

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus,

Most of you are aware that our congregation, Good Shepherd, is a member of a larger organization of congregations called the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod... or we call it "WELS" for short. Why have this organization of congregations? Truth is, there is much more we can accomplish as our congregations pool their resources. Our Scripture readings today focused our attention on two important facts. 1) Godly leadership is important for the life, health and growth of the church. And 2) getting out and sharing God's truth with the lost is among our greatest priorities. It just so happens that both of these things are much better accomplished when we work together with other congregations and pool our resources.

Many of you know that this past week, our Synod had a national convention. Every other year the congregations that belong to WELS send delegates to a Synod convention. At the convention this year, the hardest task before the delegates was to cut the budget by over 20%. The poor economy has drastically reduced offerings to Synod, so these cuts were necessary. Two options were placed before the convention: Make drastic cuts to our mission efforts. Well that's not good, because fewer hear the message of Jesus Christ. The second option: drastically cut money supporting our worker training system, necessitating the closing of at least one school. Well, that's not good either, is it? God blesses his church through godly, well-trained leaders who know his Word well and share it boldly. Two options, neither good. The delegates recognized this too. They worked hard to come up with a third option that cuts other areas, but kept the drastic cuts from hitting worker training OR missions.

I hope stuff doesn't sound like boring administration and meeting stuff to you. These decisions effect the work we, Good Shepherd, since we belong to the WELS and support that work. This is good news we should celebrate! God's people have spoken and affirmed what God says: both godly leadership together with mission outreach are vital for God's church.

My point is, yes, WELS has a heart for missions. Thank God for this! But what I want to ask you today is this: **could we ask God to give us an even greater heart for missions?** Yes, I think we could. Our sermon text for today does just that. We learn the key for renewing our desire to share the Good News. We ask our Lord Jesus Christ, "Give us hearts for missions!" Listen to the sermon text which is recorded in Mark 6:30-34.

30 The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught. 31 Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest." 32 So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place. 33 But many who saw them leaving recognized them and ran on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them. 34 When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things.

"The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught." You heard last week, earlier in Mark 6, how Jesus sent out the 12 disciples two by two to go preach the Gospel. This was their first missionary work, and they did it without Jesus at their side. It's natural that when they returned they gave Jesus a full accounting of their work.

Imagine the joy they felt as they shared stories about their successes and failures. I can imagine those who had bad experiences were refreshed as they shared their frustrations with Jesus and the other disciples and received encouragement from them. Those who had successes were also refreshed and rejuvenated as they all rejoiced in the lost souls who came to believe. So *this “reporting” was one way the disciples were refreshed.*

Let’s read further: Jesus said to his disciples: “**Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.’ So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place.**” Remember that the disciples didn’t have modern transportation available. The disciples had been teaching “from village to village.” Preaching itself is exhausting work (I haven’t met a pastor yet that doesn’t look forward to a Sunday afternoon nap when possible), but in addition they were regularly walking the dusty roads of Palestine between “preaching stations”. From their long journeys and hard work the disciples were physically tired! In order that they might be refreshed, Jesus took them to a remote place for some rest and relaxation. *Physical rest was another way the disciples were refreshed.*

Finally, let’s not overlook the most important way the disciples were refreshed in their zeal for missions. Quite simply, *they spent time with their Savior!* Quite often we read how Jesus went to an isolated place to teach just the 12 disciples. Those who share the Word of Christ must frequently hear that Word from Christ! A disciple must be filled up with Christ’s teaching before he can go and pour it out to others. A believer must remain strong in his own relationship with Christ before he can lead others to the Savior. For this reason, our Savior wanted to have some private time with his disciples. They had been separated for a while! Their faith needed to be strengthened at the feet of their Lord Jesus Christ. In this way, they would be refreshed for mission work.

Dear friends, like the disciples, if we are going to have hearts for mission work, we need to have our hearts refreshed frequently. What are some of the things that take the wind out of our sails when it comes to mission work? What distracts us from having a mission focus? What tires us out so we don’t have the energy to think about reaching the lost, especially those in far off places? Many things can do this. 1) If the congregation is struggling to meet its financial obligations, it’s easier to concern ourselves with what is immediate and close, rather than distant far. 2) Perhaps few visitors and little growth can discourage a congregation and tire it out. 3) On a personal level, perhaps we’re so busy with other things and work so hard that we don’t physically have the time or energy to think about missions. 4) Perhaps we forget to feed our own faith with God’s refreshing Gospel. Perhaps our own relationship with the Savior has been neglected and so we’re simply not all that concerned about taking the gospel to others.

Let’s pause for refreshment just as the disciples did. Be refreshed (1) by some personal time with your Savior. Read your Bible daily. Pray regularly. Go to a “quiet place and get some rest” with your Savior. (2) Be refreshed by getting physical rest when needed. Rest and relaxation is not a sin! Of course, we need not over do it, but God made our bodies in such a way that they need to rest and relax sometimes. By pushing ourselves too hard, we wear ourselves out. If we’re worn out, we won’t have the energy or the heart for missions. And finally, (3) be refreshed by hearing about the mission efforts of others, and by sharing your experiences with others. Read our Forward in Christ magazine and Mission Connection. Check out our WELS web resources. Hear, share, encourage! Our hearts WILL be refreshed for missions!

When we ask the Lord, “Give us hearts for missions”, we also ask him to give us hearts moved by compassion. Remember, Jesus had just taken his disciples across the Sea of Galilee

and intended to find a quiet place to rest and to teach them. Outreach wasn't the plan at this point. It was vacation time! But, our text says, "**many who saw them leaving recognized them and ran on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them. When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd.**" I imagine Jesus and the disciples were really looking forward to the relaxation, rest, peace and quiet. But, something changed their plans. The people saw where Jesus was headed. They ran from village to village along the bank gathering more and more people along the way. We can imagine that Jesus and his disciples arrived at the other bank first. Perhaps they were immediately met by a smaller local crowd. And gradually, more and more people arrived from other towns and villages. Soon there was a large crowd. In fact, by the end of the day, there were well over 5,000 people who had gathered to learn from Jesus!

How did Jesus handle this unexpected change of plans? Did he mildly rebuke them and send them away? "Give me a break, folks! My disciples and I have really been busy the last few weeks. Just give us a day to rest, and I'll meet you here tomorrow!" No, Jesus did not say that. Instead, he had *compassion* on them.

Jesus is the Good Shepherd. When he looked at the crowd, he saw sheep without a shepherd. Consider how pitiable people are when they don't know Jesus and aren't guided by them. Just negate what we read in Psalm 23, and you understand why Jesus had such compassion. Without Jesus, those in the crowd would have said,

"I have no Shepherd and I am in want. I enjoy no green pastures and no quiet waters. My soul is troubled and no one can calm it. I have no guide and no righteousness. When I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear great evil for there is no comfort. I have no eternal banquet. My enemies devour me; my head is wounded; my cup is empty. Indeed, my life is full of evil, disappointment and heartache, and then I will die."

What a pitiful condition! No wonder Christ, the Lord of love, the Good Shepherd, was so deeply moved to compassion!

We all know people just like those that met Jesus that day. People who are like sheep without a shepherd. Recognize the danger they are in. Let the love of Christ move you to do something about it. Lead them to the Good Shepherd.

Have you ever found compassion for the lost lacking in your life? When that happens, take a moment and truly think about your own miserable condition if God had left you on your own. Stuck in your sin, and your empty way of life, you would have no hope, no comfort, no peace. But thank God our Savior had true compassion on us! He didn't wait for us to shape up and make a change for the better. He didn't even wait for us to turn to him for help! Romans 5:8 tells us this amazing truth: "God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." Our Savior loves us so much that he gave his life for us when we were his **enemies!** Think about that! Truly, our Savior's compassion for us is perfect. May he give us also hearts moved by compassion for the lost.

So we pray that God would refresh us for missions. That he would fill us with compassion for the lost. And finally, as we pray, "Lord, give us hearts for missions" we also pray that God would give us hearts *full of good news*. When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. **So he began teaching them many things.** Remember, Jesus and his disciples were tired and hungry. They had a long day, and the last several days had been extremely busy. They already had plans set. When the unexpected crowd gathered, Jesus could have given them the Gospel in a nutshell, couldn't he? He could have said simply, "Your attention please. Everyone listen carefully! 'For

God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.’ Thank you for coming today! Depart in peace! Until we meet again!” But that’s not what Jesus did. Our text says that Jesus taught them **many** things. In fact, he taught so many things that he only stopped when it was late in the day. It was at this occasion that Jesus miraculously fed over 5,000 people. Maybe you didn’t think about this before. How did it happen that Jesus was in the situation that over 5,000 people were in a remote place with nothing to eat at the end of a long day? It’s because Jesus had taught these people **many things**. And he had done so when he himself was tired, hungry and had other plans. Jesus’ heart was full of good news, and he used every occasion to share it!

The Savior has given us the same work of shepherding. He has given us the same **means** of shepherding – His Word. Before he ascended into heaven, Jesus said, Matthew 28:19-20 **“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.”** We go and make disciples through Word and Sacrament. All people need to hear the *full message* of the Bible. First comes the warning: We have fallen short of the perfection and holiness God requires. Sin is rebellion against God, and we sin every day. Sin has separated us from God. But then comes the good news. Our Lord Jesus Christ gives us his holiness and perfection. He took our sin and guilt upon himself and suffered the punishment they deserve on the cross. He rose from the dead, and we will rise too! Eternal life is ours as a free gift from God! This is the full message of Christ. Warning and comfort. Sin and grace. Threat and promise. Law and Gospel. But always dominant will be the wonderful teaching of who Christ is and what he did for us.

Dear friends, we pray to the Lord, “Give us hearts for missions.” Such hearts will be ours when they are refreshed by Jesus himself, and when we encourage one another in this important work. Such hearts will be ours when we have the same compassion for the lost as our Lord Jesus had. Such heart are ours when they are full of the good news, and are eager to share it with others. Lord Jesus, give us hearts for missions. Amen.