

# **To Every Nation, Tribe, Language, and People: How can They Preach Unless They are Sent?**

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In the name of Jesus, dear friends in Christ:

Did you know, if the statistics are right, that if right now the unbelievers of this world would begin to line up single file outside the doors of this school, that line would wrap around this earth thirty times? And if we would get into a car and drive for ten hours a day at fifty miles an hour, it would take us four years and forty days (beyond the Synod Convention of 1997) to get to the end of that line and by that time it would have grown another 30,000 miles.

Awesome, isn't it? We live in a world which numbers 5.2 billion people and still counting. It is a world which grows by the size of a Chicago every month and every four months by the size of a California. And as our world grows in numbers so it also grows in the numbers of those who do not know our Savior Jesus. By most estimates only thirty per cent of the world's population is even nominally Christian. Put it the other way around and we realize that seventy percent or 3.6 billion people living today face an eternity without knowing, "How sweet the name of Jesus sounds in a believer's ear."

It is to those faceless billions, to those men, women and children of every "nation, tribe, language and people" who are still without Christ that we direct our attention in this essay. Having ourselves tasted that the Lord is gracious, having known the sweetness of our Savior's name, we want others the world over to know and experience what we have known and experienced. As a Synod we have officially committed ourselves to as much. The foreword of our Synod's Constitution begins with the following statement:

"The continuing purpose of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, as a gathering of Christians, is to serve all people in God's world with the gospel of Jesus Christ on the basis of the Holy Scriptures."

Among the objectives listed below this mission statement we read,  
"1. To share the gospel of Jesus Christ with all people."

That work of sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ with all people we commonly refer to as "mission work" and with good reason. The word "mission" comes from the Latin word "mittere" meaning "to send." The work of bringing the gospel message to the lost always involves sending, whether it be God the Father sending His Son into the world, Christ sending His church to the nations, or the church sending its representatives to those places where it cannot go personally. Under inspiration the Apostle Paul put it so succinctly in the passage that serves as the basis for this presentation, "How shall they preach unless they be sent?" (Romans 10:15). The simple and yet profound premise underlying Paul's words has been understood by our Synod. If souls are to be saved, if people are going to hear the gospel and be won for eternity, then there needs to be this wonderful activity of sending, there needs to be mission work.

But mission work is not something that we or our Synodical forefathers, even the most zealous "mission brethren" among them, came up with on our own. No, moving and motivating, strengthening and supporting, calling, encouraging and enabling us in mission work has always been the one who inspired Paul to raise those questions in Romans 10—our gracious and merciful God. Hence we have chosen to use the following theme and outline for this essay:

Mission Work (Sending) –  
 I. The Desire of a Gracious God  
 II. The Response of a Grateful Synod

**I. Mission Work – The Desire of a Gracious God**

Our God, as Peter says, is “the God of all grace” (I Peter 5:5). There is probably no word that reveals the mind and heart of God more distinctly than that word grace. He is, as He revealed to Moses, “The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin” (Exodus 34:6).

What is grace? It is that unmerited love of God for us despite our sinful hearts and lives. It is the unending devotion of God that existed before the foundation of the world and that will exist undiminished after this earth crumbles to pieces. The grace of God is not a passing interest, a condescending smile, a tolerant overlooking of human faults and frailties. It is the immeasurable compassion which moved God the Father to send His Son and the Son to come from the realms of glory and the adoration of the angels to this vice-bound earth, to live a life of love and service, to suffer, bleed, and die for rebellious human beings, so that He might take our place and bring us back to God. Grace promises our souls everything, yet for our salvation demands nothing.

God gave man a window into His heart of grace already in the Garden of Eden when man first fell into sin. At that point in time God had every right and every reason to destroy and eternally punish this man and woman who had so brazenly defied and disobeyed Him. But He didn't. Instead of thunderbolts and judgment piercing through the skies, we hear the first message of grace. Announcing the Waterloo of Satan and providing a Gibraltar of faith, God said to Satan in that garden, “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel” (Genesis 3:15). With those words God revealed that in grace He would send a Savior who would terminate the devil's enslavement of the woman and her descendants and bring about an enmity, a hatred, of all that is evil.

With that first Gospel message God also revealed the all encompassing nature of His grace. His promise of a deliverer embraced the entire human race, the woman's offspring. Sometimes when we study the biblical account of The Fall our attention seems to be focused only on the immediate participants. Satan is there, God is there, Adam and Eve are there. We marvel, and rightly so, that God rushed to the rescue declaring Satan's defeat and gave such a victorious, life-saving promise to our first parents. But the heart and mind of God went beyond Adam and Eve. Already there it was clear that His salvation was intended for the entire race from the beginnings in Eden to the last moment when this world is destroyed. All races, all ages, all the billions who coming from those first parents would live and strive and hope and die on this earth were included in God's gracious promise. I cannot help but think of a quote from the sainted Walter A. Meier who said of God's grace,

There are millions of acres beneath our feet on which all the sons of men can live and move. Our shores are washed by mighty oceans with endless seas and unplumbed depths. Above us are the vast reservoirs of the atmosphere, with air in overabundance for man and beast. Yet in comparison with the grace of God these pictures of land and sea and air, as limitless as they seem to us, pale into microscopic puniness. Greater than the sun or the superstars in our heaven, wider than the immeasurable reaches of the universe, with its uncounted galaxies, more inexhaustible even than endless eternity is the mercy of our God. (*The Cross from Coast to Coast*, p. 258,259)

In other words, people, we can't grasp it!

Just as we tend to have the vision of Mr. Magoo when we contemplate the story of The Fall, the same thing can happen when we contemplate the entire Old Testament. A superficial contemplation of Old Testament history could leave one with the impression that God limited his grace to one particular nation. Divine revelation, however, assures us of the very opposite. Consider the following. In II Chronicles 19:7 we are told

“With the Lord our God there is no .... partiality. “ (This, by the way, is the passage Peter confesses in Acts 10:34 he did not understand until he was sent by God to the home of the Gentile Cornelius. Apparently Peter also had myopic vision which needed to be corrected by the Lord.) Swearing by His very existence God says, “As I live says the Lord of hosts, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked should turn from his way and live” (Ezekiel 33:11). Isn’t this the same truth repeated by Paul in I Timothy 2:4, “God, our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.”? And doesn’t Peter in essence say the same thing when he writes, “The Lord . . . is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.”? (II Peter 3:9). Can anyone read such words without realizing that God does not want the death of even one single heathen person?

But God not only said it with words, He proved with His actions that the promised Redeemer was for all nations. Old Testament history viewed in the light of God’s gracious desire for all to be saved is a history of God sending men into a world darkened by sin with the light of the Gospel. Adam’s descendants from Seth to Lamech were not just ancestors of the promised Savior, they were men who publicly “called on the name of the Lord” (Genesis 4:26) letting His Name and His message be known among men. Noah was not just a man who built an ark, but a “preacher of righteousness” (II Peter 2:5) who “warned” his contemporaries “about things to come” (Hebrews 11:7) seeking to call them to repentance and faith in the God of free and faithful grace. Abraham and his descendants were not just people to whom had been committed the “oracles of God” with the promise of a Savior, but people whom God commissioned to “declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous deeds among all peoples” (Psalm 96:3).

For that reason God had the Jews live in Canaan, the center of the world. For that reason he let them be moved from country to country, from nation to nation, and scattered throughout the world. For that reason he did such great extraordinary signs and wonders among them, the news of which resounded to the ends of the earth. The Jews were to be like a city on a high mountain, like a beacon light built on the highest peak to shine far and wide. Thus the heathen world, sunk in idolatry, should again have the opportunity to come to the knowledge of the true God. (C. F. W. Walther, Epiphany sermon on the Standard Gospel).

Put names and faces into what Walther is saying. Stop for a minute and think about heaven. When we get there what wonderful stories of God’s grace will come to our ears from the lips of people like Rahab the harlot of Jericho who found cleansing and hope in the God of Israel. And what about Ruth the Moabite woman whose beautiful confession of faith, “Your people will be my people, and your God my God” (Ruth 1:16) has become the motto for so many Christian marriages today. In heaven we will meet the likes of Naaman that powerful Aramean general who was directed by a Jewish servant girl to the One who provided not only a cure for his leprosy but the answer to eternal death. With our eyes too we will see those trophies of God’s grace from Nineveh, that Assyrian capital into which God sent the unwilling missionary Jonah. All of these people will be eternal testimonies to the “mission-mindedness” of our gracious God and the way it evidenced itself in the Old Testament era.

Move on through history. If the “mission-mindedness” of our gracious God is evident in the way He used His Old Testament church in the world, it is epitomized in His sending His Only-begotten to become the Savior of the world. Jesus has aptly been called the Greatest Missionary Ever. We sing of His commissioning in one of our Lenten hymns, don’t we? “Go forth My Son,” the Father saith, “and free men from the curse of death.” And we hear Jesus respond, “Yea, Father, yea, most willingly, I’ll do what thou commandest.” With those words Paul Gerhardt captures the beautiful truth evident to the disciples and revealed in Scripture, the truth expressed by John that “we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world” (I John 4:14).

No missionary ever left more behind than He did. No one ever had to cross a wider cultural chasm. None of us ever had to suffer as He did. Without this missionary we would all still stand

condemned before God. None of us would have been saved if this cross-cultural worker had not crossed the chasm between the worlds to die on the cross in our place. (Phil Bickel, *Joy to the World*, p. 8)

The Father sent His Son “to seek and to save that which is lost” (Luke 19:10). It was the greatest rescue mission the world has ever seen. A rescue mission that made a Desert Storm look like child’s play by comparison. It was a rescue mission that could not be thwarted or aborted. A mission designed for nothing less than to free humanity from the massive chains of sin and the encroaching walls of hell.

Jesus once said, “My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work” (John 4:34). And that is exactly what happened. The cross was built and bloodied. The tomb was filled and emptied. Jesus paid in full the debt for the sins of the world. You and I may go through life and lament the fact that our work never seems to get done, that we never have enough time to finish, but not Jesus. From the cross He cried out concerning His work of salvation, “It is finished.” With His holy precious blood He has written over the debt of the world’s sin, PAID IN FULL. The empty tomb assures it. His mission is accomplished.

And the salvation that Jesus procured was a salvation He proclaimed. As One sent to seek as well as to save those who were lost, Jesus was always busy “proclaiming the good news of God.” Through the Law and Gospel which came from his lips the Holy Spirit worked saving faith in the hearts of Jew and Gentile alike. Men of “means” like Zacheus and Matthew became men of “meaning” dedicated to the Kingdom of Heaven. Women with shady pasts like the Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well or the “sinner” in Simon’s home became shining Gospel lights who “loved much because they were forgiven much.” People with hurting loved ones like the Syro-Phoenician woman and the Centurion in Capernaum witnessed the power of His word in their homes and felt the comfort of his grace in their hearts. To sinners and tax-collectors, Pharisees and Sadducees, priests and paupers, scribes and lawyers, soldiers and politicians, He went with His Word. As He went from synagogue to synagogue, from city to city, whether He had been in a home or out in a boat, by the seashore or on a mountainside, He still wanted to “go somewhere else—so I can preach there also. That is why I have come” (Mark 1:38). All one has to do is look at Jesus, God manifest in the flesh, to see that mission work is the burning desire of a gracious God. For that purpose Jesus lived and for that purpose Jesus died.

Of course, God’s passion for the salvation of the lost did not end with Jesus’ ascension into heaven. Jesus’ ascension indicated that His work was done, but the work of His New Testament church had just begun.

There’s a story that some of you may have heard that bears repeating here. It’s a legend, just a legend, but still to the point of how on Ascension Day when Jesus entered through the gates of Heaven the angel Gabriel noticed that He still bore the marks of the crucifixion on His hands. The angel Gabriel said, “Master, how terribly You have suffered for the people on earth.” “Yes,” Jesus answered. And then Gabriel asked Him, “Master, does everybody down there know how much You love them and what You have done for them and what it cost you?” “No,” Jesus said, “Not yet. Only a few know, the few I have left behind.” And then the angel Gabriel asked, “Well now, how are they going to find out?” “Well,” Jesus said, “I have told Peter and James and John and the others. And then those are to tell others and those others still others until the farthest soul in the widest circle of the world knows that my salvation has been prepared for them.” At that answer the angel Gabriel hesitated a moment and wrinkled up his forehead in a frown because he knew the kind of stuff, the frail stuff that men are made of. Finally he said, “Master, what if Peter and James and John get tired? What if the ones they tell forget to tell others? What if down in the 20th century people are no longer interested in telling about your salvation? Have you made any other plans, Lord?” “No,” Jesus answered, “I have not made any other plans. I’m counting on them.”

The New Testament records for us that “plan” of Jesus as it unfolded, at least the first part of it. Meeting with His disciples in an upper room after His resurrection Jesus said to them, “As the Father has sent me, I am sending you” (John 20:21). Later on Jesus repeated that assignment in what we have come to refer to as the great commission, “Go,” He said, “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” (Matthew 28:19-20).

Can you imagine how those disciples must have felt with that assignment? Their field of operation was all of humanity. Population comparisons aside, their world had to look a whole lot larger to them than our world does to us today. And they didn't need Gabriel to tell them the frail stuff they were made of. All they had to do was look back to the night of Jesus' capture and recall how they had all forsaken their Savior and fled in the face of danger. How would they do it? Where would they get the money? How would they overcome the obstacles? Amazingly, we don't read of such questions in the Bible. Instead we read of men empowered by the Holy Spirit who went forward on God's mission with Jesus' assurance, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me ... And surely I am with you always" (Matthew 28:18,20). Their theme song (had it been written) was "I Love To Tell The Story," that story of Jesus and His love. So clearly did they grasp God's world wide vision, so zealously did they endeavor to carry it out that the great missionary Paul could write to the Colossians, "This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant" (Colossians 1:23).

But let's remember, Jesus' "plan" did not only embrace the Apostles. When those words "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you" came from His lips, when He gave that great commission on that mountain in Galilee, He was speaking to men who were representatives of the entire Christian Church on earth. The Apostles were simply the root of the tree planted by Christ, a tree which He intends should finally overshadow the entire world and all of time. Isn't that why Jesus not only said "I am with you always," but added the words, "to the very end of the age."? God's gracious desire for the salvation of souls has moved Him to send all Christians for all time into the world "to seek and to save that which is lost" by sharing with others the saving message of the Gospel. Ultimately, you and I are here today because God has sent someone to each of us with the message of grace in Christ on their lips.

## **II. The Response of a Grateful Synod**

Why could the Lord Jesus be so confident of His "plan"? Isn't it because Jesus knew what we at times tend to forget—the power of the Gospel. One cannot come into contact with that message of God's grace and not want to share it with others. The gospel of Christ is like a whirlpool that first draws us into its center and then thrusts us out into the mainstream of the world. Luther knew that and wrote,

When a Christian begins to know Christ as His Lord and Savior, ... then his heart is permeated with God, so that he is driven to help others receive the same, because there is no greater joy for him than this treasure that he now knows Jesus.

So he heads out in every direction, teaches and urges all others, boasts about the Gospel, and witnesses of it to everyone, pleads and sighs that they might receive such grace.

He ... contests for and strives with all his might, as one who lives for one purpose, that is, that he might spread more widely among people God's honor and praise. (Korinth, Helmut, ed., 1980, translation by Ottomar E. Bickel)

Paul put it in simpler words, "Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel!" (I Corinthians 9:17). So zealous was Paul for the conversion of his fellow countrymen that he said, "I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race, the people of Israel" (Romans 9:2-3). Think of it, here was a man willing to be damned so that others might be saved! What force could have so controlled and compelled this man? The answer lies in the preceding verses where that same Apostle exalts, "I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, not any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:38-39). Paul had tasted that the Lord is gracious. He had a burning passion for others to experience the same.

Isn't that one of the primary reasons that we exist as a Synod? We want to share with others, as many others as possible, the saving message of God's grace in Christ.

Lets talk for a while about those others. Think of how many of them there are. According to the United States Center for World Missions there are 24,000 different cultural units in the world. Of these 24,000 ethnic groups only about 8,000 can be said to have a strong Christian community. That leaves 16,000 nations to go. Earlier we mentioned the billions of people who still don't know about Jesus. It sounds so cold, doesn't it, to throw out a figure like 3.6 billion. Who of us can even fathom that many people? But the fact that we can't comprehend the numbers doesn't mean that they don't exist. They do! Those numbers represent real people with real names and real lives. In your mind try to put faces on those people.

Close your eyes for a moment and imagine yourself standing in Tiananmen Square in Beijing, China. You are in the capital of the country which contains one fifth of the world's population. Surrounding you are masses of Chinese people who live in the darkness of Buddhism, a religion which after all is said and done perpetuates the great lie of Satan that man—in this case by prayer, fasting, good works, discipline, devotion and the love of others—has the capacity to redeem himself.

Now imagine yourself in New Delhi. One of every seven people in the world lives in India. They live, the great majority of them, in the depths of a wretched poverty the likes of which few, if any, of us have ever witnessed. A poverty in which millions of people live their entire lives and die on the sidewalks of the city streets. Yet, the physical poverty these masses experience is nothing compared to their spiritual poverty which moves them to worship 33,000,000 different Hindu deities.

Close your eyes again and try to imagine yourself taking in the sights and sounds and smells of the crowded streets of Jakarta and its 6.5 million. The islands of Indonesia are home to 200,000 million people. But 80% of the population bows down to the Islamic god Allah, and the great percentage of those who are not Muslim are wrapped up in a religion which is a blend of Hinduism, Buddhism and animism.

Move on in your mind to Cairo. Surrounding you are the descendants of people who once befriended and then enslaved the people of Israel. Now they live in slavery, most of them, the spiritual slavery of the Islamic faith which makes of Jesus Christ nothing more than a great prophet and rejects Him as conqueror of sin, death and the grave.

Project yourself mentally into the heart of Tokyo, Japan. Over eight million people live in this city; 115 million more are crowded into the island empire of Japan. The Japanese are some of the most educated and industrious people in the world. In our homes and on our roads are the products of their minds and hands. But do we have these people—the 98 plus percent of them who still live on in the depths of spiritual ignorance and unbelief, who worship their ancestors and live in superstitious fear -do we have them on our hearts and in our minds?

Go mentally to Sydney, Australia. You are standing among people who speak our language and share our European background. Seventeen plus million inhabitants people the continent of Australia. But the great majority of them are hedonistic materialists, people whose attitude might be summed up with the words spoken by a little girl to the minister who came calling on her father, “We don't need God. We have everything we need.”

Project yourself for a moment into Sao Paulo, Brazil. Sixteen million people live in this city with a median age of sixteen. The overwhelming majority of these millions together with their 139 million fellow countrymen are only nominal Roman Catholic. They have no idea of the Savior that you and I know, a Savior who freely says, “Be of good cheer, your sins are forgiven you.”

What about Europe? Are spiritual conditions on the continent that saw the birth of the Reformation and sent missionaries to our American forefathers any different? Perhaps most telling and most typical of western Europe is the country of France where we are told there are more spiritistic mediums and fortune tellers than there are medical doctors. On a map we would consider so much of Europe to have a Christian presence and yet, in sad reality, so many who call themselves Christians in European countries look upon the church merely as a place where man is properly hatched, matched and finally dispatched.

Continue the mental journey to the other side of Europe and place yourself in Moscow. Over seven decades of atheistic philosophy and teaching have left a nation of people that can only be called empty. Empty of Biblical knowledge, devoid of moral values, “separate from Christ ... without hope and without God in the

world.” Satan and his cultist minions are rushing to fill the void, but what these people need is to know the one true God and Jesus Christ whom He has sent.

Finally, come home to America, the “land that we love.” Do we recognize it anymore? No matter where we might live in this country the graffiti is getting closer. So also is the moral degeneracy that the graffiti reflects. The sweeping changes that have overwhelmed our society prompted one man to write, “The routine days and weeks of yesteryear are gone forever ... Our todays can scarcely recognize our yesterdays, and our tomorrows will be hard put to recognize today. And this is true in almost every area of life: in science and technology, in politics and government, in morals and religion...” In this sea of change so many are groping around looking for some stability, some anchor. Finding nothing concrete in the philosophies of this world or the empty materialism of their peers, they sum up their view of life in the crude and heart wrenching words of the bumper sticker, “Life’s a bitch and then you die.”

Yes, “darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples” (Isaiah 60:2). Real men, women and children, millions upon millions of them, lie down night after night without the peace and security of knowing the loving and forgiving arms of Jesus the Savior of the world. Millions upon millions get up each day only to continue in the “empty way of life that has been handed down” to them by their fathers (I Peter 1:18). Millions upon millions are going to close their eyes in death only to open them again in the eternal darkness of hell.

We want to reach these people, don’t we? We want them to know what we know, what God has in grace taught us. We want them to know how lost they are without Jesus Christ. That sin, their sin, has created a wall between them and God, a wall that cannot be scaled by human efforts or destroyed by human force. We want them to know that because of sin they are by nature children of wrath deserving of God’s punishment not just in the present life but permanently in the life to come.

But we also want them to know that Christ came “to seek and to save that which was lost.” We want them to know that Jesus as we by grace have come to know Him. We want them to know what He was willing to give up to come and be our human brother. We want them to know how He “resisted to the point of shedding blood” striving against sin so that He could present an innocent life as the sacrifice for the sin of all others. We want them to hear about Gethsemane, Gabbatha and Golgatha and what those places mean for the human race in general and each one of them in particular. We want them to have the peace which comes from knowing the Good News that in Christ God has removed man’s sin as far as the east is from the west, that in Christ He has buried those sins in the depths of the sea, and in Christ He has dispersed those sins like the morning dew. We want these people who live without hope to stand in faith at the empty tomb on Easter and taste the inexpressible joy that floods over a person’s heart when by grace you grasp its meaning. We want them, these millions who live in not just spiritual but also physical misery, to know that in Christ “our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us” (Romans 8:18). And we want them to look forward, as we look forward, to seeing that Savior face to face in the bliss of His heavenly home.

All of these things we want to share with those who still sit in darkness. We want to share them because we so love Jesus who has shared them with us. Peter and John weren’t the only ones who felt that “we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:20). Who of us can sit and ponder the wonders of God’s grace towards us and not want to stand on our tiptoes and cry out with Isaiah, “Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare” (Isaiah 55:1-2). Ultimately, all true and God-pleasing mission work accomplished through or by this church body is mission work which flows from hearts responding in gratitude to what God has done for us in Christ.

Isn’t that true? Throughout our Synod what compels moms to take their little children on their laps and tell a new generation about Jesus and His love? What moves dads to give up precious minutes at home with their families to serve on an outreach committee? When our teenagers bring their friends to church on Sunday, when our college students engage their dorm mates in discussions about their faith, what’s their motivation? When our members all across this country strive to let their light shine, when they spontaneously open their lips

to let their neighbors, friends, relatives and workmates know the reason of the hope that is in them, when pastors talk enthusiastically about beginning a new Bible information class—what’s behind it all? It’s not my pulpit pounding! It’s not my telling you and you telling me that if we don’t do something, souls will be lost and it will be our fault and God will be angry with us. Its not even our telling one another that Jesus sent us into the world so we better start acting like people who have been sent.

No, the thing that moves us, that overcomes our fears and swallows up our selfishness is the same thing that moved Elijah to break out of his shell and be about the Lord’s business, the still small voice of the Gospel. We hear that voice, that soothing message of God’s love for us in Christ and we want to share it with others. We count it the greatest privilege to be sent by Him to a dying world with a life-giving message.

And where we can’t go ourselves, that same gratitude moves us to send and support others in our place. Joyfully our little preschoolers give of their pennies and our senior citizens give of their pensions to send missionaries to places as close as Big Rapids, Michigan, and as far away as Lusaka, Zambia. Gratefully our lay people remember our missionaries in prayer in the privacy of their homes. Confidently they stand up in voter’s meetings and move to increase the amount of money sent by their congregations to the Synod Mission Offering. Individually and in increasing numbers they pledge Special Gifts for the Synod’s work. Why? Because the love of Christ compels them. They know what Peter and John meant when they said, “We cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:20).

Have you ever heard the description of a ruined church? If you were asked to draw a picture of such a church what would it look like? Would we portray an old deteriorated building surrounded by grounds which were overgrown with weeds? Perhaps, but that’s not what the Christian artist who was given the assignment came up with. To the surprise of many people he painted a picture of a very modern, attractive looking building. The grounds around the building were beautifully landscaped with manicured lawns and flourishing flower beds. The picture was drawn in such a way that it was possible to see inside of the worship facility. The sanctuary was attractive and appealing. It was also filled with people. All sorts of neat, well-dressed worshipers were sitting in the pews. Far off in one corner of the sanctuary the artist had painted an offering box. On the box were written the words “For Missions. “ And over the slot in the top of that box the artist had painted a cobweb.

Think about that for a moment. Didn’t that artist fulfill his assignment well? The church, the Holy Christian Church, is not buildings. It is people, God’s people. The church he depicted was truly a ruined church because the message preached in that building was so unimportant to those people that they didn’t even think it was worth sharing with another human being. The message of the Gospel had so little effect on their hearts that it didn’t motivate them enough to share it with those who were dying without knowing Jesus as their Savior.

Is the WELS a ruined church? I don’t believe so and I hope you don’t either. By the grace of God we still have the Gospel in Word and Sacraments in our midst. We trust, don’t we, that the work being carried on by our people is evidence of God keeping His promise and bringing results from that Word. Among other things we could point to the fact that the members of our Synod have sent 59 missionary pastors and 20 missionary teachers to proclaim the message of God’s grace to peoples of different cultures and different lands. We could mention our Home Mission program which supports 280 mission stations here in America. And we could mention the \$25 plus million that our members have contributed per year to support this work and the work of the other divisions of our Synod. We could mention the Special Gifts which enabled us to send missionaries to places such as Columbia and most recently the CIS. We could mention that even in death many of God’s people in our midst have reflected their spiritual life by remembering the Synod and its work in their estate. And that’s only the tangible. It doesn’t include the countless prayers that are prayed, the unseen efforts that are made so that others might learn of Jesus and His love. Because it means so much to us personally, we want others in ever increasing numbers to hear the Gospel message.

No, we’re not a ruined church, but there’s room, lots of room, for improvement, isn’t there? Did it sadden you the way it saddened me to read these words in the June 1993 President’s Newsletter? “I hope I’m wrong, but I seem to sense that the unrest, the tension, the frustration, the mistrust among our called workers is higher today than at any time during my 46 years in the ministry.” Doesn’t that observation indicate that there’s room for improvement in our midst? And there are other things. For example, wouldn’t it be wonderful if each



one of our congregations viewed itself, not just 2929 N. Mayfair Road, as a center of mission and co-mission activity? Wouldn't it be wonderful if more and more of our congregations became the wombs of future missionaries who would grow up in a congregational environment which fostered a love for the lost and a desire to serve them with the Gospel? Wouldn't it be wonderful if more and more we remembered, individually and collectively, the reality that those missionaries that we send out in our name are fragile, and need to be handled with prayer? Wouldn't it be wonderful if we weren't so selfish at times with God's material blessings, if we didn't always think first of our own kids and forget about our distant cousins throughout the world? Wouldn't it be wonderful if our congregations, all of them, saw the Synod Mission Offering not as a cold lifeless congregational statistic but as a blessed opportunity to answer Paul's question, "How can they preach unless they be sent?" Wouldn't it be something if continued contributions through Special Gifts and Planned Giving enabled us to expand our home and world mission fronts the way that funds from Lift High The Cross did? Yes, wouldn't it be wonderful if the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod would be known historically not only as a group of Christians who remained faithful to the pure and precious life-giving Word, but also as a group of God's people who were committed body and soul to sharing that life-giving Word with others the world over!

There are obstacles, aren't there, to being the kind of mission-minded Christians that Jesus wants us to be? I'm sure we're aware of that reality, personally and painfully. Those obstacles are as old as recorded history. They're called the devil, the world and our own sinful flesh. Sometimes, a lot of times, that unholy trinity has had its effect on my mission zeal and probably on yours too. If those enemies aren't diverting my attention away from that soul saving work, then they're overwhelming me with the sheer impossibility of getting it accomplished. At times they make me indifferent and other times they cripple me with guilt. There may not be a "For Missions" box with cobwebs on it in my church, but at times those spiritual enemies start to form cobwebs over my heart as far as the Great Commission is concerned.

The point is, we forget, don't we? We forget to look ourselves to the gracious Savior whose name we want to proclaim to others. Some of you here may remember the way the sainted Dr. Becker began his senior dogmatics class at the Seminary. He started by saying something like this, "We are not here in this class to make you pastors. We are not here to make you dogmaticians or teachers. We are not here to make you evangelists or missionaries. We are not here to make you good church members. We are here to so convince you on the basis of God's Word, of God's love for you in Christ and of your forgiveness and eternal salvation that nothing can ever shake you from that confidence." "When that happens," Dr. Becker would say, "everything else just flows."

Can you think of a better place to look for a renewed interest and commitment to the Great Commission than to the Word in general and our Jesus and His love in particular? When we look to Jesus we find first and foremost the promise of His pardon. Listen to Him say it, "Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven" (Matthew 9:2). Our sins, people, all of them, our individual sins, our collective sins, even those ugly sins of indifference toward the lost, He's taken care of. His blood has so completely blotted them out from the eyes of our Heavenly Father that they can't even be remembered anymore. Because of Jesus, God in His heart has declared us to be as good as He is. Doesn't that assurance make our hearts burn within us? Doesn't it make us want to go out and tell someone else about the peace that is there in the pardon of Jesus?

And don't we want to look to Jesus also for the promise of His power? When that Savior gave that Great Commission, when He sent those disciples and us with them on the most important mission of the world's history - He gave them the assurance of His almighty power. "All authority in heaven and on earth," He said, "has been given to me" (Matthew 28:18). He knows us, doesn't He? He knows how little we feel and how large we view the task that looms before us. He knows how discouraged and disheartened, how frail and fearful, how worn and weary we so often become. So in love He reminds us that the One sending us out is the One with whom nothing shall be impossible. In the face of the obstacles we meet He reminds us that He "is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine according to His power that is at work within us" (Ephesians 3:20). And when we are overwhelmed by our own weakness He reminds us that His "power is made perfect in weakness" (II Corinthians 12:9).

Finally, dare we forget the loving promise of Jesus' presence? Isn't it beautiful the way that Savior looked down the corridors of history from that mountain top? He saw Peter sitting in a jail cell in the city of Jerusalem. He saw Paul spending "a night and a day in the open sea" (II Corinthians 11:25). He saw John sitting in exile on the island of Patmos. And yes, he saw our newly elected President sitting alone in his office. He saw our missionary pastors and teachers scattered around the globe. He saw every one of us struggling and striving to be about our Father's business. "Go!" He said, but for our comfort He quickly added, "Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." Yes, Jesus is with us. He is with us to listen to our secret sighings and outward cryings. He is with us to speak to us through His Word and fulfill the promises of that Word. And He will remain with us, encouraging, empowering, enabling us for His mission. He will remain right there by our side until the day that we reach heaven.

Then we will see Him face to face. Then we will be part of that heavenly chorus of people from every nation, tribe, language and people singing, "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise" (Revelation 5:12). Try in your mind's eye to picture that heavenly chorus. See the bass section, look closely and you'll see David the adulterer and Peter the denier. See the tenors—there's Job the sufferer and Paul the persecutor. Isn't that Mary Magdalene in the soprano section with Priscilla on one side and Dorcas on the other? And look at the altos, there's Eve the very first sinner, and that woman who washed Jesus' feet with her tears. Look again at that chorus. Do you recognize some of the others? See them? They have names like Hachibamba and Ekpo, Bones and Alchesay, Salib and Jayasuri, Pelligrino and Dyjak, Pandji and Nakamoto, Valdez and Orea Luna. Those are names, just a few of them, of the people that God has permitted us to reach as we've sent others into the world with the Gospel. Now look one more time at that heavenly chorus. Remember, by the grace of God you'll be there too and so by the grace of God will I. Won't that be a wonderful day!

Maranatha! Come quickly Lord Jesus! And while we wait, let's get to work.