



Lutherans IN Africa

FORMING AFRICAN CHRISTIANS TO BE TEACHERS OF THE FAITH

Rev. James and Tiina, Maggie, Tristan, Sarai, Sofia, Jonas, and Matthew May

Notes from the Mission Field: The Comfort of Certitude



How Can One Know?

Par for the course in Africa, our trip to the Democratic Republic of Congo was a study in patience and a fascinating opportunity to observe the human condition. In Africa, you never know what you will see. And you will often find yourself intrigued by what you hear.

This time, as we drove through the night we made occasional stops, which was probably good for the obviously sleepy driver who kept sniffing something from a plastic bottle. One of our stops was at a toll booth, where our driver was keen to get an update from what his pastor prophet had preached in his absence. Mind you this was at about 1:30 AM.



The toll booth operator jumped out and started jogging with our car to tell the driver that the pastor had taught, "Very few people are true Christians. You only know if you are a true Christian by your fruits. Therefore we must change our lives and do good works or else we will never get to heaven."

Our driver rolled up the window and his expression became very grave. Am I good enough? he must have been wondering.

This sort of works-righteousness theology was often discussed during the week as we taught Lutheran liturgy, hymnody, and baptism to our

brothers and sisters of the Confessional Lutheran Church in Congo (DRC).

Therefore, the righteousness that is credited to faith or to the believer out of pure Grace is Christ's obedience, suffering, and resurrection, since He has made satisfaction for us to the Law and paid for our sins. Christ is not man alone, but God and man in one undivided person, Therefore, He was hardly subject to the Law (because He was Lord of the Law), just as He didn't have to suffer and die for His own sake. For this reason, then, His obedience (not only in His suffering and dying, but also because He was voluntarily made under the Law in our place and fulfilled the Law by this obedience) is credited to us for righteousness. So, because of this complete obedience, which He rendered to His heavenly Father for us by doing and suffering and in living and dying, God forgives our sins. He regards us as godly and righteous, and He eternally saves us. This righteousness is brought to us by the Holy Spirit through the Gospel and in the Sacraments. It is applied, taken, and received through faith. Therefore, believers have reconciliation with God, forgiveness of sins, God's grace, sonship, and are heirs of eternal life. ~BOC, FSD, III, 14-16

Thanks be to God for the pure doctrine that teaches us that faith comes through hearing of the Living Word and in the Sacraments, that our salvation comes through being baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit! Christ be praised that His is the righteousness credited to us, that there be no doubt in our forgiveness and holiness!

An Example of Instruction

The first question in the Good Newsmagazine worship edition is: "What type of worship pleases God?"

So often in life we go somewhere to DO something. We go to work, shopping, practice, or to school. We equate going to church with these places more than we would compare it to going to the doctor, to a restaurant, or a concert. This is unfortunate because Church and the Lord's Day were created FOR us. We were not created so that there would be a Sunday "performance." Sometimes church becomes so stressful that we do not even want to go because it requires so much of us: dressing up "properly," making our children behave, and being on our best behavior before all the "churchy" people.



But my favorite verse in the Bible is from Romans 5:8, *God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.* This is the same love that Jesus brings to us on Sundays and, in fact, every day of the week.



God is not going to be upset with you if you are not wearing your Sunday best or if your children make too much noise. The one thing that is necessary is to come so that the Lord may serve you and declare to you the many promises of healing, forgiveness, life, and salvation He has for you.

And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching. But Martha was distracted with much serving. And she went up to him and said, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me."

But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her."

~Luke 10:39-42

No, Jesus will not take those promises away from you if you did bad things during the week or if you are not in a good mood. Rather it is quite the opposite. He comes with the intention and the purpose to fix those things through the forgiveness of sins.



We see this in the elements of the Divine Service. We do not focus on what we do in worshiping the Triune God. No, our focus is on how our Triune God comes to us and serves us! We see and hear this in the Service of the Word:

Whenever God's Word is taught, preached, heard, read, or mediated upon, then the person, day, and work are sanctified. This is not because of the outward work, but because of the Word, which makes saints of us all. ~BOC, LC, I, 92

We see and hear this in the Service of the Sacrament:

For Christ Himself says, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick." ...He means those who are weary and heavy-laden with their sins, with the fear of death, temptations of the flesh, and of the devil. If, therefore, you are heavy laden and feel your weakness, then go joyfully to this Sacrament [Lord's Supper] and receive refreshment, comfort, and strength. ~BOC, LC, V, 71-73

We also see and hear this in the Living Word woven throughout Lutheran Liturgy. And we see and hear this in Lutheran hymnody. Truly, the latter is different from most of the "songs" sung in churches these days because, in our hymns, we do not make lofty promises to improve ourselves and become a better person. On account of our sinful nature, we cannot possibly fulfill such promises. Rather, Lutheran hymns speak the words right from the bible, as in Psalm 51:10-15:



*Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.
Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me.
Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit.
Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you.
Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, O God of my salvation, and my tongue will sing aloud of your righteousness. O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise.
By the end of the week, more and more people came to us seeking copies of the Lutheran hymnal and these Good News magazines that tell of the wonderful promises and blessings God has for all people.*



Considering Church Growth

People who have received the love and forgiveness of Jesus Christ so often desire that others also receive those blessings. This is why so many people seek effective strategies to "make the church grow." In Africa, most often foreigners use the strategy of responding to the material or medical needs of people. But Rev Pierre Stewart Keya, Bishop of the Confessional Lutheran Church in Congo, and his pastors had a fervent request: Build more schools!

They believe education is the key to changing the future. They believe the best time to build a foundation on God's Word is when they are young, so that they always know to whom to turn. It was incredible—and humbling—to see many of the schools which African Lutherans have built with their own money. However, the schools have a great need of something essential they lack: Books.

Nearly all the instruction is oral, teachers standing before blackboards. Students rarely have even a notebook or a pencil. Yet in small town after small town, school after school, were filled with children who recited the



Ten Commandments and understood and clung to them. This is quite amazing since they do not have catechisms or Bibles.

It helps to be occupied with God's Word, to speak it, and meditate on it... Certainly you will not release a stronger incense or other repellent against the devil than to be engaged by God's commandments and words, and speak, sing, or think them. For this is indeed the true "holy water" and "holy sign" from which the devil runs and by which he may be driven away. ~BOC, LC, LP, 10

Through the Word and Sacraments, as through instruments, the Holy Spirit is given. He works faith, when and where it pleases God, in those who hear the good news that God justifies those who believe that they are received into grace for Christ's sake. This happens not through our own merits, but for Christ's sake. ~BOC, AC, V, 2-4

Truly, Bishop Keya shows great wisdom in understanding the most effective strategy for church growth in Africa and in the whole world. Resources to share the promises of the Gospel and its pure doctrine are what is needed most to bring the comfort, consolation, certitude, and peace of Christ to anxious souls.

Yours in Christ,
Rev. James E May, Jr.



In front of the Lutheran Church in Boma with Bishop President Keya, his predecessor, and Paul Schulz.

To support the preaching of the Gospel and the training of workers for the harvest, please make a donation via our PayPal account via a link on our website or send your checks made payable to Lutherans in Africa to:

Lutherans in Africa
c/o Bethlehem Lutheran Church
7500 State Road
Parma, OH 44134

Lutherans in Africa is registered with the IRS as a 501(c)(3) charity. Your gift is tax-deductible to the full extent of the law.

www.LutheransinAfrica.com