

TRINITY IX

Redeemer Lutheran, Milwaukee

August 8, 1971

Pastor Martyn

"SEARCHING FOR 'STAGE PRESENCE' UNDER GOD'S DIRECTION"

"A man's mind plans his way, but the Lord directs
his steps."

As you all know, the book of Proverbs and much of the other wisdom literature is intended to be practical advice for the people of God. And so the sayings that we have before us this morning represent practical advice about ultimate directions for life. But to the 20th century ear, at least to mine, the initial impact of the advice causes me slight bewilderment.

A man's mind plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps.

How can a man's mind plan his way, and yet at the same time have the Lord direct his steps? Aren't a man's movements directly influenced by his mind? By mental cues from the brain?

Obviously, the answer is YES. But, we cannot assume that the text only speaks to the simplicity of our every day movements. Its impact, although still very practical, drives itself more deeply into the core-questions of life.

That is, the text does not simply refer to our simple gestures in life, but rather to our total stance toward life. The text is asking each of us depth questions about our lives.

Where do we receive you ultimate cues and directions for life? From only our own mind? Or do we receive directing vibrations from beyond ourselves?

Or, stated differently, if we were to choose a source of ultimate trust for direction in life, where would we look? Whome would it be? Would our own minds be our ultimate direction for our lives--or would we seek a source beyond ourselves?

Or relating these questions more directly to the text, we could ask, as our minds plan, even the most routine actions of our days, are they regularly influenced by a more ultimate source of direction?

According to the writer of Proverbs, such a condition is a given for the people of God. BUT--WHY MUST IT BE A GIVEN FOR THE CHRISTIAN: AND HOW DOES THE CHRISTIAN ALLOW HIS MIND TO BE SO DIRECTED BY THE LORD?

In order to answer these questions, I can only share a few illustrative experiences from my own life, on how I have come to understand the Christian stance or direction for life: So the first question: Why must I accept as a given that God directs my steps even after my mind has planned the way?

The answer to that question comes thru the answer to another. While in graduate school and seminary, I was often confronted by the following: Why aren't you just a humanist: Humanists are as good as Christians. They believe in helping their fellowmen. They attempt to alleviate the problems of the world. Why conform to hypocritical Christianity--why aren't you simply a humanist?

My answer often verged on the self-righteous, but I haven't come up with a better one since: "My friend" I'd say, "just look around you--just look at the alienation and separation in the world, that's why I can't be just a humanist! That's not to say that humanism isn't good--it's only to say that it's not enough. It fails to recognize a basic ingredient of men - namely, human limitations."

It's because of that condition--those human limitations--the recognition that my plans and visions, as beautiful as they may be, are often faulty--often imperfect. It's because of the recognition that I do not have all the ultimate answers- the ultimate directions in life that I cannot be a humanist, and that I therefore need direction for my plans and even after my plans have been made.

This recognition of human limitations is such a

reality for the Christian as he faces death. Death does not find the Christian clinging onto the fading breath of mortality; but rather finds him accepting this last chapter of his finite existence while he hopes for eternal unity with God. The Christian accepts the limitations of life as a given--he does hang onto the giver of that mortality, because his life's ultimate direction ends as it begins, in God.

And likewise, as Christians, you and I must live with this same kind of recognition of our limitations in our daily living. It is because we are Christians, that we do not cling to any formulas for living as if they were ultimates in themselves. And because we recognize our own limitations, we do not exploit or condemn the limitations of others. God only knows we are often tempted to ridicule the limitations of others--especially those most obvious limitations and failures--whether these be a weaker personality or social estrangement, or a host of other so called inferior attributes. But we recognize that as God has given us life, he has not given us the privilege to the ultimate control button for life--we are alive to serve Him, and in so doing, to serve each other. "Mission Control" for human life finds its source, energy and destination in God--THIS IS A GIVEN--A GOD GIVEN--A GIVEN WHICH IS VERY REAL FOR US, BECAUSE AS CHRISTIANS WE ARE KEENLY AWARE OF OUR OWN LIMITATIONS.

But, how does the Christian allow his mind to be so directed? How can he accept this ultimate direction from God without feeling worthless, or unimportant--or defeated in life.

He^u again I can only offer an illustrative example from my experiences in drama--as actor, teacher & director. Actors are forever conscious of an attribute known as STAGE PRESENCE. And an actor with stage presence is much like a Christian whose steps are directed by the Lord.

For in order to develop good stage presence, an actor must first be attentive to the directions of an expert. The good actor might have his own plans and visions for his acting, but he realizes that his plans must

always be subjected to the scrutiny of his director.

Similarly, the Christian has his own plans and visions--but if they are to have any ultimate value and worth, then they must be subjected to the scrutiny of God's direction. Obviously, such scrutiny could hardly make the Christian's life less valuable.

Moreover, good stage presence also requires a keen awareness of the other actors on stage--the good director enables the actor to become keenly aware of the other persons and actions on stage. Similarly, the Christian who has become attentive to God's direction has developed a keen awareness of all the other characters on the stage of life--because God has directed the Christian to be so keenly aware.

Furthermore, good stage presence also requires the actor to search and to struggle--few accomplished actors have known instant success--they are rarely the charmers and sex symbols of glamour magazines. Actors with good stage presence labor for hours for the right movements--they search and struggle for the right gestures and inflection--and the searching rarely sees completion without failure, frustration, anger and disappointment.

Likewise, the Christian under God's direction does not find the directions easy--God's script for life is complicated in direct proportion to the number of characters on his stage of life--and we all know how that number daily increases. His script must be daily interpreted--it must be applied to the ever changing scenery of his creation--and even when the Christian follows the directions religiously, his actions will not be spared failure, frustration, anger and disappointment. For as Christians we are aware of our limitations--we know that our performance rarely deserves a perfect review--but we also know that God accepts us even with our limitations and imperfect attempts to follow his directions.

He continually encourages us to try again--to continue to follow his directions--because his directions will not only guide us but all people to the ultimate worth and value of life--to the greatest human performance on earth.

And so we see, good stage presence only comes when an actor recognizes and attends to expert directions--directions which enable him to be keenly aware of the other characters on stage--directions which cause him to struggle and search for the ultimate expression of his potential ability.

Similarly, Christianity only experiences its ultimate worth when it recognizes and attends to the expert directions of its Lord--directions which enable its people to be keenly aware of all other conditions and peoples on earth--directions which cause its people to forever struggle and search for the ultimate expression of their God-given potential.

My dear Christian friends, there is no greater director for life than our God-- our minds assure us of that fact--He has given us our cues for living--may He direct our steps accordingly.

Amen.

Pastoral Prayer:

O Lord, our God, the visions and plans of our own minds often encounter the limitations of their scope--limitations which produce brokenness and separation between us--limitations which destroy our oneness with you--limitations which inhibit us from seeing an ultimate source of direction beyond ourselves.

Forgive us, Lord, for these destructive moments of self-reliance. Help us to influence our own self-reliant visions with you ultimate direction for us. Give us a mindset which seeks always to be attentive to your directions for us--And as we witness your revelation thru the words and actions of your servants, may your directions continually sharpen our awareness of the needs of the people around us. Give us the strength to search and struggle for your direction regardless of the dilemmas or circumstances of life.

And as we are helped in this way, may we continually offer thanks and praise to you for your ultimate gift of love which enables our plans to radiate your presence - a presence which is forever patient and kind - is not jealous or boastful - nor arrogant or rude. A presence which does not insist on its own way - which is not irritable or resentful. A presence which does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices at right--a presence of love which bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things--a presence which is especially aware of the special needs of those we name now:

May our wills forever be directed by yours, as we bring to a living reality the prayer you have taught us:

TRINITY IX

Redeemer Lutheran Church - Milwaukee

August 19, 1973

"FACING CRISES WITH CONFIDENCE" by Pastor Martyn

"The master commended the dishonest steward for his prudence; for the sons of this world are wiser in their own generation than the sons of light." (Luke 16:8)

The parable before us has no simple interpretation. If given little reflective thought, it almost sounds like Jesus is praising fraud and dishonesty. But later in verse 13 of this chapter Jesus makes his point clear: "No servant can serve two masters . . . you cannot serve God and mammon."

But we don't have that verse before us. We must try to understand why the master would commend the dishonest steward for his prudence - i.e., good judgment. Is this to be taken seriously? Or is it simply a little Biblical tongue-and-cheek? Does the parable have any religious application?

I believe it does. But let's not simply apply it **without** finding some modern parallels for the steward. Let me just give you a few imaginary situations of what or whom the steward appears like today.

First, there's Dorine. Dorine is a department store sales register clerk. She's very well liked by her supervisor. Dorine knows that the department store makes a big profit -- and she feels she should have a small share of it. So when a customer pays cash merchandise and forgets the cash receipt, Dorine occasionally has her supervisor friend void the cash receipt. Come check out time, Dorine pockets that cash amount as her profit for the day.

This continues until her supervisor friend observes Dorine in action. The supervisor confronts her, and Dorine is faced with the "steward's crisis."

Or there's Mrs. Q. She has been blessed with a loving family and abundant lifestyle. But time has seen her children grow up and her husband get busier. She finds herself alone a lot these days. Her infrequent trips to the liquor cabinet have become an hourly routine. She manages for a time to cover up her alcoholic dependency.

One day her husband returns from work and finds her blacked-out. Mr. & Mrs. Q are faced with the "steward's" crisis.

Or there's John. John has made high-school football fame. But moreover, he's handsome and a real charmer. He's contrived a plan in which he has three "steadies" from different schools. His game plan is envied by many of the guys.

But the grapevine finally leaks the information to the three gals. And John is faced with the steward's crisis.

Needless to say, these examples are not exact parallels of today's gospel story. But each illustrates the same aspect of the parable -- that is - selfish or corrupt actions lead to crises in our relationship to God and each other. This was precisely the steward's crisis.

II The steward was the business manager of his master's property. He was entrusted to set the level of profits and to make collections from the tenants. In the case before us, the steward had set the profits very high. His interest was purely in money. Upon hearing of the selfish nature of his steward, the master decided to fire him. The steward was facing a major crisis.

And so the steward decreases his profits -- maybe even takes a loss -- in order to save **his** relationship with his friends. And the master commends him for this action. Commends him for seeing that JUST and TRUSTING relationships are more eternally valuable than earthly treasures.

The master commends the steward for his good judgment in the face of the crisis. The steward is commended because for the first time he has placed A GREATER PRIORITY on caring relationships than on personal gain.

Here we have a significant religious dimension of this parable. Jesus uses a very worldly example to illustrate a very religious principle. Jesus seeks to remind us through this parable that God's people place HIGHER PRIORITY upon caring relationships than upon personal gain.

But there is a correlated faith-dimension equally important in this parable. It is the dimension of how a believing Christian faces a crisis caused by his selfish actions.

We'd all like to believe that we can avoid these self-induced crises. But to think that way is blind fantasy. We may not be facing the steward's crisis - nor Dorine's - nor Mrs. Q's - nor John's -- but we do know how our lies have created crises. And we know how our hurtful remarks have created crises. And we know how our prejudice and our cover-ups have created crises.

Yes, our faith priority of caring relationships has seen its share of replacement with personal gain. And the result has often been a crisis in that relationship.

And like the steward, we are faced with options of how we will handle that crisis. The steward could have denied the accusations. But how long would that cover-up have lasted? He would still have been a prisoner of his own corruption.

Or the steward could have packed up at night and run away from the situation. But what kind of security would that offer for the future? That could have meant a life-time of emotional and physical insecurity and shame.

Or thirdly, he could face the crisis seeking to redeem his relationships through honest confession and reasonable prices. He chose this option. He chose to face the crisis as a caring person.

Obviously, this was to his advantage -- not only spiritually, but practically. And that's the exact point the gospel writer makes. We use good judgment in our worldly affairs -- that same good judgment is needed in our spiritual affairs.

III We too have these options each time we are a partner in the creation of a crisis. We can deny our part in it - only to have it catch up sooner or later. We can run away from our part in it - only to have it haunt us. Or we can face the crisis head on - hoping to redeem the relationships involved.

God calls us to choose this third option. He reveals to us the parable of the steward so that we will know HIS PRIORITIES and HIS DIRECTION for our lives. His priority and direction for our lives IS UPON A CARING RELATIONSHIP TO HIM AND TO EACH OTHER.

God knows that his priority and direction is not an easy one to maintain. He further knows that we will fall short of it. That is, he knows that we will be ~~create~~ crises in our relationships in the future.

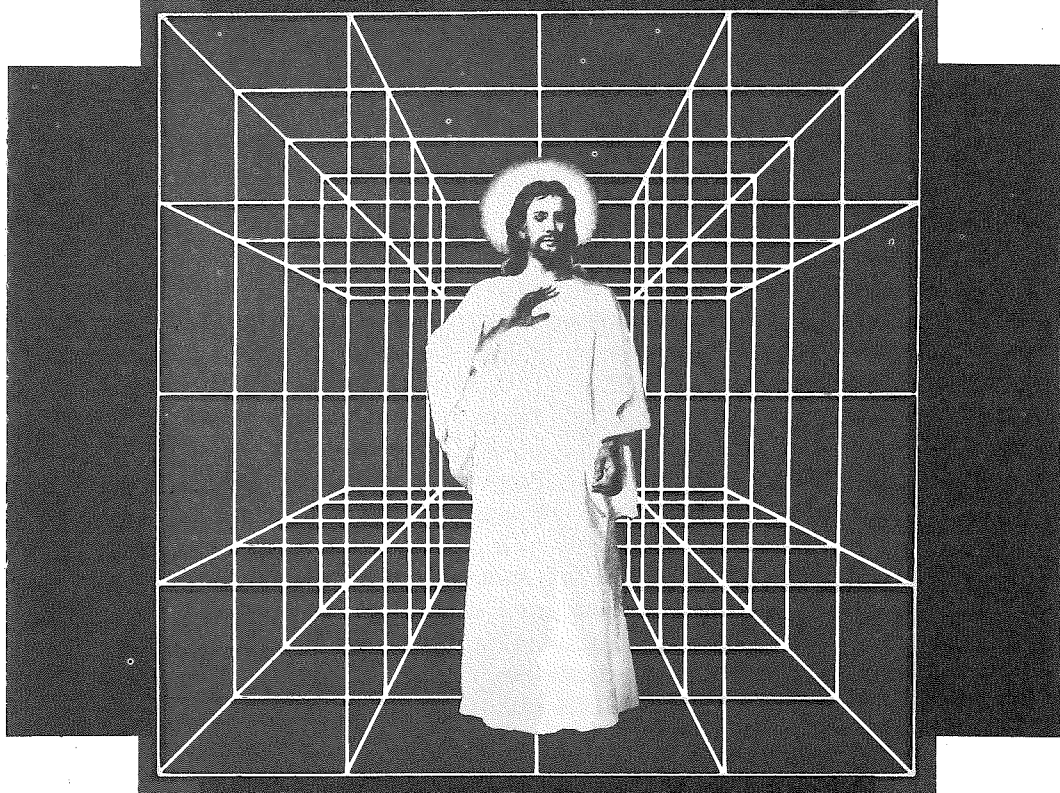
But he has enabled us to face these crises WITH CONFIDENCE. For he promises always TO WIPE AWAY all remembrances of our greed and selfishness as we confess it honestly. For me, that means I can face a crisis I have caused with the confidence of forgiveness. It means the same for you.

We are called to be images of God on earth. His forgiveness is ours to share. His forgiveness makes it possible for us to face each other IN THE MIDST OF CRISIS confident that a caring relationship will remain.

Let us be GOOD STEWARDS of this gift from God. Let us share it abundantly. Let us now face each other at his altar CONFIDENT OF HIM freeing us from our guilty burdens. Let us receive his forgiving strength - so that we are strengthened to confidently confess and receive from each other - especially in life's crises.

Amen.

THE NINTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY



A man's mind
plans his way,
but the Lord
directs his steps.

AUGUST 19, 1973

REDEEMER LUTHERAN CHURCH
1905 W Wisconsin Avenue - Milwaukee, Wisconsin
+ ORDER OF SERVICE +

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(During the first verse of the above Hymn please pass the completed attendance cards to the usher in the side aisles. Information to the pastors may be entered on the reverse side)

SERMON - "FACING CRISES WITH CONFIDENCE" _ Pastor Martyn

THE OFFERING

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ORGAN POSTLUDE - "Hymn to Joy" - Gordon Young

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TEXT FOR SOLO: Why do the Nations so furiously rage together. Why do the people imagine a vain thing. The Kings of the earth rise up and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord and against His anointed.

The Ninth Sunday after Trinity

LESSON. Proverbs 16:1-9

THE plans of the mind belong to man,
but the answer of the tongue is from the LORD.

All the ways of a man are pure in his own eyes,
but the LORD weighs the spirit.
Commit your work to the LORD,
and your plans will be established.
The LORD has made everything for its purpose,
even the wicked for the day of trouble.

Every one who is arrogant is an abomination to the LORD;
be assured, he will not go unpunished.

By loyalty and faithfulness iniquity is atoned for,
and by the fear of the LORD a man avoids evil.

When a man's ways please the LORD,
he makes even his enemies to be at peace with him.

Better is a little with righteousness than great revenues with injustice.
A man's mind plans his way,
but the LORD directs his steps.

EPISTLE. 1 Corinthians 10:1-13

I WANT you to know, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same supernatural food and all drank the same supernatural drink. For they drank from the supernatural Rock which followed them, and the Rock was Christ. Nevertheless with most of them God was not pleased; for they were overthrown in the wilderness.

Now these things are warnings for us, not to desire evil as they did. Do not be idolaters as some of them were; as it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to dance." We must not indulge in immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day. We must not put the Lord to the

test, as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents; nor grumble, as some of them did and were destroyed by the Destroyer. Now these things happened to them as a warning, but they were written down for our instruction, upon whom the end of the ages has come. Therefore let any one who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your strength, but with the temptation will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.

GOSPEL. Luke 16:1-9

HE also said to the disciples, "There was a rich man who had a steward, and charges were brought to him that this man was wasting his goods. And he called him and said to him, 'What is this that I hear about you? Turn in the account of your stewardship, for you can no longer be steward.' And the steward said to himself, 'What shall I do, since my master is taking the stewardship away from me? I am not strong enough to dig, and I am ashamed to beg. I have decided what to do, so that people may receive me into their houses when I am put out of the stewardship.' So, summoning his master's debtors one by one, he said to the first, 'How much do you owe my master?' He said, 'A hundred measures of oil.' And he said to him, 'Take your bill, and sit down quickly and write fifty.' Then he said to another, 'And how much do you owe?' He said, 'A hundred measures of wheat.' He said to him, 'Take your bill, and write eighty.' The master commended the dishonest steward for his prudence; for the sons of this world are wiser in their own generation than the sons of light. And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous mammon, so that when it fails they may receive you into the eternal habitations."

Or, Luke 15:11-32

INTERCESSORY PRAYER THIS MORNING:

Pastor and Congregation:

Dear God, Eternal Father, we affirm your direction for our lives at this moment and in the moments ahead. You have offered us an alternative for evil. You have remained faithful to us in not letting us be tempted beyond our strength. And even when we have succumbed to temptation, you have offered forgiveness. For this, your constant presence of grace, we offer our thanks and praise. Now O Lord, we ask that your grace-filled direction and leadership may be manifested by us -- especially as we touch each other's lives. Give us this loving courage, especially in our crises, as we continue to follow the direction of our Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Those for whom we pray:

Servicemen: Carl Gaenslen, James Mellon, Chaplains Ray Stubbe and Neal Davidson, Kenneth Popp, Kevin O'Leary, Ronald Smith.

Illness: Mrs. Esther Michel, Mrs. Mavis Barringer, Mrs. Lydia Fuhrman, Mina Vahl, Mrs. Viola Gerds, Al Griebler, Lena Jackson, Frieda Beckwith, Albert and Helen Held, Anna Highness, Laura Bergmann, Norma Glahn, Mabel Mace, Emmy Otten, Ida Johnson, Norma Keller, Marion Novak, Esther Pladson, Carol Stuart, Herbert Plahmer, Josephine Ruppitz, Helen Stephan, Una Boeder, Dorothea Weber, Marjorie Utech, Marie Efnor, Margaret Strike.

Bereavement: Family of Mrs. Edna Wehrley and Family of Lyle Truax

Other needs: Clara Dewey and Ed Zeifirakee

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REDEEMER MINISTRY

Pastors - Charles E. Witt, D.D., Peter R. Martyn

Secretary to Dr. Witt - Charlotte Marie Noehre

Social Service Counselor - Lenore Frederickson

Coffee House Director - Pastor D. Alan Davis

Senior Center Director - Marion Behrens

Organist - Lois Toepfner

Acolytes this morning - Carl Spencer at 8:45

David Witt at 10:30 a.m.

Greeters - Mr. & Mrs. William (Myrtle) Mandel

Announcements 8/19/73

I. Needy family -
2 - trunks
2 - suitcases

II. Frank Nick (Gaessler
(nephew at St. Mike's)

I - Deaths:

Mrs. Edna Wehley - age 81
died - Monday - Aug. 13
in state - Thursday - Aug. 16
Schmitt - Padgett.

Mr. Kyle Surax a
died - Tuesday - Aug 14 age 52
funeral - Friday Aug 17
Brett Funeral Home
Interment - Wo Mem Park

FLORAL CHANCEL DECORATIONS this morning have been given to the Glory of God and in memory of the Dawe Family.

OUR RADIO BROADCAST this morning was given to the Glory of God and in memory of Ronald Timian by the Ronald Timian estate.

REACH OUT - COME TOGETHER! Load up your car and drive to St. Luke's Church, Waukesha for the 11th annual Synodical Convention. Date September 19th and 20th. Reservations must be made by August 23d - Send check or present meal costs to Mrs. Earl Laatsch who will be available during the coffee hour August 19th.

OLGA GEUDER has planned another tour for all who are interested. It is a trip to New Glarus to attend the annual drama and festival of Wilhelm Tell. The date is Saturday, September 1st, leaving at 9:00 a.m. and taking all day. The cost is \$8.00 which includes a picnic lunch. 39 people are needed. For reservations call Olga at 453-3941.

SAVE AUGUST 26th for the next Redeemer Golf Outing which will be held at Petrifying Springs at 1:00 p.m. Phone Gordon Kuchta at 543-7338 to sign up. All persons welcome.

THE NEXT ECOLOGY PICK-UP by the Youth for Christ Club will be on Saturday, August 25th. If you have bundled newspapers, flattened cans or sorted bottles (labels off) and would like to have them stop at your home, call the Church Office. The income from the sale of the newspaper goes to support the YOUTH FUND, which in turn makes their on-going program possible.

PASTOR WITT and Toni along with two of the children are vacationing in Davenport, Iowa with Pastor Witt's father and sister. We pray that this much deserved vacation time will offer relaxation and re-creation.

WE EXTEND a special thank you to Mrs. Alice Leisman, our guest organist this morning. We deeply appreciate Mrs. Leisman's willingness to regularly share her musical talents in the absence of our regular organist.

WE HAVE ONLY ONE MORE BROADCAST RESERVED ahead, so we encourage your consideration of supporting this special ministry.

933-3061

A man's mind plans his way,
but the Lord directs his steps.

SINCE THE DAWN OF MAN, people have had ways of attempting to "divine" or predict the will of the Almighty. The ancients sought to read the future in patterns of tossed sticks or pebbles. People of all ages today are discovering the fascination of horoscopes. Religious minds continually seek to discern God's will in particular circumstances by consulting Scripture.

The person of faith is the person of conviction. For Christian men and women, it is often not so much a matter of discerning God's will specifically, but rather trusting boldly that "the Lord directs our steps"—and then yielding to that direction.

Our history as God's people leads us to affirm His direction in every age, and confirms our conviction of His leadership in all of our tomorrows.

The figure of Christ on the cover is from a painting by Paul Remmey.
The text is from today's Old Testament lesson.

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PENTECOST IX
Church of the Master - Troy
August 4, 1974
(Communion/ Baptism of Amy Rouse)

"A TIME EXPOSURE"

"The Lord answered her, 'Martha, Martha! You are worried and troubled over so many things, but just one is needed. Mary has chosen the right thing, and it will not be taken away from her.'" (Luke 10:42)

Faith is not a snapshot; it is a time exposure. Faith is not an inoculation; it is an ongoing intravenous feeding. Faith is not an "M &M"; it is a piece of taffy(licorice).

Yes, faith is that lifelong relationship of receiving and sharing the incarnate wisdom of God.

The Gospel for this Day is a fascinating account of this receiving and sharing of God's incarnate wisdom - the account of the way two sisters receive and share the presence of Jesus-- who of course is the incarnate wisdom of God.

Martha was the organizer, the perfectionist, a take-charge kind of person - always busy, busy, busy. Mary was relaxed, unhurried, content to sit at the feet of Jesus and listen to Him.

There is so much here that is familiar. Rivalry between members of the same family. Disagreement over what is most important. Differing temperaments. Differing ways of honoring Jesus. Tension produced by anxiety. The response of Jesus is illuminating.

Martha was overdoing it. She was too concerned about a lavish meal as a way of honoring their guest. Here was Jesus - on his way to Jerusalem where great issues were at stake. Time was running short. This was not the time for a great banquet - a simple meal would be sufficient

Mary had made the better choice. Time was at a premium with Jesus. She recognized her greater need - to share his loving presence. The benefits of that would far surpass even the greatest feast on the table.

How much I need to hear this lesson! Yes, I so often tend to be like Martha - I so often get hung up in details - in making sure that there's more than enough on the table, that I forget about the purpose of the meal. How easy it is to become addicted to activism. It's so easy to get caught up in activity-itis, and forget about the purpose of the moment.

No greater event strikes home than the typical American wedding. The average American couple spends HOURS making arrangements, planning this, checking on that -- yet, how many of those hours are spent talking about the meaning of this new relationship? A marriage license is one of the easiest to get -- it doesn't even require a three year renewal -- and yet, there is no license that requires more work than a marriage license. I do believe many couples would truly benefit with LESS MARRIAGE ACTIVITIES and more MARRIAGE CONTEMPLATION before the big day.

Enuf pastoral editorial. I hope the point is clear. Today's gospel is helping us to ask ourselves - how do we strike a balance between work and worship - between activity and contemplation? Somewhat differently, when engulfed in the grindmill of busyness like Martha, do we even stop to ask ourselves - WHAT DO I MOST NEED AT THIS MOMENT? IS THERE SOMETHING THAT I NEED THAT I MIGHT BE BLOCKING OUT OF LIFE DUE TO MY ADDICTION TO WORK AND ACTIVITY? DUE TO MY ADDICTION of being needed and constantly stroked, am I forgetting about a more important NEED RESOURCE for my life?

Obviously, the text gives us an answer. In simplest terms, it says: take time to be at the feet of Jesus. That's a beautiful pious phrase, but what does it mean IF APPLIED to us today?

It means that God realizes that BEYOND our need for satisfying WORK & ACTIVITY, he has engrained into us a more basic need - the need for his loving presence - that is, the need ^{to take} to be accepted, forgiven, and made to feel whole!

That need is rarely satisfied in our work-a-day world, Our activities - our jobs may be satisfying, but they rarely give us a sense of complete acceptance and wholeness. In fact, much of our labor makes us feel quite UN-whole -- makes us aware of our imperfections, of our failures.

Each of us needs A TIME TO BE REMADE - a time to be given a new wholeness - and we need that time throughout our lifetimes. We need more than an instant exposure to that time - we need a lifetime exposure for this need.

God has provided the proper die and tools for this basic need of ours. He has tooled a lifetime assembly for our remaking. And the first step of his re-styling process was offered to AMY KATHRYN ROUCE this morning.

In baptism, we pause from our hurried and frantic busyness TO TAKE THE TIME TO RECEIVE the free gift of God's love. Does that mean that baptism is the only way that God offers his love? By no means. But God has ordained baptism AS HIS WAY because then he knows that we will take the time TO RECEIVE HIS LOVE.

He knows this is a very necessary need of ours - ~~to receive his forgiving love.~~ And so he institutes baptism AS THE INITIAL PHASE of our assembly for life. We need TO TAKE TIME to hear from the very beginning THAT GOD LOVES AND FORGIVES US!

But God knows - and we know that this FIRST EXPOSURE of his love will be battered around ^{other busyness} by many forces in life. Some forces will even try to destroy this gift of love - these forces of hate, prejudice, envy, jealousy - they will

do their share of damage to what God has made in his own image. And since God lets each of his creations wander amidst all of these destructive forces he lets each of his creations run free off the assembly line - because of this, he knows we need A TIME EXPOSURE to his gift of love.

And so he tools another sacrament - namely, Holy Communion. He offers this opportunity to each of his creations - so that they may receive his loving presence throughout a lifetime. So that they can be REMADE into their baptismal image forever.

And then he provides pastors and teachers as his reminding instruments - persons who are called to remind his creatures of their need TO TAKE TIME throughout life to be renewed in the image of their creator. To be renewed in his loving presence - NOT SO THAT THEY CAN FEEL MORE PIOUS - NOT SO THEY CAN FEEL THAT THEY'RE BETTER THAN EVERYBODY ELSE.

But rather, so that what they have received, they will now share. So that they WILL TAKE TIME to share his loving presence with their family, with their working associates, with their friends, even with their enemies. So that they will take time to incarnate the wisdom of his love. So that they will offer more to each other than a LOT OF BUSYNESS.

Yes, he again invites us TO BE AT HIS FEET. To be remade in the image of his love. Today, I will offer you the wine ALREADY poured in the glasses. I do this because I want my attention to be ON YOU, rather than on THE POURING. I do this because God's people are more important than the action of pouring.

Let us receive the incarnate wisdom of God - his loving presence in Christ. Let us TAKE TIME to receive what we need most - forgiveness and acceptance. And as we take this TIME to be remade in his image of love, then LET US for all time EXPOSE that kind of love to each other. Amen

PENTECOST IX

Lutheran Church of the Master-Troy
July 20, 1975

"LIVING IN THE MEANTIME"

"The servants said to the householder, 'Do you want us to go and gather up (the weeds)?' But he said, 'No; lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them. Let them both grow together until the harvest..'"

Matt. 13:28b-30a

At my recent high school reunion, I was energetically attacked for 2 hours by one of my old flames who had recently found a new religious experience. Because of her posture of being saved and born again, she proceeded to throw hand grenades on the 30-some years of Lutheran tradition that she had been brought up in.

I admired her new conviction, but grieved over her angry and condemnatory thrashing of the mainline church. She had now found the truth, and would crusade to crush any religious conviction different from hers.

Obviously, I was shocked, troubled, and defensive with these circumstances -- and even more saddened to learn ~~that~~ that circumstances of guilt in her marriage had led her to this absolute position.

How often it is that an ecstatic religious experience can be helpful to the individual -- but in the process cause that individual to enthusiastically condemn the validity of another person's Christian understanding.

Even without an ecstatic rebirth of faith, a constant temptation of the Christian is to condemn persons rather than evils around him. When sending the financial statements out a week ago, how tempted I was to say "shape up, or ship out" to persons who have failed to share the burden of our ministry. Similarly, how tempting it is to condemn rather than compassionately love those who are still searching for trust in God.

How tempting it is to see the weeds in everyone else, while only recognizing the shaft of wheat in ourselves. How tempting it is OUT OF ENTHUSIASTIC CONVICTION to allow *ourselves to get* trapped in self-righteousness that leads to condemning others.

We so often demand in our prayers an instant removal of evil, of indifference, of deceit, of idolatry -- but we fail to see how we ourselves are caught up among those very weeds. And to demand destruction of those weeds obviously means demanding suicide - for none of us are beyond the roots of those weeds.

And so - the instruction of Jesus in this parable is TO HAVE PATIENCE - for there is not one of us WHO HAS NOT BEEN affected or infected by the weeds of evil. Jesus is saying NO ONE can claim full maturity as a shaft of wheat - we are all in the process of growing yet - which means that the weeds of evil still have hold of our roots. To destroy the weeds IS TO destroy ourselves - for none of us is free from the grip of evil.

We need only look at history to confirm this. Every reform movement - including the REformation-- has been more of a destructive movement for the faithful than a constructive movement. We have the same thing happening today.

Missouri Synod -
People are getting into all kinds of enthusiastic new Christian movements -- and they are doing so out of deep commitment. But so often they make their movement an end in itself- and in the process they destroy BY FURTHER DIVIDING AND STRATIFYING our unity in Christ. And all this is done under the guise of a sincere Christian faith.

They fail to see that the enemy in the field can be the Christian himself - who spreads the weeds of discontent and envy, the weeds of jealousy and prejudice, the weeds of perfect knowledge and self-righteousness. Yes, each one of us knows that he has had his moment for

increasing the yield of weeds rather than wheat. We've all joined in the devilish business of uprooting the faith of others through insults, through gossip, and through other leveling tricks to make ourselves feel more superior than the next guy.

And like Adam, we so often do this claiming the name of the Lord while putting ourselves and our understanding above all things.

And so through his favorite illustration - the parable - Jesus calls us back to patience with one another. He reminds us that NOT ONE OF US is yet totally free of the weeds around us. And in so reminding us, he shows us that our only hope IS NOT in ripping up ~~ONE ANOTHER~~, but in turning to God and confessing WITH CONFIDENCE OF FORGIVENESS our participation in spreading the weeds as well as the Word.

You see, this parable recognizes one reality that we find very difficult to admit - that we will never be free of weeds this side of heaven. God promises each of us salvation, but the harvest has not yet been taken in. And so we must continue to exist and believe even amidst the weeds.

We are called to live in the meantime ^{which means} ~~to~~ ^{to live} waiting on the Lord - and there's a big difference in waiting for and waiting on the Lord. To "wait upon" is the root for our term waiter/waitress. And a waiter/waitress is actively doing the work of her boss (lord).

So - to "wait upon the Lord" is not a patience which finds us sitting around waiting for God to intervene and destroy the weeds. Rather, "waiting upon" is a patience which sees us DOING God's will -- serving one another according to his will. And his will is not one which condemns, but one which uplifts through merciful love.

Our waiting-upon-work is not like the drudgery of waiting for someone who is late; it's ^{like} ~~like~~ ^{the} waiting upon that every couple feels before they are married -- it's a joyful anticipation.

~~And so~~ Their waiting upon the wedding is not drudgery - it's DOING the work of planning, saving, sharing and dreaming WITH THE GOAL OF JOYFUL ANTICIPATION.

Likewise, That's the patience we have as God's wheat, always aware of the weeds around us and attached to us. We wait upon the Lord - hoping that our example of love and forgiveness will strengthen us so that we will not give in to the weeds of evil. *Our goal is to outlast the weeds by the strengthening power of God's love.*

That hardly means that life is going to be a smooth and easy time. Jesus wasn't having a smooth time of it living amidst the weeds of his day. But he didn't apply the axe of judgement. Instead, he continued to forgive (even in the midst of crucifixion) and to call for repentance.

He is our Lord. He has called us to follow his patient example. It's not an easy one -- it's much easier and sometimes often more gratifying for our ego to judge and condemn. But that's not the patience of Christ - that's not waiting upon the Lord, but waiting upon ourselves.

God calls
~~us~~ - ~~us~~ us joyfully anticipate ^{his} the harvest the way we joyfully anticipate a wedding, a birth, long-lost friends, or whatever -- let us wait upon our Lord by serving others in his example of love and thereby experience each day the joyful anticipation of the final harvest.

Amen.

PENTECOST IX
HOPE LUTHERAN CHURCH, TOLEDO
(first sermon as Pastor of Hope)
Sunday, August 4, 1979

"A NEW CREATION"

"But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near in the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who has made us both one, and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility...

Ephesians 2:13-14

One of the great American pursuits is the building enterprise. Most of us really enjoy building things. Whether its building up a business -- constructing a new home -- or merely putting together a new swing set -- we enjoy the building enterprise.

Unfortunately - one of our best building efforts oftentimes creates some of our worst problems: namely, the construction of fences and walls. We often like to poke fun at the communists for their Wall of China - their Berlin Wall - and their Iron Curtain. But we are equally adept wall builders. Even though our walls may not be physical barriers -- they are often very secure obstructions between people.

For instance - almost everyone here this morning (except me) knows where the wall of the ghetto is. That wall is not made of concrete, but we all know where it stands.

Likewise, when we talk about the "Generation Gap" we all know approx. where that barrier stands. Likewise in many of our organizations -- there are often the written or unwritten rules of who gets in. Then of course there are the secret mottos, or educational rank, or the type of clothing worn, or the location of our homes ... or the hundreds of other walls that we have built TO DIVIDE and often DISCREDIT other people of the human race.

When you stop to think about it -- it's just amazing how much time, energy and money we spend in building walls between ourselves and others. Whether its the Cabinet shake-up on Capitol Hill -- or escalating sewer rates for the suburbs --- the issues facing us every day remind us so clearly of our preoccupation with building walls and fences between people.

Think of your own life for the last week ... or the last day ... or maybe even this morning. What has been your preoccupation in regard to other people? Have you sought to build others up, or to put them down?? Have you looked for unique similarities -- or merely sought to find fault with the differences?

Well - I'm not certain about each of you, but I do know that I spend far too much time sometimes measuring one person against another. How tempting it is to discredit one person just because he/she is not like someone else! How sad that we often dwell on the things that divide, rather than the strengths which unite!!

~~Yes~~, such is one of the great dilemma's of our day ... a dilemma that was just as great in Jesus' day. For the great wall builders in his day were the Pharisees. And their ammunition was 613 ceremonial laws which they used to show their great superiority over others, esp. those pagan Gentiles. They not only constructed a dividing wall in their temples, but even had a curtain which separated both Jew and Gentile from the Holy of Holies. Here was a devout people who gave all their religious energy TO CONDEMNING OTHERS ... TO CLAIMING SUPERIORITY over others.

Well - you know and I know that the church today still has a great Pharisee following. In fact, sometimes the Pharisees are the strongest power group in the modern-day church.

For instance, take our brothers and sisters

in the Roman Catholic tradition. What is still the greatest dividing wall in that tradition? To my knowledge, it is still the canon law -- the church's rules. I have seen many a devout Catholic Christian who has been denied Christ's presence simply because he/she broke one small rule of the church.

Or take Lutheranism. The rigid interpretation of Scripture is still the great dividing wall between Lutherans.

Or take the many Puritan Protestants of America. Still to this day social pietism is still the great divider among such Puritan offshoots as the Baptists, Congregationalists, Methodists, and many others. So often religion becomes defined as no smoking, no drinking, no dancing or other social taboos -- and the gospel of Jesus Christ gets lost in the shuffle of all the rules.

Even our modern charismatic movements suffer from the construction of dividing walls. Because here again, you must be "born again" according to certain rules to be classified among them.

So it is that both inside and outside the body of Christ - humanity is on a binge with the enterprise of BUILDING WALLS OF DIVISION.

But along comes the man from Nazareth ... and his command is courageous, yet compassionate: "Your walls shall come crumbling down if you live as my disciples." It is this Jesus of Nazareth who replaces the gigantic negotiation tables with a very simple supper table.

And he still amazes everyone who encounters Him. Because instead of coming as a

rigid rulemaker -- instead of coming with a bombastic leadership style -- instead of coming like a military commander -- he comes as THE VICTUM of human hostility. Instead of brow-beating the world - he gives up his life to show ALL HUMANITY that only sacrificial love will break down the walls of division and hostility between people.

And its because of this great sacrificial love -- that we proclaim him to be the cornerstone of our lives and relationships. He is not the cornerstone of our brick and mortar buildings -- he is the very cornerstone of our church business and transactions.

And his business -- and the business of his disciples at Hope Church -- is to build up this body of followers by tearing down all those petty things that normally divide us. That is the ministry and mission of Jesus Christ.

Jesus did not come into the world to lay down the law -- to condemn the world; he came in order to build up a body of people who live by, and believe in, and exude his forgiving love. He came in order that we might all have eternal life.

And with God's help - I dearly desire to be Christ's kind of servant at Hope Church. Not to be a new rigid rulemaker like the Pharisees-- not to lead with some kind of know-it-all bombastic style -- not to constructing dividing walls between petty differences in holiness..... but rather to preach - to teach - to build up the forgiving love of Christ, in order that the walls of sickness, of status, and of self-righteousness might come tumbling down.

Yes - it was for that reason that Christ himself instituted a supper -- a simple meal to remind us of his sacrificial love for us.

A

And he said to all who eat and drink of his bread and wine -- as you eat and drink of these, you receive me as your Lord and Savior.

That's very important to remember. Notice that we did not accept Him first! Because he has first been our Lord and Savior and accepted us -- even in our sinful, divided state.

Yes, Jesus always has acted first on our behalf -- in order that we might be like Him. In order that we might make Him the cornerstone of our lives and our church - and then act accordingly! Because in Christ, we are a new creation -- we are at peace with God and one another!

AMEN

WELCOME TO WORSHIP ...

first and foremost, there is one important thing to do ... offer great thanksgiving for the tremendous job of the interim leadership team

The Church Council & officers
The Search Committee & other committees
Frances Landis - Secretary
Bill Shock, Director of Music & the choir
Cathey Casey - Organist
Sharon Putry - Financial officer
Tom Machatterre - Custodian

Several have asked - "How's it going?"

My answer: "I now know what is what like for the Jews wandering in the wilderness ..."

at other times - felt like Apostle Peter... Jesus said - "follow me" and Peter hopped right to it ... but I'm certain a few days later, Peter probably said to himself: WHAT HAVE I GOTTEN MYSELF INTO.

O fcourse - we all know it took Peter 3-4 years to preach a good sermon -- his first good one being on Pentecost . so I hope you're all as charitable with me.

Will receive you at reception

ANNOUNCEMENT ABOUT VCS -

Forest Productions

*Will receive people in
Larkin Hall*

PENTECOST IX

Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo

July 25 and 28, 1985

Peter R. Martyn, Pastor

"BLEST BE THE TIME THAT BINDS!"

"But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ.

For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations." Ephesians 2:13-15a

"Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, Jesus said to them, "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest." Mark 6:31

We live in a world of great technological sophistication and support: computer programming, three-hour trans-Atlantic travel, instant television replay, digital calibration of our dash boards, microwave magic in the kitchen, tele-banking of our payroll and investments, and the list goes on and on. If ever there was an age of efficiency and labor-saving ease, we are living in that era.

Yet, have you noticed the people around you? So many of them are tired, dragging and worn-out. What's with all this fatigue in our age of fantasies-fulfilled? Why all the courses on stress and burnout in this great age of sophistication and technological brainpower? In short, why is everyone feeling so run-down and worn-out today?

We live in one of the most mechanized eras of history, and yet never before have people been so totally controlled by schedules, calendars and clocks. Ask a family over for dinner -- and its like checking United Airlines schedule of arrivals and departures at O'Hare. How *many days a week do you start* out at 6 a.m. and not stop until midnight?? And what's amazing about all this - some of us are ACTUALLY PROUD OF THIS KIND OF FRENZIED SCHEDULE. We seemingly like to brag about our busyness. Others seemingly like to go without eating regularly? I know many people who literally glorify over the fact that they never have time for lunch!!

What has this world come to when it's no longer kosher to stop long enough to eat? Where is all the running leading to ... other than a perfectly hectic lifestyle? Are we really serious when we say that we enjoy all this running around?

We're even conditioning our children to run through life. Which one of us hasn't had the following agenda? Pick up the child at 3 p.m. from school. Run her to piano lesson at 3:15. Run her to catechism at 4 o'clock. Get her at 5:15 p.m. and run her to softball practice while she eats a P.B. & J. in the back seat and scarfs down a coke. Run her to ballet class at 6:45 p.m. Run her to Westgate to get the latest fade for school tomorrow. Run her home by 8:45 so that she can cram her studies before she drops from exhaustion into bed at 9:30 for another day of school. Sometimes we choose to run this way, don't we? Sometimes we don't even have a choice - the neighborhood network just forces us into this running pattern. And after all, we have to keep running with the neighbors.

Jesus and his disciples were familiar with this kind of running too. Jesus had sent his disciples two-by-two. They had been busy preaching, teaching and performing miracles. And with the growing success of their missionary activity, the crowds were growing and becoming more demanding of their time and energy. Things got so hectic that Mark tells us that they didn't even have time to eat. Sounds almost like the average supper story from the 20th century, doesn't it? Busy, busy, busy -- no time to focus, to reflect, or to be renewed. Is it any wonder that Jesus and his disciples were tired and looking for a lonely place?

With that thought in mind from the gospel, let us momentarily shift to what appears to be a totally different theme in the epistle of Ephesians. Here the writer talks about a dividing wall of hostility. His audience was obviously Jews and Greeks (Gentiles). And everyone knew about that dividing wall of hostility -- it was literally a stone wall that divided the outer court from the inner court of the Jewish temple. Any foreigner (namely, a Gentile) was forbidden from entering the inner court - upon pain of death. Jews viewed Gentiles as "those far off" - utter outsiders ... separated, alienated, strangers, hopeless and godless.

The writer of Ephesians says that Christ's death tears down this wall of separation. Christ died to make Jew and Gentile one. The significance of Christ's life is that he replaces the stone wall and legalistic codes of the Jews -- Christ becomes the new cornerstone of faith for both Jew and Gentile. So goes the theology of Ephesians -- and most of the New Testament.

But for all of us here today the dividing wall is no longer in a Jewish synagogue. Likewise, that dividing wall is no longer a matter of circumcision or kosher foods. That dividing wall is not even a matter of

ceremonial laws -- although there are some still held prisoner by corporate codes and policies. The 20th century dividing wall goes back to the issue of that gospel lesson. The issue is TIME. Simple time, or the lack of it.

Today the barrier that alienates and estranges and destroys is the lack of focused time -- with God and with one another. Almost without a doubt, I could venture that more than 50% of the marriages in this congregation have or are presently suffering from a lack of focused time. Time has become the 20th century's dividing wall of hostility. It is the source of discontent and disallusion and disappointment and despair in household after household after household. Likewise, it is the source of company difficulties and even church disputes. It's often not that people are so far apart -- it's just that they haven't given each other enough time to know where the other stands. That's why we so often need arbitrators and counselors -- to merely arrange TIME for the complaining parties to share their agendas. And if both parties will patiently allow for enough TIME, reconciliation will often follow.

The world scene is not too much different. Why is it that Apartheid is such a divisive, hostile force in South Africa? Is it because whites and blacks have been created to hate each other? Hardly the case. They've never given each other ANY TIME to get to know one another. Without any focused time for understanding and knowledge, how can there be anything but a dividing wall of hostility??

Whether its family, church, community or world, it is only the gift of TIME that can bind our hearts and minds in Christian love. **BLEST BE THE TIME THAT BINDS.**

It is only as we give God a portion of that time that we can claim to be in fellowship with Him. It is only as we offer time to our families that we can claim to be part of a family unit. It is only as we offer time to our community, country, and world, that we can claim the rights of support, citizenship, or protection.

That's why Jesus was called the Good Shepherd. Not only because he was a good story-teller. Not only because he offered good advice and great teachings. Not only because he performed miraculous deeds. But most of all because he offered those in need HIS TIME. He listened. He cried. He laughed. He gave of himself and died. He was present and offered his undivided attention. St. Mark says: "When Jesus landed and saw the large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without

a shepherd. So he began to teach them." He became engaged in caring dialog. He offered his time.

Is it any wonder that we take time to be with Jesus one hour each week? Is it any wonder that this has been the pattern of the church for centuries? Is it any wonder that people have recognized the significance of this hour of retreat with Christ for years? What do you need? What do I need? We both need the assurance that we are not alienated from God! We both need the assurance that God is not far off, but near! We both need the assurance that we are loved and forgiven! We both need the assurance that we are not alone -- that we are in fellowship with others who share a common vision and faith. We both need the time to hear that still small voice of God saying: YOUR SINS ARE FORGIVEN AND I WILL REMEMBER THEM NO MORE.

Blest be THIS time that binds. It is this time, this hour of power each week that binds of hearts and minds to the grace of God. This is the only hour of PURE grace in the whole week. From every other corner of the earth we hear demands, expectations, rules, regulations for us to measure up -- from our jobs, from our neighbors, from our country, even from our own family members. Only God, through his Son Jesus Christ, graces us with acceptance even when we haven't been perfect. He has abolished the absolute perfection ~~of~~ the law -- the dividing wall of hostility of the ancient Jews.

No matter what the separation of yesterday -- no matter what the disappointments -- no matter how imperfect our time focus in the past -- Jesus Christ has died for those failures and guilt of yesterday. His death has paid the price for all our past sins. Our only hope for tomorrow is that we will not dwell upon the hostilities and broken time-commitments of yesterday.

It's like the couple who became estranged, separated, and divorced. They left their common city and resided in different parts of the country. One day, by chance, the husband had returned to their original city on business. He went out to the cemetery to the grave of their only son. He was standing by the grave in remembrance when he heard a step behind him. Turning, he saw his estranged wife. Both were inclined to walk away. But they had a common, binding commitment to that grave. And as they stood there, they finally took each other's hands -- and they clasped them together over the grave, and they cried together for the first time in years. They were reconciled through the death of the one they both loved.

It took nothing less than death to reconcile them.

Such is the same death of Jesus Christ for you and me. His death has cancelled out yesterday's hostilities and hurts. They are forgiven. We dare not cling to them or they will poison and destroy the unity of tomorrow.

As we worship together, we stand over the empty tomb of the risen Christ. We cannot stand with the risen Christ and still be against each other or anyone else. All time with Christ is renewing, rejuvenating, reforming ... it binds us to God and to each other in love.

Just like those first disciples, this time in this quiet place is for sharing the presence of the Good Shepherd. The hands of the Good Shepherd were used to bind up wounds, to feed his sheep, and to hold and give security to his flock. That is the preciousness of this time with Christ. It is the TIME THAT GOD GIVES US TO STOP RUNNING MADLY! It is the time in which we are to use our hands and our hearts to bind up the wounds of the hurting sheep ... to feed one another with forgiving love ... and to offer the security of continued fellowship in the future. Blest be this time that binds!

AMEN

PENTECOST IX
Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo
July 17 & 20, 1986
Peter R. Martyn, Pastor

"TO LAUGH AND TO LINGER"

(Now Sarah was listening at the entrance to the tent, which was behind him. Abraham and Sarah were already old and well advanced in years, and Sarah was past the age of childbearing. So Sarah laughed to herself as she thought, "After I am worn out and my master is old, will I now have this pleasure?") Genesis 18:10b-13
"Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her." Luke 10:41-42

No American patriot would try to underestimate the contributions our Puritan forefathers made to early American history. But the facts must be faced - no gloomier lot of killjoys ever drew breath on American soil. They came to worship in their own way ... and that they did, but they made everybody else do exactly the same. Talk about righteous legalism from the old country. One historian's summary goes, "A Puritan was a man who was sincerely repentant for the whole world's sins."

Historian Macaulay notes that when Puritans were in the saddle in England, they suppressed the popular sport of bearbaiting. He says, "Not because it gave pain to the bears, but because it gave pleasure to the spectators." Some three hundred years later, Henry Adams wrote, "Thank God, I never was cheerful. I come from good Puritan stock. My ancestors passed their mornings reflecting on the goodness of God and the damnation of children." Is it any wonder that American Christians are less than enthusiastic about children in worship.

We have the Puritan influence to thank for our most ridiculous laws as well as thousands of lives devoted to keeping people from enjoying themselves. There's a little Puritan in all of us. The Puritan philosophy is best summarized in the reaction of a Salem maid during the witch-hunting days. As she was kissed by her lover for the first time, she burst into tears and lamented: "Oh John, kissing must be a terrible, terrible sin! It makes me feel too good!"

Certainly the 20th century has seen the evils of a mentality that says "if it feels good, do it." But equally true, especially among religious folk, there has been a persistent mindset that says "anything that feels good must certainly be bad!" American Christianity has

long suffered from an overdose of the dreary, drab, and dull dictates of our Puritan heritage. Certainly, religion must never be fun or frivolous. Certainly worship must never reflect levity or laughter. Certainly loving the Lord your God cannot be done without King James English or a hot, smelly vestment like this. Regretably, our American forefathers lost one of God's most benevolent characteristics: HIS HUMOR!

Isn't that a tragedy of religion!?! Let's face it, what do you remember most about your whole lifetime of faith? Don't you remember best the laughable moments of your faith pilgrimages. That's certainly the case for me! I certainly remember graphically the 6:00 a.m. Easter sunrise service in Milwaukee, Wisconsin for which I arrived at 7:15 a.m. What an embarrassing Easter! And yet God has never given me a more graphic reminder of my imperfection and humanness! Every one of us needs those laughable, humbling experiences! How desperately we all need to laugh at our own efforts to be perfect and morally righteous - esp. we pastors!

It reminds me of the man who finally "got religion" and was going to show his new moral perfection and righteousness. He said to his wife, O.K. honey, I'm going down to the cellar and empty all 18 bottles of whiskey down there. I proceeded with the task. I withdrew the cork from the first bottle and poured the contents down the sink with the exception of one glass which I drank. I then extracted the cork from the second bottle and did likewise with it with the exception of one glass, which I drank. I then withdrew the cork from the third bottle and poured the whiskey down the sink which I drank. I pulled the cork from the fourth bottle down the sink and poured the bottle down the glass, which I drank. I pulled the bottle from the cork of the next and drank one sink out of it, and threw the rest down the glass. I pulled the sink out of the next glass and poured the cork down the bottle. Then I corked the sink with the glass, bottled the drink and drank the pour. When I had everything emptied, I steadied the house with one hand, counted the glasses, corks, bottles and sinks with the other which were 29, and as the house came by, I counted them again, and finally had all the houses in one bottle, which I drank. I'm not under the influence of incohol, as some tinkle peep I am. I'm not half as drunk as you might drink. I fool so foolish I don't know who is me, and the drunker I stand here the longer I get."

No story could better illustrate that we cannot save ourselves by our own moral and righteous efforts. Sometime the best cure is to laugh at our failures, in

order to start all over again. I have often said, there are some texts which are especially suited for the average member of the congregation. Then there are some texts which are particularly suited for the preacher of the congregation. Today's texts are particularly suited for this preacher: because far too often I take life, faith, religion, and my work too seriously. I do not laugh enough with God and at myself!

One of our greatest needs, especially as Christians, is to develop the habit of laughter. Because one of our greatest spiritual needs is to be freed from anxiety, fear, failure, and future troubles. And confession is a form of spiritual laughter -- it is a time where God lets us laugh away the things that have been getting us down.

Maybe that's why I've treasured Children's Sermons and introduced them in every congregation that I have served. It's the one time in worship where we give each other permission to laugh with God. We all love Children's Sermons because they let us be ourselves. Through the actions of children, we can laugh at our own imperfection, our own impurity, and our own ignorance. Children's Messages remind us much more than sermons that God is full of surprises -- and many of those surprises can only make us laugh.

That's why Abraham and Sarah laughed. Because even at their old age, God was laying another surprise upon them. They were going to have a baby -- imagine, having a baby at 90 years of age! Doesn't sound very exciting to someone who just turned 44! Imagine being twice that age and being told: "You're gonna have a baby!" How's that for a surprise - before the depression sets in??

Well, Sarah and Abraham had their baby -- and that's when we say, only by the grace of God (because at 90 it takes a lot more grace). And they named this boy, "Issac," a good Hebrew name which means "He laughs." Could God make his message any clearer: he invites us to laugh at life, with Him, and at ourselves.

Certainly God wants us to see the serious side of faith. He wants us to serve him ... to be challenged by his will ... to be faithful to his word and promises. But he knows us as we really are. He knows that deep down, we really desire to do his will. He knows our yearning to be faithful and conscientious. But he also knows that we will blow it! And the only way we can deal with our sin and failure is to be forgiven. Or said another way -- to laugh it off faithfully.

Possibly no recent writer has more graphically told this story than Norman Cousins. In his book, "Anatomy of an Illness," Cousins tells his story of a crippling, irreversible disease that hit him in the mid-60's following a trip to Russia. The prognosis for Cousins was very bleak - one doctor told him his chances for recovery were 1 in 500.

With the odds so against him, there was little harm in taking a more assertive role in treatment. For Cousins, that meant getting connected with "positive emotions." So he checked out of the hospital and into a hotel -- because the hospital for him was a negative environment -- too many germs, too many interruptions, not enough sleep, etc. And while in the hotel, Cousins submerged himself in amusing things - reruns of Candid Camera, Marx Brothers films, humor books, -- a constant battery of laughter every day. In 1979, Norman Cousins wrote this book almost totally recovered.

Certainly, his case is only one. But there is something instructive for all of us: WE NEED TO LAUGH MORE! Because life is full of both good and bad surprises. And the only way that God has given us to cope with surprises is through the gift of laughter. Our Puritan forefathers did us a great evil with their legalism against laughter. Through Sarah and Abraham, God invites us anew to make laughter an equal to sacrifice in our pilgrimage of faith.

But he doesn't leave us laughing only. Combined with laughter, he also urges moments of lingering -- where we stop our Christian busyness! In the story of Martha and Mary, Martha represents the epitome of our Puritan heritage - all work and no play! And she lets Mary know that she is very upset in having to do all the meal preparations for Jesus. But Jesus says, "Cool it, Martha! Now is the time to linger with me, not to labor for me!"

There is a time for Christian labor and sacrifice -- a time to pull out all the stops for Jesus. But there is also a time to stop and linger ... and just be with Christ. Certainly God is not against hard work, dedicated stewardship, or sacrificial giving. But God is very much against a spirit which says, "Look at me! Look how much I'm doing! What's the matter with you?"

That was Martha's problem. Martha was a typical Jewish mother -- always looking for credit for herself. She had not matured beyond a childish faith. She was still playing the religious game, "Hey everybody, look at me, look how good I am!" Martha was saying to Jesus:

"Hey Lord, what's going on here? I'm the one that's busting mine for you! Why are you paying attention to her -- she's just sitting there at your feet!"

That's when Jesus says to Martha: "Hey woman, it's time for you to linger a little." When we serve God or each other ONLY TO GET CREDIT ... ONLY FOR PERSONAL GLORY ... that's when Jesus says: "Stop! Mary has chosen what is better -- to linger, to learn, to smell the real fragrance of faith!"

How much I need this text! Because it is so easy for a pastor to get caught up in his labors ... and then start pointing the finger and saying: "Hey, look at me, what's the matter with you!?" It's at that moment that Jesus says, "Stop, Martyn, you need to laugh and linger for a while! You will not be judged by your labors of love, but by your love of the Lord!" How much we all need this text! Which one of us hasn't played Martha's game -- the game of laboring for personal glory, and not laboring out of love! Whenever we play that game, it's time to linger at the feet of Jesus -- to take some time to learn again the real meaning of faithful love.

And let's face it -- we all know one of the greatest joys of living! That's having someone with whom we can linger -- someone who will always listen, someone who will always care, someone who will not judge or condemn, someone who won't demand perfection, someone who will laugh and even cry with us, someone who will really be a real friend! Is it any wonder that we love to sing: "What A Friend We Have in Jesus ... all our sins and griefs to bear ... what a privilege to carry ... everything to God in prayer; O what peace we often forfeit, O what needless pain we bear, All because we do not carry, everything to God in prayer." Thank God, Christ invites us to laugh and linger with him forever ... especially when we take our labors too seriously.

That reminds me of another Easter sunrise story. Long before the crack of Easter dawn, the church lights were burning in the fellowship hall. Huge black skilletts were fired up cooking pounds of every kind of breakfast meat imaginable. Bowls of pancake batter and scrambled eggs lined the counter. Pans of homemade biscuits were baking in the oven. The army of women from First Lutheran were cooking a meal to accomodate Ceasar's legions. Everything was done with perfect precision.

Then came time for the sunrise service ... and the problem. Right in front of the altar was a large grate, directly above the kitchen. Immediately after the choir anthem and just before Holy Communion, the Marthas of First Lutheran made their exit for their feast of victory in the basement. Never once did they consider their noisy gongs and clanging pans as being disruptive

to those desiring to linger with Jesus at the altar.

First Church got lots of pancakes, sausages, and eggs. But a lot of Marthas missed out on the greatest gift of all - the body and blood of their Lord. They were too busy seeking their own glory in the basement. There's a time for labor in the basement, and there's a time for lingering in the sanctuary.

Sunday mornings we laugh and linger with Jesus Christ at the altar, in order that Monday morning we can be ready to labor in the world with his love.

AMEN.

PENTECOST IX
Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo
August 6 & 9, 1987
Peter R. Martyn, Pastor

"DON'T EXPECT THE GARDEN OF EDEN!"

Then the servants said, 'Do you want us to go and gather them?' But the householder said, 'No; let in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them. Let both grow together until the harvest; and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Gather the weeds first and bind them to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn'.

Matthew 13:29-30

One of our Lutheran professors recently shared his experience of a senior seminary project. He had assigned each senior to write a descriptive essay reflecting that person's vision of the church. One essay, done by a male senior, was a metaphorical masterpiece manifesting many agrarian images as reflected in today's parable. The young seminary described the church as a weedless and ripening vineyard. His description uplifted only rich soils that productively encompassed the earth with vast fields of wheat and barely growing in an unbroken mass of perfect unity. The field was meticulously tended so that it contained no useless or injurious plants or growths. In short, the seminary had envisioned the church as "the garden of eden," a place where everything was always pleasant, peaceful, and productive -- a place of unadulterated growth, of beauty, harmony and wholesomeness.

A year after graduation, the seminary - now pastor of a nearby church - returned for a campus seminar. During a break, the professor asked him: "How is your essay holding up?" The student responded, "What do you mean?" "I'm curious to hear about your experience of the church ... does it still match your essay's vision?" They both laughed, and the student said he had already encountered several revisions. Unlike his essay, the church was not an unadulterated field -- it reflected decay, spoilage, and ugliness -- signs of deficiency were seen side by side with healthy growth. In short, the church of his experience did not coincide with the church of his dreams. He had expected a Garden of Eden; he got a Garden of Everything!

That story should ring true for all of us. It certainly has great validity for me. In many ways, I still have a lot of idealism from my earlier days ... I still expect the church to be a Garden of Eden. I put high expectations upon myself ... and upon the members that I serve. I am too often impatient with the weeds and decay in the church; I am quick to get my pruning fork and spade and start digging away at the spoilage that I see.

I need to be confronted by a parable like this one today. I need to be told to ease up ... to get out of the

judgment seat ... to realize that I'm not responsible for the harvest ... to simply plant the seed, urge a little cultivation ... and then pray that God will work the rest. Most of all, I need to be forgiven by God and by you for all my impatient prodding and pushing. It's so easy to play God in the vineyard ... to assume that my time and my judgment are the same as God's time and God's judgment.

The great New England preacher, Phillips Brooks, was known for his calmness and poise. But his intimate friends, knew of his moments of frustration and irritability. One day a friend saw Brooks pacing the floor like a caged lion. "What's the trouble, Brooks?" asked the friend. "The trouble is," replied Brooks, "that I'm in a hurry, but God isn't!"

Many of you, like Brooks and me, also reflect this same unwillingness to be patient regarding the weeds in the church. Let's face it, most of us joined the church because we wanted to be identified with a righteous community ... we wanted something better than the world around us. And so many times we demand that the church live up to our "garden of eden" vision. We know we can't personally be perfect, but we demand that the church be corporately perfect.

But who are we trying to fool? There's immorality here. There's divorce here. There's abortion here. There's slander and envy and jealousy among us. There's huge growths of bigotry and greed in this vineyard. There's a multitude of idolatry and downright cheapness in this flock. Every church -- not only the PTL -- is filled with the scandal of the weeds as well as the wheat -- there is no church on earth that can claim to be the garden of eden!!

In fact, not for a single decade ...not for a single year ... not even for a single day has the church EVER BEEN GOD'S GARDEN OF EDEN ON EARTH. Oh, certainly that was God's intention for the church. There can be no doubt about God's hope for his people. St. Peter himself graphically described the church as "living stones built into a spiritual house, a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, declaring the wonderful deeds of him who called us out of darkness into his marvelous light." But from the beginning, Christ was confronted by decadence and deceit. The synagogues were closed to Jesus and his followers. The disciples were told to expect opposition and disappointment. The religious establishment plotted against Jesus' every word. The common people, who first flocked to Jesus with high hopes and great enthusiasm, retreated quickly when he didn't fill their bellies with bread or break the cruel oppression of Rome. They became weary and disenchanted of his words about a spiritual kingdom. And all this talk about the cross -- that looked more like the mark of suffering than the symbol of success. Let us make no mistake -- the church has never been a garden of eden on earth!!

But Jesus was totally aware of this reality. As Pasto Bob illustrated last week ... we are sometimes good soil ... sometimes hard & rocky. And this week, we are viewed as both weedy and wheaty ... sometimes good, sometimes bad. But the real point of these parables is that God is saying that his kingdom does not come by violent revolution or fanatic pruning, but rather through long and gradual growth ... like a seed growing in a field. The kingdom of God comes not by the sword, but by the seed. And God will patiently wait for his kingdom to mature ... because his kingdom will outlast any momentary interruptions ... whether they be hard or rocky soil ... or the growth of weeds amidst the wheat.

So, what does this parable say to you and me? Exactly what it said to God's people in the first century. First and foremost, it warns us against becoming righteous fanatics. Our role as disciples is not to rip out and destroy what we see as impure among us or around us. We are not to cast out anyone from our community. Certainly we are not to tolerate blatant immorality or sinfulness, but neither are we to excommunicate anyone who has been sinful or immoral. We are to live together manifesting God's forgiving grace.

We don't have to look far today to see what righteous fanaticism has done to a people or the world. The Iranian Sheites claim that Allah has shown them true righteousness. And anyone who lives contrary to their view & vision of this righteousness is to be destroyed. Obviously, this is the grossest example of righteous fanaticism in our world. A lessor violent expression is often heard from many of our "born again" Christian friends. If we don't accept Jesus Christ in exactly the same way as they do -- we are viewed as weeds to be cast into the fire. There is no tolerance of anyone who does not fit their definition of righteousness.

The parable today clearly identifies all Christians as mixed plants -- possessing both weeds and wheat. Our role as disciples is not to condemn the next guy, but rather to confess our own impurities in the presence of God. That's our proper righteousness and religion ... to constantly confess that we, like Jim and Tammy Baker, are not 100% pure. And because God is faithful to his whole field ... to the rocky and hard soil as well as the good soil ... to the weeds as well as the wheat ... he will not reject anyone that has remained faithful to him. Our role is to be faithful ... to confess. His role is to judge ... to determine what's really good and bad.

But God does not merely leave us there. His faithfulness to us goes one step further. He not only planted us in the vineyard, but he also planted Christ and his cross amongst us. In God's vineyard, there is constant exposure to his transforming way.

Through God's cultivating efforts ... through his constant loving exposure ...the bad is always in the process of being transformed into the good. That's been God's revelation to his people from the beginning of time to the present.

That was God's message in sharing the story of Adam and Eve. Adam and Eve were created out of the good dirt of the earth, but they turned bad. But God did not destroy them. God gave them a mission on earth in spite of their disobedience. He sent them into the world to reveal that man must work for food and shelter. Instead of rejecting Adam and Eve - God forgave them and offered them a renewed responsibility. That's his constant relationship to his imperfect, weedy followers.

Abraham tried to pass his wife off as his sister to save his own skin; yet God did not reject him, but instead gave him an even greater responsibility - he made him the Father of the Faith.

Moses refused God's call and cried out, "Send my brother, not me!" But God did not reject Moses for his weedy resistance - he used Moses to lead the Chosen people from bondage to freedom.

David committed adultery and sent his lover's husband to the front lines in order to be killed. But, instead of rejecting him for this rotten rebellion, God designated David to have a greater role for Israel ... he became the Israel's symbol of loyal hope and dedicated leadership!

Paul being a first century terrorist, destroyed every church and killed every Christian he encountered. Yet, God turned this weedy radical into the most devoted defender of the Gospel.

In his own time, God transforms the weeds of the vineyard into his healthy wheat. Our role in the vineyard is not to condemn, but to show the same compassion God has shown us in Christ. No matter how sinful, how bad the past may have been -- God never rejects his faithful weeds. He dreams that they will eventually be healthy wheat. Yes, God still has a great dream for his church; and we still have a great dream from our God -- that nothing in all creation will separate us from his love in Christ our Lord.

Yes someday, God will turn this less than perfect field - the church - into THE GARDEN OF EDEN ... AND THEN ALL HIS DREAMS AND OUR DREAMS WILL HAVE BEEN FULFILLED!

AMEN.

PENTECOST IX
Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo
July 13 and 16, 1989
Peter R. Martyn, Pastor

L E A R N I N G T H E P R O P E R P O S T U R E

(Luke 10:38-42) The familiar story of Martha and Mary.

Periodically preachers discover a gem of a metaphor from other preachers. Robert Irving Miles from Chapin, South Carolina in his commentary on this text provided such a gem this week; I thank him for his inspirational gift ON PROPER POSTURE. It seems in almost every activity of life there is a proper posture.

If you want to be a great baseball hitter, you must keep your shoulders up. If you are seeking golfing fortunes, you must keep your head down. If you want to serve tennis like Boris Becker at Wimbledon, you must learn to serve sideways. If you want to sing gloriously, you must sit with your back straight. If you want to read for a lifetime - you must hold the book at arms length ... and a little bit further each year. If you want to succeed in the military, you must learn to stand at attention.

For almost every activity of life, we must learn the proper posture. And Christian discipleship is no different. For Christians who follow the Lord of life and seek to live consecrated to his service - there is the same need to LEARN THE PROPER POSTURE.

This morning's Gospel lesson, the story of Martha and Mary, teaches us the proper posture of faith ... the proper body positions for serving our Savior. Listen again to verse 38: "Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a village; and a woman named Martha received him into her house." Each one of us sitting here tonight has done the very same thing as Martha. In our baptisms, in our confirmations, in our marriages, in our weekly pilgrimage to worship, in our bedtime prayers, in our joining this congregation ... in these activities and many others WE INVITE JESUS TO ENTER WHERE WE LIVE ... TO IMPACT THE DWELLING PLACES OF OUR LIVES.

BUT WHAT HAPPENS AFTER WE INVITE HIM IN?? The text goes on ... "And Martha had a sister called Mary who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching. But Martha was distracted with much serving ... (repeat). Which one of us hasn't experienced the frustrations of Martha work?? We're working our tails off doing kitchen or bible school or fellowship duty ... while others are just sitting around soaking up the food and fun and fellowship spirit.

To be humanly honest with this story - Martha takes a pretty bum rap! Because the church really needs many Marthas. It's because of the Marthas that the church delivers 90 cents

of every dollar to the victims of injustice. It's the Martha jobs of the church that are not glamorous, but very necessary for the efficient operation of every congregation. Jobs like ushering and counting and lay reading and greeting and teaching and altar care and nursery care and committee work and office volunteering and potluck cooking and telephone contacting and transportation of handicapped. Every year we publish a list of the MARTHA MINISTRIES of the congregation ... more than 125 offerings of time and talent. The church cannot survive without a multitude of Marthas.

But again, let's refer back to the text: "But Martha was distracted with her serving ..." I think that means that Martha HAD TAKEN HERSELF TOO SERIOUSLY ... had made her task the most important reason for being with Jesus. Like so many good Marthas in the church - we become more concerned about ourselves than we do about our Lord of his people. Like Martha - WE CAN GET SO CAUGHT UP IN OUR AREA OF MINISTRY THAT WE LOSE SIGHT of the real reason for sharing communion with Jesus. We don't commune with Jesus to call attention to ourselves and our good works ... we commune with Jesus in order to glorify him and his love for us. Jesus always has more to offer us than we have to offer him. Martha had become distracted ... she was thinking that she was making the major offering. She had forgotten - the purpose of gathering with Jesus is to receive HIS GOOD NEWS ... AND THEN THANKFULLY SHARE HIS OFFERING WITH OTHERS.

Is it any wonder that Jesus says to Martha: "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about too many things. One thing is needful." The one thing that Martha had forgotten is that Jesus comes to feed us; that is the primary reason for inviting him into our lives. Jesus comes to serve us the banquet of life. We dare never become so distracted with all our "Martha work" that we forget the reason for being with Jesus Christ.

How easy it is to become distracted with all the mundane Martha work. Like Martha, then we're only concerned about serving ourselves ... our own needs and egos. Jesus certainly needs Marthas who will serve his suppers and potlucks ... but first he needs servants who know him as their Savior. The need in the church is for cooks who know FOR WHOM AND WHY they are COOKING; for ushers who know FOR WHOM AND WHY they are USHERING. And when we lose sight of FOR WHOM AND WHY we are serving - then Jesus has to teach us again THE PROPER POSTURE OF FAITH.

And what is that proper posture: THAT WE MUST ALWAYS SIT AT THE FEET OF THE MASTER BEFORE WE CAN STAND AND SERVE HIM IN THE WORLD. Faithful discipleship always begins with SITTING ... (or shall we say worshipping). No biblical story other than the Martha/Mary story better illustrates the classic teaching: faithful Christians stop, look, and listen BEFORE THEY LEAP INTO ACTION.

The proper posture of sitting at Jesus' feet first requires us TO STOP. Mary stopped. Martha did not. This is the hardest part of faithfulness for devoted disciples. We all need to regularly STOP WHAT WE'RE DOING and WATCH WHAT CHRIST IS DOING. *We need to stop to emulate his example.*

I'm reminded of the story of American missionary who was on his usual fast-paced journey to his mission site. He was traveling with the assistance of some native baggage carriers. He was surprised one morning when they stopped and sat quietly in a circle, refusing to move on. Finally, he asked them why, and they replied: "We need to let our souls catch up with our bodies."

How crucial it is for each of us to have a daily discipline of STOPPING to meditate, to reflect upon the meaning of existence. *to let our souls catch up with our bodies.* Jesus said to Martha: "Stop long enough to meditate upon the meaning of this moment. I am on my way to Jerusalem - to be crucified. This is your last opportunity to learn from me. Are you going to waste this time by running around feeding me ... or will you take some time to be fed?"

This past week I met with Steve and Amy Havasi for their summer Bible study. That's what there "shared praxis" is all about. Not a time to become super-holy bible students ... but a time to STOP, TO REFLECT, TO APPLY GOD'S TRUTH TO OUR DAILY LIVES so that our relationships might be more meaningful. I encourage you TO STOP AND MEDITATE with Amy and Steve each Wednesday evening.

Because once you and I have stopped - then we can finally take a real good LOOK AT OURSELVES ... at the posture that we are reflecting about our lives. Because as simplistic as it is, the way we look (posture) says a lot about the way we are feeling. Jesus looked at Martha and Mary - and immediately he saw their hearts through their postures. Are we running around in circles like Martha ... only thinking about ourselves and how everyone else should appreciate how great we are??? Are we hunched down in depression? Are we knotted up in anxiety?? Are we standing over ourselves and everyone else in judgment? When was the last time we really knelt down in prayer -- not just prayed, but really knelt down and prayed?? When was the last time we really stood up to praise and glorify God?? I don't mean "standing up to sing a song" -- I mean really saying: "WOW God - thank you for your presence and guidance in my life ... thank you for blessing me!" How long has it been since you sat in contemplation?? Not in front of a TV or behind the newspaper or on the golf course -- but sat with Bible in hand, contemplating God's love and mercy for you??

Yes, this story calls us to STOP and LOOK ... and then TO LISTEN. To change our posture in whatever way it needs to be changed so ~~that~~ we can listen ... really listen to God, really listen to our children, really listen to the cries and concerns all around us.

When Jesus came to Martha's house, Mary stopped whatever she was doing in the kitchen and sat down to listen ... to be fed by Jesus. I am certain that Martha did the same thing after Jesus urged her to capture this moment since it could never be repeated again. What are the moments of your life that will never be repeated again. Are you listening to the joys and pains of your children?? You may never get another chance. Are you listening to the cries of hunger and suffering in our society?? These people will certainly die unless we take time to listen. Are you listening to the merciful kindness of your Lord and Savior?? He loves you more than anyone in this world; he wants you to listen and learn to share his love.

The proper posture for discipleship is to sit at the feet of the Lord - listening! That's why we come here week after week. To learn to sit and listen before we stand and serve. To be fed the bread of life before we can properly feed our neighbor. To be healed ourselves before we can make the hurting whole again. To worship the Lord as King before we go to work in his kingdom. To kneel in the Lord's presence before we can possibly know his power. To learn his Word before we can live his will. To take the time to be with Him before we'll ever have time for anyone else other than ourselves!!

This proper posture of Christian faith was so poignantly illustrated by the farmer who spent all day working in his barn. When he came to dinner, he discovered that his pocket watch was missing. This watch was a treasure -- a gift from his father who had received it from his father. He couldn't eat a meal until his watch was found. So the whole family headed for the barn. They look over and under, around and through everything. They literally turned the barn inside out, top to bottom -- but no watch was found. Disappointed and dejected, the farmer returned to a cold dinner.

Just a few minutes later, his five-year-old grandson came in carrying the priceless watch. The farmer's joy was surpassed only by his total surprise that a five-year-old had found what nobody else could. "How did you ever find it?" the farmer asked the boy. "It was easy" said the little guy. "I waited until everyone had left the barn. Then I waited til it was absolutely quiet ... then I stopped and sat down ... and I listened and listened. And pretty soon I heard the watch ticking and ticking ... and I walked over and picked it up."

That little boy had taught his family a great lesson: We must stop - remove ourselves from our hectic, haunting, pressure-paced busyness ... and quietly listen for the still small voice of God. When we really stop; when we really listen; we always find God ticking away ... speaking loving, forgiving, kind and compassionate words that we are always his!

You have learned your proper posture well this morning. For the past 18 minutes - you have stopped, sat, and listened to the Good News of God's love for you! Now it's time to STAND UP AND SERVE HIM! So, let's go and do it faithfully, like Mary and Martha!

PENTECOST IX
Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo
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Peter R. Martyn, Pastor

" T I M E F O R R . & R ."

For he is our peace, who has made us both (all) one, and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility ... Eph 2:14

And Jesus said to them, "Come away by yourselves to a lonely place, and rest a while ... for they had had not even leisure enough to eat. Mark 6:31f

Some years ago I commented that we live in a world of great technological sophistication and support: computer generated sermons, three-hour transatlantic travel, instant gratification thru camcorders, microwave magic in our kitchens, prolongation of life through open-heart & transplant surgeries; telebanking of payroll and investments ... and the list goes on and on. If ever there was an age of efficiency and labor-saving ease, we are living in that era.

Yet, has this made people around you more compatible, more compassionate, more caring, more giving of themselves and their time?? After two trips in the last two weeks to Cedar Point ... I've done a lot of people watching at the place that advertises itself as the "greatest get-away for fun and relaxation for families in America." I saw a lot of frustrated, fuming, and foul families at Cedar Point. Be assured, for all the hype of the Magnum and the Mean Streak - they have not served as sources of peace and solitude and reconciliation for this world.

Just recently, a pastor friend wrote the following letter to fathers and husbands as a belated "Father's Day" message: "It's hard in this pressure-cooker world to be the kind of fathers and husbands we want to be. We are pulled in so many directions by so many demands that it seems there is little we can really control. We want to keep a balance between careers and relationships, but the balance is so precarious. It's not that we are bad people or don't care about our families -- it's just that the pressure to work long hours and even weekends, to coach soccer and softball, to get the kids to dance and piano, to get the house projects done, to help with the cooking and cleaning, to romance our wives, and to spend sufficient time with the kids is overwhelming. Corporations demand our best. Workaholism is the new symbol of "success" in the culture. To be busy and always productive is to be a "good man."

This is not only a letter to fathers and husbands -- it's to mothers and wives and a whole culture that has sold out to the false shepherding of being busy, busy, busy, busy, busy, busy, busy, busy. We celebrate and give thanks for a culture that values work and productivity and mission statements and upward mobility - but how tragic when we make these things our gods rather than mere by-products of our daily vocations.

But we are in good company with this obsession with busyness. Jesus and his disciples evidently were caught in the same bind. Last week you reflected on Jesus "cast of discipleship" - how he sent them two-by-two to preach and teach and perform miracles. Well, they were evidently very successful. Crowds were growing and becoming more demanding of their time and energy. And I understand Pastor Michaels gave you the classic illustration of what happens when the disciples get all caught up with these growing crowds - and the crowds demand more and more and more! You end up with a country club church that has a 23 million dollar budget that has lost sight of its relational mission to bind-up the broken hearted and set free those who have become captive to the idolatry of a materialistic world. Well, it didn't get that bad for the original twelve -- but Mark says it got so hectic that the disciples weren't even getting time for dinner. Busy, busy, busy, busy -- no time to focus, to reflect, to be reconnected, to be renewed.

And running parallel to all this busyness of discipling in the gospel -- the writer of Ephesians today tells us about a dividing wall of hostility. We wonder what does this have to do with the hectic pace of the disciples? The audience for Ephesians was obviously Jews and Greeks (Gentiles). And everyone knew about that dividing wall of hostility -- it was literally a stone wall that divided the outer court from the inner court of the Jewish temple. Any foreigner (namely, a Gentile) was absolutely forbidden from entering the inner court - upon pain of death. Gentiles were viewed as "those far off" - as utter outsiders ... separated, alienated, hopeless and godless.

The writer of Ephesians offers a radical statement for the day -- Christ's death tears down this wall of separation. Christ died to make Jew and Gentile one. The significance of Christ's life is that he replaces the stone wall and all other legalistic codes of the day -- Christ becomes the new cornerstone of faith not only for Jew and Greek ... but for the whole world. Good shepherding is not achieved by perfecting the rules but rather by giving your life to others, esp. those who are alienated, segregated, and rejected by the "self-righteous of the day."

It should be obvious to all of us -- the dividing wall of hostility is no longer in a Jewish synagogue. It is no longer a matter of circumcision or kosher foods for us. It is not even a matter of perfecting all the social, cultural and corporate rules that we so often make the difference between who's "IN" and who's "OUT." The 20th century dividing wall of hostility goes back to the issue of the gospel -- A FAILURE TO TAKE TIME FOR R. & R.

Good shepherding - whether it's shepherding a church, a family, a city, or a nation - requires time for R. & R. Now I know you think because I'm going on vacation next week, that I mean "Rest & Relaxation" for R. & R. Well, there's no doubt we all need "rest & relaxation." But "TIME FOR

R. & R." for faithful disciples is so much more than rest and relaxation. First, as we note in the gospel text, good shepherds like their Lord take TIME FOR RETURNING AND REPORTING. Mark says, "And the apostles returned to Jesus and told him all that they had done and taught." How often I have seen people in my ministry say to the sick, the bereaved, the lonely HOW MUCH THEY CARE ... HOW MUCH THEY LOVE ... HOW MUCH THEY MEAN TO EACH-OTHER ... AND THEN NEVER RETURN AND REPORT TO THAT PERSON AGAIN. Good shepherds take TIME FOR R. & R. -- for returning and reporting. How can anyone claim to be a good church member who fails to RETURN and REPORT to his/her Lord and to CONSTANTLY REPORT TO THE REST OF THE BODY. Faithful disciples have this driving spirit which compels them TO RETURN AND REPORT how the mission is going in their lives.

And how tragic and empty life becomes when we never take the time to RETURN AND REPORT. Is it any wonder that there are often huge dividing walls between teenagers and their parents?? NEVER ENOUGH TIME FOR RETURNING AND REPORTING TO EACH OTHER. This past week when we went to Juvenile Traffic Court with Angie she felt totally frustrated by the whole experience. Why? Because everyone (except our attorney from Hope) kept on RETURNING AND REPORTING TO US (her parents) rather than RETURNING AND REPORTING to her (since it was her accident). She finally said, why even be there - nobody wants to really talk to me anyway. Maybe that's the way a lot of teenagers feel about their time at home as well ... WHY EVEN BE THERE, NOBODY WANTS TO RETURN AND TALK TO ME ANYWAY! How desparately we need to TAKE TIME as families and church bodies TO RETURN AND REPORT "what's been going on" in order to AVOID THE DIVIDING WALLS OF HOSTILITY. How life-giving it has been to me when a member takes the time to RETURN AND REPORT to me when something has been said that might have been misconstrued and possibly caused a dividing wall of hostility.

God wasn't being punitive when he commanded: "Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy." This was good, practical, down-to-earth shepherding guidance on how to keep a church family vital and alive. That's why we have regular worship services and committees and organizational structures. Because faithful shepherds take TIME TO RETURN AND REPORT on the status of their lives and their mission. But they also return to be assured that there is no dividing wall between them and their Lord. And what a blessing to hear week after week after week from Jesus Christ: "Even if you have not been perfect as I am perfect, you are still one with me and the Father!" Always good news when we return and report to the master of this household!

And that leads to the second R & R -- always an outgrowth of the first. When we take time to return and report, then we can be absolutely certain that there will be TIME FOR REUNION AND RESTORATION ... TIME FOR RECONCILIATION & RECONNECTION. Time after time after time in the gospels,

when people returned to the Lord their God they always found a Good Shepherd who offered compassion and forgiveness. Jesus Christ never rejected anyone who was in need, but fully shared that person's struggle -- whether it was grief, illness, hunger or despair. Like no other person conceived by God, Jesus Christ sees humanity so often as sheep in need of a shepherd. Therefore, he always takes TIME TO RECONNECT, TO REUNITE THOSE WHO ARE ABANDONED OR SCATTERED, TO RESTORE THE ALIENATED, THE HOMELESS AND HELPLESS, TO RECONCILE THE BROKEN AND GUILTY.

Many of you who are a few years older than me remember the story of Joe Gordon who was in his prime with the Cleveland Indians in 1947. That same year, a young black athlete named Larry Doby came to play for the Indians. Doby was the first black rookie to join the American League. He was tense and very nervous when he stepped to bat for the first time. He swung at three pitches and missed each of them by at least a foot. He walked back to the dugout - head down ... and slouched in the corner without a word from the other players.

Joe Gordon, a power hitter, was next up. The opposing pitcher was one whom Gordon usually blasted out of the park. This time, however, Gordon stepped to the plate and swung at three pitches in a row ... missing each of them by a foot. He returned to the dugout ... walked by all the other players ... and sat down next to Doby ... and put his head in his hands. No one ever asked Gordon if he had struck out intentionally. But from that day on -- every time Larry Doby went onto the field, he picked up Gordon's glove and tossed it to him. They were forever one, and Doby went on to become one of the American leagues' greatest hitters.

Joe Gordon became a Christ-figure for Larry Doby in the dugout. He became Doby's good shepherd -- he took the time to fully identify with Larry Doby's situation. He struck out to show that it can happen to the best. He broke down the dividing wall of hostility between black and white, between rookie and ranked superstar.

Many of you remember Senator Hubert Humphrey's memorial service in the U.S. Capitol Rotunda. Washington's elite gathered to say goodbye to their beloved friend. Richard Nixon was there that day. He sat off by himself, as if he were quarantined. Howard Baker, remembering, said: "Nobody would even talk to him; everybody was afraid of him." Alienation finally ended when President Jimmy Carter walked over to Mr. Nixon, shook his hand, and welcomed him back to Washington. NEWSWEEK concluded that this one simple act of humanity and compassion changed Nixon's future, "If there was a turning point in Nixon's long ordeal in the wilderness, that was it."

There comes a time whens someone must TAKE THE TIME to walk the road of compassion ... when someone must scale the dividing wall of hostility ... when someone must go out on the limb of love and restoration. Jesus Christ was that

someone, that teacher, that good shepherd who has always inspired the likes of Joe Gordon and Jimmy Carter. When he died on the cross we are told by Luke: "that at the 9th hour darkness had covered the land and then the curtain of the temple was torn in two." The curtain that separated the believer from the holy of holies was torn in two. The final wall separating humanity from its Creator was ripped apart. Is it any wonder we call Him our Lord and Savior? Is it any wonder that he continues to teach us to BREAK DOWN THE DIVIDING WALLS THAT KEEP OTHERS FEELING GUILTY AND HOPELESS AND HELPLESS AND WORTHLESS? Is it any wonder that our mission is to become reconciled and reconnected with the Larry Doby's of this world?

Yes, when we have taken TIME TO RETURN AND REPORT ... and TAKEN TIME TO RECONNECT AND RECONCILE ... then there's only one R & R left ... TIME FOR RETREAT AND RE-CREATION! Unlike most of us - Jesus didn't get much time off to retreat and recreate, even though he said: "Come away to a lonely place and rest a while - for they had not even had enough leisure to eat." But what a great joy to TAKE TIME TO RETREAT AND RECREATE when we have first RETURNED AND BROKEN DOWN THE WALLS OF HOSTILITY.

I look forward to a 2-1/2 week RETREAT starting next week. It will be a time to do those things that give my body and mind renewal and re-creation. A time to read a book or two (something I never have enough time for around here). A time to play golf at least 4/5 times a week. A time to laugh and linger with family and friends. Every shepherd needs TIME TO RETREAT AND RE-CREATE. But I couldn't leave Toledo or Hope Church without first knowing that I had TAKEN TIME TO RETURN AND REPORT here in this place:
to receive the assurance of God's love;
to receive assurance that we are still connected
... and that there is no dividing wall between us.

As senior pastor, I sometimes have to write and say prophetic things that can be easily misconstrued ... at one time it might be a deficit letter, another time it might be a challenging statement at a meeting. There were times that Jesus had to offer that same prophetic stance -- good shepherds are always needed to challenge those who have prostituted God's house with empty talk rather than faithful living. Like Jesus, I can only hope that my prophetic words are heard for their intent -- TO CALL US BACK TO OUR FAITHFULNESS TO GOD AND EACH OTHER. Never are prophetic words intended to create dividing walls of hostility. If that has ever been the case -- then we must take the TIME NOW to become reconciled as one in Christ ... graced by God and forgiven by one another.

For before or after any RETREAT, this is THE ONE PLACE in the world we want to RETURN AND REPORT only good news: that Jesus Christ is our cornerstone ... that there are no such thing as strangers in this place ... that he has broken down the dividing walls of hostility between us and has made us good shepherds of reconciliation and renewal ... servants who gather rather than scatter his flock!

AMEN

PENTECOST IX
Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo
August 6 and August 9, 1992
Peter R. Martyn, Pastor

"FIRST THINGS FIRST!"

But Jesus answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her." Luke 10:42

The Annual Meeting of First Church was over and John was ecstatic to be elected "president" for the next year. As the year progressed, his enthusiasm grew. He felt himself attending church functions that he had previously not felt a need or want to attend. He helped set up the Christmas fair; he cooked Easter breakfast with the men's group; he led a group of workers during the spring clean-up; he effectively presided over monthly council meetings and kept the agenda on track. The pastor affirmed John for his leadership tenacity, and soon John felt like a very important cog in the machine.

Slowly, however, John began to find himself unable to concentrate on the Sunday sermons. In fact, he was always so preoccupied with church business and property matters that he hardly noticed the qualities of worship that had led him to be active in the first place. John was so busy BEING BUSY that he was now forgetting to listen and learn from his Lord. Like Martha and many church leaders, he had lost sight of what it means to put "First Things First" as a devout believer.

That kind of busyness and hectic lifestyle is hardly limited to the life of the church. Few of us can make it through a single day without consulting our calendars. Family time used to be A GIVEN in most families every evening; today many families have difficulty scheduling just one evening a week where they can all be together in the same place at the same time. Time constraints, tension trouble, and pain addictions have become the by-products of our busy lifestyles. Psychology Today recently reported that "in the next twelve months, Americans will consume more than 20,000 tons of aspirin or similar painkillers. As Jimmy Connors says, if it hurts - "Nupe it!" And so in 1992, on the average each of us will NUPE IT 225 times. But all our "nuping" won't really relieve all the pain & pressure! Twenty years ago, the average person asked: "How can I get to heaven?" Today the average persons asks: "How can I get through this day?"

As pastors and faithful people we must seriously guard against this "headache, heartache & busyness" syndrome in the life of the church. Now you understand why the ELCA will not allow pastors to be congregational presidents or chairpersons of committees: THERE'S TOO MUCH OF A TEMPTATION TO JUST DO BUSY WORK WITHOUT ANY DEVOTION TO REFLECTION & RELATIONSHIPS WHICH ARE THE HEART OF MINISTRY! Believe me, this text aims both barrells directly at me. For far too often I suffer from far too much enslavement to routines, papershuffling, & busy-work ... sometimes my own doing ... but many times the demands

of the people and the turf of congregational ministry.

But let us not be too hard on those of us who are enslaved to busyness like Martha. In fact, on Thurs night, many said I was far too hard on Martha; they felt she was the one that Jesus should have commended for her hard work. One member even said, Why should Jesus commend Mary; she sat on her duff! Well, initially, we all side with Martha, because the church needs hard-working Marthas. There are many times the church needs people who will roll up their sleeves and get the job done. Isn't that what Jesus meant when he said "take up your cross and follow me." We all know there are far too few "real workers" in the life of the church or any other organization.

But as much as we must commend Martha and others like her for their good work ethic, she suffered a very serious blindness: she lost sight of Jesus' first priority of mission - TO REFLECT AND TO RELATE TO LIFE AND OTHERS OUT OF LOVE! That priority became impossible for Martha because she made the focus of mission enslavement to herself - she had to be the world's model of perfection. And when Martha or any of us forget that our mission is to reflect and relate God's love, mercy & compassion -- then church life deteriorates into "getting the job done," getting the dinner served, getting the pancakes flipped as fast as possible, and getting them in and getting them out! Then church life becomes little more than mule train ministry -- just cracking the whip on the herd! In fact, the largest ELCA church prides itself on having six 40-minute worship services every Sunday morning timed down to the very minute. Get them in, and get them out -- but don't let them take time to sit at Jesus' feet! Yes, whether it's Martha at Bethany or any of us at Hope ... it's so easy to allow the social/political systems to rule our relationships & our reflective time. Certainly Jesus is not chastising the busywork of church administration or committee tasks, but he is urging that FIRST THINGS COME FIRST! As I've said before, we must SIT TO RECEIVE HIM before we can STAND TO SERVE HIM.

And like Mary, that's the first mandate of ministry - to extend our arms and our minds - to be that place where Christ is WELCOMED AND EMBRACED ... where divine dialog is more important than demanding duties. Whenever I meet with new people - whether in pre-marital sessions or evangelism calls or new member meetings - my first priority is simply to sit and reflect and relate to the goodness of life we have been given. There is nothing more tragic than to make new relationships feel like they are being tested or scrutinized by some expert. Jesus Christ calls us to put FIRST THINGS FIRST. Take time to share his WELCOME SPIRIT ... help people understand that you care about them rather than trying to prove to them how much you know or what a great pious person you are.

The Lutheran Heritage series at Hope strongly builds upon the church as the WELCOME PLACE of our Lord -- the place that extends its arms and embrace to everyone as they are, regardless of their background or their foibles of the past. At the first class (which this fall begins on Sept. 22nd) - I will not spend time talking about the greatness of this

tradition or what we are all about at Hope Lutheran. Rather, I will ask the prospective members: "What are you really looking for from the church? What is your spiritual or personal quest? What are you now seeking as your priorities for living and learning?" Like Mary, this feels much more like a posture of sitting at the feet of Jesus - rather than having Jesus towering over us telling us how to live the perfectly, legalistic religious life.

But beyond the importance of this WELCOMING SPIRIT -- this house of hospitality - there is a second reason Jesus commends Mary "for choosing the better priority." Mary recognized in Jesus the one who is truly THE SAVIOR -- the one who came to save us from the enslaving systems and routines that cause us to sacrifice human relationships THRU our obligation to the system. Too often the system demands that we fit in and do it the proper and prescribed way -- the way it's always been done ... whether that system happens to be a church dinner, or a day at the office, or the liturgy on Sunday morning, or some other social ritual for Saturday evening.

Jesus is our Savior because he freed us from any system which says the system is more important than the people and our relationships to them. Martha was contradicting that gospel message -- SHE WAS ENSLAVED TO THE SYSTEM ... the system of always having to look good - of impressing others ... looking the busiest ... putting on the best show ... offering the grandest layout on the dinner table. In short, she was enslaved to herself ... always having to make the greatest impression upon others, rather than simply taking the time to reflect with them and care for them. Is it any wonder Jesus says to her: "Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by too many things; there is need for only one thing - to be free to love as you have first been loved by me."

Jesus deeply cared for and sought to support others ... he had a sacrificial work ethic ... but he was not bound by any human system or its petty criticisms. When he was tired, he got away and took rest. He took his vacations when he needed them, not when the company said that he could get away. He healed and he taught, but he also left the crowd when it became too pressing and demanding. When he saw children, he gathered them around him (rather than rejecting them as church folk often did/do). When people wanted to talk, he took the time to listen. And the machinery of production often ground to a halt because he believed that we do not live by bread or paychecks alone. He clearly taught, we are not justified by our own works; rather we are justified when we say: "I am about my Father's business rather than business as usual."

Jesus is the Christ and the Savior of the world because he demonstrates a lifestyle that saves us from an obsession with ourselves; from demanding all the glory for our selfish efforts to put earthly kingdoms above his eternal kingdom. Is it any wonder that the system "crucified" the one known as its

Lord and Savior. He was too much of a threat to business as usual -- he called for a new order of business in this world: where we work to put "First Things First" - we work to reflect relationships that glorify God's grace & goodness rather than demanding all the goodness & glory for ourselves (Martha).

This is certainly a text that needs to be heard by pastors and other church people who too often seek their own glory WHEN WORKING FOR THE LORD! No more classic illustration comes to mind than one of my own hard-working pastor friends, who delayed MUCH needed by-pass surgery until his summer vacation. He said he couldn't do it earlier because there were too many unfinished agendas at the church -- "necessary things" that just had to get done. He obviously had the notion that neither the church nor God's kingdom could survive without his hard work. I suspect that if he had died of a heart attack while in the pulpit he would have been regarded by his congregation and community as a great Christian martyr. I suspect that Jesus might have considered him a stupid and self-righteous fool. That's what's known as being enslaved by the system - where we make the system with all its strokes of glory more important than our health and the wholeness of our lives and families and relationships. Yes, we are all guilty of being Marthas. And then we go home or go to church crabbing and complaining because we feel so overwhelmed, so under-appreciated, so enslaved by our own addictions to ourselves and our need for self-glory!

How tragic that my pastor friend - and many more in this world and this room - how tragic that he and many of us have not yet learned that Christ came to SAVE US, NOT TO KILL US! Christ came that we might finally learn to put FIRST THINGS FIRST - to sit with Him before we stand to serve him! And it's for that reason that he commended Mary instead of Martha: "Mary, you have chosen the better priority!" Likewise, he commends us this morning FOR CHOOSING THE BETTER PRIORITY!

AMEN.

*Pentecost IX
First English Lutheran Church, Toledo
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Peter R. Martyn, Part-time Interim*

“Security or Addiction?”

And Jesus said to them, ‘Take care! Be on guard against all kinds of greed; for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions. Luke 12:15

In the past few decades, there has been much attention given to addiction and abuse in our society. This attention is long overdue. There are very few extended families in America that have not been tragically touched by drug or alcohol addiction. A week does not pass without seeing headlines about death or violence caused by drug or alcohol problems – whether in the form of shootings, traffic fatalities or some other tragedy. There can be no doubt that drug & alcohol addiction have become serious social problems.

But there is another kind of addiction that can be even more threatening. Just like drugs, alcohol, gambling and others – it manifests the same insatiable craving. “Today’s fix is never enough.” It is the alarming addiction known as material greed (covetousness). In some ways it is a more serious addiction than alcohol and drugs because no war has been declared against it. In fact, greed is socially promoted and encouraged. The greedy man’s version of “I’ll quit tomorrow” is: “I’LL HAVE ENOUGH TOMORROW TO BE SATISFIED.” But tomorrow never comes.

Do you know of anyone infected with this disease? When I think of all the stuff that clutters the Martyn home – I realize this disease has me tightly in its grip. In fact, most Americans suffer from it. But the classic case I most remember was a corporate executive in my second congregation. When we first met, he was “Mr. Cordial of the Congregation” – warm, engaging, involved, and a “great guy.” He was one of the first in that congregation to make our family feel welcome and at home.

But within two years he was fast rising up the Detroit corporate ladder. All of a sudden, financial advantage became his life ambition. In fact he got so involved with financial leverage that he lost total interest in me – not even responding to my letters. Since I wasn’t on his journey, I was no longer a fixed asset for him. And shortly after he began his wealth binge, he gave up all his meaningful relationships – to the church & to others who were once important. Today, I assume, if he is still alive, that he is still addicted to accumulating the highest net worth. His god had become his own wealth.

Jesus does not mince words with persons like this: he calls them FOOLS. The bible has four different Greek words for “fool.” The first is “amoetes” – which means “mindless.” My friend was certainly not mindless; he was sharp-minded. The second is “asophos” – meaning without wisdom or sophistication. Again, my friend was very wise and sophisticated by worldly standards. Third is the word “moros” meaning “moron” or without the ability to think. Here again my

friend was hardly a moron. The fourth word is “aphron” – without the mind of God. In today’s gospel, the bible uses this 4th term for “fool:” “aphronite,” a person who no longer seeks God’s pleasure but goes only for the perishables of life. The landowner or farmer in today’s parable was the same kind of fool.

Like my executive friend, this farmer had at one time been a really nice guy. He was probably highly respected in town; he was certainly admired by many as a businessman. He worked hard; he consecrated himself to long hours; he never took vacations; he managed his labor force well; and he was a good investor of profits. All this enabled him to become a wealthy farmer. So what’s wrong with his story? Nothing to this point – God has no problem with good investors, with wise businessmen or with profits.

It’s the next step where the farmer forgets that life is NOT GIVEN JUST FOR THE TAKING. He confuses ownership with stewardship. God did not put us here to OWN things but rather to MANAGE things for each other’s benefit. This farmer only wanted to possess what he had accumulated – he had become a prisoner of his own possessions; he was addicted to needing more and more wealth only for himself.

This farmer was like the man in NYC who one day received a copy of the New York Times – but it was dated a year in advance. In that paper were all the stock changes that had occurred to that moment. The man was ecstatic; he could make a killing on the market. As he was about to call his stockbroker he turned the page and found in bold print the obituaries. Among the listings was his own death. Only then did he realize that a life invested only for oneself forever leads to a dead end – it is a fool’s journey.

Like this investor, like the farmer, like my executive friend – we are all tempted daily to become addicted to greed & the accumulation of wealth. The mentality of our world is: “more & more for me, & only me!” This mentality is even being bolstered by one of our fastest growing small businesses: THE MINI or SELF STORAGE business. Self-storage has become the boom industry of our day. Doesn’t that say something about our addiction to things? How many SHEDS does it take to give the average American real security? Obviously, whether barns or sheds, there is ultimately no security in this building enterprise. So the question of the day: how do Christians find a lasting security?

Jesus answers in this parable: “WE BECOME RICH TOWARD GOD.” That’s a nice religious cliché – but what does it really mean? Well, who was the greatest example of “becoming rich toward God?” Obviously, it was none other than Jesus himself.

And how did Jesus show that he possessed the richness of God? Quite simply, he became a MASTER OF GIVING rather than an ADDICT of accumulating. Instead of calling his follower’s “fools,” he called them “Blessed.” He told his followers to live in his image, where it is “more blessed to give than to receive.” Then he gave his followers a whole list of beatitudes so that followers would

know how to “bless & give to others.” And even when he was betrayed & mocked & ridiculed & finally crucified – he still kept blessing & giving the gift of love ... he said: “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.” Jesus’ whole life was a down-to-earth demonstration of giving wealth away – always seeking to feed and nourish others with the abundance of God’s gifts. That’s what it means to “become rich toward God” – TO BLESS OTHERS WITH THE WEALTH OF GIFTS THAT GOD HAS FIRST GIVEN!

And let’s face it – over the centuries we have admired those like Jesus who have become MASTERS OF GIVING. Names like Abraham Lincoln, Winston Churchill, Mahatma Ghandi, Martin Luther King ... and a multitude of names here at 1st English who have been Masters of Giving. These are the ones that have become rich toward God – like their Lord, they have mastered the art of giving and remain consecrated to blessing others.

There are others who will be forever remembered for their greed and addiction to accumulating things of this world: names like Hitler, Stalin, Mussolini, and those who only climb ladders for personal gain. They will go down in the archives of time as “fools” – those without the mind & heart of God.

Life has revealed to us the WAY of Security & the WAY of addiction to wealth. Jesus has called us to choose HIS WAY of richness toward God. Like him, we are called and chosen to be Masters of Giving. Is it any wonder that day after day, week after week – Jesus still comes among us and says: “Take and eat ... take and drink”; this is the eternal model of a giving God ... it is the WAY God forgives you, blesses you and transforms you from an addiction to the things of this world.” There is no greater WAY, or TRUTH, or LIFE to follow if we want to be free of addictive greed. Thanks be to God for the richness of his security through the Master of Giving, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.