

**Sermons Preached by the Rev. Raymond Shaheen, D.D.**

<u>Year 1980</u>	<u>SERMON TITLE</u>	<u>TEXT</u>
Sept. 28, 1980	"TO LIVE, TO LOVE"	

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<u>Year 1982</u>	<u>SERMON TITLE</u>	<u>TEXT</u>
Jan. 17, 1982	"TO BE ON THE ALERT"	Matthew 24:42
Jan. 24, 1982	"THINGS THAT MATTER MOST"	Matthew 27:22
Feb. 7, 1982	"A TRUE PICTURE"	John 1:18
Feb. 14, 1982	"NO OTHER GODS"	Exodus 20:2-3
Feb. 21, 1982	"WATCH YOUR LANGUAGE"	Exodus 20:7
Feb. 28, 1982	"A DAY SIGNLED OUT - A PLACE CALLED HOLY"	Exodus 20:8
Mar. 7, 1982	"GOD'S HELPERS"	Exodus 20:12
Mar. 14, 1982	"LIFE FROM GOD'S PERSPECTIVE" <i>Pastor David Shaheen</i>	Exodus 20:13
Mar. 21, 1982	"WHERE SEX BELONGS" <i>Pastor David Shaheen</i>	Exodus 20:14
Mar. 28, 1982	"- ON STEALING" <i>Pastor David Shaheen</i>	
Apr. 4, 1982	"A GOD WHO CAN CRY" <i>Pastor David Shaheen</i>	Luke 19:41
Apr. 11, 1982	"EASTER - AN EXPERIENCE" <i>Pastor David Shaheen</i>	John 20:1
Apr. 18, 1982	"TO TELL THE TRUTH" <i>Pastor David Shaheen</i>	Exodus 20:16
Apr. 25, 1982	"THE LOVE OF MONEY"	Exodus 20:17
May 2, 1982	"ALL - - OR NOTHING"	Luke 10:25

<u>1982 continued</u>	<u>SERMON TITLE</u>	<u>TEXT</u>
May 16, 1982	"NOW ABOUT SIN - - "	1 John 1:8
May 23, 1982	"THE TWELFTH MAN"	Acts 1:26
May 30, 1982	"ON OBEDIENCE TO JESUS CHRIST"	Acts 1:4
Jun. 6, 1982	"THE TOTALITY OF GOD"	
Jun. 10, 1982		
Jun. 13, 1982	"BACK TO EDEN - - ?"	Genesis 1:26
Jun. 20, 1982	"THE ART OF REBUKING"	Proverbs 27:5
Jun 27, 1982	"SEARCHER OF THE HUMAN HEART"	John 2:23-25
Jul. 11, 1982	"AN UNFINISHED AGENDA"	Hebrews 11:13

(Prepared by Sheila Fisher 2/1/2012)

"TO LIVE, TO LOVE"

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God  
our Father and from His Son  
Jesus Christ, our Blessed Lord.  
Amen.

The respite that Winifred and I had in the hills of home passed all too quickly. Not the least among the gratifying things was the fact that we had no concern for morning delivery of the paper -- to be free from something such as that is a joy in itself. But I must confess, once, twice, maybe three times in the times I went to town I did pick up a copy of the Washington Post.

Winifred and I cherish the moment when we can read the paper together, and that we were able to do when we were on holiday as we sat there on the porch reading the last issue of the Post that came to us. She prefers the Metro Section first, and when she was finished she said, "I'm not so sure you'll find it worth reading today - - there's not much good news."

I was tempted, of course, to find why she would say that. It wasn't long, of course, as I glanced at what was in front of me . . .

- - there was the feature article: crime in metropolitan Washington -- every 12 1/2 minutes a burglary is committed...
- - and then that uncomfortable thought for those of us who live in Montgomery County -- we're #1 in the dollar value of each individual burglary -- the average dollar burglary in Montgomery County is over \$1700.....
- - then on the right-hand side of the paper, that terrible article about that woman in her 30's whose murdered body was found in the trunk of her car.....
- - and if that wasn't enough, the article at the bottom of the

page: a child paralyzed, paralyzed for life, the victim of  
a drunken driver....

The news was not good.

And I said to myself, as you would have said, "It's a wicked world." And then I reflected upon the fact that in addition to reading the Psalm-a-day that Dr. Hesse and the Saint Luke Bible Reading Fellowship has recommended, I have also been reading again the Book of Genesis, and I recalled how in those chapters of Genesis, there's deceit....there's chicanery....there's war....there's hostility....there's hatred. And now after forty years in the ministry I must say -- hasn't it always been that way? -- a world that's characterized by wickedness.

But then I remind myself, in the Christian perspective: Evil remains only as the second most powerful force in the world. There is a greater force: it is called love.

How then does one live in a world that's branded as being wicked? One lives in the world because this is the only world we happen to have. But one begins to live confidently because every now and then he'll meet someone who personifies love, whose life will be to others as the very mind and spirit of Jesus Christ -- whose only justification for existence is to live in this day, among us, as Jesus Christ would want a disciple of His to live.

The sermon on this very special day, a special day in the life of this congregation because it's a special day for a very special person -- bears the title: "To Live, To Love." You can transpose it, it comes out the same way -- from the Christian perspective -- for to love is to live, and one as a Christian never really lives unless he loves. So, Sister Mildred, on this very special day, as you mark your Golden Anniversary as a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ through the Diaconate, the sermon bears such a title. And the text, words that you'll quickly recognize -- they have been the lodestar for your life, the lodestar for

every deaconess, as emblazoned for us in the special Deaconess banner that graces the chancel this morning -- the 14th verse of the 5th chapter of Paul's Second Letter that he wrote to Christians who lived in the wicked city of Corinth:

"For the love of Christ constrains us."

I did, as you might know, check out other translations as well, in order to see how pregnant these words are in the depths of Christian meaning.

-- another translator says: "The love of Christ controls us"

-- another says: "The very spring of our actions is the love of Christ"

- - "The love of Christ leaves us no choice" says another,

-- and still another: "The love of Christ overwhelms us"

-- and this last one that I checked out: "For we are ruled by the love of Christ."

No one ever really lives, no one ever makes his mark upon the fabric of society, without being motivated. For good or for ill, there has always been the dynamic that allows people to become what they are and to touch the lives of other people, either for good or for ill. Every single one of us is being motivated, by varying degrees, of course. The deaconess is one who constantly reminds herself: it is the love of Jesus Christ that motivates me.

You must be very patient with me, I am deeply moved as I stand at this sacred desk today. I hope that I am always deeply moved when I interpret God's Word. But I am a human being, and I have strong personal relationships with the person who is being honored today....

...I knew her when she was still in her 20's, she knew me when I was just a teenager. She was one who encouraged me to respond to the call of Jesus Christ to be a pastor, and throughout her life, no matter where she has lived, she's touched base with me, encouraged me to be faithful to my calling.....

I am deeply moved as I stand here, sharing this very special day in her life.

There are other reasons why I am deeply moved. I have been fortunate, in my forty years in the ministry I have been able to work with four different deaconesses. Here in Saint Luke, as you know, Sister Mary Josephine Gouker, who is planning to be present this hour, our first deaconess here . . . Sister Dorothy Marie Stalder...and then Sister Mildred. But in my first parish, Sister Edna Coulter Hill, who was Sister Mildred's training sister, who personified so beautifully what the Diaconate was meant to be. And I for one, as I walk and work with Sister Mildred, could discover again and ever so often the indelible stamp of Christ as channeled on her life by her training sister.

I also am deeply moved because as I stand among you, I recall a few short years ago I was privileged to preach on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Ordination of her first pastor when she began her work as a deaconess. And now God gives me the privilege to preach on the day that marks her retirement, her Golden Anniversary.

I am awed by the privilege. For "the love of Christ constrains us" has been the motivating force of her life. What is it to be a deaconess? To be a deaconess is to live as Jesus Christ in the midst of people. That's the only reason why some of us are willing to go on living - - we have reason to believe that here and there God will put down in front of us someone who could say words such as these - - she'll recognize these words, every deaconess recognizes them. Listen very carefully. They breathe of total commitment, something that every one of us would envy . . .

"Saviour, thee my heart I tender, And would yield myself to thee;  
All my powers to thee surrender; Thine and only thine to be.  
Send me, Lord, where thou wilt send me, Only do thou guide my way;  
May thy grace through life attend me, Gladly then shall I obey.

Let me do thy will or bear it; I would know no will but thine;  
Shouldst thou take my life or spare it, I that life to thee resign.  
Thine I am, O Lord, for ever, To thy service set apart;  
Suffer me to leave thee never; Seal thine image on my heart. Amen.

What, I ask you, does Sister Mildred have in common with Bertrand Russell, the renowned atheist? For over half a century the conclusion to which both of them have come. She knew it all along. He came to the conclusion only after fifty years of atheism. Somebody asked him what this world needed most, and then half apologetically, as though his friends would mark his every syllable of every word, he said, "What this world needs most is Christian love."

A distinguished professor of history at Michigan State University said, "The trouble with the modern novel -- it records life as it occurs, without any moral reference, without any reference to God. Sister Mildred as a parish deaconess has constantly lived out the days of her years within the Christian context. It was evidenced so easily the very first call that I made when she came to live among us. I dialed JU 5-8495.....the voice at the other end as the receiver was lifted: "Sister Mildred speaking. Can I help you?" To live in a wicked world and to find one person whose noble ambition remains: Can I help you? Small wonder that I have such a high regard for the deaconesses.

If you have not heard me say it before, it's high time you hear it now --if you've heard me say it before you can well afford to hear it again.....she was a frightened teenager, she was the daughter of immigrants, she was married to an immigrant peddler.....she was miles and miles away from home, she was giving birth to her very first child. Who was it who went to the hospital and stayed with her all night until the child was born? -- it was a deaconess of the Episcopal Church, a co-worker known to Sister Mildred in those early days.....and that teenage mother? -- my mother. And I've thanked God again and again and again that He has placed in this world people such as deaconesses, whose only motivation for living is to meet a need in the life of another person -- for that's what it is -- and to be constrained by Jesus Christ to do it, and do it naturally!

Francis of Assisi had his disciples, and one day he said to them, "one of

these days we'll go to the village and we'll preach." Shortly thereafter he announced, "This is the day we go to the village." They walked throughout the business district, they went into the alleys, they went into the ghetto, the slums...the day went on...and then, wearied, one of the disciples said to him, "Master, you said this is the day we would go to the village and we would preach! -- when and where should we preach, Master?" And the venerable Francis said, "But don't you understand! As we walked, we preached! Wherever we went there were people -- we touched their lives! They observed what we said, they observed what we did! It's a futile thing to walk anywhere if as one walks he does not preach."

...we prize and cherish the thought that for almost a decade she's been among us, ministering in the name of Jesus Christ.

Sister, so typical of you -- here it is -- it's well-worn. The cover has been long-since gone. You gave me this book when I was graduating from high school -- 1933: Elbert Hubbard's Scrapbook. Again and ever so often I've turned to this page -- Maxim Gorky is reciting a dialogue that goes on between a grandfather and his granddaughter. Says the grandfather to the granddaughter:

"Treat everyone with friendliness, injure no one." Says the granddaughter, "How good you are, Grandfather. How is it that you are so good?" Says the grandfather: "I am good, you say? If it is true, alright, but you see, my girl, there must be someone to be good. We must have pity on mankind. Christ, remember, had pity on all of us, and that's what He taught us. Have pity, then, while there is still time. Believe me, that is right"

.....and then he goes on to tell about an event in his life. "I was once a watchman," he said, "on a country estate. It was my responsibility to guard it, and I was awakened one night -- they were robbers, that's what they were! And I surprised them with my rifle, and one of them responded with an axe, as though he would kill me on



the spot.....and I pulled my rifle on them and I forced them to go into the brush and to bring back a heavy stick....and then I commanded that each one would beat the other into weakness. And when they were subdued I took complete control. One of them cried out and said, 'Master, have mercy upon us -- give us a bit of bread! We've had no bread for our bodies' . . .

"....I kept them for a whole winter," the grandfather said, "I nursed them to health, and then when spring came, they went on their way."

....Says the grandfather to the granddaughter, "But don't you see, in this world someone has to be good."

That's why God gives us a Sister Mildred and her kind.

I would be less than honest if I did not tell you that the older I become the more I know Judgment Day is at hand. One could dread the Judgment. There are different ways of thinking how it will take place. One writer in a book says, not being particularly theologically inclined -- the thing that he would dread most in Judgment would be to have God, the Lord and Giver of Life, say to him, "I gave you your time on earth. What now did you make of it?" I know what Sister Mildred's answer can be.

Sister Mildred, I have told some of your fellow members here at Saint Luke that when you came to us to join our staff, I knew realistically that it might well be your last term of service. I prayed to our Heavenly Father that these years in our midst would be your golden years, your finest years. I would like to believe that you could say that. But that's beside the point -- as I now say to you: these years in Saint Luke Church, with you as a co-worker, have been my finest years.

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"TO BE ON THE ALERT"

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from  
God our Father, and from His  
Son Jesus Christ, our Blessed  
Lord. Amen.

*Matthew 24: 42*

I have not clocked it recently, but I presume the 14th Street bridge is surely less than ten miles from the place where you are seated this morning, and with optimum traveling conditions, one could be at National Airport in some 30 minutes from here. It is all so familiar to so many of us, particularly to those of you who may cross the bridge daily or head for National Airport with some measure of regularity. And as far as the Potomac River is concerned, we who live in this area look upon it as an old friend, with the utmost familiarity.

It's been made so different this past week. The placid or semi-placid Potomac has become a watery entombment. And within the remaining years of your lifetime and mine we shall never think of it without recalling it as an unwelcome grave, or a place where heroes were instantly fashioned.

I have been unable to rid it, this event of this past week so close to all of us, from my mind. And as I come to the sacred desk this morning I am naturally constrained to put aside the sermon that had been scheduled. I must share a reflection or two with you. Your patience, please. The words may not come as easily or as quickly as I should like, despite the pressure of the heart-beat that characterizes each syllable.

The passage of Scripture, and I have no right to stand at this sacred desk unless I am constrained to interpret for you a passage of Scripture - - and there's only one passage of Scripture that grips my mind as I am overwhelmed by this event of the past week -- it's recorded in the 24th chapter of the Gospel according to Matthew. Some of you will readily recognize it:

"Watch, therefore, for you do not know  
the hour . . ."

When the Gospel writer was dealing with this particular passage he was thinking, of course he was, of the return of Jesus Christ, of the establishing of His Kingdom here on earth. But by the very same token, our Blessed Lord gave the hearers in His day a constant alert: "You do not know the hour, you do not know the time." That's the passage of Scripture that keeps bobbing back and forth on the horizon of my thought as I've dealt with this event of the past week.

Now there are three things that I need to tell you this morning, as this sermon continues to unfold in purely auto-biographical fashion. It is, as any is perhaps intended to be, the personal testimony of one person. Hopefully, of course, that person is enlightened by the Holy Spirit. And I should be pleased indeed if by the time this sermon is concluded it would come to you unmistakably clear, with the divine perspective.

Observation #1: By the way of reflection, if you please -- a very simple thing -- two words: IT HAPPENED. My immediate reaction when I heard the news, not knowing the full story, of course, was simply this: it's a miracle that it never occurred before. I am not sitting in judgment on anyone. I wouldn't even attempt to do that if I could. There are so many things that we don't know and there are so many areas in which we're not qualified to speak, nor should we. But

it did happen.

Oh, we've taken a measure of pride in this, our airport, so close to us, that so few accidents have ever happened in its history. We've become so accustomed to thinking that nothing of this kind might happen, except soberly as we've thought of the possibility. Day after day and week after week, for so many decades, you see, in fact some of you did not know at all that there had been that tragedy in 1949.

We recognize, of course we do, that it can be said that the safest of all means of travel today, there are those who maintain is air travel -- far more risky to ride in an automobile, or a horse, or a bicycle, or a motorcycle. It did happen.

What else is to be said? It happened. And the impact was made. What can be done about it? The immediate reaction perhaps could be this, as I recall the lines of Maria in West Side Story -- when one of the characters had been stabbed...and there he is bleeding on the street...and all Maria can say is this: "I wish it were yesterday." But yesterday has come and gone. And yesterday was unscathed and unruffled -- there is the immediacy of what's before us. So I suppose my first observation that I share with you is this: IT HAPPENED. And it's over. And you can't go back five minutes earlier.

When Suzie Kerns was a member of this congregation (she and her family moved to Illinois) -- she had on display some of her art work. She left one of them behind, a batik that hangs in the main church office. I see it whenever I leave my office, on the wall directly opposite the door that leads to my office. Suzie has a custom of labeling her works of art. Every painting she's ever done, she gives it a name. And I said, "Suzie, what's the name for this one?" And then with a look on her face as much as to say, "Well it's obvious, Pastor, can't you see for yourself?" - - her title for this one is

"It's Over" -- aptly dubbed, for she portrays for us a tree, in the fall of the year, which has shed its leaves. Not a single leaf, I dare say, remains on the tree, if I remember correctly. So, as far as she's concerned -- it's over -- spring, summer has come and run its course. Now...the only thing that can be said -- it's over!

The second observation, by way of reflection -- IT HAPPENED SUDDENLY. First -- it happened. Second, it happened suddenly. Only this person or that person perhaps may have had a premonition, only the pilot who was accustomed to flying, as he indicated from his bed, had some idea that this could occur. I, who have done my share of flying, I can identify -- finding one's seat, being jostled a bit, eager to find just where you're to be located...then stuffing your carry-on underneath the seat in front of you...taking off your overcoat, your jacket, stuffing it up there in the rack ahead and trying to settle down as nonchalantly as possible, reaching for a magazine...giving only half-attention to what she's telling you about the necessary precautions that ought to be observed...

...in company with any of you, I too have known a measure of uneasiness at take-off and landing. To this very day if Winifred's seated alongside of me I reach for her hand on take-off, and there's that gentle pressure. Without any words between the two of us we know there's a prayer of thanks to God when we take off successfully and land just as well -- we've even been known to applaud when the landing's been made well.....

I can identify with them in the watery grave -- it happened -- suddenly.

And yet Scripture is always reminding us that death is inevi-

table. It's sure to come. Sometimes death comes as a welcome release, and sometimes death comes beautifully, as it did for my father of blessed memory. He was about 90 years of age when he died. And if you were to ask me what was the cause of his death, as an unlearned one, medically speaking, I'd have to tell you what maybe the doctors might say -- he died of old age -- worn out! - - "Raymond, I'm tired" - - that's what I heard him say. And almost as though it had gone full cycle I was doing for him within a week of his death, or ten days, what he had done for me at an earlier period in my life ---- I cradled him, this old man, in my arms....I washed his face, I shaved him, I groomed his hair, I prayed with him - - - all of these things he had done for me! -- years and years before....

...he had washed my face, he had groomed my hair, he had prayed with me.....

For him death came beautifully and completely.

Death doesn't always come like that. Death can come in a tragic manner, and words defy description -- and in a manner we'd be very happy if we could rid from our thinking. I have had my share of it as I've ministered with any number of you, and with the other parish that claimed my soul as a pastor before I came to you. And yet when it comes suddenly -- unexpectedly -- tragically -- what is there to say?

The third thing.

First, it happened. Second, it happened suddenly. Third: it happened locally....which is simply to say to you, be on guard, my friend. If it should have happened two thousand miles away, it would have been no less tragic. And that's the sad indictment that comes to every one of us. Unless you are unusually sensitive, some-

thing that happens so far away doesn't seem nearly as tragic as when it happens close at hand. Whenever a person bleeds, no matter where that person may be, I too should bleed in Christ....wherever a person is hungry, ill-clad, neglected, ignored....I too should bleed inside. Just because it doesn't happen at my door-step doesn't mean that it doesn't happen. And just because it may not happen so near to me, doesn't mean that it's less tragic when it happens somewhere else.

Oh, there are redeeming things that come out of anything. The Apostle Paul is absolutely right when he says that "all things can work together for good to those who love the Lord." We learn our lessons. There were the heroic ones. And we've learned a great deal that we hadn't learned before, and we will be far more sensitive to any number of things that we haven't heeded before. That purpose, too, is to be served.

Interesting, isn't it, in a sermon a week or two ago I had planned to preach for you, I was going to include an illustration that because of the pressure of time I omitted. When the Titanic was sunk, a New York paper, I've forgotten which paper it was -- a cartoonist tried to catch something of the feeling -- giant liner rent asunder, torn . . . it was one drawing that said (there were two drawings, by the way) the one drawing showing the liner, helpless at sea: THE SUPREMACY OF NATURE -  
AND THE WEAKNESS OF MAN

...and then there was another drawing showing a gallant man, absolutely refusing to take his place in a rescue craft, and stepping aside for a mother and a child. And the caption underneath that cartoon was this: THE WEAKNESS OF NATURE -  
AND THE SUPREMACY OF MAN

The gallant ones, you see, will remember who plunged into the icy water to save a woman that a minute before he had never known existed

-- indelibly etched on the fabric of your soul that person -- has he been identified yet? -- who five times refused the possibility of rescue, giving way to others....

It happened. It happened suddenly. It happened locally. I'm not being morbid when I tell you, none of us knows the hour when it may happen to us. But it's inevitable. The Christian has a decided advantage. Heeding our Blessed Lord, the admonition remains, "Watch, therefore, for you do not know" . . . and by the grace of God we can always be made ready.

That's why some of us when we have our waking moments, as we face a brand new day, get squared off with God, if you please -- ask Him to order that day in a way that we might not disappoint Him. "Watch therefore - - this day" . . . and when night settles in and we lie down to sleep, to sleep with a good conscience, with a soul that's made ready, by the grace of God.

The Christian has this advantage. Happy indeed are they who can pray, "O Lord, in the hour of death, do not suffer me to fall from Thee." This I most certainly believe.

\* \* \*

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)



"THINGS THAT MATTER MOST"

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God  
our Father and from His Son Jesus  
Christ, our Blessed Lord. (Amen.)

*Matthew 27:22*

Did it ever occur to you to ask the question: what is it that's primary in the mind of a preacher, this one in particular, if you please, as he stands at the sacred desk on a Sunday morning? In case you have not asked the question, let me encourage you to ask it -- and allow me to answer it immediately. What goes through my mind as I come to this sacred desk repeatedly, and for the opportunity I am profoundly grateful, is basically the very same thing that went through my mind on that Sunday, 26 years ago this month, when I first came to this sacred desk.

Little did you realize, had you been present then, that when I was about to preach the sermon I was saying to myself, well, here we are -- we're going to think about the things that really matter most.

Did it ever occur to you how seldom we really think about the things that matter most? When tape recorders were first put on the market, I recall how, being a guest in a certain person's home -- and he was that kind of a person, you know, who secreted his recorder, and then when the evening progressed and the greater part of it had been spent, he played back the evening conversation...and we could hear the things that we had been talking about. Honestly now, how much of it has so little value! Not that a purpose is not to be served in just talking, but to deal with the things that matter most -- that's something that stands in a class all by itself.

How fortunate we are to belong to a church whose tradition is this, that whatever happens in these moments with a man called by God to be an interpreter, that what he proclaims should be the Gospel -- rooted and grounded in Biblical truth. And that the net result should be to confront people with the person of Jesus Christ.

Some years back a religious journal used to deal with this subject periodically: How did your mind change in the last decade? I put that question to myself as I come to this sacred desk: How has my mind changed since 1956? One thing that remains constant, I have never allowed myself casually to come to this sacred desk. When I stand here I continue to stand with the sense of awe -- even as I came to you that Sunday in January more than a quarter-of-a-century ago.

Within this past week I've found time in my study to go back and scan all the Annual Reports since 1956....and at the same time I've taken more than a casual glance at some of the sermons that have been preached from this pulpit in that same period of time. I was almost tempted to preach this morning, word for word as best I could recall it, that sermon that I preached that Sunday in January when I came to you, the Sunday before I was installed as your Pastor. Let me recall for you now the text -- the 22nd verse of the 27th chapter of the Gospel according to Matthew:

"What now shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ? . . . "

...a question, you see: what I permit myself to believe the question. No question that's ever going to be asked you will be of greater importance.

For more than a quarter-of-a-century that's what I have been doing when I come to this sacred desk -- are you aware of that? No matter the content of the sermon, no matter the substance or its title -- interwoven throughout, that question has been there: What will you do with Jesus who is called Christ?

I am fully sensitive to the fact that in this quarter-of-a-century there

has been the passage of time for some of you -- that child that I baptized 25 years ago now has brought his children to be baptized...the couple that I married 25 years ago have now celebrated their silver wedding anniversary... the person who was a teenager at 15 is now 41 years of age, and perhaps a grandfather at that! . . . the person who was 40 -- 26 years ago -- has been receiving Social Security benefits for a number of months by this time. And speaking of the passage of time, I am sensitive to the truth that the person who was 75 when I first came to you has been translated into God's nearer presence. To touch people at different stages in their growth and development is an awesome responsibility, when God's holding me responsible for what I've done as I've come to this sacred desk. With whatever clear conscience He may permit me, I will want to say to Him, again and again and ever so often I put to them the question: What will you do with Jesus who is called Christ? . . . the question of Pontius Pilate.

The first thing that needs to be said: it's a personal question. And the questions that matter most in this life are always personal. He said to me as he was leaving church at 8:30 this morning, "Will you come to see me, Pastor? -- I'm going to be admitted to the hospital this week. I have cancer."

...you may read all that you want to read about cancer, but when you say to somebody else, I have cancer -- when it becomes as personal as all that, it's an entirely different matter. The questions that really matter most are always personal.

It is a personal question that has to be answered individually. I repeatedly tell those whom I instruct in the faith that belief is always a very personal thing. Nobody can tell you what you believe -- only you can say what you believe. This is one reason why, I suppose, I object strenuously, in my own mind at least, when they re-wrote the Apostles' Creed in certain quarters...and the congregation stands and with one voice -- with which I have no objection,

that they ought to have this unanimity -- but for a people to say: "WE believe." I don't mean to press the point unduly, but nobody can tell you what you believe. I cannot presume to say that the person who stands alongside of me believes, but if you happen to believe as I believe, and I believe as you believe, then together we can stand....but it's still a very personal thing.

I beg you, do not find fault with me, but in this moment before you I've tried to bring to your attention what I honestly believe is something of value that we've introduced into this congregation within the past 25 years, what has to deal specifically with the Confirmation experience. The first class was 26 youngsters; we have had as high as 66 youngsters in the Confirmation Class. But I've never allowed myself to believe that you confirm a group of youngsters en masse, where they answer collectively. In my own mind I also quarrel with the church when it had its own study some years back, when they were dealing with Confirmation, and they said basically Confirmation is a young person identifying with the adult community. It's more than that! Confirmation is a young person taking his or her stand for Jesus Christ, and that stand has to be taken individually. We become a collective expression of it, of course, but it has to be taken individually. In the things that matter most we respond personally, and that's why we introduced, and I believe earnestly introduced it wisely and well. Even when the confirmand meets for his private and personal interview at Bethany, our Retreat House, we deal with that for a half-hour: the response that you're expected to give, and what does that response mean to you as a person?

. . . and then there's that great moment in the service itself when the individual walks up and gets very close to the altar, and the question is put directly: Do you love the Lord Jesus and do you promise to serve Him through His Holy Church?

. . . and then we say every voice remains silent,  
except yours. It's a personal answer that has to  
be given individually.

Pilate made the mistake of his life when he turned to the people and said,  
"What shall I do?" Nobody can answer for you. You have to answer for yourself.

What shall I do with Jesus who is called the Christ? As the sermon concludes this morning let me introduce an element that perhaps you've never considered before, and that is, underline the preposition with. What shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ? Pilate didn't read it that way, but I hope you will -- an invitation to partnership, a challenge to identify with what Jesus Christ (and I don't say it facetiously) with what Jesus Christ is up to. Now if that question is to be put to you: What will you do with Jesus who is called Christ? -- you need to know what Jesus Christ is up to! What is He doing? In what direction is He heading? From a human perspective, how is He expending His energies? To whom is He paying attention? -- ah, that's the exceedingly precious thing! When you recall Jesus Christ, no matter how you read His life and the time that He spent here on earth, He was always paying attention to people, talking with them, challenging them, appealing to their better side, enabling them to believe that they were important to God.

What is Jesus Christ up to? He's always up to a concern for people, endeavoring to stamp upon the fabric of their minds and their hearts and the total being, that their lives do count, and they are meant to count for God! As you've heard me say it repeatedly, they're not meant for Hell, they are meant for Heaven. And that's no small thing to introduce into the life of any person. From a human perspective, it's this noble motivation of always saying you can be better than you are! . . . by the grace of God!

What are you doing with Jesus Christ? I have my moments when I think of the time of Judgment. I suppose the older one becomes the more he thinks in those terms. For one day it will all be over. And when it's all over, then

what? Well, maybe that's the question-of-questions that will be put to us: "What in Heaven's name were you up to while you were here on earth?" Happy indeed is that person who can say, "I sought in all things to glorify the name of Jesus Christ."

I hope you are to be numbered among those who take time to read the Book of Reports. For when you read the Book of Reports I hope you are able to read between the lines. As has been already said this morning, deal not only with facts and figures, but deal with motivation and objective - - to what end did we expend our energies this past year? Ours is a generation that's supposed to be more conscious of the conservation of energy than any group of Americans in recent history. We're supposed to be. How did we make our energy count in the name of Jesus Christ? And when you read that Book of Reports, happy indeed is that person who can put it aside and say it's an account of our partnership with Jesus Christ.....

-- what have I done with Him?

-- with what causes did I identify?

-- could I honestly say that, as a member of Saint Luke Church I've helped to advance the things that are precious to Jesus Christ?

And when the final story is written, that's what matters most: the manner by which we fulfill our partnership with Jesus Christ.

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(this sermon transcribed as recorded)

"A TRUE PICTURE"

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God  
our Father and from His Son Jesus  
Christ, our Blessed Lord. Amen.

*John 1:18*

Many of us covet for ourselves, as we quietly reflect upon our relationship with our children and grandchildren, the way by which we think we'd like to be remembered by them. Now there's nothing wrong with that. Happy indeed is that person who thinks he's exerting a wholesome influence that is worthy of being remembered.

Quite unashamedly I don't mind telling you that if not now, then hopefully in the years to come those two sons of ours, and those two grandsons -- I'd be very happy indeed if when they think of me, they might remember how on occasion I crawled in bed with them at nighttime and shared with them an evening prayer. Now without risk, I dare say. I remember one time in particular when, going out of the darkened room, I thought he was safely asleep...only to have him say -- "But I can't see God...I can't see Him. What's He like?"

It gives me pause to think, of course it does, and then I conclude, as well I should, that this perchance is the bottom line when we come to talk about the spiritual maturing of a child. You can rest assured that some progress is being made if a child will ask the question: What is God like?

Perhaps you are a Sunday School teacher, if not a parent, and so in a Sunday School class situation the youngster startles you and says -- right there, right aloud in the presence of all the other people, and puts you on the spot -- "But what is God like?" I submit to you that it's a good thing when that happens, because that's why we have Sunday School. Sunday School is to teach people about God. And if we don't succeed in introducing them to the basic fact of God, then we're failing.

You need to know this, and don't fault me for it -- when I put the question to me: What is God like? -- I said, "Before I answer, why don't you tell me what you think God is like." And he did. And as I recall it for you as best I can, this was his answer: "God is very, very old, and He lives in Heaven."

What will you make of the answer, honestly now? Is it a good answer, or a poor answer? I sometimes think it's not a very good answer. Now be patient with me.

God is very, very old . . . it makes me feel as though he thinks God is antiquated, out of step with this present generation, that what's happening now is alien to Him, and He doesn't quite know what's going on because He's very, very old.

And when he says to me, "God is very, very old" -- I shudder if he implies that being very, very old, God is very, very tired. What's to be said for a God who is old and tired? That question needs to be asked.

Or what's to be said of a God who is antiquated? Once in a small group where young people were present, the leader in charge probed them, and deftly so, by asking this question: How much do you suppose God knows about nuclear fission?

-- How much do you think God knows about radar?

He was shocked to have the youngsters say: "Not very much." Well, that's what happens if you think in terms of a God who is antiquated, and very, very old.

...or a God who is only, as you think of Him, in Heaven. I wouldn't give much for a God, who when we think of Him wouldn't think of Heaven. But to imprison God in Heaven -- does that mean God has no interest in this world? -- that God's only concern is Heaven?

Now do you understand, when so innocently he says to me -- "God is very, very old, and lives in Heaven" -- why I ask myself, dare I trust him with this concept of God for the rest of his life?



Alvin Rogness, able preacher, good theologian, one-time preached from the Saint Luke pulpit...he's written a number of things and relates very well to people of all generations. Once he dealt with the question: What is God like? Let me read for you the paragraph he wrote:

"Most people picture God as a comfortable old grandfather, with a long, grey beard, clothed in a long flowing white nightgown. Generally speaking, He is in good spirits. But sometimes He becomes angry, and sends earthquakes and war and rheumatism to make people unhappy. He has angels to run His errands, and His Heaven is filled with old cranks who've never learned to laugh . . . "

There are people who, when they think of God, think of Him in those terms.

Today's sermon bears the title -- "TRUE PICTURE!" We need to have God in sharp focus, we need to have a true picture. And there's a text -- of course there is a text -- I have no right to come to this sacred desk unless what I share with you is rooted and grounded in Scripture....and the text is the 18th verse of the first chapter of the Gospel according to John:

"No man has seen God at any time . . . "

Is it futile for me to go on with this sermon? You can read for yourself the intimation in the bulletin that you have in your hands. For this sermon is meant to constitute a part of me which is trying to speak to this very thing as we endeavor to describe what can't be described -- "No man has seen God at any time."

The old Jew, of course, settled for that quite comfortably. It was the command: "You shall not make unto me any graven image" -- you don't take your hands and you don't try to fashion a likeness, and then say "This is God" -- because they were given to understand from the very beginning that you can't picture God. God is spirit. They had to settle again and over so often for what they were told: "I AM THAT I AM" -- and you be content with that. They were never allowed to deal with anything that was like a picture of God! "No

man has seen God at any time" . . . and so the Jew settled for that: "I AM THAT I AM."

Henry Sloane Coffin, theologian, writer, preacher, interpreter of Biblical truth, one-time President of Union Theological Seminary in New York, was commissioned to go to the Far East to speak to people who represented different religions about the Biblical understanding of God. His purpose, of course then, his work was to tell people what God is like, to answer this question. Before he went he had a session with the rabbi, a very learned one, and perceptive. When they were dealing with this very thing, about the basic nature and character of God, the rabbi said - - let me read for you exactly what he said to Henry Slaane Coffin - - "You Christians possess one advantage over us. When we use the word God our listeners have a somewhat vague conception in their minds of righteousness and power, combined in a being who fills the universe. When you Christians employ the word, your hearers think at once of the figure of Jesus of Nazareth." And the rabbi was absolutely right, because this is what God Himself had in mind. And that's why you need to hear the rest of the text. I only read part of it for you. Always give God a chance to finish His sentence - - always give God a chance to g~~ave~~te you His complete thinking on a subject. The text reads:

"No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him. . ."

That's exactly what God had in mind. No one has ever seen Me - - but I'll see that I'm declared - - I'll see that I will be made known to you." And that's exactly why Jesus Christ came into the world.

Now let's deal with the question: What is God like? How do you get a true picture?

Well if I wanted a true picture of anyone or anything I think I'd go to those who are in a position to give it. I wouldn't fool around with people who

weren't qualified. That's why I'm so happy I can turn to the Bible. The Bible is so completely authoritative on this score, for if you want an assessment of the Bible -- the Bible is an autobiography of God. You make a mistake when you permit yourself to think it's a book about man. It deals with men, and women, and children. But it's not first a book about people -- it's a book about God... And God's dealing with people, and the way people ought to deal with one another on the basis of God's dealing with them. So if you want to know what God is like and you want a true picture, you first turn to the Bible...for the Bible reveals to us the basic nature and character of God. We get a better glimpse of what He is, who He is, and what He's been up to.

This may be a feeble attempt on my part, but be patient with me -- you're seated in a room, there's a partition. You hear a voice or voices on the other side. You're deeply troubled...you can hear something -- you can't quite make it out, but you can't see. You'd feel far more comfortable if you could see who it is. After a while you get up, and you walk outside -- a step or two in the corridor, you turn to the right, and there's a door. You knock on the door -- ah, the person answers. And then and there you can see who this person is. And an entirely new and different dimension is added to your experience.

Down deep inside every one of us there is this hunger, there is this thirst, this desire "to see" God. And God Himself satisfies that need in our lives and reveals Himself through Scripture. It's the Bible that tells us about God.

Martin Luther said, "It's the Bible that's the cradle of Jesus Christ" . . . which is simply to say it's in the Bible that Jesus Christ is made known to us. How do you know anything about Jesus Christ? You know by what you read in the Scriptures. Everything that I've preached to you from this pulpit comes to you by way of the Scriptures -- it's the norm for our faith, what we believe and what we practice. A writer of the New Testament, referring to Jesus Christ, could say: "In him -- in this person -- all the fulness of God is pleased to dwell."

You're not forgetting, are you, there was that time when some disciples came and asked the age-old question: Show us what God is like -- this you to know. And quietly and confidently -- let me give you a free translation. You know the answer for yourself, in classic Scriptural terms, but Jesus said, "You want to know what God is like? -- you really want to know? Take a good look at me. Whoever has seen me sees God!"

We Christians have this advantage. There's no question about it. When you think of Jesus Christ you think of God. When He was here on earth there were those when they encountered Jesus Christ, walked away and reverently put their fingers to their lips and whispered the name of GOD.

So you look at Jesus Christ in order to find out what God is like. Now let me ask you the question: How do you really know a person? I'm numbered among those who honestly believe you know what a person is by what he does. It may take a little while at times, and that's why some of us cherish friendships that last. The longer we know them the better we know them. What they really are will surface.

A person is what he does. I know there is room for hypocrisy there - a person may so act as to give you the impression of what he really isn't, but in the long run -- make no mistake about it -- in the long run what a person really is will be revealed. So if you want to know what God is like you look at Jesus Christ -- and what do we find Him doing? - - loving people, forgiving people, appealing to their better side, offering nothing but goodness, personifying for them Truth....living among them as God would walk in their midst.

If you want to know what God is like, we Christians have an advantage. Look at Jesus Christ - - a human being is always God's preferred method of making Himself known.

I am ashamed of myself when I look back and think of my beginning years in the ministry. At 25 years of age I was so God-sure of so many things, particularly the way I felt God changed people. I followed a man who had been my mentor, my tutor, and I use the word advisedly -- whom I fairly adored, and learned so much from him. But in my immaturity it troubled me greatly when I heard somebody say that when they thought of him they thought about God. I thought to myself, at 25 years of age, how could anybody dare to equate or to identify a person with God?

As the years come and go, I think of how absolutely precious it was that that could have been said of my predecessor. How do we think of God? Every now and then we meet someone who is God-like! You've heard me say it again and ever so often - -

-- I have my moments when I believe in truth because I've met persons who are truthful....

-- why do I believe in goodness? -- because I've encountered people who are good!

-- why do I believe in love? -- because I know how I have been loved....and how I love in return....

It's Scripture, I tell you, we are "living epistles." God becomes real to people

through people.

A few Christmases ago I found myself writing a note on some cards that I sent to a limited number of people. And I was thinking about Christmas, celebrating the fact that God has come to us in Jesus Christ -- a tremendous truth. And I found myself writing so easily: "When I think of you, my friend, it's so easy to believe that God is in this world through Jesus Christ."

When Henry Drummond was introduced to a chapel audience, George Adams Smith said, "Let me present to you a man who will remind you of Jesus Christ." It's possible. And it can happen -- would you believe it -- through you."

...."No man has ever seen God"

....but I can see people  
such as you who say they believe in God.

\* \* \* \*

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"NO OTHER GODS"

Commandment  
I

WE MAKE so little time, O God, to do this sort of thing, to give some measure of undivided attention to the interpretation of Your Word. Enlighten us by Your Holy Spirit that we may better understand. Through Jesus Christ Thy Son, our Lord, who when He came, came preaching. Amen.

Epiphany 20:2-3

He was wearing a blue uniform, and he had a badge. He was standing in the middle of the street in the 6600 block of Blair Road. I was on my way to attend the funeral of a colleague in the ministry. My mind was preoccupied with concerns that seemed very important to me.....

...would I get there on time?

...where might I be seated?

...if I arrived late, would this be a distraction,  
would I be embarrassed?

...would I find a parking place that was convenient?

...would my car, in that particular neighborhood, be safe?

...when did I last see my colleague? ...would I recognize his widow?

...would I be as fortunate to die as he -- for he was stricken at George Washington Hospital when he went to make a pastoral call . . .

You see, my mind was preoccupied with concerns -- selfish concerns -- in a very real sense of the word.

Then there was that man, wearing a blue uniform....and he had a badge. Suddenly he became almost bigger than life as he stood there in the middle of the 6600 block of Blair Road and I did as he directed, I pulled off to the side. In less than ten minutes the encounter was over. The ticket which he had handed me simply confirmed that he without any emotion at all had in a most matter-of-fact way informed me that I had been driving, according to his all-seeing electronic eye, at an excessive speed in a 20-miles per hour zone.

Realizing at once that to him my clerical collar made me no less a violator of the crime, I didn't even attempt to trade on it -- give me credit on that score at least....nor did I entertain the notion that I could excuse myself because of

a noble mission on which I was bent, to attend the funeral of a colleague.

Have you the slightest interest, now, in knowing what I did next -- once I placed the ticket on the seat beside me and the man with the blue uniform with the badge again went to the middle of the street in the 6600 block of Blair Road and motioned authoritatively to another to pull off to the side, just as he did me and the four or five others behind me -- have you the slightest interest in knowing what I did next?

Well, not much, really. Nothing spectacular, save unwittingly to gather the stuff out of which this introduction to the sermon could be made . . . I simply drove to the next intersection and very properly negotiated a turn that sent me on a reverse course, driving as you might suppose, at what seemed to me a snail's pace, of 20 miles per hour. With what also seemed like all the leisure in the world, my eyes came upon it as I looked to the right and to the left -- clear as day, there it was -- a yellow square with the numerals 20 in black bold letters. It was there, as the officer said -- it was there all the time. I had not seen it. I was preoccupied with my own concerns. No matter how noble they may have been, I was preoccupied with my world, and with my world alone.

The point which needs to be made at once: we can be a danger to others, and perchance to ourselves, when we take to the road and think only of ourselves. The law is intended to protect other people from the selfishly preoccupied person. Life itself proves the necessity for the law.

I must confess to you that Thursday morning of this past week I was not primarily concerned with either obeying -- I need to admit that -- when I got into my car that morning that was not my chief concern. What rules there were they were meant to be obeyed -- I was not preeminently concerned with either obeying or violating the law. And that, I dare say, is probably symptomatic of our generation and of our society. In the modern world, law has lost much of its meaning for many of us. And that's a sad commentary.

How earnestly do you take the law that's been laid down? How frequently do you remind yourself of basic rules and regulations for the sake of mankind that are intended to be respected? Or are you, such as I was this past Thursday morning, merrily going on my way, preoccupied with my own concerns, with my own little world, little realizing that as I traveled -- you may as well know it -- at 40 miles per hour in a zone that said, for the safety of others (read between the lines) for the safety of yourself. You keep the limit to 20 miles per hour.....

symptomatic, I dare say, of the world in which we live -- we think so little of the laws that were meant to be obeyed.

When I was a youngster one of my closest friends was the son of a Methodist preacher. And the Methodist parsonage was not far away. We went to school together, and like as not on a Sunday I very easily would go along with him to church. Now remember and remember well that whenever they had Communion, part of the ritual, simple as it was in that Methodist church in that day, was always the congregation reciting the Ten Commandments -- they were held out there in front of people. We need to go back and put the Commandments in front of us.

Before they had the by-pass around Gettysburg, whenever we headed for the hills-of-home we drove right through the heart of Gettysburg ... which meant we passed, on Route 15, the Adams County Court House. It could be that there are other court-houses of this type -- it's the only one that I know of that has emblazoned on the bronze plaques at the entrance to the court-house -- not the Constitution of the United States....not the basic code of the State of Pennsylvania, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania....not the code of Adams County. The two bronze tablets there, at the entrance to the Adams County Court House in Gettysburg: the Ten Commandments. For I have reason to believe that wherever civilized man has gone, he's taken with him a respect for the basic law of the universe.

As we meet together now these Sunday mornings before Lent and during the Lenten season, your attention will be invited to a consideration of the Ten Commandments. We do well, then, this day, to read the beginning.

" . . . And God spake all these words, saying,  
I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.

Thou shalt have no other gods before me.

Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth:

Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me;

And showing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments. . . "

Now let me say to you as earnestly as I can in the very beginning -- that you may have your times and your seasons when you will excuse yourself if you break one of these Commandments. Somewhere you've written a chapter in your life, perhaps, if you're like any number of people that I know, when you have not told the truth.



...somewhere at some time perhaps there's a chapter in your life when you have not kept your eyes where they belong, and your hands where they belong....you've taken other things, or you may have taken other persons, and used them for your selfish desires or lowest intentions. And because you have a conscience, you have been stricken by it.....

But then maybe you have had your moments when you've excused yourself. Honestly now -- you've made an allowance for your violation of God's law.

But I can also say to you with equal candor, you're not about to make excuses for everybody else, and I'm reasonably certain that you wouldn't entertain the notion of saying that just because you or I had violated one of those Commandments, that we would say this should be the accepted behavior of all the people on the face of the earth. Just because I have stolen once I would not want to believe that I would want to live in a world where I could say anybody can steal. Just because you have coveted or laid your hand on something that doesn't belong to you, a thing or a person -- in your sober moments you would never subscribe to the notion that you'd want to live in a world where everyone would be free to do that sort of thing. To the glory of the Creator, who made us, our consciences dictate that we accept the judgment of God.

When I used to have the good fortune to relate very closely to members of the Confirmation Class, I would come down as earnestly as I could and as heavily as I could, on the teaching of the Ten Commandments. I was never quite certain how they might respond with what this gray-haired chap was about to tell them. But I was willing, perfectly willing, to rest my case. I would say to them that God, having called the Children of Israel out of Egypt -- sending them on their way to the Promised Land, stopped them at a very critical point in their journey...as much as to say, "Now there are some things that you've got to get perfectly clear, there are some things regarding which there ought not to be any question. You're going to find yourself surrounded by other people, whose practices of behavior, whose code of ethics, whose scheme of morality, even their religious concepts, will not be worthy of your emulation -- and for your sake, listen to me and hear me well . . ."

(I can picture God saying it this way)

". . . before you take one step farther, before you go one mile farther, let's get it perfectly plain -- whose you are, whose world this is, and how you're meant to relate to one another."

You may not have thought of it this way, but it's as though when God gave us the Ten Commandments He said, "Here's the manufacturer's manual! -- take it! -- read it! I made the world. Who knows better how it's meant to operate, in order to get maximum benefit? Live by the rules!" And so God laid down those rules from the very beginning.

Make no mistake about it, they're completely authoritative, they are not 'Ten Suggestions' -- they are not ten alternatives. There's nothing optional about them as far as God is concerned. God says, "This is the way it is, this is the way it's meant to be."

I think God will excuse me, and I hope you will too, when at this point I need to say to you that God spoke to them in those terms not because He was on some divine ego trip, when He keeps saying I . . . I . . . I. He talks like that and He thinks like that for our sake. I'm a firm subscriber to the fact that we need authority. There were moments in my life, of course there were, when I couldn't quite understand why when my parents said something, it didn't make sense to me, but they insisted that I obey -- on the basis of what they were telling me. The longer I live the more I recognize how that family of six kids, we benefited whenever they spoke authoritatively in our behalf -- on the basis of what they knew to be true, they were in duty bound to say, "This is it -- this is the way!"

That's what God is doing. We've gone through a terrible period in our history, some of us have lived through it, when we shied away from authority, and we do it at great risk, and we do it at great peril. Whenever you and I allow ourselves to ignore the fact of law, we run into danger. Let me say it again, get it in proper perspective: very innocently I was taking my course. I had blotted out from my mind, on that particular day, any adherence to any basic rules and regulations. I was thinking only of my selfish concerns.

God, who made the world, the Creator of the universe, is also the one of whom we say, is love. And if we are to love one another, we can't afford to skip the rules. We may foolishly allow ourselves to think that as long as we love we don't need law. Even in the Christian experience we begin with the law. God Himself never has said, "You can forget it." God may say to us, "If you break My commandments I will still love you" -- and the blessed good news of the Christian experience is He will forgive us. But that doesn't mean we can get by without paying the price of the law that's been broken. And we forget that.

My mother was perfectly right when she said to me, "Raymond, you can eat

green apples if you want to, but you can also get a stomach ache!" And even though when I came home with that stomach ache, there was that maternal "I told you so" look in her eyes. It's a strange thing -- we talk sometimes about breaking the Commandments, but essentially, my friend, we don't break the Commandments. When we fail to obey them, they break us! Maybe some day, perchance before it's too late, we'll give God credit for knowing a thing or two. And every time we're inclined to travel the road without respect for His laws, we run the risk of traveling a road that leads to ruin.

I'm not taking time this morning to enumerate for you the other gods that we can put before Him, except to say to you as I walk away from this pulpit, the god-of-gods that we're inclined to put before Him, the one true God, is usually the god of self. And that's why this sermon began as it did. The most damnable of all things that we can put ahead of God is our concern for our own little world. And even if on occasion it's a noble world. But when we think of our world, no matter how noble it may be, at the expense of other people who may be found on the highway of life, we're traveling in a manner that is not pleasing to God. This I most certainly believe.

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"WATCH YOUR LANGUAGE"

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God our  
Father and from His Son Jesus Christ,  
our Blessed Lord. Amen.

*Exodus 20:7*

*Commandment II*

Periodically in the course of the years that God has allowed me to come to this sacred desk, I have invited you to consider with me a series of sermons based upon the Ten Commandments. And each time that that series has been prepared I've earnestly endeavored to provide you with a measure of insight that perhaps you may not have had before. The series was begun last Sunday morning and continues throughout the Lenten season. Today it's the second Commandment:

"Thou shalt not take the name of  
the Lord thy God in vain."

Tell me now, on the scale of one to ten -- there are ten of them, you know -- where would you place this Commandment if you had the decision to make? Among the ten there are those that deal with lying, stealing, killing, coveting, making graven images, committing adultery - - - this one, on profanity, if you please -- taking God's name in vain -- scale of one to ten -- where would you place it?

In all likelihood you would not give it the same rating that God Himself saw fit to give it. I'm convinced that that could be true.....for I am appalled, as I move here and there, find myself in this company or that group of people, to discover how frequently and how easily, and how casually, how recklessly, people use the name of Almighty God.

I would be less than honest if I did not tell you I'm offended by it. Whatever may be my weakness, I do honestly try to maintain a high and holy regard for the name of God. He is that precious to me. And I wish that when I hear people use God's name lightly or recklessly, profanely, I could say to them "You're talking about a very good friend of mine -- one without whom I'd not care to live, and I'm grateful for those who have taught me to place a high value on all that He is, and I wish that you could feel the same, for the years have taught me that your soul is in jeopardy, and the regard that you have for other people is in peril when you take a name as wonderful as His lightly."

Do I read the past with too many-colored lens -- and I remember to my soul's satisfaction how, back there in the town in which I grew up, or rather the town in which I was born - - let me tell you a bit about it.....

...it was a church-town -- Williamsport, Pennsylvania,  
where I was born. We had a number of different Roman  
Catholic parishes that I remember, all founded very

- largely by ethnic groups - -
- the Polish people, they went to Holy Rosary
- the Irish, they went to the Church of the Annunciation
- the Italians, they went to the Mater Dolorosa
- the Germans -- they were ensconced in Sauerkraut Hill,  
that's the name that we had for it -- half a block  
away from where our Minister of Music looks back with  
affection upon his alma mater.....

As I remember as an impressionable youngster seeing a man walking by that massive St. Boniface Church -- even on the side of the street where Stroehman's Bakery was located, and as he passed, he tipped his hat, he bowed his head -- a measure of respect, a measure of high and holy regard for that church, because that church represented not simply brick and mortar - - that church represented God -- God's House -- not simply the place where the Host was there in veneration, waiting for the next set of communicants to come.....no, not for that reason alone. Not simply because within that church was the statue of Mary, the beloved Mother of our Lord, for whom he had respect. It was God's House, and when the people crossed the threshold of that particular place they would find themselves standing upon holy ground and gathered together within hallowed walls. That place represented God - - a far cry, you see - - who bows his head these days when he passes a church? - - who tips his hat these days when he passes a building such as this? I am numbered among those, honestly I am, who honestly believe that people are to be judged by what they hold in reverence.

When our Supertuesday family gathers within these walls, Junior High age folk, one of the very first things that we do when they come together in October is to deliberately etch upon the minds of those youngsters that when they stand within these walls they stand on holy ground -- it's a place that's different.

Don't get me wrong, I know that God is to be found anywhere and everywhere -- I know that, you know that. But because we are human there are some things that have to be handled in a sacred manner for our own sake. A people will be determined and they will be judged by the things on which they place a sacred value. It's a far cry, I tell you, from that day when I saw the man tip his hat and bow his head when he passed the church building, to today, and we are not the better because of it.

It's a far cry when from that day when Sir Christopher Wrenn, the architect of that magnificent architectural gem which is known as St. Paul's Cathedral in London. Some of us to this day would count our visit to London incomplete if we couldn't possibly gravitate toward that magnificent structure -- that stood out there so bril-

liantly against all the damage that was being wrought on so many sides when Hitler vomited his bombs upon London - - and how the Britisher again and again, and particularly the Londoner, would say, "We can take it! - We can take it! -- as long as the Cathedral stands!" Ah, the cathedral stood for something, you see, something wonderful.

When Sir Christopher the architect designed St. Paul's -- would you believe it -- listen to what I am going to read - he posted this directive:

" . . . Whereas, among laborers and others, that ungodly custom of swearing is so frequently heard to the disregard of God and to the contempt of His authority, and to the end that such impiety may be utterly banished within these works which are intended to the service of God and the honor of religion, it is further ordered that such profane swearing shall be a sufficient crime to summarily discharge any laborer. . . "

Where is the shop steward who would talk like that today? Where is the office manager who would lay down such a directive among us now? It's a far cry from that day until now, and we are not the better because of it.

"Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain" - - -

....it is the second commandment -- that's the value that God placed upon it. No matter where you may put it, that's the priority which God says it warrants.

Have you ever asked yourself the question honestly -- why? Why should it be taken that seriously? - when people so easily ignore it? What is a name? . . begin at that point. You -- let me hear your name spoken, as I know you, and immediately there will come to the fore all that I know you to be. I cannot separate you from your name. Your name is you, and you are very special. You are a person who is worthy of respect - - you are not to be ignored!

In days gone by people chose names very carefully, honestly they did -- and that's why I'm pleased every now and then when I go to Holy Cross Hospital, as an example, on the maternity floor, in the rack where they keep their tracts, their pamphlets to give out to people. They used to have a special folder on The Naming of a Child. There was a time when people named a child according to the virtues that they expected that child to embrace, so that one day they could equate the name and the child together -- easily, naturally . . . Karen means pure . . . Dorothy comes from the Greek which means: "cast from God" . . . Althea means truthful . . . Irene means peaceful . . . Winifred, my wife's name -- I remind her constantly: lover of peace. God's name is to be equated with God. It represents all that He is.

In order to impress upon you as best I can, do you realize what would happen if

you passed a particular room where you heard people talking, and all of a sudden your name was mentioned - - you would react according to the way your name was spoken. If they laughed, and a measure of ridicule was introduced, you could feel very very uncomfortable, and you could not excuse yourself nor them by saying, "Ah, but they weren't talking about me - - that was only my name that they were using - - that wasn't I" . . . you would be a fool to think that way. For when they used your name they were thinking of you.

I know a measure of delight when I remember how she said to me: "I never really liked my name until I first heard it spoken by the man who claimed my heart. - - It was the way he spoke it." Who was it who wrote these lines, indicative of that very thought: "A person's name is not just another word. In a deep sense, your name is you.....the way people use your name shows how they feel about you.

-- if people love you, they will speak your name with tenderness....

-- if they fear you, in all likelihood they will say your name with respect.....

-- if they adore you, they will speak your name with a kind of reverence.....

-- if on the other hand they hate you or despise you, they will probably talk about you sneeringly, with scorn and contempt . . .

God knows this. And God knows what's going to happen to us, when recklessly and casually and profanely we use His name. It is indicative of the measure of respect or disrespect that we have for Him. You can't read it any other way.

Watch your language, my friend, for words constitute a window of the soul. Many of us judge one another by what we hear them say. That's one reason why, I suppose, why some people become very cautious before they speak - - because there are people who have a way of imprisoning them and engraving them in stone, because they'll never forget what they once heard them say.

When a recent President of the United States retired from office, a man volunteered to give him a bit of advice. It came a bit too late, perhaps, and the advice was simply this: "You don't always have to speak every time somebody asks you a question - - you don't always have to go forever through life saying something." - - because once, I honestly believe, I give him credit in this way - - he misspoke himself, and the media never allowed him to forget it. They trafficke on it, they made much of it. And to this very day they remembered what he said!

Watch your language, my friend. Watch your language when you speak about God. In no uncertain way it represents how you think and how you feel about Him. Would you believe me if I were to tell you there was a time in the early church when the Lord's Prayer, as an example, was never prayed by a gathered company until they first offered a prayer according to the ancient Syrian liturgy of St. James -- until they first offered a prayer asking God how to use His name aright in the prayer that they were about to offer.

In ancient Israel, there was a time when they took that command so seriously that it took a great deal of courage upon the part of any person to even attempt to think of the name of God.

Why do I make much of this? Because I honestly believe the man was absolutely right who said -- was it the President of Harvard or Yale, I've forgotten? -- who even subscribed to this magnificently when he said, "An acid test of a truly educated person may be the ease by which he speaks the name of God, and with respect."

. . . when we lose respect for God we lose respect  
for people -- because you can't properly separate  
people from God . . .

. . . when you lose respect for people, and when  
you lose respect for God, a civilization is in  
grave peril.

This I most certainly believe.

\* \* \* \*

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)



"A DAY SINGLED OUT - A PLACE CALLED  
HOLY"

GRACE, mercy and peace from God our  
Father and from His Son Jesus Christ,  
our Blessed Lord. Amen.

*Epistles 20:8  
commandment  
111*

Today we continue the series of sermons based on the general theme of the Ten Commandments:

"I am the Lord thy God; thou shalt have no other gods before Me.

"Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that takes His name in vain.

And for today's consideration:

"Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy."

I suppose I could say to you, to all intents and purposes the benediction could be pronounced at this point in the service. Don't let me build up your hopes, it's not going to happen. But in a very real sense, the sermon has already been preached regarding this subject....

...you may not have thought of it in this way, but no matter where you may live, if you've driven here this morning, as soon as you walked out of your house, turned your ignition key in the car and headed in this direction, you were giving excellent testimony to the truth that's inherent in this text:

"Remember the Sabbath Day, to keep it holy."

To all intents and purposes this sermon, as far as you're concerned, has already been preached....

Or perchance if you're numbered among those people who last night, even as you prepared for bed, may have read the Scripture lessons as printed in the bulletin that you received and helped to prepare yourself for what was going to happen today within these hallowed walls, you've already preached this sermon.

...or if perchance you're numbered among those who could walk to this place -- you've already given testimony to the truth of the text. For undoubtedly there were those on your street who saw you heading

for a particular place on this particular day --  
"Remember the Sabbath Day, to keep it holy"  
...that's exactly what you're doing.

Surely there is a smile of Heaven upon you as you remember what God said you ought not to forget.

If you have yet to reach 40, would you be kind enough to let me tell you the salutary thing that lies ahead for you. Speaking from my own experience, it was only after I had hit 40 that I began to appreciate, as I had never appreciated before, the basic values that had been inculcated in my life during the impressionable years. It was only as I hit 40 that I began to recognize what it was that I had been taught. As an example: thinking of today's sermon, while my parents were not regular church-goers, Sunday in the home in which I grew up was different. It was different from any other day in the course of the week. There was a limited amount of activity in my home on Sunday. And now when I look back, I even had what we called in those days, a "Sunday suit" that was reserved especially for when I'd go to Sunday School or church - - even the clothing that I wore had a certain halo, if you please, attached to it. It was set aside for a certain day, it was set aside for a certain purpose. The older I become, the more I recognize the value of that kind of thing. Today it's so different.

I remember, of course, when I was growing up, my home-town pastor talked about the threat of the "Continental Sabbath" - - because the Europeans, 40-50 years ago, were much more liberal than we were a half-century ago . . . but now, there's no difference - - the commercialization of the Sabbath, the Open Sunday -- anything goes these days, more or less. It's so different. And I am reasonably certain we are not the better because of it.

You may smile broadly, but only momentarily, when I tell you about the man who was my predecessor in the parish where I first served -- 50 years ago, as I recall it, when he was living he would never so much as buy a Sunday newspaper, or have it delivered to his home, for he would not be a party to keeping some youngster from going to Sunday School because he had to deliver the Sunday newspaper...nor would he go to the store across the street from the church to buy a copy, because by his patronising that store he'd encourage that store to keep open on Sunday . . .

...don't you dare smile too broadly, my friend -- give the man credit for taking very, very seriously what he believed to be was a commandment of the Lord. That was his way of trying to give due and proper regard for a divine directive.

The man who was my mentor in theological seminary, who cradled in his arms both of our sons when they were named for Jesus Christ, grew up on a farm in York County. On one occasion he told us in class how if he were going to the barn on a Saturday night to milk the cows, and as he headed for the entry his father would catch him whistling, his father would say, "Cut that out, Harvey -- tomorrow's Sunday" -- even on a Saturday night, that lad growing up on a York County farm in Pennsylvania was taught to have a regard for a day in the week that was meant to be a very special day -- don't smile too broadly! None of us has a right to short-change anybody who takes very seriously what we may take lightly, a divine directive.

Some years back, when we were being shown around the city of Charlotte, North Carolina, our escort said, "Now do you see that store across the way? -- let me tell you about that store. It's a department store." . . . and we could see as we looked at that store, merchandise items attractively displayed in the windows. Said our friend, "When Sunday comes, the curtains are drawn -- for that person who owns that store is a devout churchman. He wouldn't so much as think of entertaining the thoughts of people who pass by on a Sunday to think in terms of buying and selling." -- don't smile too broadly, my friend -- there's much to be said for any person, anywhere, who takes seriously a divine directive.

Said God, when He laid down the law -- and I must remind you what I've tried to tell you in the two earlier sermons -- when God lays down the law, it's not because He's on any ego-trip, God forbid that we should even think in such terms -- when God laid down the law He had our benefit in mind, He was thinking in terms of what would be best for us: rest -- recreation of the mind and the spirit.

I began my ministry during World War II. Bethlehem Steel had a large operation in Williamsport, Pennsylvania. Those who hadn't gone off to war were busily engaged in the war effort. They had three shifts, going seven days a week. I have proof positive for the kind of thing that God had in mind when He gave this Commandment, when one of the men came to me and he said, "Pastor, I can't take it any longer! I have been working for seven weeks, seven days a week -- I can't take it! God knew that all along. You take one day, and it's meant to be different -- a day not only of rest -- but let me say it again as quickly and as earnestly as I can, of recreation of mind and body and spirit. Some day, somehow, we might give God credit for knowing a thing or two as to how this world was meant to operate, and how we were meant to live -- in our relationship with Him and in our relationship with one another.

As far as the Commandment is concerned, you begin by underlining the first word:

Remember - - which implies, if necessary you make a deliberate effort. There are some things that never just happen, they happen only as you make a conscious effort . . . remember. And when you speak of the word remember, it implies, of course, very properly, a recollection of something that happened. I'm suggesting to you that you think in terms - - I told you each time I preach a series of sermons on the Ten Commandments I endeavor to provide you an insight that I was unable perhaps to provide you at an earlier time. I'm suggesting now, when you think of the Lord's Day, or the Sabbath, by whatever term you want to call it, it's still one-day-in-seven - - that you think in terms of an anniversary.

We need anniversaries because we're human. We need a particular time, we need a particular season when we look back and remember....

-- why do we have birthdays? -- as an anniversary celebration when we look back and we remember that once upon a time we were born, and there were two people in particular whom God chose to bring us into this world - - that's why we observe birthdays.....not only to think in terms of ourselves but to think in terms of the relationship we have with those whom God used to bring us into this world. . .

And then perchance somewhere along the line we'll place a high value on the fact that we were not only born but we were born for a reason . . . and every time the anniversary of a person's birth comes along he ought to ask himself the question, as he looks back and recalls the years that have come and gone so quickly: and to what end? What difference does it make that I have been born? - - a good question for any man to ask himself on a birthday anniversary.

-- a wedding anniversary - - why do we have them? Not that on one day in the course of the year a spouse should love the mate. ...but on that one day in the year in particular one should realize that one is related to one person in a very intimate way, as related to no other person, and the sharing of a life, and the traveling together of a common path -- remember.

We need to look back, and recall. And on this one-day-out-of-seven -- or I should say this one-day-in-seven -- because in a certain sense every day is precious in God's sight, you know that don't you? - - we ought to place a halo on every day, not just one day alone. And God holds us accountable for what we do with each of the seven days. But in this one-day-in-seven we think specifically of what's been done for us.

I don't know of any religion on the face of the earth that makes as much of the

recollection of the past as our Jewish friends in their religion. You may not have to know a Jew to know this to be true, you can read the Old Testament for yourself - - again and again and again God is asking them to look back and to recite for themselves what it is that's been done for them. And so on this one day in the week in particular we're asked to look back and remember what God has done for us! -- six days -- the seventh day -- rested . . . look back. And God called good what He had done. And God said, "It's for you, the crowning glory of my creation -- you enjoy it, you make the most of it. What a salutary effect it would be if every Lord's Day you and I sat down deliberately -- remember -- God created the world. We brand it to easily a wicked world, a world that's headed toward Hell....but a world that God says is "My world -- I made it, I know how it's best meant to operate . . ." If only one day in seven you and I sat down and deliberately thought about that, how different the six days in the week that follow could become. When we saw from the divine perspective, this is God's world, and we're meant to be in the arena where the drama of life is acted out in a way that brings honor and glory to Him who created it - - remember -- this day -- God looked upon His world and God called it good, and He gave it to us...remember.

For us Christians the Lord's Day, when death could no longer have dominion over Him, when He arose from the dead and Christians believed that to be such a tremendous truth, they said we must never, never forget it! We are children of the light and not of the darkness . . . we are children of life and not of death. And every time we come together on the Lord's Day we ought to remember that it was on this day that the Holy Spirit enveloped a company of believers -- empowered, enlightened them, and then sent them out into the world to turn the world upside-down - - it happened. What a tremendous difference it could make if every time you and I come together we could say to ourselves, we're looking back and remembering something that happened, and we are the heirs to it. And every Lord's Day is meant to be a kind of Easter all over again, and every Sunday is meant to be a kind of Pentecost all over again.

I have not come to this sacred desk this morning to rebuke you for not keeping the Lord's Day holy. I have come here to commend you, and to encourage you. Voltaire said he could ruin (I'm giving you a free translation) - - he could ruin the faith of people by destroying their Sabbath, their Lord's Day, as the case may have been. And he succeeded fairly well! A people shall be known by what they regard as holy. Remember -- this day.

I am deeply gratified when I think what happens here at Saint Luke, how you come, how you pay attention to God's Word, how you encourage one another in the fellowship that you have, in the kind of thing that's engendered when you greet one

another and have respect for one another -- as you commit yourself anew to the things that God expects us to accomplish through this congregation. And before I walk away from the sacred desk, let me number among the things that delight me as you give regard for this commandment -- you may not have thought much about it -- but I'm delighted when I realize that we belong to a church where almost every Lord's Day without exception a group of our precious young people head for the National Lutheran Home and spend a portion of their day in paying attention to older people, sharing a bit of God's love and concern. You ask me how to keep the day holy? -- any number of ways by which it can be done. And this too should be numbered among them . . .

. . . as significant as anything that ever happened at Bethany was after we had an in-depth retreat session there . . . a woman left Bethany and went right to the home of a member who was house-bound, gave her a bath, prepared her meal for the next day . . .

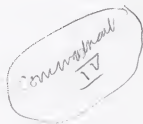
How do you please God? -- by obeying His commandments, and paying attention to one another.

\* \* \* \*

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"GOD'S HELPERS"  
(Exodus 20:12)

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from  
God our Father and from His  
Son Jesus Christ, our Blessed  
Lord. Amen.



For what it may be worth to you, let's take a second or so to get this sermon series, based on the general theme of The Ten Commandments, in a perspective. Arnold Toynbe<sup>e</sup>, the well-known historian, states that to date there have been twenty-one great civilizations of the world. The stern historical fact is this: fourteen of those so-called great civilizations of the world have disappeared. A conclusion to which one could readily come is this: they had become instruments which God could no longer use, because they had disobeyed Him. The Ten Commandments had been discarded, they had been broken, they had been cast aside.

You may say to yourself very quickly, but perhaps they were never given the Ten Commandments as those civilizations which were part of the Hebraic-Christian tradition have known them. But the interesting fact is this: it would seem to me that any student of history comes to the conclusion that no matter what the civilization may be, where there is basic disregard for what God had in mind regarding His people and His world, that civilization eventually ruins itself. Whether they adhere or do not adhere, by any measure of respect, even though it may be but a token, to what the Creator of the Universe has always had in mind for all of us.

And let it clearly be said, as a distinguished Swedish theologian once observed - - "We're all of us in the hand of God, whether with our belief or with our unbelief,<sup>if</sup> and what God decrees remains -- whether we ignore Him or acknowledge Him. For some day some of us will discover that what God has decreed life is constantly proving.

Today's sermon in the series: "Honor thy father and thy mother, that your days may be long in the land which the Lord God gives to you."

Let it be clearly understood at once, I have not come to this sacred desk this morning to lament, to chastize, or to rebuke irresponsible parents...to chastize, rebuke or lament disobedient children. One sees enough evidence of it, and one wrings his hands and lowers his head and laments enough regarding that sort of thing. But with whatever energy God gives me in the time that remains as this sermon is to be preached, I'd like to remind you of the kind of thing that God had in mind for us, and to assure you that here and there people take God seriously, and it pays off handsomely.

"Honor thy father and thy mother that thy days may be long in the land that the Lord thy God gives thee . . ."

How can I introduce this subject to you in a way that could be different? You've dealt with these Commandments from the days of your childhood. What new insight, by the grace of God, could I offer you?

I saw George Burns' second movie that deals with God -- "God - Book II" -- I think was the name of it, or "God II" -- that's cast a perfectly adorable child to be the central figure. She responds to the fact of God in a way that only a child can respond. Her parents do not understand her....the school authorities do not understand her....the psychiatrist doesn't understand her. And she does have her moments, as the story develops, when she isn't quite certain that God understands.

She gets an assignment from God, and very cleverly she helps to placard the community in which she lives with a very clever slogan -- because God wants to be known by people, you see, and God wants people to think in terms of Him. And she comes up with this very clever thing -- which is just two words:

THINK GOD - THINK GOD - THINK GOD

She succeeds admirably. And it turns out very well, really it does. And now the closing scene, when she and God are alone.



Oh, she's complained on occasion because He doesn't show up as often as He should, and as soon as He should, and now she's taking Him to task for not having shown up when she needed Him most. And as though she's countering now, angry and disturbed, she rails against God as much as to say, "And you don't need me." And God says to her, "But I do need you. I need all the help I can get, I always need helpers."

The movie concludes with a kind of Mona Lisa smile upon the face of the adorable young thing.....and you try to surmise for yourself, What is she thinking? Is she suddenly discovering what an exalted role God places human beings in? - - and to think that God should choose her, and people, to assist Him? Could it be as wonderful as that! - - and does it suddenly occur to her now as she thinks reflectively that that's what other people have been to her, as God's helpers.

Alvin Rogness, the beloved preacher, teacher, theologian of the American Lutheran Church, who once graced this sacred desk, has his own treatment of Luther's Catechism. And when he comes to the consideration of the Commandments, and this one in particular, how does he refer to parents? He's done it in a very clever and creative way. He refers to them as "God's Vice Presidents" - - God's helpers. Which leads me to say to you what I've already told you on more than one occasion, that there isn't much that God ever gets done by himself and by himself alone. The only thing that I know God ever did single-handedly was the act of Creation. And for the most part ever since then when He wants something done His preferred method is always to reach for a person. He relies upon people to get His work done.

It was John F. Kennedy who very properly said -- perhaps as masterful as anything that he said, in his Inaugural Address: "We must truly make here on earth God's work our work." And if we don't . . . who will?

So when you come to think of this Commandment, think of the exalted role in which God places people -- as His Vice Presidents, and as His agents, as

His helpers, as His assistants. Which leads me to say to you, you begin at that point when you consider this Commandment: the role of a parent.

Luther did something that we ought not to ignore. Luther said when we deal with this Commandment we ought to think of all those who have authority over us, whatever their job may be, because God is going to act in and through them in our behalf. So begin at that point: you honor your father, you honor your mother because God has chosen them, as God thinks of His world, as His agents -- the exalted role of those who are in positions of authority, as God conceives it.

Now let me say again to you what I said earlier: I know that there are parents who are irresponsible. I'm not talking about the way it's gone wrong. I'm here this morning to talk about the way it's meant to be. I have my moments when I think of the Ten Commandments as God's manual. He made the world, He's the manufacturer. And having made the world, He knows how it's best meant to operate. And this according to His scheme and His plan is the way it should operate: "I will use parents and those in authority to be My agents, to represent Me." This is the role of the parent -- an exalted role. God could not think of a better way by which to transmit His truth and His love than through those who are nearest and who are meant to be dearest to us.

I know a certain thrill when I realize that the Ten Commandments are not something that a group of preachers figured out...not something that a group of Cardinals got together and declared as dogma...not something that a council of economic advisors figured out! God's idea, the Creator of the Universe,

-- the Manufacturer of the World -- He said 'This is the way it can best operate.'

That's the role of the parent, to be as God's agents, His Vice Presidents, to be to people as He would be. And that's the responsibility that rests upon parents.

Now there's always a risk involved, because parents are human beings.

They have feet of clay. I shudder when I have my moments when I discover the two sons for whom God has given me responsibility as they mature in life, as they go from one stage to another, when they will discover how much their father's feet are made of clay. And I would ask that they be as charitable with me as I have learned to become with my parents, of blessed memory. For I, too, had my moments when I discovered that when we went to church they prayed the same prayer that I prayed -- "Father -- forgive!" There are risks involved, of course, because no one can fully obey God. But there's always the possibility, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to bring a measure of fulfillment to the assignment that God gives to us.

Which leads me to say to you: first, the role of the parents, as God's vice-presidents -- the risk that's involved because they may not be able to fully measure up . . . and together we ask for charity with one another, as God is charitable with us.

And thirdly: always the possibility of a precious reward. For, having tried to fulfill the responsibility which God placed upon her -- her name was Monica, remember it and remember it well, the mother of one of the greatest of all the Church Fathers, Augustine, who in the days of his youth was a rascal. You name any sin -- he had either thought it up or practiced it with relish... ..as lustful as they come. But Monica never gave up praying for him.

Two things were instrumental in his conversion: a Bishop of the Church who accepted him exactly as he was -- who began at that point, and was kindly disposed toward him....and in his every relationship with him was not judgmental, consigning him to Hell. Augustine never forgot the Bishop who accepted him as he was....

...and the other credit that he gives for his conversion -- the prayers of his mother. In anticipation of her death she wrote her son: "Think of me not where my body is laid, but remember me always before the altar of the Lord."

....absolutely beautiful and perfect. In the final analysis Monica wants to be remembered as she's related to God. "You shall be as my vice-president...you shall be as my agent . . . you shall be as my representative."

Where did I first learn about love? Where did I first learn the value of truth? Where did I first learn that my life could matter? -- that I was important to someone? From my parents.

Let me remind you, as I may have told you before, when my mother died I stood by the grave and with what emotional strength as I could gather I spoke the last words as I committed her body to the ground and her soul to the God who gave it. And as I walked away it occurred to me in no uncertain manner what I had always known -- but up until that moment had never articulated as well -- she was the one person, more than any other person on the face of the earth, who first taught me about God....."Honor thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God gives thee."

I have not come to this sacred desk this morning to chastize, rebuke or to sit in judgment upon irresponsible parents...to chastize, rebuke or sit in judgment upon disobedient children. But I am happy to tell you that here and there, there are people such as you who take seriously what God had in mind from the very beginning. And therein lies reason for hope.

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"LIFE FROM GOD'S PERSPECTIVE"

GRACE, Mercy and peace from God  
our Father and from His Son Jesus  
Christ, our Blessed Lord. Amen.

*Exodus 20:13*

As the first Lesson was being read this morning -- did your mind wander a bit, or, recalling that moment for you now, if I were to ask you -- those Commandments, the order in which they were read -- could the order have been changed? What if a Commandment would have been deleted -- would it have made any difference?

Questions such as this have been raised from the pulpit before, and I too would put a similar question to you as I stand today in the place of the one who ordinarily preaches from this sacred desk: How would you rate the Commandments, on a scale of 1 to 10? Where would you put the one that's to be considered this morning, as this series continues uninterrupted?

It's a bit risky to think that we could rate the Commandments. Who among us, any of us, would dare to suggest that one is more important than the other, or which one might have lesser value than the other....or to be even more risky, which Commandment could be eliminated? What if there were to be 9 instead of 10 -- which is the one, do you suppose, that the human race could get along without?

Now from a purely human point of view -- (that's been carefully worded) -- from a purely human point of view, the Commandment against killing is one that we would not want to get rid of, for that's precisely the Commandment that's ours to consider today. Recorded in the 20th chapter of Exodus, it's the 13th verse -- four words make up the Fifth Commandment: Thou shalt not kill.

Contrary to all the sordid evidence that we could present, such as murder-for-hire as an unsavory example, the case could easily be built in order to maintain that most people, if not all people, cherish life, especially their own. Even for many people, despite the constantly deteriorating condition of their own health, the desire to live remains strong and vital.

We need to think of a Commandment such as this in another way, too -- for who doesn't want to live in a society where life is held precious, that it's something to be protected, that it's something to be preserved with honor and dignity. Even the ugly fact of war is justified again and again as necessary in order to defend life

and protect the things that make for its survival, on a purely human basis. And who among us dares to deny the fact that thinking man, as we like to refer to ourselves, whatever his religious orientation, or lack of it, prefers an ordered society in which a person is free to move about, without any fear of being brutalized or killed, whatever the violent method? True as this may be, we need to remind ourselves that the Commandment is held up for us as a basic law of the human race, not by any particular referendum or fiat, but primarily because God in His wisdom has decreed it -- the Commandment: Thou shalt not kill -- it was God who established it. And I wish I could come to you this morning and tell you this Commandment is easily understood and that it's universally obeyed. But it isn't . . . and I can't.

Think for a moment, if we were to take this Commandment at face value, would it mean that all of us would become vegetarians?

-- taken at face value, would it mean that all of us would become pacifists?

-- and brace yourself for this -- taken at face value, does strict adherence to this Commandment imply that none of us would ever be allowed to defend himself, or a helpless loved one, against an unwelcome intruder? -- against a maniac or a murderer?

Any attempt on our part to understand this Commandment is compounded by the fact that when you read the Old Testament it's set before us -- there are those victories that are gained by God's Chosen People, as they go tramping off toward the Promised Land -- it's recorded for us. There are those battles -- people are killed left and right, and there's plundering with a vengeance. And those victories are recorded as God-ordained, victories over enemies, and their cities, and fields and their families . . . victories which they never could have accomplished, save for the help of God.

And what is more, there's that chapter in the Bible, that chapter in Israel's history where Moses as the law-giver makes allowance for the avenger. It's a surprise when some folks learn that there was a day when it was decreed that the next-of-kin should seek revenge when someone precious to him had been murdered.

And so we could go on, and on, and on. And while such questions are not without some value, we need to think in some other terms, to move on in order to understand this particular Commandment as best we can. For there are other questions that need to be asked --

-- why was it given by God in the first place?

-- what do you suppose God had in mind?

-- essentially now, the question is this: how is life to be viewed from the God-perspective?

~~The undeniable fact is simply this: God is creator and giver and sustainer of life --~~

The undeniable fact is simply this: God is creator and giver and sustainer of life -- looks upon life as sacred. That's really what God is saying to us in these four direct words: Thou shalt not kill needs to be interpreted: life is sacred. You cannot read it otherwise. Life is sacred.

It's for this reason, you see, that in those early days God allowed that if a man should commit a murderous act, then he in turn should forfeit his own right to live, that his own life should be taken from him. Not, mark you, that the avenging would be a violation of the Commandment, but rather that it should be an expression of the basic principle that life is sacred! And why so sacred? The answer, of course, in Biblical terms, comes naturally -- that life is sacred because man is made in the image of God. That means, dare we say it boldly, that every single human being on the face of the earth is to be understood, to be treated as an expression of God.

Whatever we may or may not come to think or understand of this Commandment, we're to remember that from God's point of view there is no life without some value, that within each person there's some measure of divine potential. And it could be that when you come to consider this Commandment, that something like this never entered your mind, that when you have to deal with some unlikely, some unattractive, some unpromising person, you should say to yourself: respect is due that person -- that you should endeavor to help that person because whatever his sin, that person is a child of God. In a certain sense, just because you may have never broken this Commandment, it does not necessarily follow that you kept this Commandment.

Luther in his explanation of what it means to take this Commandment seriously says that we should so fear and love God as not to do our neighbor any bodily harm or injury, but rather assist and comfort him in danger and in want. You see, there is more to this Commandment than meets the eye, and we make a mistake if we think some Commandments do not mean as much as others, that some do not apply to us because we haven't broken them....or in considering this Commandment and its basic intent, we realize that it's basic to all of our thinking in terms of relationships with one another, that life is sacred, that life is to be respected.

There's an ancient fable, and I do not know its source, the story about a spider who descended one day by the slender thread that he'd spun out of his body from the dark rafters of his home in a barn....and on the lower level he built his web, and before long he grew sleek and prosperous, and like some of us, he became forgetful. ....and then one day as he moved about his web he was irritated to discover that

slender filament which rose vertically from his web and disappeared into the darkness beyond. And as he mused to himself, he said, "That thread catches no flies -- of what earthly use can it be?" . . . and so speaking, he extended one of his crooked claws and he yanked at the thread, he cut it.....and whereupon the whole web collapsed.

Life around us begins to collapse when we lose its invisible means of support. Commandments are meant to remind us to whom we are ultimately responsible in the way we live. And when you think of your life, and I think of mine, you think of the life of people sitting next to you, and your neighbor. This Commandment is intended to help us understand that all life is sacred - - - and likewise, so is the way that we live out each day, and particularly in our relationships with one another.

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)



"WHERE SEX BELONGS"

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God our  
Father and from His Son Jesus Christ,  
our Blessed Lord. Amen.

*Epistles 20:14* 

This sermon is another in the series that's being preached on the Ten Commandments. And today it's Commandment Number Six that's given us to consider, the commandment that God gave the Children of Israel regarding adultery.

At the very beginning you need to hear these words. Those of you listening to the preaching of this sermon fall into one of two categories: either you have committed adultery, or you haven't. And there is a Christian perspective to be brought to bear on both categories.

Is it too daring to suggest, do you suppose, that even before this sermon unfolds, that the forces and factors that lead to adultery may be worse than the adulterous act itself. For how is it, do you suppose, that one becomes adulterous? Good question.

There is something else that needs to be said as we deal specifically with this Commandment and wrestle with it as earnestly as we can. It refers to our young people. As many of you know, we place a high value on the Confirmation experience that we have in Saint Luke. We earnestly try to make it a thing of substance. Fortunately, by far the highest percentage of our young people respond enthusiastically to what we offer. The context within which the instruction is provided is made as winsome as possible. Teachers are carefully chosen...the greater part of the instruction period is spent in small groups, the teacher having no more than eight students....

....and when it comes to material that we use, that too is carefully chosen. One of the finest books that we use as resource for our 9th grade class, the one that anticipates being confirmed, is an excellent text called "Living In The Kingdom."

A lot can be said for its format and its style and its content. But above all it needs to be recognized that its author is a veteran pastor and teacher of the Church who is a skilled interpreter of Biblical truth and is gifted when it

comes to placing a pen in his hand, despite, or because of his seventy years. He deals in a refreshing way with Luther's Catechism, and especially the Ten Commandments, and has an appealing way of reaching young people. So that you can understand why I appreciate so much his substance and style, let me indicate for you how he handles this Commandment on adultery.

What do you suppose is the heading for his chapter on this subject? Mindful of the fact that today's young people are presumably the most sexually aware generation in history, the most sophisticated, the most sexually active . . . mindful of the fact that there's an ever-increasing rate of pregnancies and an alarming rate of illegitimate parents -- he captured their interest at once with a three-word caption: the title for his chapter is simply: "Where Sex Belongs." And he gains their respect at once by the very use of the word sex and recognizing it as a fact of life. And then from that point on this grand old man that I would honestly guess would pass for the grandfather of any of us, proceeds to treat this Commandment in a most thought-provoking way.

When I've had to wrestle with the fact that each year a group of our 9th graders will be going away for a special weekend, we'd be dealing specifically with this topic and wrestling with how we express our sexuality as men and women from a Christian perspective, I've turned again and again to the words of Alvin Rogness. I've never known this subject to be treated any better than the manner in which he addresses it. Would you indulge me, then, for a minute or two? I'd like to read for you several paragraphs from his book so you can see for yourself exactly what I mean.....

" . . . We live our lives within many different circles.  
Within each we have relationships with other people.  
Some circles are large, some small. Our school or the place we work is one circle...within it are some people who like us, and we like them....

-- our home is a circle and there we know a special kind of love and special kind of relationships -- parents, children, brothers, sisters.....

-- our church is a circle where we share a faith with others. Some we know well, some hardly at all.....

-- the smallest circle is marriage -- two people who fall in love, promise to remain a circle of just two persons for life. They give themselves to each other in fullness and completeness that no other circle demands. This is the deepest and most intimate relationship of all, and it is into this circle that God has placed the gift of sexual love.

" . . . Friendship is different. This, too, is a wonderful circle. You may like a great number of people and call them friends, but most people have relatively small circle of special friends. From the time we are children we tend to gravitate to a few who are especially close to us. We do this to the end of life.

-- two people are drawn together like David and Jonathan in the Bible, not biologically, not out of common tastes in politics or even religion, not out of the equity in wealth or intelligence. Somehow they find in each other a warmth, an openness, an understanding and a trust. They demand nothing of each other. They simply enjoy one another. This is not the same as falling in love.

...if friends were to have sexual relationships with each other, their friendship would be so changed that it would be gone, simply because God does not intend sexual acts to be a part of friendship. In fact such use, or mis-use, of sex will destroy friendship. A new relationship emerges which can only grow more distasteful as friends realize their friendship is gone.

-- and certainly sex never belongs between chance acquaintances, or between people who simply like each other, even though the act may give momentary pleasure. Sex is never a detached pleasure like eating a good meal -- that you can do alone. You use food to satisfy a hunger.....in sexual relationships outside of marriage you use another person as an object to satisfy lust . . . "

And then he goes on to conclude this chapter in this way . . .

" . . . God will not be mocked. We cannot outsmart Him. He has made us, after all. He, better than we, knows where this delicate, glorious and mysterious gift belongs. And He is saying clearly that it belongs in the circle of marriage.

This Commandment is explicit against fornication and against adultery. . . "

Now there you have it. No question about what God had in mind when He laid down the law and included a specific prohibition against sharing of sex outside the marriage circle.

There is something to be said in reminding ourselves about that old platitude that could so well be applied to this particular Commandment. Remember the old saying that goes like this: "Don't take down any fence until you first find out why the fence was put there in the first place." In this day and age when God's

fence around the marriage bed is recklessly, carelessly or willingly removed, the Church does want to remind people why God put that fence there in the first place: It was put there primarily to preserve the sanctity of the home.

In order that we might get this in sharper focus, let's look at it this way: As the Children of Israel were heading for Canaan they were moving toward a people who had been declared by secular history as one of the most immoral, licentious people of all times. Even their immorality was practiced in the name of religion. And so God gave the Children of Israel a "No-No" regarding their playing fast and loose with the marriage vows. They were not to be as other people. They had the benefit of receiving from Him the manner and the method by which life was meant to be lived. It should not be necessary for them to learn the hard way, become self-destructive. They'd been given the benefit of a divine directive, and through them the whole world could learn of life from the Giver's point of view.

Now who among us would not be willing to admit that we do not always obey when God directs? None of us has ever been a flashing success as His obedient children. We do break His laws, one of them after another. And even the best among us is not free from temptation. If we don't commit one sin, then surely we commit another -- this one or that one -- or all of them. And adultery is not the only sin. It is sinful, of course, but it's one among others.

And when this Commandment is broken, what then? There's so much to pay, by many, in many ways. Happy, of course, is the person who might be able to say that he or she has been fortunate enough never to have violated this particular Commandment. But such good fortune gives no basis for either self-pride or condemnation of those who, for whatever reason, have become adulterous, whether it be once, or often.

Those of you who are hearing these words fall into one of two categories: either you have committed adultery, or you haven't. Do you remember the encounter Jesus had with the woman at the well, and those who accused her, and what it is that He had to say? "No man hath condemned thee," said Jesus to her, "nor do I." Because Jesus will recognize that no adultress is saved by condemnation, nor does it behoove any one of us to become self-righteous. But unfortunately the mistake that many people make is that they see adultery and its sinful life and accuses others as if it were the only sin. They never let them forget it.

There was a distinguished New York preacher who once concluded his sermon to his people as he dealt with this same Commandment by speaking to them with both com-

passion and conviction, and perhaps what he had to say really needs no further comment. Early in His ministry Jesus was suddenly confronted by some woman dragged out from some house of ill fame and thrown down in the dust before Him. The scribes and the Pharisees said to Jesus -- and you can imagine their unctious, self-righteous tones -- "We've taken her in the very act of adultery. Now what will the young prophet of Nazareth do? -- will he break the Mosaic law?"....and already they reached for stones to stone her to death.

....Jesus stopped down and with His finger wrote on the ground . . . and then looking up, He said, "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her."

.....and then again He stooped down and wrote in the sand, so that He did not have to look at these men. ....and when He stood up, all that He saw was the sand. Not a man was left. . . . and there before Him was the woman, and He said, "Woman, where are your accusers?"

Hath no man condemned you?

She looked up and said, "I see no man."

Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn thee. Go, and sin no more."

You and I fall into either one category or the other --  
the woman . . . the words of Jesus Christ . . .  
speak to both of us.

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

" - - ON STEALING"

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God our  
Father and from His Son Jesus Christ,  
our Blessed Lord. Amen.

I walked by it many a day during the summer that I worked in Manhattan. There it was on one of the giant bill-boards for which Times Square has always been noted. It was bigger than life, advertising a new movie about to open. The movie was called "THE RAT-RACE." On the side of this building that was facing Broadway was the artist's caricature of the proverbial man-in-the-gray-flannel-suit. He was headed for the Big City, suit-case in each hand, and underneath the picture of the man was the description of the movie - -

-- Tony Curtis is Pat, the ambitious guy from Milwaukee...

-- Debbie Reynolds is Peggy, a dime-a-dance gal....

...they are two hopefuls who are willing to do anything -- claw, steal, kill - - to get ahead in the rat-race.

I walked by that bill-board on more than one occasion, almost daily. And then one day it dawned on me, that's a description of my generation. The bill-board was about someone my age, a youthful looking figure, finished with college, trying to get started, someone young. And I refused to believe that every young person in their 20's was out to make a fast buck -- to run like a steam-roller over anyone, any time, anywhere.

The passing of the years has taught me an appreciation for a realistic reading of life. And while it's not that everyone will do anything -- claw, steal and kill -- to get ahead in the rat-race - - - while it's not true that everyone will, there's always the possibility that some will.

God, of course, knew of this possibility all along. Who, after all, reads life more realistically than God? And if it's proof you need, then it's the Ten Commandments to which I would call your attention. The Children of Israel were only a few months out of Egypt -- headed for the Promised Land, a wandering band of refugees who left with only what they could wear, or what they could carry. To these property-poor people God lays down the law, a series of commandments, and among them the one that we're to consider this morning as this series of sermons based on the Ten Commandments unfolds. It's the Commandment dealing with stealing.

Don't you think it a bit odd of God to give a commandment dealing with property to a group of people who had practically nothing? In the day's perspective, not a single one of them had a bank balance, a key to a safety deposit box, a single share of stock, a deed to a piece of land.....a house....a boat....a car....a bed! They were penniless, a bunch of homeless people on the march. The only thing any of them could call their own was what they were able to carry in their hand or wear on their back. And to this people, who have practically nothing, God says, "You don't steal." And you might smile when you think of it -- but steal what? Why, then, any one of us could legitimately ask, would God make much of this business of stealing while addressing a people who had so little?

You must always remember that God knows our nature. And knowing our nature, He knows our possibilities. You see, from His perspective, there's always the likelihood that we could become acquisitive, that we could gather, that we could possess, that we could claim. And granted that they were penniless, these homeless people wandering across the desert -- the day would come when they would settle down, they'd strike a claim, they'd begin to think in terms of what they could call their own. And when the day would come that they'd begin to prize their possessions, they could run the risk of casting a covetous eye on what someone else might prize. And when the uncontrollable reach and grasping hand would show itself, God said "Don't!"

And as you have been listening to what's transpired in the sermon so far, haven't you asked yourself the question: but aren't you overlooking something? If God deals primarily with the spiritual worth of things, why does God give so much recognition to material possessions? Haven't we been taught that we can't take anything with us? Haven't we been led to believe that we're to take a detached attitude toward property and the material things of this world? Isn't it a basic tenet of the Christian faith that we're not to lay up treasures on earth? or to put it in a more simple and a very basic way -- doesn't God's chief interest lie in people rather than property? Whatever we may or may not fully understand in this regard, the fact still remains, you can judge a person's character by the regard that they have for things -- either their own or those of other people. And as long as there are people in this world, they will always, generally speaking, acquire possessions, acquire property.

There should be no question about the fact that God smiles favorably upon the person who has taken possession of something by paying an honest dollar that's come from an honest day's work. And God who is love surely is kindly disposed toward

those who have, just because others have given to them....nor should any of us allow ourselves to think for a single moment that God would turn His face, and many of us who has an eye for a thing of value that someone has abandoned or disclaimed - - that's really the three basic ways that we do acquire things, isn't it? - -

...we get what we have because we work for it --  
things become precious to us because we've labored hard,  
and there are those who tell us that the things that we prize most are frequently the things that we've worked hardest for.....

....we do have some things because people out of love have been kind enough to give them to us....

....or you may number among the things that you now call your own something that you once found ...

But there is a fourth way by which someone can get something - - a person can steal. A person may deliberately take from another what they prize or what they cherish. And concerning stealing, God says flat-out: "No!"

Before the sermon ends let me address for you this question of why God prohibits stealing. Maybe He's the kind of a person who needs to have God explain or justify His edicts. If you are such a person, perhaps it will be helpful for you to realize that when a person steals, he actually violates the character of somebody else and destroys that person's faith in human nature. You see, God really wants us to trust, to believe in one another. And when a person steals he violates a God-given blessing that's bestowed upon him by which he was meant to work and to earn what could be his. And by stealing he actually and deliberately short-circuits God's plan for his own personal development, for his own integrity, for his own sense of honor.

And yet there's another reason with which we need to reckon: Christians of all people live by this fantastic notion that when it's all said and done, no one of us really owns anything! It's a mind-blowing idea! And in our understanding of God we begin with the premise that everything belongs to Him -- He's the giver of all things. In a very real sense, of what you and I have, we have on deposit from God.

Have you ever thought about God as the great Depositor? Don't forget that when a person deposits something, he never really relinquishes his claim. At any time God may appear, holding us responsible for what we happen to have which is rightfully His. So, the Christian looks upon property - - it's not really ours! God is the owner of all things. It's a mind-blower!



There are those who maintain that only the people who subscribe to this understanding, to this kind of reading of life, have gotten the greatest satisfaction out of both living, and dying. Look then not only upon God as the great law-giver when you think of this Commandment, but also as the Great Depositor - - who holds us responsible for what we do with what we have. And eventually it can be said that the supreme test of any person's character is what they do with what they possess.

The old rabbis, my father used to tell me, had their own concept of Judgment. It was God at the end, standing before the latest person to die and putting one simple question to them - - the answer of which, of course, would determine their eternal condition. The question, now that the person's life was over:

"Well, what did you make of it?"

The concept of Judgment like that is well worth remembering when you think of this Commandment. Life from God's point of view was never meant to be a rat-race of clawing and stealing and killing.....but rather an experience of loving, and of sharing.....

....and that's something to think about, isn't it?

\* \* \*

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

A GOD WHO CAN CRY

Luke 19: 41

In company with some of you I have had the good fortune of having a dream fulfilled by being able to visit the Holy Land. I'll never forget the first time I had such an experience. Our small company, there were only twelve of us in number, arrived and went to a small hotel not far from the Mount of Olives.

I remember several things about the hotel in particular.

First, was its location.

Secondly, the fact that it seemed that we were given individual attention by the hotel staff . . . not surprisingly so -- we were the only ones in the hotel! There were only twelve of us occupying the entire structure. The tourist season had not yet begun, and so we were the ones who were the object of the staff's undivided attention.

But the thing that impressed me most, or even more so, was the name of the hotel. It was called the Hotel Panorama...and aptly so. The hotel was so situated that we were constantly given a broad and complete view of the ancient walled city of Jerusalem.

Quite naturally, as you might suppose, I had deep thoughts whenever I would stand at the door of the hotel and look across the valley and see the Holy City. And as you can readily understand, so much of it comes back to me today as I stand in this place. For that is precisely what a trip to the Holy Land can do for a person -- enable them to identify more fully with so much that occurred in the life of our Blessed Lord.

Your patience, then, please, as I reflect on this Palm Sunday on that day in the life of Jesus -- when He beheld the panorama, the Holy City of Jerusalem, and was about to enter it in a most dramatic fashion. There is a text for this brief meditation, the 41st verse of the 19th chapter of the Gospel according to Luke:

"And when he was come near, he beheld the city and wept."

Let's see if we can get it in sharp focus. He was, as you know, God come to us in human form....which is to say, He was a man. And He was every inch a man. And now, generally speaking, men are not given to crying. Weeping, in the mind of some people, is equated with weakness, and as some folks would have it, the more

masculine a person, the less we would expect him to cry. With reverence and esteem they look upon Jesus as one greater than any ordinary mortal. Do we not also refer to Him as Christ the King? And do we not also associate with Him divinity, and call Him the Son of God....or as the Creed-writers put the words to our lips: "Very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father" ....say it again and again if you dare -- men, generally speaking, are not given to crying. And a king -- why should a king ever cry? Doesn't a king have everything that he wants? And if he doesn't have it for the moment, isn't there always some way within reason to get it? Men, generally, do not cry....kings seldom, if ever.

God -- why would a god cry?

No matter what you make of it, God who came to us in the form of Jesus Christ shed tears when He beheld the city on that first Palm Sunday as He was about to enter Jerusalem.

Your experience and mine has taught us that some people cry for no reason at all. It just seems second nature to them. But there are others who when they cry have a reason.....

-- some will cry because physical pain is far greater than they can bear....and bodily affliction weakens the mind and the spirit so much that the tears cannot be held back...

-- some people cry because of the emotional burden of life, and when the heart is heavy -- no matter how good and brave a person may be -- tears have a way of coming, and if not in public, then at least in private....

Some people cry because of their own pain, some people cry because of the pain of others . . . and occasionally a person whose joy is great may be moved to tears. Jesus wept. Why did He cry?

On the surface, presumably, there's hardly any reason why He should cry. As far as He's concerned, everything is going according to plan. His destination from the very beginning had always been Jerusalem. He wanted to ride triumphantly into the city. And now all of this was about to take place. As the prophets before Him had demonstrated, so the crowds would gather around Him, and they'd shout their hosannas, and they'd salute Him as He rides on a donkey. He never had a day quite like this. He even encouraged it, initiated it. Should this then be for Him a time to cry?

He wept. But they were not tears of joy. And He had His reasons for weeping -- knowing the true nature of people like you and me, He could see beyond the crowd's shouts of "Hosanna" to their cruel, callous cry of "Crucify!" And so when He cried He did not cry for Himself. He cried for the people that He came to serve.

And that's the line of difference between His tears and ours. We cry so easily for ourselves -- how easy it is for us to wallow in our self-pity, to feel sorry for our condition. Not so with Jesus Christ. When He cried He cried for other people, and not for Himself. When He beheld the city He wept for the people, the ones who would reject Him.....

...He cried for the people who would forsake Him  
...He cried for the disciples who would deny Him  
...He cried for the disciple who would betray Him  
...He cried for the people who would crucify Him  
...He wept for the people to whom God had given the  
    freedom of choice, and rather than choose good,  
    they chose evil.....

And there would be nothing that He could do about it except allow Himself to become vulnerable.

There is no secret about this. You know it as well as I do -- there are some of you here this morning who know exactly what I'm talking about, especially if you're a parent. For more than thirteen years you have placed in my shepherding care hundreds upon hundreds of young people. And more often than I care to remember I've stood with some of you as parents and wept, as you've seen your teenager trying to express some new-found freedom, foolishly use it to reject, to deny, to forsake, to betray the way of truth and goodness -- even to the point of preferring the Devil to Christ. And there wasn't a thing you could do about it, nor I, except to become vulnerable.

So we're all children in the eyes of God, and all too often disobedient children. Palm Sunday reminds us of our Heavenly Father who either stands in the sidelines and waits...or who is pushed and shoved about, nailed to a cruel cross, until we have done with our foolishness.....

    "And when he beheld the city he cried . . . "  
...but not for Himself. He cried for us.

For some people that's a mind-blowing idea of God. Our image is of God being so powerful and mighty. A God who cries - - a God who cries for us? What would your life be like, do you suppose, if you didn't believe in a God who cries? If you didn't believe in a God who sometimes sees our condition through the tears of His eyes? For us to have a God who cries is for us to have a God who is not detached from our life, but He's so involved that when we fail Him He's vulnerable to our sins. No other religion in the world has a God like that - - a God who cries, and not for Himself....

....who cries for people that He wants to save  
....a God who when He looks in your direction,  
as He looks in mine, occasionally will weep . .

\* \* \* \*

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"EASTER - AN EXPERIENCE"

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God  
our Father and from His Son Jesus  
Christ, our Blessed Lord. Amen.

John 20:1

The text - the 1st verse of the 20th chapter of the Gospel according to John:

"Then the first day of the week, Mary  
Magdalene arrived at the tomb, while it was  
still dark, and noticed that the stone had  
been taken away . . . "

The title, if you need one, simply this: "EASTER - AN EXPERIENCE."

Contrary to what some of you may think, an Easter sermon is not easy to preach. I'm not reluctant nor embarrassed to say this at the very beginning, so let me repeat it: Contrary to what some of you may think, an Easter sermon is not a very easy sermon to preach.

I know very well that Easter is the central truth of our Christian faith, and that every creed that we have written declares it. And no preacher dares to be silent on this day of days -- nor dare you! And that's why we include it in our worship at a most propitious point, an opportunity for every voice to be triumphantly heard and joining in echo wherever Christians gather on a day such as this: THE LORD IS RISEN INDEED! It's something that we believe. Do we?.....or do we?

Let me be as honest with you as I possibly can be, and you return the compliment -- you be honest with me. And let's be fair, very fair, with each other. I have the feeling that if I asked this question of every one who is present right now, if I asked the same question....if I were to leave this pulpit and walk down the aisle and go from row to row, and if I looked each one of you in the eye, and if I could, call you by name - - - "Do you honestly, without any doubt or hesitation -- do you fully, completely, perfectly believe on your own, not on the basis of what some have told you or what you've read or what you've seen - - - that a 33-year-old-car-

penter, put to death as a criminal, placed in a grave with a huge boulder rolled against it, came back to life after three days -- almost two thousand years ago?

I will not proceed in that manner, so you can relax. Time alone would not permit such an interrogation, or testimony, as the case may be. And frankly speaking, I suppose I could honestly say that some of you would react a bit awkwardly and think the whole exercise in poor taste. While others of you, I have reason to believe, would applaud it. And having been with you as long as I have, and being the son of a parsonage, I'm going to presume to tell you how I think or predict what the responses would be, had I gone pew to pew from person to person...and each of you would have responded.

Please understand that to a large degree what you're now going to hear has pretty much been determined by conversations that some of us have had, or has been pretty much determined by the way I've seen you behave in a time of crisis, when personal faith is either evident or it isn't.

First now, the greater majority -- could it be 70-80-90% or more -- I think would speak up. It could be that my estimate may be off a bit...but the greater majority would speak up with positive conviction...

...and a few of you, here and there, would probably break into song in a true charismatic fashion without waiting for your non-compatriots in the spirit to be bold -- they would spontaneously join you. And what you might lack in any evidence of numerical strength, your rapturous response would resound to every corner of the Nave....and with a display of restrained fervor, with a measure of unembellished affirmation, by far the greater number of you would answer with whatever variety of individual personality your temperament would reflect.

Then there would be, I dare say, a second group among us, a small percentage, and I shan't begin to predict a figure -- who would not answer with any degree of

enthusiasm. And before I say another word, you should know that as I assume them to be honest, I have no trouble at all in respecting their complete candor. They are the ones who would answer, in all likelihood, in this manner:

"I would like to say that I believe, but I have problems with the whole thing. I can't understand how it could happen. If a person dies, he's dead! I just don't understand it. It really isn't a case of my being able to honestly say that I believe.... nor is it a case of my honestly being able to say that I don't believe it . . . . "

It's to these people that this sermon is primarily directed, an honest attempt on my part to be as helpful as possible. People who have questions like this cannot be ignored.

A great preacher once dealt with this very issue far better than my limited years of experience can offer you, and he did a masterful thing. He spoke first of the fact that most people have no difficulty in accepting the crucifixion -- it's the resurrection that they can't understand. As an example he cited: "With the cross we deal with sin, suffering and death. Most of you, " he said, "know something about all three. You have sinned. And even you may not call it that, you've felt the twinge of conscience and you've done things that you know were wrong.....

...you've had your share of suffering, perhaps you've had more than your share. You know what it is to suffer from a broken heart....

...and you have been in the presence of death. Although you yourself have not yet been through it, you've seen others go through it. You've felt the chill of it.....

Easter -- the resurrection -- that has to do with something completely outside the range of your experience. You've never known anyone who has died and come



back to life . . . "

And I'm not thinking now of those rare instances where a person's heart stops beating for a few minutes, and then is made to beat again. The fact that there is nothing like it within the range of your experience is one reason why it's so much more difficult to speak about the Resurrection than it is to speak about Jesus' crucifixion. And presumably that's why more people than we care to admit say the Creed with their fingers crossed, as somehow they let the words slip from their lips.

Maybe it's because we live in the so-called scientific atmosphere that has something to do with our reluctance to say that we wholeheartedly believe. But we're the kind of people, you know, who never quite feel a thing is real unless we can explain it, or grasp it. There is something detrimental about our determination to have everything fully explained before we can stand to benefit by the experience itself.

My father, if he gets a chance to listen to the tape of this sermon, will probably be a bit jolted by what I'm going to tell you about a surmise of mine in his protracted illness. You know this illness of his has gone on now for more than five weeks. This is the first Easter in more than 45 years that he hasn't been in a pulpit....

-- this sickness has been overshadowed -- he probably won't like me telling you this, but I'm in the pulpit today . . . this sickness has been overshadowed by his constant wanting to have everything explained to him. He confronts his physicians, and my mother too, with all kinds of questions: What caused the condition?

...What's the medicine for? Does the dosage have to be so strong?...Why can't he sleep?....And why is he weak? ....Why didn't he get better three weeks ago?

...and all the while that he wants everything explained, he'd be far better off if he'd simply accept the fact that he's sick. Bluntly put, putting too much energy into trying to get an explanation can be crippling. Good things sometimes begin only after a person is willing to accept the experience as it is -- and then move from that point.

I am happy, by the way, to be able to report to you that the Senior Pastor's condition is improving. But the turning-point came when he accepted as a bona fide explanation the fact that he was nothing other than a sick man. (And parenthetically, if he hears a tape of this sermon he may be so mad he'll be out by Tuesday.)

But in all seriousness, to those of you who have trouble believing in the Resurrection just because you've never had it explained to your satisfaction, I can tell you this: chances are you will never have it fully explained to your satisfaction. I, as one of your pastors, freely admit -- I do not pretend to fully understand the Resurrection -- nor does that trouble me overmuch. There is so much that's clouded in mystery. But I am deeply grateful for all that God does reveal. And therein lies my hope and my joy and my faith. I have seen the love and the power of Christ come alive in countless people. No dead Christ could accomplish what I've seen happen in the lives of some of you into whose face I look this very moment.

I have been to Jerusalem. Along with some of you I have reverently gone to the Garden Tomb. Exactly what all happened that first Easter morning I don't know. Do you? Can you explain it fully? Can you explain it completely? That's not the point, really. What is important is not explanations, but the experience of the fact. And I want you to listen to these borrowed words which says it better than anything I could put together on my own: I do know that over Him who offered Himself in perfect obedience to the will of God, death has no dominion; sin had no claim whatever upon Him; evil never got the best of Him; suffering never soured Him. And in the end, death could not hold Him. I know that He is alive. And because He lives, you, I -- we -- shall live also. This I most certainly believe.

\* \* \* \*

(transcribed as recorded)

"TO TELL THE TRUTH"

*Exodus 20:16*

This sermon is the next-to-the-last in the series that was begun some time ago based on the Ten Commandments. Its title today is "To Tell The Truth." It's the 8th Commandment that's given for our consideration. You'll find it in the 16th verse of the 20th chapter of the Book of Exodus. It goes like this: "You shall not bear false witness."

Now it may be of some interest to you to know that some of this sermon which you are about to hear was prepared on April 15, a day and an evening which, such a short time ago, may recall for you the feverish attempt on the part of some people to have their income taxes postmarked by the final deadline - - special post offices remained open until midnight, and there were postal clerks standing on the curb lanes to reach for forms from lines of passing motorists, in order to ease their anxiety, to offer some measure of welcomed assistance related to belated, hurried tax-payers. So much for April 15, and whatever else that particular date on the calendar may bring unhappily to your memory.

But now for the moment it may be of some interest to you to know that as far as this sermon is concerned, it has been estimated that the U. S. Government has been cheated annually, at least this is their estimate this year, of some 88-89 billion dollars by people who do not tell the truth, who practice deception, if not outright fraud. Someone has gone so far as to suggest even among the so-called honest ones among us, that there is a tendency to allow for a margin of at least \$100 on each return that we, the honest ones, make - - \$100 margin in our favor.

Now you've heard undoubtedly of the so-called 'conscience-mail' that is occasionally received by the Internal Revenue Service - - not tons of it, of course, but occasionally they do get letters such as this one:

" . . . Dear Internal Revenue People,  
Enclosed please find my check in the amount of \$100.00. I did cheat a bit on my return last year. My conscience troubled me so that I could not sleep.  
Thank you . . .

. . . P.S. If I can't sleep again tonight,  
I'll send you another check in tomorrow's mail . . . "

Now you may laugh, but only momentarily, because on sober reflection -- and we are capable of thinking soberly at times, we find the smile fading from our faces when we realize that those of us who try to pay our taxes honestly, we do find

ourselves handing over to the Government every third to every fourth pay check, or to put it this way: working for the Government at least three to four months, if not more in some cases, for Uncle Sam - - - we do find that smile facing when we find that 88-89 billion dollars that the Government won't get this year because people cheat and lie - - that 88-89 billion dollars would balance the total U. S. Budget for us -- so it's been reported. And only God knows how much of our ailing economy can be set straight if the budget could be balanced.

April 15 . . . that date on the calendar simply serves to bring the sad and sorry fact into sharp focus: people do cheat....people lie. And some people say it's going on all the time, and that it's a way of life. And I for one refuse to believe that it should or that it could be so. Maybe because I was naive when I was growing up. Having been raised in a parsonage, perhaps I was protected to a certain degree. Most of my friends were made within a Christian environment. And I remember that I was taught to tell the truth -- honestly try to tell the truth, and believe generally that most people told the truth, especially the people that you respected.

...and then one day -- and I remember it well -- when I got a shock. And I haven't been the same since. I need to tell you about it, if you don't mind, that you might appreciate the frame-work of reference in which this sermon is being preached.

It goes back to the days when I was an idealistic college student and I had my heroes, and one of them was a man who looked like he could be everybody's grandfather. He was the President of the United States. His name: Dwight David Eisenhower. He was living in the White House....

(I repeat: I was idealistic -- he was one of my heroes)

...and then there was that day in 1960 that history books probably refer to, if only in a foot-note, as the U-2 Incident. Francis Gary Powell, American pilot, flying in a spy plane, was forced down over the Soviet Union. And when asked about it at first, President Eisenhower -- my hero -- lied. The question I had to ask, even though he later told the truth about the incident, the question didn't escape me:

-- if the man lies once, will he lie again?

Priscilla Bach has written a book, perhaps one of the finest that I've ever seen, entitled: "Lying: Moral Choice in Public And Private Life" and in that book she refers to the time that Adlai Stevenson had to go before the United Nations in 1961, and he had to tell lies about the Bay of Pigs invasion. And Stevenson himself has written that from that moment on his life was drastically changed. As

you might suppose, the author of this book makes much of the recent decline in public confidence not only in American government but in our lawyers and business-men, bankers and doctors. Battered by revelations about Vietnam and Watergate, almost 70% -- 7 out of every 10 respondents in a poll by the late 70's concluded that over the last ten years this country's leaders have consistently lied to the people. Author Bach maintains that the loss of confidence reaches far beyond government leadership. In 1966 to 1976 the portion of the people answering Yes to whether they had a great deal of confidence in people who were in charge of major institutions dropped from 73% to 42%, in medicine; for major companies: from 55% to 16%; for law firms: from 24% to 12%; for advertising agencies, from 21% to 7%.

...now who wants to live in a world, where no matter how ideal in other respects, where words and gestures could never be counted on? -- questions asked...answers given...information exchanged - - and all would be worthless, were all statements randomly truthful or deceptive - - action and choice would be undermined from the very outset.

There must be a minimal degree of trust and communication for language and action to be more than stabs in the dark. This is why some level of truthfulness has always been seen as essential to human society, no matter how efficient the observance of other moral principles. Even the devils themselves, observed Samuel Johnson, do not lie to one another, since the society of Hell could not subsist without truth any more than others. So God, at the very beginning, laid down the law for His people: Truth is the glue, if you please, by which people are bound, by which people are held together.

Why is it, then, that people still continue to lie, cheat and deceive? The reasons are many: people depend on deception to gain a selfish advantage. People lie to get themselves out of a predicament. People lie to avoid hurting feelings.

-- some people lie deliberately, in order to manipulate, to gain a place of power. The lamentable fact remains that all too often deception is taken for granted when it's felt to be excusable by those who tell the lies, and who tend also to make the rules....

In the final analysis, people forget that the consequences of lying, cheating and deceiving still have to be dealt with. It's from the perspective that it's clearly unthinkable that we should ever permit ourselves to think that people should be able to lie with impunity whenever they want to do so - - and it would be just as unthinkable to assert that such a right, even in the more restrictive circumstances

where liars claim a good reason for lying.

Especially true, maintained a distinguished researcher on the subject, because lying so often accompanies every other form of wrong-doing -- from murder....to bribery....to tax fraud...and to theft. So a wise man once said, "Truth and integrity are precious resources, easily squandered, hard to re-gain. They can thrive only on a foundation of respect for veracity."

A final word about this commandment -- it does lie within each of us to choose to tell the truth or to lie. God makes perfectly plain to us what our choice ought to be; and what is more, He gives us the wisdom and the power of the Holy Spirit to abide by it. You need some guidelines from the Christian perspective -- about the way to speak? Here are four simple questions you could ask yourself each time you need to deal with this commandment:

- - is it true?
- - is it kind?
- - is it necessary?
- - is it helpful?

Now, those are four questions that are worth thinking about. The Commandment is not impossible.

\* \* \*

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"THE LOVE OF MONEY"  
(Exodus 20:17)

First, by your leave, a very personal word.

My gratitude is very great to all of you for your love, your prayers, your concern during that unwelcomed and unexpected six-week seige. I have learned much by it. I began to appreciate all over again why the bells are rung during the praying of the Lord's Prayer. When the weather was right, I could identify with you as you worshipped on Sunday mornings as I heard the bell being rung when you were praying the Lord's Prayer, and I prayed it with you.

I am grateful for your cards. I did learn that I had to read some of them with marked ambiguity. As an example, any number of them said, Don't worry, Pastor David and the staff are doing perfectly beautifully . . . and then as a kind of Post Script -- "We are praying for you."

I am very sorry that my energy level is such that I know very well that I will not be able to stay for the entire two-and-a-half-hour performance of the ELIJAH tonight, but I want to be there, at least for the very beginning, and to meet with the choirs and the participants beforehand. It may be of some interest to you to know that when I was in college, even though I couldn't read music, and for some reason that I still don't quite understand -- I was scheduled to sing in the ELIJAH...and to this very day I remember: "The harvest days are over, the summer days are gone . . ." -- I blurted out a bit too soon when it came time for that part, and I tried to protect myself and divert attention immediately to the fellow alongside of me -- only to discover later that that was the nephew of the director! You can readily understand why I did not sing in the final performance.

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GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God our  
Father, and from His Son Jesus Christ,  
our Blessed Lord. Amen.

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Today we conclude the series of sermons being preached for a number of weeks now on the general theme of The Ten Commandments. You need to know, and know in no uncertain manner, why this series was chosen. I have two very strong feelings regarding the Ten Commandments: (1) There is no question in my mind that there is probably no document, if you please, which has exercised a greater influence upon religious and moral standards than this Mosaic code. Whatever the culture, whatever the traditions of our various civilizations may be, nothing, absolutely nothing has had greater influence on religious and ethical standards than the Ten Commandments.

Then too, and I say it quite painfully, I honestly believe that while they are just as valid today as they were in the day of Moses, it cannot be maintained, unfortunately, that they are everywhere revered, everywhere regarded, or even taught. And that is one of the saddest things that can be said about contemporary man. For all too often, by too many, in too many places, the Ten Commandments are discarded, regarded as something as outmoded -- quite out of character with our sophisticated so-called "new morality."

...which leads any number of people to believe that nothing is sin any more. As one astute observer of the human scene, a distinguished Roman Catholic theologian has put it, "It's this love bit of the permissive generation, where if it feels good, if you like it, you love it, you do it!" It's taken over . . . so much so that people are led to believe, dangerously, of course, you formulate your own conscience. Anything can be right...nothing can be wrong....

These are the two reasons why without any hesitation we have been thinking about these Ten Commandments for a number of weeks.

And I should also tell you this lamentable fact which you will not welcome: after 26 years I continue to know a measure of anguish that we have to spend a considerable amount of time in our catechetical program, a youngster now who is in the ninth grade, and drilling into them the Ten Commandments -- we can no longer assume that when they come to us on the first day of Supertuesday in October that any one of them can stand up and recite the Ten Commandments from beginning to end and give some interpretation -- if not Luther's, then somebody else's -- the meaning of the Commandments. I am sorry to have to say that to you, but that happens to be true.

I am reminded of what I read a few years back about a chap who was invited to visit the brand new home of a newly married couple. They were very, very pleased to show it off. They had moved in now....and as this gentleman went from room to room he soon discovered that everything was done in the contemporary manner -- it was all modern decor -- (now I have no particular fault with that, you need to bear with me because the illustration ultimately makes a point) -- and after they had finished going around from room to room within the house they said, "Maybe you'd like to see what's outside." . . . they had an attached garage. The cars were parked in the driveway, and they used the garage as some of us have been able to use an attic. And when he went into the garage he found these items that had



been passed on to them by their parents and grandparents -- heirlooms, relics. They had stored them there.

They showed off to him an old chiffonier - -

(Kelly, a chiffonier is a chest of drawers)

...it was strong, made out of solid cherry -- handsome. The visitor had an eye for it, an appreciative eye. It was more than he could take, and so before he realized what he was doing he said, "Good heavens, why do you keep such a valued piece here?" They answered, as honestly as they could - - "Well, it's an heirloom. It was used by our grandparents, and they passed it on to our parents, and they in turn have passed it on to us. But we've put it away because it doesn't fit in with our modern furniture - - it sticks out!" . . . I suppose they could have added: "It's an offensive to what we chose . . ." so it stands neglected, left alone in the garage. It did not go with their choice of furniture.

Why do I tell you this?

Take time to reflect upon it, my friend. Can it not be maintained that it could be this way with the Ten Commandments? Once they were important. There was a day when they were valued - - our grandparents, they believed in them, they lived by them, they ordered the days of their years by the Law of the Lord. Then they passed them on to their children, our parents. Now honestly, perhaps they did not revere them with the same degree of fervor as our grandparents did, but at least they recognized their validity and their existence.

They, then, did they not, passed them on to us. And what has contemporary man made of them? We hardly recognize them - - have little need for them. We are the generation inclined to make up our own rules, to make up our own regulations as we go along from day to day. The Commandments? - - they just don't seem to blend in with us. Oh, we don't completely disregard them. We, too, place them in an attic, and in this case the attic is the church. And we allow the church to become the custodians and the care-takers, of the heirlooms of the past. We tuck the Ten Commandments away in the care of the church, and there we store them as something of value as far as a yesteryear is concerned.

That's why we've included this series of sermons on the Ten Commandments. It is at great peril that we ignore them. Do you remember, I told you in the very initial sermon, in all reality we don't break the Commandments. If we don't keep them, they break us! They're ingrained into the very fabric of life, with a perfect, complete understanding of the basic traits of human nature from the God-perspective.

The final Commandment: Thou shalt not covet.

Some time ago I asked you, on a scale from 1 to 10 -- where would you rate the Commandments? -- how would you rate them? where would you put them in order? Well in all likelihood you wouldn't place a very high value upon this one. And there may be any number of you right now who are resting very comfortably because you're allowing yourself to believe in one way or another that this Commandment doesn't quite apply to you -- Thou shalt not covet.

You excuse yourself, honestly you do, because you can say to yourself, there is no law in the land, as an example, that can send me to jail because I covet. Coveting deals specifically with what happens on the inside....not at the beginning, with what happens with outward action. As an example: a man can be put in jail if he's broken the Commandment: Thou shalt not steal -- he can be accused and tried for theft, and a penalty exacted.....

...a man can be accused of perjury, legal charges brought against him, he can be taken to court and be tried, and the penalty exacted.....

...a man can steal -- charges can be brought against him -- imprisonment, fraud, you name it, and a penalty exacted.....

...and while it may not be as common as it once was, legal charges can be brought against a person for having committed adultery, and a penalty exacted.....

But as far as I know, there's no legal code that can take me to court because I can stand on the corner and cast a covetous eye on a thing or a person. You may, without anyone else knowing it, stand there and cast a covetous eye upon that house across the street that's now mortgage-free -- 4-bedroom house -- beautifully landscaped -- 3-car garage, with a heated serpentine swimming pool in the back.....

(I should tell you quite parenthetically, human as I am -- I had a tough assignment when I was preparing this sermon. It was a beautiful day and part of it was being prepared as I sat on the enclosed porch in the parsonage -- a sermon dealing with coveting -- and Al Sebastian drives up and parks on our driveway, his beautiful 98 Oldsmobile....and in the garage I have my 4-cylinder Omega -- )

....there is no law that can take you to court as you stand on the corner and cast a covetous eye on another man's wife . . . so you feel a bit relieved, don't you?

You can allow yourself a great deal of latitude, you think, with this Commandment: Thou shalt not covet. And yet with all the ardor that I can command, with all the strength that my soul can bring to bear at this point -- it's the violation of this Commandment that can send a man or a woman to Hell! And I can quote Scripture after Scripture to that effect....

" . . . for as a man thinks, so he becomes . . . "

" . . . it's out of the heart that we have the issues of life . . . "

Let me give it to you as simply as I can: let a man covet another man's wife -- it can lead him to commit any number of other sins. That's what's so diabolical about this sin -- it's the gate-way to so many other sins....let him covet another man's wife, and in order to maintain her perchance as a kept woman, he may steal, he may practice all kinds of fraud. . . .

-- an example from the Bible: David -- beloved in the sight of God -- coveted another man's wife. The coveting led not only to adultery but to murder!

...that's what makes this sin so heinous, it deals with the heart -- it goes down deep. We're all driven by our urges, we're all driven by our desires. Let's recognize that. And the stronger the person, perhaps, the stronger the desire!

You know very well by this time the strong desire that possesses my soul in behalf of this congregation, the things that I covet for you as a people of God. Paul says you can covet, but make certain you covet the right things and you covet them for the right reason! That's something entirely different.

In the New Testament Paul makes much of this thing of earnestly coveting the better things. But in the Old Testament the emphasis comes down very heavily about coveting the things that belong to somebody else that make you hellishly miserable because you don't have them. It's the kind of coveting that drives a man to dispossess in order to possess. And when it's somebody else that has the thing that he wants, it alienates him from the person who happens to have it.

There are always pluses, you know, when you allow your life to be in the hand of God. This enforced idleness, this absence away from you, gave me much more time to read the Scriptures. And I went back and discovered all over again what's always been there -- it's an excellent example of the kind of thing that I want to talk about this morning . . . who among you doesn't know about the fall of Jericho, back there in the Book of Joshua? -- where God gave the command to walk around the city, and then on the seventh day, seventh time, and then the blowing of the trumpet and the shouting -- and the walls came tumbling down. And all the while Jehovah

God had said to them, "This is going to happen because of what I'm going to do for you-- When the walls come tumbling down," says God to Joshua, to the people, "don't you dare keep for yourself any of the spoils. You shall not cast a covetous eye upon anything that's inside Jericho!" The fall of Jericho was a triumph, a tremendous success.

Now what you don't remember about that Book of Joshua probably is that not long after that there was the God-given order to seize another city by the name of Ai, which was a complete failure -- a tragedy. Flush from their victory, they fell flat on their faces. And then the reason was revealed: among them was a man named Achan, and when Achan went into Jericho he cast a covetous eye upon certain things and grabbed them and claimed them for himself and took them back and hid them in his tent. You can read it for yourself in Joshua . . . and then God had Joshua bring Achan out and made Achan confess. And as the Children of Israel recognized the consequences of their disobedience on the part of this one man their anger was so great they killed his family and stoned him to death! -- as they recognized the consequences of violating a commandment of the Lord.

What is the antidote for coveting in this sense? -- to covet the best gifts. What's the best measure of control for me as a person? Not so much attempting to control my possessions as to master my desires. And to recognize that what I already have I should learn to share and to give. But man by nature is stained by original sin. Coveting always reminds us that we want more, and more, and more, and more.

You remember the story I used to tell you about Abraham Lincoln, walking down the street with a boy on either side, and both of them crying, and somebody said, "Mr. Lincoln, you have two crying boys on your hands -- why their tears?" Mr. Lincoln says, "I have a problem. And would you believe it, my problem is the problem of the entire world: I happen to have three walnuts in my pocket, and each of my boys wants two!" -- everybody wants what everybody else has! And the that characterizes the whold world is characterized by a world that's divided between the "haves" and the "have-nots."

I hope you won't misunderstand me, I'm so sorry for whatever trend there may be in China to become increasingly Westernized. They had so little of so much that we have, and they seemed so much happier.....

Back again to this antidote for coveting -- learning to appreciate what I already have that God has already seen that I should have...and then learning to share it with somebody else.

You'll have to forgive me -- I am being carried away -- after all, it is six weeks since I have been here.....there were these two men who saw this perfectly beautiful automobile -- was it a Mercedes? -- was it a Porsche? I don't know. But it was perfectly beautiful. Together they were drawn to it.

...and the one volunteered the information, "So-and-so gave that to his brother" . . . remarked the one man to the other, "I wish I could be a brother like that!" -- -

...ah, you get it, don't you?

Instead of being covetous that the man had a brother like that -- here was the perfect answer to it:

"I wish I could be a brother like that."

\* \* \*

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"ALL - - OR NOTHING"

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God  
our Father and from His Son Jesus  
Christ, our Blessed Lord. Amen.

*Luke 10:25*

The title for today's sermon is a very simple one, consisting of three words: "ALL - - OR NOTHING;" and the text, from the 10th chapter of the Gospel according to Luke:

"And, behold, a certain lawyer stood up, and tempted him, saying, Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"  
He said unto him, What is written in the law? How readeest thou?  
And he answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself. . . . "

Tell me now, in the final analysis, how would you like to be remembered if one were to put you in this kind of category: Would you like to be remembered as the person who was able to ask the right question? - - - or the person who on occasion was able to give the right answer? If one could not do both, there's absolutely no question in my mind what I would prefer. I'd like to be remembered as the person who had the happy faculty to be able to ask the question that had to be asked.

So often in so many places and in so many different times a cause is lost because no one was either in a position or had the good sense to realize the basic question that had to be dealt with. Sometimes it's far better to be able to ask the right question, even though you may fail when it comes to giving some answers.

As an example: here is the question that was asked by a man who one day found himself in the presence of Jesus Christ and took advantage of it . . .

(Oh, I need to tell you quite parenthetically -- Harry Emerson Fosdick, when I was beginning my ministry, in my judgment was the only preacher worth listening to on national radio, and he did a magnificent job as being the pastor and the preacher of the famous Riverside Church in Manhattan. He used to say in jest that his

beloved father would tell some of his friends how much he wanted to go to Heaven...and then his friends would say to him, knowing him as they did and being the kind of person that he was - - -

"Just why do you want to go to Heaven?"

...and he answered, presumably in jest, this very unconventional answer:

"Well, I want to go to Heaven for this reason - - I want to be able to get a chance to get God over in a corner all by Himself and put a question or two to him that's been on my mind!" . . . . . )

I have reason to believe that when our Blessed Lord was here on earth any number of people waited for the chance to have Jesus Christ all by themselves, just to put to Him a question or two with which they had been wrestling.

That's about the up-shot of the basis for this text today. This fellow, as you want to say, was standing in line, and when the opportunity came he very forthrightly, as he had observed the human scene - - - remember now, astute enough to observe the human scene....and to think how people made fortunes and lost fortunes, how people dealt constantly with their fears, their failures and their frustrations . . . how any number of people had yet to come to grips with the things that matter most....

...having observed all of that, quietly and calmly and very earnestly he said, "Jesus, what does a person have to do to have eternal life?"

...a free translation of that, if you don't mind, would be:

"How is it possible to have a measure of satisfaction, to know that when this life will all be over, that you didn't miss the important thing?"

I have told you repeatedly that the old rabbis had their own picture of Judgment, and that was, when a man would breathe his last -- never again be given the chance to go back and live his life all over again -- it's all over now -- it was that picture of Judgment, in the mind of the old rabbi, where God would be standing and confronting the person whose life had been lived and was all over...  
...and the question-of-questions that would be put,

"Well, you had your chance. What did you make of it?  
Did you make the most of it?"

I have been transparent with you from time to time as I've stood at this sacred desk -- you know that -- and I cherish the privilege that you allow me to be that way. None of you can understand sometimes the anguish that I know in my soul, when I have stood by a grave and walked away, and have been in a position to realize myself the potential in that person that remained untapped, the so-called endless amount of good that could have been let loose, the countless number of people whose lives could have been blessed . . . if only that person in his lifetime had made the most of it! -- had enabled the stamp of eternal life to have been reflected on every single day that he lived. This really is this man's question to Jesus Christ: "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" --

...what can I do to make the most of the time that I have now and to feel that I have dealt with the things that are of value?

Fortunately for our sake, this is a case, the asking of the right question...

Fortunately for our sake, the giving of the right answer.

You don't always get a winning combination like that! And Jesus replied with the utmost of confidence and assurance, "You already know! It's in the book -- how does it read?" . . . and bless his soul, he answered perfectly:

"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, with all thy strength, with all thy mind, and thy neighbor as thyself."

And I am willing to believe, had I been standing there, that I would have seen a smile as broadly as possible come over the face of Jesus Christ when He said, "You have answered correctly! That's it! Do this, and you will live! -- not just somehow, but you'll live triumphantly -- magnificently -- you will live life to the full!"

Now for the moment I am in duty bound to ask you to consider the nature and the character of that answer, that correct answer:

-- to love God with all your heart? -- with all your soul?

-- with all your mind, with all your strength?

-- and your neighbor as yourself?

Unreal, isn't it? Does it lie within the realm of possibility? You can't ignore asking that question.

What people fail to realize at times is that Christianity if of all religions, I dare say, the most demanding of religions. This is demanding a great deal -- not 10%...not 20%...not 50% -- -- 100%.



Your pastors don't take this responsibility of interpreting this text lightly, especially when it comes, when the time is at hand to deal with our confirmands. You need to know that next Lord's Day and the Sunday that follows, your two pastors, and perhaps with the assistance of our newly arrived Assistant Pastor, Director of Youth Work - - - we will be at Bethany, our Retreat House, where according to our custom there will be personal interviews with those young people, 9th graders who are anticipating confirmation within the shadow of this altar on Pentecost, the last Sunday in May of this year. We have been doing this now for a number of years. We have no right to allow them to become confirmed unless we as their pastors enter in with them some measure of understanding as to what's involved . . .

- - we give them to understand that when they stand here in the service -- as you know, you may remember it from your own youngster's confirmation -- we've devised it to make it as personal as possible, and Pastor David allows me the privilege, for which I am profoundly grateful, as he plans for the service . . .

...to look the confirmand straight in the eye and to put the question:

"Do you love the Lord Jesus and do  
you promise to serve Him through  
His Holy Church?"

If we haven't taught them before they most certainly get it in the interviews at Bethany, that there's only one acceptable answer. I don't mind telling you, we put the words on their lips, we tell them what the answer is. We have no choice -- we have no alternative. With every ounce of the preacher that lies within me, let me rise to this occasion now as I stand before you - - we are in duty bound to place before them the demand of Jesus Christ. For this is the moment when they go on record to allow the world to know in no uncertain manner that they are disciples of Jesus Christ. And we, your pastors, are in duty bound to allow them to know that Jesus Christ, their leader, is a demanding leader. So the question is put:

"Do you love the Lord Jesus and do  
you promise to serve Him through  
His Holy Church?"

...and we tell them the only acceptable answer:

"Yes, with my whole heart."

Now there are people -- you may as well know this, I've always tried to be as frank with you as I can -- there are some people who tell us that that's absolutely unrealistic. We even have some parents, non-members of the congregation

whose youngsters have become part of our life and of our spirit and who are caught up with the Christian life-style as we exemplify it...and the youngster wants to take the stand . . . and we even have some parents on occasion, who if they don't smile outwardly, they smile inwardly in a measure of ridicule -- unrealistic -- how dare you allow a 13-year-old or a 14-year-old to answer "Yes, with my whole heart"? - - - the answer is simple: we have no alternative, by the authority vested in us in Jesus Christ.

As far as He's concerned, as a matter of record, it is all or nothing. So we try to interpret that to them in these personal interviews. We try to give them to understand that Christ does not want a 10% Christian....

- - Jesus Christ doesn't want a 25% Christian....

- - Jesus Christ doesn't want a 35% Christian....

...and sometimes when their parents are present for part of the interview, this gives us a marvelous opportunity to bring their parents into the picture. And if I am the one who happened to have married their parents, I say to the youngster, "Now when your dad and your mother stood in front of me -- your mother, I dare say, would have run out of church immediately if your father would have said, when I raised this question about faithfulness....according to the marriage vows, you know the conventional answer -- your mother would have run out of church, I dare say, if your father would have said, "I'll be faithful to you three nights a week -- but the remainder of the week, don't count on me!" This shouldn't be too hard for us to understand, this whole business of commitment, this whole business of all or nothing. It's the only real basis on which anything of integrity can have any validity.

But I know it's hard to understand, of course I do, because I too was once a teenager. And so I try to give them a reckless or a free translation of it by saying -- "with all my heart, with all my soul, with all my mind, with all my strength, and my neighbor as myself" -- this is what it means:

-- It meant that I'm to remember that I belong  
to Jesus Christ

-- It means that I'm meant to do what Jesus Christ  
wants me to do, no matter where I may be, no  
matter with whom I may be, and regardless of  
the condition or the circumstance or the situa-  
tion at hand . . .

Now, what's unreasonable about that?

And the grand and glorious thing about it is this: that when Jesus Christ asks us to make a promise, He says, "I'll help you to keep that promise." - - and

that's the advantage that the Christian, the disciple always has.

In these very helpful sessions that we had in the Great Hall, or the "Town Hall" meeting, a week ago - - the answers that you got to the questions that you asked...none of the three of us knew how the other was going to answer. The answers were all completely unrehearsed. Each one was on his own. And I was pleased beyond words when one person answered and said, when he was asked about whether he could fulfill the responsibilities that were being asked of him, and whether he was being apprehensive....he simply answered: "Of course I'm apprehensive. But by your help and by the help of God I'll give you the best I have."

Now we're all in this thing together, at whatever level you may be. You're not a confirmand? . . . You're beyond that age? You're a maturing Christian? Well, let me ask you the question: How are you doing? How are you faring? Suppose Jesus Christ returned and said, "You're right, you shall love me, you shall love God with all your heart, with all your mind, with all your strength, with all your soul - - - how are you doing?"

...happy indeed is that person who could stand up and say, "Not as well as I would like, but far better than I thought I could if it wouldn't be for your help!"

...and that's a happy thought.

\* \* \*

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"NOW ABOUT SIN - - "

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God  
our Father and from His Son Jesus  
Christ, our Blessed Lord. Amen.

John 1:8

I must confess to you I'm a bit reluctant to announce the title for the sermon, after hearing the word spoken at the lectern before the singing of the middle hymn -- words and music together which remind us of the perfectly beautiful world in which God has placed us. You see, the title for today's sermon is "NOW ABOUT SIN."

But after all, you see, it did start in a garden, an idyllic one at that. The text is the 8th verse of the 1st chapter of First John:

"If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves  
and the truth is not in us."

Whatever happened to sin? Nothing really. It is still around -- as much as ever if not more so. The trouble is many people recognize it only as they see it and the results of it, by whatever name, in the lives of other people. Few of us are comfortable at branding ourselves in the classic language of the Church as "poor, lost, condemned, miserable sinners." To the contrary, we're mostly inclined to ask God, and people generally, to think rather highly of us.

As I stand at the sacred desk this morning I am in a position to tell you that it's a matter of historical record that the mother of Charles W. ~~Elliott~~<sup>ELLIOT</sup>, one-time President of Harvard University, who when she heard that a friend of hers had joined the Episcopal Church, wrote her a letter, and began in this manner:

"Dear Elisa (that was her name) - - They tell me you have joined the Episcopal Church. Now honestly -- you don't get down on your knees in church, do you, and call yourself a miserable sinner! This kind of thing I will never do, nor any member of my family . . . "

...that was the mother of Charles W. ~~Elliott~~<sup>ELLIOT</sup>, one-time President of Harvard University.

She must have had a distant cousin who was one time a member of this congregation, because I remember when a group was being prepared for membership in this parish -- about 20 years ago the group met in what is now the Seminar Room. And as we were meeting for the last time before the group was going to join the next

Sunday, intelligent, sophisticated -- she said to me in no uncertain manner, "I'll be joining, but I am not to comfortable about what happens in Saint Luke Church every Sunday. You see, Pastor, we're no sooner inside the walls then you have us standing on our feet and you have us say that we've sinned against God!"....she spoke very freely and frankly . . .

She said, "Really now, I don't consider myself a sinner. At least I am in church....I am going to join in singing the hymns....I do pay attention when God's Word is read, and I try to get something out of the sermon when it's being preached....and when the offering plate goes in front of me I put my part into it -- I don't consider myself a sinner . . . all those other people who haven't come, who don't pay attention to God's word, who don't try to get something good out of a sermon, who don't financially support the work of the Kingdom -- they're the sinners, Pastor."

It took a bit of doing, but I honestly believe I did say something that was helpful, if only to quote for her the text which is the basis for all that you're going to hear in the next 15 or 17 minutes from this sacred desk.

"If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves,  
and the truth is not in us"

Bernard Shawe wrote a play called "Dr. Kanno<sup>CK</sup>ck" and I remember one of the lines - - "If you say that you are well, it's only because you do not know that you are sick." Theologically speaking, it's pretty much that way with our sinful nature. If we say that we are well, it's only because we have yet to discover that we are by nature sinful and unclean.

But honestly now, generally speaking, we shy away from calling ourselves sinners and shy away from thinking of the concept of sin, and there are reasons.

Reason Number One: When we talk about ourselves being sinners it suggests repression -- unnatural suppression of so much that we enjoy. You see, we have reared a generation of young people whose by-word, if not verbally at least by their acts, - - "If it feels good, you do it!" When we talk about our sinful nature, we are in duty bound to talk about our limitations then that are placed upon our freedom. We're not at all unhappy about the unfair restrictions on our rights to make the most of the few years that we have here on earth -- we want to do it our way. we want to do things that are pleasing to us.

I like to think sometimes, it's not an accident that the middle letter, the central letter in that word SIN is I - - because that's what sin is --

man putting himself up in opposition to God. God said to him at the very beginning, "This is what I don't want you to do . . ." But Adam and Eve got their heads together and said, "No matter what God says, this is what we're gromg tp do." And we have been paying the price for that kind of thinking ever since.

And when we talk about sin, it gives us an imagery of God -- it's not a very healthy one, at least for some people, -- don't get me wrong...

...when I was a youngster, didn't I have that concept of God, sitting there in Heaven with that great big book in front of Him, with His pen in hand, those blank pages....  
...and all of a sudden there was a page that had my name on it, and when I would come to the time of Judgment He'd open the book to the page where my name is, and then what would He do? He'd go down and read all the times when I had disobeyed Him....

...when we talk about sin we talk about a God who has an eagle-eye. And whether we're honest with ourselves or not, we permit ourselves to believe that He gets a measure of delight in catching us -- "Ah, I've got you! -- You did it again, and you thought I wouldn't see -- but I did!"

And we're especially troubled with this idea of sin because most of the sinning that we do, we find quite enjoyable. Still as of old, stolen fruit is sweet! So we don't want to think about God, to talk about a God who takes away our pleasure, the things we enjoy.

Oh, the Puritans, they were masters of that, you know. Let me tell it to you again -- sure, I told you about it before, didn't I? -- it comes out of New England, Puritan New England....

...the preacher who had two preaching points, separated by some distance, with the stream of water between the two. And one winter's morn -- he lived close by the first preaching point -- when he went to go there and keep his assignment, he discovered that his horse was lame -- the only means by which he had to keep faithfully the appointment in the afternoon at the second preaching station. How, now, could he allow himself, in the quickest way, to get to that preaching point so that those people in the afternoon would not be denied the preaching of God's Word?

...well it occurred to him -- a lame horse that he couldn't ride....winter....the water was frozen. He'd skate from one

from one preaching point to the next. And that's exactly what he did....

...only when he arrived -- remember now, Puritan New England -- there were the deacons, and they saw him skating down this little stream. They couldn't wait to hold court -- "Skating on the Sabbath!" He thought he did a masterful job defending himself. He was in duty bound to preach God's Word, to keep this assignment that afternoon to be with the faithful. And for him skating was the surest way, and the quickest to get there. He thought he had won his point against the deacons who were bringing in offense against him. . . . until one old deacon, looking him straight in the eye, with that crooked finger, said to him, "Tell me, before I cast my vote -- tell me -- did ye enjoy the skating?"

There are people who have that concept of God -- who doesn't want us to be happy, who doesn't want us to enjoy this life. We get Him wrong, you see -- go back to that page that deals with the Garden of Eden -- what is God saying to us when He places us in this idyllic and perfectly beautiful place? -- "Make the most of it -- enjoy it! I call it -- good."

I suppose every single one of us has his moments when he thinks how he'd like to be remembered when his final chapter is written. I'm not at all ashamed to tell you that when I may no longer be among you here at Saint Luke, I should like some of you to remember, and especially those of you who are young, who are part of a catechetical experience, that we wanted always to have our young people to believe -- it's a joyful thing to be a Christian, to delight in the way of the Lord, to love Him and to serve Him, to obey Him.

There are some people, then, who shy away from sin, thinking about it, because you can't possibly think of sin without believing yourself as a responsible person -- God does hold us responsible for the way we live out the days of our years. And many people in this day and age never much concern themselves with that precious ingredient called responsibility. It's a very healthy, a very salutary thing to remember that as a Christian God holds me responsible.

So we as a people have dropped the idea of sin from our thinking as well as from our vocabulary. I say we've dropped the idea, but the strange thing is that we can't, we really can't drop it no matter how hard we try, no matter how many people there are who will help us rationalize what we have done, and who will help us find reasons for dropping the idea of sin. We simply can't have done with it. We may get to the place where we accept sinning as a way of life --

-- everybody does it....and then a terrible thing sets in -- we no longer become sensitive to it, we no longer become disgusted by it. Someone has penned this one-liner: OURS IS AN AGE IN WHICH CORRUPTION SELDOM PROVOKES DISGUST. We have gotten to the place where we expect it, we even look for it.

In Norman Jaspens and Mike Froholic's book, "The Thief In The White Collar" it's been estimated that each year some one billion dollars is stolen by the so-called white collar thief, the thief who steals from the company for which he works.....and that another five billion changes hands in the form of bribes, pay-offs, kick-backs, presents and other forms of dishonesty in business life. We don't call it sinning. We simply write it off -- as a bribe, a pay-off, a kick-back....

....within the past decade loss claims in honesty insurance, the kind that covers the loss of money or goods stolen by employees, has risen by 250%....

....in the past 20 - 25 years, 105 banks have been forced to close because of embezzlement....

....at any given time the authors estimate that between 10 - 25 millions of dollars are missing in thefts that banks have yet to discover. This is the heinous thing about our generation: we've come to make terms of our sinful nature, and no longer become disgusted by it....

....and even perchance to become offended when in church the ancient traditional liturgy reminds us "We are by nature sinful and unclean."

Professor Langdon Gilke<sup>Gilke</sup> in his book "Religion in The Scientific Future" has written -- "A scientific age which has added immensely to our understanding and to our powers, has not made us more virtuous; nor has it made the meanings of our life any more secure. Our control over ourselves and our consequent control over our own destiny seems in no wise to be any more within our grasp than before. The old theological problems of the use man makes of his freedom, of his bondage to self-interest, and of the ultimate meaning of the human story have been dissolved -- neither by the physical nor by the life sciences....rather they have precisely increased by them."

Who was it who said, when he thought of all the technical advances that we've made in our day, sadly observed, "We are not good enough to be so clever."

There's a bright spot on the horizon, I dare say. Perchance I speak from



personal experience. While I have never been a stranger to sin, frequently victimized by it, I must confess to you, the older I become, the more convinced I am that in the time of judgment the words that will be voiced quickest from my lips as I face my Maker will be: "Lord, have mercy!" - - and therein may lie my hope!

Said Peter, "Depart from me, O Lord, for I am a sinful man." Confronted by Jesus Christ we see our wickedness. This I say to you quickly as I walk away from this sacred desk - - when He was here on earth, did it ever occur to you how seldom He pointed His finger at people and called them sinners? He accepted the fact that they were sinners, but as they were exposed to the beauty and the truth and the dignity of His life He won their hearts and brought a transforming touch. How fortunate - - for those of us who re-discover the fact of sin -- to re-discover the Saviourhood of God!

\* \* \*

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"THE TWELFTH MAN"

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God  
our Father and from His Son  
Jesus Christ, our Blessed Lord.  
Amen.

*Acts 1:26*

Today's sermon is based upon the first Lesson that was read this morning. It bears the title: "THE TWELFTH MAN" and the text, the 26th verse of the 1st chapter of the Book of the Acts of The Apostles:

" And they gave forth their lots; and the lot fell upon Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles."

You're fortunate, my friend, if you have what I am pleased to refer to as the gift of the sanctified imagination, which means that when you read Scripture, you try to identify as best you can with the incident as it occurred and to relate to the people involved. If we could employ that sanctified imagination now, I'd like to suggest that maybe it happened in this way: Peter, bless his soul, self-appointed leader, always constrained to speak, stands up and addresses his compatriots...and I suppose he puts it in this kind of manner:

"Do you realize what's happened to us in the last six weeks' period?" -- it's a salutary thing, you know, to do that every now and then, to look back and realize what all has occurred, and to try to bring it into some kind of proper perspective . . . and then to decide what the next step is that ought to be taken.....

That's always very important. It's never enough simply to look back, but one must also think in terms of the next step that has to be taken. And Peter began to tell them:

". . . Do you remember that within this six weeks' period of time, our Master, whom we love dearly, was denied, betrayed, crucified -- and every single one of us numbered among the Twelve forsook Him and fled. But then there was the glorious Resurrection! -- and after the Resurrection He kept appearing and re-appearing to us in the strangest places, in the strangest ways, at the strangest times!

...now very recently, we were privileged to be with Him on the mountain-top, when we saw Him for the very last. And I'm in duty bound to remind you what He said to us. He was not speaking to people generally...but He did

speak to us, and said, 'Now you go, and you preach, and you teach, and you baptize, and you witness, and you make disciples...' ..now all of this has happened within a six-weeks' period, and I also find myself constrained to tell you that it's high time we fill a vacancy. One of our twelve, you know, disqualified himself . . . "

    ...and then he made some reference to Judas and his suicidal death....

As you read that passage of Scripture, give Peter credit for this. He did not exploit Judas's miserable state. He did not grind him into the dust and say, "Rascal that he was, trusted by our Blessed Lord -- betrayer! - - - " He simply refers to the fact that he did what he did, and then makes them aware of the situation: ". . . as he disqualified himself, right now there are only eleven of us - - we ought to be twelve again."

Now I'm about to suggest to you that had I been present then, I think I'd have said, "Peter, I can't be as enthusiastic about your proposal as seemingly you are." . . . and Peter would ask me to explain myself, which I am about to do to you . . .

    ...I would have said, "Peter, if our Blessed Lord in all His wisdom chose one disciple among us who was a bad apple, figuratively speaking, if he was the dud that he was, what reason do I have to believe, Peter, that I can trust my wisdom in choosing somebody?"

    ...I think I would have answered that way.

Fortunately, as I read the record, presumably none spoke in that spirit or in that manner. But apparently they were all enthusiastic because they all proceeded to cast lots and to nominate two people, one of whom would be chosen.

Now the question needs to be asked: how do you suppose that was possible? May I suggest it was possible because every single one of them, as they thought of Judas Iscariot, the failure, thought of themselves as failures. Because it's a matter of Scriptural record that one denied...one betrayed...and every single one of them, when the chips were down, ran away. Where were they when He needed them most? So I have reason to believe that every single one of them knew the meaning of failure. And you and I need to recognize that. None of us will ever offer Him perfect obedience. For every single one of us who claims discipleship,

there is always - - let me say it again and ever so often - - - there is always the possibility of failure. None of us can guarantee Him perfect obedience. And I think they recognized that.

But what is more, you may not have recognized this - - but when Jesus Christ came back to them, appearing and re-appearing, what do you suppose happened? -- did you ever ask yourself that question?

- - let me propose to you that every now and then when He came back in those appearances and re-appearances, He came to a person, like Peter, put His strong arm around his shoulder and said, "Peter, you know that I know - - I remember how you said you'd never fail me - - I remember what I told you....and I remember how you boasted and said - even though others might, you wouldn't. But, Peter, you did!" . . . and then Peter could feel that strong gentle pressure of the arm of Jesus Christ. And Jesus Christ turned and looked Him straight in the eye and He said, "But, Peter, you're still my man! You're forgiven, and we'll start all over again."

You may never have read it this way between the lines, but I suggest to you that it could have happened in that way - - as He went to Andrew...as He went to Bartholomew, as He went to every single one of them, one by one, at one time or another, putting His arm around them and speaking that marvelous word: "You are still my man."

Two things: There is always the possibility of failure - and -

There is always the assurance of God's forgiveness.

...and this I believe was firmly established in their minds as they re-grouped, became twelve again, and began all over.

You know the method, they cast lots. In those days they used stones, they scratched upon the stone that they had chosen the name or the initial of something that represented the name of the person for whom they wanted to vote. Under the influence of the Holy Spirit there were two people who were nominated - - then they shook the vessel or the container, whatever method they may have used -- maybe a hand went in and pulled one out, or they could have thrown the pebbles up and then decided whenever this pebble fell in this direction nearest to this person, that would be the one. Eagerly they awaited. The Scriptures say it was Matthias who was chosen.

From a human perspective now, how do you suppose the man who didn't make it felt? What kind of personality complex began to set in then? Or better still, how do you suppose Matthias felt about the man who wasn't chosen? Interestingly enough, we hear nothing about either one of them from that time on. We know nothing about what happened to Joseph Barsabas, nor do we know what kind of a disciple Matthias made.

But I am inclined to bring to your attention the fact that he was labeled "successor to Judas" - - and what do you suppose that meant to him? Was that a constant reminder that there was a cloud hanging over his head? -- that he was chosen to replace a man who had failed and who had failed miserably? -- and there was always within him the possibility of becoming a Judas? . . . a question worth asking. Worth asking for the simple reason that all of us become successors to Judas. Whenever there is a vacancy created in discipleship, all the rest of us are meant to do one of two things: take up the slack, or to find another to take his place.

I don't mind telling you that from time to time as I've stood at this Sacred Desk I've allowed myself to become fully transparent to you. I try to do it as circumspectly as I can. There were six of us youngsters who grew up to become adults in my family. Little did we realize that there would be one among the youngsters, the brother next to me, who would be the one to die first -- brain tumor, lung cancer. In many ways he was the most vital of the six of us. It was a sobering experience for me, with all of its trauma, but I made up my mind that as God would give me the energy and the strength, I'd do my best to make up for the loss of his life, to live a bit more fervently, more earnestly, more seriously. Whenever there's a vacancy, there's that kind of demeanor that becomes a Christian.

And did it ever occur to you, my friend, that the Kingdom of God goes forward one generation at a time? Pastor David is perfectly correct and quite proper when he brings to our attention during the announcement period that when the newest recruits for the Kingdom walk this sacred aisle next Sunday afternoon at 5:00 o'clock, we will turn with a welcoming gesture, as much as to say: "We can't get along without you - - we need you! The troops have to be replenished!" And what is the criteria? - - a person who proclaims and recognizes the reality of the presence of Jesus Christ within his soul. Anyone can qualify as a successor to the person

who needs to be replaced as long as he meets that kind of qualification. The Kingdom of God is in need of people who can testify to the reality of Jesus Christ.

And how do you do it? One of these Sundays when I am standing at the lectern I am going to play for you a tape that I got from that adorable thing who accompanied us throughout our stay in China. She was 22 years of age April 1. We used to engage in conversation, as though she were trying to make me argue with her, because she was not a believer in God. I remember her saying to me, "Have you given up trying to convert me?"

....and my answer: "Lui, I don't convert you -- only  
God can do that!"

In the letter that I received from her this week, she wrote some beautiful things. But then, honest as she is, she was constrained to say, "I still do not believe in God as you do."

When I write her, will I argue with her? Of course I shall not argue with her. And if I were to see her again now, face to face, I would hope for only one thing: that I could communicate to her my experience. That's the way it's done! That's why you and I are here, because there's been successor to successor to successor -- and the word continues to be spread and the reality continues to be established by the bona fide witness. . . . and that's something to think about.

\* \* \* \* \*

"ON OBEDIENCE TO JESUS CHRIST"

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God  
our Father and from His Son  
Jesus Christ, our Blessed Lord.  
Amen.

Acts 1:4

There were eleven now...there once had been twelve. Which one of the twelve do you suppose it was who spoke like this? -- "I can't believe it! - - it just doesn't make sense to me!" - - sounds like Peter, don't you think?

Peter was always the one who didn't hesitate to speak what he thought; whether what he thought was worth speaking or not may have a different story. But in all likelihood it could have started a chain reaction, where one disciple turned to another and said, "Come to think of it, it doesn't make sense to me either."

You see, our Blessed Lord had just said to them - - well, let me read it for you in the classic King James, the 4th verse in the 1st chapter of the Book of the Acts of the Apostles:

"And while staying with them, He charged them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father . . . ."

It didn't make sense to them at all -- Jerusalem of all places to stay together! I can well imagine Peter saying to his Master -- "Don't you realize we'll be a bunch of sitting ducks! They tried to do you in as it was! Now if the authorities learn that we're all here together, what capital they'd make of that! -- with one swell stroke they'll annihilate all of us!--as long as we're all here together. I would submit that you think in terms of letting us scatter . . ." "Andrew, you stay at Joppa" - - "Simon Peter, you put up in Nazareth . . .".....so they could have said one to another. It made sense to them.

And our Blessed Lord, quietly and calmly, with all the confidence that forever became Him, so He would see it - - He would turn

to them and say, "But you still don't understand, do you? You're always trying to pit your wisdom against mine." - - - He may not have said it this way, but from our vantage-point we can put these words on His lips. The arrogance of human nature, to think that they know better than God! It's really been our problem from the very beginning. And so Jesus said, "I know what I'm talking about. You stay! Do I have to ask you to trust my wisdom? Have I ever failed you? Haven't all my predictions and my promises come true? If it doesn't make sense to you, then trust me for the fact that it seems wise to me. . . "

Now, this morning, as we're gathered here, we can see the wisdom of it -- His directive, His mandate, His "Stay! -- you don't scatter!" -- for the simple reason that they were not yet ready to be separated one from another. They needed to stay together for at least three reasons.

One - - They had to be unified by the Spirit, they had to be possessed by what only God could give them, and that gift was meant for each one of them. The time would come -- of course it would come -- when they would be scattered, particularly as they would remember His parting command. Then, when they would go, it might be an isolated situation when they could look back and remember what they had been given -- at a particular time, in a particular place, and as they were with one another.

When Martin Niemoeller was for eight-and-a-half years the personal prisoner of Adolph Hitler, confined in that cell, there were several things that kept him sane: one, he kept reminding himself of that precious verse of Scripture, "Lo, I am with you always" . . . and the second thing: the encouragement he received as he remembered that there in that suburban Berlin parish that he served, day in and day out there was a handful of disciples, a handful of fervent believers who kept the prayer vigil -- he was knit with them in the bond of the spirit, and that sustained him.....

....the day would come when they would be scattered, when they would be separated, but until that day would come they had to be unified by the Spirit so that they were stabilized in their isolation.

Did it ever occur to you how much you receive within these hallowed walls that holds you in good stead once you're separated one from the other? Why is it that God in His wisdom set us as solitary in families, if not for that reason? For the isolation may come, if not by distance, then by affliction, and sickness.



There was a second reason why He said, "You're not ready to go -- you stay!" -- because they had to grow in acceptance of one another, and that takes time. You're not forgetting, are you, that human as they were they could blame one another for what had happened. I can well imagine one of them saying, "Peter, you big-mouth! -- we leaned heavily on you. You were the one who spoke up and said, 'Lord, no matter what they may do, I'll always be found faithful' -- and struck a measure of encouragement when you spoke like that, Peter, you really did. But we remember what you did . . . ." Tradition has it that every now and then people would walk up and surprise Peter and then begin to crow like a rooster, that he might be reminded of his denial of his Master. Can't you imagine how they were for a while, blaming one another....

"Had you remained firm in the faith, we would have remained firm in the faith! But, Peter, you chickened out, and they took the carpet out from under our feet -- they undermined our faith!"

....they blamed one another.

They needed time, now, to adjust to each other all over again, and to accept each other as Jesus Christ accepted each one of them in turn. It takes time to accept one another....it takes time to grow in a relationship that can hold you in good stead.

There is that precious moment in the marriage service as we conduct it, which is just before the bride and the groom exchange their vows. We offer a prayer, and that prayer has one simple, single thrust -- that they may grow in love and peace together as they may face the future. It takes time to grow in accepting one another. What they were doing now as they stayed in Jerusalem was like a shake-down cruise -- that's really what it was.

There is another reason why they were asked to stay in Jerusalem -- just to spend time praying -- yes....but also thinking and reflecting upon all that had happened, upon what they had received in their encounter with Jesus Christ our Lord and Master, and what they were receiving through one another. They needed time for reflective thought.

Did it ever occur to you that this is a basic weakness of our civilization -- we have so little time simply to think and to reflect. When the girl that I mar-

ried went to school there was no such thing as a school bus system. She and her compatriots walked from where they were. When school was out, they walked the country lane, maybe took the short-cut across the meadow....and all the time you could think, you could reflect upon the things that had happened as you spent that time in school.

It's only a dream and it will probably never, never come to pass....I used to think if God would give me the privilege of building an ideal church structure, I would hope that I could find sufficient acreage to have the parking lot removed to some reasonable distance from the church structure itself. Oh, I'd have a carriage drive for those who might need to be transported to the very door of the church for reasons of physical infirmity perchance, but otherwise my dream would be that once the benediction was pronounced, the recessional hymn was sung, they could walk slowly to their car....and as they would walk they could think, and reflect upon what they had experienced in the divine encounter within hallowed walls.

There are those who prize in Saint Luke Church the quiet time before the service begins, and that brief moment when the service is concluded, when quietly you can assess and re-assess how the soul has been nurtured, the perspective that you've re-gained, the re-orientation for your life once you leave these sacred walls.....they need time simply to think and to reflect, so that when they would be scattered, they would be stabilized by what they had experienced in their thinking time.

And I'd suggest another reason why He asked them to stay in Jerusalem. Chances are there was prejudice on their part against Jerusalem. That was the place where Calvary was...that's where they did Him in. Think how long it took for a great city in this South to have its reputation renewed and re-established in the minds of many Americans as people remembered that it was in that city that the young John F. Kennedy was assassinated. Prejudices come up quickly! They are not easy to handle. So I could well imagine how some of them could have reasoned among themselves and said, "Jerusalem -- not for me! As soon as I can get away from it -- there I'll begin to practice my Christian faith. But don't expect me to practice it here!" -- no matter how sacred it was to their memory.

They needed time to reflect upon the fact that if you can't begin to practice the Christian faith where you are, chances are you can't practice it any-

"THE TOTALITY OF GOD"

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God our  
Father and from His Son Jesus Christ,  
our Blessed Lord. Amen.

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Tell me, assuming you were here last Sunday, the Sunday before that and the Sunday before that - - what were the first words spoken by the officiating minister to this assembled congregation? . . . let me ask you this question: what were the last words as the benediction was being pronounced, that were spoken to a congregation that was being dismissed? It happens Sunday after Sunday after Sunday after Sunday. Do you know what those words are?

Or by the same token I could ask you this question: if your mind could be as mine once was when the preacher would be preaching, as a youngster seated in that little church back amid the hills of home . . . my mind would begin to wander and I'd look around at the things that I could see up at the front of the church. And if you should be in that situation, what does this mean, this symbol, this drawing, this etching that you see at the highest point of the front of the church? It's there today....it was there last Sunday....it's been there now for 8 - 10 years. What does it mean?

In the Calendar of the Church today we celebrate the Festival of the Holy Trinity. It's the only festival that's set aside to pay tribute to a particular teaching of the Church. Now having said that, let me tell you this. As I remember it, it happened somewhere in Europe, as devout worshippers on their way to church, they walked that cobblestone path through a courtyard before they entered the narthex....

...year after year devout worshippers were seen to stop  
at a particular point. Before going one step farther,  
the head would be bowed, the sign of the cross would be made...

I should tell you, the church in which they were about to worship was a church that was consecrated in the name of the Blessed Mother, but there was no physical reason, had you been there, as to why they should stop at that particular point and have this measure of respect.

A visitor one time came to that church and observed what was being done and asked one of the devout worshippers, "Why do you stop at this particular point, bow the head in humility and respect, make the sign of the cross, before you take another step forward?" He did not know.

Fortunately, as additional inquiry was made, he got this answer: when the church was consecrated, on that wall in the courtyard a highly gifted and skilled artist had done a fresco of the Blessed Mother and Child. And whenever worshippers came they always stopped at that particular point and gave veneration to the Blessed Mother before they advanced to the narthex of the church.

...the fresco, with the passing of time, began to deteriorate, it was scarcely discernable. They had decided it would be re-done, it would be restored. But there was no one in the community who was gifted and skilled enough to do what had to be done. So until the time would come when someone would be found, they placed a board over it, covered it up. But then, according to custom, as the devout worshippers came the next Sunday and thereafter, they'd do what they had been accustomed to doing, the act of respect and reverence... But as succeeding generations came, still yet not having found someone who could restore it, they stopped -- not knowing why -- and did what they did.

Now having said that to you, I am fully aware of the fact that on this Sunday that marks the Festival of the Holy Trinity, there are any number of people who say, "In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost" -- and do not have a full appreciation either for the words themselves or for what could be represented. And because that happens to be true, I've set aside the sermon that I'd originally planned to preach on this, the first Sunday in June, because I'd like to talk with you as earnestly and as helpfully as I can regarding this fundamental doctrine of the Church known as the Doctrine of the Holy Trinity.

Each service of worship in Saint Luke Church begins with those words, "In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit" or "Holy Ghost"...and when the benediction is going to be pronounced, we will conclude in the same manner....

,,,when a child is baptized, he is not simply baptized "In the name of God"

-- he is baptized "In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost" . . . . the couple that was pronounced husband and wife as they made their promises within the shadow of this altar yesterday, they were pronounced husband and wife "In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost"  
-- -- why do we cling tenaciously to these words?

When Bishop Pike, out there in San Francisco, wrote his book, liberal Episcopalian that he was, he didn't hesitate to include a chapter on the Trinity in which he maintained that it was "excess baggage" as far as the Church was concerned. We'd be far better off if we'd ignore it and have done with it -- it's confusing, and it's confounding, we'd be far better off if we simply talked in these terms: "In the Name of God" . . . period.

But we Lutherans cling tenaciously to the Trinitarian concept of God. Why? Let me be as helpful as I can possibly be.

I suggest to you, a person is as a person does. You can never really understand the basic nature and character of a person until you see that person doing something. Now, trying to probe the motivation may be another story, but to all intents and purposes you can tell very much what a person is like when you see that person in action.

As a very simple illustration, suppose you and I were confined to a room, just the two of us, we were encountering ourselves for the first time. As I stood and looked at you, you remained completely immobile for all the time that I encountered you -- you never so much as moved a muscle. What would I really know about you, except as by what I could describe regarding your physical features? But let a person begin to do something, and I may have some idea as to what the person is like. Make no mistake about it, the statement can be made: a person is as a person does.

Leslie Weatherhead was a great English preacher of another generation. He was Pastor of the distinguished, prestigious City Temple Church of London, a free church, a non-conformist church. On occasion he would worship with people of other traditions. Once he went to a Roman Catholic church in Birmingham. He relates for us what happened....

...before he entered the church he knew, of course, some of the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church, and as they were celebrating Mass that day he fully understood, according to Roman Catholic teaching, that when the priest would take the

host, the bread, and elevate it, the devout Catholic would be led to believe that Jesus Christ's presence would be localized in that piece of bread. And if somebody were to press the point: "Where is Jesus Christ?" - - with profound respect the devout Catholic could say, as the priest was elevating the host - - "There is Jesus Christ." . . . .

Weatherhead relates for us in a very winsome way that as he was worshipping he observed an old man, a rather nondescript character who came in and took his place in the church. And that's all the attention he paid to him, until, shortly thereafter, a youngster, for some reason that Weatherhead doesn't relate, wandered rather aimlessly down the aisle of the church, frightened, bewildered, crying. It was the old man - - Weatherhead had no reason to believe that he was related to the child - - it was the old man who got up, and walked down the aisle of the church very carefully -- not to frighten the youngster.....and when he was close enough, with his big strong, yet tender, arms embraced that child, soothed and comforted the child, carried it in his arms and went back and consoled the youngster.....

Weatherhead, not being disrespectful, said, "To some people God was up there in the hands of the priest in a piece of bread. But for me," said Weatherhead, "when that old man came forward and embraced that child, it was as though the very arms of God were touching that child."

...Weatherhead could never have said that had the old man remained immobilized, firmly seated on that pew, but when he did what he did, Weatherhead could come to that conclusion with kind and warm thoughts as to the person's basic character. A person is as a person does.

God is as God does.

Now what do you know about God's actions? What do you know about God's deeds? For some people there is only a partial understanding, and that's why we consider ourselves fortunate in the doctrine of the Trinity. We're constantly reminding ourselves of the totality of God's deeds - - of all that He has done and continues to do. We short-change ourselves if we think only in terms of God's partial acts. As an example: some people have no difficulty in accepting the fact that God created the world. They begin...and end at that point: God's the Creator, the Master-Mind, the Prime Force, the Central Architect. They have no difficulty at all in accepting that. But they don't accept much more beyond that point.

As we Lutherans base what we preach and teach according to Scripture, the

Bible introduces us to a God who does something more than create the world. The Bible introduces us to the God who is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. And the Bible reveals the basic nature of Jesus Christ as God-come-to-us-in-human-form -- to prove and to show to us what God is really like.

As youngsters in Sunday School you know the three-word definition we had for God: "God is love." Now you ought not to have any trouble at this point -- love, properly understood, is never detached from the object that's being loved. You can't take a long-distance attitude toward someone that you love. You can't allow yourself a detached concern towards someone you love. So God did something -- "Behold, I will both seek and save my people -- I will be to them as the shepherd" Ezekiel says about God - - - "I will come to them, I will save them." And every time we exercise this Trinitarian concept of God we're reminding ourselves that God did not simply create the world but God had a continuing interest.

When we were heading toward Hell, God said, "You were not meant to go to Hell - - and I will come and keep you from going to Hell by the love that I will demonstrate for you - - sacrificial love.

God is as God does. If we simply thought in terms of creation, we would be short-changing God as far as totality of His actions is concerned. So God came to us in human form and every time we use the words of the Trinity we remind ourselves that the Father-God has a Son, and the Son came to us where we happen to be.

We who cling to the Trinitarian concept of God do not worship a God who is separated from us, exalted in the heavens. The Trinity keeps reminding us that He's a God who identifies Himself with us - - no detached, no God-in-absentia.

Now how could you know this? Because of God's continuing concern, a continuing concern that did not stop with the birth of Jesus Christ, the life and death of Jesus Christ. Let me say it again for you, God did not perform the act of Creation and say, "That's it!" . . . God did not give us Jesus Christ, have Him crucified, have the event take place in the Resurrection Garden, include the chapter on the Mount of the Ascension....and then say, "That's it!" God has done more than that.

Jesus Christ talked about that continuing action, the Holy Comforter who would come -- the Paraclete, the Spirit who would remain for us as God-in-the-Present-Tense. And that's what the Holy Spirit -- God at work in His world now. As Luther explains as he deals with the Third Article of the Creed -- it's God who comes to us as the Holy Spirit who enlightens us and empowers us, who gathers

us together. You and I couldn't possibly think the thoughts of God if God did not enter our hearts and our minds and enable us to respond together. Left by ourselves, we are incapable of fully responding to all that He is, and that's why God is always coming to us -- wooing us, surrounding us, inspiring us.

You see what would happen then if we simply said every time we came together: "In the Name of God" . . . period? But you spell it out! You say the words repeatedly, hopefully that when you say those words you might remind yourself of the totality of God's actions. This I most certainly believe.

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)



GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God  
our Father and from His Son Jesus  
Christ, our Blessed Lord.

Let me begin by reading for you the prayer that was prayed not once, but several times, as the one whom we honor completed her earthly pilgrimage. Again and again these were the words that she heard before she breathed her last. The prayer bears the title:

"Gratitude to God For The  
Joy of Being A Christian"

O GOD, I thank Thee for the saving faith in Jesus Christ my Saviour, and for the privilege of being a Christian. Give me a deep and abiding faith, and grant me the grace to show in all my actions and in all my dealings with my fellowmen that Thou art the ruler of my heart and mind and that the joy of salvation is the dominating influence in my life.

KEEP ME from becoming discouraged by the troubles and cares of this life and make me trusting, cheerful and confident. At the same time keep me humble, always, in the knowledge of salvation is from Thee, and that Heaven is Thy gift.

IN GRATITUDE for the salvation which Thou givest, help me to live, to die, in the spirit of the Psalmist -- "I will extol Thee, my God, O King, and I will bless Thy name forever and ever. Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised, and his greatness is unsearchable.  
One generation shall praise Thy works to another and shall declare Thy mighty acts. I will speak of the glorious honor of the majesty of Thy wondrous works...The Lord is gracious and full of compassion, slow to anger and of great mercy.  
The Lord is good to all, and His tender mercies over all His works...  
My mouth shall speak the praise of the Lord, and I will praise His holy name forever and ever." Amen.

"A VIRTUOUS WOMAN"

...from a prayer book given once to her mother -- a prayer book which became her constant companion . . . and Sis, from this night onward, your guide.

"All over the world today's women are changing, but wherever they are, they are still the keepers of the culture. The world of women is rapidly changing, yet mysteriously there is something stable about it. Not everything about our sophisticated culture is good. But for what is both enriching and demeaning, women seem to be the stabilizers of the culture. Whatever hold it has upon stability or permanence depends upon woman's image of herself."

...had Ethel read these lines she would have underlined them and quietly and confidently she could have said to herself, "How fortunate I am -- I have always known who I am."

One could never think of Ethel as a person having an identity crisis. She was every inch a lady, and every bit a virtuous woman, whose life was touched by the spirit of Jesus Christ.

Four times -- five times -- we traveled together. I have recalled to Winifred on more than one occasion how when we were driving along that delightful English countryside our thoughts came back to this parish, so dear to all of us who were in that car. We talked of certain people, one in particular. And then Ethel characterized that person, using words that I have frequently used to characterize Ethel . . . said Ethel of this person of whom we were speaking, "She seems to be very comfortable with herself."

"He who would climb and soar aloft,  
Must ever keep alive,  
Within his soul,  
The tonic of a wholesome pride."

That allowed her to be very comfortable with herself because she was a fully integrated person, a virtuous woman.

"The world of women is rapidly changing, yet mysteriously there is something stable about it . . . "

...so Ethel could go on and read . . .

"Not everything about our sophisticated culture is good. And yet if there is one human endowment, however belatedly discovered, that gives cohesiveness to our scale of human values in the Western world, it is reverence for the meaning of a person, the force at the heart of our vision of reality . . . "

Small wonder that we loved her as we did, because of the high regard that she had for us, as we worked. Having a high regard for herself, and being a life that she knew was touched by God, she had a way of looking for that which is of God in every single one of us.

There are some people from whom I shy away. I can't afford to be in their presence too long -- they bring out the worst side of my nature. Not so Ethel! -- she was appealing to that better side of us as she affirmed the meaning of each of us as a person.

I loved her as I would have loved her had she been my mother. And unashamedly I say to you, on occasion I used to say to her, "Ethel, if God would have had it otherwise and I would have been born all over again and I couldn't have had the mother that I had, I would have been pleased indeed had God placed me under your care."

I loved her as I would have loved a sister, with high and holy regard for the kinship that we could exchange within the family circle. And when that first night that Winifred and I met her, we met her as a sister in Christ, and her shadow has been cast benignly upon us from that very day, and surely to the end of time.

Ethel represents for us -- well, let me put it for you this way . . .

-- through her lifetime the world has moved from ponies  
to planes...

-- from carriages to cars....

-- from lanterns to lasers....

-- she was a teenager during World War I...in the  
prime of her life in World War II

...and all the changes dramatic and traumatic that have followed! But she remained constant in her role as a virtuous woman.

The one unchanging role of women in every age is to be the keeper of a vision. It is a legacy largely entrusted into their hands. Or let me put it for you this way as another has said:

" . . . Women have a timeless role to play as custodians of life, the pre-natal life of the unborn, the helplessness of infancy, the psychic fragility of the pre-rational

"A VIRTUOUS WOMAN"

years of a child. All these tenuous holds on life are entrusted to the keeping of a woman. Whatever compassion, tenderness or intuitions of decency supply a dynamic to the work of men as humanizers of society, they most often learn these from the women in their lives. It is not romanticism but humble logic that makes a man admit, however reluctantly, that woman is the keeper of the hearth, the maker of the home, and consequently the custodian of a culture. In a changing world she always manages to hold on to one unchanging role . . . "

You ask me how she became that way? I can only tell you every now and then God touches a person, and every now and then a person responds as other persons do not respond. And God sets them up in front of us, and they become exemplars, and we do well to follow after them.

Let me sum up by sharing this with you regarding Ethel. In a church in Philadelphia there are these words on a tablet: "Whatever is guiltless, candid and benevolent in the human character was conspicuous in her. Amiable in domestic life, fervent in piety, schooled in the Scriptures, eminent in tenderness and charity for others, humble in her views of herself, she was beloved and respected as a person, useful and venerable, as a servant of Jesus Christ."

I hold in my hand a card that she sent to us when she took her 90-year old mother back to their motherland, their native Hungary. Writes Ethel, "The country is still as beautiful as I remembered it. We have been busy delivering messages here and there. Time is fleeting, but I'm loving every moment of it."

...and having arrived safely in Heaven above, there's no question about it -- as she has breathed upon her the very breath of God, she's loving every minute of it.

\* \* \*

"Breathe on Me, Breath of God" - sung by Bryce Redington

(transcribed as recorded)

"BACK TO EDEN - - ?"

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God  
our Father and from His Son Jesus  
Christ, our Blessed Brd. Amen.

*Genesis 1:26*

It was a wise teacher indeed who one day, trying to make her point, placed before one of her pupils a single sheet of paper, 8½ x 11 inches in size. Somewhere on that sheet of paper, just where I cannot tell you, there was a tiny blotch, a smudge, perhaps a quarter-of-an-inch in dimension. She said to her pupil, "What do you see?" And as you might suppose, it was the smudge that the youngster saw.

When God created the world it was like a piece of paper, if you please -- immaculate, without blemish. But since then we've seen smudge after smudge. It was not always that way. Hear now the passage of Scripture which serves as the inspiration for all that you're going to hear in the next few minutes. We go back to the very first page in the Bible, a portion of that page reads in this manner:

"And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.

And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.

And God said, Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat.

And to every beast of the earth, and to every fowl of the air, and to every thing that creepeth upon the earth, wherein there is life, I have given every green herb for meat: and it was so.

And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good. . . . "

Come now, let the question be asked: can we ever go back to Eden, that Paradise? Will the day ever return when we can be as chaste as presumably we once were? Or must we admit that life is only a school where evil is being learned? Does the passage of time only tarnish? Foolish talk. Yet, not so foolish. We need to be sobered by the fact that innocence lost is lost innocence. But this is not the bottom line. Over and above all this there is the precious truth: God does not give up on us. His re-creative hand still reaches for us even though at best, as Luther said, "We give Him rotten wood out of which to carve and a lame hose to ride."

God made man, and God smiled, and He said, "It is good." And when He made man in His own image He gave him the freedom of choice, an exceedingly precious endowment by which God crowns us. Not that we should become automatically good, as though a youngster would simply say to his parents, "Yes, father...yes, mother." No parent wants a child to behave like that. God gave us the freedom of will at the very, very beginning. You know what happens so quickly -- exercising the freedom of choice, man decided to act contrary to what God had in mind. And ever since then -- dare we say it? -- if only to whisper it perhaps....seemingly it's been down-hill ever since.

But God did not intend it that way. God is always saying to us, "You don't have to be bad. You can choose to be good." God is always saying to us: "You don't have to go to Hell." God is always saying to us, "You are meant for Heaven, and you can choose, you can decide."

I am much indebted to a colleague of mine who one time placed on my desk, when she knew how seriously I took counseling ministry, a book that bears the title "Reality Therapy." And the basic theses of that book is introducing to the people the fact that cannot be ignored, that each of us, in the sight of God, is to be seen as a responsible person. God will hold us responsible for what we do with the freedom that He has given us. No man can hide behind the fact that God made it easy for him to be bad just because He gave him the possibility to choose evil. There isn't a single parent anywhere who can't possibly understand what I am trying to say to you.

In the early years when I first became your Pastor there was a deacon of the church, a member of Church Council, who came to me and confessed, "Pastor,

he's a teenage son of mine, and can you possibly understand the anguish of my soul when I see myself now standing -- almost powerless -- as he makes all the mistakes that I made in the days of my youth! And I cannot deny him the freedom of making a fool of himself, if that's what he chooses to be." . . . the harsh reality that remains. But a man doesn't have to make a fool of himself. God endowed us with the capability by which we could choose to be good.

I know it's been said in this particular manner -- the old British limerick which reads in this fashion:

"God's plan made a hopeful beginning,  
But man spoiled his chances by sinning.  
We trust that the story  
Will end in God's glory,  
But at the present the other side's winning."

With all the strength that I can command this morning, I come to you to tell you this: it doesn't have to be that way. And God again and again and ever so often is coming to us, encouraging us, enlightening us, empowering us -- thanks to the Holy Spirit, by which we can see the right path, and the strength by which to persevere with patience to remain on the right path.

But to every man there comes at some time or other, to every person, always the possibility to stay long on the wrong road. John Oxenham said it wisely when he said: "To every man there openeth a way, and ways, and a way. And the high soul climbs the high way, and the low soul climbs the low. And in between in the misty flats the rest drift to and fro. But to every man there openeth a high way, and a low. And each man decides the way his soul will go."

Some of you heard me say it this past week as I paid tribute to Ethel Anderson. Her name Ethel, you know, means noble. But Ethel did not just become the noble person that she was because she was named Ethel. Ever so often, my good friend, make no mistake about it, the moment of decision was at hand -- she chose to be noble. . . . she chose to remain noble. Goodness doesn't happen automatically -- nor, I dare say just as quickly, evil doesn't happen automatically. We make the choices. But we don't have to choose evil. There is always the possibility of being good. And to that end God gave us His Holy Word, which is the guidebook for life. It's God's way of showing us how to live!

God gave us Jesus Christ -- not only as an example, but also as a Saviour, that we might be rescued from the road to ruin. . . . God gives us His Church, in

which and through which we are nurtured and strengthened. And every time we come together -- let it be clearly understood -- this divine encounter to all intents and purposes is a re-orientation experience from all the evil by which we have been beset in the past week. In this time of worship God is turning us around, pointing us to Heaven, and saying "This -- this is the way."

I say it again, there are those of us who like to hide behind the fact that God should never have taken the risk that He did and allow us the freedom to choose evil. Joseph Epstein, in an excellent essay, quotes Alexander Solzzyneitzgen(?) who maintained, and I quote now for you: "We must not hide behind fate's petti-coats. The most important decisions in our lives, when all is said and done, are the decisions we make for ourselves." Epstein goes on in that valuable essay of his to say to us - -

"We do not choose to be born;

We do not choose our parents;

We do not choose our historical epoch, or the country  
of our birth or the immediate circumstances of our  
upbringing;

We do not, most of us, choose to die; nor do we choose  
the time or conditions of our death . . .

But within all this realm of choicelessness we do choose how we shall live - - - courageously -- or in cowardice; honorably -- or dishonorably; with purpose -- or in drift. We decide what is important, and what is trivial in our life. We decide -- that's what makes us significant, in either what we do, or in what we refuse to do. But no matter how indifferent the universe may be to our choices and our decisions -- these choices and these decisions are ours to make. The fact remains: we decide. We choose. And as we decide and as we choose, so our lives are formed."

I remember reading not so long ago about a very wonderful person, closer to 80 perhaps than 70, still trying to remain active in his day's work. With his wife he had left his office to go for lunch and then was returning. He had been ill, but he still wanted to do his day's work with whatever strength he had, as long as he could. And as they left the lunch-room, he inadvertently stepped in the path of a taxicab. He was hit. He refused to go to the hospital -- he wanted to go to his home.

A day or two after the accident there was a knock on the door. It was the taxi-driver. He brought with him a document, and asked the stricken man to sign it. The taxi-driver's job was in jeopardy; jobs were hard to come by in those



days. He wanted to keep his job for the sake of his wife and children...and he asked the man that he had hit to sign the document exonerating him from all blame. . . .

...he chose to sign that document -- and in choosing proved himself the noble person that he was. Two days later he died. The obituary said, "He died from a serious attack of influenza."

It is given to each of us to choose the kind of person we become.

"Two roads diverged in the yellow wood,  
Sorry I could not travel both, and be  
one traveler.  
Long I stood and looked down one as far as I  
could to where it bent in the undergrowth,  
And then I took the other, as just as fair and  
having perhaps the better claim because  
it was grassy and wanted wear.  
I shall be telling this with a sigh somewhere,  
ages and ages hence:  
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I took the  
one less traveled by. And that has made  
all the difference."

\* \* \* \*

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"THE ART OF REBUKING"

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God  
our Father and from His Son Jesus  
Christ, our Blessed Lord. Amen.

*Proverbs 27:5*

I have always been an admirer of the beloved Pope John 23rd, and I presume along with you, if for no other reason, because he clothed with humility the highest honor that Christendom could ever bestow upon any single person.

He reflected upon the fact that one day he would die, and this is what he said: "And when the time comes that I should die, I simply want to be remembered as Guiseppi Rencalli, the man." I sympathize with the person who, when the Pope's death had been announced, could not help but respond in this fashion: "And now the 'Plaster-Paris boys' will take over." - - he realized immediately that once he was dead, they would have the proliferation of statue after statue, each one being so simply plastic...unreal.

By that same token, as I stand at this sacred desk this morning, I am constrained to tell you that we must take great heed lest we allow Jesus Christ, the boy of Nazareth, to be denied his humanity and to make him less than the real person that he was. As I come to the Saint Luke pulpit on this particular Sunday, I am fully aware of the fact that some of you, if only a few, are expecting a so-called Father's Day sermon. I shall do my best not to disappoint you.

Naturally my mind goes back across the years, to a carpenter's shop as well as a home in a Galilean village called Nazareth....a lad -- focus your attention upon Him now -- scarcely a teenager at that, is busy as work. You may, if you wish, believe that he did everything to perfection. You may, if you are so inclined, think that he never for a single second (that's 1/30th of a minute) did anything that warranted rebuke. I shall readily understand if you are quite content in holding dearly the picture of Jesus, a Galilean boy, son of Mary, son of Joseph.

Frankly, if you permit me to say it to you, such a concept of Jesus does very little for me. While I have nothing to offer you by way of Biblical record, it has occurred to me that on occasion Mary may have had to call him more than once when supper was ready.....and if you're inclined to think in this vein as

I am this morning, picture that teenage Christ working hard and diligently in the carpenter shop, dirty with shavings....and the weather is muggy, his friends are out fishing, swimming, boating -- he has to work . . . or picture him carrying that yoke for the oxen to be delivered to the farmer who lived at the edge of town, and the longer he carried it the heavier it got, and the more, perhaps, he wished he were somewhere else, doing something else. Don't brand me heretical when I talk to you in this fashion. You do Jesus Christ an injustice if you see Him as less than the person that He was. And when perhaps on occasion He wished that He were somewhere else doing something else, and that kind of thing would surface.....do you think for a single minute that Joseph did not take Him to task?

You see, there's a passage of Scripture that spells out such thinking for us, giving us justification to think in this manner. For what else will you do with that passage in the second chapter of the Gospel according to Luke:

" . . . and Jesus went down to Nazareth and  
was subject unto them . . . "

If that means anything at all, surely it allows for parental guidance and discipline, for we have reason to believe that in this Joseph fully shared....since in those days there was no question whatsoever regarding the father of the household as the disciplinarian and as the authority figure. So on this day I'd like you to think in terms of the father as one who also serves because he rebukes.

You are wrong if you think that the father is first to be seen as the provider. There was a day when that was true. What with so many wives working these days, for whatever reason, in many instances the dependency of the family is upon a joint income. And what with the ever-increasing so-called liberation of the female species, there could be a resistance among some of you to the concept that one person, and a man at that, should be recognized as the head of the house -- the disciplinarian, the authority figure. The fact does remain that in the day of Jesus the father was both seen as provider and disciplinarian.

I am hoping to make this sermon as relevant as possible for you, and I presume there's little need on my part then to reinforce the idea that the family should be given adequate provision. Thanks to the help given by the working wife, the average family, generally speaking, is better provided for financially today than at any other time in our history. But as far as discipline is concerned ...that is another story.

There was a day, long since past, when a child would be told -- "Now you just wait until your father comes home!" -- some of you will get the image quickly..

...it was Dad who had the paddle

...it was Dad who went out and cut the switch

...it was Dad who reached for the razor strop,  
if not his belt

...it was Dad who gave the lecture in the woodshed, with  
more than words....

What I'm really driving at is to focus upon a lost art -- the art of rebuking, the art of disciplining.

Can you remember when you last, out of sheer love, deliberately rebuked and disciplined and chastised a child of yours? The father of more than a generation ago was expected to excell in the art of rebuking. And it was absolutely as direct as it could be. There was no mistaking it.

Those of us who are caught up in counseling today have been advised by some people:

-- never to speak directly

-- never to forbid

-- never to persuade

-- never to order . . . you shy away from a direct confrontation,  
you specialize in the art of indirect counseling....

And would you believe it, that there are those who say the pastors, when they preach at the sacred desk -- "Whatever you do, don't take your congregation to task. They will resent being ordered, forbidden, being given advice, or feeling the pressure persuasion."

And yet despite the current style of camaraderie, and the in status of indirect counseling, I come to you this morning to reckon with an uncomfortable plain truth from the Old Testament. The text for all that you're hearing during this sermon this morning is the 5th verse of the 27th chapter of the Book of Proverbs. Listen to it carefully, for this is the way James Moffatt translated it for us magnificently:

"Better a frank word of reproof than the love  
that will not speak."

I am willing to believe that there is down deep inside most of us a lingering hunger to be put in our place. If we don't appreciate it at the present moment, then years later we will recognize the benefit of discipline, and thank God for

those who told it as it was and cut us down to size.

Occasionally I reach for a book that I've loaned, only to discover anew that it still hasn't come back to my shelf. I'm thinking particularly of John Steinbeck's delightful little book "Travels With Charlie." Some of you have read it. You may remember, quite a while ago the celebrated author took a tour of the country leisurely, taking as his only companion his dog Charlie.

On one particular Sunday when he was in New England, he decided to go to church. He was not a conventional church-goer, as you know. It was quite an experience -- it may have been one of those 'Hell-fire-brimstone-and-damnation' sermons. At any rate, this is what he had to say regarding it. Let me read his exact words for you:

"For some years now God has been the pal to us . . . "

(you can thank him for putting it that way. How it ever crept into our theology and into our practice of the faith I don't know. But any number of people have dragged God down to our level and made Him a kind of buddy-buddy sort of thing, who would never so much as say an unkind word to us -- we were that buddy-buddy)...well, these are Steinbeck's words for it . . .

"For some years now God has been a pal to us, practicing togetherness, and that causes the same emptiness a father does playing softball with his son. But this Vermont God . . . "

...as he thought of the preacher who laid it on in that New England church....

" . . . but this Vermont God cared enough about me to go to a lot of trouble . . . "

(and I'll give it to you the way Steinbrook said it)

" . . . to go to a lot of trouble kicking the hell out of me. He put my sins in a new perspective: whereas for me they had been small and mean and nasty, and at best forgotten -- this minister gave them some size and bloom and dignity!"

....as though he put them right out there in front of him, you see. Steinbeck goes on to say,

"I hadn't been thinking very well of myself for some years, but if my sins had this dimension, there was some pride left."

And then he reflected:

"I wasn't a naughty child, but in the eyes of that preacher I was a first-rate sinner....and I was given to understand that I was going to catch it!"

You read the Scriptures, my friend, and you cannot escape this concept of God. As father-God He rebukes. He is always taking us to task, and it may surprise you a bit if you read the New Testament as though you've never read it before, to discover how often Jesus Christ is rebuking people, and taking them to task, and calling it exactly as it was!

Lest I be misunderstood, and lest you exploit what I am saying, rebuking does not always have to be as condemnation. Be very careful about that. And I'm not so sure that rebuke must always be the first word that we speak to a person...nor ought it to be the last word that we speak. But on occasion it is a word that must be spoken. From the Christian perspective it is always to be seen as a measure of concern that we have for a person...and that there's no willingness on our part to ignore the evil as we see it.

There was a man who went to Florida, Daytona Beach, at the time some years back when there was this avalanche of students from the north. The Easter recess had given them a chance to get away from home, the restraints from home, and the freedom of being away from a college campus and the classroom and the exams. They were allowing it to hang loose and to let it all hang out in front just as it was . . .

There was a man who encountered such a chap one morning walking on the beach, wearing a sweat-shirt. The man had been around -- he knew exactly what was on that sweat-shirt. But he walked up to the fellow and he said,

"Ah - you're from the University of Virginia!"

And the chap says, "No . . ."

And the man says,

"Well, why don't you drop your hands and let me read for myself what's written on the front of your sweat-shirt!"

The young man obliged, somewhat sheepishly, and this is what the man was able to read on that fellow's sweat-shirt:

HELP STAMP OUT VIRGINITY

...the boy by now was ashamed. His conscience, thank God, was being aroused. The man who had encountered him continued to walk ahead of him. But the boy for some reason -- let's say it's his conscience now -- forces him to walk after the man and to engage him in further conversation. With whatever

streak of decency there is in the fellow, he says to the man, "I suppose you'd like me to throw this sweat-shirt away?"

And the man replied:

"No, I'd like you to take it home...have it dry-cleaned. Then I'd like you to put it in a plastic container . . . In looking at you, young man, I think your future is rich in promise. You're a very likely chap. And chances are that after college you're going to get married, and you'll have some children...

...when your daughter is 16, I want you to go up to the closet, take out that sweat-shirt, and let her wear it on her first date."

The student could only think to respond:

"If my father had talked to me like that, I would never have worn it in the first place."

\* \* \* \*

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"SEARCHER OF THE HUMAN HEART"

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God  
our Father and from His Son Jesus  
Christ, our Blessed Lord. Amen.

John 2:23-25

The sermon this morning bears the title: "God - The Searcher of The Human Heart" and the text, the closing verses of the second chapter of the Gospel according to John:

" . . . Now when he was in Jerusalem at the passover, in the feast day, many believed in his name, when they saw the miracles which he did.  
But Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all men,  
And needed not that any should testify of man; for he knew what was in man . . . "

Some four decades have passed since those student days of blessed memory, those years that I spent on the campus of the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Gettysburg. I stayed in what we affectionately referred to as "Old Dorm." It was a modest, brick, three-storey structure, which I am told during the War Between the States served as a hospital of sorts. My room was #36 on the second floor - - all three floors were utilized as housing for what was almost the entire student body.

My desk was near the window. And one night in March as I sat there, I heard what was not an unusual noise in the room above me, to be followed shortly by a sudden downward draft, so it seemed to me, outside my window. Not long after that the entire student body was stunned by what was made known to us: a school-mate of ours who lived in that room above me, had braced himself on the radiator by the window, opened the window and then plunged to his death, which came immediately as his body with driven force came upon the frozen ground.

I think I should tell you, he was the son of a parsonage.

I think you should know that he was only months away from graduation, and then would follow being ordained as a Minister of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

I think I should tell you that rumors had it that he had been jilted by the woman that he loved.



We gathered together, that student body of ours, in the Chapel of the Seminary. That grand old man, our much-beloved President, Dr. John Aberly, conducted the service. He took as his text a passage of Scripture that continues to grip my soul, and I would hope would have its equal grip upon me to the very day that I die. It came from a passage of Scripture which has still endeared itself to me, one of my favorite Psalms -- #139.

"Search me, O God, and know my heart;  
Try me, and know my thoughts . . . "

It wasn't that he wanted us to be guilt-stricken...it wasn't that he especially wanted us to examine ourselves as to whether or not we would have self-destructive tendencies. But it was the intention of the preacher to have us examine ourselves if perchance we could discover the kind of person that we happened to have been.

How well do you really know yourself? How well do you know other people. Honestly now, a good question. Is it possible for a person to know himself fully and completely? Is it not true that some of us who have lived a bit longer can also freely admit that to a degree we remain a mystery to ourselves -- never quite understanding why we do what we have done, or why we may think what we think -- not only regarding ourselves, but other people as well, and the world in which we happen to be placed, the arena in which we're meant to live the days of our years . . .

"Search me, O God -- and know my heart;  
Try me, and know my thoughts . . . "

Does any person on his own ever really know who he is? Isn't this one reason why some people are perfectly willing, and constrained to do so, to spend perfectly good money to go to someone who sits there alongside of the proverbial couch, as wittingly or unwittingly they allow the pieces to come out -- hoping of course that that person seated alongside of them might put all the pieces of the puzzle together and say, "Now this is it" by the time the final session in the series has arrived....or perchance to take the palette and choose the colors which the person himself, in his own way, has indicated.....and then the counsellor says, "This is the portrait -- this is you."

Again I ask the question, is it possible for any one of us ever to fully understand himself? Does it lie within me to know who I really am? How fortunate we are as Christians -- we have a God who sees straight through us, who knows us, who knows all about us, from whose view we cannot escape.

You read again that Psalm 139 - - it's a magnificent thing....

-- it talks about the omnipotence of God -- He's all-powerful, there isn't anything that He can't do....

-- it talks about the omnipresence of God -- there's no place where He can't be found....

-- it talks about the omniscience of God -- He's the all-seeing God, the all-knowing God....

Have you ever thought of God like that? And how fortunate we are that God is one who knows us? After all, who could know us better than the one who made us? After all, who should know us better than the one who is our Heavenly Father?

....after all, who should know us better than the one who gave us His Son, to suffer, in order to redeem us.

....that's how well He knows us!

I'm not certain that I have any full idea as to what concept you have about Jesus Christ when He was here on earth. What is the first picture that comes to your mind when you think of Jesus Christ in His ministry among us? Some of you think perhaps He went around saying nice things to people and giving them a gracious pat on the shoulder and saying, "There, there - you're all right" - - I'm not so sure He did too much of that -- a reasonable amount, but never an inordinate amount.

And you are wrong if you think He spent all of His time preaching sermons, necessary as they were. And you fall short of the mark if you think every time He was with His disciples they had a prayer session -- important as that was! And you'd better alter your thinking if you think He spent all of His time snapping His fingers and performing miracles . . . important as that ministry was!

As you read the New Testament as though you had never read it before, and you may get a surprise, hopefully. Every now and then He just sat down with one person at a time, and He'd have an encounter with the person individually, and looked that person straight in the eye, and called it exactly as He saw it, and gave that person to understand the kind of person that he happened to have been. You can read all about it for yourself -- it's there -- again and again and ever so often, looking this person, that person, straight in the eye.....and I have reason to think every now and then one of them might have responded and said, "Why do you look at me like that?" -- knowing full well that everything was being laid out in front, nothing was being concealed.

We have our moments, you know, when we think we can hide things from other people. We have our moments when we think we can hide things from ourselves, and

refuse to call by name what we do know is there. But not so with God, from whom no secrets are hid!

I have good news for you, in case you haven't thought of it: you can afford to let Him look you straight in the eye, for when He comes to probe, and to search, He is the one you can trust with what He finds, He is the one who can offer the corrective. He is the one who can offer the cleansing, redeeming touch - -

"Search me, O God, and know my heart;  
Try me, and know my thoughts. And if  
there be any evil way in me,  
You lead me in the right way . . . "

That's the way the Scriptures read, that's the way they are to be understood. You can afford to trust Him, to tell it as it is, because He can provide the corrective and the cleansing touch.

Dante Gabriel Rossetti has a drawing, I am told, which interprets for us that encounter of Mary of Magdala, Mary, the woman of the streets, who when she was first encountered by Jesus Christ.....Christ is standing on a balcony, looking down on the street below...Mary, the fallen woman, the woman of the streets, is tripping along gaily and happily, with never so much a thought of God, when all of a sudden she turns and looks up - - and there He is. And their eyes meet. And she can never again be the same . . . He saw her as she was. He gave her to understand when they met that He also saw her as she could become!

Whenever you allow yourself an image of God, think in terms of the eyes of God that are focused upon you. And the Christian has a right to believe that those eyes are focused upon him as though they were not focused upon anyone else. It's as personal as all that!

When Napoleon Bonaparte had learned that some of his lieutenants were not as trustworthy as he believed them to be, he realized that he was in duty bound to find out those whom he could trust and those he could not trust. He devised, I am told, a very clever bit of strategy . . .

(but now, as I share it with you, it's so understandable  
in the light of the sermon that I am preaching)

The word went out that all of his lieutenants were to gather in a particular place on a certain day at a certain hour. Napoleon, the little man, stations himself in a large room, without any furniture whatsoever. There were only two doors, an entrance, and an exit. And only one person was to be ushered in at a time, only one person was to be in that room with Napoleon Bonaparte at the same time. He positioned himself the farthest away from the entrance door, and then as the door

was opened the lieutenant came in and walked across the floor...

...and as he did so, Bonaparte put out his hand, and he shook  
the hand of the lieutenant as he looked him straight in the eye.

When the last person had come and gone, Bonaparte had a pretty good idea of those whom he could trust, and those who were not loyal.

There is no substitute for looking straight in the eye. The youngster grew up to be a man, and as he remembered the days of his youth he recalled for the benefit of his own children how he dreaded at certain times his dad coming home from work, for his dad had an uncanny sense -- when he came home he could look the youngster straight in the eye and knew exactly as he looked in the eye of the kid what he had been up to that day that he shouldn't have been up to!

"Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and  
know my thoughts. And if there be any evil in me,  
lead me in the way everlasting."

God is the great heart-searcher. He can read what's there. And He can read between the lines. And He makes sense of what He reads. And He always provides us the prescription: what we ought to do next.

I don't know how you picture Judgment, but Studdart-Kennedy was a great British preacher -- creative, ingenious, innovative. He has a cockney soldier dreaming how it is going to be in the time of Judgment. Let me read it for you, just as he wrote it, language and all . . .

"I seem to stand alone, beside a solemn kind of sea,  
Its waves, they got inside and touched my memory;  
And day by day, and year by year,  
My life came back to me.

All eyes was in His eye, all eyes,  
My wife's and a million more;  
And once I thought as those two eyes  
Were the eyes of a London whore.

And they was sad -- my God, how sad,  
With tears that seemed to shine;  
And quivering bright with the speech of light,  
They said, "Her soul was Mine."

And then at last He said one word --  
He said just one word: "Well?"  
And then I said, in a funny voice,  
"Please, Sir, can I go to Hell?"

And He stood there and He looked at me,  
And He kind of seemed to glow,  
'Til He shone like the sun above my head,  
And then He answered, "No. You can't.

" That Hell is for the blind,  
And not for those who see;  
You know that you have earned it, lad,  
So you must follow Me.

Follow Me on by the paths of pain,  
Seeing what you have seen,  
Until at least you can build the is  
With the bricks of the might-have-been"

That's what He said, as I'm alive,  
And that there dream was true!  
But what He meant I don't quite know,  
Though I know what I have to do.

I've got to follow what I've seen  
Until this old carcass dies;  
For I daren't face, in the land of Grace  
The sorrow of those eyes.

There ain't no Throne, there ain't no Books --  
It's Him you've got to see;  
It's Him, just Him, that's the Judge of  
blokes like you and me.

And, boys, I'd sooner frizzle up  
In the flames of burning Hell,  
Than stand and look into His face  
And hear His voice say: "Well?"

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

July 11, 1982

"AN UNFINISHED AGENDA"

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God our  
Father and from His Son Jesus Christ,  
our Blessed Lord. Amen.

Hebrew 11:13

Just where it came on the agenda at that meeting of Church Council a few months ago, I don't remember, but I do recall when Ann Hesse Nuss, the capable Chairman of the Committee on Staff, had completed her report, she said, "Now if it please Council, I'd like to make another motion." The motion that she made was this: That the Senior Pastor of this congregation be authorized to prepare a paper in which he would outline for the benefit of Pastor David, who'd assume responsibility for parish administration, and for the benefit of the congregation itself, the kind of thing that the Senior Pastor would like to have seen on the agenda if he were to have continued in that role.

The intent of the motion, of course, was not to lock anybody in to what somebody else might think ought to be done, but to provide, however, a continuum of sorts of what could be considered.

It was a traumatic experience. A multi-page document was prepared. It was eventually shared with the Church Council and a joint session of the Committee on Staff, subsequently with members of the staff themselves -- traumatic in this sense, that as I reflected on more than a quarter-of-a-century of ministry among you, and as I thought in terms of things yet to be done, I was absolutely amazed at the number of things that remained on my unfinished agenda -- the things that I myself would like to see realized if I were to continue as the chief administrator of this parish...a traumatic experience to say the least.

Having said that, let me tell you how sobering it was for me to realize that when our Blessed Lord was here on earth, He had an agenda, too. and some of us have stood in the very place where presumably He came and announced His intention. He was a carpenter's-son-turned-preacher, the penniless wanderer who went from place to place -- preaching, healing, performing miracles, making disciples. He had been at it only a comparatively short period of time when He returned to His home town. They had heard a great deal about what He had been up to. It was no surprise that the congregation filled the synagogue to capacity when He returned.

They did Him honor, of course, and they said, "Why don't you read the Lessons for us" -- a mark of distinction that they would give to this person or to that person, only a limited number of people could enjoy that privilege.

He took the holy writings, and read from an Old Testament prophet by the name of Isaiah...and when He read, He read that passage of Scripture that declared how the work of God ought to be done here on earth --

- the oppressed ought to be ministered to
- the weak ought to be made strong
- the captives ought to be given some chance to  
be made free from their bondage....
- the Good News of God should be told to everybody.

When He finished reading, He did a very surprising thing. He said, "Today I tell you this Scripture is going to come true, and it's going to come true through me, because this is what I intend to do. This is how I will direct my energies as long as I will live, doing this kind of thing."

I have been to Nazareth. I wanted to go there not only because it was the place where He was brought up as a youngster, and where He worked in the carpenter shop and where He began His ministry....but because I wanted to be in that very place where He proclaimed what was on His agenda. I am in duty bound to tell you that He only had three years to do His thing, and I say that respectfully -- only three years. He died, what we might say, before His time. There was so much yet that He wanted to do!

Oh, I know very well every Good Friday preacher we have had who has stood at this sacred desk and echoed for us the words from the Cross as dealt with that one word in particular, "It is finished". But I can't possibly allow myself to believe that Jesus Christ was saying to everybody: "Everything that I set out to do is now done" . . . that wasn't true at all.

- there were still many blind people who needed  
to have vision....
- there were still many lame people who couldn't  
walk.....

And how much of His energy was spent doing that sort of thing?

-- and there were so many unredeemed souls who had yet to be roused by the love of God, and to become converts to the Kingdom. His work was not finished.

And in company with some of you I stood on the Mount of the Ascension and I had deep thoughts there too -- how Jesus Christ turned to a small company of people, as much as to say to them, "I have an unfinished agenda"...and by the way, that's the title for this sermon: "An Unfinished Agenda." And to all intents and purposes Jesus Christ is saying to His friends, "My work isn't completed. There's so much yet that I would like to do -- now you go, and you preach and you teach and you baptize and you make disciples -- you go on doing everything that I wish that I could do if I were to remain among you."

It's a very sobering thought, I tell you, to realize that here is one at 33 years of age who, as we might say, if we analyze His life, was cut down in His prime, died before His time -- so much yet to be done.

Death does not always come to everyone as it came to my dear father....at some 90 years of age he was just worn out -- he died of old age. A week or so before he died -- "Raymond, I'm just tired" . . . I can understand that kind of death. But one of my younger brothers, in his early 50's, in the prime of life -- with so much zest for living -- to be stricken with lung cancer and a brain tumor, and to go in four months -- that's something entirely different! . . . to die with an unfinished agenda -- it happens again and again and again. It happens ever so often.

When I traveled to the Dead Sea, I looked to the Plains of Moab and my heart went out to that man Moses -- hand-picked by God to be the leader of the Children of Israel....and how much flack he took from them just because he was their leader, just because he was in duty bound to do what God told him to do.....and how obstinate they were, but he gave himself to them, never failing to goad them on in the right direction, and always pointing that way. . . . and then when he got there, to have God say, "Moses, this is it! You don't go any farther -- this is where you stop! You won't set foot on the Promised Land. It happens ever so often, to die with an unfinished agenda.

But it's not all that bad, my friend. I wouldn't give very much for a person who felt, all other things being equal, that he'd accomplished everything he set out to accomplish. You have no idea how much I spend sometimes with a concern for people who are bordered, because they allow themselves foolishly to think that they've arrived -- they've done everything they set out to do -- they have no goals beyond the present moment, nothing to challenge them as far as tomorrow is concerned. And I pray earnestly that as God gives me any measure of strength, that I'll always be



thinking in terms of another chapter yet to be written! -- to be gripped by dreams yet to be fulfilled. He's the person who really lives who is always thinking in terms of another chapter yet to be written.

I beg you with all the strength that my soul can command to examine your goals and to see whether or not you are dealing with goals that are too easily attainable.....they are paltry and puny.

If I were inclined to do it sometime, and if I had the time and the energy, I could analyze our civilization by the kind of advertising to which we're exposed. The little time that I've spent reading and listening to advertisements provides me a measure of nausea. It could well be that people in years yet to come will look back upon us, as they examine our advertising, and say we were a people who concerned themselves primarily with the 3 D's: detergents, deodorants, and dog food. Important as any of these may be in itself, it's not the ultimate of our civilization.

There's a text for this sermon, the 13th verse of the 11th chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews:

"They all died in faith, not having received what was promised, but having seen it and greeted it from afar."

The person who wrote those words wrote them in times very much as the times that claim our energies and concern. And every single one of these grand and glorious persons died, if you please, with an unfinished agenda. I'm grateful for the fact -- I think I've come to deal with it now -- there will be much work to be done when I have finished my course. I will never be able to do all that I had hoped to do. And that in itself is not bad!

- none of us will live long enough to see poverty completely eradicated from the face of the earth....
- none of us will live long enough to see every person claimed for Jesus Christ .....

No matter how noble the dream, it will not happen in your day, it will not happen in your children's day. But does that give cause for despair? Of course not. It simply means that while you and I live we should devote our energy toward the realization of the dream -- trying to help make it become a reality for somebody else! That's the acid test of life -- the justification for your existence and my existence is when we devote our energies toward the good from which others may benefit.

A man said it in Church Council on Tuesday evening. It was a very salutary experience -- you ought to know this. We got finished with our agenda well before our 10:00 o'clock adjournment time. And then I was constrained, and I said to the Council, "Why don't we do something we've never done before -- and this is very, very important. We'll take time to do it: Each of you in turn share with the rest of us how you witness for Jesus Christ in your daily life."

....it's one thing to think in terms of a Council member as he witnesses for Christ through Saint Luke congregation. But this is not the only place where a person is intended to witness for Christ. -- where he labors -- how about that?

And then each person in turn gave a testimony. You would have been pleased. And I remember one person in particular who said that he tried to plant shade trees, under whose shade he himself might never sit.

So you and I, you see, are meant to give our energies toward those things that benefit other people eventually -- even though we in our day may never realize for ourselves the dream come true.

"I would not have my life be one of bliss;  
Untouched by heartache, agony, despair,  
A pale anemic thing.

My nightly prayer is that with each new day  
I shall not miss high venturings, nor  
undeserve the hiss of envious human moles.

Who never dare to touch off rockets in their souls,  
And flare above their deepening grooves.  
O grant me this, that I shall scale life's peaks,  
Explore its glooms, no mountain's ecstasy;  
Deep valleyed pains.

Then, when my last red sands by time are sieved,  
And life has struck my sinews from her looms,  
I shall have earned three words o'er my remains:

Beside Was Born and Died -- between: He Lived --  
Not for today alone, but for tomorrow as well."

What do you still want to accomplish in life, my friend? How significant are your goals? To what end are you directing your energies? These really are the questions that matter most. For you remember what I told you on occasion -- that awesome understanding of Judgment -- -- -- having God stand there when we finish our course, and have Him look us straight in the eye and say, "Well -- What did you make of it? What in Heaven's name did you do on earth today?"

On May 19, 1780, in Hartford, Connecticut, at noon, a terrifying storm arose. The sky became as dark as the night. People became frightened. There were those who honestly believed it was the Judgment Day, and that the world was coming to an end. Some persons in panic ran here and they ran there, and would you believe it, it's a matter of record that some even knelt in prayer in the streets.

The Connecticut House of Representatives was in session. Colonel Davenport was the Speaker. He calmly stood up in the midst of the fever of the chaos and confusion and said, "I do not know whether this is the end of the world or not. If not, it will be a waste of time for us to quit our tasks. If it is Judgment Day, I for one want to be found doing my tasks. Therefore, let the candles be brought, and let us be found continuing in our tasks."

Don't be frightened, my friend. You may die with an unfinished agenda. And it could be the acid test of your life as you leave behind you the kind of thing toward which you were still looking. And that can be a happy thought!

\* \* \* \*

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)