

PASTOR'S PENNINGS

LESSONS FROM A FIG TREE

Jesus told this parable: "Look at the fig tree and all the trees. When they sprout leaves, you can see for yourselves and know that summer is near. Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that the kingdom of God is near" (Luke 21:29-31).

The newspapers report a lot of bad news: war, robbery, murder, corruption, domestic abuse, even the abandoning of little babies. Life just seems to be one bad thing after another. Will there ever be an end to all this?

"Yes," Jesus says. In a short story that speaks volumes about life, Jesus teaches us about His coming on the last day.

Our loving God has put a schedule in place for this earth. Only God knows exactly when these things will take place. In His divine wisdom, though, God some-times lets us know when things are about to change. Jesus said when trees sprout leaves, you know that summer is near. In the same way, Jesus tells us when we see things such as wars, talks about wars, and earth-quakes, we know His kingdom is near.

We can't just ignore the bad news, and we shouldn't. God doesn't want us to be afraid of these sad events. Rather, He wants us to look past them and see that they are signs that tell us Jesus is coming again. Just as the trees welcome the summer months, so believers will welcome their time with Jesus in heaven.

The second coming of Jesus will bring an end to all that is wrong with the world. It will be a day of final judgment. For those who reject Jesus, there will not be another chance to believe. There will be no escape. Christ is coming back once more and that will be the last day.

Those who trust in Jesus don't fear that day. Believers know that Jesus has forgiven them and promised them eternal life. They simply wait for Him to come and take them to the paradise He has promised. They wait patiently and put up with the world's troubles, knowing that Jesus will change things forever someday.

PRAYER LIST

Romans 8:26 - *"In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express."*

We have had many blessings this last month. Some of the big ones are:

* the baptisms of Ashlie Breann Mesquita and Henry Eisenbeis. The angels of God rejoice and praise the Lord over the repentance of one sinner. We will want to thank the Lord for bringing these two children into the Kingdom of God, connecting them to Jesus and the promise of eternal life in heaven for all who believe. Please pray for the parents who will raise these children .

* Thank the Lord that He has moved David and Lindsay Mesquita to restart Bible Information classes on Tuesday nights. Pray that God would use His Word to lead them into our fellowship at Holy Cross.

* Thank the Lord also for blessing the surgery Andrea Smith had. Pray that she would regain her strength in due time so she can get back to her work.

* Please pray for the Masucci family and especially for our member Ann Masucci. Pray that she will adjust to the loss of her husband and find peace and contentment in the love of Jesus.

* Please also pray for the Glass family as they wrestle with the problems caused by cancer and a weak heart in Charlotte Glass. Ask the Lord, if it is His will, that her visits to the heart doctor will go well and the needed surgery will be able to happen soon and be a blessing for her. Please pray that the Lord will grant them peace in their hearts through Jesus' Word.

STEWARDSHIP

Are Offerings To The Lord Something We Do Only When We Are Not Hurting Financially?

Let us apply the example of the churches in Macedonia to ourselves.

2 Cor. 8:1-5 says: 1) *"And now brothers (Paul is speaking to fellow Christians; he can expect fruits of faith from them), we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. 2) Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up (overflowed) in rich generosity. 3) For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, 4) they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege (grace) of sharing in this service to the saints. 5) And they did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's Will."*

Questions:

1. What could have made giving very difficult for the Christians in Macedonia? (*Poverty.*)
2. Yet how is their giving described? (*Rich generosity. They had a single-minded desire to help their fellow believers in Jerusalem, which neither poverty nor per-secution could destroy.*)
3. What made it possible for them to give like this? (*The grace of God, which produced overflowing joy.*)
4. In what three ways does Paul describe the remarkable nature of the giving of the Macedonians?
 - Vs. 3** - *They gave beyond their ability. How? By the grace of God.*
 - Vs. 4** - *They gave without being compelled to (entirely on their own, they pleaded to give).*
 - Vs. 5** - *They gave themselves first to the Lord. (Christian giving is not an external thing; we worship God with our offerings.)*

EVANGELISM

QUOTES ON OUTREACH ATTITUDES (Adapted by Pastor Strackbein from an article on Leadership in the Mission Counselor Newsletter, July 1998, by Pastor Jim Radloff)

1. He who thinketh but hath no one following him only taketh a walk.
2. Evangelists are to be more like thermostats than thermometers.
3. A good missionary (whether lay or clergy), is not someone who can do the work of 10 people but one who can involve 10 people in the work.
4. A good evangelist is a person with a magnet in his heart and a compass in his head.
5. Nothing so conclusively proves a person's ability to share Jesus with others as what that person does from day to day to apply the message of forgiveness and grace in Christ to himself.
6. Outreach activity must be for the benefit of the lost, not primarily for the benefit of the congregation.
7. A ship in a harbor is safe but that is not what ships were built for. (Substitute the word "Christian" for "ship" and apply it to mission work in our community.)
8. Failure is obtaining outreach goals is the opportunity to begin again, more intelligently.
9. The boss says "go" - the leader says "let's go." (Apply this to what you would like to see changed at Holy Cross.)
10. Your Christian example will lead others to listen to you talk about Jesus.
11. The first step to sharing the Gospel is servanthood.
12. One person with passion about free salvation through faith in Christ alone is more influential than ninety-nine people who have only a passing interest.

*"To this end I labor, struggling with all **HIS** (Christ) energy, which so powerfully works in me" (Col. 1:29).*

*"I **CAN DO** everything through him (Christ) who gives me strength" (Philippians 4:13). Be a **CAN DO** messenger of the Gospel of Jesus Christ!*

KIDS AND TEENS

On July 31st, all teens are invited to participate with Pastor in a video game night at the Norman Public Library starting at 6:00PM.

If you have any summer activities, baseball, equestrian, soccer, golf, gymnastics, etc., please give a copy of your schedule and event times to Pastor by July 5th so he can work with youth leaders to draw up a calendar of events others could watch and cheer. The calendar will be placed on the bulletin board.

TEEN ACTIVITIES

I am attempting to coordinate the agendas of our teens this summer in the hopes that other teens and members of the congregation could watch them and cheer them on.

In June we went to see a baseball game where Robert Hahn was playing. This month we are going to try and join together and participate in an activity involving Jonah Shoenborn and Peyton Buchanan. Peyton is part of a horse drill team which competes all over the state. They will be competing at the Stephens County Fairgrounds in Duncan, OK on July 24th and 25th, and at the August 6-8 Tuttle rodeo and parade. If we can get some teen participation, I will help take them to see Peyton on July 24th.

Jonah Shoenborn is participating in a film competition which will be shown at the video game night for kids 12 and up on July 31st at 6:00PM at the Norman Public Library. Once again, I will be going and will be willing to take other teens with me. The video games will be competitive, so this should be fun for those teens that like that sort of thing. Pastor

EDUCATION

Martin Luther On Education Without Holy Scripture

"But where the Holy Scripture does not rule I certainly advise no one to send his child. Everyone not unceasingly occupied with the Word of God must become corrupt; therefore we must see what people in the higher schools are and grow up to be . . . I greatly fear that schools for higher learning are wide gates to hell if they do not diligently teach the Holy Scriptures and impress them on the young folk. (From: *What Luther Says* by Plass, Vol. 1, p. 449)

CANVASSERS

Four college aged kids are slated to canvass for us from July 13th-July 27th. Kingdom Workers (an organization of WELS lay people) will pay their transportation costs to Oklahoma. A family has offered a vehicle for them to use. We need a couple of families to host the kids. We will probably get two guys and two girls. Whoever hosts them will need to get them breakfast and a ride to church. The Outreach Board would like to ask for volunteers to sign up for providing noon meal lunches and supper. If we don't get enough, the Board will need to get them money to buy their own. The purpose of the canvassers will be to find unchurched people, and if possible, witness to them and give them literature about our church. The areas they canvass will be determined by the Board of Outreach. The current thinking is to expand on what last year's canvassers did around the church, but then also look for areas in Moore where new homes have recently been built. Please pray for this outreach effort into our community.

VBS "THANK YOU"

For all who sent their children, for all the children who came, for all who canvassed, taught, helped, and prayed for our Vacation Bible School activity, we **thank you**. Above all we thank our Lord for having given us this opportunity to reach out to the community and to share the Gospel with all the children who came. We offered classes for children age 3 to 18, and a child training class for adults. Twenty-nine children came the first three days and a few less the last two days. The average adult class attendance was about 5.

RICHARD MASUCCI

Richard Harvey Masucci, age 91, died at home Thursday, June 18th. He was born August 26, 1917 in Saginaw, Michigan to John and Loretta Masucci. He was a member of the US Army and served his country during WWII. He worked several years for a Career Opportunity Center, retiring in 1985. He and his wife Anna, moved to Mustang in 1994 to be near family. He loved his family and especially enjoyed his grand-children. He was a member of Christ Lutheran Church in Michigan and transferred to Holy Cross Lutheran about 15 years ago. He was preceded in death by his parents, two brothers, one sister and a baby daughter. Survivors include his wife of 68 years, Anna of the home, one daughter Vicki Burrow of Mustang, four grandchildren Patti, Larry, Jessi and Zachary and seven great grand-children. Services were held at 10am on Saturday, June 20 at McNeil's Mustang Funeral Service with internment following at Mustang Cemetery. Online condolences may be made at www.mcneilmustangfs.com.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

The results from the survey that was conducted following the committee reports on May 28th have been tabulated. The Norman Mission project was given the highest priority followed by the Renovation project, and then the Education project. All the projects were ranked within 1 point of each other with none of the projects receiving a majority ranking.

The Board of Stewardship has asked each committee to review the results of the survey. After reviewing the results, each committee is to draft a joint resolution on a unified focus involving all three projects. The resolution is to contain a tentative timetable of when to start implementation of the project, how it will be funded, and when it would be finished or operational. The committees will then be meeting together on June 12th to draft a combined resolution on a unified project focus for presentation to the Church Council and Voters' Body.

JUBILEE OFFERING

The purpose of the Jubilee Offering is to reduce Synod's outstanding loan debt of 22 million dollars. Each year Synod must pay 2 million dollars of interest on this debt. By eliminating the 22 million dollar loan debt, the 2 million dollars in interest can be used for other areas of the Lord's work. You may make a contribution to the Jubilee Offering throughout the month of July. The offering will be closed at the Synod convention.

DAY TRIP

For anyone interested, there is still room to go on the One Day Adventure - July 29, 2009. It is a trip to Hutchinson, KS to tour the salt mine. A 48 passenger bus, complete with bathroom, has been rented. Cost is \$72.00 per person no matter what the age and includes lunch. You will only need to bring money to buy any

souvenirs. Everything else is included in the tour price. Leave Holy Cross at 7:00AM, stop in Wichita, KS to see the Cero's Candy Factory. After that it's on to Yoder, KS and their Amish Village for lunch and to do some shopping. Lunch will be roast beef/ham, 3 vegetables, dessert, drink, and tip is included. Then on to Hutchinson, KS to spend at least 2 hours at the salt mine. On the return, a stop will be made back to Yoder, KS for more shopping before arriving back at Holy Cross at approximately 7:00PM. Please contact Suzanne Piña at 741-1686 if you are interested in going. Trip must be paid for by July 20, 2009.

VOTERS' MEETING

A Holy Cross congregation Quarterly Voters' Body pre-meeting will be held Sunday, July 19th following the worship service. This will give everyone the opportunity to review and discuss the items on the Voters' Body meeting agenda. No official action will be taken at this meeting. The agenda items will include Board reports and the recommendations from the Board of Steward-ship on the projects studied by the three stewardship committees.

The Holy Cross congregation Voters' Body Meeting will be held Sunday, July 26th. The Voters' meeting will be held following the pot luck dinner after the worship service. Each Board will be reporting on their activities of the past quarter of the year and their plans for the coming months. Also on the agenda will be the recommendations from the Board of Stewardship on the projects studied by the three stewardship committees. Actions on these recommendations will chart the course of the Lord's work here at Holy Cross in the years to come. Make plans to spend an hour taking part in the Lord's work on Sunday, July 19th and 26th.

SOUP CAN LABELS/CEREAL BOX TOPS

Please continue to bring your Campbell Soup labels and box top coupons and give them to Dina Shoumaker.

BLACKBERRY PICKING

By Barb's mother, Delores Staats

*What bounty has the Lord provided
With these berries plump and sweet!
In the fields and by the roadside
Waiting there for us to eat!
Get your pails and let's go picking!
Don your trousers, shirt and hat;
Don't let bugs or 'squitos stop you;
We'll use spray to care for that!
Have you ever seen so many
That we all could go and pick?
Careful, now, don't eat too many
Or you surely will get sick!
One thing, now, I wish you'd tell me
That I cannot understand;
Why the biggest and the plumpest
Always fall out of your hand!
Watch now! Little creatures feasting
Will be found and without fail;
Worms and bugs and spiders crawling
Somehow fall into your pail!
Wow! It's really hot and sweaty!
And we really need a drink!
Here we could be out there swimming;
We're all crazy, don't you think?
But don't let these troubles stop us
As we scavenge for this treat;*

*On fresh bread with jelly covered
We can hardly wait to eat!
Oh! These thorns and stickers scratch us
And we're tangled in these weeds!
Alas! By these, Lord, You remind us
Of our many sinful deeds.
But they also, too, remind us
Of the crown of thorns You wore
When You came in love to save us
And when all our sins You bore!
Tell me, have the wealthy people
Any riches to compare
With these black and shiny jewels,
Ripe and juicy, hanging there?
Lord, with thankful hearts we praise You
That from all Your treasure store;
Soul and body, You provide us;
We could never ask for more!*

JULY GREETERS

July 5 - Mike & Latischa Huller
July 12 - George & Nancy McKinnis
July 19 - Scott & Carole Peters
July 26 - Jack & LaVon Post

JULY CLEANING LIST

July 4 - Marlon & Karen Henry/Al & Carol Cardwell
July 11 - Eric & Diane Hanson/Chris & Mindy Chaddock
July 18 - Tom & Janet Finney/Gerry & Mary Cartwright
July 25 - Joe & Kim Glass/Jeff & Anice Glass

JULY NURSERY SCHEDULE

	<u>Nursery (Bible Study)</u>	--	<u>Nursery (Church Service)</u>
July 5 - Aimee Barnett	Everett Peters		
July 12 - Carole Peters	Open		
July 19 - Open	Open		
July 26 - Andrea Smith	Will Peters		

JULY MOWING LIST

July 4 - Bill Shoumaker/Byron Shoumaker
July 11 - John Deards/Al Cardwell
July 18 - Jeff Glass/Joe Glass
July 25 - Richard Poulin/Paul Barnett

JUNGLE JOURNAL - May-June 2009

"I had a dream last night," Shawi Miguel said as he started our conversation.

I adjusted my mind to try and understand Miguel's dream the way he understood it. For the Shawis believe that when you fall asleep and enter a dream state, your spirit may leave your body and interact with other spirits, especially the spirits of the dead.

Miguel is a member of our Amazon congregation in Parinari. He was a close friend and neighbor of Leonardo, our dear seminary student who was murdered last year by three gunmen hiding in the bush. In the following words, Miguel described his dream:

"I was lying in bed, when the spirit of Leonardo came by and started talking to my spirit," Miguel began.

"I'm dead," Leonardo said to me.

"I know, I replied.

"Leonardo first showed me the three places where the bullets had entered his body. The bullet holes were now covered over and colored white. Then, Leonardo suggested that we go and visit his house. I agreed and so our spirits started down the path towards his home.

We entered the house where his wife and children were fast asleep. They didn't realize we were there."

"Look at this," Leonardo said. "The house is not being kept clean anymore. That's what happens."

"Then," Miguel continued, "Leonardo said, 'I need to go and buy some soap. I haven't washed for 30 days.' Leonardo's spirit walked away and started down the path to buy some soap."

("Who would be selling soap in the middle of the night?" I wondered to myself.)

Miguel went on: "The dogs could sense that Leonardo's spirit was walking by so they started barking. That's when I woke up. And that's how I knew for sure I had been talking to Leonardo, because I heard the dogs barking at his spirit."

"So what happened after that?" I asked.

Surprised that I would have to ask, Miguel responded: "Leonardo got washed up and then left for paradise."

One catches a glimpse of the Shawi worldview in conversations such as these. Deep tribal beliefs that have been passed down for countless generations are imbedded in such stories.

Shawis believe that if a person "dies before their time," for example, a girl is killed by a jealous boyfriend, a man is murdered by an envious neighbor, or especially when a baby or child dies for any reason, the spirit of the dead one does not immediately leave the village. Instead, the distraught spirit anguished over losing the opportunity to live a full life, lingers in the village. This causes problems for the community, particularly the immediate family of the dead one. Take the case of our dear friend Nora.

Nora and her husband Julio lost their two-year-old, Pati, to what is simply referred to as "jungle fever." The parents were of course devastated. To say that Nora couldn't stop thinking about little Pati is only the half of it.

As Nora lay in bed at night grieving for her lost child, she would begin to hear the child crying and calling out for her! Nora was convinced that little Pati was in the house, trying to find her mother! Nora could hear the spirit wandering about the house. She could not, however, make contact with the spirit. Nora's grief was almost unbearable: Night after night Nora believed she heard her child, crying and distraught, trying to get back to her mom. Nora thought she would lose her mind. Julio decided it was time to do what any sensible Shawi would do: He began to take down the whole house!

Julio and Nora cut the lashings around all the poles and planks of their house, took apart every wall board and floor board, pulled down the thatch roof, and carefully stacked it all up. Then, with the help of others, they carried all their building materials and all their possessions, *less than a couple hundred meters away*, and set about rebuilding the house. There was no doubt in their minds that this simple yet drastic measure would work.

And sure enough: From the first night that they slept in their relocated house, Nora never again heard the anguished cries and all-night wandering of the ghost of little Pati.

Now an anthropologist might label these behaviors a culturally-sanctioned method for dealing with grief. A theologian might ask if demons are at play. The Shawis, however, are convinced that it works: If you move the home of one who died, the forlorn, homesick spirit will be unable to locate the house. The Shawis believe that confusing the spirit of a dead person is a charitable act on the part of the family: The spirit will finally realize it cannot stay and live any more in the village. It has to move on. Usually after about 30 days, according to the Shawis, the spirit will give up and head off to paradise.

As this belief in the return of the spirits of the dead is found in every Shawi community, I decided to make it the topic of one of our jungle seminary workshops. Our native students needed to know how to respond to this traditional belief. Thanks be to God, there are several verses from his Word that may easily be applied to this topic!

I began my workshop presentation with a huge drawing covering the left half of the classroom whiteboard. I drew a close-up of the face of a grieving mother, tears streaming down her cheeks. Her child lay dead on the grassy hill, bundled up for burial. And there, floating in the air was a Casper-like figure, *the exceedingly distraught spirit of the dead child heading straight for the house!* The Sem students were simply riveted to the drawing and my words as I opened our discussion on the dead.

Now the traditional beliefs of the Shawis regarding the spirit after death rest on a couple of fundamental misconceptions. I was more than happy to carefully review them. While reminding the students to give credit to their communities for their understanding of the ongoing existence of the spirit (or soul) after death, what happens to the spirit immediately after death is no secret. God's Word explains it!

Amidst the intense class discussion I joyfully announced that the spirit does *not* linger at all on earth after death. "What could be clearer than the words of Jesus to the dying thief on the cross?" I asked. We raced to find the

passage, Luke 23:43. There it was: “*today* you will be with me in paradise.” “No time for sadness or regret over anything” I said, as smiles of comprehension broke out from one end of the student table to the other. “Upon death, the spirit of the believer is instantly trans-ported to paradise!”

There was a second fundamental misconception that needed clearing up. There is of course a certain logic to the Shawi's belief that the spirit is distraught over its tragic life; of being cut off abruptly from family and friends. What the congregations needed to be taught was that the sheer bliss of Heaven left no room for shedding a tear over what was left behind! Look up Revelation 7:17, I announced. There it was: “*And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.*”

“Simply put, the moment a believer dies, he will never shed another tear;” I explained. “There is no sadness; no yearning for what is left behind, once a believer dies. No wonder Paul wrote, “*I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far*” Philippians 1:23. “Nothing but unfathomable joy and bliss begins the very moment we depart from this earth!” Dipping into early church history, I reminded the students that some Christians went so far as to label death “the second birth.” “Like heading for your own spectacular birthday party,” I mused, “huge banquet all ready, thousands of instant, heavenly friends, and there, the King of Kings, your Savior Jesus greeting you at the door!!”

By now there were quite a few thoughts and images dancing in the heads of the students. Although my own words couldn't come close to conveying the grandeur of Heaven, the workshop was really resonating with everyone! Someone mentioned the obvious: Nora and Julio, like countless natives before them, had moved their entire house for nothing!

It was time to make a second drawing on the right-hand half of the whiteboard. The students eagerly began copying my drawing. (As most of the students have little writing experience, copying pictures is the preferred method of taking class notes! All the precious Bible references were of course carefully recorded on a corner of their drawings.) In my second picture, I drew the spirit of a baptized child leaving the dead body on the hill and ecstatically racing heavenward, arms extended, to be enveloped in the colossal arms of Almighty God. The mother in the second drawing also had tears running down her cheeks. But through her tears there was also a resolute smile. “Amidst her grief,” I triumphantly exclaimed, “she knows in her heart that her baptized child is with Jesus in Paradise! Our Savior reminds us: ‘*Blessed* are the dead who die in the Lord’ Revelation 14:13.”

I had purposely left on the whiteboard the earlier drawing of the small distraught spirit searching for home. The contrast between the agonized little spirit looking for home and the ecstatic little spirit about to be enveloped by God's arms was obviously huge. The drawings represented the extraordinary contrast between the tribe's misconceived traditional beliefs and the glorious biblical truths. “The scene on the left simply never happens,” I intoned, placing a huge red X over the drawing. “‘Man is destined to die once, and after that to face the judgment’ Hebrews 9:27. One is immediately off to eternal bliss in the presence of God or off to eternal punishment with the demons. Always remember students, we have so many native villages that still need to hear the message of salvation through faith in the resurrected Jesus!”

I finally put my marker down. “Brothers, remember what we have learned here today: Every believer in Christ may say along with Simeon, ‘Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant *in peace*’ Luke 2:29.”

Until next time,
Terry Schultz