

March 8, 2010

Greetings From President Walton....



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Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

God is good, all the time! And all the time, God is good. Even in the midst of our struggles and trials, we have a God who is bigger than any of the issues we may face in life. Life is better when we walk in the light of God's grace. The Bible says, ***"If we claim to have fellowship with Him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, His Son, purifies us from all sin."*** 1 John 1:6-7 Lent is a time for us to again remember that we walk with Jesus!

Walking in the footsteps of Jesus is an especially vivid picture during the season of Lent, but even more so when you've actually walked in the places where Jesus walked. Last month I had the great privilege of touring Israel for ten days with my wife, Edith, and some former church members, along with Pastor Dean and Liz Pfeffer and a couple of his members. It was an awesome experience in so many ways. To sing songs of praise to Jesus out on the very sea He walked upon was exhilarating. To see the beautiful sunrise over the Sea of Galilee, to see the lush fields of fruits and vegetables, to see the culture of a people who have lived with the threat of war for so long, is an amazing adventure. In fact, I've eaten enough falafels to satisfy my falafel cravings for the rest of my life!

One of the most significant treks was to Masada, in the Southern Judean wilderness. In the middle of the desert a magnificent fortress still remains visible to show the ingenuity, the innovation, and the veracity of God's people from long ago. The view from Masada is incredible, and on a clear day, which we didn't really have, you can see for miles and miles.

Another trip took us to the Dead Sea. Floating on the Dead Sea is always unusual and fun experience, and I fear that someday, somewhere, when I least expect it, pictures will be posted of me

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covered in that mineral rich black mud that is reported to be so therapeutic. I just found it muddy!

I had the great joy of having traveled to the Holy Lands one other time, in 1995. Much has changed since then as the political landscape has been transformed. Bethlehem is now a walled city, not open to Israelis. We actually had to transfer buses and be led into the city by a Palestinian guide. Jericho was not open to us, so we saw it only from a distance, whereas last time I visited we actually saw the foundations of those mighty walls that tumbled. We were not allowed into the Dome of the Rock, the Muslim Mosque built on the site of the Temple. While we never felt threatened, there was a definite tension that I hadn't experienced previously. And yet, there we're also many new discoveries and sites that had been uncovered since last I visited.

One of the greatest changes since my last visit was the excavations they've done on the Western side of the Temple wall, past the Wailing Wall, by the so-called "Dung Gate." It's named because it leads out to the Valley of Hinnom, or what in Scripture is known as Gehenna (hell), the former garbage dump of Jerusalem. It's said that a channel was cut in the temple mount where sacrifices were made, and the spilt blood ran to this valley. Fortunately, we didn't spend time there---and what joy in knowing that by faith in Jesus we never will!

However, inside the old city wall is an area that once had a huge stairway that led to the Temple Mount, supported by arches known today as Robinson Arch, named after the American Archaeologist who discovered it in 1838. They have begun excavating again, and have uncovered it all the way down to what our guide said is, "undoubtedly the road on which Jesus and His disciples would have walked." I felt chills go up my spine as he said this. To be standing, even in the vicinity of where Jesus and the disciples walked---what an experience.

We arrived home on Ash Wednesday, after making a journey to the Holy Lands, but ready to make our Lenten journey to the place of the Cross—a place we actually were near. It's so real and vivid, and it will make Good Friday and Easter Sunday even more significant for we few pilgrims who had an enlightened experience to draw us closer to Jesus.

The truth is you don't need to go to Israel to draw closer to Jesus. He is here with us always, even as He's promised. And you can have your own enlightened experience as you gather around His Word and the Sacrament, where the living Lord Jesus comes to us to empower our journey and to strengthen our faith. When I returned from Israel I couldn't wait to tell folks about all I had just experienced. I wanted to tell them what I saw, what I heard, what I tasted, what I had encountered. To me, that's what the season of Lent can do for us. Lent helps to refocus our attention on that journey of Jesus to the Cross, and our participation in that journey, so that we can tell everyone around us what we've experienced.

Rich Bimler reminds us, "Every Good Friday is followed by an Easter Sunday!" That's our promise! There is joy in the journey as we walk it with Jesus! So let us prepare our hearts and our homes to experience the wonder of the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus, and may that strengthen us to walk in His light and share that good news with others!

Just a couple of other things! As we enter into this busy spring time, don't forget:

- The Pastor's have regional conferences coming up in April-May, depending on your region. A link is posted on the front page of our district website that has information about the gathering in your region. If you don't see it posted, contact your circuit counselor. Pastors: don't forget that this is part of our covenant together, and if for some reason you are unable to attend, you need to send a written excuse to your circuit counselor, with a copy to me. I appreciate that since I have to be accountable to the Synod.
- If you are looking for a pastoral candidate for a congregation or a vicar, I must have all paperwork no later than March 15th so that it can be processed and received in St. Louis. Placement services are coming up at the end of April in St. Louis and Ft. Wayne.
- We have a Synodical Convention coming up this summer in Houston, TX from July 11-17. Please keep our delegates in prayer, as well as the issues that are to come before the convention. You will be seeing more updates on these matters as we get closer to the convention. There are many

issues that will affect the future of our church body!

- And, finally, remember to stop and thank God for all His blessings—for family, friends, church and work, for food and shelter, and everything else we often take for granted. We have an awesome God!

God is good, all the time, and all the time, God is good! Amen!
Blessings on the journey!

Peace in Jesus,

Greg

*Rev. Gregory S. Walton, President
The Florida-Georgia District, LCMS
7207 Monetary Drive
Orlando, FL 32809-5753
407-857-5556 (ext. 8)
877-457-5556 (ext. 8)
407-857-5665 (FAX)
gwalton@flga-lcms.org
www.flga-lcms.org*

"The love of Christ urges us on." 2 Corinthians 5:14

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