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PRESIDENT'S LETTER - FEBRUARY 07

“For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.We preach Christ crucified.” — 1 Corinthians 1:21,23

February 21 brings us to the beginning of another Lenten season. Most of us will be privileged to preach the message of the cross in special Wednesday evening services. These quiet periods of meditation including the reading of the Passion History probably will not be very well attended. Sometimes as pastors we become tired and discouraged. We may even question the relevancy of our high office as preachers of the message of the cross.

On the way to Orlando one Sunday morning last month to preach to a small group of sixteen, I listened to the “The Lutheran Hour.” The speaker described how young people view one of our services. “Up in front there is an old fuddy-duddy in a black gown speaking to a group of old fuddy-duddies telling them to be more fuddy-duddyish.” This may lead us in desperation to question the relevancy of the preached Word to the present generation in our liturgical format. The problem is not the preached Word or the sermon. The problem is that God has given us a message that, by its very nature, is foolishness to sinful man. It is only by the power of the Spirit that this preaching of Christ crucified saves those who believe.

This is not something new. The people of Paul’s day, steeped in the Greek culture and idolatry, rejected as nonsense the proclamation of the physical resurrection of Jesus from the dead. The Epicurean philosophy of day encouraged people to “eat, drink, and be merry for tomorrow we die.” Paul did not seek to convert them by his powerful oratory or his powerful personality. Paul preached the simple Gospel message of Christ crucified.

In Luther’s Day, the Word was almost extinguished by the organized church. The preaching of Christ crucified had disappeared. The sermons, so-called, were in Latin. There was no attempt to preach Christ to the people. Luther sought to preach in such a way that the children could understand his sermons. It was the powerful preaching of the Word that brought about the Reformation.

In our day of multi-media and power point presentations, the sermon and its simple preaching of the cross seems out of place and out of touch with reality. The reality of the foolishness of the message preached leads many to abandon the proclaimed Word and substitute all kinds of alternative emotional placebos. We are tempted to attract people to the Gospel. Some would substitute new and different ways of worship to attract people to the Gospel. Some, like many former LC-MS pastors, joined the Greek Orthodox church because of its ritual and high church liturgy. Others would retreat to the liturgy of the KJV with no changes in form and ritual in order to protect what we have.

It is time to go back to the basics. We need to emphasize the Word in our preaching. We need to have a theology of Law and Gospel. The preaching of the Word has taken a back seat to counseling and social activities in the modern church. How important is the preparation of the sermon in your ministry? Professor C.M. Gullerud told us to have one hour of preparation for every minute of the sermon. Papa Tiefel began the preparations for next week's sermon on Sunday afternoon. I confess that I have fallen far short of both of these in my ministry. It used to be that the bulletin was almost an afterthought simply outlining the week's schedule. Now it is a multi page production. The time spent at the computer consumes much of our week. In the "old days" there were very few meetings. The modern pastor, who does not delegate very well, spends most of his evenings in church meetings and planning sessions.

What a blessed opportunity each week to prepare for that one time when we speak to the most people! The more time we spend in the Word, the better we will be equipped to bring the message of the cross to our people. The more time we spend in sermon preparation, the better we will be able to communicate with our people where they are. Some of the greatest preachers are those who are simply and clearly able to preach the text to their people. The most beautiful structured sermon in the world may go right over the head of the people in the pew.

Our sermons need to be anchored in the Word. I like the new pericopies which take our people through books of the Bible during the seasons of the church year. Bible class is another opportunity to lead them in the study of Scripture rather than to discuss finances or relationships. Do not doubt the power of the Gospel which is the dynamite of God. Preach Christ crucified again this Lenten season. Rejoice in the privilege of preaching Christ to those who have called you to be their pastor and to those who have not heard the Gospel.

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A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "John Schierenbeck".

John Schierenbeck, CLC President