

REVITALIZATION

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Greg Finke in Joining Jesus on His Mission writes, “We’re not on mission for Jesus, but with Jesus!” Jesus invites us to join with Him in what He is already doing. With almost ½ of LCMS Congregations winning one or less to Jesus, revitalization calls us to join with Jesus in “Seeking and saving the lost.” (Luke 19:10) Recent surveys uncover the fact that many LCMS congregations do not believe that their only priority is bringing people into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ. We speak of priorities, but the word priority is singular. We can have only one priority. Once established, we can then prioritize our different ministries in support of our one priority.

Revitalization has become a “buzz” word, with many thinking of it as just another program. But revitalization is as old as God’s promise in Genesis 3:15. By the precious sacrifice of Christ, from the cross to the empty tomb, we have been revitalized. With Christ having paid the price of defeating “sin, death and the devil,” we are called to live in a “newness of life,” (Romans 6:5) being entrusted by God with the message and ministry of reconciliation. (2 Corinthians 5:19)

Revitalization in our churches only begins when we make the simplest of all confessions, “Jesus is Lord.” He is not simply a Lord, He is the Lord. He is Lord of all, or He is not Lord at all. He is Lord of each of our strategically placed New Jersey congregations. Our ministries, decisions, actions, thinking are to reflect His Lordship and His preeminence. The Church belongs to the preeminent Lord, or it is not a Church.

We who are called into fellowship with Jesus who is not only the Lord but He is also the Head of His Church. Jesus is the Head, not the Pastor, not Voters or Council, nor traditions, or personal likes and dislikes, or popular convictions, not even majority vote. Jesus is the Head of the Church. It is His direction that counts. It is His opinions that matter. It is His ideas, thoughts and judgments that are of first importance. Without His direction we can easily wander off course and forget the business we are in. And without the passion of Christ for the lost, we will never put the energy into the on-going ministry of revitalization.

Knowing Jesus is Lord and that He is the Head of the Church, we are called and commissioned to be the Body of Christ. Personally, one of the most challenging tasks in ministry was “to explain the unexplainable” love of God in Christ Jesus. But that’s the genius of God calling the Church to be the body of Christ. “The Church is the only organization that exists for the benefit of others.” The risen and exalted Lord returned to earth to be nearer to us than ever before. The Church becomes a body that is identical with Christ’s own body. Since the ascension, “Christ’s place on earth has been taken by His body, the Church. The Body of Christ becomes visible to the world in the congregation gathered round the Word and Sacrament.” (Bonhoeffer’s Cost of Discipleship) As the Body of Christ, revitalized and renewed in the Spirit we are to be “so sacrificially loving that the people around us, who don’t believe what we believe, will soon be unable to imagine the community without us.”

How to engage our communities is ONLY hindered by a lack of creativity and a unwillingness to let our only priority dictate our actions. There are a host of technical solutions that will help us maintain our status quo. But may we, who have been revitalized by the preciousness of God’s love for us in Christ, seek diligently and passionately adaptive solutions, generated by God’s Spirit in response to Christ’s mission and His command to “Go, and make disciples of all nations.” (Matthew 28:19)