

July 2008

July 1

It's interesting to watch what newspaper editors do with stories. Our local paper, the Belleville News-Democrat, put a little story on page five. Some scientists have been at work for years on an atom smasher in Switzerland. It's called the Large Hadron Collider and it is large. This largest collider ever built has a large price tag of \$5.8 billion. It's potential for learning more about the atom is large. And there could be something else large about this collider. Critics say it could create a black hole that would swallow the earth. Placed, as I said, on page five, bottom of page five.

We all put stories someplace. I always wonder about the person sitting next to me on the plane who is absorbed in "People" magazine. Back in the days when I sometimes rode the bus to work, I was surprised how many people read the Bible on the bus. Of all the stories that could interest you, what are the stories you regularly put before your eyes? "Observe the commands of the Lord your God." (Deuteronomy 8:6)

Scientists say not to worry about the collider. Lyn Evans said, "Obviously, the world will not end when the LHC switches on." (June 29; A5) I think the riders on the bus have it right.

July 2

Hi, Christian here! Opa, I have a question. Daddy and Mommy took me to church Sunday. Pastor said, "Anyone who loves his father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me." I don't like that. I love my Daddy and Mommy the most!

Opa here. Don't worry, Christian. The pastor was reading what Jesus says. Jesus says that in Matthew 10:37. Jesus loves us the most. When we love Jesus back, we have lots of love for other people.

Opa, that's big people talk. Daddy and Mommy do everything for me. I really don't know who Jesus is and what does He do for me?

You're learning more every day, Christian. Jesus knows you don't know much about Him, except hearing His name. That's why Jesus gave you Daddy and Mommy. As you get older, you'll learn that Daddy and Mommy are doing Jesus' work for you now. You'll learn more and more about who Jesus really is. You'll learn more about His love and you'll share that with other people. The sad thing, Christian, is that big people who love family more than Jesus still haven't grown up.

July 3

"Does the Star-Spangled banner still wave over the land of the free?"

It's not the land that's free, the acres, the square miles of America, but the people who live on this good land. The freedoms that we American celebrate this weekend are rare in the long history of nations, but we are not the only free people of history. The book of Exodus

tells us that the Israelites were slaves in Egypt for some 400 years until God set them free. "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery" (Exodus 20:2).

Freedom brings responsibilities, and God told Israel He expected them to love Him and safeguard the well-being of others. That's what the Ten Commandments are about. They close with this command: "You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor." (Exodus 20:17) That's about more than wanting what isn't yours. It's God saying, "You are free! Don't become a slave again. Don't become a slave to any person or to any thing."

So how many Americans truly live as free people? How many of us think we're free but actually are in bondage searching for the right relationship or the right stuff?

I'm taking tomorrow off.

July 7

Now that we've celebrated freedom, how free are we really?

After God rescued ancient Israel from slavery, He gave the Ten Commandments. God begins by declaring, "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery" (Exodus 20:2). Use that freedom, He says, to love Me and to serve others. He wraps us His commandments with this: "You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor." (Exodus 20:17)

According to the American Heritage Dictionary, "covet" means, "To feel blameworthy desire for that which is another's." Coveting is not just wanting; coveting is wanting what belongs to your neighbor.

Think of it this way. Coveting means to put yourself back into bondage. You do that when you let your greatest desire be to get the right person or the right possessions for yourself. How many Americans think they're free but are slaves to the desires of their hearts?

"Godliness with contentment is great gain" (2 Timothy 6:6).

"It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery" (Galatians 5:1).

July 8

Last week 14 hostages were freed in Columbia. Ingrid Betancourt said, "It was not treatment that you can give to a living being, I won't even speak of a human being. I wouldn't have given the treatment I had to an animal." (Chattanooga Times Free Press, July 4; A3)

They awoke at 5:30 to a breakfast of coffee and corncakes. Lunch was rice, pasta and lentils. Once a month they were given meat or vegetables. Fruit? They had to find their own in the jungle. And in the jungle they were exposed to diseases with little more than aspirin for medicine. Worn out shoes. Worn out clothes. Their only "luxury," a radio. After six years they were freed by the Columbian government with American help.

I wonder how many religious people are content to take this story at face value. If they know the story, will they spiritualize it, saying it illustrates how Jesus frees us from sin? He does, to be sure, but this story isn't about eternal salvation but our here-and-now welfare. Governments have the God-given task of providing a safe environment for their citizens (see Romans 13:1-7). Can't we simply thank God that government fulfilled its task, whether it has anything to do with the church or not? Thank God for good in the world, without spiritualizing everything.

July 9

Enquiring minds are probably overloaded these days. Supermodel Christi Brinkley is in court divorcing her fourth husband, and she's making sure the whole world knows that he was not a paragon of faithfulness in marriage. Yesterday the wife of baseball star Alex Rodriguez, "A-Rod," filed for divorce, claiming that he's a home run hitter in more venues than Yankee Stadium.

What our enquiring minds should notice is that these high profile divorces are taking place in court. That's because the persons filing for divorce want the government to set aside a legal document, the marriage license. Whenever I meet with a couple preparing for marriage, I point out that the government gives licenses wherever the well-being of society is at stake. So they issue licenses for guns, for driving, for serving liquor, and for marriage. Unlike other societies, the reason why Americans have to go through an ordeal to end their marriage is because our government has historically had a bias toward keeping couples together.

Psalm 127:1-2 – "Unless the Lord builds the house, its builders labor in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchmen stand guard in vain." The two go together, the stability of the nation and the stability of house and home. And both need the blessing of heaven.

July 10

The other day our dog "Speaker" was at the door, looking like he wanted to come in. Diane opened the door...Speaker gets the kindest treatment!...Diane opened the door but he wouldn't come in, just looked at her. "In or out!" she demanded.

That brought back memories of my childhood. "In or out," Mom used to say and added, "Stop slamming the screen door!" I wonder how many kids today know what a "screen door" is. Anyway, "In or out! Stop slamming the screen door!" was part of the liturgy of summer.

And it's part of the liturgy of faith. In Proverbs 9 the Bible says, "Wisdom has built her house" and calls "Let all who are simple come in here." And what is Wisdom? The New Testament says, it's "Christ, the power of God and the wisdom of God" (1 Corinthians 2:24). We Christians are prone to confess Christ on Sundays and then go out and act

contrary to what we've professed. How kind that Jesus doesn't demand, "In or out!" when we sin, but keeps inviting, "Come unto Me" (Matthew 11:28; John 6:37). So, sinner, keep slamming the screen door! Just make sure you do it as you keep going back to Him.

July 11

This year's Bauer family reunion was held over the Fourth of July weekend in Spring City, Tennessee, where my cousin Charles and wife Jodi live. While we all were waiting for the fireworks to begin, my cousin Rusty explained to me the meteorology of a cumulonimbus cloud to our north. This big cloud, maybe 5 miles wide he said, was shooting out lightning every which way. Each bolt different from the others, all illuminating the cloud, and the cloud was constantly changing. Rusty's a jet pilot and told me how spectacular it is to fly near that kind of cloud at night when the moon is shining. What a show while waiting for human fireworks to begin! The Spring City fireworks were a fine display but they're over. The Creator's display of His power is not over.

William Wordsworth wrote, "The world is too much with us; late and soon, getting and spending, we lay waste our powers: Little we see in nature that is ours; we have given our hearts away. The winds that will be howling at all hours and are up-gathered now like sleeping flowers; For this, for everything, we are out of tune; It moves us not – Great God!"

Enjoy your weekend. Take in some of the Great God's ongoing display of His strength...and also His delicate beauties for you.

July 14

July 15

July 16

July 17

You forest leaves, so green and tender, that dance for joy in summer air, you meadow grasses, bright and slender, you flow'rs so fragrant and so fair, you live to show God's praise alone. Join me to make His glory known." (John Mentzner)

When our sister-in-law Carol visited us in May, she remarked how peaceful it would be to wake up every morning to the trees and flowers and lawns of the Seminary's campus. Monday we laid Carol to rest after a short battle with hated cancer. Outgoing, so outgoing, Carol gave her life in loving service to others, especially to my brother Bruce and their children Stephanie and Brad. God in His way, not ours, has now called her to a peace better than the best of nature.

I don't know that I've ever heard a sermon as meaningful as her funeral sermon from Pastor William Metzger. Using a little known text from the Song of Solomon, he talked about Jesus Christ calling to heaven Carol and all those clothed with His saving righteousness. "My beloved spoke and said to me, 'Arise, my darling, my beautiful one, come with me. See! The winter is past; the rains are over and gone. Flowers appear on

the earth; the season of singing has come, the cooing of doves is heard in our land. The fig tree forms its early fruit; the blossoming vines spread their fragrance. Arise, come, my darling; my beautiful one, come with me.” (2:10-13)

“You forest leaves...” The best is yet to come. Next time you are in the peace of nature, remember He who died and lives will one day say to you, “Come with me.”

July 18

Hail, Adonis! If you lived 2000 years ago in the Roman Empire, chances are good that tomorrow, July 19th you'd be celebrating the Festival of Adonis.

According to mythology, Adonis was a beautiful youth who loved and was loved by the goddess Aphrodite. Adonis must have been a real looker because he was also loved the Persephone, the goddess of the underworld. To end the goddesses' squabble, Zeus decreed that Adonis would spend part of the year in the underworld with Persephone and the rest of the year with Aphrodite in the realm of the living. The Festival of Adonis was the yearly celebration of the marriage of Adonis and Aphrodite, a celebration that always turned to sadness because Adonis would have to return each year to Persephone and the realm of the dead.

How different is the One who says, “Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades” (Revelation 1:17-18).

Hail, Adonis? Forget it! Give your thoughts this weekend to the One who is the resurrection and the life (John 11:25). Or do you imagine you have someone better?

July 21

From the soap opera department of professional sports, Brett Favre has decided to renege on his announcement to retire. The Green Bay Packers haven't gone out of their way to say, “Yippee! Welcome back!” Talking heads have debated this every which way...but one. I haven't heard anyone talking about personal integrity in sticking to your word.

What happens when people can't count on your word? They can't plan ahead. Green Bay was preparing for life after Brett but he mucked that up. When you don't keep your word, you can't be trusted. Whether it's a football play, agreements among friends, or the vows of marriage, life together depends upon trusting one another's words. When trust in our words is lacking, the stability that we need in relationships is undermined.

Moving higher: The Bible says it's God's word to us. If we can't trust God to keep His word, then what's left? Not much. God is “faithful;” He keeps His word. “If we died with Him, we will also live with Him; if we endure, we will also reign with Him. If we disown Him, he will also disown us; if we are faithless, He will remain faithful, for He cannot disown Himself.” (2 Timothy 11-13)

Pass fewer promises but strive for a high completion rate!

July 22

Attending worship is usually not a satisfying experience. Sometimes it's not compelling. "What does this have to do with the real life that I'm living?" But other times I'm not satisfied because it is too short. When it's compelling, helping me spiritually, it ends all too soon. I need more of this help!

Today many churches remember Mary Magdalene. Mary was in deep grief because Jesus had died. When Jesus appeared to her, she grasped Him...but He cut that worship short. "Do not hold on to Me" (John 21:17). Jesus told Mary to let go and tell the other disciples that He was going to ascend. That's the way I find it. I'd like to hold onto the compelling, the helpful worship moments but there are people out there who need to know the Lord is alive. And what people first? Jesus told Mary to tell the disciples He was alive and going to the Father. Do you know church people who act like He's still dead?

"Here might I stay and sing, no story so divine! Never was love, dear King, never was grief like Thine. This is my friend, in whose sweet praise I all my days could gladly spend!" (LSB 430, 7)

I conclude that I need to keep going back to Him for more worship help.

July 23

In the world of supermarkets, a world unknown to me, I understand "Whole Foods" is top of the line. Their niche is organic foods. So cynics relished the Schadenfreude, enjoyed the "serves 'em right" humor when "Whole Foods" store in Lincoln Park was closed down by the Chicago Health Department on finding dead mice and mice droppings. The store flunked its second inspection by the Health Department. Only on the third inspection did the store pass. (Chicago Tribune, July 12; Section 2, page 3)

Most of us try to put on our best appearances for others. Someone asks "How's it going?" and we answer "Fine." Should the conversation go deeper, we usually put the best spin on our part in things. If it's not going well, it's someone else's fault. The "Whole Foods" story reminds us to make sure our personal house is in order, lest in time the gap between our public profession and actual performance is revealed for all to see. We want to be careful that "on the day of Christ...I did not run or labor in vain" (Philippians 2:16).

I think it was Milton Berle who said he had a cousin twice-removed...once by the Police and a second time by the Board of Health. If we really believe we're sinners, we'll get our lives ready for God's inspection. Food for thought.

July 24

Last week the feds took over California's Indymac Bank. News accounts report it's the "the second-largest financial institution to close in U.S. history." Depositors under \$100,000 won't lose their investment because of the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation.

On June 26th Senator Charles Schumer of New York released a letter urging regulators to prevent the collapse of the bank. Was that public release required by sunshine laws or was it political self-serving? Whatever, the result was a run on Indymac. Depositors withdrew \$1.3 billion in the 11 days after the release of Schumer's letter and the bank failed. (Chicago Tribune, July 12; Section 2, page 3)

Senator Schumer's analysis may have been correct but publicizing his letter contributed to the collapse. American culture thrives on exposing and ruthlessly scrutinizing everything. Christianity is different. Just because something is the truth, biblical ethics say you don't have the right to say it. "Gossips betray a confidence, but the trustworthy keep a secret" (Proverbs 11:13). Yes, there comes a time for bad practices to go public, but it's in time, after appointed people have quietly done their duty.

Just because something is the truth, we don't have the automatic right to broadcast it. There's a difference between society's ruthless "sunshine" habits and Christian caution for others. It's caring for others, call it "Sunshine."

July 25

no minute

July 28

Hi, Christian here! I went to church Sunday. Mommy took me up front for the children's sermon. Pastor talked and I listened, part of the time. The rest of the time I watch the girl next to me. Do big people do that too? Do you only pay attention part of the time? After the children's sermon was over, Mommy took me by the hand and walked me back to our pew. While we were walking back, I turned and waved. I said, "Bye, Jesus!" Big people laughed. Why did big people laugh? Weren't we leaving Jesus?

Please, help me, big people. Isn't that His house? We go to visit Him and then we say, "Bye" and leave. When we leave, doesn't Jesus stay behind in church? He doesn't go home with me, does He? He doesn't go with me to day-care, does He? He doesn't go with you big people to work, does He? He's not there when you are worrying or arguing or alone or crying, is He? Don't you leave Jesus in church?

I am NOT asking Opa about this. I will think it through myself. Don't we say "Bye, Jesus" when we leave church?

July 29

According to a Harris survey, only 1 out of 4 workers plan to stay in touch with work while they're on vacation. Good for the 3 out of 4 who won't check the office! That's what my hero did. Today is the 25th anniversary of the release of National Lampoon's Vacation. Clark Griswold didn't take a cell phone or a lap top with him when he led his family from Chicago to Walley World. Of course, he didn't have a cell phone or lap top 25 years ago.

The Bible is on the side of the 3 out of 4. "Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work." (Exodus 20:8) And it wasn't just weekly time off. Festival times included many days off. The reason the Bible is so emphatic about resting away from work is so we can draw closer to one another and to God. "Come with Me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest." (Mark 6:31)

Says Rosemary Haefner of CareerBuilder.com, "Let work-related calls go to voice mail. Then, it's up to you when you return the call...(do not) get pulled into the details."
(Thrivent, summer, 2008, p. 6)

July 30

We tease Aunt Joni about her Wal-Mart habit. Hardly a day goes by but she's plopping a couple dollars into the coffers of the Wal-Mart in Paris, Illinois. But what about the local stores around the town square? Is Wal-Mart good or bad for America?

When it comes to groceries, Wal-Mart is the largest in the United States, followed by Kroger, Albertsons, Safeway, and the American arm of the Dutch company Ahold. Wal-Mart's worldwide sales exceed the next four chains combined. We're talking mega stores who get most of their supplies from mega food processors like Cargill and Tyson. About half of the food supply is controlled by these big boys. William Heffernen of the University of Missouri describes an "agricultural hourglass...with thousands of farmers producing the farm products which pass through a relatively few processing firms before becoming available to millions of consumers."

Nothing religious in any of that...until you start giving your opinion about Wal-Mart being good or bad for America. Lest we commit the sin of slander, we should know some facts.

Richard Longworth knows and writes that the giant corporations "will not disappear. For good or ill, they are changing the Midwestern past into a far different future, and this future will not happen without them." ("Caught in the Middle," pp. 65, 77). It's OK, Aunt Joni.

July 31

The housing crisis is greater than we realize. Our home in Collinsville got two new boarders, two raccoons. Since development chased them out of their natural neighborhood, they found a new home our soffiting. Thanks to our neighbor John for trapping them and releasing them in an open, undeveloped area. The raccoons don't have a clue but someone was taking care of them.

Faculty families on the seminary campus are now being entertained by a newcomer, a turkey. We have no clue where he came from, but he seems to like his new digs. Diane feeds the birds, even in summer, and Tom Turkey thinks that's just fine. I'm told turkeys are dumb and so Tom probably has no clue that someone is taking care of him.

Are you ready to transfer the theme to the worries of your life? "Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?" (Matthew 6:26-27)

We can't comprehend all the ways God provides for His creatures. Diane has been taking care of a turkey for years, and only now is he really starting to realize it.