

The Meyer Minute for February 3, 2003

I find myself more stunned today than when I first heard the news Saturday morning. The abyss of grief opens deeper and darker as I try to imagine all that families, friends, and co-workers are going through. And fear...the most careful preparation could not for them and cannot guarantee for us absolute safety.

It happened that I was in Dallas this weekend, speaking at Bethel Lutheran Church. The name "Bethel" goes back to Genesis 28 where Jacob had a vision of a ladder reaching from heaven to earth. The church members like to say that Bethel is where heaven meets earth.

Where precisely? When the prophet Isaiah wrote about God's servant Israel, he wrote about a suffering servant. Christians saw that fulfilled in Christ, who came to serve, not to be served, to suffer with us and redemptively for us.

"God sits high but looks low," goes a line from African-American preaching. That's where Bethel is, where God comes down to our suffering, down to the debris field of shattered lives and awful death. May God sustain all who mourn.

The Meyer Minute for February 4, 2003

Technology is one way we strive to spread the benefits of civilization. As careful as NASA is, the fact that the technology of the space shuttle is a creation of fallible humans introduced the possibility of failure.

That said, why didn't the Almighty reach down with invisible hand and hold Columbia safe until lit landed? Even if we knew the answer to "Why?" would that really make any difference? If God laid all His reasons out for us, we would still have before us the same two responses we have today. One is that of Job's wife. "Curse God and die." (Job 1:9) The other response is that of Job, who first complained bitterly. "I cry out to You, O God, but You do not answer." (Job 30:20) God finally broke His silence and said, "Who is this that darkens my counsel with words without knowledge?" (Job 38:2) To that strong assertion that God is, Job submitted.

Knowing the answer to the "Why?" question would not change our response. There is either submission or defiance to the Almighty. God is.

The Meyer Minute for February 5, 2003

What do you do when your emotions have been brought low, when you're not happy, not whole, and you feel scattered in your own debris field? A natural desire is to ask God to reconstitute your life, to put what has been shattered together in a new and better way. "All things work together for good" we intone. But whose good do we instinctively seek? Isn't it usually our own?

"The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, You will not despise." (Psalm 51:17)

A vital, breathing relationship with God cannot be focused on self. Jesus didn't say, "I'll follow you," but rather "Follow Me." He didn't teach us to pray for our will to be

done but rather that His Father's will be done. "Seek the Lord while He may be found." (Isaiah 55:6)

Our national grief mirrors what we all go through when someone or something dies in our own life. Offer the pieces to God, unconditionally, for Him to create you anew after His own heart. Get your will out of the way.

The Meyer Minute for February 6, 2003

An effective public speaking technique is to lock your eyes on one individual. Instead of only scanning the crowd, back and forth, you pick someone and look only at that person while you speak, staying locked on that person until you sense that the listener realizes "He's talking directly to me."

That, I think, is how the Spirit of God speaks to us. His word "is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword...it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of Him to whom we must give account." (Hebrews 4:12-13) Best of all, when God locks in on you, His intent is to speak words of life. "My words are Spirit and life." (John 6:63)

The challenge in public speaking is to make sure that the listener keeps listening, even after your eyes have moved on to someone else. The challenge that can lead you to a richer devotional life is to realize that God's loving eye never leaves you.

The Meyer Minute for February 7, 2003

I was truly moved to meditation when I came across the following prayer in my devotional reading.

I asked God for strength, that I might achieve...

I was made weak that I might learn humbly to obey.

I asked for health, that I might do great things...

I was given infirmity, that I might do better things.

I asked for riches, that I might be happy...

I was given poverty, that I might be wise.

I asked for power, that I might have the praise of men...

I was given weakness, that I might feel the need of God.

I asked for all things, that I might enjoy life...

I was given life, that I might enjoy all things.

I got nothing I that I asked for...

But everything that I hoped for.

Almost despite myself, my unspoken prayers were answered...

I am among all men most richly blessed. Amen

Should you choose, you can spend more than a minute, more than a once through, meditating on these words. And, adding to its poignancy, this prayer was found in the clothing of a soldier slain in the Civil War.

The Meyer Minute for February 10, 2003

Their gratifications are small, often delayed. They're caught between idealism and the realities of long hours, low pay, and less time with their own families. They are teachers.

Many years ago a family friend died. Diane and I took daughters Elizabeth and Katie to the visitation. Katie was maybe 5 or 6 at the time, Elizabeth 10 or so. On our way home, the girls were talking very quietly in the back seat. I butted in. "What are you talking about?" Elizabeth answered, "Katie is wondering how Alfred (our friend) can be in heaven and the funeral home at the same time."

Well, faster than Clark Kent slipping into a phone booth, I slipped into my super pastor role and explained that his soul was in heaven and his body waiting here until the last day and the resurrection of all people. I thought I did a marvelous job of explaining it so a child could understand!

But there was no immediate reaction. Finally, Katie said, "I think I will ask my teacher."

Thank God for all our wonderful teachers.

The Meyer Minute for February 11, 2003

On this date, February 11, 1861, the day before his 52nd birthday, Abraham Lincoln left his hometown of Springfield, Illinois, to travel by train to Washington to assume the presidency. After speaking of his "oppressive sadness" at parting, Lincoln spoke words that remain true today for us and for our nation.

"Today I leave you; I go to assume a task more difficult than that which devolved upon General Washington. Unless the great God who assisted him, shall be with me and aid me, I must fail. But if the same omniscient mind, and Almighty arm that directed and protected him, shall guide and support me, I shall I not fail, I shall succeed. Let us all pray that the God of our fathers may not forsake us now. To him I commend you all-permit me to ask that with equal security and faith, you all will invoke His wisdom and guidance for me. With these few words I must leave you-for how long I know not. Friends, one and all, I must now bid you an affectionate farewell."

The Meyer Minute for February 12, 2003

Having come to know some congressmen and senators, I brush aside blanket disparagements of politicians. Many are God-fearing, Bible believing servants. Yesterday I had the privilege of offering this prayer for the opening of the Senate's daily session.

Enter into this chamber, O Spirit of God, this chamber of my heart and the hearts of all who sincerely pray with me. O Most High, You know the feelings and thoughts of our hearts before they ever come to our lips. Enter in and work in us the reverence that comes from a humble acknowledgement of Your Lordship. Enter in with the inspiration of Your love for each of us, a love to which prophets, evangelists and apostles have borne witness for our temporal and eternal good. May that love constrain us to service in this Senate that will result in greater good for our beloved nation.

Spirit of our Creator and Redeemer, deliver us, we pray, from every evil of body and soul, property and honor this day and until that day when we stand before Your eternal throne. Amen.

The Meyer Minute for February 13, 2003

Right now high profile executives, government officials and celebrities are being advised what they should or should not do. More than that, they have people deliberately keeping them "out of the loop," people who think, "I'll handle this myself." And now that I think about it, it's now only high profile people who have handlers. We all have people who think they know what's best for us.

Are you a handler of God? Our fretting and worrying about what we should do is classic handling. "No need to bother God with this. I'll take care of it myself."

Theologians and religious people can be classic God-handlers. Doctrinal pronouncements, even when true, can leave us imagining we know our God to a T.

The disciples tried to handle God. "People were bringing little children to Jesus to have Him touch them, but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this, He was indignant." (Mark 10:13-14)

We all need trusted people to advise us, to help us take care of our business. Just don't become a handler of God; let God handle you.

The Meyer Minute for February 14, 2003

He narrowed the field of 25 down to Helene Eksterowicz. Last November 30th TV's bachelor Aaron Buerge got down on his knee and proposed. Now People magazine reports that their engagement is over. How fast romance fades!

In "Mere Christianity" C.S. Lewis wrote, "Ceasing to be 'in love' need not mean ceasing to love. Love in this second sense—love as distinct from 'being in love' is not merely a feeling. It is a deep unity, maintained by the will and deliberately

strengthened by habit...They can retain this love even when each would easily, if they allowed themselves, be 'in love' with someone else. 'Being in love' first moved them to promise fidelity; this quieter love enables them to keep the promise. It is on this love that the engine of marriage is run; being in love was the explosion that started it." (For All the Saints," I, 271f.)

Yes, how fast romance fades. The heroes this Valentines Day are the men and women who work at their marriages year after year after year. "Love perseveres". (1 Corinthians 13:7)

The Meyer Minute for February 17, 2003

Underneath the rotunda of the capitol in Washington D.C.-underneath, where you can't see the dome but only the massive pillars supporting the floor on which spectators above are gazing upward...Here original plans called for President George Washington to be buried. He's not. Had he been, our capitol would have become something other than the place where the goals of democracy are pursued. It would also have become a shrine to a man.

Revered men and women, dead and living, can become impediments to new generations pursuing some worthy cause. Enshrined by respect, deserved to be sure, their devotees are tempted to become followers of personalities rather than pursuers of a cause. The same can be true in matters spiritual. Reverence for godly saints and insightful ministers and teachers can deflect our focus from encounter with God, a demanding God but to the repentant seeker a forgiving God in Christ.

Underneath the rotunda is now an open space, a place where people walk as they pursue the tasks of freedom. May no person of faith obstruct your highest pursuit...God.

The Meyer Minute for February 18, 2003

Terrorist warnings, plastic and duct tape...It's a time of some fear for all of us. Two seminary students gave me a list of over 250 scientifically documented fears. Some are well-known, like agoraphobia, the fear of crowded public places. There's Francophobia, the fear of France and French culture. That's timely. Other fears are interesting: Amathophobia, the fear of dust; gynophobia, the fear of women and androphobia, the fear of men; mechanophobia, the fear of machines; and hundreds more, including, pantophobia, the fear of everything!

Why did Jesus so often tell His followers, "Do not fear?" He wouldn't have said it if they weren't afraid. He knows we are, too. So admit that you are afraid of...whatever...and "take it to the Lord in prayer."

"Almighty God, because You know that we are set among so many and great dangers that by reason of the weakness of our fallen nature we cannot always stand upright, grant us your strength and protection to support us in all dangers and carry us through all temptation; through our Lord Jesus Christ." (Epiphany IV, "Lutheran Worship")

The Meyer Minute for February 19, 2003

I can't begin to imagine the horror that must have overwhelmed the people caught in the Chicago nightclub stampede. Sharon Cohen of the Associated Press used the word "pandemonium" to describe that ghastly press of patrons trying to escape through the one available exit. Pandemonium is a word of Greek and Latin background. It's a place wholly of devils. In "Paradise Lost" John Milton gave the name "Pandemonium" to the capital of hell.

People don't believe in hell too much any more. It doesn't fit in with our idea of a doting deity who exists to serve us. But, "no one in the Bible teaches more about hell than does Jesus. And Jesus taught more about hell than He did about heaven." (R. C. Sproul, "When Worlds Collide," p. 75f.)

Jesus said about Himself, "God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him." (John 3:17) But does that mean we can reject the possibility of condemnation? There are times of pandemonium...and they just may be glimpses of a reality we should acknowledge.

The Meyer Minute for February 20, 2003

Yesterday we were shocked to learn of the murder of Nan Wyatt. A popular and respected radio personality on KMOX, the CBS station here in St. Louis, Nan Wyatt was shot to death in her own home.

Poet A. E. Housman wrote about the hatred some people have for others.

I see in many an eye that measures me

The mortal sickness of a mind

Too unhappy to be kind.

Undone with misery, all they can

Is to hate their fellow man;

And till they drop their needs must still

Look at you and wish you ill.

I once met Nan Wyatt. It was a few days after 9-11. I remember her tears, crying because of the devastation of evil.

"All day they twist my words; all their thoughts are against me for evil. ...They lie in wait for my life. Shall they escape by iniquity? In anger cast down the peoples, O God! You number my wanderings; Put my tears into Your bottle; are they not in Your book?" (Psalm 56:5-8)

Our heart goes out to every victim of sin.

The Meyer Minute for February 21, 2003

Where do you sit, literally sit and ponder the problems in your life? For me this has been a lousy week. So I sit in my place, my easy chair in our family room and brood over problems

I seldom sit there alone. The dog on the floor, the rabbit in his cage, the birds out the window...They're with me. "Hey, Dale," they seem to say. "We don't know anything about the stuff you're worrying about. What we know is that we're taken care of (that would be by Diane, not you). We're loved and when we look at you, when you pet us, we're sharing that love."

They remind me Someone is taking care of me. "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God." (Philippians 4:6)

I hope you'll take some time in your own special place this weekend. Your heavenly Father knows what you need. (Matthew 6:32) You don't need a dog or a rabbit. Just know what Jesus says, "I am with you always." (Matthew 28:20)

The Meyer Minute for February 24, 2003

From the Alamo, Lt. Col. William Travis wrote this on February 24, 1836. "Fellow citizens and compatriots, I am besieged by a thousand or more Mexicans under Santa Anna. I have sustained a continual bombardment and cannonade for 24 hours and have not lost a man. The enemy has demanded a surrender at discretion, otherwise, the garrison are to be put to the sword...I have answered the demand with a cannon shot, and our flag still waves proudly from the walls. I shall never surrender or retreat." The letter goes on and concludes with this P.S.: "The Lord is on our side."

"The Lord is my light and my salvation-whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life-of whom shall I be afraid? Though an army besiege me, my heart will not fear; though war break out against me, even then will I be confident." (Psalm 27:1,3)

Travis, the Psalmist...confident men. For confidence today, set your heart on your Creator and Savior. Focused on God, everything else will prove secondary. That's confidence.

The Meyer Minute for February 25, 2003

Chris Bushre, a student at Concordia Seminary, asked to do a report on...boredom. Huh? Yes, sir, boredom.

The word "boredom", Chris told us, came into usage about 250 years ago. Since then people have written and talked more and more about being bored. Interestingly, such talk coincides with the rise of technology. More gizmos...more boredom? Is this why reality shows are going beyond the pale in their silly attempts to gain viewers?

Yes, we've grown to dread boredom...and we dread boring religion. "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever." (Hebrews 13:8) Boring!

Oswald Chambers wrote, "Drudgery is one of the finest touchstones of character there is. Drudgery is work that is very far removed from anything to do with the ideal-the utterly mean grubby things; and when we come in contact with them we know instantly whether or not we are spiritually real." (February 19) So next time you're bored, you'll do well to change the channel to a new reality show. "Even the Son of Man did not come to be served." (Mark 10:45)

The Meyer Minute for February 26, 2003

For the 22 years Diane and I have been living in Collinsville, we've been going to Kruta's bakery. Many years ago I asked the woman behind the counter for a couple of Bismarcks. She looked at me and said, "You're from Chicago, aren't you?"

"How can you tell that?" I asked.

She replied, "That's what they call them in Chicago."

"Well, what do you call them?" I asked, my view of the universe challenged.

"Jelly-filled donuts," she answered.

"That's not right," I shot back. "A donut has a hole that you can put your finger through. This doesn't. It's a Bismarck."

She asked me a question and the result was that I learned something. Have you noticed that people ask, "How are you doing?" as they speed past you? If they really cared, they'd ask...and get into a conversation.

"What are you talking about?" Jesus asked the Emmaus disciples. (Luke 24:17) They talked honestly with Him. The upshot was their spiritual growth. "The Lord is risen!" Who knows what you might learn if you slow down for conversation. Talk...talk over coffee...and a Bismarck!

The Meyer Minute for February 27, 2003

In an upstairs closet sits a cello, in fine condition except that it needs to be restrung. Daughter Katie took lessons in high school but college came and now it sits silent. In a recent article in the New York Times Robin Pogrebin quoted cellist Avram Lavin: "The cello is a solo instrument, though not as popular as the violin or piano. I would be hard to rate instruments in terms of importance, because if you take any of them away, you have no orchestra." (February 21; B34)

Take that as a good description of your life. Sinner? Yes you are...you know that, painfully at times...but you are of infinite value to a forgiving God and to the people in your daily life. When you were baptized all heaven fixed its loving gaze on you. Now heaven hears you playing your part of faith and service in God's orchestra.

Martin Franzmann taught us to pray "that in these gray and latter days there may be those whose life is praise, each life a high doxology unto the holy Trinity."

Friend, that's you!

The Meyer Minute for February 28, 2003

12 years ago Lutheran Hour Ministries decided to prepare special broadcasts for our military personnel in the Gulf region. How surprised we were when the broadcasting company refused to air the first program! In that message I asked God to thwart the plans of evil men and give victory to the right. The problem: An Arab hearing that could infer that Christianity is merely the national religion of the enemy. That impression could create a stumbling block to the creation of faith in Jesus Christ. So I stripped all American references out of the program and for many months we did broadcast messages about the salvation God offers to all people of every nation.

That was the first Gulf War and now it seems there will be a second. While we invoke the undeserved blessing of God upon our nation and troops, we do so with this proviso, "Thy will be done." In our prayers that God will bless America we remember that Christianity is not necessarily synonymous with American national goals. "My kingdom is not of this world." (John 18:36)