

Shepherd of the Springs Lutheran Church
Sixth Sunday after Easter

Text: John 15:26 - 16:4

Theme: Corrective Notes on the Evangelistic Task

But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, he will bear witness about me. But you also will bear witness . . . (vss. 26-27)

Our text this morning presents what could be described as the politically incorrect version of the Lord's Great Commission. The more popular glitzy version is found in Matthew 28, where Jesus indicates that we are to make disciples of all nations, baptizing and teaching all things concerning the Lord. The familiar words in Matthew 28 were spoken to the disciples shortly before He ascended into Heaven. His words at that later time presume all the words of Jesus that were spoken in the upper room to the disciples as recorded in John 14-16, and especially these words in our text this morning. We have labeled our theme this morning, *Corrective Notes on the Evangelistic Task*. On the basis of what our Lord reveals, it is important today, more than ever, to regain some clarity about the evangelistic task that Jesus relates concerning his Church, and how that relates to the coming and work of the Holy Spirit, the Helper. Let's see what we can find here to clear up much misunderstanding.

The first point that we want to clarify is that evangelism is not a task of imparting useful spiritual information to sinners so that they can make the right decision and God's kingdom be advanced. When Jesus says, *you must testify of me*, and then later, in Matthew 28, where he tells his disciples, *to baptize and teach all things that He has commanded* - this is not to be understood as useful information, winsomely packaged for the non-believer to act on. To *testify* carries the connotation of a legal proceeding. The disciples are to speak of what they have seen and heard concerning our Lord. They are to speak of what Jesus has done and said for us and our salvation. Here is where there is confusion in this allusion to a court of law. The non-Christian is not the jury. We do not testify of Jesus so that the non-Christian can make the right judgments about our testimony and offer a verdict concerning Jesus.

When we proclaim Christ, it is the Holy Spirit who makes all the judgments and renders the verdicts, not the unbeliever. As Jesus said in the same context in the upper room about the coming of the Spirit in our Gospel two weeks ago in John 16, the Spirit will convict the world of three things of sin, of righteousness and of judgment. It is not that unbelievers make a decision for Christ and are saved, it is that Jesus has made a decision concerning the unbeliever and has sent the Spirit to execute the right judgments of the Father and the Son when, where, and as He pleases. As Paul indicated in Romans 10, faith comes from hearing and hearing by the Word of Christ. People confess Jesus is Lord, by the power and working of the Holy Spirit. We testify, and the Spirit makes the judgments . . . and by this, sinners are brought into the

Kingdom. Notice also that when Jesus indicates that we must testify of Him . . . He does not simply indicate that this is to be done with unbelievers . . . as if once you are saved; you don't have to hear any more about Jesus. No the testimony of the Christ concerning the word of Christ . . . the saving works and words of Jesus, is to be proclaimed also to those who have been made disciples. The ministry of presenting the testimony of Jesus has been given to the Church to build up and mature believers as much as it is to extend the Kingdom. The judgments of the Spirit, working repentance and faith, involve verdicts that convict of sin and righteousness in the lives of believers on a continual basis. We are built up and kept in the Kingdom by the very same work of the Spirit that brought us there in the first place.

Notice in our text, that as Jesus indicates that we are to provide testimony of Christ, so also is the Holy Spirit. It is not simply that there is a division of labor here, we testify . . . the Spirit convicts. Here Jesus tells us that the Spirit also testifies. About the testimony of the Spirit, there has also been much confusion. This confusion is perhaps well illustrated by the story of the preacher who was so busy one week that when Sunday service came, he only had half his sermon done. So he got up in the pulpit, preached his half-finished sermon and then announced to the congregation, that the Holy Spirit would now take over, and he sat down to a silent Church for the next ten minutes, at such time the service continued with the offering. Two visitors that Sunday left after the service where one said to the other, that Pastor's sermon was pretty good, but I don't know about that Holy Spirit fellow.

The testimony of the Holy Spirit does not occur where or when we stop as if the Spirit is coming as our Helper to carry some of the load of evangelism. He does not take over at some point in our testimony and then carry the message through to repentance and faith. Rather it is to understand that Jesus is sending the Holy Spirit to be his Helper. Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of Christ. It is the Word of Christ that we proclaim, and it is Jesus who saves sinners. The Holy Spirit is there in the Word of Christ. He is there in the Word of Law and the Word of Gospel that we proclaim. Paul called the Gospel the power of God unto salvation. The word of Christ which packs the power of the Spirit is that power. When we testify of Christ, when we bring forth the work and judgments of God concerning sin and grace, so is the Spirit . . . from beginning to end. God is pleased to send his Spirit, to put his Word into our mouths and to dwell in that powerful Word to extend and build up his Church. The Spirit testifies of Christ and saves sinners, right there in, with, and under our preaching of His word and administering his Sacraments.

And finally in our text, Jesus indicates some outward things that will happen when the Spirit has come and his Church is doing the job properly of testifying concerning Him and His saving work. The outward signs are also not what you would expect, listening to the messages today about what constitutes appropriate evangelistic

methods. Today, the criteria of doing the great commission right are all centered on results. If people are making decisions for Christ and churches are getting filled with throngs of people; well then, you are doing things right. Success and popularity are the signs that your testimony has been on target. The assumption is that the Spirit can only be as good at his work as we are at ours. When we get good at saving sinners; so does the Spirit. When we get busy and when we get good, the Church grows and is extended. The Spirit is never any better or worse in his work than we are at ours. For this reason we need to kind of forget about the Spirit and concentrate on how to be more effective and successful at what we do . . . get people to make the right decisions for Jesus and keep them in these commitments.

Notice, however, the sign that Jesus gives if we do our job right in testifying of him faithfully. He said, *they will throw you out of the synagogues, and indeed the hour is coming when they will kill you and think that they are doing the will of God . . . I am telling you this know, so that when it happens, you will remember, I told you so.* The sign that Jesus offers that servants of His Word are doing it right; that they are being faithful to his commission is this: you get thrown out of the churches and many get killed by zealous religious fanatics who will think that they are really acting with God's purpose. Notice, when things really are going well and the Spirit is here and doing His Job assisting our Lord in His saving ministry. . . When the Spirit is present and active through faithful witness by God's people . . . the faithful servants of the Word are being thrown out of churches, persecuted, and some killed. Who among us today wants to say about all these things . . . well now, THAT'S THE SPIRIT! Jesus does! That's what Jesus wants to say . . . and he did in our text. And he wants to say, I told you so. Jesus tells us that the coming of the Spirit to His Church that is faithful to His Word will be a persecuted Church. Persecution is the sign He offers that the Church is doing her job of right testimony and so is the Spirit. Things are going to plan. And when we see the signs, Jesus wants us to remember, he told us that's the way it will be. Persecution is the sign of a faithful evangelism strategy. It is God's strategy for Church growth and we have ample evidence today and through the history of the Church that it works famously.