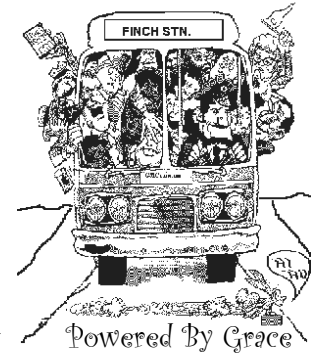


LUTHERANISM 101

Its All Grace!

Shepherd of the Hill's Bus, "Powered By Grace" was filled with the gasoline of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost Sunday and is now ready for departure on its summer road trip. We have a seat for everyone and will be traveling on the road to Emmaus into the Kingdom of God. You will be happy to know "Powered By Grace" is air conditioned and well ventilated.



We will be speaking the faith in our native tongues, but will also encourage the faith to be spoken in the tongues of little children, elementary and high school students as well as the tongues of non-churched or de-churched people. If you hear language you don't understand, just hum along. Our goal on this road trip is to live in the love of Christ and share that love with all those we meet along the way. We have several extra seats to pick up fellow travelers.

Our road map will be the Bible viewed through the lens of the ELCA. Occasionally, we will stop for educational sessions about what the ELCA teaches. If you would like to submit a question to be addressed, please write: "What does the ELCA teach about?" and put it in the offering plate. Although Pastor Bob will be driving, there will be others looking at the road map and giving directions. To avoid confusion, it would be most helpful to study the road map prior to giving directions. The **Mutual Ministry Team** has been set up so you can offer your encouragement, comments or suggestions. Please give your comments to the driver or one of the Team members: Bob Erickson, George Scudella, Becky Romano, Bobbie Anderson, or Daryl Robinson. They will be meeting at a rest stop along the way sometime during the second week of June.

Our bus only gets three miles per gallon, but, thankfully it is powered by Grace and there is no cost. Not only does Grace power the bus, it also powers you. You are asked to believe, but, even "believing" is the result of Grace, so no one can take credit for it. During this road trip, as Grace flows through you, you may find yourself doing spontaneous acts of kindness for others, even strangers. However, the love and compassion that you feel is not your own. It too is the Grace of God. You will be amazed to find that, even though Grace is flowing freely through you, its source is never exhausted. However, you must take time for private prayer, meditation, and be fed at the table of our Lord so you can experience the Source of this Grace.

Your boarding pass is Baptism, and this too is totally the result of Grace. Most of us were Baptized as infants and all we did was coo, cry and perhaps dirty our diaper. Grace did all the rest. At our Baptisms, we were grasped by the strong hand of God and nothing we can do will make God let us go. If you understand this, you understand much of what it means to be an ELCA Lutheran. Grace, not us, always takes the initiative. We are saved by Grace, through faith, but your faith is not your own, it too is the result of Grace. Whatever decision you make, or have made, to follow Christ does not earn any brownie points with God. It too was/is the result of Grace! Put another way, the appetite you have for faith is put in you by Grace. On the bus "Powered by Grace" we will find there is nothing we can take credit for, all is Grace.

So, ALLLL Aboard!!!! The engine runs quietly, but is huge—10,000 horse power! A few of the high school kids would like us to squeal the tires, but they will soon learn moderation. The bus has an automatic transmission (yes, its all done by Grace!), which makes squealing the tires a little more difficult. Besides, "Powered By Grace" does not like to draw attention to itself. She is quick to see that God gets all the credit.

Religion and Politics

As we begin our trip, the driver has noticed a piece of paper put in the suggestion box next to his coffee mug. The question is "**What does the ELCA teach about religion's involvement in politics?**" Wouldn't you know the first question would have to be one of the toughest. Remember, you can submit more questions as we progress on this trip. We hope it will be an educational one.

To address this difficult question, Pastor Bob said, “We must first see what Jesus did.” He asked someone to read Luke 4:18-20. In the middle of the bus, Hans Engelbertson stood up and read: *As Jesus began his public ministry, the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him and he read: The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.” Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him, and he began by saying to them, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.” The Pastor asked everyone on the bus: “Are we, like Saint Paul says in I Corinthians 12:27, ‘The living Body of Christ’”? They responded, “We try to be”. He said, “Then, we too should try to carry on this ministry in one way or another.”*

Mrs. Hinklemeier, who was sitting toward the front of the bus, said she remembered reading something about the ELCA and politics. She said it was called “**Advocacy**”. In fact, she happened to print it off their web site: (<http://www.elca.org/advocacy/how/index.html>) and had it in her purse. (What are the odds she would have something like this in her purse! But, we must keep the story going.) Mrs. Hinklemeier read:

Advocacy is to plead the cause of another together with them and on their behalf. When, for example, the prophets addressed kings and priests on behalf of those suffering injustice, they were advocating. The ELCA calls persons to advocate justice with and for those without power and voice in places where important political and economic decisions are being made that affect the lives of those who are marginalized. This activity is what is meant by “advocacy.” Advocacy is one way we seek to love our neighbor in response to God’s love given us in Jesus Christ.

The ELCA understands advocacy to be part of its mission. It determines what items to advocate on the basis of ELCA social statements and policy resolutions that are adopted by at least a two-thirds majority of the ELCA Churchwide Assembly.

Advocacy by the ELCA and other religious bodies does not violate what is often referred to as “the separation of church and state.” The First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution guarantees the exercise of religious freedom, including for the public witness of religious bodies. Advocacy is one way the ELCA exercises its religious freedom. In doing so it “work[s] with civil authorities in areas of mutual endeavor, maintaining institutional separation of church and state in a relation of functional interaction” (Constitutions, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions, 4.03.n).

The Pastor said that all major Christian denominations do political advocacy in one way or another and that the religious right is much more involved in politics than main stream denominations. Near election time he has been requested by Focus on the Family and similar organizations to show video clips and distribute “voter guides” during services, but has never complied because he considers such endorsements of candidates inappropriate.

He went on to say: *The Christian church has a history of speaking forcefully within the political realm to initiate change, especially when the poor are being oppressed. Examples include: the church’s involvement in the abolition of slavery, equal rights for women and minorities, confrontation of Nazism in Germany, the plight of the poor and oppressed, abortion, etc. One could say that Jesus was put to death primarily because of his confrontation with the religious/political government of his time. I would never tell anyone who to vote for. Advocacy in the ELCA is about issues. Occasionally, the Office of Advocacy within our Synod sends information about pending legislation they consider important. We put this information in the Newsletter for people to read and use as they wish. If I do mention something from the pulpit that you disagree with, please feel free to disagree! I am not God and my opinions are not infallible! Healthy congregations are comprised of people with differing views, yet members live together in Christ’s love. Please know that I take the preaching office of the church very seriously and do my best to present the Gospel. When it does intersect with politics, I pray to tread lightly on that sacred soil. Remember, I too will be judged by God and He may say, ‘Why were you silent when I asked you to speak?’*

When the Pastor finished speaking, he noticed several people had fallen asleep. Then, Ole leaned over to Lena and said, “Open da vindow and let some fresh air in. Its gitten kinda stuffy in here.”

Stay tuned in July for more adventures on the SOTH bus, “Powered By Grace”. Remember to put your “What does the ELCA teach about ...?” questions into the offering plate. ~ P.B.