

Which matters more: Going or Gaining?

Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” (Matthew 28:18-20, NIV).

Our Evangelism Board has been very busy, and as we look into various ways to get the Word out, it's tempting to turn our efforts into a “membership drive,” seeking to add to our numbers for selfish reasons like increasing the weekly offering or big numbers to point to, but while it would be nice to grow our membership so that more people will be hearing God's Word and growing in faith each week, we cannot make numbers our goal. Jesus told us to go plant the seeds. The Holy Spirit gets to do the growing and harvesting.

What does that mean? It means that an evangelism effort is “successful” if people learned about Jesus' love through our words and deeds, even if we don't get a single visitor on Sunday morning as a result of it. It means that our focus is on human souls, not statistics. It means that, until the Holy Spirit moves more people to get involved in our fellowship, we all need to work a little harder together and dig a little deeper to pay the bills and do the ministry that God has given us the honor of doing. It means that the sacrifices we make now, together, will reap rewards of eternal significance. And it means that, no matter what happens to our bank account or our membership roster, we can rejoice in the Gospel of Jesus Christ: that our salvation is a free gift, bought for us by the blood of Christ. If we, in the words of our sainted district and synodical president, Dr. Al Barry, “Keep the message straight and get the message out,” we will grow. We will grow in faith, and, God willing, we will grow in numbers. *He told them, “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field. Go! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves.* (Luke 10:2, 3, NIV).

For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. (Ephesians 6:12, NIV). We fight, but we fight together, and we fight not to kill, but to give life.