

Lutheran Church of the Master
580 Kuhn Road, Carol Stream, Illinois 60188
Curt Gerald, Interim Pastor

April 18/19, 2009

2nd Sunday of Easter

EASTER SEASON THEME: "...an UNSTOPPABLE FORCE"

TODAY'S SERMON THEME: "Meeting Needs and Responding to Doubts"

Erwin Raphael McManus, an Unstoppable Force, pages 22-61

Acts 4:32-35 (New International Version)

The Believers Share Their Possessions

³²All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had. ³³With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all. ³⁴There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales ³⁵and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need.

John 20:19-31 (New International Version)

Jesus Appears to His Disciples

¹⁹On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" ²⁰After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

²¹Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." ²²And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."

Jesus Appears to Thomas

²⁴Now Thomas (called Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. ²⁵So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!"

But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it."

²⁶A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" ²⁷Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe."

²⁸Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!"

²⁹Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

³⁰Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. ³¹But these are written that you may^[a] believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

During this Easter Season, we are having a conversation between Luke (the author of Acts), John (the author of the Gospel of John), and Erwin Raphael McManus (the author of "***an Unstoppable Force***" which is the series title you may have noticed this week on the board in front of the Church.)

IF you had known this ... well, actually Jim and I announced it on Easter Sunday so many of you HEARD about it but that doesn't mean it translated into some form of KNOWLEDGE ...

... but ... if you had been able to pick up a copy of McManus' book and read through page 61, you would have read all sorts of quotable quotes and most of which are right in keeping with what our Lesson from Acts and Reading from John are talking about today.

So ... first of all let me remind you that this day in the church year is always referred to as "Doubting Thomas Sunday" because the first Sunday after Easter Sunday always includes the Gospel reading about Thomas's need for proof concerning the resurrection of Jesus. This is also referred to as "Low Sunday," because just like the first Sunday after Christmas Day, it is one of the days of lowest attendance in most Christian Churches. Having put up extra chairs for the previous Sunday, this is the week when many congregations remove a few pews and provide more leg room because from now until next fall, (with the exception of Confirmation or First Communion services) attendance will not require all this seating space ... and the removal of pews gives the impression that "attendance is up" ... which enhances congregational attitudes and probably even encourages the weekly offerings.

So, McManus writes:

“America’s best atheists are children of the church ... the diminishing influence of the American church on American society is not simply because fewer people are going to church, but fewer people are going to church because of the diminishing influence of Christ on the church itself. THE CHURCH, AT BEST, FELL ASLEEP.” (28)

“Once survival has become our supreme goal, we have lost our way. The New Testament word for ‘witness’ is the same as for ‘martyr.’ We have come to know martyrs as those who have died for the faith. They didn’t survive, but they died facing the right direction.” (23)

“This may seem strange, but the real tragedy is not that churches are dying but that churches have lost their reason to live.” (24)

“The church became a fortress from the world rather than the hope of the world ... we must provide community with cause and meaning with healing.” (27)

“The center of God’s will is not a safe place but the most dangerous place in the world! God fears nothing and no one! God moves with intentionality and power. To live outside of God’s will puts us in danger; to live in his will makes us dangerous.” (33)

McManus asks his readers to go to Deuteronomy 2:24-31. **PAGE 42**

(The Message)

²⁴⁻²⁵ *"On your feet now. Get started. Cross the Brook Arnon. Look: Here's Sihon the Amorite king of Heshbon and his land. I'm handing it over to you—it's all yours. Go ahead, take it. Go to war with him. Before the day is out, I'll make sure that all the people around here are thoroughly terrified. Rumors of you are going to spread like wildfire; they'll totally panic."*

²⁶⁻²⁸ *From the Wilderness of Kedemoth, I sent messengers to Sihon, king of Heshbon. They carried a friendly message: "Let me cross through your land on the highway. I'll stay right on the highway; I won't trespass right or left. I'll pay you for any food or water we might need. Let me walk through."*

²⁹ *"The People of Esau who live in Seir and the Moabites who live in Ar did this, helping me on my way until I can cross the Jordan and enter the land that GOD, our God, is giving us."*

³⁰ *But Sihon king of Heshbon wouldn't let us cross his land. GOD, your God, turned his spirit mean and his heart hard so he could hand him over to you, as you can see that he has done.*

³¹ *Then GOD said to me, "Look, I've got the ball rolling—Sihon and his land are soon yours. Go ahead. Take it. It's practically yours!"*

So the way to address doubt is not argument or theological discourse ... but Christian Action ...like what we read about in today's lesson from Acts. Christian Action is proclaiming the Gospel without using any words ... which is preferable to using a lot of words and never doing anything about it!

It is the type of thing that could enable a person to say "your actions (or your inactions) are speaking so loud that I can't hear a word you are saying."

There is an unstoppable power embedded in the Church ... and he is daring the church to become the Church God had in mind.

As I read McManus and Acts and John this week, it reminded me of an analogy to something that I have experienced here. It is very clear from what was written at the time of the dedication of this sanctuary and from other things that I have read in the notebooks of history which are now in the pastor's study that there was a very specific decision made that this congregation would not install permanent pews but decided to put movable pews in this worship space in order for flexibility. But it has become apparent to me that what was intended to be flexible has become with the passage of time rewritten to be permanent.

When I read that my mind went reeling through possibilities ... if it were up to me, we'd have a summer series entitled "around the word" with the altar in the middle of the sanctuary and the pews wrapped around it arranged somewhere between a square and an octagon ... and during another season we could have them parallel to the side walls facing each other like the choir in an Anglican Church ... and I have a feeling as I say this that many of you are saying, "I'm glad he isn't going to be our permanent pastor."

The point of this is: that which was intended for flexibility has become inflexible. It happens all the time ... and McManus has said, it has happened in and to the Church.

And McManus and Luke and John are calling the Church to wake up and to be the voice of Jesus and the hands of Jesus and the feet of Jesus.

P 48 – CREATED FOR THIS HOUR ...

If you have read Thomas Friedman's book, *The World is Flat*, you might have an understanding of what this is about. But even more likely, you've heard during the past week about ...

(CBS/AP) ... middle-aged volunteer church worker with the voice of an angel is Britain's latest unlikely showbiz star.

Susan Boyle, 47, wowed judges and audience alike when she performed on the television contest "Britain's Got Talent."

When Boyle stepped on stage she told the show's judges, "I'm nearly 48, currently unemployed but still looking..."

But not likely unemployed for much longer, reports **CBS News correspondent Mark Phillips**. By Wednesday morning, a video clip of Boyle's performance on YouTube had been viewed more than 5 million times.

The unemployed Scot who said she'd "never been kissed" drew titters when she told the judges her ambition was to be a professional singer.

But her soaring rendition of "I Dreamed a Dream" from the musical "Les Miserables" astonished the show's hard-to-please judges.

They were captivated by the singer from Blackburn in western Scotland. Usually acerbic judge Simon Cowell dubbed her singing "extraordinary." Fellow judge Piers Morgan said her "stunning" performance was "the biggest surprise I've had in three years of this show."

The show, the first in a new series of "Britain's Got Talent," was watched by 11.4 million of Britain's 60 million people on Saturday night.

Or back in August, 2008, you may have heard about the "**Burger guy's bath.**"

A video posted on [Myspace.com](http://myspace.com) shows an employee of a Burger King in Xenia, Ohio, taking a bath in a kitchen sink as other employees look on or continue working. "It's my birthday and I'm taking a bath in the sink at Burger King," the laughing, tattooed worker tells the camera. "Somebody bring me a beer!" Greene County Health Commissioner **Mark McDonnell** is not amused. "It's a sophomoric, childish stunt," McDonnell said Tuesday. Burger King spokeswoman **Denise Wilson** said, "All employees associated with the video no longer work with the company."

868,000 -- about the number of hits so far to the various versions on YouTube. Yes, the footage lives on even after MySpace removed it without Tackett's consent and has even spurred a few parodies.

Or again, in the middle of this past week you might have seen the article online about "Domino's Pizza fires workers after online video shows one tampering with a sandwich." Posted by [Stefanie Murray/ Ann Arbor News](#)
April 15, 2009 15:40PM

Two Domino's Pizza employees in North Carolina were fired this week after a video surfaced on YouTube showing one of them apparently tampering with a sandwich set to be delivered to a customer.

The two-and-a-half minute video appears to have been first posted online Monday. By today, one version had received close to 730,000 hits.

The video shows one employee putting cheese in his nostril and waving meat under his backside before putting the ingredients on a pair of sandwiches.

Ann Arbor-based Domino's Pizza said the franchisee that owns the store where it occurred filed a criminal complaint against the employees. They also were fired, the company said.

Just think ... right now YOU and I could reach millions of people through the I-Phone or computer or on our FACEBOOK page. Just one tap on the "send" key ... and our thoughts will flow around the world.

We could put Jim's Easter sermon on our website and someone in India or Iran or Central Africa Republic could listen to it RIGHT NOW.

When our kids are on the Mission Trip this summer, they could do a daily video blog so that youth groups in Russia would know what they are doing as they are doing it.

One of the many point in today's readings is that any church that gets locked into a survival mode is like a computer that has been frozen ... and any Church that is really the Church will always be focused, not on supporting missions, but on being in mission.

And the mission isn't just the members ... and it isn't just the community ... and it isn't just the denomination ... and it isn't just the country of residence ... and it isn't just friendly nations ... and it isn't just the people in the whole world ...

P.25 – "Those who study science have told us that a butterfly fluttering its wings in South America could, in some sense, be the primary cause of an avalanche in Antartica."

If a butterfly could do all that ... what can the UNSTOPPABLE FORCE DO through you and me this week?