

Trinity VIII  
Redeemer Lutheran - Milwaukee  
August 1, 1971

Pastor Martyn

"MOVING TOWARD REAL SECURITY"

Jeremiah 23:16

Thus says the Lord of hosts: "Do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you, filling you with vain hopes; they speak visions of their own minds, not from the mouth of the Lord."

The past decade - the 1960's - could be appropriately labeled "The Prophetic Era" of Modern History. Anyone who has lived thru the past decade intimately understands the concept of prophecy - for the 1960's were filled with all kinds of visionary prophets / prophecy almost reached faddish proportions / regardless of political, socio-economic, or religious background, everyone seemed to be making predictions about the future and judgments of the present.

The prophecies were often contradicting cries / predictions of doom from some - and hope and promise from others. Reactionaries judged us Communists; Activitst judged us facsists; the poor and minorities judged us racists; ecologists judged us pollutionists - etc., etc. Along with these judgments came forecasts of individual and corporate gloom. || Still, other prophets envisioned hopes. They saw the turmoil of the 60's as a momentary transition period - our problems were small in proportion to our progress. In light of our advances and technology, these prophets could only promise hope.

With the infancy of the 70's upon us, we now struggle with the merits of all these prophecies / we stand puzzled by the contradictions of a trubulent decade. Should we be skeptics - or blind optimists? Are we faced with a gloomy future of a hopeful one?

If we are to take Jeremiah's prophecy seriously today, then we must at least develop a position of Christian questioning when encountering prophets who see nothing but hopeful signs. We must asses these visions of hope by asking:

Are they empty desires of wishful thinkers?

Are they delaying tactics holding off a gloomy future?

Are they just sweet sayings to cover up the sour conditions of our corporate life?

Are they simply vain hopes which deny or hide us from the reality of the real pain and suffering that we're feeling inside?

I have no simple answer for any of these questions. But the struggle I've alluded to relates directly to the struggle of Jeremiah with the prophetic conditions of his day.

Eighth and Seventh Century Jerusalem exhibited characteristics not so alien to our own era--for Israel was besieged by political upheaval, by social and moral decay, war, poverty, and idolatrous worship and living.

Amidst this chaotic scene arose the prophets--in fact, this was the peak period of prophecy in Israel. Very similar to our own past decade, it was a ripe moment for prophetic predictions. And also similar to our era, the prophecies often contradicted each other.

For Israel suffered from corruption and internal decay, yet many prophets calmly claimed that all was well. To people who had despised God's way, these prophets offered sweet words of reassurance. To those who were caught up in their own wealth, greed, and bigotry--these prophets offered pious promises of protection. From their perspective, God would intercede and offer a sugar coating for all the corruption of His people.

Needless to say, Jeremiah's vision of God's action wasn't such a bag of magician's tricks. Jeremiah recognized that God holds his people accountable for their unwillingness to change. And so he repudiated these self-seeking prophets--he warned Israel to guard against these prophets who try to hide themselves and everybody else from reality. He warned them that God is an active God in History--that he is not some God afar off in the skies. He is God who is active in the lives of his creatures--and thereby holds them accountable for their actions--to the degree that His creatures overlook his will--to that degree they bring about the destruction of themselves and all of God's

creation.

As stated in the first chapter of Jeremiah's prophecy, his mission from God was to "tear up and knock down, to destroy and overthrow," all those inventions of man which did not conform to God's blueprint for creation. These are not easy words to hear--nor were they easy words for Jeremiah to speak, for he was a gentle and affectionate man--but this was his task regardless of his warm personality. It is my task today to reiterate that warning, regardless of the nature of my personality or yours.

We must ask ourselves where we stand at this moment of history? Do we still hear God's warning to beware of false prophets who fill us full of vain hopes-- prophets who worship personal gain at the expense of corporate loss?

Such man-made gains or virtues may provide momentary security--but they will never be utopias for eternity. God warns us today to beware of our self-satisfaction and those who would promote it. He does not want us to be betrayed by a false sense of security--a total reliance upon ourselves--for of such were the people of Jerusalem before their fall <sup>and</sup> after Jeremiah's warning. God warns us only to save us from our own insecurity--reliance on ourselves. But God leaves us with more than a warning! He not only warns us against the vain hopes of false prophets, but offers us a real hope.

His hope for humanity, however, is not <sup>simply</sup> in technological progress or <sup>benefit</sup> ideological systems--he offers us hope through a person--a person who vividly portrays His image, the image of God.

Jeremiah tells of this personal hope later in his prophecy, in his 31st chapter we read:

Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt. But this is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be

my people. And no longer shall each man teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, "know the Lord," for they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."

God HAS made a New Covenant with us -- He HAS written his New Law on our hearts. And we DO KNOW OUR GOD, for he has offered himself to us in a new relationship through the person of Jesus Christ.

God thru the person of Jesus Christ has offered us a real security -- the integrity of forgiveness. And that offering is HOPE, because in forgiveness, there is no longer any guilt. In forgiveness, there is a chance for renewal. A chance for rebuilding. A chance for changing a corrupted past. In forgiveness, we have a hope which drives us to confess our brokenness; and a hope which then seeks to renew the relationship rather than hiding behind the brokenness.

Needless to say the INTEGRITY of forgiveness does not shelter us from its necessary struggle. We can't hide from the pain and apprehension that precedes the forgiving act. FORGIVENESS IS NOT LINUS' BLANKET. For sheltering oneself from reality is a false security - a vain hope.

But forgiveness patterned after God OFFERS integrity to human relationships. It drives us to confront God, ourselves, and the persons we feel alienated from. And in that struggle and confession of estrangement, we experience the integrity of our honesty and the possibility for a renewed relationship. HOW can that possibly be construed as anything but A REAL HOPE AND A REAL SECURITY!

Let us celebrate God's forgiveness -- our real security. For his forgiveness is radically prophetic in every way - as we struggle to share it, WE CAN confidently predict that it will bring REAL HOPE to anyone feeling unloved, unwanted, and unneeded.

Amen.

TRINITY IX

Redeemer Lutheran Milwaukee

July 30, 1972

"THE GODFATHER"

"And the son said to (his father), 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' But the father said to his servants, 'Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet; and bring the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and make merry; for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.' And they began to make merry." (Luke 15:21-24)

In light of a recent movie box office success, I couldn't resist stealing its title for this morning's sermon. I had great visions of a long line stretching down Wisconsin Avenue. People anxiously waiting to get into the church. But THE GODFATHER of the cinema seems to be MORE POPULAR these days than THE GODFATHER of creation.

If you came here for a violent thriller this morning, you're going to be deeply disappointed. The Godfather of today's gospel has NO CONNECTION with "family" (mafia) violence.

He's diametrically opposed to ANY SHADY FAMILY BUSINESS, whether in the underworld or in legitimate corporate enterprise. He does not find MURDER or VENGEANCE glamorous. He DOES NOT make deals with his family. He DOES NOT force his followers to do anything. OUR GODFATHER simply offers his love, and waits for his family, his followers, to ACCEPT it, and to RESPOND to it.

And most contrary to the Marlon Brando Godfather, our GODFATHER loves us most when we have failed and deserved his love least! Our Godfather DOES NOT love sin, but he does love sinners! He welcomes us with open arms and celebration, when the Godfather of the world would welcome us with a strap or machine gun.

Let's be closer VIEWERS of our Godfather today; let's see how much more attractive he is than Marlon Brando. And let's DO ALL VIEWING today -- so that we can leave here THRILLED by the picture. Thrilled so much that we're willing to live JUST LIKE OUR GODFATHER.

So what makes our Godfather so great?!? Even after we've rebelled - turned our back on him, he accepts us back WITH NO STRINGS ATTACHED! Even when we have abused and squandered his gifts, he asks for NO REPAYMENT. Isn't this contrary to the godfather's of the world.

Let's look at the godfather of our prison system. A man breaks the law, and he is greeted with the slam of a steel cage door. He has violated Gods law, and society makes him pay for his failure. BUT will society LET HIM REPENT. Will society let him experience OUR GODFATHER'S LOVE, or is he barred from that love forever. As members of God's family, it is time that we rethink the methods by which Christians REHABILITATE rebellious sons of society.

But you and I, although not behind bars, are often imprisoned by the world's godfathers. Has anyone ever said to you: "I'll forgive you, but I can't forget." OR, "I'll accept you back when you have proven yourself worthy of my acceptance." How does such Bargain-Counter-Love make you feel. If you're like me, you feel defeated before you even begin.

The love of God is not offered on a time-payment plan. Our God and Father loves us today NOT BECAUSE we have paid for our sin, BUT simply BECAUSE we have turned back to him knowing that he is our Father.

And further, our GODFATHER does not greet us with A STRAP -- he opens his arms, hugs us to him, and then throws a reunion celebration. Our Holy Communion in the hymnal is called The Thanksgiving -- it is a joyous celebration, not a penitent, dismal affair. St. Luke records earlier in this chapter of the gospel:

"there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance."

There is NOT PUNISHMENT as we turn back to our God and Father -- there are only the goose-bumps from the squeeze of a father, brother, sister, friend -- from that someone who always lifts up your life.

My friends, our violent world must begin to BETTER see this picture of our Godfather. I'm not even talking about the violence of guns and war, as bad as they are. I'm talking about the violence of words and gestures.

There are so many ways that we can feel defeated by our circumstances. Unemployment, illness, family or marital breakdowns, loneliness, discrimination, etc. As we encounter persons suffering these conditions, it is so easy to say innocent things which ONLY increase the pain and feelings of worthlessness.

The Godfather of our story gives his rebellious son a hug upon his return. Maybe we could do the same for a friend or loved one who has failed and is looking for a joy-filled lift. God's not calling on us to be schmaltzy and affectionate -- he's just asking us to understand and care when someone is already beaten down.

But our Godfather not only receives us back when we have turned away -- he also FORGIVES our jealousy caused by our righteousness. We often see ourselves as the good Christians. That often is quite true, but it can be equally dangerous.

It can foster a sense of smugness -- we can view ourselves as faith's superstars. And so like the elder brother of our story, we can become envious or jealous of the love shown to him who has fallen down.

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And like the elder brother, we soon hear ourselves making angry statements. "I'm the one who has been giving all the support to this place, and then our pastor goes and ministers to that trash." OR, "After all I've done, and then they go and have a special celebration for that person." OR, "I'm the one who has worked and sacrificed for this place, and NOW nobody cares."

Our father, yes the Godfather of our story answers our charges and his son's charges by saying:

"Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. It was fitting to make merry and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found."

Those are words of understanding from a forgiving father.

Those are God's words for us here today. He is grateful for our righteousness. And so are his ordained ministers grateful for the sacrifice and righteousness of his people at Redeemer.

But our God and Father DOES NOT LIMIT his love to ONLY the righteous. He is a God who DOES NOT HESITATE to love the sinner who has come to him. There are no SPECIAL, RESERVED seats in the house of the Lord. He greets righteous and sinner ALIKE with open arms. And he especially gives the most attention AT THE MOMENT to the sinner who has been lost and dead to the community of the faithful.

Our Godfather IS NOT ONE who separates the GOOD GUYS from the BAD BUYS. He is a God and Father who seeks to bring the righteous and the sinner TOGETHER -- so that they will accept each other with the SAME LOVE that he has shown to EACH of them.

We have returned to our God and Father today. He has received us as saints and sinners. He desires that we feast



on his love. And as we are filled with his loving presence, he asks that we become Godfathers, Godmothers, God sisters, Godbrothers, Godwives, Godhusbands, yes, Godfriends to someone who is on the road back home, but needs THAT SPECIAL SOMEONE to run out and greet him with love.

We have been called to LOVE ALL CHILDREN OF GOD, saints and sinners, white and black, rich and poor, Democrats and Republicans, good guys and bad guys.

We are NOT required to pay THREE DOLLARS to witness our Godfather's message. There is no box office price for His love and forgiveness. God only hopes that as we receive his free gift, we will EXTEND his love through our gifts.

And further, we need not have to listen to our Godfather's message for three hours to get its point. Fifteen minutes will suffice.

In short, we CAN and WILL make our version of THE GODFATHER the greatest show on earth!

Amen.

*Duplicated material  
9.8.72*

O God, our Father, we are grateful for your loving acceptance in both our righteousness and sinfulness. We have all experienced the temptation to rebel against you -- sometimes in actions, often in words and gestures. We have all had visions of going on a lark without you, O Father. We give you thanks that you are constantly awaiting our return with open arms.

Help us, O Father, to love and forgive one another in YOUR fatherly way.

Where our love has become boastful and arrogant--prune it with humility and temper it with sincerity.

Where our love has become impatient and unkind--strengthen and sustain it with greater patience and kindness.

Where our love has become rude and resentful--transform our bitterness into constructive compassion.

Where our love has become jealous and proud--deliver us from our self-pity and self-righteousness which only FURTHER erode our relationship with you and one another.

In a love so patterned after yours, may we then BEAR all things, BELIEVE all things, and HOPE all things.

We not only offer these prayers of thanks and requests for ourselves, O God; we are mindful of those this day separated from our family. And so we especially ask that you will uplift these our fellow servants with your gift of reassuring love:

(Those requesting prayers will now be named)

These praises and petitions we offer in the name of him who has revealed the TRUTH of your love to us, Jesus Christ, your son, our Lord, who has taught us to pray: The Lord's Prayer.

PENTECOST VIII  
Church of the Master - Troy  
July 28 , 1974

"A LITTLE HELP FROM A FRIEND"

"But a certain Samaritan who was traveling that way came upon him, and when he saw the man his heart was filled with pity." (Luke 10:33)

As youngsters, we know the hurt we feel when the other kids won't let us play with them. It's not much fun to be by-passed.

As teenagers, many of us have known the anguish and isolation of feeling that nobody wants to go out with us. It's not much fun to be overlooked as a teen.

As young adults striving to get a hearing - or to offer a new insight - we know the frustration we feel when established authorities offer limp excuses for not listening - or when they pass off the idea as "just another wild eyed idea from t he kid who hasn't grown up yet. It's not much fun being made to feel worthless.

As parents who have often sacrificed our own security for the sake of our families, our church, our fellow citizens -- we know the emptiness we feel when we never hear EVEN THE SLIGHTEST word of appreciation for our efforts. It's not very sustaining to be continually TAKEN FOR GRANTED.

As employees - when we have given our all-in-all, and then find ourselves without a promotion because someone's favorite son or daughter got the job - we know the depression of being by-passed.

As supervisors and employers, when we have sought to do our best for our workers and they return their thanks by going on strike - then we see too clearly how UNTOUCHED our employees are with our corporate dedication.

Yes, I'm quite sure that we've all experienced

the feelings that are associated with being by-passed. How often as pastors WE HEAR TOO LATE that we are in hot water because someone in the congregation is feeling by-passed. And what a horrible feeling it is TO FEEL left out-- to feel unheard - unappreciated -- to feel unseen -- YES, TO FEEL LIKE WE'VE BEEN ROBBED, BEATEN, STRIPPED, AND LEFT ALONE IN LIFE.

We all have been in the ditch with the traveler in the Gospel story for today, haven't we? Maybe we have not been robbed and beaten in the same way, but we do know what it means to be half-dead. We have all had the feeling of being by-passed - of being abandoned. And such moments might justifiably leave us feeling half-dead.

I believe the parable before us - although almost too familiar - can have a renewed impact when we see ourselves in the shoes of the victim in the ditch. If we can recall in our own lifetimes WHAT IT REALLY FEELS LIKE TO BE VICTIMIZED, then the actions of the Samaritan take on profound meaning for us. Then we know FROM EXPERIENCE the difference between BEING SEEN and RECEIVING HELP.

Let's focus on that difference - the difference of being seen and receiving help. All three persons - the Levite, the Priest, and the Samaritan - SAW the injured man, but only the Samaritan, when he saw, had compassion. And that is the crucial point of the parable. The victim needed a little help from a friend - whether that person was a long term friend or first time acquaintance. Only seeing the victim would be of little help. He needed to be seen with compassion - or "with pity" as translated in our text.

Compassion is the bridge between mere SEEING and TANGIBLE ACTION. This is dramatically illustrated by Jesus himself.

Many people had seen Jesus - but they did not

proclaim him a Savior by merely SEEING HIM. Many others called him their Savior - but just these words were insufficient for thousands who had not observed Jesus. Even Scripture calls Jesus our Savior - and yet the words alone don't convince any of us.

We proclaim Jesus as Savior not because he's been given this title - BUT BECAUSE HE ACTED AS A SAVIOR. He did not talk about forgiveness-- he forgave. He did not walk around handing out tracts telling about his love -- he loved. He did not set himself up as a leader for sensitivity sessions - he was sensitive to human needs. He did not converse about caring for others - he offered compassion.

For Jesus the question was not "to be or not to be." But rather the question was "to do or not to do." He was a doer of love - because it's God's nature, NOT TO BY-PASS any condition of human need. ~~to act~~ -

We are told the Samaritan ACTED with pity - which in this case, is synonymous with the term Compassion or Mercy. In the Greek text, this term is "es-splang-nisthe" ( ), which literally translated means "to be moved from the bowels by another's human need." For the ancient Greeks, ~~the~~ the seat of compassion was attributed to the bowels rather than the heart. We might very well say, then, that the Samaritan offered a "gut level" response to the need of another.

Obviously, "compassion" in the biblical sense means that the WHOLE PERSON is moved to respond. He not only sees, but he ACTS upon what he sees. And so rather than just shaking his head at a pitiful sight, the Samaritan ACTS in order to change the condition of human suffering.

And of course, the real interesting twist of the story is that Jesus uses a Samaritan to illustrate the nature of compassion. Samaritans were outsiders - they were not part of the

religious in-group. They were not the super religious folks with all the great spiritual experiences. And yet Jesus affirms this foreigner - because his action was a faithful one. He was not saying Samaritans are great, but he was saying THAT THE ACTION of this Samaritan was in the image of God's actions. . . and therefore, it was a great action.

You and I have known the feeling of being by-passed -- we have known the feeling of being victimized. God's nature is to render active help to us at such moments. His nature is to render help NOT ONLY TO US, but to any person or group of persons who have been robbed, beaten or victimized by others in life.

His nature is to render help - to have compassion. Yes, his nature is MORE than just looking at human need and then passing by. His nature is to get right in there and help those who are suffering.

He calls together a group of people to be his hands, and legs, and heart, and, yes, even his bowels. And this group that he gathers together HE CALLS THE CHURCH. This body of Christ - this group of people, with all of its different types of people, with all of the strengths and failures of these people - BUT, YES, THIS BODY he calls together to be HIS AGENT OF COMPASSION ON EARTH.

Today, my friends, we welcome ~~ten~~ NEW PERSONS into this body known as the church. Granted, it's not the whole body, but it's a very vital part of the whole - because God has appointed us to be his members of compassion. I am sure these ~~ten~~ persons joining us today desire the active compassion of Christ. They have looked to the church - because they believe that through its members they will receive God's human touch of compassion.

It is God's hope that we will be more than Samaritans to these new members -- he hopes that

we will be more than compassionate strangers. He hopes that we will be fellow saints of compassion - always seeing the need of one another, and never by-passing the opportunity to offer a helping hand.

This has not been a "by-passing" church. It has always been a place where you can find a little help from a friend. New members, we hope and pray this will be your experience with us. We also hope and pray that you will share in our ministry of compassion - that you will not by-pass the needs of this congregation, its people, and the whole church.

Above all, it is my hope, as pastor, that as we grow - we will never lose the touch of compassion that God has given us. For we have known what it feels like to be "passed by" - but we have also been shown Christ's way of compassion.

*So let us get on with it.*

Let us go, then, and do the same.

Amen.

PENTECOST VIII

Luth Church of the Master, Troy

August 1, 1976

"WARNING: HAZARDOUS TO YOUR HEALTH"

Amos Answered: I am not the kind of prophet who prophesies for pay. I am a herdsman, and I take care of figtrees. But the Lord took me from my work as a shepherd and ordered me to go and prophesy to his people Israel." Amos 7:15

The year was 750 B.C. King Jeroboam II sat upon the throne of Israel in the well fortified city of Samaria. There were signs of peace and prosperity everywhere. Never had the boundaries of Israel been so extended. Never since the days of Solomon had the trade caravans brought so much wealth to Israel. The building business was booming. New stone homes were under construction, and the very wealthy had both winter and summer homes. A time of expensive ivory decorated houses and furniture.

Noble families lived in ease--feasting upon the tender meat of lambs and drinking wine by the bowlsful whiel the music of harps entertained them. Solemn religious ceremonies were common. Priests, in splendid robes, offered the fattest cattle to God as temple choirs sang praises to the Lord. The present was prosperous, and the future promised more.

Amos walked into this world of peace and prosperity with the word of the Lord. His opening words were: "The Lord roars from Zion and utters his voice from Jerusalem." That sounded like good news to the people of Israel - esp the priests. Perhaps, thought the people, God thru this prophet was going to speak of the coming destruction of Israel's enemies.

And that Amos did! He spoke words against Gaza, Tyre, Edom, Ammon, Moab -- even Judah, Israel's sister state with whom she was having civil war. But, Amos was not through. His angry voice rose and pierced the bubble of peace and prosperity of Jeroboam's "secular city."



Amos said: "Thus said the Lord"

"For three transgressions of Israel and for four, I will not revoke the punishment; because they sell the righteous for silver and the needy for a pair of shoes -- they trample the head of the poor into the dust of the earth, and turn aside the way of the afflicted. (2.6)"

There was no uncertainty about his message. Israel too stood under the judgment of God despite its privileged position. Beneath the peace and prosperity of a great nation, Amos spied a morally rotten people.

He charged the country's leaders with corruption and exploitation of the masses. Businessmen used false weight scales to cheat the poor. When the peasants were bankrupt, they were sold as slaves-- sometimes for as little as the price of a pair of sandals. EVEN WORSE--Amos observed that in spite of the corruption and exploitation, the wealthy did not seem to be concerned. They entertained themselves with songs while the poor wept on.

And there was more! Most terrible of all in Amos' view, the unconcern of the privileged classes was accompanied by a SICKENING display of religious piety and practice. They believed God was completely satisfied with them and was wholly on their side. Amos wanted no part of such hypocrisy -- he lashed out:

"I hate, I despise your feasts and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer me burnt offerings and cereal offerings, I will not accept them. Take away from me the noise of your songs and harps. Rather, let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an overflowing stream." (5:21-24)

Moral and spiritual corruption was leading Israel to ruin & destruction. Amos was God's last flicker of light -- his message was not a conditional warning -- it was an absolute warning -- YOUR CORRUPTION WILL BE DANGEROUS TO YOUR HEALTH.

That was 2700 years ago. He was talking to Israel -- that was the single focus of his indictment. To be honest to the text, a preacher cannot claim that Amos was applying this to any nation today.

But you know and so do I, that although that was not Amos' intent, the application can still be made. His warning is as ABSOLUTE for the USA as it was for ancient Israel. We don't like to hear it -- but nevertheless, it is the only light that will redeem our future.

In this Bicentennial year we are enjoying peace and rising prosperity as the economic recovery takes hold. An agonizing war has ended. Rebellious campuses are quiet. There seems to be a truce even in our ghettos. Auto sales are way up -- new home construction is rolling again -- gasoline has not been short for this summer's vacations.

But ~~as~~ <sup>as</sup> in Amos' day, we ~~must remember~~ <sup>are to be warned!</sup> ~~for~~ like the Israelites, we are no longer concerned about basic necessities like food and shelter. Our aim is directed at the COMFORTABLE -- at the so-called secular "good life."

We are a prosperous people, no doubt about it. So -- we must ask -- what would Amos say to a nation that sees scandal after scandal taking the front pages of our newspapers -- what would he say to 40 billion a year in white collar crime -- what would he say to this great nation that claims to BE UNDER GOD??

Would he say that ~~the~~ corruption, self-indulgence, racism and sex scandals ~~are~~ <sup>are</sup> only being practiced by the 50% who do not go to church on Sunday? We know much different. For we know that we are all implicated in Amos' *indictment.*

And we also know that A NATION UNDER GOD cannot break the Law of God without reaping the consequences.

Which one among us does not need this warning -- and the assurance of grace that follows at his table. God be glorified -- that now and then--

he found someone like Amos -- with guts enough to sound the warning -- someone who did not take a stand because he was paid for it or because it was the popular thing to do.

But someone who did it because that's the way God still speaks -- through shaking prophecies as well as comforting promises.

God help us to heed his WARNING more seriously than we do the surgeon generals.

AMEN

" PENTECOST VIII  
Luth Church of the Master, Troy  
July 24, 1977

"TO BE OR NOT TO BE..."

"But (the lawyer" desiring to justify himself,  
said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

Luke 10:29

Many times during my years as a teacher and pastor I have been tempted to become an anti-intellectual. Maybe sometimes I've felt this way because some intellectuals have made me feel insecure. And yet - as much as I have occasionally been intimidated by some great minds -- I rarely have hidden from them.

Obviously - intellectuals have and will always be an essential ingredient to every age and civilization. Whether the contributions of Thomas Jefferson, Albert Einstein, Henry Ford, Mahat Ma Ghandi, or Martin Luther -- these and countless more have served humanity beyond human calculation.

Yet - so often, whether as theologian, scientist, philosopher, or lawyer (as illustrated in today's gospel), these great minds perceive life only from their ivory-tower pinacles. And not only can this divorce them from reality -- but it can also give them a false sense of egotism and self-worth.

So it is in the gospel story before us. It's such a familiar parable - and yet those are the ones that challenge us to look with fresh eyes. Today I'd like to target our focus on the lawyer.

Quite typical of lawyers (and I do have some personal experience with them -- and I'll also let Sue see a copy of this sermon) -- they seem to delight in playing legal games with almost all facets of life. I guess this is only natural of such a profession. Yet in doing so - they so often carry their exquisite rational abilities to the absurd.

Every conversation is approached as a crack legal

case. What should be a simple rule of life suddenly takes on the character of a courtroom trial. What was a simple issue of life, now becomes an intricate legal case demanding days of debate. And of course - the whole thing sounds very legitimate because it's well protected behind volumes of legal jargon.

Please forgive my sarcasm. My aim is not to discredit the legal profession -- lawyers often do a pretty good job of that by themselves. There can be no doubt -- in a complex world, great legal minds are often required to resolve intricate issues -- in fact, often needed to resolve issues which the general public has created by its stupidity and prejudice.

But enough of this, My aim here is to show that great minds - whether lawyers, philosophers, or theologians -- often play games WITH THE TRUTH in order TO AVOID the practical implications of the truth.

Just note the questions of the lawyer in our text. First, he asks what he should do to inherit eternal life. My dear friends - this guy was no Jewish dummy -- he was a devout religious man. He knew the answer long before Jesus uttered a word. And as we see - he answered his own questions perfectly. There was no doubt that he knew his Jewish catechism.

But he was doing what lawyers do very well -- he was asking leading questions. He was getting ready to drop the big bomb. And in the next verses - there she comes. Luke says in vs 29 -- But the lawyer, desiring to justify himself (aha-- there's his motivation -- self-justification -- he's not after the truth -- he's out to make himself look good) -- anyway: he says to Jesus: "Who is my neighbor?" Now there's the big general bomb. Try to answer that one in 25 words or less. The lawyer - like any good intellectual-- wanted Jesus to deal with him and life from a philosophical perspective.

Obviously - the lawyer knew God's requirements

for faithful living. But through this philosophical question -- he was setting out to prove how difficult this whole neighbor notion really is. He was showing how difficult it really is to determine who your neighbor really is. And in doing this -- he would limit the scope of neighborly love. By showing Jesus how difficult it is to love everybody -- he could now justify himself -- he could justify love on a small scale.

Obviously - the lawyer was distorting the truth to serve his own needs (also something that lawyers are very expert about).

But let's take the lawyer off the hot seat. His game has often been our game. Just like him, we know what it means to be obedient to God. But we find all kinds of rationalizations to get us off the hook. Whether its worship, stewardship, or serving our neighbor -- we all know how to be intellectual enough to avoid God's claim upon us.

How often have we heard the statement - "You don't have to go to church to believe in God." On the surface that statement is true -- but dig a little deeper and you'll find an agnostic intellectual behind it every time. It's just man asserting himself over God.

Obviously - Jesus did not get caught up in playing these *philosophical games*. He was not primarily interested in philosophical pretense. So- when confronted by it from this lawyer - he simply told a story which illustrated the issue of neighborliness.

And that story illustrated that the question IS NOT - "Who is my neighbor?" - but rather "TO BE OR NOT TO BE" a neighbor - that is the question. We are called to be a neighbor when presented with the practical circumstances of everyday life. The priest and the Levite rejected the opportunity when given the chance. The Samaritan - a heathen foreigner - embraced the opportunity rather than merely talking about it.

And for that reason - I sometimes sound like an anti-intellectual. Because too often the intellectual approach leads to what has been called the PARALYSIS OF ANALYSIS. Time is spent in analyzing the issue RATHER than doing something about it.

This rationalism ~~will~~ always makes us aware of how difficult it is to love everybody -- of how one individual surely cannot do everything love suggests - of how we're only human and God surely can't expect too much ~~from~~ us.

This <sup>kind</sup> rational approach too often encourages us to EXCUSE OURSELVES so that we can feel justified in our shortcomings. In essence -- it reinforces our shortcomings rather than challenging us toward the great possibilities God has given to us. Rationalism enables us to see the problems so clearly that we're blinded from God's plans for us.

Obviously - there are human limits and weaknesses. But that is not the focal point of our faith. That is not the heart of the gospel. Christ has not risen from the dead so that we can feel sorry for ourselves -- or so that we can justify our shortcomings.

The case before us is that God has already acted for us. He has already taken our case to court and we have been declared NOT GUILTY. In Jesus Christ, God has raised us out of the ditch. In raising Jesus from the dead - God makes clear that he has not given up on us -- even though we might have given up on humanity. God has been merciful to us -- and will eternally raise us from the ditches of life.

You see - God didn't just talk about the good neighbor and brother, Jesus. He gave us Jesus Christ as a human example of BEING A NEIGHBOR. For the faithful Christian, there is no confusion about being a neighbor.

Jesus has not called us to be distracted by an endless discussion of HOW FAR and HOW WIDE love should range. He simply asks us to respond in love in whatever specific situation that confronts us.

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*our*

It's not a matter of calculating <sup>A</sup>limits. It's a matter of expressing and verifying our love for God by BEING NEIGHBORLY.

As neighbors - I have my problems - you have yours; I have my needs - you have yours; and in one sense, they are really distinct from each other. So in one sense I have to try to decide whose need I am going to try to serve -- yours or mine.

But to see this is to see only part of what there is to see. To see this is to see only the surface. The reality of it is so much more.

As we travel around this life - every man that we meet is the man in the ditch because every man we meet - no matter how little he looks it and no matter how surprised he might be to realize it -- yes, every man is dying for need of us.

In one way or another, every human being is crying out to be known, - to be accepted - to be forgiven - to be healed - by us. So that the other guy who appears so distinct from us is not quite so distinct after all. For he or she cannot really be a SELF without us. To be really alive, not just half alive, that person needs our help, our healing.

Yes, the deeper truth is that TO BE really alive, not just half alive, we need to help and heal him. His need for mercy is matched by our need to be merciful. It is not just for his sake that we come to his rescue. It is also for our sakes. Neither of us can be really human, really alive, without the other. And every time we pass by and leave him to his own misery - we both suffer for it. The world around us is a good reminder of *MISERY* caused by people passing by.

There is no question about it. "Who is my neighbor?" is just an intellectual cop out. We are called to be neighbors. To be or not to be ... that is the only question.

AMEN



PENTECOST VIII  
Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo  
July 30 and Aug. 2, 1981

"HAVE YOU CHECKED YOUR SOIL LATELY?"

"So shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth;  
it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish  
that which I purpose, and prosper in the thing for which  
I sent it." Is. 55:11 "He who hears the word and  
understands it indeed bears fruit, and yields in one case  
a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty."  
Matt 13:23

In London's Hyde Park -- many orators get up on their  
soap boxes and speak with great courage on issues that are  
troubling them. One day a speaker was trying desperately  
to make a persuasive case for the greatness of God's Word  
of love when he was interrupted by a drunkard. The  
interruptor was very down and out ... and looked the grubby  
part of a street tramp. This person blurted out at the  
speaker: "Christianity's nothing but a failure. Look how  
long it's been here and see what a mess the world's in today!"

The speaker hesitated for a while -- and then with an  
obvious note of sarcasm - he retorted to the tramp: "Water  
has been here even longer than Christianity -- and just  
look at your face!"

The speaker's parable was obvious to the tramp and everyone  
else: water will have little impact on life unless it is  
purposely applied to those areas of our lives where it is  
needed. Likewise the Word of God: it will have little impact  
on life IF NOT purposefully received and shared by people.

In the parable of the Sower, the seed and the soils-- Jesus  
illustrates for his disciples how the Word of God impacts on  
our lives. It should be stated at this time that Jesus was  
sharing this parable at the height of his popularity. We're  
told that the crowds were so great that he had to take a  
boat out into the water in order to avoid being overwhelmed.  
These were people who were looking to him as a warrior-hero  
figure; they were expecting this savior from God to show  
them how he would establish his kingdom with brutal power.  
They were expecting a savior who would bring in a violent  
revolution.



The obvious question: Is it worth the risk? And God's answer would be "generally yes!" Because God wants us to take the risk to spread his word to everyone. If we don't take that risk - then we're telling people that God's word is a weak word of love -- it's only meant for people who see everything our way -- it's only meant for people who will be "perfect little Lutherans."

Likewise - our programs of mission sometimes get little support because we don't see an absolute 100% return on our commitment. Instead of risking the seed of God's love -- we withhold it. And then we wonder why the Word of God has not made a powerful impact on our society and world.

Thanks to this parable -- we are reminded that God never withholds his love from us -- regardless of the nature of the soil. Not only is he an extravagantly generous God -- but he continues to offer his abundant love to us EVEN WHEN WE REJECT HIM. The four soils beautifully illustrate that God gives to all -- and to all alike, even if some do not respond.

And the significant message underlying the whole text is that ALL OF US throughout our lives possess the different soils.

For instance -- which one of us has never been the hard soil along the path?? We've all played the tough guy at one time or another; we've all had our days when we've paved our hearts with the concrete of conceit. We've all solidified our souls with the stubbornness of self-centeredness. At these times - Word of God is for the birds.

And which one of us has not been rocky ground? We've all had our moments of shallow enthusiasm -- we've gushed for God for the short term only to retreat when the long term commitment was required. We've known ourselves to be quick to act, then equally quick to fall asleep.

Likewise - most of us have seen the thorny soil within our character profile. There are times we've been that hot prospect for God -- but then we've also been the hot prospect for everything else that comes down the road. We've found ourselves to be habitual joiners -- only to find ourselves with so many short roots that it's like living in a jungle. Yes - we've all known the experience of the second rate life -- where we're so good for everything that we're good for nothing.

All these experiences of the bad soil are common to each of us. But equally so -- we've had the experience of the good soil. We've had those moments where we've really been receptive and fertile TO THE SEED OF GOD'S LOVE. God is overly generous with those fertile moments-- they come in hundreds of daily experiences. It may be an honest word from your spouse - it may be someone who cared enough to share your burden - it may be a business associate who relieves your yoke - it may be the forgiveness of the Sacrament of Holy Communion.

Whatever the experience -- it is a moment where we are finally receptive to the generosity of God; a moment where we finally give thanks -- whether 30-fold, 50-fold or a 100-fold. It is that moment where we appreciate the seed of God's love -- and then want to share it.

Obviously -- that is the ultimate goal of God's abundance of love: God patiently keeps on sowing his seed, of love with the hope that we will NOT ONLY RECEIVE but also WILLINGLY SHARE. He has called us to be receptive soil... and committed sowers. He calls us to share his extravagance of love.

Obviously - that means we must check the consistency of our soil regularly. Christian worship is one of those moments where we check the consistency of the soil. It is a time to assess the elements of hardness of our hearts... the rootedness of our souls ... the thorniness of our flesh... and the fruitfulness of God's love.

Today at worship ... tomorrow at home at work at play ... everyday God's seed of forgiving love seeks to penetrate the soil of our lives. His Word breaks down the hardness of our hearts ... the shallowness of our love ... the thorniness of our flesh. Our presence here today witnesses to our regular need for a soil check.

Dr. E. F. Reinartz, who served as Secretary of the LCA for years, visited congregations throughout this country. Typically - people would tell him about their impressive sanctuaries and super Sunday school facilities. They would boast of their big budgets and generous benevolence to the church. But of all his visits - Dr. Reinartz remembers best the story of one congregation told by one of its elderly ladies:

She said: "Well, our building isn't much, and we struggle every month to meet our budget, but one thing you can say about our church is that once you join this church YOU NEVER HAVE TO BEAR ANOTHER BURDEN ALONE!"

What good soil that little struggleing church possessed. That's the ultimate extravagance of God's seed: TO GROW FRUITFUL ENOUGH TO SHARE THE BURDENS OF OTHERS.

God continues to sow that kind of seed among us -- his generosity, extravagance, and abundant recklessness never stop. Even when we are hard, shallow, unreceptive, and lacking in priorities -- he keeps us scattering his love over us. He does so because he patiently knows it will take root. And when that happens -- the world is blessed with the partnership of God and humanity FRUITFULLY SHARING ONE ANOTHER'S BURDENS.

AMEN

PENTECOST VIII

Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo

August 2 & 5, 1984

Peter R. Martyn, Pastor

"GOD NEVER GIVES UP!"

"... so is my word that goes out from my mouth. It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it." (Is. 55:11) "But what was sown on good soil is the man who hears the word and understands it. He produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty, or thirty times what was sown." (Matthew 13:23)

The first time you heard God's Word ... the gracious gospel of God's love for you... the Good News that you have an eternal, secure relationship with God through Christ -- what kind of an impression did it make? Were you moved to share the message with 100 other people? Were you inspired to go to a less secure neighborhood and work for justice? Did you run down to your local, neighborhood church and offer to be a SCS teacher, a worship assistant, a lay visitor, a shepherd, a church council leader, and a dozen other congregational functions?!? What was your reaction to hearing that Good News ... that grace of God's love?!?

What did you do the first time you heard the gospel message? The facts are -- you probably didn't do anything ... and neither did I. For many of us we were so young we didn't know the Word was Good News! And furthermore, we couldn't have cared less. Who cares about all this God-talk?? Who cares whether God loves me or not?!? "I've got a good house, three square meals, plenty of toys, and the constant assurance of being loved!" In fact, many of our kids may be wondering, "Why in the world does that guy in the white robe get so excited and keyed up about all this gospel stuff?!? That guy is really kind of strange?!?"

Yes ... the first time we heard the gospel it was probably like "seed falling along the path on hard ground." It most likely occurred during infancy or childhood -- and why in the world should it make much of an impact at that time?! Let's face it -- the church is o.k. during infancy and childhood ..... the nursery's a neat place to play ... the day-out-with-the-pastor can be a big splash ... they have good food in the potluck lines once in a while -- but the seed of God's Love???? What's that all about?!? That's for the birds!

In many ways, the Parable of the Sower is the panoramic story of our lives ... of God's never-ending efforts to plant his Word deep into our lives ... and then watch the glorious harvest of fruitfulness. But for most of us -- that process takes many years! Few Christians are automatically fruitful!

Far too often I have heard others and even I myself have preached this parable as if there were stratified categories of people in life --- some like rocky soil, some like thorny soil, some good soil. The facts are THAT ALL OF US CLASSIFY as all of those soil types throughout our lives. For instance, as already stated, the early years of our lives are so often like "seed scattered along the path." In terms of sacrifice, and fruitfulness, and really offering God's love to others -- those early years reflect little intentional productivity! Those are the years we're basically concerned about ourselves. But God still scatters ... he keeps offering his loving grace continually! He especially plants his seed of grace deeply within us in Baptism!

What's really sad is that some people never get beyond this stage of spiritual development! They may be 40/50 years old, but their response to God is like "seed scattered on the path." They live totally oblivious to God's graciousness; they remain totally childish in their appreciation levels of life. For them the Corinthian statement is, "When I was a child a I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child, and I have yet to become anything else."

Fortunately, most of us don't remain at this stage of religious maturity. We move beyond, where God's Word is like scattering "seed on rocky ground." I would suggest that this is comparable to the adolescent years of our lives ... where we are so often flitting from one fad to another. God plants his love ... and it takes root through a special boyfriend, or girlfriend, or youth group, or happening. And for a while, we're really "turned on to God's graciousness." But circumstances change, conditions are altered, fads are replaced by new fads, everything is changing ... and this changing development and fickleness tends to make us shallow, rocky ground.

That was certainly my teen-age response to God's graciousness. Following those catechism years, it was really "gung-ho for God." I was the youth leader; I could always be counted on for whatever in the life of the church. But college came; and the tough questions were asked; and the easy answers were

no longer good enough. And all of a sudden "God's loving grace was like seed planted in shallow, rocky ground -- it sprang tall for a little while, but soon withered because of poor rootedness. Just too many other fads to keep up with!

Sadly, there are still many adults who are still stuck at this adolescent stage of spiritual maturity. They're like the Palm Sunday crowd; they "oooh" and "aaahh" one week ... they are often likable and charming ... but they do not stand by the principles of their faith. They have not allowed God's grace to become deeply rooted!

Thankfully, most of us made it through the "ups and downs" of these rocky years without getting stuck there. But then we encountered the really tough one: GOD'S WORD PLANTED AMIDST THE THORNISS OF THE WORLD! These are the 20's for many of us; the 30's for some of us. These are the years that God's graciousness is constantly competing with the pleasures and powers of the world around us. Temptations of the flesh; temptations to be successful at any price; temptations to burn ourselves out at 35 just to get to the top of the heap; temptations to make things and pleasures, works and wages the total essence of life. Oh, how well we all know the thorniness of this stage.

How well I remember a certain Methodist nurse at this stage of my life. I thought we were madly in love -- and oh how the passions were running strong! In those three years, there was nothing that would displace that romance. I even gave up my childhood ambition of parish ministry... just so I wouldn't lose her! How well we all know how the passions and powers and temptations of this world can totally choke out our relationship to God.

Sadly, but truly, many, many people never get beyond this stage. There are many who go to their graves still seeking the passions and pleasures of their twenties as their life goal. God's loving grace continually gets choked out by the thorns of temptation.

But fortunately - none of us in this room have had the lasting fate of these three soils. GOD NEVER GIVES UP - he keeps us scattering his loving Word with the hope that eventually it will take root and become fruitful. And our presence here indicates that "we have finally heard the Word"... in fact, we have come to hear it again and again -- because we are trying desperately to make it fruitful through our lives.

God's goal for us is that we become seed growers -- that we



become productive of that which we have received. How could God possibly want anything else?? His word is so loving, so gracious, so forgiving -- how could he want anything but an abundant response from us!?

The message of the parable is crystal clear: GOD NEVER GIVES UP ON ANY OF US! He keeps on scattering the seed of his love; he keeps on generously and graciously supporting us with his mercy and kindness; he keeps on nourishing the baptismal seed he long ago planted.

He will not be put off by our childishness; he will not be turned off by our lukewarm adolescence; he will not be rejected by our thorny passions and power plays of early adulthood! He persists to embrace us with his love so that we WILL MAKE HIS GRACE A PRIORITY OF OUR LIVES ... so that we will yield a hundredfold, or sixty, or thirty to what we have received! GOD NEVER GIVES UP!!

He has spoken through creation and the prophets! He has spoken through Israel and her people! He has spoken through the life, death, resurrection of Jesus Christ! He has spoken through Matthew and Paul and James and Augustine and Luther and me and you! His message (his seed) has always been the same, generous, extravagant love! He asks that we respond as mature adults to his Word by fruitfully sharing it a hundredfold!! That's God's purpose for you and me -- that his Word will yield fruitfulness from our lives! It often takes many years for that productivity. But God patiently waits ... he never gives up.

He's like the artist who had given several of his sketches to a Kansas City newspaper editor. The editor looked at the sketches, and in a ridiculing way told the artist he had no talent. But the artist didn't give up. He kept on trying other offices. He got rejection after rejection. Finally he landed a job drawing publicity sketches for several churches.

He rented a mice-infested garage and there did his drawings. One day he did a drawing of one of the mice that was running around the garage. Later that little mouse became the inspiration for a whole series. And Mickey Mouse ... and the Walt Disney world was born from the seed that had been cast off many, many times before!

God has that same persistence with us! He never gives up. He patiently waits. And so it is that "when I was a child I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. But when I became a man, I gave up my childish ways!"

And now God can expect real productivity from me...and from you!

AMEN

PENTECOST VIII

Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo

July 14 and 17, 1988

Peter R. Martyn, Pastor

"MARKETING MINISTRY"

"Jesus called to him the twelve, and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over unclean spirits. He charged them to take nothing for their journey ..."

Mark 6:7-8

In Jimmy Carter's book, Why Not the Best?, he tells a great marketing tale. When he was campaigning for governor of Georgia in 1966, he made 300,000 personal contacts to promote himself in a little over three months. And in the 14 years following that campaign, he estimated that he had made only 140 intentional contacts/visits for God. SOME AMAZING STATISTICS: 300,000 contacts in 3-months for self-glory; 140 contacts in 14 years for the glory of God! Be assured, I'm not trying to give Jimmy Carter a bad wrap. I'm certain that George Bush and Michael Dukakis would reflect the same alarming statistics. The point is simple: we do such a darn good job of marketing anyone or anything that we really believe in. Yet we do such a lousy job of marketing the ministry of Jesus Christ ... even though we say we believe in Him!

As I look around this congregation, I am deeply humbled by the mass of marketing experts that claim Hope Lutheran Church. We have some of the very best here. They're here from Trustcorp and Owens Illinois, from Owens Corning Fiberglass and Ohio Citizens, from Toledo Hospital and Sheller-Globe, from Fuller and Henry and the University of Toledo, from Merrill Lynch and a multitude of privately-owned businesses. I could go on and on and on ... proudly naming a host of marketing experts from the biggest corporations to the smallest family-owned businesses. I stand here in awe of so many of you. I'm amazed at your dedication and drive, many spending 70, 80, some even a hundred hours a week marketing your businesses. But tell me honestly - how many of you really want a spot on our Evangelism Committee at Hope? Notice the dead silence ... a sudden blackout of marketing ability. Even though we all say that we believe in Jesus Christ, there are very few who are really willing to market his ministry!!

But that's not new, is it? Look at Amos. God called him from being a herdsman and said, "Go prophesy to Israel. Tell them to turn from their bullish, privileged, corrupt ways!" So Amos did it! And what kind of response did he get? Amaziah says, "Hey, you seer -- get lost! Go to the land of Judah ... eat your bread there - prophesy there; but never again step foot on Bethel soil. For this is the king's sanctuary - we don't want your prophetic feet in this kingdom!" Likewise, Jesus calls his disciples ... only to warn them that they will be mistreated, persecuted, rejected, imprisoned, and maybe even put to death ... all on account of marketing his ministry!

Marketing the ministry of Jesus Christ has seemingly never been a very popular cause. When God had faithful prophets like Amos -- he often had reluctant followers like Amaziah. When God had faithful followers like the women at the tomb -- he often had reluctant prophets like the disciples hiding out in the upper room. Even though there has sometimes been a surplus of pastors, there has always been a shortage of really committed marketing ministers for the mission of Jesus Christ. As the old biblical saying goes, "many have been called, but few have been chosen." Many have acknowledged belief in Jesus Christ, but few have really marketed his ministry with conviction.

So what does Jesus Christ do with such a situation? What would you do if your company was faced with that kind of marketing melaise? How many of us wouldn't be tempted to say, "Well, I guess our product just isn't good enough!" Thank God, Jesus Christ has the will of the Father and not the will of the world! Last week, Pastor Bob reflected the resistance Jesus met even in his own home town. But on the heels of that rejection, Jesus responds NOT BY REDUCING HIS FORCES BUT BY INCREASING HIS MARKETEERS! That's the marketing mentality of the Christian faith -- NEVER, NEVER GIVE UP! Christ will not allow the culture to diminish his ministry. His response to a lukewarm world is to turn up the jets -- he tells his disciples "MOVE OUT!" No longer will they hang onto his apron strings -- now they will go out and market his ministry to the world. THEY WILL BECOME THE BODY OF CHRIST FOR THE WORLD.

But Jesus doesn't send them empty-handed -- well, almost empty-handed. In terms of material things -- he says take very little. That was a step of marketing genius all by itself. Jesus sends out his disciples with little money, no bread, just the clothes on their backs. That sounds pretty cruel, doesn't it? Certainly, we would demand more as middle class marketeers! But the genius is obvious: without money, without bread, without their American Express card - the disciples will have to make contacts with people. They will have to establish relationships in order to survive! They will have to make contacts! And thus, they will have to market his ministry!

But enough of this digression. WHAT ARE THE MARKETING PRINCIPLES that Jesus commissions for his disciples. Well, they are principles that many successful businesses have adopted -- of course, God gave them 2000 years ago -- but they still work as a basis for many missions today. First, KNOW YOUR PRODUCT AND BELIEVE IN IT! Second, BE COMMITTED TO MAKING CONTACTS AND CONTACTS AND MORE CONTACTS! And third, LEAVE YOUR CUSTOMERS BETTER THAN YOU FOUND THEM, but above all, don't brow beat them into a sale!

Let's take a closer look at these principles. First, KNOW YOUR PRODUCT AND BELIEVE IN IT! During my college days, I worked as a suit salesman for the J. C. Penney Co. As I look back on those days, I'm amazed that I ever sold a single suit. I didn't know anything about merchandizing ... I certainly knew very little about fabrics or quality manufacturing ... in short, I was selling suits by the seat of my pants. I DIDN'T KNOW THE PRODUCT!

But God will not have his salesforce so poorly informed or convicted. Could there possibly be a better text to summarize the greatness of the gospel than the one before us from Ephesians. Just look at the product that God has given to us! First, we are blessed in Christ with every spiritual blessing. God has not asked us to speculate about the product -- about his will. He spells his blessings out specifically: unity, peace, wholeness, maturity, joy, goodness, purity, righteousness, fidelity, faithfulness, love, kindness, compassion, and the list goes on and on -- full disclosure of his blessings in Christ!

But we are not only blessed spiritually -- we are chosen to be HIS holy, spotless ones. We are no longer far off from God -- we have been adopted as heirs of his kingdom. And as his adopted heirs, we are no longer estranged or separated from God. Even our sinfulness doesn't separate us -- he has redeemed us and grafted us back in loving forgiveness. And not only have we been lavished with this grace, but he promises to unite us with all things -- HIS GOAL IS HARMONY IN THE WORLD, NO FRAGMENTATION, NO ALIENATION, NO DIVISION, NO SEPARATION.

God has not treated us like second-class salespersons in training. He has given us the full scoop. He has revealed the mystery of salvation to us through Jesus Christ. How can anyone possibly say that this ministry is NOT GOOD! Quite to the contrary, God said in the beginning and ever more so today: IT IS VERY GOOD! In fact, there is nothing so good as the love of Jesus Christ -- it's the greatest product on the human market! It's the only source of hope for a fragmented, lonely world.

Is it any wonder that God wants every person to be baptized into his family. In a world of crack and coke, in a world of cults and concupiscence, in a world where "getting even" is glamorized as a gutsy goal, in a world where the satanic and demonic are idolized as super stars -- Holy Baptism reminds us that God gives us so much more than the things marketed as magnificent by the world. Thankfully, on this day, everyone here now KNOWS THE PRODUCT ... AND HOPEFULLY, EVERYONE HERE BELIEVES IT IS NOT ONLY GOOD, BUT THE VERY BEST!!

But good marketing requires more than knowing and believing in the product. Marketing requires BEING COMMITTED TO MAKING CONTACTS. We can have the very best product in the world, but without a salesforce willing to make the contacts, we got nothing but bankruptcy! And unfortunately, there's a lot of bankruptcy in the church. The great Methodist circuit rider, William Van Orsdel, once said, "You can do lots more with lively sinners than with dead saints!" Too many churches are inhabited with too many dead saints -- people who have become too comfortable in religion ... people who take God for granted ... people who are no longer moved by God!!

Isn't it interesting -- Jesus commissioned a bunch of down-to-earth sinners -- the poor, the alienated, the uneducated, tax collectors, & fishermen. It wasn't education or status that made the difference; it was CONVICTION for the cause. Christ had made a real difference in their lives - they were changed, and they wanted to spread the word. There weren't any magical formulas or computer buttons to push -- they were just marketing themselves -- their changed, renewed lives. Jesus says - just go out as yourselves ... don't bring any extra baggage -- travel light ... for if you carry too much baggage, that will become the main business of your mission.

Reminds me of the story of the salesman who sold a complicated filing system to a thriving business. Three months later, he made a return visit. "How's the filing system working out," he asked. The CEO said, "It's magnificent, out of this world." "Well, how's the business doing?" asked the salesman. The CEO responded: "Oh, we had to give up the business in order to run the filing system."

Sometimes as a parish pastor of a medium sized church like Hope -- that's exactly what I feel I'm doing -- running a filing system, rather concentrating on contacts for Christ! The computers, the committees, the construction projects, the carloads of paper -- these consume all the energy -- and there's nothing left for the real contacts of ministry.

We've all read recently of the Jehovah's Witness group that erected their "kingdom hall" in 72 hours. When the media went to interview a few of the hundreds of volunteers who were working, one laborer answered, "Our job is to witness. We don't want this building to take up too much time or energy. So we figured we'd complete it quickly, and then we wouldn't become sidetracked." BEING COMMITTED TO MAKING THE CONTACTS is their real business -- and it's the real business of our ministry as well.

That begins right here in this setting -- it means greeting the stranger in our midst ... it means inviting your neighbor to worship with you ... it means sending a card to a sick parishoner ... it means MAKING CONTACT WITH OTHERS THRU THE GOD GIVEN PRODUCT -- THE FORGIVING LOVE OF JESUS CHRIST!

Lastly, knowing the product and making the contacts always leads to a third hope - LEAVING THE CUSTOMER BETTER THAN YOU FOUND HIM without any brow beating sales. Jesus says, if your brother or sister won't receive you, "then shake off the dust and move on." There are some fundamentalists today who could certainly improve their marketing of ministry by taking this passage literally. They are so often intent upon brow beating their viewpoint as the only way of faith.

I hardly think the "riches of Christ's grace" can be beaten into anyone. But I do believe that every time Christ is marketed that situation becomes better. Let me illustrate with the story of Gert Behanna, author of The Late Liz, who became a Christian convert at 60. After her conversion, Gert traveled extensively as a Christian speaker. And there was one thing that always bugged Gert in her travels: she was often forced to use service station rest rooms. She hated them. She used to pray to God: "Lord, if I'm really your servant, how come you give me nothing but dirty, filthy restrooms?" One day in the midst of her complaint - God seemed to respond: "Gert, just remember, I always use the restroom right after you." She had never thought of that before. And ever since that day, when Gert Behanna uses a service station restroom - she never leaves WITHOUT CLEANING THE MIRROR, WIPING OUT THE SINK, AND PICKING UP THE TOWELS OFF THE FLOOR. She always leaves the filthy restroom better than she found it.

That's how we market the ministry of Jesus Christ -- we never leave a relationship worse than we found it. We don't brow beat with God talk, we just seek to offer something that will uplift that LIFE -- maybe a hug, maybe a smile, maybe just a good morning, maybe just a listening ear ... but we seek to leave the relationship better than we found it. THAT'S CALLED REDEMPTION - RENEWAL - RECONCILIATION. Instead of complaining about the way we find things -- we do something to make them better! THAT'S MARKETING THE MINISTRY OF JESUS CHRIST.

It's my hope and my prayer -- that every time you leave this sanctuary -- you leave a little better than you came. That's God's will for you and me: TO ALWAYS LEAVE US BETTER THAN HE FOUND US! He says, "NOW TAKE WHAT YOU HAVE RECEIVED, AND LEAVE EVERY RELATIONSHIP YOU TOUCH A LITTLE BETTER THAN YOU FOUND IT! THAT'S THE WAY FAITHFUL DISCIPLES MARKET CHRIST'S MINISTRY!

AMEN.

PENTECOST VIII  
Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo  
July 30 and August 2, 1992  
Peter R. Martyn, Pastor

## "WANTED: A NEW PLATFORM FOR AN OLD PARABLE"

But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him he was moved with pity. He went to him and bandaged his wounds ... brought him to an inn, and cared for him.

Luke 10:33-34

One fact persists in life: there is much pain in this room, in this community, in this country, and in this world. None of us can make it through a week (except in Door County) without being confronted by the pains of everyday living: poverty, war, disease, natural disasters, discrimination, ignorance, anger, persecution, cancer, aids, death ... and if you've lived in Ohio this summer, too much rain! Today's gospel story presents one of the Jesus' strategies for Christian discipleship divinely designed to overcome the pains and persecutions of everyday living: BECOME GOOD SAMARITANS! BECOME COMMITTED CARETAKERS OF GOD'S CREATED ORDER!

Like the parable of the prodigal son, this parable is one of the great favorites of the New Testament. Its ethic sounds like the perfect remedy to the pains, problems and perversions of the world. The inescapable point of the story as presented by Jesus and preserved by the early church was a model of ministry to be imitated: "Go and do likewise" is its conclusion.

If we desire to inherit eternal life: "Go and do likewise!" If we desire to fulfill the law of righteousness, "Go and do likewise!" If we want to demonstrate that we love God with heart, mind, soul and strength: "Go and do likewise!" If we fully understand what it means to be a neighbor, we will "go and do likewise." If we aim to promote and participate in the kingdom of God, we will "go and do likewise." If we imitate the model of the compassionate Samaritan, then we have "gone and done likewise" for our Lord.

So the question still faces you and me today: "Have we gone and done likewise? Have we shown compassion for the hurting and victimized in our world? And the answer is that many times there have been some great Samaritan efforts by many of us. Like few other religious ethics, the good Samaritan strategy has had a great positive impact of COMPASSION in this world: its the reason we have crisis callers here at Hope, and a Social Ministry Committee, and Super Sales, and Habitat for Humanity projects, and food preparation Sundays for St. Paul's Community Center, etc. Yes, there are many times that we get beyond preaching about pain and get down into the ditches with the broken bodies and fractured spirits.

But even with all our efforts and those of millions of other churches like ours - the saga of suffering not only persists -- it mushrooms and multiplies daily in our cities, our country, and our world. In his inaugural address, Pres.

Bush offered a good Samaritan vision when he said we must become a "kinder and gentler nation ... that we must become an age of the offered hand." Like the parable of the Samaritan, Mr. Bush had the right words - the proper vision: TO BE A NATION WHICH SHOWED MERCY AND COMPASSION FOR ALL SUFFERING IN PAIN! But every conscientious American - whether Republican or Democrat - knows only too well that political platforms & visions too easily become tainted by private and party interests. Like every other President, Mr. Bush's vision has suffered the pollution and persecution of political expediency & compromise during his term. Pain and suffering still persist in this land and many others. Human power and political platforms alone cannot alter our ever-growing deficit; nor can presidential promises or party platforms stem the epidemic of homelessness, poverty, unemployment, racism, illiteracy, parental neglect, social oppression, moral bankruptcy, or the many other ever increasing diseases of the mind and body assaulting us daily. These pains have never been redeemed by presidents or party platforms.

But equally true - the platform of religion has too often offered a limited if not inadequate model to cope with pain and persecution in this world. Some of the naively faithful simply say, "pray and the pain will go away!" On the other extreme, we have those who say that "God wants us to suffer; pain is good for human character!" And then we have us middle-of-the-road Lutherans who say that God has given us models to help us overcome pain. And obviously, the parable of the Good Samaritan is one such model. But it too is just a divine model for human application; it has limitations from one age to the next. In no way does that take away from its divine inspiration and its gospel truth. We rejoice that Jesus gave the lawyer a story of compassion rather than an argument of legal precedent. But even as good as that story was, is, and always will be -- it still has limitations: it was confronting a much smaller and less complex world than ours today. The old parable still reflects the whole truth and nothing but the truth of God -- THAT EVERYONE IS CALLED TO BE A COMPASSIONATE SAMARITAN TO HIS OR HER NEIGHBOR. But the parable needs a new platform so that it reflects the unlimited love of our Lord to our world today. Or said differently, the parable must redefine in every age what we mean by: "And who is our neighbor?"

And that's where we must confront and confess the parable's first limitation: it is too parochial. The model in this parable has the Samaritan ministering only in his own neighborhood -- he just happens to find a victim of violence as he's walking down his routine roadway doing his business as usual. Well, there are certainly people with serious emotional, physical and personal needs in the neighborhoods around Hope Church. But let us never fool ourselves into thinking that God wants us to only do His mission in Ottawa Hills, Old Orchard, or Sylvania! That's the old Samaritan model. It lacks God's global platform. It's the kind of model that overlooks the burdens and misery felt daily in distant, segregated and neglected neighborhoods -- whether in Toledo,



other parts of the U.S., or in far corners of the globe. Last January, a member asked why Hope Church offers nearly 25% of its mission support to the needs of the ELCA and other agencies of mercy beyond this neighborhood. We do it because this is the platform of Jesus Christ ... because he said "go and do likewise" ... because good Samaritans get beyond their own neighborhoods with the love of their Lord.

But then we must confront and confess the parable's second limitation: it's too occasional! Ministry in this model has the Samaritan only OCCASIONALLY responding to human need -- as a momentary interruption of his regular business travel. The parable gives us the impression that the Samaritan only happened upon the victim in the ditch; his real mission was not to be a caretaker of those dumped into the ditches of life. This platform of compassion is far too limited from what Jesus really taught and especially from what he demonstrated in his own life of neighborly compassion. Compassion for the hurting is not something that only flares up when a friend has inoperable cancer or when asked for a handout by some homeless child. Compassion for the hurting is a daily vigil of dedication and priority of ministry. That's why Pastor Silleck and I carry babies (like Chelsea) down the aisle after baptism and ask for your commitment to be caretaking disciples of these children. This is not merely a moment of warm, baby-time goosebumps -- it is a moment where we willingly & faithfully say we will be god-parent-models of compassion for every child that needs our help in this world ... whether "help" is child care in our nursery or Hunger funds to feed a malnourished baby in some 3rd world country. That is the platform of Jesus Christ -- good Samaritans are not occasional helpers! They are committed caregivers every single day of every single year! Is it any wonder we are called fools for Christ!?

Finally, we must confront and confess a third limitation of the parable: it is too victim-centered. Obviously, whether its sickness, sorrow, or some other force of life destructiveness -- God wants us to show compassion for those who are victimized by hellish, damning powers. We need to pick them up and patch them up! But like the Samaritan in the parable, too often that's where our ministry stops. We don't stop to ask the deeper questions: why were these people victimized in the 1st place? Who are the perpetrators of this pain and suffering? And, how can we help stop or confront those who are causing such pain and persecution?

As one commentator stated, "too often Christian ministry is little more than ambulance service: we chase the symptoms of suffering but neglect the real causes!" Like Jesus Christ, good Samaritans not only attend to those in the ditches, but also attack the thieves and criminal element that create the carnage along the roadways of our lives. It's one thing to say we will have a war against drugs in this country; it's quite another to go after the industries and pushers that promote drugs, alcohol & smoking as the good way of life! As we have already heard in July and soon will hear again from another

party platform - there will be a lot of band-aid promises and mop-up approaches to the pain and suffering of our society. As good Samaritans pledged to the platform of Jesus Christ, we must demand more from our politicians and ourselves. We must demand government that does not merely make claims and promises about educational excellence, but is willing to make all out financial sacrifices for it! We must demand parental modeling from ourselves that not only talks about the priority of child care but is willing to make daily and personal time-commitments to be REAL GOD-PARENTS! We must finally realize that Jesus did not teach us to read HIS lips but to take up his cross and follow him -- to be willing to assume the burden of caring for the hungry, the homeless, the jobless, the sick, the broken-hearted -- ANYONE WHO HAS BEEN DUMPED INTO THE DITCHES OF OUR GHETTOS, RESERVATIONS, OR SHELTERS WITHOUT THE BENEFIT OF A GOOD SAMARITAN TO OFFER COMPASSION.

Frederick Oberlin once made a journey on foot during a winter blizzard. Exhausted, he sat down to rest; while sitting, he passed out. He would have frozen to death if a pair of strong arms had not lifted him up, laid him in a wagon, and taken him to a nearby village. The driver was a peasant, poor but jovial. Oberlin thanked him and offered him what little money he had; but the peasant refused. At last Oberlin said, "Well, at least tell me your name, so I can remember you in my prayers."

Oberlin's benefactor smiled and replied: "Sir, you appear to be a learned man. Perhaps you can tell me: what was the Samaritan's name?" That's the Christian platform of faith - not demanding recognition for every little offering ... not tied down to legalism ... not tied down to the local neighborhood ... not only giving of itself on the OCCASIONS of a crisis! But offering to everyone who has been victimized -- and always willing to attack anyone who would seek to rob, steal, or beat up on someone else! To that kind of platform, our Lord says: "go and do likewise!"

Like Frederick Oberlin, we do not know the Samaritan's name. Yet, we do know. His name is Jesus Christ. His concern for us was unconditional. His commitment to us was unlimited. His love for us took Him all the way to crucifixion. As he traveled the roadways of life, the law was quite clear: "The one who sins shall die." But he had compassion. He saw the human family lying beside history's rocky road, beaten by guilt, wounded by evil, bruised by the pains of death. And He had compassion. He brought us for healing to the inn, His church. He gave us His cross, His resurrection, His gospel - His priceless gifts of forgiveness in baptism and communion.

This public figure's promises can be trusted at all times: "You are forgiven ... you are resurrected with me into new life, life unlimited." That is THE ONE platform based upon an old parable that can be trusted this election year!

AMEN!