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## PRESIDENT'S LETTER - APRIL 04

As we approach the end of another Lenten season, we are reminded that the cross of Christ is a stumbling block to natural man. After Peter confessed that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of the living God, Jesus told him and the other disciples of the necessity of going to Jerusalem to die at the cross. Peter could not accept this because he was thinking in man's terms instead of God's terms. The cross still remains a stumbling block to the Jew and foolishness to the Gentile. It does not make sense that God saved us from death by giving His only Son into death. It does not make sense that God made Jesus who knew no sin to be sin for us so that we might be made the righteousness of God in connection with Jesus. The Gospel is itself a PARADOX, an apparent contradiction.

We need to learn that God's ways are not our ways and God's thoughts are not our thoughts. The glorious ministry of reconciliation is also a paradox as highlighted in Paul's second letter to the Corinthians. There is a difference in the way God sees our ministry and the way in which the world views our ministry. This is the paradox of the ministry of reconciliation which has been committed to us. The apostle Paul lists seven paradoxes in connection with the Gospel ministry of reconciliation.

"We give no offense in anything, that our ministry may not be blamed. But in all things we commend ourselves as ministers of God: in much patience, in tribulations, in needs, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in sleeplessness, in fastings; by purity, by knowledge, by longsuffering, by kindness, by the Holy Spirit, by sincere love, by the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armor of righteousness on the right hand and on the left, by honor and dishonor, by evil report and good report; as deceivers, and yet true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold we live; as chastened, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things." -- 2 Corinthians 6:3-10

### **GENUINE, YET REGARDED AS IMPOSTORS:**

The Gospel seems too good to be true. The apostle Paul was accused of being one of those traveling preachers whose purpose was to fleece the flock. His ministry was regarded with deep suspicion by both the Jews and Gentiles. The apostle Peter also had to affirm that he was not spinning clever fables about Jesus and His glory. As faithful pastors we are genuine with a genuine message. The paradox is that while people swallow the hype of the TV evangelists, they regard the true preacher of the Gospel as an imposter. The world regards the faithful Lutheran pastor as an imposter even though he is a genuine preacher of God's word.

### **KNOWN, YET REGARDED AS UNKNOWN:**

The faithful pastor does not attract a lot of attention today. There are many who labor in small congregations and whose ministry does not seem very impressive. Most people in the South have never even heard of the Church of the Lutheran Confession. As ministers of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, you labor in obscurity. The paradox is that while the world doesn't know you, God knows you. God has chosen you as His child and called you into the public ministry. Jesus

knows your ministry, and Jesus, after all, is the One who will evaluate that ministry on the Last Day.

#### **DYING, AND YET WE LIVE ON:**

Man is constantly dying. Each day brings us one step closer to the grave. As an apostle of Jesus Christ, the apostle Paul' s life was constantly on the line. Paul was beaten and left for dead several times. The faithful pastor is willing to lose his own life for Christ' s sake. This paradox of human existence is due to the fact that there is a life after death. For even as we are dying, we live on. The blood of the martyrs became the lifeblood of the church.

#### **BEATEN AND YET NOT KILLED:**

The apostle Paul was arrested, beaten, and harassed simply because he preached the Gospel of Jesus Christ. To the world, being an ambassador of Christ does not seem like a desirable occupation. And yet the paradox of the Gospel is that even arrests and beatings cannot prevent the Gospel of Christ from being proclaimed. For even though we appear beaten down, yet we are not killed. Persecution and beatings cannot destroy Christ' s church.

#### **SORROWFUL, YET ALWAYS REJOICING:**

As Christian pastors, we sorrow because of the sins we have committed against God and His word. Every pastor feels deeply the sorrow of his sinfulness. Compounding this is the sorrow we feel for those who reject the Gospel of Christ. Yet the pastor is always rejoicing in Christ and his gospel. As pastors we possess the joy of the forgiveness of sins and everlasting life. Let us reflect that joy in our ministry of reconciliation.

#### **POOR, YET MAKING MANY RICH:**

The apostle may be referring to the spiritual poverty we bring to Christ as repentant sinners. It is also true that often pastors are perceived by the world as having nothing. Sometimes parents do not want their children to enter the public ministry because of the low salaries. The paradox of the public ministry is that while the pastor is perceived as poor, he is in effect, making many rich through the preaching of the Gospel. This is the blessed paradox of the Gospel ministry.

#### **HAVING NOTHING, AND YET POSSESSING EVERYTHING:**

Again in summary, the Christian and especially the preacher of the Gospel is viewed by the world as having nothing. But the paradox of the Gospel ministry is that in reality, we possess everything. The kingdom of God belongs to us. There is nothing that we lack as ambassadors of our king. There is no reason for a pastor to feel sorry for himself or feel that is giving up something. We are priests and kings through Jesus Christ. We possess life in a living Christ.

You as pastors may be burdened by young people turning away from their confession of faith within several years. You may be bothered by marriages of members which are coming apart at the seams. You may be discouraged because there is no "growth" in your congregation. Never divert your gaze from the cross of Christ. Instead rejoice in God's blessed ministry of reconciliation.

Living Lord of the church, when You ascended on high You gave gifts to men, including the gift of pastors and teachers, for the building up of the saints in order to equip them for the work of ministry of reconciliation. Our special prayer today is this: Grant that we may continue in our study of Holy Scripture and be devoted to the cross in which we have life. May nothing separate us from that divine love which prompted us to desire the high calling of shepherding souls. To this end bless the glorious ministry of reconciliation also in this hour in our church body and congregations. Amen.

He is risen! He is risen indeed!  
John Schierenbeck