

The Cloud

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News and Articles from the St. Cloud Circuit of the LCMS

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Evangelism's Place in Our Theology

By Rev Joshua Reber (Trinity, Clear Lake; Faith St. Cloud; SCSU Campus Pastor; Editor of the Cloud)

What's our mission? What's our chief purpose, end, and goal? You might say evangelism. I hear what you're saying, but I think that's wrong. We need to rethink where evangelism falls in our thinking. We also need to rethink where confession falls in our thinking. "Missional" and "Confessional" have become the labels we've attached to the two poles in our Synodical thinking, and both have taken on the chief place in some's theology. The missional guys will say "The chief goal of the church is evangelism" while the confessional guys will say, "The chief goal

of the church is confessing proper doctrine.” I’ll deal with the confessional guys later, but in this article I want to discuss how we think about evangelism’s place in our theology. One error is that Evangelism has become the doctrine by which the church stands and falls. Evangelism has become the transcendent goal. We tell people to go to church, so that they can learn how to invite others to church, and the reason you want others to come to church is so that they learn how to bring others to church. It sounds like a multi-level marketing scheme! Maybe we should start giving out pink (purple?) Cadillacs to our successful recruiters.

Before you write me an angry email, I believe in the necessity of evangelism and outreach! If we don’t engage in evangelism, we’re not being the church. But if evangelism is not based in and out of God Himself, what’s the point? Oh, btw, what do you get when you cross an atheist with a Jehovah’s Witness? Somebody who knocks on your door for no reason.

God first, evangelism and all other doctrines next. What good is baptism if there’s no God to be baptized in to? What good is prayer if there’s no God to pray to? What good is evangelism if there’s no God who’s really there who loves us through His Son?

Putting God in front of evangelism makes our evangelism stronger, not weaker, just like loving God more than your spouse makes your marriage stronger, not weaker. *Our chief purpose is to glorify God.* If we make our primary goal anything else, we’ll get confused. If our ultimate goal in life is to love our spouse, we might start skipping church to spend some more quality time with them (I know, it makes no sense!). If our chief end is evangelism, then we may be tempted to start tinkering with who God is. The thinking goes, “The number one goal is to get people in the pews by any means possible, even if that means changing our creed.” Don’t believe me? Turn on TBN sometime. The thinking goes, “At least we’re doing outreach.”

If God is our chief end and goal, we will necessarily be doing outreach. It brings glory to God to preach the Gospel to others. When others are saved, God gains glory. But that’s not the only way that God gains glory. He is also glorified when His Son dies. He’s glorified when we sing praises and make confession to Him. He’s glorified when we say no to sin and overcome the devil. All the Glory be to God! Now let’s get working on giving Him that glory, outreach and evangelism necessarily included. ±

Evangelism – Biblical and Necessary

By Rev Joel Kosberg (Love of Christ, St. Cloud)

A healthy church is a church on mission, seeking and saving the lost, and living as the presence of Jesus for the sake of the world. Outreach and evangelism are essential functions of the church’s mission grounded in the story of scripture. In the beginning of the biblical story, in Genesis 1:28, God blesses humanity with the mandate to **“be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth.”** This creation mandate establishes humanity’s role as stewards of God’s world, tasked with extending His life-giving order. The missional, evangelistic purpose of the church flows from

this fundamental human purpose established in creation. Humans are to create, protect, and help life flourish. People are positioned from the very beginning as God's co-workers in his project of giving life.

However, it isn't long before we fail. And yet, God's mission of giving life stays the same. Beginning in Genesis 3:15, God begins to work for the redemption and re-creation of the whole world and all people, by partnering with fallen humanity. He chooses Abraham as his partner and in Genesis 12:2-3 he promises: **"I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you... and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."** This covenant reveals God's missional heart, choosing Abraham's line to mediate His blessing to the entire world. For centuries the church has seen this as a foreshadowing of the Gospel, where Christ, Abraham's seed, fulfills the promise (Galatians 3:16). Christians are to be a blessing to the whole world through the message about Christ.

Exodus 19:5-6 deepens this framework. Having been delivered out of slavery in Egypt, God gives purpose to his covenant people, Israel, saying, **"If you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession... a kingdom of priests and a holy nation."** The priest's role is to mediate the forgiveness that God lavishly pours out on his people. God calls Israel to be His representatives, mediating and forgiveness to the world. For Lutherans, this "kingdom of priests" foreshadows the Church's role in Christ, the true High Priest. We, the church, reflect this priestly calling, as believers proclaim God's Word of forgiveness, inviting others to know Him and become part of His holy people.

The Bible is one, unified story that finds its fulfillment in Jesus. In Matthew 28:18-20, the Great Commission, Jesus provides the capstone for God's mission through the church. After his resurrection and before his ascension, Jesus gathers his disciples to him atop a mountain. Echoing God's first mandate to humanity in Genesis 1:28, Jesus commissioned his followers to live as a new humanity creating and helping life flourish through the proclamation of the gospel in word and sacrament. Jesus declares, **"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you."** This command is grounded in Christ's authority and finished work. Evangelism is not merely a task but a participation in God's redemptive work. The church is to live as the presence of Jesus in the world giving life, blessing, and forgiveness.

This work of outreach and evangelism will look differently in a variety of different contexts. Our methods of outreach will be as diverse as the people we are intending to reach. And yet, I humbly submit a few ways in which our St. Cloud LCMS churches might partner in this effort. First, our churches must be serving the felt needs of St. Cloud and the greater central Minnesota area. What are the daily needs of our local communities that we can thoughtfully and responsibly supply? What are the pain points in our area and how might we work more effectively together to bring holistic gospel renewal to that pain? How can we serve schools, immigrants, families, and the poor as the hands and feet of Jesus?

Second, our LCMS churches have a clear gospel message of salvation in Christ alone through grace alone by faith alone. We, as Lutherans, have an ability for articulating the gospel in worship that is unique in American Christianity. We are both evangelical and sacramental. How are we inviting those who do not yet know how loved they are by Jesus to come and taste and see and hear God's love for them? Are we equipping our people to be invitational? Are our churches hospitable? Are we eager to have new people in church? Do we have systems in place to receive and teach them? And are we willing to bear the pain of the changes that might cause for our church community?

Finally, are we able to fluently share the gospel with our neighbors, co-workers, in-laws, and friends? God has placed us where we are for the sake of the people around us. Are we prepared, as Peter exhorts us (1 Peter 3:15), to share the reason for the hope that we have? In what ways can our churches equip our members for gospel fluency in their lives? As Christians, we ought to be able to share the gospel in personal and meaningful ways so that more people might be filled with hope in Christ.

Outreach and Evangelism is not peripheral to the church's mission. It is a core element of who we are and why we exist. It is grounded in scripture and lived out in our context. We are people who serve like Jesus did. We are invitational like Jesus was. And we articulate the gospel fluently with the people God has placed in our lives. In other words, we are a church on mission, partnering with Christ to seek and save the lost. ±

Evangelism at the Capitol¹

By Rev Rory Martin (Director, Church Ambassador Network)

The Christian faith finds its ground in the gospel, the *good news* of Jesus Christ. It is because it is good news that we have the obligation and the privilege of sharing it. We live in a world full of people who lack good news. Our culture is one marked by complaining, cynical comedy, and passive aggression. In my line of work, we run into a lot of people who seem to have no knowledge of any good news. I am the director of the Church Ambassador Network. We are ministry that connects the leaders of the church with the leaders of government to help governing officials see who they are called to be by Christ, and see the church as a primary resource to meet needs in communities across Minnesota. In our work at the Capitol in St. Paul, we see people every day who are enduring their work, waiting for the weekend. Enter "the pastors." Recently, pastors from the St. Cloud Circuit of the LCMS joined our ministry for a day.

¹ Editor's Note - Rory is an independent Baptist pastor, and is the first non-Lutheran pastor to write for *The Cloud*. We should get him a plaque. Obviously, there are things we disagree with him about on, and we're not shy about having those conversations, but we also believe together that Jesus Christ is Lord, and that message needs to be prominent at the Capitol.

Imagine your faithful pastors walking around the Capitol complex with a couple of Baptist pastors and an Assembly of God pastor. Perhaps that image is a bit too far-fetched for you to imagine, but since I'm one of those Baptists, let me tell you about it. We contrasted with the mood of the Capitol I described above in a couple of ways.

First, we shared unity. Our unity centers on message of Easter, the *best* news that anyone could share. At the heart of that message is a shared sinful flesh that rebelled against God and deserves punishment. It includes a shared faith in the knowledge that our salvation is in God's grace alone. Further, it points to a shared hope of a better, more permanent home in the presence God Himself forever. In a place as divided as St. Paul, with a split legislature and political rancor in every corner, this unity stands out. Something bigger than mere policies must unite people, something deeper than political parties. Only the gospel can bring this unity. As we walked around the Capitol, we showed that brotherly love can continue (Heb 13:1). This flows from of a sincere appreciate and respect for each other. We don't share the same nuances of theology, and we know it. In fact, we enjoy the occasional jab at each other's theology. But we know we are brothers, and we love what unites us more than we love what divides us. Our brotherhood is deeper than how we baptize, the meaning of communion, and how we understand Christ's return. It's a deep unity grounded in who we are in Christ.

But that wasn't all, we contrasted the mood at the Capitol in a second way. We were happy. Throughout this legislative session, pastors have joined our ministry three days each week. Each group of pastors shared a happiness that isn't typical of the Capitol complex. Your pastors ministry with us was no different. Now happiness, as you probably know, comes and goes, but the happiness of our pastors goes a little deeper. I would venture to say it's joy. That's because we know the heart of joy in Christ and walking in contentment in Him. Buoyed by our salvation in Jesus, a commitment to God's Word, and a love for God's grace, we spread our joy to anyone who would listen. How could we not when we have such good news to share? Both our message and the joy that accompanied it highlighted that what we have is different than what the world has. It's something deeper, flowing from the Spirit that produces joy (Gal 5:22-23). This makes even our jobs a joy.

This joy and unity that pastors bring to the Capitol makes us unique around here. I'm confident it is making a difference too. As we and pastors from around Minnesota share the good news as we walk in joy and unity, God will change hearts. God is a saving God. He desires all men to come to the knowledge of the truth, even politicians (1 Tim 2:1-4). And He isn't done yet. So when the temptation comes to fear, complain, or grow cynical about what's happening in St. Paul, please think of the Church Ambassador Network and pray for us. Pray that God will use His Word coupled with our unity and joy to draw people to faith and repentance and transform our state. We have hope that He can, because we know that the good news is true. Jesus isn't dead anymore; that means Minnesota has a chance! ±

Evangelism – Bring It Home

By David Buchs (Concordia, Fairhaven; Circuit Visitor)

I was not really paying attention when *Ablaze!* was underway in the Missouri Synod a couple decades ago. I just looked it up to make sure I had some details correct – it was an effort to reach 100 million souls with the Gospel by the 500th anniversary of the Reformation in 2017. One article from the LCMS *Reporter* shared the following in 2009: “The Web-based ‘counter’ that tracks the number of times LCMS Lutherans have shared their faith with others as part of the *Ablaze!* movement hit 10,006,997 as this Reporter was going to press April 29.”² That counter kept track of reported Gospel-sharing events and collected stories to help encourage sharing the faith with neighbors.

Again, I was not paying close attention at the time, and I have no first-hand experience with the theology of *Ablaze!*, nor did I bother to find out for this article. I bring it up to share my knee-jerk reaction which was a general sense of uneasiness with tracking something so profound in such a seemingly trivial way. It felt like the measurement turned evangelism into a gimmick or stunt.

I’m sharing that knee-jerk reaction to relate it to some reflections I’ve had lately on the business of measurement in the church. I think I was wrong to assume that measuring and tracking things in the church is bad. For instance, there are lots of things we naturally and appropriately measure, even when we aren’t doing it formally. If you usually come to church every Sunday and then you miss a Sunday, I’m going to check in and make sure you’re okay. If you only come to church once a year, I’m going to think about how I can encourage you to come to church more often. Church attendance isn’t the measure of faith, but it does have some value as an indicator of health, and seeing as I can’t see hearts, I pay attention to what I can.

Back to *Ablaze!* and evangelism. It’s certainly valuable to ask: how are we doing? Are we faithful witnesses to Jesus? How could we measure that? Here’s my proposal: it makes the most sense to measure the most fundamental things. I want everyone in Bible Study, but first I want them all in Church. In the same way, I want everyone to be a light to their next-door neighbors so that they can see their good works and glorify the Father who is in heaven (Mt. 5:16). But first, I want everyone to be a light in the neighbors in their own home: **“Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord”** (Eph. 6:4). Evangelism begins in the home, with parents evangelizing their children, and husbands and wives evangelizing each other. Moreover, I suspect that parents who are devoted

² Paula Schlueter Ross. “‘Ablaze!’ Faith-sharing Counter Exceeds 10 Million.” *Reporter*. May 5, 2009. <https://reporter.lcms.org/2009/ablaze-faith-sharing-counter-exceeds-10-million/>.

to evangelizing their children and husbands and wives who are devoted to evangelizing each other will naturally, with very little need to be prompted, evangelize their neighbors. The conversation you have at home spills out into the world. Evangelism begins at home. If we're going to measure something, which I think we should, let's measure how well parents are evangelizing their children. Do you read the Bible, pray, ask questions, forgive, faithfully attend church and Bible Study, face new challenges with confidence in God, and store up treasures for yourselves in heaven? If you do all of that, the rest is cake because that light is already shining brightly. **"By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another"** (John 13:35). That love for one another is centered in the Gospel. Evangelism begins in the home with love that flows from Christ's death and resurrection for us. ±

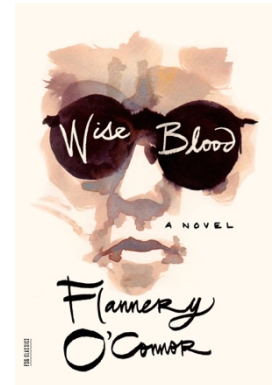
Book Review: *Wise Blood* by Flannery O'Connor (Harcourt, 1952)

By Rev Joshua Reber (Trinity, Clear Lake; Faith St. Cloud)

We all know the saying "Never trust a faith healer who wears glasses." But what about the preacher who pretended to have blinded himself to prove his sincerity to his message? That's Asa Hawks, the street preacher who the protagonist, Hazel Motes, in *Wise Blood* becomes obsessed with.

We have a hard time keeping Lutheran church bodies straight. LCMS, LCMC, LCA, AFLC, ALC, TALC, AELC, ELCA, ELS, WELS, NALC, and AALC is enough to make your head spin, and I promise those are all real (hint - L = Lutheran, A = America and sometimes Association, C = Church, E = Evangelical). O'Connor makes it more absurd with these organizations - first, there's the Church Without Christ. Then, there's the Holy Church of Christ Without Christ. Then there's a man dressed in a gorilla costume posing as a real gorilla who gets stabbed by the titular character (the one with wise blood), and the wise blooded young man puts on the costume but becomes lonely once people flee from him. Who would've guessed?

Wise Blood is absurd in all the right ways. This is what religious pluralism looks like - everyone does what's right in his own eyes, blind or not. It takes Hazel Motes becoming blind (he did so voluntarily, by the way - he had the guts to do what Hawks didn't) to really see. At that point, though, it's too late. I won't spoil the plot, but the plot isn't the most compelling thing about this book. What's most compelling is O'Connor's commentary on our modern American religious landscape. When you don't believe in the divinity and transcendence of Jesus Christ, you believe in your own divinity and transcendence. Perhaps that's why we get high all the time. ±



One might feel hopeless at the end of *Wise Blood*. Maybe you'll laugh. But O'Connor's ultimate goal seems to be evangelistic. If you're reading this, there's hope, but it's only in Jesus Christ. All other roads are called Absurd Avenue.

News

NEW CIRCUIT PODCAST

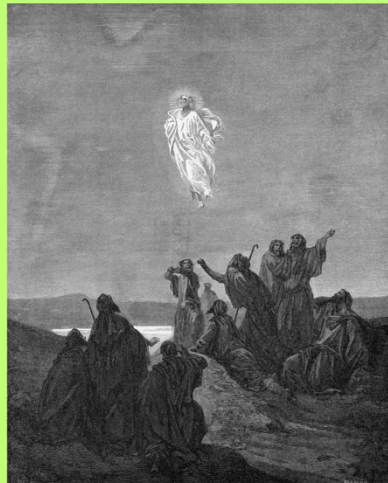
Pastors David Buchs and Joshua Reber host. The goal is to eventually have every pastor in the circuit on. We discuss the Bible and other fun topics, like books about lizard men who escaped from the lab.

Access it on YouTube, Spotify, and Apple Podcasts. Search "The CloudCast" logo on the right.



Ascension Day Service

**Thursday, May 29
7pm**



**Holy Cross Lutheran Church
2555 Clearwater Rd
St. Cloud, MN**

**Fellowship and Refreshments
Following the Service**