

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

May 16/17, 2009

6th Sunday of Easter

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

TODAY'S SERMON THEME: "Back to Zero"

*Erwin Raphael McManus, **an Unstoppable Force**, pages 185-224*

### **Acts 10:44-48 (New International Version)**

<sup>44</sup>While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. <sup>45</sup>The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles. <sup>46</sup>For they heard them speaking in tongues<sup>[a]</sup> and praising God.

Then Peter said, <sup>47</sup>"Can anyone keep these people from being baptized with water? They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have." <sup>48</sup>So he ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked Peter to stay with them for a few days.

### **John 15:9-17 (New International Version)**

<sup>9</sup>"As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. <sup>10</sup>If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love. <sup>11</sup>I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. <sup>12</sup>My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. <sup>13</sup>Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. <sup>14</sup>You are my friends if you do what I command. <sup>15</sup>I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. <sup>16</sup>You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. <sup>17</sup>This is my command: Love each other.

So even though only a few of us have been reading McManus's book during this Easter season ... and even though Jim and I have been focusing our messages on its content during these Saturdays and Sundays (including First Communion celebrations, Confirmation Sunday, and even Mothers' Day) ... now that a few of us have even been reading this book ... and now that most of you have been here in worship on a weekly basis during this Easter season ... I ask you a question today.

Have you seen this "Unstoppable Force" in your world or in your life during the past week or during the past month? And if so ... where?

#### RESPONSES?

In each service, two or three members of the congregation shared their responses to this question.

I SAW this Unstoppable Force in a news article on my computer screen ... if there were a screen behind me, I'd project it there so you could see it. You may have seen it on your screen. It was there on the Comcast home pages that has daily news events, sports events, weekly pictures, economic news, and all that. As this title flashed in front of my eyes, it caught my attention:

### Notre Dame president catches heat for Obama invite

*(the portions highlighted in green were read)*



By TOM COYNE, AP  
Fri May 15, 3:46 AM EDT

The Rev. John Jenkins got some simple advice before taking over as president of the University of Notre Dame: "Don't listen to the criticism, don't listen to the praise, just make the best decision you can."

Four years later, Jenkins is getting plenty of criticism from Catholic leaders, students and alumni because of the university's decision to invite President Barack Obama to deliver its commencement address and receive an honorary degree Sunday.

Opponents of the invitation, including at least 70 bishops, say Obama's support for abortion rights and embryonic stem-cell research contradicts church teachings and that Jenkins has created a breach with the church.

A leading Catholic scholar also declined the school's most prestigious award, making this year's commencement the first time that the Laetare Medal hasn't been awarded since 1883.

"It is clear that Notre Dame didn't understand what it means to be Catholic when they issued this invitation," Cardinal Francis George of Chicago said shortly after the university announced Obama's appearance.

In the center of the storm is Jenkins, a 55-year-old philosophy scholar who has spent much of his adult life at Notre Dame and is described as cerebral and prayerful. Jenkins, who declined interview requests, has said Notre Dame does not support Obama's positions on issues regarding the protection of human life but that his appearance provides "a basis for further positive engagement." Obama will be the sixth sitting U.S. president to deliver the university's commencement address.

Friends and colleagues say Jenkins has listened to the criticism but is confident in his decision.

"He respects people who differ, but he's resolute in his decision because he did it based on conscience and what he really believes in," said Richard Notebaert, chairman of Notre Dame's board of trustees.

Notebaert said Jenkins, who is in the fourth year of a five-year term, has the "full support" of the trustees.

That hasn't soothed critics, who question whether Notre Dame has lost touch with its Catholic roots. Calls for his ouster have grown louder amid protests by abortion opponents, who have flown pictures of aborted fetuses over campus and paraded dolls smeared in fake blood outside a recent board of trustees' meeting. Dozens of anti-abortion activists have been arrested, and more arrests are likely as protesters converge on the campus for commencement weekend.

The intensity of the criticism has surprised students at Notre Dame, including junior Eddie Valazquez, who called "this intrusion of outside forces ... a little disconcerting."

"Really outlandish protests just aren't our style," Valazquez said.

But for others, like alumnus David DiFranco, it hasn't been enough. DiFranco helped organize Replacejenkins.com, which urges donors to withhold money until Notre Dame removes Jenkins. He said the school's administration had been veering away from the church's teachings.

"Obama's just the big straw that finally broke the camel's back," he said.

Kansas City-St. Joseph Bishop Robert W. Finn has said he believes the Obama invitation would cost Jenkins his job, telling anti-abortion activists at a convention in April that "Notre Dame will need a scapegoat for this debacle."

University bylaws require that the school's president be a priest from the Congregation of Holy Cross, Indiana Province, a group now made up of about 360 men.

But Notebaert, the board of trustees' chairman, pointed to Notre Dame's tradition of presidents who were willing to make unpopular decisions. The Rev. Edward Malloy, who served for 18 years before Jenkins, drew the ire of Bishop John D'Arcy by allowing "The Vagina Monologues" and a Queer Film Festival to appear on campus.

The Rev. Theodore Hesburgh, the former president who offered words of wisdom to Jenkins, supported social causes ranging from civil rights to immigration reform and served as an adviser to presidents and popes. He was replaced as chairman of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights in 1972 over criticism of then-President Richard Nixon's administration.

"You see this golden thread that runs through the character of the presidents of Notre Dame, and I think it continues through Father John Jenkins," Notebaert said. Robert Burns, a retired Notre Dame history professor who wrote two books about the school, said he could recall only one instance in which a president of the school came under similar criticism: The Rev. Hugh O'Donnell, who fired an outspoken interventionist professor during World War II.

The criticism doesn't appear to bother Jenkins, who friends say never aspired to the job and who has said that he doesn't worry about his legacy.

"My approach is to think one year at a time, one week at a time, even one day at a time," he said upon taking office.

His ultimate goal is for the university to make a difference in the world, said John Affleck-Graves, a Notre Dame executive vice president who has known Jenkins for about 15 years.

"He wants to bring a more reflective, faith-based position to some of the big debates and decisions in the world," he said.

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Now, let's admit that you and I as Lutheran Christians read this article from a different perspective than our Roman Catholic brothers and sisters do. That different perspective is rooted in a major revolution in thinking that started back in 1517 when a

German monk named Martin Luther stood in front of a jury of Ecclesiastical Judges and was asked to recant ... and, well, this is the way it is written up in Wikipedia:

Johann Eck, speaking on behalf of the Empire as assistant of the Archbishop of Trier, presented Luther with copies of his writings laid out on a table, and asked him if the books were his, and whether he stood by their contents. He confirmed he was the author, but requested time to think about the answer to the second question. He prayed, consulted friends, and gave his response the next day: "Unless I shall be convinced by the testimonies of the Scriptures or by clear reason ... I neither can nor will make any retraction, since it is neither safe nor honourable to act against conscience."<sup>[56]</sup> He is also famously said to have added: "*Hier stehe ich. Ich kann nicht anders. Gott helfe mir. Amen.*" ("Here I stand. I can do no other. God help me. Amen."). This description of the declaration may be [apocryphal](#),<sup>[57]</sup> as only the last four words appear in contemporaneous accounts.

Abortion and embryonic stem cell research are issues on which many Lutheran and Catholic Christians hold differing opinions ... both within their own denominations ... as well as between the two denominations. I suspect if we had voting devices at each seat right here right now so that we could express our opinions on the matter ... it would be a split vote. Supposedly this is a topic that differentiates the Republican Party from the Democratic Party ... for some folks, it is clearly a matter of choice between what is "right" and what is "wrong."

Generally speaking, Lutherans realize that there is a great potential in embryonic stem cell research. Recently, a person who was worshiping with us shared with me that she was on her way to a party for a friend who had been diagnosed as being almost at death's door because of her terminal cancer. The person worshipping with us was on her way to a party for her friend because through a medical procedure which made use of embryonic stem cell research, her friend had been cured and is now celebrating her new life.

In a former congregation, I visited one of our young men, I believe in his late 20's, who had been under treatment for a terminal illness for seventeen years. At the point where there was nothing left for the doctors to do, this young man was in a program using embryonic stem cell research ... I visited him while he was in the hospital room with the special zero air flow ventilation ... because of the chemo he had been on, I'm sure he had lost every hair on his body. A few months later, this young man came down the aisle after the worship service and asked if I remembered him ... he could tell I didn't ... and then he said he was the young man whom I had visited ... at that point he was not only considered to be cured, but his hair was so long I couldn't recognize him.

Generally speaking, Lutherans also do not oppose **all** abortions ... but in order to understand what I mean, we need to set up as an example an "extreme case." Let's say that there is a young expectant mother ... let's say that she is about mid-way through the nine months pregnancy ... when her doctors detects a condition or an illness for which only two known cures exist. The one cure will save the mother but the

baby will die. The other cure will save the baby but the mother will die. In this extreme case scenario, there is no other option.

If neither cure is used (and quickly), both will die. If both cures are used, both will die. You are the woman's husband which means you are the expectant father. Time is of the essence.

The classic Roman Catholic position here is that the baby must always be saved, which is why it is opposed to any and to all abortions. The classic Lutheran position is to realize that we often have to choose between two bad choices (choices are not always between good and bad) ... and in this awful choice that no human being should have to be in, I as a Lutheran would choose to save my wife's life even if it meant that we would lose this child. This is why our hospitals will perform abortions in the first trimester of pregnancy or in other situations where the life of the mother is at risk.

Taken to its most conservative position, this debate then encourages an extremist to lob an explosive device into an abortion clinic "in the name of Jesus" and kill one or a dozen patients, doctors, and medical staff. On the other end of the spectrum, it allows that extremist to engage in casual unprotected sexual intercourse and, whenever she gets pregnant (or he gets her pregnant) to just walk into the abortion clinic and have an abortion. Both of these extreme positions are in violation of today's command to "love one another," and neither of these extreme positions are appropriate!

And isn't it true that so many things in life get divided by that imaginary line ... where we set up opposing camps ... and we're willing to fight to the end for our position. The problem is, to paraphrase 1 Corinthians 13, our ethics might be right ... but if in doing those ethics we forget to love each other ... we have totally failed!

So Chapter Nine ("Re-Formation") in McManus's book introduces us to an interesting thought. Pastor McManus read "Paradigms: The Business of Discovering the Future" by Joel Arthur Barker. McManus writes: "He explains that the crucial rule to both surviving and thriving in this new paradigm is the 'back to zero' rule, that when a paradigm shifts, everything goes back to zero." (P. 187)

Now, I haven't read Barker's material, and I'm not sure I fully understand the "back to zero rule," but I think it might be like that option on my computer that says something like "do you want to restore the factory installed default settings on your computer?"

You see, I believe there are factory installed default settings in me ... in you ... in everyone. And every now and then, I think we need to go back to our default setting. We need to clear out all the clutter and the garbage in our lives and go "back to zero."

Do you backup your computer? We do in our home. The other day my wife said she couldn't back up her laptop ... a message came on the screen saying "disc full." So, when I tried my desktop downstairs, I got the same message. And then when I tried my

laptop that I bring with me to the study here, I got the same message. So a member of my Rotary Club and our resident computer-fixer-upper, stopped in to disable the trash container. It must have taken twenty minutes to empty the trash from my desk top ... and now the backup is only 33% full ... and now the back up and all the computers are running better!

On page 187, you can read this in a highlighted, larger print section: "For us to go back to zero means we must reengage the Scriptures, while at the same time detach ourselves from all of our assumptions related to methodology."

And I would suggest this morning that if the whole Church simply hit the default indicated by today's two simple Biblical lessons more often, the whole Church (and I'm speaking now of the organism which is the Body of Christ and not the organization which is the corporation with all its denominational regional offices, boards of directors which may be bishops, church pastors/priests, or congregational presidents and council members) ... if we were to stop to realize again that you and I are not the "shareholders in this organization" but rather the "servants in this organism" ... then today's two lessons would be the default setting.

And when paradigms are shifting we need to "return to zero" ... we need to default to the factory installed setting ... and what is that setting?

### John 15:9-17

<sup>9</sup>"As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. <sup>10</sup>If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love. <sup>11</sup>I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. <sup>12</sup>My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. <sup>13</sup>Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. <sup>14</sup>You are my friends if you do what I command. <sup>15</sup>I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. <sup>16</sup>You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name.

<sup>17</sup>This is my command: Love each other.

Maybe that song released on April 15, 1965, on the Imperial label was a reminder of this default. Do you remember the song "**What the World Needs Now Is Love**" ... lyrics by [Hal David](#) and music composed by [Burt Bacharach](#). It was first recorded, and made popular by [Jackie DeShannon](#). It was released on April 15, 1965 on the Imperial label after a release on sister label Liberty records the previous month was canceled . The song reached number 7 in the US charts May of that year.

The song was originally offered to [Dionne Warwick](#), who turned it down at the time; though she later recorded it for her album *Here Where There Is Love*. It has been recorded or performed live by over a hundred artists, including [The Staple Singers](#), [Judy](#)

[Garland](#), [Wynonna Judd](#), [The Supremes](#), [McCoy Tyner](#), [Barry Manilow](#), [Ed Ames](#), [Steve Tyrell](#), [Luther Vandross](#), [Andrea Ross](#), and [Aimee Mann](#). It even made the country charts by a little known singer/songwriter, Ron Shaw, on the Pacific Challenger label in the late 1970s.

It was a top 5 song in [American Idol](#) season 2 in 2003.

Even if we don't know the words or remember the tune, maybe that is the song we need to sing this week! "What the world needs now is love, sweet love ... it's the only thing that there's just too little of." Think about that during the 5:30 news program today. Think about that as you read your newspaper today. Think about that as you go online today. Think about that as you go to work or to school tomorrow. Think about that as you pray today. Remember, 1930 years before Hal David wrote the lyrics, Jesus sang the song ...

" <sup>17</sup> This is my command: Love each other."
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