

**“No Other Name”
Presidential Address
33rd LCMS District Convention
June 22-25, 2015**

Introduction:

Some two thousand years ago the leaders of the nation of Israel found themselves on the horns of a dilemma. Having thought they had dealt with the problem of Jesus, they were befuddled when His name started popping up again. Apparently a lame man had been healed by invoking the name of Jesus. If the name Jesus is powerful enough to heal, they reasoned, it is probably too powerful for us to control. This name could be used to unseat us, and that would be bad for the nation. Their preferred solution: a gag order on one word, the name of Jesus. “In order that it may spread no further among the people, let us warn them to speak no more to anyone in this name.” You can read all about it in Acts chapter four. Good patriots, once again, for the sake of the nation, these leaders had to silence Jesus.

The conflict between the world and the name of Jesus has reached a feverish pitch once again. There is a national interest involved in today’s conflict as well. Many of the leaders of our nation seem to think that it is in the best interest of the United States to limit what has traditionally been understood as the freedom of religion, especially as exercised by Christians.

Soon you too may be asked, “What name do you confess.” What was once beyond imagination now consumes much energy from many believers. Will this be the generation that is told to no longer speak to anyone in the name of Jesus? Will we be persecuted for our faith? Will the law threaten us? Will other religions “take over” our country?

I do not stand before you to frighten you. I stand here, that by the power of the Word of God you may be liberated from fear, to prepare you for the fight that seems inevitable. The dark clouds of persecution, massing on the horizon cannot stand against the name of Jesus. He has promised that His Church will prevail. He will protect His people. Nothing will be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

What the rulers and elders of Israel did not count on, could not control, were unable even to comprehend was the power of the name. The name of Jesus works in and through His people. Peter and John answered the threat against the name of Jesus, by saying, “We cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.” So also, by the same Spirit, today you declare that you cannot but speak the name of Jesus. The Church is secure, but your neighbors are not. Some have never heard the name of Jesus, some don’t think they need it and some are sworn against it. They are all lame. They need the name, desperately.

We might take the long view. "Persecution comes and goes," we might say, "so let's just soldier on." But I am suggesting to you today that it would be beneficial, for the sake of our neighbor to examine, for a few moments, the specific strategy that satan has thrown up, at this time, against the name of Jesus. One of his favorite tactics is to substitute the false for the real.

I. The world offers many names to follow.

A. In the name of the people. For example, one of the powerful names in our culture is the name of the people. A democracy grants power to the people, and that is most recognizable in the power of the vote. We do not object so far. Where the name of the people is clashing with the name of Jesus is with respect to the Office of the Ministry. If the power of the people is wielded in such a way that the Pastor serves at the whim of the people the name of Jesus will suffer. In today's world many congregations have developed the attitude that the Pastor should tell them only what they want to hear. The fact that the Pastor must speak law and Gospel under the authority of the name of Jesus may be lost, in the minds of many, to the name of the people

B. In the name of science. For some, the name of science has become the ultimate authority. "Scientism," so-called, is the doctrine which asserts that a materialistic science, excluding the supernatural, is the sole method for gaining reliable knowledge for life. Conflict with the name of Jesus is inevitable, not only for those involved in the sciences, but for every Christian. Scientism may be solely responsible for a recent phenomenon within the Church, whereby the faith is separated into an emotional category of life. The believer who falls sway to the name of science as the absolute authority, may seek to justify his belief by relegating it to a separate, private part of life so as to avoid conflict with science. In the LCMS this is particularly evident in the controversy over the teaching of evolution.

C. In the name of the law. Faithful Christians now find themselves in the peculiar position of opposing some of the laws of the land. What if the law says that abortion is a basic human right? What if the law says that homosexual behavior must be accepted and is subject to the rights of marriage? What if the law says that people have the right to die at a moment of their choosing? We have already heard from at least one judge, determining a religious rights case, that in the name of the law we must give up some of the tenets of our faith. Does the fact that it is legal make it right? How do we react to this challenge to the name of Jesus?

D. In the name of god. A pesky problem of fairly recent origin is how to react to men and women executing violent acts in the name of god. Terrorism has shaped how many people view religion in general. The concept of using violent means to achieve religious ends is not new, but the number of adherents willing to participate in the practice has increased, as has its visibility in the public eye. Distinguishing the name of Jesus from the name Allah is not as easy as it may sound. This is especially so due to the fact that many Christians, perhaps frustrated by loss of earthly power, have concluded that if violence works for them it can also work for us. If satan can incite significant

numbers of Christians to exercise such savagery, the name of Jesus will be sullied to the degree that a clear message of the Gospel cannot be sounded. The people of God are called to live holy lives so that the world will see our good works and glorify the name of Jesus.

E. Ordered them not to speak in His name. We are not the first Christians to witness such an aggressive attack on the name of Jesus. We are not the first to have suffered for bearing His name. From the earliest days the Church has listened to the voice of the martyrs, “How long, O Lord, how long?” The leaders of the Church of Israel ordered Peter and John not to speak to anyone in the name of Jesus. But even under the most explicit prohibition the name of Jesus thrives. The laws of the first century were incapable of stamping out the name of Jesus. The laws of the twenty-first century will prove equally inept. How can this be? How can a name survive such insurmountable odds? And how, centuries later, does this name provide you with the confidence to live the life of faith in such a way that the name of Jesus can be known among and through member congregations of the Montana District? Let’s take a look at how much God has invested in the name of Jesus.

II. Our confession is that Jesus is the only saving name.

A. (Mt 1:21). She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”

The name of Jesus is intimately connected to the salvation God provides from the sinful condition.

B. (Ac 10:42–43). And he commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead. To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”

The entire Old Testament is about the name of Jesus, as the means, through faith, by which sins are forgiven.

C. (Ac 2:38). And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

The name of Jesus calls people out of sin through repentance. The name of Jesus baptizes people into life through forgiveness.

D. (1 Co 6:11). And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

We were all condemned to death through our various sin. But the name of Jesus works justification, in which our sin is washed away and we are reborn as the children of God.

E. (Jn 20:30–31). Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. The entire New Testament is a testament to the name of Jesus so that life may come to those who believe.

F. (Lk 24:46–47). and said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. In the name of Jesus the Church moves out to all nations to proclaim the name of Jesus.

G. (Ac 15:25–26). it has seemed good to us, having come to one accord, to choose men and send them to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. From the beginning the proclamation of the name of Jesus has included some risk. God has always, and will always supply men willing to risk their lives for that name.

H. (Col 3:17). And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. The people God do more than speak the name with their lips, they live the name with their lives.

I. (Php 2:9–11). Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Do not fear little flock. The name of Jesus is powerful. Because there is no other name, under heaven, given among men, by which we must be saved, it will be proclaimed until the end. And in the end every knee shall bow at the high name of Jesus.

III. God has blessed the Montana District with many gifts with which to proclaim that name.

This confidence, in the name, gives us cause to rejoice and celebrate the gifts which God has bestowed upon us. Chiefly are we bound to praise Him for the gift of His Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins, and great joy. We praise Him also for the gift of His Holy Spirit, through whom we ever receive the gifts of Word and Sacrament.

And when I think about the Montana District I am thankful, and I invite you to thank Him as well for the faithfulness He has bestowed on His people here. I want to direct your attention to specific groups. Please forgive me if I have left someone out.

A. Faithful congregations. During the last three years the Montana District has received three new congregations, River of Life, Laurel; Emmaus Lutheran Mission, Big Timber and Livingston; and Living Water, Dillon. Together we are 70 congregations confessing the name. But numbers are not most significant. What

I call you to give thanks for is the faithfulness of the congregations you represent. Their dedication to the Word of God and to the Confessions of the Lutheran Church is a blessing to me personally, to the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, and to the world.

B. Faithful schools. We are blessed by God to have six day schools in the District, as well as 16 preschools. In these schools dedicated men and women daily teach the name of Jesus to little children. Some of those children will have no other opportunity to hear the name of Jesus except, perhaps, as used in vain. Our schools are a precious gift and we should care for them as such. I urge congregations not to separate the work of school and Church, but to seek new ways to support schools as a mission to proclaim Jesus, first to our own members and then to non-members who will also submit to the Word of God.

C. Faithful members and leaders. Look around you in this room. Here gathered are leaders of congregations from across the Montana District. Some of you have known each other for years. Some are new acquaintances. I give thanks that this convention is a time when the faithful leaders of our congregations can join together for consolation, commiseration, and joy. Thank you for your service to the Church, and please make it a point to meet every other delegate while you are here.

D. Faithful Pastors. And now we turn to my Pastors, to your Pastors, men who have dedicated their lives to the name of Jesus. I know, intellectually, that not a single one of them is perfect. Yet to me they are perfect, they are perfectly qualified for where and to whom God has called them. And they sacrifice their time, their energy, and even their families so that the name can be proclaimed. I know that, by all statistics they could be paid way more in almost every other district of the Synod. Still they serve, and for that I am very, very thankful.

E. Faithful Teachers. In my view the unsung heroes of the battle for the name of Jesus are the teachers of our schools. These men and women are in the trenches every day. They see and hear good things as children grow in the name of Jesus. They also see awful things as they experience the lives of so many children that are not cared for as they should be. They strive to bring the name of Jesus into every subject that they teach, because that is why they are there. And they are not compensated the way they should be. But they are faithful, and they are passionate about putting the name of Jesus into little ears.

F. Faithful Youth workers. If teachers are unsung, our youth workers are unknown. There are only two of them. Working with the young people of our congregations is a tough job. The groups are constantly changing as one class moves in, and another moves out. The pressures on our young people are unfathomable for most of us. Our youth workers seek to direct these young people to the name of Jesus. He is the great burden bearer.

G. Faithful leaders. I have been blessed by the support, and you have been blessed by the leadership that God has granted to this District. These dedicated men and women are faithful, to a fault, to the Scriptures and Confessions, taking their cue first from the Word of God and not from the dictates of corporate America. I am thankful for the past and current:

1. Vice Presidents- Pastor Chris Tabbert, Pastor Howard Schreibeis
2. Circuit Visitors- Pastors Ray Larson, Matt Nelson, Steve Schlund, Charlie Lehmann, Dan Jacobs, John Sias.
3. Board of Directors- Pastors Christ Tabbert, Howard Schreibeis, Mark Schultz, David Warner, Principal David Topp, Crow Buck, Frank Delgado, Mark Scott, Jerry Roseleip
4. Committees- Members of the Missions Evangelism, Human Care Stewardship, Indian Ministry, Campus Education and the youth committees.
5. Office Staff- Treasurer, Steve Hildenburg; Administrative Assistant Betty Bagley

These people understand that the work of the Synod is not to accomplish the proclamation of the Gospel, but to assist the congregations of the Synod, to fulfill their calling to make the name known.

IV. The congregations of the Montana District proclaim the name within its unique context. Let's take a few minutes to examine how God is at work in the unique context of the Montana District to make the name of Jesus known. Here a few observations about our work together.

A. Very small congregations. Sixty percent of our congregations have fewer than 50 people in Church on Sunday. Eighty two percent have fewer than 100 average attendance. The total average attendance in Montana District congregations is 52 people. Those numbers mean that our congregations are very, very small. Some of my colleagues on the Council of Presidents question the viability of such small congregations and such a small District. There are those who label smallness as a weakness. I prefer to think of it as a strength of our context. For the most part our congregations are family and community oriented. We are connected with the people around us. In these close relationships we have ample opportunity to speak and live the name of Jesus.

I realize that many of you feel like you are living under the threat of closing your doors. That fear will have a negative impact on your testimony, and it is a burden you should not bear. One of the purposes of a Synod is to bring to bear the gifts of the strong in favor of the weak. The Montana District is committed to keeping the doors of all of our congregations open. We believe our message is the Gospel in its truth and purity. If we leave a community, we leave those people without access to the Good News.

B. Predominantly multi-parish. Sixty percent of our congregations are in multi-parish relationships, (dual and triple parishes.) Again, many would consider this statistic an

indication of weakness, that is, we cannot support our Pastor without joining into groups that splinter his time. On the other hand multi-parish relationships can be used to strengthen bonds between fellow believers. I encourage those of you in such relationships to work hard at loving your brothers and sisters in your fellow congregations.

C. Isolated. The average distance to the next closest LCMS congregation in the Montana District is 27.5 miles. This is a significant number because it reveals, even though it is an average number, that most of our congregations are quite isolated. That is to say that most people are not going to drive 30 miles to attend church. This reinforces the previous point that we must work hard to keep our congregations open. People will not drive to the next closest LCMS congregation.

So allow me to submit a method to the principle of keeping congregations open. In order to do that, we must begin to research innovative solutions to smallness and isolation. I have already mentioned, as one option multi-parish relationships. I think the number of such congregations is going to increase. Let me suggest also that your Pastor may have to retain another job to supplement his income. Thirdly, we may also bring technology to bear as they have been doing in Wolf Point, Plentywood and Glasgow for years. I am trying to create some space for you to rethink how things have always been done. The way it has been is not necessarily the way it must be. It is OK if your Pastor serves one or two other congregations. It is OK if he has another job. It is OK if you hear the Word from your Pastor via the internet every once in a while. On the other hand, there are some bridges that we will not cross. We will not use laymen as Pastors. That is contrary to the Scriptures and the Confessions. We will not treat Pastors as hirelings. And we will not compromise the Word in favor of gaining more people.

D. Confessional. This brings me to my favorite characteristic of the Montana District. I have found you, Pastor and people, to be confessional people. By that I mean you are committed to speaking and living, both as individuals and as congregations, the Word of God and the confessions of the Lutheran Church. You might expect that to go without saying, but in today's world it is not so. This unique aspect of service in Montana cannot be over-emphasized. The power and wisdom of God's Word will carry us through, and yes, will be the allure that grows the Church in the future. Furthermore, as confessional people we have a solid foundation from which to proclaim the name. As I often say, I believe that the Montana District has a lot to say to the LCMS, and to the world.

E. Adventurous. The apostle Paul has written, "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him" (1 Co 2:6-9). In other words, our tiny minds cannot capture what God is up to next. We cannot put Him into a box of our own design. He will do what His Word says He will do, but that still leaves Him a great deal of creative space. As His people we receive that as a gift and trust our Heavenly Father for a safe ride through life. This is an adventure. That is another thing I have noticed about Montana District congregations. You are up

for the adventure of the life of faith. Bold, innovative, yet Scriptural and godly methods do not phase you. You are willing to become all things to all people so that by all means the name of Jesus may be proclaimed.

Conclusion

God is at work. Despite the threats of this world the name of Jesus will be proclaimed and will be heard. After Peter and John were told not to speak the name of Jesus they went straight to their congregation and prayed, as follows:

“Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them, who through the mouth of our father David, your servant, said by the Holy Spirit, ‘Why did the Gentiles rage, and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers were gathered together, against the Lord and against his Anointed’”. For truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place. And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness, while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus.” And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness.” (Ac 4:23–31).

God grant it in our day also by the name of Jesus. Amen.

S.D.G.

Terry Forke

6-23-15