

Nbr. 32 – March, 2021

Not Only *What* You Heard, but also *from Whom*

Last issue, I mentioned the “pandemic inactives,” whose attendance at church services has ceased or has been greatly curtailed since the pandemic started. In some cases, they are viewing their church’s services on the internet, yet they are not gathering together with fellow members of the body of Christ around Word and Sacrament.

Colossians 1:21-23: “And you who at one time were alienated and hostile in mind by evil works he has now reconciled in the body of his flesh through death to present you holy, unblemished, and blameless before him, if you remain founded and firm in the faith and not shifting from the hope of the Gospel *which you heard*, which was proclaimed to every creature under heaven. . . .” This translation is from the *Concordia Commentary* on Colossians by Paul Deterding, page 66.

Notice the italicized words in the quote above. “Which you heard” is an understandable translation. However, in this instance the Greek word for *hearing* has an object not in the accusative case (referring to the thing heard), but rather in the genitive case (indicating the person heard). So Dr. Deterding notes that “Paul here accents the significance of the ministry of the Word as the Colossians first experienced it in that ministry of Epaphras (1:7), carried out under the supervision of the apostle, as the means to that faith(fulness) necessary for reconciliation with God” (p. 71).

See? **WOW!** We can similarly point people to the importance of the Gospel hope as people have heard it *from a person*. It might not be too much even to say, “in person”!

The Book of Jeremiah: Overcoming Life’s Sorrows

. . . is the name of a Concordia Theological Seminary continuing education course set for June 21-23 at Trinity Lutheran Church, Decatur. The teacher for this course is Dr. R. Reed Lessing, professor of theology at Concordia University, St. Paul. He is author of several volumes in the *Concordia Commentary* series, including the soon-forthcoming volume on Jeremiah.

You need not be a pastor to attend. Teachers and laypeople are also welcome! Contact Pastor Matthew Verseemann at (217) 420-0586 or e-mail pastorverseemann@msn.com

The better we know God’s Word, the more we will speak it! How about that?

Central Ill. LLL Convention – Virtual Attendance

You can attend the CID LLL Convention on March 6th at Effingham via Zoom. Contact Deloris Blessman delorisblessman@yahoo.com or phone her at (309) 361-1461. She will send you a link.

Dr. Greg Seltz of the Lutheran Center for Religious Freedom will talk at 11:30 virtually from Washington D.C. Lutheran Hour Speaker Michael Zeigler will present at 1:30.

The LLL requests a free will donation from those who join by Zoom.

“Bringing Christ to the Neighbor”

. . . is a 10-session witness workshop from Concordia Seminary, St. Louis. It is available online at https://scholar.csl.edu/christ_to_neighbor.

Dr. Robert Kolb leads the workshop, which includes videos and an accompanying study guide. Unlike other evangelism materials, this resource includes brief case studies.



Worth considering:

Love, Locality and Hospitality

When Christianity faced a virulent threat from atheistic Communism during the Cold War, German theologian Helmut Thielicke urged that service to the neighbor was not to be omitted. A Christian who adamantly defended his Christian view yet lacked love might easily give the impression that he was interested solely in asserting himself and his Christian position. People could come to think that he did not really care about them and their eternal welfare. Thielicke cautioned against failing to love one's neighbor in this way.

These days, decades after Thielicke wrote, it remains true that personal relationships form a key bridge between church and world. If anything, such relationships stand out as more important than ever in post-Christian contexts. The Barna organization's *Better Together* research (funded by the Lutheran Laymen's League) shows how groups that organize around helpful causes tend to attract a variety of participants. Such groups can become settings where Christians can serve alongside of others and get to know them, even though they might live in communities that are homogeneous and inhabit a culture that becomes increasingly polarized. (I might add, thinking back to this column in the January *See? WOW!*, that these are situations where public concerns are not handled politically.)

Also, *within* many communities and neighborhoods, a sense of local responsibility is growing more pronounced. Here is a quote from the Barna study, which is applicable to churches: "you have a neighborhood, and place *matters*."

The COVID-19 pandemic has underscored this point. Christians and others have taken the

opportunity to get to know their neighbors all over again – including the elderly couple across the alley, the single mother down the street who works as a nurse, and the grocery store clerk who lives around the block – and help them. Some congregations have undertaken projects of mercy to show love and concern to neighbors who live in the immediate vicinity of the church building.

Missiologists of various stripes agree on the importance of practicing hospitality. One suggestion is that some churches encourage their members to try to converse with neighbors at least once a week and to share a meal with one at least once a month. A previous Barna/LLL report, *Households of Faith*, observed that spiritually vibrant households tended to be welcoming and hospitable toward those outside the household.

It is certainly biblical for Christians to act in such ways. "Do not forget to show hospitality," the letter to the Hebrews urges, "for this is how some entertained angels without even knowing it" (Hebrews 13:2).

St. Peter put it more generally. "I urge you, as aliens and refugees . . . Have good conduct among the Gentiles, in order that just when they are speaking against you as evildoers, as a result of observing your good works they may glorify God in the day of visitation" (1 Peter 2:11-12).

Your physical neighbors can observe you all the more closely when you go out of your way to relate to them. Then, as Peter famously went on, "Always be ready to answer anyone who asks you to explain the hope you have, but be gentle and respectful" (1 Peter 3:15).

-- Ken Schurb kschurb@cidlcms.org

