

# ***Lutheran Mission Matters***



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# *Editorial*

## **Theology for Mission**

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From Nairobi to Neema Lutheran College in Matongo, Kenya, is a good seven-hour drive from point to point. Our exceptionally skilled driver, Sami, was navigating cautiously to our destination through some highways and mostly gravel and dirt roads. Sami was careful to avoid harm and danger to passengers, pedestrians, and beasts on the road. Herds of animals, mainly cows and goats, crossed the road at their own pace, claiming right of way and forcing automobiles to stop abruptly. Travelers noticed on the sidewalks men and women training for the Marathon. Sami, nevertheless, was full of energy and in good spirits, explaining to us the panorama of the land and, as an excellent tour guide, recounting the history and culture of the people who lived there for ages in their communities.

Sami was keen on keeping his eye on the clock, nevertheless. He was on a sprint. Dropping us off safely at our destination was his priority, but he was also conscious of his next assignment to rush back to the Nairobi international airport and receive two other missionaries who were arriving six hours hence on British Airways from England. I suggested to Sami that he might have time to spare, because international passengers generally would take longer to clear customs and come to the passenger pick-up area. Sami said that was not the case. These two men were by birth Kenyan citizens, coming home for a short break from their missionary service in Europe.

Missional innovations in our generation are reminders that our lives are larger than we ever thought, and the mission the Lord has entrusted to His Church is evermore local as well as global. Christian ministry and mission are assuming new definitions, deflating traditional presuppositions and preconceptions. Mission is the heart of God, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Tim 2:4). What Christians do in His name flows from the very heart of God. Wherever God has called to Himself a people by His Word and gathered them at the font in His name, from there His mission spreads to friends and neighbors throughout the world, to those still outside His kingdom.

God's people engage in His mission, keeping in step with their Lord and Savior. Jesus went from village to village, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom (e.g., Lk 4:42–44). He began with the synagogue, reaching out to Jews and Gentiles alike. He sent His disciples ahead of Him to places where they would normally not go—like lambs amidst wolves—as proclaimers of His kingdom, e.g., Luke 9 and 10. With no money in the bag and no clothing to change and eating and drinking what the villagers offered, the disciples were continuing in God's mission (Lk 10:16). Those who were

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unwilling to receive the disciples and the message they proclaimed were, in fact, rejecting Jesus and the Father's heart that was reaching out to everyone for their life and salvation.

Jesus' popularity continued to grow so much that both the Pharisaic strongholds of the Jewish religion and the Roman government that wielded political power over Israel perceived Him and His disciples as a threat to the establishment (Jn 12:19; 11:47, 48). Hyperbolic as it may sound, the Jews and the Romans could not subdue Jesus and His followers or foresee how this movement would so quickly turn the world upside down. Little did they care to know that Jesus' kingdom was not of this world and that His singular purpose for coming to the world was to offer Himself as the ransom for all so that by believing in Him everyone will have life and salvation. Repentance and faith in the promises of God were the only way to enter His kingdom. Christian mission is a divine mandate. Jesus Christ is the Lord's Sent One. He is sending His people into the world on His mission as the Father has sent Him (Jn 20:20).

The Gospel of God inherently has the power to transform peoples' lives and the cultures in which God has put them to live and make a living. Missional life in the majority world, to a great extent, is like lambs living among wolves. Christians literally take up their crosses and follow the Lord. In a world of religious fundamentalism and the tendency to associate Christianity with Western culture and politics, Christians in non-Western countries suffer serious consequences on account of the Gospel. Christians are falsely accused as evildoers, and their lives are threatened on account of Christ, especially since the bulk of these families belong at the bottom of the socioeconomic ladder and are fragile, vulnerable, and insecure in every way. Yet the Word that is sown among them grows and bears much fruit beyond measure on rocks, among thorns, on pathways, and in good soil as a living testimony for all people. God's kingdom remains.

The Gospel recreates for God a people wherever He sends His word of life and salvation through His disciples, apostles, and faith communities. Relative to this sending is the revelation given to Ananias to go look for Paul, who would be God's chosen vessel to "carry" (ESV) His name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel (Acts 9:15). Paul's commissioning included much suffering as a missionary among Jews and Gentiles for Christ's sake. Elsewhere, Paul spoke of his calling as bearing the marks of Christ on his body, signifying perhaps his sufferings as the signature of the Crucified One. Paul knew that he received his apostleship purely on account of God's unbounded grace (Rom 1:5). The cross has always been at the center of the apostolic proclamation. Whether in Corinth, Colossae, Philippi, or Thessalonica, the faith that was confessed took root and grew into congregations amidst conflicting ideologies, competing operations, and partisan spirit.

Robert Rosin's essays on "confessing" make this point crystal clear.<sup>1</sup> When the Reformers confessed the faith, they perceived it as making known to others the

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inexhaustible treasury of the Gospel. “To confess,” Rosin says, is first a personal action, verbalizing what a person believes with the heart and confesses with the mouth, beyond all doubt. Confessing certainly flows from the individual’s intellectual commitment to what he or she is given to believe by the Holy Spirit’s enabling.

Confessing is also a corporate/collective matter, Rosin points out. It is “a matter of individuals who confess finding others who confess the same thing, read the same thing, understand and believe the same thing from the Scriptures, and then those who find themselves with this in common stand together and confess as a group, as a community, as the church” (49). Initially, the Reformation was not so much about making larger changes in the church, says Rosin, but for preaching the Gospel, that is, making the biblical message today’s news and tomorrow’s hope (75).

Paul, the greatest theologian of the church, certainly was also the matchless confessor of the Christian faith. In the familiar Romans 10 text, Paul asks a series of questions on confessing the faith, causing the reader to concur that the ultimate purpose of confessing is to invite those outside the faith communities to come to faith in Jesus Christ. Gospel proclamation outside the church walls and its hearing and reception are prerequisites for new believers to come to the saving faith. The Lord of the Church has put His people in place in each generation to confess the faith publicly for the salvation of all who are yet to believe in the Gospel promise. Faith comes from hearing, and “How are they to hear without someone preaching?” asks the Apostle.

Mission is confessing the faith. Confessional theology is inherently missional. Christian missionaries in our world today come from the four corners of the earth and have tasted and seen that the Lord is good in Christ the Savior. God surprises the church of our generation with missionaries who may not fit the traditional patterns. They may well look, speak, and behave differently from us; and their missionary methods may be different from ours. They nevertheless are missionaries of the God who came to our world to save sinners like us, inasmuch as they proclaim in word and in deed Christ and Him crucified. For there is one Lord, one faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of us all, who is over all through all and in all. He is our faith, hope, and love. Reminiscing Rosin, “the point is not to look inward, but to make the group of holy people larger” (59).

God’s mission is our mission. Conversation about God is already theology, and the ultimate purpose of theology is missional. Missional theology matters for *Lutheran Mission Matters*. This journal participates in the mission of God within its confessional Lutheran framework and underpinning.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> *Concordia Journal*, Spring 2019 (46–75), reprinted two essays on Confessing that Robert Rosin first presented at the twenty-first International Lutheran Council that met in Berlin, Germany, in 2005 and printed in the April 2006 issue of *Concordia Journal*.

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