

PENTECOST 26  
Luth Church of the Master, Troy  
Nov. 16, 1975

"THE DOUBLE STANDARD DILEMMA"

"Then said Jesus to the crowds and to his disciples, 'The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat; so practice and observe whatever they tell you, but not what they do; for they preach, but do not practice.'" Matt 23:1

A worshipper recently commented that he felt many Lutheran clergy in the last decade have suffered from a mission malfunction. Namely, they have too often seen the mission of the church as social action only -- as soup lines in the temple. He felt that many of these clergy had lost a vision of the Word and the burning desire to proclaim it.

That observation was a good one. It would be inaccurate to claim that a large percentage of clergy are in this camp; but equally false would be the claim that said there are none.

Upon entering seminary in the mid 60's - I remember too well how some of my sem brothers were great social justice prophets but were starved of the gospel. They were great humanitarians, but empty Christians.

So it was that my seminary class began with some 80 first year seminarians. But four years later there were only 48 who were graduated - and less than 45 of those had been approved for ordination.

As you can see, there was nearly a 50% mortality rate in my class alone. I would venture that many of those sem brothers did not make it because they suffered from a mission malfunction-- they simply were not committed to the mission of the gospel - the mission of salvation, which Luther described as forgiveness and the promise of eternal life.

I am optimistic enough to believe that my class was NOT that different from most seminary classes. Normally, the seminary does not graduate and the church does not ordain clergy who suffer from a serious mission malfunction.

Of course, clergy malfunctions can develop while serving the parish. Both the pressures and the prejudices of the society and the congregation can have an eroding effect upon the proclamation of the gospel.

How often I know I have kept my mouth shut on a controversial issue due to the prejudices of a congregation. God only knows how that kind of clergy malfunction can imprison the power of his Word.

Yes - the claim cannot be denied that clergy sometimes suffer from a mission malfunction -- occasionally because a servant is ordained without an adequate diet of the gospel; more often because society squeezes the real nutrition out of the gospel IN THE NAME OF "don't rock the boat." In other words, the world does not really want the Christian TO PRACTICE what he PREACHES.

This to me is a far more tragic dilemma of the clergy and the church. It is the dilemma described for us in today's gospel.

Instead of actions without the Word as earlier described, this situation is the Word without the appropriate actions. Yes - this is the real Double Standard Dilemma of the church -- knowing the gospel - possessing the message and ministry of salvation, but not sharing it.

The latest issue of the Lutheran presents a good case in point. One of the articles is called: "Must we feed the world?" Two opposing positions are given as responses. Both views are intelligent and well-stated. But the negative view suffers from the double standard dilemma.

The author makes an excellent case for proclaiming salvation -- but he fails to see the need to incarnate that life INTO ACTS OF MERCY on this earth. He states that Jesus did not develop a "social action" program per se, so therefore our mission should be heaven and not earth oriented.

Somehow this man got through catechism without learning the meaning of the 3rd and 4th petition of the Lord's Prayer: "thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven; give us this day our daily bread."

Those are prayer petitions which call for more than rote repetition of words -- they call for ACTIONS of the gospel here and now.

Yes - how tempting it is to offer the gospel as a HOLLOW WORD. How tempting it is to give the gospel without the grain. How tempting it is to forget that Jesus fed the 5,000 and at the same time preached the gospel.

Yes - like the scribes and Pharisees in today's gospel, we've all suffered from a mission malfunction -- from the double standard dilemma -- from preaching, without practicing what we preach.

This is probably the greatest vocational risk of being a Christian. God graciously calls us NOT ONLY to say his Word of love, BUT TO ACT IT OUT WHEREVER WE MAY BE.

Yes - like the scribes and Pharisees - God has risked much in giving us the gospel. For like the Pharisees, we can make that gospel into a new kind of legalism -- where we demand actions without the forgiving love of the gospel.

Or - like the scribes - having the gospel can cause us to feel pompous and judgmental -- condemning others rather than uplifting them to the fulness of God's love.

Then too we can worship and talk very piously about God's love and salvation -- we can preach this to our kids, and then turn around and practice salvation by the power of life's almighty possessions.

God truly knows he has given us a difficult Word and vocational task. He knows that it is a Word that can be easy to say, yet much more difficult to live.

But he continues to call us to both - to preach and to practice the gospel -- that Word which frees us to live anew in the love of God. Obviously - we will not be perfect in either. That imperfection will not cause God's judgment nor his release for us from the struggle.

We remain in tension -- always experiencing the need and desire to preach and practice the love of God. And as long as we feel that tension, we know we are being controlled by God - and we can be assured that we are not suffering from a mission malfunction.

The double standard dilemma will never enjoy complete resolution in our lifetime. But thanks to the grace of God, we will at least experience hope when we fail to practice what we preach -- and moreover, his grace will again renew the proper tension between our preaching and practicing.

AMEN

PENTECOST XXVI  
Luth Church of the Master, Troy  
Nov. 12, 1978

"THERE'S NO BUSINESS...LIKE SHOW BUSINESS...IN HIS KINGDOM"

They do their deeds to be seen by men; for they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long, and they love the place of honor at feasts and the best seats in the synagogues, and salutations in the market place, and being called rabbi by men." Matt 23:5-7

We all like a good show! And whether it's Kermit the Frog or Ed Asner or Cheryl Ladd - we all like a good showperson. That's show business! And there's no business like show business - so the saying goes. And when the purpose is entertainment - I would have to agree - show business has some good things to offer. True to its character - show business seeks to glorify its entertainers. And since that's its whole purpose - there's nothing really wrong with it.

But regretably - that same mentality has often become associated with religion. And so in many quarters today, religion has become JUST ANOTHER FORM OF SHOW BUSINESS. From the extremes of 11 year-old so-called preachers to million-dollar TV extravaganzas -- religion has been making steady strides in the show business world.

And we all know what makes good show business religion-- glamorous preachers - gorgeous choirs - enthusiastic testimonials -- a sprinkling of some famous athletes or hollywood figures - and finally a good dash of hell-fire and brimstone (or some other guilt-producing technique) - all these and you'll really bring the house down. Yes this show business religion always has a resonant bass singing "How Great Thou Art" - but in the background the producers of this popular religion are usually singing a different version as they gather in their millions: singing: "How Great We Are."

But dare we point a finger out there - we'd better first take care of our own house. Show business religion has infected every religious person and every religious institution THAT HAS ANYTHING TO DO WITH HUMANITY. That's the risk of being human -- we just can't be free of the temptation of self-glorification.

"Twinkle - twinkle little star -- Oh my God, make me the greatest by far." Few of us have ever prayed those words -- but most of us have lived by that message. And obviously = there's nothing wrong with aspiring toward greatness - God wants us to use our potential and be the greatest.

But we often ~~stop at that point and~~ forget why he wants us to be the greatest: Namely - in order that we might better serve him and the rest of our world. The Christian motive for greatness IS ALWAYS TO SERVE GOD AND OTHERS.

During our stewardship Family Dialogs I was recently told that one of our families no longer worships regularly BECAUSE "WE'VE BECOME TOO FANCY." In short, that person was saying that things aren't the way they used to be. There are new faces. New ideas. New struggles. Maybe even a little more fancy-dressed people. But one thing hasn't changed at all -- THE SAME GOSPEL IS BEING PREACHED -- and that's what supposed to get the glory and the attention in this place .

God has called us TO THIS PLACE - TO HEAR THE WORD, TO SERVE ONE ANOTHER - AND TO EXTEND HIS KINGDOM. But too often we come and spend our time looking around at one another INSTEAD OF CARING ABOUT ONE ANOTHER!

Yes - ~~SOMETIMES~~ maybe we have gotten too fancy in this church. In fact, many times the whole church gets too caught up IN BEING FANCY. But I must also say that anyone who makes that accusation HAS FOCUSED THEIR EYES ON THE WRONG THING. They are looking at external things AND NOT LISTENING to the Word.

They are suffering from the same problem that some of the Pharisees had in Jesus day. Jesus was angry at some of the Pharisees BECAUSE THEY HAD MADE SHOW BUSINESS out of faith. They were showing their piety on the outside -- but they were not loving others from the inside. They were looking for self glorification, rather than for opportunities to SERVE OTHER PEOPLE.

You can understand why Jesus was concerned - he had come to make disciples of his followers - but instead,

some of these people were making SERVANTHOOD into show business stardom. Some followers were seeking personal glory rather than serving others. Obviously, they had not heard his message: HE WHO IS GREATEST AMONG YOU SHALL BE YOUR SERVANT.

So - we must ask ourselves as his followers today: Do we come to this place TO BE ENTERTAINED, or TO LEARN HOW TO BE BETTER CHRISTIAN SERVANTS?

Or again, ask yourself: Why do you follow Jesus Christ? To get some personal glory - or to serve someone less fortunate than yourself?

Or another - ask yourself: When am I happiest as a Christian? When I'm getting the glory, or when I'm giving God's mercy and love to someone else?

Or another - ask yourself: What do I expect from the church and my faith? To be praised and glorified, or to be taught to be a disciple of Jesus Christ?

Or finally - Who is benefiting from my Christian conviction? Only me, or others? Who is on the center stage of my religious outlook on life? Me - or Jesus Christ?

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If you have answered these questions honestly - then there's no one in this room who can escape the fact that: SOMETIMES WE'RE IN THIS RELIGION THING MORE FOR OURSELVES THAN TO GLORIFY GOD AND SERVE OUR FELLOWMEN.

And that condition my friends is known as SIN. And every one of us suffers from that condition. So along with me, I am hopeful that you have confessed your part in it. Because -- al of us have too often made faith INTO A LITTLE BIT TOO MUCH SHOW BUSINESS - AND NOT ENOUGH PRAISE AND SERVANTHOOD FOR GOD AND OTHERS.

But thank God that life is not over for us yet. We may have had a little Pharisee in us when we came this morning -- and we may still have a little Pharisee in us when we leave -- but By God let's hope that we also leave cleansed from our self-righteousness, and a little more willing TO SERVE than TO BE GLORIFIED. AMEN

PENTECOST XXVI  
Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo  
November 12, 1989 (Consecration Sunday)  
Peter R. Martyn, Pastor

**"WORK AVAILABLE: INQUIRE WITHIN"**

For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us; we were not idle when we were with you ... for we hear that some of you are living in idleness, mere busybodies, not doing any work. ... Brethren, do not be weary in well-doing."

2 Thess. 3:7,11,13

Every week, especially on Wednesday, our church staff is confronted by a multitude of people who are looking for food, looking for work, or looking for some kind of handout. Usually, most of these people have come to our office for FYN food voutures. By and large, many of them are poor; and most are welfare recipients. I'm very certain, esp. for the monthly repeaters, that our secretaries would like to share St. Paul's words to the Thessalonians with these people: "If any one will not work, let him not eat." And probably if most of us are honest with ourselves -- that's also the way we feel about the poor -- we see them many times as lazy, as listless, and as parasites on a benevolent American welfare or religious system.

In many ways, some of the poor act much like James, who was employed by the duke and duchess of York. One day the duchess asked, "James, how long have you been with us?" "About 30 years," he replied. "According to my records," said the duchess, "you were employed to look after Marmaduke, the dog." "Yes Ma'am" replied James. "Well, James, that dog died 27 years ago." "Yes ma'am," said James. "What would you like me to do now?"

After 27 years of living off the free lunches of the duke and duchess, James was just now asking for a reassignment. We all know people like James in this world. Generally, these are people without drive, without self-motivation, without initiative, without a healthy work ethic. But Paul was not directing this text to the lazy and listless of his society or our society.

His focus was upon faithful church people like you and me. In fact, his words were really directed at the rich members of the church of Thessalonica. The most imminent reality of the church in those days was the Second Coming of Christ. At any moment, people expected the return of Jesus from the heavens. So for the rich and well-off of the congregation, it was time to stop working/take it easy. After all, no need to work any longer if everthing was ending within a short time. For the rich and affluent of Thessalonica - these days were a time to eat, drink, and be merry ... and even worse, to become busybodies - to philosophize about who was IN and who was OUT with God.



Well, it's obvious that most of us do not fit the profile of Thessalonica. Of course, in ONE WAY we are very much like those early church folk. We may not see ourselves as rich, but we are certainly well-off by the standards of this world. But that's where the similarities end. There's hardly a person in this congregation who is seriously thinking about the Second Coming of Christ. Even more important, most members here are not idle, busybodies - speculating about who will be "IN" or "OUT" when God comes again. Quite to the contrary - the majority of the people of Hope are dedicated, determined, dutiful hard workers. I have seen few congregations where people take their daily work and professions more seriously. So what wisdom and guidance can we glean from this Thessalonian text which urges us "not to be weary in well-doing."

Well, first we must define for ourselves the meaning of "well-doing." Possibly my own "work" this past week will reflect a faulty understanding of "well-doing." On Weds. and Thursday, I had been summoned to jury duty by the Common Pleas Court, Lucas County. Now - how should a civic-minded, patriotic citizen feel about such an honor?? Thrilled, right? Excited! Grateful! Well, as you can guess, I was not thrilled, excited or grateful! After all - I had been away for two weekends -- I had a mountain of work to get done. I had a lot of paper to push and people to pastor. How dare Lucas County interrupt my work at such an inopportune time? I wasn't very ecstatic as I sat for five hours in a jury room waiting for a trial assignment. Well, it should be pretty obvious how I was defining "well-doing!" GETTING MY OWN WORK DONE! GETTING CAUGHT UP ON MY AGENDAS! IN SHORT, MAKING SURE THAT MY WORK CAME FIRST!

I would venture to bet that most redblooded executives, professionals, and even housewives in this congregation would have reacted to jury duty much like me: IT'S A WASTE OF MY WORK TIME!! That was certainly the feeling I gleaned from the other jurors -- they didn't appear to be happy about their assignments either. And that's where this Pauline text hits home. For most of us, our jobs, our promotions, our standard of living, our daily duties have almost become an obsession - rather than a means to an end. For too many of us - we work in order to work in order to prove that we are worthy of work. In short, we work for ourselves ... only to earn a good living for ourselves. That is quite contrary to the Christian concept of work: where work ... or to earn a living is NOT merely for our own well-doing, but in order to "do well" for others. WE WORK FOR THE COMMON GOOD OF SOCIETY not merely for self-benefit. The sin of society is that it has turned the work ethic into an idol -- WE WORK, WE EARN A LIVING in order to spend more on ourselves. The leveraged buy-outs of recent years have hardly served the common good of our society or even strong companies -- but those buy-outs have certainly made the rich even richer!! Greed has so often become the motivating ethic of work today.

Yet when I was called to do jury duty this past week, God was really offering me an opportunity to do his greater work ... to use my time and talents to bring greater justice into the world ... to use my ability and intelligence to foster his righteousness in society. How tragic that I viewed such duty as a waste of my work time!! For you see - by such a view I have put my work above his greater works for me. Obviously -- I dare not carry this jury duty analogy too far. There are certainly times when my work is serving justice and righteousness as much as jury duty. But I still think the application illustrates the text for our own day.

The issue in 1990 is not "idleness caused by our concern for Jesus' Second Coming. Rather, today we are suffering from an "idleness of well-doing for others." We no longer worry about the Second Coming -- we only worry about our own work, our own leisure, our own stocks, our own investments, our own time, our own pleasures. The problem today is not worrying ABOUT THE SECOND COMING -- but a lack of RESPONSE TO THE FIRST COMING OF JESUS CHRIST. Jesus said, you will know when the time is right ... the signs are already present ... now is the time to show your faithfulness to my first coming. Jesus did not urge us to get all worked up for his coming again ... for some kind of heavenly rapture. Instead, Jesus was saying: "When I return again, will I find you faithful to my FIRST COMING??"

This text from Thessalonians should not only be coupled with the Lukan text about the signs of the Second Coming. It really needs to be coupled to John 14 thru John 17. This section of John reflects Jesus' long benediction to his followers just before his crucifixion -- just at the end of his first coming. Some of the most beloved and repeated passages are found in this section: "You are my friends if you do whatsoever I command you:" "Greater love has no man than this - that he lay down his life for his friends;" "Let not your hearts be troubled neither let them be afraid..." "In the world you shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." All these captivating passages are preparing the disciples for the end of his first coming. In this context Jesus gathers with his beloved, and says: take within yourselves my body and my blood and become my real presence in the world. He urges them to go into the world teaching all nations what he has commanded, baptizing in the name of the Father, Son & Holy Spirit. He promises to be with them to the end of the age. And then he adds to all these compelling phrases a final admonition: "He who believes in me will do the same works that I have done; and greater works than these will you do."

At the end of his first coming - Jesus makes crystal clear what he is expecting from us: Not to sit by idly waiting for the second coming, BUT TO DO THE SAME WORKS THAT HE HAS DONE ... AND EVEN GREATER WORKS! Jesus makes clear

there ARE GREATER WORKS AVAILABLE FOR ALL OF US. Just "ask," and they shall be given unto us; just "seek" and we shall find; just "knock" and the door to greater works will be opened for us. But before we can do the greater works that he has already done, we must first be shown what those works are that he has already done.

He has brought the world to a new attitude toward the poor and the helpless. He has driven the demons of despair out of the lives of tortured children and adults. He has caused the power of God to touch the spirits of paralytics and enabled them to rise up with their beds and run rejoicing. He has given dignity and renewal to harlots and lepers, to addicts and adulterers, to sinners of all kinds. He has made God real and approachable to ordinary and uneducated people. He has challenged the dead religion of his people and made faithful people come alive to a new rule of a compassionate God. He has taken the ten commandments and given them new application and new meaning for all times and all people. He has taken the fear out of religion and put joy in its place. He has elevated the status of women and children, the blind, the lame, the poor, the least and the lost. He has brought the great Creator God down from the distant heavens and made the Almighty nearer than breathing and closer than hands and feet. All of these works and many more has our Savior done for us. And then he has said: GREATER WORKS THAN THESE SHALL YOU DO!! Tell me now that Jesus did not have a higher view of WORK than merely earning a living for ourselves???

It should be obvious that Jesus was not directing our attention to his Second Coming but was urging us to look very carefully at the end of his First Coming. And then he was saying: NOW YOU PICK UP WHERE I LEFT OFF!!

Jesus had but a few years in a place barely the size of Delaware or Rhode Island among a small, remnant people to all all these works. We've now had more than 1900 years to do the greater works of Jesus Christ. We've had the whole world opened up to us -- big ships, supersonic planes, electronic waves, computer chips, micro surgery, genetic manipulation, interplanetary travel. Is it any wonder that Jesus looked to the future and said to us: "Because your time is going to be so much longer than mine ... because your equipment is going to be so much greater than mine ... because your standard of living will be far superior to mine ... because your understanding of creation will be far more profound than mine -- GREATER WORKS THAN I HAVE ALREADY DONE will be expected from you ... and you ... and you!!

The question today ... and everyday ... is not: what are we to do when he comes again, but what greater works have we done since his first coming??? Have we really been consecrated to his greater works, or are we just working for ourselves and our own satisfactions? Obviously - each of us must answer that question for himself/herself. But I can say

this much. I have known several in this community of faith who have very unwillingly lost their work, their jobs. And in a culture where work is so valued, nothing can be quite so devastating. But at the same time -- these persons have not lost their WILL to do THE GREATER WORKS OF GOD. They may now have more limited financial resources -- but they have continued to be greatly consecrated to God's word and God's good deeds in this world. What greater witness can be shown than those who lose or retire from their work ... and continue to do THE GREATER WORKS OF GOD!!

Yes - let no one deceive us today -- we are here not because we fear the Second Coming of Christ. God has already graced us in Jesus Christ's First Coming. We live secure in the greatest work ever given to humanity ... the sacrificial life of Jesus Christ on the tree of the cross. But we do not pride ourselves in this security or in our own good works. Rather, we consecrate ourselves to the greater works of love and compassion that Christ has given us to fulfill during our discipleship. That's why we pledge ourselves, our time, our money to the mission of Hope Lutheran Church -- because this mission reflects THE GREATER WORKS OF JESUS CHRIST.

The mission of Hope Lutheran is more than upkeep and utilities ... more than religiosity and renovations ... more than busybodies patting one another on the back for good stewardship. Our mission, should we decide to do the greater works of our Lord, is

to give drink to the thirsty ... and fellowship to  
the least and the lost;  
to give clothes to the naked ... and food to the hungry;  
to bring comfort to the lonely ... and hope to the  
imprisoned; ...  
to mourn with the grieved ... and to rejoice with the  
graced;  
to tear down curtains of alienation ... and to build  
up foundations of forgiveness;  
to make friends with strangers ... and challenge  
enemies of the cross;  
to offer the harmony of God's love ... and the whole-  
ness of God's peace to the world.

For those seeking work - the church may be a resource for employment. But it's primary business is not offering jobs. It's real business is the affirmative action program of giving all people THE GREATER WORKS OF JESUS CHRIST. And once you and I get involved in his work -- there is never any reason to be idle or cheap, ... for we have greater works to do now and forever. And the greater works of Jesus Christ are not done just with words ... HE NEEDS THE CONSECRATION OF our time and our money!! So let's do it!!

AMEN.

## ***“DON’T GIVE UP -- JUST DO IT!”***

*“Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful. ... [encourage] one another, all the more as you see the (End) Day approaching.” Heb. 10:23;25 “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.” Mark 13:31*

His trauma began at age 5 when his adoptive parents discovered he had abruptly stopped growing. As professors at BGSU - they were facing their first major shock with this child. Immediately they took him to the U. of M. hospital where he was diagnosed as “malabsorption syndrome,” a digestive impairment. He was given a dairy-free diet and his parents were told he had about six months to live. Then it was off to Children’s Hospital in Boston. There the diagnosis was “Shwachman’s syndrome, another digestive problem that stunts growth. This was only the beginning of years of hospitalization and intravenous feedings. During those developmental years - he was laughed at, rejected by his peers, and sometimes affectionately called “the peanut.”

He was now nine; obviously, he had lived more than six months. His mother wanted him to exercise. First it was gymnastics; that was futile. Then one day it was ice. Like nothing before - there seemed to be a chemistry on the ice ... a soothing effect on his lungs. The next ten years were steady progress. Then at age 19 -- trauma hit again -- his mother died of cancer.

Although deeply grieved - his response to her death was not defeat but renewed dedication. Never before was he so determined. His dream was to become a world figure skating champion. He had almost achieved it, when trauma struck again -- his father suffered a stroke. Would this be the blow that would turn persistence into self-pity??? He would not allow one more disappointment to destroy his vision for the future. He had developed a life-sustaining faith in a simple motto of consecration: “Don’t Give Up -- Just Do It!”

Last Wednesday - Scott Hamilton was featured in an hour-long comeback after yet another trauma -- testicular cancer. His life has been a testimony to faith in God and in his God-given abilities. He has held fast to the hope that God will always be with him. So no matter how bleak the situation looks ... he continues to use his God-given gifts as long as he has the strength to do so: “Don’t Give Up -- Just Do It!”

There was another young man born of parents much less impressive than Scott Hamilton’s. This man’s childhood was not stunted by Shwachman’s syndrome, but like Scott - there was not much to tell during these years. To the best of our knowledge - this man was probably a childhood laborer -- a skilled tradesman or carpenter by the time he was 20. But like Scott - this man’s father & mother knew that God had a great mission for this child. By the time he was 30, he had

thrilled to be in his presence. His teaching and knowledge of the ultimate truths of life were beyond anything they had ever heard.

But this man's followers were rather naive. They did not know how determined he was to establish a better world--to bring the kingdom of heaven down to earth. "His times" had become very traumatic. The principalities and powers of this world began to challenge this man & his mission -- they refuted his teachings, they ridiculed his concern for the poor & powerless, and they plotted to persecute him publicly. But traumatic challenges only fortified his determination to do this mission which he knew was from God himself -- a mission of mercy, love, forgiveness & even acceptance of his enemies. In essence his motto had become the faith of his Father: *"Don't Give Up - Just Do It!"*

Seeing these circumstances, many of his followers became fearful and confused. Some of his closest associates deserted him. His friends, when confronted, denied that they knew him. The pompous and powerful of his day became hostile and hateful. One night he was tempted to ask for relief ... for a less "bitter cup." But knowing that his Father's will was of utmost importance to this world - he persevered. He consecrated himself to the true cost of Godliness -- he surrendered his life on a cross to reveal the ultimate price tag of true love. Love is never the cheap or easy way -- it's always the way of personal sacrifice. It thrives on the motto - *"Don't Give Up -- Just Do It!"*

Today's gospel tells us about traumatic events in the world -- nations against nations, wars, violence, hatred, hunger and famine, earthquakes and all kinds of disasters not even mentioned by Jesus. Jesus says these are signs that the world "is literally going to hell" -- meaning, that there is a great chasm between God and his creation & people. Throughout Christian history--preachers have often used these traumatic events to put fear into their flocks ... to proclaim doom and gloom ... to say that the end is very near. But we don't see that example--nor do we have that message from Jesus ... and not even from Scott Hamilton. When they were confronted by the most traumatic events of their lives -- those events serve to motivate them to a new beginning ... a new resolution to make a better future ... to strive for a resurrection of hope rather than a resignation to die. For Jesus & Scott--traumatic, life threatening realities led to new beginnings ... not resignations of "the end." When confronted by the traumatic events of this world, God's Word is crystal clear to us: *"Don't Give Up -- Just Do It*

*"Just Do What?!?" Do what Jesus & Scott Hamilton did when faced with adversity. Do the things that are everlasting -- seek to improve yourself, strive for justice in relationships & races, work for peace, live in harmony with family & friends, offer forgiveness rather than hostility, and consecrate yourself to a SACRIFICIAL LIFESTYLE, RATHER THAN A LIFESTYLE OF SELFISHNESS. In short, be*  
*SELF-SETTING LIFESTYLE*

I'm reminded of a vocational education teacher I had in junior high school. His job was to teach us to use wood-cutting tools. His instruction was always thorough and impeccable. But once the instruction was finished, he placed the tool in our hands and said: "Now that I've given you the tool, I will never take it back no matter how poorly you do with it. I don't want you to ever feel that I've 'GIVEN UP' on you. You will continue to use that tool until you believe in the satisfaction of your own work."

That man was a genius. He possessed the spirit & perseverance of God Almighty. What a lesson he taught: once you put a tool in your child's hands ... whether a pencil, a book, a crayon or a computer ... don't take it away and do the task for them. For when you do the task for them -- you have told them "I've Given Up On You!" Rather, like my wood-cutting teacher, put the tools in your child's hands and say, "Don't Give Up -- Just Do It!"

God doesn't take away what he has put into our hands. Regardless of the traumatic times around us in this world -- He has given us the tools to keep things going "according to His Will" as caretakers of the earth and of each other. He gives the tools in Baptism, in Communion, in hearing his Word. They are tools of Compassion and Forgiveness, of Mercy and Kindness, of Gentleness, Love and Patience, of a Sacrificial and Generous Spirit.

And so today - my Glenwood friends -- no one sits here without God's tools of ministry. He's given us time, ability and money in order to integrate these tools of ministry. Sometimes we've done poorly with His tools - at times, we've done an incomplete job; sometimes we've been selfish in our focus & efforts; and sometimes we've been faithful & exuberant. Regardless of our efforts -- God the Father has not given up on us!! His motto remains: "Never Give Up -- Just Do It!" And every year -- He reminds us that He has put His tools in our hands! At this moment, He waits for our Consecration Response ... hoping and praying that we will live by his Word: "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away. So - Never Give Up -- Just Do It!"

AMEN.