



# THE AUGUSTANA DISTRICT **Chronicle**



**Augustana District Convocation of the Cross**  
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## ABOUT THIS PUBLICATION

*The Chronicler* is a new journal which chronicles the work of Christ among those whom the Holy Spirit has gathered at the Augustana District's gatherings. The purposes for the journal is to nurture faith in between our gatherings and to share this work of Christ among our congregations. This is the first issue of *The Chronicler*. A video recording of this event can be found at <https://augustanadistrict.org/resources/video-channel/?playlist=1d15c1c&video=1c899ef>

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# CHRIST FISHES FOR BOTTOM-DWELLERS

## LUKE 5:1-11

| *REV. DR. MARNEY FRITTS, PREACHING* |

Grace to you and peace, from God our Father and the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

We have a familiar yet remarkable story before us today. What initially stands out is the miracle of a catch of fish so large, it nearly breaks the nets and sinks the boats of the fisherman. This is done in front of a great crowd on the shore who had pressed in on Jesus to hear the Word of God. And there is Simon, front and center virtually type-cast as the object lesson for the day. These images can occasionally overshadow what Jesus Christ is actually up to and precisely what his words are.

Just before this scene at Lake Gennesaret, Jesus had healed Simon's mother-in-law, word had spread in the region such that seemingly everyone was bringing their sick to him to be healed. They clamored and pressed in on him there and wanted to keep him from leaving them. Can you blame them?

But Jesus had other plans. He said, "I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns as well; for I was sent for this purpose." If we are honest, this is mildly disappointing. Casting out demons, healing the sick, curing everyone he came in contact with is quite the show! We have a sense that preaching is just Jesus letting his foot off the gas. He's God, after all! Why would he down-shift in exercising his powers? Perhaps he is up to something entirely new and something more unexpected than miraculous physical healings.

The people who had come to the lake seemed to have caught something in what he had been saying and came to the lake to "hear the Word of God." It doesn't say they "brought their sick for him to heal them," but that "they pressed upon him to hear the Word of God." So, being crowded out of the shoreline, he asks Simon, who had just come in from a weary night of fruitless fishing, to borrow his boat and to push him out a little from land. Now, many commentators, even Luther, note with disappointment that Luke did not record the sermon Christ gave to the crowd from his boat pulpit.

Yet, he had just stated his purpose for coming: to preach the good news of the Kingdom of God to other towns. He handed over the goods to the people on the sandy shore. To hand over the kingdom of God to the people means he absolved them of their sins and gave them the promise of eternal life. With this bare word, he does something for them that is entirely new and unexpected: he creates faith in them. For where God preaches the good news of his Kingdom, he is about the business of creating faith, raising the dead, and bestowing the unexpected eternal life to those in earshot.

After this, Christ Jesus turns his gaze to the weary fisherman who are cleaning their worn nets. He calls to Simon and commands him to go out fishing . . . again! The audacity and hubris of Jesus to say such a thing! Couldn't he see that they were exhausted and likely dejected because there were no fish out there which would mean no daily sales at the market? These were experienced fishermen. They had the fishing boats which they no doubt kept up regular maintenance. They had rugged nets and sturdy gear. They had not only years, but generations of the wisdom to know when and where to fish. They knew which eddies and reefs to find the fish. But no fish. Then here comes Jesus who doesn't know how to stay in his lane. A carpenter, not a fisherman. No experience at sea. No experience whatsoever in fishing. And most offensive of all, he shows no respect for the hard night these fishermen had had. "Put out into the deep and let down your nets, Simon." Jesus is set on doing some deep-sea fishing . . . with a net . . . in the middle of the day. Utterly ridiculous!

This would be tantamount to your Amazon delivery person coming into your local congregation, having had no seminary training, and likely not even baptized, telling you what you should do to attract the lost. What do they know? Is this a new variety of anti-intellectualism and anticlericalism? The complete disrespect for your countless hours, years, of study and education. They do not know your congregation any

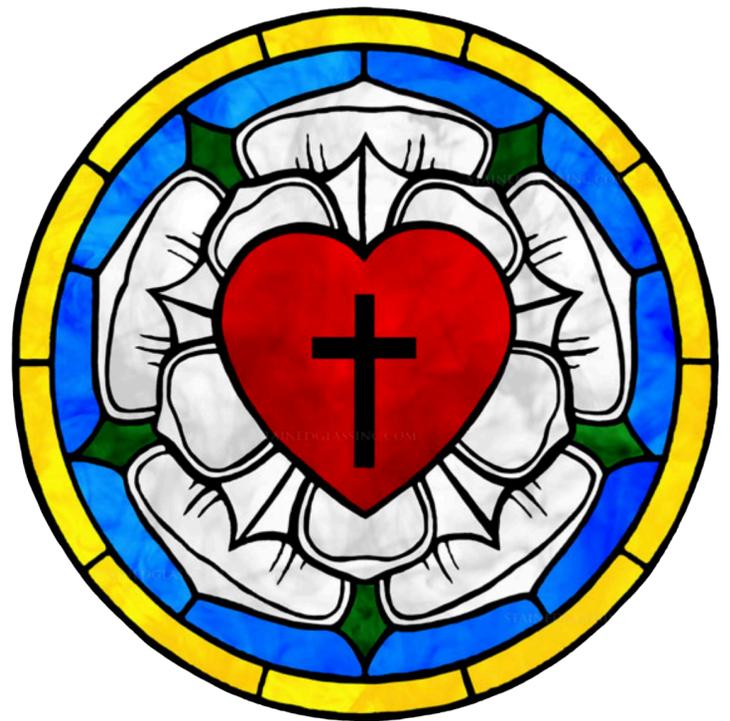
more than Jesus knows the eddies, reefs, and lake bottom of Lake Gennesaret. Whether you are a pastor or a church leader, they should at least respect that we have taken seriously Jesus' words about being fishers of men. We have youth ministry, you have been on mission trips, serve shut-in members through Stephen Ministries, or that you go annually to Mt. Carmel family camp, Camp Okoboji, or Lutherhaven Summer Camp. You have dedicated so much time and energy in congregational renewal, men's and women's bible studies, vacation bible school, the capital campaign, and we can't forget the prized discipleship programs. We have the education, the experience, and the wisdom that ought to make for a vibrant church.

In all of this, is faith made, or is faith a steppingstone to something with more substance? Have we disparaged the great commission of baptizing all nations labeling it maintenance, but not true mission? Might it be that we have taken in Jesus' words, "do not fear; from now on you will be catching men," as a project, rather than the promise that he makes? He is about raising the dead. And he has come all the way to the cross to do so. He has come to preach the kingdom of God, for that is what he came to do. And he shows up to our production and doesn't stay in the lane we have manufactured for him. He is going deep-sea fishing, with a net, in the middle of the day. Utterly preposterous!

So, I suppose that when he shows up, we are shown to be a lot like Simon Peter. And it's painful and shameful. We may even be a little afraid of what is afoot. "Sure, Jesus, whatever you say. I mean, we've only been at this all night and caught nothing. But at your word, I will let down the net. Into the deep, in the middle of the day."

We've been caught trusting in our years of practice and wisdom of the sea that we can't imagine Christ showing up and doing something unpredictable and spectacular without our effort. Maybe we imagine that we are all that, that we have the "riz" as the kids say these days, we have imagined ourselves to be an improved model of Simon, knowledgeable fishers of people, after all. Or maybe we know what kind of hot mess we are and have on our hands. Either way, Christ shows up and doesn't find us on the shore or even in the fishing boats, but he has to go to go deep-sea fishing. And lo and behold, in the dark depths he finds not only Simon, James and John, but he finds bottom dwellers like you and me. And he delivers the absolution: Do not be afraid. He does not wade in the shallows, but He dies and goes to the depths to rescue you to the surface with this bare promise: do not be

afraid; from now on you will be fishers of men. You belong to Christ. You see, because God does not walk the earth and sea looking where he might find faith, but he wondrously creates it in you. Your sin is forgiven, and it is the Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Amen. May the peace that passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.



## LUTHER'S SMALL CATECHISM

### THE THIRD ARTICLE: ON SANCTIFICATION

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

#### WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith. In the same way He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith. In this Christian church He daily and richly forgives all my sins and the sins of all believers. On the Last Day He will raise me and all the dead, and give eternal life to me and all believers in Christ. This is most certainly true.

# HERMANN SASSE ON THE OFFICE OF THE HOLY

| *DR. JOHN PLESS, PRESENTING* |

Dr. Pless did not present from a manuscript, but rather a PowerPoint presentation. Below are bullet points of that PowerPoint presentation's content. If you would like to follow along with his keynote address, please visit the Augustana District website and find the video under the "resources" tab.

## SENTENCED TO DEATH?

"The Evangelical Lutheran Church is a church which has been sentenced to death by the world"- Hermann Sasse, *Here We Stand*, 179.

## "LEST WE DESPAIR" (AP VII-VIII:9)

"But of one thing a Lutheran Christian can never despair: of the church of Christ we daily confess in the Creed. It is necessary for all of us to remember the article of faith which was given to us, as the Apology says, 'lest we despair [ne desperemus, AP VII-VIII 9]- Sasse, "Concerning Ecumenical Councils" in *Letters to Lutheran Pastors* III:145.

## HERMANN SASSE (1895-1976): EARLY YEARS

- Born in 1895
- Enrolled in University of Berlin in 1913
- Served in World War I from 1916-1918
- Ordained in 1920
- Earned Doctorate in 1923
- American Year 1925-1926
- Representative at Lausanne Faith and Order Conference of 1927

## ERLANGEN YEARS (1933-1948)

- Joins Erlangen faculty to teach historical theology (1933)
- Works on the Bethel Confession with Dietrich Bonhoeffer
- Refuses to sign the Barmen Declaration (1934)
- Publication of *Here We Stand* (1936; ET by Theodore Tappert in 1938)
- Resigns from the faculty and from the Bavarian Territorial Church



## AUSTRALIAN YEARS (1949-1976)

- Professor of Church History at Immanuel Lutheran Seminary in Adelaide
- *Letters to Lutheran Pastors*
- Growing connections to the Missouri Synod
- Instrumental in the merger of the ELCA and UELCA to form the Lutheran Church in Australia in 1966
- Died in a house fire on August 8, 1976

## MIGHT SASSE HELP US RESPOND?

"The clerical estate in America has always been a little rough around the edges"- E. Brooks Holifield, *God's Ambassadors: A History of Christian Clergy in America*, p. 2\_

## MIGHT SASSE HELP US TO CLARITY?

"The hardest thing about being a pastor today is not the long hours, the demanding congregations, the eclectic responsibilities, the fishbowl existence, or the relentless returns of Sunday. Those who have taken the vows of ordination have long shouldered all of that as the yoke of Christ. But only within in the last two generations have the clergy been forced to bear an additional burden that is far from light-confusion about what it means to be a pastor."-M. Craig Barnes, *The Pastor as Minor Poet*, p. 4.

## **SASSE & BONHOEFFER IN THE BETHEL CONFESSION**

“We reject the false teaching that the office is an order that precedes the Word and sacraments and generates them. We reject these forms of the Roman and Romanizing hierarchy and in the form of Schwarmerei. The power of the office rests neither in an institution that has become historical nor in the spiritual powers of human talent. Therefore, we oppose attempts to transfer modern leadership theories to the pastoral office. The preaching office is the ministry of the atoning Word and therefore stands in opposition to all leadership magic. (See 1 Cor. 3:5; 2 Cor. 5. 11ff)” (p.46)

## **“THE LUTHERAN DOCTRINE OF THE OFFICE OF THE HOLY MINISTRY” (1943/1944) IN THE LONELY WAY. VOL. II:117-139)**

Sasse sees the distinctiveness of the Lutheran doctrine of the ministry over against both the Roman and Reformed approaches. Both Rome and the Reformed see the ministry as an ordo whereas Lutheranism sees the ministry in terms of “office as mandate” (p. 120)

## **IS THE OFFICE LAW OR GOSPEL?**

“The Lutheran Confessions see the office of the ministry in terms of Gospel rather than law. Forms of church government –congregational, episcopal, synodical, presbyterial are matters of human not divine law” (p. 122).

## **AUGSBURG CONFESSION**

The ministerial office is the institution of Christ, through which He graciously wills to give us the fruits of the redemption He has accomplished in His death and resurrection. AC V, XIV, and XXVIII present the Lutheran doctrine of the ministry.

## **THE OFFICE AND THE GOSPEL BELONG TOGETHER**

“The doctrine of the office of the ministry is very closely connected with the doctrine of justification” (p. 124)

## **LAW & GOSPEL IN OFFICE**

“The more seriously we take the immutable, eternal, divine commandments, the more we also know the preaching of the Law is not yet the final and highest thing that has been committed to us. The final and highest task of our office is this: that we lead penitent sinners to the one who is their Savior, because he has borne the sins of the world” (p. 125)

## **THE OFFICE OF PREACHING AND ADMINISTERING THE SACRAMENTS**

- “The two are inseparable” (p. 126)
- Coordination of Word AND Sacrament.
- Without the Word the Sacrament could be transformed into an esoteric religious rite; without the Sacrament the Word could make the church a lecture hall.

## **THE OFFICE IS ONE**

Distinctions within the one preaching office are of human origin.

## **THE REAL GOVERNMENT OF THE CHURCH**

The functions of the ministerium ecclesiasticum are the real government of the church. “External” church government simply guarantees “real” church government “the fullest opportunity to work” (p. 129)

## **THE LONELY WAY BETWEEN ROME AND FANATICISM**

Luther’s battle for the office was “two-sided” as it engaged both Rome and the Spiritualist. The apostolic scriptures never apply the term “priests” to ministers of the New Testament. Yet the fanatics draw the false conclusion that all may preach and administer the sacraments (p. 130-131)

## **ONE CANNOT HOLD THE OFFICE WITHOUT A CALL**

“The call [vocatio] gives the devil great pain” (Luther, AE 40:385) But the devil has great his greatest joy in sneaky and secret preachers” (p. 133)

## **SASSE ON LUTHER**

- “Emergency situations” (see *To the Christian Nobility* (1520) and his opinion to the Bohemians, *Concerning the Instituting of the Ministry of the Church* (1523).
- Luther was no congregationalist (p.134)
- Baptism makes us priests but it does not make us apostles, preachers, or teachers (p. 131)

## **AUGUST C. VILMAR (1800-1868)**

“No Lutheran theologian has ever opposed Luther on this question. August Vilmar himself, the proponent of an expressly ‘high-church’ view of the office, emphatically agreed with Luther, even though he regarded the case of Christians in the wilderness a fictitious borderline case” (133)

### **CLARIFICATIONS OF THE TREATISE**

- The church which is the Royal Priesthood cannot be deprived of ministers;
- “The preaching of the Gospel and the administration of the Gospel is not an activity of the general priesthood, but the execution of a mandate given to the apostles, and through them, to the church” (p.136)

### **THE OFFICE AND THE EXTERNALITY OF THE WORD**

- The Office stands against Enthusiasm which is of the devil.. See SA III viii. 9;
- Hidden reign of Christ through the preaching of the Gospel;
- “He [Christ] is present in the means of grace, and the bearer of the *ministerium ecclesiasticum* actually stands in the stead of Christ”
- The sin of clerical pessimism (p.138-139)
- “On the Problem of the Relation between the [Office of the Ministry] and the Congregation” (1949) in Letters to Lutheran Pastors I:120-134
- Sasse’s conclusion: “The ministry does not stand above the congregation, but invariably within it”-Letters to Lutheran Pastors I:129.

### **“THE CRISIS OF THE CHRISTIAN MINISTRY” (1968) IN THE LONELY WAY II: 355-372)**

- Distinction Between the crisis that is ongoing and the crisis that belongs to a particular time (p. 356);
- The ministry is humanly speaking an impossible task.

### **THE CRISIS OF A PARTICULAR TIME: EXAMPLE OF THE EARLY CHURCH**

- What happens after the last apostle dies?
- Gnosticism

### **CRISIS PARTICULAR TO SASSE’S DAY**

Truthfulness of the Scriptures: “In Germany a candidate who refused to be ordained declared to his bishop: “I could perhaps preach on ordinary Sundays, but I cannot preach at Christmas and Easter; I cannot preach on myths” (p.369)

### **PARTICULAR CRISIS OF 1968 ACCORDING TO SASSE**

- Lack of candidates for the ministry;
- Church administration becoming an ends in itself

### **COMPARE SASSE WITH A CONTEMPORARY VOICE (RICHARD LISCHER)**

“What language shall I borrow? An odd question when you stop to think, and one with a long and controversial history. Over the years, preachers have not been satisfied to speak from the embedded position. They have not been satisfied with the content of the starkness of the New Testament’s theology of the word. They have sought other language to communicate the gospel. When I was a seminarian, we all preached ‘existentially’ after the manner of Bultmann, in the confidence that the existentialist analysis of the human predicament was pretty much the same as Paul’s. When we weren’t preaching existentially, we donned our white coats, lit our pipes, and preached therapeutically, in the equally misplaced confidence that psychologist Carl Rogers’s view of the person was not all that different from Jesus”- Richard Lischer, The End of Words,

### **THE PERPETUAL CRISIS FOR THE CHURCH IN EVERY AGE**

- The crisis of the ministry is that of reliance on the Word to do what God has promised. Isaiah 55:11!
- This is “the divine promise given to the Christian congregation gathered around the Word and Sacraments” (p.172)

### **A CONCLUDING WORD OF CONSOLATION FROM SASSE**

“To us it is not given, as it was to the fathers of the previous century, to experience a springtime of the church. But in the church it cannot always be spring. God also sends to His church the storms of autumn and the death sleep of winter. What is allotted to us is simply that we faithfully administer the means of grace”-Sasse, “The Lutheran Awakening of the 19th Century” in LTLP I:329-330

# PASTORAL CARE: BATTLING DOUBT, DESPAIR AND DESPERATION

| *REV. RANDY FREUND, PRESENTING* |

Thank you for the invitation! It did occur to me that I said “yes” too quickly (simply because I’m such a fan of the Augustana District) and I didn’t really think much about the topic, mental health. You’ve asked me? It is good you asked Dr. Pless, as he carried the heavy load.

But here we are. I did read the book suggested and found it interesting and helpful. I have always been big fan of Luther’s Letters of Spiritual Counsel. Luther had an amazing ability to combine his strong theology with pastoral nuance and heart. He could “deliver the goods” in a pulpit as well as on a deathbed. His nuance in pastoral care and counseling seemed to stem from a great question Nestingen would urge parish pastors so ask: “What best serves the gospel?” So, now to the topic before us, that truthfully, I am pleased and prepared to address, as best I can. Those who know me, understand that I believe everything is theological and good theology is always practical. These are not separate categories, as is so often inferred. So that is how I approach this topic and all topics. That is not a limitation. In fact, it tells me that there are a number of ways one could theologially go at this topic.

One way, when it comes to mental health, despair and desperation, I thought of a conversation I had with my brother. He certainly would not think of himself as a theologian and is, in fact, trained as an electrophysiologist. He studies the brain. So, he knows quite a bit about how trauma, grief, drugs, diet can physiologically change the brain and consequently change behavior, and in ways that lead to despair and depression and anxiety and of host of other mental issues. When I told him I was doing this keynote, he was all prepared to send me some research to back the connection between trauma, grief, drugs, diet and mental health. I quickly told him thanks, but no thanks. I have read some of his published work. When I looked at his papers, they tell me that I am out of my lane, as I can never make any sense of the jargon, even as a biology major from long ago.

But there is a theological/pastoral point to be made here. At the least, we ought to all acknowledge and give thanks for his left-hand kingdom function here. We wouldn’t know about these things unless people were gifted to study them. In understanding what we can about the scientific world, how the brain works and how this affects life and human behavior, something helpful and important is offered to pastors as we do the work of pastoral care. In order to have the compassion and understanding needed to do the hard work of pastoral care, to understand something about the root causes of the maladies we, and especially our parishioners face, this is an important part of good pastoral care. I did CPE at the U of M, and we were always told that we could observe surgeries so that we could better understand the pain and trauma on the other side. At the very least, this did make me more empathetic. But I chose not to go any further down a scientific path, as a way to understand and provide pastoral care. There is another path one could take.

In the book, *Martin Luther on Mental Health* there are any number of interesting themes one could pursue. But for the most part, I decided to leave most of this work Dr. Pless. However, I did consider pursuing the part where Saunders talked about how Luther would use laughter, fun and beer as an antidote mental stress, doubt, despair, and desperation – our topic. I’m horrible at joke telling, but I like to laugh and have found it to be a stress reliever. I definitely enjoy a good beer. I decided to avoid this path for our topic, for a couple a reasons: 1) It would be a very short address, and 2) it seemed a bit weird to give an address extoling the virtues and mental benefits of good jokes and great beer, even if I extensively quoted Martin and Katie Luther, on the latter. However, we should not minimize Luther’s words here. The devil cannot stand joy, happiness and good beer and fun. Luther loved to minimize the power of the devil (and the way the devil gets in our head and creates havoc, depression, mental stress), he did this through all kinds of methods.

He would picture the devil as a fly on his shoulder and say, “You again?!!”, and flick him away. To focus on how the devil cannot stand joy, happiness, laughter and fun is another left-hand kingdom blessing and gift we ought not ignore. It clearly relates to our topic and is an appropriate theological category to explore. But there is yet another option.

It seems every speaker is supposed to tell some personal story. This expectation kind of stresses me out. I don’t have many or tell many. But I do recall the advice I always got from my mother in times of my own doubt, despair, and desperation. It could be summarized in three words: “Hang in there.” The only analogy and personal story that immediately comes to mind related to this topic is the last time I tried to water ski. The last time was the first time. I was 19, so I can’t blame age or bad knees. All I can tell you is that I refused to let go of the rope. I guess you’re supposed to let the skis and boat motor do the work. “Hang in there, hang on,” trying to ski by my own power only got me real bad rope burns and great humiliation in front of bunch of Jr. High campers. To “hang in there” or try to cope does not seem sufficient pastoral advice or care. However, there is a place for “hanging in there.” There is reason to listen to counsel of others that have devised and offer good coping mechanisms in the face of doubt, despair, and desperation that can help you get back on your feet. This is another left-hand kingdom function that is good and helpful. I can even quote Forde as a proponent here: Forde often mentioned that part of the function of the left-hand kingdom is to “hold us in readiness to hear the gospel.” Holding in readiness, hanging on and hanging in, is related here. When you just can’t do anything or find yourself fighting against nature (or skis and ropes), you sometimes can only wait and hang on. As Luther once put it in a Table Talk quote: “I will not lie or hide before my God, by freely confess, that I am not able to effect the good which I intend, but wait that happy moment when God shall be pleased to meet me with his grace.” Sometimes good pastoral care simply involves waiting, being there with another, for that “happy hour when God meets us with his grace.” And it is here I make the transition to what I might best be able to add to the matter at hand as we focus on the topic before us: “Pastoral Care: Battling Doubt, Despair, and Desperation.”

Again, I did appreciate the suggested book, *Martin Luther on Mental Health*. One of the chapters that grabbed my attention came in the 4th chapter: “Return pastoral care to its proper place.” Here Saunders talks about how and why the term “pastoral care” was replaced by “pastoral counseling.” In part,

the reason for this shift was so that pastoral work would sound more professional and fit within the “more respected” field of counseling. Behind this, not so subtle or insignificant change, was a move from a sense of “saving the soul” moved to “transforming the mind,” according to Saunders. With this move, now the goal, the game, the trick in pastoral counseling is more about gaining control over understanding, accepting sinful thoughts, feelings and behaviors. I didn’t see this at the time, but it becomes clear now. My CPE supervisor had us all read his book, “Make Friends with Your Shadow.” This book definitely emphasized this move. Befriending our shadows amounts to accepting our sins, rather than being absolved of them. This is a rather big deal. I’m pretty sure the forgiveness of sin and the gospel itself are one. The damage from the subtle moves of the 18th and 19th century became full-blown late 20th century. Pastors were to be “companions on the spiritual journeys” of their parishioners rather than “caretakers of the soul”. Again, it is hard to over-emphasize the significance of this shift. Saunders notes the damage and hits it squarely when he writes, “Preaching Christ crucified became less important than helping people undermine (or minimize/accept) their sinful behavior, become self-assured of their salvation, and (falsely) calm their anxious souls.” Yet we maintain that the primary duty of pastoral care is to address spiritual needs, to declare the forgiveness of sin.

I can’t think of a better illustration than a scene from the old show, ER, some of you have heard this before from me. I tried to find a more recent example but can’t beat this one. It’s a perfect example of the results of what is mentioned above. While he is dying from cancer, a retired police officer confesses to a chaplain his long-held guilt over allowing an innocent man to be framed and executed. He asks, “How can I even hope for forgiveness?” The chaplain replies, “I think sometimes it’s easier to feel guilty than forgiven.” “Which means what?” “That maybe your guilt over his death has become your reason for living. Maybe you need a new reason to go on.” “I don’t want to ‘go on,’” says the dying man. “Can’t you see that I am dying? The only thing that is holding me back is that I am afraid—I’m afraid of what comes next.” “What do you think that is?” the chaplain gently inquires. Growing impatient, the man answers, “You tell me. Is atonement possible? What does God want from me?” The chaplain replies, “I think it is up to each one of us to interpret from ourselves what God wants.” The man states as her in bewilderment, “So, people can do anything? They can rape, they can murder, they can steal—all in the name of God and it’s OK?” “?” Growing intense, the dialogue grows to its climax. “No,

that's not what I'm saying," the chaplain responds. "Then what are you saying? Because all I'm hearing is some New Age, God-is-love, have-it-your-way crap! . . . No, I don't have time for this now." "You don't understand," the chaplain counters. "No, you don't understand! . . . I want a real chaplain who believes in a real God and a real hell!" Missing the point of this man's struggle, the chaplain collects herself and says in a familiar tone, of condescension disguised as understanding, "I hear you're frustrated, but you need to ask yourself—" "No," the man interrupts, "I don't need to ask myself anything. I need answers and all of your questions and all your uncertainty are only making things worse." With no more to evaluate than his tone, she encourages calm. "I know you're upset," she begins, provoking his final outburst of frustration: "God, I need someone who will look me in the eye and tell me how to find forgiveness, because I am running out of time!" (*Christless Christianity*, by Michael Horton p. 37) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vhxURmVI0lQ>

We start to see the importance of understanding the distinctions of the left hand and right-hand kingdoms and the damage done when we don't. We need to know "our lane" what our particular calling is, and in what Kingdom it lands. This has real consequences for real souls and troubled consciences. Whether pastor or lay, speaking the word Christ has authorized us to speak on his behalf is the clear call before us one that this chaplain clearly missed and exchanged the treasure for something less in that moment. We know that each kingdom has a particular role, and they are of equal value in terms of how God is so loving the world, as he promised. What we have in the ER chaplain story is not only a kingdom confusion (right-hand vs left-hand), but it points us to another clear miss with two competing theologies.

As Saunders recounts in a number of ways, we start to see the damaging work of a theology of glory. It actually increases stress and anxiety, by promising you really can get up on those skis if you hang in there, climb higher, and try harder. This sets up the line between expectation and reality: disappointment. The degree of separation between expectation and reality is disappointment. The resulting disappointment is often what lies behind the doubt, despair, and desperation that we, and our parishioners face. The theology of glory is to be distinguished from the theology of cross when there is honesty about our reality (we are broken sinners until we die) and our expectation (John 15:5 - apart from Christ, we can do nothing).

Where does leave us? A new and true reality. . Christ alone. It is no longer I who live, but Christ in me. Our

hope and expectation and reality all align in that we are completely and always dependent of the all-sufficiency and power of Christ alone.

There are many implications, but just two examples worth noting, as it relates pastoral care and counseling. There is a big difference/distinction between the feeling of happiness vs joy, between an optimistic outlook and hope. Happiness and optimism are tied to our surroundings, what we see, sense, and feel. Joy and hope are tied ONLY to the promises of Jesus Christ regardless our surroundings, what we see, sense, and feel. And this takes us to the heart of this all, in my view, and where I would like to finally focus. And that is the all-sufficient and authoritative power of the word.

Going back to our ER chaplain story, and this shift from the term "pastoral care" to "pastoral counseling" and the ensuing move from a sense of "saving the soul" moved to "transforming the mind." I'm reminded of a young, naïve chaplain, namely me, who imagined that part of being a chaplain at a hospital might be declaring the forgiveness of sin to a patient in need of such a thing. Innocently reading through a verbatim in a group session, I noticed my supervisor getting agitated. At the end of my verbatim, he leaned across the table and literally got in my face and asked, "who do you think you are, a G\_\_ D\_\_ messiah? Needless to say, at 24, not really knowing what it meant to be a chaplain, a pastor or anything close, I was crushed. Fortunately, I had Forde and Nestingen to run to. It raises the pastoral care question still before us. Is this about the "care of soul" or the "transformation of the mind?" Is this all about freeing the conscience or self-empowerment/improvement? Is this about acceptance of sin or absolution of sin?

It seems to me that we always have to go back to our roots. Is the autonomous self (and along with that, our feelings and senses) the source of what is true? Or is the truth based on a person and promise and a Word that comes from outside of us? Perceptions and feelings and lies that start and end with the self can haunt us. This all relates to why Luther counsels to go against yourself, your own thinking (not to make friends with your shadow). It is why, in the one prayer he taught us, Jesus teaches us to pray against ourselves, our wills, our kingdoms. It is why what we most need comes from outside of ourselves, an external Word. It is why we, as pastors, must trust the Word to do its own work, accomplish the thing for which it is sent and not try to control what the Word does. For, it can draw and it can drive (Samaritan woman vs rich young ruler).

Advice, both in terms of preaching, but acceptance in

pastoral counseling and care: As pastors, placed before a neighbor, we need to be cognizant of what Word needs a place, a person, before whom to land, and there, go to work. There is no template or prediction of how the Word works, frees, accomplishes, heals. I am certainly not proposing some magical, easy fix. I am not saying to pastors or parishioners that somehow applying the Word will somehow make everything well. All of this is connected to the obvious piece of all of this, namely, prayer. Like the Word itself, prayer is a mysterious power that goes to work in ways unseen but promised. Why does Jesus command us to pray for things we can't know and results we can't predict and things we can't see? Because there is a promise here that faith receives. And just as praying to God for things God already knows we need, so also, praying with and for others puts us in relationship with that person, as well as will God. As with the Word that does not return empty, why would one not access this other mysterious, but promised, weapon and comfort, called prayer?

The mysterious power of what we bring as pastors must be connected to why Paul says, "I have decided to know nothing but Christ and him crucified." We need to contemplate what this means, as it relates to our topic. It does not mean that we minimize or lessen or dismiss the aforementioned left-hand kingdom matters relating to the pastoral care function with which I began. Referring to my brother, sometimes we can provide better pastoral care, have some empathy for the neighbor before us, by knowing root causes of whatever is troubling them.

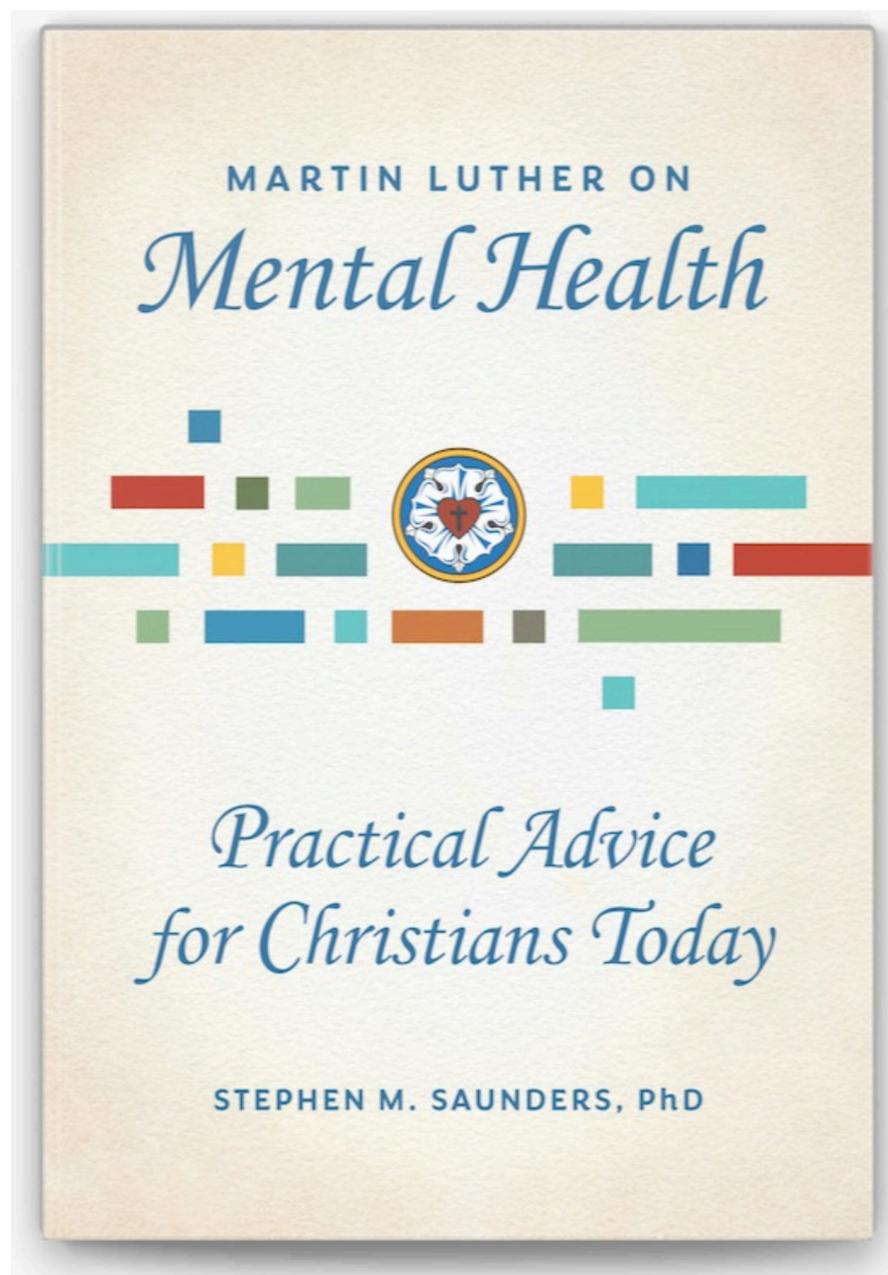
Sometimes there is value in naming our conquered foe and chasing the devil away with laughter and fun. (Remembering a story of a couple who came to Nestingen, marriage in shambles, little hope for anything, He laughed "Oh, isn't this wonderful! You are emptied! Now God can go to work and do something.")

Sometimes coping, being there, listening, silence, and waiting for the moment, this can be that "holding the person in readiness to hear the gospel," is the worthy pastoral care role. Sometimes we have to say the hard Word, even naming idols. But always as pastors, our lane, our primary role/goal, our calling is to lead with the Word. It is not some afterthought, "after" the main thing (e.g. counseling). It is the main thing. This about care of the soul, freeing the conscience. We are called to trust the truth of Isaiah 55 and how without it, we are sickly sheep.

But finally, there is one more thing. For all of us who are about this hard and wonderful pastoral work, for

who have blown it, failed, cowered, gone silent when you have the Word to share, didn't rely on the power of prayer and absolution, guilty of the sin of clerical pessimism, I have new image of God and a Word. Image of God? You know the guy at the end of the parade? Jesus rushes in and stands in your place to clean up behind you, even as He goes before you. The Word for you as pastors, who remain trapped in your own pit of doubt, despair, and desperation, the good Lord goes to the lowest points to meet you there (Psalm 139). You can't hide and don't need to. There is no place, no pit, not a thing you have done or failed to do that he will not go.

For all of us who suffer mental unhealth that spreads to others, family, friends, and parishioners, the good Lord knows about that well. And on account of the death and resurrection of our Lord, I am authorized to declare unto you the entire forgiveness of all your sins. For in the end, as is now, there is nothing in all creation that can separate you from the love of God in Jesus Christ our Lord. So, it is a new day, fresh start, clean slate, all things new, because nothing means nothing, neither doubt, despair, and desperation, nor death itself gets the last word only Christ, who lives in us. He always gets the last word in your life and in the lives of those to whom we minister. This is as true for you now, as we return to our ministries, as it is for the neighbor to whom God will direct you to next.



# PREACHING TO THE VIKINGS: A COMMEMORATION OF ST. ANSGAR

ISAIAH 62:1-7; PSALM 48; ROMANS 10:11-17; LUKE 24:44-53

| *REV. PAUL KOCH, PREACHING* |

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Yesterday, the church commemorated St. Ansgar, who died on February 3 in 865. Ansgar was Frankish, which means he was French before there was such a thing, and he eventually became a missionary to Denmark and Sweden, “the apostle of the North.” On his journey to Denmark, he accompanied the Danish King Harald, who was baptized while living in exile. Harald, the exile, hoped to regain the throne, and as a newly baptized Christian, and one who desired the support of Charlemagne’s son King Louis the Pious, Harald brought some monks along for the journey. Ansgar was one of those monks. Harald never realized his dreams of returning to the throne, but the monks who accompanied him did have some success in establishing churches in northern Germany and Scandinavia.

Ansgar was born in 801. The bishopric of Hamburg was established in 804 before Ansgar had learned to tie his boots. Ansgar would become the bishop of that young bishopric, and he made it a home base of missionary activity into Scandinavia. Ansgar was eager to bring the Gospel to the pagans. For some of the people in this room, those pagans were our great-grandparents who were worshiping gods like Odin and Thor and celebrating their highest of holy days with human sacrifice.

Ansgar’s travels were difficult, not only because the pagans rather liked their gods. Pagans can be stubborn about renouncing their idols. In this city, the descendants of those pagans, many of whom have been baptized and attend church, are still doing the Skol chant at their sporting matches and blowing Odin’s Gjallhorn, and they dream of the days when their team will go to Valhalla, which for Vikings fans means a long-awaited victory at the Super Bowl. If you’re a true follower, then you’ll know that we’re only steps from the original temple of this religion known as Met Stadium which has become the site of a new temple of commerce known as the Mall.

But for Ansgar, it was the real Vikings—the looting,

seafaring, pillaging kind—that actually attacked him on his travels and stole his money. By the time Ansgar arrived in Birka, he was penniless, but he had the support of local merchants who helped him build the very first church in all of Scandinavia. But consider this: in 845, Viking raiders attacked Hamburg and burned the city to the ground. Not only were the ecclesial buildings destroyed and their treasures stolen, but they lost their books, the written repositories of the church’s faith and history, and many of the Christian converts abandoned the faith. Ansgar continued working. He spent the final decades of his life rebuilding and restoring what had been lost, but by the time he died, the fruits of his labors proved to be fleeting. Much of Scandinavia relapsed into paganism. It would be centuries before the Gospel spread throughout the north countries.

We can be grateful that Scandinavian Christians still recognize Ansgar as a father of the church. The church’s history is not really one of unbroken continuity of institutions and their leaders. Luther was right, the Gospel is like a “passing shower of rain.” We should be grateful as long as we have it. And we should happily pay the salaries of those who have devoted their lives to it. It’s easy to say that in a room full of preachers, but it still needs to be said.

But thank God that we remember Ansgar, who can remind us that the truth and power of the word is not measured by the permanence of the institutions that it establishes. Maybe we should also thank God that he does not allow us to see the future and see how quickly our own projects will crumble after we’re gone. He calls us to be faithful and to preach to whoever has ears in our own generation. And yet for all that impermanence, why should we not also thank God for every soul in Denmark and Sweden who heard the good news of Jesus Christ from Ansgar and his coworkers? How tragic that their children and grandchildren renounced the faith and returned to paganism, but there is joy in the presence of angels over each sinner who repented, joy over each pagan whose sins were absolved in the name of Christ through the lips of Ansgar.

And thank God that the rain cloud of the Gospel did not pass away from Denmark and Sweden, never to return again! We've just sung "Built on a Rock," and we're about to sing another by Grundtvig, who is only one of the great hymnwriters of Denmark who sang the Gospel centuries after Ansgar's legacy was burned to the ground. The rain cloud did return.

The stories of the saints can be exhausting, with all their travels and the trials they suffered. We tend to be a little more sedentary, and preachers like Ansgar are inspiring on one hand, and yet burdensome if we compare ourselves to them. But Hermann Sasse was right, that the greatest trial we face is the lack of clarity in our call, not knowing what actually we're supposed to be doing.

If we're clear about that call, it won't make it easier. Isaiah announces in the sixty-second chapter, "You who remind the Lord, take no rest." Our voices are never supposed to go silent. Sometimes the phone call comes in the middle of the night that a parishioner needs prayers. Death does not avoid Mondays just because it's our day off. But even if Isaiah tells us preachers, "take no rest," he continues by saying, "and give him no rest." It is the Lord who is at work, the Lord who never rests. If you've been reading from that devotional book, *Day by Day We Magnify Thee*, then you just heard it yesterday, John 5:17, "My Father is still working, and I also am working." Luther says, "If God did not uphold and sustain us after he had made us, we should long since, yes, even in our birth and cradle, have perished and died."

The Father is still working, and so is the Son. We might get phone calls in the middle of the night or on Mondays, but it is the Lord who is ever at work. We're just the mouths through whom he speaks. We preach and absolve, but the Lord does what only he can do, standing behind those words, working faith and raising the dead. "Take no rest and give him no rest." You: see to it that repentance and forgiveness of sins is proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. All nations includes the town to which you've been called. You are not responsible for all nations. All nations means that no city is excluded. Your little town is your mission field.

"Take no rest and give him no rest until he establishes Jerusalem." Who's going to establish Jerusalem? He is, and by faith he has already done so for you. Our citizenship is in heaven. "No one who believes in him will be put to shame." By faith, you are a citizen of the heavenly and eternal Jerusalem, and you get to use the keys that open the doors of that city to your fellow sinners.

The Lord establishes Jerusalem by this proclamation of repentance and forgiveness, and he has called you to this task after he has already proclaimed these things to you. Your sin has been forgiven. You have been redeemed from worthless idols. His blood has taken your sin from you.

"Take no rest," and yet the Lord who calls you says, "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Even if the work never stops till you die, even if you get a phone call in the middle of the night or on your day off, he gives you rest, which is to say, he forgives your sins. Your labors will not be held against you.

Isaiah says, "Take no rest," but you can see in this chapter that Isaiah does not mean, "Take no days off" or "Don't go to sleep at night." He means, don't stop preaching. You can really see it here in the Septuagint: "Don't be silent," Isaiah says. In other words, "Take no rest" is a command for the pastor's mouth, not for the pastor's heart. Indeed, a Christian's heart should rest, rest in the forgiveness of Jesus Christ. Rest in the cross. Rest in the promise of the Holy Spirit that God establishes and sustains the church through the word that he's sent us to preach, the church in Denmark, here, in your parish, and around the world. Rest. God has placed your sin on his Son.

