

“Warning for Salvation”

In a recent YouTube video, an LCMS pastor posed the question – “Will the LCMS be gone by 2041?” As you can imagine, that question grabbed the attention of many – and ultimately, his answer to the question was NO, the LCMS will not be gone in a mere 18 years --- but, his presentation certainly is a warning to us and to all Christians.

He used various statistics and surveys which show a dramatic decline of those in the United States that claim to be Christians – as well as an alarming decline in membership, baptisms, and worship attendance among Lutherans. And the projections show an even bleaker future.

These statistics are partially because of demographics. Our population is growing older – and it is expected that the number of births will not keep up with the number of deaths. Some of this decline is because of the number of baptized children who leave the church before they are even confirmed. And as mentioned earlier, more and more people have chosen to have nothing to do with the church.

What I present to you today is that this issue is not primarily a matter of demographics or membership numbers – but a matter of failing to preach and speak God’s Word to others. Or, to use the language from Ezekiel 33 – we have failed to warn sinners to turn from their ways.

One of the primary duties given to prophets and pastors and all Christians – is to hear the Word of the Lord – and warn those entrusted to their care to turn from their sinful ways. So, why do we fail to warn our fellow man by speaking God’s Word to them?

One reason is that we do not take sin seriously. God says that sin is deadly, but do we believe that? If God would strike down everyone who took His name in vain with a lightning bolt – we might think, and believe, and live otherwise.

We mistake God’s patience with sinners with the thought that He is not really serious when He threatens to punish the evildoer. We take His grace for granted. We make Him out to be some sort of smiling grandfather who simply smiles at his grandchildren.

God's Word says that sexual immorality is a sin – but where are the warnings? As pastor, and fathers, and Christians – why don't we warn those who are having sexual relationships outside of marriage – loving them enough to tell them that their way is not good, that it is sinful, that it is deadly?

We cannot overlook the destructive nature of such sin. Rampant promiscuity has had devastating effects upon individuals, marriages and families. More and more children are growing up in a “fatherless” home – even though they have a father.

HIV, which largely results from homosexual activity and injecting drugs, has become such a part of our society that treatments for HIV are advertised regularly on TV and no one hardly notices (or cares).

In an environment where very few sound the warning, we have sacrificed our children to an ideology that coerces young people to chose their own identity. This is harmful. It is contrary to nature, to God's creation. Where is the warning?

Not only do we deny the deadliness of sin, we also despise the “little ones” – seeing others as insignificant – like just one sheep among many, not worthy of our time and effort. Literal “little ones” in the womb are put to death through abortion – but the outcry is “little” in comparison to the acceptance.

It's easy to simply go along with the lies that speak of these “little ones” as a “mass of tissue” or as “unwanted” ones – even though they are created by God, and one for whom Christ shed His blood for their salvation.

It's easy to circle the wagons and think only about ourselves, our families – and not love and warn others who are in danger. And when these sins strike close to home – you'd think the warning would be sounded loud and clear – but all too often it is met with silence.

And that leads me to another reason why we don't warn others – because we are afraid of dying. Synod's are afraid of dying a numerical death, and so the focus turns to encouraging families to have more children and congregations to do more evangelizing – rather than calling out the sin that causes death.

Congregations are afraid of shrinking numbers – both in attendance, and in offerings – and so they eliminate the duty to warn, and focus on being warm and inviting. Pastors fear being thrown out for boldly sounding the alarm – and so they tailor their preaching so that it fits what their hearers want to hear.

Fathers are afraid to speak up about the sins of their family members – afraid that marriage and family relationships will be put to death.

Dearly beloved, it's true – God is patient and gracious – but He does not smile at our sin. Failure to hear God's Word, and to warn others, leads to their blood on our hands – to a church that acclimates itself to society, instead of holding firmly in faith to her Lord – to sinners who continue to despise God's Word, and whose sin drags them to the depths of hell.

All sin is serious, and deadly. Repent of your failure to warn those entrusted to your care – fearing others more than you fear, love, and trust in God Himself.

Hear the Word of the Lord who does not despise the “little ones” – who does not turn His back on you, but is gracious and merciful. Because His desire is that all would be saved – His Son leaves the heavenly flock, to seek and to save the lost.

Today He comes here to save you – by warning you, repenting you, and graciously forgiving the sins of all who look to Him for mercy. Jesus is the Good Shepherd who puts you, His lost “little one” on His shoulder, and carries you home.

The blood of our sin He gladly took into His own hands – and stretched them out to deliver you from God's wrath at sin. In the death of Jesus, you see the seriousness of sin – but you also see how serious God is about your salvation.

Hear the Word of the Lord – repent and believe. The Lord has loosed your sins by His forgiveness. You are set free – here on earth, and also in heaven. That is why He comes to dwell with you today – where two or three are gathered together in His name – to save you. Thanks be to God that He is serious about our salvation. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, guards your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.