

April 04

April 1

In 1564 King Charles IX of France introduced a new calendar. Up until then, the New Year had been celebrated from March 21st until April 1st but Charles' new calendar dictated that January 1st would become New Year's Day. Since there's "nothing new under the sun" (Ecclesiastes 1:9), 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 day.

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

Although a Gallup poll last year showed 2/3rds of American adults believe in hell, the poll also revealed that only 1% think they'll go there. If you're in the 99% that doesn't expect hell, make sure your reasons are right. "The word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing" (1 Corinthians 1:18).

April 2

With Sunday coming, I thought you might smile at this from the newsletter of St. Paul's church in Chicago Heights, Illinois.

A church in wheat-growing country was having such great financial problems that the church's financial secretary resigned. Church members approached the owner of the huge grain elevator and asked him to take over the financial secretary's duties. "Yes," he finally said, "but with two conditions. No treasurer's report will be given during the first year and no questions asked about the finances during the year."

The members were surprised but agreed because they trusted this owner of the elevator. After a year passed, he gave his report. The \$200,000 debt had been paid. The paid workers received a much-needed raise. No outstanding bills. A cash balance of \$30,000.

The church members were shocked. "How'd you do it?" His answer was simple. "Most of you trade with me, so when you brought your grain I withheld 10% on your behalf and turned it over to the church in your name. You didn't even miss it!"

There's so much good our churches can do in this troubled society. Is there really a lack of money or a lack of will power?

NO COPYRIGHT

April 5

From "March Madness" to the "Boys of Summer:" "Play Ball!"

Here's a little trivia that provides this preacher with an illustration. Do you know why a baseball field has coach's boxes, those chalked areas near first and third base where the coaches stand?

Back in the 19th century there was a ballplayer named Arlie Latham, known as "The Freshest Man on Earth." When Latham coached, he ran wildly all up and down the base path. His antics were so disruptive that the baseball bosses invented the coach's box and told him to stay in it.

You've heard...and I hope believe...what the Bible teaches: You're saved by God's gift of kindness in Christ, not by the good works you do and should do. Find and dandy, but many people have drawn this conclusion: "So then I can do whatever I want." Wrong. The Ten Commandments are like the coach's box. God gave them and all the other commands of the Bible to keep us in the right place, His place, His place of faithful service to others. Believe and be saved; obey and serve.

Are you playing ball according to His rules? It would be a shame for you to be called out!

P.S. We've posted eight new sermons on my website, daleameyer.com. You may find them food for thought as you observe this Holy Week.

April 6

I'm sensing that it'll slip by if I don't do something today, even now. No other week is like Holy Week, a spiritual feast of repentance, of sorrow, and joy, of losing our selfish selves in the mystery of a loving God. But...I'm afraid Holy Week will end up a fast-food drive through if I don't prepare for it now.

Our Jewish friends are observing Passover, the "Feast of Unleavened Bread." Two practices offer insight: Before Passover all leaven is removed from the Jewish house, even down to crumbs in your couch. When the festival comes, the house is ritually searched for leaven. Some was set out on purpose, to be found and burned.

Like the real and ritual search for leaven, Holy Week will have a deeper reach into your being if you start scouring your soul now for the leaven, searching your heart and conduct now to identify what needs God's change, the dying to sin, the rising to new, righteous living that Holy Week is about. Our Jewish friends call the days before the feast, "days of preparation." Days of preparation for you or will it be "going, going, gone?"

April 7

There's nothing inherently wrong with leaven, but because it changed the dough, it came to symbolize corruption. That was not just among the Jews. The Roman satirist Persius used leaven as a symbol of moral corruption. Jesus used it for human teachings that corrupted God's revelation (Mark 8:15). For Paul, unleavened bread symbolized the rigor a Christian should apply to scouring the soul to root out malice and wickedness and to follow in sincerity Christ the "Passover Lamb" who sacrificed Himself for us (1 Corinthians 5:6-8).

The danger with giving something up for Lent is that we become satisfied because we've done something, we've made a spiritual gesture to satisfy God. If you've ever kept an aquarium, you know that a dying fish swims near the surface. The healthy fish lives deeper. So Oswald Chambers once wrote, "The characteristic of a disciple is not that he does good things, but that he is good in motive because he has been made good by the supernatural grace of God. The only thing that exceeds right-doing is right-being." What is the leaven, not in your house but in your being, that needs cleansing?

April 8

Memo to anyone who wants something from me:

I'm out until Monday. Even if my body is present, my spirit is out. Don't expect an answer to your voice mail or e-mail and know I don't want to be at your meeting.

Nothing personal. You I like; just don't annoy me these days with your agenda items. My spiritual agenda takes precedence. I'm joining the ages observing Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday and the Festival of Resurrection. Out of here and now, into the eternal.

"All of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death" (Romans 6:3). No talk of symbolism there. Mysteriously lifted out of here and now and laid in Jesus' tomb. Really! Mysteriously! And "if we have been united with Him in a death like His, we shall certainly be united with Him in a resurrection like His" (6:5). Hope. Life. The richest spiritual experience of the year, these three days. Beam me up, Spirit. Retreat time. Renewal.

I'll be back Monday, good as new. If you're curious, I'll be glad to tell you about the hope that is in me (1 Peter 3:15).

April 9

Do not go into the garden,
Oh! Jesus,
Do not go into the garden before the dawn!

If I do not go into the garden in the dead of night,
Who will lead you to the sunrise of Paradise?
I will go into the garden in the dead of night.

Do not hang on the cross,
Oh! Jesus,
Do not hang on the cross till you die!

If I do not hang on the cross like a bird,
Who will protect you from the flames of hell?
I will hang on the cross like a bird.

Do not let your heart be pierced,

Oh! Jesus,
Do not let your heart be pierced by your executioners!

If I do not let my heart be pierced like a ripe fruit,
From whom will you drink the blood and water that will heal you?
I will let my heart be pierced like a ripe fruit.

Do not go into the tomb,
Oh! Jesus,
Do not go into the tomb that they have dug!

If I do not go into the tomb like a grain of wheat,
Who will lift from your coffins your lifeless bodies?
I will go into the tomb to sleep there.

(Commission Francophone Cistercienne from the order of St. Benedict, Collegeville,
Minnesota)

April 12

In some places custom requires the preacher to make the congregation laugh once during the Easter sermon.

To say that God has a sense of humor may be symptomatic of trying to remake God after our own image. Still, there is laughter in the Bible and it often turns on our dullness to God's ways. Psalm 2:4: "He who sits in the heavens laughs" at powerful people conniving against God and His Anointed. In Genesis old Sarah laughed at God when He told her she'd have a son, but she did and "Sarah said, 'God has made laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh over me'" (Genesis 18:12; 21:6).

Did the Lord's Anointed smile inwardly when the Emmaus disciples asked Him, "Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?" (Luke 24:18). Gently He exposed their dullness, that they thought the hope of Jesus was a cruel joke, that they didn't believe His promise of triumph of life over death.

This Easter God doesn't want to laugh at us but with us: "I will turn their mourning into joy; I will comfort them, and give them gladness for sorrow" (Jeremiah 31:13).

April 13

It was the summer of 1954 and we were returning home from visiting relatives in Chicago. Brother Bruce and I, 3 and 7 years old respectively, were sleeping in the back seat of the blue 1953 Oldsmobile. "Wake up, look!" Mom said. I did and have not forgotten.

Propped up on the beach of Lake Michigan, bathed in floodlights, 252 feet long and weighing 700 tons, was the German submarine, U-505. Captured off Africa on June 4, 1944, it was being brought to the Museum of Science and Industry in Chicago to

become a permanent exhibit. Since its dedication on September 25, 1954, this memorial to the 55,000 sailors and merchant marines who died in two world wars has been visited by 23 million people.

I write about this because today is the final day of moving that U-boat from its place outdoors to a new indoor exhibit hall.

How do you account for what you remember from your childhood? I don't know, but I've grown into this childhood memory, growing ever more grateful for the sailors and soldiers and all who gave, who give today, so that one family in an Oldsmobile and all American families can live and love in peace.

April 14

Debates surrounding the 9-11 Commission reveal we're often harder on our opponent's failings than on our own.

"If...then" sentences abound. "If President Clinton or Bush had...then 9-11 might not have happened." Perhaps. The problem is human nature can't deal successfully with all the "ifs." Try as we might, this isn't a perfect Garden of Eden. Stuff happens.

The Bible has two different dynamics, Law and Gospel. The Law is conditional, an "if...then" proposition. "I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse: the blessing, if you obey the commandments of the Lord your God...and the curse, if you do not obey" (Deuteronomy 11:26-28). The Bible's religious message invites all to the Gospel of forgiveness because we've all failed the "if...then" test.

The conditional nature of the Law reveals this: Human nature is such that the "if...then" mentality cannot be perfectly satisfied in secular society. To dog your partisan opponent for his faults without recognizing your own inherent problems with the "if...then" demand is naive.

9-11 aside, the best advice for your relationships today is from Jesus: "Whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for that is the Law and the Prophets" (Matthew 7:12).

April 15

Jesus says, "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's" (Matthew 22:21). Today we're getting rendered!

Through most of western history, people have been wary of left-handers. The Greek word for the left is translated "well-named," a euphemism to ward off the evil thought to be associated with the left hand. The Romans were blunt. The Latin word for the left hand is "sinister." Today we often regard government as sinister, especially when Uncle reaches deep into our pockets.

Interestingly, in theology the government is sometimes referred to as the "Kingdom of the left." (The Church is God's kingdom of the right). That reference is not a slam. While no form of government or administration is perfect, the Bible makes clear that God intends government to bless our earthly life. Government "is God's servant for your good" (Romans 13:4).

So today we "Render unto Caesar," which means to give government their due (and maybe more!). "Render" also means to melt-down fat by heating, like rendering lard. A good thing if today's 1040 burns down our expectations of government to lean truth: "Rulers are not a terror to good conduct but to bad" (Romans 13:3).

April 16

Sunday marks the anniversary of a great exercise in hope. On April 18, 1942, Lt. Col. Jimmy Doolittle led the first bombing raid on Tokyo in World War II. 16 B-25 bombers, normally land-based planes, took off from the aircraft carrier U.S.S. Hornet. That incredibly difficult mission was an exercise in hope. Coming 5 months after Pearl Harbor, Doolittle's raid encouraged America to sacrifice toward victory.

Activate hope in your life. Grow it with the conviction that the Christ who conquered death can certainly bring you through present problems to a heavenly victory. Apply it to the special problems in your life. Pray it for others and for our troubled world. Hope, without specific prescriptions but with this confidence: "For those who love God all things work together for good" (Romans 8:28). Hope is a lively thing, says 1 Peter 1:3 when it's focused on the right object, on God who raised Jesus "from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God" (1:21). Out of such hope in the God of resurrection we make our own raids on the enemy of despair. The flowers on last Sunday's lilies are fading, but your hope? Let it bloom!

April 19

James K. Martin. He was 34 years old, quiet, but friendly with his co-workers.

Peggy Louise Holland. Peggy was a 3rd and 4th grade Sunday School teacher. She also taught Vacation Bible School and led the children's choir. She was 37.

David Jack Walker. His wife said he "was a wonderful father," loving his three daughters more than any father could. He was 54.

There are more names: Francis Williams, Mark Bolte, Baylee Almon, Teresa Alexander, and so many more.

The first news bulletin April 19, 1995 from Associated Press said this: "Oklahoma city. A car bomb ripped a nine-story hole in a downtown federal office building Wednesday, killing at least 19 people, including 17 children at a day-care center, and injuring hundreds. Other victims were trapped in the rubble. The death toll was certain to go higher."

It did go higher, 168 people. Let us never forget the evil of that day lest to our harm we ignore our present duty to sacrifice our own interests in the pursuit of a more just society and world.

April 20

"People are basically good." These days the school of hard knocks is forcing us to rethink that old saw.

"When we first got here, we tried making friends," says one American soldier in Iraq. "We did everything we could to make friends with these people. Then I started evacuating my (wounded and dead) friends, and it wasn't cool anymore." (St. Louis Post-Dispatch, April 19; A1) Now they're playing tough. Not a ringing endorsement that people are basically good.

Today's the fifth anniversary of the Columbine massacre. Some are asking whether the parents of Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold ever snooped in their sons' bedrooms. If they had, it's said they would have known something was terribly, terribly wrong. Did the parents think their boys were basically good?

Said Aristotle, "Those who wish to succeed must ask the right preliminary questions." (Metaphysics, II, III, I). One right question is whether or not you can count on people being basically good. Not everyone is a terrorist or school shooter, but the Bible teaches that we are born sinful (Romans 5:12; John 3:6; Psalm 51:5). Amidst all the bad news of recent years, one good thing is that we are acknowledging the presence of evil among us, and to the spiritually introspective, in us.

April 21

Right after the Berlin Wall went down, I visited churches in East Germany with the director of the German Lutheran Hour, Dr. Horst Neumann. The color of old East Germany was gray. Gray, leaden winter skies. Gray buildings, gray from decades of coal soot. The soul of the people was just as gray, colorless drab. I asked Dr. Neumann why the East Germans continued to live in communism, since they had little to show for it. He answered that, like Christians, they lived by faith, a deep insight. "We live by faith, not by sight" (2 Corinthians 5:7). "Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1).

So is it all the same, since most everyone has faith in something? You've heard of people who love the idea of love, but real love means loving a real person, not an idea. What makes Christian faith different from other faith systems-or should make it different for you-is not that it answers all our "Why?" questions. Martin Luther compared faith to an ascent into darkness. Life can be gray, overcast, and we often don't know why. What bearers of the name Christ know is the One we love, the One who loves you and me.

April 22

Streptococcus pneumoniae...includes meningitis, pneumonia, otitis media...and now, writes Roxanne Nelson..."Strep has become increasingly resistant to penicillin."

Staphylococcus aureus...includes skin infections, surgical wound infections, toxic shock...and now, again quoting Nelson, "Staph has become increasingly resistant to penicillin and penicillin-related antibiotics." (Washington Post, March 30; F6)

In his book, "Order Restored," Dr. Garth Ludwig quotes Lewis Thomas, whom Ludwig characterizes as a "medical optimist." Thomas wrote about AIDS: "It comes as something of a surprise, even a shock, to realize that we are faced by a brand-new infectious disease about which we understand so little and can therefore do so little. Modern medicine has left in the public mind the conviction that we know almost everything about everything. This is as good a time as any to amend the impression." (in Garth Ludwig, "Order Restored;" p.55)

Have you ever been stunned, even angry, because doctors couldn't diagnose or treat some disease that has struck you or a loved one? We are not all-knowing and not all-powerful against the diseases working against the goodness of God. Jesus' healing miracles were signs, signs of His attack against evil and signs pointing to a time "when the former things have passed away" (Revelation 21:4). The counsel today is hope, not despair.

April 23

Sunday there will be an abortion rights march on the National Mall in Washington D.C. Kate Michelman of NARAL Pro-Choice America says, "We plan for this march to be historic in both size and scope" (Washington Post, April 15; B1). The last such march in 1992 attracted half a million people.

On the Mall, as I said. Isn't that ironic? At the west end of the Mall is the memorial to Abraham Lincoln, the "Great Emancipator" who freed the slaves that some thought weren't human. Moving east you find the new World War II memorial. How many died in that war so that all of us could live? Next is the Washington Monument, harking back to the founding and the "unalienable rights" of "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." And at the east end of the Mall stands our majestic Capitol, topped off by its inspiring dome and the Statute of Freedom.

One more irony: The march will be Sunday, not just the day of worship in Christian cultures but worship that celebrates the resurrection of Christ. Sunday is a day of life's victory over death.

The day itself, the hallowed monuments on the Mall...They all cry out for life...and against the marchers who covenant with death.

April 26

If someone started talking to you about "disarticulation," what would you think they were talking about? I'd guess "disarticulation" referred to someone's problems with English.

Or if someone talks about a medical "procedure," what do you think of? Gall bladder surgery, cancer surgery, knee replacement?

Or how about this, "intact extraction?" I imagine special ops forces going into hostile territory and getting someone out alive.

Getting someone out alive. The terms I've used are ways pro-choice people describe partial-birth abortion. "Intact dilation and extraction" actually means "a doctor partially removes a living fetus from the womb and then punctures or crushes its skull. The fetus is then removed whole." That from a recent Associated Press article about word usage in current abortion court cases (Belleville News Democrat, April 21; A9).

The neutral word "procedure" is used to lure people into thinking abortion isn't much different than having your tonsils out. And "disarticulation?" Honest people call it "dismembering," dismembering what? "The fetus?" In partial birth abortion the "fetus" is a viable baby, having the same value before God as anyone else.

The law outlawing partial birth abortions is being contested in the courts. Please, say a prayer and, please, be politically aware...and involved. God help us get those babies out alive.

April 27

Thom Rainer wrote a book called "Surprising Insights from the Unchurched" in which he includes some quotations from the internet.

"Yea, I've tried church a few times. One of the deadest places I've ever seen."

"If you Christians would just stop talking to yourselves so much, you might just learn something from the rest of the world."

"I visited a church a few times with my neighbors when I was ten or eleven years old. The pastor was a mean jerk. I said I would never go back.

Maybe those people weren't giving the church a fair shake, but then again, maybe those churches and ministers weren't doing their part. Today is "Call Day" here at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, the day 110 of our students will be assigned to their first churches. They're not being sent out to be consumer-driven Reverend Feel Goods but rather are being sent in the name of God to engage people, winsomely I must add, on behalf of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Another quotation: "Many of you Christians don't know how to think, especially the ministers."

God, go with our new pastors and grace the experienced pastors with wisdom to speak Your Word faithfully (Jeremiah 23:28).

April 28

Today a Senate subcommittee will hold a hearing on healthy marriage. Senators, please, invite me! I'd love to testify about Diane and my marriage.

Our marriage grows healthier as the years go by...in part because of aspirin, blood pressure pills and vitamins.

The muscles of our marriage are healthy. Just yesterday Diane asked if I'd help her drag out some heavy garbage bags. Analyze that sentence and see who does the regular lifting!

Healthy marriage requires time together, not just quality time but quantity time. We get that most evenings, as we sit together in the family room. I especially love her when she says dependently, "Why don't you just go to bed instead of snoring here?"

Which brings me to communication, a must for healthy marriage. Diane told me weeks ago that the downspout was clogged with leaves. That's the way marriage should work. Don't assume your spouse can read your mind. Careful, attentive listening is also part of it. So I wholeheartedly listened a couple days ago when Diane told me that she had cleaned the downspout herself.

...Maybe I shouldn't be the one to testify; it should be Diane. Maybe the Senators shouldn't hold the hearings; perhaps their spouses should.

April 29

This is an intervention. For your own good, check into the clinic. You're addicted to speed.

Got your attention? I'm not talking about doing drugs. I am talking about how most of us are hooked on the ever-accelerating pace of life. Do you have a minute? Grab a quick bite? Check your mail while you're driving? This speed is killing us.

Today's an anniversary in our ever accelerating rush. On this date, April 29, in 1913 an inventor in Hoboken, New Jersey, named Gideon Sundback patented the zipper. Before the zipper, you buttoned or tied your clothes. That was slow. Then came the "separable fastener" as Sundback called it. That was faster. Now we've got Velcro, faster still.

I'm not suggesting you check into an Amish community, but for your own good, get your addiction to speed under control. Check yourself into the clinic of quiet time with God, Bible and prayer. Check in every day, even several times a day.

"In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength" (Isaiah 30:15). Then the verse adds this about Israel in Isaiah's day: "But you would have none of it."

Will you? Speed kills. Rest with God recreates.

April 30

What are the odds? In tomorrow's Kentucky Derby the odds for a horse named "The Cliff's Edge" are 4-1 but for poor "Birdstone" it's 50-1. "Birdstone's mother probably won't bet on him.

The Bible has references aplenty to the power and the beauty of horses. Like Derby horses prancing to run, Job 39:13 says the horse "paws fiercely, rejoicing in his strength and charges into the fray." Jeremiah 4:13 talks about "horses...swifter than eagles."

Is it in contrast, then, that the prophet Zechariah says, "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion...your king comes to you righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey?" (9:9) Is that why Jesus rode into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday on a donkey, to contrast His humility to a world that fawns over strength and beauty?

In Revelation 19:11 the heavenly Christ is pictured splendidly on a white horse...but He rides that horse after the donkey. The crown comes after the cross. "The Lord's pleasure is not in the strength of the horse...the Lord delights in those who fear Him, who put their hope in His unfailing love" (Psalm 147:10-11).

Imagine betting on a jockey who rides a donkey? What really are the odds?