

Leaders in the Lord!

What makes a “Lutheran” leader?

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By Mark Zarling

Take a moment and write down the first name that comes to mind when I mention the word “leader.” How many of you wrote down military heroes? How many have sports heroes? scientists? business tycoons? political heroes? Let’s change the word association game for a moment. Now write down the first adjective that comes to mind when the word “leader” is spoken. Do you think of powerful? persuasive? dynamic? forceful? How do we Americans perceive true leaders? The answer to that question is not necessarily identical to the answer of this question: how do we Lutheran Christians perceive true leaders? In America, the land of “how-to pragmatism,” people who can get things done are admired as leaders. Whatever the arena, whether business or politics, whether on the battlefield of military conflict or on the field of athletic conflict, leaders are those who achieve. If bystanders get brushed aside, so be it. If others are stepped on in the pursuit of the ultimate goal, that is just the American way. Results, not relationships, are what make the bottom line. Consequently, many Americans admire the forceful and strong. Do we as Christian Americans subscribe to that definition? What makes a leader among God’s people? Do the same definitions apply? Are you a leader? Interestingly, among those without the Spirit of God, leaders in the church often look like losers. The very fruits of faith that God creates in his people to humbly serve the body of Christ are characteristics that secular society scoffs at. I fear that far too often society’s ridicule wears us down, and so we Christians are unconsciously influenced by the world around us. Not infrequently the refrain is heard at church council meetings, “we can’t keep operating like this. It just doesn’t make good business sense.” Or, “it’s time we take action and see some results.”

Gentlemen, brothers in the Lord, you are the elect of God, by his grace elected to salvation from all eternity. You have been redeemed by God, redeemed by the precious and priceless blood of the Lamb. Jesus calls you the salt of the earth, Jesus says you are the light of the world. Christ says you are kings and priests. Sounds to me like you are leaders. You are leaders whether you realize it or not. You are leaders in your marriage, in your home, in your congregation. You are leaders because God has chosen you for service in his kingdom, and your attendance tonight is verification of that fact. But what do we mean when we speak of Lutheran leaders? What kind of leaders are we?

Your steering committee initially assigned a topic entitled “the makings of a godly elder.” Yet the committee was concerned that the word elder would carry some unnecessary baggage, even in such a gathering as this. In our circles elder usually refers to a specific role within the congregation, a role that supports the pastor in spiritual matters and in discipline activity within the body of believers. Some of you are not elders in that narrow sense. But remember that the New Testament uses the word “elder” in a broader sense. Sometimes the word actually describes what we today call the pastoral office. Sometimes it is used “in the sense of a mature Christian man who has responsibilities within a group of Christians. Remembering that broader connotation of elder, perhaps we can paraphrase and use the term leader for our discussion tonight. What makes a good and godly leader with the local parish? The next forty minutes we will spend searching the Scriptures to answer that question. May the Holy Spirit bless our walk through the Word together, and graciously empower us to be leaders in the Lord, even if it means looking like losers to the world.

The first portion of this presentation will take you back to Sunday school days. If Scripture had a hall of fame for leaders in the church, whose pictures would you see? I would like to draw some portraits of a few of the leaders God has given to his believers in both Old and New Testament times.

He was well past retirement age, yet still working at an entry-level job. Watching sheep seemed like such a waste of his education and training. He had experienced the best schooling money could buy. Yet here he was, a shepherd, at this age. And they weren’t even his own sheep! A hired hand at eighty. Doesn’t sound like much of a leader, does it? Perhaps you remember him better as the shepherd who stood at the burning bush,

and was called by God to shepherd the chosen people out of Egypt and into the pastures of the promised land. Moses. Immediately we think of the plagues, of the Red Sea crossing, of a man who was allowed to go one on one with the Almighty and receive divine revelation at Sinai. What a remarkable man! Yet a man with a past, an exiled felon, guilty of murder. A man who stumbled in service when he struck the rock at Meribah so God disciplined him and did not allow him to enter the promised land. Nevertheless, Scripture says: "Since then no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face, who did all those miraculous signs and wonders the Lord sent him to do..." What made Moses a leader?

Let me introduce you to another shepherd. This shepherd knew danger first hand. Having to defend the sheep from a lion and a bear he did not flinch. This shepherd was not just brave and courageous, a man of brawn. He had a musical bent as well, composing countless hymns. This shepherd gained fame in the valley of Elah, where the slingshot overcame the 15-pound spear. By God's grace a boy stood over a giant and beheaded that blasphemer. David, the shepherd king, the one whom Scripture praises as "a man after the Lord's own heart." What made him a leader? Was it the decade on the run escaping the fury of King Saul that hardened him and forged a patient perseverance? Was it his military prowess? There is no doubt that Bible readers would hang a portrait of King David on the leader hall of fame. But remember. David stumbled in service as well, and stumbled severely. Laziness led to lust. Lust led to adultery. Adultery led to lies. Lies led to murder. How could the Lord use someone with this defective character? And more was to come. David's pride was responsible for the death of 70,000 of his own subjects. David was certainly a sinner. How could God call him a "man after his own heart"? How could God salvage a leader out of such a sinner?

It is time to hang another portrait on our imaginary wall of fame. Perhaps this picture portrays a mountain top scene. One lonely man standing against four hundred and fifty shouting and yelling prophets. A man who has the brashness to mock and ridicule the hundreds who stood against him. One man before an altar of stone, who prays to the Lord God almighty and fire rains down from heaven, torching the sacrifice and licking dry an impromptu moat of water around that altar. One man who had the courage to stand against the government and warn a milk-toast king and wicked, domineering queen of their impenitence. One man who was given power to outrun the king's chariot for over twenty miles; power to fill the jar and the jug on a widow's shelf, power to raise a corpse. Elijah. The name conjures up a courageous prophet of God, who called king and people alike to repentance. Yet this man struggled and stumbled as well.

He went into a spiritual depression that caused him to run from his ministry and actually wish to die. He thought he was all alone, and closed his eyes to the reality of God's word at work. The Lord had to empower a burned out prophet and renew his eagerness to stand firm in the word. Despite his human weakness, his depression, his eagerness to throw in the towel, God used him. God finally translated him bodily to heaven. Like Enoch so many centuries earlier, Elijah did not taste the dregs of death. What made him a leader?

Permit me to paint another portrait, this one perhaps not so familiar. He was a prominent laymen, and powerful in the empire. Yet he went on a leave of absence to go and rally the people. With trowel in one hand and weapon in the other, the people gradually raised the walls of Jerusalem. Despite opposition from enemies without and within, the governor persisted in prayer and in example. Over and over again we read of him beseeching the Lord and praying for strength and guidance. Yet his goals were not just temporal. The rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem was not an end in itself. This leader also rebuked the people in spiritual matters. He called them to repentance for desecrating the Sabbath. He rebuked them for marrying heathen spouses from the neighbors around. He emphasized a pure and faithful priesthood—all this in the face of strong opposition, slanderous gossip, and threats to his safety. Nehemiah! What made him a leader of God's people?

We pause in front of another portrait. This one is more familiar. We see a man with a past name and a past life. In the past life he was named Saul. His career was Pharisee *extraordinaire*. His vocation was violence. He himself said, "I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man." (1 Ti 1: 12) Yet a gracious God stopped him dead in his tracks on a highway, and put to death in him the past life and raised up a new life. Now he became Paul, one trained by God in the wilderness of Arabia. Paul, the human who was "caught up to the third heaven." (2 Co 12) This murderer became a messenger of peace. This man of persecution became one

persecuted, flogged, beaten, shipwrecked, imprisoned, and martyred. Yet by his own words his resume for leadership would not turn heads. Rather, he spoke “not with wise and persuasive words, but in weakness and fear, and with much trembling.” (1 Co 2) He was handicapped in his work, daily striving to carry on despite a thorn in his flesh so severe he called it a messenger of Satan. We see a portrait of another man with a past who struggled to serve Jesus despite weakness. What made Paul such a leader?

The wall of fame goes on and on. Read through Hebrews chapter 11 and you quickly realize that God has been raising up leaders for his people throughout human history. Read Ephesians 4 and you have the promise of God that he will continue to raise up leaders for his people. The wall of portraits goes on and on. Before we walk out of the hall of fame, let us briefly pause in front of two other pictures.

The one picture is of a fisherman with a strange looking catch—he fishes men. You know this man. He was bold enough to take Jesus at his word and actually walk on water. Yet he was weak enough to look away and begin to sink. He was bold and daring enough to draw his sword in defense of the Lord. Yet he was weak enough to be intimidated by a servant girl. Here too, is a man with a past. Every morning of his life, whenever the rooster alarm clock roused him from his sleep, how could he not think of what he had done? Yet God did not reject him, but reinstated him. Oh, he would go on to serve the Savior, but not perfectly. He had to be publicly rebuked by the apostle Paul. What made Peter a leader?

Before we view the final portrait, I am going to ask you to pause and ponder. Scripture declares: “For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.” (Ro 15:4) Which of the leaders that we have briefly viewed plucks the emotional strings of your heart? Turn to your neighbor, and explain which of these leaders you are drawn to, and why? Do you find Moses fascinating, and why? Do you empathize with David? Are you drawn to Peter’s impetuosity? Or Paul’s patience? Are you like Nehemiah? Are you ever depressed like Elijah? Take a few minutes to stretch and discuss the leaders.

The final portrait is off by itself, highlighted by being in the center of the gallery. Nothing else is around it or comes near it. It is a unique picture, a picture of a Lamb who at one and the same time is a Shepherd. It is our Passover Lamb, destined for sacrifice. It is the Good Shepherd of the Church, fighting and defeating that roaring lion who stalks the flock looking to devour. It is a picture of the suffering Servant of the Lord, yet the majestic Messiah who will reign forever. It is a picture of one who humbled himself even to death on a cross, yet is exalted supremely so that every knee will bow at his name. We see the eyes of compassion that reached out to the little children and said, “bring them to me.” We see the eyes of love that healed and fed and nurtured and comforted, all the while foregoing creature comforts for himself. Indeed, “foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the son of man has no place to lay his head.” (Mt 8:20) He loved perfectly, yet does not demand love. He never forced others to follow or coerced companions to do it his way. Rather, he lived a perfect life and loved a perfect love. He “humbled himself and became obedient to death,” and prayed “your will be done.” Jesus the Christ is the nameplate on this mural of salvation. What does the Lamb who leads us want us to know about true leadership—Biblical leadership, Lutheran leadership?

The previous discussion is not meant as some exhaustive list of case studies on leadership. Rather, I hope that the Holy Spirit of God uses the review to pique our interest and remove our excuses. If you have ever served on a nominating committee for your congregation, you have heard them all. “I don’t have time.” “I don’t have the gifts.” “I can’t talk to others.” “Someone else can do it better.” “You wouldn’t want me to represent the congregation. People around here know my past.” Looking at the hall of fame of Bible leaders reminds us quickly that excuses are not a recent invention. I also hope that we can use the Bible History review to help focus our attention on the next portion of this presentation. What are some generalizations we can safely make on the basis of Scripture when we talk about Lutheran leadership within a congregation?

Lutheran leaders are men who know their weaknesses

Moses’ responded to God’s commission with an honest question. “Who am I that I should go and bring the Israelites out...” (Ex 3:11) Gone were the headstrong days of his youth when he took the law into his own hands and acted as judge and executioner at the same time. Now his question reflects a heart that knows full

well his weaknesses and limitations. Centuries later the apostle Paul confessed his weaknesses on more than one occasion. “For I am the least of the apostles and do even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.” (1 Co 15:4) “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst. But for that very reason I was shown mercy, so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience.” (1 Ti 1: 15) The first prerequisite for genuine leadership in the church is for a man to understand his weaknesses and confess forthrightly his damnable sinfulness and his damning sins. How do I stack up against a Moses or against a Paul? More importantly how do I stack up against a righteous Father? “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” (Mt 5.48) If I fall short in comparison with other humans, where does that leave me when I compare myself with the Creator?

God’s holy law peels back my heart and soul like an orange and leaves me exposed before the glare of the Holy One. There is no place to hide. Our first parents tried the bushes. We try the bottle or pills or excuses or rationalizations. Yet there is no where to run. The more we study and read the Word of God, the more the Holy Spirit hammers my heart with the understanding of complete depravity. “There is no one righteous before God, no not one.” (Ro 3) No human deserves his picture on the wall of fame. Instead of looking at a picture, look in the mirror and what do you see? Each of us needs to confess before the One who sees the heart. I haven’t lived up to God’s standards. As a father I haven’t spoken in accord with the heavenly Father’s way of speaking. As a husband, I have not thought in line with the pure and righteous thoughts of the Bridegroom. As a pastor, I have not always been concerned for the sheep in the same manner as the Good Shepherd demonstrated. As a leader in a parish, I have not always placed the needs and concerns of my fellow members above my own. I have not always patiently listened to the ideas of others. Think of the council meetings when anger flared up and I unleashed a barrage of words to destroy the opposition. Or the time I ignored my responsibilities and felt that if I attended a monthly meeting I’m doing all that is needed for kingdom work. Or consider how often my selfishness displays itself in being willing to fund church programs that serve the saved, and yet hesitate to be generous in efforts to reach out to the unsaved with the Gospel in word and in action. Such actions are sins, brothers. Leadership in the church of God begins with a solemn understanding that I don’t deserve to be a leader. I don’t deserve to be a believer. There can be no pride throbbing in the heart of a Lutheran leader. The Baptizer still calls out, and his call is for you and me. “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near. Produce fruit in keeping with repentance.” (Mt 3:2,8) If God accomplishes anything in the church, it is to his glory. It is a miracle of his grace that God deigns to use sinners in his Gospel work. There can be no doubt that the all surpassing power is his, not ours. To paraphrase a veteran pastor, “It is amazing to see what God gets done in spite of our best efforts.”

Lutheran leaders are men who know their Strength

The more we understand our weaknesses, the more we realize that we need help. Lutheran leaders know where to turn for deliverance. Lutheran leaders know exactly who is their Strength. We join Pastor Paul in saying, “I can do everything through him who gives me strength.” (Php 4:13) By the Spirit’s grace we understand that “it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.” (Php 2:13) This should come as no surprise to any Bible reading and Bible believing leader. “He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?” (Ro 8:32) The same God who sent his Son to redeem us from sin and hell, also grants us gifts and abilities for service, and empowers us with the zeal and eagerness to use those self-same gifts. God saves us for service. “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” (Eph 2:8-10) Oh, the glory of God’s grace! Grace to send his Son as a substitute to take my death sentence. Grace to cover all my shortcomings through the blood of that perfect God-Man. Grace to call us to faith through the Gospel in Word and Sacrament. Grace to gift us for service to his glory and for the good of our fellowman. God’s grace does it all, and that divine grace shines all the more brightly when it is evident to others just how weak and feeble I am. The lesson Paul learned, we need to learn daily. A gracious God answered his prayers to remove that painful thorn by saying: “My grace is sufficient for

you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Paul learned to “boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me.” (2 Co 12:9)

Lutheran leaders are men who are chosen by God, not self-appointed

In secular society leaders are often individuals who have the drive and ambition to pursue their agendas and force themselves into the limelight. In some heterodox denominations leadership occurs in the same manner. Some person stands up and says that he has had a vision from God to begin this congregation or start this ministry, and away he goes. After all, who can stand in the way of someone who claims to have a direct vision from God? In some Protestant circles an individual is convinced to become a pastor because of an “inner call” from the Lord. Yet Lutheran leadership, Biblical leadership, is a stark contrast in how leaders surface. Look at the gallery of leaders we reviewed. Over and over again we see the Lord setting someone apart, and calling into service. It is all God’s doing, and not self-aggrandizement. God chose us to believe. “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—to the praise of his glorious grace.” (Eph 1:3-6) God calls us to faith. We confess with Martin Luther, “I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength, believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, nor come to him. But the Holy Ghost has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith.”

God also sets us apart for service. If we are his workmanship, created to do good works, then we let the divine Craftsman shape us and mold us for the function he deems best. In some cases, that function is the holy ministry. Through the divine call God sets apart people for public, full-time service. Paul recognized that fact. “I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength that he considered me faithful, appointing me to his service.” (1 Ti 1:12) Paul did not hang out his shingle and embark to make a name for himself as missionary to the gentiles. Rather, he says: “For this is what the Lord has commanded us: ‘I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.’” (Ac 13:47) Still today, our synod reflects that Bible truth that servants are chosen by God. Seminary graduates do not pull out a map, pick a town, and decide to open a new mission there. Only through the divine call, extended by Christ through a mission board, is a candidate led to a location in which to explore the possibility of starting a new church. In our congregations men do not campaign for council or posture for a position. Nominating committees do the initial contacting after prayerful consideration of a person’s talents and time and spiritual maturity. It is not possible in the scope of this presentation to thoroughly present Bible teaching on the call. Yet I simply want to remind all of you that service among God’s people starts with the Lord picking us. That picking process might be through a divine call, through an election at an annual meeting, through an appointment by the council. Whatever the situation, Lutheran leaders are men who are chosen by God, not self-appointed. There is much confidence to be gained when we remember this simple truth. There is tremendous comfort to be enjoyed when we face difficult tasks. God placed us into this situation. Therefore, Lutheran leaders who know their Strength go back to that Strength and pray to the Lord. “You, dear Lord Jesus, placed me into this position. You alone can get me through it.”

Lutheran leaders are humble servants

The first three characteristics of Lutheran leaders mandate the fourth one listed above. Who can remain proud when the Law of God forcefully convicts us of our sinfulness? Who can take credit when the Gospel clearly shows Jesus as the author of our salvation and also our ascended Lord who pours out the gifts necessary for the church? Who can arrogantly assume a leadership position while waiting for the Lord’s call or appointment to serve? Humility is a key to Lutheran leadership, and a vivid difference between genuine leadership and the leaders of secular society. When squabbles erupt around the council table, remember how the ten disciples were indignant with the sons of Zebedee. Jesus alone can quiet the dispute. “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many,” (Mt 20:25-28) Later, Jesus succinctly says, “The greatest among you will be your servant.” Biblical

leadership is humble service, putting Christ first in all things, then putting my brothers and sisters before my own needs. The apostle was gifted by God with this spirit of humble servanthood. “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus.” (Php 2:3-5) Paul was willing to roll up his sleeves and get sweaty for the Savior. Nothing was beneath him in an attempt to bring the gospel to another soul. “Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.” (1 Co 9:19,22-23) Lutheran leaders are doing, not just delegating—doing whatever is necessary for the cause of the Gospel and for the good of souls. Lutheran leaders do even what seems “beneath” them. A pastor will sometimes grab a vacuum after that late night wedding. A chairman has no problem taking a shovel and removing snow from the doorway, even if he does it in his suitcoat.

Now, please, don’t misunderstand me. Delegating is necessary in the church. Jethro had to teach his son-in-law that important fact. Proper delegation among God’s people derives from a noble motivation and empowers God’s people to use their God-given gifts in satisfying service to the Savior. Yet secular society often finds delegation a tool the powerful use in order to get out of work, or to avoid some unpleasant task. Lutheran leaders do not delegate just to get out of work, or to keep their hands clean from difficult issues. Humble servants seek to serve and lead by doing, using all the gifts God in his wisdom has distributed to them. Humble leaders also motivate and encourage others to find the joy Jesus brings through Gospel service and work to involve the whole body of Christ, “For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you. Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given us.” (Ro 12:3-6)

Lutheran leaders are men who have clear vision

“Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature.” (Col 3:1-5) By the Spirit’s grace Lutheran leaders are men who always view matters from the spiritual and eternal perspective. The Lord’s Great Commission to his Church is always foremost in their minds. The Lord’s promised return always lights the fire of urgency in discussions and decisions. Other people might get bogged down in the mundane aspects of congregational life, but Lutheran leaders always see issues from a simple perspective. In what way does this impact a soul? How does this issue help reach a soul for Christ? Or how might it help to nurture a soul in its relationship to the Word? Or how can it help to reclaim a soul that is stumbling or straying? Pastor Jude speaks to Christian leaders still today. “But you, dear friends, build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit. Keep yourselves in God’s love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life. Be merciful to those who doubt; snatch others from the fire and save them; to others show mercy, mixed with fear—hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh.” (Jude 20-23)

Permit me a few practical examples. The Church of Christ needs men who are willing to stand up and patiently bring into focus the spiritual priorities. When budget discussions take center stage, Lutheran leaders are men who speak from an understanding that a balanced budget is not the preeminent goal of a Christian congregation. Some churches might have balanced budgets but still be sinning when examined under Scripture’s guidelines of first-fruit thank offerings. Lutheran leaders know that instruction in the Word is the only way the Spirit will change hearts and handbags from giving to a project, to a proportionate gift of gratitude that reflects the Lord’s amazing generosity in our lives. Other members might evaluate an annual report based upon the “bottom line” for the year. Did we gain in membership? Is worship attendance up? A Lutheran leader has a clear vision of the spiritual issues before us. Conversion is a miracle of the Holy Spirit “who works faith,

where and when it pleases God, in them that hear the Gospel.” (Augsburg Confession, article V) Worship attendance and Bible class participation are also fruits of faith that only the Spirit can grow. Lutheran leaders bring a patient perspective to the congregation’s outlook, as they remind God’s people that it is the Lord at work through the Lord’s holy Word. Consequently, we wait on the Lord.

Men who have clear spiritual vision, then, also know that the church is really about relationships, not results. Relationships are vital. First and foremost is the relationship of an individual to the Savior Jesus. That relationship is key. That relationship determines eternal destiny. A relationship of trust and faith is a gift of the Spirit through the Means of Grace. Therefore, Lutheran leaders put utmost priority that every activity of a parish somehow brings the power of the Means of Grace into contact with people. Then, and only then, is the Spirit of God unleashed to accomplish the miracle of the “first resurrection.” Practically speaking, this means that council meetings begin with more than just a quick thirty-second prayer. Time is taken for Scripture study and reflection. Organizations don’t just meet around a common “felt-need.” Every organization of a Christian congregation can be an opportunity for brothers and sisters in Christ to grow together as they open the Word of life for study and discussion. Once that primary relationship of Savior to soul is nurtured through the Word, great things happen in the soul to soul relationships throughout a body of believers. Harmony, peace, forgiveness now become more than ideals—they are realities. Not perfect yet, to be sure, but still in evidence whenever “two or three come together in Christ’s name. For there he is in the midst.” Christian congregations get a foretaste of heaven as they see the “deposit of the Spirit” worked out in the lives and interactions of God’s people. Miracles do daily occur in the parish. Watch for them. Relay on them. Lutheran leaders see past the brick and mortar, the rafters and floor joists. Lutheran leaders have the spiritual vision to understand that in the parish they call home, there is part of “the Holy Christian Church, the Communion of saints.”

Lutheran leaders are men who are bound to the Word of God alone

From the foregoing discussion it becomes clear that true “Lutheran” leaders are concerned most about the Word of God in their personal lives, and in the life of the congregation they serve. “Sola Scriptura” is more than an archaic phrase tossed around at Reformation observances. The Word is what the Spirit uses to create and nurture faith, for “faith comes from hearing the message and the message is heard through the word of Christ.” (Ro 10: 17) The Word of God, in particular the gospel of forgiveness in Jesus Christ, is the awesome power that motivates and moves us to share the message with others. The Word of God is also what guides and directs our thinking. God deigns to speak with humans. Like Samuel of old, may we all have the giant faith of a child to simply say, “speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.”

Lutheran leaders, then, are men who know that they are accountable to the Lord. Having God’s precious Word in our midst also means that we are to follow it in every aspect of our lives and service. The ways of the world do not work in the vineyard of Christ’s church. Quick fix programs do not make lasting, spiritual change within a human heart. When the congregation plans worship activity, the Word is our rule against which everything is measured. When the congregation undertakes the difficult assignment of disciplining the erring, Lutheran leaders know that no family pressure or raucous relatives can supplant the fact that we answer to the Good Shepherd. When the congregation seeks to improve its outreach efforts, priority is always given to how the Word of life can best be presented to people. Lutheran leaders are bound to the Word alone, and through it understand that they are accountable to the Lord of the Church.

Men of God, into the Word! If you do not have a regular pattern of reading the word privately, start it now. Grab a one-year Bible and begin. Take out a Bible and read through the gospel of Mark in the next 16 days. If you do not now regularly attend a Bible Hour at church, begin. You are visible role models to the people of God that you serve. What they see speaks volumes about what you think is a priority in the congregation. The Word, and the Word alone is “the sword of the Spirit” at which we can take our stand against the spiritual forces of evil. Into the Word, and the Holy Spirit will keep you in Christ Jesus the source of all life, joy, strength. “I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish,

and it will be given you. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples." (Jn 15:5,7-8)

Lutheran leaders are...

The Gospel of Jesus Christ impacts true leadership in so many positive ways. Without exhausting the subject, but now exhausting the time allotted, we can briefly highlight a few other characteristics that God the Holy Spirit wants to create and nurture within each heart here this evening. Lutheran leaders are *men of confidence*. We are confident not in our own ability, but rather in the sure promises of the Lord of hosts. We know clearly from Scripture that God's word "will not return empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it." Thus says the Lord through the prophet Isaiah in chapter 55. Every time we use that Word, God gets things done. Where else this side of heaven can you find such satisfaction in your labors? Paul's encouragement is our daily confidence. "Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain." (1 Co 15: 58)

Lutheran leaders are *men of joy*. Serving the Savior means service with a smile. How can we not smile when we know that Jesus has come that "we might have life, and have it to the full"? How can the joy of salvation not overshadow all the gloom of a greedy and obsessive world? We know that Jesus reigns. We know that He will come again. We know "that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us." (Ro 8: 18) We know that "he will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body." (Php 3:21) We know that our tombstone will be erected over an empty grave. Men of God, "rejoice in the Lord always, I will say it again, rejoice." (Php 4:4)

Lutheran leaders are *men of prayer*. We dare not close without emphasizing the obvious. Gospel work is beyond our natural ability. We cannot bring ourselves to Christ, let alone convert someone else. We cannot fix broken marriages through trite phrases and best wishes. We cannot open up wallets to support joyfully as an act of worship. We cannot force volunteers to make time for the church. We cannot compel people to attend Bible hours. The work of the congregation is beyond our natural ability. Justification, conversion, sanctification, nurture—these are all miracles that God alone can work. And he works them through the Gospel that he graciously allows us to proclaim. If it is God's work, then we better well ask his blessing, seek his wisdom, and rely on his power to get the job done. And what promises there are that prayer works. Go to the dorm tonight and find a Bible if you did not bring one along to convention. Read through John chapters 14, 15, and 16. Five different times in that section Jesus offers his people a blank check through prayer. Find the five times and underline them. Over and over again he says something to the effect, "ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it." Take Jesus at his Word. Ask and ask and ask again. Ask for people thrilled to come to worship. Ask for people eager to share the Word in word and action. Ask for harmony and peace among leaders. Ask not for balanced budgets, but for genuine understanding about the thrill of bringing thank offerings to a gracious God. Ask for peace for those with terminal illness. Ask for strength for those in broken relationships. Ask for courage and contentment for the pastors and teachers who devote all their time to serving you.

Luther's encouragement to prayer as found in his commentary on Psalm 118 is a fitting encouragement with which to close. "You must learn to call. Do not sit by yourself or lie on a couch, hanging and shaking your head. Do not destroy yourself with your own thoughts by worrying. Do not strive and struggle to free yourself, and do not brood on your wretchedness, suffering, and misery. Say to yourself. 'Come on, you lazy bum; down on your knees, and lift your eyes and hands toward heaven!' Read a psalm or the Our Father, call on God, and tearfully lay your troubles before him. It is his desire and will that you lay your troubles before him. He does not want you to multiply your troubles by burdening and torturing yourself. He wants you to be too weak to bear and overcome such troubles; he wants you to grow strong in Him. By His strength he is glorified in you." (LW 14, 60-61)

Lord Jesus, make us leaders in the Lord by keeping us in the Word.

Discussion opportunities

- ◆ Define a "Lutheran leader" in one sentence.
- ◆ Explain how Lutheran leaders look like losers to the unregenerate.

- ◆ Evaluate: It is a good policy to have all councilmen participate in a congregational Bible Hour.
- ◆ A/D Spiritual leadership is supplied by the pastor. Councilmen are chosen for their practical expertise.
- ◆ List concrete ways to increase the amount of time leaders can be nurtured in the Gospel.
- ◆ Explain: Understanding the picture of the “body of Christ” helps prevent pride and jealousy among church leaders.