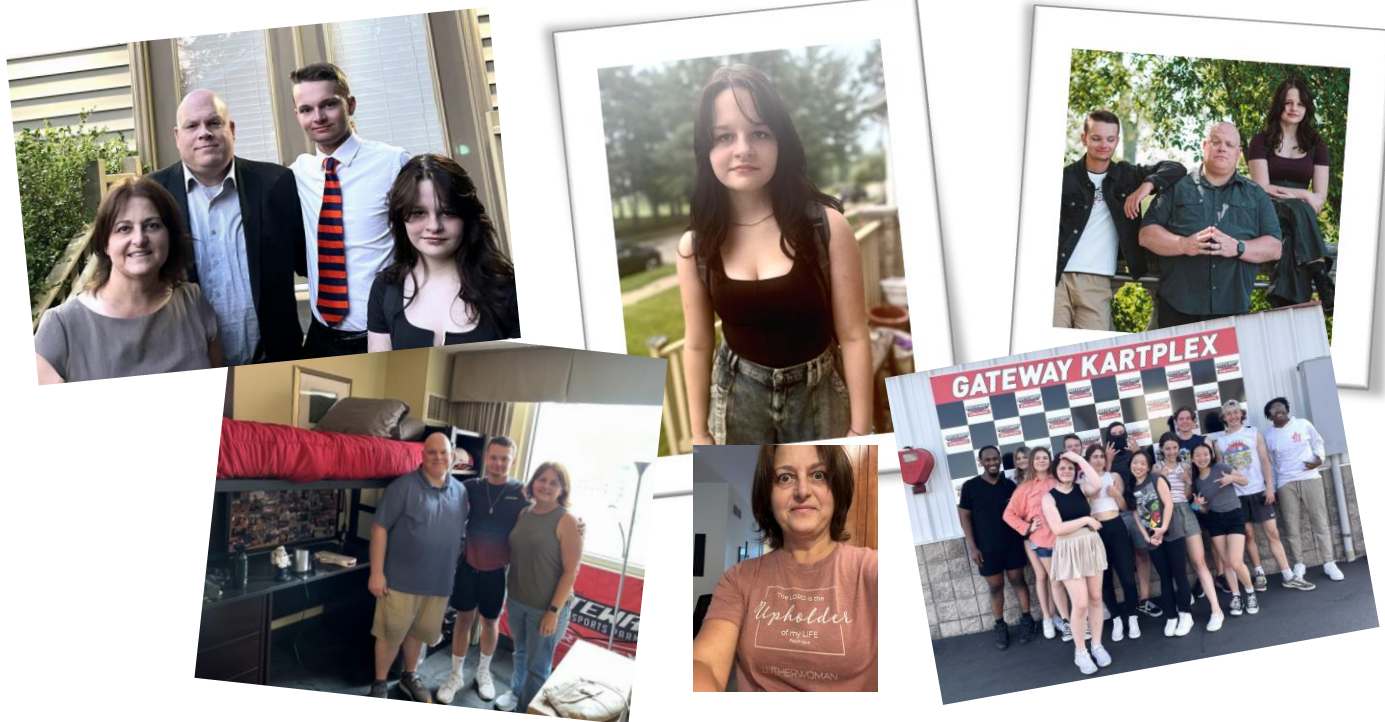
In addition to these classes, I'm continuing meetings with my mentor Dr. Dale Meyer and working hard preparing placement documentation. The preparation for Call Day has already begun!

Family Update

Jill has been working hard with a team of ladies to launch a new ministry called *LutherWoman*. It was born out of desire to reach twenty- to forty-year-old women both within and outside the LCMS. It's not intended to compete with other vibrant LCMS organizations like the LWML, but rather to reach woman who might be at a different stage of life or might otherwise be slipping through the cracks or disillusioned with church in general. Right now, they've launched a website and a series of blogs along with other forms of digital content. Ultimately their vision is for podcasts and even regional retreats to help connect these women to the life of the church. *LutherWoman* launched in early September, so it's very new. It can take a lot of perseverance to start anything new like this, but it's exciting to see how this team of women have developed this shared vision to serve other women who might not be reached by some of the other Lutheran auxiliaries. Check them out on the web or your favorite social media platform.

Faith is in her first year at Clayton High School. For those of you keeping score, this is her third school in the last four years, and she begins this year knowing that another transition awaits next year. So far, she seems to be doing really well and is making some good friends. She's enjoying some of the unique classes she gets to take like theater/dramatic arts and culinary arts. She auditioned for the school musical and will be in the ensemble for their upcoming production of *Sweeney Todd*. She loves spending time with friends and her cat, Bebe.

We're all adjusting to life without Nathan at home. He has moved back to Indianapolis to study Motor-sports Engineering at Purdue University-Indianapolis. He's adapting to all the new experiences that college brings—from roommates, to dorm food, to self-laundry—all while keeping up with his class load and working a lot of hours at a local indoor go-kart track. We're proud of all his accomplishments but miss him terribly.



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