

Trembling Evangelists

✠ **Know nothing – but Christ (vv.1-3)**

✠ **Prove nothing – but the Spirit (vv.3-5)**

In the name of Christ-crucified, dear **Trembling Evangelists**:

What is it about telling people about Jesus that sets your knees to knocking, and makes your mouth run dry while palms and arm pits run rivers? Remember that time your pastor attended a meeting of community leaders about how to keep kids off drugs? The keynote speaker began her talk with a joke about Jesus Christ. All the while the Holy Spirit kept reminding me of that Bible passage that says to confess Christ openly. Finally with time for one more question, I got my hand in the air. With my heart pounding this paid professional public speaker, had to hold onto the chair in front and explain to the audience that had mostly laughed, how Jesus Christ is the only Rock on which we and our youth can stand. In public or private does the Lord have use for us **Trembling Evangelists**? Only as long as we...

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Christians in Corinth apparently wanted more from Pastor Paul, lots more. Long before TV and radio, there were traveling evangelists who dazzled their audiences with eloquent speeches. They could gather huge crowds and make their living from city to city. As time went on they found it especially profitable in towns with Christian churches where peace and tranquility ruled. A few choice comments by these stalwart preachers could turn a congregation away from weak-kneed, **Trembling Evangelists**.

Reminds me of one elderly officer in a retirement congregation who used his pastor's absence to read a fire and brimstone sermon from Civil War times, then asked everyone why we can't have more sermons like that in our churches. Respectfully, I raised my hand and asked the group, "Did you notice anything missing from the sermon he read?" With one voice all the women in the room shouted: "Jesus!" How often have you heard sermons that barely mentioned the Savior's name?

The deeper your Christian training, the more you tend to listen with "Lutheran filters." For instance last Sunday, I caught the second half of a very popular TV preacher. His insights and Bible stories were personally uplifting for me. It was time well spent to learn some things about sanctification, which fit the Holy Scriptures, but I had not considered before. And I'll give him credit for being like Billy Graham who recognized the need for Christians everywhere to find a Bible-based local congregation for Christian fellowship and regular feeding from God's Word. But I listened hard for the Name of Jesus and the sins from which we are saved. No mention until his 30-second prayer of repentance at the end.

How decidedly different from the Lord's Apostle Paul! *"When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling."* Who could fill a coliseum with that?

Then as now, many other men were named "Jesus." And as Jesus predicted, many have come claiming, *"I am the Christ"* (Matthew 24:5). But out of the whole mass of those named "Jesus" or "Christ," *this One* alone is the crucified-Christ. *This Man* who died bloodied and battered as the most vile criminal was nailed to our cursed cross. *This One* is the one-and-only Savior from sin, death and hell. *This One* alone was proclaimed by Paul and all the apostles and prophets as the Suffering Servant, the Christ of God. *This One* alone is the God-Man, who shed His blood for us all. But when you say that loud and clear for all to hear, it makes you tremble. For Christ promises that anger and ridicule will result, persecution and hardship, because by nature all people are convinced that they're just fine the way they are without Jesus Christ, especially not *"him crucified."*

Strangely, God's way to reach all people is with **Trembling Evangelists**. You might wish a better Bible student were there to answer your friend's question. Your racing heart may forget how you prayed dangerously for God to give you an unavoidable opportunity to speak up for Christ. One mission administrator prayed dangerously, then a few hours later found himself in a foggy pileup on Interstate 94. He was okay, so he got out of his car and started looking for anyone who needed help. Pinned under another vehicle was a man with only a few moments to live. Time to call your pastor? Should you talk about the weather? Or did God place you, His personally chosen **Trembling Evangelist** at that place and time to **Know nothing – but Christ**, and Him crucified? In life and death, Christ is all that matters, and that's the way God works. He puts pastors where He wants them and graciously leads you to your friend or coworker who needs a **Trembling Evangelist** to witness more like Paul, in gentleness, patience and trust in power not your own. Christ-crucified wants you and me for this simple purpose to...

† **Prove nothing – but the Spirit (vv.3-5)**

Again, the Lord's Apostle Paul sets himself up for criticism by anyone who wants high powered media marketing: ***"I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power."***

Once a man who took my class three times was finally ready to join our fellowship. When asked what ultimately changed his mind, he replied, "It was something you said last time at our house." My mind raced back trying to remember some deeply profound comment. Instead, he answered my inquiry with something so childlike: "What you said was, 'Trust in the Lord.'"

One pastor in Shoreview said they did not do evangelism since people came to them. His church was like a business needing people to pay the bills. So who would put something like this in the bulletin? "New Life members have joined together to spread God's message of salvation in Christ. Visitors are not obligated to give an offering. We thank God for this opportunity to share His Word of grace and blessing with you!" And why try to reach the children or residents in group homes? But let me show you ***"a demonstration of the Spirit's power,"*** as He chooses to work through Word and sacrament.

No matter which congregation you join, the more active you become the more you find weakness that boggles the mind. I keep encouraging God's people in my care to pray about such things because our weaknesses ultimately **Prove nothing – but the Spirit** can be responsible for our success. It's just that I don't always remember my prayers. But our gracious God does.

Pastor Vomhof of Jesus Cares Ministries listened patiently to me wish we had more help to reach the developmentally disabled. Then he slid a paper across my desk asking, "Is this one of your members?" I won't mention her name here, but our sister in Christ was praying for opportunities to serve and emailed JCM-Milwaukee the previous day. Anticipating our prayers, God provided her gifts to research group homes not just for our congregation, but for all the others in our North Circuit. Now several New Life members are certified JCM teachers. The power of **the Spirit** brought not two or three, but all six residents eagerly attending at Janet Court, plus more staff. But it's that little old "Grandma" sitting under her blanket who can truly **Prove nothing – but the Spirit**. I almost didn't recognize her, but years ago she used to come to worship with Evelyn Downey from the Arner House. She says so little, but her heart still shines through her eyes whenever she hears about Christ-crucified. Old Lorraine has always lived in group homes or institutions. The world will barely notice when her last breath fades away. But by the power of **the Spirit**, Christ-crucified will soon enfold her in His everlasting arms.

If you're looking for spectacular, impressive, worldly wise, you won't find it here or in your personal witness – if you have ***"resolved to know nothing...except Jesus Christ and him crucified."*** But **Trembling Evangelists** are the only kind God will use. Not ***"eloquence or superior wisdom"*** – just the power of the Spirit of God who says, ***"Open wide your mouth, and I will fill it"*** (Psalm 81:10). **Know nothing – but Christ-crucified. Prove nothing – but the Spirit.** To God alone be glory! Amen.