See? **WOW!** News and Encouragement for CID **C**ircuit **W**itness & **O**utreach **W**orkers

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Christmas Snaps into Focus

Dr. Kurt Marquart once asked his dogmatics students, "What did Jesus save us FROM?" Several responses came from the class: sin – death – the power of the devil. All true.

Yet something important still had to be mentioned: the wrath of God.

Jesus was born to save. The name that Joseph was instructed to give the Child was JESUS, "for He will save His people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21).

Nothing less than the wrath of God is what sinners deserve. Not a quick "boil-over" of pique with just as quick a cool-down not much later, but rather burning wrath from the Creator when His rebellious creatures want to spurn Him and cast Him aside. This is personal.

Yet solely out of His grace, in Christ God showed up in person to reconcile the world to Himself. "For our sake He made Him to be sin Who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:21). "Since, therefore, we are justified by His blood, much more shall we be saved by Him from the wrath of God" (Romans 5:9).

The sweet little Baby Jesus came to save poor sinners from the wrath of God. When you recall this reality, Christmas snaps into focus.

He has saved you. And He did His saving work for others, too – including all those who do not believe in Him and so live under His wrath.

See? **WOW**! We get to tell them.

New C-WOW for Springfield East and West is Pastor Brian Johnston of Trinity, Taylorville. Welcome!

Effingham "Soft" Canvass

St. John, Effingham conducted a community canvass in the area surrounding the church building on Sunday afternoon, October 11. I was there, preaching on Evangelism, conducting a training for callers during Sunday School hour, and participating in the afternoon's activities.

Five teams of two were deployed to canvass. They visited 107 homes. (Many people were not home.) Two households requested a follow-up visit by someone from St. John.

There was conversation at the church afterward about St. John perhaps continuing this kind of canvassing activity in the future. Now that they have the model, they can do it themselves.

I call this a "soft" canvass. It does not lead up to a Gospel presentation at the door. Rather, it culminates in asking how we can pray for you and if you want a follow-up from someone at the church.

Callers had with them suggested prayers for a variety of needs and occasions, in case someone did request prayer on the spot. They left with people information on St. John Lutheran Church. They also had copies of CPH's *A Simple Explanation of Christianity* (Luther's Small Catechism) for anyone who was curious.

Canvassing is not an alternative to personal witness, but a supplement to it. It provides Christians one more way to reach out to their community. It also helps to give a local church the reputation as an inviting, caring community. All of this is to bring people along to the point of hearing the Gospel, believing it by the power of the Holy Spirit, and being gathered around Word and Sacrament with the rest of Christ's church.

Interested in such a canvass? Let me know.

Worth considering:

- Mark R. Teasdale, *Socially Awkward Evangelism: Overcoming Fears in Sharing the Gospel* (IVP Academic, 2026).

"This book considers evangelism through the lens of psychology" (9). It is not devoid of theological reflection, but it is longer on psychology and shorter on theology. Still, there are some interesting insights.

The book starts from the point that evangelism IS going to be "socially awkward." Our Lord never said this life would be painless. The pain in evangelism, or that keeps Christians from it, is fear. This fear is not dispelled though additional training. More training resources are available than ever, yet Christians seem more reluctant to evangelize (19).

To deal with such fear, the book sets forth an approach based on Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT). It links ACT to the Christian contemplative tradition (50-56).

This approach recognizes that anxiety will be connected with evangelism. It can be negative, leading to avoidance. Or the anxiety can be beneficial, to help us endure any shame we face for evangelizing. But the simple presence of anxiety need not determine what we will do (70).

The book recommends that Christians try to pinpoint exactly what about evangelism makes them uncomfortable. Do you grow uncomfortable simply about mentioning to someone that you went to church on Sunday? How would you feel about inviting them to come along? What about saying what you believe about Jesus? (73)

Here, by the way, the book is rather shallow theologically. It does not adequately account for the scandal of the cross. The closer our conversation comes to THAT, the more uncomfortable or anxious the flesh of Christians is likely to be.

On the other hand, the book makes a theologically good point when it says: "Across all our faulty beliefs about evangelism, we find a common assumption: Evangelism is a human activity. Socially we emphasize the human response, theologically we emphasize human sin [here, the evangelist's own sin even as he tries to witness], and technically we emphasize human competency." Making a psychological connection, it adds: "This syncs with the three most common beliefs that undergird social anxiety: (1) intolerance of uncertainty, (2) perfectionism, and (3) feeling overresponsible for others" (78).

Yet, the book notes, evangelism need not be socially confrontational. Think of it rather as "an activity marked by wisdom, justice, self-control, love, hope, and faith . . ." (87). Also, do not think the worst of people. Their response may not be as "bad" as we could be expecting.

The author tells of how he has taken seminary students in evangelism courses through a "rescripting" exercise in which they recall a negative evangelism event in as much detail as they can, consider it from the perspective of a third-party observer, and think of how it could have gone differently so as to make a positive impact (112-113). He reports that the students often come to see that their negative reaction was not against the evangelism itself, but more about particular people in that incident (115, 116).

Perhaps the book's best theological point is to quote Heb. 12:1-3. Read that with evangelism in mind. – Ken Schurb *kschurb@cidlcms.org*