

**Rev. Scott C. Schantzenbach**

ASSISTANT TO THE BISHOP ~ STEWARDSHIP SPECIALIST

NEW JERSEY SYNOD, EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA



**Stewardship Sermon Starters**  
**7<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter**  
**May 28, 2006**  
**John 17:6-19**

At the climax of “Top Gun”, two US Tomcat fighters are in a dog fight with about six Russian MIGs. One US plane is about to be picked apart, the second plane, piloted by the movie star, Tom Cruise, is slow to enter the fight. Fear and unpleasant memories make it difficult for him to take a more active posture. “Engage, engage, get back in there!” are the words shouted at him over the radio.

Jesus prayer in chapter 17 of John’s gospel asks that we not be led out of the world, it beckons that retreat not be our mode of operation. The love of God is demonstrated in active engagement with a world that is filled with risks and danger. Jesus prayed that we would be sanctified in truth all the time that we remain in the world. This sanctification is a unique church word used to describe those who are “holy”. Holy people were the same as normal people, but kind of different. “Kind of different from normal” sounds like a teen’s definition of “weird”.

Weird people do not always fit in. Jesus indicates that we do not belong to the world. We are not like the people of the world. We are different. Disciples of Christ behave differently and live by values different from those taught by our culture. We gather for worship regularly, honor our parents, don’t steal, and the list goes on.

One of the most significant ways that we act differently is how we use money. There are only three things that we can do with our money: share, save, or spend. The culture tempts us to spend all that we have with the average American household encumbered with \$8,000 in credit card debt. Our understanding of Christian Stewardship demands that we share and save while controlling our spending. Good stewardship practice is judged as weird in our 21<sup>st</sup> century culture. “Turbo Tax” software will flag your charitable contributions with an audit alert long before you reach tithing levels! Even the IRS views Christian generosity and faithful sharing as “weird.”

Gathering among the baptized to hear God's Word, to be nourished for the journey, and to support one another are ways that Jesus prayer is answered. The Lord seeks God's children and prays that we not be spared from the tough choices and hard decisions. God sends us boldly to engage the world with generous hearts and faithful witness.

When I played baseball in high school, I was troubled by the high and inside pitch. It would back me out of the batters box every time. Once backed out, it was easy to strike me out. I needed to engage the pitcher. Only when I stood in close, near the dangerous and fast pitches was there hope of a base hit or home run. Jesus calls us to engage the world, to teach Christian Stewardship so that the consumer culture will not be our defacto teacher. "Engage, engage," is the prayer of the Word that became flesh and dwells among us.

The Lord points us in that direction when he proclaims, "I do not pray that you should take them out of the world, but that you should keep them from the evil one."