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PRESIDENT'S LETTER - February 09

Fellow Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord:

On February 25, we enter into another season of Lent. It is the high point and the low point of the church year. It is the high point because Good Friday and the cross are the apex of God's plan of salvation for lost sinners. It is the low point because we see the Son of God suffer and die for our many sins. It is a bittersweet celebration for Jesus' followers. It is a sign of the times that the celebration of Lent is fading into the background in many churches and in the lives of many professing Christians. Sometimes as pastors the thought of six extra midweek services seems a burden in the midst of a busy ministry. Our people do not seem to have the time or the inclination to watch and pray for one hour a week. The entire emphasis of Lent with its readings and hymns seems strangely out of touch with our fun-driven society. Perhaps the economic problems we face as a nation will bring us back to a realization of what really is important in our lives.

The events recorded in Matthew 16 were the high point and the low point for Peter and the other disciples. It was the high point because Simon Peter confessed, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." It was upon this confession that Jesus would build his Church. Jesus promised that "the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." The problem was that Peter and the disciples did not understand the concept of the cross and the kingdom of God. The other problem was that Peter did not realize that this was not revealed because of his strength or worthiness. Jesus stressed that this was revealed to Peter by his Father who is in heaven. It seems that this confession kindled nationalistic fervor in Peter.

Jesus threw cold water on the disciples' wrong view of the Messiah and the kingdom of God. "From this time Jesus began to show the disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised" (Matthew 16:21). This is not what Peter wanted to hear. Peter began to rebuke his Savior, "Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you" (Matthew 16:22). Jesus showed Peter and the other disciples the divine necessity of the cross. Peter was setting his mind on the things of men.

Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but

whoever loses his life for my sake will find it" (Matthew 16:22-25). This is not what we by nature want to hear. You know that Peter did not get it. The cross was an offense to Peter and caused him to deny his Lord three times.

We need to realize that we are all subject to these same highs and lows in our lives and in our ministries. There are times that everything seems to be clicking in our ministries as we confess that Jesus is the Messiah and the Son of the living God. Then we begin to think in terms of the things of man instead of the things of God. We are influenced by man's measurement of success as defined by numbers and outward accomplishments. We begin to think in terms of our abilities and strengths. The cross begins to fade from our thoughts and our preaching.

Thank God that during Lent, Jesus shows the divine "must" of the suffering and death of the cross and the miracle of Easter. Jesus calls on us shepherds of his lambs and sheep to set our minds on the things of God as we feed his lambs and tend his sheep. The readings and hymns of Lent bring into focus for our people their sins (low point) and the victory of the defeat of the cross (God's high point). Let us then as pastors take up our crosses and follow Jesus. I pray that this season of Lent will be a time for quiet, personal meditation on these things of God.

When we hit our low points, Jesus lifts up again and again!



John Schierenbeck

NOTES:

Three of our teachers without calls (two graduates) have been called for the next school year. One seminary graduate has been placed. There are currently two seminary graduates without permanent calls. Pray the Lord of the harvest that he would continue to send forth laborers into his field.

As congregations continue to feel the pinch of the economic downturn, I would encourage you to keep before your people our work as a church body both at ILC and in our mission efforts

Please also remember to send your congregation's FY10 CBP estimate to Pastor Mike Roehl right now.