



# Faithful & Afire

LCMS Circuit Bible Studies — 2012-2013

## Called To Be God's Witnesses

**Called to perceive by faith and to proclaim the unseen works of God amidst the things that are seen.**

Participant's Guide - SEPTEMBER 2012

### **Topic: God's Witnesses to the Unseen Works of God's Word**

#### **1. Focus of This Study**

The Word of God, in ways unseen by the human eye, is a living and active force in the Church (Hb. 4:12), the power of God for salvation (Rm. 1:16), and the power of the Spirit to believe (Rm. 10:17). The Word is efficacious, performative, doing what it says, and truly a means of grace, that is, God's actual bestowal of his grace and not merely pointing the way to his grace.

At the same time, this transcendent Word-power is found in human vessels (2 Co 4:7). Pastors, who feel their humanness every day, draw great strength and comfort from this power, a power that saves both them and their hearers, a power that is not their own.

To catch an introductory glimpse at how God uses weak human vessels to channel his power, please read Titus 1:5-9.

How do the ministerial qualifications listed here bespeak human weakness?

Of all the qualifications, which one overrides all the others?

#### **2. Scripture Search**

Read each of the passages listed below and note how the Word of God is a living and active force.

Genesis 1:3

Mark 2:5

John 11:43

John 5:25, 28, 29a

John 20:22-23

What does the Word accomplish in people's lives according to 2 Tm 3:15-16? What precisely are the "sacred writings" that Timothy had known from childhood?

The omnipotent, creative Word of God is carried by human vessels (2 Co 4:7). To borrow a dogmatic phrase from Christology, we might speak of the "divine and human nature" of the Ministry.

The divine nature of the Ministry lay in the fact that God himself has called a man to a congregation to speak God's Word.

Briefly review and discuss the divinity of the Call in Acts 20:28 and 1 Cor. 4:1-2.

On the other hand, there is also the human nature of the ministry. Unlike the perfect human nature of Christ himself, the pastor is indeed a sinful, human, earthen vessel, with all the weaknesses, shortcomings, and inabilities he shares with his parishioners.

Revisit Acts 20:28 and 1 Cor. 4:1-2. How is the all-too-human aspect of the Ministry reflected in the very same verses that teach the doctrine of the call?

Read 1 Thessalonians 2:13.

As a man sent from God, the pastor is always mindful of whose Word he is speaking. This Word of God first of all forgives, reassures, and emboldens the pastor himself. Thus strengthened and encouraged, he moves out into the world, courageous and unafraid. The Word of God turns out to be far stronger than the pastor's timidity or other weaknesses. God's alien righteousness carries him through. (As a follow-up to this session, each pastor might want to do a word study on "proclamation" of the Word-- Hebrew basar and Greek kerusso.)

To capture the essence of proclamation, consider the following excerpt.

*"A king sends out to a city his ambassador for the purpose of announcing the decree of the king. The job of the herald is, not to publish his own personal desires or to offer his own opinion about what the king has to say, but simply to speak what the king has spoken. He speaks on the king's behalf. When he speaks, the king himself is speaking. To get the job done, the herald goes right into the marketplace in the center of town where everyone can hear the king's decree. He speaks boldly, confidently, and without apology because he speaks what the king himself wants and speaks by the king's authority. A king, after all, does not have to apologize or make excuses to anyone. The herald does not speak the king's decree as though it were merely a suggestion, which invited the comments and criticisms of the townspeople. He simply says, 'This is the way it is!' The herald proclaims and departs. He does not go into the local tavern to whisper gossip among his fellow subjects regarding what the king is all about or what he is up to."*

"In the pulpit the preacher is the herald of the King. He stands there in the place of Christ himself. When he speaks, Christ himself is speaking. The preacher knows what Christ has done for mankind and knows what he wants all people to hear. The preacher proclaims the kerugma, the proclamation, of the maker of the universe, of the Savior who needs no courses in theology. The preacher speaks on behalf of Christ and by Christ's authority, saying "This is the way it is" regarding the Lord's will, proposes, and immutable decrees. The preacher makes no apologies for what the King says through him. He does not engage in idle gossip about the King. He does not announce the King's will tentatively or throw it out as a toss-up. In short, he proclaims."

(J. Bollhagen, The Practice of Pastoral Theology, CTS Bookstore, 1997, p. K.2

As the pastor speaks the authoritative Word of God himself and does so boldly and forthrightly, (it may seem horribly contradictory to say so, but. . .) in recognition of his own weakness and in the attempt to get through to his fellow sinners, the pastor is going to have to work at getting better and better at what he does in the Ministry!! Through confession and absolution, he will grow and get better at getting out of the way and letting God be God. Already declared perfect by the grace of God and functioning in the perfect office of the Ministry, the pastor still works at doing the best he can.

Read as an example of the above 2 Tm 4:1-2. Timothy, the spotless herald of the perfect King, still had some work to do, did he not?

Another way of describing the divine and human natures of the ministry is this: the *divine* is reflected in the holy office that is occupied, while the *human* is seen in the man who holds the office.

There can never be enough wonderful things said about the office, but there should be considerable restraint exercised concerning the earthen vessel who occupies the office.

Contrast Rm 12:3 and 1 Sm 15:17. For the man who holds the office the general rubric of Romans carries the day. However, as for the office the pastor holds, Samuel's word to Saul must carry the day: *"The Lord placed you in your office, so don't belittle it!"*

Read 2 Co 4:5. How do you see the divine nature of the Ministry (the Office) and the human nature of the Ministry (the man in the Office) reflected in this one verse?

### 3. From Our Lutheran Perspective

Former Lutheran Hour speaker Oswald Hoffmann once stated: *"The Holy Spirit works best through a prepared sermon."* How might his comment be reflective of the "two natures" of the ministry?

What do you make of this? In the Augsburg Confession (1530), the quotations of the Scriptures and the quotations of the Church Fathers run in about a 50-50 ratio. In the Formula of Concord (1580), however, there are only two quotations of the Church Fathers on the entire document.

Invariably, whenever the Lutheran Confessions define the Ministry, they define it as simply *"The Word and the Sacraments."* Rarely, if ever, do the Confessions define the ministry as *"the ones who preach the Word and administer the Sacraments."* How come?

Article XXVIII of the Augsburg Confession clearly states that the power of the bishops is the Word of God alone.

**Perhaps this class session will bring the alien righteousness of the Ministry into sharper focus.**

### 4. Points to Ponder

Comment on the statement: *"The act of preaching is a microcosm of the whole history of God's dealings with his people."*

Comment on the statement: *"When Christ founded his Church, he didn't just give the Church his Book and from that point let the Church fend for herself. He gave the Church his book and the men to deliver it."*

Read Matt. 9:36-38. In this Bible story, Jesus had compassion on the crowd because it was so helpless. What was the immediate result of Jesus' compassion?

Under the doctrine of the inspiration of Scripture, it is said that the God's authors spoke the very words of God, and yet the individual personalities of the authors were preserved intact. Do you see any parallel here with the Ministry?

Comment on the common excuse heard from delinquent members: *"I don't go to church, but I pray."*

### 5. For Conversation

The following are miscellaneous conversation starters that class members may expand upon as they wish.

Theological terms such as *odium sui* (self-hatred in the confession of sins), *resignatio ad infernum* (resigning one's self to hell, knowing in confession that you are fully deserving of such an end), or "being driven to the Gospel" all have a passive flavor, that of being acted upon by God's Word.

Draw from your own experience where you have seen God's working through the Word while you yourself were merely a spectator to something far bigger than yourself.

Comment on: *"He who doesn't stand for something will fall for anything."*

Once while visiting an attorney's office (I had no official business to discuss.) the attorney pointed to his library, a whole room lined with legal manuals from floor to ceiling. The attorney said to me, "It's not fair! To do my job I have to know what is in a whole roomful of books, but you? For your job all you have to know is one book!" How well do you study and know the ONE book?

Are you a bookworm or a people person? I certainly hope so!

Read Ezekiel 3:16-19 for a stark description of a pastor's responsibility to speak the whole law-and-Gospel counsel of God.

The pastor preaches his sermon as part of an established relationship that the pastor has cultivated with his members during the rest of the week.

And finally, a little story. It has happened many times in my ministry that a new adult confirmand would ask me: *"If I want to greet you in a public setting in the congregation, how shall I address you?"* My immediate answer has usually been, *"You can just call me 'Your Holiness.'"* The reaction from the new member has usually been to dart his/her eyes in fear, but after about five seconds, a smile comes across the new member's face when he realizes that I am only kidding. A major bonding occurred between the pastor and the layperson in those moments. It was a great way to say, "Respect the office, but by myself I am no big "deal".

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