

3rd Sunday After Trinity

Initial sermon at Redeemer after ordination

June 27, 1971

Text: Luke 15:1-10

"AND THE SEARCH GOES ON"

"What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after the one which is lost, until he finds it? And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing."

Grace, mercy, and peace from God, our Father, . .

As I again stand before you in this pulpit, I am almost tempted to reverse the facts of this Gospel parable. For on this day, it would seem more truthful to say that the sheep have found the shepherd.

Whether he was truly lost, we will not speculate. But that he has been found appears to be too clearly evident. "Too clearly" referring to the fact that his larger size now makes him capable of being more easily found.

But aside from personal anecdotes, the fact remains that this Redeemer flock has again responded through a search. I, for one, do rejoice in your searching efforts. I sincerely hope that we will be searching and rejoicing together as we share in Redeemer's future ministry.

It is with a special kind of searching that we concern ourselves today. A "searching" which is not uncommon to this congregation. A searching to find the lost, the separated, the alienated in this world. In other words, a special kind of searching which takes a special kind of searcher.

The searchers in the Gospel story are a shepherd and a woman. These persons and the way they go about searching represent God's strategy for searching - a strategy whose characteristics are known to each of you.

For especially through the shepherd, we come to recognize that a God-like search may take us into threatening territory. For the search means that we must leave the security of the grazing pastures. Likewise, we must leave the flock unattended. Both these circumstances are threatening. None of us enjoy withdrawing our attention from persons we know

well. But God's searching strategy often means a sacrifice of this security in order that the lost may be found. This makes us very uneasy.

Yet Redeemer has been a witness to this kind of searching. Your ministry to the University students and to the underprivileged thru LSAC have had their threatening moments. Because here you were searching to serve persons who might have been lost from the community of God's people. And ministering to such lost persons most often is a very threatening circumstance. We do like to minister in safer territory--yet you have responded to God's call to search for and serve those who have been lost.

Furthermore, this God-like search is one which seeks especially to find the lost one even when the majority is still around. The shepherd had lost only one sheep--the woman had lost only one coin--yet that one took precedence over all the rest. This lifestyle seems to run quite contrary to so much of the Wall-street mentality of our society -- where the little guy is daily crushed out of existence by the giants--where the minority must settle for the crumbs of the majority -- where the retarded, the lonely, the aged, all those who don't quite fit into the stream of society are often hidden from even spectator seats in life.

But here again, Redeemer has been inspired by a God-like search. For your Senior Center, as only one example, witnesses to your ever present concern for the lost and lonely.

Moreover, God's searching strategy enables us to see the diligence needed for a search. This characteristic is portrayed best for us by the woman in the story. The lost drachma in and by itself has relatively little value. But it is ~~thru~~ the woman's feelings and efforts to find it that the lost silver coin becomes valuable. It is in her diligence of search that the lost object comes to have value. It is this characteristic--this diligence for searching for life's lost relationships, whether this relates to a loss of fresh air to breathe or a human life which has been lost from the main circulatory system of life -- it is the diligence of search to recover these lost relationships of creation which characterizes God's searching activity. Needless to say, God expects

His people to be diligent searchers!

And so it is that you have remained a strong and vital witness for Metropolitan Milwaukee. Each of you has recognized that your searching and serving efforts in this area must not be given up--even when the going gets rough. You have sought to be God's searching servant Church. You have sought to be diligent to his searching strategy to recover lost relationships. You have sought to search for and accept the lost--and in that, you have rejoiced.

II.

Needless to say, God's searching style for his servant Church is no easy task. His strategy encounters many barriers, from outside as well as inside the Church.

For the nuclear, computerized age we live in resists and overlooks an ongoing search for the lost. So many people today are so caught up in "doing their own thing" -- and when we're so caught up in doing our own thing we just don't have time or energy to search for, or even see the lost and deprived in this world. This is not only evident in business, politics, and even church life, but even in the family. When we observe the spectrum of activity each family member involves himself in daily, it appears that family members are often lost from the family circle, even though they may be physically present. Family communication has been replaced by the Boob Tube. Family projects and goals are destroyed by individual desires and even greed. Responsibility has been pushed out by increased affluence and over-extended credit. And so like the lost sheep, the family experiences lost relationships--between husbands and wives, between children and parents, between young and old. Yet God says, the search must go on.

But His search is also blocked from within the Church. The Pharisees are still with us. For when we respond to God's call for a ministry which searches for the deprived, the outcast, the lost, the mixed-up, then Christian Pharisees do not hesitate to repeat the words of their ancestors in today's text: "These people receive sinners and eat with them!" Yes, my friends, Pharisees have a way of standing off and condemning with words and scornful looks--but Jesus'

example was to receive and eat with the lost and out-cast. Pharisees want to accept only "good, religious people," But Jesus recognized that the lost and out-cast were more desperately in need of His comforting acceptance. And it is Jesus' example which receives our allegiance. For God speaks to us today, and every day, and tells us that the search must go on!

Yes, His search is no easy task. And He gives us no assurance that the search in His name will go without constant criticism. In fact, he gives us this parable to remind us that the Christian mission will always have its self-righteous critics. Likewise, our Christian search will encounter frustration and anger; sometimes it will seem hopeless; often our searching efforts will go unappreciated; our diligent efforts may even be laughed at.

But the lost are still to be found.

And God's Word is still a word of hope to the hopeless; still a word of acceptance to the unaccepted; still a word to the homeless.

His Word must continue to be spoken by you and me. But especially by you, for you are His people who daily encounter his lost, deprived, and outcast creatures on the highways and byways of everyday life.

And ^{there,} the search must go on!

For as that diligent search for the lost goes on, then God assures us that there will be a moment for rejoicing. Because joy and true rejoicing only come after a diligent effort.

Most of us have experienced the loss of a family member in a large crowd (like a State Fair.) We drop everything at a moment like that and begin a diligent search. And when we finally find the lost person, we all know the feeling of joy it brings.

There's a real feeling of rejoicing at that moment! Our initial reaction is not to judge or to punish, but rather to rejoice that the lost has been found.

This should also be our response to those who are lost, separated, or deprived of our fellowship. After a diligent search for them, we should not punish or condemn them, but rather rejoice that they have been found.

III.

So, today, each of us does rejoice for our presence here -- our presence with God and with each other. We sing praises and give thanks to God that he has inspired and enabled us to be searchers -- to search for Him, to search for each other -- and there's plenty of lostness and alienation that still needs to be searched out between us, and finally, to search for the lost and outcast in this world. The search has not ended! It must go on!

God's concern as expressed in today's Gospel is that we recognize and search for the lost ones in his world -- and this condition of lostness affects all of His creatures to some degree. For as His sinful people, we all know that none of us is immune from the condition of separation from Him and each other. So we too are in a state of being lost.

But He has created us with a potential to serve Him, and to serve each other. We must search, therefore, to recover that potential -- meaning a recovery of all potential servants as well as the servant potential in ourselves. For as we find our human potential for serving, then we have found God's gift and purpose for us.

His purpose is to search for anyone who has been lost to His service. For a lost or outcast person is worth nothing to God or to us until he is found, and feels the worth and acceptability of his life. God exhorts us to search for the wasted human potential in ourselves and His lost, outcast, or deprived creatures.

As the people of God at Redeemer, we have again been reminded of our searching task.

Since we are God's repentant, forgiven people -- since we have tasted His merciful acceptance, you and I will now search for the lost and outcast person.

And if our search cannot be so rigorous, we will have been inspired to accept that lost or outcast person when we bump into him. And we will offer him God's word of acceptance.

Because that word of acceptance will carry the lost sheep back into God's fellowship.

And although that person will remain a "regular sinner like you and me", His presence will make a difference for all of us, for the lost and separated will have been found. And that is a time for rejoicing and repenting together. Yet a time to remember that God's search must go on! Eternally! AMEN.

PENTECOST III
Lutheran Church of the Master - Troy
June 23, 1974

"CHOSEN BEFORE BIRTH"

"You have been told of the way I used to live when I was devoted to the Jewish religion, how I persecuted without mercy the church of God and did my best to destroy it. I was ahead of most fellow Jews of my age in my practice of the Jewish religion. I was much more devoted to the traditions of our ancestors.

But God, in his grace, chose me even before I was born, and called me to serve him."

Galations 1:13-15

experienced

Most of us, at some time, have ^{experienced} being chosen for a special position - for an honorary or prestigious place - for an event or a definite task. The process might have been by election- or maybe by appointment, achievement, talent, or simply convenience. But, the thrill of the situation was IN BEING THE CHOSEN ONE.

Even though we often protest, and maybe sometimes even refuse or withdraw - nevertheless, most of us enjoy being A CHOSEN ONE. I remember being elected treasurer of my ninth grade class. Wow! What a thrill! Campaign speeches and everything! All the big todoo - and finally I was elected and even won over a really sharp gal. So, I became treasurer of the ninth grade-- which in reality, meant absolutely NOTHING! There was no treasury - no books to keep - not even any money to collect.

But THERE WAS THE THRILL OF BEING CHOSEN! And then there was the varsity football team. Three hard weeks of practice - twice aday we were out there banging into each other for three hours. All this for three weeks, just to find out if we were going to make it past the first cut. And then there was that day in the locker room - the list was posted - and if your name was on it, YOU KNEW YOU HAD BEEN CHOSEN! You had made it past the 1st cut - now you just had to make it past the 2nd and 3rd cuts.

Yes - it's really great to be chosen! Whether it's to be on the team - or to be on the prom court - or to be the next manager, or vice-president, or executive secretary, or the next pastor -- whatever the situation, you and I know the thrill of BEING CHOSEN.

Can you imagine the way Paul felt when he came to the realization that HE HAD BEEN CHOSEN BEFORE BIRTH to be God's servant?!? What a phenomenal realization that must have been! What a day that must have been for Paul!

There he was - on the road to Damascus. We're told that he was on one of his favorite expeditions that day - and expedition of persecution! He was heading for Damacus to do some more dirty work -- to destroy the embryonic seeds of the Christian church.

And on his way - all of a sudden - he had this wild confrontation with God. We're told in Acts that it was a blinding experience, leaving Paul confused and ~~speechless~~. But the real significance of the experience was that it brought Paul BACK INTO A RIGHT RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD. And that's exactly what the Greek word "conversion" means - to return - to go back. Namely, to return to a proper relationship.

Yes, Paul came to the realization at this moment that he had been chosen FROM THE BEGINNING to be God's servant. Isn't it sad that he had to reach the middle years of his life before REALIZING that he was a chosen servant of God. Isn't it sad that he had to persecute - to destroy people and property -- to be such a PAROCHIAL person BEFORE HE COULD SEE THAT GOD HAD CHOSEN AND DESIGNED HIS KINGDOM FOR BOTH JEW AND GENTILE.

Finally, on the road to Damascus, Paul becomes aware that he has always been a chosen servant of God -- and that as a chosen child of God, he was to serve ALL MANKIND, both Jew and Gentile, slave and free, male and female as he expresses

in the 3rd chapter of this letter. All are to be served with the same will of God - the same love, the same mercy, and the same forgiveness!

My Christian friends, you and I are in the same chosen camp with Paul. We TOO have been chosen before birth to be servants of God. We have been chosen TO SERVE ALL PEOPLE with the will of God - chosen to offer the same mercy, love, and forgiveness of God to other people regardless of whom they are.

Your presence ~~and mine~~ here this morning witnesses to the fact THAT WE HAVE COME TO THE REALIZATION that God has chosen us to be his servants. Oh, he knows and we know that we're not perfect servants. We've all had our moments where we've turned our backs on our calling. In fact, I'm sure we've all even been involved in some persecution expeditions.

After all, we, like Paul, sometimes have forgotten what it means to be chosen. I'm sure that as a zealous Jew, Paul thought he was doing the right thing to destroy those Christians over there at Damascus. After all - those Christians were a bunch of poor trash -- majority of them were illiterate - they smelled -- they often lived as vagabonds - they didn't talk like the Jews (they spoke common-people's Greek, rather than with sophisticated tongues) -- and beyond all this, they followed the teachings of a young Jew who claimed to be sent by God.

Paul felt he was right to destroy these strange people
 because - Yes, Paul was truly a "successful Jew" - He says in today's lesson that he was a top-notch practitioner of the Jewish faith. ~~And yet~~, Paul had turned his back on the COSMIC WILL OF GOD.

You and I know when we've been the same kind of imperfect servants. ~~Most~~ of us are good practicing Christians, but we sure do a lot of persecuting -- of course, most of it is with our tongues. And yet we all know how our thoughts and feelings control our actions.

educ. How often I have denied other people the opportunities and privileges that I have enjoyed simply because their background or environment is different from my own. In fact, we can even get trapped by this in the church. Sometimes we pride ourselves on being good practicing Lutherans - and slander those who have a different worship experience from our own. In fact, sometimes we even resent our closest friends when they may chose a church other than the one we think is best for them.

Yes, like Paul, we know the struggles of being an imperfect servant. But, also like Paul, we live in a constant state of being chosen - from birth itself as Paul says. So that means that everyday is a new Damascus experience - everyday we must return to a right relationship with God - everyday is a conversion experience -- everyday we turn back to the Father who has chosen us before birth to be his servants.

And every time we turn back, we are confident that he again accepts us. NOT BECAUSE WE HAVE BEEN PERFECT. NOT BECAUSE WE HAVE EARNED HIS GRACE AND FAVOR. But because this is the promise that he gave us IN CHOOSING US. Yes, he ^{Promised to} accept us NOT BECAUSE OF our virtue but because his nature ~~is good~~ his nature is to love us even when we had strayed away -- yes, our Father is one who never goes sour on a deal -- when he makes a choice, he sticks with it.

How do we know this? All we need do is again review the life of Paul. Here was a chosen son, and yet ONE who had strayed away. Here was a son who had gone on a persecution pilgrimage.. Here was a son who had turned his back on God and on his fellowmen who were slightly different from himself.

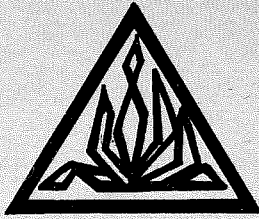
And - how did God treat this son when he returned? Did he beat him? NO! Did he demand that he earn favor by doing penance for his failures? NO! Did he tell Paul that he would

have to wait for awhile before he could again be a chosen child? NO! He simply said: My son, you have my love through Jesus Christ - now live and serve me in the same way by sharing the kind of love that you've received *with all your fellowmen.*

My friends, God has chosen us from birth and offered us the same options in life. We can either be persecutors of men, or servants of God — *offering his mercy, love, forgiveness to all persons whether they're here now or not.*

As his chosen children, let us come into *this* cosmic harmony with all his people and creations. Yes, let us daily become his servants!

Amen



CELEBRATE

THE THIRD SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST • June 23, 1974

THE DAY

"God has shown his care for his people." The widowed mother of Nain found this care as she was given back her son. The indwelling presence of Christ in our lives and in our world—"Emmanuel," God-with-us—brings comfort, hope, and joy. We find his Life in the midst of death. Into our sadness he brings joy.

THE CONFESSION OF SINS

[The Act of Reconciliation]

Minister: O Lord our God, we cry to you for help, and you hear. We recall how in Jesus Christ, your Son our Lord, you have come among us as helper and friend. Forgive our failings in his name.

Assistant: Forgive our walking in this world of wonders with unseeing eyes.

All: **Forgive us, Lord.**

Assistant: Forgive our faithless and unbelieving fears that cloud our trust in your promises.

All: **Forgive us, Lord.**

Assistant: Forgive our cares and pleasures of this world that blind us to the needs of others.

All: **Forgive us, Lord.**

Assistant: Forgive our dullness and complaining spirit that blunt our sense of joy in you.

All: **Forgive us, Lord.**

Minister: We are forgiven and reconciled to God through Christ our Lord. Therefore, let us be reconciled with one another and share the peace of the Lord.

THE PRAYER OF THE DAY

Creator Lord, from Eden to the end of the ages you watch over the people of your promise. Forgive our disobedience, that we may drink the new wine with all who trust in your grace; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

THE PSALMODY

Psalm 30; Antiphon, verse 2

May be used responsively or antiphonally

Antiphon (leader): I cried to you for help, Lord my God, and you healed me.

I praise you, Lord, because you have saved me and kept my enemies from gloating over me.

I cried to you for help, Lord my God, and you healed me.

You brought me back from the world of the dead.

I was with those who go down to the depths below, but you restored my life.

Sing praise to the Lord, his faithful people!

Remember what the Holy One has done and give him thanks!

His anger lasts only a moment, his goodness for a lifetime.

There may be tears during the night, but joy comes in the morning.

I felt secure, and said to myself, "I will never be defeated."

You are good to me, Lord; you have kept me safe as in a mountain fortress.

But when you hid yourself from me, I was filled with fear.

I called to you, Lord; I begged for your help.

What good will come from my death? What profit from my going to the grave?

Are dead people able to praise you? Can they proclaim your unfailing goodness?

Hear me, Lord, and be merciful! Help me, Lord!

You have changed my sadness into a joyful dance; you have taken off my clothes of mourning, and given me clothes of joy.

So I will not be silent; I will sing praise to you.

Lord, you are my God, I will give thanks to you forever.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit:

as in the beginning, so now, and for ever. Amen.

Antiphon (unison): I cried to you for help, Lord my God, and you healed me.

(TEV)

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Scripture readings in the Lectionary and the Psalmody are those appointed by the Inter-Lutheran Commission on Worship and are from various translations indicated by the initials following each passage: AV—Authorized (King James) Version, 1611; CB—The Revised Standard Version Common Bible, © 1946, 1952, 1957, 1971; NAB—The New American Bible, 1970, used with permission of the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, copyright owner; NEB—The New English Bible, © the Delegates of the Oxford University Press and the Syndics of the Cambridge University Press, 1961, 1970; TEV—Today's English Version, © American Bible Society, 1966, 1970, 1971, 1972. The Prayer of the Day is from a series appearing in Contemporary Worship 6—The Church Year Calendar and Lectionary. The Gloria Patri is in the translation prepared by the International Consultation on English Texts as found in Prayers We Have in Common.

LUTHERAN CHURCH OF THE MASTER
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Richard Snoad, Organist
Virginia Witte, Director

+ + + + +
WELCOME to our worship service in this season
of Christian growth. We hope and pray that
you will be inspired through worship to give
greater thanks and service to our Lord, and
His Church. If you are visiting, please sign
our Guest Register.

June 23, 1974

Organ Prelude
Greeting, Parish Notes
WE PREPARE BY CONFESSION
The Opening Hymn Page 172
The Invocation Response - Amen
Confession of sins, The Peace Celebrate
WE PRAISE GOD
The Psalmody Celebrate
The Gloria Patri Page 43
The Prayer for the day Celebrate
GOD SPEAKS TO US
The First Lesson, Second Lesson Celebrate
The Alleluia
The Gospel Celebrate
The Apostles' Creed Page 5
The Children's Message
The Hymn Page 124
The Sermon "CHOSEN BEFORE BIRTH"
WE THANK GOD
Offering
Offertory III "Create in me..." Page 56
Prayer of the Church Celebrate
Order for installation of Church Council
(including The Lord's Prayer)
WE DEPART TO SERVE
The Benediction (three-fold amen) Page 70
The Closing Hymn Page 429
The Postlude

LAY ASSISTANT: Jim Pine

NURSERY for infants thru kindergarten only.

BULLETIN NOTES should be phoned to Mrs. Axie Williams, 647-3684, by previous Wednesday.

FLOWER CHART is in the hall. Cost is \$5.00.

CHANGE IN SUNDAY SERVICE: Services will begin at 10:00 a.m. beginning Sunday, July 7th.

THE ORDER OF INSTALLATION for the Church Council: At the Organizational Council meeting on Tues. evening, Mr. Fred Witte was elected Vice-Pres., and the following were re-elected: Mr. Bill Barnes, Secretary; Mr. Ken Allison, Treasurer; and Mrs. Arline Barnes, Financial Secretary. Congratulations and may the Master be blessed through your leadership.

ADDITIONAL COPIES of the Committee Reports for the Congregational Meeting are available in the outer office.

Have you heard about THE BIGGEST BARGAIN IN TOWN? We're offering it here at the Master on Aug. 11, at 4:00 p.m. Save the date if you're a bargain hunter - keep your eyes and ears open for further clues to the bargains.

CONGRATULATIONS TO ALL OUR HIGH SCHOOL GRADS. The following are known: Kevin and Mark Allison, Del Pine, and Cynthia Puls. If there are others, please let Pastor Martyn know.

BEGINNING TODAY, our choir has a recess for the next couple of months. We offer our praise and thanks to all choir members, to their director, Virginia Witte, and to our organist, Richard Snoad, for the inspiration and support given to our worship. We will miss the choir's presence, which of course means a greater call for supportive singing, is needed from each of us.

SPECIAL THANKS to Bob Lawrence and his helper, Cindy Puls, for the construction of the new storage shed.

GARDEN FLOWERS would be appreciated for summer use in the Altar vases. Please contact Ruth Potts, 689-7069, during the remainder of June, and Yvonne Parks, 689-2709, during July.

REMINDER: Bring snapshot size picture of your family for our bulletin board in Fellowship Room.

THE LECTINARY

FIRST LESSON: 1 Kings 17:17-24

AFTERWARDS the son of this woman (*the widow of Zarephath*), the mistress of the house, fell ill and grew worse and worse, until at last his breathing ceased. Then she said to Elijah, "What made you interfere, you man of God? You came here to bring my sins to light and kill my son!" "Give me your son," he said. He took the boy from her arms and carried him up to the roof-chamber where his lodging was, and laid him on his own bed. Then he called out to the Lord, "O Lord my God, is this thy care for the widow with whom I lodge, that thou hast been so cruel to her son?" Then he breathed deeply upon the child three times and called on the Lord, "O Lord my God, let the breath of life, I pray, return to the body of this child." The Lord listened to Elijah's cry, and the breath of life returned to the child's body, and he revived; Elijah lifted him up and took him down from the roof into the house, gave him to his mother and said, "Look, your son is alive." Then she said to Elijah, "Now I know for certain that you are a man of God and that the word of the Lord on your lips is truth." (NEB)

SECOND LESSON: Galatians 1:11-24

ST. PAUL writes:

Let me tell you, my brothers, that the gospel I preach was not made by man. I did not receive it from any man, nor did anyone teach it to me. Instead, it was Jesus Christ himself who revealed it to me.

You have been told of the way I used to live when I was devoted to the Jewish religion, how I persecuted without mercy the church of God and did my best to destroy it. I was ahead of most fellow Jews of my age in my practice of the Jewish religion. I was much more devoted to the traditions of our ancestors.

But God, in his grace, chose me even before I was born, and called me to serve him. And when he decided to reveal his Son to me, so that I might preach the Good News about him to the Gentiles, I did not go to anyone for advice, nor did I go to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before me. Instead, I went at once to Arabia, and then I returned to Damascus. It was three years later that I went to Jerusalem to get information from Peter, and I stayed with him for two weeks. I did not see any other apostle except James, the Lord's brother.

What I write is true. I am not lying, so help me God!

Afterward I went to places in Syria and Cilicia. At that time the members of the Christian churches in Judea did not know me personally. They knew only what others said, "The man who used to persecute us is now preaching the faith that he once tried to destroy!" And so they praised God because of me. (TEV)

GOSPEL: Luke 7:11-17

AFTERWARDS Jesus went to a town called Nain, accompanied by his disciples and a large crowd. As he approached the gate of the town he met a funeral. The dead man was the only son of his widowed mother; and

many of the townspeople were there with her. When the Lord saw her his heart went out to her, and he said, "Weep no more." With that he stepped forward and laid his hand on the bier; and the bearers halted. Then he spoke: "Young man, rise up!" The dead man sat up and began to speak; and Jesus gave him back to his mother. Deep awe fell upon them all, and they praised God. "A great prophet has arisen among us," they said, and again, "God has shown his care for his people." The story of what he had done ran through all parts of Judea and the whole neighborhood. (NEB)

THE PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

[The Intercessions]

Minister: O compassionate and patient Father, we ask your blessing upon all who are striving toward the making of a better world. We pray especially for all who, in spite of the cost, are taking daily risks, following the example of your well-beloved Son.

Assistant: For all who are valiant for truth,

All: **We lift our prayer.**

Assistant: For all who are working for better laws,

All: **We lift our prayer.**

Assistant: For all who are working to achieve peace,

All: **We lift our prayer.**

Assistant: For all who work to heal the sick,

All: **We lift our prayer.**

Assistant: For all who seek to help the poor and needy,

All: **We lift our prayer.**

Assistant: For all who preach and teach the gospel,

All: **We lift our prayer.**

Assistant: For all who suffer for the cause of righteousness,

All: **We lift our prayer.**

*Here may be offered other prepared petitions,
the people responding, "We lift our prayer."*

Minister: Into your hands, Father, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in your mercy, through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

3RD AFTER PENTECOST

Luth. Church of the Master - Troy
June 8, 1975

"WHO NEEDS A PHYSICIAN?"

Jesus said: 'Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means, "I desire mercy, not sacrifice." For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.' Matt. 9:12-13

In the play, A Raisin In the Sun, a daughter has "had it" with her brother and is about to give up trying to relate to him. Then her mother says to her:

"There is always something left to love. And if you ain't learned that, you ain't learned' nothing. . . Child, when do you think is the time to love somebody most; when they done good and made things easy for everybody? Well, then, you ain't through learning - because that ain't the time at all. It's when he's at his lowest and can't believe in hisself cause the world done whipped him so. When you starts measuring somebody, measure him right, child, measure him right. Make sure you done taken into account what hills and valleys he come through before he got wherever he is."

The mother could not have much better summarized Jesus' words in today's Gospel. Can you hear Jesus' asking us (puffed up as we sometimes are in our own self-righteousness) - "When do you think is the time to love somebody the most; when they done good and made things easy for everybody? Well then, you ain't through learning - because that ain't the time at all. It's when he's at his lowest.

Yes, Jesus says: Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick.

So who does Jesus call as an apostle - Matthew, a tax collector - one of those agents of the despised Romans. The oppressors of the Jews, who often lined their own pockets with extra tax levies from poor people. And moreover, Jesus even dined with this lot - these damnable sinners.

And so we see that Jesus loved most - extended himself and his mercy - those who were often at their lowest -- those who really needed a physician. Matthew was undoubtedly an immoral, greedy businessman, known as a tax-collector. And it was to him whom Jesus extended his call and his merciful help.

Today - another Matthew is called -- called into fellowship with Christ and his people. We do not baptize Matthew Boyer expecting that he will be an angel - We baptize him because we already know that he's going to be a little devil (fig. speaking).

That is - we know that he'll be selfish - he'll be egotistical - he'll be self-righteous like the Pharisees -- pointing his finger derogatorily at others. We know that this is the condition of all of God's children. For we all dishonor God and his will for us. And that's exactly why we need to be baptized.

We know that Matthew Boyer and each of us needs a physician - a Lord who will help and forgive us when we're at our worst - our lowest.

Likewise - we gather here regularly as God's children - many of us may be ten times more greedy than Matthew ever thought of being. And that even makes it more difficult for us - because our greed is a socially sanctioned greed.

At the Synod Convention on Friday, our noon meal cost \$2.75 - it consisted of soup and crackers. ~~XXXXXX~~ The proceeds of the meal went to World Hunger. But within an hour after the meal, all the candy bar and ice cream sandwich machines were sold out. Yes - of all people on earth - American Christians truly need a physician.

A physician who forgives us for our greed, arrogance, and self-righteousness.

A physician who reminds us EVERY TIME WE VISIT HIM that to honor God is to desire mercy - not animal sacrifices but human sacrificial giving.

A physician who offers a gift of love -- one that heals us from the selfish and self-righteous sickness of an earlier moment. A healing that hopefully lasts. *We follow that physician's prescription.*

Today we honor our graduates. We congratulate you for your achievements - you deserve our praise. But you know - and we know how achievements can often make us fashion ourselves like the Pharisees in today's text.

Achievements can make us selfish - and sometimes malignantly self-righteous. We pray that you will guard yourselves against this pitfall of pride. We also pray that your faith will be more than pious platitudes and other piffle. We pray that your faith will offer itself in loving acts of mercy - esp. to those who are at their lowest and worst.

Above all - we pray that you will not forget your oneness with us. We pray that your future degrees or achievements will not cause you to point a derogatory finger at us, a sinful Christian community. We pray that you'll always remember that you are ONE WITH US - that you are a part of the sinful, gluttonous and often rudely arrogant body of people who seek to follow their Lord because they know he's a Great Physician.

Yes - again today and hopefully forever - we pray that you will gather with us or other Christians - that you will gather with the rest of the tax-collectors and sinners known as Christians - That you will gather around the Table where Christ has promised to always be present.

Yes - we hope that all of us will be gathered around that table with Christ NOT BECAUSE we deserve to be in his presence - NOT BECAUSE we feel we are better than anyone else - NOT BECAUSE of our pious achievements -- BUT BECAUSE we know our constant need for the reassuring touch of the Great Physician. The touch of love and forgiveness that is offered to us AT OUR WORST,

offered to us **IN** the sacrament, and then hopefully
FROM each other.

Yes - we gather around the physician's table.
In hi presence and the presence of one another -
like Matthew - so that we might be healed from
the worst of our past and then become his best
followers in word and deed in the future.

PENTECOST III
Luth Church of the Master
June 27, 1976

"THE STORY OF OUR LIVES"

"And the Lord God made for Adam and his wife garments of skins, and clothed them." Gen 3:21

The curtain on the drama of man goes up. We see a dark room - the shadow of a man moves methodically across the ~~room~~. Carefully - he places each foot on the floor. Even the squeak of the floor is muffled *by his bare feet.*

And then a voice from off-stage breaks the silence: "Where in the (beep beep) have you been?"

The man stops in his tracks. His flushed red face almost lights up the room. Then stammering and stuttering - he blurts out:

"Had to get a job done at the office -- those darn secretaries left early today, so had to do it myself."

Another uneasy pause - then the voice offstage again -- "Then why are you sneaking around the kitchen- why have you taken your shoes off?"

Again - he clears his throat and mumbles - "well, I know how mad you get if I wake you up."

Then offstage again the voice cuts through the dark and pierces the silence: "I can smell the booze in here -- who are you trying to kid??"

That does it. His embarrassment turns to bitterness -- and he fires back "Just get off my back - you (beep beep). The guys at the office forced me to do it."

Obviously - this is far from a perfect replay of Genesis 3 -- but it casts a small spotlight on the story of Our Lives as depicted from the beginning

Much like the story in the garden, this story began in the same place -- man was crouching in fear. Someone might see him as he really is -- he was

was afraid to be found out. And then when he is found out, he experiences man's most common reaction to disclosure -- a feeling of shame.

Whether the garden or the kitchen - normally these are places where mankind talks and walks freely. But under the scenes of our stories, they become hiding places -- man hiding from God and his fellow man.

But why should anyone want to hide from God? God hadn't changed. He was the same. But MAN had changed. A trust had been broken -- whether with God or spouse or whomever. When a trust is broken, a new condition of life raises its ugly head -- the condition is known as sin.

And so we have in Genesis 3 THE STORY OF OUR ^{Alienated} LIVES. A promisory agreement is made between man and God. Man breaks the trust. He lives in fear due to his infidelity. Then he is found out. He feels shame. And to deal with his shame, he tries to PASS THE BUCK rather than being honest and admitting his guilt.

~~So~~ ^{Alienated} So ~~So~~s - the STORY OF OUR LIVES - repeated, and repeated, and repeated. From unloyalty, to fear to shame, to passing the buck -- the great game strategy of sin.

"I didn't do it. It was her fault. She forced me into it. Oh, but it wasn't really my fault -- you see I was tricked into it by that evil guy over there." And on and on goes "the buck passing" -- making the strategy of sin more complicated --

all motivated by a preoccupation with ourselves.

~~A natural and easy fellowship with God and mankind is turned into exploitation, rivalry, fear, shame, and passing the blame on. The advent of sin creates huge relational losses -- with God, with creation, and with our fellowmen. The new and destructive center of this order of things is always the same: a preoccupation with ourselves.~~

Yes -- this is the story of our lives AFTER THE FALL -- after each of every FALL away from trust in God or one another.

We see this story replayed in the church, in the nation, in the home -- unloyalty, fear, shame, and finally passing the buck.

Among religious circles -- I am especially confronted by those who have experienced the FALL AWAY from trust in God. Time and time again, they tell me: it's the church's fault - ~~I especially hear this among Roman Cath. today.~~

Yes - THE STORY OF MAN - pass the buck to the church - blame faithless-ness on the institution -- or the pastor -- or the time of worship -- or the corruption in the church.

I have yet to hear ONE PERSON who has fallen away from trust in God actually admit that he/she has reniged on his trust in God.

I hardly need mention sin's strategy in politics or business or marriage and the family. We're surely witnessing the disclosure of a lot of guilty people these days -- but is anyone admitting a part in it??

directed
It seems to me that everyone's denying any part in the STORY OF OUR LIVES -- whether politician or the neighbor next door -- it's always the other guy that's dishonest, crooked, or only looking out for his own interests.

In vs. 21 of Genesis, we're given Good News regarding our dilemma: "And the Lord God made for Adam and his wife garments of skins, and clothed them."

God grants life to man and woman even after they have forfeited it. The giving of clothing is the OT's symbolic way of saying that God forgives. God's kindness AFTER THE FALL is a preview of the love he shows in his Son who became sin for our sakes.

Because of God's gracious act in Christ -- because Christ has taken on our shame -- we can stop passing the buck and own up to what we are. We are sinners, but sinners wearing the new clothes of saints.

We can stand confidently before one another in Christ -- regardless of the social stigma of our sin -- realizing that the shame of our sin IS STILL EVIDENT, but confident that we will find understanding and acceptance RATHER THAN judgment.

Confident of
~~We can give each other~~ a new word of forgiveness as from the Lord himself.

That is the whole point of the Christian faith. NOT to put us down. NOT to destroy us because of our sin. NOT to shame us more than we already are.

But to make us understand that we are sinful. To help us to confess to God and one another our breach of trust -- so that our fears, our shames, and our desire to pass the buck WILL BE TAKEN AWAY by our confidence in being forgiven.

God help us to get beyond the FALL by admitting that we are a part of it -- that we have fallen too. Yes God - help us to admit this, so that we can all get to the final act of the STORY OF OUR LIVES -- our offering of forgiveness to each other in the name of Christ.

AMEN

PENTECOST III

Luth Church of the Master, Troy
June 19, 1977 (Father's Day)

"STOPPING ALONG THE WAY"

...he stepped forward and laid his hand on the bier; and the bearers halted. Then he spoke:
"Young man, rise up." Luke 7:14

It was probably a very small funeral procession. Luke reports that "many townspeople were with the widow," but it's safe to assume that the procession was still quite small.

I say this because through Luke's gospel three classes of people are clearly shown as second class - the poor, foreigners, and women. But even more was this woman stigmatized - because in the Graeco-Roman world to be a widow with only one son, and to lose that son, was the worst fate to befall a woman.

A woman's status in this society was directly related to the number of children she had reared. Obviously, child mortality was high - so women were to be prolific re-producers. So - here was a widow who had lost her only son. She was not only considered to be cursed by God -- she was considered a NON-PERSON.

So it is that her son's funeral procession was probably small. People just did not show respect for people of her kind. But we're told that as soon as Jesus saw her, his heart went out to her. His response was not conditioned by SOCIAL MORES -- his response was conditioned by HIS FATHER. By his Father, and our Father.

Yes - what do I mean by that -- to be conditioned by HIS FATHER. ... WE call this day FATHER'S DAY -- a day to give special praise and recognition to our Fathers. And that's good! But we could give even greater meaning to it by going back to our Christian understanding of FATHERHOOD.

As I have pointed out in the 16 week seminar - we begin our creed by saying "I believe in God,

THE FATHER....! We begin the Lord's Prayer by saying "OUR FATHER..." By saying this - we are saying that God expresses his power to us in two distinct ways -- as creator, and as father. As creator, he gives us life -- just like he gives all things life.

But that aspect of God's power gives me little comfort and security. For that expression of God not only produces life -- but it also has made possible such things as storms and other destructive forces. There's little comfort in worshipping God's creative power alone -- that's why we are not nature worshippers as Christians.

But God also expresses himself as FATHER -- this is God's merciful, caring power. This is the power which God uses to relate to humanity, especially expressed through Jesus. It's God's fatherhood which says - "Young man, rise up."

So - when we say "I believe in God the Father," or "Our Father, who art in heaven," we are not proclaiming ONLY BELIEF in creative power. We are asserting our belief IN MERCIFUL POWER. We are saying our only HOPE is to be merciful LIKE OUR FATHER.

What could be more appropriate than to recognize God the Father's merciful power on this FATHER'S DAY. For it means that we believe fatherhood means a lot more than HAVING THE ABILITY TO PRODUCE BABIES. That's a mere biological function. Fatherhood, from the Christian perspective, is having the power to be merciful, to care about ALL sons and daughters of God -- esp. the ones who have been overlooked (like the widow in today's gospel).

Today's gospel story illustrates that love of the Father takes place HERE on earth. It is easy to talk about our ultimate goal - resurrection from the dead -- and I'm sure you and I look forward to that splendid future. Only sometimes - in looking forward to our future -- WE FORGET ABOUT THE WIDOW IN OUR PATH WHO NEEDS OUR CARE.

For instance - right now at Beaumont Hospital, one of our members (a widow) continues to need our care. I'm certain that she is confident about the resurrection -- but she needs reassurance NOW that she is loved. I've prepared a visiting schedule for the next eight days during my absence -- and I'm confident each day will be filled by A DIFFERENT VISITOR from the Master -- by both fathers and mothers.

For we see that the story of the young man of Nain is not a story about Jesus calling people back into life. It is an admonition to you and me to do his deeds in this world -- acts of compassion, of love, of concern, esp. for the underdog. We must try to restore dignity where we can, and add to other's esteem. We are admonished TO LIFT UP others to a level of joy-filled humanity.

This story shows that our Lord IS NOT ONLY our Father for eternity -- but also for this life. It shows that as FATHERS, MOTHERS, BROTHERS AND SISTERS we are confident of eternal life AND THEREFORE love this life.

Above all - we see through this story THAT OUR FATHER'S LOVE is one which takes time to stop along the way.

What an example for the rest of us -- we fathers. To take time to stop along the way -- along the way to success, along the way of our busy professions and jammed schedules. To stop NOT only to worship God, but to be merciful like our father in heaven.

As I celebrate this Father's Day - I pray that this might ^{continue} be our example as fathers -- as well as entire families. But my Father's Day prayer also includes a petition of thanks. For today as Father and pastor - I complete 3 years of ministry here -- and I thank you for your merciful example in our ministry.

As members - you have not only been merciful to one another -- but deeply merciful to me. As I reflect over these three years - I hardly recall a single time that anyone has said "NO" to my request to share the burden of our ministry.

We have not only shown our concern for eternity, we have shown God's mercy for the here and now.

But as I begin this fourth year - I pray that you and I might go one step further. Note in the story - no one asked Jesus to offer mercy to the widow. By nature, he just did it.

I pray that in our programs- our education ministry - our committees - our visitations of the sick, the sorrowful, or the fallen-away -- I pray that you will OFFER YOURSELVES even before being asked. I pray that you will call those who are missing from this family -- let them know they are missed. I pray that you will STOP ALONG THE WAY and offer yourself as Christ's servant to our ministry.

Then - like the people around the widow at Nain, we can proclaim with confidence - "God has shown his care for his people." And that story will run through all parts of Michigan and the whole neighborhood.

AMEN

PENTECOST III
Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo
June 5 & 8, 1986
Peter R. Martyn, Pastor

"FROM DEATH TO LIFE!"

"The man who formerly persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy." Galatians 1:24

"And Jesus said, 'Young man, I say to you, get up!' The dead man sat up and began to talk ... A great prophet has arisen among us," they said. "God has come to help his people." Luke 7:15,16

To live ... to be alive is to have visions and goals for our lives. One of the great joys of being human is that we can dream DREAMS; we have the tremendous capacity and ability to look to the future with hope ... we can always dream about a better tomorrow ... we can envision the present gloom turned to future joy ... life can change from the dreary to the delightful. People who live with this capacity I describe as people with A VISION OF LIFE.

I emphasize this because there are others who live quite to the contrary. Some people live allowing every little obstacle to defeat them or get them down. They always seem to be gloomy and despairing. They always seem to be on the verge of tears or anger or depression of some kind. They just never seem to be UP! Every difficulty becomes an insurmountable barrier. People who live with this capacity I describe as people with A VISION OF DEATH.

When the Bible talks about death, it certainly is speaking about physical death. But "death" also means defeatism, gloom, ever-lasting grief, an unwillingness to look for joy, hope, love in life. The facts are that many people are physically alive, but relationally dead. They live with a never-ending VISION OF DEATH.

God entered the world in Jesus Christ to change all this. He came that we might have life, and life more abundantly. Abundant life means living with a VISION OF LIFE -- always dreaming of better days, always looking forward to a change from grief to grace, always realizing that defeat is never the last word -- that victory is always God's final word. In the texts before us today -- we dramatically see God's purpose -- TO CHANGE OUR VISIONS OF DEATH INTO VISIONS OF LIFE ... to change our destructive tendencies (like Saul) into constructive energies (like Paul) ... to never allow the final journey of life to be a procession to the graveyard.

Speaking of processions, I am reminded of recently talking with a funeral director. He was telling me that there are two things that he fears the most with every funeral. One is that the hearse will get a flat tire on the way to the

cemetery. The other is that the funeral procession will be divided by a traffic jam or slow moving freight train. He told me once that a procession had been divided by a freight train. The train stopped and blocked the intercession for a long time. When the train finally cleared the intersection, the first half of the procession was already coming back from the committal.

I think there's something very redeeming in thinking of a flat tire for the hearse or a split funeral procession. Both of these say that the road to the graveyard dare not be a dismal, speechless, tearful journey. There needs to be a little laughter or glow of life on that road. Having a vision of Aunt Tilly heading for the cemetery ... when all of a sudden the hearse's tire goes flat -- that just does something for me realative to death. The whole procession comes to a halt. Everybody has to get out of their cars and talk about the flat tire while the funeral director madly tries to fix the thing. It would be a tremendous source of comic relief for the whole funeral party. It might hopefully serve as God's subtle word -- the procession to the grave dare not have the last dismal word on our lives.

That was certainly the message in today's Gospel text. Jesus was confronted by a funeral procession of a widow who had lost her only son. In Jewish society, for a widow to lose her only son was a double tragedy. It was bad enough to be a widow; but to be a childless widow was considered the worst of all curses by God. A childless widow was stigmatized, ridiculed and deplored by Jewish culture. She was treated as a non-person.

Along comes Jesus, has compassion on the widow, and raises her son to new life. And the front of the funeral procession turns around -- with the mother and boy now leading the procession away from the graveyard. Can you imagine what those people at the rear of the procession were thinking -- when all of a sudden they saw the procession coming with the boy who was once dead, now alive! WHAT A VISION OF LIFE! WHAT A CONVERSIONARY MOMENT! THINGS FOR THOSE PEOPLE WOULD NEVER BE THE SAME AGAIN.

Well, that's the whole point of this gospel story. Once we have received the presence of Christ ... once we have been baptized ... once we have been renewed by the body and blood of Jesus Christ -- then we just cannot live anymore with a VISION OF DEATH! Jesus Christ alters our graveyard processions -- we no longer go to the graveyard or any other place in life hopeless, helpless, fearful, or depressed. We go everywhere confident that Jesus will turn DEATH INTO LIFE. We live every day in every way WITH A VISION OF LIFE ... EVERY DAY IS MOVING FROM DEATH TO LIFE ... EVERY DAY IS AN OPPORTUNITY TO BRING GOD'S VICTORY INTO THE STREAM OF LIFE. We become life-giving people.

How is this possible? How can we do this in a society which seems so bent on destruction, despair, depression, damnation, degradation ... and all the other signs of death? How do we become "life-givers" in a world and society that seems to exploit division and doubt, greed and guilt, terrorism and tragedy, anger and anxiety?!!

The answer is simple, yet complex! We take very seriously that the power of the spirit is with us and works through us. God has already given us the outcome of our story on earth. He has told us that we will win the final victory. We will not be losers; we will be winners. That's the final word on our lives -- given to us as an absolute certainty by God. That's the outcome of our story; so how can we possibly live as losers when God has already told us that we will be winners. So, since we have been assured of being winners -- we are called to manifest that winning spirit even in the midst of the daily forces of defeat and death.

God's spirit has empowered us to be conversionary, compassionate, and committed people. Those are the traits of living in the spirit. In Baptism, we have been converted. We have not been made perfect, but we have been converted to God's way, truth, and life. To be a conversionary person of God means that we are always aware of our need to change -- to turn around and be like God. After all, that's what conversion means -- to turn around, to realize that every day we must change our ways to be like God.

So every day our baptism reminds us that we must be converted FROM DEATH TO LIFE, from gloomful living to graceful giving. In baptism we are graced to be like God -- by the love of God we have been empowered to change daily from death to life. Is it any wonder that St. Paul went through such a dramatic change. Once he had been baptized by the power of God's spirit -- there was only one way to go: FROM DEATH TO LIFE. No longer could he destroy, persecute, defy the people of Christ. He finally realized that faithfulness was more than knowing the law -- it was living the law of love.

Like St. Paul, let it never be said among us that we can't change. That's one of the basic ingredients of the power of God: we have been empowered to always change ... to always become more like God. Like alcoholics, conversion means daily accepting the responsibility to change -- to live like God.

BUT LIFE means more than being conversionary people -- it means we are deeply empowered to be compassionate like our Lord. There's a story of a little girl who spotted a puppy in a petstore that she just couldn't resist. The petstore owner wanted to help the little girl make her choice. But the little girl said, "No, I already know which one I want.

As they went to the cage, the owner's jaw dropped: the little girl was going for the sad little critter way in the back of the cage. The owner shouted: "Oh, you don't want that one - that's the runt. He'll probably die soon; come on, I'll get you a better one." At that moment, the little girl reached down, and lifted up her floor-length dress. She revealed to the owner ravaged, scrawny, toothpick legs that were supported by large metal braces. SHE KNEW WHAT IT MEANT TO BE THE RUNT. She reached down, picked up the runt, and said: "I'll take this one, and I can assure you he'll live a better life than any of the others ever dreamed of."

To be faithful means that we're deeply concerned about the runts of life -- the little people who are typically overlooked, scorned, laughed at, and ridiculed. That's what it means to move FROM DEATH TO LIFE -- it means having compassion for all people, especially those who are typically bypassed by our "success" oriented world.

But there is a third quality that enables us to move from death to life. To be filled with (LIFE) the spirit means that we are deeply COMMITTED to the life of God - namely, to loving and sharing and caring. Possibly nothing better illustrates the meaning of being a committed Christian than the life of one of our members whom we buried this week.

Catherine Cramer was born almost 62 yrs ago with a tumor in her head. At the age of 16, she had a massive seizure. Some doctors thought it was polio; others diagnosed it as a stroke. Whatever it was, she was told that her life from then on would be curtailed and full of caution. The word was clear: you will be living with a vision of death, not a vision of life.

For some people, that kind of diagnosis would have been the end. They would have curled up and died right there. But Catherine's vision was the same as God's vision -- it was a vision of life. TO LIVE LIFE WAS TO LOSE IT -- not to hang onto every little problem or difficulty and make it the end of the world. She did not allow this cerebral tumor to cancel her plans for living. She wanted a family, and she had a family. She wanted to work, and she did work. And I truly believe her "committed attitude to living" and not dying made it possible for her to live to be almost 62 years old. She did not live a life fearing death -- she lived a life loving life.

That's what it means to be moving FROM DEATH TO LIFE. It means being committed to loving and caring and sharing even when the prognosis isn't perfect. It means never giving up, because God will never give up on us - he assures us of VICTORY OVER DEATH. That's why we live as His CONVERSIONARY, COMPASSIONATE, AND COMMITTED PEOPLE!!

AMEN.

PENTECOST III
Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo
June 17 & 20, 1993
Peter R. Martyn, Pastor

WANTED: A GOOD PHYSICIAN & FATHER

The Pharisees said, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" But when Jesus heard this, he said, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but only those who are sick. Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have come to call not the righteous, but sinners. Matthew 9:11-13

In July of 1538, Martin Luther offered a profound view about physicians saying: "I have nothing but praise for physicians who adhere closely to their principles. But they should know that I do not always agree with them, for out of every human being they try to make a fixed star rather than a roving planet. The responsibility of physicians, to whom human life is entrusted, is a great one. Therefore, physicians must be humble -- that is, God-fearing ... persons who practice with the utmost respect of God, or otherwise such doctors are murderers."

Whether we agree with Luther or not, it's obvious he held physicians up to a lofty sphere. More than 450 years have elapsed since Luther said this and I believe in some ways we have even elevated physicians to a loftier plain ... and at the same time to a higher level of accountability & challenge.

In fact, as I have chatted with doctors here at Hope, they tell me that these are some of the most challenging times they have ever known. Patients expect them to be instant miracle workers. Insurance & governmental regulations have made their practices into monumental paper chases. DRG's now determine the extent of patient care in a hospital rather than the doctor. Specialization has not only made medical competence more stressful & exhausting - it has also created uneasy competition & jealousies among docs. The not-yet-released but expected health-care reforms of the Clinton task force have stimulated increased high-blood pressure, anger & distrust among physicians. Malpractice insurance has not only driven some doctors into retirement - but too often both patient & lawyer bring horrendous judgments which fair-minded people would not entertain against the unknowns & complexities of modern medicine. Just the explosion of knowledge & technology alone has escalated diagnostic training and treatment to unimaginable heights. And I am certain doctors could add many more challenges to this list.

And yet - even with all these challenges - there is no professional field to which more are enticed or wanting the Call. And even with all the health-care challenges of our day, there is no other practicing professional who is ADMIRER AND EVEN GLORIFIED like the doctor. Doctors are still more trusted & respected than any other professional. Go to any

hospital and you will still see collegiality & perr respect from other workers that few of the rest of us ever see from peers or pews. And all this brings me to a simple but significant point: I believe there is a parallel between the practice of good medicine and the practice of good ministry. In fact, I would say the traits we admire in Good Physicians are the very same traits we admire in Good Christians (as well as Good Fathers). Or to state this in its simplest terms - when medicine and ministry are at their best, they are the identical twins of HEALING & WHOLENESS.

That may sound like a rather arrogant claim from one who has such a vested interest in ministry. But if we answer three simple questions I think the characteristics that are admired in Good Physicians will be shown to be the same those admired in Good Christians (or Good Fathers!))! So let's ask the questions: 1) What are the qualities that we admire most in Good Physicians? 2) What is the mission of a Good Doctor? and 3) What is the scope of practice of a Good Physician?

First, what are the QUALITIES that we admire most in a Good Physician? Obviously, we expect the physician to be knowledgeable & well trained. But without a doubt, one of the things that patients tell me they admire most are physicians who show MERCY ... NAMELY, a doctor who is compassionate, approachable, relational, caring & sensitive. These are the qualities of a MERCIFUL GOOD PHYSICIAN.

And why is it that Jesus Christ has been called the Good Physician? Is it because he was viewed as a miracle worker? Not at all! He was a GREAT PHYSICIAN above all because he showed MERCY. His followers time after time were disobedient, lethargic, unloyal and limp! In short, they hardly took to heart his prescription for a better world! Yet he continued to SHOW THEM COMPASSION ... CONTINUED TO BE APPROACHABLE ... CONTINUED TO SUPPORT THEM ... CONTINUED TO BE SENSITIVE AND CARING AND FORGIVING ... ALWAYS GOING TO THEM TO HELP THEM!

Is it any wonder that God wants us to possess this greatest quality of a Good Physician?!? "Go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice! For I have come not to call the righteous but sinners!' MERCY BRINGS HEALING AND WHOLENESS TO THE WORLD whether in medicine or ministry!
(or fatherhood)

Secondly - we admire a Good Physician who understands her basic mission: NAMELY ... TO SAVE US FROM SICKNESS AND MAKE US BETTER THAN WE WERE BEFORE! A physicians mission is always to the one "who's out of it" -- the underdog, the ill, the one who is suffering. And to fulfill that mission - the doctor must RECOGNIZE THE ILLNESS, MUST OFFER TREATMENT, AND HOPEFULLY MUST REASSURE THE PATIENT THAT HE/SHE WILL GET BETTER!

That means a doctor must often confront a patient with bad news ... the "bad news" of telling him to quit smoking ... the "bad news" of telling her she has cancer ... the "bad news" of telling him that he's filthy fat and needs to lose a 100 pds ... the "bad news" that you can't keep going the way you're

going" if you want to keep on GOING! The doctor never shares this "bad news" in ORDER TO CONDEMN HIS PATIENT ... HE SHARES THE TRUTH IN ORDER TO HEAL, RESTORE, AND CHANGE WHAT NEEDS TO BE CHANGED!

Likewise, the great physician, Jesus Christ never confronted the world with its sinfulness & disobedience in ORDER TO CONDEMN ANYONE IN THAT WORLD -- RATHER, HE WANTED TO SAVE THE WORLD FROM THE SICKNESS OF SIN & REBELLION! Jesus Christ calls all Christians (and Fathers) to be surgeons as he is a surgeon. He calls us into a mission of SAVING US FROM OUR OBSESSION WITH SICKNESS - A MISSION OF CUTTING AWAY prejudice, greed, slander, injustice, immorality -- all the malignancies that destroy healthy and meaningful divine & human ties. As we remove these deadly growths, he asks us to apply the power of forgiveness SO THAT OUR RELATIONSHIPS WILL BE HEALED & RADIATED OF ANY FURTHER PAIN FROM THE PAST!

So - there YOU HAVE the quality and the mission of Good Physicians, Good Christians & Good Fathers -- take the power of mercy and compassion and bypass yesterday's obstructive behavior with the only graft that will ever give new life - the graft of the forgiveness of Jesus Christ!

That leaves only one characteristic yet to be shown identical: the scope of the Good Physician's practice. Could there possibly be anyone who does not know the scope of a Good Physician's practice?? HE SIMPLY TREATS ALL WHO ARE IN NEED, REGARDLESS OF CREED, COLOR, SOCIAL OR MONETARY STATUS!

Likewise, the scope and character of the mission of Jesus Christ! He ate with sinners; he kept company with prostitutes -- NOT BECAUSE HE CONDONED THEIR LIFESTYLES, BUT BECAUSE HE DESIRED TO OFFER THEM A BETTER QUALITY OF LIFE ... HE WANTED TO TRANSFORM THEM TO ENJOY A BETTER FUTURE. Like any good physician, the goal is to make what is putrid, paralyzed and painful into that which is pure, powerful and at peace.

This same Great Physician, Jesus Christ, calls all Fathers and Mothers to be HIS INCLUSIVE BODY OF PHYSICAL, EMOTIONAL AND SPIRITUAL CAREGIVERS. We, his church, are to be the instrument of wholistic healing on this earth. Good physicians and good Christians never see wholistic care as merely a physical thing. Treatment requires knowledge of the truth but also listening and presence and sensitivity to pain & sharing tears and holding hands. We, his church, are to be the body that gives focus to this compassion, this mission, and this scope of treatment in the world. We, his church, were not only the initiators of hospitals in this land -- but we are still the hospital for sinners ... a haven in this world where self-righteousness and exclusiveness is abhorred and where forgiveness and mercy are celebrated.

Jesus Christ, the Great Physician and Lord of Creation, commissions the practice of medicine and ministry and fatherhood and motherhood to go HAND AND HAND to the sick and lonely and abandoned and suffering of this world. Medicine

is called to do battle against the physical, mental and emotional breakdowns in this world. Ministry is called to do battle against the sicknesses of separation and seclusion and starvation and self-righteousness of this world -- any power which seeks to terminate or fracture people from God or from one another.

We live in an age of ever-expanding medical technology -- but analytical technology on its own will never be a sure cure for the sick of this world. It may help bring about some remission in sickness -- but only the power of mercy and compassion through the mission of medicine, ministry, and family will bring HEALING & WHOLENESS TO ALL HUMANITY. Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have come to call not the righteous but sinners." AMEN.

PENTECOST III
Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo
June 9 & 12, 1994
Peter R. Martyn, Pastor

"IT'S ABOUT GOD'S FAMILY VALUES!"

And Jesus said ... "If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. ... Truly I tell you, people will be forgiven their sins and whatever blasphemies they utter; but whoever blasphemes the Holy Spirit can never have forgiveness. ... (for) whoever does the will of God is my brother & sister & mother."

Mark 3:23,27,35

This was truly a tough week for me and for hundreds of other Toledoans - esp. members of the medical and Ottawa Hills communities. Chaplain Chas. Parker said on Wednesday - there are very few things that cause Toledo Hospital to come to a faltering standstill. But the death of John Gibbs had that halting impact. And it not only halted Toledo Hospital; it caused all of us to stop for a moment and again give thanks for the treasure of life & relationships ... and again realize as Pastor Michaels said last Sunday... what a fragile gift these earthen vessels are. Of course which one of us didn't hear John's death as the talk of the town. Even WTOL carried a special tribute to John on the 6 o'clock news last Sunday night. And speaking of tributes - Jeff Fretti at the Fretti Funeral Home told yesterday that he had estimated more than 1500 people came to say "Good bye" to John and support the family at the funeral home. Please don't misunderstand me: I am not trying today to glorify John Gibbs, he of all people would not want any such noise made. But rather, I am glorifying the spirit and presence of God which were so clearly shown to all of us in the life of John Gibbs. That's why his death touched so many of us: BECAUSE WE INHERENTLY KNEW WHEN SEEING DR. GIBBS WE HAD SEEN AND BEEN TOUCHED BY THE PRESENCE OF GOD.

In our last Presidential election, there was a lot of talk about "family values." I don't know about you - but I was rather nauseated by these political candidates who were flaunting family values only to get votes. What a contrast when one looks at the life of John Gibbs. For here was truly a family man, but a man who saw "family values" far different than politicians." And so forgive me - but I cannot resist lifting up John's life today as a way of illustrating how "God's family values" should be lived and articulated.

Let's briefly look at three of the major "family values of God" revealed in our gospel lesson for the day. First and foremost in this gospel - we are given a very disturbing "family value." In fact, it was so disturbing for Jesus that he was accused of "being out of his mind;" the same thing might have been said about John Gibbs. Because one of the most prominent "family values of God" is that our true family must exceed the boundaries of our nuclear family (and church family). In other words, our care and concern for

humanity must certainly be offered to our own immediate household -- but if it stops there, then we have not truly caught the vision of God's family values: FOR GOD WANTS US TO TOUCH THE HUMAN FAMILY FAR BEYOND OUR OWN HOUSEHOLD ... FAR BEYOND THOSE 2 OR 3 OR 4 UNDER OUR OWN ROOF.

That's again why I use John Gibbs as a good human reflection of God's family values. There is no husband or father in this room who cared more for his wife & children. (Pastor Powell told Steve/Jeff - not another busy doctor) The other stories that Jeff & Steve tell of their father far exceed anything I could ever tell about my dad. But John was not only a father and brother and friend to his own kin. He treated the rest of us JUST AS IF WE WERE A PART OF HIS OWN FAMILY. In many ways, I not only felt that I was his patient, I also often felt that he cared about me like a son or a brother. There was nothing EXCLUSIVE about John's vision of the family. Maybe that's why he wanted to be called a Country Boy -- because many country boys don't have an "exclusive or sometimes damning" mentality of others who come from different families. For John - just as for Jesus - whether rich or poor, black or white, Ottawa Hills or otherwise: EVERYONE WAS TREATED WITH THE SAME CONVICTION, THE SAME CARE, & THE SAME COMPLETENESS & COMFORTING SMILE! And that's why Jesus says in concluding today's gospel text: "Whoever does the will of God is my brother & sister & mother." I believe John Gibbs helped many people see that meaning of the gospel: how "Godly family values" are much more encompassing than "politicking family values."

Which leads to the second divine family value: God's family always lives by the law, but healing compassion and love are always more important than following the letter of the law. Jesus got into real trouble with the scribes because he did not follow the "letter of the law" to perfection. In fact, he was called "the devil" for not following the letter of the law. But he responded: "If people get better because of my treatment, then how can I be accused of being evil ... for the devil seeks to destroy, not to improve the quality of life." It was obvious - Jesus could not be "of the devil's kingdom" ... for when Jesus touched anyone, the devil's kingdom fell. But in order to make people better, there were many times that Jesus did not follow the letter of the law: he had to violate the sabbath; he sometimes did not wash his hands of the disciples hands before they ate, etc. etc. But any violation of the law always had the purpose of restoring & giving new life.

Again, was that not also illustrated by John Gibbs. I am certain that there were times that John may have treated a patient "in violation of the letter of the law:" in a manner that was not perfectly prescribed by mandated medical practice. But his motive in so treating WAS ALWAYS TO MAKE THE PERSON BETTER, NEVER TO HURT THE PERSON. In other words, if he ever violated the laws of practice, it was out of compassion and love, never out of a desire to do harm. Who would have ever called John Gibbs "the devil" or brought

a suit against him? Only those who were out of their right minds, because if you knew John Gibbs you knew that he never did anything to intentionally harm or violate another person. Thus, another primary family value of God -- God faithfully forgives those who violate the letter of the law or make a mistake when He knows that their motive was one of compassion and deep love for others. In other words, Christianity is not merely a religion of the law, but a religion of the love and compassion of God which uplifts the law to show God's truth & justice for this world.

And that of course leads to the God's final family value of the day, which is most critical for our faith and most abused in its interpretation. Jesus says: "Truly I tell you, you will be forgiven for your sins and blasphemies, but whoever blasphemes the Holy Spirit can never be forgiven." This one phrase from Jesus has created tremendous guilt and pain for many people over 2000 years. Because it has been by all kinds of religious fanatics to "define what they perceive to be an unforgiveable, eternal sin." Many of us have heard this applied to suicide ... and some have even interpreted this to mean that "swearing" is the "eternally unforgiveable sin." We're all going to hell if that's the case!

Again, and John Gibbs please forgive me, I use this family doc to illustrate a great Godly family value. For those of us who really knew Dr. Gibbs, we knew that he was one who was not 99.9% clean and without foul thoughts or deeds. John was not without blasphemies. In fact, between John Gibbs and Paul Baehren - I would be hard pressed to choose which one of these docs have told me more "off-color stories." After one incident in the Gibbs household, Steve told me that his father didn't talk to him for a few days. Yes, John was a real human father and husband and doctor and friend. He loved a good time; he could joke with the best in life and loved to laugh at himself; but he also got depressed and swore; he didn't know the first thing about balancing a checkbook, he hated uppity doctors, pastors and people in general who acted like they had the world by the tail. BUT IN SPITE OF ALL THESE WONDERFUL HUMAN SHORTCOMINGS, HE BELIEVED THAT GOD AND JESUS CHRIST WERE THE ULTIMATE POWERS OF GOOD AND GRACE IN THIS WORLD. He would never, ever teach anyone NOT TO RESPECT GOD ABOVE ALL THINGS. In fact, as I said in my sermon message of Wednesday - the most significant way that I saw him as a Great Physician was that he knew that ultimately ALL THINGS AND ALL LIFE, INCLUDING HIS OWN, MUST BE SURRENDERED TO ONE WHO WAS GREATER THAN HIMSELF.

And anyone who does not believe that is a person who is blaspheming God and cannot be forgiven: FOR AS CHRISTIANS, IT IS IMPOSSIBLE FOR US TO BELIEVE THAT THERE IS ANYONE OR ANYTHING WHICH IS GREATER THAN GOD. To make such a claim is to deny God ... and to deny God and His love IS THE ONLY FAMILY VALUE IN GOD'S EYES WHICH IS AN UNFORGIVEABLE SIN!!

Thus - we have three the three most important "family values of God:" -- 1) never to be exclusive in our care and concern for others ... which means we always extend our love and charity beyond our own families (and our own churches); 2) our faith is one which is guided and uplifted by the law, but which ultimately offers compassion even if outside the law in order to heal and restore the quality life; and 3) there is no one or no thing we honor more or give total faithfulness to than our God Almighty and his vision of love for the world in Jesus Christ our Lord. Thanks be to God and all the beloved disciples like John Gibbs who have shown us these VALUES OF THE FAMILY OF GOD.

AMEN.

PENTECOST III
Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo
June 22 and 25, 1995
Peter R. Martyn, Pastor

"CONVERSIONARY CHRISTIANS OR GRAVEYARD GROUPIES?"

"The one who formerly was persecuting us is now proclaiming the faith he once tried to destroy. And they glorified God! Gal. 1:24

"And Jesus said, 'Young man, I say to you, rise!' The dead man sat up and began to speak, ... And the people glorified God, saying, 'A great prophet has risen among us!' and 'God has visited his people!' Luke 7:15,16

To live ... to be alive is to have visions and goals for our lives. One of the great joys of being human is that we can dream DREAMS. We have the tremendous capacity and ability to look to the future with hope; even after resignations, both you and I can dream about a better tomorrow; the present unknown can become a future joy; life can change from depressing to delightful.

I emphasize this dimension because there are many others in our world today who live quite to the contrary. Some people allow every little obstacle to defeat them and get them down. They always seem to be gloomy and despairing. Some people seem to be constantly on the verge of tears or hostility or depression of some kind. Some people just never seem to "BE UP!" Every moment becomes an insurmountable barrier for the future. People who live with this capacity of doom I describe as GRAVEYARD GROUPIES - people with only a **vision of death**.

Please don't get me wrong: there's plenty of reason in our world today to be a Graveyard Groupie. Our world is littered with corpses. We can't make it through one week without hearing of some tragedy like the recent one just a mile down Secor Rd. But God never said that life would be without such pain and suffering. **In fact, the Bible confronts us directly with all kinds of pain and death, right from the beginning with Cain killing Abel.** All three lessons today reveal this same reality of death. To be a widow in ancient Israel and lose a son was not only tragic bereavement -- it meant banishment from society. Few of us have ever known the cruelty of that death. And God makes clear through hundreds of Bible stories that he hears the anguish and hopelessness of the bereaved. The gospel today clearly confirms that **God does not want "parents to bury their children!"** And when it happens, God grieves and suffers with those parents.

But God is not only grieved by physical death. He also is deeply disturbed by other realities of "death" -- like defeatism, gloom, everlasting negativism, an unwillingness to look for joy, hope or love in life. The facts are: many people are physically alive, but relationally dead! And even worse -- some people seem to be on a mission of destroying life & relationships for others. The world is filled with the Graveyarders - gloom & doom prophets: people who only promote cynicism, destruction, divisiveness and other militia strategies of "killing" the human spirit.

That's why Jesus Christ confronted the funeral procession in today's gospel without even being asked for help by the grieving mother. Because he lived in a society filled with Graveyard Groupies -- better known in that day as pharisees ...

leaders destined to make life cynical, defeating and guilt-ridden. The Pharisees (and there are still many among us today) mistakenly saw God's power as "*keeping the Law and riddling people with guilt!*" Certainly God wants us to keep his Law ... but only as a response to his Easter gift of grace ... the power of new life!! **From Genesis to Revelation - God's story is the same: he seeks to overcome everything and anything which would negate life, incl. death!** And His pinnacle story, the Easter story, proclaims that "*in Christ, death will be overcome!*" So it was that Christ resuscitated the life of a son -- to confirm that God has power over every negating force, incl. death! **Wherever Christ visits his people, doom & gloom become converted to promise & possibility.** Into our world where nothing ever seems to change, God breaks in and gives new possibilities - just as he is doing for Hope Church right now as we look to a new future and let go of the past!

The Bible says that **once we** have truly accepted the power and presence of Christ ... **once we** have truly affirmed the power of Baptism ... **once we** have faithfully received the body & blood of Jesus Christ -- then we just cannot live anymore with a VISION OF DOOM & DEATH ... as graveyarders. **Jesus Christ alters our graveyard processions -- we no longer go to the graveyard or any other place in life hopeless, helpless, fearful or depressed. We go everywhere confident that Christ is going with us.** And if Christ is going with us, then he will turn death to life ... he will help transform grief into gratitude ... defeat into renewed victory. When Christ is going with us we become his life-giving people -- Conversionary Christians!

So how is that really possible?? How can we start seeing miracles rather than just talking about them as ancient events? Well, Larry alluded to the answer two weeks ago on Trinity Sunday: **we must take seriously the fact that God's power has been poured into us!!** That's what it means to believe in the Holy Spirit: we confess that God has not only visited us 2000 years ago, **but that he is living within us right now!!** **Easter confirms that the outcome of our story on earth will be victorious, not hopeless. Thru Christ, we have been gifted to be winners, not losers.** So how can anyone live as a loser when God has already blessed us to be winners?!? Anyone who lives as a loser - as a Graveyard Groupie - has not really given thanks for God's power given to him/her. **There is but one calling for every Christian: to manifest God's winning spirit in the midst of the daily forces of defeat and death!!** God's spirit proclaims TAHT WE SHALL NEVER SAY DIE!!

Yes, God's spirit has empowered you and me to be CONVERSIONARY CHRISTIANS. We have been given the gift of a "converted spirit" -- **we have been changed from D.C. (damned corpses) to A.C. (active caregivers).** We have not been made perfect, but we have been converted to God's way, truth and life. And that means death, defeat, depression and fear have been overcome by love, forgiveness & compassion. To be a "Conversionary Christian" means that we are always anticipating our need to change -- to turn around and be more like God. After all, that's what conversion means -- **to turn around, to realize that every day we must change our ways to be like God's ways & truth!**

Do you see yourself as a Conversionary Christian ... or are you yet a

Graveyard Groupie?!? Well, it's never too late to change! God is visiting us at this very moment and saying: Let my spirit become your spirit; let my outlook become your outlook; let my compassion and love become your compassion and love ... because that's why each of us was baptized in the first place. (Thomas Rudolph) I can assure you that after that day on the road to Nain - that widow became a new spirit for Christ! And even though the Ellis boy died after his gunshot wound, I know for a fact that his parents have been converted to change the attitudes of black youth in Toledo. They will not let their son die without becoming advocates for new life on the streets of Toledo. And I have seen that same attitude among many members of this congregation! Members who have had significant losses ... but have not allowed those defeats to turn them into Graveyard Groupies ... members who have not become cynical or negative or defeatist simply because of the pain and suffering of life. I am particularly grateful for those members who have affirmed me and the future of Hope Church even under the circumstances of my decision to leave; thank you for being Conversionary Christians!

Yes, every day we are to be converted thru our baptism to help God perform the miracle of changing death into new life. **Is it any wonder that St Paul went through this dramatic change??** Once he had been baptized by the power of God's spirit, there was only one way to live: TO CHANGE DEATH & DEFEAT INTO NEW LIFE AND FUTURE POSSIBILITIES. **He finally realized that faithfulness was more than knowing the law, it was living the law of God's love!**

That same conversionary story was recently told by a little girl who spotted a puppy that she could not resist at a pet store. The petstore had just recently been given a whole litter of little puppies. And the owner wanted to help the little girl make her choice. But she said, *"No, I already know which one I want."* She went over to the cage and picked the saddest little critter, all by himself. The owner said, *"Oh, you don't want that one - that's the runt of the litter. He'll probably die soon; come on, I'll get you a better one."* At that moment, the little girl reached down and lifted her floor-length dress to reveal her ravaged, scrawny, toothpick legs that were supported by large metal braces. SHE KNEW WHAT IT MEANT TO BE A RUNT; BUT SHE HAD NOT BEEN DEFEATED BY THIS WEAKNESS. She reached down, picked up the runt, and said: *"I'll take this one, sir, and I can assure you he'll live a better life than any of the others ever dreamed of."*

That little girl, whether she knew it or not, was a Conversionary Christian: she had been gifted with God's spirit of never giving up and she was going to give that same life to another runt! God calls all of us to be Conversionary Christians: **faithful people who seek out the runts and the widows and the lost and the least in order that we might help God continue to make miracles that nobody ever dreamed possible.** Let us always be the bearers of Good News to a world desperately needing to know that tomorrow can be better than today!

AMEN.

*Pentecost III
Glenwood Lutheran Church, Toledo
June 8, 1997
Peter R. Martyn, Interim Pastor*

“ALL IN THE FAMILY!”

“Whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit can never have forgiveness, ... (but) whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.” Mark 3:29;35

There are few of us in this room who do not remember, *ALL IN THE FAMILY*. When it first appeared in the early 70's, it was a regular Saturday evening event for the Martyns. Who could possibly forget Archie Bunker and his dingbat wife, Edith. And of course we all remember Gloria and her husband, affectionally known as the “meathead.” The show was about “family life” -- that is, “ZANY family life.” The Bunkers were a “funny family!” Yet - not much more funny or different than our own -- they had their weaknesses, their foibles, their prejudices! And yet they seemed to somehow remain faithful to each other.

For me, one of the strange things about the show was the title itself: *ALL IN THE FAMILY*. To this day I still wonder what the “all” stood for. Certainly they were “all” a little crazy. But their notion of “all” was very different from mine: the Bunkers, especially Archie, was hardly inclusive or broadminded. “All” people were certainly not a part of his “acceptable” family. Archie was the epitome of the self-made man. Just ask him anything, and he had “all the right answers.” Essentially - he was against anyone who was different from himself -- against Blacks, Browns, Reds, Spics, Japs, Kikes, Mackerel Snapers and anyone with long names or political liberals. “Family” as Archie saw it was a very EXCLUSIVE and NARROWLY DEFINED unit.

And if we're all really honest with ourselves -- there's a little bit of Archie in all of us! Today's gospel makes crystal clear that Jesus came with a very different family view than Archie Bunker. Just as he said to the Pharisees, he says to us: “A house divided against itself cannot stand.” There cannot be destructive dialog between church members or churches, or between churches and neighborhoods, or between cities and nations without resulting community chaos and ultimately satanic destruction. As we have just sung, God's will is always to “bind together,” not to scatter and separate!! Separation is always the work of the devil, the evil one. Like Archie Bunker, one way we are often tempted by evil is to make our understanding of family very parochial, very limited very-self-centered, and very separated!

Jesus' vision of the family was much greater -- in fact, it was so broad that the Pharisees accused him of being “nuts!” A never-ending temptation of Christians (like Pharisees) is to VERY NARROWLY define God's family by ethnic or external ties -- as if God only loves those who dress like us, act like us, sing like us, pray like us, live in the same neighborhoods as us, join the same clubs as us, etc. Too often Christianity is defined by what's on the sleeve rather

than what's in the heart -- it's too often a matter of just "looking good!" Our "Pentecost III" gospel has Jesus telling us to grow up -- to recognize that there is really only one true family-- "the one that does the will of God!" Be assured, that was no easy thing for Jesus to say in the face of his mother, brother and sisters. We all know how tempting it is to MAKE FAMILY only a biological thing! But as always, Jesus used such occasions to make crystal clear that Godly values almost always contradict Archie Bunker values. Our loyalty, our friendship, our love as a Christian family (if truly the will of God) always surpasses the ethnic bigotry of Archie Bunker.

So the first profound truth of today's gospel is that **ALL THOSE WHO DO GOD'S WILL ARE PART OF OUR FAMILY!** But that raises an important question: What does it mean to do the will of God? Jesus responds in simple but unqualified terms: "Those who do not blaspheme the Holy Spirit do the will of God!" Jesus says, "whoever blasphemes the Holy Spirit can never have forgiveness!" This statement has been the source of great scholarly debate for centuries. There are all kinds of things that have been considered "blasphemies" of the Holy Spirit! But the context of the gospel again gives us the clearest picture to our answer. The Pharisees had accused Jesus of doing the work of the devil. And that's exactly what blaspheming the Holy Spirit is all about -- "identifying God's work or God's power or God's will with evil or destructive things!" When people call "good, evil" or "evil, good" then they have blasphemed God's Spirit!

Thus, God forgives all sin, but will not tolerate attacks which contradict his nature to be anything but loving & merciful. On the basis of this - the Tuesday Bible Study group asked me: "Does that mean God forgives a murderer??" Yes, he forgives a murderer even though he curses the act of murder! Does God forgive an adulterer? Yes, God forgives an adulterer but calls at the very same time for his family to live above adultery! Does God forgive those who get into idolatry and swearing and cheating? Yes - God forgives those who do these things, but in the same breath God calls us to repent from all these things!!

Possibly, Evangelist Ron Lavin even better clarifies blasphemy of the Spirit with his commentary. He says, "The function of the Holy Spirit (the power of Christ) is to bring us back to God when we have strayed away (sinned). The refusal to be brought back to God even when we hear and know the truth is blasphemy against the Holy Spirit." And don't we know there are members in every church who are blaspheming the Holy Spirit right now!! Some people simply refuse to come Home to their God and Father and be ONE with His Whole Family!! In short, what is unforgivable is a person who will not repent -- a person who is totally unwilling to become more like God!!

So - let's ask some practical questions on the basis of this understanding of blaspheming the Holy Spirit:

What is it that divides a home?

What is it that divides a family? a couple? a marriage?

What is it that divides a church? a denomination?

What is it that divides a neighborhood? a city?

What is it that divides a nation ... or puts nation against nation?

The answer to all these questions is the same thing: *An arrogance that leaves no possibility for repentance or change ... an arrogance that allows no room for forgiveness!! And that kind of arrogance is a blasphemy to the Holy Spirit!!*

If that kind of arrogance is shown by a member of a congregation -- no matter how much he or she reads the Bible -- that person cannot be a part of God's family BECAUSE he/she is rejecting the will of God!! As already said, the greatest family value of God's family is repentance -- a willingness to change and become more like God. Likewise, if that arrogance is exhibited by a congregation or a denomination, then that body of people is not a part of the body of Christ -- because such a body is not living repentantly. If that arrogance is shown by a nation, then that nation is NOT UNDER GOD (no matter what it prints on its money) -- because nations which are led by the Holy Spirit are nations that repent and seek to be more like God. There is but one great word from today's gospel: Jesus claims all people as HIS FAMILY who are willing to repent!! It doesn't matter whether you are brother or sister, mother or father, black or white, red or brown: if you are a repenting person - a person who seeks to become more like God, than you're ALL IN HIS FAMILY!

Is it any wonder that God has called me here today to thank you profoundly for remaining faithful to his greatest family value: repentance. For each of us who are here today are here because we know the importance of coming back and admitting that we need help -- we need restoration -- we need forgiveness -- we need to be guided by a greater power than our own egocentric spirit. We need to be part of a family that lives together and works together TO BE GREATER AND MORE GODLY THAN THE ARCHIE BUNKER FAMILIES OF THIS WORLD!

As we look to Father's Day next Sunday ... knowing that it will be a day to recognize the greatness of God through music ... let us today remember the greatness of God who is a Father that forgives us for all our stupid tricks, our scapegoating, and our self-centered bigotry. He only asks that we always return ... always repent ... always seek to be restored and forgiven so that we won't talk or act or think like the Archie Bunkers of this world!!

AMEN.