

## October 2007

### October 2

No Meyer Minute

### October 3

Britney Spears angers me. A judge took away custody of her children and gave them to Kevin Federline. The bond of parent and child comes from the Creator. So severing that bond, as Britney's conduct has, is something for which she will answer to God. Anyone can swear, "I'm a good, loving parent" and maybe she will, but heaven is silent for now. Who doesn't keep silent are the courts, the real court that can take away custody and the court of public opinion which sets the mood for so much in our society.

I picked up a new translation of Elie Wiesel's Night, his small volume of the huge horrors he experienced in Auschwitz and Buchenwald. What struck me, Britney being on my mind, was the strong, strong bond between the teenager Elie and his parents, a God-given bond nurtured by the parents. When the Nazis were removing the Wiesels and other Jewish families from their home town, Elie wrote, "The children were wandering about aimlessly, not knowing what do with themselves to stay out of the way of the grown-ups." (p. 15)

How many children today are in the same confusion because of the antics of their parents? Heaven may be silent before irresponsible parents but the court of public opinion should not be.

### October 4

A story teller sometimes twists the familiar in order to get the point into your heart. "A man had two sons," begins Jesus' familiar parable in Luke 15. "The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them. ...the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living." Reduced to poverty, now repentant, the prodigal returns home. "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you," he confesses and the waiting Father welcomes him back.

Today the Museum of Biblical Art in New York opens "Images of the Prodigal Son; The Art of Forgiveness." Many of the 70 prints, sculptures and paintings tell the story just as Jesus told it, but two give the old story a poignant twist. In an 18<sup>th</sup> century painting by Jean-Baptiste Greuze the prodigal returns home, only to discover that his father has just died. In a 20<sup>th</sup> century painting by Thomas Hart Benton the prodigal returns, only to find his father's home abandoned and in total disrepair. The artists' twist on the story makes the point: the knife of guilt will turn in your heart for a long, long time if you don't make peace while you can.

### October 5

(Big swallow) Good luck to the Chicago Cubs. There, I said it, and you don't know how hard it was. Diane and I grew up in Chicagoland and are White Sox fans. Kids in grade school used to have playground arguments and fights between Cub and Sox fans. (Another

big swallow) Diane and I have lived near St. Louis since 1973 and so our favorite National League team is the St. Louis Cardinals, arch rivals of the Cubs. But the Cardinals, like the White Sox in the American League, died this year.

It's humbling. It's not unlike those times when you say something, someone disagrees, and you realize you were wrong. It's like those times when someone tells you, "I told you so!" and you have to admit, "Yeah, you did." Life is filled with these little things that make us swallow our pride.

St. Paul told about a vision of heaven but added, "To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh," perhaps some chronic disease (2 Corinthians 12:7). So even great saints get served humble pie. Right now my humble pie is being served by Cub fans. I swallow hard and wish them well.

### **October 8**

Has anyone ever come up to you and let you have it, bombed you out of the blue? Years ago a mother let me have it because the church youth group wasn't what she thought it should be. "Where did that come from?" I wondered but soon figured it out. She was angry about her son's police problems and I and the youth group were convenient targets. Call it "displaced" or "redirected" aggression.

David Barash has written "The Targets of Aggression" in the latest "Chronicle of Higher Education" (October 5). When scientists gave regular electric shocks to a rat, the rat showed physiological signs of great stress, but when a rat had a stick to chew on, the shocks produced less stress because the rat redirected its pain to chewing on the stick. Our human experiences tell the same story. When someone feels pain, they often cope by redirecting their pain toward someone else.

We're wired to do something with our pain. So what should you do when you're the one hurt, when you want to lash out? Or...what if you're the one dumped on, bombed out of the blue? "Those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good" (1 Peter 4:19). Chew on it with prayer.

### **October 9**

Chad Shieber, a 35-year-old policeman from Midland, Michigan, died Sunday while running in the Chicago Marathon. Although temperatures Sunday were record setting, Mr. Schieber's death wasn't due to the heat but to a heart condition, mitral valve prolapse.

"Marathon" is the name of a plain in Greece. In 490 B.C. the mighty Persian Empire invaded Greece and a courier named Pheidippides was sent by the Athenians to get help from the Spartans. He ran 150 miles in two days. It's also said, perhaps not true, that when the Greeks defeated the Persians Pheidippides ran to Athens, announced the victory, and dropped dead.

Long races are pictures of the marathon of life. "The length of our days is seventy years—or eighty, if we have the strength; yet their span is but trouble and sorrow, for they quickly pass, and we fly away." (Psalm 90:10) In running your life's marathon, keep the goal in sight. "The time has come for my departure. I have fought the good fight, I have finished

the race. I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for His appearing.” (2 Timothy 4:8)

## **October 10**

I was talking with some friends about some unpleasant situation. The specifics I no longer remember. “Doesn’t sound like it was handled very nicely,” I said. To that my friend said, “Not very Christian.”

The word “Christian” seems to have become a synonym for “nice” or “live and let live,” or “no one is going to hold you accountable for what you do,” or “let’s just get along,” or some such thing. So goes this redefinition of “Christian.”

That’s a world away from the Jesus Christ I meet in the Bible. You remember? The Christ so angry that religious people were keeping others away from God that He turned over their tables in the temple courtyard? (John 2) The Christ who told some people that they were a bunch of hypocrites, children of the devil himself. (Matthew 23) Many times He wasn’t “nice.”

Following Him isn’t always a “nice” experience. Carrying His name often means the wrenching realization that the sin still in us is not a nice thing, it’s intolerable, and we need more spiritual refinement. “Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.” (Psalm 139:23-24)

Isn’t that “nice?” What’s next, “enjoying” sermons?

## **October 11**

Hi, Christian here. I am learning words. Learning words is not easy. Maybe you big people can help me. What does “baby” mean? I pat my tummy and say, “baby.” Mommy and Daddy say, “No, Christian.” I pat Daddy’s tummy and say, “baby.” Mommy and Daddy say, “No, Christian.” I pat Mommy’s tummy and say, “baby.” Mommy and Daddy say, “Yes, Christian.” So I think the word “baby” must mean fat. Mommy is getting fat. She eats a lot. Ice cream. Chocolate milk.

Words are hard to learn. Mommy says, “Christian, you’re getting a brother.” “Brother” must mean a new toy. Mommy and Daddy give me toys. Papaw and Gram, Opa and Oma give me toys. They all fawn over wonderful me. I do not share. It’s all about me.

Mommy says my new toy is coming in February. What’s February?

So Mommy’s getting fat and I’m getting a new toy. I think I have it figured out. Do you big people think you have life figured out? Opa just smiles. “Another writer.”

## **October 12**

“Lindbergh crosses the Atlantic .” “FDR dies.” “ America lands on Moon.”

Those news flashes from the past are important but today they are not exciting, only history. Has the Gospel of Jesus Christ become only history for you, important but still only old history? "Gospel" is an old English word that means "Good News." To qualify as news, a report has to carry word of something new. Can you say that Jesus Christ is good news if His word lies neglected in your life, as outdated as last week's newspaper? "My words are Spirit and they are life" (John 6:63). It's sad that not every sermon on Sunday will come across as news, and good news at that. Finally that will be between the preacher and God but in the meantime you and I have to be investigative journalists, digging into the evidence (our problems and the Bible's message) and, as they say, "getting onto something." That is finding that the old story really is Good News.

"I love to tell the story; for those who know it best Seem hungering and thirsting To hear it, like the rest. And when, in scenes of glory, I sing the new, new song, 'Twill be the old, old story, That I have loved so long."

## October 15

Monsignor Tomaaso Stenico, a senior official in the Vatican , was suspended on Saturday. He was caught on tape making homosexual advances, but saying that he "didn't feel he was sinning." The story was reported by Frances D'Emilio of the Associated Press who commented, " Vatican teaching holds that homosexual activity is sin." Point of information: most Christians would say that it's not just Vatican teaching but the Bible's teaching. Anyway, Monsignor Stenico tried to defend himself, saying the taping by a hidden camera "was done fraudulently." Talk about not getting it!

Getting what? First, that God sees everything. "O Lord, You have searched me and You know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; You perceive my thoughts from afar. If I say, 'Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me,' even the darkness will not be dark to you." (Psalm 139:12, 11-12) Don't play games to get yourself off the hook. To try to dodge your sin means, secondly, that you're not getting repentance right.

So we're being watched...by more than a camera...and when you sin there is forgiveness for sincere repentance. "In conversation be sincere, Thy conscience as the noonday clear; Think how the all-seeing God thy ways and all thy secret thoughts surveys" (Lutheran Service Book, 868, 20)

## October 16

"Every morning mercies new fall as fresh as morning dew." That line from an old hymn is proven true again. Yesterday's papers reported a decline in cancer deaths. Except for American Indians and Alaska Natives who do not have the education and access to health care that most Americans have, we are all benefiting from prevention, like less smoking, from better screening techniques and from improvements in treatment. Since 1993 the death rate from cancer has been dropping 1.1% a year and the drop in the years 2002 to 2004 has been 2.1%.

"Mercies" are the good things that God does for us. The greatest mercy is the forgiveness of our sins because Jesus Christ straightened out our accounts with God, but the good things God does are not limited only to Christians. Here you've got an example, over 10,000 people alive every year, over 10,000 people every year who two decades ago would

have died from this scourge. God does His mercies so silently that we often miss them...but He keeps on doing them.

Thank You, Lord, for all who are working to defeat cancer. Don't let us ever forget that the good things in life come ultimately from You. "Every morning mercies new fall as fresh as morning dew."

## **October 17**

"But you, keep your head in all situations." Paul's advice to the young pastor Timothy jumped out at me. (2 Timothy 4:4). A minister needs to be a calm presence in the midst of people who get agitated by who knows what. The word translated "keep your head" is directed to laypeople in 1 Thessalonians 5:6, "Let us not be like others...but let us be alert and self-controlled" and in verse 8, "Let us be self-controlled, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet."

Today Michael Mukasey begins confirmation hearings before the Senate for the post of attorney general. Tensions were running high in 1995 when he presided over the trial of Sheik Omar Abdel Rahman. When a fire alarm went off in the crowded room, "Mukasey never flinched. In his unflappable, authoritative voice, he told those in the room to be calm and stay in their seats – it was probably a false alarm" and it was. ( Detroit Free Press, October 14; 4A)

A calm personality is available to all. "Martha, Martha,' the Lord answered, 'you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her'" (Luke 10:41 -42).

## **October 18**

What do you spend your time looking at? And what's the looking going to cost you?

Yesterday's Wall Street Journal reported that a company called Acxiom has a data base of 133 million households. When you go online and interact with one of their clients, Acxiom instantly puts a "cookie" on your hard drive. The next time you visit one of their clients' websites, the ads on that site will be specifically targeted to you. For example, if you have visited a site that suggests you're a parent, you'll get an ad for a minivan, not a sports car. My description here is crude; their approach is slick. (B1, 2)

Going online is necessary and maybe a minivan is for you, but "cookie monster" doesn't care. The sale, any sale, is the thing. P.T. Barnum said that a sucker is born every minute. How do you control the addiction to buy?

"Everything in the world – the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does – comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but the one who does the will of God lives forever" (1 John 2:16 -17).

Do you spend time looking at religious art? The Spirit targets your spirit. No purchase required.

## **October 19**

Hi, Christian here! My Mommy is on a business trip. What is a business trip?

It doesn't matter. I am with my Daddy. My Daddy rocks. We are going to have so much fun. We will go to Home Depot and look at tools. We will look at tools and grunt. This is what boys do.

My Daddy and I will eat pizza. We will watch TV, eat pizza, and leave some pizza on the coffee table overnight. Why clean it up? Mommy is not home. She is on a business trip.

Saturday will be the best. Daddy and I will watch football. Daddy and I are for Texas Tech. We will watch Texas Tech and eat the pizza that is left on the coffee table.

My Daddy is great. Mommy is great too, but she always says, "Christian, darling..." I am not a darling. I am a little man. My Daddy and I are going to have the best time.

Opa says, "Christian, little man, you are so blessed to have a good Daddy. Enjoy your days with him, but don't tell your Mommy all that you did." Opa quotes the Bible, "Male and female God created them" (Genesis 1:27 )." "Christian," he says, "we boys are different."

## **October 22**

On Saturday Governor Sonny Perdue declared a state of emergency in 85 counties in northern Georgia . A drought has depleted the water supply, leaving only 3 months of water in Lake Lanier , the reservoir supplying 3 million Georgians.

1 Kings 17 tells that King Ahab had forsaken the pure worship of God, fostering an "all roads lead to heaven" approach toward religion. Result: God turned up the heat, parched earth, 3 years long. God sent the prophet Elijah (true believer, sometimes self-righteous) to a widow at Zarephath (nice lady; not theologically kosher). She had only enough flour left for one last meal before she and her son would die. Elijah asked her for food and gave this promise: "This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says; 'The jar of flour will not be used up and the jug of oil will not run dry until the day the Lord gives rain on the land.'" (1 Kings 17:14 ) She trusted the promise...and she and her son survived.

Somehow, I don't know precisely how, God is in the Georgia drought too. And trusting His promise to never fail us or forsake us (Deuteronomy 31:6), He'll bring through those who trust Him. One way or another, He'll bring water to the righteous and the unrighteous (Matthew 5:45 ).

## **October 23**

A sad anniversary today: October 23, 1983 a suicide bomber crashed a truck bomb into the United States compound at Beirut International Airport . 241 Marines and sailors were killed. My friend, serving in Beirut as a Navy chaplain, tells that people came to him complaining that they hadn't signed up for this. Perhaps to get a G.I. loan for school, perhaps to get away from home and see the world...this wasn't what they expected. My chaplain friend's response went something like this, "What did you expect? A Sunday School picnic?"

"Follow Me," Jesus says. When you've signed up through trust in the crucified and resurrected Christ, a faith worked in you by the Spirit, you're called to a hard way. Years

ago Professor C. F. W. Walther reminded young preachers, "In your sermons you like to treat subjects like these: "The blessed state of a Christian," and the like. Well, do not forget that the blessedness of Christians does not consist in pleasant feelings, but in their assurance that in spite of the bitterest feelings imaginable they are accepted with God and in their dying hour will be received into heaven. That is indeed great blessedness." (Law and Gospel, p. 312)

Jesus says, "In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." (John 16:33)

## **October 24**

A friend surrounded by the fires in southern California e-mailed and asked for prayer. "Yes," I replied, but then thought, "What exactly should I pray for?" I've decided it's a multiple choice prayer.

For the people whose lives are in danger from the fires. "Our God is the God of salvation; and to God the Lord belongs escapes from death." (Psalm 68:20) Lord, we pray that you keep this promise to protect us.

For the people whose homes are threatened. "No evil shall befall you, nor shall any plague come near your dwelling" (Psalm 91:10). Lord, not that we have deserved it, but we pray You fulfill this promise.

Should God not stop the fire from your house: "Cast your burden on the Lord, and He shall sustain you." (Psalm 55:22) Lord, help us cling to You despite what the terrible loss we see.

For the grief that comes with loss. "This is my comfort in my affliction, for Your word has given me life" (Psalm 119:50). Lord, comfort all who grieve.

That people be consoled. "I will be glad and rejoice in Your mercy, for You have considered my trouble; You have known my soul in adversities" (Psalm 31:7). Lord, remind us that You are close.

For hope. "God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying." (Revelation 21:4) Lord, make our tears glisten with Your hope.

A multiple-choice prayer, not multiple guess.

## **October 25**

You're going to lose your job, and so am I. Let's talk about making the transition.

At the end of every work day, many of you could pull a trailer behind your car for all the work and worries you take home. Sometimes you must, but when you make it a regular habit, you're killing the joy and satisfaction of this short thing called life.

But strive to leave work at work, and you'll give relaxed time to yourself, to friends and family. You'll have time to pursue hobbies. You'll have unhurried time to read and talk with

God. You'll be reminding yourself that you're saved by grace, by God's undeserved kindness, and not by any works you do. In short, you'll be transitioning to the time when you no longer work.

Understand, that time is coming. Perhaps retirement from a job you like, perhaps disability, certainly death. Even though there will be tasks that need to be done, you won't be doing them. Someone else will take your place. Leaving more work at work prepares you for the coming transition, not to mention that you'll feel better in so many ways.

"In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength, but you would have none of it." (Isaiah 30:15). Will you?

## October 26

Sunday morning I watched Glenn Beck interview Joel Osteen. He's the pastor of Lakewood Church in Houston, a mega-church that worships 45,000 every weekend. Beck asked Osteen why he doesn't talk much about Jesus. Osteen said Jesus died for our sins, rose from the dead, etc., but "when we get past that" we need instruction for living.

Imagine Christianity as a house. Is Jesus' saving work just the front entrance? Once you're in, when you "get past that," Osteen says your focus is to go from room to room, searching how to live a better Christian life.

Question: Might our shortcomings in Christian living be due to our sins? Don't we need daily forgiveness as much as instruction?

Question: If the stress is on living the Christian life, won't most hearers conclude that's the essence of the Christian Gospel, blessedness by works?

Question: "We preach Christ crucified" (1 Corinthians 1:23). Isn't that a present tense?

Question: "Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified. Are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?" (Galatians 3:1, 3)

The Bible's "house" has one "great room," the death and resurrection of Christ for our sins. Every other room in the house, every "how to live the Christian life," opens from that central great room. Don't ever "get past that."

## October 29

Although the cause was different for Habakkuk than for the newly homeless in California, both share terrible grief. Habakkuk grieved the loss of peace and godliness when his country was invaded and he was most bitter about the silence of heaven. Why do you let this happen, God? Fire victims can ask the same question.

God told Habakkuk to trust Him. "The revelation awaits an appointed time.... Though it linger, wait for it; it will certainly come and will not delay." In the meantime, and the times can be mean, God says, "The righteous will live by faith." (Habakkuk 2:1-4) Like the terrors Habakkuk's land faced, the fires roar that God is against us. This is perhaps the

most difficult challenge of Christianity, to trust God's promises in spite of the evidence, to "live by faith."

Habakkuk's crisis of faith ended with this statement of trust. "Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior." (3:17-19) I pray the Spirit of God will give similar trust to the victims in California.

## October 30

Business has not been good for casual dining restaurants like Applebee's. Some people are staying home because money is tight. Others have opted for the new and healthy offerings at fast food restaurants. "Fast food has become what we are calling 'fast casual,'" said analyst Larry Miller. To recover market share, Applebee's is introducing a new logo, new uniforms, and a new spokesperson, actually, a spokesapple. A Red Delicious apple appears in the commercials and chides people for bad eating habits, things like eating at your desk, text-messaging while you eat, eating alone... You know, the kind of things most of us do. What people should do, the spokesapple says, is go over to Applebee's for lunch or dinner. The new theme: "Together is good."

I hope the new ad campaign works, at least enough to make us think twice about our eating habits. Put two things together. First, "God sets the lonely in families" (Psalm 68:6). Second, God created us so that we need to eat. Put the two truths together and we can conclude that there is something divine in sitting down with family and friends to eat. To improve communication, to teach the younger generation, to be true blue to family and friends, try dining together. Perhaps the family that says grace together will stay together.

## October 31

Halloween... All Hallow's eve. We think about tricks and treats, ghosts and goblins, but more important is what a 34-year-old professor did on this date back in 1517. A man named John Tetzel had come near Wittenberg, Germany, and was telling people that they could get forgiveness of sins simply by giving the church some money. Martin Luther, a professor of theology, had learned that money isn't the way to become acceptable to God. To get a discussion going, he posted some propositions, some theses.

Heinrich Bornkamm has identified four basic thoughts from Luther's 95 theses: First, "God demands the whole man; He cannot be put off with a few occasional penitential acts." Second, "every deed of love transcends all that man may do for himself." Third, the church "is no religious insurance company in which works...can purchase a policy. But she is the communion of believers, all of whom stand before God naked, poor, and insecure." Fourth, "Luther gave us a picture of the true pastor as he envisaged him: as the preacher of the Word who offers up intercessory prayer for his congregation and comforts the conscience with Jesus' assurance that God Himself forgives sins." (Luther's World of Thought, pages 51-52)

Luther learned those basics from the Bible. If you don't believe those basics, you're being tricked.