

Verse And Essays

Larry Cowan

Book 12



This book is the last part in a series of books that tell the stories of my family and it includes many genealogical records. The series concludes with a memoir of youth and some poetry and essays that help tell my story. Thank you for taking a little walk with me. Original photo taken at Duluth Park Point Peninsula

First printed 1996 © Larry R. Cowan 2011

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Verse

IT WAS A FINE CHRISTMAS TREE!

Do you remember that long ago December day
When we cut down the tree in the wood?
*You were three, then four, then seventeen,
And now, dear children, you are grown.*

We trudged through the woods and looked at one,
And then another to find the best we could.
*Your life is your own now and so busy
With all that's important to make it your own.*

The tree looked good wrapped in its lights,
With ornaments you made and ones from above.
*May your tree, too, be as big and as beautiful
And fill your hearts with memories of joy and love!*

At Christmas time 1996

REFLECTIONS ON THE SEENDIPITOUS BEHAVIOR OF A GRANDCHILD

He looked intently into my face and suddenly
Flexed straight his legs and with arms raised high:
Gooka!

As if an encounter with some strange revelation,
He smiled at me.
Gooka!

He turned summersault and summersault,
Then stood shoulders back and head raised high.
Gooka!
Then came crashing to my arms.

To Noah at Christmas time 1996

HANNAH

Hymn for Baptism

Jesus calls you by the water

In His promise of the Father.
Now His child called in His Spirit,
Claimed anew born of His merit.

Reserve this child for thy keeping,
In life or death, in joy or weeping;
Hold her close, heir of the kingdom
Satisfied in strong hope waiting.

Child of beauty, newborn image,
Called of God in His visage,
Wondrous design like no other;
Formed of father and of mother.

Alone this day, one and unique;
You've joined the throng of Jordan's water
To observe Christ's loving passion,
And receive His Spirit's fire.

In this Gift of Love divine,
Today a miracle sublime,
Jesus holds you to his breast,
Angels keep you, now to rest.

God grant this father caring dearly,
And grant this mother loving ever
Your passion for this child of wonder,
In your mercy for one another.

Alleluia

TRYGGARE KAN INGEN VARA

*Dedicated to granddaughter Hannah Marie Cowan upon her Baptism
Daughter of Jeffrey Lawrence and LeAnn Karin Cowan
A child of God born May 8th, One thousand nine hundred ninety-seven
And baptized September 21 in the same year*

KEEPING WARM ON A COLD AND SNOWY WINDSWEPT NIGHT

The two small rooms in the split log home are quiet and dim.
The wind howls and the oil lamp flickers in the draft.
The walls creak and the shutters bang.
The children are tucked into their quilts on the loft.
The night is long and you wait for spring on the
Sheyenne River Plain.

Dedicated 1996 to great-grandparents Bill and Margaret Cowan,
Married summer of 1866 at Clinton, Ontario
And homesteaded at Sheldon, Dakota Territory, spring of 1880.

I SAW A LITTLE BLUEBIRD

Sitting on a fence back away from the road,
I saw a little bluebird of a glorious hue
Sitting on a fence 'gainst the drape of gray - green hills,
God's simple little creature so wondrously blue

I never heard him sing, I never saw him fly
I just saw him perched there as we quickly drove by.
I wished I could hear him or see where he flew,
I only saw him sit there so wondrously blue.

We drove from Minnesota, through South Dakota and Wyoming,
Through Montana and Idaho and into Oregon, too.
But I saw not a creature more beautiful than he,
That little mountain bluebird so wondrously blue.

Oh, We drove far to quickly and almost missed that moment of time
As we traveled on by and far out of sight.
Oh, may the vision of that bluebird be etched in my mind,
And may I never forget that fleeting moment we met!

Summer of 1996

Commentary: As we travel along life's road, we can make differences in the people we meet and even those we fleetingly brush by. And others make a difference in us - - different viewpoints, different insights, different actions and hopes. And just think how a little bluebird, too - - One of God's little creatures - - can instill a sense of peace, of joy and beauty by simply being there - just like you! Thanks be to God. Lc

PASSAGES

As a pebble dropped in a nearby brook or faraway sea
Creates its little ripple in the water for a moment,
Like a wildflower blossoms on a nearby glade or faraway
Mountain, and blows in the wind for a while;
Each of us is a small bit of history unfolding . . .

We serve in some small way for a time for a few.
A cup of water, the binding of another's wounds,
A kind word, a story of hope:
This is our treasure, this is our joy.
This is surely the walk with Christ, our Lord.

1992

Based on Romans 12: 9 - 13

This is, I think, my favorite.

LEGACY

I leave no legacy, no remembrance of me.
Of a life in a time that was, no monument can tell.
Like a moment lost in a dream,
I am soon forgotten.
 The gold from this life I must leave behind.

What then? Is there any I can keep?
Is it all forgotten? Is it all for naught?
What token can I keep as a remembrance of me?
It is only the road that others will take
 Because I was there.

The monument I leave is the difference in others,
Whether for good or for ill.
So to have mattered - to have counted,
To have made a difference in someone's life
 Is the only gold that we take from this earth.

1989

GIRL OF MY DREAMS

A girl-child born
cousins
Tending to her own in her youth
Fell in love in the park at eighteen
Darling of the family
Joys and sorrows together
Raising family, weddings and children
Work and retirement
cousins
38th Street
Grief and sorrow and
So rest now; we'll party later

A story of mom 2008

TEARS FOR MY SAKE

*"Tears for my sake.
Tears for whose sake?
Tears for Jesus sake.
Tears for the lost."*

1996

From the essay, "Tears For My Sake"

JESUS' LITTLE CHILDREN

Buried somewhere 'neath the brown earth,
Someone cherished you, someone loved you long ago.
You've gone to Jesus to play and romp,
To giggle and laugh.

You look down on us and wonder,
It's such fun - You could laugh, too!
1996

Although these words are not exactly theologically correct, it's good to know that God cares for each and every one of us and that the children are in Jesus' loving care. Vis., Matthew 19: 13 - 14 (RSV): "Some people brought children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them and to pray for them, but the disciples scolded the people. Jesus said, 'Let the children come to me and do not stop them, because the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to such as these'."

NIGHT OF TRAVAIL

Part I

Crouched in the darkness of the hovel under the bridge,
Two little ones unwrap newsprint to expose the stale scraps
From the trash in the alley above;
Perhaps there'll be no tomorrow, perhaps there'll be no more
tomorrows.
Weary from the day's searching, they'll sleep and wake, sleep and wake,
For the approaching night will be damp and cold, damp and cold.

As in a dream Jesus came, real and true, a tiny child so frail and soft.
Keep him warm! Cover his feet! Wrap him in rags!
Cuddle him close and nurse him if you can.
Jesus, if you stay the night perhaps we'll make tomorrow!
Stay with me now, Oh please! Keep me warm and stay the hunger.
Little Jesus, perhaps we'll make tomorrow, perhaps we'll make
tomorrow.

Clouds drift unseen across the night sky and the cold hours slowly pass.
Be near me, Lord Jesus; I ask you to stay
Close by me forever and love me, I pray.
Bless all the dear children in your tender care
And take us to heaven to live with you there, to live with you there.

Part II

The sun sinks low in the sky and reflects brilliant reds and orange in the
distant clouds.
The road winds around the hills and they hurry along the trail.
The woman at full term bounces heavily upon the ass,
While her husband sets the brisk pace at her side.

It had been warm earlier in the day but a breeze was blowing now and
the air was cool.

"Mary, do you feel ok? How is your back? I'm sorry, we'll be there soon."

The village will be crowded with travelers and they are troubled that perhaps they'll find no room.

The angels will sing tonight.

December 10, 1997

Just as I was finishing this, the phone rang and it was a volunteer for Freedom Place Up and Out of Poverty, a non-profit group that places homeless families. 2630 Cedar Ave S., in Minneapolis. I had given them a donation back in March of 1993 Uncanny.

. . . AND SO WE SOJOURN TOGETHER

Begotten of a place I never have seen,
From long ago toils upon a road much forgotten,
You are my friend, my neighbor, and my lover.
Let us hold hands, hold tight, and don't let go,
For when it's time to go, it was good holding hands.

Ah, youth, reach thy sovereign hand.
Hold tight to the ring; hold it high!
Flex your sinews and shout your song,
Dance in the meadow and dance on the sea,
And embrace her glory with all thy might!

From the depths of sorrow and the abyss of grief,
Comes the dawn of knowing the breadth of great joy.
Joy! Oh Joy! Catch the ring! Hold my hand!
For what is joy but an opposite measure of grief,
For sorrow and joy meet in the Presence of God.

A collage of families across this broad this Earth,
Unique, diverse and remarkable;
From high desert sands and high mountain slopes,
To low windy coastlands and low fertile plains;
Let us hold hands, we're one in this place.

Until one approaches the face of death's battle,
Courage is a shallow thing.
At the deathbed of one loved, or when faced by one's own,
Courage is not to lay fault or say who is to blame,
Courage is to say I forgive, I have loved, hold my hand.

Brothers and sisters, mothers and fathers,
Let us bear one another's burdens; bless; celebrate and delight.
Let us hold hands as we sojourn together.
Let us hold hands, hold tight, and don't let go,
For when it's time to go, it was good holding hands.

Six verses on our walk through life
Winter of 1995

LOST GOLD

Part I

I leave no legacy, no remembrance of me.
Of a life in a time that was, no monument can tell.
Like a moment lost in a dream,
I am soon forgotten.

The gold from this life I must leave behind.

What then? Is there any I can keep?
Is it all forgotten? Is it all for naught?
What token can I keep as a remembrance of me?
It is only the road that others will take

Because I was there.

The monument I leave is the difference in others;
Whether for good or for ill,
So to have mattered - to have counted,
To have made a difference in someone's life

Is the only gold that we take from this earth.

Part II

Laid waste in death are the lives of children,
Of brothers and sisters, of fathers and mothers.
Their days you stole would have numbered

From the time of Christ.

Laid waste in grief upon the living children,
Of brothers and sisters: of fathers and mothers.
Their days to remember

Will span 10,000 years.

Is this the legacy you left behind,
Is this the Gold you took from the earth?
To matter - to have counted, to have made a difference
Is the only Gold we take from this earth....

To have given a cup of water,
To have bound another's wounds,
To have spoken a kind word or a story of hope;

This is the treasure of Gold we take from this earth....

Before the beginning
And far off into the eons of distant time;
The echo resounds:
"My loving kindness endures from everlasting to everlasting."

The token of Gold has been bought
For fathers and mothers and brothers and sisters.

1992 Free verse Adapted April 1995 based on Oklahoma City bombing.

(I don't consider this verse terribly good but here it is.)

UNCLE PREACHER

For being there to baptize Shirley and Dad,
For being there to baptize Junior and Mary Ann
And little Wayne, and for baptizing my brother Billy and me*.

But mostly I want to thank you for being there for mom and dad during their
hard times and good,
For your support, counsel and prayers during the 1930's and early 1940's.

Your presence did not go unnoticed and I suspect that, unbeknownst to you and
to the times, many lives were changed, even to the grandchildren and great-
grandchildren of those to whom you ministered.

Thanks.

Dedicated to the Rev. Ole Akre, born May 1st, 1870 - died February 23rd, 1946. Pastor,
The Norwegian Lutheran Church
By grand-nephew *Larry Cowan*, 1997

* Dear Betty, not named here, was baptized in the hospital shortly before she died by Rev.
Bittner, a hospital chaplain, and witnessed by her nurse.

The Stories We Share

L. Cowan 2009

Being community is about the stories we share.
It's about your story. It's about my story.

We are community to the degree that we listen to one another.
Whether it's the people with whom we worship on Sunday;
Or the neighbors along our streets we see each day;
Or the stranger in the city who happens by;
Or the lonely and disenfranchised who need our care.

It's about the stories of Jesus who attends to us all.

To have mattered. . . .

Larry Cowan 1992

"I leave no legacy, no remembrance of me.
Of a life in a time that was, no monument can tell.
I am soon forgotten.
What gold there may be in this life, I must leave behind.
What is it then? Is it all forgotten?"

What can I leave as a remembrance of me?
It is only the road that others will take
because I was there.

The monument I leave is the difference in others;
Whether for good or for ill....
So to have mattered - to have counted,
To have made a difference is the only gold

That we take from this earth...

We hear so much these days of the term "to make a difference." A few years back, a survey was taken of a group of old folks and they were asked to rank what they feared most in life. What they said was that:

1. The first and most fearful is to know that your life has made no difference to anyone.
2. The second is that nobody cares and that you may be alone.
3. And the third and least fearful is that you will die and it will be over."

I am then brought back to the Boy Scout Law of my youth which states, "A Scout is trustworthy, loyal, helpful, friendly, courteous, kind, obedient, cheerful, thrifty, brave, clean and reverent." Whether boy or girl, woman or man, if one follows these rules throughout life, certainly in old age there will tears of joy to know that there has been a difference because of you

Two Worldviews

I've worked hard and I like my stuff.
I want my stuff secure and I'll fight for it.
I want more stuff.
Nobody should have too much.
Everyone should have enough, and
Nobody should go without.

Larry Cowan 2005

Some of My Favorites

LOOK WELL TO THIS DAY

Memorized from the Minneapolis Sunday Tribune
About 1956 when I was sixteen - Source unknown

Look well to this day;
For in it lie the verities of existence,
The glory of action,
The bliss of growth,
And the beauty of memories....

For all our yesterdays
Are but a dream
And all our tomorrows
Are but a vision.

But today well lived
Will make all our yesterdays
A dream of happiness
And all our tomorrows
A vision of hope.
Look well, therefore, to this day.

Some of My Favorites

TOGETHER

They were young and glad together
In the dawn of life's first May,
When in bright and sunny weather
Sang the birds from every spray.
Clear the heaven shone out above them,
Blue and radiant were the skies,
All things living seemed to love them,
And the spring gleamed in her eyes.

Through life's summer still together,
Hand in hand and heart to heart,
They have borne the sultry weather
And have watched the days depart.
Still she is to him the maiden
Who stepped daintily of old
Through the grass, her apron laden
With bright buttercups of gold.

Still together, still together,
They will face autumn hours,
In the grim November weather
Love will strew their path with flowers.
For their love has ever brightened
Since the first long loving day,
And their happiness has heightened,
Though their hair is growing gray!

George Barlow
Reprinted from the collection, Because I Love You.
Edited by Anna E. Mack.
Lee and Shepard, Publishers. Boston 1894

FROM Enoch Arden

Woman, disturb me not now at the last,
But let me hold my purpose till I die,
Sit down again; mark me and understand,
While I have power to speak. I charge you now
When you shall see her tell her that I died
Blessing her, praying for her, loving her
Save for the bar between us, loving her
As when she laid her head beside my own.

Alfred Tennyson

LIFE'S GIFTS

When I grow gray and men shall say to me,
"What was the worth of living, truly told?"

Lo! thou hast lived thy life out; thou art old;
Thou hast gathered fruit from many a green-leafed tree,
And kissed love's lips by many a summer sea,
And twined soft hands in locks of shining gold,
But all thy days are dead days now, behold!
Life passes onward, - what is life to thee?"

Then I will answer, - as thy gracious eyes,
Love, gleam upon me from dim far off skies, -
"Life had its endless deathless charm, - and still
That charm weaves rapture round me at my will,
Life has its glory, - for I have seen *thee*;
And roses, and June sunsets, - and the sea."

George Barlow
Reprinted from the collection Because I Love You
Edited by Anna E. Mack
Lee and Shepard, Publishers. Boston 1894

MY FATHER'S GIFT

[The world] also should know
That he passed along to his daughter a deep,
Resilient faith that God's love never wavers
And that, no matter how hard life seems
Or how cruel the world is,
That love is constant,
Unconditional and eternal.
"God always listens,
And He's always watching,"
My father told me often throughout the years,
Letting me know that this is one
Of the cornerstones of his life.
The private man, beneath the public one,
Has always felt a hand on his shoulders,
Keeping him safe, and he has never doubted
That they belonged to God.

From her book, "My Father's Gift," by Patty Davis, 1995.
The daughter of former President Ronald Regan reveals in this excerpt from her new book the deep nature of her father, which - - despite years of dissension between them - - she has grown to cherish.

MOTHER TERESA OF CALCUTTA

"As I reflect on the life of Mother Teresa, I am drawn to the simplicity of her faith and her work. She reached out with compassion and unconditional love to others in need. She saw Christ in all people, be they rich or poor, and was concerned about every one of them.

The basis of all this was her tremendous love of God and her way of serving God by passing on His love to those in need.

If we are truly to honor her life, we must accept the legacy of unconditional love that she so humbly gave to those in need. We must give our love and compassion to all we meet on our journey and save the judgment of others to God. If we are to find true peace and joy, it will come in giving of ourselves in service to others.”

Mary Jo Copeland, Caring and Sharing Hands Mission, Minneapolis, MN
Reprinted from the St Paul Pioneer Press Sept. 12, 1997

My Creed

From a plaque in a medical clinic patient waiting room

- In some way, however small and secret, each of us is a little mad....
- Everyone is lonely at bottom and cries to be understood; but we can never entirely understand someone else, and each of us remains part stranger even to those who love us....
- It is the weak who are cruel; gentleness is to be expected only from the strong. Those who do not know fear are not really brave, for courage is the capacity to confront what can be imagined....
- You can understand people better if you look at them - no matter how old or impressive they may be - as if they are children. For most of us never mature; we simply grow taller....
- Happiness comes only when we push our brains and heart to the farthest reach to which we are capable....
- We leave no legacy other than to have made a difference - whether for good or ill. It is the difference we have made in the lives of others and in our children who carry on - this is our treasure. This may be the only gold we take from this earth....
- The purpose of life is to matter - to count, to stand for something, to have it make a difference that we have lived at all.

ABOUT GROWING UP

Advice From A Single Mom

Let me tell you my parenting philosophy:

Give your kids respect and they'll respect you in return.

Share your life with your kids and they'll share theirs with you.

Listen to your kids and they'll listen to you.

Provide clear guidelines and values and they'll live up to your expectations.

On the other hand, If you:

Smoke, drink and do drugs, your kids will do the same.

If you get angry and scream, they will imitate you.

If you kick the dog, they will kick the cat.

If you hit your kids, they'll hit the smaller children.

If you disobey the law, your kids will do the same - -

And possibly land in jail.

Dear Abby, Los Angeles, CA

By Aleksandra Bihlmaier, Fort Collins, CO

St Paul Pioneer Press, Oct. 18, 1997

Some of Jeff's Favorites

MEMORANDUM

Don't spoil me.
I know quite well that I shouldn't have all I ask for - I'm only testing you.
Don't tease me, or make me feel smaller than I am.
It only makes me behave stupidly "big."
Don't correct me in front of people if you can help it.
I'll take much more notice if you talk quietly with me in private.
Don't ridicule me or make me feel that my mistakes are sins.
It upsets my sense of values.
Don't be too upset when I say, "I hate you."
It isn't you I hate, but your power to thwart me.
Don't be taking too much notice of my small ailments.
Sometimes they get me the attention I need.
Don't nag.
If you do, I shall have to protect myself by appearing deaf.
Don't bribe me or make rash promises.
Remember that I feel badly let down when promises are broken.
Don't be inconsistent.
That completely confuses me and makes me lose faith in you.
Don't tell me my fears are silly. They are terribly real to me
And you can do so much to reassure me if you try to understand.
Don't think it is beneath your dignity to apologize to me.
An honest apology makes me feel warm towards you.
Don't forget how quickly I am growing.
It must be very difficult for you to keep pace with me but please try.
Don't forget I love experimenting.
I couldn't get along without it so please put up with it.
Don't offer me a choice when there is not a choice.
It's confusing.
Don't compare me with anyone else.
Like me for what I am.
Don't ask me, "What is it?" when I bring home something I created in school.
I can give you a better idea if you say, "Tell me about it."
Don't tell me I'm bad when it's my behavior you disapprove of.
Try to arrange situations so that my behavior is socially acceptable.
Don't forget that I can't thrive without a lot of understanding and love.
But I don't need to tell you, do I?

Source unknown

THANK GOD FOR TODAY

This is the beginning of a new day.
I can waste it or use it for good.
What I do today is important because
I am exchanging a day of my life for it.
When tomorrow comes, this day will be
gone forever -

Leaving in its place something I have
traded for it.
I want it to be for gain, not loss; good, not ill;
Success, not failure; in order that I
Shall not regret the price I paid for today.
Anonymous One of Jeff's mottoes

THE SERVANTS SONG

Will you let me be your servant?
Let me be as Christ to you,
Pray that I may have the Grace to
Let me be your servant, too.

We are pilgrims on a journey,
We are travelers on the road,
We are here to help each other
Walk the mile and bear the load

I will hold the Christ-Light for you
In the night time of your fear;
I will hold my hand out to you,
Speak the peace you long to hear.

I will weep when you are weeping,
When you laugh I'll laugh with you.
I will share your joy and sorrow
Till we've seen this journey through.

When we sing to God in heaven
We shall find such harmony.
Born of all we've known together
Of Christ's love and agony.
by Richard Gillard © Scripture in

Commentary: Coalitions such as Promise Keepers, The Million Man March, NOW, Right To Life, The 700 Club, and many others stake their roles in our society and in the social structures in which we interact and I make no judgment of their sincerity or service. I comment, however, that we must each recognize our pride in the face of that service. In scripture, the Gospel of Mark 10: 35 - 45 suggests that we ask ourselves, "*What is this all about?*" In this text, for example, two of His disciples suggest to Jesus that they may sit one at His right hand and the other at His left in His kingdom.

Likewise each of us seeks to define and hold positions of honor among those persons with whom we interact and perhaps on behalf of God's kingdom as well. Well, Jesus told the disciples that's not how it works. Here's the deal, He told them, "*whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first must be slave of all.*" However we would assert our roles toward our spouse, the opposite gender in general,

toward any who are unlike ourselves, such a role must be blended with the humility of a servant. Can we speak words of care and love directly to our spouse? - Or with the humility of a servant to a homeless person? Or with compassion to one whose skin is the darkest shade of black? - Or white? - Or disfigured? - Or extremely fat? - Or gay? Or perhaps even to persons who don't make as much money? Or who don't know even how to keep a regular job? Or perhaps to those who have hurt you or perhaps more difficult, to those whom you've hurt? These are uncomfortable words. Who can you say these words to? Jesus doesn't ask for our service or our commitment or that we be good stewards; no, He calls for our undivided love and devotion offered in pure humility. The sacrifice he calls for is our very life. The message of the text of this song is very similar to *"Passages,"* Poem #5 above.

Laudate Dominum

Psalm 117

From *Vesperae solennes de confessore* K. 339

W. A. Mozart (1756-1791)

Laudate Dominum omnes gentes, laudate eum omnes populi.
Quoniam confirmate est supernos misericordia ejus,
et veritas, veritas Domini manet, manet in aeternum.

Sing praise to God all ye nations, praise Him all ye people, all ye souls on earth.
For He hath shown His kindness toward us, His love and merciful kindness,
and the truth of God lasteth forever, lasteth, lasteth for all eternity.

Gloria patri et filio et spiritui sancto,
secut erat in principio et nunc et semperet in saecula saeculorum.
Amen, amen, amen, amen.

Praise to the Father and to the Son also, and the Holy Spirit,
as it was then and will ever be, both now and always through the centuries everlasting.
Amen, amen, amen, amen.

Some Things That I Think Of

1. If everything consists of atoms made up of tiny particles that occupy virtually no space within the atoms, then why is it that when we observe the world around us that everything isn't invisible or at least hazy shadows that we can see right through? I suppose that if everything were invisible that there would be no point to seeing and that we wouldn't have eyes anyway. The earthworm has no eyes and moves about in its tiny solitary tactile world. From the worm's perspective, is their world as expansive and exciting as the worlds we observe? The bat flies around in the dark and uses its ultrasonic radar instead of eyes to flit about and never runs into anything. What does his world look like?

If there were nothing to observe the universe, would the universe still be there? What if there was nothing to observe the twinkling stars at night or to smell the new grass of spring or to hear the roll of thunder across the night sky? Well, my first thought would be that those things probably wouldn't matter anyway if there was nothing to observe them. So, does the observance of a thing mean that it exists or even creates its existence or can a thing exist independent of its observation?

If the universe is not observed, then what would the universe be? What I think is that if there was nothing to observe, question or study the universe then it would be an enormous blob of nothing - an empty nothingness. On the other hand, the universe is really beyond our capacity to categorize. My observation on this is that reality is really confounding and it is beyond our capacity to know.

1. If the universe is a reality because of our perception of it, then are not other things we perceive of as much a reality? Is not God, in our various perceptions, also real because of our perceptions of that otherness out there that has a hand in our existence? I don't see this as cause and effect but as some sort of a proof.

2. The Buttercup flower blows in the meadow and bees come along and spread its pollen. The Buttercup grows seeds and a whole meadow of buttercups erupt. Why? Really, *WHY*? Does the Buttercup know that it needs to produce seeds so that other Buttercups will grow? This sounds crazy - Is the Buttercup aware of the other Buttercups in the meadow? Does it know they are there and do they communicate in some way? Seems to me the Buttercup must be able to observe its "universe" and have some sense of its "community" - Otherwise, why does it even exist? And what about the Maple Tree? Or weeds in the yard?

3. Let's talk about time. What happened yesterday isn't any more. What happened just now before I blinked doesn't exist - Reality is what exists in that infinitesimal moment in time that is called now. So if another me is way out in space and is able to observe me, then I would see me doing what I did before apparently as a present time existence. That would not be true, however, because I would already be doing other things! Is there a way that I could instantaneously interact with myself from that distant place to alter what already has been? I think that with present technology that would unlikely be able to be done but if it is proposed theoretically then it's plausible. What then does this say of what we call time or the extension of one moment to another? If it's theoretically possible to interact with the past then what can we say of the existence of the present? Is the present a fuzzy blend of what has been and what will be? Is it possible that from a different vantage to then observe the future? Also, there are some persons who seem to have an insight or vision of what will be (great earth events or

highly charged personal experience) of which there are many testimonies. Some years back, for example, I experienced a moment of profound grief for what seemed to be no reason. I innately knew that it was about someone in our family but not in our immediate family who was going to suffer great harm. It turned out shortly to be true. Is there in the mind (perhaps of all creatures) the ability to know the past (even the distant past) and to know the future? This discussion presumes that the observation of what exists creates what exists - Is that possible? Hmmmm.

4. I wrote an essay a while back that I titled "God is a Spider?" In it I pursued a concept that the essence we call God has universal attributes far beyond what we humans can comprehend or conceive.

5. Oh, Hell. Woun'cha know, I am millions of years old. The helical chain of deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) that is the blueprint of who I am has been alive, crafted and molded apparently over some millions of years and is still going on. So in my body and in the make up of me lie not only the vestiges of that ancient past but also the present culmination of those experiences of who I am and how I act. It seems to me, then, that the knowledge of all that lies deep within me as well. If that is so, then is it possible for me to really access the people of my past who are part of me? It's said that we use only minuscule part of our brain capacity so is there other stuff lying down there deep within that that we could get a hold of to see our distant past? Or is there more to it than that?

6. Human geneticists have recently determined that our ancestral human parents had their beginnings in a place we now call northern Africa and that some 40,000 years ago we migrated from a place we call Uzbekistan in central Asia to become the various peoples of the Earth each with their distinct characteristics and traits. Now Jesus was a Jew among them and lived some 2,000 years ago - That's only one twentieth of the time 40,000 years ago. From that perspective, 40,000 years is not that long ago. Also, if we look at the period of time between when Jesus walked the dusty roads of Jerusalem and today when we fly from one place to another in a few hours; that is just a short 50 generations ago.

7. Again, here's a bit of rambling. My point of this little essay is that as knowledge of the universe expands, it is a common universe for all of us and that it extends beyond our tactile observation of it.

As I sit out on my back deck and look out at the night sky it seems that out there extends a long distance from where I sit. Cosmologists (or is it cosmetologists, huh? - It doesn't matter.) have put up monster arrays of ultra-sub base noise receiver dishes that seem to be picking up the billions of years old vestiges of the noise of the beginning of this place. Science has come to know a lot about this place - how it was formed; what it's made of and where it's going. They even have a fair idea of how long we have been here. This is not to say that the stuff is easy to understand but that it relates a common experience for us all - We're all in this place together and it's all part of our common existence. I cannot say strongly enough that there is no other experience. So then, if we are thus inexplicably connected in this common bond, I wonder if we are each connected to one another more deeply in ways that we cannot now understand. Hmmmm. Generally, I think we would all agree that that is true - but we don't know what it is. Is the basis of our reality found way out there in that sub-sonic x-ray boom or is it the in the ever present now moment of our communal observation.

Are we all really spiritual beings (yes, even the buttercup and the bee) and our observation of one another and of what is really the experience of the presence of God? I am heartily

convinced that the later is true.

8. This is something that I don't wish to ponder just now but perhaps at a later time. It's about dying. It's about remembering things of the past and the transition from the anticipation of things that I want to do and accomplish and about how I enjoy relationships and friends and particularly Nancy and our family. It's about getting up each day with things to do and people to see that give my life meaning. On the other hand it seems that there is a time of transition where I begin to no longer consider the temporal things of such importance and finally to long for the quietness and peace of leaving it behind in death. It's a little bit scary but a time for further contemplation will come, I'm sure.

9. It makes me sad when I hear those who oppose creating space to discuss end-of-life care. In my work years ago at the bedside of the many patients who ultimately died, I can only think of it as a holy time and of the loving, competent care they received at the hands of the medical staff. I think of some of the disastrous assaults on the humanity of some where the staff had no directive but to proceed with useless life support. Some cultures consider death as a natural part of life but many in the U.S. believe we must stave off death from our presence as an unwelcome visitor.

My experience began in 1954 when I was fourteen and attended the funeral of mom's uncle Carl Christensen at Mora. I remember sitting in the back of the church thinking, "This is good." A good man lives his life to old age and his friends come in from the fields and their farms to honor his life. Then he goes to be with the Lord Jesus. Sounds good to me.

While I was in college working evening in the operating rooms at the U of M Hospital. Part of my job was to bring downstairs, often daily, the many who died on the table during open heart surgery at the hands of Dr. C. Walton Lillihei, pioneer heart surgeon and teacher. I would see him afterward in the locker room, head in his hands, resting and contemplating how it could have gone differently. Later as a respiratory therapist in an acute care setting working together in the care of people on life support we saw many who made it and many who didn't.

Out of those experiences I have concluded that life is precious and the relationships are holy. I feel that those like the former Alaska governor and others who has spoken strongly apparently have no understanding of this.

The discussion about end of life is important. It's interesting to me that Lutherans are open to the discussion.

10. Within twenty minutes time you and I could be at the mega-market checkout counter purchasing our choice of any variety of foods locally grown or flown in fresh from far corners of the world. Most folks in the world, however, have no choice of what they eat. In fact millions each day have no choice of whether they eat at all. For many the daily task is to find and prepare the family's single meal of rice or meal. The dichotomy of our world of abundance and the meager choices available to people in other places is plain to see and we all know it.

Two billion people live on less than two dollars a day and each day 30,000 children die for lack of adequate food. We go to church each Sunday and worship God not thinking that so many live on the edge. Is there a God at all? What is our calling?

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observation of it.

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So then, if we are thus inexplicably connected in this common bond, I wonder if we are each connected to one another more deeply in ways that we cannot now understand. Hmmmm. Generally, I think we would all agree that that is true - but we don't know what it is. Is the basis of our reality found way out there in that sub-sonic x-ray boom or is it the in the ever present now moment of our communal observation. Are we all really spiritual beings (yes, even the buttercup and the bee) and our observation of one another and of what is really the experience of the presence of God? I am heartily convinced that the later is true.

Reflections of many over the centuries trying to explain God and our experience of God have lead down many paths. Everyone however, has a universal common experience of existence. The preacher in the Biblical book of Ecclesiastes points out to us that whatever has been thought of has been thought of before and that whatever has been said has been said before. We're all thinking the same thing and we have a common experience of the presence of God. God is within us and we are not only capable of experiencing God but, indeed, are creatures of God's creation and God participates in (or perhaps is) the life in us. How cognizant we are of God's presence in us the question. In seeking to know God, it's a common experience to find that God has been there all the time. The bible says that we see God like through a hazy dark glass and I'm glad that's so because it helps us to seek God.

This little discourse is not meant to try to prove that God exists but to suggest that life has a common bond of existence, an inexplicable force of being part of one another that transcends our physical beings. And I suggest that our observation of our realms is more than physical but has a mystical, spiritual foundation. It's not about us but that force within that we call by many names.

The obvious next question, of course, is "Does that force within us have an otherness about it or is this thing really the existence of what we are?" To suggest that this force is just part of what we are, it seems to me, doesn't address the communal nature of what we are; it doesn't address how we got here and it doesn't address the really big question of Why. To suggest there is a force out there and within holding everything together seems more plausible.

Well, that's about it.

Larry Cowan, Sept., 2009

Essays

On Being a Bridge . . .

Christmas time of 1989 Updated

"When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy; and going into the house they saw the child with Mary, his mother, and they fell down and worshipped him. Then opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, Gold and frankincense and myrrh. . . .

" Matthew 2: 10 - 11

This is an amazing story. Why were they so excited about a baby born to travelers in an animal stall!? I would like to share with you a thought that I was reminded of this season: This thought is that, *Joy comes to us not from happy times and knowing that things in life are in order but in knowing that we are Christ's own.*

They had found a great joy, the child who would be the redeemer!

Jesus breaks open for us a paradox. For happy times we are so thankful and we cherish them, of course. But you may know by your own experience that joy is not a flippant thing. It comes to us in a paradox out of pain and suffering - by our own experiences of difficult times and perhaps by our anguish and hope of Christ's suffering as well. Joy is the knowledge that we will endure - as individuals - as family - as a community - and as history unfolds. Joy is a deep sense that nothing can separate us from the love of God who sustains us. Did these Magi of the East see and understand the suffering that the baby was to take onto himself? Did they foresee how He would be thrust into the breach of history? Did they know how he would be loved? Did they have a sense of the mystery unfolding in this birth of the Messiah?

Just before Christmas and about a week before his wedding in 1994, I asked my son, Jeff, the question, "Why, if God loves us so, is there so much pain and suffering?" His immediate response and a wise answer, indeed, was, "So that we may know Him better."

It is no new thing that around us and perhaps very close is much pain and suffering - - often shrouded in the cloak of hopelessness - - for those who have no home and who end each day without food; for those disenfranchised from hope; for those who suffer illness alone; for those who have been raped and abuse in their youth and cannot speak out; for children in the streets who cannot go back; for the elderly looking to death without any who care, for young mothers with none for sharing and support; for those who carry the guilt of ending a child's life in abortion; for those whose life is centered on self-pity, addiction and abuse; even those who suffer the pain of lost love, broken families, and of separation by death. Joy...? Joy! How can that be! How absurd! Oh, how can I cry out to rend your heart and mine!

With sad and angry words, the hurt cry out in a crescendo of: "What is love?" "How can there be God?" "I have no life!" Shortly after Jesus' birth, Joseph and Mary fled with Jesus into Egypt while Herod had the small children around Bethlehem all slaughtered. Jesus, indeed, has come to us in the midst of our suffering and He tells us then and today, "True religion is this; to visit the widows and orphans."

Yes, we are called in joy to stand perhaps on the edge. It is you and I by our actions that bring the suffering into the cradling arms of Jesus. That is our great joy; that is Christ's mission. It is in you and in I that the Savior is found. As we see lives pass by - - even those in the generations of our families - - some who over the years have been fortunate; some who just get along; and others who have seen extreme misfortunes; we are called in joy first to

kneel and secondly to stand perhaps on the edge. As Jesus asked of Peter on that fateful day not so many generations ago, he asks of you and of me, "Peter, do you love me?"

These ramblings are based on my notes of a message by Dean J. W. Matthews during Holy Week over 30 years ago in 1964 at Westminster Presbyterian Church in Minneapolis and originally rewritten by me at Christmas - time of 1989. Dean Matthews' homily was on "The Principle of the Cruciform" from the 10th chapter of St. John where Jesus states, *"Therefore doth the Father love me, because I lay down my life. No one takes it from me. I lay it down of my own free will."* Dean Matthews then asks, "Why, then are you and I here?" He concludes; "The absurd body of Christ, the church, expends their death on behalf of mankind. The church exists only when it offers its death on behalf of the world and lives on the brink, the edge of their life. They throw their death into the breach of history. The communion of Christ's Church only exists in history as it conforms to the "Principle of the Cruciform;" and takes the world's suffering unto itself. Peace

Tears For My Sake

June of 1996

It was the middle of June of 1996 and Evangelist Billy Graham brought to our cities what would be one of his last evangelistic crusades; and over a period of five days over 300,000 people gathered together to hear the call to salvation. Prior to the crusade, the organizing committee made a plea for prayer for the Grahams, the co-workers, and the counselors; that the crusade would have a positive and lasting impact on the Twin Cities. In particular was the plea that our prayers must be "of tears for those who don't have a personal relationship with Christ.

"Where are our tears?" we were asked, "We need to have a burden in our hearts for the lost, the unborn and the unsaved." We were asked as we go to our knees each day to lift these burdens up to God.

In the 126th chapter of the book of Psalms, David writes about those tears for the lost. In this Psalm, David first rejoices over those returned to Zion from captivity and then remembers the sorrow and tears shed for their return. Do we have such a burden for those not born anew in Christ as was for those not returned to Zion? Listen to the text.

Psalm 126 -- A Joyful Return To Zion

*When the Lord brought back the
Captive to Zion,
We were like those who dream.
Then our mouth was filled with laughter,
And our tongue with singing.
Then they said among the nations,
"The Lord has done a great thing for them."
The Lord has done great things for us,
And we are glad.*

*Bring back our captivity, O Lord,
As the streams from the South.
Those who sow in tears
Shall reap in joy.
He who continually goes forth weeping,*

*Bearing seed for sowing,
Shall doubtless come again with rejoicing,
Bringing his sheaves with him.*

A thousand years later, another cried. Saint Monnica, born 331 a. d. and mother of Augustine of Hippo, is remembered in the church on May 4th each year as a model for her relentless prayers and the unceasing tears that she shed. Her son, Saint Augustine bravely tells her story.

Augustine admits that he held to pagan religious beliefs and his mother Monnica almost despaired of seeing him shed these spiritual deceptions for the truth of Christ. The church said he was lost and unteachable. But Monnica's prayers and her tears never stopped. Today, whenever she is spoken of, her weeping is remembered. Saint Augustine is called "the son of these tears."

So Monnica is an example to us of the passion, fervor, and tenacity of her prayers for her children. Augustine would later write, "O Good Omnipotent Lord, who cares for every one of us, as if you care for him only; and so for all, as if they were but one!" The truth and passion of God's love was surely communicated to Augustine through the unwavering love of a mother who would not let him go.

Perhaps, too, she should be called the patron saint of all who have unbelieving family members. Her husband and her son, those closest to her, did not see what she saw. But she held them close to her in prayers and witnessed the power of God opening their eyes. Monnica symbolizes for all of us the power of prayer.

The Apostle Paul in Romans 12.14-21 tells us of the intensity of our tears together as Christians. He instructs us "to be of the same mind toward one another," rejoicing when others rejoice and weeping when they weep and to overcome evil with good. I believe Paul points out here that we are to be of one fellowship, sharing even in our emotions, and to be an example to those on the outside of this fellowship. Verse 20 reads,

*"If your enemy is hungry, feed him:
If he is thirsty, give him drink;
For in doing so you will heap coals of
Fire on his head."*

In chapter 10 of St. Matthew, Jesus also speaks of being an example to those on the outside - - to the Samaritans and to the Gentiles (those unclean). Here Jesus sends out the twelve disciples to the "lost sheep of Israel," to preach, saying, "*The kingdom of heaven is at hand,*" to heal the sick, to raise the dead and to cast out demons. He tells his disciples that they will be persecuted, and so be a testimony to the synagogues, to governors and to kings, and to the gentiles. And I add here - - again "Heaping coals on their heads!" So in both of these texts, Romans 12 and Matthew 10, the theme is to overcome evil with good and to be a testimony to those on the outside looking in.

Now let us move to that incredible text of Romans chapter 5 - - Here let us watch Jesus as he steps over the line in what he would do for all of us on the outside. The question raised here is, "How far would I go to save someone else?" Well, Paul says that if the man in need of saving were righteous, it's possible some good person might stand forward to die for him. But, in fact, Jesus died for us, "while we were yet sinners." We were not his close friend from youth, nor his buddy in battle and certainly not righteous. We are, indeed, strangers to him and, yes, the enemies spoken of in Romans 12 and the Pharisees, governors, kings, and Gentiles of Matthew 10 getting the ultimate coals of fire heaped on our heads.

Did Jesus return evil with good? Yes, indeed, he died for us while we were yet sinners! What can we do? What can I do? Surely, I should weep for joy and be eternally grateful. Yes I should. I suppose that's what I should do.

But do you know what? If Jesus died for enemies and sinners, he also died for that lady down the street that I don't even like and also for her stupid children! Now this is starting to get complicated. And I guess I could name a few more people that I could care less about and I certainly don't want to get involved with. Apparently they, too, are as worthy (or perhaps as unworthy) of salvation as I am.

Should I pray for them quietly? Should I have tears of sadness pleading to God that salvation come to them? Should I reach out? I can't quite get into it.

I believe it's very important to understand that while Jesus died for us as *poor miserable sinners*, as good Lutherans like to envision ourselves in God's presence, He didn't save us out of pity, but as a gift to ennoble us. (See II Timothy "... of power, etc".)

Jesus died for my neighbor lady and her children. Jesus told his disciples, ***"Therefore doth the Father love me, because I lay down my life. No one takes it from me. I lay it down of my own free will."*** He had no objections about for who He died - - I do. And in dying, He died for me, too.

The Apostle Paul is also a man of paradox: Let us look at how his rejoicing in his Savior is mixed with weeping for the lost. In Philippians 3: 17 - 21, he writes:

"Brethren, join me in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern. For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame - - who set their mind on earthly things. For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may conform to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself."

And so it is in the sure knowledge of our eternal reward we must assuredly weep for the lost. And so we pray with tears for the lost and we return their evil with a sure kindness, with goodness and with charity; thus heaping coals on their heads that they may be saved; and so also we know that those same people will persecute us, hate us, and even murder us on the streets because of Jesus. It happens all the time and some will be saved.

Saturday evening was Youth Night at the Billy Graham Crusade and my wife, Nancy, was at work at St. Johns Hospital in the recovery room where patients are cared for in the period after surgery. On this evening, Nancy was caring for an eighteen-year-old girl who was waking up after having severe cuts sutured and closed. She was cut when she fell into a plate glass window. Her parents weren't at her side but, instead, Nancy says, she had three loud, scummy young hoodlums with her who couldn't talk without injecting the F... word. From their behavior, it was apparent that more than one of them has had their way with her. When the girl awoke, she made sure all knew that she was a manager at a convenience store. It was like she was saying, "I'm really not so bad; I'm somebody important!" She had a number of tattoos on her body.

Another young girl came into the hospital that evening. After her surgery, though, Nancy would not be seeing her in the recovery room - - Her departure would be different. While at a party she suffered a cerebral hemorrhage and upon arrival at the hospital was placed on life support. After medical evaluation, her family made what was, I'm sure, the most difficult decision of their lives. This young wife and mother, and growing daughter was to be an organ donor before morning. It's called a "harvest." This girl was nineteen and the mother of a small baby.

The anesthetist expressed how sad she was to do this case, but Nancy said she should also look at the other side. She said there are people right now packing their bags and securing emergency airline transportation. And I'm sure they were looking to God with tears of hope, of joy and of excitement that they, their spouse or their child will be given a chance to live.

Wow. How tenuous is our time here on earth - - and when we're afraid, we'd like people to know that we're really not so bad and, yes, we are important. We'd like to think that when we die we've made some difference.

While Nancy was at work and the Youth Crusade Event was going on, I was at home in prayer and, yes, with tears streaming down my face imploring God to do a mighty work in the hearts of the youth at the crusade and for the youth in our cities that they may be opened to learn of Jesus and to follow him. I, myself, have known how important this event can be and that this experience can be life changing for a lifetime.

I prayed a prayer of tears that night. Certainly not because of my prayers alone but, I believe, because of the many thousands of prayers lifted up, eighty-two thousand young people heard the word of God and most of them dedicated their lives to Christ that night! The Holy Spirit of God and His angels were certainly at work filling their hearts in that place! This was the largest gathering of people for any single event in Minnesota history and it was for the sake of Jesus who, in tears, cries out for you and for me.

What about that young girl with those cuts? I pray God that by Your Spirit, by events and by courageous witnesses to You, she and her friends will find You. What about the girl who became a "harvest?" I pray to You, Lord that people and events have already surrounded her with your love and that she is in the eternal harvest with you this day. What about my neighbor? I pray God to forgive me again, and again, and again for being so wretched. May God Himself reach out in his Spirit, and through angels of care, and through ones close to her to be merciful.

Who should we pray for?

Prayers for the lost:

1. For me and you,
2. For our families and friends,
3. For woman and men in their needs,
4. For our Nation and its leaders
5. For the homeless, hungry and disenfranchised.
6. For the sick and the dying,
7. For children and the unborn,
8. For drug addicts, criminals and thieves,
9. For murderers, rapists, and power abusers.
10. For those alone and mentally sick,
11. For persons I don't like and for enemies,
- X". For the thousands of thousands in the world.

It's really important.

*"Tears for my sake.
Tears for whose sake?
Tears for Jesus sake.
Tears for the lost."*

The Faith of my Childhood

By Lawrence Richard Cowan

On April 12, 1954, my great uncle Carl Johan Christensen died at Mora, Minnesota at the age of 75. He was born on May 2, 1878 at Fauchild Ostre, Toten, Norway and married Anne H. Sandsmark (1885 - 1958) at Blue Earth County in southern Minnesota. They had several children and farmed a place just out of Mora near Knife Lake. Carl was my Grandmother's brother and I remember the many times being out to Mora with my parents to visit.

Carl was buried out of Calvary Lutheran Church in Mora and I remember his funeral. I was almost 14 and I remember sitting in the back of the nave watching the many men in their coveralls in from the fields and the woman with their hot dishes and I thought to myself, "This is good. A hard working man finished his life and comes home to his Lord. His family and friends come in from their work this day to mourn and to celebrate God's goodness. Yes, today is a good day."

I was confirmed in the Christian faith two months later by Pastor Carl A. Zimmerman at Hope Lutheran Church in north Minneapolis where I attended Sunday School and sang in the choir.

In my youth, I have often asked the question, "How is it possible that if Jesus, whom the Bible says is God's Son, died on the cross for my sins and I believe that; then my sins are forgiven and I am right with God?" I am asked to believe this and yet I would like to understand how this mechanism works. I suppose I could believe many things - - But does this make it so? There are several hard questions here and I'd like it explained to me.

Well, I believe I found the answer (for me, anyway) over thirty years ago in these verses of the Psalms of David. It's from the 51st chapter that starts out with the familiar, *"Have mercy on me, O God, ... Wash me... ... and cleanse me..."* It is the last part of that chapter, however, that struck me and has been important to me ever since.

From the RSV, in Verses 15 - 19, David writes:

"O Lord, open thou my lips, and my mouth shall show forth thy praise. For thou hast no delight in sacrifice, were I to give a burnt offering, thou wouldst not be pleased. The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart thou wilt not despise.

"Do good to Zion in thy good pleasure, rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, then wilt thou delight in right sacrifices, in burnt offerings; then bulls will be offered on thy altar."

I want you to know that I have pondered these words, I would guess, since the late 1950's and that they have been an intense revelation to me of how Jesus' death on the cross is the most wonderful gift to me. Let's ponder these words while I make two points.

The first point is that if there is God, then God must be like this: That which we call "God" is holy and awful and demands our reverence. He is strong beyond our wildest imaginations. His force is the power within the spinning sub-atomic particle and the heave of the great galaxies far beyond our knowledge. He is within the molecular chain that creates the daisy, a deadly virus, and the human species. He is spiritual, for thought and imagination, although untouchable, do exist. The dog wags its tail, the cat crouches, and we mourn when

someone dies. He is the "I AM." He was before the beginning of time, He is in this moment, and will be, beyond the eons of ages to come.

The second point is that if I turn from God, even in a derelict instant, and God is not merciful, then I am forever destroyed. I have no salvation and I am lost. David says, "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned and done that which is evil in thy sight, so that thou art justified in thy sentence and blameless in thy judgment." If it's me against the above-mentioned God, then it's no match - - I am certainly lost.

So if one turns from God, even I, in one momentary and fleeting thought, then the verdict must be that I (and anyone like me who has defied God) should be treated like so much refuse flushed down the toilet of some dark rooming house on a lonely remote corner of the earth and forgotten, or worse; suffer eternal damnation. If there is God, then the judgment is rightly deserved. There is no sacrifice or burnt offering that I can present that will make it right. No, none.

Well, if I can't make it right, who can make it right? Contrary to what I've sometimes thought, it is not so much my repentance that makes it right - - although that's certainly part of it; but it's the action of Jesus who, laying his hand on me, takes my sin and makes me clean. The following are two accounts of redemption - - one from Scripture and the other from C. S. Lewis - - that helps make this clear to me.

The first is that glorious chorus from Revelations, "Worthy is the Lamb that was Slain," which was set to music in G. F. Handel's oratorio, *The Messiah*. The question from Revelations chapter 5 is asked, "*Who is worthy to open the book of life?*" ... and none is found worthy. And then a messenger comes forward and exclaims, Yes! - Someone is found! - It is the Lamb that was slain! - He is worthy! Then the legions of all heaven sing out, "*Worthy is the lamb that was slain, and hath redeemed us to God, to God by his blood, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing, forever and ever, amen!*" The second illustration of being bought back (i.e. redemption) is from the children's books, *The Stories of Narnia* by C. S. Lewis that I read to my children some years ago. In one of the books, *The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe*, Lewis writes of little Reepicheep the mouse that excitedly encourages the other animals, saying over and over again like the prophet, "But Aslan is coming, Aslan is coming!" In this children's book, Aslan, the great lion, is a simile to the Christ, the Lion of Judah to be slain, the one who will save us. It's a profound metaphor of how Jesus laid down his life to save us.

So, what does God require? It's pretty simple, actually. Let down my guard; let down my defenses; accept my errors, my mortality, and how I screw up and how I want to have control. I can try anything I like; give anything I want and it's not enough - - It's still not sufficient.... And it's not a matter of "I'll be better." All God wants is for me to say, "Have mercy." He is worthy - It is as simple as that. The battle is won.

In the above passages in Psalms, David does not even take credit for his praises to God. He states that no personal sacrifice is enough. But to say, "Have mercy," is enough. He proclaims that God wants my heart and then I can be proud of the good works I do - - giving glory to God. Then I can worship God and have joy.

My daughter, Jennifer, underlined the following verses in my Bible and wrote in the margin, "POWERFUL -WOW": John 11: 25 - 27a *Jesus said to her, I am the resurrection*

and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?

She said to him, "Yes, Lord.

The text, "Jesus said to her, I am the resurrection and the life; he who believed in me, though he die, yet shall he live," is also mine. It is my confirmation verse from 1954 and I, too, have treasured these verses.

The last verse of the poem from the Lenten hymn, Alas, And Did My Savior Bleed, by Isaac Watts (1674 -1748), reads as follows and it, too, is my soliloquy.

*"But tears of grief cannot repay
The debt of love I owe;
Here, Lord, I give myself away:
It's all that I can do."*

So the act of God to show us mercy was to die in our presence by our hand. This was not a thought, a philosophical concept, or a moral reasoning. It was physical, it was an act, and it happened. So in the same manner, my response is physical, it is an act and it happened. Thanks be to God!

I have often thought, "Is Jesus truly God in our presence?" I believe history confirms that he was crucified - - as were so many others of his time. But did he truly rise from the grave and was he seen by so many and did he return to glory? Did he really do those miracles? Does he hear and reach to us in our prayers today?

I am awed and cannot comprehend how great was the motive of the thousands in the early church who went willingly to a torturous death in the Roman circuses rather than recant their faith. I cannot comprehend how His church has survived in history and has become so alive among people in the world today. Is it a chance of history? I think not.

We read from Scripture that God, Himself, will keep upon our foreheads the terrible words, "Thou shalt fear and love God above all thing." Yes, these words are reason for trembling because He is God. Should I come close to Him? No, it is not by my action but it is He who draws near to me and it is his doing even that I love him. I understand intimately the words of the third article of Luther's Small Catechism that say, "I cannot by my own reason or strength believe... but the Holy Ghost called me...." Even my faith belongs to Him!

Over the years, some of the books that have been important to me in my faith are 1) The Cost of Discipleship, by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, martyred for his faith at the end of World War II; 2) Christian Liberty, a treatise by Martin Luther that discusses our freedom and the nature of responsibility as Christians; 3) Existentialism and the Modern Predicament, which discusses the nature of faith, by 19th Century Danish philosopher, Soeren Kierkegaard; 4) St. John of the Cross; a compelling biography of a simple 16th Century Carmelite monk who some say is the, "greatest mystical theologian in Christian history," written by the French author, Leon Cristiani; and 5) a homely little booklet of the writings of a monastery cook in 17th Century France. I am pleased that he is my namesake: "Brother Lawrence - - His Conversations and Letters on the Practice of the Presence of God". I quote from the forward: "*There must have been something rare in a monastery cook that a Grand Vicar should listen to his talk and go home and make notes of it; and that high-placed persons should beg of him not the recipe for a sauce but his secret for a happy life.*"

In his ninth letter for example, Brother Lawrence writes (Concerning Wandering Thoughts in Prayer):

"My Reverend and Greatly Honored Mother:

"You tell me nothing new; you are not the only one that is troubled with wandering thoughts. Our mind is extremely roving; but as the will is the mistress of all our faculties, she must recall them and carry them to God as their last end.

"When the mind, for lack of discipline when we first engage in devotion, has contracted certain bad habits of wandering and dissipation, such habits are difficult to overcome, and commonly draw us, even against our wills, to things of the earth.

*"I believe one remedy for this is to confess our faults and to humble ourselves before God. I do not advise you to use multiplicity of words in prayer; many words and long discourses being often the occasion of wandering. Hold yourself in prayer before God like a poor, dumb, paralytic beggar at the rich man's gate. Let be your business to keep your mind in **the presence of the Lord**. If it sometimes wanders and withdraws itself from Him, do not much disquiet yourself for that: trouble and disquiet serve rather to distract the mind than to recall it; the will must bring it back to tranquility. If you persevere with your whole strength, God will have pity on you.*

*"One way to recall the mind easily in the time of prayer, and preserve it more in tranquility, is **not to let it wander too far at other times**. You should keep it strictly in **the Presence of God**; and being accustomed to thinking of Him often, you will find it easy to keep your mind calm in the time of prayer, or at least to recall it from its wanderings.*

*"I have told you already at large, in my former letters, of the advantage we may draw from this **practice of the Presence of God**. Let us set about it seriously, and pray for one another.*

Yours, ____."

What a wonderful little message about how to be quiet before God in our prayers. I find it a joy to see that in the text of my book just after, "yours, _____," my daughter, Jennifer, a child just learning to print, penciled in "in crist." She had apparently been reading it, or at least looking at it, in her childhood.

Another set of books that have influenced me are the writings of Cambridge professor, C. S. Lewis, including *Miracles*, *Mere Christianity*, and *The Problem of Pain*. I find it a particular honor to have been able to read his books, the *Stories of Narnia* all the way through to *The Last Battle* to you, my children at your bedtimes. These are brilliant, thoughtful writings of a spiritual man and I pray their meaning will be clear to you even in your old age.

I close this little essay now with a quote from the Prologue to C. S. Lewis' biography, *Through The Shadowlands*. Lewis writes:

"Give yourself up, and you will find your real self. Lose life and you will save it. Submit to death, death of your ambitions and favorite wishes every day, and death of your whole body in the end: Submit with every fiber of your being, and you will find eternal life. Keep nothing back. Nothing that you have not given away will ever really be yours.

"Nothing that has not died will ever be raised from the dead.

"Look for yourself, and you will find, in the long run, only hatred, loneliness, despair, rage and decay.

"But look for Christ and you will find Him, and with Him everything else will be thrown in."

- Pax

What is God like?

Well, first of all, what if there is no __?

Secondly, if there is __, then what is __ like?

And thirdly, if __ is, then how do I interpret ___'s meaning for me?

One who asserts that there is no God would conclude that there is no force "out there" that has an interest in the outcome of our being and we should act in all we do in our own interest to have happiness and success in life. Such a person may also say that it is presumptuous and egocentric to even consider that there is some force that has an interest in our personal outcome. That person might say that there is some primordial force that controls the universe but it is purely a natural phenomenon not based on what we call reason and is without interest in outcomes. The human species is simply one of the myriads of biological organisms that happen to thrive and evolve on this planet over many millions of years. That which we call our thought process, intelligence and emotion is only chemical and neurological synaptic activity related to evolving reproductive functions of the species. When an organism dies, then that organism specimen is simply over.

To that assertion, my question is this: What is it that we call the "primordial force and natural phenomenon" and does this proceed with purpose? And if so, to what purpose? For example, for what purpose is the great energy within the small atom so strong that could level a mountain. For what purpose is the great energy of a black hole that consumes even light? For what purpose has the incredibly powerful DNA molecule evolved? None?

If there is no purpose, then that which we call natural phenomenon creates out of chaos. If we say there is purpose, then whose purpose? What purpose? These are unanswerable questions.

That which we call __ has many names. __ would have to be that mysterious cosmic force that keeps the "worlds in their orbits", that creates all that is, that knows and watches and is active in all that is. That which we call __ would have to be beyond our physical nature. __ would have to exist beyond time, space, and mass and yet, would be within it. __ would be in not only what we can feel and touch, but also within our thoughts and emotions. __ would be physical and spiritual beyond what we know. __ would be neither male nor female, yet both and neither. In awe and reverence, the ancient Hebrews had no name they would call __ nor would they apply a pronoun to __. I believe they may well have understood better than we __'s awful nature.

If ___ really watches us all, how can __ keep track of all of the goings on and thoughts of all of the people who have lived from the beginning of time and of the 5 billion people alive today? Of that, St. Augustine remarks, "___, who cares for every one of us, as if you care for him only; and so for all, as if they were but one!"

How do I interpret __? How do I know __? There are two ways. The first is by what I can conjure up in the inward being and the second is by what information is given to me. The Bible says that we cannot by our own reason or effort believe there is __, but it is by

working of __ that we believe. Because belief is of the mind does not mean that its existence is less real than, for example, a rock that we can hold in our hand. Because belief is of __, it may well have substance as real as anything that we can scientifically examine.

It is interesting to me that the biblical story that relates how being was created out of chaos is in the myths and lore of diverse cultures throughout the world's history. The story of __ and creation exists in the cultures of China, of Mesopotamia, India, the Norse, ancient Greek, Inuit, Native American, and Mayan cultures. The stories are told differently, but the theme remains the same.

I believe the story of God is complete in the action of one we call the Christ, and recorded in history. The Apostle Paul concludes at the end of his letter to the Romans that Christ is the culmination of history. He not only explains but acts out how we fit together with this thing we call __.

Can it be possible that Jesus and __ are one as he said? It is only my finite reasoning that gives me my doubts. *"Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is a child of God."* I John 5: 01

On Community

The following are comments and reflections based **Romans 12: 9 - 13** and adapted from William Barclay's devotional book, *The Letter to the Romans*, first published by the Saint Andrews Press, Edinburgh, Scotland, 1955 and later by The Westminster Press, Philadelphia. Barclay was Lecturer in New Testament and Hellenistic Greek, University of Glasgow, Scotland.

Passages

"As a pebble dropped in a nearby brook or faraway sea
Creates a little ripple in the water for a moment;
Like a wildflower blossoms on a nearby glade or faraway
Mountain and blows in the wind for a while;
We are a small bit of history unfolding . . .

We serve in some small way for a time for a few.
A cup of water, the binding of another's wounds,
A kind word, a story of hope:
This is our treasure and this is our joy.
This is surely the path to which we are called."

Reflection Based on Romans 12: 9 - 13
Larry Cowan, 1992

We are the family of God supporting one another in every way. A central theme of Paul's Letter to the Romans is his immense love for the Jewish people and of their heritage and of his anguish over their rejection of Jesus; and yet of how he rejoices over the many people, who because of their rejection, come to believe and the Gospel is spread. Paul writes that we are all one -- Jew and Romans alike -- and the rest of us as well; and from where we come and who we are doesn't matter. Paul writes of community.

Romans: 12: 9 -13 (RSV) "Your love must be completely sincere. Hate that which is evil and love that which is good. Be affectionate to one another in brotherly love. Give to each other priority in honor. Do not be sluggish in zeal. Keep your spirit to the boiling point. Seize your opportunities. Rejoice in hope. Meet tribulation with triumphant fortitude. Be persevering in prayer. Share what you have to help the needs of God's dedicated people. Be eager to give hospitality."

Commentary:

1. **Your love must be completely sincere.** Our love must be an altruistic love, meaning charitable, benevolent, humane, and caring with no hypocrisy, no play-acting, and no ulterior motive. Jesus sought no control or power over others in his love and caring. But, Oh, how again and again we carry our own one-sided agenda when we display how we care. Our discussions with others may be used to manipulate and to build our own power and position. We accuse of duplicity, perhaps publicly, those who don't see our way. This is not love. Barclay points out that there are many who display affection with "one eye on the gain that may result". He says there is such a thing as selfish love, whose aim is to get far more than it is to give. The Christian love is a love that is clean of self - it is a pure outgoing of the heart to others. Perhaps Jesus had an advantage. It's hard for us

to know the thoughts of another - of the dreams and troubles, the sins and how others care; but Jesus knows our hearts each minute of the day. Let us be more like Jesus and listen when He admonishes us to love one another.

2. **Hate that which is evil and love that which is good.** The devil is at work seeking whom he can devour - in the world and even in the Church. This is an issue not to be taken lightly.

According to Barclay, Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881), often considered the greatest social philosopher of Victorian England, we need to see the *infinite* beauty of holiness and the *infinite* damnability of sin. A person is not safe when his/her life consists of prudent avoidance of evil and calculated adherence to that which is good. He must hate evil and love goodness. Of one thing we must be clear - what many people hate is not evil, but the consequence of evil. No person is a really good when he is good simply because he fears the consequence of being bad. Not to fear the consequence of dishonor, but to love honor with a passionate love is the way to real goodness.

3. **Be affectionate to one another in brotherly love.** The Greek word used here means family love. Let me be clear on this as well. We must love one another because we are one family. We are not strangers to one another within the Christian church; much less are we isolated units; we are brothers and sisters of each other, because we have the same father, even God. The Christian church is not a collection of acquaintances; it is not even a gathering of friends; it is the family of God.
4. **Give to each other priority in honor.** Problems oftentimes arise because recognition or thanks has not been given to someone and the person feels slighted and neglected. Perhaps someone is given more prominence or recognition and trouble brews. The mark of the truly Christian person however is always humility. Barclay relates a story of Principal Cairnes (apparently of Glasgow) - - whom he says is one of the humblest of men and a great saint and scholar. The story is told that he was a member of a platform party at a great gathering and as he appeared on the platform, there was a great burst of applause. Cairnes stepped back and let the next man pass, and began to applaud himself. He never dreamed that the applause was for him. Indeed. Give each other priority in honor.
5. **Do not be sluggish in zeal.** Barclay writes there is intensity in the Christian life. There is no room for lethargy. It is always a choice between life and death - - life is short and is a preparation ground for eternity. The Christian may burn out but cannot rust out.
6. **Keep your spirit to the boiling point.** The one person that the risen Christ could not stand was the man who was neither hot nor cold. Today, people are apt to look askance at enthusiasm; the modern battle cry is, "I couldn't care less." The Christian is desperately in earnest and therefore aflame for Christ. Barclay wrote of this back in 1955. Are our attitudes toward enthusiasm for the risen Christ any different today? Are we hot or cold?
7. **Seize your opportunities.** The Greek text here can be taken two ways - "Serve the Lord" or "Serve the time," that is, grasp your opportunities. Barclay felt it is likely Paul is calling to us "seize our opportunities as they come." Life presents us with all kinds of opportunities - to learn something new; to cut out something old or wrong; to speak a word of encouragement or of warning; to help or to comfort. One of the tragedies of life is that we fail to grasp these opportunities when they come. "There are three things which come not back - the spent arrow, the spoken word, and the lost opportunity."

8. **Rejoice in hope.** Barclay writes that when Alexander the Great was setting out on one of his Eastern campaigns, he distributed all kinds of gifts to his friends. In his generosity he had given away nearly all of his possessions. "Sir," said one of his friends, "You will have nothing left for yourself." "Oh, yes I have," said Alexander, "I have still my hopes." I'm sure that Czar Alexander gave out of his abundance; but what of the widow whom Jesus speaks of who gave out of poverty? The point of this passage is not the giving or the gift; but that the Christian must have hope; that is, be essentially an optimist. As followers of Jesus, we are certain that "the best is yet to be." Our hope is in knowledge that God's grace is sufficient for all things and that strength is made perfect in weakness. There can never be such thing as a hopeless Christian.

We have this hope together and the joy of fellowship - and even having fun together is the serious business of practicing love for one another, even as Christ has commanded.

Whether in sharing that joy or in experiencing each other's sorrow, our role is to promote *connectedness*: Let us grow in love for one another; for we are, in fact, members of the eternal community called the family of God. That's a long time to have friends! Rejoice in hope - - Our hope is in the resurrection!

9. **Meet tribulation with triumphant fortitude.** When beset by sorrow and tears, when tragedy looms, when struck by implacable forces, how can one say that there is hope or any cause for joy? Many of the people at Rome to whom Paul writes in the Book of Romans were to be tortured and sacrificed in the years to come for Jesus' sake. Jesus, the Very Son of God, suffered terribly in taking on not only the physical pains of the cross which culminated in his death but also the spiritual anguish of acknowledging and taking on our sin. "Thy rebuke has broken his heart." Let us remember the sufferings of Jesus: And let us not forget how He loves us so. From Isaiah 51 we read, "A broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart I will not despise;" and from the Book of Revelation, "I will wipe the tears from their eyes." Can we say then that this is only a foolish hope? Paul uses the words 'triumphant fortitude' meaning to go forward as, in fact, the victorious! As Christians, we have Jesus at our side (and to carry us) to meet tribulation with triumphant fortitude. We can in prayer lay our sins and sorrows on Jesus and he will lift us up far higher than we can imagine. William Cowper, the English poet and hymn writer, explained it as follows:

"Set free from present sorrow,
We cheerfully can say,
'Even let the unknown tomorrow
Bring with it what it may,
It can bring with it nothing
But He will bear us through"

More recently, we remember the familiar anonymous poem "*Footprints*," in which the question is asked, "where were you, Jesus, when I needed you?" And He answers, "There was only one set footprints on the sand because it was I who was carrying you."

10. **Be persevering in prayer.** Barclay reminds us that there are times in life when we let day add itself to day and week-to-week, and we never speak to God. When you or I cease to pray, we strip ourselves of the strength of the Almighty God. Barclay uses the word despoil here. The dictionary gives the meaning of this word: *to ravage, denude, and to lay waste as by plundering or destroying!*

11. **Share what you have to help the needs of God's dedicated people.** We are to share with those in need. Back in 1955 Barclay wrote that, "We have become a world bent on getting. Look magazine and the new television set we bought told us to buy that new Sears refrigerator, nylon stockings, a Chevrolet car and to smoke Camel cigarettes." Life was good for those in the middle class. Today, it's grown to where we're inundated with an unlimited array of consumer products. For example, in the U. S. there's no food item produced anywhere across the face of this earth that is not readily available within a ten minute drive. We have even become no longer worshipers but consumers in our church and in our relationship with God. With the incredible resources for communication and information, do we not see the needs around us? Do we understand that all we have is a gift of God?

During Holy Week of 1964, Dean J. W. Mathews of Westminster Presbyterian Church of Minneapolis gave a homily on "The Principle of the Cruciform." I was so struck by the message I could not help but to take notes. His sermon was from the 10th chapter of St. John where Jesus states, "Therefore doth the Father love me, because I lay down my life. No one takes it from me. I lay it down of my own free will." Dean Matthews then asked (and asks of you and me today), "Why, then are you and I here?" He concluded, "The absurd body of Christ, the church, expends their death on behalf of mankind. The church exists only when it offers its death on behalf of the world and lives on the brink, the edge of their life. They throw their death into the breach of history. They exist as they conform to the 'Principle of the Cruciform.'" Then following Jesus' example, we share our means and more . . . We share our life and offer our death to any in need.

12. **Be eager to give hospitality.** Over and over the New Testament insists on this duty to give hospitality. William Tyndale (1495-1536), Bible translator and martyr, used a magnificent word: He translated it that the Christian should have a "harborous" disposition. Christianity is the religion of the open hand, the open heart, and the open door.

The End is Praise:

In passages 16: 25 - 27, Paul concludes his message to the Christians of Rome:

"Now to him who is able to make you stand firm, in the way that the gospel I preached promises and the messages Jesus brought offers, in the way which is now unveiled in that secret, which was for long ages wrapped in silence, but which is now full-disclosed, and made known to all the Gentiles - as the writings of the prophets said it would be, and as the command of God now orders it to be - that they might render to him a submission born of faith, to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, be glory Forever. Amen"

Commentary on Romans 16: 25 - 27:

1. The gospel makes persons to be able to stand erect and to stand firm, to be decisive, to be able go into battle for the message that Jesus brought - and against the shocks of the world and the assaults of temptation. Here Paul sounds out the gospel that he preached and loved. The gospel is God's power unto salvation; it is that power which keeps a person safe, which makes him and her able to meet life erect, even when life is at its worst and its most threatening.
2. The gospel that Paul preached was offered by Jesus Christ. That is to say, the gospel takes its source in Christ, and is transmitted by people. Without Christ, there is no gospel.

3. It is a gospel that is the consummation of history. It is something that was there from all ages and which at the coming of Christ was revealed to the world. His coming was the hinge of history. It is the event to which all history was working up; and it is the event from which all subsequent history draws. It is a plain fact that at the coming of Christ, the world could never be the same again - it cannot be disregarded.

Reflection Questions:

In what ways are the people of Rome in the days of Paul's letter similar to us today?

What different things did they need to endure? How did they affirm their faith?

In what ways are our affirmations different? How do we stand up in terms of the marks of the Christian?

How do we as a congregation and I as an individual in our relationships with one another and to God measure up in?

Loving honestly?

Intensity for loving goodness and hating evil?

Connectedness, brotherly affection?

Rejoicing in the hope of resurrection?

Facing difficulty and sorrows?

Giving honor and having humility?

Fire for the Lord?

fervency in prayer?

Unconditional service and giving?

On Resurrection

What are the implications of the fact of resurrection on my daily life?

What are the implications of the fact of resurrection on my future plans and goals in life?

With some understanding of scriptural fact of resurrection as a background, how should I view my death and the death of those whom I love?

What are the implications of righteousness in resurrection?

How should I view my role in the life of the desolate and forsaken as regards the resurrection?

How do I feel about the resurrection as regards being dead, stone cold dead and rotting in the grave or burned in an incinerator?

Lazarus! Come Out!

The section underlined in the middle of the next column on this page was underlined in my Bible some years ago by my daughter Jennifer and she wrote in the margin, "POWERFUL - - WOW." The part that reads, "*Jesus said to her, I am the resurrection and the life; he who believed in me, though he die, yet shall he live,*" is mine also. It is my confirmation verse from 1954 and I, too, have treasured these verses.

The verse is from the story of Lazarus whom Jesus brought back from the dead. The story from the Gospel of St. John 11: 17 - 53:

"Now when Jesus came, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles off, and many of the Jews had come to

Martha and Mary to console them concerning their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went to meet him, while Mary sat in the house.

Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. And even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you."

Jesus said to her, ***"Your brother will rise again."***

Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day."

Jesus said to her, ***"I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?"***

She said to him, "Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, he who is coming into the world."

When she had said this, she went and called her sister Mary, saying quietly, "The Teacher is here and is calling for you." And when she heard it, she rose quickly and went to him. Now Jesus had not yet come into the village, but was still in the place where Martha had met him. When the Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary rise quickly and go out, they followed her, supposing that she was going to the tomb to weep there.

Then Mary, when she came where Jesus was and saw him, fell at his feet, saying to him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."

When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled; and he said, ***"Where have you laid him?"***

They said, "Lord, come and see."

Jesus wept.

So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!"

But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?"

Then Jesus, deeply moved again, came to the tomb; it was a cave, and a stone lay upon it. Jesus said, ***"Take away the stone."***

Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, "Lord, by this time there will be an odor, for he has been dead four days."

Jesus said to her, ***"Did I not tell you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?"*** So they took away the stone.

And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, ***"Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me. I knew that thou hearest me always, but I have said this on account of the people standing by, that they may believe that thou didst send me."*** When he had said this, he cried out with a loud voice, ***"Lazarus, come out."***

The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with bandages, and his face wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, ***"Unbind him, and let him go."***

Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and saw what he did, believed in him; but some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what he had done. So the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered the council, and said, "What are we to do? For this man performs many signs. If we let him go on thus, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and destroy both our holy place and our nation."

But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, "You know nothing at all; you do not understand that it is expedient for you that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation should not perish." He did not say this of his own accord, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus should die for the nation, and

not for the nation only, but to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad. So from that day on they took counsel how to put him to death. "

Death: A Big Deal

Charles Lutz, Editor of the Metro Lutheran, Minneapolis, wrote an article in that newspaper of April 1996 that he titled, Death: A Big Deal. I reprint it here because we tend to forget and have so many ideas of what it means to die and of what the "hereafter" perhaps is like. Scripture, on the other hand, is very specific in its meaning of death and the hereafter.

Lutz writes, "Death is at the center of what it means to be human. It, along with birth, is the one experience that every human being has. And Death is central to the biblical story.

"Christians take death and dying seriously. We teach and believe that death is real. As we are reminded every Ash Wednesday, "You are dust and to dust you shall return."

"Christianity doesn't toy with the idea that some part of me will never die (Immortality is a pagan concept). When I die, *all* of me am dead. Thus, our creeds don't talk about the soul's immortality; they speak about resurrection - - of the body, meaning, of course, the whole person. Flesh and spirit together will be resurrected.

"Jesus, our Lord, didn't just fall asleep for a few days. His followers testified that he died - - truly died. And God raised him up.

"It is the same reality that God has in mind for us. We aren't told how God does it. But we do know that there is a new life to come, with God. Contrary to popular opinion, we won't become bodiless spirits. Nor will we be angels. The bible indicates that our new life will include materiality: we will be flesh again.

"So death is a big deal for believers. It's an important word in the Christian vocabulary, but it's not the last word. The last word is that death - - humankind's final enemy - - has been forever defeated by the life, death and resurrection of our Lord. Thanks be to God who gives us the victory!" - Charles P. Lutz.

Biblical references to the Resurrection

The Gospel of St. Matthew 22: 23- 33

The same day Sadducees came to him who say that there is no *resurrection*, and they asked him a question, saying, "Teacher, Moses said, 'If a man dies, having no children, his brother must marry the widow, and raise up children for his brother.' Now there were seven brothers among us; the first married and died, and having no children left his wife to his brother, so too the second and third, down to the seventh. After all of them, the woman died. In the *resurrection*, therefore, to which of the seven will she be wife? For they all had her?"

But Jesus answered them, "*You are wrong, because you know neither the scriptures nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like the angels in heaven. And as for the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was said to you by God, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? He is not God of the dead, but of the living.*" And when the crowd heard it, they were astonished at his teaching.

The Gospel of St. Matthew 27: 51-54

And behold the curtain in the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom, and the earth shook, and the rocks were split, and the tombs also were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised, and coming out of the tombs after his *resurrection* they went into the holy city and appeared to many. When the centurion and

those who were with him, keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were filled with awe and said, "Truly this was the Son of God!"

The Gospel of St. Luke 14: 12-14

He said also to the man who had invited him, "*When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your kinsmen or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return, and you be repaid. But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. You will be repaid at the **resurrection** of the just.*"

The Gospel of St. Luke 20: 34-38

And Jesus said to them, "*The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage; but those who are accounted worthy to attain to that age and to the **resurrection** of the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage. For they cannot die any more, because they are equal to angels and are sons of God, being sons of the **resurrection**. But that the dead are raised, even Moses showed, in the passage about the bush, where he calls the Lord the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob. Now he is not the God of the dead, but of the living; for all live to him.*"

The Gospel of St. John 11: 21-27

Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. And even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you."

Jesus said to her, "*Your brother will rise again.*"

Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the **resurrection** at the last day."

Jesus said to her, "*I am the **resurrection** and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?*"

She said to him, "Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, he who is coming into the world."

Acts of the Apostles 17: 16- 34

Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols. So he argued in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons, and in the market place every day with those who chanced to be there. Some also of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers met him. And some said, "What would this babblers say?" Others said, "He seems to be a preacher of some foreign divinities" - because he preached Jesus and the resurrection. And they took hold of him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, "May we know what this new teaching is which you present? For you bring some strange things to our ears: we wish to know therefore what these things mean." Now all of the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time at nothing except telling or hearing something new.

So Paul, standing in the middle of the Areopagus, said, "Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. For as I passed along, and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an alter with this inscription, 'To an unknown god.' What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. The God, who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in a shrine made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all men life and breath and everything. And he made from one every nation of men to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their habitation, that they

should seek God, in the hope that they might feel after him and find him. Yet he is not far from each one of us, for 'In him we live and move and have our being'; as even some of your poets have said, ' For we are indeed his offspring.'

Being then God's offspring, we ought not to think that the Deity is like gold, or silver, or stone, a representation by the art and imagination of man. The time of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all men everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed, and of this he has given assurance to all men by raising him from the dead.

Now when they heard of the **resurrection** of the dead, some mocked; but others said, "We will hear you again about this." So Paul went out from among them. But some men joined him and believed, among them were Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them.

Acts of the Apostles 23: 1-11

And Paul, looking intently at the council, said, "Brethren, I have lived before God in all good conscience up to this day." And the high priest Ananias commanded those who stood by him to strike him on the mouth. Then Paul said to him, "God shall strike you, you whitewashed wall! Are you sitting to judge me according to the law, and yet contrary to the law you order me to be struck?" Those who stood by said, "Would you revile God's high priest?" And Paul said, "I did not know, brethren, that he was the high priest; for it is written, you shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people.

But when Paul perceived that one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, "I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees; with respect to the hope and the **resurrection** of the dead I am on trial." And when he had said this, a dissension arose between the Pharisees and the Sadducees; and the assembly was divided. For the Sadducees say there is no **resurrection**, nor angels, nor spirit, but the Pharisees acknowledge them all. Then a great clamor arose; and some of the scribes of the Pharisees' party stood up and contended, "We find nothing wrong with this man. What if a spirit or an angel spoke to him?" And when the dissension became violent, the tribune, afraid that they would tear Paul in pieces, commanded the soldiers to go down and take him by force from among them and bring him into the barracks.

The following night the Lord stood by him and said, "*Take courage, for as you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must bear witness also at Rome.*"

Acts of the Apostles 24: 10- 23

[The high priest Ananias has brought Paul before the Governor Felix with accusations that he is an agitator among the Jews and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes and that he even tried to profane the temple. See Acts 23: 1-11 above.]

And when the governor had motioned to him to speak, Paul replied, "Realizing that for many years you have been judge over this nation, I cheerfully make my defense. As you may ascertain, it is not more than twelve days since I went up to worship at Jerusalem; and they did not find me disputing with anyone or stirring up a crowd, either in the temple or in the synagogues, or in the city. Neither can they prove to you what they now bring up against me. But this I admit to you, that according to the Way, which they call a sect, I worship the God of our fathers, believing everything laid down by the law or written in the prophets, having a hope in God which these themselves accept, that there will be a **resurrection** of both the just and the unjust. So I always take pains to have a clear conscience toward God and toward man.

Now after some years I came to bring to my nation Alms and offerings. As I was doing this, they found me purified in the temple, without any crowd or tumult. But some Jews from Asia - they ought to be here before you to make an accusation, if they have anything against me. Or else let these men themselves say what wrongdoings they found when I stood before the council, except this one thing which I cried out while standing among them, 'With respect to the *resurrection* of the dead, I am on trial before you this day.'

But Felix, having a rather accurate knowledge of the Way, put them off, saying, "When Lysias the tribune comes down, I will decide your case." Then he gave orders to the centurion that he should be kept in custody but should have some liberty, and that none of his friends should be prevented from attending to his needs.

Paul's Letter to the Romans 6: 5-11

For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a *resurrection* like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him so that our sinful body might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin. For he who has died is freed from sin. But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him. For we know that Christ being raised from the dead will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. The death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Paul's 1st Letter to the Corinthians 15: 12-19

Now if Christ is preached as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no *resurrection* of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised; if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified of God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised. If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all men most to be pitied.

Paul's Letter to the Philippians 8: 3-11

Indeed I count everything as a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as refuse, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own, based on law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith; that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his suffering, becoming like him in his death, that if possible I may attain the *resurrection* of the dead.

Paul's 2nd Letter to Timothy 2: 14-19

Remind them of this, and charge them before the Lord to avoid disputing about words, which do no good, but only ruins the hearers. Do your best to present yourselves before God as one approved, a workman who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth. Avoid such godless chatter, for it will lead people into more and more ungodliness, and their talk will eat its way like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, who have swerved from the truth by holding that the *resurrection* is past already. They are upsetting the faith of some. But God's firm foundation stands, bearing this seal: The Lord

knows those who are his," and, "Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity.

Paul's Letter to the Hebrews 6: 1-4

Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrines of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, with instruction about ablutions, the laying on of hands, the *resurrection* of the dead, and eternal judgments. And this we will do if God permits. For it is impossible to restore again to repentance those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they then commit apostasy, since they crucify the Son of God on their own account and hold him up to contempt.

Revelations to John 20: 4-6

Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom judgment was committed. Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their testimony to Jesus and for the word of God, and who had not worshipped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life, and reigned with Christ a thousand years. The rest of the dead did not come to life until a thousand years were ended. This is the first *resurrection*. Blessed and holy is he who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and they shall reign with him a thousand years.

Commentary on The Resurrection

The span of life is as short as a ripple on a pond and we better be sure we get around to helping one another out. It doesn't get any more serious than this.

It's a lot scary to think that upon death I am totally dead and have no contact with the outside and I even have no thought or spirit. Jesus says that if I believe and am baptized, I will be saved and God will one day at the resurrection raise me to everlasting life. That day may possibly be thousands of years from now and I won't even be waiting for the resurrection because I'll be dead. I will be one day be brought back alive and have my body raised from the ashes. It will be totally God's doing and I must put my entire trust in God to do it. It'll be like I am suspended and trusting upon entry (that is, when I die) that God will press the button to bring me back. Scriptures say that I will no longer be subject to death.

What are the implications of this? Well, I better make sure that those around me whom I love and even those whom I dislike are aware of the need to repent and to believe and learn of Jesus so that they will not be left out or be lost. Part of their coming to salvation is on my head and on the heads of all believers to pray, to talk about salvation, and to lead godly lives, and to bring the lost to salvation. It's really important.

1. Jesus discusses the resurrection in absolute terms - - the question of its fact isn't even an issue.
2. We in our life and in our death are to emulate Jesus in a death like his - following the concept of the Cruciform.
3. There will be a resurrection of the just and the unjust.

4. The just who are dead will all sleep in God's care until the day of the resurrection.
5. The just will be equal to the angels - not like them but equal to them.
6. The just will be rewarded for their acts of mercy and for sharing with the poor and disenfranchised.
7. Death will be conquered at the resurrection and there will be no death - ever again.
8. We shall be raised in bodily form - complete with mind, body and spirit.
9. There will no marriages in the resurrection.
10. There shall be two resurrections. The first shall be when Jesus returns and the martyrs shall be raised to rule on the earth for 1000 years. The second resurrection shall be after a time when God has loosed the devil and many calamities shall occur and the faithful shall be persecuted and martyred. At the end, the devil shall be put down and all of the saints shall be raised to live eternally with God and giving glory to Jesus who died for our sin.
11. The elemental doctrines of Christ are repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, baptism, the laying on of hands, and the *resurrection* of the dead, and eternal judgments. Of these there should be no debate and we should move on to maturity.
12. The early Church did not keep these doctrines and stories of the events of Jesus and the resurrection to within their own group, but preached and discussed and debated them with any who would hear or who happened by; from the market places and streets to the synagogues and temple, even to the Areopagus of Athens.

Read the First Letter of Peter

Sing, "I Am The Bread of Life"

Song #702 From *With One Voice*
Augsburg-Fortress Press

A Poem

As a pebble dropped in a nearby brook or faraway sea,
Creates its little wave for a moment;
Like a wildflower blossoms on a nearby glade or faraway mountain,
And blows in the wind for a while,
Each of us is a small bit of history unfolding . . .

We serve in some small way for a time for a few.
A cup of water, the binding of another's wounds,
A kind word, a story of hope;
This is our treasure, this is our joy.
This is surely the example of Christ, our Lord.

"Passages" Based on Romans 12:9-13
Larry Cowan, 1992

Biblical references to life

into his nostrils the breath of l.; Gen 2.07
to guard the way to the tree of l. Gen 3.24
I have set before you l. and death, Deu 30.19
now, O Lord, take away my l.: 1Kin 19.04
"Remember that my l. is a breath; Job 7.07
Lord is the stronghold of my l.: Ps 27.01
For with thee is the fountain of l.; Ps 36.09
O Lord, what the measure of l. is Ps 89.27
give me l., O Lord, according to thy Ps 119.107
The wage of the righteous leads to l. Pro 10.16
The fear of the Lord prolongs l. Pro 10.27
A gentle tongue is a tree of l. Pro 15.04
The fear of the Lord leads to l. Pro 19.23
during the few days of their l. Ecc 2.03
In my vain l. I have seen everything; Ecc 7.15
All these is the l. of my spirit. Is 36.16
you found new l. for your strength, Is 57.10
Their l. shall be like a watered Jer 31.12
O Lord, thou hast redeemed my l. Lam 3.58
awake, some to everlasting l. Dan 12. 02
do not be anxious about your l. Mt 6.25
He who finds his l. will lose it, Mt 10.39
deed must I do, to have eternal l.? Mt 19.16
was l., and the l. was the light of men. Jn 1.04
said to them, "I am the bread of l.; Jn 6.35
It is the spirit that gives l. Jn 6.63
You have the words of eternal l.; Jn 6.68
lays down his l. for the sheep. Jn 10.11
"I am the resurrection and the l. Jn 11.25
the way, the truth, and the l.; Jn 14.06
lay down his l. for his friends. Jn 15.13
And this is eternal l., that they know Jn 17.03
and killed the Author of l. Ac 13.15
to eternal l. through Jesus Christ. Rom 5.21
but the l. he lives he lives to God Rom 6.10
sanctification and its end, eternal l. Rom 6.22
the spirit of l. in Christ Jesus Rom 6.08
one leads the l. which the Lord has 1Cor 7.17
does not come to l. unless it dies. 1Cor 15.36
kills, but the Spirit gives l. 2Cor 3.06
mortal may be swallowed up by l. 2Cor 5.04
and the l. I now live in the flesh Gal 2.20
whose names are in the book of l. Php 4.03
When Christ who is our l. appears, Col 3.04
consider the outcome of their l. Heb 13.07
the crown of l. which God has Jas 1.02
By his good l. let him show his Jas 3.13
hands, concerning the word of l. - 1Jn 1.01

He who has the Son has life; 1Jn 5.12
grant to eat the tree of life. Rev 2.07

Reference to Eternity

also he has put eternity into man's mind, Ecc 3.11

References to Eternal

the blessings of the eternal mountains, Gen 49.26
The eternal God is your dwelling place, Deu 33.27
feet to be thrown into the eternal fire. Mt 18.08
deed must I do, to have eternal life?" Mt 19.16
but the righteous into eternal life." Mt 25.46
you into the eternal habitations. Lk 16.09
should not perish but have eternal life. Jn 3.16
of water welling up to eternal life; Jn 4.14
You have the words of eternal life; Jn 6.68
and I give them eternal life, and they Jn 10.28
And this is the eternal life, that they know Jn 17.03
his eternal power and deity, has been Rom 1.30
gift of God is eternal life in Christ Rom 6.23
for us an eternal weight of glory beyond 1Cor 4.17
the things that are unseen are eternal. 2Cor 4.18
made with hands, eternal in the heavens. 2Cor 5.01
according to the eternal purpose which Eph 3.11
us and gave us eternal comfort and good 1Th 2.16
hold of the eternal life which you 1Ti 6.12
become heirs in hope of eternal life. Tit 3.07
the source of eternal salvation to all Heb 3.09
by the blood of the eternal covenant, Heb 13.20
undergoing a punishment of eternal fire. Jud 7
with an eternal gospel to proclaim to Rev 14.06

On Being a Volunteer

The Prospect for me of Volunteering?

What prevents one from being a volunteer?

- ^ "If I get started now, then they'll want everything."
- ^ "They'll be calling me all the time."
- ^ Troubles at home and unable to expend the mental energy
- ^ Feeling not good enough
- ^ Shy and can't talk and seem foolish
- ^ The many overwhelming commitments of life
- ^ Traveling team hockey
- ^ Having to interrelate with some persons other than from within my group
- ^ Working day and night
- ^ All of the family chores and dealing with the children,

and driving them everywhere, and going to their games and programs and on and on to a never-ending day. Is this what's troubling you, Bucko?

How to be a volunteer

- ^ Make volunteering part of your life.
- ^ Assess your goals in life not only for the long term future but for tomorrow and for the coming week and maybe it needs to be in your list of priorities.
- ^ Talk to someone who volunteers.
- ^ Seek a little counsel.
- ^ Accept a small challenge to start.
- ^ Most don't volunteer forthrightly - - they help out only if asked.

Why? It's possible that they don't want to appear bold or perhaps they want to be sure that someone will appreciate it first.

- ^ Part of the benefit of being asked is the feeling that someone thinks that I am worth something and have an ability.

Benefits of volunteering

- ^ Meet some new folks
- ^ Get to use something you're talented at.
- ^ Get to learn a new talent.
- ^ Grow in ability to interact with others.
- ^ Get a chance to have someone appreciate you.
- ^ Possibly develop long term and fast friends.

Volunteering in Service to the Lord

On Tuesday this week a volunteer called and asked me to write something on why I volunteer. I guess the main reason that people volunteer is that **the thing they volunteer in is something they believe in** and they want to help out and be part of it. You perhaps could say that it fulfills part of a personal destiny. I don't think it's related so much to the need to socialize or to get recognition - - Such volunteers are often short lived. But if you truly believe in the work, you'll likely volunteer for life.

The way I see it, the ultimate volunteer was our Lord Jesus who took our sins upon himself and died on our behalf, redeeming us from death to eternal life in the resurrection. In the 10th chapter of St. John, Jesus states (RSV), ***"Therefore doth the Father love me, because I lay down my life. No one takes it from me. I lay it down of my own free will."*** Now that's a volunteer.

Some years ago I attended a noon Holy Week service at Westminster Presbyterian Church of Minneapolis and Dean J. W. Mathews spoke on "The Principle of the Cruciform." He spoke of following Jesus and said, "The absurd body of Christ, the church, expends their death on behalf of mankind. The church exists only when it offers its death on behalf of the world and lives on the brink, the edge of their life. They throw their death into the breach of history. They exist as they conform to the "Principle of the Cruciform." With that, I should do a little volunteering? My goodness, Jesus wants my life - - my all!

And so we should do what we can to fulfill the work that is the Lord's. I have no special place as a volunteer; but let us work and not grow weary, as the harvest is great!

In Matt. 9: 35-37 (RSV), Jesus speaks of the harvest: ***"And Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every disease and every infirmity. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and were helpless, like a sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into the harvest."***

How should I conduct myself? A poem I wrote some time ago reflects my thoughts on where I (and we) fit in:

**"As a pebble dropped in a nearby brook or faraway sea,
Creates its little ripple in the water for a moment,
Like a wildflower blossoms on a nearby glade or faraway mountain,
And blows in the wind for a while,
Each of us is a small bit of history unfolding . . .**

**We serve in some small way for a time for a few.
A cup of water, the binding of another's wounds,
A kind word, a story of hope;
This is our treasure, this is our joy.
This is surely the example of Christ, our Lord."**

***"Passages" by L. R. Cowan, 1992
Reflections on Community based on Romans 12:9-13***

What are some of the things I have done to volunteer at church?

I am amazed to think that I have taught Sunday School for over twenty-five years including one-year teaching deaf children.

I served as Sunday School superintendent for 3 years.

I served 4 years as chairperson of the School Board at Gethsemane School where my children went to school. We worked hard and accomplished many difficult tasks during a time of transition for our school when we split from Walther School Association.

I served as Chairperson of the Stewardship Committee at our church for two years and successfully completed our tasks. Under my leadership, we took the intensive approach of having home "cottage" meetings.

I served 2 years as chairperson of the Interpersonal Ministries Committee at our church and successfully completed our tasks. Although I was reluctant to proceed with this initially, we had a very good year and a good time.

I was one of about three volunteers who painted the gym and put the stripes on. I also painted the large "hornet" that's seen on the wall. I also helped with painting the walls in the school hallways for the renovation and other service tasks.

I served Boy Scouts as assistant scoutmaster for 2 years and then as scoutmaster for 2 years. I'm proud that we got three boys through Eagle Scout rank.

I have supervised a number of Boy Scout service projects and served as merit badge counselor for several of the academic merit badges (The non-fun ones like citizenship and communications!)

I sing in the sanctuary choir.

On Prayer

1. Paul, The Apostle

Romans: 12: 9 -13 The Christian Life in Everyday Action. We are the family of God supporting one another in every way. Writing to the church at Rome, Paul expresses an immense love for the Jewish people. In a paradox he anguishes over their rejection of Jesus, and yet rejoices over the many people, who because of their rejection, come to believe and the Gospel is spread.

Paul exclaims his strong conviction that we are all one - - Jew and Roman - - and the rest of us as well; and from where we come doesn't matter. Paul points to prayer as an integral part of that life in community with believers and in fellowship with Christ Jesus.

Paul writes: ***Your love must be completely sincere. Hate that which is evil and love that which is good. Be affectionate to one another in brotherly love. Give to each other priority in honor. Do not be sluggish in zeal. Keep your spirit to the boiling point. Seize your opportunities. Rejoice in hope. Meet tribulation with triumphant fortitude. Be persevering in prayer. Share what you have to help the needs of God's dedicated people. Be eager to give hospitality.***

2. William Barclay

Barclay, lecturer in New Testament and Hellenistic Greek, University of Glasgow reflects on the above Romans text, *"Be persevering in prayer,"* in his book, The Letter to the Romans (1955):

"Is it not the case that there are times in life when we let day add itself to day and week to week, and when we never speak to God? When you or I cease to pray, we strip ourselves of the strength of Almighty God." Barclay uses the word despoil here, with the meaning of ravage, denude, and to lay waste as by plundering or destroying!

3. Saint Monnica

Saint Monnica, born 331, was mother of Augustine of Hippo. Saint Augustine tells her story and she is remembered in the church on May 4th each year as a model for her relentless prayers and the unceasing tears that she shed.

Her son, Augustine, held to pagan religious beliefs and Monnica almost despaired of seeing him shed these spiritual deceptions for the truth of Christ. The church said he was lost and unteachable but Monnica's prayers and her tears never stopped. Whenever she is spoken of, her weeping is remembered. Augustine is called "the son of these tears."

Monnica is an example to us of the passion, fervor, and tenacity of her prayers for her children. Augustine would later write, "O Good Omnipotent Lord, who cares for every

one of us, as if you care for him only; and so for all, as if they were but one!" The truth and passion of God's love was surely communicated to Augustine through the unwavering love of a mother who would not let him go.

Perhaps, too, she should be called the patron saint of all who have unbelieving family members. Her husband and her son, those closest to her, did not see what she saw. But she held them close to her in prayer and witnessed the power of God opening their eyes. Monnica symbolizes for us all the power of prayer.

4. Brother Lawrence, Order of the Carmelites of Dechausses

From the writings of a monastery cook in 17th Century France: "*Brother Lawrence - - His Conversations and Letters on the Practice of the Presence of God*."

In his ninth letter (Concerning Wandering Thoughts in Prayer), Brother Lawrence writes:

"My Reverend and Greatly Honored Mother:

"You tell me nothing new; you are not the only one that is troubled with wandering thoughts. Our mind is extremely roving; but as the will is the mistress of all our faculties, she must recall them and carry them to God as their last end.

"When the mind, for lack of discipline when we first engage in devotion, has contracted certain bad habits of wandering and dissipation, such habits are difficult to overcome, and commonly draw us, even against our wills, to things of the earth.

"I believe one remedy for this is to confess our faults and to humble ourselves before God. I do not advise you to use multiplicity of words in prayer, many words and long discourses being often the occasion of wandering. Hold yourself in prayer before God like a poor, dumb, paralytic beggar at the rich man's gate. Let be your *business* to keep your mind in *the presence of the Lord*. If it sometimes wanders and withdraws itself from Him, do not much disquiet yourself for that: Trouble and disquiet serves rather to distract the mind than to recall it; the will must bring it back to tranquility. If you persevere with your whole strength, God will have pity on you.

"One way to recall the mind easily in the time of prayer, and preserve it more in tranquility, is *not to let it wander too far at other times*. You should keep it strictly *in the Presence of God*; and being accustomed to thinking of Him often, you will find it easy to keep your mind calm in the time of prayer, or at least to recall it from its wanderings.

"I have told you already at large, in my former letters, of the advantage we may draw from this *practice of the Presence of God*. Let us set about it seriously, and pray for one another. Yours, _____"

5. C. S. Lewis, Cambridge University

From the Prologue to his biography, *Through the Shadow lands*:

Lewis writes, "Give yourself up, and you will find your real self. Lose life and you will save it. Submit to death, death of your ambitions and favorite wishes every day, and death of your whole body in the end: Submit with every fiber of your being, and you will find eternal life. Keep nothing back. Nothing that you have not given away will ever really be yours.

"Nothing that has not died will ever be raised from the dead.

"Look for yourself, and you will find, in the long run, only hatred, loneliness, despair, rage and decay.

"But look for Christ [in prayer] and you will find Him, and with Him everything else will be thrown in."

1. **And whatever you ask in p., Mt 21.22**
2. **For your p. is heard, and your wife Elk 1.13**
3. **Yourselves to p. and the ministry Ac 6.04**
4. **You may devote yourselves to p. 1Cor 7.05**
5. **With all p. and supplication Eph 6.18**
6. **Consecrated by the word of God and p. 1Ti 4.05**
7. **The p. of the righteous man has great Jas 5.16**
8. **The breaking of bread and the p. Ac 2.42**
9. **Keep sane and sober for your p. 1Pe 4.07**
10. **That are the p. of the saints; Rev 5.08**

On Worship

What is it that we mean when we say that we worship God and how is it expressed within a community setting?

Worship is many things: It can involve so-called praying in the spirit, of offering praise to God and of offering prayer for life and of repentance. It can contain experiences of faith and of doubt, of turning from God and giving up to God. It can be an expression of our faith statement and creed; and of singing songs of joy and of grief. It is hearing the Gospel and of its meaning in our lives. It can be quietness of mind and spirit.

Worship can be formal as in the Mass or informal as in a gathering around a campfire sharing testimonies and contemplating the wonder of God. Worship can emphasize the events of Christ's life in seasonal services or emphasize specific themes of the Bible or experiences of life.

What does it mean when one prefers a particular style of worship? Does it have something to do with a need to express a certain way, to have that expression recognized by others, to find deep answers to personal need? Perhaps preference in worship form is used to hide some emotion. I would guess it has something to do with all of these things and more.

Robert Bellah, in his essay The Dynamics of Worship * states that, *“Worship, if we define it as a human activity, is an attempt to relate to the sacred or holy and that it tries to break through the straight or profane world of every day pragmatic common sense. It is a departure from the plane of the mundane, a departure that often rouses a sense of the uncanny, of the presence of the mysterium tremendum.”*

Bellah continues by making a simple but profoundly important observation: *“Unless there is a link between the religious symbols making up the worship ceremony and the particular past and present of the worshipers, then the worship process cannot begin. Indeed, the more deeply the symbols do grasp the real problems and conflicts of the worshipers the more powerful the subsequent experience can be. But what happens in worship is the transformation of the personal into the transpersonal, the immediate into the transtemporal. Through the transformation the immediate problems and conflicts can be seen in a new light, insight can be achieved, and post worship changes can ensue.”*

“Worship, to be maximally effective, must provide not only a symbolic reordering of experience but an element of consummation and fulfillment. The experience of worship should produce an influx of life and power, a feeling of wholeness, of the grace of God, of being at the still center of the turning wheel.

“If worship doesn’t ‘work’ it may not be because it is ‘irrelevant,’” Bellah points out. *“Worship involves a partial regression from the normal defensive ego-functioning so that there is a greater openness to both inner and outer reality. But it is precisely this regression and openness that may be seen as dangerous and threatening to the ego”*[so that he cannot let down his defenses enough to participate meaningfully in the act of worship].

Meaning in contemporary worship

The continuum of corporate worship runs from the solemnly contrived liturgical service to the unstructured and deliberately spontaneous. Examples of each may be a solemn High Mass of the Catholic church or even the common Lutheran liturgies to the Friends Meetings of the Pennsylvania Dutch or even the gathering of college youth in a coffee house for the purpose of communion and communication.

Bellah observes that in the deliberately spontaneous worship there is a participation that doesn't exist in the formal service. He also points out, however, that the spontaneity even of the informal service is "partial and flickering." He states that much of what happens, as in a conventional service, is a performance put on by a few people for an audience of non-participants.

Bellah concludes with a few observations.

1. One of the things the service tries to do is to draw the participant through the usual cognitive frameworks and put things in a new perspective.

2. The conventional service today lacks authenticity because it has no surprises; it is not a point at which the world of every day is broken through but only a particularly cozy corner of it.

3. The deliberately spontaneous service has elements of exhibitionism and of deliberate shock in mixing what is familiar in one group and deliberately mixing it with traditional religion. A danger of mixing what is familiar with forms of the traditional is that the kick may come not from discovering something genuinely new oneself but from appearing avant garde to others.

Our Worship experience

It seems at the surface we are a rather homogeneous community and that our needs for worship expression are not extraordinary. We are mostly a suburban middle class folk: We are mostly employed; we have families with growing children; most of us have bills and money is tight. We have hopes and aspirations that draw us to our church: We seek answers and consolation.

Our worship is expressed in a variety of settings. While we are used to the worship texts of our tradition, we often look to other more contemporary settings for variation and novelty to keep the worship experiences fresh. This is expressed also in the variety of music forms we use.

As we reflect on these concerns regarding worship form, there are two questions for which we must continue to find answers. These are:

1. How well do the religious symbols which make up the worship ceremony link with our particular past and present and

2. Do these symbols grasp the real problems and conflicts of the worshipers?

In a particular worship setting, indeed, the symbols are meaningful for many, perhaps even profoundly so. But for others the liturgies and symbols are not part of their experience. To the degree that these differences are not resolved, the worship experience is not contemporary and meaningful to all.

Conclusion

I reflect that worship doesn't begin in the sanctuary at all - - It begins with the sorrows and joys of life that turn us to God. It begins with stories like little Timmy who did something his family thought was impossible - - He didn't die from his disease as was expected but turned age six. He turned six with the help of the national organ donor program and the skilled hands of the transplant team. And it begins with a call in the night to tell you that your son and daughter-in-law were killed in a car crash on an icy road. It begins in the maternity ward when you call your parents to say that the twins are born and they are healthy. It begins when you are told that you have cancer and may live three months. It begins when you are struck by the plight of families starving in far off nations, of people killed by senseless strife.

I remember the day President Kennedy was shot. I was preparing to go to my next class at the University when I heard. First there was the news; then the dirges on all the radio and TV media; then people, it seemed by instinct, gravitated into their houses of worship. Yes, worship begins with the sorrows and joys of life that turn us to God. Thank God for the Holy Scriptures that show us the way!

* Essay, The Dynamics of Worship, in *Beyond Belief*, Robert N. Bellah, University of California Press, Berkeley, Calif., 1991, PP 209 - 215 Bellah is Professor of Sociology and Religion at UCLA and has studied the issues of socialization and religion for many years. I was first introduced to his work at the St. Paul - Minneapolis Joint Synod Convention at Gustavus College a few years back when he spoke on his book *Habits of the Heart*.

** Essay, It Doesn't Go Far Enough, *ibid.* P 195

On The Sanctity of Life

Only God is Holy

There is none like God who creates and takes away, who molds the worlds and us in it like a potter's vessel, who strengthens us in the ironwright's furnace and who dashes us to pieces. It is God alone who is perfect in love and in mercy. Our sanctity is that we are created of God and redeemed. Read the Book of Job and Psalms 145.

To Preserve Life

To care for our environment, for the animals in the field, for the chain of life, for our own life and that of our neighbor is our domain.

To Give Life

To be born, to plant, to expect the future, to anticipate life, to forgive and be forgiven; this is what we are blessed with.

To Offer Life

The only life we have that we can offer is our own and we may offer it for many things. As organ donor, as blood donor, to our country in war, as a replacement for another,

in the work we do for the hungry and homeless, to offer sanctuary, to be a sanctuary, to go into difficult situations for another and even to give our own life for another. We have no right to offer another's life for our own. "I lay down my life for my sheep."

To Take Life

Only God gives and takes life and we have no role in determining the length of another's life. Even to end another's life in what seems to be an act of mercy is to play the role of God. The issue then is not whether the taking of another's life is right or wrong or whether it is moral or not - - The issue is whether or not it is a sin against God.

Euthanasia

If the taking of another's life is done with permission and without malice; if a person is in unbearable physical or mental pain and is helpless or close to the end of life, is it good or is it evil to end such a person's life? God has created this life - Is it ours to take it from him? If we take such a person's life, it should be done on the pleading of the person so wishing to die and with trembling and with tears for it is a sin for which we need to plead in the arms of Jesus for mercy and for release. Do we then willfully sin so that we may be forgiven? The apostle Paul discusses this and he responds with a strong no.

War

Should we take another's life in war to protect our Nation or another Nation? This is surely a sign of the sinfulness of mankind and we need to plead for God's mercy.

Capital Punishment

Should we take another's life without their consent? Even if the taking of another's life is without malice, it is a sin. It is the sin of murder. But Jesus says that even if we hate another, we have committed murder in our hearts and it is a sin. Is the one sin greater than the other? Is it a sin because it is an act of evil against one's neighbor and against God? It is sin because it is a turning away from God and disobedience. That is the sin and there is no sin that is worse than another. They are all terrible evils of supreme consequence because they alienate us from God.

Murder

The sin is not that another has died but that by a deliberate action and malice at one's hand the poor soul has died. To cause the death of another even in one's heart is the same sin. Jesus says that to hate or to wish evil on another is the sin of murder.

Abortion

Should we willfully end the life of a fetus? Is it a sin to end the life of a fetus if you know that the child will be born into poverty and neglect? Is it a sin to end the life of a fetus if you know that you, the mother, will be subject to abuse, neglect or compounded poverty, or that you will have little chance for a good marriage or even a chance at life? Is it a sin to end the life of a fetus if it seems clear that the child would be deformed or unable to thrive? Is it a sin to end the life of a fetus because the child was conceived from rape, incest or other non-consensual intercourse and the child thus considered unclean? To willfully take another's life so that yours may be better or even that you will keep your life and not die is a sin. This is surely a sin.

If it were my wife or daughter whose life was in known jeopardy because of her pregnancy, I would think that I would wish to give my life in place of either life that may be lost. In the end, I would opt to end the pregnancy to save her life - - the more so if done during the early pregnancy. I would have difficulty saying that I would opt to "abort the fetus" as these are uncomfortable words.

A late term suction extraction? I would rather that the child be born, given a name and be baptized, and allowed to die comfortably and be mourned than to be treated so.

If the intercourse was forced or was unwanted; was the result of a variety of distasteful events including rape and incest, and if the pregnancy is normal; I don't know what I would want except that I would surely want the mother to have the best caring counsel she can get. And then make her decision.

Our Role in Outreach

- We are called as individuals to search out our answers to each of these issues.
- We are called to seek God's Word and to pray earnestly as we come to our own personal conclusions.
- The church is called to reach out with a visible role in providing comfort, healing, support, resource and sanctuary.

On The Servant Church

The call to be a servant

Throughout the book of Hebrews, the author details for us the nature of the high priest to offer sacrifice on our behalf and explains how Jesus fulfills the role of High Priest culminating in God's own sacrifice for us - the Son of God. To shed light further on this, the author compares Jesus sacrificial authority to the one who was perhaps the greatest High Priest of the Old Testament: Melchizedec, who served during the time of Abraham.

Specifically, I wish to open up chapter 6, verses 1 - 12 where the author, well versed in Hebrew Scripture, wonderfully explains to us how the doctrines of Christ are our foundation and that we are to be resolute in our faith; not rehashing these issues but how we are to move on to accomplish the ministry to which we are called. The author addresses the elemental doctrines of Christ and concludes that our job is not to debate them but to learn them, hold them in our heart and move forward. That is our call.

The text reads: Heb. 6: 1 - 12 (RSV) *Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrines of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and faith toward God, with instruction about [baptism] the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgments. And this we will do if God permits.*

For it is impossible to restore again to repentance those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have been partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they then commit apostasy, since they crucify the Son of God on their own account and hold him up to contempt. For the land that has drunk the rain that often falls upon it, and brings forth vegetation useful to those for whose sake it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God. But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to being cursed; its end is to be burned.

Though we speak thus, yet in your case, beloved, we feel sure of better things that belong to salvation. For God is not so unjust as to overlook your work and love which you showed for his sake in serving the saints, as you still do. And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness in realizing the full assurance of hope until the end, so that you might not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

Wow! What a challenge.

The author makes four points in this text.

1. The challenge to go on to maturity
2. To leave those who have been partakers of God's mercy but now have contempt for Jesus.
3. To understand that God sees your work, your love and your service for the saints.
4. And to not be sluggish but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

What then should be our work?

In Scripture, we read that the just will be rewarded for their acts of mercy and for sharing with the poor and disenfranchised. The motivation for such acts is purity in love for Jesus and not at all for the reward. Consider some exemplary persons such as Mother Teresa of the slums of Calcutta and Mary Jo Copeland of The Sharing and Caring Hands Mission of Minneapolis. Consider Jesus who showed us how to be a true disciple by washing the feet of his disciples.

What a fantastic engine!

If you've read any Thomas The Tank Engine books to your children, you know how there are different kinds of trains that do different things. Some little engines huff and puff struggling to do their job while streamliners flash right along by. Well, my perception is that while we're not a streamliner, we're an engine that's chugging busily right up the hill.

For starters, if you've been around Gethsemane for a bit, you'll see the so many folks who, by their actions and concerns and prayers, share what the Lord means to them. What a blessing - folks who have concerns for the needy and those who suffer, for the work of the church, for prayer, for Christian family, and even for joy and for having fun together. This is surely a community of Christ's church.

A question one might ask is, "What is the Coal that feeds this engine of ours?" No, it's not our offerings and financial support. The coal that feeds our engine is God alone, the Holy Spirit who works in our lives.

We at Gethsemane look to Jesus in our sense of mission and of need to serve one another and those in need. This is shown by the actions and words of many. Have you seen it?

Romans: 12: 9-13 (RSV) "...Your love must be completely sincere. Hate that which is evil and love that which is good. Be affectionate to one another in brotherly love. Give to

each other priority in honor. Do not be sluggish in zeal. Keep your spirit to the boiling point. Seize your opportunities. Rejoice in hope. Meet tribulation with triumphant fortitude. Be persevering in prayer. Share what you have to help the needs of God's dedicated people. Be eager to give hospitality."

Some Bible passages to look up.

Ex 30: 11-16 and the poor shall not give less than half a shekel

De 15: 7-11 If there is a poor man of your brethren, within any of the gates in your land which the lord your God is given you, you shall not harden your heart nor shut your hand from your poor brother, but you shall open your hand wide to him and willingly lend him sufficient for his need, whatever his needs.

I Samuel 2: 06-08 The lord makes poor and makes rich;

Job 5: 8 - 16 So the poor have hope, and injustice shuts her mouth.

Job 29: 16 I was a father to the poor

Psalms 34:6 This poor man cried

Psalms 40: 17 As for me, I am poor and needy

Psalms 41:01 Blessed is he who considers the poor

Proverbs 19: 01 Better is the poor man who walks with his

Isaiah. 11:04 righteousness he shall judge the poor

Is. 25:04 has been a stronghold to the poor

Jer 22: 16 the cause of the poor and needy

Amos 2: 07 the head of the poor into the dust

Amos 8 :04 and bring the poor of the land to an

Matt 5:03 "Blessed are the poor in spirit,

Matt 11:05 and the poor have good news preached

Matt 19: 21 your possessions and give to the poor,

Matt 26:11 For you always have the poor with you,

Luke 4: 18 me to preach good news to the poor

Luke 19:08 half of my goods I give to the poor

Rom. 15: 26 contributions for the poor among the

2 Cor 6:10 s poor, yet making many rich

2 Cor 8: 09 yet for your sake he became poor,

Rev 13: 16 both rich and poor, both free and

On Baptism

I was baptized into the death of Christ Jesus on June 9, 1940 when I was just a month old. Before I was born, my sisters Shirley, age 3 1/2; and Betty, 8 mos.; and brother Wayne, age 5; died in their childhood each at different times. I never knew them but they, too, were baptized into Christ Jesus and I am confident that they are with Him in Glory.

Does Baptism save? I believe that when a child is baptized, that in the act of baptism we invoke God's Spirit to dwell in the child and, indeed, God comes to the child. The act of offering the child is ours, but that the Lord dwells with the child is surely an act of God. Does God's Spirit come to us only in baptism? By no means. God calls everyone to himself.

On The Presence of Angels

Notes: There are more than thirty references in the old and new testaments to angels and their work. Are You There?

Are you present in the night watching over me? Do you watch over Nancy as she sleeps? Is Noah or Hannah your assignment for life? Do you keep Jennifer and Mark and Jeff and LeAnn safe? Do you watch over me to intercept the troubles I might encounter?

Presence: The way in which or the quality by which a person outwardly manifests his personality

Gifts: Something freely given to one person to another for their benefit or pleasure. When Jennifer was a little girl and we were living on Driftwood Lane in Stillwater, her bedroom was on the lower level and that's where she said that an angel was sitting at the foot of her bed watching over her.

On Hands for Ministry and Healing

(A work in progress)

INTRODUCTION

In Paul's letter to the Hebrews, chapter 6, the laying on of hands is one of six basic tenants of the Christian life and to the mature Christian it is not an issue about which one should spend time debating. In the book of Acts, the laying on of hands was a means whereby the recipient receives the Holy Spirit. The recipient may then speak in tongues and prophesy. In Paul's book of Timothy, Paul writes that Timothy prophesy and to emphasize its role in the church.

I suggest that the issue of the laying on of hands has a position of low priority within Lutheranism was not a controversial issue with Luther. Many churches embrace this act far better than we for ministry - even the Roman Catholic to which Luther belonged.

Scriptural and historic Examples with commentary

Stories of how touch has healed.

My Conclusions - its place in the community of followers, in the church setting and in the world

Biblical references

Questions to elicit essay responses of how healing hands touches or doesn't touch our lives.

SIX BASIC TRUTHS OF CHRISTENDOM

The Apostle Paul, writing to the church at Jerusalem, has just explained how Jesus is the High Priest after the order of Melchizedek - A concept people at the Jewish church at Jerusalem should well understand. But he now admonishes them, saying,

"You have been Christians a long time now, and you ought to be teaching others, but instead you have dropped back to the place where you need someone to teach you all over again the very first principles in God's Word. You are like babies who can drink only milk, not old enough for solid food. And when a person is still living on milk, it shows he isn't very far along in his Christian life, and doesn't know much about the difference between right and wrong [good vs. evil]. He is still a baby-Christian! You will never be able to eat solid spiritual food and understand the deeper things of God's Word until you become better Christians and learn right from wrong by practicing doing right." (Hebrews 5: 12 - 14 Living Bible)

I use the Living Bible translation here because its contemporary text clearly brings out this "slap in the face" for the Hebrews. Don't get me wrong - Paul is not admonishing the Hebrews because he thinks they're ignorant or incompetent. No, he's really angry with them because he knows they're much better than that (see v. 6: 9). He knows they understand the messages from God's Word. His point to them is that they must not doubt these words or debate them and thus be in jeopardy of turning from God. They've got to get going - they've got work to do!

At the beginning of chapter 6, Paul continues with words to the Hebrews to which we too must pay close attention. Those words to us are that there are certain truths regarding the foundation of our Life in Christ about which we should have no question. Let us not get hung up on them and let us not move away from them. Paul Continues,

"Let us stop going over the same ground again and again, always teaching those first lessons about Christ. Let us go on to other things and become mature in our understanding, as strong Christians ought to be. Surely we don't need to speak further of the foolishness of trying to be saved by being good, or about the necessity of faith in God. You don't need further instruction about baptism, the laying on of hands, and the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment. The Lord willing, we will go to other things." (Heb. 6: 01 - 03 LB)

What a strong proclamation! So these six things are sure:

1: Our salvation is in Christ and not by anything that we can do. The Latin phrase *Res ipsa loquitur* suggests that **because** the facts are so obvious, Paul need explain no more!

2: Faith in God is essential. Do you believe in God? Do you believe that he exists and that he is your personal savior? Have you accepted him? Have you given over your life to him? Praise God, Almighty!

3: Baptism. Baptism is the giving up of the old self and being born again into the death of Christ. Should we debate how Baptism is to be conducted and whether it should only for those who are able to declare their faith or should we include even our children. Baptism is not a declaration of our faith but a gift of God. Let us move on.

4: Laying on of Hands. Now this is an item about which we as Lutherans are not very familiar. The laying on of hands is a means whereby one receives the Holy Spirit. Perhaps it's because laying on of hands gets a little personal and, with our staunch Lutheran theological background, we're standoffish on this one. And perhaps it's terrifying because it is a life-changing event.

Let us remember that laying on of hands hasn't been a strong issue within the Lutheran church. In all of his writings and sermons, the major portion of Martin Luther's energy was taken up with the issue of justification and the concern to correct the issue within the church and it is in regard to the issue of justification that we as Lutherans are distinctive within the family of God's people.

5: Resurrection of the dead. Wow. There is one thing from which we cannot escape and that of course is that we are all destined to die. But we have a marvelous hope and our

hope is in Christ. Can you comprehend what it will be like? Can you believe it will happen? I guess we generally go on with the concerns and activities of our lives without much thought of that one-day when it will come to an end. But then we are confronted with a loved spouse or friend who is diagnosed with a terminal cancer or even one of our children is suddenly taken from us. Then, in our loss, it becomes clear and we have this hope. Thanks be to God!

6: Eternal judgment. God is holy. Let us not forget that. We shall be judged by whether we have loved or by our works of selfishness and indifference. I love the story of Mother Teresa whose order tends to the dying who would otherwise die alone. She says that her job is not to reach all the sick and dying in the world because that is God's work and not hers. To think it was her job would be a matter of building herself up, of inflating her importance, and it would be a sin. Her job is only to reach her hands of healing to the soul of each individual who comes to her - a few at a time in humility and in mercy. Mother Teresa says that it by this that we will be judged and I believe her.

Damnation

Bible References:

Hands

Healing:

Sharing and Caring Hands Ministry, Minneapolis
Little Sisters of the Poor, Calcutta

Deut 34: 09 for Moses had laid his hand upon him

Mat. 19: 15 And he laid his hand upon them and went [Jesus laid his hand on the children saying that of such is the Kingdom of God. This was a blessing of the children.

Acts 8: 18 Then they laid their hands upon them and they received the Holy Spirit [The Spirit was given through the laying on of hands]

Acts 19: 06 He said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed? And they said, "No, we have never even heard that there is a Holy Spirit." And he said, "Into what then were you baptized?" And they said, "Into John's baptism." On hearing this, they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hand upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them; and they spoke in tongues and prophesied. There were about twelve of them in all.

I Ti. 4: 14 the elders laid their hands upon you. [Timothy received spiritual gifts when the elders laid their hands upon him]

I Tim. 5: 22 Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands [It is a serious thing and it is to be done after some mental consideration] [The two text references in Timothy to laying on of hands is in reference to the officers of the church and duties of minister.]

Perhaps God is a Spider

We lived just a block off the Mississippi River on the north edge of Minneapolis at 5230 North 3rd Street. The house isn't there any more - - Neither is the street. It's part of the interstate highway system and now hundreds of cars and trucks pass through that place each day busy with their own concerns and schedules. But back then the street was unpaved and quiet. The neighbors visited with friendly concern and children played and ran about in the yards. Bed sheets and towels on the clotheslines flapped in the breeze and an occasional dog barked and chased after the children. In our back yard, there was a wild plum tree, a grape arbor with two swings, lots of irises, a rickety old screen house and a doghouse. Lilac bushes ran along both sides of the yard. The Lilacs on the south side were kept neatly trimmed and the ones on the north were let to grow tall. A large Box Elder tree shaded the porch in the front and, in the back; a dirt alley ran behind the old garage.

It was the middle of July and the sun was warm in the still noon air and small white clouds drifted across the bright sky. In the back yard, the Morning Glories bloomed under the kitchen window and the grass was a little dry because it hadn't rained for a while.

Mom was hanging out the clothes on the line and, by the door to the back porch; I played in the dirt along the corner of the sidewalk. I had a few little rubber trucks and a farm tractor. With my fingers, I made little roads in the dirt. The year was 1944 and I had just turned four years old in May. With a child's imagination, I could go just about anywhere then.

First there was me and then there was my brother Billy. He was a year older than I and we would play in the dirt and ride our trikes and run around the neighborhood and have fun. Billy was my leader in playing with friends in the neighborhood and I followed along. Billy was skinny and I was kind of chubby, I thought. Then there was my mom and dad. It seems mom was always washing clothes in the basement or making dinner in the kitchen.

I remember that dad was always working or busy with something. He'd work on the car in the garage or trim the hedges in the yard or tend his vegetables in the garden or talk to the neighbors. I remember relatives and my cousins would come over a lot and he would talk and there was a lot of laughter. Mom laughed too and I liked that. I had a lot of fun when my cousins came over. Mom was thirty-four and dad was thirty-seven then. Dad was a waiter at the Jolly Miller and he took the streetcar to go to work. I thought that my sister Mary Ann was a lot older than me and almost grown-up at that time - - I guess she was ten. My brother Junior was thirteen and, it seems, he was away most of the time with his friends. He went down to the river a lot.

It may have been that same summer that I remember riding my tricycle along the sidewalk by the south side of the house. There were Peonies planted next to the house and the buds were fun with ants crawling all around sucking up its nectar. I liked to pick off the buds and watch them roll on the ground like marbles. Mom would say, "Now, don't pick those buds!" Earlier in the spring, Box Elder bugs by the hundreds, or maybe thousands, crawled around the siding of the house and basked in the warmth of the sidewalk.

I remember mom canning beans and peaches and baking bread. I remember the "dough gobs" that she would fry up on the stove and roll in sugar from the left-over dough. We would run in from our playing and run out with these wonderful warm treats.

Out in the back yard, the sidewalk ran out to the garage and, just to the right, the grape arbor grew up on two sturdy posts and across an arch. Two well used wooden swings hung from the arch on strong ropes. Mom made grape jelly from the grapes of that vine if she could get to the ripe grapes before the birds would eat them - - which was often the case. And next to the grape arbor was the wild plum tree. Mom made plum Jelly, too. And under the

plum tree, our dog Pal sprawled out to rest in the shade. His doghouse was in the Iris patches just up from the plum tree along the Lilac hedge.

One summer afternoon I took a nap in the doghouse. It may have been that same year or possibly a year earlier in 1943. I guess mother was frantic. Everyone in the neighborhood was out and the police were looking for me, too - - I guess I was lost. Mom found me, though. As she walked past the doghouse she thought, "He can't be in there," but looked in anyway. There I was - - sleeping. I remember how comfortable it was there in the doghouse. It had a screened back window that allowed some circulation and had warm straw on the floor. With little spiders with their spider webs in the corners, I remember that it was a nice place.