

In Jesus' name. Amen.

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*We read as follows in Jesus' name:*

After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them on ahead of him... And he said to them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. Go your way; behold, I am sending you out as lambs in the midst of wolves. ... Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace be to this house!' ... And remain in the same house, eating and drinking what they provide, for the laborer deserves his wages. Do not go from house to house. Whenever you enter a town and they receive you... and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.' <sup>(ESV)</sup>

*This is Your Word, heavenly Father; sanctify us in the truth, Your Word is Truth. Amen.* (John 17:17)

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Christ is risen, **He is risen indeed.** Alleluia!

Dearly beloved,

It is a curious thing that this text from *The Lutheran Hymnal* is selected for the feast day of St. Mark, since it doesn't name St. Mark, nor does it come from the gospel account recorded by him.

But here it is none the less, so let's dig into this text a little and see what hope and joy is to be found.

Now according to tradition, St. Mark was 1 of the 72 sent out by Jesus to go before Him.

We do not know for absolute certainty that he was, since Scripture doesn't name him among them, but being part of this group would not be outside the realm of possibility for one who played such a role in the transmission of the Gospel.

You see, even Mark's family apparently played a prominent part in the early Church in Jerusalem.

We hear in Acts 12:12 that after Peter was miraculously freed from prison by an angel, that he went "**to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose other name was Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying.**"

Some speculate that this is the same house with a large upper room

where Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper and where Jesus appeared on Easter Sunday evening, and where the Holy Spirit came upon the Apostles at Pentecost.

And so it is also supposed that since this was John Mark's house, that it was possibly St. Mark that could have been the man that Jesus told Peter and John to follow to the his house.

It further goes on that he was possibly the "young man" from his own Gospel that fled from the soldiers naked after they arrested Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, <sup>Mark14:52</sup>

after he followed Jesus and His disciples when they left his house after the eating Jesus' last supper.

Now, we do not know if these things are indeed true or not,

but we are certain of other roles that St. Mark had in the early Church.

And it would seem, at least possible, that Jesus' warning to the 72 saying,

**behold, I am sending you out as lambs in the midst of wolves,** was difficult for St. Mark early on.

Some speculate that on St. Paul and Barnabas' 1st missionary trip that St. Mark became timid

at the sight of the fangs of the wolves early on in the trip and had withdrawn from the mission team to return to Jerusalem (back home). <sup>Acts13:5-13</sup>

Perhaps it was timidity.

But it could just as easily also been over concern or fear for the lack of physical necessities or the hardships of travel, or the lack of encouraging support for the ministry they had faced.

Of course, Jesus had also spoken of these concerns to the 72 when He sent them out.

He didn't promise that they would always find a "son of peace" to stay with.

And He didn't promise lavish feasts in every town or home.

Instead, He exhorted those 72 apostles to eat what was set before them,

the daily bread that the Lord had provided for them through their ministering.

Regardless of whatever caused St. Mark to withdraw from St. Paul and Barnabas,

this left such an impression on St. Paul that when Barnabas suggested bringing St. Mark along for a 2nd trip, they had a **sharp disagreement**, so much so that they split up,

Barnabas going with St. Mark to Cyprus and St. Paul going with Silas through Syria. Acts15:39

...

But it's not as if these concerns and fears have stopped to be real concerns and fears for ministers today.

It can be intimidating to leave one's home to go to an unknown city and state far away and not know how you will be received.

It can be concerning to take a call that in the call document doesn't promise to provide all the financial support that you might consider necessary for you and your family.

It can be fearful to take up a small mission or small congregation surrounded by a very worldly or godless community where physical safety or religious persecution are an issue.

And it isn't as if pastors are the only ones that deal with these or similar fears and concerns.

Church members moving from one city to another for economic or other reasons

can also feel the concern of moving from one congregation to another,

from the care of one trusted shepherd to another as yet, unknown shepherd.

And while pastors move from one congregation to the next,

sometimes there isn't a faithful Church anywhere within 200 miles of a new location.

And all congregations have their own quirks and issues,

so leaving one group of struggling sinners for another group of struggling sinners isn't always easy.

Who knows if a certain congregation will be full of "sons of peace" or if they will be contentious?

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It is in reference to this apparent weakness of St. Mark that in the hymn stanza regarding him that we sang/will sing "*The weak by grace made strong.*"

One might think that after St. Paul seemed to have written off St. Mark for his 2nd mission trip, that he would simply discount him from then on.

And yet, we read in St. Paul's final letter, as he is preparing to face his execution:

**Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is very useful to me for ministry.** 2Timothy4:11

Can you see this as the fruit of St. Paul's earnest prayers to the **Lord of the harvest to send out laborers?**

He knew the harvest was plentiful. He knew the laborers were few.

And as he considered the congregation in Rome and his impending execution,

he desired that a faithful shepherd would come and minister to himself and to them.

St. Peter also found St. Mark to be a faithful minister as he sent greetings from the Church in Rome and from **“Mark, my son.”**<sup>1Peter5:13</sup>

According to tradition, it was this relationship through which Mark’s gospel has its apostolic authority. Whether or not Mark was part of the 72 sent out by Jesus, whether or not he was present in Gethsemane, or among the 500 disciples who saw Jesus resurrected or at home during Pentecost hearing the Apostles speaking in tongues the wonderful works of God, he heard the gospel from both St. Paul and St. Peter and by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, recorded it for the world to read.

From Isaiah 52 we heard,

**“How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, “Your God reigns.”** (Read Mark15:19)

It was by God’s grace that St. Mark was strengthened after his apparent display of weakness.

That strength didn’t come from within himself.

He didn’t suddenly just decide to take up courage.

That strength was given to him by His crucified and resurrected Lord.

St. Mark knew, like in the message given to the 72, that **The kingdom of God had come near to him.**

This was the message that St. Mark focused on in his brief, but action-packed gospel account.

St. Mark wastes no time at the beginning of his gospel telling the reader what his book is about.

He writes in Mark 1:1, **“The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.”**

Then only a quick-paced 14 verses later, he summarizes Jesus whole message saying that Jesus said,

**“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”**

If it were the weakness of timidity that caused him to withdraw from St. Paul and Barnabas,

or fear of adequate support, or the hardships that they had to endure,

the Lord had made him bold to repent of his sins, and to confess his Savior, not only in sermons,

but also in writing **the gospel of Jesus Christ...** the good news of:

Jesus’ perfect, righteous life, lived for the sheep,

His innocent suffering and death, endured to atone for His fold,

and His glorious resurrection from the dead, to justify the world of man.

And kept him bold in that confession all the way to his earthly death.

Today the paraments of the Church are red.

This is an indication to you that on this feast day we are celebrating God’s grace to a martyr,

one who gave his life in testimony to the gospel.

Tradition reports to us that St. Mark ended his earthly ministry, not in Rome, like Sts. Peter and Paul, but in Alexandria, Egypt where he became their first bishop.

It was here then that, according to tradition,

his beautiful feet that had **brought the good news and had published peace... [and] salvation...** became more beautiful still.

Tradition recounts that in the year 68 AD Easter coincided with a festival to a pagan Egyptian god.

As St. Mark was celebrating the feast, an angry mob grabbed him  
and drug him through the streets of Alexandria by a thick rope for two days.  
His flesh was torn and scattered on the rough and rocky road throughout the city.  
It is testimony of the confidence he had in the Savior who had laid down His life for him,  
and had raised Himself back to life, promising to do the same for all those who listen to His voice.  
How fitting, then, that every year we are *enriched by his triumph song* <sup>LSB:15</sup> as we use his account  
to hear the good news of the empty tomb of our Savior, Jesus Christ on Easter Sunday.

The Lord grant you boldness in the face of those people and circumstances that would intimidate you,  
cause you fear, or lead you to distrust the providence of God.

The Lord grant you steadfastness to confess your sins and your Savior in all situations.

The Lord grant that you would be willing to endure all, even death,  
rather than give up on the forgiveness won by Jesus Christ and the certain hope of life everlasting,  
so that, along with St. Mark, you also will rise to glory when your Lord calls you to Himself.

**Christ is risen! He is risen, indeed! Alleluia!**

*Soli Deo Gloria*