

TRINITY XVIII  
(Worldwide Communion Sunday)  
Redeemer Lutheran Church - Milwaukee  
October 1, 1972

"ALL IN THE FAMILY"

"I give thanks to God always for you because of the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus, that in every way you were enriched in him with all speech and all knowledge-- even as the testimony to Christ was confirmed among you-- so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ; who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ." (I Corinthians 1:4-8)

Today is a DAY OF THANKSGIVING! Thanksgiving for the love, forgiveness, fellowship, unity, yes the grace of God revealed to us through his Son, Jesus the Christ. A day of thanksgiving for having ALL IN THE FAMILY at the Lord's Table at the same time.

It's really great to have ALL IN THE FAMILY sharing grace at the TABLE at the same TIME. Isn't it sad that it only happens once a year! Yes, it's sad for us, and it was sad for Paul and the Church of Corinth.

For the first chapter of Paul's letter to the Corinthian Church continues in verse 10 on a less grateful note. He says:

"I appeal to you by the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ; agree, all of you, in what you say, so that there will be no divisions among you. Be completely united, with only one thought and one purpose. For some people from Chloes' family have told me quite plainly that there are quarrels among you. . . One says, 'I am with Paul'; another, 'I am with Apollos'; another, 'I am with Peter'; and another, 'I am with Christ! Christ has been divided into groups! Was it Paul who died on the cross for you? Were you baptized as Paul's disciples?"

Today we might ask: Was it Luther who died on the cross for you? Were you baptized as the pope's disciples? Were you commissioned to follow Wesley or Christ? Where do ~~you~~ we really stand? With the freedom of Christ's forgiving promise -- or with the enslavement to a particular Christian sect?

Scripture answers these questions for us:

'God so loved the world -- not the Lutheran Church, or Roman Catholic Church, or any particular church -- but the world that he gave his only begotten son . . . ' (John 3:16)

'There is one body and one Spirit, just as there is one hope to which God has called you. . . . one Lord, one faith, one baptism;' (Eph. 4:4)

'Christ is like a single body, which has many parts; it is still one body, even though made up of different parts. In the same way, all of us, Jews and Gentiles, slaves and free men, Lutherans and Protestants and Catholics, all have been baptized into the one body by the same Spirit, and we have all been given the one Spirit to drink.' (ICor. 12:12-13)

'I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one goes to the Father except by me.' (Jn 14:6)

Need we bother with further proof texts? Hardly! For these truths are all self evident to each of us. For we know that we are ALL ONE IN THE FAMILY of God. As Christians WE DO STAND with the freedom of Christ's forgiving promise.

But in all seriousness, what difference does this make? What difference has it made? What difference can it make?

Let me share with you one difference THAT IT HAS MADE. One instance which strongly indicates that God is breaking through to his Church.

Representative theologians from the Lutheran and Roman Catholic traditions met in 1970 to discuss the nature of the ministry and Holy Communion in these separated traditions.

The Lutheran theologians concluded:

We joyfully witness that in dialogue with our Roman Catholic partners we have again seen clearly a fidelity to the proclamation of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments which confirms our historic conviction that the Roman Catholic church is an authentic church of our Lord Jesus Christ. We commend to those who have appointed us that through appropriate channels the participating Lutheran churches be urged to declare formally their judgment that the ordained Ministers of the Roman Catholic church are engaged in a valid Ministry of the gospel, . . . and that the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ are truly present in their celebrations of the sacrament of the altar!

The Roman Catholic theologians concluded:

We acknowledge in the spirit of Vatican II that the Lutheran Communities with which we have been in dialogue are truly Christian churches, possessing the elements of holiness and truth that mark them as organs of grace and salvation. We see no persuasive reason to deny the possibility of the Roman Catholic church recognizing the validity of this Ministry. Accordingly, we ask the authorities of the Roman Catholic church to recognize the validity of the Lutheran Ministry, and correspondingly, the presence of the body and blood of Christ in the eucharistic celebrations of the Lutheran churches.

<sup>one</sup> ~~That is~~ <sup>are</sup> the new beginning of an old oneness. And ~~they~~ will make a big difference in Christ's church. But we must be ready to implement that Spirit of oneness. For in so doing, we will be gratefully rejoicing with Paul and saying:

"I give thanks to God always because of the grace of God which was given in Christ Jesus."

But this is only a "churchy" difference. I believe we celebrate more than this as we celebrate our oneness today. For as we are one in Christ, ALL IN THE SAME FAMILY, we CAN make a big difference FOR THE WORLD NOW -- AND FOR THE WORLD YET BEING BORN.

There are all kinds and sorts of cracks in our present world. Political and racial divisions have caused hatred and bigotry to leak on and pollute all of us. A ten year war has torn families and friends into shreads of apathy.  
~~We have become so calloused by this war~~

One of our youth this past week said: "We have become so calloused by this war that we read about continued bombings and killings like we read the stock market statistics." Is it any wonder that our young people are confused by our sense of values?

There are so many forces which divorce and crack us into pieces these days.

Christian friends, we need some glue and cement. And we have that glue and cement as we come as ONE FAMILY to the Table of our Lord. For although the world may continue to crack and break us, we need not despair. Our Christian faith seeks to always glue us back together.

And so just like the family which eats and drinks at the same table IS BETTER CEMENTED TOGETHER, so it is as the whole Church eats and drinks at the Lord's Table WE ARE REUNITED AND AGAIN FREED TO LOVE EACH OTHER.

And we can again say with Paul: "We give thanks to God for his glueing grace in Christ Jesus."

But our oneness in God's family today MAKES ANOTHER GREAT DIFFERENCE. We leave His talbe

as one Family. And that means we have a solidarity of service. As one CORPORATE BODY, We CAN serve and BETTER meet the needs of sickness, seclusion, sin and supression in the world.

But our corporateness, our oneness, does not give us license to feel @GREAT in the worldly sense of greatness. Our oneness does not give us tause to feel SUPERIOR.

That kind of corporate greatness is found in the business and underground world. Under such a corporate system, the individual often becomes subservient to the corporation.

There is no subservience in Christian servanthood. We offer God's grace -- whether in food, forgiveness or fellowship -- WITH NO THOUGHT OF PRICE -- NO STRINGS ATTACHED.

The corporate systems of the world are too often at the opposite extreme -- a price tag on everything. Individuals, corporations, unions, governments are too often motivated TO SERVE only out of a SHEER motive of profit -- out of personal gain. Such a person or organization is NOT SERVING his fellowman - he is seducing him. Christina service is not motivated by sheer personal gain - but by sacrificial givinig.

The Chnrch's oneness of service motivates us to love our neighbor as ourselves. And as we do this as the WHOLE UNIVERSAL church, we DO HAVE THE POTENTIAL to serve everyman as our neighbor. That may not make the church GREAT in the worldly sense, but as St. Paul says, it will greatly enrich the character of the church and society.

Finally, as we all worship as one family today, we experience the DIFFERENCE of being sustained as ONE BODY to the end of time.

We all know the importance of being TOGETHER with the family for important occasions. TODAY, we've all been invited to the family get-together, and we've all come with our Christian brothers and sisters.

As we continue to respond together in this way, GOD assures us that OUR WHOLE FAMILY WILL NOT BE LACKING IN ANY SPIRITUAL GIFT. In other words, the WHOLE Christian Church will be sustained to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord.

Friends in Christ, as you and I and ALL IN CHRIST'S FAMILY receive his promise of freedom from our guilt, we are compelled to share his promise at our family tables, our factory tables, and all other tables where people gather for real nutrition in life.

There are still too many REAL Archie Bunkers and meatheads in this world. They suffer from ignorance, false pride, fear, and guilt. And their sickness can spread and contaminate ALL IN THE FAMILY of God.

So let's join together with ALL CHRISTIANS EVERYDAY to share Christ's promise of freedom from ignorance, false pride, fear and guilt. Let's transform the Archie Bunkers in our society.

And then along with Paul, WE WILL GIVE THANKS to God always for his grace in Christ Jesus-- knowing that we are not lacking in any spiritual gift, and waiting for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ; who will sustain us to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen.

PRAYER FOR TRINITY XVIII - Oct. 1, 1972  
Worldwide Community Sunday  
Sermon Title: All in the Family

Heavenly Father, author of unity and peace,  
You have called us into the body of Christ:

Help us live as one in Him.

You have given us one faith:

Keep us strong in that trust.

You have given us one baptism:

Let us live without dividing it.

You have given us apostles and prophets:

Let us hear them with singleness of heart.

You have given us pastors and teachers:

Enliven us to learn with the same purpose of  
mind.

You have equipped us for the unity of faith:

Help us to forgive and love in the unity  
of your example.

You have created your church to be one living  
family, made up of many diverse members;

Help us to serve that purpose without  
parochial or sectarian prejudice.

O Lord God, touch all today  
who are sick or weary,  
who are mourning or despairing,  
who are in combat either mentally, emotionally,  
or physically,  
who are poor, hungry, or unemployed,  
who are trapped in sinful habits or guilt,  
who are lonely and imprisoned.

Touch these and touch us with your love so that  
we will be freed to bring

strength where brokenheartedness dwells,  
courage where disappointment reigns,  
increased joy where thankfulness rings out,  
and new hope where depression and indifference  
smothers life.

And now as we share your promise in this  
Sacrament, may we go and free others suffering  
from fear and guilt, in the name of Christ  
our ~~XXX~~ one Lord. Amen.

ST. MATTHEW, APOSTLE & EVANGELIST  
Luth Church of the Master  
September 21, 1975

"WHAT'S NEXT?"

"As Jesus passed on from there, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax office; and he said to him, 'Follow me.' And he rose and followed him." Matt. 9:9

He saw a man sitting at the tax office, and he said, 'Follow me,' and the man followed him; just as simple and just as complicated as that. Such an overwhelming decision made so instantaneously. And where was the incentive for such a major vocational shift? No feasibility study -- no personnel profile -- no job description to ponder over - just follow me.

How often I've been romantically inclined toward this text. I've so often viewed it with such awe - thinking that Matthew could make such a major change in his life so instantly -- so absolutely without weighing the pros and cons.

And yet, most of us have done the same with the major decisions of our lives. When it comes to the crucial decisions of life -- Do I love her enough to marry her? Is it worth dying for? Shall I take the promotion? -- with these decisions, we lay down the slide rules and strike out for the unknown.

It's the little things - like do we ask the Smiths or the Browns -- do we buy it in yellow or lime green - do we do it this way or that -- it's so often the little decisions that see us fretting and fuming with the pros and cons.

But with the big ones - it almost seems like we're often primed. We date for a year or two-- so when he says: "Will you," our response is instant. One meeting with the Call Committee of the Master, and my response was - "that's for me," or could have been "that's not for me."

Yes in these life-changing matters, so often,



like Matthew, all we need to hear is "Follow me" --- no forewarning, no explanation, no attempt to persuade. Come on. This way. I will show you. These are words that do not even need a voice to make them heard. The eyes can speak them - or a pair of hands. Even silence will often do. But we always answer this call with our feet.

We get up and start following. Or we don't, which of course is also decisive. But it's the life-changing situation that often finds us responding IMMEDIATELY to the call.

*of family*  
At one time or another, each of us has done that in regard to the church. Maybe it was due to our marriage - or maybe to some crisis in our lives -- but our presence here today confirms the fact that one day we heard "Follow me," and we followed with our feet.

So that's where we are. Now what? WHAT'S NEXT?? Obviously, there's no definite answer to this question. Only our feet will finally tell. But that's where each of us finds once we're taken the first step. WHAT'S NEXT??

I'd be willing to speculate that Matthew might have even asked this after he gave up his tax ledger. WHAT'S NEXT? It's after the wedding -- after the engagement - after the first day at the new job that we SEE CLEARLY that our new reality MEANS greater responsibility -- greater demands -- maybe even greater frustrations.

So, what's next? We <sup>almost always</sup> usually know, but here's where we ask a host of follow questions TO HELP EASE the new demands upon us. So we ask: How far must I follow? Where do I follow him? How much can I take along with me? What do I get for my pains? What will it cost me? Who is this who asks me to follow?

Yes, how familiar these questions are! We now realize that even ONE STEP means DEEP COMMITMENT. That's why every rite & sacrament in the church is utterly serious business --

they all represent THE FIRST STEP REPOSE to "follow me." Whether joining the church, baptism, marriage, confirmation, or pledging -- each shows that we've heard the call and our first step has got us in deeply.

So - where will our following take us? One thing for sure - it will often take us WHERE WE DON'T WANT TO GO, BUT WHERE WE ARE WANTED AND NEEDED. Let's face it -- few of us really want to serve the outcasts of society. But that's where our following of Christ takes us -- and what's really miraculous IS THAT ONCE WE'VE FOLLOWED, EVEN RELUCTANTLY -- THE NEXT TIME WE WANT TO DO IT. (Illustrate)

And what will it cost us? Most often, just our trumpeted up superiority. Because to follow means to follow, not to lead. That means we don't point to our own superior MORAL CHARACTER but to the dimly seen figure out there that we are stumbling after. (illustrate)

And then we ask - what can we take along with us? Obviously, we take along the love of God. But we're dishonest if we think that's all we take - because we also take along our selfish motives. Whether the motive is prestige, comfort, or another self-serving aim, we all can be thankful that Jesus did not say - "First be sure that your motives are pure and selfless and then follow me." For if he had said that, none of us could have followed.

And then the question - how far? How far must we go with him. And we all know the fight answer - as far as the hill where the three shadows fall and the women stand weeping beside them. But we also know in advance that we lack the courage unto death. And so he calls us to go as far as we can - and maybe our shame, our regrets, our guilt is crucifixion enough.

And finally - who really is this that we're asked to follow? He is the one we are free to follow or not to follow -- and many today

have heard the call and chosen not to follow  
OR to follow at no risk by making no commitment,  
simply calling themselves Christian.

But this man is the one we begin to know  
fully ONLY BY FOLLOWING. Reading about him  
in a book is not enough. Being able to talk  
about him - and to quote all the right passages  
is not the real goal of following.

To really follow is to become a part of his  
body, the church -- a weak thing in many ways,  
often a half-hearted body, sometimes a body  
that shows little faith. But a body that's  
full of hope in ~~even its weakest~~ steps of  
following. Its the only body that he has in  
this world, the only hands and feet to do his  
work.

*through Matthew, and*

And such is his power that ~~even~~ through us -  
others may be led to know that WHAT'S NEXT  
is to follow through with his loving example  
in the lead.

AMEN

PENTECOST XVIII

Luth Church of the Master, Troy  
October 10, 1976

"TO BE A CHILD ... OF GOD"

In the 9th chapter of Mark's gospel, the evangelist states: "Whoever receives one of these children in my name, receives me..." It appears that Jesus was saying that anyone who claims to accept him will also accept children.

It also appears that this was necessary to say because children were in the same category with women and tax collectors during Jesus' day -- they simply were second class persons -- children were far from being idealized.

Yet the fact remains -- most commentators are somewhat unsure how this verse fits into the general discourse on greatness. In Mark's concern for being brief, he sometimes leaves us hanging.

But if we look at Matthew's parallel to this section, there seems to be more food for thought. In chapter 18, vss. 1-4, Matthew states: ... the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them, and said, 'Truly I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.'

\* This gives so much more clarity to the relationship of children and the debate on greatness: "unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."

Sounds pretty ridiculous, doesn't it?? Here Jesus' disciples come to him with this very serious concern about greatness -- they're burning inside just hoping that Jesus' qualifications of greatness will fit them perfectly -- in fact, being the original twelve, let's face it -- they surely thought they had the edge on everyone else.

And what does Jesus say to them: "turn and become like children and you'll be the greatest." Imagine the letdown for those disciples. "Here we come to him with this very important question, and he tells us TO BECOME LIKE KIDS!"

Can't you imagine what was going through the disciples' minds -- they must have been asking: what kind of a Mickey Mouse outfit is this guy Jesus trying to set up??

Could he possibly be serious?? He must have things turned around! After all, we're to be the models - the examples for children, not the other way around. Let's face it -- a child becomes great by modeling after his parents. That's the right script -- surely Jesus was injecting some humor with the disciples.

But you know and I know that he wasn't. There are more than two dozen references in the N.T. to our being "children of God." It's for real that Jesus identifies greatness in children.

And I believe he does this because he perceives AT LEAST three gifts in children that are often unlearned in becoming adults. In fact, for the sake of religious significance, I believe we can call these A CHILD'S THREE GIFTS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.

First, a child has the gift of FOLLOWERSHIP (which obviously could be called the gift of faith or trust). Greatness for adults is to be a super leader -- greatness for a child (and of course a child of God) is to be a determined follower.

Which child do you and I know who is obsessed with being the best leader. Very few. But almost every child BY NATURE is open to suggestions -- desires guidance -- will follow the lead of mom and dad even though he may balk while doing it.

Do we see why Jesus upholds the child as the greatest in the kingdom?!? A child is a born follower -- he has the gift of followership -- the gift of complete trust in authority.

And so it is Christian friends -- we are children of God. Do we see what that really means?? It means that our concern in this faith community is not with being ON THE TOP -- we need not fret about being the best leader or the leading congregation in the synod. Those are the things that the world would like to seduce us into being concerned with.

Our concern is simply to use the gift of followership that God has given us -- to follow and trust by loving him above all and our neighbor as ourselves.

Secondly, Jesus encourages us to be like children because of a child's gift of unhindered love. A child does not have to be brow-beaten to show her acceptance and caring of others-- esp. her parents. In fact, one of the joys of the young child is the constant unconditional giving of himself. Even punishment is short remembered.

It's as the child grows older that he/she learns conditional love -- the learning of jealousy, selfish ambition, and to give only when there's a profitable return.

Yes - Jesus says become like children -- and how difficult it is to turn around and recapture this second gift of the Holy Spirit. How fast we lose our child-like view of love -- how fast we replace it with a lusting, greedy, and obsessive love.

then

Is it any wonder that Jesus uses children as his metaphor when illuminating greatness!? For through the response of the young child, we see the greatness of God's servants -- the giving of abundant love and acceptance because of the father's abundant love and acceptance.

Lastly, the child has the gift of accepting vulnerability. Quite simply -- he lets go, trusting his life completely to the hands beyond himself. Let's face it -- there is no more risky position in life than being a child.

The child is totally dependent upon the security and nurturing influence of his elders. Yes, what a vulnerable position for a child -- yet, every child because he/she is a child simply must accept the risks of that position.

Likewise, to be a child of God is to accept the vulnerability of life. To be a Christian does not give us any special retreat from the damning and destructive forces of life. Faith is not a protective shield against the hassles, the suffering, and the disappointments of life.

In fact, to be a child of God is even more risky. Why? Because a child of God depends upon love and forgiveness in a world that often depends upon hatred, hostility, and putting the other guy down.

We follow in the footsteps of Jesus Christ -- a man who was crucified because of his dependence upon forgiveness. Yes, to be a child of God is risky business -- for the world wants to get even rather than be forgiven.

And so, children of God live a life of joy, yet sacrifice. A life of satisfaction, yet often one with fewer tangible rewards.

But children of God accept all these risks -- because beyond their followership and unconditional love there is the greatest gift of all -- the promise of eternal life in Christ. So even the risk of death is not defeat.

Yes - for children of God there is no reason to question or debate over who is the greatest. It has and always will be Jesus Christ. So it is that we turn and become God's children who follow with unconditional love the life of Jesus Christ.

AMEN

PENTECOST XVIII

Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo

October 11, 1981 (Congregational Meeting--Organ Proposal)

"NO UNEMPLOYMENT PROBLEMS HERE!"

And the householder said: 'Go into the vineyard too, and whatever is right I will give you.' Matt 20:4

Most of us here today have known hard work at a fair wage. In fact, many of you here today have committed yourselves to the hard work of going the extra mile. And some here have even known hard work without a fair wage. *Yet the majority of us - young, old, rich, poor, male, female, have at least* known the privilege ... the grace of working.

Very few of us here today have known days or weeks or months or even years when no one would hire us. In looking at my own life I have been gainfully employed since the age of 12 -- and only once during that period was I turned down for a job I really wanted. So I can't really say that I know the world of headaches, weariness, quarrels, tensions and occasional fun that goes with being unemployed. But I can imagine that it's not very enjoyable.

It's got to be tough to face endless days of doing nothing and facing loved ones with no pay. It's got to be humiliating to live in a world of food stamps and quiet silence when folks say heartless things about persons without jobs. *In some ways* -- it's got to be a world which seems to be lacking the grace of God and the kingdom of God.

Today's gospel parable takes us into that world -- the world of the unemployed. Evidently Jesus had great empathy for the people in this world -- because he bases this parable upon those people. And a basic message underlying the parables details IS THAT GOD'S GENEROSITY (grace) IS GIVEN TO EVERYONE ... SO THAT THEY WILL EXPERIENCE THE JOY OF WORKING.

Contrary to some interpretations -- this parable is not the Christian version of business management or commercial economics. Jesus is not trying to offer a new standard for labor negotiations. Even though the



parable uses a commercial enterprise as its focus, Jesus is not urging business to pay equal wages for all employees, regardless of seniority or time worked. ~~their~~

But the parable is implying if not directly saying that WORK is a vehicle of God's generous grace. Through work you and I gain a sense of self-worth and a whole outlook on life. Whether that work is in the home, the factory, or an office -- it is one of God's essential vehicles of human affirmation. God does not want anyone out of work ... "standing idle as the parable says." He wants to "grace" everyone in this world with a meaningful opportunity to use his/her abilities.

God wants us to see that working IN AND OF ITSELF is a great source of his grace -- and of human joy. Therefore he wants his world to be a place where everyone has an opportunity TO WORK ... to experience the fulfillment of his grace through work.

And so we see in the parable that the householder aggressively sees to it THAT NO ONE REMAINS WITHOUT WORK. Obviously - the householder in the parable represents God. And this parable is clearly telling us, the people of God, that we are to be aggressive in our attempts to seek employment for those without jobs.

The community of faith is God's arena -- his vineyard... and he wants all members in that vineyard to experience his grace through daily work. On one level of this parable -- God is calling us to be aggressive in our efforts TO SEEK WORK FOR ANYONE UNEMPLOYED IN THE BODY OF CHRIST. Obviously - we are not always successful in those efforts -- but like the householder, we must never stop looking and searching and supporting.

But there is another level of God's generosity that impacts upon all of us. Within the body of Christ, God has offered each of us an equal opportunity position. Regardless of when we have entered God's vineyard -- his community of faith -- we have all received the same reward: his never-ending forgiving love.

Because we have been "graced" so generously by God, he calls us to a new level of joyful labor in his vineyard. In fact, God wants us to see that work in his kingdom IS NOT A DRUDGERY, but a PRIVILEGE. It is a privilege to be able to offer a labor of love for the benefit of God's kingdom.

And as the parable suggests -- the reward of working for God is not in the wages BUT IN THE WORK WHICH GIVES MEANING AND PURPOSE TO LIFE. Please don't misunderstand me -- I am not suggesting that pastors or other church professionals should work for nothing. That can too easily become the interpretation of this parable.

But the essential reward of working God's vineyard is the privilege of sharing his character -- his authority -- namely, his love. There is no bargaining table between ourselves and God -- there is only a Communion table where everyone comes and kneels at the same height before God.

*in the vineyard --*

God makes no special deals relative to his grace; he does not offer greater shares to those who have labored longer; he does not withdraw his loving compassion from those who have only labored a short time.

Unlike the meritorious standards of this world, God knows that everyone is equally in need of his grace regardless of the length of their labors. And so it is that God offers his love equally -- whether the person be an 80 year-old pillar of the church or a new born baby just baptized. Both receive the same measure of God's grace. There are no special rewards from God for length of service.

From the world's standards - we know *the response to this* Kind of generosity from God -- grumbling and jealousy. . . We want God to play favorites -- to love according to the seniority system. But God will not function according to such systems. He knows that they create bitterness and jealousy. He wants laborers in his vineyard ~~NOT TO~~ **WORK** for special privileges, but for the sheer privilege and joy of doing God's work.

And so - as the sermon title indicates today, there are no unemployment problems in God's kingdom. There's all kinds of opportunities for those who are willing to serve. In fact, there's a severe shortage of willing workers.

But there is tremendous joy where people are responding affirmatively to his call. I'm certain there are many ways I could illustrate this fact; I'm even more certain there are many more personal ways that you could illustrate the JOY OF WORKING FOR THE LORD in your own lives. For instance -- there are several women in our congregation who deliver meals on wheels every week of every year. There aren't any special wages paid for this labor of love; many times there isn't even much credit given for it. But there is tremendous dedication and joy in this work BECAUSE THE REWARD IS EQUAL FOR ALL -- the satisfaction of sharing God's loving grace for someone in need.

I'm certain there are many other stories that could be told from the lives of our families or our professions. Hopefully - we can all think of at least one area of our lives where we are motivated to labor by faith, by grace, by love rather THAN BY SOME TANGIBLE REWARD.

There are many persons and ministries at Hope which have reflected this labor of love in months gone by ... but one group deserves a word of gratitude today. This group has worked diligently for 15 months. At times their labors were greatly confused; at other times they were outright disagreeable. But never have I seen a group so devoted; so willing to work without regard for time or reward; so concerned that they would be sensitive and caring of the whole congregation that they were trying to represent.

Yes - for 15 months the organ search committee met seeking to make their labor a reflection of God's grace and love for Hope. Their aim was not *to receive praise for* themselves; but to provide a new opportunity for praising God.

*135-Yes 18-No.*

God has not allowed the organ committee to stand idle for the past 15 months. He has called them to be laborers in

his vineyard ... to help fulfill his mission and glorify his name.

*But the*

*in this vineyard of time*  
Organ Committee has only been one response ... one way that God has employed us to fulfill his love on earth. There are literally hundreds of others in the life of this body, his church. Each of them will enable us to be more than idle followers of Christ ... and each of them will help us experience the joy of working for the Lord and his people.

Whether we are first or last, whether we are young or old, whether we are rich or poor, whether we are male or female -- there is never an unemployment problem in the body of Christ.

AMEN

PENTECOST XVIII

World Communion/St. Francis Day  
Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo  
October 3, 1982  
Peter R. Martyn, Pastor

"LET THERE BE PEACE ON EARTH"

"The harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace. What causes wars, and what causes fightings among you? Is it not your passions that are at war in your members? You desire and do not have; so you kill. And you covet and cannot obtain; so you fight and wage war."

James 3:18-4:1-2

Jauhn Francesco Bernadone was born to Peter Bernadone, one of the wealthiest cloth Merchants of Assisi, Italy, in the year 1182. He was baptized John with only his mother present. But his father, returning from a merchant voyage, in sheer excitement named him Frances -- thus John Francis. Although he learned to read and write, he never studied theology or canon law in preparation for his later religious life.

In Francis' day you were born into one of two classes -- either the majores -- the nobles, knights, and lords, or the minores, the common people. The Bernadones' were among the top majores. Like other Christian parents of this day, the Bernadones brought up their two boys (Angelo and Francis) in softness and luxury. Parents actually prided themselves in teaching their boys shameful, abominable acts -- the more perverted the boys became, the more pleased their parents.

With such training it was no wonder that Francis learned early to become a rich, spoiled merchant. He excelled in making money, and was still better at spending it. To be among the wealthy merchants' sons was to be among the night prowlers whose excesses in drinking, women, and hell-raising was beyond proper words. For the merchants and their sons, the greatest good in life was to fill your own appetite -- in today's metaphor to get all you could with gusto. As one biographer put it -- there was nothing Christian about the merchants but their names.

It is no wonder then that WARS, especially territorial and merchant wars, were never-ending realities of Francis' day. Like today -- their cause was always the same -- a struggle for economic and egotistic power. Omer Englebert, today's

leading biographer of St. Frances says: Not only had war, with its orgies and disorders become a necessity and a habit, but it had become the preferred occupation, the ruling passion, and the whole life of the nobility -- the word "peace" no longer had any meaning.

It was from that milieu that Francis of Assisi made a radical 180° turn to become to this day a leading proponent of peace and humility. At the age of 25, kneeling in prayer before a wooden crucifix in the chapel of San Damiano in the foothills of Assisi, Francis heard from the figure of Christ on the crucifix: "Francis, go repair my House, which is falling in ruins." From that time Francis committed himself to poverty and peace with an abandon not visibly repeated in the 800 years of history since.

There was no man who knew better the words of today's text from St. James: "What causes wars, and fightings among you? Is it not your passions for power and lust? You desire and do not have, so you kill. And you covet and cannot obtain, so you wage war." These were not just trite biblical sayings for Francis. Francis had grown up in a household where coveting, killing, and lust for power was the order of the day. He knew the meaning of the absence of peace and the reality of war. It was a daily reminder for 25 years.

The danger for us today is to put St. Francis back into the middle ages saying he has no relevance for our day. Yet in reality we all know in many ways we suffer from the same disease that infected the 12th century nobility: WE WORSHIP ECONOMIC POWER AND WEALTH! Like the nobility of Francis' day, we talk about peace and love and charity and the poor -- but we go on preparing the way for total destruction.

For instance, have we ever given serious thought today to the impact of just one nuclear bomb dropped at the corner of Secor and Bancroft. 70,000 people would be instantly killed -- that's one-fifth of our city. The fire storm would cover a radius of 12 to 15 miles -- it would demolish everything from Bowling Green to Monroe, Michigan -- from Swanton to the Davis Besse nuclear plant.

The crater at Secor and Bancroft would be 650 feet deep -- that's 1½ times the depth of the O-I building. From Detroit to Findlay, from the Ohio/Indiana border to Sandusky -- people would receive 2nd degree burns.

The agriculture of our rich, fertile farming area would be destroyed from 2-3 years. I could go on with additional graphics os such a holocaust -- but remember, we are only talking about the effect of one nuclear weapon. Imagine the impact of several!

We say we must stockpile nuclear weapons in order to preserve peace and life --- but what kind of peace and what kind of quality of life are we seeking to preserve?? I am neither a pacifist or a hawk -- but neither am I an irrespons-  
sible Christian who talks about peace without considering the REAL CONSEQUENCES OF NUCLEAR WAR.

Like St. Francis of Assisi -- never before have individual Christians been faced with the issue of integrity when it comes to peace on earth. St. Francis had one thing on his side -- a far less sophisticated weapons system. When he took his stand for "peace," he was not contending with foreign powers with mounting nuclear warheads. In one sense, one strong voice for "peace" was better seen and heard in his day.

And yet - as our sermon hymn resounds forth this day -- the same principle is true today -- there can only be peace on earth when it begins with each of us individually. Much as it began with St. Francis, it must begin with us -- NOT around oval offices and united nations chambers -- but within the heart and soul of each person.

Regardless of political system or party loyalty -- peace is a power which emanates from the heart each individual. And whether we live in Poland, Moscow or Toledo -- there is but one true source for that peace -- it is the same source that graced St. Francis with such humility and peace -- it is the forgiving love of God. And that peace ... that harmony ... that redirection of our energies and ambitions finds its motivation around the great peacetable--THE TABLE OF OUR LORD.

It is from this table that St. Francis found his inner peace; it was from the Lord's body and blood that St. Francis realized that life's purpose was to UPLIFT AND GLORIFY creation and not destroy it through arrogance, lust or pride.

It was around the Lord's table that St. Francis confronted the ultimate integrity of sacrifice and humility. It was around that same table that Francis realized that he, like all of us, was a poor sinner ... that he most needed the richness of God's grace. It was around the Lord's Table that St. Francis saw the motive for giving and sharing with the poor. Yes, it was around this Table that Francis saw the true meaning of a Suffering Servant -- and he sought to model his life after his forgiving Lord.

St. Francis did not seek to become a great saint -- he simply sought to be a faithful mirror of Jesus Christ. He did not have to learn great theologies or canon laws -- he experienced the greatest theology and law of love known to the world -- the peace-giving love of Christ for the whole world in Holy Communion. St. Francis learned the greatest truth there is to learn in the presence of the Lord's Table -- that peace on earth begins when each of us receive the peace of Christ's presence into our lives.

Edwin Meese, President Reagan's chief advisor and a fellow Lutheran, in his article in THE LUTHERAN says: "There can be no winners in a nuclear war and only one collective loser-- humankind itself. The highest priority is to protect the peace and prevent the dreaded calamity of nuclear war." He goes on, "What can make such a peace possible?? Three factors: unity, deterrence, and dialogue."

I would emphasize the first of Ed Meese's three factors: unity. There is one place where that unity is already pervasive throughout the world -- it is around this Table. As people of God gather around the eucharistic table -- regardless of their politics, their nationalism, their ideology, their financial status,... THERE ARE ONE IN CHRIST.

The power of that unity not only assures us of peace in our hearts -- but it can serve to offer peace on our earth as well. It is not merely a dream; it is a reality. We have seen in the life of St. Francis how that dream came true. He was more than a peace-talker; he was a peace maker. He not only dreamed about peace, he worked for it on earth!

So, like St. Francis, let there be peace on earth ... and let it being with you and me.

AMEN



PENTECOST XVIII

Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo

September 25, 1983

Peter R. Martyn, Pastor

"PEOPLE OR PROFITS?"

"And Jesus said, 'So I tell you, make friends for yourselves with worldly wealth (and profits), so that when it gives out, you will be welcomed in the eternal home. ... For no servant can be a slave of two masters; he will hate one and love the other; he will be loyal to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money'" Luke 16:9,13 (GOOD NEWS)

A couple of weeks ago a salesman contacted our custodian, Dave, to answer one of our long-time prayers: the elimination of our greasy kitchen ceiling. Somehow or other, the salesman seemed to know that Dave had been looking for the perfect product for a long time. After confirming the fact that this "perfect product" came in 5-gallon containers -- Dave indicated that he should ship this small quantity and we'd give it a try.

The next week the product arrived; on the same day the invoice arrived. Fortunately - Dave had not opened the product before invoice arrival. The invoice read: \$188.00 plus shipping, another \$23.00 -- a total of \$211.00 for 5-gallons of ceiling cleaner. Upon presenting Dave with the bad news of the bill -- we both agreed, something smelled pretty rotten about this cleaner!

I instructed Dave to get competitive prices for a similar product with our local distributor. A competitive product was available in the Toledo market for around \$35.00. Needless, to say - I instructed Dave to call the salesman and present him with the facts -- obviously, asking him if some mistake had been made on the billing.

The salesman responded that the \$188.00 was the customary price charged for 5-gallons of this "heavenly" cleaner. Without hesitation -- Dave informed the sales rep that we would be sending his super-duper cleaner back to where it came from... since we could get a similar product here in Toledo. With almost no hesitation -- the salesman then said -- "well, would you be willing to keep the product if I brought the price down to \$50.00.

Dave responded: "No, that's still not good enough since

we can get a similar product in Toledo for between \$35 - 40. Again, with little hesitation, the sales rep said: "Look, I want to keep you as a friend. I'll give you the cleaner for \$37.00 and I'll absorb the shipping charges."

Amazing isn't it -- how a product that normally sells for \$188.00 plus \$23 in shipping can all of a sudden come down to \$37 and no shipping charges. What would you call a deal like that??? I think generally in the annals of business I would call it a ~~graffy~~ salesman. It was surely obvious before we presented the salesman with the crisis -- somebody was definitely going to get rich at the expense of Hope Church. I personally suspect that the salesman was the graft promoter; he had evidently been given a bottom line price that ~~we~~ would ~~sell~~ for and still INSURE A COMPANY PROFIT -- anything over that bottom line \$37.00 was profit in his pocket. He was going to net himself a \$150.00 profit on one sale of 5-gallons of ~~celling~~ cleaner!!

Do you see how the parable of the unjust steward parallels this situation. The steward is just another term for "manager" - he was the manager of a master's property. It was his job to collect rent from the tenants who farmed the master's land. It is known from biblical scholarship that many of these managers were extremely usurious -- they practiced graft. They not only collected the rent due to their masters -- they would often double the rent and pocket the difference. Their aim in life was not to promote good relationships between the master and tenants -- but rather to promote GREAT PROFITS FOR THEMSELVES. They were consumed by graft and greed -- a desire for bigger and bigger profits!!

The parable makes obvious that this manager's master finally learned what was going on -- THAT THE TENANTS WERE BEING GOUGED! So he ~~summoned the steward for an accounting~~ -- at which time he fired the manager. HE CREATED A GREAT CRISIS in the manager's life! The manager realize he could do nothing else with his life. He's not strong enough to dig ditches; and he's too proud to beg. So for the first time in his life he decided to TURN OVER A NEW LEAF -- he sought to win the relationships of the tenants! He REDUCED HIS EXHORITANT PROFIT in order to keep the friendships of the tenants!!

It's for this reason that the Master commends the manager. He is not commending the manager's dishonesty -- his graft -- his fraudulent behavior. But he(master) is saying: At last

manager, you have seen the light; for the first time you have valued PEOPLE over PROFITS!! For the first time you are seeking to set straight A LIFETIME RECORD OF EXPLOITING OTHER PEOPLE!!

It took a major crisis in this manager's life to learn one of the most basic lessons of life: PEOPLE ARE TO BE SERVED, NOT EXPLOITED!! PEOPLE ARE MORE IMPORTANT THAN BIGGER AND BIGGER PROFITS!

The lesson of this parable is absolutely consistent with all the basic teachings of our Lord: NAMELY, RELATIONSHIPS TO ONE ANOTHER ARE THE FUNDAMENTAL WAY IN WHICH WE SHOW OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS!! When the young lawyer came to Jesus and asked: 'What must I do to inherit eternal life?' -- Jesus offered very practical advice: LOVE GOD AND LOVE ALL PERSONS. Likewise - in the Final Judgment, Jesus asserts that the acid test of faith IS OUR WILLINGNESS TO SERVE OTHERS WHO ARE IN NEED -- for I was hungry, and you fed me, I was naked, and you clothed me; I was thirsty and you gave me drink; I was sick and you visited me, I was in jail and you came to me."

The acid test of our individual and congregational faith is NOT HOW GREAT HAVE OUR PROFITS BECOME -- BUT, HOW MUCH OF OUR PROFITS HAVE WE SHARED TO SERVE OTHERS?!!?

The steward (manager) learned a lesson we all need to learn: "money is an excellent servant but a treacherous master!!" Dr John Rilling, former Ohio Synod bishop, says: "Our problem as Christians is NOT to end up to be the richest man in the cemetery. God calls us to use our time, talents and money not only to make life easier for ourselves -- but especially to lift the crushing burdens of human poverty! We can't buy our way into heaven, but we can make this life a little more like heaven for everyone!" Along the same line - a famous Denver, Colo. statue says: "All a man has when he comes to die IS WHAT HE HAS GIVEN AWAY!"

We all nod and say "yes" to these principles of faithful living -- BUT LIKE THE MANAGER, we often fail to live them until faced with a major crisis. It is so hard to escape the grip of self-serving sin!

But the parable before us forces us to deal with one of the toughest questions of life: HAVE OUR WORLDLY PROFITS & WEALTH

OUR WORLDLY GOODS BECOME OUR MASTER OR OUR SERVANT?!?!

That is a tough question -- we are managers of God's resources. Whether time, talents or money -- whatever we are given is a gift from God to be used TO SERVE OTHERS and thereby glorify God, the giver!! What do we do with all the profits that God has given us?!?

The leadership of this congregation will be faced very directly with the toughness of that question in the next month or two. For God has profited this ministry through many of you here today -- but in the next month or two he will offer us an ~~additional~~ measure of profit.

Several months ago - an elderly gentleman reached a crisis in his life. His best friend died -- she had been a long-time member of Hope. He had often seen our pastoral ministry to this woman-friend of his. He also experienced the pastoral ministry in that moment of crisis. And that crisis soon turned to another -- within 30 days, he was close to death. But he had the soundness of mind to put Hope Church into his Last Will and Testament for  $\frac{1}{4}$  of his estate.

Here was a man who had never crossed the threshold of this church building. But here was a man who finally saw the meaningfulness of a relationship to God and his people. And he responded to that relationship by offering a good portion of his life profits to our ministry.

Obviously -- the disposition of those profits NOW BECOMES THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE CHURCH COUNCIL. And the big question has not changed at all: will those profits serve people ... or will they just be used to make greater profits?!? There is no easy answer to that question?? But as responsilbe managers -- the church council will have to struggle with that reality IF REMAINING FAITHFUL TO OUR LORD AND CREATOR.

But that's not only an issue for Hope's church council. It's an issue for you and me -- an issue that we must address every day of our lives. God has profited many of us greatly-- WHAT MEASURE OF THE PROFITS WILL HE RECEIVE FOR THE SAKE OF SERVING PEOPLE -- FOR THE SAKE OF HIS KINGDOM?!?!

I truly believe that the people of Hope have a sense of integrity and honesty that far exceeds the salesman who tried to cheat this church. I truly believe that the faithful of this congregation would not practice graft with God -- they would not withhold their profits from his ministry and mission! I truly believe that all of us who have profited by the forgiving love of Christ WILL RETURN A FAIR MEASURE OF THAT PROFIT TO CHRIST AND HIS MISSION THROUGH THE GIVING OF OUR TIME, TALENTS, AND MONEY! May God inspire us to share our profits at all times -- long before the death crisis of our lives!

AMEN

PENTECOST XVIII  
Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo,  
October 14, 1984  
Peter R. Martyn, Pastor

622

"BEYOND COMPARISON!"

But the owner answered, "Friend, I am not being unfair to you. Didn't you agree to work for a denarius? Take your pay and go. I want to give the man who was hired last the same as I gave you. Don't I have a right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?"

Matthew 20:13-15

Church budget time has again arrived. Next Wednesday evening your Finance Committee will be struggling to propose a fiscally responsible 1985 budget. I say fiscally responsible meaning ... a budget that captures a committed expression to Jesus Christ and his mission! But how will they arrive at that budget presentation?

You and I know exactly how that will be done. First of all, they will look at the budgets of Hope Church for the past several years. They will compare these budgets to what was actually given during those years. Then they will compare 1985 with 1984. They will do a comparative study of inflation in 1985 as compared with other years of the 80's. They will compare Hope Church to other churches in the area -- what's happening in those churches? And they will even compare Hope Church to what's going on in the business community of Toledo. All these comparisons will be part of our 1985 planning.

In short, 1985 will be projected on the basis of comparisons. That really doesn't sound too unusual, does it? Let's face it -- that's the way most of our decisions are made. We spend an inordinate amount of our lives comparing -- comparing our situation, our standard of living, our net worth, our resources with the guy down the street.

As we all know, we compare our homes with the homes of our neighbors. In fact, many times when they get something new or unusual -- it becomes the fad of the neighborhood. We also tend to move into neighborhoods or go to churches where the people have a comparable status or occupation. We like to associate with people who have similar career interests or aspirations. Although we talk a lot about "being independent," much of that is just talk -- for we like to belong to the same clubs, vote for the same people, buy the same kinds of clothes, and the list goes on and on and on -- we're basically very comparable people.

Comparisons. Comparisons. Comparisons. To live in this world is to be constantly making comparisons. But not only

making comparisons, we actually base many of our decisions and judgments upon those comparisons.

For instance, why are you here at Hope Church this morning? Is it because you have compared Hope to other churches and possibly given Hope the edge? Is it because of some special program at Hope Church -- possibly because of a renewed youth emphasis or ongoing family orientation? Is it because you believe and are proud of Hope's growing music potential and emphasis? Is it because of Hope's unique location? Maybe (and this is most doubtful) -- maybe it's even because you actually appreciate the pastoral leadership of Hope??

Interesting isn't it -- that we often identify even with a church because of secondary comparisons. Has anyone ever asked: Is Jesus Christ at the center of this congregation's proclamation?? Does this church confess God as creator and Lord of the universe?? Does this church give proper emphasis to word and sacraments?? How much emphasis does this church give to the "undeserved but loving grace of God" in its preaching and teaching? Is the power of the Holy Spirit alive and being uplifted in the lives of those who gather in this place??

How often are those questions asked about Hope Church?? I would guess very rarely. Because those questions -- those are the essential questions of the church. And with those questions you will find very little difference between Hope Lutheran, or Epworth Methodist, or St. Michaels in the Hills, or Covenant Presbyterian, or any other mainline churches nearby. Those questions get to the real heart of the church's mission and existence. But so often our comparisons merely deal with the superficial stuff of the church's life -- the way the church looks, the way people dress, who belongs to which organization, and all the other "secondary comparisons" of congregational life.

That was the precise situation of the parable before us today. A landowner had a job in his vineyard that needed to be done pronto. He went out to hire workers. He found several who needed work. And he hired them and promised them a fair day's wage -- one denarius. The workers were thrilled. Instead of being idle -- they were going to be given a full day's wage; they were ecstatic with this promise. It was a very generous offer -- esp. just to get the work. Well - the owner continued to go out and get more workers. Each time he promised a full day's wage -- one denarius. Even up to the last hour -- he still promised one denarius. The same offer was given to all -- a full day's wage.

But once the early workers found out the offer made to the later workers -- they were furious! They began to grumble and begrudge their denarius. They felt cheated -- even though they had agreed to ONE DENARIUS. They became

deeply angered by the owner's generosity. We see exactly what they had begun to do --THEY BEGAN TO MAKE COMPARISONS. And once they began comparing themselves to others -- the became entrapped by envy, jealousy and anger. Once they began making comparisons, they totally forgot the original agreement -- their full satisfaction, their joy and good fortune of one denarius, their ecstasy with even being employed for the day.

How we all identify with those early workers, don't we? Like them - most of us feel they got screwed! We feel that way because it is so human to make comparisons -- so human to get caught up in the comparative analyses of the world. Comparisons which lead to jealousy and envy and even hatred -- comparisons which many times even lead to death! Which one of us hasn't seen that very narrowmindedness in the ongoing strike at A.P. Parts! It's the basic mentality of the world -- I'm gonna get mine even if I have to take the company down the tube with me! Once we overlook God's basic generosity and begin making life an arena of comparisons -- then we are destined to go downhill!

That truth is so aptly illustrated in the legendary story of the two brothers who lived in perfect harmony for many years. One day a magic genie appeared to them and said: "Ah so -- you have done so well, you have been so kind, it is only fitting that you should reap your reward. Then he told them to ask for anything and "it would be theres." Just before he disappeared, he added a couple of conditions. Said the magic genie - "The wonderful thing is that although only one brother can make the wish, the other brother will receive twice as much of whatever is wished for! But the offer is only good until sundown."

The brothers were ecstatic -- or it appeared that way. What should they wish for? The sky was the limit! What would they go for -- a million, a billion, a never-ending supply. Would they go for money or things? The possibilities were endless!!

But all the while the "wishing brother" was having second thoughts. Even though he knew he would get whatever he wished for -- it bothered him that his brother would get twice as much! He began making comparisons. Greed and envy began to fill his heart. The sun was about to set and he still hadn't made a wish. His brother seized him and said, "Come on, get with it -- the time is running out." He grabbed him by the throat and yelled, "Come on, wish...wish...wish! Wish or I'll choke you to death!"

Gasping for air, the wishing brother blurted out: "I wish, I wish ... I wish to be blind in one eye." That's the power of making comparisons -- it causes envy, jealousy, hatred, ... and can even lead to death!

God has never wanted that kind of "carrying on" among his faithful people. He has therefore gone beyond fairness ... he has gone beyond mere justice ... he has gone beyond a mere labor mentality in his generosity toward us. He has promised to treat every one of his faithful people equally! He has promised everyone the same grace! Whether a life-long, 85-yr old suffering servant or a four-week old baby like Logan Matthew -- God's offering is the same: THE GENEROSITY OF HIS UNDERSERVED, FORGIVING LOVE! God makes this offer NOT BECAUSE WE DESERVE IT, BUT BECAUSE WE NEED IT! He sees how stingy and self-interested we have become, and he declares: I WILL GIVE YOU A NEW WAY ... I WILL SHOW YOU WHAT REAL GENEROSITY IS -- I WILL POUR OUT MY ABUNDANT LOVE EVEN THOUGH NONE OF YOU DESERVE IT!

Our habit of baptizing tiny infants reflects our belief in that loving-kindness of God: Even before the newborn child can begin to conceive the difference between right and wrong, the fullness of the divine life is poured into his frail human flesh. God doesn't reward us in proportion to our human goodness or effort -- he rewards us in proportion to his unconditional love and kindness! And that reward is BEYOND COMPARISON!! There is nothing or no one in life that offers such generosity -- such love -- such kindness!

Rational, logical people are upset with that kind of generosity. Just like the laborers in the vineyard, they grumble over that extravagant kindness -- that generosity! They don't like it because God's ideal is not our society's ideal. Our society says: only hard workers will get there rewards! But God says -- even faithful failures will get their reward! That kind of generosity just doesn't make sense in our world. Because we don't want to be justified by God -- we want to justify ourselves. We don't want God to have the merit -- we want all the merits for our own efforts.

Well, as long as we play the game of merits and rewards and comparisons -- there will continue to be envy and jealousy and hatred all around us. God has a better idea. He asks us to forget about making all our silly comparisons the basis of our responsiveness. Instead, he says "Start focusing upon my generosity." When we start focusing upon his generosity toward us -- there can be only one response: WE WILL BEGIN TO BE GENEROUS LIKE HIM!! In fact, our generosity will begin to look like his -- it will be BEYOND COMPARISON!!

Then we won't go back to last year's efforts or last year's budget in order to look to the future. Because last year -- or any other comparative year -- does not tell us one thing about God's generosity at this moment. Those years only tell us HOW GENEROUS GOD WAS THEN -- or possibly, how selfish we were at that time.



We dare never merely compare the past if we are really concerned about the present and the future. Oh - as human beings we will definitely look to the past. By nature that's our habit. But God help us if we look to yesterday for tomorrow's vision. Yesterday is dead and gone. It cannot determine today or tomorrow! Today is a new day -- we must look to this day and tomorrow with a vision of God's present and future generosity!

We must ask ourselves: Has God given us a fair wage in this world?? Have we been treated generously?? Have we been assured of eternal salvation as well as momentary support?? What difference has Jesus Christ meant for us?? Have we been loved and forgiven even in spite of our sinfulness and selfishness?? Hasn't God truly affirmed us -- especially in America -- with great abundance and loving kindness???

The answers are YES! YES! YES! YES! AND YES AGAIN!! God has most generously said "Yes" to us -- BEYOND COMPARISON! How can we possibly say "no" to him and each other?? How will we respond to his generosity?? Like the laborers - will we begrudge his generosity?? Will we play the game of comparisons with one another?? Or will we go BEYOND COMPARISON -- GIVING GENEROUSLY AS GOD HAS FIRST GIVEN TO US?!?

AMEN

Leadin for Pentecost XVIII  
Peter R. Martyn

Good morning. Hoping your week has been one of special blessings and generous expressions of love. Today we continue in the gospel of Matthew -- chapter 20, vss 1-16. This is the famous parable of the laborers in the vineyard -- only recorded in the gospel of Matthew. It's a hard parable for most of us to understand. Because the owner treats everyone equally -- agreeing to pay both the early laborers and the later laborers the same wage -- one denarius.

This is not the way of the world. When we do more or work longer we expect more. We constantly live by comparing what we get to everyone else. And what that leads to is envy, jealousy and hatred. God does not want things that way. Instead he offers a better example. He offers each and every one of us equal grace -- regardless of our age, sex, length of church membership, economic status, or whatever. God knows us better than we know ourselves -- he knows our greatest need is for his love. So he offers it without any hitches -- freely given, equally given, with the hope that we will comprehend that his gracious love is BEYOND COMPARISON to anything else. Thus, the sermon title: BEYOND COMPARISON. To have received that generous love can only mean one thing: WE MUST SHARE IT WITH EQUAL GENEROSITY. THAT IS OUR AIM AS CHRISTIANS -- TO GENEROUSLY OFFER WHAT WE HAVE FIRST RECEIVED. (Prayer, text, sermon hymn)

PENTECOST XVIII

Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo

September 29, 1985

Peter R. Martyn, Pastor

**"WHAT HAVE YOU BECOME  
NOW THAT YOU'VE GROWN UP?"**

"Taking the child in his arms, Jesus said to them, "Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me."  
Mark 9:36-37

Well, now that you've grown up and become what you've always wanted to be, are you thrilled with the results? Are there any missing links in your life - or have all the notches been satisfactorily filled? Would you say that you are now living the contented life -- no more frets, no more fumes, no more fusses ... you've got it all in hand!! Is all the dissension and disappointment and despair a thing of the past? Now that you've made that commitment of thousands of hours and dollars to get that Ph.D. or whatever the goal was -- has it been the reward and answer to your former emptiness? Now that you've climbed the ladder and you're seeing things from the top -- do you feel the power and prestige of your new security? WHAT HAVE YOU BECOME NOW THAT YOU'VE GROWN UP?

Do you finally have all the answers that you were looking for? Are you more respected and revered by your peers and colleagues? Has your added leisure and net worth really given you the peace of mind that you've always wanted? What's it really like to HAVE GROWN UP -- TO HAVE GIVEN UP ALL THAT CHILD WITHIN US?

Well, I can't speak for all of you -- but as for me, many times it's really horrible!! So I've made it. So I'm now pastor of one of the LCA's larger congregations -- those that are in the top 10 to 15%. What has such power and prestige really done for me? Has it made me more Christlike? Has it given me more compassion? Has it made me more forgiving? Has it brought out the best in me?

The treadmill of big institutions does not necessarily bring out the best - in fact sometimes it does just the opposite - just as it has done for most of you who have been measured "successful" by the world's standards. That success often makes us "more greedy and grumpy." That success often leads to distrust and even deceitfulness. And that power and success far too often fosters a destructive spirit within us. Let's face it -- growing-up in this world is hardly any guarantee of leading the good life.

A few months ago the New York Times Sunday Magazine published a two-part cover story about the spectacular demise of Wall Street's oldest continuing brokerage firm -- one of

Possibly the following quote from a church bulletin best describes our Lord's goal for us: WE SHALL BECOME TRUE CHRISTIANS ON THAT DAY WHEN THE CHILDREN OF THE WORLD EXCITE US AS LEAST AS MUCH AS THE RULERS OF THIS WORLD.

In what way should children excite us? Well, contrary to the greatness of rulers, children reflect an inherent dependence and trust in their elders. Ultimately, they would rather take orders than give orders (even though it often doesn't seem that way with 4-yr olds). In short, most children reflect confidence in the wisdom of their elders.

Jesus urges us to "welcome children" because then we are welcoming what is so basic within all of us -- the need for an honest relationship with ourselves and with God. Children trust and depend upon others. And that is the basic message of our faith in God ... TO TRUST AND BE DEPENDENT UPON HIS LOVE. Trusting children see not only their strengths, but also willingly admit their weaknesses and sinfulness.

Our deepest needs and hungers do not change just because we've grown up. Don't you still yearn for affection and warmth and love? Don't you still cry out for forgiveness and understanding? Aren't you still looking for answers and meaning and purpose for your life? Isn't your search for hope just as alive today as when you were a child? There's still a lot of child in each of us, and God help us never to lose sight of it!!

But "welcoming children" not only helps us see ourselves for what we really are. More importantly, it helps us see our mission as God's children -- his church. Our mission is to welcome all the children of the world -- namely, to serve the weak ones, the small ones, the destitute, the lonely and isolated of the world.

Our mission is not like the great ones, who merely love to flex their muscles in front of a mirror. Our role is to look through the windows of the world and seek out the little ones wherever and whoever they may be. Regardless of their skin color or social status or neighborhood, unlike the great people of this world, our role is not to control others but to serve them in love.

According to Jesus, you and I have really become grown-up when we let go of our worldly measures of power and share whatever we possess with the less fortunate. That's real greatness. Because you can't fight or quarrel with someone who's willing to give it all away. There's only one response to such generosity and kindness: GRACIOUS ACCEPTANCE AND THANKSGIVING!!

the most revered and powerful institutions of its kind. It was an intriguing tale of ambition, secrecy, greed, corruption, and ruin. It was the tale of lust for power and position, a tale of ruthless disregard for others in pursuit of profit and control. The firm's partners all went their ways with handsome financial settlements and bonuses, which for each amounted to more than most of us will earn in a lifetime. Yet curiously, none seemed content. Their resentments, contentions and suits continue to this day. These partners had grown up, but what they had become leaves much to be desired. Lust for power and preoccupation with position had become the total fruits of their labors.

Their story is much like that of the banker whose houseboat was sinking off the Florida coast. He radioed for help. The Coast Guard picked up his SOS and radioed back: "We are on our way ... what is your position? We repeat: What is Your position? "I'm Executive Vice President of First National Bank."

Isn't that often the way we measure a person's worth in the world -- by the position he/she has achieved. So often when attending seminars/conventions, the leaders are not interested in "why you're there" or "what you can offer," but rather "who do you represent" or "what is your position or status." You only count as a person if you have an important position. The somebodies of this world, the great ones are the ones with power, wealth, and position. THAT'S WHAT OUR WORLD TEACHES US TO BECOME WHEN WE'VE GROWN UP.

Is is any wonder that Jesus Christ was not too popular in this world? His own disciples got caught up in this worldly wisdom -- quarreling over who was the greatest. So Jesus entered that scene and with few words turned our whole grown-up world upside-down: "Whoever welcomes a child such as this welcomes me."

All those years we strive to be free of the child within us. All that effort to leave behind our childhood innocence and seek instead to be self-sufficient and sophisticated. All that desire to forget about our child-like acceptance and trust, and run after all those adult accumulations and cultural clout. And then this Jesus of Nazareth comes along and denies everything that we've become -- he tells us to go back to our childhood. Is that what he is really saying: BECOME A KID AGAIN?? Does he really want us to merely become a reborn child??

Well, for certain, he doesn't want us to become anymore childish than we already are. For just like his disciples, one of our greatest childish traits is to make power and prestige the prize of living. That's not welcoming or becoming the child that Jesus is talking about.

That's exactly what Jesus did for you and me on a cross some 2000 years ago. He welcomed the child within himself. He gave up control of his life to God. He surrendered everything that the world calls great -- power, prestige, prominence. Instead, he took upon himself what God calls great -- the love of others. That example of self-giving love continues to be what God says is our greatness ONCE WE HAVE BECOME GROWN-UP IN HIM.

Maybe no better modern example has been given to us today than Radar on the TV series M.A.S.H. At first impression, Radar appears to be a nobody -- a push over. He wasn't a forceful doctor type; he certainly didn't give many orders. He didn't run after women or get the unit's most admired award. Radar was just a necessary and efficient clerk (very much like a certain secretary Hope is honoring today); a clerk who went to bed with his teddy bear.

But when you look more closely at Radar, there's the grown-up God wants us to be. He was one of the few of the M.A.S.H. unit who could love the unloveable. He was a man who went out of his way to make life better or easier for others. He was extremely competent in getting things accomplished without always calling attention to himself. He filed reports, he cut red tape, he got the supplies, he kept everyone happy. And where would the M.A.S.H. unit have been with this peacemaker who kept everyone talking to each other.

Radar was the true child of God -- a servant of all. Here was a man who functioned, got things done, brought peace and love to others, without having to stand on center stage and ask for all the credit. HERE WAS A MAN WHO REMAINED A CHILD OF GOD EVEN AFTER HE HAD GROWN UP. Like His Lord, He was the greatest, because he was a servant of others.

AMEN

PENTECOST XVIII  
60TH ANNIVERSARY COMMEMORATION  
Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo  
September 17, 1989  
Peter R. Martyn, Pastor

**"HAPPY DAYS ARE HERE AGAIN!"**

"Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven." Matthew 5:12

Today we celebrate a Happy Anniversary of 60 years. And last week we celebrated a Happy Anniversary of 10 years. Last month we celebrated a Happy Godsend to Pastor Bob after nearly six anniversary years. For all of us here today, we have or will be celebrating a Happy Anniversary for whatever number of years God has given us. We like to celebrate happiness in terms of years. And certainly as we look at 1989 ... this tremendous year of anniversary and renovation and renewed vitality ... we can certainly say: **HAPPY DAYS ARE HERE AGAIN!**

But we all know that's only a partial truth. Happiness is so much more than years and renovations and renewed health. In fact, each of us is very much still searching for the real meaning of happiness. It takes a lot more than an anniversary or renovation or profitable year to really make us happy. Even with all the wealth, comforts, and pleasures of America, on this very day 70 people will commit suicide and 1000 more will attempt it. That's 365,000 "happy people" like you and me who will be unhappy enough in 1989 to try to snuff out their lives. In your lifetime and mine -- almost 15 million people will attempt suicide. That's hardly a very good barometer of happiness in America - is it??

Some years ago the editors of Psychology Today sent questionnaires to 52,000 subscribers to determine what really makes them happy. Their response was a mixed review. But one subscriber wrote back and asked to see the results of the survey: He said: "I think I'm happy - but I'd just like to verify it with your results."

We laugh at this man, but each of us in his or her own way is trying to verify what happiness truly means. Many of you remember the story of the desperate man who finally went to a psychiatrist. He was lonely, despondent, miserably depressed, and desperate for a fast fix. The psychiatrist, feeling that the man simply needed a brief change of environment, snapped his fingers and said: "I've got just what you need; there's a great circus in town with a very humorous clown; I saw this guy the other night and he's the greatest act for a good, full-bodied alteration of the mind. Just go see this clown and you'll be much better." After a momentary silence, the patient said: "Doctor, I am that clown!"

There are a lot of clowns in this world -- a lot of people looking for a momentary fix of happiness ... and many more who are putting on masquerades of happiness. And

certainly some of these masqueraders have joined Hope Lutheran Church over these past 60 years. But regrettably -- these kind of people never stay. Because they have not yet grasped the true character of happiness -- the true nature of blessedness.

The Beatitudes are the perfect text for an Anniversary Celebration because they reflect the true character of Christian happiness. The word "blessed" in Matthew 5 is a Greek term meaning "the highest state of happiness" - equal only to that experienced by the Greek gods.

The clowns - the masqueraders of this world have two very serious misconceptions of this highest happiness. First, they think that such true happiness is found only in the pursuit of pleasure. Please note -- there is nothing in the Beatitudes that suggests that pleasure and happiness are synonymous. True happiness does not depend upon how you feel at any moment or what you own or the size of your house or church ... or the scope of a renovation or some other tangible pleasure.

A recent ad in USA TODAY sported the following about the BMW automobile: "... you can't buy happiness ... But for a mere \$299 per month, you can lease exhilaration. Simply visit your authorized BMW dealer before September 30." And then after further extolling the virtues of the BMW 325, the ad concludes: "For a program of spiritual uplift ON EASY MONTHLY TERMS, visit your BMW dealer today."

Could anything be more contrary to a true spiritual uplift -- obtainable in easy monthly terms. Since when is true happiness effortless, easy, and nothing but pleasurable. And that's also where the clowns of this world make their second mistake about happiness -- they claim that happiness is found thru the avoidance of pain.

It reminds me of the story of Dean Briggs who served as academic dean of Harvard. A graduate student came to his office to appeal for his incomplete and late thesis saying, "Dean, I'm really sorry but I just wasn't feeling very well." The dean replied, "Young man, I think it's time you realize that most of the significant work done in this world is done by people who aren't feeling well. They just do it because they know it's got to be done!"

I can attest for that pain this week. True happiness for me would have been to avoid the pain of writing this sermon -- and possibly that might have been true happiness for you as well. Because it's been a week of pain and frustration for a small number of people TO GET THIS BUILDING BACK IN SHAPE ... AND STILL FULFILL THEIR OWN JOBS OR MINISTRIES. As the saying goes - there has not been an avalanche of helpers. But such is the story of the church and Christ's ministry -- it never gets done by people who avoid pain and hard labor. The multitude of tasks of the church as well as faithful living in our own homes cannot be done without pain and hard labor -- whether it's the simple task of visitation or the

more difficult task of confronting an abusive spouse or lazy child. Obviously - Christians do not seek to be verbally or morally offensive. But at the same time, we do not sacrifice our own self-respect and our witness to Christ simply because it might cause someone pain ... it might ruffle some feathers. We take seriously Jesus' be-attitude: "Happy are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter evil against you FALSELY on my account." True Christian happiness is even celebrated in the midst of confrontation and pain.

So it is that the happiest days of Hope Lutheran have not been those years when we have merely pursued our own pleasures or avoided our own pain. Quite to the contrary - THE HAPPY DAYS HAVE ALWAYS BEEN HERE AGAIN when Hope Church has sought to be a BEATITUDE BODY. And the first condition of such beatitude happiness is found in PURPOSEFUL LIVING AND GIVING. The highest days of happiness at Hope since 1929 have been those days of LIVING CHRIST'S ULTIMATE PURPOSE: WE HAVE NOT COME HERE TO BE SERVED... BUT TO SERVE OTHERS WITH THE LOVE OF THE FATHER AND OFFER OUR LIVES AS A RANSOM FOR OTHERS.

So it is that Jesus says, "Blessed are the meek - they shall inherit the earth." "Meekness" is not whimpiness, but rather sacrificial servanthood. And it takes true grit to live out that kind of happiness. But those have been the HAPPY DAYS OF HOPE ... those days when this people has been willing to roll up their sleeves to give blood or get down on their knees to scrub dirty floors ... the days of those who have given sacrificially to resettle a Viet Nam family in our midst ... those who have faithfully brought that little bag of groceries to feed their neighbor ... those who have shared blankets, clothing, and dollars for the vast poor of the world ... those who have gone to visit a shut-in and willingly sat there and listened to the same story for the umpteenth time ... those who have prepared and transported hot food for the homeless at St. Paul's Community Center ... those who have week after week missed out on adult study and fellowship because they have been nurturing our children ... those who have supported a struggling mission in Hesperia, California so that it might one day celebrate it's 60th anniversary ... those who have mourned with a fellow member after the loss of a spouse or parent or child. These have been the happiest days in the life of Hope ... because they have been fulfilled the very purpose of our identity as the Church of Christ: TO SERVE RATHER THAN BE SERVED!!

And today -- our mission is not to look back and pride ourselves on our faithful happy days of purpose in the past -- but to faithfully commit ourselves to this same PURPOSE FOR ALL THE DAYS THAT GOD GIVES US IN THE FUTURE! That's the way we will always know that HAPPY DAYS WILL BE HERE AGAIN!!

But Christ's purpose is but one facet of our happiness today; a second and equal dimension of this happy day IS THAT WE HAVE REMAINED PEOPLE-ORIENTED, rather than building bound or liturgy locked!



Look again at the Beatitudes -- there's not one reference to buildings or material things as a basis for Christian happiness. Obviously - God's people need a functional and supportive meeting place. But their true happiness is not a measure of their possessions, but a measure of their people skills as peacemakers, mercy givers, and lovers of righteousness. The happiest days of Hope Lutheran Church have been our people-oriented periods. I can't speak for the first fifty years -- but I believe the same realities held true. It is always the times that we brunch and lunch together, that we feed the soul and the stomach, that we gather in circles of friendship in one another's homes, that we lunch together with Luther, that we study and witness to the Word, that we potluck and ponder the crucifixion in Lent, that we surprise one another with loving roasts, that we gather for Christmas receptions and Easter breakfasts, that we celebrate stewardship victories, that we take the slow train to Chicago with our confirmands ... all those wonderful times of people-oriented support, **THOSE ARE THE HAPPY DAYS THAT GOD CALLS US TO RELIVE, TO RENEW, TO REVITALIZE, TO RESURRECT, AND TO REFORM FOR THE NEXT SIXTY YEARS.**

But we cannot even stop with Christ's purpose or our people-orientation. There is a third characteristic that truly shines as our greatest light of happiness in the world: **OUR PASSION FOR GOD!** The **DUTIFUL** decades with Walter Larson, the years of **DEDICATION** with Dick Powell, the **PERIOD OF PEACE** with Umhau Wolf, the **GROOVE OF GROWTH** with Peter Martyn -- none of these shepherds or associated assistants have been the source of true happiness at Hope Lutheran. Only as these servants have manifested the majesty, mystery, and magnificence of God has there been happiness in the life of Hope Church. The happiest days of Hope from '29 to '89 have been directly correlated to our passion for God's love, mercy, and compassion.

Look at the facts. It is God's love that has moved this community to grow and blossom for some 60 years! It is God's strength that has kept this 60-yr old body healthy and robust through schism and surgery. It is God's righteousness that has probed and prodded this people to reach out and serve a suffering world. It is God's Spirit of reconciliation that has uplifted this flock when torn by human stupidity, scorn, and stubbornness. It is God's compassion that has comforted and consoled the tired and the weak, the grieving and the guilty. It has not been due to a Larson or Ullery, a Powell or Matevia, a Wolf or Martyn, or any other pastor or personality who seeks to take merit for the **HAPPY DAYS OF HOPE**. We who have served in this privileged pulpit are but the messengers of a magnanimous grace that can only be given by God! And thanks to your willingness to receive it and share it -- so it is that we have been able to reach sixty years and still say that **HAPPY DAYS ARE HERE AGAIN!**

But let us not forget -- we cannot rely upon the PASSION OF THE PAST! We must take this same passion for God's grace into the future. We must not be misled by the clowns of this world who would like to convince us that we can pursue pleasure and avoid pain and STILL BE THE CHURCH OF CHRIST! Our anniversary orders are the same year after year - we are the poor in spirit (those who seek to know their God) ... the ones who mourn with and for others, so that we too might be comforted ... the ones whose meekness is sacrificial service to others ... the ones who hunger and thirst for the righteous love of God ... the ones who seek to be merciful and pure in heart rather than self-righteous and self-seeking ... the ones whom God looks to as his peacemakers on earth.

Yes, true happiness is having a passionate, life-long love affair with God ... and an intimate, life-giving relationship with his people. And when that's the basis of our HAPPY ANNIVERSARY -- we can even be reviled and persecuted falsely, BUT STILL BE ONE WITH GOD AND EACH OTHER. And that's when we know for sure that HAPPY DAYS ARE HERE AGAIN ... and will be forevermore at Hope Lutheran, Toledo, Ohio.

HAPPY ANNIVERSARY. AMEN.

PENTECOST XVIII (Worldwide Communion Sunday)  
Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo  
October 7, 1990  
Peter R. Artyn, Pastor

"HOW DO YOU EAT?"

"'Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for a denarius? Take what belongs to you, and go; I choose to give to this last as I gave to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or do you begrudge my generosity.'" Matthew 20:14-15

Today is World Communion Sunday for millions of Xans. Some years ago, this first Sunday of October was set to assure Christians throughout the world that we would hold ONE MEAL in common -- the Lord's Supper ... and that this MEAL would inspire our attitude toward all other meals. As we illustrated a couple of weeks ago to those receiving their 1st Communion today - Christians are well known for eating and drinking. And these young students wasted no time in showing Jeff, Debbie and me how well they know how to eat and drink -- \$80.00 worth of pizza and pepsi consumed in 25 minutes.

But Holy Communion is another celebration of eating and drinking - a meal which celebrates God's gracious goodness of freeing and liberating all people from bondage and sin ... freeing us from anything that would make us less than God wants us to be! So today, I want to take the liberty of changing the images of our gospel parable from a vineyard to a supper table ... from wages for work to bread for the body. And I especially want us to reflect upon the way we eat. As one theologian has said, "the way we eat symbolizes the way we relate to life as a whole. The way we approach a table of food is usually reflective of the way we approach the table of life.

So, how do you eat? How do you approach the table of life? Are you the way I was before my heart surgery? Are you one (like I used to be) who doesn't take time to sit down to the table? My breakfasts before surgery were always "standing breakfasts" -- always eating the toast or fatty donut as I walked out the back door. Is it any wonder that I needed five bypasses? How much time do you take to really savor your meals? Even that Peanut Butter Sandwich -- do you ever think what a treasure of nourishment you have been given in P.B. & J? Does your meal regularly include a moment of reflection ... at least a brief time for giving thanks? Or are your meals pretty much all the same -- whether it's steak or a Big Mac - it's down the hatch and back to the "fast lane?"

As I said earlier, the way, the manner, the attitude we bring to the dinner table is often reflective of our whole attitude toward life. So without any further commentary on my poor eating habits or yours, what am I trying to illustrate? Quite simply, I want to illustrate that today's parable reflects two ways that we can approach "the meals of life set before us." One response to EATING IS TO BE DISSATISFIED AND

DEMANDINGLY BITTER ... to complain that it's not good enough, that I didn't get my fair share, that I have been cheated of what I deserve, that I expect a much bigger portion! The OTHER WAY IS that we can sit down in gratitude and appreciation -- we can come awesomely thankful for the never-ending gracious, goodness of every meal.

Now let's apply this meal imagery to today's parable. The vineyard owner recognizes that the grapes are ready for harvest. Time cannot be wasted. He seeks workers to gather the harvest and promises each of them a full banquet -- a full course meal with all the trimmings at the end of the day.

The day's end comes. The workers gather. Like any of us who have been promised a banquet - we are not free to determine the menu, but we are free to determine the manner in which we will partake. We've all heard our kids famous question, "What's for dinner?" And then when we've given the response, we know that their manner is sometimes not reflective of gratitude. Well, many of the workers responded pretty much like spoiled, overindulged children. Those who worked the longest grumbled and groaned - they felt they deserved more than strip steak and mashed potatoes. After all, they had worked the full 12 hours, at least they deserved T-Bone and Lobster! Instead of being grateful for the owner's generosity and goodness as promised, these workers came to the table of life resentful, bitter, only complaining and comparing themselves to others rather than being thankful that at least this day would end with a full belly.

Have you ever encountered this scene before? Have you ever felt like these workers? It's the old, old story of humanity - what has become the seniority system today. This story was first told ages ago in Genesis. God had just created this awesome world with a huge, grandiose garden to fully satisfy the hungers of his newly made creature. There was food to eat and plenty of shade for rest. There were running rivers and seas to fully quench his thirst; there was ample opportunity for work so that this new man's self-esteem would be totally satisfied. There was even the bonus of a companion who would fully satisfy his relational needs. Essentially, the creator said: "Take, eat, and participate fully. It is good, and it is yours to enjoy and take care of."

And what was the response of this newly made creature to the bountiful table set before him? What was Adam's profile to this generosity of the giftgiver? He was sullen, resentful, and dissatisfied! This newly made man was not satisfied in being a servant of the Lord - a worker of this awesome vineyard, called earth. Moreover, he was not satisfied with the menu that God had provided. After all, he was the only hard worker God had on this earth -- surely God could do a lot better for him ... he deserved much better. So he proceeded to grasp for the one fruit in the Garden that had not been offered -- the "Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil." He grasped to be God himself."

So goes the old, old story. And we ask, how did Adam eat? How did he approach the table of life? He kicked over the table and spilled God's goodness all over the floor like garbage! Is it any wonder that the Bible sees "chaos" as the human response to generosity! Adam reflects the continuing saga of human stubbornness and refusal to accept God's generosity. Humanity continues to turn God's party of creation into a brawl for earthly power and possessions. And you still don't think it's true?!? Well it's being graphically illustrated for all of us these days through the rebellion of Iraq. Hussein begins the game, and now everybody is kicking over the tables and turning God's generosity into a potential mixture of oil and blood over the desert fields of the middle east.

Just like Adam, people have forgotten to come to the table to eat with thankful hearts and grateful minds. Now people come to the table for positions of power and honor and greatness. Now people come to the table not thinking of God's goodness but rather of their own greatness -- of their status, their prominence, their goodness -- making certain that only good, self-righteous, hard-working friends get to be seated next to them. Now the banquet meal of life has been turned into a human brawl for position and honor - for human praise and glory. And now the one who offered so generously to all has been accused of being unfair to some.

Is it any wonder that humanity needed a new Adam on earth? Is there any question that this world desperately needed a Messiah? Could anybody question the necessity of this second Adam's plan to institute a COMMON MEAL which would again set things straight -- which would again establish the generosity and goodness of God? Thank God, that this second Adam when he was dying from his cross caused by the rotten table manners of humanity, didn't cry out: "O.K., I want it understood that only those of you who are truly worthy will get benefit and nourishment from my Last Supper. The rest of you scum better start saying your prayers and hope that they turn the heat down in hell before you arrive!" No, this new Adam did what was totally contrary to the 1st Adam -- he again offered the generosity of God. He took the outward, visible bread and wine of the earth and he gave them the inward, invisible grace and presence of God. And he gave this generous forgiving gift to all who would receive it!!

This new Adam did exactly what was most desperately needed in this world -- he transformed all the tables of life with just one Table of the Lord. "He made clear that his thoughts were not our thoughts, and his ways not our ways. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are his ways higher than our ways, and his thoughts higher than our thoughts." For at his Table, it was no longer a matter of position or power or greatness or prominence that counted. At his Table, it was only a matter of gratefully needing and gratefully receiving. At his Table ALL ARE SERVED AND SATISFIED SO THAT THESE SAME PERSONS MIGHT SERVE AND SATISFY ALL OTHERS AROUND THEM.

At his Table, there is no reason - there is no justification for complaint, bitterness or dissatisfaction - because all are graced and forgiven. At his Table, all recognize that they have fallen short of the higher glory of God -- so all come with grateful hearts and minds ... ready to be transformed to the higher goodness and generosity of God.

So, again I ask you today: HOW DO YOU EAT? How will you come to this Table today? How will you leave here and eat at the many tables of life beyond this place? Will you be transformed by the generosity of God's meal? Will you start living anew according to his higher thoughts and his higher ways of generosity?? Or will you leave here little different than you came ... going out complaining to God and everyone else HOW YOU HAVE BEEN ROYALLY SCREWED ... only looking at yourself, only feeling that you haven't received your fair share, only seeking position and power for yourself, only demanding that you deserve better for all your hard work?

On this Worldwide Communion Sunday, God again graphically reminds us that we are not getting what's fair ... we are not getting what we deserve -- for what we deserve is to be booted out of his kingdom! What we deserve is to be scraped into the garbage pit! Instead, we get the gracious generosity of a God who rescues us from our own stubborn self-importance ... who embraces us and uplifts us - whether we come as prostitutes or professionals, as teamsters or corporate technocrats, as life-long Christians or recently reborn children of God, as saints or sinners.

How do you eat at this Table of life? Hopefully, with thanksgiving and praise for God's awesome goodness and generosity! And God hopes you will take these manners with you to all other tables of life. AMEN.

PENTECOST XVIII (WORLD COMMUNION SUNDAY)  
Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo  
October 3, 1993  
Peter R. Martyn, Pastor

## "SEEKING EQUITY; GETTING GENEROSITY!"

For my thoughts are not your thoughts; nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord. Isaiah 55:8

'Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage? Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you. Am I not allowed TO BE GENEROUS with what belongs to me?

Matthew 20:14-15

As parents who have more than one child, we diligently "SEEK EQUITY" (meaning fairness/justice) for all children. When Angie got a PIZZA PARTY on her 10th birthday; then Sarah had to be offered a similar party on her 10th. As Angie was given a new "ten speed" when she was old enough; so Sarah expected a "ten speed" when she was old enough. As Angie experienced a "private high school" and now college away from home; so the Martyns can be anticipating similar expectations from Sarah. We have been committed to equal treatment.

Oviously, SEEKING SUCH EQUITY transcends family circles. The Staff Committee here at Hope has wrestled to draft policy statements that reflect equity for ALL staff. Thus, such matters as vacation time, pension, health benefits, pay scale; all these matters & others have required hours of deliberation with the goal of fairness. The whole ELCA has struggled for decades with the issues of equity -- whether that be a matter of fairness for female pastors, or representation at Assemblies or the most recent issue of ordination for the lay diaconate. In fact, the principle of SEEKING EQUITY stands behind the whole health care crisis today: how can employers, hospitals, insurance providers and patients establish a more equitable system of cost, reimbursement and pay. No matter what our circle of life - the challenge and opportunity presents itself: TO SEEK EQUITY FOR ALL PEOPLE INVOLVED IN LABOR, MANAGEMENT, PRODUCTION, AND SERVICE TO OUR SOCIETY.

Yet as primary as we make this ESSENTIAL GOAL OF SEEKING EQUITY, most often we fail to achieve it in almost every arena of life. The facts are my parents sought equity between my brother and me. But the real truth is that Mike had it harder as the first son than I did as the second son. The same is probably true for your children and mine. Like it or not, Sarah has probably had it "cushier" than Angie did. And that same principle shows itself everywhere, including life in the church. The three pastors here at Hope may not work any harder or minister to any more people than the DCE or Director of Music; but we often get more percs or more admiration (when many times others deserve them more than we do).

Like it or not, we all play favorites! We like to think that we always SEEK EQUITY IN ALL THINGS, but many times our actions nullify this principle. For instance, when Pres.

Horton from UT or Coach Gary Blackney from BG have come to Larson Hall -- we all cozy and cuddle up to these guys as if they are the real reason for success in their schools. They may be good men, but the equitable facts are that it's still the quality of educators and the talent pool of the players that will either make UT or BG the great schools that we want them to be. Yes, as much as we often demand equality for all, we know that the world we live in resonates the loudest for the favorites, for names like Michael Jordan, Cindy Crawford, and Bill Cosby. Is it any wonder that everybody cries: "Life is unfair!" And each and every one of us is part of that unfairness. We establish friendships not with those who need us most but with those who are most like us. We say we're ecumenical, yet we will often only do something "if Lutherans have always done it that way." We talk about our "openness" and lack of prejudice yet we do almost nothing to encourage minorities to share our ministry. We claim that youth ministry is a priority commitment of our congregational life; yet we are very content with a very minimal involvement or dedication of youth in church life. In fact, when we try to encourage it -- we're told that "they have too many other things to do!" The facts are - LIFE IS NOT FAIR ... AND NEITHER ARE ANY OF US! We seek equity, yet we're very inequitable in living out our lives.

And all of this leads to one of our greatest temptations - to claim that God is no different from us ... that he plays by the same rules as the rest of us; THAT HE PLAYS FAVORITES, AND THAT HIS MISSION IS MERELY TO SEEK EQUITY LIKE OURS. For instance, we put God into the "equitable model" when we say that those who have given the most deserve the best in life. In fact, we even go further: we often say that "God is really unfair" because he allows devoted and dedicated members to suffer. We somehow have developed a religious philosophy which claims that "good people shouldn't die and suffer; only bad people." And some of us even say that this is what the bible teaches.

Well, obviously God desires equity and justice for all in this world. And he hurts deeply (maybe even more than us) when his courageous and faithful children are suffering, esp. for his sake. Yet, the parable before us today makes his intent & motivation crystal clear: HIS DESIRE IS NOT MERELY TO GIVE WHAT IS FAIR AND EQUITABLE; HIS OFFERING TO EVERYONE IS PURE, EXTRAVAGANT GENEROSITY! That's the point of the parable. God's goal is not equity, but generosity. Let's take a closer look at the parable and see this real meaning.

The grape harvest appeared to be the best in years. At dawn, the vineyard owner surveyed the bulging vines, knowing that bad weather was just a few days away. With the sun shining warmly, he quickly realized the harvest had to be reaped now--or he might lose it to an October frost. Knowing of the high unemployment in town, he went to the market at 6 a.m. and hired a group of workers, promising a fair day's wage.



Realizing that these workers could not accomplish the job by themselves, he went back at 9 a.m., at noon, at 3 p.m. and even at 5 p.m. to hire more laborers -- each time promising all of them a fair day's wage. At 6 p.m., the harvest was completed. He paid the 5 p.m. workers first -- \$25.00. Those who got there earlier immediately began to calculate -- the earliest figuring that they would go home with up to \$300. But they all got exactly the same -- \$25.00 -- exactly what they had been promised -- a fair day's wage.

Had any of us been there -- we would have been among the first grippers and grumblers. We would have been chastising the owner for being too generous to everyone, esp. those who had only worked an hour. We would have been like the lady who went to the artist to have her portrait painted. At the first setting, she told the artist: "Now you be sure you do me justice." He looked at her and replied: "Lady, what you need is not justice, but mercy!!"

Dear friends in Christ: THAT'S WHAT ALL THE WORKERS NEEDED -- MERCY, NOT MERELY JUSTICE! They had all been unemployed; they had desperately needed a fair day's wage; they had all needed someone who would give them something to take home to support their families. Is it any wonder that the owner answered: "I have not cheated a single one of you. Can I not be generous with all of you so that you may all go home and provide for your families. For I do not merely SEEK EQUITY AND JUSTICE; I OFFER GENEROSITY TO ALL!

The point of this parable and for this day of worship is to remember that EQUITY is not the ultimate sign of the kingdom of God. Equity is the lowest common denominator; justice/fairness is what is expected from all of us in this world. You do me a favor; and I'm supposed to do you a favor in return. That's equity; that's justice! But the true sign of the kingdom is GENEROSITY! When we encounter GENEROSITY, then we know that we have encountered the very presence of God. That's why the Sacrament of Holy Communion is so extravagantly important in our tradition: BECAUSE IT IS ONE OF GOD'S GREATEST SYMBOLS OF GENEROSITY! Holy Communion is not mere equity ... it is not what we deserve, it is pure generosity! This Sacrament is not something God gives to us because we've given something to Him: this Sacrament is pure MERCY; IT IS TOTALLY LOVING KINDNESS; TOTALLY THE GRACE OF GOD! Not one of us deserves the goodness of God's forgiveness; yet that's what God offers at His Table -- EXTRAVAGANT GENEROSITY; EXTRAVAGANT FORGIVENESS!

This past week, Debbie showed me a story from Sports Illustrated that truly exemplifies the true generosity of a Father. It's primarily a beautiful story about Boomer Esiason's mission to help his son Gunnar's battle with Cystic Fibrosis. But beyond this touching tribute to a tough quarterback, there's another new dimension to Boomer's life as a New York Jet. Listen to Sports Illustrated's version:

There was silence on the Jets practice field... but

there he was again - the old man with the black shoes and the white socks, sitting alone in his lawn chair among the pinecones. The old man with the St. John's Redmen's cap pulled down to his sunglasses and pack of Tareyton's tucked inside his sleeve.

Every practice he sat there. At the end of the morning session, he drove 40 minutes back to his home on Long Island; then climbed back into his truck two hours later and drove 40 minutes for the afternoon workout. He had become known as the "man in the lawn chair." Many players had no idea he was the quarterback's dad. Boomer looked over and gave him a wave.

Somehow, life had washed Boomer back to the place he had grown up, where he had been healed and hurt as a boy. Yes, that little boy whose mother had died of lymphoma, who had looked over to see his dad on the sidelines every year, every practice, every game -- was now the adult, the father of a little boy with cystic fibrosis ... now again seeing his dad every day, every practice, once again.

He never said a word, the old man, about who you have to be for your children ... how much of your life you have to give away. He never had to say it. He just sat there each practice under the pine trees. The man in the lawn chair.

When you give generously like Boomer's dad to his children ... and like God our Father to his children -- then you don't have to say a word about SEEKING EQUITY OR JUSTICE IN THIS WORLD. You just give and give and give, because that's what it means to love like God our Father.

Dear Christian friends - if you can't see God in the bread and wine on this altar ... then imagine him as "the man in the lawn chair ... sitting here every day, every hour, for every practice session of life. He is always present in this place -- whether we work out here every day or once a year; for over 50 hours a year or just one hour. He just sits here with us to assure us that he does not merely seek justice for us; instead, he gives mercy. Unlike all the other players and coaches of life -- he forgives our every mistake, our every fumble, our every bad play. And he comes back to this same place ... just sitting here in his lawn chair waiting to give us mercy again and again and again! Now which one of us would ever reject such a generous, merciful Father??

AMEN.

*A man went to his first son and said, "Son, go and work in the vineyard today." The son answered, "I will not;" but later changed his mind and went. The father went to his second son and said the same; this son answered, "I go, sir;" but he did not go. Which of the two did the will of the father? Matt. 21:28-31 Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, ... who did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself ... and became obedient to the point of death. Phil. 2:5,6,7,8.*

I give special thanks to Pastor Hegele and your Stewardship Committee for this opportunity to be your Consecration Sunday Preacher. Possibly, I'm the only one giving thanks today, because traditionally among Lutherans ... **Stewardship-Consecration Sundays are not the most exciting or participatory Sundays of the year.** Like most Christians, Lutherans Say a lot about "faithfulness and consecration," but they often don't Do A Lot about Living it. As the saying goes, "It's Easier Said Than Done!!"

Consecration Sundays always remind me of a consecration preacher who was in a similar position to me today. Like me, his task was to come to a somewhat strange congregation and really *"fire up the faithfulness of those local troops."* Somewhat unlike me, **this pastor was really into symbolism in sermonizing.** He not only wore wild, flamboyant vestments, he also **carried a huge Christ Candle to every church** in which he preached. He somehow thought that by using this Christ Candle that the glory of God would really shine and "fire up" the faithful in that flock.

Every where he went, he would instruct the acolyte that just before the reading the gospel, he would intone: *"And the Glory shone around Him."* And at the precise moment of singing this introduction, the acolyte was to enter and light this huge Christ Candle. **[Walk to Christ Candle!!]** So the service was proceeding very smoothly. It was time for the reading of the gospel. And in his best stained-glass voice, the pastor pranced to the candle, cleared his throat and sang: *"And the glory shone around Him."* He paused; he waited; he looked to the sacristy door, but no acolyte. So he cleared his throat and belted out more loudly: "And the Glory shone around Him." Again, dead silence from the sacristy; He was beginning to sweat a little now. So he really cleared his throat, and this time belted out with great gusto: "And the Glory shone around Him." At that very moment, the sacristy door opened; a little boy's head peeked out, and in a squeaky voice he chanted back to the pastor: *"And the cat PEED on the matches!"*

*Now isn't that exactly the way most of you feel about Stewardship Sundays?? You know* it's supposed to be a day of great glory and faithfulness to God! *You know* its supposed to be a great opportunity to renew your Consecration to Christ & His Church! *You know* what we're all supposed to say on Consecration Sunday: "that God loves a cheerful giver ... that "it's better to give than to receive" ... that we are "to give from our first fruits!" You know all these things! **But the way so many of us feel about Consecration Stewardship Stuff is like somebody invited "the cat to pee on the matches." Right!?!?**

perfect and profound ... whether they are weddings or Christmas celebrations or Easter services or Consecration Sundays. But so often on the most special days, there are always cats lurking around seeking to dampen God's spirit. **And maybe that's the greatest glory of God and His church!!** Because there is nothing that God says more emphatically than: *"I will not be defeated by those cats or dogs or devils who want to snuff out my fire and my life! I will not be "put down" by those who I have asked to say "Yes" but keep on saying "No!"* God's glory and his church's glory is not in her perfect preachers or sanctimonious celebrations or Consecration Sundays: her glory is in the cross of her Lord--her glory is in those servants like their Lord who seek to empty themselves by keeping God's light shining even when others try to dampen that Spirit or put it out!!

Just like our Lord, we people of God have basically **two choices: we can consecrate ourselves to the Ways of the World ... or we can consecrate ourselves to the Way, the Truth and the Life of Christ!!** As we all know, too many of us too often consecrate ourselves to the Ways of the World. Like our gospel text today: **we have all had times like the one son where we've "SAID 'YES,' AND "LIVED 'NO!' Or like the church at Philippi, we are totally into an "obsession with ourselves;"** as Paul says, **"only looking to our own interests ... not being of our Lord's mind "who emptied himself for the sake of others ... because that's what obedience to God is all about!!**

Yes, we know many live contrary to this lifestyle of obedience above all to God! Many are only consecrated to a lifestyle of simply "looking out for #1!!" **They suffer from the most serious of all diseases: "self-righteousness" or "self-obsession," only taking care of their own pleasures, which was rampant in the church at Philippi as well.**

But Jesus shows us a model very different from the world's obsession with self-fulfillment. Our world says, **EXALTATION** comes through filling up yourself with all you can possibly get--*"get all you can get with gusto!!"* To the contrary, Jesus said & lived **EXALTATION** by "emptying himself for the good of others!" I ask you: who are the truly blessed in this world; who are the ones we remember most -- those who sought to get it all for themselves ... or those who emptied themselves for others?!? **The truly faithful are the ones who not only SAY they believe in God, but LIVE AND SHOW that belief in God by emptying themselves for others!!** It's more than a lot of religious noise or religious motions ... **it's doing something TO SHOW HOW GOD HAS MADE A DIFFERENCE!**

It reminds me of the story of **Wahlstrom's Wonder**. He was one of those guys who loved to tinker in his basement. Always had some kind of project going. One day he decided to clean up the shop and was amazed at all the stuff & parts he had accumulated. So he decided to put all the parts together. Then his project began to mushroom; his neighbors heard about it, and they brought all their parts over to him. Lo & behold, he made this gigantic contraption; pulleys, gears, belts, electric motors. Finally, Wahlstrom finished it, and he turned on the switch. The neighbors were fascinated; they called it "Wahlstrom's Wonder!" Hundreds and hundreds of moving parts. But only one problem: Wahlstrom's Wonder didn't do anything. It just sat there, without contributing or doing anything for anyone except **MAKING A LOT OF NOISE!!**

church and as parents is to help our children and each other **BECOME LESS TALK AND MORE GOD-LIKE ACTION!!**

And we all know, that's **EASIER SAID THAN DONE!** But that's Christ's example and mission. **And if it hasn't begun before, it can still begin today!!** I can't speak for any of you, but I do know where I began to learn the example of "consecrating myself ... of emptying myself to glorify God! *It wasn't at the mall or on a golf course or in the beautiful trails of nature ...* it was **RIGHT HERE IN THE HOUSE OF GOD.** That's why God calls you and me to consecrate ourselves in & to the life of the church -- because this is the only place in the world where we will ever learn true exaltation: that in emptying ourselves, we are not only filling ourselves, but fulfilling the will of God in this world!!

Yes, that example began in my home with my parents who always expected the same example in our church home! Because in those homes--**NEVER ONCE** did my parents just **TALK ABOUT LOVE, THEY GAVE ME THE ASSURANCE OF BEING LOVED.** **And where did my parents learn that EXAMPLE of self-emptying love? It was in the Church of Jesus Christ.** There they learned "*when God empties himself for us, then we respond by emptying ourselves for others!!* That's better known as Consecration: or said as my dad always said: "God has blessed us greatly, Peter; no Christian should ever be afraid to ask another Christian to give to God!!" I learned very young there's one thing I should never be ashamed of -- **asking to give to God & his mission thru the church!!**

Let me illustrate more fully. My dad was a skilled mechanic for Rockwell Int'l for 40 years and never made over \$10,000/YR in his lifetime. Yet as I have said, that same father *instilled in me from my early youth "that a Christian is never ashamed to ask another Christian TO LIVE FAITH BY GIVING BACK TO GOD WHAT HE HAS FIRST GIVEN!!* My father did not have superior intelligence, or saintly wisdom or material abundance; but he did know that when God has blessed you ... and then asked you to say "Yes," you don't say "No!" It may not be easy to say "Yes," but you say it anyway!!

So, when I was **13 yrs old,** I secured my first paper route - the Oshkosh Daily Northwestern with 100 customers. I earned 7 cents/customer/week. That's 7 bucks a week. That was big money for a 13-yr-old in 1955. Every Saturday morning I collected 35 cts from every customer of which I could keep 7 cts, or a total of \$7/ week. And every Sunday morning, my father met me before we left for church and made certain that 70 cts of that \$7.00 was in my church envelope. **And why did he do that?? Because that's what saying "Yes" to God is all about!! It's more than just a lot of religious talk! Be assured, there were many times it wasn't easy--many times I wanted to keep that 70 cts. Faithfulness is always **EASIER SAID THAN DONE!** But if my life was to be an example of what God had shown me in Jesus, then I had to start learning how to "empty myself in order to glorify God!"**

Obviously, **my father taught me to tithe!** What started out as 70 cts a week or \$35 a year in my last year at Hope Church became well over \$10,000! I mention this not to boast, but only as an example for all who say "Tithing is expecting too much!" **Be assured, tithing is important, but not the most important! Not just 10% of what I have is God's --**

*that again!)* Each of us today, this Consecration Sunday, must ask ourselves: **WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR ME TO SAY AND TO LIVE A "YES" TO GOD?** Or as Billy Graham has said, *"God has given us two hands; one for receiving ... the other for giving."* Which hand does God and everyone else see us using more often??

Maybe the best way to help you answer these questions is to tell a final story about **another pastor whom I did not know, but heard about.** It's one of those **depression era** stories--those days when pastors were often paid with crops or clothing or animals. It was the story of a little parish in Pennsylvania. The pastor & parish were very poor. **But there was one rich man in the parish whose daughter came to the pastor to be married.** It was the biggest wedding ever seen in that county. At the end of the service, the rich father came to the pastor's study with **a shoe box - a gift for the pastor.** He opened the box to find a pair of leather gloves, elegant gloves. The pastor graciously offered thanks and the rich man left. **Immediately, the pastor threw the box onto his desk in anger; he was insulted by such an inappropriate gift from such a wealthy man -- one who knew how poor he was.**

**Over the next 30 yrs, that pastor carried that box to three more congregations.** He'd move the box from one desk to another, never even taking the gloves out of it. Finally, as the pastor reached retirement and was cleaning his last desk, he took out the box and decided to try on the gloves. He went to put them on, only to find that his hands wouldn't go into the holes. He reached into one finger - and he pulled out a \$100 bill; then a second finger, another \$100 bill; then third finger & fourth & fifth. All ten fingers were stuffed with \$100 bills. And in the thumb of the second glove was a note. It read: *"Dear pastor, I know you are a faithful man who believes in God above all things; please use these gifts to foster your belief in God's kingdom and your life!! I love you & I love Christ!"*

God has given us **gloves of life that are filled with \$100 bills -- he has emptied his everlasting security upon us!** Why is it that some of us leave his gifts **ALL BOXED UP** for a lifetime?? That's saying **"Yes!" to God but living "No!"** Oh, it's EASIER SAID THAN DONE to live according to God's "Yes;" but how many of us want to die like the pastor from Pennsylvania -- only living by keeping God's blessings ALL BOXED UP during the best giving years of our lives. *Today, my good Christian friends, God asks you one more time to say "Yes" to Him and really mean it!!* Reconsecrate yourselves to Jesus Christ and his mission thru Holy Trinity! **Don't say "Yes" to God, and then give him a pittance of your life!** Be of the same mind of your Lord ... who emptied himself for others ... and in so doing, was truly **EXALTED FOREVER BY GOD THE FATHER ALMIGHTY.**

**AMEN.**

*St. Matthew, Apostle/Evangelist [Pentecost 18]  
Glenwood Lutheran Church, Toledo - HOMECOMING  
September 21, 1997  
Peter R. Martyn, Interim Pastor*

*[And] Jesus said, 'Follow me.' And Matthew got up and followed him. ... And [the Pharisees] said to his disciples, 'Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?' Then Jesus said, 'Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice. For I have come to call not the righteous, but sinners.'*

## ***"STAGES OF DISCIPLESHIP"***

Charles Lamb, a noted 19th century poet & literary specialist, as a young child was taken by his sister to a quaint cemetery. They spent the entire day reading tombstone inscriptions. Charles was fascinated by all the accolades chiseled into the headstones: "always virtuous;" "committed to charity;" "beloved;" "never selfish or arrogant;" "forever faithful & true;" "benevolent & kind to a fault;" "always patient & loving." The whole cemetery was filled with people possessed by these redeeming attributes. As he and his sister were going out of the cemetery gate he asked: "Where are all the naughty people buried?"

Another story has a woman at a church funeral listening to the preacher offering a homily about her recently departed husband. After more than a half hour of glorifying this man's virtues, she turns to her son and says: "Please go to the casket and see if the man inside is still your father."

Certainly in death we are moved to lift up the best of another while that person was alive. It is important to honor and dignify life in the midst of death. But at the same time, we must remember that every gravestone overlooks a very significant inscription: "Here lies a naughty person!" No one makes it into this world or out of this world without at some time being a "naughty guy or gal." In fact, some of us come into the world and leave the world with the distinct honor of being "forever naughty persons."

And that's why the first and most important "stage" of becoming a disciple *is that Jesus Christ came into this world to assure us that we are loved, forgiven & cared for no matter how naughty we once were or may have become!* No one can ever become a disciple of our Lord if he/she has not first experienced this grace of God--this total, unconditional mercy / forgiveness of the Father. That's why most often in our tradition we baptize infants -- we want every child to know that the mercy & forgiveness of God are offered by God's own choosing & generosity ... not by any merit or honor or ritual that we have performed. That's why Jesus chose Matthew, a tax collector, to be a disciple; that's why Jesus chose to dine with other sinners and tax collectors. Not because they deserved God's forgiveness; not because they had turned pure & virtuous; not because they had accepted Jesus Christ as their Lord & Savior! But because it's God's character to forgive & redeem ... even while we are yet naughty children. And we all desperately need that Grace from God!

Matthew didn't deserve to become a disciple. Ezekiel didn't prepare to become a prophet. I didn't plan to become a pastor...and certainly not at GW. No one in this room was qualified on his or her own merits to become a child of God through Baptism. We all received discipleship simply because **GOD CHOSE US THRU HIS MERCIFUL WORD TO MAKE US HIS HOLY ONES** even while we were yet naughty. Jesus Christ chose to graciously care for us; we did not first choose to care for him. That's the mercy of God--being loved while yet a sinner. And we all desperately need that mercy!

So every single person seated here today has been made a disciple -- not by anything we have done, but only by the grace & mercy of God. And once God has chosen us -- he doesn't "unchoose" us. Once redeemed -- always redeemed! Once baptized -- forever baptized! And that's why it's so important to come home regularly to the Father -- to be reminded that he is always a merciful & forgiving God! One commentator puts it this way: "Rather than whipping everyone into shape and then finally inviting them to the 'celebration of their reformation' -- Jesus instead invites all sinners to His table to dine with Him and receive grace as a gift." In other words - once marked with the cross of Christ, we are always Christians. That's why the greatest news throughout the Bible is God saying, "Be not afraid; I will be with you 'til the end -- you have nothing to fear!" God blesses us forever as 1st stage disciples. But God also wants us to do something with His mercy. So, like Matthew, he calls us to follow his Way every moment of the day. Second stage disciples are not only redeemed; they are called to follow in Jesus' footsteps. So what do we mean, "called to follow?"

"Being called" simply means that God puts his Word into your mouth & mine! Thus - when we utter anything, we are to utter his Word, not our own naughty words. When I stand to preach or teach -- I am to be empowered with His Word, not my own words of vanity [that's also why God doesn't want empty chit-chat from me or from you while his Word is being spoken]. When the choir sings or when we sing a hymn -- it is God's Word that is being sung ... not some performance to glorify ourselves. When we kneel to pray -- we ask for His direction & purpose ... not merely to promote our own desires & deeds. When we comfort the sick or sorrowful -- we implore our words and hugs to be his presence of healing & hope. When we stand with the lonely, lost or hungry -- his Word is to be transformed into real shelter and real food not just empty speeches. In short, when you or I have been called -- we can't wait to share God's Word of mercy ... because it can only do good for others. That's why Matthew so instantly followed Jesus -- it was the opportunity of his lifetime to finally share mercy rather than merely ripping people off.

So goes second-stage discipleship: we are called to glorify God in all we do and say rather than merely pointing to ourselves. Obviously, we are still naughty underneath, but what others see is God's goodness & kindness rather than our own sinfulness. That's why it's so tragic when a "called disciple" reveals things that are contrary to God's good word or good deeds. We saw that graphically illustrated this week. Three weeks ago a pastor from one of the fastest growing



community churches in Toledo had a 1/4-page Blade ad uplifting his 33rd Birthday as a part of their Family Day. Friday that same pastor was arrested for indecent exposure on a public highway in daylight near his home. That pastor is still redeemed by God -- still graced, still forgiven, still needing God's mercy. Yet this pastor has contradicted God's second stage of discipleship: he has been called to reveal God's Word in mind, body, spirit & speech--not merely his human, sinful need for birthday glorification or sexual deviation.

So, God asks each of us today: How are we doing as Second-Stage Disciples? Have our words and our deeds been consistent with God's mercy, kindness and goodness?? That question leads to the third and final stage of discipleship: Has Christ really changed us to be His merciful ministers ... or are we just stuck as religious keepers of ritual. The Pharisees were stuck as religious keepers of ritual. Their source of spiritual pride was PERFECTLY PERFORMING ALL THE RIGHT RITUALS -- which of course meant no association with sinners or non-ritual keepers. These Pharisees thought they were the most healthy religious specimens that could be found. But as Jesus intimated -- they were the sick ones ... because their whole purpose was to perform rituals rather than to offer mercy. All their religiosity had not changed them to be like God: they didn't love the unlovable ... they didn't forgive ... they didn't help the helpless ... they didn't give hope & support to the hopeless. They just did religious rituals. Regrettably -- a lot of Christians are still doing the same thing -- just going through the motions of religious ritual.

Thus - we must ask ourselves -- why will we shortly go through the ritual of Holy Communion. Hopefully--not because it's a mere ritual. And not because it's unique to our denomination or religious heritage. And hopefully not because God likes to make our Sunday services longer. God instituted this Sacrament because it's his way of showing us mercy & forgiveness. And we are a people who desperately need to receive and to offer that same mercy of God. So--God instituted Holy Communion with the hope that once we take his body and blood inside of us--WE WILL BE CHANGED! He hopes we will become not merely 1st stage disciples ... not merely takers of His redemption, but also givers of His redeeming power. In short, we will become more like him -- a people who shows mercy for the sake of others rather than only sacrifice for the sake of ourselves!

Third stage disciples are constantly seeking to be changed and to help God change others. It's like Jean Valjean in Victor Hugo's famous novel and play, Les Mis. While under the safety and security of a monastery that was keeping him alive, Valjean stole the silver chalices, plates & candle holders. When he was found out -- instead of condemnation, the chief priest offered forgiveness -- not because Valjean deserved it, but because he needed it. And from that moment on -- Jean Valjean was changed from petty criminal to benevolent caregiver for the poor and disadvantaged. Jean Valjean was ritually impure -- but he became a great disciple of mercy thru one act of mercy & kindness given to him. And the same was true for a tax collector known as Matthew.

**So, at what stage of discipleship are you and I today? Obviously, our presence in this place reveals that we have received the grace and mercy of God -- we are redeemed disciples. And that's good & faithful -- so hopefully we're here to glorify God for that gift! But we dare not stop with a mere Homecoming salute to God in his sanctuary. He calls us to get his mercy outside of church walls -- to offer what we have first received in our homes, schools & daily associations -- **TO PUT HIS WORD AT ALL TIMES & IN ALL PLACES INTO OUR MOUTHS & DEEDS.** So, let's overcome that underlying naughty spirit that lurks in us all -- let's be changed by God's mercy today so that one day the preacher can honestly say: *"Here, like St. Matthew, lies a True Disciple of the Lord!"***

**AMEN.**

*Pentecost XVIII  
First English Lutheran, Toledo  
October 7, 2001  
Peter R. Martyn, Part-time Interim*

## ***A LITTLE FAITH GOES A LONG WAY!***

*The apostles said to the Lord, 'Increase our faith!' Jesus replied, 'If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it will obey you.' Luke 17:5-6 But I am not ashamed, for I know the one in whom I have put my trust, and I am sure that he is able to guard until that day what I have entrusted to him. 2 Tim. 1:12*

LITTLE WORDS like “follow me,” “go into all the world,” “forgive, as you have been forgiven,” “repent and believe,” “love one another,” and “serve rather than be served.” LITTLE DEEDS like giving a cup of water, welcoming a stranger, visiting the sick/ the lonely/ the imprisoned, washing the disciples feet or wiping the lips of someone dying, or crying with the bereaved. LITTLE THINGS like five loaves and two fishes, a widow’s mite, a sparrow that falls, a small wafer and a sip of wine, or a tiny mustard seed.

Little words, little deeds, little things – these were so often the focus of Jesus’ ministry. Jesus did not concentrate on the big things or the big people – he was far more interested in the little, the small, the seemingly inconsequential – he was concerned about the least and the lost and the lonely – he was moved to compassion for the little children of the world. Is it any wonder that Jesus compares FAITH & THE KINGDOM OF GOD to one of the littlest things known to him – a grain of mustard seed.

And today Jesus says that a mustard-seed faith in the gospel can overcome the darkest, the greatest, the biggest of all tragedies. And anyone who questions this truth needs to pay closer attention to the beehive of activity going on near the WTC. Literally thousands upon thousands of people have joined forces in that place to make certain that death and destruction will not have the last word on the terrorist tragedy. In religious terms ... Satan & terrorism always tear down; but God & faith always build up.

Stephen Jay Gould, a Harvard professor of zoology, recently summed it up this way in a *New York Times* article. “Good and kind people have outnumbered all others by thousands to one. Every incident of evil will be balanced by 10,000 acts of kindness, too often unnoticed as “ordinary” efforts of a vast majority.” He goes on, “I have stood at ground zero, stunned by the twisted ruins of the largest human structure ever destroyed in a catastrophic moment. The scene is insufferably sad, but not all depressing. In human terms, ground zero is the focal point for a vast web of bustling goodness, channeling deeds of kindness from an entire planet – reaffirming the overwhelming weight of human decency.” (*A Time of Gifts*, 9/26/01)

*Page 2 - A Little Faith Goes A Long Way*

In theological terms Gould is saying that one destructive act has already inspired thousands upon thousands to respond with life-giving, sacrificial acts – that is, with faithfulness to the gospel. Just like Jesus' crucifixion on Calvary was not the last word, likewise the horrible death & destruction at the WTC will not be the final word. Instead a mustard seed faith in God's mercy, love & kindness is already defeating this single act of evil. The gift of faith in the One who overcame sin, death and the power of evil now encourages us to carry on and calls us to care for our neighbors in times of anguish and crisis.

Make no mistake about it – the WTC scene is still fraught with great pain and suffering; but there is also a vision of hope and resurrection rising up from that smoldering heap of incense. Bucket by bucket, shovel by shovel, we have begun to see tragedy transformed into the loving-kindness of God. That's the way faith works – in thousands of little acts of transformation. So we give thanks and we pray for continuing faithful acts of transformation from that east coast rubble. But what about you and me? What is the message of transformation for us today? How is your faith and my faith doing? It has certainly been deeply jostled and tested since Sept. 11<sup>th</sup>! So what difference can today's message make for your faith and mine?

First Paul urges Timothy ( and each of us): *“Don't be ashamed of your faith in the gospel!”* Has anyone here ever been ashamed of his/her faith in the gospel? Has anyone here ever been ashamed or denied your faith in Christ? Has anyone here ever had to make a choice between being politically correct or being faithful to our Lord? We'd all like to say that we've never denied or compromised our faith. But that's probably not the truth for any of us. Not one of us has perfectly abided by the 1<sup>st</sup> Commandment!! In a consumeristic & pluralistic culture – every day we are tempted to make something else more central than our faith in the gospel. So how can we show less shame and a greater spirit of power, love & self-discipline to our Lord?

Quite simply – we just let Jesus Christ be the pioneer of our faith. That means he's in charge: we simply follow!! He is the one who has already gone before us. He is the one who has blazed the trail of total righteousness. He is the one who has fully sacrificed his life on the cross for us ... precisely because of our inability to do it on our own. He is the one who has freed us from sin and all the shame that surrounds it. So these are the days we must courageously show a greater trust and commitment to simply FOLLOW him as Lord.

What does that mean in terms of our current crisis? It means that we don't allow terrorism to become an obsessive fear ... because Christ's death and resurrection have already overcome all acts of terrorism. Christ has already freed us from being prisoners to death, to terrorism, to every other power of darkness and defeat. Instead he has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. Now that may all sound overly religious or too theological, but

that's where we must put our ultimate trust – in Christ's promises and not in the threats of religious fanatics! In a sense Paul is saying through this text ... if we want to do warfare with terrorists then we cannot be ashamed of our faith in the gospel. For either we trust in Christ or we trust in ourselves. And we all know our trust must be in someone greater than ourselves! So we trust in Christ because he has promised that he will go before us and never leave us or forsake us. There's no shame whatsoever in taking that stand ... because that's the best news we could ever have in these challenging times.

Secondly, the message today is that we can be faithfully transformed to possess the very heart of God; faith enables us to become the image of God! The Luke text says it this way: *we have done only what we ought to have done.* Isn't it sad that it so often takes a major tragedy for us "to be the way God created us to be." Just look at the American transformation that has shown the very heart and nature of God in these last few weeks. Many of these people may not even confess the faith, but they have been living as a faithful reflection of God. The mustard-seed of faith in the gospel has again taken root as the work ethic of our land. Is there anyone who would question the outpouring and ongoing transformation as a reflection of faithfulness to God's power and love.

Pastor Theresa Roos illustrates this reality with a similar story about Hwy 50 near Sacramento. Hwy 50 in that area is a crucial artery for many businesses and communities. When major floods and mudslides caused this highway to be covered, thousands of people worked together to move 30,000 cubic yards of dirt and rock from the impassable road. Working hard and cooperatively, these people moved that mountain off the highway so quickly that Hwy 50 was re-opened 38 days earlier than expected. With the heart of God ... with people doing what they know ought to be done ... with faith in the gospel ... mountains can be moved. Yes, a little faith goes a long way!

A final application today is found in Paul's admonition to Timothy and each of us to "rekindle the gift of faith that is within us." In Holy Baptism, each of us was given that gift of God's grace – the assurance that each of us is a beloved and forgiven child of God. Now when and where is that gift most dramatically rekindled in our faith life??

You guessed it – each and every time we partake in Holy Communion. Here is what Christ truly intended to be an authentic moment of transformation ... a moment in which worldly divisions, distortions and distinctions are changed ... a moment where we finally stand united in forgiving mercy. Oh yes, we stand united by a flag in America ... but there is no greater unifying power than the forgiving love of Jesus Christ. How desperately the whole world needs that unifying power at this time. Thankfully as we receive his body and blood we are not Arab or American ... not rich man or poor man ... not Lutheran or Roman Catholic ... but simply equal sinners blessed by God's abundant mercy and love. This is the visible treasure of the gospel giving us strength to stand firm against the evil principalities and powers of this world. For a brief

*Page 4 – A Little Faith Goes A Long Way*

**moment – esp this Sunday – we are at peace with all who surrender to God’s gracious and forgiving will. How we pray that the whole world ... and especially all religious fanatics ... would rekindle this faith in a God of mercy and forgiveness ... in a God of justice and peace.**

**So, let there be peace in this small part of the earth, and let it begin with each of us. Let it begin as a mustard-seed faith ... as a small but authentic expression of Christ ... as a little wafer and a little wine ... as a little Word that says, “given and shed for your sins” ... as a little act of grace that transforms sinners into saints who seek to care for others in the image of God’s love. A little of that faith goes a long way!**

**Amen.**