

GO THEREFORE AND
MAKE DISCIPLES OF ALL
THE NATIONS, BAPTIZING
THEM IN THE NAME OF
THE FATHER AND OF THE
SON AND OF THE HOLY
SPIRIT, TEACHING THEM
TO OBSERVE ALL THINGS
THAT I HAVE COMMANDED
YOU; AND LO, I AM WITH
YOU ALWAYS, EVEN TO
THE END OF THE AGE.

We Recommit Ourselves to the Mission of the Church

An Essay for the Twenty-First Convention of the
Church of the Lutheran Confession
Bruce J. Naumann

*Lift up your eyes and
look at the fields, for
they are already white
for harvest! - John 4:35*

Dear fellow laborers in the harvest of souls -- members, delegates, pastors, and officials of the CLC,

Ours is a day of instant communication. History-making events happening a world away appear in our living rooms as they are taking place. Pagers and cellular phones provide instant communications to common citizens and heads of state alike,

wherever they may be. When important events occur, people who need to know are just a call away. Such was not always the case, of course. Before the days of cell phones, satellites, and even radio transmission, important information had to be delivered personally. In some cases this led to tragic circumstances. Consider, for example, the end of the "Great War" -- World War I, in the early part of this century. Brutal trench warfare had been fought on the front lines of central Europe between the Allies and Germany. Neither side could afford to show any lack of determination to win the war, right up until the very end. When an armistice was signed on November 11, 1918, the war was over -- *but many were not expecting the war's end, and did not find out about it for some time.* Communications simply did not travel very fast in those days. Sadly, many men became casualties of World War I *after* hostilities had officially ceased! Can you imagine the tragic irony of losing one's own life--or losing a loved one--to a war that was already over?

In the eighty years since the end of the Great War, we have come a long way in the technology of advanced communications. It is now easy to send or receive a message--across town or across the world--in ways that were never imagined in 1918. And yet, a life-and-death tragedy of epic proportions still haunts the world every day ...because of a lack in communications! A far greater war than all of mankind's struggles has been waged and won, by our Savior Jesus Christ. In this war there are no innocent bystanders. All people since Adam are guilty, but through Christ all are redeemed, without exception.

Therefore, as through one man's offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man's righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man's obedience many will be made righteous. (Romans 5:18-19)

The Lord Jesus gained the victory over sin and Satan by dying for the guilt of our sins and then rising from the dead. The world's most dreadful foe lies defeated, and the news is ready to be proclaimed:

*The strife is o'er, the battle done; Now is the Victor's triumph won;
Now be the song of praise begun. Alleluia!*

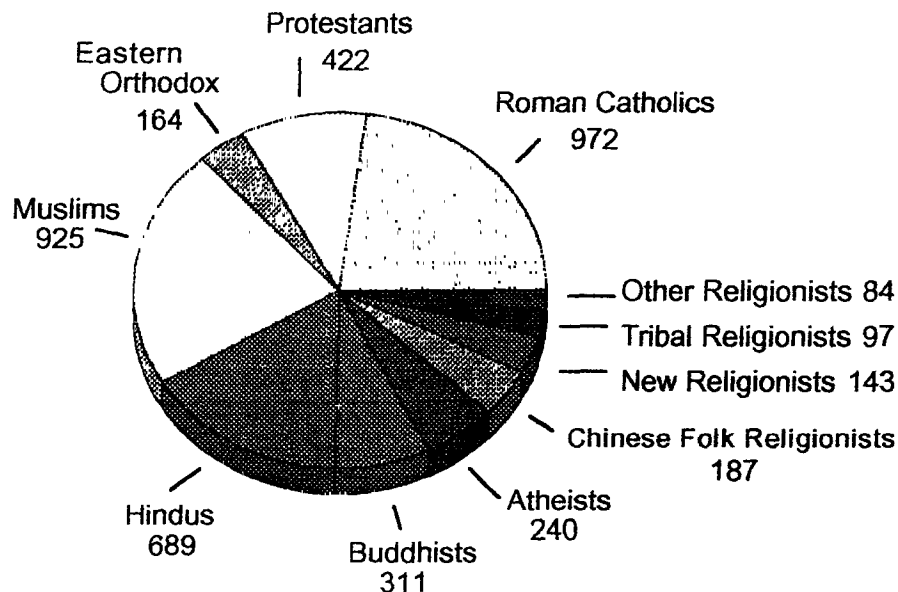
*Death's mightiest pow'rs have done their worst, And Jesus hath His foes dispersed;
Let shouts of praise and joy outburst. Alleluia!*

*He closed the yawning gates of hell: The bars from heaven's high portals fell.
Let songs of praise His triumph tell. Alleluia! (TLH 210)*

The objective fact of the end of hostilities between God and man is extraordinarily great news. We rejoice in these glad tidings! At the same time, we have the sobering realization that casualties continue to mount in this war -- ironically, a war that has been officially over for nearly two millennia. Because of unbelief, masses of people are living and dying in a state of war with the True God, when He has already declared peace and forgiveness. Please consider carefully these estimated figures for the spiritual condition of our world population:

SPIRITUAL CONDITION OF THE WORLD

Numbers given in millions*



*Please Note: These figures are compiled from the 1994 *World Almanac and Book of Facts* and the 1994 *World Book Encyclopedia*. Since different sources give different (and sometimes conflicting) estimates, these figures are for illustrative purposes only.

We hear the words "million" and even "billion" so frequently that they do not make much impression anymore. But these are not just statistics, they are the SOULS of people for whom God gave His only Son, and for whom that Son died. God is not willing that any of them should perish, but that all should come to repentance and eternal life. God has shown the extent of His love and care by providing a completed salvation for each one of these billions. His care should be our own, as well. It has been said, "A missionary is one who never gets used to the sound of heathen footsteps on their way to a Christless eternity."

These numbers should produce a deafening roar of "footsteps" in our ears. Nearly two thirds of the souls in the world openly adhere to pagan beliefs and idolatry. Most of the remainder are being led in the teaching of self-salvation under the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox faiths. Only about 10% of the world's population belong to churches that claim the heritage of the Reformation. Sadly, the majority of these churches are falling prey to apostasy. Since they have abandoned the Scriptures as the only authoritative rule of faith and life, they have abandoned the true Gospel, or are in the process of doing so. The poet paints a somber but accurate portrait of the world in which we live:

*Fearful scenes are flung our way;
Masses jostle to a judgment day,
Led by liars headed for fire;
Death they ignore and demons admire;
Helpless, hopeless, tricked, but proud —
Who will go and love this crowd?
He who bravely met the test leaves for us the scene impressed:
Who will die as Jesus died, calmly setting self aside?*

-- Byron Harting

No one, of course, can die as Jesus died. He alone could selflessly take the guilt of the world on Himself and suffer on the cross for all. However, our Lord **does** call on us to take up our own crosses, follow in His footsteps, and be His ambassadors to the world. The mission of the Church is to act on Jesus' command which He gave in the Great Commission:

"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

- Matthew 28:19-20

Fulfilling this commission involves setting self-interest aside. In view of the gift of eternal life that Christ has given us, and the tremendous cost that He paid to redeem us, what could possibly keep us from doing our utmost in this most urgent and blessed calling? Why should a *recommitment* to missions even be necessary? Unfortunately, a many things **do** get in the way, all of which have our sinful flesh as their common denominator.

Son, go, work today in my vineyard. . . And he answered and said, 'I go, sir,' but he did not go. - Matthew 21:28-30

The Lord's call to us, His disciples, cannot be more clear: "You shall be witnesses to Me" (Acts 1:8); "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15); "Let your light so shine" (Matthew 5:16). Surely, it is good and right to give glory and praise to our Lord for the ways in which He **has** worked among us toward these ends. We ought to take note of what the Holy Spirit has accomplished through us and thank Him for it. We see His active presence in our history, and the upbuild-

ing of His Church through our witness, as our first essayist at this convention has reminded us. We see how He has preserved the pure teaching of His Word in our homes, classrooms and pulpits, and the necessity for us to guard and treasure this sacred trust, as was the subject of our second essay.

However, if we make an honest appraisal of ourselves, our congregations, and our church body with regard to faithfulness to our mission, we will also see our many failures. We see neglect when it comes to recognizing the urgency of carrying out the mission of the Church, because we do not fully appreciate the dire consequences of God's judgment on unbelief. Every person with whom we come in contact -- whether they are mean and surly or fine and friendly -- will spend eternity in torment and separation from God, unless they come to know the Lord Jesus as their only Savior from their sin! More than that, we see neglect when it comes to the full appreciation of the treasure we possess in the Gospel of full and free forgiveness through Christ. This message has the power to change the eternal destiny of sinners bound for hell to saints bound for glory! It is surely a grievous sin to take the Lord's righteous wrath lightly and to take His forgiveness for granted. Martin Luther bemoaned the fact that so soon after the start of the Reformation his countrymen had lost their first love for the Gospel:

When the Word of God first arose, twelve or fifteen years ago, people diligently listened to it, and everybody was glad that "good works" were no longer to plague them. They said: "God be praised that we now have water to drink." For then we were thirsty, and the doctrine tasted fine; we drank of it and found it a precious teaching. But now we are sated; we are tired of the drink and are surfeited with it, so that our Lord God must depart and let us die of thirst; for He remains only with those who feel their misery. But there are few who know this. The majority turn the Gospel into liberty for the flesh.

(What Luther Says, p. 1199)

Have we also lost our first love, like the Ephesian church addressed in Revelation chapter two? Has the day come that we are more interested in self-preservation than Gospel proclamation? May the Spirit graciously work in our hearts to prevent these things! As we count on His strength, let us be aware of our own weakness. We regularly praise our God for His saving Gospel message with our lips. But we often fail to show the fruit of our faith with regard to the Church's mission by our deeds. Why do we so often see a lack of willing eagerness to set self-interests aside and do what it takes to communicate the good news to others?

*Paul & Leischer:
Matt. 28:18-20 includes both
preservation and
propagation*

Like Moses, we may respond to our Lord's call to witness with misplaced modesty. Moses resisted God's call to be a witness to the Egyptians and to lead Israel out of slavery. His excuse was that he did not consider himself to be an effective speaker. The Lord corrected him by pointing out that his success depended not on his own talents, but on the sufficiency that God Himself would provide. He said, *"Who has made man's mouth? Or who makes the mute, the deaf, the seeing, or the blind? Have not I, the LORD? Now therefore, go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall say"* (Exodus 4:11-12). When we are in doubt about our own abilities, we need to be constantly reminded that God's strength is made perfect in our weakness.

Like Gideon, we may be overwhelmed by the task at hand and "underwhelmed" by our own resources. The Lord called on Gideon to rise up and deliver a leaderless and downtrodden Israel from the hand of the mighty Midianites. Gideon resisted at first because of he felt that he lacked the necessary qualifications. However, the Lord showed through him that no task is too great, no foe is too powerful to stand before a believer who is acting on God's commands. The Lord assured Gideon, *"Surely I will be with you, and you shall defeat the Midianites as one man."* -- Judges 6:16. With God fighting for him, Gideon completely defeated the enormous invading army of Midianites with a mere 300 men. Can the tiny CLC ever hope to bring the Gospel to the world, beginning at home? The Lord has done more with less.

Like Elijah, we may become despondent when it seems that we are all alone and that our efforts to be witnesses for the true God are futile. Elijah was suffering from missionary "burn-out" when he asked the Lord to take his life. He was convinced that he alone had kept himself from idolatry in Israel, and complained about being persecuted for it. The Lord's answer? *"Go, return on your way. . . I have reserved seven thousand in Israel, all whose knees have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him"* (1 Kings 19:15, 18). We often are not privileged to see the results that God produces from our service in His kingdom work. It takes a real exercise of faith to be certain of His promise that His Word will not return to Him void, but will accomplish the purpose for which He sent it. Our God has never gone back on a promise!

Like Jonah, we may become so fed up with the wickedness of those to whom we are to witness that we would rather see them punished than forgiven. Jonah only went to preach in the city of Nineveh under duress, and became angry at the prospect of God sparing the city. Would we rather dismiss the dying souls around us with a vindictive "good riddance," instead of going out of our way to give them the Good News of salvation in Christ? *"Christ died for the ungodly,"* says Paul (Rom. 5:6). As redeemed sinners, we should know that well! The Lord demonstrated his care and concern for all when he said to Jonah, *"Should I not pity Nineveh, that great city, in which are more than one hundred and twenty thousand persons who cannot discern between their right hand and their left. . .?"* (Jonah 4:11). It takes a selfless kind of love to look at the worldly desert wasteland around us and see a field ripe for harvest -- but that's what Jesus sees!

Like Jeremiah, we may be intimidated by the prospect of opposition to our witnessing. We should expect scorn and intimidation, for Jesus said quite plainly, *"You will be hated by all for My name's sake"* (Luke 21:17). Jeremiah was insecure because of His youth, but the Lord urged him to have courage -- not in his own strength, but in the strength of the Lord. *"You shall go to all to whom I send you, and whatever I command you, you shall speak. Do not be afraid of their faces,*

for I am with you to deliver you," says the LORD" (Jeremiah 1:7-8). We ought not be surprised when we meet with opposition to the Gospel, but neither should we be afraid. We are bearers of God's Word, which does not change and will abide forever. Because we have nothing to lose, we have nothing to fear. Christ has given us all things!

Like Peter, we may be hesitant to set aside our cultural preferences for the sake of the Gospel. Peter needed special convincing from God before he would enter the home of Cornelius, a non-Jew, to preach there (Acts 10). He later compromised His Gospel witness in Antioch by showing favoritism toward certain outward Jewish customs (Galatians 2). Here Peter found himself on the receiving end of a rebuke from St. Paul, who clearly saw that the defense of proper Christian liberty is finally the defense of the Gospel itself. Are we sometimes guilty of demanding that prospects for the kingdom of God must fit our particular cultural mold before they can be considered truly Christian? We should rather take our cue from Paul, who would never budge an inch when it came to defending the truths of God's Word, but who was eager to sacrifice anything and everything else -- to "be all things to all men" -- in order to have greater opportunity to plant the seed of God's Word (1 Corinthians 9). Like our Lord, we are not in this world to **be** served by it, but to **serve**!

Christ has committed Himself to us by dying on a cross in our place. As believers, each of us is now committed to Him. We are disciples. That means that as individuals, congregations, and a church body we have responded to our Lord's command to work in His vineyard by saying "I go, sir." How often we have reneged! Satan wins a victory whenever we refuse to work, offering excuses like Moses' false modesty, Gideon's inferiority, Elijah's despondency, Jonah's distaste, Jeremiah's fright, or Peter's inflexibility. Let us honestly identify our inactivity in the work of God's kingdom for what it is: SIN. Let us fall on our knees before God, individually and collectively, in repentance. And then, let us take great comfort in the fact that each of these men of faith, sinners though they were, found mercy and complete forgiveness from a loving Lord. **So do we.** Though they were weak and flawed in themselves, each of these men accomplished great things for the Lord's kingdom because of His power working in them. **So can we!**

Repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations. - Luke 24:47

Try to imagine, if you will, the group of believers that were gathered in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost, following Jesus' ascension. There were fewer of them there than there are gathered here today in this Fieldhouse. They had no budget problems, since they had no budget. They had no buildings, and no building projects. They had no boards or committees. There were no salaries, retirement programs, or health plans. In short, they had none of the

outward organizational assets that the Lord has blessed us with today. The issue of material means -- or, more accurately, the lack of them -- was completely overshadowed by the joy of the Gospel and the compelling urgency to proclaim it. Those first New Testament Christians had tremendous assets! They had the abiding presence of Christ, the promise of the coming of "*another Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost*" (John 14:26), and an incredibly powerful tool -- the Gospel in Word and Sacrament. This Gospel was an unheard-of message: that God had already reconciled all people to Himself by sending His Son to pay the full price for complete forgiveness.

There are many things that are different between their world of the first century and ours that is nearing the twenty-first. But the essential things remain the same. God is reconciled alone through His Son, faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God, and the true Gospel message is largely UNHEARD.

While it is true that the name of Christ has been spoken in nearly every corner of the globe, it hasn't reached them all. And a vital question to ask when speaking about the preaching of Christ at home and abroad is this: Which Christ is being preached? After all, Jesus told us to expect impostors in these last times. *"Then if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or 'There!' do not believe it."* (Matthew 24:23). Which Christ is reaching the world?

- ♦ Is it the "Christ" of mythological development, a product largely of what his followers wanted to believe about Him after He died and stayed in the grave? Or is it the true, risen Christ of the inspired Word, who said *"the Scripture cannot be broken"* (John 10:35), and *"Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away"* (Matthew 24:35)?
- ♦ Is it the "Christ" who paid for the sins of only a few, but never intended for the vast majority to come to faith and be saved? Or is it the true Christ of Scripture, who *"... desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth."* (1 Tim. 2:4)?
- ♦ Is it the "Christ" who offers a *potential* salvation, one that hinges on our right conduct or decision toward God? Or is it the true Christ of Scripture, who doesn't merely give us a **plan** for salvation, but **salvation itself** -- *"... not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy."* (Titus 3:5)?
- ♦ Is it the "Christ" who excuses and accommodates sin, or the true Christ of Scripture, who suffered to set us free **from** sin, who says *"Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more"* (John 8:11)?
- ♦ Is it the "Christ" who enters the heart by signs, wonders, and surging emotions? Or is it the true Christ of Scripture, who says *"The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life."* (John 6:63), and *"Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God"* (Romans 10:17)?

The Christ of history, True God, who redeemed all men without exception, who justifies ungodly sinners only because of His mercy and grace, who would have us live righteously, who comes to us in His Word and Sacrament -- this is the true Christ of Scripture. Happily, He is the Christ who dwells in the heart of every true believer, regardless of their denomination. But this Christ is only officially and truly proclaimed by confessional Lutheran churches. In our harvest work of announcing the good news of God's grace, we need not feel that we are only gleaning the "leftovers" behind many other harvesters. Your next-door neighbor may have heard a vague rumor that God is gracious and forgiving; you can assure him that it's true and show him why! Your community may have churches that preach *about* forgiveness; you are part of a congregation that actually *bestows* it in Jesus' name! Our foreign missionaries may not be the only Christians at work in their fields, but they are among the very few who bring the true Christ to heathen lands. Surely this is a cause that is worthy of our prayers, our personal involvement, and the thank-offerings from hearts that have been made clean by Christ's redeeming blood!

*He who goes out weeping,
carrying seed to sow,
will return with
songs of joy, carrying
sheaves with him.*

-- *Psalms 126:6*

A truly Lutheran church possesses the richness of the Gospel like no other. Unfortunately, in our day it is not enough to identify oneself only with the word "Lutheran." It is necessary to explain further by adding the word "confessional" or "conservative." We gladly identify with the word "conservative" when it comes to our teaching. A conservative is happy to have things remain the same. Since God's Word does not change, we want to go right on "not changing" with it. But may the Lord prevent us from becoming "conservative" when it comes to our Gospel outreach!

We simply cannot afford to have things remain the way they are, while, as the hymn writer puts it, "the souls of men are dying, and the master calls for you!" Let us recommit ourselves to practicing liberality with the Gospel. Let us continue steadfast in prayer, that the Lord of the harvest would send out laborers into His harvest. Let us be on guard against the worldly "wisdom" which would have us believe that our own striving and effort can somehow make God's Word more effective. Let us place our confidence in the tremendous power of the message itself, for Lord says of His Gospel that it is ". . . *the power of God to salvation*" (Romans 1:16), ". . . *living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword*" (Hebrews 4:12), and "*the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe.*" (1 Thess. 2:13). By His grace, the Lord has preserved the pure Gospel among us. We've got the message straight. The time is right to get the message OUT. If we only open our eyes and look around us, we will see a field white for harvest. If we open our eyes and look within us, we will see sin and negligence in our calling. It is only when we open our eyes again to the cross that we see the solution for our own sins, and the compelling reason to recommit our lives for His service.

It is true that very often our labor will appear to be in vain. The true Gospel will always be the aroma of life to those who believe, and the aroma of death to those who do not. But that should not dampen our joy in the service of our King. Remember the tragedy of war deaths that *followed* Armistice Day in 1918? There was mourning for all the dead, no doubt, but the joy of victory and peace was sweet regardless. The finest and happiest assignment that any soldier could have must have been that of going through the trenches to announce the good news: "Victory is won! Peace is ours! We're going home!" That is our work. In this life it will always be work in the "trenches." But it is a sweet vocation for believers of all ages and walks of life! Let us then be about our blessed duty with willing, eager hearts!

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|--|--|
| <p>1. <i>Oh, Christians, haste, your mission high fulfilling,
To tell to all the world that God is light.
That He who made all nations is not willing
One soul should perish, lost in shades of night.</i></p> | <p>3. <i>Proclaim to every people, tongue and nation
That God, in whom they live and move, is love:
Tell how He stooped to save His lost creation
And died on earth that they might live above.</i></p> |
| <p>2. <i>Behold how many thousands still are lying
Bound in the dreary prison house of sin
With none to tell them of the Savior's dying
Or of the life He died for them to win.</i></p> | <p>4. <i>Send heralds forth to bear the message glorious:
Give of your wealth to speed them on their way;
Pour out your soul for them in prayer victorious:
O Christians, haste to bring the brighter day!</i></p> |
- Amen.*

Text: Mary A. Thomson Tune: Frances R. Havergal

THUS IT IS WRITTEN,
AND THUS IT WAS
NECESSARY FOR THE
CHRIST TO SUFFER AND
TO RISE FROM THE DEAD
THE THIRD DAY, AND
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NATIONS, BEGINNING AT
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