

Ministers Message

Mission Department Newsletter

From the Mission Department

Our Heavenly Father richly blessed the 2024 Ministers Camp and our joint LLC-SFC-SRK meetings. We enjoyed moments that must have been much like the moments that inspired the psalmist to write: “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity” (Ps. 133:1). May the memory of the joy that filled our hearts during those days also help us to deal with the trials and adversity of our daily endeavor.

The Bible translation issue was discussed again at this year’s ministers camp. The discussion was free and comforting and provided reason to continue to move the issue forward. Based on that discussion the Pastoral Committee has initiated steps to produce material and communication that will prepare member congregations to discuss this issue next year at the 2025 LLC Annual Meeting. May God lead and guide this work.

The next LLC 2024 Ministers Webinar will be held May 30th at 8:00 pm CDT. We will consider confession, the power of the keys, and soul care at that webinar. Two presentations, one was written by Keijo Nissilä and the other by Juhani Uljas will provide the basis for our discussion. Keijo Nissilä’s presentation, “Confession and Soul Care,” will come as an attachment with this issue of Ministers Message. Juhani Uljas’s presentation, “Confession and the Power of the Keys,” will come a little later but prior to the webinar. Please mark your calendars.

A busy summer schedule is just ahead. Many of us will serve at confirmation school, or at other camps, on mission trips, or perhaps at this year’s summer services. As we consider our assignments, it’s good to remember Paul’s advice to Timothy: “Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15). We can apply ourselves to the study of God’s Word and serve with the gifts that God has given us. We can serve securely when we base our instruction and preaching on God’s Word. The times and the issues may change from year to year, but God’s Word, which endures forever, provides a sure foundation in every time. As the psalmist says, “The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple” (Ps. 119:130). May God grant us wisdom and faith to do the work entrusted to our care.



ARTWORK: RAIMO ÖSTERBERG

Noteworthy

Upcoming Events

LLC 2024 Ministers Webinar #2
Confession, the Power of the Keys,
and Soul Care
May 30, 2024
8:00 pm CDT

LLC Longview Summer Services
July 4–7, 2024

LLC 2024 Ministers Webinar #3
August 29, 2024
8:00 pm CDT

LLC Ministers & Wives Camp,
West Coast
September 20–22, 2024

LLC 2024 Ministers Webinar #4
November 7, 2024
8:00 pm CST

Jesus and the Sons of Thunder

Leo Väyrynen

Luke 9:51-56

Profit responsibility is a buzzword in the corporate world. This demanding principle is not appropriate in the work of God's kingdom. In gospel work, above all patience is required. The employer, that is, God is responsible for the results of the work.

Noah is a good example of patience. Already as a little boy I remember hearing in services that Noah preached for 120 years before the flood, even though no one repented. Jesus' disciples, Zebedee's sons James and John, did not have Noah's patience. Indeed, Jesus called them figuratively "the sons of thunder." They became angry when the inhabitants of a certain Samaritan village would not give Jesus and His disciples a place of lodging. As is well known, the Jews and Samaritans did not tolerate each other. The Samaritans would not receive Jesus when they noticed that He was Jewish. They concluded this because Jesus was travelling to the holy city of the Jews, Jerusalem. The Samaritans worshipped their own God on Mount Gerizim.



JESUS CONVERSES

Jesus met many people during His life. Several of them wanted to converse with Him. Jesus' teaching gave birth to questions in some listeners. They wanted to hear more since His teachings deviated from the teachings of the scribes of that time. Several people approached Jesus because of their difficulties and problems. Jesus also used to talk on His own initiative with people He encountered in various situations.

Several discussions which Jesus had with various people are recorded in the Bible. This year we will publish a series of writings in this paper by Leo Väyrynen on some of these discussions. Although around two thousand years have passed since these discussions, their topics and issues are still timely. We notice this in this series of writings.

James and John's patience ended when their Master was treated rudely. They said to Jesus, "Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did?" Their minds were filled with thoughts of revenge. They wanted to do as Prophet Elias did. Elias rebuked King Ahab, who sought for help from a false god. Ahab sent his men to capture Elias, who asked God to send down fire from heaven and destroy his enemies. One hundred men died.

What did Jesus do when He heard what the sons of thunder suggested? He did not do as Elias did, rather He rebuked His disciples, "Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them." Jesus did not hate the Samaritans like the Jews did. Jesus once conversed with a woman at a well, although she was a Samaritan and also had led a bad life. Jesus loved all people, even His enemies. He was patient and wanted the time of visitation to continue in the land of Samaria.

Impatience and zeal have tended to corrupt God's work later as well. We remember what happened in Koutokeino during the time of Lars Levi Laestadius. When the gospel was preached in that area, many were overcome by carnal fervor to convert all people. When among the people were those who didn't believe but turned against them, those

Jesus Converses

misguided heroes of faith killed a storekeeper and sheriff. They acted in the same way that James and John would have wanted God to do to the Samaritans.

A few years ago, the bishop gave me a three-month assignment as parish priest in the Härmä area. I was startled. I thought that the descendants of the Ostrobothnian knife-wielding ruffians live there. That's why I thought I would attach a knife to my belt just in case. Then a friend of mine pointed out that current law forbids one to carry a knife on his belt. When I pondered this further, I remembered that the law of the Spirit also forbids it. The weapons of earthly power are not used in the spiritual realm. The work of the gospel is to be done with the weapons of the Holy Spirit, not by the arm of the flesh, by force. I remembered Jesus' warning to sword-wielding Peter, "They that take the sword shall perish with the sword."

The proverb says, "The forest answers in the way you shout into it." Often harsh behavior generates even harsher

resistance. I put my knife into a box when I went to the Härmä area, and it turned out to be a good thing. My short assignment in Härmä was one of the best of my life. The people treated the diminutive pastor kindly, and many listened to his sermons very attentively. God knows whether or not the sowing of the Word done in weakness will bear fruit. Jesus already taught that the sower doesn't always see the results of his work. Some can rejoice over the fruit of their work later. The sower might already be resting in the rest of God's children when the sowing of the Word begins to produce increase.

God has love to wait and patience to give a time of grace. Let us also have the same mind. The eighth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles relates that Samaria was the first land in which Christian mission work was done. One of those that did this mission work was apparently this same John, who suggested to Jesus the destruction of the Samaritans. We can imagine how powerful an experience it was to John that in the land of Samaria were found those who repented.

Epistle Postil

Pentecost

Niilo Hintikka

THE SHEDDING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

The hour of Pentecost is determined by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit described in the Acts of the Apostles. Fifty days had passed since Easter. Originally, Pentecost has been a harvest thanksgiving festival in the Jewish calendar, when the wheat has ripened.

In the most recent calendar reform, the celebration of Pentecost was shortened to one day in our country. Even though this celebration of the beginning of summer is only one day anymore, its position in the church calendar is emphasized in this way that the Sundays in the Pentecost period are named as Sundays after Pentecost. Thus, the aim has been to emphasize the day's significance in salvation history.



On Pentecost the same epistle text from the beginning of the second chapter of the Acts of the Apostles is used in all three church years. The narrative is the only description of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and in its uniqueness belongs to the worship service every Pentecost. Luke conveys therein one of the essential foundational events in salvation history—the fulfillment of Jesus's promise.

Epistle Postil

Acts of the Apostles 2:1–13

THE SHEDDING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Jesus' promise of the shedding of the Holy Spirit was fulfilled on Pentecost. At the beginning of the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 1:4–8) is the red thread, the theme, of this entire important historical book. The events of Pentecost are there as a starting point. On Ascension Day the resurrected Jesus had commanded His disciples to remain in Jerusalem and wait for fulfillment of the promise given by the Father. It is mentioned that there were about 120 men and women. They gathered together in a familiar house either in the temple area or it's vicinity.

The coming of the Holy Spirit was both heard and seen. The sound of a rushing mighty wind filled the room and flames that looked like cloven tongues descended on the disciples. They all received this same promised gift, not only the core group of the twelve apostles. John the Baptist's reference to Christ, who baptizes with the Holy Spirit and fire, had now been fulfilled.

THE MIRACLE OF SPEAKING WITH TONGUES

In connection with the building of the Tower of Babel, God had scattered the proud people and confused their language so that they could not understand each other (Gen. 11:1–9). On Pentecost the Holy Spirit gave the apostles the ability to speak with various tongues. They did not receive some new common language, but the Lord opened their mouths to speak the languages of various nations. It's important to note in Luke's description that this speaking in tongues was completely understandable and nothing mysterious and incomprehensible. Thus the way to proclaim the gospel was opened to all nations. The language miracle was not an end in itself, but a grace gift from God.

TO THE WORK OF THE GOSPEL

Pentecost was the starting point of mission work. Already this language miracle contained the statement, "We do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God." Now the time had come to go and carry out the resurrected Lord's mission command to preach repentance and the forgiveness of sins in His name.

Nothing happens randomly with God, not even this that people from different lands had gathered in Jerusalem for this festive occasion, both Jews and converts. There were



very many people. Luke lists the nations from within the then-known territory, that is, the territories of the Roman Empire. Now the gospel of God's kingdom began to be proclaimed in these lands also, when over 3000 hearers of the word in the festive throng accepted the word and were baptized after Peter's sermon. They became Christians.

CHRIST'S WORK CONTINUES

According to our Christian faith, the Father and the Son dwell in the congregation through the Holy Spirit. Jesus promised through His mission and baptismal command to be with His own "always, even unto the end of the world" (Matt. 28:20). Then the work of the Triune God will have reached its conclusion on earth.

The Holy Spirit works through people, sinful and deficient in themselves, who have been pardoned. The resurrected Jesus breathed on His disciples and said, "Receive ye the Holy Ghost." Thus He gave to them the authority received from the Father to preach the message of the forgiveness of sins (John 20:19–23). God has seen it good to continue the work of salvation in that entirety which is formed by the Holy Spirit, the congregation, and the sermon of the Gospel. None of these can be removed nor can anything be added to them without doing violence to the Word of God.

Jesus himself in His time comforted and taught His own. Thus He functions even now through the Holy Spirit in the hearts of God's children. He lives and governs in His grace kingdom. Even today each one of us needs the Spirit of Pentecost, the Comforter and Defender. Our constant plea is "Pour out the spirit of mercy and yearning; set all our hearts with Thy charity burning." (SHZ 183:1)

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