

PENTECOST XII

Luth. Church of the Master, Troy
August 10, 1975

"THE CRY FOR COURAGE"

"A voice said to him, 'Elijah, why are you here?' He replied, I have been most zealous for the Lord, the God of hosts. But the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, torn down your altars, and put your prophets to the sword. I alone am left, and they seek to take my life."
I Kings 19:13-14

Have you ever had one of those moments where you've felt that God has deserted you? A moment in which you have felt threatened - or stung by a crisis or disaster -- a moment in which you have felt that the odds are totally against you??

Almost all of us have had such an encounter -- moments where we might say we have "almost lost our faith." Moments where we're crying out for courage enough just to face the next hour -- the next day. A time where we might even raise our fists to the sky and yell - why me, God?!? How can I possibly deserve these circumstances of life?!?

Well - such was the moment for Elijah, the 9th Century prophet who comes to have near *comparable* rank with Moses and Jesus in biblical revelation.

Elijah was feeling deserted. Here was this courageous prophet -- now turned into a self-pitying, moping, deserter. Hiding from God and the rest of humanity in a cave.

One would hardly think that he had just won a miraculous victory the day before. The Northern Kingdom of Israel was under the rule of King Ahab, who was married to Jezebel. This same Jezebel had been the chief instigator of turning the Israelites to the worship of Baal, the fertility god.

Elijah had been called as prophet to challenge and denounce both the worship and prophets of

Baal. And so he set up the acid test on Mt Carmel. All of the Israelites were called to the Mountain. The 450 prophets of Baal were given a sacrificial bull; and Elijah was given a sacrificial bull.

Each was to pray to their god for fire in order to roast the slaughtered bulls. The Baal prophets even after slashing their wrists could not generate any fire from Baal.

Elijah's request from the Lord resulted in the deliverance of fire - the point of the miracle being that Yahewh not Baal is the source of all power for life. The Israelites responded by confessing faith in the Lord and in their frenzy fulfilled Elijah's prophecy by killing the 450 prophets of Baal.

Jezebel, who was not present, reacted to this by ordering Elijah's death. And even with this victorious battle over Baal, Elijah's reaction to Jezebel's threat was to run for cover. So he retreats to a cave in Mt. Horeb.

And ^{then} what is his reaction ^{from the Mt.} to ~~all this~~ - he cries out to God as if the Lord had deserted him. He becomes gripped by self-pity. Instead of being strengthened by his victory and the many other gifts that God had given him in life, he thinks now only about the immediate threat of Jezebel. All he can now see are the negative circumstances surrounding him. Elijah was experiencing a loss of faith.

How applicable this is to each of us. We can be presented with blessing after blessing in life. And then we encounter one threat or one defeat or even a couple of crises -- and we let that isolated negative moment defeat us.

How often we let one threat to our lifestyle undermine our faith. I recall the sixties. The church was finally trying to relate compassionately to blacks and other minorities. I remember how that was such a threat to a

predominately white Lutheran church.

I've experienced the same in ^{reality} just the everyday life of the Master this summer. The last 4 - 5 weeks have shown the first real attendance drop at the Master. And admit I must that this has been a little threatening -- I've had those days, like Elijah, where I've quietly peered to the heavens and said, Lord, have your people forsaken your covenant?

Yes - how easy it is to let one or two isolated instances completely overshadow the many blessings we have. Even in our family life, how much we falter in our faith for one another just over a minor ^{factor} in the other person -- COMPLETELY OVERLOOKING ALL THE BLESSINGS THAT WE HAVE RECEIVED FROM THE SAME PERSON.

Yes - not one of us is unlike Elijah -- we all make a joke out of our faith at different times. We all, like Elijah, need the Lord to remind us of the true substance of our faith. We all need regular reminders of what it means to really TRUST IN THE LORD.

Like Elijah - we all need God to break thru to remind us that TRUST IN HIM (faith) gives us no release from duty.

Elijah had won a great victory. He had served God well. And he was figuring it was time to rest on the laurels of the past. But right on the heels of that victory comes Jezebel with a new threat. And here we have Elijah saying - "How come?"

How often, we make faith, like Elijah, into a good work or two. We so often foster a faith which says: I've done my share, now let someone else do it. But you know and I know that faith does not have an INACTIVE ROLL.

Our faith is called to be on ACTIVE DUTY throughout life, even though, like Elijah, it may have faltering moments. Yes, trust in God means that every day is a new day TO SHOW OUR THANKFULNESS for God's love toward us.

That means the battles and struggles of life never cease - even though we've been victorious over yesterday's conflict. Tomorrow, or maybe this afternoon, will be a new moment to again show our trust in God's love in Christ. But also, like Elijah, it may be that moment when we're tempted to run for another cave and hide from the new threat.

But God will break thru again - the faith he has given us will again remind us at that moment that we can't isolate ourselves in a cave of self-pity. We can't do what God has called us to do inside a cave -- faithful Christians can never be hermits.

Elijah was feeling that God had deserted him. To the contrary, he had deserted God. His new crisis caused him to run from life and from God. Faith causes us to run to God so that we can face life head-on.

And so God reminded Elijah that there was a remnant of faithful people -- he was not alone. He would only find courage and strength as he remained in relationship to the rest of God's people. It's in that community of faith - the church - where we are to receive courage and strength to face life's threats and conflicts.

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That is ~~the~~ purpose of our gathering -- not only to hear ~~of~~ sermon -- not only to receive the Sacraments - not only to give thanks and praise to God - BUT ALSO to minister to one another. That is why God calls us to be his church -- because our ministry is ~~very limited~~ if we're only having devotions at home or in front of a TV set. Our ministry, to be Christ's ministry, must go beyond our families and beyond any congregation or denomination. And that's what we're about at this moment -- praise God for ~~our~~ ^{with} presence and willingness to continue to share HIS FULL MINISTRY. For your presence here witnesses that you are not hiding your faith in a cave and feeling sorry for yourselves.

Yes, your presence here witnesses to your need to have your faith fed. Your presence witnesses that you are striving for a living faith -- one which must be regularly fed by eating and drinking at the Lord's table.

Yes - your presence and mine witnesses to the fact that our trust in God needs constant regeneration from this banquet with Christ. For in this banquet, we are offered the forgiving presence of our Lord.

And nothing can give us greater courage to face the future than God's promise of forgiveness

Yes - each of us knows that the storms of life are not over. We realize that faith in God does not shield us from crises or threats to our life. But faith in God does give us courage to face any conflict.

Because faith is the offering of God's promise of forgiveness and eternal life - that's a guarantee of salvation. And we come to his Table to say THANKS -- and to be fed, so that we might feed one another with a health food that cannot be purchased - the courage of God's love and forgiveness. *The*
courage that he gives us we remain
Amen
committed to his saints on earth.

PENTECOST XII

Luth Church of the Master of Troy
August 29, 1976

"DIRECTIONS: IMITATE GOD"

"In a word, as God's dear Children, imitate him, and live in love as Christ loved you, and gave himself up on your behalf as an offering and sacrifice whose fragrance is pleasing to God."
Ephesians 5:1-2

Recently, Dr. Marvin A Block, chrman of the American Medical Associations Committee on Alcoholism, said: "People are drinking more today as a very necessary aesthetic to conversation." He concluded: "People simply can't stand each other as people any more."

Sounds pretty far out, doesn't it? Yet, one only has to be in the presence of teens when they are candidly talking. Two famous phrases in their vocabulary today are: "He or she's a creep" or "He makes me want to puke."

Unfortunately, these feelings are not limited to teenagers. Adults may not be quite so candid, but TOO OFTEN we make each other sick -- and that has especially become a truth in the corporate world today.

In the best of psychological jargon, we babble about integration -- integration of society, integration of races, integration of the family, integration of personality -- yet even as we babble, the splits are often widening. The English word, "crazy," comes from the French, "ecraze" - which means split up, broken, shattered. And so it is that we have a "crazy world" - where people emphasize their split-up-ness their brokenness -- their fragmentation.

We look out this morning on a world that is sick with hatred. But this is not the world's problem. Cities cannot hate. Nations cannot hate. Political ideologies cannot hate each other. The world is sick with hatred because individuals are sick with it.

I'm not saying this because I want to depress

you this morning; I'm saying it because I'm constantly drawn into it through my vocation. Whether visiting families or sitting down with businessmen, I am amazed at the preponderance of "put downs" in contrast to the small fraction of "uplifting sentiment."

Just analyze your own conversations at home sometime. How often are the things you say a "put down" of someone or something else??? Such an analysis will tell you how hate-filled you really are.

Similarly, I'm told by the businessmen in ^{business} ~~this~~ community that "this is the only way to get ahead" -- to either stab the other guy in the back or put him down some other way. In fact, we all know that's the very philosophy of advertising. Is it any wonder that our society-- that we as individuals -- are conditioned to DISTRUST if not HATE.

We have chosen to systematize HATE -- whether in the organized form of the KLU KLUX KLAN -- or the more subtle form in such words as "creep" or "narc" or "pukehead."

YET EVEN IN THIS STATE OF CONSTANT DISOBEDIENCE,
~~AND~~ GOD has given us a systematic way to overcome what we have created. It's not diplomacy, or antidefamation, or tolerance, or social education, or some other political strategy. We have surely learned by NOW that behind many such programs are BRILLIANT HATERS, clever devils who call themselves Republicans and Democrats.

God has given us a man who has a NEW COMMANDMENT-- this man doesn't offer a suggestion, or an option, or a compromised platform -- nor does he offer a NEGATIVE LAW (his commandment is not a Thou Shalt Not). His commandment has proven itself 100% effective - WHEN IMITATED. The Directions are so simple that we have made them complex: namely, IMITATE GOD.

Or in his own words, love one another as your Heavenly Father has first loved you. That's an outgoing life. First, outgoing to us in Christ's sacrifice. And now outgoing to one another in

our sacrificial response.

Paul gives us a simple, practical, understandable system for developing this outgoing life. He says, to IMITATE GOD is to "Bear one another's burdens."

In psychological language, this means a transformation from the EGO-centric life into the CON-centric life. From the life pointed INward - to the life pointed OUTward.

Bearing one another's burdens is just that -- carrying another's load, instead of simply putting him down. Walking in his shoes, instead of kicking him when he's already down.

God has further formulated the community known as the church to be HIS systematic body which seeks to be CON-centric rather than EGO-centric. It is this body which has been called to show the HATE-FILLED world the example of love.

I am truly thankful that this job has been done here in this house. I truly thank God for each of you -- for you have sought to IMITATE HIM during the hours that we have spent together.

That has truly been the example of Ginnie and Fred. I hardly say this to glorify them, but rather to glorify God for inspiring Ginnie and Fred "to live in love as Christ has loved them." Believe me, I know only too well the sacrifices they have made for the benefit of God's house-- often at the cost of their own home and family.

Yes, we have much to be grateful for in this house -- we have tried to be a family that cares and shares. And anyone who doesn't feel that spirit of caring and sharing has no one to blame but himself. For like any other family, you have to be present at the family table in order to experience that family's bread of life.

~~But~~ *YET WE OFTEN RUN THE RISK OF ENDING IT HERE* out family spirit must never end here -- for the hour or more that we share here is often the EGO-centric side of our faith. The real

test of our IMITATION OF GOD is what happens after we leave here. If our example of love only lasts a little over 60 minutes, then our faith has an ARTIFICIAL FLAVOR.

So, in a word, as God's dear children, let's imitate him in everything we do, and live in love as Christ first loved us.

AMEN

PENTECOST XII

Luth Church of the Master, Troy
(also at Fellowship Methodist)

August 21, 1977

"IN GOD WE TRUST"

"Abram put his trust in the Lord, and because of this the Lord was pleased with him and accepted him." Gen. 15:6

It was 9:30 P.M. last night and the sermon was not yet completed. Then it was 12:30 A.M. this morning and the sermon was still not yet completed. It was at that time that I was very much tempted to say -- "Well, Peter, just have faith - just trust in the Lord, and everything will work out."

Yes - how many times have you and I heard people say this thinking they were reflecting faith in God -- but really talking about blind optimism. Regretably - for many people, faith is just letting things flutter in the wind -- just hoping beyond hope that everything will turn out o.k.

God help us to know the difference between FAITH and FATE. Because if I had gone to bed at 12:30 this morning - I would have been trusting God's Word to FATE - not faith.

Somewhere in the history of Christianity - faith was re-defined as either EMOTIONALISM or RISKING THINGS TO CHANCE.

For instance, one of my standard questions in pre-marital counseling is "Why do you want to be married in the church?" And 80% of the time, the response is "I just wouldn't FEEL right if I were married someplace else."

And so faith is reduced to EMOTIONAL OR SOCIAL FEELINGS. Even more regretably, many devout Christians have reduced faith to the very same thing -- to a framework of emotionalism. So it is that many people today are caught up in

intense emotional movements -- thinking that religious faith is being charged up -- reducing faith to cries of ecstasy and agony.

Thank God -- he does not let us play these games for very long. Through men like Abraham, God has made clear that the fulcrum of faith is hardly man's emotional climate. It doesn't take much of an imagination to realize this.

Abraham was 99 when God called him into active duty. 99 is hardly a time for the emotional ecstasies of adolescence. In fact, as you read further in Genesis 15 you realize that Abraham was not too excited about his new leadership position. If he had trusted his emotions - he would have surely said to God -- Hey, Lord, I'm just a little too old to be leading Israel. And quite frankly, it scares me. You better find someone younger to do the job.

Likewise - through Abraham - we realize that faith is not banking on the odds of man -- i.e., trusting in chance. God couldn't have made a poorer choice if odds were the basis of faith. The odds were at least 99 to one against God and Abraham.

Yet - God chose Abraham - and he accepted the call to leadership. So what was the basis of this great trust - this faith? Exactly the same basis of your faith and mine -- God made a promise to Abraham. And that's the basis of all faith - the promises of God.

I seriously wonder what **motivated** the United States mint to put "IN GOD WE TRUST" in all of our coins and bills. I wonder if the basis of that printing was upon the promises of God - or the power of the Almighty Dollar.

Well it should be obvious that when we say "In God We Trust" we mean that God's promises never fail. ~~That's~~ ~~God's~~ ~~promise~~.

To believe in God's promises is to have faith.

At 99, God told Abraham that he would produce children and be the leader of his people. And Abraham said under his breath - "you've got to be kidding, Lord." But even with his human skepticism, he trusted God's promise and lived accordingly. And the promise was fulfilled. That's faith.

God's promises to you and me are as staggering as they were to Abraham. Because as the Hebrew writer says - they are promises of the things we hope for -- of the things we cannot yet see. And under our breath, like Abraham - we hear God's promises and say "you've got to be kidding, Lord."

For through Jesus Christ God has promised that he loved the world so much that whoever believes in him will not perish, but have eternal life. And under our breath we say, "you've got to be kidding, Lord" - and yet, this is the basis of our faith.

And St. Paul promises that there is nothing in all creation - not even death itself- that will separate us from the love of God, which is ours in Christ our Lord. And under our breath, we say "you've got to be kidding, Paul" and yet this promise is at the foundation of faith.

And Jesus promised - "Eat this bread, and drink of this cup" and you will be forgiven. And under our breath we say, "Jesus, that's ridiculous - your bread and your wine and your word will offer forgiveness? you've got to be kidding" -- and yet as we eat and drink, we fulfill the promise of faith.

Yes - In God's promises WE TRUST. That is the basis of faith. And so it is that Paul says in his letter to the Romans - "So then, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message comes through preaching Christ."

And again we're tempted to say " you've got to

be kidding, Paul." You're saying just hearing the promises of the gospel is the basis of faith. You're saying I just have to accept those promises and I have faith.

And Paul, and Jesus, and God respond by saying - yes, accept those promises with pleasure -- and be certain that this is the basis of your faith.

AMEN

PENTECOST XII

Luth Church of the Master, Troy

August 3 & 6

"IF YOU WANT TO WALK ON WATER, YOU'VE GOT TO GET OUT OF YOUR BOAT"

And Peter said, "Lord if it is you, bid me come to you on the water." And Jesus said, "Come." Matthew 14:28

Today we deal with the twin cousins of Christianity: faith and courage. They are dearly related - yet not the same. Faith is a gift; courage is the response to the gift. Without faith, there is no courage to do the will of God. Without the evidence of courage, there is probably little faith. This is the essence of the text before us - the interrelatedness of faith and courage.

And none other than the greatest himself, namely Peter, takes center stage again to demonstrate the dynamics of faith and courage. The scene is similar to the one encountered last week by the sailors along the Detroit River -- a windy storm -- too great for any small vessel - has blown up and the disciples are in peril of death.

Enter Jesus of Nazareth atop the turbulent waves to rescue his crew at 3 a.m. in the morning. For the sake of pure speculation and intrigue -- one has to wonder what Peter and the boys were doing out at sea at 3 o'clock in the morning.(?) Regretably, Matthew leaves out these details about his youthful friends. Suffice it to say -- that today's youth are not the only ones who have done some rather silly things at strange hours of the morning.

Well- whatever their fishing escapade -- the fun and games were over. And Jesus had come to their rescue -- without the typical rescue craft or the coast guard at his side. Whether Jesus walked or skimmed over the water like a flat rock we do not know. All Matthew reports is that when he came into view of the disciples -- he was walking on the sea. Dare we forget -- the emphasis of this text IS NOT upon sea-walking -- but rather upon Jesus Christ as the rescuer of those who believe in him.

It's obvious from the disciples' response that they were not accustomed to seeing their Lord walking on water. But

Peter - decides to test the waters and test the Lord by saying - o.k., Jesus, if it's really you, then bid me come to you!" And Jesus bids him, "Come."

.It's at this point that all game playing stops. Peter has often been mocked for being the impulsive - arrogant - boasting disciple -- and that he sometimes was. But nobody steps out of a boat in a turbulent sea UNLESS he has faith AND the courage that results from faith. AND PETER GETS OUT OF THE BOAT!

Here was an invitation from Christ to test the faith of Peter. It was an invitation to leave the security of the familiar -- and to enter into a new level of relationship and experience with God. And for all of his short-comings -- Peter had the "guts" to do it.

Here is an example of faith that each of us HAS OFTEN ENCOUNTERED! An opportunity to serve Christ is before us -- and Jesus says to us -- "Come on, give it a try!" And what do we do with that? DO we get out of our boats of security -- or do we cling tight!?!

Just take the new Book of Worship for example. Here Christ is giving us a new opportunity for praise and thanks to God. But in subtle ways -- I've heard resistance already. We want to cling to the boat of security of the past. I myself was resistant to this new hymnal when the idea was first introduced.

Or maybe Christ says - "Come on - try to teach; try to make an evangelism call -- try to give *at a goal of going under* -- literally, hundreds of ways that Christ says to us: "Come on, GET OUT OF YOUR BOATS if you want to see a miracle!"

Well - Peter got out! And can't you just see him walking along the water saying: Hey guys, look at me -- I'm walking on water. But that lasted only a little while. Pretty soon he started having that sinking feeling of being ALL ALONE -- he began to feel helpless -- knowing that his resources ALONE would not keep him afloat!

All of us who have responded to Christ's invitation know this feeling -- we all know the feeling OF SEEMING

to be alone -- HELPLESS -- without adequate resources. For those of us who come close to tithing -- we sometimes feel like we're all alone trying to keep the ship afloat. Or when you go out to make that first CALL ON A PROSPECT -- what a lonely moment that can be. Or even some of our Thursday eve worship services this summer -- with only 15 or 20 people here, you begin to think that you're the lonely disciple. Or leaving a church with a large staff and coming to the Master -- no secretary, no custodian, no division of duties -- yes, there are times *in following* Christ that we say: "What am I doing out here alone!?!"

But then comes the second dimension of courage. It takes courage to get out of the boat when Jesus says -- "Come on." But it takes equal courage to say to Jesus Christ and to the other disciples: "HELP, SAVE ME." Faith not only gives us courage to get out of our boats -- it also gives us courage to ASK FOR HELP.

The truly faithful person KNOWS THAT HE/SHE CAN'T MAKE IT ALONE. Without Christ -- that person knows life will just not work. Peter had the courage to yell out to his Lord in the presence of the other disciples: "Lord, save me."

My dear friends -- every disciple of Christ NEEDS HELP -- because it takes guts to ask for help. The person without courage NEVER GETS OUT OF HIS BOAT -- AND NEVER ASKS FOR HELP. Peter knew he couldn't make it alone. He needed the help of the body of Christ.

I think the application should be clear. In this business called the mission of Christ -- none of us can make it alone. Either the whole body of Christ HELPS -- or we go under. [Many of you will be called on BY JESUS CHRIST in the next few weeks -- I HOPE you will have to courage to get out of your boats. Because Jesus Christ will give you the help that you need if you GET OUT OF THE BOAT so that he can help you.

How do I know that? Because that's the story of faith -- that's the story of the Bible -- that's the story of everyone WHO HAS TRIED IT -- everyone who has gotten out

of his/her boat. And everyone who has gotten out of the boat KNOWS HOW THEY CAN MAKE IT ALONE -- they fall short, but they can count on Christ TO SAVE THEM.

Because he comes to them -- now in the form of bread and wine -- and he gives himself to them - and to us. He forgives us for our lack of courage -- and he forgives us WHEN OUR COURAGE has failed. And that helping hand is all we need -- to go right back into the storms of life and continue to DO HIS MIRACLE OF LOVE.

AMEN

PENTECOST 12

Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo

Aug. 26, 1979

"SOME IMITATIONS ARE AS GOOD AS THE REAL THING"

"Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God."

Eph 5:1-2

Ever since childhood I've been fascinated with cars. I can remember when I was around eleven year old - I used to go to my grandfathers farm each and every summer.

He had one of those old black hearses sitting out in his yard -- and of course, he also had a 1949 chev pick-up truck. And for some strange reason, good ole Grandpa Martyn used to let me take those cars and drive up and down the grazing fields. I kind of shutter to think about it now, because I'm sure that he must have been holding his breath every time he watched me making those dusty trails as I zoomed around the fields.

Of course for me it was a great fantasy -- when I was in the hearse, I'd make believe I was an ambulance driver. When in the truck, I'd make believe I was a stock car driver. If only my grandfather had known my driving fantasies.

Well - I was especially reminded of the varieties of cars as I reflected upon today's text from Ephesians -- we are urged to imitate God by walking like Christ. The notion of imitating brought to my mind the whole enterprise of auto manufacturing-- all the similarities and differences between cars.

In some of my courses I have often used the automobile to describe different images of the church. For instance, some people feel the church should be like a Cadillac limosene. Namely, it should be an ornate, expensive, well-designed object of polished and sophisticated beauty. As such -

this means that the church - the body of Christ - is an object to be used to impress others -- an object that is to provide comfort and romantic beauty. This kind of church has little relevance to daily life -- it is only used on special occasions.

Yet on the other extreme - there are those who would have the church to be an old, black pick-up truck that's only found in the poor part of town. For these people -- looks are least important. This body is scratched and dented and abused -- it looks like it will fall apart any day. But they like it that way - because they feel that Jesus and his body should look ragged and relevant. ~~And by hook or by crook, they get the job done.~~

So - what's your auto image of Jesus Christ and his church? What kind of image of Christ should we be imitating. Is Christ's church to be an exclusive limousine -- or a store-front pickup truck?

Obviously - all cars get the job done-- they all provide basic transportation. Likewise, all churches do the basic job (or at least pretend to)-- they proclaim the gospel of Christ. But in your mind, what automobile image best imitates the style of God in Jesus Christ?

There are many people inside and outside the church who feel the church should be an imitation, of an ambulance or firetruck -- an institution ^{designed} only for crises. Accordingly, Christ and his church is only needed when people are hurting, when babies are born, or when people die. ^a This makes God into a magic man -- he's the one who offers magic miracles -- who sprinkles magic water - or who opens the doors to the magic kingdom of heaven. The image of God for these people is that of a heavenly magician.

There are other more down-to earth images. Some

would style Christ and his church as a Sunday morning school bus. According to this model, Jesus is only to be imitated by children. This little Jesus bus runs around all over creation picking up kids while their moms and dads continue to hibernate with their Sunday morning hangovers.

Still quite different - there's the body of Christ that styled after a Model A Ford. This one hardly has any kids in it. It's an old antique that's badly in need of restoration and reformation. This body of Christ protects itself by being locked up in the garage all week -- and only comes out for a short Sunday morning spin.

Yet on the other hand - there's a growing handful today who would like the church to be like a dragster or funny car. As such, this model is loaded with charismatic power. It's juiced up with super chargers and always expressing itself in loud bursts of babbling ecstasy. Yet so often this model is too overpowering -- and most impractical along the average roadway of life and faith.

By far - the largest majority of people want Christ and his church to imitate a medium-sized sedan. This is the church that goes about business as usual and never rocks the boat. But like any average sedan, it doesn't have much impact on any one either. It's sort of a compromise between power and mileage -- between style and utility. It keeps on running, but it never sets any records. Everything about it is just average-- it's the church without any real challenge or any real commitment.

Well - as you see - it can be fun to compare the body of Christ to different cars. But equally true -- all of these images fall short of imitating the real thing. In fact, not only car images fall short - but language itself cannot fully

describe an authentic imitation of Christ. Since that is the case, I would at least like to suggest one further auto image that seems a more authentic imitation of Christ and his church. And wouldn't you know it!?! It's even manufactured in Toledo, Ohio! You guessed it -- the good ole AMC Jeep. (And please be assured - I'm not being paid for this promotion!)

But at least in theory - the Jeep is designed to stand-up to all kinds of wear and tear -- it's rough and ready to go anywhere. It's not only built for smooth super highways -- but it's capable of taking short cuts through rough terrain. It's not built to be ornately impressive, but rather to be utilitarian - to get the job done. And it's main function is not to be driven in funeral processions -- rather, it's designed to be involved in everyday life, and even capable of getting people out of deep ruts and through stormy blizzards. *Openness,*

Friend in Christ - the Jeep in many ways describes the authentic love of Christ. It is a love that will endure all kinds of wear and tear--- even crucifixion. It's a love built not only for smooth roadway surfaces -- but one that can take the rougher terrains of life. It's the kind of love that is constructed to get the job done -- because it's major agent of power is the forgiveness of God. Above all -- it's not chiefly designed for use at death -- it's made for heavy usage along the everyday paths of life -- and even capable of bringing people out of the deep ruts and stormy blizzards of bad times. *Openness -*

Yes - that's the real thing -- an imitation of the kind of love Christ has first given to you and me. For his love has endured - even after our indifference toward it or rejection of it. His love is always ready to accept and forgive us NO MATTER DEEP THE GULLIES OF SIN. His love is the kind that will leave behind all the obstacles that we have put in his way IN ORDER TO SHOW US THAT WE ARE HIS BELOVED CHILDREN!!

Yes, Christ has already given us the real thing-- and now he calls us to imitate his kind of style. Or to put it in the jargon of this day -- to ~~kind of~~ be like a Jeep -- rough and ready to go, always seeking to get the job of forgiving done now on earth, rather than waiting until it's too late -- yes, rather than waiting for that time when we will join the limosenes in our own funeral procession.

God help us to imitate his love on earth, *always following treadmarks* the love of Christ, always confident that God will power us through whatever mountains or valleys ahead of us.

AMEN

PENTECOST 12

Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo
August 17, 1980

"IS IT SHOWING?"

"Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be great." Genesis 15:1

"Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." Heb. 11:1

"Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." Luke 12:32

I am told that the construction of San Francisco's Golden Gate bridge was accomplished in two phases. The first phase, so the story goes, was a near disaster. During this phase more than 20 workers fell tragically to their deaths in the bay waters hundreds of feet below.

This great cost in human life brought the construction of the bridge to a screeching halt. The engineers pondered as to how they could complete this project with renewed assurance and conviction. Finally - at great expense, a huge net was fastened to the emerging bridge.

With the net in place - the second phase of work began. During the entire completion of the project - only ten more workers fell from the bridge -- and they all fell into the net. Not one single life was lost in phase two of the operation.

But not only lives were saved. During this second phase, the workers increased their productivity by a whopping 25%. The assurance of that net not only prevented people from falling -- not only prevented people from being killed -- but it also gave the workers a psychological confidence WHICH VASTLY IMPROVED THEIR PRODUCTION!

That NET became the workers' object of faith. As long as that net was showing, they had confidence in their work -- and they were even

motivated to go well beyond the normal limits of production. Above all - with that net they knew they could even fail - they could fall -- but that would not be the end.

Dear Christian friends - as I've reflected upon this story I've seen a powerful analogy between those bridge workers and all of us in this world. Because in many ways -- all of our lives might be compared to those bridge workers.

We are all teetering on the bridge of life -- each of us is in a real sense on a different span of the bridge.

We would all like to believe that we are on absolutely solid ground. But that's not really the way it is in life. Life is much more like a bridge building experience. It is filled with risks and uncertainties; it is filled with great demands for balance and sure-footedness; it is filled with the ecstasies of being 600 feet above the ground, but also filled with the fears and agonies of falling flat on your back and being broken to pieces. Yes - life is much more like being a worker on the Golden Gate bridge.

And if you and I can imagine life to be that way -- then we can also see how reassuring it is to have a net under us as we go about our daily labors. Life is much more confident -- much more productive WHEN THE NET IS SHOWING THAT WILL CATCH US SHOULD WE FALL.

Dear friends in Christ - that is what God, our master engineer, has provided for us as we go about building ~~our~~ bridges in life. God has provided us with a safety net, in order that we might live and work and play on our bridges of life WITH UTTER CONFIDENCE AND HOPE.

Faith is essentially being given a safety net by God. Or as our OT text states this morning, "Fear not, Abram, I am your shield."

God gives us the mission to build bridges between Him and one another in life; he commissions us to design bridges which will support his love for us and our love for one another. He directs us to construct some of the most stupendous spans of bridge that have ever been built in this world --

spans of bridge between rich and poor,
spans of bridge between educated and illiterate;
spans of bridge between races, and cultures and classes.

There is no bridge building enterprise, including that of the Golden Gate, that has even been as difficult or as risky as God's blueprint for the Bridge of Humanity.

God knows that his Bridge for Humanity is no small scale enterprise. It has the risks of costing many human lives. And God does not want to see that kind of human sacrifice for the sake of his kingdom. So he has provided a very secure safety net at great expense to himself -- he offers the life, death, and resurrection of his Son, Jesus Christ, as the assurance of his love and forgiveness SHOULD WE

FALL FROM OUR MISSION OF BRIDGE BUILDING.

No greater faith has even been shown to or in humanity than the faith that God has shown in us. Even after centuries of rejection -- after millions had turned away and chosen idols instead -- God still offered the safety net of Jesus Christ in order that all might be saved.

God does not want anyone to fall **off** the bridge of life into the waters of death and nothingness. God wants us to be secure as we build his bridges in life; and should we fall, he wants to catch us in order that we might be saved so that we can return to the work that he has begun in us.

That's the assurance that every human being hopes for ... and that's the conviction of God's promises to us - *HE WILL NOT LET US FALL OUT OF HIS KINGDOM - not let us fall from his loving outreach.*

God ~~is~~ shows us that he has provided a safety net for all of our comings and goings along those bridges of life. The question that we must address to ourselves is: ~~IS IT SHOWING?~~ Is God's faith in us showing in our response to him and to one another?

Do we show a confidence in God's promises and security that he has given us? Do we live life with the assurance of things hoped for, showing others that even if we fail we are not only confident but we are expecting their forgiveness along with God's? As Jesus said in today's Gospel -- do we live showing a confidence that God has already given us the goodness of his kingdom -- he has already shown us his safety net in Jesus Christ.

I don't know about you -- but I see a lot of people every week who seem to be totally oblivious of God's loving safety net for them. Many of these people have chosen a lifestyle without the undergirding power of God. They do not want to give allegiance to God's security plan because it requires bridge-building for the common good. They claim they do not need God's love or security net of salvation. They are taking care of Number 1 ... and that's all they seem to care about.

Is it any wonder then that there is an epidemic of fear and guilt in our society? Is it any wonder then why we are more intent on building weapons of destruction than bridges of peace? Is it any wonder that divorce and dissension continue to be the popular choice for resolving domestic difficulties? Is it any wonder that segregation by culture, creed, and color remains the UN-official policy of the day?

The question remains a personal one: Is God's faith in us showing in our response TO HIM and for one another? We would be less than honest if we claimed that our faithfulness was perfect. But God does not expect perfection -- he would not have to provide a safety net if he expected perfection. But he does ask for a faithful and productive effort.

Much like the workers on the Golden Gate -- you and I can commit ourselves to the risks of God's mission confident that even should we fail God will not let us fall into a sea of destruction.

I believe the people of Hope have caught a vision of this security net from God ... and they have responded anew this past year to their bridge building efforts. I say that as a statement of faith because the presence of Pastor Camlin here today IS JUST ONE TANGIBLE SIGN OF THE INCREASED PERCENTAGE OF FAITH IN THE BRIDGE BUILDERS OF HOPE.

Yes - you are to be commended for the confidence you have shown in God's mission for Hope. Just like those Golden Gate bridge workers you have taken the risk to be bridge-builders for Christ in a society that has become much more faithful to hedonism. You have taken the further risk to add another pastor to the staff... and you have done so because of *your* the undergirding security of God's word.

Pastor Camlin enters as a visible extension of God's security for us. By having Pastor Camlin on board - we have just added several feet to the security net of God. Because just like me - Pastor Camlin has been called here to offer the assurance of those things hoped for -- namely, the forgiving love and promises of God. As servants of God's word, we are here to share the security of God's love especially during those crisis falls of life.

But obviously - the security net (namely faith) is of no value if it does not motivate the workers to increase their bridge building efforts. Only as the works of faith become real does the world realize that God's safety net has served a fulfilling function.

That safety net not only gave the Golden Gate workers psychological confidence -- it even enabled them to increase their productivity by 25%. Surely God's word of loving security is capable of producing even greater results from all of us. Let us never stop showing our faith in the undergirding love of God.

And let us show ^{our faith} by using our skills and our possessions for the good pleasure of building up his kingdom on earth.

AMEN

*like
the
plant*

PENTECOST XII
Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo
August 27 & 30, 1981

"EVER HAD THAT SINKING FEELING?"

(And Jesus said) 'Take heart, it is I, have no fear.'
... So Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and
came to Jesus; but when he saw the wind, he was afraid, and
beginning to sink he cried out, "Lord save me!" *Matt. 14:27, 29*

Nearly all of us have been involved in sharing a
humorous tale about walking on water. The most recent
occurrence for me was last Sunday at Giant Oaks Golf Course.
It was the 5th hole -- a par 3 about 150 yards. To the
left and for 40 yards to the front left of the green --
there was a huge pond. To the right, approx. 20 to 40 yards
in front of the green, there were two giant oak trees.
You can imagine where my tee shot landed -- about 20 yards
from the green to the left -- smack dab in the pond 10
yards from the shoreline.

Within seconds of the ball landing, one member of our
foursome said to me: "That should be no challenge for you,
Pastor -- they teach you to walk on water in seminary, don't
they?"

Obviously - we all had a little laugh and then proceeded
to the pond. And of course, at the end of the 18 holes we
all had a bigger laugh when the whole group found out how
many balls Camlin and Martyn had deposited in the various
creeks and ponds. But to the great disappointment of the
Hope Open participants -- neither of us were able to walk-on-
water to retrieve any of those balls.

I begin with this humorous anecdote today because it
illustrates the way many people seriously feel about the
miracle stories -- they see them as little more than a good
joke. Much like Pastor Camlin illustrated last week with
the miracle of feeding 5000, many of us see no deeper than
the incredible details of the miracle stories. So whether
it's feeding 5000 or walking on water -- if those details
cannot be rationally explained, we turn the whole account
into a humorous joke.

The facts are that God never intended the miracle stories
to be rationally understood or explained. His aim IN DOING

notoriety
A

MIRACLES was not what yours and mine might be -- he was not seeking world recognition for sea-walking or crowd pleasing. Quite simply - God does miracles to reassure his followers of his basic nature and presence -- namely, TO BE HELPFUL. Whether it's feeding a crowd or rescuing the terrified from the sea -- the miracle's point is that God COMES in times of trouble TO RESCUE, TO REASSURE, TO HELP, & TO CARE.

No matter how little sense walking-on-water makes, God really could care less. What he cares about is that he was there in the person of Jesus Christ -- he was seen, he was heard, he was recognized, he was concerned, and he did offer a helping hand. All the gospel writers tell this story with slight variations of detail -- but they all seek to make the same point: GOD SEEKS TO REASSURE, TO SUPPORT, TO LITERALLY SAVE THOSE WHO CALL UPON HIM FOR HELP.

That's the miraculous nature of God - the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: He seeks to be present and helpful in times of trouble -- whether in the person of Jesus, or the person of A.S. - a doctor, or pastor, or friend, or family member, or whomever has come to reassure. God's real power is not only in his water-walking ability, but in his desire to love us even when we fail or foolishly venture into turbulent or forbidden territories. God's character is to reach out and rescue in order that we might trust him (have faith).

Jesus says - "Take heart, it's me; have no fear." I have created the seas and the rivers, and if I desire to walk on those elements of my creation, then that's my prerogative. The good news of the gospel miracles is not their variety of details, but their uniform truth -- God desires to rescue us from the sinking realities of life -- fear, guilt, greed, immorality, hopelessness, finally death.

That's God's focus in the miracle story:

But there's a second dimension to every miracle story: the response of those who've experienced it. In essence, everything that God gives is miraculous -- whether its the gift of life, the satisfaction of bread, or the assurance of his forgiving love. Once given to us -- he invites us to take the risk of sharing them courageously.

Like Peter, once assured of God's presence, Christ invites us to walk with him over the shifting waters of life. Quite literally - walking on water means having the courage to take the risks of faith - NAMELY

To enter new arenas - new relationships - new ministries - new opportunities for outreach --- whether in the neighborhood ... the church ... or the worldwide community. This call for the courage to take risks is esp. paramount with all the gov't cutbacks.

Jesus says, "Come on, walk with me, have no fear, for even if you die you are still secure -- you have been assured of a lasting relationship with your Father."

We often criticize the compulsiveness of Peter, but we too seldom congratulate him for his gutsy faith. Peter demonstrates better than any other disciple that we can take the risks of walking with Christ and even fail - YET BE ACCEPTABLE IN GOD'S SIGHT. Jesus rescued Peter even in spite of Peter's changing courage and cowardice.

As Robert Schuller would say - Peter was a possibility disciple -- he did not allow the potential of failure scare him from the risk of commitment. He realized that walking with Christ might yield a sinking feeling (that he might fail in his mission). But he did not negate the opportunity, because he believed before he even got out of the boat that he was forgiven should he fail.

As disciples today -- God offers us the spirit of St. Peter. A spirit which sees every ministry of Christ's church as a great opportunity rather than a great obstacle. A spirit which says - yes, I'll take the risk, because Christ has assured me that I'm forgiven even if I should fail.

But Peter had an even greater quality of faith than his compulsive courage in the face of challenge: he had the courage to ask for help in the face of failure. Peter demonstrated the greatest truth of faith: the recognition of human frailty and dependence upon God.

Peter had the true mark of courageous faith: the willingness to admit his human limitations. No one can make it all alone. God has created us as dependent creatures -- dependent upon Him and one another.

Faithfulness is having the guts to admit our human frailty-- our need for God and others -- our emptiness without the support of God and others.

No matter how tough we think we are, as individuals or nations, sooner or later every person or power in this world meets his Waterloo. For most of us - that sinking feeling is not only a once in a lifetime reality -- it's a daily or weekly happening. It's often caused by our desire to be more magnanimous than is humanly realistic. Faithfulness at such moments is not setting our jaw to the sun and doubling our fists -- rather it's saying: "I need some help." Or as Peter said: "Lord, save me."

Every pastor's repertoire of relationships is filled with stories of people WHO DIDN'T BELIEVE IN ASKING FOR HELP. There really can be NO MIRACLES ON EARTH as long as we are unwilling to ask God and one another for help. The model of the church for ages has been a model of faithfully asking... and in most cases, faithfully receiving.

*i.e.
Alcoholics*

Jesus commended the sinner and not the wealthy Pharisee in the temple because THE ONE admitted his human condition and need for help; the other was trying to play God.

The so-called moral movements abounding in our society today deserve praise and recognition for their righteous-mindedness. But they suffer from the same sickness of the radical groups of the 60's -- they claim to be the absolute truth of God without human error or frailty. They are like the Pharisee in the temple--- full of self-praise and a stumbling block to God.

Today - like never before - God calls upon us to affirm our universal dependence upon him and one another. That is a difficult task in a world far more obsessed with nuclear armaments than Almighty God. But God desires to rescue his creation from her own self-destruction. He uses the same method he used with Peter 1900 years ago:

he came to Peter as a human being named Jesus; he offered Peter a rescuing hand from defeat and failure; he told Peter and all Peter's followers to do the same thing for one another, above all forgiving one another when they failed.

That's the true meaning of the miracle of walking on water: coming to the rescue when you are called; being courageous enough to ask for help when it is needed; and being faithful enough to offer it when it is asked for.

Prof. Richard Hoefler beautifully illustrates this miraculous ministry in his story of two lifelong army buddies. They enlisted together and soon found themselves on the battlefield together. During combat with the enemy, a shell exploded near them. When the smoke cleared, the one man saw his buddy several yards from him lying motionless on the muddy ground.

He began running to his wounded buddy, when several other men dragged him back into the safety and shelter of the trenches. The young man cried: "Let me go! Can't you see I must get out there and help my friend?!" The other soldiers responded: "It's totally useless. Your friend suffered a direct hit; he never knew what hit him."

But feeling their grip loosen-- the young man broke away and dashed to his friend. Rounds were going off all around him. He lifted up his friend's limp body -- held his head close to his own mouth -- then laid him reverently on the ground.

He scrambled back to the trench, and all the guys chewed into him saying: "You dumb clown! You risked your neck over a dead man. We told you so!"

The young man choked out: I'll never regret what I did, no matter how great the risk. When I reached the side of my friend, the last thing he said before he died was: 'I knew you'd come *to help me.*

The reassurance that even in death God rescues his beloved children from the fear of dying alone. Just another example of the daily miracle of walking on water. The miracle of being rescued from that sinking feeling of being all alone.

AMEN

PENTECOST XII

Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo

August 19 & 22, 1982

Peter R. Martyn, Pastor

"LET US BREAK BREAD TOGETHER"

I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if any one eats of this bread, he will live forever; ...

John 6:51

In Toledo, we call them St. Lukes, St. Vincents, MCO, Toledo, Mercy, Flower, St. Charles, Parkview and Riverside. Every good sized town in the country has these places. We call them places for the sick. We usually don't go to these places unless we have a serious medical problem.

But hospitals did not originally have that relationship to illness. Their origin is in the word itself -- hospital, which is the same root for the words hospitality and host.

A hospital originally was a place where you could find shelter, rest, and food. They were literally "hospitality places" - where a person served you called a "host." The first hospitals often were connected with monasteries and convents -- places where pilgrims and travelers could find refreshment, a meal, and a bed for the night. This hospitality was considered a Christian sign. The monks and religious orders took it very seriously. And from their tradition, the hospital of today has evolved -- now having a primary care for the sick.

In the true and biblical sense of the words-- hospital and church have always been deeply correlated. From the original meaning and location, the church was the hospital -- the hospitality place. It was that place where you could find rest, refreshment, and above all, food. And the host of this hospital was none other than God himself thru Jesus Christ.

It is not by happenstance that food and the breaking of bread has been integral to the church's life. We often hear people today, esp. budget committees, questioning whether food needs to be connected with our fellowship together. We need only look at our history. From our Jewish roots, comes the Passover Meal -- the celebration from Egyptian slavery. For Christians - the eucharist, the Holy Communion, is the extension of that passover meal -- the celebration of deliverance from the slavery of sin.

Christian worship was born around a table in an upper room. That's where it all started -- not in a magnificent cathedral, not in a glorious sanctuary, not on the high altar of some great church, not thru the pomposity of a virtuoso preacher, organist, or tabernacle choir. It all began around the table of a Jerusalem upper room in an inn -- what we would not call a bar or a tavern. It was a very secular place, but very well designed for hospitality and the mutual breaking of bread.

We dare never forget these humble, secular origins or we shall lose our way. God often uses the small and lowly to achieve his great and extravagant goodness. Is it any wonder we use the simplest of elements in the eucharistic meal -- simple bread, simple wine. Everything else in this hospitality place is a luxury -- the beautiful wood, the elaborate candleabra, the excellent organ and renovation soon to come -- all of these are extras. They are not wrong, but they are also not essential. Their only purpose is to enhance that which is central -- the sharing of the Bread of life, namely, Jesus Christ.

Take away this book ... take away that water ... take away the inexpensive bread and less than gourmet wine -- and the whole church collapses. Without the Word and the Bread of Life, we have lost our reason for hospitality -- we have nothing to celebrate.

And so we gather in this hospitality place (this church) for the breaking of bread -- but there is a two-fold dimension to our bread-breaking. One dimension we might Bread for the World. That dimension sees reflection when we offer food, shelter, and refreshment to the weary and hungry in our world. Pastor Camlin challenged your response two weeks ago when he preached the first in this series of the Bread of Life. Our tangible efforts of outreach and benevolence fulfill this dimension of hunger.

But there is a second dimension of bread-breaking and hunger in every Christian community. That dimension does not relate to physical bread or hunger. But it uses the imagery of Bread. This dimension relates to the life of Jesus Christ. He calls himself the living bread ... and he challenges his disciples to be as filled with him as they are with physical bread.

Jesus is saying, my hospitality house is more than a refuge for receiving physical bread, it is also the arena for sharing my living bread -- my presence, my power, my compassion. Or as our Ephesians text says, this hospitality house is that place where we find the imitators of God, those beloved children who walk in love, as Christ loved us.

We come together in this place not to merely admire the physical trimmings and table settings -- not to glorify any person or program among us -- not to gorge ourselves with physical delights -- but to share the living bread, the power and person of Jesus Christ. As Pastor Camlin alluded last week - we come here to be freed from our slavery to our physical selves in order that we might be more hospitable and loving with one another. It is Jesus Christ, the living bread, who makes the possible.

For most of us, it is very natural to enjoy the physical bread and goodness of life. Few of us would think of going through a day without at least one good meal. Good food is life giving. Likewise, many of us wouldn't go through a week without at least one opportunity for exercise. We live in a culture that has become deeply conscious (even obsessed) in analyzing our physical needs & physical shapes.

yes - in our society

We have met the challenge of physical bread and exercise in our lives. In many of our homes we are even teaching our children the importance of sharing the Bread of the World with the weary and hungry. But the challenge of imitating the living bread is still very much before us -- for many a person and family suffers severe malnourishment in this area of hospitality.

For instance, how many of us have analyzed our growth in our faith since the day of our confirmation?? We regularly take note of our physical weight...our physical strength...our physical symptoms of illness. But amazingly - we often try to live out our adult lives with the understanding of Jesus Christ given to us in SCS or catechism. Even if that teaching was superb -- without constant refreshment (just like exercise) our faith becomes very flabby and decays, just like stale bread.

In my 12 years of parish ministry, I've always been amazed by parents who put so much emphasis upon Christian education

for their children without any serious study themselves. Their children can see right through that kind of double standard. That becomes esp. true when the children ask them a challenging question about the faith -- and their only response is: Go ask pastor for the answer. There's no way that children will ever take Jesus Christ, the living bread, seriously if they do not see their parents taking him seriously -- meaning, seriously studying his Word.

The primary roles, then, of the church's hospitality are to feed the weary and hungry of the world with the physical bread of life (whether in form of bread or money) but also to refresh and renew the members of Christ's body with his living bread. As always - we can meet the challenge of feeding the weary and the hungry -- that is no overwhelming challenge for a congregation with our potential. But the real challenge will be to respond to the opportunities for renewal of the living bread in the life of Hope.

Within a few weeks, Holy Communion will be offered at one of the two services each Sunday. It should be obvious that the motivation for this is very biblical: to offer Hope's members the living bread more regularly.

But we all know that the living bread of Christ not only comes through the Sacraments. It is also made manifest through preaching and teaching ... as well as the imitation of his love in our lives.

Within three weeks - we will be installing our educational ministry staff for the next year. These teachers will not all have the same dynamic skills and personalities -- but they will all possess the same commitment: to share the living bread of Christ.

Our response to these ministries of Word and Sacrament, both as adults and children, will show many things in the life of Hope:

- 1st, our response will show our commitment to the living bread
- 2nd, our response will show our willingness to grow and to exercise the power of Jesus Christ, and
- finally, our response will show that the people of Hope truly do seek to be imitators of God, walking in love as Christ first loved us.

AMEN

PENTECOST XII

Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo
August 30 and September 2, 1984
Peter R. Martyn, Pastor

"EVER PRESENT HELP IN TIMES OF TROUBLE"

"Jesus immediately said, 'Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid.' ... Then Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water to Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, 'Lord, save me.'"

Matt. 14:27,29

The story is told of an old merchant ship that was caught in a dangerous storm on the high seas. The winds were wailing and the waves were pounding the little vessel all over the place. Assessing the grave situation, the captain ordered a young sailor to climb the main mast and set free the sail which had become tangled and useless. When the young sailor got halfway up the tall mast, he became wildly frightened by the tossing turbulence of the storm and screamed down to the captain: "I can't do it! I'm going to fall! I'm afraid the storm will blow me away! Help me, what should I do!?" The captain yelled in reply: "Just keep looking up, young man! Forget the storm; don't look down! Just keep looking up and you won't fall!"

I truly wish that captain had been around about six years ago when I was caught on Lake St. Claire in one of my first -- and last -- sailing expeditions. Sue and I had been invited out on a member's 30-ft sail boat for an afternoon cruise. About an hour into the cruise and a horrendous storm blew up. There was nothing to do but to take down the sails and let the storm blow us out to sea. That was the beginning of 75 minutes of never-ending motion and turbulence. But unlike the wise old captain, I did not look up. I kept on looking at the 10-ft waves and the wild rollicking of the boat. I kept on wondering how long it would be before we would be truly doomed to the rocks. I kept on getting more and more fearful. If only I had looked up - at least my stomach would have been relieved. But at the 60-minute mark - I could no longer take it. And as the saying goes -- I initiated the boat with my cookies all over the place.

If only I had looked up, I would have saved a lot of clean-up. But instead I focused upon the turbulence of the situation; and focusing upon the waves and wind and turbulence only caused more fear and frantic nausea. How often when faced with stormy circumstances we become totally transfixed by the wind and the waves -- we will not be gripped by anything but the turbulent realities of our troubles. And then those troubles become amplified, and more amplified, and more amplified ... until we are totally consumed by the storminess of our circumstances.

I am reminded of the story of a family friend who had served in the Korean War. He had been on patrol one day and had stepped on a mine. The explosion resulted in permanent blindness and a handsome face that was tragically disfigured. He handled all of this quite well -- his faith was strong ... and his faith had given him great courage.

But his wife -- she was deeply angry. She shook her fist at God; she was angry at "what God had done to her husband." And she made life miserable for herself... and for him.

Finally one day he sat her down and said: "Look Susan, God didn't cause that war; and God didn't plant that mine. But God has seen me through -- he has given me the courage and determination to face every operation ... to face every treatment ... to face every part of this ordeal. And if you'll just let him -- he'll give you that same courage and determination. He'll see you through, too!

That's the message of today's gospel! In the midst of the terror and fears of the storms of life, Jesus came to give reassurance and courage to his faltering followers. What a significant message this is for all of us -- because we live in a world filled with storms ...raging storms ... personal storms, corporate storms, relational storms, ... storms of guilt and greed, storms of fear and hopelessness, storms of despair and death ... storms of turbulence everywhere. And our great temptation is to focus ONLY upon the severity of the wind and waves and turbulence of all these stormy seas.

There is no doubt about it... life has its heavy seas! There is much in this world that can cause us to be afraid. On this Labor Day weekend, American labor is fearful of its future in the face of foreign imports and automation and fierce competition. We once thought that more deadly weapons would make war more unthinkable - but today we are both intimidating and being intimidated by global nuclear confrontation. In our personal lives - some are facing the storms of terminal illness ... some the loss of loved ones ...some personal bankruptcy ... some family breakdowns and separations and ruined relationships. There are stormy nights in our lives or those around us. The gales are whistling, and the breakers are threatening to capsize our little rafts of security.

Right within the hallowed halls of Hope Lutheran we are facing a stormy night. In the five years that I have been your pastor - I have never had to sound a serious alert about financial deficits. But this next week a letter will go out sounding the real alert.

But this stormy deficit -- just like all other stormy conditions of life -- forces us to ask a deeper question: What is the focus of our life at Hope Lutheran? What is the reason for our existence? For whom are we living? Or said another way: Are we going to allow a stormy deficit to become the essence of our mission, our purpose, our ministry? Like any other stormy condition of life -- are we going to allow our present distress to overshadow THE ONE WHO IS HERE AMONG US -- THE ONE WHO HAS COME TO RESCUS US!

Our great temptation - whether in or out of the church - is to try to take on the storminess all alone. Like Peter, we try to "walk on water" without real faith and commitment to Jesus Christ. Well today's gospel story makes it very clear that we can't do anything alone. In fact, the gospel makes very clear that we are never alone -- that Jesus Christ will not allow any stormy condition or deficit to defeat us. The Good News is that Christ IS WITH US -- EVER PRESENT -- ALWAYS PRESENT TO REASSURE US ...TO ENCOURAGE US ... AND TO FORGIVE US FOR OUR FEARS AND FAILURES.

When Peter frantically needed Jesus, Jesus was there. Two hands were clasped tightly while the storm raged around. While one hand was sinking, the other hand was saving. The message is crystal clear: NO ONE CAN GO EMPTY HANDED THROUGH THE CRISES OF LIFE. We need the saving hand of Jesus Christ. And as the body of Christ (the church) we need the support of one another's hands and hearts and humble gifts to save us from the turbulence of every crisis.

There are two simple messages from this miracle story. One is that there is a time in all our lives when the faithful thing to do IS TO YELL FOR HELP! Contrary to popular belief, that's not a sign of weakness, but rather a sign of faithfulness. When the storms of life are raging around us, the faithful person has the guts to cry out: "LORD, SAVE ME!" That's also what the faithful congregation does -- it cries for help: "Lord, save us!" Faithfulness is having the guts to reach out to God and his people AND CRY FOR HELP ... its having the guts to admit that we are dependent upon God and one another to make it through the stormy conditions of life.

The second message is that despite hell or high water, Jesus Christ always comes to the rescue of those who cry in distress. Christ does not want anyone to feel defeated by the turbulence of life's stormy seas. He reaches out to us; he offers us the security of his love and forgiveness -- and there is no greater security than that! He comes to us in this Sacrament ... he comes to assure us that we are not alone, that he has not abandoned us, that he is very much PRESENT IN OUR TIMES OF TROUBLE regardless of the conditions

that we are facing. Christ assures us that we never need face the stormy darkness alone. For Christ gets into the boat with us and calms our storms of guilt and fear and inadequacy and isolation. His presence enables us to focus upon his supportive love rather than the turbulence of our own fears and frantic nausea.

Certainly this doesn't mean that all storminess is removed from our lives. Likewise, it doesn't mean a magical end to Hope's present deficit. Christ does not offer an escape from reality. But he does give us the faith and courage to face reality -- he gives us the strength and renewed confidence to do battle with life's turbulence. We can overcome the darkness because we have the helping hand of our Lord. And once you and I have been grasped by the security of Christ's grip - we will not allow the momentary disappointments and defeats and deficits TO BECOME THE FOCUS OF OUR EXISTENCE OR MINISTRY. Jesus Christ does not offer us a deficit reality -- he empowers us with a discipleship reality. And now ... every day .. is the time to live up to the potential that he has given us as his disciples.

Jesus has taken up residence within each of us -- he is our EVER PRESENT HELP IN TIMES OF TROUBLE ... if we allow him to be that power for our lives. It was totally unthinkable that a little Jew named Paul could make an impact on the Greek and Roman world. But he did -- and no one has made such a great impact since. It was considered impossible for a monk like Luther to break the tyrannical power of medieval Rome. But he did ... and we are the result of his efforts.

Jesus Christ is just as present in your life and mine as he was in Paul's and Luther's. As Christians, we will always be the apostles of the impossible ... for with God, all things are possible. We will never allow the momentary storms and disappointments and deficits to defeat us -- for Christ is with us, in us, and lives through us ... with Christ, all things are possible ... not even death can defeat us.

AMEN

PENTECOST XII
Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo
August 7 and 10, 1986
Peter R. Martyn, Pastor

"GETTING READY FOR GLORY!"

"Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions and give to the poor. ... Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning, like men waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet, so that when he comes and knocks they can immediately open the door for him." Luke 12:32, 35

What have you been getting ready for? Well, if you live in Toledo, Ohio, there's only one thing to get ready for - the PGA Championship! Why else would I come back from a vacation in God's Country of Minnesota to the August dog-days of Toledo? Why else would I read "Golf & the Gospel" on vacation? Finally the time has come to GET READY FOR THE PGA AT INVERNESS. There's no way to be in Toledo this week and not in some way "get ready for the PGA."

In fact, I am amazed at the tremendous commitment that people have given to this tournament! Some 83 members have worked on a PGA championship committee for years planning this event -- it has meant a phenomenal commitment of planning, promoting, and pumping big bucks into the PGA. It has also meant big investments from local corporations -- not only money, but management people to fraternize with customers in the 11 hospitality tents on the grounds. Moreover, more than 1,500 volunteers are giving of their time and talent to the PGA this week. More than a 100 security people will be on guard; more than 850 members of the press; more than 250 from the ABC television staff alone. Every motel room in the surrounding area is filled to the brim to accommodate the more than 120,000 people who will invade Inverness. Some 15 to 17 million dollars will be pumped into our Toledo economy. All this and much more just to follow 150 pros chasing a ball for 18 holes.

Now let me tell you - all this represents a tremendous commitment of time and talent for the glory of one event! Wow! I'm impressed! We should all take our hats off to the people who have staged and schlicked this show together! It's good for Toledo! And it's good for all of us who like a good local golf show!

But I must admit with all candor -- God would never rate such a display of time and talent and commitment! We really know how to GET READY FOR EARTHLY GLORY! When it's a matter of promoting something with glow and

gloss and glitz and glitter -- WOW! do we know how to do it! We really know how to get the team going when there's glory in it for the local folks, or for the local corporation, or for the local country club! There's no limits -- we get out the pocketbooks, we give away tickets, we promote, we sell, we'll do anything to promote a good show! We really GET READY TO CELEBRATE THE TREASURES AND TRIUMPHS OF THIS WORLD!!

But ask those same 115,000 people on the fairways to give away some of their possessions to the poor -- and they'll say: ARE YOU SOME KIND OF NUT?! We'll give anything for a good golf show -- but give something away for the kingdom of God? You better go to the 19th hole and take a long, cold shower!

As I have already said, nobody loves a good golf show more than me. But having the PGA Championship here only illustrates so graphically just how willing individuals and industries and communities are TO GIVE AWAY THE GOODS AS LONG AS THERE'S SOME GLORY IN IT FOR THEM!

It's like the story of the wealthy man who died and went to heaven. An angel was taking him on a guided tour of the celestial city. And he came to a magnificent heavenly mansion and asked: "My God, who lives there?" And the angel said: "Oh, that man was a gardener on earth." The wealthy man became excited: if this was a mansion for a gardener, then imagine what mine will be like! Then they came to an even more magnificent mansion. "And who's is this?" The angel said: "This one belongs to a woman who was a missionary in Africa." Wow. Now the rich man was ecstatic. Finally they came to a tiny eight-by-eight foot shack without windows and only a piece of cloth for the door. It really looked like the pits. "This is your eternal home," said the angel to the rich man. The man was aghast! "But why this dump!? All the other mansions were so beautiful!" The angel smiled sadly: "Well, sir, I'm sorry, but you sent nothing for us to work with ... you withheld everything for your own mansions on earth!"

Obviously, the story is fabricated. But it makes the point of how committed we often are TO GETTING READY FOR OUR OWN GLORY. We commit ourselves to the things that we can see and touch and taste and feel -- but to the spiritual and relational ... well, we'll get ready for those things some day! But not now! Now's the time to get ready for the tangible treasures of this world! It is so difficult for us to overcome this obsession with ourselves ... our own glory!

It's like the story of the woman caught in a fire on the 4th floor of her apartment building. The firemen quickly arrived and extended a ladder to her window. As she came out, she was holding a screaming baby in her arms. Immediately, a safety net was stretched beneath the window and the firemen urged her to drop the child into the net. She did so, and the child was saved. Then they yelled for her to descend the ladder.

But at that moment she returned to the burning apartment and came back to the window dragging her bulky mattress. Precariously, she began to descend the ladder - one hand holding the mattress, the other grabbing the ladder. The firemen yelled for her to drop the mattress onto the safety net. But she would not. She came the full distance, clutching onto the mattress. The people were amazed! How could this woman so freely toss her child into the safety net, but not the mattress. Later they were informed that her lifetime savings was stored in the mattress. She was willing to let go of life, but would never stop clinging to her real possessions. "For where your treasure lies, there will your heart be also."

There is rarely a question of readiness when it comes to the treasures of this world. We will sweat for them, we will sacrifice for them, we will jeopardize life itself for the sake of our treasures. We are so adept at GETTING READY FOR EARTHLY GLORY!

When we look at the games people play on earth -- whether the game is the PGA or family vacation fun or even church membership -- God and his kingdom seem to always get the last move. We are good at GETTING READY FOR SERVING OURSELVES ... but very poor at GETTING READY TO SERVE AND KEEP THE LAMPS BURNING FOR THE MASTER. With such a scorecard, I am amazed that God did not disqualify us long ago! We certainly haven't played par ball with God! It's lucky when he gets a triple-bogey effort from many of us. We make our birdies and our eagles where there are earthly rewards! Yes, I'm amazed that God has even allowed us to see his fairway ... much less to live on his green. But amazingly - he goes all the way. He gives us a hole in one, and he shoots it for us!

As Luke quotes our Lord: "Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom." God knows that we will not seek to shoot for his kingdom by ourselves. We are far too oriented to the tangible treasures around us. So instead of forcing us to play four rounds to prove ourselves, God does it for us with one stroke: HE GIVES US THE KINGDOM IN THE PERSON OF JESUS CHRIST. He hopes by dropping the kingdom in the

hole before our eyes that we will finally see the real treasure of life: a relationship that will not wear out, forgiving love that thief or moth cannot destroy. The true treasure ... the true championship of life is not secured at Inverness ... nor will it be won through amateur or professional efforts or scores under par. The true treasure is a gift: THE FORGIVING AND FAITHFUL LOVE OF JESUS CHRIST.

The question, of course, is now that we've got it, what are we going to do with it? There's only one answer: GET READY TO SHARE IT. THAT'S THE WHOLE GAME PLAN OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH: LEARNING TO SHARE THE TREASURES THAT GOD HAS GIVEN AS GIFTS. That often means selling possessions and giving to the poor. It may mean other forms of sacrifice and service. But these are nothing compared to the treasure. That's simply being faithful.

It means recognizing that God has been infinitely faithful to us for millions of years. He has created us, sustained us, and nurtured us into being whom we are today. That has taken a long time, regardless of what theory of evolution you happen to believe in. And God doesn't want to see us blowing the investment that it has taken him more than 3000 years to create -- a faithful community of loving and forgiving people.

That faithful community is known as the church. It's certainly not a perfect reflection of his kingdom. But it's the best reflection that he has on earth. It's a community filled with his presence and his power. It's a place where his Word is most clearly spoken, and where his forgiveness is broken and shared. It's the one place in the world that is always ready to be his servant -- SHARING HIS GREATEST TREASURE: HIS FORGIVING AND FAITHFUL LOVE.

It's made up of sinful people. People like you and me, who are very oriented to the treasures of this world. People who rarely shoot perfect scores. Certainly people who would not be classified as below par shooters. In fact, most of us live at a double-bogey or triple-bogey pace -- rarely making par for God. By and large, we are not the PGA champion type. We're basically average folk. But like most champions, we do like to go after the glory. But in one way we're very different -- we know that God has already given us the greatest treasure ... which we cannot achieve by any of our own efforts. A treasure far greater than any PGA trophy. A treasure that must be given away, because it brings life and liberty and peace to all who receive it. GETTING READY TO SHARE THIS FORGIVING AND FAITHFUL LOVE OF GOD IS THE GREATEST GLORY EVER GIVEN TO HUMANITY. I pray that each of us will treasure ITS worth as much as we treasure the PGA at Inverness!

AMEN.

PENTECOST XII
Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo
August 3 and 6, 1989
Peter R. Martyn, Pastor

F A I T H T H A T B U I L D S B R I D G E S

"Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be great." Genesis 15:1

"Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." Hebrews 11:1

"Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." Luke 12:32

As I re-entered Toledo turf last Sunday evening after a two-week retreat -- I felt many mixed feelings. Obviously, I was glad to be back on terra firma -- my present homeland, with people I knew and loved and trusted. After fighting Chicago traffic for a few hours - there's nothing quite like the homeland of Toledo. But being back also meant a confrontation with many uncertainties and challenges of the future -- committee leaders yet to be chosen; a sick father who was now sicker at St. Charles; the dust of renovation still very unsettled and in everything; the advent of a second decade of pastoral ministry at Hope ... and the challenge of keeping it fresh and vital; and most obviously, the loss of a good friend and colleague in Bob Meckley. Amazingly, returning from vacations always seems to have more challenges than comforts.

But that's the picture of life almost all the time -- a constant confrontation with the uncertainty, the unknowns, the challenges of the future. Our tendency is to clutch onto the security of the past rather than confront the challenges of tomorrow. How do we find the faith to face an unknown future? That's exactly the theme of the three texts from scripture today. In all three cases, God says, "Fear not ... for faith is the assurance of things hoped for; fear not ... for the father has already given you the kingdom." Those are wonderful promises from God, but how can they become living realities of our lives?

There is no simple or single answer to that question, but I believe there is an image that enables us to LIVE BY THAT FAITH. I used this image almost ten years ago in one of my first sermons at Hope. It was the story of the construction of the Golden Gate bridge in San Francisco. Any of you remember that story? Well, I've got to tell it again because many times a good story cannot be bettered.

I'm told that the Golden Gate bridge was constructed in two phases. During phase one, 20 workers fell tragically to their deaths while working on the bridge. This great cost of human life brought construction on the bridge to a standstill.

But there was a second phase. At great expense, a huge SAFETY NET was fastened below the emerging bridge. And construction again resumed. During this phase, ten more workers fell off the bridge, but each was safely rescued by the net. Not one single life was lost in Phase II of the operation.

In fact, not only was life totally secure during phase two, but productivity also increased by 25% during this phase. The assurance of the net not only prevented workers from fearing death, it also gave them the psychological confidence to vastly improve their production.

Needless to say, that net had become the workers' object of faith. As long as the net was hanging - there was total confidence, total motivation, total productivity. The workers knew they could still fall, but they could not fall -- the future was secure!!

My dear friends in Christ, in many ways our lives are just like those bridge builders. We would all like to believe that we are standing on absolutely solid ground, but in reality -- each of us is really standing on a different span of unfinished bridge. The life God has given us is really an ongoing bridge building experience. It is filled with daily risks and uncertainties; it is filled with great demands for balance and sure-footedness; it is filled with the ecstasies of one day being 600 feet in the air above it all ... and the next day being dashed to the turbulent waters of chaos to be confronted by brokenness and possible death.

When we view life that way -- then we realize the importance of having a SAFETY NET under us at all times. And that is exactly what God, our master engineer, has provided for us. He calls us to be bridge builders in life, and he provides the safety net in order that we might live and work and play on our bridges WITH CONFIDENCE AND HOPE for the future.

FATH IS LIVING WITH THE ASSURANCE THAT GOD HAS PROVIDED AN EVERLASTING SAFETY NET FOR LIFE. As the OT text states today, "Fear not, Abram, I am your shield." God gives us the never-ending mission to build bridges between Him and one another in life. He commissions us to design bridges which will support his love for us and our love for one another. He directs us to construct come of the most stupendous spans of bridge that life on this planet has ever seen ...

spans of bridge between rich and poor, black and white;
spans of bridge between well-educated and illiterate;
spans of bridge between racist and radical;
spans of bridge between communities and cultures and
classes and countries and continents.

There has never been any bridge building enterprise that has been more risky, more uncertain, more challenging than God's blueprint for the Bridge for Humanity. Our piddly building renovations are but a few breaths in comparison to God's great blueprint. And if we had to achieve God's blueprint without his support - it would cost millions of lives (which we have already seen through countless wars and international skirmishes). But God does not leave us build bridges without his absolute security. He has provided the greatest SAFETY NET of all at great expense to himself -- the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. There is no greater assurance of his total love, total forgiveness,

total support of our bridge building efforts.

No greater faith has ever been shown for humanity than God's faith through the safety net of Jesus Christ. After centuries of rejection, after eons of idols and false gods, God still offers his safety net of Jesus Christ that we might always be rescued when we fall from his bridge building mission in life.

And where is the visible expression of that SAFETY NET of Jesus Christ on earth?? It is right here -- the body of Christ is God's safety net of faith for life. This is where we learn of God's love and forgiveness from infancy ... where we are taught to care for the least and the lost ... where there is always safety and security in God's sanctuary ... where God uplifts and supports us just as we are ... where bridges are built and walls are torn down.

For what is God's Word from this body when someone has fallen into hunger or poverty in this world? "Fear not," says God thru this community, "my safety net will uphold you and feed you through this body of Christ." Is it any wonder that we continue to support Feed Your Neighbor, St. Paul's Community Center, or World Hunger -- all these are part of God's safety net of faith thru the Body of Christ. Obviously, some people rip off the system -- they take advantage of God's safety net. But God does not withhold his safety net just because of the foolishness and ignorance of humanity; he calls us to be his safety net of feeding for the hungry of the world. That's the way we build bridges in this world.

And what is God's Word from this community when someone has fallen into despair or guilt? "Fear not," says God thru this body, "come unto me and I will give you rest. Take and eat; take and drink ... be assured that you are forgiven for all your sins. Now let go of whatever is getting you down; you have been rescued by my safety net. Now get up from your bed of self-pity and procrastination. Become a new person in the love that I have given to you.

And what is God's Word from this community when a pastor or DCE or member of this church is perplexed by the uncertainty of having enough willing workers for the tasks of tomorrow?? "Fear not" says God, "just ask, and the workers will be given to you; just seek, and the workers will be found; just knock, and the doors of willing workers will be opened unto you." That's the bridge building faith of this community.

And what is God's Word from this community when someone is suffering terminal illness? "Fear not," says God "I have already gone and prepared a place for you. If I had not done so, would I have told you that I had. I am the resurrection and the life, he who believes in me shall never die." d

God's mission is always to build new bridges for the future. Like Abraham entering into a new land among a new people, we are to build new bridges of God's love and mercy in this world. God provides a safety net along the way so that

we can never be defeated in our bridge building efforts. Because we have the assurance of his ever-present rescue, we continue to productively build his bridges of love and compassion in the world.

On August 3, 1989, there are many uncertainties and challenges still facing Hope Lutheran Church. Pastor Bob's departure certainly adds one more unique challenge to our unknown future. But no matter how great the uncertainty -- no matter how many the challenges -- God's mission is just the same today as it was 60 years ago. It is not altered by pastors' personalities or parish priorities. His mission is to **COMPLETE THE BLUEPRINT FOR BRIDGING HIS LOVE TO ALL HUMANITY.**

And that is one mission for which we can never fear defeat or call retreat. **BECAUSE GOD HAS PROVIDED US WITH HIS SAFETY NET OF JESUS CHRIST -- the FAITH, THE ASSURANCE** that even when we fall and fail and flounder in our bridge building efforts ... he rescues us and returns us to his productive working force. What a glorious privilege to be **BRIDGE BUILDERS FOR GOD.** For no matter how challenging the present or how flawed the past, we journey forward with the complete hope that we will **BRIDGE GOD'S KINGDOM ON EARTH, AS IT HAS ALREADY BEEN BRIDGED FOR US IN HEAVEN.**

AMEN.

PENTECOST XII
preached at Redeemer Lutheran, Milwaukee, Wis.
August 11, 1991
Peter R. Martyn, Pastor

"WORDS AREN'T ENOUGH!"

Jesus said, "I am the bread of life. ... This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that a man may eat of it and never die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if any one eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh."
John 6:48; 50-51

It's so good to be back at Redeemer. And I even get to preach on a text that Pastor Witt has preached on for the last two weeks ... and for next week as well - THE BREAD OF LIFE THEME. Just like the good ole days - if I screw up, at least Pastor Witt will get it right for you one of these weeks!

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

When Jesus says, "if anyone eats of this bread," he is not asking his followers to take him literally - to become cannibals. He is asking us to integrate his life personally -- TO TAKE HIM FULLY WITHIN US ... TO MAKE HIS LIFESTYLE IN THE FLESH OUR LIFESTYLE IN THE FLESH ... TO MOVE BEYOND A RELIGIOUS VOCABULARY TO A REAL GIVING, LIVING, FLESH AND BLOOD ONENESS!!

Like Harry Emerson Fosdick's question, today we must ask ourselves: SINCE THE FIRST DAY THAT WE BECAME CHRISTIANS, HOW HAVE OUR LIVES BEEN ANY DIFFERENT? HAS OUR LIFESTYLE CHANGED AT ALL?? OR FOR THAT MATTER - HOW HAS IT CHANGED IN THE LAST WEEK? OR THE LAST 24 HOURS? HOW HAVE OUR LIVES CHANGED ... BECOME DIFFERENT BECAUSE OF THIS BREAD OF LIFE? Is our faith little more than pious platitudes - or do we stand and fall with the truth and justice and peace of Jesus Christ?

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

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

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

For God, words were never enough. Instead, he gave totally of himself in the flesh of blood of a man named Jesus Christ. Maybe that kind of giving can only be illustrated by the story of the old beggar and the stone soup. This beggar wandered into a village once and announced to the villagers that he had a magic stone that could make the best soup they ever tasted. The people did not believe him, but one person put on a pot of water on her old burners (it was probably Olga Peterson) just to test the beggar. Once the water began to boil, the beggar dropped his stone into it.

And then he said - "Now this will become the most delicious soup that you have ever tasted. But then he paused and said - "Now is there someone in the area that might want to add a few carrots to the pot while it is cooking - it would be so much better with your carrots?!? Then a farmer watching the whole event said that he had some carrots, so he dropped them into the pot.

Then the beggar continued: "Now, this is going to be the greatest soup you've ever tasted! But if someone had a bit of beef and bacon to add ... it surely would add to the greatness of this rock soup! Within minutes, two villages ran home and brought back several chunks of beef and a few pounds of bacon and dropped them in. Then the beggar mentioned potatoes ... and then he went on with peas and corn and onions ... and a little salt & pepper ... and then some cabbage. And before he had hardly said any of these things, the villagers were bringing them from their homes and gardens. AND AT LAST, AFTER THE SOUP HAD COOKED SUFFICIENTLY AND EVERYONE FELT TOTALLY INVESTED IN ITS MAKING ... LO AND BEHOLD, THEY SAT DOWN TO THE BEST POT OF STONE SOUP THEY HAD EVER EATEN IN THEIR LIVES.

The WORDS of the Beggar were not enough. It took the commitment of a whole village in order to fulfill the mission of making the greatest stone soup that had ever been made. And Jesus said, "Truly, truly, I am the bread of life; I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if any one eats of this bread, he will live forever!" WORDS AREN'T ENOUGH; when Jesus says "the bread which I shall give is my own flesh ..." he is talking of his total commitment to us in order that we might offer that same total commitment to Him!

Someone once said, "It doesn't take much of a person to become a Christian; rather, it takes ALL of that person." General William Booth, creator of the Salvation Army, said, "The secret (of my success is), God has had all there was of me. There have been men with greater brains, with greater wealth, with greater opportunities! But from the day I experienced the plight of the poor and had a vision of what Jesus Christ could do for them ... I made up my mind that God would have all of William Booth that there was to have."

I sincerely hope that God has made that kind of difference in your life and mine! Because that's the Redeemer that I remember - a people from which God has had all that he could possibly have from each of you! That's what it has always meant in this household of faith "to eat of this Bread of Life" - it has meant that you have made up your minds that God will not only have your words -- but like Jesus Christ and General Booth -- he will have all that there is to have of you -- your minds, your bodies, your souls, your pocketbooks, and your spirits! For truly, truly ... then you have eaten the Bread of Life ... and when you've eaten that Bread of Life, you shall live forever as if you are one flesh and one blood with Jesus Christ! And that's a lot more than just words!

AMEN.

PENTECOST XII

Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo

August 27 and 30, 1992

Peter R. Martyn, Pastor

F A I T H F O R T H E F U T U R E

"Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great." Genesis 15:1

"Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." Hebrews 11:1

"Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." Luke 12:32

Well, the two big conventions of the summer of 1992 have now ended. The flags are no longer waving, the balloons are no longer dropping, and the residents of NYC and Houston are back to business as usual. The hope of these conventions is that our faith in the future has been restored or inspired by one of the political candidates running for president. I must admit from the talk that I have heard - it has not been a great summer of restoration or inspiration of faith!

One party and its candidate have attempted to inspire Americans "to change." The other party and its candidate have sought to restore American pride in "traditional family values." There is no doubt about it -- both of these parties and their candidates have made some important points and have deserved our attention. There certainly are changes that need to be made at every level of government. And there certainly is a need to restore traditional family values of caregiving, parental responsibility, religious conviction, and the sanctity of human life.

But President Bush probably identified the real problem when he said: "This election is not only about change, because change has a flip side: that flip side is trust or faith." And without a doubt, there is a crisis of FAITH in America. The Greek word for FAITH is "pistis," which means "that to which you hang on for dear life; that to which you clutch as if your very life depended upon it." What is it that we "clutch onto as if our very lives depended upon it? For far too many Americans, as Pastor Larry said last week, about the only thing clutched onto is BIGGER AND BIGGER BARNS. One thing has certainly become too true in America: WE DO NOT CLUTCH ONTO GOVERNMENT AS IF OUR LIVES DEPENDED UPON IT. In fact for most people in this community -- the feeling is that there is too much government ... too much beauracratc control. Yes the facts are - regardless of our political loyalties - there is a crisis of faith in government. The problem is not merely "change" or "family values;" the problem is trust, or better stated, a lack of trust (faith).

Obviously, this crisis of faith goes well beyond the boundaries of Washington. We live with the best in technology, the best in communication, the best in travel, the best in productivity, the best in the standard of living, And yet, we

live in constant confrontation with uncertainty, unknowns, fears and challenges of the future. This is certainly one age where we have learned that clutching onto the past will no longer address the challenges of the future. What we need today is no different than what any other civilization has needed for its future - a faith, a trust, a conviction, a dedication to someone or something that will see us securely into tomorrow.

The three texts before us today tell us that the faith that we need for a secure future is found in the promises of God. God says: "Fear not ... for I will give you the assurance of what you are hoping for; fear not ... for I have already given you the kingdom." These are wonderful words ... uplifting promises ... essential truths. But how can they be translated into REAL TERMS OF SECURITY for our day to day living for the year 2000 and beyond??

In my 22 years of parish preaching, I still go back to a parable that I have used before to illustrate the meaning of faith in God's promises. It is the story of the construction of the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco. As I have told before, the bridge was constructed in two phases. During phase one, 20 workers fell tragically to their deaths while doing construction. This great cost of human life brought this building enterprise to a standstill.

But there was a second phase. At great expense, a huge SAFETY NET was fastened below the emerging bridge. And construction was able to resume. During this phase, ten more workers fell off the bridge, but each was safely rescued by the net. Not one single life was lost in Phase II. In fact, not only was life totally secure during this phase, but productivity also increased by 25% from the workcrew. The assurance of the net not only prevented workers from fearing death, it also gave them the confidence to vastly improve their productivity. The workers knew they could still fall, but they could not fail -- the future was secure.

As I have said before, in many ways our lives are just like those bridge builders. We would all like to believe that we are standing on absolutely solid ground. Yet in reality - each of us is standing on a different unfinished span of bridge. That's the life God has given us on this earth: a never-ending, bridge building experience. It is filled with daily risks and uncertainties; it is filled with great demands for balance and sure-footedness; it is filled with the ecstasies of one day riding the waves of the Atlantic ... and the next day being dashed and destroyed by those same waters through a turbulent hurricane.

Obviously, the same is true for politics or any other endeavor on this earth. A political party and its leader may have some of the best platform blueprints ever designed for the country. That same person/party may have thousands of

dedicated workers to build that platform and win the election. But even with such outstanding engineering and dedicated laborers - THERE IS NO SECURITY AGAINST A FALL. For every platform and party is but an imperfect human system; there are no guarantees against recession, depression, and ultimate collapse. Let it be known to every other system of human good works, there is a need for a safety net that overcomes the fall. And that's why there can be no absolute faith in any political party or any other human system -- THEY ALL LACK THE SAFETY NET.

Whether we are Republican or Democrat, Lutheran or Roman Catholic, rich or poor, black or white, male or female - there are two realities of faith for a secure future THAT ONLY COME FROM GOD. First, faith is living with the assurance that God, and God alone, has provided an everlasting safety net for our lives. Whether Genesis or Luke today, the message is the same: "Fear not, Abram, I am your shield." God does not allow us to build any of life's bridges without his absolute security. He has provided the greatest safety net of all times AT HIS OWN EXPENSE: the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, his son. With that safety net - there is total assurance of his love, his forgiveness, his mercy, his understanding in whatever bridge building effort we are about in life. No matter how risky our endeavor, God has promised that he will rescue us should we fall ... he will not allow us to suffer defeat or death!

And once we are assured that he will not allow us to suffer defeat, then we are ready for the second gift of faith: he trains, equips, and commissions us to be bridge builders. And that is one of the greatest MISSING ELEMENTS in the platforms, campaigns and rhetoric of political parties and other worldly systems: instead of building bridges in this world, they are too often seeking to tear down people who don't think and act and dress and socialize just like them. Bridge building is something that is rarely taught by political parties, because their goal is to win even if it means tearing down the other side or the other nation or whomever may have a different point of view.

There is only one place where a bridge building kind of faith is taught and preached and praised and uplifted: it is right here ... in the body of Christ. This is where God's safety net is held out for all peoples, regardless of race, color, politics, or status. This is where we are taught to care for the lost and the least ... where there is always security for someone seeking a sanctuary ... where bridges between humanity are built and walls between races and nations are torn down.

Yes, this is the body where we hear God say: "Fear not, for my people is a body that will feed you and clothe you and welcome you so that you will no longer be a stranger in this world." That's why this body is an advocate for Feed Your Neighbor, and World Hunger, and Disaster Relief for Hurricane

victims, and a haven for the homeless and the poor and hungry from the streets of Toledo. Because this is a body of faith in God and his safety net for all people; it is by his order that we have been commissioned to be bridge builders of society.

Yes, this is the body where we hear God say: "Fear not, come unto me and I will give you rest. Take and eat; take and drink." Yes, it is this body that is taught to live by faith and forgiveness, not by slander, jealousy, gossip, or any other destructive words/actions that would tear down THE BRIDGE OF GOD'S LOVE BETWEEN the family of man. Yes, if you're looking for family values in this world - you'll get mucy better instruction in this body than from the body politic.

And when a pastor or leader in this body is perplexed or uncertain of having enough workers for the building tasks of tomorrow, then God says: "Fear not, just ask, and the workers will be given; seek, and the workers will be found; knock, and the doors of willing workers will be opened unto you (at least that's the way it's supposed to be!!).

And when someone suffers terminal illness or death in this body, the same word of faith is heard from God: "Fear not, for I have already gone to prepare a place for you. For if I had not done so, would I have told you so. I am the resurrection and the life, anyone who believes in me will never die!"

Can there be any doubt where the real faith for the future is found in this world?!? It should be pretty obvious that the principalities and powers of this world do not deserve that trust. For too often they operate without faith in God's safety net or his commission to build new bridges for all humanity in the future. Like Abraham entering into a new land among a new people, we are to build new bridges of God's love and mercy in this world.

This is no small undertaking of faith. But it is the one mission for which we can never fear defeat or call retreat. Why? BECAUSE GOD HAS PROVIDED US WITH HIS SAFETY NET OF JESUS CHRIST -- the FAITH, THE ASSURANCE, THE CONFIDENCE that even when we fall and fail and flounder in our bridge building efforts ... he rescues us and returns us to HIS productive working force. What a glorious privilege to be BRIDGE BUILDERS FOR GOD. For no matter how challenging the present or how flawed the past, we journey forward with complete FAITH IN THE FUTURE. That's why we never stop praying: THY KINGDOM COME, THY WILL BE DONE, ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN!

AMEN.

PENTECOST XII
Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo
August 11 & 14, 1994
Peter R. Martyn, Pastor

"IT'S THE REAL THING!"

Therefore, be imitators of God, as beloved children.
And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for
us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. Eph. 5:2

Like many of Paul's epistles, Ephesians offers exhortations for Christian conduct that are amplifications of the Ten Commandments. The writer exhorts us "not to lie; not to be controlled by anger; not to steal; and not to speak evil." Beside these negative commands he also offers positive directives: "to speak the truth; to do honest work and give to those in need; and to speak in a kind and edifying way." Not a person here who would argue with the importance of these moral disciplines for faith & living. In fact, the results of a 20-year study would seem to indicate that we have slipped seriously in our teachings & expectations of morality for our children. This survey was done with 12/13 year-old church members; the aim was to reveal to what extent profanity has been used over this 20-yr period. Since 1974, use of profanity among 13 yr old girls has risen from 24% to 77%; for boys the increase has been from 66% to 99%. Thus, almost every young teen-age boy uses profanity as a constant part of his daily language. Yet Paul says, "Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for edifying, that it may impact as grace to those who hear." We all know the truth, don't we: hearing teenagers use the "f-word" constantly as well as all kinds of other vulgarity/profanity has certainly reminded us as parents & pastors of our failure to teach our society and its children the importance of the second commandment.

So let that be one challenge from today's text. But the text's greater challenge exceeds both the negative/ positive directives of morality. Even though the Christian faith emphasizes the moral code of the commandments - this is not the most powerful message of the gospel. Obviously, lying, stealing, and damaging talk are not to be tolerated or encouraged by any self-respecting Christian or community. So, Paul urges us to recognize the importance of these exhortations in our talking and our teaching. But he also sets a higher standard for Christians to achieve than mere moral virtue in their daily living. **THE REAL THING** that makes Christianity most unique and more profound than any other religion **IS THAT GOD BECAME ONE OF US IN ORDER THAT WE MIGHT BECOME IMITATORS OF HIM!** That's the real thing: to become imitators of the one who became flesh and dwelt among us full of grace and truth!

And when Paul used the word "imitation" he was using language which any intelligent person of Greece could fully understand. For in this Greco-Roman world "imitation" was

the highest principle for training orators. The teachers of ancient rhetoric declared that learning of oratory depended upon three qualities: 1) theory; 2) imitation and 3) practice. And the greatest of these was IMITATION. The orator was trained to imitate the masters who had gone before him. That's THE REAL THING that makes Christians different from all other religions: WE IMITATE THE MASTER WHO BECAME THE LIVING BREAD OF LIFE FOR THE WORLD. This imitation is not to be a mere matter of the mind or morality -- WE ARE TO BE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE VERY HEART AND SOUL OF GOD! When we imitate the heart & soul of God, then great things like peace and wholeness and reconciliation happen in this world.

Let me illustate with both positive & negative examples. In a small country village church, an altar boy helped serve the Sunday mass. The boy accidently dropped the glass cruet of wine. The priest struck the altar boy sharply on his cheek and shouted: "Leave this altar immediately and never come back again." Obviously, the priest was most interested in teaching morality - what was proper practice! That boy became Tito, the Communist leader of Yugoslavia after WWII.

Certainly I am not suggesting that this one incident in the life of the church turned Tito into a dictatorial atheist. But I am saying that if Jesus Christ is THE REAL THING, then we must imitate his actions every opportunity we get. I know for a fact that there are many of you who were abused as children like this altar boy and have never truly trusted the love of God ever since. The church (and some Christians) has often been guilty of "preaching the truth of the gospel" but "living by the damnation of the law."

Thankfully, this is not the only example that the church has shown. About the same time as Tito there was another altar boy who served mass with a bishop at St. Mary's Cathedral, Peoria, Ill. This altar boy also dropped the wine cruet. Bishop John Spalding, the celebrant, beamed warmly and whispered to the young boy: 'Someday, son, you will be doing just what I am doing here today, 'cause I dropped the wine cruet when I was an altar boy like you.' That altar boy grew up to become Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen, one of the greatest Roman Catholic advocates for Christian unity & concord. Again, I am not saying that one incident inspired Sheen to imitate Christ, but I can only believe it was a great example of encouragement & grace for his life.

And that is the REAL THING that sets our Christian religion apart from all others - not our morality or intellectual mentality, but our willingness to be a LIVING EXAMPLE OF THE HEART & SOUL OF GOD for one another. Who do you treasure most in your life?? Do you really admire people who are perfectly virtuous ... who are always throwing it in your face and making you feel inadequate and inferior because you still have faults and doubts. Be assured - those are not the people that I most treasure! Jesus most often criticized and condemned those kind of people for being self-righteous. And the last people he would ever have us imitate are the self-righteous!!

So, who were the real heroes for Jesus? Who would he have us imitate as the greatest examples of faithfulness? Certainly the Peters, the Pauls & the Marys - the ones who imitated Jesus yet often suffered from faults of denial, from feeling overwhelmed with sinfulness, from living with thorns & family rejection. In spite of these faults & problems, they knew the heart of God's love was forgiveness. That's why the adulterous woman at the well was uplifted by Jesus as a hero of faith -- not because of her imperfect morality, but because of her persistent belief!

The Blade this week said that a recent survey at Ohio University shows that between 60-80% of today's young adults no longer believe there are heroes to be followed. The article indicated that part of the blame for that cynical attitude is due to the press -- it has falsely given the young the impression that heroes are without any fault or weakness by constantly exposing ALL the faults of every potential hero. How tragic that the young today do not live with the inspiration of heroes. Thank God - I do not have to look very far to see my heroes. Many of them are seated here in church week after week. These are my heroes because they imitate Christ even knowing that they are not perfect and without fault. Many of my heroes here are mothers who show patience and understanding even with several kids yelling at the same time. Some of my heroes are Hope's business leaders: they have shown me how to imitate Christ under the most adverse circumstances -- to just be patient and kind and wait for the bullyness of others to pass by! Yes, they have not talked about forgiveness -- they have urged me to imitate what I often preach and teach about. In other words, they have shown me OUR REAL HERO ... THE REAL THING, JESUS CHRIST ... and that since Jesus loved and forgave me even when I HAVEN'T deserved it, that I should do the same for others: BECOME AN IMITATOR OF THE HEART AND SOUL OF GOD!

That heroic example was most recently illustrated for me by Pastor Tony Compollo, one of the inspirational speakers at the Atlanta Youth Gathering. While on his speaking circuit in Chicago, he couldn't sleep, so he went to one of those all-night White Castle diners to get coffee & a roll. While there, two prostitutes came in being very loud, crude & vulgar. He was about to leave when he overheard one of the women say it was her birthday tomorrow. The other prostitute sneered, "So, what do you want me to do - give you a party?!?" The first woman became very sad and said, "Why should you or anyone else give me a party - I've never had a birthday party my whole life." The prostitutes left shortly thereafter.

Tony went over to the cook and asked if these girls came in every night. The cook said, "Yep - every morning at 3:30 or so!" Then Tony said to the cook: "Would it be o.k. if I threw a little party for Agnes tomorrow nite at 3:30 a.m? The cook agreed and the next nite Tony Compollo was back at

2 a.m. decorating the White Castle with red crepe paper and big cardboard signs saying: "Happy Birthday, Agnes!" And somehow the word got out to the neighborhood, because around 3 a.m. the diner began filling with all of Agnes's friends.

At 3:30, Agnes appeared with the other woman and every one shouted: "Happy Birthday, Agnes!" and began singing to her. By the time the cook had brought out the cake, Agnes was crying like a child who had been rescued from a bad dream. Before Tony left, he had everybody join him in a prayer of thanks to God for this moment of grace for Agnes and prayed that her life would change - that she would begin to experience more and more of the goodness & grace of God. And just before she left the diner, she stopped and hugged my Tony and said: "No one has ever treated me before like a child of God. Thank you for being the first to offer me THE REAL THING ... THE REAL LOVE OF GOD!!"

What a tragedy that any child could ever say "that he or she had never been treated like a child of God before." God asks us to "imitate his loving forgiveness for every child in this world." Your job and mine is to make sure that no child near us ...or around us ...or in our neighborhood ever becomes a prostitute or any other vulgar expression of life BECAUSE THERE WAS NOBODY AROUND TO TELL THAT CHILD THAT HE/SHE IS A PRECIOUS & FORGIVEN CHILD OF GOD!

Today, we do that for Anthony Pope. In Baptism, God assures this Tony and each of us that His Spirit is sealed upon us - that we can always be assured that we are precious children of His. But those will only be words unless we IMITATE THEM ... UNLESS WE MAKE THEM THE REAL. Anthony will never know the real thing unless his parents, his godparents, his church, his community imitates the love of Christ: KEEPS ON LOVING HIM & FORGIVING HIM EVEN WHEN HE IS A NAUGHTY BOY AND USES BAD LANGUAGE! AMEN.

Pentecost XII
Glenwood Lutheran Church, Toledo
August 10, 1997
Peter R. Martyn, Interim Pastor

“LESS OF ME; MORE OF THEE!”

Therefore, be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ has loved us and gave himself for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.” Eph. 5:1-2

Does anyone here today know one of the latest fads in business and professional life today? It's called MENTORING! Glenwood is way ahead of this fad; our Confirmation Program has used “mentoring” for the last couple of years. And for those of us who are a little older -- we remember when mentoring was not a fad but was called such things as “hero worship,” “an apprenticeship” or maybe an “internship,” whether in hollywood or in the local hospital. And mentoring is hardly a fad in Christianity or Christian parenting -- ours is a “mentoring religion.” It is the whole foundation of our practices of “infant baptism” and Christian education. Jesus constantly exhorted his disciples to “follow Him and His Way;” “to do unto others as He had done;” “to teach by his example; to imitate His Father & become One as they were One.” Mentoring is finding that “special someone” and then “imitating” the very best of that person.

So -- who would you choose as your “mentor” right now if you had the total freedom of choosing anyone on this earth? [Your spouse?; a best friend?; another G/W member?] When I was eighteen, the Martyns got a new pastor at St. Andrew's & I truly believed that “Pastor Mert” could almost walk on water. Not only did he preach down-to-earth sermons and love the Packers ... he would even have a beer when he came to social functions or helped with the construction of our new church building. He was “cool” and he became my mentor for becoming a future pastor. But then reality struck! I found out he had a pretty bad temper; he even yelled at me a couple of times! I also found out he was very demanding in some things and very lazy in others! In short, I found out my hero was very much like me and you - just another human being with worts! Yes, I learned in the summer of '68 ... and again in the summer of '89 the real danger of making any other Christian my major mentor. I had forgotten that he (or she) too is sinful like me! All of us have diseased hearts!

In fact, sometimes we might be better off to use animals rather than humans as our earthly mentors (be assured, there was a day I never would have said this!). But there's a legend which says that Mark Twain even proved this contention. In his experiment, his goal was to promote a new harmony in all creation. He built a cage inhabited by a dog & cat together. Once they learned to accept each other, he added a pig, monkey, bird & a few more creatures. He was amazed; after time, they all adjusted to each other. So he gave it a try with humans. He began with an Irish Catholic, Scottish Presbyterian, a Buddhist, a Turk & a Muslim. Then he added a Methodist, Lutheran and finally a Baptist Missionary. Upon returning to this “Cage of Human Paradise” several months later, he found “not a specimen alive.” Whether this story is true or fictional, it

illustrates the real challenge of mentoring as human beings. We always allow jealousy and turf battles to get in the way and defeat us!

And that's the challenge of "righteous mentoring" given to us today by Paul or his student in Ephesians. He exhorts us NOT TO DO four things: "not to lie; not to be controlled by anger; not to steal; and not to speak evil!" Then he offers three positive commands above & beyond the negative ones: "to speak the truth; to do honest work & give to the needy; and to speak in a kind and edifying way."

Now - would anyone here today disagree with any of these directives??

Hopefully not - for these are the foundation of all great religions. Wouldn't we call these "good mentoring directives?" Now the tough question: How many of us truly believe we live up to this mentoring model??

Just to test it out -- let's examine two examples from Paul's list of exhortations: "not speaking evil" and "speaking in a kind & edifying way!" A recent 20-year study surveyed the "speech & morality" of 12/13 year-old church members (these were church members). The aim was to see to what extent profanity had been used by these kids over the last 20 years. The results: Since the mid-70's, profanity among 13-yr-old girls has risen from 24% to 77%. For boys the increase has been from 66% to 99%. That means today that only one out of every 100 13-yr-old-boys does not regularly use profanity!! And sadly - most parents are not very upset by these results! And we wonder why teen-agers have adopted "evil speech" and the "f-word" as a part of every-day vocabulary.

My dear friends -- what are we "mentoring" to our children today? Is anyone telling our kids "there's a better way!" Have we allowed the TV set and the Video Store to become our primary after-school teachers? How do we talk about other people (esp. people who are different) in the privacy of our own homes? Do we uplift and celebrate diversity ... or do we denigrate those less fortunate/different from us?? What kind of example do we offer right here in the life of the church?? I hate to be too blunt -- but I have too often heard too many "suffering fools" here & other churches: people who constantly complain and find fault but never rejoice about anything!! What do you and I do when people try to poison other people with their tongues?? Have you heard any lies lately? Have you been a party to any anger & insults?? Have you found yourself going along with evil talk? Are we urging others to "speak the truth in an edifying manner?" Or have we succumbed to the "games of gossip & griping" that often rip the church family apart??

Now we can see why St. Paul said in last Sunday's text from Ephesians that "only Jesus Christ can be the head of this body known as the church." Only when we imitate Christ do we speak His gospel truth rather than our gossip lies! Only when we mentor the model of our Lord do we reveal that we are a body of "the righteous" rather than "the rumors."

Dear Christian friends - the ELCA, every church, this congregation, & each of us needs a new motto: "LESS OF ME; MORE OF THEE!" Too often

we church folk are feasting on fat lies instead of the Bread of Life. In fact, I was tempted today to title this sermon, "We Are What We Eat!" In other words, if we daily consume a diet of anger, bitterness, lies, contempt and abuse -- then that's what we often feed to others. We can only model what has been mentored to us. An abused child becomes an abusive parent; an evil-speaking parent reinforces "evil talk" from his/her children. "We Are What We Eat!" It's time for a change in our diet! It's time to use the recommended diet book that has been on the market for 2000 years.

Good mentors feed on the Living Bread of Jesus Christ! They come to their dinner tables, their church altars and their daily meeting & business rooms and they pray: "O Lord, Less of Me & More of Thee!" And we all know what it means to feast on another person. Every adult in this room has had his/her moment of feasting on someone who has been a Lover or a Friend for life. We know how totally satisfying that can be when such relationships continue to offer more than temporary support. That's God's Call today and every day: **FEAST ON THE LIVING BREAD OF JESUS CHRIST!** ** Give Him your full attention more often so that you soak up more of Him and less of Self! *** Study His life and remember His Words rather than relying upon Church rumors & gossip! **** Prayerfully open your hearts to His presence rather than merely opening yourself to sexual pleasures!! ***** Grow in faith & dependence upon his grace rather than holding only to personal greed!! ***** Season your days with praise and thanksgiving rather than spending your nights rehearsing complaints & insults against others! ***** And welcome Christ by serving the least and the lost rather than crying about how little you've got!

And the really great news about this diet is this: even when we fail to receive the proper intake of this Bread of Life ... instead of rejecting us as misfits or slobs of the world, this Christ mercifully forgives us and calls us back to His Table again and again--and tells us over & over: "Take and eat; take and drink!" Now that's the greatest mentor the world has ever known!

So, Lord Jesus - it's time for your mentoring spirit to come alive again at Glenwood and every other community which names your name & prays for your spirit to be: "Less of Me -- More of Thee!!"
AMEN.

Pentecost 12
Zion Lutheran Church, Waterville
August 18, 1996 - 9:15 a.m.
Peter R. Martyn, Visiting Pastor

“JUST AS YOU ARE!”

Thus says the Lord God, who gathers the outcasts of Israel, I will gather others to them besides those already gathered. [Is. 56:8] For God has imprisoned all in disobedience so that he may be merciful to all. [Romans 11:32] Then Jesus answered her, ‘Woman great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish.’ And her daughter was healed instantly! [Matt. 15:28]

I am certain that many in this congregation have regularly used motels and hotels for both vacations and business trips. And I’m certain you’ve all had a bad reservation experience. Possibly you’ve never had one like the executive whose accommodations were totally bungled ... and he was the featured speaker for the event. He had sent his reservation with deposit; he had followed all the pre-registration procedure. Yet when he arrived, his deposit was politely returned and he was told the hotel was “Sold Out!” Angry & frustrated, he began making the rounds of nearby hotels. No luck! Six tries ... and six refusals. He came back to the original.

In his best assertive manner, he confronted the desk clerk: “Now look, sir, if the President of the U. S. walked in right this minute and asked for a room, you’d have one for him, wouldn’t you?” The desk clerk paused momentarily, and then said: “Well, I guess we would!” The executive continued: “Well, I’m glad to hear that; I can guarantee you that the President is not going to show up today, so please give me the room that you would have given to him.”

I hope all of you remember that strategy; it may actually work. But what it illustrates is our never-ending desire to be “on the inside.” When it’s important to be “on the inside,” some will even resort to “Presidential clout” to get there! And to live in this society is to be very aware of who’s got the clout ... and who doesn’t; we live very aware of who are the “insiders” and who are the “outsiders.” If you really “want to be in” in much of our culture, then “you’ve got to live in the right neighborhood ... know the right people ... carry the proper credentials ... reflect a flawless facade ... look like a macho man at 55”...and the list goes on and on and on. For many of us, life becomes a daily scramble to prove that we are **SOMEBODIES; so many of us spend so much time simply establishing ourselves as “insiders” -- as people with clout! Is it any wonder that a **SOCIETY PAGE** is still one of the most read sections of **THE BLADE**, esp. by women. It supposedly tells us “who’s in” and “who’s not!”**

And that was the exact situation confronted by Jesus in today’s gospel. He confronted a Canaanite woman: an obvious outsider ... a social and spiritual outcast from the Jewish scene. And interestingly enough, Matthew does not hide the blatant Jewish bias (today we would call it a racist bias) of the disciples. Immediately, the disciples say: “Send this woman away, for she

is crying after us!” In short, they are saying: **TELL HER TO GET LOST, for she is not one of us ... she is not an insider!** So Jesus tests the waters with this woman and tells her his mission was to the Jews, not the Gentiles. Then Matthew even puts a distasteful hyperbole in the Jesus’ mouth by referring to the Gentiles as “dogs.” But the woman persists that “even the dogs eat the crumbs from the Master’s table.” The point is clear & graphic: **God’s kingdom is not reserved for only INSIDERS ... for only those who have family or physical ties.** In fact, through this story we see clearly that God’s kingdom has nothing to do with family or physical ties.

The mission and ministry of Jesus Christ always challenges our culture’s categories of “insiders” and “outsiders.” Jesus entered this world to establish a new universal truth: that our brothers and sisters are not **CHOSEN** by us, but rather **GIVEN** to us **BY GOD!!** In God’s kingdom, **“true brothers and sisters are not such because of anything they have done, but simply because they have been given to each other!”** Think of your own brothers and sisters: they are what they are to you because they were given to you that way, not because of anything you or they have achieved or mastered! So, God says, regardless of our talents, regardless of our strengths/weaknesses, regardless of our successes or defeats ... we are what he has called us to be: brothers and sisters, always **INSIDERS ... BECAUSE THERE ARE NO OUTSIDERS IN HIS KINGDOM!**

And that’s exactly what we have celebrated just a few moments ago in Holy Baptism. In, under and through this sacrament, God adopts all of us as insiders ... as heirs to His Kingdom! Baptism makes absolutely clear that no one can claim any special holy merit; no one can claim educational privilege; no one can claim any edge by ethnic or cultural status. We have but one trust and one claim: **THAT GOD HAS BLESSED US WITH HIS GREATEST GIFT: HIS EVERLASTING BAPTISMAL MERCY & FORGIVENESS.** From the day of Baptism, God accepts us **AS WE ARE ...** of course, always hoping that we will become more like Him every day!

So, the aim of life is **NOT TO GET CLOUT**, but to **GROW IN FAITH**: to always trust that God loves and forgives us “Just As We Are! No matter how far we may wander ... no matter how great our failures may be ... no matter how horrible our sins seemed yesterday ... today, **FAITH** tells us that God **HASN’T GIVEN UP ON US ... AND NEVER WILL!** Faith tells us that God never plays the game of “who’s got the most clout?” God simply redeems us “as we are,” and seeks to make us over each and every day.

And that’s one of the greatest insights of today’s text: **Just as God doesn’t give up on us, likewise, we don’t give up on God.** In other words, because we know he always accepts us **JUST AS WE ARE**, we therefore seek always **TO BECOME LIKE HIM: TO ACCEPT OTHERS AS THEY ARE!** That’s why Jesus led the disciples into the country of Tyre and Sidon ... into Canaanite territory. He was taking them into “faith’s testing grounds” -- into foreign territory to see if their faith was the same as the Father’s ... to see if they would truly be accepting of those who were different from them.

Yes, God is constantly testing us “to see if we are still playing the game of clout -- calling some “insiders” and others “outsiders.”

So, today Jesus seeks to take us into Canaanite territory again: to test us to see to what extent we have made others OUTSIDERS. He tests us with addicts ... he tests us through social diseases ... he tests us to see what our attitude is toward global missions ... esp. toward races which are different from our own. How much mercy do we show to those who are outwardly different from us but have the same Baptismal grace?!? Well, I don't know your answer; but I do have a challenge for you today. Maybe after this challenge, you'll be glad that I won't be coming back. But too many sermons only reach our heads; once and a while, sermons need to reach our hearts and even our pocketbooks.

Three months ago, Pastor Lynn Miller from Redeemer asked me to spearhead renewed funding for the LEARNING CLUB®. This is a national program begun by two nuns 25 years ago to help urban & rural children improve their reading and math skills. But really the program helps them become more productive citizens. Just as we heard at the Republican Convention -- education is the key to getting kids out of the slums. The LEARNING CLUB® teaches discipline, teaches self-esteem, teaches cooperation, teaches respect for authority, even teaches children a basic understanding of the free enterprise system -- they only get rewards when they do their work -- and do it well!!

Unlike many other programs, the ^{new} strategy for funding the LEARNING CLUB was to seek local individual/congregational support. No government help!! So, I helped Pastor Miller identify 38 potential Major Contributors. 19 of them have already pledged \$500 or more to the LEARNING CLUB this fall. That means since July 1st, we've already received over \$10,000. On Friday, Hudson's gave us a \$2000 grant. But we still need \$6000 to reach our \$20,000 operational goal. Debbe Apgar, former DCE at Hope Lutheran (whom your pastor knows well) will be the new director! Now we need congregations and other individuals to get “On Board.” People who are willing to help 25 Black kids each year become more productive citizens. Hopefully, each of you has come here today with an extra buck or two in your wallet. I'm asking you today to sacrifice that extra buck or two. Yesterday, I called on one of your shut-ins; I told her what I was going to do today; she said, “*Let me and my daughter be the first;*” they each gave two bucks for the LEARNING CLUB kids. I hope you'll do the same before you leave today; obviously, if you don't have an extra buck or two--you can write a check. But what a thrill it would be to leave Zion today with \$300 or \$400 extra bucks for the LC!! God accepts you and me JUST AS WE ARE! He asks us to accept these urban kids JUST AS THEY ARE ... but then he asks us to help them become more like Him ... more loving, more productive, more merciful! The LEARNING CLUB will help them achieve productivity & self-esteem.

There is one final illustration to take home from our texts today. How many of you have ever heard that there is an unforgiveable sin? All my

life I was told that there was one sin that God simply wouldn't forgive: one way God wouldn't accept us AS WE ARE. Obviously, that sin is suicide. Be assured, self-destruction is a very serious sin. God doesn't give us this great life in order for us to flush it down the toilet. But look again at today's text from Romans: *"For God has imprisoned all of us in disobedience so that he may be merciful to all."* For any of you who have ever had a suicide in your family ... or been close to someone who just couldn't go on ... read this text over and over. It clearly says that we are all IMPRISONED IN DISOBEDIENCE: some of us show that disobedience by not worshipping God as he has commanded; some of us show that disobedience by taking God's Name in vain; some of us show that disobedience by lying and stealing and coveting; and yes, some people show that disobedience by being self-destructive -- sometimes quickly with a gun; many times slowly with cigarettes. But these are both acts of self-destruction! And God promises to be merciful to all ... **BECAUSE HE IS A GOD WHO IS GRACIOUS & FORGIVING -- HE ACCEPTS US AS WE ARE!** Our texts say as clearly as anything in the Bible today -- there is no person or no condition outside of the realm of God's mercy. God will forgive all disobedience!!

Said another way, we have a choice. We can choose one of two mountaintops for our lives. One mountaintop was reserved for the Greeks and their gods; it was called Mount Olympus (akin to the Olympics we have just seen). An old man, suffering from arthritis & heart disease painfully ascended Mt. Olympus seeking the pity of the Gods. He fell down at the temple gates & entreated the mercy of the gods. But instead they reprimanded him: *"Be gone, old man; do you not know that the gods who sit atop Mt. Olympus will not even look at the form of an old, decrepit man. We only want men here with physical clout, stamina and great strength!"* There are many roads in this world leading to Mt Olympus; but be careful, because these roads demand worldly clout and super-human strength; and the gods on this Mount will often reject you when you get there.

But there is another mountaintop: it is called Mt Calvary. On this Mt. reigns another God, known as Jesus Christ. And he invites everyone to come to His mountaintop JUST AS THEY ARE! He says, *"Come to me all of you who are struggling with burdens of guilt and I will give you rest. ... Come for I will forgive your iniquity and remember your sin no more. ... Come for my house shall be called a House of Prayer for all people"*... a place where everyone is welcomed as an INSIDER ... whether you have worldly clout or not! Which Mount are you ascending? Well, God has already gone up the mountain for us; we have been baptized and brought up to Mt. Calvary by body & blood of Jesus Christ. His sacrifice assures us that we are loved and forgiven JUST AS WE ARE! And since we now know we are redeemed, we have the freedom to become more like God. So don't leave here today without offering Him the glory of an extra buck or two -- he's given you a lot more than a couple of bucks!!

Amen.