

EASTER VII

Lutheran Church of the Master - Troy

Dedicatory Sunday (Organ)

May 11, 1975

"A VISION OF UNITY"

"Holy Father, keep those you have given me true to your name, so that they may be one like us." John 17:11

If tomorrow were to be your last day on this earth, what would your thoughts be like today? I would venture to bet that many of us would be thinking about our families.

Such was the case of Jesus on the day before his last day. He was thinking about his family - his intimate family of disciples. And his thoughts took the form of a prayer for unity -- he desired that his family might be one with him and the Father - and share that oneness with each other.

Obviously, we're dealing with the Gospel of John - so we know the emphasis of that oneness: namely, a oneness in the love of God. For LOVE is the major theme of this evangelist.

I am sure that if this were my second to last day, I would be praying for a continued oneness in love with God for my family.

But as we all know - whether Jesus' prayer or our prayers - the prayer does not shield us from those forces which seek to shatter THAT UNITY OF LOVE.

For instance - a popular force today is uniqueness - somewhat reflected on the back of this morning's bulletin cover. Today - the world tells us that we've got to be unique - different - we've got to have OUR THING. Women and mothers have especially been besieged with this message today.

And that message obviously has some merit to it. For God himself desires that each of us USE the potential he has given us. But obviously - uniqueness (or whatever tag you want to give it)

can become an IDOL that we worship. Any role -- including the idolization of motherhood or fatherhood -- can become a graven image.

Principle of So often today - the role takes priority over the UNITY OF LOVE. Such is the danger of both the "libber" and "chauvinistic" movements -- BOTH OF THEM are too often closed ear to Jesus' prayer for unity.

This is not to depreciate motherhood one iota. Luther described the church as "mother church," because it was the source of God's sustaining love. Likewise, it is largely due to the mothers of our society that there is a unity of love in our families - they have borne the greatest burden - and we fathers dare NOT be proud of our too often ABSENT influence.

But the domestic family alone cannot offer us the full unity of God's love. Recent deaths have forced us to face the fact that we need a family of support beyond the domestic household. So it is - that Jesus prayed that the church might be his family of healing and grace.

extended Someone indicated to me after worship last Sunday that I seemed angry because many of our family were missing last week. And I was - because God has called all of us to be his healing agents of love. And you can't heal or love if you're unaware of what's going on.

One of our teenagers is presently recuperating from a serious and painful surgery. Her comments this week so beautifully recognized the vast range of Jesus' prayer for unity -- she commented on how much NOT ONLY her own family's love was meaning - but how much she needed that same love from doctors, nurses, the other patients, her friends, --- from everyone present with her, she was needing & experiencing God's unity of love.

Yes - Jesus' prayer for unity does not shield us from the pain of surgery - nor the other forces of tribulation in life. But he prays that his disciples might be one in his love SO THAT WE CAN STRENGTHEN one another when the painful *moments*

do strike. For to be AT ONE with God and his people IS TO RECEIVE his compassion and mercy when it is most needed. I am confident that a couple of members felt that power THRU YOU this week because of THEIR ONENESS and OUR ONENESS WITH CHRIST & THE FATHER.

And we know where we continue to get this strength to carry through life's trials. To be certain, we have gotten it from our mothers and our families - at least in most cases. But mothers and families are earthen vessels -- we have been tragically reminded of late how vulnerable we are as human vessels. So human love is insufficient in and of itself.

God has given us more than mothers, fathers, and family -- both in the domestic and ecclesiastical realms. He has given us the tangible power of his love -- an eternal, mysterious, and everlastingly unifying gift. He offers us His sacrament.

To come forward and receive the bread and the wine BREAKS DOWN ALL DIVISIONS. We are forever ONE at his table - unified in his love - strengthened by his forgiveness - and commissioned to share that same gift NOT ONLY at our family tables - but wherever we gather in this world.

So let's do it - not simply because today is Mother's Day - not simply because we are all rooted in domestic families -- but because it is God's desire for us AND Jesus prayer for each of us - THAT WE EVER REMAIN ONE IN HIS LOVE.

AMEN

EaSTER VII
Luth Church of the Master
5-30-76

"SINCERELY YOURS"

I do not ask you to take them out of the world, but to guard them from the evil one. . . . Consecrate them by means of truth--'Your word is truth.' As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world."

John 17:15,17-18

It was in the bleak of February. The weather forecast was horrible. It was already blizzarding -- yet there he was at 5 AM pulling into the driveway.

He was giving up three days of his valuable time -- three days to be spent with me.

So - off we went to Minneapolis -swirling through the clouds of billowing snow in that 1956 Mercury.

Three days to retreat from the hectic pace of business as usual -- three close days of caring and sharing -- of getting new visions of what it's all about.

^{we}

Three days, in one sense, that^{we} were in the world, yet not of the world.

Such is a brief description of the 1st time my home parish pastor took me for a jaunt to the seminary. Not really a spectacular event from a worldly point of view, yet one that remains set apart in my memories.

It remains a consecrated moment because it was one of those set apart times that I deeply experienced both God and man saying: I Am Sincerely Yours." God and man speaking through Pastor Luebke.

It must have been that way for the disciples as they heard Jesus' words of farewell to them. John here shows us Jesus in retreat with the twelve -- getting ready to move from the upper room to the lower streets.

What we might expect here is a pep-talk -- or some good advice on sales technique or surefire evangelism. Instead the disciples receive an intimate gift never to be forgotten - A FOOTWASHING. How could have Jesus better communicated that he was sincerely theirs.

Jesus consecrated himself and sanctified his disciples through an intimate gift. He had the twelve withdraw from the hectic pace of the world in order to confirm God's love for them.

And isn't that often where and when we really experience God's love most emphatically-- when we withdraw from the hectic pace of worldly business as usual. That day when mom or dad came into the room for a special talk -- that time when your spouse was not distracted by TV or a business associate -- that letter that you read from her in the seclusion of your room.

That moment when we again hear that we are sincerely loved -- that we are truly one another -- that God has consecrated himself to us -- and **often does this** through other people. Let's face it -- to really hear this message often requires withdrawal. Is it any wonder that the Christian church has established a weekly ritual of withdrawal known as worship??

Is it any wonder that worship does not carry the same beat as the rest of life? Worship was intended to be different -- to be mystical-- to be a moment of withdrawal from business as usual. INTENDED TO BE this way so that we might hear Christ saying - that he is **SINCERELY OURS** -- that we are loved and forgiven -- that we are worth more than any other possession in the world, worth so much that he humbles himself by washing our feet and dying for us.

Yes to hear his Word most often requires withdrawal. But like the disciples -- our faith is not then lived out in retreat. The withdrawal, the retreat, the worship is only preparation for living in the world. The worship service begins after we leave here.

So it was that the 3 day retreat with my home pastor was only preparation for the present. It was a necessary prelude, but the real action has followed.

So it was that Jesus prayed: "Consecrate them by means of truth. Your word is truth. As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world."

Worship offers us a gift that we are to share in the world. We are sent into the world - not to conform to the evil-ness we see there, but to sanctify that world - to cleanse it from its impurity.

And it is through **OUR** intimate moments with Christ that we are empowered to give his footwashing gift - that we are empowered to humble ourselves.

For each of us that moment began with baptism-- an intimate time when God communicated that he was Sincerely Ours. And that moment has been sustained with others -- Communion -- Bible Study - Education - Fellowship & Worship.

All these are moments of withdrawal which prepare us to live his gift of love on the road of life. Luther put it this way:

"This life is not righteousness but growth in righteousness, not health but healing, not being but becoming, not rest but exercise. We are not yet what we shall be, but we are growing toward it. The process is not yet finished, but going on. This is not the end, but it is the road. All does not yet gleam in glory, but all is being purified."

So it is - to live in the world and also be sincerely Christ's is NO EASY mission. Jesus recognized that fact in this last prayer -- he was keenly aware of the challenge facing the disciples. Likewise, God is keenly aware of the challenge facing each of us.

For we know it is far easier to succumb to the world's values than to remain consecrated to Christ's lifestyle in the world. The expression "go to hell" is far too often leveled at Jesus and what he stands for.

How sad that so many misunderstand Christ's purpose -- he has not come to condemn, but to make whole.

And so it is that the task still remains the labor of a few. It began with twelve -- and it is still a handful who have chosen to regularly withdraw and again be consecrated by his power to purify.

His Word remains as the whole truth and nothing but the truth. God help us to continue to retreat with him regularly - and then take his purifying power into the world which hungers for righteousness -- but has lost the way.

AMEN

EASTER VII

Luth Church of the Mastër, Troy
5-22-77

"A UNITY OF PURPOSE"

Jesus said, "I do not pray only for them, but also for those who believe in me because of their message. I pray that they may all be one. Father! May they be in us, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they be one, so that the world will believe that you sent me."

John 17:20-21

Imagine that you knew that you would be murdered in a few days. Imagine that you're gathered with your family and friends for the last time before this tragic event. What would be the nature of your conversation??

Would you be asking your family to avenge your death? Would you be blāspheing your enemies? Would you be asking for self-pity? for praise and glory for all your heroic accomplishments? What would the nature of this conversation be like? Angry, bitter? Compassionate, concerned? No doubt - this is a tough circumstance to imagine.

Well - for five chapters (from chapter 13 - 17 the gospel of John reports the intimate conversations of Jesus and his disciples in the upper room -- all these conversations taking place before Jesus' crucifixion. He concludes these conversations with the great Priestly Prayer here in John 17.

Here is Jesus' Farewell Discourse. He knows he will soon face the grim reality of murder. And what does he ask of his family as he faces that truama?? "That they might be one, as he and the Father are one. No anger, no revenge, no self-pity -- just a deep concern for his followers. Is it any wonder that we believe in Jesus Christ??

I doubt that I could be quite as considerate under the circumstances. I'm sure the same might be true for some of you. But in taking a closer look at Jesus concern here -- at his prayer for unity -- we might see that such a claim is not impossible for us, even at death.

For centuries Jesus' intercessions for unity in this prayer were used to justify all kinds of secondary concerns. For instance, some church bodies have demanded that Jesus' was calling for organizational oneness. Namely, that he wanted only ONE denomination -- one big gigantic super-church.

Nothing could be further from the truth. Such an idea fails to recognize that Jesus was true God. He surely understood man well enough to know that organizational unity would NEVER BE A REALITY ON EARTH.

Consequently - there is no one right structure, or constitution, or polity for the church. Sometimes the democratic principle works best, sometimes the hierarchichal -- sometimes a biblical mandate, other times group consensus. But never on earth will the church be an ONE ORGANIZATIONAL FAMILY.

Others have advocated that Jesus was calling for a unity in liturgical expression. Thus - there have been all kinds of worship purists. And instead of unity -- all this pious promenading and nit-picking usually leads to greater division -- sometimes at the cost of the gospel.

And which of us doesn't know some parents, pastors, or priests who have used Jesus' prayer here as a proof text for denominational unity for marriage partners. Obviously - there are all kinds of practical reasons for a family to support and be nutured by the same church body. But Jesus hardly had that rationale in mind when he offered this prayer.

What is so tragic is that some parents and parishes have nearly destroyed marriages or family ties BECAUSE of their insistence upon marital church unity. How tragic when parents and church bodies try to play God.

And of course greatest of all misinterpretations is the Christian who says that Jesus desired a unity of opinion in the church. So it is that such persons claim we must be of total agreement upon tractors, and parking lots, music selections, size of the pastor, and on and on.

So often we get caught in the pit of pen-ultimates -- of secondary things. I've known Christians who have left the church because they disagreed with some decision. I've known Christians who have not communed because their opinion on something was different than the pastors.

You see how the devil works -- he takes our egotism and he plants it RIGHT BETWEEN us and Christ. And he keeps on making us think that our opinions ARE THE BASIS of unity in the church.

So it is that people rightfully charge the church with hypocrisy, and abuses, and failure to live perfectly the Christian Faith. And they're right! The church is made up of very sinful human beings.

But you know -- those same accusers can look at a hospital full of sick and dying people -- and they never accuse a hospital or doctor of being hypocritical. You see -- they fail to see that the church is just like a hospital. It is for people who are still in the process of being cured -- of getting it together -- of becoming whole.

AND THAT'S THE UNITY THE JESUS PRAYED FOR -- that we might be one as he and his father are one -- that we might be united in purpose -- the purpose being -- healing the sickness of

alienation and division caused by sin. That like Father and his son Jesus -- and his martyred disciple, Stephen -- that like them, we might live with one purpose: TO FORGIVE, so that man might be healed instead of making him sicker than he already is. *And as I said earlier - I think we could all desire the claim of unity - even as we face death.* That's the purpose that Jesus lived, died, and resurrected for -- THAT ALL MIGHT BE HEALED FROM GUILT NOW AND ETERNALLY, ~~And that's only possible as we are ONE with him~~

And whatever it takes to accomplish that purpose --SO BE IT. We will not let any pen-ultimates cause us to lose sight of that purpose.

We will not let parking lots, and tractor funds, and building programs deter us from this purpose. QUITE TO THE CONTRARY -- it is because of this purpose -- it is because of our faith in Christ and his redeeming love, that we will take on any challenge if it will help us accomplish HIS PURPOSE.

Whether its STRENGTH FOR MISSION or our future facility needs -- we never look at those in isolation. Only as we relate them to the purpose of the love of Christ do these programs have any meaning. If they will not accomplish that purpose -- then they should be scraped.

~~But~~ they will ~~only~~ accomplish ^{that} HIS PURPOSE as we become ONE with him .

So with our Lord today -- let us prayerfully ask ourselves -- what is the basis of our unity with him? Are we relying upon our own opinions and prejudices -- or are we fired up by his redeeming love??

AMEN

7TH SUNDAY OF EASTER
LUTH CHURCH OF THE MASTER, TROY
MAY 7, 1978

"ONE FINAL WORD"

"HOLY FATHER, PROTECT BY THE POWER OF YOUR NAME
THOSE WHOM YOU HAVE GIVEN ME, THAT THEY MAY BE ONE, AS
WE ARE ONE." JOHN 17:11

RECENTLY, A PASTOR FRIEND WHO WAS A CHAPLAIN IN THE
SECOND WORLD WAR SHARED THE FOLLOWING REFLECTION WITH ME:

"For three years I lived, worked, trained, and ministered with a Paulist priest, a fellow chaplain in the Marine Corps. I remember the Sundays in our base camp overseas when he had two Masses and I had two Services. And despite the fact that there were many men that had to be on duty and couldn't attend those Services -- we regularly had 2000 of the 3000 men in our regiment in attendance.

I remember so vividly the day we landed on the beaches of Iwo Jima - in the first hour of what was to prove to be the bloodiest battle in the history of modern warfare. From that 1st hour to some 30 days later -- we went about seeking to minister to the men -- to assist the wounded -- to gather up and bury the dead.

I remember how we used to crawl up through the artillery barages - the sniper fire - the hails of mortar -- crawling along trying to seek little groups of men and give them Holy Communion. The priest heard the confessions of some of my men -- and I heard the confessions of some of his. And we bestowed the absolution of the gospel TO THEM ALL.

He gave Communion to many of my men -- and I gave Communion to many of his. You see -- when you're faced with matters of life and death the very next second --
IT DOES NOT MATTER WHO BRINGS YOU CHRIST. IT ONLY MATTERS THAT HE IS THERE -- AND THAT HE'S WITH YOU.

DEAR FRIENDS IN CHRIST -- I WANT TO REPEAT THOSE LAST TWO POWERFUL SENTENCES: "YOU SEE - WHEN YOU'RE FACED WITH MATTERS OF LIFE AND DEATH THE VERY NEXT SECOND-- IT DOES NOT MATTER WHO BRINGS YOU CHRIST. IT ONLY MATTERS THAT HE IS THERE -- AND THAT HE'S WITH YOU."

I AM DEEPLY INDEBTED TO PASTOR VALBRACHT FOR THESE POWERFUL WORDS. HOW TRUE THEY ARE! AND YET ISN'T IT A TRAGEDY THAT WE HAVE TO BE IN A FOXHOLE BEFORE WE REALIZE THAT DEATH MIGHT HAPPEN IN THE NEXT SECOND! ISN'T IT TRAGIC THAT JESUS PRAYER FOR UNITY OF SPIRIT AMONG HIS PEOPLE IS ONLY FULFILLED UNDER THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF HUMAN DESTRUCTION AND CHAOS! HOW SAD THAT HUMANITY HAS TO BE FACING HIS TERMINATION BEFORE HE REALIZES THE UNIFYING POWER OF CHRIST'S LOVE!

I HAVE EXPERIENCED THIS HUNDREDS OF TIMES. WHILE WORKING AS A HOSPITAL CHAPLAIN -- UNDER THE PERIL OF DEATH, THE NURSES OR DOCTORS NEVER ASKED ME FOR MY DENOMINATION WHEN THEY WANTED ME TO GIVE COMMUNION OR PRAYER FOR THE DYING PATIENT. THEY JUST SAID -- JOHN JONES IS DYING AND WANTS YOU TO PRAY FOR HIM!

JESUS PRAYS: "HOLY FATHER, PROTECT BY THE POWER OF YOUR NAME THOSE WHOM YOU HAVE GIVEN ME, THAT THEY MAY BE ONE, AS WE ARE ONE." JESUS IS NOT PRAYING HERE FOR ORGANIZATIONAL UNITY -- HE ISN'T SAYING THAT HE WANTS LUTHERANS AND CATHOLICS TO GET TOGETHER TODAY AND BECOME ONE GIGANTIC CHURCH. BUT HE IS PRAYING THAT CHRISTIANS MIGHT POSSESS HIS SPIRIT -- HIS POWER OF

COOPERATION -- HIS POWER OF MERCIFUL HELP -- HIS POWER OF FORGIVENESS -- HIS POWER OF UNITY, WHICH MAKES HOLY COMMUNION THAT SAME WHETHER IT'S CELEBRATED AROUND A LUTHERAN OR ROMAN CATH ALTAR. HE IS PRAYING BY THE POWER OF GOD'S NAME -- AND GOD'S NAME UNIFIES THE HEARTS OF PEOPLE -- IT DOES NOT DIVIDE HUMAN SPIRIT. IT'S MAN'S SELFISHNESS AND ARROGANCE THAT DIVIDES THE HUMAN SPIRIT -- AND ALSO DIVIDES CHRIST'S CHURCH.

BUT ISN'T IT SAD THAT SOME PEOPLE MUST FACE A CRISIS BEFORE THEY REALIZE ^{their need} GOD'S NEED FOR UNIFYING LOVE IN THEIR HEARTS. I WAS REMINDED THIS PAST WEEKEND OF HOW THE LOVE OF CHRIST IS JUST NOT IN THE HEARTS OF SOME OF OUR MEMBERS. MONTH AFTER MONTH GOES BY WITHOUT THEIR EXPRESSION OF LOVE FOR CHRIST OR HIS CHURCH. A CHURCH CLEAN-UP COMES ALONG -- AND THANKS BE TO GOD FOR THOSE WHO HAVE GOD'S NAME IN THEIR HEARTS -- THEY DO THE JOB -- AND THE SAME ONES ARE ALWAYS MISSING!

BUT LET THERE BE A CRISIS - OR SOME SPECIAL NEED IN THEIR LIVES FOR THE CHURCH'S MINISTRY -- THEY WILL BE THERE RIGHT AT THE FRONT OF THE LINE DEMANDING PERFECTION FROM THE CHURCH AND THE PASTOR. Yes, HOW SAD THAT WE DON'T REALIZE THAT IN THE NEXT SECOND DEATH COULD STRIKE. AND ^{EVERY moment we} IT'S AT THAT MOMENT THAT WE ARE EITHER ONE WITH GOD AND HIS PEOPLE -- OR DIVORCED FROM HIM, AND HIS LOVE.

MATTERS OF
YES -WHEN YOU'RE FACED WITH LIFE AND DEATH IN THE VERY NEXT SECOND - IT DOESN'T MATTER WHO BRINGS YOU CHRIST -- IT JUST MATTERS THAT HE'S THERE WITH YOU.

I THINK IF WE THOUGHT ABOUT THAT THOUGHT MORE OFTEN THERE'D BE FAR LESS DIVISION, DISCORD, AND DIVORCE IN THIS WORLD. AND THERE'D BE A LOT MORE PEOPLE WORSHIPPING AND THANKING GOD HERE -- BECAUSE TOMORROW MIGHT BE TOO LATE! EVERYBODY SAYS THEY'LL GET AROUND TO THANKING GOD FOR LIFE AND ETERNAL LIFE TOMORROW! BUT TOMORROW SO OFTEN COMES TO LATE!

TODAY - JESUS SAYS - FATHER, MAY THEY BE ONE, AS WE ARE ONE. AND JESUS DOES MORE THAN JUST TALK -- HE GIVES US MORE THAN EMPTY PROMISES. HE OFFERS US UNITY WITH HIMSELF AND THE FATHER THROUGH THE SACRAMENT OF THE ALTAR. AND HE PRAYS THAT AS HE HAS MADE HIMSELF ONE WITH US -- WE WILL MAKE OURSELVES ONE WITH EACH OTHER... NAMELY, THAT WE WILL LOVE AND FORGIVE EACH OTHER.

I THANK GOD THAT YOU HAVE RESPONDED TO HIS PRAYER FOR UNITY TODAY. WITH ME, PLEASE PRAY FOR THOSE WHO ARE NOT HERE TODAY -- AND ESPECIALLY, LET US PRAY FOR THOSE WHO ARE PUTTING OFF THEIR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD AND WITH US 'TIL TOMORROW. LET US PRAY THAT THEY MAY KNOW THAT EVERY MINUTE OF EVERY DAY WE ARE FACING THE MATTER OF LIFE OR DEATH THE VERY NEXT SECOND. IT DOES NOT MATTER WHO BRINGS CHRIST TO US -- IT ONLY MATTERS THAT HE IS THERE -- THAT HE'S WITH US.

WILL HE BE WITH THOSE WHO CONTINUE TO PUT HIM OFF UNTIL TOMORROW? FATHER, MAY THEY BE ONE, AS WE ARE ONE!

AMEN

EASTER VII
Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo
May 18, 1980

"IS IT WORTH IT?"

"And Stephen cried out with a loud voice,
'Lord, do not hold this sin against them.'" Acts 7:60

Maria Goretti, a 12-year-old Italian girl, died in 1902 after being brutally raped and stabbed by a 21-year old boy. A few moments thereafter on her death bed her last words were, "I forgive him." Maria Goretti was proclaimed to be a saint by the Roman Catholic Church in 1950 because she exemplified the life of Christian commitment and self-denial. Instead of hating her assailant and murderer, she forgave him.

Recently, the man who did these things to her died at the age of 89 years. He died a repentant and devout Christian. His last words were: "I have suffered enormously for killing a saint. But through her, I found hope and I found redemption. Now, I will rejoin Maria in Heaven."

By living a life and dying a death of self-denial, Maria Goretti led her own murderer into the kingdom of heaven. Her obedience to the forgiving love of Christ had redeemed the life of another person.

Many scholars believe that Stephen's untimely death as a young missionary served the same purpose for Saul who became St. Paul. Saul was a leader among the group that stoned Stephen. He also saw Stephen look to the heavens and exclaim as he was dying: "Lord, do not hold this sin against them."

The lives of Maria Goretti and Stephen the martyr graphically illustrate the redemptive power of sacrifice. Both Maria and Stephen,

like Jesus himself, were sacrificial victims of sin. But also like their Lord, their dying words were life-giving: **THEY WERE Obedient TO CHRIST TO THE VERY END.**

I am certain that Maria's parents found that kind of obedience very difficult to accept. I am certain that they were not too thrilled with their daughter's last words: "I forgive him." I am certain that they could have cared less about the redemption of a murderer's life when it resulted in the loss of their own daughter. I am certain they would have rather killed that man than forgiven him.

Yes - like Maria's parents - by nature we are not very willing to sacrifice especially when it means loss to ourselves. Most often we give up only when we get more in return. We are by nature very practical people. And practical people think first of themselves -- and maybe second about the next guy.

Obviously - being practical is not all bad. God calls us to be good caretakers - good stewards of all his creation. He calls us to make wise investments and to use all resources of the earth wisely, including our bodies, our time, and our treasures.

But there is a higher calling than mere worship of the things of practical worth. Our first calling is to be obedient to a person -- namely, the person and power of Jesus Christ. Because Christ was first obedient to us as persons -- God calls us to respond likewise -- to be committed first and foremost to that same priority of human compassion.

It is no easy calling to put human compassion and forgiving love above all things of worth in

life -- including life itself. Yet we see in the lives of Maria Goretti and Stephen the Martyr this very example of obedience -- even unto death itself they were yet willing to offer the power of Jesus Christ.

And as we look at the lives of Maria Goretti and Saint Stephen -- and likewise as we look at the lives of people today who follow their sacrificial example -- we are bound to ask: Is it worth it? Is being a Christian worth the price?? Are the sacrifices that we offer really uplifting other people?? Is our sacrifice of a \$175,000 a year uplifting the hearts, souls, and bodies of people?? Are we sacrificing for the glory of God -- or is our obedience to Jesus Christ just one of many tax deductions?? Is it all worth it?!?!

Well - I think if we're really honest -- there are times that all of us really wonder whether all this pushing and shoving for Jesus Christ really accomplishes his forgiving love. As a pastor there is hardly a week that goes by where I DON'T ask myself: Is it really worth it? When I see people misuse and abuse their relationship to Christ and one another ... when I see people make the body of Christ into just another social club ... when I hear people complain about the pittance or two of sacrifice that they make for Jesus' sake -- all this causes me to wonder: Is it really worth it?!?!

But that's always the question when love is involved. I'm certain that doctors and all other professionals who serve people continue to ask the same question. They commit their lives to uplifting others, only to see people turn around to their lazy and destructive habits.

Surely every parent has asked the question thousands of times when it comes to the sacrificial love of their children: IS IT REALLY WORTH IT.

But the answer is always the same when the higher calling of love is at stake: **THE ANSWER IS ALWAYS YES!!!** A loving sacrifice is always worthwhile when another life can be uplifted.

Such was surely the case for me this past week -- as is the case most weeks. It was a week, like most weeks, with many intrusions. And like most weeks - some of them were insensitive and unnecessary -- and these were the ones, like always, that caused me to ask, and probably caused you to ask: **IS IT REALLY WORTH IT??**

But the answer to that question is best found by remembering the many significant times that called for a sacrificial giving of Christ's love. Yes - it was in those few quiet, sacrificial hours of waiting in the hospital for results from the doctor - it was in that 45 minutes of time (which I did not have) yet gave along with that \$20 bill to that young person who was about ready to give up -- it was even in taking the time to serve coffee to 150 mothers and daughters. Through those small yet important sacrifices -- lives were affirmed, lives were uplifted, lives were served, lives were redeemed by the love of Christ.

And that kind of sacrifice is always worth it! I think this can all best be illustrated by the example of a father, who for one short moment, did not think the sacrifice of love was worth it.

He was sitting at his desk with a month's bills and accounts before him. And his 12-year old, bright-faced, starry-eyed son rushed in the room and impetuously announced: "Dad, it's your 50th birthday, and I'm going to give you 50 kisses!" And his son began to make good on his 50 kisses, when his dad exclaimed: "Andrew, don't do it now, I'm too busy!"

The boy silently recoiled -- and quickly left the room with his big blue eyes filled full of tears. Apologetically, his father yelled to him: "Andrew, you can finish the kisses tomorrow." But there was no response of recognition from the next room.

That same evening - the father came into the room and said: "Andy, come on, finish the kisses now." But for one reason or another, the boy did not hear his father -- or was not in the mood to oblige him.

Two months later -- the waves of a nearby river had accidentally closed over the body of this 12 year old boy. And so it was that his father ^{now} found himself carrying and kissing his dead little boy to his eternal resting place.

And you know, and I know, how much that father regretted those thoughtless words that day when he was given the chance TO SACRIFICE A LITTLE OF HIS TIME for the sake of a higher calling: TO SHOW HIS LOVE FOR HIS SON.

YES - IT'S ALWAYS WORTH IT -- always worth the time, the energy, the sacrifice of the things of life and life itself - TO SHARE THE FORGIVING LOVE OF CHRIST!

AMEN

EASTER VII
Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo
May 31, 1981

"ONE LAST WORD"

"HOLY Father, keep them in thy name, which thou hast given me, that they may be one, even as we are one."

John 17:11

"...And you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth."

Acts 1:8

If tomorrow were to be the last day of your life -- what would your thoughts be like today? What kind of last impression or last word would you impart to the world? And to this situation add the fact that your life/death dilemma has been caused by the betrayal of your friends. How well would you cope with these circumstances?

Would you go into a deep depression, secluding yourself from everyone? Or would you strike out in anger at your betrayers ...and maybe even those closest to you? Would you feel cheated - possibly venting your resentment at God? Would you beg for freedom -- even sacrificing your faith or patriotism just to spare your life? What LAST WORD or LAST TESTAMENT would the world receive from you?

Such is the context of today's texts -- both from John and Acts. In one case, we have Jesus' Last Word before his crucifixion; in the other, we have his Last Commission before his Ascension.

In John's text - the Last Word of Jesus is a word of prayer on behalf of his followers. That alone is quite incredible! He doesn't plead for himself, but rather for you and me, his followers. He prays that we would remain ONE - as he and the Father are one ... in unity or harmony with his love. He prays that we will

Devil always seeking to invade
our lives & to drag out our relationships
not "cop out" on his model of love when the going gets rough. ⁻²⁻ with X.

Amazing isn't it -- that he should offer that kind of prayer in the last hours of his life. Amazing that he should be more concerned about the future circumstances of human relationships than he is about his own life. Amazing but true; Christ was always far more concerned about the harmony of the future than the turmoil of the past or present.

There is much food for thought in this last word of our Lord. Because like the whole life of Christ, it is a Word which seeks to bring hope rather than despair to the world. In the very grip of death, Christ prays for a resurrected spirit of harmony and wholeness among his followers.

One really has to wonder why we so often choose to live contrary to this prayerful hope that Christ has for us. For so often when the going gets rough, we are tempted to run away, to give up, to contradict Christ's prayer for harmony and wholeness.

Just take the simple little issue of human error. Obviously human error often causes embarrassment, many times creates turmoil, and periodically even makes us suspicious or distrustful. But should human error be the cause for separation or divorce? Should human error be the cause for people to run away or to sever previously meaningful relationships? Should human error of the past be allowed to destroy the harmony of love for our future??

We all know the right answer: the human error of yesterday should not be allowed to destroy the human harmony of tomorrow. But all around us we can see people who have allowed yesterday's human errors to destroy tomorrow's hope for harmony -- for the oneness of love which Christ prayed for.

Whether its the institution of marriage or the institution of the church -- every sector of our society is desparately in need of this Good News from Jesus Christ: TO BECOME ONE IN HIS SPIRIT OF LOVE. Every institution and every individual suffers from human error, and only the forgiving spirit of Christ can heal yesterday's wounds of separation.

Granted - sometimes it means a totally fresh start - sometimes it means a totally new relationship -- sometimes it means the creation of a new institution or vocation -- but Christ calls us to stop picking away at the scars of yesterday's wounds. To become one with Christ and the Father is to be BORN ANEW TODAY -- to bury yesterday's mistakes, yesterday's pranks, yesterday's human errors six-feet-under - never to rise again.

To become one with Christ and the Father is to be able to see tomorrow WITHOUT ANY PREJUDICES -- WITHOUT ANY SINS -- BECAUSE GOD HAS WIPED THE SLATE CLEAN. God has graced us through the cross of Jesus Christ; the tears, the turmoil, and the tragedy of yesterday is forgiven and forgotten by our Lord. He calls us to leave yesterday's heartaches behind us and get on with his mission of mercy ... and TO BECOME UNIFIED IN THAT MISSION.

And that's where his second Last Word is heard: just before his Ascension, he tells his followers .. "you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth." God has never been satisfied with one little piece of earth in the middle east: he wants the whole world to hear his Good News ... he wants the whole world to praise the name of Jesus Christ. He wants us, his followers, to be united IN GETTING THAT JOB DONE!

His task reckons us to be more than a mutual admiration society of worshippers. The principal purpose of the church has never been to merely provide a proper place with air-conditioned atmosphere for adoring God. As one scholar recently put it ... "Many people have become so caught up in the worship and adoration of God that they have lost their awareness of what he commissions them to do: TO WITNESS AND SERVE.

Yesterday, during my final confirmation conference, I asked each confirmand "Who has been the greatest advocate of the Holy Spirit in your life?" Without an exception -- they all named either both or at least one of their parents.

Many of them were really amazed to realize that their parents had been their major vehicles of the Holy Spirit. Their parents had encouraged them to be like God ... and after all, that's what the Holy Spirit is all about. That power, that person, that presence in our lives which encourages us to remain committed to the peace, and love, and truth of God himself: that's the power of the Holy Spirit.

Thanks be to God for parents who take their example of witnessing to their children very seriously. But Jesus says to us as parents and people: I want you to be my witnesses beyond the boundaries of your families. I want you to witness of my love beyond the boundaries of your neighborhoods ... and beyond the narrow confines of your homogeneous communities.

Jesus calls us to be witnesses who rate our church-life not merely by how much we enjoy the worship service but by how much we carry out his commission TO SHARE HIS LOVE and TO SERVE THOSE WHO NEED HIS MERCY.

If the original disciples had remained huddled in worship in the upper room rather than taking

the Good News into the streets -- none of us would yet know that we have already been redeemed by God.

Those first disciples risked their lives and reputations when they hit the streets with the news that Jesus Christ is truly the Messiah, God's son and our Savior. They did more than talk about the Cross of Christ ... they did more than adore the Cross or wear it around their necks -- they carried the cross as they sought to unify the Jewish and Gentile world with the love of Christ.

— Some years ago, following a presentation of the Passion Play at Oberammergau, a group of tourists wandered backstage to take some pictures of the cast and sets. One tourist tried to lift the cross to his shoulder but found it too heavy. He turned to Anton Lang, the actor who portrayed Christ and said, "Why don't you carry a lighter cross? No one would know the difference." Mr Lang replied, "I could not take the part of Christ without feeling the weight of the cross."

Those are real words of wisdom for us. The true spirit of discipleship is taking up the cross and following ... and feeling the burden of doing it. There is a modern tendency to make Christianity so easy and so attractive THAT WE NO LONGER FEEL THE BURDEN OF THE CROSS. The last word of Christ can hardly be reconciled with a mission program which makes discipleship synonymous with the easy life.

Christ wants us to know the comfort and the burden of following him; the comfort of his forgiving love, and the burden of sharing that love with one another and the whole world. He still has ONE LAST WORD for us today: to be witnesses of his forgiving power to anyone and everyone who is still trapped by yesterday's human errors and sinfulness.

AMEN.

EASTER VII

Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo

May 11, 1986 (Mother's Day)

Peter R. Martyn, Pastor

"FATHER, SON, AND . . . MOM!"

"I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: ... I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them." John 17: 22b,26

There are three festivals of glory on the Christian calendar in America -- Christmas, Easter, and Mother's Day. Let's face it - every American can tell you that Mother's Day is the second Sunday of May. How many Americans can tell you that Pentecost is 50 days after Easter? Christmas, Easter and Pentecost may be the global festivals of Christmas importance, but more Americans can tell you why we celebrate Mother's Day than Pentecost. Like Christmas and Easter, American Protestants have made Mother's Day a day of holy obligation. We Protestants like to take our shots at the Roman Catholics for their days of obligation. But at least they have openly chosen to venerate the Holy Mother; they have made it part of their Christian tradition. On the contrary, we have chosen to venerate human motherhood rather than holy motherhood! For Protestants, rather than Father, Son, and Holy Spirit ... it's more like "Father, Son, and ... Mom!"

I hope all of you mothers here today will tolerate my jesting about your day as well as our liturgical traditions. And I also hope that you will understand the burden that Mother's Day puts upon conscientious preachers as well as our biblical tradition. Today is Mother's Day; it is also the Seventh Sunday of Easter ... a day which uplifts the theme of Christian unity. Somehow, every year, the conscientious pastor has to melt together these two realities -- that is, if he wants to keep his job! Let it never be said that our secular traditions do not dictate religious life. Somehow or other, today we must make a marriage of Mother's Day and Jesus' Prayer for Unity.

How can we be faithful to the Gospel and to our Mothers? And more importantly, how can we get beyond Hallmark's concept of Mother's Day -- which in reality is just another "Sweetest Day?"

There is a real clue in our gospel text with Jesus' final "will and testament" - his prayer for unity. He says he has "given us his glory." What does that mean: to be glorified in Christ? Quite simply, it means we have been empowered with his loving will of sacrifice! Thus, his prayer for unity means "we will be one with him as we reflect

his loving will of sacrifice -- his glory. And where on this earth do we see "that loving will of sacrifice" manifested most obviously? Through the Holy Spirit! And where do we best see the Holy Spirit enfleshed in daily living? Most dramatically in our "MOMS."

So you see -- it is even appropriate to say, "Father, Son, and ... Mom!" Because mothers by their very nature enflesh the glory of Christ -- they are the most dramatic human vehicles of the Holy Spirit ... they are often like Christ himself - the nurturing spirit of loving sacrifice. And how do these moms show this nurturing love of Christ? I would like to suggest three ways: THROUGH COMMUNICATION, THROUGH COMMITMENT, and THROUGH COMPASSION! These are the three C's of the glory of Christ; the three C's of loving sacrifice - Communication, Commitment, and Compassion.

God's glory is that he never stops communicating to us and with us! God is always an ACTIVE SPEAKER ... and an ACTIVE LISTENER. God never stops telling us his story of love. We've heard it hundreds of times; and we need to hear it thousands more! God tells us, even in spite of our sin, that we are loved, accepted, and forever forgiven! That's the message of Baptism! But equally true, he never stops listening to our hurts and hassles! The psalmist says (66): "Truly God has listened; he has given heed to the voice of our prayer. He has not rejected our prayers or removed his steadfast love from us." God is an "active listener" as well as an "active initiator" of love!

Is it any wonder we value our mothers like the Holy Spirit? Mothers are the ones who tell us and tell us again and tell us again how much we are loved. Mothers are the ones who love us in spite of our failures. Dads so often expect perfection; moms nurture us to do our very best! And we never get tired of hearing the story of love from mom. But moms are not only great talkers; they are by far the most active listeners.

Bill Vamos tells about a cartoon that he saw of a mother driving home with her four small children, the family dog, and several bags of groceries in the station wagon. You can all imagine the picture, can't you? Her face shows the mixture of love and frustration ... patience and near hysteria. Behind her all four children are talking at the same time. It's something like this: 'Tell Billy to stop waving at the car behind us.' 'Daddy's good hat is back here and Dolly's standing on it.' 'Which bags are the lollypops in?' 'Blow your horn, mom, and make the police car move.' 'Janie just dropped the ketchup bottle on top of the prune juice, and the bag's leaking all over!' 'Drive faster, mom, we're missing our "He Man" show!' 'Stop bouncing the car, mom, I can't read the cereal box.' 'It's cold back here

sitting on the frozen food.' 'Who put their fingerprints on the back window?' 'Hey mom, why'd you turn off the radio?' 'Jimmy's opening the cookie bag, mom!' 'What's the matter, mom, you don't smile very much when you drive with us?'

Mothers have a special way of enfleshing the Holy Spirit by communicating the love of God even as they listen to the multitude of hurts and hassles of their children ... as well as the neighbors down the street.

But mothers not only reflect this dimension of the glory of Christ! Beyond good communication, they are COMMITTED to those they love! A mother's commitment comes from the heart and soul - not from a constitution or organizational chart or merger document. If we as Lutherans intend to be one - then our commitment to Christ and each other must come from within ... not from the quotas or constitutions drafted by the CNLC.

Evangelist James Robinson tells of seeing a TV interview with members of the Hell's Angels motorcycle gang. He was impressed by their creed. He says, "Do you know what they kept holding up as their most supreme virtue? They kept saying, 'We're a family. We're together. We live together, we fight together, we die together. We stick together!'"

Amazing isn't it -- the Hell's Angels seem to understand the nature of commitment better than the Holy Christian Church. The glory of the Holy Spirit is that she empowers us to be committed to God and each other. The church needs to look at moms to get a clue of what commitment is all about. Moms do not make a commitment for what they can get out of it -- they make a commitment for what they can give of themselves! That's the Spirit of loving sacrifice; that's the glory of Christ; that's being empowered by the Holy Spirit!

One of the greatest thrills in the parish ministry is sharing the lives of the committed "little people" of the church. Several of you here at Hope fall into this category. You are the people whom I can count on ... and who can also count on each other! You are the ones who will always be here when the doors are open. You are the real mothers of this Mother Church. You may not be the decision makers or the speech writers or the corporate movers and shakers -- but you are the positive, encouraging, uplifting voice and Spirit of Christ at Hope! You are the ones for whom your church is always in your thoughts ... your prayers ... your calendars ... and your budgets!

I must be honest -- there's a drastic need for a lot more "little people" in this church. Because "little people" act like mothers -- they are committed ... they are not caught up in their own power, pride, pomposity and

importance. It is often the "big people" who are the frustration and thorn in the side of Mother Church. They want all the attention ... they want all the glory, but they only give a pittance of commitment!

It's interesting that I came here seven years ago. Our baptized membership was around 900. Today it is over 1250. I had hoped within five years that our worship attendance would increase to an average of 400 (from near 300). But last year, our average just barely hit 330. The sad fact is that too many "big people" don't feel they need God or the other "little people." They send in their token pledge once a year -- and that takes care of their commitment! God and his people are not regularly in their thoughts, prayers, calendars or budgets! There is a desperate need for a revival of the "mothering spirit" in the life of Hope! I hope you are all praying for this renewal!

But there's one final Big "C" for those who possess the glory of Christ (like our mothers)! Communication, commitment, and lastly, COMPASSION! That's possibly one of the greatest assets of most mothers -- the ability to sense and feel the needs of children and others who are hurting.

That was also one of the greatest gifts of the Pentecost Church -- it had the ability to "feel with others." The first church set up one of the first welfare programs for widows and orphans -- for all who could not provide for themselves. One of the greatest reasons for the phenomenal growth of the early church was that the average person really felt "he was cared about ... I really do matter to those people."

"They care about me. I really do matter to them." Those are the most important reasons for us to be a part of this church family. This is the glory of Christ; this is the life of the Spirit; this is the spirit and glory of motherhood! This is the spirit and glory that always makes us one in Christ: "WE FEEL CARED ABOUT! WE MATTER!"

Maybe that can't be told any better than through the story of the two mothers living in a nursing home. The one mother nearest the window was warm, talkative and always sociable. The other mother next to the door was a lonely paralyzed stroke victim. One day the mother next to the door asked the mother next to the window to describe what was going on outside. The mother next to the window took great delight in her description. She described the flowers bursting and blooming ... the birds delightfully beaking for worms ... the postman whistling as he made his rounds ... and the children riding their trikes and bikes. This became a daily ritual. The mother next to the window brought renewed beauty and life to the paralyzed woman.

But one warm and sunny day - the mother next to the window suffered a heart attack and died. Soon thereafter she was replaced by another woman. And again, with great difficulty, the woman next to the door asked: "Would you please describe for me what's going on outside?" The new roommate looked out the window, then looked at the paralyzed woman and said: "You must be crazy. There's nothing outside this window but a brick wall." That new roommate had never learned the meaning of "compassion."

Communication, commitment, compassion. These are the three C's of the glory of Christ. These are the three C's of his will of loving sacrifice. These are the three C's of the power of the Holy Spirit. And these are the three C's of the Holy Mothers of God and his people everywhere. And these are the three C's that make us one -- as mothers and fathers, sisters and brothers, parents and children, Lutherans and Roman Catholics. YES, PRAISE BE TO GOD THE FATHER ... TO GOD THE SON ... AND TO GOD THE MOM ... for their spirit of communication, commitment and compassion!

AMEN.

EASTER VII
Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo
May 31, 1987
Peter R. Martyn, Pastor

"GLORY TO GOD . . . ON EARTH!"

"I glorified thee on earth, having accomplished the work which thou gavest me to do." John 17:4

"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the close of the age." Matt:28:19-20

With the 90° heat outside, it hardly seems like we're IN BETWEEN spring and summer. But we are living "in between" those seasons right now. Likewise, today we are "in between" liturgical seasons. We are living "in between" the Ascension of last Thursday and the Pentecost of next Sunday.

For most of us here, living "in between" the Ascension and Pentecost is no big deal. But to those 1st century Christians in today's lessons, the "in between" time was filled with anxiety and apprehension. These people had seen God's glory on earth. Through the person, the teachings, the life, the ministry, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ - these Christians knew first hand the meaning of "glory to God on earth!" Jesus Christ in his life, death, and resurrection was the glory of God on earth! But with Jesus' ascension, the future looked grim! Where was the glory now?? Who would now manifest God's glory on earth? Who would en flesh the glory of God? Whose example would be followed? How would God's power now show itself? Could these early converts really believe Jesus when he said he would send another Counselor??

It wasn't fun to be "in between" the Ascension and Pentecost during the 1st century. In fact, Luke in the book of Acts has two men saying to those early disciples: "Men of Galilee, why do you stand there looking into the heavens?"

Isn't that exactly what you and I do when we encounter those "in between" times in our lives. How many of us remember the time we lost our first love?? Do you remember just standing there looking into the sky . . . thinking that life would never be worth living again. Or for those who have really lost a spouse -- they begin to wonder how they will ever give glory to God on earth again!? When a congregation loses a favorite pastor or deeply committed family - the people often look to the heavens convinced that it will never be the same again. When the Green Bay Packers lost Vince Lombardi, they encountered one of their greatest "in between" times in history . . . and they haven't recovered from it yet!! There's nothing quite so difficult as the "in between" times!!

We've all known those times between the Ascension and Pentecost -- maybe some of you are facing one of them right now!! Those are the times that God seems so distant -- somewhere up there in the clouds, but not down here on earth -- so remote, so removed, so dislocated from our earthly dilemmas. So often it's during those "in between" times that the church neglects the poor and suffering; is it any wonder that the glory of God on earth gets turned by Christians into persecution & crusades, inquisitions & religious wars, sectarian quarrels, bigotries, and even self-serving ministries that gross their leaders 1.9 million a year. Too often these things happen in our "in between" seasons -- when we have lost sight of God's true presence, true power, true glory!!

But none of these are the true stories of God's glory on earth! They are all perversions of God's story ... and there will be many yet told in the future. But there are millions of stories that rarely get told ... because they aren't sensational enough for Nightline or the 6 o'clock news. They're just down to earth stories of God's glory! Just the daily variety. One of those stories was recently told by an LCA pastor in Pennsylvania. Ole Sam's story is a classic of the glory of God on earth during life's "in between" times. I'd like to share Ole Sam's Secret with you today -- because his secret is also your secret and mine. It is the way we give glory to God on earth at all times ... but especially in our "in between" times.

"The villagers who lived around the "Point" didn't think Ol' Sam would stay on after Kate died. They had been as close as any couple they knew. No one could ever recall them saying things like "I love you" in public; but then, they didn't have to. You could see it in their eyes... the way they looked at each other ... how Kate would put her hand on her husband's when he stood behind her rubbing her shoulders.

Kate died peacefully in her sleep. Ol' Sam was thankful that she didn't suffer. But his pain was deep. No one saw him for many days following the funeral. People were afraid he had given up and died.

Finally, some of his closest friends elected a representative to go and check things out. It was Ned, the postmaster, who drew the short straw. As he neared the Point, he was afraid of what he'd find ... but there was Ol' Sam bent over in the garden, hoeing with such vigor that he was surely battling more than the weeds.

Well, Ol' Sam not only recovered from grief, but much to everyone's surprise, he also decided to stay on the Point. Being the keeper of the lighthouse was lonely enough when one had a mate, but now many wondered how he was going to make it "all by himself."

They were glad, however, that he decided to stay because he was the most faithful keeper of the light known along the whole coast. Night after night, without fail, his beacon sent out its signal warning of danger; and his fog horn blurted at the slightest sign of mist gathering. Ol' Sam was a dedicated keeper and friend of all the fishermen in the villages.

Many times he put his life on the line for someone else. No one ever forgot the night several years before Kate's death when a strong gale wind was blowing. Ol' Sam kept a constant vigil that night. It was a good thing that he did, too. At first he wasn't sure he was seeing right. It looked like a small boat in trouble, being pushed closer and closer to the murderous rocks.

He ran for his binoculars and saw what he had hoped was not there: a cabin cruiser in distress. He could make out at least two people on the deck. He called quickly to Kate telling her to raise the Coast Guard on the radio.

He slipped into his jacket and ran to his dock where his motor launch was moored. That launch was Sam's pride and joy. It might have been ancient, but it was powerful and dependable.

After he cast off the lines, Ol' Sam fought the vicious tide. It seemed as though the angry sea was hell-bent on claiming life that night. But he made it safely to the crippled boat and rescued the young couple and their small baby. As the launch maneuvered its way back to the lighthouse, they watched their boat as it splintered -- dashed without mercy against the rocks.

Ol Sam and Kate took the couple and their baby into the warm, cozy lighthouse apartment, giving them warm clothes and blankets. Kate fussed about in the kitchen brewing hot tea and muffins. And, as she was known to do, she also muttered to herself: 'Dam fools to be out on that water on a night like this ... and with a small child to boot ... not an ounce of sense in either of their heads.' She muttered on and on without showing any deep anger.

Sam chuckled and told them to give her no mind. "If she wouldn't be fussin' over you, she'd be chewin' at me. Gives me a rest havin' her take on after someone else." he said, his eyes twinkling as he sat back and puffed his pipe.

Yes, that's the way Kate and Ol' Sam were. And, after Sam faced his loss, that's how he continued to be. The light from the lighthouse burned just as bright ... the fog horn sounded just as clear as it ever had. He continued to put his life on the line, tinkered with his launch, and walked the high balcony on lookout for fishing boats. He knew all of the skippers by name and greeted all of them as they passed by.

Ol' Sam was a puzzle to the villagers. He seemed to have a source of strength that kept him going. He lived as though he knew a secret and that secret was the source of his strength.

They knew that he missed Kate. But, they had the feeling that Ol' Sam lived as though Kate was still with him. He didn't withdraw as they thought he would. He continued to go to church, was the first one at the church's potlucks, still taught the boys how to tie all the important knots, carved small boats and even built a few in bottles.

So, Ol' Sam was the talk of the village. How could he be so peaceful? How did he remain so composed? How could he stand being alone all the time? How could he cope so well? How could he live still glorifying God on earth??

One night all of these questions were answered. Little did Cap'n Henry realize that as he piloted his fishing boat through the opening in the breakwater that he was going to be the one to make the discovery. At first he didn't know what was wrong, but he sensed something was amiss. Standing on the bridge of his boat, he was squinting at the lighthouse and then realized that the light was not burning. 'Ol' Sam would have had that light burning by now,' he said to himself. A cold shiver ran down his spine; something was wrong.

He changed course and headed for the dock. He walked up the narrow path leading to the door of the lighthouse. He knocked, waited, and then tried the doorknob. It was unlocked. Stepping inside he called, "Sam, Sam!" But no answer. The apartment was clean and neat, but no sign of his friend. Slowly he climbed the circular staircase to the nautical level. He didn't have to climb all the way before he saw the keeper of the light seated at his chart table.

Ol' Sam did not stir. His head was down on the table top, cradled in his arm as if sleeping. In front of him was an open book, his right hand resting on a page in the book. Cap'n Henry drew closer; it was Ol' Sam's Bible, the one he carried to church every Sunday. Sam's finger was pointing to a verse in the book.

Cap'n Henry bent over Sam's lifeless body and read the verse. The verse was the answer; it was Sam's secret. Now he knew where Sam got the strength to keep on going in spite of his losses. Now he knew how Sam kept on living as if Kate was still at his side. Now he knew how Sam could sing with such off-key gusto on Sundays. Now he knew how Sam could give glory to God ... and be totally at peace on earth! Cap'n Henry read the verse again: "Lo, I am with you always, even to the close of the age!"

Like his Lord, Ol' Sam gave glory to God on earth by accomplishing what God first gave him to do: TO BE THE BEST KEEPER OF THE LIGHT THAT THE VILLAGE HAD EVER KNOWN. That's still the way we GIVE GLORY TO GOD ON EARTH ... by doing our very best to accomplish what he has first given us to do!! Like Ol' Sam, we might be tempted to give up when we have those "in between" times, but then we remember that "Lo, I am with you always." God's blessings are still with us ... even in the midst of our losses. The Ascension did not remove Jesus Christ from our midst; he is still with us in word, in deed, in sacrament, in the communion of saints, in the forgiveness of sins, and in the promise of everlasting life.

Like our Lord, like Ol Sam, let's continue to give GLORY TO GOD ON EARTH by accomplishing the work that he has given us to do: TO LOVE OTHERS, AS HE HAS FIRST LOVED US!

AMEN.

EASTER VII (Mother's Day)
Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo
May 12, 1991
Peter R. Martyn, Pastor

"TO BE TRULY SET APART!"

Jesus prayed: "Holy Father, keep them in your name ... that they may be one, even as we are one. ... I do not pray that you should take them out of this world, but that you should GUARD them from the evil one. Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be consecrated in truth."
John 17:11b;15-19

There are three festivals of glory on the Christian calendar in America: Christmas, Easter and Mother's Day. Every Mother's Day I am reminded of that small parish that had the Little Mother's Club that continually miscommunicated in the Sunday bulletin. Their announcement always read: "Next Thursday at 5:30 p.m. there will be a meeting of the Little Mother's Club; all those wishing to become "Little Mothers" should please meet the minister in his study. Thank God Lutherans don't have "Little Mothers' Clubs," but we do have a liturgical & lectionary tradition that gets interrupted every Mother's Day. Ever since Woodrow Wilson's presidential proclamation in 1914, Mother's Day has been "truly set apart" as the main focus of worship for this Sunday of Easter.

Of course, like other holidays, Mother's Day is a "text" with variant readings and different interpretations. Today, many cynics would say it is an antiquated observance; and at worst a patriarchal indulgence - just another time to evoke traditional ideals of motherhood and domesticity. They say the "true Christian church" should be on the forefront of developing more inclusive liturgies and structures that promote gender equality. In other circles today, esp. among evangelical Protestants, motherhood will be nearly equated with the birth and resurrection of Jesus Christ himself.

Esp. in the last three decades, many alterations have been made to Mother's Day. In the 1970s, the National Organization of Women designated MOTHER'S DAY as the official day to rally for the Equal Rights Amendment and better access to child care. In the 80's a group called the Women's Party for Survival reappropriated Julia Ward Howe's emphasis: Mother's Day should be a day to publicly demonstrate for world peace. And in the 90's, esp. led by some California groups, Mother's Day is being uplifted as a time to honor Mother Earth.

Interestingly, all of these varied renderings and reactions overlook the original motivation for this day. The unique vision "to set apart" a "Mother's Day" was not motivated by motherhood, by women's issues/roles, or by the desire to give attention to the Christian home or family. The

movement was begun by a Methodist laywoman, Anna Jarvis, upon the death of her mother on May 9, 1905. Jarvis recalled that her mother, more than any other person she knew, had truly sought to glorify the life of Jesus Christ. Esp. through her work as a lifelong Sunday School teacher, the elder Mrs. Jarvis epitomized living as a dedicated disciple -- she laid down her life for literally thousands of children. So the Mother's Day Movement began in May, 1907, with Anna Jarvis offering memorial gifts and a special service in commemoration of her mother's lifetime devotion to being "ONE with Christ, even as he was ONE with the Father."

So we see that Mother's Day was not some secular invention that was imposed upon the church's Sunday lectionary, nor was it created by some tacky tradespeople who saw great opportunity to make another quick buck. Quite to the contrary, Anna Jarvis envisioned Mother's Day as a truly "holy day" - a divine gift of creation, a day to correlate "maternal affection and perseverence" with the character of Jesus Christ and his true disciples. For years, Anna Jarvis lashed out at the florist industry and others who made this day a commercial enterprise. In her most severe years, she urged churches and faithful Christians not to buy any gifts, flowers or greeting cards - but rather to visit home, write their mothers a letter, or offer a memorial gift to the church as a tribute of thanksgiving. In short, Mother's Day had been truly "set apart" NOT TO IMMORTALIZE motherhood or any domestic roles, but rather TO GLORIFY Jesus Christ and all mothers who sought to sanctify and consecrate themselves and their children TO ONENESS WITH HIM.

That's why we are here today on Easter VII and Mother's Day! To first and foremost recall and celebrate the fact that JESUS CHRIST IS TRULY SET APART from all other teachers, prophets, leaders, mothers or whatever in the world. And why do we set him apart? Because he totally, categorically, and most completely fulfilled what it means TO BE ONE WITH THE FATHER:

- 1) He guarded his followers from the evil one;
- 2) He sanctified his disciples in the truth - namely, that they are always forgiven and loved by God no matter how much they have sinned and fallen short of God's glory!

and

- 3) He sent his believers INTO THE WORLD with his truth. Contrary to so many religions, he did not view religion as an escape into some kind of monastic isolation from the darkness, demands and difficulties of the world.

That's why we profess Jesus Christ to be THE WAY, THE TRUTH, AND THE LIFE -- because his life perfectly revealed what it means to be ONE WITH THE FATHER IN THE WORLD.

"TO BE TRULY SET APART" - whether as mother, father, son or daughter - does not mean that you and I have been given some kind of privileged place by God in this world. Rather, it means that we have been given a very radical responsibility in this world -- NAMELY, TO BE ONE WITH JESUS CHRIST - TO LIVE HIS LIFE IN THIS WORLD AND FOR THIS WORLD.

So it is on Mother's Day. "To be truly set apart" on this Day in this place does not mean we are uplifting the gifts of motherhood or the domestic life (as important as they are). Rather, like Anna Jarvis today, we are uplifting the very gifts and character of those who are ONE WITH THEIR LORD: 1) those who guard their children against the evil one; 2) those who are consecrated to God's truth of forgiving love; and 3) those who willingly send their children into the world to be ONE with His Way, His Truth, and His life!

That's why I honor my mother today even though she has been dead for more than 15 years. Not because she was the greatest mother that a son could have had -- there were many other mothers in our neighborhood who were stronger, wealthier more jovial, more athletic, and who even gave their sons and daughters more time and energy. Likewise, she was not the best housekeeper or cook -- she only vacuumed once a week, she always cooked too blandly, with an eye on cost rather than quality, and she even made her sons help regularly with the laundry. But like Anna Jarvis' mother, there was nothing in all creation that would separate Blanche Martyn from Jesus Christ and his love.

I She, like her Lord, was the one who guarded her sons against the evil one. What did that mean in the 50's? Not anything too different from the 90's. It meant that we could not always conform to the worldly standards around us ... we didn't have the latest fashions and newest gadgets in our home ... we didn't drive new cars or flaunt our status to our friends. But those priorities at that time represent the same misguided priorities today -- they often reflect the way and the truth of the evil one. His techniques today are no different than the 50's - he wants us to make the powers of materialism, consumerism, idolatry, infidelity, leisurely comfort, and the good life of unending possessions our god. But those who are "truly set apart" -- whether mothers, fathers, SCS teachers or pastors -- those set apart seek to guard against these temptations of the evil one ... the one who would say that drugs and sexual freedom and racism and rape and authoritarianism and lying and coveting and all the other violations of God's love are THE TRUE WAY OF LIFE. THOSE MOTHERS "TRULY SET APART" BY CHRIST DO EVERYTHING HUMANLY POSSIBLE TO GUARD SONS AND DAUGHTERS FROM A SPIRIT THAT IS CONTRARY TO BEING ONE WITH GOD.

II Again, like her Lord, my mother sought to CONSECRATE ME IN THE TRUTH - not any old truth of the world, but the true promises of God revealed in the Bible. To be truly ONE WITH THE FATHER is to be one that never stops telling and telling and telling again that I am a child who is loved, accepted, forgiven and eternally secure with God! That's not hokey religion, that's the promise of God that every child desperately needs to know from parents. That was the consecration of Jesus Christ, that was the consecration of my mother, and I hope that has been the consecrated truth of your family life. I don't care how dumb kids think the Christian faith is ... they need to be told again and again and again THAT THERE IS NO GREATER TRUTH OF LOVE EVER GIVEN TO THE WORLD THAN THE PROMISES OF GOD THRU JESUS CHRIST!

It is not always easy to hear that truth in a world which seeks to immortalize the creation rather than the Creator. Possibly, you read yesterday's Blade. (amazing isn't it - both Larry and I have been getting our negative illustrations from the Blade lately ... might there be some ultimate truth to be seen here?) On page 27 a large headline "FROZEN IN TIME - the story of the followers of cryonics. Do you wonder what the Way, the Truth, and the Life of these believers in cryonics really looks like? Well, look no farther - here's what they say: "Well, there are no promises in our techniques of freezing your life for the future, but it's better than the alternative: no hope at all!" Another follower said: "it's not that I want to come back; it's just that I don't want to die!" Well, there's not a red-blooded American in this room this morning who wants to die, but our trust is not in freezing this decaying life for the future, but rather receiving the resurrection of future life forever. It is to that truth that we have been consecrated by our Lord ... and hopefully by our mothers, fathers, and everyone else WHO IS ONE WITH THE FATHER.

III Finally, like her Lord, my mother sent me into the world to be part of God's body of transformation and new life for this world. As Pastor Michaels said last week, true joy is not some feeling of juicy ecstasy but rather the fulfillment of God's purpose. Jesus' joy was complete because he fulfilled the purpose of His father. Likewise, my mother's joy was complete when she was fulfilling the purpose of her Father. Her Father's purpose was not to send her sons into the world merely to make more money, or to go along with things as the world would have it, or merely to raise families and play golf and cut the lawn. Her Father's purpose was that her sons would be just like the Son of the Father -- that they would share a ONENESS OF his love, his compassion, his mercy, and his justice for the needy, the helpless, the sick and sorrowful, and the destitute of the world.

Possibly we can best understand what that means by recalling the dialog between Peter and Jesus later in this gospel just before Jesus' ascension. Jesus asks, "Peter, do you love me?" And in his typical impetuous and impulsive manner, Peter says effusively: "Yes, Lord, you know I love you!" And Jesus responds: "Then feed my sheep!" Have you ever wondered why Jesus asked the same question three times? He knew that Peter's words, like yours and mine, sometimes do not result in actions but merely fleeting feelings. TO BE ONE WITH THE FATHER AND THE SON is more than having the right theology or proper Sunday lectionary or any other prescribed religious ceremony. Jesus said, "Feed my sheep," and that's more than Sunday morning rhetoric from a pulpit. It is a love which is willing to be hung on the cross in order that the darkness and hatred of this world might become the light of his peace and forgiveness for all humanity.

Jesus Christ was "truly set apart" because his priority -- his life purpose WAS TO BE ONE WITH THE FATHER. He came not to talk about the meaning of love but to demonstrate the

true reality of God's love. Likewise, I would like to believe that my mother was "truly set apart" because her priority was not housecleaning or great cooking or making a name for herself in the business world. HER PRIORITY AND LIFE PURPOSE WAS TO BE ONE WITH THE SON OF GOD ... as fully obedient as she could be in doing the love of her Lord ... feeding his sheep. Today, we celebrate a day for all mothers! But I hope in this place it's also a day for all fathers and brothers and sisters and aunts and uncles ... ALL WHO HAVE SOUGHT TO BE ONE WITH THE FATHER AND SON ... WHO HAVE MADE THEIR FIRST PRIORITY HIS LIFE PURPOSE

to guard against the evil one ...
to consecrate themselves to the Way, the Truth, and the
Life of Jesus Christ ...
and to send themselves and their loved ones into the
world to feed the hungry sheep who are yet looking
for direction, guidance, love, and acceptance.

Like their Lord and like the mother of Anna Jarvis, the mothers who gather in this place seek to offer a love which is FOREVER visible, vulnerable, and valuable. For like the Son of God, they have not come into this world to merely offer words of comfort & sympathy, but to give their very lives as a sacrifice for others. And "TO BE TRULY SET APART" in that way means that your life purpose will go well beyond any "Little Mother's Club!"

AMEN.

EASTER VII (Confirmation Sunday)
Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo
May 31, 1992
Peter R. Martyn, Pastor

"YOU GOT THE RIGHT ONE, BABY! UH! HUH!"

"The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one. I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. John 17:23f

(Open Diet Pepsi can) Is this THE RIGHT ONE?? (Uh! Huh!) Well, according to the 1992 Confirmation Class - they would choose Pepsi over Coke anytime! So - Pepsi is THE RIGHT ONE for this class. You and I may certainly not agree that Diet Pepsi is THE RIGHT ONE, BABY (in fact, many of you know that I prefer Diet Coke) - but this advertising slogan has been a real marketing mainstay for Diet Pepsi & the Co.

This past Friday morning I talked to Mr. Bill Bruce, the advertising executive in NYC who was responsible for developing the "Uh Huh" ad. He also happens to be the nephew of our Exec. Sec., Norma Lajiness. He told me that the ad was inaugurated at the 1991 Superbowl. Not only was it the highest rated spot during that Superbowl, but it also was picked as the top campaign ad in the country that year. In fact, after the ad appeared, Pepsi launched a nation-wide contest for home video spots that would use the "Right One" jingle. More than 4,000 creative entries followed. Not only did the "Uh, Huh" ad skyrocket Diet Pepsi sales - it also rekindled Ray Charles' career. Just from one 30-second spot, his hits have now become hot sellers among younger children who had never even heard of him before. And what has this meant for Diet Coke. Well, Coke was so threatened by this campaign that they made a risky decision to revise the thrust of their \$68 million diet advertising focus: "just for the taste of it!" And so the battle between the biggest "diets" continues. But as for the average person in Toledo, Ohio -- at least in talking to family and friends this week - they say they're "tired of "the right one, uh, Huh!"

So what's the lesson that we've again learned from the thrust of hoopla over campaigns like this: that THE RIGHT ONE HAS TO SATISFY MORE THAN A PHYSICAL THIRST. As the 1992 Confirmation Class has learned over and over and over again this year - one of the real temptations faced in life by Jesus and all of us IS TO MAKE OUR THIRST FOR PHYSICAL AND MATERIAL THINGS our ultimate goal ... our greatest good ... our true God. That's really what lies behind all good advertising - the ability to tempt the consumer to believe that at last he/she has found THE ABSOLUTE RIGHT ONE ... THE TRUE FULFILLMENT OF WHAT IS NEEDED IN LIFE!

Well, even though Diet Pepsi has had a good run as "THE RIGHT ONE" - we all know, it's not the ULTIMATE thirst quencher of life. So then, WHAT IS THE RIGHT ONE BABY? UH, HUH?? Well, sadly but truly, I learned this past week

that the RIGHT ONE is CERTAINLY not me. Here for almost 50 years I have been diligently trying to be THE RIGHT ONE for all of my catechism students. I have laughed with them and chided them, I have sometimes tried to be the class comedian - I even brought them breadsticks every week from Sofos (and White Sox tickets in Chicago). And now, at last, I have finally been told the truth. One of the parents told me this week that Pastor Jeff is really THE RIGHT ONE -- she said: he's the YOUNG ONE, he's the ONE with SEX appeal, he's the ONE with brilliance, he's the FLIRTATIOUS ONE, and most of all -- he's the ONE that still has that great crop of red hair and sexy red beard. And here all along I thought the RIGHT ONE had something to do with pastoral care and shepherding kindness; and now I've learned that it's all connected with YOUTHFULNESS AND GOOD LOOKS. Boy, what a devastating week ... at last I've learned that if you're almost 50 and balding badly ... YOU'RE NO LONGER THE RIGHT ONE, BABY! Well, I have just one prophecy for Pastor Jeff - just wait a few years ... and a few more babies ... your day will soon come: when your chest will start sinking to your waistline ... when your chin will make great terrain for mogal skiing ... and when the hair on your head will only show itself on your chest and your arm pits. Yes, Jeff -- it won't be long and they'll be singing about your Associate Pastor: he's "the right one, baby! Uh Huh!"

All kidding aside -- it should be obvious today that THE RIGHT ONE is not found through the Diet Pepsi Challenge or through a Diet Pastor challenge. Quite to the contrary - Jesus makes clear in his final prayer on earth ... his final testament to his followers ... that there is BUT ONE TIME, ONE PLACE, ONE CONDITION when we know that we have found THE RIGHT ONE:

when we see the glory of God
rather than the greed and divisiveness of humanity!
That's the Right One Baby - uh Huh! When Father is fully one with Son ... and when Son has made us fully one with Him and the Father -- then at last, YOU GOT THE RIGHT ONE, BABY! And that's exactly what Jesus Christ has done for each of us (esp. the seven confirmands today). In Holy Baptism - he has made you and me fully ONE with the Father. He has told you that God Almighty is the RIGHT ONE - the ONE who can be trusted at any time, the ONE who will always forgive and forget, the ONE who will never lead you astray, the ONE who will heal you and hold you and help you until the very day of your resurrection! DO YOU GET IT?! (uh! Huh!) Do you hear the good news that you are loved and saved and perfected by God?! (Uh! Huh!) Do you realize that there are no other gods above this God?! (Uh! Huh!) Do you want to follow in the footsteps of this God called Jesus Christ?! (UH! Huh!) Well, THEN YOU GOT THE RIGHT ONE, BABY! UH! HUH!

But now the question remains -- will you continue to show your ONENESS with that Father from now and forevermore!?! (UH! HUH!) Because that's the way that Jesus says God is glorified in this world - WHEN WE SHOW OUR ONENESS WITH HIM - WHEN WE SEEK TO BE HIS AMBASSADORS FOR HEALING AND BINDING UP THE BROKENNESS of this world. In Holy Baptism - and esp.

through your parents, your pastors, your church and hopefully your whole family - you have been given the seed of God's love and forgiveness. The question today and every day will be: WHAT WILL YOU DO WITH THE SEED OF LOVE THAT GOD HAS GIVEN TO YOU??

I am reminded of a parable (story of comparison that makes a point) by William R. White in his book, Stories for Telling. He tells a classic parable of a king and his four daughters. The king was about to leave on a several-year journey - so like Jesus in his final prayer from John 17 - the king summoned his four survivors to tell them goodbye and wish them well. But while he was saying farewell - he said he had something for each of them to help them take charge of his kingdom while he was gone. Asking them to hold out their hands - he gave each of them a grain of rice - then he left without a further word.

The first daughter (being the oldest and most practical) took the grain of rice and wrapped a golden thread around it and hid it in a crystal box. Each day thereafter she took it out and admired it.

The second daughter, considering the rice to be precious, kept it safe by putting it into a wooden box and stowing it under her bed.

The third daughter looked at the grain of rice ... and after a brief time decided it didn't look any different than any other grain of rice ... so she blew it off her hand, forgot about it, and went on with business as usual.

The fourth daughter (the youngest) knew there must be something very special about that grain of rice, but wasn't quite sure what it could be. Yet, she knew her Father to be a very wise & creative man. And after much thought - it finally came to her what she was to do with it.

Years elapsed and the kingly father returned asking them what they had done with the grain of rice. The first daughter came out with her crystal box saying: "Father I knew this rice was very special so I kept it in a special place and looked at it every day." The kingly father bowed and said: "Well done, daughter. Thank you."

The second daughter brought her grain in the box and told her father that she had kept it safe under her bed all those years. Again, the kingly father bowed and said: "Well done, daughter. Thank you also."

The third daughter rushed to the kitchen and found a grain of rice, ran back to her father and said: "Here father is your grain of rice. Smiling the kingly father bowed and said: "Thank you."

The youngest daughter was the last to step before her father. She said: "Father, I do not have the grain of rice you gave me." Her father asked: "What did you do with it?"

She told him she had spent several days thinking about the meaning of the gift. Then she said she finally discovered what he had intended. She said to her father and sisters: "Come to the back window." There through the window as far as the eye could see were fields and fields of rice, enough to feed the entire small nation of that king.

The king, seeing the faithfulness and wisdom of this daughter, said to her: "You have received the crown of my kingdom, for you have learned what it means to glorify THE ONE who has given you the seed of life ... for you have glorified your father by planting the grain of rice for the goodness of this whole world.

Dear Christian (Confirmands) friends - that's not the Pepsi Challenge -- that's the Christian Challenge. It's the challenge that faces every confirmed Christian every single day: "WHAT WILL I DO WITH THE SEED THAT GOD HAS FIRST GIVEN TO ME!?"

Will I glorify God by sharing his vision of love and forgiveness with others?! (UH! HUH)

Will I seek to serve rather than always be served by others in this world?!? (UH! HUH!)

Will I seek to break down the divisions between white and black ... between rich and poor ... between the lowest and the highest ... between urban and suburban ... between the greatest and the least?!? (UH! HUH!)

Will I bring the spirit of Christ's mercy and love not only to the INSIDERS of this church and community -- but make every effort to bring OUTSIDERS & OUTCASTS into this fellowship of believers?!? (UH! HUH!)

Will I be a disciple of hospitality and seek to break down the pettiness and pervertedness of the social cliques and cultural clanishness that are so much a part of the world our society and often the church?!? (UH! HUH!)

Will I be willing to take up my cross and suffer like Jesus for the sake of someone who has less status, less money, less education, and less pominece than I do!? (UH! HUH!)

Will I work for harmony and wholeness in this body of Christ rather than promote factionalism & favoritism which only serves to create a cancer in the body of Christ?!?
(UH! HUH!)

When you and I can say "UH! HUH!" to these questions and many, many more like them - then "YOU GOT THE RIGHT ONE, BABY!! (UH! HUH!) And once you've GOT THE RIGHT ONE -- DON'T LET ANYONE TELL YOU THAT THEY'VE GOT A BETTER RIGHT ONE FOR YOU!! (UH! HUH!!) AMEN.

EASTER VII

Glenwood Lutheran Church, Toledo

May 11, 1997 - Mother's Day & "Bring-A-Friend Sunday"

Peter R. Martyn, Interim Pastor

"FATHER, SON and ... MOM!"

All mine are yours and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them. ... Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one. ... Sanctify them in the truth; this is your word of truth. ... I have made your name known to them so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.

John 17:10,11b, 17 & 26

There are three American festivals of glory on our Christian calendar - Christmas, Easter & Mother's Day. Every Christian can tell you that the second Sunday of May is Mother's Day. But how many Christians can tell you that Pentecost is 50 days after Easter?!? Christmas, Easter & Pentecost may be the pinnacle festivals of our faith -- but Mother's Day gets greater honor, glory & obligation than Pentecost from both Protestants & Roman Catholics! Is it any wonder that today we celebrate, "Father, Son and Mom?!"

I hope you moms can take a little jesting. But I also hope you understand the burden that Mother's Day places upon conscientious preachers. Today is the 7th Sunday after Easter -- a day which uplifts our Lord's Prayer for Unity -- that we Christians might be ONE as the Father and the Son. So, if I want to show my love for the presence of God as well as the presence of mothers -- I must somehow "marry" Mother's Day to Jesus' Prayer for Unity.

And thanks be to God and His Spirit -- there is a real theme of Unity in this final "prayer & testament" of Jesus. Please notice what Jesus prays: *"Father, I will be glorified in them ... that the love you have made known in me will also be in them."* To glorify Christ is to be empowered by his loving will of sacrifice!! Or said another way, we are truly one with Christ when we reflect his will of sacrifice--that's his true glory! Now my dear friends -- where in this world do we best see Christ's loving will of sacrifice uplifted? Obviously, through the Holy Spirit!! And where does that Spirit become most enfleshed in our daily living?? Most dramatically in MOMS! Is it any wonder that today's sermon title is possibly the best version of the Trinity: *"Father, Son and ... Mom!"*

Yes, mothers by their very nature enflesh the glory of Christ. In most cases, mothers are the vehicles of the Holy Spirit; they are the nurturing spirit of loving sacrifice in our homes and in our land. And how do most moms show this nurturing and sacrificial spirit of Christ's love? Let me suggest three: they communicate that Spirit; they are committed to that Spirit; and they foster the compassion of that Spirit. Yes, through communication, commitment and compassion -- Moms glorify the sacrificial love of Christ!! Let's look at each!

First, one of the greatest traits of God's glory -- he never stops communicating his love for us!! God is the ACTIVE SPEAKER OF LOVE ... we are to be the

ACTIVE RECIPIENTS OF his LOVE! God never stops telling us how much he loves us!! Even in spite of our sin and shortcomings -- God keeps coming back and embracing us with his loving forgiveness! That's the message of Baptism, of Holy Communion, of faithful worship, of the Christian church: God never stops telling us that he will embrace us, protect us and bring us back home!

Now I ask each of you: where have you most often heard that message of God's Spirit on earth? I hope you can answer like me: from your mother!! In spite of her shortcomings, my mother was the one who kept on telling me & telling me again how much I was loved by her & loved by God! My mother was the one who loved me in spite of my stubbornness & stupidity. My mother was the one that would say to me after I was in trouble: "I will not leave you or desert you; my spirit & love will be with you always!" My dad was a good dad, but he too often expected perfection. My mom nurtured me to do the very best ... and then even when I failed would say, "You'll be able to do better next time!" There was always a message of grace from mom ... not merely an expectation of perfection!

Cartoonist, Bill Vamos, captures the challenge of nurturing moms as he describes the typical conversation of a mom driving the whole family home from the grocery store. Behind her in the station wagon are the four kids all talking at once: "Tell Billy to stop waving at that car behind us ... Dad's good hat is back here and Dolly's standing on it ... Where is the bag of lollipops? ... Blow your horn, mom, and make that police car get going! ... Janie just dropped the ketchup bottle on the prune juice and it's leaking all over the bag ... Drive faster, mom, we're missing the "Mighty Ducks!" ... Stop jerking the car, mom, I can't read the cereal box! Hurry up, mom, it's cold back here sitting on the frozen food! ... Mom, Billy's fingerprints are all over the back window? Mom, Jimmy's opening the cookie bag and their falling all over the floor! Hey, mom, what's the matter --you're not smiling the way you normally do?!?"

Yes ... mothers are most often the ever-present communicators of God's spirit -- a spirit which listens to the hurts and hassles and hangups of God's children -- yet keeps on loving and forgiving them anyway!!

But like the Holy Spirit - moms are not only the best communicators of God's love -- they also reflect His undying COMMITMENT to those they love! Unlike the movers and shakers of this world - a mother's commitment comes from the heart, not from a constitution or organizational chart or merger document. Evangelist James Robinson tells of seeing the Hell's Angels motorcycle gang on a recent TV show. He was amazed by their creed, which went something like this: "We are family -- we live together; we fight together & we die together!" In many ways, he felt the Hell's Angels understood the nature of commitment better than most Christians in the church.

Just take a closer look at the average mom and we'll see that real commitment. It's like the story of the family who came home every Sunday for a home-cooked meal from their mom. Week after week, this ritual happened. But the mom's health started to fail and it was becoming a real burden. So one day her pastor asked why she was continuing to undertake this monumental task -- he felt it

was time for one of the kids to pick up the ball. The mom looked the pastor square in the eye and said: "Pastor, sometimes I truly feel that my Sunday meal is the only thing that's keeping this family together. As long as I am able--I'm going to do everything I can for this family! God only knows there's enough in this world to drive them apart! It's my duty to keep them together!"

That's the spirit of Jesus Christ -- a spirit of commitment to keep the family together as one ... to protect them from the evil one. How desperately the church needs people like that "mom who cooked Sunday dinner even when it was a burden!" You certainly know I'm not merely talking about cooking dinners ... I'm talking about a spirit of commitment that sees nothing more important than "keeping the family together!" That was the Spirit that made Christ ONE with the Father ... and that's also the Spirit that makes MOMS ONE with the Father! The church & the whole world needs "committed moms" like these ... people who value nothing more than keeping the family together!! Thanks be to God for the moms who have shared that spirit with their families.

Finally - the last "C" of the Spirit -- an attribute which again glorifies Christ in our moms: COMPASSION -- the ability to sense and feel the needs of children and others who are hurting! By nature, as I said last week, most of us think of ourselves first. In John 17 -- Jesus is offering this prayer in the Upper Room on the eve of his crucifixion. If it were you or me, I think we might be concerned about ourselves. Yet his total focus was upon his followers -- he prayed for their safety & wholeness in a world which was seeking to destroy them & pull them apart. Yes - the Spirit of Compassion: that ability to suffer with someone whose life has become difficult without seeking to pull them down any further.

Possibly COMPASSION was the greatest gift of the Pentecost Church. Like most small churches -- people felt "cared about" in this early church. Each and every person really mattered. I sincerely hope this is still one of the most important purposes of the church and its ministry: TO SHOW THE WORLD THAT EVERY PERSON MATTERS! And certainly - this is one of the most profound attributes of the mothers of our world. It's the reason that we have MADD chapters, and AIDS benefits, and feeding centers like St. Pauls, and Interfaith Hospitality Networks: there is no greater glory of God than showing how He suffers with his hurting children. And that's a mother's compassion!

It reminds me of one of my favorite nursing home stories. Two mothers were in this home. The one nearest the window was a warm, talkative and always socialable person. The one next to the door was a lonely, paralyzed stroke victim. One day the mother next to the door asked the mother next to the window what was going on outside. The mother next to the window took great delight in her description: she described flowers bursting into bloom ... birds delightfully beaking for worms ... the postman whistling as he made rounds ... and the children whirling and twirling on their trikes & bikes. This became a daily ritual for these two ladies. The mother next to the window brought renewed

beauty to the paralyzed mother. One warm, sunny day, the mother next to the window suffered a heart attack and died. Soon thereafter, she was replaced by another woman in that bed.

Again, with great difficulty, the stroke victim next to the door asked this new woman "what is going on outside the window today?" The new roommate looked out the window, then looked at the paralyzed woman and said, "You must be crazy! There's nothing outside this window but a brick wall!" The new roommate suffered from the greatest sickness of our world: "a lack of compassion and understanding for others who are suffering worse!" There's a moral to this story: "If the church is to really be the church -- then it must see more than four brick walls ... and it's members must see that their ministry goes beyond those four brick walls!"

So there you have it -- the COMMUNICATION, COMMITMENT AND COMPASSION of God's love -- the three "C's" of the glory of Christ ... the three conditions of his final testament of loving sacrifice. These are the three "C's" of the Holy Spirit ... and these are the three "C's" of the "Holy Mothers" of God! And even greater -- these are the three "C's" that make us ONE ... whether it's ONE in marriage ... ONE as a family ... or ONE as a church! When there is a Spirit of communication, commitment and compassion to God's sacrificial love -- then we can be assured of ONENESS in this world! And most often -- that Spirit will be revealed by "the FATHER, the SON ... and the MOM!"

AMEN.