

How Beautiful Are the Feet: The Dignity of the Public Gospel Ministry

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When I was a young boy growing up on a farm in South Dakota, I attended quite a number of Mission Festivals with my parents. The day usually began with a morning service followed by a noon meal. Most of the people socialized on the church grounds during the noon hour as they waited for the afternoon service, which was followed by a lunch. The refreshment stand was closed only during the actual time that the services were going on. Neighboring congregations were invited, and it was not unusual for a congregation to drop its own morning service so that its members could attend the Mission Festival of a sister congregation. Occasionally there was even a friendly rivalry between two congregations to see who could gather the largest mission offering in a single day.

More often than not one of the Scripture lessons for the day would be the well-known words of Romans 10:

Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news" (Ro 10:13-15).

That last sentence always intrigued me. How did feet get into the picture? How beautiful is the voice of those who bring good news! That would have made sense to a young boy. But feet?

The Prophet Isaiah provides the answer, "How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, "Your God reigns"" (Is 52:7). The reference is first of all to the messengers who brought the good news to the Israelites that their captivity was over and they were free to return to Jerusalem. It expresses their joy as they catch sight of the runners hurrying toward them to make this glorious announcement. The heralds are tired, their feet are covered with dust, perhaps also calloused and bruised, but to the Israelites in exile they were beautiful feet—beautiful because of the message they brought!

Isaiah also had in mind, however, those to whom the Apostle Paul now specifically applies this picture—gospel preachers who bring good news, the good news of release from a far more serious captivity, the captivity of sin, its guilt, its curse, its punishment. The feet of these heralds are likewise beautiful, beautiful because of the message they bring. It is still the message that gives the public gospel ministry its dignity.

No one has to tell us that the dignity of the public gospel ministry, the esteem in which the office is held today, leaves much to be desired. The days are largely gone when parents, especially also lay people, considered it an honor to have a son or a daughter in the preaching or teaching ministry and were proud to tell their friends about it. In those days parents, pastors, and teachers pretty well took care of recruitment for the synod's worker training schools. Full-time recruitment officers connected with the schools were unheard of for a calling as beautiful and glorious as the public gospel ministry.

In today's world those same parents are often the most difficult to convince that their son or daughter could serve well in the public ministry. These parents have noted, often more so than the children themselves, that the office no longer commands the inherent respect it once did. They see all kinds of negatives, both real and perceived—long hours, low pay, little appreciation for service rendered. They have watched called workers resign in increasing numbers. Perhaps they have had an unpleasant experience in their own congregation. They don't approve of the way their pastor was treated. They feel he got a raw deal. I could produce some correspondence from pastors and teachers themselves which states rather bluntly, "The church will never get a son or daughter of mine for the ministry, not after what I've been through."

Nor have the media helped to enhance the image of the public ministry. The clergyman you see portrayed on the screen is usually cast in a less than complimentary light, running the gamut from the inept Father Mulcahy of *MASH* to the adulterous Cardinal de Bricassart of *The Thornbirds*. Well-known radio and television evangelists have also done their part to reinforce that negative perception, thereby making all public ministers somewhat suspect.

There was a time when the aberrations of the clergy were largely kept under cover. That was not good. But today the pendulum seems to have swung in the opposite direction. Last month Milwaukee's WTMJ-TV featured a series on "Priests Who Prey." The station must have received a few phone calls, because by the time of the third segment the reporter began by pointing out that it should be understood that his findings were by no means restricted to Roman Catholic clergy. We would not quarrel with that observation, nor would we be naive enough to think that "it can't happen here."

I could sympathize with the situation in which the archbishop of the Milwaukee Archdiocese found himself. I find it difficult to disagree with him when he writes:

Saying that pedophilia (and we could add any other vice as well) is less frequent among priests than among the rest of the population does not console much, because even one case is too many. The very nature of the priesthood demands that one who ministers to others be trustworthy. An abuse by a clergy person has deep and disastrous results because it also harms people's faith and relationship to God. It can cause youth to become cynical and distrustful of all religious structure....The repercussions of these allegations on the morale of all priests are enormous. They feel guilty by association and fear that everyone is looking askance at them or is suspicious of them.

I certainly would not want to minimize the negative impact that such highly visible and well publicized falls from grace have on the image of the public ministry. But once we get past the immediate victim or victims, I don't think this is the dominant force at work today in eroding the dignity of the public ministry. People know that there are less than honorable folk in every profession. They know that there was a Judas among the Twelve. And while unbecoming conduct on the part of one who has committed his life to the public gospel ministry is extremely destructive, as long as the church deals with such public misconduct, does not condone it or sweep it under the rug, does not simply move the offender with a slap on the wrist to a new assignment at a safe distance, but makes it clear that such a person no longer possesses the scriptural qualifications for the public ministry, the affected congregation usually rebounds rather quickly under the faithful ministrations of a new shepherd. When it doesn't, when there is ongoing unrest, when a small segment of the membership continues to make life miserable for the successor of the unfrocked offender, it is probably because these folks are more tolerant than they ought to be. They feel the congregation and the synod have been too hard on their former pastor or teacher, "After all, we're all sinners. He hasn't done anything that a lot of us haven't done. Can't we just forgive and forget?"

I tend to believe that there is a more subtle reason why the dignity of the public gospel ministry is suffering, why parents are reluctant to encourage their children to consider it, why those preparing for it need constant counseling to stay on track, why some feel they have no choice but to resign and get out. The reason is that the influence of the world has rubbed off on the church, an influence that often causes us to forget that the dignity of the public gospel ministry is still where it was in Isaiah's day, where it was in Paul's day, where it has always been—in the message. The reason the dignity of the public ministry is suffering is because the church that lives and works in the world has become lukewarm in its love for the message, the message of the God of all grace who loved the whole world so much, loved me so much that he gave his own Son to save me, to set me free "from all sins, from death and from the power of the devil." Why? "That I should be his own, and live under him in his kingdom, and *serve* him"

During my 45 years in the public ministry there is one illustration that I have used probably more frequently than any other. I have told it so often that I always introduce it by saying, "Some of you have probably heard me tell this one before." And now that my days in the full-time public ministry are winding down, I make no apology for telling it once more, because I have not found a better one to illustrate what the Christian life is all about, what the public ministry is all about. The public ministry is not a place to ask, "What's in it for me? What can I get out of it for myself?" It is not a profession in which I can justify becoming totally immersed in such things as salary packages, vacation policies, fringe benefits, and opportunities for advancement, but rather an opportunity for service, for selfless, self-sacrificing service to the One who loved me and gave himself for me.

The story revolves around a young slave girl whose sobs attracted the attention of a wealthy plantation owner as he was passing through the market place. Moved by a momentary impulse of compassion and generosity, he became involved in the spirited bidding and bought her at a considerable price. When the auction was over the clerk handed the girl a bill of sale which normally would have made her the legal property of her new owner. But to her surprise it was little more than a blank piece of paper. The only thing written on it was her name, then the word FREE in capital letters, and the signature of the purchaser. At first she didn't know what to make of it. Was it perhaps a cruel hoax of some kind? But as soon as she realized that it wasn't, as soon as she realized what had happened, what this piece of paper meant, she hurried back to the clerk and pleaded, "Where is the man that bought me? Please help me find him. This man has set me free, I must serve him the rest of my life."

I have no way of knowing whether something like this ever happened. But the illustration does express a valid scriptural truth, "Christ has set me free. I must serve him the rest of my life." Something truly wonderful happens to the person who knows that Christ has set him free. He or she becomes a new creation in Christ with a new heart, a new life, a new incentive for living, a new power by which to live. Paul expressed it this way, "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Ga 2:20). The believer now earnestly strives to live his life in accordance with God's will because he wants to. "Christ's love compels us" (2 Cor 5:14). And that is freedom of the highest order.

"Christ has set me free. I must serve him." Remember when the mother of Zebedee's sons came to Jesus with a special request? She wanted one of her sons to sit at the Savior's right, the other at his left in his kingdom. Jesus disposed of her request rather quickly. But when the ten heard about it they were indignant—not that they were above such thoughts themselves, but they were rather disturbed because the sons of Zebedee had thought of it first. They feared they might have missed out on some desirable perks. It was then that Jesus sat them down and said:

You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many (Mt 20:25-28).

We don't have to invest the public gospel ministry with dignity. God has already done that through the message. It is there regardless of what anyone else may think or say about the ministry. And it will have true dignity and worth among us when both those who serve in the ministry and those whom they serve respect and appreciate and love the message. It will have true dignity and worth when public ministers themselves view their glorious calling not as an opportunity to be served, but to serve.

Less than a year ago I stated in one of my letters to the circuit pastors:

We're all prone to overstate a case at times in order to make a point. I frequently see this happening today when we talk about the impending shortage of pastors. No one can deny that down the road a bit it will be very real, especially if we feel that the only way we can conduct ministry is exactly the same way we've always done it (one sure way to escape the shortage is to stop opening missions). But it isn't here yet. What we sometimes forget is that there are 20 plus CRMs who are not currently serving for a variety of reasons, but who are eligible and available. We also forget that there are many pastors still in their first assignment, some for quite a number of years, who have never had the opportunity to consider another call. This also contributes to the unrest and lack of joy in the ministry that many are feeling today and is a contributing factor in the higher than usual number of resignations that we are seeing today.

Picking up on this, one of our pastors recently wrote that he had been in the ministry 14^{1/2} years and had not yet had a chance to consider another call. Of the 22 pastors in his conference, he said only three had the opportunity to consider another call during the past year. He closed with the question, "For your upcoming paper around the Christmas season, is a surplus of pastors causing people to lose respect for pastors?"

I had to say that I didn't know to what extent a perceived surplus is causing people to lose respect for pastors. I am sure that some people who tend to be a bit "picky" might become a little more tolerant if they knew in advance that they might be faced with an extended vacancy, perhaps might even have to share a pastor, if the present pastor leaves. But respect for the gospel ministry does not come from things such as these. If the dignity of the public gospel ministry is *suffering today* (and it is), if parents are reluctant to encourage their children to consider it, if those preparing for it need a great deal of counseling to stay on track, if some feel they have no choice but to resign and get out (and each case will have reasons of its own), I submit the real problem is that the message is no longer held in high regard. And the only solution for that is to dig more deeply into the Word, so that I understand that when the Scriptures tell me that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Ro 3:23), they are speaking to me. For only as I become fully convinced that by nature I am spiritually blind, spiritually dead, an enemy of God, inclined only to evil, then and only then will it be sweet music to my ears when I hear the joyous announcement of the angel, "A Savior has been born to you" (Lk 2:11), when I am assured again and again that "where sin increased, grace increased all the more" (Ro 5:20). That is good news. There is none better. As the church appreciates that message it will appreciate the messenger, the herald, who proclaims it. When the church appreciates that message, it will joyfully sing:

How beautiful are their feet
 Who stand on Zion's hill;
 Who bring salvation on their tongues
 And words of peace reveal!

How charming is their voice!
 How sweet their tidings are!
 "Zion, behold thy Savior King;
 He reigns and triumphs here."

How happy are the ears
 That hear this joyful sound
 Which kings and prophets waited for
 And sought, but never found.

How blessed are the eyes
 That see this heavenly light!
 Prophets and kings desired it long
 But died without the sight.

The watchmen join their voice
 And tuneful notes employ;
 Jerusalem breaks forth in songs,
 And deserts learn the joy.

The Lord makes bare his arm
 Through all the earth abroad.
 Let every nation now behold
 Their Savior and their God. (*TLH:487*)

But we have talked enough about the regard of others for the ministry. All of us here today, however, have the privilege of serving in the public ministry. So let us spend the remainder of our time talking about our regard for the ministry. Since each of us knows that the dignity of the public gospel ministry lies in the message, since each of us knows that the public ministry provides an opportunity not to be served, but to serve, the question we in the public ministry will want to ask is, "What does this mean for me in the conduct of my ministry? How can I conduct my ministry in a way that does not detract from the dignity Christ has given it, that does not discredit the message the Savior has entrusted to me, that truly glorifies my Father in heaven? If, under God, I can model the public ministry in a positive manner, as a demanding though rewarding profession, I will have helped to provide an effective recruitment tool."

Since the dignity of the public ministry lies in the message, I will need to hold fast to sound doctrine. I will need to search the Scriptures diligently to ensure that I preach and teach his Word faithfully. Not as an end in itself. Not that I may become complacent and bask in the confidence that I have all the correct doctrinal formulations. Not that I pride myself on being associated with a visible organization whose primary interest in life is to be a society for the preservation of orthodoxy—for myself, my family, my congregation, my kind of people. I want to be faithful so that I have a relevant message to proclaim "to every nation, tribe, language and people" (Re 14:6). I want to be faithful so that I have a relevant message to proclaim "in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe as you hold out the word of life" (Php 2:15-16). I want to preach and teach his Word faithfully for I know that the reason, the one reason, the only reason I am still in this world is because God has chosen to use me as one of his witnesses to proclaim the gospel of a living Lord to a dying world.

Because of my high regard for the treasure entrusted to this jar of clay, I will always strive not to let my person stand in the way of the message. I am not now speaking only of clear-cut cases of false doctrine or

scandalous living or manifest unfaithfulness in the performance of one's ministry, though these obviously get in the way of the message rather quickly. I am speaking also, maybe especially, of borderline situations. No one is quite ready to come right out and charge the called worker with false doctrine or scandalous living or unfaithfulness, but he comes dangerously close. He is always living on the outer edge. Attempts to deal with him are less than satisfactory. Instead of being the healer who, under God, is an instrument of peace in bringing the flock together he is often at the center of the controversy and the cause of division. How often does the message fail to get through because of quirks and idiosyncrasies on the part of the messenger! How often can it be said, "What you are speaks so loudly that I cannot hear what you say!"

And because a real God became a real man to save real people the focus of my ministry must always be on people. In fact, dealing with people is what the ministry is all about. Someone once said, "Treat people as if they were what they ought to be, and you help them become what they are capable of being." I am going to paraphrase that a bit and say, "Treat people as what they are and, under God, you will help them become the kind of people God wants them to be." And what are they? The members of our flock are children of God, sinners as we are, but sinners cleansed by the blood of Christ, who have become new creatures in him and who want to live their lives in accordance with his will. They won't always show it, but we had better not forget that they are the salt of the earth, the reason why God still permits this world to stand. We need to treat them that way. And even if we don't have a natural inclination for it, we had better learn early in our ministry the importance of packaging all of our accumulated knowledge, all of our ministerial training and skills in a person who is warm, friendly, caring, genuine, the kind of person about whom the flock will say with justifiable pride, "He's my pastor. He cares about me. I can talk to him. He doesn't talk down to me. He doesn't give me the feeling that I'm intruding on his time, but rather that I'm the reason for his being there. He doesn't get uptight when I make a suggestion or maybe even have an honest difference of opinion with him. Best of all, he has a sense of humor. He can laugh, especially at himself."

"I bring you good news of great joy," the Christmas angel announced. We are bearers of the best news this world has ever heard, the good news of a God who loved us so much that he sent his own Son to save us. Should that joy not be reflected in our lives? How can I move through life with a perennial frown when I have so much about which to be happy? God has redeemed me from sin. He has promised me an eternal home with him. Meanwhile, he assures me that he will direct everything in life for my good. On top of all this he grants me the privilege, a privilege given to very few, of serving him in the public gospel ministry. And even when life in general and my ministry in particular seems to have a lot of shadows, rays of sunshine will often come from unexpected sources if I will not close my eyes to them. It has been well said, "The Lord gives us just enough problems so that we do not forget our complete dependence on him and just enough blessings so that we do not become discouraged." And when on a given day joy seems so hard to come by, it doesn't change the fact that our names are written in heaven. That is our real reason for joy. Let it show!

So, does it really matter that others may have a low view of the public ministry? Isn't what God thinks of it enough for me? The Apostle Paul, who endured considerably more for the sake of the gospel than any of us ever have or are likely to, considered it a glorious calling, a very special gift of God's grace. We hear him say, "Although I am less than the least of all God's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ" (Eph 3:8). That the Lord should redeem us from sin and call us to saving faith is already amazing grace. But that he should choose us to be his witnesses, that he should permit a few of us to serve him in the public ministry when he has legions of angels at his command, is nothing short of mind-boggling.

I am not sure who said it first, but it has often been repeated in one form or another, "When you receive your first call, regard that place as the dearest spot on earth. Conduct your ministry there as though you were going to be in that spot the rest of your life, for you may." Although it is highly unlikely that most of us will

serve in only one kind of ministry in only one place, we do well to remember that the place where God has called us to serve at any given point in time is the dearest spot on earth. Because of God's call through his church we know that this is where God wants us to serve. And whenever we get in over our heads, often through no fault of our own, we can come boldly to the throne of grace and say, "Lord, you put me here, and you have promised to provide the necessary strength for whatever you ask of me." With that assurance we can serve faithfully until God calls us elsewhere. We need not cast about for greener pastures, thereby depriving ourselves of joy in our present ministry. If the Lord needs us elsewhere, he will find us. And our present ministry will occupy our time and attention so completely that there will be little time and even less inclination to occupy ourselves with ministries that God has assigned to others.

The Apostle Paul writes, "So then, men ought to regard us as servants of Christ and those entrusted with the secret things of God. Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful" (1 Cor 4:1,2). Here is the overriding qualification for the public ministry—faithfulness. God can use people who have marked weaknesses in certain areas—and all of us are living proof that he does—but he has no use for a person who is unfaithful. This too is written for our learning—and our comfort. More than once I have told young pastors who felt their gifts were inferior to those of their peers, who were not seeing the same visible results in their ministry that some of their classmates were enjoying, more than once I have said, "The only thing God placed us in charge of is sowing the seed." And that we are to do with all the faithfulness at our command. It won't do for us to hide behind the old cliché, "I preach the gospel." It won't do for us to rest on the laurels of a seminary diploma, a certificate of ordination, and then become a self-appointed critic of every honest and sincere effort to help us in our demanding and responsible task. Faithfulness includes a willingness to "become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some" (1 Cor 9:22). But the results, the fruits, the harvest—that is in God's hands, not ours. That is why we can go to bed at the end of each day's faithful service and sleep, because it is out of our hands now. It is where it belongs, in the hands of God. Let it be more than a hymn that we sing. Let it be a truth to which we steadfastly adhere as we fervently pray:

On what has now been sown
 Thy blessing, Lord, bestow;
 The power is Thine alone
 To make it spring and grow.
 Do Thou in grace the harvest raise,
 And Thou alone shalt have the praise. (*TLH* 46:1)

It was Reinhold Niebuhr who said, "God, give us the serenity to accept what cannot be changed; give us courage to change what should be changed; give us wisdom to distinguish one from the other." There are things in our ministry that are extremely important, areas in which we have little or no freedom of movement. There are others where it doesn't make a particle of difference whether they are done this way or that way. Perhaps we can borrow another leaf from the Apostle Paul's book. Wherever the Word of God had spoken, there Paul did not budge. That settled the matter for him. Here there was no room to maneuver. But in areas that are truly free in the New Testament liberty that is ours under grace Paul often displayed a flexibility that was well ahead of his time. He understood that the dignity of the gospel ministry lies in the message. Like his Savior before him he viewed his ministry as an opportunity to serve, not to be served. The overriding aim and focus of his ministry was to lift high the cross in order to reach as many as possible with the gospel. That focus was so important to him that he didn't always have to be number one, didn't have to have the last word on everything, didn't claim to be the ultimate authority, didn't insist that things always be done his way. Not what happened to him personally, not whether he or someone else got the credit, but that people were reached with the gospel—that is what mattered to him. That is all that mattered—that by all possible means he might save some. We do well to make this our prayer, "Lord, help me to see the things that are really important and the things that don't really matter

one way or another! And Lord, give me the wisdom to know the difference!" Let us pray as though all depended on God, for it does; yet work as though all depended on us!

The dignity of the public gospel ministry will also lead me to respect my brother's ministry in the same way that I expect him to respect mine. Matthew 18 will be an essential part of my *modus operandi*. I expect others to follow this Scripture when dealing with me. I owe my brother no less. Judging his ministry, often from a considerable distance, on the basis of something I have heard or read without bothering to hear his side of the story, taking for granted that he must be guilty of what I have heard or read and resorting to the use of a smoking pen by which I place him on the defensive to prove his innocence, setting aside the orderly procedure for resolving conflict that we have agreed upon as brothers in favor of seeking to rally those whom we believe to be of alike mind—these things do not edify. They create division. They undermine the unity of the Spirit in the brotherhood. We do well to remember that the Eighth Commandment was also given to us who serve in the public gospel ministry.

Recently in a gathering of pastors I was asked, "What do you see as the future for the WELS?" It was a meeting that took place outside the WELS' heartland. The man who asked the question pointed out that most of the pastors present were serving small congregations. They were struggling valiantly to uphold a confessional position in an area and at a time when such a position is not popular. "We're often discouraged," he said. "We're frustrated." Against that background and in that real world he wanted to know my assessment of WELS' future.

I had to answer, "I don't know." That's not really in our hands. We are obviously living in the days of which Paul wrote, "For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths" (2 Tm 4:3-4).

Yet Paul did not say, "It's no use. We might as well give up. If you can't beat 'em, join 'em." He said instead, "But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardships, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry" (2 Tin 4:5).

I don't know what the future of WELS is. God hasn't revealed that to us. But we do know what our assignment is and the principles that are to guide us in carrying it out.

The Word of God has not changed, and it won't. The Bible is still God's inerrant Word, errorless and incapable of error in all of its parts, the only norm and standard for our faith and life. And the mission of the church has not changed, and it won't. That mission is not to reorder the structures of society, to improve conditions here and now apart from the regenerating power of the gospel (though that will also come as a by-product when the church is faithful to its mission). That mission is rather to lead the elect of God through faith unto salvation. That mission is to call sinners to repentance, to proclaim forgiveness through the Cross of Christ, to encourage believers in their Christian life. And the only means God has given his church to carry out that mission is his Word as revealed in Holy Scripture. Only by proclaiming law and gospel, sin and grace, the wrath of God against sin and the mercy of God in Christ will people be converted and saved. And those who by the power of the Holy Spirit have accepted Christ as their personal Savior and the Lord of their life will bow to his will in all matters and as new creatures in Christ make their impact on the society in which God has called them to serve.

I repeat, the Word of God has not changed, and it won't. The mission of the church has not changed, and it won't. But the environment in which you and I are called to lift high the cross has changed dramatically and is changing constantly. So the challenge for our synod in this decade is

to be sensitive and alert to that changed environment and, without sacrificing a single Word of God's eternal truth, to examine all that we're doing and how we're doing it and why we're doing it, always with the aim of reaching one more soul with the gospel, of lifting high the cross and more faithfully nurturing those already in the church and reaching out to those who do not yet know Christ as their Savior-that by all possible means we might save some.

(Report of the president to the 1991 convention, *Proceedings*, 1991, pp 25,26)

Our assignment as public gospel ministers is to be faithful to the Word, faithful to the church's mission, and, in matters that are truly free, to be willing to become all things to all men so that by all possible means we might save some. The rest is in the Lord's hands. The future of the WELS is in the Lord's hands. And it couldn't be in better hands.

The dignity of the public gospel ministry is in the message. Listen to the words once more: "How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, `Your God reigns.'" That message has been entrusted to us. There is nothing better to lift us above the routine and the ordinary and make each new day of grace another joy-filled opportunity to serve, to serve the One who loved us and gave himself for us, the One who came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.

Encouraging one another as the Scriptures exhort is admittedly not a strong suit in the WELS, especially among its called workers. We are not very quick to tell brothers when they do something right. We take that for granted. We are much more adept at telling them when they do something wrong, or when we only perceive that they have done something wrong. When we can't find something to criticize, it is almost as though we're not proper guardians of orthodoxy. The life of many a brother could be made more joyful, here and there one might even be saved for the ministry if we took the time now and then to speak an encouraging word. We ought to do more of that in our circles; we ought to do much more of it among brothers. But after all is said and done we should not have to depend on this to keep us functioning with all faithfulness. Ours is a higher and nobler motive. The love of Christ compels us.

And on those days when we begin to feel sorry for ourselves, when our ministry seems so futile, when there seems to be so little appreciation for our faithful service, then we need to open our Bibles and put it all in perspective as we read:

Suppose one of you had a servant plowing or looking after the sheep. Would he say to the servant when he comes in from the field, "Come along now and sit down to eat?" Would he not rather say, "Prepare my supper, get yourself ready and wait on me while I eat and drink; after that you may eat and drink"? Would he thank the servant because he did what he was told to do? So also you, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, "We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty"(Lk17:7-10).