

**Presidential Address  
32<sup>nd</sup> Convention  
Montana District LCMS  
Holiday Inn, Billings, Mt  
June 11-14, 2012**

**“Go Into All the World and Proclaim the Gospel to the Whole Creation”**

(Mark 16:15)

**I. Proclaiming the Gospel in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ. There may be many reasons for attending a District convention: a chance to meet old friends, an opportunity to hear good preaching, a desire to learn more about the church. I suspect that the chief reason you showed up for this convention is that you believe the Gospel of Jesus Christ. You believe it is the truth, and you believe that it should be proclaimed to the world. That is the convention theme, from Mark 16:15, “Go Into All the World and Proclaim the Gospel to the Whole Creation”.

In many ways proclaiming the Gospel is a timeless joy. The message always stays the same. In other ways proclaiming the Gospel in the 21<sup>st</sup> century presents challenges Christians may have never experienced. Let me outline three that I think you should spend some time considering.

**A. Challenges to the proclamation of the Gospel.**

1. Culture: For much of the history of this nation Christians have been cultural insiders. By that I mean that the Christian faith was thought of in a kindly way. Even if members of the community did not believe in Jesus they still respected the Church, its Pastors, and individual members. Many would have agreed that America is a Christian nation. The contributions of the Church to the general welfare of society were noted and applauded. There were even trappings of power accorded to the Church. Pastors and Bishops were considered to be leaders of their communities. They were asked to speak and even pray at community events. They were appointed to committees and boards because they were assumed to have some clout with their constituencies.

Today, many of these amenities have disappeared. Worse, the Christian faith is regularly mocked in film and print. Intellectuals bend over backward to explain that this is not a Christian nation. Public confessions of the faith often attract legal action. Pastors and Bishops are suspected instead of being respected.

This challenge must not be ignored. How will we proclaim the Gospel in a hostile environment?

2. Science: The modern world, where most of us grew up held to a theory of truth that is foreign to the latest generation. We grew up believing that an objective truth actually existed. Whether it was science or philosophy or religion asking the question the objective was to search out the truth, the reality, the answer. The post-modern world, we live in today, does not believe that truth actually exists. What passes for science and philosophy today is often understood only as a matter of perspective. Religion is summarily tossed onto the lazy susan of personal affinities. Most of you have heard someone say, “I’m not religious but I am spiritual.” That usually means that they have drunk deeply at the trough of individualism to the point that they have constructed their own spirituality. They do not believe they have found truth. They believe they have cobbled together something that pleases them.

This challenge must not be ignored. How will we proclaim the Gospel to a generation that does not believe in the existence of truth?

3. State: First amendment rights have been held dear by most Americans. The Church is not the least among them. The Church has used these rights to bolster its ability to proclaim the Gospel.

In a recent series of decisions, ranging from Health and Human Services telling the Church that it must provide for birth control under its insurance plans, to the refusal of the House of Representatives to support a bill that would ban abortion for the sake of gender selection, to the President of the United States publicly declaring that he supports marriage rights for homosexual couples, it appears that first amendment rights, at least as far as the Church is concerned are being re-examined.

This is a challenge that must not be ignored. How will we proclaim the Gospel if the state chooses to limit that proclamation?

## **B. The Gospel answers the challenges and the needs of mankind.**

We live in a day where a large portion of the Church seems to have forgotten that the answer to these challenges, and indeed the answer to all of the problems of living in a sinful world are found in the Gospel. Entire confessions of faith, whole denominations are floundering, searching for answers to these challenges. Unfortunately, they are often looking in all the wrong places. Some are looking to money, some to technology, some to entertainment, some to corporate business principles and some to human nature. "If we only have enough money," "If we had the right technology," "If our worship is entertaining enough," "If we ran this congregation more like a business," "If we give the people what they want," we will survive. These are no answer.

Instead, this is what Jesus says, "Go Into All the World and Proclaim the Gospel to the Whole Creation". He tells us to proclaim the Gospel. This is Jesus' answer. Why would Jesus tell us to proclaim something that was not the answer?

1. Sin. Lots of things have changed. This hasn't changed, people are still sinners. No, we cannot do whatever we feel is right at the moment. God has established an active law. It condemns us to the point that we cannot save ourselves. Every human being has the same status before God, apart from the Gospel. We are sinners because we do not meet His standard of holiness.

2. There is only one Savior. Much has changed. This hasn't, there is and can be only one savior. No, there are not many paths to God, and a self-constructed "spirituality" is nothing more than narcissistic silliness. All the religions of the world cannot be true, because they contradict each. Christianity is unique because it alone proclaims that man cannot save himself by his behavior. We proclaim a savior, Jesus Christ.

3. God's love sends a Savior to save. The world has changed, but God hasn't. God is love. God so love the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. In this is love, not that we loved Him but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the expiation for our sin. Here the love of God is at work. Jesus Christ did not come to condemn the world but to save it. The love of God, demonstrated in the life, death, resurrection, ascension and return of Jesus is the answer to all of life's challenges.

## **C. We are commanded to proclaim.**

1. Success? So we proclaim. Please note that God does not give us quotas, benchmarks, goals, or deadlines. He doesn't even give us a concise, 25 words or less, comprehensive, inspiring, mission statement. The life of faith, the life of the body of Christ is not about success.

2. Growth? Despite all the hoopla about Church Growth we must remember that God doesn't even tell us to grow the Church. In fact, He explicitly says that growth is His prerogative. Paul told the Corinthian congregation, "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth." Growth can become a harmful idolatry. We must be clear about God's command.

3. Proclaim. We are commanded to proclaim. The Gospel message stays the same. The applications, and to a degree even the method of proclaiming may change with the ages of this world. But, we have this command to speak the truth of the Gospel, boldly, courageously, in season and out of season, wherever and whenever He gives us leave.

## **II. Who is going?**

### **A. Pastors**

1. The Office of the Public Ministry. This text specifically refers to the office of ministry. This is not an office the Church created for its convenience. It is not optional. God created this office so that: there would be a seat of wisdom regarding the Word of God- (The title- elder); that there would reflection of the Father's love in Jesus- (The title- pastor); and a center of authority regarding the stewardship of the Gospel- (The title- overseer). The Lutheran Church recognizes the necessity of this office when it says in its Confessions, "It is taught among us that nobody should publicly teach or preach or administer the sacraments in the church without a regular call." (AC XIV)

2. Respect. This office is given little respect these days. Many, even some within our Confession seem intent on diminishing this office. If a layman, or a woman, or even someone with a different confession can get the job done, many seem to think that God's standards for the office should be relaxed. Further, it is common practice to feel that the Pastor is present to please the people, and if he doesn't then either he should leave, or the members will leave. Somehow we seem to have missed that what really suffers as a result of the current disrespect for the office, is the proclamation of the Gospel.

3. Proclamation. This office is given the responsibility to see to the proclamation of the pure Gospel. The Lutheran Church recognizes this when it says in its Confessions, "To obtain such faith God instituted the office of the ministry, that is, provided the Gospel and the sacraments. Through these, as through means, he gives the Holy Spirit, who works faith, when and where he pleases in those who hear the Gospel." (AC V) Yes, Pastors are going into the world to proclaim the Gospel.

### **B. People.**

1. People. Pastors are not the only ones who are going to proclaim the Gospel. God gives the Pastor to a specific people. He gives the people to a specific Pastor. This arrangement exists not simply to give the Pastor someone to preach to, but for the sake of the proclamation. The people of God also live and speak the Gospel. Peter writes to the people of God, "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a

people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.” (1 Peter 2:9)

2. Partnership. Together Pastor and people proclaim the Gospel. Paul writes to the Philippian congregation, “I thank my God in all my remembrance of you...because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.” (Phil 1:3) This fellowship, this working side by side for the sake of the Gospel is a beautiful creation of God.

3. Vocation. God is at work in His people. Although the farmer grows the food, God is the one who gives us our daily bread. So, Luther says, it is as if God clothes, or masks Himself in His people to accomplish His work. God is at work in His people in their various vocations and stations in life. Through these vocations and stations in life God sees to it that the Gospel is proclaimed to all creation. The people of each congregation have far broader and more intimate access to the people of their community than does their Pastor.

### **C. Congregations.**

1. Congregations. God gathers congregations. Congregations are not accidents, nor are they social gatherings of like-minded people. Jesus said, “For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.” (Mt 18:20) Please note the passiveness of the gathering. The people are not gathering themselves. God gathers congregations for the sake of proclaiming the Gospel to all creation.

2. The Body of Christ. Congregations are a reminder that the Church is the body of Christ. There are many members of our congregations. No two members are precisely alike. This is by God’s design. Each member, with his unique set of skills, abilities, talents, vocations and stations in life proclaims the Gospel in a unique context. And yet, each member works as a part of the body, not as an individual on his own quest.

3. Resources. Congregations, then, proclaim in ways that individuals cannot. By gathering people together in a congregation God creates a pool of gifts that is greater than the sum of its parts. Congregations can make a public confession to their community in ways that are more effective than individual testimonies.

### **D. Synod**

1. Human institution. Synods are human institutions. There is nothing in the Scripture about creating a synod. However, there is nothing that says the Church does not have the freedom to create a gathering of congregations that have the same confession of faith. As long as the Synod abides by the confession of the pure Word of God the human institution can serve the Church.

2. Proclamation. Synods work for the proclamation of the Gospel, not their own survival. The danger is that a Synod spends more time working for its own survival than it does for the sake of the proclamation of the Gospel. This is one reason that we have District and Synodical conventions. We want to make sure that our Synod stays on track of proclaiming the Gospel in its truth and purity.

3. Synod. The word synod means to walk together. So a synod is a gathering of congregations that walk together to see to some aspect of proclaiming the Gospel. Synods proclaim in ways that individuals and congregations cannot. But synods should not get caught in the trap of doing what congregations should be

doing. There very limited purposes for a Synod. A synod should be doing what congregations cannot do by themselves. Examples of this work might be: Educating Pastors and Teachers, sending out missionaries, ecclesiastical supervision and large scale works of mercy. Each of these duties of a synod is undertaken as a means of assisting the Church to proclaim the Gospel.

### **III. Who is “the whole creation”?**

#### **A. Believers**

1. Believers. Believers need to hear the proclamation of the Gospel. There are some voices in the Church today implying that proclaiming the Gospel to those who already know Jesus is not mission work. I disagree. Do believers need to hear the Word? Yes! Did Jesus send us to speak the Word to believers? Of course He did. This is part of the mission.

2. Pastors. Pastors are sent to proclaim to believers. God gives congregations to Pastors and Pastors to congregations. The believers in each congregation do need to hear the Word of God from their Pastor lest they fall away from the faith. The Word of the Gospel is the only thing that can sustain their faith.

3. People. God’s people are sent to proclaim to believers. God gathers congregations. One of the reasons He does this is so that His people can hear and see from each other the truth of the Gospel.

#### **B. Unbelievers**

1. Unbelievers. Of course, unbelievers need to hear the proclamation of the Gospel. Without the hearing of the Gospel that creates faith unbelievers are destined for hell. Yes, God did create a place of punishment for those who do not know Jesus. Remember we cannot save them. God does that work. He does use us to proclaim the Gospel to unbelievers.

2. Pastors. Pastors are sent to proclaim to unbelievers as well. It is possible that this fact has been given less emphasis than necessary. God does not give the Pastor only to a congregation, but, as a prophet of God, Pastors are given to the communities in which they reside to proclaim the Gospel to all who can hear.

3. People. Likewise the people of God are sent to proclaim to unbelievers. Friends, neighbors, relatives, and co-workers all hear and see the Gospel proclaimed by the people of God. God gives His people to the world so that unbelievers can hear the Gospel and come to faith.

#### **C. Neighbors**

1. “Who is my neighbor?” Jesus was once famously asked, “Who is my neighbor?” The answer was a surprise to His hearers. Loving our neighbors does not simply mean being nice. In the final analysis, love means proclaiming the Gospel. The story of the good Samaritan suggests that our neighbor is the people that we really don’t like very much. While this is true it is, at the same time, much broader than that.

2. Near. We normally think of our neighbor as people who are physically, emotionally, or even spiritually close to us. Yes, these are people who need to know the love of God in Christ Jesus. God sends us to bind the wounds and care for our neighbors who are close.

3. Far. In another sense those who are not “close” to us are also our neighbors. The Samaritan was not close to the wounded man in any way. Likewise, there are people in our communities, and the world who are not close to us. They may be of another race, ethnicity, intellectual or financial status. Sometimes these differences loom larger in our minds than their need to hear the Gospel. God sends us to bind the wounds and care for neighbors who are far away so that they can hear the Gospel.

#### **IV. How will we know when we get there?**

##### **A. Faith.**

1. The world’s map. Sometimes we fall into the trap of using the world’s map instead of the one provided by the Word of God. How do we know when we have gone into all the world and proclaimed the Gospel to the whole creation? The number of people in the pews is not the answer to the arrival at the goal. Paul writes to the Church at Corinth, “So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.” These gifts may help us determine the destination of our proclamation.

2. Faith. God calls us to be faithful. “Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy.” (Faithful) (I Cor. 4:1) What good does a faulty proclamation do? None. Our first act of proclamation is to be a careful assessment that we are saying what Jesus told us to say, nothing more, and nothing less. Just as arriving at one’s destination alive is essential to the journey, so proclaiming the pure Gospel that brings life, is essential to the mission.

3. He is Faithful. “Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful.” (Heb. 10:23) We dare not think ourselves independent. The survival of the Church does not rest on our ability to be faithful. God is faithful. In His faithfulness He keeps us true to His Word. Thus we arrive, in His faithfulness, proclaiming the Gospel.

##### **B. Hope.**

1. Failure? We have examined only three challenges to the proclamation of the Gospel in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. There are countless others. It would be easy for us to become discouraged and lose hope. It is particularly tempting in Montana to think, “We are too small and too isolated to have much impact on the proclamation of the Gospel.” I remind you that if you have proclaimed the Gospel in its purity there can be no chance of failure. The Word will do its work, when and where the Holy Spirit sees fit.

2. Hope. Our hope is not based on our ability to fulfill the mission. Our hope is based on the power of the Gospel to save. God promises that He is at work in that Word. We have arrived at the goal of the mission when our hope is placed not in ourselves but in His Word.

3. Risks. Fear a failure seems to drive a lot of our decisions regarding when, where and how we proclaim the Gospel. So, allow me to speak a word of freedom to you. On the basis of our hope in the power of the Gospel I encourage to reconsider how you evaluate risks for the sake of proclaiming the Gospel. I submit to you that risks should not be evaluated on the basis of probability of success, but on the value of the goal. Proclaiming the Gospel to believers and unbelievers is a very valuable goal. I plead with you to jettison

the “We’ve never done it this way before.” and the “This isn’t going to work.” approaches. It is acceptable to take some risks so that the Gospel can be heard. It is hope, to believe that when it is proclaimed it will work.

### **C. Love.**

1. Power? There is considerable confusion about how God is at work in the two kingdoms of Church and State. The Church dare not evaluate its mission on the basis of power or influence in the world. God works through the state by the power of the sword. He works through the Church by the power of the Word. From time to time the state may flex its muscles in areas God does not intend, but the Church cannot be intent on the defeat of the state. Instead of power, the greatest gift God has given His people is love. Love is mightier than the sword.

2. Love. This is how God determined to work in the world, love. God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son. God knew what was best for us and sacrificed Himself on our behalf. Since this love is tied to a specific act of God in Christ Jesus, it cannot mean letting people do whatever they want to do. Love is strong. It is manifest in the proclamation of the Gospel. We cannot be in the mission without loving and we cannot love without being in the mission. Since God is love and since He is in His people we can be assured we have arrived.

3. Proclaimers. Jesus said, ““Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach, (proclaim) there also, for that is why I came out.” (Mark 1:38) Jesus came to proclaim. Like teacher, like disciples. We have been sent out to proclaim. That happens in the context of love. That is why Jesus said, “By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” (John 13:35) You, dear brothers and sisters, can be confident that the God of love is at work in you as you go into all the world proclaiming the Gospel to all creation. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

S.D.G.  
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