



# bring Jesus

## Making sense of mission

by Rev Dr Steen Olsen



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# LET JESUS SPEAK!

**You are relaxing with friends. Most of them are not Christian. They know you are involved in the Lutheran Church. One of them says, 'I saw on the news that another clergyman has been charged with abusing children.'**

What do you say? Do you get defensive and say that it really is only a very small percentage of clergy who engage in this sort of disgusting behaviour? Or maybe you go on the attack and point out that non-Christian teachers and others who work with children also offend in this way? Maybe you don't say anything or just offer a brief comment like, 'Yes, that's terrible.'

How about another approach? You say: 'When I see such reports I am reminded of something Jesus said. One time people were bringing children to Jesus to be blessed and his followers tried to stop them. Jesus was indignant and said, "Let the little children come to me. Do not stop them." Another time he warned, "It would be better for you if a millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown into the sea, than for you to cause one of these little ones to stumble"' (Mark 10:14; Luke 17:2).

Then you do a difficult thing. You don't say anything else. You resist the temptation to add a comment or to explain. You let your friends grapple with the actual words of Jesus. Let them respond to what Jesus says.

Or perhaps one of your mates tries to bait you: 'There's going to be a Expo at the Showgrounds next weekend. Are you going?' Maybe you respond: 'Very funny. Actually Jesus sometimes said some quite surprising things. For

example there was this time when they brought a woman to him who had been caught committing adultery. (I always wondered where the bloke was, but that is another story.) Anyway, they told Jesus that the law demanded that she be stoned to death. Jesus replied, "Let the one who is without sin cast the first stone." We are told that starting with the eldest, one after another they all left, until Jesus was alone with the woman. Jesus looked at her and asked, "Who condemns you?" She said, "No-one, Sir". Then Jesus said to her, "Neither do I condemn you. Go and sin no more" (John 8:1-11).

Again, you let the words of Jesus stand and do not try to improve on them. Don't say more than you need to. Let people wrestle with Jesus and what he said. Don't answer questions that they haven't yet asked. Respect people and let them engage in further conversation when they are ready.

Artificial approaches to talking about our faith turn people off. In the past we often started with a question like, 'Will you go to heaven when you die?' and then tried to get from there to talking about Jesus. We started from the outside and then tried to work in, until we could bring the message of Jesus. Why not start at the heart and centre with Jesus and what he said and did, and then work outwards and see where that leads?

Evangelism is best understood as any process that allows Jesus to bear witness to himself in his own words. The Spirit works through the Word. In essence, we don't need to defend Jesus with our arguments; we just need to turn him loose.



## We don't need to defend Jesus with our arguments; we just need to turn him loose

Rather than put forward arguments and try to prove the Christian message, we tell stories. All the world loves a story. Stories engage us and draw us in.

In times past we have developed rational arguments seeking to prove the existence of God; issues like creation versus evolution or philosophical arguments that the Bible is inerrant. Most of today's non-Christians reject all claims to absolute truth. They simply say, 'Not convinced!' The other tack we have used is the subjective testimony approach, which is all about our own experience and what it means to us. Many today will simply say, 'That's nice for you! You have your experience; I have mine.'

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When we direct attention to Jesus and let him speak, we reveal the truth about God from within the Christian story. The story is its own authority. It authenticates itself. It is not proved by arguments about the reliability of the Bible. The story of Jesus stands or falls on its own merits. It is the word of God, through which the Spirit works to bring faith 'where and when he pleases in those who hear the gospel'. You can be confident about that.

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As a church where love comes to life we support existing communities to be active in mission.

LCA Strategic Direction 2013-2018, p15.  
[www.lca.org.au/sd](http://www.lca.org.au/sd)

