

Sermon offered by
Pastor Peter R. Martyn

Epiphany II
Redeemer Lutheran Church - Milwaukee
January 14, 1973

"YOU'VE GOT A LOT TO GIVE"

"Having gifts that differ according to the
grace given to us, let us use them: . . ."
(Romans 12:6a)

Most of us have just enjoyed a period of
gift-giving and gift-receiving. Christmas
is without a doubt the peak of American gift
exchanging. And although there are always
the annual cries of commercialism, nevertheless,
we all enjoy receiving gifts. And many of us
even enjoy giving them.

And following the giving and receiving comes
the displaying. Some of us wait for special
occasions to reveal the new acquisitions. Some
of us keep them under the tree to exhibit for
guests over the holidays. Yet others have them
well "broken in" by the New Year.

Whatever the practice ONE PRINCIPLE remains
a reality for the receiver: He/she knows that
THE GIVER will appreciate SEEING the gift USED.

A gift-giver really rejoices in seeing his
gift BEING PUT INTO USE. Conversely, a gift-giver
OFTEN feels REJECTED when his gift RESTS FOR-
EVER VAULTED IN THE BOTTOM OF A DRAWER.

Obviously this phenomenon applies to more than
Christmas gifts. There is great joy and satis-
faction for an employee who feels that the
administration is using his special talent.
But equally, great disappointment when his/her
talent is overlooked or taken for granted.

Similarly, a person can feel REAL WORTH and
VALUE when his opinions are given serious
attention and consideration -- even if in the
long run they are rejected. But it is very
defeating when one's opinions, his gift of
expression, get NOT EVEN ONE LISTENING EAR.

The principle is almost universal: WE ALL APPRECIATE SEEING OUR GIFTS, USED.

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We learn especially from today's Epistle that God has given each of us SOME VERY SPECIAL GIFTS. Paul says: Having unique gifts-- having charismata -- let us use them.

Have you ever said, or heard someone else say: "Wow! He really has charisma!!" I'll bet you never thought of yourself as a Greek student. But of such is the biblical Greek term - "charisma." It means: One who possesses a very special personality -- a person who is extremely credible, trustworthy, and effective in his whole manner. A person who possesses a VERY UNIQUE GIFT.

And so again we listen to Paul's statement: "Having charismata - or charismaes - that differ according to the grace given to us, let us USE THEM. God has given us SPECIAL PERSONALITIES -- we have received UNIQUE GIFTS -- we have been given the power to be EXTREMELY CREDIBLE, TRUSTWORTHY, AND EFFECTIVE IN OUR WHOLE MANNER.

God has entrusted A LOT TO EACH OF US. And that means we have a LOT TO GIVE. But have we been eager to display these gifts from God?

I wonder how appreciated God feels as the gift-giver? I wonder if he HAS WITNESSED the use of his gifts TO THE SAME DEGREE that he has given them??? Does God have reason TO REJOICE or might he feel DISAPPOINTED?

I surely don't know. None of us can really know for sure. But we might all get a little closer to his feelings if we try a brief experiment. Let's just imagine for the moment that we are God. Let's just make believe that we see ourselves and everyone else from his position. Maybe by making believe, we'll get a clearer picture of reality.

So, here we are in our heavenly kingdom. We have poured a variety of gifts into the lives of this community. We are looking for the visible use of those unique talents.

perspective

First we look for the USE of the specialized offerings - the gifts of prophecy, service, teaching, exhortation, practical support and mercy. As God, we have given these gifts for the upbuilding of the community of faith. Are they being recognized and used?

For instance, prophecy. This is the gift of proclamation - proclaiming man's dependance upon God. As we imagine ourselves as God, have we given this special gift ONLY TO PASTORS? Wouldn't that put extreme limitations upon our Word - that is, God's Word? Evidently, we've offered this gift to many in this community. We SURE HOPE that ALL WHO HAVE IT, WILL USE AND DISPLAY IT!

One gift we DO SEE BEING USED in this community is contribution "IN LIBERALITY." This community is really using this gift -- especially those who have been given a special measure of this gift. As we play God, we are surely grateful for the USE OF THIS GIFT.

There is another special gift that we see being used here. SEVERAL persons in this community are DOING ACTS OF MERCY, WITH CHEERFULNESS. Compassionate mercy is cheerfully *being* given BY MANY in this community. As we play God, we are surely grateful for the Senior Center, LSAC, blood donors, the callers, the LCW, and several other limbs of social ministry.

But ^{many} others have been given this special gift of mercy. We would like them to use their special talent. Maybe they could begin by just being more cheerful -- just a little more friendly with Others gathered here.

And so, have

As we imagine ourselves as God, we seem to have reason TO BE PLEASED AND DISAPPOINTED about the use of these special gifts. But we do not despair - we always live with the hope that the gifts WILL SOON BE USED that are NOW UNUSED. For from God's perspective, there is never reason to GIVE UP, to BECOME A WHIMPERING SKEPTIC, to TAKE BACK THE GIFT.

God does not reñig on his gifts - he hopes FOR THEIR USE to the glory of his name. Every moment is a moment TO BEGIN to display the great variety of God's gifts.

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As we continue playing God, we also realize we have given some general gifts of grace. We have given everyone -- EVERY SINGLE HUMAN CREATURE -- the ABILITY to love genuinely. We have given EVERYBODY the power "to hate what is evil, to hold fast to what is good."

As we look over every community of faith, we see far too many TRAMPING on the gift of love in pursuit of selfish desire. As the supreme giver of this gift, we can only feel deeply disappointed. Weren't the directions clear enough? Weren't Paul's words ever heard?

"Love is patient and kind; it is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things."

As God, we soon realize that the gifts we have given REQUIRE REAL COMMITMENT AND EFFORT TO BE USED.

We realize that man would rather find honor with himself, than show honor in someone else.

We realize that man finds it difficult to be patient in tribulation.

We realize that man, in all of his hurrying and scurrying to make a name for himself, even finds it difficult to practice the gift of hospitality these days.

As for blessing those who persecute man, the blessing is too often the but or bullets of a gun. As human beings we all know the NEAR IMPOSSIBILITY of our willingness to BLESS those who persecute us. Just think of the last time someone attacked you verbally. ... when someone really put you down." How DO WE react to this type of persecution?

Most of us too often get defensive -- we retaliate -- we strike back.

Yes, as we see ourselves from God's perspective we realize that man finds it very difficult to be a blessing to his fellowman-- esp. when feeling persecuted.

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And so as we have imagined ourselves as God, we have just glimpsed at OUR resistance TO USING God's gifts. And it is for that very reason -- the reason of man's resistance and rebellion -- that God has had to still offer another gift. The gift of repentance and forgiveness.

As the ultimate sign of his love, God offers man the gift of freedom from guilt. Through Christ, God says: Repent and be saved. That is, be saved from a life of despair, of depression, of hopelessness.

This gift allows today to be a new day. With this gift from God, we cancel out all the misuse and abuse of the past.

But like the other gifts, repentance and forgiveness is not EASY to put into use. It is difficult to admit error -- to apologize -- to give that other person a second chance.

But if we really ACCEPT and USE this gift, the struggle always guarantees A GREAT DIVIDEND -- new life, life free TO USE ANEW our charisma from God.

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My friends, each of us has a very special charisma. Some, the charisma of prophecy. Others, the ability to serve. Others, the gift of teaching. We all have received and we all know the genuine gift of love -- We all have been blessed even when we have persecuted others. We know the gift of blessing. And we all have RECEIVED the gift of repentance and forgiveness. *thru faith*

We have God's most unique gift-- there is no greater charisma. The charisma of grace - the love of God. Let us use this gift in GREAT PROPORTIONS.

Our society, our world, even our church and ourselves are looking for a little glue for the cracks. You know, as well as I, where the cracks are. And you know the causes for the cracks. And you know what you can use to repair those cracks.

You can USE the gifts of God's grace. He has given them to you and to me. I need not repeat them, because you know what they are. If you need another reminder, just reread today's Epistle and the rest of Romans 12.

Yes! You really do have charisma! You really do have a lot to give.

Amen.

CONFESSIOIN OF ST. PETER (Epiphany II)
Luth Church of the Master
Jan. 18, 1976

"NO IDENTITY CRISIS HERE"

"And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock
I will build my church, and the powers of death
shall not prevail against it." Matt. 16:18

"And there is salvation in no one else, for there
is no other name under heaven given among men by
which we can be saved." Acts 4:12

Most of us gain a good share of our identity --
who we are -- by learning from or imitating
persons in authority around us. Parents, teachers,
bosses, pastors, TV personalities and the like
largely become the molds for our identities.

our era
And yet seems to be greatly afflicted with
identity crises -- people not sure of themselves
nor who they really are. I believe much of this
stems from a break down in the lines of authority.

On the one hand, erosion in authority has
occurred because of new permissive principles --
NOT ALL OF THEM BAD. ~~But~~ Too often this philoso-^{1/2}
phy boils down to the premise that everybody's
opinion is as valid as everybody else's. Too often
it's simply ~~the~~ vacuum of values approach to life.

On the other hand, respect for authority has
been corrupted by the abuse of authority. We
see this played as the loop-hole law game --
or possibly more visible as power politics
camouflaged cover-ups. Whether it's Watergate
or Woody Hayes, the message seems to be the
same: win even if you have to play dirty.

Seemingly sad, but seemingly true - we have
comprehended far less than we have learned
from history. For the video playback of mankind
too often looks the same -- clutching to the
pendulum for security, swinging forever from
human permissiveness to human absoluteness.

Is it any wonder that man's identity crisis
continues. His extremes continue to create for
him the problem of alienation -- manifested one

year by deceitfulness, the next year by war, the year after that by family fragmentation, and on and on with a divisive lifestyle.

So - today we listen to Peter's confession. And he proclaims the only no-risk insurance against crises in identity - namely, becoming unified with the spirit of Christ. Peter says that is man's only security -- his only rock of salvation.

Some may say that this sounds like good pious rhetoric. It is. But it's so much more. It is the only sure-proof avenue to the kingdom of heaven, which is far better than being dead-ended in six feet of earth.

And how often we're tempted to make the purpose of life no greater than the pebbles of earth. Just look at the church over the centuries when it has allowed itself to be grounded to less than the rock of salvation. For centuries the church interpreted "the rock" to mean the Petrine or papal office. Need we even elaborate on the division, pettiness, and holy wars resulting from this. Need we mention the misuse and abuse of Christian authority due to this so-called human infallibility.

It is doubtful that the church hierarchy was ever truly the anti-Christ -- but we do know that God's spirit has been stifled under claims of inerrancy and pure doctrine.

Yes - our identity is hardly secure when we give allegiance to hollow men who are fashioning their own kingdoms -- and off times doing so with much holy talk. Peter's aim was hardly to railroad people into worshipping him -- or the institution that he presided over as chief-pastor.

Peter's confession needs to be heard today as much - maybe more today - than it did in that first century. The church, both people and pastor, can so easily be tempted to make the pastoral/priestly office akin to godliness.

And then when that leader of the flock lets somebody down (which he always does), we painfully

recall that our Christian identity is not grounded in any one human or institutional authority. Any pastor or any church body is just a microcosmic chip off the whole rock.

Yes Peter's confession reminds us that our identity is not secure when grounded to any one person or church body. ~~Sixthly~~ - our identity suffers insecurity to idols outside the church -- whether good health, productivity, or a piece of the rock of real estate.

For as much as these are worthy goals and deserve our attention in life, their foundations are as shaky as the shifting sands of time. A secure identity needs something less vulnerable.

Peter's confession offers that confidence. He claims that only in the primacy of Christ's spirit will we stand secure -- not even the power of death shall prevail against the power of Christ.

And that's more than religious rhetoric - because our presence here witnesses that his power of love does overcome death. For which one of us has never suffered a loss.

Thank God that he continues to provide the power of Christ -- the rock of salvation, through the body of Christ known as the church. God works through that body to keep us secure in our identity -- to keep us strong in his love when we come face to face with the crises and power struggles of life.

Contrary to some claims, our identity in Christ does not make us mamby-pamby weaklings. In fact, we become quite the opposite. Clinging to Christ means that we no longer need to hide from the crises or confrontations of life. We face them - head on. Knowing that even if we are defeated by the cancers and conflicts of living, including death itself -- WE WILL STILL BE VICTORIOUS because we still have a Father who accepts us and welcomes us home

That spirit of Christ is the rock of salvation and the basis of our identity.

Without that foundation of love, the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity is just another nice religious cliché. There is no unity in the church - in a congregation - in a marriage - in a corporation - or any other institution if this spirit of Christ's love is absent.

~~This~~ is the insurance against identity crises that the church offers at no charge. We don't pay for this model of God's love -- he freely offers us a piece of the rock of salvation.

As our identity in the authority of Christ's love keeps us secure -- let us imitate the same example -- and esp share it with those facing life's crises and conflicts. For there is salvation in no one else - there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we can be saved.

AMEN

*Postscript
There is no identity
crisis in the true church of
Christ. We know who we are -
We know who has authority in our
lives - and we live accordingly.*

EPIPHANY II

Luth Church of the Master, Troy
January 16, 1977

"JUST FOR THE FUN OF IT"

"Jesus performed this first of his mighty works in Cana of Galilee; there he revealed his glory, and his disciples believed ~~in~~ him." John 2:11

How many of you ^{are aware} ~~know~~ that we who are liturgical Christians are now in the "show off" season. Epiphany means to "show forth" or "make manifest" -- in this case, to show off or show forth the glory of Christ.

So it is ~~that~~ the lessons show forth the glory of God in the person of Jesus Christ. They are lessons which evidence the special and miraculous power of Jesus. So in today's gospel the passage concludes: 'there he revealed his glory.'

But the revelation of God's glory in Christ usually has a purpose beyond the mere miraculous detail. And so today we must decided how this miracle at the wedding feast shows forth Christ's glory.

Obviously, it's incredible--truly miraculous--that water could be instantly changed to wine. But beyond that physical fete - what significance does water-into-wine have for our faith? How does this "showing forth" cause you and me to be more trusting in the ministry and power of Jesus?

Quite frankly, water-into-wine doesn't do too much to bolster my faith. Obviously, it's something only God could do; but in terms of its present significance on my life, it's pretty much an act of the past. The fact is that most biblical scholars have had great difficulty in understanding the real point of this miracle story.

For the Christian who likes to make faith into tight ~~knit~~ moral maxims, there's little to

nothing to satisfy that appetite in this story. Even the te'd'te that Jesus has ~~with his~~ mother has little moral value -- sometimes it's been interpreted with a negative family value.

But properly translated as a colloquial response, Jesus' mother says: "they have no wine," and he responds: "now mom, never mind. It's my affair. Don't worry. Be patient, and I'll see to it."

There are others, both Christians and scholars, who must attribute great divine significance to every action of Jesus. There's hardly any fuel for such great thoughts from this story.

Some scholars have asserted that because the jars were empty that this was symbolic of the emptiness of the Jewish purification rites. So they claim that the story shows that Jesus becomes the fulfillment of the Jewish traditions through his actions.

Other scholars stretch their imaginations and speculate that Jesus' wine-tinto-water is a forerunner of the importance of the Eucharist (Holy Communion). But surely Jesus did not need from 120 to 180 gallons of wine to prepare for Holy Communion.

Most present interpretation -- beyond accepting the miracle as miracle -- simply finds the point to be enigmatic -- that is, puzzling. Can a really significant purpose be attached to this miracle? The answer is probably "no"--that is, there is no dramatic truth for faith shown here.

Dr Paul Achtmeier suggests that the point here relates more to the ongoing stream of life than to the dramatic peaks of existence. In other words, Jesus performed this miracle in a manner of speaking "just for the fun of it." Or on the less colloquial side, "Just for the Joy of the Marriage Celebration."

Jesus recognized the importance of this occasion and did not want to see it spoiled. We know that such feasts often went on for two or three days. And at this particular feast, a very embarrassing social situation had occurred. The wine had run out. ~~So here~~ ~~was~~ A young couple ~~was being~~ threatened by social disgrace. Here was a couple that would begin their marriage under a cloud.

The love of Christ would not tolerate that kind of injustice to the couple. And so we see that the miraculous love of Christ is offered NOT only under the conditions of illness - or bereavement - or death -- or to the poor or other times of dramatic misfortune. But Christ offers himself even in the more secular and routine events of our lives. And he does not foster many of the social taboos which man has invented and then attributed to the Christian religion.

Now this miracle takes on real redeeming value -- for we can now see that our Lord and Master is a Savior who has compassion and love for us even in our routine and social lives.

But look back at the story again. How many of the wedding guests recognized Christ's power at that feast? Only a few. The disciples, Mary, and the house servants. The rest of the guests simply went on celebrating never giving thought or thanks for the miracle.

And how true it is. The power of God -- yes the miraculous power of God -- is forever active in our routine and social lives. Whether its the healing that comes from a cut or broken finger or the healing that comes with a reconciled relationship many times at a party -- these are all manifestations of God's miraculous power in Christ.

God keeps on giving for the joy of our lives; we keep on taking, many times for the joy of

it, and often just for the fun of it, which can be bad or good.

So it is that we thank God today for his mysterious presence amidst us EVEN WHEN WE FAIL TO RECOGNIZE HIM. We thank him for continuing to offer us the miracle of life, of breath, of healing, of reconciliation, of life after death.

Yes, Jesus performed this first mighty work in Cana of Galilee; there he revealed his glory. Glory recognized only by a few, but glory given for the joy of all human life. Thanks be to God that those disciples believed in him, and took the time to show forth that glory to us.

AMEN

EPIPHANY II
Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo
January 20, 1980

"FOR THE COMMON GOOD"

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of working, but it is the same God who inspires them all in every one. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good."

(And the Gospel story)

I Cor. 12:4-7

Almost everyone in this room has been invited to a wedding and reception. But no one in this room has experienced a Palestine wedding like the one in Cana.

Weddings in those days were really *EXTRAVAGANT AFFAIRS*. The celebration usually lasted a full week. The actual ceremony occurred late in the evening - after a gigantic feast (in other words, the reception came first). A wedding march took place after the ceremony -- with all the guests escorting the couple by a torchlight procession to their new home. Half the fun of the procession was that they would take the most roundabout route possible.

Of course - there was no honeymoon. The couple stayed home and kept open house for at least one week following the ceremony. That week was a continual week of feasting *with wine* -- it was considered *the* supreme occasion in life.

It was to this week-long wedding feast that Jesus was invited. And for one reason or another, shortly after Jesus arrived the wedding provisions began to run low. You must understand that hospitality of this sort was considered a sacred duty among these people. In other words, for provisions to fail at a wedding feast was paramount to calamity in the lives of these newlyweds.

And what was Jesus' response to this near

calamity -- he miraculously turned the water into wine. *The underlying point here* is not in the physical change of the substances -- *the theological* point is that Jesus was concerned about THE COMMON GOOD of that couple and their guests.

There are many sub-points that a preacher could make about this miracle. Chief among them is that it is very obvious that Jesus was not opposed to a good time -- he provided more than an ample supply of wine for the rest of the week. But obviously - the main point is not that Jesus was seeking to encourage wild parties.

What Jesus shows here is that anyone who possesses God's power (Spirit) SEEKS TO PROVIDE FOR THE COMMON GOOD of people around him. Jesus illustrates thru the miracle that Christians seek first to provide for the joy of others. It was Jesus' main purpose, main goal, main reason for living TO FULFILL THE NEEDS OF OTHERS, including even the festive needs of a good party! His whole life and ministry was devoted to the common good of others.

That is exactly the point that Paul is urging in his letter to the Corinthian Church ... and to all churches today. He was saying to the Corinthians, and he is saying to each of us here today -- THAT GOD HAS GIVEN EACH OF US A SPECIAL ABILITY WHICH CAN BE USED FOR THE GOOD OF EVERYONE.. FOR THE COMMON GOOD.

Regardless of the gift - whether preaching, or teaching, or analyzing, or healing, or reading, or giving, or constructing, or listening -- all these gifts are from the goodness of God. But all of them are to serve the same purpose-- to bring about common goodness for all people.

Paul's point is so simple to see - yet so difficult to implement. It was God's intention that all people should be different - should have different gifts, yet all be working for the common good.

That is also God's design for his church. He desires a unity of Spirit for his church. In other words, he desires that we all be working for the common good of one another and all people in the world. But that does not mean a structural/~~organizational~~ *organizational* unity of his church.

In fact - the church beautifully illustrates that there is greater strength when there is a diversity of congregations ALL WORKING TOWARD A UNITY OF PURPOSE. Structurally - *organizationally* - we need a diversity of denominations -- because by nature humankind needs different strokes for different folks.

But purposefully -- we must be united. We must all be seeking to fulfill the same goal in and through out ministries. It is that unity of purpose that we pray for today -- just as Jesus prayed for it some 2000 yrs ago.

All churches must band together TO SERVE THE COMMON GOOD of humanity. Together we must oppose the hostile aggression we see in Iran and Afganistan today. Together we must defeat the forces of prejudice and poverty in our local and worldwide communities. Together we must stand for fidelity in the family. Together we must set precedents in law and government which reflect the guidance and morality of God. Together we must rally God's kingdom on earth rather than making it only a heavenly thing.

Yes - only as Christian churches work for the common good on earth will we be seen as an instrument of God. When the world sees that we are more interested in *the Common Good* than *our selfish interests* - then *God's Kingdom will have come on earth as it is in heaven.*

In many ways the church must be like a good medical team. God has given each church special gifts -- he has given us our specializations. But like good specialists-- we must see beyond

our specialty. ~~That~~ ^{Any} specialty is just one good link among equals in the chain. All specialties must work together toward a common goal.

As the total team, all churches must work together toward the common goal of healing the world's divisions with God's *uniting power*.

I believe this message is particularly urgent in our day -- because we have lost sight of the common good. Regretably -- today we too often use our ~~ABILITIES ONLY~~ own selfish good, rather than the common good.

For instance -- few people enter universities today to become better citizens or better servants of our society. They do not perceive their education as a beneficial by-product for our culture and society. Instead -- education has been narrowly defined as a way to make a good living. I truly pray that *educators and students will dedicate their talents to the* more wholistic role that education must serve in a democratic society -- *the common good.*

The same flaw seems to be prevalent in our political system. Last Sunday I read an editorial in THE BLADE which claimed that American foreign policy is suffering from *TRANQUILIZATION*. In short -- the article was reflecting what Paul said to the Corinthians *2000* years ago -- we no longer have a foreign or domestic policy which seeks the common good of all humanity. Our world has no clear vision of the common good -- it is being ruled by the whims and fancies of economic, self-interest groups.

So instead of politicians drafting *an* international vision FOR THE COMMON GOOD -- *more than a dozen today are spending millions politicking for themselves rather than common good.* *Is* it any wonder that Americans are confused and bewildered -- those in Washington and those trying to get in give us nothing but constant contradictions without any unity of purpose or mission.

Don't get me wrong. I am a strong advocate for diversity in politics and parties. Likewise, I am a strong advocate for diversity in racial composition -- for diversity in business and free enterprise -- for diversity in the church and its leadership. But such diversity must always have ~~the~~ common good *as-its goal*. It must always serve the common good of all people.

Our country, our community, our world needs the redeeming influence of God's guidance. We have become a world and society TOTALLY OPSESSED with self-interest. The very organizations which were organized to offer justice and fairness to all HAVE BECOME SOME OF THE WORST ADVOCATES OF SELF-INTEREST IN OUR SOCIETY.

God deliver his church from this kind of perverted view of life. Whether Lutheran or Presbyterian, whether Muslim or monk, whether Ayatollah or guru -- God calls upon his faithful people to be a new kind of leaven in this world. He has given us a variety of gifts -- a variety of worship styles and structures -- a variety of sizes and strengths -- but ONLY ONE PURPOSE: we are to work, pray, and strive for the common goodness of all people.

To that end -- the church's is one foundation,

with a variety of expressions - all working for the common good.

AMEN

EPIPHANY II
Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo
January 15, 1984
Peter R. Martyn, Pastor

"SHOW AND TELL TIME"

"...I will give you a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth."

Isaiah 49:6b

One commentator has recently said: "You can't read the Servant Songs of Isaiah without feeling to strong impulse of God's Call! Much as we established last week that God's light for the world is pervasive, impartial, and permanent -- today our texts call us TO COME AND SEE, TO GO AND TELL, in short, TO SHOW AND TELL THE WORLD WHAT WE HAVE SEEN!!

The obvious question is - how do we go about doing this?? What is the character of our "SHOW AND TELL TIME??" We surely don't want to come off on a childish level of "show and tell" as we did in grade school. We already know that we have many cultural critics who dismiss the church as infantile and irrelevant to the real world. On the other hand, we don't want society to perceive us as self-righteous and arrogantly hypocritical! There are all kinds of those religious fanatics flying around these days.

How can we SHOW and TELL THE TRUTH of Christ without being perceived as superficial on the one hand ... or supernaturally superior on the other?!? Isaiah's answer, like Christ's to his disciples, is that we become SERVANTS and not mere RECIPIENTS of the light! As Christ himself has said: "He who would be great among you, let him become your servant."

So - how do we fulfill the responsibility of our servanthood? Carlo Maria Giulini, the conductor of the Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra, possibly gives us our best insight. He was asked in a recent interview: "How do you fulfill your responsibility as a music director?? He answered: "First, I serve the music as well as I can. Second, I serve the orchestra as well as I can. And third, I serve the audience as well as I can. That's it!"

Please note that in his response he consistently used the same word: "I SERVE." That is always the most prominent reflection of the light of Christ. Christ's followers are always seeking to serve others rather than be served themselves! But specifically -- what are they serving?? To use Guilini's metaphors -- they are serving the music, the orchestra, and the audience! Or to translate these into religious symbols -- they are serving the Gospel, the church, and the World!!

That is the crowning task of those who follow the light of Christ -- to serve the music of God (the Gospel of Christ) ... to serve the orchestra of God (the One, Holy Catholic, Apostolic Church) ... and to serve the audience of God (namely, the whole global world!).

Let's look at these more closely! What do we serve? What is the call of our responsibility?? As Guilini said -- My responsibility is "to serve the music as well as I can." That's the first call of servanthood as God's people! TO SERVE UP THE SONG OF SALVATION AS WELL AS WE CAN!

The first and most important reflection of God's light is the message itself -- the song of salvation! That's what we are called to serve -- to offer to others. Not ourselves, but the love of Christ!!

Tell me - what do you remember from your earliest days in your life with God?!? I don't know about you -- but what I remember are those little songs of salvation of childhood. "Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so." It was often through the musical message that the Gospel was being born and sustained in me!!

It was often a simple song, but the theme was a strong one -- an almighty, everlasting theme: For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in him will **not** perish but have everlasting life!" That's the mighty fortress of the Gospel -- that God is absolutely, unconditionally, forever and always for us!! That he has come into this world to assure us that we will never end up on some dung heap in some city cemetery! But that we will end up where we began -- WITH HIM!!

Yes -- that kind of message is worth **SHOWING AND TELLING TO** others -- it worth singing about with great gusto!!

But we are not only called to serve the music! As Guilini said: Secondly, I have a responsibility to serve the orchestra as well as I can. Please note: With each response, Guilini said: "as well as I can." Responsibility always means "more than just average!" We serve so that we feel the pain and pressure of servanthood -- much in the same way that we serve our own families and children. We don't give half-heartedly to our kids; God calls for the same kind of responsibility for his gospel, his church, and his world! WE SERVE AS WELL AS WE CAN!!

So - secondly we serve the orchestra -- we serve the ONE, HOLY, CATHOLIC, APOSTOLIC CHURCH! In short, we serve for the harmony of the whole people of God, regardless of their denominational tag. Think about a symphony orchestra for a moment if you will (or even a grand organ like ours). The ultimate beauty of the orchestra is not merely in its solo instruments -- but in its ability to reflect a rhapsodic harmony -- when it reaches its most unified chorus!

That's what it means to be a servant of Christ's light -- to be one who is responsibly working to maintain a unity in God's orchestra -- to foster wholeness and harmony among the diverse instruments of God's band!

God does not call upon his music-makers to merely "get along" with one another! He calls upon us to aggressively care ... and forgive ... and foster those things which promote harmony and wholeness both inside and outside the body!!

This is one of God's music lessons that many individuals and congregations in Toledo have not yet learned very well! I have never been in any city where I have seen so many individuals and congregations trying to play their own tunes -- rather than the unified melody of God! I am constantly hearing individuals and congregations taking shots at one another; it's obvious that many have not yet grown up in their faith!!

As I have often told our church Council -- my goal is to see that all the individuals of Hope as well as the congregation plays in harmony with God! That is the purpose of God's song of salvation -- and that is the role of the conductor, better known as the pastor -- to see to it that people do not go off tooting their own horns!!

EPIPHANY II
Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo
January 15, 1984
Peter R. Martyn, Pastor

"SHOW AND TELL TIME"

"...I will give you a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth."

Isaiah 49:6b

One commentator has recently said: "You can't read the Servant Songs of Isaiah without feeling to strong impulse of God's **Call!** Much as we established last week that God's light for the world is pervasive, impartial, and permanent -- today our texts call us **TO COME AND SEE, TO GO AND TELL, in short, TO SHOW AND TELL THE WORLD WHAT WE HAVE SEEN!!**

The obvious question is - how do we go about doing this?? What is the character of our "SHOW AND TELL TIME??" We surely don't want to come off on a childish level of "show and tell" as we did in grade school. We already know that we have many cultural critics who dismiss the church as infantile and irrelevant to the real world. On the other hand, we don't want society to perceive us as self-righteous and arrogantly hypocritical! There are all kinds of those religious fanatics flying around these days.

How can we SHOW and TELL THE TRUTH of Christ without being perceived as superficial on the one hand ... or supernaturally superior on the other?!? Isaiah's answer, like Christ's to his disciples, is that we become SERVANTS and not mere RECIPIENTS of the light! As Christ himself has said: "He who would be great among you, let him become your servant."

So - how do we fulfill the responsibility of our servanthood? Carlo Maria Guilini, the conductor of the Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra, possibly gives us our best insight. He was asked in a recent interview: "How do you fulfill your responsibility as a music director?? He answered: "First, I serve the music as well as I can. Second, I serve the orchestra as well as I can. And third, I serve the audience as well as I can. That's it!"

Next Sunday you will get a taste of Hope's missionary mindedness through our 1984 Projected Budget. One of the few increases for 1984 will be a Worldwide Mission increase of \$6,000 --- from 33,000 in '83 to 39,000 in '84. Some people might be tempted to say -- that's an awful big increase. But let's look at the facts. It will represent a 13¢ (that's 13 cents) increase for each of our 870 confirmed adults. That means we'll be challenging each confirmed adult to give 50¢ a week to our worldwide mission rather than 37¢ a week!

Regretably -- I am sure there will still be some who will say -- "My gosh, 50¢ a week is an awful lot to give to God's whole world! Of course, those same people will take hundreds... maybe even thousands for their own families each week. But they begrude 50¢ a week for God's song of salvation to the whole world!!

God help us to be the grown up servants that we are!! Let us **SHOW AND TELL** the world of the greatness of our God and his Song of Salvation **BY MANIFESTING THE UNITY OF HIS LOVE** in everything that we do and say! And let's do with generosity and gusto!

AMEN

EPIPHANY II
Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo
January 20, 1985
Peter R. Martyn, Pastor

"AFTER THE CALL, THEN WHAT?"

"The Lord came and stood there, calling as at the other times, 'Samuel, Samuel!' Then Samuel said, 'Speak, for your servant is listening.'" I Samuel 3:10

(Beeper Noise) We've all heard that sound before, haven't we? For many in this congregation, the "pager" is a daily phenomenon of their work in the hospital setting. Most people here know what it means to be "On Call." That "beeping" noise is a clear indication of "being called" -- somebody needs help, somebody needs advice, somebody needs support, somebody is in trouble, in short, somebody needs me!

There was a time not too long ago that only doctors wore these silly little things. But today we find a variety of people wearing them -- from plumbers to politicians ... yes, even the pastors of Hope Church. Be assured, we don't wear this thing because we think we're indispensable ... or because we think that the world could not get along without us. Actually, we're worn one of these in 1984-85 because it only costs 10-bucks a month to rent it.

More truthfully, we are wearing the pager because we believe it's important to be "reachable" -- reachable for the "call" of need. But even when a person is reachable, that still doesn't answer the most pressing question: AFTER THE CALL, THEN WHAT? I would like to suggest today that what holds true for the PAGER also holds true for our Christian calling. Whether called on a pager or called by Christ, the same three factors are involved: RECOGNITION, READINESS, AND RESPONSE. These are the essentials of any call in life: recognition, readiness, and response. Without all three components, the Call will probably be meaningless and without purpose or results.

Obviously, with a beeper the call is obvious -- it's penetrating sound makes it difficult to avoid. It is the sound of crisis. The same is often true for God's call -- he calls us in times of crisis. But his call is many times less recognizable. It does not come as a penetrating beeper -- more often it's merely a summons for help, for understanding, for sensitivity, for a willingness to care.

The most obvious example of that Call was reflected a couple of weeks ago when Pastor Bob and I sent 45 "Calls" to persons who had indicated a willingness to "visit" on their Time & Talent forms. It's pretty hard to avoid the Call when

it comes on parchment, typed in beautiful old-English. But most times it doesn't come so graphically -- it comes as a cry of crisis, as a cry for affirmation, as a cry for sensitivity, as a cry for caring or love or forgiveness. It always comes as a cry of need -- a cry of need and a cry to be needed.

We often miss this cry because our world has not taught us to be very good listeners. Before Samuel could respond to God's direction -- he said: "Speak, for your servant is listening." Listening is the most important element of recognition.

Prof. Ralph Nichols, Univ. of Minnesota, did a presentation for Dana Corp. some time ago called the "Art of Listening." He reported that Paul Rankin of Ohio State University had done research on 65 white collar professionals. Each person promised to keep a careful log of his conscious, waking conversation every 15 minutes for a two month period. Rankin collected the results and tabulated them with amazement. He repeated the study with 65 additional professionals -- he got the same statistics.

He found that 70% of our conscious day is spent in communication; 7 out of every 10 minutes we are communicating. The breakdown was as follows: 9% of the time is writing; 16% is reading; 30% is speaking; and 45% is listening. He concluded that America had built her school system upside down. Our system spends inordinate amounts of time teaching reading and writing -- and almost no time teaching listening.

Neither Rankin nor I are advocating a flip-flop in American educational priorities. But his research certainly illustrates how little effort is put into listening. To be sensitive to God's call means that we must especially LISTEN TO THE CRIES AROUND US. Faithfulness does not necessarily mean "speaking" -- it means "listening" -- above all, listening before speaking. That is one of the key ingredients of Hope's Lay Visitation Seminar -- we are attempting to help members become better listeners.

Because "listening" is not only essential to recognition -- it is a key element to READINESS. To be ready for the Call assumes an openness ... a readiness not only to the cries of the world, but also a readiness to hear ... to listen to the Word of God. Readiness assumes a willingness to listen -- to know the love of God ... and to have a deep and personal appreciation and knowledge of that love.

The seminary dean of one of our Lutheran seminaries received a four-page description of the kind of man (and of course it was a "man," not a "woman") desired by a pulpit

committee. The four-page description went on and on listing all the right leadership qualities. It was a beautiful resume for any position of corporate leadership. But the seminary dean's reply was brief, in fact, two sentences: "Dear pulpit committee, You don't say whether or not the young man should believe in God or not. Do you really care?"

Readiness to the call of God assumes that you and I have experienced more than a couple courses in management by objectives. It assumes that we have experienced the love of God and have a deep appreciation for that experience. It assumes that we have received the power of God in baptism and that we want others to have that eternal promise. It assumes that the Sacrament of Communion is a deeply moving moment of forgiveness ... and that we would do nothing to deny this moment for others. It assumes that we recognize the price paid by Jesus Christ for our salvation -- and that we honor God above all for that sacrifice.

Readiness above all means that we have given allegiance to the authority of God -- that he is the One in charge of our destiny. Jesus Christ is our shepherd, our leader, our master. Personally and corporately, we do not live by the democratic decisions of a church council, but by none other than the ultimate authority of Christ. In fact, his grace means so much to us, that like Philip, we are forever inviting others to be here with us -- we are always saying: "Come and See ... come and experience the presence of Christ ... it will change your life too."

In fact, that is why you and I are here this morning. We know that being the church does not have the glossy promotion of Superbowl XIX. We know that worshipping God means the sacrifice of sleep on Sunday morning. We know that giving God glory means denial of the self. But that's why we're here -- because God's gracious love has called, gathered, enlightened and sanctified us. God's love has made us a holy people -- a caring, sensitive, forgiving people. There is no more uplifting power in this world than that love of God -- and we have come here **READY** to accept it.

So we have passed the first two conditions of the Call of Christ -- we have RECOGNIZED IT ... AND WE HAVE MADE OURSELVES READY for it. We have opened ourselves to the forgiving Word of Christ. But we haven't fulfilled our discipleship UNTIL WE HAVE RESPONDED TO IT.

As one theologian has appropriately said: "Only our feet will finally tell whether we have really heard and made ourselves ready for the call." It is then that the question arises: where will our following take us? God only knows.

We can be certain that it will not necessarily take us where we want to go BUT DEFINITELY WHERE WE ARE WANTED. Because when you and I are ready, then WHERE WE ARE WANTED IS WHERE WE WANT TO GO.

To follow means just exactly that -- to follow WHERE WE ARE WANTED. We point not to our superior moral character, but to that dimly seen figure of Christ for whom we are stumbling after. What we take along is nothing we alone possess -- we take along the adventurous love of Christ. We don't know what that love will get us. Who knows, it may even get us the cross. It may mean that we will end up on the hill with those other three figures. But what greater love can we give than to lay down our lives for the ones we love. That's the ultimate response to the CALL.

Obviously, few of us will go as far as the hilltop of Golgatha. Sacrifice is a little too much for most middle class blood. But nevertheless, we go ... following His lead. It would be great if we would all follow with banners flying and fervant movement. But more often than not, we go dragging our feet -- complaining about how much time this Christian commitment thing takes ... worrying about whether we will really have anything to offer ...fearing rejection from those to whom we minister... hoping above all that this Call will not lead us to a premature cross -- to any real sacrifices in our faith.

But we come -- we recognize the Call and make ourselves ready to fulfill it. We go. We respond. Sometimes reluctantly, sometimes with enthusiasm. But we always go from here telling others to "Come and See ... to come and share ... to come and go with us." For we are the body of Christ. We have heard his Word, and he has made us ready to love and forgive and become his righteous body in this crying world. So we go ... in body, mind and spirit. We go sometimes in weakness, many times half-hearted, often times with a faltering faith. But we go full of hope, because we are always confident that we are following a leader who will not lead us astray, namely Jesus Christ.

So with recognition and readiness of His call to love, let us respond WITH GRATEFUL HEARTS AND COMMITTED LIVES!

AMEN.

EPIPHANY II
Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo
January 19, 1986 (Cong. Budget Meeting)
Peter R. Martyn, Pastor

"HAS HALLEY'S COMET CHANGED YOUR LIFE?"

"This, the first of his miraculous signs, Jesus performed in Cana in Galilee. He thus revealed his glory, and his disciples put their faith in him." John 2:11

In 1682, Edward Halley was 26 when he first saw the comet that would bear his name streaking through the sky. Comets have often been thought to be special signs from God -- and in the 17th century, they were particularly thought to be messages of doom from angry gods. In fact, in the 1910 appearance of Halley's - a French astronomer asserted that the comet's tail contained cyanogen vapors -- poisonous gases. He warned that life on earth would be snuffed out when the tail passed near the earth's atmosphere. And so as the official date of May 18, 1910 drew near, clergy preached hellfire and brimstone messages in all night services and relatives bid one another farewell. Need I say, the French astronomer was wrong.

As most of you know, Halley, who predicted from Issac Newton's laws of gravity, that this comet would appear every 75-76 years never realized what a stir his namesake would cause. Last year scholars discovered a Babylonian reference to Halley's comet dating to 164 B.C. It is therefore believed to go back to a sighting 76 years before that by Chinese astrologers in 240 B.C. But it never caused the stir in those early days that has been made of it today. 80 companies in the U.S. are presently selling tens of thousands of comet items. More than three-dozen new books are vying for readership at this time. 1986 revenues alone are predicted to top \$500 million. Telescope sales in the last year rose by 50%. Travel agencies are booking "southern" packages from \$1400 to \$29,000 to such places as Peru, Botswana, the Amazon, and Sydney, Australia. On March 26th, you can take a Royal Viking Cruise with non-other than Carl Sagan himself. But you'll have to wait for someone to cancel, because the cruise has been sold out for six months.

What do you make of all this? It sounds to me like many people are still looking to the skies to envision a life-changing event. It would appear that some people really think their lives can be altered by some kind of celestial happening like Halley's. At least all the hype around Halley's would indicate that this is what people today view as real life-changing excitement.

We laugh to ourselves -- and yet which one of us has

not dreamed about some kind of heavenly fix for our earthly routines and hassles. We all have our dreams that something out there is going to finally change it all for us here. Something out there in the universe will make life here all better. Something out there will finally give new vision, new meaning, new joy, new vitality to the dull, flat, uninspired, hum-drum, cloudy January days in Ohio. Many of us dream of that quick fix just like our teenagers dream of that special romance that will change it all. Speaking of romance - did you know that people in love actually have less colds in the winter? Dr. Joyce Brothers says that those in love have less than half as many colds as non-lovers. So you see, love is not only a spiritual reality -- it also uplifts the mind and body.

But like Little Chap in the musical "Stop the World I Want to Get Off," many of us never stop dreaming of making it big in the world. Little Chap was driven by a fantastic ambition to become rich and famous. Finally, he succeeded in making a million dollars ... and proud, prosperous, and successful he sings: "For once in my lifetime, I feel like a giant, I soar like an eagle as though I had wings..." Then Little Chap becomes even more wealthy. He makes additional millions. He is elected to parliament, knighted by the queen, the recipient of numerous honors. He falls into many love affairs -- but they are all meaningless because he loves only himself.

Finally, at the end of the play, he has become an old, bitter, cynical man who can only sing: "What kind of fool am I? ... an empty shell, a lonely cell in which a lonely heart must dwell ..." Yes, we always dream that the answer is out there. Somewhere out there in the skies as a comet ... somewhere out there in the clouds as a goldmine. Somewhere out there!

A Harvard scholar, Harlow Shapley, has recently drawn up a list of the "possible causes of the destruction of civilization." On this list he has included nuclear war, natural catastrophe, widespread disease and famine. But you know what he ranked as the #3 cause? BOREDOM! Just plain, old boredom -- which affects about 99.9% of us.

Thank God for the story of the miracle of Cana in Galilee. Because this story graphically reminds us that the real life-changing events ARE NOT OUT THERE, BUT RIGHT HERE IN OUR VERY MIDST. The very things/persons that we often take for granted have the potential to be the most life-changing realities of our lives. We're just so busy looking out there that we don't see what's right here around us/within us BEGGING TO BE A MIRACLE.

Pastor Michaels so beautifully alluded to one of these miraculous elements last week -- WATER. Jesus doesn't go out to find some special comet or some other extra terrestrial object to bring renewed joy to the wedding at Cana. He simply takes what's already there -- about 160 gallons of water ... and he changes it into wine. He uses what everyone else had taken for granted, in order that he might glorify God and bless this couple.

Like the wedding guests, we so often take for granted the abundance that God has given to us. God uses water to bless us and cleanse us and nourish us and sustain us and renew us. What greater thing could God give us than the water of Baptism -- blessing us with the assurance of eternal life with Him. Believe me, after having the potential of a major fire at the Martyn residence on Thursday -- I am deeply grateful for the miraculous gift of plain, old water. It gives us the fire of God's love, but also puts out the fire of destruction.

But water is not all we have in abundance. We have been blessed with a great community, a growing-dynamic church, some of the best schools in the state, beautiful children, the freedom of religion and speech, a responsive and democratic government, outstanding medical care, resources galore through our church, our community and our nation. These are the life-changing, miraculous signs that are all around us -- day in and day out. On top of all this -- we are even more fortunate ... God has blessed us as a congregation with a tremendous abundance of material wealth. There should be all kinds of miraculous signs pouring out of this congregation and our lives. If things at Hope or in Toledo are dull, boring, lifeless, and limited -- it's only because we have not allowed God to work the miracles that are right here with us. We have either been too blind or too chincy to let God really use the potential that he has given us. Water can only become wine when we show our faithfulness to REALLY DESIRING THE MIRACLE TO HAPPEN.

Well, the facts are that God has already done it without us. He has turned the water into wine. The wine is better known as the gift of his grace. He has freely given us the greatest gift known to humanity -- self-worth, divine-affirmation, self-acceptance. That's what the wine of forgiveness is all about ... esp. in the sacrament. It's the assurance of God's loving forgiveness even in spite of our sinfulness, even when we have fallen short of his glory.

Every one of us knows that he or she is guilty of a dull, listless, often boring response to the abundance of God's gifts. We have not given as he has first given to

us. We have often taken his abundant gifts and life for granted. He has given us measure upon measure of blessings. Yet so often our response is "hom-hum." Certainly our average commitment of twelve bucks a week to Jesus Christ is hardly proportionate to the blessing of ~~one~~ ^{one} thousand a week that he gives to so many of us. None of us can deny our guilt for our less than miraculous response.

And yet - the water has already been changed to wine. Christ blesses us with his gracious acceptance - even when we should be rejected. He still gives us the power that changes our lives -- the power of his forgiving love. It's that forgiving love that enables us to possess a new mental attitude, a new mission consciousness, a new motivation for Jesus Christ in 1986 and every year. It is Jesus Christ who gives us a new measure of our self-worth even in spite of our past failures. He comes to us as down-to-earth relational love -- not as a comet in the sky.

Tom Skinner, the gifted black leader of Associates Inc. of New York, spoke at a prayer breakfast a few years ago in Des Moines, Iowa. He described a survey indicating that 50,000 suicides occurred the previous year in New York. From the data, it was found that "the average income per suicide was \$37,000 per year." Skinner said, "You would think the average guy could make it on that. Why all the suicides?" Then he answered his own question, "Maybe it has something to do with the 10 million Americans who are alcoholics, nearly half of them being youth -- and most of them coming from upper, middle class families with college degrees." He concluded: "Today, people don't seem to know who they are or whose they are. They don't seem to believe they are loved or have any cosmic significance or worth!"

As members of the body of Christ, we do not look to the sky for our cosmic significance or human worth. Nothing up there is going to change our lives or make us feel acceptable. We look around us and within us for the presence of Jesus Christ. For his presence is incarnated into the midst of his whole creation. He is around us and within us -- in our friends, in our families, in our marriages, in our working places, in our schools, and especially in our churches. And only his power of forgiving love can change the dullness and drabness of our guilty lives. Only his power can motivate us to give new meaning and new mission to our reasons for living. Only his forgiving power can make us one body of believers on earth -- now and forever united with a variety of gifts
ALL COMMITTED FOR THE UPBUILDING OF THE COMMON GOOD OF
THIS WORLD.

AMEN.

EPIPHANY II (Confess of Peter)
Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo
January 18, 1987
Peter R. Martyn, Pastor

"IS IT WORTH IT?"

But the servant said, "I have labored to no purpose; I have spent my strength in vain and for nothing." ... And God answered, "I will make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth." Is. 49:4,6

Peter said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." And Jesus answered, "I tell you Peter, on this rock I will build my church, and the powers of death shall not prevail against it." Matthew 16:16,18

It's inventory time, isn't it?! Many businesses at this time of the year try to unload the old merchandise before their new fiscal year. It's time to determine what is really worth keeping ... what is really worth merchandising in 1987. What should we be marketing in 1987?

Even many department stores have their annual "white sale" at this time. Evidently, it's time to unload last year's sheets, towels, and pillow cases to make room for the new line (which, of course, is not very different from the old line.)

But it's not only business inventory time. Many of us have just gone through our New Year inventories -- a comparative inventory between 1986 & '87. We look at the old year and evaluate its strengths and weaknesses. And then we look at the new year trying to assess what we can do differently. We may make a few resolutions. We may withdraw from some of the old activities or associations. Or, if you're like me, and you've noticed that 1986 offered a 10% gain -- then it's time to join a tennis club "to work off the flab."

Well, it's also inventory time for the church. It's time to compare the old year and the new year. It's time to determine the strengths and weaknesses of our mission and ministry. It's time to look at our 1986 successes and determine ways to enhance them in 1987. And it's also time to look at our 1986 shortcomings and ask ourselves: What's the matter? Why are we so weak in that area? Why are we content with such a failure? What can we do to avoid such a shortcoming in 1987?

Certainly for a pastor this is truly a time of personal and pastoral inventory. Each year at this time, the bishop sends us our "pink slip" -- an evaluation with several tough questions: "Do you want to continue your ministry in Toledo? Do you want to be considered for another Call? What were the real joys of your ministry in 1986? What were the real problems confronting your ministry in the congregation or personally?"

Those are tough but important questions - regardless of our vocation. But especially after the last few weeks of struggling with difficult deaths and a serious deficit, they have become more challenging. When one feels that his energy levels have been consumed at the 98% level -- and the congregational response is still a deficit, he begins to ask himself: "Is it worth it?" When one takes inventory of congregational and programmatic growth -- but then sees plateaued levels of commitment and attendance, he begins to ponder: "Is it worth it?" When one looks at the competence and excellence of staff for the dollar value -- and the commitment made to cooperative and expanded programming -- and then sees the small response to so many opportunities, he begins to wonder: "Is it worth it?"

But I am not alone in this question. The multitude of you who are here today (and will be at the budget meeting) are the highly dedicated of Hope. You are among the same people year after year who respond to our challenges for leadership and commitment. I am certain that many times you begin to ask: "Is it worth it?" Especially when you see the low levels of commitment from so many who call themselves "members" - you certainly are justified in asking: "Is it worth it?"

Yes, it's inventory time -- and that's always a time to ask: "Is it worth it?" That's the same question Isaiah asked relative to the servant's call from God: "Is it worth it?" And the servant's response was: "I have labored to no purpose; I have spent my strength in vain and for nothing."

We've all had our days when we've felt that way in the life of the church. But not only in the church! Many homemakers feel that way every day! I'm certain many business leaders at both OCF and O-I have felt that way this year ... and maybe yet today. And yes, Bob, the Cleveland Browns are certainly feeling that way after last Sunday. At inventory time, we all look at ourselves and we ask: "Is it worth it?" All this work ... all this effort ... all this gut wrenching time ... and where are the results?? Where are the great gains? Where are the monuments erected to my glory for all this sacrifice!?

Is it any wonder that Isaiah was so depressed? From his human point of view, the servant had labored tirelessly and the results were negligible! But where was the focus?? It was entirely upon himself ... upon his own efforts. It was a self-lamentation ... a crying over spilled milk ... a stewing because the servant had not seen enough earthly reward!!

Isaiah's servant needed a new vision ... a new focus for his efforts ... a new perspective for his ministry. And

the same is true for you and me. We need to get beyond our selfish selves in this church business and ask ourselves: Whose ministry is this? For whom are we working? To whom have we given our lives? Why are we members of Hope Church or any church? Whose glory are we seeking around here anyway?

The Browns of Cleveland were obviously looking for their own glory in the Pasadena Superbowl. But the saints of Hope, Toledo have a totally different confession of faith. Our vision, our purpose, our reason for being at Secor and Bancroft is not for ourselves ... not for our own glory, but so that we might light the world with the living God, Jesus Christ. That is our whole confession of faith -- that is the sole purpose for our existence in this place. We have but one reason to be here: TO GET THE FOCUS OF OUR MINISTRY OFF OUR OWN VANITY AND CENTERED IN THE LOVE OF CHRIST FOR THE NEEDS OF THE WORLD. Or as Isaiah said, "Either God is our strength, or he is nothing!"

Once we make Christ the center of our work ... our purpose ... our being, then our ministry is always worth it, regardless of the results. Why??? Because he is the only rock ... the only foundation that survives the shifting sands of our lives. Everything else ... and everyone else is transitory - ever changing! Only Christ is the solid ground of humanity. That's why Jesus says to Peter: "On this rock (on Peter's confession) I will build my church, and the powers of death shall not prevail against it."

Nothing destroys that foundation of Christ as the living God when genuinely believed and confessed. Two brief illustrations should suffice. In Ethiopia, the Mekane Yesu church has been continually persecuted by the government. One hundred pastors are in prison for preaching the gospel. Some 400 churches have been closed - many now being used as government posts. The general secretary of the church, its chief executive, was kidnapped in 1980 and has never been heard from since. He is presumed dead. Hundreds of worshippers have been dragged from services to prison. Yet in spite of this cruel persecution, the Mekane Yesu church has grown fourfold in the last 20 years. Maybe our mainline churches are not growing because we've got it too easy.

The church in China had to go underground after the revolution in 1949. When it was permitted to emerge some 30 years later in 1979, it had more dedicated followers than when it went underground. Christians line up today to get copies of the Bible in Chinese. In the Soviet Union, a great spiritual hunger is apparent - where attendance is growing after almost 70 years of repression. As the saying goes, "the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church."

Yes, the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and all who have

faithfully followed is what makes it worth it. Hope Church is built upon a solid foundation -- not the foundation of quitters or cozy Christians, but the foundation of Jesus Christ. The foundation of one who gave his life for the love and goodness of humanity. There is nothing that can shake that kind of security -- that life is the only rock of lasting worth in an "anything goes" world.

But we have been given more than a solid foundation. In Christ, we fulfill one of our greatest human desires and needs: TO BE UNITED WITH ALL HUMANITY. To stand alone in this world is not only the height of emptiness -- it can also be our greatest affront of arrogance and ignorance. To act as if we can "do it all alone" is the epitome of insult and denial of God. But to stand with Christ in this world is to be united with all humanity. There is no greater worth given to humanity than to recognize that he is but a needy part of a much greater whole.

Columnist Mike Royko, the Chicago Tribune, tells of the young professional couple who just spent their first Christmas in poverty (because of layoffs). They wanted a Christmas tree - but simply couldn't afford one. On Christmas Eve they walked to a corner lot and began to search for a "cheap" tree. After a long search, they could not find anything reasonable. Finally, they moved to a pile of discarded rejects in the corner. They asked the salesman, "How much?" He said, \$1.50. After spending more time, they finally came to the salesman with two "rejects" and paid \$3.00. That Christmas they had a beautiful tree - because they carefully wired the two "rejects" together and made the greatest tree they had ever seen.

To deny one's relationship to Christ is to be standing alone as just another reject. But in standing with Christ, we are "wired" into a healed humanity. In Christ, we are a reflection of our greatest beauty -- we finally reflect the fulness of humanity - together as black & white, rich & poor, Jew & Gentile, male & female. That's the true image of God -- the oneness of humanity. That's why we celebrate this Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. Because Christ cannot be seen as the living God until the world sees that Christians are truly one!!

Yes, we have great worth when we reflect Christ as our foundation ... and show his foundation as a union of all his faithful. But there is yet one dimension of worth to be fulfilled. We must finish what Christ began in each of us -- the foundation of his forgiving love given on Golgatha. Our worth is directly related to our willingness to finish this loving act of Christ. That's exactly what Jesus means when he tells Peter that he has been given the keys to the kingdom. We must continue to unlock the forgiving love of Christ in the world.

Leonardo da Vinci once started a beautiful canvas work in his studio. He chose a subject, sketched its outer lines, shaded it here and lightened it there. Then when half finished, he stopped and turned to one of his students saying: "Here, I want you to finish the work that I have begun."

The student protested: "But I am not worthy to finish what you began." The student was correct -- he wasn't worthy. But daVinci assured him, "Let my example inspire you to do your very best."

How dare you or I say to Jesus Christ or to each other: "Is it worth it?" Jesus Christ has set the example. He has shown us the foundation of his love. There is only one response to what he has already begun: TO GIVE HIM OUR VERY BEST! That's always worth it! So let's get on with it!

AMEN.

EPIPHANY II
Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo
January 17, 1988
Peter R. Martyn, Pastor

"COME AND SEE!"

Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." Nathanael responded: "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said, "Come and See!" John 1:44-45

Can anything good come out of Toledo?? Have you ever heard that one? We've all heard something like it! Let's take a little survey: how many of you have ever heard someone else be-rate Toledo, Ohio? There's little doubt about it: TOLEDO, OHIO GETS A LOT OF BAD PRESS! As I sit on the "Image and Marketing Task Force" of the Committe of 100 -- we have a real job ahead of us: TO GET ALL THE ALLIGATORS OFF TOLEDO'S BACK!

Like Nathanael in today's gospel - too many people inside and outside Toledo don't know what a good thing we've got going here! Just like Nathanael thought Jerusalem had it all over Nazareth, likewise so many today think that the Chicagos and New Yorks, the Atlantas and Houstons, the Los~Angeloses and the Fort Lauderdaleas have it all over Toledo. Tell me now - what other community could compare to Holy Toledo:

1) Excellent public and parochial schools; 2) an outstanding state university; 3) a tremendously supportive family environment; 4) superb management and labor opportunities; 5) a fantastic access to the entire community without constant traffic jams; 6) good police protection and low crime rate; 7) a strong, diverse, and yet cooperative religious community; 8) outstanding medical services; 9) shopping and commercial vitality galore; and 10) tremendous cultural focus in the arts and music! Show me any community that can match Toledo in all ten of those areas!!

But the first step to GOOD NEWS anywhere or with anyone is RECOGNITION. Good News is not Good News until it is recognized as Good News! Only then do people get excited about it! Toledo's problem has often been the problem of the church: WE DON'T RECOGNIZE GOOD NEWS EVEN WHEN WE HAVE IT!! Or stated differently, too often we don't get VERY EXCITED about the Good News that is all around us!

It's like the story of the poor, elderly woman who worshipped regularly in a congregation like Hope. The Council leaders were embarrassed by her because she just got too excited about the preaching: she would yell, "Amen, Praise the Lord, Hallelujah" throughout the whole sermon. One Sunday morning the leaders greeted her at the door with an agreement. They promised her a heavy, new warm blanket if she would hold her tongue during the sermon. She agreed. At first, she remained silent ... but as the pastor got more and more wound

up, his words grabbed the little lady's heart, until she exploded with excitement: "Blanket or no blanket - Praise the Lord! I say, Amen brother!!" The moral of that story is that too much excitement can get you into real trouble in the church. Maybe that also applies to Toledo as well.

The point should be obvious: NO GREATER GOOD NEWS CAN BE FOUND THAN THE PERSON AND THE POWER OF JESUS CHRIST! But even Jesus' followers sometimes don't seem to be very excited about it! How different it is for you and me when we get a new house ... or buy a new car ... or fashion a new wardrobe ... or have a new grandchild ... or get a new promotion! We show real recognition over things like that! We quickly say: "Hey, Come and see what we just got ... look at our new little pumpkin ... isn't this the greatest thing you've ever seen!"

Before Nathanael could become a faithful disciple -- he had to first RECOGNIZE THE IMPORTANCE OF JESUS CHRIST. Likewise for Toledo -- before Toledo will become a great city, we must give it that kind of recognition!! I thank God for your presence here today -- BECAUSE YOUR PRESENCE RECOGNIZES THE IMPORTANCE OF JESUS CHRIST IN YOUR LIVES AND IN TOLEDO!

But we dare not stop with RECOGNITION -- for that would give us only an intellectual religion. Once we give recognition, THEN WE CAN GET READY! Readiness is a commitment to reception ... being committed to immersion in the Good News!

Today's budget meeting offers a good illustration. There's really great news that needs immersion today! 1987 was a very good year! But if the officers merely stood up and said -- "It was really a good year ... therefore we want you to make 1988 9% better," many of you would not be motivated. As practical human beings, we need to be SHOWN: SHOW US HOW GOOD IT WAS, AND THEN MAYBE WE'LL DO BETTER!

Readiness means a commitment to reception -- to being immersed in the Good News! Readiness means we want an EXPERIENCE OF THIS GOOD NEWS!

Hopefully, that's why I've spent 12-15 hours in the last few days organizing and creating the reports for the officers. Not only because it's necessary -- but because I'm very excited about the news ... and I want to share this excitement with everyone else! Like Philip, I'm saying: "Come and See ... come and see the exciting faith that you have manifested in the Lord Jesus Christ! Come and see the real mission that you have revealed! And God makes me confident that once you see the real stuff of your faith -- then you'll be inspired to do even better in 1988!"

Yes, READINESS is more than RECOGNITION! Some people (even at Hope) say they believe in Jesus Christ -- they show recognition ... but they don't show readiness! They don't worship! They don't study! They don't give! They don't serve! In short, they don't show any experience of Jesus!! It's merely an intellectual recognition -- no real stuff!!

Readiness is what you are all showing today -- the willingness to be immersed in God's Word! In fact, when we are really READY -- it's such a good experience, our relationship to Christ and each other is so uplifted -- that we act just like Philip. We say to our friends and neighbors: "Hey, Come and See what's happening at Hope! Jesus Christ is really alive and well over there! It's really a Christ-like experience to be with those people!! Come on, come and see!!

Yes, RECOGNITION and READINESS are two important steps of discipleship! But without the third, every community of faith would simply be a mutual admiration society! Once we recognize the presence of Jesus Christ ... once we have been made ready to experience his compassionate, forgiving power ... then only one step is left: RESPONDING TO IT!!

One theologian has appropriately said: "Only our feet will finally tell whether we have really recognized and made ourselves ready for the Good News!" The question is: Where will our following take us? Obviously, God only knows! But we can be certain that God will not always take us where we want to go -- but rather, WHERE WE ARE WANTED AND NEEDED! Because when you and I are really ready - then where we are wanted and needed IS WHERE WE WANT AND NEED TO GO!

Tony Campolo in his book, Who Switched the Price Tags?, graphically illustrates the true meaning of RESPONSE! He tells the story of Teddy Stallard and Teddy's teacher, Miss Thompson. Miss Thompson didn't really like Teddy - because Teddy didn't seem to like school. Teddy was hardly an attractive kid ... his homework was horrendous ... and his attitude was highly ambivalent. In short, Teddy wasn't very loveable; in fact, Miss Thompson felt a good deal of resentment toward him. She almost enjoyed giving Teddy "F's" -- she kind of viewed it as divine retribution.

Of course, Miss Thompson knew Teddy's background. His school records indicated he had been a student of promise in the first grade. But then something went wrong at home. In second grade his mother became seriously ill; in third grade his mother died. By fourth grade Teddy was tabbed as a slow learner. And now in fifth grade, Teddy was way behind. Yes, Miss Thompson knew this situation ... but she still resented Teddy!

It came time for the 5th grade Christmas party. All the kids had brought Miss Thompson a gift. Quite to her surprise, Teddy had brought a crudely wrapped gift as well. Opening it in front of the whole class, she discovered a gaudy rinstone bracelet, with half the stones missing, and a bottle of cheap perfume. Sensing that the other children were beginning to smirk and giggle, Miss Thompson had the presence of mind to put on the bracelet and the perfume. Then she invited the children

to "COME AND SEE ... TO COME AND SEE AND SMELL" saying - "doesn't this perfume smell wonderful?!?" The children got the hint and gave their "ooohs" and "aahs."

At the end of the school day, Teddy came in to see Miss Thompson and said: "Miss Thompson, thanks for putting on the perfume ... you smelled just the way I remember my mom ... and her bracelet looked just as pretty on your wrist! I'm so glad you liked my presents!"

That night Miss Thompson got down on her knees and asked God's forgiveness for her attitude toward Teddy. And from that day forward Miss Thompson was a new teacher and Teddy became a new pupil in her 5th grade class. Amazingly, Teddy's attitude and grades improved dramatically!!

Many years later, Miss Thompson received a letter from Teddy telling her that he had graduated second in his high school class. He signed it, "Love, Teddy!" Four years later she got another letter from Teddy advising her that he had graduated from college on the top of his class. And then four years after that, she received a letter signed: "Theodore Stallard, M.D. And in that letter, he said: "I'm getting married, Miss Thompson. And since my father is now dead too, would you be willing to sit where my mother would sit for the wedding if she were alive?? You are all the family I have left!!

It was one thing to RECOGNIZE the need to share Christ with Teddy. It was another thing over the years TO GET READY to share that love of Christ with Teddy. But at last, when Teddy wrote her and said, "Come and See!" -- Miss Thompson RESPONDED WITH HER FEET, HER BODY, HER WHOLE LIFE TO TEDDY! She sat proudly where Teddy's mother would have been seated for that wedding. For she had been getting READY for a long time to RESPOND to Teddy with the full, forgiving, compassionate love of Jesus Christ. For when we respond with the love and compassion of Christ -- it's like a teacher becoming a mother, or father, or sister or brother!

That's why you and I are here today. Because Christ has called us to "come and see." And like Miss Thompson, we are getting ready to respond to wherever God will finally take us!

AMEN.

WEEK OF PRAYER FOR XAN UNITY (Epiphany II)
Sermon preached at Corpus Christi Parish
January 19, 1991
Peter R. Martyn, Pastor

"W H A T A B O D Y !"

(A sermon drafted before the invasion of Iraq - attempted to revise in the past couple of days.) "And now, friends, I beg you through the mercy of God to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice holy and acceptable to God, your spiritual worship. ... Just as each of us has one body with many members, and not all the members have the same function, so too we, though many, are one body in Christ and individually members one of another." Romans 12:1,4-5

Several years ago, TV host Merv Griffin had invited a contingent of body builders to his show. As the dialog was moving along, Merv asked one of the really muscle-bound guys this memorable question: "Tell me, son, what do you really use all those muscles for?" THE BODY BUILDER STOOD UP, TOOK CENTER STAGE, AND FLEXED HIS MUSCLES FOR THE AUDIENCE. That was his answer; he said nothing and sat down.

Merv countered, "No, I'm afraid you misunderstood my question: I asked, what do you really use all those muscles for?" Again, the guy stood up and said, "I'll show you!" And he flexed again, offering a different pose. Merv quickly jumped in, "NO, NO, you're still missing the point. I'm just asking, what do you really use all those muscles for?" And for the third time, the body-builder simply struck a muscular pose.

Needless to say, the body builder didn't get the point. All those muscles - all that strength - but no real use for it OTHER THAN SELF-DISPLAY. Body building has become quite a fad for many folks today. I even see Father Bacik regularly grinding it out many days (course I've never seen him pumping iron). After having five heart by-passes two years ago, I can speak very personally for the importance of physical fitness and body conditioning. But what's the real reason for building up the body?? Far too often, like the men on the Griffin show, it's just a matter of SELF-DISPLAY!

As we encounter the fourth day of Operation Desert Storm, we are deeply aware of seeing one nation flex its muscle against another. Many of us are wondering - what's the ultimate reason for all this muscle flexing?? Is it just a big show of SELF-DISPLAY!?! For me personally, I've become more convinced that Saddam Hussein seems to identify with this motivation: HE WANTS THE WORLD TO BE INTIMIDATED BY HIS MUSCLE! So it is that many feel the United Nations coalition is justified in attacking Hussein's military might. Others feel that Hussein's body would have slowly atrophied & deteriorated if sanctions had been given more time. Whatever our opinions -- I sincerely hope that the U.S. initiation and oversight of this campaign represents more than SELF-DISPLAY OF MILITARY MUSCLE.

But given this situation - we could not be focusing upon a more spiritually appropriate theme than the WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY. Because this theme - and esp. the second lesson from Romans today - truly transforms our thinking about bodily realities, whether the body politic or the body of Christ. At least God offers us a vision, a purpose that transcends the hedonistic, narcissistic mentality of the world, to say nothing of war-making. In fact, it was George Bush himself (in one of his most eloquent moments when again asking us to read his lips) who two years ago quoted a Latin saint who best summarized the greatest mission for not only the body of Christ - but every compassionate body of this world. The saying went: "In necessariis, unitas; in dubiis, libertas; in omniis, caritas." (Now you know why I became a Lutheran pastor rather than Roman priest.) Bush had someone translate this; "IN CRUCIAL THINGS, UNITY; IN IMPORTANT THINGS, DIVERSITY; IN ALL THINGS, GENEROSITY!" I truly believe this should be a part of the mission statement of every Christian church body. Let me amplify!

"In crucial things, unity!" What is the most crucial expression of the body of Christ? What is the one reality that unifies this body? What is the most crucial reality of this body of Corpus Christi and the body of Hope Lutheran? THEY BOTH POSSESS AND SEEK TO OFFER THE ONENESS OF THE GRACE OF GOD!! Like no other body in the world, this body is called by God to serve his grace - his benevolent forgiveness to saint and sinner, to Arab and Israeli, to George Bush and Saddam Hussein. In these most difficult days of Operation Desert Storm - there is no greater challenge to the body of Christ. I remember too graphically the failure of the church during the Viet Nam era. During that time, we forgot our purpose; we lost sight of our mission; we OFTEN BECAME POLARIZED IN MUSCLE-FLEXING. We beat on one another according to ideology rather than listening, debating, sometimes disagreeing, but ultimately LOVING EACH OTHER ALL THE SAME.

I hope we have learned, "In crucial things, the unity of the grace of God!" I hope when people pass by Corpus Christi or Hope Lutheran these days they say: "What A Body! - WHAT A BODY OF PEACE & LOVE!" Too often they have only said that about Hope Lutheran because they think its a pretty building. Too often the church has been little more than those body builders on Merv's show: WE'VE TURNED THE BODY INTO AN OBJECT OF SELF-DISPLAY! Operation Desert Storm makes us consciously aware that we have a crucial mission of UNITY that far transcends denominations, buildings, bureaucracies and bishops. What a challenge the body of Christ faces at this moment! In Christ, we must OFFER God's grace to both pacifist and promoter of actions in the middle east. Our greatest challenge is to celebrate the diversity of opinion while holding fast to the crucial unity of Christ's love and forgiveness. That is our unity ... and our hope in the face of Desert Storm.

But the body of Christ not only reflects this unifying power. "In important things, diversity!" The body of Christ not only has strength in its unifying gift of grace, but it gains strength in the diversity of gifts that are shared by its individual members. In the past week, it is because of the great diversity of opinions that have been shared in bible studies, in PRAYER RALLIES FOR PEACE like Tuesday, in just talking with parish members that I have been able to feel my greatest strength amidst the chaos of war. Each member of the body has rendered a diverse viewpoint ... and thereby given me greater stability in the face of what I have called "spiritual schizophrenia."

It reminds me of the story of the little girl sitting on the steps of a massive cathedral in Washington D.C. A man passing by, paused for a moment to admire this architectural masterpiece. As he was admiring the building, the little girl said, "Well, do you like it?!" He answered, "Most definitely - I think it's one of the most beautiful in America."

"Well, I'm glad you like it," she said, 'cause I helped build it!" The man smiled affectionately and said: "You're pretty small to have had a major part in building such a huge cathedral! Tell me, what did you do?" The little girl proudly perked up and said, "My daddy is a bricklayer. And every day that he worked here I brought him his lunch."

"In important things, diversity!" This little girl's job may not have been the greatest in the world's eyes, but it was very important to her and her dad. How desperately we need to affirm one another - esp. during these unsteady times of war - for the diversity of tasks and ideas that we can share with one another - all with the intent of building up the body ... giving it stability ... not allowing it to become chaotically idolatrous to any one ideology.

The importance of that kind of diversity reminds me of the story of the surgeon, the engineer, and the politician. They were arguing about which of their professions was the oldest and most fundamental. The surgeon said, "Well, since Eve was made from Adam's rib, and since that was the first surgical procedure, certainly surgery is the oldest and most fundamental.

"Yes," countered the engineer, "but before that, order was created out of chaos, and that most certainly was an engineering job." At which point the politician said, "Ah ha, and just WHO DO YOU THINK CREATED ALL THE CHAOS???"

Things haven't changed much since that argument -- the politicians are still doing a pretty good job with chaos -- Desert Storm is just their latest success. But God's intention for diversity is to insure harmony rather than chaos for his body. When one member of the body suffers, other members come to the aid of that suffering member to

restore harmony. When one member is honored for special gifts ... or great theological insights rendered by the likes of Father Bacik -- then all the members rejoice ... BECAUSE SUCH SHARING OF GIFTS, TALENTS, AND INSIGHTS GIVES GREATER HARMONY TO THE WHOLE BODY. Much as GRACE (forgiving love) is our uniting gift, DIVERSITY seeks to assure lasting support and harmony to the body. No one gift, no one idea, no one interpretation is necessarily more important than others -- ALL GIFTS, ALL TALENTS, ALL INSIGHTS offer essential harmony to the body.

Lastly then, "in all things, generosity." As we established at the outset today, the mission of the body of Christ is never for mere self-display. The body of Christ is always more than its individual possessions or parts. The body is not energized by itself -- by looking into the mirror and flexing its muscle. It is energized by the heart of God through the sacrificial life of its Lord, Jesus Christ. It is forever seeking to do the will and reflect the heart of God. And it looks to the sacrificial life of Christ for its example.

Is it any wonder that the body of Christ ALWAYS offers itself with generosity! IT CANNOT DO OTHERWISE - for that's the only example that it has been given from God. God's generosity is always the same -- he always leaves the body, whether the individual or the whole church, better than he found it. We enter this holy place burdened by guilt and bewildered by the bigotry of the world. And GOD MOVES US to sing, to pray, to meditate, to eat and to drink ... and finally we leave ... generously forgiven, generously renewed, generously revitalized to be THE SACRIFICIAL BODY OF CHRIST IN THE WORLD. Or as St. Paul proclaims today: "we go out into the world to offer ourselves as a living sacrifice of what we have first received, the body of Christ." This is our true spiritual worship. In short, our mission is not one of self-display but of serving others with the grace and truth that we have received.

And when that becomes the unity, diversity and generosity of the body of Christ -- is it any wonder that people will pass by and say, "Wow, what a body!" For where else in this world can you find a body of people UNITED BY GRACE, DIVERSELY COMMITTED TO BUILDING UP HARMONY, AND UNANIMOUSLY WILLING TO GIVE WITH GODLY GENEROSITY. What a body God has given us! Not Lutheran, not Roman Catholic, but ONE, DIVERSE, SACRIFICIALLY GENEROUS BODY OF CHRIST. Now that's something worth flexing!!

AMEN.

EPIPHANY II (Martin Luther King weekend)
Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo
January 16, 1994
Peter R. Martyn, Pastor

"CALLED TO BUILD BRIDGES!"

Now the Lord came again and stood there, calling as before: "Samuel, Samuel!" And Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening." I Samuel 3:10

And Nathanael said to Philip, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip answered, "Come and see." John 1:45

Frederick Buechner in his book "The Hungering Dark" just read by Pastor Silleck's "Book Club," uses the Latin word "Vocare" to define a "calling:" namely, to be "called" or to have a "calling" is that for which we are summoned to "spend our lives." So, all of us are "called" to something; all of us have a vocation "to which we are called to spend our lives."

Buechner goes on to say that with every "calling" there is the reality of "listening and hearing." In other words, that to which we have "listened" most is often our "calling." For those who are bound to music -- music often becomes their "calling" -- THAT TO WHICH THEY SPEND THEIR LIVES. To those intrigued with healing or human dynamics -- medicine or psychology often becomes their "calling" -- THAT TO WHICH THEY SPEND THEIR LIVES. Yes, we are all called; in fact, in Holy Baptism like Nicholas today, we are all called to spend our lives to the service and glorification of God.

But one of the biggest roadblocks in "the callings" of life today is that there is so much noise in the world that it has become difficult to hear "any voice with clarity" -- certainly it has become difficult to "hear the voice of God" in a culture which drones on daily with "news & music" 24-hrs a day. Within seconds of getting into our family car, the girls or their friends immediately request that the radio be turned on. Enter the average household and you will find the T.V. going even with nobody watching it. Most of the morning joggers that I run with wear head sets, either listening to radio or tapes. When we become so immersed in the sounds of Music/News/Sports -- pretty soon EVERYTHING WE HEAR IS LITTLE MORE THAN BACKGROUND NOISE.

That's the way it's been for me relative to what was once Yugoslavia: the reports of shelling and killing and devastation that we daily receive about Bosnia have just become a lot of background noise for me. It's even that way sometimes here in America -- earlier this week, the news was about Bibi England being killed at Wendy's & next week it will be murder for someone else at some other place. We become so immersed with the NOISE OF MURDER that pretty soon it doesn't even seem to have an impact any more.

But that was changed for me last week with a Christmas card from one of my seminary friends. She is now a staff reporter for the Minneapolis Star Tribune; she had visited Yugoslavia in 1988 and was deeply inspired by an Old Bridge

in the Bosnian city of Mostar. In the mid-16th century, Suleyman the Magnificent, a renowned Turkish military ruler, ordered a Muslim architect to build the span over the gorge of the Neretva River. The architect devoted nine years to the task of bonding limestone blocks with iron braces & lead. When he finally removed the scaffolding after 9 yrs, he doubted his effort so much that he fled in terror and began to dig his own grave.

That was in 1566; since then the bridge has survived floods, wars, political skirmishes and modern environmental pollutions. When my friend saw the bridge in 1988, she said "it revealed a fairy tale loveliness. Along with 24 mosques & innumerable minarets, Mostar had become one of Bosnia's prize tourist attractions. It had been a town where Muslims, Serbs and Croations had worked together, mingled together & married much as if they were the "melting pot of America." My friend said this bridge, called "Stari Most," "was the Taj Mahal of Eastern Eurpoe; it was to Yugoslavia what the Eiffel Tower is to France or the Statue of Liberty is the United States."

Then came the break-up of Yugloslavia in mid-1991. And last November, the battered ruins of "Stari Most" along with three bloodied, dead children (nine were killed in all) were shown on the obituary page of the New York Times. The Times article reported that the Coatian militia boasted that they had fired only 10 shells that day at the bridge before it fell; it had already taken 50 earlier hits before that day. And Bosnian Prime Minister Haris Silajdzic was reported as saying that the attack was planned to produce "as many casualties among children as possible."

Since last week, I no longer "listen" to Bosnian reports as background noise. What's happening in Bosnia regrettably is happening all over the world: BRIDGES ARE BEING BLASTED APART INSTEAD OF BEING BUILT UP. That Old Bridge in Mostar was not only the creation of a mid-16th century architect; it is the very CALLING of every created human being in this room and throughout the world. THE CALLING FOR WHICH GOD HAS CREATED US ... FOR WHICH GOD WANTS US TO SPEND ALL OUR LIVES ... IS TO BE BRIDGE BUILDERS NOT BRIDGE BLASTERS. That's why God called Samuel; because Eli and his corrupt priestly sons had become "Bridge Blasters;" God needed a new architect who would begin to BUILD HIS CHOSEN PEOPLE INTO ONE, whether they were Jews, Muslims, Croates, Serbs, or whatever! And then later, God gave that same task to those who were CALLED by his Son -- people like John the Baptist, and Peter, and Philip and Nathaniel.

And look at HOW Nathanael responded to this new CALLING! He said, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth??" Do you know what we call that response?? It's called prejudice!! It's the same kind of response that you or I might make when someone from the inner city of Toledo says, "Come and See" what the Lord has done in this city; and we answer: "Can anything good come from down there!?" Nathanaels' answer

was the same response given by those "Croatian militia" or the Prime Minister of Bosnia: "KILL THOSE CHILDREN BEFORE THEY MULTIPLY!" Instead of fulfilling the CALLING of God -- Nathanael was still hooked ON OLD PREJUDICES ... he couldn't imagine that the PROMISED ONE could possibly come from such an impure place as Nazareth. And it always takes someone like Philip to help us see the real picture. Philip yelled, "O.K. - then Come and See!" It was only when Nathanael came face to face with Jesus Christ that he realized HIS REAL CALLING: Christ had come to be a bridge-builder for him in order that he would become a bridge-builder for others.

That's the vision that Jesus himself offers in today's text. He states "I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man." Obviously, as is often the case in John's gospel, we see Jesus describing himself as the BRIDGE/LADDER BETWEEN HEAVEN AND EARTH -- CHRIST HAS COME TO CONNECT THE CREATOR OF THE UNIVERSE WITH THE CHILDREN OF THE EARTH. Jesus Christ's CALLING is to bridge the gap between the goodness of God and the murdering instincts of humanity. And the only way that Christ can accomplish that CALLING is by attracting like-minded disciples to his mission in this world.

"Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Yes, the very best has come out of Nazareth ... and he has been CALLING the very best to His CALLING ever since. "Can anything good come from Atlanta, Georgia?" If we were still unbaptized like Nathanael, then we'd respond in a typical prejudiced manner. But tomorrow we recognize that one of Christ's "very best" did come from Atlanta; because this same Martin Luther King was fully committed to the "bridge-building" CALLING of Jesus Christ. Like Christ himself, King called this country to examine the racism of any of its structures that "tear down bridges" rather than "building them up." Like Christ himself, King challenged every American to "bridge the chasms of hatred and fear."

But just as we keep on "baptizing" infants (like Nicholas) this morning -- we are reminded that Christ's CALLING like Martin Luther King's CALLING is not yet done in this world. It doesn't take a Wall Street analyst to notice that as economic times get tougher in any culture -- then racism revives itself and pretty soon you have Croate against Serb, Muslim against Christian, and Black against White. Recent killings in our own country clearly indicate that there is growing suspicion between anyone who looks different, who speaks different, or who comes from a different country.

Our CALLING as Christians today is no different than the CALLING of those Christians of the 1st century. God keeps on saying: "Come and see! Don't let the background noise totally obliterate my spirit and my message! Who are you really following -- bridge builders like Christ, or small minded, self-interested players like the Nathanaels of the

world. We believe and we profess that Jesus Christ was and is truly God BECAUSE HIS WHOLE LIFE WAS A BRIDGE-BUILDING ENTERPRISE. Instead of stoning prostitutes, he forgave them and asked: "Let him who is without sin cast the first stone!" Instead of rejecting the hungry and the lost, he said to his disciples: "Does anyone have any loaves and fish? And with a mere seven loaves and few fish, he somehow miraculously BRIDGED THE NEEDS OF SOME 5,000 HUNGRY PEOPLE. The stories go on and on and on -- how a beaten man was by-passed by all the religious experts, but a Samaritan became the true bridge builder of Christ -- not because of his religious credentials, but because he offered the man spirit and compassion of Jesus Christ.

At this particular moment -- there is only ONE VOICE to be heard in this place. It is not my voice, it is the voice of Jesus Christ speaking. And his voice is saying: "Come and see what I have done! "The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news preached to them." So, take up your cross and follow me! But don't think that I have merely come to bring peace on earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword -- a scapal that separates those who kill from those who care and show compassion. For he who loses his life for my sake will find it. But whoever would be great among you must first be your servant, for I came not to be served, but to serve and to offer my life as a ransom for many. For this is my beloved with whom I am well pleased; I will put my Spirit upon him, and he shall proclaim justice to all peoples; he will not wrangle or cry out loud, nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets, for he will not break a bruised reed or quench a smoldering wick. For thru him, I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, every hill & mountain made low; the rough places will be made plain, & the crooked places will be made straight. Yes, I have a dream that one day all little children will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character. And that day is the day when every Christian no longer DREAMS ABOUT BRIDGE BUILDING, BUT SPENDS HIS/HER LIFE BEING THE BAPTIZED BRIDGE-BUILDER THAT CHRIST HAS CALLED EACH OF US TO BE!

AMEN.

Epiphany II
Glenwood Lutheran Church, Toledo
January 19, 1997 (Martin Luther King weekend)
Peter R. Martyn, Interim Pastor

“YOU AIN’T SEEN NOTHIN’ YET!”

Philip said to Nathanael, ‘We have found him about whom Moses and the prophets wrote, Jesus, son of Joseph from Nazareth.’ And Nathanael said, ‘Can anything good come out of Nazareth?’ Philip answered, ‘Come and See!’ And Jesus said to Nathanael, ‘Do you believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these!’ John 1:45-46; 50

“Can anything good come out of Toledo?” Have you ever heard that one? Well, we’ve all heard something like it. Let’s take a survey: How many of you have ever heard someone be-rate the city of Toledo??? There’s little doubt about it: Toledo gets even more bad press than Nazareth!

And the truth today is, that like Nathanael, too many people both outside and inside Toledo **DON’T HAVE THE EYES OF FAITH!** When I say they don’t have “the eyes of faith,” I’m talking about people who don’t have a “vision of confidence” ... people who have no source of hope-filled power beyond themselves ... people who have given into cynicism and skepticism ... a vision of hopelessness about life in general.

Dear friends of Glenwood, much as people say, *“Can anything good come out of Toledo,”* some people might be saying the same thing about Glenwood right now. There are some folks in this flock who only have “the eyes of the days’ gone by.” They only remember the glory days of Dr. Bell and Pastor Steele and even Pastor Imhoff. But somehow in the last decade, they have lost “the eyes of faith.” They have lost sight as to WHO IS IN CHARGE OF GLENWOOD CHURCH. I fear that they don’t trust in Glenwood or her future because they only have “eyes fixed on the things of this world.” Regrettably, they have lost sight OF THE ONE WHO HAS ALWAYS DONE GREAT THINGS FOR GLENWOOD -- the power & Spirit of God himself in Jesus Christ. There have never been “any great things” at Glenwood or Toledo or Nazareth without the reigning power of God.

Well, that was exactly the circumstance that Jesus faced with Nathanael. Nathanael was a good man, just like many people in Toledo and many members of Glenwood. Nathanael (we’re told) was even an honest and virtuous man. But when Philip came to him with Good News -- Nathanael lacked the “eyes of faith.” Because of the circumstances in & around Galilee, Nathanael had become a total cynic and skeptic. He could not see at that moment that with the power & presence of Jesus, Galilee could be a better place. He was initially closed to any vision of God’s power “coming into this world.” But once he encountered Jesus “face to face under the fig tree,” he finally realized that the **VERY SON OF GOD HAD COME FROM NAZARETH TO MAKE GREATER THINGS HAPPEN IN GALILEE & THE WHOLE WORLD!!**

This text makes crystal clear that the first step of discipleship is always the same: **A TRUE DISCIPLE MUST HAVE THE EYES OF FAITH.** To have the "eyes of faith" simply means that we recognize that God has the power to do anything and everything as long as we are open to using His power. Once open to God's power, then like Philip, we get very excited about God's mission and we find ourselves saying to our friends: "Hey, Come and See what's happening at Glenwood or wherever the place may be!!!" And then like Philip ... and like Nathanael ... and like millions ever since - WE FOLLOW!! And it's at that very moment that Jesus is saying to us: *"You will see greater things than these!"* Or put into today's vernacular: *"You ain't seen nothin' yet!"*

Before great things ever happen for any of God's people, they must first have "the eyes of faith"--the vision that God's power is alive & working through them. The examples of this are so plentiful that we could spend the whole day uplifting them. Look at Abraham -- called to be the patriarch of a people who didn't even exist at the time of the call. Can you imagine what Abraham could have said!?! "What good can come from this puny people and this lack-lustre-land of Israel??" But Abraham had the eyes of faith -- he had a vision that God's power was with him ... and Israel was blessed as the chosen people of God.

The same was true for Moses. How could one little man ever go up against the principalities and powers of the Egyptian Pharaoh??? There is only ONE WAY any such man could have ever succeeded in that vision -- he had to have the "eyes of faith" -- he truly had to believe that God's power was with him and that he could lead this people out of slavery into the promised land.

And what about Job?? Here was a man who lost everything -- his spouse, his land, his family, his herds, his wealth and finally his physical health!! Certainly this man could have said, "What good can ever come to a man who believes in God!?" But he didn't allow his physical losses to cause him to lose "the eyes of faith." He believed that God's power of compassion and love was still with him and would ultimately bless his life again and again and again.

And what about Martin Luther. Which one of us would be willing to challenge the religious establishment of the 16th century?? If we think we have religious and political corruption today ... we have no idea of how evil and rotten rulers became "to get things their way" in Luther's day. Greater things happened in the 16th century because one man had the "eyes of faith!" Only God's power & Spirit could have reformed and revitalized a church that had become poisoned by papal power ... but it took a disciple with the "eyes of faith" to see that the job got done.

And the same must certainly be said for Martin Luther King on this weekend as we uplift his memory and ministry. Here was a baptist preacher with the "eyes of faith" who dreamed not an egotistical dream, but a baptismal vision for all God's people on earth:

I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed. ... I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia sons of former slaves and sons of former slaveowners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood. ... I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in antion where they are NOT judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character. ... I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, and every hill and mountain shall be made low ... the rough places will be plain ... and the crooked places will be straight.

This is **NOT an impossible dream** of a black-American freedom-fighter! This is **NOT the impossible dream** of a Negro who led a civil rights movement some 30 years ago. **This is the IMPOSSIBLE DREAM OF JESUS CHRIST!!** It's the dream that Jesus has for each of us when we come under the water & Spirit of baptism. **Once blessed** with His cleansing & renewing power... **once nurtured** from infancy to adulthood in that baptismal faith ... **once grounded** in the everlasting prayer which petitions "God's will be done on earth" ... then Jesus says to each of us: "***You aint seen nothin yet!!***" Yes, today ... and every day, Jesus says to Glenwood & Toledo & Chicago ... and to all races & ethnic groups in America and all over the globe ... **he says to all who have eyes to see and ears to hear: "YOU WILL SEE GREATER THINGS THAN THESE!!"**

My friends in Christ, the truth of the gospel is as powerful today as it was at any time in the 1st century or before. **Samuel's words & life were impotent and had no impact upon Eli until Samuel was given the "eyes & ears of faith."** Once he realized that God was really seeing him and really speaking to him -- great things began to happen. Samuel cleaned up a mess of corruption that had been made of religion and the priesthood by Eli's sons.

That is the same truth for each of us. **As long as we are only listening to each other and all the bad news around us in this world -- we will NOT see great things happening in the body of Christ. As long as we listen to the cynics and skeptics around us and among us -- we are doomed to failure and to a fruitless future. But once we see life & church & daily routines with "the eyes of faith" ... once we let God's power reign supreme in our day to day lives ... then you and I will see a vision of greater things. Whether it's Glenwood or our own families -- if we see God's possibilities and power ... then we will be able to say: "You ain't seen nothin' yet!!"** That has been the visible truth from the time of Moses to Mary Magdalen to this very time of Martin Luther King Jr. **When we let God give us the "eyes of faith" ... when we let His power direct our will and our ways -- then we will always say: "You ain't seen nothing yet!"** May God bless us with "the eyes of faith" that rely on His power at Glenwood ... so that our future will be consistent with Christ's vision for us: "***You will see greater things than these!!***"

AMEN.

*Epiphany II
First English Lutheran, Toledo
January 20, 2002
Peter R. Martyn, Part-time Interim*

WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING FOR?

When Jesus turned and saw (John the Baptist's disciples) following, he said to them, "What are you looking for?" John 1:38

It should be obvious from today's gospel that John the Baptist had quite a following. He was possibly the first preacher who had followers more interested in him as the messenger than in Jesus as the Messiah. Throughout history – that has been a church problem: more people following a clergy messenger than the anointed Messiah. But like a good pastor, John was trying to rectify this problem. So he told two of his disciples to follow after Jesus. And then Jesus confronted them with a question: "What are you looking for?"

That question has been the pivotal question for all Christians from the beginning until the end of time: **WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING FOR?** Each of us must ask ourselves that question every time we come to worship or associate with any religious expression. Is our main reason for coming here simply to find comfort and companionship? Or because of dwindling numbers, do we feel obligated to be here on Sundays? Are we simply here out of habit? What kind of changes are we expecting in our lives or in other lives because of our being here? Will people who see us during the week recognize any differences in us because we have been here? These and hundreds of other questions could be asked. And they all revolve around the same question Jesus asked 2000 years ago: **WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING FOR?**

One thing is certain – we are not like the faithful in Sobrado, Portugal. In that city there is a dog named Preta. Every Sunday morning Preta leaves her owner's home at 5 a.m. and walks 16 miles to a R. C. parish to take her usual place next to the altar during mass. The dog stands and sits whenever worshippers do. It has been reported that church attendance has dramatically increased since Preta joined the parish. In other words, to Jesus' question: what are you looking for? ... a high number of people in Sobrado are answering: **THAT FAITHFUL DOG.** We could justifiably say that that parish has gone to the dogs. I wonder, however, how many congregations would use a dog as a ploy for increasing Sunday attendance?? Would 1st English ever stoop to try that form of animal evangelism?

Well it's obvious that when Jesus asked the question he was not seeking a dog pedigree as the answer. Instead Jesus was testing these disciples to determine their degree of divine devotion. Were these disciples really seeking a personal encounter with God? Were they looking for a transformation in their personal lives? Did they really want to be changed? Were they searching for a deeper understanding of spiritual commitment ... of love & compassion ... of mercy

and forgiveness ... of justice and righteousness?? They responded to Jesus by asking, "Where are you staying?" Or said differently, where are you making your home in this world? Jesus said, "Come and see;" "Come and learn what ministry means when you stay with me!" So they not only stayed the day ... they stayed for the rest of their lives. Thus, the point of the gospel: Are we looking to stay with Jesus wherever that may be ... or wherever that may take us? That is a question that is uniquely confronting First English at this time in history: **WILL YOU STAY WITH JESUS EVEN IF IT MEANS HE MAY TAKE YOU TO A DIFFERENT PLACE??**

We could leave today's message standing right there. Because we have an answer to what Jesus was asking: what are you looking for? **TO STAY WITH JESUS WHEREVER HE TAKES US.** But how can we be assured that our mission reflects that kind of "staying power?" Carlo Guilini, the one-time conductor of the LA Philharmonic Orchestra, offers a unique insight to satisfy this mission goal and purpose. He was once asked, "How do you fulfill your responsibility as music director?" He answered: First, I serve the music as best I can; second, I serve the orchestra as best I can; and third, I serve the audience as best I can." Obviously, Gulini's terms of mission were music, orchestra and audience. To translate those into religious symbols ... the question becomes: are we serving the gospel (music), the church (orchestra) and the world (audience) the best that we can? To stay with Jesus wherever he takes us is to focus upon those three areas of discipline: the gospel; the church; the world.

So, when we invite anyone to "come and see" the ministry of 1st English, the focus of that time together is NOT to glorify "A place" but to glorify the gospel. Nothing is more vital to staying with Jesus than the theme of the gospel ... *"that God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whoever believes in him will not perish but have everlasting life."* That's the mighty fortress of First English and every ministry that stays with Jesus – that God is absolutely, unconditionally, forever and always for us. That he came into this world to assure us that he will cleanse us and never abandon us. That's the light that has come into this world through the Lamb of God – a light of everlasting love that cannot be terminated by the stubbornness or the terrors of our times.

Like Gulini with the symphony, our mission with God is to serve up that gospel the very best that we can. When people come and see First English, they should never leave confused as to what we are all about: we are not here to glorify ourselves, but to glorify Jesus as the Lamb of God who has rescued us from the powers that destroy love, compassion and forgiveness in this world. As long as we serve the gospel first and foremost – we have reason to stay here forever ... whether yoked, blended or whatever form it takes.

But secondly, to stay with Jesus is to serve the church the very best that we can. And how do we best serve the church? Quite simply, by being faithful to what God has called us to be: **ONE, HOLY, CATHOLIC, APOSTOLIC BODY!** "One" & "Holy" simply mean that God wants us to be **IN HARMONY** and **AT**

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PEACE both inside this place and outside this place. Conviction to Jesus Christ is more important than any other loyalty. Moreover, we are to be a reflection ... a light of God's everlasting character rather than a mirror of an ever-changing culture. God's character seeks to offer care, commitment and compassion regardless of the location or the cost. That's the holiness that people must come to see in this place or wherever this mission is located.

As we celebrate Martin Luther King's dream this weekend, we are reminded that God was the first to have this dream for his church – that all his faithful children would live in peace and unity regardless of color or creed. That's the universal (the catholic) focus of First English made known by every apostolic saint who has ever spoken ... to promote peace and unity among the whole people of God. Nothing is more vital to the church's ministry than to fulfill God's dream for peace and unity among all people.

So that naturally leads to the third dimension of "staying with Jesus wherever he takes us" – to serve the world the best that we can. There's an old story that compares the church to a large department store with hundreds of employees. Each morning this body of good people reports for dedicated duty. They organize the merchandise with great care. They prepare the cash registers and sales predictions with great preciseness. Then the bell rings for the day to begin. But instead of opening the doors to the public, they spend the whole day only selling the goods to each other. The moral of this story is that too many congregations have lost sight OF THE NEEDY ONES they are called to serve.

God has called First English and every other congregation NOT to serve itself, but to offer itself as a ransom for the needs of the community around us. First English has responded to that call by offering its building for the special needs of this community. And God says to 1st English, "Well done my faithful flock!" But my mission asks for personal sacrifice as well as facility offerings ... because God's body always becomes strongest through personal sacrifice. Yoking may certainly help 1st English feel stronger. But the real challenge ahead is – how will the faithful of 1st English really make personal sacrifices to serve the needs of those beyond this place? I don't have the answer to that question ... but I do know that God is **LOOKING FOR DEEP, PERSONAL SACRIFICE.** That is the greatest answer "to staying with Jesus."

So again – what are you looking for? Hopefully, you are looking to stay with Jesus wherever he takes you. That obviously means that 1st English must do the best that it can do to serve the gospel, the church and the world. Are you ready to be yoked to that mission?? Well – don't get yoked with any congregation or pastor who is not looking for that kind of answer!

Amen