

Lutheran Church of the Master  
580 Kuhn Road, Carol Stream, Illinois 60188

Curt Gerald, Interim Pastor

April 25/26, 2009

3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Easter

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

TODAY'S SERMON THEME: "Mission, Momentum, and Change"

*Erwin Raphael McManus, an Unstoppable Force, pages 62-95*

### **Acts 3:12-19 (New International Version)**

<sup>12</sup>When Peter saw this, he said to them: "Men of Israel, why does this surprise you? Why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk? <sup>13</sup>The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his servant Jesus. You handed him over to be killed, and you disowned him before Pilate, though he had decided to let him go. <sup>14</sup>You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you. <sup>15</sup>You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this. <sup>16</sup>By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus' name and the faith that comes through him that has given this complete healing to him, as you can all see.

<sup>17</sup>"Now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did your leaders. <sup>18</sup>But this is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that his Christ<sup>[a]</sup> would suffer. <sup>19</sup>Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord,

### **Luke 24:36-48 (New International Version)**

Jesus Appears to the Disciples

<sup>36</sup>While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you."

<sup>37</sup>They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost. <sup>38</sup>He said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? <sup>39</sup>Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have."

<sup>40</sup>When he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet. <sup>41</sup>And while they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement, he asked them, "Do you have anything here to eat?" <sup>42</sup>They gave him a piece of broiled fish, <sup>43</sup>and he took it and ate it in their presence.

<sup>44</sup>He said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms."

<sup>45</sup>Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. <sup>46</sup>He told them, "This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, <sup>47</sup>and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. <sup>48</sup>You are witnesses of these things.

I have been told that in the ancient world, kings would establish the boundaries of their kingdoms by placing statues of their likeness on those boundary lines so that a traveler would know when (s)he was entering into another king's domain. I suppose that would have made it like when our high school groups from Zion Lutheran Church in Cottage Grove, Minnesota, were backpacking in the Bighorn Mountains. Above the timber line the pathway would be marked with piles of rocks so that from this pile you looked up or ahead and saw the next pile and walked to it ... and then to the next one ... until the pathway became a little easier to follow through the forested areas.

The King's image marked the territory. I think that is what stands behind that verse in Genesis:

1:26 - Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, <sup>[b]</sup> and over all the creatures that move along the ground."

<sup>27</sup> So God created man in his own image,  
in the image of God he created him;  
male and female he created them.

I have never seen this verse as being a description of physical likenesses as though God is a big "US" or you and I are little "gods." Rather, I believe the author of Genesis had this ancient tradition in mind ... and what the author is saying is: "we have been created to be markers for God's kingdom on earth." We are here to let everyone know that God is invested in what happens here. God created it ... God owns it ... God wants is used right!

In the last couple of weeks, our President apparently said something that provoked some folks ... I guess he said that "the United States is not a Christian nation." Well, it is right ... isn't it? A nation is a political entity that, with the exception perhaps of Israel, is incapable of making a faith statement.

The United States guarantees religious freedom ... but by constitution it cannot require anyone to make a religious statement. That constitution talks about "God" in general (a deistic statement) ... but there is nothing in that constitution that proclaims faith in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit which is what Christianity would require.

In this great nation that guarantees us religious freedom, you and I live together ... hopefully peacefully ... with people who follow other religious teachings or none at all ... as the bumper on our family cars say: COEXIST! But this is not a Christian nation ... it is not a Jewish nation ... it is not a Muslim nation ... it is not an atheistic nation ... a nation cannot believe ... it can only be so constituted as to allow an individual to believe.

As Christians in this great nation we are united with Christians around the world is making one very specific statement ... and that is our witness ... that this Jesus ... the one born in Bethlehem ... the one crucified some 33 years later ... the one raised from the dead three days later ... as our reading from the ACTS tells us today ... the one who ascended some 40 days later ... the one who lives and reigns in eternity and who will be coming back (who knows when) ... this Jesus is the Messiah to whom the Scriptures sacred to our Jewish cousins pointed ... and he is the one and the only hope for the world.

As today's Gospel says: we are witnesses to the world of this truth.

Some of you ... that remnant of you who were in worship last week on "Doubting Thomas Sunday" also called "Low Sunday" ... those folks may have come today expecting to see that Pastor Curt had rearranged the pews ... and if so, then let me say that you misunderstood me.

For the sake of the rest of you, in last week's sermon I made an analogy ... I walked out into the middle of this room and said that last week's texts were LIKE ... if I were your pastor, knowing as I know from what I've read in this congregation's records, that this congregation specifically decided to use moveable pews so that this could flexible ... so I said that if I were your pastor, I could imagine a summer worship series entitled "gathered around the Word" for which we would put the altar in the middle of arrange the pews around it ... and I said that what has happened in these years is that flexibility has turned into permanence ... and that our texts and our reading from McManus' book remind us that the original purpose of the Church was MISSION but in many, if not most (I would say 75% of congregations today) that MISSION HAS BEEN REPLACED BY MAINTENANCE.

In today's reading from McManus (pp 62-95), he specifically talks about two important concepts related to MISSION ... the first is that it involves MOMENTUM and the second is that it involves CHANGE THEOLOGY.

p. 64 - "the church was intended to be a revolution - a movement, not an institution."

p. 65 - "We are not to build monuments but to join the movement... (to) become a place of refuge for an unbelieving world. The church becomes the place where the seekers finally find the God they were searching for."

p. 71 - "When the ox messes up the manger, it accomplishes the purpose for which it was created. We are not called to have clean mangers."

P. 71 - "God never intended the Bible to be studied for information or knowledge alone. The Bible was written so that we might respond to the truth and voice of God."

Pp75/65 - "God is creating a community with a cause ... (whose focus) is not a plan but a purpose and a passion ... a movement without knowing where you're going (but only ) knowing why you're going."

p. 84 - "God calls us to take the memories with us but to leave the memorabilia behind."

P. 85 - "Simply stated, if the Bible doesn't bring change, it is not being engaged."

p. 86 - "From the beginning, the church was a symbol of radical change."

p. 89 - "When the church refuses to change, she refuses to obey."

p. 91 - "The further we are from the past, the better we remember it - -- but not the clearer. Soon the details are lost to the dream. In the end what we remember never existed. History is lost to nostalgia. Like a seductress, the past can tempt us to leave the present and forfeit our future."

And the future is what the Gospel ... the Good News ... of Jesus Christ is all about.

So ... yes ... back to last Sunday's analogy ... I'd love to see us spend the Pentecost season (the time from Pentecost Sunday, May 31, through Christ the King Sunday, November 22) under such a theme as "Gathered Around the Word." But you see the point is that it is the WORD that compels the rearrangement ... not just a desire for flexibility. In Church, everything we do bows before the Word of God, both the Living Word which is Jesus and the printed word which is Scripture.

Maybe it will help to compare a Church in Mission with a Church in Maintenance with some analogies:

| A Church in Mission  | A Church in Maintenance  |
|--|--|
| The worship team develops worship services which will invite first time worshippers to think about Jesus             | The worship team develops worship services that make sure we always do the same thing the same way ... this pot always goes here ... that plant always went there. |
| The finance team sees itself as an enabler ... as the one who raises the funds to enable what the worship team plans | The finance team sees itself as the controller of funds, the final decision maker of plans, and the main report for a council or congregational meeting            |
| Uses the Church year   | Worries about the fiscal year  |
| Property enhances the worship space from the parking lot entrance to the bathroom stall                              | Property locks up the valuable items   |
| Council is the keeper of the vision  | Council is the maker of every  |

|   |   |
|---|---|
|   | decision  |
| Worship is the means of inviting new members  | New members means more contributors and more dollars  |
| Realizes the importance of adequate funding, legal integrity, ethical standards, and corporate responsibility (stewardship) | The only thing that matters is money ... and we aren't getting enough of it ... and we need more fund raisers |
| Looks to the future ... and knows that the best is yet to come  | Looks to the past ... and regrets what is no longer.  |

I have a problem which church planning programs and with staff review documents ... it usually says "what are you going to accomplish in the next year?" with the idea that next year's review will be based on what we thought a year ago.

A year ago ... before the banks closed and the economy toppled and the election was decided ... what were each of us going to do? Have we done it? The point of the Church is that the Church doesn't in actuality decide its future: Jesus does. And in all honesty right now, we could and probably should unite in saying that right now we don't really know where God is going to lead us this year ... we don't know who the next pastor will be ... we don't know what disasters local or global the Church might call upon us to respond to ... we don't even know which ones of us will be alive a year from now to reflect on this.

This much we do know:

**Acts 3:18** But this is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that his Christ<sup>[a]</sup> would suffer. **19** Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord ...

AND ...

Luke 24:<sup>45</sup>Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. <sup>46</sup>He told them, "This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, <sup>47</sup>and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. <sup>48</sup>You are witnesses of these things.

When I retired, one of the gifts I was given was a little plaque that hangs on our kitchen wall ... and it simply says:

"I may not know what the future holds ...  
But I know the one who holds the future."

And that is enough.