

“We Believe”—The Theology of Evangelism

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“We believe and therefore speak.” This theme for our 1971 Synod Convention directs our thoughts to the work of *Evangelism*. When our theme says, “and therefore speak,” this refers not to any kind of speaking. This refers to speaking the Gospel, the Evangel. To speak the Gospel is to be a witness unto Christ (Acts 1:8), and that is what evangelism is all about.

“We believe,” the first half of our theme, directs our attention to that which leads to speaking, to that which impels the speaker, to the message that must be spoken.

It is only proper that we begin with this. Unless we begin with believing, we can hope for little speaking. On the other hand, where there is believing, the speaking ought inevitably to follow. This is the relationship of the two parts of our convention theme. In this essay we direct our attention to the first two words: We believe. In doing so we present the theology of evangelism, that is, we examine the Biblical basis for our speaking.

We believe - to believe means to accept as true. But it means much more than that. It means to trust, to depend upon, to rely upon. Believing is something the mind and heart do. But it isn't just any kind of believing that leads to evangelism. We believe, that is we believe the Gospel, we trust in Christ, we rely upon His Word and promises. In other words, what we believe is important.

In more technical doctrinal study we may speak of faith in two ways. One is to speak of faith as an activity, faith as the act of believing. The other is to speak of faith as the object of the activity, faith as that which is believed. But when we say, “We believe,” we cannot separate the two. To believe without the right object is to have a husk without a kernel. To speak of faith in an object without having that be an activity of the heart is hypocrisy. When we say, “We believe,” we are saying: with our whole heart we trust in the Gospel of Christ; we stake our very lives on Jesus' redemption. Faith as an activity and faith as object remain together here.

We believe and therefore speak. It is a fact that our heart controls our mouth. It is a fact that what we believe affects what we say—and do. That is a fact of everyday life. It is also Biblical. Our theme is based on II Corinthians 4:13b, where St. Paul asserts this of himself. He quotes from Psalm 116. There in verse 10 the inspired poet too had sung: “I believed, therefore have I spoken.” That is the way it will ever be. This impresses on us **the compelling power of faith in evangelism**. Under this theme we present the theology of evangelism.

Faith is a compelling power in evangelism

- I. Because of what we believe,
- II. Because of the characteristics of what we believe, and
- III. Because of what faith makes of us.

I. What We Believe

What do we believe? The Creed states what we believe. Luther's Small Catechism is a summary of our faith. The Book of Concord is our most complete confession of faith. These express our faith; they do so because they state what the Bible says. In reality we believe what the Bible teaches. Let us then briefly review some chief elements of our faith, basing this on portions of St. Paul's Letter to the Romans. This may be considered the Bible's most comprehensive presentation of what we believe.

The Wrath of God Against Sin

In Romans 1:18 we read: “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness.” The holy God leaves no doubt about His attitude toward unrighteousness, ungodliness, wickedness, and sin. His wrath is revealed against it all.

Paul, in the first chapter, speaks of the idolatry, the immorality, the depraved perversions of his day. Behind it all is man’s failure to acknowledge God as God. It is not that man is completely ignorant of God and His judgment on wickedness. Rather, the men he describes are such who, “knowing the judgment of God, that they who commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same but have pleasure in them that do them” (Rom. 1:32). This pictures the utter depravity of men who, while recognizing the judgment of God against evil, yet find pleasure in and even approve of it with a kind of diabolical delight.

Indeed, how wicked the world is: Also our world, with its perversions, homosexuality, X-movies, violence, drug addiction, abortions, etc., etc. Not only does wickedness abound. We also can hear flagrant defense of it all under the claim of human freedom. Man continues to exchange the truth of God for a lie and worships and serves the creature more than the Creator (Rom. 1:25). That is the world in which we live. Even the approval of wickedness abounds.

But, we may say, thank God that you and I know that the wrath of God is revealed against all this ungodliness. We know, God will not be mocked. He will come in judgment. We know this—and sometimes feel very comfortable with this knowledge, for this applies to the wicked world out there. We may say to ourselves: But I don’t engage in violence; I’m not a drug addict or even a drunkard; I don’t go to X-movies; I love my wife; and I’m honest in my business. How comfortable to know that the wrath of God is revealed against the wicked world out there!

We feel comfortable until Paul asks the question: “And thinkest thou this, O man, that judgest them who do such things, and doest the same, that thou shalt escape the judgment of God?” (Rom. 2:3). Do we think we shall escape the wrath of God because we are incensed over the evil in the world? Do we think that we are not guilty too? Paul says: You do the same; you are just as guilty as the world you judge. He asks: “Thou that preachest a man should not steal, dost thou steal? Thou that sagest a man should not commit adultery, dost thou commit adultery? Thou that abhorrest idols, dost thou commit sacrilege?” (Rom. 2:21f). This is Paul’s final conclusion: “Are we better than they? No, in no way; for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin; As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one...For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:9,23). No, I cannot point only at the wicked world out here. The wrath of God is revealed against *all* unrighteousness of man, also mine. This is what I know and believe about man, about all men, about myself: All have sinned. I must confess: *I* am a lost and condemned creature. Paul leaves no sinner comfortable in his sin. What he teaches us about man’s sin and the righteous God’s judgment of sin allows for no complacency. The wrath of God against ungodliness and sin is terrifying. It is terrifying because I too am unrighteous. And the wages of sin is death, that means hell.

Redemption through Christ by Grace

Terrified at God’s wrath against sin, our sin, we listen as Paul goes on: “Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood” (Rom. 3:24,25). As soon as we hear the words “redemption” and “propitiation” and “blood”, we are reminded how our Savior said that “the Son of man came...to give his life a ransom for many” (Matt. 20:28). We can see John the Baptist pointing to Christ and hear him saying: “Behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). We are reminded of Isaiah prophesying: “He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; ...the Lord hath laid on him the iniquities of us all” (Is. 53:5,6). All of this reminds us of the fact that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who became also the Son of man, our brother, took man’s sin on Himself, experienced the full wrath of God against sin when He as our ransom gave Himself a sacrifice for sin. Thus, once for all, Christ Jesus through the shedding of His blood has paid the penalty for sin, has turned away the wrath of God from man to whom sin is no longer imputed. Man is justified, declared just, innocent, free from the guilt of sin.

This happens freely by His grace. This means that man made no contribution that merited such action on the part of God. The grace of God alone moved Him to effect this amazing change. This fact, the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, is the very center of what we believe.

Through Faith

Paul also points out that this justification is ours by faith. By way of example he uses the illustration of Abraham. The faith of Abraham was not a work Abraham performed. It was Abraham taking God at His Word. Faith is accepting God's promise at face value, depending, relying on it, "being persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform" (Rom. 9:21). Thus through faith in the blood of Christ man accepts the redemption as his own, being fully persuaded that the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, has indeed cleansed him of all unrighteousness.

Peace

And what is the result for man? "Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 5:1). The wrath of God revealed against sin left man no peace. That all has, however, changed through Christ. We now have peace with God. His wrath has been turned from us. What love is this: "God commendeth his love toward us in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him" (Rom. 5:8,9). With Paul we say: "We also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement" (Rom. 5:11). Yes, what a change for us, from the wrath of God to peace with God—through Christ. This is what we believe.

Servants of Righteousness

But will not such free salvation make man careless about sin? Paul asks the question: "Shall we sin, because we are not under the law but under grace?" (Rom. 6:15). "God forbid", is his answer. Paul wants us to know that "to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are whom ye obey, whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness" (Rom. 6:16). We must not forget that by baptism we died with Christ. Now like Christ we should rise unto a newness of life (Rom. 6:4). When we were made free from sin, we became the servants of righteousness (Rom. 6:18). Indeed, through Christ's death we have died unto sin, with Him we are to rise unto newness of life, a life in which we now are servants to righteousness, unto holiness (Rom. 6:19).

Such a new life will call for a struggle in us, a hard battle. We see this happening in ourselves that to will the good is present with us, but how to perform that which is good we find not. We now delight in the law of God after the inward man; but we see another law in our members, warring against the law of our mind and bringing us into captivity to the law of sin that is in our members (Rom. 7:18,22,23). Indeed, the life of service to God is not an easy one. Again and again we fail, and we cry out: "Wretched man that I am: Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" (Rom. 7:25). By faith we know the answer: "I thank God through Jesus Christ, our Lord" (Rom. 7:25). Yes, for a truly blessed life of service to God we must look to Jesus, our Savior. Only as we are joined to Him by faith can we have a life in which sin is renounced, a life in which God is served.

Eternal Glory

Though we have peace with God through Christ, though we are victors with Christ, the Christian's life in this world of sin will not always be peaceful and pleasant. Tribulations and trials, sufferings and sorrows can be expected. But then life seems rough, we can say with Paul: "For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us" (Rom. 8:18) By faith "we

know that all things work together for good to them that love God” (Rom. 8:28). Yes, whatever difficult times still confront us in a troubled world, glory awaits us in the future, a wondrous glory we cannot now comprehend. This creation of God, corrupted by man’s sin, “shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God” (Rom. 8:21). Though we now have the Spirit of God as a first fruit, a pledge of future glory, “we groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, that is, the redemption of our body” (Rom. 8:23). How wonderful when our bodies shall be changed and be like Jesus’ glorious body: Truly a wonderful redemption, a glorious salvation lies before us through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

All This We Believe

All this in no way exhausts what we believe. We have picked up only some choice nuggets from the gold mine of Scripture. Paul’s letter to the Romans is a vein in this mine that promises rich returns to him who digs deeply into it. But choice nuggets these are that we have mined, enriching us beyond measure with the priceless treasure, Jesus Christ, with whom there is peace, hope, life, eternal glory.

What we believe can most simply be stated with the one word, Gospel. Yes, what we believe is indeed gospel, that is, a good spell or message, good tidings, This is a literal translation of the word used in Greek, *εὐαγγέλιον*, good news. So it is. It is a message that concerns itself with man’s most significant and persistent problems, sin and death. In the face of sin and its judgment we believe in redemption, forgiveness through Jesus. In the face of death we believe in life and eternal glory with Christ. That is indeed an evangel, a gospel, good tidings. If we had to believe that death must end only in judgment unto damnation and hell such a faith would compel avoiding the subject, denying its truth. Who would want to speak about such a terrifying eventuality, such a fearsome certainty. Better to deny its very possibility. If we had to believe that death ended it all, such a faith would lead to a reluctant speaking of facts that are at best unpleasant and disturbing. But we believe the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This is a gospel of hope, peace, life, salvation. What a compelling power such a faith must be to evangelize, to speak forth this good news!

Indeed, because of what we believe, our faith is a compelling power in evangelism.

II. The Characteristics of What We Believe

The power of our Christian faith, impelling us to testify of Christ, is evident also when we consider some of the characteristics of what we believe. We shall consider four that are particularly significant in this connection: the universality as well as the uniqueness of the Gospel, its power to work faith and its divine origin.

Universal

What we believe is universally true and applicable. For that reason it must be universally proclaimed.

All have sinned. *All*? That is what Scripture says. That is what we believe. *All*—that includes my mother and father, my son and daughter, my husband or wife, my co-worker and my fiancée, my neighbor and my closest friend, as well as that casual acquaintance. That includes every person in the swarm of cars that rushes down the freeway. That includes each of those thousands I see in a crowded stadium or on a busy street. Yes, *all* have sinned. That is a universal fact.

The wrath of God is revealed against *all* unrighteousness. *All*—again! Not only against murder, but also against hate; not only against theft, but also against covetousness; not only against adultery, but also against lust; against *all* unrighteousness. How guilty before God this makes all men!

And death and judgment—because of sin, judgment unto damnation—face all men. Benjamin Franklin once said: “In this world nothing can be said to be certain, except death and taxes.” But of the two, death is the more certain. Scripture says: “It is appointed unto men once to die, and after this the judgment” (Heb. 9:27).

Sin, death, judgment, hell—that is the story of all men. With all their differences, how much men are all alike: The way to hell is a broad one. Men don't have to look for it. They are on it—*all*.

But all of this, in a way, is only preliminary. God uses the word “all” not only in speaking of His wrath against sin. We turn to what in the face of these universal facts we nevertheless can and do believe. Here, too, God speaks in universal terms. God “will have all men to be saved and to come unto the knowledge of the truth” (I Tim. 2:9). The Lord “is not Willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (II Pet. 3:9). Jesus Christ “is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world” (I John 2:2). God in Christ reconciled the world unto himself (II Cor. 5:19). Jesus takes away with His sacrifice the sins of the world (John 1:29). All men, the whole world—these are the expressions our God uses also here when speaking of those for whom Christ won eternal redemption. The human problem is universal, but so is the divine solution. The thieving publican, the adulterous woman, the despairing jailor, the crucified murderer, each of them could know that Jesus came to seek and save him. The Ethiopian eunuch, the Greek philosopher, the Roman centurion, they too were redeemed through the blood of Christ. Your neighbor may not know it, but also his sins were removed through the sacrifice of Jesus. Your sick friend too can be assured that Christ has opened the way to an eternal life for him. The fact is, whenever you look at another human being, whether he be black or white, old or young, rich or poor, shaved or bearded, you see another one of those “all” for whose sins Jesus died. We believe in a redemption that embraces all men in its saving purpose. This is true not merely as a possibility that can become a reality under certain conditions. This is true as an accomplished fact of history. Jesus Christ died, and when He did, it was for the sins of all men.

Then all men have the right to hear of it. Dare I hoard for myself the treasure that is meant as much for my neighbor as for me? A treasure he needs just as much as I do?

Unique

Universal redemption—does this mean that there is also universal salvation? Reason wants to draw that conclusion, but Scripture does not. Scripture claims exclusiveness and uniqueness for the Gospel it proclaims. “Neither is there salvation in any other,” said Peter of the crucified and risen Jesus; “for there is no other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). Jesus called Himself “the Way and asserted: “No man cometh unto the Father, but by me” (John 14:6). One mediator, and only one, between God and man is recognized by Paul in writing to Timothy (I Tim. 2:5). What does this mean? It means, and that without equivocation, that there will not be one person in heaven who has bypassed Christ. It means that it is a lie to say that there are many ways all of which lead to heaven. Who has not heard that said? With equal logic one might say that any liquid will quench the thirst of man. Whoever laps up the ocean's salty waves soon proves the error of that statement. Whoever would drink hemlock with Socrates would find, not his thirst quenched, but his life snuffed out. All roads lead to heaven? Whoever follows another way than Christ will testify in hell that this is a lie that damns. No other name but that of Jesus. No other way but Christ. No mediator but one. That is Scripture's claim. That is the truth. The way of salvation is an exclusive one, unique. Men need to be directed to it. It is a matter of life and death.

In contrast to the broad way that leads to hell, Jesus tells us that the way to life is a narrow, a confined or restricted, one (Matt. 7:14). That is another way of stressing its uniqueness. And the result is that many follow the broad way; few, however, find the narrow one. The universality of the atonement indeed gives all men the right to be on this narrow way. But its uniqueness results in the vast majority never finding it. How important for those who know this way to direct people, all people, to it. There is no other.

But how? What determines the road I'm on? He that believeth not shall be damned. That is Scripture's description of the multitudes on the broad way. They are damned because they do not believe in the atonement Jesus gained for them. But how do we find the narrow way? When are we on it? Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. Faith in Jesus' redemptive work puts us on it.

Powerful

This brings us to another characteristic of the Gospel significant for evangelism. The Gospel is powerful; it creates faith.

St. Paul writes: “Faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the word of God” (Rom. 10:17). The Gospel is like rain, Isaiah tells us. It effects growth, it “watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud...so shall my Word be...it shall accomplish that which I please” (Isa. 55:10,11). St. John recorded the Gospel; he wrote what Jesus had done “that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God” (John 20:31). Words persuade. Words convince. By means of words we get people to believe what we say. However, this is true of the Gospel in a special way. God’s Word persuades in a way human words cannot. Jesus says this when He claims for the Words which He spoke: “They are spirit and they are life” (John 6:63). There is power working through the Gospel that is not true of any human word. This is the life-giving power of the Spirit. St. Paul points this difference out. He tells the Corinthians: “And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man’s wisdom but in the demonstration of the spirit and of power” (I Cor. 2:4). In his preaching Paul did not persuade his hearers the way men seek to persuade with words that captivate and convince. Another power was working as he spoke the Word of God. That was the Holy Spirit.

“No man can say that Jesus is Lord but by the Holy Ghost.” No human word, no persuasion of man will lead to faith in the redemption of Christ. The Holy Spirit must work that faith. He does through the Gospel. That is why St. Paul calls the Gospel the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth (Rom. 1:16). Shall we fail to use it? Shall we confine this power under a bushel?

Divine

Finally, what we believe was divinely revealed. It is not of man, but of God. It had to be, or we wouldn’t have it.

Why not? Because the things that God prepared for them that love him are not known to man by nature. The eye of man does not discern them, nor are they heard among men, nor found in their hearts and minds (I Cor. 2:9). “Natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him, neither can he know them” (I Cor. 2:14). In the Gospel we have that which is above and beyond human discovery, invention, or contriving.

How did we get this Gospel that was beyond human discovery? God has revealed it to us by His Spirit, St. Paul assures us (I Cor. 2:10).

This happened already in the Old Testament when God revealed what He would do for man’s salvation. In those days of old, God at sundry times and in diverse manners spoke to the fathers by the prophets (Heb. 1:1). Those holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Ghost (II Pet. 1:21). They wrote what God revealed so that Paul confidently asserted: “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God” (II Tim. 3:16).

God continued His revelation. God “hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son” (Heb. 1:2). This is the One of whom the Old Testament Scriptures testified (John 5:39). This is the One who could say, “He that hath seen me hath seen the Father...The words that I speak unto you, I speak not of myself” (John 14:9,10). The disciples recognized that God was speaking to them in Jesus. Peter in behalf of all said: “Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life” (John 6:68).

Jesus no longer speaks to us in the manner He spoke to the disciples. But He still speaks to us. What He did and what He said is still revealed. Of the things freely given to us of God St. Paul says: “Which things also we speak, not in the words which man’s wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth” (I Cor. 2:13). Paul thanked God that the Thessalonians, when they heard his preaching—and we can add, when they read his writings—received it, “not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe” (I Thess. 2:13). The New Testament continues God’s revelation to us. The apostles and evangelists wrote what God wanted recorded with the words the Holy Spirit gave them to use. The Holy Scriptures, the Gospel they reveal to us, are of divine origin.

When we believe the Gospel that was given to us in the Holy Scriptures, then what we believe is that which came to us by divine revelation. What we believe is of God. When we speak what we believe, Jesus' promise is true also of us: "He that heareth you heareth me" (Luke 10:16). When we speak the Gospel, God is using our lips to speak His revelation. What a responsibility: What a privilege: If we believe that, can our lips be sealed? Shall our tongues be silent? Shall not the very housetops become pulpits from which to shout this Gospel into all the world?

Let each of us remember the characteristics of the Gospel we believe. What we believe is universal. It was prepared for all. I dare withhold from none what rightfully is his. The Gospel is unique. There is no other way to life. I cannot silently stand by as men in droves go down the broad way to eternal death. The Gospel is a word of power. I must speak forth that Word to loose its power to work in hearts that hear. The Gospel is divine. It is God speaking to the ignorance of man. My lips must speak it forth to serve as mouthpiece of our God.

Indeed, because of the characteristics of what we believe our faith is a compelling power in evangelism.

III. What Faith Makes of Us

Faith compels us to speak. Faith compels us because of what faith makes of us.

Who am I? Our confession is: I believe in God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Faith in the triune God gives us our identity. Who am I? Whoever has no answer to that question finds his life to be aimless, without purpose. What purpose does our faith give to our life? This really is our question: What does God tell me about myself as a believer? Who does He say I am? What does He say is the purpose of my life? Listen to what Scripture tells you about yourself as one who believes in the triune God.

Children of the Father

You say: I believe. Know, then, that the Heavenly Father claims you as His child. John writes: "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name" (John 1:12). Again he writes: "Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God" (I John 5:1). St. Paul writes: "Ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus" (Ga. 3:26). Sin forced us to say like the prodigal son: "I am no more worthy to be called thy son!" But for Jesus' sake the Father calls out to us: "My son. You were dead, but you are alive again." And He slays for us the fatted calf, preparing for us the feast of heaven. As children of God we are declared heirs, heirs of God through Christ (Gal. 4:7). Just what is all involved in being God's children we cannot now fully see and understand. John writes: "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be" (I John 3:2).

What a transformation has occurred through faith: from lost creatures, condemned eternally, to children of God, heirs of heaven, eternally. You have the full right to call the Almighty God of heaven and earth Abba, Father. Don't let the wonder of it be lost. God the Father calls you His child. You call Him Father. Marvel and rejoice!

But don't stop with that. He who was God's Son, begotten from eternity, said while here on earth: "I must be about my Father's business" (Luke 2:49). Can you and I, adopted children, say any less? The Father's children we are by faith. Our Father's business ever must remain our prime concern.

Branches in Christ

You say: I believe. Listen to the intimate relationship the Lord Jesus claims for you by faith. He uses a picture from nature. "I am the vine, ye are the branches" (John 15:5). How close is the connection between a vine and branches. A branch is not merely tied or nailed or glued to the vine. It abides in the vine, and in such a way that from the vine vital power and fruit-bearing energy surges into the branch. Cut off from the vine, the branch is dead wood.

This connection to the vine also gives purpose to the branch's existence. "He that abideth in me and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit; for without me ye can do nothing" (John 15:5). Yes, by faith you are called a branch in Jesus, the Vine. You live and bear fruit through power from Him. This fruit results not simply from a command of your Savior. The fruit must be there because of what you are, a living branch, vitalized, energized, empowered by Christ, the Vine. Consider who you are, a branch in Christ, the Vine. Marvel and rejoice! And bear fruit!

Temples of the Holy Ghost

You say: I believe. As such the Holy Ghost makes you something very special. Who are you? Paul addresses these words to you who believe: "What? Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost who is in you, whom ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price" (I Cor. 6:19,20). To the Ephesians Paul writes of "the Spirit of God, by whom ye are sealed unto the day of redemption" (Eph. 9:30). The Holy Spirit has taken over in you; He has made your body His abode. You don't belong to yourself. Even your body isn't yours. God has paid a price for you. His claim on you is evident by the Holy Spirit's indwelling in your body. That is who you are by faith in Jesus Christ.

This has practical consequences. Scripture points them out. Paul warned the Corinthians: Don't use your bodies in the interest of sin; flee fornication; don't be joined to an harlot. Rather they are told: "Glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's" (I Cor. 6:20). To the Ephesians this thought is carried out in greater detail (Eph. 4:25-32). Christians should not grieve the Spirit by which they were sealed, that indwelling Spirit. Paul warns them against lying, stealing, filthy talk, bitterness, wrath, and anger, against placing any member of their body into the service of sin. The Christian, body and soul, belongs to God. And so, whatever he does with his eyes, his ears, his lips and tongue his hands and feet, his intellect, indeed, every part of him, should not fail to take into account that the Holy Ghost has taken over. Remember, you are temples of the Holy Ghost. Don't grieve Him! Don't drive Him out again!

Priests of a King

Who am I? What is the purpose of my life? Peter sums it up for you: "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light" (I Pet. 2:9, NASB). You have an identity that makes you something special in this world. You are a chosen one of God, claimed by Him as His very dear possession, made holy by Him through Christ; you are the priest of a King. Treasure this priesthood that identifies you together with all your fellow Christians.

And what as the King's priest is your life's purpose? You must proclaim the excellencies of your God. You must tell forth what He has done in leading you from the darkness of sin and death to the light of the Gospel, to the light of life in heaven. Thus you are about your Father's business. Thus you bear fruit as a branch in Christ. Thus the Spirit finds your body a welcome temple to inhabit.

Indeed, our faith is a compelling power in evangelism because of what it makes of us.

Conclusion

"We believe and therefore speak." This convention theme makes an assertion. But it is also an occasion for self-examination. We have a faith whose content and characteristics compel speaking. We have a faith that makes us such who must speak. Now each of us must ask himself: Do I? Do I as the King's priest tell forth the wonderful deeds of Him who called me from darkness to light? Do I speak to the sinner I meet about my Savior and his? Has faith compelled *me* to speak?

It can be enlightening to see ourselves as others see us. An observer coming from without may reflect our true selves back to us in a way that a biased self inspection fails to do. During this past year God sent a

missionary from distant India to us to spend some time in the midst of our Synod. He, together with his faithful Christian wife, came to us, for they believed that the content of our faith, what we believe, was true to the Scriptures. And that is what they found, a church that held to the inspired Scriptures as do they, a church whose faith agreed with theirs, for both, they and we, had found this truth in Scripture. And yet, as they observed our church, this question fell from his lips: “Are your people really Christians?” What raised that question in his mind when he could see the correctness of what we believe? “I never hear them talk about Christ,” he said.

Never? Perhaps we bristle at this obvious exaggeration. Never? We pastors may point to our sermons, our instruction and Bible classes, to the words we speak at the bedside of the sick, and to our visits on the unchurched. Never? Our teachers may correctly point to the many children that have heard them tell of Jesus. Never? Our people may direct attention to our evangelism committees, to canvass teams, to the young people who again this summer are making calls, teaching classes, telling about Jesus in our crowded cities. Never? It’s an obvious exaggeration. And it was hardly meant in an absolute sense.

And yet, it lets us see ourselves as others see us. Never? It does force each to ask himself: When did I last confront a sinner with my Savior? Never? Is it perhaps true that we do talk more freely about politics and weather, about sports and cars and jobs than we do about Christ? Never? Is it perhaps true that we think we speak about Christ more than we actually do? Never? By now our conscience may be saying: I must admit this to be true in my life more than I care to confess. Is it true that for many our motto should in fact read: We believe and yet fail to speak?

To the extent that it is true that we do not speak about Jesus, to that extent the question can be asked: Are we really Christians? We must indeed guard against the judging of hearts. But to raise the question is not to pass judgment. Besides, our Savior said: “For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh” (Matt. 12:34). Luther’s German translation is more picturesque: *Wes das Herz voll ist, des gehet der Mund über*. (Literally: The mouth spills over with what fills the heart.) We are reminded of a cup filled to overflowing. Whatever so completely fills it is also what will pour forth from it. And because it is so full, it must run over. The Gospel that has truly filled the Christian’s heart must spill out from his lips. If it doesn’t, one rightly wonders how full his heart is. And so the absence of “Jesus-talk” raises the question of how full our hearts are with the Jesus-Gospel. That is what is meant by a question like: Are your people really Christian? Do they really have Jesus in their hearts? Does He and His Gospel really fill their hearts to overflowing? God has preserved to us the content of our faith, preserved it true to Scripture. But does it also grip our hearts? Does it so abundantly fill our hearts so that from this abundance our mouth must speak?

Or are we full in another sense? Are we full to the point of satiety? Are we full like the man who has repeatedly indulged in his favorite food? He has lost his interest in food. He has grown lazy. He is full and fat and flabby. Have we had the Gospel so fully for so long that we are full, satiated? Has it lost its wonder for us? Has its importance faded because we have never been without it? Has the fullness of God’s grace to us made us spiritually full and fat and flabby? We pray God this may not be so.

All of this is, of course, an individual matter. It pertains to your heart and mine. We so easily generalize, and so are tempted to speak of the Synod as a whole. We believe that the Gospel is still powerful in the hearts of men, one by one. We believe that it does still grip hearts, one here, one there, as God gives grace.

Fellow believers! What we believe is what the world needs. What we believe is universally true and unique, powerful and divine. Our faith makes us children of God, branches in Christ, temples of the Holy Ghost, priests of the King. May all of this so fill our hearts to overflowing that we must pour forth the faith that has gripped our hearts. May each of us have a heart taken captive by Christ, by His Gospel, so that we may, as living examples of it, unite in our theme: We believe and therefore speak.