

PENTECOST XI  
Church of the Master - Troy  
August 18, 1974

"WHAT'S YOUR PLEASURE?"

"I will tear my barns down and build bigger ones, where I will store the grain and all my other goods. Then I will say to myself, Lucky man! You have all the good things you need for many years. Take life easy, eat, drink, and enjoy yourself!' But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night you will have to give up your life; then who will get all these things you have kept for yourself.'" (Lk. 12:18-20)

What's your pleasure? Quality? Or Quantity?  
That question permeates our reflections for this day.

There is a story told of George Bernard Shaw that he was once seated beside a Dutchess at a dinner party. In the course of their conversation, he asked: "Tell me, Dutchess, would you live with a man for a million pounds?" "Well," replied the Dutchess, "I suppose I would."

Then Shaw asked her: "Would you live with a man for five pounds?" The Dutchess, insulted, retorted: "What do you think I am?!" Shaw replied, "We've already established that; now we are just determining the price."

Funny, isn't it, that we will do almost anything if the price is right. We somehow are even susceptible to selling our souls for silver. Judas did it long ago - and leaders have been getting caught left and right doing it today.

Strange how the rich man in today's parable was infected by the same tragic flaw - he had put a higher value on quantity than on quality. Quantity had become an end - rather than a means to a qualitative end.

Personally and pastorally, I'd like to believe that this story can only be applied to Bible times

past. I'd like to be able to say that Christians today just don't suffer from this "quantity hang-up." I'd like to be able to say that and then I wouldn't have to deal with the UNCOMFORTABLE cutting edge of today's lesson.

But I know, and you know, that we're all addicted to this quantity fixation. We're all still part of that breed that gets its priorities messed up. Whether it be land, dollars, or jewels -- we're all impressed by size. The "bigger the better" we forever proclaim (except for times of gas shortages). We so often think "the more the merrier." And soon our whole measuring system on the inventory of life is done by addition and multiplication tables.

When we look at life itself we often marvel at the longevity of some lives and think that many years of living is a great achievement in itself. Our scientific generation seems to conclude that the greatest boon it could give to mankind is to stretch out the life span. And so again, we've been sucked into the idea that quantity is of utmost importance.

Look at this morning's bulletin. Even while I was dealing with the text before us, I was being conned into the quantity-game. Granted, there is support in worship through a greater number of people -- but quantity alone does not assure an inspirational experience.

Examples galore instruct us of our obsession with worshipping quantity. Some time ago, a meat shortage was announced. The response was not toward equalized buying, but toward hoarding.

Hardly a day passes that we do not read or hear about a group on strike. Obviously, a man deserves a fair-quantity wage and should protest if he is cheated from it. But so often strikes are motivated by a desire for OBSESSIVE QUANTITY -- the more-more-more for me-me-me syndrome seems to dictate our economic lifestyle.

Unfortunately, our quantity-appetites are too often reinforced by our production methods. No longer is it necessary to re-use our possessions -- we now simply throw them away. Is it any wonder then that we are close to raising a generation which has lost its sense of value for property - for material things.

How can a young child learn to value material properties when he/she sees enormous plastic bags of things thrown away weekly? How does a child learn to value a piece of furniture when he/she knows that it will be replaced without any fuss? And so our children grow up with the same quantity appetite that they have been given.

Yes, the rich man in today's parable was not the only man of history obsessed with WANTING MORE QUANTITIES OF THINGS. This is no easy text for me to deal with BECAUSE I too often see myself as that rich man (even though I am far poorer than he).

One of our members recently told me that he feels it is impossible for us to escape this stockpiling urge. He was telling me that it's the mentality of his whole subdivision. To live in peace with his neighbor, he must succumb to the praise and glory of quantity.

I think we can all empathize with him. Our culture has geared us for getting more. The media, whether live or in print, tends to reinforce our natural urge toward vanity. Every six minutes, the T.V. tube seeks to satisfy our appetites -- sometimes even creating quantity needs that we haven't even thought of.

There's the ad for a certain make of car in which the buyer says: "What am I doing here. I really don't need this car - BUT, I want it so I'll buy it." And so the quantity beat goes on -- get, accumulate, stockpile, build-up, whether you need it or not.

The emptiness of quantity alone is clear enough.

So, how can we re-orient ourselves toward a more quality lifestyle? Well - we already have. Just in hearing this parable we have God's reminder that he calls us TO USE HIS CREATION FOR THE COMMON GOOD - not only for our own good. For if we are going to make a quality impression in life, then we have to leave our fingerprints of concern and involvement on the human relationships we touch.

*to be chances to life*

The donation TO LIFE, and not the duration or the quantity, is the mark of a Godly life. Just in hearing this parable today, that possibility is again re-opened for us. Just in confronting the rich man's obsession with quantity, we can avoid those moments where we're tempted to do the same. Just in seeing that his life came to a conclusion WITHOUT ANY CONTRIBUTION to his fellow man, we can avoid such qualitative emptiness in our own lives.

*rather than take from life*

God has called you and me to offer QUALITY CONTROL to all human relationships. He knows of our temptations toward quantity -- and we know of them as well. He knows that we will fight for a lifetime the battle between a quantitative or qualitative lifestyle.

But he gives us the power to live for quality-- he gives us himself and a way to live. He *not* ~~does not~~ gives us material possessions -- he gives us a loving relationship. And with that love comes forgiveness for any quantitative obsession of the past. And in giving himself, he further alerts us to the fact that ALL POSSESSIONS are really his -- he only gives them to us TO USE and TO SHARE.

*only*

So, what's your pleasure? A lifestyle of quantity or quality? The choice is ours. But God assures that we'll experience far greater pleasure -- yes, eternal pleasure when we use his quantity for the common good. Because that's his method of quality control for his whole creation.

*Amos 11*

PENTECOST XI  
Luth Church of the Master, Troy  
August 22, 1976

*Fellowship  
Methodist  
11 AM*

"RISE ABOVE IT"

Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; he who comes to me shall not hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst." John 6:35

I think I can state almost categorically ONE TRUTH for all of us in this room -- our main problem is not one of physical hunger or thirst. For Americans like us in this room, Jesus' metaphors of hungering and thirsting almost seem to be too remote.

This hungering and thirsting bit just doesn't seem to be a health problem for us. We are much more concerned about cancer and heart disease than this hungering and thirsting for the true bread.

But maybe we should take a closer at this true bread talk. For I am told that America's number one health problem has a lot to do with it. For our NUMBER 1 untreated disease is not cancer or heart disease, but rather DEPRESSION. And depression has a LOT TO DO with hungering and thirsting for the bread of life.

For instance, how many of us can make it through a single week without a rather significant attack of depression??? Let me speak for myself -- I don't think I can remember a week in which I have not had at least a pretty good minor case of depression. And often that turned-in-anger is over something pretty petty.

Yet, like you, I am one who shares in Christ's victory over death and depression -- we profess to have overcome these things -- yet, which of us can claim that we're never depressed???

You know and I know that all of us suffer from this number one health problem. And I personally believe that anyone who claims otherwise is a liar.

But WHY??? Why is it so common among us?? Why

has it become number one?? How can it be that depression even outranks cancer and heart disease??

I'm sure there are many individual reasons and hunches -- but I'm also quite sure that each reason is just a slight variation from the conclusion that Jesus gives in John's gospel -- NAMELY, most of us are overwhelmingly preoccupied or struggling for the bread which perishes.

Many of us have set as our highest goal and priority THE THINGS OF LIFE which perish. We have made these things, whether singular or plural, the main purpose for living.

So it is - like all perishable goods and creatures -- when we can no longer see them or feel that we have them in our grasp, we get DEPRESSED -- which clinically means, we turn in anger on ourselves or those around us. We no longer feel secure or even a sense of worth -- many times, we even get to the point where we want to check out of life -- to give up.

We've made so much of that perishable thing or person and the loss of it, that we no longer see any value in the free gift of life.

The applications of this truth are as numerous as the perishable things of life. Let's assume that we have made another person into the TRUE BREAD -- that we have equated this person to a dietary status. All's well as long as that person is alive and fills that billing -- which usually doesn't last more than a week, maybe a little longer in early romances.

But with the first deep disappointment, or the first disloyalty, or possibly with separation or even death ---- it's at that moment that the truth finally comes home -- we have put complete faith in a perishable person. And on the heels of that truth usually follows depression.

So it is with all of life's creatures and creations. How often you and I have made material wealth our ultimate purpose -- and we still do this -- even after we've learned that it doesn't

guarantee happiness. Why is it that the psychiatrists appointment books are loaded with wealthy depression cases??

Jesus in today's gospel is just trying to save us a lot of unhappiness -- he's trying to smoke out those things which we have made equal to him. He's asking us to ask ourselves: Are we seeking to be saved by anyTHING other than Him??

For many of us -- we have done that with our vocations. And I speak of myself in this category. Why is it that many of us have allowed ourselves to become slaves to a 65 - 70 hour week?? Do we expect special rewards in heaven?? Well, God has already promised us the true bread without the 70 hours.

You know and I know why we kill ourselves in our vocations -- we want the praise and promotions of this world. So it is that Jesus reminds us here -- these praises and promotions are o.k., but lest we forget that they are perishable, he again reminds us that he is the only PROMOTION which will not perish.

How difficult it is to RISE ABOVE this sheerly physical and materialistic level of life.

(We see the same picture in the Exodus story in today's first lesson. God thru Moses had just delivered the Israelites from certainty of Egyptian death. But what was their focus -- was it gratitude?? By no means. They were grumbling due to the lack of food in the wilderness. Instead of gratitude, they were depressed.)

Likewise, the apostle in Ephesians sees these Gentile Christians acting no different than the pagans. They were making the physical and materialistic most important. The true bread for them had been lowered to lusts in the street. And ultimately, that leads to depression and despair -- just ask any prostitute, and they'll tell you they've lost the true bread of life.

But Paul and Jesus make clear we don't have to remain STUCK in depression and self-depreciation.

There's a way we can rise above it. We can lift up and celebrate what God has given us in Christ -- he has given us acceptance, he has given us help when we feel helpless and lost, he has given us the promise of an eternal home when we feel like we've been thrown to the dogs.

I know -- that often sounds like a lot of pious platitudes -- but we know it's more.

Because every one of us has had a moment when we have received that BREAD OF LIFE. That moment when we should have been rejected, but we were accepted and forgiven. That moment when family, friends, or even a stranger could have looked the other way, could have made up some legitimate excuses -- but instead, they came to us and helped lift us out of the muck of our depression.

Every one of us HAS EXPERIENCED THE NOURISHING POWER of a moment like that -- a moment like that NEVER perishes -- we never forget that stroke of love -- it fills us up so that we can carry on. That's the true BREAD OF LIFE -- because that's the life of Christ.

And whether it's received through the sacrament, or through the preached word, or through the hugs of our daughters or sons, or even the lasting embrace of a lover -- IT IS THAT BREAD OF LIFE who is the power of Jesus Christ -- and we will not be depressed nor hunger and thirst for acceptance when we give and receive that bread of life.

AMEN



PENTECOST XI  
Luth Church of the Master, Troy  
August 14, 1977

"WHEN WILL WE EVER LEARN?"

"It is useless, useless, said the Philosopher. Life is useless, all useless ... After all this there is only one thing to say: Have reverence for God, and obey his commands, because this is all man was created for."

Ecclesiastes 1:2; 12:13

The introduction to the book of Ecclesiastes in the GOOD NEWS BIBLE says "this book contains the thoughts of 'the Philosopher,' a man who reflected deeply on how short and contradictory human life is -- with its mysterious injustices and frustrations, and concluded that "life is useless." He could not understand the ways of God, who controls human destiny. Yet, in spite of this, he advised people to work hard, and to enjoy the gifts of God as much and as long as they could."

Many of the Philosopher's thoughts appear negative and even depressing. But the fact that this book is in the Bible shows that biblical faith is broad enough to take into account such pessimism and doubt."

So goes the American Bible Society's introduction to this book. Personally - I think they've overlooked what the Philosopher says in the last two verses of the book. But even with that frosting on a rather dismal cake - it's impossible to overlook the futility and meaningless that has gripped this philosopher.

One only has to read the first three chapters of this book - or even this short section in today's lesson -- and with few exceptions -- we find ourselves shaking our heads in agreement. And the more you read of this philosopher, the more you say - ~~the more you say~~ "BY JOVE, he has a pretty realistic picture of *things*. ~~the world really is.~~"

Was still in her twenties. Obviously, it was a sad and hurtful loss. But the church-folks back home gave her many "judgmental glances" when she started seeing other men. They figured she hadn't grieved long enough. In short, they were forcing her to feel that it was un-Christian to care about other people. They were making an idol out of one man and one relationship.

Yes - how often we force people to worship other creatures or things instead of God. And then we wonder why people feel that "all is useless." For some reason we just never learn that there is an ENORMOUS emptiness in chasing after things which don't last. Because, like the philosopher, we end up feeling like we're "striving after wind."

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Over and over again - God has said "Life is useless -- very useless, WITHOUT HIM.

Life can only be meaningful when we are guided by an eternal spirit - namely, the Holy Spirit - God himself. When we turn ourselves over to God here - then life is never useless.

That doesn't mean life will be a bowl of cherries. There will still be hardships, and failures, short-comings, frustrations, and of course, death.

But none of these will destroy our life perspective now -- because we will see life ultimately in God's hands. And he assures us of a place with him even though we may feel that yesterday or the day before was useless.

God help us to learn that life is useless APART FROM HIM.

AMEN

*Yes*

The fact is - his dismal picture is pretty much on target ~~quite~~ *too much* of the time. As the philosopher continues, he paints rather accurate portraits of injustice, of broken promises, of suffering under wicked leaders, of crime, of disregard for wisdom, of the uncertainty of the future. All these realities lead him to say that "all is useless." ~~He~~ *He even says* - "There is nothing at all to look forward to."

On and on, the whole book goes with this dismal stuff. And yet as dismal as it is, many people when reading it will be shaking their heads in agreement. In fact, time after time I have sat with people in this congregation and heard them paraphrase the very core of this philosopher's discourse. But why?? Why does he feel this way - and why do we so often feel this way??

Why does he say "all is useless?" Why do we say "It's not really worth it?" Why do we say "I've about had it" or "I'm ready to throw in the towel?" Why did I have such strong feelings of resigning this past week?? What causes a person to feel such meaninglessness -- such futility - such a feeling of being let down by life????

Well, obviously, I don't have all the answers. But one thing stands out clearly in this philosopher's life - and many times in ours. In the second chapter of Ecclesiastes, the word "I" appears 32 times (not to mention the other chapters). In addition, there are 22 instances of the words "My" "Me" or "Myself" in this chapter.

There is a great clue as to why this philosopher feels that "all is useless" -- because ~~the~~ the world *has* revolved around him and all his good works. All of his striving IS ONLY FOR HIMSELF.

*And so* He sees the world begin ~~ing~~ and end ~~ing~~ with him. ~~\_\_\_\_\_~~

Even in all his wisdom - he has been  
seduced by life - because all of his striving was  
CHASING AFTER EARTHLY THINGS -- the three P's--  
position, power, and possessions.

Obviously - there's nothing wrong with  
having any of these. Position, power, and  
possessions are all logical ambitions of  
living. But when they become the ultimate  
goal of existence -- then like the philosopher,  
we are left with his summation statement:  
then we are chasing after the winds, because  
none of these things are lasting.

Yes, the philosopher says "useless," and  
we feel like "it's not worth it" because *like him,*  
so often we lose a perspective on life. We fail  
to see that our existence in eternity is just  
but a brief second or two. And like the  
philosopher, we make that brief moment the ulti-  
mate goal of everything. Is it any wonder that  
he feels and we feel then that life is  
meaningless - hopeless.

Yes, when will we ever learn??

How sad that we often make secondary things  
the ultimate things. How sad to see some  
people stockpile and stockpile their investments  
in life -- and ALL THE WHILE THEIR DOING IT,  
they complain and gripe about life like this  
philosopher. Or like the man in the gospel  
story -- who builds barns and is always waiting  
for a better day before he will acknowledge  
that he is a transient creature on earth.

How sad that people like me let little things  
get them down -- as if those little things  
were equal to eternity itself. How sad that  
we will sometimes make impulsive and rash  
decisions just because "our feelings are hurt."

Yes - how often we equate God's eternity with  
one thing or one little piece of creation. I'm  
reminded of that when thinking about a discussion  
I had with a family the other evening.

The ~~man~~ <sup>person</sup> had lost her first husband when she

Motto: You only live once - so  
get all the goods you can.

PENTECOST XI

Luth Church of the Master, Troy

July 27 / July 30

"BREAD, PLEASE!?"

The text: The miracle of the feeding of ~~the~~ 5,000.

In 1972 a chartered plane flew from Montevideo for Chile. It carried 15 members of a rugby team, along with 25 others. The plane crashed into the side of the Andes mountains. Only 16 of the 45 passengers survived. They stayed alive by eating the flesh of the dead passengers.

Two of the team set out to find some help. They struggled across huge mountains and after many days came across a peasant keeping watch over his flock in a remote valley of the Andes. At first the farmer thought the two men were terrorists. But the next morning he was back and the two survivors frantically tried to make him understand. But the roar of the river between them made it impossible to hear.

So the survivors tied a message explaining who they were to a rock - and threw it across the river. In return, the farmer cut off a piece of bread - tied it to a rock - and threw it across to them. As the two men held the bread in their hands, one turned to the other and said: "We are saved."

We might say with great truth THAT BREAD IS THE STAPLE OF SALVATION. It saves from starvation - and as the Bread of Life, namely Christ - it saves from spiritual death. *Truly a symbol of salvation.*

In a fashionable Manhattan church, the pastor was urging the people to come forward to receive bread and wine of Communion. A little girl in poor clothing had slipped into the back of the church and had heard the pastor's appeal. She walked down to the front, and stood timidly before the pastor, and then said: "I am hungry. Bread, please."

While the majority had come for spiritual food, one had come that morning for physical food. And that is the whole purpose of Christ's *earthly ministry*: to satisfy the two basic needs of humanity - bread for

the body and bread for the soul. Though man does not live by bread alone, he cannot live without bread. That's the point of the miracle of the feeding of the 5000 -- that Jesus' compassion is not one-dimensional. He came to offer the spiritual and physical bread of life at the same time.

And any church - any group of disciples seeking to be faithful to their Lord - must be a church and body of disciples that seeks to offer both the physical and the spiritual to a hungry world. God created man WITH BOTH OF THESE BASIC NEEDS. His *INTENTIONS* is that both of these needs are taken care of FOR ALL PEOPLE IN THE WORLD.

A church which proclaims the word without offering physical bread IS A CHURCH suffering from malnutrition. And a church that offers only physical bread without the spiritual word is a body of Christ that is suffocating. *The body of Christ nurtures the whole man - both physical and spiritual.*

*There you have* it! That's the essence of this miracle story. I could quit now -- merely leaving you with the message that as Christ's church, bread is important -- and God calls us to dispense both the physical and *his* spiritual *power* to a hungry world. *nutrients*

But it's too easy to hear that without looking beyond the crust of this text. The text becomes more real when we really get into the inner dough of Jesus' compassion. That's the real stuff of this miracle -- and I would like to briefly share the realities of his compassion under three emphases of this text: THE CALL to compassion - THE CARE of compassion - and THE CONSEQUENCES of compassion.

First, the call. Note that in this text Matthew talks about a crowd. Immediately, the Christian knows he is not dealing with a devoted church community. Jesus is here dealing with all kinds of people - faithful, pagans, immoral people, misfits, - the whole gamut. And what is Jesus' first response to this hodge-podge of humanity: HE HAD COMPASSION ON THEM. *HE HEALED THEM.*

Now compare this to his disciples' response. They urged Jesus to send the crowd away to villages so they can buy their own food. Typical selfish Christians - those

disciples. As far as they were concerned, Jesus had done his preaching. So send the crowds home. After all, feeding all those people was a serious economic problem. Here again we see the disciples suffering from some of their typical problems -- lack of confidence in Christ -- and a one-dimensional view of Jesus' ministry... they had separated the physical from the spiritual needs of humanity.

As Jesus' 20th century disciples -- where do we find ourselves in this issue of spiritual and physical. Like the disciples, how many of us cop out to economics when Christ calls for compassion?? There are so many areas of human need - but let's just take hunger for an example. Today, the hungry crowd does not number 5000-- it's more like 5000 times 5000 -- 25 million starving people.

Does that move us to compassion at all -- especially when we know that 50% of our American population is overweight. As Americans, we spend 10 billion dollars each year on diets and slimming programs... that's more than half of what the federal government spends on public assistance (welfare). A recent report even indicates that 40% of our dogs are overweight -- dog food companies are now producing "Fit & Trim" diet dog food.

You can see why the Lutheran Church in America in convention in Chicago voted to extend the World Hunger Appeal through 1980. Because the real point of this text is THAT BEFORE ANYTHING CAN BE DONE ABOUT HUNGER OR ANY OTHER HUMAN NEED -- there must be someone who possesses the quality of compassion. And that's why Jesus Christ calls his disciples to compassion - because where there's a heart, there's a way.

But we dare not kid ourselves -- Jesus wants more than a bunch of bleeding hearts. He says in very clear words to his disciples: "YOU GIVE THEM SOMETHING TO EAT!" Miracles never happen just because someone is in the right frame of mind - it takes more than religious talk and peity and prayer for miracles to happen. The CARE OF COMPASSION is when disciples put forth effort -- in today's society that means time, talent & treasure.

Please take notice of these very important details in this picnic that Jesus shared with the crowd. First, I again repeat what I just said: For the miracle to happen, the disciples has to distribute the food. The implications of that should be very clear to all of us.

But the second ingredient is even more tremendous. In Jewish circles, if you ate with someone IT MEANT THAT YOU HAD PAID THE PERSON THE HIGHEST COMPLIMENT -- it was a sign of total acceptance. And here is Jesus eating with everyone! What a radical acceptance of humanity! There's no discrimination at the Lord's table -- he does not pick and choose who will come to dinner with him.

That's the CARE OF COMPASSION. When we get beyond being a bleeding hearts club -- and start distributing our abundance. And moreover, when we begin to break down the false barriers of status -- reaching out to all people with the spiritual & physical bread of life.

And that brings us to the CONSEQUENCES OF COMPASSION. Just take a gander at the beginning of this miracle story: we're told that Jesus withdrew to a lonely place. Here was this man with all this miraculous power from God -- and he goes off to be by himself. Why?

Just read the first 13 chapters of Matthew! Or read the first 12 verses of chap. 14. Jesus had been rejected NOT ONLY BY THE PEOPEL OF STATUS AND POWER, but he had even been rejected by his friends in his home town, Nazareth. *John the Baptist - beheaded.*

Those are the consequences of compassion - rejection, persecution, and sometimes even EXECUTION. That's the way the World often responds to Jesus call & care of compassion. That's the way the powerful, the wealthy, the self-righteous REACT to compassion.

Just think about your own circumstances. How do you react to the human need of others? What's the first thing you think of? Is it economics?? Or do you say, let them take care of themselves! That kind of response is the surest sign of self-righteousness. It's a flat-out contradiction of the compassion of Christ.

But Jesus remains the same yesterday and today. He continues to call us to compassion -- he continues to urge US TO DO THE FEEDING - both physically and spiritually! Because that's the true nature of *faithful* disciples. AME



PENTECOST XI  
Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo  
August 4 & 7, 1983  
Peter R. Martyn, Pastor

"SECURITY OR ADDICTION?"

And Jesus said to them, "Take heed, and beware of all covetousness; for a mans life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."

Luke 12:15

Recently there has been much concern about problems of addiction and abuse in our society. This attention is long overdue. Drug and alcohol addiction has devastated many individuals and families. You will note that the August edition of the News of Hope reflects some of the serious consequences of drug and alcohol abuse in our culture.

But there is another kind of addiction that is equally threatening. Just like drugs, alcohol, gambling and other addictions -- it manifests the same insatiable craving. Today's fix is never enough. It is an alarming addiction known as material and financial greed (the Bible uses the word covetousness = greed). The greedy man's version of "I'll quit tomorrow" is -- I'll have enough to be satisfied tomorrow. But tomorrow never comes.

Possibly you know someone with this disease. A one-time good friend of mine from a former congregation suffered this disease. When I first came to know him -- he was a great person to talk to; in fact, he was one of the first people in that congregation who took the time to care and share.

But it was only two years later that he had become a total addict. He was so addicted to his own world of financial money-making that he couldn't even take the time to answer several of my letter and inquiries. All he craved was more money and more success. The more he accumulated, the more insecure he became. He soon needed a fix that was twice as big as the last one. Today he is helplessly addicted to the accumulation of something -- which of course, will not last ... may not even last 'til next year. Much like a drug addict -- it hurts me when I think HOW IN JUST TWO SHORT YEARS he surrendered Christianity, his church, me AND MANY MEANINGFUL relationships in order to pursue the accumulation of wealth!

Jesus does not mince words with a person like this -- he calls this kind of a man a "fool." Please don't misunderstand our Lord. He was not seeking to put-down people who are concerned about security; he understood that was a reality of life -- we all need enough to comfortably survive. Likewise, Jesus was not saying there is anything inherently wrong with material success.

But he was saying that material success and financial greed **QUICKLY CAN LEAD** to omitting God from our lives. Or applied to Jesus' term "fool" -- the fool is the person who only seeks perishables in life. And unfortunately -- there are many such fools in this world.

When perishable things become the governing principle of one's life --- when we merely live to stockpile our IRA's, our bonds, our bankrolls or whatever -- **THEN JESUS SAYS WE HAVE LOST SIGHT OF GOD**. That was the problem of the farmer in Jesus' parable.

This farmer was probably a pretty good guy at one time -- in fact, he still was probably very respected in his community. He would probably have been the kind of businessman many of us would have admired. He worked very hard; consecrated himself to long hours; never took vacations; managed his holdings and labor force very well; and invested his returns in good bluechip stocks. All this enabled him to become a millionaire farmer. Up to this point -- his story sounds pretty good; a real rags to riches success story.

But something went wrong. Somewhere along the line his wealth caused him to forget the meaning of life. He confused ownership with stewardship. He was no longer a manager of God's resources (good steward) -- he was now accumulating for the sake of accumulating. His possessions had become his God. Like an alcoholic or drug user -- he had become an addict -- addicted to greed; a prisoner of his own possessions.

He was like the man in New York City who one day received a copy of the New York Times -- but the copy was dated a year in advance. It was a gold mine; it had all the stock returns for the next year spelled out in black and white. The man was ecstatic; he began to dial his stockbroker while he was turning to the next page; there is bold print were the obituaries; and among them was his death notice.

Like the farmer and the New York investor - we are all tempted daily to become addicted to greed (covetousness). Esp in our culture-- because our culture has often made this kind of addiction socially acceptable. We will not tolerate drug abuse; we will not promote alcoholism; but too often we will encourage MATERIAL ADDICTION - even among our friends. And we all know the results of such addiction -- overwhelming pressures; oftentimes great anxiety & worry; sometimes divorces or depressions; and even sometimes suicide.

I believe that we're here tonite because we know there is a better way. Each of us wants security -- but none of us wants addiction. And we're here because we believe that God offers security and things lead to addiction.

Contrary to a lot of popular opinion -- we know that Jesus talks very straight about money and possessions. Even more than sex -- Jesus saw how the worship of possessions can become humanity's greatest evil. He had a different philosophy for the good life.

For Jesus - the issue is not whether we are rich or poor -- millionaire or migrant. Jesus did not seek to insult the rich or degrade the poor. He sought to foster a consistent lifestyle for everyone -- NAMELY -- to encourage everyone to become an artist of giving rather than an addict of taking.

Jesus called this BECOMING RICH TOWARD GOD. That sounds much like a religious cliché. But it really is so much more. Becoming RICH TOWARD GOD INVOLVES two simple principles of the good life: LOOKING BEYOND YOURSELF; LOOKING BEYOND THE WORLD.

Jesus lived by two simple principles of the good life: he looked beyond himself and he looked beyond the world. He literally lived the third article of the creed: HE BELIEVED IN THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS, THE RESURRECTION OF THE BODY, AND LIFE EVERLASTING. He lived for others ... he lived for eternal values ... he lived for relationships that will not perish. He lived to become rich toward God!!

And who are those people over the centuries who have been known to be rich toward God?? They are the ones like Jesus himself -- the ones who have mastered the art of giving!! Names like Abe Lincoln ... Winston Churchill ... Mahatma Ghandi ... Martin Luther King. These are the ones who became

rich toward God -- because they mastered the greatest art of life -- THE ART OF GIVING.

Think about those who are remembered for their greed and obsession with security; Adolph Hitler; Stalin, Mussolini; Joseph McCarthy; and a host of Roman emperors.

The ones we cherish in life are the ones who have shown us the art of giving. There was none greater than Jesus of Nazareth. He continues to give us his body...his blood... the very essence of his life in the Lord's Supper. He continues to be the total contradiction of greed and material addiction for this world. That's why we continue to proclaim that he is THE WAY, THE TRUTH, AND THE GOOD LIFE for all who are looking for ultimate rewards and everlasting success!

AMEN

PENTECOST XI  
Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo  
August 4 & 7, 1988  
Peter R. Martyn, Pastor

## "THE HIGHER HUNGER"

Put off your old nature which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and put on the new nature, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. Eph. 4:23-24

Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; he who comes to me shall not hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst." John 6:35

One writer has recently written that we live in a hungry world ... where almost everyone and everything has its mouth open for more -- from the tiniest baby bird in its nest ... to the smallest minnow or goldfish in a pond or bowl ... to the hugest hoppototamus or man-eating plant in "Little Shop of Horrors" - EVERYONE IN THIS WORLD HAS HIS/HER MOUTH WIDE OPEN SAYING "FEED ME ... MORE." For lack of a better description, I would call this "the lower hunger of the world" -- our basic need to fill our bellies.

No matter what we call it, we can't manage in this life very long without satisfying this lower hunger. Upon arriving home last Sunday evening near midnite -- my first task after unloading the car was to get some bread and milk for breakfast. So there I was after midnight -- searching for bread and milk - my 1st agenda to satisfy the lower hunger of Monday breakfast.

Thankfully - God has given us a wonderful array of things that satisfy our lower hunger. Sometimes we preachers get down on the basic appetites of humanity -- our basic need for food, shelter, security and sensual & sexual satisfaction -- what a blessing that God has created us with the need to fulfill these basic desires. BUT AS WITH EVERY GOOD THING OF CREATION, THERE IS A REAL DANGER WITH THESE HUN- GERS -- WE CAN MAKE THEM THE ULTIMATE REASON FOR LIVING!

That was certainly illustrated to perfection by me on our most recent week of vacation in Door County, Wisconsin. Talk about making the "lower hungers" the essence of life. We took along five bikes, we took tents and sleeping bags ... even though we were staying in a totally furnished condominium overlooking beautiful Green Bay; we took along the VCR plus table games galore; we filled the refrigerator with succulent steaks, chicken, sandwich meats & snacks; we had a swimming pool and two tennis courts on the property; just a few miles away was a sandy beach and nearby horse riding stable; within walking distance was a 27-hole golf course and charter fishing dock; an amusement park with go-carts was just a six mile drive; there were shops and antique boutiques all over the place. Talk about having all the lower hungers at your finger tips. But even with all these things -- there were still moments of boredom. More than once, the children were heard to say: "What's there to do? There's nothing to do here!"

Isn't it amazing? We travel to Wisconsin with a U-Haul stuffed with all the pleasurable things of this world ... and it still isn't enough! Talk about making the lower hungers the essence of living. Isn't it tragic: TOO OFTEN WE DEFINE LIFE AS DOING PLEASURABLE THINGS RATHER THAN BEING LOVABLE PEOPLE. We think that our purchasing - and our parading - and our playing with things is the answer to the hunger of our lives.

But soon we learn like Mill Valley, California -- true satisfaction must transcend our tummies. Tom Sine in his book, WHY SETTLE FOR MORE AND MISS THE BEST?, says that Mill Valley, California is nationally touted as one of the most desirable suburban communities in the U.S. The residences there begin at a million and go up from there. Driveways display sparkling arrays of Porches, BMWs, Mercedes, and Winnebagos. The schools have the latest state-of-the-art computers, labs, and video technology. At Christmas, living rooms look like transplanted department stores.

But recent research shows a very different side of Mill Valley. Those fabulous dream homes mask one of the highest levels of drug and alcohol abuse in the nation. Teen suicides and family breakups are at critical highs. Filling all the lower hungers of life still leaves a lot of emptiness.

Zig Ziglar in his book, RAISING POSITIVE KIDS IN A NEGATIVE WORLD, tells of a well-known Hollywood TV commentator. The commentator was being asked about the suicidal death of comedian Freddie Prinz. Finally, the question was asked, "Do you know of any other superstars in athletics, music, movies, TV, or the entertainment field who might also be in danger of taking their own lives?" After a moments reflection, this commentator answered: "I don't know of any famous person in these fields who is not in danger -- because I don't know of a single famous person who is truly content." Even satisfying the lower hunger of fame does not fill the void.

Right in the Bible itself we have the perfect story of a man who saw the lower hungers as the ultimate satisfaction in life. The prodigal had a hunger for independence, he wanted the thrill and excitement of living high and fast and wild ... freedom from the dull routine of farmwork. But all too soon, this sensuous bread and wine ... the thrills and frills became scraps of leftover food and drink. Suddenly the prodigal realized there is a higher hunger to be satisfied -- a longing for home, family, love, respect, integrity, and lasting relationships. He had been DOING ALL KINDS OF NEAT THINGS, but HE HAD YET TO BECOME A REAL PERSON!

And that's precisely Jesus' message in today's text: when we make our lower hungers our ultimate goal, we always come away unsatisfied ... still hungry for more.

Jesus affirms the importance of the lower hungers of life -- that's where John 6 began last week: FIRST, JESUS SATISFIES THE NEED FOR NOURISHMENT ... he feeds the 5000. But after Jesus leaves the crowd, they come after him ... seeking more of the same bread. They want Jesus to become THE TYPICAL "BREAD WINNER" - to give them more for their mouths, more things, more stuff, more power, more wealth, to satisfy their greedy desire for more and more. Immediately Jesus challenges them: "Your vision of the good life must get beyond your bellies ... there is a higher hunger, which cannot be satisfied with material stuff.

It is that higher hunger that Jesus Christ seeks to satisfy -- and it is that higher hunger which is the essence of our ministry in the name of Jesus Christ. Possibly that higher hunger is best described by the words of Carl Tucker as he was commenting upon an upcoming national election several years ago. He said, "To accomplish the task before us, our next President will need a vision -- not just of how to cope, but of where to grow, and why. Americans need more than a promise of more prosperity ... of more net worth for themselves. As much as we need full employment, more importantly, we need full involvement. We need to lift our eyes beyond special interests and move toward national and global interests. Above all, we need as Americans to believe again that we have been placed here on earth to fulfill some important purpose ... some global purpose."

Carl Tucker's words are certainly most fitting in 1988 for the Bush and Dukakis campaigns. And they are certainly a reflection of the campaign of Jesus Christ for the past 2000 years. The real substance that truly satisfies our real hunger IS NOT A THING, but a person -- namely, Jesus Christ. Our higher hunger in life is for an experience of personal satisfaction rather than mere material sustenance. Our vision, our purpose, our holiness as Christians is that we have moved away from worshipping THINGS AS OUR GOD to worshipping a PERSON AS OUR GOD.

And that person has shown us the way, the truth and the life that leads to fully satisfying life's hungers. It begins first of all with Holy Baptism -- believing from deep within ourselves that we are fully forgiven and accepted by God. And then it means living like fully forgiven and accepted persons - being changed, being renewed. Or as St. Paul says today, putting off the old nature ... the greedy nature, and putting on the new nature ... the likeness of God.

But since we know we suffer from the greatest addiction of all time -- the addiction to sin -- it also means that we take every opportunity to be fed anew by this person called Jesus Christ - the bread of life. So every time he offers his transforming love, we eat and we drink -- not for material sustenance, but to be changed again, to be renewed again, to be transformed into the likeness of his image.

That's why we gather at this table to eat this little scrap of bread and drink this tiny cup of wine -- NOT BECAUSE THERE IS ANY REAL FOOD VALUE IN IT, BUT BECAUSE OUR HIGHEST HUNGER IS BEING SATISFIED. We are being made into new persons again ... we are being transformed from the old into the new ... we are being made into the likeness of Christ.

And I ask each of you -- what greater likeness could you possible be given in the world. Is there any superstar that can compare to Jesus Christ? Is there any material worth than transcends the value of his life? Is there any food that can compare with the Bread of Life, the very Son of God? Is there anyone or anything that can better satisfy our hunger and thirst for real righteousness and the real love of God?? Can there be any question that Jesus Christ is truly the bread of life come down from heaven??

Come, take and eat. Come, take and drink. And in so doing, put on the new nature, created after the likeness of God -- become the holiness and righteousness of Christ in the world. Become the body of Christ that satisfies the real hungers of the world -- the need for love, mercy, forgiveness, compassion, understanding, acceptance. Become the body of Christ for a world filled to the brim with material things, but starving to death for the real bread of life!

AMEN.



PENTECOST XI  
Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo  
August 16 & 19, 1990  
Peter R. Martyn, Pastor

"B R E A D , P L E A S E ! ? !"

As he went ashore, he saw a great throng; and he had compassion on them, and healed their sick. Matt. 14:23

In a fashionable Manhattan church, the pastor was urging the people to come forward to receive "the Bread of Life" - obviously, the bread of Holy Communion. A little girl, very poorly dressed, had slipped into the back of the church and had heard the pastor's generous appeal. She immediately walked down to the front and stood timidly before the pastor saying, "Bread, Please!?!". He offered her a piece of the Communion bread. And she remained standing before him: "More Please - More Bread, Please!?!"

While the majority of parishoners that morning had come for spiritual bread, there was one who was seeking physical bread. And God, being the extravagant God that he is, not only fully satisfies our spiritual needs ... but he equally provides for our physical needs. God satisfies all human hunger - the bread for the body and the bread for the soul. These lessons, esp. the feeding of the 5,000, so graphically proclaim OUR GOD AS THE GRACIOUS GIVER OF ALL BREAD! Whether the freely given bread of baptism, or bread of communion, or bread of your dinner table, God just keeps bringing it on!

You all know there are many interpretations of the feeding of the 5,000 -- ranging from a simple miracle of multiplication, to a miracle of sharing, to the miracle of sacramental healing of the Lord's Supper -- but there is ONE underlying point to all of these interpretations: THE COMPASSION OF JESUS CHRIST IS NOT ONE-DIMENSIONAL. He came to make clear that God seeks to satisfy both the human need for the physical as well as the spiritual bread of life.

A church which proclaims the spiritual word of healing without offering physical bread to the needy is a church suffering from malnutrition. Likewise, a church that offers physical bread to the needy without the spiritual word of healing is a church suffering from the poverty of materialism. The true body of Christ nurtures the whole person - giving both the physical & spiritual bread of life!

That's the essence of this miracle story. I could quit right now (while I'm ahead and still being heard). I could leave you with this profoundly simple but gracious message: GOD IS THE EXTRAVAGANT GIVER OF ALL BREAD OF LIFE. God fully satisfies the spiritual and physical hunger of humanity.

But if I stopped here I'd only be giving you the crust of the gospel. We'd only be viewing the surface of the BREAD OF LIFE -- we'd be overlooking the inner dough. THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST NOT ONLY SHOWS US THE ABUNDANT GRACIOUSNESS OF OUR GOD -- IT ALSO CHALLENGES US TO GIVE BACK WHAT GOD HAS SO GRACIOUSLY FIRST GIVEN! God blesses and breaks his body for us in order that we might be HIS BREAD OF LIFE FOR OTHERS.

The real stuff of this gospel-miracle is not the multiplication of bread ... but the EXTRAVAGANT COMPASSION that serves to make Jesus Christ the miracle-maker. That's the challenge of this gospel ... or let us say today the three challenges of this gospel - THE CALL of compassion, THE CARE of compassion, and THE CONSEQUENCES of compassion.

First, the CALL of compassion. The story of the feeding of 5,000 makes crystal clear that COMPASSION is not some kind of isolated religious virtue that has no relationship to real PHYSICAL life. Too often people accuse religion of being so heavenly oriented that it's no earthly good. Well this text graphically states that religious compassion is totally oriented to earthly goodness and human need. We're told that Jesus wanted to get away and be alone; he was particularly grieving the news of John the Baptist's death. "But the throng followed him on foot." They were hungry for his presence; and they were hungry for something to eat.

By his own nature, Jesus was tired of serving - he wanted to be alone. But the human of hunger and healing were all around him. And Christ's response teaches that COMPASSION is the ACTION called for when human need is recognized. The disciples' natural response was to send the crowd away empty. The Call of Christ's Compassion was: "They need not go away; you give them something to eat."

I have been told that the average person blinks his eyes 13 times every minute. I have also been told that 13 people starve to death every minute in this world. That means, of course, that every time you and I blink our eyes, another person dies of starvation. (Not guilt trip.) Christ's Call of Compassion seeks to miraculously change these statistics.

Tom Peterson in an article in Christian Century characterized world hunger with this imagery. He said, "Imagine a DC-10 preparing to land; it's filled with pre-school children. Some are sleeping; some are playing and laughing in the aisles; some are crying for attention. But just before landing, something goes wrong and the plane plummets to the ground killing all aboard. Then ten minutes later -- even before emergency vehicles arrive -- another DC-10 of children crashes right next to the first. Ten minutes later, a third crashes. And the tragedy continues -- every ten minutes a jet falls to earth, all day and all night, day after day, week after week, month after month, year after year. That kind of death by physical hunger is not some far-fetched story of Tom Peterson. Every single day - 40,000 children die from hunger-related diseases.

All of a sudden a miracle of feeding 5,000 doesn't seem like so much, does it? Is it any wonder that Christ's Call of Compassion has not diminished over these 2000 years? Only the Compassion of Jesus Christ can miraculously transform human hunger. But physical hunger alone is not the only human need calling for Christ-like compassion. The daily newspapers are filled with stories of

people hungering for the spiritual bread of life -- for healing, for mercy, for forgiveness, for understanding, for tolerance, for patience, for gentleness, for self-control. We don't even need to read the paper - that same hunger pervades this very room. Human greed, guilt, gouging, and grief has caused rampant hunger in this world. Throngs of people are seeking the presence of a Christ figure who will offer compassion rather than condemnation; someone who will offer the spiritual bread of caring rather than the crumbs of complaining or chastising; someone who will take time to touch and hold, to talk and hug rather than just run-on-by "I've got my own agendas to get done."

Just this week, a member courageously told me how I had recently been so intent on my agenda - that I had totally by-passed his presence. Obviously, that happens to all of us; esp. to pastors on Sunday mornings when everybody is trying to grab a little crust of the pastor. Thankfully God offers us the spiritual bread of forgiveness to share when we have had those moments. But he also calls us to his level of compassion. He says: "Do not allow anyone to go away physically or spiritually hungry. You give them something to eat." Just in telling me his feelings, we had an opportunity to feed one another with the bread of life.

Obviously, that commission is not only the Call of Compassion - it is also the Care of Compassion. Like the disciples, too often we've heard the CALL OF COMPASSION, but we think it's somebody else's business TO DO THE CARING. As was stated by the disciples: "This is a lonely place, and the day is now over; send the crowds away to go into the village and buy food for themselves." But Jesus took the loaves and fish, he blessed and broke them, AND THEN GAVE THEM TO THE DISCIPLES ... AND THE DISCIPLES DISTRIBUTED THEM TO THE CROWDS. It seems pretty obvious from this story that the miracle of feeding REALLY HAPPENS in this world when ALL disciples become care-givers of compassion. That seems to be the model that Christ has chosen to get the work of feeding done in the world.

The facts are -- God has not been cheap in his grace to the world. One author has said that Americans eat 228,000 bushels of onions every day. That's a lot of bad breath. But even with this consumption of a quarter million bushels of onions per day, the earth keeps on producing more and more. And that's just onions. That doesn't count corn, green beans, and the multitude of other goods that God has extravagantly given to us as Americans. We have 5.7% of the world's population, and we consume half of the world's goods. How dare we ever say, "this is a lonely, deprived place ... send the crowds away into other villages and buy food for themselves." God has extravagantly blessed us - both physically and spiritually. No one dare claim that he or she has been deprived of the bread of life.

I am reminded of the story of a famous mayor from Toledo, Ohio who died not so long ago - Golden Rule Jones. During his term of office in the days of the Depression, he sometimes sat as presiding judge of the night court. One

night a man was arraigned for stealing money from a grocery store. His defense was that he needed the money for food; he pleaded that he was a victim of hard times. But Golden Rule Jones found him guilty. Jones said, "You did not steal from society, you stole from a private citizen trying to make a living. I'm fining you ten dollars." At that point, Jones reached into his wallet and said: "I'll pay the fine for you." And then he instructed the bailiff to pass the hat around the courtroom and he said to everyone there: "I'm fining everyone in this courtroom 50 cts; you are all guilty of being members of a society that has forced this man to steal in order to feed his family with a loaf of bread. The collection will go to the defendant!

Golden Rule Jones had become a true advocate of divine righteousness -- both justice and mercy were offered to the defendant. Christ calls for care-givers of that same righteousness today. It is not right for anyone to rip off society because he/she feels deprived. Such actions will lead to the justice of juries and jails. But it is equally not right for a society to deprive anyone of the basic need for the bread of life.

God has established the church to be the caregiver and conscience for this basic need in society. The church is God's divine instrument of compassion in this world. God commands that this body be HIS caregiver and conscience for the spiritual and physical bread of life. He has extravagantly provided his grace to this community -- this table and the bread given here reminds us THAT THERE IS NOTHING THAT CAN SEPARATE US FROM THE LOVE OF GOD IN JESUS CHRIST. And likewise, this becomes the community where God reminds those of us who have been materially blessed TO BE COMPASSIONATE CAREGIVERS IN THE SAME PROPORTION TO WHICH WE HAVE RECEIVED - to break and sacrifice what we have for the good of others.

And what are the CONSEQUENCES when the disciples have heard that Call and given that Care -- "and they all ate and were satisfied ... and they took up 12 baskets full of leftovers." The CONSEQUENCES are that miracles of feeding happen. Or to speak theologically - the kingdom of heaven comes down to earth. And as we learned last week from Bishop Rave and the previous week from Pastor Silleck -- that's the ultimate goal of our faith and ministry ... that the kingdom of God will be experienced daily in our lives. That we will be a people who feed one another not only with physical bread, but with mercy & forgiveness, with understanding & tolerance, with patience, gentleness and self-control.

Possibly the story of the little boy who had heard about Dr. Schweitzer's work in Africa best summarizes the yeast of compassion and its miraculous results as the bread of life. The little boy was moved to help Schweitzer; he had enough money to buy one bottle of aspirin. So he wrote the U.S. Air Force and asked if they could fly over Dr. Schweitzer's hospital and drop his bottle down to Schweitzer. A radio

station began broadcasting this young boy's concern for helping others thru Dr. Schweitzer (that's called the proclamation of the gospel). Others began to respond to this little boy's compassionate caregiving. Eventually, he was flown by the U.S. government to Dr. Schweitzer's hospital along with 4-1/2 tons of medical supplies worth some \$400,000 freely given by thousands who responded to one little word from a radio station. Christ's call of compassion began with one radio station. Christ's care of compassion began with one little boy who had one bottle of aspirin. And the consequences of that call and care led to 4-1/2 tons of medical supplies. Dare we ever say that our single offering will not serve as the beginning of a miracle??

Like that little girl in Manhattan, we each stand before our Lord saying, "Bread, Please!?" And he says, "Take and eat, this is my body given for you. Nothing can separate you from my love." So, what will you and I do the next time we hear someone else say, "Bread, Please!?" I sincerely hope that we will give as Christ has first given -- that we will be Christ's caregivers who enable the consequences of another feeding of 5,000, or 400,000, or the 35,000 FYN recipients right here in Toledo, Ohio. God bless you for being his compassionate CARE-GIVERS AND CONSCIENCE for this world.

AMEN.

MARY, THE MOTHER OF OUR LORD (Pentecost 11)  
Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo  
August 12 & 15, 1993  
Peter R. Martyn, Pastor

## "AVE MARIA ?"

Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant." Luke 1:46

"Hail Mary full of grace, the Lord is with Thee,  
blessed art thou amongst women;  
Blessed is the fruit of thy womb (Jesus);  
Hail Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners  
and at the hour of our death. Amen."

Although most of us Lutherans never said this "Ave Maria" as a regular part of our daily devotions, most of us can remember times when we heard it being said during rosaries and other meditational moments. Many times, we found it somewhat distasteful -- because it just seemed to be rattled away without much meaning or deep personal conviction. And the concluding verse was particularly distressful to Lutherans ... appealing to Mary "to pray for us" and thus giving her intercessory power. It just seemed to be another one of those superstitious prayers rotely repeated by our Roman Catholic friends.

But then there was that other "Ave Maria." This one has the same lyrics, but it's tune was written by Schubert. (Have Claire play a few bars) As we all know, this rendition is captivating and uplifting; I would guess that more than 75% of the Lutheran weddings for which I officiate want to include this "Ave Maria" as a meditational moment. I have rarely heard any Lutheran offer even the slightest foul words about this lilting lullaby of "Ave Maria."

Never let it be said that Lutherans are predictable. On the one hand, we despise one form of the "Ave Maria;" on the other hand, we are captivated by another. And this ambivalence about "Ave Maria" is quite characteristic of the way we feel about Mary in general. Probably, most Lutherans will be shocked today to even realize that our lectionary actually includes a commemoration day for Mary, Mother of our Lord. (Altho, I understand Silleck warned you.)

Recently, Lutheran and Roman Catholic theologians completed the 7th treatise of Lutherans & Roman Catholics in Dialogue. This treatise is entitled: "The One Mediator, the Saints, and Mary." In their conclusions, theologians from both church bodies affirm "that Christ and Christ alone is the sole mediator of God's plan of salvation; devotion to Mary and other saints is not to be practiced so as to detract from our trust in Christ." It is good and clarifying that both Luth and R Cath theologians affirm this strong conviction to Christ as the only mediator of God.

But just like the classic ambivalence Lutherans have about Mary -- the treatise is very weak in that it does not encourage Lutherans to become more willing to be educated and understanding of the life, obedience and devotion that has surrounded Mary for many years (to say nothing of just getting to know a female saint better).

In fact, Lutherans have strongly retreated from their own reformer's admiration of St. Mary (I only know of one St. Mary's Luth Church/America). Not only did Luther retain the "Hail Mary" in his 1522 "Personal Prayer Book," but he said in his Works: "no greater thing could God have done than that Mary became the Mother of God. (Did you hear that: Luther described Mary as the "Mother of God" - that's a strong affirmation of Mary and motherhood!) He goes on to say: For on (Mary) there follows all honor, all blessedness, and her unique place in all humanity -- she has no equal: namely, that she had a child by God the Father in heaven."

It should be obvious: Martin Luther would have much preferred that we study the life and faith of Mary rather than studying his life and faith. But I think one of the great Lutheran theologians of our own century, Joseph Sittler, says it better than anyone I have ever read. In his sermon at Rockefeller Chapel on Mother's Day in the 1960's he said: "Protestant Christianity has been so concerned to say what Mary IS NOT that we have ignored what SHE IS. So fearful are we of wild and sometimes idolatrous veneration of the Blessed Virgin that we have withheld any veneration at all. This is to evade the fact that the way to correct imbalance is to teach balance, not to damn imbalance with silence. ... It is not strange, but right and proper, that her meaning should be declared and her praise sung from Protestant pulpits. If we can find it in our competence in this place to hail the witness to the faith of Luther, of Augustine, of Paul, of Peter, of Calvin, of Wesley (and the list of male saints goes on and on) ... how grudging before God never to utter an Ave Maria - Hail Mary!

So today at last from at least one Protestant pulpit is heard an Ave Maria - a Hail Mary. But we must be mindful that that's exactly where the problems and dangers of commemorating saints began for Protestants. Protestants always feared that too much focus upon Mary or any other great saints would lead to immortalizing the saints rather than glorifying God for the faith of these saints. As I have often said in funeral sermons for deeply faithful members: "My purpose today is not to glorify this person, but to glorify God who could inspire such faith and obedience from this person." And that's what we must be about today!! Not HAILING MARY, but GLORIFYING GOD FOR THE FAITH & OBEDIENCE REVEALED BY MARY. We Lutherans have been just as guilty as any tradition of violating the focus of our faith. Far too often our Reformation celebrations have ended up glorifying St. Martin rather than glorifying God who gave us this great reformer. In fact, Mary being the

lowly and faithful servant that she was ... she would be greatly embarrassed by all the adoration and relics and rosaries that have been created to immortalize her over the past 2000 years. Too often the commemoration of saints' days causes idolization rather than honoring of these great witnesses.

To properly commemorate Mary -- and thanks be to God that our male dominated faith has finally included the faithfulness and example of a woman -- but to properly commemorate Mary, we should not be singing or saying any "Hail Marys!" today! That's the problem we had with the old practices of Roman Catholicism. TOO MUCH DIVINITY AND POWER WAS ASSIGNED TO THIS WOMAN! Proper commemoration of Mary recognizes her obedience to God and faithfulness to Christ. That's it! That's the focus of commemoration!

So, what examples of obedience and faithfulness from Mary become sources of inspiration and guidance for our own obedience and faithfulness today?? To answer that question, we need only look at Mary's song of faithfulness, the Magnificat from our gospel text:

"My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant."

First and foremost, Mary's obedience & faithfulness involves getting herself and her ego out of the way so that God can be seen and glorified. Pastor Mark Ellingson in his commentary on the Magnificat says: "Mary does not try to promote herself and convince God what a great deal he has gotten by choosing her!" In other words, "true faithfulness is always transparent!" When we see through the person to see the greater power that is behind the person THEN WE HAVE TRULY ENCOUNTERED A FAITHFUL & OBEDIENT SERVANT.

How desperately we all need this example of obedience and faithfulness in our daily lives! True faith is one in which God inspires us to point away from ourselves and thank Him for the gifts that he has given us in the first place. Maybe that's why I am always a little uncomfortable at the Rotary meetings that I regularly attend. The international Rotary has a most commendable motto: SERVICE ABOVE SELF! And yet, often Rotary meetings are filled with never-ending litanies and praises and pats on the back for this little thing and that little thing! Obviously, I think people need affirmation for their efforts; but a little private note for things like becoming a grandparent would be more appropriate than a public display of pomp. And what's the real motivation for the Grandparents Club - is it "service above self" or the contribution expected for the Rotary Foundation? True "service above self" is simply giving because we have thankfully first received a special gift from God or others. That was the obedience and faithfulness of Mary: SHE RECOGNIZED THAT GOD HAD GIVEN HER THE MOST SPECIAL GIFT OF ALL CREATION - TO BEAR THE SAVIOR OF THE WORLD!



Secondly, Mary shows obedience and faithfulness by recognizing that God can choose the lowly -- in fact, often chooses the lowly -- to fulfill his divine mission in the world. How tragic that we live in a world which defies the importance of the lowly and the little guy. How pathetic that a woman must become a Janet Reno or Ruth Bader Ginsburg before she is given any credibility in this world; there is no more important task or higher credibility than becoming a mother in this world. How tragic that we so underrate this lowly yet most lofty role of womanhood. How further putrid that we live in a culture which says that "you're only a somebody if you regularly finish among the top ten finishers of the PGA or NBA or NCAA or whatever. Which one of us wouldn't delight in just being #250 or even higher on the PGA list?? And yet the kids said it graphically to me as I took them to Cedar Point on Tuesday: "Oh, Pastor, it's no big deal to get an autograph from one of the NOBODIES on the tour; we're only out to get Nickalaus and Norman and Nick Price!" What has caused us to so devalue ourselves and life just because we are not among the top ten?!?

How desperately we need to see the example of Mary -- that God can choose what is poor and insignificant and he can make that person the most blessed of all. How urgently we simply need to use the special gifts and graces that God has given us ... and be thankful for what we have!! RIGHT NOW AS PARENTS, GRANDPARENTS AND FELLOW MEMBERS OF THIS FAMILY OF FAITH -- we need to tell our children and each other that WE DON'T NEED TO BE AMONG THE TOP TEN TO BE VALUED BY GOD OR ANYONE ELSE. All we need to do is thank God for the special grace that we've been given -- and then use it ... and use it ... and use it to his glory, whether that gift be money or musical talent or planning ability or technical skill or gourmet cooking or simply hitting a golf ball less than 200 yards off the tee.

Lastly, Mary shows obedience and faithfulness to God by showing that she was hardly a submissive, timid "womanly servant." Instead, many today would call her a Christian radical -- for she sings of the liberation of the poor and the axing of the arrogant: "He has shown strength with his arm and scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts; he has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted those of low degree; he has filled the hungry with good things, & the (arrogant) rich He has sent empty away."

Mary's faith is in a God who will not allow power-brokers in society to undermine or impoverish anyone. Mary's obedience is to a God who will not tolerate injustice or bigotry or racism just because it happens to be the way of the rich and powerful. Mary's faith recognizes that religion and politics and economics and education and prayer have to be mixed together every day before there will be justice for all in any nation. For Mary, obedience and

faithfulness are not limited to an hour on the Sabbath morning; God's goodness and mercy must permeate every decision and every action in daily life.

Today we honor and commemorate Mary, the Mother of our Lord. But we don't do this by saying or singing "Hail Marys" or even beautiful "Ave Marias." We do this by uplifting the obedient and faithful example of this woman -- a woman who is honored for being the greatest Mother of God by offering "service above self." As God has used her to mother His son, may he use her again to mother this sacrificial faith and obedience from us!

AMEN.

*Pentecost XI  
Glenwood Lutheran Church, Toledo  
August 3, 1997  
Peter R. Martyn, Interim Pastor*

## **"FROM BELLY TO BELIEF!"**

*And Jesus said, 'Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. ... And this is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.' ... Then Jesus said, 'I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.' John 6:27, 29 35*

**A pastor once asked a female member of the church, "Does your husband believe in life after death?" to which the wife responded, "My husband doesn't believe in life after dinner." Like her husband, for many the priorities of life have but one focus: filling the belly & becoming couch potatoes. No greater temptation has faced every generation than merely filling the belly & the pocketbook.**

**That had become the reality for those following Jesus after he miraculously fed 5000 a day earlier. These people now envisioned the "good life" as crowning Jesus "Belly King!" After all, here was a guy who could "deliver the goods" in the time of need. And let's face it - there are times when people need that kind of savior. And certainly the people of Palestine often needed such a savior, for they had been hardened by poverty, hunger and famine. Just like anyone in poverty or hunger today - the temptation is often a "quick fix" with food or drugs thinking that will solve everything. Well, as stated last week -- when confronting poverty or hunger ... the first step is to offer shelter or food. But Jesus didn't stop there, and neither can we. Once the bellies were filled, Jesus asked the more important question: "NOW WHAT?" Now that your belly is full, what are you going to make of your life that will be more lasting than a belly of bread?**

**This was the genius of the gospel of John: he moves his readers from one level of need to a higher level of concern ... from the physical to the spiritual ... from one kind of consumption to a more profound appetite level -- from filling the belly to the deeper fullness of belief! That's the focus of today's Bread-of-Life-Theme which will be with us for a couple of weeks now: **WHAT DOES IT REALLY MEAN TO SAY, "I BELIEVE!"** Is "belief" little more than saying "I've got mine!" We all know that's what some see and expect from religion! Is "belief" only for MY benefit? Or does "belief" take my life to a higher level of concern & commitment for others?? So what does it mean TO BELIEVE?**

**Well, first we know that 95% of all Americans say "they believe." Gallup poles still tell us that the vast majority of Americans are "believers in God." But I ask you first of all today -- "when you believe in someone, doesn't that impact the way you relate and care for that person?" How can 95% of Americans believe in God and only 25% of Americans regularly praise and thank God?? Let's face it -- too many Americans have a strange notion of "belief." If 95% of Americans really believed in God -- then they'd spend their time differently ... they'd deal**

with their families & neighbors differently; they'd value the Sabbath differently ... they'd even run their businesses differently. And most of all - they'd realize that belief or religion has something to do with their personal lives. Because the facts are -- most Americans say: "Just keep belief & religion out of my personal life, esp. if it has anything to do with the way I spend my time or money."

Maybe a personal illustration will help you see how "beliefs" can be so easily contradicted. Nine years ago I was told I had very serious arterial disease -- so serious I needed five heart by-passes. The question was and still is - "Have I shown my doctors since 1988 that I believe what they told me?" What must I do to show "my belief?" Quite simply: I have to continue to CHANGE THE WAY I LIVE ... personally & professionally. If I hadn't started to exercise, to watch my cholesterol, to reduce my stress & work load -- then the doctors could have rightfully said, *"Peter is not a believer!"*

Likewise, "believing in God always leads to a change in the way we live our lives!" The great preacher of Riverside Church in NY, Harry Emerson Fosdick, said it more powerfully than I could. When at the Univ. of Beirut while touring the near east, he was invited to speak for students representing 16 different world religions. His concern was: *"How can my words have an impact on such a diverse group?"* He began by saying, *"I am not here to ask anyone to change his/her religion. But I am compeled by God to ask all of you to face up to a deeper question: HOW HAS YOUR BELIEF (religion) CHANGED YOU? How has belief in God made you a different person? How has belief in God transformed your character? How has belief in God made you a better person for this world?"* This week, Nation of Islam leader, Louis Farrakhan, asked a simi-lar question. You may not agree with him, but he still asked the right question Weds. night in Toledo: *"How come you don't have any power but Jesus did? It's because you're praising him with your lips but not following him with your lives."* So, first & foremost - BELIEF transforms us to live differently!

But there's another equally important dimension of belief. I like to illustrate this dimension with Horace Greeley's response to a lady who was seeking new life for her church. She said, "Mr. Greeley, our church is in dire straights. We've tried everything to keep it going: a turkey dinner, a rummage sale, a dinner theater, and last week an ice cream social for the whole community. Will you please tell us how to keep a struggling church from going under?" Greeley responded with three simple but sobering words: **"TRY REAL BELIEF!"** [meaning real faith in Jesus Christ rather than in things of the belly!!]

And where does "real belief" always begin?? With God, and not ourselves! So why are so many churches struggling or on the verge of "going down?" Because they are looking at themselves and not looking to God for their power! From Genesis to Revelation - God has shown us the meaning of belief. *"God spoke, and there was light ... and there were waters ... and there was the earth ... and finally there was man, made in God's image."* God did not show his belief by merely giving words or making confessions of faith. He showed "belief" by acting & doing according to his original promise: **THAT HE WOULD UPLIFT US, LOVE US, & SUPPORT US!** He went way beyond lip service in his

promises. He became His Word in flesh & blood and dwelt among us in grace & truth so that we would know exactly what it was and still is **WE BELIEVE IN!** "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent." We don't believe in a philosophy or morality religion: they have all failed! We believe in a person named Jesus who called himself the Bread of Life.

It's like Lepaux in France who was trying to start a new religion called "theophilanthropy." His religion was not "making converts" so he asked the advice of a diplomat named Talleyrand. After a moment, Talleyrand suggested the only sure-fire way he knew for planting theophilanthropy in French hearts. He said to Lepaux: *"Just allow yourself to be crucified & buried ... and then return three days later and your religion will burn in their hearts."*

Talleyrand's answer merely mocked his friend's question. Yet there is no other answer. We have amassed all kinds of doctrines & religions which purport the truth. Great minds have offered great theologies & philosophies. But our belief is built not on theologies & philosophies, but on the life, death & resurrection of Jesus Christ! We believe that if we live **HIS WAY, HIS TRUTH & HIS LIFE** - - this world will be uplifted, loved and reconciled. For His "way, truth & life" are the only forms of bread that do not decay, but last forever!!

Millions in this world are seeking change and transformation through politics, economics and ethics -- all of which are good. But too often these philosophies are mere formulas or food for the belly. They are short-term solutions to long-term separations & divisions in this world. If we really want to transform these separations in this world -- then Jesus Christ must become more than a good idea for us. He must become our Bread of Life: that is - we must swallow all that Jesus has told us. Or said more simply -- we not only need to consume his body and blood in Holy Communion ... we need to leave this place willing to break & feed our own lives to those suffering in sin beyond us.

Let me illustrate how this "belief" in the Bread of Life not only changes us, but must be offered to others to change them as well. Some time ago I was talking with a member who was getting a physical next to another lady who owned an eight room house. And this second lady was bragging that she had a different gun in all eight rooms of her house. When she answers the door, she always answers it with one of her eight guns. I ask you: What do we really believe is our greatest hope and security in this world? How is it that we can say every Sunday that we believe in Jesus Christ as our Lord & Savior yet on Monday - Saturday pack eight different guns as life's real saviors? What do we believe? Has the bread of the belly replaced the Bread of Life?? Has the gun become the new order of salvation for a society that says it believes in the gospel but would rather live by violence than grace! Are we doing the **WORK** of God in this world ... or have we become satisfied with the **WORK** of the devil??

The Bread of Life says: "Come--take and eat--take and drink ... believe that you can be changed from what you were into what God wants you to be. And when you believe this, WORK as disciples of my Way & Life in this world!"

AMEN.

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First English Lutheran, Toledo  
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Peter R. Martyn, Part-time Interim*

## ***“WHEN PEACE DIVIDES”***

*Therefore since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith ... Hebrews 12:1-2*

*Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division! Luke 12:51*

Many of you remember Bette Davis. Before her death in 1989, she had made 86 feature films and appeared in 15 TV movies. She was often described as high-strung, hard-edged and brazen. Over her entire career, she lived with an embroidered pillow on her bed that read: “NO GUTS – NO GLORY!” This motto was not just a saying; she personified this motto by giving her life to three disciplines: 1) Hard work; 2) looking ahead to a goal without being defeated by yesterday’s mistakes; and 3) a willingness to take risks. She believed that these three disciplines divided her from the run-of-the-mill actresses.

Long before Davis was born, another man fulfilled these same disciplines to perfection. 1) No human being ever worked harder to achieve God’s will on earth. 2) This same man’s goal was to reconcile (bond) humanity to God even in spite of all the ongoing human failures and flaws. And 3) this man subjected his life to an evil world of persecution and betrayal and died an innocent victim of the same corrupt system. Obviously, that man was Jesus – and his life sought to glorify an everlasting peace that can only come through sacrificial perfection. Thanks be to God that all who are baptized have received that everlasting peace.

Yet in today’s gospel, Jesus says: “Do you think that I have come to bring peace? No, but rather division.” How can we call Jesus the Prince of Peace when he makes such a statement like this? Isn’t it true that everywhere else in scripture Jesus says the opposite: “Peace be with you.” So now why this very hard saying about division? Obviously, we must look more closely at the meaning of “peace.” From a biblical viewpoint, “peace” is not the absence of conflict or struggle ... nor is it having superior powers over everyone else ... nor is it the pretense that everything is fine when it really isn’t. These are the world’s mistaken ideas of peace: “that everything’s o.k. when it really isn’t.” That’s a peace of the “softhearted” rather than a peace of the pure in heart.

The peace of the pure in heart is a decisive transformation of relationships ... a decisive power that overcomes distortions – where kindness overcomes hatred – where truth overcomes falsehood – where integrity overcomes dishonesty – where faith overcomes unbelief – where forgiveness overcomes rejection and indifference. So, peace is not the absence of conflict but rather the absence of distortion and deceit ... the absence of destructive behavior... the absence of

advocating falsehood ... the absence of distrust in God's will. Peace then is not merely saying nice words with a priestly smile; rather it is being transformed by the prophetic character of God. Peace is the discipline of acting like God in the midst of conflict and struggle.

So those who are gifted with this peace of the Lord have made a decisive choice to be very different from an “easy-going, everything’s-o.k.-world.” Like Christ himself – 1) they will work harder to achieve God’s will on earth; 2) like Christ, they will seek the goal of bonding humanity to God even in spite of human failures; and 3) like Christ, they will be more willing to risk persecution and sacrifice to get God’s job done. Is it any wonder that Jesus says his peace will cause division ... even in families. Because his peace comes with the price of surrender and self-sacrifice; and many even in the same family are not willing to make such a commitment to Christ and his peace. Thus, the peace of the Lord often divides because it demands dedication to Jesus Christ above all other things – including family members.

That’s why the second reading today uplifts a great cloud of witnesses who revealed this same peace of God in the midst of many crises – names like Abraham, Moses, Gideon and Barak and others. And today we could add many more names – like Mother Teresa or Martin Luther King. These are the ones who realize that our Lord did not say that peace comes from “an anything goes attitude,” but that peace comes when we reflect the character of God. So as Paul says in Colossians – the way of peace is to be clothed “with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness and patience ... forbearing one another and forgiving one another.” That’s the peace of the Lord ... a very decisive character of Godliness for those who call themselves witnesses.

Yet, as we look at that full cloud of witnesses we see that there were many on that list who ran less than a perfect race. There were some like David whose greatness was flawed by adultery. There were others like Samson whose strength became weakness at the hands of Delilah. Still there were others like Peter who could at one time confess Jesus as Lord and at another time DENY him as Lord.

I would guess that most of us here today identify with this last group of witnesses. Like David, most of us know what it’s like to do battle with the flaws of temptation and sinfulness. And like Samson, most of us have known the betrayal and weakness of being deceived by those around us ... sometimes our own family. And like Peter, which one of us has never vacillated in our profession of the faith??

But like this group of witnesses -- what can we claim today in terms of being assured of the peace of Christ. Since we, like them, have not run the perfect race of perseverance – have we lost hope in God’s glory? Do our flaws make it impossible to ever really be in the fulness of Christ’s peace?? And even worse,

like so many around us today, are we just pretending that everything is all right when it really isn't??

Let's start with the last question first: Is anyone here pretending that everything is o.k. when it really isn't? I can't speak for any of you, but I can certainly make my own honest confession: there have been many times when I have pretended that everything was o.k. and it really wasn't. For instance – when making decisions with our children – how many times have I “gone along with things” when I knew it was not the true character of God?? Or how many times have you or I known someone to choose abortion or drugs or dishonesty – not because it was the right choice, but it was simply the easier choice. Jesus says he cannot bring his peace to me or anyone else who is living a lie about the truth. And that's a major problem in our world today: many of us are fooling around with the real truth. Is it any wonder that instead of peace -- there is much confusion, depression and disappointment lurking in our world?

And what is said for individuals can also be said for groups: Jesus cannot bring peace to any group that has NOT made an honest assessment of itself. That obviously hits home at First English. Because one of your greatest yearnings at this time of conflict in your life is to be at peace with God regarding your future. Well the first thing you need to do is say “THANK YOU” for the great cloud of witnesses from 1<sup>st</sup> English over your more than 100 years. But then you must be brutally honest about your strengths & capabilities for the days ahead. Nothing could be more hurtful for this body of Christ than to pretend that everything is o.k. when it really isn't. ( A mission strategy - Sept. 15<sup>th</sup> )

So, the question still stands before us: are my flaws or yours as church too great to be assured of Christ's peace? Christ's answer is always the same as he gives in baptism – “your flaws are never too great for my blessing of peace.” On the cross, Christ already conquered all flaws & conflicts & struggles of the future. So as individuals and groups we have been assured of his peace even if we can't get our ducks in perfect order for the future. Christ has already won the war over every human flaw and failure. So regardless of the past or the future – there is never any reason for guilt or shame ... for those who run the race with Christ depend on His perfection and not their own.

That's Christ's good news of peace! It's not by our perfect runs that we have assurance of peace. It's by his perfect “disciplined race on the cross” that he has already won the victory for every person and every group that still seeks to be his witness. Yes, his peace divides us from those who think “that everything is o.k. when it really isn't.” We know that everything is not o.k. – and that's why we're at peace with Christ! And with Christ, we will continue to work harder to reach the goal of bonding humanity to the peace of God that passes all understanding – even when we know that we won't run that race perfectly!!

Amen.