
NEW LIFE IN CHRIST
SCRIPTURE: GALATIANS 3:28

What Were You Born?

There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.

Galatians 3:28

Some years ago, I met a man from a world as deeply divided as the one Paul lived in when he wrote his letter to the Galatians. Elias Chacour was then the head of one of the few schools in modern Israel that welcomed students from any ethnic or religious background. Jewish, Christian, Muslim, and Druze youngsters were invited to study side by side in Chacour's school in a Galilean village not far from Nazareth. Chacour himself was also a study in diversity. He was a Melkite Christian priest, an ethnic Arab, and an Israeli citizen.

One evening, as we sat outside and talked on his rooftop, Chacour said that in his world it was commonplace to ask someone when you first met, "What were you born?" The correct answer was something like, "a Melkite," or "a Muslim," or "a Jew." But Chacour said that when he was asked that question, he always answered, "I was born a baby." And then he threw his head back and laughed.

Teach us, God of all, that all your children share in your divine image. Amen.

Michael L. Lindvall, Fort Wayne, Indiana

SATURDAY, MAY 2, 2020

NEW LIFE IN CHRIST

SCRIPTURE: GALATIANS 5:1

Just One Rule

For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

Galatians 5:1

Paul wrote his letter to the Galatians to assure Gentile Christians that they were not bound to the old Mosaic law, with its many ritual and dietary restrictions, a system of rules he provocatively named “a yoke of slavery.” Yet Christians *do* observe rules for living, most notably the Ten Commandments. So the practical question becomes, “Just what biblical rules are we called to obey?”

One of the greatest Christian theologians of all time was the North African bishop Augustine of Hippo, who lived in the latter fourth and early fifth centuries. He wrestled with this very question in a sermon in which he said, “Love and do what you will.” What he meant—and what this means for us—is that all our choices about right and wrong should be filtered through the exceptionally fine filter of love. We can ask ourselves, “Would the loving thing be to do this thing or not to do it?” The discernment may sound simple, but it is, of course, extraordinarily demanding.



God of love, may we dare to love one another as relentlessly as you love us. Amen.

Michael L. Lindvall, Fort Wayne, Indiana

NEW LIFE IN CHRIST

SCRIPTURE: PSALM 31:1–5, 15–16

Guilt or Shame?

*In you, O LORD, I seek refuge;
do not let me ever be put to shame.*

Psalm 31:1

The psalmist prays that he never be “put to shame.” Please note—the psalmist did not pray that he would be found *guilty* of anything. We often use the words *shame* and *guilt* as if they mean the same thing, scolding a child with “shame on you.” Yet the deeper meanings of the two words could hardly be more different.

A prison psychologist once told me that most of the men he works with have one thing in common: they have been relentlessly “shamed.” He meant that they had somehow been told that they were unforgiveable and unredeemable. Shame knows no resolution. Shame lasts forever and becomes a part of who we think we intrinsically are. Guilt, on the other hand, is the simple reality that we all fall short. By the grace of God, we are nevertheless always forgivable. Guilt, unlike shame, finds resolution. Guilt is temporary, not an intrinsic part of who we are. We come to church on Sunday and acknowledge the reality of our guilt in the prayer of confession. That prayer says nothing about shame.



May we never shame one another or ourselves. Amen.

Michael L. Lindvall, Fort Wayne, Indiana

NEW LIFE IN CHRIST

SCRIPTURE: ACTS 7:55–60

Spirit Power

But filled with the Holy Spirit, he gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.

Acts 7:55

When Stephen faced a crowd angered by his declaration of faith in Jesus, he did not cease his witness. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, he looked to God and continued his brave proclamation of faith. Stephen did not do this on his own but by the power of God's presence with him.

A seminary professor of mine once defined the Holy Spirit as “the present tense of God.” Time and again in my life and ministry, I have felt unequal to some task before me. Maybe I was staring at a computer screen struggling with a sermon or preparing to attend a challenging committee meeting.

At times like this, I have found myself driven to pray for God's strengthening and empowering presence—the Holy Spirit—to do what I was called to do. Like Stephen, all of us often find ourselves “unequal to the task before us.” The promise is that we are not alone but that “God in the present tense” can empower us to do what we cannot do on our own.



Come, Holy Spirit, and enable us to do what we cannot do alone. Amen.

Michael L. Lindvall, Fort Wayne, Indiana

NEW LIFE IN CHRIST
SCRIPTURE: ACTS 7:55–60

Ego Martyrdom

*Then he knelt down and cried in a loud voice,
“Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” When
he had said this, he died.*

Acts 7:60

Stephen is traditionally counted as the first Christian martyr, that is, the first person to die for the new faith. The Greek word for *martyr* means “witness.” The implication is that by standing firm for their faith—even in the face of death—martyrs bear witness to their radical trust in Jesus Christ. There are places in today’s world where Christians are still being persecuted, even suffering death for their faith. Few of us, however, are likely to be called to make such an ultimate witness.

Perhaps as challenging as physical death is, the call to put our relentless egos to death is even more difficult. Putting others and their welfare before ourselves, our desires, and what we deem our needs. This is precisely what Stephen does when he speaks his final words, words that echo those Jesus spoke from the cross: “Lord, do not hold this sin against them” (Luke 23:34, NIV). Jesus places the eternal fate of his murderers before any fear or anger he might have felt.

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*Free us, Lord, from the ravages of our insatiable egos.
Amen.*

Michael L. Lindvall, Fort Wayne, Indiana

WEDNESDAY, MAY 6, 2020

NEW LIFE IN CHRIST

SCRIPTURE: 1 PETER 2:2–10

Always Growing

Like newborn infants, long for the pure, spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow into salvation.

1 Peter 2:2

When the author of 1 Peter speaks to his readers about the Christian life, he chooses two utterly dissimilar images—growing infants and building a temple. Different as they are, these images have one thing in common. They both suggest a process that unfolds over time. Infants grow slowly into adults; temples take decades to build. Just so is the Christian life. We are always growing, or being built, into the men and women God is calling us to be. But the process takes time.

The Protestant reformer Martin Luther put it this way: “This life therefore is not righteousness, but growth in righteousness, not health, but healing, not being but becoming, not rest but exercise. We are not yet what we shall be, but we are growing toward it, the process is not yet finished, but it is going on, this is not the end, but it is the road.”*



Grow us, build us, a day at a time, into the men and women you call us to be. Amen.

Michael L. Lindvall, Fort Wayne, Indiana

*Martin Luther, “Defense of All the Articles,” Lazareth trans., quoted in Roy Moran, *Spent Matches: Igniting the Signal Fire for the Spiritually Dissatisfied* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2015), 170.

NEW LIFE IN CHRIST
SCRIPTURE: JOHN 14:1–14

Many Mansions

In my Father's house there are many dwelling places.

John 14:2

The promise of eternal life is central to Christian faith. Jesus promises it in this passage; his resurrection confirms it. Yet to a skeptical world, we can offer no proof positive. Here is why we can trust it to be true: First, we trust that God is good. So much that we have seen and known in this life testifies to the goodness of a loving God. Second, we trust that God is more powerful than death. The resurrection of Jesus bears witness to belief. It's simply true that God is not God unless God is almighty—mightier than all, mightier even than death.

And if God is love and if God is almighty, it follows that the God who wove the mystery that is life on this earth is weaving in and for us an even greater mystery in life beyond life. We stumble at imagining this love, but we dare to trust it with all our being.



May we trust in you—in life and in death. Amen.

Michael L. Lindvall, Fort Wayne, Indiana

FRIDAY, MAY 8, 2020

NEW LIFE IN CHRIST

SCRIPTURE: JOHN 14:1–14

The Way

Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

John 14:6

These oft-quoted words are part of the longest speech attributed to Jesus in the four Gospels, longer even than the Sermon on the Mount. Spanning chapters 14–17 of the Gospel of John, this speech is often called the Farewell Discourse. Jesus makes the speech on the last night of his life and offers it intimately to his gathered disciples, who are growing increasingly anxious. The overarching theme of this speech, Jesus’ final discourse, is giving of oneself, personal sacrifice, and radical love.

All these beams of light focus like lasers on Jesus giving of himself on the cross the next day. In the larger context of the speech, which is made following Jesus’ washing of his disciples’ feet and in the looming shadow of the cross, “the way” is clearly self-giving; “the truth” is love; and “the life” is sacrifice for others.



Dear Jesus, may we follow in your way, know your truth, and live in your life. Amen.

Michael L. Lindvall, Fort Wayne, Indiana

NEW LIFE IN CHRIST
SCRIPTURE: JOHN 14:1–14

The Image of God

“Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.”

John 14:9b

There is a French saying, *Le Dieu défini est Dieu fini*, which means “God defined is God finished.” The saying reminds us that God is radically unlike humans. Our mortal brains can never fully comprehend the mystery or the fullness of God.

That being acknowledged, the core affirmation of our Christian faith is that in Jesus Christ, God has spoken to us in a language we can understand. We are human, and we understand “human,” so God, in loving deference to our humanity, came to us as a human being like us.

London’s Trafalgar Square holds a monument to the naval hero Admiral Nelson, whose statue used to sit on top of a tall column. The column proved to be so lofty that no one could see the statue, so a replica of the great man was placed at the foot of the column where mere humans might see it. Just so, in Jesus Christ, God comes to us at street level.



Gracious God, may we look to Jesus and, through him, behold you. Amen.

Michael L. Lindvall, Fort Wayne, Indiana

TRUST IN CHRIST

SCRIPTURE: PSALM 66:8–20

Tested

*For you, O God, have tested us;
you have tried us as silver is tried.*

Psalm 66:10

M. Scott Peck began his best-selling book, *The Road Less Traveled*, with these words: “Life is difficult. This is the great truth, one of the greatest truths. It is a great truth because once we truly see this truth, we transcend it.”* The psalmist says much the same thing, though it is in the context of his abiding trust in God. He acknowledges the difficulties that every life encounters. To be “tested” is to be tried “like silver.”

To accept that life is not easy for anyone, never free of “tests,” is the first step in living through inevitable life challenges. The next step, which the psalmist describes later, is to trust that God will be with us and strengthen us through life’s difficulties. God will bring “us out to a spacious place” (v. 12) where our trials are behind us.



*Loving God, we know that life can be difficult. Be
with us and strengthen us so that we may come once
again to “a spacious place.” Amen.*

Michael L. Lindvall, Fort Wayne, Indiana

*M. Scott Peck, *The Road Less Traveled* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979), 1.

TRUST IN CHRIST

SCRIPTURE: ACTS 17:22–31

So Many Choices

Then Paul stood in front of the Areopagus and said, “Athenians, I see how extremely religious you are in every way.”

Acts 17:22

Our world is alive with endless ideas about the meaning of God and of life. Bookstore shelves burst with self-help books and volumes outlining the latest take on “spirituality.” The internet, Facebook, YouTube, Tumblr, and a plethora of apps offer a variety of short takes on an endless variety of philosophies of life.

It would seem that Athens was much like our world in this way. When Paul visited the Areopagus, a square in the city replete with assorted religious monuments, he did not denounce them so much as recognize them as human attempts to know God and understand life. Paul noted one monument, to an unknown god, and then proclaimed the good news that God has, in fact, made himself known in Jesus Christ. Likewise, in our time, we should recognize our world’s struggles to find God and understand life. Like Paul, we can still proclaim God’s act of making God’s self known to us in Jesus Christ.



Make us patient, God of grace, with all who struggle to know you and understand life. Amen.

Michael L. Lindvall, Fort Wayne, Indiana

TRUST IN CHRIST

SCRIPTURE: 1 PETER 3:13–22

Do the Right Thing Anyway

*But even if you do suffer for doing what is right,
you are blessed.*

1 Peter 3:14

A cynical old trope declares that “no good deed goes unpunished.” While this is certainly not true in every case, it seems that doing the right thing can sometimes earn us criticism or lead us into difficulties. The author of 1 Peter recognizes this truth but encourages his readers to follow their consciences and do the right thing, even if it brings them reproach or leads to struggles. He reminds us that in doing what Jesus Christ was called to do, he himself suffered greatly.

Our moral compass should not be set so much by the world’s definition of what’s right but rather by a conscience shaped and guided by our faith in God and trust in God’s word. We are not to be blown about by the moral breezes of the day. Instead, we should be driven by the steady wind of God’s guiding Spirit.

*Make us strong, O God, to do the right thing, as
defined by the love and law of Christ, even if it
brings us criticism and difficulty. Amen.*

Michael L. Lindvall, Fort Wayne, Indiana

TRUST IN CHRIST

SCRIPTURE: JOHN 14:15–21

Obedience and Love

“If you love me, you will keep my commandments.”

John 14:15

I obey stop signs when I am driving out of fear of having an accident or of getting a traffic ticket. Fear is not an altogether bad motivation for obedience, both to laws and to informal social norms. Fear of punishment or the negative judgment of others keeps most of us from doing a lot of things we should not do.

Some Christians obey God out of fear, especially the fear of hell. But in this longest of Jesus’ discourses, he mentions neither fear nor hell. The only motivation for obedience he speaks of is love. “If you love me, you will keep my commandments.” And again later, “They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me” (John 14:21). Fear is but a penultimate motivation to obey God; love is the ultimate motivation. Novelist Thornton Wilder wrote, “There is a land of the living and a land of the dead and the bridge is love, the only survival, the only meaning.”*



Teach us to love and obey, Gracious God, to obey you because we love you and one another. Amen.

Michael L. Lindvall, Fort Wayne, Indiana

* Thornton Wilder, *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* (London: Boni and Liveright, 1927), 138.

TRUST IN CHRIST

SCRIPTURE: JOHN 14:15–21

A Little Help

“And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever.”

John 14:16

Like God and Jesus, the Holy Spirit is known by more than a few names: Holy Spirit, Spirit of Truth, Spirit of Wisdom, Giver of Life, Spirit of God, Spirit of Christ. In this passage, the Holy Spirit is assigned yet another name. The Greek word John uses to name the Spirit is usually translated as “advocate.” It literally means “one called alongside.” The word’s origins lie in the legal system of the time. If you had to go to court, you needed an advocate, someone to go along with you to give you courage and comfort. Some Bible translations actually prefer to say “Comforter” rather than “Advocate” to translate this fresh name for the Holy Spirit.

But whatever translation you favor, Jesus’ meaning is both clear and powerful. He will not leave us to deal with the challenges of life all on our own. His promise is that the Advocate, the Comforter, “The Present Tense of God” will accompany us in and through everything that life might set before us.



Remind us always, Loving God, that in everything you are as near to us as our own breath. Amen.

Michael L. Lindvall, Fort Wayne, Indiana

TRUST IN CHRIST

SCRIPTURE: JOHN 14:15–21

No Orphans

“I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you.”

John 14:18

The Bible often speaks of “widows and orphans” in the same breath—time and again. Scripture commands us to show mercy and offer protection to “the widows and orphans,” a phrase that comes to stand for all the most vulnerable among us. In a male-dominated culture, women without a husband and children without a father routinely found themselves without any means of support or protection, frighteningly vulnerable to exploitation and destitution.

The night before his crucifixion, Jesus promised his little band of disciples that in spite of what lay before him and them, he would not leave them orphaned, that is to say, they would not be alone and vulnerable. Jesus promised them his ongoing, strengthening, and comforting presence with them in the Holy Spirit.

In the last few years, both my mother and father died. They were in the nineties, but their deaths technically make me an orphan. I don’t feel orphaned, however, because I dare to trust in the presence of a heavenly Father/Mother.



May we trust in the promise that the Holy Spirit will never leave us orphaned. Amen.

Michael L. Lindvall, Fort Wayne, Indiana

TRUST IN CHRIST

SCRIPTURE: JOHN 14:15–21

The Trinity of Love

“They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them.”

John 14:21

Though the word *Trinity* never appears in the Bible, its three persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—are often spoken of together, just as they are in this passage where Jesus speaks of himself, his Father, and the Advocate or Holy Spirit.

The doctrine of the Trinity not only is faithful to Scripture, but also it is the affirmation that God is relational, that God is in relationship rather than existing as a cold, isolated, and unrelational singularity. Augustine, the great theologian of the early church, spoke of God the Father as “the Lover,” Jesus the Son as “the Beloved,” and the Holy Spirit as “the Love” that binds them together.* His point, and the deepest meaning of the Trinity, is not only that God loves but also that God actually *is* love, a divine dance of joyful mutual love. This is no mere abstraction. In this passage, Jesus invites us to join in that relationship, to enter into the great dance of love.



O Trinity of Love, lead us to join in the dance, open to your love, and eager to love one another. Amen.

Michael L. Lindvall, Fort Wayne, Indiana

*St. Augustine, “On the Trinity,” *Basic Writings of St. Augustine*, vol. 2, ed. Whitney J. Oates (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1992), 790.

A NEW WORLD

SCRIPTURE: PSALM 47

All the Earth

*For God is the king of all the earth;
sing praises with a psalm.*

Psalm 47:7

Here's a new vocabulary word of the day: *henotheism*. Most people in the ancient world were probably henotheists, that is, they believed that every nation and ethnic group had their own god or group of gods. The Romans had theirs, the Greeks theirs, and the Persians theirs. This was seen as the natural order of things. Occasionally, the Old Testament suggests that even Jews sometimes saw things this way.

But as Psalm 47 proclaims, Jews, and later Christians, saw things in a radically new way. There was only one God in the universe, and this God was sovereign of all the earth, not just over one nation or ethnic group. As obvious as this seems to us today, this radical new idea produced profound implications. If there is but one God, all the peoples of the earth are children of that single God and are thus brothers and sisters in a way that henotheists never could be.



*God of the universe, may we always remember that
you are the God of all the peoples of the earth. Amen.*

Michael L. Lindvall, Fort Wayne, Indiana

A NEW WORLD

SCRIPTURE: ACTS 1:6–14

It'll All Pan Out

He replied, "It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority."

Acts 1:7

Thirty years ago I attended a talk at Princeton University and heard a story that I will never forget. The story was told by a famous preacher named Fred Craddock. He was listening to two of his preacher friends argue about the end of the world. One of the two was a "premillennialist," and the other was a "postmillennialist." In the heat of the argument, they turned to Fred and asked, "What are you, Fred?" Craddock answered, "I'm a panmillennialist." "What's that?" they asked. "Oh, I just trust that everything will pan out in the end."

This is pretty much what Jesus says in this passage from the beginning of the book of Acts as well as in the Gospels. A fascination with the details about the end times pulls us beyond what we can know into unhealthy speculation and disputation. The governing word for us is trust. Trust that the sweep of history is somehow in the hands of a loving God, that the end of time, just like the beginning, will "all pan out."



*God of eternity, may we trust that time is in your hands in a way we cannot understand or imagine.
Amen.*

Michael L. Lindvall, Fort Wayne, Indiana

A NEW WORLD

SCRIPTURE: ACTS 1:6–14

Telling the Story to the World

“. . . and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

Acts 1:8

Judaism is not a “missionary religion” like Christianity is. A person is usually born into Judaism or perhaps becomes a Jew through marriage or a personal decision. Christianity, on the other hand, has added members by being a missionary faith from its beginning. From this chapter and through the twenty-seven thrilling chapters of the book of Acts that follow, Peter, Paul, and other disciples are “missionaries.” They embrace a mission to tell anyone who will listen the story of Jesus Christ. When you have good news, you want to tell it to everyone.

Today, we often feel awkward telling other people about our faith. We feel reluctant to speak of things so intimate or to impose our beliefs on others. But like these first disciples, it is hard to sit on news as good as the love of God in Jesus Christ. To simply share Christ’s love is not the same as imposing something on another.

Give us the courage to gently share our faith with others when the time and place are right. Amen.

Michael L. Lindvall, Fort Wayne, Indiana

A NEW WORLD

SCRIPTURE: EPHESIANS 1:15–22

Information and Wisdom

I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him.

Ephesians 1:17

I enjoy asking Siri, the voice command function on my iPhone, “Siri, what’s the meaning of life?” I am obviously not the only person who thinks this is fun. Siri always has an answer, usually a playful one. For example, Siri just now answered, “It’s nothing Nietzsche [a German philosopher] couldn’t teach ya.”

The internet is a sea of information but a desert of wisdom. Though we sometimes conflate them, information and wisdom are not the same thing. Very smart people can be anything but wise; wise people are often those with no formal education.

In this passage, Paul promises to pray that the Ephesians might be blessed with “a Spirit of wisdom,” not “a Spirit of information!” Knowing facts is a good thing, but wisdom is more than information. Wisdom is born of life experience and deep reflection on that experience. Wisdom is often rooted in all we have learned in our walk with God.



Grant us a spirit of wisdom, O God. Amen.

Michael L. Lindvall, Fort Wayne, Indiana

A NEW WORLD

SCRIPTURE: LUKE 24:44–53

Open Minds

Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures.

Luke 24:45

A major American denomination, the United Methodist Church, recently adopted as its motto “Open hearts, open minds, and open hands.” The motto is both powerful and faithful to Scripture. In this last chapter of Luke’s Gospel, the risen Christ opens the minds of his disciples so that they might understand the connection between the promises of the Old Testament and his death and resurrection.

We resonate with the image of “open minds” rather than “closed minds.” A closed mind refuses to listen to anything new, reluctant to hear anything that disturbs its preconceptions. An open mind is willing to attend to the fresh and disturbing. We must remember that Jesus’ death and resurrection were startlingly fresh and disturbing news to those first disciples. The gospel is often still fresh and disturbing news, shattering our preconceptions. As always, we are called to open our minds to the gospel anyway.



*Open our minds, O God, even when you lead us
where we never thought to go. Amen.*

Michael L. Lindvall, Fort Wayne, Indiana

A NEW WORLD

SCRIPTURE: LUKE 24:44–53

Our Older Brothers

. . . and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.

Luke 24:47

A Jewish friend once quipped, “You know, Michael, if Christianity hadn’t come along, it would have been necessary for us Jews to invent it.” I chuckled and understood that his words had two levels of meaning. First, Jews *did* “invent” Christianity. Jesus was a Jew, and all of his disciples and most of his first followers were Jews. Second, my Jewish friend was suggesting that Christianity was *necessary*. In a sense, Christianity expanded faith in the one God to all humanity. Of course, Christians trust in Jesus in a way Jews do not, but the God of Judaism is the God in whom Jesus trusted and the God Christians worship.

When Jesus commands his followers to proclaim the gospel to all nations, he also says, “beginning from Jerusalem.” His words remind us that our Christian faith is rooted in Jewish faith and that our Jewish friends and neighbors are our older brothers and sisters in faith.



Remind us that our faith is rooted in the Old Testament and that the Jews are our older siblings in faith. Amen.

A NEW WORLD

SCRIPTURE: LUKE 24:44–53

Happiness and Joy

And they worshiped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy.

Luke 24:52

In his autobiographical book, *Surprised by Joy* (Harcourt Brace, 1955), C. S. Lewis makes a sharp distinction between happiness and joy. Happiness, he notes, is linked to our current circumstances. You feel happy because the day is sunny or because the rain came to water your dry garden. Joy, on the other hand, fulfills the deeper longing for that which is beyond our present circumstance. Lewis speaks of the joy he experienced in his relationship with God. In a letter to a friend, he said of joy, “It jumps under one’s ribs and tickles down one’s back. . . . My private table is one second of joy is worth twelve hours of pleasure.”*

Such joy, rather than mere happiness or simple pleasure, is at the heart of our faith. As Augustine of Hippo put it sixteen hundred years ago, “A Christian should be an Alleluia from head to foot.”**



Fill us with joy that transcends present circumstance so that we may be beacons shining with God’s love. Amen.

Michael L. Lindvall, Fort Wayne, Indiana

*Alison Flood, “Unseen CS Lewis Letter Defines His Notion of Joy,” *The Guardian*, December 9, 2014, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/dec/09/unseen-cs-lewis-letter-defines-joy-surprised-by-joy>.

**Blago Kirov, *Augustine of Hippo: Quotes and Facts*, 1st ed. (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2016), 4.

SUNDAY, MAY 24, 2020

FILLED WITH SPIRIT

SCRIPTURE: NUMBERS 11:24–30

Can't Do It Alone

He gathered seventy elders of the people, and placed them all around the tent.

Numbers 11:24b

The forty-year trek from slavery in Egypt to the land of milk and honey turns into a rougher ride than expected. The people of Israel complain about everything, from the food to Moses's leadership. They even reject God at one point in the journey when they melt down their gold jewelry to fashion a golden calf to worship. So God tells Moses that he needs help and instructs him to appoint seventy "elders" to assist him.

Like many people, I often have trouble asking for help, even when I desperately need it. To ask seems to be an admission of weakness. I also know that the people I ask to help will often do the job in a way I would not. There is strength in admitting my weaknesses and graciousness in accepting that other ways of doing things might just be better than mine.



Give us the courage to turn to others and ask for help and guidance when we need it. Amen.

Michael L. Lindvall, Fort Wayne, Indiana

FILLED WITH SPIRIT

SCRIPTURE: NUMBERS 11:24–30

Unofficial Spirit

But Moses said to him, “Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the LORD’s people were prophets, and that the LORD would put his spirit on them!”

Numbers 11:29

As he leads the often-cantankerous people of Israel from Egypt to the promised land, Moses is told by God that he can’t do it alone. God instructs Moses to appoint seventy official “elders” to assist him. Two other men, a pair named Eldad and Medad, who were not appointed by Moses, proceed to “prophesy” anyway. Moses’s second-in-command, Joshua, reports this infraction to Moses, suggesting that Moses should stop them because they are not “official.” Moses declines and tells Joshua that he wishes everybody had such a prophetic spirit.

We do well to attend to people in our lives who have official status, such as technical experts, scholars, lawyers, and pastors. But deep wisdom can also come our way from people with no special expertise or official recognition, such as family, friends, neighbors, or even strangers. They offer us wisdom and guidance born of lives of faith and experience.



Teach us to listen for wisdom from both “official” and “unofficial” sources. Amen.

Michael L. Lindvall, Fort Wayne, Indiana

FILLED WITH SPIRIT

SCRIPTURE: PSALM 104:24–34

The Wonder of It All

*O LORD, how manifold are your works!
In wisdom you have made them all;
the earth is full of your creatures.*

Psalm 104:24

I write these words from a cottage overlooking Lake Michigan. There is currently a gale warning. Winds are peaking at forty-five knots and whipping up eight-foot waves. A few minutes ago, and a bald eagle soared over the front deck of the cottage: eagles like to fly when the wind howls. And suddenly, surprisingly, the sun appears, light crowning the whitecaps down the length of the beach.

My sore temptation is to take all this for granted, so consumed have I become with the routine and detritus of life. But the wonder of creation is ever there. The psalmist notices creation not just in this psalm but time and again in those many psalms that praise the Creator. The poet Gerard Manley Hopkins said it unforgettably in his poem, “God’s Grandeur”: “The world is charged with the grandeur of God. . . . The Holy Ghost over the bent world broods with warm breast and ah! bright wings.”*

*Save us, Creator God, from the sin of not attending
to your utterly gratuitous wonder. Amen.*

Michael L. Lindvall, Fort Wayne, Indiana

*Gerard Manley Hopkins, “God’s Grandeur,” in *Poems* (London: Humphrey Milford, 1918; Bartleby.com, 1999), <https://www.bartleby.com/br/122.html>.

FILLED WITH SPIRIT

SCRIPTURE: PSALM 104:24–34, 35B

Praise

*I will sing to the LORD as long as I live;
I will sing praise to my God while I have being.*

Psalm 104:33

The Westminster Shorter Catechism is a series of 107 questions and answers based on the seventeenth-century Westminster Confession of Faith. It was designed to instruct children in the essentials of Christian faith. I had to memorize portions of the catechism when I was confirmed at age eleven. I once memorized it all when I was in seminary to earn \$150. I have retained only snippets, but the first question and its answer are burned into memory: “What is the chief end of man?” “Man’s chief end is to glorify God, and enjoy him forever.”*

I like the combination of “glorify” and “enjoy.” The psalmist is clearly enjoying God in Psalm 104, recounting all the lovely wonders of what God has created and now sustains. And the psalmist’s joy turns naturally to praise, that radical act of pointing away from yourself toward God. How curious and wondrous that our main purpose in life might be simply to praise God, all else flowing from that core act.

Turn us from ourselves, O God, to praise you for the wonders that crowd our lives. Amen.

Michael L. Lindvall, Fort Wayne, Indiana

**The Westminster Shorter Catechism in Modern English* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co, 1986), 356.

FILLED WITH SPIRIT

SCRIPTURE: ACTS 2:1–21

Hiding Out

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place.

Acts 2:1

We can only guess why Jesus' followers got together for the old Jewish spring festival of Pentecost some weeks after his crucifixion and resurrection. Perhaps they needed to see each other. Maybe they were afraid that what had happened to Jesus might happen to them. Maybe they just got together to reminisce, to recall Jesus and their time with him.

Whatever they were doing, they were not facing outward. They were not looking to the future. They were not telling the world about Jesus. All that would change before the end of the day. The spirit of the living God fell upon them. They began to tell the world the story of Jesus: what he taught them, how he died, and how he lives again. All this put them at great risk.

When we are afraid, we are tempted to turn inward, to hide out. We need a strength and courage beyond ourselves to turn outward and move forward. That strength and courage can be named "Holy Spirit."



May your Spirit give us courage to move into the future when we are afraid. Amen.

Michael L. Lindvall, Fort Wayne, Indiana

FILLED WITH SPIRIT

SCRIPTURE: ACTS 2:1–21

Other Languages

All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

Acts 2:4

There are about 6,500 spoken languages in the world today. The Bible has been translated into about one tenth of those languages. The challenge those first disciples faced on the day of Pentecost remains before us: How do you communicate the story of Jesus to people who speak a different language? I cannot begin to conceive the Pentecost scene two thousand years ago! Tongues of fire and a cacophony of languages burst into what was to be a quiet holiday gathering.

What Pentecost means is simply that the story of Jesus is a story for the world, not just people like us who speak our language, those people whom we can understand. There are infinite ways to articulate the gospel story; God is bigger than any one of them.

Give us Spirit to hear and speak to people different from us. Amen.

Michael L. Lindvall, Fort Wayne, Indiana

FILLED WITH SPIRIT

SCRIPTURE: ACTS 2:1–21

Filled with New Wine

But others sneered and said, “They are filled with new wine.”

Acts 2:13

What was to be a quiet Pentecost turned into a scene so wild that passers-by speculated that Jesus’ disciples had been drinking. Peter, who not long ago had denied that he even knew Jesus, stood up to defend his fellow disciples. Nobody’s drunk, he said. “It is only nine o’clock in the morning” (v. 15). He then quoted a long passage from the Old Testament book of Joel about the Spirit filling the world, even slaves and women; about sons and daughters prophesying; and about old men dreaming dreams. Then Peter, the erstwhile coward, heedlessly preached a long and brave sermon.

Someone once asked me the rhetorical question “Michael, do you ever get so excited about something that you could be accused of being drunk?” The answer those first disciples could have made to that question was a clear yes. The rhetorical question my friend put to me haunts me yet. I hope my answer is yes. After all, the origin of the word *enthusiasm* is a Greek term meaning “in God.”



Fill us with a Spirit that explodes with so much joy as to be just a bit scandalous. Amen.

Michael L. Lindvall, Fort Wayne, Indiana

FILLED WITH SPIRIT

SCRIPTURE: JOHN 7:37-39

Thirst

On the last day of the festival, the great day, while Jesus was standing there, he cried out, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me."

John 7:37

I was once at a dinner party when a healthy sixty-year-old woman suddenly fainted. We could not rouse her, so we rushed her to the emergency room, imagining the worst, only to be surprised when the doctor diagnosed simple dehydration. It had been a warm day, and she had neglected to drink enough water. A human being can go weeks without food but only about three days without water.

In this passage from John's Gospel, Jesus uses thirst as a metaphor for a human being's need for God. We thirst for water; we thirst for God. I once read of a river baptism in which the preacher suspected that the candidate for baptism was less than sincere. As he baptized the man, he held him under the river until he began to struggle. The man popped to the surface gasping for air, and the preacher said, "Come back when you need God like you need air." Air, water, God: all the stuff of life.



We need you like we need air and water, O God. We bless you for the thirst and the gasping. Amen.

Michael L. Lindvall, Fort Wayne, Indiana