



August 17, 2023

Brothers,

Summer greetings to you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ!

The end of summer activities and transition to the fall schedule always gets a bit hectic. I hope you were able to get away to enjoy some rest and relaxation this summer before the frenzy of the season ahead is once again thrust upon you.

Eugene Peterson once wrote that only lazy people are busy. He meant that taking the initiative to plan a reasonable schedule including time for family, rest, prayer, and meditation leads to a calm and ordered life, and, hence, contentment in ministry. The kingdom of God does not come by means of adrenalin and our hectic activity, but by means of God's Spirit working through His Word.

Jesus regularly took time for rest and renewal, which for Him included intentional time for prayer and meditation upon the Word of God. Part of His regular routine was to go off by Himself to pray (Matt. 14:23; Mark 1:35; Luke 5:16). He invited his disciples to unplug from the daily press of ministry to "come away by yourselves ...and rest a while" (Mark 6:31). I found myself praying regularly for you this summer, that the Lord would grant you energy and joy amid the difficulties of ministry and that the Good News of Christ the crucified would continue to be proclaimed to your people and community.

My summer was rather full and rewarding, even if packed with many miles journeyed. I managed to get away for time with my immediate and extended families, interspersed with traveling all over the district - preaching at multiple anniversary celebrations, installations, and ordinations. One of my special joys is to capture a snapshot of the wonderful ministries of our MN South District and how you men diligently carry on in the care of souls and the proclamation of the Gospel despite the winds of change and opposition. There is so much to celebrate! Thank you for your dedicated service and faithful work in God's kingdom.

Another joy for me is meeting the wonderful lay men and women of our district who love their congregations and pastors, and willingly sacrifice their time and effort to assist in congregation life and ministry. I had many engaging conversations and learned much about the history, hopes, and dreams of multiple congregations. Sometimes these conversations included fond memories that celebrated great successes. Others recounted significant struggles and friction, while some expressed a longing for the distant past. But every time, I was thankful for the interaction with these precious souls and what I learned. Each conversation underscored the importance of pastors finding time away to pray and focus on our Lord and His Word amid all the bustle and burdens of ministry.

Brothers, here's my point. I realize it's easy to get lost in the problems and busyness of ministry, which sometimes includes sweating it out with your critics. But it's important you take notice of

what you're doing in the name of Christ and celebrate it. After all, you are the Lord's own servant, placed exactly there in that place to tend the precious sheep and lambs of Christ with his transforming Word and healing sacraments. You proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God which brings the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Our gracious God wants you there so the many lost sheep of your communities can hear a word of compassion and hope in Christ Jesus.

However, you also need that same hope and consolation for your own life and ministry. When you try to go it alone, keeping a stiff upper lip amid all the chaos of ministry, the devil has you cornered. He gleefully watches you wither away under the pressures and strains of ministry, because you've never allowed yourself to celebrate what's been accomplished through you or ever take a break to find rest and reprieve.

If our Lord intentionally took time away from His work and ministry, you can too. So, here's my challenge. Get out your calendars and look at each month all the way thru Easter Sunday (March 31, 2024). Mark out a day at least once a month when you will unplug and take some intentional time away to pray and meditate on the Word of God. It will be good for your soul, good for your ministry, and good for your flock.

In fact, I will *go first* and do the same thing. Those of you who know me well know I'm not always geared that way, but I'm going to mark off my seven days of prayer and meditation right now - and stick to it! Won't you join me, please? The soul you save may be your own.

Your brother in Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Rev. Dr. Lucas V. Woodford". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the typed name.

Rev. Dr. Lucas V. Woodford