

Look at what God's Love HAS DONE,
&
what God's Love is DOING to you!

Marcus Schulz

[Presented at the Colonial North Pastors' Conference,
Faith Evangelical Lutheran Church, Pittsfield, MA,
October 2-3, 2007]

For starters I would like to thank our Steering Committee for giving me this assignment. I'll admit I was not thanking them at first, but after reading essay after essay I truly was blessed by this study on sanctification.

One of the unexpected blessings I received from my study was that I once again found the true blessing of being a confessional Lutheran and being a part of a confessional Lutheran church. In the spiritually desolate land I find myself being a pastor in, there are many times I find myself saying "No one understands or appreciates God's Word or sound doctrine!" But my study has unearthed for me that there are those who truly do and did understand. I am not alone! Our brothers of the 1500's understood the importance of standing firm on God's Word and not retreating one inch for the sake of the Gospel. Our brothers that are still speckled throughout this world and making disciples of all nations understand this as well. To God be the glory that He has firmly planted us in His everlasting Word and has placed us in a confessional Lutheran church body we know as the WELS.

So where do I begin? Thousands of essays, books, and articles have been written on sanctification. Should I focus on the wide sense of sanctification or the narrow sense of sanctification? For those of you who need a quick brush up on the differences between the wide and narrow senses of sanctification – our brother Earle Treptow gives us these descriptions of each in his paper, which was just delivered to our delegates of our synod's most recent convention:

Sanctification in the wide sense is everything that the Holy Spirit does to set us apart from the unbelieving world, including forming faith in our hearts, making us new creatures, instilling a desire to serve him with our lives, enabling us to fight the good fight against our spiritual enemies, preserving us in the childlike certainty of faith as long as we live, and finally glorifying us at Christ's return. – In the narrow sense of the term, sanctification refers to Christian living, the believer's life of service to the Savior.¹

Should I focus on the errors of other churches or should I focus on the Bible's clear teaching of what sanctification is, and what it does to the human soul and life? So where do I begin and where do I end?

But then I remembered that this paper was assigned to me to be a practical paper, which hopefully will be of some use to you as you leave this conference. I will make it a point that each paragraph will not be a quote of our forefathers, professors, and our other more brilliant brothers in the faith – even though their thoughts are higher than my thoughts – but instead, I will try to converse to you in a heart to heart talk – brother to brother.

For starters, let's pretend we are not pastors, we don't have our congregations to go back to, we don't belong to a synod – named WELS, we don't have the problems of our people weighing down our hearts and minds; but instead, we find ourselves in front of the empty tomb and having our Risen and Victorious Lord and Savior looking at us eye to eye and comforting us with his Word. It is here where I begin my day most every day. It is here and only here that I find my forgiveness, my security, my comfort, and my eternity. It is here that I hear and see the peace that surpasses all understanding. It is here that God rescues me from the mire and muck

¹ Rev. Earle Treptow quotation from his essay: *Sanctification: Set Apart by God's Grace to Serve*. Delivered to our WELS 59th Biennial Convention delegates on July 31 – August 2, 2007. Page 4.

of life, sets my feet upon the Rock, and gives my heart a firm place to stand and a new song to sing. It is here that I see what God's love has done for me and what it is still doing to me in my daily walk of life. Brothers, Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Let the cradle, cross, and empty tomb greet you every morning; otherwise – your problems, deficiencies, your flock's problems and deficiencies will instead greet you. I don't know about you but I would rather wake up every morning and have my Savior's cradle, cross, and empty tomb greet me, rather than anything else.

So, my first practical advice to you, which is nothing new at all, is to read the Word, rejoice over the Word, don't focus on your workload, but instead focus and fill yourself up with what the empty tomb declares to us: **GOD AND SINNERS RECONCILED!**

The M1A1 Abrams tank of the United States Army and the fighter jets of the United States Air Force get all the attention – but if it wasn't for the supply trucks and air tankers they would be dead in their tracks and falling from the sky. My point being – we are the fuel suppliers to our flocks! If we are on empty, they too will soon be empty. Brothers – let's keep our tanks full. The fuel is there; the fuel is paid for, and the fuel is delivered directly to our hearts by the Holy Spirit.

It wasn't too long ago in my ministry that I had a visit with Mission Counselor John Huebner. He asked me how I was reaching out into the community, what my plans were for the upcoming Autumn, what sermon series I was running; and the questions kept coming and coming. I don't think I really impressed him much with my answers or lack of answers that he was looking for.

He then continued his session with me by putting about a foot high mountain of papers on my desk and saying: "Here are some of the things your cousin Joel is doing up in Canada." (Not a direct quote.) All these things were great ideas, plans, and programs, which I'm sure would work here – but the problem was with me. I remember asking John "Great plans and ideas, but what if I'm not motivated to carry them out?" And for the first time he was quiet. The problem wasn't him – it was me; I was on empty. For me to implement all these plans was like trying to get that last little glob of toothpaste out of the tube that should have been replaced a long time ago.

I needed him to counsel my soul with God's Word. I needed to hear the Gospel again and again. I needed to hear: "Marcus, you are God's forgiven child!" "Marcus, God has made you his ambassador of his full and free grace!" "Marcus, you are a modern day witness to his resurrection!" "Marcus, the Lord has made you a watchman of His Church!" "Yes, Marcus, you are an heir of everlasting life!" "Just look at what God's love has done!"

What I needed to hear most desperately is exactly what I heard from him in his closing devotion with me. Now that pile of ideas, programs, and events was most beneficial to me and I couldn't wait to implement them in my ministry.

So, before anything else is said I say to you: "**(Insert your name)**, you are God's forgiven child!" "**(Insert your name)**, God has made you his ambassador of his full and free grace!" "**(Insert your name)**, you are a modern day witness to his resurrection!" "**(Insert your name)**, God has made you a watchman of His – the King of kings and the Lord of lords!" "Yes, **(Insert your name)**, you are an heir of everlasting life!" "Just look at what God's love has done!"

Now that we have been retuned and our hearts are now singing the praises of our God; how do we retune the whole symphony orchestra, known as our congregation? I know that all of us know how to preach on the wide sense of sanctification – but how do we teach, preach, and show sanctification in the narrow sense? I'm sure all of us want to upgrade our congregations from a beginner's band to a full piece symphony orchestra.

Teaching sanctification

I'm sure all of us love teaching our Bible Information Courses and seeing the Holy Spirit bring comfort, joy, security, and peace to those attending. I'm sure all of us start with a law and gospel, or sin and grace presentation; perhaps, following something like *God's Great Exchange*.

If you are like me – our first session begins with putting our prospects on the hot seat of the law. "Would you go to heaven if you died tonight?" Followed up with the next question of: "What would you say to God if he asked you, 'Why should I let you into my heaven?'" These questions serve as a spiritual diagnostic test to see on whom they are relying on for salvation. Usually, we find our prospects at first in full entanglement of work righteousness – but after patient instruction they leave their first session embedded in God's eternal hands.

Don't rush this first session. Fully proclaim God's law, but then fully proclaim the Gospel. What is more important? Tilling the garden or planting the garden? They both are essential for producing a good crop come harvest time. The law tills our prospect's hearts open wide and exposes all their shortcomings and flaws; don't end your first session at this point. Tilling is always the hard job but it is an essential job because it gets the ground ready for the planting and watering. The law gets the prospect's soul ready for the planting and the watering of the Gospel seed.

After patiently teaching the doctrine of justification, we then move on to what our new status before God means to our daily lives. I always stress every opportunity I have to tell my prospects that our justification has been completed, but our sanctified living is always a work in progress. I tell them never to start looking more intently on their works but to always have their eyes fixed on Jesus - the author and finisher of their salvation. Fruits of faith will be produced as long as we have ourselves connected to the Vine, who taps us into the lasting nutrients of his cradle, his cross, and his empty tomb.

In order to demonstrate what I've been trying to explain above I will now share with you a sermon I preached to my flock on Galatians 5:1,13-25.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ!

So when is the last time you have been in a fist fight, or a wrestling match in which you thought your life was in jeopardy? I will give you a little time to think about this as I tell you about the last time I was in a wrestling match with another person. The last wrestling match I was in was during my sophomore year in High School with a classmate of mine named Sam Holcomb. His nickname was Chicken Hawk. He shoved me and I shoved him back. He shoved me harder and I shoved him harder back. Before I knew it I was in a wrestling match and why? I don't even remember anymore. So when is the last time you've been in a fight? A real life and death struggle? Has anyone here been in a fight like this within this last year? Please raise your hand. How about the last ten years? I guess it's worse than I thought; none of you even know that you have been in a life and death struggle every day of your life.

The battle is between our Old Adam and our New Man - which our text describes in this way: "***For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want.***" Another way of putting it and I'm sure we have all heard this before "The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak." Our New Man wants a life that is filled with these fruits of the Spirit: "***love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control***"; but our Old Adam has taken us kicking and screaming (or worse than this maybe not kicking and screaming, but perhaps hand in hand) into a life filled with: "***sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like.***" The Apostle Paul shows us the seriousness of this battle with the following words when he says: "***I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.***" Gulp! We now see the seriousness of this struggle.

I'm sure that some of us even had a little tangle with our Old Adam this morning with whether or not we should come to hear God's Word. I picture a tag team type of wrestling match - your New Man desperately wanted to tag out and rest in the corner of God's Word; but your Old Adam was holding onto your leg and trying to pull you closer to his corner of the world. Who has the upper hand in your life right now? Is your Old Adam laying on you with the full weight of his guilt right now? Is Satan doing a countdown on your life right now? Are you at one, five, or nine in the countdown? "How do I get out of this death hold?" Do you know how

to tag out every time you get yourself in this type of situation? You mean – you have forgotten or haven't heard? It's not tagging anyone but focusing on Him who has already won for us. Jesus has set us free! There is no such thing as a fifth quarter, an extra inning, or another round! Christ has won; so we have won!

Don't be fooled into playing another round, another inning, or another quarter when it comes to your salvation. Salvation has been won for us because of our MVP - Jesus Christ. Can you imagine winning the Super Bowl and the opposing team challenges you to play one more quarter? Can you imagine playing another inning after winning the World Series? No way! And why would you? But this is exactly what we do when it comes to our salvation; we get into another quarter, another inning, and we do this without our Most Valuable Player and we lose every single time. Our opponent has us convinced to give up! It's no longer worth fighting for! When the reality is that we have already won when Jesus died for us and rose for us. The only way we can get disqualified is if we FORGET this or REJECT this and try to go it our own way, which will never work. You may have forgotten but I'm here to remind you that you are forgiven. You may have rejected this for awhile, but I'm here to remind you that HE HAS REDEEMED YOU. Don't forget the words of Galatians 5:1 - ***"It is for freedom that Christ HAS SET US free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery."***

Many churches will focus on how to live life and focus on living life; but they never focus on our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave His life on our account. I picture it like this: imagine the whole world held captive in six by eight foot cells and you too find yourself in a six by eight foot cell; and then you see your spouse and children in the same condition. What would you want most? A person to give you designer curtains for your cell? A person to give you a book on how to live life as a captive or a book on "Five Essential Things You Need to Live a Happier Life in Captivity"? Or how about a person who can paint a beautiful mural for you so that you can daydream about and pretend to find yourself in that picture? All these would be a waste of time! What you would desire most is someone to release you, so that you can go free. Today your prayer has been answered and I'm here to release you from that prison of guilt, that bottomless pit of hopelessness, and I do this by pointing you to the Key – Jesus Christ. Who released us and took on our full captivity for us. (David the adulterer – Zacchaeus the cheat – Paul the persecutor – the thief on the cross – that procrastinator)

We have been set free and called to be free! No longer free to sin and feed the appetite of our Old Adam; but we are now free to live our lives for Him, who came not to condemn the world but to save the world through His sacrifice on the cross. My dear brothers and sisters in Christ strive to live lives of ***"love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control"*** NOT TO BECOME CHILDREN OF GOD - but BECAUSE YOU ARE CHILDREN OF GOD!

Don't play another quarter, another inning, or another round! Christ has won! We have won - because of Him! The first quarter was when sin entered this world. The last minute of this first quarter was God's promise that He would send a Savior. The second quarter began when our Savior was born! The third quarter was when Jesus lived the perfect life for us. The fourth quarter seemed to be disastrous, an all out route that went Satan's way. It had Jesus nailed to the cross, bleeding, and breathing His last, BUT Jesus came back and gave us the victory. The empty tomb being God's receipt to us that we indeed are forgiven.

There is a fifth quarter though that I would like for all of you to participate in. In Wisconsin, and I'm sure in many other State Universities, there is such a thing as the Fifth Quarter. The fifth quarter takes place after a football victory. The fifth quarter is the time to party and rejoice over that victory. Our life is the fifth quarter my dear friends in Christ. Let's rejoice over the victory Christ has won for us.

Amen.

So when it comes to teaching about the narrow sense of sanctification you have to first lay the ground work of sin and grace, our unfaithfulness and God's faithfulness, our insufficiency and Christ's sufficiency. Prepare the soil, plant the seed, water the seed, and God will make it grow in His own time. A farmer doesn't expect to harvest the day after he plants. A farmer works the hardest in the spring: preparing the soil, planting

the seed, and praying for rain. A farmer rejoices the most though after the harvest is in. Brothers, what day it will be to see those souls, which God used us to plant the seed of the Gospel in throughout our ministries, standing beside our Living Lord.

Preaching Sanctification

Teaching and preaching sanctification go hand in hand. Godly living is the central message of most churches today. People live godly lives outwardly because of this, but they do this with the wrong motivation. Their outward godly living is motivated by the law. They do "good" works in order to become God's children; rather than doing good and pleasing works because they are God's children through the blood of Christ. Do you want your people to continue to grow in their sanctified living? Of course! You do this by not giving them a list or a process to follow but by fully proclaiming God's Word both in law and Gospel. Good preaching results in your people living God pleasing lives.

It wasn't too long ago that I had a bird which continually kept trying to fly through a certain church window. This bird was persistent and about every five minutes it would come crashing into this window. I thought to myself "Just look it Marcus – this bird wants to be a Lutheran." I don't know what this bird was thinking that day but perhaps its thought process was something like "If I can just try harder - I will get through!" But what I was thinking that day was "If you try any harder you are going to die trying!" So what I did was tape up a piece of paper so that this bird could see that there was something there and that it wasn't free sailing through; and it worked.

Before we say "This bird wasn't the sharpest beak in the nest!" we have to admit that we have done the same thing when it comes to salvation. We thought we could sail right through into heaven on our own merit but for some reason we were always smacked down with doubt and guilt. The harder we tried to win God's approval the harder we fell. We would have died trying if it had not been for God. God put the law up like that piece of paper to show us "Don't even think about coming here! Look for a different way!" Galatians 3:23 declares "***The law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith.***" Salvation is not found in the law! Salvation is found in Him, who defeated the law for us. It is through faith in Him alone that we are saved!!

I used to work on a construction crew during my college days and I would always shake my head with disgust when people would run right through a barricade. The barricades were set up so that no one dared to go through. But many times a week our older generation of drivers would try to go through them. Then they would have the audacity to yell at me and my crew for putting those barricades up. How many times does our God shake his head at us when we try to blow through the barricades of the law? The reason for the law is to show us "YOU CAN'T COME THROUGH HERE – YOU WILL DIE TRYING!" The purpose of the law wasn't to give us a "TO DO" list but was given to give us a "YOU CAN'T DO THIS!" list.

So there we sat broken down, like that poor bird, having crashed full speed into the law. Our heart was now steaming with frustration, doubt, and guilt. We gave up but then we heard the Gospel for the first time THE RIGHTEOUS SHALL LIVE BY FAITH! The way to heaven is through faith in Jesus Christ and Him alone. WE HAVE BEEN JUSTIFIED, WE HAVE BEEN DECLARED NOT GUILTY, because of Jesus. Our salvation doesn't depend on us and what we do but on Him and what He has done for us!! Brothers, we know this but not too many others know this. My prayer for all of us is that we never get sick of proclaiming this.

What I mean is this: two of my favorite movies are: *The Hunt for Red October* & *Braveheart*. I have watched each of these movies numerous times, but their appeal has now dulled. Why? Because I know what happens; I know the dramatic twists; and I know the ending. But this dullness turns to excitement once again when someone new comes in to watch it for the first time. In the same way this full and free salvation we know and hold to so dearly loses its newness to us sometimes because we know what happens. Even though we know what happens, many in our pews or chairs are hearing this most amazing love story for the first time. Don't rush the text and don't forget the little details even though it might be the umpteenth time you have explained it. The

words we preach are powerful, so powerful that they not only change a person's life around but their eternal destination around.

I'm sure we have heard many times from people outside our fellowship say: "Lutherans despise good works!" It's not that we despise them but we despise the motivation that they are done with. Never miss any opportunity to preach on where good works fit in the life of the Christian.

Here is an example of how I explained this to my people last year on the 17th Sunday after Pentecost with the text being James 2:1-5, 8-10, 14-18. Let us open our bibles and read this text and then I will proceed.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ!

So what is your personal favorite book of the Bible? Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, or, - , - ,? I'm sure to those of you who are older love the comfort Psalms offers to your souls; to those of you new to the Christian faith I'm sure one if not all the Gospels stand out as comforting to you; and to those of you who love defending the truth of free and full salvation to those who oppose it – Galatians or Ephesians might stand out to you. I bet none of you said the book of James though. The book of James is the book most often quoted for those who say "Salvation is through faith AND WORKS." The book of James is also one of the most misquoted books of the Bible as well. But reading through the book of James we would have to say "It sure sounds like they are right – for in James it says ***'Do not merely listen to the Word – do what it says. Faith without works is dead!'***" But my dear brothers and sisters in Christ you must also look throughout all of Scripture to see where our salvation truly rests. Ephesians 2 comfortingly and simplicity declares in the 8th and 9th verses: ***'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'*** Galatians 5:2,4 has this warning to those who are ever so slightly depending on their works for salvation when it says: ***'Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of NO VALUE to you at all. You who are trying to be justified by law HAVE BEEN ALIENATED FROM CHRIST; you HAVE FALLEN AWAY FROM GRACE.'*** Romans 3:20-25 tells us the purpose of the law is to show us our sin; and the purpose of the Gospel is to show us our COMPLETED and FINISHED salvation: ***'Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin. – But now a righteousness FROM GOD, APART FROM LAW, has been made known, to which the Law and Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in JESUS CHRIST to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and ARE JUSTIFIED FREELY by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.'*** And to the most comforting words from the lips of our dying Savior in John 19:30 ***'It is finished!'*** Don't let anyone put a question mark to where God has put an exclamation point.

"Then why does James promote good works pastor?" My dear friends you have to remember that James was written to believers – to those who knew that complete and total salvation was won for them by Christ. James reminds us to do good works not so that God loves us – BUT because God loves us and gave Himself for us. James doesn't write to us to show us how to become children of God, but writes to us because we are children of God, yes – we are heirs of everlasting life, yes – we are sons and daughters of the Lord of lords and King of kings. FAITH ALONE SAVES – BUT FAITH IS NEVER ALONE.

Our Lord loves good works, but only one type of people can produce good works that are pleasing in His sight. Let me explain: a few weeks ago my oldest son and I traveled down to Fenway Park for the first time to see the Boston Red Sox. We got to see the field that we viewed almost every night this summer on TV. We saw Big Papi, Ramirez, Curt Schilling, and many others just feet away. It was the night that David Ortiz hit his 54th home run of the season, which landed only 25 feet away from our seats we were told, because you see at the time we were out buying a hot dog. Anyways they won! But their victory didn't really matter because they were already mathematically out of the playoff race. In the same way many people's good and noble works count for nothing because they are out of the race to heaven as well. What made their civically "good" works in

the eyes of the world filthy before our Father in heaven? They were done with the wrong motivation. What disqualified them from the race? Work-righteousness, which gets people every time. Just curious – do any of you know what the deadliest mountain is? It is not Everest; it is Sinai.

I can remember my Grandma Busse making a lemon meringue pie that she forgot to add one important ingredient to: the lemon. It looked like lemon meringue pie, had the texture of lemon meringue pie, but without the lemon in it - it had to be the most terrible pie I ever tasted. Many people do tremendous and noble works but they are missing one all-important ingredient: faith in Christ. These works look great, sound great, do great things for the public good, but without faith in Christ these works taste terrible to our gracious God and are only a stench to Him as Hebrews 11:6 clearly states **"WITHOUT FAITH IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO PLEASE GOD."** The good news is that we are in the race because Christ has won the race for us and soon we will receive the crown of everlasting life.

So what are we to do as we run this race for our everlasting crown that awaits us? James is the handbook for us – God's children – on how we now can live a pleasing life for our gracious Father in heaven. The book of James tells us that we praise God with our ears when we listen to His Word, we praise God with our tongues when we don't tear down people but build them up, and we praise God when we show others God's love through our actions. Today James spurs us on to praise our gracious God in two specific ways: by avoiding favoritism and avoiding an inactive faith.

If Jesus was visibly here this morning right now, what would you do? Take Him out to lunch? Invite Him over for supper? Take Him on a foliage trip? Have Him stay over in your best bedroom? Hug Him? Embrace Him? Rejoice over Him? These might be some of the ways I'm sure we would greet Him. I know He isn't visibly here this morning but He gives us many opportunities to show our love for Him by loving others like they were Him. You don't have to look too far to see people needing to be embraced with love nowadays. James gives us this example and advice today - he begins with **"Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in shabby clothes also comes in. If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, 'Here's a good seat for you.' But say to the poor man, 'You stand there' or 'Sit on the floor by my feet,' have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?"** Are you a profiler? Do certain people have to meet certain credentials to be in your group? We view a person's look, we view a person's status, we view a person's rank, popularity, title behind his or her name, to see if they are a match we feel comfortable with. When we view people let us only see one thing: a soul purchased and forgiven by Jesus. Let this soul know this.

Jesus was by no means a discriminator. Jesus reached out to the prostitutes, tax collectors, Samaritans, those having leprosy, the blind, the possessed, the rich, and those depending on their actions for salvation. He reached out to all people & He reached out to us, who also were once dead in our transgressions and sins. The way He showed His love for them was to show them their sin and then show Himself as the One who would save them from their sin. He never changed His Word, but His loving Word changed people's lives everywhere He went. We worship the Lord when we avoid favoritism and discrimination, and also when we don't avoid those living in a sinful lifestyle but embrace them and lovingly point out to them their sin, but also their Savior.

We praise and worship our Lord when we avoid an inactive faith. Our text addresses these following words to our hearts this morning; **"Faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead."** Don't view your TO DO LIST this week to reactivate your faith – view HIS "HE DID LIST" and your faith will produce fruit.

I didn't worry this year if my bean plants would produce beans; but what I did concern myself with was to make sure they had good soil and that they were watered frequently. In the same way don't worry about doing good works but concern yourself with making sure that the soil you're planted in is good soil (God's Word), water yourself with God's message of love and forgiveness frequently and fruits of faith will be produced. By keeping your eyes fixed on Jesus, His Life, His Death, His Resurrection, and His Word; there is no longer need for worry about producing fruits of faith; they will be there. Today, I hope you leave not with "This week I will do this, and this, and this!" BUT with this – "Since I'm a child of God through His sacrifice alone I will live like a child of God in everything I do."

Amen.

One final word on teaching and preaching sanctification. As you have hopefully seen you can't teach and preach sanctification, without first preaching the law and Gospel. If we don't preach the law in it's severity, we won't be showing our people the severity of sin. When we minimize sin, Jesus' completed work is minimized. When we maximize the seriousness of sin by preaching the law, we are also maximizing the seriousness God had in saving us. The law says "You can't hide from God! God has no ears for excuses! Come clean with God!" The Gospel says – "God has made us clean with Christ!" When sin is minimized, Jesus is minimized. When sin is maximized, God's full extent of grace is maximized.

For example, if you were buried up past your ankles in dirt – would you thank me for digging you out? Probably not, because I'm sure most of you could have dug yourself out. Let's say you were buried up to your neck in dirt and I came and dug you out; would you then be more thankful to me? Of course, you would. But what if you were buried six miles down and I gave up my wealth and all my strength to get you out, would you be even more thankful to me? Of course! Well my dear brothers in Christ, we were farther than six miles down when God saved us. We were dead – but God brought us to life through the Gospel. God didn't blink an eye or give us a second thought when it came to saving us; in fact, He gave up everything for us. We pause when we see who the only causality was of this rescue mission: God's only Son, our Savior Jesus Christ. Now would I have to say to you, after pulling you six miles up from beneath earth's surface, "Say thank you!?" No way – your thankfulness would be demonstrated right away in your words and actions to me. In the same way when the law and Gospel are preached our lips and lives will speak and demonstrate our thankfulness to Him, who brought us from death to life. In view of this mercy we will offer our bodies and lives as thank offerings to our most gracious God.

Encouraging Sanctification

The Apostle Paul in his first letter to the Thessalonians writes "***Finally, brothers, we instructed you how to live in order to please God, as in fact you are living. Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more.***"² Here he commends them on their God pleasing lives and here he encourages them to do this more and more. Never underestimate what believers can and are willing to do when asked. Here are just two recent events that happened in my congregation.

It wasn't too long ago that one our families became in great need of financial assistance. They needed \$3650 by week's end or they would be evicted from their condo. My heart went out to them and I wished that I had the means to assist them myself right away – but I couldn't at that time. What was I to do? I thought to myself – "There is no way my people would come up with this amount in a matter of a few days." I called one of my elders and the president of my congregation at the time and asked for their wisdom on how to handle this situation. Their advice was to put out an urgent email describing the situation and the need for a quick reply. The email went out and in about an hour's time we had the money to loan them. Seeing this response from my flock encouraged me to no end. But this is were it gets good; I went back to my computer to write another email that the monies had been raised, when I saw another nine responses from other families in our congregation, who were willing to help out as well. I thought my whole week was going to be spent on finding a way to help this family, but instead I spent most of my week writing letters of thankfulness to those who stepped up to help. God's love produces generous people – why would I ever doubt this?

Another example happened this summer. We were running pretty tight in our budget, our synod was in a crisis mode, and the plea came from the synod for everyone to increase their CMO's. "Now is not the time!" I thought to myself. I took this request to our voters and they decided to increase our CMO by another \$1,000 and also wanted to participate in my plan of directly giving to our synod through IMO's. Currently, we have eight of

² 1 Thessalonians 4:1,2

our families contributing \$25 or more on a monthly basis to our synod. By the way, I still have half of my congregation to contact regarding this program.

All our people contribute greatly in their giving of their God given time, talents, and treasures. But don't ever underestimate their willingness to help out even more. They too marvel at what God's love has done for them. What an ongoing blessing it is to see what God's love is doing to them.

Acknowledging sanctification

I'm sure we all remember our parents saying to us in our childhoods "Now did you say thank you?" I am by no means saying that any of us are childish; but perhaps we forget to acknowledge our gracious God and His gracious people when fruits are produced. Here I now turn to Irwin Habeck's essay *Don't Downgrade Good Works*, concerning this issue:

They [good works] ought to be acknowledged. Our Lord did. Perhaps his most enthusiastic acknowledgment of any good work is that which he accorded to Mary of Bethany. There was no commandment to chart her course, there were no precedents for her to follow. There were those who expressed serious doubts as to whether she had moved in the right direction. But Jesus settled the matter: "*She has done a beautiful thing to me.... She did what she could*" (Mark 14:6,8)

Then there was Maundy Thursday evening. Jesus knew that all of his disciples would forsake him and that Peter would even deny him. Yet in that very context he acknowledged their good works: "*You are those who have stood by me in my trials*" (Luke 22:28). Even after he had returned to glory, his saving work down here completed, he still revealed himself as the one who acknowledges the good works of his believers. In five of his seven letters to the churches in Asia Minor his words "*I know your works*" are followed by an acknowledgment of whatever good works he saw in their life.

His great slave and apostle, Paul, followed the pattern set by his Master. In his first letter, that to the Thessalonians, he set the tone. "*Your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope... You became imitators of us.... You became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia*" (I Thessalonians 1:3,6,7). The Philippians twice supplied him with financial support. Paul did not just send them a receipt. In a most tender tone and complete purity of motivation he acknowledged what had been done as a good work, "a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God" (Philippians 4:18). Then look at the extended list of greetings in Romans 16. Notice how often he does not only mention names, but also in connection with names acknowledges the good works of those named.³

This [acknowledgment of good works] needs to be done honestly, however. Our motives need to be pure. When we express our appreciation for the good works of believers, it ought to be done because we are happy to see the Spirit at work and want to share our reaction with the other. It ought not to be done for selfish reasons, for example, to gain the good will of the other in the hope that he will be inclined sometime in the future to show us a favor.⁴

Sanctified living is not to be taken for granted

Whatever the size, big or small, from a single apple to a full bushel of apples, fruits of faith must never be taken for granted. If a member approached you and said "Pastor, we have to talk; your wife just opened her heart to me about your ministry here." What would your first reaction be? I'm sure we would get on the phone and see what damage was done and I'm sure we would have on our mind as we dialed the number "What has gotten into my wife!?" After your conversation you find out that she spilled her heart open to this member about your joys you've had and are having in your ministry here. We breathe a sigh of relief! Why are we breathing a sigh of relief? Because maybe the only words from our mouths to our beloved wives have been the disappointments that you're experiencing in your present calling. When do we call our circuit pastors and

³ Habeck, *Don't Downgrade Good Works* – Our Great Heritage, Vol. 3, pages 114 & 115

⁴ Habeck, *Don't Downgrade Good Works* – Our Great Heritage, Vol. 3, page 114

district presidents? When things are just rosy or when you've had it with your congregation? The point I'm desperately trying to make is captured best in these words of Irwin Habeck once again:

The scene which meets a pastor's eyes when he surveys his congregation is not always exhilarating. Church attendance often is not as good as he would like it to be, nor is communion attendance, nor are contributions. The list of delinquent members weighs like an alp (mountain) upon his heart. Other cases which call for brotherly admonition and church discipline keep cropping up. It is hard to find members who are willing to contribute time and effort to serve on the church council, the evangelism committee, the stewardship committee.

If the pastor holds these problems too closely before his eyes, they prevent him from seeing the good works which the Spirit is producing on the part of his people. As a result his tone becomes belligerent, carping, or whining. The pastor ought to train himself to give equal time to the good instead of harping only on the bad. Don't take good works for granted. They are miracles. Acknowledge them. Be specific.⁵

I heard this story once of a father who had two daughters, and it goes something like this. It was a few weeks before Christmas and this father had each of his daughters sit on his lap as they paged through the toy section of a department store catalog. The oldest daughter was the first to sit on her father's lap and she didn't waste any time to point out all the things she wanted. "Daddy, I want this." "Daddy, I want that." "Daddy, I don't have this." "Daddy can I have this too?" After circling most of the toy section it was time for this father's youngest daughter to sit on his lap and do the same thing that her older sister had just completed. She opened the catalog to the toy section and she started to point out certain items but instead of saying "I want this." "I want that." "This would be nice." She would say "I have this daddy!" and "I already have that too daddy." Brothers, let us rejoice over what we already have in our congregations and pray to our gracious Father in heaven to give the other things we desire.

In conclusion

I didn't know where to begin this practical paper but this is where I will end it. Much more could be said, but I will take the advice coming from many of my college and seminary professors: less is more.

My final destination I take you to is where we began our journey – the empty tomb. It is here that God rescues us from the mire and muck of life. It is here he sets our feet upon the Rock. It is here he gives our hearts a new song to sing. It is here that we see what God's love has done for us and what it is still doing to us in our daily walk of life. Brothers, Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!

My closing advice to all of you is to remember what Luther once said "I simply taught and wrote God's Word, other than that I did nothing, the Word did everything!"

Sola Gratia!

Sola Fide!

Sola Scriptura!

⁵ Habeck, *Don't Downgrade Good Works – Our Great Heritage*, Vol. 3, pages 117 & 118.

Bibliography

- Bivens, Forrest. *Spiritual Renewal as Expressed in the Christian's Life*. Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Essay File.
- Concordia Triglotta*. Tr. F. Bente and W. Dau. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921.
- Habeck, Irwin. Essay: *Don't Downgrade Good Works*. Our Great Heritage – Northwestern Publishing House, 1991.
- Koehler, Edward. *A Summary of Christian Doctrine*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1952.
- Koester, Robert. *Gospel Motivation*. Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2007.
- Lange, Lyle. *God So Loved the World*. Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2000.
- Lange, Lyle. *Sanctification: Alive in Christ*. Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1999.
- Treptow, Earle. Essay: *Sanctification – Set Apart by God's Grace to Serve*. Presented to the 59th Convention of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod in New Ulm, Minnesota, 2007.
- Walther, C.F.W. *The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1986.