

Inside This Issue

The Theology of the Cross and Christian Mission

How do you “go tell” when your motto is “Here I stand”?

In this issue of *Lutheran Mission Matters* we focus on the link between the mission of the church and Luther’s theology of the cross.

Luther nailed his 95 theses to the Castle Church door to spark a discussion. He received an opportunity to discuss his “new theology” in 1518 at Heidelberg. For this he prepared some new theses for disputation, theses that today are often called the “Heidelberg Disputation.”

Theologians of glory may not intend to, but they try to justify themselves. They end up looking to works or praising strength or avoiding shame. Theologians of the cross know and believe what God has made known through the shame and foolishness of the crucified Christ.

There is much to mine in this topic, especially the power of the gospel for Christian mission.

To be frank, I was late coming to know the power of the gospel. In my second year at Concordia Seminary, “Red Fred” Danker had us translating Paul’s Letter to the Romans. My translation of Romans 3:20–21 went something like this, “God’s way of putting people right with Himself has been revealed, and it has nothing to do with the law. The law and the prophets give their witness to it, but God puts people right through faith in Jesus Christ.” For some reason, obviously by grace, I heard this not just in my head but in my soul. Why hadn’t I heard this before? It was a lesson I continued to learn on vicarage, sometimes painfully.

During my 1969-70 vicarage in Monterey, CA, my supervisor gave me leeway in preaching. After a few weeks I knew everything that was wrong with the congregation, and in my first sermon let everyone know it. Shaking hands at the door, a middle-aged woman greeted me: “I get beat up enough at home. I don’t need to come to church for that.” How painful that learning experience was!

The law accuses, drives us to Christ, but it is the gospel that brings healing and impels Christians to love God and others. I did make some progress preaching in that loving, forgiving vicarage congregation, Bethlehem Lutheran Church. After one of my later sermons a member met me after church and said, “You’ll make a good door keeper.” I am still learning that lesson.

Recently, in preparation for a move, I was going through fifty-three years of paper sermons. I saw the early sermons were mostly law. But “The gospel is the power of God for salvation.” (Romans 1:16). As I grew in ministry, I learned to listen to the

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hearts of people and the heart of God to bring gospel to bear on the joys and pains of living. It is a lesson I need to continue learning.

We all need to continue learning how to release this incredible power of the gospel. The articles in our Fall 2024 LMM issue help us see the powerful and unique role the theology of the cross plays in Christian mission.

You will find insights of pastors, missionaries, mission executives, and others on the theology of the cross and mission. I pray their insights will help you grow in your understanding and appreciation of the power of the gospel to bring the love of Christ into every part of God's world.

In the articles submitted for this publication we see the various connections made by these authors between the theology of the cross and God's mission:

Joel Okamoto explains that the theology of the cross was a new paradigm for Christian faith and life at the time of the Reformation—and ours, and “something clearly reflected in the New Testament.”

Joshua H. Jones discusses Luther's concept of “agonizing struggle,” connecting it to the Heidelberg Disputation and contemporary experience.

Robert Kolb takes us deep in Luther's insights about living under the cross, pursuing God's mission to bring the saving message to others, encountering God Hidden and God Revealed.

Adam Francisco investigates Luther's response to the looming threat of Islam at his time and explores how Luther encourages Christians, following the theology of the cross, to prepare themselves to bear witness to Muslims even while living under Muslim occupation.

Kevin Robson presents the Mission Affirmations and policies of LCMS mission entities to show how the theology of the cross is clearly involved throughout.

Cari Chittick and Alfonso Espinosa show how a gospel-centered mission impels us to care for the marginalized, especially children with special needs.

Dale Meyer seeing in the Man of Sorrows, Jesus portrayed in Isaiah 53, highlights the prophetic call to address societal injustices and the need for the church to embody Christ's love.

Will Fredstrom prepares us for the Fall 2025 issue of LMM with a forward-looking discussion of the digital age, and the coming technologies that influence today's world.

MISSION OBSERVERS

Philip Brandt shares pastoral experiences and leads us in a study of Paul's pain, pleading for and receiving forgiveness in 2 Corinthians, showing the importance of not just speaking of the theology of the cross, but *doing it*.

Robert Stuenkel demonstrates the Lutheran insights empowering Christian growth during his 35 years in ministry to college students.

Jon Zehnder overviews sources expounding the theology of the cross and encourages missionaries that “the confidence you can have in proclaiming the Gospel is because the Holy Spirit will be working through that Word.”

In my mind, our emphasis on theology of the cross makes Lutherans uniquely qualified for mission work. The law kills; the gospel has the power to bring people out of the world to the cross; and it has the power to impel forgiven people back into the world, bringing with them the saving love of Jesus. The theology of the cross was Luther’s revelation of God’s “go-power.” That same power is ours today.

Rev. Dr. Robert Scudieri