

TRINITY X
WRIT Broadcast - Milwaukee
August 15, 1971
Text: I Cor. 12:1-11

Pastor Martyn

"BEING A UNIQUE PIECE OF THE PUZZLE"

In the 12th chapter of his first letter to the Church at Corinth, the Apostle Paul offers witness to our individual uniqueness yet corporate commonality as the people of God.

"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."

These words are probably the most unambiguous proclamation of our recognition and willingness to accept diversity amidst unity--that is, even as we recognize the centrality of Christ, Christianity allows for a diversity of gifts, services, and workings as vehicles for the realization of its own Christ-centeredness. In fact, Christianity doesn't really have a choice in the matter--for through creation itself God has ordained this diversity of gifts and services--it is His intention that each of his human creatures possess a uniqueness not as an end in itself, but as a means to a greater end--for the common good. To the degree that these human gifts, services, and working experience God's intention and motivation, the common good is served--that is, the whole people of God is served.

Needless to say, we would only be kidding ourselves if we were to believe that God's intention for our gifts and abilities experiences ready-made fulfillment. Although the potential for fulfillment stares at us daily, its realization too often gets road-blocked or detoured. That is, God's intention for the expression of our uniqueness for the common good daily encounters the roadblocks of obsession, or repression and suppression.

The roadblock of obsession stifles the uniqueness of one's gifts and abilities through the establishment of a self-admiration society. Here the person clearly recognizes his gifts and abilities, but sees little service for them beyond himself. One might say that he aspires to a playboy mentality finding his most intimate romance and fulfillment with the mirror on the wall. The person so self-obsessed does not exclude himself from other relationships . . . people are essential to his well being--he simply selects those who offer fuel to his egocentric fire. And so the uniqueness of his gifts, the avenues for his service, and the channels for his works are close-circuited at the source of their potential generation.

The hypothetical illustration above too often sees its parallel in our churches today. We so often become obsessed with the beauty of our particular worship form and in the process overlook the diversity of gifts which are being lost because of our self-inflation. We get so hung up on doctrinal positions that we crowd both the Spirit of God and his forgiving fellowship out of our reach. Similarly, our denominational obsessions make our unity in God and His intention for the common good not only a mockery for those who are struggling to understand Christianity but also a mockery of God himself.

Yet our God-given gifts, services and workings for the common good are not only stifled by the roadblocks of obsession, but also by the detours of repression and suppression. Here God's intention for our gifts and abilities for the common good are again stifled by our self-interest, a self-interest motivated by fear and stubbornness.

The detour of repression finds a person mumbling holy words and phrases but failing to employ his gifts and service to activate these expressions. If the Spirit of God is to be alive, uplifting for the common good, then it must be surrounded by the gifts, services and workings of human flesh in action.

Similarly, the detour of suppression and its proponents denies God's diversity of gifts and services by saying, "That's not the way it used to be."

Here God's gifts and services are challenged by established patterns as if they were the absolute expression of God's Spirit working in man. We need only re-read this text to recognize God's Spirit challenges such once-for-all gifts. If God is truly alive for his people, then there are no limits to the diversities of gifts, services and workings to be rendered for the common good by His people.

The readblocks and detours of obsession, repression, and suppression are not to be tolerated by Christians if we are hopeful of God's Spirit being manifested for the common good. For God's Spirit intends, yes, even motivates the varieties of gifts, services and workings among his people. The Spirit of God cannot be sliced into cuts of exclusiveness.

Every piece of God's puzzle for life is a gift to the remaining pieces--each piece and parcel of the whole serves the totality of the puzzle--it gives it form, shape and greater clarity of meaning--each piece works to bring about that wholeness. All of the pieces remain God-given--and as such, each of those pieces manifests its God-given intention and motivation for the common good.

As Christians each of us must be thankful for the unique gifts, services, and abilities that we possess, regardless of their nature. But like the pieces of a puzzle, we must recognize that we live in relation to other unique persons. It is only as our uniqueness comes into contact and acceptance of other unique persons on the puzzleboard of life, that the totality of life both for us individually and corporately takes on new shape and meaning.

A single, unique piece of a puzzle has very little meaning if it stands alone on a puzzleboard. Similarly, our unique gifts, services and workings have very little meaning if they do not come into active relationship with other unique people of God. For as we come in contact and accept the other unique forms and expressions of God's people, then we come to better know that His Spirit is being manifested through us for the common good. And it is at that

moment in our lives that we feel a sense of real worth--a sense of real affirmation in life--a sense of really sharing our gifts, services and workings with others to bring greater clarity, meaning and value to the life that God has given all of us. That is truly manifesting the Spirit of God given to each of us for the common good.

Amen.

TRINITY X

Pastor Martyn

Sunday, August 15, 1971

Redeemer Lutheran Church - Milwaukee

Text: Luke 19:41,42

"A PROGNOSIS FOR PEACE"

"And when he drew near and saw the city he wept over it, saying, 'Would that even today you knew the things that make for peace! But now they are hid from your eyes!'"

During the past week, I was called to minister to the needs of the family of a dying man. The family and I shared an hour or so on Monday and Tuesday at the bedside of the cancer victim. These were two days of intense turmoil for the 74 year old man. Finally he died, early Wednesday morning. As I was driving home from the hospital on the sleepy, deserted freeway, my thoughts drifted over the past two days. I remembered the man--struggling to breathe - desperately seeking a position of comfort--momentarily gaining consciousness and asking me what the verdict was-- and then I remembered his look at this early morning hour--no tension in his face--no fear in his gaze--no wheezing--uneasy movements in his body--JUST STILLNESS, COMFORT, CALMNESS, yes, PEACE! I recalled at that moment Jesus' words in today's Gospel: "Would that even today you knew the things that make for peace! But now they are hid from your eyes."

For that moment, that morning, they weren't hid from my eyes. And since that time, I have seen in that man's disease and death and final peace, some possible answers to the question I wanted to share with you today: What makes for peace? What is a reliable prognosis for peace? By concentrating on three stages of a serious disease, I think we might all come to better understand what the CONDITIONS for PEACE are.

First, let's just briefly establish a meaning for PEACE. For the time being, let us just say that peace is a relative calm--a reunion of things separated--a lack of turbulence or division--a oneness of wholeness--harmony without dissonance.

So, now what are the conditions for that condition. The first is a recognition of the disease--of the separation--of the turbulence--of the disunity. And by recognition, I mean a TOTAL ADMISSION to its existence.

A doctor can give a diagnosis for a disease, but that alone will be no promise of peace for the person. The person himself must admit to himself that he has the disease before there will be any chances for peace for the diseased cells as well as peace for the patient. And so it is with all conditions of life.

A diseased marriage will never experience a condition of peace until both partners recognize that they are the diseased agents. Until they each recognize how they each contribute to the division, the turbulence, the dissonance in their relationship--until they each recognize and admit their contribution to the breakdown of harmony, THERE WILL BE NO PEACE FOR THEM.

Needles to say, this also applies to the relationships between people in general as well as nations. Rarely is only party responsible for the turbulence of war or racial divisions or other breakdowns between people. The disease of division lurks in all persons and nations. And until each person and thereby each nation recognizes and admits his contribution to the disease, there will be NO PEACE for those persons and nations. And Jesus will continue to say:
"Would that even today you knew the things that make for peace! But now they are hid from your eyes."

There was no peace for Jerusalem because her people were unwilling to recognize and admit that they were decaying internally--they had become a greedy, self-satisfied, and godless people--they had become blind to their own disease of self-righteous separation.

But as Christians we guard against this condition, we recognize and admit to contributing to the disease of separation and division--for we are all carriers of this disease--and there will be no peace for the disease or for us until we confess to our contributory nature.

A second condition for a prognosis for peace is the search for a suitable therapy. An admission of the disease is not enough--it must have treatment. That often means some discomfort and pain. It means cutting out the diseased part of life. It means stitching up the wounds after the removal of the diseased portion. It means a time is needed for recuperation--and special tender, loving, care. This second condition is a THERAPEUTIC APPROACH--that means it as an approach which seeks to heal the division, rather than causing further separation and turbulence and destruction. It is an approach which recognizes that God seeks to heal, not to divide and destroy.

And so with the admission of division in marriage, comes next, the therapy. The therapy which cuts out that which creates the division. The therapy that stitches the wounds of the past. The therapy of recuperation--a time for especial tender, loving care of each other.

And so it is with all relationships in life. It takes more than an admission from us if we have denied another man an equal opportunity--we must go the second step, we must struggle with him to help restore a united relationship--we must seek to treat the disease of division in each of us.

And similarly with nations. If we are to follow a God-like therapeutic approach to peace, then we must no resort to the irrationality of destructive weapons--such an approach does not heal the wounds, but further promotes the malignancy. Such an approach is not God's therapy, but rather man's sinful wrath. For God's therapy is not one of wrath to those who know him well, his therapy is to "love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your strength, and with all your soul, and with all your mind--and to love your neighbor as yourself." And with this kind of therapy, Jesus need not say:

"Would that even today you knew the things that make for peace! But now they are hid from your eyes."

The people of Jerusalem had hid their eyes from God's therapy--for they were not even willing to admit that

they suffered the disease of separation.

But this is not so for Christians. We are very much aware of God's therapy for us--he continually offers us his prognosis for peace--to love Him and our neighbors as ourselves--that is the healing of forgiveness and that is a second condition for a prognosis for peace.

Finally, the last condition for a prognosis for peace is the acceptance of death. Not only the acceptance of physical death when that moment comes, but that death of dying to our own stubborn, arrogant self. Men will always live with fear and with the disease of division until they accept the ultimate will of God. And that means dying to the self--to the arrogant self--it means that we recognize that each ripple of life endures for an instant and then flows on--we do not hang onto our mortal selves or mortal will if we are looking for a prognosis of peace. Peace means that we recognize that all life does not end in ourselves, but ends in God.

In Baptism, we recognize this greater will for life - greater than our own. In Baptism, we are given a greater reason for living than we could ever have in ourselves. Because in Baptism, we are offered the eternal will of God--which means that we die to our own will and accept God's will for us - his forgiveness.

In accepting His Will, we come eyeball to eyeball with the prognosis for peace. Because in accepting His Will we come to recognize our own disease--the disease of separation from him--the disease of separation from one another--the disease of separation which we have traditionally come to know as Sin.

But with His Will offered to us, we have also His treatment for our disease--we have the forgiveness for our separation--we have His prognosis for peace--we have a forgiveness which we are to share so that God's prognosis for peace may be experienced throughout the world.

Under this prognosis, we die unto ourselves, in order that we may live beyond ourselves in Christ.

The people of Jerusalem had lost sight of God's will. They were living only for themselves--and consequently they died a destructive death only because of their own self-righteous arrogance.

And so Jesus said: "Would that even today you knew the things that make for peace! But now they are hid from your eyes."

They are not hid from our eyes today. God lives in us as we let Him live. Let us share His forgiving Will with one another--here and everywhere--so that we will be able to share an everlasting prognosis for peace.

Amen.

8/15/71

Pastoral Prayer

O Lord our God, eternal author of peace for this world, we give you thanks and praise for the forgiveness which you have offered us. For there is no greater peace than being at one with you.

And now O Lord we ask that your spirit of peace will be with us as we prepare for the experiences of another week.

Give us the strength and courage to face the disease of division within us. Help us to admit it to ourselves and to those whom we are separated from.

Make us always know that as you are a God who is always with us, we need never turn to the irrationality of war and destruction if we but turn to you first.

Help us to admit O Lord that our wars and destruction are evidences of our turning away from you. Likewise, as we feel the division and separation between loved ones and friends, give us the courage to treat these divisions with your healing power of forgiveness and reconciliation.

Especially, O Lord, make us aware and sensitive to those persons who are experiencing division, internal turbulence, and other forms of dissonance; Deliver us from judging them self-righteously -- rather enable us to show your love for these persons. Help us to instill your healing power in all the relationships in life. And especially, O Lord, may we be your agents of peace for those among us who have been subjected to the divisions in life or whom are feeling especially divided from you and from us at this moment.

We pray that these and all others may know and accept your peace, especially if they face the prospect of death. These things we ask in the name of your son,

TRINITY X

Pulpit sermon by
Pastor Martyn

Redeemer Lutheran - Milwaukee
August 26, 1973

"THE LORD'S VARIETY - THE SPICE OF LIFE"

"To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit
for the common good." I Cor. 12:7

Sherri is an eleven year old girl. She has saved her allowances all summer to go to the circus that has come to town. Sherri has never gone to a circus before, and she is really excited about it.

The day finally comes. She enters the grounds and soon finds herself going from one small tent to another. Wow! Are the acts ever exciting. Soon her money runs out, and she returns home -- totally thrilled by what she has seen.

The next day Sherri picks up the paper and begins reading about the circus. And then, for the first time, she realizes that she had only seen the side shows. She had MISSED the main event. She had only seen the things that were most OBVIOUS as she entered the grounds.

Sherri's dilemma has too often been the dilemma of God's people - the Church. It was this dilemma that the Corinthian Church was facing. The people had communicated this dilemma to Paul. Basically they were asking him: "As God's people in this community, how can we discriminate between that which is a spiritual side show and the real thing?"

The Corinthians were faced with this dilemma because they lived in the midst of much religious fervor and enthusiasm. As you might guess, religious enthusiasm like any other enthusiasm can lead to excesses and even fanaticism. It also can lead to idolatry - where a certain person, or form, or way of doing things becomes a main object of devotion. There was much evidence of this in the Corinthian Church.

Paul responds that it is by the manifestation of the gifts of the Spirit that we know if we are sharing the ministry of the Lord or the ecstasy of a side show opportunist.

As a Christian community today, we face a similar dilemma. Although we may not see great numbers in our churches today, nevertheless, we live in an age of religious and spiritual enthusiasm. There is a fantastic religious search going on. We need only mention that secular universities have established religion departments -- and students are packing these classrooms.

Both non-church people and church people as well as church drop-outs are forming house groups geared for more intimacy in worship. The charismatic movement continues to grow in expression inside and outside the established church. The constant flow of people to psych wards, to psychologists and psychiatrists, and to other spiritual counselors -- these all indicate a deep spiritual hunger and a yearning enthusiasm for life's meaning and purpose.

And so if we are at all serious about our faith, we are inquiring much like the Corinthians: How can we discriminate between the real thing and the spiritual side shows?

For instance, of all the established religious bodies, most of us would willingly admit that the Roman Catholic Church has seen the most dramatic renewal during the past decade. And I hope like me, you are rejoicing with these our fellow Christian servants - for we are closer in being one in the Spirit.

And yet with all this renewal, I am sometimes hard pressed to find that JESUS IS LORD of it all. For in my mixed marriage counseling, I have so often been confronted by reams of religious red tape. There, as Paul states in this epistle, the "dumb idols" of the past compete with the present Spirit of the Lord.

The rules, and the emotions, and the prejudices of the past FORCE the gifts of the Holy Spirit into silence. And under such constraint, the Spirit of Jesus as Lord becomes DEAF AND DUMB.

But Paul says WE HAVE BEEN GIVEN and WE ARE TO USE a variety of the Spirit's gifts for the COMMON GOOD. When God through Paul says - for the common good - I can only believe that he means for the good of both partners, and both families, and both denominations. And so we can see that renewal in worship DOESN'T NECESSARILY deliver us from our religious side shows.

We Lutherans have our own variety of side shows. We talk a good line of being justified by God's grace, and yet we so often practice justification by synodical affiliation. As a Lutheran, I am deeply disturbed by the divisions in the ranks of our Missouri brothers & sisters. Can such controversies be precipitated by the Spirit of the Lord when Paul says his Spirit manifests itself FOR THE COMMON GOOD?!

And yet our dilemma is more than an institutional one -- it is a personal one as well. I am sure that everyone here has benefited from a spiritual side show, and then made that experience the main event of his/her life. Maybe it was a contemporary worship experience - or a singing group or soloist - or maybe even a pastor.

Under the influence of such side shows, that person or event or way of doing things BECOMES THE ONLY WAY. And so devotion which belongs to God is so easily diverted to things and other people -- and the Spirit of the Lord and his variety of gifts IS CAST INTO AN IDOL -- whether that is a building, or a person, or simply a way of doing things.

Obviously, Paul is encouraging us to be enthused by all the things and people which enhance our spiritual life. But he is warning us against idolizing any one of them.

I believe such idolization was (or is) precisely the shortcoming of the Jesus people. The followers of this movement tend to prescribe a rather so narrow scope for the Spirit of the Lord. And if I can experience and witness to Christ in that prescribed way, then I can consider myself a chosen disciple. Here again the Spirit of the Lord and his variety of gifts ARE SQUEEZED INTO THE MOLD OF MEN.

The same seems to be the enthusiasm of too many national or local religious crusades. We read that thousands upon thousands of people pack the arenas for evangelists like Billy Graham. And we are overwhelmed by the enthusiasm and dedication exhibited at these events.

And yet a week goes by and things so often have returned to normal. And that's not to "put down" any crusade or its enthusiasm. But it is to question whether such events REALLY *EXTEND* the real Spirit of the Lord. Because we must ask where are the committed thousands upon thousands? For they are needed to DO the work of the Lord. They are needed to DO the Lord's work for the COMMON GOOD, not only FOR THEIR OWN GOOD!

Where is the enthusiasm after the crowd goes home? Paul reminds us, as he reminds the Corinthians, that our spiritual enthusiasm is only a dumb idol if it is manifested only FOR OUR OWN GOOD. God has given us a gift of the Spirit to fill the needs of others and at the same time satisfy our own.

I was awakened again to this reality after the first Dome event in Houston. Two of our kids left the Dome early that first night because they were "turned off" by all the enthusiasm. When I returned to our motel, they told me they had felt that too many kids were just playing the Jesus game. They just could not be forced into all of the "hand pointing to heaven."

As we continued to talk, they indicated to me that their faith had to be more than a lot of spiritual goose bumps. They said they'd seen too much of this "Hoorah for Jesus" in big groups, and the opposite when the kids are relating in small groups.

I was a lucky pastor to share that moment. Because these kids realized that their faith had to be lived after they left the Dome. And they were honest enough to admit to me that they didn't know if they WERE COMMITTED ENOUGH TO DO IT.

I don't know if they realized how much they were living their faith right at that moment. Because they were struggling with their faith and with their God -- and that is a sign of faith vitality. For when we stop struggling -- when we stop seeing the variety of gifts of the Lord's Spirit -- when we think we have all the spiritual answers nice and neatly packaged-- THEN WE CAN BE SURE THAT OUR FAITH IS ONLY A DUMB IDOL.

And this is Paul's point to us today. He says the main event in our life is JESUS AS LORD. And what that means is that WE ARE ALWAYS ready to accept and to share the variety of gifts offered by the Spirit of the Lord. God says through Paul that we have all been given a gift of that Spirit -- and we are to use that gift for the common good (which includes our own benefit).

That means the night those two kids struggled and questioned -- the Spirit of the Lord had given them the gift of questioning. And believe me, their questions were for the common good; they helped us all struggle with a very important dimension of our faith -- and that is: HOW DO WE LIVE IT BEYOND THE SECURITY AND CONFORMITY OF THE GROUP? How do we make our faith more than a side show -- are we willing to make it the real thing?

Spices are used to build up - to give added flavor -- to make food more tasty and eating more enjoyable. The Lord has given us a variety of gifts much like he has given spices for food. The more we employ his varieties, the more we add and build up his community.

What is the Lord's spice -- his special gift that you can apply to life? Maybe you know of some bitterness. Maybe you know of a sour relationship. Maybe the Lord's gift for you today is to help turn that bitterness into a more pleasant relationship. God says it will happen if you apply that gift of his spirit.

Maybe before you leave today, you might look around and see if there are any strangers near you. Maybe they are feeling this is a cold place-- God is calling upon you to apply his gift of warmth.

God asks you to be open to the special gift of love that he has given you. I cannot prescribe it for you -- God says you will discover that gift as you continue to relate to him and each other.

~~And~~ God does say quite clearly through Paul today THAT YOU CAN make worship now and after you leave here MORE THAN A SIDE SHOW. You can spice up your life and someone else's with the Spirit of Christ our Lord. And as you share the variety of the Spirit's gifts of love, you WILL KNOW that you are involved in the main event of life.

Amen.

Sermon given by
Pastor Peter Martyn

TRINITY X

Sunday - August 26, 1973

WRIT Broadcast

"God's Living Word"

"WHAT MAKES FOR PEACE?"

"And when he drew near and saw the city he wept over it, saying: 'Would that even today you knew the things that make for peace!' Lk 19:41

The time is nearly 2,000 years ago. The setting is the Mount of Olives outside the city of Jerusalem. There is a crowd rejoicing and singing Hosanas. They are spreading their garments for a man on a donkey. His name is Jesus - he is being hailed as their king.

And yet, as the lights dim on that triumphant scene and our attention shifts with Jesus a few hundred yards west, we see Jerusalem. And we hear Jesus' grieving sigh: "Would that even today you knew the things that make for peace!"

We'd like to believe that Jesus' agonizing remark was only appropo to 1st century Jerusalem. But we know differently.

True. The fires and shrieks of Viet Nam have all but subsided. And so with this major war and its death and destruction NOW just a dark memory, we like to believe that we now know the things that make for peace. And we like to feel that we DO HAVE peace. And in this one instance, we thank God that we do have relative peace.

But how many of us can claim individual or for that matter national peace purely on the basis of a peace treaty. I wish it were so easy. But the signing of a document does not bring with it instant tranquility. For as long as there is personal or corporate hurt, or loss, or division, or anger, or depression -- there is NO peace.

And we know that NOT ONLY WARS cause these things. For wherever there is struggle, or conflict, or grief, or crisis there is bound to be division and anger, hurt and depression. And needless to say, these are not the things that make for peace.

So Jesus' weeping over Jerusalem goes far deeper than disgust with war. His agony is precipitated by the fact that the people of Jerusalem had lost sight of their relationship with God. They had shifted their trust to their own powers and their own might. They had divorced themselves from trusting in the power of God's love -- consequently, Jesus predicts a future of conflict, crisis, and destruction. A future without peace. And as we know, Jerusalem fell some four decades later.

We hardly need remind ourselves that conflicts, crises, cover-ups, and divisions of all kinds still plague us today. Jesus is still agonizing over God's people and saying: Would that even today you knew the things that make for peace!

And so we are pressed to ask: What makes for peace? Is it possible to have a wholeness in our relationship to God and each other? Is this peace - this wholeness - just a Christian fantasy--just a theological wish never-come-true? Or is it our Christian experience?

I believe it is real. And I believe Christ has made it a real Christian experience. And I believe by way of a modern metaphor each of us can see how real God can make our experience of peace.

So, what makes for peace? Using the metaphor of a disease and its treatment, a first condition for peace is AN ADMISSION THAT SOMETHING IS WRONG. To borrow an illustration from Alcoholics Anonymous, an alcoholic will never have a chance of recovery - a chance for peace-

unless he admits to himself and someone else that he is sick -- that his life has become unmanageable.

In other words, there can never be peace in a relationship which has seen conflict and division UNTIL THERE IS HONEST CONFESSION. Whether the situation is a marriage or the national affairs of government, as long as there is denial, and deception, and cover-up-- Jesus continues to say: Would that even today you knew the things that make for peace!

Yes, the first thing that makes for peace is an honest confession of sin. There can never be a cure for a malignant disease nor for a conflict UNTIL the cancer is located and revealed.

In relationships, that cancer too often consists of a stubborn, destructive, egocentric will. God desires that we be at peace with him and each other. He calls us into that whole relationship by asking us to repent to him and each other -- to confess openly and honestly our resentments, our fears, our distrust, our failures and limitations.

God promises that this admission begins to lead us toward peace. But God does not leave us there - for he knows that confession hurts and can leave us feeling naked and alone.

Our God knows we need support after we have unveiled the knots that have tied us and maybe even strangled us with guilt. And with God and those who follow the example of his Son, there is the support of forgiveness. As Christians, we believe there is no greater gift that will make for peace THAN THE GIFT OF FORGIVENESS.

God calls upon us to share this gift with one another after we have heard an honest confession. He asks us to apply this gift within the stream of daily life -- whether the

gift is applied due to an honest confession regarding Watergate - or due to an honest confession from a son or daughter who previously had trapped themselves by lies or arrogance.

God promises that there can be peace when his gift of forgiveness is applied.

But evenmore, God has made it possible for that peace to be more than a temporary or fleeting one. He promises that peace can be ever-present as we surrender our will and replace it with His will. This does not mean that we become religious fanatics or moralistic legalists. Some Christian groups would have us believe that God has called us to be the super-pietists and little tin gods on earth. God would not have had to send his Son to redeem if he had had any expectation of us becoming angels on earth.

To surrender our will and take on his means that throughout life we willingly are ready to always confess our sin of separation, and then to receive his forgiveness and to share that same gift. To live accordingly is to die to oneself and to live for Christ. And to live accordingly IS TO KNOW THE THINGS THAT MAKE FOR PEACE.

And so as Christians WE DO KNOW the things that make for peace. But we also know that these things must be prayerfully applied if we are to experience THAT peace.

God's peace is not hid from our eyes. We know that the sin of separation canbe confessed and that it will be forgiven. And we know that wholeness -- yes peace -- will be restored in our relationship to God and each other as we share his will in this way.

God continually calls us to take an inventory of our lives and relationships. Do we have any unresolved conflicts? Are we harboring resentments that have gone unexpressed? Do we feel angry with God or someone else, and have not told them about it? Have we been let down and not shared our feelings with the source of disappointment? Are we depressed because we have not shared the hurt and bitterness with the one who has caused it? Are we carrying bags of guilt rather than unloading them to God and each other?

We know the things that make for peace -- God has revealed them to us through the ministry of his Son. He promises that as we unload our burdens to him and each other they will be lifted -- he promises that we will experience his peace.

This is his will. As his faithful people, let us surrender ourselves to his will, and then experience the things that make for peace.

Amen.

Pentecost X
Luth. Church of the Master, Troy
July 27th, 1975

*Stress not on
price paid,
but value
of pearl.*

"IN SEARCH OF THE PEARL OF LIFE"

"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it."

Matt. 13:45-46

In one word there is often a whole story. It can often include the entire human family in its embrace. Such a word is the word "search."

Everyone is involved in a quest for the things he values most. The human family is always looking - looking for security in the face of life's uncertainties - looking for a new experience that will make us happy - looking for a solution to a distressing problem.

People often go from one doctor to another in search of better health. Others go from job to job looking for the best. Some even go from church to church searching for perfection this side of heaven.

Each of us reaches us for someone to love, who will love us in return. The journey of life finds us ever searching for that perfect pearl of satisfaction and fulfillment. We continually seek for that which will bring our lives to their highest fulfillment.

So Jesus in a parable compares ~~us~~ ^{his people} to merchants in search of the finest pearl -- since pearls were more highly valued in antiquity than even diamonds. We're journeymen & women - seeking the most valuable pearls of life -- seeking that which will give our lives greatest satisfaction.

As I look over my life thus far, I stand amazed at some of the treasures which I had classified as valuable pearls -- as the greatest gems of satisfaction.

I recall my post-college and pre-seminary days. There I had discovered the "never-never-land" pearl. This was the pearl of perfection. Everything - everyone - every institution that did not live up to the ideal of perfection was discarded as extra baggage from my life.

And so God and the church were shelved from my life -- there was disease and war - there was bigotry and racism - so God and church became estranged partners from my life.

How often intellectualism becomes the pearl of greatest value in life - esp. for the college educated. But what a divisive, self-righteous pearl knowledge can become. Sad, but true, high-bred intellectuals are often the most lonely people in the world. Surely the pearl of perfect knowledge is not of greatest value.

Another over-rated find in my life was what I call the "trinket-treasure & tinsel" pearl. Here the greatest pearl of life was synonymous with the things I possessed. So, before accepting my second teaching job, I had to purchase a Mustang convertible -- that would surely impress everyone that I had found the pearl of life.

So went the Mr. Flash era of life - but how empty things are without loving relationships. So many people get transfixed by the radiance of this pearl of life. It is such a tangible pearl - so very real and full of lustre -- but, oh, such a finite treasure - so meaningless in the ultimate scheme of things.

Then there was that searching and striving for the pearl of prominence -- seeking to be the "top dog" - making that the great pearl at any price. Yes, how easy it is to be tempted by this pearl while serving in the cathedral church of a synod. *of prominence*

Thank God for opening my eyes to the false glitter of this jewel. Obviously - there is nothing wrong with the ministry of a cathedral

church, but how easy in such a place for one's motivation to become STATUS rather than SERVICE. And what a stumbling block status has become in our civilization.

How often this has become the primary pearl in man's search for satisfaction. Evidences leap out at us daily of the corrupting influence of this pearl -- the sin of Adam - man wanting to take God's place of control and influence. Man over-reaching his bounds and limits to control the lives of others. Man simply questing for his own prominence at the cost of civilization.

And so we read about Watergates, and broken homes, and energy shortages, and partner swapping and other forms of pollution -- these and many other signs of man ~~searching for~~ the pearl of equal status with God. *claiming*

And no where are life's battles more fierce, more unforgiving, more dog-eat-dog than in this kingdom of ~~man~~ *prominent man,*

Yes, like many of you, I have too often momentarily searched for and found these pearls of life. And obviously, these pearls still crowd into my life and continue to haunt me. God help me, and each of us at those moments, to see the inferior quality of these ~~pearls.~~ *gems.*

God help us to see the real pearl of infinite value - the pearl that has been given to each of us as a free gift - the pearl known as ~~God's~~ *God's* kingdom ~~of heaven.~~ That pearl offers more than a never-never land, more than a trinket world, and more than status among men.

That kingdom is the greatest pearl because it is that place in life where I feel accepted and loved.

... It is that moment in life when I realize that I am not perfect, nor ever will be, nor is anyone else. But because God continues to accept me (even in my imperfection), I *am*

freed to improve those faults

... this kingdom is the realization that I am not yet mature -- that I still am not what I should be, but that I won't be defeated by that realization.

. . . yes, the kingdom of heaven is that world wherein forgiveness dominates the battles of my life.

God knows there is no greater pearl of life that you and I can possess. So he gives us his kingdom, with the hope that we will cherish and make it a MAGNIFICENT OBSESSION in our lives.

That leaves only one obstacle in our search. How can we trust that this kingdom is really the greatest pearl. Surely, my word is not enough. Even the words of this book are not enough.

There is only one reality that confirms the kingdom of heaven as the greatest pearl in our search. THE LIFE, DEATH, AND RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST.

For in Jesus Christ, we see the kingdom of heaven MADE FULLY KNOWN. Christ's life gives, forgives, and heals the fragmentation caused by our ~~searching for~~ ^{worship of} less valuable pearls.

Our journey and search will continue. There will be numerous times that we will be seduced by inferior pearls of life. But God never withdraws his kingdom - he especially offers his accepting love to those who return after being lured by less valuable gems. He calls us, his church, to be ~~the~~ instrument of his kingdom on earth. To be his pearl of acceptance and love. To be the body of Christ - a body where forgiveness dominates over the battles of life.

Let's face it - no pearl can be found having greater value for our lives.

AMEN

PENTECOST 10
Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo
August 12, 1979

"GROWING UP"

"And his gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we attain the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God - to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ."

Eph. 4:11ff

You've all probably heard the story of the New England school teacher who was by-passed for his promotion. The offended teacher was furious - and he protested that he had had twenty years experience. "No, you haven't" responded the headmaster, "You have, in fact, had one year's experience repeated twenty times."

There's much truth in this story for all of vocational life, including Christianity. There are so many areas of life which can reflect one year's experience merely repeated 20, or 30, or 50 times. We are so often prone to allow ourselves to be trapped by the rhapsodies or the ruts of our past. And so such lives come to an end not much different than they began -- never really growing up other than physical flabbiness.

Or it's like the farmer at the county fair. He had exhibited a pumpkin that was the exact shape of a two-gallon jug. "When it was no bigger than my thumb," he said, "I stuck it in the jug and just let it grow. And when it filled the jug - it just quit growin.'"

Regretfully - some people are like that pumpkin -- they grow up in jugs of confining beliefs. Their spiritual lives and growth are

stunted by the size of the jug -- the jug standing for narrow or limited beliefs. Yes, for far too many Christians -- the Christian faith has been narrowed down to a few, simple rules. And so these Christians never fully expand into the stature of Christ.

At the Church Council get-together on Thursday evening, I spoke briefly about this problem in the church today. So often we don't achieve Christlike results because we have not set Christlike goals. For instance - take last Sunday's attendance for an example. It was very good - and everybody was ecstatic about it. But why shouldn't it be that way every Sunday in the summer?!?!?

Well- because we have not set Christlike goals for our worship in the summer. We are so often satisfied with so much less in the summer -- and that's exactly the kind of return we get. If we set small goals we'll get small returns. Yes, like the pumpkin in the 2-gallon jug -- we often settle for less than our full potential -- we become confined by the limitations or excuses that we make for ourselves.

Possibly - you've all heard the story about the preacher who spoke to the children on the topic: Why The Little Girl Fell Out of Her Bed. Well, the gist of his message was simple: She fell asleep too close to the place that she got in!!

Likewise - this is why many Christians have fallen out of the church -- and out of the presence of God: they feel asleep too close to the place that they got in. For God never promised that being a Christian would be an easy lifestyle -- a lifestyle without sacrifice, pain, and suffering.

Instead - God promised that the Christian lifestyle would be calling for constant growth and nurture -- today's lesson says "We are to do the work of ministry, building up the body of Christ -- shooting for the goal of Christ's stature. But you know and I know - that whether its business, politics, or religion -- there are always those who would rather sleep than grow up!!

There can be little doubt that children often give us some of the greatest insights about life. There's the story of the little girl who came home from her first day of school and said to her mother: "Mommy, I think I started something today that I'll never finish!"

There it is from the mouth of a youngster -- there's the apostles message to the Church at Ephesus in today's text: To be in Christ is to start something that you and I will never finish-- we're called to keep on growing up in our Christian faith. Always finding new insights! Always having new experiences! Always aware of new truths and gifts from God. Always growing up to be more like Christ!!

That's the true nature of the individual Christian -- and of the true Christian church! Never fully satisfied with the present level of maturity. Always seeking to grow in God's grace and in Christian giving. Always looking up to him who is the head; never comparing myself to the guy next door -- because the guy next door is not Jesus Christ -- and Christ is the only example for me to look up to.

That's why the apostle says: "I beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called. A life of growth -- but one that shows patience with one another -- one that shows forbearance of the faults of others -- one that seeks to build up the Spirit of peace among others, rather than tear down that spirit of Chris

And so my friends -- how do you and I stack up according to this yardstick of growth???

Are we measuring ourselves against Christ -- or against that guy or gal who stopped growing the day he/she was confirmed?? The great temptation is to make other Christians (or so-called Christians) the yardstick for our growth. But God deliver us from that kind of game -- because that's so often using the lowest common denominator as the measure of faith!!

Quite to the contrary - I would like to believe that most of us here have grown up beyond this cultural game. Yes, let us instead commit ourselves to growing up in Christ. For we are all sensible enough to know that we haven't yet arrived -- we are still working toward that higher goal - namely, to measure up to the stature of the fulness of Jesus Christ himself.

And the facts are that we all know that that's an impossible growth goal to achieve in this life. But since we are fools for Christ - we are sensible enough to dream the impossible dream -- because our growth standards are very high - they are the standards of Christ himself.

Yes - because Jesus Christ is our Lord and Savior -- we are not satisfied with last year's growth. We are not satisfied with last year's discipleship and giving. We are not satisfied with last year's peace and unity in this body of Christ. In short, we are not content with the goals of yesterday -- because we are still growing up today - still seeking to become a greater, more unified body of Christ for the future.

And yes, because we know Christ as our Lord and Savior - we will always grow with confidence. Because we know that even if we fail to achieve greater growth this year -- Christ will surely forgive us. And then he will challenge us to again lead a life worthy of our calling -- namely, to grow up that much more next year!!

AMEN

PENTECOST X

Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo
August 3, 1980 (HOLY Communion)

"NEVER STOP ASKING!"

"Ask, and it will be given you;..." Luke 11:9

"Whatever you ask in my name, that I will
do so that the Father's glory will be shone
through the Son." John 14:13

Every Christian has heard the text before
us today from the gospel lesson. And I'm
certain that many of us have even used this
text to prove a point in our lives.

There is probably no text in the biblical
corpus that makes discipleship more appealing
than this one from Luke: Ask, and it will be
given to you. In business terms -- we would
surely have to admit that God is truly making
"a firm offer" in this promise. Nothing comes
closer to an unconditional guarantee than to
hear the words, "Whatever you ask in my name,
that I will do."

I remember a time when I really ^{tested}~~tried~~ out
this passage. I think it was in my sophomore
year in high school. I had a big algebra test
coming up, and I really wanted to achieve
a high grade on that test. I had studied for
the exam, but I also had that knowing feeling
that I should have studied much more.

It was about that time that I recalled this
verse from the gospel of Luke and John. So
I thought to myself -- God says, "ask in my
name and I'll give it to you." Boy this is
really one time when I can use God's help."
So the night before the test I asked several
times IN GOD'S NAME that he would give me
that "A" that I really wanted on that test.

And so the day of the test came. And I
took that test -- relying a little bit on my

knowledge, and relying a lot on the fact that God would come through for me. Well you all know what happened -- I failed miserably!! I had asked for an "A," but instead I had received an "F."

It would have been very easy at that point to blame the whole thing on God. After all, he hadn't come through for me. I had asked, but he had not given what I asked for. But by the grace of God, I came to the realization that I evidently had the wrong interpretation of that verse.

Possibly = you've had a similar experience in your life. I know that in my counseling and visitation of people, I often hear people refer to this verse with the same kind of disappointment that I felt after the algebra test.

People have often said, "Pastor, I've been asking God for this or that, but he just hasn't done anything. He just does not give me what I want. Pastor, I'm really beginning to question whether prayer is worth anything... I really don't know if there is any power in prayer." *I don't think God cares."*

Many of us here today I'm sure have had some real moments of doubt about the power of prayer. And that's probably true because many of us have approached PRAYER pretty much the way we approach a candy machine: we put our coin in the slot, ~~push~~ the button, and out comes a chocolate bar. Likewise in our prayers -- we offer up our requests, and then we expect God to deliver them just like the candy bar. Prayer for many Christians is little more than a heavenly slot machine... after everything else has failed, they finally take a gamble on God.

Well it should be obvious that God's ~~not~~ fashioning of prayer is not modeled after the one-arm bandits in Las Vegas. God does not answer our prayer requests in magical jackpot fashion -- where some go home with more than they bargained for, and others go home broke.

The problem for most people in their prayers IS NOT IN THE ASKING, but rather in the things that are asked for. God wants us to ask --- and ask, and ask, and ask. But our asking IS NOT MERELY FOR THINGS, but rather for his purpose in relation to those things.

That's what it means when we say we are praying in God's name or for the sake of Christ. It means that we are passing our petitions through the screen of God's divine purpose.

If my prayer is in harmony with God's purpose, then he will show me how to cooperate with him so that I MAY REACH THE GOAL WHICH IS HIS AS WELL AS MINE. To "ask and to receive in God's name" is to ask for and receive his purpose relative to the object of my request.

In prayer we are asking for God's power so that we might cooperate in fulfilling his purpose in our lives. We do not pray for God TO TAKE OVER and DO IT FOR US. Rather, we pray that we might be given his purpose and the power to fulfill that purpose faithfully.

Leslie Weatherhead beautifully illustrates this principle of power and purpose in prayer in an illustration which I have slightly altered. He tells the story of a woman who had been very ill and who was dearly adored by her husband. She had been sent home from the hospital to gain strength in order that she might walk again.

So every day her beloved husband asked God

to give his wife the strength to walk again. But at the same time -- he would also carry her around from room to room... and on sunny days he would carry her out to the orchard and back again. Day after day, he carried her to every place she wanted to go.

His doctor had observed this, and finally one day this doctor said: "If you continue to carry her from place to place, she will never walk again. She will get so accustomed to all this fussing that she will not try to walk and her muscles will atrophy."

The husband ~~got~~ the point. From then on he had to watch her walk, with great trembling and stumbling. There were times that he even had to watch her fall. He was continually tempted to rush in and carry her. It would have been a great expression of his power, but it would have totally defeated his *purposeful* purpose for her: THAT SHE MIGHT WALK AGAIN.

It was costly to hold back -- but only as he held back did he begin to see the answer to his prayer -- his wife began to walk again when he no longer intervened for her. *He finally realized that he had to pray not to take care for her.*

Likewise, God does not intervene and do it for us as an answer to our prayers. Rather, he gives us his purpose when we ask for it in our prayers. And he makes clear that we must cooperate with his purpose if we desire to reach his goal of love and harmony on earth.

There's no doubt about the fact that it would be a lot easier if God merely intervened each time we ask for something. But that would only serve the purpose of weakness -- that would merely make God's people into dependent puppets. We would be living in a world without doctors, without hospitals, without factories, without governments, ~~without~~ scientists, without schools, without human

achievement of any kind -- because we would merely be human puppets of an intervening God.

God has never chosen to be that kind of intervening God. Some 1900 years ago his Son prayed to him that he might not have to drink the cup of suffering. Yes - Jesus asked to be relieved of the cup of suffering. But God did not intervene. God did not answer "yes" to Jesus request for relief. Because such an answer would not have accomplished God's purpose for Jesus' life. The cross was not a power of weakness, but rather the very power of salvation for everyone who would believe.

Yes - God does not chose to intervene and do it all for us. Instead he choses to reveal his purpose to us EACH AND EVERY TIME WE ASK HIM TO GIVE US THAT DIRECTION.

And the facts are that we can never stop asking. Because once we stop asking, we forget about God's purpose for life and begin to live only for the day to day *things*. And sooner or later those day to day *things* are gone and we've missed the whole purpose of life.

But God will not have us do that. He tells us unequivocally: ASK, for my purpose, and I will give it to you; SEEK my purpose, and you will find it; Knock at the door of my eternal purpose and it will always be open f or you.* And just in case you need some extra guidance about that purpose -- God says, my son has given it to you in a nutshell.

Namely -- about all else, first and foremost in your life -- you are to bring my kingdom into this world in *ordewr* that my will is done every day on earth as it is done in heaven.

Likewise -- you are to share the daily bread that I have given you, you are to forgive one another as I continue to forgive you,

* God calls upon each of us to keep on asking.
* What is God's purpose in your marriage? studies? sick -

and you are to reject temptation and all other evil as you live out your daily life.

This is my purpose for you, my people. Ask, for it, and it will be given to you; seek it, and you will find it, knock, and the door of my purpose will be opened for you. As you fulfill this purpose and continue to ask for it in your daily life, you will show the power and glory of your Father who is in heaven.

AMEN

PENTECOST X
Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo
July 28 & 31, 1983
Peter R. Martyn, Pastor

Text: Luke 11:1ff

"TEACH US TO PRAY!"

Have you ever noticed that the Bible is always pushing prayer? Prayer is not viewed as an optional reality for the Christian life. We are urged to pray spontaneously as children, to pray fervently as saints, to pray always without ceasing, to pray for one another, to pray for peace, and even to pray for our enemies and those who persecute us. We are further urged to pray by asking, by seeking, and by knocking -- in other words, we are to pray in an active way, not only by passive words. But many times all of this prayer-talk leaves us standing very perplexed -- not knowing exactly what we're supposed to do with prayer.

One author has said that he has forever noticed in most churches that it's far easier to get a group together to discuss or study prayer THAN IT IS TO PRACTICE PRAYER. In short, even though we say we believe in prayer -- at many times we're very uncertain as to what it's all about. Even though we've had the sophistication of 1900 years -- we're much like those early disciples. We turn to God and say: "Lord, teach us to pray."

And maybe that's a first and most critically important reality to recognize right up front with our text: PRAYER REQUIRES GUIDANCE AND DIRECTION. The disciples had been with Jesus for almost 3 years at this time -- they had shared many moments of prayer. And yet they were still uncomfortable with the whole reality. In ~~fact~~ ~~ture~~ -- this is one of the few recorded requests of the disciples: TEACH US TO PRAY.

Notice that the disciples did not request: "Teach us about prayer." Rather, "Teach us to pray." Help us to be active pray-ers! They did not doubt prayer -- they were just uncomfortable with it.

In one sense the disciples' request is their first answer: "Teach us to pray." assumes that there is a willingness to learn and to do it. And that's a first

principle of prayer. You have to want to pray if you want prayer to be meaningful. The same is true for walking or eating with a spoon, or riding a bicycle or whatever -- there has to be a desire and there has to be someone willing to help. Praying does not come automatically -- it requires encouragement and practice.

Prayer requires a teacher. But the teacher does not have the content -- the teacher merely encourages the one who prays to talk -- he just gives the pray-er permission to say whatever is on his mind. And like every good teacher -- the pray-er is encouraged to regularly practice saying what he/she has on his/her mind. If he's afraid, then talk about it. If she's ashamed, then tell the whole story. If he's feeling thankful, then let it be known. If she desires guidance, then ask for it... and look for it ... and seek it and knock until it's given. That's practicing prayer.

Too often - especially in the life of the church -- we rely too heavily upon pastoral and priestly and public prayers. These prayers so often deny us the opportunity to practice our prayers. The facts are -- no one else CAN or SHOULD say our prayers for us.

Bishop Fulton J Sheen told the story of being asked to open the New York State Legislature with prayer. He responded to the representative: "I am not going to pray for you. There are certain things a man does for himself. He blows his own nose, he makes his own love, and he says his own prayers."

Bishop Sheen makes a great point -- far too often pastors and priests become the only official prayer-people. So often by assuming that role we deny the priesthood of all believers the opportunity to practice their prayers. And that just fortifies a never-ending cycle -- everyone remains very reluctant to pray -- especially in a public forum.

Yes - we all have to be taught to encourage one another to pray -- and to give one another opportunities to practice. But Jesus is teaching us some other great truths in this encounter with prayer. For instance - One of our greatest foibles with prayer IS THAT WE MAKE FORM AND VOCABULARY more important than purpose and meaning.

Every one of us has known someone or heard someone say: Oh, we can't use that version of the Lord's Prayer!! That's not the real one -- that's not the one I learned when I was a kid. Some people have even gone so far as not using a new hymn book or liturgy because a word of prayer or creed has been changed. We so often act as if there's ONLY ONE HOLY WAY TO SAY SOMETHING -- ESP IF IT'S THE LORD'S PRAYER.

We have to thank God for this Lukan version of the Lord's Prayer. It's very different from the Matthean version -- which is the one that most of us know better. And this text teaches us without a doubt THAT WE SHOULD NOT GET HUNG UP ON FORM OR WORDS OR VERSIONS and make them more important that the purpose or meaning of prayer.

The Lord's Prayer was never intended to be prescriptive. There was never one exact way to say. We need only look at the two versions. JUST LOOK AT THE DIFFERENCES.

(see attached appendix A)

Jesus' intent was to suggest through this prayer the importance of in our relationship to God and one another, -- He wasn't prescribing exact words -- he was giving us meaning for our lives.

Jesus says in this prayer -- here, let me teach you about praying. These are the realities of prayer:

First and foremost -- to recognize God as Father. AS ABBA. That Hebrew word means "Daddy." And what do we know about Daddies --- THEY ARE ALWAYS APPROACHABLE. THEY WILL NEVER REJECT US. Right from the beginning - the Lord's Prayer teaches us that God is our Daddy -- that we can approach Him with anything -- everything. He is concerned about us totally.

Then we encounter such words as "Thy Will, Thy Kingdom, On Earth as in Heaven." That clearly teaches us that prayer does not automatically give us all the answers -- but it seeks to give us God's direction. In prayer - we are seeking God's Spirit -- we are asking and seeking that our actions might be like Christ -- LOVING, FORGIVING, MERCIFUL, UPLIFTING. Faithful followers need to pray because they are constantly looking for guidance and direction from God.

Finally -we remember the words "Give us this day or each day; forgive us our trespasses; lead us not into temptation."

In these petitions of the prayer -- as in the parables from this text -- Jesus reminds power of prayer: THAT WE ARE NOT SELF-SUFFICIENT. That regardless of our wealth, position, or worldly power EACH OF US MUST ADMIT THAT WE ARE STILL NEEDY. We are in need of daily bread, in need of daily forgiveness, in need of being needed, in need of being loved by God and others every day of life.

Jesus teaches us to pray THAT WE NEED TO ADMIT OUR NEEDFULNESS of God and one another -- of God's creation and the support of society -- of the Spirit's guidance and those who share the knowledge of God's Word and Spirit.

Prayer is that willful human expression of our needfulness of God and others in our lives. Prayer is not manipulating God to get certain things -- it is sharing with God our hopes and fears, our joys and sorrows ALL WITH THE EXPECTATION that God will strengthen us and guide us through whatever lies ahead.

There is possibly no better way to illustrate all this than to relate it to last evening's call in the night. Late evening I was called by the emergency staff of St. Luke's to respond to the cry for help -- our organ technician's heart had stopped and it was feared that he might not make it. The family needed to talk to someone -- which in essence really means they needed to pray with someone. I don't mean by that a long formal prayer -- I simply mean talking together about hopes and fears ... about joys and sorrows, ... and possibilities and problems.

How did those prayers look in specifics. Well, obviously, we shared thoughts both formal and informal for the restoration of strength and health. When sickness strikes - we pray for restoration. But as faithful followers - we always know that there is no 100% guarantee of restoration. Many variables will determine that -- the seriousness of the illness, the previous heart attacks, the strength of other organs, and of course, the person's will to live.

And so TO PRAY is not only to pray for restoration; Jesus teaches us to do more than that in our prayers. He teaches "get physical"

us to share words of God's assuring love. He teaches us to honestly confess the seriousness of the moment -- and to pray for strength to do battle with the suffering that may lie ahead. He teaches us to offer forgiveness for all the trespasses of the past. He even teaches us to pray that we will have the courage to face a lifestyle or daily rhythm change if that is necessary. ALL THESE THINGS NEEDED TO BE SHARED LAST NIGHT AS WE WAITED FOR THE WORD OF RESTORATION ... OF THE WORD OF DEATH & RESURRECTION. We thank God that it was the word of restoration the next day.

Yes -- we thank God for being a Father who teaches us to pray with total confidence -- a Father who will listen to anything and everything we have to say; and a Father (a Daddy) who will always respond with loving guidance and merciful forgiveness EVEN THOUGH HE WILL NOT ALWAYS PROMISE A 100% CURE!

AMEN

"WHEN LITTLE
BECOMES LEFTOVERS"

PENTECOST X
Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo
August 1 & 4, 1985
Peter R. Martyn, Pastor

"WHO GETS THE LEFTOVERS?"

And Jesus said, "Where shall we buy bread enough for these people to eat? ... But when they had all had enough to eat, Jesus said to his disciples, 'Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted.' So they gathered them and filled twelve baskets with the pieces of the five barley loaves left over by those who had eaten. ... John 6:5, 12-13

(Sermon begins with pastor dumping following items into garbage can: 9 loaves of bread, 1 bag bagles, 1 bag of submarine buns, 3 bags of pizza crusts, 5 bags of hot dog buns, 1 bag hamb. buns, 2 bags pita bread, and mention of several containers of soup.)

You're all wondering if I've gone mad! Well, not quite. These are the actual leftovers from several functions that have been held in the church during the past few months. On Monday afternoon, I went to the kitchen and unloaded the freezer of all these things. Most of them had been freezer burned, so I dumped them in the garbage can. Then I began reflecting upon the 6th chapter of John. You never saw a pastor scavenging so fast for freezer-burned bread from the garbage can. But sadly, most of this bread is no longer edible.

It's tragic -- but this is the situation that many of us face every week in our homes. We don't worry too much about the leftovers, do we? We leave them in the refrigerator too long; they sour or turn moldy -- and then into the garbage can. The same is so often true for the things in the freezer. There is so often such an abundance, that we just don't get around to using the leftovers or the freezer goods.

In our modern world, we don't worry too much about the leftovers. After all, there's a lot more where these came from. We can always run to the store and get some more. Who Gets The Leftovers, you ask?? Well, far too often, the garbage can gets the leftovers.

Maybe all of this is too graphic! Maybe I'm being a little unfair. Maybe some of you do try to conserve and use up the leftovers. I know we try to do that -- in fact, some nights we even have "kitchen pot luck." But many, many times, we end up throwing away the leftovers. Just like most of you, we have learned to become part of a disposable generation. In fact, plastic packaging today even reinforces our throw-away mentality. We just aren't too concerned about the leftover bread of life.

Leftovers ... leftovers ... leftovers. There's hardly a meal in our Toledo homes without leftovers. There are few of us in this congregation who can claim that we have just barely enough to feed the family. Most of us have been blessed with abundance and then some. There's hardly a meal without the decision of what to do with the leftovers. And by and by, many times you know who gets the leftovers! The garbage can.

cut

What is my aim in all this "leftover" talk? My aim is not so different from Jesus' aim with his disciples. He often heard them talking "poor talk" -- complaining about how bad things were. When faced with a challenge, the disciples so often emphasized the problems rather than maximizing the possibilities of their situation. So Jesus took one small boy, a little lad with five loaves and two fish -- and he blessed and multiplied that small offering for 5000. And then he had the disciples gather up 12 baskets of leftovers. And what was the message in all this? THAT WHEN WE SHARE EVEN THE LITTLE WE HAVE IT CAN LEAD TO AN AMAZING BLESSING FOR A MULTITUDE!!

When I was in Israel, we went to the Church of the Multiplication built in the 3rd century. The walls still display the mosaic depicting the feeding of the 5000. What do you think that early artist recorded as the most significant act in this miracle? Do you think it was the multiplied food? Or the disciples scurrying around feeding the crowd? By no means. The artist focuses upon the five loaves and two fishes. He records the little boy's gift as the thing to be remembered. The willingness to share produced the miracle. When we give God all we can, then he promises there will be enough to go around. Our act of generosity will ignite the explosive power of a chain reaction known as the miracle of multiplication.

Maybe we don't see any miracles of multiplication these days because we're too prone to throw things away. Or said differently, many times we don't use the potential that God has given us. We have certainly been abundantly blessed. But when faced with a challenge of giving -- so often we focus upon the inherent problems rather than the real possibilities. I have so often heard -- "Well, I certainly can't do that -- there's no tax advantage to that kind of giving." We think of ourselves instead of the ones in need.

Let's just take one simple example of leftovers. Almost every family here spends a buck a week on junk at the grocery store. That dollar a week is really spent for leftovers -- the unnecessary things. Imagine if every family of Hope gave that \$1.00 every week for one year to World Hunger. That would be \$550 per week; or \$28,600 per

year for World Hunger from just one congregation. That would be 14 times what we gave to World Hunger last year. All of that coming from just the sacrifice of \$1.00 per week from each family. Imagine if all 6,150 LCA congregations joined with us in this one buck a week miracle of multiplication. That would net over \$100 million for the World Hunger Appeal IN JUST ONE YEAR. All of this from just one dollar a week per family for one year. Five loaves and two fish. The miracle of multiplication CAN happen today -- if we really want it to happen.

God hasn't changed his miraculous strategy at all. First, just as with that little boy, he asks us to use the provisions that he has given us. The world hunger problem today is not one of adequate provisions, but rather one of fair distribution. God has abundantly offered provisions for everyone on earth. But he asks us to be responsible for the distribution process. And its pretty hard for God to offer adequate provisions for starving Ethiopians when he sees the vast majority of Americans wasting their abundance day after day after day.

The feeding of the 5000 teaches us a new lesson on the perception of our world. When Jesus gathers the leftover fragments, there is a vital message for all of us: EVERY PIECE OF BREAD IN CREATION IS SACRED. Every piece of bread, every thing created by God might be the source of a miracle for someone else. All creation is sacred; everything is from God, whether it's Wonderbread or Grandma's sourdough. All good things are given by God, regardless of the wrapper. (A new respect for creation)

1st pt.

The gospel message is simple. Take what you have at hand, including your leftovers. Offer them to God -- and any thing we offer to God he will bless and multiply to meet the world's cry for bread.

But Jesus didn't leave us with merely a message for our physical needs. He took the idea of bread to a higher level in the gospel of John. He said, "I am the Bread which came down from heaven." And in the Last Supper he took bread and broke it and said, "This is my body." Look at the world today. Has there ever been a greater need for a Shepherd to feed his sheep? Hatred, hostility, pain, emptiness, heartache, suffering, guilt, greed, etc. But God has the remedy.

Just as with physical bread, God also provides more than adequately for our spiritual needs. Through the body and blood of Christ, he offers the resources for our spiritual fulfillment. We, the church, the body of Christ, become the loaves and fishes. God asks us to offer ourselves to Christ -- to come to the altar and be

2nd pt - EVERY PERSON IS NEEDED!

filled with the Bread of Life. In so doing, he will bless us, break us, and multiply us to meet the world's greatest human need -- THE NEED FOR FORGIVENESS AND MERCY.

God's always works his miracle of multiplication through people like you and me ... and like the little boy on the hillside. There's a great story of a village in France where all the families owned their own vineyards. Each year, each family gathered its grapes and offered a tenth of their wine to a large vat in the church. It became the storehouse for village celebrations and the sacrament. One year, a harvester had a poor crop and decided to keep his wine. When the time came to share his tenth, he poured water into the vat. After all, with so many offerings, what difference would his make? Anyway, he could make up the difference the next year.

At the end of the year, the priest and villagers gathered for the tasting of the vat. The mayor opened the spigot to begin the celebration. Only clear water came pouring forth. All the vineyard growers had thought their offering would make little difference. Each had held back his tenth. And there was no wine for the vat, for the community celebrations, or for the sacrament. THE MIRACLE OF MULTIPLICATION ONLY WORKS WHEN EVERYONE OFFERS HIS FAIR SHARE!!

The feeding of the 5000 is not some archaic Biblical miracle story. It is as current as any story of human need in the Blade or New York Times today. It is God's story of filling human need. It is God's story of taking our little and maximizing its potential. It is God's story of taking his little -- bread and wine -- and maximizing HIS forgiving peace THAT PASSES ALL HUMAN UNDERSTANDING.

God has made us a part of both dimensions of his story. That's the Good News. And that Good News is that we see more than HIS gift of bread ... more than the stuff of life. We see the GIVER who gives all the bread of life, both physical and spiritual.

And once we see the GIVER who is behind all breads of life - our whole attitude toward bread is transformed. Once we see that all bread, all things, all leftovers ... everything comes from God, then we become grateful for every little thing we have. And then we no longer have to be told or commanded to give of what we have -- WE GIVE BECAUSE WE HAVE FIRST RECEIVED. And that's the beginning of a whole new spirit, a whole new attitude toward life, toward leftovers, toward God and toward other people. It's called the beginning of a truly GIVING SPIRIT.

And those blessed with God's giving spirit will rarely throw any of God's gifts into the garbage can!!

AMEN.

3rd -
WE RECOGNIZE
THAT THE
LEFTOVERS ARE
NOT OURS
TO KEEP.

PENTECOST X
Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo
July 24 and 27, 1986
Peter R. Martyn, Pastor

LET'S MAKE A DEAL!"

And Abraham said, "May the Lord not be angry, but let me speak just once more. What if only ten can be found there?" And the Lord answered, "For the sake of ten, I will not destroy it." Genesis 18:32
"So I say to you: Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives, he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks, the door will be opened." Luke 11:10f

The following THANK YOU letter appeared in the newsletter of a popular television evangelist: "Please publish my thanks to the Good Lord for the many favors received and prayers answered, among them, the obtaining of an auto driver's license for my nephew, who has been declared legally blind. His job demanded that he have the legal authority to drive his car." Devotedly, T. P., Virginia."

Beneath this letter, the evangelist made the following editorial addition: RESIDENTS OF VIRGINIA - PLEASE BE WARNED AND ON THE WATCH FOR A DEVOUT NEPHEW WARING COKE-BOTTLE GLASSES. HE IS DANGEROUS TO YOUR HEALTH AND WELL-BEING. MOREOVER, VIRGINIA AUTO LICENSE INSPECTORS: PLEASE BE MORE THOROUGH IN YOUR DRIVER'S EXAMINATIONS."

This woman's concept of prayer was like "Let's Make A Deal!" She didn't care whether "her deal with God" was hazardous or unhealthy for others. As long as she "got her deal." "Her deal" was to get her blind nephew behind the wheel of his car; and by God, that was the deal that she got!

This woman's "deal with God" is not much different from yours and mine when we were children. Remember your "Let's Make A Deal" prayers with God: "Dear God, please let Dad and Mom get me that new bike for my birthday and I promise I'll say my prayers every night before bed." Or "Dear God, please give me passing grades on this report card and I'll promise to study next semester." We've all made a few deals with God, haven't we?

Many times in prayer, we bring this quality of "bargaining" or "haggling" with God. Prayer for many people is like having a divine Aladdin's Lamp -- just rub it whenever life rubs you the wrong way. Say a little prayer, and everything will get better. Say a few hail Mary's ... cross yourself at the right moment ... look pious and proper in church, and God will give you a good deal.

It's like the true story of Yogi Bera when he was catching for the N.Y. Yankees. A young rookie came up to bat for the first time. Using his foot, he made the sign of the cross in front of home plate. Yogi, being a devout Catholic himself, took the tip of his catcher's glove and wiped away the cross. The young batter looked down at Bera and said, "Hey Yogi, what cha do that for?" And Yogi looked up and said, "Give God a break - just let him watch you at bat this time!" Yogi was giving a great lesson in theology: YOU DON'T MAKE ANY DEALS WITH GOD JUST BY SAYING THE RIGHT WORDS OR MAKING THE RIGHT SIGNS.

Today's Old Testament text is probably one of the greatest "Let's Make A Deal" stories ever told. Abraham has just been given God's covenant - his promise of faithfulness. But Abraham is deeply aware that God is not pleased with the people of Sodom and Gomorrah - they have been unfaithful and wicked. And Abraham's nephew - Lot and his family - live in Sodom. Abraham does not want to see his relatives destroyed. So he begins "his deal" with God.

"What if you find 50 righteous people -- will you spare the rest." God answers "yes." "What if there are 45," asks Abraham. God says he will spare the rest. "What if there are only 40?" Again, God says he will spare the rest. "What if there are only 30?" Again God will spare them. "What if there are only 20?" Again God says he will be merciful. Finally, Abraham says, "May the Lord not be angry if I speak just once more. What if only ten can be found to be faithful?" God answers: "For the sake of ten, I will not destroy the city."

What an appropo reflection of the character of Middle Eastern people. Any of us who have been to Israel know this mentality of bartering and bargaining. What a tremendous insight into Abraham's intimate and personal relationship with God. Certainly God would not destroy the whole city if he could find just 10 faithful people. For such small odds ... only 10 people ... God will make a real deal - he will save the whole city! Could God be any more merciful ... any more fair ... any more generous?

Well, in the next chapter of Genesis, we see that Abraham's deal did not fly. Not even ten faithful could be found in Sodom. So as God had promised, since not even 10 could be found, then the whole city must go. Of course, Lot and his children were spared. But what's the whole point of this story ... as well as the other texts before us today?

Very simply - God has made a fabulous deal with us:
HE WILL BE FAITHFUL & FORGIVING TO ANYONE WHO LOVES HIM!

He will not renig on his promises. He will show mercy and forgiveness to anyone who trusts in him. He will not destroy ... he will not conemn -- even when people have a history of wickedness and corruption. In fact, God has put his seal on this deal in this person of Jesus Christ. It is not merely a verbal promise -- it has been signed, sealed, and delivered with the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. As St. Paul says to the Colossians: "Christ is the fullness of the Diety in bodily form... He forgave all our sins, and cancelled the written code, with all its regulations... nailing it to the cross." We have received the greatest deal ever given by God: the assurance of eternal forgiveness, love and life with God. What greater deal could ever be made with imperfect creatures like us?

There can be no doubt about it -- God has delivered on his side of the deal! The question remains: what about us? What are we supposed to do? How are we supposed to deliver on our side of the deal? God makes it graphically plain that one of our greatest signs of faithfulness to him is THROUGH PRAYER. That's our side of the deal: TO PRAY. But what does that mean? Saying religious words? Looking pious on Sunday mornings? Reading from a prayer book? Saying "grace" before meals? Rattling off the "Our Father" before bedtime? What is this "prayer stuff" all about?

The bargain is this: the disciples ask Jesus to teach them to pray. And once they are taught, then Jesus expects them to do it. And what is the model of Jesus' teaching? Obviously, the Lord's Prayer. And that prayer teaches us a lot about our praying!

The first part of the "prayer deal" is that prayer is not merely for ourselves. Jesus teaches us to pray: "Our Father, hallowed be your name ... your kingdom come ... your will be done." 50% of the Lukan prayer has nothing to do with us -- but everything to do with God. That's the first part of the "prayer deal" WE PRAY IN ORDER TO RECOGNIZE THE CHARACTER ... THE WILL ... AND THE PROFILE OF GOD. We pray to recognize that God is our "Father" -- in Hebrew, "ABBA" - which means daddy. We pray in order that we might feel close to daddy - close to someone who is always merciful and kind and fair in his dealing with us. That's why we need to pray all the time -- to remind ourselves of the true character of God.

Because life hits us with many blows -- we get knocked down with cancer and business failures and divorce and old age and frustrations and cranky kids and bad neighbors and a host of other everyday negations. And when these things happen -- we need to pray ... we need to remind ourselves that this is not God's intentional doing.

This is life's doing ... this is just the way life is. God never promised with life would be without its warts. But he did promise that he would love us and forgive us through all the blemishes of time. That's the deal that he made through Jesus Christ. Even in the midst of death, God's deal is that he will be faithful to us -- he will give us eternal life! What greater deal could we be given? We pray to stay connected with that WILL AND CHARACTER OF GOD!

But our deal with God goes beyond his character. We also pray that his character may become our character. Prayer also reminds us of what God wants from us ... it reminds us of the great potential that God has given us. Prayer reminds us of one of the greatest gifts of faith: PERSERVERANCE! God's people are just like God: THEY NEVER GIVE UP! That's what it means to ask, to seek, and to knock. God's people are always asking for God's will to be done ... are always seeking out his will ... are always knocking at doors to have them opened for God's sake.

Faithful people never stop asking ... never stop seeking ... never stop knocking! They are like the neighbor who comes in the middle of the night asking for loaves of bread. Let's face it -- having someone come in the middle of the night asking for bread is a true pain in the behind. But that's the perserverance of God's people. They never stop asking ... seeking ... and knocking for the fulfillment of God's will in the world.

Is it any wonder that we pastors are often called "Prayer Leaders." What is a prayer leader? It is the person who keeps us asking, who keeps on seeking, who keeps on knocking on doors for God's sake! It is the person who keeps on reflecting God's character of generosity and gracefulness. It is the person who keeps on bugging you about being like God ... about doing God's will in the world.

We've all heard those pastoral critics who say, "All that pastor does is ask for this and ask for that ... he just keeps on asking!" That's exactly what God expects of his PRAYER LEADERS. They are to be the official "askers, seekers, and knockers." They are to be obnoxious in their perserverance -- like a neighbor asking for bread in the middle of the night. That's the role of prayer leaders, whether clergy or lay people -- they are out there on the front lines always asking, always seeking, always knocking for Christ's sake! And what are they asking for?

First and foremost, for faithful people who "hallow God's name:" - that God's name and character will be set apart as the most holy and revered name in the world.

But they will also be asking for "God's will to be done on earth - not only in heaven." That means they will be asking God's people for more than pious platitudes - they will be asking for works and deeds and sacrifices of love!

Another part of the deal is that prayer leaders will say: "Give us this day our daily bread." And a prayer leader can only ask God to take care of his daily needs when he has been willing to extend that same care and concern for others. That's the deal with God. You and I never ask for merely ourselves; as we ask, we always seek to fulfill the needs for daily bread in the greater community of the whole world.

One of the most explicit parts of the deal is the bargain that Jesus has made with us relative to forgiveness. We do not expect forgiveness from Christ when we have not forgiven those who have offended us. So we are constantly asking for forgiveness; we are constantly seeking to forgive others; and we are forever opening the door of forgiveness to those imprisoned by guilt or despair.

The final bargain is that we ask not to be subjected to difficult trials and temptations. Obviously, that means that we will not be the source of trials and temptations for others. And that's a pretty stiff bargain - if you don't want to be tempted, don't tempt others!

Yes, God has made a tremendous deal with all of us. He has promised to be faithful in loving and forgiving us forever through Jesus Christ. Our response - our part of the deal - is to pray unceasingly ... by asking others to be graceful ... by seeking to be graceful ourselves ... and by knocking on those doors of opportunity to provide daily bread ... to be merciful and forgiving ... to be the holy priesthood of a holy Father.

So let's make a deal: that the power, and the glory, and the kingdom will be God's forever, and ever.

AMEN.

[REDACTED]

PENTECOST X
Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo
August 13 & 16, 1987
Peter R. Martyn, Pastor

"WHAT'S IT WORTH TO YOU?"

Jesus said, "The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it."

This is my Lottery Ticket. It's all mine! It's the first Lottery Ticket I have ever had in my life. I never go out and buy Lottery tickets, because I figure the odds are always against me. But I've kept this Ticket because it was given to me on my 45th birthday last month -- by a member of the church. The winning numbers that day were: 01,10,14,28,34,43; my ticket's numbers were: 01,04,07,13,19,33. As you can see, my 45th birthday did not bring me a winner! I was a loser again, but it would have been fun to be a winner.

If there's one thing we all value -- it's being a winner. What's It Worth To You and Me?? It's worth a lot if we can be a winner!! We like to be winners; we like to be on the top; we like to have the best score; we like to have the highest ratings; we like to be the most popular; we like to have the neatest cars; the healthiest bodies; the roomiest houses; the greatest net worth; the most influential friends; the biggest bankrolls, the winning lottery tickets. These are the tangibles we treasure! These are the things that we will seek with great abandon! These are the not-so hidden pearls of our lives! These are the things in this world that say loud and clear: HE/SHE IS A WINNER!!

So along comes Jesus Christ and says: our highest hope ... our greatest goal ... our most precious pearl ... our most tantalizing treasure IS THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN!! And everybody goes under his or her breath: (pputhhh) What's he talking about?? Let's be honest: not one of us in this room has made the kingdom of heaven our highest treasure!! Maybe we should just pack up and go home -- because the meaning of this text is very clear, yet not one of us lives by it! I mean, if this kingdom of heaven is such a winner, then why are there only a few takers here tonite?? If this Kingdom is such a great treasure ... such a valuable pearl, then why will I spend 40 years of my life trying to sell the idea ... and still be frustrated?? If this kingdom of heaven is so great, then why are people so ready to invest in the leading indicators of the stock market -- but not willing to make equal investments in one of the greatest indicators of the LCA ... Rose of the Desert Lutheran Church, Hesperia, California??

MaA 13-44-46

What's It Worth To You -- this Kingdom of Heaven??
All of the prime indicators are not very flattering --
irregular attendance levels, benevolence cuts, difficulty in
recruiting teachers & volunteers, complaints that the same
old people have to keep carrying the load, giving of the
left-overs rather than the first fruits, resistance to real
sacrifice, etc. etc. From the average statistics of all
churches, it doesn't appear that many Christians see much
value in the Kingdom of Heaven. What's the culprit here
... what causes us to be so ho-hum about this great pearl?
Why do we give this pearl of great price so little worth as
faithful followers??

First, I believe we don't treasure the Kingdom of
Heaven because we don't see it as a reality of the here and
now. The Church and its pastors/people have made the
kingdom of heaven into a pearly gate vision of the future!
It's something we only contemplate at the end of life; it
has nothing to do with the day to day living; it's only for
little old gray haired ladies and tired old balding men.
Is it any wonder that nobody treasures the kingdom!!

But the kingdom of heaven is not only a pearly gate
story. The kingdom defined is this: living today and
tomorrow at our highest potential under the direction of
God -- that's what the kingdom means! It is being sought
and found by God, and then fulfilling his will on earth.
It is the most earthly expression of loving and giving that
can be mustered up by humanity!! It is not the pearly
gates, it is here and now and surrounding and permeating
and penetrating and pulsating through this room. It's not
only a treasure of the future, it's a precious pearl of the
present.

Possibly some of you have heard the story of South
African man who hungered for wealth. He sold his beautiful
farm to go in search of diamonds and gold. He traveled the
globe, following every clue and searching every crevice.
But his worldly search gave him nothing. In despair,
poverty, and broken health - he drowned himself.

Another man bought his farm from the estate. He
loved to walk the land daily - just admiring its beauty.
As he stepped over a stream one day, something caught his
eye. He stooped down and picked up a stone - a deeply
glittering stone. He found one, then another, then
another. On that farm was the richest diamond field in the
world. The world's greatest treasure had been under the
first farmer's feet all the time.

Such is the kingdom of heaven. It's not some far off
reality of the pearly gates. It's the baptismal grace that
God pours over us here and now ... his love, his

forgiveness, his pearl of peace, his treasure of time and talents and trust and tolerance and tenderness and touch! The kingdom of heaven is not a pearly gate story -- it's God's presence in us and under us and through us and around us ... every hour, every day, every year, and into eternity!!

What's That Worth to You ... and Me?? There is nothing in all creation that can separate us from the ultimate worth of that treasure!!

But yet - we still don't value it, do we? Not only because we make it a pearly-gate thing, but also because the gold and glitter of this world blinds us to the real treasure of lasting worth! In a world that seduces us by the hour to buy and build and barter and bankroll and beat up on the next guy -- it's very difficult to discriminate between the temporal and the eternal.

Most of us are easily conned like the old cobbler who lived a contented and happy life in the village. People passed by his shop and laughed and waved as they heard him singing while fixing shoes. People just loved to stop at the shop and bask in the warmth of his smile.

One of his close observers was the village banker -- who sang very little and smiled even less. The banker was also a poor sleeper. At first he was irritated by the cobbler's good humor. But soon he too became attracted to the shop. Finally, he asked the cobbler for his secret of happiness.

At the end of the conversation, the banker asked: "Are you wealthy? Pardon me for asking, but how much money do you make?"

The cobbler responded: "My family is seldom in want; some days I only fix shoes and no one buys. My shop is closed on holy days so there's no income when we celebrate the saints. I can't give you an accurate accounting of my income, but we've always gotten along."

The banker responded: "How wonderfully simple. Well, I have decided to eliminate your future financial problems. Take this gift of 300 gold coins and use them whenever you need them."

Overjoyed, the cobbler ran home and buried the coins under the foundation. But the days that followed began to be different. He would often leave the shop and go home when his family was absent, thinking someone might be stealing his coins. He started losing sleep at night worrying about his coins. Old friends noticed he no longer sang with cheer, but seemed suspicious every time someone entered the shop.

Finally, the cobbler visited the banker, and said: "Thank you for your generous gift, but I cannot afford any longer to keep this bag of coins. Please take your money back so that I may again experience the joys of my life -- my music, my sleep and my friends. It seems that when I buried this money, I also buried my happiness and joy."

Like the cobbler, so often we make our "little bags of gold coins" into the ultimate security of life. And then we wonder why we can't sleep ... why we are so suspicious ... why we are so fearful ... why we have lost our good cheer ... why we have forgotten the joys of the kingdom of heaven -- our music, our sleep, and our friends. The kingdom of heaven teaches us the true relationships of ultimate value ... our love from God and for each other!!

What's That Worth to You ... and Me? What does it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and in the process loses his own life??

Thirdly, maybe the kingdom of heaven has lost some of its brilliance for you and me BECAUSE THE WORLD HAS TAUGHT US THAT WHICH IS CONTRARY TO THE KINGDOM -- TO EXPECT TO BE LOSERS! Isn't that so often the lesson of our daily lives? Only one team wins the championship! Only one or maybe two people win the super lotto! Only a few of us retain our health and vitality beyond our 70's! Only the big guys come away as winners of three or four million in our corporate buyouts! The little guys, if lucky, end up relocated, or if not so lucky, in the unemployment lines. Less than 10% of the people control more than 90% of this nation's wealth! To be a part of the majority so often still means that I will come up a loser.

But there is no such condition in the Kingdom of heaven. Unlike the Lottery, there are never only a few winners - because all are winners in the kingdom of heaven. The treasure is not for a few ... not for the rich ... not for the powerful ... but for all! So you say you're wanting to be a winner ... then why are you looking to the kingdom of this world ... almost everyone loses there. But not so with the kingdom of heaven ... everyone is an equal winner there ... no one has a corner on that market. Everyone receives an equal share! And the miracle of God's love is that an equal share is the whole treasure!!

Where else in life do all the shareholders become equal winners?? There is no kingdom on earth that can equal the love, justice and mercy of the kingdom of heaven!! What's It Worth To You ... and Me! Well, we should be able to give it more than an embarrassed laugh!! What's It Really Worth To You and Me?? Well, as one admirer recently said to a master musician, "I would give my whole life if I could play the way you do!!" And the musician answered: "That's precisely what it cost me, my whole life!!" And that's what the kingdom of heaven is worth to you and me: THE COMMITMENT OF OUR LIVES!! AMEN.

“A FAITH THAT BUILDS BRIDGES”

“Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”

Hebrews 11:1

With the daily news of floods, droughts & natural disasters in this country and the world ... and with Friday's terrorist attack on the U.S. embassies in Africa that killed 80 & injured over 2000 ... and with the pandering and politicking of a sex scandal in Washington D.C. that never seems to end ... and with a new fall term of school approaching and children wondering if classmates will be toting guns ... and with Managed Care challenging the security of necessary health care these days ... and with the shocking death of a 51-yr old mother of Glenwood who had just 24 hours earlier jubilantly seen the birth of her first granddaughter -- with all these and many more daily confrontations of uncertainty -- it is not easy on Sunday or any other day to know the meaning of faith. For some people, “faith” is little more than optimism -- just “hoping that everything will work out for the best.” That's a very insecure “faith” in our kind of world. For others, “faith” is little more than “fatalism” -- a feeling that “everything is already programmed ... and whatever happens was meant to be.” In light of the tragedies in Africa and the horrendous loss of Judy Jennings this past week -- I cannot find any comfort or consolation in that kind of faith.

Of course, there are many variations of faith between these two. I'm reminded of the Southern Baptist congregation that had been living with a never-ending drought. Finally the preacher called a revival to pray for rain. They gathered faithfully hoping their prayers would alter the heavens. But as the meeting began, the preacher looked at his flock and said, “Brothers and sisters, yo'll knows why we is here. And I thank the good Lord that yo'll has brought your Bibles. But what I wants to know is -- where is yo' umbrellas??”

Or there was that vision of faith like St. Paul's from a Methodist man who went to his presiding elder. He told the elder that the night before he had seen in large, gold characters in the sky -- “P.C.!” He interpreted these to mean, “PREACH CHRIST” - so he wanted to be ordained as a preacher. The elder -- knowing this man to be very excitable and utterly unfit for preaching -- said, “My son, I believe you saw “P.C.” in the sky, but I fear you misinterpreted this sign of faith from the Lord. It did not mean “Preach Christ” but rather “Plough Corn” -- and I do believe your daddy's waiting for you in the field right now.”

So, what's our vision of faith? Paul says “faith is the assurance of things hoped for -- the conviction of things not seen.” The Greek word that Paul was using here is “pistis” - a faith which means “that to which we hang on for dear life and will never let us down!” So, what is it that you and I hang onto in the best and the worst of times? Obviously, it is our trust in God's promises of the kingdom -- that we are loved, forgiven, acceptable and never abandoned. But how can we affirm that sense of faith in a more practical way?

There are probably several options, but I found an illustration years ago that has always been helpful. It was the story of the construction of the Golden Gate bridge. I'm told the bridge was constructed in two phases. During Phase One - 20 workers fell tragically to their deaths while working on the huge spans. This great cost of human life brought construction to a standstill. But there was a second phase. At great expense, a huge SAFETY NET was fastened below the emerging bridge. And construction again resumed. During phase #2, ten more workers fell off the bridge, but each was safely rescued by the net. Not one life was lost in Phase #2 of the operation.

In fact, not only was life more secure in Phase #2 -- but productivity also increased by a whopping 25%. The assurance of the net not only prevented workers from fearing death but also gave them the psychological confidence to vastly improve their productivity. Needless to say, that NET became the workers' object of faith ... *the assurance of things hoped for ... the conviction of things not yet seen.*

The building of the Golden Gate bridge is an analogy to the Christian life. We would all like to believe that we are standing on rock, solid ground -- but in reality ... each of us is standing on a different span of an unfinished bridge. The life God has given us is really on an ongoing bridge building experience: it is filled with daily risks & uncertainties ... it is filled with great demands for balance & sure-footedness ... it is filled with the ecstasies of one day being 600 feet in the air above it all ... and the next day being dashed to turbulent waters of chaos to be confronted by brokenness and death [as Judy experienced].

Is it any wonder that life on this earth needs a SAFETY NET. And God, our master engineer, has provided one for us. He gave his Son, Jesus Christ, as the SAFETY NET for the whole world. In the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ -- all humanity can finally see -- that no matter how uncertain things may seem in the world -- God will get us home safely. No matter how far we fall -- God will be there to rescue us ... with forgiveness, with love, with mercy, with the assurance that even if we physically die, we will rise again to new life.

And because we have this SAFETY NET of Jesus Christ -- we have the faith ... the assurance that we can be God's Bridge Builders in this world. We have confidence and hope in every endeavor God calls us to undertake. In fact, God's SAFETY NET especially gives us assurance when we encounter the storms and turbulence around us. [As a congregation - you have just gone through two years of stormy times. These were times that Glenwood's faith was tested. But the SAFETY NET of Jesus Christ always there! Sometimes -- we acted and maybe even said things that indicated we were not very trusting of God or one another. But now we know ... that when God says he will help us build a new bridge for the future ... we have the assurance of that hope ... the conviction that it will soon be seen. With you -- I give great thanks to God for your future with Pastor Nelsen ... and with you, I am looking forward to sharing in that bridge building experience in whatever way I am allowed.]

But - God calls us to build many other bridges than Sunday morning worship. He commissions us to build bridges which will support his love and mercy between people that sometimes the world has trouble getting together. You see -- when we have faith in God ... we realize that His mission is very much like building the Golden Gate bridge -- it is a construction process that requires stupendous spans over very turbulent waters.

That's why God calls Glenwood to be bridge builders between rich and poor ... black and white ... to build bridges between well-educated and illiterate ... to build bridges between racists and so-called radicals ... to build bridges between cultures & classes & countries & continents. That's what faith in God does for the faithful -- gives them the confidence to build bridges because God has given us the safety net of Jesus Christ in our mission.

And much like building the Golden Gate bridge -- God's mission is a very risky, very challenging and a very uncertain blueprint in this world. But God paid the ultimate price already for this mission. There is no reason to fear ... even if we falter in our efforts, we cannot fail. We have the love, mercy and compassion of Jesus Christ always holding us up -- so we cannot be defeated.

The church is the visible expression of Jesus Christ's SAFETY NET in this world: we are called by God to keep relationships in this world secure. So -- when we know of anyone who is suffering ... whether from hunger, from injustice, from guilt, from addictions, from despair ... we are to be the loving arms of Jesus Christ to give those persons security in their distress.

As I have worked with you for the past two years -- I have been proud of your willingness to be God's safety net of faith in this community. I hope unlike many other congregations -- you will never abandon the ministry that God has given you ... because to do so would be like abandoning your faith in God. God needs bridge builders in the Old West End. He is giving you a new and very committed pastor-leader who will inspire you to faithfully bridge builders. Keep the faith -- build bridges of the love & mercy of God in this community.

But you also have hurting families right within your midst. So remember that as much as you are a safety net for those outside ... you must also be a safety net for those inside. The recent death of Judy Jennings means that Glenwood families must be a safety net for the Jennings children. We can't let these kids fall into the chaotic waters of this world. Just as you did for the Schaedlers and many others -- now you must do for the Jennings family. But this is a greater challenge -- because these kids have been left with no parents. So, when you are asked to help -- remember: faith is building a bridge over the churning waters of chaos. Helping families like the Jennings is not just doing good deeds ... it is showing your faith in God by doing his mission for those in need. That's what we promise to every child who is baptized in this sanctuary -- that we will be there as Christ's SAFETY NET whenever and wherever that time

may come. I am praying that together we will continue to build bridges of love, kindness and help for these kids – and any other children of God who have been devastated by tragic losses in their families.

Because as we do this -- we show our faith: as God's people we live with the assurance of things hoped for ... the conviction of things not yet seen ... namely to love, to forgive, to be the abiding presence of Jesus Christ for anyone who needs a SAFETY NET in this world.

AMEN.