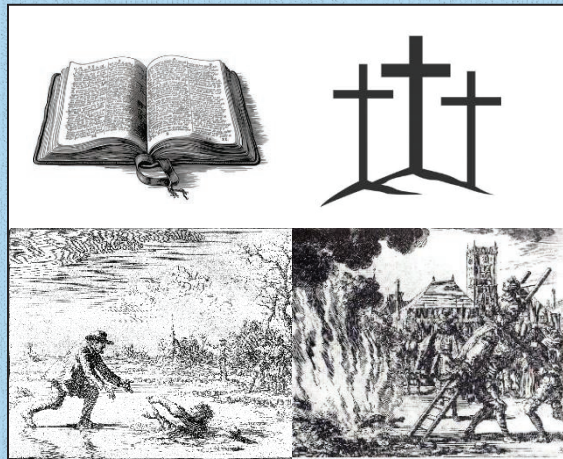


Countdown to 500

# Anabaptist Reformation II?

For American Anabaptists as we consider  
our January 21, 2025, 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration  
in light of our church and our nation in this Day.



Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves  
and take up their cross daily and follow me.  
Jesus, Luke 9:23 kjv

Ken Stoltzfus  
July 10, 2024

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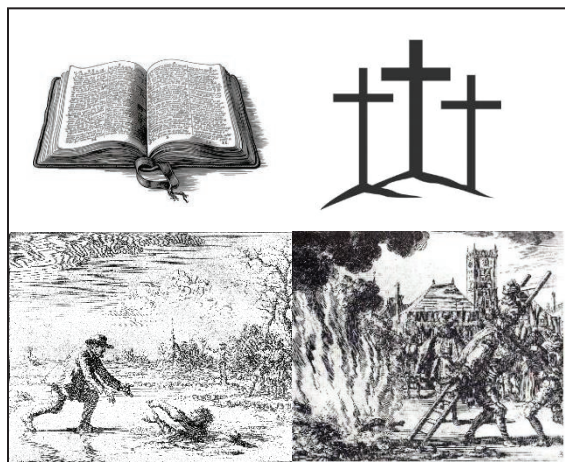
I have earnestly sought the heart and mind of God in this treatise, nevertheless I write as a flawed man. I submit "ANABAPTIST REFORMATION II?" to the Church to be judged and corrected according to the Word of God in general, and the words and intent of Jesus in particular, but will not yield to any other standard or authority.

"But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us reveals the fragrance of the knowledge of Him in every place. <sup>15</sup> For we are a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing: <sup>16</sup> to the one an aroma from death to death, to the other an aroma from life to life. And who is adequate for these things? <sup>17</sup> For we are not like the many, peddling the word of God, but as from sincerity, but as from God, we speak in Christ in the sight of God." II Corinthians 2:14-17

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## Introduction

I recently viewed over 500 websites and/or Facebook pages of Anabaptist churches and was greatly encouraged by a common desire to serve God and to make Him known. Nevertheless, my sense of concern for the Church continues to grow as I observe developments there and see unfolding events in our nation and the world, including political, economic, spiritual and natural phenomena.

There is a widespread sense that something big is taking place around us. That God is up to something, possibly End-Times related, and that difficult days are likely ahead for Christians, especially in America. That is confirmed to me from within a wide spectrum of folks in our Amish and Mennonite communities.

I share in the sense that God will have a mission for our Anabaptist community in that Day, but I'm asking if we are ready for it. Does He need to do a deep work in us before we can be useful to Him in the way that many think? I am troubled by the possible aroma of a kind of pride that blinds us to our own needs.

Yes, we have an amazing heritage in our Anabaptist forbearers, but A), how much are we like them in real life?, and B), other belief systems also have much to offer and we can benefit from them.

I believe that the only way for us to be useful to our Father overall in a time of difficulty, would be for us to repent now, and turn back to Him in humble obedience.

Our revival would probably not begin as a "program" in some large assembly, but as clusters of like-minded brothers and sisters gathered and sought God's heart in a spirit of humility that allowed them/us to hear His voice in various ways, and to then follow His leading into repentance - and He would take it from there.

It is likely then, that if we followed Jesus as our forbearers did, we would become like them, and like the Hebrews 11 heroes of faith, and our most effective influence would be our absolute confidence

in the Father in a way that empowered us to endure suffering for His Names' sake even to death.

"Countdown to 500, Anabaptist Reformation II?", the July 4, 2024 document that follows, is strong meat, but I believe it represents the kind of thing that Jesus would say if He were given the pulpit in our churches. It reflects my deeply felt concern that we have forgotten how seriously the Father takes the open disobedience of His people, including the strong words of Jesus. I don't qualify to judge anyone, but He will, and He has set the unchanging standards that judge us.

He has offered us incredible life now and forever through Jesus, but even the sincere faith of those who love Him and seek Him and want to serve Him, is vulnerable to becoming a religion of man as we embrace man's forms and rules to express and protect it. We thus abandon the pure faith in Christ that is essential to the great salvation that He offers, and miss the powerful witness that follows it.

Please remember Hebrews 2:1-3 as you read on, and consider the call to repentance:

*For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away from it. <sup>2</sup> For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every violation and act of disobedience received a just punishment, <sup>3</sup> how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was at first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard,*

Where are those who will join hearts in praying for our church, that this time of celebrating our 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary would be a time of preparing for the future by embracing a new vision to follow Christ as our forefathers did those five centuries ago?

Ken Stoltzfus

July 10, 2024 and only 195 Days to January 21, 2025!

## Countdown to 500

# Anabaptist Reformation II?

For American Anabaptists as we consider our January 21, 2025, 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration in light of our church and our nation in this Day.

While obviously focused toward the Anabaptist faith community for soon-apparent reasons, the principles and prayed-for applications of this paper apply to all Christ-followers, everywhere, in all times.

### Part I

It is Monday morning, July 1, 2024. I'm at Lodestar Mountain Inn, on Smokehole Road, Upper Tract, WV USA. If that sounds remote it's because it is. Eleven miles of winding up the mountain from the main road, turn after turn on a very-secondary though paved road, brings one to this glorious setting that God thought up millennia ago. See [lodestarmountaininn.com/](http://lodestarmountaininn.com/).

As the only guest here for the week I have the whole 524 acres to myself except for a few staff, so it qualifies as a quiet place away to hear the Lord and to write - if He gives me something to say.

It feels like I came here with an assignment to hear the Lord and write about our upcoming, January 21, 2025 anniversary of the first act of the Anabaptist Reformation. The adult, re-baptism of Conrad Grebel, Felix Manz and Georg Blaurock in Zurich, Switzerland began what is often called "The Radical Reformation," and it is called that for a reason. Is it fair to ask if the Anabaptist community is still radical as compared to others, and if so, how, and if not, why not?

I am inspired by the sense that I hear from various friends that God will use the Anabaptist community in a special way in some difficult days ahead in America and possibly globally. But are we ready for that, or would something need to transpire between now and then - and if so, what? What would need to happen before we could again become a wildfire-like movement that is borne by the wind of the Holy Spirit to draw countless souls into the Kingdom of God in *our* Day?

### AND SO - -

I came with a premise that says; "Any celebration of our 500<sup>th</sup> will be incomplete if it does not include a call to repentance for having abandoned the faith of our Anabaptist forefathers; a faith that was one of history's most authentic expressions of the Church of the book of Acts that was founded on the words of Jesus and whose purpose was to obey Him, and to be about His business in the power of the Holy Spirit regardless of the cost; the Church whose "faith" demonstrated that of our Hebrews 11 'Heroes of faith' and who could be named with those in 10:32-39."

As I picked up my Bible for some first-thoughts this morning I heard God whisper, "Isaiah 32:2." The text rang a bell with me but I had forgotten what it was, and I was consoled as I read:

*Each will be like a refuge from the wind and a shelter from the storm, like streams of water in a dry country, like the shade of a huge rock in a parched land.*

I liked that and wondered if it could be speaking of the Anabaptist community. Maybe this article won't be so bad after all. Maybe I can just say nice things.

And then, after reheating my first cup of coffee I was reminded of the sober reality that Jesus loved sinners and broken people in general but had a distinct distaste for hypocrisy - and things got quiet here at the laptop. I wondered where this was going.

## MOVING ON

The next scripture text that came to me was Isaiah 60:1-3, one of my absolute favorites for the Church.

*Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. For behold, darkness will cover the earth and deep darkness the peoples; but the Lord will rise upon you and His glory will appear upon you. Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising.*

Oh, that feels good too.

Isaiah speaks of darkness covering the earth, and I join the many who sense that a great darkness is coming, maybe in a special way for America. It will be an oppressive darkness that extinguishes what is now “the light” for so many American Christians, including Anabaptists.

The “light” that now often guides our hearts and affections is the opportunity and freedom that are offered by what we call “The American Dream.” TAD has too often become the “eye” that Jesus spoke of in Matthew 6:22, and even among us Anabaptists it has produced the spiritual darkness of verse 23. Verse 24 is as true today as it was 2000 years ago.

Still, there’s something potentially uplifting and affirming in Isaiah’s words. What if God actually *does* plan to use the Anabaptist community in some special way in the coming Day? But is there a “Catch-22” of sorts in that? (Per Dictionary.com, “a situation where one is trapped by two contradictory conditions. It’s more generally used to refer to a paradox or dilemma.”)

Isaiah wrote that “Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising,” but what or who is that light and where does that brightness come from? Is it from our Anabaptist belief system and the culture it has produced? Is it the glory of having survived these 500 years? Or that we have followed our Anabaptist forefathers, as they followed the New Testament Church, as they

followed Jesus and thus took the Gospel to all the world including our neighbors?

If that last line sounds like bait, it’s because it is. I don’t want to throw water on glowing embers of hope, but how well *have* we done at being the Matthew 5:13-16 preserving salt and guiding light in our nation, or even in our communities? *Do* we bear the kind of light that Isaiah spoke of, and if not, what needs to happen before we do?

## THE OPTIMIST IN ME

For over 55 years, starting with the “opinion boards” in the foyer in the Eastern Mennonite College (now EMU) Ad Building, I have protested what appears to me to be a downward spiral in the Biblical spirituality of our Mennonite community.

In flying we speak of a graveyard spiral, “A spiraling dive that can happen when you become disoriented, and when you have little or no visual reference to the horizon. Unfortunately, lots of graveyard spirals end with the airplane impacting the ground in a high rate-of-descent, banked turn. In that scenario, one mistakenly thinks their wings are level, when they are actually banked to the left or right.” From [www.boldmethod.com](http://www.boldmethod.com)

Graveyard spirals are nearly always fatal, as in the late John F. Kennedy Jr.’s accident.

But back to the Anabaptists and my optimism. In spite of my strong assertions that we have lost our “horizon,” our reference point for keeping ourselves spiritually level with the Word, I have always felt that there was a latent “seed” in the Anabaptist soul that could germinate and grow if watered and nourished. I wouldn’t subject myself to the discipline of seeking God’s heart and writing this article if I didn’t still believe that.

Here are excerpts from one description of the early Anabaptist “horizon,” their reference point in life, written in 1542 at the close of a report of 2,173 brethren and sisters who gave their lives for their faith. I took it from pp33-34 in Guy F. Hershberger’s “The Recovery of the Anabaptist Vision,” Herald Press, 1957:

*No human being was able to take away out of their hearts what they had experienced, such zealous lovers of God were they. The fire of God burned within them. They would die the bitterest death, yea they would die ten deaths rather than forsake the divine truth which they espoused. . . .*

*They had drunk of the waters which had flowed from God's sanctuary, yea, the water of life. They realized that God helped them to bear the cross and to overcome the bitterness of death. The fire of God burned within them. Their tent they had pitched not here upon earth, but in eternity, and of their faith they had a foundation and assurance. Their faith blossomed as a lily, their loyalty as a rose, their piety and sincerity as the flowers of the garden of God. The angel of the Lord battled for them that they could not be deprived of the helmet of salvation. Therefore they bore all torture and agony without fear. The things of this world they counted in their holy mind only as shadows, having the assurance of greater things. They were so drawn unto God that they knew nothing, sought nothing, desired nothing, loved nothing but God alone. Therefore they had more patience in their suffering than their enemies in tormenting them.*

We proudly (in our own humble way) call ourselves Anabaptists, but what is the fire in *us*? Where have we pitched *our* tents? What waters do *we* drink from? What *are* we drawn to, and what *do* we seek, desire and love? How Anabaptist *are* we?

I was an ordained Mennonite pastor (Ohio Conference) in 1975 and well recall our 450<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration. We were “up” on ourselves in ways that made me restless and I haven’t yet seen reason to think it will be different this time around. We really do appear to think that we Anabaptists qualify as the “light” that Isaiah spoke of. Maybe we do. Maybe we don’t, but could.

## Timeless Truth

Deuteronomy 8:11-20: Be careful that you do not forget the LORD your God by failing to keep His commandments, His ordinances, and His statutes which I am commanding you today; <sup>12</sup> otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, and you build good houses and live *in them*, <sup>13</sup> and when your herds and your flocks increase, and your silver and gold increase, and everything that you have increases, <sup>14</sup> then your heart will become proud and you will forget the LORD your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; <sup>15</sup> He who led you through the great and terrible wilderness, *with its* fiery serpents and scorpions, and *its* thirsty ground where there was no water; He who brought water for you out of the rock of flint.

<sup>16</sup> In the wilderness *it was* He who fed you manna which your fathers did not know, in order to humble you and in order to put you to the test, to do good for you in the end. <sup>17</sup> Otherwise, you may say in your heart, ‘My power and the strength of my hand made me this wealth.’ <sup>18</sup> But you are to remember the LORD your God, for it is He who is giving you power to make wealth, in order to confirm His covenant which He swore to your fathers, as *it is* this day.

<sup>19</sup> And it shall come about, if you ever forget the LORD your God and follow other gods and serve and worship them, I testify against you today that you will certainly perish. <sup>20</sup> Like the nations that the LORD eliminates from you, so you shall perish, because you would not listen to the voice of the LORD your God.

## Part II

### FIRST THINGS FIRST

The first thing that we need to get straight is that the light Isaiah speaks of is that of God's Presence. Jesus is the Light of the world as He said in John 8:12, and He intends that His Presence in us will bring light to those around us as in Matthew 5:14.

That Light drew 3000 souls to Himself in one day (Acts 2:41) as His newly Holy Spirit-baptized and empowered Church bore testimony of Him. Countless believers followed through the witness of this newly founded, purpose-driven Matthew 16:18 Church, until the Gospel reached the entire then-known world.

They were a people captured by the message of that Gospel to an extent that dramatically shaped their lives and became what they were "about." And it was so at the beginning of the Anabaptist Reformation as their Spirit-empowered life and testimony bore witness to the truth of what it meant to renounce all in order to follow Jesus.

They had found the Matthew 13:44-46 hidden treasure and pearl of great price, and "sold everything they had" to obtain them.

*The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field, which a man found and hid again; and from joy over it he goes and sells everything that he has, and buys that field.*

*<sup>45</sup>Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking fine pearls, <sup>46</sup>and upon finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold everything that he had and bought it.*

They believed that Jesus meant what He said in Luke 14:33, and gave up everything in order to follow Him because He had set that as a condition of being His disciples.

*So then, none of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions.*

But what about us, today?

### HOW DO WE - -?

How *do* we correlate that with the lifestyle that presently describes many Mennonite and Amish "Anabaptists" and our communities? A lifestyle that is endorsed by the church. One that so easily pursues earthly wealth more than the treasures of the Kingdom of Heaven. Or don't we? Am I being unfairly critical?

I'm speaking of a lifestyle that frees us to indulge in The American Dream as much as our unsaved neighbors do, and which reveres our "wealth managers" who help us lay-up Matthew 6:19-forbidden, treasure.

There are tens of million\$ of it in "Anabaptist" hands within 50 miles of my home in Kidron, Ohio USA, even as hundreds of millions of God-created men and women will go to an eternal hell without ever hearing the Gospel because we consumed upon ourselves the "blessing" of the natural resources of our land, and of the freedom and free enterprise system that allowed us to develop them - even as vital and effective evangelistic and discipling ministries are shackled by a lack of re\$ource\$. Ask me and I'll tell you about them.

My personal belief is that God deliberately created this American scenario in order to facilitate a people taking the Gospel to the ends of the earth, which we have done in some measure - but especially today, with much less zeal than we apply in consuming it's benefits upon ourselves.

We can only try to justify ourselves by arguing that Joseph rode around in a beautiful chariot pulled by impressive royal steeds as he was dressed in royal garb with gold rings on his fingers, if we forget about Jesus. The Jesus who had no place to lay His head. The One Who spoke Luke 9:23-26, saying that we must give up our pursuit of the world's definition of "the good life" and die to our fleshly instincts by denying our "self" and taking up our cross daily, if we want to follow Him. Yes, *that* Jesus.

Please respond in true Anabaptist humility and integrity now. Does the pursuit of earthly treasure, or the Romans 14:17 "righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" of the Kingdom of God, most

capture your imagination; influence your Matthew 6:22 eye; and consume your resources?

Does that Romans 14:17 R-P-J thing excite you, or does it sound boring compared to gaining the stuff of this world like your friends do? R-P-J represents the abundant Life of the first Garden, which was lost by Adam's choice back then but whose prerequisite of intimacy with the Father was won back for us by the events that followed Jesus' choice in the second Garden. Do we most enthusiastically pursue the fruit of Adam's choice or of Jesus' choice?

Now I know what some of you are thinking, so just STOP, right there! Don't make me out to be saying something that I'm not saying. You know better, but you're trying to justify yourself by dismissing me as "unrealistic" and you have a lot of churchy support in that. Does it make Jesus unrealistic too, if I'm simply communicating what He said He requires of His disciples? Or doesn't He?

Take it the way Jesus meant it even if it makes you an oddball Anabaptist. Even if it sets you apart from your present Amish and Mennonite Anabaptist community as much as our Anabaptist forefathers stood out among the other reformers. Dare to be a radical! That's simply what it means to follow Jesus as those whose name we claim, followed Him - those whom we fantasize that we emulate. Really?

The best that this world can offer is nauseating rubbish compared to the human wholeness that is ours as the Life of God Himself flows into us as we are reunited with Him Spirit-to-Spirit through Christ, and let Him rule in our heart and soul - our mind, will and emotions. Our Anabaptist forefathers believed that - do *you*?

### **WHAT OR WHO ARE WE CELEBRATING?**

Who or what are we celebrating on January 21, 2025? Is it what *they* did on that date 500 years ago, like we celebrate Christian holidays as a remembrance to connect our life with theirs? Or *our* 500 years of faith, service, and community, as I've seen on some anniversary-related literature? Are we celebrating "them," or "us," or the life that is ours as we follow Christ as they did? It matters.

### **Timeless Truth**

Matthew 6:33: But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. NASB1995

Romans 14:17-18: for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. <sup>18</sup>For the one who serves Christ in this way is acceptable to God and approved by *other* people.

I John 1:5-10: This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all. <sup>6</sup>If we say that we have fellowship with Him and *yet* walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; <sup>7</sup>but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin. <sup>8</sup>If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. <sup>9</sup>If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous, so that He will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. <sup>10</sup>If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us.

and let us consider how to stimulate one another  
to love and good deeds,  
not forsaking our own assembling together,  
as is the habit of some,  
but encouraging one another;  
and all the more as you see the day drawing near.  
Hebrews 10:24-25 NASB 1995



## Part III

### AN UGLY REALITY

What does “Anabaptist” mean today and who is one? How far is our LGBTQ-affirming, gender role denying and pro-choice Left, from our sometimes cult-like, strictish Amish on the Right? I’m sorry, but I think that in effect it is more like how far the east is from the west, than the north from the south.

We have so many major groups/denominations/conferences of Anabaptists, many of whom would find it difficult to speak blessing over each other. And would I exaggerate to say that there are then a thousand levels between our strictish Amish and our progressive Mennonites, each with their own rules and requirements for membership, and often, to even to be considered fellow-believers?

It is the rare one from either end of the spectrum who would freely love, embrace, and partner-in-mission with their brother or sister from the other extreme end. Why, we’re even able to separate from those who are only a step or two away from us in some cultural expression and its rules to assure compliance. Don’t we have a long and sordid history of dividing, judging, rejecting and even banning each other?

Why would Amish friends whom I have taken to be born again, join the rest of their church in placing their own child whom they know to be a sincere Jesus follower, under the ban for leaving the Amish to follow Him in a Mennonite setting?

Why can’t “Anabaptist” even bridge *that* gap? It could only be because of an almost cult-like expression of a religious system that judges and separates out of the fear of man in a way that violates the priesthood of all believers, through a leadership style that openly violates Jesus’ clear instructions in Matthew 20:25-28. And what does He say in Matthew 23 about such things, including His several “woes”?

### MORE

We are divided over the work of the Holy Spirit, too, but if God uses us in a special way in a coming Day it will include those who are Spirit-baptized and empowered, through whom He can make Himself known through signs, wonders, healings, deliverance and more. In that time, some Anabaptists will be at risk of blaspheming the Holy Spirit by declaring God’s work through their brethren to be the work of Satan. Be careful!

Only in rare cases will there be enough power in “Anabaptist” to enable us to remain true to each other and to Christ when betrayal would prevent the taking of our property and/or our life, and I expect to see that Day. Such enabling is by the rule of Christ in us, which is spirit in nature. Our Anabaptist forefathers were known to be people of the Spirit.

Spoken words are only sounds with meaning; they have the meaning for us that we give them; they quickly become identity issues with spiritual weight; and we judge others by the meaning *we* give the word. I have considered myself a Protestant and an Evangelical, but was recently at an event of hundreds of more “conservative” saints where I learned that to be accepted there, I should not admit that.

I didn’t test the word “Charismatic” with them, and maybe *you* will take a step or two back when you learn that Elaine and I embraced that word-label for ourselves in May, 1970 - but don’t rush to a judgment that assumes the extremes that antagonists like to warn about. No, we weren’t at Munster - it started in a little Mennonite church near Eastern Mennonite College in Harrisonburg, Virginia.

We are also deeply divided over our positions on Israel. And on eschatology, gender-related roles in the home and church, social justice, peace and racism issues, dress standards (or not), the head covering (How many standards *are* there? Where’s my ruler?), worship style including the use of instruments, the necessity of the cross, and the principles of Biblical interpretation that shape those various positions.

Add to that politics including American “Christian nationalism,” the “Trump effect” and “the border,” and you have what no realistic thinker would consider grounds for unity. “Anabaptist” isn’t enough, so there’s only one solution.

Is it noteworthy that as we approach January 21, 2025 our efforts in reconciliation are focused toward the divisions and pains that took place between the Anabaptists, and Zwingli/Luther/Calvin and other reformers and those who followed them in Switzerland 500 years ago, more than toward our present Anabaptist community here at home which remains so utterly divided? Is it easier to extend forgiveness toward those who persecuted our ancestors, than to repent of our own prideful and judgmental hearts and souls that so easily produce disdain and create distance among us, here and now?

The cross could unite us but “Anabaptist” cannot. Most of the things that we disagree on and separate over (and judge each other for) would become irrelevant when Jesus is truly Lord of our life; when our identity and security are in the Kingdom of God, present and future; and when we obey Jesus’ John 13:34-35 command to love each other as He loves us.

Cultural distinctives can separate us from the world in a certain way, but they cannot separate us from the spirit of the world and they create potential for self-righteousness in the process. When we deny ourselves and take up our cross daily to follow Jesus, it *does* separate us from the world and the spirit of the world and will naturally produce the cultural distinctives of the Kingdom of God that are *of* and *by* faith and not of man. When will we Anabaptists become most marked by love, unity and mission?

#### **A BRAVE ATTEMPT AT UNITY**

One brave current attempt at unity is our Center-Left’s production of the \$1.5 million “Anabaptist Community Bible,” a new study bible designed to embody the spirit of the Anabaptist tradition through its contributions from 500 Anabaptist study groups. See: <https://anabaptismat500.com/>

I say Center-Left because it uses the Common English Bible (CEB), which makes some assumptions in translation that most on the Right would find offensive. One of the most flagrant efforts to avoid traditional language is the translation of Mark 10:45, where Jesus says; “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many,” but the CEB renders it, “for the Human One didn’t come to be served but rather to serve and to give his life to liberate many people.” And there’s more.

Overall, the translation empowers those who want to minimize or eliminate gender-based roles and related topics, and opens the door to what the majority of present Anabaptists would not believe in that respect. Google “Kerry Lee critique of the CEB translation” to see an objective critique of the translation and its impact. Time will tell what effect this effort has on our unity.

#### **SEARCHING OUR HEARTS**

My sense is that most of us from one end of the spectrum to the other are fairly well settled in our position and feel little need for change. We believe that all would be well if “they” were like “us.” Aren’t prayers for unity typically prayers for “them”?

It is well known that the great revivals of history emerged out of humble saints pleading with God for revival, starting with their own heart and soul in the spirit of Psalm 139:23-24.

*Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me and know my anxious thoughts; and see if there be any hurtful way in me, and lead me in the everlasting way.*

We like to “claim” II Chronicles 7:14, but we often treat one phrase there like it’s a chunk of gristle in a steak. You already know it, but it reads:

*if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land. NIV*

We usually apply this to our nation, but it applies to our prayers for the Church as well. The distasteful phrase there is “and turn from their wicked ways,” because we’re reluctant to admit that we could have any.

So let me ask. How can we be so divided, so judgmental of other Anabaptists (or other saints for that matter), and so in love with the world and the things of the world, if we didn’t have something dark lurking inside of us? Maybe in a closet, but there nonetheless. Could there even be some ungodly threads woven into the fabric of our present Anabaptist culture?

Consider I Peter 4:17 and ask, “When will we dare to bow before our Lord together and ask Him to show us our sin?”

*For it is time for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?*

If we dared to do that, it could lead to deep repentance that led to whole new dimensions of faith, life and unity for us.

### **REPENT! OF WHAT?**

Some of this might be painfully specific, and some applies more to our Left or our Right, so please invite the Holy Spirit to instruct you as you read.

We must repent of being “the quiet in the land,” a dynamic that the Richards and Hoover books (see Resources) explain so well.

And we must repent of the arrogance that has allowed us to judge ourselves as superior to our brethren (Anabaptist and otherwise) in a way that we separate from each other.

And of the arrogance that frees us to blatantly dismiss many of the clear (for those who have eyes to see) but serious things that Jesus said about Kingdom life here and now.

Brace yourself now. Especially beginning in the late 1960’s, many have come to make themselves judges of the Word and interpreters

of its meaning and application according to the lawless spirit of feminism that infiltrated and rose to power in our faith community since then. It continues to today, producing offspring that are reprehensible to God. We are to instead, invite His Word to judge us according to its timeless truths and His timeless intention of holiness for His I Peter 2:9-12 royal priesthood. That goes deep, and we must repent if we have any hope of being His people in our Day.

And we must repent of abandoning the message of man’s depravity and God’s solution, each with their eternal consequences, and of replacing them with a social gospel and its emphasis on peace, social justice, racism and “good works” that are empty of a message of eternal hope. We have too often become the “waterless cisterns” (don’t Google that) of Jeremiah 2:13.

### **A CULTURE OF DECEPTION**

Now *this* is strong! We must deal with a culture of deception among us. It is most openly and flagrantly displayed in the well-known and assumed practice of making rules that allow one to ignore the rules by doing something acceptable in order to “cover” something that is not. This starts with a rule that is of man and is supposedly designed to express or produce righteousness, but rarely does so because it is of law and not of spirit.

Everyone knows it’s fake and we make light of it. Things like putting ones’ work truck in the name of an employee or a friend or relative who hasn’t joined the church. Or having a meaningless agreement of some kind that technically allows one to have a modern, computer-driven but bishop-approved business with power from outside. (How *could* a bishop deny such to a \$ucce\$\$ful entrepreneur in his church?)

Or like putting a phone booth on a neighbor’s land, where he pays the bill and they reimburse him? Or sending your smart phone out and having it dummed down because the bishop forbids a phone that has internet access - but then getting a tablet that has those pretty Verizon bars? “It’s not a smart phone.”

Or having the most modern (and expensive) solar systems to produce electricity to run our modern appliances in our fully-wired houses. Which is the most “modern,” that, or power run in from outside?

One of the deepest and most life-inhibiting deceptions is the practice of reading scripture, singing, praying and preaching in a language that is unknown to the people, for the sake of tradition. It elevates dead tradition over the value of the life that God intends to flow through those practices, and pretends to confirm our spirituality even if it doesn’t connect one to the Father and the Life He offers. Phew!

Now, before someone jumps on a bandwagon here, let me say that most of us, including me, have our personal tastes in worship form and can find it hard to engage with God in the forms that others find enriching. Maybe hymns versus contemporary worship songs, preaching style, and so forth. Why do we jump from one church to another so often?

The big problem is that those who practice deception, even if that particular deception is “approved,” embrace a spirit of deception and thus become deceived themselves. Practicing deception in material things leads to deception in spiritual matters. We are a deceived people in multiple ways and it’s not only the Amish.

We would be a very different people if our cultural simplicity was actually Biblical simplicity and was worked out with integrity in life. If it were actually of faith, it would set us free from our present love for the world and the things of the world - which are easily pursued behind a façade of “plain life.” How many things have become necessities to us that were only recently luxuries?

And speaking of that - don’t we trick ourselves into thinking that symbols of simplicity or of modesty, which might be practiced out of the fear of man, actually *are* proof of our practicing the principle they represent even if our soul lusts for the worldly way that they are intended to protect us from - which we often practice with impunity when we don’t think we’ll get caught? BTW, the most

beautiful women are those who dress modestly and are confident in who they are without needing to display their bodies in order to gain approval from men. Or from each other.

### **BLESSED?**

Another area of deception is to assume that we are “blessed of God” if we are financially “successful.” However, the relational, financial and other life principles of Proverbs will work for anyone, not just Christians, and our cultural traits of industriousness, creativity, perseverance and diligence can generally produce success for anyone. It is not safe to assume that our prosperity is His blessing upon us.

Further, many have somehow deceived themselves into thinking that we are “blessed by God” even if we do business in cash and don’t report it as income. How many bags of “puppy cash” and suchlike are there among us? How many safes stuffed with cash? Giving and receiving untaxed cash is widespread and assumed, and we become deceived about our own true spirituality when we deceive Uncle Sam in this way.

Some tests of whether our “success” is God’s blessing or simply the result of our hard work and culture, are whether we have treated our employees fairly; have practiced honesty and integrity in every aspect of our business (including paying required taxes); have viewed our profits as creating opportunity to extend the Kingdom of God more than for personal lifestyle and opportunity to indulge in the world; and, in achieving it we have prioritized life in a way that we can care for relationships that we are responsible for.

If so, we will find our security and affirmation in Him and may humbly but freely bask in the sense of His prospering us. If not, we will carry hidden pride; will always worry; and will be driven by a passion for “more.”

An anesthetizing false belief that we must repent of, is that giving an Old Testament 10% tithe frees us to use the remaining 90% as we wish. No, we own nothing. We are only stewards. It is *all* His and all is subject to His instruction on how to use it. If we have abundance, it is for us to live modestly and give generously. Please

do not make this to say that we are to be “poor,” but it does assume the remote possibility that God could ask us to give it all away. How many of us would become the Rich Young Ruler of Matthew 19:16-26 if put to that test?

This spirit of deception can reach into the very core of our spirituality, empowering self-righteousness based on what we say we believe and which we express in the things we do. Many of our “good works” and appearances of righteousness that we (maybe subconsciously) think help justify us before God and cover some of our roaming into the wastelands of the “world,” are odious to Him. Nothing but unadulterated, pure, obedient faith is acceptable to Him.

The Father’s standards for us are high, very high, and they can only be met by His power in us and his grace in our weaknesses after we have received His gift of eternal life. Anything that we reach to as a source of spiritual life becomes a god to us and gets between us and Him. No traditions, ways of life or rules of men can ever qualify us for the immeasurable, present and eternal reward that follows our humbly bowing before Him at the foot of the cross and surrendering the rule of our life to Him.

We become the victims of our own deception, because we have tricked ourselves into believing that something of man, is of God, and have cheated ourselves out of the authentic life He offers.

Brothers and sisters, we have work to do, but so much will change in a moment when we repent and set the eyes of our hearts on Jesus and His Kingdom alone, like He calls us to. Like our forefathers and mothers modeled for us some 500 years ago. Why *wouldn't* we?

### Timeless Truth

Ephesians 4:25: Therefore, ridding yourselves of falsehood, SPEAK TRUTH EACH ONE OF YOU WITH HIS NEIGHBOR, because we are parts of one another.

Ephesians 4:29: Let no unwholesome word come out of your mouth, but if *there is* any good word for edification according to the need *of the moment*, say that, so that it will give grace to those who hear.

Matthew 18:3-4: Truly I say to you, unless you change and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. <sup>4</sup> So whoever will humble himself like this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

John 8:31b-32: If you continue in My word, *then* you are truly My disciples; <sup>32</sup> and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.

John 5:39-40: You examine the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is those *very Scriptures* that testify about Me; <sup>40</sup> and *yet* you are unwilling to come to Me so that you may have life.

Titus 2:11-14: For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all people, <sup>12</sup> instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously, and in a godly manner in the present age, <sup>13</sup> looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, <sup>14</sup> who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, eager for good deeds.

James 4:8-10: Come close to God and He will come close to you. Cleanse *your* hands, you sinners; and purify *your* hearts, you double-minded. <sup>9</sup> Be miserable, and mourn, and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning, and your joy into gloom. <sup>10</sup> Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you.

## Part IV

### MARKS OF REPENTANCE

Several lines of demarcation and observable proofs of repentance, will be our disdain for accumulating this world's goods and laying up earthly treasure, and instead laying up treasure in heaven; living in a way that facilitates fulfilling the Matthew 28:18-20 Great Commission in Acts 1:8 Holy Spirit power through every resource in our hands; loving our brothers and our neighbors as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us; and embracing a whole new level of integrity in faith, word, deed and culture.

*Those* traits, which are only possible for those who enter the Kingdom of God through the Matthew 7:13-14 narrow gate and live there as Luke 9:23-26 saints, denying themselves and taking up their cross daily, would make us more like the Anabaptists whom we profess to identify with. It would produce a fullness of life that we cannot presently imagine, and equip us to be useful tools in the Master's hand now and in the Day to come. It costs us everything but is like buying pure gold for a penny an ounce.

Our repentance would then migrate out into the larger Matthew 16:18 Body of Christ and become Matthew 5:13-16 salt and light there, along with creating the setting where many who are now on the fringes of faith or are altogether skeptical or even antagonistic, could see a convincing testimony that would draw them into life in Christ. That could include family members and others whom you have been praying for, for years. There *is* hope!

### BORN AGAIN?

Digging deeper now, it's time for us to openly ask ourselves if we are actually preaching Christ and the cross in a way that leads to our being born again, or if "confessing our sins" and being baptized merely inducts us into a religious system and culture that assures us of escaping hell and going to heaven when we die.

Maybe many of us should be rebaptized after committing ourselves to take up our cross daily and forsake all to follow Christ with the

Kingdom mindset and worldview that Jesus modeled, and which He calls all of His followers into. Could that launch Anabaptist Reformation II? (Think seriously before volunteering because there's a price to pay.)

How would radical (Biblical) obedience to Christ be welcomed in our Anabaptist community today? They wouldn't kill our bodies of course, but would they slay our reputation and distance us relationally even as our Amish brethren do today to those who forsake an unbiblical Amish vow in order to follow Christ more closely?

Many in our community are aware that God is up to something. They sense that troubles are coming in America and that He is calling us to prepare to serve Him in that time. I say boldly but humbly that few faith streams could serve Him better than those who followed Christ as our forbearers followed Him. We're not even close to that but we could be.

Many of us, after being truly born again, will need to open ourselves to Acts 1:8 Spirit empowerment and the flow of the I Corinthians 12 spiritual gifts that equip the saints for the work of the Kingdom of God. Don't we often try to help Jesus build His Church with spiritual handsaws and hammers? Even the Amish use power tools in building a house! It's time that we obey Jesus in receiving that empowerment and in giving ourselves to the mission it enables us for.

### 201 DAYS TO GO!

As of this writing we have 201 days until January 21, 2025. We can still repent and turn our faces toward God in a way that refocuses the fruit of our precious belief system and the culture it creates, toward the purpose for which God instilled them in us.

The measure of our separation from others who truly are of the Body of Christ, significantly defines the measure of our disobedience to one of Jesus' most essential commands, and no cultural or religious façade can "cover" that for us. However, I have no fantasy that our Anabaptist community ever can be "one." The present division is simply too wide and too deep for anything more than being united in an imaginary or romantic sense of being Anabaptist.

My confident hope though, is that those who agree on the authority of inerrant scripture, and who search the Word, embrace its unchanging truth, and are committed to pursuing a godly life - but who differ on certain cultural expressions, will be able to seek God together; come to respect and bless each other; and partner in the great work that He will set before us. That will likely exclude the 10-20% or so on each end of the spectrum.

These four days have confirmed and deepened my premise (p4) that approaching the celebration of our 500<sup>th</sup> *must* be a time to seriously consider where we are at, and to humbly compare the spirit of our church today with that of those whose vision and sacrifice led to the derisive name “Anabaptist.” That could transform us and bridge the gap between many of us, making us one for the sake of His Name and the sake of those who yet need Him.

We *can* become a dynamic part of what He is doing in bringing in an end-time harvest. We *can* know the overflowing, unquenchable faith that produces the steadfastness and the Kingdom fruit of those who went before us those five centuries ago. We *can* still release into the Father’s hands our forbidden laid up treasure and see Him use it for its intended purposes in bringing the lost to Christ.

### WRAPPING IT UP

Don’t be surprised if national or global events between now and January 21 give us a special opportunity to turn our faces toward Christ. Will that be an act of God’s judgment or His mercy? Will it unit us or divide us?

Our next presidential inauguration is January 20, one day before our 500<sup>th</sup>. Regardless of what happens between now and then, don’t *ever* forget these two things:

- 1) Unless we repent, America *will* collapse under the weight of our sin, but only in sovereign God’s time. Just as He shaped Israel the land and Israel the people for Jesus’ first coming, so He is shaping America, the world and the Church for what comes next. Maybe soon, maybe not. His hand is over the red button and no one else can push it - not even the devil himself.

- 2) Our identity and security are in the Kingdom of God and its King, and we are safe regardless of what happens on this earth. Nothing matters except that we live with our eyes on Him and pursue the life of His Kingdom. It is only our earthly-mindedness that could cause us to fear and despair.

Three questions:

1. Do you desire to be part of what God is doing in our Day?
2. Are you willing to invite Him to search your heart and to expose your need for personal repentance?
3. How can we Anabaptists partner with each other, and with those of other belief systems, in making Christ known today in spite of our differences?

So there you have it, four days later. It is Thursday afternoon, July 4, 2024, and 201 days to go! Oh, July 4<sup>th</sup> - - - is it time for a revolution of a different sort?

I love you all. Your fellow bondsman of Jesus,

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\* \* \* \* \*

Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump *of dough*? <sup>7</sup> Clean out the old leaven so that you may be a new lump, just as you are *in fact* unleavened. For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed. <sup>8</sup> Therefore let’s celebrate the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

I Corinthians 5:6-8

## Part V, Resources

### Revelation 22:11-21, The Final Word

And he said to me, “Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near. <sup>11</sup> Let the one who does wrong still do wrong, and the one who is filthy still be filthy; and let the one who is righteous still practice righteousness, and the one who is holy still keep himself holy.”

<sup>12</sup> “Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward *is* with Me, to reward each one as his work deserves. <sup>13</sup> I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.”

<sup>14</sup> Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they will have the right to the tree of life, and may enter the city by the gates. <sup>15</sup> Outside are the dogs, the sorcerers, the sexually immoral persons, the murderers, the idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices lying.

<sup>16</sup> “I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you of these things for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star.”

<sup>17</sup> The Spirit and the bride say, “Come.” And let the one who hears say, “Come.” And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires, take the water of life without cost.

<sup>18</sup> I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; <sup>19</sup> and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book.

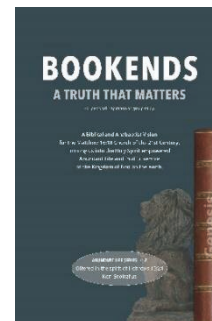
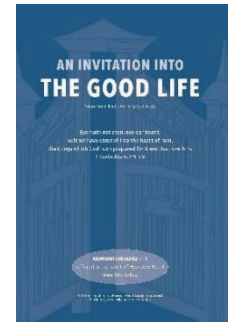
<sup>20</sup> He who testifies to these things says, “Yes, I am coming quickly.” Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.

<sup>21</sup> The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen.

### An Invitation into THE GOOD LIFE

THE GOOD LIFE takes us back to the Garden and describes life there, and tells what happened in man when he fell. It describes man’s fallen condition and why the things of the world are so appealing to us, followed by declaring the John 10:10 life that the Father offers through the work of the Son - - and the reasons why we are missing so much of it.

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### BOOKENDS, A Truth that Matters

BOOKENDS tells the story of God and man, from Genesis to Revelation, where God says, “I want to make life good for you but you must do it my way,” and man saying, “Thanks anyway God, but I think my way is better.” It describes what life would look like for us if we followed Jesus as our Anabaptist forefathers did and invites us into that journey. \$8.99

Both are available in-store and online at:

**Berlin Gospel Bookstore**, 4900 Oak St., Berlin, OH 44610, call 330-893-2523 or email [merv@mygospelbookstore.com](mailto:merv@mygospelbookstore.com). To buy them online, put “Ken Stoltzfus” in the search box on [www.mygospelbookstore.com/](http://www.mygospelbookstore.com/) to bring my books up and order them. A quantity discount is available.

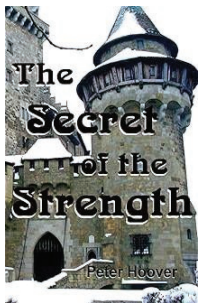
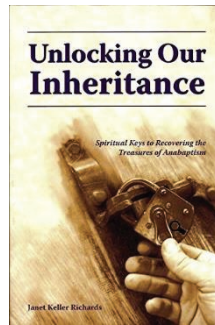
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I am deeply touched, informed and challenged by Janet Keller Richards' **Unlocking Our Inheritance**. Its 350 pages and 25 chapters are chock full of information and insight that will help you understand both the roses and the thorns of our history and how they shape who we are even today. It is profound. A prayer at the end of each chapter helps us process what has been written.

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Peter Hoover's **The Secret of the Strength** is another "must read" for anyone wanting to understand us better. Hoover points out the strengths of our forbearers in a way that can help us follow suit, and is candid about some of our blemished past in a way that helps us understand some of our blemishes today. **Free** from Kingdom Driven Ministries, P.O. Box 1751, Martinsville, IN 46151, [www.kingdomdriven.org](http://www.kingdomdriven.org),

email [info@kingdomdriven.org](mailto:info@kingdomdriven.org), call or text 574-370-3004.

Vaughan R. Martin's **Jezebel and the Battle for America** is of a different stripe, but crucial for those who want to understand America in our day. I hope you do, because we will only "see" what God is doing in our Day if we understand our nation and have a heart to partner with Him in the troubled days ahead.

Especially if the Obama name comes up in American politics again, it will be important that you have the insight that Martin presents in the introduction. That alone is worth the price of the book.

Available on Amazon, \$9.00, and sometimes on Ebay or elsewhere.



## God's Great Plan of Salvation

King James Version

For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; Romans 3:23

Behold, the LORD's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: <sup>2</sup>But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear. <sup>3</sup>For your hands are defiled with blood, and your fingers with iniquity; your lips have spoken lies, your tongue hath muttered perverseness. Isaiah 59:1-3

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. <sup>17</sup>For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. <sup>18</sup>He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. <sup>19</sup>And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. -- <sup>21</sup>But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God. John 3:16-21

And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. <sup>12</sup>He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life. <sup>13</sup>These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God. I John 5:11-13

But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. <sup>9</sup>Much more then, being now

justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. Romans 5:8-9  
For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. II Corinthians 5:21

Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed. I Peter 2:24

Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; <sup>6</sup>Which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour; <sup>7</sup>That being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life. Titus 3:5-7

That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. <sup>10</sup>For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. <sup>11</sup>For the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed. - - <sup>13</sup>For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. Romans 10:9-13

That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world. <sup>10</sup>He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. <sup>11</sup>He came unto his own, and his own received him not. <sup>12</sup>But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: <sup>13</sup>Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. John 1:9-13

