

Dear Saints,

I have a challenge for us this summer. If you do not have your beach body for this summer, you probably will not have it this year. But you do not need a beach body to participate in our challenge. Briefly, I want us to do two things: 1) Talk to someone new about Jesus, and 2) Invite someone to church. Let me explain why.

The church primarily grows through word of mouth. Sometimes the internet plays a role like the yellow pages did in the past, but the church has always spread first and foremost through Christians confessing Christ and His Word. Now it is true that preaching is the primary means the church employs to proclaim and teach the Word of God, and I take that responsibility seriously, but we have a good Biblical basis for why all Christians should confess Christ. Jesus says to all His disciples, “Whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven.” (Matthew 10:32, NKJV) Whenever Christ is confessed, the Holy Spirit is active and working on men’s hearts. Some might repent and believe the Gospel. Many will not. Our responsibility is not to save souls, but to confess Christ and let the Holy Spirit work!

Furthermore, Peter says to all Christians, “Always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear.” (1 Peter 3:15, NKJV) Christians have a living hope that should be evident to those around us. And when it is noticed, you have an opportunity to talk about Jesus. And the Holy Spirit will do His work whenever you talk about Jesus. Again, some might repent and believe in Jesus.

What about the method of having babies to grow the church? This is also an historic way to grow the church. As parents raise their children in the fear and admonition of the Lord, the Holy Spirit works on them to create faith in Jesus. And how do you raise your children in the Faith? By reading Bible stories to them and telling them about Jesus. Of course, taking them to the Divine Service is also necessary, but you do not invite your kids, it is just something you foster in them. And God willing, they will make the Faith their own and raise their own little Christians.

Unfortunately, I know the pain of having a child who has left the Faith. All we can do is keep them in our prayers and confess Christ to them as we have opportunity. We trust that God, the Holy Spirit, will continue to work on them to create repentance and awaken faith.

Some of you already do a great job of this. I know that you will continue to do a great job of confessing Christ. But if you are like me, you struggle to confess Christ. (I do not always wear clericals, and I admit it is easier for me when I do because people expect me to talk about Jesus.) For many of us, it is not easy to talk about Jesus and your Faith with acquaintances and strangers. There is a couple of things we can do to help.

First, know your Small Catechism better. The better you know it, the easier it is to confess it to others. After this, you can add helpful verses to your memory, and you are even more prepared to share them with others! (Romans 3:23 and Ephesians 2:8-10 come to mind!)

Second, you can bolster your speech with “God be praised!” and “Lord, have mercy!” Luther teaches in the 2nd Commandment of the Large Catechism that we should teach these phrases to our children. When something wonderful happens, we can say, “God be praised!” When something bad happens, we can exclaim, “Lord, have mercy!” When these become second nature, people will notice! And if it is good for children to do, it is also good for us.

Third, start with someone you know well and trust. Like everything else in life, as you practice a particular behavior, you get better at it. And it gets easier.

Again, our challenge this summer is to tell someone about Jesus and to invite someone to church. It may or may not be the same person. Maybe no one will be added to Grace. But maybe God will add a family or two to our church family. It is sometimes easy to forget that the Holy Spirit works when and where He wills. Either way, nothing bad can come from confessing Christ. And at the end of the day, we are called to be faithful. God will bless us in His perfect timing.

So, what about closed communion? I know that is an incredibly awkward discussion. We are being faithful by practicing this difficult and historical practice of the church, but that does not make it any easier. I recommend not leading with Closed Communion. I also recommend expressing it in gentler terms. Something like this: “Hey, we believe that the Lord’s Supper is Jesus’ true body and true blood. It’s a really big deal for us here at Grace. Would you do me a favor and abstain from the Lord’s Supper right now? We would love to have you as part of our Grace family, but we want to allow you the time and space to decide if you want to join us. Our pastor can answer your questions. I know he would love to talk to you.” I believe that would come across more gently, but I could be naive. Maybe you have a better way to say it. I would love to hear it, if you do.

And finally, be yourself. You do not need to become like someone else to share Jesus. Use your own words. Be yourself. God will use you as you are!

Let us make this summer the summer of confessing Christ. And let us see how our Lord will bless us. He most certainly will.

In Christ,
Pastor Maggard