

House Cleaning or Hosting?

I recently heard the following statement regarding evangelism in our district and Synod: “You need to have your house clean before you can invite guests over.” The speaker was implying that, because sinful behavior and attitudes on the part of Christians can drive non-believers away from the church with disgust at the hypocrisy, that we should wait to do evangelism until we have things straightened out in both our synod and our congregations.

And this is a legitimate concern. A lot of internal strife can scare away visitors who might otherwise receive the Gospel with joy and faith.

Yet when we see the unsaved as poor beggars at death’s door, hoping for a scrap of food to give them life, we get a better understanding of the relationship among doctrine, church relations, and evangelism. When you go to a hospital, you expect it to be clean, but you don’t expect everyone there to be healthy, and while many people unrealistically expect all Christians to be perfect, we don’t pretend that to be a reality.

What is our neighbor’s need? More than anything else, our neighbors need a cure for death. Death is the number one killer in the world! While that may seem trite, the reality is that we actually have a solution, and it’s a free solution. The solution is found on the cross, because it was there that Jesus submitted to death on our behalf in order to conquer it once and for all, and since He rose again from death, we have the promise that we, too, will one day rise just as Jesus did, flesh and blood, to live forever, free from trouble.

Nowhere in the Bible is anything given that is more important than sharing the Gospel. That is not to say that the truth of God’s Word can be compromised to get the Gospel out—if we change the message or selectively skip certain parts, we’re not really getting the message out—but 1 Peter 3:15 says, “always be ready to give an answer to everyone who asks you a reason concerning the hope that is in you.” *Always!* Because the news is *that good!*

What, then, should we feed our neighbor? Feeding them with sweets that make them happy but have no substance will not help them, so we don’t spend a lot of time on “making them feel good,” and poison, like false teachings, will hurt them, so we feed our neighbors with God’s Word in its purity, because the Gospel needs no sweetening. Nothing is so sweet as eternal life given freely, and no other message will give that life.

I am not ignoring the need for true unity. Our church body is a “Synod,” which means “walk together,” and we don’t always do that. We often butt heads or trip each other up, but more often than not, this is not a matter of people going different places, but just taking different routes to the same destination. It’s important to keep each other on the road of sound, Biblical teachings, and we have a responsibility to each other to point out the misleading signs along the way so nobody is led astray from the eternal life won for us by Jesus on the cross, but it’s equally important to pick up as many people as we can on the way so that they, too, may know that God has forgiven us, not because we have kept our houses clean, not because we’ve kept our houses full of guests, but because Jesus paid off the mortgage that only the blood of the Son of God could cover. That is the message we share, and that is the message by which we have eternal life.