

2ND SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Lutheran Church of the Master - Troy

June 16, 1974

(1st Sermon & Sunday as pastor of the Master)

"JUST SAY THE WORD"

"But say the word and my servant will be cured. I know, for in my position I am myself under orders, with soldiers under me. I say to one 'Go,' and he goes; to another, 'Come here,' and he comes; and to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it.' When Jesus heard this, he admired the man, and turning to the crowd that was following him, he said, 'I tell you, nowhere, even in Israel, have I found faith like this.' Luke 7:7-9

This past week I received a letter from my former associate in Milwaukee. The first sentence read: "It's not easy to be the Savior of Redeemer Church." How true that is for any one of us who finds himself in a savior position. It's not easy nor possible to fulfill the role of a savior.

One man has succeeded in doing this. But can you imagine the stress - the strain - the real difficulty Jesus must have encountered during his ~~s~~bbreviated earthly ministry as Savior.

Oh, I'm sure ^{he} sensed some satisfaction. But imagine the frustration of having constant demands. Crowds always clamoring for the quick cure. Everybody thinking that he has a greater right to the Savior's time than the next guy. Never a moment of privacy - no chance for a real vacation - always having to fulfill another person's need, and then suffering death as a reward for it all.

Yes, this son of a carpenter became the Savior for mankind - he accepted the vocation of Savior - he accepted the calling of freeing others from their burdens ONLY TO ADD A GREATER burden to his own life.

Some of us like to play this savior role now and then - there is sometimes a momentary glory in it. But the cost is more than any one of us can bear. No one of us is capable of being the Savior - of anyone or anything - and that surely goes for the 32 year old pastor of the Master.

God has given us ONLY one Savior - born of a teen-age virgin. And this man had the audacity to really desire to help other people. He even had the audacity NOT to be a parochial or ethnic Savior. His concern was not only for his immediate family, or friends, or even his great Jewish nation.

He was a Savior who showed mercy NOT BECAUSE he owed anyone any favors - NOT BECAUSE someone smiled at him the right way - NOT BECAUSE he agreed with another's political or social philosophy - BUT RATHER - he showed mercy - he helped - he forgave because he loved in the image of his Father. And his Father's love was directed toward anyone in need.

To be this kind of a Savior was NO EASY task - but it's the kind of a Savior that you and I CAN REALLY believe in - because this Savior's love is always given to us, regardless of who we are or what we have done.

It was this same man from Nazareth who was the object of a Centurion's request for help. Now you and I know that a Centurion was hardly regarded as part of the Jewish "in-crowd." The Centurion was a Roman soldier - and we all know of the atrocities suffered at the hands of this army. Yet here was a Roman commanding officer requesting the miraculous help of the Jewish Messiah.

Obviously, the Centurion was a friend of the Jews. We're told he was a friend of the nation who had helped to build the temple. Nevertheless, he was the commanding officer for a "century," a hundred Roman foot soldiers.

Centurions were the backbone of the army - much like Sergeants in our own military. The discipline and efficiency of the legion as a fighting unit depended upon them. They were career-army officers - their office was the highest to which the ordinary soldier might aspire. So there can be little question as to this officer's national-political loyalties.

Yet, here was this Gentile - the first Gentile that we know of to relate to Jesus - this mighty officer and foreign authority to the Jewish nation -- here was a STRANGER, who was confident of the help of God through his son, Jesus Christ.

Yes, the really incredible focus of today's proclamation for us IS THAT A STRANGER to God's chosen people BECOMES THEIR EXAMPLE of complete confidence in the power of God. It is the Centurion - ~~not~~ a high priest . . . not a respected Pharisee or scribe . . . not a devout Jew, but a Centurion who says: "Say the word and my servant will be cured."

A Centurion - a foreigner - even often a despised foreigner - sets the pace for all followers of this Savior from Nazareth. Jesus himself was astonished - he says: I tell you, nowhere, even in Israel, have I found faith like this."

What greater affirmation - what greater epitaph could we have than to have our Lord say about any of us: "He trusted in God's power and love, even more than those who had a better advantage."

So, what can you and I learn from this stranger - the Centurion?

I would think that first we might learn something by reflecting upon the position of the Centurion. He was an authority - a "top dog" - he knew how to give orders and commands, and

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yet he realized ULTIMATE^L he was under the authority of a far greater power - the love and direction of God. He recognized that ULTIMATELY we're all under the power and dominion of God. Yes, he TRUSTED that ULTIMATELY only God's love, mercy, and forgiveness can solve the alienations, the illnesses, the predicaments of life.

Many of us in this congregation are in ONE SENSE like that Centurion. We may not be strangers to God's people, but many of us are called to be authorities - to be "top dogs" in our professional life. And it's good that many of us have aspired to such leadership.

But we must ask ourselves - what ULTIMATELY rules our decision and policy-making? What authority do we place our ULTIMATE trust in in our work-a-day relationships? I heard this past week of a business executive who placed his ultimate trust in *his own craftiness - creating* a destructive, *alienating* spirit that has caused much turmoil for many other people.

That top ranking authority still needs very much God's love and forgiveness - but he also needs to be cured from the *disease* that he is spreading by inflicting his arrogance and pettiness upon others. Yes, how much our Centurion reminds us of our need to TRUST in God's power of love and mercy!

But a second application demands attention - especially for persons like me, who often get uptight with the narrowness of military thinking. Jesus offers mercy to the person, regardless of his ideological ^{position}.

Jesus responded to a Roman soldier. I'm sure he was not greatly pleased with the Roman military bureaucracy. I'm sure he hated the mindset of military atrocities. But God's love through his son ALWAYS penetrated through the roles that mankind plays. God's mercy and love IS NOT limited to any particular uniform - to any flag - or to any particular pigmentation of skin. RATHER HIS LOVE IS DIRECTED TO THE CRY OF HUMAN NEED.

My Christian friends - he calls us into that confidence of his love. We all have our political-social identities - BUT WE DROP THESE MASKS WHEN WE LOVE ACCORDING TO HIS EXAMPLE. Yes, I know, it's not easy to drop those worldly identities when it means that we must love someone we can't agree with. But such was Jesus' relationship to a Centurion - and such is OUR TRUST in his power.

Finally - a last consideration by way of comparison. We are NOT strangers to God's love, nor to his people. How does our confidence in his power compare to the Centurion's?

~~One simple application -~~ Do we express BY THE WAY WE LIVE a confidence in God's love with our children? Do they really perceive our TRUST in God's way and his love? We all know the answer to this - for children have a way of reflecting back to us THEIR CONFIDENCE level in our love. If they're giving us TRUST-LOVE vibrations, then we can be assured that we are sharing the confidence of God's mercy and love.

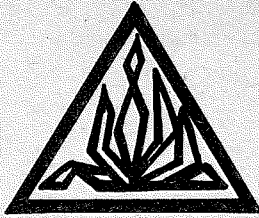
And so Fathers - sons - and daughters - yes mothers and grandparents as well - on this Father's Day, God calls us to express our confidence in his love to one another. Even if we've become strangers, we can begin ANEW today to share his love with each other. Because with the power of his love, strangers are most capable of receiving and sharing his ~~RENEWING~~ *power a renewing power that unites.*

So, like the Centurion, let's place our confidence in his example -- let's share with each other THE TIME, THE ENERGY, AND THE LIFE that our Savior has offered us. For our NEED for this Savior and his ministry of love CAN NEVER GO ON VACATION.

TODAY +

Let's say HIS word to one another [^] THROUGHOUT THE SUMMER.

AMEN



CELEBRATE

THE SECOND SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST • June 16, 1974

THE DAY

The centurion's faith is a model for our own: "Say the word and my servant will be cured." And Jesus' response? He admired the centurion. He was surprised and delighted at the faith of a Gentile, and he was full of joy because he had found the response of a believing heart. Here is a vision to sustain us through the week.

THE CONFESSION OF SINS

[The Act of Reconciliation]

Minister: Let us confess our sins before God and in the presence of one another.

Assistant: O King of Justice and Prince of Peace, too often we are insincere in word or deed. But speak your word, O Lord,

All: **Forgive and heal.**

Assistant: Too often we are arrogant and cruel. But speak your word, O Lord,

All: **Forgive and heal.**

Assistant: Too often we are impatient and quick to find fault. But speak your word, O Lord,

All: **Forgive and heal.**

Assistant: Too often we are faithless and unbelieving. But speak your word, O Lord,

All: **Forgive and heal.**

Assistant: Too often we attend to trivialities and neglect the weightier matters of your law. But speak your word, O Lord,

All: **Forgive and heal.**

Assistant: Too often we worry over petty faults, and are blind to gross injustices in business or in public life. But speak your word, O Lord,

All: **Forgive and heal.**

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

Lord God of all nations, you have revealed your will to your people and promised your help to all men. Help us to hear and to do what you command, that darkness may be overcome by the power of your light; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

THE PSALMODY

Psalm 117; Antiphon, verse 1a

May be used responsively or antiphonally

Antiphon (leader): Praise the Lord, all nations!

Praise him, all peoples!

His constant love for us is strong,
and his faithfulness is eternal.

Praise the Lord!

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): Praise the Lord, all nations!

(TEV)

THE LECTIONARY

FIRST LESSON: 1 Kings 8:41-43

SOLOMON prayed:

"To the foreigner, likewise, who is not of your people Israel, but comes from a distant land to honor you (since men will learn of your great name and your mighty hand and your outstretched arm), when he comes and prays toward this temple, listen from your heavenly dwelling. Do all that the foreigner asks of you, that all the peoples of the earth may know your name, may fear you as do your people Israel, and may acknowledge that this temple which I have built is dedicated to your honor." (NAB)

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 RICHARD SNOAD, ORGANIST
 VIRGINIA WITTE, DIRECTOR

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WELCOME to this house of prayer. We are glad you are able to worship this morning. Join us in this week's activities. If you are visiting, please sign our Guest Book.

June 16, 1974

Organ Prelude
 Greeting, Parish Notes
WE PREPARE BY CONFESSION
 The Processional Hymn Page 487
 The Invocation Response - Amen
 Confession of sins, The Peace Celebrate
WE PRAISE GOD
 The Psalmody Celebrate
 The Gloria Patri, Kyrie Page 43
 The Gloria in Excelsis Page 49
 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 537
 The Sermon "Just Say the Word"
WE THANK GOD
 Offering
 Anthem "God of our Fathers" George Warren
 Offertory III "Create in me..." Page 56
 Prayer of Church
 Order for installation of new LCW officers
 (including The Lord's Prayer)
WE DEPART TO SERVE
 The Benediction (three-fold amen) Page 70
 The Recessional Hymn Page 323
 The Postlude

LAY ASSISTANT: Kim Lawrence

NURSERY for infants thru kindergarten only.

CONGREGATIONAL MEETING immediately following this morning's worship. Five new councilmen to be elected, as well as the presentation of Committee reports. The quality of faith, life and direction of the congregation are largely determined by your Church Council and Committees. Your attendance at this meeting will be crucial for the future of the Master.

ORDER OF INSTALLATION today for the following Kutheran Church Women, who were elected at the General Meeting last Tuesday. As we share in the Installation for them this morning, let us extend our sincere thanks to last years leaders, and congratulations and appreciation to the newly elected officers for their leadership and service as we continue to pray for ongoing guidance and inspiration for our LCW program.

PRESIDENT: Nancy Puls

V. PRESIDENT: Margaret Wilson

SECRETARY: Tammy Mook

TREASURER: Arline Barnes

CHRISTIAN SERVICE: Yvonne Parks

CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP: Sylvia Bouvier

HOSPITALITY: Maud Davidson, Marion Pine

CHRISTIAN EDUCATION: Marilyn Winsand

Kathy Ramos

CIRCLE LEADERS:

Morning: Margaret Hier

Afternoon: Dee Delimonte

SPECIAL ORGANIZATIONAL COUNCIL MEETING, Tues.,

June 18, at 7:30 p.m. at the church. All church council representatives will be installed at the worship service next Sunday, June 23rd.

ALTAR FLOWERS are given to The Glory of God, in memory of Mrs. Coyles father, and brother, by the Coyle family.

GERANIUMS brightening the church entrance-way were placed there by Bob Lawrence as a tribute of thanks to all those who worked on the parsonage. Thank you, too, Bob.

BRING SNAPSHOT size picture of your family, that it may be placed in the space reserved for your family, on the bulletin board in the Fellowship Room. Amos Winsand will take the picture for you, following today's service.

SECOND LESSON: Galatians 1:1-10

PAUL, AN APOSTLE sent, not by men or by any man, but by Jesus Christ and God his Father who raised him from the dead—I and my brothers who are with me send greetings to the churches in Galatia. We wish you the favor and peace of God our Father and of the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins, to rescue us from the present evil age, as our God and Father willed—to him be glory for endless ages. Amen.

I am amazed that you are so soon deserting him who called you in accord with his gracious design in Christ, and are going over to another gospel. But there is no other. Some who wish to alter the gospel of Christ must have confused you. For even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel not in accord with the one we delivered to you, let a curse be upon him! I repeat what I have just said: if anyone preaches a gospel to you other than the one you received, let a curse be upon him!

Whom would you say I am trying to please at this point—men or God? Is this how I seek to ingratiate myself with men? If I were trying to win man's approval, I would surely not be serving Christ! (NAB)

GOSPEL: Luke 7:1-10

WHEN *JESUS* had finished addressing the people, he went to Capernaum. A centurion there had a servant whom he valued highly; this servant was ill and near to death. Hearing about Jesus, he sent some Jewish elders with the request that he would come and save his servant's life. They approached Jesus and pressed their petition earnestly: "He deserves this favor from you," they said, "for he is a friend of our nation and it is he who built us our synagogue." Jesus went with them; but when he was not far from the house, the centurion sent friends with this message: "Do not trouble further, sir; it is not for me to have you under my roof, and that is why I did not presume to approach you in person. But say the word and my servant will be cured. I know, for in my position I am myself under orders, with soldiers under me. I say to one, 'Go,' and he goes; to another, 'Come here,' and he comes; and to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it." When Jesus heard this, he admired the man, and, turning to the crowd that was following him, he said, "I tell you, nowhere, even in Israel, have I found faith like this." And the messengers returned to the house and found the servant in good health. (NEB)

THE PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

[The Intercessions]

Minister: O God, our Heavenly Father, your Holy Spirit teaches the hearts of the faithful and guides us into all truth; look in mercy, we pray, upon your world, your chosen people, and your family of faith gathered here. We lift our prayers on behalf of all for whom you have taught us to pray:

Assistant: For all who lead your people—the church—as presidents, bishops, pastors, teachers, missionaries, evangelists: Lord, in your mercy,

All: **Hear our prayer.**

Assistant: For all who are burdened with the responsibilities of public office—all rulers, members of legislatures, judges, magistrates, mayors: Lord, in your mercy,

All: **Hear our prayer.**

Assistant: For all who are engaged in research, learning, and scientific investigation—teachers, administrators, professors, students, technicians, engineers, librarians: Lord, in your mercy,

All: **Hear our prayer.**

Assistant: For all who serve in ministries of healing—doctors, nurses, orderlies, surgeons, diagnosticians, pharmacists: Lord, in your mercy,

All: **Hear our prayer.**

Assistant: For all who face any special need, all who are in debt or poverty, all who are facing difficult decisions, all who are overcome by circumstances greater than their strength: Lord, in your mercy,

All: **Hear our prayer.**

*Here may be offered other prepared petitions,
the people responding, "Hear 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.

All: **Amen.**

2ND SUNDAY OF PENTECOST
Lutheran Church of the Master, Troy
June 20, 1976

"FREEDOM FROM RULES AND REGULATIONS?"

"The sabbath was made for man, not man for the sabbath; so the Son of man is lord even of the sabbath."
Mark 2:28

"FREEDOM"! How often have we heard this glorious word during this bicentennial year. "Let freedom ring!" "Proclaim Liberty." It's one of our deepest passions - the desire to be free!

For anyone who has lived in a home imprisoned by economics - where every desire of the family is met by the words "We can't afford it" -- for that person, freedom is a real hunger. Likewise, for a youth shut in by a family that only responds in the negative - No, no, no. Likewise, for a nation controlled by a dictator or colonial power like South Africa. So it was that Patrick Henry rightly cried, "Give me liberty or give me death."

Yet - freedom talk is often so shallow. Too often freedom does not deliver what it seems to promise. Families gain financial independence and wreck themselves with it. Youth gain the freedom of expression and make misery of it. Nations gain liberty and find neither peace nor prosperity nor happiness.

Yes, so often with liberty comes death. Why is that so?? Jesus deals with that in today's text.

The issue is the sabbath day. And if there ever was a restrictive day, it had to be the Jewish sabbath. Rule upon rule determined just exactly what you could do and could not do - to the smallest detail.

For instance, the Pharisees wouldn't even drag a stick along the ground on the sabbath - because as it left a mark in the soil, it would be classified as plowing. Only 39 deeds were permissible on the Sabbath - a man could carry nothing heavier than a fig on that day. They even debated the propriety of a man with a wooden leg traveling on the sabbath --

because his leg was heavier than a fig. A woman was forbidden to look in a mirror on the sabbath because she might see a gray hair and be tempted to pluck it out - that would be classified as reaping.

Sabbath became a science to be studied rather than a Divine providence to be enjoyed.

And so along came Jesus and his disciples walking through a grain field and picking grain and eating it. That was really FREEDOM -- really FREEDOM FROM THE RULES AND REGULATIONS.

One might almost be tempted to think that Jesus must have been a pretty groovy guy to follow. After all, it sounds like he advocated freedom from man-made rules. Sounds like he was really free -- someone who did his own thing.

But Jesus was hardly a do-your-own-thing kind of person. When the pharisees ~~attack~~ him, he does not make the claim that he or anyone else can do anything he wants to do. Instead - he proclaims two principles of Christian freedom:

First - that human need overrides the sabbath rules-- even David broke those rules when he and his men were hungry. The sabbath was made for man.

Second - that loyalty to him - the Lord of the sabbath - is the basis for any freedom from the sabbath rules - or any rules or regulations.

Those principles are a far cry from a philosophy which says DO YOUR OWN THING -- unhindered by rules, regulations, or loyalties. Christian freedom is a FREEDOM that comes through allegiance to Jesus and accepts responsibility for the needs of mankind.

Obviously - that's something man often does not want to hear. We would often rather have Jesus smash all the rules and regulations -- so that we can be what some people call "totally free" -- which really means - totally imprisoned by our passions.

But Christian freedom always has a siamese twin --

namely, responsibility. There can be no freedom unless there is linked with it an allegiance to something higher - a willingness to assume responsibility for others. The do-your-own-thing mentality never leads to freedom, but ~~often~~ to anarchy.

We've seen that kind of anarchy in the 60's from the left-wing do your own thing people -- and in the early 70's; that same anarchy was created by rightwing leaders who talked about law and order but lived by their own rules and regulations.

If there is any one sin that has really grabbed us good in this age - it is the sin of being irresponsible and still claiming freedom. Whether it be in relation to national issues and just the nuts and bolts labor of work in the church -- we so often think we can be free without being responsible.

Just listen to the campaign rhetoric so far this year. Is any candidate raising the issue of justice and equality -- or the issue of hunger in the world? Has any candidate yet suggested that we lower our standard of living.

To do so would guarantee defeat -- politicians know that people want to keep what they have and add some more. And so they attack giant bureaucracies -- that's always a popular battle cry. But just make sure they don't attack the bureaucracy that puts the bread & butter on our tables.

And we call this freedom?!? We may call it freedom, but we know it's really selfishness - or more traditionally, SIN.

Likewise - in the moral arena today. we are told not to repress our desires - to do as we please -- that anything goes -- that nothing is wrong if it gives us pleasure. That, we are told, is freedom.

But such freedom has no higher loyalties. Much like the gospel today, there are times that rules and regulations must be given up FOR HIGHER LOYALTIES-- like the alleviation of hunger, or injustice, or freedom from oppressive systems.

When like the jewish sabbath, rules are made for the sake of rules -- then they need to be abolished.

But if our purpose is to have freedom, then we must have rules that are founded on higher loyalties than the self -- and founded upon the acceptance of the responsibilities that go with freedom.

Back in the garden, God made man free, with dominion over all the earth. But that freedom and dominion IS ONLY OURS SO LONG AS our first allegiance is to God -- who made us and the earth.

Christ came to offer us that allegiance once again. It is an allegiance that is often broken by sin -- but can be remade through the forgiveness that he offers and that we offer each other.

And in that allegiance to Christ, lies the freedom to be what we were made to be. Freedom to be servants for his sake.

Freedom to even be free from rules and regulations which do not serve his higher authority -- for he is the lord of lords, and king of kings.

AMEN

PENTECOST II

LITH CHURCH OF THE MASTER, TROY

MAY 28, 1978 11 A.M.

"WHEN THE FLOODS COME, THEN WHAT?"

"Every one who hears these words of mine and does them will be like the wise man who built his house upon the rock; and the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat upon that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock." Matt 7:24-25

LIVING IN GREENTREES SUBDIVISION IS A DAILY REMINDER OF LIVING ON A PILE OF SAND WITH AN EVER-FLOWING RIVER FLOWING ETERNALLY. I AM CERTAIN THAT GREENTREES MUST SURELY TAKE FIRST PLACE AMONG SUMP-PUMP RUNNING IN TROY -- NOT AN HOUR PASSES THAT THE SUMP PUMP DOESN'T FLUSH A FEW MORE GALLONS FROM THE FOUNDATION OF THE HOUSE. ONE OF THESE DAYS WE MAY AWAKE TO FIND, THAT MUCH LIKE NOAH AND THE ARK, WE HAVE FLOATED INTO LAKE ST. CLAIR.

LIKewise, FOR THOSE OF US WHO HAVE TRAVELED TO THE TOP OF THE PLAZA HOTEL, OR THE HANCOCK OR SEARS TOWERS, OR TO THE TORONTO CN TOWER -- ONE WONDERS AS YOU'RE UP THERE SWAYING IN THE BREEZE -- WHAT KIND OF FOUNDATION IS THIS PLACE REALLY ON?? IS IT REALLY DOWN INTO SOLID ROCK - OR JUST DRIFTING ON THE SAND OF TIME, READY TO CRASH DOWN UNDER THE STRAIN OF A GOOD WIND?

WELL FOR CERTAIN - CHRIST PICKED A GREAT METAPHOR WHEN HE CHOSE TO TALK ABOUT ETERNAL VALUES IN TERMS OF THE PARABLE OF THE BUILDER. FOR ANY OF US WHO HAVE BUILT A HOME OR VISITED ONE OF THESE GIANT SKYSCAPERS KNOWS HOW IMPORTANT THE AREAS OF FOUNDATION --

ARCHITECT-BUILDER -- AND ENDURANCE ARE IN LIFE. THE CHARACTER OF ANY BUILDING IS OFTEN A FACTOR OF THESE THREE THINGS -- ITS FOUNDATION, ITS ARCHITECT-BUILDER, AND ITS ENDURANCE AS MEASURED BY THE TESTS OF LIFE.

LIKEWISE - THE CHARACTER OF EVERY PERSON -- OR SHOULD WE SAY THE FAITH-SUBSTANCE OF EVERY PERSON IS DIRECTLY RELATED TO THESE THREE ESSENTIAL BUILDING COMPONENTS -- THE FOUNDATION - THE ARCHITECT-BUILDER - AND THE ENDURANCE TESTS.

WHAT IS THE FOUNDATION -- THE BASIS -- THE STUFF OF OUR LIVES -- ON WHAT FOUNDATION HAVE YOU AND I ANCHORED OUR LIVES?

"ROCK" - OBVIOUSLY STANDS FOR ETERNAL THINGS A NEVER-ENDING RELATIONSHIP. BENEATH ALL THE SURFACE WISDOM OF THE WORLD - THERE IS CHRIST, THE ROCK. THE THOUGHTFUL PERSON DIGS INTO HIS TRUTH UNTIL ON THAT FOUNDATION HIS LIFE RESTS. AND OF COURSE - THE FOUNDATION IS NOT SEEN -- NONE OF US CAN REALLY JUDGE HOW DEEP ONE IS ANCHORED INTO CHRIST. IN FACT, THE FOOLISH MAN LOOKS AT HIS HOUSE AND SAYS -- "MY, OH MY, ON THE SURFACE MY HOUSE LOOKS SO MUCH SUPERIOR TO HIS -- SURELY IT IS MORE HANDSOME, THEREFORE IT MUST BE BETTER."

THERE IS THE GREAT PITFALL OF ^{LIFE} ~~FAITH~~ -- BASING OUR LIVES UPON SUPERFICIAL APPEARANCES. -- ~~THE~~ FOOL LIVES FOR APPEARANCES -- THE PERSON OF FAITH LIVES FOR SUBSTANCE -- THAT WHICH IS ANCHORED IN THE ROCK -- THAT WHICH DOESN'T SHOW IN APPEARANCES, BUT WHICH DOES SHOW IN LABORS OF LOVE.

YES, WHAT A DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE FOUNDATIONS ^{FOR} OF BUILDING A HOME -- OR BUILDING ONE'S RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD. FAITH IS NEVER INSTANTLY ANCHORED -- BECAUSE THAT FAITH IS PUTTING YOUR TRUST IN A RELATIONSHIP OF SAND. A FAITH IN THE ROCK OF CHRIST TAKES A LIFETIME OF HARD WORK TO ANCHOR IT DEEPLY INTO THE BEDROCK OF ETERNITY.

SECONDLY -- BUILDING A HOME OR BUILDING A CHRISTIAN CHARACTER IS DEEPLY DEPENDENT UPON THE ARCHITECT-BUILDER. AS I VISIT NEW HOMES IN THIS AREA, I AM AMAZED AT THE QUALITY OF BUILDER COMPETENCE THAT YIELDS \$100,000 OF HARD EARNED MONEY. IT'S OBVIOUS THAT AMERICAN VALUES HAVE CHANGED -- WE BUILD FOR THE PRESENT, NOT FOR THE FUTURE.

THERE IS A STORY OF A RICH MAN WHO ENGAGED A BUILDER TO BUILD THE FINEST HOUSE YOU HAVE EVER DREAMED OF. NO EXPENSE WAS SPARED - AND THE BUILDER WAS PLEASED WITH HIS WORK. AND THEN THE RICH MAN SAID: "THIS HOUSE IS YOURS; YOU MUST NOW LIVE IN IT." IT WAS ONLY THEN THAT THE BOTCHES STARED THIS BUILDER IN THE FACE; ONLY THEN DID HE REALIZE HOW MUCH BETTER HE COULD HAVE DONE HIS JOB. A MAN MUST LIVE IN WHAT HE BUILDS.

TOO MANY PEOPLE TODAY NO LONGER USE JESUS CHRIST AS THEIR ARCHITECT-BUILDER. HIS BLUEPRINT CALLS FOR BOTH A VERTICAL ~~LINE~~ AND HORIZONTAL CROSSBEAM. HIS PLAN DEMANDS DEPENDENCE UPON GOD'S GRACE -- AND OBEDIENCE IN ANSWER TO THAT GRACE TO YOUR FELLOWMAN. THE CROSS IS AN INTEGRAL DIMENSION WHEN CHRIST IS THE BUILDER OF OUR LIVES.

BUT JESUS CHRIST AND CONTEMPORARY BUILDERS ARE OFTEN

AT ODDS -- CONTEMPORARY BUILDERS STRESS THE IMPORTANCE OF BUILDING FOR THE PLEASURES OF THE PRESENT -- THEIR PHILOSOPHY IS "TO HELL WITH THE FUTURE!" DON'T WORRY ABOUT TOMORROW - LIVE FOR TODAY, EAT - DRINK - AND BE MERRY! AND THEN PEOPLE ASK: I WONDER WHY THERE'S SO MUCH CHAOS, VIOLENCE, WAR, AND BAD NEWS IN OUR WORLD?

LET'S FACE IT -- MUCH OF OUR SOCIETY IS FOLLOWING THE DIRECTIONS OF A VERY BAD ARCHITECT-BUILDER!

WHICH LEADS TO THE THIRD POINT OF TODAY'S PARABLE -- THE ENDURANCE TEST. EVERY HOUSE IS TESTED -- LIKEWISE, EVERY PERSON. PROVIDENCE HAS DIFFERENT SEASONS. NO MAN ESCAPES TEMPTATION, DESTRUCTION, SORROW, OR THE CLAIMS OF RESPONSIBILITY. AND OFTEN, "THE FLASH STORMS" THUNDER IN WITHOUT ANY WARNING! WHOSE HOUSE STANDS THE TEST? WHICH PEOPLE MAKE IT THROUGH THE ENDURANCE TESTS OF TIME?

YOU KNOW THE FACTS AND SO DO I - EVERY ONE OF US FROM A PHYSICAL POINT OF VIEW IS LIVING ON A FOUNDATION OF SAND! EVERY ONE OF US PHYSICALLY WILL EXPERIENCE THE GREAT FALL CAUSED BY THE STORM OF EXTINCTION. BUT HOW WILL WE HANDLE THAT STORM -- OR ANY OF THE OTHERS TEMPESTS OF TIME?

AGAIN - WE COME BACK TO THE ISSUE OF THE REAL FOUNDATION OF LIFE -- WHEN THE STORMS COME, ARE WE ANCHORED INTO AN EVERLASTING RELATIONSHIP. OR HAVE WE FASTENED OURSELVES TO THE SHIFTING SANDS.

YES - IT'S ON THE ENDURANCE TRACK OF TIME THAT A HOME

IS REALLY TESTED. LIKewise, THE TRUE FAITH OF EVERY INDIVIDUAL IS TESTED ON THE SAME TRACK.

THE PERSON WHO LIVES FOR THE MOMENT -- THE PERSON WHO LIVES ANY OLD WAY -- THE PERSON WHO RELIES TOTALLY UPON HIMSELF AND HIS GOOD WORKS -- ALL THESE PEOPLE WILL HAVE A GREAT FALL WHEN THE TEMPESTOUS STORMS HIT -- ESP. WHEN THE LAST BELL TOLLS. WHETHER WE HAVE PUT OUR FAITH IN PLEASURE OR OUR OWN GOOD WORKS -- WE SOON LEARN THAT SUCH FAITH IS BUILT UPON A SHORT TERM FOUNDATION -- THAT'S LIVING ONLY ON THE SURFACE OF LIFE.

THERE ARE MANY PEOPLE WHO SAY, "LORD, LORD" -- MANY PEOPLE WHO MOUTH THE RIGHT RELIGIOUS WORDS -- BUT THEIR LIVES ARE NOT REALLY ANCHORED IN THE ROCK, JESUS CHRIST. THERE ARE MANY PEOPLE WHO ARE WORSHIPPING NATURE THIS WEEKEND - AND THEY WILL WORSHIP NATURE ALL SUMMER. AND THEN WILL COME THE WINDS AND STORMS OF TIME -- AND NATURE WILL PASS AWAY. AND THEY WILL STAND IN THEIR OWN FOOLISH NAKEDNESS, SAYING -- "HEY, WHAT'S GOING ON?"

YES, MANY PEOPLE BUILD THEIR LIVES ON THE SHIFTING SANDS OF TIME -- THEY EVEN INCLUDE IN THEIR LIVES THE APPEARANCE OF FAITH. BUT THEN THE FLOODS COME, AND WHOOSH -- IT'S AS IF THEY HAD NEVER REALIZED THAT THERE IS A DEEPER FOUNDATION THAN THE APPEARANCES OF LIFE.

BUT NOT SO FOR THOSE OF YOU WHO CONTINUE TO ANCHOR YOUR LIVES IN THE ROCK OF LIFE. OH - YOU TOO WILL ENCOUNTER THE DESTRUCTIVE FLOODS AND WINDS -- AND YOU TOO WILL SEE THE SURFACE THINGS DESTROYED -- BUT YOU WILL NOT

GIVE UP YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD AT THAT TIME. YOU WILL NOT LET THE DESTRUCTIVE WINDS AND RAINS OF LIFE ALTER YOUR FOUNDATION. BECAUSE JESUS CHRIST IS NOT ALTERED BY THE FLOODS AND DESTRUCTIVE FORCES OF LIFE. FOR PEOPLE ANCHORED TO HIM -- LIFE GOES ON, WHETHER ON EARTH OR IN HEAVEN. LIVE NEVER ENDS.

SO MY FRIENDS, WHEN THE FLOODS COME, THEN WHAT?
JUST STAY WHERE YOU ARE -- ANCHORED TO CHRIST!

Luth Church of the Master

PENTECOST 2

June 17, 1979

"WHO'S THE HEAD OF YOUR HOUSEHOLD?"

"For it is not ourselves that we are preaching, but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. ... The Sabbath was made for the sake of man, and not man for the Sabbath: therefore the Son of Man is sovereign even over the Sabbath."

II Cor. 4:5; Mark 2:28

On Mother's Day several weeks ago, I sought to apply the text to that particular cultural celebration. Since I don't want to be accused of discrimination - I will try to do the same today with Father's Day.

So, first let's make a couple of general observations about Father's Day. My personal feeling is that Mother's Day gets much more public billing than Father's Day. I personally think this is regrettable - because it fosters the notion that fathers have a kind of secondary responsibility to their families.

But even more to the point - today's texts do not lend themselves neatly to a Father's Day focus. Instead, they strongly emphasize the Lordship of Christ to be manifested by the human family. And yet it's at this very point that we can jump into the text and apply it to Father's Day.

I have intentionally given a rather leading title to today's sermon. For some people in the Christian Church, the answer to this question is given without hardly batting an eye -- the head of the household, they say, is always the father. And of course they will rummage around verses in Ephesians and I Peter to support their position.

But how sad that these same people don't seem to see the stronger authority in today's text. . . .

Where Paul clearly says that in the Christian community we do not hold one ~~an~~ another up above someone else - but that the head of this household of faith AND OF OUR FAMILY HOUSEHOLDS is none other than Jesus Christ.

As long as Christ is the head - then it really doesn't matter who's calling the shots -- because they will be for the edification of the whole household.

The first commandment underscores this very same point -- when God says we are to have NO OTHER GODS that also applies to the lordship of our households. When one parent seeks to Lord it over the other parent -- there is obviously a violation of the 1st Commandment.

It would be helpful to spend more time on the ramifications of the 1st Commandment - but that will have to be saved for another day. Today I would simply like to expand some concerns about fathers as heads of households in our society.

Unfortunately, I can't say a lot of positive things about this delicate area. Beyond the breadwinning responsibility, many fathers in our society have seemingly lost touch with what it truly means to be "head of the household." In fact I would go so far as to say that in far more than 50% of our homes the mothers are functioning as "heads of households."

Now what do I mean by that? I mean first and foremost - that a head of household is the one who raises the lordship of Christ and the authority of God above all else in life. It means taking the responsibility to PUT WILL OF GOD and THE EXAMPLE OF CHRIST ABOVE ALL ELSE. Equally, it means emphasizing worship of that same Christ on the Sabbath.

We all know of fathers who bring their kids to Sunday School each week -- or bring their wives to church BUT DON'T WORSHIP THEMSELVES. That practice does not qualify by the Lord's standards. I'll never forget the guy in Milwaukee who brought his family every week to the 11 a.m. service. He would park his car in the church lot -- the wife and kids would come to church -- and he'd go over to the Holiday Inn lounge (air-conditioned) and have a couple of drinks while he waited for worship to conclude. Is it any wonder that his sons made a mockery of Christ and the church?!?

From God's point of view, the wife was functioning alone as the head of the household in that situation. But obviously - God does not want either partner to function alone. Regardless of our sexes - he wants us to function as initiators and supporters of his Lordship in our households.

Have you ever taken the time to do an inventory of your household at home? Who urges the Lordship of Christ in your family? Hopefully both parents do -- which means you both function as heads of the household at different times. Needless to say - being the head of the household from a Christian perspective does not mean lording it over one another -- it means taking the initiative to promote the example of Christ in your home.

The same of course is true for this household-- known as the church. Who is the head of this household? The natural temptation would be to say the pastor. But how sad if he is the only ones who fosters the lordship of Christ. There are times that each of us is called to be head of this household -- whether it's simply by inviting a neighbor to worship or serving on the Call committee for a new pastor. In each of these functions - we have an opportunity to assert the lordship of Christ -- and to urge that

the Sabbath was made to give humanity an opportunity to encounter the will of that God and Father of us all.

Quite frankly - I have seen seven and eight year old children who function better as heads of households than do their parents. I say this because some grade school children are more aggressive advocates for the lordship of Christ than are their parents.

Well - Hopefully the point of today's text is clear ~~And so today~~ - Paul urges us to consider the object of our preaching. What or who is it that we really make the content of our trust and proclamation in life. When faced with a ~~major~~ *major* decisions - do we consult our Lord? Do we pray for guidance from his Word? Do we incorporate his power of mercy and forgiveness in our actions? Do we allow him to be the head of our households -- or is he just a household word of profanity?

AMEN

In short -

"WHEN THE FLOODS COME, THEN WHAT?"

Pentecost II

Hope Lutheran Church

June 18 and 21

"Every one who hears these words of mine and does them will be like the wise man who buildt his house upon the rock; and the rain fell and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat upon that house, but it did not fall, because it was founded on the rock. Matt 7:24-25

Over a year ago, California residents along the Santa Monica Mountain Range and SanFernando Valley experienced heavy rains and flooding. After several days of rains, the hills became mud slides and the outcome for many was a total loss of their homes and belongings.

Shortly thereafter my father-in-law was assigned to the area and was amazed to find many of the people seeking to rebuild their homes in the very same area. They had been told before they built the first time that the area was "very high risk." Now they had even experienced the consequences of their failure to listen the first time -- AND YET THEY WERE AT IT AGAIN -- rebuilding on the same hills; in the same valleys.

Hundreds of people have used the same logic along the San Andreus falt. They have been told of the inherent dangers. The high risks. The potential catastrophic consequences.

And yet they go ahead and build. The government has even allowed the building of a nuclear plant along this unstable land formation. That's like having a virtual time bomb in your back yard,

And so when the floods come ^{again}, then what?? And when the falt cracks away, then what? They have heard the words of warning! They have expereined the results of flooding! But quite

obviously -- they have not listened -- and it doesn't appear like they will listen in the future. Jesus would compare these people to the foolish man who builds his house on the sand. They hear the word... but they do not listen.

This is the focus of today's Gospel text. It is the conclusion to Jesus' Sermon on the Mount -- a sermon where Jesus sought to draw an image of true discipleship. And Jesus' picture shows the true disciple as one who not only hears the word of grace ... as one who not only talks about God ... but the one LISTENS and then LIVES the meaning of God's Word.

The essence of this text is to drive us to the core of our lives with the question: To whom or to what have we given our greatest loyalty? What is the real foundation of obedience for us? What is the essential power motivating our daily actions?

Yes -- who or what is the authority that directs our lives -- the one we listen to!?! For the Californians -- the authority is the beauty of the ocean and the rapid appreciation of their homes.

This past week - Toledo voters had to make a choice: either FOR or AGAINST a payroll tax increase. For those of us who took that vote seriously -- there was a real struggle -- a struggle between the credibility of city management and our personal feelings of tax integrity. Regretably -- I don't think many Toledoans listened very carefully TO THE SERIOUS CONSEQUENCES this city is presently facing. None of us like increased taxes -- but none of us want an unstable foundation for our community either. The struggle for justice and righteousness has not yet been resolved -- in Toledo or anywhere else.

And that's what our text today wants us to see, feel and experience. It is always a struggle to hear God out - always a struggle to

really listen to and live by God's Word -- always
a struggle to remain grounded to God's way of
forgiveness and mercy and equality and justice
for all. -3-

To be a Christian is never to be free from
this struggle -- to be a Christian is to struggle
daily with what it means to be obedient and
faithful.

And it's for that reason that Jesus gets
very upset with the lip-service type of believer.
The most derogatory words of *Gospels* are
offered by Jesus to those who merely "mouthe"
their faith with words like "Lord, Lord," but
do not live it with their lives. Jesus says
to that bunch: "Depart from me ... you have made
faith into nothing more than a pious show".

To be a disciple -- to be a believer -- is to
feel the constant pressure point of faith. The
true disciple never feels he/she has come of
age -- there is always room for greater growth,
always space for increased service, always
potential for growth in giving and forgiving.

God calls us to be true disciples -- he gives
us his Word in order that we will always know
the ultimate foundation of life. But he warns
us at the same time to beware of false prophets.
He warns us that we are forever only one step
away from denying him and choosing the shifting
sands of popularity or pluralism, *greed, nature, worship*

As tempting as those shifting sands often are,
God has offered us a better choice. In fact,
only a foolish man would reject the foundation
that God has provided: the forgiving power of
his Son, Jesus Christ. God could not offer us
greater stability and security for our lives.
We have been gifted with the greatest foundation
of life itself: the life of Jesus Christ.

To have the life of Christ and to live it IS TO
BE ASSURED OF A FOUNDATION THAT WILL WITHSTAND
ALL THE STORMS OF LIFE, including death itself.
You and I have received a foundation for living
that far exceeds the beauty and appreciation
of anything that nature or this world can offer.

Yet even gifted with this foundation of Christ's love does not give us license to feel we've got it made -- the struggle of faith is always a reality. Because as the old saying goes, "Into every life some rain will fall." It may only be a sudden shower on our business or our health; or it may be the catastrophic flood of family death or international holocaust. We never know the shape of tomorrow's winds or the crest of the flood waters that may be ahead of us.

But one thing we do know is that God has given us a foundation that will withstand anything that the world can dish out. God calls us to daily secure ourselves to the foundation of his love in Christ.

In baptism we have been anchored to that foundation of Christ. But the principalities and powers of this world CONTINUE TO CUT AWAY at that line every day. All of us know people who have allowed themselves to be cut loose-- who have chosen to drift aimlessly looking for the real foundation. Daily baptismal renewal/essencial

A recent Gallup poll has indicated that 95% of the American people claim to believe in God. Unfortunately, Mr. Gallup's pole suffers from ^{social} gullability-- because belief is more than merely saying "Lord, Lord." Belief is more than the appearance of sounding and looking religious.

Belief is not only knowing forgiveness, it is being forgiving. Belief is not only listening to words of love, it is offering words of love. Belief is not only acknowledging the miracles of Christ, it's becoming one of Christ's miracle workers.

The residents of California have heard the word of danger inherent in building on many valleys and the San Andreus fault. But they have not yet believed. *They are yet* far more interested in outward appearances than they are in the foundations for their homes.

They are not only fools -- they are damned fools. Because damned fools are people who live for appearances rather than for real substance in life.

difference

God has offered us a substancial~~ly~~ *foundation* that has dwelt secure, stable, and well-tested for 2000 years. It is the foundation of the love of Jesus Christ. It is the choice of wise men in life -- becuae it is the only foundation that will withstand the rain, the floods, and the winds of eternity AND YET REMAIN SUBSTANCIALY THE SAME.

AMEN

PENTECOST II

Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo

June 5, 1983

Peter R. Martyn, Pastor

"BREAKING THROUGH THE BARRIERS"

(Solomon prays) Likewise when a foreigner...comes do according to all for which the foreigner calls to thee; in order that all the peoples of the earth may know thy name and respect thee, as do they people Israel, and that they may know that this house which I have built is called by thy name."

I Kings 8:41,43

As most of you know -- the Search Committee has been busy lately reviewing and analyzing resumes for the acquisition of a new Director of Christian Education. It was through the same process that we brought Larry Michaels aboard -- and I am particularly happy for his presence and part-time ministry with us.

The naive among us probably think that the search process is a special piece of cake -- especially since it includes a few free meals. But those who are involved in the search realize that it's no easy task -- whether in the church or a local corporation. Looking for new personnel is an exciting task -- but it is fraught with risks and responsibilities that can either benefit or undermine the future of an organization

And probably one of the greatest risks in the Search Process is the temptation to judge RIGHTLY or WRONGLY on the basis of superficial things. That is a risk we all live with every day of our lives --- judging others only on the basis of superficial characteristics like hair style, or skin color, or clothing fashions, or sex appeal -- and of course, the list goes on. But that risk even becomes more paramount in a Personnel Search.

As is the case with every resume evaluation -- a judgment is made about a person by merely looking at a piece of paper. Without a doubt -- that piece of paper can often give significant insights into the personality and working habits of the prospective candidate. But equally true -- that resume can

serve as an ultimate barrier to any meaningful relationship with the candidate.

As was reflected in an interview with a DCE candidate this past week -- only after seven hours of conversation and dialog was the Search Committee ready to formulate any decision regarding the candidate. And of course, even that decision is filled with the risk of being inaccurate. But the most crucial element in the whole process IS THE SPIRIT OF PATIENCE AND ACCEPTANCE AND LOVING KINDNESS THAT PERVADES THE DECISION-MAKING. Whether the decision is "yea" or "neigh" -- it is vitally important in the life of the church that a candidate feel a real sense of acceptance during the interview process.

I want to commend the Search Committee for that spirit of deliberation in our process thus far. I not only say that to affirm the committee, but also because the MAJOR ISSUE at stake in today's lessons focuses upon the depth and meaningfulness of relationships.

Both the first lesson and the Gospel lesson raise the issue for us: To what extent do we as the people of God promote meaningful and accepting relationships without allowing superficial barriers to stand in the way???

For instance -- to what degree do we determine a person's acceptability on the basis of their physical size, esp. in terms of their weight?? To what extent do we screen out kindness and acceptance of those who belong to a different political party?? To what extent do we make membership in church synonymous with living in the right part of town?? In short -- what kind of social accrudiments have we made our gospel of acceptance?? Are we in the church involved in making people sometimes feel like unacceptable foreigners??

How great it would be if we truly lived by the grace of God -- being as totally accepting as God. But too often we live by the rules of cultural acceptability -- which are often packed with the power of sin. Let me illustrate with the story of the one-time rural preacher who became the bishop.

As a young preacher -- this pastor was invited to preach in a country church before he had received a regular call. Being a senior seminarian just graduated -- he had not yet made any money and could not afford a car. Since he was an

jock and sports enthusiast -- he decided that he would jog the ten miles to the church (forgetting of course, that there would be no shower waiting for him in a country church). Well, he made the 10-mile jog -- but he also looked-like a worn-out jogger at the service. His clothing and shoes were dusty -- and of course, he suffered from a perspiration problem.

The congregation let him know WITHOUT WORDS but with coolness and lack of hospitality that he was not greatly appreciated. Only the church custodian had compassion on the young pastor and invited him to his home for Sunday dinner.

Nearly 25 years later -- this joggin preacher had become a bishop in the church and was invited back to dedicate the new church edifice that had just been completed. He preached a powerful sermon -- telling the congregation this was his second trip to Faith Lutheran. He recalled for the cong. his first trip. He also told them that this trip he had received a multitude of invitations for Sunday dinner and even overnight lodging-- but he had rejected all of them. He said that he really knew that he was welcome in one house-- that of the custodian -- and he would spend his time again this Sunday with the custodian and his family.

That congregation had made its barriers very obvious on the pastor's first visit. They simply would not accepting anyone - esp. a pastor - if he did not live up to their social/cultural expectations. And yet once he had acquired status as a bishop -- the barriers came down - even though he was still the same pastor he had always been.

Our culture teaches us from childhood onward TO CREATE ALL KINDS OF SUPERFICIAL BARRIERS so that we can be exclusive with our love and concern for our fellowman. Is it any wonder that we have the social, racial, economic and global problems that are reported daily by the media. WE HAVE ERECTED BARRIERS instead of building BRIDGES with one another. We have too often conformed the church into another cultural club of society.

Is it any wonder that Luke - the Great Physician, the evangelist who is most concerned about healing the ills of mankind, especially the sin of exclusiveness and separation -- is it any wonder that Luke tells the story of the centurion and Jesus.

PENTECOST II

Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo

June 5, 1983

Peter R. Martyn, Pastor

"BREAKING THROUGH THE BARRIERS"

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The naive among us probably think that the search process is a special piece of cake -- especially since it includes a few free meals. But those who are involved in the search realize that it's no easy task -- whether in the church or a local corporation. Looking for new personnel is an exciting task -- but it is fraught with risks and responsibilities that can either benefit or undermine the future of an organization

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That's why our church continues to be a part of the World Council of Churches and other caring organisms of the church-- because we do not put politics and ideology above the love and compassion of Jesus Christ. Christ is our Lord -- we follow his rule and example above all else. And like our Lord and Savior -- we look deeper than the uniform or fashion that a person might be wearing. We look at their need and their desire for a faithful relationship -- and we offer them the graceful acceptance of God's love and compassion.

Jesus Christ BREAKS THROUGH THE BARRIERS of culture, clan and club. He has compassion on harlots, and prodigal sons, and Samaritans, and tax-collectors, and sinners of all kinds. Pentecost announces Christ acceptance of all foreigners-- because his mission and love IS TOTALLY AND GLOBALLY INCLUSIVE! That kind of love and acceptance cost Jesus Christ his life -- it was not always socially acceptable. But it was the grace of God -- and we are called to live by that grace -- which is a much higher standard of social acceptability!

AMEN

PENTECOST II

Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo

June 21 (Thurs.) June 24 (Sunday), 1984

Peter R. Martyn, Pastor

"MINIMAL RELIGION: SPIRITUAL QUICKSAND!"

"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father in heaven. ... Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock."

Matthew 7:21, 24-25

Sir Alexander Fleming, upon introducing his newly discovered drug, penicillin, warned against taking too little of it. An underdose, he said, would permit germs to remain in the system thereby allowing one to build up an immunity to the drug. These immune germs could be "passed on to others so that the thoughtless person playing with penicillin could be responsible for the death of another," if not his own death.

Much as some people would play with underdoses of this drug, it would appear that many today have the same approach to faith and religion. Many people almost seem to be playing with religion; religion is a mere game of appearances: YOU TAKE JUST ENOUGH TO GET BY. So it is that many people attend worship just enough to temporarily quiet their consciences; they attend just enough weddings, funerals, and other special celebrations TO KEEP THEM FROM LONGING FOR A GENUINE ENCOUNTER WITH GOD as well as a genuine COMMITMENT TO GOD! They get JUST ENOUGH religion to make them immune to the real thing.

One author has said that having "a slight touch of religion" is really worse than having none at all BECAUSE IT DELUDES THE PARTICIPANT INTO LIVING BY APPEARANCES. Having "a slight touch of religion" essentially means that there is no real foundation or no real commitment there -- it's all a matter of playing games and looking the part!

George Gallup reveals that ninety-seven percent of the citizens of the U.S. claim a belief in God ... and approximate-

ly 64% of the population claims some kind of church affiliation. But these figures fail to show the real performance levels. When you get down to the real performance levels the figures drop down to the low thirties -- and for real commitment, the figures drop down into the teens. As the saying goes, there are many who are religiously concerned, but far fewer who are spiritual committed! For the masses, an underdose of religion is enough -- just an occasional contact -- a periodic inoculation TO MAKE A GOOD APPEARANCE!

Well, I really shouldn't be sharing this perspective with those of you who are here. After all, let's face it -- we're among that 30% figure -- we're the ones who seek to offer more than "empty appearances" -- we're the ones who are attempting TO OFFER A REAL PERFORMANCE! Certainly none of us suffers from the sin of religion by appearances.

I wish I could say that such was totally true. But I can't say it for my own life, so I'm led to believe that the same is probably true for your lives. Too often we all suffer from a "minimal religion" approach to faith. For instance, I need only listen to myself once and a while to notice the way I've encouraged others to be more faithful. I've often heard myself say: "Well, you know, you ought to take A LITTLE MORE interest in your faith life!" Notice the phrase that I used: "a little more interest." To say that is to definitely give the impression of a minimal level of commitment -- that true faith only requires a MINIMAL RESPONSE from the believer!

We all suffer from this sin of "minimal religion!" I have so often heard well-meaning Christians saying to others: "It really doesn't take too much of a commitment; you can work it into your spare time." Or we'll say - "You really ought to come to church ONCE IN A WHILE" -- not regularly, but just "once in a while." And in our stewardship thinking, we so often ask "for just a little bit more." We don't talk about real commitment, or significant sacrifice, or giving so that it hurts -- we merely ask for "a little bit more." These are all expressions of MINIMAL RELIGION.

And minimal religion is spiritual quicksand -- because it is only concerned with appearances. It is not concerned with faith from the heart! It is not concerned with a deep commitment to the foundations of our faith! It is not

concerned with the abundance of God's grace. It is only concerned with LOOKING RELIGIOUS.

When I was first considering the parish ministry, my home parish pastor gave me a book entitled "How To Become A Bishop Without Being Religious." The book was a satire on how so much religion is mere appearances. In jest, it stated that if you really wanted to be a bishop without "religious faith from the heart," then just look the part. And how do you do that? Well, you always wear black; you always look very serious; you always speak with a deep resonant tone; you never drink in public; you look well groomed, but also *on the verge of* poverty; you obviously do not smile much, and never lose control with outright laughter; you conduct worship with stained-glass piety in your voice ... and the list goes on. The point was simple: YOU CAN BECOME A BISHOP BY MERELY LOOKING THE PART!

Jesus' harshest words in scripture were directed at those who suffer from this sin: He says: "Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons. Then I will tell them plainly, "I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers." Jesus had little tolerance for people who made religion into pious appearances; who were only concerned about "looking religious." This is why Jesus was so critical of the Pharisees -- because they were consumed with religious appearances.

... Religious appearances will save no one! Whether it's good deeds or religious piety -- these are not the foundation of our salvation. There is so much more to religion than shows on the surface. True religion is a deep, abiding trust in God's Word -- a deeply grateful trust in his love, in his mercy, in his graceful forgiveness. It is a power embedded deeply in the very fibers of our lives. It is a power that exudes from the very core of our lives and expresses itself in Christlike gratitude...in Christlike love ... in Christlike forgiveness and concern for others.

These expressions are not for the sake of appearances -- they are offered for the good of other people. We do not express our religion to get any credit for ourselves; we express our religion in order TO GIVE LOVE AND SUPPORT AND KINDNESS AND FORGIVENESS TO OTHERS! And these can never be minimal expressions TO ANYONE WHO HAS EXPERIENCED THE GREATNESS OF GOD'S LOVE. How can we give back minimally

what we have received so abundantly from God. There's just no way! Once we have experienced THE FOUNDATION OF GOD'S LOVING FORGIVENESS -- there is only one response; WE GIVE IT TO OTHERS WITH GREAT GUSTO! WE FULFILL THE LAW OF GOD'S LOVE!

It's like the story of the European traveler who upon coming to the United States found himself walking through the awesome canyon of New York's financial district. He was truly awed by this center of financial power and he said: "Surely here is the power and greatness of America."

A few days later he stood in the awesome rotunda of our nations' Capitol and gazed on the statues and symbolism of our country's leadership. "Ah," he said, "now here is the greatness of America."

Some months later he was the guest of a farmer in northwestern Ohio. It was noon and the farmer's daughter rang the bell on the post out back. In from the field came the hired hands. After washing, they all took places at the sumptuously laden table. The visitor watched as the farmer took down his Bible and read reverently the following from Psalm 90:

"Lord, thou has been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting thou art God."

Then the farmer offered a simple prayer of thanksgiving ... expressing his love to God, his pledge of continuing service to God and his fellowmen ... and his gratitude for God's goodness." The visitor sat awe-struck as everyone began to eat. And then he said to himself: "Now I have truly found the real greatness of America."

The greatness of America ... the greatness of any people or country ... the greatness of this congregation ... the greatness of each of us IS NOT TO BE FOUND IN OUR RELIGIOUS APPEARANCES. Our greatness has been given to us in God's Word ... in his promises ... in his forgiving love. It is the eternal rock and foundation of our lives ... it will withstand all the tempests and storms of life ... it will not fall or change with the shifting sands of life; IT IS THE VERY SUBSTANCE AND REASON FOR OUR BEING HERE! And God asks us to faithfully and fervently SHARE THIS EVERLASTING FOUNDATION OF HIS LOVE WITH GUSTO!

AMEN

PENTECOST II

Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo

June 18 & 21, 1987

Peter R. Martyn, Pastor

"WHEN YOU'VE GOT IT . . . FLAUNT IT!"

... since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, they are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as an expiation by his blood, to be received by faith ... Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. Romans 3:24-25,27a

In a medieval cathedral, an old priest was to have a Vesper service. His sermon was entitled, "Love of God." It was dark when the parishoners huddled in the nave. They were surprised when the old priest entered the chancel with a ladder and lantern. He said nothing, but soon placed the ladder alongside the Crucifix and climbed to where the lantern reflected the nail print in Jesus' right hand. Then he descended the ladder, and went to the left side. Again he climbed and reflected the left nail print. Then down, only to climb again to the thorn-pierced brow. And then down the ladder to the spear-wounded side. At each place he allowed the lantern to shine on the wounds for more than a minute without any words. Finally, the old priest climbed down to the chancel floor and broke the silence with a five word homily: "Can we do any less?" That was it - "Can we do any less?"

I'm sure many of you are hoping that I would end it right there as well. Well, I'm sorry, I can't let it go at that! But the actions of that old priest should cause us to question: What is it that we flaunt to the world around us?? Do we show others the "righteousness of Christ," or do we boast instead of our own deeds of piety and pompousness?? What is it that the world sees through us - the body of Christ?? What is the source of our boasting? Why do we really invite our friends to this church on Sunday morning (or Thursday evening)?

Is it because we are so exhilarated by the good news that we share here? Or is it because we want to show off our beautiful organ ... or a great sounding choir ... or is it our emphasis upon ministry to children ... or maybe our air conditioned sanctuary? Is our invitation an opportunity to glorify God or to point to some worldly achievement of our own?

We have learned well the lesson of 5th Avenue in this society -- "when you've got it, flaunt it!" Obviously, this advertisement was never intended to reflect the gospel of Jesus Christ. Quite to the contrary, whether for an airline or aspirin, the aim of 5th Avenue is self-flagulation! Go for worldly glory! Seek after social recognition! You only go round once in life, so get all you can get with gusto!

So, what are we flaunting as followers of Jesus Christ?

Do we give to others because we have first received ... do we love because we have been loved, or have we become addicted to the recognition/reward mentality of our society? Pick up many church newsletters and often you will get the answer. As illustrated in this publication from one of our local ministries here in Toledo, more than half of this monthly publication is devoted to recognizing donors who have given gifts that month.

Obviously, I am not opposed to recognition and properly thanking generous contributors. I'm a realist as an administrator. But sometimes I ask myself some pretty penetrating questions when half of my time is consumed with worrying about whether "Molly" or "Jane" got properly recognized. What kind of story is the church telling when more than 50% of its story is merely a donor list?! That's not very exciting news to the non-committed. Is it any wonder that some people are skeptical about the church -- they view us as a "Self-Admiration Society" -- they see us to be just another self-affirming club of society. Instead of several pages of names -- don't we have a story to tell of the Christlike nature of our ministry! Or for the sake of survival as an institution, must we keep naming the same names every month ... just to keep everybody happy?!?

Obviously, since I'm hoping to keep my job here, I will not render any definitive judgment. But I hope the question causes all of us to think a little about the true purpose of our mission as a church. Because that's at issue in the Romans text before us. Paul addresses in vss 27-28 what's at the heart of Christian piety: God's will is to accept us not because of our righteous deeds but because of his righteous love in Christ! We don't earn God's honor by flaunting our faithfulness -- rather, God honors us by faithfully flaunting upon us the undeserved love of Christ!! So then, of what shall we boast?? Of our own righteous acts? Absolutely not, because God does not love us on the basis of those deeds, but on the basis of his deed -- the death of Christ on the cross!!

We have a real tough time with this expression of God's benevolence! It just goes contrary to everything that is put before us in the world. We are motivated in this world by rewards and recognition. Do this, and you will get an A+. Do that, and you will enter into Phi Beta Kappa. Achieve this, and you will be honored among Who's Who in America! Ultimately, this mentality teaches us that you only give when you can be assured of some reward as a direct result.

Is it any wonder that God's mission gets only the crumbs of this world?? There's not enough earthly reward in the religious business! It's far more salutary to belong to other clubs in society -- there's more worldly recognition in it. Likewise, is it any wonder that the newest trend in worship

is to give applause for good music performances. Many choirs and musicians now measure their efforts by the amount of applause offered. A little over a week ago at Centennial Hall, the Pentecostals got a romping applause after their numbers ... because they outperformed everyone else ... they played best to the audience. Under this rubric, ministry is not given out of thanksgiving but in order to get the greatest earthly reward. So ministry becomes a matter of glory for the self rather than glory to God, the giver of all gifts.

What we all need today is an old priest to enter into the sanctuary of our lives with a ladder and lantern to again show us the source of our salvation. WE ARE NOT SAVED BY OUR OWN GOOD WORKS! WE ARE NOT REJECTED BECAUSE WE ARE YET SINFUL! WE ARE NOT EVEN HOPELESS BECAUSE OF YESTERDAY'S GUILT! The wounds of Christ are still as vivid for us today as they were for those standing at the foot of Golgatha. Those wounds have cancelled God's verdict of condemnation. Instead, God has granted us an acquittal - we are not judged but set free. There is only one response to such goodness from God -- TO FLAUNT HIS GRACE BY LIVING IT FAITHFULLY WITH EACH OTHER! Our righteousness is but a drop in the bucket compared to the waterfall that never ends from God.

But how quickly we misconstrue his righteousness into our own. The most tragic flaw of the PTL is not Jimmy Bakker's affair with a church secretary, but rather the ministry's claim of perfect righteousness in God's sight and everyone else's. Whenever we flaunt our own human ministries and institutions as pure vehicles of God's grace we have already pronounced the death sentence upon ourselves. Paul says, "since all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, we can only be justified by his grace as a gift" ... not by our own merits. PTL failed to learn the most fundamental lesson of Scripture -- to claim your own righteousness is to forfeit God's righteousness!!

But we don't have to look at the PTL to throw darts. Our own new church body -- the ELCA - suffers from some of the same self-righteous thinking! According to our ELCA constitution, the new church is flaunting itself as a God-like institution of inclusiveness because we now give "constitutional recognition" to women, blacks, and other minorities. But in flaunting these "inclusive categories," how many others have we overlooked?? For instance, one of my professors recently stated "why don't we have an inclusive category for 'truck drivers,' and another for 'factory workers?'" Anyone who has ever been to one of our church conventions readily sees that we are primarily a "white collar church." Or for that matter, why not a provision in our constitution for 45-yr-old white pastors who have dedicated their ministry to the church for some 20 years? It is tragic that a church body which was founded upon the proclamation of "a totally inclusive gospel" must now succumb to political pressures of flaunting constitutional inclusiveness!

But as Paul so aptly states, "we have all fallen short of the glory of God ... including the new ELCA. By our very sinful nature, we would rather flaunt our own good deeds (our sacred Constitution) however well-intentioned ... and thereby reduce God's grace to our own short-sighted view of holiness and perfection. In this year of 1,987, it is again time for us to make the greatest discovery ever given -- that God has granted us a gift far greater than anything that we can constitute, contrive, or conjure up through our own efforts -- he has blessed us with his eternal love and all-inclusive forgiveness! It is that gift which we are called to FLAUNT! And how are we to do this?? By loving our neighbor because God loves us so much! By giving in gratitude, not to gain God's love or the world's recognition, but simply as an expression of what we have first been given! By working and sweating and achieving - not for personal fame, but out of thanksgiving for the God-given gifts and talents which we have received.

In many ways, this whole text is possibly best illustrated by John Aikin's story of the Little Dog. One day this little puppy was walking around his master's farm. As he came to the pen where the horse was fed, he heard this great animal call to him, "You must be new here! Well, puppy, you will soon find out that the master loves me more than all the other animals because I carry large loads for him. I suspect that an animal of your size is of no value to him at all!"

The little dog hung his head and was about to walk away when he heard the cow in the next stall: "I have the most honored position on the farm because the lady makes butter and cheese from my milk. You, of course, provide nothing of value to the family."

"Cow, your position is certainly no greater than mine," called the sheep. "I lend the master wool to make his clothes. I provide warmth for the entire family. You are correct, however, about this puppy ... he gives nothing to the master."

One by one the animals joined in the conversation, flaunting their honored positions on the farm. The chicken told how she produced eggs, and the cat, famous for her quickness in ridding the house of mice. All the animals did agree on one thing: the little puppy provided no service of value to the farm family.

Stung by the criticism of all the animals, the puppy found a secluded spot and began to cry. An old hound heard the sobs and paused to listen to the little one tell his story. "They are right," he sobbed, "I provided no special service to anyone!"

"It is true," said the old hound, "that you are too small to pull the wagon. And you will never produce eggs, milk or

wool. But it is foolish to cry about what you cannot do. You must use the talent the Creator gave you to bring laughter and cheer to this household.

That night, when the master came home totally exhausted from long hours in the hot sun, the little puppy ran to him, licked his feet, and jumped into his arms with slobbering wags. Falling to the ground, the master and the puppy romped and rolled in the grass. Finally, holding him close to his chest and patting his head, the old farmer said, "No matter how tired I am when I get home, I feel better when you greet me. I wouldn't trade you for all the other animals on the farm."

God wouldn't trade any of us for all the other animals in the world because he has created us to be his special servants of his grace -- his gift of love to the world. "And when you've got it ... FLAUNT IT!" (CAN WE DO ANY LESS?)

AMEN.

There may be times we feel that all the other "animals" of the world are more gifted than you or me - that's when we are reminded - that God created us to flaunt his grace, his undeserved love. And who would trade that kind of love for any other animal in this world.

PENTECOST II
Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo
June 14 and June 17, 1990
Peter R. Martyn, Pastor

"S A N D C A S T L E S A L W A Y S S I N K !"

Every one then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house upon the rock; and the rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat upon that house, but it did not fall, because it was founded on the rock. And everyone who hears these words and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house upon the sand; and the rain fell, the floods came, and winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell; and great was its fall.

Matthew 7:24-27

Five years ago, Jon and Debbie Apgar invited the Martyns to visit them at the New Jersey shore. On the second day, we all went to the shore and began to build the world's biggest and most intricate sandcastle. We began the process with our shovels and buckets about 11 a.m. in the morning; finally by 4:00 p.m. we had finished the feat. It was a masterpiece of human creativity ... a multitude of roadways and waterways and fortresses and peaks. Around the perimeter was a large mote -- defying enemies and winds and floodwaters. Many of the sunbathers that day visited our sandcastle and offered words of admiration and awe. But at a little after 5:00 p.m., the Atlantic tide began to move in. And by shortly after 5:30 p.m., the great sandcastle masterpiece had been washed away! So it is: SANDCASTLES ALWAYS SINK!

That's exactly the essence of the text before us today: Jesus cautions us against those prophetic architects and engineers who would claim that the sandcastles of our hands and minds are the bedrock of hope & faith for our lives. As the great reformation text from Romans alludes today -- our greatest temptation is to boast and glory in our own works ... to make the things of our hands and minds the salvation of our souls ... and then find ourselves totally aghast when the tide turns, and our SANDCASTLES SINK! Jesus warns there is but one bedrock power for our lives -- the unsinkable grace and love of God. We have but one mission -- to constantly anchor our hope, our faith, and our ministry to the bedrock of God's grace. Anything less is cause for Christ to say: "I never knew you; depart from me ... for you have merely lived to glorify yourself ... and not the grace God has given you."

We need look no further than this sermon to illustrate the point of this text. We preachers ... esp. in the Lutheran tradition ... have a great tendency to claim that the "preached word" is the bedrock of faith! As we have been searching for a new Associate, one of the greatest concerns of the Committee is the candidate's creative preaching! Obviously, preaching should be powerful and majestic; hopefully it will inspire comments of awe and admiration. But God forbid that it should ever become the focus and the reason for our being here on Sunday mornings! SERMONS ARE LITTLE MORE THAN SANDCASTLES OF A SINGLE HUMAN MIND! Granted, they should be inspired ... but inspired means that they should point to something greater than themselves ... namely, THE BEDROCK GRACE AND GOODNESS OF

OF GOD! One author has rightfully said that you should ask the following question about every Sunday's sermon: "Does the preacher's message strengthen you to better bear the burdens of your life ... or does it merely make the preacher look better?" Obviously, the sermon is but one sandcastle of inspiration, but it should always point to our trust in God and his love rather than glorifying our own minds and theological masterpieces.

That's why Jesus cautions us in today's text about those who say "Lord, Lord," but get no further in their faith than pompous words. Jesus cautions - faith in God is more than fancy words and creative liturgies and intricate vestments. None of these take the place of a deep commitment to the love of God ... and loving acts performed in faithfulness to the bedrock of Christ. The church, just like individuals, can be tempted to think that God's glory is found in counting heads and dollars. How quickly we can forget that Jesus did not say, "Count my sheep," but rather "Feed my sheep!"

In light of these thoughts, I hope you understand why preachers like me find ourselves very suspicious of all the telemarketing of evangelism these days. Too often these televangelists are obsessed with creating sandcastles rather than uplifting the bedrock of Christ - their messages emphasize the greatness of their glossy formats, the greatness of their choral performers, the greatness of their glass cathedrals ... but what happened to the GREATNESS OF GOD'S GRACE? Yes, Jesus cautions us today against our own false prophecy ... when we make our own words, our own thoughts, our own pieties, our own sanctimonious services MORE IMPORTANT THAN THE BEDROCK OF HIS GRACE. Such SANDCASTLES ALWAYS SINK!

But we are not only tempted to glorify ourselves within the context of worship. This past week I visited two of our members who have been blessed by miraculous surgeries. One of the surgeries appears to have been successful; the other has failed after three tries. My point here is to say that we must see all surgeries and all health care, whether successful or not, as a SANDCASTLE and not as BEDROCK for our lives. Be assured, I speak with deep gratitude and awe when I talk about successful surgeries. But I must ever remember that surgeries and medical treatments and all health care IS BUT A TEMPORARY FIX, NOT AN EVERLASTING CURE! Just like the sandcastles on the Jersey shore -- we should admire and rejoice in every medical advancement that we are given. BUT WE MUST NEVER MAKE MEDICAL SCIENCE INTO THE BEDROCK OF OUR FAITH ... turning it into a God to be worshipped like much of our society is doing today. Because no matter how good the medical fix may be -- the day will soon come when the tide turns ... when the flood waters come crashing in ... when the tempest again hits ... and then our trust must be firmly rooted to more than a few bypasses that have been temporarily grafted inside the chest. THEN WE MUST CLAIM THE BEDROCK OF FAITH - THE EVERLASTING GRACE OF GOD, RATHER THAN THE SANDCASTLES OF HUMAN AND MEDICAL TECHNOLOGY!

The same holds true for other human endeavors that we sometimes make the bedrock of our lives and communities. This past week, Chrysler announced that the "Jeep JJ," if it goes into production, will be built here in Toledo. After all the bad news of so many plant closings, this is certainly good news on the Toledo horizon. But God help us in Toledo if we keep on looking to Jeep as the salvation for life in Toledo! Our text today reminds us that Jeep, whether its the Cherokee or the JJ, is but just another sandcastle of creation in Toledo, Ohio. The day will come when the tide will turn on Jeep ... when the JJ will no longer be sexy for yuppies ... when Toledo will again realize that its bedrock of business cannot be grounded in any one enterprise, but rather a multitude of expressions of God's grace. The Bible has long warned us against worshipping any one idol of human ingenuity ... against any one sandcastle of our hands and minds. Yes, SANDCASTLES ALWAYS SINK!

Even sacred things like marriage must be kept in proper perspective. Like many of you this month, I am celebrating an anniversary -- more than 20 years of dedication to one other person. Obviously, as Christians we value marriage as a human expression of God's divine grace ... just as we value fatherhood today, as a crucial component of the family and marriage. But again - we dare never make idols out of any one human relationship - or father/mother/wife/husband. For me, every anniversary reminds me that even the sacred trust of marriage is a sandcastle. For which of our marriages has not been buffeted by the changing tides and tempests of life? Ultimately, disease and death invades every human partnership. I am graphically reminded of this every time I visit one of Hope's widows(ers). Today, Jesus again cautions us to anchor our marriages to the love and grace of God ... not to the personalities or perfections or powers that we once knew when we were irrationally overtaken by affection. Truly sacred marriage ALWAYS transcends the HUMAN SANDCASTLES OF BEAUTY AND SEXUALITY AND MATERIAL STUFF -- ALL THESE ULTIMATELY SINK!

Yes - today Jesus Christ cautions us against idolizing the things of our hands or our minds as the bedrock of our faith. And obviously, Jesus is warning us against the idolatry of life itself! That was brought home again to me last Sunday as one of our members who is a school teacher confronted me with tragedy at the front door of the church. The teacher related that a loving mother of one of her students had just been killed. And the teacher's sorrow and mine were even more painfully felt because the mother had been killed by a drunk driver. She asked me: "What am I to say to my kids at school?" Be assured, as I told her, there is no easy anesthetic to tragic death. Sometimes all we can say is, "I am deeply sorry; I really hurt with you." But today's text gives us a more theological answer. Namely, it says, "Tell the kids that life in this world is a very tenuous gift! It is given to us from God as a sandcastle, not a rock! It is constantly in danger of being destroyed -- by disease, by drunkards, by wars, by human foolishness. It is precious, but not everlasting! It is always given with the knowledge that the tide can turn at

any moment ... the tempests can gather when least expected. It is at that moment that we need the bedrock of God's grace -- the assurance that no matter what may come, nothing will separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ. Yes, tell those kids that this is the only bedrock of life that has ever been promised to us: the everlasting rock of Jesus Christ. Anything and everything else are SANDCASTLES ABOUT TO SINK!

Nothing more graphically brings this text to conclusion than the Jewish folktale of the sorrow of a woman who had lost her son in a tragic accident. This woman had made her son the bedrock of her life. Everything revolved around her son's coming and going. And then he tragically died in a foolish accident. The woman was crazy with grief. No one and nothing could comfort her. At last a friend took her to the house of a holy man where she pleaded: "Use your powers to bring my son back to life. Surely by prayer or magic you can induce the Almighty to lighten my grief."

The old man spoke kindly as he said: "My dear woman, bring me a mustard seed from a home that has never known sorrow or tragedy, and I will use that seed to remove your grief & pain."

Immediately the woman set out in search of the miraculous mustard seed. First she visited a wealthy family, figuring that tragedy was less likely to strike the rich. As she approached the mansion, she was greeted by the woman of the house. And then she said: "I am in search of a home that has never known sorrow. Certainly with all your wealth you must have never known despair or sorrow?!"

"Never known sorrow," cried the wealthy woman. "You have come to the wrong house." And then she began a day-long litany of all the trials and tribulations that had beset her family -- many of them caused by a jealousy and bitterness motivated by their wealth. The widow was so overtaken, she was invited to stay in that home for several days, listening and supporting the wealthy woman. When she left to resume her search she visited a modest home about two miles away. The experience was the same. Wherever she traveled, from mansion to hut - she was greeted by tales of sadness, tragedy, and sorrow. Everyone found her to be the most willing and careful listener they had ever known.

After months of travel, she became so involved with the grief of others that she totally forgot about her search for the miraculous mustard seed. Obviously, she had indeed found that miraculous seed. For as long as she had merely focused upon herself and her own grief, she was like a SANDCASTLE ALWAYS SINKING! But from the moment she focused her energies upon the will and love of God for others, she found THE BEDROCK OF GOD'S GRACE ... and being anchored to his goodness and grace, she was forever relieved of her own grief. And so it is for us ... when anchored to the will and grace of God ... rather than to our own WORDS, our own GRIEF, our own human LIMITATIONS, we will live as more than SANDCASTLES ALWAYS SINKING. For we can be assured ... the tide will turn - the rains will fall - the floods will roll - the winds will blow, but the everlasting bedrock of Christ will remain our anchor ... for we have been saved by grace through faith! AMEN.

PENTECOST II
Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo
June 2, 1991
Peter R. Martyn, Pastor

"A DAY TO . . . REMEMBER!"

"Remember the Sabbath Day, and keep it holy!" Which one of us could forget that 3rd Commandment from our catechism days? We learned that the Sabbath, whether on Saturday or Sunday, was the Lord's Day -- it was a day in which God had commanded his people to rest: "Six days you shall labor, but on the seventh day ALL YOUR HOUSEHOLD SHALL REST."

Amazing - how God gives something good like the Sabbath, and so often we end up turning it into something bad - something negated rather than celebrated. God gives us the beauty of creation, and we turn it into toxic waste. God gives us the power and pleasure of sexuality, and we turn it into pornography, exploitation, and gender struggles. God gives us a day to remember his gracious and forgiving goodness ... to take a break from the curse of work and adversarial relationships, and we turn that day into blue laws and other negative notions of God's merciful authority. So, the Sabbath, instead of being a day of grace ... becomes a day of gottas ... "you gotta do this, you gotta do that, and above all, you gotta go to church."

Tragically, the history of the Sabbath from Jesus' encounter with the Pharisees through the middle ages and up to the present time HAS TOO OFTEN BEEN TURNED INTO A NEGATIVE ENCOUNTER WITH GOD. Instead of remembering the Sabbath as a time to celebrate the transcendent power of God's love for us, the ancient Pharisees turned this day into a legalistic negation of any form of human work. "Work" was defined as carrying anything heavier than a fig. A man with a wooden leg couldn't walk on the Sabbath because he was lifting more than a fig. A child couldn't drag a stick through the sand on the Sabbath because she was moving the soil which was classified as plowing. A woman couldn't look in the mirror -- for she might see a gray hair and want to pluck it -- plucking was classified as reaping. And obviously, the disciples were plucking heads of grain - they were guilty of work on the Sabbath. The law of the Sabbath was so brutally applied that it was more "just" to starve yourself on the Sabbath than to reap grain for good health and vitality.

For centuries, laws of the Sabbath were interpreted in this negative, condemning, judgmental way. In Massachusetts in 1630, a man was publicly whipped for slaughtering a chicken on Sunday for his family. A sea captain was put into the stocks for three days for simply kissing his wife at the doorstep upon returning from a 3-year voyage. Many "Blue Laws" are still on the books banning movies and liquor sales on Sunday. In Connecticut, it was a legal offense to shave on Sunday; in Boston, illegal to take a bath on Sunday; forbidden to hum in the streets of Cicero, Ill. on Sunday. I have only read of one good blue law - in Nebraska, husband and wife were forbidden from quarelling on Sunday (imagine what a quiet drive that was to church with the kids).

Well, Sunday hardly suffers from all this "blue law" legalism any longer. In fact, today the pendulum has obviously swung to the opposite end: Sunday has merely become the best day "to have fun." Sunday today is a day without any prohibitions or restrictions -- in fact, it has almost become the day that "anything goes" in our culture. Alcohol statistics, due to national sports, now claim as much boozing on Sunday as any other day of the week. As announced yesterday in the Blade, this coming Sept., even Jacobson's will break with a 100-year tradition -- their stores will be open on Sundays next fall.

So what do we do with this so-called "holy day" that has become in some ways so unholy? What is the nature of our "rest" today on the Sabbath? What, if anything, are we "setting apart" on this day TO REMEMBER?

Quite simply, first and foremost, and above all else, we are to remember the transcendent power of God - the fact that nothing in all creation was, is, or ever will be without the handiwork of the Creator. And it's impossible to remember that transcendent power if our minds and bodies are pre-occupied with other things THIS DAY just as they are the other seven days - whether it's water-skiing on Devil's Lake, or putting the ninth green at Inverness, or cranking out cutbacks in the O.I. tower, or shopping at the newest Monclova Mall. The Sabbath is that day ... that time that God has called us TO STOP ... TO GIVE THANKS FOR HIS MIGHTY HAND .. FOR HIS OUTSTRETCHED ARM when he rescued his people from a total slavery to work in Egypt and finally gave them a land in which to rest. Deuteronomy says today you shall rest, because when you were slaves in Egypt, you were not allowed to rest. And God has rescued you from this slavery to work!

And on this same day ... and every other Sunday, God says to you and me: YOU ONCE WERE SLAVES OF SIN ... TOTALLY SEPARATED FROM ME AND EACH OTHER BY IGNORANCE, GUILT, HATRED, SLANDER, JEALOUSY, AND PERVERSION! But through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, I have rescued you from such stupid slavery and again made you one with me. I have given you "rest" - namely, re-creation in my image ... I have made you my body of forgiving grace, the very body of Christ himself. And this Sabbath, this Lord's Day, this Sunday and every other is to be a time forever set apart by you to praise and thank me for my transcendent power GIVEN TO YOU IN JESUS CHRIST ... for you have become a new creation, a royal priesthood, a chosen people ... chosen to proclaim the wonderful deeds of your God who brought you out of darkness into his marvelous light. First and foremost, and above all else, Sunday is a day to remember how we have been graced with the greatness of the love of our God!

It reminds me of the story of the grasshopper carved into the marble of the huge Exchange Building in London, England. A new mother once walked along a path in the woods of northern England, where she abandoned her baby, putting

it under a shrub. Later that same day, a boy came along that path and saw an unusually big grasshopper near that shrub. As he tried to catch the grasshopper, it jumped under the shrub. As he knelt down to capture it, he saw the abandoned child. After taking the child home, his family raised the baby boy who became a leading banker in London. This banker erected the large Exchange Building for his business, and made certain that a large grasshopper was carved into its marble facing ... a constant symbolic reminder of how God had rescued him from total abandonment thru a grasshopper.

Our Sunday symbol today is not a grasshopper -- but a cross ... and bread and wine ... and water -- all reminders that the ultimate power of deliverance is not ours, but God's. At least once a week, we are called to give praise and thanks to the ONE who has generously given us the abundant life -- security from the evil one and assurance that the way, the truth, and the life will always be ours!

But on this day we not only remember God's transcendent power -- we also remember his imminent power right here among us. Or as stated by Paul in our second lesson, our Lord's greatness was not in calling attention to himself, but in becoming a slave for others! As one commentator put it: "Jesus lived as a slave for the needs of others, and he died as a slave for the sins of this world." So it is that St. Paul writes: "For we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as slaves for his sake." And again, Paul amplifies in Phillipians: "Let this same mind be in you that was in Christ, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave."

This kind of lifestyle was beautifully illustrated by King Olav of Norway, who died earlier this year as the world's oldest monarch. Revered as the "people's king" for his plain manner, even though a great-grandson of Queen Victoria -- he spurned privilege. He sent his children to public schools and once insisted on putting his name on a national health waiting list for an eye operation. He was forever revered for thinking of the needs of his people. Greatness meant becoming a slave for the needs of others.

During the Revolutionary War, an officer dressed in civilian clothes came upon soldiers replacing a fortification. The workers were bone-tired, but the man in charge kept on barking orders at them. When the civilian officer asked the man why he didn't help his men, he replied: "Because I'm a corporal." So the stranger pitched in and helped finish the job. Then he said to the corporal, "The next time you have a job like this and not enough men to do it, call your commander-in-chief, and I will again come and help you finish the job!" Only then did the corporal realize that the civilian officer was General George Washington. Our tendency is to always think more highly of ourselves than we ought! That's called human sin and separation from God!

We all desperately need a day to be reminded of the idolatry of our sinfulness and the greatness of our Lord -- a greatness to which we are called as his body: TO LIVE AS SLAVES FOR THE NEEDS OF OTHERS AND DIE AS SLAVES FOR THE SINS OF THIS WORLD. Without the Sabbath - there is no hope for us or God's greatness in this world!

Finally, this day is to be remembered because we need to know that "nothing in all creation can separate us from the love of God." The greatest tactic of the Tempter is to delude us into thinking that when trouble strikes ... we are all alone, that God has abandoned us. As was graphically seen in the life of Paul, the Christian life is not lived without affliction, without persecution, without being struck down and often perplexed. Those are the moments the evil one would like us to think we have been abandoned by God - while lying in that hospital bed suffering with cancer; while wondering where the next job will come after last week's termination; while wondering if there will ever be hope after last night's terrible trauma with one of your teenagers.

But instead of going to pieces and flying into blind rage when opposition mounted against him, Jesus confronted conflict by praying for a strategy. And God's answer was to call 12 disciples to be his combative power even as he faced his final persecution. God was with Christ in the midst of his affliction. Likewise, when Paul was confronted with imprisonment, God was with him in the midst of this persecution. Those were the times that Paul wrote some of his most powerful epistles. God may not always physically deliver us from all affliction and pain, but he will never abandon us. He will suffer with us through that trouble and opposition - hoping that we will use even affliction as an opportunity to express his love. That's why we so desperately need the Sabbath - because we constantly need a time to hear God say over and over to us: YOU WILL NEVER BE ALONE; I WILL SUFFER WITH YOU AND BRING YOU WITH ME TO THE END OF THIS AGE; YOU WILL SHARE THE ETERNAL BANQUET WITH ME AND ALL WHO HAVE LOVED MY APPEARING; DO NOT LET TODAY'S AFFLICTION UNDERMINE YOUR HOPE FOR TOMORROW'S HEALING; ... DO NOT FEAR, I WILL NEVER ABANDON YOU!

That spirit of determination was humorously illustrated in the life of a stuttering Bible salesman. As a salesman, this affliction - this stuttering - could have totally destroyed his spirit and opportunities for success. But he used even this affliction - this stuttering to show that it was an opportunity for God to be present. He concluded every sales with one key sentence: "Do you w-w-want to b-b-uy this B-B-Bible n-nnow, or do y-y-you want m-m-me to r-r-read it to you?" People gladly bought the Bible - rather than suffer his affliction with him. God was truly WITH THEM.

We remember the Sabbath Day and keep it holy -- because there is no other time or place where we so totally celebrate God's transcendent power - a power that rescues us from the slavery of life's afflictions and idolatries in order to make us ONE in our Lord's resurrection ... and ONE in his gracious will to become slaves for the needs of others. AMEN.

PENTECOST II

Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo
June 21, 1992 (Revised from May, 1989)
Peter R. Martyn, Pastor

"WHERE OUTSIDERS BECOME INSIDERS"

"When Jesus heard this he marveled at the (centurion), and turned and said to the multitude that followed him, 'I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith.'"

Luke 7:10

One of the greatest temptations of life is to spend our time and our toil classifying people as "outsiders" or "insiders." A popular habit for most of us during adolescence was to exclude others on the basis of weight, complexion, hairstyle, wardrobe, school system, family home, racial identity, sports ability, intellect, etc. Some kids spend gobs of money and a glut of time just trying to "fit in" with the latest "insider" identity fads.

But this is hardly a teen-age seduction. Many of our most prestigious clubs have all kinds of "insider" stipulations. We all remember last year's great hubbub when many prestigious Country Clubs were found to be exclude blacks and Jews and women members. Insiders vs. outsiders. Last week, Franklin Park Mall was being attacked for being exclusive in its hiring practices. And we've all seen it so far in this Presidential year, Ross Perrot was certainly considered the real "outsider" in Jan., but is fast becoming the "insider" because people are fed up with political insincerity and inaction by the Washington beauracracy. What a world we live in--an ever-present battle zone between insiders & outsiders! Just imagine the drain of energy and time that we spend each week in our homes, businesses, schools, malls & marketplaces defining who's on the "outside" and who's on the "inside."

Even the church has succumbed to the waging of this war. A few weeks ago, I received a request for missionary support from a former Lutheran UT student who worshipped here for her four years and helped in our Sunday School. But in her missionary work, she has become identified with a Christian group that is highly and sometimes rigidly fundamentalistic. Because this group is sometimes potentially offensive in its theological position, the church council acted to "table" her request for help. The fear was that we would have another missionary claiming to have the "true gospel" when the true gospel was already being proclaimed in the land to which she was being sent. Yes, even within Church circles the debate continues -- who proclaims the "true gospel" ... who are the real "insiders" ... and are there any real "outsiders?"

It is no wonder that St. Paul caustically addressed the church at Galacia! The Galatians had perverted the gospel by claiming that a person needed to be circumcised to be a true insider! So Paul says: "I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you in the grace of Christ and turning to a different gospel -- not that there is another gospel, but there are some of you who are perverting the gospel of Christ. ... And for anyone proclaiming a contrary gospel, let that one be accursed."

Biblical language does not get much stronger. Paul is saying if there is anyone in the church who preaches or teaches an attitude of exclusiveness among believers, let that person be damned! The Good News translation says, "let that person go to hell!" If you're looking for tough love -- St. Paul gives us a pretty good dose.

If there is one clear statement that permeates today's texts it is this: BY GOD'S GRACE, WE ARE ALL INSIDERS! If there is one place that a person should finally feel freed from social, racial, political, economic and cultural exclusion - it is in the body of Christ. Finally a sanctuary, a safe place where we need not CONFORM, but where we are TRANSFORMED BY GOD'S GRACE! Is it any wonder Solomon stood at the altar of the newly constructed temple in today's O.T. lesson and said: "O Lord, there is no God like you in heaven or earth keeping his promise of steadfast love for all your servants who walk before you!" Already Solomon was proclaiming that outsiders (foreigners) will become insiders by the grace of God. Rich or poor, black or white, man or woman, strong or weak, liberal or conservative -- IN GOD'S HOUSE WE ARE ALL INSIDERS. Thank God, at least there is one place in this world that is a HOME OF PROMISE.

How desperately we all need such a HOME!! How desperately we all need a place where promises can be trusted ... a place where we are not loved one minute, and hated the next. I can't imagine anything more devastating than being raised in a home where you never know from one minute to the next what to expect from your elders. How grateful I am that I could always trust the love of my mother and father. How life giving it is to be raised in a family context where there is not constant quarrelling and quaking over "who's good enough today to be INSIDE." How gracious it is when we can even make a serious mistake ... an immoral offense ... and still be forgiven. Such is the dwelling place of the Lord. No matter how bad the blunder - moral, political, religious, whatever ... this is one house where you can trust the promise - GRACE & FORGIVENESS WILL BE GIVEN!!

I can assure you -- Peter Martyn is one of God's children who makes mistakes and errors of judgment. As many of you vividly recall, the Stewardship Committee had my blessing a year ago when a letter was mailed to members who were behind with the words "PAST DUE" stamped on their statements. We all need a little jacking up from time to time, but that was certainly an inappropriate way to motivate "insiders" of this family toward becoming more faithful. I have certainly repented more than once for that judgment. And thankfully - this house lives by God's grace, not human condemnation, and by his grace God makes me a forgiven insider.

But the real question for this day is -- WHAT DO WE DO WITH THIS GOOD NEWS OF GOD ONCE WE'VE GOT IT?!? Do we take its comfort without living by its challenge?? THAT'S THE REAL HEART OF THE TEXTS BEFORE US TODAY. God does not merely promise to COMFORT us -- His gospel also CHALLENGES US TO BE FAITHFUL COMFORTERS LIKE HIM. And who does he use as his example of perfect faithfulness?? An insider?? No way - he uses an outsider -- a Roman centurion.

Centurions were obviously "outsiders" from every perspective of Jewish society -- politically, culturally, socially, and most important, religiously. But through the centurion, God not only shows that AN OUTSIDER CAN BECOME AN INSIDER ... BUT OUTSIDERS CAN EVEN BE USED AS FAITHFUL EXAMPLES FOR TEACHING INSIDERS.

Here was a Roman centurion -- today we might compare him to one of Saddam Hussein's ambassadors. Centurions were wealthy, high-ranking officials of a despised nation. Being of upward nobility, the centurion was allowed to have Jewish slaves. Most centurions were not only ruthlessly authoritarian toward their slaves, but arrogantly demeaning of all Jews, esp. religious ones.

But here was a centurion who was not only a competent leader, but also a compassionate lover. In a society where servants were seen as mere replaceable objects, this centurion did not allow the evil institution of slavery to blind him to his servant's health and wellness. He desired healing for this servant out of love for him. But he also showed this same love for all Jews - even though he was an outsider. It was Jewish leaders who came to Jesus on behalf of the centurion. It was this centurion who had built a synagogue for the Jewish people. It was this centurion who had kept the peace not by brutal force, but through compassionate caring for God's people. It was this centurion who was an outsider - politically, culturally, and religiously -- but he was a true man of faith ... one of God's true insiders.

Like any true insider ... a true man of faith, this centurion claimed no special religious privileges ... as some of his Jewish subjects had done. INSTEAD, HE CLAIMED SPECIAL RELIGIOUS RESPONSIBILITY! Faithfulness offers the PRIVILEGE of being loved by God; but faithfulness also offers the RESPONSIBILITY of loving others like God has loved us.

That's the true nature of any insider -- it's not merely a matter of one's title or name on the rolls - rather it's a matter of what one testifies as the truth. Here was a centurion who confessed his need for God's help! Here was an authority who recognized a greater authority than himself. Here was a leader who sought not merely to please people by saying what they wanted to hear, but to please God by seeking to live by His Word and support others thru his Word. Or as St. Paul says - here was an outsider who knew the true gospel of the insiders -- a gospel which seeks to support, help, reconcile, and uplift those who are in need ... rather than a perverted gospel which seeks to exclude, judge, demean, and condemn those who are different from "us insiders."

Is it any wonder that we're told this Roman centurion had compassion for all his subjects. COM - PASSION ... the word means, WITH PASSION ... HE HAD DEEP LOVE FOR OTHERS!

On this Father's Day weekend, those are the kind of fathers that we uplift and celebrate with thanksgiving: the ones who show their deep love for their children and other children of God. But even more important, like the centurion, the fathers who show their DEEP PASSION FOR GOD ... who like the centurion, even beyond his patriotism ... sought to show his greatest allegiance to God and his healing spirit. Yes, we especially honor fathers this weekend, like that centurion, who recognize that all the corporate or military might in this world cannot change the decadence and disease of humanity; only God's healing power & those faithful to God's compassion can transform this world into the harmonious unity God intended for it.

A few weeks ago, I urged the confirmands to continue to choose the RIGHT ONE BABY - the FORGIVING GRACE OF GOD. There is no other place THAN GRACE (BAPTISM) to start as disciples. But confirmed disciples never stop there - THEY NEVER TAKE A GIFT WITHOUT OFFERING IT TO OTHERS. We call God omniscient and omnipotent because he knows our needs and provides for them. God didn't merely say he loved us -- HE ACTED WITH PASSION - HE GAVE HIS LIFE FOR US. That's true faithfulness. God calls upon us to be like him - to be life-giving insiders.

That life-giving faithfulness is reflected in the fable of three tulip bulbs named NO, MAYBE and YES. Someone had put them in the bottom of a can until planting time. One day they were discussing their future.

NO said: "As far as I'm concerned - this is it! I've come as far as any bulb will ever come. I'm content with things as they are; I don't desire anything else. I'll just stay here in the bottom of this can."

MAYBE responded: "Well, maybe there is something more. Perhaps if we try harder by ourselves things will get better. So MAYBE tried harder by himself to make his life better, but nothing happened. So he gave up in frustration.

YES, on the other hand, said: I believe there is something more, but I don't believe it's up to us. I've heard that there is ONE who will come and help us be more than we are ... if we just wait for him and trust his helping hand.

One day a hand reached into the can to select bulbs for planting. NO and MAYBE shrank back and avoided the helping hand. But YES gave himself gladly to the helping hand of the gardener. He could scarcely believe what happened after that -- he was buried into the ground, and within weeks ... BECAME A RADIANT BURST OF COLOR AND FLORAL LIFE.

When we say YES to God's helping hand - we sprout, we blossom, we generate new life both inside and outside ... and Jesus says about us ... not even in Israel have I seen such faithful germination!!

AMEN.

PENTECOST II
Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo
June 10/13, 1993
Peter R. Martyn, Pastor

" IT 'S PRACTICE THAT COUNTS ! "

Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. ... Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. Matthew 7:21;24

There is a story told of a wealthy and generous man who lived in a great mansion with his family & servants. The servants had been with him for years; but he had developed a special fondness for one servant in particular. He called that servant to him and told him that he was going to take a long journey. In his absence he was going to entrust this beloved servant with a great responsibility: he wanted the servant to build another home as beautiful as his own.

The Master departed, leaving an enormous sum of money entrusted to the servant for the building of this new mansion. His only instruction was to make certain that the house offered the very best in support and foundation. The servant set about his task, but realized for the first time that his master was not there to oversee the day-to-day work he was doing.

As he began making plans, he found a great site. However, the man who sold it to him warned him that it was very low and that it might not sustain heavy rains. He decided to build on the land anyway, thinking that the price was much cheaper than he or the master had expected and that meant some extra profit for himself. So, after buying the low land, he made plans for the foundation. The builder urged an extra heavy slab to withstand any potential floods; but the servant settled for a smaller foundation, again pocketing the extra profits for himself. And so it went. Every time a builder suggested what should be done to keep the house more secure & safe - the servant settled for something less and pocketed the profits.

Finally, the master returned. But on his journey back, he had decided to sell his home and move to another country. But in return for the years of faithful service from his beloved servant, he offered the servant the newly-built mansion. And as the master rode off with his moving caravan - the rains began. And it poured, and poured, and continued to pour.

Friends in Christ, here was a servant who had been shown nothing but gracious generosity -- he had been given grace upon grace upon grace by his master. And when given the chance to live by the same principles, what did he practice: CONCEIT, GREED & UNFAITHFULNESS TO THE MASTER!! Here was a master who had shown his servant the way, the truth and the life; he had offered extravagant love and merely asked for a promise of faithfulness to that example. The servant promised in word, but not in deed! And who was the loser? Not the master, but the servant.

Is it any wonder that we have the great Lutheran text from Romans today combined with the Matthew's final mandate from the Sermon on the Mount. Every devout Lutheran knows that we have all sinned & fallen short of God's glory; therefore we are justified by grace, not by our own works. There is no better text that summarizes God's extravagant & forgiving love to us. Is it any wonder that we baptize infants (like Breanna)? Is it any wonder that we teach/preach that we cannot earn God's favor by our religious or civic deeds. We want all children to know forever that they can be certain that God will always accept, love and forgive them!

But as one author has said, Luther's addiction to GRACE "alone" was merely a clarification. He never intended to lead us to the conclusion that our works are of no value at all. We may not be "saved by our works," but God never wanted us to conclude that "He forbids us to practice his loving works of mercy!" Quite to the contrary - just like the wealthy master in our story today - once we are shown the example of grace, we are to be practitioners of that grace.

I can only believe one of the greatest disappointments to our Lord is a church building filled with people who make great promises, but then fail to allow those promises to affect their daily conduct! It's the very thing that I have heard many of you saying about the Clinton administration thus far. During the campaign, Clinton made many promises to reduce the deficit and hold taxes for the majority of the middle class. But the conduct of his administration thus far seems to be hedging or downright contradicting those promises. My point here is not to take political sides, but to use the political arena to illustrate what goes on day after day in the religious arena: ALL KINDS OF PROMISES ARE MADE TO GOD THAT ARE NEVER INTENDED TO BE KEPT!

That's why Jesus said "Not everyone who says, 'Lord, Lord' will enter the kingdom, but only those who do the will of my Father in heaven." Jesus' intent here is not to offer a word of damnation; he always forgives an honest effort. But he does not affirm deceitful/empty promises! He is obviously pushing us here beyond mere pious words ... pushing us to a deeper level of faithful practice! Not only to profess words, but to act on them; not only to hear with our ears, but to perform with our hands and feet; not only to receive the gift of grace from a forgiving Lord, but to live & give that grace to others!

In short, Jesus is pushing us here from "knowing" the will of God to "doing" the will of God. We all know God's will: namely, "to love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul & strength ... and to love your neighbor as yourself!" We all know this is the will of God; many of us know all the right scripture passages; but we all too often live by our own wills. Just like the servant of the wealthy master, he knew the will of his master; but he chose to live by his own selfish desires.

In short, the texts today urge us to move from

"profession" to "practice." That's the way it is in every legitimate profession of life. A profession is not a profession until it has moved from theory to practice. None of us would ever hire a lawyer who is not known for her "good practice of the law." Likewise, we choose doctors who are noted for "practicing good medicine:" they must not only have medical knowledge, but they must also know how to "treat" people! As we watch the NBA playoffs these days, we certainly realize that the Michael Jordans & Charles Barkleys have great understanding of the sport -- but they only got where they are because they practiced and practiced and practiced those shots. Likewise, in music and the arts; faithful artists not only know the techniques -- they practice and practice and practice those techniques!! But too often in religion too many people too often think that "profession" of the faith is enough! JUST SAY YOU "LOVE JESUS" AND THAT'S THAT! Jesus could not have made it any clearer today - just saying "Lord, Lord" will not be enough to enter into the kingdom; those who have been graced live by that grace -- their works reveal the will of the Father.

So you ask me, "Well, Pastor, give me one good example of someone who practiced the will of the Father; show me what this love of God is REALLY like!" I certainly can't improve upon Jesus' own supreme example - the good Samaritan. Here was a person who showed rock-solid faith. Here was a man who built his life on the foundation of the grace of God. And when you've built your life on that foundation -- you NEVER pass by someone who is in need of mercy and compassion. You stop. You help. You care. You share. You give what you can give. And then you go the extra mile and promise to cover whatever expenses that might be incurred during the recuperation period.

When "H-Day" finally comes - that's when Hillary's Health Care proposal finally gets unveiled, I hope it has more than a bias of political practitioners or legal practitioners or health care practitioners or special interest practitioners. I hope above all that this new Health Care proposal offers a radical and revolutionary view of what health care was first constituted and intended to be in America -- a reflection of the PRACTICE OF THE LOVE OF GOD - NOT the practice of medicine or law or insurance or government regulations, but the PRACTICE OF THE LOVE OF GOD ... where Good Samaritans have always been the primary model for health caregivers. It's time that all health care professionals & institutions take another hard look at the "practice of the Good Samaritan" to be reminded about a "practice that counts" for more than MONEY OR PROFITS OR GREED, but rather a model that seeks to care for people!

Nothing better illustrates THIS PRACTICE OF DOING GOD'S WILL (OF CARING & LOVING LIKE GOD) than the Jewish folktale I've previously told of the woman who lost her son in a tragic car accident. The woman had made her son the bedrock of her life. Everything revolved around that boy's coming & going! And then the foolish car accident! The woman was crazy with grief. No one nor anything could comfort her. At last a friend took her to a holy man where she pleaded: "Use your

powers to bring my son back to me. Surely by some prayer or some miraculous gift you can induce the Almighty to lighten my grief!"

The old man spoke kindly as he said: "My dear woman, bring me a mustard seed from a home that has never known sorrow or tragedy, and I will use that seed to remove your grief & pain!"

Immediately, the woman set out in search of the miraculous mustard seed. First she visited a wealthy family, figuring that tragedy was less likely to strike the rich. As she approached the mansion, she was greeted by the woman of the house. And then she said: "I am in search of a home that has never known sorrow. Certainly with all your wealth, you must have never known despair or grief?!"

"Never known sorrow!" cried the wealthy woman. "You have come to the wrong house." And then the woman began a day-long litany of all the trials & tribulations that had beset her family - many of them caused by bitterness & jealousy motivated by their wealth. The widow was so overtaken, she was invited to stay in that home for several days, listening & supporting the wealthy woman. Then she left to resume her search and she visited a modest home about two miles away. The experience was the same. Wherever she traveled, from mansion to hut - she was greeted by tales of sadness, tragedy & grief. Everyone found her to be the most willing & careful listener they had ever known.

After months of travel, she had become so involved with the grief of others that she had totally forgotten about her search for the miraculous mustard seed. Obviously, she had indeed found that mustard seed. For as long as she had merely focused upon herself and her own grief - she was like a SINKING SHIP, SAPPED BY HER OWN SORROW & GRIEF! But from the moment she focused her energies upon PRACTICING THE WILL & LOVE OF GOD FOR OTHERS ... AS SOON AS SHE BECAME ONE OF GOD'S WOUNDED HEALERS then she found the bedrock of God's grace ... then she got beyond her paranoia of sinking sand ... then she was anchored on the foundation that could not be altered by rain, floods or winds ... for it was the everlasting rock of God's love.

Like this woman, today we learn that IT'S PRACTICE THAT COUNTS ... a willingness to offer what we all have first received from God ... the assurance of forgiveness, the mercy of compassion, and the certainty of a love that bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things! A PRACTICE OF LOVE that never ends!

AMEN.

*Pentecost II
Glenwood Lutheran Church, Toledo
June 1, 1997
Peter R. Martyn, Interim Pastor*

Moses said, "Observe the sabbath day and keep it holy, as the Lord your God commanded you." Deut. 5:12

"What we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves (servants) for Jesus' sake." II Corinth. 4:5

"The sabbath was made for humankind, not humankind for the sabbath." Mark 2:27

"FIRST THINGS FIRST!"

As already stated in the Children's message, Sabbath is the last day of the old week; Sunday is the beginning of the new week. The Sabbath is the day the Creator rested; Sunday is the day the Lord was resurrected & born again. So, if we believe in FIRST THINGS FIRST, then we are not a Sabbath people ... we are a Sunday people. We are not here looking for rest; we are here seeking renewal & resurrection. We are not here to escape from work ... in fact, in reality we're here looking for work ... for our mission as disciples.

In fact, we have to be very careful with today's texts -- because "Sabbath" texts always get interpreted too literally or too legalistically. God's intent for either the Sabbath or Sunday was never to get us mired down in rules & regulations. That's what Jews & Christians have too often done with the Sabbath & Sunday. The Jews developed 613 ceremonial laws that strictly interpreted "the way to live on the Sabbath;" Christians some years ago instituted "Blue Laws" which forbid shopping & commerce & movies etc. on Sunday. Both of these had a good intent -- to give respect to God's special day of glory! But -- they also created a false order of worship -- WHERE GOD'S PEOPLE too often PRAISED & UPLIFTED THE CODE INSTEAD OF THE CODE-GIVER!

And the biggest problem for both Jews and Christians over the centuries has been one of "Sabbath Symmetry" -- getting the Lord's Day into balance with God's intention! "Sabbath Symmetry" simply says: that all humankind needs a guiding power that helps us get beyond human greed ... we need a divine principle that transcends our petty appetites & parochial worldview ... we need a world view that makes life more than black and white, winning or losing! In short, we need a time SET APART to allow God to bring some balance and perspective into our lives. We need a day in which we recognize there is a greater power than ourselves ... esp. a power that cares and is committed when we are lost and defeated. Above all, we need a power that calls us to live in an IMAGE THAT IS GREATER THAN OUR OWN IMAGE! That's what is meant by "Sabbath Symmetry!" And whether it's Saturday or Sunday, or Wednesday or Thursday is not important -- what is important is that we are SEEKING that greater guidance ... that greater goodness from above & beyond!

That's why we gather on Sunday and Jews gather on Saturday -- to seek a Sabbath Symmetry: to celebrate God's perfect goodness and loving kindness and remind ourselves that we are not nor ever will be so perfect! It's like the story of the two little SCS boys who came to their class with their bibles. The

first boy brought a bible that had been given to him as a special gift: it was still in the original box. He had never even allowed the bible to get dusty; had rarely opened it, and certainly never with dirty hands. This boy saw the second boy's bible. The cover was stained & soiled; some pages were covered with dirty fingerprints; many verses were underlined & notes were scribbled in margins. The first boy punitively said: "Don't you know that the Bible is God's Holy Word; you should take better care of it!" His friend hesitated and then said: "This Bible takes care of me, I certainly don't take care of it!" That second boy understood Sabbath Symmetry -- "the sabbath was made for humankind, not humankind for the sabbath!"

God's Word, God's laws, God's guidance, God's love was never given in order to be left in a box!! God gives himself in order that He might be given away IN BOTH WORD & DEED! God's Word and God's Laws are not to be idolized as holy relics, BUT TO BE ACTUALIZED in holy living! God's Word and Law only become HOLY when lived by his people.

The first step of living according to God's Word is to always take time to be renewed -- that's a Sabbath Symmetry. Detrich Bonhoeffer appropriately stated: "There is no commandment to "work," but there is a commandment to "rest!" God understands us very well -- he knows our tendency is to think that we "can work our way into paradise!" Rather, God says "you will find paradise if you take time off first to see what I have done for you!" God says, "Put First Things First -- first learn my character ... and then go and live in the same image as your heavenly Father!"

So, first we must "rest" with God. That doesn't mean sleeping during Martyn's sermons -- it means STOPPING our hectic pace & LEARNING from the One who is greater than us. To put it into human terms -- we need to be with God in the crib before we crawl out on our own!! Yet, that's always the second step -- to crawl out and become caretakers of others! St. Paul says, "We preach not ourselves, but Christ as Lord and ourselves as his servants." First, Sabbath Symmetry reminds us WHOSE WE ARE ... but then it shows us THE WAY WE NEED TO BE GOING!

Sabbath Symmetry gives us the Law not as an end in itself, but as a guideline for the way we are to serve others! We never idolize the Law--it's purpose is not for legal glorification but to help us accomplish human wholeness! Possibly that's illustrated by the story of the boy who had been told by his pastor that "God was everywhere!" He went home and checked it out with his parents. Then he returned to his pastor and said, "You're right, my folks said that God is everywhere!" Relieved, the pastor said, "I'm glad your folks agree with me!" But then the boy went on: "But pastor, if God is so big, then he's bigger than my dad's garage, right?!" "YES!" "Well, then" said the boy, "He's also bigger than the Rocky Mountains, right?!" "YES!" said pastor. The boy continued, "Well pastor, you did say that God was inside of me as well, right?!" "YES!" "Well then, why doesn't God stick out more if he's so big!?!"

"Keeping the Sabbath" is quite meaningless if God doesn't stick out of us after we have worshipped Him! One year at Hope, our DCE used "feet" as the symbol of God's presence for our SCS kids. Obviously, "feet" stick out. And if we don't use our feet to help and uplift other people -- then we don't have a very good Sabbath Symmetry. It does little good for a Jew or a Christian to "read the Law" from the Bible or talk about it on the Lord's Day but NEVER MOVE IT from the sanctuary to the street. When we preach Christ - we don't merely know the Law ... we live the Law BY "doing unto others as we would have them do unto us!"

Finally -- only on the Sabbath or Lord's Day are we reminded of the true nature of our God: that he is a Lord who gives 100% of himself to us forever! Through the life, ministry, death & resurrection of Jesus, we have come to know a God who puts FIRST THINGS FIRST! He doesn't give us just a little piece of himself: HE totally surrenders himself ... in thoughts, words & deeds!

We see that character illustrated every day for us in the sports world. The BULLS are again in the NBA playoffs. And Michael Jordan has been interviewed and interviewed. And if you really listen to Jordan -- his goal is not a matter of always "winning," but always giving 100%. Every smart athlete recognizes that it's humanly impossible to always win -- but it is always possible to give 100%!! God's winners always give 100% of themselves!

That's God's Way of putting FIRST THINGS FIRST! Is it any wonder that God expects the same from his team, the Christian Church! As we learned from Kathy Schaedler's example in her short time here, the goal of faith is NOT to "always win," but while we are giving to give 100%!! For all of us there will be many losses ... there will be defeats ... there will be disappointments ... there will be some days when we're almost tempted TO GIVE UP! But the Sabbath reminds us that the spirit of God is with us ... God is always giving us 100% of Himself! He urges us to give 100% for others! That's putting FIRST THINGS FIRST -- that's "keeping the Sabbath." That's what makes God's spirit & presence so powerful in this world: His children are never perfect ... they are NOT always winners--they have their warts & blemishes. But whatever their circumstances, like the BULLS, they keep on reflecting God's image -- THEY GIVE 100%!

Obviously, 100% gets expressed in different ways at different times in our lives. At 30 - my 100% was different than it is now in my 50's! But my goal has not changed: God still calls me to give my very best at this moment -- 100%!! That's putting First Things First -- that's reflecting a Sabbath Symmetry! It's not a matter of legalism or literalism ... of creating more & more rules for holy days. "Observing the Sabbath and keeping it holy" means [1] first & foremost to take time out to be uplifted by God's goodness ... [2] then to let his goodness "stick out" tangibly through our feet & our deeds ... and lastly [3] to remember that faithfulness is giving 100% of what God has first given you ... and sharing it with others! God bless you as you continue to put FIRST THINGS FIRST!

AMEN.

*Pentecost II
First English Lutheran, Toledo
June 17, 2001
Peter R. Martyn, Part-Time Interim*

“LET GO ... and LET GOD!”

“Therefore I tell you, her sins, which were many, have been forgiven; hence she has shown great love. But the one to whom little is forgiven, loves little.” Luke 7:47

An ancient Rabbi once wrote: *“We are born with our fists clenched ... and we die with our hands wide open.”* I hope you hear the profound message in that simple sentence: it takes most of us an entire lifetime to learn that we were born “to let go.” Life is given by God in order that we might give it away: God wants us to offer others the bounty He has given us! There are many ways to say it but basically it’s learning to live with our hands WIDE OPEN instead of being clenched SHUT!

But seemingly most of us learn the opposite lesson better. From early childhood we are taught to “hang on” not to “let go.” First it’s a bottle; then it’s holding onto daddy’s hand; then it’s holding onto a fork & spoon; and then it finally becomes holding onto toys, then bigger toys, then houses, then more property, and then status & investments & professional rank, etc. etc.

Is it any wonder that our early training soon leads our children and each of us to say: *“It’s mine, and you can’t have it! I got it first ... it’s all mine, and you can’t have any of it!”* We teach to clutch; to close; to control; to contain; to basically grab life and keep it all for oneself. *“Take all you can get with gusto, cause you only go round once in life.”* The goal of life becomes “obtaining, possessing, claiming, capturing and forever retaining.” *“Hold on, but never let go!”*

Please don’t get me wrong – I know how important some of this is just to help us develop our ego strengths and unique identities. We all need ego & identity! But too often our world teaches only the importance of clenching our fists. We have become masters at teaching of possessiveness: “my” town; “my” nation; “my” friend; “my” child or “my” church; “my” stuff. We put so much emphasis upon individualism and control that there is no room left for sharing and cooperation. Then it becomes *“my way, or no way at all!”* And then we wonder why we have rifts between rich & poor; divisions between black & white; and ever growing alienation between adults & children. Our obsession with “holding onto” ultimately leads us to believe that we can control the world – we’re in charge of everything – we have life in our own grip.

But the life of faith teaches us a very different lesson. First faith teaches that we cannot clench our fists forever! Why? Because we lose things – in fact, every thing! We lose our jobs, our loved ones, our health, our wealth, our status, and finally even life itself. Holding on with clenched fists is ultimately a losing battle. Faith teaches that life is an ongoing process of surrender – as a father, it means letting go of my daughters ... it means losing my football physique ... it

means no longer being what I once was as a senior pastor¹ ... it means finally giving up this life for the greater life of eternity with God. The same thing is true for every congregation. We need only look at our rural Northwest Ohio countryside to see many congregations that once were strong and vital – but now they are having to surrender to God what belonged to God in the first place. After all – they were organized for that single purpose – to give God praise and glory. When congregations have been faithful to that purpose for over a hundred years – it's o.k. when it's time to surrender back to God what he first has given them. Yes, there comes a time when we can no longer say “it's all mine!” “I'm gonna keep it just the way it always was!” No, there comes a time when we must “Let Go ... and Let God!”

Thank God for the biblical stories of people who finally learned to “let go” like this – stories that tell us about people who trusted in God's love & forgiveness as life's ultimate power. Today's gospel story is a graphic case in point. We meet a woman who possessed a precious ointment. Since she was a woman of the streets, she probably acquired this ointment from sleeping around with men of the town. She was a common prostitute ... and therefore despised by the elite Jews of her day. But she had learned what you have I have been taught so well: she had learned to grab life with gusto ... to literally take all she could get! Just like most of us, she clutched all she could have! Although her method was immoral, her mentality was not much different from the wealthiest of Jewish society or our society. But in her gut she had come to learn that she was waging a losing battle. She was not a happy camper; she was holding onto guilt ... she was suffering from greed ... and she was nearly overcome by the grossness of her life.

And at that moment she encountered Jesus of Nazareth. And for the first time with this man, she was able to LET GO – she could turn loose her guilt, her precious oil, her rebellion and her greed. In the presence of this man's accepting love & mercy, she could finally LET GO because she was given grace instead of rejection. The love given by Jesus Christ was OPEN-HANDED ACCEPTANCE RATHER THAN CLENCHED FIST REJECTION! Finally this woman had found someone who did not point a finger ... someone whose love was not a stern demand for perfecting all the rules ... someone whose love was forgiving rather than scolding. And that led to a whole transformation of her life. She became a woman who sought to GIVE rather than to GET ... or as the text says, “because she was greatly forgiven, she was now able to show great love.” Strength was no longer clutching onto a life of the streets, but letting go of that false security and hanging onto the forgiveness of Christ.

We have seen just the opposite example of strength and false security this week. Last Monday we watched the murder of one who still thought he clutched the ultimate power of life. Timothy McVeigh was the classic modern man: he was filled with rage & self-righteousness; he was diluted by a sense of omnipotence and revenge; and he was motivated by only a self-serving ethic. And what did this man achieve by hanging onto all of his anger & alienation?? He not only destroyed the lives of hundreds of innocents in Oklahoma City – but since 1995

and to all eternity his life will represent a sin-filled trail of hostility and continuing horror!

Imagine – if like the woman in today’s text – just imagine if just once Tim McVeigh had stood before God and the people of this country and said: *“O God, have mercy upon me for I have fallen totally out of your image; I have sought only an eye for an eye; forgive me for the senseless wrong that I have reaped upon hundreds of innocent victims.”* Obviously, that statement may not have changed the outcome of McVeigh’s trial or even capitol punishment. But just think how much more redeeming and merciful his life would have been ... especially to the families of those he had murdered.

Today’s text proclaims that a mustard seed of remorse & repentance has the potential to become a mountain top of forgiveness. Regretfully, there will never be any mountain tops associated with Tim McVeigh – he died only fortifying the hellishness of his behavior. There is no rule of law that would have ever made McVeigh’s life right or justified!! But he did have an option to choose the Way of reconciliation ... he could have chosen the Way of repentance ... he could have sought the Way of forgiveness even after his horrendous crime. Yet he chose to HANG ONTO his own pitiful Way of arrogance RATHER than living by the righteousness of Jesus Christ. Ultimately, God will be the final judge of McVeigh and all of us. The question remains: Will God be merciful to sinners who blaspheme His Spirit??

You and I do not need to allow that question to hang in the balance. God gives us two clear choices. We can HANG ONTO our greed, our senseless grudges and our gross actions. Etc. etc. Or, like the woman in our gospel, we can LET GO and LET GOD renew our hearts and minds. After seeing the stupidity of a life like McVeigh’s, there should be no question of what to choose: TO LET GO OF ALL POWERS OF DEATH AND DAMNATION: to let go of lies, slander, deceit, idolatry, revenge, lust, envy and all the other darkness of life.

We have seen the perfect example of that Spirit in the life of Jesus Christ. In obedience to the will of His Father, he LET GO of his life ... in order that you and I might be able to HANG ONTO God’s love forever. There is no greater love story to be told on Father’s Day. Is it any wonder that this Son gathers us again at his Father’s table to declare to us: *“You are forgiven; though your sins are many, you have been forgiven forever! Now go and show great love to one another ... show that because you have been forgiven greatly ... you will love greatly and greatly glorify your Father’s name!”*

Amen.

Pentecost II
First English Lutheran Church, Toledo
June 2, 2002
Peter R. Martyn, Part-time Interim

From Profession to Practice

Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. ... Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. Matt. 7:21;24

Have you heard the story of the wealthy & generous man who lived in a huge mansion with many servants? Among his many servants, he had developed a special fondness for one. He called that servant and told him he would be taking a long journey. In his absence, he wanted this servant to build another mansion as beautiful as his own.

The Master departed leaving an enormous sum of money for the project. His only instruction was: "Make certain you build on the best foundation and provide the best support system." The servant began by finding a site. But he was told that it would not sustain heavy rains. But he built on it anyway because it was much cheaper and would mean more profits for himself. Next he was urged to use a heavier slab; again he chose a smaller slab because it meant more profits for him. In fact, every suggestion the builder made to improve security and safety – the servant settled for less and pocketed the profits.

Finally, the Master returned. On his return journey, he had decided to sell his own home and move to another country. But in return for the years of faithfulness of this servant, he decided to gift the man with this new mansion. And as the Master departed, the rains began. And it poured and poured.

Friends in Christ, here was a servant who had been shown nothing but gracious generosity – he had been given grace upon grace by the Master. And when given the chance to live by the same principles, what did this servant practice?: **DECEIT, GREED & UNFAITHFULNESS to the Master. Sounds a little like my story and maybe even yours?! We profess so easily in words, but find it much more challenging to practice with deeds.**

That's why we have the comfort today of that great Lutheran text from Romans combined with Matthew's final mandate from the Sermon on the Mount. We all know that we have sinned and fallen short of God's glory; thanks be to God that we are "justified by grace, not by our own works." No text better summarizes God's extravagant & forgiving love for us.

But as one author has said ... Luther's addiction to GRACE "alone" was merely a clarification. He never intended to lead us to the conclusion that our works are of no value at all. We are not "saved by works" but God never wanted us to conclude that He "forbids us from practicing his loving works and

acts of mercy.” Quite to the contrary – just like our earlier story – once we are shown the example of grace, we are to become practitioners of grace. The life of faith is always moving from Profession to Practice.

That’s why Jesus clarifies in Matthew “Not everyone who says, ‘Lord, Lord’ will enter the kingdom, but only those who do the will of my Father.” Jesus intent here is not to offer a word of damnation; he always forgives an honest effort. But he is pushing here beyond mere pious words ... pushing to a deeper level of practice. Not only to profess words, but to act on them; not only to hear words with our ears, but to perform with our hands and feet; not only to receive the gift of grace from a forgiving Lord, but to live and give that grace and mercy to others.

Jesus is pushing us here from “knowing” the will of God to “doing” the will of God. We all know God’s will – namely, “to love the Lord with all our heart, mind, soul and strength ... and love neighbor as self.” It’s too easy to profess this scripture passage and then turn around and live by our own selfish will. Just like the servant of the wealthy master – he knew the will of his master, but he chose to live by his own selfish desire.

In a sense, these texts urge us to become “professional” Christians in the best sense of that word. That is – just like a doctor, lawyer or musician – we expect these to practice good medicine, law and music. So it is with Christians. It’s not merely professing pious words and phrases ... it’s a daily practice of love, mercy, kindness and forgiveness ... doing the will of the Father in heaven.

So you ask – give us one good example of someone who practiced the will of the Father; show us what this love of God is REALLY like! Well, obviously, the supreme example is Jesus himself. But Jesus illustrates his own faithfulness with other excellent examples – like the Good Samaritan. Here was a person who practiced rock-solid faith. Here was a person who built his life on the foundation of the grace of God. Because when you build on that foundation, you don’t pass by someone who needs compassion and mercy. You stop! You help! You care! You share! You give what you can give! And you even go the extra mile by providing whatever you can for the future needs. That’s practicing the will of God; that’s moving from Profession to Practice.

Another classic story that illustrates “the practice of doing God’s will” is the Jewish folktale of the woman who lost her son in a tragic car accident. This woman had made her son the bedrock of her life. Everything revolved around the boy’s coming and going! And then the foolish accident. The woman was struck deep with grief. Nothing and no one could comfort her. At last a friend took her to a holy man where she pleaded for him to use his powers to bring her son back. “A prayer, a miracle, but somehow induce the Almighty to lighten my grief!”

The old man spoke kindly and said: “My dear woman, bring me a mustard seed from a home that has never know sorrow or tragedy, and I will use that seed to remove your grief and pain.”

Immediately the woman set out in search of this miraculous mustard seed. First she visited a wealthy family, figuring that tragedy was less likely to strike the rich. As she approached the mansion, she was greeted by the woman of the house. She said: “I am in search of a home that has never known sorrow. Certainly with all your wealth, you must not be accustomed to despair and heartache.”

“Never known sorrow!” cried the wealthy woman. “You have come to the wrong house!” Then the wealthy woman began a day-long litany of all the trials and tribulations that had beset her family – many of them caused by bitterness and jealousy motivated by their wealth. The widow was so overtaken that she was invited to stay in the home for several days ... listening and supporting the wealthy woman. Then she resumed her search and visited a modest home about two miles away. The experience was the same. Wherever she traveled, from mansion to hut – she was greeted by tales of sadness, tragedy and heartache. Everyone found this widow to be the most compassionate and careful listener they had ever known.

After months of travel, she had become so involved with the grief of others that she had totally forgotten about her search for the miraculous mustard seed. In reality, she had found that mustard seed. For as long as she merely professed her own grief, she was like a SINKING SHIP – sapped by her own sorrow and heartache. But from the moment she focused her energies upon practicing love and mercy for others ... she found the bedrock of the Almighty’s grace. In focusing upon the pain of others, she got beyond the paranoia of her own sinking sand. Finally she was anchoring herself to the foundation that could not be altered by the storms of life – the everlasting rock of God’s love and mercy.

Like this woman, like Jesus, like the Good Samaritan – we learn today that profession always leads to practice ... a willingness to offer what we have all first received from God: the assurance of forgiveness ... the mercy of compassion ... the certainty of a love that bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things. **A PRACTICE OF LOVE THAT NEVER ENDS.**

AMEN.