

TRINITY XXIII

Sunday - November 14, 1971

Redeemer Lutheran Church

Milwaukee, Wisconsin

"SECULAR? OR SACRED? OR BOTH?"

Text: Matthew 22:16,21

"Teacher, we know that you are true, and teach the way of God truthfully, and are not afraid of anyone; for you do not regard the position of men. Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not? . . . (Jesus) said to them, Render (therefore) to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's"

One of my former professors once stated that "we find God in the midst of human affairs, or we don't find God at all."

At first this statement struck me as quite an exaggeration. And yet if we truly believe that God is present in, with and under all his creation, then he is truly in the midst of all human affairs.

But of course this is only true to the degree that we as rational beings are willing to see his presence in our affairs. So often we are guilty of segregating God's presence into the areas and categories where we want him to be.

For instance, we so often limit his presence only to beautiful places--to beautiful sanctuaries. Or we are famous for the claim that religion just doesn't mix the rest of our affairs. Or we establish implicit ground rules for our social gatherings--one of which is that anything goes except religion or politics. And so on.

In other words, instead of allowing God to be present in the midst of human affairs, we often pit Him against human affairs. We seem to enjoy putting God into a corner of life so that he has only a limited relationship to the secular world.

This is exactly what the Pharisees and Herodians were seeking to do with Jesus. They wanted him to pit the

I'm wondering how you and I would answer their question: "To whom do you owe your allegiance: To your God, or to your country?"

I would hope that our answer would be similar to Jesus' "TO BOTH". But in light of the way we so often segregate God from a relationship to our worldly affairs, I'm wondering if we don't more often get entangled in the Pharisee's trap--where we pit God against society or government as absolutely incompatible.

I think there have been times when we have all been tempted into this trap. And even times when such thinking is quite justified. For there are many times and circumstances which demand that we bring God's power of righteousness to bear upon human institutions and government. But the circumstances of the Gospel story before us attempt to portray for us the proper relationship between the so-called secular and the sacred.

Jesus here attempts to illustrate that we are all subject to both the powers of this world and simultaneously subject to the power of God. That is, both powers have their ground or locus in God.

And so, because of our sin, God ordains--he institutes the existence and authority of worldly powers. And we are admonished by Him to be obedient to that worldly power as long as it seeks to serve and bring justice to all people under its control.

And yet at the very same time, we are subject to the power of God--and to His power of love, forgiveness, and merciful acceptance of us--the spiritual power of life.

So on the one hand, God ordains and uses man-made powers to make us accountable to each other and to give order to His world. On the other hand, He uses His forgiving power to bring hope into our lives when we have failed Him and each other by rebelling against His law of love and our laws for an ordered life. His forgiving action renews us to again strive for righteousness and justice for all the people of God in the world.

So as God's people we are forever faced with a God-ordained tension--a tension which has traditionally been called the tension between law and gospel--or the tension between the kingdom of this world and kingdom of God; or the tension between the secular and the spiritual realms.

Jesus' response in today's Gospel affirms for each of us that these two realms - although by nature quite different - must find simultaneous function and service in our lives. Christians, who truly know their own sin, cannot live or function ONLY as agents for man's worldly power NOR ONLY as agents for God's spiritual power. God ordains both of these realms of power to be a part of each of our Christian lives. To the degree that they experience the tension they create for each other--to that degree we can make claim to God's purpose and will working within us.

I am sure these ideas create some confusion in your minds. We need only look at much of Luther's writing especially his treatise on "Temporal Authority" to understand the complexity of the two kingdom doctrine. But helpful clues to its understanding can be found from the circumstances of many of our lives. If we just consider the typical family we have an ample illustration of the God-ordained tension that MUST exist and be sustained between the secular and the spiritual powers.

Through creation itself, God ordained that man and woman should be one--that they should be the foundation for the family. This family unit becomes God's agent for His spiritual power in life. Not of course His only agent for spiritual power, but a very important one.

This same family unit must be nurtured and given adequate physical needs in life. And so man creates an agent of secular power to meet his total needs. And so a corporation or business is established--and that business Provides an essential structure for the order of the family unit. So God also ordains this agent of secular power. But here we must remember a very important consideration. This secular power,

like that of all others, has a purpose beyond itself -- its purpose is to provide for the family unit. That is, its purpose, just like the spiritual power of the family unit itself, is to further enhance the love between the members of the family.

When a person's or society's worldly power--whether that is a job--a government policy, a piece of property, or whatever--when that worldly power becomes an end in itself, then it has lost its God ordained purpose, it has lost its God ordained relationship to life, and consequently, it becomes an evil power for all life.

So whenever our jobs, our worldly status, our position of power, our monetary security, etc. become ends in themselves--then these powers of the secular realm have become evil--they have lost their proper relationship to God and the family of mankind--they have become isolated worldly powers pitted over-against the power of God.

When we find ourselves, our leaders, our country or other countries in such a state of affairs, then we have come face to face with the sin of human arrogance. And then we must turn back to God for His power of forgiveness.

The Pharisees in Jesus' day sought to slander and scandalize him by tricking him into pitting secular power over-against God's power. The Herodians hoped for the opposite. They wanted him to refute any obedience to secular power so that they could arrest him as a rebellious person. He was tricked by neither.

You and I are often confronted by similar circumstances today. We are often scandalized by other Christians when we recognize the need to support secular programs which will help to bring justice, peace, and brotherhood to all men. Such critics fail to see that God has ordained secular powers to limit the desires and serve the needs of all men. As long as they are fulfilling this God-ordained relationship, they command our respect and support.

Still others today would have us denounce any kind of a relationship to the established structures within society. These self-ordained saviors hold out chaos and permissive freedom as alternatives to the present order of things.

Obviously, these views and others like them fail to embody God's wisdom as proclaimed by Jesus:

"Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's,
and to God the things that are God's."

Jesus here offers us a proper perspective for the relationship between the spiritual and secular in life.

Although he recognizes them as separate domains of power, his statement affirms that they are both ordained by God;

that they must remain ever in tension
with each other so long as men sin--

but above all, that God is active in both the secular and the spiritual realms, seeking to accomplish His will of love, justice, and righteousness for all men through the power of His Word, now and always evident in the powers of His world.

May God's power of love, justice, and righteousness continue to influence our relationships in both our secular and spiritual lives.

Amen.

PENTECOST XXIII

Luth Church of the Master

Oct. 22, 1978

"IT TAKES EVERYTHING YOU'VE GOT"

"You shall love the Lord your God with ALL your heart, with ALL your soul, with ALL your mind, (and with ALL your strength). Matthew 22:34

Commandments - esp. biblical commandments - are not really the in thing these days. Ask the average person on the street if he follows the rules - and he'll look at you very strangely and say: What rules? The mentality of the day is very much against the traditional commands of God.

And yet I would be very wrong to say that we are a society without any rules. But the rules have been written by the powerful people of today. They have their own 10 commandments. They might go something like this.

"I am the Lord your God - you shall have no other corporation beside me"

"You shall not take the name of your psychoanalyst in vain"

"Remember your golf day - and keep it holy"

"Honor your union and its membership"

"You shall not kill - unless its in the best interests of your country."

"You shall not commit adultery - with anyone else who might tell your boss."

"You shall not steal - local and federal taxes excluded."

"You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor -- unless its going to cost you your own skin."

"You shall not covet your neighbors things -- just be sure that yours are as good if not better than his."

I'm glad you've seen the humor in these. And I would further guess that your snickering is an indication that there is some truth in these so-called commandments. Yes, whether the man on the street knows it or not -- he is

living by the rules. Maybe not God's rules -- maybe not society's rules -- but he's living by somebody's rules.

I'm always amazed by teen-agers who get up-tight with their parents rules. The facts are - that they have their own set of rules that are often much more stringent. For instance - I would be an utter failure in today's teen world -- I'm not skinny enough - I don't have enough jeans with holes in them - I don't drive a Trans Am - and I don't even have an FM Stereo in either of my cars. Now that makes me an utter failure according to the commandments of today's teens.

Yes - the facts are that we all live by the rules. But the real question for us -- is the same question that the Pharisees asked of Jesus. You see - the Pharisees had 613 rules that they lived by. And they thought these 613 were a lot better than anything that Jesus would ever come up with. So they asked him: "What is the great commandment?" Which is the greatest rule.

And Jesus replied: You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart - all your soul - all your mind -- and all your strength. It's quite obvious that Jesus couldn't have offered a better answer. And it's quite obvious that he couldn't have phrased a more impossible commandment TO FULFILL.

Yes - those are the facts of this commandment -- it is the very best - and yet the most impossible to fulfill. Notice that Jesus uses the word "ALL" -- all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, all your strength.

Right there he had the Pharisees. And he has us as well. None of us can possibly give THE TOTALITY OF OUR BEING in loving God. We are victims of our own limitations as well as slaves of sin. God always gets less than 100%. But as his faithful community -- that's still our goal -- we still strive ~~FOR~~ a 100% commitment. As long as God knows that we are striving toward that perfection - he will forgive us when we come up short. That's the good news - that God forgives us even when we only give him a 5% effort -- as long as he sees that we have been striving for 100%.

But why should we strive to ^{give} get heart - soul - mind - and strength TO LOVE GOD. Well the most obvious answer is because he gave 100% for us. In Christ, we have received God's 100% effort on our behalf. So he asks us to live in his image -- to be little Christs -- to grow toward Christ-like human ~~ity~~ perfection.

And you know - and I know that IT TAKES EVERYTHING WE'VE GOT to do that. And God knows that too! It's more than just getting our mind in tune with God. God says OUR MINDS are to be totally in tune with his -- BUT NOT JUST INTELLECT ALONE.

He says our hearts must be there also. God's not talking about our pulse rate here -- he's calling upon us to show a deep affection for God. Loving God with all the heart is being emotionally fed by his Word.

To love God with all your soul IS SURRENDERING YOUR PERSONALITY to God for constant re-shaping. It's letting God penetrate deeper than the surface.

Finally = loving God with all your strength means that it takes some doing on our own. Loving God is hard work and sacrifice. That's what the cross was all about - Jesus had to struggle to accept the cross. Likewise, for you and me. It takes strength - stick to itiveness, and perseverance if love for God or anyone else is going to be long lasting.

TO LOVE GOD - TAKES EVERYTHING WE'VE GOT. Heart, soul, mind, and strength.

And what will all this striving to love God DO FOR YOU AND ME? It can only lead to the fulfillment of a second rule which is as great as the first: IT WILL lead us toward LOVING EACH OTHER AS WE LOVE OURSELVES.

Yes - God calls us to tell the average person on the street THAT THERE ARE ONLY TWO GREAT RULES TO LIVE BY: to love God with heart, mind soul, and strength - and then love everyone as we love ourselves.

AND Because he has always given 100% for us -- we can never shoot for less!

PENTECOST 23

Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo

November 11, 1979

"HOW FAR CAN YOU SEE?"

"And many rebuked him, telling him to be silent; but he cried out all the more, 'Son of David, have mercy on me.'" Mark 10:48

I hope you have had an opportunity to study the yellow insert in your bulletin this morning? More than that - I hope you have taken the time to prioritize these important things in our lives.

If we had time to get responses from everyone here today - I'm certain there would be a great variation in priorities. But as I was thinking about these things in relation to my life -- ONE THING kept coming back as my top priority: namely, my sight. How many of you ranked sight as your highest priority?

Few of us can deny that sight has such a great impact upon almost everything that we do... and almost everyone we meet or know. Without the gift of sight -- our incomes, homes, savings, families, mobility, and even marriages can be jeopardized. Yes - for many people, the gift of sight is next in importance to life itself.

As I think about the pastoral ministry and the gift of sight - I find it hard to imagine one without the other. Whether it's preaching, or counseling, or teaching, or going to the hospitals, or attending another meeting -- it would be a great jeopardy to be a pastor without the ability to see.

And yet -- how often I've taken this gift for granted! How often I've awakened in the morning and not said one word of thanks for being able to see for one more day!! How often I've gotten up and groaned about something RATHER THAN REJOICING JUST TO BE ABLE TO SEE ANOTHER DAY!!

And I would venture to be that most of you have

taken your sight for granted in pretty much the same way?!?!?

The facts are -- that most of us here this morning are still blessed with the gift of sight. It may not be perfect -- but at least we can see. Yet how many of us really appreciate this great gift?? Most of us can see -- and yet in reality, most of us are blind BECAUSE WE FAIL TO APPRECIATE THE GIFT.

but even more tragic -- even with our physical ability to see --- many of us suffer from a more tragic blindness -- THE INABILITY TO SEE THOSE THINGS THAT HAVE LASTING WORTH FOR OUR LIVES. Put more bluntly -- we are often indifferent to God's direction and to the needs of people all around us!!

This is precisely the point of Mark's gospel narrative in the story of Jesus healing Bartimaeus. Jesus heals Bartimaeus' blindness. That's a simple miraculous fact of the story. But Mark's point lies NOT IN Bartimaeus' blindness -- but in the blindness of the twelve disciples.

Here were 12 men and a great multitude proudly marching with Jesus -- it was the triumphant entry into Jerusalem. And along comes a blind beggar pleading for help. Do any of these devout followers of Jesus stop to offer a hand?? By no means. They are far too interested in keeping up with the crowd. In fact, they not only walk past Bartimaeus -- they tell him to get lost and shut up.

And that's Mark's great point in this text: TOO OFTEN JESUS' FOLLOWERS SUFFER FROM A WORSE BLINDNESS THAN PHYSICAL BLINDNESS. They see Jesus with their eyes, but their hands and hearts do not move them TO DO ANYTHING like the real Jesus. In short, too often Jesus' followers only see the Sunday procession --- but they become blind to the hurts, the hassles, and the heartaches that are crying out in the

world on Monday thru Saturday.

*They are too busy
keeping up with the
crowd to care about
people who don't fit in.*

For instance - in the November newsletter, each of our families received a detailed analysis of the needs and responses to the World Hunger Appeal. That brochure made evident that some 14 million dollars has already been offered to help domestic and world hunger needs. But the challenge is not over -- as (I'm certain) Dr. Hosman will make clear this morning. We have seen with our own eyes that the distribution of wealth and food IS STILL A SERIOUS PROBLEM IN OUR WORLD: how will we respond to it??

Will we remain blind to these cries for mercy? Or will we at least take the time to determine our ability to respond to them? So far, six persons from this family of faith have taken the time to respond to World Hunger.

I hardly need mention the critical need for your response to next year's ministry at Hope. There's a crying need for additional help with our ministry at Hope! And there's a crying need in our community for the message and personal presence of Jesus Christ through our ministry.

So how will we respond to this challenge?? Will we make an ongoing month-by-month commitment to Hope's ministry in 1980?? Will we have the Christian conviction to be courageous in our pledging in 1980? Or will we use the famous old cop-out of decades - saying that my giving is between God and me. *You see - my* giving is not between me and God --- it's between God's people and me. God doesn't need my giving -- but his people on earth do. That's where he calls for me to be merciful; and that's where I'm tempted to be most blind!!

How sad - but how true -- that Christian disciples (like the 12) often suffer from

short-sightedness. Our great temptation is to be like those 12 disciples as they entered Jerusalem with Jesus -- we are tempted to tell the hungry, the homeless, and the heartbroken to GET LOST and SHUT-UP. Yes - we're tempted to get all caught up in this Sunday morning procession -- and forget about all the cries for mercy right around us.

~~How~~ sad that most of us can see -- and yet often remain blind to the human needs around us. How sad that we often have to suffer the loss of life or health BEFORE WE REALIZE HOW IMPORTANT IT IS TO BE MERCIFUL TO ONE ANOTHER.

But how FANTASTIC that God never loses sight of us and our needs -- how fantastic that he is never blind to our struggles. How fantastic that he continues to accept us even when we have become physically and spiritually blind ~~to ourselves~~. Even when human blindness and arrogance cost him the sacrifice of his son -- he remained faithful and merciful to us. HE HAS NEVER STOPPED GIVING OR FORGIVING US!! What a fantastical father we have!!

And that's his message for us today -- he's called us together again TO GIVE US ANOTHER CHANCE TO REALLY SEE HIS KINGDOM. He's called us together in order that he might open our eyes to the real needs of life -- in order that we might see his unfinished tasks on earth BEFORE WE SEE HIM in heaven. He calls us together again to be his eyes - his hands - and his heart on earth.

And while he has us together - he again asks us: HOW FAR CAN YOU SEE? Can you only see as far as those things on that yellow sheet?? Well - if that's all the further you can see -- then you haven't seen beyond yourself -- and

you surely haven't yet seen God. because God helps us to see beyond ourselves. He helps us to see beyond our selfish desires. He helps us to see that there is a greater purpose in life than merely stockpiling our investments.

He helps us to see people like par~~ti~~maeus -- people who need a miracle of mercy. It is my hope and prayer that we will all be more than blind disciples as we encounter the challenges of ministry ahead of us.

Christ's

AMEN

PENTECOST XXIII
Hope Luth Church, Toledo
November 15, 1981

"HOW'S YOUR LOVE LIFE?"

"Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law? And Jesus said, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it, You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

Matthew 22:36-39

It was only a few years ago that Madison Avenue told us if we would use it regularly -- we would have a great love life. There was no doubt about it -- this product would guarantee happiness in all our relationships; it was especially the absolute ingredient for a perfect marriage. Use it in the morning; use it in the evening, and you would be on your way to an ultra-prite love life.

By now you've guessed it -- it was Ultra prite. Ultra prite only a few years ago made the claim that it was THE WAY AND THE TRUTH to a lasting love life. Needless to say, the Colgate Palmolive Company was very successful with their advertising lingo-- millions of people began using Ultra-prite. Evidently their claim did not prove to be totally true -- because the Colgate Company no longer uses this ultra-prite pitch.

But it surely illustrates how fickle we can be when it comes to the foundation of love in our lives. In a few of my wedding homilies -- I have used this same image to impress upon the bride and groom the kinds of superficial claims that the world makes when it comes to love. Buy this brand of toothpaste; wear this kind of panty-hose; cover-up with this type of make-up; drive this model car and you will find the ultimate reason for living -- you will find the love of your life.

That is the precise issue that the lawyer is testing Jesus about in today's gospel text when he asks: What is the greatest commandment? Rephrased that question really reads: what is your ultimate reason for living -- what is the real love of your life??

You and I are confronted by the same test every day of our lives. The lawyer comes in the form of a peer group ... or business associates ... or possibly as social friends or religious acquaintances. But the question is always the same, what is the greatest commandment of our lives ... to whom or what do we give our greatest loyalty ... what is the love of our lives.

Jesus responded that the answer for the Christian disciple is very simple: To love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind ... and to love your neighbor as yourself. Jesus said to the lawyer -- that is the real reason for living -- that is the ultimate foundation of love for my life.

I think that the majority of us here today would agree with Jesus. We like his response, and it's probably one of the chief reasons that we worship here on Sunday. We too believe in this foundation of love; we think it's very important and we give it regular lip-service, at least on Sundays.

But do we really understand the radical meaning of loving God with heart... soul... and mind ... and neighbor as self?? Or maybe the question should be -- why do we love God so much ... and why should we love our neighbors as ourselves?

To answer this we must go back to the very beginning -- to the creation story of Genesis. In this story - we find God creating nature and life ... and at the end of each day we're told that he pauses and pronounces "that it is good," that he is pleased. We're told that he does this creating in a garden called "Eden," which in Hebrew means a place of great delight.

So that means that God perceives his creation as a place of great delight -- and he wants humanity to perceive that same delightfulness of creation. God takes time off from his work not out of weariness, but because he wants to enjoy his creation. He wants to be pleased ... to be delighted by his creation.

But in the creation drama God is not fully delighted ... not fully pleased until the climax of the story: the creation of humanity. It is with humanity that God takes his greatest pleasure -- he calls humanity the "crown of his creation." And to show his great love for this one facet of creation, he gives humanity dominion over the rest of creation.

But he doesn't stop there. He literally creates humanity in his own image -- that is, he puts his own life within humanity. In no other creature of creation does God give this dominion or self- image.

In Genesis - we read that God breathed his breath into humanity. In no other creature did God give his own breath. Obviously -- the breath of God is synonymous with his Spirit... and as you all know the Spirit of God is his power of love. So it was only to humanity that God gave his power to love.

And what does that mean for you and me? It means that God has crowned us with glory and honor like nothing else in all creation. It means that like no other creature God has given you and me the power to be just and loving in our relationships to Him and to each other. It means that God has set us apart from all animals to be the truly compassionate and merciful ones on the earth.

Do you see why we baptize children, and not animals? Because God has set us apart from all other creatures to be his image on earth. And it's through baptism that we first announce to a child that he/she has been given the greatest status of life on earth -- namely, to live in the image of God. That is both a great privilege -- but also a great responsibility.

Most of us willingly accept the privilege of being God's children on earth. Like the Jews of Israel, we are glad to be among God's chosen people. We are grateful for God's grace through baptism and communion. We rejoice in knowing that God has created us in his own image -- that he has given us dominion over all things.

But all of this leads to the question of the day: namely, what is the ultimate meaning of our privileged position in God's sight?? Or as the lawyer said, what is the greatest commandment of all? It is at this point where privilege turns into responsibility!!

God not only gives us the privilege of his Spirit of love and forgiveness -- he also expects us to be responsible with that Spirit of love. We are given his power of love; he expects us to use that power in the same way that he does.

For instance - he says because we have received his example of love -- we are not to use that love in an adulterous way. God does not love us for his own gratification, but that we might be gratified. He expects us to love one another in the same way. The adulterer's motive is always opposite God's -- the adulterer loves for his own gratification, not in order to help and support the other person. So it is that God's law says, "You shall not commit adultery," because it is contrary to the love of God.

We love God with heart, soul, and mind because that is how he has first loved us. He has loved us above all else in creation. Even when we have failed him and become disobedient, he has offered us his heart, his soul, and his mind in his whole life in Jesus Christ. He has died for us to show us how ultimately responsible and merciful he really is.

In response to that love -- he commands us to live in that same image ... to love him totally, and to love our neighbor as ourselves.

I have often heard well-meaning Christians say "that charity begins at Home." Obviously, the word "charity" comes from the Greek word, "love" or agape. In the old King James version, the word used was "charity" rather than "love." So essentially people are often saying that "love begins at Home." I would surely have to agree with this sentiment; but unfortunately that's often where love ends as well.

For far too many Christians "love" or "charity" never gets beyond the home. That's hardly what God meant when he said "love me totally" and "love your neighbor as yourself."

God puts no restrictions on his ^{neighborly} love; he puts no civic, congregational, or nationalistic labels on his mercy and compassion. He loves all, and he calls all to love like Him who believe in Him. There isn't such a thing as a parochial church according to God's ultimate standard; it is either a ^{global} universal church, or it isn't the church of Jesus Christ.

We are here today as the privileged people of God. We have received the ultra-writteness of his love. We have been graced with the goodness of his Word and sacraments... and with the abundance of his creation and possessions. Our love life from God has been the epitome of blessedness.

And now he calls us to be responsible with what he has first given us -- his spirit, the power of his love. He authorizes us to offer our love life in his image. Namely, to love Him with heart, soul and mind ... and our neighbor as ourselves NOT ONLY because it is pleasing to Him -- but because it is the very reason for living, because it is pleasing to all of God's creation.

AMEN

PENTECOST XXIII
Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo
November 18, 1984
Peter R. Martyn, Pastor

BACK TO THE BASICS!

"Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?"
And Jesus said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God
with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all
your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a
second is like it, You shall love your neighbor as
yourself."
Matthew 22:36-39

The little boy was just slightly over three years
old. He had wandered away from his parents who were at a
large campsite near a rock quarry. Unbeknownst to them,
that morning the workmen would be blasting rock in the
quarry. Preparations had been made; the men took temporary
shelter after the fuse had been lit and the alarm sounded.
Then they watched in horror as the three-year old boy
wandered into the open space unknowing of the danger.
Every passing second brought him closer to death.

Frantically, the workmen waved their arms and
shouted. But the child just laughed ... and started
waving back at all of them. He was becoming totally amused
by the adult antics -- he thought it was all a "fun game."
None of the men dared to run forward -- the blast was just
seconds away. Into this confusion appeared the child's
mother.

With instinctive wisdom the woman knelt down -- she
opened her wide arms, and warmly and smilingly called the
child's name. Instantly, the child ran for her. As the
air shook with the explosion's fury, the little boy was
being hugged tightly in the arms that he had known so
often. A mother's love was the difference between life and
death.

What made the rescue possible was the knowledge those
two had about each other. The child knew that he was
loved; and that love drew him to the source of affection.
That love attracted him like nothing else could. The woman

Those are the basics that God offers freely to each of us. Just like a warm, trusted mother or friend, we are always attracted to God because of his BASIC LOVE FOR US. This great law then should not be seen as a harsh command: "LOVE GOD WITH HEART, SOUL, MIND, AND STRENGTH!" This law is simply a natural expression of intimacy - "love God with your total being because God can be trusted ... God can be counted on." God, like the mother in the story, will give you the assurance and support that you need in your special moment.

Some years ago, Norman Cousins, then editor of the Saturday Review, visited our American troops in Korea. As he was touring the battlefield, he asked the army guide: "How is the morale of our men here?" "Well," the soldier answered, "it's not just a matter of U.S.O. shows and free beer. To have morale, we have to be connected up with the folks back home and connected up with something that really matters. The trouble here is that we just don't feel connected up."

Without "the connection" to God's love, we are like those army troops - a demoralized people. We can have all kinds of things ... all kinds of wealth... all kinds of entertainment ... all kinds of escape through momentary pleasures. But all of these things are like "U.S.O. shows and free beer." They are just superficial substitutes for the real thing. All of us have a daily need to get BACK TO THE BASICS -- namely, the affirming, assuring, accepting love of God. We may not all admit it -- but that's a basic need of our lives.

Weekly, I encounter people who have become demoralized, defeated, totally fearful, oftentimes even despairing over some problem or crisis of life. Even I sometimes find myself making momentary problems into life consuming powers. Those moments are like being a few seconds away from a quarry blast -- we feel totally helpless and hopeless. How essential in those moments to look to the open arms and assuring invitation of God. He beckons us to come and be uplifted. He seeks to rescue us from the destructive powers of life. He embraces us with the warmth of his kindness. He again makes us total

strength and power. Let it totally cleanse and renew your whole being.

This is getting BACK TO THE VERY BASIC NEED OF LIFE -- the need for an unchanging, constant center by which we measure all other things. This center is the constant faithfulness of God. His affirming, assuring grace for you and me never changes. He can be trusted even more than a mother to a child in great danger. It's with warm empathetic assurance that Jesus says: "Love the Lord your God with heart, mind, soul and strength."

Jesus' encompassing response is offered to the religious giants of his day, the Pharisees. As we all know, the Pharisees were really good people. They were the people who took religion most seriously. They were forever doing Bible study. They not only quoted scripture, they observed holy rules and regulations with a deeply committed precision. But now they were testing Jesus to trap him, not to learn anything new from him. They were testing him to find out if he had "the right idea about God" - namely, their idea.

But Jesus responds: faithfulness is not a matter of mere right ideas, but rather a matter of "right relationships." God offers us more than an idea -- he offers us the most basic of all things in life -- A RELATIONSHIP OF LOVE ... A RELATIONSHIP OF AFFIRMATION ... A RELATIONSHIP THAT ABOVE ALL CAN BE TRUSTED, FOR IT IS MORE THAN A MERE IDEA. Jesus says, "let your mind, body, soul and spirit be transformed by this relationship." That's the essence of faithfulness -- being transformed by a relationship of love.

And that leads us BACK TO THE SECOND BASIC NEED OF LIFE -- "loving our neighbor as self." Once we have been drenched with the power of God's affirmation and acceptance, there is only one way to live: AFFIRMING AND ACCEPTING OTHERS IN THE SAME WAY. We give away the greatest treasure of life -- the love of God. We love others as we have been loved.

Here again this commandment is not a forced issue

What's the catch? Now what do I have to do? What's the trick? What do you want from me, anyway?"

There's always a catch in human love, isn't there? We give -- to get something in return. But not so with God's love. He gives because he knows we need the BASIC assurance, the BASIC acceptance, the BASIC self-esteem. But once we've received, then we have the power to share that grace. God has created us with the potential to grace others -- to live in his image. He loves us totally so that our grace-potential will be offered to others. He knows we can't release that potential UNTIL WE HAVE EXPERIENCED IT OURSELVES. Through Christ, he offers us the experience.

But of course, loving like Christ is basically risky. We may never get a response from those we love. We may never get the respect we think we deserve. We may never get any acknowledgement or appreciation. That's always the chance we take when loving like God. There is no assurance of any response or gratitude. But since we know our own BASIC NEED FOR IT -- we don't calculate the cost ... we love others, as we have first been loved.

Was it a wasted effort that the mother loved her little boy about to be blown up? No way! However, that little boy probably went off after the explosion and played with his Care Bear -- acting almost oblivious to what he had received. Is it a wasted effort when we love our children and teach them the love of Christ? Oh -- sometimes we may feel that way. Because so often they fail to show signs of gratitude. They seem ungrateful, unappreciative, uninterested, unconcerned. They seemingly could care less about us or God.

But why are you here today?? Because someone, at some time, somewhere in your life history cared enough to love you as God first loved them. Someone took the time to truly affirm you -- to truly accept you -- to truly love and forgive you in the very likeness of God. Someone has loved you with mind, body, soul and strength. And that someone wants you to do the same for others. That's why you're here -- to be fortified in that love.

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Wouldn't it be great to get to the end of life's drama, and there to meet the Author of Life and have him say to you and me: "You really made the dream that I had for you come totally true!"

That's the dream God has for us. Not that we will only consume his love for ourselves, but that we will love others as he has loved us. For of such is the kingdom of heaven.

AMEN

PENTECOST XXIII
Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo
November 15, 1987
Peter R. Martyn, Pastor

"UNDER NEW MANAGEMENT"

"Say to all the congregations ... 'You shall be holy; for I the Lord your God am holy.'" Leviticus 19:2

"And you became imitators of us and the Lord, ... so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia." I Thess. 1:6

And Jesus said, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind! ... And you shall love your neighbor as yourself."
Matt. 22:39-40

Today I'd like to share a story of two service station managers, Clem and Jesse. I worked for both of them while I was in college. They both owned and managed their stations - Clem owned a Shell station; Jesse owned a D-X station (now Sunoco). I am deeply grateful to both of them ... for without them, I would have had greater college debts. They were both nice guys ... they were both good managers ... they were both successful ... BUT THEY HAD VERY DIFFERENT MANAGEMENT STYLES.

Clem, the Shell manager, most often managed from a little office in the station. He gave the orders, and we did the work. Oh, once and a while he would help with a tough job that needed troubleshooting - but my greatest recollection of Clem was hearing him "give orders from the little office." He was always "off" on Sundays. But he would always drive into the station in his Alpha Romeo (a sports car similar to a Porsch today) and just check up on us. Sunday was a slow day -- so we were expected to clean the station spick and span. I always viewed Clem as a "Keep my hands clean manager."

In terms of scripture, Clem reminded me of being "Under Old Management." Why "Old?" Because his management style reminded me of God in the Old Testament. Just like the God of the O.T., Clem was a loving guy ... he always had the best of intentions ... but he always seemed to be "running things" from a distance. He gave his orders in words, but rarely through his own flesh. Obviously, like God in the OT, Clem was very involved in running the station -- but it just didn't feel like he was really there. It felt like he was always on an ivory tower ... giving his orders like a prophet from a mountain top. Clem always seemed detached, distant, disconnected from

always there with his wash mit ... not making "car washes" only work for the hired hands. I remember one year I went out for football. Unlike Bob's story last week - I not only had one all-conference center ahead of me ... there were two centers ahead of me. I was third man on the bench. But even if I had been first-string -- I may still have hung up the shoulder pads for my job with Jesse. He was always more than a manager -- he was an example, he was an inspiration, he was a living model for my life. He gave me more than a grid-iron play book -- he was always running the plays with the rest of the team.

Work at the D-X station was like living "Under New Management." Working for Jesse reminded me of God in the New Testament. The commandments are the same in the New as in the Old. It's still the same God ... the same "love with all you heart, mind, soul, and strength ..." But Matthew is different from Deuteronomy because now it's not just words ... now God is living those words. Now God is loving with heart, mind, soul, and body as Jesus Christ. Now God is not merely "asking or commanding" my all in all -- now God is giving HIS ALL IN ALL!

Well, I doubt that I need to tell you which management style motivated me the most. I willingly worked for Clem for a little less than two years because he was the boss. But for the more than three years that I worked for Jesse - I would have laid down my life for him, because he had already laid down his life for me! And Jesse and Jesus seem to have a lot in common. Because when Jesus says, "Love God with all your mind, body, soul and strength" -- he's not just talking like Clem ... he's living like Jesse. He's in the grease pit with his workers ... getting his hands dirty ... burning his knuckles ... rolling his sleeves up ... giving to others as he expects others to give!!

Jesus does not ask us to find the gift of eternal

What a joy to be living "Under the New Management" of Jesus Christ! What a thrill to be among the rose buds of Jesus Christ in this place. What ecstasy to know that you and I are here not because somebody is "yelling out commands from a heavenly office" -- but we're here because Jesus has been here and is now enfleshed in all of us thru Baptism! He's not some remote boss ... he's not giving orders from a distance ... he's walking in the wilderness with the rest of us. We are following the footsteps of a Lord who has already been here ... a Lord who has been tempted and mal-treated ... a Lord who has been challenged and condemned by the bosses of this world ... a Lord who has suffered and sacrificed his WHOLE LIFE in order to

life on our own - he actually gives us the gift of eternal life in his own example. jk lones

us

be honest -- we all resent bosses who BARK BIG, but LABOR A LITTLE! Several years ago, Robert Townsend wrote a book called "Up The Organization." He stated that the greatest challenge facing business was to remove the barriers to the boss -- to make the workers feel that the boss was with them ... sensitive to their needs and concerns. [Is it any wonder that Japanese manufacturers have challenged American production? The Japanese system does not isolate the boss in an ivory tower. The worker sees that the boss gives more than orders -- he's often right there on the line, giving himself ... doing exactly what's he asking others to do!]

He gave a ^{humane} leader who would motivate by a living example of what he expects from his followers. How interesting that God fashioned this "New Management" style some 2000 years ago ... and it's still proving to be the best model for all productive enterprises of life.

God does not ask you or me to do anything that he has not already done. Is it any wonder that your pastors at Hope put on the aprons and labor in the church kitchen. Their aim is not merely to teach others by their example. Their aim is to show their identity with the real boss, Jesus Christ. For if Jesus Christ were here in the flesh today - he would most certainly be seen with an apron in the kitchen. Because that's what humble service is all about -- a willingness to give your life not only as a corporate commander, but also through domestic duty, through diaper changing, through soup kitchen support to the poor, through visiting the sick, through any offering where there's a need to love your neighbor as yourself. "Under New Management," Jesus Christ offers the perfect example of what he expects from others!!

But he offers more than a perfect example -- he also shows the perfect commitment ... A TOTAL GIVING, rather than a mere piece of himself. Some authors today, many gurus today, and even a fair number of churches today proclaim and define "love" as "feeling good about yourself." "If it feels good, it must be love." Well, obviously, sometimes love feels good. But that kind of mentality and that kind of church really misses the mark of Christian love. Because Christian love is total commitment ... and total commitment many times doesn't feel good ... even though it always yields the greatest good!

I am more than certain that Jesus did not "feel good" bearing on the cross ... yet that was the greatest expression

gave us a leader, a boss who was totally susceptible to real ~~business~~ needs and concerns.

Because Christian love feeds and clothes and houses and nourishes and cares and nurtures. Because Christian love educates and edifies and advocates and administrates and heals and helps and negates injustice. Because Christian love builds and beautifies and serves and satisfies and condemns corruption and greed. Because Christian love always sacrifices for the sake of others -- since that's the example of its Manager and Master!!

And how does Christian love accomplish all this? It does it with ALL OF YOU ... and with ALL OF ME! Notice -- I didn't say -- PART OF YOU AND PART OF ME! "Under the New Management" of Jesus Christ, God does not ask for anything which he has not first given. And since he has made a TOTAL COMMITMENT of himself, he only asks for the same - A TOTAL COMMITMENT FROM US!

It means that we will FORGIVE totally as we have been FORGIVEN!!

It means that we will be FAITHFUL TOTALLY as God has been TOTALLY FAITHFUL to us through Jesus Christ!

It means that we will LOVE God with more than our minds because he has LOVED US with his whole mind, whole soul, whole strength, and whole body!!

But possibly the greatest challenge to us today - it means that we will GIVE to God as he has GIVEN to us. Or said more succinctly, God's heart has always been with us so he gave us his total treasure! "And where your hearts are, there also will be your treasure!!"

Many of you remember the Jack Benny show. Benny always appeared as a rather stingy character. In one segment, Jack was stopped by a mugger who commanded: "Your money or your life!" Benny did one of his famous aside long pauses, where upon the robber again said, "Your money or your life!"

At this, Benny answered indignantly, "I'm thinking it over!" There was laughter, but nervous laughter. Because as Benny was illustrating - our money is a real expression of our lives. We sometimes try to fool others - claiming that our money has nothing to do with our life. But the facts are - they are inseparably one! Where you give your life -- there also will you give your money. "Where your heart is, there also is your treasure!"

also changed - and land ownership became the mark of importance. Then that was followed by the pre-eminence of education -- the college-trained, the professional became the object of social envy. And today, it has all melted down into one important standard: YOUR NET WORTH IN DOLLARS! Today money has become synonomous with the importance of one's life.

So we cannot escape this expression of life. When God says, "Love with all your heart, mind, soul and strength -- he certainly means a lot more than your money! But in this world today, he also MEANS most categorically YOUR MONEY! The preacher who avoids talking about money ... or makes flimsy excuses that money doesn't matter HAS SUCCUMBED TO CONTROL BY THE DEVIL. For the devil loves to convince Christians that love of God has nothing to do with their money!!

Like I said earlier - Christian love does not always feel good! Sometimes it feels downright uncomfortable -- downright sacrificial. But who ever said that carrying the cross felt good? God's love not only comforts and soothes -- it also challenges and stirs! Sometimes God makes us cozy; many times God makes us do battle within ourselves.

It's like the story of the farmer who made a pledge of \$25,000 to the church building fund ... and then he refused to pay it. When he was asked to explain his refusal, he said, "When I made that pledge, I was too religious to look after my own self interests."

"Loving God with heart, mind, soul, and strength" is never merely looking after our own self interests. Nor is it making comparisons with "what others do." It is only looking at the example of our Manager and Master, Jesus Christ. And it is seeking to become "holy like him." And then it is striving to live completely UNDER HIS MANAGEMENT FOREVER.

And what's that like? It's the difference between working FOR Clem or working WITH Jesse. I'll take Jesse anyday!!

AMEN.

PENTECOST XXIII
Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo
October 21, 1989
Peter R. Martyn, Pastor

WARNING: DANGEROUS WHEN SELF-AFFECTED!

(TEXT: PARABLE OF THE PHARISEE & PUBLICAN - LUKE 18:9ff)

(Small sermon survey) How many of you have heard the parable of the Pharisee and the publican at least a half-dozen times before today? // How many times has it been interpreted in such a way that the publican ends up being the hero? // How many of you identify more with the publican than with the Pharisee?

Well -- for almost all the years that I have been in the church ... and esp. since I've been a pastor - the interpretation has always been to praise the publican and to persecute the Pharisee. In other words, the bad guy becomes the good guy ... and the good guy becomes the bad guy. The facts are - publicans in Jesus' day were really THE PITS. We may not like IRS examiners today -- but tax collectors in the 1st century can only be compared to mafia bosses or drug dealers today. They were the epitome of extortion and falsehood; it would be like collecting U.S. taxes today to support the Russian military complex. And the question is - how would you feel if the person standing next to you was using your taxes to support the Russian regime, while at the same time piously reciting the Confession of Sins??? Wouldn't you have some doubts about his confession? Wouldn't you wonder about his true faith? Wouldn't you be tempted to look down upon this character who was seemingly trying to appear so "righteous and repentant?"

Well - if you and I have any sensitivity to such a situation -- then we might be somewhat more compassionate to the Pharisee. Without a doubt - Pharisees have taken a lot of UNFAIR HEAT from pious pastors like me. Possibly one purpose of today's sermon -- at least for me -- is to give Pharisees a fair shake. Because, like it or not - Pharisees are most like you and me. Like us, the Pharisees were the people who took religion seriously. And that certainly isn't all bad. The Pharisees were intent upon reflecting God's image in their daily living. Again, that's not all bad. A Pharisee would never be listed among the cheats and chislers - the extortionists and rapists - the DUI's and other disorderly characters of our world. Pharisees HONORED the establishment. Pharisees OBEYED the rules. Pharisees were DISCIPLINED beyond

So Christian friends -- we dare not condemn those whom we celebrate as the epitome of a virtuous religious life? Pharisees were not minimalists of the faith -- they not only tithed of their wages ... but of all their possessions, even dividends and capital gains. Tell me now - would anyone here be offended to be seated next to a Pharisee?? Aren't we looking for such faithful traits in new members?? Do we not rejoice when new members honor God by faithfully serving his church?? Do we not commend Christians who live by discipline and obedience to God's law? Are we not grateful for faithful friends who have made religion more than a superstitious cult? Do we not give thanks for those among us who diligently study and teach us and our children the faith?? Let's face it -- WE LOVE PHARISEES! WE WELCOME PHARISEES! WE DESIRE TO BEFRIEND PHARISEES! WE WANT NEIGHBORS THAT ARE PHARISEES! Because, in short, we all are Pharisees. We want to be seen as devout, dedicated, dutiful, determined believers in God! AND THERE'S ABSOLUTELY NOTHING WRONG WITH BEING THAT KIND OF BELIEVER!

So today - let's set the record straight -- Pharisees are good people. Moreover, Pharisees are faithful people. And even more - Pharisees are to be respected for their goodness and faithfulness. This parable is not saying that PHARISEES ARE BAD! BUT IT IS OFFERING A WARNING TO ALL PHARISEES ... which I hope I've already established includes all of us -- namely: PHARISEES ARE DEEPLY FORGETFUL OF WHOSE THEY ARE! In their religious fervor -- they forget why they came here in the first place, they forget they are already graced, and they forget they are yet sinful ... they still need help!! And such forgetfulness leads them to SELF-AFFECTATION, SELF-ADMIRATION, SELF-PITY, SELF-CONCERN, IN SHORT -- TO AN OBSESSION WITH SELF.

The publican went home justified -- in a right relationship with God -- not because he was good or moral or obedient or kind or righteous. Quite simply -- he had not forgotten the purpose OF COMING TO GOD -- TO GET HELP, MERCY, KINDNESS, FORGIVENESS, GUIDANCE. He came to the temple ... he came to pray BECAUSE THERE WAS ONLY ONE REASON TO COME TO THIS PLACE -- TO GET HELP ... TO LEAVE HERE DIFFERENTLY THAN HE CAME!

The Pharisee had forgotten the purpose of COMING TO THE LORD! He was so caught up in his own righteousness -- he was so caught up in himself -- he no longer needed anything from God. He simply came to remind God how great he already was. As the text most accurately says -- he came to "pray with

devout people feel this way - they have closed themselves off by their own pride or self-confidence. God cannot fill hearts or minds or hands that are tightly gripped. God cannot work miracles with those who have closed their lives to his touch and presence. The Pharisee left the temple pretty much as he had entered it -- UNCHANGED, UNJUSTIFIED, UNMOVED ... JUST AS NARROW AND CLOSED AND JUDGMENTAL AS HE HAD ENTERED IT! He did not leave a better person because he had left no room in his life for God to enter. He was totally filled up with himself and his own goodness.

Obviously - the parable is a warning to all of us who follow in the Pharisees footsteps. It beckons us to ask: Why are we here? Why do we worship? Why do we pray? Why are we Christians? Are we here to merely let God know how great we already are -- or have we come to be moved, changed, justified, helped, renewed by God??

The parable lifts up the publican because without a doubt he knew why he was there -- HE DESPARATELY NEEDED HELP! The parable offers the same message to us and all other Pharisees -- we come here FOR GOD'S HELP, FOR MERCY, FOR GUIDANCE!

First and foremost - we come here TO GROW IN GRACE. As God's faithful children - we no longer come to worship in order to tell God how victuous and moral we have been. God already knows everything anyway! The question is no longer: What must I do to be saved? Only people who haven't heard of God's love thru Jesus Christ ask that question! In Christ - the question becomes: What must I do that others might be saved?? Salvation is not a selfish question; salvation has been given through Jesus Christ. But salvation is still a servant question!

As each of us awake in the morning, the question is not: How can I use these 12 hours to save myself, but rather - how can I use these 12 hours so that others might know the saving love of Jesus Christ. The gospel frees you and me from self-concern, from self-admiration, from self-affectation! The gospel frees us from SELF-CONCERN in order that we might SERVE others! And that's why devout Pharisees come here -- to be helped, to be stimulated, to be challenged TO GROW IN GRACE. Not to brag about my tithe -- but to see ways that I can GROW IN MY GIVING ... GROW TO BE MORE LIKE CHRIST.

Secondly -- we come here TO LOOK UP TO GOD, rather than TO LOOK DOWN ON OTHERS. The purpose of worship and prayer and

Over and over, he repeated these degrading words about self. Soon his associate walked by -- and became very impressed with his senior's humility. So the associate knelt down and prayed fervently: Oh Lord, I am the worst of sinners. I am nothing. I am a wretched worm."

While the two pastors were thus praying - the custodian walked by and overheard them. Impressed with their devoutness, he knelt beside them and prayed: "Oh Lord, I too am the worst of sinners. I am nothing. I am a worm." The associate pastor stopped praying - looked over at the custodian - turned with a slight huff to the senior pastor and said: "Look now who thinks he's nothing!!"

WHEN WE STOP LOOKING UP TO GOD FOR GUIDANCE ... AND BEGIN LOOKING DOWN ON OTHERS FOR COMPARISONS -- then we have forgotten why we have come here in the first place. And soon sincere faith becomes self-conceit and social snobbishness.

Finally - we come here TO SEE OUR HELPLESSNESS ... TO SEE THAT WE TOO HAVE FALLEN SHORT OF THE GLORY OF GOD. The greatest danger for devout disciples is that they soon see themselves as self-made saints. The Pharisee in our text today didn't need help because he had graded his own exam, he had given himself all A's, he had appointed himself valedictorian of the class. No longer was he consulting with God or anyone else about his faithfulness -- because he had become his own judge and jury. And his verdict was plain and simple: "God you must be so proud of me ... you are so fortunate to have me ... too bad you can't clone others to be like me." He came NOT FOR HELP, but merely to "pray with himself."

Somehow the Pharisee had not learned the first lesson of faith: "The more we know God, the more we need God!" I am reminded of the first year seminarian who returned home to preach his first sermon. How well I remember myself in that first year. He was excited about all his new insights; he was full of higher and lower criticism of scripture; he was going to return to his home pulpit and set the record straight regarding decisive views of the Bible. He finished his sermon; he was convinced it was far superior to anything ever heard from that pulpit. He walked into the pulpit in his dazzling new alb. When the sermon hymn ended, he began and then went blank ... his voice totally left him. He struggled for several minutes, but finally left the pulpit in tears. After the service, he asked his home pastor what had happened. The old

-- WE COME FACE TO FACE WITH THE ONE WHO DIED FOR US ... not to teach us what WE can do, but to show us what no one else has done for us: FORGIVEN US JUST AS WE ARE! THROUGH HIS BODY AND BLOOD, WE HAVE BEEN CHANGED, RENEWED, JUSTIFIED FOREVER! There is no greater or more lasting help that has ever been given to Pharisees or publicans. When we enter this place in that spirit ... in need of God's renewing and forgiving love -- then we are equipped to offer the world more than self-righteous egotism.

God help us to always enter this place IN HIS SPIRIT -- READY TO GROW IN GRACE, ALWAYS LOOKING UP TO HIS EXAMPLE, AND FOREVER KNOWING OUR NEED FOR HIS HELP! For when we enter in that spirit -- we will always leave here justified ... changed ... different than we came.

AMEN.

PENTECOST XXIII

Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo

November 11, 1990 (CONSECRATION SUNDAY)

Peter R. Martyn, Pastor

"KEEPING THE PROMISE!"

The Lord said to Moses: 'Say to all the congregation the people of Israel, You shall be holy; for I the Lord your God am holy' Lev. 19:1-2

"And you became imitators of us and of the Lord ... so that you became an example of all believers ..." I Thes. 1:6

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and mind. You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Matt. 22:36,39

Patrick Ross, the Chief Executive Officer of Rax Int'l Restaurants, was recently elected Chairman of the Board of Wittenberg University. At our most recent Board Meeting in October, Mr. Ross outlined three mission functions that every Rax Restaurant upholds: 1) Quality food; 2) Fast, friendly service; and, 3) A clean dining environment. Rax calls the fulfillment of those objectives: KEEPING THE PROMISE. Every Rax executive, every restaurant manager, every single employee is trained, evaluated, and promoted on the basis of KEEPING THE PROMISE - Quality food, Fast friendly service, and A clean dining environment.

Consecration Sunday is truly a day for each of us to reflect upon our own personal and congregational mission and promises. Today we have said is a day TO LET OUR LIGHTS SHINE; or to apply the Rax philosophy to Hope Lutheran - there is no GREATER day than this for KEEPING THE PROMISE. I can assure you - if you attend the brunch today ... thanks to Ed & Lois Smith and their crew, you will receive the PROMISE - the best in QUALITY FOOD; FAST, FRIENDLY SERVICE; AND A CLEAN DINING ENVIRONMENT. But as much as we all like a good meal - KEEPING THE PROMISE on Consecration Sunday must exceed our own appetites.

So what's the principle of KEEPING THE PROMISE in this place? Obviously, we don't look to Rax Inter'l or any other principality or power of this world for inspiration on Consecration Sunday. We look to only one source of promise - God himself. For from the beginning, God promised Abraham and all his descendants that he was a God who could be trusted -- he would be forever faithful to his promises. And God delivered on his promises to Moses and the people of Israel. And he

Because we have been so graced by God, our mission (like every Rax Restaurant) is to keep the promise to our Creator. Obviously, quality food; fast, friendly service; and a clean dining environment must always be part of that promise at a Consecration Brunch! But God's mission -- as much as Lutherans in Toledo hate to admit it -- transcends the dining rooms and donut shops of America. KEEPING GOD'S PROMISE, first and foremost, is a HOLY BUSINESS, not merely a food concession! Second, KEEPING GOD'S PROMISE is a striving to imitate one and only one example of life in this world - the life of Jesus Christ. And finally, KEEPING GOD'S PROMISE clarifies emphatically that his boundaries of love are always THANKFUL GIVING, and nothing less!! Keeping the Promise means that we strive to live within his boundaries of love - and nothing less!

So, first and foremost, we have said that KEEPING THAT PROMISE IS A HOLY BUSINESS. The first lesson states, the Lord said to Moses: "Say to all the congregation - you shall be holy, for I the Lord am holy." What does it mean to be holy -- to be God's holy people? Quite simply, it means that we are set apart -- set apart not to feel good about ourselves, but set apart to act faithfully ... to do what is right for others.

When I was growing up, I often said to my parents - "I don't feel like going to church or SCS today!" And yet, I always went. I remember hearing my mother say, "I don't feel like baking cookies for that funeral reception today." Yet she always baked the cookies anyway. How often I have heard members say, "I don't feel like I should have to carry the load anymore in this congregation - I've done my share." Yet those members continue to come through year after year after year! Which one of us in our faith life hasn't said, "I don't feel like doing it anymore!" And yet, amazingly, 99.9% of the time, God's people always COME THROUGH and do it EVEN WHEN THEY SAID THEY DIDN'T FEEL LIKE DOING IT! Because "holiness," being set apart by God, is not a matter of how you or I feel -- it's a matter of knowing in your heart, mind, and soul what it right by God - AND THEN DOING IT! Holiness is comprehending what God would do under the circumstances ... and then acting on it faithfully.

Please recall that Jesus did not feel good about suffering and dying on the cross. He even sweat blood over it and asked God " to please take away this cup of suffering if

And promising that kind of holiness in heart, mind, and soul is but one small step from KEEPING THE NEXT PROMISE - IMITATING THE ULTIMATE EXPRESSION OF HOLINESS, JESUS CHRIST HIMSELF. Obviously, I am not some kind of googoo theologian or pompous pastor who truly believes that we can achieve the standard of Christ himself; but I am crazy enough and committed enough to believe that EVERY CHRISTIAN HAS NO GREATER DUTY THAN TO STRIVE FOR THE EXAMPLE OF CHRIST EACH AND EVERY DAY OF LIFE. And in practical terms - that means that you and I are constantly on the lookout for EXAMPLES who we believe best imitate the life of Christ ... so that we might imitate them.

When I graduated from the Luth School of Theology in Chicago (my seminary) I was almost 30 years old. IN those days there were not many second career seminarians. My friends and classmates were surprised that I accepted a Call to be an Assistant Pastor at a downtown, ALMOST INNER-CITY church in Milwaukee. Since I was one of the oldest graduates in the class, they simply felt that I would obviously accept a call to be the "head hancho" in some suburban parish.

As you can plainly see -- even among seminarians (who are trained to imitate Christ) there is a reluctance to imitate those persons who might serve as the best possible examples of Jesus Christ. How grateful I was to have had four years under the example of Rev. Charles Witt, the senior pastor at Redeemer, Milw. Over and over and over again, I heard Pastor Witt challenge Redeemer "to reach out beyond a survival mentality - to serve others like Christ rather than being obsessed with their own survival. How grateful I can be for the Spirit of Christ that I saw imitated in Chuch Witt. He sought to inspire every member to personalize Christ words -- "I have not come to be served, but to give my life as a ransom for others."

You and I have been blessed by that same Spirit of Christ because we have had the opportunity to imitate what was first imitated for us. Whether it's Redeemer, Milw or Hope, Toledo - not one of us has an excuse for not imitating the life of Christ. His spirit and example has been demonstrated for us for decades in this place. There is no greater challenge to this cong. or any other on Consecration Sunday -- we are to become nothing less than imitators of Christ our Lord. And we are competing with a marketing world that by and large contradicts KEEPING THIS PROMISE. Many of you have seen

Finally, KEEPING THE PROMISE means that we live within the boundaries of the love of God. Most of you are familiar with basketball courts. Two sets of parallel lines form the boundaries and serve to limit where the game can be played. Boundaries in basketball, just like boundaries in life, provide order and guidelines to help play the game. The team with the ball controls the tempo of the game doing almost anything it wants AS LONG AS IT STAYS WITHIN THE BOUNDARIES. However, if someone steps outside the parallel lines, the order of the game has been broken -- and that team forfeits the ball to the other.

Jesus was being questioned about the boundaries of the law by a law professor who was seeking to trick him. But Jesus responded by saying that KEEPING GOD'S PROMISE means that we live all of life within two parallel boundaries: WE LOVE GOD COMPLETELY and WE LOVE NEIGHBORS AS WE LOVE OURSELVES. Jesus embodied these two boundaries to perfection; every other law was secondary to these two. In essence - quite to the surprise of the Pharisee who wanted Jesus to make the law much more complicated - Jesus was saying you can do anything you want to do as long as you LOVE GOD COMPLETELY & LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.

Nothing speaks more powerfully about OUR CONSECRATION TO GOD AND ONE ANOTHER. And I have not found a more perfect illustration of KEEPING THIS PROMISE than one told by Shel Silverstein in his story, The Giving Tree. NOT only was this story told to me by a seminary professor, but I understand it was recently shared with our SCS children by one of our own leaders (thank you, Kirt). There was a boy and a tree; and in their own way, each of them loved the other. Every day the boy would gather leaves FROM the tree and make them into crowns to play king of the forest. The boy would climb the tree and eat its apples. They'd play "Hide & Seek," and when the boy was tired he'd rest in the tree's shade.

Time went by and the boy grew into a young man - too busy now to play in the tree. The tree was lonely. One day the boy came to the tree and the tree said: "Hey, come on boy, swing from my branches and eat my apples. "I'm too big to climb and play" the boy answered. "I want to buy things and have fun. Can you give me money" "I have no money," said the tree, "I only have leaves and apples. Take my apples and sell them - then you'll have money and you'll be happy."

So the boy cut the branches and built a house, and he was again happy. And again, he stayed away for a long time. When he returned, the tree rejoiced and said: "Hey, boy, come on and play in the shadow of my trunk!" But the boy answered: "I am too old and too sad to play; I want a boat that will take me far away on a cruise. Can you give me a boat?"

The tree answered: "Cut down my trunk, and make yourself a boat." So the boy cut down the trunk, made a boat, and sailed away. Years and years passed; finally the boy returned - now a very old man. He walked with a cane and was very sad. But the tree saw him yet as a young boy.

"I am sorry, boy" said the tree, "but I have nothing left to give to make you happy. MY apples are gone; my branches are gone; and my trunk is gone. There's nothing left but my stump. "Don't be sorry" said the boy, "I'm too old to climb and play ... I have no teeth to eat apples ... my family is gone so I need no house. I no longer have energy to sail my boat, and if I did, I wouldn't no where to go. I just need some quiet - some peace - a place to lie down and rest.

"Well," said the tree, "come and rest on my stump. Rest yourself on me forever." So the boy laid down ... and at last, the boy was happy again. And, as the Lord of the forest looked down - the boy and the tree were ONE. And the Lord of the forest sighed for such peace & love on earth.

Nothing more graphically illustrates God's love for us as this tree in the forest. Never once did the tree say: "Hey, this isn't fair - I'm not getting anything out of this deal." That's not a question for God or for those who live within the boundardies of his love. God is a thankful giver. All God seeks to do is to give. AND LIKEWISE, ALL THOSE WHO LIVE WITHIN HIS BOUNDARIES OF LOVE DO THE SAME -- they love with heart, mind, soul and strength. It's not a matter of giving back 10%, or 20%, or any other quantitative measure -- it's loving like God ... GIVING ALL YOU CAN GIVE BECAUSE THAT'S THE LIFE OF A THANKFUL GIVER. To give anything less than the potential that God has given us is NOT TO LOVE GOD with heart, mind, soul and strength!

Like the tree in the forest, like the holiness of our God, like those who have always imitated Christ - we give until we have nothing left to give. For such giving is from