

## June 1

Last Sunday many Christian churches observed Pentecost, remembering the coming of the Holy Spirit upon Jesus' first disciples. The third person in the Trinity, the Holy Spirit is credited with working saving faith in Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 12:3).

Religious people make claims about having the Spirit, but how do you get the Holy Spirit? Here's a quotation I expect you'll find troubling. "We should and must constantly maintain that God will not deal with us except through His external Word and sacrament" (Smalcald Articles, III.VIII. 10). That comes from Martin Luther and was adopted in 1580 as an official statement of the Lutheran Church's understanding of the Bible.

My follow-up question: Whether you agree or not, why? What is your basis for rejecting or agreeing with this or any other religious statement? Have you thought through your beliefs on the basis of biblical texts, church teaching, history and logic?

I'm leaving this subject hanging...except for one thing to factor into your thoughts. When you're really down, when you're hurting and need some divine help and hope, it's sure nice to know where you can go and what you can read and hear to be touched by the Holy Spirit.

## June 4

Think "worldwide." Three men, including an American citizen, were arrested for plotting a massive attack on New York 's JFK airport. The ringleader, the American, planned an attack so terrible that "even the twin towers can't touch it." They operated largely out of Trinidad and Guyana , two places not known as hostile to the United States . Also this weekend American forces bombed an area in the African country of Somalia , a place where terrorists were thought to be hiding. It's a worldwide war on terror.

This weekend my travels took me to a Chinese Christian congregation. How impressive to hear my sermon translated into Cantonese and Mandarin! Jesus promised, "This Gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations" (Matthew 24:14) and heaven will be filled with people "from every nation, people, tribe and language" (Revelation 7:9). This too is worldwide, God's working against evil that keeps people in bondage to sin and strife. "Wars and rumors of war" (Matthew 24:6) will continue and America may win or lose, but followers of Jesus are eternally optimistic. "The One who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world" (1 John 4:4). A slogan of the Chinese congregation says "Think Globally." That's true in both wars. Think globally, totally.

## June 5

Today the new Billy Graham Library opens to the public in Charlotte , North Carolina . It's got a lot about Rev. Graham, something that makes the respected evangelist uneasy. "I've been here at the library once, and my one comment when I toured it was that it is too much Billy Graham. My whole life has been to please the Lord and honor Jesus, not to see me and think of me."

It's tempting to honor the servant we see more than the Master we can't see. Through the bronze serpent in Numbers 21:9, God directed the children of Israel to look up to Him for deliverance. That bronze serpent foreshadowed the lifting up of Jesus Christ for the deliverance of all people from sin and eternal death (John 3:14 ). That's good, positive, Christ-centered, but we can honor the servant more than the One to whom the servant points. So 2 Kings 18:4: King Hezekiah "crushed the bronze snake that Moses had made because up to that time the Israelites had been burning incense to it. They called it Nehushtan."

Might you and I so honor the servants whom we have seen that we detract from the Christ we have not yet seen? "There's never been a minister as good as..." A good minister would be sad to hear us say that.

## June 6

Are you in the habit of reading your horoscope? Why do you do that? Curious about what might be coming your way?

It was reported last week that the genome, the genetic content, of Dr. James Watson has been mapped. In 1953 Dr. Watson and Dr. Francis Crick discovered DNA, the carrier of a person's genetic information. This is the first time that anyone's personal genetic makeup has been known...by humans, that is. God has always known everyone's code. "O Lord, You have searched me and You know me. You created my inmost being; You knit me together in my mother's womb" (Psalm 139:1, 13).

Funny thing though, Dr. Watson doesn't want to know if his genetic makeup predisposes him to Alzheimer's. Sometimes the future is best left unknown. (New York Times, June 1; A19)

So back to the horoscope. I suspect that many of us get hooked on reading the horoscope because we're curious about what may be coming our way. Curiosity killed the cat... and curiosity that looks for guidance in a horoscope deadens trust that your heavenly Father will send what He knows is for your good. If you know Him to be your loving Father, you'll hold His hand and let Him walk you into the future. "Commit your way to the Lord; trust in Him" (Psalm 37:5).

## June 7

Hi, Christian here. (snivel, snivel) I am sick. (cry) I feel bad. Mommy says I've got it at both ends, whatever that means. Carmen takes care of me during the day. Carmen called Mommy and said, "Come, get Christian. He is sick." So Mommy came. I threw up on her.

Mommy told Oma and Opa that my face always lights up when I see her. Not this time. My face did not light up. My eyes hardly opened up. I want to sleep. Instead of go, go, go on my new shoes, I want to sleep. I feel so bad. (snivel, snivel). Mommy told Oma and Opa that I just want to snuggle on her shoulder. I feel so bad.

Do you big people get sick? Do you ever feel so bad you think you'll never feel better again? When you're big, who comes to get you? Who picks you up and comforts you? When you are sick, do you know Who to turn to? That would be a bad time to start looking for someone to turn to. You better find that Person now, before you feel so bad!

I better go now before I do something more than snivel.

## **June 8**

A big news item yesterday reported that Dr. Shinya Yamanaka of Kyoto University has succeeded in turning skin cells into stem cells. The doctor implanted four genes into the skin cell of a mouse and somehow, that's the word for today, somehow the genes made that skin cell revert to a stem cell. Two other teams of scientists have replicated Dr. Yamanaka's findings. Can this be done with human skin cells? That's yet to be determined, but the apparent possibility offers hope for battling disease.

This is big because of the moral debate about using stem cells that come from embryos. Richard Doerflinger, spokesman for the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, said the new possibility "raises no serious moral problem, because it creates embryoniclike stem cells without creating, harming or destroying human lives at any stage."

Besides my pleasure that embryonic stem cells need not be the only way forward, I was struck that the word "somehow" popped up several times in the account I read. One example, "Cells that absorb all four genes are somehow converted to stem cells." Scientists will eventually explain "somehow," but now and even when it is explained people of faith understand "somehow" with this conviction: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." (Genesis 1:1; New York Times, June 7; A1, 30)

## **June 11**

Walgreen's runs TV commercials that picture life in a perfect world. Alas, it's an imperfect world...so you need omnipresent Walgreen's.

Attorney General Alberto Gonzales is in Miami today to speak to a conference on nuclear terrorism. He may want to stop by a Walgreen's and get something for a headache. Back in Washington the Senate is scheduled to hold a vote of no confidence in the Attorney General.

Expressions of no confidence come in various forms. A lousy performance review at work, or being let go... failure in school... a friendship ended because someone thought you didn't measure up... divorce... Expressions of no confidence come to the high and to the lowly. General Peter Pace is keenly disappointed because the administration did not want his reappointment as Chairman of the

Joint Chiefs of Staff to be an occasion for contentious war hearings.  
So he wasn't reappointed.

Our critics may be correct...meaning we can learn something...or they may be shallow partisans...meaning an injustice is done. It's an imperfect world and Walgreen's isn't the answer. "Dust thou art and unto dust thou shalt return" (Genesis 3:19). When you're on the short end of no confidence, remember it was God who first breathed life into dust when the world was perfect. He can still breath new life into you.

## **June 12**

Hi, Christian here! I was sick. Mommy said I had it at both ends. I still don't know what that means. I felt so bad. Now I feel better. Now I go, go, go, go with my feet, not with something else.

Opa asked if I am thankful I feel better. Opa, that is a dumb question. No, of course I am not thankful. I do not think very much. I do not think about stopping go, go, going to be thankful. I just feel. When I feel bad, I am crabby. When I feel good, I take it for granted. I just feel. I am a baby. Babies live for the moment.

Are big people like that? Do big people just act how they feel? Do big people turn crabby when they don't feel good? When you big people feel good, do you take it for granted? Do you big people try to understand your feelings? Are you big people more thoughtful than babies? More thankful?

I don't understand Opa. Some day I will. Opa says, "O bless the Lord, my soul, nor let His mercies lie forgotten in unthankfulness and without praises die!"

## **June 13**

Last week William J. Jefferson, a congressman from Louisiana , was indicted. "The 94 pages indictment details 11 bribery schemes and 16 criminal counts, including racketeering, soliciting bribes, wire fraud, money laundering and obstruction of justice."

Imagine someone presenting you with 94 pages detailing what you've done wrong! In a way, you have been. The Bible is a much bigger indictment against you and me. Mr. Jefferson says, "I am absolutely innocent of the charges that have been leveled against me. I'm going to fight my heart out to clear my name" (New York Times, June 9; A10). People who meditate upon the biblical indictment are not so confident. "Do not bring your servant into judgment, for no one living is righteous before You" (Psalm 143:2).

I should say it this way: People who meditate upon the biblical indictment are confident in a different way. "If You, O Lord, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand? But with You there is forgiveness; therefore You are feared. Put your hope in the Lord, for with the Lord is unfailing love and with Him is full redemption" (Psalm 130:3, 7).

If convicted, Mr. Jefferson faces up to 235 years. You already have been convicted, but receiving God's pardon through Jesus Christ brings eternal life.

## **June 14**

Years ago I was visiting an elderly woman, Mrs. Lange. Because she wasn't able to get to church any more, I'd make regular pastoral visits. One visit Mrs. Lange 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. Lange told me that they ran the minister out of town.

## **June 15**

Mike Ditka is no shrinking violet. "Da coach" is feuding with Gene Upshaw of the NFL Players Association. Ditka says the association is not adequately taking care of its retired football players, especially veterans who played before gazillion dollar salaries. Ditka says Upshaw, "has no comprehension of what it means to give back to the game. He's a fraud." (Chicago Tribune, May 27; Section 3, page 8)

This weekend we honor our fathers, the good ones at least. "Honor thy father and thy mother" God says (Exodus 20:12). Buy off the old man with a tie and card? God's commandment is about honoring all those who are ahead of us. Some are ahead of us in authority. Leaders in government, church, and society should serve us by looking toward our best interests, much like parents. Others are ahead of us in age and that's what "da coach" is fuming about. Who of us is not guilty of getting irritated by...the person who walks slowly with a cane...who can't hear all we younger people say...who reminisces all the time...who fumbles for change in the check-out line, holding us impatient youngsters up... Ties and cards are fine, but our society needs more: Respect and honor for those ahead of us. Father's Day is just one small part of it.

## **June 18**

"I have just met a wonderful girl," a young Billy Graham wrote to his mother. "Her name is Ruth Bell. This is the girl I'm going to marry." He did, and after 64 years of marriage Ruth Bell Graham passed away last week. Rev. Graham said, "I look forward to meeting her in heaven."

He said of their last years together, "We've rekindled the romance of our youth." Now Dale knows little about romance, as my wife and daughters will tell you. Or at least I know little about popular, media-induced ideas of romance. When two people well into their 80's talk about rekindling romance, you know they're talking about something different. They're talking about sitting together and talking, or sitting together and not talking. This deeper romance means looking at each and realizing how precious and how patient the other has been. The love language of later years says, "We've been through so much together, you and I. We've raised the kids. We've paid the bills, or most of them. We've become the best of friends. When something happens, I want to tell you before anyone else."

"I was young and now I am old, yet I have never seen the righteous forsaken"  
(Psalm 37:25)

I think I understand that kind of romance. Happy anniversary, Diane.

## **June 19**

I sat in chapel the other day and heard a Bible reading from Luke 7. Here's how it reads in the old King James Version. "Jesus went into a city called Nain.... When He came nigh to the gate of the city, behold, there was a dead man carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow. And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her and said unto her, 'Weep not.' And He came and touched the bier.... And He said, 'Young man, I say unto thee, Arise.' And he that was dead sat up and began to speak. And He delivered him to his mother." (Luke 7:11-15)

Jesus, it says, touched the bier. A bier is the stand on which a coffin is placed. Newer translations don't use the word "bier" but "coffin." Say bier and people think beer, the alcoholic drink. Back in college, we would sometimes be enjoying our beer (responsibly, I hope!) and would sing, "In heaven there is no beer, that's why we drink it here."

As I said, I was in chapel. The professor sitting next to me said he had recently heard a sermon on this text. The preacher titled the sermon, "In Heaven There Is No Bier." A memorable title; our wonderful prospect!

## **June 20**

It's Wednesday, "hump day," half way to the weekend. Today your energies may be flagging, your zest for work may well be gone.

Observant Jews take great delight in the fact that their day of rest, the Sabbath, is always coming. Always. There's no time in their week when Sabbath rest and renewal aren't just around the corner. That's an expectant attitude that must revive their flagging spirits!

We Christians can learn from that. Our Savior says, "I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28). That means that even in the depths of work, even on "hump day," His rest and renewal are just around the corner.

"Are we there yet?" Kids love to pester their parents with that question. Looking for some rest and spiritual renewal? Put that question to your heavenly Father. His answer? "You're almost there!"

Dear Father, may the promise of coming times of refreshment help me through this day. Amen.

## **June 21**

### **No minute for this date**

## **June 22**

You know the term "culture war." A friend of mine says that people who follow the Christ of the Bible should think of the "culture war" as the home mission field to which God is calling us.

I thought of that Wednesday when I was privileged to sit in the East Room and hear the President explain his veto of a bill permitting embryonic stem cell research. He said there are more and more ways to produce stem cells without creating and destroying human life. Surely his words will be misrepresented, I thought, and they were. Mrs. Clinton vowed to "lift the ban on stem cell research." That's a crass misrepresentation. (New York Times, June 21; A21)

This one battle in the culture war can be won by people opposed to the destruction of embryos. But "culture war as mission field" requires more than opposition. It calls us to present our position as a demonstration that ours is a God of life and not death and that we love this God because He cares for the weakest and the least. If you and I are sincere in our profession of faith, then it's not enough to fight and maybe even win the culture war but, as my friend says, to see culture war as mission field.

## **June 25**

While you're doing whatever it is you do this Monday, Bobby Cutts Jr. is being arraigned in Canton, Ohio. Cutts is charged with two counts of murder, one for killing 26-year-old Jessie Davis and the second for killing their unborn child, due July 3<sup>rd</sup>.

While you're doing whatever it is you do this Monday, extradition is being sought in Illinois for Christopher Vaughn. Vaughn was arrested in Missouri and charged with eight counts of first-degree murder. Vaughn is charged with murdering his wife Kimberly and their three children, Abigayle, Cassandra, and Blake.

In both cases the victims had church connections. They weren't godless people who didn't give a rip about God and Christ. They did...and were still murdered. Just as surely as God sends His material blessings upon the just and unjust (Matthew 5:45), He sometimes lets His people be struck down by terrible sin. That you may have gone to church yesterday is no missile defense shield.

Christian confidence is a cautious quality. "Sin is crouching at the door" (Genesis 4:7). Pray for protection from the evil others would do to you. More sobering, pray that you the sinner do not do evil yourself. "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." No Monday, no day is routine in a sinful world.

## **June 26**

When I was a parish pastor and visited the nursing home, I often met Jesus Christ. That's right. A 60 something man, short gray hair, would come up to me and say, "I'm Jesus Christ." "Glad to meet you," I answered, or something like that. I knew he was a bit off, but then again, I had to wonder.

Senator Barack Obama told the United Church of Christ that the religious right "hijacked" faith and divided the country. The Senator's convinced he's speaking God's truth, but his word leaves me unconvinced. Rudy Giuliani raises the eyebrows of Roman Catholic bishops with his equivocations on abortion. Says he's against it but shouldn't impose his views on others. Must make God wonder, almost.

Competing claims about God and faith are confusing. Check the Bible (Acts 17:11) and then, "Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind" (Romans 14:5). My nursing home friend was a bit off, but certainly not as far off as a self-righteous judgmental person. "I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of Mine, you did for Me" (Matthew 25:40). Americans would do well to wonder a bit more and humbly check the Bible...or else an Ayatollah or PC person will come to a neighborhood near you.

## **June 27**

On this date in 1880 Helen Keller was born in Tuscumbia, Alabama. When she was only two-years-old, disease took away her sight and hearing, something that would have consigned her to an isolated and insignificant lot were it not for the persistent love of her parents. Eventually Helen was paired with Anne Sullivan who taught her to read Braille and to speak. Helen Keller blossomed into a richer life than many people who take sight and speech for granted. She traveled, lectured, and authored books translated into over 50 languages.

When that illness devastated Helen, her parents may well have questioned God. When something unwelcome comes to you, same question: Why, God? John chapter 9 tells that Jesus came upon a grown man who had been blind from birth. The disciples reflected a self-righteous judgment, common in that day and ours. "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" You know, what did I do that I'm getting dumped on??? Jesus waved the question off. "This happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life" (9:3). Then Jesus restored sight. When life's events have blinded you to God's goodness and stopped your praises, His Spirit opens our eyes and mouths to understand trouble in new ways. Your troubles are God's opportunities.

## **June 28**

A key to relationships is not simply spending time together but how you spend time together.

A scientist named Aylmer married a beautiful woman named Georgiana. They loved each other deeply and, since life was slower back in those days... The story is set in the 1700's... Aylmer and Georgiana spent much time with each other. But...

Georgiana's beauty had one flaw, a small crimson birthmark on her left cheek. The more time they spent together, the more Aylmer obsessed about that one physical flaw. Georgiana, wanting to please her husband, also obsessed about it and consented to let her husband, the scientist, concoct a potion to remove the mark that was ruining their life. He did...and in removing the birthmark he also took Georgiana's life. Her imperfection was part of her being.

The story is called "The Birthmark" and was written by Nathaniel Hawthorne.

How will you spend your time together this holiday? Sin makes us rationalize our obsession with other people's imperfections. The love of Christ suggests a better way. "Love covers a multitude of sins" (1 Peter 4:8).

## **June 29**

Wednesday evening I was in a car equipped with Sirius satellite radio and I listened to an old time radio drama. Katharine Hepburn played a young wife who was discovering disturbing things about her new husband. To my surprise, the show ended with no resolution. For the next installment, I guess.

Next came Superman. Lois Lane was getting deep into trouble, not knowing she was about to walk into a quicksand bog. Superman didn't know where to find her...and that's where that radio show ended. Come back tomorrow.

More than helping pass time, listening to those old time shows reminded me that of all the units of time, the day is most basic. "And there was evening and there was morning, the first day" (Genesis 1:5).

Today the ballyhooed iPhone comes out. It's faster than Superman and, if information is power, the iPhone and such gizmos can make you more powerful than the man of steel. Not bad, but bad goes your mood when you let these devices put you under the tyranny of "Now," of "ASAP." "Sufficient for the day is its own trouble" (Matthew 6:34). Why ratchet up the day's troubles with instant communication? I'll buy a satellite radio and listen to each day's installments before I buy the iPhone.