

Faith & Fellowship

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September/October 2021

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FAITH & FELLOWSHIP
Volume 88 - Number 5

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Quiet Moments

Email prayer requests to: pray@clba.org

Ignited by God

H.E. WISLØFF



To bring people to Jesus must be the goal in all work in God’s kingdom. This should also be the goal for each one of us in all that we say or do.

It is not so difficult to discuss religious matters with our neighbors. Most of them are interested in such topics. It is more difficult to turn the conversation so that it becomes a testimony that will bring those with whom we are talking, to Jesus.

Our goal is not to win in a discussion but to win a soul. To succeed in the first it is enough that you have sufficient intellect, but for the second you must be ignited by God.

If the gospel has become the power of God to us personally, it will make us evangelists. We cannot be silent concerning that which we have seen and heard.

Hans Edvard Wisløff (1902—1969) was a Norwegian theologian and writer. He was also the Bishop of the Diocese of Sør-Hålogaland from 1959 until his death in 1969.

Wisløff, H.E., Quiet Moments on the Way Home. Fergus Falls, MN: Faith & Fellowship Press, 1993.

Timeless Love

TROY TYSDAL

It would be the last time the young pastor would visit the old man, and there was something heavy on the old man's heart. He had spent the last few months in physical pain, but that was not what troubled him now. Now he seemed at peace with the pain, and even to accept his impending death. There was no more resistance, at least not for himself. What troubled the old man now, what kept him hanging on, was the one he would leave behind. He had been caring for the woman who had cared for him for so many years. The woman who had made sure there was a meal waiting for him when he worked overtime at the office. The woman who had read stories and rocked their children to sleep. The woman who had shown him both love and forgiveness for over 60 years. He had been hiding her dementia, not that people didn't notice, but that he had done his best to care for her and to keep them together in their home. That was over now, and he knew it. In the old man's final moments, the young pastor had hoped to talk about Jesus, but the old man had only his wife on his mind.

When people have the opportunity to share their last words, you can be sure of this; the subject will be one of extreme importance to them. We often think of the Great Commission as the final words of Jesus Christ. They were given to us after his death and resurrection—just before his ascension into heaven. Jesus had called his disciples to Galilee, and he had told them to go—to make disciples of all nations. He told them to baptize and to teach, and he promised to be with them always. His words mattered. They were of the utmost importance.

But they are not the *only* final words we have from our Lord.

JOHN 19:25-27

Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When



Shegner Laker on Unsplash

Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to her, "Woman, here is your son," and to the disciple, "Here is your mother." From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.

The words of Jesus to the Apostle John, the disciple whom he loved, show us Jesus' humanity. They show us, that in his darkest hour, he looked beyond himself to care for the woman who had cared for him. It is a tender, intimate moment in which we can feel the love of Jesus for his mother. He has bigger problems to worry about than Mary. He has been nailed to a cross. He is bleeding and in pain. His Father in Heaven has forsaken him, yet he charges the disciple whom he loved to care for his mother.

Can you feel it?

This was someone of extreme importance to Jesus.

Perhaps that moment of tenderness should be the lens through which we read the Great Commission. Jesus speaks with an intimate love, as with the love of a son for his mother, a husband for his wife, a grandfather for a grandmother,

as he charges his followers to go into the world to make disciples of all nations—to baptize and to teach. In reality, Jesus was telling them, "Bring my children home."

When I sat with the old man, many years ago, I told him, "God loves grandma more than you do, and he has not forgotten her."

Perhaps that is the message you need to hear today?

You are not forgotten. You are someone of extreme importance to Jesus, and you are not alone. Let that truth find a place in your heart, and may the God of peace fill you with the love of him who calls you home.

Rev. Troy Tysdal is Director of Communications and Prayer for the Church of the Lutheran Brethren and serves as editor in chief of Faith & Fellowship magazine.



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Gathered in Christ

ROGER OLSON

“Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.’”

Matthew 28:16-18

Eleven. Their number shows that things hadn’t turned out quite as expected. Eleven was a rather odd, uncomfortable number. How could they forget or comprehend the man who changed everything? The traitor who brought everything crashing down. They were no longer a balanced twelve, that vivid picture of the fledgling Israel, the full number, chosen by their Savior God.

These twelve should have proved a rock-like foundation for the building of God’s Kingdom, but in their three-year trek with their Master they had suffered

the loss of one of their members, and loss wasn’t a strong enough word. They had been skewered by the ongoing thievery of a covetous and betraying man who walked with them. Who would think such a thing could happen in Jesus’ company?

But it does, doesn’t it?

They anticipated things finally coming together in a new and glorious Kingdom where they, no doubt, would have important posts. They could taste the success as Jesus entered the capital to shouts of “Hosanna!” But then it all crumbled quickly, as they were sold out by one of their own. And even those who had pledged to stand tall in the hour of their Master’s crisis, they had to admit they had all failed in spectacular fashion.

I was enthused by the presence of a new young family in our tiny congregation. They were active. What a difference they made! It was so encouraging! We shared friendship, family times together.

So when they moved on to “greener pastures” church-wise, I was deflated, devastated. My new-found friend didn’t understand why their decision to go to another church should make a difference in our relationship. Perhaps he was right. But it did. I felt betrayed and I was discouraged.

As we build “the Kingdom,” it can easily become *our* kingdom. Our well-laid plans can fail. The people in whom we place our trust all too often disappoint, and if we’re honest, we will find ourselves first on that list.

Perhaps you can identify with these men. Like the disciples, you’ve had surprises over the last months and years. The unexpected multi-month jolt of COVID. The struggle of short- or long-term restructuring of your church’s ministry.

As you’ve seen friends in your church grow in the grace that is theirs in Jesus

“Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life.”

John 5:24

Christ, you are filled with joy! You’re rightfully energized, encouraged, and excited by what you are observing. Yet I suspect you’ve also experienced the deep loss of those you love. Like the eleven, your sense of wholeness has been destroyed as those close to you have unexpectedly slipped away or tripped and fallen. And then there are those who are snatched away from you through moves, disinterest, distraction, or through death.

Why? Is this what the kingdom of Christ is supposed to look like? You review what you should have done, and you grieve. And our nation—wracked by always more turmoil. No matter the political persuasion, we are left shaking our heads at the popular attitudes, values, and behaviors—and we grieve.

Then there’s the tiredness, and not just from work, but from the seeming lack of progress. Of not seeing happen what in your estimation, “should have happened.”

When is the mission of our congregation, or my personal ministry, or my personal life under the risen King going to “take off” and be something I can be proud of? When am I going to be able to sing “Happy Days are Here Again”? Like Jesus’ first disciples, this isn’t exactly what we signed up for. We expected more, but really, nothing seems to have changed...

Where do we go now? Well, where did Jesus’ eleven disciples go?

Home. Back to the beginning. Jesus’ disciples had been pointed home, back to Galilee, and specifically to the mountain Jesus identified.

This was no chance gathering. The women who first found the tomb empty were given the message, “... go, tell his disciples and Peter, ‘He is going ahead of

you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you” (Mark 16:7). Indeed, he had told them earlier, at the time of their solemn promise to never forsake Jesus in his hour of trial, “But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee” (Matthew 26:32).

Why there? On this relatively desolate, out of the way, quiet mountain, Jesus had something to say to them, something to give them. They may have been disoriented, confused, joyful, despondent. Whatever their frame of mind they were in the right place, as they gathered in Jesus’ Name.

The text doesn’t say how long they waited for Jesus, or what occupied their conversation. It simply says, “When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted.” The worship was an appropriate response! But the doubting? Or it could be translated, “Some hesitated.”

Those who hesitated to worship were likely questioning: “Is this Jesus really worthy of worship? He is flesh! Yahweh alone is our God. We are to worship none but him. Is Jesus God? Can we place the full confidence in him that we would in Yahweh? Is this man One whom we can rightly worship?”

How does Jesus respond to these hesitant souls who had come back home, back to the beginning? The same way he does to us, with our joys and triumphs, our tragedies and disappointments, our souls reshaped by events that turned out far differently than we ever could have imagined. He says, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.”

He is reminding them of his authority to heal, authority to cast out demons, authority to raise the dead, and authority

to judge. The future of every man, woman and child is in his hands. He has authority over everyone who has ever lived and died. And you—your complete future is in his hands. Jesus said, “Whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life... For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself” (John 5:24, 26). Jesus, the Son, has this authority. And now, by faith, he is our life.

Jesus says to those hesitating hearts and to ours, “All authority is mine. I’m in charge. I’ve got perfect control of your situation, I’ve got you! I have called you by name, you are mine.” He is the One who has given up his life, hanging on a Roman cross for you. He is the God of all authority who loves you so dearly that he chose you and purchased you by his own blood.

This is the One who is still building his Church, placing his resources in empty hands and his words in empty mouths, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.



Rev. Roger Olson is Pastor of Living Faith Church in Watford City, North Dakota.



kevinschreiber/Stock

Backwards Grace

MICHAEL HUSSEY

The grace of God is backwards. It does not make any sense. At least that is how things look from the world's perspective. If you want something in this world you must work for it—you put in the time and effort. You give the blood, sweat, and tears necessary to earn what it is you want. But grace doesn't work like that; it is free and unmerited favor. It is purely a gift, it cannot be bought, it cannot be worked toward, and it cannot be stolen. It is freely offered and freely given, and that does not make any sense at all to the world. The Apostle Paul warned us that this would be the case: "...but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles" (1 Corinthians 1:23).

Christ has called us to "go 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" (Matthew 28:19-20a). Our calling is to go and make disciples; God supplies us with the tools of teaching and baptism.

Ultimately this means that God has given to us the Word and sacraments as his means of grace to make disciples. By those means, God delivers his grace to fallen and lost sinners.

Neither the message of God's grace nor the way in which he gives it make sense to the world. The primary means that God has given to make disciples is the gospel, found in his holy Word. And what does the world make of the Bible? They think it is an old dusty book filled with stories and fairy tales that might have some decent morals, but it is also backward and outdated. It is a book that oppresses women and represses healthy sexual expression. In the world's eyes, to accept the Bible as truth is to be close-minded, judgmental, sexist, bigoted, and homophobic.

What about the other means of grace God has given us? Holy baptism, in the eyes of the world, is merely an outward service, just a tip of the hat. It is something likely done to appease your grandmother, rather than something with any significance to your spiritual life. To

the world, the Lord's Supper may appear a pious, yet completely meaningless, snack during the worship service.

Many people in the world ignore holy Scripture, and when they don't, they either mock it or violently war against it. They could not care less about the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper. So, what are we to do? How do we go about making disciples in this world? Well, we do what we have always done. We do exactly what Jesus has commanded us to do.

The opinion of the world doesn't sway God. It doesn't change God's mind, and it doesn't make him work in a different way. God isn't concerned when people in the world don't like him very much. In fact, the world has always been opposed to God, yet God has always loved his fallen, rebellious, and wicked creation.

He loved this wicked, sinful world so much that he sent his only begotten Son to put on the same flesh as mankind. He was born of a woman but born without sin. He lived the same life that we do. He faced every single temptation that we

“Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles...”

1 Corinthians 1:22-23

face, but faced it all without sin, and did it all in our place. Jesus was betrayed with a kiss and suffered under Pontius Pilate. He was crucified and died bearing the sins of the entire world. Jesus became the perfect propitiation, the perfect substitute for us. He paid the price for every one of our sins and paid it all in full. It is truly finished. After that, he rose again to new life, promising that all who believe in him will also rise to new and eternal life with him.

That is the gospel message that we must share with a world of people dead in their trespasses and sins, already standing condemned before God. Their only hope—and ours—is that, as the Apostle Paul wrote, the gospel is God’s power unto salvation (Romans 1:16), and that faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of Christ (Romans 10:17).

The gospel is able to take people from the darkness and bring them into the glorious light of Christ. It is able to take people from being dead in their sins and trespasses to being alive in Christ. It is able to make God’s enemies into

his beloved children. It is able to take those who are condemned already and simply awaiting hell and make them into redeemed saints awaiting the glorious return of Jesus Christ. That power of the gospel has not changed, will not change, and cannot change, because it is firmly rooted in the promise of God. God has declared that the gospel is his power unto salvation, and it remains so, both now and forever.

When the world sees holy baptism, they might just see some outdated ritual. The world might see only water that could wash away dirt, but because of the unchanging promise of God, this water washes away sin. When the world sees the Lord’s Supper they see some pious snack, but because of the unchanging promise of God, what we receive is the body and blood of Jesus Christ given and shed for the forgiveness of our sins. God has made promises, and he is always faithful to keep them.

God still uses his means of grace—Word and sacrament—to save lost sinners. He has made promises and those

promises will stand true for all time and eternity. So, hold tightly to the means of God’s abundant grace. Cling to the Word of God. Remember your baptism. Cherish the body and blood of your crucified and risen Lord given at his table. And point lost sinners to the place and Person where they too can be redeemed, at the foot of the cross of Christ.



Rev. Michael Hussey is Pastor at Sidney Lutheran Brethren Church in Sidney, Montana.



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“I Am With You”

PAUL LARSON

“And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

Matthew 28:20b

It’s been wedding season in our extended family, with two of our sons and two nephews marrying in the last nine months! I had the privilege of officiating all four. At the last wedding, Sam and Meghan’s, I gave them this verse: “...as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience” (Colossians 3:12). The outline of my little wedding homily was simple: 1) You NEED Jesus’ clothing. 2) (As believers in Christ) you HAVE Jesus’ clothing.

I believe this is about Jesus, not primarily as our model, but fundamentally as the *source*. I told them Christ’s clothing is not a work to be grasped, but the gift of his own Self to *receive*. And then I made a comment to Sam and Meghan, in the flow of an uncle cheering them on, on their wedding day. And afterward, I spent a considerable part of the reception time unpacking that comment with several people who found it jarring. In light of

Jesus’ clothing not being our work, but the work and gift of the person of Christ, I told Sam and Meghan, “So don’t spend all your life trying to be *like* Jesus. Just give yourself to being *with* him!”

Jesus’ concluding words of his Great Commission are not some warm afterthought, but arguably its climactic pinnacle: *I am with you*.

To the Church of the Lutheran Brethren, a people shaped by grace and summoned by mission, Jesus calls and sends us, saying: *I am with you*. To the failing and failed, to the frustrated and depleted: *I am with you*. To those in our congregations and among our pastors living with the ache of being pent up during this pandemic, weary of polarization, exhausted by another new technology or issue or opinion or “pivot” required of them, Jesus says: *I am with you*.

This is the summation of all of Scripture. It is God’s promise and answer to humanity—from creation to incarnation to crucifixion to resurrection to Pentecost, from Word and sacrament to the great maranatha: *I am WITH you*.

You know, we haven’t always known

what to do with that Word from God, have we? We haven’t always liked it, nor wanted it—God to be *with* us.

I like quiet. I like a lot of “alone time” with my thoughts. This last summer, my wife Bee and I were doing time, “hard labor,” in a dense area of foliage on our rustic lake lot. I could hear her working her way down the hillside. I couldn’t see her behind the trees and brush, but I knew she was there, coming closer and closer... because I could hear her phone. (You see, as much as I prefer quiet, her default mode is to have the sound on, listening to something.) So I called up the hill: “I heard your podcast in the garden. I was afraid (and annoyed), so I hid—because though I am not naked, I am weary of podcasts...”

Beyond personal preferences of quietude, sin always involves a certain *hiding*, right? In the first Garden and ever since: facing temptation on the brink of succumbing to sin, we don’t like to think about being in the view of God nor in his presence.

There may be a corollary in what commonly happens in the Church’s pursuit of her mission. It is a great

“I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”

Galatians 2:20

temptation to pursue the work of Christ *without the presence of Christ*. Can you imagine hearing and pursuing Jesus’ commission to make disciples apart from Jesus being with us? Yes, sadly. Yes, we can—when we hear the Great Commission as sheer assignment, task, responsibility, commitment. When we hear the Great Commission and disciple-making as fundamentally a matter of *doing*, rather than first and foremost, at core, as a matter of *being*, in and with Christ!

If, while we seek to make others his followers, we follow not *him* ourselves, where do we land? Inevitably—at idolatry, envy, comparison, competition, jealousy, deceit, anger, exhaustion, dissension, pride, depression, burnout, capitulation, etc. There is a great impasse when our mission grows detached from the presence of Christ. And, great opportunity for renewal and vitality when we repent and believe again in Christ present and inseparable from his mission.

In *The Evangelizing Church: A Lutheran Contribution*, we hear this underscored:

It is about the real presence of Jesus in the gospel we proclaim...

Every time we distance ourselves from the living Lord, we are actually retreating from our own evangelical heritage. Why? The heart of evangelical theology and preaching is that Christ is alive and present among us concretely and unmistakably. Jesus’ word and presence are real, direct, graspable, and available for us—today! ...Jesus does come today as he came to the disciples in Galilee...

Luther’s view of the means of grace grew out of his understanding of the incarnation itself as God’s order of salvation. Salvation, in fact, depends

on Jesus coming in concrete ways... the proclamation of his word, the celebration of the sacraments, and the life and witness of the Christian community.¹

So, my CLB friends and partners in disciple-making mission, because Jesus knew this was the only way it could be done, he gave us this Great Commission: “Go make disciples, and surely I am *with* you!” It is only Jesus’ commission; it is only the Great Commission—if he goes *with* us!

Does anyone need to know this again today, in this time of isolation, division, confusion? *I am with you*. This is the sum of all of Scripture; the simplest gospel; God’s answer and promise to the plight of sin-fallen and self-exiled humanity. From creation to incarnation to crucifixion to resurrection to Pentecost; by Word and sacrament, to the Church joined to God’s mission, and to the great maranatha: *I am with you*.

I was visiting with a friend in his 90s, Harold “Diz” Kronenberg—a much decorated veteran and locally famed athlete, whose house was a veritable trophy showcase of accomplishment. Diz had lost his wife a few years earlier. On this visit, facing a move, Diz expressed no concern for his multitude of trophies, but much for what would happen to a small chest that stood in the middle of his family room floor. He said, “The Wisconsin Historical Society wants what’s in this chest—all the love letters Marj and I wrote during World War II.” While Diz had served hazardous duty as a ball-turret gunner on a B-17 bomber, he and his fiancée sent off letters to one another nearly every day, and they had saved one another’s letters. Diz’s eyes glistened, his voice faltered, at the prospect of parting with the letters. “I’m not sure I can give

them up....” He paused. “I just want to read them one more time.”

Toward the end of my friend’s life, what mattered most to him is the same thing that will matter for all time for all of us: it is not productivity, but proximity; it is not exertion, but affection; it is not mission accomplished, but mission accompanied; it is not that which makes you stand apart, but that which draws you near; it is not a trophy case of what you’ve won, but a treasure chest of Who has won you.

Jesus gives you a Great Commission, and at the heart of it is a promise. It is absolutely essential. It is an invitation to stop so much trying to be *like* Jesus, or be liked by Jesus; but rather it is to rest yourself in just being *with* him.

Oh, hear Jesus’ Great Commission and follow it! But do not hear it apart from his living presence speaking to us, the CLB—the same as he spoke to Mary and Martha at the tomb; the same as he spoke to his disciples then; he is here now and speaks this same word to us: “And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”



Rev. Paul Larson is President of the Church of the Lutheran Brethren.

Source

1. *The Evangelizing Church: A Lutheran Contribution*, Richard Bliese & Craig Van Gelder, pp. 36-40.

CLB Shared Ministry: Contribution Report

\$2,900,000

2021-22 Fiscal Year Goal

\$638,000

Received Through 8/31/21

The CLB Fiscal Year Ends April 30, 2022.

Commissioned

ROY HEGGLAND

Location, location, location! We all recognize that repetition because we have heard it so often over the years. When buying (or selling) real estate, the number one rule governing value is location. That is why the nicest and biggest house in one neighborhood will often be worth less than a much smaller home in a more desirable neighborhood. Location matters!

Context, context, context! That probably does not seem as familiar, but it should, especially in the reading and understanding of Scripture. Lifting Scripture verses out of the surrounding context will often result in a distorted understanding. One verse that is often the subject of this misunderstanding is Philippians 4:13, “I can do all things through him who strengthens me” (ESV). This verse is often used to suggest that I can accomplish any goal because Christ is with me. Athletes may quote this to spur themselves on to greater achievements. But if we read this verse in the context of the Apostle Paul having learned to be content in every situation, the meaning of “all things” in the verse becomes clear: through Christ I can be content in any situation in this life, whether hardship or abundance.

In the same way, when Jesus gives the command “Go” in Matthew 28:19, it is set in a context that helps us understand to whom the command is given and why.

The command was given to the eleven disciples who would become leaders of the early Church, soon to be birthed by Jesus through the coming of the Holy Spirit. But at this point, they were confused, discouraged, and probably frightened. They went to the mountain in Galilee where Jesus told them to go, and Matthew 28:17 tells us that, when they saw Jesus, they worshiped him! But it also says that some of them doubted. Perhaps that is why Jesus first reminds them that he is the person to whom all authority in heaven and on earth has been given. And, in the context of that person of all authority being with us to the end of the age, they (and we) are empowered to complete the task given to us—even in the midst of our doubts and fears.

Here is how Peter and John, just a short time later, answer the Sanhedrin, as they are faced with another authority trying to interfere with their role in the great Commission: “Then they called them in again and commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John replied, ‘Which is right in God’s eyes: to listen to you, or to him? You be the judges! As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard’” (Acts 4:18-20).

The very nature of the task commanded—make disciples by baptizing and teaching—strengthens our understanding that the command was

given to the disciples as a corporate body, representative of the Church. That is not to say that the command does not apply to each of us individually, but that, as we engage in fulfilling the command of Jesus, we do so as part of his Church. Remember that God has equipped the members of the Church to accomplish his mission. So he gave us the great “co”-mission, intended to be fulfilled as we pursue the goal of reaching the lost together. Some of us are evangelists, some are teachers, some are elders, some are gifted with hospitality. We, the Church of the Lutheran Brethren, are all called to use our gifts to further this Great Commission.

Whoever you are and whatever your vocation and gifts, you have been called, as part of the Church, to tell others about Jesus, to pray for the lost and for those who are sent to reach them, to give so that more may hear, and to serve the Church with the gifts God has given you. You are not alone! All in the Church are fulfilling that mission with you, and best of all, the God of the universe is with you always. Thanks to God for his calling upon us as the Church of the Lutheran Brethren.

Roy Heggland is Associate for Biblical Stewardship for the Church of the Lutheran Brethren.

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New Projects

CHERYL OLSEN

In one of his last conversations with his disciples, Jesus said, "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (John 13:34-35). As followers of Jesus today, let us love in words and actions!

Missionaries Dean and Linda Bengtson have been showing love to their neighbors in Ishinomaki, Japan in tangible ways since 2011, when the Great Tohoku Earthquake and Tsunami devastated that nation. Over the next several years, people from our churches traveled to Japan and helped in the clean-up efforts. Relationships have been built and the gospel continues to be shared through the House of Hope ministry. Now, young families are building homes nearby, and children are playing in the playground next door, giving new additional opportunities for connections. But there is no place for adults to sit, converse, and continue to foster these new relationships.

WMCLB has designated the House of Hope Playground Project as our 2021-22 Focus Project. We will provide a permanent table and benches to bless that community, and to help build relationships. Prayers have already been answered, as the official permissions have been granted to install these structures! Now it is our turn to give financially, to make this project a reality!

A second project is benefiting students at Hillcrest Lutheran Academy, the Christian school that is a subsidiary of the CLB. We are giving funds for a flight simulator for their STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) lab, which is an exciting and helpful addition to their curriculum. Pray for these students to impact others, now and in the future, with the hope found in Jesus.



Volunteers working with Dean Bengtson on the House of Hope Playground Project.

The SWEET (Seminary Women Encouraging, Equipping, and Training) Retreat for Lutheran Brethren Seminary's female students and for wives of Seminarians was begun by WMCLB in 2003 as the Focus Project. Since then, it has been an ongoing annual event appreciated by many who have become missionaries and wives of pastors. The retreat this year will take place September 24-25. Help us support this important event, and pray for these women engaging in ministry.

HELP funds (Household Equipment Linen Project) helped three missionary families last year. With your giving, we can continue to provide for the practical needs of those who serve overseas, as well as praying for their witness to unreached people groups.

These new projects are detailed in the WMCLB 2020-21 Annual Report that was distributed by email this summer. The report gives much information about the past year and plans for the future.

If you did not receive a copy, email wmclbcontact@gmail.com.

Until we can meet together at Convention 2022, let us share the love of Jesus with our families, friends, and those God puts in our paths. Let us encourage each other with these goals: Studying the Bible; Supporting the Mission; Serving our neighbors; Sharing our lives.

Cheryl Olsen is the Faith & Fellowship Correspondent for Women's Ministries of the Church of the Lutheran Brethren.



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Aekkasit Rakrodjit/Stock

Christ Goes With You

SHAWN BOWMAN

Has life ever caused you great doubt? What do you do? Where do you go? There are times when we are crying out saying, “Dear Lord, I have no idea what to do. Please show me the way.” This last year has given out crazy things to deal with like never before, and sometimes it causes one to doubt. I know I have. So the question that needs to be answered is, “Where do we find peace in the midst of all this confusion?”

Let’s take a close look at Jesus’ disciples in Matthew 28:16-20. I am oddly comforted to see that they too struggled with doubt. Could you imagine their conversation as they huddled up in fear following the crucifixion and burial of Christ? On Easter morning, they surely wondered who might have stolen the body. How could the resurrection of Jesus have happened? You and I may go through similar confusing times as well, as we ponder the mighty acts of God in the Bible through Word and sacrament,

or witness the miraculous works of God in our day-to-day activities. The disciples doubted after they saw their teacher suffer and die. Has doubt crept in for you after the death of a loved one? Maybe you’ve tried working through the events in your life only to find yourself asking the same questions: “Why such loss? Why am I struggling with depression and anxiety? God, where are you?”

But also in Matthew 28 we see Jesus who, as God, knew that the disciples were struggling. He knows when you struggle as well. Responding to his disciples’ doubt, Jesus said, “All authority has been given to me.” He is saying, “I get it, I know how you feel. Even though you don’t feel qualified, I want you to know I AM qualified, and I am calling you to go out in the midst of all this confusion, pain, and struggle—and point people to the cross.” Tell them the story of Christ’s death and resurrection.

Jesus showed the disciples where to meet him in verse 16. As God assures us

today that he is with us, he tells us where to meet him. Jesus leads us to the place where he is, so that we may know him, worship him, and abide in him. The place where Jesus is located is in the *Word of God*. This is the place where a lost and broken heart looking for hope finds the supernatural strength to tell Jesus’ story of suffering, death, and resurrection. We have the greatest message ever given to mankind. Real freedom is breaking the silence and telling his story. Tell the Easter story over and over again to a world without hope.

God first delivered his promise of Christ’s work all the way back in Genesis 3:15. He bookended his promise at Calvary. So 2 Corinthians 1:20 (ESV) declares, “For no matter how many promises God has made, they are ‘Yes’ in Christ. And so through him the ‘Amen’ is spoken by us to the glory of God.”

Do we doubt? YES. So how do we press on through our dilemmas? Philemon 1:6 states, “I pray that you may be active

***The Apostle Paul writes, “For no matter how many promises God has made, they are ‘Yes’ in Christ. And so through him the ‘Amen’ is spoken by us to the glory of God.”
2 Corinthians 1:20 (ESV)***

in sharing your faith, so that you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ” (NIV, 1984). Go tell someone with a hurting heart what Christ has done for them. They will see your hurts and struggles, but better yet, they will see your faith in the One bringing you through this pain. Then understanding starts to come. You can be sure of his promises. Wherever you find the name of Jesus proclaimed, there he is. He is here now to save you from your sin. His blood has forgiven you. His Spirit has already given you faith to believe and cry out to him. You say, “Yes, Jesus forgive me.” Jesus says, “You are forgiven.”

Jesus then says in Matthew 28:19, “Go and make disciples.” By his provision, “You are forgiven,” Jesus brings all who believe into his process of declaring the good news. New life is yours! This is what creates the desire to go. God provides the way for you to make the proclamation. God’s process is to seek and save the lost, through his Son living in you! Jesus

restores the broken and wounded; he gives hope to the hopeless. Jesus defeated our enemy death by giving you his life. That is what God provides through Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection.

You know him because you believe he is the Savior from sin, death, and the devil. You believe your sins are washed in the blood. Jesus has rescued you. He has given you *restoration and redemption*. He provides for you today *the way, the truth, and the life*. These are the gifts that he commissions you to offer the world *today*. GO, and know that Christ is with you. In verse 20 Jesus boldly states, “I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” You can take this to the bank: His presence is always found in his Word. He is with us now, right here in our midst. As the Word is read, Christ is revealed.

Whether things are going great or whether you’re struggling and suffering, Jesus declares that he is with you. When Jesus is with you, he gives you his strength, he gives you his presence, and

he gives you his peace that surpasses all understanding. He carries you through trials and gives you wisdom and humility through successes and failures, so that you can see his hand leading and guiding. He teaches you so that you can shine his light into a dark and dying world. You, like the disciples, can be sure about the place to meet the Lord. He will always be found in his Word, and he will always go with you.



Rev. Shawn Bowman is Pastor of Victory Lutheran Brethren Church in Jamestown, North Dakota.



DanBrandenburg/Stock

Recovering a Lost Treasure: Vocation, Priesthood, and The Great Commission

GAYLAN MATHIESEN

I sometimes wonder if many of God’s people feel disconnected from the Great Commission. After all, what does our work as a waitress or a welder, a business owner or a barista, a paralegal or a parent have to do with God’s redemptive mission? Have you heard the saying that ministry is the highest calling? This thinking elevates “sacred work” above “secular work,” implying that to *really* serve God we must leave our “secular” work and go into full-time vocational ministry. But what if that isn’t God’s calling for you?

How did we get to this place? Perhaps, while rightly emphasizing the authority of Scripture and justification by faith, we neglected another primary teaching of the Reformation: *the priesthood of all believers*. How should we understand this biblical concept? How does it impact our everyday work? To answer these questions, let’s begin by exploring vocation.

We typically view vocation as our occupation, and that’s partly right. In Latin, *vocatio* indicates a sacred calling, such as to the priesthood or a monastery. But Luther insisted that all work done in faith is sacred, likening our work to “the masks of God,” as God conceals himself while blessing our neighbors through our daily tasks. In an excellent little book titled *God at Work*, Gene Veith says when we pray “Give us this day our daily bread,” God answers that prayer through the farmer who grows the grain, the miller who grinds it into flour, and the baker who turns flour into bread. “The purpose of all of our callings is to love and serve the neighbors that each vocation brings into our lives (in marriage, our spouse; in parenthood, our children; in the workplace, our customers; and so on) . . . We are saved only by grace through faith in the work of Jesus Christ. But then we are sent back into our callings to live out that faith. God does not need our good

works, Luther said, thinking of elaborate efforts to merit salvation apart from the free gift of Christ, but our neighbor does need our good works.”

Vocation includes, but is much broader and more varied than, our paid occupations, taking in the many and varied ways we benefit others. *All work done in faith is sacred*. This is what Paul meant when he wrote: “Only let each person lead the life that the Lord has assigned to him, and to which God has called him” (1 Corinthians 7:17, ESV).

Disconnected from faith, work can be unfulfilling; but connected to faith it can be a powerful means by which God blesses people and accomplishes his mission. Understood this way, we experience a deeper joy in our callings, and accordingly participate more effectively in God’s redemptive mission. But is work always satisfying and enjoyable? No, sad to say, we live in a fallen world where some perform their vocations in

“But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.”

1 Peter 2:9

self-seeking, even destructive ways. If possible, we might transform that place, or we might need to move on. Then too, some vocations are evil, and then the law must do its work.

Perhaps you are now thinking, “I understand our vocations are God’s means to serve and love our neighbors, but how does this help me participate more fully in God’s redemptive mission?” We turn now to the “priesthood of all believers.” As Peter wrote, “...you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, *that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light*” (1 Peter 2:9, italics added). Vocation and the priesthood of all believers work together.

Let’s be clear that this priesthood does not replace what we call “offices” of the Church, such as: “the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers” (Ephesians 4:11). Those are specific callings with corresponding spiritual gifts. But offices alone do not satisfy God’s missional purposes in our world. Paul went on to say these offices are “to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ” (4:12-13). This is evidenced in Acts 8, as “all except the apostles” were scattered and preached the gospel wherever they went. In Acts 11:19-21, Luke picked up the story: “Now those who had been scattered... traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, spreading the

word only among Jews. Some of them, however, ...went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus. The Lord’s hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord.” Accordingly, the 16th century reformers denied any biblical grounds for insisting that churchly offices are sacred vocations while the proverbial “butcher, baker, and candlestick maker” are not.

In his 1520 treatise, *To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation*, Luther dismissed the practice of dividing Christians into “spiritual” and “secular” classes: “The fact is that our baptism consecrates us all without exception and makes us priests. As St. Peter says, 1 Peter 2[:9], ‘You are a royal priesthood and a realm of priests’, and Revelation, ‘Thou hast made us priests and kings by Thy blood’ [Rev. 5:9f.] ...Everyone who has been baptized may claim that he has already been consecrated priest, bishop, or pope, even though it is not seemly for any particular person arbitrarily to exercise the office.”

So, just how do vocation and the priesthood of all believers work together? Vocation connected to faith serves this priesthood. Are you a parent? Your children are disciples of Jesus in the making, and connect you to a larger circle of parents, children, and organizations that benefit families. Christian parents and children are God’s salt and light in those spheres. Are you a businessperson? You are providing a service through which God brings benefit to others, so conduct your business with integrity and serve well. Here too, you inhabit a larger circle

that needs Jesus. Whatever work you do, God gives you the capacity to bless others and build relationships, providing a platform for speaking of Jesus, but also supplying a non-verbal witness in support of the spoken gospel. As Jesus said, “let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:16). Most likely you are already doing this, but haven’t thought of it as serving God’s mission.

And lastly, a communal witness is compelling. We enhance the effectiveness of our witness by working with other believers, praying for opportunities to bring the good news of salvation in Jesus to our neighbors, locally and globally. Let us join together as God’s Church sent, drawing strength and courage from Jesus’ promise: “And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28:20b).

Dr. Gaylan Mathiesen Ph.D. serves the Church of the Lutheran Brethren as professor of Mission and Evangelism at Lutheran Brethren Seminary.

Source

1. www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/how-vocation-transformed-society/ Accessed 7/23/2021.
2. John Dillenberger, ed., Martin Luther, *Selections from His Writings*, Anchor Books, 1958, p.408-409.



Sonja N. showing the love of Christ in Chad, Africa.

Going to the Brokenness

SONJA N.

We hear in the Great Commission a call to *go*. What does it mean to *go*? Before Jesus ascends into heaven, he gives this charge to his disciples, to his followers. Why should they *go*? Because he wants to use his followers to bring all people into relationship with him. He wants all people to be released from sin and eternal death, to live in the freedom of Jesus Christ.

When I realized that there were people in Chad who had no access to God's Word, who didn't know Jesus as their Savior, then going to Chad to give them his Word was an easy decision.

Before arriving in Chad, our family spent a year in the French Alps to learn the French language. The Alps was one of the most beautiful places I have ever lived. We had mountain views from our

windows and lived among cathedrals and castles. Then we moved from the picturesque Alps, surrounded by such magnificent beauty, to a starkly different place—to Chad, where my cobblestone walks were turned into dry dusty roads.

As I walked in my neighborhood in Chad, I was surrounded by animals grazing on garbage and kids collecting it to fuel the fire their mothers would cook over. It was difficult living among such harsh realities of this world's poverty. I longed for the beauty I had gotten to know while living in France during language school. I was longing for the comforts I had known living in Western nations my whole life. Life got hard. It was easy to stay inside my house, and not go outside. I had *gone*, but did I really *go*?

In living among the brokenness of the world I was stripped of all the ways I

thought I could give them the gospel. The people in my village are unable to read so giving them the written Word like I could in the States wouldn't work here. My ability with their language was at the level of a preschooler, so it was difficult to help them understand the Word. I desired to relieve the pain of their suffering.

Humja was the first malnourished baby I met in our village. A group of children led me to his home, where I met his mother. She knew that something was wrong, that he was too thin. I could see the love and care she had for him in her eyes. I began to make bottles for him and feed him two times a day hoping that I could give his body what it needed to grow and be healthy, each time praying, "The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face

And Jesus came and said to them, “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, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Matthew 28:18-20

toward you and give you peace; in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” It was tiring making bottles daily and one day I was exhausted and didn’t bring him one. The next day I learned that he had died during the night. The one day I didn’t bring a bottle. You see, it’s easy to put our hope in our deeds, isn’t it? It’s easy to put our hope in tangible things. I tried hard, really hard, but I wasn’t able to take away the ugliness and the brokenness, and God didn’t fix it right then either.

I desired to see God’s beauty in this place. I prayed, asking him to show it to me.

I began keeping a list of things I was thankful for, naming them, numbering them. Each day I would get up with my coffee, think about what I was thankful for, and then spend time in God’s Word. God began to show me his beauty—sometimes in his creation, the birds, the banana leaves; sometimes in simple pleasures like coffee or bacon. As I spent more time with the people in their suffering, God showed me beauty in his people, in relationship. The feeding of Humja led to other children coming, and they were able to receive nourishment

to make them strong enough to then transition to food. This led to so many relationships.

God taught me what *going* means. When God calls us to go, it is not just a one-time event, it is a daily going, a daily wading into the muck that is outside our door. When we live in nations where resources and help are so plentiful, I think we are able to hide this muck we walk through every day more easily. We all long for eternal comfort, but in Chad there is no hiding the muck. The longer I live in Chad, the beauty of relationship grows. And the desire of God wanting relationship with his lost children becomes my desire too.

I know of the beauty of Jesus Christ because I know how he takes my brokenness and makes it whole, and I long for others to know it too. I realize now that he wanted me to live in my brokenness, to embrace it. He works in ways we cannot see. We continue to give what we can even when we don’t feel like it’s making a difference in this world. You offer what you have and pray that God will use the brokenness, the tears, your presence, cold water, his Word, whatever you have to offer. This is what sustains

me, that his presence in me is enough. I can simply trust in him and do not have to figure out what his plan is. It is a daily offering of giving what I can, while *going* each and every day, no matter how broken things seem to be. To God be the glory. Amen.



Sonja and her husband David serve the Church of the Lutheran Brethren as missionaries in Chad, Africa.

A Great Commission Partnership

LARRY OLSON

A unique partnership began in 2013 when Pastor Daniel Dama, from Benin Republic, West Africa, appeared at Immanuel Lutheran Brethren Church in Pasadena, California. I'll let Pastor Dama tell how God brought him to Immanuel:

I first came to Immanuel Church in Pasadena on Easter Sunday, March 31, 2013. As a new international student at Fuller Seminary, originally from a conservative church, I was looking for a church not far from Fuller student housing where I was living. A Cameroonian friend who knew Pastor Steve Lazicki recommended ILBC to me. Pastor Lazicki and Chuck Eidem were my first connections.

As we interacted with Pastor Lazicki and Chuck, we all realized that we somehow shared a common mission history. We knew the same people in Pala and Gounou Gaya in Chad, and many others in Cameroun (Kaélé, Garoua, N'gaoundéré, Maroua...). Penny Eidem and Stephanie Lazicki seemed to have been born at Hôpital Protestant, N'gaoundéré, where my two boys were born.

The Immanuel congregation, though few numerically, was deeply rooted in the Word of God; the congregation was mission-minded; people were caring without any complex; it was a praying congregation. I soon joined the praise and worship team and led Bible studies, and in the midst of crisis, I became an interim pastor (unofficially). I felt the love of Jesus, yet we sometimes wept together, and frequently laughed out loud together like a perfect family. That was the type of congregation I was looking for in Pasadena. ILBC was unique. It became obvious that my being at ILBC was a divine orchestration, not an accident!

Pastor Dama received a Master of Arts in Intercultural Studies in 2014, as he puts it, "in collaboration with ILBC under the spiritual mentorship of Pastor Steve Lazicki."

In 2017, Pastor Dama returned to Fuller Seminary to begin a four-year PhD program. As



Pastor Daniel Dama.

a church, we at Immanuel signed an affidavit of support with the understanding that he was on a full scholarship as he had been for his Masters. However, it only covered tuition. His living expenses were not included. In a radical step of faith, the Immanuel congregation agreed to fulfill the terms of the affidavit of support. This commitment would be absolutely IMPOSSIBLE except for one thing: God's miraculous provision, which he had put into motion over a half century earlier.

Unknown to us, a couple who had been part of the ILBC family for many years had deeded some mineral rights to ILBC. This oil revenue provided a more than adequate amount to cover these expenses. Through this miraculous provision, the faith of our people was strengthened, and Pastor Dama will graduate in December.

Pastor Dama writes of his PhD studies:

I am currently enrolled in the PhD program at the School of Intercultural Studies, Fuller Theological Seminary (fourth-year PhD student), in collaboration with ILBC, Pasadena, under the spiritual mentorship of Pastor Larry Olson (2017-present).

Pastor Dama and his family have encouraged us to intentionally respond to the command of Jesus to go and make disciples of all peoples whether overseas or right where we are located.

To find out more about the ministries of this gifted man of God, search Daniel Dama, and also AfricaSings.com.

Rev. Larry Olson is Pastor of Immanuel Lutheran Brethren Church in Pasadena, California.

Breslin Ordained as Pastor



L to R: Rev. Ron Sunwall, Rev. Benjamin Breslin, Elders Jim Pollock, Walt Wood, and Elder in Training Andy Bernard.

On August 22, 2021, Benjamin Breslin was ordained as pastor at Faith Fellowship Lutheran Brethren Church in Kelso, Washington. Rev. Ronald Sunwall officiated.

Johnson Called Home

Rev. James Albert Johnson, 88, went home to be with his Lord and Savior on June 21, 2021.

Jim spent 60 years in the ministry as a follower of Jesus and never wavered in his convictions. Jim and Myrna (Von Wald) were married August 21, 1954. They spent more than 29 years in Rolette, North Dakota, where Jim was a pastor at Ebenezer Lutheran Brethren Church and a building contractor—an occupation he termed a fruitful necessity to his calling as pastor.

Jim served on the Church of the Lutheran Brethren's denominational board, and six years as the director at Inspiration Point Bible Camp. As part of the development of the camp, Jim built four dormitories and an office building. Jim loved to spend time with his wife and family. Most memorable is how Jim modeled unconditional love, deep care, and outreach to others. Blessed be the memory of Rev. James Johnson.



Elders Ordained



L to R: Elders Kevin Sortland, Doug Bounds, Patrick Erickson, Doug Panchot, Dwight Schmidt, and Steve Tonneson, and Rev. Shawn Bowman.

On May 16, 2021, Kevin Sortland and Doug Panchot were ordained as elders at Victory Lutheran Brethren Church in Jamestown, North Dakota. Rev. Shawn Bowman officiated.

Sperlich Ordained as Elder



L to R: Dr. David Veum, Elder Brian Watts, Pastor Michael Edwards, Elder Klaus Sperlich, Elder Dennis Kantz, Pastor Marc Sperlich.

On June 20, 2021, Klaus Sperlich was ordained as an elder at Good News Lutheran Brethren Church in McAlisterville, Pennsylvania. Dr. David Veum officiated.

Butler Ordained as Elder



L to R: CLBC President Jon Overland, Elder James Muir, Pastor Ryan Dittmann, Elder Greg Butler, Rev. Anthony Heiraas, Elders Hannes Scholz and Roy Cook.

On July 18, 2021, Greg Butler was ordained as an elder at Peace Lutheran Church in Calgary, Alberta. The President of the CLB—Canada, Rev. Jon Overland officiated.

Faith & Fellowship is the official publication of the Church of the Lutheran Brethren, 1020 W. Alcott Ave., P.O. Box 655, Fergus Falls, MN 56538-0655, issued six times a year (January/February, March/April, May/June, July/August, September/October, November/December) by Faith and Fellowship Publishing, 1020 W. Alcott Ave., P.O. Box 655, Fergus Falls, MN 56538-0655. Phone (218) 736-7357. The viewpoints expressed in the articles are those of the authors and may or may not necessarily reflect the official position of the Church of the Lutheran Brethren of America (CLBA). Periodicals Postage Paid at Fergus Falls, Minnesota 56538.

(USPS 184-600) • (ISSN 10741712)

SUBSCRIPTIONS: **Faith & Fellowship** is offered to its readers at no charge. We would encourage your continued support with a donation, and if you would like to be on our mailing list, please contact our office. Periodicals Postage Paid at Fergus Falls, Minnesota. CHANGE OF ADDRESS: Please give both old and new addresses and allow four weeks.

Direct all correspondence, including submission of articles, to: **Faith & Fellowship**, P.O. Box 655, Fergus Falls, MN 56538-0655; Telephone, (218) 736-7357; e-mail, ffpublishing@clba.org; FAX, (218) 739-5514.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to **Faith & Fellowship**, P.O. Box 655, Fergus Falls, Minnesota 56538-0655



Not My Language, But Theirs

I recently had the privilege of preaching for six consecutive Sundays at a church of another Lutheran denomination. They are great people, and I enjoyed it very much. But I did find myself wrestling week-by-week with the way I communicated the gospel. Could I preach exactly the same sermon as I would for my CLB congregation? My friends at this other church had largely been raised in ALC, and then ELCA, congregations for their whole lives, until—roughly ten years ago—they found themselves too conservative for their denomination, and needed to leave.

These friends love the Lord. They love the Word of God. But there are “cultural” differences from the CLB. As one example, they enjoy worship through a liturgy. For many of them, a non-liturgical service might feel formless, not worshipful—as if they hadn’t “been to church” that day. There are also some different theological emphases, so that some of my words or concepts might come across to them as foreign. And a CLB-length sermon might, for them, feel twice as long as necessary! So my desire has been to connect with these friends, gospel-wise, in a way they will hear. How do I speak in *their* language rather than mine?

This is akin to learning to speak your spouse’s love language. If you’re reading this and you’re married, but you have no idea what I’m talking about, you had better stop reading and google “love languages” right now!

Our missionaries literally learn to speak the love language of the people Jesus has sent them to. They spend years learning languages and acclimating to another culture to share the good news of Jesus in a way that the people can both hear and take to heart.

According to our CLB Vision Statement, “We see God stirring in our church a fresh passion to reach beyond our own comfort to all people among whom God places us...” *Beyond our own comfort!* That’s learning to speak *their* language, instead of ours! Think of the years and great effort required of our missionaries to reach the point of comfort in their new culture.

For me, preaching in another church wasn’t very difficult. I learned to express the gospel just slightly differently than I do with my congregation. But if that took me a little out of my comfort range, how much more discomfort will we feel as we interact with the “not so Christian” world that surrounds us?

Jesus, in the Great Commission, called his followers, including us, *to go*. And he certainly means go beyond our comfort. As the Lord brings us into close contact with people who don’t yet know him, how can we speak or show the gospel to them? Let’s pray that God will teach us to communicate in *their* language, so they may hear—through us—how much he loves them.

Rev. Brent Juliot is Contributing Editor of F&F magazine and Pastor of Living Hope Church in Menomonie, Wisconsin.

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