

## Preacher's Pen points

## Two Signs Speak



### A Sign!

This week I noticed a sign, a marquee in front of a church building in our area. The message read, "Under the same management since Pentecost, AD 33". As I reflected on the sign I sympathized with the concept embodied in the message. For the Scriptures clearly teach that Jesus promised to build His church (Mt. 16:18), and that His church came into being on the day of Pentecost (Ac. 2:1,47). Moreover it is equally clear that the church was and is to be under the management of Jesus Christ. For the Scriptures plainly reveal that the Father "*put all things under His feet and gave Him to head over all things to the church which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all*" (Eph. 1:22-23). The sign I saw made clear the church's noble intentions to identify with the church that Jesus built and to be under His management. Their attitude is commendable.

### Another sign!

However, as I pondered the thought of the first sign my eye drifted to another sign nearby identifying the group meeting in that particular place. It read "St. John's Lutheran church". This sign is also intended to tell those who pass by something about the people who meet there. They are Lutherans. They embrace the teaching of 16th century reformer Martin Luther.

### Can these signs be reconciled?

I could not help but consider the irony in the juxtaposition of those two signs. The first affirms the management of Jesus; the second the leadership of Martin Luther. The first would suggest that this group seeks to be Christians; the second suggests

that they seek to be Lutherans. I could not help but think that if this church is under the management of Christ, then why not simply called it a "church of Christ" or "a church of God" as NT churches were designated (Rom. 16:16; 1 Cor. 1:1)? If those who comprise it are disciples of Jesus, why not just call themselves "Christians" like the first followers of Jesus did? (Ac. 11:26) rather than Lutherans.

### Lessons to be observed

My purpose in writing is not to denigrate this particular Lutheran church. Instead it is to call attention to those truths clearly taught in the Bible. Jesus is the head of the church and has been from its founding. Our goal should be to follow His teaching only and honor Him, and not men, in how we designate ourselves. To his credit Martin Luther recognized these truths and urged his followers, "I ask that men make no reference to my name, and call themselves not Lutherans, but Christians. What is Luther? My doctrine, I am sure, is not mine, nor have I been crucified for any one. St. Paul, in 1 Cor. 3, would not allow Christians to call themselves Pauline or Petrine, but Christian. How then should I, poor, foul carcass that I am, come to have men give to the children of Christ a name derived from my worthless name? No, no, my dear friends; let us abolish all party names, and call ourselves Christians after Him Whose doctrine we have." (Hugh Thomason Kerr, *A Compend of Luther's Theology*, Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1943, p. 135)

Luther was right and we could wish that, wherever churches exist, one sign would be sufficient to declare that church's intention to follow only Jesus and glorify Him—"Church of Christ"! —Johnny Felker