

What is a Missionary? What is Mission Work? Usually we may think of sending men to foreign lands – strange languages and customs – bringing the sweet message of Jesus – the Savior. The mission societies of Europe in the 1800's sent missionaries and pastors to the untamed lands of America. In the late 1800's our own Wisconsin Synod sent its first World Missionaries to the Apaches in the Arizona Territory. In 1949 on April 30th, we sent Arthur Wacker and Edgar Hoenecke, the WELS "49er's to the first true foreign mission field of Central Africa (now Malawi and Zambia). So many have followed to different areas of the world. To the unknown but with the Lord at their side. Supported with our prayers and gifts.

But there are more to missions. All forms that go beyond our borders – joint work. 1) Yes, world missions; also, 2) Home missions; 3) training future pastors and teachers; and 4) our synod's headquarters with its various services and publishing house.

But there is still more! Sharing the Gospel locally with our unchurched friends and neighbors and relatives. An army of men, women and children touched by Jesus' love as the disciples were in our text! Privileged! Here we are encouraged:

THEME: MARCH FORWARD AS MISSIONARIES!

I. FREELY YOU HAVE RECEIVED!

now II. FREELY GIVE!

Most people have the wrong idea about religion! Their focus is on the Law and God's demands. That is the religion we naturally know and cling to. That is what all man-made religions teach, **"This do and you will live,"** but not Christianity! No, rather Jesus GIVES! Freedom! A full life both for now and eternally! Jesus sends missionaries moved by this TRUTH in our text, **"Freely you have received!"**

Our text takes place in the second year of Jesus ministry in Galilee where Jesus went from town to town "preaching the Good News of the kingdom and healing..." A two-fold gift – healing for the body and the soul. We are told, **"...when he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd..."** This is the picture: sheep – no shepherd, wandering, cut and bruised, driven by wild animals – harassed and helpless. So many people had physical difficulties but more importantly spiritual attacks from spiritual leaders who gave them nothing but law – OBEY! OBEY! – but gave them no hope for the many times they sinned and failed!

Jesus' heart went out to them, he had compassion, perhaps, not unlike our response to images that often flood our televisions of mistreated animals or sick and malnourished children in distant lands – cries of, 'Can't you do something?' Oh, Jesus freely gave and the people freely received. For sick bodies healing and crushed spirits, burdened with guilt of sin – **"Be of good cheer, your sins are forgiven"**.

Now in our text that free giving was expanded to the 12 disciples. He gave them AUTHORITY, **"He called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out evil spirits and to heal every disease and sickness."** And he sent them with Good News to freely give, **"6Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel. 7As you go, preach this message: 'The kingdom of heaven is near.' 8Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received, freely give."** The disciples were no great Bible scholars like most of us...they did not fully understand what Jesus meant by the words, **"the kingdom of God is near"** until after the Spirit was sent on Pentecost. They pinned their hopes on some earthly kingdom. Jesus was pointing to the eternal kingdom established by his sacrifice on the cross for sin – an invisible kingdom that comes to all who believe! A free gift! **"Freely"** – in the Greek literally, 'as a gift'—**"Freely you have received!"**

Received what? When we see these disciples – we should see ourselves - Prone to confusing the teaching of scripture. Jesus told them at least three times he had to suffer, die and then to be raised to life and enter into his glory. But they weren't listening! Don't we do the same at times. At times, saying, 'I think this is what Jesus wants – don't confuse me with what scripture says'? And perhaps, the same ugly sinful pride that surfaced for the disciples when they argued about who was to be the greatest in the kingdom of God. In the Church, sinning by often arguing about things that are neither commanded or forbidden in scripture but insisting that our way is best or that 'we have always done it that way' - to the harm of our fellow believers? If we will examine our hearts daily we can only conclude - Yes, together with the disciples, we are unworthy sinners, under God's decree, **"There is no difference for all have sinned and fall short of the Glory of God."** Rm 3:23 There is no praise from God for all of our busyness and doing in the Church or out of it!

We need help and amazingly – Christ FREELY GAVE! The picture the Lord provides in the prophet, Hosea, is striking. The Lord told Hosea to go out and marry a harlot (an adulterous woman) and have children with her.

Then when she became unfaithful him, he was to take her back. He was to be a Model of the Message he was to share with God's people, Israel. Israel had committed spiritual adultery by worshipping other gods. Then the Lord says, **"I will show my love to the one I called, 'not my loved one.'"** Love for the undeserving! By all Law, Hosea had no obligation. But now "buy her back". Take her back! **"Love her as the Lord loves the Israelites."** **Hosea 3:1**

God has a gift for sinners. He is under no obligation! For the undeserving! The unworthy! **FREELY YOU HAVE RECEIVED!** Romans 3:24 All have sinned and all **"are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus."** That's why Jesus came – for the harlot – the undeserving – for us. A gift – through Christ's death on the Cross – sins paid for in full- ALL – our words and actions driven by pride together with them all. Forgiveness that wells up to eternal life –in the perfect joy of heaven. For each one of us!. To all he says, **COME AND DRINK!** **"To him who thirsts, I will give to drink, without cost from the spring of the water of life!"** **Revelation 21:6.** To all who believe this promise, **"FREELY YOU HAVE RECEIVED"** Can we keep such Good News to ourselves?

II No, rather, Jesus urges us...**NOW FREELY GIVE!** Share the Good News! One of the wonders of aging is that for many of us, morning comes quite early. In the summer, most of the days at about quarter to 5, with the windows open, just before sunrise, the birds are singing with great cheer! They know that sunrise will bring a new day that God will meet their needs of food, water and shelter. Simple needs and wants and they greet the day with joy! Now if the birds can rejoice in the simplest of things, how much more do we have reason to shout for joy each morning? We have a gracious God who provides for all of our physical needs but more than that who sent his Son to rescue us from sin and death – whose mercies and forgiveness are new every morning. Whose promise of heaven is more certain than the ground upon which we stand. Our Savior encourages us to sing for joy! Share the Good News! Freely give!

In our text Jesus sends the 12 disciples to a more limited group – the lost sheep of Israel – to the Jews – to his chosen people. But soon he would expand that commission to - **"Go into all the world!"** **MARCH FORWARD AS MISSIONARIES!**

Recognize the opportunities! He tells the disciples, **"The harvest is plentiful..."** And again, **"Lift up your eyes over the fields..."** This is a picture we can appreciate – soon there will be harvests in our fields—wheat, beans, and corn. Lord willing an amazing harvest in the fields! So also there are plenty of souls to be brought into God's kingdom through the Gospel. Billions around the world who do not know Christ! Countless souls in Europe and Latin America, Africa and China, India and Pakistan, and now even Vietnam. Opportunities! The harvest is plentiful!

But then the harsh reality, **"The laborers are few."** Earlier Jesus had sent out the 72 disciples with the Gospel. Sadly many of them fell away. But now he does not curse his luck and say, 'We can't do it!' Rather, here he sends the 12 with **AUTHORITY!** Into the great harvest. **"The harvest is plentiful but the laborers are few!"** Our Wisconsin Synod assigned 22 or 23 graduates from our seminary this year. One of them was assigned here. When I graduated from the seminary there were 65 in our class. These are precious gifts from our gracious heavenly Father. But sadly over 100 pastor vacancies in congregations remain without any expansion into new mission fields. Yes, there are some significantly larger classes studying for the preaching ministry. But, "The Laborers are few!"

What can we do about the shortage? First, Pray! Jesus says, **"Ask the Lord of the harvest therefore to send out workers into his harvest fields."** Now as never before we need to pray the **MISSION PETITION**, "Thy kingdom come!" so that the Holy Spirit would move the hearts of young men and women in our congregation and others to be workers in the great harvest! To those who have **FREELY RECEIVED** from the hand of God to also **FREELY GIVE** – hold out the words of life. Personally encourage our young people to serve. While farming, engineering and many others are noble callings; for the person who has the gifts and joy in the Gospel, what better life's work than to share that joy in Christ?!

A number of you have asked, 'Do you think this young pastor will be able to handle the task?' The best answer I can give is, **'NO, NOT BY HIMSELF.'** **BUT** empowered by the Holy Spirit in the Word and Sacrament and with your support, his work will be blessed and so will this congregation. You will **MARCH FORWARD AS MISSIONARIES** - In this community and to the world!

The Lord emphasizes the importance of congregational unity, **"Keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of Peace."** Nothing hinders our effective witness (our missionary work) more than internal divisions. Matters of Bible teaching and practice can be decided by humbly studying the Word together. But sadly too often we can get caught up in matters neither commanded or forbidden. The color of the pastor's robe or what to have for a community Thanksgiving meal. Remember who we are, Saints, blood bought souls tied together with Christ in our Baptism –

here seeking to be nurtured on the Word and Sacrament – commissioned to MARCH FORWARD AS MISSIONARIES with the Gospel – our source of joy. That’s why the Apostle Paul urges us, “**Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.**” Romans 12:16 When we act or speak, ASK, *‘Will this build up others or am I being driven by false pride?’* When we fail as we often do - ask the Lord for forgiveness and then those we have hurt – be assured of Christ’s forgiveness. Remember what you have FREELY RECEIVED and then FREELY GIVE! Encourage your new pastor and your fellow believers; pray the Lord of the Harvest to send more workers; encourage our young by your example to a greater appreciation of our MISSION; support the work generously with your offerings; and share the Good News of Jesus with friends, neighbors and relatives who do not know Jesus! FREELY YOU HAVE RECEIVED, FREELY GIVE!

Friday was a challenging day in our household. For a number of weeks we had faced the strain of activities that were not a normal part of our routine—good times, yes, but we were tired and conflicts can follow so easily. But amazingly the birds were singing again early Saturday morning. We awoke to the assurance of God’s Mercies – his forgiveness new every morning. SO FREELY GIVEN! Reassured of his forgiveness, we were able to march into a new day – Refreshed and committed to love one another. It has been a privilege to have served you for close to a year. It is my prayer that you, together with your new pastor, will MARCH FORWARD AS MISSIONARIES – arm in arm. You are privileged to share in this ministry. Do so mindful that, in Christ, how FREELY WE HAVE RECEIVED blessing upon blessing, now FREELY GIVE! AMEN