

Church Workers in Southeast Asia Explore Luther's Theology of the Cross



In Exodus 33, Moses asks to see God's glory. He has been given the often thankless task of leading God's stubborn people from slavery in Egypt to freedom in their promised land and he wants to see some sign, some evidence that God is with him. But God will not let Moses see His face. "Man shall not see me and live," God says. (Exodus 33:20) Instead, all that Moses will see is God's back.

Often we too, have the same desire as Moses; we want a sign, some tangible proof showing us the direction God wants us to take, some proof that He is for us. But in this world those signs can be few and far between. Instead as Luther teaches in Thesis 20 of his Heidelberg Disputation, in this world we look on all things through suffering and through the cross. The sign of God's love, the sign of His blessing, the sign of hope, is the cross, and nothing else.

From this central insight Luther developed an entire theology of the cross which became one of his most important contributions to understanding the work of Christ. In November 2009, 23 Lutheran pastors and deaconesses in Cambodia and 18 of their colleagues in Thailand gathered to grow in their understanding of this central element of Lutheran Theology. Sponsored by the Lutheran Institute of South Asia (LISA), the course focussed first upon the how the Scriptures reveal the Theology of the Cross. Discussion then focussed upon Luther's teachings on this subject as all 28 Theses of the Heidelberg Disputation were translated and discussed. The focus then shifted to see how the theology of the cross is applied in ministry, especially in worship, preaching, and servant leadership.

The reality of God's presence in suffering was in many ways nothing new to these church workers, some of whom have suffered greatly for their faith. Their real life experiences added a unique dimension to the class that continually moved discussion from the theoretical to the practical.

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