

## Article: On Fire for Christ!

Sometimes, the Lutheran Church is accused of not being very missional. We're solid regarding doctrine - justification by grace through faith alone - but when it comes to mission, well, we're clueless - or so the thinking goes.

But do you have any idea how ridiculous that is? How can you have pure doctrine yet no concern for the lost? That doesn't even make sense. If your doctrine's pure, you'll care deeply about missions. If you don't care about Christ's mission, impure doctrine's the least of your worries. You aren't even a Christian!

Some pastors and their congregations run around believing that bringing people to faith in Christ is *our* job, even if they don't say they believe that. When we aren't getting results, that's a sign we aren't doing it right and need to make the Word a little more appealing. They look at all those so-called "confessional" pastors and their flock - those who stubbornly cling to those irrelevant doctrines from a long time ago, namely the 16th-century Lutheran Confessions, and snicker that they will never grow their church. These "confessionals" need to get with the times!

It is a misunderstanding to believe that we can bring people to Jesus without understanding the depth of sin and our natural inclination to hate God. Some people believe that we can make Christianity attractive, but the truth is that the message of the cross is considered foolish by those who do not believe. Trying to make Christianity appealing means preaching something other than true Christianity. So they throw away some of the best gifts the Church has for mission: her liturgy and hymnody. These treasures are absolutely saturated with God's Word and instil faith like nothing else in the world. But the liturgy isn't attractive enough, so they throw it in the trash. They opt for services and songs that are a little more worldly and a lot less doctrinal. In their effort to reach the lost, they end up watering down the Gospel - the very means by which the Holy Spirit brings about conversion - and replacing it with some "genetically modified message," something they have created that is better than God's Word alone.

It's not hard to fall into the trap of thinking we need to help the Holy Spirit out. Preaching the Gospel in its truth and purity and administering the Sacraments in accordance with Christ's institution is a good first step, but surely there's more to God's mission than that. I mean, look at the results. There's much more room in the pews these days than there used to be. How many congregations have found themselves in a rut - same old, same old - week after week?

God's Word always accomplishes its purposes. The problem isn't with the efficacy of the Word; it's with our false expectations. Think back to what Christ taught in the parable of the Sower (Matthew 13). All the Sower is concerned about is getting the seed out there. He's not particularly concerned about where it falls, so He throws it everywhere. Granted, it's not the best farming method, but when it comes to grace, God isn't exactly concerned with efficiency. The Sower doesn't sit around worrying about the yield of His labours. The Word often falls upon deaf ears and stony hearts and gets snatched up, scorched, or strangled.

Now it's only that we would want a good crop after doing all of that planting, but that's not in our hands. Our job is to plant faithfully and leave the growth to God. Even if we don't get any harvest at all, that's still no excuse to start using genetically modified seed. Satan would have us measure success by numbers and money, not faithfulness. We've been given to teach the Word of God in its truth and purity and to keep sowing it *no matter what*. That's how God's mission works.

Our confessions tell the truth. God's Word works when and where He wills. If we cannot, by our own reason or strength, believe in Jesus Christ or come to Him, then neither can we, by our own reason or strength, bring others to Jesus Christ. That's the work of the Holy Spirit.

There is no promise that money and success will follow faithful preaching, and if our Lord's example is any indication, it'll usually result in the opposite.

The way of the cross is a narrow way, and our Lord prepares the faithful by telling them how vehemently the world will hate them. He says the hour's coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God. You shouldn't expect lots of people and money if you're doing it right. When you see those things, more often than not, something is seriously wrong.

So what about those jewels of dead orthodoxy we call the Lutheran Confessions? Are they really all doctrine and no mission? The question itself is flawed. It sets God's doctrine up as if it were a hindrance to His own mission.

God's mission is at the heart of the Church's confession: "*Our churches teach that people cannot be justified before God by their own strength, merits, or works. People are freely justified for Christ's sake, through faith, when they believe that they are received into favour and that their sins are forgiven for Christ's sake. By His death, Christ made satisfaction for our sins. God counts this faith for righteousness in His sight*" (Augsburg Confession, V).

That is God's mission. The salvation of wicked sinners by His grace through faith. Justification is both a doctrine and God's mission at the same time.

But how does God justify sinners? That's exactly the next question the Augsburg Confession answers: "*So that we may obtain this faith, the ministry of teaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments was instituted. Through the Word and Sacraments, as through instruments, the Holy Spirit is given. He works faith, when and where it pleases God, in those who hear the good news that God justifies those who believe that they are received into grace for Christ's sake. This happens not through our own merits, but for Christ's sake*" (Augsburg Confession, V).

God's kingdom comes when our heavenly Father gives us His Holy Spirit. His Holy Spirit calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies - He accomplishes God's mission of justifying sinners - through the preaching of Christ crucified for your sin and by giving you Christ's grace-filled Sacraments.

The people of Australia need the Gospel just as badly as we do in our congregations. When people don't come, it's not our job to bend over backward and beg them. Our Lord never shoved the Gospel down the throats of those who didn't want it.

Jesus once told a parable about this. He said a man once gave a great banquet and invited many. But those to whom the invitation went out didn't want it. They had more important things to do. But the Master didn't beg them to come. Instead, He became angry and started inviting the poor and the crippled and the blind and the lame, not to mention those on the highways and hedges. As for those who were originally invited, Jesus says none of them will taste His banquet.

Jesus warned His disciples that they would be rejected by many. When that happens, He says, shake the dust off your feet at them.

Not everyone wants to hear the Gospel. Even in the Church, we can take God's Word for granted. This is something we need to be aware of and guard against. The Holy Spirit isn't interested in sitting around and waiting for ungrateful people. Luther once said, "*O my beloved Germans, buy while the market is at your door; gather in the harvest while there is sunshine and fair weather; make use of God's grace and word while it is there! For you should know that God's word and grace is like a passing shower of rain which does not return where it has once been. It has been with the Jews, but when it's gone it's gone, and now they have nothing. Paul brought it to the Greeks; but again when it's gone it's gone, and now they have the Turk. Rome and the Latins also had it; but when it's gone it's gone, and now they have the pope. And you Germans need not think that you will have it forever, for ingratitude and contempt will not make it stay,*" (To the Councilmen of All Cities in Germany That They Establish and Maintain Christian Schools, LW 45:352-3).

God grant us His Holy Spirit so that we cling to the pure doctrine of the Gospel and support its proclamation here and throughout the world.