

¹⁴ When [Jesus] went ashore, he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion for them and cured their sick. ¹⁵ When it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, “This is a deserted place, and the hour is now late; send the crowds away so that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves.” ¹⁶ Jesus said to them, “They need not go away; you give them something to eat.” ¹⁷ They replied, “We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish.” ¹⁸ And he said, “Bring them here to me.” ¹⁹ Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven and blessed and broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. ²⁰ And all ate and were filled, and they took up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve baskets full. ²¹ And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.

Matthew 14:14-21

WE ARE CALLED
Rev. Dave Whetter

On September 5, 2024 three ELCA Synods from the United States, (NE Minnesota Synod, NW Washington Synod and the Central States Synod) sent representatives to Belgrade, Serbia to visit with our Russian companion synod, the Synod of the Urals, Siberia and the Far East. Belgrade was chosen as our meeting site because it was a place where all of us could safely gather. Jon Brudvig and I went representing the CSS. Our goal was to reestablish our ties with our Companion Synod partners in Eastern Russia as we had not met with them in person since before the war in Ukraine started. The trip was to last one week, but upon arrival we quickly learned that because of unforeseen circumstances we were only able to stay for two days.

Although saddened that our time together would be short, through conversations at meals and more formal meeting times, we quickly reestablished our ties and our common mission of sharing the Gospel. As I listened to our Russian partners, I realized that many of the issues we face in the church here in the US, declining membership, fewer young people, secularism... are the same issues our Companion Partners face. There is one major difference, however, that I have continued to pray and worry about when it comes to our Companion siblings. Archbishop Provorov shared with us that in Russia the church is constantly viewed with suspicion as the government and others focus on rooting “spies” and “enemies of the state.” Lutherans are especially viewed with suspicion because of their ties to the “enemy” – Germany and the USA.

The persecution of Christians is real in this world and there are incredible faith leaders in other places in this world, like Russia, that face real persecution daily just because they know they are called to share the Gospel. They are called to feed the people, even when others are looking at them with suspicion and seeking to have them jailed, or worse for being enemies of the state because of their faith. Archbishop Provorov shared the Matthew text above to point out that even though they have little in Russia, God has called them, even in the face of real danger, to keep feeding those who are in need.

We have that same call, don't we? We are called to share the Gospel and feed the world. As we journey through this Season of Epiphany, a season in which we reflect on the divinity of Jesus and how we are to respond to this gift, may we remember that we are called to feed and to love the world.

Prayer:

God of our hopes and dreams, so often we feel as though we do not have enough for ourselves, let alone for others. Gather us into your love and open our heart and our minds to your ways so that we might be able to not only see all our blessings but discover ways that we can share our blessings with the world. Guide us to be those that feed the world and share your love. Amen.