

In 1564 King Charles IX of France introduced a new calendar. Before mandating this change, the New Year was celebrated from March 21st until April 1st but the new calendar set January 1st as New Year's Day. Some people didn't adjust to the change and kept on celebrating April 1st. They came to be known as April Fools. Pranks soon became part of the duty of this day.

Hindsight is 20/20. If someone fools you today, you won't realize it until later. That, I suggest, is a little ray of insight on reality. In His parable about the 5 wise and the 5 foolish virgins, Jesus makes it clear that it's at the end, the end of your life, Judgment Day, that spiritual wisdom or folly will be revealed. (Matthew 25:1-13)

A recent Gallup poll showed that 2/3rds of American adults believe in hell, but only 1% thinks they'll go there. If you're in the 99% that doesn't expect hell, make sure your reasons are right. "The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing." (1 Corinthians 1:18)

The Meyer Minute for April 2, 2003

So here we are, in a society quite obsessed with feelings, specifically feeling good. When feeling good is the basis of life, some undesirable consequences follow.

On opening day, reporters interviewed baseball fans and heard, or at least I thought I heard, twinges of guilt. "Here we are having a good time while our troops are facing death in a most desolate place."

I find myself feeling a bit guilty that I'm not following media coverage of the war quite as intently as I did two weeks ago. Do you know that twinge of guilt?

But is this respite wrong? Didn't our Creator teach us a pattern of work and rest? When the Bible talks about guilt it talks about facts, things done that are wrong. It's this touch-feely society that deceives us into thinking we're doing something wrong when we take a brief rest from total absorption with the war. Turn away from the news for a while...and then get back to your work in this war: be informed, discuss the issues, pay your taxes, and most important, pray.

The Meyer Minute for April 3, 2003

Almighty God, we appeal to You in this time of battle. As David relied on You when he faced Goliath, we commend to Your protection our young men and women.

Visit the homes of those whose hearts are anxious because a husband or wife, a parent or child is serving in the war.

Sit with those who have been devastated by death. Dress their wounded souls with the comfort You alone know best.

O God, let us not pray foolishly. We are sinners who have so often ignored Your will and gone our own self-centered way rather than walk in the path of Your commands. Our society has increasingly accepted choices and life-styles that are condemned by Your Word. We have concocted a civil religion that vainly imagines

You our servant and ignores Your justice and holiness. For all this and more, give us true sorrow and lift us to the cross of forgiveness.

Only because of mercies shown to sinners dare we seek Your help. And so we appeal to Your mercy, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

The Meyer Minute for April 4, 2003

How often do we see someone doing something wrong-or at least what we think is wrong-and we judge? We all do it, often.

What's going on within us? In Romans 2 Paul teaches that all people by nature have some knowledge of what's right and wrong. That knowledge is not complete; it's fuzzy at best. Still, it's there. God the Creator put into every person a sense of right and wrong.

So when you see someone doing something wrong, that insight is really from God. Your Creator put into you a sense of what's right and wrong. Now the focus is shifted away from your judgment on someone else's wrong to this: how are you handling the insight God has given you? Now the pressing question is how is it between you and God? Are you handling the insights about right and wrong that He's given you in a way that pleases Him?

"Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged." (Matthew 7:1-2)

The Meyer Minute for April 7, 2003

"Our daughter shared a conversation she overheard at home," writes August Mennicke. "Our 3-year-old grandson was standing at the basement stairs, trying to muster enough courage to make the descent. Before taking the first step, he said, 'Oh, Jesus, it's awful dark down there. You'd better hold my hand.'" (*Devotions for the Chronologically Gifted*, p.58)

19th century poet John Greenleaf Whittier also wrote about a 3-year-old and about us adults.

A tender child of summers three

Seeking her little bed at night,

Paused on the dark stair timidly.

"O Mother, take my hand, said she,

"And then the dark will all be light."

We older children grope our way

From dark behind to dark before;

And only when our hands we lay,
Dear Lord, in Thine, the night is day.
Reach downward to the sunless days
Wherein our guides are blind as we,
And faith is small, and hope delays;
Take Thou the hands of prayer we raise,
And let us feel the light of Thee.
"Commit Thy way unto the Lord." (Psalm 37:5)

The Meyer Minute for April 8, 2003

At the place where I work, Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, today is "Call Day." 87 men will be assigned to their first churches. In most cases they have no clue where they'll be sent. It could be Zap, North Dakota (yes, there is such a place) or San Diego, California. A missionary to Kazakhstan or a hospital chaplain in Cleveland? Like the prophet Isaiah who said, "Here am I; send me" (Isaiah 6:8), these soon-to-be pastors understand that they'll be sent where the church thinks they can best serve.

An archaic practice? Yes. Paul ordered Titus to stay in Crete (Titus 1:5). There's an underlying issue here for you. Obeying is not congenial to people today. While the well-intentioned placement of new pastors is not perfect, God is. God tells you what He expects. The most basic question that you and I must answer is this: Do you obey God or do you do what's right in your sight?

May the new pastors find joy in obedient service and may the people they'll serve grow in loving and faithful obedience to God.

The Meyer Minute for April 9, 2003

Why? I don't know, but the general truth is this: God deals with us through intermediaries. Words, like the words of the Bible, are God's intermediaries through which He deals with us. So are people. Paul spoke of himself as an ambassador (2 Corinthians 5:20). God uses middlemen and He uses them for the good of others.

Now that we anticipate a good outcome to the war, we praise our military but remember...they're middlemen too. "Come and see the works of the Lord...He makes wars cease to the ends of the earth; He breaks the bow and shatters the spear, He burns the chariots with fire. Be still and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth." (Psalm 46:8-10)

Like Jacob's ladder leading to heaven, the person who knows God through His words looks upward from below, up from the middlemen, the visible military to the invisible

God who gives victory. "Whoever is wise, let him heed these things and consider the great love of the Lord." (Psalm 107:42-43)

The Meyer Minute for April 10, 2003

"These dead shall not have died in vain." Lincoln's words echo as our fallen soldiers are brought home and buried.

The New Testament says little about dying for one's country. Paul says, "For a good man someone might possibly dare to die." and Jesus says, "Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends." (Romans 5:7; John 15:13) The New Testament is an exhortation to faith in Jesus but, something some Christians comfortably overlook, this faith produces citizens who sacrifice for others.

About to die by the Nazis, Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote, "It is only by living completely in this world that one learns to have faith...By this-worldliness I mean living unreservedly in life's duties, problems, successes and failures, experiences and perplexities. In so doing we throw ourselves completely into the arms of God, taking seriously, not our own sufferings, but those of God in the world-watching with Christ in Gethsemane. That, I think, is faith." (Letters and Papers from Prison, 370)

The Bible urges us to be "living sacrifices". (Romans 12:1) The funerals of our fallen reinforce that divine call.

The Meyer Minute for April 11, 2003

It hurts when life goes against our will and our wishes. I'm not thinking now of evil things we might want to do but about good things, innocent hopes that godly people have for themselves and for others. Our hopes are pricked, we hurt and get discouraged.

Encouragement at such times is common but it doesn't enable us. "You tell me to hang in there...but I can't." If Jesus is only an encouragement to bear up under adversity, you're still the one bearing your burden. But if Jesus dwells in you...Remember, "It is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me" (Galatians 2:20), then His ability to bear the cross becomes your ability to bear adversity...and bear it to a good outcome.

"Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." (Hebrews 12:2)

"It is not the sharpness of the thorns that we should dwell on, but the sweetness of the rose." (Alan of Lille, 12th century)

The Meyer Minute for April 14, 2003

What makes you angry on Monday? On Monday of Holy Week Jesus really got ticked off.

The day before, Palm Sunday, Jesus entered Jerusalem to wild acclaim. On Monday of Holy Week He entered the Temple area. One of the courtyards around the Temple building was for the Gentiles. When Jesus saw that courtyard had been taken over by people changing foreign currency into the Jewish money needed for sacrifices, He went ballistic. He overturned their tables and benches and quoted Isaiah 56:7, "My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations," and then added this zinger from Jeremiah 7:11, "But you are making it a 'den of robbers.'" Jesus knew He was destined to die to pay the penalty of sin so that all people could know the forgiving love of God. So when Jesus saw religious people letting the routine business of the church get in the way of people worshipping God, holy eruption!

You've got anger energy. Redirect it. Clear away anything that gets in the way of your spiritual meditation and worship this Holy Week.

The Meyer Minute for April 15, 2003

I've worked with media outlets that don't let you criticize other religions. All roads lead to the same place kind of stuff. I've also worked with stations that seem to specialize in criticizing the beliefs of others. This reflects America today. When it comes to knowing and talking about truth, our society is deeply divided, almost schizophrenic.

On Tuesday of Holy Week Jesus talked about taxes (Mark 11:13-17) but that was in the wider context of religious teaching, teaching that was a two-edged sword. He did criticize but His goal was to include all people. He criticized religious leaders of Jerusalem for being hung-up on their view of truth while also teaching His disciples God's truth. When it comes to truth, God obviously has the definitive word. Holy Week should be a time when you and I struggle with questions of eternal truth. Like Pontius Pilate, our society asks, "What is truth?" To God this is no philosophical issue. He wants to unite people around His truth. What's the basis for what you believe? Jesus spent today teaching...Are you learning?

The Meyer Minute for April 16, 2003

For Wednesday of Holy Week the Bible records no activities by Jesus. Perhaps He was busy and we just don't know what He did. On the other hand, we can make an educated guess that Jesus chose to spend the day in rest and quiet at the place where He was lodging, the home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus in Bethany.

That He spent the day in quiet contemplation was His way of facing challenges. He had arrived at Bethany the Friday before and at sunset began the day-long observance of Sabbath. No work was done on Sabbath; only contemplation of the Torah and communion with His heavenly Father. Other times during Holy Week Jesus withdrew for spiritual re-creation. Almost every day He worked in Jerusalem and then retreated to quiet in Bethany. Tomorrow, Thursday, when His enemies will close in for the kill, Jesus keeps Passover and prays in the quiet of Gethsemane. "Don't just do something; sit there." "Wait on the Lord." (Psalm 27:14)

The Meyer Minute for Maundy Thursday

One preparation for Passover, which began last evening, is to rid the house of leaven. A candle is lit, a blessing spoken, and the house is searched in silence for any leaven. When it's found...as it will be, for some was hidden ahead of time...the leaven is put in a bag to be burned the next morning. The search, writes George Robinson, "underlies the importance of a break with the past, with the ties to Egypt and slavery." ("Essential Judaism," p. 120)

"A break with the past." Jesus, an observant Jew, kept the Passover on this Thursday of Holy Week. Yes, He anticipated a break, a break with the age old tyranny of sin and evil by His sacrifice on the cross.

"Get rid of the old yeast," wrote St. Paul, "that you may be a new batch without yeast-as you really are. For Christ, our Passover lamb has been sacrificed. Therefore let us keep the Festival, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and wickedness, but with bread without yeast, the bread of sincerity and truth." (2 Corinthians 5: 7-8)

The Meyer Minute for Good Friday

Seven words from the cross...

"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." But how often we live bitter lives because we don't forgive those who wronged us!

"Today you will be with Me in paradise," He said to the thief who confessed his sin. But many of us expect heaven without personal repentance.

"Woman, behold your son," He said to mother Mary. "Behold your mother," He said to John. But we let personal busy-ness stop our love for family.

"My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" God abandoned Jesus a short time so that the full judgment against our sin would be felt. But we trivialize sin.

"I thirst." That he said to fulfill Scripture. But we live by God's words or human words?

"It is finished." No more buts. Yes, we're sinners but the price of your sins was paid in full. In full. You can't work your way into heaven; you can only believe the One who opened the way through forgiveness.

"Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit." Do you?

The Meyer Minute for April 21, 2003

Had your fill of Easter eggs? Writing in "The Lutheran" magazine, Kathleen Kastilahn explores the history of Easter eggs. According to a legend in the Orthodox church, Mary...the Mary who saw Jesus at the tomb after the resurrection...Mary went to Rome to complain about the injustices that Jesus suffered in His trial and she said Jesus had risen from the dead. To demonstrate the point, she picked up an egg from a nearby table and compared the resurrection to the new life that comes from

the egg. The Emperor scoffed. The dead don't rise, he said, anymore than that egg you're holding will suddenly turn red. Yes, the egg miraculously turned red! (April, 2003; p. 17).

I've got this suspicion that we accept the resurrection on Easter Sunday but don't carry it into our daily life. How often don't I, don't you, look at a situation and we wring our hands? So little hope! We need daily resurrections of hope. Christ is risen; He is risen indeed. Never have enough of that Easter egg message. There is no hopeless situation in your life!

The Meyer Minute for April 22, 2003

Today is "Earth Day." Activities today and throughout the week will call attention to ecology.

I live in Collinsville, Illinois, a city 12 miles east of the Mississippi River. When I drive into St. Louis on the interstate, I pass a large earthen mound called "Monks Mound." It and smaller mounds in the area were built between 900 and 1200 A.D. by a thriving Indian civilization.

Driving on toward the river, I see another man-made mound. This may well be the defining monument of our time, the garbage pile...Or what's the politically correct term? "The land fill." This mound is growing every day.

If the world lasts a few more millennia, I wonder how archaeologists will define our time? We are intrigued by the archaeology of Indian cultures. What will people conclude about us when they rummage through our land fills?

"Better a little with the fear of the Lord than great wealth with turmoil." (Proverbs 15:16)

"Be content with what you have, because God has said, 'Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.'" (Hebrews 13:5; Deuteronomy 31:6)

The Meyer Minute for April 23, 2003

Got a dragon in your sights?

"At the town of Silene, in Libya, there was a dragon, who was appeased by being fed two sheep a day; when these failed, the townsfolk offered by lot one of their young people. One day the lot fell on the King's daughter, who was led out to the sacrifice, dressed in her wedding gown. George appeared and transfixed the dragon with his spear and then using the Princess's girdle led the bemused dragon into the town, where it was beheaded." ("Lives of the Saints," 13th century)

Today's the day of St. George, patron saint of England, legendary dragon slayer. There's another dragon associated with St. George: "And the great dragon was cast down, the old serpent, he that is called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world; He was cast down to the earth." (Revelation 12:10)

Christ defeated the power of evil, cast down the dragon to be slain. What's the dragon, the temptation to evil in your life, that you can defeat today? Get a dragon in your sight...and slay it.

The Meyer Minute for April 24, 2003

Senator Rick Santorum stirred it up. "If the Supreme Court says that you have the right to consensual (gay) sex within your home, then you have the right to bigamy, you have the right to polygamy, you have the right to incest, you have the right to adultery. You have the right to anything." (AP, St. Louis Post-Dispatch, April 22; A4)

Responded one gay rights activist: "It is stunning, stunning in its insensitivity."

I, for one, believe that the homosexual life style is wrong. That comes from my commitment to the Bible as the Word of God. Of course, not everyone agrees and in a democracy that's your right.

Is this really insensitivity...or might we feel that we are above moral reproach? One group says, you're advocating immorality; that's wrong. The other group responds, you're intolerant; that's wrong. Have we grown afraid of criticism?

Romans 2:14 teaches that God has planted in us all a vague sense of right and wrong. Democracy is designed to facilitate debate about right and wrong. We should be tactful, but aghast at insensitivity? That stifles democracy.

The Meyer Minute for April 25, 2003

Going to do some spring yard work this weekend? Play some golf? Whatever it'll be, let me try to plant a thought in your mind.

Before the universe came into existence, there was God...all alone...nothing else existing...only God. God...perfect in Himself...needs no one or nothing else. God, who simply is, the great "I am" (Exodus 3:14) and now...this amazing thought...God creates something other than Himself. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." (Genesis 1:1)

Why would He do that? I'm speculating now, but only a bit. He created so that He could delight in His creation and, getting personal, so that He could commune with you. Religious messages talk about seeking God, but the corresponding and greater truth is that He seeks to be with you.

Believe in godless evolution and you are ultimately an insignificant speck. Believe, on the other hand, that the Creator of the cosmos comes to you, especially in the message of a Brother who died and rose...that will give you a "Wow! I matter!" as you are refreshed this weekend.

The Meyer Minute for April 28, 2003

Monday...remind yourself of your priorities.

Popular, competent, rising in his profession, 39-year-old NBC reporter David Bloom died April 4th in Iraq from a pulmonary embolism. Shortly before he died, Mr. Bloom e-mailed his wife. He wrote: "Here I am, supposedly at the peak of professional success, and I frankly care less. Yes, I'm proud of the good job we've all been doing, but in the scheme of things it matters little compared to my relationship with you, the girls and Jesus." (Washington Post, April 17; C1)

That's the kind of sorting out of priorities that God tells us all to do. When a Jewish theologian asked Jesus about the most important commandment, Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 6:5-6, "Here O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord you God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength." And then Jesus added Leviticus 19:18, "The second is this: Love your neighbor as yourself."

How are you going to work out those priorities this week?

The Meyer Minute for April 29, 2003

Smallpox, tuberculosis, polio...medical science defeated them. We got the idea that if we could only cure cancer and heart disease and a few others, we'd arrive at continual health. But then came sicknesses, some totally new, others new to us...Legionnaires' Disease, AIDS, West Nile virus and now SARS. Does it shake your faith in our progress toward perfection?

Despite such setbacks, some people assume that nature is perfect, corrupted only by man and our modern style of life. We may well be sinners but not Mother Nature. Yes, eventually we'll get back into harmony with perfect Mother Nature.

The first book of the Bible takes a contrary view. When Adam and Eve brought sin into the world and made it part of our inheritance, nature was also corrupted. Genesis 3:17-18 calls the ground "cursed" and says it will produce troublesome "thorns and thistles." Of course, some problems in nature are man-made but tornadoes, hurricanes and earthquakes aren't.

SARS, like thorns and thistles, reminds us nature isn't perfect. God give us the wisdom to rein nature in without ruining our lives and environment.

The Meyer Minute for April 30, 2003

People who oppose any hint of faith in public life might hail John Jay of New York and Edward Rutledge of South Carolina. In September 1774 they spoke against a proposal to have a public prayer spoken at the First Continental Congress. Those who see some role for religious expression in public life are glad to know that the Congress voted for a prayer. On September 7, 1774, an Episcopal minister, Rev. Duche, offered the prayer using Psalm 35.

John Adams wrote to his wife that he "had never heard a better prayer, or one so well pronounced. I never saw a greater effect upon an audience. It seemed as if heaven had ordained that Psalm to be read on that morning...It was enough to melt a heart of stone. I saw tears gush into the eyes of the old, grave, pacific Quakers of

Philadelphia...I must beg you to read that Psalm." (Michael Novak, "On Two Wings;" p. 14)

Tomorrow is this year's National Day of Prayer. You might want to take a minute today to read...and to pray...Psalm 35.