

...to Seek † to Save...

From our dear Lord Jesus this is God's Word for us today: ***"For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost."*** Who are the ***"lost,"*** and from what did Jesus ***"save"*** them?

In His dear Name, dear loved ones of God:

If only the first time were my last time! In the Portland International Airport I was talking to the mother of a classmate. She listened to me describe my disappointments with the synod high school or college I attended, then asked me a question: "Did you read the article President Toppe wrote in the *Northwestern Lutheran*?" "No," I replied, "What article was that?" "The one about students who go home and complain about our synod preparatory schools." I swallowed hard. "I guess I should read it."

Fast forward too close for comfort to a Pastor-Teacher-Delegate Conference a few years ago. Now I was defending those same synod schools. A slightly older pastor took me aside afterwards and tearfully, but firmly admonished me for the way I was coming off. Again, I failed to control my tongue.

Through the Lord's Apostle James, the Holy Spirit says, ***"No one can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison."*** This tiny tongue is like a small spark that can set a whole forest on fire. ***"The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell."*** (James 3:5f,8) Where Satan fails to make murderers, adulterers and thieves out of God-fearing church members, he often succeeds in getting them to gossip. Good intentions cannot save us who by nature are ***"the lost."***

Dust off your Catechism. Review the Ten Commandments. Note that the same God who says, ***"You shall not murder...commit adultery...[or] steal..."*** also says, ***"You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor."*** Martin Luther's explanation stands solidly on Scripture: ***"What does this mean? We should fear and love God that we do not tell lies about our neighbor, betray him or give him a bad name, but defend him, speak well of him and take his words and actions in the kindest possible way."***

A great congregational challenge comes in a building project. Sometimes the stronger your support of the ministry, the more difficult it is to ***"speak the truth in love."*** We prove we're not grown up yet. (Ephesians 4:15) How can we honestly and frankly discuss our differences without falling into this sin? Ask yourself a few personal questions: *Could I say this with everyone around? Or are there certain people that I would not want to hear it? Will my words build up the church of Christ, or tear it down? Could someone take my little negative and turn it into a big problem?* Even if you are mature enough to carefully guard your words and sincerely be positive, you have to ask yourself: *Am I defending my neighbor against gossip?* Not one of us have kept this commandment perfectly as God demands.

"The Son of Man came to seek and to save [us] lost [sinners]" – "from the strife of tongues." (Psalm 31:20 KJV) He was reaching His goal that first Palm Sunday when thousands of tongues were shouting glad Hosanna's and praying for God's blessings on Him. But Jesus knew as He rode that humble donkey's colt into Jerusalem that many tongues would turn on Him that first Holy Week. In spite of warnings, one disciple would betray Him, another deny Him, and the rest desert instead of using their tongues to defend Him against false accusations. Many vicious tongues would shout, ***"Crucify him!"*** And many would taunt Him on the cross to come down and prove His power as the Son of God.

But ***"The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."*** He would use His tongue to cry out, ***"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do!"*** And the Father would do just that, forgive us all for the misuse of our tiny tongue by His magnificent mercy that covers a multitude of sins.

My feeble failures to control my tongue only prove how desperately I need this week. You do too. We cannot dissect our comments to try to outweigh the bad with good. God's holiness goes beyond your grandmother's advice, "If you can't say something good, don't say anything." God's holiness demands that you always speak up and defend others. God's holiness insists that in your heart of hearts you take their words and actions in the kindest possible way.

We need to come confess our sins together this Maundy Thursday and together be reconciled to God and each other. We need to follow our Savior to the judgment hall that night and into Good Friday to see how He held His tongue perfectly in our place to suffer our shame of all the times we have spoken out of turn. We need to see Him hanging between the earth and sky to wash away every stain of gossip from us all. We need to sit quietly by on Saturday and consider the depths of His saving love the looked until He found us and will not let us go. We need to come celebrate His victory over sin, death and hell to turn these tongues to praise in the glorious light of Easter morning. It is God's love alone that sets us free ***"from the strife of tongues."*** And God's love alone can give us the grace to ***"speak the truth in love."***

Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest."

Amen.