

The Grace Lutheran

Newsletter of Grace LCMS – Greenwood, Arkansas

July 2026

From Pastor's Pen... 250 Years... How Far We've Come!



Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

This coming month our nation celebrates our 250th birthday. For many months (even years) leading up to this historic milestone, many people (on the entire political spectrum) have been hearkening back to our country's founding, citing (or at least claiming to understand) the vision and intent of our founding fathers in breaking away from England and declaring (and then fighting for) independence. No matter the issue, the main point is always focused on the concept of "freedom." We Americans have been blessed with a form of government that grants freedoms that are very unique, not just when they were first codified, but still today some 250 years later. We have freedoms that almost no one else in history has ever been able to enjoy.

This raises a question though: ***How far have we come?*** Have all these freedoms ultimately proved to be bane or blessing? Understand: I am ***NOT*** saying (or even implying) that we should somehow have less freedoms or have our freedoms taken away from us. Not at all! My question centers more on ***"what have we done with these***

freedoms?" Have we made good and God-pleasing use of these freedoms? Have these freedoms, particular the freedom we have regarding worship, hurt us or helped us over this "long run" of 250 years?

I'm reminded of the account of William Booth, a Methodist preacher from London in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Rev. Booth devoted his life to ministering to his fellow Londoners, particularly those who languishing in poverty. He recounted how he daily walked streets that were filled with poverty, drunkenness, prostitution, and spiritual emptiness. What disturbed him the most, though, was not the darkness outside the Church. It was the compromise slowly creeping ***inside*** it.

He saw people of all stations in life, from the most well-off to the most impoverished, from the greatest to the least, all wanting heaven without holiness of life. They wanted forgiveness without repentance. They wanted "religion" without surrender. And long before modern Christianity became so very comfortable in America, he issued a warning that still feels unsettling today, perhaps even "prophetic."

"The chief danger that confronts the coming century will be religion without the Holy Spirit, Christianity without Christ, forgiveness without repentance, salvation without regeneration, politics without God, and heaven without hell."

Continued on next page...

Pastor's Pen, *continued*...

More than a hundred years later after Rev Booth first observed and warned, the words still feel painfully relevant... even here in our “one nation, under God.” Why? Because it *is* possible to keep the language of Christianity... while still losing the weight of it. It *is* possible to sing about the cross while still refusing to die to the sinful self that put Christ on that cross. It *is* possible to admire Jesus publicly (and many do) while still resisting Him when it comes to “my own private life/decisions.” *This is what he meant when he lamented a future of “politics without God.” He wasn't referring to “godless politicians,” which we can always seem to blame, even as we vote for them. No. He was pointing the finger at the average “good Christian,” who would separate their faith from their “politics” whenever it suited them; e.g., “political issues” such as abortion, homosexuality, transgenderism, etc. Ask yourself: Do some “good Christians” (even “good Lutherans”) in our day and age do such a thing? ***Absolutely... and it isn't good, right, or faithful.*** Truth does not become less true simply because people—whether individuals or groups/parties of people—become uncomfortable with it. Perhaps the most dangerous deception is not open unbelief, but a version of Christianity that still sounds “spiritual” while quietly removing the very things that gave it power.

So... how far have we come in these past 250 years? Just looking at the past couple decades, how far have we come? For better or for worse? Has our “freedom”

made us better Christians... or not so much? In terms of “freedom,” are we free to do/believe whatever we want as long as we “still love Jesus”? Remember, lest we forget (and have largely forgotten already), while Christians have been set free in Christ, this does ***NOT*** mean we're free to believe/do whatever we choose. Either Jesus is “Lord,” i.e., “in charge” or He's not. We are either slaves to sin, or slaves to Christ and His righteousness. Which is it? Understand: being a slave of/to Christ is not a bane, ***but a blessing!*** It's a joy known and understood only through faith. Either we live as one justified by/because of Christ alone, or we use our “freedom” to justify things/beliefs that fly in the face of God and His blood-bought righteousness; i.e., “justify our politics.” There's an old hymn that proclaims, “Before You, Lord, We Bow.” Either we bow before the Lord in all things... or we don't.

Yes, you are free to do/believe whatever you want. That's one of the “freedoms” God (not government) has granted to all men. But... what pleases the Christian? What pleases the “slave of God”? Answer: What pleases the Christian is what pleases God. It's that simple. It always has been, and it always will be.

Your brother in Christ,

Pastor Zirbel

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Life in Christ...

Pastor Zirbel's **Wednesday Bible Study** continues with the study of the book of Haggai – All are encouraged to attend the study that begins at 10:00 am.

July Birthdays

- 3 Kim Pinckney
- 7 Jim Conaway
- 9 Creenna Bocksnick
- 10 Ward Locklear
- 12 Perry Goines, Jr
- 20 Barbara Williams
- 23 Cheyenne Blanton
- 29 Mallory Blanton
- 29 Myra Werner
- 31 Michael Pharis



July Anniversaries

- 11 Scott & Julie Basham
- 21 Joseph & Kim Pinckney

Remembering in Prayer:

*Let my prayer be counted as incense before You,
and the lifting up of my hands as the evening
sacrifice! Psalm 141:2*

For the sick – Father of mercies and God of all comfort, our only help in time of need, look with favor upon those who suffer illness and infirmity. Assure them of Your mercy, deliver them from the temptations of the evil one, and give them patience and comfort in their illness. If it please You, restore them to health, or give them grace to accept this tribulation with courage and hope.

For those who grieve – Heavenly Father, into whose keeping we entrust our loved ones, help us to look to You in our time of sorrow, remembering the cloud of faithful witnesses with which we are surrounded, Grant that we may one day share in the joys of those who now rest in Your presence.

For faith to live in the promises of Holy Baptism; for one's calling and daily work; for the unemployed; for the salvation and well-being of our neighbors; for schools, colleges, and seminaries; for good government and for peace.

Let us bless the Lord. Thanks be to God!



Grace LWML will be taking a summer leave from regular meetings during July & August. Meetings will resume in September. Please continue to keep the mission of LWML in prayer, and look forward to more LWML news in next month's newsletter.



*Grace Lutheran Church
18218 US Highway 71 South
Greenwood, AR 72936*

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Worship Opportunities:

Sunday Worship Service 8:00 & 10:15 AM

Sunday school & Adult Bible Study 9:00 AM

Wednesday Adult Bible Study 10:00 AM

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