

19 Pentecost 2016
September 25, 2016
LIFT Outdoor Service
Fremont, Ohio
Grace and peace to you...

Dear Friends in Christ, it is good to be here. And it is good to be here together. Lutherans. Methodists. Episcopalians. L-I-F-T. Living in faith together. For this is the way that Jesus longs for us to live, and to serve, and to love. We were not made to be alone. We need one another. And the world needs what we have to share. The world needs genuine community and the world needs the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

So, I'm now in my 8th week on the job as the Bishop of the Northwestern Ohio Synod. A seasoned veteran. 3 weeks ago, I was walking down the front steps of a church and someone was behind me calling "**Bishop! Bishop!**" So, I stopped, looked around, and thought.... "**I didn't know the Bishop was here**". Then I realized that she was calling for me. So, it takes a little time when God calls you to do a new thing. As I believe God is calling you to do a new thing. L-I-F-T. Living in faith together.

So lift. Lift up your eyes, to **see** the people God wants you to **see**. Lift up your hearts, to **love** the people God wants you to **love**. And lift up your hands, to **serve** the people God wants you to **serve**.

Because sometimes we don't always see who God wants us to see. Now, Jesus liked to tell stories, and He especially loved telling parables. 1 time His disciples came to him and said, "**Why are you always telling parables.**" Jesus says, "**To you has been given the secret of the Kingdom of God. You know how it works. But to those who can't yet see it, everything comes in parables, creating readiness, nudging them toward faith and insight. These are people—whose eyes are shut. Whose ears are closed. Whose hearts are dull. But blessed are your ears, for they hear. And blessed are your eyes for they see**". Though the tricky part is lifting our eyes to see the people God wants us to see.

This morning Jesus tells a parable about 2 men. A rich man and a poor man. Now we never get the name of the rich man, but the poor man is named Lazarus. And

Lazarus is the among the poorest of the poor. He ekes out his existence as a beggar. He relies on the goodness and the grace of others. Lazarus has nothing. Not a nickel to his name.

The rich man, on the other hand, has everything. Purple clothing made from the finest linen. Sumptuous meals on a daily basis. A large home, surrounded by a security gate. The rich man has it all, and yet he has nothing. Because he does not see who God wants him to see. The rich man never lifts his eyes to the plight of poor Lazarus. But how could he not see. How could he not see what was right in front of his eyes?

So, I was on the campus of BGSU a few weeks back to be a guest on a radio show. So, I am walking through campus to get to the radio booth, and there are all of these students walking to their classes. And it was really strange. Well for 1, they all looked like they were about 11 years old. That was strange, but what was even stranger is that none of these young people were talking to one another. They were all looking down... at their phones. All of them. 1 young man looked up at me, but then quickly realized that I was neither Poke man or Pikachu, so he stopped looking up, and he looked back down.

At the rich man's gate, lay a poor man named Lazarus. And he lay there because he is too weak to stand. His body is covered with sores. And he is so hungry, so hungry that he would gladly eat the scraps that fell from the rich man's plate. Food fit for dogs. And there lies the irony. It's the dogs who see the hunger and the poverty. They notice Lazarus and they come and lick the poor man's sores. We don't always see who God wants us to see. Because all too often we've either stopped looking or we're turning away.

But the truth is that Lazarus still lingers at our gate. And we've seen the television footage. Stick people with swollen bellies. Hungry children in Somalia, and Syria, and Haiti. But the truth is that we don't need to sail across oceans to see Lazarus. Lazarus lingers among us. That's why churches run food pantries in Findlay, and Fostoria, and Fremont. That's why there are reduced lunches in our schools. My wife

teaches elementary students, and she is thankful that her school provides breakfast for the children who most need it. Lazarus lingers among us. Closer than we might imagine. That single mom who is struggling with 3 kids, might just be Lazarus. The elderly widow living on Social Security, might just be Lazarus. The couple caring for their mentally challenged daughter, might just be Lazarus. And so we lift. LIFT. We lift our eyes in order that we may see the people God wants us to see.

We lift our eyes to see... and then we lift our hearts to love. In the communion liturgy, Pastor Bob Young will invite us to lift... to lift up our hearts. And we will lift them. We will lift them to the Lord, which is what you do when you're in love. There was once a scribe who came up to Jesus and asked, "Which commandment is the 1st of all?" Jesus said, "The 1st is this. Hear O Israel. The Lord our God. The Lord is one. You shall love the lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind". But Jesus couldn't leave it there. And you know how Jesus can be. Because there's that 2nd part that goes with the 1st part. "**And you shall love your neighbor as yourself.**" And for Jesus, the neighbor always includes the last, the least, the lost, and the Lazarus.

The rich man had a neighbor named Lazarus. And Lazarus lived right outside the rich man's gate. They were neighbors. But there was this chasm between them. There was this great divide. And you know that can happen between neighbors. That can even happen in our families. And maybe you're struggling with a sibling, or a parent, or a child. Lift up your hearts. Or maybe it's your co-worker, or your classmate, or your boss. Let it go. Set it down. Leave it behind. Lift up your hearts. And love the people God wants you to love. Because love is the only thing that can bridge that chasm. Love is the only thing that can cross that divide. And that's why it takes a cross, and a Christ, and Him crucified.

But how do we love those who are the hardest to love? When I was 10 years old, my uncle lost his job. So uncle, aunt, and cousin came to live with us. We had a small house, so my cousin and I shared a room. He was 2 years older, so he was faster, and

stronger, and took up more bedroom space than he was allocated under the agreed upon treaty. So, we fought all the time.

1 time we were scrapping on the kitchen floor, and my mother got between us. **‘What is the matter with you 2?’ Why are you always fighting?’ “I hate him!”** I said. And my mother just looked at me. And when you’re a kid, you know that look. It’s not the look of anger, nor the look of surprise. It’s the look of deep disappointment. The look of, **“How could my son ever say something like that.”**

Later that night she took me aside and said, **“Daniel, we don’t hate people in our family. We love our family.”** I said, **“How am I ever gonna love him?”** Mom said, **“1 like at a time.”** Eat your heart out Mark Zuckerberg, mom was doing Facebook before you were even born. And mom was right, you can change your heart, 1 like at a time. Because when my cousin moved out 10 months later, I cried like a baby. Lift. L-I-F-T. Lift up your heart and love the people God wants you to love.

And finally lift up your hands to serve the people God wants you to serve. And when you put those hands together, like you’ve put them all together, stir in the Holy Spirit, you can make a real difference in the community and in the world. I mean think about what Jesus did with 12. And I know we’re not Jesus, but there’s more than 12 of you here. So lift up your hands and serve the people God wants you to serve. For when you lift your hands and open your hands, it will change your heart.

I was in New Orleans a few weeks back at our National Churchwide Assembly. 900 Lutherans all in 1 place. That’s a lot of Lutherans. So, I was walking to the convention center, wearing my collar, and a man walked up to me and said, **“You got a dollar?”** I said, **“What are you going to do with it?”** He said, **“Get a sandwich over at Maxwells.”** **“Yeah, I’ll give you a dollar.”** Then he asked, **“You a preacher? I do a little street preaching.”** **I’m gonna come hear you preach. Where’s your church?”** **“Well I’m not really a pastor anymore?”** **“They kick you out? You just remember that Jesus had nowhere to lay His head.”** **“They didn’t kick me out.**

They made me a bishop.” “A bi- A Bishop!” You got \$5?” We laughed. And I would have given him \$5, but I only had 2.

I turned to go, and he said, **“Bless you Bishop. In the sweet name of Jesus, bless you!”** He walked away with \$2. But I’m still walking with the blessing he gave me. You never know what God’s gonna do when you do what God calls you to do.

So lift. L-I-F-T. Lift up your eyes, and **see** who God wants you to **see**. Lift up your hearts, and **love** who God wants you to **love**. And lift up your hands, to **serve** who God wants you to **serve**. For God is in the lifting business...

For just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up. Lifted high upon that cross, and then lifted up and out of that empty tomb. “For God so loved the world... For God so loves you... that he gave. He gave. He gave. His heart. His hands. His all.

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In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen