

Sermon followed by Service

February 4, 2024

Luke 23:26-34

A thousand more churches shut down than opened up. Not last year, not the COVID years before; but 2019, the year before COVID hit. Now, across America, fewer than two-thirds claim to be Christian, down from three-fourths just ten years ago. In another generation or so, people claiming to be Christian will be in the minority. For our children, that may already be true; for children across America, most of their peers don't know what it means to be Christian. Here in Lake County, the numbers don't seem so bad, but there are far more people who claim to be Christian than who actually believe or live as Christians. And those who aren't Christian, what do they think of us Christians? They're more likely to describe us as misogynistic, racist, and controlling than generous, friendly, and caring.

Those are just the stats. What about the stories? A middle schooler is shamed by his teacher in front of the class for saying he believes God created the world. A woman loses her job for refusing to go along with immoral or unethical behavior. I could go on, but you have your own stories, don't you? Funny looks, barbed comments, cold shoulders you get because you're Christian.

With all that going on around us, it can be so easy to think what? "We poor Christians." It can be so easy to think of ourselves as victims. And then what? We get wrapped up in our hurts and our frustrations and our disappointments; we get wrapped up in our fixes and our smarts and our power. In other words, we get wrapped up in our self.

Wrapped up in our self, it can be so easy to lose perspective. We are more free here to live and speak as Christians than billions of people around the world. Around the world, millions of Christians are in danger of being arrested, imprisoned, kidnaped, tortured, killed - why? for living and speaking as Christians. The freedom that we enjoy - to live and speak as Christians - even if it's less than what it used to be - is the exception in human history.

More importantly, when we get wrapped up in our self, thinking of ourselves as victims, we become defensive, attacking; offensive grumbling and complaining, judging. We fall into the trap of looking to politics and politicians, lawsuits and courts, thinking they will fix our world for the church. When we think of ourselves as victims, instead of living with the victory of Jesus Christ, we lose sight of what Jesus has for us - and we can't help but feel sorry for ourselves.

Should we? Should we feel sorry for ourselves? Should we be looking for pity? We won't get it from the world. Many people are glad to see Christianity's influence fading, glad to see us Christians put back in "our place," hoping to see us shut up and shut out. They're not thinking: "Poor Christians."

Poor Christians. Is that what Jesus would say?

Picture Jesus on the way to Golgotha, to the cross. His back shredded from the scourging. His face bruised purple from being beaten before the Jewish leaders, and Herod, and Pilate. Blood dripping from the thorns in his scalp. After a night without sleep, after a night of abuse, he's exhausted. His body crumples under the weight of the cross, so the soldiers draft someone from the crowd to carry it.

No wonder the women mourned and wailed! We don't know whether they were followers of Jesus or just followers of the action. Either way, we do know the sight of Jesus so brutally treated had them weeping and mourning.

But what does Jesus say? **“Don't cry for me! Mourn for yourselves and for your children!”** In fact, just five days earlier, Jesus had wept over the people of Jerusalem. Because they had rejected God's promised and delivered Messiah, they would experience God's judgment. The time was coming when mothers would rather be childless than have to watch their children suffer. People would beg to be crushed to death by a mountain rather than be starved, taken prisoner, tortured, and enslaved by their enemies. History tells us of those horrific things that happened just 40 years later when the Romans came to crush Jerusalem's revolt. Thinking ahead, Jesus didn't cheer that they would get what they had coming. No, before any of it happened, Jesus wept.

Jesus wept. Not for himself, but for his people coming under judgment. And not just for them, not just for his own people. Follow Jesus to the Place of the Skull; listen to Jesus as he's nailed to the cross. What are his first words? **“Father, forgive them.”** Forgive whom? His disciples? The women weeping for him? No, forgive the soldiers driving the nails through his hands and feet!

What do we hear there? A heart focused on others instead of self. He's thinking about the families of Israel, the Israel that's rejecting him. He's thinking about the soldiers who had no idea they were crucifying the Son of God. He's thinking of you and me. If Jesus had pitied himself, he could have escaped. But he was pitying us wretched sinners who were facing an eternal judgment, an eternal

destruction far worse than anything the Romans could mete out. That's what we deserve, but Jesus had sympathy for us, for you.

Think about that. Jesus' heart went out for you. But he didn't just weep for you, he took God's punishment for you. He died for you. He shed his blood to cover you, to hide you from the judgment and destruction that is coming.

What kept Jesus going through all that, through all that was being done to him? Thinking of you. Thinking of what he was doing for you. Thinking of you with him in heaven.

And what keeps us going? Not self-pity. Self-pity for how hard it might be to be a Christian doesn't keep us going; self pity sinks us. So what keeps us going? Anger? Pride? Pride that we're sticking with Christ? Anger against those against Christ? Anger and pride don't keep us going with Christ. Anger and pride show a heart twisting away from Christ.

So what keeps us going? Looking past ourselves, past our pride, past our hurts. Looking past ourselves to Jesus. To Jesus and his cross, to Jesus and his Easter. As we look to Jesus, we find strength in his Word and sacraments - "I'm here for you; I've got you; I'll get you through this." And as we see Jesus, we find him helping us carry our crosses.

Not just to get through the day. Not just to get through the harassment. Not just to escape. Not just to win our way and get our say. But Jesus helps us carry our crosses so we can look past our self and to look with pity, with sympathy, with love on the people around us.

We have brothers and sisters in the faith who are struggling with pain and temptation. We have people in the pews with us who are feeling the attacks of our anti-Christian world, people with us who are feeling harassed and put down for trying to walk the walk, and talk the walk of Jesus. Walk with them, talk with them, pray for them and remind them of what Jesus has for them.

And not just for them. Remember whom Jesus wept over; remember whom Jesus prayed for: **“Father, forgive them.”** People who were rejecting him, people who were nailing him to the cross. There is a destruction coming that this world cannot fathom, infinitely worse than the atrocities that took place in Jerusalem. Some might joke about it; some might deny it. But so many of those who put God on trial, so many of those who test you and judge you, are like the soldiers crucifying Jesus. They have no idea what they’re doing. They might think they’re fighting against outdated values or old-fashioned fairy tales; they might think they’re fighting for freedom and love. But they don’t realize they’re fighting against the Son of God, and they have no idea how badly it will end for them.

What if we saw those people like Jesus saw them. Not as enemies or obstacles, but as sinners like us. What if we saw them as fellow sinners who have been so duped by Satan’s lies that they’re doing his bidding without really realizing it? What if we were to have pity on them, pray for them, warn them, tell them about God’s forgiveness, just like Jesus did? Who knows how many might join us with Jesus!

So, in a world turning against Christ and his church, let’s skip the self-pity - it won’t do anybody any good. Instead of self-pity, show and share the pity, or better, the grace and mercy of Jesus. How? Not like a victim, but like a victor with the victory of Jesus.

“Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven!”

The God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen. (1 Peter 5:10-11)

February 3 & 4, 2024

THE SERVICE

IN OUR WORSHIP TODAY ... we look ahead to our mid-week Lent series: God on Trial. We live in a world judging God, and as we seek to walk and talk with and like Jesus, we find ourselves judged by the world. How do we respond when we find ourselves attacked with Christ and his Church? Do we feel sorry for ourselves? Or do we show the love of Jesus - a love that he extends to both friends and foes?

OPENING HYMN

"Rise! To Arms! With Prayer Employ You"
Hymn 871

Rise! To arms! With prayer employ you,
O Christians, lest the foe destroy you,
for Satan has designed your fall. Wield God's Word, a weapon glorious;
against each foe you'll be victorious, for God will set you o'er them all.
Fear not the prince of hell, here is Immanuel!
Sing hosanna! The strong ones yield
to Christ, our shield, and we as conqu'rors hold the field.

Cast afar this world's vain pleasure and boldly strive for heav'nly treasure.
Be steadfast in the Savior's might. Trust the Lord, who stands beside you,
for Jesus from all harm will hide you. By faith you'll conquer in the fight.
Take courage, weary soul! Look forward to the goal!
Joy awaits you. The race, then, run;
your battle done, the crown of glory will be won.

Jesus, all your children cherish, and keep them that they never perish
whom you have purchased with your blood. Let new life to us be given
that we may look to you in heaven whenever fearful is our mood.
Your Spirit on us pour that we may love you more,
hearts o'erflowing; and then shall we,
from sin set free, sing praise through all eternity.

INVOCATION

In the name of the Father and of the T Son and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

CONFESSION AND ABSOLUTION

If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves
and the truth is not in us.

**If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just
and will forgive us our sins
and purify us from all unrighteousness.**

Let us confess our sins to the Lord.

Holy God, gracious Father,

I am sinful by nature

and have sinned against you in my thoughts, words, and actions.

I have not loved you with my whole heart;

I have not loved others as I should.

I deserve your punishment both now and forever.

But Jesus, my Savior, paid for my sins

with his innocent suffering and death.

Trusting in him, I pray: God, have mercy on me, a sinner.

Silence for meditation and reflection

Our gracious Father in heaven has been merciful to us. He sent his only Son, Jesus Christ, who gave his life as the atoning sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. Therefore, as a called servant of Christ and by his authority, I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the T Son and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

LORD, HAVE MERCY (*Sung*)

In peace let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, have mercy.

For the peace from above and for our salvation, let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, have mercy.

For the peace of the whole world, for the well-being of the Church of God,
and for the unity of all, let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, have mercy.

For this holy house and for all who offer here their worship and praise, let
us pray to the Lord.

Lord, have mercy.

Help, save, comfort, and defend us, gracious Lord.

Amen.

GLORY TO GOD IN THE HIGHEST (SUNG)

CW 176

Refrain: Glory to God in the highest, and peace to his people on earth.

Lord God, heavenly King, almighty God and Father, we worship you, we
give you thanks, we praise you for your glory. *Refrain*

Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Father, Lord God, Lamb of God, you take
away the sin of the world; have mercy on us. You are seated at the right
hand of the Father; receive our prayer. *Refrain*

For you alone are the Holy One, you alone are the Lord, you alone are the
Most High, Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit in the glory of God the Father.
Amen. Amen. *Refrain*

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Lord God of our salvation, you have called us to be witnesses of the good
news of peace and hope in Jesus. Even so, the world continues to fight
against Christ and his Church. As we answer your call to show and share
Jesus with a world turned against him, keep us safe and confident in your
care, and give us the heart of Jesus to continue sharing his good news of
peace and hope and love; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who
lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.

FIRST READING

Philippians 1:12–18

Now I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what has happened to me has actually served to advance the gospel. As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. And because of my chains, most of the brothers and sisters have become confident in the Lord and dare all the more to proclaim the gospel without fear.

It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. The latter do so out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains. But what does it matter?

The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice.

Yes, and I will continue to rejoice.

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

PSALM OF THE DAY

Psalm 73A

Refrain

God is the strength of my heart and my por-tion for-ev - er.

Tone

As for me, my feet had / almost slipped;

I had nearly lost my / foothold.

For I envied the / arrogant

when I saw the prosperity of the / wicked.

It troubled me deeply till I entered the sanctuary / of God;

then I understood their final / destiny. *Refrain*

You guide me with your / counsel,
and afterward you will take me into / glory.
Whom have I in / heav'n but you?
And earth has nothing I desire be- / sides you.
My flesh and my / heart may fail,
but God is the strength of my heart and my portion for- / ever.
Glory be to the Father and / to the Son
and to the Holy / Spirit,
as it was in the be- / ginning,
is now, and will be forever. / Amen. Refrain

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Isaiah 40:31

Alleluia. Those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles. Alleluia.

GOSPEL

Luke 19:41–44; 23:26–34

As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it and said, "If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes. The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God's coming to you."

As the soldiers led him away, they seized Simon from Cyrene, who was on his way in from the country, and put the cross on him and made him carry it behind Jesus. A large number of people followed him, including women who mourned and wailed for him. Jesus turned and said to them, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and for your children. For the time will come when you will say, 'Blessed are the childless women, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!' Then

“ ‘they will say to the mountains, “Fall on us!”
and to the hills, “Cover us!” ’

For if people do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?"

Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him to be executed. When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified him there, along with the criminals—one on his right, the other on his left. Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." And they divided up his clothes by casting lots."

The Gospel of the Lord. **Praise be to you, O Christ!**

HYMN OF THE DAY

"O Lord, Take Pity Once You've Seen"

Hymn 865

O Lord, take pity once you've seen what's leaving us so shaken:
your saints are few and far between— we feel we've been forsaken.
So many call your Word untrue, refusing to believe in you—
they have us far outnumbered.

May God root out all those who teach religion that is twisted,
who say with bold, defiant speech: "We cannot be resisted.
For we alone have right and might; our views are welcomed with delight.
To whom must we now answer?"

Therefore God says: "I won't delay! My people's hopes are waning.
Their sighs disclose their great dismay; I've heard their sad complaining.
My healing Word will work as planned,
will bring relief, will make them stand, will strengthen and uphold them."

Dear Lord, the godless gather round the guides whose teachings suit them.
Within your Church let there be found the courage to refute them.
Preserve your Word and keep it pure, and thus we shall remain secure
from evils that surround us!

SERMON

NICENE CREED

We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one being with the Father. Through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation, he came down from heaven, was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, and became truly human. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate. He suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who in unity with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets. We believe in one holy Christian and apostolic Church. We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. Amen.

PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

Eternal Lord, give us peace as we ponder the good news that you forgive our sins in Christ. Lead us to see clearly the path you have laid out for us.
Work in us so that we believe and live the Word we have heard today.

Provide courage and compassion to all who preach and teach your Word. Fill them with a love like yours as they proclaim your grace to us and all people.

Move us to love all ministers of the Word wherever they serve.

Guard and guide the families of our congregation. Lead husbands and wives to love each other with commitment, respect, and patience. Help parents to grasp the eternal value of keeping their children close to Jesus all their lives. Grant joy to those who are single, and make them a blessing to others.

Protect us from the temptations that surround us; give us pure hearts and minds.

Provide wisdom and insight to those who make laws and set policies. Give us respect for those who protect us from crime. Lead us to value the rights of our fellow citizens and to defend those who cannot defend themselves.

Bless our land with peace and prosperity so that the gospel may be proclaimed to all.

Give us passion to share the story of your love with our family and friends. Overcome unbelief, and open the hearts of people everywhere to believe the good news that Jesus has forgiven their sins and opened the gates of heaven.

Fill us with joy over every sinner who repents and comes to trust in you.

Extend your healing power to those who are sick and suffering in body or mind. [Pour out your special blessing on . . . *here name the person and the cause of the petition.*] Give patience and compassion to all who care for the sick and dying.

Lift the eyes of the distressed to your love in Christ.

Hear us, Lord, as we pray in silence.

Silent prayer

Gracious God, you govern and direct all things and you love all people. Hear our prayers, spoken and silent, and answer them in your wisdom and grace.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

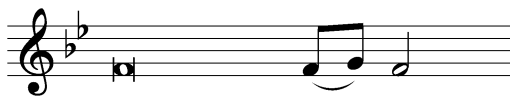
LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

THE SACRAMENT

(Guests, please see our communion practice on page 2.)

(Gluten-free wafers are available; ask Pastor.)



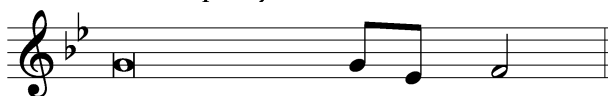
The Lord be with you.



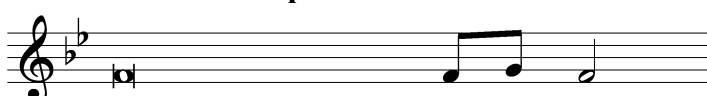
And al - so with you.



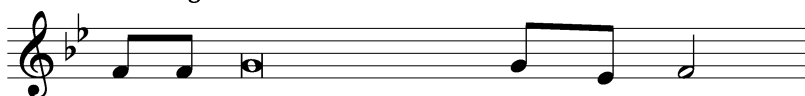
Lift up your hearts.



We lift them up to the Lord.



Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.



It is right to give him thanks and praise.

It is truly good and right that we should at all times and in all places give you thanks, O Lord, holy Father, almighty and everlasting God, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lived among us as a human being and revealed his glory as your only Son, full of grace and truth. Therefore, with all the saints on earth and hosts of heaven, we praise your holy name and join their glorious song:

HOLY, HOLY, HOLY (SUNG)

Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power, God of might.

Heaven and earth are full of your glory.

Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

Hosanna in the highest, hosanna in the highest!

WORDS OF INSTITUTION

Our Lord Jesus Christ, on the night he was betrayed, took bread; and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is my T body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

Then he took the cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you; this is my T blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins. Do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me."

The peace of the Lord be with you always.

Amen.

JESUS, LAMB OF GOD (SUNG)

Jesus, Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world; have mercy on us.

Jesus, Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world; have mercy on us.

Jesus, Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world; grant us your peace.

DISTRIBUTION HYMN

"Here, O My Lord, I See You Face to Face"

Hymn 660

Here, O my Lord, I see you face to face;
here would I touch and handle things unseen,
here grasp with firmer hand eternal grace,
and all my weariness upon you lean.

This is the hour of banquet and of song;
this is the heav'nly table spread anew.
Here let me feast and, feasting, still prolong
the brief bright hour of fellowship with you.

I have no help but yours nor do I need another arm but yours to lean upon.
It is enough, O Lord, enough indeed;
my strength is in your might, your might alone.

Mine is the sin but yours the righteousness;
mine is the guilt but yours the cleansing blood.
Here is my robe, my refuge, and my peace:
your blood, your righteousness, O Lord, my God.

Too soon we rise; the vessels disappear;
the feast, though not the love, is past and gone.
The bread and wine remove, but you are here,
nearer than ever, still my shield and sun.

Feast after feast thus comes and passes by,
yet, passing, points to that glad feast above,
giving sweet foretaste of the festal joy,
the Lamb's great marriage feast of bliss and love.

CLOSING PRAYER

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;
his mercy endures forever.

Whenever we eat this bread and drink this cup,
we proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

We give you thanks, O Lord, for the foretaste of the heavenly banquet you have given us in this Sacrament. Through this gift you have fed our faith, nourished our hope, and strengthened our love. By your Spirit, help us to live as your holy people until that day when you will receive us as your guests at the wedding supper of the Lamb, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

BLESSING

The Lord bless you and keep you.

The Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you.

The Lord look on you with favor and give you peace. **Amen.**

CLOSING HYMN

"O Church, Arise"

Hymn 870

O Church, arise and put your armor on; hear the call of Christ our captain.
For now the weak can say that they are strong
in the strength that God has given.
With shield of faith and belt of truth we'll stand against the devil's lies;
an army bold whose battle cry is love, reaching out to those in darkness.

Our call to war—to love the captive soul, but to rage against the captor;
and with the sword that makes the wounded whole
we will fight with faith and valor.
When faced with trials on ev'ry side, we know the outcome is secure,
and Christ will have the prize for which he died—
an inheritance of nations.

Come see the cross, where love and mercy meet,
as the Son of God is stricken;
then see his foes lie crushed beneath his feet, for the Conqueror has risen!
And as the stone is rolled away, and Christ emerges from the grave,
this vict'ry march continues till the day ev'ry eye and heart shall see him.

So Spirit come, put strength in ev'ry stride, give grace for ev'ry hurdle,
that we may run with faith to win the prize of a servant good and faithful.
As saints of old still line the way, retelling triumphs of his grace,
we hear their calls and hunger for the day
when with Christ we stand in glory.

OFFERING

*If you prefer online giving, you may scan this code
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Celebration in Uganda

Last summer, our synod declared fellowship with the Obadiah Lutheran Synod (OLS), a small confessional Lutheran church body in the African nation of Uganda. On Jan. 13, the OLS held a synodwide worship service celebrating its fellowship with WELS. Members of the OLS traveled from towns and villages through southeastern Uganda to attend—some for more than six hours. More than 800 people attended the special worship celebration. Missionary Howard Mohlke and I were blessed to attend as the representatives of WELS.

The morning began with heavy rains. Because the celebration was to be held outdoors and the dirt roads leading to the location were impassable, the service was delayed for several hours until the rain stopped. But the weather did not dampen the enthusiasm of those who came to worship. The service began with songs by the youth choir and with the robust singing of many hymns by the worshipers. The service also included the ordination of a new OLS pastor, an address by OLS President Makisimu Musa, and words of encouragement from many of the OLS pastors in attendance. The celebration also included words of greeting from the WELS representatives as well as encouraging words of congratulations by local and national Ugandan government officials.

Just as the delegates at our WELS convention last summer were overjoyed to establish fellowship with the OLS and thanked God for the blessing, so the people of the OLS shared in that joy and thanks.

The OLS is planting new congregations in towns and villages throughout Uganda, and it is being blessed with a growth in membership. Along with that growth comes challenges, especially when it comes to the need for all-wheel drive vehicles that can negotiate the bumpy and muddy roads to enable contact with remote congregations. And while the synod builds its own churches with locally made mud-fired brick, it is in need of funds to provide roofs for those buildings.

WELS members have been generous in their support for these projects, and the OLS is very grateful for what has been received. But additional funds are needed to complete the necessary projects. If you would like to support the OLS in the gospel ministry it is faithfully carrying out, you can send your gift to WELS World Missions, designated for the OLS in Uganda, or **donate online**.

Serving with you in Christ,
WELS President Mark Schroeder