

EASSTER V  
Luth Church of the Master, Troy  
May 16, 1976

"AN ORGANIC CONNECTION"

"I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing."  
John 15:5

Soon the summer camping season will hit full tilt around Michigan. One can hardly live in Michigan and not like camping. And with camping comes the campfire.

I am confident that almost all of us have had to at one time build a campfire. And that process always begins with a search for firewood. We look for the dry firewood.

How great we feel when we find dry wood. ~~leaves~~, leaves gone, branches dry, yes, dead. You bite your axe into it -- and so often then you discover almost total decay from the inside. What you thought would be great firewood turns out to be WORTHLESS DUST.

Such is the nature of today's theme -- the focus is upon healthy relationships. Jesus says, I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit -- FOR APART FROM ~~ME~~, you are nothing but WORTHLESS DUST.

Through vivid metaphors of nature, Jesus illustrates that we (the branches) are dependent upon Christ (the vine) IF WE DESIRE TO PRODUCE HEALTHY FRUIT. Jesus makes clear that the whole purpose of the branches (of God's people) is to produce fruit that can sustain others.

He says - detached from the vine, the branch produces nothing. It withers and dies. And what do we do with dead branches - we through them in the fire. They are useless.

Jesus here says that there is an organic connection between him and his followers. And

Whenever anything is organically connected, there is always the same result -- nourishing fruits. Jesus is saying that life without this organic connection is spelled -- hell.

So it is that he uses the image of a grapevine. Spreading its branches, each is intended to bring forth fruit. The vinegrower doesn't invest time and effort in cultivating vines merely so that they will look good. He looks for results. For good fruits.

So it is with God, our vinedresser. Through baptism, God has grafted us to the vine of Christ. Through baptism, we have been promised eternal nourishment from the vine.

So - there can be only one result -- good fruits. This doesn't mean a doctrine of good works FOR THE SAKE of good works -- it means that BECAUSE we are grafted to the vine there can be ONLY ONE RESULT -- fruitful works.

To claim an organic connection to Christ without any production of FRUITFUL WORKS is pure hypocrisy. That doesn't mean that we are perfect in our works -- nor does it mean that we are saved by our fruitful works -- BUT IT DOES MEAN THAT WE' DO SHOW FORTH THE WORKS OF THE LORD -- because we are organically connected to him.

And what are those fruits. Paul enumerates them as follows: the fruits of the spirit are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control."

That's what we are given through Christ - and that's what we have to offer to others because of our organic connection. So - today we take a good look in our fruitbaskets -- what do we find there -- love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, & self-control

Those are the fruits of our organic connection; let's continue to cultivate the orchard of life with these organic fruits -- there is no better health food for our society. AMEN

5th SUNDAY OF EASTER

(Mother's Day)

Lutheran Church of the Master, Troy

May 8, 1977

"A NEW COMMANDMENT"

"I give you a new commandment: love one another; as I have loved you, so you are to love one another. If there is this love among you, then all will know that you are my disciples."

John 13:34-35

Over the course of a lifetime, each of us may have memory of only a few gems. That is, in a lifetime of being a Christian -- a few illustrations of the faith may really stand out over all the rest.

Recently - through the Adult Seminar that I've been teaching - the originator of the course shared a story WHICH BETTER THAN ANYTHING ELSE gives great insight into our faith.

But even more than that - it really points up the nature of Christian love. Love, love, love -- we hear about it so much, and understand it so little. But this illustration (for me) really nails down the essence of love. ~~It truly confirms why YOU AND I can glorify God as we know him through our Christian faith.~~

Yes, more than anything I've ever heard -- it gloriously illustrates why you and I believe in Jesus Christ and HIS LOVE. I beg the forgiveness of the evening seminar -- for you'll now hear it for the second time.

There are really only two faiths - two religions in the world. Let me illustrate. You're walking along one day and you fall into a very large hole. And you start scratching and jumping trying to get out - and then you hear something, and you look -- and behold - there's a serpent back there -- a deadly poisonous one. And now you're really panic-stricken.

And along comes a Mohammeden. And he looks down and

says - "Ah, dear brother, I see you've fallen in a hole. I'm indeed sorry for you. But all in this world is all His will. And this too is part of his will for you. Submit - resign yourself to his will." And he goes on his way and leaves you in the hole.

And along comes a Hindu. And he looks down and says, "Ah, dear brother, I see you've fallen in a hole; I'm indeed sorry for you. But Nearvana is our goal -- absorption into the diety -- and we reach that by contemplation ----- Contemplate!" And he goes on his way and leaves you in the hole.

Along comes a Buddhist. And he looks down and says, "Ah, dear brother, I see you've fallen in a hole; I'm indeed sorry for you. But the eight-fold path to virtue is the way to God -- and when those are perfected, you will reach him. You obviously have not perfected those yet - or you'd not be in the hole. Contemplate - perfect them." He goes on his way and leaves you in the hole.

Along comes a Confucist. And he says, "Ah sooo, dear brother, I see you've fallen in a hole; I'm indeed sorry for you. But all in this world is "ying" and "yang" and comes out in the "y'end." And he goes on his way and leaves you in the hole.

And -- along comes Jesus Christ. And he looks down and sees you in the hole -- and WITHOUT A WORD, HE JUMPS IN THE HOLE WITH YOU. And - he pushes you out of the hole. And as he does so, the serpent bites him. And he falls dead in the bottom of the hole - and you walk away a free man.

And that's the difference -- that's what makes the difference between the love of Christ and all other religions and faiths in the world. There is no love like the love of God in Jesus Christ.

All the rest of the religions and peoples of the world leave you in the hole. And God gets in the hole with us. All the rest of them -- everybody else -- will tell you to reach eternal life OR the eternal good

on YOUR OWN. By striving, contemplating, or by some other striving after perfection. Only Jesus Christ got in the hole with us - and ended up dead in order to get us out of the hole. And then his resurrection - closed the hole.

My dear Christian friends -- now who can claim that God has not loved us? Who can claim that he doesn't know the love of God in Christ? Only someone who doesn't want to know it - who doesn't want to receive it - who doesn't want to share it.

Yes - God so loved the world, that he got into the hole that we've created for ourselves -- and pushed us out -- only to die in doing it. That's the love of Christ for you and me. And because he's given that love to us -- he says: now I give you a new commandment - to love as I have loved you.

Yes - disciples of Christ are people who don't philosophize when they see someone in a hole -- they don't tell the person to wish himself or pray himself out of a hole. They get into the hole and help the other person out... even when it means personal sacrifice.

We thank God for this beautiful parable from Dr. Jim Kennedy. But we thank God also for those persons who have lived this parable -- and who continue to live it. People who instead of just talking and philosophizing or complaining how tough they've got it -- yes, people who get into the hole and shove us out. These people have not only received the love of Christ -- they are offering it.

And I can't help but say today that those people SO VERY OFTEN are known as MOTHERS. Yes - go ahead, call me a chauvinist -- but admit it or not, mothers more often than fathers GET INTO THE HOLE and shove us out. Their not afraid to get dirty - to get close to the sick and dying -- to be compassionate to the needy and underprivileged.

It's often the fathers who rationalize - who criticize-- who hold back the love of Christ -- who demand that the person pull himself out of the hole.

But thank God that the love of Christ lives a bit more passionately in mothers. Yes - thank God for those who see a man, woman or child in a hole -- and JUMP IN. Especially, thank God for our mothers - who are so often the most shining example of Christ's NEW COMMANDMENT.

Yes - if there is this kind of love among us -- then we surely know that we are his disciples."

AMEN

EASTER V

Luth Church of the Master, Troy  
May 12, 1979 (Mother's Day)

"LOVE LIKE MOM"

"Little children, let us not love in word and  
speech but in deed and in truth." I John 3:18

While at the Synod Convention, one of the  
Oakland County pastors came up to me and  
prodingly asked: "Well, Pete, have you got your  
sermon all done for Sunday?"

I was quick to answer - "Nope ... but I do  
have the title and theme.

He responded: "What is it?"

The title is, "Love Like Moms," meaning that  
I believe the love that God commands is often  
best exemplified in the lives of our mothers.

Well - my good brother and preacher friend  
was aghast that I was going to bring mothers into  
my sermon. He proudly claimed that he had not  
made mention of mothers at all on Mother's Day  
for the last 14 years. He acted as if the Word  
of God was going to be corrupted somehow by the  
mention of mothers.

Well, I struck back fast and hard. I told him  
that's ridiculous... especially on a Sunday when  
the theme of the text is to OBEY GOD BY NOT ONLY  
LOVING IN WORD AND SPEECH - BUT IN DEED AND TRUTH.  
I told him -- what better illustration could  
you have of this text than the love of mothers.  
~~Mother's Day could not have been given a better~~  
text than the one from I John 3.

Needless to say - my attempts to illustrate  
the text today will be largely drawn from  
the real world of motherhood. I doubt that a  
better arena can be found TO ILLUSTRATE THE TRUE  
NATURE OF THE LOVE OF GOD ... that it is a love

of not only word and speech -- but one of great merciful deed and truth. So allow me this opportunity to string together a few examples of famous and not-so-famous mothers who make God's commandment to love MORE THAN MERE WORDS AND SPEECH.

First there is the case of a young boy named Thomas /Edison and his mother. Edison was told that he could never finish school because he was too stupid. The school superintendent sent Thomas home one day with a note of expulsion. For the rest of his life Edison never went back to school.

However, he had a mother who possessed a simple but unconquerable faith. She convinced him that life had a great purpose for him. And when he family became a famous inventor - he said: "My mother taught me not only the three R's, but she implanted in my mind the love and purpose of learning. My mother was the making of me; she let me follow my bent."

Edison's mother offered more than word and speech -- she loved by letting go. She planted the seed, and then gave it plenty of room to blossom. She loved Thomas enough to let him fail, even when she had confidence that he would succeed. That's the love of a great mother ... because it's love in the image and command of God.

John Wesley's mother often told him to do something a number of times. Repeatedly - she would ask him without raising her voice -- without showing her deep frustration. One time - after giving him instructions for the 20th time, he husband said: "Susannah, I'm amazed at your patience! You've already told the boy 20 times. And she replied: "If I had stopped at 19, the whole of my effort would have been wasted. It was the 20th time that crowned the whole endeavor."

The love of deed and truth is a love that does



not quit on the 19th times. That is the love of God for us, and it is so often the love of a mother for her children. It is that act of mercy which does not stop at the 19th offering... but always goes one further - HOPING THAT THE WHOLE ENDEAVOR WILL BE CROWNED.

At a summer boy's camp a counselor regularly inspected the living quarters each morning. On the first day - he found a large umbrella hidden between the bed sheets of a small boy. Since this was not a required item of the camp - he asked the boy for an explanation. The little boy looked up on the counselor - and finally solemnly asked: "Sire, did you never have a mother?"

Being a mother means sending your little boy to camp with a big black umbrella; and being the little boy means you spend a whole week at camp trying to hide the umbrella from the other kids. But that umbrella represents the deep concern a mother has for her children .. a concern that goes far beyond mere word or speech. Just like God, a mother provides her children with the tools that will protect them from dangerous or harmful exposure.

There's a story told of a husband - who being a good chauvinist - decided to give his wife a day off from domestic duty. When she returned at the end of the day, he was near collapse. He had kept a list of all the things he did while she was gone: Opened the door for the kids 106 times; shouted "Don't" 94 times; stopped quarrels 17 times; wiped noses 19 times; answered 145 different questions; lost his temper 45 times; and ran after the children 4 miles.

I do think this story has become a bit embellished but the point is well made: Being a mother is so much more than loving in a word or speech. It is literally a sacrificial chore too often overlooked by many - esp husbands and fathers.

~~When from dangerous or harmful exposure.~~

Victor Hugo tells of a French mother after the Revolution who was driven from her home with her two children. They wandered through woods for days living on roots and leaves. On the third day, they hid in some bushes as soldiers approached. But the captain heard some rustling - and had his sergeant investigate. Upon finding the mother and children, the sergeant took them to the captain who say they were starving. At once he gave them a small loaf of bread. The mother eagerly took it, broke it in half and gave it to the two children.

The sergeant in amazement asked the captain: Is it because the mother is not hungry?? And the captain replied: "No Sergeant, it is because she is a mother!"

Loving in deed and truth means sacrificing ... not because it's the thing you want to do ... not because it's easy to do ... but because it's the godly thing to do when there are those whose need is greater. It is my hope that we will illustrate this truth today through our Mother's Day Offering to sponsor our Vietnamese family. Here is where we as a congregation can show our love IS MORE THAN WORD AND SPEECH ... it is deed and truth. It is the kind of love a mother has for her starving children ... love which gives up for the sake of those in greater need ... love which responds obediently to the command of God.

Dr. G. Campbell Morgan and his wife had four sons who became pastors. At a family reunion a friend asked one of the sons, "Which Morgan is the greatest preacher among you?" The son looked at his famous preacher-father, and then promptly replied: "My mother!"

Yes - mother's are often the best preachers, because they not only love in word and speech --

but they love in deed and in truth. They may not have an ordination certificate like my pastor friend -- they may not be able to articulate theology like my pastor friend -- but they do a heck of a good job of following the command of God: they love others in deed and in truth.

Obviously - not all mothers deserve such praise and glory. But all godly mothers most definitely do. All mothers who name Christ as their Lord surely deserve to be affirmed on this day ... and everyday for **seeking** to fulfill IN DEED AND IN TRUTH the loving will of the Father in heaven.

So whether your mother is dead in Christ like mine ... or living in Christ - all such mothers have and will continue to be **THE MOST POWERFUL WITNESSES OF THOSE WHO ABIDE IN HIM, AND HE IN THEM.**

For they have not only loved in word and speech, but in deed and truth.

AMEN

EASTER V  
Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo  
May 1, 1983  
Peter R. Martyn, Pastor

"THE DISTINCTIVE MARK"

"By this all persons will know that you are my disciples,  
if you have love for one another." John 13:35

Regardless of our profession, our age, our maturity, our educational status, or our life experiences -- we are all involved in a search! Life, at many times, is one big test tube experiment. We test it and examine it -- we probe it and ponder it -- and we keep on searching for what we are seeking. And what are we seeking?? AUTHENTICITY!! We are searching for authenticity! No one wants to be taken in. Whether its making a purchase... or building friendships, or terminating a partnership, or voting in an election -- we all want to discover the truth! The false ... the stuff done for show ... the slick gloss of life inevitably betrays us. The phrase "truth in advertising," has become so essential and necessary today because "truth" has often become a casualty in the massive effort to shape buying habits.

For instance - what's the truth about the koala bear -- the beautiful little bear portrayed in the airline commercials as a cuddly, furry, creature that everyone would love to bring home from Australia. Well, according to John Brown, Minister of Tourism for Australia, "koaholas are not cuddly little animals at all." This past Thurs Mr. Brown spoke to a Tourist Industry Association luncheon in Brisbon, saying: "the belief of Americans that koaholas are lovely, cuddly little bears is fairly well exploded when they arrive in Austrailia and pick up one of the rotten, little things." He went on to say: "they find that koaholas are flee-ridden, it piddles on you, it stinks, and it scratches like crazy!"

It's obvious from this report -- koalals are not distinctively cuddly at all -- as they are advertised. Well - there is not only a search for truth in advertising today -- there is also a search for authenticity on the religious scene. Rightfully so, many are asking today: Who are the genuine disciples of Christ?? Who are the authentic spokesman of the truth?? If you listen to the many denominations answer this question -- it often sounds like an Australian airline advertisement: you'll hear many competing and conflicting claims of "whose got the truth."

Jesus' answer comes much closer to the heart of it. It is not by traveling a certain prescribed route or canon law; it is not by being able to use all the right religious words. These are not authentic faith or discipleship. Jesus says: "By this (distinctive mark) all persons will know that you are my disciples -- if you have love for one another!"

That's the distinctive mark of Jesus Christ ... and that's the distinctive mark of those who follow him: "to love one another." This theme of love is hardly anything new for those of us who gather regularly for Word and Sacrament. But as old as the theme -- we just can't get away from it -- and if we're honest with ourselves and one another -- the facts are that we need to hear about it ... and find ways to revitalize it in our lives. Because -- this power of love is the most basic foundation to religious authenticity. And if we are really searching for authenticity in religion -- then we are also searching for authenticity of love.

One author has recently given me a new insight into this power called love. He breaks "love" into three stages: proclamation, intimacy, and imitation. He claims that imitation is the last stage of love or friendship -- what he calls the highest stage -- the stage that Christ desires from us.

This author says: we all know what happens when people come to know and admire and desire affection with one another -- they fall in love. He calls this the first level of love -- the level of proclamation. The first thing we do when we fall in love is tell everyone else about it. When you're in love you just can't help talking about that other person -- sometimes even to the point of boredom for other people. When we fall in love -- we want to tell (proclaim) it to the whole world.

But the newness of that feeling soon wears off -- and we begin to quiet down. We stop talking about our "loving relationship" and instead we begin to live it. This is the level of intimacy-- we want to be in the company of that other person, spend time together, go places, do things -- just simply be together. That's a great stage too. But the author claims (and I agree) that real love does not stop there!

He goes on to a third level! He says: "The greatest expression

of love comes when we begin to imitate the person we love -- when we begin to make that other person a model for our own lives." He illustrates by saying that when couples grow old together they begin to act alike -- sometimes even look alike. They begin to reflect one spirit -- they look at things in the same way -- they start to share the same likes and dislikes, they begin to take on the same habits and actions.

For this author - "imitation" is the distinctive mark of love. And whether we agree with the author or not for our own lives -- he has hit the mark for the life of Christ. Jesus was not talking about mere proclamation or intimacy in the gospel -- the new commandment he gives us is a blueprint for imitation. Imitate me, he says, in your love for one another.

When people are searching for authentic religious communities they are looking for people and congregations that imitate the love of Christ. When they see that which is contrary -- they have reason to be upset with the church -- especially the Christian Church.

That was so aptly illustrated this past week in the hallway outside the church office. One of our staff members had a friend visiting that day. The friend was waiting for the staff member in the hallway. While waiting - she couldn't help but overhear some of our teenagers using the church phones. They were calling "800" numbers and ordering magazines under fictitious names

That is the distinctive mark that has been left with this friend of our church staff. This person has been left with a very false impression of Hope's teenagers. But as Jesus says -- we are known by what we do. We can either imitate him, or we can choose to do some of the stupid things that are urged by the world around us.

Jesus prays that we will be authentic followers -- imitating him. Jesus says - no greater love can a man have than to lay down his life for his friends. That is the distinctive mark of the Christian faith. And it is best illustrated in the famous story of the man who was walking along innocently and fell into a deep pit. He jumped and scratched to get out of the pit -- but his efforts were futile. And as he was about to rest for a moment -- he noticed a poisonous snake in the pit with him. He was now panic-stricken.

About that time -- a Mohammeden came along. And he looked down into the pit and said: "Ah, dear brother - I see you've fallen into the hole. I'm sorry for you. But all in this world is His will. And this too is part of his will. Submit, and resign yourself to it." And he went on his way.

A few moments later - a Hindu heard the man. He looked down and said: "Ah, dear brother, I see you've fallen into this hole; I'm indeed sorry for you. But Nearvana is our goal - absorption into the diety -- and we reach that by contemplation. So, please contemplate!" And he went on his way.

Some time later a Buddhist passed by. And he looked down and said: "Ah, dear brother, I see you've fallen into this hole; I'm indeed sorry for you. But the eight-fold path to virtue is God's way. So perfect the eight-fold path, and then you will reach God. You obviously have not perfected that path of virtue -- or you wouldn't be in this hole." Perfect those virtues." And he went on his way.

Along came Confucist. And he said, "Ah soooo, dear brother, it appears that you have fallen in this hole; I'm indeed sorry for you. But all in this world is "ying' and "yang," and all comes out in the "y'end." And he went on his way.

Then along came Jesus Christ. And he looked down and saw the man in the hole -- AND WITHOUT A WORD, HE JUMPED IN THE HOLE WITH THE MAN. And he pushed the man out -- and in the process, he was bitten by the snake. And he fell dead at the bottom of the hole -- and the other man walked away a free man.

That's the distinctive mark of the love of Christ -- he gets into the HOLES that we have made for ourselves -- and helps us out through his love. And then he suffers the consequences for our mistakes. All the other religions of the world leave the man in the hole -- they tell the man to CONTEMPLATE or to STRIVE FOR PERFECTION. Only Jesus Christ gets into the hole and helps. And then gives up his own life to save another -- and then his resurrection closes up the holes of life forever.

So you say you're still searching for the authentic expression of God and religion. Well, in Jesus Christ, you have found the most distinctive mark that can be found of God in the world-- he loved us enough to die for us! He says: By this you will know that you are my disciples: if you love one another. And that may mean getting into the pit of someone else's problems!

AMEN

EASTER V  
Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo  
May 20, 1984  
Peter R. Martyn, Pastor

"THIS IS THE LIFE!"

"You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light."

I Peter 2:8f

"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. ... I am the way, and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

John 14:1,6

"Let not your hearts be troubled!" Who is Jesus trying to fool with these easy words?? He was about to depart company from his dearest friends - his disciples. After three grueling years of sacrifice and ministry in His name, he comes to his final meeting with his closest earthly associates in the Upper Room and says: "Let not your hearts be troubled." How would you or I have reacted to such "easy" words?? After giving up everything for this Messiah -- our jobs, our income, our security, even our families -- now he tells us "not to be troubled!" After all - he's only going to be crucified ... he's only going to die a horrible death on the cross. But don't be troubled!!

These words were not easy words for those first disciples to hear!! The situation isn't much different today! They are still not easy words to hear regardless of the circumstances of our lives. As many of you know - I have often said these words at funerals!! They are beautiful words of hope and resurrection in the midst of death! They are words EASILY said in the face of death -- but they ARE NOT EASILY HEARD!! The pain and loss and emptiness ARE VERY REAL. Comfort and consolation does not come easily from six or seven comforting words.

But we must certainly remember -- these words were not intended as mere reassurance in the face of death. They were given as reassurance FOR THE LIVING OF LIFE -- for all who continue to follow in the footsteps of Jesus Christ. They were given for you and for me! And they are no easier for you and me to hear than for someone who has lost a loved one.



Because these words go counter to the facts of our lives! To be honest with ourselves and one another -- we must admit that we are often VERY TROUBLED! Not one of us in this room is without some kind of worry or upset! We all have our troubles -- we all have our fears! Some of them are real -- some of them are imagined! We worry, we fret, we try to manipulate people and things and events, even ourselves -- we do all this in order to grasp onto some kind of security!! By and large -- these's not a one of us who feels totally secure!! Yes - the facts are, we don't have to look very far to see where trouble is -- it is looking at us when we look into the mirror each and every day!

I have often said to people who are close to me -- that most people DO NOT join the church out of strength, but rather out of weakness! What I mean by that is that most people "Join" NOT TO GIVE, BUT TO GET!! We join in order to get fellowship and friends. We join to get nurture and support ... to get affirmation and strength.. to get prayers and positive feedback ... to get hope and confidence ... to get something for our troubled hearts! By and large - we become members of the church BECAUSE OUR HEARTS ARE TROUBLED -- because we need REASSURANCE AND SUPPORT!!

I don't say this to make anyone feel guilty -- I say it simply because it is a fact of life! It's the reason that I'm a part of the church; it's the reason that I'm a pastor as well -- NOT ONLY TO GIVE, BUT TO GET SUPPORT AND AFFIRMATION!

As I have counseled many over the years .... and as I have been counseled by others -- that has always been the dilemma of the church's ministry: HOW DO YOU GIVE ENOUGH OF YOURSELF TO OTHERS WITHOUT TOTALLY EMPTYING YOUR CUP AND BECOMING USELESS?!?? How do I as a pastor ... how do we as God's people ... as God's holy nation ...as God's royal priesthood -- how do we respond to the troubled hearts of this world WITHOUT ENDING UP TOTALLY WASHED OUT ... FOREVER BURNED UP ... EXHAUSTED TO THE CORE?!?!?? *JUST ANOTHER TROUBLED HEART!!*

This is the never-ending question of the faithful!! This is the question which permeates our lives each and every day -- the gap between WHAT WE DO ... AND WHAT THE GOSPEL CALLS US TO DO IN FOLLOWING CHRIST! How can our hearts NOT BE TROUBLED when we look around and see the little that we have accomplished in Christ's name?!?! How can our hearts not be troubled by

literally millions of starving people in other lands ...and many here in the U.S. as well! How can our hearts not be troubled by poverty and deprivation and unemployment here in our own country?!? How can our hearts not be troubled by the pain and emptiness of the senile and aged and those left alone by jet-set indifference?!?! How can our hearts not be troubled by the suffering and rejection and lack of forgiveness daily passed off as propriety in our society?!?!

It is hard to be a committed Christian disciple in this world without OUR HEARTS BEING TROUBLED! There is truly a wide gap between the demands of the gospel and the reality of our human experience. There is a great wedge between our Sunday religion and our Monday real life. How on earth can we not be troubled, when the truth all around us tells us THAT WE HAVE FALLEN SHORT OF THE GLORY OF GOD!!

How can we not be troubled by our own human weaknesses -- our sensuality ... our self-indulgence ... our own variety of vices ... our own inability to "lift up the cross and live the sacrifices of the Gospel!"

My dear friends in Christ -- it's when we really feel this sense of a troubled spirit THAT THE GOSPEL HAS ITS DYNAMIC POWER FOR OUR LIVES!! The gospel of Jesus Christ is not addressed to our human perfection -- it is addressed to our troubled human condition!! God does not need to save those who are already perfect and sinless ... those who do not need a physician! God in Jesus Christ has come to give the ABUNDANT LIFE to those who are truly in need ... to those who have troubled hearts and need some relief!!

To be human is to be flesh and blood -- often weak flesh and often hot blood!! This is something that many Christians find hard to believe ... esp. self-righteous Christians -- those who already think they are perfect! To be human (and that includes everyone) is to be split between WANTING THE GOOD and WANTING THE BAD -- to be morally schizophrenic! To be human is to be in the daily arena of extraordinary temptations -- all kinds of disturbing desires!

We may imagine that everyone around us is happily secure ... strong in faith, pure, undefiled, problem-free and temptation proof!! We may imagine that this is the case for everyone else-- except us. Well, don't you believe it. Such trouble-free people

do not exist!! And they have never existed!! We are - all of us -- regardless of which collar we wear -- we all share in a common humanity! We all travel the same roads ... and dream the same dreams. We all share a common condition -- and it is to this common, human, sinful condition that the gospel speaks!!

Hundreds of people will worship here and elsewhere this morning. Gather those people anywhere and you will find among them a great kaleidoscope of human problems and pain. There is not one of those persons in any of those church crowds who will be problem-free. Each one will be carrying his special load to the altar this morning!!

It is to that one person -- it is to all those hundreds of persons -- it is to those millions of Christians carrying their problems THAT THE GOSPEL IS ADDRESSED HERE AND NOW!! And that Gospel of Jesus Christ says: that he is aware of our doubts... that he is aware of our burdens ... that he is aware of our temptations ... that he is aware of our insecurities!! That gospel says that he has come in order to take upon himself ALL OF OUR TROUBLED HEARTS!! That as he was crucified -- he took with him to that cross our troubled hearts and spirits!!

Whether we are troubled spiritually, morally, physically sexually, emotionally, psychologically, financially or socially-- it does not matter!! He sees our troubled hearts -- and he comes back to us and again says: "I am the way, the truth, and the life." Come unto me ... come as you are ... come with everything ... come especially with your burdens and your troubled hearts ... and I will give you rest ... I will give you forgiveness, in order that you can be born anew!!

Come unto me and RECEIVE LIFE!! THIS IS THE LIFE, that I will give you my loving forgiveness IN ORDER THAT YOU NEED NOT BE TROUBLED ANY LONGER!! This is the life of Jesus Christ!! This is the life of those who follow in his footsteps!!

Today's gospel is telling us to have our courage and our hope in "the way, the truth, and the life." -- rather than in ourselves and all the other forms of security THAT WE THINK WILL LAST FOREVER!! Life is not trouble-free!! There is no such thing in life!! Life has its trials, tribulations and temptations! But in Jesus Christ -- we can unload those troubles-- we can be relieved of the burdens -- we can be born anew to HOPE. THIS IS THE LIFE ... for it is the only way and only truth for every one of us!

AMEN

EASTER V  
Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo  
April 23, 1989  
Peter R. Martyn, Pastor

**"THE BEST IS YET TO COME!"**

"Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, ... And he who sat upon the throne said, 'Behold I make all things new!'"

Rev. 21:1,5

"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you." John 13:34

In the town of Livingston, Africa, there is a museum which holds memorabilia of the missionary David Livingstone. One of the most prized and popular exhibits is a gold watch that had been worn by Dr. Livingstone throughout his years as missionary. His close friends tell that each night before he went to bed, the last thing he would do was wind his watch in preparation for his next day's work (obviously, those were the days before quartz watches).

On the night that he was told he was dying ... and would probably not live to see the sunshine of the next day, Dr. Livingstone raised his elbows from his sick bed and got his gold watch. And then as he had done thousands of times before, he carefully wound his watch in preparation for another day's work. He died that night, but in the victorious faith of believing that HIS BEST WORK WAS YET TO COME.

Obviously, that night the VERY BEST DID COME FOR DR. LIVINGSTONE: God gave him the ultimate new heaven and new earth! All suffering, all pain, all uncertainty, all struggle, all tears were now wiped away for this faithful evangelist. Behold, God had made all things new!!

Yes, for Dr. Livingstone, and for each of us, THE BEST IS YET TO COME. The promise of an eternal relationship with God is the very best that God gives to each of us. The promise of a new vision of a new life without pain and hassles and heartaches IS THE VERY BEST.

But is that it?!? Is that the whole goal of our Christian faith!? Does God expect us to merely sit around for seventy years and wait for eternal bliss in heaven?!? Is that the essence of our Christian theology - God essentially wants us to flee from this world so that we can enjoy the paradise of a new heaven someplace else?

Well, that's hardly the whole truth of scripture! And it certainly wasn't the whole vision of Dr. Livingstone or the total vision of St. John who wrote Revelation. Dr. Livingstone was winding his watch NOT IN PREPARATION TO DIE, BUT FULLY IN PREPARATION to make the very best of another new day ... should it be granted. God's Word and God's truth is that THE BEST IS YET TO COME not only in heaven, but on earth!

Obviously, God is the giver of all things. He makes all things new, whether its heaven, our backyard garden, or a revitalized heart. God gives the gifts to all creation. But God expects us to be more than takers ... he calls upon us to be givers of what we have first received. Love is received in love. That is - love not only takes, it acts out ... it gives of itself!

None of us can claim to be creators of love, but each of us is a procreator of love. Our purpose for living is not for mere existence, but for offering others what we have first received. All things new come from God, but that newness enters the world through each of us. Let's take this surgical heart of mine. He has created this heart with the potential of daily newness -- part of that comes from diet, part comes from exercise, but the most recent part came from the restructuring, surgical hands of a Dr. Jones. Like that surgeon, God calls upon each of us to be procreators of his newness. Obviously, you and I don't have a surgeon's hands; but we do have a Savior's heart. God is not merely dwelling someplace up in the heavens -- God is dwelling within the hearts of his people. His holy tabernacle is not up there, but right here, within each of us!

Like Dr. Livingstone, the goal of our Christian faith is not to sit around waiting for the blissfulness of heaven; the goal is to wind our watches every night in anticipation of MAKING TOMORROW THE VERY BEST DAY IT CAN POSSIBLY BE!

Obviously, that raises the question: does the goal of faithfulness mean that tomorrow will not have any trials, tribulations, pains or persecutions?? Not at all. Faithfulness does not change the powers of evil and sinfulness in this world. Tomorrow will still be a day with hunger and homelessness for some ... still a day of disease and death for others ... still a day of unemployment and poverty for still others ... still a day with natural diasters, war, drug addicts, oil spills, sex scandals, military disasters, and dope pushers. Our faithfulness will not totally transform the reality of life's trials and tribulations.

That was even more the case for Christians in the first century when John was writing Revelation. Just because he said, "God would make all things new," didn't mean there would be an end to trials, tribulations and pain. In fact, for those Christians it was much more graphic than for us. They not only suffered the natural trials and tribulations -- they were persecuted and punished for merely being Christian. Many of us today find it an impossible challenge to even handle natural trials of disease, droughts, and accidents. Imagine our despair if we were being persecuted and subjected to pain because of our faith in Christ.

So then, if we must continue to live with these trials and tribulations, what does God mean when he says "he will make all things new!?" He means quite simply, that we possess the spirit of his love ... a spirit which is not defeated by the daily trials and tribulations of existence. Because those trials are not God's will ... they are expressions of sin and separation from the will of God.

God wants the very best for us -- he gives us a new commandment which summarizes his will: TO LOVE ONE ANOTHER EVEN AS HE HAS LOVED US. Our mission, should we decide to accept it, is to rewind our watches daily WITH THE LOVE OF HIS SPIRIT. And in so doing, GOD'S VERY BEST WILL YET COME ... because the trials and tribulations of life never defeat that will of God. That was most certainly true in the 1st century, it's even more certainly true for each of us in this century!

Never in the history of civilization has the Christian Church and its people had the love of God so good. Can we possibly allow the little trials and tribulations of our lives to get us down?? Can we possibly claim to have no reason to hope? Can we possibly say we have nothing to look forward to? Can we possibly defy God's gospel truth that the BEST IS NOT YET TO COME!? Only those who are suffering from serious addiction or fried brains cannot see God's unlimited newness before us!

It reminds me of the story of the troubadoor who traveled central Europe during the Middle Ages. He was renowned not only for his skill in song but his constant joy. When crowds cheered his musical tales, he would bow, wave his hat, and flash his infectious smile of warmth. He never allowed the hecklers or jeerers to spoil his spirit or to ruin his singing for the crowd.

One day, a little girl asked him, "Why are you always so happy? How can you keep your spirit up even when people try to get you down??" "Ah," the troubadoor answered with a wink, "I am always happy for two reasons. First, for just the joy of singing ... the sheer pleasure of telling the story in song. And second, I am always happy in knowing that I have done the very best I could to share a loving story in song. The rest, my daughter, is up to you and others who listen."

"The rest is up to you and others who listen." The troubadoor realized he didn't make all things new -- it was only his job to share his song of love the very best he could! God would make all things new for anyone who had really listened. When we do the very best we can with God's love, then we don't have to worry about the results ... GOD WILL MAKE ALL THINGS NEW FOR THOSE WHO HAVE REALLY LISTENED.

Maybe you still don't believe it? Maybe it still sounds like wishful thinking to you. Well, let's go back to our original illustration. Dr. Livingstone died. But he knew his death would not mean an end to Christianity in Africa. Because it wasn't his work, it was God's work that was making ALL THINGS NEW IN AFRICA. But God had used Livingstone. And thankfully, many Africans listened to him ... and to those who came after him. Is it any wonder that Africa has become the fastest growing Christian continent in the world?? THE BEST HAS COME TO AFRICA ... because people listened & learned ... and God made all things new!! And that's still God's truth today -- whenever we love as he has first loved us ... no matter how great our trials and tribulations -- THE BEST IS YET TO COME!!

AMEN.

EASTER V  
Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo, Oh  
April 28, 1991  
Peter R. Martyn, Pastor

**"NOT GOOD IF DETACHED!"**

Jesus said, "Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing." John 15:4-5

Virtually every page of the Bible declares, "Not good if detached!" From the beginning in Genesis to the victorious conclusion in Revelation, God offers a simple but profound truth to his believers: "Not good to be detached!" At the beginning in the garden, God says to Adam: "It is not good for you to be alone; I will make you a helpmate." NOT GOOD TO BE DETACHED! At the end of Revelation, John proclaims the same theme: "Behold, the dwelling of God is with his people. He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more ... neither mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away. ... Behold, I make all things new!" NOT GOOD TO BE DETACHED!

Hasn't that been your exact experience and mine with God? Where did he begin with you and me? It wasn't a few weeks ago ... or months ... even years. It was way back at the beginning, and there God said: "Not good if detached!" In Holy Baptism he grafted each of us to his vine so that no one or no thing could ever separate us from his love.

Obviously, I was too young on that Sunday in 1942 to remember the splashing of the baptismal water. But from that moment to this very moment, I have heard the same message from God hundreds and hundreds of times: "BEHOLD, I MAKE ALL THINGS NEW - BUT not good if detached." Daily, through my baptism and your baptism, God reminds us who we are and from whom we have received "the abundant life." Not just physical life, but the life of love and forgiveness and compassion and mercy AND ALL THE OTHER THINGS THAT CAN NEVER BE TAKEN AWAY. And without those things, physical life is nothing! Yes, every day, God says: "I am the vine, you are the branch. He who abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit!"

How crucial to be reminded that the purpose ... the reason for creation, for baptism, for worship, for being here at this very moment IS TO ENHANCE RATHER THAN NEGATE THE CONNECTIONS OF LIFE. And why is this message so vitally important on this 28th day of 1991? Because the theme from our consumer culture often runs totally contrary to this vital principle of faith! We are profoundly influenced by the throw-away, short-term thinking of our day!

As one commentator put it - the consumer mentality today caters to individualism and an ala carte approach to everything, incl. religion. The whole mentality is "Don't worry about interconnections ... don't worry about the earth or the environment ... don't worry about the next generation ... let the future take care of itself. "Be free NOW to do your own thing." Participate in life only for the glory that you CAN GET RIGHT NOW! Get all you can get with gusto before they get you! Don't get too attached to anyone or anything -- you might be expected to do something for somebody other than yourself! Stay on the fringe ... keep your distance ... be cautious about commitments ... take care of #-1 because nobody else will do it for you.

Is it any wonder that we have a fragmented world and a disconnected culture? No other era has ever known the world as such a global village, and yet that village has rarely reflected such chaotic tension. East distrusting west, and middle east at odds with almost everyone; racial unrest at home, abroad and worldwide; cities all over this country and the world ravaged by racism, crime and economic deprivation; and the church, nominally united by Christ, in reality is divided by gay rights, abortion rights, gender rights, and a host of other "righteous" groups who claim to have God totally on their side. And from the beginning, God has said: "Not good if detached." Yet in our fervour to be either righteous or rebellious, we just go on "detaching" ourselves from him and one another.

But as we learned from Genesis to Revelation -- "it is not good for you to be alone!" God's intent is not for self-glorification, not for self-righteousness, not for isolation. God so loved the world that he gave us inter-connections, interactions, and interrelations. But time after time, like Israel, we live as if God's whole purpose was to give us life "so that we could show the world how much we stand apart from all the others!"

A graphic illustration of such "stand offishness" was again shared with me this week. Former members of Hope moved to the east coast. During a recent celebration at their Luth church, their bishop was a special guest. Following the service, this family greeted the bishop warmly. After they had passed him, he invited their 10-yr old daughter back. He shook her little hand and then said: "Now you can go home and tell all your friends that you shook the hand of a bishop!"

Her parents were outraged that a bishop could actually glorify himself in such a manner. Obviously, the little girl doesn't even know what a bishop is - other than possibly for a chess game. But even if she did know a bishop of the church, is it appropriate for a Luth bishop to parade himself like a movie star? Is his ministry one of setting himself apart from the body ... of elevating himself to be among the high and mighty of the world? Or is his role to glorify the vine and all those who are grafted to it?



Why didn't he say: "Little girl, when you go home today, I hope you tell your friends that you're one of Jesus' most fruitful branches!"

That bishop needs to come to Toledo on the last weekend of April and see Hope Lutheran in action as the "fruitful branches of the vine of Christ." Forgive me if you missed the Super Sale yesterday (of course, now you know when I was finishing my sermon) ... but quite honestly, if you missed this event at Hope you missed a classic down-to-earth illustration of today's text. Because believe it or not, nothing in the life of Hope better shows how Christians abide in him and bear his fruitfulness. Just reflect for a moment upon the ramifications of the Super Sale.

First, it's not something that we do to benefit ourselves ... it is done to serve others (Habitat and Mobile Meals). As Christ said, "I have not come to be served, but to serve and give my life as a ransom for others." It's whole purpose is to show that it's motivating source is Jesus Christ - not Hope Luth Church. But the fruitfulness just grows from that source! Months of planning go into this 5-hour sale. Hundreds of hours of coordination. And then the Social Ministry Committee does what every Committee is charged to do: GET THE REST OF THE BODY INVOLVED IN FRUITFULNESS! Hundreds of members offer themselves ... by giving used items, by bringing them to the church, by sacrificially giving away some of their best things, and finally, by giving hundreds of work hours this past week to arrange and organize and price and finally sell all the goods. And then comes Saturday ... and 75 - 100 faithful of Hope are here to help nearly 1000 people shop. For 5 hours, the assembly room looks like an army of ants imitating the troops of Stormin Normin Schwartzkoft. And then all the leftovers ARE GIVEN AWAY ... TO ST. LOUIS PARISH FOR THE POOR. And just 90 minutes after 2 p.m., the downstairs assembly room looks better than it looked a week before - clean and ready for our SCS children.

And the real treasure of this event ... is that I did not hear one negative word during the whole ordeal. No complaints! No petty gossip! No racial slurs! No gripes or groans! Just a oneness of spirit and attachment to Jesus Christ as the true leader of the event (with a lot of help from Helen Olsen). For five hours at 2201 Secor Road on Sat., April 27 - God was showing HOW GOOD IT IS WHEN HIS PEOPLE ARE NOT DETACHED! And for those same five hours, the shoppers were saying: "Boy, this is the best sale we have ever seen - so many good things, so well organized, and all of you people are so helpful and kind as well." Dear friends in Christ, don't miss this event next year -- you will find no better example of what it means to be the FRUITFUL BRANCHES of the vine of Jesus Christ at Hope Lutheran.

Yes, God's intention from the beginning was NOT ONLY to show our connection to him, but also to show the fruitfulness of that connection. For of what value is a connection to any vine if the branch shows no fruitfulness?? To be grafted to Jesus Christ does not mean to bear blossoms. Blossoms are only concerned with looking good; they only want others to admire them. To abide in Christ and he in you and me is NOT ONLY A MATTER OF LOOKING GOOD, BUT A MATTER OF LIVING GOOD ... a matter of bearing the same fruit of the vine! There is no other purpose for our being here week after week. We come here not to be admired ... not to be looked at ... not to be "juiced up" with some goody-goody gas from God! We come here to be PRUNED BY THE HOLY WORD OF GOD. In short, we come here to have that which is dead, immoral, sinful, gross, selfish, and greedy CUT AWAY! At the same time, we come here to be reinforced and renewed by life, love, joy, kindness, patience, peace, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control -- namely, by the fruits of the Spirit!

It is that constant pruning process -- so often painful yet life-giving - it is this process which is the pilgrimage of the church. We come here knowing that fruitfulness with God is not without pruning ... not without pains and losses and disappointments and departures and dreams destroyed ... not without divorces and disabilities and diseases and deaths. All these we share as the pruning experiences of life in the body of Christ. But as we are separated from those things which can no longer live, we are also revitalized by the nourishing power of the living vine. We are uplifted and loved, we are forgiven and fortified, we are strengthened and supported by a God who always says: "Abide in me and grow and you will be even more fruitful than you were before!" For those grafted to the vine of Christ, the pruning experiences of life are not CAUSE for giving up, BUT RATHER REASON for expecting GREATER GROWTH AND STABILITY!

Life in the vine is like the Amherst College experiment with the squash. The class planted a squash, and when it was about the size of a human head, they banded it with a steel harness to determine the lifting power of the squash as it tried to grow. They estimated it would be able to lift 500 lbs through this resistance to growth. In a month, it was pressing 500 lbs; when it hit 2000 lbs, they had to strengthen the bands. Finally at 5000 lbs, the pressure broke the bands. They opened the squash and found it full of course fibers that had grown to fight the obstacle that was hindering its growth. The roots of this squash had reached out 8,000 feet in all directions -- all with the purpose of giving greater strength to the squash's fiber.

If a squash can reveal such strength against resistance, imagine our capabilities when grafted to Jesus Christ. For he has promised that no obstacle will ever separate us from

his love. We all know about those obstacles. We are harnessed with all kinds of conflicting obstacles in life -- doubts, depressions, addictions, discouragements ... all of which seek to stunt and destroy our growth as servants of Jesus Christ. But Jesus Christ promises that none of these worldly powers will overcome his life-giving connection to us. No one or no thing has ever been able to stunt the growth of his love in us. His life and his love is the only everlasting vine on earth. We draw our nourishment from him and by his grace we bear never-ending fruit. And with that kind of fruitful connection, there is but one principle that keeps us faithful: "DEAD FOREVER IF DETACHED!"

AMEN

## EASTER V

Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo

May 14, 1995 (Mother's Day)

Peter R. Martyn, Pastor

### "BEHOLD ... ALL THINGS NEW!"

*"... and God himself will dwell with them; he will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for these things have passed away." For the one seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new!"*

One theologian has recently said, "God never runs out of surprises!" Sometimes his surprises are exhilarating -- like resurrection or forgiveness or a miraculous healing. Other times his surprises are shocking -- like allowing tornadoes as a part of nature or calling dear friends or pastors to new/different ministries. Certainly God was involved in a rather shocking surprise to Hope Lutheran this past week -- it was "unsettling to receive" and it was equally "unsettling to give." I hope you understand that there is much sadness and struggle in both "giving it" and "receiving it." Grief is always a tough reality for its creator and its recipients. I have certainly had some intense tears with several groups this week. And like all losses, reactions to my resignation have ranged from anger to shock to speechlessness to even "relief" for some. But out of every surprise from God comes the same result: "Behold, I am making all things new!" Every significant loss always leads to a renewed and reinvigorated future.

For first and foremost it must be said: God does not want any one or any thing to be taken for granted. There is nothing more devastating to God than to see his daily gifts "taken for granted." No praise, no thanks, no time set aside for renewal with the Giver -- just "take, take, and take some more" has become a way of life and even a value system in our culture and many others today. Likewise, God is equally devastated when children take their parents for granted ... or when citizens take their government for granted. That's the whole motivation behind the 4th commandment: "Honor your mother and your father (honor those in authority)." As I outlined four years ago on Mother's Day, in May 1907 Anna Jarvis, a Methodist laywoman, initiated the commemoration of Mother's Day because her mother reminded her of the life of Jesus Christ: **of the one who boldly layed down his life for the good of the whole flock!**

And that's the way God has always "made all things new in his creation." One of his servants must boldly surrender his/her own self-glory for the good and glory of the greater kingdom of God. Quite frankly, I believe this type of faithfulness has often been more characteristic of mothers than fathers in our culture. Mothers are often the ones who "make all things new" by surrendering their own desires to the greater good of God and their families. That is certainly most true these days of mothers who choose to stay at home; they take a lot of flack for seeking to fulfill the commandment "to love family above all else." But isn't that the same Call that a certain nun took in Calcutta, India ... and the very reason we call her "Mother Teresa." Obviously, part of that name comes from her R.C. background as a nun; but more than anything, she epitomizes the role of motherhood. As I said three weeks ago, Mother Teresa and her helpers transformed a black hole in India that had become the haven of vicious criminals,

dead beats and all kinds of illness, homelessness & starvation. With her bold leadership and God's presence motivating her, "Behold ... God was and still is making all things new in Calcutta!"

I have the same fond memories of my own mother. When I was considering a Call to suburban Detroit in '74 - some 350 miles further away from home than Milwaukee at a time when my mother's heart disease was worsening -- it was my mother who boldly said, "*Peter, allow God to open you up to His future and don't become imprisoned by what has been given to you in the past here in Wisconsin. Go for it, Peter, you have your mother's blessing!*" And what did my father say to all this: "*Well, Peter, if your mother says it's o.k., then it must be o.k.*" **"Behold," said God, "I am making all things new for you Peter thru the bold faithfulness of your mother!"** I hope other daughters & sons here today have had the same "bold experiences" thru your mothers.

Who was it in this culture that started MADD - "Mothers' Against Drunk Driving?!" It was the mothers of our society that said enough is enough of this tragic slaughter of our teens on highways due to intoxication. "Behold," they said, "we are going to help God make all things new" so that the families of tomorrow are not innocently persecuted by these unnecessary tragedies and deaths!

Why is it largely that mothers and grandmothers faithfully attend Lunches with Luther and the "Book Club" and "Caregivers" and "Prayer Chains" here at Hope Lutheran? Because that's how God "makes all things new" -- by relating his Word to the events of our lives! Certainly, he hasn't closed the doors for fathers to any of these groups -- but men would prefer to be on "Councils" and "Budget & Property Committees" because these areas deal with tangible things that don't require a lot of emotional investment. Why have mothers been the primary movers of our efforts with the Interfaith Hospitality Network, the Super Sale, St. Paul's Community Center for the homeless, the Samaritan Counseling Center -- almost all the major expressions of Outreach in the life of Hope?? Why is it that mothers are so often more boldly willing to be "God's Spirit of newness" and fathers tend to "hold back for the status quo or even pour cold water on God's spirit of compassion?" **Because God has particularly blessed mothers with the "courage of their convictions."** "Behold ... I am making all things new," says God; ... and if fathers resist my will, then I will use the mothers of this world (as I often do each week to get their children to church and Sunday School).

Well, once in a while, a father catches God's renewing vision for his world and he becomes a pastor (many fathers, of course, wouldn't consider this, because it doesn't pay enough; other fathers in the congregation just complain about sermons that are longer than 12-minutes). Be assured, it's not very easy in our culture for fathers to catch this vision because men are told from little up: "Don't worry about your health or family relationships or even in some cases the goodness of the world around them!" **Regretably, too often the only thing that men are told to "worry about" is the "bottom line."** Obviously, that's not all bad because somebody has to keep the world in a state of profitability. But unfortunately, many men are never told that there's more to life than the bottom line. Certainly, that's what I was told as I was growing up; I started working

when I was eleven years old because I learned from my dad that nothing was more important than "working hard and securing a good bottom line." **Well, about two months ago, I finally had to confront this male bias of "bottom-line-believing."** For as I have certainly testified over sixteen years -- bottom-line thinking affects me as much as anyone ... that's why I have often uplifted that Hope's bottom line has grown from \$140,000 in 1979 to over \$440,000 in 1995. And that's also why I have celebrated that our body of believers has escalated from 960 in 1979 to over 1460 today. But as I have tried to share with all of you this past week, there is more to serving God than celebrating the "bottom line." **In fact, "bottom line" thinking can be very dangerous because it can distort the real vision of God for his shepherds and his sheep.** God asks, "Am I the Alpha & Omega," or has the "bottom line" replaced me at Hope Lutheran? "Am I the Bread of Life," or has my bread become confused with material and secular things among the people of Hope? "Am I the light of the world," or has my light been dimmed by the human lights of the Michael Jordans & Ohio States & Michigans of this world? "Am I the resurrection and the life," or has my people chosen some other way & truth for their lives?

Certainly, I hope I have faithfully pointed to Christ as the Alpha & Omega, as the Bread of Life and Light of the World, and certainly, as the "resurrection and the life." **But there comes a time in every shepherd's life and in every congregation's life where these images of Christ must be "seen anew!"** And the boldly faithful decision at that time -- just like the one made for me by my mother over 20 years ago -- is to step aside so that "a new vision of Christ might be celebrated in the future just as it has been celebrated over these past sixteen years." And that decision must be made at two crucial but intertwining times! **The first is when the shepherd** is beginning to feel overwhelmed with the task of his flock and needs to reduce the demands of his workload. **The second is when the flock is still in a strong, vital and stable position** so that it can meet the future head-on with an aggressive desire to seek the best and be fully renewed! Or to view the opposite - the worst thing a shepherd can do is to take his flock down to his own declining status just because he won't admit his vulnerability to anyone! **That's called "cowardice" and there are a lot of pastors who would just as well "coast" rather than give their flocks their very best! I can't do that! Like my mother and Mother Teresa and all good mothers, there comes a time for boldness:** a time to make the move to step aside and allow God to come front and center to his flock at Hope Lutheran and say: **"Behold, it's time to make all things new again in this flock!"**

May God continue to bless all mothers, and fathers, and children and members of Hope Lutheran in the days ahead to be courageous like these new members who are joining today -- for they are not joining simply because of the "head goose;" they are joining because they have seen God's spirit in this place "making all things new." So, may God continue to bless Hope Lutheran and Peter Martyn with a future that faithfully professes Him as the Alpha and the Omega -- the one **"who boldly makes all things new!"** For that is God's commandment of love from St. John **and for each of us thru all of 1995 ... and forever!**

AMEN.

*Easter V (Mother's Day)  
Glenwood Lutheran & Sunset House  
May 10, 1998  
Peter R. Martyn, Presiding Pastor & Chaplain*

## ***"A NEW VISION FOR AN OLD 4-LETTER WORD"***

*And the one seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new!" Rev. 21:5  
"I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you,  
you also should love ~~us~~ another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if  
you have love for one another. John 13:34-35*

**For the last four decades -- there has been a NEW VISION for this world each decade. In the 60's -- the vision was essentially "newness for the sake of newness." There was a new breed of politics ... a new breed of women ... a new stance on morality ... a new kind of radicalism which attacked previously untouched and sacred institutions. Essentially the 60's were without roots -- it was the "anything goes era" -- new life styles, new hair styles, new mini-skirts, even new body organs if a match could be found for you. In the church -- it was an era of new worship forms and new understandings of authority and the bible which has altered life in the church to this very day.**

**Then came the 70's. All of a sudden -- the vision was 180° the other way -- now everything had to be "old." People were purchasing old homes, old furniture, old antiques, old cars, old whatever. Everyone was questing for his or her roots; it was a search for the authentic "you" -- the "I'm o.k. You're o.k. era." It was a time of getting back to the basics - reading, writing and arithmetic; a time of "old fashioned honesty and integrity -- of telling it the way it really was."**

**Well - that search for authenticity soon changed in the 80's to: "Getting It All For Myself." A leading conservative analyst, Kevin Phillips, called the 80's "a triumph of Upper America -- money, greed and luxury became the stuff of popular culture. The rich got richer, while nearly all the rest of America paid the price." It was a decade of bloody takeovers -- where leveraging and loosing were key words of the day. Phillips says "for the first time in America, it was no longer significant to be a millionaire -- now you were only a somebody if you were a mega-millionaire or billionaire.**

**And now we've nearly reached the end of the 90's. The new visions of the 60's, 70's and 80's have not "made all things new on earth." Racism is still rampant in this society. Violence has made its way from our streets into our middle schools. Spiritual & moral decay is not only found in alleys & flophouses but allegedly in some of the highest offices of leadership. So how would you characterize the 90's?? I haven't heard any phrases, but I would offer the following: "Global Economy Thrives During Decade of Un-Godly Values!" The 90's have certainly been the era of global economic expansion; there are no longer any economic enemies in this world. Time will tell whether this will be a heavenly influence on this earth. But much like the earlier decades -- a global economy has not "made all things new on earth."**

There is still only one distinctive power that will make "all things new on earth." It is a 4-letter word that is used and grossly abused by today's pop culture. But it is equally misused and abused by many religious cultures. Obviously -- that 4-letter word is "LOVE." One author claims that "LOVE" is misused and abused because too often it only reaches its first stage of application -- which he calls proclamation.

First stage "love" is when people meet each other and desire to share affection with each other. We say about such people that "they have fallen in love." "To fall in love" is a feeling level of love which causes one person to constantly want to talk to the other person. This is the level of love reflected in many pop recordings of "love" -- it's a feeling level where love is talked about, and talked about, and sung about and sung about. It's a very romantic level of love.

There's nothing wrong with a "romantic level of love" other than it's most often very self-centered! It's a very elementary level. But with time -- "love" progresses to a stage of INTIMACY -- where we want to live with the other person and not just talk about him/her. Again, this is a normal in the evolution of love -- spending time together, going places, doing things together -- but this level of love will not "make things new" in this world. Again, it tends to be a very self-centered reflection of love.

Finally this author says LOVE reaches an "imitation level" -- where the one person models the love of the other person out of a deep commitment to the other. Sometimes this is seen in elderly couples -- where they begin to act alike ... to see things in the same way ... sometimes to even look alike. This author says this is the distinctive love that "can make things new in this world" -- because it is self-giving ... not out of self-centeredness but out of a desire to fulfill the other self. This love, known as agape love, is the love of Jesus Christ. It is also the love of those who imitate Jesus Christ -- the kind of love which Jesus commands between his disciples. This is the love which seeks to satisfy the will and the work of God -- the only love that can "make things new" because it shows patience, kindness, no jealousy or boastfulness, and a total commitment to overlooking the wrongs of the past. This love is not merely a "feeling to be talked about or a feel-good-intimacy" -- this love works to fully satisfy the needs of the other.

Nothing better illustrates this love than the story of the man who innocently fell into a deep pit one day. He jumped, he scratched, he tried every trick he could fathom -- but all his efforts were futile. And as he was about to rest -- he noted a poisonous snake in the pit with him. Panic stricken -- he called for help!

At that time - a Mohammeden came along. And he looked into the pit and said, "Ah dear brother - I see you've fallen into a hole. I am sorry for you. But all in this world is his will. You must submit and resign yourself to His will." And he went on his way.



Moments later, a Hindu appeared. He looked down and said, "Ah, dear brother, I see you have fallen into a hole. I am indeed sorry for you. But Nervana is our goal -- absorption into the diety. So you must contemplate ... contemplate ... contemplate." And he went his way.

Some time later - a Buddhist appeared. And he looked down and said, "Ah, dear brother, you have fallen into a hole. I am indeed sorry. But the eight-fold path to virtue is God's way. So perfect the eight-fold path, and then you will reach God. You obviously have not perfected that path or you would not be in this hole." And he went on his way.

Then along came Confucist. And he said, "Ah so, dear brother, it appears you have fallen into a hole. I'm indeed sorry -- but all I this world is "Ying" or "Yang" ... and all comes out in the "Y'end." And he went on his way.

Finally - Jesus Christ came along that road. And he looked down and saw the man in the hole. And without a word -- HE JUMPED INTO THE HOLE with the man. And he pushed the man out -- and in the process ... he was bitten by the snake. And he fell dead at the bottom of the hole ... and the other man walked away a free man.

That is the distinctive love of Jesus Christ -- always getting into the holes that we have made for ourselves ... and helping us to get out and be free ... because that is our greatest need. Jesus loves us by fulfilling our greatest need. And then he suffers the consequences. All other religions talk to the man ... they appear to be compassionate -- but their concept of love is to offer rules, or steps of perfection, or concepts of contemplation. Only the love of God in Jesus Christ acts to fulfill the need of the other person.

And isn't that the way many of us remember our mothers. Loving mothers obviously give rules. But when their children are caught in a mess -- loving mothers don't tell us to contemplate our way out ... they get into the hole and shove us out ... often suffering dire consequences themselves. In fact a great mother, Agnes Bejaxhiu, better known as Mother Teresa -- never became a biological mother -- but she was the very embodiment of the love of Christ -- she saw what had to be done to fulfill the needs of the other ... and she did it! She had a vision of what makes all things new in this world -- the willingness to imitate the love of Jesus Christ! God bless every mother here today who has had that same willingness! For you have not only been good mothers ... more importantly, you have been what the world needs most -- good disciples of Jesus Christ.

AMEN.