

Rev. Scott C. Schantzenbach

ASSISTANT TO THE BISHOP ~ STEWARDSHIP SPECIALIST

NEW JERSEY SYNOD, EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA



Stewardship Sermon Starters
6th Sunday of Easter
May 21, 2006
Vision for Mission Sunday
John 15:9-17

“You are my best friend.” Those five simple words were spoken by Miss Daisy to her chauffeur, Hoke, as they bring an emotional close to the movie entitled, “Driving Miss Daisy” (starring Jessica Tandy and Morgan Freeman 1989).

Miss Daisy is an aging southern aristocrat who is somewhat of a road hazard. Her well intended son hires a driver (Hoke) to keep her from behind the wheel. For as widely separated as they are on the socioeconomic spectrum, Miss Daisy and Hoke have much in common. The two characters maintain the pretense of a servant/master relationship for the sake of those around them, but after years of life together they become deeply devoted friends.

Jesus said, “I do not call you servants any longer...but I have called you friends...” (John 15:15) With these words Jesus invoked a radical new order which closed the chasm between God and humanity. God invites us into the full fellowship of friendship, and leaves this as our example for relationships with others.

It is an extraordinary thing, this promotion from servanthood to friendship—even revolutionary. In it we discover a vision for mission grounded in the grace and friendship of God. This friendship, as it is demonstrated by Jesus, is of unique value because it is a relationship without constraint. You need not care about a friend, but you choose to do so. You are under no obligation to tell a friend how you feel, what you hope, what you’ve done, where you are going, but you want to share your life with that person, even as a friend will share with you.

The Vision for Mission appeal promotes this friendship by providing over 5 million disciples the opportunity to make Christ known in Word and deed. Members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America count themselves as followers of Jesus and give top priority to helping change lives in the United States and around the world. One way friendship and faithfulness is expressed is by supporting Vision for Mission, an annual offering designed to support the church’s domestic and global mission.

As a child I remember traveling to different homes at holiday time. Christmas was at our house. Thanksgiving was at the home of my Aunt Anna and Uncle Harvey. Easter dinner was hosted at the home of a different relative. The food, decorations, and format of the day changed seasonally. But as we prepared for these celebrations, one thing remained constant. All of the friends and relatives brought a “holiday apron” with them. They came prepared to work and share...not because they were made to do it but because it was an expression of love.

Today, few of us tote aprons to homes when we visit. We might assist in the preparation if asked. We would do “what we have to” but we are not so bold as to presume to help...we honor the domain of the host.

When we are invited to the Lord’s Table to eat, we have a similar attitude as when invited to a neighbor to enjoy a meal. We might do what is expected...that which is

necessary...but not more. Discipleship in our generation risks degenerating into minimum requirements. Those who would be disciples often look more like servants than friends.

Followers of Jesus continue to celebrate this season of resurrection, reminded and assured that the Lord anticipates us to be friends. Vision for Mission affirms both the claim of Jesus that, "I do not count you as servants any longer...but I have called you friends...", and the freedom to be generous in our relationships with others.

The Lord gives us Vision for Mission so that we might wear it like an apron. In our sharing all will know the Lord is our friend, and that our love has become genuine.