

Nbr. 48 – January, 2023

### **Real Greatness**

One of the Series A Gospel lessons for the Epiphany season quotes the famous words of John the Baptizer about Jesus: “Look! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). This lesson makes for a most helpful inner-biblical commentary on a recent Gospel lesson for Advent 3, where Jesus said of John: “I tell you the truth, there has never appeared among all of those born to women anyone greater than John the Baptizer. Yet the least in the Kingdom of heaven is greater than John” (Matthew 11:11).

So John is the greatest, greater than all the previous Old Testament prophets. Why? Because he could and did point, in the flesh, to the Lamb of God who takes away the world’s sin. For in the Kingdom of God, greatness always comes in relation to the crucified and risen Christ. John was therefore the greatest man of the Old Testament.

We are not necessarily surprised by this fact. But we may find ourselves pausing over what Jesus said about “the least in the Kingdom of heaven”: that such a one is greater still than John.

Think again, though, in terms of relation to Christ – to Who He is and what He did. John’s prophetic work all took place before Jesus died for us and rose again. Ever since, even the humblest Christian can talk about, as accomplished fact, what John could only predict.

*See?* **WOW!** Greatness in God’s kingdom is by relation to Christ the King. Jesus’ words about John rebuke our delusions of grandeur. They also strongly attest to the fulness of blessing that our Lord gives and that He blesses us to tell about.

### **Beyond the Classroom Information Session Sites**

Sessions will run from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. at the following Lutheran schools:

- February 4 or 11: Our Savior, Springfield
- February 18 or 25: St. James, Quincy
- April 1: St. John, Effingham
- April 22: Bethel, Morton
- May 6: St. John, Champaign

See the last *See?* **WOW!** issue (#47) for details.

### **New on CID Website**

In addition to adding two new Bible studies on cultural idols to CID’s website, as mentioned toward the end of the next page, we have also revamped the “Studies” page under “Resources.” It now lists several studies in various categories. You no longer have to scroll thru a description of each study before you can see the title of the next one: <http://www.cidlcms.org/resources-studies.html>

### **A few reminders . . .**

- *Small Church Summit*: register by Dec. 30 for this event on Sat., Jan. 7 (snow date is Jan. 14) at Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church, Farmersville. If your group wants to come as far as Springfield and spend Friday night here, let me know and I will try to arrange housing for you. See <http://www.cidlcms.org/news.html>
- *Prison Ministry Materials reimbursement*: Only a couple have taken us up on this. See <http://www.cidlcms.org/outreach-missions-prison.html>
- *Talk about Church Planting*, a great way to reach new people with the Gospel. See [www.cidlcms.org/outreach-church-planting.html](http://www.cidlcms.org/outreach-church-planting.html) for a brochure and a series of four short videos.



*Worth Considering:*

### **Preaching and Teaching on Cultural Idols**

In our sin, we Christians join others in entertaining idolatrous cultural assumptions and narratives. These cultural idols play roles in shaping the lives of people, yet they go unnoticed by the same people – again, Christians included. For these assumptions and narratives surround all of us like water surrounds a fish.

There is a need to show church members, perhaps especially new church members, various deep cultural assumptions that they have bought into, and to deal with these assumptions via God's Word. Such "hold-over" assumptions from the world often include idolatrous patterns of thought and behavior. These are certainly subjects for Christian doctrine or teaching. Yet they are not typically covered in conventional doctrinal instruction, at least not explicitly or extensively. For instance, people can go through catechetical instruction on Baptism, yet still not specifically see the conflict between Baptism's "I belong to Christ" and the "I belong to me" of Western autonomy.

As I have previously written in this newsletter (number 27 for Oct., 2020), during 2019 I surveyed CID pastors and asked them about such "hold-over" attitudes evidenced by new adult members of the churches they serve. The pastors identified the following "top five":

1. Above all, I want to be happy
2. I do not make time for spiritual disciplines
3. Meaning lies in me, not in what is outside of me
4. I am more interested in my rights than in my duties (TIE)

I am more interested in therapeutic advice than spiritual advice, say, from a pastor (TIE)

To assist preachers in addressing the first three of these, I composed a trilogy of articles

containing "sermon starter" ideas. These articles have all now appeared in *Concordia Pulpit*

*Resources:*

- "Confronting Idols by Lectionary Preaching, Part 1: A 'No Time for God's Word' Attitude," vol. 31 (Nov. 29, 2020-Feb. 14, 2021):10-14.
- "Confronting Idols by Lectionary Preaching, Part 2: An 'Above All, I Want to be Happy' Attitude," vol. 32 (Nov. 28, 2021-Feb. 27, 2022):9-13.
- "Confronting Idols by Lectionary Preaching, Part 3: A 'Meaning Lies within Me' Attitude," vol. 33 (Nov. 27, 2022-Feb. 19, 2023):10-14.

In addition, I did *Issues, etc.* interviews on the first two topics. The audio may be found at <https://issuesetc.org/?s=schurb+happiness> and <https://issuesetc.org/?s=schurb+time>

As for the two topics that tied for fourth place in the survey, CID now presents 2 four-session Bible studies, one study on each topic. The one on rights-over-duties was written by Pastor Jeffrey Teeple of Peace Lutheran Church, Angola, Indiana. The study on a preference for therapeutic-type advice was written by Pastor Philip Rigdon of St. John Lutheran Church, Kendallville, Indiana. These two Bible studies appear on the CID website with the permission of the authors, who wrote them initially for a Doctor of Ministry course that I taught at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne. These authors are happy to make their work available to congregations of the Central Illinois District.

Their two Bible studies can be useful for parish education efforts in general, but they might prove especially valuable in a congregation's efforts to incorporate new adult members. These studies may be found at <http://www.cidlcms.org/outreach-cultural-idols.html>

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**Circuit Witness and Outreach Workers**