



People always say, "Oh, you're the strict ones," when I tell them I go to a Missouri Synod church. How do I respond to that?

That's a very common response. It's so common that I've wondered if it's in the official definition of the Missouri Synod in Webster's Dictionary or on Wikipedia. It's also a response that makes me cringe. I mean, what does the word "strict" conjure up in your mind? In my mind I get this picture of some old school marm (whose face would crack if she smiled) rapping kids across their knuckles with a ruler for just grinning out of turn. Not the kind of image you want to project.

For starters, "strict" is an unfair label. There are a lot of churches out there that are much "stricter." In Missouri Synod congregations, it's ok, for example, to dance, to play cards, to attend movies, even to have a drink now and then (as long as you don't get drunk). We're ok singing contemporary songs side-by-side with old hymns (which, of course, were contemporary music at some point in time). We don't make it mandatory for people to tithe (although tithing is a good thing and something God requires, it's also something that must come from a thankful heart not a grudging one).

My response to the "strict ones" comment would probably go something like this: "I don't know about the word "strict," but we do try to stick to what God has said in the Bible. If He says 'This is the way it should be,' then we don't have the right to do things some other way. In fact we have an obligation to do it the way God has said."

Quite honestly, I think that deep down that's really what people are looking for in a church. They want the church "be church" - to accurately represent God. They don't want the church to represent the ever-changing culture. We have newspapers, TV and internet for that. It's kind of like the fact that kids, deep down, want their parents to be parents - not just "buddies." Kind of like people want the doctor to be just that - a doctor. Someone who tells them the truth - what they need to hear to get better.

We do have one major challenge as we seek to stick to God's word: We do not want to become like the Pharisees of Jesus' day and add a bunch of extra restrictions that God hasn't given.

The person who asked this question told me they responded to the "strict ones" comment by saying, "We simply proclaim the Gospel of Jesus." That's a good reply. I would simply add to that the comment the apostle Philip made when his friend Nathaniel was skeptical: "Come and see."

Thanks for asking,
Pastor David

Send your questions to <mailto:pastor@livingwordlutheran.net>