Andrew K. Frey Walking Together Sunday Isaiah 49:1-6 Listen to me, you islands;

> hear this, you distant nations: Before I was born the LORD called me; from my birth he has made mention of my name.

- ² He made my mouth like a sharpened sword, in the shadow of his hand he hid me; he made me into a polished arrow and concealed me in his quiver.
- ³ He said to me, "You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will display my splendor."
- ⁴ But I said, "I have labored to no purpose; I have spent my strength in vain and for nothing. Yet what is due me is in the LORD's hand, and my reward is with my God."
- And now the LORD says he who formed me in the womb to be his servant to bring Jacob back to him and gather Israel to himself, for I am honored in the eyes of the LORD and my God has been my strength—
 ⁶ he says:

"It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth." (NIV 84)

Theme: Together we Spread the Light of Christ

What is the point of belonging to a Synod? Why is Holy Cross a member of the WELS? There are many great reasons why we belong to this synod. The most important is that the WELS teaches God's word in its truth and purity, and we want to join together with those who share our same faith. You can also be assured that the pastors in WELS congregations have been trained correctly distinguish between law and gospel. They always strive to keep the focus on Christ. Our Holy Cross, Standish, MI. November 20, 2011 educational system is one of the reasons why we have held on to the truth.

Another reason why we are part of the WELS is so that we can do mission work. As a small congregation of about 100 souls we are not capable of spreading the gospel through out the world by sending missionaries. So we join with others to send missionaries who spread the gospel throughout the world— to places like Africa, Indonesia, and East Asia.

When we do mission work the process is often slow and painful. And in this instant-gratification society we become frustrated when we don't see results sooner. And this may discourage us from supporting mission work.

But God's word is powerful and effective. Wherever it is spread the Holy Spirit brings people to faith. So together we spread the light of Christ.

Chapter 49 of Isaiah has a double fulfillment. These words do refer to Isaiah. But they also refer to Christ. He is ultimate fulfillment of this prophecy. Jesus is speaking this words about himself. He says about God, **The LORD called Me from the womb; From the body of My mother He named Me.** Jesus is the one God chose from the beginning of the world. God chose him to be our Savior. He chose him to live a perfect life in our place. To suffer and die on the cross. To become guilty of our sins. To suffer through the pain and torment of hell. To rise from the dead. And to take us to live with him in heaven forever.

Jesus is the one whom God chose to spread the gospel throughout the world. And Jesus was prepared to do so. **He has made My mouth like a sharp sword, In the shadow of His hand He has concealed Me; And He has also made Me a select arrow, He has hidden Me in His quiver.** Jesus is a weapon. A powerful and effective weapon to spread the gospel. A sharp sword, a select or polished arrow—the best there is. This reminds us of a passage in Hebrews. For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. The Father sent the Son to spread the powerful gospel throughout the world. But Jesus was first sent to the lost sheep of Israel. He was sent to bring the Jews back to God. To call them to repentance. And lead them to see that he was their Savior. After all, Jesus was a Jew. He was sent to save his own people.

But that wasn't big enough for Jesus. God told Jesus it was too trivial of a thing for him **To raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore preserved ones of Israel; I will also make You a light of the nations So that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth.**" Before Jesus came, the gospel was almost exclusively for the Jews. Sure, there were some Gentiles who heard the gospel—but for the most part only Jews heard the gospel. But then Christ came and so did the gospel to the Gentiles. From then on the gospel was spread to the ends of the earth.

Jesus was prepared to spread the gospel everywhere. In a similar way we, together as a synod, prepare young men and women to spread the gospel. And they are prepared to spread the gospel everywhere. They are prepared to share the message of Christ in large cities, small towns, or out in the country. They are also prepared to spread the gospel in foreign lands. And this is often done is speaking a foreign language. They are prepared to share the gospel to anyone in any place at any time.

And how are they prepared? Through our educational system. God has blessed us with great schools which focus on Christ. It starts in our Lutheran elementary schools. Continues on in our Area Lutheran High Schools, supported by local congregations, which teach our young children on the basis of God's word. But the gem of our synod begins with our two preparatory schools-Luther Prep in Watertown, WI. And Michigan Lutheran Seminary down in Saginaw. There young men and women begin their training to become called workers in God's kingdom. And we help them out. Through our prayers, support, volunteering we help them be prepared to spread the gospel. Many of those who graduate from our Prep schools go on to Martin Luther College in New Ulm, MN. This is where all those who study to be pastors and teachers in our synod attend. And for teachers, after four or five years they are called by the Holy Spirit through a congregation to teach God's word. Those who are studying to be pastors move on from MLC after four years to Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary in Mequon, WI. They spend three years on campus, and

one year learning at a congregation. And by the time they graduate they are fully capable of spreading the gospel, preaching, and teaching God's word in its truth and purity. This three-tier system—prep schools, college, and seminary, is certainly a blessing from God. And you support those who are studying to spread the gospel through your offerings. Part of your offerings go to the work of the synod. And much of that funds our educational system. And another good portion goes toward mission work. Mission work here in America, and mission work throughout the world. Without being part of a synod, we wouldn't be able to train our young men and women to share the truth. And we wouldn't be able to participate in foreign mission work.

When you think about it, this is exciting. God blesses us so that we can train and send others to share his message. But that excitement can soon wear off. Especially when we don't see results. Many of us expect immediate results. When a new Pastor comes in, they expect everything to suddenly become great. When a new mission is started in a certain city, they expect there to be a full-fledged congregation within months. From the time a missionary steps foot in a foreign country we expect hundreds if not thousands of souls to be won over by the gospel.

But the truth is hated. People rebel against the unaltered word. The gospel is offensive to unbelievers. Many people reject the gospel. They get angry when God's word is upheld against human reason. People want to believe what they want to believe. They want to live how they want to live. They don't want to be told the truth. They don't want to hear they are they are sinning. The devil works hard against the gospel. And many who hear it, do not believe it. And when immediate results aren't seen we become restless. We complain that more isn't happening. We wonder what is wrong when the church doesn't grow by leaps and bounds. And then we may be tempted just to drop everything. "Do we really need to spend millions of dollars preparing our called workers if no one is going to listen to them anyway? Do we really need to waste all the time, talent, and energy it takes to send missionaries overseas?" It seems that our work is all in vain. And that it is not worth keeping it going. At times it seemed as if Jesus' work was in vain too. Jesus spent over three years spreading the gospel. At first glance, it seemed as if he gained many followers. But they were concerned with seeing

miracles. They didn't really care much for what he had to say. He faced opposition from most of the Jews. Those in his home town tried to throw him off a cliff. Finally, he was betrayed by one of his disciples. Sentenced and put to death by the very people he was sent to save. And where were his followers when this was going on? Many rejected him. Others denied that they knew him. It seemed as if Christ's work was all in vain. Jesus himself says so in verse four. I have toiled in vain, I have spent My strength for nothing and vanity. It doesn't matter how great the pastor or teacher is. It doesn't matter how charismatic, how good of speaker, or leader, the missionary is. All that matters is the gospel. And some people will always reject that gospel, no matter what. Some will never follow the truth.

But just because we don't see results, doesn't mean that our work is in vain. For the gospel doesn't work on our timetable, but the Holy Spirit's. He is the one who makes the gospel effective. He works through the gospel so that many people are brought to believe in something that is offensive to us by nature. And, as God points out later on in the book of Isaiah, his word will always yield results. As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, And do not return there without watering the earth And making it bear and sprout, And furnishing seed to the sower and bread to the eater; So will My word be which goes forth from My mouth; It will not return to Me empty, Without accomplishing what I desire, And without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it. God sends his gospel to bring people to faith and to strengthen that faith. And it will always accomplish that purpose. That is because God's word is living and active. This is a weapon that is used to penetrate people's souls Through the gospel countless of people have been brought to faith. It is powerful and effective.

Jesus knew this full well and he used it to gain believers. He said, **Surely the justice** *due* **to Me is with the LORD, And My reward with My God.** Jesus knew that the time would come when people would believe him. Not everyone was going to reject or try to kill him. His reward would be that millions of people would be brought to faith. They would join him in heaven forever. And Jesus would have glory. The glory of our God and Savior. And that is what makes Jesus a light to the nations. For his gospel wasn't just for the Jews. But also for the Gentiles. He was sent to save the whole world. He did this through his death and resurrection. Therefore salvation is for all. It is to go to the ends of the earth. And so we spread the gospel. Together we share the light of Christ We join together to train pastors and teachers who will spread the gospel. Together we start missions here in America. Together we send missionaries throughout the earth. Sure, we spread the gospel individually to those we know and love. But we join with other to spread the gospel throughout the world. So that the Holy Spirit can bring people of all nations to the one true faith. And so that Jesus may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.

Is the synod perfect? Of course not. It is filled with sinners. Yet we join together as a Synod in order to train men and women to teach the truth. We join together as we teach the Word in its truth and purity. We join together so we can spread the message of Christ throughout the world. For he saved sinners and brings eternal life to the ends of the earth. Amen.