

The Christian Difference is the Gospel

The gospel is not an obvious teaching. We Lutherans can easily take it for granted. Some years ago, I heard a church leader say, “Yes, of course we are all straight on the gospel, now we have to get busy on using it!” This then was a call for us to do and us to serve, never mind about God’s doing and God’s serving. The gospel can never be treated as obvious. “Oh, yes, well of course we have the gospel. It’s all sewn up. Let’s get on to bigger and better things.” There is nothing bigger. There is nothing better than teaching what Christ says that He “*has not come to be served but to serve and give (My) life as a ransom for many*” (Matt. 20:28). The Christian difference is the gospel.

Even the disciples “don’t get it.” They are afraid when Jesus turns His face to Jerusalem to confront His doom. He plans to “*be betrayed to the Chief Priests and the scribes. They will condemn Him to death and will hand Him over to the Gentiles. ³⁴ They will mock Him and spit on Him, flog Him and kill Him, and after three days He will rise*” (Mark 10:33-34). The disciples, however, want to move on to bigger and better things. “*Grant that one of us may sit at Your right, and the other at Your left in Your glory*” (Mark 10:37). They had no idea what they are asking! If even Jesus’ closest companions cannot get this straight, why should we think that the gospel is “obvious, every knows it, and no big deal.” Only when they are confronted by the Crucified One after He has risen, and only after the Lord had sent them the Holy Spirit did the disciples truly “get it.” Only then could they witness to the servant Lord who gives Himself to sinners through suffering and death. The Christian difference is the suffering Lord.

Unfortunately, many churches today have long soft-pedalled Christianity. Soft-pedalling has not worked. The church’s enemies are still implacably opposed to our teaching and principles and they are still coming for us. Never doubt it. The baby boomer project attempting to make Christianity less offensive to the continuously offended has failed. It has left many churches utterly lethargic, unable to respond faithfully to the declining culture and its false messiahs. Many Christian churches are simply fighting for sexual degeneracy, and all manner of “wokenesses” under the guise of what are called “justice and equity.” They certainly have no time for the Saviour whose church it is; the Saviour who gives Himself for sinners. When nothing done by humans could be classified as sin, what good is a Saviour from sin?

When the only shameful things are acts, words, or deeds that offend against “wokeness,” who needs a Saviour who suffers and dies? In a world where your deeds can be dredged up from your online profile from Facebook etc., and weaponized against you, who needs a merciful Christ that swallows down your depravity and returns your life to you cleansed by His precious blood? In a day when love has grown cold, how can the Saviour’s love unknown to the loveless shown, lead us to a love that covers a multitude of sins? Such a Saviour is inconvenient, because He makes it impossible for us to destroy others in the forum of public opinion. The churches have not preached this Christ who serves us. Therefore, we can find no way to serve one another. We can only devour each other, chew upon each other, and spit each other out. O Lord Jesus, save us from such a world! This the Christian difference: The God who serves (Mark 10:45).

Jesus has come for just this purpose. He comes not to fix a world broken, but to save His dear children from this present evil age by giving His life as a ransom. Because the world is fallen and frustratingly fractured, we feel held hostage by the madness. We feel as though someone has ordered us to stay home behind locked doors (Oh, wait! We feel that way because someone already has!). Our Lord has come to rescue us from being taken hostage in Satan’s dominion. He will not leave us in the clutches of the enemy. He comes to serve us in the place of our exile and defy our enemy, throwing down the gage of God’s Word, “*A person does not live by bread alone but by every Word that comes out through the mouth of God*” (Matthew 4:4).