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**Devotional Essay #2**  
**Saturday, June 8, 2002**

I. Introduction

It is a great pleasure to be with you and take part in the Sixth Convention, a milestone of the LCC. I bring you greetings from the President of our Lutheran Church in Brazil, Rev. Dr. Carlos Walther Winterle, and from our Seminary in São Paulo, which Dr. Mayan had the opportunity to visit last year.

I want to thank you all for the opportunity to share with you the blessings of being a part of the mission of God. The theme of this Convention is fascinating and motivating: *That all may know his name*. It is a challenging theme for every Christian, pastor and congregation.

Whenever the church meets to discuss, plan and take actions in order that all may know His name, it must be courageous and bold. It must be careful lest it be just one more conversation about mission that doesn't lead to action. Faith and confidence in the Lord are essential so as to avoid such an outcome.

There is a story about a church which once prayed for rain during a long period of drought: the pastor and church members had decided to go up to the hill on a Sunday morning in order to pray for rain. It was a very hot day. Among the multitude walking up there was a little boy carrying several umbrellas with him. Somebody puzzled and confused, asked him why so many umbrellas. His answer was put in a question form: "Are we not gonna ask God for rain today? We'll need them on our way home."

As we meet to pray and ask the Lord to use us in such a way that all may know his name, we had better be prepared! Our temples may need new painting, more pews added, more pastors, more training for ushers and more people available for the Lord's work in our church. The church will need good strategy planning, assimilation programs and follow-up of the many opportunities the Lord opens up as it reaches out into the community to share the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

To study, discuss, plan and take action in mission on the basis of Scripture and the example of the Early Church is a blessing indeed. It challenges us, moves us. It makes Satan, his angels and the all of hell shake and tremble. We are shaken too - but in a positive way. Solomon's prayer is a *doxological prayer*, moved by *humbleness and servanthood* to the Lord, filled with the *burning desire* that all people in the world may know the Lord's name and be saved. In order that people might know God's name, the Early Church asked for boldness to proclaim His Word. This is still our prayer today: "Give us boldness, o Lord, as we proclaim your salvation, so that

all may know your name." The Holy Spirit through God's word gives us power and strength, compels and leads us in our Christian life of witness. When we as God's church pray for action in mission, for opportunities, we have to be prepared, for as Acts 4.31 says, the apostles prayed for courage, boldness, and so it happened.

Our purpose in this study is to take a close look, to meditate on some factors, which made the early Christians become bold in their witness and missionary endeavor - and by the grace of God - draw some lessons for our ministry and missionary work today.

II. How did the Early Christian Church become so bold in its missionary outreach?

We find the answer to this question in several parts of Scripture. Since we don't have time here to look at all the passages we will only look at some of them.

A. The heart of the matter

The starting point of the church's reason to be, of its reason to be grateful and bold in God's mission, has been the same since the beginning; it will never change and will be the same forever. I am talking about the undeserved grace of God in Jesus Christ towards us sinners. In the Early Church's case, as well as in ours, the motivation for mission had its starting point in God, "from whom all blessings flow". From "not my people", because of our sins, we are now called God's people as stated by Hosea: "I will say to those called 'Not my people', 'you are my people; and they will say, 'You are my God'" (Hos 1.9; 2.23). The Apostle Peter says: "Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy" (1 Pt 2.10). This promise echoes throughout the entire Old Testament, up to its consummation on Calvary and the empty tomb: "They will be my people, and I will be their God" (Ez 11.20). In Ephesians 2.1-10 we are told that it is by grace that we are saved. Grace, God's undeserved and endless love for us sinners was given to us in his Son Jesus Christ our Savior. In Christ Jesus we were re-created and called back to God. We are called, blessed, empowered and commissioned to go out into the world proclaiming this same promise, good news and assurance to all - it is God's desire that everybody believe in Jesus Christ and be saved, and enjoy the blessings of being his alone and members of his church on earth and in heaven.

B) The outcome of their call through God's grace

In several instances in the Gospels, Jesus makes it clear to his disciples that the starting point of their salvation is in him alone, in his grace. Also, that after

being called in him, from darkness to life, from sin to forgiveness, a wide door of opportunities for witness and service to him would open for them. Once they were called they would become fruitful in their lives and witness also:

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener (John 15.1). “I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing (John 15.5). “You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last” (John 15.16).

Jesus gave his disciples the promise of his Holy Spirit and this promise was fulfilled on Pentecost Day: “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth (Acts 1.8).

In their everyday life they always had the assurance given by Jesus, as stated in Mathew 28.18-20:

<sup>18</sup>All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. <sup>19</sup>Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup>and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.

They were granted the direction and protection from Jesus in their witness:

How did they become so bold? They were people chosen by God’s grace, they were called by the power of the Holy Spirit. They were sent out with the guarantee of the power of the Holy Spirit and Jesus, the head of the church. As we may see from some excerpts of Mathew chapter 10:

<sup>16</sup>I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves.

<sup>19</sup> But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say,

<sup>26</sup> So do not be afraid of them. There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known.

<sup>28</sup> Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.

<sup>31</sup> So don’t be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.

<sup>32</sup> Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven.

Later on in the New Testament we see several instances where God’s people were reminded of their call into God’s mission. The Apostle Peter wrote to the church of his time:

<sup>9</sup>But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. <sup>10</sup> Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

The Apostle Paul stresses the results of God’s grace in our actions as Christians in this world when he says:

<sup>14</sup> For Christ’s love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. <sup>15</sup> And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.

So, what else did they need? They had the forgiveness of sins, the assurance of fellowship with Jesus, protection, the Holy Spirit, the authority given by Jesus, the message to preach and the multitudes to reach out to. Their arena, the world or field, was right there at their doorsteps and they made good use of this all - they turned the world upside down.

They were all aware that they were the people of God, called out of the world of sin and darkness by the Word and the Holy Spirit into the fellowship of Jesus and His church. They were still sinners; they had their weaknesses as we do; their lives and actions were not perfect, for while we remain in this world we are still *simul iustus et peccator*. But even so they knew that they were sent by Jesus into the world, with a message, under His power and direction, in His name and authority, in His company and on his behalf, proclaiming that “salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved (Acts 4.12).”

Finally, the outcome of our call by grace, the results of Jesus’ love in our lives, are well stated by Luther in his explanation of the Second Article of the Creed: “... that I may be his own and live under Him in His kingdom and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness...”

III. What are some challenges in our mission today which call for confidence and boldness in the Lord? (What are some areas in God’s mission in which we are called to be bold today?)

1. To view mission from a holistic or comprehensive point of view. There are still members and congregations, which take evangelism committees and the pastor’s job as “proud” excuses for not getting involved in mission work. An Evangelism committee or a program for witnessing in

the parish should strive to make all members aware that they too share in the responsibility and privileges of local mission. Also, the so-called “five areas of ministry of the church” cannot be working on their own, without any cooperation among them. They need to become integrated, and planning for missionary outreach is what brings them together; it is the golden ribbon that unites them. Each area of ministry has its own objectives, but that must not lose sight of that which binds them together - the witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

2. To acknowledge and trust that the mission belongs to God and not to us. We are only His servants. The *missio Dei* belongs to God exclusively, just as the church is His. As he builds his church he makes His mission grow. His mission is Christocentric, emerging from God’s grace; it is advanced by His flock on earth, the church, and it is doxological. What does all this mean? There is no place for anxiety in God’s mission, there is no need to worry as if the results depend of only on us and on our methods of doing mission. God wants us to be faithful in living and sharing his word of salvation, but He, and He alone, through the Holy Spirit, brings about the results. This is confirmed by Paul: “I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow (1 Co 3.6-7).

3. To contextualize the Gospel in accordance with the customs, geographical location and social conditions of the people. Are we effectively communicating the Gospel to people from all levels of society?

4. To take into account the fact that the world in which we live is rapidly becoming more urban. Sometimes the way we develop our urban mission shows that we are not very attuned to the city’s life and dynamics. In several places we are still working with a rural mentality in the city, or sometimes the reverse happens - consciously or not we try to force our urban attitudes on farm churches, expecting changes in the blink of an eye. In rural as well as in urban mission we sometimes feel as though we were trying to force round screws into square holes.

5. To reevaluate the way our congregations and missions do their follow-up and their short-term and long-term planning. It is no longer acceptable for pastors and congregations to develop the ministry in an empirical way. God’s mission is too important and our rapidly changing world challenges the church to plan in detail and comprehensively for mission.

6. To stress the centrality of Christ in our message to a world full of syncretism, paganism and relativism in matters of faith and salvation (Ac 4.12).

7. To pursue a compassionate attitude, reaching out in love to the lost. Our Mentor Jesus Christ displayed this attitude *par excellence*: “When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and

helpless, like sheep without a shepherd” (Mt 9.36). Before proclaiming the unknown God to the people of Athens Paul “was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols” (Ac 17.16). A compassionate heart doesn’t feel comfortable with the lostness of the world - it translates inner attitudes into actions of love; this was happening constantly in the Early Church.

IV. What lessons do we learn from the boldness of the Apostles and of the Early Christian Church?

1. The Early Church was not perfect, but it was on the move. When we talk about the Early Church we can easily idealize it, imagining that it was blameless without any conflicts, divisions, mistakes or sins. However it had to deal with problems both internal and external - as occurs in our church today. There were rivalries among the Apostles and members; many other difficulties and barriers had to be overcome, such as false teachings, pride, lack of fellowship, immorality and so forth. All of this shows that the church was made up of sinful human beings, who in this world are still under the cross. But at the same time the church displayed worthwhile characteristics, which showed that God’s grace was at work among the Apostles and members in general.

2. There was strong emphasis on the study and teaching of the Word, on the fellowship of believers, on the breaking of bread, and on prayer, worked by the Holy Spirit (Ac 2.42).

3. A high degree of worth and respect attributed both to the pastoral ministry and to the priesthood of all believers (cf. Pastoral Epistles; Ac 6; 1Pe 2.8,9).

4. It was a church that identified with the people and reached out to them in their daily lives. The church was active in the streets, in open markets, in public and private places - everywhere.

5. The highest value in the Early Church was God’s missionary enterprise. There was feeding and leading with the Gospel and the Sacraments inside the church, and at the same time there was the action of reaching out with the Gospel to those in darkness. Fellowship and nurture exercised within the church would not happen at the expense of those outside the church. It was an inclusive church, having clear understanding of its missionary intention and dimension (Hans-Werner Gensichen). The early Christians saw God’s work reaching out to the ends of the earth. Their view of mission was worldwide. They were committed to the job, not willing to compromise the Gospel. It was not an easy task, for there were many challenges, dangers and persecutions. But they were ready to pay the price of witnessing with their lives. They did it gladly, without complaining. Their joy for sharing in the suffering of the Gospel sometimes took them to extremes, to the point that they needed Jesus’ advice: “However, do not rejoice that

the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.”

6. Along with the usual discussions about doctrines, strategies and church administration, there was a sense of unity and purpose in mission. The Holy Spirit didn't let them lose sight of the greatness of the work and moved them towards expansion. And they made the best possible use of this blessing.

7. They made good use of the media, communication and transportation of their times. They were contextually inserted in the social, political and religious environment of their era, thereby greatly benefiting the Gospel. They planned and developed well-grounded strategies suited to each particular context.

8. They had a priority in their lives and work - to reach out to every person with the Gospel.

9. Their actions were based on love and care for others.

They were engaged in proclaiming the Gospel and in caring for the needy.

10. There was the consciousness given by the Holy Spirit that they were called by Jesus to be His followers and consume themselves continually as bridge builders - vertically in sharing the love of Jesus to all - horizontally in exercising their faith active in love. We are called to follow their steps in grace and love.

## V. CONCLUSION

We are invited to join in a word of prayer, that the Lord make us bold in His word, that He continue to make us as bridge builders between hell and heaven, among human beings. That He may show us the way and be with us as we go and share His love with others - so that all may know His name and be saved.