

## *“Open Eyes...Hearts Ablaze”*

### Lutheran Women’s Mission League Sunday

Jeremiah 20:9 (ESV) "If I say, 'I will not mention him, or speak any more in his name,' there is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot."

1 Peter 2:9-10 (ESV) "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy."

Luke 24:31-32 (ESV) "And their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. And he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, 'Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?'"

I greet you with grace, mercy and peace from God, our Father, and Jesus Christ ,our Risen Lord, and the Holy Spirit, who lives within us, as believers, empowering us.

Some of you, no doubt, are familiar with a man by the name of John Newton. During Colonial times, he was the captain of a slave ship. He would capture Black Africans and transport them to Colonial America, many of whom died during the voyage. Newton was known as a mocker of God and even a mocker of those who expressed their faith in God. In fact, he referred to himself as the “Great Blasphemer” and an “infidel and libertine.” He recounts that during a violent storm, only moments after he had left the deck of his ship, the man who replaced him was washed overboard and drowned. It was then, Newton said, that he began to realize his own helplessness. He began to read the Bible. In time, he became a different man. He turned to Christ. He got married. He even became a minister and an active opponent of the slave trade. Toward the end of his life, he wrote, “When I was young, I was sure of many things; now there are only two things of which I am sure: one is that I am a miserable sinner; and the other, that Christ is an all-sufficient Savior.” He also many wrote pamphlets, books and hymns, including the words: *“Amazing grace -- how sweet the sound; That saved a wretch like me!; I once was lost, but now, am found; Was blind, but now I see!”* God opened John Newton’s eyes, and those of the two men on the road to Emmaus, where it says, “And their eyes were opened, and they recognized him....”<sup>32</sup> They said to each other, “Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?” As a believer in Christ, your eyes are opened, too, just like Jeremiah, Peter and the men from Emmaus! The very words of God, burn within you. Oh how important is the word of God! Like it says in Hebrews, "For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart." Heb 4:12 (ESV) This is

the word that opens our eyes and sets us on a course that God directs. This is the word that fills our hearts and minds, that we might share the good news that God has saved us by grace, through faith -- the very gift of God! He can save those around us, as well. Pray that God will provide the opportunities and give you the words.

As a witness, you simply tell what you know -- what Jesus has done for you. Share a conversation with someone about spiritual matters. It shouldn't be intense. Ask them for information: Do they have a church home? What do they think of the Bible? Do they attend church? Find out what people think, and then respond. Invite them to Immanuel. Talk to them about why you worship and what you know about Jesus. All of these are ways to witness.

Jeremiah, in our lesson from the Old Testament, testifies, "If I say, 'I will not mention him, or speak any more in his name,' there is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot.'" - Jeremiah 20:9 (ESV) A burning fire to share the word of God with others, as you are chosen by God.

Peter tells us in our epistle lesson that we are a "... a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy." - 1 Peter 2:9-10 (ESV) Chosen and adopted into the family of God, given the identity of belonging to the King's family, you are of the royal priesthood. As a priest, you have access to God, and proclaim the word of God. You are a holy nation, living in the power the God. The kingdom has come to your heart. You are a citizen of the King in His kingdom. You are his ambassador. You proclaim who the King is. You share the good news of salvation and His everlasting Kingdom that is to come. Saint Peter declares, "But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells." - (2 Peter 3:13 ESV) As we wait, we, as citizens of the King, declare and proclaim the King and His coming kingdom.

That proclamation is part of the mission of the LWML. The Lutheran Women's Missionary League was founded for the purpose of "serving the Lord with gladness" by supporting Gospel outreach from local churches to the farthest corners of the earth. Our Synod is also about outreach. *Ablaze* is the name given to the movement among Lutherans worldwide to reach at least 100 million unreached or uncommitted people with the Good News about Jesus by 2017, the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Reformation. There are updates and more information on synod's web site, search LCMS or ABLAZE.

This *Ablaze* movement takes its name from the account of the disciples on the road to Emmaus from our lesson from Luke. It's God's Word that warms our hearts, that sets us ablaze to tell others about

Jesus. In His last appearance to the disciples on earth, Jesus said, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). He says the same to you. What a privilege to be part of His mission! Where is the Jerusalem, the Judea and the Samaria, in your life? The idea of Jerusalem refers to right here at home. It's right outside your door. Your "Jerusalem" is your friends, your relatives, your co-workers and your acquaintances. The people of your "Judea" live farther away, and we participate with other churches and districts to reach these people in our county, state, and country. Your "Samaria" represents people who live nearby, but who do not share our culture. All of us live near, or come into contact with, those who are from a different culture. They may have been born here, or they may be immigrants. Either way, we can share Jesus by helping them get settled in the community, building relationships with them, and telling them about Jesus. Being Christ's witnesses "to the ends of the earth" means much the same today as it did in Jesus' day. From the beginning, the Christian Church sent missionaries to the far reaches of the world. We do this through our partnership with LCMS World Mission, our Synod's global Gospel outreach arm, through prayer, through encouragement and through giving.

Dr. Robert Roegner of LCMS World Mission shares his summer experiences in India. During a worship service, five pastors were baptizing some forty converts, one of the converts, a woman in her twenty's, shared with him after the service, that, "while I have tears of joy flowing from my left eye, I have tears of sorrow flowing from my right eye." So he asked, "Why so sad as well?" He said, "I'll never forget her face. She looked at me square in the eye and said, 'While I have received Jesus in my heart today and His grace and forgiveness, my husband, my mother and father, my brothers and sisters, my aunts and uncles, and all of my cousins do not know God's grace and forgiveness because they still live in the darkness of all the Hindu gods.'" He continued to pray for the woman and her family. The following spring, he recounts, he received an email from one of the other pastors. The the majority of their Easter baptisms were members of this woman's family, including her husband, her mother, and her father. Through much prayer and sharing of the good news, this women's family had come to faith, as she lived her faith with her family. That is our calling, our eye opening. May our hearts be ablaze with the good news as we share with those that God has placed before us. May God grant this to us all. In His name we pray, AMEN.

May the peace of God that passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.  
AMEN.