

Lutheran Distinctives in Evangelism

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

Introduction

Read and discuss this quote from Martin Luther: "But as it is, He wants to bind us all together by such a divine gathering so that the Gospel will take its course further and further and through our confession also others will be gathered in." (From a sermon preached on the Festival of Christ's Ascension)

What evangelism assumptions of Dr. Luther do you discover in this quote?

Searching the Scripture

Read 1 Peter 2:9. The _____ of all believers.

When did we become "priests?"

According to this verse, what is the purpose of our priesthood?

Read Ephesians 4:11. Note the important word "some."

Not everyone is gifted for the evangelism task, yet all are priests.

What does this tell you about your sharing the Good News about Jesus?

Read 1 Peter 3:15-16a. Always be _____

There are at least four important teachings in this verse:

1. "in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord"

Why is that the first thing?

2. "Always be prepared..."

Are we more "prepared" than we think?

3. "the reason for the hope that you have"

What do we talk about?

Why do you have hope when you go through tough times?

4. “with gentleness and respect.”

How do we give the reason for our hope?

How does this show in our relationships and conversations?

The above thoughts from the Scriptures are basic truths we share with many, many fellow Christians in the whole Body of Christ. Yet, Lutherans in some ways have a unique perspective on the task of sharing the Gospel. We emphasize the necessary work of the Holy Spirit in creating faith in our hearts. Indeed, that is one of the key understandings of the work of the Spirit. The Nicene Creed calls the Holy Spirit the “Lord and Giver of life.”

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1. The role of the Holy Spirit

“I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, nor come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel...”

(Luther’s Explanation to the Third Article of the Apostles Creed, Small Catechism)

What does Luther’s explanation say about those who want people to “decide” to believe in Jesus?

About those who talk about when they “accepted” Jesus?

What does this say about the active and passive role of the Holy Spirit and the believer?

2. The distinction between Law and Gospel

“In this controversy the main doctrine of Christianity is involved; when it is properly understood, it illumines and magnifies the honor of Christ and brings to pious consciences the abundant consolation that they need. . . . Our opponents confuse this doctrine miserably, they obscure the glory and the blessings of Christ, and they rob pious consciences of the consolation offered them in Christ.”

(Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article IV, Tappert Edition, Page 107)

The above quote indicates the two criteria by which Lutherans know they have properly understood and interpreted a passage of Scripture. What are the two criteria?

How do they keep us focused on the Gospel?

How do they get confused when faith becomes a matter of our doing something?

3. Free Will and the Life of a Seeker.

Read Luke 19:1-10; the story of the conversion of Zacchaeus.

In what way was Zacchaeus a spiritual seeker?

What are the “sycamore-fig trees” today’s spiritual seekers climb?

According to verse 10, who was the real Seeker in this account?

“The person who is not yet converted to God and regenerated can hear and read this Word externally because, as stated above, even after the Fall man still has something of a free will in these external matters, so that he can go to church, listen to the sermon, or not listen to it.” (Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, Article II, Tappert edition, p. 531)

According to this quote, what is the evangelism role of the believer and the church?

How do we maximize the opportunities for a seeker to make good decisions in “these external matters” so they can be in a position to hear the Gospel?

Conclusion

List one new insight you have gained for your life as a “priest” who is called to “proclaim the mighty acts” of God.

List one new insight you have gained regarding the Lutheran distinctives in evangelism.

Pray for the Holy Spirit to use your witness to help others hear the Gospel.

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