

The Mission of Good Shepherd Lutheran Church

John 4:22-30, 39-42, Trinity Sunday XVI

October 1, 2006

Beloved of the Lord.....How does a church grow?.....or better yet, how should a church grow? In our world today there are many ideas and philosophies regarding church growth. In order to draw people in, many churches adopt various strategies. They have Karate classes, Aerobic classes, Divorce workshops, Bingo night, Turkey dinners, Teen counseling, car washes, youth ministries, carnival night, and Life-style workshops. Many churches use these activities to attract attention and draw people in. But is that the real mission of a church?

A church is not a club, nor is it simply a place where people get together. Rather a church is a communion of saints who assemble together in order to hear God's Word and be strengthened in the faith by the Gospel. We are a congregation of sinners, yet at the same time we are a congregation of saints made clean by the blood of our Savior. How then do we want our church to grow? The apostle Paul answers this question in Romans 10:17. "Faith *cometh* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." Since faith comes by hearing God's Word, God's Word is the only tool the Lord has given us for "church growth". Church growth is only pleasing in God's eyes, if it is the result of people hearing and believing God's Word. "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God." True faith comes solely by way of God's Word. God's Word is God's tool to convert the soul. First there is the Law, which like a plow breaks up our stubborn, self-righteous, and proud hearts. God's Word does not sugarcoat our situation. All sin merits damnation. But God doesn't stop there and leave us hanging. After we realize we are in dire straights, God comforts us saying, "Fear not for I have redeemed thee, I have called *thee* by thy name; thou *art* mine." Is. 43:1 Indeed God redeemed us by His blood payment of the cross. He purchased us so that we would no longer be slaves to sin. He freed us from the power of sin, death, and the devil. His grace and divine love for us is so pure, that He now calls us His own. He gives us the blessed name of "Christian". Jesus says, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life." Jn. 5:24 Faith then is not just a matter of hearing with our ears but it is believing with our heart the Gospel message of salvation! Believing in Him, we have life everlasting! God will not condemn those who trust in His Son. All your sins have been paid for by Jesus Christ.

But so many in this world do not know or believe this any of this. Many live in unbelief and they refuse to repent of their sins. God therefore has given to His Church, His holy Word in order for His Church to grow. And when I say His "Church", I speak of the Invisible Church of all Believers. It is an Invisible Church, because faith is hidden in the heart. "Behold the kingdom of God is within you." Therefore it does no good to no one to pack the masses into church by various activities, if the people are not fed the

good, wholesome, life-giving Gospel Word of Jesus Christ in order that their souls be saved from sin. While we do want our church here to be full, it is only so that every soul hear God's Word and be saved!

Since today is our annual Mission Festival, let us think of it this way: the mission of Good Shepherd Lutheran Church is not really to fill our church pews, but our mission is to fill heaven. We preach Christ crucified, and the full truth of His Word. Jesus Christ is our Beautiful Savior, and we wish to share our Beautiful Savior with others, that they too may be saved! For "there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth."

I. Many in this world do not know what they worship. In our lesson today, Jesus desired the repentance of the Samaritan woman. Jesus told her that she didn't know what she worshipped! The Samaritan religion was a mixture of Judaism and heathenism. While they knew somewhat the promise of the Messiah, the core of their faith was the belief that good works earn God's favor. It is the same today. Even in a believers heart, because we are still children of Adam and Eve, there is the natural belief that man must first earn God's favor, and THEN God will be gracious and forgiving. But this is not true. It was God's mercy which moved Him to sacrifice His own Son. God was not "moved" by our works. Even the best and most "holy" works of a Christian, are heavily tainted and stained with sin. Isaiah writes, "All our righteousnesses are as filthy rags." We should have no faith or confidence that our good works can earn God's favor. They cannot.

Dear Christian, your faith must be based solely upon God's Word, and particularly the righteousness of Christ. Nothing else but the righteousness of Christ can withstand the judgment before God's throne. We should also be careful that our own faith is not based upon feelings or emotions rather than God's Word. We do not need to feel, experience, or touch God in order to be comforted with God's Word of forgiveness. The preaching of the Gospel, Baptism, the Lord's Supper, the Benediction at the end of service....these Words from God give us all the comfort we need. Jesus says, "My grace is sufficient for thee." Our faith is settled and secure when it is grounded upon God's Word. It is God's word which says, "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." By faith in the righteousness of Christ, God sees you as a perfect, holy, pure, clean, white as snow individual, because the righteousness of Christ covers your sins. Faith receives the gift of God, the righteousness of Christ as a garment which covers all sin. God sanctifies and cleanses us by His Word. Jesus said, "Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you." Jn 15:3

II. We must use God's Word to prepare others to receive Christ. If we are to be effective Christian witnesses, we must know how to speak both the law and the Gospel. It does no good to comfort someone with the sweet Gospel of forgiveness, if they do not desire to be forgiven in the first place. Who can understand grace, if they first do not understand sin. And so we, like Jesus, must know how to

speaking the law which is a servant to the Gospel. Jesus spoke the law to the Samaritan woman when He exposed her adulterous life. She had been married and divorced five times. Her life indeed had been sinful. But the woman didn't argue with Jesus. She didn't defend her adulterous life, and indeed she was sorry for it. Jesus knew the sorrow in her heart and so He didn't dwell on the subject of her adultery. Remember the law is a SERVANT to the Gospel. The law does not convert any soul, but it only prepares the soul for conversion.

In our world today we must learn to be bold enough to speak the law. After all, if we have a friend playing with dynamite, aren't we going to tell him it is dangerous? If we have a relative who is an alcoholic, doesn't love demand us to warn him that his drinking will ruin his own life and even that of his family? The same is true in the spiritual sense. If we truly care for someone, we must learn to tell them that what they are doing is wrong and sinful. This teaching of the law is necessary if one is to repent. God's Word of the law then, is like a sword, the Sword of the Spirit, which cuts through the sinful heart of man, exposing his sin, and breaking his pride. God wants all to be convicted of guilt. Therefore a part of our mission, is to speak God's law to impenitent sinners. Romans 3:19 says, "Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.....By the law *is* the knowledge of sin." The law shows us we are without excuse. Man's guilt is apparent to God, and by the law God makes man aware of his sin. We all need the law, but those who are hardened in their sins especially need it. Sinners cannot repent and believe the Gospel, until they first know the destructive power of their own sin.

III. It is the Gospel Word which converts the heart, nothing else. But once a person realizes the desperateness of their spiritually lost condition, then we have the great joy of bringing the Gospel Word to the sorrowful heart! God does not leave us comfortless, neither should we leave our fellow sinner comfortless. Joyfully then preach to them the Gospel! Tell them the good news of their salvation! Tell them of Jesus Christ, who is the Savior, Redeemer, Son of God and Son of Man, a true Friend of sinners! He is our Prince of Peace, our most Beautiful Savior! He has delivered us from the stranglehold of sin and death, and given life everlasting in heaven! The Gospel news of God's love breaks down the wall of unbelief! And you know dear Christian, keep in mind, it is harder to preach the Gospel, than the law! Why is this? Because of the conscience, people to some extent already know they are sinners. Their own conscience grates upon them daily telling them they have done wrong. The law of God is already written in their heart. But the Gospel message of salvation is not. The Word of the Gospel is something which is complete foreign to man. For when you tell that sorrowful sinner that Jesus has paid for all their sins, and that was His true purpose in coming to this earth, they will be doubtful. When you tell them that God has freely forgiven them of all sins for the sake of Jesus Christ, it will sound like a dream to them. When you tell them that the

grace of God, and indeed heaven is a free gift from God with no strings attached, they will have their doubts. But you know, you are not alone in your fight to comfort your friend who mourns his sins! God is with you! His Holy Spirit will help and guide you when you speak the Gospel Word to their hearts.

Consider the Samaritan woman of our lesson. Truly she came to faith by the words of Jesus Christ who revealed Himself to her as the Messiah! She was so joyful to hear this news of her salvation, that she dropped everything and ran to the city of the Samaritans! She joyfully told them that their Messiah was out there by the well! She, as a newly converted Christian, faithfully witnessed God's Word to these fellow Samaritans! And you know what? They listened. "Many of the Samaritans of that city believed on him for the saying of the woman." Though the bearer of the Gospel message was a sinful woman who had been married five times, when she spoke, they heard God speaking - because they heard God's Word! For when God speaks even through the mouth of a sinner, it is still nevertheless God's Word and it therefore carries all the power and authority of God Himself, as if God was speaking in person! This is why in church every Sunday, when the sinful pastor says to you, "I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost", you can have wonderful comfort knowing that God Himself has just forgiven you, though He forgave you through the mouth of a mere mortal.

Quickly now, after hearing the Samaritan woman the people of the city go out to see Jesus, many of them already believers by the godly words of the woman. They invite Jesus to stay in their city, and they joyfully receive God's Gospel Word...many are converted! "Many more believed because of his own word." Moreover they reveal to us the most blessed news of our lesson today! They say to the Samaritan woman who had been their messenger, "Now we believe, not because of thy saying: for we have heard *him* ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world." What a beautiful confession of faith this is! How God can be praised for teaching their hearts, His divine and free forgiveness! They knew by faith....they were confident, that this Jesus was the Savior of the whole world! And that my friends, is the Gospel in a nutshell. Jesus Christ is the world's Savior! He converts the heart by the preached, read, written, and spoken Word! In the case of these Samaritans, God used this simple woman to bring them His Word, and they believed. They believed not because of the messenger, but they believed because of the message. God still works today in the very same way! Through the mouths of sinful Christians, and primarily through the means of preaching, His Word is spread abroad to all nations, that all may know that Jesus Christ came to save sinners. The mission then of Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, is to speak God's Word to others, that they too may be saved. Let us therefore rejoice this day in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. For He is your Lord, and your Savior, redeeming you and your neighbor from sin. Amen.