

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is our sincere hope that the publication of these selected sermons by Dr. Lee Moorehead, in commemoration of his eight years of outstanding ministry at First United Methodist Church in Madison, will bring continued inspiration, renewal of faith, and enduring joy to untold numbers of people.

This project began with a suggestion from a member of this church who wishes to remain anonymous. It has been brought to completion by the devoted efforts of many people. Our appreciation is extended in particular to:

Dr. Lee Moorehead for his prompt and unstinting cooperation in the selecting and editing of these sermons.

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The Directors of
The First United Methodist Church Foundation,
Madison, Wisconsin

1984

A MINISTER WHO WILL BE MISSED

His own parishioners aren't the only ones who rank the Rev. Lee Moorehead as one of the most talented preachers in town. People from all over the city can attest to his gifts. Among them: warmth and compassion, coupled with a gift for raising provocative questions and making his listeners think.

Moorehead has been pastor of the downtown's First United Methodist Church for the past eight years. He will retire shortly and return to his hometown of Peoria.

The Methodist minister will be a tough act to follow. Widely read and deeply interested in world affairs, Moorehead has been a staunch defender of church-state separation.

But he has also rightly observed the spiritual implications of secular issues, questioning, for example, the morality of nuclear weapons that can destroy all of creation. In a move that reflected his respect for dissent, Moorehead invited his congregation to "talk back" to him when he sermonized on that subject. They did.

In contrast to some pastors who lean on prepared sermons, Moorehead painstakingly researched and wrote his own; they often related Biblical lessons to the everyday lives of his parishioners.

Moorehead was also interested in breaking down the walls between the church and the community. A few years ago, he started an innovative program, "Books Between Bites," which brings together a wide range of Madisonians over the noon hour to discuss books over lunch.

Lee Moorehead has enriched Madison with his lively mind and generous spirit. We'll miss him greatly.

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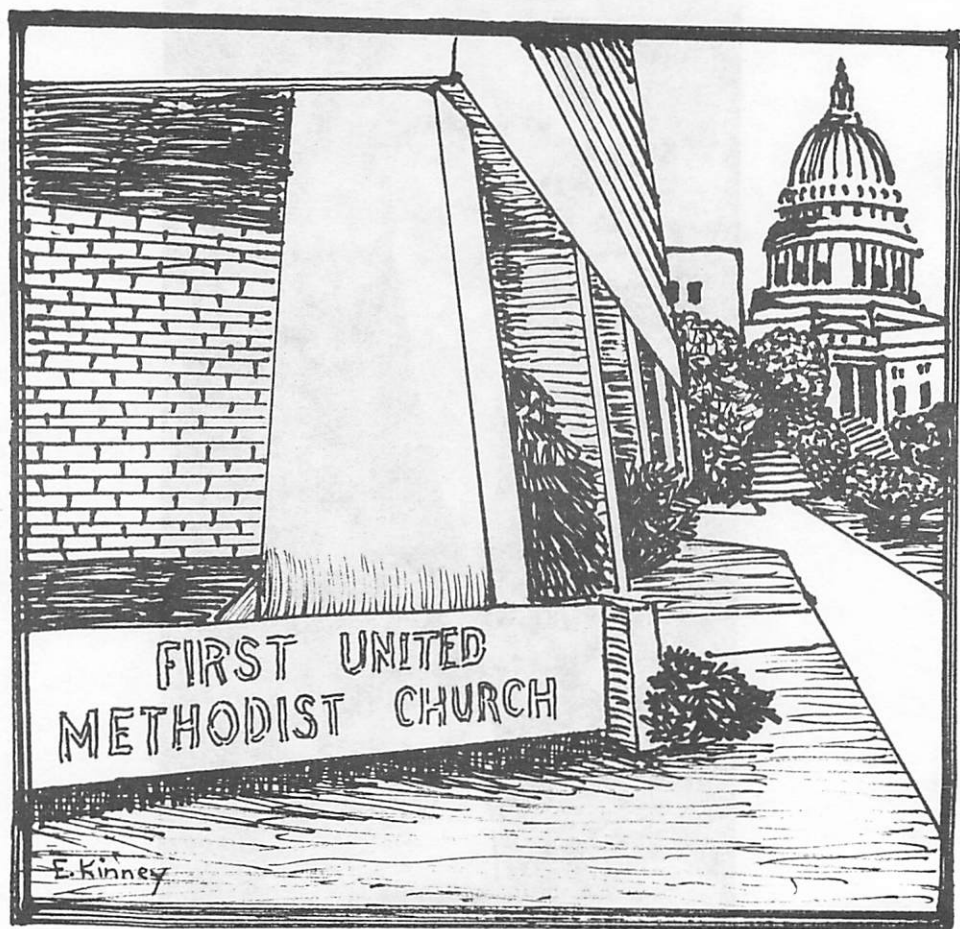


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HOW DOES A CHRISTIAN LIVE IN SIN CITY?

February 4, 1979

Many Madisonians have an affectionate name for our city. It is called "Sin City." We often chuckle when we refer to Madison in that way. We laugh, too, when we compare our city with other wide-open cities like Las Vegas and New York, San Francisco, and now Atlantic City. It is almost as though we are saying that it is all right to have some places in the country where people can go to indulge themselves.

Indeed, Madison is a beautiful and exciting city. It is a wonderful place to live. Its blend of governmental, educational and cultural activities provides all of us with exceptional opportunities of growth and stimulus. There is in this community an exceptional degree of freedom which makes it possible for persons to pursue and develop their own individuality. It is not so in many cities.

But our city, like many other cities, is a living paradox. Beneath the freedom and the excitement, the fun and the openness, there are misery and human degradation. If we are given an unusual degree of freedom in which to express ourselves, it is also true that we often use that freedom towell, I am going to use a term that seems out of date, but which is the most accurate: sin. Yes, this is Sin City. It is Sin City because beneath the glitter and the glory there are human rebelliousness and violence which can only, for Christians, be described as sin.

It took an illustrious psychiatrist, Dr. Karl Menninger, to remind us several years ago that we have tried to avoid the old religious concept of sin. He wrote an important book which he called Whatever Became of Sin? Well, we Christians need to recover that terminology and apply it with telling accuracy to our city. We might be reminded of what the prophet Isaiah wrote long ago as he contemplated the degradation into which Jerusalem and Judah had fallen:

*Jerusalem is stricken and Judah fallen
because they have spoken and acted against
the Lord, rebelling against the glance of
his glorious eye.*

*The look on their faces testifies against them;
like Sodom they proclaim their sins
and do not conceal them.*

*Woe upon them! they have earned their own
disaster.*

(Isaiah 4:8-9, NEB)

Jerusalem is here compared to the proverbial wickedness of the city of Sodom. The city proclaims its sins, and does not seek to conceal them. Is that not a description of some modern cities that seem to advertise their sinfulness, to revel in it? Isn't that a true picture of Las Vegas? What about Madison? Do we not seem to advertise ourselves, however playfully, as Sin City? Perhaps we should be reminded that Isaiah said that Jerusalem and Judah were stricken and fallen "because they have spoken and acted against the Lord."

Why is this really Sin City? I will tell you: despite the great evidence of wholeness and goodness in our city, there is always that kind of sinister deception in which evil parades as good. For example, one of the so-called "massage parlors" calls itself "This is Heaven." It lies. It is in reality a house of prostitution. Within its walls broken lives are exploited, children are abused and marriage fidelity is desecrated. In our city we should see these goings-on as sin. Yes, in Sin City.

On State Street at midnight you see bright lights and the scene resembles Times Square in New York. Everywhere there is heard laughter, and revelry makes the streets ring. People seem to be enjoying fun and frolic. But in the dark shadows, in the alleys, and in the unlit doorways and rooms there are human souls suffering and struggling with the degradation of drugs and alcohol. A lovely young girl walking alone may be dragged into a loathsome corner and ravaged. Yes, beneath the facade there is violence and sin.

Well, how do Christians live in such a city? Enjoying as they do the educational and cultural riches, glorying in the utter magnificence of the capitol dome at night, how do Christians concern themselves with the fact that countless children are being abused with alcohol and young girls under age are being lured into the vicious clutches of prostitution? Is there anything that a Christian can do to make a difference in a vast city of changing scenes and life styles like this city? Think about what we might do for a moment.

The first thing we have to think about is really a problem. We have to recognize the freedom of human souls to conduct their own lives. All of my life I have been troubled by censorship. What is good and wholesome to me may be poison to someone else. I cannot lightly disregard the freedom of others to conduct themselves as they choose.

Let me give you a very personal example. I grew up committed to the idea that alcoholic beverages were best left alone. I devoutly wish that everyone would become a teetotaler. But obviously I run into great difficulty. Many people -- good people -- would be incensed if I tried to take away their freedom to use alcohol as they choose. They and I might not see eye-to-eye concerning what is moral and good in this regard.

So in a wide-open city, I have to recognize that it is not easy for me to prescribe the moral behaviour of everyone. The other day a candidate for mayor in our city pulled an interesting electioneering stunt. He went into a pornography book store and with a ball bat commenced to smash up the fixtures. Since the store is apparently operating inside the law, the proprietor called the police. They came and arrested him and charged him with criminal damage to property. Now of course the first thing he did when arrested was to call the local newspapers so he would get publicity for his acts. Possibly some might have seen him as the ghost of a figure who long ago smashed up the tables of money-changers in the temple. But calling the newspapers considerably restricted that interpretation. No,

I don't think we can act as Christians and do that. As a Christian, I do not think it would be fitting for me to walk into a bar with a ball bat and start smashing up the liquor supply.

On the other hand, I don't think an ordered society, where everyone is protected, can allow everyone to do everything he might please. Last week at the Golden Globe Awards in Hollywood a startling thing happened. Given a citation was the film, "Midnight Express," the story of a young, would-be drug smuggler. When the author-screen-writer, Oliver Stone went forward to give his acceptance speech (Jan. 27, 1979) he called upon the government to allow "adults to pursue happiness in any way they can." Do you know what the star-studded audience did? They booed and hissed following his remarks. Apparently, even in wide-open, free-living Hollywood, people are appalled to think that anyone can do anything he wants to find happiness. That would include robbery, rape, arson, and murder for some. Yes, there are limits. But as Christians we must be aware that finding and determining those limits is extremely difficult and complex.

Still, what can Christians do, living in Sin City? I offer the following suggestions.

-I-

First, they can show that they care and have compassion for the victims of sin.

Our model for this is the picture of Jesus weeping over Jerusalem. From a height Jesus must have looked down upon the Holy City to lament: *"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that murders the prophets and stones the messengers sent to her! How often have I longed to gather your children, as a hen gathers her brood under her wings; but you would not let me."* (Matt. 23:37, NEB) That caring and compassion ought to characterize the Christian as he or she looks at this city. The Christian cares because in

Christ he has been sensitized to love all human creatures,
and to respond to their needs.

I want to share with you something that came right
out of the heart of one person in our church. Donna
Turner saw a film strip entitled "As Strong as the Land."
It was about women throughout the world. Three times she
saw it. She was so overwhelmed with a feeling of compas-
sion for her sisters that to get a meaningful release she
wrote these words out of her empathy for them. These
words could speak for Christians as we think about the
troubled souls in our city:

*Listen, do you hear something? Turn the stereo
down.*

It sounds like a woman crying.

*Over there in the fields with a baby tied
to her back . . . weariness.*

*Listen, do you hear something? Lay aside the
paper.*

It sounds like a woman crying.

*In a bare room, children hungry, her
man gone . . . loneliness.*

Listen, do you hear something? Put down your drink.

It sounds like a woman crying.

*On a bed - a self-induced abortion . . .
pain.*

*Listen, do you hear something? Walk a little
slower.*

It sounds like a woman crying.

*Immobile, she stands helpless before the
dark shadow. . . fear.*

Listen, do you hear something? Hush!

It sounds like a woman crying.

*It is my heart - oh, sister, I hear you. . .
love.*

And I say to you, listen, do you hear something? Do you

hear the voices of boys and girls, of youths and middle aged adults, of old and broken adults? Do you hear them crying? Above the revelry-roar of State Street, and the bustling commerce of our shopping centers, do you hear the sounds of crying, and do you weep with Christ as he wept over the fallen state of Jerusalem?

Several weeks ago someone broke into our church, apparently looking for money. Whoever it was smashed in three of our beautiful doors and our quite dispensable soft drink dispensing machine. Whoever it was broke into my study and tossed my precious papers all over the floor. Two of those mangled doors have not been repaired or replaced as yet. But everytime I look at them, or pass through them, I think of this person who left the scars of his anger and need upon the beauty of this church. How I wish that I could talk to him, and tell him of Christ. How I wish that I could show him that I care and that I have compassion. How I would like to gather him into my arms, as a hen gathers her brood under her wings.

-II-

Indeed, we do not have to be proud, we cannot gloat over the "Sin City" side of the place where we live. But there is another thing we can do: we can make our church, Christ's Church, truly a mission in this world for the rescue of human souls. That is what we can do as Christians in Sin City.

Sometimes we smile at the store-front churches which call themselves Rescue Missions. With our fine clothes and our sleek cars we wouldn't want to attend there on Sunday morning. But that term -- Rescue Mission -- is not a bad one to describe the function of the church in our city. A few minutes ago we sang:

*Rescue the perishing, Care for the dying,
Snatch them in pity from sin and the grave;
Weep o'er the erring one, Lift up the fallen,
Tell them of Jesus the mighty to save. (No. 175)*

What's wrong with that as a description of our calling to be a church?

Several years ago someone told of a sign he had seen on a church: "This Church Exists for the Sake of Those Outside of It." (Kenneth Miller in Man and God in the City., p. 83) To be sure, the church exists for the sake of those who have joined it. It ministers to their salvation and their joy. But it is never the church of Christ without existing as well for those who are outside it.

So every day we have passing through the halls of this church a constant procession of lost and hungry souls. Many of them are oddly and poorly dressed. Many seem to be off-beat in their life-styles. They come seeking help: bus tickets to take them on their journeys, food for their stomachs, food for the families, lodging in a time of stress. Many of them tell us stories that we know are not true. They make up tales that are bizarre and calculated to rip us off. Some of them irritate us with their poverty, their flippancy, their hostility. But I know that every face masks a human soul that is suffering from spiritual hunger. I know that many of them are lost and lonely, that in their lives they have been betrayed and abused, and that they are trying cynically and deceitfully sometimes, to make it through this world. In every face there is the reflection of neglect and rejection. We listen to every story. We do not meet every request. But we try to turn no one away without showing that we care.

Our Food Bank, our two day care child centers, are ways we have as a church to express our love and caring for God's children.

A year ago this last Christmas Eve I saw a startling

sight on State Street after midnight. I was on my way home from our midnight service. As I traveled on Gorham and crossed State Street I could hardly believe what I saw: Santa Claus was walking jauntily across the intersection, all alone. Early on Christmas Day he waved at me. I don't know what he was doing there at that hour, all alone. But he was there. Many nights since I have crossed State Street in the late hours. Many times I look up and down to view what is happening on our most famous street. People are coming and going. People often seem in a festive mood and I can frequently catch sounds of loud laughter. But then, as I pause for the signal, I see another figure crossing the street. There is about him a humble beauty, an aura of strength and grace. His hands seem strong, yet tender, as though he were reaching out to help those in trouble and in need. I know who he is. He is Christ. And he walks our city streets and he shows that he cares for all human souls. However dark and dreadful may be the shadows of this city, how deep and despairing its sin, he is there. And I want to sing:

*Yet in thy dark streets shineth
The everlasting light;
The hopes and fears of all the years
Are met in thee tonight*

Can you and I find any better way to live in this city
than by following where he leads us?

DRACULA, SUPERMAN AND CHRIST

May 13, 1979

When I was growing up and very much at your age, I was powerfully influenced by tales of fiction and stories of real events. There were books that ran in series and I gobbled them up. I can remember them now and the feelings they invoked in me. There was the X Bar X Boys series--all about young cowboys and their adventures in the Rocky Mountains. There were the Hardy Boys who solved all kinds of mysteries. There were the Golden Boys whose adventures in the Maine woods taught me so much. Then there was Tom Swift who invented so many things that fascinated me. And then there were the Mercer brothers whose adventures in a military school made me send off for catalogs to all of the military schools for boys. I read these stories over and over again, and some of them I still have and I am going to invite my grandchildren to visit me someday soon so that I can read the stories to them and enjoy them all over again. These books delighted my imagination and led me through many adventures that I would otherwise never have had.

But do you know, I don't think my generation was entertained by the kind of fictional characters which have been so prominent for you. Dracula never horrified me and Superman never led me to jump off of a roof, thinking that I could fly. My children grew up with these stories in books and films and comic strips. It is only recently that I have begun to learn who they were.

I wonder what figures of fiction or history have captured your imagination? I think I know who some of them are. On this Confirmation Day I am going to ask you to wonder with me about three persons who have appealed to our imaginations and faith. Let me name each one, and see how they do indeed reflect some of the realities of our world.

First there is Dracula. I know that all of you have been introduced to him.

Apparently there actually lived in 15th century Transylvania a tyrant by that name. A writer by the name of Bram Stoker seized upon this historical character and expanded him into a mythological character of great evil. Dracula represents the dark world of vampires in which loathsome creatures suck the blood out of human bodies. As a force of evil, Dracula is always clashing with the force of good. Dracula is sometimes seen in the form of a bat, flying through the darkness of the night. He rules by fear and force. His power is that of terror. As one writer has pointed out, he "lives by taking life. He drains his victims of their blood that he may live; they must die to prevent his death. He grabs, clutches, crushes." (Dracula: Christian Heretic," by Christopher Gist Raible, in Christian Century, Jan. 31, 1979, p. 103-104) Dracula lives only in the darkness. His one resting place is a coffin filled with dirt.

This fictional Dracula has, of course, held us in great fascination. I wonder if it is because the evil he represents is so prevalent in our world. The world is full of evil and violence, all right, and it is not fictional. We live in a time when the forces of evil and destruction move like marauding armies through our earth. I don't have to tell you of the terrible and terrifying things that are happening: mass murders, hijackings, kidnappings, muggings, rapes, robberies, vandalism, wars. These are all very real and sometimes in our moods of despair we might be inclined to think that the Dracula figure is more real than fictional.

You young people cannot avoid living in this kind of a world. It is right here before you. This violent world seeks to recruit you for its death and destruction, its blood-sucking and its mind-bending. Right on your

school campuses you meet people who try to lure you into all kinds of death traps. They do indeed ask you to join the ranks of the trappers. You will remember the night in our Confirmation Class when so many of you told of the severe trials and pressures to which you are being subjected. And now as you soon move on into high school you know what to expect.

In high school you know that there will be those who will seek to destroy your own personality, your individuality. They will try to beat you down, beat you up and get you to join the ranks of the boozers, the druggers, the vandals. In reality they will be trying to terrorize you into vandalizing buildings, ravaging your own sacred integrity. I am not telling you anything that you do not know, for it is you who have told me of these things.

One of you told us that night when we asked how you felt about going into high school: "I am terrified." I think he was speaking for many. Yes, there will be not a few Dracula types wanting to suck your life blood and to get you to fly by darkness in bat formation.

Dracula was first presented as an absorbing stage play. The drama ends, of course, with Dracula's destruction. But before the audience leaves the theater Dr. Van Helsing speaks to them:

Just a word of reassurance. When you get home tonight and the lights have been turned out and you are afraid to look behind the curtains and you dread to see a face appear at the window - why, just pull yourself together and remember that after all there are such things. (Ibid. p. 104)

Yes, there are such things in the real world. But so much for Dracula.

Now there is, of course, another super hero who has captured the imagination of us all. He is Superman! Superman, quite the opposite of Dracula, is pure goodness. By his great power he rights the wrongs of the world and saves people from terrible deaths and injustice.

I went to see the recent film telling about "Superman." I just sat in the theater thoroughly enjoying the spectacle of an all-powerful man doing everything that was right and good. Before coming to Wisconsin we lived in Southern Illinois, not far from Metropolis. While we lived there the city of Metropolis made an effort to exploit the Superman story. They had a special Superman Day Celebration. A Baptist preacher dressed up as Superman. With middle-aged fat bulging out from his skin-tight blue and white uniform he didn't quite seem able to fly faster than light. Indeed, if he had tried to fly he would have fallen flat on his face. But it was all a lot of fun. That's what Superman is: a lot of fun.

Superman can do everything and his character shines with utter purity. He can fly faster than sound and his strength is so great that he can reverse the disasters of an earthquake by taking the globe in his mighty hands and start the planet rotating in the opposite direction. He can swoop up to the top of a skyscraper and prevent someone from falling. He can fly effortlessly through the concrete canyons of a great city, and on a beautiful evening he can take his girl friend on the most romantic trip through space. How I would have loved to have been able to do that! But alas when I was Superman's age I didn't even have a car. I always had to beg to go on a double date!

O, how we would love to be able to look up from this sordid world to behold an object in the sky: "It's a bird! It's a plane! No! It's Superman!" He's coming to save us from evil and from woe. He will stop the drunks

who are about to kill people with their cars! He will forestall the vandals in their vandalism! He will intervene in rapes and robberies! He will overpower the hijackers! He will swoop down into the kidnappers' lair and set the victims free!

Sometime ago I saw a most interesting cartoon. It is by Marlette. It shows Superman standing in his familiar cape. Beside him are printed these words:

There is a man who was sent to Earth by his father, was raised in humble circumstances, and since he was not of this world dwelt among men and women of Earth as an outsider. But his was a special destiny . . . By dedicating his unique gifts to the service of truth and justice he stood for the oppressed, the meek, the afflicted, the outcast, the powerless. . . for all of humanity.

This is not Him (He). (Christian Century, Jan. 31, 1979, p. 96)

-III-

So let me remind you of the third figure to whom you have been long ago introduced. Indeed, if we could sum up the entire meaning of our Confirmation Class training it would be about him. He is Christ.

Dracula is a myth about evil. Superman is a modern legend about goodness and truth. But the story of Jesus Christ tells us about the most wonderful man who ever lived. He is the Way and the Truth and the Life.

There is a man who was sent to Earth by his father, was raised in humble circumstances, and even though his truth was not of this world dwelt among men and women of Earth

as one of them. But his was a special destiny. . .By dedicating his unique gifts to the service of truth and justice he stood for the oppressed, the meek, the afflicted, the outcast, the powerless. . .for all of humanity.

This is He - he is Jesus Christ. He has left with us the symbol of his love and courage, this cross which is radiant with his presence.

Dracula and all of his modern henchmen live by blood. They drain blood from others so that they may live. Christ sheds his blood so that all may have life.

Dracula rules by terror. Christ rules by love and peace.

Dracula can live only in the darkness. Christ invites us to walk with him in the light.

Superman entertains us with his magic shows. Christ fills us with his real power.

Superman is fiction. Christ is real.

Superman cannot suffer because he knows no human frailties. Christ was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities. Christ died for us.

In Superman we know that we are being entertained by a figure who seems to conquer evil with such ease. Christ looks into the abyss of evil and helps us to overcome it with the grace of his courage.

Superman flies before us, but with Jesus we walk, even through the valley of the shadow of death.

Indeed, Christ empowers us to face our real lives without fear and trembling. Superman you will find will not be of much help to you as you go on to high school

and face the temptations and tribulations of your youth. You will not find Superman present when you are being propositioned by drug pushers, alcoholics and vandals. But with St. Paul you can say: "I have learned to find resources in myself whatever my circumstances. I know what it is to be brought low, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have been thoroughly initiated into the human lot with all its ups and downs - fullness and hunger, plenty and want. I have strength for anything through him who gives me power." (Phil. 4:12,13)

I suppose that many of you young people have had the crushing experience of seeing some of your heroes fall, and fall hard. Sometimes those whom we look up to fail, and that failure casts us down. Right now there are so many people in the world who I think have let me down. They have turned out to be not the heroes I truly wanted them to be and what I thought they were. I know you have been disappointed, too. Sometimes those closest to us fail, and we are hurt. They can be fathers or mothers, brothers, or sisters, friends, sports heroes, and even public leaders. Some people think their ministers have failed morally. Well, I want you to know that though we were far from perfect and you will see us fail, we want to pledge to you that we will do all in our power, by the grace of God, to try to be true to the kind of Christian character we have called you to. We will try so hard never by our own behaviour to disappoint or disillusion you. If we do that we will have to stay close to Christ.

Dear Christian young people, years and years ago I made a commitment to Christ. It was on a lovely evening, on a hillside overlooking a lake. A man rowed across the lake and tied up his boat at the foot of our hill. A thousand young people listened as he called us to the Christian life, and some to the ministry. I stood up that night and said that I wanted to be a minister. As that evening vesper service concluded, we walked away from that hillside singing, "Where he leads me I will follow, I'll go with Him, with Him all the way." That night I was eighteen years old and I had no idea where he was going to

lead me. Where he has led me has sometimes been more demanding than I wanted. It has been through ways of defeat and disappointment, difficulty and drudgery. At times I have been terribly afraid, and as I look out upon this real world, I am actually terrified. But wherever he has led me, he has gone with me. He has never left me alone. I have stumbled and fallen, many times, but he has never forsaken me. All of my life I have had the feeling that he is at my side. I have betrayed him and tried to flee from him. But always I have found him again, only to learn that he would not let me go. So I believe I can say, as I hope you will, too: "I have strength for anything through him who gives me power."

Dracula and all of his legions give us chills and thrills. Superman and his amazing exploits give us fun. But Christ will give you life. I pray that you will grasp that life when we place our hands upon your heads and say, "May the Lord defend you with his heavenly grace and by his Spirit confirm you in the faith and fellowship of all true disciples of Jesus Christ." With him you will "have strength for anything through him who gives (you) power."

WE SHALL OVERCOME
November 18, 1979

A few moments ago we sang "We Shall Overcome." As everyone knows, that was the great hymn-song of the civil rights movement of the sixties. It obviously supplied an emotional and spiritual fuel for a movement that in a large measure won its objectives. But, frankly, isn't it a bit silly to be singing that song today? In an act of unprecedented terrorism which holds 62 Americans hostage in the embassy in Tehran, does the world not seem to be so out of joint and so far removed from reason that it makes no sense to be emoting about how "We shall overcome"? After all, in the sixties the civil rights marchers were appealing to the United States Constitution and the truth that is supposed to be basic to American life. But the Iranians have no such constitution, no such national theme, and they are playing a deadly game inside our embassy in Tehran. Would it be at all prudent and helpful for those 62 hostages to be singing, "We shall overcome"?

Furthermore, if you were a Cambodian and you were watching the jaws of genocide closing over an entire nation, would it do much good to sing "We shall overcome"? Well, I suppose that most of us are being overwhelmed with a sense of despair about our world. Not only despair, but fear. Indeed, terror. Always before we have been motivated by the faith that we could overcome all obstacles on our road to fulfilling the great American dream. We have seen our society as the "New Jerusalem", coming down from God, it being our destiny to solve all of the world's problems. But is there now any real sense in trying to overcome this world which seems to be perishing in the agonies of a thousand incurable ailments?

And yet here we are in a sanctuary dedicated to Almighty God, singing hymns and reciting scripture about a man who came from God to show us how to overcome. You will remember that he was despised and rejected and in the end,

even abandoned and betrayed by his friends. He was tried, spat upon, whipped, speared and put to death in agony on a cross. But even knowing that all of this was going to happen to him, he was able to say shortly before the end, *"The hour is coming, indeed it has come, when you will be scattered, every man to his home, and will leave me alone, yet I am not alone, for the Father is with me. I have said this to you that you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."* Is Christ the one who has inspired his followers through the ages to sing together, "We shall overcome"? In our present-day despair can we just give up and say that the world is so rotten and sliding pell-mell to hell that there is nothing we can do to overcome anything? Certainly it cannot be so with the Christian. In this world we do have tribulation -- plenty of it! There may be some things that we cannot change, but there are those things which by the grace of God we can change.

Take a look at this great song, "We Shall Overcome," and let us see what it is that we can overcome. Three assertions I want to lift out of that song.

-I-

The first is a message to Christians who belong to the church:

*We'll walk hand in hand,
O deep in my heart
I do believe
That we shall overcome some day.*

Sometimes the world seems so forbidding that we feel that we have no way of coping with tribulation. But is this not one great purpose of the Church of Christ: We come together week after week to share our witness and to strengthen each other. For example, I need you so much this week. I wake up in the middle of the night almost terrified by the atrocity in Cambodia and the grim picture in Iran. I have that

useless, helpless feeling, that there is nothing I can do about any of this. But then today we are here together. I need you to share with, to share with me, to strengthen me, so that tomorrow morning I can go back and cope again.

I did not at one time like the metaphor of the football "huddle" to describe the church. It sounded too chummy, too self-contained. But now in a way it makes sense. We are here to huddle together, to get our heads together, to check the signals about what we can do against the massive opposition of evil in our world, to get some vital signals from the "bench." Then we break from the huddle, and we seek to overcome the opposition.

The church is not the place to escape from the world. It is rather a temporary shelter from the storm, where we can warm our bones and our hearts, take the fresh offering of sacramental power, and then go back into the world.

The church is a place to overcome our loneliness in the struggles of life. Here we find that we are not alone. Doesn't it do you some good to look around this room and see that there are other people here? I think I once told you that when I was growing up I used to shiver when violent storms were crashing outside at night. Sometimes I could feel the house shake. But I always felt better when we had guests in the home. Somehow they gave me courage and comfort. Is it not the same with the church? Remember how we sing of the church?

*Mid toil and tribulation,
And tumult of her war,
She waits the consummation
Of peace forevermore.
'Til with the vision glorious,
Her longing eyes are blest,
And the Church victorious
Shall be the church at rest.*

Indeed, to overcome, we'll walk hand in hand.

We also sing in our great marching song:

*We are not afraid
O deep in my heart
I do believe
That we shall overcome some day.*

If the church does anything, it helps us to overcome our fears - our fears of harm, of danger, of non-being, of not being accepted in the world.

When Martin Luther King, Jr. and the civil rights marchers sang and swayed to the rhythms of "We Shall Overcome", do you suppose that all fear was removed? Indeed not! That does not remove fear, but it overcomes fear. In many situations in my life, I have been genuinely afraid. I was able to overcome that fear, not obliterate it. And so it may be with most of us.

Recently I saw an interview that a sports writer had with the well-known baseball star, Bill Madlock. I am glad to say that Madlock came from my hometown, Decatur, Illinois. Apparently Bill Madlock is such a good hitter that he has been the victim of many "brush-back" or direct hit pitches. But in the interview he explained his reaction: "*When pitchers hit me, I feel that they're just showing they're afraid. . (but) I'm not afraid at the plate. I've led the league in getting hit by pitches, but I've never been afraid.*" (Chicago Tribune, July 18, 1978, p. 2)

Fear is such a pervasive and paralyzing emotion. This past week I attended an all-day seminar for clergy at the Mendota Mental Health Institute. There we discussed "The Psychiatric and Pastoral Responses to the Sociopathic Personality Disorder-Antisocial Type." Our discussion really dwelt on the sex offender. I was keenly interested to learn that one of the major problems confronting the therapist in a place like Mendota is his own fear of the

patient. That fear can be completely disruptive of therapy. It must be overcome, though. Perhaps it can never be entirely removed. In the real world in which we live, all of us have to overcome fear.

A writer, Gordon Harland, has declared: *"He who has been given courage to look into the abyss of darkness is the one who knows how to walk straight and gentle into the power of a new hope."* (from program "The Wind Whispers," a multi-reflection on United Methodism created for the North Central Jurisdictional Conference, Sioux Falls, S.D., July 14, 1976)

In our day many Christians find themselves faced by terrifying shadows that evoke fears. Think of those hostages held in the embassy in Tehran! They must surely fear that in the fury of the religious fanaticism being vented against them they could die. We will not know until they are released how they survived, but they must have some way of overcoming that fear.

How do you suppose Jesus Christ overcame his fear as he faced the powers that held his life in their hands? Facing that death, and probably trembling with those fears, he was able to say to his disciples who were about to flee: *"In the world you have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."* The next time you are in a tight spot, and your heart is quaking with fear, will you remember those words and the one who said them?

Before I went to Israel three summers ago, I tried to prepare myself by reading Saul Bellow's book, To Jerusalem and Back. Bellow quoted A. B. Yehoshua: *"Perhaps there is something exceptional in all our Jewishness, in all the risk we take upon ourselves, in the fact that we live on the brink of an abyss and we know how to do so."* (p. 161) Maybe that explains the endurance of the Israeli people who live in the midst of unceasing danger. Ought it not also to describe Christians?

And finally, this marching song would also have us sing:

*The truth will make us free,
The truth will make us free,
Oh, deep in my heart, I do believe
That we shall overcome some day.*

Finally the Christian, trembling as he does before the mighty powers of this world, must take his stand on the truth if he will overcome.

And what, for the Christian, is the truth? Yes, the world asks us that quite cynically, just as Pontius Pilate sneered at Jesus. For the Christians the truth that makes us free is in Christ. *"You shall know the truth and the truth will make you free."* That means, "You shall know Christ, and Christ will make you free." If you really want to overcome whatever there is in this world that overwhelms and harasses you, you can do so with the presence and power of Christ.

Remember, if you will, the words of one of our great hymns, "Once to every man and nation comes the moment to decide." In one part of that hymn James Russell Lowell makes us sing:

*Though the cause of evil prosper,
Yet 'tis truth alone is strong;
Though her portion be the scaffold,
And upon the throne be wrong;
Yet that scaffold sways the future,
And, behind the dim unknown,
Standeth God within the shadow
Keeping watch above his own.*

Last fall Betty and I attended a dinner at the Edgewater Hotel, sponsored by the Mt. Zion Baptist Church. The special guest for the evening was Martin Luther King, Sr.,

one of the most saintly and beautiful human persons I have known about. He is now a very, very old man and in poor health. Scheduled to give the main address of the evening, he asked, because of his doctor's orders, to be excused. He had his grandson speak in his place. But he did make a few moving, grace-filled remarks. As he spoke I could not forget what he had suffered. In 1974, addressing delegates to the American Lutheran Church, he said: "I'm not bitter and carry no ill will in my heart against any man, no matter how he treats me. I do not hate the man (James Earl Ray) . . . who supposedly took the life of my dear son. I don't hate the man (Wayne Chenault) who came by - to get me and took the life of my wife. I've got a job to do - going on being everyman's brother no matter what his color or beliefs. I love you, everyone of you, and I hope you love me." Then last fall at the Edgewood Hotel, that dear and beautiful old man, led us in singing, "We shall overcome, Deep in my heart, I do believe, we shall overcome some day." I knew then that I was in the holy presence of God's grace, of God's holy spirit, and that this beautiful old man could say those words and sing like that because he had taken seriously the words of our Lord: "In the world you have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."



THE CASE OF GOD vs. HURT
December 9, 1979

The sermon theme for this morning was suggested to me by my son, Tim, a second year law student at the University of Virginia. Last summer Tim was working in a law office in Charlottesville. In a research assignment he came across the record of a case that had been given this remarkable title: "God v. Hurt." He made a copy of the case and sent it to me. The fuller title was this:

Richmond
Mary Green God
v.
David A. Hurt and Eva Moore Hurt
August 31, 1978
Record No. 761253

Reading this four page record was for me like trying to read a foreign language - the terminology was so forbidding and opaque. So I called in Professor Stuart Gullickson who translated it for me. It seems that Mrs. God had sold Mr. and Mrs. Hurt a piece of land for which she could not deliver a clear title because Mr. God had a life estate interest in the property and he would not relinquish it. But Mr. and Mrs. Hurt were saying that they wanted the property now; Mrs. God had breached the contract and could not deliver the property because it was not free and clear. That is as far as I am going to go in relating the situation to you.

Obviously it is the title of the case that got lodged in my mind: THE CASE OF GOD vs. HURT. In that title one finds the theme of an entire library of Christian theology. At this very time in the history of the world, I think we can grasp the significance of biblical faith: GOD IS IN THIS WORLD CONTENDING WITH THE HURTS THAT ARE INFLICTED UPON HUMAN BEINGS.

Incidentally, I wondered if there are people who actually have the name God. I know there are many people

who bear the name Hurt. Curious about this, I went over to the telephone company and browsed through some of the directories from our large cities, such as Chicago and New York. Sure enough, in the Queens directory, I found the phone number of one Sachai God. I did not call him up because he is not the God I am trying to get in touch with. But I was assured that there are people with that name.

Recently I sat for three days under the leadership of two men, Richard Avery and Donald Marsh, who are widely recognized as imaginative and creative interpreters of modern liturgy. They have written much music for the modern church. One day Don Marsh led us in an exercise. He asked us to consider three different uses of the word "hurt". They were:

1. Ask a child who has cut his finger, "Does it hurt?" Pretty stupid question, don't you think?
2. To someone who has just been physically injured, you direct the question, as the doctor does: "Where does it hurt?"
3. Then the injured person might grasp his side and say, "It hurts here!"

Marsh then pointed out that all three uses of the word "hurt" spell it in exactly the same way. That's the way the word invariably appears in print. But, he said, this is why the Word had to become flesh. If Christ had not been a real human being, flesh of our flesh, bone of our bone, we would not really believe that he is real. Then Avery and Marsh had us sing one of their songs:

If only God would speak with us,
Oh, every single week with us,
Would tell us what to do,
Then surely we'd come through.

If only God would stay with us,
Each night and working day with us,

Stand by us in the mud
And spill some holy blood!

If only God would hurt with us,
And wear a common shirt with us,
Remove his robe of gold
And shiver with us cold.

If only God would sup with us,
Break bread and drink the cup with us,
Share time with us and then
Assume his throne again. (Hymns and Carols,
No. 7, p. 1)

Well, we know that God does stand by us, that he spills holy blood, that he hurts with us, and shivers with us cold. We know that because of Christ. We know that because when Jesus preached in his hometown synagogue in Nazareth, he told his audience what his mission was to be by quoting a well known passage from Isaiah:

*The spirit of the Lord is upon me
because the Lord has anointed me;
he has sent me to bring good news to the humble,
to bind up the broken-hearted,
to proclaim liberty to captives
and release to those in prison.*
(Isaiah 61:1, NEB)

That, you might say, was the announcement of the CASE OF GOD vs. HURT. The hurt are those who are poor, who are broken-hearted, who are captives, who are in prison. God has sent Christ into the world to contend with those who inflict hurts. There is no way that he can bring good news to the poor, bind up the broken-hearted, proclaim liberty to captives, and release those in prison, without conflicting with those who cause the hurts, and calling them into account.

Following a kind of legal analogy of a confrontation in the highest court, let us think of God as having sent

Christ to be the Judge, the Prosecutor, and the Healing Physician of the World.

-I-

Think of God first as the Judge of our hurts in this world. Often in human courts the judge has to decide if someone was really hurt, and who did the hurting.

There are, of course, all kinds of hurts. Some of us are quite easily hurt. We are quite childish about the little slights and cuts and offenses that fall upon us. Generally we like to pout and act like we are "hurt" because this gains sympathy. But compared to the real hurts of the world, our little hurts are almost laughable.

John Ciardi has a slightly cynical poem about this:

IN PLACE OF A CURSE

*At the next vacancy for God, if I am elected,
I shall forgive last the delicately wounded
who, having been slugged no harder than anyone
else, never got up again, neither to fight back,
nor to finger their jaws in painful admiration.*

*They who are wholly broken, and they in whom
mercy is understanding, I shall embrace at once
and lead to pillows in heaven. But they who are
the meek by trade, baiting the best of their betters
with extortions of mock helplessness.*

*I shall take last to love, and never wholly.
Let them all in Heaven - I abolish Hell -
but let it be read over them as they enter:
"Beware the calculations of the meek, who
gambled nothing, gave nothing, and could never
receive enough." (39 Poems, p. 13)*

We need not worry too much about the "delicately wounded,"
"the meek by trade," but give our concern, as Christ did,

to the "wholly broken." Christ as Judge will know the difference.

Christ as Judge will know those who have hurts but try to keep them deeply hidden. He will sensitize us to these hurts deeply hidden and make us more aware that they exist. Last summer at the Philadelphia Zoo, I was impressed by a sign at the elephants section. It said, "Thick skin, but sensitive skin." Some people we automatically dismiss because we say they have "thick skin." Little do we know how sensitive, how hurt they are. Christ knows.

Christ will also be the Judge of the hurts we inflict upon ourselves. The other day in chopping up some logs, I let the ax fly out of my hand, striking my leg, cutting a deep gash. I did that to myself and deserve no sympathy! Of course I may need sympathy and understanding from the next person who goes out with me on a wood cutting venture. He may not want to go for fear of his life! But I inflicted that hurt upon myself.

Christ as Judge will make us more aware of the hurts we inflict upon others, and of the hurts that lie so deeply hidden that we do not see them in others. The great saintly Mother Teresa of Calcutta, who was just appropriately awarded the Nobel Prize for 1979, has said: "The greatest evil in life is the terrible indifference toward one's neighbor." You can't take Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan seriously without hearing that judgment.

This, I submit to you, is the Case of God vs. Hurt.

-II-

Now think of Christ as the Prosecutor. There is a close affinity between the role of the prosecutor and that of Christ as the Prophet. As the Prophet, Christ came from God to commence divine proceedings against us for the injustices and hurts we inflict upon other human souls. You cannot read the Holy Bible without seeing the strong case of God vs. Hurt.

Jesus cleansing the holy temple of its corruption, overturning the commerce tables and driving out the money-changers is a picture of Christ the Prophet-Prosecutor. In this same role, Jesus is heard when he declares: "Causes of stumbling are bound to arise; but woe betide the man through whom they come. It would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a millstone round his neck than to cause one of these little ones to stumble. Keep watch on yourselves." (Luke 17, 1,2, NEB) Do you know what that means? That means that Christ is saying, "Woe betide the man" who unjustly and unnecessarily inflicts injury upon any human soul! Sure there are passages about "peace of mind" and "the lilies of the field" in the Bible. But you had better be aware of the Case of God vs. Hurt as God speaks through his prophets Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Peter, Paul and Jesus. You read the Bible carefully and you will feel the lash of divine indignation against anyone who hurts another human being.

The Case of God vs. Hurt, therefore, means that we will be prosecuted for:

- child abuse
- wife abuse
- husband abuse
- prisoner abuse
- hostage abuse

The Case of God vs. Hurt means that God is angry:

- when a newborn baby is beaten so badly that brain death results and only a respirator can keep his body alive;
- when a young man so abuses his God-given body that he literally drinks himself to death while on-lookers stand idly by enjoying the macho scene, cheering him on;
- when a woman is violated and raped under the cowardly cover of darkness;
- when the personnel in a national embassy are taken hostage and subjected to terror and deprivation while snarling mobs outside cry for trial and blood;

- when any regime, be it that of Idi Amin or the Shah of Iran cruelly tortures and slays thousands of human souls;
- when any government is guilty of the atrocity like My Lai, an entire city wiped off the face of the earth;
- when as in Cambodia 2 million human souls are slaughtered, and untold numbers more left to starve to death;
- when 6 million Jews are gassed and slain in a Holocaust;
- when airloads of persons are hijacked and kidnapped and subjected to terror.

It does not matter that in a holy season thousands of people in one breath chant "God is great," and in the next breath scream, "Kill Carter!"

It does not matter that in a season when Christmas carols are piped through department stores, and people mindlessly croon "Silent Night," and then shout "Kill Khomeini," "Nuke the students!"

It does not matter who they are: they can be Iranian students, or Bishop Muzorewa's army, or Zimbabwe's rebel front fighters, or Irish Catholics, or Irish Protestants, or Israeli terrorists, or PLO terrorists, the Ku Klux Klan, or "freedom fighters," or nice suburban sophisticates sneering down their collective noses at poor people, minorities, and the downtrodden and the oppressed. Whenever, and wherever you and I or anyone else on the face of this earth is inflicting hurt and humiliation upon other human beings, we will find that we are fighting against God, and that we will be held to account. We will be fighting God in the Case of God vs. Hurt. For God sent his Son to bring good tidings to the poor, to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners.

Just one other thing about this Case of God vs. Hurt. In the Supreme Court of God Almighty, God has also appointed Jesus Christ as the Healing Physician. He was sent to seek and save those who are lost, to comfort those who mourn, and to heal the broken-hearted. And anyone who wants to believe that this is true will be expected to do the same.

Once every month I have been going on a Sunday evening to the Dane County Jail to conduct a service. The chapel is a large cell which also serves as a miniature gymnasium. In that cell-chapel, there is an altar and the musicians who go with me and I try to bring a message of hope and healing. The men and women who come voluntarily to the service - most of them are very young - are rapists, murderers, bank robbers and drunken-driver killers. Each night as I look into their faces, I see two things: I see the terrible, irreparable hurt that they have inflicted upon others. And then I see the hunted, haunted hurts in their own souls. The last time I went, there was a handsome young man sitting quietly in the front row. He is only 17 years old. The next day he was to be sentenced to the reformatory for a murder he had committed. I talked with him briefly. In his eyes I saw a deep sadness, a deep hurt. I do not know the whole story of his life, but I saw that deep hurt.

As I look into these faces, I am overwhelmed by a desire I cannot fulfill: O, how I wish that I could heal them! How I wish that I could restore to life and hope the people they have hurt! But of course I do not have those powers. And yet, just being there as a minister of Christ is the same as presenting, as it is here this morning, THE CASE OF GOD vs. HURT. All I can do or say is to proclaim that Christ came to bring good news to the poor, to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners. I can only proclaim this, for Christ is the Good Physician and the Healer.

The next time I go to the County Jail, I am going to

tell them a story that is being widely circulated. It is about someone who says: "One night I dreamed I was walking along the beach with the Lord. Many scenes from my life flashed across the sky. In each scene I noticed footprints in the sand. Sometimes there were two sets of footprints, other times there was only one. This bothered me because I noted that during the low periods in my life, when I was suffering from anguish, sorrow or defeat, I could see only one set of footprints, so I said to the Lord, 'You promised me, Lord, that if I followed you, you would walk with me always. But I have noticed that during the most trying periods of my life there has been only one set of footprints in the sand. Why, when I have needed you most, have you not been there for me?' The Lord replied, 'The times when you have seen only one set of footprints, my child, is when I carried you.'" Please, please, dear Christian friends, as you sit here in this divine courtroom, hear that testimony in THE CASE OF GOD vs.HURT. It is meant for you and every child of God.

THE RIDER OF LAME HORSES
November 2, 1980

This Tuesday, November 4, we will be selecting once again a person to become the President of the United States. Today as Christians with a biblical orientation, I would like for us to reflect on that decision. I shall not tell you how to vote, or even for whom to vote. I will not give you my rating of the candidates. I will not issue my own report card on their moral and spiritual qualifications for this high office. Rather, I would like to remind you that each of the candidates before us is a human being subject to all of the frailties and flaws of mortal nature. As a people, we tend to look for political "saviors" who are exceptionally gifted. How desperately in our time we need political leaders who can reach the heights of greatness! Indeed, this is a time when we need to be greatly led.

As we think about the human characteristics of the presidential candidates who are before us, we need to be reminded of one key fact in the Constitution of the United States of America. Article VI of the original text, not an amendment, says: *"No religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under the United States."* As Christians, we have no right to make such a test, but we do have the necessity of testing our own faith and our biblical understanding. Recently I saw a quotation attributed to Martin Luther that has taken up residence in my mind. Luther said: *"God can carve even the rotten wood and ride the lame horse."* (James Gorman in *The Other Side*, Sept. 1980, p. 24). I have searched everywhere to locate the context of that statement in Luther's writings. Several scholars were unable to tell me where I could find it. But then Dr. James Stein, Jubilee Professor of Church History at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary, a fine friend, led me to the exact source. Indeed, in order to get the necessary scholarly background for this sermon, I had on Friday a long, long-distance phone call with Dr. Stein. He assured me that Luther did

refer to the God *"who rides the lame horse."* (Bondage of Will). In several other places he showed me that Luther was sure that God uses the limitations of human beings for the sake of his own purposes and glory. In another place, Luther declared:

If someone cuts with a rusty and rough hatchet, even though the worker is a good craftsman, the hatchet leaves bad, jagged and ugly gashes. So it is when God works through us.

(Heidelberg Disputation, 1518)

This suggests, I believe, how we need to think about the candidates for the office of President. Just because they are human, close examination will reveal that they have characteristics like rotten wood and lame horses. But Luther knew, and we know, that biblical faith proclaims that God can carve that rotten wood and ride those lame horses!

Dr. James Sanders, one of our greatest biblical scholars, affirms that this is how we may read the characters who stumble and march across the pages of the Bible. He has written:

An honest reading of the Bible indicates how many biblical characters were just as limited and full of short-comings as we today. ...The Bible offers no great or infallible models, no saints in the meaning that word has taken on since biblical times - nearly perfect people. None! It offers indeed very few models to follow at all except the work of God in Creation and in Israel in the Old Testament and the work of God in Christ in the New. Biblical people were just like us! Abraham and Sarah lied when they were scared (Gen. 12:13; 18-15) and laughed (Gen. 27:17: 18:12) when they could not believe their own ears either. Jacob, our father, was a liar and a supplanter (Gen. 27: 19). Joseph was an obnoxious imp (Gen. 37:10).

Moses was a murderer and fugitive from justice
(Exod. 5:12-15)

The presentation of the disciples in all three synoptic Gospels follows the same theologem: they appear to be incredulous and even rather stupid. Judas's betrayal of Jesus is told in the same scenes as Peter's denial of Jesus and the bickering, sleep, and flight of all the disciples (Luke 22+ 3-62). When one has come to realize that God can take the selling of our brother Joseph into slavery and turn our evil into our later salvation (Gen. 50:20), then one has also realized that God has taken our selling of Christ to Caesar and made it our salvation.

(God Has a Story Too, p. 22,23)

So I think it is not disrespectful to think of our Presidential candidates as "lame horses." Remember what has been said about them:

- one man is said to have a deep, mean streak to be vengeful and dishonest.
- another man is said not to be too bright, that he makes many mistakes, that he cannot get his facts straight.
- another of the three candidates is said to be a pompous turncoat, seeking only to be a spoiler.

Of course, not all of the charges they have been making against each other are strictly true, but there is truth in much of what they say. But now then consider this assertion: if the great God of the universe cares about what happens in our world and in the United States in particular, if he has any way of influencing events in the midst of human lives, then he will be riding at least one of these lame horses for the next four years. Flawed and lame as he may be, God will work through him.

At least this is what the Bible asserts. Consider, for example, the case of Joseph and his brothers. Joseph was a brat, the obnoxious favorite "pet" of his father. His brothers could not endure his hatefulness so they sold him into slavery. Years later when Israel was suffering from a famine, they went down into Egypt to beg and buy grain. When they arrived in Egypt they were met by their brother Joseph who had risen to a place of great power in the Pharaoh's household. At first they did not recognize Joseph, but eventually he revealed to them his identity. There followed a dramatic moment of reconciliation. The essence of the biblical insight is contained in what Joseph eventually said to his brothers: *"You plotted evil against me, but God turned it into good, in order to preserve the lives of many people who are alive today because of what happened."* (Gen. 50:20, TEV) This is what you would have to call God's use of an obnoxious upstart.

Take a long look at the list of men who have served as President of the United States. They are a marred, maimed, often mischievous lot. Taken altogether, they look like a stable of lame horses!

- Jackson, Fillmore, Buchanan, Lincoln and Garfield were all born in log cabins.
- Washington, Jackson, Van Buren, Taylor, Fillmore, Lincoln, Andrew Johnson, Cleveland and Truman never went to college.
- Jefferson, though a brilliant man, lived the life of a country squire, benefiting enormously from the slave trade. Though he was by conscience opposed to human slavery, he owned 100 slaves. And many of his biographers now believe that he broke the moral code of southern culture by fathering six children by his beautiful slave, Sally Hemings, carrying on this deception and duplicity for over 30 years.
- Abraham Lincoln had not much more than one year of

the most primitive schooling, and he was lamed most of his life by being plunged periodically into the deep abyss of melancholy.

- Franklin D. Roosevelt, elected for four terms, was frightfully crippled by polio and confined to a wheel chair.
- Harry Truman, rough-cut in character, salty in language, never went to college.
- Lyndon Johnson, a schemer and political wheeler-dealer, sponsored the most sensational civil rights legislation in the history of our nation.
- Richard Nixon, driven from office by the scandal of Watergate, made one of the most important moves in the history of our international relations by effecting our reconciliation with China.

Therefore, we should look at all three of the presidential candidates and realize that each of them is very likely a "lame horse." In a time that has witnessed Teapot Dome, Watergate, Billygate, and ABSCAM, why should we expect any of our candidates, mortal as they are, to be saintly and perfect? None of them is a god, each of them is human. But the one thing we can expect is that God will ride the lame horses. This is the way God achieves his purposes in our history.

One thing, of course, that makes all Presidents of the United States "lame horses" is that they have to make critical decisions affecting the lives of all humanity without being privy always to divine truth. Recently I read an article about the late preacher Carlyle Marney, in which the writer indicated how Marney viewed things always as a pastor: *"Marney was interested in ethics from the standpoint of a pastor rather than that of a scholar. It is an old maxim in ethics that scholars can reserve judgment until all the data are in; people on the front lines have to make decisions at deadline time whether all of the data are in or not."* (John J. Carey in "Carlyle Marney

as *Ethicist*," in Theology Today, July, 1980, p. 171) The President of the United States may have to make in our time a terrifying decision. In a moment of sheer terror he may have to decide whether to launch a counter-nuclear attack, and he may have to make that decision before all of the data are in. If, and when that happens, let us pray, let us believe, that God is riding the lame horse!

We have only to look closely at our own human lives to see how true this is. If the Church of Jesus Christ is the divine community of God's faithful people, then God has to depend upon lame members for the practice and witness of his love. But how lame we all are! This past summer, two men - who shall go unnamed here, but who are known to most of us - volunteered to do important painting and repair work both at the church and at our Vicar Lane parsonage. They worked hard and they saved the church much money. But all the time they were doing that work, they were suffering from serious ailments. One man had two double-hernias and recently underwent surgery. The other man dragged himself to the work sites, even though he was suffering from a severe ailment in his back. You might say that these were two of the lamest men who ever worked for the church! But despite their physical pains, their lameness, the work was done. This illustrates how God gets his work accomplished through the sinful, frail, and lame human souls who belong to his church.

From the Bible we have the impression that even if one of our three presidential candidates was not a Christian in any sense, God could use him for his own purposes. For example, - ironically now modern Iran - was used by God to restore Israel and rebuild the temple. Isaiah declared that God took this pagan king and said to him, "*You shall be my shepherd to carry out all my purpose, so that Jerusalem may be rebuilt and the foundations of the temple may be laid.*" (44:28) Furthermore, Isaiah asserts that Cyrus will be his "*annointed*" (45:1) My friend, Dr. James Stein, the authority on Martin Luther, shows me that Luther believed that "*Cyrus was divinely ordained by God.*" Luther wrote:

"Then God provided that all of his temporal possessions (Cyrus's) should serve to establish the religion of God and that Cyrus should be a preparation for the kingdom of God." (Luther's Commentary on Isaiah 45:1) Yet there is no evidence that Cyrus ever acknowledged the God of Israel. So if God can use a pagan king for his purposes, he can take the President of the United States - whoever he might be - and ride the lame horse!

For Christians there is a profound reason for believing that God can do this. It is the humanity of Jesus himself. The great God of all Creation has come to us in the frail, lame flesh of Jesus Christ. Paul wrote to the Philippians: "Let your bearing towards one another arise out of your life in Christ Jesus. For the divine nature was his from the first; yet he did not think to snatch at equality with God, but made himself nothing, assuming the nature of a slave. Bearing the human likeness, revealed in human shape, he humbled himself, and in obedience accepted even death - death on a cross." (2:5-8, NEB) Indeed, when God sent Christ into this weak and limited human flesh, he showed us once and for all what he can do with our humanity, our lameness!

Last summer we had a wonderful family reunion in our daughter's house in New Jersey. It was the Fourth of July and we were preparing a celebrative meal. All of a sudden there was a scream of pain in the yard. Our two grandchildren, David and Kimbie, were playing croquet. There was a huge dispute over whose turn it was, and David ended up with Kimbie's mallet in his head. Blood was gushing forth. The family dinner had to be postponed for over two hours while a rush trip was made to the emergency room of the hospital ten miles away. As David was taken away bleeding and sobbing, Kimbie became crestfallen. It seemed now that all of the family had turned against her. I took her by the hand and said, "Let's take a walk." We walked for a long time, the silence broken only by her soft sobs. Then she asked me: "Will David have to stay all night at the hospital?" "I don't think so," I replied. A few mo-

ments later I said, "Kimbie, you didn't mean to hurt David, did you?" And she said, "No, I am so sorry." When the family emergency squad returned from the hospital David bounded out of the car, and then, as though nothing ugly had happened, we were all seated at the table for our dinner. The only reminder David gave us of his trouble was a bandage on his head. As people finished their meal David went to the piano in the living room to demonstrate for the family his growing prowess on the keyboard. In a moment all of us were listening intently. What do you suppose he was playing? "When the Saints Go Marching In"! Even I, with my low musical I-Q, knew that it was not being played flawlessly. But that maimed, and lamed little seven year old boy was reminding us of something: If there are any saints at all, anywhere, they are maimed and lame.

On Wednesday morning we will have elected a President of the United States. Let us remember that whoever he is, he will be hacking away at our perilous problems with a rusty and rough hatchet. In all likelihood he will be a lame man. But let us never forget that God rides the lame horse.

THE ELEPHANT MAN
December 14, 1980

All of my life I have loved the theater. I think I love it because some events in the theater have moved me profoundly. Some theater critics, holding to a high view of art, would disdain the idea that the theater should ever preach. But I believe that the theater has an inherent power, and right, to preach. I have often left the theater believing and feeling that I had just witnessed - witnessed, mind you - a powerful sermon. In the last year I have seen and read a play which I think measures up to that description. The play is called "The Elephant Man" and it is based upon a real-life, historical drama.

The story of "The Elephant Man" begins with his birth on April 21, 1864, about one year before the American Civil War ended. His name was John Merrick and he was born in Leicester, England. As John Merrick began to grow as a child it was apparent that he was going to be deformed. His mother, a Baptist schoolteacher who died in 1876 when Merrick was twelve years old, was crippled by an elephant in a circus accident during her pregnancy. When Merrick had attained his fullest physical stature his body was hideously deformed. Today his disorder is known as multiple neurofibromatosis. Sir Frederick Treves, the famous London surgeon who discovered the inner truth about Merrick, described him thus:

(He) was a little man below the average height and made to look shorter by the bowing of his back. The most striking feature about him was his enormous and misshapened head. From the brow there projected a huge bony mass like a loaf, while from the back of the head hung a bag of spongy, fungus-looking skin, the surface of which was comparable to brown cauliflower. On the top of the skull were a few long lank hairs. The osseous growth on the forehead almost occluded one eye. The circumference of the head was not less than that of

the man's waist. From the upper jaw there projected another mass of bone. It protruded from the mouth like a pink stump, turning the upper lip inside out and made of the mouth a mere slobbering apperture. . .The nose was merely a lump of flesh. . .The face was no more capable of expression than a block of gnarled wood. The back was horrible, because from it hung, as far down as the middle of the thigh, huge, sack-like masses of flesh covered by the same loathsome cauliflower skin.

The right hand was of enormous size and shapeless. . .The hand was large and clumsy - a fin or a paddle rather than a hand. . .The other arm was remarkable by contrast. It was not only normal but was, moreover, a delicately shaped limb covered with fine skin and provided with a beautiful hand which any woman might have envied. From the chest hung a bag of the same repulsive flesh. . .

To add a further burden to his trouble the wretched man, when a boy, developed hip disease, which had left him permanently lame, so that he could only walk with a stick.

-(The Elephant Man. A Study in Human Dignity.
by Ashley Montagu, p. 15,16)

John Merrick was, then, to the human eye, a horribly, monstrously misshapen creature, loathsome and repulsive to all who viewed him. Early in his life he was seized by an exploiting showman who exhibited him as a freak in sideshows and carnivals. Sometimes his appearance was so horrifying that the police shut down the show. On the sideshow screen he had had drawn a crude likeness of an elephant.

On a November day in 1884 a remarkable man, Sir Frederick Treves, discovered the Elephant Man. An anatomist and surgeon, Treves first was attracted out of scientific curiosity. Eventually he invited John Merrick to come to the London Hospital, the largest institution of its kind in the British Empire. He gave him

an attic room and began probing into his background. At first he assumed that Merrick was an imbecile. But as he worked with him he made an astounding discovery. Inside that bodily mass of malformed and repulsive tumors there was a gentle and loving human spirit, a keen intelligence.

This discovery and the subsequent attention Merrick received from London society, even royalty, was so remarkable that Merrick has become the subject of treatment in the contemporary theater and films. Bernard Pomerance wrote the play which moved me so deeply. For the past several weeks there has been playing in Madison a film, also called "The Elephant Man," which takes a quite different kind of look at this human phenomenon. Ashley Montagu, one of the most distinguished anthropologists and social biologist, took profound interest in Merrick and has published a book using the same title, The Elephant Man.

Sir Frederick Treves writing about Merrick in 1923, made these observations.

Those who are interested in the evolution of character might speculate as to the effect of this brutish life upon a sensitive and intelligent man. It would be reasonable to surmise that he would become a spiteful and malignant misanthrope, swollen with venom and filled with hatred of his fellow-men, or, on the other hand, that he would degenerate into a despairing melancholic on the verge of idiocy. Merrick, however, was no such being. He had passed through the fire and had come out unscathed. His troubles ennobled him. He showed himself to be a gentle, affectionate and lovable creature, as amiable as a happy woman, free from any trace of cynicism or resentment, without a grievance and without an unkind word for anyone. I have never heard him complain. I have never heard him deplore his ruined life or resent the treatment he had received

at the hands of callous keepers. His journey through life had been indeed a long a via dolorosa, the road had been uphill all the way, and now, when the night was at its blackest and the way most steep, he had suddenly found himself, as it were, in a friendly inn, bright with light and warm with welcome. His gratitude to those about him was pathetic in its sincerity and eloquent in the childlike simplicity with which it was expressed.

(Ibid. p. 24)

Someone by now, I perceive, may be asking, "What has all of this got to do with us here at worship on Sunday morning?" To me it has to do profoundly with you and me. As God's creatures living in a crowded world, we react in so many different ways to the other human creatures around us. Some we accept, some we reject, and to most we are simply indifferent. But this morning I propose that with this real, historical "Elephant Man" in the foreground of our thinking and feeling, we examine our various responses to other creatures in God's kingdom.

-I-

At the very outset I believe that we will have to confess that in our humanness we are often either cruel or indifferent toward those who are in some way handicapped.

Belatedly our society is becoming aware of those with handicapping conditions. Buildings are being built, sidewalks are being constructed to care for the needs of those who are otherwise hampered. Jobs are being made available to those who have formerly been excluded. The General Conference of the United Methodist Church has mandated certain recognitions of persons with handicapping conditions. But why have we been so slow to do this, why are we so reluctant to accept persons who are not "normal" like most of us?

This week I discovered an eloquent passage from the Book of Job in the Old Testament. You will remember that Job was the man who had been overwhelmed with an avalanche of troubles and tragedies. Crying out against his torments and his tormentors, he declares: *"In the thought of one who is at ease there is contempt for misfortune."* (12:5, RSV) Indeed, people who have physical, mental or psychologically handicapping conditions are often repulsive to us. Living as we do in a society that celebrates robust physical health and fitness, we turn away from the sight of those who are unfortunate. The very sight of them disturbs us. We don't want to see them. Sometimes we mock them and cruelly torment them, just as we view a freak in a circus. Tragically, the sight of the unfortunate sometimes brings out in us such disgust that we react in a mean and ugly fashion. When one is "at ease" in his own life he has contempt for those who are not of his own kind.

Our children learn this kind of contempt from us at an early age. In every school where there are handicapped or "special" children, other children display mockery. Be the "special" child mentally retarded, deaf, too tall or too short, overweight, crippled, or just racially or religiously different from the others, taunts can be hurled and humiliation invoked. In the presence of someone handicapped we are so ill at ease that we often react cruelly.

I know of one very bright young woman who has been blind most of her life. When her mother discovered that she was blind she could not bear the thought of having to care for her, bearing the burden of this handicap, so she abandoned her and saw that someone else raised her. Then one day when the blind girl had grown into young womanhood, an unknown assailant, scheming to take advantage of her handicap, stole into her apartment and brutally raped her. And yet, despite this insensitive and brutish treatment at the hands of others, this young woman was encouraged to believe in herself by a sister, also rejected by the mother, who chose her as a bridesmaid for her wedding.

I have seen a lovely picture of her, taken at her sister's wedding. Yes, there is in all of us, I fear, to our great shame, a streak of cruelty toward those who are unfortunate. "In the thought of one who is at ease there is contempt for misfortune."

-II-

But to find any meaning in this worship this morning we must, as Christians, move away from those mean attitudes. The Christian is one who invariably perceives the presence of God in every human creature.

It must certainly be noted again that Sir Frederick Treves discovered the beauty in the beastly appearance of John Merrick. The stage play by Bernard Pomerance presents Treves as a man who had obvious vanities and ego. In the play Treves is seen as a man who had more than just a compassionate interest in the Elephant Man. He was obviously enhancing his scientific, medical and social reputation with his ministrations. No doubt there is some of that in all of us. We like to be on record as supporting the showcase charities, especially at Christmas time. If we do something to help someone we often want our deed to be well publicized. Treves may have been like this, but he was much more. It was he who perceived that inside the hideous, monstrous hulk that was John Merrick there was a gentle, loving and intelligent soul. For that he must be given just credit.

In the film called "The Elephant Man" there is a most moving scene that occurs when Treves and Carr Gomm, the Administrator of the London Hospital, are striving earnestly to reach into John Merrick for communication. They seem to be getting only the most incoherent sounds. He can recite, almost mechanically they believe, the beginning of the twenty-third psalm. They are still convinced that he has sub-normal intelligence. They leave the attic room in despair of ever reaching him. But after they have left they hear him reciting a long string of

words behind the closed door. They creep back to listen intently. They are astonished to hear him reciting the entire 23rd psalm. Then they know that there is far more depth to him than they had imagined. Later they learn that his fine mind is steeped in the Bible and the Book of Common Prayer.

Last spring at North Central College I heard James Barrett, an educator, tell a most striking, true story. When Barrett was the president of a small church college in the south, a bearded, long haired, unkempt young man arrived at the college and sat all day in the waiting room without approaching anyone. The secretaries, keeping an eye on him, feared that he would rob the office. The president said he wasn't worried - he knew how much money they had, which wasn't much! Late in the afternoon the man stalked into the president's office and stood before his desk. The president asked him what he wanted. The man said he wanted to go to college. He presented his records which were dismal, showing him to have been a straight D student in high school. The one exception was a B in a physical education course. His SAT was in the 600's and his IQ was 82, with a note written by the teacher that he could not be expected to make further educational progress. But the man insisted that he be given a chance. President Barrett agreed to let him come to the eight week summer session to see what he could do. Then the young man left to return home. About three hours later the president got an irate phone call from his mother who said that the president was a fool. She was so angry she could hardly speak. She put her husband on the phone, and what he said could not be repeated, except for the parting shot -- that if President Barrett admitted their son to the college, he would be completely the president's to support. This would mean food, clothing, housing and education costs. Barrett decided to accept the challenge, and scraped up the necessary funds. At the end of the eight weeks the young man had improved his standing so remarkably that his entrance to the fall semester was assured. Four years later he graduated with a fine record and out of curiosity the

president had him re-tested. Now his SAT was in the 1600's, his IQ up to 130. Again he appeared at the president's desk and asked for help to continue in graduate school. Barrett asked him if he didn't think enough had been done for him, but the young man persisted in asking for him to trust him again. The president agreed to try. Three years later the young man appeared once more. He said to Barrett, "I want to stand here where I stood seven years ago in such different circumstances." Then he laid a packet on the president's desk. In it was his Ph.D. diploma in aeronautical engineering from Georgia Tech. To the president he said, "Thank God somebody cared."

Right now we are in the midst of celebrating Christmas and all of us should be reminded of what the coming of Christ has meant to the worth of individual souls. Nowhere is this difference put more beautifully than in a beloved Christmas song:

O holy night! The stars are brightly shining,
It is the night of my dear Saviour's birth;
Long lay the world in sin and error pining,
Till He appeared and the soul felt its worth;
A thrill of hope the weary soul rejoices,
For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn.

Fall on your knees, O hear the angel voices
O night divine, O night when Christ was born,
O night, O holy night, O night divine.

Why do you suppose that so many people in the world worship on that blessed Christmas night? We worship because we know that Christ has made human souls feel their worth. Yes, even the repulsive, misshapen Elephant Man discovered his worth.

John Merrick died one night, at the age of 26, apparently because for the first time he lay down upon his bed to sleep, just like other people do. Always he had had to sleep propped up with pillows, because of the enormous weight of his head. But this night his head was so heavy that it crushed his windpipe, and he died. Sir

Frederick Treves summed up his life with these words:

As a specimen of humanity, Merrick was ignoble and repulsive; but the spirit of Merrick, if it could be seen in the form of the living, would assume the figure of an upstanding and heroic man, smooth browed and clean of limb, and with eyes that flashed undaunted courage.

His tortured journey had come to an end. All the way he, like another, had borne on his back a burden almost too grievous to bear. He had been plunged into the Slough of Despond, but with many steps he had gained the farther shore. He had been made "a spectacle to all men" in the heartless streets of Vanity Fair. He had been ill-treated and reviled and bespattered with the mud of Disdain. He had escaped the clutches of the Giant Despair, and at last had reached the "Place of Deliverance," where "his burden loosed from off his shoulder and fell off his back, so that he saw it no more.

(Ibid. 37, 38)

In this Christmas season this tragic and yet triumphant story reminds us of another man of whom it was written:

He grew up before the Lord like a young plant
whose roots are in parched ground;
he had no beauty, no majesty to draw our eyes,
no grace to make us delight in him:
his form, disfigured, lost all the likeness of a man,
his beauty changed beyond human semblance.
He was despised, he shrank from the sight of men,
tormented and humbled by suffering;
we despised him, we held him of no account,
a thing from which men turn away their eyes
Yet on himself he bore our sufferings,
our torments he endured,
while we counted him smitten of God,

struck down by disease and misery;
but he was pierced for our transgressions,
tortured for our iniquities;
the chastisement he bore is health for us
and by his scourging are we healed.

(Isaiah 53:2-5, NEB)

In that figure word-painted by Isaiah, Christians have
found the presence of Christ.

FOR RABBI MANFRED SWARSENSKY

November 15, 1981

Early on Tuesday of this past week, a monumental event occurred in the life and history of Madison. In the dark hours of the night the black angel of death drew near and lifted from this earth the saintly soul of Rabbi Manfred Swarsensky. Perhaps few men in the history of this colorful and unique community have been as loved and honored as he. Few have contributed as abundantly and beautifully as he to the moving stream of our humanity. It is likely that never will one like him pass this way again.

Not only enshrined in the heart and memory of Madison, he was a dear and beloved friend of First United Methodist Church. I speak now for my predecessors who have ministered here during the past forty years and for a host of lay admirers who cherished his friendship, his teaching, his leadership, and his prophetic presence. I speak especially, too, for many young people of this church who during the last several years sat spellbound during his visits to our confirmation classes. Last year especially was memorable because he spoke twice to our confirmation class. As he spoke I had the feeling that he was giving to these young people a kind of last will and testament. Frail of body, his words often choked by a deepening digestive disorder, he poured forth a stream of intimate detail concerning his early life in Germany, his career as a young rabbi in Berlin, his arrest by the Nazis and his humiliation and ill treatment in concentration camps. He knew that the days of his life were growing fewer, and he wanted these Christian young people to know of his experience and concerns. During the following months I visited him several times in the hospital, talked to him on the phone, exchanged letters, and prayed constantly for his precious soul. And then on Tuesday he died. Ever since I have felt a great absence in my heart, a deep sorrow in my life.

Yet he is not absent from my memory. Ever since Tuesday morning when I learned of his death I have been absorbed in the meaning, the message and the mission of his life. If one such as he may never pass this way again, it behooves us

to ponder his treasured wisdom, to savor his compassion and goodness, and to take seriously the scrolls of prophetic warning he has left behind. And we must do these things as Christians, and to do so, as Christians, will be unnerving and unsettling.

-I-

In the past year Rabbi Swarsensky has shared with me two great haunting concerns. One was his fear that this generation would forget the horrors of the Holocaust that blackened and degraded what we call "civilization." Manfred Swarsensky struggled for life during those nightmarish years, suffered under their fiendish fury, became a victim - albeit a survivor - of this incredible wickedness on earth. In the most recent months he was aghast at the monumental efforts raised either to forget or to declare that these horrors never occurred. Several big attempts have been made to "prove" that these horrors never happened, with one professor at Northwestern University writing a book labeling the Holocaust a hoax. On September 11, 1981, Rabbi Swarsensky wrote me a letter and enclosed an article which he had taken from the Hadassah Magazine. The article was by the great Jewish writer, Elie Wiesel, and it has to do with an event of unspeakable human depravity. On September 29, 1941, thousands of Jews were driven through the main streets of Kiev as Ukrainians looked on. They were being marched by the Nazis, and they were machine-gunned and buried in a huge pit. When the mass killing was finished with methodical madness, tens of thousands of human beings had been killed - most of them Jews. Some estimates say 100,000 were savagely slaughtered. In the article that Rabbi Swarsensky sent me, Elie Wiesel, himself a survivor of the Nazi horrors, wrote:

I returned to Kiev in August 1979. Of course I asked to visit Babi Yar. Since I was on an official visit - as the head of the delegation of the President's Commission on Holocaust - I obtained satisfaction. City officials, followed by television cameras and reporters from the local and foreign press, accompanied us there. Why not? Now

they thought they could boast of a monument at Babi Yar. In fact, there it is - a monument large and grandiose, as only the Soviets are capable of producing. Impressive from all points of view, except ... except the word "Jew" does not appear on it anywhere! This monument is supposed to be in memory of the Soviet citizens assassinated by the Fascists ... And then (says Elie Wiesel) I lost my temper, as never before. In my address, I said everything that had been weighing on my heart.

"In 1965, I stood on this very spot and I felt anger; now it is shame which I feel. I am ashamed for you ... You know perfectly well that the men and women who are lying in this grave were killed as Jews! By what right do you deprive them of their identity? They lived as Jews, worked as Jews, dreamed as Jews, and it is as Jews that they were isolated and designated by the executioner; it is as Jews that they were subjected to fear and torture and death. By what right do you now cast them into anonymity? In the name of what do you mutilate their being? Why don't you grant to them the place that, when alive, they claimed in Jewish history?"

(Hadassah Magazine, Aug/Sept. 1981,
p. 15)

And I believe that that is a message that our dear friend, Rabbi Swarsensky, left with us. I believe he shared it with me so that I would share it with you. We have no right under God to deprive these tortured souls of their identity! We have no right to cast them into anonymity, to mutilate their being!

-II-

The other grave concern of the Rabbi was for the rising tide of anti-Semitism, visible and audible all over the world. Many times we talked of this. All over the world, and in our own culture, indeed, are these ominous signs seen and heard.

With what anguish and sorrow are these signs heard and seen in the ears and eyes of a Jewish man or woman who has suffered from this malignant disease! Rabbi Swarsensky was a dear friend of Christians and he blessed them constantly with his counsel and gifts. But can you not imagine that often in his heart he wondered about this persistent malady that still ravages the hearts and minds of many who call themselves Christian? How many of us, the victim of anti-Semitism might want to know, would stand by Jewish people in the continuing ordeal of hatred that ravishes them?

Riveted in my memory is a drama by a German playwright, Rolf Hochhuth, called The Deputy, produced as "the most controversial play of our time" in 1964. The story of the play is based upon a large and substantial judgment of historians that contended that Pope Pius XII did very little to exert his mighty influence against the crimes being committed by Hitler against the Jews. Even noting its fictional character, one is deeply moved and troubled by the anguish of one German Roman Catholic priest, Father Riccardo Fontana, who was so horrified by what he saw happening to the Jews at the hands of the Nazis that he made his way to Rome and demanded an audience with the Pope. There he pleads with the Pope to speak out against these unspeakable horrors. The Pope replies that he has already done much to protect the Jews and that he can do no more. The priest, Riccardo, is appalled by this indifference. In a most telling moment in the drama Riccardo, while the Pope is signing a proclamation that the priest considers utterly innocuous, takes out the yellow Star of David and pins it to his cassock. When the Pope sees what he has done he is struck dumb. A Cardinal of the court, in breathless fury, orders Riccardo to remove the yellow star. Refusing, Riccardo speaks:

This star which every Jew must wear
as soon as he is six years old,
to show he is an outlaw - I shall wear it too
until . . .

Then the Pope, quivering with rage, interrupts:

He will not! We forbid him - forbid - on a
cassock - this ...

The Pope stops, his voice failing him. Then Riccardo speaks,
quietly, soberly:

I will wear this star until
Your Holiness proclaims before the world
a curse upon the man who slaughters
Europe's Jews like cattle.

(The Deputy, p. 217, 218)

Many times have I read that passage, but as I re-read it
now I think of a great and good man like Rabbi Swarsensky.
Our honoring of his memory today will be no more than empty
sentimentality if we do not as Christians dedicate our lives
to contending against every shred and sediment of anti-
Semitism, in our own hearts and in the hearts of those around
us. If we want truly to honor his name, and the names of
countless martyrs like him, we too will wear that yellow
Star of David in our hearts until the last evil trace of
anti-Semitism is washed from our humanity.

-III-

An aspect of this dear man that none of us shall ever
be able to forget, therefore, is his endurance of suffering.
Our minds are often numbed and paralyzed when we contemplate
the intense suffering that seems to fall upon some human
beings. Perhaps we don't like to think of it for long, be-
cause we fear that it could all happen to us. But here was
a man who not only suffered through what he was pleased to
hear me call once "a hurricane of horror," but who also was
ravaged in his own physical body by repeated maladies. Five
years ago he underwent critical open heart surgery. After
what seemed like a fine recovery from that he developed a
serious malfunction of the esophagus. For a long time he was
actually starving to death. Often I had wondered if these
severe bodily ailments borne by a man of small physical
stature could not be attributed in part at least to the

spiritual, physical, mental and emotional abuse he had suffered under Nazi torture. But after the most delicate and critical surgery seemed to give the promise of his recovery from the esophagus malfunction, it was discovered that he was stricken with cancer. During the long years of all that intense suffering and affliction I am sure that he often felt the anguish and sense of abandonment expressed by Job in the Old Testament. And certainly he must in his own heart have cried out as did our Lord, on the cross, speaking as Jesus did the words of the 22nd Psalm: "My God, my God why has thou forsaken me? Why art thou so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning? O my God, I cry by day, but thou dost not answer; and by night, but find no rest. Yet thou art holy, enthroned in the praises of Israel."

Obviously there was in this man a grace that enabled him to transcend the hurts, the humiliations, the bodily afflictions. Several years ago Manfred gave me a record album of a sermon he had delivered to his congregation at Temple Beth El on Christmas Day, 1970. He had just returned from Berlin where he had been invited to attend the 25th anniversary of the reestablishment of the Jewish Community after the collapse of the Nazi regime. The mayor of Berlin, on behalf of the City, had invited him and several others who at one time had served the Jewish community in various capacities to take part in this historic occasion. As a young rabbi in Berlin he had watched the smoldering ruins of the synagogue he had served, that house of worship having been torched by the Nazis. The house where he had lived had been reduced to rubble. On two nights in November, 1938, the glass window panes in every store owned by Jews in Germany had been shattered. The night in history is now known as "Kristalnacht." Rabbi Swarsensky told our Confirmation Class last February how he had been shoved into a crowded truck and carried off to a hell-hole for assignment to a concentration camp. He remembered that two boys clutched his hand in fear. He had confirmed them in his synagogue. The nightmare of imprisonment followed. I have wondered as he lay dying if he still felt the frightened clutching of these young

hands in his; the stomping of the S.S. boots, the clicking of heels; the sight and stench of smoke rising from gas ovens; the snapping of necks on the gallows; the taste of corpses in the death camp soup.

On Friday of this week I listened to the impassioned sermon, recorded on these phonograph records, that he had preached on his return from Berlin. He called that sermon "You Can't Go Home Again." In that sermon he told his people:

Twenty-five years ago I would have said never again shall I set foot on that cursed soil. But twenty-five years ago no one would have invited me.

Nothing, of course, is forgotten; nothing, of course, can be forgiven. But as a Jew I have no right to push away a hand stretched out in reconciliation. Hatred, unbending, unending hatred is neither an emotion by which I can live or a philosophy by which I want my children or my children's children to live.

So Manfred Swarsensky came to our Confirmation Class and taught us how we can live by the law and the love of Christ. For having known this rabbi neither can we go home again - not home again to the same old selves in which we betray Christ with indifference and ill will.

For some Christians - some Christians, I emphasize - the life of a Jewish man like the rabbi poses a problem. Some cannot believe that such a Jew can find true salvation. Though Rabbi Swarsensky had more Christian virtues than many of us Christians, he was not a Christian. He did not acknowledge as do we that Christ is the Messiah. Hence there are certain Christians who say that such a man cannot be received by God in Eternity. Indeed, one highly placed official, the president of a huge Protestant denomination, boldly declared about a year ago that "God does not hear the prayers of a Jew." When I wrote a letter to a news-

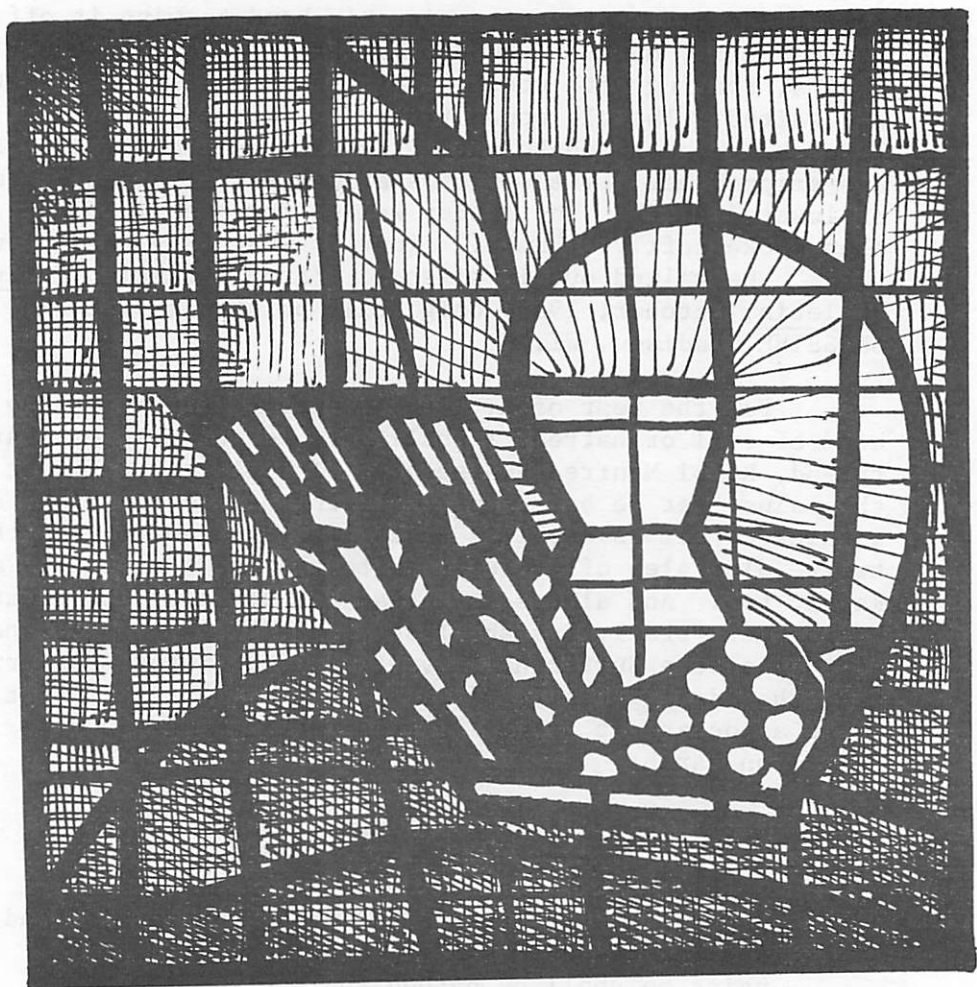
paper protesting the ugly absurdity of that view, another minister in the community responded in another public letter, not in anger at what the world had done to Jews, but with the judgment that I was scarcely entitled to such an opinion because I had not baptized 2600 people as had the minister who had made the original charge. Manfred wrote me a note thanking me for my letter. No, I have not baptized, and will not baptize 2600 people in this church, but neither will I ever baptize my parishioners with a sense of arrogant and unbiblical superiority over Jews. And if that same point of view that declares that God does not hear the prayers of Jews also means that Jews have no chance of being received by God in Eternity, then I would not want to be received in that kind of Eternity myself. On occasion Manfred Swarsensky enjoyed the words of Jesus: "In my Father's house are many mansions. If it were not so, I would have told you." (John 14) I cannot visualize the Eternity Christ has pictured without a mansion for Manfred. Surely the great prophet Isaiah was a comfort to Manfred, as he has been to us this morning as we listened to his words framed in our anthem, "Say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not; behold, your God will come and save you. . . A highway shall be there, and it shall be called the way of holiness; the redeemed shall walk there; And the ransomed of the Lord shall return with songs and everlasting joy: and sorrow and sighing shall flee away." (Isaiah 35:3-10, RSV)

About thirty years ago there was an auxiliary Catholic bishop in Chicago by the name of Bernard J. Sheil. He was a courageous and prophetic man. One night against the objections of his colleagues he went to a hall full of hate to attend a meeting of the so-called Christian Front. For 15 tense moments he took the floor and denounced anti-Semitism, white supremacy, and every vile lie that had been bellowed that night by a demagogue. The audience listened with intense hostility. When Bishop Sheil had finished he started slowly to walk down the center aisle. Suddenly there was a scream of rage. An old woman, seething with hatred, stepped out to block his path. She shrieked, "I'm

a Catholic, but you, you - you're not a Catholic bishop. God damn you! Nigger lover! Jew lover! A Bishop! Ha, ha ! Rabbi Sheil!" Then, completely hysterical, she cleared her throat and spat over one side of the bishop's face. The bishop did not raise his hand to wipe it off. By this time, most of the people were standing on their chairs, roaring with wrath. But the bishop stood silently, and waited. The old woman froze, did many others. Then she began to shake violently as though a sudden chill had gripped her. The mob of snarling faces became a group of lowered heads. The bishop waited for another moment, then spoke softly. "Rabbi? That is what they called our Lord." He walked out in silence. (from Christian Friends Bulletin, October, 1951, originally printed in THE PRO-GRESSIVE, Madison, WI.)

For the rest of my life, whenever I confront any kind of evil or hatred, I shall have to remember my dear friend, Rabbi Manfred Swarsensky. I shall never forget the pains that he bore, the suffering he endured. And as I think of him as Rabbi, I shall always be aware that the twelve disciples often referred to the man I call Lord as Rabbi, too. And always as I read the words of the great Prophet of Israel, Isaiah, I shall ponder especially the picture of the Suffering Servant, a word picture summarizing the Ideal Israel, and later used to portray Christ. I can associate it as well with a rabbi who was a dear friend on earth:

Yet the lord took thought for his tortured servant and healed him who had made himself a sacrifice for sin; so shall he enjoy long life and see his children's children, and in his hand the Lord's cause shall prosper. After all his pains he shall be bathed in light, after his disgrace he shall be fully vindicated; so shall he, my servant, vindicate many, himself bearing the penalty of their guilt. (Isaiah 53:10,11 NEB)



WHEN WERE YOU BORN AGAIN
April 18, 1982

Last summer at the Princeton Institute of Theology, Dr. Thomas Torrance of the University of Edinburgh and New College, one of the world's leading theologians, shared a most striking incident out of his own life. When he was serving as the Moderator of the Church of Scotland, someone came up to him and asked: "Are you born again?" Yes, indeed," was Torrance's reply. "But when were you born again?" the questioner persisted. Torrance then stunned the man with his reply: "I was born again in Jesus' birth from the Virgin Mary and again in his new birth from the Tomb." Torrance then went on to explain that his life has always been hid in Christ. As Paul wrote to the Colossians, *"For you have died, and your life is hid with Christ in God."* (3:3, RSV) Ever since hearing that I have pondered his answer. We have heard much in recent years about "born again" Christians. There are those who use this question almost as a weapon against those whose faith they suspect.

Being born again stems from a familiar passage in the Gospel of John. Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews, came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do, unless God is with him." But Jesus answered him: "Truly, truly I say to you, unless one is born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God." To Nicodemus this was preposterous. How could a man be born again when he was old? He was thinking only of physical birth. But Jesus continued: "Truly, truly I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit."

Everyone can determine when he was born again. Everyone of us has a birthday when physical birth occurred. But when did our spiritual birth occur? Dr. Torrance declares that his spiritual birth has occurred many times, and that it is closely related to what God has done in Christ.

His second birth is "hid with Christ in God" because God sent Christ into the world and because God raised Christ from the dead.

This morning let me focus attention on when you were born again. Perhaps you have never regarded yourself as a "born again" Christian. Perhaps you have yet to experience that rebirth. But let me suggest two momentous occasions in your life when that might have occurred, or is yet to occur.

-I-

You will be born again, for example, when you truly accept what God has done for you in Christ. In other words, you will be born again when you believe that Christ lived and died to prove to you that you are a person of worth. Indeed, "Christ died for you." If you believe this and act upon it you will be born again.

Many persons flounder and languish because they do not have any such vital belief. They hate themselves and allow other people to walk all over them because they don't think of themselves as being of any account. Such an existence is a kind of living death. Several years ago I was amused and stimulated by an episode in the Ryatt family comic strip. Little Winky Ryatt is resting up against a tree, doing nothing. His little sister is admonishing him: "Winky Ryatt, you're always loafing: You don't have any idea where you are going in life, do you?" Winky thinks for a moment and then replies, "I don't even know where I came from." (6-20-80) Hence the "loafing" and drifting. Winky speaks for many. They just exist because they have no impression that there is meaning in their lives. They don't know that they came from God; they do not believe that they are hid with Christ in God.

One of the verses in the beloved hymn, "Amazing Grace!" is this:

*'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,
And grace my fears relieved;
How precious did that grace appear
The hour I first believed!*

Every therapist, every counselor, every pastor will testify that a person is "born again: when he or she believes that he or she has been accepted. In his classic sermon, "You Are Accepted," Paul Tillich shows us how this works:

But the depth of our separation lies in just the fact that we are not capable of a great and merciful divine love toward ourselves. On the contrary, in each of us there is an instinct of self-destruction, which is as strong as our instinct of self-preservation. In our tendency to abuse and destroy others, there is an open or hidden tendency to abuse and destroy ourselves.

.... (But) Sometimes . . . a wave of light breaks into our darkness, and it is as though a voice were saying: "You are accepted. You are accepted, accepted by that which is greater than you, and in the name of which you do not know. Do not ask for the name now; perhaps you will find it later. Do not try to do anything now; perhaps later you will do much. Do not seek for anything; do not perform anything; do not intend. Simply accept the fact that you are accepted!" If that happens to us, we experience grace.

(The Shaking of the Foundation,
pp. 158, 159, 162)

That is the grace that appears the hour you first believe.

This is something like the experience that slaves had during the Civil War. They were slaves, treated like slaves; they knew that others regarded them as something less than human. Their problem was accepting what their slavery said to them about themselves. But then along came the Emancipation Proclamation in the middle of the

war. That Proclamation declared that they were free! By that Proclamation many of them were born again. Now they knew, they believed that they were free, that they did no longer have to think of themselves as slaves.

Mark Twain in one of his books told about a natural phenomenon that occurred during the Civil War. A narrow neck of land one night was cut through by the Mississippi River. A Negro slave going to sleep on that narrow strip was in the state of Missouri. But when the morning came he found that the swift current of the river had cut through, and when he awoke he found that the land on which he was standing was now east of the river. Since that land was now a part of Illinois he was a free man! In a very real sense that suggests what has been made possible for all of us during this past week. Before Easter we may have resided on a land where we were not free to believe in ourselves. But if we have taken the message of Easter seriously, now we can accept ourselves because we believe that God acted in Christ's resurrection to free us from our old, dead selves.

*How precious did that grace appear
The hour I first believed:*

That is what it means to be born again. That is when you are born again.

-II-

Let me tell you of another kind of occasion when you will be born again. You will be born again the moment you learn to treat others with justice and love. The very moment that you decide that others, too, are accepted by God, and that they are worthy of your acceptance as fellow beings of great worth and value, you will be born again. This is the effect of Christ's Resurrection.

Several years ago I saw a notice which announced that a certain week was going to be celebrated as "Accepti-onal Children's Week." This meant, of course, that during

that week exceptional children were to be recognized and honored. This generally refers to handicapped children. But I could not help noticing the misspelling which I thought was inspired. It was spelled a-c-c-e-p-t-i-o-n-a-l children. There really is no such word, but it might well be coined. Acceptional children then, would be those who are accepted in love and justice. Now when you come to that kind of an acceptance of others you will be born again. You will be born again in Christ.

This would be true because taking Christ seriously means that you have to learn to:

- love even your enemies, accepting them because Christ has accepted them.
- accept those who are fallen, those who are sinners, like yourself. You accept them because Christ has accepted them, and you.
- accept those who differ from you in color, race, or national origin, or even of religion. You accept them because Christ, in God, has accepted them.

If you do any one of these things for Christ you will be born again. Right on the spot! You will feel it, you will know it, because your heart will be flooded with grace.

Everything I have said this morning was beautifully emphasized this past Wednesday at our High Noon by one of our Certified Lay Speakers, Nancy Barth. She was speaking about "Doubt," basing her words on the doubts that the disciple Thomas raised about Jesus in his Resurrection. Nancy concluded with this witness:

I would like to share one experience with you, one in which I was able to challenge that voice (of doubt). About 12 years ago a series of real tragedies struck my family. I don't need to go into all the details. . . . but suffice it to say that I had come to the point where my faith in God was just about zero. I had built for

myself a concept of God, and it included the idea that if I was good and led a moral life then nothing bad would ever happen to me. But bad things were happening and the opposite side of that coin was that God must be allowing or even causing them to happen. I began to feel like God was some kind of a monster who had the power to change all this but refused to do it. I wanted to say, "If you're that kind of God who needs you?". . .but I was scared to death that if I did, more bad things would happen.

I had reached a terrible low point, but somehow I had managed to hold onto one thing. I still believed that Jesus had been born, that he had lived a life of love and that somehow he had died for my sake. I also believed in the resurrection and that Jesus could still hear me when I prayed.

One night in fear and trembling, I decided to trust him and tell him everything I had been thinking. I told him that if God was like I thought he was then I could no longer believe in him. But that if he wasn't like that, then I was willing to learn if he would teach me.

It was then that a wonderful thing happened. In my mind I heard him laugh. It was a sound of incredible beauty and joy, and I know I could never put into words all that that sound said to me. But one thing I know is that Christ was delighted that I had trusted him enough to tell him all my doubts and fears. It was as though he had been waiting a long time for me to come to this moment. Also I knew that in this case it was a good thing for me to be a doubting Thomas.

Does anyone here want to ask someone else, "When were you born again?" Let me tell you that you have just heard of one beautiful moment when a person was born again.

How precious did that grace appear
The hour I first believed!

THE MOOREHEAD BIBLE DIGEST
January 9, 1983

Most of you are aware, I am sure, that the Reader's Digest has published a new edition of the Bible which reduces considerably its bulk. It is called simply The Reader's Digest Bible. It has reduced, or digested, the total content of the Bible by 40 percent. This has been accomplished by eliminating passages thought to be unnecessary. Many of the passages that are duplications of other passages have been omitted. Thus the new Digest Bible has also cut out all chapter and verse numberings so that it reads in one continuous flow. The Reader's Digest employed a panel of scholars who did the editing and digesting and arranging.

One of our very distinguished members sent me a cartoon in which a somewhat grubby looking character is confronting the clergyman at the door of the church, just after a service. This person is saying to the clergyman, "I thought your sermon would be shorter now that Reader's Digest has condensed the Bible." Now that the Reader's Digest has handled the Bible in its own particular style, I am sure that the rest of us might assume that we also have license to do all sorts of things to the Holy Book. But what we might all recognize is that it is the practice of all of us to interpret, condense, digest and cut it according to our own whims, prejudices and self interests.

In a very modest sort of a way this morning I want to show you how the Moorehead Digest of the Bible would look. Of course I do not have time to show you my cuttings on every page, but I will offer a few samples so you will get the idea of where I am coming from. I shall proceed by alternating between passages I would keep, and passages I would remove, so as to get the Bible down to my size and liking.

* * * * *

For example, I would certainly keep the first four words of the Bible in Genesis: "In the beginning God." That gives me great assurance and comfort in a world of frightening uncertainty and hazard.

But in that same Book of Genesis, just three chapters later, I would remove one of the questions God asked Cain after Cain had removed his brother, Abel, from the earth. God asked Cain: "Where is your brother Abel?" (4:8) Now though I have never killed anyone, that question troubles me because I know deep in my heart that I do almost nothing to help those fellow human beings who are being starved to death, tortured, and killed by tyrants. I am afraid that I will hear that question, "Where is your brother Abel?" in a conscience-wrenching context.

* * * * *

Moving quickly through the Old Testament I would surely keep that precious Twenty Third Psalm, "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." I could not live without that psalm, for in tight and dangerous places in my life, in the lonely and despairing watches of the night, in times of storm and stress those words comfort and sustain me.

But I am not sure that in my Digest I want to keep all of the Ten Commandments. The Commandment, "You shall have no other gods before me," gives me a problem with my conscience. You see, there are some things that mean a

great deal to me, such as my Franklin stove. Every time I fire it up I care for it almost as though it were an altar. And my books and my car are precious to me, and I think I tend to adore them. Furthermore, I might want to eliminate that Commandment which says, "Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work; but the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God." (Exodus 20:8-10) Now frankly, it is hypocritical for me to leave that Commandment in my Bible. I like to eat out at public restaurants on the Sabbath, causing many people to work that day while serving me; and I like to watch football games and take hikes through the Arboretum; I mow the lawn, blow snow and cut firewood. Now I can eliminate that in all good conscience because that Commandment, frankly, reflects a cultural period in history to which all of us here are not committed. And, you know, I am sure that all of the rest of you would like to have that Commandment taken out of our Bible. Also I would remove the Commandment which says, "You shall not covet your neighbor's house." But why should my neighbor have a better house than I have when I may actually work harder than he does, and am more deserving? Besides he has so many nice things in his house. Why do I have to sleep on straw? Let's just cut that out.

* * * * *

Another passage that I would certainly keep is the Christmas Story. Actually I would keep all of those lovely stories which make Christmas so beautiful. And it is so reassuring to me to know that the Christ child came in an evil and foul time just like ours, and that his coming celebrates the greatness and the goodness of God. I don't think I could have gotten through the last days I have experienced in this world without the story of that Love which came down at Christmas.

But you know, I would leave out of my Bible that puzzling account in the New Testament where Jesus came back to his hometown of Nazareth, first as a conquering

hero. Remember how they all gathered that Sabbath in the synagogue, and they murmured with pride and admiration at seeing one of their own who had become so famous. Yet you have to face up to that ugly part of the story when they rose up against him in wrath as he preached his sermon. Now here is a good place for me to show you how people of all ages and persuasions have digested their own Bible material. In that sermon he had two sermon illustrations that raised their wrath to the boiling point. He reminded them that in the time of Elijah, "when there was no rain for three and a half years, and a severe famine spread throughout the whole land. Yet Elijah was not sent to anyone in Israel, but only to a widow living in Zarephath in the territory of Sidon." The other illustration was this: "And there were many people suffering from a dreaded skin disease who lived in Israel during the time of the Prophet Elisha; yet not one of them was healed, but only Naaman the Syrian." (Luke 4:16-30) The hometown folks in Nazareth got the points, and they didn't like them. In their wrath they drove him out of town, almost lynching him. Do you know what they in effect did? They were digesting the Bible according to their own tastes. Those two sermon illustrations were taken by Jesus directly from the holy scriptures, from what would be for us today First Kings and Second Kings. In each of these passages there are detailed accounts of how the prophets Elijah and Elisha had shown mercy to persons who were not only outside of Israel but the citizens of nations whom the Israelites hated. So that day they just took their knives and cut those passages out. It is just what I am doing now.

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Going on let me tell you that I would certainly keep that story Jesus told about the Lost Son. That parable gives me great hope to believe that God would accept even one like me who had wandered away and wasted all of his resources in riotous living in the far country. One of the most beautiful scenes in all of the Bible occurs when that broken and lost son comes trudging over the hill only

to see his loving father running out to greet him with open arms.

BUT, the last part of that story which seems to be so clearly attached to it, I would abort. The other part of the story tells about the older son who had remained at home, being faithful to his father, never questioning his authority, never lying down on the job. But when that scoundrel of a brother came home to be made the object of a great celebrating party, that elder son felt cheated and neglected and misunderstood. (Luke 15:11-32) I think I would feel the same way. I have worked hard all of my life; I have been faithful; I have never done anything too terribly wrong, so I cannot bear to see those no-good bums receive the wonderful grace of God which I think, frankly, he should reserve for worthy persons like me. So, in my Bible Digest I'll just cut that out.

* * * * *

Certainly I would want to keep in my Bible version those sublime sayings in the Sermon on the Mount, especially the Beatitudes - at least most of them:

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs
is the kingdom of God.
Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall
be comforted.
Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit
the earth. . .
Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain
mercy."

(Matthew 5:3, 4, 5, 7)

But let me tell you that I think the Beatitudes go too far. So in my Bible Digest I would just quietly remove those last two which say: "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute

and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so men persecuted the prophets who were before you." (Matthew 5:10-12)

I don't think I would leave that in the Bible because, frankly, I don't see what I have done to deserve persecution.

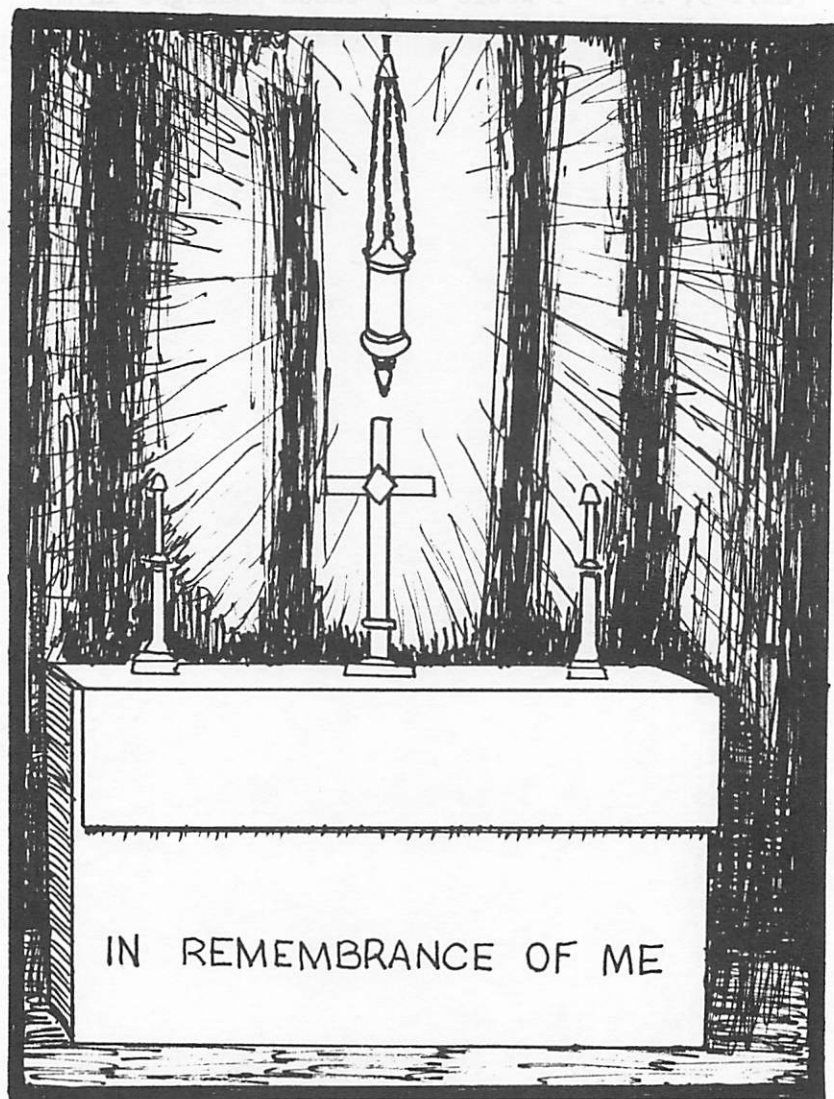
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Finally, let me tell you about how I am considering what to do with another tremendous passage of scripture. It comes from the last Book of the Bible, Revelation. Much of this puzzling book I would excise. It is so terribly weird, its daring imageries grotesque and forbidding. But there are a few passages I would keep.

I would keep that beautiful verse, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any one hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me." (3:20) And then I must turn to the last two chapters, the 21st which begins: "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband; and I heard a great voice from the throne saying, 'Behold, the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away.'" (21:1-4 RSV)

And the very last chapter I would keep. It begins: "Then he showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb. There shall no more be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and his

servants shall worship him; they shall see his face, and his name shall be in their foreheads. And night shall be no more; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they shall reign for ever and ever." (22:1-5, RSV) I would keep those passages in my Bible because I don't think I could live without them.



THE ORDEAL OF TWO MEN IN MADISON
September 11, 1983

"Let me give you, as an instance, one utterance of his (Oliver Cromwell) which has always hung in my mind. It was just before the Battle of Dunbar. . ." 'I beseech ye in the bowels of Christ, think that ye may be mistaken.' I should like to have that written over the portals of every church, every school, and every court house, and, may I say, of every legislative body in the United States. I should like to have every court begin, 'I beseech ye in the bowels of Christ, think that we may be mistaken.'"

-Justice Learned Hand in The Spirit of Liberty,
p. 229

There is hardly any human news story appearing in our modern media that does not have some counterpart in the Bible. The Bible is a faithful recording of what happens in our human lives. Take, for example, the story of what happened to Joseph in Egypt. As everyone knows, Joseph was sold into slavery by his jealous brothers, and taken to Egypt. There he came under the ownership of a man, Potiphar, who took a quick liking to him. Potiphar gave him a prominent and almost free place in his household. Potiphar's wife also took a liking to him. She saw that he was well built and quite handsome. She tried to seduce him. But Joseph was an upright man, grateful for the favors her husband had granted him, and he refused her invitations for sexual intercourse. Yet she kept trying. One day she was so persistent that he fled from her presence, unfortunately slipping out of his robe and leaving it in her grasp. This gave her the means of accusing him of rape. The result was that Joseph was thrown in prison. Eventually, of course, because he was a brilliant discerner of dreams, he gained his release, after two years, by being able to interpret for the Pharaoh a most puzzling dream he had had. Joseph became, thereafter, a power in Egypt second only to the Pharaoh. But the fact remains that he languished in prison for two years because Potiphar's wife had borne false witness against him.

A similar travesty of justice has occurred in Madison and Dane County. Two young black men were accused of robbery by another man who drifted into town and apparently needed some money. On December 7, 1980, he saw these two young men in their car downtown, got their license number and went to the police with the story that they had robbed him of \$50. The details of what followed are now almost too incredible to believe. Within fifteen minutes the home of these two young black men was surrounded by the police SWAT team, with shotguns trained on the house. The two young men were so frightened that they actually called the police when they saw that they were surrounded. The police entered their quarters, charged them with the crime, and began to ransack the house. They searched the attic and tore up floor boards. They tore their car apart. In court the man who accused them gave a most plausible and convincing story. In their trial before a jury the case was carefully presented. The lawyer of one of the young men, James Cox, succeeded in getting the case dropped against his client on the grounds of insufficient evidence. The other man, Elwin Donaldson, was convicted by the jury and locked up in the Dane County jail while awaiting transport to a state penitentiary. Sixteen months later the man who had accused them of this crime was arrested in Dimmit, Texas, for robbery. In the custody of the Texas police the man chose to confess that he had fabricated a story of robbery against two black men in Madison, Wisconsin. He was then brought back to Madison, put on trial, and is currently serving a five year sentence in a Wisconsin penitentiary. Mr. Cox and Mr. Donaldson were then absolved of a crime they never committed and Mr. Donaldson, after two months, was released from jail. Their defense had cost them unimaginable anguish and grief and \$12,000 in legal fees.

Deeply troubled by this gross miscarriage of justice, I have reflected on it considerably. How, I asked, could something like this happen in Madison, the city of shining social justice, the city of enlightened police and judges, the city of exceptional services for human welfare? I could scarcely believe it. Several weeks ago I called up

Mr. Cox and Mr. Donaldson and asked them if they would go to lunch with me as my guests. They accepted and we met for several hours. I found them to be young men of the highest caliber, with excellent reputations, highly intelligent and educated, never having experienced such things as alcohol or drug abuse. Moreover, they are both men of sincere religious convictions, faithful at worship. They have beautiful relations with their families, and on the night of their arrest Mr. Donaldson was returning from the Veteran's Administration Hospital where he had visited his father.

After meeting with them I was so sick at heart that I was compelled to reflect upon biblical, theological and social principles. Though the accounts of this ordeal had been fulsome in the media, I decided that I wanted to find out for myself what had happened. I felt compelled to make my own investigation. In succession, then, I have talked to a newspaper editor, a prominent professor of law, the Chief of Police for the City of Madison, the attorney who represented Mr. Cox and the former District Attorney who was in that office at the time. I also talked to members of the black community and leaders of black organizations and to the chaplain of the Dane County jail. And all of the time I was relating what I was learning to the biblical, theological and ethical mandates that I know from the Holy Bible. I want, therefore, as a minister of a Christian church in Madison, to share with you this morning three features in our human situation which I think caused these two fine young men to suffer this ordeal.

-I-

The first factor I want to mention is as old as Adam and Eve; Lying. Just as was Joseph the victim of Potiphar's wife turned liar, so were Mr. Cox and Mr. Donaldson made to suffer because of the vicious lie of an unknown man who happened one night to drift into town. It is, of course, not the first time that someone in the human race has been locked up in prison because of another human being telling a lie.

One of the Ten Commandments is: "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor." (Exodus 20: 16, RSV) To bear false witness against any other human being is to inflict hurt upon him. It might be argued in this case that the man who bore false witness against Mr. Cox and Mr. Donaldson had never seen them before in his life and could therefore scarcely have considered them "neighbors." Would you determine that the "neighbor" spoken of in this Commandment is confined only to the people in your block, or those whom you know? Hardly.

Lying, of course, is an oft-practiced human frailty. The Bible is full of characters, even heroes, who are portrayed as huge liars. Jacob, after whom Israel was named, was an accomplished and artistic liar. David lied about his adultery with Bathsheba. Sometimes we even glorify lying, as in the entertainment provided by the Liars' Club and their antics. I have just been reading one of the greatest American novels, Mark Twain's Huckleberry Finn. In this book we are entertained and laugh uproariously at the lying antics of Huck and his friends. When I was in college we had in our fraternity a man who was about ten years older than the rest of us. He took us all for pure saps. He was a liar of huge talents. He told us stories, as though they were true, that fascinated us. I knew that he was lying all of the time, but I kind of enjoyed him.

But the kind of lies told against Mr. Cox and Mr. Donaldson are not funny and entertaining. They cause tragedies.

I think there is a flip-side to the Commandment, "You shall not bear false witness." It is this: as an intelligent human being of integrity you have moral responsibility to distinguish truth-telling from lying. Admittedly it is often difficult. In many court cases skilled psychiatrists are summoned to determine if a person is telling the truth, and they cannot always tell. Sometimes we prefer to believe the lies people are telling. But we should be reminded that in our legal system there is the best possible

protection for innocent people in that juries must agree that the accused is guilty beyond any reasonable doubt. In the case of Mr. Cox and Mr. Donaldson they believed that the liar was telling the truth. It is very hard to tell whether people are telling the truth.

During the past week we have all been appalled by the stumbling explanations the Russian authorities have been giving for their brutal destruction of a planeload of 269 innocent human beings. It is plain that they do not hesitate to lie to cover up an atrocity. Lying is a way of life for many people. Pastors and counselors often hear it said, "My husband (or my wife) lies to me." In the Watergate scandal of recent memory we witnessed the spectacle of men in very high places lying through their teeth.

But remember, according to the Commandment of God, it is a sin to bear false witness. That is what it is, sin. How else could you describe what happened to these two innocent men in Madison?

-II-

Another human factor in the ordeal of these two men I think we cannot honestly avoid identifying. It is racism. There is not a single one of us, certainly not I, who is free from this taint of human weakness.

Deeply embedded in the psyches of us all is the tendency to reject certain other human beings. From the days of our cradles there have been breathed into our ears certain notions about white superiority and the inferiority of non-whites. We struggle all of our lives, if we struggle at all, to root out and rid ourselves of these attitudes. No section of our nation is free from this human blight. One lesson from the great Civil War that we must never forget is that though the North won the war and banished slavery from the land, the people in the North hated blacks with a venom that was no different from that of many people in the South.

Again the Bible shows us about ourselves. The reason that the hometown folks in Nazareth rose up against Jesus, almost lynching him and driving him out of town, was because in his sermon he had declared that God cares as much for the other tribes and nations as he did for them. Their anger and violence flared from this racist match. The same insight is the overarching truth in the little book of Jonah. The reason the prophet Jonah was fleeing from God was that he could not abide God's command to him to go to Nineveh and share the Gospel of Salvation. Jonah hated the Ninevites.

Almost everyone has seen a film which has become something of a classic. It is the film "In the Heat of the Night" that starred Sydney Poitier. In that vivid drama a murder was committed in a southern town - it could have been a northern town. Within a matter of minutes a handsome young black man was found waiting for a train at the railroad station. He was elegantly dressed and groomed and he had money in his pocket. Ipso facto, he was guilty of the crime. Everyone of the officials whom I interviewed in preparation for this sermon agreed that that was a possible factor. It is certainly not the only factor. It may not even be the most important factor; but because of our humanness, because of our psychic histories that disable our reason, it cannot be dismissed as being irrelevant.

James Cone, one of our leading black contemporary theologians, has revealed in his biography that when he was a student at one of our leading Methodist seminaries he was the victim of racial prejudice. The professor of Social Ethics, mind you, told racial jokes in class and snubbed Mr. Cone. The professor refused to endorse him for a PhD program, indicating that no black could ever reach that achievement. James Cone did receive a PhD and on the day of his achievement there were five persons receiving doctorates through that seminary. The professor of Social Ethics came by to congratulate them. He shook hands with the first two, passed over Mr. Cone, and then bestowed his congratulations on the other two. If this happened in a theological seminary we must certainly conclude that we all have problems with race.

The legal process that gives us the best possible hearing involves police persons, prosecutors, judges and juries. And we are all human, all frail, all sinful. If you have ever as a Christian sat on a jury you might reflect on the secrets of your own inner life.

That this miscarriage of justice should happen in Madison provokes a sense of towering irony. I knew that Mr. James Doyle, who was the District Attorney at the time, is a man deeply committed to racial justice. He talked to me freely and openly about this tragedy. Chief of Police David Couper, likewise, is an enlightened and highly educated man committed to racial justice. He told me that in all of his career as a policeman he had never encountered a situation like this. As I turned to leave his office I looked at the wall behind his desk. There I saw two large portraits, side by side: one of Mahatma Gandhi, the other of Martin Luther King, Jr.

Remember what we read in the Book of Acts: "And he - God - made from one every nation of men to live on all the face of the earth." (17:26, RSV). It is therefore a sin against God for us to maltreat a single human being because of his race.

-III-

The third factor in this human ordeal that I want to point up is that of justice. There is no way that the Christian, captive to the Holy Bible, can escape responsibility for safeguarding justice.

The Bible makes justice inseparable from the love of God. In the prophet Amos God speaks:

Take away from me the noise of your songs;
to the melody of your harps I will not listen.
But let justice roll down like waters,
and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

(5:23, 24, RSV)

God accepts our adoration in worship, but what he is most interested in is the way we treat other human beings: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself." (Luke 10:27, RSV) And in Isaiah God declares:

For I the Lord love justice,
I hate robbery and wrong;
I will faithfully give them their recompense,
And I will make an everlasting covenant with them.
(6:8, RSV)

In Micah the Prophet says:

He has showed you, O man, what is good;
and what does the Lord require of you
but to do justice, and to love kindness,
and to walk humbly with your God?
(6:8, RSV)

As mere mortals we have to acknowledge that the justice we practice, even when we are at our best, is approximate, tentative, fragile and partial. We do not have in us the righteousness and justice of God. And Madison, Wisconsin, which I dearly love, is not the Holy City. Yes, even Madison with all of its affirmative action and enlightenment, its high incidence of higher education and liberal politics is a city where, after the most rational, deliberate and controlled legal process two totally innocent men could be made to suffer injustice. I think it should not pass from our awareness without our reflection, our prayers of confession, and our beseeching Almighty God for his grace.

Many of you will remember that deeply moving novel and film by Harper Lee, To Kill a Mockingbird. In that story we see how an innocent black man is accused of rape by a distressed young white woman. In this southern town a respected and conscientious white lawyer defends the black

man. He defends him most ably. The young woman takes the stand and lies. In the end the jury is more bound by social and racial sanctions than it is by justice, and the black man is convicted of a crime that he did not commit. A most memorable scene occurs at the end of the trial. During the trial the black members of the community are confined to the balcony, and they are strictly forbidden by deeply entrenched custom to make any vocal demonstrations. After the jury has rendered its verdict, and everyone but the white lawyer has left the courtroom, all of the black people remain in the balcony. Then when the lawyer arises to walk out slowly they all stand in silent tribute to his courage, his humanity and his integrity. They know that in a hostile environment there was one man who had done justice.

I hope that I have not appeared to engage in any cheap generalizations. Not every one is innocent, and justice means that the guilty should be held accountable for their deeds. How striking it was to me yesterday that as I was putting this sermon on paper the phone rang and a man from the county jail wanted me to take a collect call. His story was that he was being held unjustly and that he wanted me to provide him \$400 in bail money. I checked with the chaplain and found that this man has been repeatedly arrested for misdeeds and that he takes the yellow pages and calls every minister in town whom he can get to answer the phone. How different his case is from that of James Cox and Elwin Donaldson. I can tell you that because I have gotten to know them, and because I feel so deeply about what happened to them, I shall utter as a prayer the next time I am called upon to make my pledge of allegiance to the flag I love: "I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America, and to the republic for which it stands, one nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all. And believing truly that this nation is under God, I shall in my heart and mind add, "Let justice roll down like the waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream."

Help me, O God, to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with Christ. Amen.

MARTIN LUTHER - THE GNARLED OAK
October 23, 1983

November 10, 1983 will be the 500th birthday of Martin Luther, one of the most dominating and compelling figures on the scene of human history. Few human beings have left the deep footprints on the sands of time that were left by Martin Luther. Last Friday night when Homecoming events were being celebrated at the University of Wisconsin, and a big hockey game was being played at the Coliseum, and a barber-shop festival was being held, a huge crowd gathered at Luther Memorial Church to hear one of the world's greatest theologians, Hans Kung, another German, speak on Martin Luther.

Martin Luther, the great Reformer, was the principal father of Protestantism, his powerful witness changing the course of European history in the 16th Century. It is changing still. For centuries most of the great books written about Luther were written by celebrating Protestant scholars. But lately, in observance of the fact that the Roman Catholic Church in the 20th century has acknowledged Luther for his vital influence on history, Roman Catholic writers have been writing fulsomely about Luther. In the past year two outstanding accounts of Luther's life have appeared, one by John Todd, a Catholic layman, the other by Peter Manns, a Roman Catholic priest.

What we are reading about Luther now is quite different from what was written twenty years ago. Protestant writers tended to idealize and romanticize Luther, carefully and discreetly omitting extended discussion of his flaws. When I was a student at Boston University School of Theology one of my professors was a spell-binding historian, Edwin Prince Booth. He had written a glowing account of Luther's life which he called Martin Luther - the Oak of Saxony. This book truly portrayed the heroic witness of Luther, but glossed over his flaws. In it there was almost no mention of Luther's warts and blemishes that trouble present-day admirers of Luther.

Because Luther's presence is to this day so dramatically vivid on the stage of human history, and because his life so powerfully illustrates the full extent of human nature, I want us to think about him and what he still means to our world. But I want to amend my Professor Booth's admiring portrait of him by using as my theme, "Martin Luther - the Gnarled Oak." There is a difference, that will tell us much about ourselves. First we shall view Luther as being like a mighty oak, and then as a gnarled oak.

-I-

The mighty oak is a fitting metaphor for Luther. The oak tree has been called the "monarch of the forest." In ancient times it was sacred to the god of thunder, and from Luther's life there rolled epic thunder. It was said that oak trees are more likely to be struck by lightning than any other tree, and Luther's life had the effect of lightning on history. The oak is known for its strength, hardness and durability as timber, as well as longevity. Luther's force conveyed all of these characteristics.

At the age of 21 Luther was an Augustinian monk at Erfurt, positively terrorized by thoughts of God. So terrified was he that he strove with painful physical exertion to please God by fulfilling all of the duties and laws of the church. So intent was he that his physical body was wracked by agony and tension. Devoted to the Bible he ransacked its pages to learn how he might be saved. Eventually he came to a great discovery, and profound relief to his soul, when he realized that one is saved only by the act of God's grace and mercy, God's acceptance of the sinner. He was writhing in a snake-pit of guilt and remorse until he made this discovery in scripture. The basis for this discovery was Paul's Letter to the Romans. In his later interpretation of Romans he wrote:

Though I lived as a monk without reproach, I

felt that I was a sinner before God with an extremely disturbed conscience. I could not believe that he was placated by my satisfaction. I did not love, indeed I hated the righteous God who punishes sinner, and secretly. At last, by the mercy of God, meditating day and night, I turned to the context of the following words: "In it (the Gospel) the righteousness of God is revealed, as it is written, 'He who through faith is righteous shall live.' There I began to understand the righteousness of God is that by which the righteous live through a gift of God, namely by faith. And this is the meaning: The righteousness of God which is revealed by the gospel, is a passive righteousness with which the merciful God justifies us by faith, as it is written: 'He who through faith is righteous shall live.' Here I felt that I was altogether born again and had entered paradise itself through open gates.

These words, "He who through faith is righteous shall live," became the watchword, the igniting word of the Protestant Reformation.

This new vision of scripture soon brought Martin Luther into a head-on collision with the authorities of the Roman Catholic Church. Everywhere he went he preached this new faith. But it was a warlike challenge to the contemporary practices of the church. In a powerful sermon from the pulpit of the Cathedral Church at Wittenberg, Luther proclaimed this message. As John Todd observes: "Luther knew the sermon was provocative, but was already becoming convinced that he must speak out. The force of his own inner storm was driving him on to say what others held back from. The atmosphere was becoming tense." (Todd, p. 125)

In this time the Pope at Rome was seeking to build St. Peter's Cathedral by sending an agent-priest, John Tetzel, around the empire selling indulgences. By buying a piece of paper pinned to a board, the faithful were assured that the unforgiven sins of their dead loved ones would be forgiven,

and that these dead then would fly out of Purgatory up to Heaven. It was a gross and contemptible practice that angered Luther, and he spoke out against it.

In 1521 Luther was ordered to report to the Diet of Worms where he would be put on trial for his life. With Emperor Charles, a 21 year old youth looking on, Luther was ordered to recant what he had written so voluminously. His books were all spread out on a table before him. Luther was accused of refusing with headlong rashness to submit to the decisions of the Church. He was told to answer clearly, renouncing what he had written in his books, and not with a horned reply. It was then that the Mighty Oak of Saxony drew himself up before a hostile audience and made one of the most unequivocal and powerful statements in human history:

Since then Your Serene Majesty and Your Lordships seek a simple answer, I will give it in this manner, neither horned nor toothed. Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures or by clear reason (for I do not trust either in the Pope or in the councils alone, since it is well known that they have erred and contradicted themselves), I am bound by the Scriptures I have quoted and my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not retract anything since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience. Here I stand, may God help me. Amen.

Thereafter Martin Luther became an influential celebrity in Europe. Condemned as a heretic who hid out for several months in Wartburg Castle to save his life. He eventually emerged to become a prolific scholar and preacher, and the translator of the entire Bible into German. Eventually he was excommunicated from the church, though the Pope and Emperor at first hesitated to ban him.

Another of Luther's great biographers, Roland Bainton,

in writing of his famous stand against the emperor at Worms, wrote:

The most intrepid revolutionary is the one who has a fear greater than anything his opponents can inflict upon him. Luther, who had so trembled before the face of God, had no fear before the face of man. (Here I Stand, p. 135)

My seminary professor, Edwin Prince Booth, was right: Luther stood like the Oak of Saxony. He was tremendously strong, durable and hard. In the words of his own hymn he is described:

And though this world, with devils filled,
Should threaten to undo us,
We will not fear, for God hath willed
His truth to triumph through us:
The Prince of Darkness grim,
We tremble not for him;
His rage we can endure,
For lo, his doom is sure;
One little word shall fell him.

-II-

But consider now with me another side of Luther's character and personality. If he was as sturdy, strong and hard as an oak, he is also to be seen as a gnarled oak.

Some trees, even oaks, are gnarled. This means they have knots, or gnarls, which are warped or twisted. A knot in wood is a hard protuberance with twisted grain. Some people are seen as gnarled, too, meaning that they have a crabby aspect to their nature. They may be cantankerous and hard-bitten. There was this side to Martin Luther.

To tell you the truth, though I greatly admire Luther for his brilliant, fertile mind, and for his monumental courage as a prophet of the faith, I find it hard to

like him. Philip Melanchthon, one of his close theological associates, said that he was "a harsh and severe doctor." (Todd, p. 371) In a recent article about him, Martin Marty, in speaking of his 500th birthday, wrote: "This is a celebration of a person, of highly flawed and unadorable Martin Luther." (Christian Century, "Martin Luther's Reckless Grasp of Grace," Oct. 26, 1983, p. 964) We do stand in awe of him, but few of us would find him adorable.

The more recent and unadoring scholars writing of Luther have shown him to be a man of earth, very earthy indeed. John Todd observes that "Excerpts from the more ribald parts of Table Talk have tended to make a caricature of Luther as though he might be some kind of foul-mouthed Billy Graham." (p. xvi) Luther's talk was coarse and vulgar, sometimes bordering on the obscene. If a modern minister were to use his language few congregations would tolerate his presence. Much of his conversation in daily life was strewn with what we would call four-letter words.

But vulgar as his language was, it was his vehement attitudes and abuses of other people that really cause us trouble today. The peasants of Europe who revolted against their princely lords, largely under Luther's inspiration, were castigated and repudiated by Luther. To the peasants who had many grievances Luther preached non-violence and resignation. (Todd, p. 270) The result was that they were slaughtered. Luther was criticized heavily because he renounced them. Luther declared that "It is better that all of the peasants should be killed rather than that the sovereigns and magistrates should be destroyed." (Todd, p.272) I personally find that attitude of Luther to be untenable and repulsive, so that if I see him as an Oak it is as a badly gnarled Oak.

Since these later years of scholarship have been more honest and forthright about Luther, his ugliest and least defensible characteristic has been seen in his vicious anti-Semitism. Early in his career Luther gave high honor to Jews and Judaism. But in his old age he turned against

them in bitterness. John Todd shows that in 1543 he launched into a full-length tirade against the Jews by publishing about 60,000 words of what he called "On the Jews and Their Lies." He recommended cruelty against the Jews because he was apparently angry because they had not become Christians in larger numbers. He declared "Let their synagogues be burnt for the glory of our Lord and Christendom. . . Let their houses be razed. . . Let their prayerbooks and talmuds be confiscated." (Christian Century, Oct. 12, 1983, p. 904)

I shall never forget my first perception of this side of Luther. I learned about it by reading William L. Shirer's classic work The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich. Shirer wrote:

It is difficult to understand the behaviour of most German Protestants in the first Nazi years unless one is aware of two things: their history and the influence of Martin Luther. The great founder of Protestantism was both a passionate anti-Semite and a ferocious believer in absolute obedience to political authority. He wanted Germany rid of the Jews and when they were sent away he advised that they be deprived of "all their cash and jewels and silver and gold." and, furthermore, "that their synagogues or schools be set on fire, that their houses be broken up and destroyed. . . and they be put under a roof or stable, like the gypsies . . . in misery and captivity as they incessantly lament and complain to God about us." - advice that was literally followed four centuries later by Hitler, Goering and Himmler. (p. 236)

Many efforts have been made by Luther's defenders to either justify or explain this unwarranted viciousness, but most of his admirers today are appalled and ashamed. If he was like a great Oak Tree he was badly, tragically gnarled.

Especially, then, in his later years there was about Luther this alarming vehemence of soul which roared furiously against his enemies and those who disagreed with him. The same stamina of character that made him a hero at the Diet of Worms had another side of ferocity that was anything but gracious. But what else is new about the double-mindedness, the two sides to all human nature? Do not these very flaws in Luther and in us make us more aware of our total dependence upon God for his mercy and forgiveness, his acceptance of us despite our sins? Only through faith in God's righteousness and mercy and grace can we as his creatures live!

How can we account, then, for this great man, albeit a gnarled oak? Roland Bainton, the great American biographer of Luther, recalls what was said by Karl Barth, perhaps the greatest theologian of our century. Barth said that he felt "like a man climbing in the darkness a winding staircase in the steeple of an ancient cathedral. In the blackness he reached out to steady himself, and his hand lay hold of a rope. He was startled to hear the clanging of a bell." (Here I Stand, p. 83) Bainton believes this can be said equally of Luther. Luther pulled a rope that set bells to clanging, bells that still clang 500 years later. It may be God's way of changing history.

One of my favorite plays is John Osborne's Luther. What a subject for theater is Martin Luther, and Osborne has made the most of it. Near the end of the play when Luther is a famous and successful leader of Europe he is visited by his old friend, Johann von Staupitz. Staupitz asks Luther: "When you were before the Diet of Worms, and they asked you those two questions - why did you ask for that extra day to think over your reply?" The dialogue is this:

Martin: Why?

Staupitz: You'd known what your answer was going to be for months. Heaven knows, you told me enough times. Why did you wait?

(Pause)

Martin: I wasn't certain.

Staupitz: And were you? Afterwards?

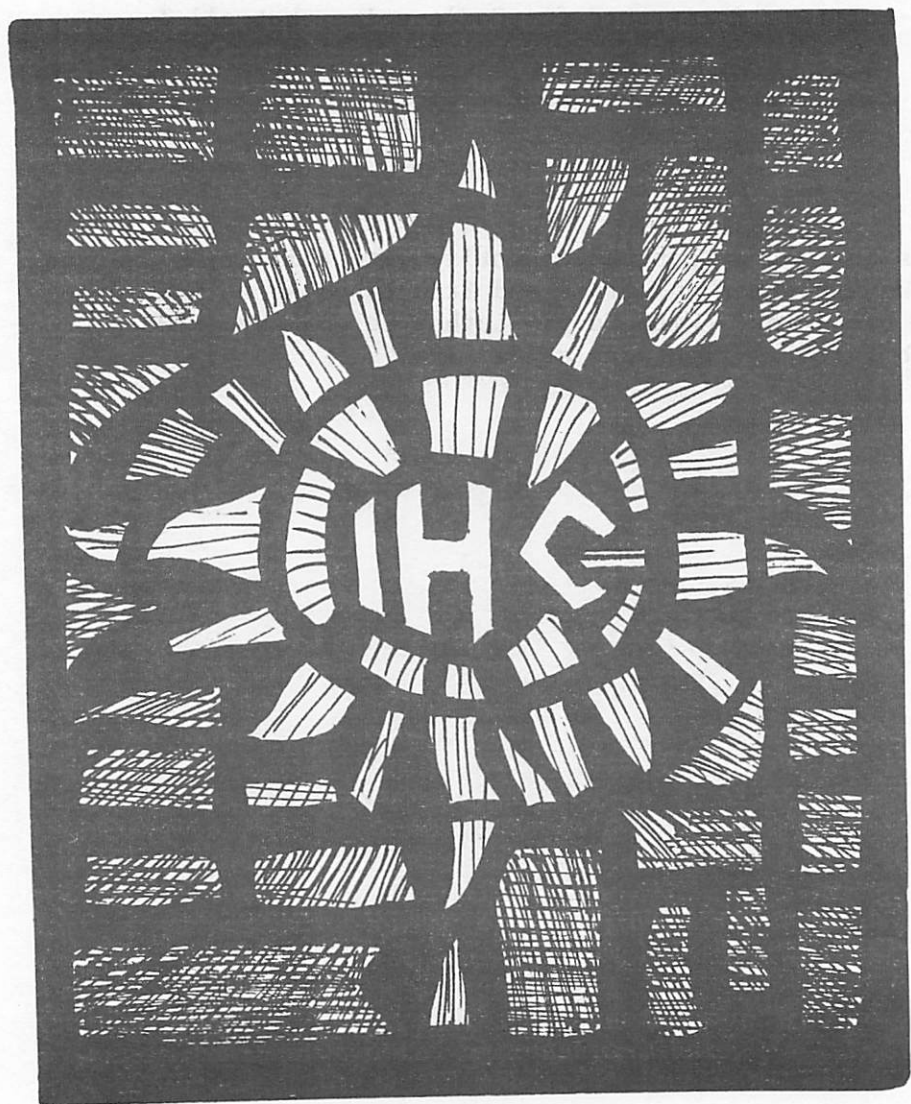
Martin: I listened for God's voice, but all I could hear was my own.

Staupitz: Were you sure?

(Pause)

Martin: No

Perhaps in that we can best identify with this great Gnarled Oak. We are human and frail and frightened as he was, even in our victories. With Martin Luther we can say: "He who through faith is righteous shall live."



HOW BEAUTIFUL UPON THE MOUNTAINS

January 8, 1984

As I enter the fortieth year of my ministry I want to pay tribute to the great ministers of Christ who have profoundly influenced and inspired me. A few of them I have known personally, but most of them I know through the history and the traditions of the Christian faith. All of them have had deep reality in my life. I can think of no better way to describe the effect this noble army of prophets and pastors has had on me than to recall this passage from the prophet Isaiah:

How beautiful upon the mountains
are the feet of him who brings good tidings,
who publishes peace, who brings good tidings of
good
who publishes salvation,
who says to Zion, "Your God reigns."
Hark, your watchmen lift up their voice,
together they sing for joy;
for eye to eye they see
the return of the Lord to Zion.

Having treasured those words all of my life, let me tell you how they truthfully portray the lives of Christ's ministers who have blessed us all beyond reckoning.

This passage suggests a vivid scene from the walls of Jerusalem. Those who have been appointed watchmen are on the walls looking toward the mountains. Suddenly they see a figure running across the mountains. The watchman concentrates on the swift approach of the running messenger. He watches his feet as they bring him nearer to the city. For a long time the people have been scanning the mountains for a view of a hurrying herald. They are impatient and anxious. The runner may be bringing from the scene of a battle news of victory. But Isaiah understands the messenger to be bringing the news that God is reigning like a king. The running feet are beautiful!

One biblical commentator notes that "The exclamation 'how lovely' (beautiful) does not refer to the lovely sound of the footsteps, but to the lovely appearance presented by their feet which spring over the mountains with all the swiftness of gazelles (Song of Solomon 2:17; 8:14). Their feet look as if they had wings, because they are messengers of good tidings of joy." (Commentary on the Old Testament, Vol. 7, p. 299, Keil-Delitzsch) Another commentator notes, "Suddenly he (the watchman) sees the most beautiful sight in the world, the feet of a messenger running with good news, with the greatest news in the history of Israel. . . What they (the watchmen) see is not the messenger but the return of Yahweh himself. The prophet repeats his call to a joyous shout (52:2). The great act of what Yahweh is doing will be seen all over the world." (The Anchor Bible: Second Isaiah, John L. McKenzie, S.J., p. 217)

Martin Luther has a most trenchant commentary on this passage in Isaiah:

By means of personification he (the prophet) pictures the apostles running over the mountains with beautiful feet to denote that the teaching of the Gospel is not bound but is freely scattered over all the mountains, that is, kings, princes, peoples, nations, tribes. Over these the Gospel runs." Who publishes peace," that is, the forgiveness of sins. "Good things" mean joy and happiness and fruits of the Spirit. "Salvation" means freedom from death and all evils and the gift of eternal salvation. . . . Their running, I say, is truly sweet, that is, their ministry is most delightful, not like Moses and the prophets. To run means to serve in the office of preacher, as Paul says (Phil. 2:16): "I did not run in vain." Thus the foot is the instrument of his running. For when the Gospel runs, it proclaims all good things, cheerfulness of conscience, deliverance from the Law, and the best use of all external things. (Luther's Works, Isaiah, p. 210)

It is in this way, then, that I think thankfully of all of God's prophets, pastors, priests and saints who have made me see that the Gospel runs. "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him (those) who bring good tidings." Let us see how Isaiah has shown God's ministers three ways to make this proclamation.

-I-

For one thing, Isaiah speaks of God's ministers as watchmen. From the best possible vantage point they watch for not only the good news, but for the approaching, imminent threat of anything that is the enemy of the Gospel. The watchman looks for the good news, but he also warns those in his care of the presence of evil.

All of God's ministers are watchmen. A watchman is one keeping a vigil, who guards persons and property. Watchmen are especially important at night. In biblical times when the harvest was on watchmen kept vigil over fields and vineyards. Sometimes they erected watchtowers by piling up rocks so that their observation would be enhanced. As sentries they walked the walls of the city, at night providing safety for the people. Especially were they valuable in times of siege. It is no wonder that Israel thought of its prophets as watchmen for God. It was their function to perceive impending doom and make such announcements to a sleeping, indifferent people. They saw themselves as watching over God's people. They bear a heavy responsibility. They speak for God. (see Interpreter's Bible Dictionary, Vol. 4, p. 806)

Ezekiel especially saw the minister, the prophet as a watchman who is required to give warning. God's wrath would fall upon the watchman who failed to give necessary warning: "But if the watchman sees the sword coming and does not blow the trumpet, so that the people are not warned, and the sword comes, and takes away any one of them; that man is taken away in his iniquity, but his blood I will require at the watchman's hand. So you, son of man, I have made a watchman for the house of Israel; whenever you

hear the word from my mouth, you shall give them warning from me." (Ezekiel 33:6,7 RSV) When God saw that his appointed watchmen were not doing their job, he banished them and he, God, became the watchman-shepherd: "I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I will make them lie down, says the Lord God. I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the crippled, and I will strengthen the weak, and the fat and the strong I will watch over; I will feed them in justice." (34:15,16 RSV)

How deeply indebted all of us are to the brave watchmen of God who through the centuries have warned us of evil, who have protected us from the human elements that rage and rape! Often we have condemned them, persecuted them, as Jesus said, and we have been angered and turned away by their messages. They have suffered abuse and defamation; they have been harassed and killed, but they have been faithful to God.

Just twenty years ago I spent one evening in a Washington, D.C. hotel with another minister as my roommate. We were attending a meeting of the General Board of Christian Social Concerns. For much of the night we talked. He was a highly regarded and delightful minister from the south. He told me that recently he had had a visit in Birmingham, Alabama with his four brothers. They got him in a corner of the basement and with menacing eyes demanded of him: "Why are you betraying us?" Word had reached them that he had taken a courageous stand in the civil rights struggle. I asked him why he had turned out to be different from his four brothers. Tears welled up in his eyes. He replied: "I came to think of black people as the children of God, the same as I." I like to remember this friend of mine as one who was living up to his name, for his name is Ted Hightower! He was a preacher who took Christ seriously, at risk. He was a watchman over the city.

Some time ago a friend, Rodney Shaw, spoke here in Madison during Peace With Justice Week. He told about a

woman who was demonstrating for peace. Someone asked her, contemptuously: "Why did you leave your children to come to this picket line? Shouldn't you be home caring for your children?" She replied: "It is because of my children that I am here!"

Many of us have not known how to respond to the Roman Catholic bishops in America who have made an historic stand for peace through their pastoral letter. They have been denounced as meddlers, busy-bodies, people who are not sufficiently expert to take positions like that. But there is another way of looking at them: they are pastors in the name of Christ. They see on the near horizon the gathering clouds of a nuclear, global holocaust, and they have become watchmen in the nuclear night. Someday, if we pass through this era of unthinkable, unparalleled danger to our world, we may look back upon them and say: "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good tidings, who publishes peace."

-II-

In the second place Isaiah shows us that it is important in our human experience to get a view from the mountain tops. Trudging as most of us do daily in the dusty flats, we find our lives changed when we get a perspective from a higher plane. How thankful I am for those ministers of God who have seen things from the mountaintop so that they could bring God's truth to me!

The same Isaiah who wrote the beautiful scriptural passage that we are pondering also declared:

Get you up to a high mountain
O Zion, herald of good tidings;
lift up your voice with strength,
O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings,
lift it up, fear not;
say to the cities of Judah,
"Behold, your God!" (40:9, RSV)

If we really knew the lives of those who have influenced us most profoundly we would find, I am sure, that they have been able to reveal to us the things of God because they have seen God in mountaintop experiences. As with Moses on Mt. Sinai, God has spoken to them.

Three of Jesus' disciples, Peter, James and John, had such an experience. A few days before Peter had hailed Jesus as the Messiah only to learn to his horror that the Messiahship meant repudiation, disgrace and death for Christ. Undoubtedly Peter had brooded about this. Then one day Jesus took Peter and James and John apart into a mountain. Some scholars believe that what happened on that mountain was primarily an experience of Peter. There they saw Jesus transfigured in a dazzling vision. "His face shone like the sun, and his garments became white as light." Then out of the cloud they heard a voice: "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him." (Matt. 17:2, 5 RSV) (See Major, Manson and Wright, The Mission and Message of Jesus, p. 113-115) Perhaps not too much emphasis should be given to what follows in Matthew's version of this vision on the mountaintop, but I have always been impressed to see that as soon as Jesus and the disciples came down from the mountain they ran into a desperate human need. A man came up to them with an epileptic son, begging for help. Jesus asked for the boy to be brought forward, "and the boy was cured instantly." (Matt. 17:14-18, RSV) Though Matthew in arranging his Gospel may not have intended this emphasis, this suggests to me that the purpose of a mountaintop experience, in our lives, is that we should be able to respond to a human need. "How beautiful were the feet" of Jesus and those disciples when they came down from the mountain!

How grateful I am for the prophets who have gone to the mountaintop to bring back visions of peace and justice! On April 3, 1968, Martin Luther King was in Memphis. He was personally depressed and tornado warnings were out for Memphis. Two thousand people were awaiting his arrival in an auditorium. But he didn't want to go. By nightfall a heavy rain was lashing the city. At 8:30 Ralph Abernathy called

and told him he had to come to the temple. That night he did go, and gave one of his memorable speeches. Recalling much of his life he said:

I don't know what will happen now. We've got difficult days ahead. But it really doesn't matter with me now. Because I've been to the mountaintop. Like anybody I would like to live a long life. Longevity has its place. But I'm not concerned about that now. I just want to do God's will. And He's allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I've looked over. And I've seen the Promised Land . . . Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord. I have a dream this afternoon that the brotherhood of man will become a reality. With this faith, I will go out and carve a tunnel of hope from a mountain of despair. (Let the Trumpet Sound, the Life of Martin Luther King, Jr. by Stephen B. Oates, p. 486)

The next day Martin Luther King was killed by an assassin's bullet. But forever, oppressed and despairing people will be uplifted by the vision of this man who went to the mountaintop. And how grateful I am for his vision! From that mountaintop he brought the good news that transformed an oppressed and deprived people, and from that mountaintop he gave us a new vision of "America the Beautiful." "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good tidings, who publishes peace."

-III-

There is one more trait of the Gospel's deliverance to us. Do you remember that Martin Luther declared that the Gospel runs? Luther also said, "God's word has hands and feet. It runs after a man: it seizes him. And a sacrament can chase us down the years." (From Arthur Gossip's sermon "On the Meaning of Infant Baptism," in Experience Worketh Hope, p. 171)

We have only to recall how the Gospel of John reports the Resurrection. "Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb, while it was still dark, and saw the stone had been taken away from the tomb. So she ran, and went to Simon Peter . . . Peter then came out with the other disciple, and they went toward the tomb. They both ran, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first." (20:1,2,3,4 RSV) In the most profound way the Gospel got a running start!

The New Testament often speaks of people running. In Hebrews we are counseled: "Let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith." (12:1,2 RSV) The Gospel is so filled with joy that those who believe in it and feel an urgent need to proclaim it have to run in order to express their faith. Though I have been in the ministry for forty years, I have never felt more like running to express my gratitude to God for allowing me to be a minister.

You will recall that in one of the most respected series television has ever produced, M*A*S*H, the opening scenes always made your spine tingle. There in that Korean wilderness we saw the approach of a helicopter-ambulance bringing wounded humans from the front. As the music quickened our pulse, we saw the doctors and nurses running up the hill to receive and care for those broken, bleeding bodies. To their appointed tasks they brought mercy, caring and skill.

Some of us have been in gatherings when a person becomes suddenly stricken with illness. The emergency squad is called and in what seems almost a miraculously short time a large square box of a vehicle rounds the corner, its horn blaring, its lights flashing. From the vehicle spring the skilled paramedics, their feet swiftly moving, their skilled mercy to perform.

Often I have sat with those who settle down for a long wait in a hospital room after a loved one has been wheeled off to surgery. Hours pass and our wait grows more anxious.

But then suddenly, down the corridor come the swiftly moving feet of a surgeon to bring good tidings of surgery that has been well performed. How beautiful are those feet! Yes, they are beautiful, even when the news is sad, uncertain or doubtful.

So I think this morning of all of those preachers of the Word of God who have faithfully through the centuries proclaimed the Good News of the Gospel. In good times and bad, to people receptive or rejecting, to those obedient or indifferent, they have brought us from the mountains of God the Gospel of Christ. The Apostle Paul thought so much of Isaiah's view that in his Letter to the Romans he thought of it in relationship to preaching: "But how are men," he asked, "to call upon him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how are they to hear without a preacher? And how can men preach unless they are sent? As it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who preach good news!'" (1-15, RSV)

In speaking as a layperson to a group of preachers about preaching, I heard Dr. Leigh Roberts say: "It is not accidental that we speak of the sermon delivery. A sermon is delivered!"

Not long ago I saw a service truck parked on Dayton Street. There was a sign in the window that read: "THIS TRUCK IS OPERATED BY GENERAL VENDING. WE ARE IN THE PROCESS OF MAKING A DELIVERY." O, how I would like to have some sign like that posted outside this church right now: WE ARE IN THE PROCESS OF DELIVERING THE GOSPEL!

In memory and honor of all the dedicated preachers and pastors and ministers I have known, I want to say:

"Take my feet, and let them be.
Swift and beautiful for thee."

and

"He has sounded forth the trumpet that shall
never call retreat;
He is sifting out the hearts of men before
his judgment seat;
O, be swift my soul to answer him; be jubilant
my feet!
Our God is marching on!"

"How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who
brings good tidings, who publishes peace, who brings good
tidings of good, who publishes salvation."

So:

Go, tell it on the mountains
Over the hills and everywhere,
Go, tell it on the mountain
That Jesus Christ is born.

FATHOMS FROM FORTY YEARS IN THE MINISTRY
January 22, 1984

I have been somewhat hesitant and self-conscious about using the word "fathom" in "Fathoms From Forty Years in the Ministry." Once I thought of this term in its form "unfathomable," meaning that something was so deep that it could not be understood or grasped. With regard to my ministry that would be pretentious. But then I looked up the word and discovered that a fathom is "a unit of length equal to six feet." A second definition is "to measure the depth of by use of a sounding line." But it is really the third definition that I am using this morning: "To understand thoroughly."

I cannot honestly say that I understand my ministry thoroughly. I am sure that there are those who will venture to say that they understand my ministry, thoroughly, and what they understand may not be too flattering. Still I am going to share with you some of the things I have fathomed from being a minister for over forty years.

Reaching the forty year mark in the ministry has often been an excuse for preachers to preach on this theme. The late Harry Emerson Fosdick did this on the occasion of his fortieth anniversary in the ministry. Actually, I am in between my fortieth and forty-first years, and forty being an important symbolic number in the Bible, I am going to proceed.

If a minister cannot learn anything, or fathom anything, after forty years, it becomes clear that the authorities should have discerned this twenty years before and cashiered him.

At this point someone might arise to ask, "Who cares? What difference does it make what you have learned or fathomed?" If I were to answer such a question it would be with an expression of my respect for many of you who so love the church and are committed to its purposes that I

know you care very much what I have thought and learned.

These, then, are some of the fathoms by which I measure the years I have been privileged to be a minister.

-I-

First, as the years have passed I have been less certain of having absolute, unimpeachable answers to questions and perplexities of towering mystery.

When I began my ministry I was certain that I had all of the right and needed answers to the problems of the world. After all, I was right out of theological seminary, and that had been an exciting, confidence-building three years. So I thought, Just give me a pulpit and I will straighten people out, and I will tell them how to solve the problems of the world. But the years have passed, accumulating into decades, and there has been an attrition of that absolute confidence.

In seminary I knew that I would face as a pastor tragedies that befall families. In seminary I knew that I could deliver complete and satisfying answers, just as they could be quoted from textbooks. But it slowly dawned on me that I was not really that smart or all-knowing. One night I was called to the hospital where a precious little boy, Skippy Reynolds, was dying. For several hours I was with that mother and father, and then when Skippy breathed his last, and the first blushes of dawn were appearing on the horizon, I went home with that mother and father. We entered their home, now desolate and dreary with death. I began that night, and that early morning to learn something: I could minister to them and comfort them, just by being with them, and showing that I cared, that I loved them, and not by dishing out "answers" as to why little Skippy died. Skippy and his mother and father have been fixtures in my heart ever since.

In the intervening years I have pondered theological and biblical meanings more than ever before. I have been with many of you when with breaking hearts we have turned away from freshly opened graves. Together we have searched for answers to "Why, why, why?" But what we know most of all is that "love that wilt not let us go."

What I have discovered over the years is the Bible. I have discovered that the Bible has plumbed these depths, that in its sacred pages there are the anguished cries of Job and the Psalmists, and Jeremiah, and that there is a marvelous book called Ecclesiastes that fairly shouts its questions at God, and that there are no easy, simplistic answers. I have discovered by searching the Holy Scriptures that there is nothing wrong or sinful about saying, "I don't know, I don't understand." Do you know, by honoring the Bible I have learned that I cannot play the role of God, that I do not know everything, that there is so much I do not know.

I came to understand the significance of John Wesley's famous Aldersgate experience. On that very day he had been so troubled that the words of the 130th Psalm spoke his innermost feelings:

Out of the depths I cry to thee, O Lord;
Lord, hear my voice!
Let thy ears be attentive
to the voice of my supplications!
o o o o o o o o o o

I wait for the Lord, my soul waits,
and in his word I hope;
my soul waits for the Lord
more than watchmen for the morning,
more than watchmen for the morning.

Out of that anguished prayer came Wesley's glowing experience in which he was, in faith, able to say: "I felt my heart strangely warmed." He did not get answers to all of his questions. Indeed, Wesley scholars tell me that all of his life, even into his old age, Wesley was plagued with doubts.

So honest, viable, durable faith does not consist of having all the answers.

-II-

But in the second place I think this understanding affects a pastor's capacity to minister to people. There are, I have found, human souls who are so deeply troubled and perplexed that they crave absolute answers to towering questions and "explanations" of mammoth mysteries.

The result is that some troubled Christians turn away from the pastor and seek these answers and explanations elsewhere. This has been my experience. Even when I have been very close as a pastor to certain persons and families in their deepest troubles, I have found that I cannot satisfy or comfort them because I keep remembering Job's unanswered questions in the Old Testament. On a number of occasions these persons have come to tell me that they must go to another church. They thank me for my pastoral care, and they tell me that they love me. Sometimes they put their arms around me and draw me close. But I have not been able to assuage their anxieties, and sometimes I have asked them to follow my understanding of the Gospel's implications for the social order where they cannot go. They want me to tell them that they are o.k., but they have a hard time saying that I am o.k. too.

I love them and wish them well, and commend them to their new church. I do not judge them. About my own ministry I can only be faithful to what I believe. I can only try to be honest and forthright. And most of all, I once again give up trying to play God.

-III-

A third fathom in my experience is really an unfathomable matter. All of my life, and much more so now, I have been troubled in my theology because I see that I have been so blessed in this world while so many others seem

condemned to misery, war, poverty, and hopelessness. This is frankly a theological problem for me and a towering mystery.

Most of us get very angry and disturbed when things do not go well with us, and we suffer loss. But how can you explain the fact that your life has seen so many good things happen to you when others have had only bad things? How do you account for that?

I have never suffered from lovelessness, war, hunger, poverty, cold, physical disability, ill health, or hopelessness. I have, in fact, always been buoyed up by a great sense of hope. Let me give you an example of my perplexity. During these terribly cold nights and days I have awakened in the night to feel very snug and secure in a warm bed. But then I am troubled by the realization that this cold is cruel beyond measure to people who have no homes or little heat.

Then this week in my quiet and luxurious retreat for study at St. Benedict Center, I read an article by two sociologists who had made a trip across America in an "un-air-conditioned, ten-year old Buick, searching out the homeless and talking with shelter providers who act as their advocates." This couple had already spent time in the East working on a book about the homeless. Now they traveled into the Midwest and the West. They wrote: "We listened to them on streets, under bridges, beside boxcars, in shelters, parks, Travelers' Aid offices, their own dilapidated auto and ours.." (James Young and Marjorie Hope in "The Homeless: On the Street, on the Road," Christian Century, January 18, 1984, p. 48ff) It disturbed me greatly to learn that there are thousands upon thousands of these homeless people across this great land of ours. And I knew that they are right here in Madison, for last Sunday as we took the elevator in the City-County Building to go to the 6th floor jail chapel, we saw a human figure lying in a heap on the floor, apparently homeless. Many times I have seen that sight there.

I wondered about that human being. Why is he there, and I live in a palace? Now don't tell me that it is because I have worked hard, and that I am entitled to all that I have got. It is plain rubbish to conclude that. I really don't know. It troubles me. But this one thing I do know: the Christian faith I profess has much to do with feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, welcoming strangers, visiting the sick, going to those who are in prison.

One thing I cannot do as a minister of Christ: I cannot preach a sermon assuring you that all of the good things you have in this life are yours rightfully because you are so good and diligent that you have earned and deserved them, while all of those wrecked human souls out there have got just what they deserve and what is coming to them. I have sung, and I think understood, "Amazing Grace" too many times.

-IV-

This leads me to a fourth fathom in my ministry: I feel terribly guilty and responsible for the way our society has treated minorities. I am not a member of a minority group. I do in fact belong to the predominant and all powerful group of whites, and I have benefitted immeasurably from this status. But not in my conscience.

If there is anything of which I am absolutely certain it is this: it is a sin for us to discriminate, to injure, to humiliate, any human soul because he or she has a colored skin or because he or she belongs to another religion or another nation. In this I do not hesitate to make a judgment because I know this to be from my study of God's Holy Word and from the nature of God himself.

I wept when I read Martin Luther King's first book, Stride Toward Freedom, in which he detailed the brutality and hatred that black people had to endure just to get the freedom to sit anywhere on a bus. And my grief deepened and widened as I have followed the cruel and unspeakable injustices,

the barbarity, that have been heaped upon black people. I know that these are a sin against Christ.

And I shall all of my life be sick at heart when I think of what the so-called Christian world permitted to happen to Jewish people, six million of them, during the Holocaust in Europe. It is hard for us Christians to divest ourselves of the prejudices, ill-will, and small-mindedness that have fed into the ravenous furnace of hell that made it possible, and still make it possible, for the world to slaughter and dehumanize Jewish persons who, in our Bible, are known as the Chosen People of God.

As many of you know, my lifelong hero has been Abraham Lincoln. As a boy I read in a boy's life of Lincoln how he floated down the Mississippi on a flatboat to New Orleans. There for the first time he saw human souls being bought and sold like cattle on the auction block, families being torn apart, absolutely denied dignity and freedom because they were slaves. The story may be apocryphal, but I have always remembered what Lincoln is reported to have said: "If ever I get a chance to hit this I will hit it hard." Now when Lincoln was president he was not totally lacking in racist feelings. He might even be considered a racist according to twentieth century positions, but in his heart he was appalled at what he saw and felt, and so have I been all of my life.

At the end of my life I will have still a deep regret. I will regret that I have done so little to assuage the suffering of the people who were led so nobly by Martin Luther King; and I shall always carry a sorrow for the remembrance of the suffering endured by one of my dearest friends on this earth, Rabbi Manfred Swarsensky.

-V-

All of which leads me to a final fathom, if I may still call it that. As a minister of Christ I have tried to speak up for truth and righteousness, but I am deeply

THE MIRACLE OF FLOATING DRIFTWOOD
February 12, 1984

There are undoubtedly those who think I have an obsession with Abraham Lincoln. Each year, for eight years, I have preached a sermon on Lincoln, on the Sunday nearest his birthday. Today, February 12, 1984, is the perfect Sunday for it is his birthday. He was born 175 years ago today.

A few years ago a very thoughtful man wrote me a letter in which he raised the question about my purpose in speaking of Lincoln. Is it because I grew up in Lincoln Land and walked the Lincoln trails? No, that would not be sufficient for me to seek to fasten your attention on him once a year. Is it because I read much about Lincoln and I want to lay upon you the details of what I have learned? No, that would not be sufficient.

Let me try to tell you why I reserve annually this sermon time for Lincoln. I believe that of all the heroes of the great American Story, Abraham Lincoln best reveals the miracle that God Almighty can bring to pass in our fearfully made human lives. In an age that is almost cynical about the possibility of human greatness, when persons I regard as "anti-heroes" are widely adored, I am reassured to remember what God can do with one frail human soul. Looking back on the six important years he spent in New Salem, Lincoln said that he had come to that village like "a piece of floating driftwood." (The Lincoln Reader, edited by Paul M. Angle, p. 63) The full import of Lincoln's life, therefore, reminds us of what God can do with "a piece of floating driftwood." We do, after all, proclaim a Gospel of Amazing Grace that makes it possible to believe that God can take the stained and sodden stuff of human life and fashion it into a miracle.

At first the Annunciation experience of the Virgin Mary in Luke may seem to be an inappropriate text for this consideration. But a careful hearing of that passage tells us much about the power of God. Mary, who is unmarried, is astounded when the angel tells her that she will bear the

Holy Child. Furthermore it is acknowledged that it is absurd to think that Mary's kinswoman, Elizabeth, could also conceive a child in her old age. But the key words are these: "For with God nothing will be impossible." Mary's soul soars with elation as she sings:

My soul magnifies the Lord,
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
for he has regarded the low estate of his
handmaiden.

.

He has shown strength with his arm,
he has scattered the proud in the imagination
of their hearts,
he has put down the mighty from their thrones,
and exalted those of low degree;
he has filled the hungry with good things,
and the rich he has sent empty away.
He has helped his servant Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy,
as he spoke to our fathers,
to Abraham and to his posterity forever.

(Luke 1:37, 46-48, 51-55, RSV)

If God works in real history I do not think it is impertinent to believe that these words describe the great upheaval of the Civil War that wrenched the life of this nation. "The proud in the imagination of their hearts" were "scattered." "The mighty from their thrones" were "put down," and "those of low degree" were "exalted." "He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he sent empty away." As God himself moved through these surging currents of human history, the pivotal human person was Abraham Lincoln.

Philip Van Doren Stern in his biography of Lincoln has observed: "The fact that the American people have made Abraham Lincoln into a hero and a god is not to be regretted. In their very act of deification the people have indicated what they themselves most admire in a man."

(The Life and Writings of Abraham Lincoln, p. 4) It has been, thus, the place of Abraham Lincoln in our history to compel us to name our standards and our values. As we ruminate about his life we have to consider "the miracle of floating driftwood." That miracle, which is God's miracle, may be seen in three great transformations in Lincoln's life, "for with God nothing will be impossible."

-I-

We may begin by recalling that this "piece of floating driftwood," born in poverty and obscurity, was drawn by some powerful and mysterious current into becoming one of the masterpieces of the human spirit.

Several years ago there appeared a cartoon depicting the day of Lincoln's birth. One man asks another: "Anything new?" The other man replies: "No. Oh, there's a new baby down at Tom Lincoln's. But nothing ever happens around here." (Christian Century, Nov. 9, 1955, p. 1296) That new baby down at Tom Lincoln's was born in a crude log cabin. It didn't seem that much could really "happen" in such abject poverty. Tom Lincoln worked a hardscrabble farm on the South Fork of Nolin Creek, in Kentucky. After Lincoln had been nominated for the presidency, there was a rush of writers who sought to obtain biographical data about his background. One of them was John Locke Scripps of the Chicago Press-Tribune. Scripps dug for the homely facts of his youth. "Why, Scripps," Lincoln protested, "it is a great piece of folly to attempt to make anything out of my early life. It can be all condensed into a simple sentence, and that sentence you will find in Gray's Elegy, 'The short and simple annals of the poor. That's my life, and that's all you or any one else can make out of it.'" (With Malice Toward None, The Life of Abraham Lincoln, Stephen B. Oates, p. 4) Lincoln was one of five presidents born in a log cabin. Others were: Jackson, Fillmore, Buchanan, Garfield.

Abraham Lincoln seemed to be embarrassed in later years by the remembrance of his humble and poverty-stricken

beginning. His father could barely write his name. His law partner, Billy Herndon, said that "There was something about his origin he never cared to dwell upon." Herndon claims that one day when they were discussing a law suit that involved hereditary traits, Lincoln confided in him: "Billy, I'll tell you something, but keep it a secret while I live. My mother was a bastard, was the daughter of a nobleman so called of Virginia." (The Lincoln Nobody Knows, Richard N. Current, p. 22, 23) His mother Nancy died of the "milk sick" epidemic in 1818, and Lincoln became strongly attached to his step-mother, Sarah Bush Johnston. It is likely that she could neither write nor read.

Later Lincoln became apparently estranged from his father. They never seemed to understand each other. Some say that Lincoln had hostility toward his father's intellectual limitations. When in 1850 Thomas lay dying in a farmhouse in Coles County, Lincoln was informed but did not visit him. Thomas died on January 17, 1851, and Lincoln did not attend the funeral. When he was wed to Mary Todd in Springfield on November 4, 1842, his parents were not invited to the wedding. They were married in the home of Mary's sister and brother-in-law, Elizabeth and Ninian Edwards, and since the Edwards were socially prominent and of aristocratic bearing, the backwoods mother and father would have seemed out of place.

Stephen Oates, Lincoln's most recent biographer, has observed that "One of Lincoln's greatest sorrows - from his view - was that he's worked himself to the bone for recognition and success and yet had carried a social albatross about his neck: the lack of family respectability." (Ibid, p. 55) Oates says that Mary's family, the lordly Todds, never accepted him. They were highly educated, but he came from "nowhere." Some scholars believe that it was in part Lincoln's lowly background that caused him all of his life to have to fight his way out of depression and melancholy.

At the age of twenty-two Lincoln had separated himself from his father and step-mother and when he landed in New Salem he had no place he could call home. As he said,

he was "a piece of floating driftwood." How, then, did this man become one of the great figures of human history?

An earlier, respected biographer, Lord Charnwood, wrote: "For perhaps not many conquerors, and certainly few successful statesmen, have escaped the tendency of power to harden or at least to narrow their human sympathies; but in this man a natural wealth of tender compassion became richer and more tender while in the stress of deadly conflict he developed an astounding strength . . . For he was a citizen of that far country where there is neither aristocrat nor democrat. . . He faced the difficulties and terrors of his high office with that same mind with which he had paid his way as a poor man or navigated a boat in rapids or in floods." (Abraham Lincoln, p. 455-456) Given the meager and sometimes miserable background from which he sprang, does that not seem to be a miracle? A miracle of floating driftwood?

Most of us mortals are scorched and shaped in the fires of adversity. But we do not have to come out as misshapen, crippled creatures of chance! There is a grace, as there was in Lincoln, that makes it possible for us to rise miraculously above miserable circumstances. "For with God nothing will be impossible." It is to be remembered that often a piece of floating driftwood, tossed and sculpted by savage currents, is prized as a work of nature's artistry, and is displayed as a thing of beauty in the home of one sensitive to loveliness. In many an American home there is a picture of Abraham Lincoln, reminding the dwellers therein that "a piece of floating driftwood" can, by the hand of God, be shaped into human greatness.

-II-

If this great man could spring from a hardscrabble background, it behooves us in the second place to marvel at his everlasting eloquence. How could a man with such a mean formal education become such a craftsman of the English language that his words are enshrined as treasures in the literature of the world? From "a piece of floating driftwood?"

Again we must conclude, "For with God nothing will be impossible."

Between his eleventh and fifteenth years Lincoln went to school irregularly. School for him was possible only between winter harvest and spring plowing. All told he had about one year of formal education, consisting of reading, writing and 'rithmetic. And yet from this man there flowed some of the greatest utterances of speech and writing that have been recorded in history: The House Divided Speech in Springfield, his arguments in the Lincoln-Douglas debates, the First Inaugural, the Gettysburg Address, and the matchless Second Inaugural, to name only a few. Allan Nevins helps us to understand his growing mastery of language:

His early political utterances are not distinguished by any special force of logic, much less of felicity of expression. But they are distinguished by integrity, sense of balance, an instinct for compromise and a certain magnanimity; that is, by moral qualities. (p. xx)

Then Nevins marvels at his miraculous growth:

Few men understood the intelligent masses better than he, and the vocabulary and phrasing he had drawn from Shakespeare, the Bible and Blackstone were sufficient clothing for his honest thought in reaching them. For, above all, it was his thought which set him apart. He had perfected his logic until he could take a complex set of ideas, a jarring, confused array of facts, and, as shapeless globules of water are suddenly crystallized into ice, turn them into a diamond-clear pattern, which everyone saw to be Truth. (The Life and Writings of Abraham Lincoln, edited by Philip Van Doren Stern, p. xxiii)

Richard Current has declared: "He must rank as the most gifted writer among American statesmen of all time. . .

These powers of his are the more remarkable in view of the fact that he was one of the most poorly educated and least widely read of all public men in American history." (Ibid, p. 7)

How can this be explained? Alistair Cooke in his fine book America, after seeking to divest Lincoln of some of his godly aura, marvels, too, at Lincoln's eloquence: "By some brain chemistry that has never been explained, Lincoln transformed in middle life his whole style of speaking and writing. His earlier speeches are frontier-lawyer-baroque, stuffed with the fustian of his time. We know that he steeped himself in the subtleties of Shakespeare, the cadences of the Bible, and the hard humanity of Robert Burns. And somehow, and conspicuously during the war, he became what he always must have been: a shrewd, honorable frontiersman of very great gifts. Not the least of these was his ability to express a hard, unsentimental truth in the barest language every tinker and tailor could understand." (p. 217, 218)

Perhaps what we are trying to understand is why unknown, ancient persons could write the incomparable stories of Genesis, or the theological brilliance of Job, or the profound prayers of the psalms, or how simple fishermen could have inspired the genius of the Gospels, or how an exiled man named John on the Isle of Patmos could have conjured up the vivid imagery of Revelation. How could these literary gems have been cut and polished, save that "With God nothing will be impossible." So, too, with the man who came from the plains and poverty of Illinois, the man who called himself "a piece of floating driftwood." By the grace of God that "driftwood" speaks an eternal eloquence for the souls of all human beings.

-III-

Finally, we have to marvel at the miracle that made Abraham Lincoln one of the most articulate and effective spokespersons for God in the history of humankind. Albeit an amateur, he became a master of practical theology.

It is simply incredible that theologians of great prominence pay high tribute to Lincoln's theological vision. Elton Trueblood has written a book which he entitled Abraham Lincoln - Theologian of American Anguish. Reinhold Niebuhr, perhaps America's greatest theologian, wrote: "Analysis of Abraham Lincoln's religion in the context of the prevailing religion of his time and place and in the light of the polemical use of the slavery issue, which corrupted religious life in the days before and during the Civil War, must lead to the conclusion that Lincoln's religious convictions were superior in depth and purity to those held by the religious as well as by the political leaders of his day." (Christian Century, Feb. 10, 1965, p. 172)

This is all the more remarkable when it is remembered that Billy Herndon declared that Lincoln was a non-believer, if not an infidel. It is clear that as a young man Lincoln harbored many religious doubts, and might have been characterized as an agnostic. But in the crucible of the war, Lincoln groped for deeper truth, and he came to see himself as "an humble instrument in the hands of the Almighty, and of this, his almost chosen people, for perpetuating the object of that great struggle." No one on either side of that struggle was as able as Lincoln to see that God was the God of all humanity, and that the will of God would ultimately prevail, even though his will would not necessarily be the will of either side. Even though he was the powerful leader of one side, he said that he could not judge, lest he be judged. He understood God's nature, despite the ambiguities and the heated religious rhetoric that raged on both sides.

The theological eloquence of this man has to be seen as a miracle. Carl Sandburg notes something special that was observed as Lincoln's funeral train passed through New York City. "On one arch of crape and white over Broadway in New York ran the sentence, 'The great person, the great man, is the miracle of history.'" (Abraham Lincoln, the Prairie Years, the War Years, p. 728) Would we not have to add, that this great person, this great man, was the

miracle of God, who is the God of history?

Philip Van Doren Stern in his biographical essay, recalls that Lincoln came as a youth to Illinois in an ox-cart, to settle first in a lonely place just a few miles west of Decatur, where I grew as a boy. Stern's closing passage is so moving that I want to share it with you:

On the night of May 2 the funeral train left Chicago and headed southward through the small towns of Illinois. It was raining, but people came to stand along the railroad track. They built bonfires to light the scene, and as the train passed slowly through the greening fields of the prairie country, thousands of silent figures were silhouetted against the dull red flames. All night long the train traveled toward Springfield; it passed Bloomington of the famous "Lost Speech" shortly before dawn; it reached the little town of Atlanta as the sun rose to bring fair weather to the day. It moved on through Lincoln, Elkhart and Williamsville in the early morning hours. It approached Springfield about nine o'clock, running with bell tolling and a long black plume of smoke trailing across the level fields outside the city.

Tens of thousands of people were in Springfield. They had come from prairie villages, from farms and from isolated places scattered far across the state. Among them were men who had known Lincoln on the circuit, people who remembered him from New Salem days, pioneers who could recall the time when an ox-cart had first brought his family to Illinois.

The train steamed slowly along the tracks where country wagons were drawn up to see it pass; it crossed a bridge over the winding brown waters of the Sangamon River; it approached the forest grove in which Springfield had been built; it came to the first houses on the edge of town;

it entered the business center where people were standing on the tops of buildings because the streets were so crowded that it was impossible to get near the railroad station. And then, at ten minutes after nine, it pulled into the Chicago and Alton depot, where regiments of soldiers and the dignitaries of Springfield were waiting to receive it.

Minute guns began their solemn firing. A military band played the slow measures of a funeral dirge. The bells of the city began to toll. But there was a sudden hush of voices around the station as the train came to a stop.

The people of Springfield stood watching in terrible silence as the body of their fellow townsman was taken from the train.

Abraham Lincoln had come home.*

"A piece of floating driftwood?" O, no! A miracle of God's own choosing, "For with God nothing will be impossible."

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*Philip Van Doren Stern in The Life and Writings of Abraham Lincoln. 1940, Random House, Inc. Used with permission.

LEAVE THE LIGHT ON

June 3, 1984

This is a theme I have been saving for this day. Several years ago Betty came home from a Ministers' Mates luncheon at Annual Conference and told a true story that Zelda Stanke, the widow of one of our United Methodist ministers, Oscar Stanke, had shared at that luncheon. When they had decided to retire, they went to a seminar led by the famous psychiatrist, Elisabeth-Kubler Ross, who was offering positive suggestions for continuing to lead creative lives. After they had retired they did many interesting things together. One evening she was leaving Belleville where they lived, to drive to Madison where she was to speak to our United Methodist Women here at First Church. As she was about to drive away, Oscar leaned in at her car window and said, "I'll leave the light on for you." She went on her way, and returning some hours later, found the light still glowing through the window. But when she entered the house she found that "The light that had burned within him had gone out." He had died while she was gone. But Zelda said she felt that he truly had left light for her to continue. Later that year Zelda went back to college.

I have treasured that story and pondered its meaning for several years. As I share it with you this morning I am not, of course, referring to death. I feel very much alive and well, but as I leave this church to enter a new phase of my life I would like to have you remember me as one who left the light burning in the window. It is a small light, not enough to illuminate the whole house. But it is a light, and I pray that you will want to keep it burning. It is not really my light. It is rather the light of Christ.

Dr. Edward W. Bauman, minister of the Foundry United Methodist Church in Washington, D.C., tells of one of his theological students who returned from his last service at a nearby student parish. During the service he noticed that an elderly woman had been crying. As she

left the church he commented about her tears. She told him: "It is because this is your last Sunday. You are leaving us." But the student pastor with sincere modesty, replied to her: "You shouldn't cry. I'm sure they will send you someone better to take my place." At that the woman began to cry again, and she said: "Oh, that's what they all say, but every year it gets worse and worse." (God's Presence in My Life, p. 56) Now there may very well have been situations like that in this church before, but I assure you that that is not what is going to happen now! You will be excellently and beautifully served by your new minister, Kenneth Engelman. The light in the window is going to burn much brighter.

I speak to you out of the love I feel for all of you in my heart today, because I have run out of Sundays. A few years ago I chuckled, perhaps prophetically, when I saw a Peanuts strip in which Charlie Brown is talking to Linus. Charlie is saying: "My grandfather says life is a lot like a football game . . ." Linus asks: "Does he feel like he's in the fourth quarter?" Charlie replies: "Worse than that . . ." He's afraid he doesn't have any more "Time Outs." (3-7-81) Well, I don't have any more "time outs" between Sundays, so I want to tell you what is in my heart.

As some of you know, my life-long model for a preacher has been the late Ernest Fremont Tittle of Evanston. I once was keenly interested to learn that when Tittle was still in grammar school, he pursued a career as a gaslight tender, "Starting out at dusk to light the city's street lamps, and again at five in the morning to turn them off." (A Mighty Fortress, a collection of Tittle's sermons with a biographical sketch by Paul Hutchinson, p. xi) I must tell you that all of my life I have wished that I could be a lamplighter. One of my treasured childhood poems comes from Robert Louis Stevenson's classic A Child's Garden of Verses. And among those precious poems that illumined my childhood, and still my life, is "The Lamplighter":

My tea is nearly ready and the sun has left the sky.
It's time to take the window to see Leerie going by;
For every night at teatime and before you take
your seat,
With lantern and with ladder he comes posting up
the street.

Now Tom would be a driver and Maria go to sea,
And my papa's a banker as rich as he can be;
But I, when I am stronger and can choose what
I'm to do,
O Leerie, I'll go round at night and light the
lamps with you!

For we are very lucky, with a lamp before the door,
And Leerie stops to light it as he lights so many
more;
And oh! before you hurry by with ladder and with
light,
O Leerie, see a little child and nod to him tonight!

On several occasions when I have been invited to read in schools to little children I have read that poem. Yes, if there were still lamplighters being hired today I would apply immediately for such a job!

Indeed, as Christians that is what all of us are called to do. Our calling is in the Sermon on the Mount: "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hid. Nor do men light a lamp and put it under a bushel, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven." (Matt. 5:14-61, RSV) In a world that seems so dark and forbidding to many, there are many places, when it grows dark, where we can leave the light on.

-I-

Most frequently, I suppose, we are attracted by lights set on a hill. We love to look up and see a light flickering

and flashing in the night. But what about a light shining in the valley?

A few years ago Lois Gilbert gave me a copy of a letter that her mother and father, Hazel and David Talbot, had received from a woman who had lived near to them in Palatine, Illinois. Hazel gave this letter to Lois as the Talbots prepared to move to the Oakwood Retirement Center. Mike and Fritzie Check lived some distance from the Talbots on a hill, a little above them. Their two properties touched and the Talbots permitted the Checks to drive across their land to get to their own. The Checks had a beautiful marriage. Mike was a highly respected professor at Northwestern University and Fritzie, a lawyer, edited a law journal.. Mike died and the Talbots received this lovely letter:

Dearest Hazel and David, dearest of Friends:

The feeling within me for the happiness you gave Mike and me, and for the hands extended by you in sympathy is way down so deep in my heart that it cannot well up in mere words.

The warmth that flows to me each evening from the beautiful mums and from your lighted home with its constant welcome give me strength in the face of terrible loneliness and heart-ache.

God is generous in giving me your love to help fill the void. May His blessings and bountifulness be with you always.

Lovingly,

Fritzie Check (April, 1959)

In sharing this letter with me two years ago, Lois added her own note: "I especially like the second paragraph and the reference to the lighted home which comforted her. Thought maybe you could use it in a sermon sometime. Lights on hills are comforting, but lights from valleys are also comforting."

As your minister for these past eight years, I have told you many times that I do not have cozy and clinching answers to towering questions of mystery and suffering. Furthermore, I have raised serious questions about your way of life, and my way of life, of our behaviour and performance as Christians. But believing fervently in that Light of Christ that came into the darkness of our world long ago, I have always tried to leave the light on. Yes, in the valleys as well as upon the peaks. One of the old hymns that I have loved reminds us:

Brightly beams our Father's mercy,
From his lighthouse evermore;
But to us he gives the keeping
Of the lights along the shore.
Let the lower lights be burning!
Send a gleam across the wave!
Some poor fainting, struggling seaman,
You may rescue, you may save.

-II-

"Leaving the Light On" also describes the nature of the Church. This is what the church is all about.

Many years ago at a School of Mission I heard Betty DeVore, a missionary with her husband in Nome Alaska, tell about an Eskimo boy, 12 years old, who stayed at church one night until they closed up. It was 20 below zero outside. Later that night he knocked at the parsonage door shivering in a pair of pants and a light windbreaker. His drunken father had locked him out and he had seen the light in the parsonage window. The minister asked him to go home and try once more. He had already been wandering about in the cold. He returned to the parsonage. His father would not let him in. So they opened their door, and took him in. They gave him a hot shower, warm pajamas, and a bed. The next day he returned to his own home, and his father, now sobered, let him come home. The minister counseled with the father many times. The boy was always in church. That

is what a church is all about, I believe. There is always a light of hope, help and healing, and of welcome in the window.

Many years ago I heard Bishop Shot K. Mondol of India tell of an Indian church set on a hill. From around the foot of the hill, families came in the afternoon to worship. They brought their lanterns. Then when the service was over and the sun had fallen beneath the horizon, and darkness began to spread over the earth, the leader of each family would go to the central light in the midst of the church and light his lantern. Then the families would leave, their lanterns lighting the way. Bishop Mondol commented that that was a beautiful sight to see those families scattering their lights all around the countryside as they returned to their homes. That is how I think of this church. I see you carrying the light into your homes, your schools, your offices, your neighborhood, your work place, yes, even your political activity.

I do not know the Rev. Ted Rockwood of Rochelle, Illinois, but last fall I was deeply moved by an open letter he wrote to the Northern Illinois Area News, printed in the United Methodist Reporter. (Nov. 18, 1983) What he wrote described the Church of Christ at its best on earth:

On Tuesday, Sept. 20, 1983, the Northern Illinois Conference in general and I specifically lost a beautiful parsonage lady in the name of Evelyn Lillian Rockwood, to the ravages of multiple sclerosis.

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Although an invalid for the past three years, and blind for the past two years, Evelyn gave a witness that, even in these trying conditions, she could inspire many others to not give up hope. Her situation motivated her own congregation to face up to the handicapping conditions of their buildings and to overcome them. Her illness was a catalyst for prayer and for those with special nursing talents to organize.

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Many tributes have been paid to this Christian lady who dedicated her life to ministering to her family and sharing the ministry of her husband. But perhaps the greatest tribute was penned by a 90 year old former parishioner who wrote: "She has taken her bright candle and gone into another room I cannot find, but anyone can tell where she has been by all the little lights she leaves behind.

-Rev. Ted Rockwood
Pastor, Rochelle UMC

So I think of all those great souls in my life who have gone before me, disappearing into rooms which I cannot, for the moment, find. But I can tell where they have been by the little lights they leave behind. How true this is of this great church. So many of you by the loveliness and vitality of your Christian witness have lighted my way into the future. Whenever I have the privilege of preaching the Gospel I will share the light you have given me.

Through a life of sixty-five years I have toiled and trudged, sometimes slipping and sliding in the dark. In the springtime of life I walked through lush fields. In the summer times I have groped my way up steep mountains of mystery and wonder, perspiration flooding my eyes; in the cool, elegant fall I have wondered how far it is to the end of the trail; in the bleak midwinter I have felt the cold, biting winds of doubt and fear. But always, in every season and on every journey, I have been led by Christ who walks before me as a majestic and mysterious Guide. As I see steep hills and impossible canyons still looming in the horizon, I think of Christ as he taught us to think; I see him as the Light of the World. Yes, that light is on the mountains; and as the mists settle in the valleys below that Light is still there. In a world where great storms thunder and threaten, where earthquakes uproot familiar landmarks, there are times when that Light fades and falters. But always it reappears! There it is! O Light of the World

we hail thee! And you and I carry in our love and witness, the reflections of that light. "You (too) are the light of the world." Do not let it be hid. Do not light your lamp and put it under a bushel, but put it on a stand, so that it will give light to all in the house. "Let your light so shine before men (and women) (and children), that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."