

## Mission Work

1Peter 2:11-20

The Fourth Sunday of Easter, April 22, 2018

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Broadlands

One of the differences between believers and unbelievers is the reaction that they have to Jesus when He returns again in glory.

Believers in Jesus will welcome the return of Jesus with joy. The reason that believers will welcome the return of Jesus in glory with joy is because Jesus is coming to bring them salvation. In other words believers in Jesus know that sin is evil and that they are sinners. Believers in Jesus know that the creation is beset by death, but that it should not be beset by death. Believers in Jesus acknowledge the linkage between sin and death. Believers in Jesus acknowledge that Jesus has saved them from sin and death by His resurrection. Therefore when Jesus comes again in glory Jesus is coming to bring them a life without sin and death. Believers in Jesus long to be clothed with a life without sin and death in it.

This is why Jesus says, "Anyone who loves his life will lose it. Anyone who hates his life in this world will keep it for everlasting life." Believers in Jesus know about sin and death and because they know about sin and death they hate their lives in this life. They hate their lives that are filled with sin. They hate their lives that are filled with death. Jesus comes to bring them a life without sin and death and when He does so they will glorify Him.

Unbelievers are unaware of all of this. The worst unbelievers scoff at these notions. Therefore the unbelievers do not believe that their lives are filled with sin. They do not acknowledge that death is a great evil that afflicts the creation. They figure that death is normal. They relate sin with other names to make it seem less evil. They call it mistakes or misfortunes or bad decisions or whatever. Unbelievers figure that this is the only life that they have. If this is the only life that they have then if they are to have a life at all, they had better live it up. This leads to a life of endless striving to be better and do better or it leads to a life of self-indulgent pleasures as they try to make the most of this life.

Unbelievers will not rejoice when the Lord Jesus Christ returns again in glory. The unbelievers will wail at His coming. When the Lord Jesus Christ returns the unbelievers will realize that the faith of the believers is now vindicated. The believers were right, but it is too late to do anything about it now. The Lord has returned for judgment. The unbelievers will be surprised and they will mourn and wail, but it will be too late then. Jesus will cast them into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. There they will weep and gnash their teeth. They will not glorify God there.

Believers will confess on that day that Jesus is Lord in joy that He is Lord over their sin and over their death. Unbelievers will confess that Jesus is Lord in grief and shame because when He returns again in glory there will be no alternative, but to confess that He is Lord.

In view of this reality then, the mission of the Church should be one of living such that the Gentiles glorify God on the day when Jesus returns.

How shall this be done?

It shall not be done by marketing the Church. Nowhere in all of the Bible does God command us to market the Church. In fact it does not even occur to God to market the Church. If it does not occur to God to market the Church, why then does it occur to us?

Marketing the Church operates on the presupposition that the unbelievers can be convinced to become believers. If that is the case then the Church must use every tool at her disposal in order to convince the unbelievers to become believers. To us in America it is no different than trying to convince a

potential customer to buy the product. Under this assumption the Church will bow the knee to whatever wind of current trend is blowing so that we might convince the unbelievers to become believers. We will do whatever it takes to appeal to whatever appeals to unbelievers in order to convince them to become believers. Under this model of thinking the Church is no longer the bride of Christ, living in fidelity to Him, but rather she is a prostitute selling herself so that the unbelievers will love her and become believers. The Church becomes nothing more than a peddler of goods and her called workers, hirelings, worthy of firing unless they produce results.

But unbelievers cannot be convinced to become believers. It is a simple truth and reality. God teaches it to us everywhere. Unbelievers cannot become believers, not on their own. Therefore they cannot be convinced to become believers. No amount of persuasion in the world will make an unbeliever into a believer. You might persuade him to sit on the pews with you, but then if that is all that you have done, you have made him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves.

Listen to the Holy Scripture: The natural man cannot receive the things of the Spirit, because they are foolishness to him. The things of the Spirit are spiritually examined. The natural man in this passage is the unbeliever. To the unbeliever the things of the Spirit are foolishness to him. The things of the Spirit are the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Those things are spiritual. They are foolishness to the unbeliever. Therefore he cannot receive them unless he becomes a believer and examines the things of the Spirit according to the Spirit.

Listen to Holy Scripture: the natural man cannot submit to God's law. It is not just that the natural man does not submit to God's law. It is that the natural man cannot submit to God's law. God's law demands faith. When God says, "You shall have no other gods," that commandment cannot be kept without faith. Therefore the law of God demands faith. But the natural man does not submit to God's law. The reason that the natural man does not submit to God's law is because he cannot submit to God's law. If the natural man cannot submit to God's law, then he cannot have faith.

That means that no matter how much convincing you try to do, no matter how entertaining you make your worship services, no matter how many programs of outreach that you have it will not matter to the unbeliever. Even if he joins your church on the day of visitation when Jesus returns again in glory, he will not glorify God. He will stand in dread of him. And then what good did his church attendance do?

In order to glorify God on the day of visitation, the unbeliever must become a believer. That is the only way it can happen. Only the Word of God can make an unbeliever into a believer. Faith comes from the Word of God.

So what is God's mission program in order to get the word out to the unbelievers so that they will become believers?

Well, the first thing is to lay aside your fleshly lusts. Lay aside your fornication.

I heard once the account of a man who had access to satellite television subscriptions. He was aware because of his management position of which channels which users of satellite television had subscribed. He therefore had found out that a pastor had a subscription to a pornographic channel. That man would never listen to the Christian message or the word of God. The very means that would make him to a believer in Jesus and save his soul for all of life everlasting is a means to which he would not listen and the reason that he would not listen to it was because he knew of a pastor who had subscribed to a pornographic channel. This pastor was proclaiming through his actions that the word of God meant nothing to him. And if the word of God meant nothing to a pastor, why should it mean anything to an unbeliever? This pastor taught this unbeliever that no matter who spoke the word of God to him, that

person was not speaking it out of sincerity or care, but in order to justify some lust of the flesh in which the person speaking the word of God was engaged. So even if sincere believers in Christ spoke to him the word of God, he would not listen. And the means which would save him was refused. God's name was blasphemed among the Gentiles because of this pastor. And what about you?

Immanuel Lutheran Church as near as I can tell commits fornication at about the same rate as the unbelievers. Not that I witness fornication, but I have ears and I have a brain. What are we saying to a world of unbelievers who are aware that our Word of God forbids such fornication? If the Word of God is so worthless to us that we do not heed it, why should the unbelievers heed it? Just think what it would be like if every member of Immanuel Lutheran Church lived in chastity. We would be an institution about which people would ask, "Why are they so different? What is so important about their God that they would live in a way different from the status quo?"

I knew a young high school man to whom a young woman offered herself in sexual union. He declined. When she thought that he had declined sex with her because he found her unattractive he went ahead and explained that it was not her attractiveness, but rather that his Lord did not permit it that kept him from fornicating with her. She never forgot that. I don't know whether or not she ever became a believer in Jesus, but she never forgot the man who declined fornication even though everyone else was doing it and she was willing simply because his Lord did not permit it.

Who is this Lord that this young man would find so important that he would lay aside his fleshly lusts simply to be loyal to Him?

The second thing to do is to submit to the government.

Now obviously if the government orders you to sin, God requires you to disobey it, but most of the time you will submit to the government. It does not matter to God what form of government you have. Submit to it. It does not matter to God how corrupt your government is or what sins it does. Submit to it. It does not matter to God whether or not the government to which you submit is filled with believers or unbelievers. Submit to it.

If Christians become known for doing illegal things, God's name will be blasphemed among the Gentiles. If Christians do illegal things because they can get away with it, then how do we distinguish ourselves from others? We are living exactly the way that others live. If we do as much as we can get away with and still remain legal, we are obeying the letter of the law of the land and not its spirit. If Christians live the same as everyone else lives, then no one will listen to their message because they will not see the value in the message. But if all Christians submitted peaceably to the state then we would call attention to ourselves and people would ask why. If Christians submitted to the state and then suddenly disobeyed the state over a matter of God's law, then people would really ask why. Why would these peaceable people who go along with everything the state says suddenly protest on this one issue? And when the only answer is our Lord, then the Gentiles will become interested in our Lord. They will see the difference the Lord makes in our lives and they will be willing to hear His Word.

The third thing to do is to submit to your employer.

Most of us get observed at work. That is our daily vocation. Our actions at work speak to our beliefs and values. God therefore commands you to submit to an employer even when he is unjust. Submit to an employer even when he is harsh and unfair. If he treats you unfairly submit to him and you will be just like your Lord who was treated unfairly and harshly and procured your everlasting salvation by doing so. If you act like everyone else at work and gossip about fellow workers or gossip about the boss, then why should the unbelievers listen to your message? It obviously makes no difference in your life. But if you submit to the boss even when he treats you harshly or unfairly, then people's attention will be attracted to you and people will ask why?

You may be wondering here whether or not God is asking you to be a floor mat. Does God simply want people to walk all over us? God has called you to walk in the footsteps of Jesus. In other words follow the example that He set. If you believe that the chief priests, scribes, Pontius Pilate, and his soldiers treated Jesus like a floor mat, then yes, God has called you to be a floor mat. Because if being Christ like is being a floor mat, then only floor mats rise from the dead unto life everlasting. Everyone who stands up for themselves is bound for hell as those who worship themselves and not Christ.

Now it should be obvious from this passage of Scripture and obvious from life in general that your lives bear more witness to Christ than do the words that you speak. It is the Word that changes unbelievers into believers, but the unbelievers who listen to the Word are not listening to a Word that is not incarnate.

Think about it. The Word became flesh and the apostles beheld His glory. The Son of God is the Word of God. The Word of God is the creative almighty Word that God spoke in the beginning and throughout time through the prophets. That is the Word that became flesh. The Word of the Old Testament does not just sit there on the page. It becomes flesh and walks around and we call Him Jesus! The Word of God takes action. If it does not become incarnate and take action, it is not the Word of God. Therefore when the Church proclaims the Word of God, that Word of God will take action in the life of the Church or it is not the Word of God. That action will then be seen in the lives of the members of the congregation and be observable to the unbelievers. If then such changes and transformations have not taken place in the congregation, then the congregation has not been receiving the Word of God and without the Word of God no unbeliever will become a believer and no amount of marketing or evangelism as we call it these days is going to matter at all. On the day of visitation no one will be glorifying God. They will all be terrified and surprised that He came.

But when the Word of God transforms the congregation in the fashion that God has described for us today in 1Peter, chapter two, unbelievers will become believers in our midst and there will be no way to stop them from glorifying God. And they will glorify God now and on the day of visitation!

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.