

Lutheran Lay Fellowship of Metropolitan Washington DC



LUNCHEON MEETING **Thursday, March 6, 2014 – 12:00 noon**

Saint Luke Lutheran Church
9100 Colesville Road at Dale Drive
Silver Spring, MD 20910

Opening Announcements

LLF President Bob “Sarge” Sargeant opened the meeting at noon. There were neither birthdays nor anniversaries to celebrate this month. There was one guest present at this luncheon meeting. Sarge then asked if there were any “life events” people would like to share.

Dan Bella Memorial Service will be held March 22nd at Pilgrim Lutheran Church at 11:00 AM. Address of church: 5500 Massachusetts Ave., Bethesda, MD 20816

Angie Evans recently returned from a trip to Florida where the temperatures are in the 70’s and 80’s. Although the weather here is harsh in comparison, she said it was good to come back – this is home for her and it’s fun to be with family again.

Rev. David Berg has now retired from ELCA parish ministry after 44 years. He continues to work as Chaplain at Anne Arundel Medical Center and Supervisor of Clinical Pastoral Education for the University of MD Shore Regional Health System.

Sarge reported that his church, and several others in his immediate vicinity, are doing a 36-week program called “The Story”. There is an adult book, one for Sunday School and the sermon series is coordinated with the book. The Story is helping churches everywhere experience Scripture like never before! For more information, see <http://www.thestory.com>

Pastor Berg told the group that April's guest speaker on 4/3 will be Dr. Mike Maxey, President of Roanoke College and on May 1, Pastor Amy Sevimli from the Metro DC Synod, ELCA, will speak on "Building a New Generation of Lutheran Leadership".

Opening Devotion

The devotional today was given by our Chaplain, Rev. Larry Schmidt. He started by reading the words of Isaac Watts (1674-1748) from the hymn "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross".

1. When I survey the wondrous cross on which the Prince of Glory died;
my richest gain I count but loss, and pour contempt on all my pride.
2. Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast, save in the death of Christ, my God;
all the vain things that charm me most, I sacrifice them to his blood.
3. See, from his head, his hands, his feet, sorrow and love flow mingled down.
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet, or thorns compose so rich a crown.
4. Were the whole realm of nature mine, that were an offering far too small;
love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all.

Lent has a theme of the "Lamb of God". The Old Testament is full of animal and bird sacrifices. When was the first sacrifice?

Let's go back to Adam and Eve, "the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life" (Genesis 2:7) and "for dust you are and to dust you will return." (Genesis 3:19) "The Lord God made clothes out of animal skins for Adam and his wife to wear." (Genesis 3:21) This was the first recorded animal sacrifice.

It takes a sacrifice to make things better. All religions acknowledge that life comes out of death. Death is a transformation to something new.

Introduction of Speaker

Pastor Berg was asked to introduce himself but most in the room already knew him. For the benefit of those reading these Meeting Minutes, I will include his biography as published in the Meeting Announcement.

A graduate of Moravian College and the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia, Pastor Berg has served parishes in central Maryland since his ordination in 1970. For 18 years, he served as Chaplain at Fellowship Square Foundation. Nearly a decade ago he served as president of LLF and orchestrated the move from SW DC to its Silver Spring location. This Annapolis resident now serves as Chaplain at Anne Arundel Medical Center and Supervisor of Clinical Pastoral Education for the University of MD Shore Regional Health System.

Presentation: Talk on Bill O'Reilly's book, KILLING JESUS

Some people here are familiar with FOX commentator, Bill O'Reilly who, along with a fellow Catholic, Martin Dugard, have brought to us Killing Lincoln and Killing Kennedy. Now, in my opinion, they have rendered a service by producing a biography, Killing Jesus.

The book is controversial because the authors have marketed the book as “*A History*”-- substantiated by the four gospels as well as the Jewish historian, Josephus and secular sources like Pliny the Younger, Tacitus and Suetonius—but *not* as a book of faith. Evangelicals in particular contend that the 270-page volume takes the miracles and resurrection of Jesus much too lightly and that too much space—one-third of the book—is squandered on recapping the grotesque lives and sordid exploits of the homicidal rulers who governed the Roman empire in the decades before, during and after Jesus.

However, those criticisms don't really bother me. Jesus was born and lived “*in the fullness of time,*” meaning that our Lord and his kingdom invaded this rough-and-tumble world of “*realpolitik*” where life was cheap and where religious and secular rulers governed with impunity. The authors describe quite vividly, for instance, how Herod Antipas probably was three sheets to the wind hosting a stag party when his stepdaughter performed her lascivious dance and then, as a reward, he succumbed to her mother's wishes and gave them the head of John the Baptist on a silver platter. They also point out how Pontius Pilate as a middle-management bureaucrat stuck in the outer reaches of the Roman Empire had the dubious honor of coopting and quelling those restless Jews whose “god” was someone other than Caesar.

But the authors also spare no criticism when describing the entrenched caste in and around the temple in Jerusalem. Following a literal reading of the gospel accounts, they narrate *two* episodes in which Jesus drives out the moneychangers for bilking Passover pilgrims and charging excessive prices for the animal sacrifices they came to offer. Most sermons in my opinion don't go deeply enough in describing how Jesus threatened the economic infrastructure of the high priests and Sadducees during this period of decadence as history shows that, between 50 BC and AD 70, 28 of the 33 high priests that presided over the temple came from four families. Jesus declaring ultimately that He was the real Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world obviously threatened the nepotism and the system of paybacks that the authors describe. If Jesus had his way, he would turn the sacrificial system of that day upside down and Caiaphas, power-hungry and hardly any better than any Roman governor, had to move quickly and strategically.

There are other criticisms of this book, one being that this “right-wing talk show host” gives us salacious gossip, gory details and a Tea Party Son of God. Another criticizes the simplistic notion that there are “goodies” and “baddies.” The Romans are bad, corrupt and “unrelentingly cruel”—especially in their imposition of taxes. The Jewish elite is bad, because it is hand in glove with the Romans in brutalizing and fleecing the “good people of Galilee.” Ordinary Jews are good. But the Pharisees are very bad. They are

arrogant, self-righteous, self-interested and power-hungry. Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathia, however, are given their proper due as true followers of Jesus who claim his body after the Crucifixion.

Which brings me to the miracle of the Resurrection. O'Reilly and Dugard narrate only part of John's account of Mary Magdalene seeking Jesus' body that Sunday morning and then state rather flatly that the body has never been found. Period. Omitted is any description of post-Resurrection accounts of Jesus' appearing to the disciples. Because these authors don't pretend to be theologians, they don't attempt to explain that *any miracle*, including the Resurrection, can only be seen as such *through the eyes of faith* and therefore has a double-edged quality to it. While some soldiers gambled for Jesus' clothes and saw in him only another misguided Jew and rabble rouser, the centurion saw the same Jesus and declared, "This was the Son of God!" While Mary, Peter, Thomas and 500 other disciples claimed they witnessed the Risen Christ days after his resurrection, non-believers assert that it must have been an apparition or some story they concocted. To me, however, the growth of the early church from a band of timid and defeated followers to what it has become in history is in itself a sign that God's Spirit was at work then and continues to be so now. Moreover, God's Spirit *in me* also is the "proof" I need that the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world also has taken away my sins and given me new life, again and again.

Killing Jesus will disappoint some people. Some will say it is too ugly and sensational in narrating secular history. Others will say there are factual errors or simple omissions to gospel accounts. What the authors do for us, however, is reveal that this Jesus was not just a prophet, good teacher or storyteller known for his wisdom. He is known and worshiped, not because of what he said, but because of who he was (and is). For this reason, this book is one to be read and discussed during this Lenten season.

Closing Devotion

Rev. Larry Schmidt gave a short benediction to close the meeting at 2:05pm.