

PENTECOST 25

Luth. Church of the Master, Troy

Nov. 9, 1975

"NO INVESTMENT, NO RETURN"

(the one talent man said) "I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours. But his master answered him, 'You wicked and slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sowed, and gather where I have not winnowed? Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own interest.'" *Matt. 25: 25-27*

It might be very tempting to say that this parable sounds like a good P.R. story for First Citizens Bank. At first glance, it seems like a simple story of investments.

Yet, like most simple things, a longer look often raises more questions. And Edmund Steimle, famous Protestant Hour preacher, raises a gem of a question: Why is it that Jesus puts the one talent man on the spot?

The big guys get off the hook. But the spotlight almost seems to be frying this guy — cowering as he offers HIS ONE TALENT IN RETURN. Why did he get such a scathing rebuke?

It is especially curious because Christ always felt compassion for the little guy. Always he was concerned for the "lost" — the sinner — the overlooked — the outcast — whether it was a despised Samaritan or a beggar *like* Lazarus.

Why then the writhing scorn with this cautious, fearful little man? After all, he had done nothing dishonest. He had simply done what most people did in those days to keep money safe — dig a hole and bury it. Why does Christ point the finger at him?

*It is* Precisely because of Christ's great concern for the little, apparently unimportant people that the spotlight turns on the one talent man.

For Christ seeks to reverse the ordinary scale of values.

He knows that you and I are forever hypnotized by the busy and important affairs of life. He knows our appetites drool over size and bigness -- the biggest house, biggest car, the biggest city, the biggest profit, the biggest stocks, even sometimes the biggest church. If it's big, so often we figure it must have eternal value.

So our Lord - in contrast - picks out the insignificant one (from our perspective) and makes us see ~~the~~ importance. Five loaves and two fishes among 5,000 - a mustard seed, a widow's mite, a lily, a sparrow, a pinch of salt.

Christ challenges our eyes to a new way of looking at things -- no longer allowing us TO USE the big salary, the big bank acct, the big job, the big investment TO BE THE ONLY VALID MEASURE OF WORTH.

Christ enables us to see HOW GOD REALLY WORKS. He chooses an obscure, little nomadic tribe and promises them, of all people, his care. Then he sends his son, not into the center of things, but into an off corner of the world -- born not even in a descent bed, but a stable. Has his son grow up like a peasant, not even in the center of things but the back country.

And then he has his son NOT MAKING FRIENDS with the five and ten talent men, but with the oddest lot of unpromising people -- an adulterous, a blind beggar, and a whimp of a Jew named Zacheuss.

And God does all of this TO CONVINC us THAT he is incredibly concerned about little ordinary people -- LIKE YOU AND ME. So - he focuses the spotlight on the one talent man.

But that still doesn't answer - WHY was Jesus so harsh on the poor fellow???

Obviously - there are risks and perils awaiting the five and ten talent men in life... esp the perils of becoming smug, indifferent, aloof, and loveless. BUT THE ONE TALENT MAN IS BESET BY THE GREATEST PERIL.

HE IS FAR TOO READY TO THINK OF HIMSELF AS A LITTLE MAN -- of no great importance to anybody, not even to God.

He is the man who says, I've only got one vote, so why bother? He is the man on the assembly line or the clerk in the office who so often thinks he's as replaceable as a flat tire. He is the man who never makes the newspapers unless he dies or bites a dog.

He is the occasional attender at church who prudently keeps the door open JUST A LITTLE FOR GOD, but avoids the responsibility in the church (and often community) because someone else will do it. Then he turns around and accuses the OTHER ONE-TALENT WORKERS of being a clique.

Yes - it was this cringing self-debasement, this hiding behind the skirts of littleness, which caused our Lord to blaze away and say: "Thou wicked and slothful servant!" God is concerned about you - he has risked everything for you - he has invested eternity in YOU -- and you stand there cowering, not trusting God enough to make use of what he has given you. Not thinking that your one talent - IF PUT TO WORK - can work miracles.

Yes - that's the truth of the gospel. God has always been accustomed to working wonders with the little one talent people who have faith enough in Him to have some faith in themselves and their significance.

Moses - a stuttering murderer. James and John - a loud-mouthed fishermen. a blundering foot-in-his-mouth Peter. A bitter little Pharisee, Paul. A guilt-ridden common monk, Luther.

He took these little one-talent people and worked wonders. He worked wonders because they did not hide like our parable man.

They did not go cowering along shrugging off their daily opportunities and responsibilities while they WHINNED about the way things were going in the world. They had taken WHATEVER God had placed in their hands, HOWEVER UNPROMISING it might have appeared -- TRUSTING only that when invested God would make something of it.

Yes - you and I are that one talent man -- often hiding behind our littleness. Not wanting God to put the spotlight on us - because after all, the five and ten talent people are the ones who should really be doing it.

But God handles the spotlight -- he wants to know what you and I have done or what we plan to do with the opportunities he's given us TO SERVE HIM. Will we bury them in the ground? Will we make light of his gift?? Or will we use EVEN OUR ONE LITTLE TALENT -- will we invest our one talent so that it gets a return for God and his kingdom?

Yes - God is tremendously concerned about his one talent people. His biggest problem is not the big, important people. They're so caught up in their own big things that they've already forgotten about God. Their reward will be a short-lived, selfish one.

God's big concern is with us - his one talent folks. Because we've got this devilish notion that we don't count -- that what we do is of little importance. Yes - that's our greatest sin -- our depreciation of the talent that God has given us, *of ourselves.*

That can also be our great sin as his church. Depreciating ourselves -- being fearful to use what little we've been given for his glory -- burying our talent instead of investing it for God's glory.

Now maybe we see why God put the one talent man under the spotlight of scrutiny. Because that man is you and me. And God has big plans for little you and little me. And he along with all heaven and earth are waiting to see what INVESTMENT we'll make of what he's first given us.

Will we bury it and feel sorry for ourselves at the end of time? Or will we INVEST that one talent to GOD'S GLORY, and then experience HIS glorious return? Will we recognize BEFORE IT'S TOO LATE how important we are to God and to his whole hungry creation?

AMEN

PENTECOST XXV

Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo

November 9, 1986 (LOYALTY SUNDAY)

Peter R. Martyn, Pastor

**"IN PRAISE OF PILLARS!"**

But we are bound to give thanks to God always, for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God chose you from the beginning to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth. To this he called you through our gospel so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by letter. 2 Thessalonians 2:13-15

There's a great Sunday School story told about a teacher who was attempting to explain to her 1st grade class the meaning of "pillars of the church." To help her illustrate, she took the class into the sanctuary. Much like our own, it was supported by twelve beautiful pillars. She said, "Now these are the building pillars which support the church building; but the real pillars of the church are people - people who are deeply dedicated, people who seek to treat everyone fairly, who never gossip or call each other bad names, who are obedient and faithful to God's principles, and who sacrifice their time and money for the sake of others." The children listened very attentively. She really thought she had scored a great impression, so she asked for questions. An inquisitive, six-yr old raised her hand and asked: "Teacher, do we have any of these people pillars in this church?"

Do we have any of these people pillars in this church? To that question Paul responded: "We are bound to give thanks to God always for you!" And to that same question I respond today, "We are bound to give thanks to God always for you!" Because, by and large, you who are here today are the PILLARS OF HOPE CHURCH.

I am told that in the Shenandoah Valley, there is a stately old mansion on whose walls hangs a portrait of the famous Confederate General, J. B. Stuart. The portrait was evidently given to a friend, for across one corner of it is a handwritten message from Stuart himself: "Yours to Count On! J. B. Stuart." I wish we had a large enough hallway at Hope to hang portraits of the real pillars of Hope rather than her pastors. Because on those portraits would be

We all know that the mission of the church is to ASK FOR, TO SEEK, AND TO FIND people pillars of faithfulness for God's mission. And as many of you know, Hope Church has been doing just that for 57+ years. Especially during this time of Stewardship emphasis, we have been doing a lot of ASKING; we have been SEEKING out greater faithfulness; and we have been FINDING dedication from many. But there comes a time when the message must be more than ask, seek, and find. There comes a time for praise and thanksgiving for those who have responded faithfully to the call. That time has come today - Loyalty Sunday. At least one Sunday each year must be devoted to MORE praising and thanking and LESS asking and seeking! I hope you hear that message today -- a message IN PRAISE OF THE PILLARS OF HOPE! For we all know, without adequate praise, both individuals and groups soon retreat to their old selfish ways. There's a delicate balance between asking and thanking -- and when we ask too much, we run the risk of stifling a response.

It's like the story of the black preacher who was exhorting his congregation to give more -- "to get the church to soar to higher goals." "Brothers and sisters," he proclaimed, "What this church needs is the energy to get up and walk on her own!" One of the deacons in the back yelled, "Right on, brother! Let her walk, yes, let her walk!" The preacher being inspired by the response raised his voice and added: "But we can't be satisfied with walking ... we got to pick it up and run ... I say run, run run!" The deacon again exclaimed: "You're saying it brother, yes - let her run, let her run!" By now the preacher was really charged up and said: "But running is not enough either. This church has really got to fly ... I mean it must reach way up to the kingdom of God." The deacon again responded, "Yes brother, let her fly, let her fly!" The preacher paused for a moment, and then continued solemnly, "Now if this church is going to fly, we've all got to work much harder and give a lot more money!" There was another pause, and the deacon responded more softly: "Just let her walk, brother, let her walk!"

Yes, too much ASKING and PLEADING in the life of the church can lead to negative returns. We must always balance our proclamations with both challenges and encouragements, with petitions and praises, with appeals and appreciations. Today, Paul gives thanks for the faithful pillars of Thessalonica. And today Peter gives

First, true pillars always show that they have been chosen for a special mission of support. To be chosen as a pillar always means to have a supportive role. Pillars were never meant to stand alone or in isolation. I give thanks to the pillars of Hope who have responded as a chosen community to support the burdens of ministry.

Recently we have been studying the Call of Moses in Lunches with Luther. That study has made it crystal clear that Moses was in near despair as he complained to God "that he couldn't do it all alone." He could not carry Israel's burdens alone. So God instructs him to select 70 leaders to bear the burden with him. Those were the first pillars of the "church."

I am thankful that this same spirit reigns at Hope today. There was once a "fat cat" mentality in the life of this people -- everyone lived as if a "fat cat or two" would finally bear the financial and administrative burdens of this church. Thankfully, that spirit no longer lives. This congregation relies heavily upon all 550 family units (in fact, when 170 have not been faithful as promised, we get into the deficit we're in today). No longer can we rely upon a few to overcome deficits or to fulfill our ministries. We need everyone! Likewise, when people say they will give of their time or talents - we use them! 11 of the 15 council leaders are new members in the last six years; 27 of the 32 SCS teachers have become members in the last seven years; all committees except one are chaired by new members.

You want to know what it means to be "chosen" by God to live faithfully? Get involved in the life of Hope and you'll soon learn that it takes a lot more than a few fat cats to make God's mission happen! Yes - I give thanks for the chosen pillars of Hope who have responded faithfully to God's mission in this place.

Likewise, I give special thanks for the multitude of pillars at Hope who have "stood firm" to the traditions of Jesus Christ (rather than the traditions of men). In the late 60's and 70's - this congregation saw a great exodus of people. Many left for a safer suburban church, where they would no longer hear about justice or racial diversity or responding to the poor. This was not God's exodus to the promised land; it was a human retreat to suburban

mission movement throughout metropolitan Toledo.

Equally, the pillars of Hope have "stood firm" through whatever crisis has affected this congregation -- whether it was a personality clash with pastors or the annual battle with budget deficits. The real pillars of Hope remind me of the unemployed members of a congregation recently reported in the Reader's Digest. The pastor, knowing of the high unemployment in the parish, one Sunday passed a wicker basket with \$100 in ones and fives. He told members, "Today, I'm doing something different. Because of your faithfulness even during hard times, today I want you to take from the collection whatever you need, without shame." When the basket was returned, it contained \$67 more than the original \$100. That's the spirit of the real pillars of Hope as well -- they "stand firm" even during the difficult times ... even when it sometimes means digging a little deeper!

A historian once commented on Winston Churchill's importance to the people of England and to the whole Western World during the Second World War. He said, "There was a time in the dark days of the London "blitz" when the only thing that stood between England and oblivion was one stubborn old man." That kind of stubbornness in the church means standing firm for the traditions of Christ! That means standing firm for sacrifice and servanthood even when the times are tough! I give thanks for the pillars of Hope who have always "stood firm" and sacrificed even during the tough times!

Finally, I give thanks that the pillars of Hope have not just stood still like concrete columns. There is no virtue in standing firm if you are dead (unfortunately, some people never realize that until they are dead). When Paul instructed the Thessalonians to stand firm, he did not mean "turn to stone." Rather, he meant stand firm like a tree -- be well rooted, but keep on growing!

The pillars of Hope have grown like firm, living trees. They have recognized the need for diversity of program and professional leadership. The Lord has been faithful in this place, because his message has been strengthened and guarded through a variety of expressions and leadership styles. The seven, last deadly words are not alive and well at Hope Church: "We Never Did It That

blessed as a pillar of Hope - be assured, there is nothing and no one standing in your way. God has already chosen you to be a pillar -- so get with it!

Certainly, I am not suggesting that the pillars of Hope are perfect. They too are sinful and have much room for growth and improvement. But they have done the faithful thing -- they have responded to the CALL TO TAKE CARE, BY SHARING of their time, talents, and money to glorify God. And on this day, God their Father wants them to know that he is deeply grateful for their faithfulness -- and so am I!

AMEN.

PENTECOST XXV (CONSECRATION SUNDAY)

Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo

November 9, 1991

Peter R. Martyn, Pastor

**"WHEN THE RECESSION HITS HOME!"**

For thus says the Lord God of Israel, "The jar of meal shall not be spent, and the cruse of oil shall not fail, until the day the Lord sends rain upon the earth." And she went and did as Elijah said; and she and he, and her household ate for many days. I Kings 17:14-15

For they contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, her whole living. Mark 12:44

Someone has defined the difference between prosperity, recession and depression like this: DURING PROSPERITY, you are annoyed because the dog and cat won't eat the expensive canned food you have purchased for them. IN RECESSION, you are delighted that the dog and the cat won't eat that expensive canned food. You hope and pray that they will remain finicky until better times. DURING DEPRESSION, YOU BEGIN TO LOOK THOUGHTFULLY ... AT THE DOG AND THE CAT.

The recession is officially over according to experts in Washington. Pres. Bush argued just two days ago while in the Netherlands "that the nation was no longer in a recession." A lot of Americans are surprised to learn this. When I listen to my neighbors and to people here at Hope ... I hear a lot of "fear about recession and those already hurt by it." People have lost jobs and can't find new ones. I'm told that personal bankruptcies are at an all time high. The Federal gov't is passing the buck to state gov'ts ... the state is passing the buck to cities ... and cities are passing the buck to you & me thru levies. This past week, people of the Metro Toledo area even turned down a levy to guarantee emergency services by REMSNO. Washington may think that the recession is over, but I haven't seen much comfort from local folks in "knowing that happy days are here again!"

Our OT lesson and Gospel today are about two ladies who knew very personally about recessions. Both were widows; no group in Ancient society knew the pain of recession more bitterly than widows. The first widow was so desperate - she was gathering sticks to make her final fire; she was ready to bake her final meal for herself and her son ... and then die. A stranger approached her and asked her for water; as she was

come from. For those seeing such a bleak future, how hopeless life must be. But not for the eyes of the stranger. For the stranger was Elijah, a prophet, who knew that God was a bountiful, abundant Provider. Elijah was much like an old Christian saint, George Mueller, who supported his orphanage exclusively through prayer. Mueller never asked directly for a contribution; he merely prayed that God would compassionately provide. Someone once said: "It looks like Mueller's orphanage is a hand-to-mouth operation." Mueller responded: "You're absolutely correct. It's God's hand and my mouth."

In short, Mueller was saying what we all know about prayer: "God will provide when someone makes known the need!" Your hands and my hands become God's vehicles for feeding the needy ... just as the widow's hands became God's hands for feeding Elijah! And Elijah correctly stated: "God is a bountiful giver - the jar of flour and jug of oil will not be used up until the Lord gives rain on the land." We don't know where His hands came from in this story -- but we do know that God continued to provide flour and oil! It was a hand-to-mouth operation; God's hands and Elijah's mouth provided for the needy!

Our second widow is known to all of us! It was she who made her way quietly through a crowd at the temple. Some of the wealthier worshippers were throwing large sums of money into the treasury. We suspect that they were giving in order to be seen. Shyly, this widow put in two, small copper coins, worth less than a penny. It was the least anyone could give; Rabbinic law forbade putting in just one coin; the smallest allowed was two. She put in the smallest possible; yet, it was all she had. And Jesus said: "I tell you, this widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. For they gave out of their wealth; she gave out of poverty -- she gave all that she had and held back nothing for herself.

Not many of us here have known the hard times of these widows. But we know at this moment that 26 million Americans live below the poverty level. One sociologist calculated that one in every three families in America is just one paycheck away from bankruptcy. As one terminated employee recently said: "I used to live in the lap of luxury -- and then luxury stood up!" I recently read that it costs more to buy a car in America today than it cost Christopher Columbus to equip his boat and undertake three voyages to and from the

The first principle has remained the same during prosperity, recessions and depressions: FIRST & FOREMOST, FOCUS UPON GOD'S GENEROSITY & SACRIFICE BEFORE FOCUSING UPON YOUR OWN GIVING OR YOUR OWN CIRCUMSTANCES. Elijah had to remind the widow that God had not stopped giving; he was still a God who provided abundantly for human need. God was, is, and always will be a God who can be trusted to give without quitting. And in Jesus Christ, God has given us the unmatched gift of generosity. As Pastor Silleck commented last week on the meaning of Consecration, today I reiterate the same basic principle of faithfulness: the first question is not, WHAT MUST I DO FOR GOD, BUT RATHER, WHAT HAS GOD ALREADY DONE FOR ME??

Whether it's stewardship in the church or in my family or in the community -- the first principle is never to focus upon myself but upon God's generosity. When I was serving Luth Church of the Master in Troy before coming to Toledo - the congregation had dwindled to 35 committed families. People kept on wondering why the congregation was not growing ... why people were reluctant to join. My first fall there, I had to honestly answer that question. That cong. wasn't growing because the people were looking at themselves rather than at God. No matter where it was - you could always hear the same message: "We can't do that ... we can't afford that ... we've done all we can do ... we're too small to do that ... we don't have enough!" Who wants to be part of a congregation with that kind of "negative self image??

That first fall - I asked one thing: STOP FOCUSING UPON YOUR LIMITATIONS, AND START CELEBRATING WHAT GOD HAS ALREADY GIVEN TO YOU!! That one principle has continued to transform that congregation into one of the strongest and fastest growing churches in the ELCA today! Instead of living in fear of the future, this congregation is NOW living in faith -- in celebration of what God has already provided!! They just needed to focus upon what God had already given ... rather than upon what they feared they could not give or do!

One author has called this the principle of "PRIMING THE PUMP." It's the story of the rusty old water pump in the desert. Beside this pump stood a sign saying: "I have buried a bottle of water in the sand by this pump. There is only enough to prime the pump. Don't drink any of it; use half of it to wet the leather; wait a little while, then pour the rest into the pump. Then pump, and you'll get all the water

The second principle naturally derives from the first: ONCE WE TRUST THAT GOD WILL PROVIDE - WE BECOME A REFLECTION OF THAT TRUST WHEN TIMES GET TOUGH! Or stated more simply - we give as God has first given, not only in prosperity, but esp. in times of recession & depression.

Let me first illustrate with the life of Sir Harry Platt, who died five years ago at the age of 100. Platt was not unusual because he lived to 100; nor because he is still considered the founder of modern orthopedic surgery; nor even because he was president of the Royal College of Surgeons. What was significant about Platt is that as a child he was a chronic invalid, suffering from serious bone and joint disabilities. How easy it could have been for Dr. Platt to become embittered and self-pitying. But that would have done nothing for his pain or anyone else's. From the recession and depression of his pain, he offered the prosperity of possibilities for others still suffering. As one commentator stated, "he turned his scars into stars for others."

No greater witness of this kind of giving could be illustrated today than the example of Magic Johnson this past week. There can be no doubt that a RECESSION HAS TRULY HIT HIS HOME. Up to this time, the HIV virus has led to recession, depression & then death. And yet Magic Johnson has not "thrown in" the towel or retreated to a corner of the locker room to mope and die. He has come forward to give new life and new hope to a culture living in fear of AIDS. He has reached deep into the recesses of his soul ... and there he has found the generous grace of God ... and he has offered that grace rather than his own personal grief.

I believe that same truth can be said for the people of Hope today. Since the RECESSION HAS HIT HOME -- one might think that God's faithful would re-trench and retreat at this time. But the facts show THAT GOD'S FAITHFUL GIVE AS GOD HAS FIRST GIVEN, ESP. IN TOUGH TIMES. Last year on Consecration Sunday -- only 218 families had CONSECRATED THEMSELVES TO CHRIST'S MISSION AT HOPE. Today - that number is 289 ... and 41 of those 289 have promised to be "faithful contributors" even though they could not give a dollar figure. Last year - \$225,000 had been pledged from those 218; this year, \$281,000 has been pledged from 248 givers. The average giving has not gone down IN THESE TOUGH TIMES ... instead it has gone up by more than an average of \$100 per giving unit. YOU WANT TO KNOW WHAT THE FAITHFUL DO WHEN TIMES GET TOUGH?? We don't

assaulted like never before with hundreds of appeals. But the question of priority has not changed one iota in this era. THE FIRST PRIORITY OF GIVING IS STILL TO GLORIFY GOD! As a Christian, I give to the United Way, to Rotary, to a Tennis Club, to Jerry's Kids, to Wittenberg University, to the Luth School of Theology, to Metro Toledo Churches United, to a host of others charities. I also pay my taxes. BUT GLORIFYING GOD IS STILL MY GREATEST PRIORITY ... AND THAT GIFT REFLECTS ITSELF ACCORDINLY. It is my greatest priority of giving!! And it is the greatest charitable cost of my life!

In the story of the widow who gave the two small coins -- it was not the amount of her gift that mattered. It was that her gift represented the greatest cost of her life! It was not a mere token of her wealth, it was a gift of totality -- GIVEN WITH THE INTENT THAT IT REPRESENTED A SACRIFICE ... THAT IT WAS ALL SHE COULD POSSIBLY GIVE! That is the final principle of faithful giving -- THAT IT REPRESENTS A TRUE COST OF MY LIFE AND YOURS ... THAT IT IS A REFLECTION OF MY FULL THANKSGIVING FOR THE TOTAL COST OF THE LIFE OF JESUS CHRIST!

As Christians, giving financially to God is a part of our faithful duty. But this duty is not performed out of obligation, rather, it is offered out of thanksgiving. Like the widow, we give, not because we have to, but because we want to! We find no greater joy than giving generously to glorify the Lord! Through our giving, we want to offer our highest priority of thanks to the glory of God! Any other principle or percentage of giving - incl tithing - can be a fraud. BECAUSE IT MAY NOT REPRESENT A TRUE PRIORITY ... AND A TRUE COST OF GENEROUS GIVING FOR MY LIFE.

In times of prosperity, recession and depression - Jesus Christ has appeared to put away sin ONCE FOR ALL by the sacrifice of himself. In thanksgiving - we give as he has first given -- as a true cost of our lives, whether those be times of prosperity, recession or depression. AMEN.

PENTECOST 25 - CONSECRATION SUNDAY

Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo

November 13, 1994

Peter R. Martyn, Pastor

"THE NEVER-ENDING STORY OF CONSECRATION"

"But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the age to remove sin by the sacrifice of himself." Hebrews 9:26 And Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. For all of them gave out of abundance; but she out of poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on." Mark 12:43-44

Consecration Sunday is a very special day for me. Six years ago on this day, you invited me to return to this pulpit after 2-1/2 months of recuperation from Open Heart surgery. Your willingness to pray for me, support me, encourage me, but above all, TO WELCOME ME BACK was one of the greatest expressions of Consecration that I have ever known. There were times in that 2-1/2 months that I wondered what would happen: Would you view me as a cripple? Would you begin a search for a new sr. pastor immediately? Would you tell me on January 1st that I had six months to find a new Call? But instead, you WELCOMED ME HOME ... back into the loving arms of Hope Lutheran. That was and still is the faithful Consecration of Hope Church.

**But ... it is NOT the Never-Ending Story of Consecration!  
It is ONLY ONE Story of Consecration!**

In the fall of 1979 - Hope Lutheran Church was deeply concerned about fulfilling a \$130,000 budget. With much prodding from the Spirit (and a little from Peter), we achieved that goal! Last year, 1993, that same Hope Lutheran not only fulfilled a \$407,000 budget (more than 3 times the 1979 goal) -- but this same body also gave an additional \$105,000 to special missions, to renovation debt, and to other special causes. Tell me now that this body of Christ has not grown in maturity, stature and faithfulness?!? And let it never be said that money doesn't matter! There is not one of us in this room that can fulfill our life mission without the benefit of money!

**But ... this is NOT the Never-Ending Story of Consecration!  
It is ONLY ONE Story of Consecration!**

parties for your children or yourselves - celebrations don't happen without a lot of hard work and dedication. I hope before you leave today that you will thank each other and those leaders who have been MOST CONSECRATED in doing the planning, the preparing and the hard working that will make today's celebration a success.

**But ... this is NOT the Never-Ending Story of Consecration!  
It is ONLY ONE Story of Consecration!**

Two weeks ago, two of our young members who have two little children ... **Dave & Jackie St. Aubin** ... rented a U-Haul truck, took two days of personal vacation time, and drove this truck full of the stuff that you donated to Lisa & Roger Brown (Annelle's daughter and son-in-law who were burned out of their home). I'm sure many of you have taken "Personal Vacation days" to carry out a mission of faithfulness to some needy family or needy cause. I only lift up David and Jackie because this was the most recent told to me ... and because they illustrate how many of you take your CONSECRATION well beyond this Sunday morning Sanctuary.

**But ... this is NOT the Never-Ending Story of Consecration!  
It is ONLY ONE Story of Consecration!**

This past Tuesday, I prepared a gourmet meal for 24 women of Hope who spend hundreds of hours each year cleaning our pews, filling our communion glasses, delivering our flowers, polishing our brass, cleaning and arranging our paramonts, and filling our pew racks with all the stuff that your children love to scribble on. These women told me on Tues. that very rarely does anyone come back to the Sacristy to thank them for their ministry, but they keep on doing it anyway ... **because** they don't do it for thanks, they do it because it's a ministry of CONSECRATION OF HOPE LUTHERAN CHURCH.

**But ... this is NOT the Never-Ending Story of Consecration!  
It is ONLY ONE Story of Consecration!**

Week after week after week, 25 members and staff along with eight assistants consecrate themselves to educating you and your children about the Way & Truth of our Christian faith. Most of these

Way off in Chicago, Illinois ... and nearer in Findlay, Ohio -- there are two pastors overseeing the mission of your church: Bishop Herbert Chilstrom & Bishop James Rave. These two men are part of a network of more than 367 national and 8 state of Ohio executives who oversee all 11,000 ELCA congregations, all campus and other special ministries, all national/international outreach ministries like World Hunger, all 10 seminaries and 29 colleges, all 275 social service agencies of the Lutheran Church, all publications and curricula, all 500+ global missionaries, and all other departments and divisions of this church including the 16,608 pastors. Along with Bishop Chilstrom, his other 366 national executives manage the nearly \$100 million mission of the ELCA. None of these people work 40 hours a week! Like most of you, they all work 60-70 hours a week! And with the tremendous downsizing of the ELCA nationally ... many of them are now doing ministries that were done by 2 or 3 people before. But like most of you - they do this because they are faithful and dedicated to One who is Greater than themselves!

**But ... this is NOT the Never-Ending Story of Consecration!  
It is ONLY ONE Story of Consecration!**

Today, we've encountered another story among the thousands of stories that we share here regularly. Today's story is about a widow. And just like today's church - she's at temple with a lot of other people ... many of them who are very wealthy. And Jesus is watching them. The wealthy people are putting very large gifts into the temple treasury. But this widow only puts in two small pennies. Yet we soon learn that it's not the size of the gift that counts from this widow -- it's the fact that she gave EVERYTHING SHE HAD! Unlike many in our society today, this poor woman was not a wealthy widow ... she was a widow of welfare! But unlike the wealthy in this story - she was not giving what she had in order to impress others or to get her name on the Society page. She was not a SHOW-TIME GIVER like the rich in the temple! Here was this little widow - who was but a dwarf of privilege and wealth - yet she became a giant of faith. Only this widow offers a true gift of Consecration - she gives with total risk & courage! She does not know where her next penny will come from ... but she CONSECRATES her last coins to the temple treasury! She illustrates that CONSECRATION isn't

century after century after century. And each time he looked closely at his "chosen" people (at the ones who remembered him) he could not understand why they kept on falling away & following other gods. Each time he looked, he saw that they had made their kingdoms **and** their traditions **and** their power **and** their truth more important than His Way & Truth. So finally he decided: "**The only way they will become like ME is if I first become like THEM!**" So he did what no other recorded God in all history has ever done ... what the Greeks thought was foolish and the Jews thought impossible: HE BECAME MAN, and dwelt among his chosen people **showing them his grace and truth**. But things didn't change! His people still wanted their kingdoms, their power, and their glory more than His! And then they even decided to destroy his Only Son! And out of persistent love, he let them do it. "He decided this Son would appear once for all to remove all sin by the sacrifice of himself." Yes, he gave up the Only Son he had ever given to a fallen world. He allowed this Only Son to die on a cross so that EVERYONE MIGHT KNOW that even when we crucify and mock and ridicule God ... He still remains CONSECATED TO US!

And by that one act in history -- you and I, whether rich or poor, black or white, Democrat or Republican -- we are redeemed ... we are assured that we will always be a part of an everlasting kingdom rather than a fallen world. And the facts are: **without his Act of Consecration on the Cross, there would be no Hope for us ... nor would there be any Hope Lutheran!**

**And - that is the ONLY NEVER-ENDING STORY OF CONSECRATION!** And never let it be said that **my story or your story** of Consecration is MORE IMPORTANT than God's Story through Jesus Christ.

AMEN (IT IS MOST CERTAINLY TRUE!).

Pentecost 25

Glenwood Lutheran Church, Toledo

November 9, 1997

Peter R. Martyn, Interim Pastor

## ***“The Everlasting Consecration Story!”***

*“But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the age to remove sin by the sacrifice of himself.” Hebrews 9:26 “Jesus said, ‘Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. For all of them have contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put everything she had, all she had to live on.’” Mark 12:43-44*

**“CONSECRATION.”** It’s a word you have heard often this past year. It means **“to make holy” ... “to be dedicated to a sacred trust or duty” ... “to be set apart for a Godly mission or vision.”** Holy Baptism assures every Christian that God will forgive and redeem him/her. But “consecration” becomes the fruit of that Baptism -- it becomes the visible expression of “becoming Holy” ... “of being dedicated to God.” So -- as noted last week - all Christians are saints by virtue of what God does in baptism; but not all Christians become “consecrated saints” -- they don’t make it their DUTY to become “Holy like God!”

The biblical story from today’s gospel not only reflects a “saint” - but a “consecrated saint” -- a woman who was not afraid to lose herself in God’s holiness. In Hebrew society - she was viewed as little more than trash. First, she was a woman; second, she was poor; and worst of all, she was a widow. She had no economic worth or support. In contrast to her in the text were the religious elite of the day, **the scribes**: they wore long robes, constantly jockeyed for positions of honor, offered long prayers to impress others and often took unfair advantage of widows. And this poor widow -- even knowing the corruptness of these scribes -- still gives her last two pennies to support the ministry of the temple. Why? Because she values nothing more deeply than the gracious Word of God. And that’s the mission of the temple, even with corrupt scribes.

So there you have it. A great story of consecration -- a story of a poor widow who set herself apart from all other saints by showing the meaning of being holy ... giving your whole self to God. But this is not THE EVERLASTING CONSECRATION STORY!

There’s a more recent story of an Albanian woman who went to India in 1929 as a nun of the Loreto Order. She became the headmistress of a school. But in

sisters & brothers, 775 homes and 1,369 medical clinics that continue to serve 120,000 people every day worldwide.

That's another story of consecration -- a story of another woman set apart to show the true spirit of God's love. But it's not THE EVERLASTING CONSECRATION STORY.

Consider William & Catherine Magee, founders of Operation Smile. One is a plastic surgeon; the other a social service worker. OpSmile began in 1982. Since then it has performed surgery on 18,000 kids in 15 countries. Without charge - these surgeries correct cleft palates, burn scars, & other disfigurements ... while training the local doctors to do the procedures. Thanks to a million dollar gift from the Conrad Hilton Foundation - OpSmile is going strong.

That's another story of consecration -- a couple using their special talents to reveal the holy love of God. But it's not THE EVERLASTING CONSECRATION STORY!

Evie Rosen of Wausau, Wisconsin is 69. At this moment Evie is probably knitting afghans. Why? Because winter is coming and blankets are needed. Evie is a retired needlework shop owner. Disturbed by all the stories of the homeless - Evie started Operation Warm. She said: "I knew that many homes had balls of yarn. So if knitters would just knit a 7-inch by 9-inch rectangle - we could put them together for afghans." So, she started Operation Warm in 1992 and got the word out to churches, retirement homes and craft shops. Last year - the Operation Warm network distributed 16,000 afghans.

That's just one more consecration story -- but it's not THE EVERLASTING CONSECRATION STORY.

Fanny Epps spends every day, five days a week with disabled children at Norge Elementary School in Williamsburg, Va. Her day begins long before the school opens at 7 a.m., because she has to catch her bus at 5 a.m. every morning to make it to school on time. But when she gets there - the many children with Downs syndrome and other motor difficulties are waiting for her to put on the tape recorder so that she can lead them in a chorus of "Jingle Bell Rock." By the way Fanny Enns is 99 years old and says. *"I don't want to act dead while I'm*

-- that's 35 years -- every week he drives a truck to New York City to deliver food to a Bowery Mission. That's a six-hour round trip every week to a seedy section of Manhattan. Each and every week, his truck is loaded with produce, canned meats and pastries from Mennonite farmers and businessmen in Pennsylvania. He says he does this "because he has been entrusted to get this food to the poor who finally offer happy faces when they see him coming."

Just another consecration story; but there's yet *one more consecration story.*

It is a story about Yahweh, the God of all Creation. This story saw God looking over his creation century after century. And each time he looked closely at his "chosen" (his "saints") - he could not understand why they kept falling away & following other "gods." Each time he looked-- he noticed they had made THEIR KINGDOMS ... and THEIR TRADITIONS ... and THEIR TRUTH more important than his Way & Truth. So finally he decided, "The only way they will become HOLY like me is if I first become like them."

So, God Almighty did what no other god in recorded history has ever done -- HE BECAME A MAN. The Greeks called it foolishness; the Jews thought it a total example of impotence. But God came among his chosen ones to show them real grace and truth. But things didn't change. His people still wanted their kingdoms, their power, and their glory MORE THAN HIS! And then they even decided to destroy the One He had sent. And out of persistent love, He let them do it. "He decided this Son would appear once for all to remove all sin by the sacrifice of himself." Yes, He gave up his only Son to a bunch of sinners who had fallen from their "holy" sainthood. He allowed His Only Son to die on a cross so that EVERY PERSON MIGHT KNOW that even when we crucify and mock and ridicule God ... He still remains CONSECRATED TO US!

Even when we only go thru the motions of baptism--even when we don't come to church regularly--even when we don't consecrate ourselves as God's holy saints --GOD STILL REMAINS CONSECRATED TO US. That's *THE EVER-LASTING CONSECRATION STORY.* It's the greatest story ever told.

The lucky ones in this world not only know this story -- they want to be a part of this *"everlasting consecration story"* for others. That's why I took the time today to tell you about a poor widow & Mother Teresa, the Magees & Evie

25th Sunday After Pentecost  
Glenwood Lutheran Church, Toledo, OH  
November 17, 1996 10 a.m. - Consecration Sunday  
Peter R. Martyn, Interim Pastor

## “FAITHFUL INVESTORS!”

*Jesus said, “A master, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them; to one he gave five talents (a talent weighed 75# & was equal to 15 years of wages); to another he gave two; and to another one, to each according to his ability. ... and the one who had received one came forward and saying, ‘Master, I knew you were harsh, reaping where you did not sow & scattering where you did not scatter seed, so I was afraid ... and I hid your talent in the ground.’”* Matt. 25:14; 24-25

Consecration Sundays always remind me of a consecration preacher who was somewhat like me at Glenwood--he had a short-term Call but also wanted to really “*fire up the faithfulness of that Christian body!*” Unlike me, he didn’t play the cymbals; he was really into sermon symbolism . He not only wore wild, flamboyant vestments, he also carried a huge Christ Candle to every church in which he preached. He somehow thought that by using this Christ Candle that the glory of God would really shine and “fire up” the faithful in that flock.

Every where he went, he would instruct the acolyte that just before reading the gospel, he would intone: “*And the Glory shone around Him.*” And at the precise moment of singing that introduction, the acolyte was to enter and light this huge Christ Candle. So the service was proceeding very smoothly. It was time for the reading of the gospel. And in his best stained-glass voice, he pranced to the candle, cleared his throat and sang: “*And the glory shone around Him.*” He paused; he waited; he looked to the sacristy door, but no acolyte. So he cleared his throat and belted out more loudly: “And the Glory shone around Him.” Again, dead silence from the sacristy; He was beginning to sweat a little now. So he really cleared his throat, and this time belted out with great gusto: “And the Glory shone around Him.” At that very moment, the sacristy door opened; a little boy’s head peeked out, and in a squeaky voice he chanted back to the pastor: “*And the cat PEED on the matches!*”

*Now isn't that exactly the way most of you feel about Stewardship Sundays?? You know* it's supposed to be a day of great glory and faithfulness to God! *You know* its supposed to be a great opportunity to renew your Consecration to Christ & His Church! *You know* what we're all supposed to say on Consecration Sunday: *"that God loves a cheerful giver ... that "it's better to give than to receive" ... that we are "to give from our first fruits!"* You know all these things! **But the way so many of us feel about Consecration Stewardship Stuff is like somebody invited "the cat to pee on the matches." Right!?!?**

Now isn't that the way it is with all the ...

Consecration Sundays: her glory is in the cross of her Lord--her glory is in those servants like their Lord who seek to BE LIVING INVESTORS IN keeping God's light shining even when others try to put it out!!

Just like our Lord, we people of God have basically **two choices: we can consecrate ourselves to the Ways of the World ... or we can consecrate ourselves to the Way, the Truth and the Life of Christ!!** As we all know, too many of us too often consecrate ourselves to the Ways of the World. **Like our gospel text today: we have have been blessed with many more than five talents ... yet so often we bury them. We profess belief in the Master, but we don't faithfully invest in His Mission. Like the one talent man, we are wise in things of this world, but timid when it comes to the Lord: we'll gladly invest in the stock market ... but we act as if it's too much to REASONABLY INVEST WITH THE SAME CONVICTION IN JESUS CHRIST!!** And I underscore REASON here ... because that's a real vision of this parable. Jesus is not only talking about good monetary investments in His mission; he is asking his disciples to be "as reasonable & smart" in church things as they are in secular things!!

Yes, we all know how contrary our church life can be to our "worldly life." Many are only consecrated to a worldly lifestyle of "just looking out for #1!!" **They suffer from the most serious of all diseases: "self-satisfaction" - only looking out for themselves. The one talent man was a good man, it's just that he had no vision beyond himself -'beyond things right now.'** He forgot that we make a "heavenly accounting" as well as an "earthly accounting!"

But Jesus shows us a model very different from this worldly obsession with self-fulfillment. Our world says, **GLORY is filling yourself with all you can possibly get--"get all you can get with gusto" -- invest only in this world's stocks & bonds!"** To the contrary, Jesus says **TRUE GLORY only comes by "emptying yourself for others!"** The text says it this way: **"For to those who have, more will be given; but from those who have nothing, even that will be taken away."** That almost sounds like the rich get richer while the poor get poorer! Not at all! **"Those who have"** refers to **those "who possess the spirit of the gospel - the goodness of God."** To those, much more will be given! We all know, when we love like God, we will receive the greatest satisfaction. When we don't have that love, than obviously ... everything is taken away from us. **The truly faithful are the ones who not only SAY they believe in God, but LIVE AND SHOW that belief in God by INVESTING THEIR TALENTS INTO GOD'S MISSION & MINISTRY ... AND THEY REJOICE IN SEEING ITS GREAT RETURN A HUNDREDFOLD! They don't bury God's goodness: they make a difference for God, not only FOR themselves!**

Wonder didn't do anything. It just sat there, not contributing or doing anything for anyone except MAKING A LOT OF NOISE!! It might as well have been buried in the ground!

That's like the life of Luigi Tarisio. When he died he had acquired 246 of the best violins in the world. *When others got into his house after his death, they found all 246 violins stored in the attic, closets, dresser drawers, even on the walls of his shower.* But not one of those violins had ever been played. They simply sat around collecting dust. His passionate devotion to "acquiring" violins had robbed the world of hearing some of the best violins ever made. He had buried God's greatest talents in the ground of his own house!!

Isn't that too often the profile of many Christians?? **They just sit in church like Wahlstrom's Wonder -- making a lot of noise, but not contributing to Christ's mission. Or they are Christian Collector's Items -- they are beautiful instruments created by God, but just collecting dust ... no longer being used for any majestic purpose of God!** Each of us must ask ourselves at least once a year: what is the difference between my NOISE and my CONSECRATED ACTION?? Am I playing the same old tune that I played 30 or 40 or 50 years ago?? Or, am I playing no tune at all?? Dear friends in Christ - God wants less TALK AND MORE ACTION FROM HIS FAITHFUL INVESTORS!! And that begins at anytime we're willing to let God take control of our lives and our investment portfolios.

I can't speak for any of you, I can only tell you when God first presented me with His INVESTMENT STRATEGY to glorify His Name rather than my own. It happened in the only place that God gets a hearing without any competing noise: right here **IN HIS HOUSE!** Yes, I first learned about being a FAITHFUL INVESTOR in God in HIS HOUSE from my parents! Because in Baptism, they had promised to teach God's example of giving! And in my home, my parents didn't **TALK ABOUT GIFTS OF LOVE, THEY GAVE ME THE GIFTS OF GOD'S LOVE.** And where did they learn that INVESTMENT strategy of self-emptying love? It was in the Church of Jesus Christ. There they learned "*when God invests in us, then we respond by investing in Him for others!!*" That's better known as Consecration: or as my dad always said: "God has blessed us greatly, Peter; no Christian should ever be ashamed to ask another Christian to give to God!!" I learned very young there's one thing for which I will never feel shame: **asking to give to God & his mission thru the church!!**

Let me illustrate more fully. My dad was a skilled mechanic for Rockwell Int'l for 40 years and never made over \$10,000/YR in his lifetime. Yet as I have said, that same father *instilled in me from my early youth "that a Christian is never ashamed to ask another Christian TO LIVE FAITH BY GIVING BACK TO GOD WHAT HE HAS FIRST*

*GIVEN HIM.* God did not bestow upon me intelligence, or spiritual wisdom, or material

envelope. And why did he do that?? Because that's God's strategy: He blesses us in order that we might bless others!! It's more than just a lot of religious talk!

Obviously, **my father taught me to tithe!** What started out as 70 cts a week or \$35 a year became over \$10,000 at Hope! At Glenwood in 1997 it will be over \$3,000, because my income is considerably reduced as a 2/3 pastor. But my point is not to boast about tithing! **Be assured, tithing is important, but not the most important! Not just 10% of what I have is God's --everything I have is God's!!** All he asks of me ... and esp. of you today is to NOT BURY THE TALENT HE HAS GIVEN US! *And anyone who makes thousands of dollars a year and only gives God a few bucks a week -- or nothing as 136 confirmed Christians at Glenwood --these are BURYING GOD'S GIFTS IN THE GROUND!* Each of us today, this Consecration Sunday, must ask ourselves: **WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR ME TO 'invest in God's mission at Glenwood' -- what are God's Gifts for Glenwood???** Or as Billy Graham has said, *"God has given us two hands; one for receiving ... the other for giving."* Which hand does God and everyone else see us using more often??

Maybe the best way to help you answer these questions is to tell a final story about **another pastor whom I learned about.** It's one of those depression era stories--those days when pastors were often paid with crops or clothing or animals. It was the story of a little parish in Pennsylvania. The pastor & parish were very poor. **But there was one rich man in the parish whose daughter came to the pastor to be married.** It was the biggest wedding ever seen in that county. At the end of the service, the rich father came to the pastor's study with a shoe box - a gift for the pastor. He opened the box to find a pair of leather gloves, elegant gloves. The pastor graciously offered thanks and the rich man left. **Immediately, the pastor threw the box onto his desk in anger; he was insulted by such an inappropriate gift from such a wealthy man -- one who knew how poor he was.**

**Over the next 30 yrs, that pastor carried that box to three more congregations.** He'd move the box from one desk to another, never even taking the gloves out of it. Finally, as the pastor reached retirement and was cleaning his last desk, he took out the box and decided to try on the gloves. He went to put them on, only to find that his hands wouldn't go into the holes. He reached into one finger - and he pulled out a \$100 bill; then a second finger, another \$100 bill; then third finger & fourth & fifth. All ten fingers were stuffed with \$100 bills. And in the thumb of the second glove was a note. It read: *"Dear pastor, I know you are a faithful man who believes in God above all things; please use these gifts to foster your investment in God's kingdom and your own family!! I love you & I love Christ!"*