

# The Cloud

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News and Articles from the St. Cloud Circuit of the LCMS

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## We're Still Here!

*By Rev Joshua Reber (Trinity, Clear Lake; Faith St. Cloud; SCSU Campus Pastor; Editor of The Cloud)*

**Despite your best efforts, we've managed to publish a second issue.** If you ever read about the history American Lutheranism, you'll notice how important theological newsletters/newspapers were. Walther started a publication called *Der Lutheraner* 3 years before the Synod itself was founded. People all over the country knew about the Saxon immigrants in Missouri because of this publication. It also served as an evangelism tool.

My hope for this newsletter is that our circuit would become a city on a hill. Does the St. Cloud Circuit matter? No and Yes. We're small and geographically irrelevant. We've been called the crabbiest circuit in the District. But need I remind you that Abraham only had 1 son? Read Genesis 22 sometime. It's the craziest story in the world (the sacrifice of Isaac) followed up by a "boring" genealogy of Abraham's cousin who had tons of children. Abraham only has 1, but all it takes is 1 seed. All it takes is 1 Reformer standing before the Emperor to stand on the Word of God. All it takes is 1 faithful preacher with an open Bible. All it takes is 1 faithful circuit to change the world.

# How to Fix This Mess

*By Rev David Buchs (Concordia, Fairhaven)*

**The world's a mess.** I don't think that's news to you. But there are different kinds of messes. And there are different reasons for a mess. And then there's the question of how to clean up a mess.

So, what kind of a mess is it? When you look around, what do you see?

Do you see rising costs, too much work, not enough time? Do you see corruption, political scandal, lies, and manipulation? Do you see broken relationships, broken homes, betrayal, and mistrust? Do you see gross behavior, a delight in perversion, and an embrace of ugliness? Do you see depression, despair, and anxiety? Do you see injustice, oppression, and greed? Do you see disappointment, grief, and suffering? Do you see aimlessness, the loss of tradition, and do you long for how things used to be? Do you hear everyone telling you what to do all the time? Do you see social pressures, unreasonable expectations, and guilt? Do you feel like you can never catch a break? Why is it like that?

There are at least two easy mistakes to make in the face of this mess:

First, It's easy to be overwhelmed and resort to survival mode. You just try to get by and you learn to care less. You become numb and desensitized to everything that's wrong with the world. It's too much to take in anyway. You find things that make you happy, and you stick to them. You don't bother with the mess – that's someone else's problem.

The second mistake is to think that if we tried just a bit harder and had just a little bit of luck, we could sort out the mess on our own. You join a movement or you pick a cause. You become very concerned and you wonder why no one else seems to care like you do. You fight and you struggle but for every step forward, it feels like two steps back.

Here's a clue to understanding the trouble: the mess of this world is not an accident. It's not just neglect or

sloppiness. It's the work of the devil. He's sinister and deceptive and he has enlisted countless poor souls to help tear things apart and turn this place inside out.

That's why we can't solve it with elbow grease and a few good turns. And that's why hopelessness is the most serious pandemic.

It is precisely into this mess that the Bible speaks:

**Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD!**

**O Lord, hear my voice!**

**Let your ears be attentive**

**to the voice of my pleas for mercy!**

**If you, O LORD, should mark iniquities,**

**O Lord, who could stand?**

**But with you there is forgiveness,**

**that you may be feared.**

**I wait for the LORD, my soul waits,**

**and in his word I hope;**

**my soul waits for the Lord**

**more than watchmen for the morning,**

**more than watchmen for the morning.**

**O Israel, hope in the LORD!**

**For with the LORD there is steadfast love,**

**and with him is plentiful redemption.**

**And he will redeem Israel**

**from all his iniquities. (Psalm 130)**

The God who created the heavens and the earth also loves his creation with an undying love. And he is brokenhearted over the mess. In fact, we don't even know the half of it. He knows every last bit of it. And so he sent his only Son to die for the sins of the world, to redeem you from all your iniquities. He suffered hopelessness and despair on the cross, to give you the hope of eternal life. He gave up his body and poured out his blood to put an end to the ravings of the devil and to create anew the heavens and the earth. That day is coming, so do not despair. Do not put your trust in earthly things, but fix your eyes on Jesus.

**“Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God” (Psalm 43:5)!**

# A Thanksgiving Homily

By Rev Zachary Hoffman (Holy Cross, St. Cloud)

**“And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus” (Phil 2:19).**

Cast aside your 30 days of thankfulness posts on social media. (Did you even make it through 23 days so far?) Forget your gratitude journals. Stop worrying about what you will say when you share the things you are grateful for when you sit at the table later today.

Let’s do something different this Thanksgiving. In order to take the pressure off, don’t tell me what you are thankful for. Tell me what you need instead.

You host, buy food, serve, go out to breakfast tomorrow. While everyone else around the table seems to be doing well on the inside you might be agonizing about the cost, or the anxiety that comes from the forced interactions, or the conflicts that are barely kept underneath the surface. We plaster on a smile, and carry on. We have grown accustomed to hiding our needs. You don’t have to hide it. Tell me what you need.

In fact, we hide much from each other, it is hard to say it out-loud, but on days like today old hurts done to us by those who were supposed to love us still live strong in our hearts. Sometimes those who hurt you are the ones you are obligated to eat with a couple times a year on major holidays. You politely say “pass the potatoes *please*”, but your heart screams “Hand. Me. That. Knife.” Know that you do not need to carve out a time where you can complain about those who offend you behind their backs. Tell me what you need instead.

We have come to think that every joy in the world is so fleeting that we have to seize it like it is the last piece of pie. We run after so much that offers us joy and pleasure. It is often said that it is our consumerist culture that leads us to think that

everything that can be purchased is an absolute need, but no. While some of that might be true, the problem is us. We sense an emptiness a fear that fills us when come to even the edge of feeling a lack of joy that we quickly run to fill our homes and garages with the best of everything. This discontent ruins our hearts and makes them cold. our gaping endless appetite for more ironically has no room for contentment. Close the Amazon app for a minute, and tell me what you need.

The Apostle Paul boasts confidently: **“My God will supply every need of yours according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.”**

I think about those first two words: My God. We chase after so many things that we cannot won and so much that will not last. A facade that keeps the world from seeing our problems will not last no matter how careful we are in building it. Even if you get revenge or win an argument against someone who hurt you how long will the joy of that last? Of course, all the temporary goods we try to buy and keep, because we are driven to them out of a sense of emptiness will not last. We know that already. But Paul says here two words. Two little words that are more audacious than all that we, in the darkness of our sin, could ever dream of. He says “my God”. As if God is his! As if he can say: “Yeah. I got him. He’s mine.” It turns out that our selfishness has driven us to pursue the smallest things. Who knew that a person could claim to have God!?

But Paul knows that he is rich beyond measure even though he is getting up there in years, and has no idea when he will be able to eat an adequate meal next, or if he will ever be able to breathe the free air ever again that exists outside of his prison cell. Due to his imprisonment there are even some who have forgotten about him entirely. Weak in his flesh and suffering afflictions daily- Paul is a living picture of what it means to have a treasure in a jar of clay.

Still he says Christ is his. Also, God the Father is his! Therefore, he confidently writes: “My God”.

Maybe there is a flaw in many of the expressions of gratitude we might make at this time of year. It is not that it is bad to give thanks for your family, a car that starts, or turkey that isn't dry. No. These are all fine things to be thankful for, and it might even help to write it down. It's just that all of these things come and go. We cannot miss what is truly ours forever.

After all, Christ said this is my body and blood given and shed for you.

Christ also said I am with you even until the end of the age.

He has promised to abide in you, so that when you call out "My God" in your deepest suffering he hears.

He remembers his compassion for you and he will not let you be destroyed.

To you the Son has been given, and that means you also have the Father.

I would argue that the best part is that God now can say that same about you. You belong to him. His love has been lavished on you in the waters of your baptism and now you are a child of God.

To understand this is to become thankful. You do not need 30 different reasons to give thanks this month. You do not need to fill a gratitude journal with different thoughts. This is reason enough to sing songs of thankfulness for all eternity. The Lord God, is your God. Christ who has given his life for you now abides with you and is in you forever and ever. Rejoice. You have more from that than anything the world can give. You have a better future given to you than any future you can build for yourself. You have the crown of one who has conquered death waiting for you in the end, and now you are covered in his righteousness.

This God of ours will supply the rest too. Don't worry. He knows. He will not forget. "My God will supply every need of yours according to the riches

of his grace." Paul also writes: "He who did not spare his own son, but gladly gave him up for us all, how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?" Romans 8:32

Rejoice and give thanks to the Lord your God. Then tell him everything you need. Your God graciously provides all that we need and immeasurably more than we can even imagine.

Amen.

# Book Review by Rev Bruce Timm

(Redeemer, St. Cloud)

*Tending the Heart of Virtue* by Vigen Guroian

As Pastor Reber will gladly tell you, I'm an old boomer.<sup>1</sup> I've been buying books for 40 years, but I'm trying to save my pennies for retirement, so I requested this title through the Great River Regional Library. About a month after I requested it, I got notice that I could check it out. Now you can, too. And we can rejoice that our tax dollars are of some use.

The basic premise is that we need to instill virtue in our children. This, of course, assumes that we believe in virtue, which is really an assumption that we believe in God as the author of humanity, love, friendship, redemption, faith, courage, beauty, goodness, and obedience. Guroian's book encourages the reading of fairy tales to instill these virtues and to awaken the imagination of our children to consider these characters and their stories as lessons for their own lives.

Don't trust Walt Disney! Guroian takes you back to the original fairy tales and delves into the stories in detail. In the chapter entitled "On Becoming a Real Human Child", Guroian discusses the story of Pinocchio. In the movie, Geppetto wishes upon a star that his wooden puppet might become a real boy. Geppetto's wish is granted because he has given happiness to others and because Pinocchio proves himself "brave, truthful, and unselfish." But in the book, it is Pinocchio who makes the wish to become a grown man, but the blue-haired fairy explains that he must "begin by being a good boy" (p. 41) and this involves (guess what?) virtues – obedience, truthfulness, an education, and consoling one's parents.

In both the movie and the book Pinocchio wants to grow up, but in the book, the virtue of goodness is entailed, which means maturing requires moral responsibility. Guroian makes a link between Pinocchio being a puppet and what we could call original sin. He writes, "Pinocchio is a wooden puppet, and as the blue-haired fairy says to him, puppets never grow: 'They are born puppets, they live puppets, and they die puppets.' The deeper meaning belongs to the metaphor of 'woodenness.' The woodenness of his mind and will, not that he is made of wood, is Pinocchio's most difficult obstacle to growing up." (p. 39)

The movie portrays Pinocchio as earning "humanness" because he proves himself "brave, truthful, and unselfish." As Guroian points out, that is works righteousness. In the

book, Pinocchio "becomes a real flesh and blood human child after he awakens from a dream in which the blue haired fairy forgives him for his former waywardness and present shortcomings." (p. 40)

While there is so much to enjoy in this book, take caution. Guroian is an Orthodox Christian and the Orthodox believe in a progressive justification which they call *Theosis* (deification). As you read the book Guroian will speak many wonderful truths about God's grace and salvation, but he will hint that it is not enough. While Pinocchio was made a real human through forgiveness, he still has not finished the moral task he is consciously pursuing. Lutherans believe that justification is complete in Christ, but that our sanctification is ongoing as we cooperate with God in doing what is good and right.

Guroian traces Pinocchio's journey through temptation, sin, and forgiveness. He desires to make Geppetto's life easier by restoring his fortune, but he is sidetracked by "allurements of quick gain and easy pleasure. He is tested and tried and repeatedly fails to resist temptation." His "wooden head" overrules his "good heart." That sounds like the battle of the old Adam and the new man in Christ which Saint Paul describes in Romans 7.

The blue-haired fairy is a Christ-figure in the book. She, appearing as a little girl, saves Pinocchio from death by hanging on a tree and adopts him as her brother. When he is lured away from her by temptation she dies. Is this not what happens when we depart from Christ? He is no longer our living Savior, but He is dead to us.

The blue-haired fairy is immortal, so she continues to help Pinocchio and arrives to help him on Busy Bee Island. Pinocchio is desperately hungry but refuses to work for a meal. His "wooden-headedness" is at work. The fairy, now grown into a young woman, offers him some bread if he will carry a pail home for her. He resists, but then relents and when he finishes the bread, his eyes are opened, and he slowly recognizes the fairy and rejoices. Right now, you should be thinking about the disciples on the Road to Emmaus. If you aren't, don't worry, Guroian will help you.

I'm approaching my limit on words, and I don't want to upset the editor and get cancelled. This book will acquaint you with *The Velveteen Rabbit*, *The Little Mermaid*, *Charlotte's Web*, *Bambi*, and introduce you to some lesser known fairy tales. It will make you think of Christ, of grace, and of sanctification, and it will likely inspire you to buy some fairy tales to read to your children or grandchildren.

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<sup>1</sup> This has been fact checked and verified.

## Winter Reading

If you're going to be stuck in the cabin this winter, you better have some good books to read. I forbade anyone from listing the Bible - it is assumed that you already read the Bible (hardy har har). Good literature enhances your reading of the Bible. We are people of the Word, so we should get good with words. To that end, here are some books we suggest with a little blurb. -ed

### ***The Book of the New Sun* by Gene Wolfe**

Like Tolkien, Wolfe was (he died in 2019) a devout Roman Catholic who wrote fantasy novels which contained an overwhelming amount of theology. And like Tolkien's magnum opus, *The Book of the New Sun* is multiple books (4). Written in the first-person by the "omniscient" Severian (and "translated" by Wolfe, which gives him the liberty to make up words), the story follows the adventures of a torturer turned almighty ruler. The details are thick. It can be easy to get lost. The saying is, "One does not read Wolfe, one only re-reads Wolfe." Sound daunting? I promise you it's rewarding. Reading a piece of literature this close makes us better for "One does not read the Bible, one only re-reads the Bible." - Rev Joshua Reber (Faith, St. Cloud; Trinity, Clear Lake)

### ***The God Who is There* by Francis Schaeffer**

The greatest Christian apologist of the first half of the 20th Century was GK Chesterton (I like CS Lewis as much as you do, but Chesterton was first and heavily influenced Lewis. Oh, and Chesterton was funnier). The greatest apologist of the second half of the last century was Francis Schaeffer (this newsletter has a policy of NEVER apologizing to John Warwick Montgomery). Schaeffer was a Presbyterian; conservative Presbyterians are our friends. They're confessional and they know what they believe. I never understood philosophy until I read this work. Now I go around complaining about Hegel and Kierkegaard in my newsletters, and my friends can't stand me. This work is highly accessible, and Schaeffer has a clarity about the subject matter and cultural trajectories that we Lutherans should envy. I was tickled when I found a copy in my church's library a few months ago. This book will open up many doors for your future learning. It's a foundational book that I wish I had read before I went to college and seminary. - Rev Joshua Reber (Faith, St. Cloud; Trinity, Clear Lake)

### ***George MacDonald: A Biography of Scotland's Beloved Storyteller* by Michael Phillips**

It has been said that C.S. Lewis came to faith while reading stories by George MacDonald. I had never heard of George MacDonald until I read the book *Tending the Heart of Virtue* and learned about this Scottish author and all the fairy tales he wrote. This book will give you a glimpse into Scottish life in the late 1800s and the religious movements affecting Scotland. George MacDonald tried to make a living as a preacher, and it might be good that he could not make a go of it. He was raised in a country of strict Calvinists who believed in double predestination – that God chooses to save some and to damn others. MacDonald could not reconcile this with the grace of God. Instead of becoming a Lutheran which would have helped him immensely he made hell a temporary place where God sent you until you repented. That and some other novel doctrines didn't go over too well in Scotland so that's good. MacDonald was a popular writer and speaker, and the book traces his life story and his writings, with many ups and downs spiritually and physically. The book drags a little at points but introduces you to a great writer whose stories greatly influenced not only Scotland but the world. - Rev Bruce Timm (Redeemer, St. Cloud)

### ***Is Atheism Dead?* By Eric Metaxas**

If you don't read Metaxas shame on you. He has written books on Luther, Bonhoeffer, and William Wilberforce – great Christian heroes. He has also written an autobiography about how he has come slowly to the Christian faith (*A Fish Out of Water*). Metaxas does not crank out a book or two every year. His books are well researched, very accessible, and he is worthy of the title "wordsmith." I got this book free at a conference. Who can turn down a free book by an author you love to read? I've only read about 100 pages of this 400-page book, but I'm hooked. The book cites the overwhelming evidence for the existence of God and then moves on to the truth of Jesus Christ. It is an "Apologetic" (a Defensive) book of Christianity. In the first 100 pages Metaxas covers all the scientific discoveries that support the creation of the world by a Designer. I'm not a science guy but the uniqueness and complexity of the universe, the earth, our solar system, and the sun, all contributing to the earth's ability to sustain human life is amazing and miraculous. Metaxas makes complex ideas understandable with his down-to-earth illustrations and examples. Parts II and III of the book cover archaeology and truth. Many of the greatest

atheists are quoted and debunked so you'll be made aware of their arguments and fallacies. The book is easy reading, rich in content, and encourages your faith from evidence supporting the Biblical record. - Rev Bruce Timm (Redeemer, St. Cloud)

***Never Split the Difference: Negotiating As If Your Life Depended On It* by Chris Voss**

Written by a former FBI hostage negotiator, this book will certainly scratch your itch for the inside scoop on an occupation that you've only ever imagined through the lens of Netflix. But that's not where the value of this book lies. Instead, it offers a humbling perspective on our weaknesses in communication: both the weakness that results from our own biases as well as the

weakness that come from the essential distance between two human minds. There are, of course, lots of tips and tricks for getting what you want in a conversation. I don't recommend employing these on your wife. She won't appreciate being regarded as a terrorist. But you will find lots of helpful tools for reframing your thinking about conversation, avoiding some common pitfalls that derail conversation, and keeping yourself from dehumanizing your conversation partner. All of this is valuable for communicators of the Gospel. Of course, we don't rely on tactics or strategies, but thinking clearly about communicating can help in getting ourselves out of the way. - Rev David Buchs (Concordia, Fairhaven)

## Circuit News

### **Circuit Website!**

Check us out at [lcmcloud.org](http://lcmcloud.org). If the Synod wants to purchase the domain once they get their Cloud Services up and running, we'll sell it for no less than \$2 million. Other domains we considered – [kieschnickskittens.com](http://kieschnickskittens.com), [noturmomscircuit.com](http://noturmomscircuit.com), and [stcloudcircuit hacks.com](http://stcloudcircuit hacks.com).

### **Re-enactment of the Diet of Augsburg**

To celebrate the 500<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Augsburg Confession, we're going to act it out. Put June 25, 2030, on your calendars! It'll be held at Concordia in Fairhaven. Pastor Buchs has already called dibs on Charles V. We'll cast Luther when the time gets closer (we'll examine who's got the best "monk hair" in about 4 years).

### **Love of Christ (St. Cloud) and St. John's (Kimball) are vacant.**

Please pray for these congregations, that the Lord of the Harvest would send them a pastor!

**To include your congregational announcements, please email [joshua.reber@ctsfw.edu](mailto:joshua.reber@ctsfw.edu).**

## Mememes of Grace

*The Reporter* got us thinking...

of the English District, is now a congregation of the [REDACTED] District. **THE BRIDGE LUTHERAN CHURCH, [REDACTED]** has merged with **FAITH LUTHERAN CHURCH, [REDACTED]** and they are now named **A BRIDGE TO FAITH LUTHERAN CHURCH.** — *Rev. Dr. [REDACTED] president, [REDACTED] District*

What if St. James and St. John's Lutheran Churches merged?

