

## **THE WORD OF THE LORD GROWS: CHRISTIAN APACHE VOICES**

*A farmer went out to sow his seed.* With these words Jesus began his “Parable of the Sower” (Luke 8:4-15). He soon explained, *The seed is the word of God.* Seed, which is sown and nourished, grows. Similarly, when the Word of God is proclaimed in its truth and purity, faith is produced and grows. The New Testament writers quickly adopted Jesus’ image. Peter told his readers, *you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God* (1 Peter 1:23). Paul added, *All over the world this gospel is bearing fruit and growing* (Colossians 1:6). That’s what mission work is all about.

I have titled this presentation THE WORD OF THE LORD GROWS. In 1896 a frightened missionary, Paul Mayerhoff, walked onto the Ft. Apache Indian Reservation with Bible in hand. The enduring Gospel has been proclaimed ever since and has born good and abundant fruit. You, sitting here today, look around; look at each other. THE WORD OF THE LORD GROWS.

I have subtitled this paper—CHRISTIAN APACHE VOICES. God said, *my word that goes out from my mouth ... will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it* (Isaiah 55:11). God keeps his promise. I want you to hear Christian Apache voices from across the decades illustrate the growth of the Gospel in this Apache Mission. We start with Baptism.

### **TREASURE YOUR BAPTISM: THE VOICE OF ROBERT CHINO**

*Baptism ... now saves you also* (1 Peter 3:21).

The year was 1911. Missionary E. Edgar Guenther and his wife, Minnie, had just arrived at East Fork and were getting settled. One day they heard that an Apache boy was grievously ill up Seven Mile Canyon. Since their saddles had not yet arrived, the two set out on foot and made the four-mile hike up the steep trail. There they found Robert Chino. Robert, the son of the local chief, L-1, had been dismissed from the Government boarding school because he had advanced tuberculosis. Mrs. Guenther reported, “Young Robert fairly drank in the Gospel truths we brought him and after a number of visits asked to be baptized” (M. Guenther 1956:40). Soon thereafter, Missionary Guenther was ready to perform the baptism at the Indian camp, but L-1 suggested a delay. Rev. Guenther turned to the chief and again began to explain the significance of baptism. Robert, however, grew impatient. He exclaimed, **“Explain that to him afterwards when I am gone, but don’t wait until it is too late.”** The baptism took place. Robert died a few days later. At the graveside L-1 hushed the crowd and said that Robert had requested that no one should cry over him since he was going to a better home. Robert was the first Apache baptized on the Ft. Apache Indian Reservation. And THE WORD OF THE LORD GROWS.

## **SPEAK THE TRUTH IN LOVE: THE VOICE OF CHARLEY GARLAND**

*Instead, speaking the truth in love, we would in all things grow up into Christ, who is the head (Ephesians 4:15).*

One reason the early WELS missionaries were allowed on the Apache reservations was the Government's insistence that they would open schools so that children would be taught to read, write, and display "proper etiquette" (W. Kessel 1995:19). The Lutherans seized the opportunity and started schools in Peridot and in East Fork.

By the time the Guenthers arrived in East Fork the fledgling parochial school had faltered and closed. Guenther was expected to re-open the school, which he did. The missionary husband and wife team were running themselves ragged making school furniture, typing school lessons, teaching, providing a noon meal for the students, and doing a myriad of other tasks. And, yes, even missionaries reach the limit of their frustration. One day the students were restless and could care less about the subject matter. Guenther boiled over. He later wrote:

I let loose in terms that left no one in doubt what I thought of them at the moment, collectively and individually. During the following recess Charlie Garland went over to the house, and, without preamble, said to Mrs. Guenther, "**When somebody talk mad to me I feel like to fight in pieces,**" then turned on his heel and left the room (E. Guenther 1956-1957:110).

Of course, Mrs. Guenther had no idea what Charlie was talking about, but Missionary Guenther knew. Charlie was only a first grader in the Lutheran school, but with one sentence he became the teacher. He not only provided a keen insight into Apache culture, but he also laid down the law in no uncertain terms. Guenther accepted this admonition and repentance was forthcoming. *Speak the truth in love* (Ephesians 4:15) was the lesson learned. Guenther later wrote (1956-1957:110): "Too bad that to this very day one runs across teachers and professors who have not learned that a fatherly or brotherly heart to heart talk in private will accomplish more than a dozen 'dressing-downs' which betray only cowardice at their best."

As a postscript, it should be noted that little Charlie Garland became Pastor Guenther's favorite student. Later he joined the Guenther family on a car ride all the way to the Midwest and back. And THE WORD OF THE LORD GROWS.

## **BLESS THE CHILDREN: THE VOICE OF A SCHOOL BOY**

*Jesus called the children to him and said, 'Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these (Luke 18:15-16).*

Is it possible that a little Apache boy ultimately was responsible for saving not just one but dozens of babies? It was 1914 or 1915. After supper, Missionary E. E. Guenther and his wife Minnie were ready to retire for the night when they heard a knock at the door. The tall missionary opened the door and looked down at a small Apache boy from the mission school. The out-of-breath lad, who obviously had been running, blurted out, **You come quick!** (M. Guenther 1956:40). Guenther threw on his clothes and, thinking the Indian camp was nearby, stepped into his slippers and left with the boy. As it turns out, the missionary and the youth ran at a trot for two miles.

The scene at the camp was one of confusion. Apaches were talking back and forth. The center of their attention was a newborn baby who happened to be born with six fingers on each hand

which was “very bad medicine.” One forceful grandmother was persuasive in her argument that the baby be killed in accordance with Apache custom.

Guenther acted quickly and decisively. He picked up a butcher knife, held the blade in the fire, wiped it clean and then sliced off the two extra tiny fingers. He then tore his handkerchief in two and wrapped each tiny hand. The life of the baby girl was spared. She was now “normal.”

Apaches at this time practiced infanticide. A baby born with a deformity or the weaker one of twins was all too often put to death or set out to die. In the years which followed, the Guenthers started receiving into their home such helpless Apache babies as well as babies who had lost their mothers. Other missionaries and their wives did the same. By 1922 the number of dispossessed babies had grown so great that the Guenthers started the first orphanage in the American Southwest, the East Fork Orphanage, or Nursery as it was called (W. Kessel 1987:20). And to think one young Apache boy from the mission school was responsible for saving the first baby by uttering one small sentence—**You come quick!** He knew Jesus and right from wrong. And THE WORD OF THE LORD GROWS.

### **WORSHIP THE LORD: THE VOICE OF CHIEF ALCHESAY**

*I rejoiced with those who said to me, “Let us go to the house of the LORD” (Psalm 122:1).*

Over the span of 125 years, many Lutheran churches were built and thousands of services were conducted on both reservations. The real impetus for public worship came not from mission boards or missionaries but from the needs and desires of the Apache people themselves.

In 1920, Chief Alchesay, along with many other Apaches, wanted a church in Whiteriver. Consequently, missionary E. E. Guenther started to process the necessary governmental “red tape” which required an official petition from the Indian Office signed by a “goodly number of representative Indians” (E. Guenther 1956-1957:16). Easier said than done. When Guenther handed Alchesay the petition, the chief was concerned and said:

**I cannot sign your paper; I believe what you say, but I do not trust writing on paper. I signed a paper once for the Government and found that it gave a white man permission to round up all our bronco ponies for a [measly] fourteen dollars a head. Now you will understand why I cannot sign your paper; paper can lie.**

Alchesay would not sign and neither would any other Apache out of fear of being exploited by the Government. Guenther explained to Alchesay that the words on the paper were his words and had not been touched by Government hands. With that Alchesay said, “**Good. I will tell my people to sign your paper. Then you come back to me and I will put my thumb print on the bottom.**” Everyone in the North Fork area (where Alchesay was chief) signed, as did every sub-chief on the reservation. Alchesay put his thumbprint on the paper.

When the Whiteriver church was dedicated on Easter Sunday, 1922, Alchesay was given the key and he unlocked the front door. During the service he was baptized first, followed by 100 Apaches. The old chief encouraged everyone present to attend this church regularly for it was the only one on which he had given his thumb mark of approval.

The next year Alchesay walked up to the altar carrying an infant, “**his son**”, as he called him. He watched as the baby was baptized and, in compliance with the chief’s wishes, the child was named after him, Arthur Alchesay Guenther, and became a child of God through the Sacrament.

Chief Alchesay died on August 6, 1928. Many years later Missionary Arthur Alchesay Guenther learned the rest of the story from the last living child of Chief Alchesay, Bertha (Alchesay) Burnett. She reported:

**That (church key) became one of his most valuable possessions. He never gave it away but always kept it. When he was dying in 1928, he made a last request that the key to “his” church be put in his hand. This was done, and there it stayed when he died and it was buried with him** (A. Guenther 1975:87).

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## **SHARE THE GOOD NEWS: THE VOICE OF TOM WYCLIFFE**

Jesus said, *Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven* (Matthew 10:32).

Tom Wycliffe didn't start out acknowledging Jesus. In fact, he was on the slippery slope to hell. Missionary E. E. Guenther commented, "When he was young he was a bad man. He drank much, gambled and did many evil things." That changed in 1918. The missionary proclaimed the Law and Gospel. Tom heard it. The Holy Spirit worked faith in Tom's heart. His whole life changed 180 degrees. He was baptized as was his family. In time he became an interpreter for the missionary, and in 1922 when Alchesay unlocked the door of the Whiteriver church for the first time, Wycliffe was one of three Apaches who addressed the Apaches in their own language (W. Kessel 1994).

Every day Tom would show up at the missionary's home and ask the pastor which camp he could visit that day and share Jesus. When asked why he was so eager to spread the glad tidings of the gospel of the crucified and risen Savior, Tom replied, **I feel just like a ditch running over with water** (Frey 1921). Tom simply could not help himself. He was so filled with the love of Jesus that it had to bubble forth. This is exactly what Jesus promised when he said, "Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him" (John 7:38).

Tom's days on this earth were numbered. He was dying of tuberculosis. He asked the missionary for Holy Communion and added, **I know that Communion is no medicine for my body. But I know that it will make my soul strong, so that the devil will have no power over me.** Six days later, on August 27, 1923, his breathing was labored. Between strained breaths he told Missionary Guenther and Apache evangelist, Lon Bullis, **I think I am going to Heaven today.** He asked to hear the Creed and Psalm 23 over and over again. E. E. Guenther (1923) recalled, "And he wanted to hear Christian songs. We sang one after another of his favorites. The last song we sang was 'I Love to Tell the Story.'" That night he died. Tom's was the first church funeral held at the East Fork mission. He was buried in the nearby cemetery. He was a strong Christian Apache evangelist who died in the arms of the Lord. And THE WORD OF THE LORD GROWS.

## **BE PREPARED FOR JUDGMENT DAY: THE VOICES OF SINEW RILEY AND HIS GRANDMOTHER**

Jesus said, *In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am* (John 14:2-3).

Sinew Riley was an Apache Scout stationed at Fort Huachuca. One day while on furlough in Whiteriver, he visited his friend, Missionary E. E. Guenther. Riley shared this story.

**You remember my grandmother? Yes? Well she died the other day... Something funny happened in her life once. She went up on the mountains one day about ten years ago to pack wood as she was accustomed to do. She believed in Jesus and she liked to pray. She would pray right out there in the woods or anywhere. She had learned that Jesus was coming back some day to judgment. That did not frighten her in the least. She thought much about that and always wanted to be ready when he called for her. Kneeling down to shoulder her wood she prayed again along these lines.**

**Then before she was able to get up with the bundle on her shoulders she heard a whirring up in the sky that sounded like the noise of a harvesting machine. The sound would come nearer and grow into a roar and then grow fainter again. That happened several times. At last the thing that the sound came from circled over her head like a large bird. "It's Jesus coming to get me," she cried joyfully. "How soon He has answered my prayers." But now the object dropped gradually away from her and came to ground on the flat at Fort Apache. "Now I must hurry to Him," she said eagerly to herself. "You bundle of wood stay where you are. I don't need you where I am going."**

**Arriving at camp she was told of the flying machine that had alighted at Fort Apache, the first one in these parts. This news did not disappoint her nearly as much as one would have expected. "That's alright," she said. "He'll come back after me some other day."**

**Not long ago my grandmother died. You know sometimes when Indians are about to die they threaten to send evil spirits from the other side to make trouble for their enemies. When my grandmother knew that her end was near, she said, "I am going to Jesus now. I have no hard feelings towards anyone. There are no evil spirits where Jesus lives. Therefore, nobody need be afraid that I will send any back from there" (E. Guenther 1927).**

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## **REJOICE, THE LORD IS RISEN: THE VOICE OF ROSE DEHOSE THOMPSON**

Jesus said, *I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies* (John 11:25).

Rose Dehose Thompson was from Cibecue and was a member of the Lower Cibecue Mission. She married and had children, some of whom moved to Whiteriver. Whenever she came to visit her children she always attended church where Arthur A. Guenther was pastor. Rose held a special place in Pastor Guenther's heart, and he called her *shi-woye*—'my grandmother' (A. Guenther 2006:6). Rose deeply loved her family and the missionaries, but above all she loved her crucified and risen Savior and Lord, Jesus Christ.

Some years earlier she had written a letter to Arthur Guenther's father, E. E. Guenther sharing her insights about Easter.

**Again we have celebrated the happy Easter. We hear so much of our Savior's suffering during these Sundays. I am sad of hearing about Jesus our Savior being nailed to the cross. If I was there and see his blood dropping to the ground I surely would cry for him.**

Now it is the glad news again that he is alive again after he was dead. The happiest thing in our life is to live again after we die. That is to live forever in the next world with Jesus our brother and our heavenly Father who watches over us during our lifetime here on earth.

We also have many wonderful things here on earth that we should be thankful for, such as the things we wear on our body, cattle or herds, homes and fields. Best of all God has given us our children that make us so happy at our home. We bring our children to God on Easter morning to be baptized. This is the way we celebrate our Easter to show that we are all God's children and Jesus is our Savior that will save us in our trouble. He can forgive our sins. He can help us in sickness and sadness. He will raise us when we die and take us home to our heavenly Father which is in heaven....

Thank the Lord that gave us our children. May our children grow up to be men and women. Give them wisdom and an understanding heart to hear thy Word. We don't ask for riches but for wisdom that we will have everlasting life through Jesus Christ who died on the cross for our sins.

Easter is the happy day for us again. I will say on Easter, Christ lives again.

Rose Dehose Thompson ("Wee-Sawn") Lower Cibecue Mission Apache

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## **PRAY, PRAISE AND GIVE THANKS: VOICES OF APACHE MEN IN WAR**

*Rejoice always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18).*

World War II raged in the Pacific and in Europe. Men were called to arms. Nearly 300 Apache men enlisted and went off to war. During the War years, Missionary Edgar Guenther and his wife, Minnie, faithfully corresponded with over 100 Lutheran Apache servicemen. "By mail, they counseled, cheered and strengthened the faith of those young men so far from home" (R. Kessel 1991:8). They sent Easter and Christmas packages and gifts "overseas" to the men. The Apache men in return wrote hundreds of letters back to the Guenthers relating their experiences and thanking them for sending *The Apache Scout*, the Lutheran Mission publication. One central theme expressed by the Christian Apache men in war was prayer.

The Guenthers corresponded with Lee Harvey and sent him *The Apache Scout* and some pinion nuts. Lee wrote back (December 2, 1944):

**I didn't believe myself eating pinions way out here some where in Marianas Islands... We had quite a battle here with the Japs, and as I remember I was praying to the Lord in my fox hole one night when the Japanese heavy artillery were putting up a barrage of shells in our area, and the big shells were landing right close.**

Junior Dazen another soldier stationed in the South Pacific wrote the Guenthers on January 11, 1944. **Thanks to you both for the nice Bible, Prayer Book, Stationaries etc, which I always wanted, above all I'll never forget it ... Thanks to Lord Jesus, that I'm fine maybe it's because I pray to him each night before going to bed, and each morning when I wake up.**

Fredrick Declay was the first Apache soldier to leave the reservation for overseas duty. On August 12, 1943 he wrote: **I had already spent eighteen months on this Island** [in the South Pacific]. He noted that when he read *The Apache Scout* **it seems that I have been all over the reservation again. I know that you are preaching our people on the reservation to be Christian and that you are praying for us that are serving in the Armed forces so that we could all return to our folks again some day... Please keep on praying for us.**

Ray Keys wrote on May 14, 1945. **I'm now somewhere in Germany and also I've seen plenty actions. Thanks to our Lord who has protected me through the dangerous life. He is with me so now I have nothing to be afraid of.**

Byde Josay wrote on June 21, 1944.

**Really Rev. Guenther, I am really glad indeed; an also appreciate the things your race of people did when they raised me. Also I'm glad I have found the right way to pray praise and give thanks to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. I was wondering an worrying for quite a long time, where I would be now hadn't it been for the Lutheran church to adopt me... Wishing you the blessing of God our Father and of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.**

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## **MAKE GOD-PLEASING DECISIONS: THE VOICE OF DOLLY GUY**

*So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God* (1 Corinthians 10:31).

It was New Year's Eve, 2000. About 30 of us were touring biblical sites in Greece and Turkey. That night we were in a moth-eaten hotel near the ruins of Troy in Turkey. We were in the dining room and our supper was nearly over when the hotel manager called for our attention and proudly introduced a belly dancer.

Soon into her "performance" she began to get sexually suggestive. I whispered to my wife, who was seated next to me, "I don't think this is going to help our marriage very much." She replied, "You better believe it isn't." So we quietly and unobtrusively left our dessert and walked out. Over the next half hour about a dozen of our tour group did the same. The rest stayed to watch the show.

I invited the "walk outs" to come to the hotel room where my wife and I were staying for an impromptu New Year's Eve midnight devotion. They came, and we read Scripture and we prayed.

One of those who walked out quietly and attended the devotion was a lifelong friend, a White Mountain Apache woman whom many of you probably knew. Her name was Dolly Guy from the Whiteriver church. Earlier that evening, before the midnight service, my wife and I went for a short walk around the hotel grounds. Dolly joined us. On the walk I asked Dolly why she decided to leave the belly dance. Her answer was to me, earth-shattering. **It was just wrong**, was her sole explanation. It was short, eloquent, and 100% meaningful. She made a judgment that the dance was not God-pleasing and that her presence as a spectator would not be God-pleasing either. Her quiet departure was a testimony to her faith.

The next morning on the bus, our main tour guide, a theologian from the Midwest, seized the bus microphone. He explained why he and others stayed at the dance and didn't quietly walk out like the rest of us. He reasoned that when you are in a foreign country you don't want to seem

disrespectful to our host. Later, in private, I asked Dolly about his speech and the dance. Her response was the same, **It was just wrong**. And so it was. And THE WORD OF THE LORD GROWS

## CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

*But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy (1 Peter 2:9-10).*

Today we celebrate God's ongoing love for the Apache people. For lo these many decades, the seed of God's Word has been planted and has taken deep root in the hearts and lives of countless thousands. We have reviewed God's power at work in the lives of a few "common, every day, garden-variety Christians" (to use Rev. A. Guenther's phrase). While they may soon be forgotten on this earth, their names are written boldly in God's Book of Life. What a blessing; what joy. And THE WORD OF THE LORD GROWS.

*After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb" (Revelation 7:9-10).*

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