

TRINITY XIII *<Communion>*
September 5, 1971
Redeemer Lutheran - Milwaukee
Text: Luke 10:23-37

BEYOND THE BY-PASS

Pastor Martyn

"It's Not Much Fun Being By-passed"

Grace, mercy and peace . . .

Almost everyone here today, whether young or old, has probably encountered a time in his life when he has felt passed-by.

As youngsters, we know the hurt we feel when the other kids don't let us play with them? It's not fun to be by-passed.

As teenagers, we know the anguish and isolation we feel when no one "wants to go out with us." It's not much fun to be left-out.

As young adults striving to get a hearing and to offer a new insight now and then, we know the frustration we feel when established authorities continue to offer limp excuses for not listening. It's not very fulfilling to be by-passed.

As parents who have often sacrificed our own security in order to serve our families, our church, our fellowmen--we know the emptiness we feel when we never hear even the slightest word of appreciation for our efforts. It's not very sustaining to be by-passed.

As elderly who see more clearly humanity's destination along the river of life, we feel the hardness of the bleachers as we squint to see life's action from the corner of left field. It's not very rewarding to be by-passed by life, in life, or thru life.

Yes, we all have known and experienced the feelings that are associated with being by-passed. It's not much fun to be left out--to be unheard--to be unappreciated--to be unseen--to be robbed, beaten, stripped and left alone in life. We all know the feeling of being half-dead, don't we?

We all have been in the ditch with the traveler in the Gospel story for today, haven't we?

Maybe we haven't been robbed and beaten in the same way, but we do know what it means to be half-dead--we do know what it feels like to be by-passed by all the other persons along life's roadway--we do know the importance of having a compassionate neighbor in life, and that doesn't mean only the person next door.

Each of us knows the intimate importance of belonging--the need to be cared about--the need to be heard and appreciated--the need to be actively flowing with the other ripples along the stream of life. We know how each of us must be a neighbor to each other if we are to avoid the agony of being by-passed along the road of life.

It's not fun to be by-passed. We not only know that from our own experience, but also from the experience of today's Gospel. So as Christians that makes us doubly aware of our responsibility to avoid by-passing the needs of others along the roadways of life. Our world is full of beaten, stripped, robbed, yes, half-dead persons suffering in the ditches of life--they are waiting for a Samaritan to show His compassion. A little of their half-deadness undoubtedly lurks in all of us here--and in many who are not here--for sin is also a sign of being beaten--robbed--and half-dead to life.

So, how will we respond to the deadness in ourselves and to that all around us?????

Will we, like the priest of our story, be tempted to by-pass the deadness felt by our neighbor or that in ourselves? This kind of by-pass is so easy for us. Because it's the good old religious by-pass. It's being so caught up in our own denomination--or our own worship style--or our self-styled Savior complex--yes it's being so caught in our own religious regulations that we just don't have any time or any place--that means a place right here--for anyone who doesn't conform to our rigid standards. When we employ this pious by-pass, then we have also by-passed God.

We must avoid the trap of its temptation. Yet, there's another trap. For we, like the Levite of our story, might also be tempted by the by-pass of playing it safe in life. The Levite just couldn't get involved. That would mean possibly risking his reputation--and especially it would mean a sacrifice of his time and effort. Such a by-pass means that we, like the Levite, avoid any kind of involvement which might hurt a little. It means that we keep everything inside--we dare not really encounter other lives around us in a compassionate but truthful way because we are afraid of our own fragile ego. And how I do speak for myself when I consider this particular by-pass--for I so often find myself slipping into its grip--slipping into the grip of playing it safe, avoiding the challenge of the Gospel.

There is a third option. And that's Christ's route. It was the route taken by the Samaritan. It was the route that had no by-pass. It was the route with no escape from involvement. It is the route where a neighbor can't be missed--because it's a direct route--an expressway that leads directly to a neighbor's need--and that often means that we have to get into the ditch of life with our neighbor and help drag him out.

It's the direct route that led Christ into compassionate relationships with paralytics as well as prostitutes, with lepers as well as licentious leaders, with believers and unbelievers, with all persons along the roadway of life. Christ's direct route sees all men as neighbors along the way--His compassion is withheld from no man--His route is so direct that it almost always means that one must die along the way--die to the self, and live for God and others.

As we come together again this morning, He bids us to share His route--He asks us to share in His sacrifice--to taste the real presence of His body and blood--He withholds His Sacrament of life from no one--for He has compassion on all who come in His name, on all who seek His forgiving help.

As we share His life in Word and Sacrament, we are given His directions for our route in life--He offers us the roadmap for all of our relationships in life--

A roadmap, which if followed, will yield an eternal roadway for life and the directions are rather brief:

You are to love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.

This is to be our response to the gift of forgiveness we are given. We can't afford to by-pass the possibilities that are offered via Christ's roadmap--for His route in life eliminates our own half-deadness--it rebuilds routes to lost relationships--and it leads us directly to the needs of our neighbors. His route enables us to do more than feel sorry or offer pious platitudes--for his route leads to spending our lives, sacrificing our gifts and talents with our neighbors in need.

You and I need never feel by-passed in life--Christ assures us that we belong to Him--that He cares--that He hears--that He appreciates--and that He places all of us on the mainstream of His roadway in life.

He bids us: Go and do likewise! AMEN.

O Lord, eternal Samaritan to all in need along the roads of life, we give you thanks and praise for revealing your roadway of life to us.

Especially do we thank you for offering each of us your compassionate presence--for in your forgiving presence, we experience the hand of life which pulls us out of the ditches of despair and guilt.

Deliver us, O Lord, from being tempted to by-pass the needs of any and all of our neighbors.

Forgive us when we succumb to our own pious narrowness--give us your strength and courage so that we avoid the by-pass of playing it safe.

May we truly render our lives as a service to you, sacrificially offering ourselves and our gifts to the needs of our neighbors. Especially enable us to offer this kind of service to our special neighbors in need (Names those in special need)

As you give us a renewed and rebuilt life through your gift of grace, may we go and do likewise in the name of Jesus Christ, Our Lord, and Savior.

AMEN.

PENTECOST XIII
Church of the Master - Troy
September 1, 1974

"DIVISION IN THE HOUSE"

"Do you suppose I came to establish peace on earth? No indeed, I have come to bring division." *Luke 12:51*

If there was ever a text -- upon first reading -- that I would desire to eliminate from the good book -- this would be the one.

Is there possibly a text that could make us feel more uneasy? As a new father, this text has an even greater abrasive quality!

I would venture to bet that upon FIRST READING there is hardly one person here who finds Luke's recording of Jesus very appealing.

Most of us would rather limit ourselves to John at this point - where John quotes Jesus as follows:

14:27 "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you."

16:33 "I have said this to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."

20:21 "Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I send you."

How do we reconcile ourselves to these seemingly contradictory passages? In one case, so irritating -- in the other, so comforting.

First - if there is one great lesson to be learned from today's text it is that ALL OF SCRIPTURE MUST BE VIEWED FROM WITHIN ITS CONTEXT. So often well meaning Christians use scripture as a simplistic answer book and thereby quote passages out of context.

It is so clear from the text before us how

misleading **this** approach to the Bible can be. For here we have ~~to~~ groupings of texts where Jesus conveys essential truths ABOUT peace. Superficially seen - these texts convey opposites. ONLY WHEN FRAMED WITHIN THEIR CONTEXTS do we perceive a consistency in the Gospel.

In John's Gospel, Jesus confidently promises peace because he is dealing in those passages with committed disciples. And so we often hear John 14:27 used at the memorial service of a dedicated Christian. But in Luke, Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem. The "baptism" he must undergo is a baptism of fire BECAUSE it is the baptism of crucifixion. It is a costly rendering up of life.

And while Jesus envisions this realization of his future, he recognizes the human condition around him. And what he sees is much antagonism to his mission and ministry -- he further sees that within families there are divisions of loyalty.

Further He sees family members who call themselves his followers, yet **TOTALLY** contradict their profession of faith in the way they live. And he further sees that his call to discipleship will split families -- he sees that some family members will follow him, and the other members will continue in their pagan and superstitious ways.

And so he says: Do you think that I have come to establish peace on earth WITH ALL THESE CONDITIONS? No indeed, I have come to bring division ~~BY~~ SUCH SITUATIONS.

In essence he is saying: I have NOT come to establish "cheap peace" on earth. The greek term for peace is erene-- meaning, wholeness or harmony. And so Jesus is saying: I have not come to give harmony TO THOSE who persecute the faith by the way they live. That would be a cheap peace!

I have not come to set at peace those who call themselves Christians but live as superstitious worshippers of the stars. That would be a cheap peace!

I have not come to offer the peace of forgiveness and then not see that peace shared in the lives of those who receive. That would be cheap peace!

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in No, indeed! I have come to bring division ~~to~~ those situations. I have come to proclaim that my peace IS MORE THAN AN EMPTY OFFERING -- I have come NOT TO DIE IN VAIN, but through my death, to proclaim a new allegiance to my way of life. And for those who DO NOT RESPOND, I cannot gloss over their lack of commitment. I cannot offer peace to those who show NO COMMITMENT to this in their lives.

By their unresponsive-ness to the offering of my life, I have only one choice -- to divide them from those who have remained loyal.

Jesus was dealing with people who had exhibited a division of loyalties - many wanted to follow, but to retain their superstitious beliefs -- or to worship other sources of power and still claim Christ as their Lord. Jesus here says: No indeed! Either I am Lord, or you're not in harmony with me. You can't have Caesar and me as your ultimate authorities.
You can't worship Hitler + Christ at the same time.

Obviously, Jesus' intent is still to give his peace to all who are committed to him and his way. But similarly - he does not promise harmony to those WHO YET RETAIN A DIVISION OF LOYALTY.

He has not come to establish peace for those whose Lord is the horoscope column or who worship witches. For those who give praise and glory to these gods, Jesus says: I have come to bring division in your household. For you cannot claim me and these!

Similarly, I have not come to establish peace for those WHO CALL ME BY NAME but live as aliens to my way. And so - for the person who does not confess his sin -- who conceals his guilt -- who deceives and covers up his evil ways -- FOR THAT PERSON, Jesus says: I have not come to establish peace, for there is no way I can offer peace as long as you are living IN OPPOSITION TO MY WAY. No indeed. All I can offer to you is division -- and that division will affect all of your relationships, including your ~~immediate~~ family.

For you cannot live in deceit and be in harmony with me or with your family.

Yes, Jesus in this Lukan context was not intending to make an offer of cheap peace. His intent was therefore no different than in John -- for his intent was to offer REAL PEACE. And the only way he could achieve that at this juncture point of his ministry was to confront ~~the disobedient~~ people. To ask them: Who rules in your life? Where are your ultimate loyalties? Are your ultimate loyalties with me, or with the creatures and creations of this earth?

It is my hope - and our Lord's -- that your presence here this morning witnesses to your ultimate loyalties. I have been gratified this summer that many members of this congregation have manifested a loyalty to their Lord. It is my prayer and my hope THAT OUR PRESENCE HERE is more than an outward sign -- that it is more than a necessary habit -- I sincerely pray that it reflects a deep commitment WHICH WE SHOW IN THE WAY WE LIVE.

Hopefully, that commitment TODAY has enabled us to confess to God and each other WHATEVER POISON has robbed us of peace. And if we haven't made that confession to the source of that venom YET, hopefully we will be strengthened to do so by the time we leave here.

Similarly - if we have robbed another human

being of his dignity, hopefully, our attitude will change after realizing through this lesson that such an offering is the cheap peace of this world -- a peace which is not in harmony with our Lord.

There is no doubt, my friends -- asserting loyalty in Christ will bring divisions. Because our world is not tremendously LOYAL to his way.

But as you receive his peace through this sacrament, it is his hope that you will be able to reflect THAT HARMONY with him. And in so reflecting His peace - HIS LOVING AND FORGIVING IMAGE -- in so reflecting, it is HIS HOPE AND ours that even if you find a DIVISION IN YOUR HOUSE, that the reflection of his peace will bring about a new wholeness -- a new harmony.

And in that sharing, it is further God's hope and ours -- that those divided from loyalty to our Lord will find in his love A NEW REASON to commit themselves to his way of life.

My friends, there is no greater sign for the times. There is no horoscope that will yield the peace and wholeness of life that comes with reunion with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Let us replace ~~our~~ division within our families by a new loyalty to the forgiving presence we are about to share.

Amen

*within our community
or business
within our nation -
within the human household -*

PENTECOST XIII

Luth. Church of the Master - Troy

August 17, 1975

"A MASTER PLAN FOR HUMANITY"

(Jesus answered the woman): "O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire"
(Matt. 15:28)

Many corporations and institutions today are functioning by a management system called "Management by Objective." From my layman's point of view, I understand this to mean that a company sets goals - then seeks to fulfill these objectives through a process of data gathering, analysis & testing of the data, program development on basis of analysis, and finally critical evaluation to see if the program has met the goals.

This style of management is really quite ancient. In fact, God has used it from the beginning of creation. It was the management style behind his masterplan for humanity.

The objective of God's masterplan was universal salvation - that is, his goal was for all people to be in perfect harmony with him and each other. That was and still is God's ideal - that is still his desire for all creation.

His data gathering and analysis has through the ages yielded to him the same results -- that man has been out of joint with God and fractured from one another. And God found that the basic cause behind this IN ALL INSTANCES was due to the fact that man was worshipping other gods -- whether fertility cults, golden calves, or computerized systems.

Thus, God developed a program which would get mankind back on the right track. And it was a guaranteed masterplan - if only man would hear it and respond to it faithfully.

His masterplan began with Abraham, the great Father of our faith. To Abraham, God made a great promise -- that he would forever be

He wants everyone to belong.

Israel's loving God, and that she would be his chosen people. And God said to Abraham, if you live faithfully in this covenant, you will be a light to all nations -- and soon all nations would turn from their idols and become UNITED in Yahweh and to one another.

And God continued to reinforce this masterplan through Issac and Jacob and Joseph and Moses. Each time confirming his love for his people -- each time faithfully delivering them from the chaos & fragmentation they had caused by their deviation from his objective.

He blessed them continuously -- offering them a Passover -- giving them divine guidance and reassurance through the Ten Commandments -- calling out among them faithful leaders and servants. And as they would deviate from his objective, he would give them prophets -- hoping that they would see their meandering from his goal.

Yes, he had chosen Israel to be his servant -- to be the instrument of his objective of universal salvation. Israel had been chosen to bring all mankind together - to unify and harmonize the creation in obedience to the will of God.

many of the Jewish leaders
But ~~man~~ chose instead to replace God's objective with ~~his~~ ^{their} own goals. So instead of universal salvation, Israel chose nationalism. Instead of seeing that being the chosen people meant being responsible servants TO ALL MANKIND, Israel insulated herself as God's exclusive kingdom. Instead of the Law becoming God's directive for the fulfillment of his love, the Law became a wedge - it became ~~the instrument~~ ^{an instrument} for man's boasting that he was better than the next guy.

Moral majority → Instead of God's objective being a light of harmony for all nations, his objective was turned into a sword and battle cry - each nation claimed that God was on her side.

had created
God's ~~goal~~ ^{goal} was a portrait without walls --

No walls - no outcasts - no³ foreigners

a society without outcasts - a kingdom without foreigners. But his people had ~~seen THEIR CALL~~ as a privilege, rather than a responsibility *locked the portrait in their hearts & failed to share it.*

But God would not be distracted or manipulated from his objective - it was still his masterplan for humanity. His objective of universal salvation would still be fulfilled -- and now he knew there was only ONE WAY his goal could become reality. He must incarnate his objective-- he must reveal his goal as more than an intellectual objective -- he must live the goal as a man, in the flesh.

And so, in Jesus of Nazareth, the world finally saw that God was absolutely serious about management by objective -- his goal was NOW More than an idea - his goal was now living flesh - loving, forgiving, caring, and showing all mankind that belief (faith) is not simply an intellectual formula - BELIEF IS LIVING IN TOTAL HARMONY WITH GOD AND ALL PEOPLE.

But even God in the flesh ~~was an~~ *seemed to be* INADEQUATE PROGRAM to accomplish his goal. And how do we know that?? The Gospel lesson before us.

Jesus was in Tyre & Sidon -- he was on foreign turf -- already an indication that God's love was for all people. And what do his disciples' do when a foreigner - a Canaanite woman asks for help? They say, come on, Lord, she's not a Jew -- let's get on with business as usual.

But Jesus was not conned by his disciples. Instead, he carries on a little te- 'd-te with this outcast - seeing if she really was serious about her faith in Him. She retorts, even people who are treated like dogs deserve the Master's crumbs. Obviously, she is understating her case.

And so - Jesus responds to her -- my woman, you truly do have faith -- you truly do believe in God's objective of harmony through me, And what a lesson this is for the disciples -- very indirectly, Jesus makes clear to them that

God's objective is not only for one nation, but for all people who live in harmony with him and each other.

And that's why, my friends, that Christians still proclaim Christ as the way, the truth, and the life. Not because he's the only revelation of God's truth, but because he's the most tangible and vividly realistic revelation of God's goal for humanity.

And sadly enough, even with Christ, God's masterplan is still not fulfilled for humanity. For we continue to be a broken and fragmented world and society. As Jews & Gentiles, as blacks and whites, as men & women, we continue to assert our own objectives OVER AND AGAINST God's objective for us.

And for many - ^{many whom are} ~~even some~~ of ~~them~~ Christians and Jews by religious identification -- ~~they~~ ^{we} live by belief in nationalism, or legalism, or Hitlerism, or racism, or some other golden calf that they have made as an OBJECTIVE for managing life.

Thank God -- even when we blow it, we still have his objective. Brcause part of his objective in Christ was that we might often have to be forgiven -- before we'd have the renewed sensitivity to see the light of his masterplan.

And that light we need -- so that we might forgive each other and reduce the division and fragmentation we have caused.

Yes - Christ was and is and will be -- we believe in him because he lights up God's objective for us. So now that we have again seen God's goal through Jesus Christ, let's again make it the primary objective in managing our relationships - both to God & each other.

For in Christ, we have God's masterplan for harmonizing humanity.

Amen

PENTECOST XIII
Luth Church of the Master, Troy
Sept. 5, 1976

"WORDS AREN't ENOUGH"

"He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood
abides in me, and I in Him." John 6:56

I'm certain those of you who have been here
for the past three weeks are beginning to
wonder if the record is cracked. We've been
in the 6th chapter of John for three weeks --
and each week the Bread of Life theme has
been the major lyrics of the gospel.

I guess I need not admit that popular music
is not the only thing that is repetitious -- so
is the gospel of John. And John's reason is
no different from any other writer who repeats
himself -- he doesn't want his reader to
forget -- he wants the Bread of life to have
long-lasting nutritional value.

And so he carries it to its logical conclu-
sion -- even though it sounds somewhat cannibal-
istic -- John says the faithful one eats Jesus'
flesh and drinks his blood and attains eternal
life in so doing.

John's metaphor for belief is a good one --
it has great sacramental power. But beyond
the good images of the words, what is Jesus
saying through John?? Why this heavy emphasis
upon the eating and drinking of the Bread of
Life?? Can we get beyond the pious phrases to
the practical application??

Yes - and that's exactly what Jesus was
leading us to do through John. Through John,
Jesus is saying "Words just aren't enough!"
To be real -- to be purposeful -- our relationship
to God and each other must get beyond words.

It's so easy to learn the "right" vocabulary
regarding the religious life. For many years,
that's about all catechism gave to the student --
the right words. The important thing was to
learn the right words - and better yet - the

correct pious appearing facial expression. With those two features, you could easily convince anyone that you were a truly religious person.

But pious phrases and facial expressions sooner or later prove to be an insufficient diet. Recent years have illustrated that almost too clearly with some of our leading national and even evangelistic leaders.

Yes, faith goes deeper than its audible or visible expression at a podium. In fact, John says we really ONLY can claim authentic faith when we experience Christ under our skin -- in our very inwards.

That almost sounds repulsive -- but John's theological point finds numerous illustrations in our day to day life.

Frank Sinatra's great hit, "I've got you under my skin" is a good application of John's eating and drinking metaphor. Obviously, Sinatra is not saying that another person is actually under our skin. But he is saying that our life has become so consumed by thinking and feeling that other person's presence -- that in one sense, that person is under our skin.

That feeling represents more than just mouthing words about another person. Likewise, which one of us has never written a "thank you" letter and found ourselves writing: "Words just aren't enough to say . . ." We're saying that the words we're writing don't do justice to the things that we're feeling. We're saying that our gratitude goes deeper than a superficial expression of "thanks."

And in our love relationships - how often we realize the impotence of words. The promises made on a wedding day mean nothing if there is no forgiving love, no mutual understanding, no sharing of burdens in the days that follow.
Yes, Let's face it -- wedding vows aren't enough -- their very important words, but still only words!

In counseling, people often say much more to

me through their attitudes, gestures, and non-verbal actions than through their words. How often I've seen couples telling each other that they love one another in a tone of disgust and bitterness. Words aren't enough.

In worship, we begin with confession -- unloading ourselves of hatred, insincerity, and guilt. The Celebrate we use is made up of words -- words which help us to deal with both our personal and social sin. But these are only words if we do not let go of our guilt and hatred. If we leave here depressed and filled with slander for the world around us, then we've really not allowed Christ to get under our skin.

We pray the Lord's Prayer -- how often people get uptight about the translation being used -- in other words, they get up tight about the words being used. But they so often don't get uptight about living that prayer -- thy kingdom come NOW into my life -- thy will be done NOW in my life -- forgive us our trespasses, as we (as I) forgive others.

Yes - how often we get stuck at the word level of life. How depressing that life can be!

But Jesus through John shows us a deeper meaning in life. He says, eat Christ's flesh, drink his blood. Let Christ become integrated into our very being, and we into his. In short, let God's presence be more than words -- let him get under our skin. The result will be eternal life NOW.

Words just aren't enough. And they have never been enough for God. He has given us more than words - more than the words of the Bible, - more than promisory words of eternal life -- more than words of forgiveness.

He has given us the life of a man. This is eternal life in person. This is the Bible in the flesh. This is forgiveness acted out -- not just some nice pious slogan.

God has not just given us words of resurrection-
he has delivered it to us - he has shown us
eternal life by resurrecting Jesus Christ.

God has not ^{Simply} given us some superficial,
romantic words about love and forgiveness. His
love was a moonlit cross and real blood. And
that same figure on the cross gathered his
disciples and said -- when you eat this bread,
and drink this cup, you are sharing my real
presence.

We share more than God's words -- we share
a real sign of his love --- a physical reminder
that as we eat and drink we are one with God --
that we are loved by him regardless of past
sins -- that we have more than just words,
that we have eternal life in Christ.

AMEN

PENTECOST XIII
Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo
September 3 & 6, 1981

"A MASTER PLAN FOR ALL PEOPLE"

... for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples. Is. 56:7

Then Jesus answered the woman, 'O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire.' *Math. 15:28*

On Tuesday evening the Organ Search Committee will meet with an architect and organ builder to begin the formulation of an ultimate Master Plan for the church's worship needs hopefully through the middle of the 21st century. This plan will reflect the culmination of 14 months of research and study. The plan will have to meaningfully correlate all kinds of information: the rationale for the organ, costs & comparative costs, benefits vs. limitations, design and visual illustrations, longevity of service, financing opinion surveys Ultimately - this Master Plan will help the congregation have knowledge and confidence in the final product.

Master plans are essential in all avenues of life. Whether its the family, a business enterprise, or city government, the people in that corporate body want to know the ultimate objective -- where are we going!?! Quite frankly, I believe that problems facing Toledo today are directly related to yesterday's poor master planning. Regrettably - yesterday's short-sightedness has forced today's resignations -- incl the most recent one of a competent city manager. Unfortunately - Mike Porter came too late -- people were already disallusioned with Toledo's planning. In simple terms - they had lost FAITH in their city and its leaders.

But unlike the founding fathers of Toledo, God has always had a clearly drafted Master Plan. Again stated simply - his plan is to incorporate all people worldwide into one fellowship with him. Like all master plans, God's is very idealistic. But like all great master planning, God does not compromise on his ideal. He wants universal harmony in the world; and that begins with our attitude and faithfulness to his plan.

Regretably, the data gathered and analyzed over the last 20 centuries has not yielded much better success than the recent Toledo payroll tax increase. Measurable faithfulness... measurable praise of God has yet to do much better than a .500 batting average. In fact - many historical eras seem to reflect intentional rebellion against God's plan. Whether the fertility gods or golden calves of one era, or the corrupt religiosity or hedonistic greed of another era -- God's plan has suffered continued abuse and defeat.

But even with continued rejection and rebellion -- God has not withdrawn his plan or promise to anyone who will have it. He began the plan with Abraham, the great Father of faith. To Abraham, God made a great promise -- that he would forever be a loving God, and that Israel forever would be his chosen people. And God told Abraham "As you live faithfully in this covenant, you will be a light to all nations -- all people will turn from their idols and become UNITED IN MY PLAN -- there will be harmony in families, in nations, in the world.

But God didn't leave his plan only with Abraham. He reinforced it with leaders like Isaac and Jacob; Moses and David. Each of these leaders confirmed God's continuing love and promise for his people.

God continued to bless his chosen people -- he delivered them from bondage, he fed them in the wilderness, he gave them divine guidance for living in a new land. And as they would deviate from his stated objectives -- he offered prophets to reinforce the original plan.

God had great hope for his chosen people. They were to be an example -- a living image of his kindness and love. They were chosen to bring all nations and people into one fellowship of faithfulness to God and love for one another.

But many of Israel's leaders chose instead to replace God's objective with their own goals. Instead of universal harmony and salvation, Israel chose nationalism. Instead of being responsible servants to the world, Israel chose to insulate herself as God's exclusive kingdom. Instead of the Law serving as God's directive to love, the Law became a barrier to separate the "clean" from the "unclean"-- a barrier between self-righteous and sinner.

Obviously Israel has not been nor is she the only nation that has replaced God's objective with a nationalistic one. We too, the USA, have often done the same. But the point here is that God had chosen Israel for the special purpose of INITIATING HIS MASTER PLAN. But God's portrait of a world without walls -- of a society without outcasts -- of /a kingdom without foreigners -- all of this was rejected (and of course, continues to be rejected today).

Amazingly - God would not be distracted or manipulated away from his plan. There was only one route left for his goal to become reality. He would have to incarnate his objective; he would have to give his objective the flesh of a human being. And so God became fully man, and his master plan now became more than an idea -- it became loving, forgiving, caring human flesh.

But even though God had personalized his plan -- his people still rejected him ... and of course, the plan. That is the issue at stake in the gospel story.

We're told that Jesus ^{only} was withdrawing into Tyre & Sidon-- a foreign territory. Not foreign because it was a different land, but foreign because it was not Jewish. Therefore it was considered "unclean" -- considered "untouchable" -- people with whom you just did not associate.

Isaiah had made quite clear that God's plan was to have a house of prayer for all people. But even Jesus' disciples were now saying - "Come on, Lord, she's not one of us. Let's get on with our mission to our own people.

And Jesus even seems to be saying the same thing when he tells her, "his mission is to the lost children of Israel." There are volumes of scholarly speculation as to why Jesus said this -- as well as stalled her with a more abrasive statement. There is no time today to cover all these scholarly positions. But one reason has to be shared for Jesus' challenge of the woman: God's plan would not allow Jew or Gentile to view Jesus as a quick-cure-man. Jesus wanted the woman to see him as more than a quick cure artist. He wanted to illustrate that FAITH must be deeper - more persistent -- more ultimate THAN MERELY A QUICK CURE.

It is the woman's persistence that convinces him that she has faith that goes deeper than the quick cure.

He cures the daughter - but the real miracle is that God has again fulfilled his master plan. He has again reached beyond the boundaries in which he was being imprisoned by his followers. The miracle is that God has again restored life according to his master plan. For that brief moment in Tyre and Sidon -- the world's prejudices were broken down-- the world was one relationship closer to God and his ideal.

Is it any wonder that we call Jesus Christ the way, the truth, and the life. We say that NOT because Jesus is the only revelation of God's love and truth. But we DO say that he is the way, truth, and life because he remains the MOST TANGIBLE EVIDENCE OF God's Master Plan in History.

In the sacrament of Holy Communion, Jesus Christ remains that tangible evidence of God's presence and plan for us. In Holy Communion, Christ breaks down the superficial barriers of race and clan. He delivers us from our burdens and guilt and failure. He offers us his his power of renewal-- a power that rejects our inclination toward divisiveness.

He offers us God's primary objective for the management of our lives: to live in harmony by forgiving one another as we have been forgiven.

This Labor Day weekend reminds us of the blessing and privilege of living in an enterprising nation like ours. But the weekend also reminds us of great divisions not yet resolved between labor and management -- divisions that threaten economic stability and world harmony. Labor Day also reminds us of the growing chasm between the "haves" and the "havenots" -- those that have the jobs, and those who are yet unemployed. Likewise - as we take time off this weekend, we can hardly forget the erosion of harmony caused by persons who make a full time vocation of violence and terrorism.

In short - sickness yet permeates our communities and world, far more than confronted Jesus in Tyre and Sidon. God's master plan offers no quick cure to all problems. But with his plan and our faithfulness to it -- healing will come. He calls us to be personally responsible in our teaching and example to implementing his miraculous plan. As Bishop Crumley recently said at the LCA Youth Gathering: "Having faith is aiming to please God." Pleasing God is aiming to live in harmony with one another.

AMEN

a nation with a great Master Plan

PENTECOST XIII
Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo
August 26 & 29, 1982
Peter R. Martyn, Pastor

"X-RATED LOVE"

"...the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh. ... Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you; he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day." John 6:51b, 53

A few years ago, a Dublin newspaper narrated the adventures of a young Irish couple on vacation in Hong Kong, along with their pet poodle, Leo. One evening, they dined at a nice Chinese restaurant. Not having a dog-sitter, they took Leo with them. Just before they were seated, they communicated to the head waiter, who spoke no English, that they wanted to feed Leo as well as themselves.

Seeming to know exactly what they meant, the smiling head waiter shook his head in understanding and scooped up little Leo in his arms marching off to the kitchen with him. The couple was so pleased that their little Leo was going to get special treatment in this Chinese kitchen. AND after a rather long time in waiting for their meal, the head waiter returned carrying a large covered silver tray which he placed at the center of the table. The husband removed the cover at which time the wife promptly fainted.

There on the large silver platter, browned in juices and garnished with pepper sauce and bamboo shoots was a Chinese gourmet speciality -- roast poodle, once known as Leo in Chinese culture.

The couple did not eat, of course. They returned immediately to Ireland, suffering from severe emotional shock. Of course the story, maybe amusing to some, illustrates a very serious reality for all of us: there can be great difficulty when making literal translations from one culture to another. But for those here who are dog-lovers, there is only one way to view this story: it is an X-rated nauseating and violent horror story. Obviously, the Chinese culture saw it very differently -- they viewed it as cultural refinement, as pure sophistication of gourmet taste.

Need I say further about the difficulty of translating words from one culture to another with the same meaning. The

6th chapter of John concludes with that same cultural dilemma. Especially for our Western culture, this part of the gospel is truly X-rated -- talking about love in terms of eating flesh and drinking blood. Six times in this short section Jesus urges the faithful "to eat his flesh." Four times he mandates the "drinking of his blood." To Western ears and sensitivities of the 20th century --these words are downright repulsive!

Taken literally, one could accuse the Bible at this point of promoting cannibalism. Taken literally -- nothing could be more X-rated than eating flesh and drinking blood. Taken literally -- this passage is far worse than any of our modern TV violence or motion picture sex.

Both the story of roasted Leo and the text before us today illustrate the extreme danger of literal interpretation. Whether its the cultural realities of a restaurant or the religious realities of faith -- not all words were meant to be understood literally.

It should be obvious why the Jews took great offense at these words of Jesus. To them the words meant cannibalism and great disobedience to God's holy law. The Hebrew people were strictly forbidden in the Old Testament to eat any meat in which the blood still remained. To this day, many Jews still follow this practice of kosher foods -- meaning that they can only eat meat which has been killed in a particular way. Along comes Jesus telling these kosher Jews to eat his flesh and drink his blood. And being great legal literalists, we can see why a great division developed between Jesus and the Jews at this juncture.

The issue of literal interpretation continues to spark division in the church today. Fundamentalists want everything in Scripture to be understood as the literal truth. Progressives (to which most Lutherans belong) believe in a far more symbolic interpretation of passages like this one and many others in Scripture. We all know the results of these interpretive differences -- denominational divisions. The closest one to us is with the Luth Church-Missouri Synod -- which will not join us in the Lutheran merger talks now ongoing.

Although literalism seeks to preserve, it often mis construes. Instead of seeing the fuller meaning, it only sees the narrow

meaning. Such was surely the case for the Jews confronting Jesus. Because of their literalism, they totally missed the greater truth of the words of Jesus. Jesus was not literally saying he wanted his followers to eat and drink his flesh and blood, but he was saying he wanted his followers TO TAKE WITHIN THEMSELVES his total person. Jesus was saying by these eating and drinking words -- INTERNALIZE MY POWER ... INTERNALIZE MY PERSON AND MY LOVE. Jesus wanted faithfulness to be more than words ... more than cheap talk.

The great crooner, Frank Sinatra, recorded a famous hit record called, "I've Got You Under My Skin." Obviously, Sinatra was not urging us to get under one another's skin. But he was saying that love, real love, is that power where we are so consumed in thinking and feeling the other person's presence that we feel like that person is under our skin.

We communicate the same reality to one another when we say in our letters: "Words just aren't enough to express my gratitude and love." Literal words just don't always convey the depth of our commitment and feelings.

Jesus says: eat my flesh; drink my blood -- he is clearly saying: let me become totally integrated into your being. Let faith ... let love be more than words ... more than cheap, religious talk -- let my power, let my presence, let my generosity and love GET UNDER YOUR SKIN.

The church needs to internalize this message because too often we live only at the surface of our faith. We put on a good religious act. We learn all the right religious vocabulary ... we put on a pious smile ... and then we try to pass that off as commitment to Jesus Christ.

That kind of superficial religiosity was recently illustrated in a major article of the August Reader's Digest. The article, written by Joseph Harriss (who is merely a roving editor for the Digest and has no religious credentials whatsoever), was entitled: "Karl Marx or Jesus Christ? Which master is the World Council of Churches serving?" In the article, Harriss accuses the World Council of supporting terrorist groups -- he takes words from speeches at the 1975 Nairobi conference totally out of context -- he insinuates that the World Council supports front organizations which seek to overthrow white regimes in Africa -- in short, he strongly insinuates that the WCC is Marxist oriented in its

theological and political stance. Sadly but truly, many Americans will read this sensationalism as if its the Gospel truth. They won't stop to inquire as to whether this reporter has his facts straight. They won't investigate the religious credibility of the facts Harriss reports. They'll just jump on the bandwagon of this reporter (who for all they know may be an atheist) and take him at his literal word.

Fortunately, the head bishop of our church, the Rev. Dr. James Crumley, knows how people often respond to these sensational reports in popular magazines. Along with nine other major church leaders, he has developed a five-page single spaced explanation SHOWING THAT EVERY CHARGE IN THIS ARTICLE was either a half-truth or a total misrepresentation of the truth! If you are interested, I have made reprints of this article which is found on the table in the narthex.

But what is the point of this illustration? Quite simply, just like the controversy the Jews were creating over flesh and blood, it is a matter of seeing things superficially or at a deeper level. Like the Jews -- the Reader's Digest reporter has no deep interest in Jesus Christ -- he has only a superficial view of the mission of Christ in the world. His primary interest is to sell good, sensational stories. On the other hand, the bishop of our church has a lifetime of commitment to the whole church -- he seeks to show the deeper love of Christ for the whole world.

As for me, I will stand with him who is Christ's serious and committed representative NOT ONLY FOR THIS CHURCH, but for the global community as well.

Daily - we encounter those in society who seek to discredit Jesus Christ and his church. They use half-truths and a total lack of understanding about the living bread. In most cases, they have never really eaten the flesh and drank the blood of Christ -- they have not let Christ get under their skin. They are out to serve their own selfish egos -- they have rarely heard the Gospel of Jesus Christ which calls for his church to feed the hungry and clothe the naked of the world. They aren't truly interested in the needs of the whole world -- they are only concerned with their own selfish appetites.

It is no wonder there are divisions in the body of Christ -- it only takes a Joseph Harriss or two in this world to go.

about misrepresenting Christ and his church. But that story is not new -- as we see from our text today. Christ and his church have often been misconstrued by those for whom faith is only a surface reality.

Christ calls us to a deeper understanding of his flesh and blood -- to a deeper understanding of what it means to be his body in the world. It means that we must often sacrifice for others -- it means that we must often feed those who may not even agree with us politically. That was surely illustrated in the feeding of the 5000 -- Jesus did not go around and ask which political party they belonged to before he fed them. He fed them because that was their human need; and then he preached the Gospel of His love with the HOPE that they would follow.

He has the same HOPE FOR US -- that we will have more than a superficial allegiance to him that our faith will be more than cheap talk ... that we will make sacrifices as he BROKE his body and BLED for us. We eat of his body and drink of his blood so that we might be empowered with his love for others.

Dr. John Rilling, former Ohio Synod president who recently died, in one of his books made the observation that a pastor is "one who feeds." He said the most unpastoral thing that can be done is to want to be fed rather than to feed others. The task for the church, its pastors and people, is to have a true vision of the world and its hungers --- and then to have the courage to feed it generously."

Christ has integr ated his power and presence within us through the Word and Sacraments. We have been made the benefactors of his courage, his faith, his love, his never-ending generosity. We will know the fullest meaning of eating his blood and drinking his blood ONLY AS WE SHARE HIS BREAD WITH THE WORLD.

AMEN

PENTECOST 13
Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo
August 18 & 21, 1983
Peter R. Martyn, Pastor

"NO GUTS -- NO GLORY!"

"Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings to us closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God."

Hebrews 12:1-2

"Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division;... Luke 12:51

The great American actress Bette Davis keeps a pillow on her bed with the embroidered motto -- "No guts--no glory!" That may sound rather crude for Bette Davis as well as today's sermon title -- but it speaks directly to both the life of discipleship and the life of successful actresses.

Bette Davis has a goal for her life -- to be a successful actress. In short, she wants to be a winner. And to be successful... to be a winner -- there is no easy way! Winners, whether in the field and track championships in Helsinki, Finland or the Glass Bowl of Toledo, Ohio, all recognize that there is no easy way to glory! Basic to winning is the willingness to WORK HARD; to LOOK AHEAD TO THE GOAL, and not look back to yesterday's failures or today's competitors; and to be willing TO TAKE SOME RISKS. To work hard...to look ahead ... to take risks -- all these take guts. Or as the Hebrews text puts it -- they all take discipline. And the word "discipline" comes from the O.T. proverbial word "musar," which means THE RESULT OF TRAINING.

Most of us are no different than Bette Davis or the gold medalists in Helsinki, Finland. WE ALL WANT TO BE WINNERS. Whether it's our corporate life or our personal life -- we aspire toward success; we want to be viewed as a winner; we want to overcome whatever obstacles confront us.

And the bottom line is that there is no easy way! There is only the disciplined way -- made up of the hard work of training, trimming, and sometimes tribulation; likewise the discipline of singlemindedness -- not looking back at yesterday's mistakes ... not looking around at the competition, but looking ahead to the goal; and finally the discipline of risk-taking -- being willing to take the leap of faith, assured of the support of God and others.

These principles of hard work, single-mindedness, and risk-taking are so basic to our daily lives -- in business, in the health professions, in professional education, in the sports world. Etc. Etc. But so often they are absent from the life of our Christian community! We will be winners for Owens-Illinois, winners for Univ. of Toledo, winners for our socio-economic status, winners for the Olympics, BUT OFTEN NOT WINNERS FOR JESUS CHRIST!

Too often when it comes to our faith life ... to our relationship to God and his mission in the world ... to our corporate witness as the church -- when it comes to these, then we expect it to be easy and comfortable! We seemingly confuse the gift of grace with the cost of discipleship. We evidently think that just because we've been assured of salvation -- there's no urgency in our mission in the meantime.

It is for that reason that Jesus confronts his disciples with the hard question in today's gospel: "Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth??" Reinterpreted, Jesus is saying: Do you think that I have come to merely tell you that anything goes?? Do you think that I have come to give you an easy way?? Do you think that loyalty to me is just one of 57 varieties to choose from?? Well, if that's what you think - then there will be great division in your household.

We sometimes wonder why there is so much division and conflict in the church -- and even in our families -- when it comes to the life of the church. The answer is clearly given here by Jesus himself: THERE ARE FAR TOO MANY DISCIPLES WHO HAVE NOT TAKEN THE DISCIPLINE OF THEIR FAITH VERY SERIOUSLY! Or as the Hebrews writer puts it -- they have become fat and lazy. They have allowed the sin

of apathy and ignorance to cling closely; they have dropped out of the race of faith; they are casually spectating from the sidelines of their favorite clubs thinking their social status will save them. They are perfecting their tennis or racket, all games -- but not perfecting their faith -- not seeking to carry the cross of Christ which requires sacrifice and servanthood.

My intent here is not to make this message sound like hellfire & brimstone (many of us got a full diet of that in our youth); but my intent is to say that Jesus Christ clearly expects some discipline from those who claim discipleship. The Word of Christ is a two-edged sword; he came as Priest and Prophet. As Priest = the Word of Christ seeks to comfort the disturber -- this is Christ's healing, surgical, comforting, forgiving word. But that's only half of the gospel -- Christ also came as prophet -- this Word seeks to disturb the comfortable -- it seeks to shake-up people who have made discipleship an easy, apathetic, uncommitted lifestyle! Like Christ himself, a pastor is not being true to his calling if he does not preach both the priestly and prophetic Word!

There are far too many illustrations in the life of the church where God's people have turned discipleship into easiness and apathy. Possibly some of you have heard one of my classics.

A few years ago a mother told me that her daughter would probably not be attending by catechism class in the fall. My obvious question was: WHY NOT? She responded: Well, the word has gotten around that your class is tough, and therefore she doesn't want to come. I asked her: And how did you handle that?? She said, "Well, I told my child to at least go to your first class ... and then she could drop out if she didn't like you."

Would we ever say that to our children about school?? Would we ever give them the option to "drop out" of the family just because they didn't like us one day?? And Jesus says: "Do you think I have come to give an easy peace?" And the Hebrews writer says: "Let us run with perseverance the race of faith -- looking to Jesus the pioneer of our faith." We wonder why there is sometimes no glow and glory in the life of our faith -- the answer is simple: There's no guts -- no courage -- no discipline -- no committed training in the example of discipleship! We too often encourage the easy way when it comes to Jesus Christ!

A few months ago our church council discussed the fact that very few of our teenagers or young adults make a meaningful commitment to our mission. It was pointed out that

some time ago a decision was made that our teenagers and young adults WHO ARE CONFIRMED should not be given envelopes unless they ask for them . Again, the illustration serves the point: You can't expect a disciplined response if you don't encourage a disciplined example!

I was not a very good football player in high school -- in fact, I spent many games on the bench. But I learned a very basic principle from my coach that applies to discipleship as well as football: IF YOU DON'T EXPECT MUCH FROM A PLAYER, YOU WON'T GET VERY MUCH!! If you don't ask for a committed response from a member, adult -- you won't get one! -- whether from the young or old!!

Jesus Christ has made a committed response to you and me. He not only epitomized the life of love -- he gave up his life to verify that he loves none more than you and me! He ran the race of faith to its most bitter end -- to death.

He doesn't ask us to give up our lives on the cross as he did. But he does ask us to enter the great Christian marathon with determination and a willingness to run, and train, and persevere!

And he has made clear that the Marathon of faith will not be an easy race -- it will take guts to endure -- it will take constant training and assurance and equipping. It will take singlemindedness -- a willingness to look at the ultimate goal, and not be overwhelmed with the mistakes and sins and institutional failures along the way. And it will take risks -- a willingness to reach out beyond the security of institutional comfort. It will sometimes mean division from family and friends -- because the locus of our ministry goes beyond the circles of social acceptability!

But to enter the race -- to be baptized in Christ -- is to be assured that we will be in the winners circle. We may encounter struggle and setbacks along the way -- we may not win all our friends and influence all our family -- but we will win the greatest crown of all -- AN ETERNAL RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD ... A PERFECT PEACE WON FOR US THROUGH THE MERITS OF JESUS CHRIST... AND AN EVERLASTING GLORY FROM GOD!!
AMEN

PENTECOST XIII

Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo

September 3 & 6, 1987

Peter R. Martyn, Pastor

"JUST AS YOU ARE!"

"Thus says the Lord God, who gathers the outcasts of Israel, I will gather yet others to him besides those already gathered." (Isaiah 56:8) "For God has consigned all men to disobedience, that he may have mercy upon all." (Romans 11:32) "Then Jesus answered her, 'O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire.'" (Matthew 15:28a)

Having a multitude of professionals as we do in this congregation, I don't have to emphasize the importance of confirming reservations for conventions or business trips. But I'm sure you've all had a bad hotel experience or two. Possibly you've experienced one like the executive whose hotel accommodations had been bungled. He had sent his reservations with deposit -- he had been told everything was in order, and yet when he arrived, he was politely given his deposit and told that the hotel was "sold out." But being a main speaker at the convention -- it was imperative that he get a room. Angry and frustrated, he began making the rounds of nearby hotels.

After the sixth hotel had refused him, he was ready to take on Conrad Hilton himself. So he confronted the desk clerk with his best assertiveness: "Now look, if the president of the United States walked in here right now and asked for a room, you'd have one for him, wouldn't you?" The desk clerk paused momentarily, and said, "Well, I guess we would." The executive continued, "Well, I'm glad to hear that. Because I can guarantee you that the president is not going to show up this afternoon, so please give me the room that you would have just given to him!!"

When it's important for us to be "on the inside," we'll even resort to "presidential clout" in order to move from the outside to the inside. To live in this society is to be very conscious of who's got the clout ... to be very aware of who are the "insiders" and the "outsiders." And to be really acceptable in this society -- to really be an insider ... you've got to have clout. You've got to live in the right neighborhood ... know the right people ... possess the proper pedigree ... carry the right credentials ... reflect a flawless facade ... look like a teenager at thirty-nine ... and the lists goes on and on. Life becomes a daily scramble to prove that you are really a SOMEBODY ... that you really count ... that you really have clout ... that you are one of the privileged insiders.

It's a game we all play, isn't it?? We spend so much of our time determining who are the INSIDERS and who are the OUTSIDERS. For some people, this is their whole social life

-- categorizing and chattering and coffee-clutching about the insiders and the outsiders. It's no wonder that Dorothy Raine's column is so popular in Toledo -- it's the social barometer of whose got the clout ... of this community's insiders ... of the people who really count!

And that's exactly the situation that confronted Jesus in today's gospel. He is confronted by a Canaanite woman -- an obvious outsider - a social outcast from the Jewish scene. And interestingly enough -- Matthew does not hide the blatant Jewish bias of the disciples. Immediately they say to Jesus -- "Send her away, for she is crying after us." In short, tell her to get lost ... for she is not an insider. So Jesus tests the waters by saying that his mission was to the Jews, not the Gentiles. Matthew even puts a distasteful hyperbole into the dialog with Jesus referring to the Gentiles as "dogs." But the woman persists that even "the dogs eat the crumbs from the master's table." The point is graphic: God's kingdom is not reserved for only those who have family or physical ties as "insiders." In fact, the kingdom has nothing to do with family ties, only faithfully ties!!

The mission and ministry of Jesus constantly challenged the culture's categories of "insiders" and "outsiders." Jesus entered the world to offer a new universal truth: that our brothers and sisters are not CHOSEN by us, but rather GIVEN to us. Or said differently, true brothers and sisters do not play games of clout -- they just are what they are. They are not brothers and sisters because of anything they have done -- but because they have been GIVEN TO EACH OTHER! Regardless of their talents, regardless of their strengths or weaknesses, regardless of their victories or defeats -- they are brothers and sisters ... always insiders to each other!

That's exactly the relationship that God gives to us in Holy Baptism. He adopts us as insiders - as heirs -- not so that we can claim some kind of holy or pious clout -- but so that we live assured that we have Spirit ... his love and forgiveness.

To get into God's kingdom does not take CLOUT -- it takes FAITH! You have to believe -- believe that you have received the gifts of God's spirit -- namely, his love, his forgiveness, his eternal acceptance. And once you believe you have been blessed with his gifts. Then you are an insider -- not because of your geneology ... not because of your social contacts ... not because of your net worth or lack thereof ... not because of any cultural connections ... BUT JUST BECAUSE GOD HAS BLESSED YOU AS YOU ARE! YOU ARE ACCEPTABLE JUST AS YOU ARE ... BECAUSE THAT'S GOD'S PROMISE TO YOU!!

So, the aim of your life is no longer to GET clout, but to GROW in faith -- to trust that God never gives up on you. To trust that God loves you "Just As You Are!" No matter how far you may wander ... no matter how great your failures may have been ... no matter how horrible your sins may seem to you ... faith tells you THAT GOD NEVER GIVES UP!! Faith tells you and

me that our God never plays games of cultural clout -- he doesn't categorize us as INSIDERS AND OUTSIDERS. God loves us JUST AS WE ARE -- so that we might become everything that he wants us to be.

And just as faith tells us that God doesn't give up on us -- faith also tells us that we don't give up on God. And we show that kind of faith BY BECOMING WHAT HE WANTS US TO BE. That's possibly why Jesus led the disciples into the country of Tyre and Sidon ... into Canaanite territory. He was taking them into faith's "testing grounds"... into foreign territory, to see if their faith was like their Father's...to see if the disciples would truly be accepting of those who were different ... those classified as cultural "outsiders."

Jesus continues to take us into Canaanite territory today. He continues to test us through cultural "outsiders" -- PEOPLE OF DIFFERENT RACES AND LIFESTYLES. He tests us through addicts and others with social diseases. He tests us by observing our faithfulness to global missions and other ministries that move us beyond the security of our backyard. He tests us even from within our own community -- to see how merciful we will be to each other when we have failed or fallen short of his glory.

To what extent have we perpetuated the myths of our culture or the mercies of God's kingdom?? How much mercy do we show to our own family members when they have confessed their own wrongdoing or sinfulness? How often do we see the speck in someone else's eye and overlook the log in our own? Do we really believe that God has "consigned all men to disobedience, that he may have mercy upon us all." What does that mean for you??

It means many things for me. First and foremost it means that there is no person or no condition outside of the realm of God's mercy. But let me be more specific ... because there are some sins which we have classified as UNFORGIVEABLE -- such as suicide. Obviously, self-destruction is very sinful -- just as slander and bigotry are sinfully destructive of others. But I have always shared this text from Romans with families who have experienced a loved one's suicide -- because it so graphically reflects God's mercy rather than his condemnation. It so graphically says that we are all destined to be disobedient -- sometimes very destructively -- but that's how we are. And because of that -- God remains faithful to us - showing his mercy rather than his damnation.

Or to use the image of this sermon -- we are all without clout in the eyes of God, for we have all fallen short of his glory. Thus, we are all equally in need of his mercy, regardless of the nature of our disobedience. And that's exactly what God promises to the believer -- HIS MERCY!! Even though we should be "outsiders" because of our disobedience, God has made us "insiders" because of his mercy.

So we no longer have to play games of cultural clout with each other -- calling some insiders and others outsiders. We no longer have to view Jews as outsiders and Christians as insiders. This Romans text clearly says that God will have mercy upon both of us - both faithful Jews and faithful Christians. So there is no longer justification for anti-Semitism among faithful Christians. Our mission is not to judge the Jews, but to be faithful as Christians.

And how can we best do that?? Well there is one graphic and tangible sign of our faithfulness: our regular pilgrimage to this altar -- not because of our moral perfection ... not because of our social goodness ... not because we have some kind of Christian clout ... not because it's the thing to do the first Sunday of the month. We come to this altar because it is the place WHERE GOD ASSURES US OF HIS MERCY!! We come because God offers us his body and his blood through Jesus Christ at this place like NO OTHER PLACE -- the assurance of being forgiven, so that we might now forgive each other!

We get to make one of two choices in this life. We can choose one of two MOUNTAIN TOPS for our lives. One mountain top is reflective of the way of the Greeks. According to this tradition, the Grecian gods were supposed to dwell at the summit of Mount Olympus. There's a story of an old man, suffering from arthritis and severe heart failure, who painfully makes his way to the foot of Mount Olympus seeking the pity of the gods. He falls down at the temple gates entreating the mercy of the gods, but instead is reprimanded by a temple priest who scoldingly says: "Be gone, old man; do you not know that the gods who sit atop Mount Olympus will not even look at the form of a sick, old man. We only want men with physical clout and vitality up here!!"

Having clout in this world is a diversion we all seek at one time or another. But that road always leads to Mount Olympus, where the gods ultimately reject us because we lack perfect clout and vitality.

But there is another mountain top, called Mount Calvary. On this mountain top reigns another God, known as Jesus Christ. And he invites everyone to come to the mountain top "Just As You Are." He says, "Come to me all of you who are heavy laden with the burdens of your guilt and hopelessness, and I will give you rest. Come for I will forgive your iniquity, and I will remember your sin no more. Come, for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples ... a place where all people are welcomed as insiders BOTH THOSE WITH AND WITHOUT CULTURAL CLOUT!

AMEN.

PENTECOST XIII
Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo
August 18 & 21, 1988
Peter R. Martyn, Pastor

"WORDS AREN'T ENOUGH!"

Jesus said to them, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you; ... ' John 6:53

I warned last Sunday's worshippers in the Children's Message -- your steady diet of the Bread of Life would not end until this week. Of course, if any of you have missed the past three weeks of worship -- you will get the same diet today that you missed the past three weeks - THE BREAD OF LIFE DIET.

Why so much emphasis upon this theme? Isn't this poor planning on the part of the lectionary writers? Let's face it, maybe two weeks ... but four weeks of bread is a little too much holy dough. And yet -- nothing could be more untrue. Every market specialist in this room knows that the only way people get the message is through repetition and redundancy. That's why our kids can sing all the pop songs, because that's all they hear all day on the radio -- the same top 40, over and over and over again.

And if Jesus Christ is really the Bread of Life, then we need more than one offering. We need to hear that truth over and over and over again; we need to hear it in different ways by different voices through different mediums and from different perspectives. But above all, this Bread of Life must become more than just another pious word.

That was so eloquently illustrated for me recently by a close pastor friend of mine who was being interviewed for a new position. He had just seated himself with the Search Committee, when he was confronted by the question: "Pastor, do you believe that the Bible is the inspired, inerrant Word of God?" He paused momentarily, and then answered, "Yes and No." He went on. In John 8, Jesus says, "If you continue in my word, you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." If you mean that the Bible is the inspired, inerrant "truth" of God, then most certainly I would answer "Yes." Obviously, that "truth" is none other than Jesus Christ.

But if you mean that "all the words of the Bible" are absolutely true ... absolutely inspired and inerrant -- then I must answer "no." There is no way that all the words of God can be condensed into one book. Obviously, the words of the Bible seek to reflect the "truth" -- namely, Jesus Christ. To the degree that they reflect the truth of Jesus Christ, they are inspired and inerrant. But some of the words of the Bible have nothing to do with the truth of Jesus Christ - so I would

not classify those words as "inspired or inerrant." In short, this pastor was saying: THE WORDS OF THE BIBLE AREN'T ENOUGH! ONLY JESUS CHRIST IS THE TRUTH, THE WHOLE TRUTH, AND NOTHING BUT THE TRUTH OF THE BIBLE.

The same is true for each of you right now. I sincerely hope that you're getting a few words of inspiration from this sermon. And I even hope that you would say that there are some inerrant thoughts in the sermon's words. But you'd better be getting more than words from me -- because you are not here to get words, no matter how inspired or inerrant. You are here to receive the power and presence of Jesus Christ. And that is the only reason I am standing in this pulpit. I am not here to entertain you with my words; I am not here to inspire you with my wisdom; I am not here to instruct you in moral living. I am only here to feed you with the way, the truth, and the life of Jesus Christ. As St. Paul says, "For what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake."

Preaching is more than sharing virtuous, wise, moral ideas -- it is more than offering a code of living -- it is more than propagating an ideological platform. Preaching is providing the flesh and blood of Jesus Christ -- it is the oral distribution of the Bread of Life -- it is the mouth to ear resuscitation of Jesus Christ into the heartbeat of humanity. WORDS AREN'T ENOUGH for the truth of preaching, for the truth of the Bible, or for the truth of God.

Certainly many of us who have been watching the party conventions this summer. These conventions have truly taught the difference between preaching and politics. I have now seen snatches of seven nights of political speeches. There can be no doubt -- great oratorical genius has been heard from both sides. Jackson, Dukakis, Reagan, Gerry Ford - and tonite Bush - they have all been poised and polished. But politics has become the paradise of words. Truth, justice, real life -- these themes are so often sacrificed to self-interest. "Say what the constituents want to hear ... say the right words, even if you don't really believe them ... but say the words the voters want to hear." Say the words that will get applause; say the words that will bring down the house; say what the party wants to hear -- even if it means compromising truth and honesty. Just appeal to the self-interests of the constituents -- after all, the constituents are god. There is no room for real truth, real justice, real honesty in convention halls -- because real truth and real justice do not guarantee votes!

The once-politician now evangelist-again, Pat Robertson, even had the gall to criticize the opposition for not using the "G-word" as he called it -- God. Of course, while he

was still in the presidential running - he didn't want much identity with the G-word himself -- he didn't want to be identified as a TV evangelist. But now that he's back in the 700 pulpit - now he can say his holy words again. Now he can throw stones at others when they fail to use the holy words that he didn't want to use a few months ago. Pat Robertson characterizes how shallow the words of politics can become. Even worse, he shows how shallow religion can become when it goes to bed with politics. Politics and politicians so eloquently show how "words aren't enough." Just using the G-word means nothing when its just a religious or political slogan -- as it so often has become with both TV evangelists and politicians.

Harry Emerson Fosdick, the great preacher of Riverside Church in New York, so eloquently challenged all of us who use religious rhetoric to sound pious. He was touring Palestine and other countries of the near east. He had been invited to address the University of Beirut - a student body comprised of many countries representing 16 different religions. What could he say of relevant interest to such a mixed group? He began by saying: "I do not ask anyone here to change his religion, but I do ask all of you to face up to a tougher question, "How has your religion changed your character ... how has it changed your life?"

When Jesus says, "Eat my flesh and drink my blood," he is not asking his followers to take him literally - to become cannibals. He is asking us to integrate his life personally -- TO TAKE WITHIN US HIS LIFESTYLE ... TO MOVE BEYOND A RELIGIOUS VOCABULARY TO A REAL SERVANT LIFESTYLE.

Like Harry Emerson Fosdick once asked, today we must ask ourselves: SINCE THE FIRST DAY THAT WE BECAME CHRISTIANS, HOW HAS OUR LIFESTYLE CHANGED? OR FOR THAT MATTER - HOW HAS IT CHANGED IN THE LAST WEEK? OR THE LAST 24 HOURS? HOW HAS YOUR LIFE AND MINE CHANGED BECAUSE OF JESUS CHRIST? Is our faith little more than pious jibberish - or do we stand and fall with the truth and justice of Jesus Christ?

I'm reminded of the lady who wrote to the famous American editor, Horace Greeley. Her church was really in serious trouble. Her note said, "Mr. Greeley, our church is in dire straits. We've tried everything to keep it going; a strawberry festival, an oyster supper, a donkey party, a turkey dinner, and finally, last week a box social. Will you please tell us how to keep a struggling church from going under? Greeley responded with two, terse words, "Try Christianity."

Jesus always inspires that kind of response: "Words aren't enough." Bingo games won't do it. Church carnivals are not the character of Christ. Ice Cream socials are nice, but they will not replace the flesh and blood of Christ. Jesus says, integrate my lifestyle into your body ... become like me ... sacrifice and serve like me ... that's truly trying Christianity.

The model for our Christian lifestyle is none other than God himself. God made it clear from the beginning that WORDS WOULD NEVER BE ENOUGH. In Genesis, we read "And God spoke and there was light ... and there were waters ... and there was the earth ... and there was finally man, made in his own image." From the very beginning, God's Word was never limited to nouns and verbs, adjectives and pronouns. God's Word has always been clothed in flesh -- in living, giving, vital life. God did not merely give words in the Bible ... not merely promises of eternal life ... not mere expressions of love and forgiveness. God gave THE WORD that became flesh and dwelt among us full of grace and truth. This is the Word of God - not a rhetorical vocabulary, not a religious platform, not a string of cannon rules, not absolute understanding on all issues of life. GOD GAVE A REAL PERSON, WHOSE PRIMARY POWER WAS TO LOVE AND ACCEPT A SINFUL, REBELLIOUS AND OFTEN CONFUSED WORLD.

God's Word is not a superficial, romantic tune of love and forgiveness for a moonlight cruise in the Carribean. God's Word was and still is a moonlit cross draped with the crucified flesh and coagulated blood of his Son. And that same Son on the cross said - INTEGRATE MY FLESH AND MY BLOOD INTO YOUR LIVES ... eat and drink my presence ... make my sacrificial servanthood a reality for yourselves by giving yourselves to others!

Words have never been enough for God. He gave us the very flesh and blood of himself. Likewise, words have never been enough for his faithful people. They give of themselves because they have received the flesh and blood of Christ. The question is: how has his flesh and blood really made us different? How has the integration of his body into ours made us more alive, more vital? How has his flesh and blood transformed and energized our actions and reactions??

How much we would all like to say that Christ's life has totally vitalized all of our expressions. How great it would be if every experience of Holy Communion would incorporate Christ into our bodies for 30 days! The spirit is willing, but the body is weak. Just this past week, I served some of my favorite Toledo bratwurst to a remnant of Luther lovers at Devil's Lake. We had a grand old time ducking a Devil's Lake windstorm and then trying to cool off in the lake's bath water temperatures.

Just before we departed, several ladies asked me: "How much do we owe you for the brats?" I realized their concern was motivated by kindness and goodwill. But I also felt bad that these same people had forgotten that the bratwurst were motivated not by me but by Jesus Christ. Regretably, too often even within the church -- the flesh and blood of Christ has not been injected into the life of the body. When Christ really gets into our bloodstream - then our greatest desire is TO GIVE! The question is no longer "how much does it cost," but in Christ "how much can I commit."

How can I say that I am a faithful disciple of Christ and then turn around and charge my fellow servants for a few bratwurst?? The spirit of Christ won't allow that -- because his spirit is agape ... an internal power which seeks to offer tangible gifts of love. Obviously, if I was poor and deprived, then it would be appropriate to be paid. But God has blessed me through you ... even as he has blessed all of us with great abundance. Since Christ lives in us, we are always seeking to let him live through us! Or said differently, the love of Christ is never given with a price tag -- it is always given as a gift of grace. We grace others as we have been graced. Thanks be to God that I am what I am by the grace God has given me. And that grace has not been given in vain - certainly not only in pious words!

God help us to realize that faithfulness is so much more powerful than piety ... faithfulness is so much more than mouthing creeds or saying liturgies or sounding religious! Words aren't enough! God's goal is to change lives -- to make us new, vibrant, vital, vigorous servants like Christ. Unlike politicians, we have been transformed to a higher level than self-interest; we have become integrated to Christ's level of interest. We have become like Lady Aberdeem, the great 19th century saint from Inverness, Scotland.

Today, some women might describe her as a feminist or women's libber. But those would be empty words to Lady Aberdeen -- because her motivation was more than ideology or self-interest. In 1882 she founded a Scottish orphanage, a pioneer of orphanages. In 1893, she founded the "Onward and Upward Association" to help domestics get education and recreation beyond the drudgery of their jobs. In 1897 she founded the Victorian Order of Nurses to help sick folk on the lonely Canadian frontiers. In 1919, she led a delegation to the Peace Conference in Geneva on behalf of all women in the world. Someone asked her where did she get the vision and strength for her vigilant mission of 60 years; she said, "I make it a practice to stand in a certain place where I can look up at the mountains and say, 'I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.'"

God has given us more than words; he has given us the flesh and blood of Jesus Christ. The integration of Christ's body not only strengthens us to do great things - but also enables us to be great disciples, who profess our faith by saying: WORDS ARE NEVER ENOUGH! AMEN.

PENTECOST XIII

Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo

Aug. 30 & Sept. 2, 1990 (Labor Day Wkend)

Peter R. Martyn, Pastor

"PLEASE SAY, 'YES!'"

And the woman said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from the Master's table." Then Jesus answered, "O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire." And her daughter was healed instantly.

Matthew 15:27-28

I have been a Lutheran for all 48 years of my life. In a personal way, I received the gospel for the 1st time through Holy Baptism in 1942. There were few Sundays in my youth that I missed church or Sunday School. In my home, we prayed before meals, before bed, and we had daily devotions every evening at the supper table. I spent three years in catechism, learning all of Luther's catechism from memory and writing ten, full-page sermon outlines every year. I was an active leader of our youth group. In college, I was elected President of the Lutheran Student Association. I was first asked to preach the gospel as a sophomore in college. I sang in every choir of every congregation to which I belonged. AND YET WITH ALL THIS ORTHODOX INDOCTRINATION TO THE GOSPEL -- I DIDN'T REALLY HEAR THE MESSAGE OF THE GOSPEL UNTIL I WAS 25.

That may sound strange. But I would guess the same is true for many of you. Some of you may be older than me ... you may be longer lifetime Christians, but have you really heard the fullness of the gospel message yet? For me - the real transformation happened in Monroe, Wisconsin when I was teaching high school. I was hospitalized having had exploratory surgery; post-surgery left me with a serious condition of peritonitis (mass infection). My temp. became so high that I don't even remember where it peaked. But during the two week ordeal, I was daily visited by a Rom. Cath. nun. Every day Sister Catherine came and held my hand and said: "Peter, you're going to get better; you know that, don't you?" For several days I could not answer her. Finally, one day she said, "Peter, God is seeking to cure you; he wants to heal you; he wants you to get better. Do you understand?" Again, my answer was confused. Finally, she said: "Peter, please say, YES!" Being a dutiful Christian - I said "Yes!"

Obviously, my saying "Yes" did not automatically heal me. But it became a real moment of personal and religious transformation in my life. It became the moment that I realized in a powerful way what God had been saying to me for 25 years: "Yes! Peter! Yes!" I finally heard the gospel -- that God's word, especially in crisis, is a word of hope, a word of affirmation, a word of support. For 25 years, God had been saying: "Yes, Peter, I love you; Yes, Peter, you are forgiven. Yes, Peter, I want you to be well and whole. Yes, Peter, I have great opportunities for you. Yes, Peter, you are one of my needed disciples."

But not 'til this moment of crisis had I really listened to the Good News of my Eternal father. Up to that time, I had pretty much taken his "Yes" for granted. But when Sister Catherine persisted, "PLEASE SAY, YES!" -- it finally came to me: the gospel of Jesus Christ is God's constant affirmation, constant desire to heal, constant effort to make us whole, constant desire to watch over us, constant desire for us to answer "YES TO HIM!"

In short, I was 25 years old before I really made a new beginning with God. Some would call that a born again experience; I would simply say that I had been somewhat brain dead to God for 25 years. I had not allowed the gospel to really make me a "Yes-man for God." That's God's intent for the gospel - to make us say "Yes" to his Way, Truth & Life. Instead of brokenness, God says "yes" to harmony and wholeness. Instead of separation and heartache, the gospel says "Yes" to reconciliation and renewal. Instead of division and discord, Jesus Christ says "yes" to unity and forgiveness. What a miraculous moment it can be when we finally hear and see the gospel as God's resounding "YES" -- as his healing, merciful love in spite of the pessimistic "dogs" that we so often become.

That's exactly the circumstances of today's text. In some ways, the Canaanite woman in this text reminds me of Sister Catherine in Monroe, Wis. They are from different cultures, from different periods of history, and from far different religious backgrounds. But they both reflected the same conviction and faith in God's power to make things new. How this Canaanite woman could have ever come to know God in such a way - I don't know. Obviously, her worship of Baal had not shown her a gracious and forgiving god. Very possibly, it was simply the crisis of her crazy daughter. Much like many of us who have been in some ultimate crisis - at that moment we are sometimes for the first time really open to God's help. Sometimes only life's crises enable us to be totally open, totally ready, totally trusting in God by saying: "I'm finally ready God - help me with your "Yes!!"

Well, this woman came to Jesus totally ready, totally open, and totally willing to trust God. She had heard amazing stories about this Jewish preacher -- that God could truly say "Yes" through this man. She had already known God's "Yes" through the birth of her daughter. Now she needed God to say "Yes" again. She simply could not believe that God would say "No" to her request. THAT'S FAITH - BELIEVING IN GOD'S "YES!" So she would not be put off. She pleaded, she persisted, and she prayed for God's "Yes." And even though her Canaanite past was against her ... and even though the disciples were against her -- the gospel of Jesus Christ could only be FOR HER. Jesus said, "O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire!"

This story clearly identifies God's intention for us in the midst of crisis -- his desire is to make us whole, to heal us, to forgive us, to assure us that "Yes, he will be with us 'til the end of the age!"

As we well know from this story - there was a moment where Jesus not only hesitated, but harshly challenged this woman. Some scholars say he was testing her - to determine if she really believed in the power of God's "Yes." Other scholars say it was a moment of human weakness for Jesus -- he was just tired - hastled from the masses seeing him as the magic, miracle worker. As for me, I can accept either interpretation. Neither view changes the outcome of the encounter -- that God is faithful to his "Yes" to those who genuinely seek his renewing power. Please understand - sometimes that renewing power is not a physical cure -- sometimes it is the everlasting cure of the resurrection. But God never renigs on us "yes" -- he always offers his renewing power.

Can you imagine the kind of advocate of the gospel this woman became after that encounter with Jesus. When people came to her for a helping hand, for a word of support, for a listening ear, for the incarnation of God's "Yes" -- you can bet that she was now a transformed advocate of God's love, mercy, and forgiveness. Like me, it took her more than 25 years to become that kind of believer -- but what a difference God's people can make when they really uplift the "Yes" of the gospel for others.

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This congregation has certainly known that transforming power of saying God's "Yes" to others in crisis. Several years ago - one of the disciples at Hope had the vision of God's "Yes" to open the church doors to a Friday evening A.A. group called "New Hope" today. For years now - this church has been seen as God's beacon of Hope for those suffering with alcohol and drug addiction. God's healing comes, when with him, we say "Yes" to those suffering from negating illnesses in this world. Some 15 years ago, a remnant of the people of Hope inspired the whole congregation to say "Yes" to those suffering hunger in Toledo. And now since 1975, Hope Church has been a constant source of God's sustaining grace to the Feed Your Neighbor program.

Again, some seven years ago this body of Christ said "Yes" to a divorced pastor who was pleading for God's help to return to the church's ministry. Not only was Hope a healing and renewing blessing for Pastor Bob, but he was also a source of supportive grace for all of us. And now with Pastor Silleck we have again echoed A NEW BEGINNING TO the "Yes" of God's grace and glory. As we well know, there are some Lutheran congregations that would not be open to a pastoral leader who brings God's revelation from two different traditions. Some would see that as a negative. Obviously, God sees that as a positive -- because he makes crystal clear in this text that his grace has nothing to do with WHERE YOU HAVE BELONGED BUT TO WHOM YOU HAVE BELONGED. WE DO NOT BELONG TO LUTHERANISM - WE BELONG TO JESUS CHRIST. That's why we are here again today -- to be reminded to whom we belong -- to celebrate and be renewed in the "Yes" of his gospel -- to be the people of God who break down the false barriers of race & clan, of social status and all the other traditions which so often separate and divide God's people according to human standards. We come here to be comforted and challenged by God's eternal "Yes!"

As was reflected by the disciples in this text, too often our tendency as Christians is to say "No" rather than God's "Yes" to those desperately needing grace and mercy. The disciples said - "Send her away, for she is crying after us." Like the disciples - sometimes we look no further than what we see -- we see what's on the outside, a Canaanite, someone who doesn't reflect our culture, our status, our traditions. We see ourselves, like the disciples, as the chosen ones of privilege, rather than the ones that God has chosen for service to others. So instead of reflecting the same grace, the same affirmation that they had received from their Lord, the disciples offered HUMAN NEGATION INSTEAD OF DIVINE AFFIRMATION AND ACCEPTANCE. SEND HER AWAY!!

It is said that the split between the Mennonites and the Amish in the 15th century came about because of BUTTONS. That's right - buttons. One group decided it was all right to wear buttons because they were useful. The other group said, NO -- because buttons were decorative and sinful. And these two faithful groups split over buttons.

Isn't that the case always when the focus of our faith is upon external things -- upon our buttons, or buildings, or bank accounts, or being better than the body of Christ down the street. When faith, when marriage, when religion, when international affairs, when our society becomes obsessed with external things ... when we make things the essence of our faith, then we become negative toward others ... we start putting one another down because your things are not my things and my things are not your things. Then our ultimate hope becomes one of having the most bonds, battallions, or buttons, or some other external measure of faith and human worth.

T. L. Koo, a Chinese Christian leader early in this century, summarized it this way when he was facing the crisis of Japanese invasion. "We heard the final air-raid warning; we knew from that moment we had only ten minutes to run into the open fields because there were no dugouts in the city. Soon wave upon wave of Japanese planes would be over us. In those short ten minutes, I lived through the experiences of my lifetime. A feeling of utter helplessness swept over me. The usual things with which we had surrounded our lives now lost significance. Most of us had always felt secure and proud of our ability to save. But in the open field, we realized money could not help us. I had prided myself on being a university graduate, but my PH.D. was of little help with attacking planes. One after another - all those things that we had made the source of our faith fell away under that open sky in those fields. I was standing there stripped of everything before God - and my lips began to whisper: "The Lord is my shepherd/I shall not want ... he maketh me to lie down in green pastures /// and nothing shall separate me from the love of God /// and I will dwell in house of Lord forever."

Whenever we strip away all the false securities of our lives, we find ourselves standing before God like this Chinese leader or like a Canaanite woman - like dogs looking for crumb from Master's table. Sinful, imperfect, lustful, rebellious,

selfish & greedy - desperately crying, persistently pleading, feverishly praying to God: "Please say, Yes!" And time after time after time, God answers "YES!" - "Take and eat; take and drink!" Can there be any greater assurance of God's desire to constantly renew and affirm us -- to empower us with his "Yes" for others.

Is it any wonder that Jesus concludes: "Let him who is without sin be the first to cast a stone. Your sins are forgiven; you are renewed, healed, and made whole again - now go and sin no more." Or said differently from the view of the gospel today - "Now go and say "Yes" to someone else who is begging for mercy and healing and hope. Maybe that "someone" is a victim of AIDS. Maybe its a teenage girl who has had an abortion or a baby out of wedlock. Maybe its a racial minority who is destitute for understanding. Maybe its your spouse or your parents or children. Maybe its your corporate friend who has just been "restructured" out of the company. But whomever it is -- the gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ says, "Please say, Yes!" Please, have mercy upon anyone really needing help! AMEN.

PENTECOST XIII (1991)
Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo
August 15 & 18, 1991
Peter R. Martyn, Pastor

"C A R P E D I E M !" (SEIZE THE MOMENT!)

Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise persons but as wise, making the most of the time, because the days are evil. Therefore, do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. Ephesians 5:15-17

A brief survey: How many of you saw the movie, "Dead Poet's Society?" I hope you enjoyed it as much as I. As you recall, Robin Williams portrayed a flamboyant Prof. John Keating in a posh, private and conservative preparatory school for boys. But he was a masterful motivator of these boys; he had them moving about the classroom & courtyard, standing on his desk, engaged and thrilled by poetry like they had never ever expected to be in a lifetime. And day after day after day -- the motto he inculcated into their minds and spirits was the Latin phrase, "Carpe Diem!" which translated means "Seize the Day ... Seize the moment." In short, Mr. Keating was teaching them to seize every moment as an opportunity for transforming life. Carpe Diem!

For those of you who have a better memory than this old English major - the inspiration for Keating's teaching style came from a group of Cavalier poets during the 17th Century reign of Charles I. In fact, many of you are familiar with the lines of one of these poets, Robert Herrick, who wrote these memorable verses "To the Virgins ...":

Gather ye rosebuds while ye may
Old Time is still a-flying
And this same flower that smiles today
Tomorrow will be dying.

Obviously, the love poems and songs of these cavalier poets urged people to "seize the day ... seize the moment" ... don't wait for tomorrow when the opportunity for love, for completeness, for transformation is given to you today.

Some 1600 years earlier, Paul (or his student) was writing Ephesians at a time of growing alienation and apathy. For Paul, Christ was the source of reconciliation and unity for the whole world -- yet he saw a world moving further and further from unity to sectarianism, to apathy, to the dissipation of drunkenness rather than the discipline of spiritual formation ... in short, to a mindset of greed and grossness rather than a spirit of grace and gratitude. For Paul, there was a drastic need for CARPE DIEM - for believers to SEIZE THAT MOMENT for transforming the world. And so he says: "Be careful how you live. Don't live like ignorant people, but like those who possess the wisdom of the Lord. Seize every moment as an opportunity to transform apathy and alienation into God's power of reconciliation through Jesus Christ! Carpe Diem! Seize the moment for Christ!

Apathy, alienation, greed, indifference - these have always been the challenges facing God and his people. That was exactly the situation God often confronted with his people, Israel. He had sent prophets, great kings, charismatic leaders, profound wisdom writers -- all these servants of the Lord sought to manifest the Way, the Truth, and the Life for the people of Israel. But like many of us today, Israel uplifted other gods and worshipped idols and lust for the things of the world. There was only one option for God -- Carpe Diem! He had to "Seize the Moment" -- it was time for the Word to become flesh and dwell among his people in truth and grace ... IT WAS A TIME FOR WORLDLY TRANSFORMATION IN THE FLESH! Is it any wonder that chills still run up and down our spines every Christmas when we hear "for to you is born this day in the City of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord." God SEIZED THE MOMENT -- he transformed the world like it had never and will never be transformed again -- he gave himself to the world in the flesh! What greater gift of transformation could be given!?

And that same Word, namely Jesus Christ, went about living this same principle of "Carpe Diem" -- SEIZING EVERY MOMENT and transforming hopelessness into possibility and promise ... blindness into sight ... deformity into wholeness ... prostitution into compassionate fidelity ... and death into new life. The life of Christ was a life of CARPE DIEM -- seizing every moment as a time for renewal and revitalization of the living. But especially on the night before he was betrayed, Jesus seized that ultimate moment. No longer would teaching and preaching prevent what was now the pre-destined sacrifice of the Lamb of God. There was only one choice of transformation ... so Jesus said to them, "truly, truly I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you ... for he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him." These are not words of cannibalism in today's gospel; these are John's Words of Institution for Holy Communion. Jesus was saying, from this day forward ... those who are faithful to me WILL SEIZE THIS MOMENT ... they will become one with me through the sharing of the Eucharist. Carpe Diem! Seize that moment ... not once a month, but every opportunity which presents itself. It is not optional -- it is the very Bread of Life come down from heaven!

So goes the historical and theological focus for today. Now what does all this have to do with living in Toledo, Ohio on August 18, 1991. It has a lot to do with our times. We may not reflect the same kind of apathy/animosity that was prevalent in Ephesus (it was Jew verses Greek in those days; today it would have different racial overtones). Likewise, today we certainly rarely see crucifixions as we enter our cities and towns. But these are still great times of apathy and alienation ... of greed and grossness ... of all kinds of immorality, drunkenness, and lust that lurks in the minds, hearts, and bodies of our sophisticated, educated, and talented society. The words of Ephesians are God's authentic alert for all of us "to look carefully how we live!" Carpe Diem! Seize the moment for transforming life thru the power of Christ!

I rejoice that this spirit of "carpe diem" has continued to resonate in the life of this congregation. About sixteen months ago, Bishop James Rave called me and said, "Peter, there's a former Roman Catholic priest who has entered the ELCA who could serve you well at Hope Church -- he could be a blessing to your ministry and you could be a blessing to his new beginning in the Lutheran Church." And Pastor Jeff has been that for us and I believe we have been that for him. WE SEIZED THE MOMENT -- not for Lutheranism, not for Roman Catholicism -- but for the transforming spirit and grace of Jesus Christ! Carpe Diem! This was a moment in which the old walls between two Christian traditions came tumbling down - a true moment of transforming grace. And having a priest turned pastor who fully understands the painful pilgrimage that sometimes results from harsh canon law - this church can become an even richer haven of grace for the alienated even as it offers that same transforming spirit to its pastors.

And again that spirit of "carpe diem" has shown itself in the replacement of the Larson Hall roof. Thankfully, God has blessed the people of Hope with sufficient means to overcome facility problems without losing sight of their main mission -- to proclaim the gospel and grow in God's reconciling spirit to bind up the brokenhearted of the world. The people of Hope SEIZED THE MOMENT to remedy a roof problem without diluting their real mission of glorifying God thru worship, education, and serving the world.

And again the people of Hope SEIZED THE MOMENT in calling Annelle Donaldson to a ministry of music in this place. The extended Staff Committee was challenged with several, well qualified candidates. To the best of their ability - their task was to match talents with the needs and expectations of a growing music ministry. Carpe Diem! They SEIZED THE MOMENT for that Director who brought the right mix of skills and experience with both youth and adults. And now that God has again blessed us with Annelle, we will be led into new praises of his ever-living spirit of transformation.

And again that spirit of "carpe diem" was reflected by a member who gave me an unexpected phone call this week. She had noted the horrible weeds around the Secor Road parking lot. She asked: "Is it o.k. if I send my gardener over to pull those weeds?" That's carpe diem -- that's seeing a need and SEIZING THE MOMENT to transform it. Whether it's weeds in the parking lot or grief over a lost loved one or care for the lonely & lost -- God's people SEIZE THOSE MOMENTS in which they can be agents of his transforming love ... or as Paul says, they look carefully for opportunities to manifest the spirit and the will of God.

Carpe Diem! SEIZE THE MOMENT -- look carefully for that opportunity to transform life from tragedy into triumph. /// And yet many times we are face to face with that opportunity ... and WE DON'T SEIZE IT ... WE ALLOW EVIL, SLANDER, BIGOTRY, GREED, GROSSNESS, AND EVEN DEATH TO BE VICTORIOUS!

Very possibly - you did not receive much publicity in Toledo in the last few weeks about the Jeffrey Dahmer case in Milwaukee. To be in Wisconsin ... and especially to be in Milwaukee ... has been a living nightmare for the past four weeks. Some of the circumstances in this case classically illustrate how COMMITTED SERVANTS fail to SEIZE THE MOMENT - how evil becomes the winner over the gracious will of God.

On May 27th, a 14-yr old Laotian boy was seen running naked in Milwaukee's streets. Several witnesses called the police to come and rescue this young man. When the police arrived, Jeffrey Dahmer was also there. He told the police that this boy was a 19-yr old lover of his who had had too much to drink and that they had had a fight. Without any further investigation, the police passed this incident off "as a domestic squabble between two homosexuals." They didn't even check out the boy's age; nor did they run a computer check on Dahmer, who had a previous criminal jail record for molesting boys. Soon after the police left, Jeffrey Dahmer murdered this Laotian boy. And between that night and July 22nd - Dahmer murdered and dismembered four more victims. Servants committed to protecting life and liberty FAILED TO SEIZE THE MOMENT - and death became victorious over life.

As tragic as this situation has become, esp. for residents of that area (which include members of Redeemer Lutheran), it is not right that we point a self-righteous finger at the police officers acting as if we have never failed to SEIZE THE MOMENT. Daily, God gives us a multitude of "carpe diem" opportunities ... moments to transform guilt and greed into grace and gratitude ... and time after time we fail to SEIZE THOSE MOMENTS. But even more tragically in this Milwaukee case - as I saved the Sentinel reports daily, not one of the officers has publically stated that "he was sorry" for his failure. That is the true tragedy of our world today: NO ONE ACCEPTS RESPONSIBILITY FOR FAILURE ... NO ONE ADMITS GUILT ANYMORE. The immediate response of the officers to their suspension by the chief was to "go to the union and complain that they had become unfair scapegoats."

Dear friends in Christ - there is no perfect word that will remedy human failure. But God has given us a powerful word that will transform failure. It is the simple but sublime statement of our Christian faith: "Be merciful to me, a sinner! Please forgive me, for I am deeply sorry!" This word won't totally overcome human hurt ... it won't take away the pain of death ... but it will at least show that the spirit of God is alive and active! It will show that even in the midst of loss, WE MUST STILL SEIZE THAT MOMENT TO OFFER THE WILL AND SPIRIT OF GOD! CARPE DIEM! SEIZE THE MOMENT FOR THE TRANSFORMING RECONCILIATION OF JESUS CHRIST!

Several years ago, that spirit of "carpe diem" was classically revealed in the life of a Philadelphia hotel clerk. An elderly man and his wife had sought a room in this Philadelphia hotel. With no rooms available - but recognizing this elderly couple's need for rest - the hotel clerk gave up his room to the couple. The next morning as the elderly man was paying his bill, he said to the clerk: "You're the kind of manager who should be the boss of the best hotel in the United States. Maybe some day I'll build one for you." They laughed together and the elderly couple went on their way.

Several months later, the clerk received a letter from the elderly man. He recalled that night in Philadelphia and invited the clerk to New York, providing him with round trip air fare and accommodations. When the clerk arrived in New York, the elderly man led him to the corner of 5th Avenue and 34th Street. He pointed to the new building just completed and said: "This is the hotel that I just built for you to manage." The clerk stammered and asked, "Who are you, anyway?" The old man replied, "I am William Waldorf Astor." The hotel became the original Waldorf-Astor; the young clerk, George C. Boldt, became its first manager. And all of this became a reality because of carpe diem - BECAUSE A YOUNG MAN SEIZED THE OPPORTUNITY TO BECOME GOD'S TRANSFORMING SPIRIT FOR AN ELDERLY COUPLE.

Is it any wonder that Paul says: "So be careful how you walk ... how you live. Don't live like ignorant people filled with drunkenness ... but live according to the will of your Lord!" Carpe Diem! Seize every opportunity as a moment for transforming greed and grossness into the gracious goodness and gratitude of your forgiving God. ... Yes, Prof. John Keating LOST his job at the posh preparatory school in "Dead Poet's Society" -- but he WON the hearts, minds, and lives of his young students forever. Somewhere there's a great saying, isn't there ... he who loses his life for Christ's sake, always wins the ultimate victory! Carpe Diem!

AMEN.

Pentecost XIII
Glenwood Lutheran Church, Toledo
August 17, 1997
Peter R. Martyn, Interim Pastor

“I’ve Got You Under My Skin”

[God]

“Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but wise ... be filled with the Spirit, as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts. Eph. 5:15, 19 Truly I tell you unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. John 6:55

Can you imagine the repulsiveness of today’s gospel to the Jews: “eat my flesh and drink my blood!” Here was a people forbidden by God’s law to eat animal blood, yet Jesus tells them to “drink his blood.” I hope you can see from this passage how the Bible at times needs to be understood in its deeper rather than surface or literal meaning. When Jesus says “Eat my flesh, Drink my blood,” he is not desiring *to be in our stomachs* [although that occurs in Holy Communion]; rather he desires to be *“under our skin.”*

Frank Sinatra’s great hit, *“I’ve Got You Under My Skin”* really interprets this text for us. Sinatra is not being a literalist -- he does not mean we should crawl underneath one another’s skin. But he is advocating that “when we really love someone” we become consumed by thinking & feeling & sharing that other person so much that it’s like having him/her “under our skin.” [Real presence]

That’s Christ’s exhortation to every Christian: “Get me under your skin!” Be consumed by my presence! Live every moment overwhelmed with my love. In everything you do and say, do it with my peace & joy! *Let me under your skin* so that you are not burdened with guilt or anxiety. Above all, “when I’m under your skin,” then you’ve got the assurance of my forgiveness. So, “eat my flesh and drink my blood:” GET ME UNDER YOUR SKIN!

As we all know - that’s the only reason we come to church every week: “To Get Jesus Christ Under Our Skins!” That’s why we listen to sermons! That’s why we receive the sacraments, esp. Holy Communion. That’s why we serve the needy & give mercy to the sick and sorrowful -- to help them again feel Christ’s presence “under their skin.” But today - our Ephesians text makes more clear than anything else the **EMPOWERING WAY WE CONVEY THAT CHRIST IS IN US, UNDER US, OVER US, & THROUGH US:** the one great way we reveal that Christ’s spirit is not merely on the surface - but deeply within us directing our every move. Paul says, “be filled with the Spirit as you sing psalms & hymns & spiritual songs, singing & making melody to the Lord in your hearts.”

In every age - singing has been the way we convey that which is at the deepest level of our lives. Whatever is under our skin will be revealed in what we sing and the way we sing! The great ancient theologian, Augustine, said, “The one who sings prays twice!” From the beginning of the church, the greatest truths were not set forth in bible studies, but in songs! And the same is true today!

Why is it that our kids love to go to national youth gatherings?? Not because of the preaching & bible studies, but because of the fantastic spirit of singing! It is through music that God's spirit is most powerfully conveyed. The majority who say they don't like Lutheran worship are not really upset with the liturgy -- but much more upset with the way Lutherans sing! Because too often we sing as if "there's nothing under our skin"--we sing without Spirit -- without really showing the real presence of Christ's vitality! So it is that some of our best friends often find it difficult to worship with us!!

Be assured - the real presence -- the essential nature of Jesus Christ is fully received in Holy Communion regardless of how we sing. Almost all scholars agree that in the eating and drinking of Holy Communion we all receive the VERY PRESENCE OF J.C. That's why our church has a stipulation that active members must at least receive the sacrament annually to be alive in Christ!

But how does that person or any other Christian show that he/she has received Christ's spirit "under his/her skin?" Paul answers, "by singing and making melody to the Lord in our hearts!" Paul obviously means that in worship and teaching -- music must take the lead. Music is the way Christians show the mark of "being filled with the spirit" - whether they sing "on" key or "off."

Let me share a couple of personal illustrations. Last Tuesday, I helped lead a devotional period for alzheimers' residents at Sunset House. First we sang "A Mighty Fortress" with the residents. There was seom response, but not much! Evidently this hymn was still too heady! Then we sang that simple but superb children's song: "Jesus Loves Me." Nearly half of the residents responded when we came to the refrain, "Yes, Jesus Loves me!" Even though these were elderly women with low cognitive skills -- they came alive when the music stired their deeper faithfulness. They aren't very responsive to preaching and teaching -- but they are "filled with the spirit" through music.

A second illustration. Periodically, you may notice that I or other pastors seem to show special favoritism toward the choir or possibly certain members of the choir. There is usually a very spiritual reason for such recognition: these choir members not only bolster congregational vitality but bolster the pastor's spirit. Their spirit of joyful & exhuberant singing helps the preacher come alive in his proclamation. That's why choir members are so essential to the life of a congregation and the vitality of worship.

So you can see why I re-wrote stanzas to *Adeste Fideles* today as our sermon hymn? Because we all know that Christians love to sing their favorite Christmas carols. It's often from Christmas music that people finally feel they are given a chance to share "melodies to the Lord from their hearts." And when you sing a sermon hymn with gusto that simply empowers me all the more to preach [and you to leave here] with greater conviction and joy.

Let me test this contention of "musical spiritedness" in one final way. What do you do when you are particularly thankful or pleased or happy about something in your life? Don't you often sing? Don't you find yourself "whistling a happy tune?" Maybe [like some of my non-singing friends] you just belt out your praises in the shower by yourself. That's exactly what worship & glorifying God is all about -- expressing our gratitude & pleasure for a God who gives himself totally to us -- even in dying on a cross to reveal the depth of his love.

Is it any wonder that there have always been two primary purposes of music in the church? One is to praise God with our hearts, minds and souls. The other is to discern the difference between what is wise and unwise for our living. Most of us understand the purpose of praising God with our total beings. But many of us have rarely reflected on the fact that music helps us discern wisdom from foolishness & stupidity. That's why most people cannot tolerate music which has degrading lyrics or a depressive meter -- because music was not ideally intended to focus on the vulgar, the hideous or deeply depressive side of life ... at least not church music. Personally, I enjoy a wide range of music from classical to rock to Christian pop to gospel and even a little country. But when any song only offers an overpowering "base beat" with exploitive lyrics about "doing it to another human being" -- then music has become a blasphemy to God's spirit.

That's why wedding couples are encouraged to choose selections which reflect God's spirit rather than a vulgar human spirit. The purpose is not to be restrictive, but to make certain that the selections are uplifting and affirming of God's nature and expression. Good music helps us fix our minds & hearts upon the wisdom, goodness and grace of God. And that's why a dying culture is one which no longer strives to build up God's spirit in the hearts of people.

So, God says to all of us today through John & Ephesians: "**GET ME UNDER YOUR SKIN!**" Let my Word fix your minds on what is noble, joyous, pure, unchanging and eternal. And what is pure, unchanging and eternal! Nothing but the Bread of Life, Jesus Christ. And how can we best express that we are filled with His Spirit? Through "*making melodies to God of what is in our hearts.*" So, let us prepare to eat and drink the very presence of our Lord as we sing a different version of Ode to Joy as drafted in your bulletin:

Holy God, Forever Gracious,
Hear us as we pray today;
Give us Wisdom; Give us Courage
As we hunger for Your Way!
May Your Bread of Life em-power
Doom and darkness go a-way;
Always may your living Spirit
Show us how to light this day! AMEN.

Pentecost XIII
Glenwood Lutheran Church, Toledo
August 25, 1996 (first Sunday as Interim)
Peter R. Martyn, Interim Pastor

“MORE THAN SQUEEZABLY SOFT!”

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God--what is good and acceptable and perfect. Romans 12:1f

Most of you may remember Mr. Whipple, the dutiful, somewhat prissy, grocery store manager who never seemed to have anything to do but guard the Charmin tissue. When passing the display, shoppers couldn't resist squeezing the Charmin. So Mr. Whipple stationed himself by the display to warn shoppers “Not to squeeze the Charmin!!” Yet after all his unsuccessful efforts to stop others, he finally succumbs himself and is caught squeezing the Charmin. He violates his own principles and conforms to the way of the world around him.

Much like Mr. Whipple, St. Paul told the young church at Rome *“not to conform to the world around them, but to be transformed by the renewal of their minds.”* The J.B. Phillips translation offers an even better translation: *Do not let the world squeeze you into its own mold, but let God remold your minds from within.* Sounds good, doesn't it, but doesn't sound very easy!!

To be a faithful Christian is to struggle with this Pauline statement for a lifetime!! Not one of us in this room has avoided the pressure of being too squeezably soft. We live in a world where the pressures and the powers, the fads and the frills constantly seek to squeeze us into this or that or something else. Much like Mr. Whipple, no matter how good our intentions, we often find ourselves succumbing to all the social sentiment & slang.

For instance, it has always been difficult to be a teenager ... but it's ten times more difficult to be a teenager today. Because there are so many more cultural fads, so many more pressures, so many more “cool things to do and crazy places to go.” And what if teens don't succumb to peer pressure? Well, it usually means rejection from the group. And which teenager wants to be abandoned by his/her peers?? Oh, kids say they want to be individuals, but we all know that conformity to the group is far more important than real individuality. And as these kids get a little older, all of a sudden it becomes conformity to certain clubs, certain professions, certain styles, certain neighborhoods, certain churches, and the list goes on and on.

But conformity is hardly only an individual or personal thing. It's election time again. And which one of us believes that there is no conformity in politics? Political parties thrive on being “squeezably soft” to the party-line. Last week Dole told us that he's going to give us a 15% across the board tax cut. The Republical Convention assured us that by 2002 we'll all

be richer and the deficit will be smaller. What will Clinton promise in Toledo tomorrow nite--and later in Chicago? I doubt that he'll say anything about a 15% tax cut; and we know Hillary will not be as charming as Elizabeth. But I've become pretty cynical about all these political party promises. Because I think politicians offer little more than "squeezably soft rhetoric." They too often only tell us what we want to hear rather than what we need to hear to be the strong & sacrificial nation we once were. And what has that meant for a majority of us?? We've become squeezably soft on big government; squeezably soft on human rights & racism, squeezably soft on commitment and sacrifice, squeezably soft on the value of human life & relationships, squeezably soft on gun control, drugs, alcohol addiction, oil consumption, abortion, environmental issues, and a host of other things that were once called "the will of God!" In short, like the Romans in Paul's day, we've become soft on anything that may have a personal cost!!

But let's not be too tough on politics without also looking at religion. Most churches like Glenwood--that have "rock-solid" faithful people-- are struggling to grow. But churches that offer "Sunday entertainment" and Razz-Ma-Tazz performances are growing by leaps and bounds. Why? Because church survival today means marketing a consumer mentality -- we must squeeze our liturgies and prayers into the mold of popular packaging & glitzy products in order to attract the so-called faithful. Please don't get me wrong--I truly believe the church needs to be much more enthusiastic and spirited and exuberant; but not for the sake of consumer conformity. There is only one call of conformity as a Christian: to be transformed by the Spirit of Jesus Christ. And Jesus Christ doesn't call us to consumer profitability; he calls us to compassionate prophecy & proclamation of His Word!!

Yet look what gets peddled as "authentic religion" today. At a recent Christian booksellers convention with 11,000 bookstore sellers present, there was one called the "Bible Study Pen Co" (how's that for an entrepreneurial?) This company actually has the gaul to say that it's pens are better for Bible study "because they are the highest quality pen made by a Christians and the pen has an everlasting highlighter & pen all in one." Just what you always wanted, right?? Another company was called Jesusworks Activewear. One of their T-shirts' slogans was, "the righteous JUST DO IT by faith." One buyer said, "Now I finally know how the Roman Catholics have succeeded at birth control & family planning: by faith alone, without any human works!"

I hope the point is made: religion today is being squeezed into a "consumer marketing mold" rather than a dynamic expression of faithfulness to God from his people. Paul faced the same dilemma in the Roman church. In his day, ritual slaughter of animals was viewed as the appropriate commitment to the diety. "*Kill a lamb and you had fulfilled your religious commitment to God.*" In the middle ages, conforming to obligatory mass attendance was sufficient as an appropriate sacrifice to God. Today, conforming to a few years of catechism and then occasionally showing up at church is considered an appropriate sacrifice to the Lord.

Is there any transformation of the mind or spirit in any of these so-called religious practices? Would we call these practices “good, acceptable and perfect” in God’s sight? What difference has God’s grace made when we “kill a lamb,” “go to an obligatory mass,” or “stop praising God after catechism.” For eleven chapters in the book of Romans, Paul expands upon the meaning and magnificence of God’s grace. Then in chap. 12 he says, *“I appeal to you, therefore, by the mercies of God to present your bodies as a living sacrifice--this is true spiritual worship.”* In other words Paul is clearly saying: “What difference has God’s grace and mercy really made in your life?? Has it transformed your mind--are you a kinder, gentler, more caring and more forgiving person?? Has it made you a more sacrificial liver and giver--are you a JOY-MAKER or JOY-TAKER in your daily living??

My dear Christian friends, have we come today to be transformed by the power of God -- or will we just settle for another Sunday of being squeezeably soft? Is it religious business as usual; or will we go home changed ... a little more Christlike than when we came? Do you need any changing from any fragmentation in your life?? Do you need any healing for any pain or persecution in this past week? Does your mouth or your spirit need to be transformed from prejudicial pettiness or racist rage toward minorities? In what way have you come today to let God transform your mind & spirit??

Or maybe we should ask: where does transformation begin for us?? Well, obviously, for most of us it began at a baptismal font! But for nearly all of us, that was so long ago that we can’t recall what a great moment of transformation it really was! So God has given us another symbol of transformation. And he calls us into the sanctuary every Sabbath so that we can be transfixed by the power of this simple yet profound symbol. And he says He wants this symbol to dominate every moment of our active lives. Is it any wonder that we revere the symbol of sacrifice that stands as a beacon atop Glenwood’s altar. That cross reminds us of WHO we are and WHOSE we are: sacrificial servants of a sacrificial Savior. George McCleod states: we need to recover the cross outside our sanctuaries. He says: *“Jesus was not crucified in a cathedral between two candles, but on a cross between two thieves, on top of a garbage heap, on a crossroad so cosmopolitan that they had to write his title in Hebrew, Latin & Greek. Jesus was crucified where cynics talk smut, soldiers gamble and thieves curse. He died in a market place, because that’s what he died for -- a sinful world, not a sinful church!!”*

So, good, rock-solid Glenwood people--how can you and I “lift high His cross??” Well, certainly by doing more than wearing it around our necks or carrying down the church aisle. For the next two weeks the gospels will instruct us in ways of “taking up the cross.” This week we’re told that “cross bearing” is not being “squeezed into the mold of the fads of this world.” And more--we’re told there are at least two ways we can show that we “lift high the cross.” First and foremost, in everything we do and say, we confess Jesus Christ as our Messiah. He is the Rock of Faith; the unchanging foundation in times of shifting sands. Well, this is a time of shifting sands for Glenwood.

And Jesus thru your interim pastor reminds you today UPON WHOM YOU ARE TO PUT YOUR TRUST & FAITH!! My task as interim is to remind you regularly to get your hearts and minds on the true Shepherd and Master of this flock. In making some 20 calls this past week--I heard great names like Bell, and Steele and Imhoff. I truly thank God for those dedicated pastors. But the way some Glenwood folks talked about them almost led me to believe that they had become Glenwood Messiahs rather than Glenwood messengers. Every pastor is replaceable; only Christ remains as a permanent fixture! The task before you now is to find yourself a messenger whom you will love & uplift but not worship & adore in place of Jesus Christ! Above all, Jesus says clearly in this text, find a messenger who will point to the real Messiah, and not keep pointing to himself or herself!! That's a real challenge from Jesus ... because as a pastor, I know what a temptation it is to point to myself and not to my Lord!! So in your Call Process--keep very clear that you are looking for a faithful messenger like St. Peter: "one who confesses not himself, but Jesus Christ as Messiah.

Secondly and lastly for today, "lifting high the cross" means we daily kneel at the foot of the cross and say to Jesus: "Use me as you will, Lord!" Be assured, that takes real transformation ... real change!! Most of us want to hang onto control or the past ... we really don't want to take the risk to surrender control at Jesus' feet and say, "Use me according to your will!" I know that for a fact, because since resigning at Hope ... I have been thinking too much about the past--too much about the good ole days. And how can God do anything with me today if I keep "being squeezed into "holding onto yesterday's control!?"

Maybe the story of the little boy in NYC best illustrates what it means to say "*use me as you will Jesus!*" In his black church, everyone came forward to put his/her offering in the baskets. The boy was obviously poor. But he came forward anyway. And when he got to the front, he asked the usher to put the basket on the floor. He just stepped into the basket and stayed there. A titter of embarrassment went thru the congregation, and finally the pastor asked: "Son, what are you doing?" The boy answered: "*I can't give any money cause I don't got any; but I can give myself, and this is what I do now for Jesus!*"

"To lift high the cross" means that you and I are so changed -- so transformed in mind & spirit by the love & mercy of Jesus Christ ... that we are ready at any time "to step into the offering basket and offer ourselves." For isn't that what it means when Paul says: "I appeal to you, present your bodies as a living sacrifice, for this is true spiritual worship." Need anything more be said today about being "more than squeezeably soft today!?"

AMEN.

Pentecost XIII
First English Lutheran, Toledo
September 2, 2001
Peter R. Martyn, Part-time Interim

DIVINE ETIQUETTE

“For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.” Luke 14:11

We live in a world that is very conscious of a social pecking order. In fact, social etiquette is such an obsession with some people that they literally get sick worrying about it. I have known mothers of the bride who have worried far more about the seating of guests than getting to know their future son-in-law. Recently, at the Library rededication – it was a great evening to observe “who’s who in the Toledo pecking order.” Yes, the concern for propriety, prestige and position can easily overshadow the building of loving/caring relationships.

But don’t get me wrong: I am not against social etiquette. In fact, some things today have totally lost rules of etiquette. Let’s face it – social & cultural etiquette give order, balance and guidance to our whole social environment – and that is very important. But an obsession with position or place can also spawn some of the world’s greatest divisions & jealousies & resentfulness.

Let me illustrate with a favorite story. Several years ago, two researchers for the Kinsey Institute had done an extensive survey on the sexual attitudes of 3,000 adults. It took more than ten years to compile the data. When it was finally ready for publication – the researchers could not agree as to whose name would appear first on the publication. Then after 10 more years of squabbling, it took other colleagues to finally intervene in order to get the document published. Sounds exaggerated, doesn’t it – but which one of us has not seen ego, arrogance & self-pride raise their ugly heads?

This same social & cultural “one-upmanship” can become terribly poisonous to the body of Christ. In fact, that was the exact situation recorded in Luke that confronted Jesus – the Pharisees were obsessed with choosing positions of prestige & honor instead of offering God’s ministry of compassion. The whole essence of community life was an obsession with pecking order & positioning – people were most concerned about jockeying and scrambling for better places ... for more prominence ... for places of greater glory & recognition & special honor. So Jesus tells a parable that pulls no punches. In his characteristic manner in parables, he exaggerates his point – having people in higher seats take lower seats so that they can be invited to higher seats. His tongue & cheek example of musical chairs seeks to make one simple point: SELF-EXALTATION is out of bounds wherever Christ is hosting the table.

Here again – don’t get the wrong message from Jesus. He fully understands the need for a social pecking order in the world; he knows that climbing the ladder is part of the social order of this world. But he does not want that

pecking order to become the purpose and essence of the church's life and ministry. That is always the risk and the temptation of the church in the world – to merely adopt the social and cultural order of the day. Jesus does not want the church to become “just another club” dictated by social norms.

So Jesus promotes another kind of etiquette that is far more consistent with his lifestyle. It has a governing principle that does not cause exclusiveness or divisiveness or other demonic expressions. For today's purposes, I'm calling this Divine Etiquette – and this etiquette is governed by the power of humility. Contrary to the way in which it has been defined, humility is a power of strength rather than a power of weakness. Humility is not being wishy-washy – it is not a matter of walking around with your hands folded and your head hung low – RATHER, humility is offering one's life as an instrument of peace, love and mercy WITHOUT DEMANDING ALL THE CREDIT FOR DOING IT. That's real power – being a sacrificial instrument without demanding all the accolades for oneself.

And that was the humility of Jesus Christ – a humility of fully surrendering his own life for the sake of others. And that's always what humility means in the Bible – a willingness to sacrifice without needing self-gratification or self-glory for doing it. Jesus didn't tell his disciples to go out and tell everyone how humble he was – that he was God's greatest servant on earth. Everyone saw his example of humility: HE SACRIFICED WITHOUT ASKING FOR CREDIT. Unlike the lists of the prominent & the powerful – there was no special list of honored names for his efforts: HE HAD COMPASSION AND LOVING CONCERN FOR EVERYONE. That's Divine Etiquette – to humble oneself through a sacrificial and servant lifestyle for all in need.

So, Jesus turned the tables of etiquette upside down. The key words for social and cultural etiquette are “rank, power, status, position and a concern for self-recognition.” The only key word for Divine Etiquette is quite the opposite – **HUMILITY ... a willingness to sacrifice for the sake of others.**

So there you have the theology of Divine Etiquette – living by a humility that seeks always self-sacrifice rather than self-recognition. The question remains: how do we apply this etiquette and humility to the life of First English ... or any other group of Christians? Well, there are two ways that God wants us to foster his etiquette of humility: first, we are to be guests of it; and second, hosts of it!

As guests – totally contrary to social etiquette – our aim is not to boast or to seek recognition or to bring any focus to ourselves. Rather, guests simply THANK GOD for being included in his kingdom. Now is there anyone here who finds it difficult to be a guest??? Unlike social etiquette – guests of God's grace do not squabble over rank or status or number of good deeds done; rather, they simply appreciate Christ's sacrifice that makes them one with God and each other. There is no separation among these guests – this is one place in the world where everyone is an equal recipient. So the Christian community

IS NOT TO BE CHARACTERIZED by people jockeying or scrambling for closer seats to Christ. Just as Jesus told James and John – it's not a matter of being on the right or the left ... it's a matter of drinking the cup of sacrifice ... and only Christ has done that perfectly. Guests have been assured of an equal place in the kingdom of God. And that's good news ... we are not blessed by rank or status, but by our faithful thanksgiving in what Christ has already done for us.

As you can obviously guess – being guests is the easy role. But Divine Etiquette follows any good ethical principle – when you have received a divine gift, what are you to do with it?? The obvious answer: **GIVE IT AWAY!** So God calls his guests to also be **HOSTS**. And hosts are empowered with humility to be instruments as well as objects of God's goodness and grace. And the example that hosts follow is being "instruments like Christ himself." And to whom did he offer his forgiving grace? "*God so loved the WORLD*, that he gave his only begotten son ..." Like Christ himself – we are to be hosts of his forgiving mercy for those inside and outside our circle of fellowship – seeking like Christ to sacrifice for others without any expectation of a return. That's the mission strategy of the humility of Divine Etiquette – always seeking to sacrifice for those who are still searching for God's circle of fellowship ... and hoping that through the example of our sacrifice – that everyone will finally see the light. Again, we do this not for self-recognition or honor, but to glorify Christ who has first given the prize to each of us.

So it is that life goes on with both social etiquette and divine etiquette. We cannot avoid the decision-making of social etiquette. Daily we are confronted with questions of rank and status and position and recognition. But God has asked us to make a higher choice as well: we are to make decisions that are inspired by Divine Etiquette. And when we make those decisions – when we choose mercy & peace & forgiveness & kindness ... we ultimately make this a better world ... because we are not living merely to glorify ourselves, but to glorify the goodness and grace of God that has been poured into our hearts. May God bless you to use the humility of his Divine Etiquette every day ... "for those who humble themselves will be exalted!!"

AMEN