

Trinity Te Deum

The official newsletter for Trinity Lutheran Church

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Sunday School and Bible Study 9:15 AM – Divine Service 10:30 AM

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February 2015 – March 2015

Aids to Faith & Answers for Life

A Lent Sermon Series on
The 5th, and 6th Chief Parts of
Luther's Small Catechism
2014-2015

(Meat Lovers Welcomed!)

Having completed our study of the Fourth Chief Part of the Small Catechism, Baptism, we move on to the other two sacraments. The Fifth Chief Part deals with Private Confession and the Sixth with The Sacrament of the Altar. With this sermon series, I am trying to answer the questions I hear people commonly asking as opposed to ones in the past where I basically explained Luther's explanations.

I am grateful to the folks who make the effort to come out to these evening services. A pastor really has so very few opportunities to teach his people compared to the 24/7 download the world does in multimedia. Here at Trinity there are 3 hours and 15 minutes each week to learn. There is more when Adult Confirmation class is being conducted and less during Advent and Lent. The majority only take advantage of the 15 minute sermon each week. That is simply not enough to thrive, grow, and prosper in the Faith that is literally being bombarded daily. But that is on you not me. I will be asked on the Last Day what I have taught the sheep entrusted to my care. You will be asked what have you learned.

No one is saved by a certain level of knowledge. What saves

is Christ's pure life and atoning death. But Scripture does rail against Christians who can only handle the milk of Christianity and have not moved on to the meat. The series I do on the Catechism every Advent and Lent are meat you can sink your teeth into, so are the Bible classes I do throughout the year.

Why do you suppose if a doctor put us on a meatless diet, we would feel put upon, burdened, yet a self-imposed spiritual meatless diet is considered normal by most church-going Christians?

Ash Wed. Feb. 18 7:30 PM

Isn't Private Confession
Catholic?

Wednesday Feb. 25 7:30 PM

If I Don't Have to Why
Should I?

Wednesday Mar. 4 7:30 PM

Real Presence or Really
Absent?

Wednesday Mar. 11 7:30 PM

What about Communion in
other Churches?

Wednesday Mar. 18 7:30 PM

Who is Worthy to Receive
Communion?

Wednesday Mar. 25 7:30 PM

Why not Commune Every
one who wants to?

Marriage in a Godless Culture

West Point Circuit Presentation

October 26, 2014

Rev. Philip Hale

St. Paul, Bancroft; St. John, Lyons

Continued from previous newsletter

A Definition of Marriage

The Christian definition of marriage is simple: "The two shall become one flesh" [Mt. 19:5; Mk. 10:8], but it is in no way restricted to Christians. "Be fruitful and multiply" establish marriage as the foundation of human life. "The institution of the family is necessary to our very existence, basic to our culture, and critical to our happiness and well-being."

⁷ Family (as father, mother, and children) is the most natural unit of humanity in this world it is a work of the creative God who makes the two into one and causes them to multiply. Everyone participates in this work of God, because we must have children for the race to propagate. Governments can't raise children, so families are needed.

God creates all life, not just Christians. He makes us into two sexes, male and female, thereby indicating we were made for marriage. Everyone is created for this purpose, but it is not a law or rule one must obey. It is simply a fact of nature. In this natural order, "God is not so much a law-giver as a creator and ruler."⁸ He also impels us with procreative desires to the married state. "In normal persons the sex urge is bound to assert itself and it is not possible to escape its insistent call."⁹ After the fall into sin, not everyone must marry, though most should. "God did not create husband and wife. What he created was the sexual distinction in unity (man as male and female) which forms the larger background of marriage."¹⁰

While people consent to this union, they do not create it, God does. It is entirely God's creative work. He creates one out of two, and keeps them glued together as a single flesh. Although pagans can well enough see what marriage is about (since it is completely natural), they cannot see it as God's work. Christian marriage is no different from pagan, civil marriage. There is only one marriage, not two like for the Roman Church. Though, believers in Christ are to see the Author of marriage as God Himself. Society or "mother nature" did not create it, it is the reason God created man in two different forms. The teaching of the Small Catechism is to inform the Christian view of this natural order: "God has made me and all creatures; He has given me my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my members, my reason and all my senses, and still takes care of them." Marriage is as obvious as the body we have been given. We were made differently to operate as one, to have children, and to know one another in a life-long union. "Man and woman were created to become 'one flesh,' i.e., a unity effected by God Himself so that a permanent union would result."¹¹ Inseparable, but not identical, is the marital act. Sexual intercourse is intended by God Himself. There is nothing shameful about it or our bodies; we were designed by God for it. Without it there would be no babies, and God would have made a mistake with our bodies. But only in marriage is sexual desire used rightly. The young need to hear a positive view of God's creation. Don't be ashamed of what God made you for. Even inappropriate lust serves a purpose, because it leads to family.

None of us would be here without the specific marital act. Yet, even outside of marriage, it is marital in character. I Cor. 6:15-16 reads: "Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! Or do you not know that he who is joined to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For, as it is written, 'The two will become one flesh.'" Sexual intercourse unites male and female and is a type of marriage, though without public recognition it is defective and illegitimate. "Those who live together without being married, in fornication, consider marriage to be nothing as if it were something that occurs by happenstance" not God's Word.¹² They dishonor the estate God made, and therefore God Himself. Those living together in sin must be called to repentance, because there is no such thing as a private marriage. But physically God unites in this act between male and female. There is no "safe sex" it is always unitive, it joins and unites. It is God's own work to make two into one for life.

The world thinks of "safe sex" in terms of preventing children and sexually transmitting diseases, but it is always marital it unites two into one flesh. The same words are used of joining with a prostitute as with a wife: "the two will become one flesh." So, apart from intentions or a public commitment, a marriage union arises out of God's work, in conjugal union. There is no "safe sex," it is always a giving of the whole self, a uniting, a true knowing and revealing to another person. It is always a permanent decision. God makes it always a true marital act, even when it is

treated as meaningless gratification. Our young people must know that this is serious business.

Even "pre-marital sex" is a misnomer there is only marital sex that God always works through, whether intended by man or not. Even pagans realize sex should be something special and that it changes a relationship forever. 93% of respondents to one survey wished they had waited longer to consummate a non-marital relationship.¹³ Only those waiting until validly married will have no regret, because it is God's will for bodily union to be marital, part of his public estate. Those who do not will suffer and open themselves up to union with someone with no commitment. It harms the body and soul. Even a tawdry, one-night stand, then, entails a divorce physically it breaks asunder what God has joined. In the words of a song on the radio, which describes a fling with a girl who cheats on him: "And I wasn't looking for a promise commitment/ But it was never just fun and I thought you were different."¹⁴ Sex is bigger than us, which is why sexually "cheating" is still viewed as destructive today. It is actually adultery, People just don't know they have joined themselves previously. "You shall not commit adultery" applies to the unmarried too.

Only male and female can unite. This is a fact of nature. It is impossible for two of the same sex to become one. In electronics there are male and female cable ends. To make a connection opposites are required. This basic and obvious fact of nature is now obscured through an impractical way of thinking. Why? Because love is not about the body or how God made us.

Nowhere is sexual pleasure indicated as relevant to producing this one flesh union. This is shown in the conception of new life, God's own act, which requires neither great pleasure, nor desire for children. God works through means, in this case the body parts we cover in modesty. This makes accidental unions (and children) improbable. Sexual union is a sharing of our whole person. It is misused outside of marriage.

The bodily union of male and female is the one defining act of marriage. Not just as a continual activity, but in a single bodily union God joins two into one. "Adultery is therefore not a breach of contract, not personal harm inflicted upon the partner, not a formal violation of the law, but destruction of the divinely fashioned" one-flesh reality.¹⁵ Adultery is not an exception to the "no divorce rule," but the actual tearing of the one flesh into two and the physical joining to another in bodily union. To create a new one flesh bond, is to destroy the previous marital unity. Outside of adultery, the one flesh union is not broken even if intercourse becomes impossible. Adultery, the joining of one's body with another, destroys what God has created. Even a legal second "marriage" can be adultery in actuality. It is truly adultery, no matter what man or state may say, if the original marriage bond is still intact. The unity in marriage is all God's doing and only He has the authority to break the resulting unity by death.

The Greek word for join [kollao] speaks of God's uniting action. It means to glue or cement together.¹⁶ So, "mutual consent of the contracting parties must be the vital element."¹⁷ Not

that consent forms or keeps the union together, but it marks public entry into this institution. Consent to divorce does not break this union, in fact, it lasts until in death God breaks it or in the adulterous act man does. Jesus spoke of this reality: "Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and he who marries a woman divorced from her husband commits adultery" (Lk. 16:18). Marriage is an act of God, since He physically unites two bodies together. It is He who cements and holds together the one flesh unions of all people. Man is not given the authority to separate this work of the Lord. "What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate" (Mt. 19:6). Marriage is and will remain entirely the Lord's work, though He does it in such a hidden way that He does not get any credit from unbelievers. We are called to honor and uphold marriage as a holy way of life, even if we are single, and not accept cheap, degrading, dishonorable substitutes.

To be continued...

7: Gene Edward Veith Jr. and Mary J. Moerbe, *Family Vocation: God's Calling in Marriage, Parenting, and Childhood* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 15.

8: Werner Elert, *The Christian Ethos*, trans. Carl J. Schindler (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1957), 77.

9: Lenski, *Marriage in the Lutheran Church*, 107.

10: Geoffrey W. Bromiley, *God and Marriage* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 1.

11: *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, 4 vols., ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), III:264.

12: Martin Luther, *What is Marriage, Really?*, trans. Holger Sonntag, ed. Paul Strawn (Minneapolis: Lutheran Press, 2013), 41.

13 Browne, *Dating for Dummies*, 282.

14 Ed Sheeran, "Don't."

15 Elert, *The Christian Ethos*, 90.

16 Abbott-Smith, *A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament*, 3rd ed. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1956), 252.

17 Lenski, *Marriage in the Lutheran Church*, 236.

Recharging at the 2015 ACELC Conference

The last time I wrote one of these e-mail blasts, I called myself the "pet layman" of the ACELC Board of Directors. While that description remains frightfully accurate, my real job is to lecture mathematics at the University of Texas at Austin. Academia is a wonderfully interesting place, not just because of all the fascinating mathematics being discussed and created, but also because there are so many, very different sorts of people crowded into one small space. At any given moment on the 11th floor of Moore Hall there must be at least 10 different languages being spoken. We have people weighing 80 lbs, and people weighing over 300 lbs – all genders (there are a surprising number of these), all colors, all religions, all political bents, and every dietary variation imaginable. "Diversity" is one of our sacred cows. I enjoy interacting with my colleagues and students, and learning about their opinions, countries, and their perceptions of America, Texas and meat-eaters.

But, having said that, there are times I just want to seek out "my own kind." It takes extra effort to carry on a conversation with someone who doesn't speak English well. It takes extra effort to listen closely to a narrative and not try to interpret it through one's own world view. It takes extra effort to pay attention so that one does not give offense. And that extra effort is often tiring.

So it can be a great relief to retreat back home, where communication flows effortlessly, where I share a common context with others, and where I'm not so worried about making someone angry (...again...). I would guess that pastors, especially confessional pastors who may find themselves surrounded by pastors who are not-so-confessional, might have the same experience. After walking on eggshells at the circuit meetings and winks, it must be a relief to gather with other confessional pastors who have the same troubles, same opinions, same taste in beverages, etc.

Erblicken Sie: The annual ACELC conferences. What a delight it is to be able to travel to all the various host congregations and see The Familiar. There are the Church ladies, serving up coffee and homemade snacks (and sweetly not seeing all the crumbs and spills.) There's that one retired elder who knows where everything is and has a key to it. But mostly, here gather people who believe that to be Lutheran means to adhere to the Lutheran Confessions. They agree that "lay minister" is an oxymoron. They believe in Closed Communion. They dislike contemporary worship almost as much as I do. And the reports (the shockingly many reports) of faithful pastors being unBiblically removed, their families impoverished and their reputations tarnished (and, I suppose, their naive, youthful dreams crushed), hurt them as they hurt me. The theme of the 2015 ACELC Conference, February 10-12, is "Office of

the Holy Ministry Part II (The Unbiblical Removal of Pastors)." The Conference will be held at Holy Cross Lutheran in Kansas City, Missouri – and I, for one, am really looking forward to it. Like you, these reports of injustice gall me, and every time I hear one, I want to do something about it. Who do I have to write, bribe, punch, or tattle on to get this evil to stop spreading? As Lutherans, we should probably refrain from bribing and punching, and go with what we do best: Teaching and preaching (or "barking"), which is what the ACELC Conference is all about. I hope my presence at the conference adds, in a small way, to our collective voice when we publicly decry the unBiblical practices which seem rampant throughout the Missouri Synod.

And one thing I hope to see this year is many new faces. Kansas City should be a much more do-able drive for most than, say, Austin was in 2013. At least for those who don't live in Austin. We have a great program of speakers, and offer a healthy dose of *Gemütlichkeit* – and we would love to see you there with us. Details of the Conference can be found on the ACELC website. Come, join us, and get recharged!

Dr. Bart Goddard, ACELC
Board Member, Trinity Lutheran
Church Austin, Texas

P.S. If you haven't yet seen the new ACELC film, "If Not Now, When?" you can find it on our website under the "ACELC Film Project" link. There you will find the full film; parts I and II, broken down for easier viewing; as well as

six study guides on different parts of the film. You may also order DVDs (one copy or more) if you would like to have a copy that can be viewed without a computer or shared with your friends as a gift.

Closed versus Close

Posted on September 29, 2014 by Rev.
Paul R. Harris

I recently listened to an excellent presentation by a brother in the ministry on this topic. He gave it to his circuit. He went over the history of these two words and how they jumped from the Baptist to the Lutherans and how they once were considered synonymous now they are not. Close is used to save the conscience of the pastor practicing open Communion to the delight of his flesh and the satisfaction of his unfaithful people.

Probably shouldn't have broken there. The last sentence was mine not the brother's. This next paragraph is neither but it was presented by the brother to his circuit. "Accordingly Christians should not deal with any manifest sinner, with any despiser of the Christian congregation, with anyone who would not submit to discipline, or with any unbeliever or false believer as if they stood in brotherly faith fellowship with him. Here every preacher has the precise instructions that God's Word gives him about the administration of the Sacrament. It is obvious that all those with whom Christians cannot maintain any brotherly faith fellowship, should also, according to God's Word, not be admitted to the reception of the Sacrament, by which the most inward brotherly faith fellowship is established and expressed. What are those preachers doing who admit anyone without distinction? They are

proving that they are unfaithful, frivolous stewards over God's mysteries. They are interfering with God the Lord in His office and setting themselves up as lords over His holy Sacrament, when they should be its ministers. If they do not come to their senses in time, woe to them forever and eternally!" This statement is from C. F. W. Walther in his *Pastoral Theology* (Drickamer Translation, p. 114)

That stirred those who were listening to the presentation. They couldn't believe Walther really said that. But he did. Maybe words like that will shake our synod out of the theologically complacency that says closed, close, potato, potahto, meh? As diverse sources as Edward Gibbon who writes of Christian history with a sneer and Herman Sasse who is a favorite theologian of the current LCMS president say differently.

First the sneerer: Arians would confess the Son was different from all other creatures but they denied he was either of the same or a similar substance as God. The divide was between Homoousians and Homoiousians. "As it frequently happens that the sounds and characters which approach the nearest to each other accidentally represent the most opposite ideas" (*Decline and Fall of Roman Empire*, 330). Here Gibbon isn't sneering but keenly observing what we pretend not to see. There is a huge difference now expressed in the words close and closed when it comes to Communion.

Second, President Harrison's favorite theologian: The Reformed say the controversy between Lutherans and them in regard to the Lord's Supper is about the mode of presence not the presence itself. It's about

how the body and blood are present. That they are present everyone agrees according to Reformed theologians. "To this, the old orthodox theologians countered that in this way any doctrinal question could be easily set aside. One could say that between the Arians and the Nicaeans there was complete unity regarding the biblical statement 'God was in Christ,' they just could not agree on the how of this presence" (Sasse, *The Lonely Way*, II, 88). Today the open Communion crowd says there is complete unity regarding the synodical statement "We practice closed Communion;" we just can't agree on how to practice it.

Concede this point and the whole discussion changes as it did with the Arians and the Reformed centuries ago. As the Arians wanted to pretend they were not saying something different than the orthodox and the Reformed wanted to pretend the debate was over how not what, so now the open Communion crowd wants to talk about "responsible pastoral care" and "emergencies." And as the Arians and the Reformed said so say defenders of open Communion: We are quibbling about words, semantics, logomania.

In a Synod that claims to still believe "By the Word of the Lord the heavens were made, " and "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us," we better be willing to quibble about words if there is any doubt about whether we are really saying the same things as Paul urges us to in I Corinthians 1:10.

You can say potato and I can say potahto; you can say Caia-phas and I CaIaphas; you can even say close and I can say closed. We just can't pretend

that we're really saying the same thing when we know we're not. If we do, we will make no strides in the direction of *koinonia*. We will, however, make leaps and bounds toward hypocrisy and judgment.

Is God Trying to Tell Us Something?

By Rev. Todd Wilken

There is always the temptation to interpret today's headlines as messages from God. How often in the weeks following the terrorist attacks on September 11 have you heard a Christian say something like, "God must be trying to tell us something." Such statements are usually followed by that Christian's opinion of exactly what God is trying to tell us.

God Himself tells us in Isaiah, chapter 55: "My word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it." God never tries to tell us anything. If God wants to say something, He says it. And if God says something, it gets said.

Do we always hear and understand what God says? No. And that is precisely why God does not speak through headlines; God speaks through Scripture. Headlines change every day. Scripture never changes.

When Christians scour the headlines, the TV news, their own imaginations or their dreams and visions for divine communication, they are looking for God in all the wrong places. Could God communicate with us through such means? Of course He could. The question is never what God can or can't do. God can do anything He likes. The

issue isn't what God can do, the issue is what God has promised to do.

When Christian scour the headlines, the TV news, their own imaginations, their dreams or visions for divine communication, what they end up doing is making Scripture fit the headlines, their own imagination or dreams. This is completely backward. Paul says, we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ, not the other way around.

The other thing they end up doing is writing new chapters of Scriptures with every new headline or vision. After all, if it's genuine communication from God, doesn't that make it God's Word too?

One of the hardest things for Christians to believe today is that God has already said everything He has to say. God has literally uttered His final Word in Jesus Christ. He has nothing more to say. With the closing words of the New Testament God has said everything He has to say.

If Christians want to know what God is "trying" to say then they ought to look to what God has already said in His Holy Word. Any alleged divine communication outside Scripture is suspect and to be ignored.

The most glaring recent example of "God must be trying to tell us something" are the words of the Rev. Jerry Falwell. The Rev. Falwell appeared on The 700 Club days after the terrorist attacks in New York, Virginia and Pennsylvania and said:

"The abortionists have got to bear some burden for this because God will not be mocked. And when we destroy 40 million little innocent babies, we make God mad. I really believe that the pagans, and the abortionists, and the feminists, and the gays and

the lesbians who are actively trying to make that an alternative lifestyle, the ACLU, People for the American Way — all of them who have tried to secularize America — I point the finger in their face and say, 'You helped this happen.' "

The problem here is that, as political rhetoric, Falwell's words are golden. He leaps at a prime political opportunity, he names names, he resonates with all the right interest groups. But, as theological formulation, Falwell's words are garbage.

Now, there is always the temptation to see tragic events like this as God's judgment on a specific nation, people or society. Those on the right are saying its judgment for abortion, homosexuality, and general secularism. Those on the left are saying its judgment for capitalism and the military-industrial complex.

For those who will assert that the events of September 11 were God's judgment specifically on the American nation. How specific are you willing to be? If it was specific to America as a nation, was it even more specific than that? Was it as specific as the state of New York or the District of Columbia or the countryside of Pennsylvania? New York City? Lower Manhattan? The blocks immediately surrounding the World Trade Towers?

You see, you can make it as specific as you want, and what is there to stop you? It is nothing more than spin and speculation. Why? Because there is no certain Word of God on the what happened on September 11.

The impulse to use this tragedy for our own agenda is strong. But we must resist it. The terrorists who did this thing were trying to make their own point. Do we want to follow in their footsteps

and use this tragedy to make our point too?

If we do this, How are we really any different than the terrorists themselves? And haven't we really outdone the terrorists in cowardice? At least the terrorists had the conviction — as wicked as it was — to actually do something to make their point. We, on the other hand, wait for someone like them to carry out these heinous acts, and then claim them for our own agenda. It actually disgusts you when you think about it.

Were the events of Tuesday, Sept 11 God's judgment? Yes, but not in the sense that most prominent evangelicals are claiming. Every tragedy and trouble, big and small, which God permits in this sinful world signals and warns of His final judgment to come. Jesus tells us to observe them as continuous signs and warnings to all men: "Now there were some present at that time who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. Jesus answered, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish. Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them — do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish"(Luke 13:1-5), All these things are permitted in order to call us to repent and seek his mercy in Jesus.

The simple message is clear to all of us, not just to the abortionist, the homosexuals, the ACLU, The People for the American Way. The message is not found in the headlines or in the spin and

speculation of Jerry Falwell. The message is found right there in Jesus' own words: Repent.

We didn't need a terrorist attack to communicate that message to us. It's right there in the Bible.

God permitted man's sin and its consequences to run their deadly course for a few hours on Tuesday, September 11. We need to remember that it is only because of God's merciful protection that such things don't happen more often. If God did not constantly curb and turn aside the schemes of sinful people like us, every day would be like that dark Tuesday.

There is another message that is clear in Scripture. And you'll never find it in the headlines. It is the message that always follows the message of repentance. It is the message of forgiveness for Jesus' sake.

That message of forgiveness seems conspicuously absent from the Rev. Falwell's words. I know he knows it, but he doesn't say it. He seems to imply that if the abortionists, the homosexuals, the ACLU and The People for the American Way would just stop their sins, God would stop the terrorist attacks. But isn't there more to God's Word than that? "He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). Doesn't God make it clear in Scripture that His patience is designed to bring us to repentance and to faith in Jesus Christ? God our Savior wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. "For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men — the testimony given in its proper time" (1 Timothy 2:3-6).

Doesn't all men include the abortionists, the homosexuals, the ACLU and The People for the American Way? Yes, it most certainly does.

This is what is so often missing when we see such great tragedies and conclude, "God must be trying to tell us something." That "something" so seldom includes God's call for us ALL to repent and trust the saving work of Jesus.

But it is just that message of repentance and forgiveness in Jesus that God is always telling us, through His Word.

Issues, Etc. Journal, Vol. 1, No. 3, pp. 15-17

Is There an Imperative to Grow?

Posted on [July 14, 2014](#) by [Rev. Paul R. Harris](#)

The sainted Reverend Father Rudolph Kurz once wrote a paper saying that there is no command in Scripture for the church to grow in numbers. He went through every passage of Scripture referencing the church to prove his point. That point was lost on the then burgeoning church growth movement. It shouldn't be lost on us. We now see to what lengths, to what depths, to what shame — clown ministry, polka worship, silly string in the Divine Service — pastors and congregations are willing to go to in service to the cause of growing. The theological imperative is "grow in numbers, somehow, some way" rather than "preach the Word in season and out." I have no doubt that humans can grow a human organization but only God can grow a Church and He doesn't do it by any means possible but only by the Means of Grace.

Calvinist with their emphasis on predestination, sadly and unbiblically dual in nature, see this more clearly than we do. John W. Robbins writes in the foreword to Gordon Clark's *Today's Evangelism: Counterfeit or genuine?* "One of the sins for which Christ condemned the scribes and Pharisees — the religious leaders of his day — was their dynamic evangelistic program. 'Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel land and sea to win one proselyte, and when he is won, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves'" (v).

Robbins goes on to observe that whether it's synagogue growth or church growth the making of converts is not enough. The question is: to what are people being converted to? I have always said what you win people with is what you win them to. You win them with programs, service to others, good feelings, community, your ebullient personality, etc. and that is what you have won them to. In a most startling way Robbins points out the danger and even destructiveness of having growth in numbers as your goal. "Growth, as a goal, is the ideology of the cancer cell" (vi). He says that the concern and focus of Christian evangelism is not growth but truth.

Conservative columnist George Will wrote an op-ed piece for Christmas ("The Happiest Holiday," *The Washington Post*, 24 December 1998, p. A17). In the column he referenced a late 19th century British skeptic who said these three words should be engraved above all church doors: "Important if true." He then went on to quote at length English poet-laureate John Betjeman's poem "God was

Man in Palestine.” The poem ends with this verse:

*No love that in a family dwells,
No caroling in frosty air,
Nor all the steeple-shaking bells
Can with this single Truth compare -
That God was man in Palestine
And lives today in Bread and Wine.*

And then Will closes with “Important – very important – if true.” If it’s not true, it’s not important. We who are servants not of a truth but the Truth must lead with and emphasize most that we have the Truth that redeems, saves, empowers, and satisfies.

Because we live in the age of the skeptic, we are tempted to take our culture on from the “if” standpoint, precisely where the British skeptic invited his century to do battle with Christianity. We are moved to rise to the challenge: “Prove to me what you’re saying is true and I will concede it is important.” Apologetics does address the proofs that show Christianity is not unreasonable and is based in history, but this is a scholarly undertaking. So what the church at-large has done is to start with what everyone considers important: family, serving others, and even entertainment. Putting the best construction on this, these Christians hope to go from the things everyone will admit are important to the one thing needful: the Truth.

Neither the apostolic ministry nor Church proceeded this way. They started with the Truth that is so big, so important that it could be simply proclaimed. Paul was not ashamed to proclaim the Gospel to the biggest skeptics, most important philosophers, and greatest thinkers of his day.

Ah but the results were rather poor in Acts 17. The numbers just weren’t there. That didn’t stop Paul from moving on to Corinth in Acts 18 with the same message, but evidently even Paul got discouraged because the Lord said to him one night, “Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city.” The Lord had many people in that city, and the Gospel preaching of Paul would reveal them.

“Grow, grow, grow” is the imperative of cancer. Keep on preaching, keep on teaching, keep on sowing is the imperative of Truth.

Risk and Litigation Home of the Unbrave

Jan 5th 2015, 22:30
BY W.W. | CHATTANOOGA
Timekeeper

THE ominously named "Winter Storm Gorgon" is set to dump scads of the white stuff across a broad swathe of America, from the Rockies to the Poconos. Law-abiding families mustn't rush to break out the toboggans, however, for there is a trend afoot to outlaw sledding: F]aced with the potential bill from sledding injuries, some cities have opted to close hills rather than risk large liability claims.No one tracks how many cities have banned or limited sledding, but the list grows every year. One of the latest is in Dubuque, Iowa, where the City Council is moving ahead with a plan to ban sledding in all but two of its 50 parks."We have all kinds of parks that have hills on them," said Marie Ware, Dubu-

que's leisure services manager. "We can't manage the risk at all of those places." Other wholesome locales, such as Des Moines, Iowa and Lincoln, Nebraska have also restricted sledding to certain hills posted with sled-at-your-own-risk warnings. This crackdown on unregulated sledding seems of a piece with the recent American tendency to curb marginally perilous childhood pleasures, such as tricycling without body armour or venturing alone into the back garden without a Mossad-trained security detail. Restrictions on sledding, which often takes place on municipal lands, at least have an apparently clear public basis: fear of city-budget sapping lawsuits. In particular, Dubuque's attorneys cite the precedent of seven- and eight-figure payouts in lawsuits in Boone, Iowa and Omaha, Nebraska. American litigiousness, it would seem, is at war with the childhood fun of rushing headlong and out-of-control down a snow-covered hillside.

Several years ago my colleague, striking a similar note, lamented that liability concerns are taking the fun out of American public swimming holes and playgrounds, and endorsed the somewhat saner balance of risk and regulations he enjoys as a resident of the Netherlands. In response, Kevin Drum of Mother Jones drew up a broad-brush list of differences between American and European legal systems, which would seemingly account for why Americans are suing themselves into a society of guardrail-happy worry-warts. For exam-

ple, most European countries try such civil cases before judges, and force losers to pay for the other side's costs. In America, however, cases are tried before a jury (which tend to be more likely to award damages), and there is no "loser pay" rule. European countries also tend to have more rules regulating business, and better enforcement of those rules, Mr Drum argued, whereas America prefers litigation to enforcement.

All this seems to help explain the putative difference between America and its European peers. But does this difference really exist? According to a study by Mark Ramseyer of Harvard Law School and Eric B. Rasmusen at Indiana University's Kelley School of Business, "Americans do not file an unusually high number of law suits. They do not employ large numbers of judges or lawyers. They do not pay more than people in comparable countries to enforce contracts. And they do not pay unusually high prices for insurance against routine torts". Indeed, the country's approach to most legal cases is unexceptional, the paper's authors argue. But occasionally there are cases in which someone or a group of people are awarded an unholy sum, and

this is where the country and its courts get its grim reputation. These cases may be surprisingly rare, but the very threat of them spurs all sorts of meddlesome and unproductive efforts at protection.

Perhaps this is not as surprising as it may seem. Americans are not so much unusually litigious as unusually fearful, and this fearfulness extends to the prospect of lawsuits. The occasional jaw-dropping award in a personal injury or class-action lawsuit creates, like the occasional terrorist attack, a salient sense of pervasive danger. It's not that Dubuque or Des Moines suddenly faces a new and extraordinary risk of getting sued into oblivion. It's just that the risk, as small as it is, now looms larger in the imagination, becoming too great for the no-longer-bold American spirit to bear. Shutting down sledding hills is inspired by the same sort of simpering caution that keeps Americans shoeless in airport security lines and, closer to home, keeps parents from letting their kids walk a few blocks to school alone, despite the fact that America today is as safe as the longed-for "Leave It to Beaver" golden age.

As an American (and Iowan!) I find this sort of flinching risk-aversion profoundly embarrassing. We might like to locate the blame for things like sledding bans somewhere out there in the unruly tort system (and indeed Messrs Ramseyer and Rasmusen do), but we must face the possibility that the blame also lies within. Perhaps it's better to be safe than sorry, but one wonders whether we won't become sorry to have made such a fetish of staying safe. In much the same way that dominant firms, jealous of market share, tend to become over-cautious and lose their edge, America the weak-kneed hegemon risks losing the can-do, risk-taking, innovative pioneer spirit that made it the world's dominant economic and military power. Is it worth devoting so much zeal to protecting America's young minds from brain damage if the finest among them wind up too conservative to seek anything but a sure paycheck? If Americans need something to fear, it should be that by continuing to inspire this surfeit of heedfulness in generation after generation, America risks heading downhill, and not in the fun way.

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February 2015

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT
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1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Adult Class 12:30 PM	Confirmation 5:00 PM	Trustees Meeting 6:30 PM	Bible Stories: 10 AM Choir: 6:15 PM Colossians: 7:15			
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
Adult Class 12:30 PM	NO Confirmation ←-----	Pastor at ACELC conf.	NO Bible Classes Choir: 6:15 PM -----→			
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
Adult Class 12:30 PM	Confirmation 5:00 PM		Ash Wednes- day Communion 7:30pm			
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
Adult Class 12:30 PM	Confirmation 5:00 PM					

March 2015

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Adult Class 12:30 PM	Confirmation 5:00 PM	Trustees Meeting: 6:30 PM	Lenten Vespers 7:30pm			
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
Adult Class 12:30 PM	Confirmation 5:00 PM	Voters Meeting: 7:00 PM	Lenten Vespers 7:30pm			
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
NO Adult Class ←-----	NO Confirmation Camp Out	-----→	Lenten Vespers 7:30pm			
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
Adult Class 12:30 PM	Confirmation 5:00 PM	Elders Meeting: 7:00 PM	Lenten Vespers 7:30pm			
29	30	31				
Adult Class 12:30 PM	Confirmation 5:00 PM					