



THE AUSTRALIAN EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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WORTHLESS PASTORS AND CARELESS SHEEP

What is the meaning of the adjective, “worthless”? Simple: something is worthless when it has no real value or use. An example may be, “That promise is worthless.” We may also use the word to describe someone else. “Joan had been deserted by a worthless husband,” for example. By this, we are really describing someone’s qualities.

The Bible uses “worthless” to describe bad shepherds. Not the ones who work out in the fields looking after their sheep, but the shepherds who are to look after the Lord’s sheep. Namely, pastors. In Zechariah 11:17, the LORD told the prophet, “*How terrible for My worthless shepherd, who deserts the flock!*” In His discourse with Zechariah, the LORD had said a bad shepherd would not do all of the things a good shepherd does. The LORD then provided a very good summary of the work a good shepherd does: (1) he goes looking for the lost, (2) he seeks the young, both the young in years and the young in faith, (3) he works to heal those who have gotten hurt in their faith (in the spirit of Galatians 6:1: “*My fellow-Christians, if a person is overtaken in some sin, you who are spiritual should set such a person right again in a gentle spirit*”), and (4) he works continually to provide for the needs of the healthy that they may remain healthy. In the case of the bad shepherd, he does the opposite of all these things a good shepherd would do.

Is it too harsh to say that there are a lot of worthless shepherds (pastors) in Australia today? If our answer is yes, then why?

One reason why they are so worthless is not due to an element of incompetence. Their worthlessness is not because they lack organisation, communication, or interpersonal relationship skills. On the contrary, many pastors in Australia are indeed very professional and are organised effective communicators and extremely personable; however, they are still worthless.

But why are they so worthless? And why such harsh words towards these worthless pastors?

Nothing more than the fact that these worthless pastors *do not listen to the Word of God before they preach to their hearers*.

In the Old Testament book of Jeremiah, we hear about worthless and false preachers. I invite you to

read Jeremiah 23:16-23. All their babble is nothing more than hot air and lies. The reason being, they make it all up! Not a word they speak comes from God. These worthless and false preachers have closed ears to God’s Word.

And so, if a preacher’s ears are closed to God’s Word, then everything he says is nothing more than cotton candy silliness. Indeed, if a preacher has his ears closed to God’s Word - no matter how charismatic, professional, and competent he may be, the preacher is essentially on the same level as a parent reading fantasy stories to little children.

This is why we must be very particular and demanding of our pastor and any future pastors. We must expect our pastor to get as close to the Bible as possible – to study it diligently and even in the original languages so that he may be entirely captive to the Word of God. The pastor must be immersed in the Word before he preaches the Word of God to his flock.

And so, we should expect our pastor to diligently study God’s Word in the original languages and within its historical context before he preaches. Congregations and Christians should want their pastor close to the Word of God, never expecting him to just ‘wing it.’ There is no such thing as an innovative or creative sermon. The pastor should never do a ‘new thing,’ for God has spoken everything we need to know for our salvation through His Word.

Now, while there is nothing wrong with pastors having good communication, organisation, and interpersonal relationship skills, the church must demand that its pastor cling to the Word of God as first importance. The sermons and teachings of the church through the pastor must originate from God’s Holy Word, for if they do not, all is vain – all is empty... everything becomes worthless. The church should expect that the pastor’s main calling is to be faithful and not necessarily successful. If given a choice, the church should demand 30 years of boring and faithful preaching over 30 years of entertaining heretical preaching.

But unfortunately, there is another problem that must be addressed as well. There are also many careless parishioners in Australia right now. Australia is full of a bunch of obtuse, sleepy, and neglectful parishioners.

Now, the reason why these parishioners are so careless is not due to a lack of empathy. Their

carelessness is not because they lack kindness, love, or gentleness. On the contrary, many parishioners are indeed very kind, loving, and gentle; however, they are still careless.

But why are they so careless? And why such harsh words towards these careless parishioners?

These careless parishioners have no stomach for solid teaching but only want spiritual junk food. All they want is easy street. They are more concerned with what makes their bellies happy, and their wildest dreams come true than what God has to say in His Word. Bluntly stated, they have no taste for God and are set in their own ways. As the Apostle Paul says, *“For a time will come when people will not endure sound doctrine. Instead, they will follow their own desires and, because they have itching ears, they will surround themselves more and more with teachers. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths”* (2 Timothy 3:3-4).

We hear a lot of laments these days about how the youth have forsaken the church. While there are many reasons that contribute to this phenomenon, the late Pastor Kurt Marquart really pinpointed the problem. Permit me an opportunity to paraphrase him from 1978, speaking to this issue: *“When youth do not listen to the truth but go looking for what they want to hear, the main problem is not with the youth but with their elders. If youth are confused, it is mainly because of their parents. For example, if the liturgy is boring to children, it is usually because the parents do not find it very interesting either. If children saw adults going to receive the Word and Sacraments as the most important activity of their lives, they would respect it too and would never dream of treating it as a pop event, to be tinkered with by every Tom, Dick, and Harry. A church that has parents captive to the Word of God - particularly fathers - will generally have the devotion of their children too. But a church that surrenders to the appetites of the gut and the will of the stubborn heart neither deserves God’s Word nor the presence of youth – that is for sure.”*¹

No wonder why it is so common to see worthless pastors and careless parishioners together; they are two peas of the same pod. Careless parishioners who rebel and despise God’s Word are happy to hear worthless pastors say, “Don’t worry! All is well!” And worthless pastors who like being in positions of power

and authority are equally glad when parishioners live the way that they want to, for it is then easy to say to these parishioners, “Don’t worry; nothing bad will ever happen to you.”

What does all of this mean for the congregations of the AELC?

Quite frankly, we are all in this together. The Word of God has a warning for pastors and parishioners even today. The Lord is against smooth-tongued pastors who make up their own messages and drift away from the Word of God. The Lord is also against parishioners who follow their own hearts and plug their ears to His Word.

And so, we must not only repent of the times that we have failed in these areas, but together, we must drop to our knees and cry out for mercy, protection, and discernment.

We must pray for our pastor that he would be faithful to God’s Word, when times are good and when times are bad. Pray for your pastor that he would not turn his back on truth or be tempted to tickle your ears but be faithful regardless of how full or empty the pews and offering plates may be.

And know that your pastor prays for you. Every day he prays that the Lord would grant you zeal for the truth, discernment to identify falsehoods, and the integrity to hold your pastor to the faithful confession of the Word.

And together, let us pray boldly against the devil, the ideologies of the world, and the trickery of our sinful old Adam that attempt to steal us away from God’s Word. May we all receive from the altar of grace: forgiveness, life, and salvation.

GOD’S FORGETFUL FORGIVENESS

Sometimes we struggle to forgive. When someone sins against us, we can have trouble forgiving. This is especially true when we have been badly hurt, and we feel that the offending party doesn’t deserve forgiveness from us. Even when we try to forgive, every so often we still remember their sin against us. Years later, we may still get angry when we think of how we were hurt by others, even if we have forgiven them.

On the other side, sometimes we have hurt someone else by sinning against them. Perhaps we have sinned against our parents, spouse, or children. They have spoken their forgiveness to us, but we remember our sin. We know that our relationship will never again be what it was before our sin. Especially

¹ Paraphrase and Adaption of: Kurt Marquart, "Liturgical Commonplaces," Concordia Theological Quarterly: Volume 42, Number 4 (October 1978): 343.

when we have badly hurt someone, even years later, our sin against them arises in our heads and we think that surely, they must be thinking about our sin, too. Sin leaves a wedge between people because it is still remembered, even if it is forgiven. Forgiveness between mankind is never perfect.

It can be easy to project this kind of imperfect forgiveness onto God. When we struggle with a particular sin and fall into it yet again, we think surely God is getting tired of forgiving us. Surely, He's counting up the times we have fallen into sin and soon, if not now, we shall have crossed the line. Surely soon, if not now, God will say, "Enough! No more forgiveness for you!"

These thoughts are not from God; they are from our sinful flesh and the devil. The devil wants nothing more than to convince us that God will no longer forgive, and that He's run out of patience with us. Our sinful flesh wants nothing more than to convince that there is no more forgiveness, so we ought to stop fighting against sinful desires and just give in and remain in them.

This is not what God's forgiveness is like. God actually forgets our sins even if our neighbour cannot forget and you cannot forget. God says, "*I, I, am the One who blot out your rebellious actions, for My own sake; and I shall not remember your sins*" (Is. 43:25). He says, "*I shall forgive their wickedness and not remember their sin any longer*" (Jer. 31:34); cited also in Heb. 10:17.

What this means is that each time God forgives you your sin, it is like the first time that He forgives you. He is not counting up your sins on a tablet throughout your life. Every time you are absolved, your sins are wiped clean and removed from you as far as the east is from the west (Ps. 103:12). Every time you receive the true body and blood of Jesus for the forgiveness of sins God treads your sins underfoot and throws them into the depths of the sea (Mi. 7:19). Your sins are washed away, and God remembers them no more.

God's forgiveness is perfect. It is complete. Jesus' death was the perfect and complete sacrifice for all sin and all sinners, so no sin remains for those who are in Christ.

Don't get hung up on deserving forgiveness, either. Forgiveness can never be deserved. Forgiveness is given freely by grace. If it was deserved, then grace would no longer be grace (Rom. 11:6), but forgiveness would be one's due (Rom. 4:4).

God's forgiveness also comes with the Holy Spirit who strengthens you in your fight against sin. The Holy Spirit gives you a new heart (Ezek. 36:26); He gives you a new will and new desires (Rom. 7:22). The Holy Spirit causes you to walk in His statutes and makes you careful to obey His rules (Ezek. 36:27). The Holy Spirit enables you to put to death the sinful deeds of the body (Rom. 8:13).

Each time God forgives you is like the first time He forgives you, but He doesn't leave you wallowing in your sins. By His Holy Spirit, He lifts you out of your sins and strengthens you in your fight against sin. He will not remember your sin, but He will remind you to turn away from sin. He does not tabulate your sins but will discipline you for your own good so that you are not hardened by the deceitfulness of sin and thus fall away from Him (Heb. 3:12-13; 12:3-17).

So do not grow weary or fainthearted. The Lord disciplines the one He loves, but it is so that you will share His holiness (Heb. 12:6, 10). God continues to remove your sins from you as far as the east is from the west, trample them underfoot and throw them into the depths of the sea. God continues to forgive your sins and remember them no more. God continues to forgive you and strengthen you in your fight with sin.

A WELL WRITTEN LETTER

A member from the Marburg congregation showed me an interesting letter written in 1926 by Pastor Temme. While it is addressed to the members of the Marburg Lutheran Congregation, Pastor Temme begins the letter by addressing the singular "brother" in Christ. So perhaps it was written toward a particular member. But it doesn't matter. The letter makes for good reading and learning!

To the members of the Marburg Lutheran Congregation.

Dear brother in Christ,

It is hereby brought under your notice that the annual meeting of our Marburg Lutheran congregation will take place at the church, on Thursday afternoon, January 6th, at 2 o'clock.

During the last two years the attendance of our meetings has been bad. This state of affairs is not at all pleasing to the Lord of the Church, our Saviour, Jesus Christ, nor is it in the best interests of our congregation. Christ says in Romans 12:11, "Be not slothful in business." Jeremiah 48:10, "Cursed be he

that doeth the work of the Lord deceitfully.” It is the Christian duty of every voting member to attend all meetings of his congregation, unless evident reasons prevent him from doing so. If one member has the right to stay away, then all may stay away and our congregation will disappear.

Meetings are necessary, just as it is necessary to have meetings of School Committees, L.P.A’s, Show Societies, etc., if they are to exist.

Do not say that you are satisfied with what the others decide. If you are not there, how can you expect others to come? It is true, whoever does not attend, must be satisfied with what is decided at the meeting. But is it right to let others do your work? Is it fair that you spend your time in your own personal interests, whilst other members of your congregation are at the meetings? Why should only a few sacrifice the half-day? “Bear ye one another’s burdens” Galatians 6:2. 1 Corinthians 7:7 “Every man hath his proper gift of God, one after this manner and another after that.” You, too, can do your little bit.

The bad example of staying away from meetings and services will not be forgotten by the younger people. It might lead many astray. Do not say that there is too much quarrelling at the meetings. This is not true. If it were, why not come along and bring peace. You are just the man we should need.

Dear brother in Christ, the business of the congregation is your business. What a privilege to be a chosen worker in God’s kingdom! I make an earnest appeal to you, for the sake of the love that you bear to Jesus, who did so much for you; for the sake of your congregation; for the sake of your immortal soul, make it your business to attend all meetings and services of the congregation. The time is not wasted. Hebrews 10:25 “Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together as the manner of some is.” Luke 11:28 “Blessed are they that hear the Word of God and keep it.”

Wishing you a blessed New Year, I am, your loving Pastor, H. Temme.

FROM THE PASTOR

As I write this, lockdowns hang over our head. While our Downs congregations can still worship together, it is not so for our members below the Range, who are right in the middle of a lock-down now! I pray it won’t last too long, and for those in the thick of it, please be

careful. Thankfully we have resources available at our fingertips on the AELC website to help us with our home worship. The website has now been revamped, and I thank all those who have helped to refresh and update the site.

As we approach the end of the year, things to look forward to and to plan soon include a confirmation service at Marburg (set down for the month of September), Marburg’s children’s picnic, and Reformation Day at Lowood. The picnic and the Reformation Day service are both to be held in October, but we shall have to see how things pan out. Depending on future restrictions, we might have to make some changes.

Our next AELC service is set down for August, the 29th, at Trinity Oakey. The service will begin at 10.00am. Please come along if you can. These days are always enjoyable and gives us all a chance to catch up. We shall also have a quick meeting after service to determine if we can make changes to the service schedule a little bit. There have been a few suggestions made, and these were handed out a little while ago. If there are other suggestions, please bring them along to the meeting. This meeting might also be a good chance for our congregations to give a little bit of a report about how we are all travelling, now that we are operating as one parish.

I continue to visit as many members as I can, and my regular visiting list is growing. If you, or any one you know would like to be added to the list of regular visits, please let me know.

In the meantime, as we continue to see the erosion of godly morals around us, we must not lose heart. Instead, we give thanks to God for all the good He has given us and continues to give. We truly are blessed to be called His children, and my prayer is that He will not take His Spirit from us but will continue to serve us through His Word and Sacrament. God bless, Pastor.

