

Like Lambs Among Wolves

✠ Pray for workers. (vv.1-12)

✠ Rejoice in your victory. (vv.16-20)

In the name of Jesus Christ, the great Liberator of our bodies and souls, dear fellow disciples:

It's universally true of all humans – different personalities. Likewise Jesus' disciples then and now. Those of us who were alive and aware on September 11, 2001, remember where we were. I was driving to a pastors' conference when the first plane hit. Like many others, I imagined a small passenger plane. But when the second airliner flew into the other tower, most everyone was thinking terrorism. We pastors said our prayers, turned around and went home to minister to our families and congregations.

Sadly, I was wondering, "Lord, how can I minister to others when I'm so stirred up inside?" Remember last week's Gospel and the "Sons of Thunder"? With James and John it seems I'd need our Savior's rebuke about their suggestion to call down fire from heaven on that Samaritan village that wouldn't welcome Jesus. ***"You don't know what kind of spirit is influencing you. For the Son of Man did not come to destroy people's souls, but to save them." Then they went to another village.*** (Luke 9:55f EHV) Fortunately, mature disciples of our Lord were posting prayers on the WELS website which the Lord used to calm me down. Reality still today, we are **Like Lambs Among Wolves**.

✠ Pray for workers. (vv.1-12)

When you love your country, it's easy to forget that all of Jesus' disciples are also citizens of heaven. So when Jesus sends out the "Seventy-Two," we're seeing the first evangelism team of laymen going out ahead of Jesus to prepare the way for His ministry. Two-by-two teams would feel outnumbered going into unknown villages. With our shortage of pastors and the challenge of opening 100 new missions in the next decade, we need to obey our Lord now more than ever: ***"The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. So ask the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into his harvest field."*** New Life short one Elder and several key positions on our Board for Lay Ministry? Pray, Christian, pray!

Our Lord lays serious responsibilities on men in particular to serve as Christ-like leaders. That's why I share the fact that I never wanted to be a pastor, maybe a teacher, but certainly not a pastor. In the Lord's school of grace, I've grown very grateful for the privilege of sharing God's Word. My worst fear as a child was sharing my faith with strangers. Why do you suppose my dear Lord Jesus made my first job going door-to-door delivering catalogs for a salesman? What joy this summer several young men from New Life headed out to Montana to help a new mission. **Pray for workers!** Could one be you?

Some personalities prepare, but never get going. Others get distracted on the way. Some are fearful of needs there or not knowing what to do. Jesus has you covered. After Pentecost, different people groups would not be so supportive. But for now, the Lord commanded His lay missionaries, ***"Go your way"*** – quietly and without notice. ***"Look, I am sending you out as lambs among wolves"*** – but I'm always with you to protect and encourage. ***"Do not carry a money bag or traveler's bag or sandals. Do not greet anyone along the way. Whenever you enter a house, first say, 'Peace be to this house.' And if a peaceful person is there, your peace will rest on him, but if not, it will return to you. Remain in that same house, eating and drinking what they give you, because the worker is worthy of his pay. Do not keep moving from house to house. Whenever you enter a town and they welcome you, eat what is set before you. Heal the sick who are in the town and tell them, 'The kingdom of God has come near you.'"*** God works in hearts through Word and sacraments because ***"the kingdom of God is within you."***

Don't expect everyone to like you. ***“But whenever you enter a town and they do not welcome you, go out into its streets and say, ‘Even the dust from your town that clings to our feet, we wipe off against you. Nevertheless know this: The kingdom of God has come near.’ I tell you, it will be more bearable for Sodom on that day than for that town.”*** Just move on. Leave judgment and justice up to God on the Last Day when every soul will stand before His judgment seat. Some think Sodom and Gomorrah will be the worst off, but far worse for the soul that says, “No,” to God's grace in Christ.

So much work. So little time. So many souls to reach for Jesus, and the millions are multiplying day by day. Is it any accident for citizens of heaven to see so many people from other countries streaming to America? Rise above political arguments, dear citizens of heaven. See souls in need of Jesus! Isn't that how our Lord taught the former persecutor to think? Paul writes: ***“He died for all, so that those who live would no longer live for themselves but for him, who died in their place and was raised again. As a result, from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we knew Christ according to the flesh, we no longer know him that way.”*** (2 Corinthians 5:15f EHV) The nations are coming to your light, the Light of Christ that burns within your soul. And more babies will be born with needy mothers and fathers. See more to love and save by baptism and faith in Jesus. **Pray for workers**, then...

✦ **Rejoice in your victory. (vv.16-20)**

Whatever happens, don't take it personally – not for depression, not for arrogance and pride. Jesus says, ***“Whoever listens to you listens to me. Whoever rejects you rejects me. And whoever rejects me rejects the one who sent me.”*** so if your efforts are successful and people are listening as you share Jesus with them, praise God. They're really listening to Jesus speaking through you. And if they reject you, don't take it personally. They're really rejecting Jesus, and ultimately heavenly Father who sent Jesus.

Can you relate to the 72 when they returned? ***“Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name!”*** Congregations eagerly welcome guests. Some get most excited in buildings. Outward signs of success could rob us of true joy in Jesus. So Jesus says something that sounds strange to our ears.

All during Jesus ministry something was happening in the spiritual world that God and the angels could see, but it was invisible to blind mortals like us. Jesus says He came to destroy the devil's work. And he could see it happening. ***“I was watching Satan fall like lightning from heaven.”*** You might think the forces of evil are winning but they're not. Jesus is! And you have the Gospel power of Good News.

Our fearfulness, our laziness, the fact that we're so distracted by earthly things, all this greed, this materialism, even the tiniest sin of all of it makes us deserving only of God's wrath and punishment. And that's not just a sorry, sick life on earth. It's that everlasting torment in the fires of hell. But take heart. ***“The Father rescued us from the domain of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”*** (Colossians 1:13f EHV) Gratitude grips our hearts with the power of the Gospel, the good news that all sins are forgiven for all people. Christ's authority tramples snakes and scorpions and overpowers our sinful nature, the world, and Satan himself. You have Jesus' Gospel power to overcome all and, nothing will ever harm your soul, not even it death. ***“Nevertheless do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you but rejoice that your names have been written in heaven.”*** This joy no one can take away. Jesus predicted the world falling apart, society, churches. ***“Fear not little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.”*** (Luke 12:32 EHV)

Earthly investors have a portfolio that grows and shrinks with the stock market. But Jesus wants more encouragement for you, so he opens His portfolio in heaven. And guess what, you're in it! Purely by God's grace and forgiveness all your sins and mine are all washed away. The righteousness and holiness that God demands, He gives in our baptism and daily through his Word and sacrament. Come what may, **Rejoice in your victory.** It's not what you see on earth. It's not even over the demons. It's the personal, eternal **victory** of your name written in heaven. **Like Lambs Among Wolves** for now, but this old order of things is quickly passing away. **Pray for workers. Rejoice in your victory!** Amen.