

Bible Studies

January 6-7, 2007

Dear Members of Our Savior,

This past November, a large majority (81%) voted to do some kind of strategic planning with an outside consultant. However, the vote was much closer concerning which of the two options we should choose. I believe that either option would have been very beneficial for our congregation, and that there pluses and minuses for both.

Perhaps the chief objection to our final selection (Forward Solutions, Inc.) is that our consultant, Mrs. Ingrid Kulick, does not work primarily with churches, although she works exclusively with non-profit organizations and has worked with churches in the past. One of the great selling points of the other option (LCEF SMP) was a month of preparation and Bible study before we “got down to business.”

However, we have an amazing opportunity to have the best of both worlds. Mr. Wes Ziebell of LCEF has graciously given us the Bible studies that he uses, and that we would have used if we had gone with LCEF SMP. I have reproduced “Week 1” here without modification so that we have the advantage of an outsider’s perspective on this spiritual aspect of our planning process together with the great expertise that Ingrid brings to us.

I encourage you to read these three short lessons in the week ahead. Then next Sunday, January 14, I will incorporate the “Questions for Group Study” based on Lessons 1-3 in my sermon for your thoughtful consideration. At that time you will also receive Lessons 4-6 to read the following week. We’ll take a week off for our 50th Anniversary celebration on January 28 and resume in February.

Peace in Christ,
Pastor Young

Lesson 1 — God has plans for you

Read: Jeremiah 29:11-12.

Jeremiah had a rough time to be a prophet. The people of Jerusalem were being conquered by Babylon, and many were dragged off into exile. Those were dark days, days darker than any of us here now can remember (at least here in the US). However, the LORD had Jeremiah give a simple reminder to the people — God has a plan for them.

Now, the fact that God had a plan for the exiles didn’t mean that they suddenly got to come home and that everything was hunky dory. It didn’t mean that there was no more pain or suffering; it didn’t mean that everything was to be good right now. But God worked much good through those exiles (see the book of Daniel for evidence) and eventually brought them home to Jerusalem (see Ezra and Nehemiah).

God indeed has a plan for our congregation — and indeed, we should live our lives in prayer, asking God continually for His guidance in our lives. But remember, just because God has a plan for us doesn’t mean that there won’t be trials and struggles — just like those exiles struggled will probably will have struggles in the weeks to come. But by the Grace of God, He will see us through those struggles.

Prayer: *Gracious Heavenly Father, we come to you in prayer, bringing before You our concerns for this, Your congregation. Cause your Word to take rich and deep root here, that we might grow in faith towards you. Give us your guidance, so that we might know Your Will of how we are to best serve you in our Community. In the Name of Christ Jesus we pray, Amen*

Lesson 2 — You are predestined.

Read: Romans 8:29-31.

God doesn't work by accident. Granted, from our limited perspective here on earth, things might seem like accident, they might appear to be just coincidences, but God knows what is going on. God indeed has His plan, and He sees that His plan is carried out.

Your faith is proof of that. God has chosen you to be His own adopted child from all eternity, and God has seen to it that your faith has been created by His Word and maintained by His Word, by Preaching, by the Liturgy, by His Holy Supper. We didn't choose to come to God, rather God saw to it that His Word was brought to us, whether it was through a friend and neighbor when we were grown, or by our parents who brought us as squirming infants to be Baptized and washed clean of our sin.

Thus, we can already see God's plan for us being worked out in our lives. God has set up and ordered everything so that we can gladly hear His Word in His House. And now, as a Congregation, we are going to be studying, praying, working, and organizing so that we as a body might continue to be a place that God uses to bring His Gospel to those whom He has plans for. Let us pray for guidance, that we might see and understand more how God will use us.

Prayer: *Almighty Heavenly Father, You have called us by your Gospel out of darkness into Your marvelous light. Without our work or effort, you have given us richly your forgiveness and love, showering us with Your grace. Grant us Your guidance, so we might see and understand how you are planning to use us in the lives of the people in our community, so that with gladness we might serve your purposes. In the Name of Christ Jesus our Savior we pray, Amen.*

Lesson 3 — Offer Yourselves.

Read: Romans 12:1-2.

Paul here seems to be speaking complete and utter nonsense, at least according to the reason of the world. To be a sacrifice, in the ancient world, meant to be killed. Dead. Done. Burnt to a crisp — that's all folks. So what Paul says here about being a living sacrifice is a completely backwards idea.

That is, until we remember Christ Jesus. He is both living and a sacrifice. In fact, Jesus is the ultimate example of Sacrifice (nothing tops the Cross, a la Hebrews 10:10), and in fact, as the Lord, the Word by Whom Life was created, Jesus certainly is the chief example of what it means to be living. Life after the resurrection, that is what it means to be Living with a capital L.

So it's clear to us what Paul is saying. We are those who have been Baptized into Christ, we have been overwhelmed by the mercies of God, we have been united to Christ. Because we are Christians in Christ, we too are living sacrifices — just as Christ our Lord gives of Himself to us, we too in service to God continually give of ourselves to others. This is part of God's plan for us, that our lives be ones where we show forth Christ Jesus. Thus we know that God will give us His guidance in seeing us accomplish this goal of His. Remember, it's not about me and what I do, but rather about Christ Jesus and what He will do through me. That's such a better way to live.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, accomplish Your plans and desires through us, we pray, that in our lives we might share and proclaim the Sacrifice of Your Son Christ Jesus for not only our sake, but for the sake of the whole world. Use our lives to spread Your saving Gospel. Grant us wisdom, that we might see You at work in our lives, and that we might have the strength to always strive to be Your living sacrifices. In the Name of Christ Jesus we pray, Amen.*