

dren, could you encourage her to be a Lutheran teacher? Maybe that person is you! What's holding you back? Shy? Scared? Perfect! That's exactly whom Jesus' uses to carry out his work, because he wants everyone to know that it doesn't depend on us. It all depends on him. Not everyone has the gifts to be a pastor or teacher, but many people do. Whom could you encourage for ministry today?

My personal experience would say that we don't do that enough. I went to MVL. It was a great school, but I still remember the day a friend and classmate asked, "Nathan, what are you going to do?" I wasn't sure, but I said, "I think I'm going to go to MLC to be a pastor." She said, "MLC? Why do you want to go there? You can do anything you want. Why would you waste your time at MLC?" Where did she get that thought? Who was it who taught her that being a pastor isn't worthwhile? Was it the way her parents complained about their pastor? Was it other classmates?

You want to know the truth? I really could have used encouragement! I wasn't sure I wanted to be a pastor. You know why I went to MLC? Because I didn't get drafted into the NBA right out of high school! I went to MLC because there was nothing else I wanted to do, so I thought I might as well give it a try. But I was scared, remember? I still get scared talking to people about Jesus. You people are scary! But God has a history of taking fearful, doubting people and making them into his witnesses! His hands were pierced for me and my sins. His feet were pierced for me and my doubts. He rose to give me hope and peace. Life is not about having this or that. It's about knowing Christ and the power of his resurrection. I'm a witness of Jesus.

And so are you. I want you to look at yourself as Jesus' witness. No matter what calling God has given to you in your life, he has given you opportunities to point others to him. When you miss those opportunities, he doesn't give up on you. He gives you more. And more. And more. You don't just get one chance—you get a lifetime of opportunities to share Jesus! The more that Jesus convinces you through his Word, the more you will be able to witness to others about him. And as you do that, look for someone you could encourage to witness as their life's calling. You never know who that might be. We have members in our congregation right now for whom the high school basketball teammate of their child went on to become their pastor!

I want to leave you with one final proof. Jesus wasn't afraid to give proofs of his resurrection. One of the greatest proofs that Jesus rose is what happened in the lives of his disciples after they saw Jesus. On Easter evening, they were afraid and locked in a room. Going out and telling others about Jesus was the last thing on their minds! But after they saw Jesus alive, what did they do? Jesus turned them into the most courageous people the world has ever seen. Do you know the Greek word for "witness"? It's "martyr." That's exactly what all but one of those disciples became—martyrs. They were so convinced of Jesus' resurrection that they died for their faith in Jesus. What changed? They saw Jesus. They knew his peace. And they heard his words, "*You are witnesses!*"

Luke 24:36-49
Pastor Nathan Nass

Third Sunday of Easter
April 30, 2017

³⁶While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." ³⁷They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost. ³⁸He said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? ³⁹Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have." ⁴⁰When he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet. ⁴¹And while they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement, he asked them, "Do you have anything here to eat?" ⁴²They gave him a piece of broiled fish, ⁴³and he took it and ate it in their presence. ⁴⁴He said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms." ⁴⁵Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. ⁴⁶He told them, "This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, ⁴⁷and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. ⁴⁸You are witnesses of these things. ⁴⁹I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high."

You Are Witnesses!

On one of my trips to Mexico, my Spanish teacher was a Jehovah's Witness. I had one-on-one classes with her, so I got to learn a lot about her religion. There's a big difference! Jehovah's witnesses don't believe that Jesus is really God. They don't believe that we get to heaven by faith in Jesus. It was sad but good for me to hear it straight from her. Here was my last question for her, "Do Jehovah's witnesses really have to go out and knock on everyone's door?" She seemed surprised at the question. "How can I be Jehovah's witness if I never witness?" she said. I didn't know what to say. I just know that I claim to be Jesus' witness but rarely witness about him. Do you?

It's hard to share our faith in Jesus. Here is a sad truth: The groups of people with the most corrupted beliefs about the Bible—Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons—are the most active in sharing their faith. Why is that? It's hard for us to talk with family members about God, let alone invite someone to church. It's hard for me too. When I was studying to be a pastor at Martin Luther College, I can remember nervously thinking, "I can be a pastor as long as I'm not asked to do outreach!" I know the thoughts you have. "What if they reject me? What if they get upset?" How many doubts and fears and excuses do we have about witnessing to our faith in Jesus?

If that's what you're like, then you're just the type of person God wants to use! God has a history of taking fearful, doubting people and making them into powerful witnesses for him. Just think of Jesus' disciples! On Easter evening, they were a confused mess. They had abandoned Jesus as he died. Now they were struggling to believe the reports that Jesus

was alive. Doubts and fears and excuses all around. When suddenly Jesus stood in the middle of them. Oh boy! What would Jesus say? “Where were you guys on Good Friday? Why are you so scared?” Except that’s not what Jesus said. Jesus said, “*Peace be with you.*” Wow. All was forgiven. “*Peace be with you!*”

So the disciples ran out celebrating... No! “*They were startled and frightened.*” Doubts and fears don’t go away easily. You know that. Jesus knows that. In fact, seeing Jesus alive actually made them even more troubled and frightened than before. So Jesus gave up on them and went to find someone else... No! Jesus doesn’t give up. He smiled. “*Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself!*” There was something in Jesus’ hands and feet—scars of nails. Powerful reminders of his love for us. “Don’t be afraid. It’s me!”

But you know what? “*They still did not believe it because of joy and amazement...*” It all seemed to be too good to be true. They didn’t want to get their hopes up only to have them dashed again. I think we can relate to these guys! Do you recognize this cycle in your own life? Our doubt. Jesus’ promises. Our doubt. Jesus’ forgiveness. Over and over again. Despite so many assurances from Jesus, our doubts and fears keep us from the peace that comes from Jesus. But Jesus doesn’t give up. As many times as you doubt, as many times as you’re afraid, he comes to reassure you. Next he ate a piece of fish. He couldn’t be a ghost. He could eat fish! He had risen!

I hope you see something today in Jesus: Incredible patience and grace. I bet you sometimes have doubts about Jesus. I bet you still have worries and questions and fears. Jesus is not afraid of your questions. Jesus is not afraid of your doubts or your fears. He takes them away—over and over again. How often aren’t we like those disciples? “Yes, I know Jesus, but...” “Okay, here’s another promise...” “Yes, I know Jesus, but...” “Okay, here’s more forgiveness...” With infinite grace and patience, Jesus has a history of taking fearful, doubting people, forgiving their sins, and making them powerful witnesses for him.

You know how he does that? Jesus points us to God’s Word. Jesus said, “*This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.*” Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures.” Jesus was saying, “It’s all there in the Bible. Everything you need to have peace—it’s all there.” You can trust Jesus’ Word. I once heard a pastor put it this way, “I’m a simple man. If somebody predicts his own death and resurrection and then pulls it off, I’m with him. I don’t really care what he says, I’m with the guy who rose from the dead.” Just like he said!

And if you’re with Jesus, then he has one more thing to say to you, “*You are witnesses of these things.*” “*You are witnesses.*” Being a witness of something has nothing to do with your ability or your power or your strength. It means that you’ve seen something that you want to pass on. If you believe in Jesus as your Savior, if you’re convinced he died and rose for your forgiveness, then God wants you to witness to others. It’s almost like what my

teacher said, “How can I be Jesus’ witness if I don’t witness?” God has a history of taking fearful, doubting people and making them into powerful witnesses. “*You are witnesses!*” Every Christian is a witness for God’s grace.

At the same time, God also calls some people to be witnesses in a special way—to be full-time workers in his church. Over the next few weeks, there will be graduations at Martin Luther College and Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary—our schools of ministry. As our district president, it’s Pastor Degner’s job to assign new pastors and teachers into congregations and schools throughout Minnesota, including a new pastor to our own church. It’s a big job! Pastor Degner spends days reading bios on dozens and dozens of graduates and tries to fill each vacant church or school with the best fit for a pastor or teacher. What an exciting time of year! New witnesses ready to go out!

There are things that our small Wisconsin Synod isn’t able to do, but God has blessed the WELS with the most thorough worker training system of any denomination in the United States. All future teachers, staff ministers, and pastors attend Martin Luther College in New Ulm for at least 4 years. When teachers graduate, they are licensed and prepared to teach in our Lutheran schools. After future pastors graduate from MLC, they attend Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary in Mequon, WI for four more years. When our new pastor, God willing, is assigned to our congregation on May 18th, he will have 8 full years of training to be a pastor. That’s a blessing! Ready to witness.

It’s just there’s a problem: There’s not enough witnesses. We are facing a shortage of pastors and teachers in our Wisconsin Synod. Let’s start with teachers. Just in the city of Milwaukee, WI, we were short 50 Lutheran teachers for this school year. WELS Schools in the state of Florida have said they need 100 more teachers in the next four years. That’s a lot! Then there are the pastors. Across the WELS, there are 125 pastoral vacancies—like right here at our church. This year, our Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary has only 27 graduates. 125...27... Just to compare, in the 1960s and 1970s, every single year over 55 men graduated from our Seminary. We need more pastors!

Jesus once looked out over the world and told his disciples: “*The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field*” (Matthew 9:37-38). What a prayer for us today! By God’s grace, we have the funding to start 6-8 new WELS mission churches every year, but there aren’t pastors to fill them. There are hundreds of men around the world who have asked our WELS to train them to be pastors in their own countries. What an opportunity! But who’s going to teach them? “*The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.*”

We need more witnesses! Remember: If we need pastors, how long does it take to train them? At least eight years! Look around you. That sixth grader isn’t ready to be your pastor now. But in 14 years, he will be a different man. Can you encourage him today? That high school student doesn’t know what she wants to do, but she sure has a gift with chil-