

...FOR THOSE SEEKING THE EMPOWERING PRESENCE OF THE *Holy Spirit*

Lutheran Renewal

Church According to JESUS:

Chasing the Darkness Away →

By Neil Cole

The church has fallen back on its heels in a defensive posture, seeking refuge in its own fortresses of buildings, programs, and “Christian” businesses, schools, and ministries. Trying to avoid the threat we were always meant to thwart, we have lost ground over and over again until at last we have nowhere left to go, surrounded by wickedness. We have allowed the enemy to take over the culture and society, and we complain from the safety of our fortified so-called Christian strongholds.

But this is not how Jesus intended His church to be. If we sit back in our fortress, frightened by all that seems to threaten us, we let countless souls remain captive to the forces of hell. We need to turn from defense to offense and storm the gates to set the captives free.

» *This is church according to Jesus.*

When we went to Long Beach, California, to start a church, our first plan was to start a coffeehouse. God ruined our plans by suggesting to us that we go instead to the coffeehouses where lost people were already. We began to hang out at a local coffeehouse called the Coffee Tavern. There we met Sean.

One of our team recognized Sean because they were both involved with a band at the local college. Sean was an outstanding musician before drugs took everything from him. He later confided to me

that the day we first found him he was waiting for his drug dealer to show up. He was obviously hurting. His clothes were dirty, his hair greasy, and he looked disheveled.

Sean had sold all of his instruments to feed his speed habit. He had lost all his jobs because he would often steal to buy more drugs. He was circling around the drain, about to go down for the last time. We invited Sean to my home for church. I must admit I was surprised when he came, and even more surprised when he came back again, and again. Eventually he even began to smile and interact with us.

At our first baptism, he was there taking pictures, so I knew he was getting close to entering the family of God. I asked him if he wanted to get baptized and he said, “No, I haven’t accepted Christ yet, but I will real soon.” A couple of weeks later, I baptized Sean in the ocean.

After Sean was baptized, he celebrated by getting high on speed. He and I were in a weekly accountability relationship. Every week we would confess our sins to one another, and he was always confessing to surrendering to his addiction. He was already attending mandatory twelve-step groups because of a court order, and he already had mandatory drug testing, but to no avail. Discipleship and accountability didn’t work, so we stepped it up and had him live with us for a short time. He stayed clean while he lived with my family, but as soon as he moved back home he fell again to the bondage. I didn’t know what to do to end this, so



Lutheran Renewal

(Independent of North Heights Lutheran Church)

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2701 Rice Street • St. Paul MN 55113-2200

Telephone: 651-490-1517 • Fax: 651-486-2865

www.lutheranrenewal.org • ilrc@aol.com

Alliance of Renewal Churches

www.arcusa.org • 651-486-4808

The Master's Institute

www.themastersinstitute.org • 651-765-9756

“The Church is a vibrant, authentic expression of Jesus’ love and truth in this dark world, and with Jesus at the helm, she is unstoppable!”

I suggested a rehab center. He didn't like that idea and begged for another option. I said, "Well, there is one other radical option we could try."

He said, "Great; what is it?"

I said, "You and I get in the car right now and drive over and tell your drug dealer about Jesus." With a smile I added, "Maybe if your dealer gets saved it will cut off your source." Sean smiled because he didn't know if he should take me seriously . . . but I was dead serious. I said, "Listen, Bro, there is a darkness in your life. How are we to get rid of darkness? Can we vacuum it up? Can we just sweep it aside? No, there is only one way to overcome darkness: light. Paul says in Romans 12, 'Do not be overcome by evil but overcome evil with good.'" Sean could see now that I was serious.

He replied, "Well, all right, but it won't go well if you're with me. Let me do it alone." Apparently I look more like a narcotics agent than a drug addict. I agreed but added that if by the next day he had not done it, we would do it together.

He found his dealer (not very hard for a drug addict) and shared the Gospel. You are probably imagining a sinister man as his dealer. It was a woman, a mother in fact. Drugs are an equal-opportunity employer. She lived next door to him in the ghetto and supplied drugs for the local kids.

From that point on, Sean never took any drugs. He was free. The power of the Gospel, received and also given to others, transformed his heart. It is the power of God for salvation to those who believe (Rom. 1:16), and by sharing the Gospel with those who were influencing him, Sean internalized it and learned to believe it in a more substantive way. We are often so quick to search for other ways to

help people that we overlook the most powerful: the simple message of Jesus internalized and shared with others. Sean's dealer did not become a Christian that day, but her fourteen-year-old son did accept Christ, and Sean baptized him. Within a year or so, we heard that she did become a Christian after her son was taken from her and she was sent to jail. Eventually Sean led several of the boy's friends to Christ and baptized them. He started a new church in the neighborhood made up of young kids looking for something better for their lives. He still shepherds them and is always introducing me to young people who have come to Christ.

The Church is a vibrant, authentic expression of Jesus' love and truth in this dark world, and with Jesus at the helm, she is unstoppable!

We should not be running from drug dealers and darkness. If indeed we really are the light of the world, we should be running toward the darkness with the understanding that we cannot be overcome by darkness. We should take the light and jam it right down the throat of darkness.

My wife, Dana, is a schoolteacher. She used to work for a Christian school but in recent years chose to teach for the Los Angeles Unified School District in South Central L.A., Watts in particular. This is a notoriously bad part of town. In her first week of work there, she came home with a big smile and a glow on her face as if she were strangely fulfilled. She said these unforgettable words that still make me proud: "It is so much more fun to be light in the darkness than to be light in the light."

I suggest we all learn to have more fun!

Our greatest significance is found in the darkness, not in the light. The smallest light will defeat the darkest of night. We were born to be warriors, born again to be chasing the darkness away.

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