

Lutheran Evangelism.

by

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29 April 2008

"As you are going," our Lord commands us, "make disciples."

The Great Commission comes to us all. We as Christians have been called by the Gospel, to be sure. But we have also called to the proclamation of the Gospel. Making disciples is our vocation as believers; it is what we have been called to do. This is not only the job of the pastor, but is in fact our vocation. The pastor's job is to build up the congregation for the work of the Kingdom. We as followers of Christ are to continue in the task of proclaiming the Kingdom of God to the world. The Kingdom is in you, we are told in scripture, but its fulfillment is also "not yet."

Lutheran evangelism is not a program like "Evangelism Explosion". Instead, Lutheran evangelism is about lifestyle and catechesis. Actually, Lutheran evangelism is an outgrowth of our sacramental theology. Lutheran theology is about our lifestyle, and it is about our proclamation of the Kingdom as we live our lives in the world, but not of the world, as we bodily take the holiness of God into this fallen world. Lutheran evangelism is about our doing the work of the Kingdom through the seeming insignificance of acts of love and mercy; Lutheran evangelism is therefore about our teaching the truths of the Kingdom as and while we live out our vocation before the world. Ultimately, Lutheran evangelism is vocational rather than programmatic.

We must make it clear that the term "vocation" in Lutheran theology is not synonymous with the term "job," but refers to the roles in which we live as Christians. As Christians, our lifestyle is a presentation of the Kingdom of God in all its dimensions. We do not reflect the world; neither do we cloister ourselves from the world. We are in the world but not of the world. Our lives represent the Kingdom of God before the world and to the world. As vessels of God's holiness, we confront the principalities and powers, be they temporal or demonic; we confront the evils in society, be they personal, political, economic, cultural, or even familial; we minister to the lowly and to the downtrodden, to the sick and to the weak, to the aged and to the immigrant.

Lutheran evangelism is also catechesis---not just the formal process as it exists within the church, but also individual believers presenting the truths of the Kingdom to the world through word and deed. Catechesis is what our Lord meant when he told us to make disciples. As Christians, we proclaim the Kingdom by applying the truths of God's word to the situations and people in our daily lives. We have been catechized in these truths in the church and therefore we take these truths to the world. "The Christ in me is stronger for my brother than the Christ in me for me" (Dietrich Bonhoeffer).

Of course Lutheran evangelism does not bring about the fulfillment of the Kingdom of God. Our proclamation of the Kingdom is penultimate, not ultimate. We exist between the times, between the "now" of the appointed time of salvation, and the "not yet" of Christ's return in glory. The proclamation of the Kingdom contains both

the "now" and the "not yet." This is the mystery of the faith: "Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again."

We are called to represent the Kingdom of God in our lives and through our teaching. We are to be ready in season and out of season to give an account of the hope that is in us. This is my call, and it is your call; this is the call given to the church by Christ.

The LCMS must become the evangelistic Lutheran church body in America if we are to survive. We must disciple new converts to fill our pews. We must plant new churches to fill our synods. We must be in the world, confronting sin and the devil; ministering to the poor; instructing people in the truths of the Kingdom; and representing the Kingdom before the world.

None of this will make us comfortable, but so what? Our Lord did not call us to a comfortable life. Instead, he called us to a soldier's life; he called us to come and die. Our Lord came not to bring peace on earth, but a sword. We must therefore put on the full armor of God and move forward into the world. That is our calling from God. That is our mission as believers. And that is our vision as a church body.

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