

PENTECOST V  
Church of the Master - Troy, Mich.  
July 7, 1974

"BRIDGING THE GAPS"

"Ponder the great words of Paul in the Second Lesson. Remember that society in his day was even more sharply divided and rigidly structured than our own. Jews and Græeks lived in separate worlds. Slaves and free men were miles apart even though they lived in the same household. Women had few rights and were regarded in every way as unequal to men. With these and many other cultural gaps. Paul boldly proclaims:

'It is through faith that all of you are God's sons in union with Christ Jesus. You were baptized into union with Christ, and so have taken upon yourselves the qualities of Christ himself. So there is no difference between Jews and Gentiles, between slaves and free men, between men and women, you are all one in union with Christ Jesus.'

Paul cuts across all gaps that divide with this bold declaration that in Christ Jesus we are all in the same relationship to God. In Christ there are no differences that matter.

My friends, this is explosive material - and people in Paul's day knew it. No wonder it was observed that the Christians were people who were out "to turn the world upside down." No wonder people of Paul's day reacted negatively to the Word of these Christian fanatics. No wonder Jesus was crucified - he didn't fit into the gap-mentality of his day.

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How do Jesus and his followers fit into the mentality of our present day? That is, how do you and I - his followers - deal with the gap-mentality of our own day? Do we recognize it = and does our faith enable us to respond to it = in any particular way?

Let's just isolate a few of our gaps and determine what a disciple's response to them might be. First - the old favorite - the generation gap. Is there truly a fragmentation between generations or is this just a myth of the day?

I believe there is a gap fragmenting people of different ages - different educ. levels - different economic plateaus. And so often underlying this fragmentation there seems to be a lack of patience. We might call the generation gap a patience gap.

Namely, we just don't have time today TO UNDERSTAND or TO EXPLAIN. There's always the next appointment to get to - the next party - the next client - the next job. Who's got time to listen - to explain - to understand what's really buggin someone else. The tempo of life is hurry-up - I've got to get going.

My Christian friends, do we recognize this lack of patience in our relationships? Or is it only limited to non-Christians? Obviously, we are all to some degree caught in this ~~gap~~ trap. of *impatience*.

Can our Christian faith help us build bridges over this gap?? Paul says: You were baptized into union with Christ, and so have taken upon yourselves the qualities of Christ himself. My friends, one of Christ's greatest qualities was patience. Our Lord knew how to wait for those lost sheep - and to understand and care for the lost sheep even while they were wandering

You and I have been baptized into that union with Christ - we wear his garment of patience. We do have a faith which enables us to bridge - to bring new union to generations fragmented by a secular doctrine of impatience.  
*Then how about that second favorite gap - The credibility gap.*  
 A study printed at the end of 1973 indicated that the American people have approx. 19% confidence in the exec. branch of government - about

29% confidence in Congress - about 29% confidence in major companies - about 30% confidence in organized religion - and among those at the top, about 57% confidence in medicine. Needless to say, Paul's age had no absolute market on credibility gaps. Who can possibly deny, ~~that~~ <sup>however,</sup> ~~the~~ malignancy of trust ~~that~~ has metastasized into almost every sector of human relationships.

Does our Christian faith have any answer for this dilemma? Paul says: You were baptized into union with Christ, and so have taken upon yourselves the qualities of Christ. My friends, this ~~Jesus~~ of a carpenter of Nazareth exhibited qualities of mercy - of compassion - of honesty - of kindness ---- yes, qualities which we call the love of God.

Each of us has been united with this Christ - we have been styled and re-styled with the qualities of his love. As long as we maintain this union in all of our relationships, credibility gaps will be denied entrance into our endeavors, whether business, government, or family.

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But then, too, our age like Paul's has its gap between slave and free -- but of course, our civilized world can make this gap look much more subtle and proper. And yet the gap rears its head whenever an issue causes us to make contact with the slave. Needless to say, the bussing issue which has been simmering in the Supreme Court makes us vividly aware of mankind's compassion-gap.

I do not believe the pulpit is the place to offer a decision to a very complex issue. But the pulpit is the place to deal with the qualities of Christ - and to relate them to life. And the quality of Christ which is the MISSING LINK in racial attitudes today IS THE QUALITY OF COMPASSION. Too many Americans have allowed pigmentation to become the gap between caring and indifference - if not outright hatred.

Paul proclaims: You were baptized into union with Christ, and so have taken upon yourselves the qualities of Christ. My friends, the answer to our racial gap IS NOT COMPLETE harmonious agreement on every issue -- but the answer is Christ-like compassion, rather than barbaric hatred.

Finally, we might deal with the personality gap - the chasm which has affected this congregation. To know Christ is to know that each of his disciples has different strengths and weaknesses. Jesus did not try to make a Peter out of James. He did not try to make a Martha out of Mary Magdalene. He knew how to affirm the strengths and weaknesses of a disciple, and to use these attributes to the glory of God and to the building of a caring community of faith.

How sad it can be when we deny our fellowship with God's community because of a past personality gap or conflict. Paul says we have taken on the qualities of Christ himself. My friends, that means that you and I have the power to accept the diversity of our personalities -- the diversity of our witness styles - even the diversity of our piety. It does not mean that we have to express ourselves like the next guy - it does not mean we have the same gifts - it does not mean that we must have total agreement on religious practice.

*Patience  
Love + trust  
Compassion*

But it does mean that we accept one another in the love of Christ -- using our talents, however meager, for the benefit of the common good.

*And it is right here that we renew the qualities of Christ first offered to us in baptism.*

And where are we renewed in this power. Odd as it may seem to a secular world, we're renewed in the qualities of Christ right around this table. This is our bridge-building event - this is the event in which the baptismal qualities of Christ are renewed. This is where we physically move to taken in the ~~physical~~ qualities of Christ's love.

*acceptance of differences*

*affirming*

"Take and eat. Taken and drink." Yes, take the qualities of Christ again and again -- take them every time they are offered - take them and build his bridge of love over the gaps of life that just CANNOT be avoided.

Take His qualities and build a new unity - a new community of faith - a new fellowship with God, with one another, and with all humanity. And do all of this, because you have been baptized into union with Christ, and so have taken upon yourselves the qualities of Christ himself.

AMEN

PENTECOST V

Luth. Church of the Master - Troy  
June 22, 1975

"NOTHING TO FEAR BUT . . ."

"Fear not, therefore, you are of more value than many sparrows." Matt 10:31

No one is a stranger to fear. The person who insists he is afraid of nothing may be talking loudly to impress himself - while in reality he's trying to avoid the nagging apprehensions that lurk at the edges of his life. Fear can be controlled and managed, but it will not go away by refusing to face it. Robert Frost once observed, "There is nothing I am more afraid of than scared people."

God only knows - many people today are scared people. I think it's safe to generalize - we're a world living scared.

~~few other~~  
Scared of blacks and other minorities. Scared of change and the future shock that comes with it. Scared of growing old. Scared of going out at night - even in the security of our suburban neighborhoods. Scared of losing jobs and the industrial flux of the moment. Scared of failure. Scared that our kids won't be what we want them to be. Scared that we'll be found out by our parents. Scared that we won't satisfy everyone - and what a fear that is (and how I speak from experience in regard to this fear.).

Yes, fear can be controlled and managed, but it won't go away by refusing to face it. And we surely can't avoid it in an age with so many scared people

Imagine, then, for a moment - how the twelve Apostles were feeling while Jesus was talking to them as reported in today's gospel. Here they were - twelve diverse men - many of them poor - few of them very polished - all of them aware that the Christian population of that moment was right there - they were the future or failure of the church -- everything depended

upon this hodge-podge of Christ's followers.

Is it any wonder that Jesus dealt with the issue of fear. You can bet your bottom-bippie that these twelve guys were shaking in their sandals about this time. And Jesus didn't let them have any false illusions - he was a realist. He said right straight out - do not be afraid of those who will kill the body. Jesus was making it clear that following him is no ticket to freedom from suffering or death. In fact, to the contrary, he was telling the disciples it may mean an early death.

Imagine - the audacity of our Lord. Calling disciples into that kind of fearful situation. And yet, he told those disciples - and he tells us today - "Fear not, you are of more value than many sparrows." I really wonder how comforting that thought was to the first twelve??

But beyond such speculation, what does appear to be crystal clear is that Jesus painted no illusions about the Christian life BEING WITHOUT FEARS.

Today's gospel graphically illustrates that the Christian is not safeguarded from the common hazards of life -- esp. the hazard of evil people who will destroy those they disagree with. Through Christ, we are beckoned continually into the lion's den -- there often to be humiliated because of our conviction of love and forgiveness.

Yes, Christian living can be fearful business; in fact, following Christ often drives us into fearful situations. Because Christ's followers are called to minister in areas where the rest of the world passes by - Christ's followers always get the high-risk calls.

But Christ does not leave us defenseless at that point -- he says that we need not be controlled by our fears. Because there is a greater FEAR which overcomes our terrors and insecurities -- namely, THE FEAR OF GOD.

Here is the kernel of today's gospel. Jesus

tells the disciples TO FEAR GOD above all things. The Greek term "fear" as used here, does not mean "to be terrorized by God," rather, it means to live in wholesome respect - awe - total reverence for God. Christ says that his followers are to live with this kind of fear and their scary fears will be diminished.

How can this be so??? ~~Quite~~ <sup>Well</sup> simply, if I live with a wholesome respect for God - namely total reverence or fear, then I will live out my life as a PIONEER rather than a SETTLER.

Because to live IN REVERENCE OF GOD is to live as a man hungry for adventure, for new life, for the challenge of being on the trail. This is the spirit of Christ - a pioneer spirit, rather than a SETTLER spirit, which seeks SAFETY FIRST at all costs.

This was the spirit Christ instilled in his first disciples - a pioneer spirit. One in which you do not ATTACH yourself completely to the finite things of life. Because once we root ourselves firmly to the objects of this world, then we live in constant FEAR of losing them. And that kind of fear can be very UN-healthy.

Yes - we are a pioneer people - always seeking new ways to offer the love of God - risking ourselves for his sake.

Obviously - as pioneers - we ~~can~~ often fail - we very seldom satisfy everybody. But at that moment, we remember a second dimension of our calling. We are pioneers who have a covenant - <sup>on the</sup> namely, we have a God who does not desert us <sup>on the</sup> when we lose or fail. He accepts us - forgives us - and then calls us to be a COVENANT PEOPLE. Namely, a people who can be trusted - so that when others are feeling defeated by life, they will feel confident to turn to us and receive understanding and help. For they will know us as a reverent, God-respecting people.

And that points up our third trait due to our



Fear of God - namely, because we respect our Father, we are his servants, not his slaves.

Fear of God, does not make us feel forced to do his will. He does not intimidate us - he loves us. And the response to love is servanthood, not slavery.

And that is the unique motivation of the Christian - respect for God causes him to serve others first, when he knows his greatest temptation is to serve himself first.

We are servants of others because AS CHRISTIANS we recognize that God has created us WITH NOT ONLY MORE VALUE than sparrows - but more value than any other creature or thing. We are the most valued creation of the Creator. And if we DO NOT become his servants, then the world will be left to destroy itself.. . for it will be a world without fear of God - NAMELY, a world without respect and reverence for the Creator.

My friends, we are God's pioneers - secure in his covenant of love - called to be his servants on earth because we are his most valued creation. That makes me feel real good about my relationship with him and with you. So let's not blow it - let's live as his pioneer servants secure in love for him and one another.

Let's live that way - his way - because living that way - we'll be aware of the fears of life, but we won't live as scared people. We'll have nothing to REALLY fear - but God himself, which is not a relationship of terror, but one of reverence and respect.

AMEN

*for him, for one another,  
+ for all creation*

PENTECOST V (July 4th weekend)  
Luth Church of the Master, Troy  
July 3, 1977

"ROOTS"

"Who do you say I am?" Peter answered, "You are God's Messiah." ... And he said to them all, "If anyone wants to come with me, he must forget himself, take up his cross every day, and follow me."  
Luke 9:20,23

The tall ships unfurled their sails and proceeded majestically up the Hudson. Musket fire crackled across the slumbering battlefields. Minutemen vanquished redcoats and rockets burst in air. That was July 4, 1976 -- one year ago.

But in the year since the bicentennial birthday bash, there has been a curious sequel. At 200 plus 1, Americans seem to be focusing not so much on their country's history as on their own. The names they are poring over like precious artifacts are not Yorktown or Valley Forge - but Galway, Anderson, Holmberg, and Haley. By thousands - people are crowding archives and journeying over seas.

Spurred by the Bicentennial, and then galvanized by Alex Haley's "Roots" - the quest for person origins has skyrocketed in the last six months. So goes the opening lines in an article in this week's issue of NEWSWEEK.

And I'm sure there's significant truth in it. Just this past Wednesday, Sue and I received a letter from the former youth director in Milwaukee saying her family was knee deep in search of their past. Earlier this year my dad turned up at our house with this rather detailed family history of the Martyns. And today - we're having a Bratwurst Bash -- obviously celebrating my German heritage.

Just two weeks ago a planeload of Finnish-Americans embarked for Helsinki on an ancestral pilgrimage.

Recently Continental Trailways ~~has~~ launched a high-powered campaign titled "Take Our Routes To Your Roots -- offering a \$75 fare to anyplace in the U.S. with a "How To" pamphlet on Ancestor hunting.

Pam Am World Airways has a new heritage commercial called "All of us came from someplace else - and they're soon marketing a new game called "Heritage Hunt."

A local Detroit firm is offering a new T-shirt emblazoned "American Roots." At Salt Lake City's huge Mormon Church genealogical library - traffic has almost doubled since the "Roots" telecast. Some colleges this fall will be offering FAMILY HISTORY COURSES - teaching students how to search through National Archives, how to interview grandparents, and how to use original documents like family Bibles.

And why all this hullabaloo about Roots?? Jeanne Eddy Westin, author of "Finding Your Roots" feels that "people are floating, their looking for an anchor." Other historians say that immigrant Americans are finally felling security rather than uneasiness about their Americanism. So - they're finally free to search for their past without fear of stigmas. Whatever the reason - the fad for ROOTS is going strong.

Quite frankly - it's refreshing to see Polish, German, and Italian Americans as well as blacks looking to their heritage with pride. Far too long this country claimed to be a melting pot-- which really turned out to be a homogenizing machine which cranked out Anglo-Saxon bleached whites with Brooks Brothers Suits and the same way of speaking and thinking.

Yes - it's important for us to feel respect for and pride in our ethnic past. But like all ego-centric fads -- this one ~~could~~ lead dangerously counter to Jesus Christ. It seems to have the potential for driving us more

inward -- for leading us to self-glorification--  
toward narcissism -- and other forms of  
belly-button gazing.

We ~~are~~ need to feel good about ourselves and  
about our ROOTS -- but there is a fine line  
between self-respect and self-worship. If  
this search for ROOTS just leads to greater  
games of one-upsmanship -- then we have gone  
deeper into human idolatry. And then I truly  
fear for America and her people.

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It seems to me that Jesus in today's gospel  
was also searching out his disciples FOR  
THEIR ROOTS through his interrogation. His  
line of questioning was one of searching for  
their identity -- their ROOTS. First he asked:  
Who do others say I am?

Notice - this is just a question of informa-  
tion. He was testing the disciples to see  
if their ROOTS were personal -- or just based  
upon the opinions of other people. Jesus knew  
that followers had to base their commitment  
on MORE THAN the opinions of others.

So he asked the second question: Who do you  
say that I am? And Peter rightfully responded:  
YOU ARE GOD'S MESSIAH. And you see -  
that statement is more than an opinion of  
others -- that is a statement of personal  
commitment. When a person can make that  
statement - he has real ROOTS in Christ.

And only a person with such ROOTS can possibly  
identify with Jesus' next personal statement:  
"If anyone comes with me, he must forget  
himself, take up his cross every day, and  
follow me." ONLY when faith is rooted deeper  
than the opinions of others DOES THIS STATEMENT  
seem possible. Only with personal ROOTS IN  
CHRIST is it possible TO LOSE YOURSELF - TO  
TAKE UP YOUR CROSS EVERYDAY.

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As you can see, our cultural search

for ROOTS can be moving in the opposite direction from Jesus Christ. Because you see - our culture's way of showing ROOTS is often TO GLORIFY YOURSELF.

But Jesus' way of showing ROOTS is TO FORGET YOURSELF -- to lose your life for his sake. That doesn't mean that we must completely deny ourselves and become monkish -- taking all kinds of vows of self-debasement.

Yes, it surely

doesn't mean we give up all the things which we enjoy -- but it does mean that at the roots of our existence -- there is a drive to serve other people.

During the eight days of my vacation -- this congregation illustrated THIS KIND OF ROOTS in Christ. For eight, solid days, either one or more people visited Bea McGaw at Beaumont Hospital. And I believe they did so NOT OUT OF DUTY -- but out of love for Christ and one of his suffering servants.

I can't tell you what a thrill it was to talk to Bea's sister this week as she said -- "Pastor - in all my life, I've never seen members of a congregation respond like that."

My dear friends in Christ...Those are the ROOTS we believe make a difference in this world. And it has been those same roots of personal sacrifice that have made America what she is today.

So - today and always, we thank God for our Savior -- who has shown us the TRUE ROOTS of our heritage: whoever wants to save his own life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it."

AMEN

St. Peter/St. Paul  
5th Sunday of Pentecost  
June 27, 1980  
Hope Lutheran, Toledo

"HUMAN WISDOM OR DIVINE FOOLISHNESS?"

"Let no one deceive himself. If any one among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is folly with God."

I Cor. 3:18-19

A few years ago a corporate executive of the K-Mart Corporation was hosting Sue and I at his home in suburban Los Angeles. He had had a few drinks, and had evidently decided it was finally time to lower the boom of truth with me.

He began by asking me why I was wasting my time in the Parish Ministry. He continued by saying surely someone with my background and willingness to work could do a lot better for himself in the business world. He finally concluded by telling me "that there was no future in the ministry -- that I should get out of it and get into something that was worth my commitment of time and energy."

In short, this successful executive was telling me that as far as he was concerned -- the only careers of life that are worth anything are those careers which will provide large incomes and all the pleasures of this world.

That executive was by no means in the minority-- by and large, he represents the majority opinion in our society. As I sit down and talk with most college students these days -- the primary motive in their career goals is often a monetary one. A recent research survey of American universities further confirmed the fact that most students today are seeking to enter job markets which offer the biggest payoff. During the couple of years that Sue served as the Assistant Dean of the Law School -- this same motive was clearly evident in the professional goals of law students.

Obviously - there is nothing inherently wrong with a goal of economic security. We all desire that in life. But unfortunately -- that goal too often today has become a life-consuming ambition. *It has become the golden calf of 20<sup>th</sup> century.*

*has equated with* In fact, it is this condition of affluence which human wisdom of our world. It is because of this wisdom that my executive friend told me "that I was wasting ~~my~~ time in the parish ministry, because he knew (as I know) that you cannot become filthy rich in the ministry."

Martin Luther experienced the same kind of rejection from his father when he accepted the Call to monastic life. His father had prepared and channeled Luther's life to become a prominent and prosperous jurist. When Luther entered the monastery -his father was so enraged that he nearly ~~d~~isowned his own son.

It was obvious -- Luther was not choosing the wisdom of the world -- instead, he was choosing that divine foolishness of serving his fellowman as a MONK. And according to the world, nothing is more foolish than a life of sacrifice.

You can surely understand why religion, and Christianity in particular, is not very popular among the young peer groups of our society. If there is one time in life that we as humans "are into ourselves," it's during the period of adolescence. It is during that period of life that human wisdom is equal to self-gratification.

And along comes the church and says to the teenager or young adult -- true happiness is found in serving your fellowman. And that teenager either says aloud or under his breath -- bull--oon-ee!! True happiness is having fun -- getting your kicks -- doing crazy things and having wild parties!!

*Any wonder that only a few show up for Can Week.*

Yes - the divine foolishness of Jesus Christ runs quite contrary to the human wisdom of the world -- especially the wisdom of the young. Because the divine foolishness of Christ says: "turn the other cheek, go the extra mile, love your enemies, take up your cross and follow me, lose your life for my sake, or in short, sacrifice!!"

Sacrifice! That's the real rub -- that's the thing that just does not fit into the human wisdom of the world. Because human wisdom is primarily concerned about SELF-INTEREST -- not the interests of others. Human wisdom says "take care of number one, and the heck with everyone else." Human wisdom says -- by all means DO NOT SACRIFICE -- because it's just not practical.

Human wisdom says - live for today, and let tomorrow take care of itself. Human wisdom says -- get your fair share before it's all gone. Human wisdom is the way, truth & life of the advertising man -- who says, don't only take what you need -- take all that you can get -- after all, you deserve the best today -- so get it, while the getting's good!!

*And out to -*  
But St. Paul says -- Human wisdom is nonsense!! Human wisdom is folly in God's sight! Human wisdom is folly because it only seeks to serve our own self-interests. And that's why Paul says to have the wisdom of God you have to be foolish -- because only foolish people according to human wisdom seek to serve anyone else.

Yes, only fools according to human wisdom seek to serve -- so, Let's take a closer look at one of those foolish persons in order to see how he exhibits the wisdom of God. His name is Wally. And a few years ago - he was on a bus with a load of other Army reservists on their way from Louisville, KY to Fort Knox. It was one of those hot summer sultry days much like today.



The bus was on one of those long, winding Kentucky roads. Along with several other cars, the bus was standing still in the valley at a railroad crossing awaiting an approaching train. The tracks were parallel to the bus -- and rising behind the bus was a fairly long and steep hill. So as the soldiers relaxed on the bus -- they could hear the engineer giving full throttle to the diesels in order that the train would ascend the mighty hill.

Wally sat there slumped over the seat -- leaning on a set of gloves with his fatigue hat draped over his sunglasses face. Wally was one of those guys that always seemed to be half-asleep or half awake.

But as the train neared - the calm was shattered by a loud -- "My God ... somebody do something!" As the soldiers stood up -- they could see ahead that a little girl was standing on the tracks - totally oblivious of the approaching train. They all stood frozen -- unable to act. All except Wally.

At the sight of the little girl - Wally <sup>had</sup> sprung to his feet and was dashing through the Emergency door - then forward to the little girl. As the locomotive hurtled past the bus, frantically blowing its horn, they could see Wally scrambling up the 15 foot embankment to the tracks where the little girl stood frozen in freight of the 10,000 tons of rolling thunder. As the forces converged, the soldiers saw Wally at the last moment diving into the shadow of the speeding locomotive.

The sparks continued to fly from the train's wheels as it slowly ground to a halt. The engineer kept sounding the horn in bursts -- telegraphing his panic at what surely had come to pass. Then the train began to back up. And as the gigantic engine passed the 15 foot embankment where Wally has made his leap --

*that had*  
the crowd now gathered at that spot, lurched out with a loud cheer. There stood Wally on the other side of the tracks with the little girl in his arms -- his sunglasses now broken and dangling around his neck. As the train stopped, he put the crying child down - and then simply yelled to the crowd: "Somebody better call an ambulance - I think I broke her shoulder."

And when the ambulance LEFT - the reservists got back on the bus. But now there was a strange silence that had fallen over that previously boisterous group. Each soldier -- seemed to be wrestling with the nagging question: "Why had they not acted?"

And they all knew the answer: Human wisdom had told them that it was too much of a risk -- human wisdom had told them that they might have to sacrifice their own lives in order to save the little girl. But as each of them rationalized their human wisdom -- each of them also realized THAT IF SOMEONE ELSE'S LIFE WASN'T worth saving -- then how could their's be worth saving??

By the same reasoning -- Wally had been a fool. He had acted at great risk to himself. His act was utter foolishness -- in fact, divine foolishness. He sought to save someone else's life by risking his own. Yes - that's utter foolishness -- but that's the kind of foolishness that always puts human wisdom to shame.

Wally had the same choice as everyone else in that bus: either HUMAN WISDOM or DIVINE FOOLISHNESS? Wally chose the way of Christ -- divine foolishness. He offered his life as a living sacrifice in order to save another.

I'll celebrate Wally's foolishness any day before I'll celebrate the wisdom of the rest of those troops. All of life was enriched by what

Wally did. The kingdom of God was made visible by what Wally did. He showed that the foolishness of the kingdom of God makes much greater sense than the human wisdom of the world which always seeks to play it safe -- to merely gratify self-interests.

And hopefully - that's why you and I are Christians -- because we desire to celebrate the divine foolishness of God -- a God who loved us so much that he sacrificed his life for our sake.

A God who called men like St. Peter and St. Paul. Two great Christian men -- who lived pretty much like Wally -- they were divine fools. They were fools by the world's standards, because they sought to offer their lives for the sake of others. And that's divine foolishness, rather than human wisdom.

But I'll take the foolishness of Peter and Paul any day to the chicken-hearted wisdom of this world. And maybe that's the best answer I can give my executive friend from K-Mart: ~~I'm in the parish ministry~~ because I love the divine foolishness of God and his people FAR BETTER than the self-righteous, smugness of the rich and stingy people of this world.

One of my pastor friends in Minnesota sends his newsletter to me each week - and I noted his sermon title this week was: "In Search of Heroes." I envy him - because I wish that had been my title.

because our world and society is in drastic need of some real heroes -- from the President's office right down. And the real heroes of life are the people like St. Peter and St. Paul -- and the Wally's of this world. The real heroes of life are the divine fools -- the ones whose lives are a living sacrifice for all humanity.

AMEN

PENTECOST V  
Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo  
July 9 & 12, 1987  
Peter R. Martyn, Pastor

**"HAVE NO FEAR??"**

So have no fear of them; for nothing is covered that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. What I tell you in the dark, utter in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim upon the housetops. And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. Matt. 10:26f

In the November, 1984 issue of Psychology Today, a survey on FEAR was conducted. I've enclosed an exact copy of the brief questionnaire in the bulletin. More than 1000 subscribers responded and the results were printed in the February, '85 issue. It doesn't take a genius to know the #1 fear: the death of a loved one. Fear of serious illness took second place, with financial worries and nuclear war tied for third. Next came fear of being the victim of a crime. There was a large gap between these five fears and the other seven.

The only surprising finding was that respondents were more afraid of spiders and snakes than they were of losing their jobs. One person wrote: "The Russians could torture me forever, but once they released a couple of snakes in the room I'd tell them anything." Natural disaster, the dark, flying, and going to the dentist all brought in a minimal response. But ladies - you did it again ... men were more fearful of the dentist than were women. Some of the "other" fears listed included loneliness, heights, public speaking, fire and being unloved. Two people even said their greatest fear was running out of toilet paper. Only a few claimed not to be afraid of anything!!

One thing is certain from this survey -- those few who claimed no fears were not telling the truth. HAVE NO FEAR! So easy to say ... more difficult to hear, but nigh impossible to act upon. We all have fears. We all have insecurities. We all have worries. So let's at least establish one reliable truth - we are all fearful.

But how do we then reconcile this human reality with the text before us. Jesus says, "Have no fear of those who can harm you. Just get out there and proclaim the good news. Don't be afraid of ridicule, mockery or bodily harm -- have no fear!" How can we be faithful to this admonition in light of our feelings as well as the obvious results from Psychology Today. HAVE NO FEAR?? How do we do it?? What is the meaning of this text in practical terms for our daily living? Well, I think we can be honest with the text and also honest with ourselves and still have fears while overcoming ultimate fear. How do we go about doing this??

I don't think Jesus was ever unrealistic about human fears. Earlier in chapter 10, Jesus warns his disciples of the following: "I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; beware of men ... they will deliver you and flog you ... you will be dragged before councils ... when they persecute you in one town, go to the next ... behold, you will be hated by all for my name's sake." It seems to me that Jesus was telling them they had much to fear.

And by implication, I think the first step in overcoming one's fear IS TO ADMIT THAT THERE'S REASON TO BE AFRAID. To overcome the obstacles of fear, one has to admit that there are obstacles to be feared. I think that's what Jesus was clearly saying: BEWARE, AS A DISCIPLE OF MINE THERE ARE MANY OBSTACLES OUT THERE TO FEAR. So don't deny it, don't play games with yourself, don't claim to be a tough guy who has no fears. Just admit to yourself and others THAT YOU ARE HUMAN ... AND THAT YOU TOO ARE AFRAID.

I think that is a first courageous step for any Christian seeking to overcome his/her fears of life ... and particularly fears of ministry. You've got to confess that you have them. But Jesus does not leave it there by any means. Second, Jesus says, DO NOT ALLOW THE OBSTACLES OF FEAR TO BECOME IMMOBILIZING FORCES!! See them for what they are -- simple, human fears ... common to life, but not the end of the world.

I remember vividly when I began preparing to teach high school public speaking. During those first several college courses I was scarred stiff to do public speaking. I always thought that was so strange. Here I was, preparing to teach high school kids to become better speakers, and yet I was still afraid myself. But how did I overcome that fear?? Certainly not by running away from it. Rather, I did not allow the fear to immobilize me. I kept on getting up and speaking ... and speaking ... and doing drama ... and confronting my fear by addressing audiences. And with time, I began to feel much less fearful of speaking. As the old saying goes, ONLY PRACTICE OVERCOMES PARANOIA.

I did not allow the obstacles of fear to immobilize my efforts to take action. I kept on speaking. I'm told the same holds true for anyone who has ever had a serious car accident. Initially, such persons are terrified of again getting behind the wheel. But the only way to overcome that fear is to get behind the wheel again ... very soon ... and drive and drive and drive!! Fears are natural, but they must be addressed and confronted if they are to be overcome. To run away from that which we fear is to only magnify the fear.

We've all heard people say, "We'll do anything but Evangelism ... we just can't talk to others about our love

for Christ. Obviously, they're really saying "they're afraid to tell others about their love for Christ." And that's natural -- we're all afraid to do something that we have never confronted before. I was deathly afraid the first time that I had to preach a sermon. It's only natural to be afraid of witnessing when you've never done it before. But once you confront it ... and do it again and again ... you begin to overcome the fear and start to realize the fulfillment. In fact, there's nothing more fulfilling than sharing the love of Christ! We experience that reality every day with our children ... that's why we love them so much ... because in loving our children we experience sharing the love of Christ.

Is it any wonder that Jesus confronts his disciples with the question: WHAT IS THE GREATEST POSSESSION ENTRUSTED TO YOUR LIVES? YOUR BODIES ... OR YOUR LOVE FOR GOD? The answer is obvious -- do not fear the loss of your body as if it were more important than the loss of your love for God! For to lose the love of God is to lose everything -- and that is the greatest fear ...for that is the reality of hell.

So what is the second step to overcoming the obstacles of fear?? CONFRONT THEM! CHALLENGE THEM!! ADDRESS THEM!! BUT ABOVE ALL, DON'T RUN AWAY FROM THEM! What does that say for you and me in practical terms? Well, let's go back to our #1 fear from Psychology Today ... the death of a loved one. First, we have to admit that DEATH is a real fear. But secondly, we have to confront the fear head on ... we cannot let human losses totally immobilize us ... make us feel that there is no longer any reason to live. We must talk about the loss ... about it's hurt ... about it's pain ... but then we must not allow that human hurt and pain to become eternal. We must not crawl into a cocoon to escape reality; somehow thinking that silence and sulking will give us peace.

Jesus says through this text -- the worst hurt, the worst pain, the worst defeat is not what we say, but what we don't say! To run away from God's word ... to become protective of only our bodily life ... is to negate the love of God. God will forgive all our feelings as well as all our human fears and failures. Faithful Christians never retreat from their fears, but confront them head on ... even being willing to sacrifice life if that can reveal faithfulness over fearfulness.

This Godly perspective was appropriately shown by Maximilian Kolbe, a Polish priest, in WWII. In 1941, Father Kolbe was imprisoned by the Nazis in Auschwitz. This priest came to be loved by the other prisoners because of the unselfish way in which he shared his rations and because of his comforting and counseling manner. In July of that year, one inmate escaped. As a reprisal, the commandant arbitrarily chose ten men to be starved to death. One of

them cried out for mercy because of his wife and children. Father Kolbe stepped forward and offered to take the man's place. The commandant agreed and the exchange was made. Kolbe survived for two weeks without food or water, consoling his fellow victims with prayers. Finally, the Nazis killed him with a lethal injection.

Obviously, Father Kolbe experienced fear during this ordeal at Auschwitz; as a human being, he did not desire to be persecuted or murdered. But Kolbe saw that the Nazis could only kill his body; they could not destroy the power of God's love that was so superior to his body. With that assurance, he confronted his fear of bodily loss and offered himself in the place of the other man. He did not allow the human obstacle of his own body to immobilize his action.

Hopefully, none of us will ever have to face Kolbe's fearful circumstances. But faithfulness is confronting the fears of this world and not allowing them to rule supreme. The price of faithfulness is NOT to run from terrible things, but to confront them - to overcome the terrible with the tremendous love of God! Obviously, sometimes that means we must even bear the terror in our own bodies. Is it any wonder that we are called suffering servants??

But ultimately, even this method does not offer eternal security against fear. As has already been stated, confronting our fears is no guarantee that we will overcome our ultimate fear: DEATH ITSELF. So what is our ultimate weapon against fear? Quite simply, to entrust our lives into the everlasting hands of God.

A story that graphically illustrates this truth comes from the Civil War, when Abe Lincoln would frequently visit wounded soldiers in the hospital. On one occasion, he encountered a young lad close to death, and asked the boy: "Is there anything I can do for you?" "Please write a letter to my mother," asked the dying soldier.

The young soldier failed to recognize his visitor as the Chief Executive and just went ahead with his letter: "Dearest mother, I was badly hurt while doing my duty, and I won't recover. Don't sorrow too much for me ... I have given my best. May God bless you and father. Kiss Mary and John for me." The president signed the letter for the boy and added a postscript: "Written for your son by Abraham Lincoln."

The soldier asked to see the note and was astonished to discover who had written it. "Are you really our president?" the boy asked. "Yes," said Lincoln. "Now is there anything else I can do." The dying boy, now shaking, said, "Will you please hold my hand, I think it will see me through to the end." The president held his hand while offering words of

encouragement until the soldier's spirit slipped into the glory of God's kingdom.

Abraham Lincoln offered the words and the hands of Jesus Christ to that soldier. There is no greater ministry against fear. God gives us a choice: we can stand only on the side of earthly life ... or we can stand on the side of heaven, while yet glorifying the things of the earth. Obviously we stand on the side of heaven with Christ - where there is no fear of any earthly obstacle ... not even death itself.

HAVE NO FEAR? Oh, we will certainly have some fears, but they will never overcome our faith and our love of God! Because God himself holds us in his hands. The kingdom of heaven is at hand. There is no earthly fear that can overcome his kingdom. For the greatest of all fears on earth is the respect of the Lord. And there is nothing in heaven or on earth that can separate us from this fear ... this ultimate faith in our loving Father!!

AMEN.



PENTECOST V  
Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo  
June 23 and 26, 1988  
Peter R. Martyn, Pastor

**"A FAITH FOR DROUGHTS AND DOWNPOURS!"**

And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. He said to them, "Why are you afraid? Have you no faith?" And they were filled with awe, and said to one another, "Who then is this that even wind and sea obey him?" Mark 4:40-41

One author has said that too many Christians are only fair weather followers -- they only have faith in God when the sun is shining. Well, the sun has certainly been shining lately. In fact, I'm going to say something I thought I'd never say in Toledo, Ohio - WE'VE HAD TOO MUCH SUNSHINE! And all this sunshine has taught us an old but new truth about the weather -- too much fair weather can create just as many problems as too much rain. In fact, the fair weather has become so bad in Ohio that some people have called in Indian rainmakers to see if their gods will be more responsive.

Just like the miracle story in today's gospel, the weather always makes for good illustrative material. We certainly know how much we love to talk about the weather. And the recent drought has given us new ammunition for our weather talk. But it had also taught us another lesson: 40 days and nights without rain is no better than 40 days and nights of a downpouring deluge. I read that in 1937 the midwest experienced one of the greatest floods in U.S. history. 150 people died; millions were left homeless; property damage escalated to several hundred millions; and the Ohio River extended its banks in several states enlarging itself by hundreds of miles. Some people actually believed that the time of Noah had returned -- that God was again punishing his people for their complacency and disobedience.

Well, these last forty days have taught us that the 1937 flood was no more devastating than the 1988 drought. Both conditions cause us to wonder about God and creation. First we wonder if God has any direct meteorological connections. If so, how can he let these devastating droughts and downpours occur? And esp. for Ohio farmers, how can he allow the crops to burn up? Finally, when will he intercede and end the crisis with a good-ole three-day downpour?

Well, the weather is not the only thing that causes our doubts about God... that causes us to lose our faith. There are certainly other conditions that are equally devastating and tragic. Just in the past few weeks, I have listened to the pain of two families struggling with cancer patients. One family member said to me, "Pastor, this is enough to make me lose my faith; in fact, I think I already have lost my faith." When the storm of cancer hits, many times families

encounter a real drought of faith. And cancer's not the only storm -- it might be Aids, or financial ruin, or an elderly parent, or a broken marriage, or a confused child, or a family fued, or unemployment, etc. Whatever the storm, the conditions surrounding it precipitate helplessness & hoplessness, anger, doubt, despair, and sometimes even suicide. We just can't understand how a loving God would allow such storms to invade our lives. How can God allow for destructive diseases and suffering circumstances and still be a loving God?

That question has plagued every generation of faithful followers. And there has never been an easy answer to it; but there has always been a faithful answer to it. In fact, I would suggest today that there are three facets of faithfulness that help us to understand how God can be a loving God in both times of drought and downpours. The gospel text today gives us the context for understanding such faithfulness. Just as Jesus takes his disciples for a boat ride -- God calls us is to get into the boat of life with him ... and in so doing, to understand what faithfulness is all about.

First, God says "Get into the boat with me and take the greatest joyride you'll ever have ... but please understand, this boatride WILL NOT BE WITHOUT TURBULENCE OR TERMINATION. It's right there where many faithful Christians go wrong -- they think that getting into God's boat means that life will never be turbulent ... that God has promised an everlasting boat ride on earth without termination.

So when turbulence comes ... when disease and death cut the boatride short -- then the so-called faithful are tempted to bail out ... to give up on God and life ... to claim that God has not been faithful!! Like the disciples, when the storm hits ... when the turbulence comes up, then we panic, we are overcome with fear, we want to give up on God, on life, on everything! Thankfully, God understands our panic better than we do. That's one of his greatest attributes of faithfulness -- he hangs in with us even when we're tempted to bail out from him! God understands that we are often only fair weather followers -- that we think our boatride with him should never encounter any turbulence, troubles, or termination! So God hangs tight with us ... he does not desert us, but instead forgives us.

In this first facet of faithfulness, God says "Get into the boat with me, but don't expect a joyride of everlasting peace. I will ride with you all the way ... and you can be assured that there will be an abiding internal peace. No matter how turbulent the seas may get, you will never be without me ... I will be with you always, to fortify and forgive you through the whole journey." But most of us are like Job -- we want more than God has promised. Job lived a very righteous and respectable life ... he was the epitome of a "good Christian." He only had one problem -- he thought his

virtuous living qualified him for "no turbulence or termination on his journey with God." God sets him straight quickly in terms of who is Creator and who is creature: "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Who determined its measurements? Who laid its cornerstone? How dare you expect this joyride of life to go without turbulence and troubles!" As Job learned, turbulence comes to the good and the bad ... sometimes it comes catastrophically to the good like himself. Here was a righteous man, who lost his wife, his children, his wealth, his property, his health -- everything, EXCEPT THE LOVE OF GOD!! Job still had the assurance that God was with him, even in the midst of all his catastrophic losses! That's the first facet of faithfulness -- THAT GOD PROMISES THAT LIFE'S BOATRIDE WILL NOT BE WITHOUT TURBULENCE OR TERMINATION, BUT HE WILL BE PRESENT TO FORTIFY AND FORGIVE US REGARDLESS OF THE DIFFICULTIES.

But faithfulness goes beyond knowing of God's promises of abiding presence and peace. God wants his presence and peace to be more tangible than mere words. So he says, "Don't ever go it alone in my boat -- surround yourself with a fellowship of support." Obviously, God intends us to be in his boat with others - namely, the church. We're in that boat right now -- this sanctuary is actually shaped as a boat turned upside down. God calls us to get into the boat with people who have the mind and heart of Christ - namely, with those who willingly sacrifice for others.

Nothing more graphically illustrates this second facet of faithfulness than the story of the American WWII ship, the Dorchester. On a cold February 4th, 1943 - the Dorchester was carrying several hundred soldiers off the coast of Greenland. Suddenly, an enemy torpedo ripped into its hull. Within minutes the ship would go down. Amid the panic, four chaplains - Alex Good, a Jew; John Washington, a Catholic, and Clark Poling & George Fox, two Protestants, stood together with their lifebelts fastened. Many of the soldiers had none. There was no chance of survival without a lifebelt. So the four chaplains took off their belts, gave them to four other soldiers, joined hands, and prayed the Lord's Prayer together as they sunk with the Dorchester.

Faithfulness in God is always different from other kinds of faithfulness in life because God's people sacrifice for others. The Rotary's motto is "Service Above Self;" the Christian's motto is: "Sacrifice for the Sake of Others!" Recently, one family was talking with me and mentioned that their older children had some ambivalence about me as their pastor. I asked, "Why?" They answered, "They think you talk too much about money!" I checked back over my sermons -- for the past decade, I have focused upon money usually two or possibly three times a year. So about 5% of my sermons might have a reference to commitment in terms of money. I like to

refer people who get "up tight" with my sermon references to money to Jesus' sermons - like the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus is far more demanding & graphic than I ever thought of being.

What's the point? The point is that faithful people willingly sacrifice for the sake of others. Whether it's money, time, concern, teaching, learning -- they readily sacrifice for the sake of God's mission. For some that sacrifice might be a dollar; for others it wouldn't be a sacrifice even at ten thousand. For some that sacrifice might be this hour of worship each week; for others thirty hours devoted to God's mission might be sacrificial. The point is simple: once we get into the boat with God, we become sacrificial servants for one another. That's faithfulness.

Even Jesus could not be faithful to God all alone. He needed help - he called twelve disciples to get into the boat with him. And then he told them, "Don't think this journey is going to be without trouble. I am sending you out just like sheep to a pack of wolves. Watch out, for there will be many men who will seek to arrest you. Everyone will hate you because of me. When they persecute you in one town, go on to the next. If you want to become great, then you must become the slave of others - like the Son of Man, who did not come to be served, but to serve and give his life as a ransom for others." Faithfulness has always been a willingness to get into the boat for more than a joyride ... the real journey of faithfulness is becoming a sacrificial servant of others.

Finally, faithfulness is hearing God say, "I will get you to the other side -- you will reach your destination with me." No matter how devastating the turbulence ... no matter how terminal the disease ... no matter how grotesque the tragedy -- God promises that we will reach our destination. Our final epilog will never be: **FOUND AT THE BOTTOM OF THE SEA!**

Some time ago, a visiting Scotsman was walking through the Cave of the Winds at Niagara Falls. Deafened by the pounding roar and foam of the water - he felt totally cut off from the world. But then he said, "The only link I had with the rest of humanity was the presence of the hand of our guide. I could not see him, but I was still conscious of the pull of his hand. I was confident he would get us to the other side."

That's the ultimate facet of our faithfulness -- trusting in God's hands to get us to the other side. When the storms of life come, we have two options for our hands. We can clench our fists and beat our breasts in frantic fear and angry panic. Or we can reach out and grasp the hand of the One who calmed the sea. He will grip us firmly; he will hold on regardless of the turbulence of the journey. The boat may twist and bend and even break in half, but God will carry us secure to the other side. That's the ultimate foundation of our faith! God says, **YOU CAN DEPEND UPON ME ... MY HANDS ARE THE GOOD HANDS FOR ALL PEOPLE - THEY WILL KEEP YOU SECURE IN TIMES OF DROUGHT OR DAYS OF DOWNPOUR!!** **AMEN.**

PENTECOST V  
Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo  
July 5 and 8, 1990  
Peter R. Martyn, Pastor

F E A R      T H A T      B E C O M E S      F A I T H

Do not fear those who can kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell."      Matthew 10:28

Throughout the holy scriptures, there is the constant admonition: "DO NO FEAR!" Right from the beginning in Genesis God says to Abraham, "Fear not, for I am your shield." Five more times in Genesis God tells his earliest pilgrims: "Fear not." When Mary learned of her pregnancy with Jesus, the angel said: "Do not be afraid, for you have found favor with God." When Jesus was born, the angels announced: "Be not afraid ...". Some sixty times throughout scripture these same words are used in varying situations: "Do not fear." And yet no matter how many times God seeks to assure us "not to fear," we are still a people of paranoia, neuroses, and insecurities galore.

No matter how many sermons I preach, no matter how strong my faith and conviction, no matter how well I think I know the text -- I still face every sermon with a high degree of fear and insecurity. Obviously, my fear is not really over my inability to preach, but that I will not be able to make God's word come alive ... that it won't live with the vibrancy and power that I want it to have.

Many of you remember a survey ON FEAR that I quoted a few years ago. Our #1 fear has not changed since the mid-80's -- the death of a loved one is still our greatest fear. Then comes the fear of serious illness followed by financial worries; then comes the fear of being a victim of crime. As you may recall from this survey -- some people even had a fear of running out of toilet paper. I don't know what technology will do in the next 100 years for toilet paper -- but I doubt that 100 years will wipe away those first four major fears -- death, serious illness, money problems, or criminality.

One woman recently said to her pastor: "Every person these days has to be a little afraid or a little stupid." Isn't that a sweet commentary on the end of the 20th century. To be alive is to live with nagging fears. Sometimes the phobias are just those daily variety, like the fear of our kids being out late at night with friends and wondering if they'll make it home safely. And then sometimes they're what we call the much more dreaded variety -- the fear of cancer, heart attacks, strokes, AIDS, bankruptcy, burnout, job termination, or facing endless days as a vegetable in some nursing home.

So how do we reconcile all of these natural fears with the Biblical injunction: "Fear not!" The answer is simple and yet complex. In its simplicity, the bible's most elementary message is: "Do not fear in such a way that you become faithless." "Do not allow fear to immobilize you -- to choke

*wondering if they have been tempted by some phobias*

out your love for God and others in this world." That's the simple bible answer.

The more complex answer is that we are to have a constructive fear rather than a destructive fear. When the Bible says, "Fear not," it does not mean we should have no fears at all. Jesus would not have so clearly warned his disciples of all the threats in the world if he thought the faithful life could be lived without fear. The bible does not say "HAVE NO FEARS." Not only is this poor advice, it is downright impossible and ever harmful. The bible makes vividly clear that there is all kinds of evil to fear in this world. So the first kind of constructive fear is the watchful instinct of self-preservation -- seeking those things which will preserve the mind, the body, and the soul. Though it is true for all of us -- soldiers in battle, police officers after a gunman, people who work with dangerous machinery or infectious diseases, and those in any kind of life-threatening service -- all these need "healthy or constructive fear" in their jobs for their own self-preservation. In fact, we all need a "healthy fear" of our daily work -- those who do not take time off or needed vacations are not preserving the balance of mind, body and soul. So some fear is not only a reality, it is a necessity for faithful living.

But our text today says that there is an even healthier fear ... a more constructive fear: "the fear of the Lord." Many modern minds have balked at this traditional phrase of the bible. Luther in his catechism always began his explanation of the commandments by saying: "we are to fear and love God above all else." In the baptismal liturgy, when the pastor lays his hand on the child's head and prays: "Pour your Holy Spirit upon (this child) - the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord." Several members have mentioned that they feel troubled by the word "fear" here. Tragically, too many of us think of terror or intimidation with the word "fear." Fear becomes a destructive reality. Instead, "to fear the Lord" means to have "awesome respect," "regal reverence," "to be fully faithful to God's rule." TO FEAR THE LORD means to awesomely, respectfully, and reverently follow Christ's rule -- because there is nothing that could be more constructive for life.

One of the greatest signs of fear and terror in this world is the loss of God's rule in peoples lives. For the most part, 20th century humanity has become ruled by her body, by his bankroll, and by their belongings. That's why St. Luke's correlary to today's text from Matthew more graphically conveys the real source of fearfulness in human life -- THE OBSESSION WITH THINGS. Luke says, "Fear not, little flock. For it is the Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom /Notice Luke says nothing about earning God's favor - he gives us the kingdom as a gift\_/ Then Jesus continues in Luke with his favorite device of hyperbole: "So, therefore, sell your possessions. Give alms. Provide yourselves with purses that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief or moth can destroy. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."

Jesus lived two thousand years ago -- long before VCRs, video games, personal computers, 20-thousand dollar cars, mutual funds, lake cottages, and designer jeans -- and yet he already knew humanity's greatest stumbling block -- BEING POSSESSED BY OUR POSSESSIONS. According to Jesus Christ, there is but one source of destructive fear: OUR DESIRE TO HAVE IT ALL AND HOLD ONTO IT ALL FOREVER! We get so caught up in the stuff that we can buy in life that we make the stuff the reason for living life. And when we make the stuff of life the reason for living -- then the fear of losing any part of it, whether the body, the bankroll, or the belongings, chokes off our faithfulness to God and to others.

Jesus knows that we have this nasty habit of seeing our bodies, our bankrolls, and our belongings as the keys to the good life. That is why Jesus' word here is so pertinent and powerful. "Fear not, little flock. For it is the Father's good pleasure to give the whole kingdom to you." Jesus is not saying, "Hey, don't worry. God will bail you out of any jam or misfortune." Rather, Christ is telling us that we don't have to be afraid that we will miss getting it all, because the "all" we truly need has already been given unto us. God has already given us the whole treasure -- he has given us the full kingdom on earth ... creation, Jesus Christ and salvation, and the Spirit to live constructively with one another. What more could we possibly possess?? The "fear of God" simply means that we will reverently, respectfully, and rightfully allow Christ to rule the disposition of all things, including our bodies, our bankrolls, and our belongings. Because let's face it -- ultimately, all these are God's anyway!

When we see life and living from this perspective ... from the "fear of God" vantage point ... then we start living faithfully. Then we start loosening our grip on our bodies, our bankrolls, and our belongings. Then we start really enjoying life, because fear and terror has been turned into faithfulness and fulfillment on earth.

In a sense its like driving on an icy highway during the first storm of December. Fear and terror is never a friend under such circumstances. Rather, constructive fear or caution is our friend. Caution says: "Slow down. Be alert. If you have to stop, pump your breaks." But fear and terror incapacitates us. Fear causes us to slam on our brakes, skidding our car helplessly into that very accident we had feared.

The "fear of the Lord" causes us to be wise, even cautious in the management of our bodies, our bankrolls, and our belongings. "To fear the Lord" means to become good stewards of everything that he has entrusted to us -- never doing anything that would intentionally cause us or anyone else to needlessly suffer. "To fear the Lord" does not mean that we give away ourselves or our possessions foolishly to the church and its ministry -- it means that we give away ourselves and our possessions FAITHFULLY to Jesus Christ and his mission to others in the world. "To fear the Lord" means that God will always forgive our foolishness, but he will not tolerate our faithlessness.

How different life is when we are empowered by this "fear of the Lord." No longer do we merely close up our lives looking only after our own wants and needs. No longer are we motivated by the mentality which says "get all you can get now cause you only go round once in this world." No longer is reality merely defined by buying and selling, by profits and losses. Now reality is defined by liberty and justice for all, by being merciful and as well mighty, by a righteousness of the law as well as a forgiveness of the heart -- by the awesome, respectful, and reverent rule of God. And when we live under the rule of God -- our bodies, our bankrolls, and our belongings are seen as divine possessions for the blessing of others in this world.

Obviously, living under God's rule ... living in the "fear of the Lord" does not mean there will be no more risks, no more losses, no more tragedies, no more fears. Jesus has never promised that those who are faithful will become God's cosmic pets and bear a charmed life of ease and pleasure. God only says that those who "fear him" will be given the support, the strength, and the inspiration to carry them through whatever duty or peril is yet to come in life. He promises that through that duty or peril, "nothing in all creation will be able to separate us from his love in Christ." Could there be a greater promise of security? Could there be a greater gift of victory? If you can think of anything more secure, please let me know!

In the meantime, God has but one word of advice regarding the phobias of this world -- "to fear him above all things," for only this fear leads to hope, peace, and faithfulness in this world, and only such faithfulness promises victory over all the insecurities and evils of this world.

AMEN.



PENTECOST V  
Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo  
July 1 & 4, 1993  
Peter R. Martyn, Pastor

"IN GOD WE TRUST . . . AND FEAR!"

"Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell." Matthew 10:28

July 4th weekend prompts many pastors to become very nationalistic in their preaching. For some churches, this is a weekend of special musicals celebrating the freedoms of America. It is a time to unravel "Old Glory" in all her splendor and play upon the patriotic colors of "the rights of we the people." It is a time to give thanks for the freedoms and democratic principles that have made this nation a great beacon of God's light of justice & truth.

I hope that by just mentioning all these facts that it becomes evident that I celebrate the patriotic virtues of this country. But when the church gets all caught up in July 4th heroic preaching, then I am reminded of the story of the man who wanted to get through the Pearly Gates. He knocked and was informed by St. Peter that it would take 1,000 points to get in. So Saint Peter asked about his record.

With great pride, the man mentioned his perfect attendance at Sunday School as a child. St. Peter gave him 10 points for that. Then he proudly recalled for Peter the fact that he had served as a church deacon for some 20 years. He got 20 more points for that. Then the man followed with a rehearsal of a number of worthwhile causes that he had supported through his church -- things like Feed Your Neighbor, St. Paul's Community Center, Luth. Social Services, etc. St. Peter gave him a whopping 25 points for those commitments. After outlining several more virtues, he could still only garner 20 more points . . . for a total of 75. He finally cried out: "Good Grief! The only way I am going to get into this place is by the grace of God!"

To which Peter immediately responded: "Nine hundred and twenty-five points. Come on in!"

This story classically illustrates what Christian freedom is all about: that freedom from condemnation and judgment DOES NOT REST UPON patriotic virtues or pious platitudes or heart-warming anthems, but rather upon the undeserved love & forgiveness - the grace of God. That's the freedom that we are to celebrate in this place! And it is especially important to remember on July 4th weekend that the true source of freedom & grace is God Almighty, and not ourselves!

But the gospel text today will not allow us to dabble in the domain of freedom. Because whether July 4th weekend or not, this text drives us to deal with something far more real & motivating than freedom - NAMELY, FEAR. When a husband & wife exchange semi-automatic weapons as their symbols of

wedded matrimony -- as a couple recently did at their wedding -- then we know that our country is much more gripped by fear than by freedom!

The fireworks' celebrations of this weekend may remind us that we have gained independence from Great Britain, but all the bangs & oooohs & aaahhs will not free us from the global tensions of terrorism and zanies like Saddam Hussein. There will still be phobias of cancer and coronaries to face in many households this weekend. Some of us won't even go to the fireworks display because of our fears of crime & violence. And these are just the tip of the iceberg of fear. There are the ongoing financial tensions and deficits of our day, the job security anxieties, the parental fears of raising children in a permissive culture, the sexual paranoia with AIDS, the dread of runaway health care costs, or the ultimate fear of becoming just another abandoned vegetable in some far-off nursing home.

So, how do we reconcile all these natural fears with Jesus' injunction in today's gospel: "Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell!" Some sixty times throughout scripture these same words are used: "DO NOT FEAR!" How can a people hardly free from paranoias, neuroses and insecurities take this biblical injunction seriously?? The answer is simple, yet complex! In its simplicity, the Bible's most elementary message is: "Do not fear in such a way that you become faithless!" "Do not allow fear to immobilize you -- to choke out your love for God and others in need in this world." That's the simple Bible answer.

The more complex answer is that we are to have a constructive fear rather than a destructive fear. When the Bible says, "Fear not," it does not mean we should have NO FEARS AT ALL! Jesus would not have so clearly warned his disciples of all the threats in the world if he thought the faithful life could be lived WITHOUT FEAR. The Bible does not say, "HAVE NO FEARS!" Not only is this poor advice, it is downright impossible and harmful. The Bible makes vividly clear that there are all kinds of evils to fear in this world. So the first kind of CONSTRUCTIVE FEAR is the watchful instinct of self-preservation -- seeking those things that will preserve the mind, the body, & the soul. That's why we go to the doctor regularly; it's a constructive fear to preserve mind, body & spirit for as long as possible. The same is true for soldiers in battle, police officers after a gunman, or people who work with dangerous machinery infectious diseases - all these need "healthy & constructive fear" in their jobs for their own self-preservation. In fact, we all need a "healthy fear" of our daily work -- those who do not take time off or needed vacations are not preserving the balance of mind, body & soul. So, some fear is not only a reality, it is a necessity for faithful living!

But our text today says there is an even healthier fear ... a more constructive fear: "the fear of the Lord ... fear him who can destroy both soul & body in hell." Many modern

minds really balk at this traditional phrase of the bible. Luther in his catechism always began his explanation to the commandments by saying: "we are to fear and love God above all else." As you have often heard in the baptismal liturgy, we pray: "Pour out your Holy Spirit upon this child - the spirit of wisdom & understanding, the spirit of counsel & might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord." I have told you before that some members have said they are offended by this phrase "the fear of the Lord." Tragically, too many of us think of terror or intimidation with the word "fear." "Fear" becomes a destructive reality. Instead, "to fear the Lord" means to have "awesome respect," "regal reverence," "to be fully faithful to the rule of one who is greater than me." TO FEAR THE LORD means to awesomely, respectfully & reverently follow the rule of Christ ... because there is nothing more constructive for my life than his rule!

Or to say it in a different way - what Luther was talking about with the meaning of "fear" is that "we stand in awe before something that is greater than ourselves." For instance, we fear cancer because we know that cancer is more powerful than we are. We are helpless against it. That is a destructive power greater than ourselves. In a more constructive sense, we are to "fear God" because he is greater than we are; he has the power to create and love and forgive; but he will not force us to go His way. And when we violate and defy His way, then we choose to surrender our minds, bodies & souls "to gehana" - to the godless realm.

So with all this in mind, Christ simply teaches this about fear: No human life is without fear! It is rather a question of whom or what we fear most ... of whom or what we recognize as the greatest power that is greater than us. In the end, it is a question of whether the WAYS/POWER OF GOD or THE MERE CIRCUMSTANCES OF CHANCE determine the outcome of our lives.

Needless to say, there is only one word that is strong enough to overcome fear -- that is "trust." That's why we say, "IN GOD WE TRUST" - IN GOD WE PUT OUR ULTIMATE HOPE OF FREEDOM & GLORY! Or as we have learned today, "IN GOD WE TRUST & WE FEAR ... we awesomely respect that he is the greatest! We trust his guidance because we know there is no one greater to guide us to what is good; WE PUT NOTHING ABOVE HIM. Or said in another way - either everything will come out all right because God is in charge; or everything will come out all wrong because the world and each of us "has chosen to do our own thing!"

AND BECAUSE HUMANITY HAS ALWAYS CHOSEN TO DO HER OWN THING, there was only one thing that God could do to show us HIS solution to this never-ending dilemma of trust and fear: this Lord God laid down himself in a stable and hung himself on a cross. He entered into everything that causes us to fear. He even took on the final fear - death itself!

And He rose victorious over that worst of all fears - IN ORDER THAT WE MIGHT BE TOTALLY FREE ... FREE FROM EVERY FEAR THAT KILLS THE MIND, BODY OR SOUL! And so we know that there is Someone in this world who has handled ALL FEARS & THE WORST OF ALL FEARS. He is our Lord Jesus Christ. IN HIM WE TRUST ... and awesomely respect (FEAR) his way and his truth above all others in this world! For He is the greatest truth and source of freedom from fear that we will ever know!

AMEN.

Pentecost V  
Glenwood Lutheran Church, Toledo  
June 22, 1997  
Peter R. Martyn, Interim Pastor

## ***“WHEN STORMS RAGE, THEN WHAT?”***

*“And they said to him, ‘Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?’ And he rebuked the wind and said to the sea, ‘Peace! Be still! Then he said, ‘Why are you afraid? Have you no faith?’ Mark 4:38b-40*

One author has said that too many Christians are only “fair weather followers” - they only have faith in God when the sun is shining. Quite frankly - I think this author was wrong. Summer statistics show that Christians are much more faithful to worship when it's raining or overcast. Of course - we all know the reason for that-- if you can't garden or golf, you might as well go to church!

One thing is certain about all Christians: when the storms rage, so do our struggles & doubts about a loving God. People in southern Ohio this year have been asking serious questions about God's goodness to them amidst all their flooding. Storms of life often cause Christians to question their faith. And obviously - I'm not only talking about “weather storms.” There is hardly a week that goes by that somebody doesn't say to me, “Pastor, this cancer is really shaking my faith!” Yes, cancer has become a storm of life ... along with AIDS, financial problems, caring for elderly parents, broken marriages, confused and drug-infested children, family feuds, unemployment, and the “storm list” goes on and on! Whatever the storm -- the conditions around it are always the same: anger; doubt; hopelessness; helplessness; despair; & the feeling that “everything is out of control!” And then we ask: “How can God be a loving God and still allow these storms to rage?!?”

That question has plagued every generation. And there has never been an easy answer to it! But, as I have often said in funeral sermons -- there is a faithful answer to it! In fact, God offers three powerful assurances in the face of the storms of life. And today's gospel illustrates those “conditions of faithfulness” outlined by our God!

First & foremost, God says: “Get into my boat and enjoy one of the greatest joyrides you'll ever know -- the gift of life! But please understand, this boatride will not be WITHOUT turbulence & termination.” It's at that point that many Christians go wrong -- they think that getting into God's boat means life without turbulence, without trials, without tribulations and often without termination.

Is it any wonder that some people want to bail out on God as soon as life gets a little turbulent. Look at the disciples - when the storm hit, they panicked and were overcome with fear. Thankfully - as illustrated by Jesus - God fully understands how whimpy we often become. In fact, one of God's greatest attributes is His faithfulness - he hangs onto us when we're tempted to let go of him! Instead of deserting us, he holds us tight & forgives us when tempted to let go! That's God's greatest word given to Cody Joe today - I'll hang onto you forever!!

So, first and foremost, we have a God who abides with us through whatever turbulence comes our way! He says to us as He said to Jesus: "I will ride with you all the way ... no matter how turbulent the seas or the enemies around you -- I will never leave you alone; I am as close to you as the breath of life, always assuring you that you are loved and forgiven!"

But most of us are like Job: we want more than God has promised. Job lived a very righteous and respectable life; he was the epitome of a very religious person. He only had one problem: he thought his virtuous living qualified him for "no turbulence, no troubles and certainly no tribulations." God sets him straight quickly in terms of WHO is creator and WHO is creature: "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Who determined its measurements? Who laid its cornerstone? How dare you, Job, expect the joyride of life to be without any turbulence!?!" As Job learned, turbulence comes to the good and the bad ... and sometimes even catastrophically to the good like himself. Even after losing his wife, children, wealth, property, & health -- God still said: "Job - I am still with you; even as you have been led into this mess, I will see to it that you are led out of this mess!" God never promises that we will avoid turbulence, but he does promise to stay with us and help us out of it!

But beyond God's abiding presence through his Word of forgiving peace, he also gives us the tangible support of his body in the midst of storms. In short, God says: "Never go it alone in my boat - surround yourself with my fellowship of support!" Is it any wonder that we are here in this "nave" -- this sanctuary shaped like an upside down boat! God always says - "Stay in the midst of those people who have the mind and heart of my Son -- for they will uplift you and keep you secure when you feel torn apart by the storms of this world."

And why does God urge us to join-up with "church people??" Because like his Son, "church folk" are called to live by the principle of sacrifice. When trouble comes, they think not only of their own skins, but of all the other lives that God seeks to save. We have seen that in lives of this Christian community and others hundreds of times -- from people like Kathy Schaedler, and Martin Luther King, and Father Bernardo, and hundreds of Christians whose purpose was to give FIRST rather than be given unto. That was also graphically illustrated in 1943. The Dorchester was carrying several hundred soldiers off the coast of Greenland. Without warning, an enemy torpedo ripped its hull; it would sink within minutes. The four chaplains - consisting of a Jew, a Roman Catholic and two Protestants - stood together with their lifebelts fastened. Seeing many soldiers without lifebelts ... and knowing there was no chance of survival without one ... the four chaplains offered their belts to the others, joined hands, and prayed the Lord's Prayer together as they sunk with the Dorchester.

Obviously, most of us might not have that kind of sacrificial courage. But the real joys of Christ's body are those moments when we see others willingly surrendering their abundance to those who have little. In fact, that's why most of us are here -- because we will have those turbulent times when we will need

the sacrifices of others! Like our Lord, when we hear the cry for help -- we are called to lift others up who are fearing the waves & winds of life's storms.

Finally, faithfulness under the storms of life is not only our willingness to live sacrificially like our Lord -- but also our willingness to finally trust God's power to overcome whatever turbulence confronts us. No matter how devastating the turbulence ... no matter how terminal the disease ... no matter how grotesque the tragedy ... God's promise always abides: **HE WILL GET US SAFELY TO THE OTHER SIDE** ... whether the "other side" is restored health ... or a new relationship ... or the resurrection from dead & useless life! But never, never will God allow our final epilog to read: "*Found Dead at the Bottom of the Sea!*"

The story of today's gospel makes crystal clear that God never leaves us without a helping hand. God did not send a Hallmark card with angels greeting us with some innocuous joy powder or hallelujah juice to help us overcome life's troubles. Instead, He sent the very best he could send: He sent himself. In the person of Jesus, God has descended into the foxholes of our racial bitterness, into our sexual paranoia, into our marital mud-wrestling, and into our never-ending doubts. He knows we all have fears about tomorrow, about the end, and about the unknown. But he will not leave us in fear; ye seeks to change our haunting doubts into his divine determination & destination: **THE ASSURANCE THAT WE WILL BE VICTORIOUS OVER ALL TRIALS AND TRIBULATIONS OF LIFE!!** What greater hope could we be given?? What greater confidence could we live with?? What greater love could there be ... than the love of God, which bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things.

When Storms Rage -- God will be there with us ... always making sure that we get to the other side with Him! That's **THE ULTIMATE PROMISE** that we can always count on!

**AMEN.**