

## June 1

If Mother Nature reads the papers, watches TV or surfs the net, she knows today is the beginning of hurricane season in the Atlantic . Will she wreak more hurricane havoc this year?

From time immemorial people saw a direct connection between God and the weather. "Clouds and thick darkness surround Him... Fire goes before Him...His lightning lights up the world... (Psalm 97:2f.). But today we have scientific explanations for weather, explanations like jet streams, gravitational pull and so on. When ancient peoples beheld nature, they were moved to reverence the unseen God. Today meteorological explanations have taken away that ancient awe...

...unless you go into the country and look at the stars, unless you let the storms remind you of your creaturely limitations...unless you make a step into the awe the ancients felt. Awe is essential to faith, and both awe and faith are necessary in the hard-fact, unloving, "hurricanes" of modern life. That we can explain natural phenomena doesn't remove God. Quite the opposite, it makes the unseen God and His approaches to us in the message of Christ even more mysterious. So take a step into the awe. "Mother, may I?" "Please do," says all creation. "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of His hands" (Psalm 19:1).

## June 2

I heard about a minister who included an object lesson in his Sunday sermon. The minister took four glass jars into the pulpit. He filled one glass jar with chocolate, another with liquor, a third with cigarette smoke, and the fourth glass jar with dirt. He then brought out four worms and put one into each of the glass jars. A few minutes later the minister showed that every worm had died except the worm in the dirt. The moral of the object lesson was supposed to be the benefits of clean living, but when the minister asked the congregation to tell him what they learned, a woman called out, "If you eat chocolate, smoke and drink, you won't have worms."

Someone always pops up to offer a contradictory interpretation. The editorials of the weekend paper, Sunday morning talk shows... Whether it's blame for Katrina, murders at Haditha, or the DaVinci Code... confusing and conflicting opinions abound. What's your guiding thought through the swirl of opinions? Long ago I learned this ancient rule: Interpret the difficult passages of the Bible on the basis of its clear passages. Nothing is clearer than "God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16 ). You'll find that rule simplifies life.

## June 5

Can you get HIV from kissing? No, but 37% of Americans think you can. Can you get it by sharing a drinking glass? No, but 22% say you can. 16% of Americans think you can get HIV from a toilet seat...you can't...and 55% don't know that a pregnant woman who has HIV now can take drugs so the virus will not be passed to her child. Those are some statistics reported by the Kaiser Family Foundation in May.

Today marks the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first report from the Centers for Disease Control about AIDS, the acquired immune deficiency syndrome. The disease was first found among gay men, a fact that has stigmatized HIV carriers who are not homosexual. Deborah Shelton of the St. Louis Post-Dispatch wrote about 12-year-old Josh Pillman, a normal all-American boy who got HIV from his mother. She had received tainted blood in a transfusion after a car accident 20 years ago. To see your child shunned is tough on parents. Josh's dad says, "People don't even know the basics to know that they don't have to worry about casual contact." There are 2.3 million children around the world who have HIV. (May 28; A12)

Jesus was upset the disciples kept children from Him (Matthew 19:13 ). Do we keep people away by not knowing more facts?

## **June 6**

June 6, 1944 ...D-Day...the Allied invasion of Europe ...3,393 soldiers die at Normandy .

How many Americans who go about their business today and become aware it's June 6<sup>th</sup> will think of D-Day? Certainly Normandy survivors, as will the families of those who made the ultimate sacrifice. I'm an early baby boomer and my generation learned to mark this date in our memories.

"We shall never forget" is a sentiment often heard about momentous dates in history, dates like Pearl Harbor on December 7<sup>th</sup>, 9-11, and D-Day. But how does it become a lively date, a motivating fact from history, in the mind of a young person for whom 1944 seems as far away as 1776? Take a little survey of younger people around your office and I venture not many will know the significance of June the 6<sup>th</sup>.

I think a heavy consciousness that God has expectations of us is a big part of the answer. God's Son Jesus won heaven for us but God hasn't taken us there yet because He has work for us to do here and now. That includes working for justice in both neighborhood and world and showing compassion to those in need (See Micah 6:8). Which is to say, to keep America's great dates alive, let's be mindful why God let us live this new day.

## **June 7**

Many years ago a retired pastor advised me not to bring something up for a decision unless I had first counted my votes and knew I would win. So why, I wonder, is the Senate going to vote today on an amendment defining marriage in America as a union of a man and woman? Neither side expects the 67 votes necessary to send the amendment to the states for ratification.

"The reason for the debate is to divide our society," said Senate Minority Leader Harry Reid. He's right. Sometimes causing division is the Christian thing to do. "Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword" (Matthew 10:34 ). Division results when some people believe and live according to God's revelation in Christ. The debate over gay marriage exposes this division: Some accept but others reject the natural limitations with which we are created by God. Writes the Pontifical Council for the Family, "Man of

modern times has radicalized the tendency to take the place of God and substitute Him."

Why bring the issue to a Senate vote? Not to win, not to convince the already convinced, but to get the undecideds thinking. Does the Creator give us the right to redefine the institution of marriage?

P.S. Two seats have become available for our July 29-August 11 tour to Germany . Reply if you're interested.

## **June 8**

Why? Why did the early Christian Church grow at a phenomenal pace (Acts 2:47)? And why did those first disciples...those unschooled, ever-arguing disciples...stick to their story about Christ, even to the point of death? According to tradition, all suffered martyrdom except John. Again, why did first century non-Christian authors Pliny and Tacitus allude to something highly unusual happening after the crucifixion of Jesus? One more: Why did opponents of the first Christians never dispute that Jesus' tomb was empty? Jewish stories claimed that Jesus hadn't really died; He was in a coma in the tomb. Others claimed that Jesus' body had been stolen (Matthew 27:64). What's never disputed is the report that the tomb was empty. Why? Why did all these things happen?

Shenanigans...that's the answer in the media these days. To establish their power and privilege the first Christians took a very human Jesus and spun him into the deity subsequent millennia have worshiped. Certainly there was no such thing as resurrection, or so the new revealers of truth want us to believe. But those "why" questions linger, and the one answer to them all is that God surprised the world with hope by raising Jesus from the dead.

I'm thinking about the resurrection because on this date, June 8th in 632 A.D. the prophet Mohammed died. He's still dead.

## **June 9**

I hate shaving. Be aware, there will be no social or religious value in this Minute. Shaving is the biggest nuisance of my life. Scrape stubble every morning, and if you rush it, you cut it. Have you women ever gone out with TP on your face? "What'd you do, cut yourself?" "Oh, be quiet."

Some Saturdays I'll decide not to shave but as the day wears on that sandpaper plays with my head. I imagine that my face is collecting all the dirt in the air. Who needs an air cleaner when you can have a grubby husband collecting dirt and pollens on his unshaven face? Tomorrow is Saturday but we're having company. I have to shave. Bummer.

No offense to you who like, as they call it, "facial hair." Many of you are nicely groomed but I don't get the baseball players who put on that stubbly look. Obviously they haven't seen those commercials for razors or shaving cream; you know where the beautiful young woman comes up and strokes his smooth face.

Hey, that's my hope when I shave but it never happens. You'd think a ballplayer with fame and money would shave so that he'd be sure to get that girl.

So there! I hate shaving...and I feel better now that I got it off my chest...I mean face.

## **June 12**

Al-Qaeda has promised there will be "Major attacks that will shake the enemy." Just bravado after the death of al-Zaqwari or a substantial threat? God only knows.

That's right, God only knows. An expression often heard is the "sovereignty of God." Our powerful, all-knowing God is in control of all things, even when it may not appear that way to our limited knowledge. God is sovereign but how much comfort is in that expression? People like to say, "There but for the grace of God go I," but what about that child of God who doesn't get rescued by the sovereign God?

Sovereign, yes, but it is far more helpful to know Him as Savior. "God sits high, but looks low" is an old refrain from the African-American pulpit. Sitting high is sovereignty; looking low is coming down to you not in power but in grace. God doesn't always prevent the hurts of life but when they come He dresses the wounds, pours in His healing balm. Jesus Christ is sovereign Lord, no question, but He's beloved because He is Savior.

Another terrorist attack? We pray the Almighty to thwart the plans of evil people and He can. Come what may, we pray that we will know He is always with us to give help and hope, a Lord...and a Savior.

## **June 13**

About a month ago I planted a perennial called "spiderwort" in our backyard garden. What has fascinated me these last weeks are the flowers, blue flowers with three pedals and with six hairy, spider web like stamens. In the morning when the sun is not scorching, those little flowers are open and I go into the garden to admire them. Later in the day when Ol' Sol is high and striking hard, spiderwort's flowers close up. Last Sunday afternoon was a cool day in our area. I walked into the garden in the late afternoon and the spiderwort flowers, normally closed in the hot afternoon, were open for me to admire.

A friend of mine is a counselor who thinks the most basic human emotion is fear. That may be. What you and I see in one another may come across as what? Aggressiveness, arrogance, aloofness, vulgarity, humility, or a host of other things. It could well be that there is a deep-seated fear underneath that outward appearance. Do you and I often react to the wrong thing in our interactions with people? Spiderwort flowers open up in beauty when they don't feel threatened by the scorching heat of the sun. Maybe the people in your life will open up to your gentle kindness.

## **June 14**

Years ago I was visiting an elderly woman, Mrs. Fischer. Because she wasn't able to get to church any more, I'd make regular pastoral visits. One visit Mrs. Fischer told a story from the days of the First World War. The members of a German Lutheran church in the area wanted to let their non-German neighbors know that they supported the war effort. That was no small effort because they held their worship services in German, spoke German at home, and to a Yankee they easily appeared to be enemy sympathizers. To dispel that idea, the leaders of the congregation decided they would display the Stars and Stripes in the church sanctuary, right next to the altar.

To that the minister emphatically said, "Nein! No!" I suspect I know why the minister responded that way. He knew that the God of the Church is a God of all peoples, a God who wants all to be saved (1 Timothy 2:4). God is not only a religious right Republican God or a Democratic left God. He's not an American God. He's God of all. That minister had a good point. On this Flag Day, check yourself. Have you uncritically confused your religious faith with your American patriotism?

By the way, Mrs. Fischer told me that they ran the minister out of town.

## **June 15**

"Creeping Charlie", we call it, a weed that sends out runners, countless runners. Try as we do, we can't get rid of "Creeping Charlie."

Go to a garden store and you might see a sign for sale. "One is nearer God's heart in a garden than anywhere else on earth." In some ways that's true. This year we've got more cardinals and finches than usual in our backyard. Momma and Papa rabbit were busy; more bunnies this year than ever before. The Creator has done so well, and you don't need a church or a Bible to figure than much out.

But there's ol' Creeping Charlie and you know that something's not quite right in God's garden. "Seek the Lord while He may be found" (Isaiah 55:6). You follow the runners, you struggle with all that is wrong in life, and finally you see the value of a garden guide, not a book from the garden shop, but the Bible, which explains the "weeds" and offers the promise of a time and place where evil will be uprooted forever.

"His reign shall know no end, and round His pierced feet

Fair flowers of paradise extend their fragrance ever sweet."

Then we will be nearer God's heart than any where on earth.

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## **June 19**

Now that Father's Day is past, let's think about some other "fathers".

"Civil government...is to be classed with the estate of fatherhood. In this case a man is father not of a single family, but of as many people as he has inhabitants, citizens, or subjects. Through civil rulers, as though our own parents, God gives us food, house and home, protection and security." (Martin Luther, Large Catechism, 150)

Last week in Washington D.C. I happened to sit with Asa Hutchison, formerly a Congressman and official in Homeland Security and the Drug Enforcement Administration. Mr. Hutchison displays more words from Luther in his office. "It is certainly a shameful despising of God that we do not let our children perform this great and divine work (of government service and let them study nothing except how to make a living...It is necessary to keep the best boys for this work..." (In Ewald Plass, 1771)

Like parents, so important, leaders deserve our prayers. Speaking to the class I taught, Father Daniel Coughlin, Chaplain of the House of Representatives, asked us several times and most earnestly to pray for government officials and also for his service to them.

So I invite you to do that, to pray by name for government leaders through whom God intends us.

## **June 20**

The news reports major flooding in Texas and wild fires in Arizona, and that's only two of many recent natural disasters. "Hang in there," is common encouragement spoken to victims. "Hang in there." But how do you do that? Flooding or wildfires or other serious problems...What are you struggling with now? How do YOU hang in there when your strength and energy, when your will and hope are almost gone?

Not easily. In my own experience I've found that I barely hang on, only by the skin of my teeth. The ancient psalmist complained, "How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will You hide Your face from me?" (Psalm 13:1)

But complaining to the Lord also means we're going to the best source of help. "I would have lost heart, unless I had believed that I would see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Wait on the Lord; be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart; wait, I say, on the Lord!" (Psalm 27:13-14).

So when you barely have the strength to hang in there, hang onto His promises. God is a God of resurrection at any time of year, not just Easter. Though He moves slowly, isn't it His nature to make good on His promises to you?

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## **June 22**

I continue to be mystified by the World Cup. Not growing up with soccer, the World Cup doesn't capture, never has captured my attention and probably never will. " U.S.A. U.S.A!" Some of you have been cheering on the United States soccer team. Others, I among them, are not very interested.

It reminds us that not everyone sees the world the same way you or I do. Your friend, your parent, your child, your spouse... they often have a different point of view than you do. Did you ever stop to ponder how someone else sees the world? Did you ever think what's it like for someone to live and work with you? That makes for an interesting exercise and calls for patience and understanding. That also happens to be difficult...so it's much easier to think, "My opinion, my point of view... It's all about me!"

Hopefully we get wiser as we get older. Truth is, I'm a little bit, a wee little bit more tuned into soccer now than four years ago. Be it soccer, or more important, relationships at work or home, striving to see things from someone else's point of view is what the Golden Rule is all about. Jesus says, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you" (Matthew 7:12 ).

## June 23

Turning again to "God Allows U-Turns", a series of stories by Allison Bottke, I share this story from Michael Powers.

Brian "was a special education student at the small high school I attended. He was constantly searching for love and attention. It usually came for the wrong reasons, from students who wanted to have some 'fun'. He was the joke of the school..."

Mike defended Brian, even had him over to the house. "Hey, Mike," Brian asked, "How come you're not like some of the other kids at school?" Mike told him about the love of God the Father. "Brian really opened up to me. He explained that his dad had left him and his mom when he was five years old. He told Brian he couldn't deal with having a son like him anymore, then he walked out of Brian's life and was never seen again. Brian told me that he had been looking for his dad ever since. "Now I know why the tears kept flowing that day in my bedroom. His search was over. He found what he had been looking for since he was five years old, a Father's love. "He would never again be alone."

There's a place for you in your Father's house this Sunday.

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## June 27

It's summer, obviously, and that means that many religious denominations are having conventions. Regional conventions in my own church are talking about things like staying true to the Bible, getting the message out, finances, and the like. Then there's the other extreme.

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) convention last week voted that "the divine Trinity – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – could also be known as "Mother, Child and Womb" or

"Rock, Redeemer, Friend." "A panel that worked on the issue since 2000 said the classical language for the Trinity should still be used but added that Presbyterians also should seek 'fresh ways to speak of the mystery of the triune God' to 'expand the church's vocabulary of praise and wonder.'

Ah, so much I could say and so little time to say it! We're not content with the way God has revealed Himself to us. We're seeking ways to freshen up our lives rather than obeying the life-changing Word of God. Sounds to me like rebellion against the divine revelation. "Everyone did as he saw fit" (Judges 17:6; 21:25). "In later days some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits" (1 Timothy 4:1).

"This does not alter the church's theological position," said Nancy Olthoff, a committee chair. (AP, June 20). Huh? Somethings should be as obvious as summer, should be.

## **June 28**

A report from another summer church convention: "VirtueOnline" reports, "the 75<sup>th</sup> General Convention of the Episcopal church...overwhelmingly refused to even consider a resolution that affirmed Jesus Christ as the "only name by which any person may be saved."

Those last words quote Acts 4:12. Clear passages in the New Testament teach that Jesus Christ is the only way to heaven. "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6). But 70% of the delegates voted not to affirm that New Testament teaching.

A delegate from Texas : "My friends, this...is the very essence of our faith. Surely we can say together that Jesus Christ is Lord. And if we can't, we have no reason to be here."

A Florida delegate: "If we cannot affirm the unique salvific power of Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior, we are no longer a Christian church."

But from North Carolina : "We don't do up and down votes on Jesus Christ as Lord."

Finally, the Man from Nazareth says, "If anyone is ashamed of Me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of Him when He comes in His Father's glory with the holy angels" (Mark 8:38).

## **June 29**

This morning's paper tells that 200,000 people had to evacuate their homes in Pennsylvania because of flooding. James Adams said, "We lost just about everything - the cars, the clothes, even the baby's crib. I'm not sure what we are going to do."

Martin Luther King Sr. shared a story from another minister. "When the depression was deepest, a mother had just one glass of milk with four or five children to drink from that one glass. He said all the children but one begged to drink and finally one of the children said, 'Mama, Mama, how deep can I drink?' Then she measured it off. Sometimes, when these trials and tribulations hit you, you have to ask God, 'Oh,

God, how much? How deep must I drink?' So I say occasionally to God, 'God how much more must I bear?' I never ask Him why. Because I know He is going to see me through." ("An Affirmation of Life," in For All the Saints, I, 320)

"The Lord will fulfill His purpose for me; Your love, O Lord, endures forever" (Psalm 138:8). Mr. Adams despaired, "I'm not sure what we are going to do." Is the answer to trust God's good purpose even in the midst of troubles? Are you responding to problems by denying or affirming God's love?

## **June 30**

Its preamble says the Constitution was "ordained" for several purposes, one being to "secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our posterity." While those are religiously freighted words, they did not introduce a Christian constitution or legitimize one religious outlook as superior to others.

Senator Barack Obama, Democrat of Illinois, spoke thoughtful words recently about religion in the public square. "Not every mention of God in public is a breach to the wall of separation." "Secularists are wrong when they ask believers to leave their religion at the door before entering the public square." "We cannot abandon the field of religious discourse. ...In other words, if we don't reach out to evangelical Christians and other religious Americans and tell them what we stand for, Jerry Falwells and Pat Robertsons will continue to hold sway." (Washingtonpost.com; June 28)

A diverse and free exercise of religion was the Founders' design for the new nation. James Madison wrote, "A religious sect may degenerate into a political faction in a part of the (nation); but the variety of sects dispersed over the entire face of it must secure the national councils against any danger from that source." (Federalist Paper Number 10)

As you celebrate the "blessings of Liberty " these next days, thank God for the vibrant religious debates we can and should have in public life.

Have a good and safe holiday. I'll be back next Wednesday.