

Change of Attitude

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“Repentance” is one of the key words and key teachings from God’s Word, the Bible. “Unless you repent...” are words the Lord frequently speaks to each of us. The word “repent” literally means “to change one’s mind”—figuratively it means to feel regret and remorse to the extent that a person changes what they’re doing, turning away from evil or turning toward a neglected good.

We all need to examine ourselves and daily repent, trusting in Jesus and God’s free gift of forgiveness we find in him.

Congregations also do well to do that collectively, asking such questions as: “Is our teaching from the Bible correct? Are our practices in keeping with the teaching? Are we loving each other? Are we loving our neighbors in Jesus’ name?”

And the answer is always, “Not nearly good enough.” But thanks be to God, the life Jesus lived was more than good enough, and his righteousness counts for all who trust in him.



True Story

The reason for my writing about this is a true story I heard recently. Here it is.

When one of our recent national disasters happened, Lutheran Church Charities received a phone call from the district president asking them to come with the Comfort Dogs and asking LCC to contact the congregation in the community with the disaster.

LCC did that, and the pastor asked if he could get back to them so he could check with the elders—a very good idea. But he didn’t reconnect with LCC for a couple of days, so LCC staff called him again.

The pastor said words to this effect: “The elders and I have checked, and all our members are unaffected by this. So thanks for the offer, but we don’t need any assistance.”

Oops

I hope you’re groaning out loud after reading that.

Here’s the thing: Thanks be to God that the members of the congregation were unaffected by the disaster, but what about the hundreds of their neighbors who suffered harm?

Fortunately, with the agreement of the district president, LCC contacted another Bible-believing church in the community that welcomed LCC and the Comfort Dogs and worked with them to bridge compassion and healing to any in the community who needed it.

The LCC team there says they are having more and deeper times of witness and prayer with the suffering than they normally experience in disaster response with the Comfort Dogs.

Sadly, our LCMS congregations don’t always consider helping people outside themselves.

Looking Outward

Some congregations are totally inwardly focused. Now we definitely should look inward to our own members and take care of each other. But we also see the model of Jesus who looked not just to the insiders but also to the outsiders. And he still does.

How about your congregation and mine? Even more, what about me? You? Our sinful nature will always say in response to disaster, “Hey, I’m fine. Too bad for them.” That’s what the priest and Levite did in Jesus’ parable of the Good Samaritan.

Our regenerated and baptized new life remembers that Jesus could have changed his mind about going to the cross for us. But he didn’t.

He definitely did not need to make payment for his sins and guilt and shame since he had none. There was nothing in it for him but unspeakable suffering. But seeing our hopeless situation, he cared so much that he laid down his life for us.

In him we have forgiveness and new life. That not only frees us from sin, death and the devil, it also frees us to look outside ourselves to the needs of others. We can repent of our inward focus and pray, using the means of grace to bring about a change of attitude—one that is outward looking and full of compassion and action.

What Will We Do?

I hope the story of the congregation that declined assistance from LCC will be something we reflect on. “What would our congregation have done?” And then take it another step and ask, “What is our congregation doing now?”

Maybe there’s not a huge disaster like a storm or a flood or a school shooting in your community. But every person where you live is facing disaster—the disaster of sin that results in all kinds of tragedies and, worst of all for those who don’t know the Lord Jesus, the disaster of life and death without forgiveness.

So if brothers and sisters in the faith in other congregations are hurting, we don’t just say, “But we’re OK.” We offer help. And if neighbors who don’t know Jesus are suffering, again, we offer help in Jesus’ name.

Most congregations—OK, all congregations—need to check their attitude toward those outside of “us.” We need to repent our selfish ways and look for ways to love our neighbors.

One last thing: let’s not dwell on “that congregation” who declined the offer from Lutheran Church Charities. Yes, let’s glance at that and learn from them. But let’s rather dwell on the cross and the empty tomb—not only for our own comfort but also for the comfort of those outside the church.