

THE PRESENTATION OF OUR LORD (replaces Epiphany IV)  
Luth. Church of the Master - Troy  
February 2, 1975

"ON LOAN"

"For this child I prayed; and the Lord has granted me my petition which I made to him. Therefore I have lent him to the Lord; as long as he lives, he is lent to the Lord."

(I Sam. 1:27-28)

Both Samuel and Jesus are dedicated to the Lord in today's lessons. Unlike our practice of Confirmation, where the child himself confirms or dedicates himself to his faith, the parents of Jewish sons <sup>offer</sup> took this responsibility upon themselves.

Hannah's language in I Samuel <sup>is very</sup> ~~really~~ captivating.  
"Therefore I have lent him to the Lord; as long as he lives, he is lent to the Lord." What beautiful imagery of our relationship to God and creation. We are "On Loan." God offers us a loan of time -- he gives us <sup>us</sup> ~~so~~ that we might flicker for a moment of time's eternity. He hopes that during this flicker of time, we will shed his light on our human relationships.

Yes, each of us is ON LOAN. We possess nothing - and no one. We are simply lent a few decades with the hope that we will use them to the glory of God.

As we celebrate the dedication of Samuel and Jesus, we are invited to think about our own dedication to the LOAN God has given us. How have we lent ourselves to the Lord?

The way we offer ourselves might be compared to the way three house-owners in Troy <sup>could</sup> responded to their mortgage loans.

First, there's Mr. Bragmore. Mr. Bragmore responds to his loan by telling you how great he is to have got it -- then he tells you again --

and continues TO NEVER STOP telling you HOW GREAT he is because HE HAS EVERYTHING! Bragmore's response to everything he's been offered in life IS A POSSESSIVE ONE.

Bragmore never stops talking about what he owns - what he's got - what he's done -- WHAT HE did for HIS kids. From Bragmore's perspective, he owns life.

Some Christians dedicate themselves to God in the same way. Their song of faith IS NOT "How Great Thou Art," but "How Great I Am" <sup>to POSSESS YOU, GOD.</sup> because I possess this gift or that one -- because I have all wisdom and knowledge of God.

many  
There are times ~~all~~ of us become trapped in this ~~super~~-pious position. We no longer see trust in God as a gift to be used and shared -- rather we become obsessed with our possession of faith. We make "faith" an end, rather than a means to an end. <sup>possession of faith</sup>

We talk about "faith" as something to be possessed, rather than something to be shared. No one possesses faith - it is God's gift of love TO BE SHARED IN HIS NAME.

The second character of our parable reacts 180° contrary to Mr. Bragmore. Here we have Mr Paranoid. For this man, the loan becomes a stumbling block for the rest of his days. All he talks about and thinks about IS HOW MUCH HE STILL OWES. Instead of the loan enhancing his life and existence, it simply becomes another burden -- like a prison ball around his neck.

His days are spent in fretting and complaining that ~~he's afraid~~ he won't be able to make the next month's payments. The loan has become a jeopardy rather than a source of joy.

Similarly, many Christians respond to the loan of life and faith. Instead of gratitude for the gift of faith and the gospel, we find so

many Christians dwelling upon FEARS that their faith isn't good enough. Faith for them becomes a ritual of trying TO BECOME PERFECT - forgetting that God offered his son because man was incapable of perfection.

Here the gift of God's love and forgiveness is turned into a utopian commandment -- namely, I must pay back God completely with love and forgiveness before I can experience the benefits of his gift.

This response to God's loan of life and faith leads to a negative and hopeless Christianity. It is amazing how many Christian sects are today thriving on this perversion of faith. It leads Christians into a GLOOM & DOOM response rather than a REPENTANCE & RESURRECTION Response.

The third loan response is that reflected in today's texts. Our parable here shows us a Mr. Hope. His response to the mortgage loan is a new confidence - a revitalized security - a deepened thankfulness -- and a desire to invest HIS ENERGIES ANEW. The loan for him means hope and possibilities. He ~~knows~~ he ~~does~~ not possess anything -- it ~~was~~ still a loan -- but it ~~was~~ a loan TO BE USED for the fulfillment of life.

Likewise, we have Hannah, Elkanah, Joseph and Mary. The loan of life in their sons MEANT new opportunities for them and others to experience the fulness of life. To dedicate these sons to God COULD ONLY mean new confidence and security for that generation and those to come. They were deeply grateful for the NEW SERVANTHOOD their sons represented.

Similarly, this is our response to the loan of life and faith that God has given us. We have new security and confidence NOT BECAUSE WE POSSESS LIFE OR FAITH, but because God has enabled us to use his gifts and to share them. This is what we rejoice in as Christians.

Further, our response is thankfulness FOR THIS LOAN. A few years ago a man wrote an article telling about his own life, distraught by problems. He was left with three young children when his wife died.

Then he remarried and a handicapped child was born to him and his new wife.... a child beyond the help, even, of our 20th century specialists. One day this man chanced upon his young son kneeling in prayer.

He asked the lad, who desperately wanted to be rid of his handicap, what he was praying for. The boy replied, "I was thanking God that I have such fine parents."

God loans us life and faith - never on this side of heaven do we experience the perfection of that loan. But it is still God's gift -- and his caring love is behind it. For the brief flicker of time that we have HIS LOAN, we use the gifts we have to his glory -- always thanking him by serving him in the image of his compassion.

And just so that we don't forget his REAL CHARACTER - he regularly gathers us around his table/again offering the security and confidence of his love -- again hoping that we will be thankful for it -- again LOANING US his example so that we might share it WHILE WE YET LIVE .....

We own nothing - the church possesses nothing - it is only the steward of God's mysteries -- God gives us his loan of love thru the sacraments - through the gifts of the Spirit - through our fellowship and families - through all creation. And God wills that we take his gifts and CONTINUALLY MOLD and RESHAPE them to his will. Let us dedicate ourselves accordingly.

Amen

4TH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY  
Luth Church of the Master  
Jan. 30, 1977

"ANOTHER FOUR LETTER WORD"

"Love bears all things, believes all things,  
hopes all things, endures all things. Love  
never ends." I Cor. 13:7-8a

There is rearely a week that passes that  
IT is not found somewhere among the top ten  
hits.

IT is often demeaned because people talk about  
it as if it is something that you can "fall  
into." And further, it is regularly blasphemed  
when it is limited in its definition to sex  
or sentimental talk.

It is daily romanticized and cheapened by  
Hollywood -- from soap opera to movie screen,  
people fall "into it" and "out of it" as if  
it was as easy as climbing in and out of bed.

Most pre-maritals sentimentalize IT -- they  
make it into an emotional feeling. They think  
because their chemical juices are running  
that they must have it.

Daily, people confront one another in court  
claiming that the opposite side NO LONGER HAS IT,  
OR NO LONGER GIVES IT, OR NO LONGER FEELS IT.

Preachers forever use it, and abuse it,  
and sometimes even confuse it.

Yes, IT has become a household word; for  
many people JUST ANOTHER FOUR-LETTER WORD --  
for too many a FOUR-LETTER WORD without much  
meaning or understanding -- FAR TOO EASILY  
SAID, FAR TOO OFTEN not truly understood or  
intended.

Yes, another household word, where we say  
"we love this" or we "love that" -- making the  
meaning of love into a sentimental, syrupy,  
elusive feeling rather than a power of the will.

Is it any wonder that the state of human relationships is what it is -- whether divorce, prejudice, immorality, or violence. We have become a confused people ABOUT LOVE.

Paul faced the same situation back in Corinth in the first century. He was confronted by a confused people. Not only confused about LOVE, but confused about the whole of religion. It's possible that's our problem as well.

The church Paul had started was growing fast and furiously. The people were expressing their religious convictions in all sorts of ways. But the people of Corinth were perplexed. They could not tell which of all these religious expressions was most clearly "OF GOD."

So Paul sat himself down and gave them an answer in one of the most magnificent passages of scripture: I Corinthians 13. Of all the expressions of religion, he wrote, the only one that really counts in the end IS LOVE. Other religious expressions may have value-- preaching, teaching, healing, even "speaking in tongues." But unless they give expression to love they are worthless.

Love, Paul says, is the indispensable mark of true religion. You can have faith enough to move mountains - but without love, it is nothing. Because faith without love ends in witch hunts and ugly religious controversies and ridiculous absurdities like magical powers and other self-proclaimed Messiahs.

How about self-sacrifice? Paul says you can give everything you have to feed the poor but unless the motive is a deep concern for their well being - it is trash. Being a martyr without love is a wasted life -- perhaps nothing more than mock-heroics or self-pity.

How about knowledge? Paul says you can know the Bible backwards and forwards, you can be a great scholar, and yet without love, your knowledge is worthless. Merely knowing enough about God is

not enough. Only love ... never ends.

O.K. We may all follow up through these first two points -- that love has often just become another misunderstood household term, and that love is the greatest expression of religion.

But knowing these two things STILL doesn't give us a handle on OUR LOVE. Time and time again, even Christians limit love to a good feeling, to a good emotional experience, or in some other way sentimentalize love.

And although feelings are involved in love -- love is much more than a feeling. Love is a power -- a power that is NOT innately ours -- but a power that is given to us.

Possibly love can be illustrated by the image of a flower ~~seed and~~ bud. At birth, we are like a flower bud. We are still closed; incapable of giving the beauty of love -- almost totally dependent.

A flower bud must receive warmth from the sun and nourishment from soil and rain before it will expose the beauty that is within it. God has created it with the potential to give beauty - but first it must receive nourishment.

Likewise, each of us. God has created us with the potential POWER ~~of~~ love. But first, we must be nourished with it -- through parents, friends, and the Word of God.

That's why Lutherans put so much emphasis upon infant baptism and the parents commitment to an active life in the Word. So that the child will be properly nourished with the Love of God.

So it is, that real love is not just some gushy emotion -- it is a power given to us by God. And Paul makes very clear what the dimensions of that power are:

Paul says we are energized with the following components from God: patience and kindness; with a spirit that is not jealous or boastful; a spirit that is not arrogant or rude; a spirit, yes a power that is not irritable, or resentful, that does not insist on its own way. A power that does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices at right.

And what is this power: it is the power of the cross. That's the power of love that God nourishes each of us with --

And it is with that power that WE DO NOT ask what others can do for us, but rather what we can do for others.

It is that power of the cross -- that infinite, never ending acceptance of us that God gave through the cross of Christ -- it is that power which makes LOVE more than just another four-letter word. It is that power which makes love the greatest expression of religion.

And it is that power -- given to us by God -- which bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things.

It is only that power -- far more than a good emotional feeling -- yes, that power of the cross WHICH NEVER ENDS.

amen



EPIPHANY IV  
Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo  
January 30, 1983  
Peter R. Martyn, Pastor

"WHAT THE WORLD NEEDS NOW!"  
(in conjunction with the Luther Home of Mercy  
filmstrip, "Love In Action.")

(Sermon opens with recordings of Dione Warwick  
singing "What the World Needs Now" and the Beatles  
singing "All You Need Is Love.")

It was Dione Warwick and the Beatles in the 60's, the  
reality today has not changed. The words may be different,  
but the concept -- the theme -- the central  
idea remains the same! Nothing in all creation has been  
given more attention than the theme of LOVE. It permeates  
nearly all pop recordings ... it captures a major portion  
of nearly all movies ... it remains the central reason  
and remembrance for our presence here on Sunday mornings.

Paul said it majestically 2000 years ago: "So faith,  
hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of  
these is love." Who could possibly disagree with such  
truth? Very few have been able to say it better than  
St. Paul. His lyric of love has out-lasting poets and the best  
recording stars through the ages. It will always be on  
the top of the charts.

But even with all its romantic beauty -- it can suffer  
from the same shortcoming of the multitude of recordings  
and movies about love. Even though it truthfully conveys  
God's Word -- it may never get beyond what I call the 1st  
level of love -- the expression level of love! Obviously -  
the expression level of love is most essential -- there is  
nothing more frustrating than loving someone and never  
hearing an expression of the same!!

But that expression remains a 1st level of love. And  
what the world needs now ... and has always needed ...  
is more than romantic sayings and songs of love. Because  
as Paul says -- all those songs and sayings can be just  
like noisy gongs or cymbals ... just a lot of noise.

What the world desperately needs is the tangibility of love -- the tangible outreach of human care! The world needs this second level of love -- a love made known by Jesus Christ. God had expressed himself at the first level. And he could have merely let it go at that -- he could have cried out through the universe: "I love you, I love you, I love you!" But words alone are not God's true nature. He knew the world needed more than the noise of his love ... more than a good recording of his voice. The world needed to be acted upon -- to be touched by the human incarnation of love.

So God entered the world physically! And through the physical touch of healing and holding and feeding and sacrificing -- he achieved the second level of love: HE RESPONDED AND FULFILLED THE NEEDS OF OTHERS! He totally shared his life -- even unto death -- for the sake of others. That's getting beyond the 1st level of words.

We often hear people say, "I really love Hope Church." But too often that's exactly where it ends: JUST WORDS! No physical presence! No outreach! No offering of self! No sharing of relationships - which is the real meaning of "church" in the 1st place. The real greatness of love is not in saying the words -- but in the tangible fulfillment of those words.

God shows us the tangible level -- the higher level, where words become actions! But God even goes one step further -- he gives us a third level. For God's love not only reaches out -- but it does so in a special way: that's the 3rd level of love -- the manner of action:

It is a manner of patience/perserverance; yet kindness;  
it is a manner without jealousy or boastfulness;  
it is a manner not selfish, irritable or resentful;  
it is a manner which does not keep record of wrongs,  
but concentrates on the positive things!  
it is a manner which bears and endures all things.

WHERE IN THE WORLD DOES SUCH LOVE IN ACTION EXIST? Obviously - it exists between God and each of us ... and for all I know it may exist every day in your family.

But there is one place it exists, every day, 365 days a year. Oh not perfectly -- but it is LOVE IN ACTION in the manner of Christ! For the final eight minutes of this sermon - I want to share with you a glimpse of that LOVE IN ACTION.

Hopefully - this will not just be another eight minute recording of LOVE -- hopefully you will not only hear and see this tangible expression of love -- hopefully YOU WILL BE MOVED TO REACH OUT AND TANGIBLY SHARE IN IT!

As God has blessed us with that tangible love - LET US so bless others!

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(Presentation of "Love In Action" - Luther Home of Mercy story)

EPIPHANY IV  
Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo  
February 3, 1985  
Peter R. Martyn, Pastor

## "TEACHING THAT MAKES A DIFFERENCE"

"They went to Capernaum, and when the Sabbath came, Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach. The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law. ... The people asked: 'What is this? A new teaching -- and with authority! He even gives orders to evil spirits and they obey him.'" Mark 1:21-22;27

"The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law." That one sentence is filled with tremendous power, and yet we don't know SPECIFICALLY what made Jesus' teaching so amazing, so astonishing, so authoritative! Mark just doesn't give us the specific techniques of Jesus' teaching. All he says is that the Jews in the synagogue were amazed.

What is it that made it so authoritative? so amazing? Certainly Jesus must have had a tremendous combination of content, style and personality; he made such a remarkable impression -- there had to be something really unique about him ... something that really made a difference. At this early stage in his ministry he certainly had no reputation, no claim-to-fame, no credentials; and yet he seemingly didn't need any of these. He spoke and people listened ... with great fascination, amazement and interest.

Every parish pastor would give his eye-teeth for some of the specifics of Jesus' teaching style. In fact, every parent and teacher would love to know the make-up of Jesus' power and authority. More than that, every congregation would love to have Christ's authority when it comes to securing a teaching staff.

Every summer, when Pastor Bob and the Education Committee send calls to our teachers, we wish we had the amazing authority of Christ. Because every time we extend "the call for teachers," we always get the same response: A TREMENDOUS RESERVATION ... MANY TIMES OUTRIGHT REFUSAL! Two years ago the Sunday School coordinator made 60 personal calls in order to get 10 teachers. That meant that 50 people turned her down before she got 10 people to say "yes." Sixty people were offered the "authority of Christ," and yet most of them said -- GIVE IT TO SOMEBODY ELSE!! Why is it that so many are UNWILLING to share his authority??

Most of the time, it's because we have the wrong notion of what that authority is all about. Almost without exception, the people "who said NO" did so because they didn't feel qualified to teach. For instance, most of them

said, "they didn't know enough about the Bible. They didn't have command of enough Bible verses." Others said they didn't have enough theological training. Still others claimed they were not familiar enough with the Lutheran traditions and teachings. And still others felt that they did not have the credentials to teach -- they just felt inadequate or totally unqualified.

This situation is hardly unique to Hope Church. All congregations in our sophisticated times are having difficulty getting teachers. In fact, some congregations have gone so far as to hire professional teachers to do their Sunday School teaching. Some congregations are actually looking only to those persons who have "official teaching credentials" to do their teaching.

How pathetically sad that we have missed the real AUTHORITY of Jesus Christ! As one scholar has said: "Jesus authority was not derived from tradition ... he did not live in the prison of quotation marks." He did not rely upon mere precedents of Israel, even though he lived up to the Mosaic Law. He did not get into the hair-splitting business of Bible verses and quotes and precedents -- that was the authority of the scribes and Pharisees. He came with a new style -- a new teaching. He came with a style that REALLY MADE A DIFFERENCE IN PEOPLES' LIVES.

Jesus' authority was not based upon precedent or Bible verses or denominational traditions! His authority was based upon HUMAN NEEDS -- AND THE FULFILLMENT OF THOSE HUMAN NEEDS! That's what made his teaching so authoritative -- he sought to fulfill the needs of those he served. That is what his truth is all about -- he was not fulfilling a religious tradition -- he was fulfilling human needs. Those who have REAL AUTHORITY IN LIFE ARE THOSE WHO SEEK TO FULFILL THE REAL NEEDS OF PEOPLE.

A man came to Jesus possessed by a demon -- an evil spirit. What was the man's need? TO BE FREED ... TO BE RESCUED AND RELEASED FROM THIS EVIL POWER. Jesus could have quoted a lot of Bible verses over this man. Jesus could have told this man what it meant to be a "true Lutheran." Jesus could have told this man that the world was full of sin (as if the man didn't already know). But all such talk would have been just that -- good religious talk, good pious doctrine.

Instead, Jesus recognized that this man was suffering from some inherent evil power. That power needed to be emptied from this man's life. So he told that power to "shut up" and "come out." Jesus taught by his deeds -- that was the authority of his teaching. He offered more than

good religious words -- he taught by OFFERING GOOD RELIGIOUS DEEDS -- BY HELPING AND HEALING!

Jesus calls us to USE THAT AUTHORITY IN OUR TEACHING -- TO DO SOMETHING FOR OTHERS ON THE BASIS OF THEIR NEEDS, NOT ON THE BASIS OF OUR IDEAS, OR UNDERSTANDINGS, OR TRADITIONS. The authority of Christ IS TO RECOGNIZE THE NEED OF OUR BROTHER/SISTER ... AND TO SEEK TO FILL THAT NEED WITH ACTIONS AND NOT MERE WORDS OR THOUGHTS.

And what are our greatest human needs? Obviously, they vary from one person to the next. But without a doubt, each of us has an overwhelming need TO BE ACCEPTED, TO BE FORGIVEN, TO BE LOVED. We have these needs because none of us is totally free of demonic forces. We are all possessed by the demon of perfection -- that demon drives us to the limits to be perfect, to be the best, to have the most, to always look the sharpest - never frazzled, never upset, never feeling down. What an impossible demon this can be. Along with him, there is the demon of guilt -- that power which haunts and rejects and condemns us for our past actions and sins. Then there is the demon of self-righteousness -- that power which has us always comparing ourselves to everyone else -- always seeking to portray ourselves as so much better than the rest. We all suffer from these demons, and many others. IN SHORT, WE NEED TO BE FREED! ONLY THE AUTHORITY OF CHRIST CAN FREE US -- because his power rescues us from life's demonic powers!

Christ has given each of us his authority -- the power to be free - and to free one another from life's demons of self-destruction. That power was given in baptism. There's not one of us who doesn't have it -- because it's not dependent upon Bible verses, or theological degrees, or any other forms of our own achievement or knowledge. It's dependent upon one thing -- THE LOVE OF CHRIST ... AND OUR WILLINGNESS TO ACCEPT IT AND LIVE BY IT.

Here again, just in case there's any doubt about it, Christ offers us his loving authority in this bread and wine. THIS IS THE LOVE AND FORGIVENESS OF GOD -- THIS LOVE, THIS AUTHORITY, THESE ELEMENTS MEAN WE ARE TOTALLY ACCEPTED, TOTALLY FORGIVEN, TOTALLY FREED FROM WHATEVER DEMONS ARE SEEKING TO POSSESS US. This Sacrament is not merely some 2000 year-old idea; it is not merely some intellectual concept of Christian history. It is the very power and authority of Christ -- given, shed, and broken for us all.

We are all qualified teachers of Christ. Maybe we don't teach in formal classrooms, but we are all teachers in the classroom of life. We teach every single moment with our eyes, our words, our actions, our time. What do we give our lives to more than anything else -- THAT'S WHAT WE ARE TEACHING! What power do we share more than anything

else - THAT'S WHAT WE ARE TEACHING. When we forgive, we ARE TEACHING that this is the authority of Christ in our lives. When we show the difference between right and wrong, we ARE TEACHING that Christ's authority has high standards. When we love, WE ARE TEACHING that Christ's authority is one of kindness, patience, and compassion. When we shelter the homeless, WE ARE TEACHING that Christ's authority means MORE THAN TALKING ABOUT RELIGIOUS CONCEPTS -- IT MEANS SERVING THE POOR, THE NEEDY, THE DESTITUTE ... WHEREVER THEY MAY BE.

That's the authority of Christ. It was beautifully illustrated in Friday's BLADE in a story of St. Paul's Methodist Church assuming leadership for the homeless at the old Flower Hospital in Toledo. Here is a congregation in the inner city -- a congregation whose building was destroyed by fire ... a congregation which could easily say "it's impossible for us to care for the needy and homeless -- we've got to build a new church home for ourselves." But instead of rebuilding a church tradition, St. Paul's is building a home for the homeless. That's living by the authority of Christ rather than the traditions of brick and mortar churchmanship. Thank God for people like those at St. Paul's -- for they are seeking to BUILD UP CHRIST'S AUTHORITY. For Christ's authority TEACHES US to destroy the demonic powers of this world, whether they be disease, hunger, greed, or guilt.

To teach with Christ's authority means so much more than impressive, intellectual or theological ideas. It means living by the example of Christ. That's TEACHING THAT REALLY MAKES A DIFFERENCE. That's the GOOD NEWS that needs to be shared in this world! That's authority that goes beyond Bible texts, or theological degrees, or any of the other human credentials or traditions. For of such is the authority of Christ -- to experience the love of God, and to share that experience from the heart. THAT'S REAL AUTHORITY -- BECAUSE THAT'S TEACHING THROUGH ACTS OF LOVE RATHER THAN MERE INTELLECTUAL IDEAS. AND THAT'S TEACHING THAT MAKES A DIFFERENCE.

AMEN.

EPIPHANY IV  
Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo  
February 1, 1987  
Peter R. Martyn, Pastor

## "SOMETHING TO BOAST ABOUT!"

But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. ... so that no one may boast before him. ... Therefore, as it is written, "Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord." I Cor. 1:27,31 (This final statement, like the O.T. lesson from Micah, comes from Jeremiah 9:23-24: "Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches; but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth; for in these things I delight.")

To mainline Greeks and Jews of the first century, you were only something or somebody if you were highly recognized by others in the culture. To the Greeks, articulate wisdom was the source of boasting. It was not what you said, but how you said it that made you great. If you had a cunning tongue, if you glittered with persuasive rhetoric, if you were a mental acrobat -- then and only then you had reason for boasting.

Likewise, for a Jew, signs of physical strength and power were sources of great boasting. The Jews looked for wonder workers, miracle men, messiahs who could deliver victory over the negating elements of earth. Certainly such power could not be seen in a crucified Messiah. Is it any wonder that Jesus Christ was foolishness to the Greeks -- and a stumbling block to the Jews.

Instead of choosing an articulate, highly sophisticated, well-educated aristocrat -- God chose a baby born of a poverty-stricken welfare couple. To the Greeks this was the epitome of foolishness. Likewise, instead of an all-powerful Israeli general, God chose a suffering servant -- one who was even so weak as to be persecuted on a cross. To the Jews, suffering was certainly no characteristic of their son of God -- a total stumbling block to belief.

Has it changed very much since that first century? What is the source of our boasting today? Do we "boast" in Christ -- are we thrilled by his incarnation, his loving kindness, his sacrificial character, his forgiving spirit? To many honest Americans, Jesus Christ is still foolishness! And his crucifixion continues to be the stumbling block for hosts of people. Let's face it, suffering and sacrifice just aren't the name of the game in America!!

So what do we boast about? Well, "If you've got it, then



flaunt it!" "Invest in Durable Goods - Volvo, a Car You Can Believe In!" "Bayer - The Wonder Drug that Works Wonders ... an aspirin a day keeps the heart o.k." "Look Who Gives You The World as a Perk -- Northwest Orient Airlines." "AT & T, The Right Choice." "Crest -- As Close As You Can Get To A Lifetime Guarantee." We need only look at this glimpse of advertising to see the source of our boasting. Much like the Ancient Greeks and Jews, we continue to flaunt our own wisdom, our own strength, our own creativity, our own productivity as the objects of ultimate human pride and worth. In short, we boast about ourselves.

Now please don't misunderstand me at this point. God is not against self-worth and self-esteem (and neither am I). God very much desires these traits from all of us. But he asks: What is the true source of your self-worth and self-esteem? For the Greeks and Jews of the 1st century, they never got beyond themselves. Their self-worth and self-esteem was totally correlated to their social and cultural status. In short, their worth/esteem was merely a by-product of the way others saw them. Anyone who did not have social worth or cultural clout was viewed as nothing. Needless to say, that meant 98% of all Christians were worthless ... of no value ... because the earliest followers came from the lowliest ranks of society.

Obviously, the situation of Christianity is radically changed today. Most Western Christians come from solidly middle class society. But the question for us is no different than for our 1st century brothers/sisters: What is the true source of our boasting? Is it our social worth? Is it our cultural clout? Are we only something ... or somebodies when others give us such recognition? Is that the real essence of self-worth?

Civilizations change ... societies become more sophisticated ... wisdom and knowledge explode voluminously - but people and lifestyles remain pretty much the same. Just like the Greeks and Jews - the wisdom of God's incarnation and offering of his crucifixion still seem like foolishness to many and still a stumbling block to others. What has the world's explosion of wisdom changed in 2000 years? How has human power and productivity made this planet a more secure habitation?

Well, we know from the time of Christ until 1750, human knowledge doubled. Then it doubled again between 1750 and 1900. Then doubled again between 1900 and 1950. And by 1960, it had doubled again in just ten years. Every 60 seconds, 2000 pages of new information are added to human wisdom. And yet, how has this changed us? As we read in 2 Timothy "we are always learning yet never coming to a knowledge of the truth." And where has all our wisdom taken us? General Omar Bradley said, "We have too many men of

science and too few men of God. We have grasped the mystery of the atom, and rejected the Sermon on the Mount. The world has achieved brilliance without wisdom, power without conscience. Ours is a world of nuclear giants and ethical infants. We know more about war than we know about peace, more about killing than we do about living."

Recently I was reading Christian Century magazine, and the journalist tells of visiting an Episcopal Church. Upon entering, she noted the mountains of clothing and canned goods stacked high along the hallways. When finally greeting the rector, she said, "You should rename this Emergency Episcopal Church." The rector warmly responded: "Oh, don't be fooled by all this stuff. If I wanted to be sure that my people WOULD DO NOTHING ABOUT SOCIAL JUSTICE, I'd go out and get a thousand hungry people to wait at the doorstep. And my good churchpeople would start organizing other people to donate food, to collect food, to stack food, to transport food, to cook the food, and even to clean up afterward."

Yes, it's easy to motivate charity. My people would be so busy moving food from one end of the town to the other that they wouldn't have any time or energy left TO DO ANYTHING ABOUT WHY ALL THOSE PEOPLE WERE HUNGRY IN THE FIRST PLACE!"

Now there's something to boast about -- what causes the injustice of hunger in the first place? This Episcopal rector finally got to the heart of God Almighty -- that he has blessed us in order that we might be a blessing to others so that hunger is wiped off the face of the earth! The rector concluded: "It's time we stop merely moving cans from one basement to another ... and start asking: WHAT ARE THE ACTIONS THAT CAUSE AND TOLERATE SO MUCH HUNGER??"

That's what Christians boast about! Questions that get to the heart of God's blessings to us ... and our willingness to see that his blessings are distributed fairly and justly in this society. That's what Micah and Jeremiah meant by "walking humbly with our God."

Too often, in America and other wealthy lands, our wisdom and strength sounds something like this: "Wow, look how much I've got all for myself!" God Almighty calls that the worst kind of boasting -- because it is arrogant pride. It is not self-worth or self-esteem, but rather pure greed and human idolatry. And that's nothing for anyone to boast about.

But there is a way in which we can boast about our blessings. It sounds something like this: "Thank you, Lord, for helping me to share so much of what I've got!" Now that's something to boast about! It's not the saying or the having, but the doing ... the sharing that's the real boasting. AND THAT'S SOMETHING TO BOAST ABOUT!

But Christian boasting goes yet one step further. It's one thing to boast by sharing God's blessings. And that's truly the way we walk humbly with our God. But what happens when we fail ... when we fall short ... when we miss the mark? Ah, now there is the second source of Christian boasting -- for Christians not only boast in sharing their blessings, but boast also in their weaknesses. This is one of the greatest graces given to a Christian -- he does not have to fear his failures, his faults, his shortcomings ... for God is gracious, and will no longer remember our past iniquity.

The Iran-Contra deal continues to hang over the head of America and our Democratic way of life. Unfortunately, our politicians (and many Americans) do not realize that their greatest strength is in their weakness: TO ADMIT WRONGDOING, SO THAT IT NO LONGER DOES WRONG! When will America learn of the wisdom and strength given in honest confession?? Denial and other forms of "taking the 5th" only intensify distrust and magnify the disaster.

One of the greatest attributes of Godly wisdom and strength is the willingness to admit weakness and defeat. How tragic that we have developed pompous government officials who boast in praying to the Lord but never seem to hear the Lord's command "to repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand." This whole macho mentality leads to the tough guy stance -- in which the law courts are forced to "air the dirty laundry" through multi-million dollar law suits. When will we learn the greatest wisdom saying of all times: "I'm sorry -- please forgive me ... I didn't mean to do you any harm." NOW THAT'S SOMETHING TO BOAST ABOUT!

And that's why we again gather around this table. Because it's the only summit table of supreme wisdom and strength in this world. For it's not our great human wisdom that we flaunt at this table. And it's not our great power that we parade around this circle. We come to this table to boast of the greatest gift ever given -- the forgiveness of Jesus Christ. For he is the foolish one who forgives our egotism that has caused so much idolatry. And he is the weak one who forgives our slander which has mocked his goodness and falsely nailed him and so many to the cross. And he is the suffering servant who forgives our greed which has degraded the neediest of God's children in the world.

Yes, we do have something to boast about "in the Lord." For he has blessed us, that we might be his blessing to others. And that's our greatest self-worth. And he has even given us self-esteem beyond that! For he forgives our human failures and weaknesses - in order that we might again become the keepers of his loving beatitudes ... which in summary lead us TO DO JUSTICE, TO LOVE MERCY, AND TO WALK HUMBLY WITH OUR GOD! AMEN.

EPIPHANY IV  
Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo  
January 28, 1990  
Peter R. Martyn, Pastor

## "POVERTY THAT YIELDS RICHES"

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of God." Matthew 5:3

This year is called the "A-Lectionary" year -- the year of Matthew. Starting today, and continuing for the next three Sundays, we are confronted with some of the most radical teachings of the New Testament -- Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. Obviously - "radical" here means "to the very roots of our faith" - that which speaks to the heart and soul of faithful living.

The Sermon on the Mount begins with the well-known Beatitudes. Some commentators have called the Beatitudes the "Be-Happy Attitudes," or the Blessed Attitudes or the Happy Blessings. Other less enthusiastic critics have called these teachings "other worldly idealism," or foolish wisdom, or just plain "heavenly hype beyond earthly hope." Whatever the Beatitudes are called, they still present the true portrait of Christian character. If you want to know what makes Christians tick - look no further than the Beatitudes. In these nine traits - the Christian lifestyle of gentleness, compassion, spiritual neediness, mercy, peacemaking, and sacrificial giving is summarized. Obviously - no Christian perfectly reflects these traits externally, but they possess them in their hearts and seek to produce them in their lives.

To be fair to all the Beatitudes, a full day's sermon might not even do justice. Neither you nor I could handle that. So let's just look at the first Beatitude, which sets the tone for all the others but is so often misinterpreted: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Recently I shared this Beatitude with my Level III catechism class. Like so many people - some of the students thought Jesus was saying "Blessed are the poor." Jesus is certainly not blessing the poor or material poverty. Although I must admit, there are some things that we can all learn from the poor and those who work for the poor.

I'm reminded of the story of the nun whose order was the Little Sisters of the Poor. Each year these nuns canvassed their neighborhood for donations for the elderly poor. One year, as a sister was canvassing the wealthier section of the area, she was met at the door by the sophisticated and well-to-do man of the house. Being the great free-thinker and sacreligious person that he was, he thought this an opportune time to embarrass the sister and her cause. He said, "Sister, I'm quite ready to give you a hundred dollar donation - but only under one condition: you must first drink a glass of champagne with me." The sister's hesitation was short. After

all, the \$100 would buy a great quantity of food for the poor - she could certainly manage one small glass of champagne. He brought a chilled bottle of champagne, and the brave Little Sister emptied the glass with haste. Then, presenting the glass to her host, she said: "And now, my good sir, I'll have another glass, please, at the same price as the first!"

Well, Jesus is not urging us toward drinking champagne for the poor, nor toward vows of poverty, nor toward any other kind of external/material poverty. According to our Christian faith, blessedness (which literally means happiness) comes from the inside out not from the outside in. It is not the kind of house that a person lives in, but the kind of person who lives in the house THAT REALLY MATTERS. It is not the kind of clothing that a person wears, but the kind of person inside the clothing THAT REALLY COUNTS. It is not the kind of church that a person goes to, but the kind of person inside the church THAT HAS REAL SIGNIFICANCE.

When Jesus says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit," he is driving at something very fundamental and basic about our faith. He is saying, "Blessed are those persons who really feel their spiritual poverty ... who feel a need for ultimate and eternal direction and assurance." If a person is poor - that person really feels his or her poverty at a gut level. Poverty is not an academic or ethereal reality, it is felt daily and deeply within that person's being. So when Jesus says, "Blessed are those persons who feel their spiritual poverty ... he is saying, blessed (happy) are those who are not certain and confident of their own self-sufficiency ... who are aware that truth and certainty must be sought beyond themselves.

Is it any wonder that we identify the Beatitudes as GOOD NEWS?? What greater GOOD NEWS is there THAN a BEATITUDE that says that we don't have to have it all together all of the time?? What greater GOOD NEWS is there THAN a be-attitude that affirms me even when I don't have all the right answers. What better GOOD NEWS is there THAN a be-attitude that says I can still be happy even when I'm not totally secure and certain of myself!? What more potent GOOD NEWS is there THAN a be-attitude that says I am still a blessing even when I'm not right on target every time?! What more life giving be-attitude is there THAN one which says I am still acceptable EVEN when I don't yet know it all.

Is it any wonder that we baptize infants (like Sean) before they think they know it all. We are saying, "Blessed are the poor in spirit" ... blessed are those who will look to God for the ultimate relationships and realities of the good life. That's what baptism is saying - NEVER STOP TURNING BACK TO YOUR HEAVENLY FATHER FOR THE ULTIMATE TRUTH AND LIFE. Because when we turn back to God, we hear Jesus saying: "Blessed are those who know that they don't have to always have it all together!" THAT'S NOT POVERTY -- THAT'S OPENNESS ... AND OPENNESS IS TRUE RICHNESS. "Blessed are those who

are not yet fully certain and yet keep questing." That's not poverty, that's true wisdom ... and what greater wealth is there than wisdom? "Blessed are those who are still uncertain of themselves and yet still seeking GREATER certainty." That's not poverty, that's growth and human potential ... and that's the ultimate treasure of heaven on earth. "Blessed are those who know they have missed the mark yet keep on trying to find a better way." That's not poverty, that's the way of true greatness.

Yes, this first beatitude shows us the only POVERTY THAT YIELDS RICHES in life. It is a spiritual poverty ... a spiritual attitude in life which instructs us never to depend only upon ourselves for true greatness. The poor in spirit are those who have a radical dependence upon God that goes beyond dependence upon the finite touchables and tangibles of this world. The poor in spirit are those who have an earnest devouring hunger for God, while knowing at the same time that this hunger will never be fully satisfied and their cups will never be running over. The poor in spirit are those, who by their very nature, are thirsty and hungry for affirmation & guidance, for acceptance and challenge, for stimulation and service from outside of themselves. The poor in spirit never, never, never find themselves spiritually satisfied. Instead, they forever look to the kingdom of heaven for their direction and fulfillment.

Contrast this with what our society ... and even some churches .. identify as the "fully satisfied" - the truly mature. Which one of us hasn't heard a well-meaning Christian say, "I've been born again - I'm now fully filled with the Spirit." Or at the other end of the spectrum - "I've worked hard and made my own way to success in this world. I don't need God or anyone else." Those expressions of human arrogance are so often the greatest signals of poverty and insecurity ever heard. The gospel of the world says: "Blessed are the successful, for theirs are the principalities and powers of this world. Blessed are those who look satisfied and self-sufficient - they don't think they need God. Blessed are those who have it all together on the outside - they remain empty on the inside. Blessed are those who always smile and never sweat -- surely they think they have the peace that passes all human understanding. Blessed are those who forever play it safe, keep their distance, and always say they're trying to keep everybody happy - they will never suffer for a worthy cause. These are the ones who are truly poverty stricken in this world -- because they have made what's on the outside in more important than what's from the inside out.

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Before we can ever show the treasure of God's kingdom ... the riches of his grace on the outside -- we must first discover our internal poverty and decay ... the tremendous need for his love and mercy and abiding presence on the inside.

Recognizing the internal poverty and decay as a first step to external wholeness, happiness, and richness of the human spirit was graphically demonstrated by a seminary brother of mine in Chicago. He had complained of constant toothaches and mouth problems. But, like most poor seminarians needing dental work, he would never go to the dentist. He just wasn't ever ready to get in the chair.

Finally he decided to go to the University of Chicago Dental School and let someone there take a look at his mouth and teeth. A hygenist cleaned his teeth and took some xrays, and then the fun began. First, she brought in one dental student, then he went and got others, then he got others, til at last they called their professor to have a look at the internal disaster of his mouth. A young dentist literally worked his way through dental school on my friend's teeth. He filled them; he bridged them; he capped them, he crowned them and he worked on the gums. Nothing in his mouth was left untouched. In fact, after finishing the work, the dental student took an impression and told my friend it would remain as a constant reminder in his office of how impoverished someone can get on the inside before they will do anything about it.

Until my friend finally accepted the poverty of his dental condition -- his mouth and teeth and gums ... his oral life was slowly but surely going to pot. He had to accept the fact that his life was decaying from the inside before things would be better on the outside. So it is for our spiritual lives. Before our lives can grow and blossom and show the true goodness of God's grace - we must first accept the fact of poverty, decay and need for renewal from within. We must get into the chair with God and let him extract the decay and then replace that decay with the precious crown of Christ's love.

Then we will have learned that before we ever look polished and renewed on the outside -- we must always and forever seek restoration from decay on the inside. **THAT'S POVERTY THAT YIELDS RICHES!** For those who are "poor in spirit" first recognize their need for renewal from within so that the Kingdom of Heaven might be their earthly reflection from without!

AMEN

EPIPHANY IV  
Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo  
February 3, 1991  
Peter R. Martyn, Pastor

## "A WORLD YET POSSESSED"

And immediately there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit; and demon cried out: "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God." But Jesus rebuked him saying, "Be silent! And come out of him!" And the demon, convulsing him and crying with a loud voice, came out of him.

Mark 1:23-25

We hear this gospel from Mark today and we say, "Demons - in the 21st Century!" Come on, Jesus, get with the program! We are living in an eriodite computer age. It might be a gremlin or virus that failed our systems, but never the devil who made anyone do it. The only reason for "garbage out" today is because somebody put "garbage in" - and that has nothing to do with devils or demons.

This whole subject reminds me of the story of the little girl who got steaming mad at her younger brother. She pushed him down the landing, called him rotten names, and then spat on him. Her father was horrified and finally said, "Dolly, the devil must have made you say and do those things!" And she answered, "The devil might have made me push him down the landing and call him names ... but I thought of 'spittin on him all myself!" We may think of ourselves as too sophisticated for devils and demons, but we still do a lot of "spittin on one another in this world."

In spite of all our satellite intelligence, our surgical lasers, and our stealth guided missiles, we have not advanced too much farther than our compatriots in the first century when it comes to human compassion and care. Like many people in Jesus' day, we are still haunted and driven and crippled and overcome by forces beyond our control. We may not talk about pointy tails or devil's pitchforks - the jargon has changed to sociological trends and psychological predispositions - but the end results are still the same: THERE ARE POWERS WITHIN AND AROUND US THAT STEAL OUR JOY, OUR HOPE AND OUR STRENGTH. And when these powers turn our lives into fits of rage, into fads of alienation, and into unending burdens and feelings of hopelessness - then we live in "A WORLD YET POSSESSED." Call it whatever you want to call it, but it is A WORLD YET POSSESSED by a spirit of bitterness and fear - a spirit of hatred and every other poison that robs life of its joy, its hope, and its harmony.

Many would like to believe that this is not the true picture of the real world. They have this romantic notion that all the world needs is positive thinkers ... just more possibility people ... more people who subscribe to the



proverbial sayings of the prophets and other philosophers of great wisdom. These people say, "If we just follow the teachings of Jesus or some other great teacher, everything will be just fine." "If we just pray more earnestly and have more faith in our creative potential, then all will soon be well." They go on with other platitudes, "If everyone in the world would just follow a basic principle, like the Golden Rule or the Ten Commandments, then the world would return to its perfect order." "If we just apply the philosophical genius of great religious and secular thinkers, then we will be delivered from future fears of chaos and confusion in this world." These romantic thinkers see the world as just one, small step away from creative control and human harmony.

Alfred Nobel, for whom the Nobel Peace Prizes are named, was one of these romantic thinkers. After his inventive genius of discovering dynamite, he announced to the world: "My dynamite will more assuredly bring peace to this world than a thousand conventions. As soon as humanity finds out that in one instant whole armies can be destroyed, they will surely abide by the golden peace." But as soon as humanity found out that whole armies could be wiped out in an instant, we proceeded to do just that! The WORLD WAS YET POSSESSED!

The 11th edition of the Encyclopedia Britannica was published in 1910, just at the beginning of this 20th century. Under the category of "torture," the editors offered the following philosophical truth: "This subject is now only one of historical interest." Romanticism again reigned - but the WORLD WAS YET POSSESSED!

How much we all wish this romantic notion of the world were true! How much easier the marketing of Christianity would be if all we needed were the teachings of Jesus Christ and the Golden Rule. How much we all wish that a world with better education, with a better standard of living, with improved communications, with more sophisticated technology -- how much we all wish that such a world would be a place without hopelessness, without fear, without sorrow or pain. And to some degree - our world is a better place because of all of these things. But too many times in JUST THIS CENTURY - and most recently in Iraq - we have seen with crystal clarity that education and technology in the hands of the inhumane only make them more sophisticated in their inhumanity. The romantic, the rational, the reasonable approach to improving this world is VITALLY important, but it will not deliver us from A WORLD YET POSSESSED!

The only authentic view of a world DIS-POSSESSED OF THE DEMONIC is the same one revealed by Mark in his Gospel. Mark recognizes that this world needs Jesus as Teacher, as Friend, and as Lamb of God. But the first thing that Mark reveals about this world and its Jesus is that this Lord, this Savior must first REIGN AS exorcist, and then teacher, friend, and Lamb of God. From Mark's perspective, this world first

needs a Lord who will stand face to face with the demonic powers and say: "Be silent! Shut Up! And come out!" For Mark, that's the first word of grace from our Lord -- a Word which confronts and delivers you and me from those powers which make us less than the image of God.

The world, according to Mark, is not a totally rational place to relate, not a totally reasonable place to dialog, and hardly a totally fair place to live. From Mark's perspective, this world is oftentimes out of control, it is filled with diabolical problems, it is distressed with burdens and bondages and sorrows and diseases and distresses of all kinds and quantities. In short, it is not a romantic world of orderly control and harmony as God intended it; instead, it has become a world which daily rebels and resists and rejects and refuses the Will of its Father. It is a World at War with God Almighty! And the only hope for such a world, according to Mark, is a Jesus who confronts every visible power that takes away hope, that takes away joy and strength and stability from our daily living.

Mark sees two cures to THIS WORLD YET POSSESSED! First, it needs to be addressed straight-forwardly by the authority of God! Or to put it bluntly, when the power of the demonic - when the power of darkness which hurts and destroys and alienates and kills ... when this power is made visible, it must be immediately addressed by the voice of our God, saying: "In the name of Jesus Christ, STOP WHAT YOU ARE NOW DOING!"

This past week, I believe I illustrated that voice of Jesus Christ in my level III catechism class. Four out of the six in class that day had come to class totally unprepared. Now get me straight - I don't mean a little unprepared ... I mean they had done nothing! When I learned of their demonic laziness ... a laziness which was not only hurtful to them, but also disrepsectful of me -- I said quickly and loudly: "STOP THIS GOOFING OFF OR YOU WILL BE OUT OF THIS CLASS FOR GOOD!"

In a world where there has been a growing disrespect and defiance to the voice of authority, we desparately need to re-assert NOT OUR OWN VOICES, but the voice of our God -- a voice which is compassionate and forgiving, but also a voice which will not tolerate a spirit of indifference and defiance to the grace and goodness of life. God did not give us life so that we could take his creative goodness for granted and spit on one another in the process. God has a very high standard for the way we will live with one another, and when that standard is violated, he shouts: "ENOUGH OF THIS DEMONIC STUFF -- COME OUT OF YOU, RIGHT NOW!"

I truly commend George Bush for standing up to Saddam Hussein and saying: "In the name of God - that's enough of your demonic stuff! You will no longer spit upon the world - as of Jan. 15th, it will come out of you - or else!! "

And yet as grateful as I was for that Godliness, I was distressed by his recent speech and by the same sentiment in Wall St. Jour. article by theologian Richard John Neuhaus - they both described the Persian Gulf War as a "moral cause." Certainly this war might be described as a "just cause" - as a justified response to aggression ... or as a "just war." But since when have we as a church or nation ever described the killing of humanity as a "moral cause." War by its very nature is immoral, just like abortion, racism, youthism, divorce, lying, stealing, adultery -- ALL OF THESE ARE IMMORAL. At times we might be able to justify them according to certain human situations, but they are never MORAL CAUSES. All bad causes are forgivable - but no demonic causes are ever moral!

And when this world starts talking about "immoral realities" as "moral causes," then we are again aware of a WORLD YET POSSESSED -- A WORLD WHICH DESPARATELY NEEDS TO HEAR THE VOICE OF GOD'S AUTHORITY SAYING: "ENOUGH OF THAT DEMONIC STUFF - COME OUT OF YOU NOW!" For God's voice is not a voice of damnation, it is the voice of grace ... the voice of liberation - the only voice in this world that frees us from perversion and chaos--from illness, alientation, or any other power which seeks to render life hopeless and helpless.

But, as we have learned from religious cults and sects, we have to be very careful with God's voice of authority. Sometimes people act as if they have "God's authority" by just sounding tough. It reminds me of the story of the man who went to a doctor with a headache. A large, authoritarian nurse stood at attention behind the reception desk. The man said, "Could I see the doctor, I have a bad headache." She commanded: "Go into that room, close the door, and take off your clothes." "But maa'm." "Get into that room, close the door, and take off your clothes!" He went into a rather dimly lit room, closed the door, and took off his clothes. And then he realized there was another man in the room - with his clothes off as well. Finally he said, "I can't believe I'm standing here like this and all I've got is a headache." To which his new found friend replied: "You think you've got it bad. I just came here to read the gas meter!" Needless to say, this world does not need more authoritarian authorities. But this world desparately needs Christian voices that will speak the word of Jesus Christ: "ENOUGH OF YOUR DEMONIC STUFF -- BE SILENT AND COME OUT NOW!"

The voice of Christ is sometimes a very strong, very direct, and very confronting voice, but it is always a voice which seeks to exorcise any spirit which holds us captive and imprisoned -- captive to fear and grief, imprisoned by despair or doubt, bound by guilt and greed. Is it any wonder that we still come to the synagogue - to the sanctuary to be confronted by the voice of our Lord. He graciously commands the demonic within us "TO SHUT UP AND COME OUT!" And then he fills us with heavenly food, so that we might offer to others what God has so graciously given us - the forgiving mercy and everlasting love of Jesus Christ! We leave the sanctuary different than we came - healed and ready to be helpful to others yet possessed.

Yes, first we are confronted with the voice of Christ which gets our attention. But equally important, we must respond to his voice of authority -- we must give up the demons of guilt & fear, of self-pity & bitterness, or whatever other gremlin has caused a virus in our systems.

Too often, we hear his voice, but we're like the lady who was sitting on the doctor's examining table. She looked pitiful -- pale, drawn, and sickly. And as she sat there she said to him: "Doctor, what can I do to feel better without giving up the things that are making me feel so bad!?" We want the cure, but we're unwilling to surrender those things that have made us sick!

Regretably, too many Christians only want a nodding acquaintance with Jesus Christ. They want to be counted in his company, but only from a distance. Healing, hope, and harmony don't come FROM A DISTANCE - THEY ONLY COME THROUGH A DEEPLY personal surrender to a power greater than ourselves. Sooner or later, all of us must come to that personal Gethsemane where we pray, NOT MY WILL, BUT THINE BE DONE! When the world is willing to PRAY that EACH AND EVERY DAY with you and me -- it will no longer be A WORLD YET POSSESSED!

AMEN.

EPIPHANY IV  
Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo  
January 31, 1993 (Superbowl Sunday)  
Peter R. Martyn, Pastor

## "GETTING BEYOND SUPERBOWL BOASTING!"

"But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; ... in order that as it is written, 'Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.'" I Cor. 1:27;31 "He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" Mich 6:8

Well, if you're a Buffalo Bill's or Dallas Cowboy's fan, this has been your week to enjoy a Superbowl Boasting Blitz! On Thursday, the Blade ran an extensive story about Bill's quarterback, Jim Kelly; later today he makes his third attempt to be a Superbowl ring winner. On Friday, it was Troy Aikman's turn for boasting rights in the Blade - how this Cowboy quarterback has brought his Dallas team from a 1-15 record in 1989 to the Superbowl in '93. So this afternoon, many of us will be mesmerized from 3 'til 10 p.m. by all this Superbowl hype. And I'll be there with the rest of you -- BOASTING FOR THE BILLS and hoping that underdog Jim Kelly finally sees his Superbowl dream come true.

But what does the Superbowl really say about the changes in priorities over the past 2000 years. For mainline Greeks and Jews of the 1st century, you were only something or somebody if you were highly recognized, publicized, dramatized or glamorized by the culture. As Greeks, articulate wisdom was the source of boasting. It was not necessarily what you said, but how you said it that made you a super somebody. For Jews, signs of physical strength and power were the sources of boasting. The Jews looked for wonder workers, miracle men, messianic macho figures who could deliver victories over the negating elements of the earth. For the Jews, you only counted when a winner! And who gets the headlines today? It's still the smooth-tongued wonders like Rush Limbaugh, David Letterman, Bill Buckley, Bryant Gumbel and a host of others who may not say much, but they say it well. Likewise, there's still great intrigue with the macho-military men like General Schwartzkopf or pumped-up heroes like Arnold Schwarzenager or Superbowl stars like Kelly, Aikman, Montana, Marino, or a host of other miracle makers.

Amidst all this boasting of human wisdom and physical strength, God enters the world as a baby: born to a poverty-stricken welfare couple. Is it any wonder that Jesus Christ was foolishness to the Greeks and a stumbling block to the Jews?? Instead of choosing an all-powerful Israeli general who waxed eloquent like Schwartzkopf, God chose a suffering servant -- one who was even so weak as to be mocked and persecuted on a cross. Do we have any wonder why the Greeks and Jews had some difficulty in proclaiming Jesus Christ as

their Lord and Savior?? But let's not be too harsh on those 1st century Greeks and Jews! Where do we stand on this Super Sunday regarding the incarnation of God into human history? Are we here today in the flesh, but still mentally thinking that "this Jesus-thing" is a lot of foolishness?! Do we truly boast of His loving-kindness ... or is it just nice religious sentiment?? Are we moved by His sacrificial example so that the world sees OUR OWN SACRIFICES? Do we exemplify his spirit of justice & truth, or do we follow the world's wisdom of "getting by with whatever we can." Do we walk humbly with this Christ, or are we "pumped up" by the wisdom of retaliation -- making light of this foolishness of Christ's forgiveness?!?

In short, what do we find ourselves boasting about? I don't know about all of you, but what I hear people BOASTING ABOUT MUCH OF THE TIME are their investment returns, their new homes and cottages, their get away vacations to the Vail or the Carribean, their promotions to bigger and better jobs, their new exercise regimen which will make them swelt and smashing again, their new acquisitions of property, their new prominence on this board or that club, etc. etc. In short, what I hear myself and others often boasting about IS OURSELVES, OURSELVES & MORE OF OURSELVES!

Obviusly, God wants us to feel good about ourselves -- he expects us to have self-worth and self-esteem. But he asks the tougher question: WHAT IS THE TRUE SOURCE OF YOUR SELF-WORTH AND SELF-ESTEEM? Like the Greeks, is it just a matter of having social and cultural sophistication?? Or like the Jews (and Bills and Cowboys) is self-esteem a matter of who happens to be the toughest and biggest and strongest and meanest at this particular time in history?

Well, if wisdom and strength are the true sources of self-worth and self-esteem, then let's just look at the world today and ask ourselves if it is a safer and more secure place. From the time of Christ until 1750, human knowledge doubled. Then it doubled again between 1750 and 1900. Then again doubled between 1900 and 1950. And in 1960 - just ten short years, it had doubled again. And today it is doubling even more rapidly; in fact, every 60 seconds some 2000 pages of new information are added to the archives of human wisdom. Yet has all this voluminous production of wisdom and sophistication made us better able to handle pain, suffering and setbacks? Paul says in 2nd Tim: "we are always learning yet never coming to the knowledge of the truth." Has all this wisdom really given us greater self-worth and self-esteem? Gen. Omar Bradley responded: "We have too many servants of science and too few messengers of God. We have grasped the mystery of the atom, and rejected the Sermon on the Mount. Ours is a world of nuclear giants and ethical midgets. We know more about making war than we do about sustaining peace -- more about killing than we do about real living!"

And if we're not impressed with Bradley's commentary, then let's look more closely at the likes of the Superbowls to see if they really are the sources of greater wisdom, self-worth, strength and self-esteem. Did you know that Superbowl Sunday spurs the biggest day of domestic violence against women in our society?? Many women's shelters in America report as much as a 40% increase in calls for help on Superbowl Sunday and the following Monday. Patricia Giggans of the Los Angeles Commission on Assaults Against Women says that "Superbowl Sunday is often the trigger point for the whole cycle of violence in many relationships. The BETTING, the BONDING and the BEER for men can quickly turn into the BEATING of the women." Dear friends in X, if we want true human self-worth and self-esteem, then we must GET BEYOND SUPERBOWL BOASTING where human wisdom and strength are touted as the all-in-all of a super civilization.

There is yet but one source of true human self-worth and self-esteem. IT IS THE ONE WHO TEACHES BY THIS WISDOM AND STRENGTH: "Blessed are the poor in spirit ... blessed are those who mourn ... blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness ... blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy!" NOW ...THERE IS WISDOM AND STRENGTH TO BOAST ABOUT!! As St. Paul said, "God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise." So often God has chosen foolish country bumpkins like Abraham Lincoln, Martin Luther, Saint Francis of Assisi, Mother Teresa, Pope Paul, and a host of others like them who have shown the worldly wise where the truth really can be found!! Again Paul says, "God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong." How interesting that God can choose a disabled person like Jeff King: who by human standards of strength is certainly physically weak; yet from this dialyzed parapalegic I have heard and seen and shared more visions of strength and wonder and bravery and courage than from any tough linemen on the grid iron. And right here at Hope Lutheran we have a pastoral colleague who could boast greatly of his profound human wisdom & achievements. Larry Michaels has his B.A., his Master's of Divinity, his Doctor of Ministry, and now his PhD in English! But does this cause him to boast in the presence of God!?! By no means! He's still just an ordinary shepherd of the Lord, boasting of the love, kindness and justice of the one who laid down his life for us all; just walking humbly with this same Lamb of God!

Yes, what is our source of boasting?!? We boast not in ourselves, but in the Lord. For Jesus Christ, and he alone, is the only one in this world who truly accepts us as we are -- not because of our good works, our wisdom, our muscular bodies; but because we forever suffer from fears, failures, faults and daily shortcomings! And that's ultimately the only road to be traveled to self-worth and self-esteem in this world; that road where we can be assured that we will still be loved and accepted and forgiven even after we fail and fall down on the hard surfaces of life. Yes, that's the one we call Father & Mother - the one who always says he/she will forget our mistakes and remember our sins no more!

Nothing more dramatically has illustrated that power of loving self-worth and self-esteem for me than the story of Derek Redmond from last summer's Olympic Games. At the start of the 400 meter race, Redmond popped his right hamstring. I'm told this is a very severe and excruciating injury that quickly ends a runner's chances of finishing anything! But not for Derek Redmond! Redmond got up and started hopping toward the finish line. The other runners had all finished the race in just seconds. But Redmond, now in tears, kept slowly and laboriously hopping! It looked as if he would fall any moment, crushed by pain & defeat! Suddenly a man appeared beside Derek. His father had run down from the stands and pushed his way through crowds and security guards to reach his son. His father put his arms around his son and let him cry on his shoulder for a few seconds. Then holding his son from falling, father and son hobbled over the finish line together! Derek had finished the race!

There is the true essence of our self-worth and self-esteem! We're not somebodies because of our own great wisdom and degrees; nor are we the greatest forever because of our brute and bullish strength! We are SOMEBODIES because we have been saved by a Father who is willing to come down out of the stands and carry us over the finish line! That's what we boast about -- that justice, that loving kindness, that walking over the finish line with our Father!!

That's why we gather again at this Father's table! Because it's the only summit table in all creation of supreme wisdom, truth and strength! Yes, at this table it's not our great human wisdom and degrees that we flaunt in one another's faces. At this table, it's not our great strength and physiques that we parade before God and one another! At this table, we come to boast of the one who did not stay hidden in the heavens. This Father came down to the playing field of life and sacrificed his own body when we became too weak or too frazzled to go over the end zone by ourselves. This foolish Father comes and sits with us and forgives our stupid egotism that causes us so much idolatry & jealousy! This same "weak" Father sits with us at His table as the only Father who would possibly forgive our stubborn slander and evil spirit after nailing his son to the cross. Yes, he is the only Father who has demonstrated "that to lose your life is to really gain it" -- for only thru forgiving our greed has he given us another chance TO BECOME MORE GENEROUS LIKE HIMSELF IN THIS WORLD. So, dear friends, if we must boast ... let us boast of this Father, this Son, and this Holy Spirit.

Amen.



## "ALL YOU NEED IS ... "

(Beatles lead in *All You Need Is Love*) Almost all of us have heard this classic song from the Beatles. It was the answer to the existential need of the 60's. I'd like to believe that the answer is still the same in the 90's ... and into the 21st century: "All You Need Is Love! But when I ask pre-marital couples what are the three most crucial needs of your future marriage, I usually get a response in this order: 1) financial security; 2) a home; and 3) good jobs. Obviously, these are crucial needs of every couple ... but the answers would seem to say that most newlyweds are more concerned with Material Things than with Love!

But that's certainly more than a newlywed concern. Ask the average American today -- even the average Christian: what is your greatest need? A high majority will answer: All You Need is Enough Money. All You Need is a Good Job. According to the latest political spinsters, ALL YOU NEED IS LESS TAXES. And today, millions of Americans are answering: All You Need Is the Superbowl! And two days from now - all the Superbowl needs will be long forgotten. I sometimes wonder if I'm the only one who misses the idealism of the 60's -- where at least the Beatles and others saw spiritual truths to be the real NEEDS of everyday life.

Well, maybe it's good that our world has lost its appreciation for Love Above All other Needs ... at least that gives me something to preach about. Because the world of the Corinthian Church was very similar to the world that you and I are confronting today. The culture of Corinth, like our own, viewed itself as **very intellectual and sophisticated, was very competitive and full of petty rivalries** (like San Diego vs. San Francisco); **was very self-seeking and snobbish; and was very incestuous (loose morals) and striving after personal gratification** above the common good. Basically, Corinth was a culture divided, where one's personal gifts and self-status were more important than the harmony of the whole community. Can we at least see a slight correlary between our own culture and Corinth? For instance, in Friday's *Blade*, Deion Sanders, one of today's Superbowl heroes says: "In between the white lines, I'm a bad boy. I'm selfish, and I don't care about anyone but myself." Granted, we all know that's good superhype, but what kind of impact does that self-glorification have upon our impressionable children? It certainly doesn't say: LOVE AT ALL COSTS; rather, DIVIDE & CONQUER!

I hope I need no more proof about the correlation of Corinthian & modern culture. Paul's message rings as authentic today as it ever did 2000 yrs ago. He identifies **three characteristics** of God's love (known as Agape) that need to be uplifted and shared daily thru the press, work, homes, schools, churches of our lives: 1) that Agape (God's love) EXCELS above all else; 2) that Agape FEELS, but more importantly, ACTS; and 3) that Agape LASTS forever!

to trust, but how do we get this truth into our hearts? Maybe the best way to illustrate is to use my own frustrations of getting LOVE from my head to my heart. A couple of years ago, I notified Bishop Rave that this would be my last senior pastorate. I told him that if I lived long enough to receive another Call, I wanted him to find me an Associate or Resource Pastor position. But like upward mobility in our culture, the church is not oriented to this kind of thinking. Much like other vocations, pastors are encouraged to seek the bigger and better positions -- to go from one senior position to a better senior position. But unlike many senior pastors in the church, I have found that "being the head guy" often makes it hard to **really Love Like God**. Obviously, management & administration are necessary, and I have loved them and done well at them. But too often "management" gets in the way of **real love** -- just like too many hours or too many trips away from home gets in your way OF REALLY LOVING YOUR FAMILY.

The worst pastoral example in the church today is the Bishop -- not because he's a poor pastor, but he just doesn't have time to REALLY LOVE HIS SHEEP while being overwhelmed with administrative problems. Having to be the pusher and the prodder of programs and giving and oversight and staff conflicts and celebrations and recognitions and marketing and mad people and hundreds of other necessary tasks often leaves little time for just LOVING & CARING LIKE GOD. In my case, just the pastoral matter of properly communicating concerns to other leaders of the congregation sometimes gets me into trouble that I never imagined as a part of pastoral shepherding. And what does all this mean? It too often means that LOVE cannot EXCEL above all else in my work. And you can make the same application to your own lives. Agape is the power of compassion, of concern, of forgiveness, of helpfulness, of justice, of generosity -- how much does this power EXCEL above all else in your household ... among your friends ... in this church or in this community? Paul simply says: ALL YOU NEED IS A LOVE THAT EXCELS ABOVE ALL ELSE! Think about that for rest of day.

Secondly, Paul says this Agape FEELS - it has emotions and passions -- but more importantly, this LOVE ACTS. And how does it act? Paul says true love is not obsessed with self but concentrates on the other. He says this love rises above pettiness and malice because it is always looking beyond itself. He says this love is always ready to trust and give the benefit of the doubt. He says this love hopes for the best from the other, but is ready to forgive the other when he/she proves unworthy of that trust. He says this love forgives, and it does so without a grudge. He says there is no higher action than this love because it gives all other gifts meaning and purpose. In short, he says this LOVE is the most powerful action we can offer to one another.

So, love is not merely saying some gushy emotion or giving a passionate hug, it is a willingness to LOSE YOURSELF in the most dirty and dingy work of life. Mother Teresa left the security of a convent for the "dying" on the streets of Calcutta. She dragged dying bodies into a dingy temple that had been offered to her by the city. In the temple, she loved and

But you all know the amazing results of Sister Teresa's love in that dingy temple! She only took terminal cases, and yet after being in her care many of the "terminal" stopped dying. When Robert Schuller recently visited, one of the nurses said, "We are going to have to change the name of this place from the Home of the Dying to the Home of the Living." Acts of REAL LOVE stop death and division and separation and all other forms of destructive and deadly, egotistical forces of life.

When Jesus asked Peter, "Do you love me?" Peter answered, "Yes!" Immediately Jesus said, "Feed My Sheep." Love Acts; Love Does Something Tangible! When John said, "God so loved the world that he GAVE his Son," God's love was superbly identified with GIVING SACRIFICIALLY, not GIVING SOME GUSHY/MUSHY FEELINGS. Love **feeds** the hungry; Love **builds** homes; Love **mends** broken hearts; Love **changes** the world so that real heroes are seen as those who care for more than themselves and their own multi-million dollar salaries. Love not only FEELS, it ACTS!

Finally, Paul says: Agape LASTS! Certainly God and a compassionate church understand that there are relationships that have been and always will be hurtful. God would never advocate that such abusive relationships should "endure forever and ever!" But when a relationship is built upon the FOUNDATION OF HIS LOVE - a Love which is willing to die in order to raise up the other -- then there is NOTHING THAT CAN OUTLAST THAT LIFE-GIVING, SACRIFICIAL SPIRIT.

That's the spirit of a wife who stands day-in and day-out by the bedside of her husband who has had a stroke and just gently caresses his face and hair. She knows that he may never wake up, but her love is built on the foundation of God's ... so **she keeps on giving** even if there is no physical hope. That's the spirit of Richard Steele who keeps on translating the Bible even after he is blind because **he wants to make sure that the love of God is not in any way curtailed by his blindness**. That's the spirit of this congregation which has sought to make sure that the early depression of the 30's just like the downturns of the 80's **will never in any way curtail the proclamation** of the gospel in this place. And that was the spirit of a group of soldiers released from prison camp at the end of WWII. Because of poor transportation and bad weather ahead, the soldiers were told they could only bring one piece of baggage. Two buddies had been through the hell of war together and they did not want to separate now over something as petty as a piece of baggage. When one was selected to go and the other told he must wait for the next boat - the first man dumped all his possessions into a garbage can and told his friend to get into his bag. He then strenuously lifted his bag on his back ... and carried the most important piece of baggage he would ever take aboard the ship.

That's the meaning of a LOVE THAT LASTS. Nothing in all creation gets in the way of a LOVE LIKE GOD'S. Not even a cross can crucify God's love! That's all the world needed 2000 years ago ... and that's all the world needs now! Amen.

*Epiphany IV  
Glenwood Lutheran Church, Toledo  
February 2, 1997  
Peter R. Martyn, Interim Pastor*

## **“SPEAK WITH AUTHORITY!”**

*And Jesus rebuked the [unclean spirit] saying, ‘Be silent, and come out of him!’  
And they were all amazed, and they kept asking one another, ‘What is this? A new  
teaching - with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him.  
Mark 1:26-27*

To “Speak With Authority” is very different from being authoritarian. Many leaders in this world have yet to make the distinction. Possibly the story of the revival evangelist best illustrates the point. This flamboyant, tuxedoed preacher always prided himself on his great authority at revival meetings. As a handsome, debonair voice of the diety - he would conclude each night with his booming authoritative voice, lifting his arms & eyes to the heavens ... and with a thunder of authority he would pray: “Oh, I see you Lord Jesus; I see you ... my bleeding Lord. Yes, Lord, I will speak your words; I will proclaim your deeds; I will call your children to you! Oh, Hallelujah, Jesus! Hallelujah Lord! Oh Lord Jesus, I see you coming right now!”

This same ritual went on night after night, always concluding with this same prayer. On the final night, a teenage boy who had been at every meeting decided to “put the evangelist to the test.” He dressed up like Jesus with long wig, halo lights and a flowing, white robe. As the evangelist reached his rapture, the lad slowly descended the steps in the middle of the dark balcony. The preacher was going full tilt, waving his arms and thundering his palms on the pulpit when he saw the appearance of Jesus coming down from the balcony. With an almost hideous screech, he shouted: “Oh my God, He is here ... he is in the balcony!” He turned with fear, ran out of the theatre, and left the congregation in limbo. The service ended abruptly - without an altar call!

This preacher had confused “authority” with “authoritarian.” Authoritarian is merely “acting out” the part of authority! It’s what preachers were often taught in seminary years ago -- to sound religious without necessarily being religious. It was sounding good and acting tough, but not delivering on any of your stated convictions. Authoritarian schools taught preachers to “sound big ... to have great resonance in their voices! After all, we all know that God had a bass voice, right?? (tenors/sopranos) According to this school, preaching was not to be personal ... it was simply an opportunity to “reveal religious history” ... “to sound grandios & pious” ... “to quote all the great scriptures verses” -- but not to abide by the convictions that were quoted.

“To Speak With Authority” is quite different. One who has “authority” confirms three conditions in all he/she says: First, he/she leaves no “doubt” about the subject. In other words, we don’t say, “I think this is what God wants us to do;” we say, “This is the Word of the Lord, and it can be totally trusted!” Second, he/she lives out or corroborates his/her words with consistent actions. Thus, if we proclaim that we care for the poor or downtrodden -- we

devise ministries and opportunities to serve and not merely "talk about" such religious actions. Finally, "to speak with authority" means there is always an immediacy to our message. When we call for action, people know that it's needed NOW. Unlike some leaders in both government and the church -- we do not sit around waiting to determine which way the wind is going to blow tomorrow. Since we are a faith community that always lives confident of forgiveness -- we take the risk ... we ask for action TODAY ... confident that God will be with us even if we don't succeed!!

This was the speech pattern of Jesus Christ. When he spoke, not only did everyone listen, but they would say: "This sounds like a new teaching -- he speaks with authority!" (1) He spoke totally confident that he knew His subject, namely God his Father. (2) He not only spoke, but he acted consistently with what he said. (3) And finally, he asked for action NOW, not sometime later when the wind happened to be blowing favorably toward what he was asking. And WHY DID HE SPEAK WITH SUCH AUTHORITY??

Because he was addressing a demon-filled world. Obviously, people in the ancient world believed in demons. There was great pain & suffering in the 1st century. It was a world in which both disease and natural disasters took a heavy toll; infant mortality was regularly anticipated and life expectancy was barely the mid-40's. Since this world was without any scientific understanding, everyone believed that DEMONS caused all this human agony & suffering.

Obviously, we are much more sophisticated today. We know that much of our pain is caused by our own selfishness & stupidity; some is purely circumstantial; and much is yet unknown. But, does that mean that we are living in a world "without demons??" Does that mean we no longer need to "speak with Christ's authority" when we encounter the demonic?? Let me illustrate somewhat humorously the reality of the demonic which continues to be very present every day in all of our lives.

Possibly some of you have heard about the little boy who got steaming mad at his sister (or maybe this has happened in your own home). He pushed his sister down the landing, called her rotten names and then spat on her. His father was horrified by his son's behavior and said: *"Billy, the devil is surely making you do those things."* To which Billy replied: *"The devil might have made my push her down the landing & call her names, but it was my own idea 'to spit on her.'"* And speaking of spit, there's also the story of the little girl who locked herself in the closet. After a long silence, her mother heard gurgling sounds from inside & then heard the little girl say, *"Mommy, haha ... I just spit on your shoes."* There was a long silence; then more gurgling noise & the voice again, *"Mommy, I just spit on your dress."* Then a long time passed and nothing happened. So her mother finally said, *"Honey, what are you doing now?"* After a brief pause, the little girl responded: *"I'm waiting for more spit to come!"*

We may laugh at these stories. But they are examples of how demons are still very much alive in our world today. They are the demons of belligerence,

arrogance, haughtiness, racism, bitterness, destructive anger, verbal & physical abuse, indifference, negative thinking, depression, slander, hopelessness, pity, and the list goes on and on and on!! And just like Jesus called out the demon from the man in our gospel, he is asking us to *speak with the same authority*: to say, **"Be Silent ... and Come Out of You!!"** My question today is this, good Christian friends: How often do we choose to speak with Christ's authority when we are given the opportunity???

For instance, in the earlier examples: when we see a child spit or swear at another child, do we SPEAK WITH AUTHORITY and say: **"Enough of that ... be silent ... Come Out of You Right Now!!"** Well, that's the first step of speaking with Christ's authority: when confronted with disrespect or a demonic spirit, we are to say in the name of Jesus: 'STOP NOW! COME OUT OF YOU THE SPIRIT OF PAIN, HURTFULNESS & DESTRUCTION!!'

At the training session for the Learning Club on Thursday evening, Sister Magdalen (Nat'l Director) illustrated how this works compassionately in her teaching ministry. When children act billigerently or with disrespect -- they are told by the teacher that they have just lost five or ten or twenty points for the day. **In other words, they are told there are consequences for demonic behavior. Regrettably my friends, we live in a world that's afraid to SPEAK WITH AUTHORITY about consequences. Nobody ever says "No! -- that's wrong ... that will hurt me or someone else."** Instead, when we see people "spitting at each other," we laugh! And then we wonder why there's so many people **"waiting for more spit to come!"**

Yes, to SPEAK WITH AUTHORITY first means that we have the faith in Jesus which says, **"Stop! Be Silent! Come Out of You, Demon!"** But secondly, "to Speak with Authority" means that we say **"Come Out" with compassion and even hold the other person as we say it!** Unlike the revival preacher, we don't speak authoritarian just to sound tough. I'm reminded here of the story of a man who came to the doctor's office complaining of a headache. A large, authoritarian nurse barked at him: **"Just go into that room, close the door and take your clothes off."** But that man appealed, **"But mam, I only have a headache."** **She commanded back: "Did you hear me - I said get in there and take your clothes off."** So he went into a dimly lit room, closed the door and took off his clothes. **Only then did he realize another man was in the room.** So he said, **"I can't believe it! I'm standing here naked just because I have a headache!"** To which the other man replied, **"You think you've got it bad; I came here to read the gas meter!"**

To speak with Christ' authority IS NOT TO BE authoritarian, but to be compassionate to others WHILE CALLING OUT OF THEM DEMONS THAT ARE DOING GREAT HARM. **That takes real courage and real conviction -- to be compassionate, yet caring enough to say: "Stop acting like a demon; Come Out of You!"** It's like the sick woman who went to her doctor and said: **"Doc, what can I do to make me feel better without giving up the things that are making me feel so bad??"** She wanted a cure without any surrender ... without

**choosing to change what had made her sick!** That's like an alcoholic or addict who wants to be cured, but is unwilling to surrender the alcohol or substance that is making him sick. There will never be a cure if we don't "CALL OUT THE DEMONS THAT ARE MAKING US SICK"

So it is that Jesus said to the demons that possessed this man: "***Be Silent, and come out!***" And they were all amazed ... because he spoke with authority. He has given each of us the same power & authority to speak to this world. In fact, his power of forgiveness in Holy Communion cannot cleanse us if we are yet filled with demonic powers. **When we see the demonic ... we too must have the faith of Jesus ... [1] to know what God wants ... [2] to speak & act consistently ... and [3] to speak NOW rather than waiting for the wind to blow this way or that!** Like our Lord, we must say: "***Be Silent! Come Out of you ... for you have a demon of arrogance, illigence, slander, racism, or some other hurtful power that has possessed you!***"

God bless us ... in fact, he assures us he will bless us when we "***Speak With His Authority!***"

AMEN.

*Epiphany IV  
Glenwood Lutheran & Sunset House  
February 1, 1998  
Peter R. Martyn, Presiding Pastor & Chaplain*

## **“ALL YOU NEED IS ... “**

*But strive for the greater gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way. ...  
So now, faith hope and love abide, these three. But the greatest of these is love.*

*I Cor. 12:31; 13:13*

“All you need is Love” sing it. Is it possible? That song is 30 years old ... first sung in 1967. In a sense, it became the anthem for a “Love Generation.” John Lennon & Paul McCartney offered powerful words in that hymn: “There’s nothing you can do that can’t be done; Nothing you can sing that can’t be sung; Nothing you can say, but you can learn how to play the game ... It’s easy: All you need is love, that is all you need.” Lennon & McCartney almost made it too easy.

Some 2000 years earlier, Paul wrote an earlier version of that “Love Hymn.” Like the backdrop of chaos in the Beatles’ version, Paul’s also reflected a chaotic situation: the Corinthian congregation was rebelling & out of control. From Paul’s viewpoint - they were acting in childish ways ... constantly arguing over whose gifts were more important in the congregation. In essence - Paul was saying exactly what Lennon & McCartney said, “All You Need is Love!!”

For certain, Paul was not writing a “love song” for weddings. I Cor 13 may offer an excellent example of “lasting love” for marriages. But weddings were the furthest thing from Paul’s mind when he wrote this. He was addressing a congregation where members were quite literally “at war with one another.” His focus actually began with last week’s lesson: where he emphasized that all gifts are necessary and equal for building up the body of Christ.

But that was not the way the Corinthians were acting. Some claimed that “speaking in tongues was the greatest spiritual gift” (Paul deals with that in Chap. 14). Others argued the ability to work miracles was the key to everything. Still others said “teaching” was superior; others preaching; others healing; some claimed prophecy & discernment of spirits; others leadership & administration. All this arguing about the “greatest of gifts” was tearing the church apart. So Paul says - “every gift is essential that builds up the body; every talent is important for the health or organic whole of the body (church). Every person is blessed with a gift; every person is called to serve. But all these gifts are of no value if they are not bonded together in the spirit of LOVE.”

So Paul says: “put away your arrogance; stop your boasting; forget your envy; abandon your one-ups-manship ... for LOVE is not envious or boastful, not rude or arrogant. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable and resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing.” Love is not “me first,” it is “me” serving others in the name of Christ.



Oscar Wilde tells the story of demons trying to tempt a holy man who lived as a hermit. The demons tried everything -- they tried to stir up the monk's fleshy desires. They failed! They attempted to sow doubt and fear into his mind. They failed. They tried to make him believe all his discipline and prayer and austere living was for naught. They couldn't!! Then the devil showed them the way. He had a messenger sent to the man who whispered in his ear: "Have you heard the news?? Your brother has been made bishop of Alexandria!" According to the fable - as the man heard these words a scowl of malignant jealousy came over his serene face. And Jealousy became the cause of this man's spiritual collapse.

Likewise - the story of a competitive & self-centered actress. She suffered from mild depression so she often went for treatment. One day she arrived at the doctor's office elated. She had just been offered a part that might launch her career into stardom. But the next day she was shattered & despondent: she had read in the paper that a friend of hers had been selected for a movie role. Even though it had nothing to do with her role, she hurtfully told her therapist: "But you don't understand! For me to be happy it is not enough for me to succeed! My friends have to fail!!"

My dear friends -- we all know that way of jealousy and envy - don't we! And if we're really honest -- most of us are experts in that kind of pride and arrogance! Every person in this room has at one time or another gloated over the failure of someone else. How hard it is to put away fear and arrogance and celebrate the fulfillment and joys of others. I myself have had too many moments (esp. since my resignation) where I have gloated over the problems that others might be having. And there are times that I have been tempted to withdraw my "service commitment" hoping it might cause hardship to some who have turned their backs on me. Why is it that we mock, we chide, we exalt ourselves at the expense of others. Do we not know the difference between these actions and love??? We know -- but too often we don't care!!

I am told that was the case of a certain Michael Carneal in Paducah, KY. You all remember his story. He was the teenage boy who stole an arsenal of weapons and then took them to his high school opening fire on a prayer group and killing three & wounding five. The young shooter claims he didn't know why he did it! Yet - we learned only too soon that his friends often teased him about his small stature. And his essays in school revealed a young man filled with hatred who was feeling weak, powerless and unloved. And when anyone feels weak, powerless & unloved -- he/she takes up the arsenal of war (cases like Hitler, the Unabomber, etc ).

Last spring Michael Carneal knelt at the altar of St. Matthew's Lutheran Church and pledged his consecration to Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior as he made a confirmation of his faith. How is it that just a short time later he could kill and maim his own classmates?? Possibly -- there was a more excellent way for those around Michael to relate to him. What he needed -- like many more in America & everywhere -- was a real experience of the self-giving love of Jesus Christ.

Unlike all the pop music which describes "love" as little more than a romantic, sentimental or erotic feeling -- "true love" is an unselfish behavior which seeks the very best for "the other" no matter how screwed up he or she may be. It is acting with utter patience, kindness and unselfish forgiveness toward the other. Yes - love is a feeling -- but so much, much more. There is a Swedish saying -- "in every man there is a king, and in every woman, a queen. If you say to them, 'Your Majesty,' their majesty will come forth." "Love" is treating the other to bring out the "majestic" or highest quality of that man or woman.

Possibly no better illustration is ~~given~~<sup>given</sup> than the young German boy who was slow in school. He was not only bothered by his slowness; he also was greatly upset by his appearance, esp. his unruly hair. One day a peasant girl sarcastically said to him, "Hair show's a person's character ... and yours is the worst I've ever seen." The young man was devastated. Soon thereafter, while visiting his grandma -- he saw a great artist's portrait of the Apostle John. In the painting, John had unruly hair. So the boy thought, "Well, if an apostle can be a saint with unruly hair -- maybe I'm not all bad ... maybe God can use me!"

That young boy with the unruly hair became a concert pianist at age 30. Later he became a scholar and college president. But he gave all that up to become a medical missionary in French Equatorial Africa. His name was Albert Schweitzer. A simple painting had communicated to Dr. Schweitzer that there was a "majesty" in his life beyond his unruly hair. All he needed was a little love from someone or something that would confirm that the Majesty of God's ~~was~~<sup>character</sup> was with him!

The same is true for each of us in this room. We all have an abundance of things -- but we are starved of real love: people who daily and hourly treat us with the majesty of patience, kindness and unselfish forgiveness. We all need a lot more of this "more excellent way." So as you look at your spouse, your children, your friends later today ... and this coming week ... pause for a moment and say under your breath "your majesty" before saying anything else. Then you will be treating them with God's majestic patience & kindness! And what you will have is more than a feeling -- you will have the reality of LOVE.

AMEN.

*Epiphany IV  
First English Lutheran Church, Toledo  
February 3, 2002  
Peter R. Martyn, Part-time Interim*

## **SOMETHING TO BOAST ABOUT!**

*But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong ... so that no one might boast in the presence of God. (So) as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord."  
I Corinthians 1:27, 29, 31*

To mainline Greeks and Jews of the first century, you were only something or somebody if you were highly recognized by others in the culture. To the Greeks, articulate wisdom was the source of boasting. It was not only what you said, but how you said it that made you great. If you had a cunning tongue, if you glittered with persuasive rhetoric, if you were a linguistic & verbal acrobat – then you really had reason for boasting.

Likewise, for a Jew, signs of physical strength and power were sources of great boasting. The Jews looked for wonder workers, miracle men, messiahs who could deliver victory over the negating elements of the earth. Certainly such power could not be found in a crucified Messiah. So is it any wonder then that Jesus Christ was foolishness to the Greeks ... and a stumbling block to the Jews?

Instead of choosing an articulate, highly sophisticated, well-educated aristocrat – God chose an infant born to a welfare couple who later died on a cross. To the Greeks, this was the epitome of foolishness. Likewise, instead of an all-powerful Israeli general, God chose a suffering servant – one who was even so weak as to surrender to death on a cross. To the Jews – this kind of suffering and defeat was hardly a characteristic of their son of God – it was a total stumbling block to belief.

So, has anything drastically changed since that first century? What is the source of our boasting today as a people of faith? Do we "boast" in Christ – are we thrilled by his incarnation, by his loving kindness, by his sacrificial character, by his forgiving spirit? To many people, Jesus Christ is still the epitome of foolishness. And his crucifixion continues to be a stumbling block for lots of people in terms of belief. Let's face it, suffering and sacrifice just aren't the name of the game for most Americans.

So what do we boast about? Well on this Superbowl Sunday, we boast about the New England Patriots or the St. Louis Rams – of course, if I had had my way, we would be boasting about the Green Bay Packers. But seriously, like the Superbowl, we boast about groups and businesses and teams that are seen as winners. And we boast about bigness – big numbers, big budgets, and big deals. And globally these days we boast about military superiority and

sophistication. And in the Toledo area we boast about those schools that pass ALL the proficiency tests. And in higher education we boast about being in the top 25 or possessing more rank & power with higher degrees than the next guy. And in the church, we boast about having scads of young families and filled sanctuaries at several services every Sunday. Like the ancient Greeks and early Jews, we continue to flaunt our own wisdom, our own strength, our own creativity, our own productivity as the objects of our greatest pride and worth. In short, we boast about ourselves!

So what do we really gain from all of this boasting? For instance, let's just take a deeper look at the area of knowledge. From the time of Christ until 1750, human knowledge doubled. Then it doubled again between 1750 and 1900. And it doubled again between 1900 and 1950. By 1960, human knowledge was doubling every decade. And now today – in less than a minute, more than 2000 pages of new information will be added to human wisdom and knowledge. And yet – has all this knowledge made the people in this world more compassionate, more generous, more reliable as a people of truth and justice? The story of Enron testifies to the fact that knowledge alone does not guarantee truth, justice or kindness in our daily affairs. Or as General Omar Bradley once said, "We have too many people of science and too few people of God. We have grasped the mystery of the atom and rejected the Sermon on the Mount. Ours is a world of nuclear giants and ethical midgets. We know all about war and nothing about peace – all about killing and nothing about living." From a military man – that's quite a confession!

Is it any wonder that God chose a WAY that the sophisticated world would call utter foolishness – the power of the cross? This way was not the way of always winning but the way of merciful giving – surrendering a part of my life so that your life might be more complete. This was the way of Jesus Christ where power comes from self-sacrifice and self-surrender. \*\*\* It is the self-sacrifice which foolishly says that it is more blessed to give than to receive. \*\*\* It is the self-surrender which foolishly understands that it is a real blessing to be poor in spirit – to recognize one's need for guidance from above. \*\*\* It is a sacrifice which seeks not the easy solutions but hungers and thirsts for the highest form of righteousness. \*\*\* It is a surrender which reveals an openness (a meekness) to be led rather than an arrogance of knowing-it-all. \*\*\* It is a sacrifice which honors & awards peacemakers rather than troublemakers. \*\*\* It is a surrender that fosters arms of uplifting (mercy) rather than fists of resistance and rejection. Yes, these are just some of the blessings of the power of the cross – **SOMETHING TO REALLY BOAST ABOUT!**

But Christian boasting goes one step farther. It would be an other-worldly fantasy if all Christians could perfectly fulfill the way of the cross like their Lord. Such a world would be an idyllic place of peace and justice. But the facts are – we all fall short ... we all fail ... we all miss the mark of the Beatitudes (even though they remain our guide). And here we encounter a second great

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source of Christian boasting. Not only do we boast in the Lord because he has shown us his way of strength and sacrifice in the cross ... we also boast because of our weakness – because in the cross we are assured of forgiveness. Not only does the cross show the way of sacrificial discipleship, it also uplifts the way of gracious forgiveness and renewal. In other words, even in our greatest weakness ( our sin ) we yet possess our greatest strength (God’s forgiveness!).

Much like the principals in the Watergate Affair years ago, the officials of Enron have yet to learn this wisdom of God: to admit your weakness in order to gain your ultimate strength. The wise and sophisticated of our world still think you can win with falsehood, lies and cover-ups. Thankfully, God has shown this foolish world a much better way: wisdom and strength come through confession and repentance, not cover-ups. When will an arrogant world learn that denial and other forms of “taking the 5<sup>th</sup>” only intensify distrust and magnify a disaster??

One of the greatest attributes of Godly wisdom and strength is the willingness to admit weakness and defeat. How tragic that pompous officials often talk about praying to God but never seem to hear the Lord’s response: “**REPENT, FOR THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS NEAR!**” What some call foolishness is one of God’s greatest wisdom sayings of all time. It goes like this: *“I am sorry, please forgive me – I didn’t mean to cause all this havoc!”* **NOW THERE IS SOMETHING TO BOAST ABOUT!**

That’s the reason we regularly gather at this Table of the Lord. This is the only summit table of supreme wisdom and strength in the world. It’s not our great human wisdom that we flaunt at this table. It’s not our supreme strength that we parade before this table. We come to this table to BOAST of the greatest gift ever given – the forgiveness of Jesus Christ, the power of the cross. For Christ is the foolish one who forgives our egotism that has caused so much hurt and idolatry. And Christ is the weak one who forgives our slander which has mocked his goodness and falsely nailed him to the cross. And Christ is the suffering servant who forgives our lust and greed which has degraded the neediest of God’s children in this world.

Yes, we do have SOMETHING to boast about in the Lord. He has blessed us with THE WAY of the cross – he has shown us the power of sacrifice as his disciples. And even when we fall short of this glory as disciples – he assures us of the other dimension of his sacrifice ... that we can be forgiven so that we might live anew by his Beatitudes. When the world sees us living in these ways of the cross – it will say like Micah: these people do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with their God ... truly something to boast about!

Amen.