

The Meyer Minute for May 1, 2003

By act of Congress and presidential proclamation, today is a national day of prayer.

Almighty God, who hast given us this good land for our heritage: We humbly beseech Thee that we may always prove ourselves a people mindful of Thy favor and glad to do Thy will. Bless our land with honorable industry, sound learning, and pure manners. Save us from violence, discord, and confusion; from pride and arrogance, and from every evil way. Defend our liberties, and fashion into one united people the multitudes brought hither out of many kindreds and tongues. Endue with the Spirit of wisdom those to whom in Thy Name we entrust the authority of government, that there may be justice and peace at home, and that, through obedience to Thy law, we may show forth Thy praise among the nations of the earth. In the time of prosperity, fill our hearts with thankfulness, and in the day of trouble, suffer not our trust in Thee to fail; all which we ask through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (The Book of Common Prayer, p. 820)

The Meyer Minute for May 2, 2003

The story goes that a Montana sheepherder got sick and was taken to the hospital in Fort Benton. His sheep dog followed his master to the city and kept watch outside the hospital door. When the sheepherder died, his body was taken to the train to be shipped back to his family in the East. The dog, Shep was his name, appeared at the train station, cried for his master and vainly chased the train down the tracks.

For the next five and a half years, Shep met every train that came into Fort Benton, hoping that one of the passengers getting off would be his master. Shep became well-known and kindly people took care of him but he refused to be taken to anyone's home. He had but one devotion: waiting for his master to return. Shep's devotion did not waver until the cold winter day in 1941 when he died.

It's a true story and when I read it, I couldn't help but think, if only I, if only we could demonstrate that same unwavering devotion to our heavenly Master.

The Meyer Minute for May 5, 2003

I'm sitting in 23B, an aisle seat, handwriting some notes, when a flight attendant stopped the service cart right next to me. After serving me, she leaned over and asked, "Did you go to parochial school?"

"Yes."

"I could tell by your penmanship."

"Thank you. Almost every day we had to practice our penmanship."

Childhood experiences leave indelible traces on our adult lives. Some traces are good. For most of us, turning into our father or mother is not a bad thing. But the child victimized by abuse may well become an abuser. The child of an alcoholic

shows unique symptoms. The child of divorce is scarred. Parents and educators try to leave positive traces but being sinners, it just doesn't always happen.

My 7th and 8th grade teacher, Mr. Heidemann, once told us that he wasn't satisfied with his writing so he took a special course in penmanship. The result was exquisite penmanship. That reflects the best thing I learned in parochial school, not penmanship, but a God who forgives sinners and then gives us the grace to improve.

The Meyer Minute for May 6, 2003

According to one newscast Monday there were 84 reports of tornadoes...275 reports of hail...and 29 dead. Devastated lives...and I...most of us...go about our daily business.

Luke 10: The commandment, "Love your neighbor as yourself," prompted a religious person to some hair-splitting, "Who is my neighbor?" Who out there do I have to, must I help? Jesus responds with the parable of the Good Samaritan and reframes the whole issue. The parable shows the question isn't "Who is my neighbor" but this fact: You are the neighbor to everyone you meet.

The Good Samaritan is a fictional character. Were he real, I'd guess his helping wouldn't be a one time thing, something he did to get into the press, a.k.a Bible. If he's real, he's developing the character trait of helping others. There's the soul-searching question. How's your character development coming along? A real Good Samaritan...or only in your dreams?

The little town of Fair Play, Missouri, was wiped out by a tornado. Fair Play. "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." (Matthew 7: 12) Hi, neighbor!

The Meyer Minute for May 7, 2003

Larry Eustachy is now the former basketball coach of Iowa State. He resigned because his drinking and partying habits with college students came to light. William Bennett, champion of conservative moral values, admitted he has a gambling habit, having lost millions. Both have promised to give up their respective vices and we hope that years from now these incidents prove minor in their biographies.

"A good name is more desirable than great riches; to be esteemed is better than silver or gold." (Proverbs 22:1)

Writing about the Ten Commandments, Martin Luther said, "Besides our own body, our wife or husband, and our temporal property, we have one more treasure which is indispensable to us, namely, our honor and good name, for it is intolerable to live among men in public disgrace and contempt." (Large Catechism)

Also in the news this week were transcripts of hearings chaired by the late Senator Joseph McCarthy, the communist witch hunter of the 1950's. His reputation is permanently shot. "If you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall." (1 Corinthians 10:12)

The Meyer Minute for May 8, 2003

Former Oklahoma congressman J.C. Watts recalls that, "often there wasn't money to buy enough for everybody. My mother had a solution. When she put the platter on the table, she often didn't take a helping for herself. Like most kids, I was usually so busy trying to get my share I never realized that Mama rarely got hers. Instead, she would sit quietly on the couch, reading a magazine or doing the mending while we noisily plowed through Mama's good cookin', never giving her a second thought. Afterward, I would see her in the kitchen, cleaning up and making her meal out of what she found left over on our plates." (What Color is a Conservative?" p. 26)

Good mothers do things like that, and in so doing they model how all of us should offer ourselves as "living sacrifices," reflecting God's will that we love Him and serve others. We probably didn't know all they did for us when we were growing up, but hopefully our lives show it now. "By love serve one another." (Galatians 5: 13)

The Meyer Minute for May 9, 2003

Years ago, a March day I think, I set out to drive to my mom's house in Chicago. When it started to snow, I-57 quickly became packed with snow and slick. Bitter cold winds were blowing across the farm fields, blowing hard. Traffic crept along at 5 miles an hour. Exit ramps were treacherous, so I couldn't turn around, I couldn't call anyone (no cell phones then). I was scared...and I got angry. My mother's a stickler for being on time...I was angry about the tongue lashing I was sure to get.

The 4 hour trip turned into a 10 hour ordeal. Wow, I sharpened my tongue to answer every conceivable criticism for being late! So when I finally pulled into her driveway, I was ready for her...or so I thought. She came running at me, tears pouring down her cheeks, gave me a big hug, and sobbing, gasping for air, she said, "I thought something had happened to you." I wasn't ready for a mother's love.

Scared, angry, defensive...Because we easily forget that we are loved, we set aside this weekend to thank God for His love through our mothers.

The Meyer Minute for May 12, 2003

Dr. Eugene Lowry tells of a graduate student, a dancer, who made this observation: If you want to move forward, you must relinquish the balance with which you are standing.

Michael Jordan was fired as the president of the Washington Wizards. Even legendary Air Jordan must have felt off balance when he got the news.

If we're sometimes thrown off balance because of poor job performance, there are other times when it's the result of our own sin. Larry Eustachy is experiencing that because of his drinking, William Bennett because of his gambling.

Other times imbalance is not because of our job performance or our sins. Terrible tornadoes in the Midwest have thrown countless lives out of balance.

So it happens. How do you gain stability? Plant your foot into the future. God said to Abraham, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you." (Genesis 12:1) One foot at a time, Abraham moved forward. There are few constants in life, perhaps none save this, the One who says, "Follow me". (Luke 9:59)

The Meyer Minute for May 13, 2003

Michael Shaw wrote an interesting article for last Sunday's St. Louis Post-Dispatch. Washington Park, Illinois, population 5300, has had a tough go of it for decades. Declining economy, declining population, 15% of housing stock vacant, dilapidated, overgrown, or burned out.

Ah, but now there's hope. Strip clubs, 6 of them so far, attracting over 200,000 visitors a year from surrounding communities. We're talking tax dollars! And these are civic-minded businesses. Why, the new Hustler club donated \$20,000 so the village could buy a new squad car, not mention their generosity in giving \$4,700 to candidates in the last election.

My colleague Professor William Utech shared something interesting Friday. Somewhere he learned that people who handle poisonous snakes are not as likely to be bitten when they grab the snake as when they try to put the snake down.

Thanks again to Michael Shaw for his article (May 11;D1). Someday good people in Washington Park will decide that this isn't the kind of town they want...but by then they'll have a devil of a time trying to get rid of the snake.

The Meyer Minute for May 14, 2003

The New York Times, "All the News Fit to Print," is now cleaning up the mess created by former reporter Jayson Blair. Blair was fired for fabricating new stories.

Back in 1899 the editor of the New London, Connecticut, "Bee," advertised,

"Here various news we tell, of love and strife,

Of peace and war, health sickness, death and life...

Of old mismanagements, taxations new,

All neither wholly false, nor wholly true." (Mitchell Stephens, "A History of News." p. 201)

Can you believe what you read?

A friend of mine down at the gas station likes to say, "Dale, when the Big Guy calls me, I'm going to tell Him I'm a friend of yours."

To which I say, "You know, that won't be your normal audit. H&R Block won't go with you. You have to appear on your own."

Which is why, I'm convinced, a thinking person will be driven to read the news and the Bible, too. We are responsible for knowing the truth and one day you and I will be called to answer for it.

The Meyer Minute for May 15, 2003

From a church newsletter I picked up the following "Diary of a Bible." The author is unknown.

January: A busy time for me. Most of the family decided to read me through this year. They kept me busy for the first two weeks, but they have forgotten me now.

February: Clean-up time. I was dusted yesterday and put in my place. My owner did use me for a few minutes last week. He had been in an argument and was looking for some references to prove he was right.

March: Had a busy first day of the month. My owner was elected president of the PTA and used me to prepare a speech.

April: Grandpa visited this month. He kept me on his lap for an hour reading from 1 Peter 5:5-7. He seems to think more of me than do some people in my own household.

May: I have a few green stains on my pages. Some spring flowers were pressed in my pages.

How does the diary of your Bible read this far into the year?

The Meyer Minute for May 16, 2003

A baby was baptized in our church last Sunday, a baptism accompanied by an old bit of ritual. When the pastor invited the congregation to join in praying the "Lord's Prayer," as Protestants call it, the "Our Father" as Roman Catholics call it, he placed his hand on the baby's head. That little gesture symbolized that the congregation was praying that prayer of Jesus on behalf of the child.

"Our Father," not my Father. American society obsesses on the individual. That's not true in every society and it wasn't the case in bible times. Read the Bible carefully and you'll see that the pronoun "you", which we instinctively take to mean one individual...Read carefully and you'll see that many times that word "you" is plural. It's out of that plural mindset that we pray for one another. So the pastor placed his hand on the baby's head and we all prayed for that baby.

Maybe you don't think of yourself as a great intercessor for others. Try something simple today. Identify someone and for that person pray, "Our Father who art in heaven."

The Meyer Minute for May 19, 2003

Did you connect the dots?

Scott Peterson was charged with two murders, the murder of his wife Lacy and the murder of their unborn child.

Terry Nichols, charged with 160 counts of first-degree murder for his role in bombing the Murrah Federal Building, was charged with two additional counts...for two unborn children killed with their mothers.

27 states already have laws against the homicide of a fetus. The White House wants it made a federal crime.

Are we connecting the dots here? More and more we see the recognition that an unborn child is just that, an unborn child, who is entitled to the protection of society.

Carrie Ann Lenz was one of the pregnant mothers killed that April day in 1995. Only the day before she learned she was carrying a boy. Her mother, Doris Jones, said, "She was very excited about having this baby. He was a part of us already." (Dallas Morning News, May 15, 2003; 6A)

Pro-choicers, isn't it time to connect the dots? "He was a part of us already."

The Meyer Minute for May 20, 2003

Riyadh...Casablanca...Last week's attacks were the latest battles in the war on terror...and we lost.

"God is love." (1 John 4:8) That is a self-less love, a love that gives gifts to all. God is no respecter of persons (1 Peter 1:17). Jesus said, "He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous." (Matthew 5:45)

That's God, but what is the essence of terrorism? Terrorists take it upon themselves to deny life to innocent people, and life in this world is the place where we are to receive the many gifts of God's love. "The Lord is righteous in all His ways and loving toward all He has made." (Psalm 145: 17) Terrorism respects some persons but not others, sets aside the Golden Rule (Matthew 7:12), and does injustice in the face of a just God.

"Let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never failing stream." (Amos 5:24)

That's the goal. So we continue to pray "that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness." (1 Timothy 2:2)

The Meyer Minute for May 21, 2003

"Children have never been good at listening to their elders, but they have never failed to imitate them." (James Baldwin, quoted in "What Color is a Conservative" by J.C. Watts, Jr., p. 60)

For sure! Prosecutors filed charges against 15 Chicago area high school seniors for viciously hazing juniors. Apparently a parent illegally supplied the kids with a keg of beer. In another Chicago-area incident, young people broke into and trashed a home while the owners were away.

"Children learn what they live," is the old adage, so the obvious moral for parents is to examine the lifestyle they're modeling for their children. But what about young parents, like the keg providers or the ones who didn't teach respect for property...parents convinced at the moment that their modeling is good for their impressionable children? And what hope is there for the older person who realizes too late the error of earlier parenting ways?

To tell you the truth, I'm not sure...but I do draw one conclusion: We adults need to scrutinize our behavior daily. If you're interested, read the Old Testament prophets. They won't exonerate all your ways.

The Meyer Minute for May 22, 2003

I'm eager to see how this one turns out. Annika Sorenstram plays golf today with the men of the PGA. Another installment in society's confusion about the relation of the sexes! When the topic is men and women, someone is sure to put the Bible down for teaching that women are inferior.

Not true. "The Gospel of Thomas," a book written in the style of the biblical gospels, didn't make the cut when the church decided what books to include in the Bible. One reason was the Gospel of Thomas taught that a good woman might be given a soul when she gets to heaven. On the other hand, 1 Peter made the cut. It describes believing women as "co-heirs of the grace of life." (1 Peter 3:7)

A classic chapter is Proverbs 31. The woman it describes is no veiled wallflower!

The Bible says more, especially about husbands and wives, but inequality is not taught. I wish Annika Sorenstram well...and I'll listen with great interest as the pundits try to figure out what our Creator has told us already.

The Meyer Minute for May 23, 2003

In 1800 Thomas Jefferson wrote John Breckinridge and described how highly we Americans value self-government. "Of the sacredness of this law our countrymen are impressed from their cradle, so that with them it is almost innate." (in James F. Simon, "What Kind of Nation," p. 107)

This Memorial Day weekend we reinforce that "almost innate" sense of living as free people under the rule of law. We especially remember those who died in Iraq. It wasn't for oil they died, a cynical and discredited view. It wasn't primarily to free the Iraqis and rid the world of a bully. It was more to eliminate weapons of mass destruction that could threaten us. It was more to weaken those who would terrorize us. Above all, they died that we might live freely. To live and rule ourselves as free people is for us, as Jefferson said, a sacred law and for that they gave their lives.

It is "almost innate," and so we don't take their sacrifice for granted. Americans pause to remember and we Christians add our thanks to God.

The Meyer Minute for May 27, 2003

Back to work after the holiday? Several of my friends were laid off recently. In July American Airlines will be laying off over 3,100 flight attendants.

When you've been laid off, you obviously face problems and some are spiritual. You're tempted to become angry and bitter at your former boss. If the boss is Christian, you're tempted to label him a hypocritical Christian.

Whether a smart move or not, the boss had the right. That's the law, the requirement side, the expectation side of life in this world. The Gospel of Jesus' forgiveness and hope doesn't prevent lay-offs but can help you cope. The inspiration He gives leads you to avoid bitterness, although bitterness is obviously quite inviting at the time. To respect the boss' right to lay you off but still be kindly minded is not easy...but you'll be better off for it.

"Let those also who suffer according to the will of God entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right." (1 Peter 4:19) Remember your faith is in God more than in people.

The Meyer Minute for May 28, 2003

The Duke of Windsor died on this date in 1972. He had abdicated the throne of England in 1926 to marry his love, Wallis Warfield Simpson. Ah, Romance! Ah, Love!

At the other extreme there's the "Divorce Bus." Once a month the "Divorce Bus" makes its run in Miami-Dade County, serving people who have filed for an uncontested divorce. The Washington Post reports that one day the Divorce Bus facilitated 26 divorces in 45 minutes. (Internet, May4)

C. S. Lewis observed that "being in love" is a feeling...and no feeling lasts forever. "But of course, 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. It is on this love that the engine of marriage is run: being in love was the explosion that started it." (From Mere Christianity, quoted in For all the Saints I, 271f.)

Stay off the bus! Get out your will power and spend some time today tuning up the engine of your marriage.

The Meyer Minute for May 29, 2003

You go to Europe and you visit big old cathedrals that are little more than tourist destinations. Some have even been converted into museums. I think many American Christians have a museum mentality about church. A curious place, focused on the past, the keeper of ancient stories.

Today the church celebrates Ascension Day. It's the day when Christ's visible appearance was removed from human sight. Christ Himself isn't gone. "I am with you always," He promised. (Matthew 28:20) It's just that we can't see Him...now...but we will in the future. "Men of Galilee, why do you stand here looking into the sky?" the angel asked the disciples after Christ's ascension. Reminds me of gawking in old cathedrals. "This same Jesus who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen Him to into heaven." (Acts 1: 10-11)

This is not to belittle the past. Forgiveness for sin and the hope of resurrection comes from past events. Ascension reminds us that the church is no museum. Like the eyes in your head, faith looks forward. Are you?

The Meyer Minute for May 30, 2003

I missed it yesterday! Bob Hope turned 100. I've got a reason, though, for being late. Yesterday was Ascension Day and I thought it wiser to offend Bob Hope than to disappoint God. Belated congratulations, Mr. Hope.

His tours to military bases were a great service. During World War II President Roosevelt ordered some entertainers be deferred from the draft. Bob Hope had wanted to enlist but was told, "Look, just do what you're doing and entertain troops, because you're valuable doing that." ("American Way," May, 2003; p. 35)

"You're valuable doing that." I trust that you're valuable to others for doing the things you do. You're not doing it just for yourself, are you? Of course, serving others isn't always appreciated. During Viet Nam, Bob Hope told the troops, "I wanna tell you guys, the country's behind you 50%!" (p.35)

Still, we haven't ascended yet because there are good works to do. "Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms." (1 Peter 4:10)

Happy Birthday, Mr. Hope!