

REPORT OF THE BISHOP

***“Just then some men came carrying a paralyzed man on a bed.
They were trying to bring him in and lay him before Jesus.”*** (Luke 5:18)

What are the key questions in your heart today?

~How will I survive this tough economy?

~How will I recover from the sickness that has ravaged my body and soul?

~How can I make sense of a complicated world?

~How will I get my kids through college?

~How can I go on, knowing the person I love is hurting so?

~How will I use my gifts to better the world?

~How can I forgive when I don't feel like it?

These questions, and many more, are certainly worth our prayers and ponderings. The question I would like to put before you today is this:

“How are you carrying others to Jesus?”

In a beautiful story in the Gospel of Luke (5:17-26) we see a man brought to Jesus by his friends. The man was paralyzed so they had to carry him on his bed to get him there. The crowds around Jesus were huge. How would they ever get the man to Jesus?

The friends refused to give up hope. They carried the man to the roof of the building where Jesus was speaking and healing. They made a hole in the roof and let their friend down carefully in front of Jesus. ***“When he saw their faith, Jesus said: ‘Friend, your sins are forgiven you.... Stand up and take your bed and go home.’”*** (Luke 5: 20, 24)

Without his friends, the man could not have found Jesus. Without their faith, he would not have been healed. They carried their friend to Jesus.

“How are you carrying others to Jesus?”

The writer of Ephesians (1:17-19) reminded the early Christians of the power that was theirs, not by their own reasoning or doing, but through the grace of our wondrous God in Christ.

***“I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory,
may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him,
so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened
you may know what is the hope to which he has called you,
what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints,
and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power
for us who believe , according to the working of his great power.”***

Do you know how necessary you are? Do you know how needed you are? Can you imagine that there is at least one person who may need you to carry him or her to Jesus?

If so.....no.....*because* it is so....
What would that look like?

Would it look like an old friend forgiving another old friend even before the other apologized?
Would it look like one disciple welcoming the other at service of worship and a shared cup of coffee for conversation afterward?

Would it look like a Confirmand reading Bible stories to a home-bound elder?

Would it look like a visit to a person just home from the hospital for a shared prayer for healing?

Would it look like letting go of your need to control others and the need to have things your own way?

Would it look like offering water to the thirsty, clothing to the naked, food to the hungry, welcoming a stranger, visiting someone in prison or caring for someone who is sick?

(Matthew 25:31-46)

“How are you carrying others to Jesus?”

I don't know about you but I can carry things better when my load has been lightened. I can carry others better if I let go of some of the burdens that hold me back. You know...

Letting go of:

~the need to judge if the person is worthy,

~the need to be thanked,

~the need to be noticed for doing something good,

~the need to be assured the person isn't doing something I do not approve of,

~the need to keep my schedule in line,

~the need to keep my own life in order.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote in *Life Together*...

“...spiritual love does not desire but rather serves, it loves an enemy as a brother. It originates neither in the brother nor in the enemy but in Christ and his Word....This means that I must release the other person from every attempt of mine to regulate, coerce, and dominate him with my love.” (pp. 35-36)

As I continue to make visits to our congregations in the East Central Synod I see some of the burdens communities and individuals are bearing.

THE BURDEN OF ECONOMIC STRAIN

Jobs have been lost. Lives have been challenged. Pensions have been lessened. Families and individuals are getting along with less. Congregational budgets are stressed and mission takes a back seat to survival.

THE BURDEN OF MEANINGLESSNESS

There are leaders and communities who truly do not know why they are gathered. They have lost their God-centered calling. They have made things other than the Gospel of Jesus Christ central in what they do and say.

THE BURDEN OF ANGER AND DOUBT

Families are torn, friendships are shattered and whole congregations change affiliation because of strong emotions that leave most searching for a ***“still more excellent way.”***

(I Corinthians 12:31)

THE BURDEN OF APATHY

When people do not care or cannot care it is nearly impossible to carry others to Jesus.

THE BURDEN OF ABUNDANCE

Although our economy has been tossed about we are still blessed beyond compare. We have the luxury of forgetting the poor, ignoring the needy and ***“passing by”*** (Luke 10:29-37) the wounded that we meet on the road of life.

THE BURDEN OF BIBLICAL ILLITERACY

We have championed our intellectual freedom to be *enlightened* while refusing to cling tenaciously to the Word of God revealed to us through God’s Holy Spirit through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This situation is not new. Listen to what Martin Luther said in 1529: *“The deplorable conditions which I recently encountered when I was a visitor constrained me to prepare this brief and simple catechism or statement of Christian teaching.”*

(Preface to Luther’s Small Catechism)

THE BURDEN OF CERTAINTY

I am not sure I have seen a time in my span of 53 years where so many people are absolutely certain about so many things. In warning educators about this burden Parker Palmer writes: *“...objectivism, which seems to put the object of knowledge above all else...is so obsessed with protecting the purity of knowledge that students are forbidden direct access to the object of study, less their subjectivity defile it.”* (*The Courage to Teach* p. 119)

THE BURDEN OF PRIDE

An age-old nemesis to us all. Martin Luther wrote in *The Large Catechism* while explaining the meaning of The First Commandment as if speaking for God: *“See to it that you let me alone be your God, and never seek another...I am the only one who will satisfy you and help you out of every need. Only let your heart cling to me and to no one else.”*

The friends in our story from Luke had to lay their burdens down to take their friend to Jesus. They needed sharp minds, flexible muscles, agile movements and a strong faith to bring the man to Jesus.

“How are you carrying others to Jesus?”

What do you need to let go of in order to share the good news of Jesus with someone in need? In what ways might you sharpen your mind? In what ways might you become more flexible in order to use your muscles for the benefit of others? What agile movements can you learn to increase your ability to see where others may be hurting or in need? How can you strengthen your faith so that you can be ready with a testimony that mirrors the challenge I read in the margin of my Study Bible recently?

*“For better or for worse, our faith affects others.
We cannot make another person a Christian,
But we can do much through our words, actions, and love
to give him or her a chance to respond...to the living Christ.”*
(Life Application Bible, NRSV, 1990 Edition)

In a time of many questions might we be so bold as to ask:

- ~How can we better serve the people in our community who have not heard the story of Jesus and his love?
- ~How can we lay aside our arguments and our agendas to see and meet the needs of those who are hurting close to home and around the world?
- ~How can we gather in worship to sing, celebrate and proclaim the saving grace of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ so that it will nourish our ministries every day?
- ~How can we be people not only *of* the Word but *in* the Word? How can we study, pray, learn and grow our communities of faith through reading the Bible together?
- ~How can we remember that there are those who are paralyzed with fear, loneliness, grief, anger and separation? How can we lay our burdens down? How can we lift our sisters and brothers up? How might we carry *them* to Jesus?

***“I pray that, according to the riches of the Father’s glory,
God may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being
With power through God’s Spirit,
And that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith,
As you are rooted and grounded in love.”***
(Ephesians 3:16-17)

IN THANKS TO GOD FOR OUR SYNOD STAFF

***"I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints,
And for this reason I do not cease to give thanks for you
As I remember you in my prayers."***

(Ephesians 1:15-17)

JILL ROZNOWSKI (Synodical Mission Administrator)

Jill is often the first voice you will hear on the phone when you call. She makes sure that connections are made, advice is shared, care is given and that people know their needs are heard. She manages our mobility process, guides our yearly Assembly, oversees communications, guides the Call process and does all of this and more with graciousness and love in all things great and small.

DARLENE KALFAHS (Congregational Resource Director)

Darlene loves to teach and loves to help others grow in their faith and their learning about our church. She manages one of the finest Resource Centers in our ELCA. She cares and directs those who are: teaching Sunday School, leading Bible studies, planning Vacation Bible Schools, helping with Confirmation and leading adult forums. She strives to nurture and encourage us all into a lively experience with God's Word. She is talented, caring and a blessing to us all.

DIANE CLARK (Mission Investment Director)

Diane is the first person you will see as you come into our office. No matter what she is doing she will greet you with warmth, attention and personal care. She makes sure that we manage our finances in order to strengthen our mission. She patiently works with Treasurers and Council leaders in helping them understand financial difficulties that often arise. Diane is a person that blesses us with grace and hospitality in all that she does.

KAREN PECKHAM (Discipleship Support Staff)

Karen is helping us out part-time after serving our synod faithfully for over 13 years. She manages the Candidacy Committee and supports the mission of the Resource Center. She also lends a hand to projects of urgency that call for extra help and person-power throughout the year. You will find Karen, as always, to be cheerful, ready to guide you with your questions and earnestly seeking to support your ministries and your discipleship in Christ.

JOY MORTENSEN-WIEBE (Director of Evangelical Mission)

Joy is our 'resident expert' on mission and growth in our congregations. She has been called by our synod and our church to help us focus on leading others to Jesus. She works tirelessly in support of our congregations and small groups who are seeking to enliven their testimonies and their ministries in Jesus' name. She leads retreats, plans our yearly Assembly, and guides our Candidacy Committee. Joy is a treasured and compassionate *partner in the Gospel* to us all.