

4 EPIPHANY V

Lutheran Church of the Master - Troy, Mich.
February 10, 1974 (Second Weekend Exposure)

"ON CALL"

"And I said: 'Woe is me! For I am doomed! For I am a man of unclean lips, living among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts! . . . Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send? Who will go for us?' 'Here I am,' I said, 'Send me!'" (Is. 6:5,8)

"Master," Simon answered, "we worked hard all night long and caught nothing. But if you say so, I will let down the nets." They let down the nets and caught such a large number of fish that the nets were about to break.
(Luke 5:5-6a)

The telephone rings late one night, and you jump out of your skin. You try to pretend that it is not ringing, but finally you answer it. And a voice says: "Listen, something has happened. Something has got to be done. I don't know what to do! I know you're busy, but you've got to come. You've got to come!"

Many of us have received calls like this one in the dead of the night. Doctors regularly receive them. Pastors less often. Family members receive them quite often. We've all known from these often frightening arousals the real life meaning of being ON CALL. Whether they have come as the night cry of a child or the agonizing appeal of bereavement - most of us have known the feeling of BEING ON CALL.

So whether it was the year that King Uzziah died, or the year that JFK or Martin Luther King died, or the year that somebody you or I loved died -- many of us know the reality of hiding face in hands as we hear the CALL IN THE

hazy darkness: "Whom shall I send into the pain of a world where people suffer and die?" And there's a long pause - that hesitation which hears each of us deliver the following soliloquy ~~to ourselves~~: Woe is me! For I am doomed! for I am a man of unclean lips . . .

Reinterpreted, these words say: God, I'm not fit for this call. I can't handle it, God! I'm too aware of my past failures -- I'm afraid, God, cause I just don't measure up to your standards!

That was Isaiah's response TO BEING ON CALL. Isaiah - the great and mighty prophet! Just imagine that powerful prophet standing before the Lord sputtering out his impotency - his unworthiness. What does this picture do for you?

I hope it does for you what it does for me. It's really assuring for me to realize that even God's SUPERSTAR prophets had their moments where they fluttered in weakness -- WHERE THEY CAME FACE TO FACE WITH THEIR OWN LIMITATIONS AND IMPERFECTNESS.

It's good for me to visualize this rerun of Isaiah ON CALL for at least two reasons. First, because it assures me that I'm not the only servant of God who has fluttered and sometimes even wanted to retreat IN THE FACE OF BEING ON CALL. And second, it again reminds me of my constant need TO RECOGNIZE and CONFESS MY LIMITATIONS TO GOD and to my fellow believers.

And I hope each of you experience a similar inspiration from this. For instance, have you ever fluttered when facing the challenge of God's Call. In the work of building up this congregation by calling on persons who might be hostile toward the church, has there been that time when you've said - "Woe is me,

Lord. I'm a man of unclean lips -- I mean, I just can't do that kind of thing." Or maybe the fluttering was in the family *or social scene* God was calling you to deal with a marital *or* or adolescent conflict - to bring his forgiving love into that scene. But instead of dealing with the situation, ~~you walked away~~ *taking it on* you walked away from it feeling sorry for yourself *while condemning the other person.*

Yes, we've all had a variety of moments when God has faced us and said: 'Whom shall I send?' And we've all known the desire to retreat from that Call. We've all known the feeling of being gripped by our limitations -- by our weaknesses - our guilt - our failures of the past! *Our indifference or hatreds!*

But like Isaiah, in that moment of coming INTO HONEST realization of our incompleteness - we recognize at that moment God's touch of forgiveness. And it is that touch of grace that gives us the strength to respond to the Call -- that gives us the strength to say: "Lord, send me! I can make it, cause I know even if I fail, you'll still accept me!"

Isaiah could have been left standing there drooling in his dirty view of himself. But God does not leave us to waddle in self-pity or guilt. He desires to lift us out of the muck that we've often brought upon ourselves. He desires to free us from any immobility caused by sin -- he touches us with forgiveness so that we can respond to his call to serve -- to serve by similarly forgiving - to serve by caring for that person who has called us out of the warmth of our security blankets. *But I'd only be trying to feel you and myself if I claimed that call out of security is easy.*

We need only look at Peter's response in our Gospel story to again be reminded of the struggle involved in responding to God's call. Peter says: "But Master, we worked hard all night and caught nothing. But if you say so, I'll let down the nets."

Needless to say, Peter wasn't wildly convinced that there was any hope in listening to this strange master. I'm sure he was saying under his breath - "Some guys just never give up." *Typical super cynic.*

4e5, Being ON CALL to do God's work is not always an instant process, reward, or solution. To care - to love - to forgive like our Lord often require heaps of time and patience.

I am sure each of you knows this only too well ~~in this~~ congregation. But God has blessed you with the willingness to continue the struggle. Oh, I'm sure there have been moments when you've reiterated the Peter Principle of our gospel - when you've said - "But Lord, we've worked hard all these several years. Lord, we want a big catch right now!"

But we thank God that his presence has been constant -- he has enabled you to say: "But if you say so, we'll not give up! We'll continue our struggle to make your presence known in Troy!" With that spirit, you can be assured that God will not allow you to come home with empty nets.

My Christian friends, we're ON CALL BY GOD to manifest that spirit every moment that we breathe -- in every relationship that we touch or that touches us. The struggle TO PATIENTLY AND CONSTANTLY manifest this spirit of God's forgiving love is no EASY CALL in our personal or social situation.

The demands of our personal ambitions today -- the struggle for success -- the constant forces which tear away at the roots of our most meaningful relationships -- ALL THESE HAVE THE POTENTIAL to weaken our relationship to God and each other. Through Isaiah and Peter today, we are again reminded of the first call each of us was given through our baptism into Christ -- we were first called

to be servants of our Lord. First given life by our Lord. First forgiven by our Lord. First called to recreate life for others through the forgiving love of our Lord.

God has called us to be on continual STAND-BY STATUS. At any moment - no, at almost every moment we are coming face to face with the Lord of hosts -- we are facing a God and a humanity who desire to see and be touched by the Master's love.

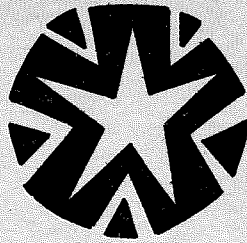
Yes, As Christians, God calls us into a constant stand-by readiness. Many of you remember the days of radio when they had no long play records or tapes. The programs were live. When transmission difficulty arose, the announcer interrupted and said: "Please stand by until we have the problem corrected."

But during that break there would be music. And it would be live. The major networks had hired orchestras TO STAND BY for any such emergencies. At a moment's notice they had to be ready to play. So they became known as "Stand-by orchestras."

Our texts ~~remind~~ remind us today that God has designated us to be ON CALL as his stand-by people. We can't always completely eliminate the suffering of another, but we can stand by. We may not be able to solve another person's problem, but we can stand by with him through the ordeal.

We may not always have a verbal answer or great words of comfort for the person calling us into a crisis, but we can be God's people standing-by in love and concern. For what greater love is there than to know that someone cares enough to just be there -- to be there standing by in response to that call in the night -- or the call in the brightness of each day's greatest busyness.

And I heard the voice of the Lord saying: "Whom shall I send?" 'Here am I, Lord. Send me!'



CELEBRATE

THE FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY • February 10, 1974

THE DAY

When God goes fishing for witnesses, he nets strange catches—Isaiah, Peter, James, John—perhaps even you and me! When he sends us to invite others to be his people, the Spirit gives us a clear word to speak, so that all who hear may understand.

THE CONFESSION OF SINS

[The Act of Reconciliation]

Minister: Let us confess our sins to the God who draws us out of obscurity into the light of his love.

Silence

Assistant: We have often hidden when we heard your call, pleading that we are not good enough or strong enough to do your will.

All: **For not trusting you to lend us your strength, forgive us, Lord.**

Assistant: We have often criticized others whom you have commissioned because we found them inadequate, and we have withheld our support which could have strengthened them for your work.

All: **For not loving others enough to lend them our strength, forgive us, Lord.**

Assistant: We have often feared to risk rejection and opposition for your sake.

All: **For wanting to save face for ourselves rather than to share your love, forgive us, Lord.**

Minister: The Lord who sends us confidently to proclaim his redeeming love, now forgives our sins and grants us peace. Let us joyfully share with one another the peace of the Lord.

THE PRAYER OF THE DAY

Almighty God, you have filled us with the new light of your Word who was made man and lived among us. Let the light of our faith be revealed in all that we do; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

THE PSALMODY

Psalm 85:8-13; Antiphon, verse 8a

May be used responsively or antiphonally

Antiphon (leader): I am listening to what the Lord God is saying; he promises peace to us, his own people.

He promises peace to us, if we do not go back to our foolish ways.

Surely he is ready to save those who honor him, and his saving presence will remain in our land.

Love and faithfulness will come together; righteousness and peace will meet.

Man's loyalty will reach up from the earth, and God's righteousness will look down from heaven.

The Lord will make us prosperous, and our land will produce rich harvests.

Righteousness will go before the Lord, and prepare the path for him.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit:

as in the beginning, so now, and for ever. Amen.

Antiphon (unison): I am listening to what the Lord God is saying; he promises peace to us, his own people. (TEV)

THE LECTIONARY

FIRST LESSON: Isaiah 6:1-8

THE VISION of Isaiah:

In the year King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a high and lofty throne, with the train of his garment filling the temple. Seraphim were stationed above; each of them had six wings: with two they veiled

CELEBRATE, January-February 1974 issue. February 10, 1974; Volume V, Number 12.

CELEBRATE is prepared by the worship office of the Division for Parish Services of the Lutheran Church in America. It is published bimonthly in weekly parts by the Board of Publication of the Lutheran Church in America, 2900 Queen Lane, Philadelphia, Pa. 19129. Second class postage paid at Philadelphia, Pa. Copyright © 1974 by Fortress Press. Price per weekly part, \$1.20 per 100 copies postpaid; minimum order, 50 copies of each issue. Printed in U.S.A.

Scripture readings in the Lectionary and the Psalmody are those appointed by the Inter-Lutheran Commission on Worship, and are from various translations indicated by the initials following each passage: **AV**—Authorized (King James) Version, 1611; **CB**—The Revised Standard Version Common Bible, © 1946, 1952, 1957, 1971; **NAB**—The New American Bible, 1970, used with permission of the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, copyright owner; **NEB**—The New English Bible, © the Delegates of the Oxford University Press and the Syndics of the Cambridge University Press, 1961, 1970; **PMS**—The Psalms in Modern Speech, translated by Richard S. Hanson, © 1968 by Fortress Press; **TEV**—Today's English Version, © American Bible Society, 1966, 1970, 1971, 1972. The Prayer of the Day is from a series appearing in **Contemporary Worship 6—The Church Year Calendar and Lectionary**. The Gloria Patri is in the translation prepared by the International Consultation on English Texts, as found in **Prayers We Have in Common**.

LUTHERAN CHURCH OF THE MASTER
 3333 COOLIDGE HIGHWAY TROY, MICHIGAN
 Church Phone 643-0176 Feb. 10, 1974
 REV. PETER R. MARTYN, Visiting Pastor
 REV. CHARLES RICHTER, Vice-Pastor
 RICHARD SNOAD, Organist
 VIRGINIA WITTE, Director

WELCOME to this house of prayer. We are glad that you are able to worship this morning. Join us in this week's activities. If you are visiting, please sign Guest Book.

Organ Prelude	
Greeting, Parish Notes	
<u>WE PREPARE BY CONFESSION</u>	
The Processional Hymn	Page 416
The Invocation	Response - Amen
Confession of sins, The Peace	Celebrate
<u>WE PRAISE GOD</u>	
The Psalmody	Celebrate
The Gloria Patri, Kyrie	Page 43
The Gloria in Excelsis	Page 49
The Prayer for the day	Celebrate
<u>GOD SPEAKS TO US</u>	
The First Lesson, Second Lesson	Celebrate
The Alleluia	Page 52
The Gospel	Celebrate
The Apostles' Creed	Page 5
Childrens' Message	
The Hymn	Page 374
The Sermon "On Call"	Pastor Martyn
<u>WE THANK GOD</u>	
The Offering	
Anthem "Now Let Us All Praise God"	Young
Offertory III "Create in me...."	Page 56
Prayer of the Church, Lord's Prayer	Celebrate
<u>WE DEPART TO SERVE</u>	
The Benediction (three-fold amen)	Page 70
The Recessional Hymn	Page 555
The Postlude	

We extend sincerest greetings to Rev. Peter R. Martyn, Asst. Pastor of Redeemer Lutheran Church, Milwaukee, Wis., who is conducting our worship service this morning.

LAY ASSISTANT: Karen Wilson

ALTAR FLOWERS are given to the Glory of God, and in honor of their parents, by Mr. and Mrs. Donald Klimesh, and Mr. and Mrs. Juan Ramos.

LCW CIRCLE MEETING Tuesday, Feb. 12 at 9:30 am, at the church.

COUNCIL MEETING Tuesday, Feb. 12, at 7:30 p.m., at the church.

NURSERY for infants through kindergarten only.

BULLETIN NOTES should be phoned to Mrs. Axie Williams, (647-3684) by previous Tuesday.

FLOWER CHART is in the hall. Cost is \$5.00.

CHURCH SCHOOL for 4 year olds through adults at 9:45 a.m. on Sundays. Adults meet at First Citizens Bank at the corner of Big Beaver and Coolidge.

ADOPT-A-ROOM for cleaning! See schedule.

SENIOR CHOIR rehearses 7:30 p.m. Wednesdays.

their faces, with two they veiled their feet, and with two they hovered aloft.

"Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts!" they cried one to the other. "All the earth is filled with his glory!" At the sound of that cry, the frame of the door shook and the house was filled with smoke.

Then I said, "Woe is me, I am doomed! For I am a man of unclean lips, living among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!" Then one of the seraphim flew to me, holding an ember which he had taken with tongs from the altar.

He touched my mouth with it. "See," he said, "now that this has touched your lips, your wickedness is removed, your sin purged."

Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? Who will go for us?" "Here I am," I said; "send me!" (NAB)

SECOND LESSON: 1 Corinthians 14:12b-20

ST. PAUL writes:

Since you are eager for manifestations of the Spirit, strive to excel in building up the church.

Therefore, he who speaks in a tongue should pray for the power to interpret. For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays but my mind is unfruitful. What am I to do? I will pray with the spirit and I will pray with the mind also; I will sing with the spirit and I will sing with the mind also. Otherwise, if you bless with the spirit, how can any one in the position of an outsider say the "Amen" to your thanksgiving when he does not know what you are saying? For you may give thanks well enough, but the other man is not edified. I thank God that I speak in tongues more than you all; nevertheless, in church I would rather speak five words with my mind, in order to instruct others, than ten thousand words in a tongue.

Brethren, do not be children in your thinking; be babes in evil, but in thinking be mature. (CB)

GOSPEL: Luke 5:1-11

ONE TIME Jesus was standing on the shore of Lake Gennesaret while the people pushed their way up to him to listen to the word of God. He saw two boats pulled up on the beach; the fishermen had left them and were washing the nets. Jesus got into one of the boats—it belonged to Simon—and asked him to push off a little from the shore. Jesus sat in the boat and taught the crowd.

When he finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Push the boat out further to the deep water, and you and your partners let your nets down for a catch."

"Master," Simon answered, "we worked hard all night long and caught nothing. But if you say so, I will let down the nets." They let the nets down and caught such a large number of fish that the nets were about to break. So they motioned to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. They came and filled both boats so full of fish that they were about to sink. When Simon Peter saw what had happened, he fell on his

knees before Jesus and said, "Go away from me, Lord! I am a sinful man!"

He and the others with him were all amazed at the large number of fish they had caught. The same was true of Simon's partners, James and John, the sons of Zebedee. Jesus said to Simon, "Don't be afraid; from now on you will be catching men."

They pulled the boats on the beach, left everything, and followed Jesus. (TEV)

THE PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

[The Intercessions]

Minister: People of God, let us pray.

All: **We give you thanks, Lord Christ, for calling us as you called fishermen long ago, and for sending us to tell others of God's creating and redeeming love. Give us confidence to love in your name and courage to tell others of the joy of knowing you.**

Assistant: We pray for all we know who are in need.

Silence

Assistant: Send your healing, we pray, wherever there is sickness of body or spirit. Help us to minister with your love to all who are sick, hungry, in prison, or in need of any kind.

All: **Make us your merciful disciples, Lord.**

Assistant: We pray for all who lead in our world. Guide them to make just laws and to administer them fairly. Alert us to injustice, and work through us to establish your justice in our world.

All: **Make us your watchful disciples, Lord.**

Assistant: We thank you for the gifts of creation that sustain our lives. Make us watchful and careful of your providence until you return to make all things new.

All: **Make us your careful disciples, Lord.**

Here may be offered other prepared petitions.

Minister: Lord—Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer of our lives—take all that we are and all that we have, and use us in your service.

All: **Amen.**

EPIPHANY V

Luth Church of the Master, Troy

Feb. 8, 1976

"THE PRICE OF POPULARITY"

"And Jesus said to them, 'Let us go to the next towns, that I may preach there also; for that is why I came out.'" Mark 1:38

We all know the story. The small town husky linebacker leaves the U.P. to become a real giant Lion at Pontiac Stadium. Instant stardom. The crowds come to see him - his picture is plastered on all sports pages. And when he returns home for a visit, the old men sitting in front of the general store want to see in him the same kid returning -- as though nothing had changed.

But they all know they'll be wrong -- though no one will admit it. Their home-town, pink-cheeked crusher is now national property-- and to be a hero of national proportions, you get a long way away from that small town in the U.P.

Or shall we take Nazareth. Well, it must have seemed that way to the folks in Nazareth. Their home town boy had returned. The same homespun cut as any other boy -- clean, hard-working, good family. But with a difference. He had become famous throughout the land. He was no longer Nazareth's exclusive property.

So - what had really happened to him?? We have seen that he was baptized and chose an odd cross section of men as disciples. He began his ministry of preaching and healing. And suddenly he was like Elton John at Olympia. Suddenly his name was on every lip, his deeds given rapid publicity. He was "in demand." The pressure of the public was upon him.

Thus - we meet this situation in Mark's gospel today. First - we see Jesus healing Simon's mother-in-law - and by that evening the whole town's at Simon's door with the sick and demon possessed. Obviously - Mark gives us a touch of hyperbole here - but there's no doubt -- Jesus was

in the thick and thistle of popularity.

No longer was ministry possible to a small little in-group; no longer did he have time for lengthy coffee clutching with the long-term converts. There was now an urgency in his ministry -- he was becoming beset by crowds; he was beginning to know the real exhaustion of ministry - both physically and spiritually.

And so he arose early in the morning to go out into the hills for some quiet prayerful, solitude. And what should happen? Soon his new and enthusiastic disciples find him out and cut short his devotions. "NO TIME FOR THAT, PEOPLE ARE LOOKING FOR YOU!" they said.

All of a sudden - the price of popularity is squaring off with Jesus. What woes and burdens stardom brings! From the unknown preacher, to the hassle of a busy schedule. Calls for him are coming in from all over. Instant popularity. And what subtle or obvious changes popularity can make. What a devastating experience popularity can be.

There's not one of us who has'nt dreamed about it -- but, oh what devastation the spotlight can create. What an upsetter of personal goals popularity can be. How easy the power of popularity can be perverted into the power of the Devil.

Just prior to this point Jesus had been tempted three times to receive instant popularity. Each offer he turned down. Yet - those temptations were the very prelude to this moment. He now knew he had the power to turn stones into bread. Before there was only the solitude of the desert. Now he's got thousand of cheering fans -- how much more tempting the whole proposition sounds when you've had a taste of fame.

No longer is temptation theoretical -- now it's very real. People are waiting for him wherever he goes -- how easy it would be to simply please the crowds with another miraculous act. Popularity, the power which can so easily tempt us TO GORGE

ourselves with self-glorification and greater greed

And how often we see that tune played out in society. The shy Nebraska boy makes it big on radio and TV -- and soon the substance of his Tonight Show depreciates into self-congratulatory back-slapping and always too obvious attempts to get another laugh.

A serious, conservative Richard Nixon gets eaten up by his own power hungry fantasies due to popularity.

But we need not look so far away from home -- we need not look to the stars or politicians. Their popularity malignancies are usually as obvious as Old Faithful..

But what do we see around us -- or in ourselves. How often have we known the beautiful girl turned repulsive by the power of popularity. How often have we seen the popular church soon gorge itself with poisonous pride. How often have we allowed promotions to inflate our pompous perspective of ourselves.

Yes - popularity need not be a bad thing -- but yet how easily it can poison the human personality. Let there be no mistake -- Jesus had the freedom as a man to choose that poisonous route.

But instead - he chose God's route for the application of popularity. And that route is one of serving those who are especially ~~in need~~.

The sick - the guilty - the miserable *unpopular -*
How easy it would have been for Jesus to stay in Nazareth -- to milk forever the praise and adulation of those folks. (And how often it is that a Pastor stays forever in a congregation -- milking dry the praise of the people --making it impossible for anyone to follow him.) But not so for Jesus -- his mission was to mankind ^{*the masses*}. There was a world sorely in need of healing -- ^{*of man's kind.*} ~~Christ's ministry is hardly localized -- if it is truly Christ's ministry.~~

That was and still is the key to Christ's popularity -- he was and still is the most

popular Lord of history - because his mission was beyond himself. He accepted the strokes and appreciation of others -- but did not let this distort the goal of his mission. His mission was to heal a sick and often guilt-ridden world.

That meant he could not bathe in the present praise - that meant no parish boundaries for his ministry. For Christ's ministry is never ONLY localized , if it is truly Christ's ministry.

The proper investment of Christian popularity IS TO MOVE ON TO THE NEXT TOWN -- meaning, to move on to the next area of human need as soon as you've solved the last one. To move on with the gospel -- for that is why God came to us in the flesh of Jesus Christ.

As long as the Christian person and the Christian church promote and experience this style of popularity --- they have GREAT reasons to grow -- great reasons to be rightfully PROUD (or to boast as Paul says) -- for their boasting is motivated by the popularity of Christ's example of love within them.

And that is why he came - that we might share his popular example.

AMEN

EPIPHANY V
Luth Church of the Master
February 6, 1977

"SURPRISE!!"

"And I said: 'Woe is me; For I am doomed!
For I am a man of unclean lips, living among
a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen
the King, the Lord of hosts! ... Then I heard
the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I
send? Who will go for us?" "Here I am,"
I said, 'Send me!' " Isaiah 6:5,8)

(And the call of Peter, James & John)

Most everyone in this room has experienced
one of those telephone calls in the dead of
night. You try to pretend it's not ringing,
then you jump out of your skin to get to the
receiver.

And often on the other end is a quivering,
or possibly hysterical voice, many times
breathing deeply, and you hear: "I don't know
what to do. Can you come now!" Or possibly
the voice simply says, "It's all over - she
just died."

Yes, most of us have had a call something
like that. Doctors get them regularly (and
what an existence that must be). Pastors
receive them occasionally. Family members
get them at least a few times in a lifetime.

We've all known from these arousals the
real life meaning of the song we just sang:
"God calling Yet, shall I not hear? shall I
not rise?" Yes, the call of God often comes
as quite a surprise.

So whether it was the year that King Uzziah
died as it was for Isaiah, or the year that
your loved one or my loved one died, or the
year that Kristine Mehelich and many others
have died -- a year that we all know too well
already -- regardless, most of us know the
reality of "God calling yet."

And although the words may be different, very often you and I feel much like Isaiah when that call comes: "Woe is me! For I am doomed! For I am a man of unclean lips..."

Reinterpreted, these words could be rendered as: "Not me, God. I'm not fit for this call. I can't handle it. I'm too much aware of my shortcomings! I'm afraid, cause I just don't measure up to your standards, God!"

But God offers up a second surprise to Isaiah at that point. Not only does he surprise Isaiah by the call, but he also pardons all of Isaiah's shortcomings. He gives Isaiah a clean slate - so he can no longer use his past as an excuse for the present & future. He will not allow Isaiah to capitalize on his past weakness.

And so God calls again: "Whom shall I send? Who will go for us? And surprise number three! Isaiah makes a 180° switch: Here I am, Lord! Send me!"

And that's the way life with God really is -- always full of surprises!! Full of surprises because God does not allow his faithful ones to rely or capitalize on their weaknesses when calling them into his service.

Certainly this was the case for those three fishermen, Peter, James & John. They had had it. Peter complains of their all night toil without success. He wants to give up; he's ready to be a quitter. But Jesus says, "come on, one more time."

And surprise! A lesson for Peter in trusting in God or trusting in the power of defeat. And please notice - trusting in God takes effort. God's surprises don't come without cooperation and effort on our part.

And the surprise of Peter, James & John repeats itself all over scripture. Joseph sold into slavery becomes prime minister of Egypt. Moses flees his country and becomes

the leader of a new people. Something great comes out of puny Nazareth. An instrument of execution, the cross, becomes a symbol of hope for millions. A tomb in a garden becomes a sign for everlasting life. Saul the persecutor becomes one of the greatest champions of the faith he sought to destroy.

Yes, God's greatest power is that he turns yesterday's defeat into tomorrow's victory. How true even for another man called Peter. How well I remember when Fred Marks from the Board of American Missions asked me to consider a call to the Master. He painted a glorious picture of this scene, a land and a people full of milk and honey...

And what was my response to that majestic call? "Woe is me! I can't do it, Lord. I am just a little man -- I'll never survive among those corporate giants in that motor world. Those rich folks over there will surely intimidate me. No Lord, not me!"

And what was God's response through Fred Marks? "Peter, thus saith the Lord, 'those folks over there put their pants on the same way you do every day. Remember this and you'll have no trouble' I can assure you those words are not found in scripture, but I often feel they should be.

Yes, like Simon Peter, and Isaiah, and Jeremiah, and Job, this Peter was playing the same game with God. How tempting it is to exaggerate or invent or be controlled by our weaknesses.

For instance, did you ever notice around stewardship time how much people talk about the tough times. What a slap in the face to God. Instead of saying to Christ, "Here I am, use me" -- he often gets a list of excuses.

And likewise when God calls us to share our faith with others, whether the sick, bereaved, or new residents. We will toil and readily

speaking our piece for the company, or for the neighborhood association, or for service or civic groups -- But when God calls upon us to speak for him, all of a sudden we belch out: Woe is me! I can't do it, Lord!

How easy it is to get caught up in the power of defeat -- the power of being negative and pessimistic. How often I've seen church leaders, whether pastors or other church servants, become sacrificial goats because "they didn't do it the way he or she used to do it."

One of the old favorites you often hear when a public leader gets into trouble is: "He's only human." Obviously, that's true. But God calls leaders to offer more than a smorgasboard of weaknesses.

But SURPRISE again. God is faithful. He does not leave us to sulk or glory in our excuses or weaknesses. He gives us the power of renewal - known as forgiveness. With that power we are different than we were before.

To be forgiven means to be changed -- no longer indulging in our weaknesses -- but now relying anew on Christ's uplifting power. With that power we don't even fear failure, because even failure is forgivable.

So it is that our message as believers need not be: Woe is me. I am weak. But rather, "Here I am, Lord, Send me."

AMEN

PIPHANY V

Luth Church of the Master
Troy, MI

Feb. 4, 1979

"ALL THINGS TO ALL PEOPLE?!"

"I have become all things to all men, that I might
by all means save some. I do it all for the sake of
the gospel, that I may share in all its blessings."

I Cor. 9:22-23

The NEW YORK TIMES reported that when the traffic
lights were short circuited in Times Square - somebody
phone the police.

Police headquarters referred the call to the Traffic
Division;

the Traffic Division switched the call to the 47th
Precinct;

the 47th Precinct suggested that Traffic Patrol B
should assume authority for the problem;

Traffic Patrol B insisted that the Department of
Highways be notified to take care of it;

the Highway Dept then advised the Broadway
Maintenance Traffic Lighting Division --
and so went the response to the cry for mercy.

We laugh at these circumstances. And we know
that they are reflective of the problem of
bureacracy, whether in government or business. And
many times the church suffers from the same disease.

On Friday - I asked one of the Synod officials if
I might have a "LUTHERANS LOVE DETROIT" bumper
sticker. He said - you'll have to talk to the Detroit
Coalition about that. Here they were - two offices
next to each other in the same building -- and yet
how difficult sometimes to get a response to a simple
request. We proudly say that WE ARE ONE CHURCH --
congregational and agencies all part of the LCA -- but
like government and industry - sometimes we get too
caught up with specialization.

~~Well~~ - We all know that there is a need for
specialization in our world -- especially in many of
the scientific fields. We have all been benefactors
of specialization -- in fact, many of your jobs are a

direct and necessary result of specialization. We can truly thank God that we live in a society which affirms the uniqueness of different talents.

But I would doubt that there is ONE PERSON here who has not also EXPERIENCED the frustration and dehumanization of specialization.

I've seen it far too often in the parish ministry. Some pastors are fantastic theologians -- great thinkers --- but they don't have an ounce of sensitivity when it comes to really caring for people. They deliver great lectures on the nature of grace and forgiveness -- but they have not yet learned how to repent and to forgive!

And which one of us hasn't experienced the frustration of specialists in medicine or law?? There's no doubt that we need specialists in these fields -- but how sad when they forget their own humanity. How sad when they forget that a patient in a hospital bed needs answers whether he asks the right questions or not! How sad when they forget that a divorce client is going through a great emotional trauma -- that client needs the benefit of every bit of reassurance that can be given. And if the answers can't be given -- then these specialist should have the integrity TO SAY JUST THAT!

And which one of us hasn't known of a production line coming to a halt BECAUSE there wasn't a screw-driver specialist anywhere to be found.

We've even specialized the human race. Some places are forbidden territory for certain races or ethnic groups. Some people want to divorce politics from religion -- others feel they can't have legitimate religion unless they form a feely-touchy group that meets outside the organized church.

And to all this Paul says -- I have become all things to all men, in order that I might by all means save some." Paul here is saying that his motive in ~~all~~ he does IS NOT PERSONAL GAIN -- but rather TO OFFER THE AFFIRMATION OF GOD TO OTHERS.

Paul could have easily been just like all other Jews in his culture. He was a well-educated Pharisee. His father had been a wealthy man -- Paul was definitely of the aristocracy. *He could have set himself apart like all the other Pharisees,*

But unlike ~~these~~ other Jews -- he did not limit the love of God TO HIS OWN KIND. He understood that there was only one who deserved total allegiance -- namely Christ. And if totally for Christ -- then he had to be totally for all others, regardless of their circumstances in life.

~~And so he proclaimed boldly that the job description of every Christian is to be TOTALLY OPEN AND RECEPTIVE TO ALL PEOPLE like Paul~~

Paul's life had moved out from the narrow confines of his race and early religious training. He could speak to members of his own race as one of them -- but he could also speak to Gentiles as one for whom race differences WAS NO LONGER AN IMPORTANT ISSUE. The only thing that made any difference to him was that through his relationship to others THEY HEARD AND FELT THE GOSPEL. The whole motive for life was to help people experience THE EQUALITY OF GOD'S LOVE, rather than the things which made people feel divided.

There is nothing more natural for us as humans than to concentrate on our differences. One of the greatest games we play is to find an inferior trait in the next guy so that we can boast about how superior we are. How sad that we should spend a lifetime capitalizing on the things that divide us -- rather than the power which unites us!

But what a temptation! There are times we all want to hide behind our little uniqueness - our little specialty. That way we can be insulated from the struggle of involvement -- the struggle of the cross.

After Monday nights Parish Planning meeting -- I was very tempted to write an old chaplain friend of mine and see if any chaplain position's were available. I was tired of the ministry of Christ -- trying to be

all things to all people. I was tired of having to push in areas where I feel others have expertise -- AND SHOULD BE WILLING TO OFFER IT -- for the sake of the body of Christ.

Yes - I was tempted to run and hide behind a specialty -- a nice 8-5 job where I could just be a chaplain -- where I didn't have to be all things to all people -- where I didn't have to be a fundraiser, preacher, planner, miracle worker, counselor, organizer, administrator, secretary, nice-guy, politician, shepherd -- etc.

But really - in all those things God has called me and each of you to do one thing -- to love and forgive each other as he has first done for us. In doing that - ~~we can continue to~~ be all things to all people. *then we will*

*to show
the
word*

And so here we are again - and here's where we should be -- at the altar of our Lord -- receiving the power which continues to bring us together -- which continues to break down all of our superficial specializations -- the power which makes us one -- which binds up the wounds that we cause by our divisions -- the power of Christ.

Take and eat - take and drink - and become all things to all people!

AMEN

EPIPHANY V
Hope Lutheran, Toledo
February 10, 1980

"AYE, AYE, SIR!"

Jesus said to Simon, "Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch." And Simon answered, "Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets!" Luke 5:4-5

"Strive to excel in building up the church."
I Cor 14:12

Again for a half-dozen Sundays this year, like every year, Epiphany shows us the Christ and his greatness and authority. And again like every year his greatness is primarily shown through his miracles. And so we have good reason to sing "Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty" today -- and every Sunday of the church year!

But thank God for today's text from Luke! Because even while Luke captures the majestic power of Christ out in the middle of the sea - he also makes us clearly aware that Jesus was a pretty poor fisherman. For Jesus had beckoned an expert fisherman like Simon to take the boat out into deep water and drop the nets for a catch.

Now I'd hardly consider myself an expert in fishing but I do recall one thing: "If it's fish you want to catch, the last place in the world you want to go is out there in the deep water." Yes - I'm certain that Peter had all he could do to hold back from saying, "Come on, Lord, there's no way we're going to catch anything out there!"

And to add insult to injury = Jesus was urging them on a fishing expedition in the middle of the day. Again I'm certain Peter really had to bite his tongue. In a diplomatic way, Peter finally tries to save Jesus some embarrassment by saying, "Master, we have toiled all the night and caught nothing."

But recognizing the authority of Jesus, Peter does not push his resistance too far. Like any good mate at sea, he finally responds, "Aye, Aye, Sir!" I will do as you say!"

Well we all know how the story miraculously concludes. The message is crystal clear: By trusting the words and leadership of Christ, Peter experienced great results. In fact, the results were so incredible, that Peter gave up his fishing career and became a full-time preacher!

There's no doubt about the fact that this is a great miracle story. But is that all it seeks to convey? Is the story merely a great fish story? Obviously - it is a great fish story -- but equally obvious, it seeks to convey a much more important message: NAMELY, THE CALL AND COMMITMENT TO DISCIPLESHIP!

And that's the theme of all the texts today: the call and commitment of discipleship. We see it through Isaiah, we see it through Paul's urging us "to strive to excel in building up the church," and of course, we see it through Peter.

But what are the implications for you and me? How do we see our own discipleship in terms of today's text. Surely Luke is not calling all of us, like Peter, to become full-time preachers.

I'm really grateful that an emphasis of today's worship is the presence of the combined choirs. Because the Christian discipleship integral to today's text can beautifully be illustrated through the efforts of church choirs. Let's take a closer look to show what I mean.

Most of you are unaware that six months ago Bill Shock asked Hope's choir to do what Jesus asked Peter: To go out into deep water for a catch. He took them into territory where they least expected to succeed. The deep water was called Brton's "Ceremony of Carols" - which was shared with us on Christmas eve. It was deep water because it was very difficult, and very unfamiliar music.

It was filled with all kinds of risks. In short, there was no guarantee of success. And that's the true nature of Christian discipleship -- it's going into territories that ARE OFTEN RISKY -- territories of poverty and prisons, prejudice and arrogant power. These are deep fishing areas -- they are filled with risks -- but that's where Christ calls us to offer our discipleship.

Again - the choirs illustrate that kind of faithfulness for us today. Warren, Bill, Cathy, and the choirs have again gone out into the deep. They've put two bodies of people together with the faith and hope that they will inspire our discipleship. In many ways that is very risky -- because a new kind of commitment of togetherness is called from both bodies. And it has been especially difficult this past week because our organ has been on the fritz six times this past week.

Yes - the choirs illustrate ^{that} the call of discipleship ^{is} to take the risks of going into deeper water without any guarantee of success. But even though Christ does not offer the choirs or anyone else a guarantee of success -- he does offer something far better: HE GIVES THE CHOIR AND EACH OF US A MESSAGE THAT IS ABSOLUTELY TRUE AND CANNOT FAIL -- even if we fail in our attempts to convey that message.

That's why Christ says with utter confidence: Do not be afraid. With his message, we have nothing to fear -- because *HIS MESSAGE IS A MESSAGE WHICH SUPPORTS, WHICH UPLIFTS, WHICH INSPIRES, WHICH HEALS, ... THAT MESSAGE IS ALWAYS WORTH THE RISK!*

But the call of discipleship not only urges us to take risks. There is a second dimension that always goes along with the first. After Peter went out into the deep -- the fish were not brought in without a lot of hard effort. Here again church choirs beautifully illustrate this dimension of discipleship!

Each week our choirs proclaim Christ's truth -- but it takes a lot of hard work if the job is going to be done completely. Like all good messengers of Christ - choirs, directors, and organists take their rehearsals of Christ's message very seriously. True discipleship always takes a lot of hard work.

Possibly we can all learn something about our own discipleship from the choirs today. The words they are singing are the words of faith in Christ. Choirs do not just sing words -- they sing the faith. That's why they sing these words with such conviction -- because their directors work them hard on the words of faith.

In light of this effort by choirs,

Each of us should ask ourselves: How hard do we work to get the message of faith across to others??? The least we can do as Christians IS TO SING IT OUT LOUDLY when we're together in church. I'm often amazed that some people call themselves Christians -- but they hardly move their mouths when called upon to share a witness of their faith.

Yes - the choir works hard to convey the message of faith -- because that's the nature of discipleship -- working hard to inspire others to become faithful.

Well - all this finally leads to the third and final dimension of discipleships: Namely, true disciples don't worry about results, instead they commit themselves to the task at hand.

Imagine if Peter had worried about the results of his discipleship. Can't you just see Peter saying to Jesus: "O Master, I'm just a common fisherman, I can't possibly do evangelism or preaching." But Peter did not worry about results. He just left his nets -- and got on with the task of sharing the message.

How often in the church we worry too much about results-- and consequently, we often get nothing done! We've all seen congregations and committees who worry so much about results -- that they never get down to business with the task at hand. Likewise -- when a choir spends all of its time worrying about the results -- and does not get down to the task of rehearsal -- it really never gets the job done.

The call and commitment of discipleship IS NOT TO WORRY ABOUT THE RESULTS. God says - leave the results in my hands. You get on with the task and you won't have to worry about results.

Dear freinds in Christ -- *let's follow his lead.* like a good choir, let's say "Aye, Aye, to our director." Let us all get to work with the task of sharing the message of Christ. Because when we are striving to work hard on that task -- we can be assured that God will show us the results -- WE WILL BE BUILDING UP HIS CHURCH!

AMEN

"JUST A LITTLE BIT MAKES ALL THE DIFFERENCE"

EPIPHANY V

Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo

February 5, 1984

Peter R. Martyn, Pastor

the
"You are the salt of / earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? Then it is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trodden under foot.

Matthew 5:13-14

It was one of my first attempts at homemade bread. I had labored over the dough in the early morning hours; it had risen beautifully and was ready for the oven. There's nothing like the aroma of baking bread. And soon it was on the table cooling -- and everyone was anxiously waiting for it to cool down. Finally - the moment came to taste that new and special recipe! The family members sunk their teeth into the fresh dough. And immediately, everyone knew something was wrong. There were no exclamations of ecstasy; the bread was as flat as sawdust! Just a little bit of salt would have made all the difference -- but now it was too late!! The bread was a disaster!!

A salt-free diet may be a necessity for some -- but a salt-free society would be the end of civilization! Salt has been one of the most precious powers of flavoring and preserving from the most ancient days to the present. For centuries it has been called "the seasoning of life." It has been so vital to human survival that wars have been fought over it ... empires have been founded upon it and civilizations have grown up around it.

Man realized from his earliest days that he had to have salt or perish. Without the proper balance of salt and water, death occurs through dehydration. In pre- and post biblical days -- a bag of salt was considered as precious as a person's life. In Palestine -- much as in many of our foods today -- it was an indispensable preservative! Salt was so valuable in early times that our English word "salary" is derived from the Latin word "salarium" -- which means "salt money." For in ancient times - people were paid a "salt allowance."

Is it any wonder then that Jesus should identify his disciples -- his followers -- you and me -- as the "salt of

the earth." As was so common with Jesus -- he would take a common every day substance -- and he would show how that simple substance manifests the truth and power of discipleship.

So it is that Jesus calls us "the salt of the earth." Jesus is not merely playing around with domestic metaphors for Christianity! He is affirming that we have been graced to the core with his **FLAVORING** and **PRESERVING** power! Therefore, he says, I have a mission for you -- "to be the salt of the earth." Your purpose, says Jesus through this salt imagery, is two-fold: 1) **TO GIVE ZEST TO LIFE**, and 2) **TO PRESERVE LIFE FROM CORRUPTION!!**

Jesus is saying - by virtue of your baptism -- you have been labeled. And the back of your label reads: This person gives 1) zest to life, and 2) preserves life from corruption. That's the label of a salty Christian!

God calls us to live up to our "salty" labeling -- to bring renewed flavor and zest to life. The ancient world of the New Testament was bored and weary. All of the luxuries and excesses of life had made people apathetic and ungrateful for life's blessings! Life had become hum-drum!

I doubt that I would be exaggerating to say that the same is often true today! In fact, many times our society connects Christianity with that hum-drum feeling. They seem to say that Christianity should reflect the "blahs" -- that it should be legalistic and rigid and negative and dreary and sad and long-faced!! The great Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Homes once said: "I might have entered the pastoral ministry if certain clergyman I knew had not acted and looked like undertakers." How sad that some Christians would rather reflect the drabness of death rather than the salt of life.

We all know it only takes a pinch of salt to give vitality to any substance. I am deeply thankful for the many of you here at Hope who continue to be pinches of salt for me and the rest of the staff. It is often your pinch of flavor -- your vitality that keeps our ministry **ALIVE & WELL**. I sincerely hope that Bob, Larry and I have also served to give some zest to our mission and ministry.

It only took a pinch of disciples - just twelve - to get a world-wide revolution of love going in the first century. The same is still true today. At present we have slightly more than a couple dozen lay visitors involved in the Lay Ministry Seminar; I am hopeful that these few will be a new spark of revitalization for many more at Hope. God does not need big

numbers -- he only needs saltiness from a few to revitalize his mission in the world.

Yes - Jesus calls us the "salt of the earth" because he knew that only a few can make a great difference. But likewise, that little bit has a way of permeating a much larger area. Christ calls us the "salt of the earth" because we are to reach out and permeate the world beyond us!

Salty Christians are not hermits -- they are not exclusive club members or socialites who withdraw from the unclean and corrupted world. Quite to the contrary -- Christians by nature (like salt) have a special role of preservation in the world. As those who possess the qualities of Christ, we are called to touch the unworthy and the unclean and the rejected of the world. We are called to bring new life to that which has become corrupt and tainted.

In short -- our focus of mission is not upon ourselves, but upon the suffering and segregated and sick and sorrowful in the world. In short, we are not in this world for institutional success or survival -- we are here to give new life to everyone experiencing death -- whether that death is known as immorality, alcoholism, exploitation, nuclear annihilation, or any other form of human destruction.

As Jesus said, if salt loses its ability to flavor it is worthless. That means, if the church is worth its salt, it will seek to permeate every area of life with the forgiving love of Christ! We cannot be the "salt of the earth" if we merely sprinkle a little grace on one another in this sanctuary!

In fact, as Christ says, we lose our saltiness as his church when we become self-centered. Likewise, when we no longer see wrong in the world and struggle against it -- then our salt has become nothing more than the sand of the world ... then we have become conformed to the world around us, and our salt is no longer good for anything but to be thrown out!

But we know God would not have it that way! Just like salt on a table -- God continues to flavor our lives with his inconspicuous ingredients. Instead of empowering us with sensational lightning bolts -- God comes into our lives through common every day elements -- like bread and wine, like water and salt! It just takes a little bit of God's substantive power...on a regular basis...to make all the difference in world!

In simple substances and frequent offerings, God's forgiving love permeates our lives. Simple substances ... and simple words like "take and eat ... take and drink" as you do so, the guilt and imperfection and failures of yesterday are forgiven. You are now flavored with new life ... the power of my love. Now go and do likewise -- give yourself to the world like the "salt of the earth!" Bring new zest to life, and preserve the world from further corruption!

AMEN

more than a couple dozen lay visitors involved in the Lay Ministry Seminar; I am hopeful that these few will be a new spark of revitalization for many more at Hope. God does not need big

EPIPHANY V
Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo
February 7, 1987
Peter R. Martyn, Pastor

"A STORY WITHOUT STRUTTING!"

(And Jesus) rose and went out to a lonely place, and there he prayed. And Simon and those with him pursued Jesus, and they found him and said, "Everyone is searching for you!" And he said to them, "Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also; for that is why I came out!"

Mark 1:27-28

A story is told during the early days of the automobile that a man and his model-T were stalled on a lonely, wilderness road. No matter how much he cranked it, advanced the spark, or adjusted other things, it just wouldn't start. Unlike these days when we all understand those computer chips under our hoods, this was still a time when people were stumped by motorized carriages. It was not long before a chauffeured car stopped and the man in the back seat stepped out to help. Within a few minutes, he had the model-T purring like a kitten. As he was about to re-enter his car, he introduced himself as Henry Ford.

I call this A STORY WITHOUT STRUTTING! Henry Ford had two choices out on that lonely, wilderness road. He could have strutted right on by that needy man ... after all, he was Henry Ford ... and the man wouldn't have known the difference anyway. Or, much as he did, he could stop and serve a fellow traveler in distress.

We face a similar situation in the story of Jesus in Capernaum. On the basis of one healing by Jesus, Simon's mother-in-law, the whole countryside had gathered at her door. And Mark says, "He healed many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons ..." In modern terms, Jesus had become an overnight success. In a very short time, he had made a great name for himself. If there was ever a moment, now was the time for him to make a medical killing with his miracles.

But what does he do? He goes out to a lonely place -- in Greek, "heramos" - a wilderness setting, a place without distractions, a place of critical decision-making -- he goes to this place to pray. And soon his disciples appear. Forthright Peter says, "Lord, what are you doing here? Come on, the whole town's crying for you! Get up and let's go for the real action!"

Jesus had been very successful. And the greatest temptation confronts us WITH SUCCESS! WILL WE ALLOW OUR SUCCESS TO MANAGE US, OR WILL WE MANAGE OUR SUCCESS? While attending the Ohio Pastors' Convocation this past week, Dr. Clinton Coleman, Bishop of the American Episcopal Church, said:

One of the greatest problems facing the church

(or any institution) at anytime can be SUCCESS. Too much success can become a burden - too much success can "do us in." Because success leads to a pietistic arrogance. We've all seen it, haven't we? A certain smugness, a kind of cockiness, a sense of superiority, a spiritualized arrogance disguised as psuedo-pietism. Bishop Coleman calls this humanity's tendency "to strut." "I've got it made ... nobody can take it away from me ... I know what I know ... and just look at me strut!" He says most of us have known Christians who can even strut while sitting down.

But look at this story ... this story of Jesus Christ: "He healed the sick, gave sight to the blind, made the lame to walk, enabled the deaf to hear, made the dumb to speak, calmed the troubled seas, and even raised people from the dead -- BUT NO WHERE DID JESUS CHRIST EVER STRUT!! His was A STORY WITHOUT STRUTTING!

What a refreshing story! What a life-giving example! What a story of success! When the optimum moment was upon him to turn success into advantage over others, Jesus said: "Come on, lets move on and be about our business of preaching ... for that is why I have come. My purpose is not to strut, but to serve and satisfy others with the love of God."

Jesus did not allow success to go to his head -- for he knew that too much success in anything can be as devastating as downright dejection and failure. Success can so easily cloud the nature and purpose of our mission. Success can overinflate our egos and become the very substance of our self-destruction! Every mission in life, whether of church, community, corporation, country, or caring family -- every mission needs a "heramos" -- a retreat time, a time for reassessment, a time for reconsidering: WHAT ARE WE HERE FOR? Without that constant retreat to a lonely place -- success too often becomes self-destruction!

One graphic illustration should suffice. Another convocation speaker, Dr. Leon Sullivan (Baptist preacher from Philadelphia), commented that one of America's greatest success stories was her commitment to become an industrious and highly productive nation: AN INDUSTRIOUS, PRODUCTIVE PEOPLE WHO TOOK GREAT PRIDE IN THEIR PRODUCTS! But he says the America of today has lost sight of this great principle of economic security. Today, everyone's in it only for his or her own success: IT'S ONLY FOR WHAT I CAN GET OUT OF IT! Sullivan says, "We have allowed yesterday's triumphs to go to our heads ... to overinflate our egos. Today we are strutting around to the rest of the world saying, "Look at how great we have been ... don't you wish you were successful like us!"

But while the U.S. has been strutting her past successes Japan (and soon China) has been building her economic enterprise of industrious productivity! Upon a recent visit

to Japan, Dr. Sullivan got up early one morning and took a ride along Tokyo's major industrial highway ... dotted by hundred's of new plants. He noticed thousands ... ten thousands of people running along the highway. Finally he asked the driver, "Where are they going?" To which the driver replied: "They are running to get to work ahead of time!" Then Dr. Sullivan visited a plant just before noon. At high noon, the lunch whistle blew, but nobody in the plant moved. Sullivan asked the manager, "What's up ... what are all the people waiting for?" To which the manager replied: "They're all waiting to eat lunch after every one else has already done so." Possibly an exaggeration, but it does say something about the propriety and priority of work over break time!

Sullivan goes on, "After that visit to Japan, I now understood why the world beats a path to Japanese doorways." Here was a little island in the middle of the Pacific ... the second largest producer of steel in the world ... and yet there's not one stitch of iron ore beneath this country's ground. Be assured, I would never surrender American soil, American democracy, American education, American lifestyle to that of a rigid, Oriental aristocracy. But like it or not, Japan has captured what was once only an American institution -- a dedicated spirit of industrious, productivity!!

Sullivan continues: "Those people have made a commitment to working together as one body! They are not strutting around to past successes ... trying to look better than their neighbors ... they are instead serving ONE MISSION: THE FUTURE GOOD OF THEIR WHOLE COUNTRY! Like the story of Jesus Christ, Japan reflects A STORY WITHOUT STRUTTING! Instead, Japanese leaders are saying: "Let us go on to all other towns of Asia and build this same spirit of industrious, productivity! While we are often busy stockpiling war heads to put down Russia, Japan is wiping us out of the world markets with our own spirit of industrious, productivity.

What is the cure for such a situation? It's time for the U.S. to take a little retreat -- to go off to a lonely place and ask ourselves: FOR WHAT REASON HAS GOD PUT US HERE IN THE FIRST PLACE?? To strut over yesterday's successes, or to serve tomorrow's needs?? It's time for everyone in America to again start working as a united people -- labor and management, black and white, rich and poor. The ego inflation of our past successes is upon us. Either we re-dedicate ourselves to working together as one people ... or it won't be necessary to bring us to our knees with war heads -- we will smash ourselves to economic smithereens.

The Bible says: the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. God has a very practical plan for the successful mission of his people: NAMELY, THAT THEY COME TOGETHER ONCE A WEEK TO REDEFINE THEMSELVES ... TO GIVE CREDIT TO GOD FOR THEIR SUCCESSES ... AND TO BE ASSURED OF HIS FORGIVENESS FOR THEIR FAILURES. Worship is not an optional

retreat for the faithful. Worship is our lonely place ... worship is our "heramos" ... worship is our place of decision making for God and for ourselves. Worship reminds us of whose mission we are about in this world. Worship reminds us that our purpose is NOT TO STRUT, BUT TO SERVE. Worship tells us who we are and why God has put us here!

Oh, there are still some very successful people among us who like to strut ... in fact, once and a while we all still do a little strutting! But by and large most of us have become God's servants -- we have left the strutting to those who only show up at Christmas and Easter --- they strut in and they strut out! They're never here long enough to really know what a faith life is all about. They think it has something to do with strutting ... they think the church is just like all the other clubs in society -- it's a place for strutting your successfulness. But what a different lesson we receive when we retreat with God regularly!!

Those vessels on the altar are hardly symbols of strutting. That cross hanging from the chancel is hardly a symbol of success. This stole around my neck hardly symbolizes a life of self-gratification!! All these symbols around us reflect service and sacrifice, reflect love and liberty for the downtrodden and helpless. Jesus never said those who follow him will be successful ... he said they will be servants ... he said they will experience sacrifice ... he said they will take up their crosses and follow him. Ours is not a story of strutting, but of serving the least and the lost and the lonely and the laughed at.

Our mission is like the mission of Dr. Carrol Behrhorst. Here was a medical doctor called by the Lutheran Mission Board to Guatemala. He was to build a modern medical hospital and share his genius with those backward, sickly people. But when he got there -- he did nothing. Well, not exactly nothing -- he retreated by himself to meditate. Because here was an opportunity for him to make a personal gold mine. He could become Guatemala's miracle worker. He could live and work in his sanitized hospital setting - hoping that millions of Indians would run to him to be rescued.

But thankfully, Dr. Behrhorst saw it differently. Instead of strutting as Guatemala's miracle man, he first healed a young boy whose father had already purchased the boy's casket. He then realized these people were without hope, without understanding of self-care, without sanitation, without preventative medicine. So instead of building a sanitized medical complex, Dr. Behrhorst kept moving ... from village to village to village. And in each little village, he developed a network of trust ... and taught principles of hygiene and personal care. He switched entirely from a curative to a preventative medical program. And instead of treating a brave few in a brand new medical complex, he treated thousands and thousands. By normal medical standards,

he was not a successful doctor -- he was poor, he was overworked, he was understaffed, and he was not written up in the New England Medical Journal. By American standards of success, he had very little to strut about! But wow, was he serving in the image of Jesus Christ!! Because of his spirit of industrious productivity, he had revolutionized the medical standards of a whole country. He had encouraged sanitary housing and clean water, balanced nutrition and birth control, improved agricultural production and marketing cooperatives, and trained a whole host of local health promoters -- not people with M.D. degrees, but people with a commitment to the renewed health and vitality of other people!

Like a man from Nazareth, Dr. Behrhorst's is A STORY WITHOUT STRUTTING! It's a story of a man who carried the cross for a community of needy people. And that community now has a resurrection story to tell. What greater success could we ever want to share ... than another story of the resurrection of our Lord! Thanks be to God for all of us who would rather SERVE than STRUT our way through this wonderful gift of life!!

AMEN.