

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

Curt Gerald, Interim Pastor

May 2/3, 2009

4th Sunday of Easter

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

TODAY'S SERMON THEME: "one in spirit, but many stories"

Erwin Raphael McManus, *an Unstoppable Force*, pages 96-131

MAY 2/3 (9:15), 2009 – CURT

MAY 3 (10:45), 2009 – CONFIRMATION – JIM HOLLENDONER

Acts 4:5-12 (New International Version)

⁵The next day the rulers, elders and teachers of the law met in Jerusalem. ⁶Annas the high priest was there, and so were Caiaphas, John, Alexander and the other men of the high priest's family. ⁷They had Peter and John brought before them and began to question them: "By what power or what name did you do this?"

⁸Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: "Rulers and elders of the people! ⁹If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a cripple and are asked how he was healed, ¹⁰then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. ¹¹He is

" 'the stone you builders rejected,
which has become the capstone.^{[a]'}^[b] ¹²Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."

John 10:11-18 (New International Version)

¹¹"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. ¹²The hired hand is not the shepherd who owns the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. ¹³The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.

¹⁴"I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me—
¹⁵just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life
for the sheep. ¹⁶I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must
bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock
and one shepherd. ¹⁷The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my
life—only to take it up again. ¹⁸No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of
my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up
again. This command I received from my Father."

Hear again the words that have just been read from Scripture:

⁹If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a cripple and are asked
how he was healed, ¹⁰then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus
Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man
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In pages 96-131 of his book "...an Unstoppable Force," Pastor McManus
introduces two words: "Ethos" and "Story." He tells us that "ethos" can be
described as "a tribal emotion" ... and he goes on to say that it is "the
fundamental character or spirit of a culture; the underlying sentiment that
informs the beliefs, customs, and practices of a group or society. The
distinguishing character or disposition of a community, group, or person. To
simplify, an ethos is expressed through spontaneous, recurring patterns."

I suggest that our Gospel reading states more clearly than anything else what the
ethos the Church which is the Body of Christ really is ... and, as such, it states what
the ethos of this congregation is: "we are a flock of sheep and Jesus is our
shepherd."

In the earliest days of my ministry, the theologian I would refer to when this text
came up was my wife's Mom who lived on their farm in South Dakota. I would
call her and say: "tell me about sheep." Simply stated, her response would be to

say: “well, in one word, they are stupid.” They would stand fazing the blizzard winds and freeze to death if they weren’t shepherded back into safety ... they would lose a lot of their newborn ewes if someone wasn’t there to help them during lambing season ... they roam about like 1st graders on the soccer field just in one big mass of wool ... they easily wander off and get lost and can’t find their way back.

Probably nothing has infected the Church more than having the wrong ethos, the wrong idea, of what the church is. In recent years there has been a shift to talking about it like a fortune 500 corporation ... and we’ve talked about hiring the pastor as though (s)he were a CEO ... and we’ve brought the “best practices from the board room of Crate and Barrel into the council meetings ... and our goal has become to sell the Gospel to more people as though we are selling widgets to ... it is no wonder that our Bishop tells us that 66% of the congregations in the Metropolitan Chicago Synod are reporting declines ... because the Church has chosen to live like GM and Enron and the fortune 500 companies ... instead of being that lazy crazy flock of sheep that Jesus wants to shepherd.

Some questions were raised at last week’s quarterly meeting by some folks ... and among them were questions about “what can we do to get former members back and to attract new members?”

A response could be twofold. A response to the first question might be “nothing.” In most cases, when a person or family has left one congregation, the main thing we need to do is to make sure that they find another. The best thing is to be able to send a Letter of Transfer to their new congregation and to entrust them into the spiritual care of that flock of sheep. Placing too much emphasis on “getting former members back” is somewhat like “rearranging deck chairs on the Titanic.”

But a response to the second question might be this: “whom have you invited to come with you to worship lately?” Our worship attendance could double in one week ... all it takes is for “each one to invite one.” My former congregation worked with Linnea Nilsen Capshaw in a visioning process ... and after reviewing the demographics of our community she reminded us that people don’t respond to ads in community newspapers (especially not if they’re in the church section ... about the only way church ads work is if they’re placed in the sports section which is too expensive for most congregation’s budgets) ... telephone campaigns

don't work ... even a sign in front of the church has very little impact ... mailings are too expensive and most people simply recycle it without looking ... so, she said, there is only one way that works ... "tell your story to your friend, and invite him or her to worship with you ... and then bring them by the arm ... and introduce them to Jesus."

In the reading from Acts, Peter simply told his hearers the story which was simple: "Jesus healed this guy." And with their stories like this, the Church emerged.

Are you ready to tell your story? It doesn't have to be a long story ... and you don't have to memorize it ... but to simply tell the story to someone else of what Jesus means to you?

You don't need to quote the whole Bible in order to tell someone else why Jesus is important to you. It might be the story of how you were knocking at death's door with that diagnosis of cancer, but how you outlived the doctor's timetable ... and you believe it was through the prayers of the people of God in worship.

It might be the story of how you had hit bottom in alcoholism or drug addiction ... but someone from church did an intervention ... and now you have been in sobriety for five years.

It might be the story of how you were wandering without purpose in life, but a sermon or a Bible study or a choir anthem or a candle flickering in the sanctuary or a hymn or a conversation with someone in church suddenly brought you new focus.

Because these stories are always rooted in THE story of Jesus who came among us know us by name and to love us in deed.

You see, a church doesn't need another program for evangelism ... it just needs to do what the word means: "to tell the story." Instead of attending another Bible study on Evangelism, I encourage you to go out and evangelize. Instead of wishing for a program for someone else to do, I encourage YOU to pray about whom you might be a witness to and then seek him or her out this week.