

PENTECOST XXII  
Luth Church of the Master  
October 19, 1975

"I PLEDGE ALLEGIANCE TO . . ."

(They said to Jesus) "Tell us then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not? . . . Jesus said to them, "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." Matt. 22:17,21

"America, Love It or Leave It."

"Keep politics out of religion"

"Rid the world from the Word."

"Separation of church and state"

"America, Right or Wrong!"

I'm certain all of you have heard these slogans. Maybe you've even used one or more of them. They represent "reductionism" - reducing one's philosophy of life, whether politics or religion, to a slogan

Further, they represent dangerous extremes. On the one hand, there is the spiritualist extreme - this person gets minimally involved in society, possibly by paying his taxes - but writes off the world as a lost cause and lives in a spiritual vacuum.

On the other hand there are those who offer Caesar their unquestioning loyalty. They are the "Love It or Leave It Americans. They make a golden calf out of a nation and its leaders.

Obviously, Jesus makes it clear in today's gospel that the serious Christian lives at neither of these ends of the spectrum.

As citizens of the state we are responsible for shaping its policies so that it becomes an instrument for the common good. The paying of taxes is only a small part of it. Hopefully,

our sense of Christian ethics influences both our expressions and participation in the affairs of state.

At the same time, we are citizens of a higher kingdom and are held fast by a prior allegiance. In baptism, <sup>we</sup> sound our primary allegiance in life -- first and foremost, we obey the commands of God. And so like Peter, there may be times in our lives when we must say, "I must obey God rather than men."

Christians cannot be reductionists. To follow our Lord is to say: Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's. That obviously means the Christian lives in constant tension. There are no simple answers to the question posed by the Pharisees. That's what they wanted to trick Jesus into doing -- giving a simple answer. The answer is not "yes" or "no", but "both."

But obviously, the question is - where is the line to be drawn between what is Caesar's and what is God's? Where do our obligations fall?

Jesus did not give a reductionist answer -- but his response does force us to do battle with our values (which obviously determines our allegiances). When he says - Render to Caesar his things, and to God his things -- he is <sup>asking?</sup> saying - who reaps the greatest value of our lives??

This means we cannot neither be Jehovah's Witnesses nor can we be Americana athiests - to be either is a denial of our baptismal faith. As always, we are in the in-between struggle -- we are never free from the saint-sinner syndrome.

So - we must ask ourselves -- ~~how~~ do we show our values in the way we live? Who is our almighty agent -- is he God, or is it the I.R.S. We give 20% of our life's treasure to the IRS agent -- what ~~portion~~ portion does God receive of the treasure he first gave us?? If he receives less than 2%, then surely there is not much tension between him and the IRS agent

Surely if God is below 2%, then we <sup>absolutely</sup> ~~surely~~ know that we are rendering FAR MORE to Caesar than we are to God.

Some would say - we are forced to give 20% to Caesar. Yes - no Christian can deny that. But if Christians were really doing their job as Christians -- there would be no need for a Defense Budget - there would be no poor or welfare mothers - there would be no urban blight.

Too often - far too often - Caesar has had to expand the very programs that Christ has commanded his followers to establish in his name. Far too often, Christ's disciples have sold out to CAESAR's bureaucracy.

It's time that we as Christians get things back into the proper tension -- that is, if we still value our Christian principles and ethics.

We can begin in 1976 to re-emphasize our Christian values in at least a couple of small ways. First, the percentage of time, talent, and treasure we give to God and his work ~~will~~ <sup>we can</sup> ~~more~~ REALISTICALLY be in tension with what we give to Caesar via the IRS. Secondly, as we celebrate the Bicentennial, hopefully, it will be more than a sloganeering glorification of Caesar and his power. Hopefully, we will apply God's power of mercy to our Bicentennial in the same way that his power of mercy was at the foundation of this great country.

In these small ways, we will at least be moving toward God as well as Caesar in our daily tug of war. Furthermore, we will be more than hypocrites as Christians -- we will be showing (as Luther said) that we have one foot in the kingdom of heaven, and the other in the kingdom of this world.

~~And that~~ <sup>YES</sup> our struggle as Christians is constantly one of seeking to get the foot in heaven to have greater influence on the foot on earth. For in so

struggling, we are living out our baptismal allegiance ~~we~~ are rendering unto Caesar the things that are his, and unto God the things that are his - which, of course, include the light, the darkness -- yes, the formation and continuing power of the whole creation.

AMEN

PENTECOST 22  
Luth Church of the Master, Troy  
Oct. 15, 1978

"WHERE DO WE DRAW THE LINE?"

"Tell us, (Jesus), what you think: Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not? ... Jesus said, Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." Matt. 22:17,21

How interesting that this text should present itself in these late, great days of tax crusading. Everybody and his brother has introduced a tax proposal for you and me to vote on this Nov. 7th. And all this proliferation of proposing has accomplished one thing for certain: we now have mass confusion amidst a high percentage of the population.

Behind this whole crusade is a very basic question: Where do we as Americans draw the line on taxes? How much should Caesar get? What is a fair share? Of course these are not the questions on everyone's mind. For many of the tax proposers -- the issue is one of opportunism. Many of these so called "fair proposals" are nothing more than a selfish opportunist taken advantage of the mood of the country. They want us TO DRAW THE LINE on taxes NOT FOR THE GOOD OF THE COUNTRY -- BUT FOR THE GOOD OF THEIR OWN SELF-INTEREST.

Interesting isn't it -- how that was exactly the same situation that Jesus was facing with the Pharisees and Herodians. Here they were - two opposite camps ganging up on Jesus to make him look bad. The Pharisees were the right-wing legalists -- they were hoping Jesus would say - "Pay taxes to Caesar." Then they could accuse him of blasphemy -- because they confused paying taxes with actual worship. The Herodians were the left-wing Jews -- they had swung their allegiance to Herod. They were hoping Jesus would "Deny taxes to Caesar" -- then Jesus would be in trouble with the official government.

In a sense - ~~it was like~~ like Jesus was being taken on by the John Birch Society and the ~~Socialist~~ Party at the

*Return to Paul's place*  
-2-

same time. Each side was hoping that they could trip up the Christ -- they were hoping he would draw the line on one side or the other. Either he was going to be for Caesar and against God - or for God and against Caesar.

Well - you and I know where he drew the line -- right down the middle! "Give to Caesar the things that are his, and to God the things that are his." There is no greater statement in the Bible regarding the Christian's responsibility TO BOTH THE POLITICAL AND RELIGIOUS ARENAS OF LIFE. Obviously Jesus is saying that everything belongs to God -- but equally so, there are things that justifiably must be given to the government. Namely, a Christian owes his government taxes -- both for the support of public services as well as the welfare of his country, which includes defense, the aging, the poor, and all other critical areas of human need and protection.

The bottom line of Jesus statement here is that there is no STATIC answer to the question? There is not one line to be drawn. Jesus does not cop out to the easy answer of giving a legalistic formula regarding taxes. Unlike some of the proposals which we will soon be voting on -- Jesus does not make the issue one of simple mathematics. He keeps his answer very general: give to Caesar the things that are his -- to God the things that are his.

That leaves the struggle up to you and me. That's where the struggle of true faith should always be -- WITHIN OUR OWN HEARTS! God knows that the needs of life cannot be reduced to some simplistic solution. Human needs are forever changing. As conscientious Christians - God gives us the responsibility to determine what is necessary to support our country and ourselves -- and what we will return to him for the proclamation of his Kingdom.

If the Pharisees and Herodians had asked Jesus: "Is it lawful to worship Caesar?" Jesus' answer would have been a very simple, and emphatic: NO! But their question was one of worldly administration: Is it lawful to pay taxes? AND Jesus' answer is, Yes - but not only taxes, you owe your whole life to God as well!

That puts a whole new perspective on the question: Where will we draw the line? That means for most of us - we will give our fair share to Caesar. ~~Regardless of what tax proposal we support - I hope Americans still have enough common sense to realize that WE ARE DOOMED without adequate tax programs. California is just beginning to feel the results of their simplistic solution to a very complex matter. God help us to see the difference between TAX REFORM and TAX SUFFOCATION.~~

~~Yes~~ - for most of us here - Caesar will continue to get his fair share. Of course - anyone who is knowingly cheating Caesar NOT ONLY has his government and fellow Americans to deal with -- he also will have to account for this with God. It is quite clear that Jesus makes TAX EVASION as sinful as any other immoral act of man. He says very clearly: GIVE to Caesar what is Caesar's. And whether we're individuals or corporations -- we know in our own hearts when we are unfairly cheating our country of its fair share.

But I'm going to let the IRS and God himself do the judging on that matter. Our concern as Christians IS ESPECIALLY directed to the second half of Jesus' statement: Give to God that which is God's.

LET GOD  
BE  
GOD!

Again - you'll note that Jesus doesn't give us any simple little formula. Unlike the Old Testament - Jesus says nothing here about 10%. That may be a good guide -- but Jesus was wise enough to know that you can't apply that kind of law equaaly to different people. In other words, 10% of \$5000 is far more proportionally than 10% of 50,000.

So Jesus avoids percentages - he deals with the whole general issue: NAMELY, how much of your life does God receive in love and gratitude?

Or put more specifically -- since God has forgiven you -- how much of your life is devoted to forgiveness? Think about that for a moment -- how often do you shared that spirit of God?

Or another specific -- since God has granted you the wherewithal for a successful career -- how much of your

*Wileen*

are you sharing with God? How did God benefit from your promotion this year? How have you shared the joy of your bonus with your Lord? Does God even know about your success - or are you trying to keep it hidden from him?

Where do you and I draw the line? Are we like our Lord Jesus -- do we draw the line so that country, family, and God receive what is essential for those missions. Or are we like the Pharisees and Herodians -- or like the John Birchers or the Communists - we draw the line so that God or country is eliminated from a fair share?

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Maybe a far better way to get at this text is to look at it from our future rather than our present. When our day has come and gone -- how will we be remembered? how will God see us? how will Caesar see us?

For most of us -- when that day comes, Caesar will say to us: JOB WELL DONE, MY GOOD AND FAITHFUL PATRIOTIC SERVANT. You have served your country well! Yes, most of us will get a medal of commendation from Caesar - because almost all of us will at least have given Caesar 15 - 20% of the success of our lives. And some hear will even get greater medals from Caesar -- for service to country in the military or civilian duty.

Likewise - our families will feel good as well. We will leave them secure -- many of us may even leave a comfortable inheritance. Yes, our families will commend us also.

And finally - how will God remember or see us? Well - you can be sure there will be many that God will praise FOR A JOB WELL DONE. If you read the insert page of the newsletter -- you know whom I'm referring to. From many of those persons - God gets a fair share of the action.

But God does much poorer among the masses than Caesar. There are some in this congregation who have paid there taxes regularly -- but God has yet to get even a small measure of time, talent, or treasure. Few people live by tax evasion - but far too many live by Godly Graft.

*How on the one hand will ... How did you get that last ...*



We must surely pray for these people -- they have totally missed out on the joys of the kingdom. And we surely don't want them to miss out on the final joy.

But dare we get hung up with them -- we'd best come back to ourselves: and again ask WHERE HAVE WE DRAWN THE LINE? AND Jesus concluded: "Givee to God the things that are his!"

AMEN

PENTECOST XXII  
Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo  
October 19, 1986  
Peter R. Martyn, Pastor

"STICK TO IT!"

Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. ... Will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly."

Luke 18:1, 7-8

For some 2000 years Christians have been praying, "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done." Has anything in the world really changed with all our praying? Is there a better vision of God's kingdom on earth today than in the first century? Are Christians better at "doing God's will" today than they were before the Reformation? The facts are, we all know the answer: THINGS HAVEN'T CHANGED MUCH! Although Christ has come, we have not seen many other lasting signs of the kingdom. And yet the message of the parable today is crystal clear: "Hang in there ... keep on praying ... be persistent ... don't give up ... STICK TO IT!"

We know the importance and truth of that message deep in our hearts -- but many of our experiences make us somewhat hesitant. Certainly after hearing the message today from Bonnie Kinschner and Tim Greenwood, many of us are pretty cynical: THE SAME OLD STORY, YEAR AFTER YEAR! This year just more critical than other years! We pray ... we hope ... we tell the story ... we communicate, we push, we pull, we cry and appeal -- but the response seems to be almost the same. It's hard to STICK TO IT in many businesses, but even more difficult in the life of the church. "It's easy to lose heart" among God's people.

And yet we know the answer: KEEP ON PRAYING ... KEEP ON HOPING ... KEEP ON LIFTING UP THE MISSION OF GOD. It reminds me of the story in a small Missouri town of a family who built their dream home, then they were refused electricity "because the house was more than 500 feet from the nearest fire hydrant." We all know how tough it is sometimes to fight city hall or the utility companies.

Well the dispute went on for five years. The wife indicated that during that time "they had a new house but

They stuck to it! That's what it means to be a believer - sticking to it when the odds are totally against you. Hanging in there, even when you know you'll lose the battle. Always praying -- that's what it's all about!

But the facts are -- praying does not always mean success like the Missouri family. Unfortunately, that's the interpretation that many people have of prayer. Some people think that prayer assures "instant success" in everything. Or that if we pray hard and long enough, we're finally going to change God's mind to our way.

It's like the story of the little boy who had just taken a geography test. His mother was walking past his room and saw him down on his knees by his bed, fervently in prayer. And in his prayer, he kept on repeating one word: "Tokyo, Tokyo, Tokyo." She began to fear that her son was getting into some kind of eastern cult. Finally, she asked what he was praying about. "Oh, that mom, well we had a geography exam today and I was praying that God would make Tokyo the capital of France."

Isn't that the way a lot of us have viewed prayer: an attempt to manipulate God to see things the way we see them, or the way we mistakenly have seen them. We only feel we've had answers to our prayers when we've gotten things our way. We have really mistaken the identity of prayer. Why should we be persistent in prayer? Or even more to the point, why pray at all when we know things aren't always going to go our way?

First we pray NOT MERELY FOR A CURE, but to show that WE CARE! Obviously, when people are sick we want them to be cured. And certainly we include petitions for A CURE in our prayers. But our prayers cannot manipulate a CURE - THEY ONLY SHOW THE PERSON HOW MUCH WE CARE! And that is often more important than the cure!

When I was diagnosed 17 years ago as a possible Hotchkins patient, many people came to me and said: "Peter, we're praying for you!" I'm sure that some of those people thought their prayers would lead to a cure. And maybe in ways that I don't know about those prayers did. But what was vitally essential for me WAS TO KNOW THAT THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY CARED ABOUT ME ... even in the midst of my struggle. And moreover, those prayers reassured me that God also cared about me THROUGH HIS PEOPLE! That's why we

"because I wanted to be a part of a community that really cares ... that helps me feel accepted ... a place where I am cared about and where I can care for others." Last Tuesday evening our Evangelism Committee was struggling with this very concept. We were asking: DO NEW PEOPLE REALLY FEEL CARED FOR ... AND CARED ABOUT? That's where the prayers of a pastor and people are exactly the same: CARING FOR OTHERS! That's why we STICK TO IT in this place even when things don't always go our way -- BECAUSE, ABOVE ALL, GOD HAS CALLED US TO BE HIS CARING PEOPLE IN THE WORLD.

But we don't only pray to show that we care. We also pray because it's a sign of faithfulness in God. Prayer clearly demonstrates that the ULTIMATE CARE ... THE ULTIMATE HEALING is in God's hands -- not the surgeon's hands. That was so classically illustrated yesterday in Bishop Sauer's sermon for Pastor Paul Getter who died last Monday. Bishop Sauer said: "When Pastor Getter went in for by-pass surgery last Monday, he was not afraid, because he said he was going to sleep with God. Even if the surgery was unsuccessful, Pastor Getter was confident he would wake up in the presence of his Father.

That's why an old bedtime favorite prayer was: "Now I lay me down to sleep ... I pray the Lord my soul to keep ... If I should die before I wake ... I know the Lord my soul will take." Although the theology is a little inadequate in that prayer, the message is one of confidence and faithfulness. That's the way the Christian faces each night ... as well as each physical battle of life: CONFIDENT OF GOD'S ULTIMATE CARE AND HEALING.

Just as in Pastor Getter's case - sometimes the physical healing doesn't come in answer to our prayers. But the prayers were still answered by God. And he offered Pastor Getter the promise that he first made in baptism -- that there was nothing in all creation which would separate Pastor Getter from his love in Christ." We don't always get the cure we want -- but we always get GOD'S LOVING, FORGIVING, AND ETERNAL CARE!!

We always get God's faithfulness ... and that's a lot more than a feeling. I've sometimes heard people leaving church and saying: "Well, I didn't get anything out of that today." What they mean is they didn't get the right feeling. We forget that feelings can be very deceptive

to distinguish between feelings and faith. When a man is fully determined to obey God, because it is RIGHT that he should obey God, that is called faith. Too many new converts only go forward in their duty when they are " in the right state of feeling." When duty to God is before you, it is not a matter of feeling, it is a matter of faith. You do not wait for feeling -- you just do it!

That's the persistence of prayer -- DOING IT, BECAUSE IT IS BEING FAITHFUL. It's not a matter of waiting for the right feeling, it's a matter of just sticking to it BECAUSE GOD WILL ULTIMATELY BE VICTORIOUS!

Yes, we pray because it shows that we care ... and it shows that we are faithful. But maybe most important, we pray because WE VALUE GOD'S KINGDOM MORE THAN ANYTHING ELSE IN LIFE. Or said differently, I pray because as a Christian I have seen that life and God's kingdom is more than just me. Prayer reminds me of God's goals for life, which are greater than just taking care of Peter Martyn. Prayer links me to God's goals, plans, and purposes for my life.

And where else but in the Beatitudes are those goals more graphically summarized for us. It's regrettable that we only read the Beatitudes on All Saints' Sunday. They should be the daily meat of our prayers.

"Blessed are the poor in spirit." We pray daily that we are nothing without God -- that without his breath and his abundant blessings -- we are nothing but dirt! Yes, blessed are those who recognize that they are nothing without God.

"Blessed are those who mourn." We pray daily that we will have compassion on anyone who has suffered a serious loss. Because ultimately, we will all be physical losers in life. None of us will take our physical life or physical possessions to the grave. Blessed are those who live compassionately for the losers in life.

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness." We pray daily not to merely think about what is good and right -- we pray that we will hunger and thirst for what is right. As much as we seek to be fed and stuff ourselves, we seek equally to feed the world with equity and justice and fairness.

EVERY DAY.

"Blessed are the peacemakers." I don't have to tell you what that means. Christians are the ones who STICK TO PEACEMAKING IN THIS WORLD OF HATE AND WAR. As has been clearly illustrated already in this sermon - praying for peace doesn't mean we'll have it. But it does mean that this is the direction to which God calls our every efforts. To pray for peace means that we will daily work for peace.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake." And what do we get for all our prayers and our works of love?? Do we get special rewards? Does God promise us that because of all our faithful prayers and good works that we will be spared suffering and struggle. Hardly! To the contrary, God only says that we may encounter even greater persecution for our faithfulness. That's the answer that he gave his only begotten son ... why should we expect anything different?

We are called to pray persistently ... TO STICK TO IT ... because that's the life of discipleship. It shows that we care, and it shows that we are faithful. But above all, it shows that "his kingdom comes NOT ONLY THROUGH OUR WORDS, BUT THROUGH OUR SACRIFICES. That's the way it came through Jesus Christ ... that's the way it comes through the body of Christ. We pray that we might be a blessing to others as he has been a blessing to us! I thank you for your prayers for me ... for your church ... for this world ... and for each other -- STICK TO IT, EVEN WHEN IT DOESN'T TURN OUT THE WAY YOU WANT IT! Every prayer is a prelude to the kingdom of God on earth.

AMEN.

PENTECOST XXII (CONSECRATION SUNDAY)  
Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo  
November 8, 1992  
Peter R. Martyn, Pastor

**"PRAY WITHOUT CEASING!"**

Jesus told the disciples a parable about their need to pray always and not lose heart. ... For when the Son of man comes, will he find this faith on earth?" Luke 18:1,8

For some 2000 years Christians have been praying, "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as in heaven." Has anything in the world really changed with all our praying "for God's will to be done?" Is there a greater fulfillment of God's kingdom on earth today than in the first century? Are Christians doing better "with God's will" today than they were during the Reformation? We all know the answer: THINGS HAVEN'T CHANGED MUCH IN 2000 YEARS! Although Christ has come ... and we believe he will come again ... we have not yet seen overwhelming evidence "that his kingdom has dominated the earth!" And yet, the message of today's text is: "Hang in there; keep on praying for his will to be done; be persistent in this mission; don't give up; PRAY WITHOUT CEASING!"

Regardless of your political loyalties (and I have sensed that many were disappointed with Tuesday's results) - yet we must admit this morning that we have all just witnessed this PERSISTENCE OF FAITH in Tuesday's outcome. Much like the woman in today's parable - the odds were stacked against Bill Clinton. He was running against a president who had established an excellent record in foreign affairs; Clinton was tarnished by early troubles in his marriage and his Viet Nam posture; he was chastised by the religious right as a neo-pagan who mocks the 10 commandments; he was a governor who had managed only a small state budget (compared by Perot to a little more than a toy co.). Yet, Clinton must have prayed and not lost heart! As Vice President Quale stated, "if Clinton runs the government as he ran his campaign, then this country will be all right for the next four years!" That was quite an affirmation of good faith from the opposition.

And we see that same example of persistence in today's gospel parable. Widows in NT times were symbols of all who were reduced to poverty thru no fault of their own. This widow had a legitimate claim; but the judge appeared totally disinterested. Perhaps he was lazy; perhaps he wanted a greater honorarium than he knew a poor widow could offer. But

That's the teaching of prayer from this parable: prayer is not merely verbal talk thrown up to heaven! Prayer is a basic attitude; prayer is a condition of Godly persistence; prayer is the expectation that persistence in seeking God's will offers great things; it leads to JUSTICE & PEACE ON EARTH! "To pray without ceasing" reminds religious people of THREE REALITIES OF FAITH BETWEEN GOD & HIS PEOPLE: 1) that faithfulness always means struggle; 2) that faithfulness always requires strength & support from God; and 3) that faithfulness always recognizes that we have been BLESSED TO BE A BLESSING!

FIRST, faithfulness (or to pray without ceasing) always means STRUGGLE! Today's OT lesson finds Jacob still struggling to be reconciled to his brother, Esau. He had become a rich and prosperous man, with 2 wives & 11 children. Now after 21 years, he was returning to his land to face God and Esau. It was a great struggle. Likewise, Jeremiah struggles with God to be His messenger. Job struggles to remain faithful to God after he finds himself totally depleted of his wealth. Paul struggles to remain faithful after his conversion, and one of his great prayers is: O God, I do the things that I know I shouldn't, and don't do the things that I know I should!"

And what greater experience of struggle in prayer could we ever be given than Jesus' encounter at Gethsemane?! He wrestles with God, praying that the cup of sacrifice might be removed or avoided. But finally his prayer concludes (as all prayer should): "not my will, but thine be done!"

How much struggling and wrestling did we do TO FULFILL GOD'S WILL before we came to Consecration Sunday today? In the letters mailed to everyone, the Stewardship Commtee concluded: "Please prayerfully consider your response!" BEING FAITHFUL (PRAYING WITHOUT CEASING) MEANS STRUGGLING WITH OUR COMMITMENT AND RELATIONSHIP TO GOD!! Because we are sinful, it means always fighting against our basic instinct: TO HAVE GOD TAKE THE CUP OF SACRIFICE AWAY!! WE WANT TO KEEP EVERYTHING FOR OURSELVES, AND ONLY OFFER GOD THE LEFTOVERS!!

It's like the Nebraska pastor who was asked by the elderly lady in his congregation to conduct the funeral for her pet dog. Being a good Lutheran and certainly understanding the theology of burial and final rights, he politely told her that his schedule was too busy to accommodate a dog funeral. When asked if he could suggest another pastor, he advised her to go



PRAYING WITHOUT CEASING ... being faithful to God is a real willingness to struggle AGAINST OUR OWN SELFISHNESS: TO FULFILL GOD'S WILL (NOT OUR OWN) IN EVERYTHING WE DO! That certainly includes Consecration of our time, talent, & money!

But secondly, being faithful recognizes that struggle alone won't do it! Ultimately, praying without ceasing means a willingness to RECOGNIZE THAT WE ARE ALWAYS DEFEATED WHEN WE GO INTO BATTLE ALONE - WITHOUT THE SUPPORT OF GOD AND OTHERS! To pray without ceasing is to always recognize our limitations without the presence of God's help! Which one of us hasn't had moments when we have felt like we had lost heart" -- when we feel that the whole world is against us?! Some of you are suffering right now with terminal illness or the devastation of the loss of a loved one. What will keep you going!? How will you be able to face the days ahead WITHOUT CEASING?

Ten days ago, three of us clergy were asked the same question relative to our heart conditions & open heart surgeries: WHAT KEPT US GOING? WHY DIDN'T WE GIVE UP? WHAT SPIRITUAL REALITY SUPPORTED US? Interestingly, without consulting ahead of time -- each of us gave the same answer: We knew we were not alone; we knew that others were praying for us; we knew that God was present through our families, our friends, and our congregations; we knew we had not been abandoned by God or his people!! (Certain Jeff & Sharon feel the same way now!)

That's what keeps a Christian going when facing tough times: THE ASSURANCE THAT GOD GIVES IN PRAYER: THAT HE WILL NOT LEAVE US ALONE ... HE WILL NOT ABANDON US! HE WILL SEE TO IT THAT HIS WILL IS DONE ON EARTH AS IN HEAVEN; THERE WILL BE JUSTICE & HEALING FOR US. WE WILL BE VICTORIOUS WITH GOD!!

Yes, faithfulness ALWAYS means a struggle; & ALWAYS MEANS the assurance that God will not leave us alone! But finally, to pray without ceasing means that God tells us what we so often forget when we do not pray: THAT WE HAVE BEEN BLESSED, TO BE A BLESSING TO OTHERS. As Archibald MacLeish once said: "We Americans have more in our garages and kitchens and cellars than Louis XIV had in the whole of Versailles!" But how easy for us to forget WITHOUT PRAYER how blessed we are!!

As I have told you before, I am grateful I had a skilled mechanic for a father. He wasn't rich, but he was a great dad who was always home at night when I needed him. And the one time I could always count on his presence was on Sunday

But Sunday morning was the significant day. My father met me at the door before we left as a family and always asked as we were leaving: "Peter, do you have your envelope? Did you offer 70 cts from your \$7.00?" It wasn't only the teaching on tithing that my father was trying to impress upon me: it was the more important principle: FAITHFULNESS MEANT THAT THOSE WHO ARE BLESSED ARE TO BE A BLESSING TO OTHERS. As Pastor Jeff noted a few weeks ago - "tithing" can sometimes even be a bad teaching. Because it implies that 10% is God's and the rest is ours. As he stated that day - everything is God's! The issue is not whether I give 10% or 15% or 20% -- the issue is whether I have lived up to the principle of faithfulness: AS I HAVE BEEN BLESSED WITH LOVE, CARE AND THE SECURITY FROM GOD; HAVE I PLEDGED TO OTHERS THE SAME LOVE, CARE, & SECURITY.

That's what it means to "pray without ceasing" -- to always be mindful of God's will: THAT HE HAS BLESSED US, SO THAT WE MIGHT BE A BLESSING TO OTHERS! Obviously, if he had blessed us according to what we deserved, many of us would be in deep trouble!! But God wants great things to happen FROM THOSE HE HAS BLESSED -- he wants his will to be done on earth as it is in heaven THROUGH THE PEOPLE OF HOPE! We have the potential of fulfilling his will on earth IF WE REALLY PRAY TO BE A BLESSING ... IF WE REALLY LOOK AT WHAT WE HAVE FIRST BEEN GIVEN! But so often we're so busy and impulsive, that we don't take the time to really SEE HOW WE HAVE BEEN BLESSED.

That was certainly the case of the Penn. Pastor who graphically illustrated the problem of STUBBORNNESS TO BLESS OTHERS AS HE HAD BEEN BLESSED. I've told the parable before; but it needs retelling every Consecration Sunday. He was shepherding a small parish in depression times, often being paid in food and clothing. But this fall the daughter of the richest man in the county was to be married in his church. It was the biggest wedding the little church and county had ever seen. After the ceremony, the rich man came into the pastor's study with a black box. He offered it to the pastor as a gift; the pastor opened it and found a pair of kid gloves. After giving thanks, the wealthy man left. Then the pastor threw the box into his desk - disgusted with the rich man's cheap gift.

Over the next 30 years - the pastor carried that box to three more congregations. He'd move the box from one desk to another, never even trying on the gloves. Finally, as he reached retirement and was cleaning his last desk - he took out the box and tried the gloves. His fingers wouldn't go

BLESSINGS ALL BOXED UP?!? Or like the faithful who have gone before us -- will we bless others as we have first been blessed? Will we fulfill God's expectation for us TO DO GREAT THINGS -- will we pray without ceasing to struggle & be strengthened to FULFILL HIS KINGDOM ON EARTH AS HE HAS FULFILLED THAT KINGDOM FOR US IN HEAVEN.

Dear DISCIPLES of Hope - you have been blessed to be a blessing! Now let us struggle and never abandon the God who has remained so faithful to us! Yes, let us pray to re-consecrate our lives to his will and his kingdom on earth!

AMEN.

*Pentecost XXII  
Glenwood Lutheran Church, Toledo  
October 19, 1997  
Peter R. Martyn, Interim Pastor*

## ***“THE POSTURE OF GREATNESS!”***

*“... whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and give his life as a ransom for many.” Mark 10:43-45*

A few years ago, Joel Gregory became the Senior Pastor of First Baptist Church in Dallas -- a 30,000 member congregation that occupies five-city blocks in downtown, metropolitan Dallas. I've never known Joel Gregory personally -- but I do know First Baptist, Dallas. A former Hope member, who was once a Baptist pastor, served as an Assistant Pastor at First Baptist, Dallas. He described First Baptist (Dallas) as the pinnacle church of America -- the largest Christian congregation in this country. It houses two schools, a college and a radio station. As its senior pastor, you receive a beautiful home, memberships in several country clubs, and luxury box seats for the Dallas Cowboys football games. As the saying goes in so-called real world out there -- when you've reached First Baptist, Dallas -- you've reached the top.

But things never seemed “right” during Gregory's pastorate. The church leaders felt First Baptist should be growing faster -- 30,000 members wasn't big enough! These same leaders wanted significant expansion of the physical plant -- five city blocks was too small. Most of all -- church members still expected Pastor Gregory to follow in the tradition of W.A. Criswell, who had served First Baptist for 46 years. Despite his official retirement several years earlier, Criswell was essentially still running the show. Pastor Gregory characterized First Baptist as a “human zoo of power, ambition and ego.” As you might guess - a power struggle erupted and began dividing the church. So, like any good pastor, in September, 1992 ... Gregory stunned Southern Baptists in all of Texas and this country by resigning this prominent pulpit.

He left Dallas, went to Forth Worth, and became a door-to-door salesman. Lots of church folk in Dallas now characterize Gregory as a failure. But Gregory recently said, “For the first time in my life at 46 years old I'm finally learning what it means to be a servant rather than a superman. I am finally seeing the real needs of others ... and I'm serving them rather than merely glorifying myself. In short, Gregory has not only gone through a major pastoral change. he has gone

ever been --nearly a half million dollars ... and every single year the leaders and I were working madly for bigger & bigger numbers. And then one day I asked myself, "Why are we doing this?? Who are we trying to impress?? Whose kingdom are we building here?? Is this really what God wanted when he called me to serve in this place?? Are we serving ourselves or are we serving God??"

Certainly -- we were serving both God & ourselves. But from my perspective as pastor -- we were beginning (or maybe I was beginning) to tilt too far to the principalities and powers of this world. We were growing, but worship attendance was declining; we were bigger, but fewer people were coming to Bible study. We had greater man & woman power -- but fewer people were willing to get their hands dirty. Like Joel Gregory -- I sometimes felt I was part of a human zoo of power, ambition, and ego -- and too often I was feeling like the lead monkey rather than the lead minister. And when the church begins to feel like a lot of monkey business--then it's time to "shake the dust off and move on."

Jesus has but one role for all his ministers -- to be servants of others. When any church begins to posture itself before others ... or when any Christian begins to posture herself before others -- when positions & pedestals of honor or status or privilege mean more than being a servant or slave for God Almighty -- then the church and its members have LOST THE POSTURE OF GREATNESS!

So, I ask you today -- how are you feeling about your posture at Glenwood?? What does it mean at Glenwood to "drink the cup ... to share the baptism of Jesus Christ??" Whose posture do you see when you see Glenwood Lutheran -- people playing games on a gym floor ... or people climbing the hill of Calvary with Jesus?? Are the people in your picture of Glenwood carrying a cross ... or are they carrying memorabilia & relics & trophies of the glories of the past??? Is the posture of Jesus Christ still the central focus of Glenwood's picture?? Or is Glenwood like First Baptist, Dallas: still hanging onto postures & pastors of the past?? Has Glenwood buried what is already dead?? Is she looking to a new ministry-posture with anticipation and excitement??? Is she excited about her future ... about being God's servant in this area?? Or is her glory of the past getting in the way -- is she holding onto what was once great, but can no longer be a part of tomorrow's mission??? THE POSTURE OF GREATNESS is always a people who is not afraid to let the old glory die ... so that the new life of Jesus Christ's servanthood might rise.