

Lutheran Church of the Master  
580 Kuhn Road, Carol Stream, Illinois 60188  
Curt Gerald, Interim Pastor  
February 21/22, 2009  
The Transfiguration of Our Lord  
*“Stewardship: Proclamation!”*

2 Corinthians 4:3-6 (The Message)

<sup>3-4</sup>If our Message is obscure to anyone, it's not because we're holding back in any way. No, it's because these other people are looking or going the wrong way and refuse to give it serious attention. All they have eyes for is the fashionable god of darkness. They think he can give them what they want, and that they won't have to bother believing a Truth they can't see. They're stone-blind to the dayspring brightness of the Message that shines with Christ, who gives us the best picture of God we'll ever get.

<sup>5-6</sup>Remember, our Message is not about ourselves; we're proclaiming Jesus Christ, the Master. All we are is messengers, errand runners from Jesus for you. It started when God said, "Light up the darkness!" and our lives filled up with light as we saw and understood God in the face of Christ, all bright and beautiful.

One of the hardest things to realize is that it isn't about ME ... it isn't about US ... it isn't about YOU.

When someone says, "you know, I quit going to that church because when I went to worship I DIDN'T GET ANYTHING OUT OF IT."

A woman once told me that she didn't like coming to worship in a Lutheran church because they usually start with that awful confessional stuff where people are told that they have to confess that they have done things wrong. She preferred a church THAT MADE HER FEEL GOOD ... and she never wants to hear that she was doing things wrong.

In these past years the music wars have waged within denominations in general and within congregations in specific ... and the way the lines are often drawn it is clear that what is at the heart of this controversy is that "they don't sing MY FAVORITE SONG.

Remember the days when radios were first introduced into cars ... and they didn't have any push buttons. And then, there were five push buttons. And then, FM was introduced. And then you could get stereophonic sound. And then you could add an 8 track. And then you could have a cassette tape

player. And then you could have both a cassette player and a disc player. And then you could store 60 cassettes in your trunk. And then you could get surround sound. On the website the other day I found this statement: "Your car in-dash receivers are the centerpiece of your car's sound system. The entertainment media that can be controlled by an in-dash receiver includes but is not limited to: AM/FM radio, CDs, DVDs, MP3 and other digital media, video, satellite radio, Bluetooth, and GPS Navigation." And every now and then you might hear your favorite song from the 60's. But since we live in a time of so much variety, there isn't just one way to say it, sing it, think about it, or hear it any more. When it comes to car radios and family room theaters and restaurants and schools and political campaigns and probably every place else in life ... we like to think it is all about us.

But today we are reminded that here ... in this space and in this place ... it isn't all about us. Here it is all about ... Jesus.

And sometimes we need to remember that, "Yes, Jesus loves me" but it is also true he doesn't JUST LOVE ME. It is hard sometimes to realize that Jesus loves, as John 3:16 reminds us, THE WHOLE WORLD ...and that means Jesus loves the folks that you and I don't even like.

It is true ... Cubs fans ... Jesus loves the Sox fans too.

It is true ... Republicans ... Jesus loves the Democrats too.

It is true ... straight people ... Jesus loves the gays and lesbians too.

It is true ... Lutherans ... Jesus loves the Baptists and the Willow Creekers and the Roman Catholics and the Greek Orthodox too.

It is true ... Christian people ... Jesus loves the Jew and the Muslim and the Buddhist and the agnostic and the atheist too.

It is true ... American ... Jesus loves the Iranian and the Iraqi too.

It is true ... that Jesus's love isn't just something we receive but that it is also something that we are to give.

When you're on the mountaintop the world looks so beautiful. When you look down on the clouds roaming around the valleys, it is an awesome sight. When you hear thunder echoing from mountain to mountain ... you have a sense of what the intention of How Great Thou Art really was. You can think about building a permanent dwelling there and growing old there on the mountain peak.

But Jesus' disciples always find out that life isn't about their (our) desire to dwell on mountain tops. Often times, like a parent dragging his or her screaming child out of the candy store, Jesus calls us to follow him back down the mountain ... back to the people we'd rather be away from ...and he reminds us that there (here) is our purpose ... because it isn't about us.

It is about Jesus. Our only message, one we've been to the baptismal font, is about Jesus.

And that is what stewardship is all about. In a world where everything advertised wants to be at the center of our attention ... where everyone is wearing this perfume ... or driving that car ... or wearing these jeans or jewels ... or taking this vacation ... we all know that we deserve to be pampered.

But Jesus isn't into pampering ... at least not in this life. That may come later after we've checked into the Heavenly Hilton ... but for now ... it is "back down the mountain Dude" ... and there is a lot of hard work to do because, to put it bluntly, "somebody has to do it ... and nobody wants to do it ... so Jesus says ... JUST DO IT!"

WWJD ... What would Jesus do? Normally, we probably don't want to ask. He was a rebellious fellow ... he probably sat in the back of the temple as a youth and found the weekly services to be boring! Because he knew they could be so much more!

You've heard the question before, I'm sure: "If we were arrested and charged with being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict us?"

If someone looked at our daily planners or our palm pilots ...

If someone looked at our bank check registers or credit card reports ...

If someone looked at our monthly calendar ...

if someone compared our entertainment expenses with our contributions ...

if someone looked in our clothes closets or refrigerators or food pantries ...

if someone looked at our income tax forms and saw what our charitable deductions were ...

if someone looked into our minds and could read what we've been thinking about ...

if this someone were Jesus, would Jesus say “Sweet!” or would Jesus say “Uff-dah!”

If this someone were the person charging us with faith, would he or say “Yes, you are a follower of Jesus” or would this person say “You know, I really can’t tell!”

And what is true about individuals, can also be true about congregations. A congregation can make the mistake of thinking that it is all about “ME” ... THIS church ... OUR local ministry. Such a congregation will say, “we don’t need no stinking synod or churchwide ... we don’t need to send our money to Dickens Street pr 8765 West Higgins. We don’t need to help congregations in Chicago ... or Indian Missions in South Dakota ... or send missionaries to the Central African Republic ... or support Lutheran Social Services of Illinois as it is the #1 provider of care for the poorest of the poor in Illinois. And sometimes that thinking is based on arguments we may have with the larger church.

I want to share with you what Dr. David Preus, then Presiding Bishop of the American Lutheran Church, said at our Commencement Service at Augustana College in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, in 1969. He called on each of us to have a lover’s argument with the church in each and all of its expressions. Is the Church perfect? Of course not. But nonetheless, as contemporary song writer Derek Webb put it in his song “The Church:”

i have come with one purpose  
to capture for myself a bride  
by my life she is lovely  
by my death she’s justified

i have always been her husband  
though many lovers she has known  
so with water i will wash her  
and by my word alone

so when you hear the sound of the water  
you will know you’re not alone

chorus

***‘cause i haven’t come for only you  
but for my people to pursue***

***you cannot care for me with no regard for her  
if you love me you will love the church***

i have long pursued her  
as a harlot and a whore  
but she will feast upon me  
she will drink and thirst no more

so when you taste my flesh and my blood  
you will know you're not alone **chorus**

there is none that can replace her  
though there are many who will try  
and though some may be her bridesmaids  
they can never be my bride **chorus**

My best friend for 56 years now is now the Senior Pastor of one of the ELCA's largest congregations ... it is a church that has been making plans to exit the ELCA for several years, partly because a previous pastor wanted to lead the congregation out of the ELCA. And partly because, every time the ELCA sneezes about confessional issues or gay rights issues, that congregation is up in arms.

BUT: in spite of their disagreements and issues, that congregation continues to maintain a lover's argument with the two larger expressions of this Church: the Synod and the Churchwide. At the present time, out of 10,408 congregations in the ELCA, that congregation is the ELCA's

- (1) 15<sup>th</sup> largest congregation in terms of baptized membership: 5,727
- (2) 7<sup>th</sup> largest congregation in terms of average attendance: 2,177/week
- (3) 3<sup>rd</sup> largest congregation in terms of operating expenses: \$4,375,161
- (4) 1<sup>st</sup> largest congregation in terms of synodical benevolence: \$319,000
- (5) 1<sup>st</sup> largest congregation in terms of total benevolence: \$1,141,974

Their investment in the ELCA is the reason for their deep concern about the Church's mission. They know what it means to have a lover's argument with the Church.

This week, I'll be sending out promise cards in hopes that everyone here today and many of the rest of the congregation will be ready to indicate their decision ... what percentage of their income they will be setting aside

as a faith promise to God and what that equals in current dollars for their mission support in this congregation.

As you consider what your response will be, I hope you to will be able to make that response as:

- (1) a promise of faith even in these turbulent times ...
- (2) even in the midst of lover's arguments you may have with this congregation, its past pastors or its current interim, its past or current leaders, past members who may have left the congregation ... and
- (3) remembering that it isn't about US.

If it is all about Me / Us / You ... the evidence might be insufficient.

If it is all about Jesus ... we should be found guilty beyond the shadow of a doubt. Stewardship is one of those exhibits in the courtroom that is liking a smoking gun ... and it will help to convict us as followers of this Jesus!

As Paul says in today's reading:

<sup>5-6</sup>Remember, our Message is not about ourselves; we're proclaiming Jesus Christ, the Master. *All we are is messengers, errand runners from Jesus for you. It started when God said, "Light up the darkness!" and our lives filled up with light as we saw and understood God in the face of Christ, all bright and beautiful.*

Please turn in With One Voice to #651 – “Shine, Jesus, Shine!”