

**10/23/17**

**Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,**

During October, I will be using devotions that were written for Reformation 2017 for Martin Luther College in New Ulm, MN. The devotional booklet is entitled: “I Shall Not Die, But Live.”

*Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith. (Hebrews 13:7)*

Leadership is a buzzword in church, school, and business circles. Lots of effort and energy are spent on distinguishing different styles and how they interact. Lots of time is spent in training, in formulating a sense of mission and a vision for the future. What, for you, are the key characteristics of a good leader? Competence, confidence, commitment, creativity, integrity, honesty, passion, patience, dependability, decisiveness—and this is only a partial list. Recall those who “spoke the word of God” to you. What leadership qualities did they have?

When the writer of the book of Hebrews spoke of “leaders,” the emphasis was on their faith. What they believed showed in how they lived. They communicated what was most important to them—that “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.” These leaders shared a message of enduring and eternal love. No doubt each of the leaders referred to in our verse could recall their lives “before Christ.” Some of them may have been unbelievers; some of them may have been attracted to the deceptive morality of the Pharisees; some of them were undoubtedly devout believers who were waiting patiently for God to reveal his salvation. All of them surely spoke about weakness and sin, doubts and fears, about how much all people need the promise of God’s forgiveness. No doubt these leaders had many of the qualities we listed above, each of them colored by the Christian faith they professed.

There is no question that God raised up and trained Martin Luther to be a leader, though early on this may not have seemed very evident. Luther had retreated to the seclusion of a monastery because he

thought he could find peace there. But try as he did, he could not become holy on his own. By the Word of God, he came to hear the true gospel—our enormous debt of sin was laid on Jesus, and his holy life was credited to us. As Luther considered the truth of the verse above, he wrote: “As Peter, Paul, and other saints like us in body, blood, and infirmity were made blessed by the grace of God through faith, so we are comforted by their example that God will look in mercy and grace on our infirmity.”

By those who knew him, Luther was encouraged to study and to take a leadership role in the church. He became a passionate and tireless witness of God’s grace in Christ. He confessed before councils, he taught in classrooms, he preached from pulpits, he wrote volumes of commentary that still instruct. We remember him as a remarkable leader. But, as Luther himself said, “I did nothing: The Word did it all.” That is the kind of faith to remember and imitate.

***Prayer:*** *Lord God, you have appointed leaders in your church, but you see how unsuited they are on their own to meet so great and difficult a task. If they had lacked your help, they would have ruined everything long ago. Help them to devote their mouths and hearts to you as they learn and ponder diligently on your Word. Use them as instruments of your saving gospel, and strengthen them for their difficult work. Amen. (Luther’s Sacristy Prayer, adapted and modified)*

Rev. Paul Koelpin (NWC ’86, WLS ’90) serves Martin Luther College as a professor of theology and history and as the men’s soccer coach.

...See you in church.

Keep looking up because the Lord is always looking down – Psalm 121

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