

## **The Meyer Minute for July 1, 2003**

"I'm what is know as gradually disintegrating," said Katharine Hepburn. "I don't fear the next world, or anything. I don't fear hell, and I don't look forward to heaven." (St. Louis Post-Dispatch, June 30; A8) In a way that's similar to Christians who say they don't fear death, their reason being their belief in Jesus.

12 young people, educated, optimistic, training themselves to make contributions to society...Killed in the collapse of a porch. Make sense of that.

Yes, I fear death...and it's obsessing me about the God who takes us while saying He loves us.

"Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring very deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil" (Ecclesiastes 12:1).

For me, for now, I can only live by an inquisitive faith that trusts that there is a Resurrected One who will lead me through the valley of the shadow of death. How are you facing your final journey?

## **The Meyer Minute for July 2, 2003**

Has the Supreme Court opened the door for gay marriage? People who believe what the Bible says against homosexuality-I'm among them-are wondering what we can do. How do you change a person's heart?

Well, that's it right there. Arguments from the Bible or from logic often fail to touch the heart. The gay lobby knows it's a matter of the heart. That's why they consistently appeal to acceptance, to toleration, to compassion.

William Safire of the New York Times points out that we've done such a lousy job at traditional marriage that an alternative style of marriage where people really are committed and sacrifice for each other looks appealing. "Rather than wring our hands and cry 'Abomination,' believers in family values should take up the challenge and repair our own house."

"Law brings about wrath" (Romans 4:15). Court decisions, a marriage amendment to the constitution, state laws defining marriage...They won't work until one side in the culture war starts winning hearts on the other side. That may well need to start in your own family.

## **The Meyer Minute for July 3, 2003**

"Rabbi Levy saw a man running in the street and asked him, 'Why do you run?' He replied, 'I am running after my good fortune!' Rabbi Levy tells him, 'Silly man, your good fortune has been trying to chase you, but you are running too fast.'" (Wayne Muller, "Sabbath," p. 48)

The Ten Commandments lead off with the command to worship only the God of Creation and Redemption. That takes place in the heart. The next commandment, "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain," should be kept by your lips. The next commandment, the third or fourth, depending on how you count them, says, "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy." Where does that take place? In your management of time. God commanded His ancient people to build a day of rest into their schedule. We've lost that wisdom, that rhythm, in our frenzied lives. Jesus says, "Come with Me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest" (Mark 6:31).

A long weekend...enjoy it...and rethink the rhythm of your life.

## **The Meyer Minute for July 4, 2003**

Happy Independence Day! Be safe, be sound, be mindful, mindful...

...that the American Revolution bequeathed liberty unlike any other revolution.

...that it wasn't only the wisdom of the framers but also the first generation of Americans who actually made the constitution work.

...that protest goes along with patriotism in a healthy public life.

After the bitterly divisive election of 1800, Thomas Jefferson gave one of the most conciliatory inaugural speeches of American history. "Every difference of opinion is not a difference of principle. We are all republicans, we are all federalists. If there be any among us who would wish to dissolve this Union or to change its republican form, let them stand undisturbed as monuments of the safety with which error of opinion may be tolerated where reason is left free to combat it."

A new museum opens today in Philadelphia, the National Constitution Center. It includes interactive exhibits, like putting on a robe and sitting on a replica of the Supreme Court bench. Our government is participatory. Independence is not an entitlement to those who are not mindful.

## **The Meyer Minute for July 7, 2003**

Thinking twice before praising marriage and family...

Last month I had the privilege of being the keynote speaker at the International Lutheran Singles Association. Attendees came from almost every kind of single group that you can imagine. In addition to plenary sessions, workshops were offered on an array of topics. "Cooking for one." "Single Parenting Discussion Group." "Widows Issues." "Basic Home Repair." "Sexuality and Singles." "Sexual, Emotional, Physical Abuse."

"Two are better than one" (Ecclesiastes 4:0). Married people, facing life together, easily forget how scary many situations can be when you face them alone. Illness, unemployment, guilt, self-doubt, fear, loneliness...They're especially tough when you have no soul mate with you from sun-up to sun down. Jesus is there, of course, ("I am with you always," Matthew 28:20) but we like Jesus "with skin on." I wonder

how often well-intentioned talk about marriage and family doesn't inadvertently turn a dagger in the heart of a single?

The people who attended that singles conference are great people, loving, welcoming, and in so many ways fulfilled. Without saying a word, they reminded me to be sensitive.

### **The Meyer Minute for July 8, 2003**

President Bush visits Senegal today. For three centuries Senegal was a departure point for the deadly "Middle Passage," for slave ships sailing from Africa to the Americas. One 19th century writer said, "Were the Atlantic Ocean dried up today, one could trace the pathway between the slave coast of Africa and America by a scattered roadway of human bones." (Eyewitness Accounts of Slavery in the Danish West Indies," p. 45)

The sins of the fathers...

Among the memorabilia on the walls of my office, there's a newspaper front page headlining O. J. Simpson's acquittal. When white seminary students come into my office, they ask, "Why do you have that there?" I answer, "Just a reminder that racism is still with us."

We all should be on a "Middle Passage" of the heart, a passage of putting to death any inheritance of hatred. "I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate Me, but showing love to thousands who love Me and keep My commandments" (Exodus 20: 5-6).

### **The Meyer Minute for July 9, 2003**

In this month's Revue Biblique Joe Zias and Emile Puech report they've discovered an ancient inscription that says, "This is the tomb of Zechariah, martyr, very pious priest, father of John."

Told by an angel that he'd father John the Baptist, Zechariah wanted a sign. "How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well along in years" (Luke 1: 18). The request wasn't well received. He was made speechless until after John's birth. By contrast, when Mary was told she'd give birth to Jesus, she asked the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?" (Luke 1: 34).

Seeking and interpreting signs is not a good basis for spiritual life. Trusting God's promises is a better way to go. St. Paul said, "We live by faith, not by sight" (2 Corinthians 5:7). Mary did that; Zechariah did not.

Looking back we can often see what God has done. Archaeological discoveries are doing a marvelous job of confirming the truth of the Bible. But for today and tomorrow, it's biblically better to trust God's promises.

## **The Meyer Minute for July 10, 2003**

I trust we were all saddened by the deaths of the Bijani sisters, the 29-year-old Siamese twins.

Is nature perfect? Some environmentalists leave us with that impression but here was one case where we see that nature is not perfect.

Some say, "We shouldn't play God," but Siamese twins shows that to be too simplistic too. Science often interferes for good in imperfect nature.

The story is told about a young minister in his first church, a rural church. One day he saw a retired farmer working in his garden and stopped to chat. The old farmer enjoyed the visit and proudly showed the minister all that was growing in the garden. Feeling the burden of his calling, the young minister said, "You know, none of your garden would grow if it weren't for God."

The older farmer replied, "True, but last year I let God take care of the garden all by Himself and you should have seen how it turned out!"

Nature is not perfect and we are not God. We are to be good stewards of His creation.

## **The Meyer Minute for July 11, 2003**

On this date in 1804 Vice President Aaron Burr killed Alexander Hamilton in a duel. Burr, persistently troublesome, was indicted three years later for treason. "Aaron Burr...being...under the protection of the laws of the United States, and owing allegiance...(thereto), not having the fear of God before his eyes, but being moved and seduced by the instigation of the devil..." (In James F. Simon, What Kind of Nation, p. 245).

"We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done in the body, whether good or bad" (2 Corinthians 5:10).

What would happen if more people in government and business were mindful that they will appear in judgment? How many marriages would have been preserved...How many relationships would be better off...How different would things be in your life if you lived each day mindful that "We must all appear...?"

The Bible teaches our only hope at judgment is Jesus. That is not, however, a blank check to do our will rather than God's. That's the highest treason.

## **The Meyer Minute for July 14, 2003**

President Truman's newly discovered diary has this entry for January 6, 1947. You churchies know, January 6th is Epiphany.

The White House "is a ghostly place. The floors pop and crack all night long. Anyone with imagination can see old Jim Buchanan walking up and down and worrying about conditions not of his making. Then there's Van Buren who inherited a terrible mess from his predecessor as did poor old James Madison...But they all walk up and down the halls of this place and moan about what they should have done and didn't..."

We all get down on ourselves. "Poor me, they'll miss me when I'm gone." They will; most of them love you. Here's an epiphany. Paul wrote, "I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body" (Philippians 1:23-24). When you follow Christ, life is about the cross, about struggling with Him against all that sin throws against us. So when you're weighed down by the effects of sin, He'll help you. After all, it's His cross.

### **The Meyer Minute for July 15, 2003**

Growing up in Chicagoland, there was no love lost between the Cubs and Sox fans. We had playground fights about which team was better. People who imagine you can like both the Cubs and Sox don't understand sinful human nature. Back home old timers knew that we're born sinners and so they taught their children that one team is good and the other team is evil. Well, maybe not evil but bad and not to be liked.

So tonight Chicago hosts the All-Star game, which has become a namby-pamby thing in recent years. Hall of Famer George Brett said, "There was no secret that the AL didn't like the NL and the NL hated the AL" (Star-Tribune, July 13; C13). The suits in baseball offices have figured out that they need to restore some good ol' playground hostility to the game. That's why they've been pitching this year's game with the slogan, "This Time It Counts."

Wouldn't we be better off if we put more energy into sports rivalries and less energy into road rage, arguments, bitterness, hatred? We're born sinners; let's deal with it. Go American League!

### **The Meyer Minute for July 16, 2003**

This weekend a new governing council was chosen for Iraq. It's intended to be an important step toward democracy in Iraq. Hold that thought...

In Lutheranism the heart of faith is that God sent His Son Jesus to earn forgiveness for our sins and open up a future of love and hope. "God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him" (John 3:17).

Now back to the Iraqi council. Jesus dying for our sins doesn't directly address the work of that council, does it? So is our Christian God only present when sin and forgiveness are talked about? Not at all. Christians often forget the extensive involvement of God in our world.

God not only instituted the church which proclaims the faith, hope and love that are in Christ. God also instituted government, be that in Christian or non-Christian lands

(Romans 13:1). This new Iraqi council is a demonstration of God's presence in the world for good. Will the new council be up to God's good presence? We pray it will.

### **The Meyer Minute for July 17, 2003**

They were 14-years-old and 11-years old. Police in Concord, New Hampshire think Sarah and Philip were killed by their father Manuel Gehring.

In Charleston, West Virginia, a surveillance tape shows a man assaulting an 11-year-old girl in a Target store. A police sergeant said, "You can see he was very cool, very calm, very calculated in the way he stalked this young girl."

In Uganda 13,000 children carrying their bedrolls flee to the town of Gulu every night. The children are afraid that if they stayed home, they'd be abducted by Ugandan rebels and enslaved. If they were abducted and tried to escape, or if they didn't work up to expectations, they'd be killed. So they flee for their lives, 13,000 of them, every night to Gulu for safety. This from a CNN report by Catherine Bond.

One of the most terrible sentences in the Hebrew Bible says, "(The Babylonians) killed the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes" (2Kings 25:7). We want to hear happy endings for our children, but there's no happy ending in these stories, not yet.

### **The Meyer Minute for July 18, 2003**

This is an alert. For this Minute you are asked if your summer is speeding by without some significant down time.

Remember when kids chased after the milkman to get some ice or after the Good Humor truck for ice cream?

Remember when you played ball or dolls or rode your bike or climbed a tree? Stay inside with the computer? Are you crazy?

Remember when cutting the lawn wasn't hired out to a company but to a kid? Sometimes he used a push mower!

Remember when it got so hot you slept on the floor near the front door because that was the best place to catch a bit of breeze?

Remember when you got bored? Your parents didn't go into a panic and come up with things for you to do. You got bored...and you got better acquainted with the second most important person in your life, yourself.

Remember when summer's down time gave you time with the most important person, your God, your Creator, your Savior?

This has been an alert. Slow down your summer.

### **The Meyer Minute for July 21, 2003**

Whose children are they?

Arthur Boone is a missionary for the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. In a recent newsletter "Missionary to Missionary" Rev. Boone wrote this: "The president (of Venezuela) wants to decree that all minors under the age of 18 be property of the State. Parents would no longer have the right to educate their children according to their own will but would probably have to submit them to a system that would include pro-revolution propaganda and other brainwashing techniques. It would also mean that parents would not be able to travel freely with their (the state's) children...without special permission from the government." (July, p. 5)

Again, this is current, not decades old from some communist country. So whose children are they?

"Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right...Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:1,3).

While the Venezuela situation strikes us as a horrendous proposition, are some contemporary parenting practices in America in effect handing our children over to the state?

### **The Meyer Minute for July 22, 2003**

The daily routine easily becomes too much, assaulted by pressures, struggling with feelings, no sense of satisfying purpose. The hamster runs mindlessly on its treadmill. We can identify.

Participating in the church helps Jesus' followers see beyond the cage, to be reminded we live in two time zones, "body here yet soul above" as one hymn says it. Today offers one of those transcending opportunities, the day the church calendar honors Mary Magdalene.

Because Mary's hometown of Magdala had a whoring reputation, tradition labeled her a call girl. Fact is, the Bible doesn't say that. Mary did have some kind of physical or emotional disease that Jesus healed (Luke 8:2). Her response to Jesus was to become one of His most prominent followers.

Had Mary only run the daily treadmill, she'd be no special encouragement to us. Her devotion to her Deliverer is what we remember. "God has set eternity in the hearts of men" (Ecclesiastes 3:11). The transcendent look outside our cage helps the Spirit reset our clocks, "body here yet soul above, full of faith and hope and love."

### **The Meyer Minute for July 23, 2003**

"Are you big enough to make me, you little wimp? Come over here and make me." Not said by a playground bully but by one congressman to another. Meanwhile Democrats, angry at Republicans, had left the hearing and the chairman of the Ways and Means Committee had called in the police. Congressman Herger of California said, "This is not a happy or proud day for any of us."

The "peoples' house," as congressmen like to call it, truly was a peoples' house, reflecting the angers and hard hearts that show up from time to time in all our houses. One aspect of genius in the American political system is that it takes into account the foibles of sinful people. While many attitudes toward government are born out of idealism, our founders were influenced by David Hume who included the reality of human passions in his philosophy of government.

So it's good the House and Senate have almost always had chaplains and, yes, the Supreme Court has said it's constitutional. The Lord knows we all need spiritual guidance to restore peace in all peoples' houses.

### **The Meyer Minute for July 24, 2003**

Visit the concentration camp Buchenwald and you'll see a room where prisoners were brought for a "medical exam." The "exam" included standing against a wall to measure your height. You'll see what the prisoner did not, a small slit in the wall through which a guard on the other side would shoot and kill him.

Qusai Hussein. Among his atrocities, he'd sometimes have his victims killed by dropping them into a shredding machine. If the victim was dropped in head first, death was quick. Feet first, slow and painful beyond words.

Not everything that happened in the Bible is commanded to us, including all the specifics of ancient Israel's government. The Bible is, among other things, a book of history. Still, it's God's book and contains His commands about contemporary government. One is the duty of the state to punish evil and promote good (1 Peter 2:14)

Evil didn't die with Qusai and Odai. Former Representative Tim Roemer hopes that a terrorism report issued today will "rivet the American people's attention on the continuing problem of terrorism." "Amen" to that.

### **The Meyer Minute for July 25, 2003**

Financial problems?

John Marshall, a young lawyer destined to become chief justice of the Supreme Court, handled the finances of his friend James Monroe, who would become the fifth president of the United States. On February 24, 1784, Marshall wrote to Monroe: "The exertions of the Treasurer and your other friends here have been ineffectual. There is not one shilling in the Treasury and the keeper of it could not borrow one on the faith of the government. The extreme inclemency of the season has rendered it impossible for the Sheriffs to make (tax) collections and I have my fears that you will not receive (your pay) until some time in April."

From cold finances Marshall turns to the heart...

"This cold weather has operated like magic on our youth. They feel the necessity of artificial heat, and quite wearied with lying alone, are all treading the broad road to Matrimony." (In Jean Edward Smith, John Marshall, p. 99)

Financial or other problems, why not use this weekend to let God's love and the love of friends and family warm your heart?

### **The Meyer Minute for July 28, 2003**

When I was a kid, my dad would occasionally take me with him on the milk truck. Whenever we'd meet a truck from another dairy, both milkmen would wave at each other. "Do you know him?" I'd ask. "No," father said. "Then why'd you wave?" "Because he's trying to make a living the same way we are."

If you're following the Tour de France, you know that Lance Armstrong took a tumble last week. His handlebars got caught by the handbag of a spectator and down he went. Instead of speeding past the fallen Armstrong, his competitors stopped and waited for him to get up.

I was shocked the other day to hear a theologian explain how some religious people rationalize their lack of sympathy for non-believing victims of 9-11. Some of the most uncaring people in our world also claim to be the most religious.

"Have we not all one Father? Did not one God create us?" (Malachi 2:10) True religion this Monday morning includes showing courtesy to all you meet, competitors included. After all, they're trying to make it too.

### **The Meyer Minute for July 29, 2003**

Straining toward any goal in your life? Do you find getting there half the fun?

Lance Armstrong tells how a journalist asked years ago "if I was entered in any of the spring classics. 'No,' I said. 'Well, why not?' 'I'm focusing on the Tour.' He kind of smirked at me and said, 'Oh, so you're a Tour rider now.' Like I was joking." (It's Not About the Bike," p. 222)

Armstrong had a single-minded focus...and won, five times. What if you put forth all your energies but don't achieve your goal? Rejection, tears, a painful reminder of the eternal order of things. God is God; we're not. He's unlimited in His abilities; ours are quite limited. "My time is not yet come," said Jesus. He had focus and He succeeded, and if you relate your life to Him, you can still have hope and peace...even if the earthly goal seems lost.

Lance Armstrong used a phrase to describe his own pursuit, "A peace in the simplicity of our dedication" (p. 223). You don't have to win to have that.

### **The Meyer Minute for July 30, 2003**

Here's another demonstration that we're living in a world where all roads lead to heaven...or so many people think.

Senator Joseph Lieberman of Connecticut said, "I know we all have confidence that Bob Hope is now on the last road...which is, in his case, the road to heaven where he'll be joining up with Crosby and Lamour and so many others he brought such joy

to during an extraordinary 100 years of life." (In "CQ Today Midday Update," July 28, 2003)

Bob Hope was a great entertainer, an exemplary philanthropist, a great citizen. His contributions to our civic life will long be remembered and we thank God for them. But in historic Christianity that did not qualify a person for heaven, just as a Gentile was not considered one of God's chosen people by ancient Jews. I don't know anything about Bob Hope's spiritual life and I'm not his judge. But isn't it strange that people, the Senator for example, can brush aside centuries of serious theological talk and pronounce the eternal judgment that belongs only to God?

### **The Meyer Minute for July 31, 2003**

One of my favorite cartoon strips is "Shoe," a strip about birds who live lives just like ours except that they're birds not humans. One time the birds were talking about identify theft and Cosmo said that he hoped that whoever stole his identity would do a better job with it than he had.

It's a rare bird who's not concerned about his or her reputation. We most respect those people who are what they are, what you see is what you get, people of good reputation and that's the way most of us want to be regarded.

So imagine the anguish of Katie Lovell who was mistakenly identified as Kobe Bryant's accuser. Imagine how she feels when people with nothing better to do, no purpose in life and a numbed conscience, display her picture with the words "Whore Alert," when men on the internet discuss her body.

"Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor," says God (Exodus 20:16). That command is intended to protect reputations. Katie's mom is looking at legal action against those who have hurt her daughter's reputation. Here's hoping her lawyer can convict some dirty birds.