

Hosea 5:15 – 6:6

June 21, 2009 – PENTECOST 3 ~ Faithful Father's Day

Return to the LORD

✠ **In repentant faith (5:15 – 6:2)**✠ **In certain faith (6:3-6)**

In the name of Jesus, our heavenly Bridegroom, dear holy Bride of Christ:

My brothers and sisters and I were trying to sleep one summer night when Mom was having baby number six or seven. We heard Dad come in and turn on the hallway light. “Mom had her baby.” “What was it, Dad? What was it?” “It was a boy or a girl.” “No, Dad, what was it?”

This week after much prayerful deliberation I came to a decision about the two divine calls which the Holy Spirit extended to me through His Church. One I returned, the other I retained.

The first came in May of 1986, when the Minnesota District Mission Board called me to serve as Mission Explorer with target center a mile north at the intersection of Highways 49 and 96. My Mission Counselor, Pastor Bob Hartman, asked: “How patient are you?” then explained that I would not be able to hold services for a full year. Hundreds of homes had to be canvassed with followed-up on unchurched prospects. The Lord richly blessed those 1300 surveys and over 400 follow-ups. Our first worship at the former Snail Lake Elementary School was attended by 180. This mission soil was deep and rich.

In our Wisconsin Synod, congregations through their District President can place a pastor's name on a Call List. As usual the telephone surprised me a few weeks ago from Christ Lutheran Church, Baxter, Minnesota, up near Brainerd. Especially at such a time as this, it is a great honor to be asked to serve in two different places. Prayerfully considering with New Life and her leaders where God's gifts can do the most good for His kingdom, what else can we do? First, we need to **Return to the LORD...**

✠ **In repentant faith (5:15 – 6:2)**

Remember last summer's Bible Class and the LORD's strange command to Hosea? As an object lesson for His people of Israel, God commanded Hosea to marry a whore. God gave their three children names for His disgust at Israel's sinful rebellion. And when Hosea's wife Gomer returned to her lovers, the LORD told him to buy her back. Israel's whoring after other gods deserved complete destruction as the LORD says, *“For I will be like a lion to Ephraim, like a great lion to Judah. I will tear them to pieces and go away; I will carry them off, with no one to rescue them.”* (5:14 NIV) But God's plan was reconciliation: *“Then I will go back to my place until they admit their guilt. And they will seek my face; in their misery they will earnestly seek me.”* Our Bridegroom wants His bride **In repentant faith.**

Sometimes fellow pastors ask, “Is your congregation growing?” I always answer, “Yes,” because as long as we are in God's Word, He promises we will bear much fruit like branches on the Vine. Spiritual growth has been evident in adult confirmations and new ministries like New Life Women of Faith, and Jesus Cares Ministry at the Janet Court group home. Lately WELS Prison Ministry is enlisting New Life for Lino Lakes Corrections. But I've been troubled by a “plateau” in membership. God blesses when and where He wills and wants us to be content. But are we doing all we can to spread God's Word?

Praying about this for a few years, I've been led by the Holy Spirit to the letters to the seven churches in Revelation. The Spirit explains that Jesus is holding the seven stars, or messenger-pastors, in His hand. This is comforting as Christ cradles and protects, fearful that He can crush at will. Jesus walks around among the seven lamp stands which are the seven churches. (Revelation 1:9-20)

Through the pastor to the church in Ephesus the LORD of the Church says, *“I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. You have persevered and*

have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary. Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love. Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place. But you have this in your favor: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.” (Revelation 2:2-7 NIV)

Have I been doing the things I did at first? Survey and follow-up was time consuming before our worship services started. My Mission Counselor said parish duties would preclude that focus. But I still have to ask, “Have I..., have we as a congregation, *forsaken [our] first love?*” Would the Lord say to us as to the pastor and congregation at Sardis, “*You have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead?*” (3:1) Would we receive the same warning as Laodicea? “*Because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth. You say, ‘I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.’ But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see. Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent. Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.*” (Revelation 3:16-20)

Whether I get to be a blessing here at New Life or north at Christ in Baxter, it’s time to **Return to the LORD**. He has spared us the tearing wounds of conflict, but pride and lukewarm laxity must be gone **In repentant faith**. “*Come, let us return to the LORD. He has torn us to pieces but he will heal us; he has injured us but he will bind up our wounds. After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will restore us, that we may live in his presence.*” As Joseph Hart wrote so beautifully in his famous hymn: “*Jesus gives us true repentance By His Spirit sent from heaven; Whispers this transporting sentence, ‘Son, thy sins are all forgiven.’*” (TLH 358:3) So quickly He revives us with new life in Christ!

† **In certain faith (6:3-6)**

Both these Calls remind me how undeserving I am of God’s gifts and the confidence of His people. I feel like the Syrophenician woman begging Jesus to heal her daughter, only to have Jesus call her a “dog.” Still she was not put off by that. “*Yes, Lord,*” she replied, “*but even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs.*” (Mark 7:24-30) **In certain faith** Jesus healed her daughter.

Through Hosea, God’s believing Remnant encouraged one another: “*Let us acknowledge the LORD; let us press on to acknowledge him. As surely as the sun rises, he will appear; he will come to us like the winter rains, like the spring rains that water the earth.*” **Return to the LORD – In certain faith**. Our holy God will always look at our hearts, homes, congregation and see sinful stagnation if left to ourselves. He will always have to ask: “*What can I do with you, Ephraim? What can I do with you, Judah? Your love is like the morning mist, like the early dew that disappears. Therefore I cut you in pieces with my prophets, I killed you with the words of my mouth; my judgments flashed like lightning upon you. For I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings.*”

The LORD has been merciful to this pastor and God’s people at New Life. Christ gave His sinless body into death to cleanse us of all our sins. His holy Apostle Paul sounds this ringing application: “*Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you.*” (Romans 12:1-3 NIV)

Christ’s Call to Baxter is essentially the same as here. But New Life’s Evangelism budget funds very necessary mailings to reach a mobile community. Our Administrative Assistant helps the pastor

with inreach to members and outreach to the unchurched. The Lord has taught me in this process that I want to be, I need to be a new pastor. Remember when I returned the exploratory Call to start a church in Saskatchewan, Canada, years ago? We pretended I was the “Vacancy Pastor” here for three months while I got back on the street. Some current members are still blessings from our “Vacancy for Evangelism.”

That exact approach won't work at this time since the Lord has blessed us with growth in so many other areas of ministry. But I did return the Call to Christ-Baxter because I would like to serve as the “new pastor” here at New Life. From personal to professional, God has shown me changes that can make my ministry more effective with His blessing. I will detail these as requested at last week's Open Forum in my next *New Life News* article. But as a “new pastor” I would want to get started right away getting to know the members. See the Activities Page for open member meeting times after the Bible Information Classes. These are more BIC's than ever before for interested friends of New Life and member-review of doctrine. Please note the questions to prepare for these member visits with your “new pastor.”

As “new pastor,” I am surprised how many Bible classes New Life offers each week. That's the most ever at New Life too. I would encourage all members, especially the leadership to come and seek the LORD together in His Word. Rightly it has been said that the health of a congregation is directly proportional to the percentage of its leaders in Bible Class. The Holy Spirit will make us alive in Christ with the **certain** and **repentant faith** to **Return to the LORD** with the “*first love*” to do more than at first.

If this were an installation service, you would hear your “new pastor” swear to God to be faithful to His Word. I would promise again to conduct my ministry according to the Lutheran Confessions as a correct and accurate exposition of the Bible, which is the Word of God. To each of these key questions I would answer, “Yes, and I ask God to help me.” You would be encouraged as a congregation to pray for your “new pastor.” Many of you tell me you do already. I beg for more prayers that your “new pastor” and this congregation may be a blessing as long as the Lord allows. For it is truly God's grace and mercy that brings us back together with God as partners in His Gospel ministry. God's loving kindness and tender mercy in Christ our heavenly Bridegroom move us to **Return to the LORD – In repentant faith and In certain faith.** Amen.