

The Meyer Minute for August 1, 2003

I travel a lot, 57 speaking engagements last year, so I'm often in hotel rooms...hotel rooms with fluorescent light fixtures over the sink. Did you ever notice how those fluorescent lights bring out the gray in your hair? Only the Lord knows how much time I've spent staring at the mirror, wondering where those, uh, signs of maturity came from.

Jesus said, "You cannot make even one hair white or black" (Matthew 5:36). Yes, we can and our youth obsessed culture encourages us to hide the truth. Come on, are J Lo or Brad Pitt or Friends what life is really about? No, here's what it's all about:

Throughout all their lifetime my people will prove

My sovereign, eternal unchangeable love;

And then, when gray hairs will their temples adorn,

Like lambs they will in my bosom be born.

(Lutheran Worship, 411, 4)

It's gotten to the point that I no longer need a fluorescent light. Even in a dimly lit bathroom, those gray hairs are all too obvious. That's OK. It's a regular reminder that more and more I am one of Jesus' little lambs.

The Meyer Minute for August 4, 2003

"Lizzie Borden took an ax

and gave her mother 40 whacks;

When she saw what she had done

She gave her father 41!"

Today's the anniversary of Lizzie Borden doing in Andrew and Abby Borden in 1892 in Fall River, Massachusetts. Or was it Lizzie? She was brought to trial and acquitted. Whatever, kids will have it in for dad and mom.

"Honor your father and your mother" (Exodus 20:12). Martin Luther commented on that commandment: "Young people...must be taught to revere their parents as God's representatives, and to remember that, however lowly, poor, feeble, and eccentric they may be, they are their own father and mother, given them by God" (Large Catechism, 108).

As kids in grade school, we used to sing this ditty...and we sang it out of any adult's hearing...

"I love Bosco; it's rich in poison D.

Mommy put it in my milk and tried to poison me.

But I fooled Mommy and put it in her tea

And now there is no Mommy to try and poison me."

Sorry, Mom. Quite the wrong attitude on our part!

The Meyer Minute for August 5, 2003

I had to laugh. Walked down to buy the Chicago Tribune, read it as I returned home, and saw that the new Iraqi Governing Council couldn't agree on a president. They ended up electing a 9-member presidency. "'This is a disaster,' said Mudhar Shawkat, an aid to Iraqi Congress leader Ahmad Chalabi. 'The bottom line is: Everybody thought he, himself, should be president.'" (July 30; A1)

Here at home, presidential candidates are showing up all over the country. Everybody thinks he or she (Carol Mosely Braun) should be president.

My religious denomination will have an election next summer and the names are already flying. Everybody thinks he should be president.

"Jesus said to (His disciples), 'The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them...But you are not to be like that. Instead, the great among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves.'" (Luke 22:24-26)

So I read the paper and laughed at the self-promoting Iraqis. I hope it doesn't doom their country's reconstruction...and I pray self-seeking doesn't hurt our lives here.

The Meyer Minute for August 6, 2003

Some things the Bible teaches about marriage are controversial, but here's a statement that shouldn't be. A Christian husband and wife are "fellow heirs of the grace of life" (1 Peter 3:7).

They are equal in the sight of God. The wife doesn't stand behind the husband when they get married. No controversy there.

Fellow heirs of the grace of life. Salvation now and fully expressed in the world to come is nothing earned. Heirs, recipients. "By grace you are saved" (Ephesians 2:10). Here controversy, or better, internal personal struggle should arise within the husband and the wife.

"If we love a human being and do not love God, we demand of him every perfection and every rectitude, and when we do not get it we become cruel and vindictive; we are demanding of a human being that which he or she cannot give. There is only one Being Who can satisfy the last aching abyss of the human heart, and that is the Lord Jesus Christ." (Oswald Chambers, My Utmost for His Highest, July 30)

Fellow heirs of the grace of life.

The Meyer Minute for August 7, 2003

A U S A Today/CNN poll released last week showed declining support for making homosexual relations between consenting adults legal. Before the Supreme Court decision, 60% favored making such relations legal. Now it's down to 48% (USA Today, July 29; 1A)

In conflict resolution it's often helpful to go below the surface debate, to identify smaller underlying areas of disagreement. A question for Christians on both sides of the debate is about spiritual authority.

Is every word in the Bible to be taken directly, fundamentally, with no interpretation? Or, do the teachings of the Bible need to be interpreted in view of other teachings in the Bible? Or, is the Bible just a historical document that we consult but have to make our own way in this modern time?

No time here to go deeper, just this question: To what authority do you point for your own views on homosexuality? Is your own personal position coming from your own passions...or from your own prejudices...or demonstrably from God's Word? Have you searched the Scriptures on this...or are you just going with public opinion?

The Meyer Minute for August 8, 2003

Walk as Christians says Ephesians 4:1. That applies to driving too.

Sheila Peters is a flagger, one of those construction workers who hold a "slow" or "stop" sign as you enter a construction zone. Easy job? "You're standing out there, swinging your sign, and people are coming at you at 80 m.p.h. Drivers throw stuff at you. They spit on you. I've had several people jump out of their cars and scream."

Deborah Wead's husband had died of cancer, leaving her to raise four children. Deborah ran a cleaning business during the day and worked as a flagger at night to help pay for her daughter's wedding. At work last week near Chicago she was struck and killed.

Reporter Colleen Mostony reported those stories and shared these numbers: In 1997 construction zone fatalities were 693. In 2001, the last reported year, the number was 1,079. (Chicago Tribune, July 30; A1 14)

It's very natural to get angry when you're held up by construction. Here's the faith check: How do you handle that anger? "Be completely humble and gentle. Be patient" (Ephesians 4:2).

The Meyer Minute for August 11, 2003

From a speech that Mark Twain gave in London in 1899:

"Yesterday I was at a luncheon party. At the end of the party a great dignitary of the English Established Church went away half an hour before anybody else and carried off my hat. Now, that was an innocent act on his part. He went out first and, of course, had the choice of hats. As a rule I try to get out first myself. But I hold that it was an innocent, unconscious act, due, perhaps, to heredity. He was thinking about ecclesiastical matters, and when a man is in that condition of mind he will take anybody's hat. The result was that the whole afternoon I was under the influence of his clerical hat and could not tell a lie. Of course, he was hard at it."

Church was yesterday, I hope. On this day when you re-engage the real world, whose hat are you wearing? Whose influence are you under? "Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (Ephesians 6:17).

The Meyer Minute for August 12, 2003

"We are ready to kill and steal anytime," said a fighter in Liberia's civil war, a man who goes by the name of "Red Devil."

Charles Taylor resigned yesterday as president of Liberia. After 14 years of civil strife, "Red Devils" are all over the place. Worse than the political crisis is the humanitarian crisis. The harbor in Monrovia is littered with dead bodies. Many of those surviving have to eat leaves to stay alive. President Taylor? He's been holding out for a dignified send-off!

Some say love is the answer to the world's problems. Peter denied Jesus and simply a look from Jesus was enough to make Peter repent (Luke 22:61). Looks and loving words work, hopefully, when sincere believers do wrong. But in the world of governments? "I grew up with the gun and the gun will keep me going," said another Liberian combatant (St. Louis Post-Dispatch, August 10; A11). Love has its place and I hope you know love in your life and family but that's not the way governments work (Romans 13:4). Let's not be naive.

The Meyer Minute for August 13, 2003

Jim Schaefer is a staff writer for the Detroit Free Press. He recently interviewed 41-year-old Darrel Pennel at Pennel's "home," "home," being under an overpass on I-94.

"Why do you live under a bridge?" Schaefer asked.

"People ask me a lot...Maybe drugs got involved. I got into this thing they call crack. And I lost it all."

"How did you get hooked on crack cocaine?"

"This truck driver friend of mine, we were out partying one night...and these girls (said), 'Hey guys, let's go get a room.' So we go to a motel, we get a room. She breaks out this sack of these things and a glass stem. I ain't never seen this...Next thing I knew, I lost my home and my business over this crap. Self-respect also went down the drain."

Are you responding to Mr. Pennel's life with some quick, judgmental jargon, like, "That guy needs to get God into his life?"

"Do you believe in God?" asked Schaefer. Pennel answered, "Yes, definitely." (Detroit Free Press, Friday, August 8; 1, 4B) So I wonder, what's the solution?

The Meyer Minute for August 14, 2003

Darrel Pennel is a 41-year-old living under an overpass in Detroit. Thanks to "Free Press" writer Jim Schaefer for permission to quote from his interview.

Pennel comes from a good family, but says, "somewhere's down the line there, I missed something, man-made me go sidetracking. For some reason, to this date, I'm still sidetracking. And I don't know how to snap out of it."

"What do you do under the bridge?" reporter Schaefer asked.

"I read books. And I think about a lot of stuff, man. I think about how my life's going. How I screwed up. How I can make it better. I think about how people tell me how I should be doing."

"What would you say if someone told you to get a job?"

"I wouldn't know how to answer that question. I would probably say, 'That's kind of rude, bro. You don't even know what I'm going through.'" (Detroit Free Press, August 8, 1,4B)

"Don't tell me what a friend I have in Jesus until I see what a friend I have in you."

The Meyer Minute for August 15, 2003

Darrel Pennel, the homeless man we've been following, has a question. "What I would like to know is why I'm like this. Why I persist to be like this. I lay there at night sometimes, and I think about my whole life and it just goes like a movie...I keep looking at it...waiting to see that special spot. I don't see that special spot." (Interview by Jim Schaefer, Detroit Free Press, August 8; 4B)

Do your best; Jesus will forgive the rest. That's how many understand Christianity, but not Jesus. "Unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the Law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:20). Few people, if any, can outdo the righteousness of the Pharisees. An introspective person finally concludes that his good conduct still hides an inner being that isn't right. "Do not bring your servant into judgment, for no one living is righteous before You" (Psalm 143:2) No "special spot" in this movie. Meet homeless Mr. Pennel and you've met an expression of your own inner being. We all need a Savior.

The Meyer Minute for August 18, 2003

If it hadn't been for Thomas Roeser, I'd have missed it. Roeser, a columnist for the Chicago Sun-Times, reported about the media's non-coverage of a new poll on abortion rights. Called "Progress and Perils: A New Agenda for Women," the poll found, quoting Roeser, "most women either oppose abortion or want to limit it drastically." The poll was commissioned by Faye Wattleton, former president of Planned Parenthood, who said, "There is alarming news...There is significant and growing support for severe restrictions on abortion rights."

The major media have largely ignored the story. Roeser: "Don't hold your breath for the news to be accepted in the establishment media. Cliché-beholden analysts will be repeating the stereotype of modern Feminist soccer moms. Feminist soccer moms they may be, but increasingly they're pro-life." (Chicago Sun-Times, August 9; 12)

Some of us are pro-life, perhaps allowing for some extreme exception, like saving the life of the mother. So here's unheralded evidence that the cause of life is growing, a testimony to what a woman in one of my first congregations used to say, "The truth will out."

The Meyer Minute for August 19, 2003

The blackout had barely begun when people started the blame game. Sure, there's blame but it's also true that some people have been unjustly criticized. How do you handle unjust criticism?

Several weeks ago a friend told me how I was being blamed for something that had happened. With a rush of anger, I said they're ignorant because the facts don't support the accusation. "Invincible ignorance" an old professor of mine called it, and life is full of people who can't be conquered with the truth.

The author of Psalm 69 had been unjustly charged with some kind of theft. "Those who hate me for no reason outnumber the hairs on my head. Those who want to destroy me are mighty. They have no reason to be my enemies. I am forced to pay back what I did not steal" (v. 4).

Unjust criticism happens all the time. Vindication may not come on this side of eternity. That's another reason why it's so important to be in constant communication with the Almighty, your ultimate Judge. Make sure that you're tight with Him about your conduct.

The Meyer Minute for August 20, 2003

He placed a 2 1/2 ton monument to the Ten Commandments in the state judicial building but a federal judge said it's got to go by today because it suggests an establishment of religion. Roy Moore, chief justice of the Alabama Supreme Court, says, "I have no intention of removing the monument."

You'll hear the argument made that the United States was founded as a Christian nation. That's not explicitly stated in the constitution, although some old state constitutions do proceed on clear Christian assumptions. To say that we were founded as a Christian nation really comes from the fact that the majority of the

early Americans were Christians, more precisely Protestants. If today's religionists want to call America back to its heritage...let's adapt and say Judaeo-Christian heritage because we're not all Protestant, not all Christian...then the lesson of history is to make America more Judaeo-Christian by winning more hearts, not by court decisions or controversial legislation. Forced obedience is no obedience.

The First Amendment forbids the establishment of a national religion. Compared to America, Christianity is comatose in many countries where it has been the legally established religion.

The Meyer Minute for August 21, 2003

Young, rich, but stunned, Millard Fuller promised to do anything when Linda left him because he had neglected his family. Linda gave Millard another chance. So they settled on a biracial farm where they helped build houses for poor families. That was the beginning of Habitat for Humanity, which today dedicates its 50,000th house in Granbury, Texas.

Here's how Habitat changed one woman's life. "I've got two teenage sons, whom I rarely saw in the evenings in my other place. Every time the phone rang, I thought it was the police calling about my boys. Now, they're home every night, and they bring their friends to watch television, play games, or study. They said...they used to be too ashamed to let anyone know where they lived." (Jimmy Carter, Living Faith, p. 167)

Congratulations, Habitat! Jesus once said of Himself, "Foxes have holes and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to sleep" (Matthew 8:20). To us He says, "Whatever you did for one of my brothers or sisters, no matter how unimportant they seemed, you did for Me" (Matthew 25:40).

The Meyer Minute for August 22, 2003

I took a bike ride the other day on one of the trails in our county. What a beautiful, late-summer day to be outside!

I rode along and noticed countless grasshoppers. Those little guys can do a lot of damage.

Some trees have already started to lose their leaves. That's a pain, raking leaves. If you're content to let them fall, your neighbor is upset with you.

Some wooly worms cross the path. I wonder if they really do predict how severe the coming winter will be. Man, I hate driving in snow.

Peddle on; grouse on!

Under an overpass I see that some girl has spray painted, "Brian, you are my everything!" Look out Brian. You're getting a real winner, not to mention a vandal.

Grouse on!

I better get used to this peddling. Our old car has 150,000 miles on it and the last thing I can do is take on car payments.

I could tell you more but my Minute is almost up. Ever notice how human nature, sinful human nature, can ruin a perfectly nice time?

The Meyer Minute for August 25, 2003

About education...

Hannah Breece was born in Pennsylvania in 1859. She became a teacher and in 1904, at age 45, agreed with the federal Department of the Interior to teach school in Alaska at a salary of \$600 a year. Her first school was in Afognak, a village near Kodiak.

There was prejudice. "the Aleut children were a ragged, unkempt lot and the Russian...children treated them shamefully" (p.17).

There was superstition. One child wouldn't eat popcorn because he thought only the devil could turn something inside out.

Hannah must have wondered if her efforts were futile. Afognak had a church, school, and tavern. About the tavern, she wrote in her memoirs, "Here you are, ready to tear down what each institution can do for the good of the people." (p. 13)

She drilled them in civics, but "One day, I asked, "Who says which man shall be president of the United States? With one accord they chorused, 'The Czar!'" (A Schoolteacher in Old Alaska, p. 22)

Hannah stayed in Alaska until 1918, an unheralded hero in a noble and needed profession. God bless our teachers!

The Meyer Minute for August 26, 2003

Child abuser John Geoghan in heaven?

Jesus told a parable about a boss who paid his workers for the full day they had put in. At the same time he paid a full day's wage to some guys who had worked only one hour. "Whoa!" crabbbed the first workers. Not fair! Jesus' point wasn't about earthly wages but that eternal salvation is a gift from God, not the result of our works. (Matthew 20:1-16)

Only the Lord knows if John Geoghan truly repented of his terrible crimes, but if he did, biblical teaching tells us that he, like the thief on the cross, was received by Jesus into heaven (Luke 23:39-43). Whoa! That strikes me as grossly unfair. You with me? That reaction shows how radical, how scandalous Jesus' message is to our instinctive belief that we should be rewarded for our decent life. The deepest spiritual use of the commandments is not to justify how we've tried to live but to see ourselves in need of God's gift of salvation.

John Geoghan's eternal destiny? Your reaction reveals a lot about where you are spiritually.

The Meyer Minute for August 27, 2003

Have you ever seen the stars, I mean, really seen the stars? I grew up near Chicago where the city lights block out most of the stars. When I was 26 and went to serve my first church in the country, I looked up...wow!

This morning the planet Mars is only...only? 34.65 million miles from earth. It hasn't been this close in recorded history. If you haven't seen it yet, you can still do so tonight. 34.65 million miles away. Wow!

Facing such vastness, you can go two ways. The first is to conclude that you and I are insignificant specks in the universe. Evolution leads to that conclusion. Doesn't do much for you self-esteem. The second conclusion is to think, Wow, it's so, so vast, and yet the Bible assures me that God knows and loves little ol' me.

Scientists say the next time Mars will be this close will be August 28, 2287. If you opt for the second conclusion, that God loves you and has even given you a Savior, then you and I'll be in heaven. Talk about wow!

The Meyer Minute for August 28, 2003

Carlyle Marney recounts a story told by David Reid, chaplain at the University of Edinburgh. It seems a young minister spent his whole time studying theology, never leaving his books to associate with his people. "When asked how he liked his new parson, an old Scot said that he supposed he was all right, in the main, but six days he was invisible and the seventh day he was incomprehensible."

Today's the 40th anniversary of Martin Luther King's famous speech, "I Have a Dream." Commentators are praising the oratorical power of that speech, deservedly so. It was one of the greatest American speeches of all time. One reason it succeeded was because it tapped into some of the deepest feelings we Americans have, whatever our color. Dr. King knew the heartstrings of his audience. He identified with them, rather than pontificating to them. That's a requisite for successful communication. The young minister may have known the truth, but he was incomprehensible because he didn't rub shoulders with people, didn't listen to their stories, didn't meet them where they were at. Sometimes we religious people have trouble with that.

The Meyer Minute for August 29, 2003

A wonderful woman named Erna Rubin told about her favorite childhood pleasures. "One of my favorite activities was the church picnic the first Sunday in June. The men played horseshoes and the women sat around and talked. There were booths with different things, but my favorite stand was the one with ice cream. Ice cream would cost 5 cents for one scoop, and I got to buy a cone with one scoop. It was too expensive to buy it often. I liked the pointed sugar cones so I could bite off the end and suck the ice cream out of the bottom" (p.8).

Erna knew how to enjoy the good things of life, the simple, commonplace things like a 5 cent cone. If you stop and think about it, these little common things are really the things that we treasure as we get older and hopefully wiser. "You will eat the fruit of your labor" (Psalm 128:2).

Have a safe and relaxing Labor Day weekend, enjoy the simple things, and have an ice cream cone.

I'll be back on Tuesday.