

The Feast of Rosh HaShannah (Trumpets)

Leviticus 23:23–25; Genesis 22:1–19

Rev. Kevin Parviz, pastor, Congregation Chai v'Shalom, Ladue, Missouri

Walking in Y'shua's Footprints

An Advent midweek series in which each sermon is based on one phrase of John 3:16.

1. The Feast of Rosh HaShannah (Trumpets)—Leviticus 23:23–25; Genesis 22:1–19
2. The Feast of Yom Kippur (Atonement)—Leviticus 16:1–34; 23:26–32
3. The Feast of Sukkot (Tabernacles)—Leviticus 23:33–43; John 7:37–44
4. The Feast of Chanukkah (Dedication)—John 10:22–30
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6. The Feast of Pesach (Passover)—Exodus 12:1–14; Matthew 26:17–30

This series follows Jesus as he observes the Jewish festivals mandated by God and observed by Jews in his day. Rev. Kevin Parviz, author, grew up observing these festivals with his Jewish family and now is pastor of an LCMS Jewish-Christian congregation, Congregation Chai v'Shalom (Life and Peace), Ladue, Missouri. Pastor Parviz shares the traditions of these festivals and how Christians can find encouragement from them for their faith in the everlasting power and majesty of God and of Y'shua, the Messiah. The sermons are appropriate for midweek Lenten services or can be reserved for use at another time.

As we prepare to observe the season of Lent, we are reminded that it is a season of penitence and introspection. Although we walk with our Lord each day, during Lent we become more intentional as we step into the footprints that Y'shua (Jesus) has left for us to follow. At a superficial glance, his footprints do not seem particularly remarkable—a sandal print like many others on the dusty road before us. There is no command inherent in the footprint that orders us to follow, yet we are drawn. The Holy Spirit prompts us, and we respond in faith. We know the footprints in which we walk lead to the cross and to a death that should be ours. Even more, we know they lead to life, a life that is ours because of the death that Jesus died for us. With this anticipation we walk with Jesus during our Lenten season.

The Road to the Cross

The road is dusty and has many ruts to deter our journey. So many people have walked this road before us that it is difficult to tell which footprints are those of our Lord and which are those that lead to a different path. Some footprints stray off the path altogether, never reaching the cross. Those who left these prints never looked up to see the hill before them, never looked at the cross to see for themselves that it is empty. There is a way off the cross. They missed it, so they wander aimlessly, waiting for their own cross that is to come.

Some of the footprints get to the cross but never descend the hill. They see the death, but they cannot see beyond it. In their fear they stand frozen before the cross beating their chest and crying out to God. Their cries are loud, so loud they never stop to hear God's voice.

As we travel the dusty road searching for the footprints to guide our weary feet, we listen to God's voice. He

speaks to us through the Word, truth written for us to read and "hear." I believe also that he provides truth to his people through tradition, if only we would look.

Many of God's covenant people wander aimlessly, celebrating traditions that have no real meaning to them. They stray off the path, unable to discern the footprints of the Messiah. They seek their own path. Yet, year after year, they find their way back onto the path as they celebrate the festivals that God ordained. As they cross this path again, God gives them another opportunity to "pick up the trail" through the truth he has given in tradition. Jesus celebrated these festivals and gave no reason to discontinue observing them. As God says in Leviticus, they are "lasting ordinance[s] for the generations to come" (Ex 12:14). So let's follow Jesus' footprints to the Feast of Trumpets, learning while we are on the road, so we may guide any weary traveler who might stumble onto our path by showing them the truth available through tradition.

Jesus is Jewish. Born into a Jewish home, he was dedicated at the temple according to Jewish custom (Lk 2:41–52), and he worshiped often at the temple, celebrating the festivals that God ordained. For him, the Feast of Trumpets would have been a day of rest and preparation, a day of sacred assembly at the temple, and a day to bring an offering to the Lord. It was a day commemorated with trumpet (shofar) blasts, and, perhaps, preparing for the Day of Atonement to come 10 days later.

The Jewish New Year

Today the Feast of Trumpets is considered the Jewish New Year, also called Rosh HaShannah, Hebrew for "Top (Head) of the Year." How, you might ask, can the "first day of the seventh month" be the beginning of a new year? The Jewish calendar is a lunar/solar calendar, designed around the phases of the moon but corrected every 17 years for the position of the sun. The festivals of the Jewish community are agrarian in nature and follow the cycle of the harvest. While the first month, which normally occurs in the spring in the northern hemisphere, is the beginning of the religious year, the autumn is the beginning of the civil year and starts with the blast of trumpets (Rosh HaShannah).

The sound of the shofar is used by God in many ways. While most Christian churches use bells to call people to worship, throughout Scripture God uses the trumpet to bring his people to a holy place. At this time of year, more than any other, Jewish people come to the synagogue to worship. Rosh HaShannah and Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, are called the High Holy Days, and the synagogues are full on these days.

The Jewish people believe something else about the trumpet. Tradition says that when the trumpet sounds on Rosh HaShannah, God opens three books: a book of life, a book of death, and an intermediate book. When he opens these books, he inscribes names into them. Those who have been exceptionally good—in fact, perfect—God inscribes into the book of life. Those who have been especially wicked, God inscribes into the book of death. Everyone else, those whose fate is undetermined, he inscribes into the intermediate book. It is traditional at Rosh HaShannah to send greeting cards saying *L'Shana Tova Tiku Teivu*, which means “May your name be inscribed in the book of life.” But that is just a greeting—a greeting with no assurance. Those who hear the trumpet and come before God are left to wonder.

The Days of Awe

For the 10 days after Rosh HaShannah, called the Days of Awe, the Jewish community works to assure themselves a place in God’s book of life. This is the time during which debts are repaid, old animosities are forgiven, and *mitzvot* are done—good deeds that will persuade God to give life for another year. The Days of Awe are a time to emulate Abraham because Abraham performed the best *mitzvah*, that of trusting in God.

The binding of Isaac, or the Akedah, is read on this day. The trumpet sound is a reminder to the Jewish community of this historical event. Abraham had been called out of his home. God said, “Go!” so he went. He took his wife, his nephew, and all his possessions, following God’s promise that he would become a great nation.

Let’s travel back to Moriah during Abraham’s time. We are at the base of the mountain. Three days earlier, Abraham had been asked to take his son, the seed of God’s promise, and sacrifice him on that mountaintop. Abraham has come to Moriah with Isaac, two servants, and a donkey. He must have been anguished. Not only was this his son, the flesh of his flesh, but also the evidence of God’s promise for his people. Was God already breaking the covenant he had established with Abraham? Certainly not, for Abraham knew God’s character as sterling, his integrity as fact. God does not break his word. But Abraham still must have asked himself, “Why am I climbing this mountain to sacrifice my son?” Abraham’s faith in God’s character and word gave him strength. Perhaps he believed that this would be an opportunity for God to show his magnificence. Abraham tells his servants, “Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then we will come back to you.”

Abraham places the wood for the offering on Isaac’s back, while he carries the fire and the knife. Isaac asks the question that begs to be asked: “The fire and wood are here ... but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?” (Gen 22:7). How can a father tell his son that he is the lamb? But then, Abraham’s faith in God gives him the answer, “God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son” (v 8).

An altar is built, Isaac is bound, and the knife flashes in the sun, raised above the head of the child of promise. But an angel stops Abraham and leads him to a ram caught in the thicket by his horns, a ram provided by God. And for the third time, God promises that his covenant with Abraham will be fulfilled, that all nations will be blessed through him. So as we “return” from Mount Moriah, the ram’s horn (shofar) sounds as a reminder of Abraham’s faithfulness and of God’s promise.

The Trumpet Calls Us

The Feast of Trumpets calls us to worship—not to the empty worship of the unfaithful, but to a living relationship with God. The trumpet does not call us once a year but every second of our lives as we respond to God with thanks for all he has provided. And the trumpet does not simply remind us of Abraham’s faith, with which God was pleased, but it announces that God is sending us a Sacrifice yet to come.

This future Sacrifice is One we can show to those who cross the path that we walk, a picture for those who listen to Akedah but don’t see it with eyes of faith. It is a picture that we can see ourselves, a picture that sustains us on the dusty road when we have fallen into a rut or when it becomes difficult to see the footprints of our Lord in the myriad of other dusty prints. Just as Abraham put the wood for the sacrifice on his son’s back and led him up to the top of the mountain, God also laid the wood for the sacrifice on the back of his Son and led him to the top of the mountain. Jewish tradition says that Mount Moriah and Mount Calvary are the same place. God stayed Abraham’s hand and provided a substitute for Isaac. It was not yet time for the Lamb that God would provide. God would sacrifice his own Son—it was the only way to open the book of life forever.

For those who see the Sacrifice and believe, as Abraham did in God, it is credited as righteousness. Their names are inscribed in the Lamb’s book of life. There is no more work to be done. The Days of Awe are no longer days of dread, wondering if human work is sufficient for God, but days of wonder as we are awestruck at the mighty work of our God, who has redeemed us through the sacrifice of his Son. We are no longer on the cross; we are no longer on the mountain. We have followed Jesus’ footprints down the mountain to the tomb and have seen God’s hand raise him from the dead. He walks with us today. And we await the blowing of trumpets because they will announce the day that Jesus comes again to take us home to God. Share the story. Enjoy God’s Feast of Trumpets.

The Feast of Yom Kippur (Atonement)

Leviticus 16:1–34; 23:26–32

Rev. Kevin Parviz, pastor, Congregation Chai v'Shalom, Ladue, Missouri

Join me on our walk this week. As we place our feet in the footprints of our Messiah, they lead to the temple. Ten days ago on the Feast of Trumpets we were called by the shofar. Through these past Days of Awe, we have prepared for this day, Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. For this festival, another of God's "lasting ordinance[s] for the generations to come," the faithful assemble at the temple and fast.

Special Sacrifices

If we go back in time to Jesus' day, our long dusty road has led to the city gates of Jerusalem. Ahead of us the high walls loom, in a way forbidding, as we pass through in our journey to the temple and the courts. On this day in Jerusalem, there will be a death.

God has decreed that there will be a sacrifice—a sacrifice unlike any other throughout the year. Today the high priest intercedes for us with God, and the sacrifices he offers make atonement for our sins. He begins with a young bull for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering. The young bull is sacrificed for the sins of the high priest and his household. Then the priest will take two goats and present them before the Lord. He casts lots for the goats, with one goat chosen for the Lord and one goat chosen as the scapegoat. The lots cast, the Lord's goat is sacrificed as a sin offering for the sins of the people.

The blood from the sacrificed bull and goat is taken and sprinkled on the mercy seat of the ark of the covenant (the atonement cover) and also applied to the horns of the altar to make atonement even for the Most Holy Place (the temple and the altar) because of the uncleanness and rebellion of God's people. The other goat is taken out to the people. The high priest places his hands on the goat and confesses the sins of all the people, transferring them to the scapegoat, which then is released into the wilderness and left to die. Finally, the burnt offering is made among the people. The ram is sacrificed as atonement for the priest and all the people. Then the ram is burned with the fat from the slain bull and the goat. The bodies of the bull and the goat are taken outside the city gates and burned.

The conflagration is complete. The sacrifices have been made. The blood has been shed and has covered the sins of the people for another year. The scapegoat is alone with no food at the mercy of those who would kill it ... waiting. But back in Jerusalem, the people are joyous, because they once again have been affirmed in their covenant with God. Through no work of their own but the offering they have brought before God, he has once again turned away his wrath and granted forgiveness.

All are joyous perhaps, but for one. As we stand in the temple court, the sunset heralds a new day, and we

anticipate a festival meal. Our companion is quiet. Imagine Jesus coming to the temple year after year, witnessing the people of God carrying out this command of God—witnessing this precursor to his own sacrifice—knowing he soon will be the sacrifice and the scapegoat.

God promised, through his prophet Jeremiah, that he would make a new covenant with his people—not like this ceremony that must be completed each year. The new covenant would forever change the people's hearts. God would forgive their wickedness and remember their sins no more—a "once-and-for-all" sacrifice whose blood would indeed pay the penalty for the sins of all people. For those who allow this blood to flow over them, it covers their hearts, recreating them in an image of righteousness that God could abide. As Jesus considers these things at Yom Kippur, he must have grieved for those in the crowd who would reject God's final sacrifice—those who had seen the pictures of Abraham and Isaac on Mount Moriah, witnessed the picture that God painted in the blood of animals before them, and yet refused to see his deliverance. It is a great price Jesus will pay to redeem so few.

Where Is Atonement Today?

Yom Kippur today is but a shadow of what God intended. The ram's horn sounds, and God is said to close the book of life and the book of death, having inscribed names in each. The Days of Awe are over. Jews have done what they can to mollify God. If he accepts the offering of good works, a name will be inscribed in the book of life for another year. If he rejects the *mitzvot* (good deeds) as insufficient, a name will be inscribed in his book of death. And while the end of this day brings rejoicing and a meal, it is an empty joy and a meal much like any other. Those who come together at Yom Kippur must ask themselves a question: How do I know in which book my name is inscribed?

Jews have brought the sacrifice to God, but they are sacrifices of works and good deeds. There has been no blood, no death. But, then, the temple is no more, remember? Yes, in A.D. 70, the Romans destroyed the temple in Jerusalem, just as Jesus had said. Its destruction was so complete that not one stone was left standing on another, and it has not been rebuilt to this day. So how can God expect such a sacrifice? Surely, people can reason with God. So say the rabbis following the destruction of the temple.

And so, modern Judaism was born. It was reasoned that by prayer, repentance, fasting, and good works, forgiveness could be negotiated. Today, in synagogues and homes throughout the world, the High Holy Days are observed with traditional prayers. The *Al Chet*, an acrostic prayer, outlines sins and asks for forgiveness. In the *Kol*

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Nidre, a prayer dating back to the ninth century, the people forswear all oaths, obligations, and commitments made during the year—oaths that have hindered their relationship with God. Jews fast on this day, denying themselves in an effort to please God. Good deeds are done; surely God is pleased. The shofar sounds; the books are closed. It is done for another year.

As sundown approaches, we return to Jerusalem anticipating the meal we will share with our quiet companion. He seems downcast. His eyes are pleading. “What does your Father ask of you? Do you not know?” For it is only his blood that can cover the sins of men. “For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one’s life” (Lev 17:11). And the question remains unanswered. “How do you know in which book your name is inscribed?” While most simply wonder, the adventurous may say, “If I live to hear the shofar blown at Rosh HaShannah next year, then my name was inscribed into the book of life.” If I live another year, my work was sufficient. Only to start the cycle again.

No More Treadmill

God does not desire us to live on the treadmill of works, seeking to shed our sins in the comfort of a controlled environment of our making. He has shown us the path. It is dusty, uncontrolled by us, exposed to the wind,

sprinkled with blood. For the blood sacrifice has been made. Once, for all. Jesus became that scapegoat. He was led into the wilderness, tempted, attacked, and he survived unharmed. He was brought to the temple, consecrated by his Father, and then sacrificed. Now we can smell the blood. Now we are witnessing death. This is the one whose death can cover all our sins—an unblemished lamb, an unblemished man. Once this sacrifice was made, God had no use for a temple, so he allowed it to be destroyed. A new temple was built within the hearts of those covered by the blood of the Lamb. Then we are sent to walk that path in the footprints of Y’shua. God did not leave his Son in the bowels of the tomb, but he brought him forth to walk the path before us, leaving his footprints for us to follow. It is not a path of our making, and sometimes the wind that blows is uncomfortable. But the path goes somewhere, and the wind that chaps our face is prompting us on. For it is God’s breath, giving us life, leading us home.

And so Yom Kippur has become not a solemn day of wondering how to please a God that we do not know, but a joyful day, praising him for the atonement he has already worked for us. A new covenant has been given. He has forgiven our sins and remembers our wickedness no more. The treadmill is stopped, and we are on our way home. Now we can answer the question. We know in which book our name is inscribed, because we have God’s promise. Our names are in the Lamb’s book of life.

The Feast of Sukkot (Tabernacles)

Leviticus 23:33–43; John 7:37–44

Rev. Kevin Parviz, pastor, Congregation Chai v'Shalom, Ladue, Missouri

After the High Holy Days and the revelry of breaking the fast, there is another feast. It is only five days after Yom Kippur. It would seem that God wanted his people to spend the whole month at the temple!

The Feast of Sukkot, or Tabernacles, is an eight-day festival that begins on the 15th day of the seventh month, known as Tishre today. In this “lasting ordinance for the generations to come,” God commanded a sacred assembly and that no regular work be done. In the Book of Numbers, God outlines specifically the amount and type of offerings to be made on this day and throughout the next seven days. Another sacred assembly follows at the end of the week, Hoshannah Rabah, the Great Hosanna.

A Harvest Festival

Sukkot is a harvest festival. It is no surprise that God ordained three major festivals within 15 days of each other during the fall harvest. Harvest time was, and still is, a busy season for farmers. It was easy to become preoccupied with responsibilities and feel as if it were necessary to work seven days each week to bring in the crop. Work could interfere with family, worship, and relationships with God. It was easy to lose focus and believe that the success of work depended on oneself and one's labor. After all, if one didn't work hard, how would he support himself and his family? One might even reason that hard work is the sacrifice made to provide for the family. We think that way today also.

But God will have none of that. He takes every opportunity to remind us that he is the provider. He reminds us that he is the Lord. He brought his covenant people out of the land of Egypt. He parted the Red Sea to deliver his people from the hand of Pharaoh. He provided water from the rock and manna in the wilderness. He gave his people a covenant to live by until the day he would provide a Redeemer to relieve suffering, comfort distress, and bring his people home to him. For most of their wilderness journey, survival required only that they thank and praise God. It is this time that is remembered at Sukkot.

Build a Sukkah

“On the first day you are to take choice fruit from the trees, and palm fronds, leafy branches and poplars, and rejoice before the LORD your God for seven days. ... Live in booths for seven days: All native-born Israelites are to live in booths so your descendants will know that I had the Israelites live in booths when I brought them out of Egypt. I am the LORD your God” (Lev 23:40, 42–43). So was born the *Sukkah*. The *Sukkah* is a temporary dwelling built by a Jewish family in yards, on rooftops, or even indoors. *Sukkah* means hut, tent, or tabernacle and has become a

Jewish tradition that symbolizes the wandering in the wilderness. The booth is designed as a reminder of Israel's migration from Egypt to the Promised Land. Sukkot then, celebrates the historic event of the wandering and also expresses gratitude for God's provision.

The ceiling of the *Sukkah* is made of foliage spread sparsely enough to let those inside glimpse the sky. It symbolizes God's protection over those who seek him. It is not a ceiling of man's design that provides our protection from the world but a ceiling of God's design. The *Sukkah* is built from branches. Nehemiah directed the people to gather “branches from olive and wild olive trees, and from myrtles, palms and shade trees” (Neh 8:15). The people were to live in these booths for seven days to remember those who lived in temporary dwellings during the wandering. Today, while some Jewish people may build a *Sukkah*, rarely does anyone live in it. Some may eat a meal in the *Sukkah*. It does, however, stand in the presence of the people as a reminder.

Rabbis have given the elements used to build the *Sukkah* their own interpretation. The “choice fruit” that God commands is called *etrog* and is a heart-shaped citrus fruit. Often those who build a *Sukkah* will hang citrus fruit from its boughs. The *etrog* symbolizes the best fruit of the land and is evidence of God's abundant provision. Rabbis also teach that the *etrog* stands for a kind heart that belongs to God. Second, *lulav* or palm branches represent the agricultural aspect of the feast. The palm branches also represent the spinal cord, a symbol of courage and steadfastness. *Hadas*, or myrtle, is the third element and represents the human eye because of the eye-shaped leaves of the myrtle. With such an eye, the Jew can see the good in man and shun the sin of envy. Finally, *aravah*, or the willow branch, is used to represent the mouth, to teach man right thinking and straight speaking. Rabbis teach that the *Sukkah* is a picture of the Jew, a wanderer who exhibits kindness, courage, freedom from envy, and cleanness of speech. Binding together each of these elements, Jews weave the *lulav* in all directions as a reminder that God's protection and provision surround them.

Only One Righteous Jew

If the *Sukkah* is a picture of a righteous Jew, then truly there is only one Jew it can picture. The psalmist reminds us that there is no one living who is righteous before God. Yet God himself became a man, a Jew who walked the dusty roads of the Promised Land. Y'shua, Jesus, is the only man who exhibits kindness and courage. Only he is free from sin, full of right thinking and straight speaking. He came to us to teach. He chose the Feast of Tabernacles to teach us about himself.

Jesus' brothers had asked him to attend this feast with them in Jerusalem (Jn 7:1–10). They were skeptics and wanted Jesus to prove in public the things they had heard about him. Jesus declined to go with them, but later he went in secret because he had to go to the feast to fulfill all God had commanded. Jesus listened to the crowd to hear what they said about him. Halfway through the festival, Jesus began to teach, but his words were not understood. His teaching was not received. Then, on Hoshana Rabah, he used another of the traditions of his people to make his meaning clear.

On the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles, the priests at the temple poured out water from a large urn into a basin. The water represented God's Spirit and was a prayer that God would send rain to the earth and that next year's harvest would be plentiful. (This tradition continues today as Jewish congregations gather on Hoshana Rabah and pour water onto a dry and thirsty ground.) To us the water represents God's Spirit poured out on a dry and thirsty people. It brings life, just as Jesus proclaimed loudly in our text, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him" (Jn 7:37–38).

Suddenly, it is clear. The pouring out of the water, the representation of God's Spirit, the references to Isaiah's prophecies of Messiah, and the time in the wilderness came together in one astonishing claim by this man. The rock that

God used to bring forth water to quench the thirst of a weary and grumbling nation was before them. And for those who would believe, the Spirit of God would indeed flow from within them, pouring out life to those who share in that water, refreshing them in their weariness and removing any need for grumbling.

But before this water could flow, another stream must flow. It has only been two weeks since Yom Kippur. The dust and blood from the sacrifice still cling to the soles of those who walk the path. But those sacrifices were not sufficient. Another must be made. Jesus is that sacrifice. He knows that for water to flow from within us, it must flow from him first. And so, Jesus poured himself out for us. Thirsty himself, he drank from a stalk of hyssop, gave us his own spirit, and died. And as a spear pierced his side, a stream of water flowed from his body—water that would quench the fires of hell.

Jesus' physical life on earth was only temporary. He was destined to die for our sins, and for this purpose God became a man. His time in the tomb was also only temporary. He was destined to rise from that tomb to go to his own home and prepare an eternal place for us. The *Sukkah* built during this Feast of Tabernacles is a temporary dwelling, but through its sparsely thatched roof one can see the stars in the heavens and our eternal dwelling place. For our faith is in him who builds us a permanent home on the rock.

The Feast of Chanukkah (Dedication)

John 10:22–30

Rev. Kevin Parviz, pastor, Congregation Chai v'Shalom, Ladue, Missouri

It is winter. The fall harvest is complete, and the festivals are over. God's ordained festivals have been observed, and now there is a long, cold, wet winter until the spring festivals begin. It would be easy to lose our focus on God during this time when we walk roads muddy and rutted by winter rains. No sooner do footprints appear ahead of us than they are washed away. We wander, our dedication to the journey waning with each muddy step.

If we were to follow Jesus in his time, we would follow him to the temple, even though the fall sacrifices have been completed. God did not ordain a festival time during the winter to come to the temple. Perhaps he was aware of the difficulty of traveling to Jerusalem in the rain. But we follow Jesus to the temple anyway. He is going for the Feast of Dedication.

A Traditional Festival

This is a traditional, historical celebration when Jews remember God's protection and provision for his people. The Feast of Dedication, or Chanukkah (also spelled Hanukkah), is a time when we remember another of God's great miracles. Do you recall the only reference in Scripture to this popular Jewish holiday? It is not in the Old Testament at all, seemingly the most logical place, but in the Gospel of John. "Then came the Feast of Dedication at Jerusalem. It was winter, and Jesus was in the temple area walking in Solomon's Colonnade" (Jn 10:22–23). This covered "patio" at the temple was a good place to gather during the rainy season. And it was there that Jesus was observing this feast.

The events this festival commemorates occurred during the intertestamental time, the 400 years or so between the writings of the prophet Malachi and the birth of Y'shua, Jesus. They tell the story of an occupation and are recorded in the apocryphal books of 1 and 2 Maccabees.

In 167 B.C.E., Israel was occupied by the Syrians, who wanted to bring Greek culture to the region. The Greek culture recognized many gods, and the king of Syria, who controlled Israel, fancied himself one of them. His name was Antiochus, and he called himself Antiochus Epiphanes which means "Antiochus, the manifestation of God." Of course, this angered the Jewish people, who believe in one God. And these people angered the ruler, who believed himself a god. So Antiochus began to oppress the people by placing statues of himself in the towns and throughout the countryside, then forcing the people to bow down to his likeness. He even placed an idol in the temple itself and had a pig sacrificed on the altar to make the temple "unclean" so the people could not worship there.

One of the priests of the temple, Mattathias, fought back. He fled to the hills of Judea to organize resistance to Antiochus. His son Judah, a born leader, brought many men

to the hills to fight. Judah was nicknamed "Maccabee," which means hammer, because the people began to see Judah as the hammer of God. In fact, many would come to follow Judah, believing him to be God's promised Messiah.

The Fight for Freedom

And so the warfare began. The Books of the Maccabees record the numbers and types of warriors each side had in this battle. Judah's troops were outnumbered by the Syrians and were poorly armed. Yet they assaulted the huge, well-trained, well-armed Syrian army. (This army was trained in the style of Alexander the Great, and even had elephants that they would get drunk and stampede into the Jewish troops.) But the Syrians lacked the most important asset of this battle. They were no match for the one true God.

Needless to say, the battle was won. God led his troops to victory in a miraculous defeat of the Syrians. His people won their land back and once again could worship as they pleased. But the temple was defiled. So the people began the process of cleaning up and rededicating the temple.

The temple cleaned, the altar consecrated, the lampstand aright, and the curtains hung, the dedication had begun. Here tradition takes over from the recorded history. Tradition says that after the war oil was found to light the lampstand for only one day. It would take several days to prepare more oil according to prescribed procedures. But God worked yet another miracle. The small amount of oil found, enough for only one day, burned for eight days, long enough to prepare the needed oil. The light was a symbol of God's presence, sustaining his people through all time.

So we join Jesus at the temple almost 200 years later in a festival to remember this miracle. The temple still stands. The lampstand still burns. But it seems to burn only through the benevolence of another foreign conqueror. The Romans now control this land. Judah the Maccabee, once hailed as God's Messiah, has been dead and buried for many generations. And the people are looking for another man to deliver them. They ask, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly" (Jn 10:24).

The Messiah Will Come

God's people have longed for and waited for the Messiah for millennium. They will follow him who promises them victory. But they have failed to recognize the real enemy over whom victory will be given. Mistakenly, they equated deliverance with physical deliverance from a human enemy. But that deliverance would only be temporary. A new conqueror would darken the horizon. God desired his people be delivered from the enemy forever—and that enemy is the devil. Not through warfare or politics

can this enemy be destroyed, but through an act of service. Humility and sacrifice are the weapons God used to bring deliverance. Only one Messiah gives victory over this enemy, and only one Messiah promises eternal life. Those who follow him will be delivered.

In world history there have been those in the church who claimed to represent Jesus, who have forced Jewish people to bow to Jesus as an idol. These forced “conversions” are remembered too at this festival. One Chanukkah tradition, the *dreidel*, has grown from the time of these “conversions.” A seemingly innocent children’s game, the *dreidel*, is a four-sided top inscribed on each side with a Hebrew letter. The letters are an acronym for *Nes Gadol Haya Sham*, “a great miracle happened there.” This game allowed the Jews to remember God’s protection at this time of the year. The persecutions are remembered from generation to generation, and many have not yet found the deliverance actually offered by Jesus, who humbled himself and died for all people.

The True Messiah Has Come

The truth can be seen in this tradition of God’s people. Service is central to the story of the Dedication. A new lampstand with nine branches, the menorah, has grown from the tradition of Chanukkah. Eight branches commemorate the miracle of the long-burning oil, but the ninth is a mystery. *Shammes* means servant. The ninth candle is called the *shammes*, or servant candle, and is used to light the other lights. Christ, the Servant, brings his light into the world. The message of the Chanukkah menorah is the same message that Jesus teaches. Follow him and he will bring light, the light of eternal life.

Jesus uses the metaphor of a shepherd, and those who follow are his sheep. But a shepherd is not a conqueror of

his flock. He is a servant. He leads them, feeds them, and teaches them. If the enemy comes into the camp, the shepherd will sacrifice his life for the sake of the sheep. It takes a humble man to serve sheep in such a way, for the sheep often do not even know the protection that they receive. But they do know the shepherd’s voice. It is a voice they follow, a voice that leads them to the light.

Returning to Jesus and his delayed arrival into Jerusalem for the Feast of Dedication, our text tells us this is when the people ask him to declare himself. And Jesus does declare himself. He is the one for whom they have waited. His miracles and his teaching attest to his authority. But like Judah the Maccabee, whom many thought was the Messiah, Jesus will die. Jesus will die on the cross for his people’s freedom from sin. He will die to give them, and us, new life. When Jesus proclaimed he was the Messiah, Judah had been dead and buried for many generations. The Jews had lost hope. Then Jesus died too. However, unlike Judah, Jesus did not remain in the tomb. His burial was the pause between his battle with the true enemy, the devil, and the announcement of his victory when Jesus was raised from the dead three days later. No false messiah has done this thing. We are delivered forever.

But there are times, in the winter of our lives, when the testing seems too great. Then the lights of the Chanukkah menorah remind us that Jesus brings us the light of eternal life with God’s Spirit to lead us. Just as the light in the temple was seen as God’s presence protecting his people, God’s Holy Spirit has come to live in us, making us into temples for God’s glory. When that temple is attacked and the enemy seems on the verge of conquering, the light of the Servant reminds us of the victory and rededicates us again to God.

The Feast of Purim (Lots)

Esther 9:20-28

Rev. Kevin Parviz, pastor, Congregation Chai v'Shalom, Ladue, Missouri

There are many places that Y'shua left his footprints, and some are not mentioned in Scripture. The Gospels, while a recounting of the life of Jesus, are not intended to be a motion picture, akin to *The Truman Show*, where every moment of his life is recorded for an audience's viewing. Scripture is more like a snapshot album, each picture with a frame and a space between it and the next. John himself said that "Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written" (Jn 21:25).

Celebrated by Jews and Jesus

However, we can speculate about the space between the snapshots! It is likely Jesus celebrated and later taught at all the Jewish festivals and celebrations. What better time and place? One of these, probably, was the Feast of Purim.

The Feast of Purim commemorates the events that occurred approximately 400-500 years before the birth of Jesus and are recorded in the Book of Esther. While not a feast commanded by God, it is a feast commanded by the testimony of Scripture and the decree of Mordecai the Jew and Queen Esther. "These days should be remembered and observed in every generation by every family, and in every province and in every city. And these days of Purim should never cease to be celebrated by the Jews, nor should the memory of them die out among their descendants" (Esth 9:28). Jesus, being a Jew and a descendant of those who received this decree, most certainly would have observed the Feast of Purim. This feast recalls a time during the exile from Jerusalem when God's people faced genocide.

The land at that time was under the rule of a Persian king named Ahasuerus, whose Greek name was Xerxes. Xerxes ruled over 127 provinces stretching from India to Cush in the Upper Nile. His wife, Vashti, refused to respect and obey him, so on the advice of his counselors, Xerxes had her dismissed. Growing lonely for companionship, Xerxes sought a new wife and took a young Jewish girl named Esther, whom he found desirable. Esther had been raised in Persia by her cousin Mordecai, who had adopted her on the death of her parents. Mordecai approved of the union but counseled Esther to withhold her ethnic identity from Xerxes. She did and became his queen.

Mordecai, in fatherly protection of Esther, now queen, "hung about" the king's gate. One evening Mordecai overheard a plot to assassinate Xerxes. He reported this to his "daughter," who promptly informed her husband of the plot and credited Mordecai for discovering it. The details of the plot and the role of Mordecai were recorded "in the book of the annals" for all to read.

The Pur Are Cast

Following these events, and for reasons untold in the story, Xerxes honored a man named Haman, commanding that everyone in the kingdom kneel down to Haman. But Mordecai, still hanging about the king's gate, refused to bow to Haman. This enraged Haman, and he sought to kill Mordecai. However, the death of Mordecai was not enough for Haman's anger. He plotted to kill all the Jews in Xerxes' land. So he had the *pur*, or lots, cast to determine the month that he would have the Jews in the kingdom killed. That month established, Haman had the king authorize destruction of the Jewish people in all 127 provinces.

When Mordecai heard of the king's edict, he put on sackcloth and ashes and mourned throughout the city, "wailing loudly and bitterly" (Esth 4:1). Coming again to the king's gate, he waited for Esther or her attendant. When the attendant came, Mordecai told him all that he had learned and pleaded for Esther to intercede with Xerxes on behalf of her people. But Esther demurred, fearing that approaching the king without his bidding would cost her her life. From the king's gate, Mordecai replied to his "daughter," "Do not think that because you are in the king's house you alone of all the Jews will escape. For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?" (Esth 4:12-14).

Compelled by this argument, Esther hesitantly approached her king and invited him to a rather strange banquet. She insisted that the king bring only Haman to this banquet. Bragging about this "honor" to his family, Haman's only regret was that the Jew Mordecai still sat at the king's gate. Haman's wife encouraged her husband to have a gallows built, ask the king to hang Mordecai, go to the dinner, and be happy. Delighted by his wife's advice, Haman had the gallows built.

Meanwhile, the king could not sleep. (It would be no surprise if we were to find that Shakespeare's model for his comedies was the book of Esther.) Xerxes is restless and rises to read. What better book than the chronicles of his reign. Reading about the plot to assassinate him, he asked his attendants how Mordecai had been honored for his role in uncovering the plot. Finding none, he sought to honor Mordecai. At that moment, Haman enters to seek the king's help in hanging Mordecai. Haman was asked for his advice: "What should be done for the man the king delights to honor?" (Esth 6:6). Haman, assuming it was himself, suggests the king place royal robes on that man and lead him into the city on horseback with loud proclamation.

Delighted, Xerxes commands Haman to do just that for Mordecai.

Angered and humiliated, Haman follows the king's orders. On returning home, however, he receives more gentle wisdom from his wife. "Since Mordecai, before whom your downfall has started, is of Jewish origin, you cannot stand against him—you will surely come to ruin!" (Esth 6:13). Haman has no time to ponder his wife's prophecy before he is swept off to the banquet with the king and queen.

The Jews Are Saved

Needless to say, Esther does intercede with her king for her people at this banquet. The king was aghast at such a plan to destroy the people of his lovely queen. (What was he thinking earlier?!) Asking Esther who would devise such a plan, she quickly denounced Haman as the evil man who would destroy a nation. The king ordered that Haman be hanged on the gallows that Haman had built for Mordecai. Although the king could not rescind his original edict that Jews could be killed, he ordered a new edict that the Jews could kill anyone who attacked them. The Jews were saved. A happy ending except for two chapters describing the retribution by the Jews. But in the midst of the bloody retribution, it was commanded that these events not be forgotten.

Every year at Purim, Jewish families come together to read the Megillat Esther, the scroll of Esther, the story of their deliverance. What an opportunity Jesus had for teaching! God lifted up Esther and Mordecai to save their people from genocide. But spiritual genocide threatened God's people in Jesus' time. Evil threatened to possess God's people, and God lifted up a man to save them. But this man, the Son of Man, our Messiah, was not spared the gallows as was Mordecai.

In the Book of Esther, when the level of tension is the greatest and the danger of genocide is imminent, Mordecai's words ring out. "For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish" (Esth 4:14). Mordecai knew the character of God. Mordecai knew God would not break his promise. Though evil might destroy Mordecai and Esther, God would sustain his people and protect them. God chose Mordecai and Esther as his instruments of deliverance in the time of Xerxes.

Four hundred years later, God would send the final deliverer. Y'shua would also receive counsel at the king's gate. Born in a humble stable, later he would ride through the city on the back of a colt with a royal robe over his shoulders. The people would praise him as the "Son of David." Evil would plot his death and see him hang on a tree. Although the Evil One appeared to win against Jesus, the prophecy of Zerash, Haman's wife, would still be heard. To Haman, and to Satan, she could proclaim since the Deliverer "before whom your downfall has started, is of

Jewish origin, you cannot stand against him—you will surely come to ruin!" (Esth 6:13).

All God's People Are Saved

Imagine the glee on Haman's face had he succeeded in persuading the king to hang Mordecai. Imagine the king, absolving himself of the responsibility for Mordecai's death with a letter and a signet ring. Imagine the grief on Esther's face as she watched Mordecai hang while Haman danced in sordid joy. Had Mordecai died and Haman won, the Jewish people would have suffered greatly. But Mordecai was correct. Even if Haman won that day, God would raise a deliverer. The victory Mordecai won was only temporal and short-lived. Jesus and the cross still waited to deliver God's people.

Imagine the glee on Satan's face when he succeeded in persuading the governor to hang Jesus. Imagine the governor, absolving himself of the responsibility for Jesus' death by virtue of a hand washing. Imagine the grief on Mary's face as she watched Jesus hanging on the tree. But Jesus had to die to relieve the suffering of sin for all God's people. Although Satan danced in sordid joy, his victory was temporal and short-lived. Imagine the shock on Satan's face when only three days later Jesus lives again, securing the final victory over Satan and the last deliverance God's people would ever need.

During the Feast of Purim, Jewish families celebrate by preparing and eating *Hamentaschen*, or three-cornered pastries representing Haman's hat. Each time Haman's name is mentioned in the reading of Esther, the Jews use noisemakers, stamp their feet, and make a great cacophony. They put an *H* on the bottom of their shoes as symbols of the attempt to blot out the name of Haman from their history. But there is only one sole that truly has the capacity to stamp out the name of Haman, the name of evil. A footprint in the road ahead clearly has an *H* engraved in the bottom of the sole. And next to that is an *S*. The footprint is deep in the road, as if a great weight has been brought down on the letters. And a great weight has. The weight of the Son of Man is the only way to stamp out the evil of Haman and Satan.

Esther is a curious book. It is the only book in Scripture that does not contain God's name. That Esther was canonized as part of Scripture, without ever mentioning God, is evidence of her power in God's plan. Some have speculated that God is not mentioned in Esther because when it was written the Jews were not allowed to worship their God, and therefore the references to him were veiled. Some say that God's name can be found in the book of Esther by acrostics or gematria, which is Jewish numerology. But whatever the truth, it is plain that God's name is written all over the Book of Esther. Who but God could arrange events so well?

When you teach your son, you teach your son's son.—*The Talmud*

The Feast of Pesach (Passover)

Exodus 12:1–14; Matthew 26:17–30

Rev. Kevin Parviz, pastor, Congregation Chai v'Shalom, Ladue, Missouri

It is springtime, and another of God's major festivals arrives. This one, like most others, is commanded by God as a "day you are to commemorate; for the generations to come you shall celebrate it as a festival to the LORD—a lasting ordinance" (Ex 12:14). Certainly, it is one to which Y'shua's footprints lead us year after year and one mentioned several times in Scripture.

Remember when Jesus was 12 years old and disappeared from the caravan after the Passover? Even in his adolescence, he was drawn to the temple. His parents had to search for him. However, where else would he be than in the temple, his Father's house? At his young age, Jesus was sitting with the teachers, learning and teaching. Although the temple conversation is not recorded, one may imagine that it was about the Feast of the Passover, which had just ended.

Scripture does record Jesus teaching about the Feast of Passover or Pesach, a teaching Christians celebrate on Maundy Thursday and every time they come to his Supper at the altar. Jesus used this festival to prepare the disciples for his leaving.

The Defining Event

Pesach or Passover is a defining event in Jewish life and history. At the Passover God showed his power and majesty, his protection and love, for his people when, with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, he brought them out of the land of Egypt. (We are well acquainted with these events. Not only have they been recorded in Scripture, but I'm sure that Charlton Heston's Moses is dramatically leading the Israelites again this year in the classic movie *The Ten Commandments* and that children are again watching the animated film *The Prince of Egypt*.)

The Exodus story is imprinted on our culture. The Passover is central to the Exodus and has become the principal celebration of the Exodus by the Jewish people. A primary component of the Passover is the Seder, the Passover meal, and the many traditions that developed around it through the centuries. Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper while he and his disciples celebrated the Seder. In one sense, Christians also celebrate the Passover every time they come to the Lord's Supper. The Passover celebrates freedom from slavery. The Lord's Supper celebrates freedom from sin.

The Seder Remembrance

The Seder, which means "order," is the liturgy for the remembrance of the Exodus. A major part of the Seder is *HaGaddah*, or the "telling." Telling the story is most

important to the Jewish people. Many elements of a Seder support the telling of the story. Ceremonial foods represent events leading up to the Exodus. First, perhaps most important, is the *matzoh*, unleavened bread called the bread of haste because the Israelites did not have time to let their bread rise before they fled to the desert. They were prepared to leave at a moment's notice, and so *matzoh* is eaten today in remembrance. In the tradition of the Seder, unleavened bread has come to represent purity. Therefore, the *matzoh* represents something sinless.

Other ceremonial foods, explained in detail during a Seder, are bitter roots and horseradish to bring tears to the eyes. These tears recall the tears of bitterness shed by God's people while they were in bondage. Scripture notes that God commanded the bitter roots be eaten with unleavened bread. It was probably this "dipping" of the bread into the bowl of bitter roots that Jesus referred to when he said of Judas, "the one who has dipped his hand into the bowl with me will betray me" (Mt 26:23).

Charoseth, a sweet mixture of nuts, wine, apples, and honey, has been added to the tradition of the Seder and represents the mortar used to build the cities of Pharaoh. *Karpas* (today parsley is substituted) was a green leafy plant with a long stalk called hyssop. Hyssop is the plant that David cried out to be cleansed with in Psalm 51 after his sin with Bathsheba. And it was a hyssop stick on which the soaked sponge was raised to the cross to soothe the thirst of the dying Messiah. Hyssop represents life and cleansing. God said to take hyssop and dip it into the blood of a sacrificed lamb and paint this blood on the sides and tops of the doorframes of the houses where the lamb was eaten. This sign, the blood of the lamb, identified God's chosen people to the angel of death when he passed through the land slaying the firstborn of Egypt. The parsley, representing hyssop, is dipped into a bowl of saltwater to recall the blood that was shed and the death that was spared the Jews.

Where Is the Lamb?

There are food elements that represent the Passover lamb also—a roasted egg and a lamb shank. No lamb is served at a Passover meal because the temple was destroyed in 70 C.E. The sacrifice of a lamb is no longer permitted. The egg represents a roasted lamb. Traditionally, the darkened shell is removed to find the white of the egg symbolizing rebirth. Through Y'shua, we know that although the lamb was sacrificed, the shell was darkened, and death was the result, it was not permanent. Rebirth came three days later, the temple was rebuilt. When we

consume the white egg and discard the darkened shell, we are reborn in the image of him who was darkened and reborn for us.

The table is set with a place for everyone invited and an "Elijah's place," the vacant seat for the one that the Jewish people hope will come but has not yet—the Messiah. It is tradition to invite a "foreigner" to the table, a Gentile or even a Gentile-Christian. Other accoutrements for this meal include the Seder plate for the ceremonial foods, wine goblets, linen napkins, and a *matzoh tosh*.

The Bread and Wine

A *matzoh tosh* is a curious thing. It is one linen with three sections. Before the meal, a sheet of *matzoh* is placed in each of the three sections. How this tradition started is debated, but most agree that it predates the time of Jesus. Some scholars argue that it was started by Jesus' disciples to remember his last Passover. Most rabbis argue that the *matzoh tosh* designates Israel and her patriarchy, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. From these three men came one people. Other opinions link the *matzoh tosh* to the worship of the temple—in the service of one God, there was the temple, the Levites who took care of the temple, and the priests. Jewish Christians consider the three parts of the *matzoh tosh* as the Trinity, three persons in one God. But none of these explanations are proven by the tradition.

At one point during the meal, the head of the table will take the *matzoh tosh* and remove the middle *matzoh*. He will break this *matzoh* in half. One half, called the *afikomen*, is wrapped in a linen napkin and hidden. *Afikomen* means "that which comes after" and has been interpreted to be the last piece of food consumed at the Seder. Following the meal, the children at the table search for the *afikomen*, and the one who finds it receives a gift. Usually that gift is the child's first Hebrew Scriptures, and it is tradition to give that gift at the festival of Shavout, or Pentecost, 50 days later.

Four cups of wine are consumed at the Seder. Each cup has a name and corresponds to God's promises in Exodus 6: "I will bring you out from under the yoke ... I will free you ... I will redeem you ... I will take you as my own people and I will be your God." The third cup, the cup of redemption, follows the supper of the Seder and is consumed with the *afikomen*. The *afikomen* and the cup of redemption recall God's promise of redemption.

Matthew (26:26–27) records, "While they were eating [the Seder meal], Jesus took bread ..." (probably the *afikomen*) "gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying 'Take and eat; this is my body.' Then he took the cup ..." Paul (in 1 Cor 11:25) notes it to be the cup after supper, the third cup of the Seder, the cup of redemption. Jesus "gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, 'Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins'" (Mt 26:27–28).

Remember, Scripture is more of a snapshot album. The pictures have frames, and spaces between them. But the context of the Seder fills in the spaces for us. Jesus took the bread, *matzoh*, that is prepared very carefully for Passover. It is unleavened so it does not rise; therefore, it burns easily. The dough is rolled out in sheets and then a wheel with pins is rolled over it to pierce the dough so that the heat will rise through the bread, cooking it rapidly and not burning it. But the bread does have baking marks between the perforations. There are dark stripes where the heat does not rise through the bread.

When Jesus took that bread he was being literal. It is his body. Sinless, with no trace of leaven, pierced through, striped by heat, taken from the middle of a three-part, though unified, linen. Broken, wrapped in linen, and hidden away only to be found later by those who would receive the gift of the Word, 50 days later at Pentecost. When he took that wine, he was being literal. This cup, the cup of redemption, is his blood, the blood that would be poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. It is his blood that seals the doors of our hearts, and his words would bring to mind for the disciples a promise and prophecy spoken by Jeremiah 600 years earlier. God would bring to his people a new covenant, not like the one he gave them when he brought them by the hand out of the land of Egypt. No, in this covenant, God would forgive the sins of his people forever and remember their wickedness no more. Only the blood of God's own Son could accomplish this miracle, and on this night, Jesus tells them it is done.

More could be said about this meal. Jesus' footprints lead us to it and away from it and back to it again. We return to this Table often, and we receive his gift often. This gift gives comfort and strength. May it also give you boldness of faith.

From the Editor

Three days before we celebrate the Resurrection of Our Lord this year, our Jewish friends will celebrate Pesach (Passover). Some of you will have your own Christian version of the Jewish Seder and connect it to the Lord's Supper as Jesus himself did. Using the series *The Jewish Festivals* and the *Passion of Our Lord* this year, you have an opportunity to examine the roots of the Christian faith by studying Jewish holidays during the Lenten season. The series can be used as a regular midweek series or in a special Bible class.

Some of you might ask, "Why study the Jewish festivals?" I can think of at least six reasons:

1. To help us better understand our Jewish neighbors and friends.
2. To increase our understanding of the Hebrew Scriptures that were written "to teach us" (Rom 15:4).
3. To appreciate the Jewish roots of our Christian faith and practices.
4. To help Jewish believers keep Jesus Christ at the center of their celebrations of Jewish holidays.
5. To give us knowledge so we have natural conversation starters as we witness to Jewish friends and neighbors that Jesus is the Messiah, the fulfillment of the prophecies.
6. To overcome latent anti-semitic attitudes that tend to surface as we read how the Jews were involved in the killing of Christ. As a boy, the author of this series, Kevin Parviz, was still called a "Christ-killer."

If you do not use the Jewish festivals sermons as your midweek series, there are two other options. Vernon Gundermann provides an outline of six services called *The Sounds of Lent*. These are not full-length sermons, but you can have fun with the outline by fleshing out the various sounds and stretching your imagination. Or you can use a Lenten series previously published in *Concordia Pulpit Resources*. There are nine other series published in the last nine years. Check your files or the files of a brother pastor.

And don't miss the helpful suggestions from David J. Peter on how to evaluate your sermon both during preparation and after delivery through the acronym CARPE. He shares how he used it in his own ministry and congregation. Part 2 will come in the next issue of *CPR*. The article can challenge you! And I challenge you to read it.



—Erwin J. Kolb

