

There Once Was Two Congregations

Luke 10:38-42

The Ninth Sunday after Pentecost, July 17, 2016

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Broadlands

There once were two congregations. They were both Lutheran congregations. They were even both Missouri Synod congregations.

In the one congregation was a group of members who took seriously our Lord's admonitions to the poor. They read the passages where our Lord tells the rich man who wanted to justify himself that if he wanted to receive eternal life that he should sell all that he had and give to the poor. They read the passage where Jesus is judging all nations on the Last Day and He tells those whom He welcomes into eternal life that they had seen Him hungry and had feed Him. They also read about the people whom the Lord dooms into Hell and how they saw Him hungry and did not feed Him. That is because anyone who feeds the least of the brothers of Jesus is feeding Him and anyone who fails to feed the least brothers of Jesus is failing to feed Him. They had read the passages about Saint Paul collecting money from the Gentile congregations in order to help the poor in Jerusalem. The reason that there was poor in Jerusalem was because a famine had struck Jerusalem. The money was therefore to give to the poor saints in Jerusalem to buy food so that they did not go hungry. They had also read about our Lord's great miracle when He feed five thousand men plus women and children with fives loaves and two fish. The reason that our Lord did this was so that they would not faint when they went home for they were in a remote place and there was nowhere for them to buy bread to eat.

This congregation was also plain sensitive to the meaning of the commandment to love your neighbor as yourself. They heeded our Lord's parable of the Good Samaritan. They wanted to help their poor neighbors in the community in which their congregation was located. They wanted to start a program where their congregation prepared meals for the hungry people in their community. Such meals would be distributed to those in need not only from their own congregation, but also from other places around the community where the poor could go to get some food to eat and find some relief from their hunger.

The other congregation was also Lutheran. Their members attended the Divine Service on Sunday to hear the Word of God. They gave some money to the poor in their community.

In the first congregation the group of people that took an interest in preparing these meals got the approval of their pastor and of the trustees of the congregation to use the parish hall to pack the meals for the poor. On the first day that they did this, there were 10 volunteers who showed up to pack meals. They packed several hundred meals for the poor.

After the event the volunteers met for a meal themselves and talked about what had happened. They were pleased that they packed so many meals with such few volunteers. They were pleased that they were helping their neighbors. It gives you a good feeling to help your neighbors. They felt like they were doing God's work. They understood from the Scriptures that by serving their neighbors they were really serving their Lord. They felt really good about that. They looked forward to the day when Jesus told them that they had been His good servants.

But the more they discussed how many meals they had packed the more they thought that they could do more. They only had ten volunteers. There was plenty of food left over that still needed to be packed. They began to think about how many meals they could pack if they had more volunteers. Think

if we had twenty volunteers! Think if we had thirty or even fifty! Think how many poor and hungry people we could serve that way. Think of how many more meals we could pack for them. Think how much more service to the Lord that we could do.

They then decided to make some better announcements in the bulletin to make sure that their congregation knew when the packing day would be. They would ask their pastor for permission to speak to the congregation and point out some of these Bible passages where Jesus tells us to serve our neighbors in need. They would point out that such service was really rendered to our Lord Himself. They would then get more volunteers, pack more meals for the poor, and render more service to Jesus.

They got excited about this and they did it. They got their pastors permission. They spoke to the congregation and exhorted them just the way that they had planned. They put announcements in the bulletin to make sure everyone knew what day they would be packing food.

When the day came for them to pack food for the poor, they had 100 volunteers to pack food! What a blessed day that was! They packed thousands of meals for the poor. They made a great day of it. Afterwards they gave thanks to God for their opportunity to serve the poor and by doing so to serve their Lord.

The other Lutheran congregation gave money to the poor and continued to attend the Divine Service listening to God's Word on Sunday morning.

When the first congregation saw the success that they had had with their food packing program, they decided to expand. The 100 volunteers were eager to help so more and do some more. After all, it was for their community. They were helping their neighbors. Didn't Jesus tell them to love their neighbors as themselves? They thought that if they expanded their program, they might be able to eliminate hunger in their community. Wouldn't that be great? They could be part of God's plan to eliminate hunger in their community!

The leadership of the congregation then formed a plan to pack food for the poor at regular intervals throughout the year. The volunteers would rotate in and out of jobs and do what they good at if they wanted to. They were also able to rotate in out of doing anything so that no one got burned out. They decided that if they met twice a month they could really do something to eliminate hunger in their community. They could really do something in service to the Lord!

They made their plans. They made their announcements. They gave their appeal to the congregation for the necessary volunteers to make this program work. They even prepared brochures on the program. They gave it a name and outlined their goals with the program. The congregation allocated funding in its budget for the effort. They even made a short video in order to promote the program inviting anyone who wanted to come to help them pack meals for the poor.

The other Lutheran congregation sent a few volunteers to help out and continued to attend the Divine Service and listen to God's Word.

The first congregation had hundreds of volunteers packing boxes for the poor at an unheard of rate. They packed hundreds of thousands of meals every year. They fed more poor people than there were members of the congregation! Nobody bothered to check to see whether or not hunger was actually being reduced in their community. They were simply happy to serve Jesus. They knew that by serving their neighbor in this way that they were loving their neighbors as themselves and they were happily serving Jesus.

After one particularly successful packing party the congregation decided it was time to invite other congregations in their community to help them pack meals for the poor. Once again just as they had in the past they got excited about the idea. They thought to themselves, if all of the Christian congregations in our community banded together to pack meals for the poor we could not only feed the poor in our own community we could feed the poor of other communities as well! They were so proud of themselves. They were so proud that they had thought of this for Jesus.

Just think of the unity of the body of Christ if we could involve the other congregations in this noble endeavor. We could show just how the body of Christ works together in order to change the world. They knew that by doing this they were loving their neighbors as themselves. They knew that by feeding the poor they were actually offering service to their Lord Christ. They wanted as many Christians as possible to be involved.

So when they drew up the schedule for packing boxes for the next year. They invited all of the other congregations in town. The other congregation sent their volunteers. The other Lutheran congregation in town sent some of their members over as volunteers also and they continued to hear the Word of God in the Divine Service on Sunday morning.

Wow! What success! What unity! What a thrill to see all of those Christians working together! The first Lutheran congregation was so proud of themselves. They had volunteers now approaching a thousand packing meals for the poor. Even the unbelievers came and helped them pack meals for the poor. They had this organized down to a science. They were now sending meals all over the world.

They were so pleased with themselves, but one thing troubled them. Members of other congregations helped them pack boxes and even though their own congregation had a sizable showing of volunteers still there were other people who were members of the congregation who could help who were not helping.

The leadership of the congregation asked themselves, "How could we get those people involved?" They decided that the best way to do it was to have a packing event during Divine Service on Sunday morning. They did not want to do it after Divine Service because some people would go home. But if they did it instead of Divine Service, they would make sure to maximize the involvement of the congregation.

So that is what they did. Instead of Divine Service on Sunday morning the congregation packed meals for the poor. Since the congregation had several hundred people in Divine Service every Sunday morning the number of volunteers in the congregation obviously increased.

There were some people who complained about it, but the leadership in the congregation told those complainers that this was serving Jesus Christ. They said that this was every bit as much serving Jesus Christ as it was to have a church service.

The leadership was so insistent that that was true that they invited the other congregations in their community to do this on Sunday morning with them. Many of the congregations in the community participated canceling their regularly scheduled service to pack meals for the poor.

But the other Lutheran Church did not. They would give money and send volunteers on the other days, but not on Sunday. On Sunday they were at the Divine Service listening to the Word of God.

After this went on for several years where the first Lutheran congregation would pack meals instead of Divine Service twice a year and the other Lutheran congregation would not send volunteers on Sunday morning, but rather on the other days, the first Lutheran congregation began to notice.

The Lutheran congregation that started this whole packing project to help the poor noticed that the other Lutheran congregation would not send volunteers whenever there was Divine Service. It irked the packing congregation that their fellow Lutherans would not help them help the poor. Didn't they love their neighbors as themselves? Didn't they love Jesus? Why weren't they helping the poor people in their community? Didn't they care at all? Eventually some members of the congregation that started the packing project began to look down on their brothers and sisters in the other Lutheran congregation. They sneered at them in their hearts.

The Lutherans from the first congregation began to pray for their fellow Lutherans fearing for their salvation. They would rather sit and hear the word of God on Sunday morning than help the poor. The Lutherans from the first congregation thought that the Lutherans from the second congregation were inconsiderate and unloving. Oh, they would never say that to their face, but it is what they thought. And so the Lutherans from the first congregation who started the packing program even on Sunday morning prayed for the salvation of the Lutheran in the second congregation who sat in Divine Service listening to the Word of God instead of helping their neighbors. They prayed to the Lord and told Him to tell that other congregation to help them!

And the Lutherans in the packing congregation were surprised when on the Day of Judgment the Lord received the Lutherans from the second congregation into life everlasting. And the Lutherans from the packing congregation asked the Lord, "Why did you allow them into life everlasting when we prayed to you to tell our fellow Lutherans to help us serve You?"

And the Lord said to them, "The Lutherans of the other congregation sat in the Divine Service and listened to Me. They had chosen what is better and it will not be taken away from them."

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.