



Sharing with you my heart . . .

Just as long as I believe in Jesus

“Jesus said, ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life.’”
John 14:6

Dear Baptized in Christ,

Have you ever heard anyone say, “Well, as long as we just believe in Jesus, it doesn’t matter what else we believe?” This is called Gospel Reductionism. It’s a big word that carries with it some big baggage.

Here’s how Gospel Reductionism sounds:

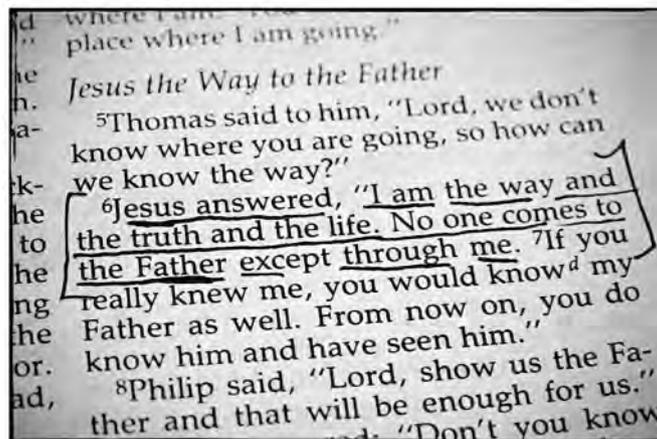
- ▶ “It doesn’t matter if I believe in creation or evolution — as long as I believe in Jesus.”
- ▶ “It doesn’t matter if women are ordained into the ministry or not — as long as I believe in Jesus.”
- ▶ “It doesn’t matter if there really is a hell or not — as long as I believe in Jesus.”
- ▶ “It doesn’t matter if marriage is between two men or two women — as long as I believe in Jesus.”
- ▶ “It doesn’t matter if babies are aborted or not — as long as I believe in Jesus.”
- ▶ “It doesn’t matter if I believe the whole Bible is true or not — as long as I believe in Jesus.”
- ▶ “It doesn’t matter if Jesus is truly present in Holy Communion or not — as long as I believe in Jesus.”

When you hear statements like this (innocently or on purpose) — this is called Gospel Reductionism. It reduces the Christian faith and the Gospel itself to this wrongly simplistic understanding that as long as we believe in Jesus, it really doesn’t matter what else we believe.

This is a deadly understanding of the Christian faith. Whenever the Bible and its teachings are compromised, the very person and work of Jesus Christ is compromised, and thus is the Gospel itself.

Consider Creation and Evolution

John 1:1-3 is quite clear that Jesus is God, and as God He is indeed the creator of the world. As God, the second person of the Holy Trinity, Jesus created the world in six 24-hour days. Gen. 1:1 tells us that



“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.” To say “I believe in Jesus,” one must then deny evolution and hold to the Scriptures, which teaches creation alone. It is this same Jesus, then, who recreated fallen man through His own death and resurrection.

Consider Women’s Ordination

God makes Himself known in the

second person of the Holy Trinity as a male, Jesus Christ, a son born of Mary. This is profoundly consistent with the Order of Creation, as God creates the male to be the spiritual overseer of women and children. This is not something man usurps, but it is a holy office God bestows on the male.

In His earthly ministry, Jesus called males to be His disciples, who then became apostles. The office of the holy ministry is an apostolic male office of Christ, where the pastor is called to be the overseer of the bride of Christ.

Holy Scripture knows nothing else than males filling the office of the public ministry, such as 1 Tim.

3:1-2, and 2 Tim. 2:2, 15. To say, “as long as I believe in Jesus,” and then hold to women’s ordination is to confuse, and even ignore, Jesus Christ and who He is as the overseer of souls and the bridegroom of the Church. And yet, as the Good Shepherd, Jesus calls male undershepherds to feed His sheep with His Word and Sacraments to care for their souls and life.

Consider Same-sex Marriage

Jesus is God. The Bible is God’s Word. Therefore, the Bible is the Word of Christ. Whenever God’s Word is altered, changed, ignored or re-interpreted, this is ignoring and re-interpreting the very Word of Christ.

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District News

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In John 5, Jesus says to the Pharisees, "You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; [but] it is they that bear witness about me." The entire Bible points to Jesus. Creation, the pastoral office, marriage and family — all of these find their root and meaning, their depth and understanding in Jesus Christ!

Romans 1 states that God "gives up" those who practice homosexuality, and He turns them over to their lust and impurity because "they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator."

To rationalize homosexuality is to rationalize Christ. To alter God's Word is to alter Christ (in one's mind). To say, "as long as I believe in Jesus" and yet reject God's Word concerning marriage and sexuality does not really believe in Jesus at all.

And yet, Jesus created man and woman to be one flesh in marriage, to be fruitful and multiply and to enjoy the companionship and help-meetness of one another. This same Jesus calls sinners to repentance, absorbs all sin into His own flesh and forgives those who believe in Him. This same Jesus gives strength and faith to those who continually wrestle with the temptations of this world and the sins of the flesh.

The point is this — every doctrine, every teaching, every portion, morsel and bit of Scripture ultimately is about Jesus Christ. To distort, confuse or reject even one part of Scripture is to ultimately distort, confuse or reject Christ Himself.

Martin Luther said, "I have also noticed that all error, heresy, idolatry, offense, misuse, and evil in the church originally came from despising or losing sight of this article of

faith in Jesus Christ. And if one looks at it correctly and clearly, all heresies do contend against this dear article of Jesus Christ" (Luther's Works 34:207-8, "Three Symbols").

Gospel Reductionism damages, harms and even destroys faith. This is, so to speak, a thread from every teaching and doctrine of Scripture to Christ Himself. When threads are cut and severed, one by one and more and more, eventually all of faith and life is severed from Christ Himself.

The Scriptures do not "reduce" Christ, but rather all of Scripture is filled with Christ.

All of Scripture leads us to the manger in Bethlehem and the baptismal waters of the Jordan River.

All of Scripture leads us to the Palm Sunday procession and to the Upper Room, where Jesus gives His Body and Blood for the forgiveness of our sin.

All of Scripture leads us to the Garden of Gethsemane, where Jesus prayed to drink the cup of God's wrath for our sin.

All of Scripture leads us to Pilate's throne, where God took our sentence of death in the cry to "Crucify Him!"

All of Scripture leads us to the cross of Calvary, where Jesus, the Scapegoat of our sin, is truly the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

All of Scripture leads us to the tomb of death, where in Holy Baptism we die with Christ.

All of Scripture leads us to the open tomb on Easter Sunday, where we rise with Christ, triumphant and victorious over sin, death and the devil.

And finally, all of Scripture leads us to our grave, where we will hear the voice of Christ pierce our vault as He summons us to arise and live

with Him forever in Paradise.

All of Scripture — it's every page, it's every teaching, it's every event, it's every doctrine — is about Jesus Christ, the great comprehensive Gospel of God! This is the Jesus who is indeed "the Way, the Truth, and the Life!" There's nothing "reductionism" about Christ — for all is fulfilled in Him, including the very salvation of your life and soul!



In the name of Jesus,
Rev. James Baneck
Galatians 2:20

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North Dakota District ...

this is **YOUR** news!

- ▶ Bible school
- ▶ Youth group
- ▶ Servant events
- ▶ Mission trips
- ▶ Outreach
- ▶ Retreats
- ▶ Anniversaries
- ▶ Awards
- ▶ Campus ministry
- ▶ Community events
- ▶ Camp events

We want to hear from
YOU!

Send photos, news items,
feature stories, new
subscriptions, etc.,
to Denise Wolfgram at
ndlcmssc@
midconetwork.com

WITNESS, MERCY, AND LIFE TOGETHER LUNCHEON EVENT

Human trafficking in North Dakota

- April 11
- 10 a.m.-2:45 p.m.
- Baymont Inn and Suites (Seven Seas Hotel), Mandan

Human trafficking is all over our news in North Dakota. The LCMS and LWML North Dakota districts invite church workers and lay members to attend a lunch workshop to be educated about human trafficking and how to respond to the victims.

We will begin in the Word with a Bible Study led by Rev. Dr. James Baneck, North Dakota District presi-

dent, followed by speakers Rebekah Marcis Grimm, a social worker with a passion for social justice, especially in regard to human trafficking, and Dawnya Underwood, assistant director for Children's Services of Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service. Through her social service experience, she ensures that the vulnerable are protected, embraced and empowered by just and welcoming communities.

There will be an ingathering of Walmart gift cards and gas cards to be used by pastors in the "oil patch" and a freewill offering for mites will

be taken.

Group transportation from Fargo is being arranged. Reservations are made on a first-come basis. For more information on transportation, contact Rhonda Hoge at hogegolf@cablone.net.

Registration forms have been sent to your congregation. Please respond to Nikki Tyrrell, LWML, at tyrrells@ndsupernet.com or 9290 34th St. SW, Taylor, ND, 58656

The cost is \$10, which includes registration and lunch.

Invite a friend to attend with you, and come ready for fellowship and an opportunity to learn and serve.



Giving Hearts program exceeds expectations

Grace Lutheran School, Fargo, is so very excited to announce the totals from Giving Hearts Day, sponsored by the Dakota Medical Foundation. Gifts given to GLS, through the "Giving Hearts" program in February, totaled \$26,105, exceeding the goal of \$25,000! The faculty and staff wish to express great thanks, as they are humbled and overwhelmed by the generosity of those who support Christian education in the Fargo-Moorhead community. Many, many thanks to all for your kindness.



Nistler is family ministry at Zion

Kristin Nistler was commissioned as the new full-time director of Family Ministry at Zion Lutheran Church, Bismarck, on Sunday, Feb. 22. May her ministry be a blessing to the Lord's work in Bismarck.

District News

Y.I. Club on a roll at MLS

Martin Luther School (MLS) in Bismarck started promoting the Lutheran Church Extension Fund's Young Investors (Y.I.) Club in the fall of 2014. Through the Y.I. Club, students learn how to be good stewards of the gifts God has given to them.

Principal Kathy Jones introduced the program to parents at the school open house and fall concert. Thursdays at MLS have become "YI Stamp Day," when students bring in money to purchase a stamp for their stamp collection card. Two parent volunteers help run the stamp booth from 8-8:30 am. Each dollar brought in is exchanged for a stamp to place on the child's card. When the card reaches 25 stamps (\$25), it is mailed to LCEF and the account begins gaining interest at 3.5 percent. Additional investments can also be mailed in at any time.

About 45 stamp cards have been started, and 25 students have filled up cards to send in. After complet-

ing the first card, students are given a yo-yo, compliments of LCEF, to encourage their participation in the program. Students have been so excited to bring in their dollars! The program has helped students at MLS learn to save money on a regular basis and understand more about stewardship.

Some of the staff members and parents have also started stamp cards/accounts for their infants, toddlers, high school-aged children to build the accounts for siblings of the elementary students. We also have grandparents and godparents contributing to student accounts.

Some of the other perks of the YI account include earning money for good grades and servant events. Students ages 7-18 can earn up to \$25 for good grades per year by mailing in their report cards and \$25 per year for completing service projects. Each participant is also



mailed a quarterly newsletter, which includes Bible activities, articles, updates and age-appropriate information about

stewardship. High school seniors who are YI investors can also apply for college "Take Heart" scholarships worth up to \$3,000. To find out more about the YI Club and how to start a program at your church or school, visit http://lcef.org/yi_club.

Schools or churches starting stamp programs can request information, posters, stamp collection cards, and prepaid envelopes free of charge. New programs even receive \$100 in free stamps with their first order! If you have questions about Martin Luther School's stamp program, please call 701-224-9070. If you would like help setting up a program, contact Kristin Nistler at 701-400-2069.



DCE Leising installed

St. Andrew Lutheran Church, West Fargo, had the privilege of installing Emily Leising as Director of Christian Education on Jan. 25. Emily recently graduated from Concordia University, Nebraska and had completed her internship at St. Andrew. She is a welcomed addition to the staff at St. Andrew and is pictured above with Rev. Adam Harvala, left, and Rev. Clark Jahnke. We welcome Emily to the North Dakota District!



DCE Koehler honored

During the North Dakota District Convention in Grand Forks in January, North Dakota District President Rev. Dr. James Baneck, left, recognized DCE Ken Koehler for his 40 years of service as the DCE of St. Andrew Lutheran Church, West Fargo. Pictured with Baneck and Koehler is LCMS President Rev. Dr. Matthew C. Harrison. We thank Ken for his dedicated service to our Lord!