

The Nail in the Garage

A Testimony to God's Healing Power

By Jim Likens

Every once in a while a pastor has an opportunity to make a great impact on the people of his church. Now it would be real easy for the pastor to fall into the trap of sitting at his desk, his hands behind his head, his feet on his desk and saying to himself, "What a good boy am I." That of course would be a great mistake.

Every opportunity to have an impact on the people of God is a direct result of God not the pastor.

Twenty years ago I was a pastor in Indianapolis, Indiana at Messiah Lutheran Church. As Palm Sunday approached I wanted to have a message for my people that would invite them to get directly involved in the passion of Christ. I announced on that Sunday morning that the church would be open from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. until Good Friday.

In the back of the church there would be an eight foot cross on a table. Next to the cross would be hammers and nails. I asked the people to write on a piece of paper that thing in their life that caused them the most guilt: not when it happened but every night when they went to bed. They were told to fold that piece of paper up four times, bring it to church and nail it to the cross.

By the time the Good Friday service came, it was hard to find any visible wood on the front side of the cross. It was also interesting to see that some nails might have been hit two or three times leaving a good amount of the nail out of the wood. Then there were other that the head of the three inch nail was almost buried into the wood.

During the Good Friday service I had the elders bring the cross to the front of the church and place it in a stand. I preached on *Col. 2:13b-14* – "God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the written code (the Law), with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross."(NIV)

As is the tradition in many churches, the people leave in silence.. For this Good Friday I had recorded the sound of a hammer hitting a railroad spike. I ran it through an echo chamber and made a looped tape. I had one of the elders bring a heavy canvas bag to the front of the church. He walked with me down the aisle as I dismissed each row. To everyone over the age of twelve I gave a 60d common nail. That's a six inch nail. I had hand polished everyone of the two hundred nail in the bag.



In my sermon I told the people that I wanted them to take the nail I would give them and place it somewhere where they would see it every day. The reason? To remind them that the Law that condemned them had been CANCELED, taken away, and NAILED to the cross.

That was in 1988. In 1992 I left Messiah Lutheran Church and took over the management of the video department at the International Headquarters of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod in St. Louis. Over the years, on trips back to Indy to visit my two oldest children, I would visit with some of my former members. Nearly all of them would say as I walked into their homes, "Pastor, I still have my nail."

Remember in the first paragraph of this article, the "What a good boy am I!" thing? Well, that happened almost every time. That is until several years ago when a man took me out into his garage and showed me his nail. It was hanging right in front of the windshield of his car. He told me it had been there since the Saturday morning after that Good Friday service.

"You know pastor," he said, "that nailed saved my marriage. I was leaving the house one night after a terrible argument with my wife and I was never coming back. As I got into my car and started it I looked up and saw that nail. I remember you saying to look at it every day and remember that my sins were forgiven, taken away and nailed to the cross." He stopped for moment and let out a big sigh. "Pastor I had been saying that for me ever since you gave me that nail. All of the sudden I realized that it applied to Jenny, too. I turned off the car and ran into the house and grabbed her with a really big hug. I asked her to forgive me. She did. That nail saved my marriage."

Every opportunity to have an impact on the people of God is a direct result of God not the pastor. And this man of God said, "Amen."