

Lutheran Distinctives in Evangelism

Leader's Guide

by Jerry M. Kosberg

From the Missional Bible Studies series of the Center for U.S. Missions

Goal: Examine Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions to identify basic assumptions of Lutherans as they share Christ with others.

Introduction

The Luther Quote.

Make sure the class identifies these important assumptions:

- “He wants to bind” -- Note who does the binding.
- “divine gathering” -- The Church is unique in the human family. It alone is a divine gathering.
- “Gospel will take its course further and further” Note that the goal is not that the church will grow, be able to pay its bills, or be bigger than other churches. It is about the Gospel touching more and more lives.

Searching the Scripture

1 Peter 2:9. The priesthood of the baptized is an important aspect of Lutheran understanding of vocation and service.

Ephesians 4:11. The point is that even if someone says “Evangelism isn’t my gift,” we are all still priests and are called to share Christ with others.

1 Peter 3:15-16a. This is one of the few verses in Scripture that actually lays out an evangelism strategy for the church and believers. The basic strategy is to always be prepared. The congregation can help members be prepared.

1. This is first because you can’t give away what you don’t have yourself.
2. Most of our members are more “prepared” than they think. It’s fun to stop at this point and ask everyone in the class to share with the person sitting next to them one thing they like about Jesus. Give them a minute or two to do this--share just one thing they like about Jesus. Everyone will be able to do that. Now, congratulate them, because they were prepared to share their faith. The point is, they are more prepared than they believe.
3. They don’t have to win an argument. They don’t have to--can’t--convince anyone. Just talk about the hope they have when going through a tough time, when they have failed, or when there is illness in the family or death of a loved one.
4. Ask them to think about how gentleness and respect are evident here.

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We turn the corner here and go into our Lutheran Confessions for some insight. Depending on your usual pattern of study, you might want to have a copy of *The Book of Concord* to show the class. *The Book of Concord* contains a number of documents written during and shortly after the time of the Reformation. Three of the documents (Smalcald Articles, Large Catechism, Small Catechism) were written by Martin Luther; the rest were written by his followers. *The Book of Concord* was finalized and published in June 1580, 50 years after the presentation of the Augsburg Confession to Emperor Charles V in Augsburg.

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1. Luther quote from the Small Catechism, Third Article explanation.

If you wish to go to Scripture for some background on this, you could review the Scriptures that depict natural man as blind (2 Cor. 4:4), dead (Eph. 2:1) and an enemy of God (Rom. 8:7). Also, look at 1 Cor. 12:3 and John 6:29 which clearly depict faith as the work of God. The point here is to challenge the thinking that faith is a human response to human activity, rather than an act of God in His grace.

2. The distinction between Law and Gospel is a treasured aspect of Lutheran theology. In the Augsburg Confession, Article 4, the Lutherans had made the point that we are justified by grace through faith, apart from works of law. The Roman Catholic scholars in the Confutation rejected that and quoted many Bible verses to support that we contribute to our salvation by our works. In the Apology (Explanation) to the Augsburg Confession, the writer stated he had to teach them how to read the Bible. He then proceeds to lay out the need to distinguish between the Law and the Gospel. If we ask of the Law how to be saved, we will always get the wrong answer. If we ask of the Gospel how should we live, we will always get the wrong answer. The quote in the study lays out the two criteria. It is important to encourage the students to talk about this.

3. Free Will and the Life of a Seeker.

The above does not mean Lutherans see no need for engaging the unbeliever nor that they nor the unbeliever have no role to play. But it is an “external” role. We can build friendships, invite winsomely, clearly lift up Jesus Christ, and create venues in which folks hear about Jesus. But we cannot thereby “convince” someone to believe, nor coerce faith, any more than an unbeliever can “decide” to believe. The Holy Spirit creates faith. But, as Luther said, He calls us by the Gospel. Here is the God-given task of the Church: to share that Gospel, to allow the Gospel to take its course further and further, so more and more lives are touched by this Good News, and others also are gathered in.

It would be good if the class could talk about what they need to do to maximize ways in which they can share the Gospel with the unchurched, so the Spirit can be at work. Think of it as sowing the seed. God brings the harvest, another common biblical imagery of evangelism.

The Zacchaeus account says, yes, there are those who are seeking. But the real seeking, the real reason “salvation has come to this house” that day was not that Zacchaeus sought Jesus, but that Jesus sought Zacchaeus. He came to seek and to save the lost. Our calling is to be the ambassadors for this seeking God. If time permits, it might be fun to use the sycamore-fig tree of this account as a metaphor for all the ways spiritual seekers of today “climb out on a limb.”

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