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Mission and 1 Peter

How Should Lay People Verbalize the Gospel

What role do lay people play in verbalizing the Gospel of the forgiveness of sins in Christ? In other words, how should Christ's Church understand lay evangelism? This is a question of remarkably great controversy in many churches throughout Christendom, and especially the LCMS, because it has to do with the Office of the Ministry and the Priesthood of All Believers; two terms and concepts laden with connotations and historical baggage enough to make a conversation on the subject exceptionally difficult. For the reasons of such baggage and connotations, to begin with, we'll lay aside such summary symbols and look exegetically at the specifics of God's Word so that we may come to better understand the doctrines of Scripture – which we can then bring to bear on these freighted phrases.

One notices that the most consistent *sedes doctrinae* for the subject of lay evangelization in the writings of the Reformers is the epistle of 1 Peter. For example, Luther: "If the eunuch that was converted by Philip remained a real Christian, which is exactly what one would assume, then he without a doubt taught many others God's Word since he was commanded 'to proclaim the deeds of the one who calls us out of darkness into his wonderful light' (1 Peter 2:9)."¹ "You [the layman] should preach the 'good work,' that is, the miraculous work that God has done as he brought you from darkness into light. This is the highest priestly office."² "These fellows are the Christians, Christ's brethren, who with him are consecrated priests, as Peter says too, 1 Peter 2,

¹ Luther, *On the institution of the ministry of the church*, 1523, WA 12:192.15-23

² Luther, *Sermons on 1 Peter*, 1523, WA 12:267.3-7, 318.25-319.6

'You are a royal priesthood.'³ Chemnitz: "The Scriptures of the New Testament mention besides [the Levitical priesthood] also a royal and holy priesthood (1 Peter 2:5, 9; Rev. 1:6; 5:10; 20:6). 'Christ has made us kings and priests.' In only these four passages is any mention made in the New Testament of a royal priesthood beside the unique priesthood of Christ. However, these passages do not speak only of the presbyters but all about believers in general."⁴ "All Christians are indeed priests (1 Peter 2:9; Rev. 1:6), because they offer spiritual sacrifices to God. Everyone also can and should teach the Word of God in his own house (Deut. 6:7; 1 Cor. 14:35). Nevertheless, not everyone ought to take and arrogate to himself the public ministry of Word and sacrament."⁵

Approaching the Gospels or the Pastoral Epistles we find many arguments for directing much of the authority to preach and to teach to the Apostles and the pastors – with only scattered instances of lay evangelism, such as the Samaritan woman of John 4. The epistle of 1 Peter, however, is clearly written to the Church at large and contains some of the strongest and clearest texts regarding lay evangelism in the New Testament. Therefore, to clearly answer the question of what role lay people were intended by Christ to play in verbalizing the Gospel to others, let us carefully study Peter's 1st epistle that we may with joy embrace the fine line set forth in God's Word.

Peter begins his Epistle in the proclamation of the Gospel as rooted in the name spoken in Baptism; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: "according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood" (1:2). In this language of "sprinkling with his blood" Peter is connecting the sacrifice of Christ with the

³ Luther, *The right and Power of a Christian Congregation*, 1523, LW 39:309-10

⁴ Chemnitz, *Examination of the Council of Trent*, Vol II, 467

⁵ *Ibid...* 678

Sinai covenant ceremonies (Exodus 24:8, Lev 8:11, 30)⁶ and also with the sacrificial atonement of Christ from the songs of the Suffering Servant (Isaiah 52:15, 53:5).⁷ With this Peter then says that we are to be presently "sprinkled with his blood" – and this, not metaphorically or symbolically, but his language is actual: the true and physical encountering of the blood of Christ upon you. The writer of Hebrews runs with this same subject throughout his letter, especially in chapter 9 and 10, showing how the blood of Christ is the true and perfect blood which God intended to be sprinkled upon the altar for our purification and upon the priests to allow them entrance into the holy places and offered as sacrifice for sins; and this, again, not by some metaphorical blood, but the very real blood shed on the cross. A review of the New Testament uses of the blood of Christ is helpful here for shedding light on how Peter would have understood the true and physical blood of Christ and how he then connects such blood to the Trinitarian name spoken over us in Baptism.

The major repeated subject of the physical, true blood of Christ placed upon believers is in reference to the Last Supper and the Passover – as the blood placed upon the believer so that the angel of death might pass over him or her. Thus the Synoptics (Matthew 26:28, Mark 14:24, Luke 22:20), 1 Corinthians 11:25, and John 6 speak of the blood of Christ as "true" blood which saves from death and gives eternal life through the forgiveness of sins.⁸ Then the physical blood of Christ is poured forth upon the earth from his side pierced at the cross (John 19:34). Another place where the New Testament speaks of the blood of Jesus is in statements like the Jews at the

⁶ Exodus 24:8, "And Moses took the blood and threw it on the people and said, 'Behold the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words.'" Leviticus 8:11, 30, "And he sprinkled some of it on the altar seven times, and anointed the altar and all its utensils and the basin and its stand, to consecrate them... Then Moses took some of the anointing oil and of the blood that was on the altar and sprinkled it on Aaron and his garments and also on his sons and his son's garments. So he consecrated Aaron and his garments, and his sons and his sons' garments with him."

⁷ Isaiah 52:15, 53:5, "So shall he sprinkle many nations; kings shall shut their mouths because of him; for that which has not been told them they shall see, and that which they have not heard they understand... But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed."

⁸ Whether you take John 6 as a pre-teaching on the Sacrament or not, it says his blood is "true drink" and that this blood gives eternal life.

Crucifixion: "His blood be on us and on our children" (Matthew 27:25, Acts 5:28). *While these verses are taken figuratively, it is worth noting that when spoken by Jews, they carry the weight of the Covenant ceremonies where the blood was actually put upon them in place of their own.*

Within Peter's own epistle he again references the blood of Jesus in 1:18-19 in a manner which summarizes the other way in which the blood of Christ is spoken: "Knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot." That is, the blood of Christ is the sacrificial payment for the sins of the people like that of the Day of Atonement. Thus the blood of Jesus is that sacrifice which covers over our sins and purifies us as God's holy priests and people (2:5, 9).

When you further extend the study to include the death of Christ as the place wherein he shed his blood, then the connection between the Trinitarian name invoked in Baptism and the blood of Christ becomes plain. Thus Paul says in Romans 6:3-4, "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life." And Jesus in John 3:3, 5 says, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God... Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God." And it's certainly worth noting that the only other Apostle to use the phrase "Born Again" outside of Jesus in John 3 is Peter here in the first chapter of his epistle (1 Peter 1:3, 23): "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead... since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God;" So it is right and proper to see Peter making a connection here with the grace

given us in Baptism with the invocation of the Trinitarian name and the real sprinkled blood of Christ shed for us for the forgiveness of sins. To say it another way, it can be seen that Peter is declaration Baptism – and also Communion – as the place where the real, true blood of Jesus is sprinkled upon us for the forgiveness of sins. So Luther can say, "All that the mortal eye beholds is water as we pour it. Before the eye of faith unfolds the pow'r of Jesus' merit. For here it sees the crimson flood to all our ills bring healing; the wonders of his precious blood the love of God revealing, assuring his own pardon."

Everything that flows from these opening Trinitarian verses is rooted in the proclamation of that Gospel of the Means of Grace in the blood of Christ. Peter begins by blessing the Father for his mercy poured out upon the Church through Baptism (1:3, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,") and continues to apply this imperishable hope into the lives of those undergoing persecution. The language he uses to describe this persecution gives us insight to how the apostle and the Holy Spirit would cause us who have been Baptized to view such trials: "griefs" and "various trials" (1:6), "tested genuineness of your faith" (1:7), "serving" (1:12), "passions of your former ignorance" (1:14), "exile/diaspora" (1:17), "futile ways inherited from your forefathers" (1:18), "purified your souls by obedience" (1:22). Thus, the Baptized Christian can view the sufferings of persecution as those tests and refinements which strengthen and purify our faith against the attacks of the world. He concludes with the great summary at the end of chapter 1: "And this word is the good news that was preached to you" (1:25).

Thus in chapter 1 Peter roots his preaching of the life of the Christian in *the Mission of God in Christ* as he, the Apostle sent by Christ to be an eye-Witness of our Lord's resurrection (Acts 1:21-22), evangelizes to those elect exiles in the Diaspora (1:1-2). *Missio*, from whence we

get the word Mission, is a Latin word from the Greek *Apostello*, which means To send or To be sent for a purpose. The Father sent his Son who sent the Spirit onto the Church whom the Son sent out into the world to bring the lost back to the Father. With his opening chapter, Peter proves this to be the pattern of the Apostles as those sent to proclaim Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit who are actually preaching justification in Christ through the Word and Sacraments. That is the Mission of Christ for this world until he comes again.

As we shall see further in the Epistle, this forms the foundation for the average person in the Church's witness and evangelism. That is to say, we must insist from the example of 1 Peter, that private or lay preaching and teaching does not exist without the apostolic mission of the Church. To say it another way, the witness of the Church has its source and sustenance in the public preaching and teaching and administering the Sacraments of the Church through the Apostles. It's not until verse 22 of chapter 1 that Peter turns from a Gospel preached specifically for his "congregation"/audience to the reaction of the congregation to others, and this only briefly as he shortly returns right back again to a very particular, personal proclamation: "Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love another earnestly from a pure heart." So we must first be fed and strengthened by God's Word and Sacraments preached and administered to us before we can in turn "love one another earnestly from a pure heart" (1:22). Apart from this ministry there can be no true love and no pure hearts.

Then, in chapter 2, Peter moves from the mission of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit through the Apostles to the Church on to the new creation mission of the congregation. That is, those who have heard the Gospel of Jesus Christ and have, as Peter says in 1:3, been born again through the waters of Baptism have now been brought into the movement of the mission of the Trinity as they are no longer on the outside as the direction of the mission but on the inside as the

movement, itself. They are now the Church who is sent out to the world to reach the lost with the same Gospel that rescued them.

But how are individual members of the Church to reach out according to this mandate as part of the "apostling" Church? Peter begins to answer this question in chapter 2 with a heavy emphasis on vocation. He speaks of the believers as the Temple and the priesthood (2:5, 9), institutions of the Old Testament which God intended to show the world the grace and glory of the one true God and to point ahead to Christ(1 Chronicles 17:21,⁹ Psalm 98¹⁰). So the Baptized Christians exist just like the Temple and the Priesthood at one and the same time to stand as those who live completely for Christ and those who live completely for their neighbor – sure within themselves of their own salvation in the blood of Christ and purposefully aware and attractive to the nations/Gentiles as the place of the presence and peace of God. As such, Peter calls those who have received mercy to live holy lives before the Gentiles, in word and work, in order that unbelievers may also come to faith through their witness (2:12).¹¹

It's worth noting the motivation Peter gives for encouraging these Christians in the "diaspora" to live honorable lives in verse 12. He says "so that... they may...glorify God on the day of visitation." What is "the day of visitation?" There are two simple interpretive perspectives for this "visitation." The first refers visitation to the coming of the Gentiles into the presence of the Christian congregation. Here one would read the verse "and glorify God on the day of their visitation." This would mean that Baptized Christians are called to make special notice of their lives outside of the gathering of the saints so that when Gentiles come to join them in the service of the Word that they aren't hardened in their consciences against the hypocrisy of Christians.

⁹ 1 Chronicles 17:21, "And who is like your people Israel, the one nation on earth whom God went to redeem to be his people, making for yourself a name for great and awesome things, in driving out nations before your people whom you redeemed from Egypt?"

¹⁰ Psalm 98:2, 3 "The LORD has made known his salvation; he has revealed his righteousness in the sight of the nations... All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God."

¹¹ 1 Peter 2:12 "Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation."

This is a prevalent concern among non-believers even today and a reason frequently cited in studies for why individuals choose either to leave a church or never attend in the first place.¹²

With this interpretation, Peter would be encouraging Christians in order that outsiders may prevent scandals in their churches.

The other simple interpretive perspective refers this visitation to Christ's return on the last day to judge the living and the dead. The word in the Greek is *episkopes*, meaning "over-sight" or "supervision" or "inspection." Its connotative reference in the New Testament is the office of Bishop – which could lead one to interpret it as the day of visitations on the Bishop's rounds of inspections, but the reference here isn't to inspecting the Church but inspecting the Gentiles. There is only one who judges all nations, who requires an "inspection" of the hearts of all people, Christians and Gentiles, alike; and that one is God. Here one would read the verse "glorify God on the day of his visitation." This would mean that Peter has in mind the reality of the day of judgment with the return of Christ and how our actions in this life can cause non-believers to "see our good deeds and glorify God on the day of his visitation." In this interpretation, Peter is putting before his people the simple fact that there will be a judgment and those who don't believe will be condemned and those who do will be saved (John 3:16-18¹³), and the actions of his congregation – specifically the lay members of his congregation who interact the most with the Gentiles in the world – are to be made in light of the outcomes of that judgment.

While the first interpretation teaches great things to the Church and, as a lesson, should not be overlooked, this writer believes the second perspective is more fitting to the text, firstly because of the use of *episkopes*, and so sees the apostle Peter putting one emphasis of mission on the coming day of judgment and the common layman's role in bearing an honorable example of

¹² Kinnamon, *UnChristian*,

¹³ "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God."

Christ for the world to see and so, by the power of the Holy Spirit, come to faith. This conclusion is furthered by the similar statement from chapter 4 where Peter says, "With respect to this they are surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery, and they malign you; but they will give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead." Here one may rightly speak about the place of encouraging evangelism through the preaching of the reality of the condemnation in hell of unbelievers, because Peter does so. While there is much abuse on this topic – by those who, for example, run a ticker of those who die without faith – Peter demonstrates that there is a proper place for encouraging evangelism through word and work in light of the coming judgment of God; and that by the constant realization and revelation that all of actions lived in Christ have an impact on the proclamation of the Gospel and the way the world receives Christ here in this life before he comes again to judge the living and the dead.

And Peter illustrates how they might do this through the teaching of Vocation: first in the civil realm (2:13), with slaves and masters (2:18), husband and wives (3:1) and all the Baptized, in general (3:8). Thus Peter demonstrates that the foremost way Christians are used in the movement of the mission of God is through their lives lived according to their calling (vocation) so that they may "proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his glorious light" (2:9). This means that the Baptized Christian has the responsibility to know God's Word and how it says God's people should be living so that they bear the right and true proclamation of the Gospel through their lives and words to the world around them.

Here Peter places Christian ethics in its proper Evangelization sphere. Ethics for the Christian isn't about having to do one thing or another as Fundamentalists want it to be. There isn't a one-size fits all solution to every single issue in life – and that is on purpose by the beautiful plan and purpose of God. Rather, Christian ethics is about bearing the image of Christ in the most honorable way for the world to see so that they may come to know him through us.

What the Christian does in the civil realm (2:13) should reflect what they believe about God's commandments (e.g. Exodus 20:12), his continual action in this world (e.g. Romans 13:1), and Christ's kingship over all creation and specifically over Christians (e.g. Acts 2:36). Yet how this doctrinal core is practiced will be affected and changed by the specific situations in which one finds themselves. So the Baptized Christian is set free to consider in every aspect of their lives how to act in the best possible way in order to display Christ and him crucified for the world. To use the words of Jesus to express this, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" (Matthew 16:24). So ethics is vocation and vocation is ethics as Peter puts it forth here in chapter 2.

In the middle of this section of vocation and ethics, Peter is also clear to remind his congregation, and us today, that it's not just about living the deeds, but also we are called to speak. Luther rightly highlights that to "proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light" (2:9) is first and foremost to actually speak the excellent activities which God has done; and the most excellent of all being what God has done in Christ. And to whom is this proclamation to be done? The immediate antecedent is the Gentiles of verse 12 and the unbelievers of verse 7. Thus Peter declares that every Christian has the responsibility – the dignity and "calling" of God to "proclaim his excellencies" in word and deed, not just as part of the congregational confession but also in the world in their vocations.

Then Peter unites the Christian's story to the Christ who spoke and worked in order to exhort the Baptized to be proper preachers of the Gospel: "For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin

and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed" (2:21-24). In this way the saying of St. Francis comes into its own, "Preach Christ at all times; use words if you have to" (which, you will eventually always have to). And where does the Christian encounter God's Word in a consistent and applied way so that they may know how to live it out in their lives and speak it to others? Yes, thus Peter roots the lay witness to the Divine Service as the source and sustenance of their evangelism efforts in word and work.

Herein lies Peter's primary distinction between the public and private office. Ascribing to the public office the responsibility and authority given in Scripture does not take away from the laity's responsibility or authority for preaching but rather properly locates it. The pastor's role is to preach and teach in the public life of the Church and so connect people to the word and work of Christ, be that for the public worship services or the public mercy works or service projects, etc... He is localized for the benefit of the Church. The laity however are localized in their vocations – a much broader audience than is had by any one pastor. Both are preachers of the Gospel. Both are witnesses to the world around them. The difference is the audience and the expectation. Note that Peter never tells his congregation to Baptize the heathen or to administer the Lord's Supper to each other. These are the public acts of the Church given for good order to the office of the Apostles: to pastors. But the proclamation of the Gospel through word and work is entirely commended to the laity in their whole lives with equal fervor as to their ministers.

Peter then moves his congregation to see where they will be given the opportunities to proclaim the excellent works of God in Christ. Amidst this vocational preaching of Christendom, the theme of persecution runs throughout Peter's letter and comes to its climax in 3:14-18 as he declares "But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense (*apologia*) to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet

do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil. For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit..." Note again that Peter unites the Christian's story to the Christ in our persecution even as he will go on to connect us further to the resurrection of Christ in our Baptism. So the Baptized, living in Christ, will suffer persecution in the civil realms, with slaves and masters, husbands and wives, and all aspects of life and this will be our place of living out the vocations to which Christ has called us. For when we do suffer persecutions, Peter calls all the Baptized to be ready even as Christ was ready to make a bold defense and confession of our faith through word and work. Just as Paul says of pastors in 1 Timothy 6:12-14¹⁴ so Peter says of all the Church.

This *apologia* is rooted once again in the preaching of Christ that has come to take root in our hearts and lives through the Word and Sacraments; for we do not choose to make Christ holy in our lives, nor to confess him as Lord (1 Corinthians 12:3¹⁵), but the Holy Spirit has captivated our hearts and taught us to honor Christ the Lord as holy through his Means of Grace (Romans 10:17, 1 Corinthians 12:9, Titus 3:5¹⁶). So it is through the pure preaching of the Word and the right administration of the Sacraments that our hearts are prepared by Christ to make such a defense by the power of the Holy Spirit; which is simply another way of saying that all good

¹⁴ 1 Timothy 6:12-14, "Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called and about which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. I charge you in the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who in his testimony before Pontius Pilate made the good confession, to keep the commandment unstained and free from reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ."

¹⁵ 1 Corinthians 12:3, "Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says 'Jesus is accursed' and no one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except in the Holy Spirit."

¹⁶ Romans 10:17, "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ." 1 Corinthians 12:9, For to one is given "faith by the same Spirit." Titus 3:5 "He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and the renewal of the Holy Spirit."

apologetics are rooted in the Church's worship life. So one could take Peter's encouragement and add to the common saying, *lex orandi, lex credendi, lex missii*.

Here Peter brings us face to face with the major differences in Christendom regarding Sunday morning worship. Mainline Evangelicals predominately view worship as our action of praising God and so make worship principally a matter of singing songs and prayers. In its extreme, some denominations have gone so far as to declare that church is not for believers but only as a catching ground for unbelievers; which, in Armenian theology, means it's a place of offering up ourselves to Jesus or "Kingdom multiplication." In both of these positions, worship is not about the feeding and sustaining of the Christian by the gifts of Christ but about our actions offered up to God. Knowing therefore that individual Christians still need to be fed and strengthened by God, Evangelicalism takes the page from Pietism and locates this sustenance in small group Bible Study and daily, private, devotions. Also at work in Evangelicalism is the teaching service, which moves towards this recognition of the need to be fed by God's Word, yet this tends to take place in a far more informal setting that attempts to feel less like worship – less impressed upon by the presence of the Divine – and therefore much more like a "large-scale" small-group Bible Study. So their actual worship service, even taking these other "auxilliary" functions in consideration, remains about offering up what they've done throughout the week rather than receiving from God – as a rule.

Lutherans predominately view worship as the exact opposite of Evangelicals. The Divine Service is the place where God comes to us through Word and Sacrament to feed and nourish everyone, whether unbeliever through the Word or believer through both Word and Sacrament. Here in Worship God supplies our needs and by his great provision, by uniting us to Christ. He *then* makes the Baptized part of his mission out into the world – to bring more people back with them into worship to receive God's gifts and be united as well to Christ into one body: the

Church. Yet if we think of worship as something we do, we miss the purpose and need of God to change our hearts and empower our actions.

Nowhere is this more blatantly proclaimed in Peter's epistle than in his section on our salvation through Baptism at the end of chapter 3:18-22, "For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison, because they formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water. Baptism, which corresponds (serves as an antitype) to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him." The subject of this entire conversation is Christ – not us. Christ is the one who suffered for us. Christ is the one who waited patiently; who brought the Flood to destroy the earth and saved eight persons through water. Christ is the one whose blood sprinkled over us in Baptism appeals to God for our good conscience through Christ's resurrection. Christ is the one who has gone into heaven and subjected all powers to himself. We simply passively receive his great and wondrous gifts which he freely gives to those who believe in him. Thus Peter can say, "Baptism...now saves you." This not something you have done, but something God has done to you by the power of his name in the blood of Jesus Christ; which draws us right back to the beginning of Peter's conversation in chapter 1 of the Trinitarian name and Baptism – which leads into our life as Baptized Christians who witness Christ in our lives through words and works. So God initiates the giving of his gifts to us, he causes us to have the faith to receive those gifts by his Holy Spirit, and God empowers us to live after the example of Christ – in whose blood we've been Baptized and with

whose Spirit we've been filled. That's the pattern of Christian worship as set forward especially here by Peter in his epistle.

We are prepared by Christ through worship to bring the Gentiles into the Church through vocation and through proclamation and making a defense to anyone who asks: word and work. We take the language of worship and use that as Christ has equipped us to share it with the world. So Peter returns to Creedal and worship language, talking about Baptism and the resurrection, ascension, and reign of Christ at the right hand of God (3:22); he quotes from the Psalms (2:7¹⁷); he is rooted in the doctrine of the Trinity (1:2-3); Christ suffering in the flesh (4:1); doxology (4:11, 5:11¹⁸); and the kiss of love (5:14) as the sign of reconciliation and fellowship within the church. Hence Peter brings the whole argument to a close by encouraging the pastors throughout the Diaspora to exercise oversight over their congregations as good shepherds (5:1-4¹⁹), because worship matters as the place where the Baptized are prepared to defend the faith. What God gives to his people in worship he then expects them to be able to give freely to the world around them.

So what role do lay people play in actually verbalizing the Gospel of Jesus Christ to others? The answer of 1 Peter is that the laity have just as much of a role in actually preaching and teaching the Gospel as do pastors, simply in a different context and from a different direction. The pastor has been given the responsibility to preach and teach the Gospel as a public act of the Church so that the laity can be equipped to live out the responsibility to preach and teach the Gospel in their public lives as the Church. Therefore, as Peter exhorts, pastors must

¹⁷ 1 Peter 2:7, Psalm 118:22 "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone."

¹⁸ 1 Peter 4:11, 5:11, "To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen... To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen."

¹⁹ 1 Peter 5:1-4, "So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight (*episkopountos*), not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory."

train their people to be ready to act and to speak at all times with the truths and gifts they've received in worship.

So let's apply Peter's preaching. Martin Luther drew a fine line regarding lay evangelism in his "Babylonian Captivity of the Church," fighting the extreme clericalism of the papacy. In the eras since Luther, the battle has swung to its extreme opposite in the form of the anti-clericalism of mainline Evangelicalism. Against both extremes, though, the exegetical median of Luther (taken from 1 Peter) is still the clarion call of the Church striving to live as Jesus instituted her to be. In recent years our Synod has done very well to help counter the "everyone a minister" teaching of Evangelicalism with such Bible Studies as the Witness, Mercy, Life Together Study, where the Scriptures are clearly set forth to help everyone see that the primary references to "witness" and "mission" in the New Testament refer to those who stand in the public office of the ministry, i.e., the Apostles and their successors. And there has been a distinct surge of the teaching of vocation as the place of lay mission throughout Lutheran churches in our time. Yet there still remains debate over what role do lay people play in actually verbalizing the Gospel of the forgiveness of your sins through the blood of Jesus Christ to others.²⁰ And the issue of Lay Deacons in the Synod adds yet more tension to the issue which the middle line of Peter – taught clearly by Luther – helps to clarify if followed.

In one extreme case, you hear well-intentioned theologians locate the effectiveness or validity of the Gospel solely in the Divine Service or the Office of the Ministry – thus confining the proclamation of the Word to the pastor's preaching and the liturgy on Sunday morning. This must be the first wall to come down, even as Luther decries how the priests took the Gospel captive away from the people. Luther cites 1 Peter 2:9 as one of the key texts for showing that all Christians have been given the right and responsibility to verbalize the Gospel of Christ to

²⁰ Anecdotally, you can see this in such discussions where one asks whether we can call what laity do in verbalizing the Gospel proclamation and preaching or simply confession, as if this distinction of terms would somehow "protect" the Office of the Ministry.

someone else for the forgiveness of that person's sins (Luther, A.E. Vol. 36, 149), just as discussed above: "This is part of being a priest [1 Peter 2:9-12], being God's messenger and having his command to proclaim his Word. You should preach *the* 'good work,' that is, the miraculous work that God has done as he brought you from darkness into light. This is the highest priestly office" (emphasis added). Luther rightly noted in 1 Peter and throughout the rest of the New Testament that "priest" here does not refer to the clergy but to all Christians.

Chemnitz makes this same point in his second volume of "The Examination of the Council of Trent" when he confronts the insistence of the Council to give the name and authority of "priest" only to those who sacrifice the Mass, prescribe discipline, and absolve sins (678, 2ff) . Priest is not a title of clerical tyranny, but in the New Testament is the new title for *all* of those who partake of the sacrifice of our one true High Priest, Jesus, and who, because of his one final atoning death, now make only living sacrifices of thanksgiving and praise through word and work. So the proclamation of the Gospel, the effectiveness of the Means of Grace, cannot be limited strictly to the preaching of the pastor – lest we be guilty of ignoring truths of Scripture we find inconvenient – but rather it belongs to the whole people of God, whom Peter calls the "royal priesthood" and whom he charges with the duty "to proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness and into his marvelous light." Thus this extreme of clerical captivity of the Church can be avoided by the clear teaching of the chief cleric, Peter.

In the other extreme case, you hear equally well-intentioned theologians deny any differentiation between the pastor and the people when it comes to proclaiming the Gospel. This also denies the clear words of Scripture where Sts. Paul and Peter make clear that there is a difference between the pastor and the people (1 Corinthians 4:1²¹, 1 Timothy 3:1-13²², 1 Peter

²¹ 1 Corinthians 4:1, "This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God."

²² 1 Timothy 3:1f, "The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer (*episkopes*), he desires a noble task..."

5:1-4²³). Moreover, as Luther makes clear, for many others of which includes the sake of good order (1 Corinthians 14:40) we recognize the difference between the public office and the private office of preaching (Luther, A.E., Vol. 36, 149). Christ has instituted those standing in the office of the Apostles to publically preach and teach according to good order in the public activities of the Church; as one who represents the Church before the world even as he represents Christ before the Church. So the proclamation of the Gospel is set within the Office of the Ministry.

Too often this aspect of the proclamation of the Gospel, the Office of the Ministry, is set aside or down-played by the advocates of an "everyone a minister" doctrine and practice because it insists that there is a hierarchy and authority within the Church, and this many anti-authoritarians and anti-institutionalists cannot abide – declaring it to be a "domination" of the laity on the part of the clergy. Yet the authority of the pastoral office must be maintained lest one fall into the exact same form of trap as that on the other extreme – ignoring Scripture we find inconvenient and making the Church into our image and likeness rather than that instituted by Christ. So we who strive to live according to the command and institution of Christ must not forsake the Office of the Ministry for that which is more appealing to our pride and comfort.

Between the two, we see the beautiful Gospel freedom instituted and intended by our dear and gracious Lord and proclaimed by Peter in his first epistle and aptly taught by Luther²⁴. Both the clergy and the laity have been given the Gospel and thus given the responsibility and right to proclaim it, though the clergy do this as the public office and the laity as a private office; the clergy as the ones who feed Christ's gifts to his people and the laity as the ones who share such divine gifts with others through their vocation in word and works. This is, as said above, a

²³ "So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: shepherd the flock of God as among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory."

²⁴ Regardless of when in his career he taught it.

fine line to draw, but between the two extremes of "everyone a minister" and the "Babylonian captivity of the Church" lies the biblical answer to what role lay people play in verbalizing the Gospel of Jesus Christ to others just as Peter taught.

We may put it this way: Christ instituted his Church to bear his Word of repentance and forgiveness of sins to the world through the Means of Grace. The Church as Christ's institution is comprised of the pastor and the people. Where we come to think of the Church as only the pastor, we fail to live according to Christ's institution of the Church as those gathered/called (*ecclesia*) to receive Christ. Where we come to think of the Church as only the people, we also miss Christ's plan and purpose of instituting the Church through the Apostles and those who stand in their stead according to Christ's mission (*apostello*). Either extreme draws us away from the Church which Christ instituted. So Luther, after the clear teaching of the Apostle Peter, rightly divided the Church according to the offices of responsibility given to her: the public Office of the Ministry, of those standing in the stead of the Apostles in the stead of Christ to publically preach the Gospel and administer the Sacraments, and the private office of those receivers of the Word and Sacraments who are called to live out in their private lives what they have received from Christ through his ministers. This is the picture of the Church Jesus built upon the rock of the good confession.

Peter's epistle therefore helps us find the middle ground of the freedom of the Gospel in this discussion and so avoid tyranny of the Church on both sides. The words of the great Apostle call every Christian to bear witness to the hope they have in words and works from what they have received in the Means of Grace that Gentiles may see and hear and, by the grace of God, come to trust in the Triune God before Christ comes again to judge the world between the faithful and the faithless. May God the Father send the Spirit of his Son into our hearts to make all the members of his Church so bold to verbalize the Gospel: both pastor and people.

Let me, then, introduce you to an evangelism training ministry of the LCMS that seeks to live out this biblical, Lutheran mission: Ongoing Ambassadors For Christ (O.A.F.C.). Founded over forty years ago by an LCMS pastor who wanted to give his Confirmation students a way to live out and share what they'd learned, this national organization works through local groups to train youth and adults to confess Christ through Song, Bible Study, Puppet Shows, Dramas, a Neighborhood Survey, and Personal Witness training by gathering monthly at a different LCMS church with other youth and adults from their district to study God's Word and live it out.

What makes OAFIC fitting to the teachings of Scripture above? One of the main focuses of our weekend is the witnessing survey we use in our neighborhood canvass. Telling youth to confess Christ is one method of teaching, but if you can get them into a position where they actually do it teaches a far greater lesson, especially in a fairly safe place where they can practice as much as share. So where can youth actually share their faith? Cold calls are a pretty good place for this. We train youth to ask spiritual questions of strangers, like "Where do you go to church?" and "Do you have a Bible in your home," and finally we ask "Where do you believe you'll go when you die?" and "Why?" In such a situation of the survey, youth discover the range of people's answers – real world beliefs and not just what a book says about denominations – and they also discover the Christian's responsibility to give answer to the hope that they have whenever they encounter someone who doesn't know Christ. That's why we use a survey. And OAFIC trains youth with biblical answers and confessions in Law and Gospel format to share with people at the door in various situations and faiths.

And so our youth, having encountered the real-world reasons to hold dear what they've learned in the Divine Service, are equipped to then turn around and live it out in their lives apart from these OAFIC weekends. Think of it as an extension – an application – of the Divine Service in hearing the proclamation of the Word and giving especially youth an opportunity to practice

"proclaiming the excellencies" of God in Christ before attempting to do so in their families, schools, and neighborhoods. Add to that experience learning to share solid, Christ-centered words in Dramas, Puppet Plays, Bible Studies, Songs, and Personal Witnessing training, and you've got youth equipping themselves to share Christ by practicing living out the words and works of Christ they hear in the Divine Service. Visit www.OAFC.org for more information about this ministry of the LCMS that strives to equip youth to share their faith by practicing and by doing – or by signing up to host a weekend in your area.