

Nbr. 58 – February, 2024

### **Storming the Enemy's Gates:**

#### **Maybe More than What You Thought**

Jesus said: “. . . on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hades will not overpower it” (Matthew 16:18). Until fairly recently, I figured these words were saying that the assaults of Satan and his hordes would never defeat the church. Then someone noted for me that *gates* are not offensive weapons. They are defensive in nature. Jesus was saying that the church could go on the offensive against hell itself and win.

This happens, in effect, in evangelism. The Holy Spirit uses our witness to move people from the power of darkness to Christ's kingdom of light.

Still more recently, it has been pointed out that in Matthew 16:18 Jesus was in effect quoting Himself from the Old Testament. After the Angel of the Lord kept Abraham from killing Isaac, He spoke of Abraham's offspring (plural) being multiplied as grains of sand. Then He switched to the singular: “And your Offspring shall possess the gate of His enemies, and in your Offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed. . .” (Genesis 22:17-18).

The Christ takes possession of His enemies' gates, for in Him all the nations are blessed. He is the Second Adam Who died under the curse of sin, yet to Whom God in the resurrection says: Not guilty. There is a win for the whole world! Jesus gave His church the keys to open death and hades. He extends His kingdom and conquers hades and death when the Good News of His victory is told.

*See? WOW!* What a gift is exercised in evangelism! (Have a look at R. Reed Lessing and Andrew E. Steinmann, *The Messianic Message* (CPH, 2023), 46-47.)

### **Promoting *Every One His Witness***

About 20% of CID churches have used *Every One His Witness* (E1HW). So 80% have not.

E1HW is the Synod's prime tool these days for teaching personal, vocational evangelism. CID's Evangelism Commission is heavily encouraging its use in 2024. Please help spread the word.

Questions about E1HW? Let me know.

### **Questions of the Week Survey**

For a month and a half, the CID office has been sending to each church in the District questions of the week. Soon we will try to find out how the District is doing with these.

An electronic survey will go to all CID congregations in early February. There will be a 10-day response window, ending just before Lent.

This survey will help us to determine the effectiveness of the weekly questions. Especially are we interested in discovering how many church visitors they help you contact.

Please encourage congregations in your circuit to respond to this short survey. Thanks!

### **Weekday Noontime Lenten Services in Springfield**

Reminder: Trinity, Springfield will have services Monday-Friday, 12:15 to 12:40 p.m. They start on Ash Wednesday and end on Good Friday.

Members of our churches who work nearby are urged to attend, and bring others. Referrals will be made for nonchurched people who attend and wish to know about LCMS churches near them.

### **“Back page” item**

Our “Worth Considering” feature is part of a presentation I made last month to the Lutheran Concerns Association in Ft. Wayne. Thanks to LCA for permitting me to share these thoughts with you.



**Circuit Witness and Outreach Workers**

*Worth Considering:*

In making disciples, the church needs deliberately to go.

At the end of the Gospel according to St. Matthew, Jesus gave instructions to make disciples by baptizing and teaching. He said this to His disciples-now-apostles, and perhaps others too.

Every imperative has an implied subject. So here: you, plural, make disciples. Who is the “you?” Even if we have in view only the eleven (that is, the twelve minus Judas), here are two points to be considered. First, while these men were apostles, they were also representing the whole church, the whole New Testament people of God corresponding to the twelve tribes of Old Testament Israel. Jesus was speaking to the church, not just the apostles.

Second, Jesus followed His command with “Behold, I am with you all of the days until the end of the age.” Again, who is this *you*? This last sentence of Matthew forms a bookend with the first Messianic prophecy quoted in the book, in chapter 1, about Immanuel, which means “God with us.” Is it at all likely that now at the end of the book, with His atoning work accomplished, after His death and resurrection, that Jesus would be saying only “I am with you apostles” or even “I will be with the pastors”? No, Immanuel is God with us, with His church. He was telling His church to make disciples.

See Isaiah 40:9: *Zion* proclaims. No wonder the catechism says the church is the mother that begets and bears every Christian by God’s Word!

But let me also call your attention to a word in this text that we have not yet mentioned: go. This word is a participle in Greek, so some have thought it would be better translated: *as you are going*. If you are taking *as you are going* to mean *make*

*disciples whenever you can work it into the regular run of all the other things you do ordinarily*, then let me invite you to reconsider this matter.

People do think this way, it seems, including some pastors. In a survey in CID last year, a pastor said he speaks of Christ with those who are not his church’s members “when the opportunity arises,” that he has “no set time.” He reports spending only one hour a week directly bringing the Gospel to non-churched people. Another said he speaks of Christ with people outside his congregation “when the opportunity comes up.” He reports devoting an average of zero to one hour a week on this. If these are the numbers for pastors, one can only imagine how much less they might be for laypeople!

If the Greek word *poreuthentes* means “as you are going” in Matthew 28:19, this is the only instance in the entire book where it means that. When Jesus instructed the disciples of John the Baptizer to go and tell him what they saw and heard, he was not saying that they should get the message to John as the opportunity arose amid all their other activities. They were to go and tell John.

Jeff Gibbs explains that in Matthew the “go” in the expression “go and do something” basically doesn’t have a lot of force. These are participles of attendant circumstance which really do not add much. The real freight is carried by the following imperative, in this case, “make disciples of all nations.” Since the nations were not all present there in Galilee, some purposeful movement was required to reach them. So *poreuthentes* is best translated: go. Still today, wherever there are unbelievers, the church should deliberately go and make disciples of them, not just get to them as we can fit it in. — Ken Schurb [kschurb@cidlcms.org](mailto:kschurb@cidlcms.org)

