

"FOOD" FOR SUMMER THOUGHT

Peter J. Jessen, 6-14-00

Dear 8th graders about to be High Schoolers,

I am writing to share with you some of the things we discussed in the month of classes after you were confirmed. Please add this to the "Spiritual Tool Box" I gave you for Confirmation, May 7th.

There are those who wonder whether you are too young for these thoughts (although I don't), that you have to be interested in changing your life before you can deal with this, that this is high school and college material, etc. However, I have been dealing with concepts like these with Kindergartners (we discussed roles) to 3-4th graders in Junior Great Books sessions in Minnesota, to 6th-8th graders in both Minnesota and Oregon, as well as with college classes I have taught and high school groups I have talked before. Needless to say, I've discussed these concepts with my own kids since before they started elementary school. Remember that Romeo and Juliet were 14 and that Alexander the Great had conquered the known world by the time he was 21 (having, obviously, started when he was a teenager). And 100 years ago kids your age studied Latin and other languages and read from the great histories and volumes of world literature. So what is your response to that? Are you too young to deal with these kind of thoughts and issues? How might they help you in SLY and in high school?

It is my view that you can handle it and that the real problem is that all of us would be better off if we started with these materials earlier in life. It is interesting to note what Jacques Barzun writes of in his latest book, From Dawn to Decadence: 500 Years of Western Culture, in which he refers to the decay of the West's governing principles and ideals, a decline which proceeded faster after the great moral and material devastation of World War I. Given the reality of what we discussed as we studied Mary Pipher's work, not to mention our study of the struggles of the church and early Christians, which seem very relevant to the struggles we have to day, which is, **how do we live in and act with love?** How do you respond to Barzun's notion that "creative energies" have been "turned...from their course, first into frivolity and then into the channel of self-destruction," which Pipher discusses in terms of girls and others discuss in terms of boys?

This coming school year is an important year for all of you. It will be your transition from the last time (8th grade) you were mostly with "smaller people" and to when, after confirmation, you will move on to the first time (high school) when you will be mostly with "bigger people". The difference: in 8th grade you were the biggest of the little people. In your first year of high school you will be the "littlest" of the big people.

The Anthropologist Van Gennep coined the word "rite of passage" in 1909. In modern society we no longer have major ceremonies for the moments when kids know they have met a major transition in their life. Our main rites of passages are, for everyone, driving at the age of 16, being able to vote and registering for the draft at 18, and being allowed to drink at 21. For too many, "binge drinking" as college freshman is their rite of passage. Sadly for too many, it is the passage to the desolate island of dashed dreams. Both our popular culture and mass culture offer up examples, especially TV, film, and music, that this is OK, as seen in the fact that for every celebrity who messes up and or OD's, there are plenty more waiting for a chance to take their celebrity place.

After you were confirmed, our May question dealt, in part, with this question we raised about young people: why is it that it seems as if never have so many had so much and yet enjoyed it so little? **Rites of passage** were to equip the young with the tools and knowledge and insights they needed to navigate their worlds as adults. **Confirmation is just such an undertaking:** to provide you with the spiritual tools, knowledge and insights obtained over 2-4,000 years which were passed on to your parents who now pass them on to you so that one day you can pass them on to your children. St. Luke has had two of the best themes possible for wonderful umbrellas under which to study: for the year 1999: All Are Welcome! And for the year 2000: Equipping the Saints for Living.

2000: New Year, New Decade, New Century, New Millennium. Wonderment or bewilderment?

- Same/new? Born Again? Transformation? Personal Development, etc., or not?
- New Year's Resolutions: Pause & reflect where we've been and where we want to get to, & how.

The Key Spiritual Practice we used: Breathe, concentrate on a verse: "The Lord is my shepherd" and on "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." When in a quandary, negative attitude, angry, or fearful, (1) pause, (2) breathe deeply, slowly, and (3) pray: "Help me to feel your love, Lord, help me to respond with love." "Help me to know who I am and to live the Gospel with my deeds, and even words sometimes." Other times: when we can think of nothing, or are just too afraid, "speak the word": JESUS!

The month of May has provided us with the perfect themes for reflection and discussion over the summer as you prepare for **your next rite of passage:** the entry into High School.

All year we have asked the key Q: How can we find balance, purpose, and meaning in life & unlock the power within us? The answer for Christians for 2000 years has been: Through using and developing the gifts we were born with and those we learn, "with the help of God" (the Creator, the Savior, the Comforter,, by respecting all of God's creation (of which the most precious is each human being), getting to know and trust Jesus personally, in our hearts, and always tapping in to the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, through prayer and meditation (which we can practice any where, any time).

We explored how we could go about "equipping the saints for living". We pondered:

- Pastor Knapp's sermon question of 1-9-00: **Do we know who we are? If we know who we are, we live the gospel: we serve and love others!** Which relates to "equipping the saints for living."
- How to learn the **tools** for Christian living/love/service/success when we have no instincts for doing so, of which the "Spiritual tool box" was one attempt to answer the question.
- **Peter Berger asks:** , (1) "Who are we?" (**God's**) and (2) "How are we to live together?" (not Egypt's exploitative relationship among people, where His people were freed from slavery, but rather through the **gifts** Pastor Knapp reminds us that God gave us with the 10 commandments, gifts which help us define our roles/relationships/actions/actions/thoughts for figuring out life.

The theme for May, after your confirmation of the above, has been **how to live in and act with love**, taking much of our source material from (1) the Gospel of John and (2) the book 4th from the last in the New Testament, I John. The clue concept: understanding how to love even people who are not being loving to us. As they too are God's creatures, we are to love them into reconciliation.

To discuss this in May, we added to the Knapp and Berger questions we asked all year, the question of **Michael Cassidy**, the question regarding how, as "**Reconciliation is the ministry of the gospel**," do we deal with "our major problem--that of obeying the **greatest commandments** of Jesus, "...**love the Lord ... and ... love they neighbor as thyself**"? We asked: how can we demonstrate "love as a political virtue" and thus "be part of the solution" and not "part of the problem"?

Charles Dickens opens his novel *A Tale of Two Cities* with the paradox of then and now:

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of our despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way.

In a conversation with **Mary Pipher**, at the end of April, when she was in town, she urged me to read the new book by **David G. Myers**, *The American Paradox: Spiritual Hunger in an Age of Plenty* (Yale University Press, New Haven, 2000). The foreword is by the Lutheran Pastor and Ph.D. historian, Martin E. Marty. Following Dickens, Myers opens with Dickens' quote, and echoes how the theme fits our day as well, that: we live in the "best of times...the worst of times." He gives many clues and much to think about in the following two lists:

Signs of the "best of times" (pp. 2-3) [good stewardship; adults and kids using their God-given gifts]

- Although population has doubled since World War II, food production has tripled and food is cheaper than ever before.
- Welfare roles are shrinking as joblessness reaches a quarter-century low.
- Inflation--the "cruellest tax"--is at a 30 year-low, interest rates have moderated, the dollar rides strong, and the stock market has touched undreamed-of heights.
- The prices of cars, air travel, gasoline, and hamburgers are at record real-dollar lows. The half gallon of milk that cost the average American 39 minutes of work in 1919 now...only 7 minutes.
- The national budget, faster than anyone dared expect, has a substantial *surplus*.
- Over the past half century, performance on intelligence tests has been rising, and race and class differences have lessened somewhat.
- Heavy drinking rates, hard liquor consumption, and drunken driving fatalities are declining.

Signs of the "worst of times" (pp. 5-6) [adults/kids **not** using their God-given gifts]

- The divorce rate has doubled.
- The teen suicide rate has tripled.
- The recorded violent crime rate has quadrupled.
- The prison population has quintupled.
- The percentage of babies born to unmarried parents has sextupled.
- Cohabitation (a predictor of future divorce) has increased sevenfold.
- Depression has soared--to ten times the pre-World War II level, by one estimate.

You have heard the phrase "the good old days." Recall the book I told you about of child labor, etc., called *The Good Old Days--They Weren't*. Myers goes on to bring that to our attention.

The situation at the turn of the 20th century: 1900: pp. 3-4 [adults not using our God-given gifts]

- Children exploited (1900: children laboring at age 11; 1/4 of southern textile mill workers were children; 7 year olds worked 12 hour shifts.
- Families often broken by death. Due to mortality: marriages averaged 12 years; 4 in 10 children lost a parent by age 21; 1850: only 2% lived past 65; before 1900: only 4 in 10 women were alive to experience the "empty nest"
- Social safety net had huge holes: no social security, no child support, 1 in 5 kids in orphanages
- Limited education opportunities: only half of 5-19 years in school; 3.5% of 18 yr old = HS grads
- Women had restricted opportunities: today women are far more like to marry for love and less likely to endure abuse out of economic need.
- Minorities were shunned

We need **tools** (see "tool box") for Christian living/love/service/success and guides/teachers for how to use the tools. Do we relate with love and service or with non-caring exploitation?

After sharing this with the 7th graders, I asked them how they would respond to his question: "never have so many had so much and enjoyed it so little." **Q:** What can we do as disciples of Christ, as "witnesses" to the love of Christ? **Q:** What ratio of talking and doing (action)? **Q:** how do you relate your answers/thoughts/discussion to the "lessons learned" chart?

In one of the verses for May 21st (Acts 8:31), when the Apostle Philip asks the Bible reader if he understands what he is reading, he is told, **"How can I, unless someone guides me."** Philip was his guide, speaking and teaching and "proclaiming to him the good news about Jesus." He asked Philip, "What is to prevent me from being baptized?" (v. 37). Philip baptized them. And: I John 4:7, 16, 19, 21: **"let us love one another, because love is from God.... God is love.... We love because he first love us. ... The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also."** And: John 15:5: Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit."

Do you agree with David Myers when he says that (p. 294) "most of us wish for" the following, in terms of what we want our culture to be:

- welcomes children into families with mothers and fathers that love them, and an environment that nurtures families,
- rewards initiative and restrains exploitative greed, thus building a strong economy that shrinks the underclass, and balances individual liberties with communal well-being
- balances individual liberties with communal well-being
- encourages close relationships within extended families and with supportive neighbors and caring friends, people who celebrate when you're born, care about you as you live, and miss you when you're gone
- values our diversity while finding unity in shared ideals,
- develops children's capacities for empathy, self-discipline, and honesty,
- provides media that offer social scripts of kindness, civility, attachment, and fidelity,
- regards relationships as covenants and sexuality not as mere recreation but as life-united and love-renewing
- takes care of the soul, by developing a deeper spiritual awareness of a reality greater than self and of life's resulting meaning, purpose, and hope."

Consider reading two books this summer: (1) the above book by Myers, The American Paradox: Spiritual Hunger in an Age of Plenty and (2) the book The Passing Summer: A South African's Response to White Fear, Black Anger, and the Politics of Love. by Michael Cassidy (a white South African lay evangelist).

As you read The Passing Summer, substitute the U.S. for South Africa, and your own fear and anger with friends and family, and ask how you can interact with others with love. Ask yourself how you respond when fearful or angry. Then consider the lot of blacks in South Africa during apartheid (the book covers the author's personal response to one of the darkest summers before the final end of apartheid). Could it be said of you, as Cassidy says of blacks:

I grasped afresh that South African blacks, and especially black Christians, are in many ways incredible. Their capacity to bear pain, to tolerate indignity, to forgive, to dredge up new goodwill from who knows where and still be gracious never ceases to amaze me" (pp. 18-19).

Cassidy discusses (p. 422) "Love as a political virtue." And with love, the country was changed.

At one point we briefly discussed some models used in history to change relationships between people. As a result of reading Cassidy's book, I have a better understanding, and want to share that with you here. The four models we discussed: (1) Masada, in 1st century Palestine, between the Romans and Israeli Zealots; (2) West Germany after World II, through the "Evangelical Academies"), (3) South Africa, to change from apartheid to post-Apartheid, and (4) the Oslo Accords now in effect in the Middle East between Israel and the Palestinian Authority. To put it bluntly, the "Oslo Accords" need the "politics of love" of model #5 below if the combatants are to avoid the Masada affect (Model #1: the Zealots committed suicide rather than deal with or give in to the Romans). The empirical reality is that the presence of the acknowledgement of love in **Models 2 and 3 were successful**, and that its absence led to the failure of #1 and is leading to the failure of #4. #5 organizes this principle for any macro-level conflict negotiation. The **fifth model** that Cassidy has developed is that of "The Politics of Love" to achieve "reconciliation."

This 5th model served as an inspiration to regarding how to let their better natures prevail, and continues to serve as an inspiration to other peoples of the planet caught in the same kind of process. **The model is also practical, in that "the golden rule is finally what life is all about" and is at the heart of every major world religion and most secular philosophies.** But how does a nation or large institution incorporate the golden rule all claim to want to follow but find so difficult to follow? Our answer: through love, which turns revenge into actions that treat the offending perpetrators of prejudice with the love, respect and civility they deny others.

Cassidy discusses his **ten point model** in detail in his book's Part Six, "The Politics of Love (The outworking of love as a valid political principle," in three chapters, Chapter 19 ("Winning in the World's Workshop" based on the Swiss Hans-Ruedi Weber referring to South Africa as "the laboratory of the world," in 1973, for how they did would greatly affect the world's belief in what is possible), Chapter 20 ("Love as a Political Virtue" which is to sing songs Cassidy doesn't mention but which relate (the Dianne Warwick song "What the world needs now, is love, love, love", or the song made popular world-wide by Michael Jackson to "Heal the world and make it a better place," as well as similar slogans sponsored by major soft drink companies, or Disney's "It's a Small, Small World After all"), and Chapter 21 ("Love in Structures", as in the constitution, laws of the land, etc.).

The 10 steps model proposed in 1988 by **Cassidy**, p. 425, is certainly needed by those involved in The Oslo Accords, as well as any other global "hot spots" needing conflict resolution, **as well as by each of us** in our relationships with others:

		The "politics of love" means:		
1 Dealing with one's own heart	2 Abandoning the negative because love is positive	3 Working out what we profess as a Christian nation	4 Rising to the demands of enemy love and forgiveness	5 Accepting love as a political virtue
		6 Working for structural reconciliation		
		7 Putting love into a constitutional framework		
		8 Working love into economic structures		
		9 Prayerfully thinking and acting ourselves into a new order and a new day		
		10 Taking the long view		

Recall our conversations regarding Hannah Arendt, from her book The Human Condition, in which she points out that the only way to **keep chaos at bay is by keeping promises** and that the only way to **keep from reacting negatively to the irreversibility of our words and deeds is through forgiveness**, that forgiveness and reconciliation are not the provenance of just Christians, although Jesus emphasizes it more than anyone else, but rather that it is **necessary for all people because of the "human condition."** To forgive in order to be reconciled requires loving. Love is what is missing in the Middle East with the Oslo Accords. Without love, it will ultimately fail. Love and

reconciliation are a necessary part of the human condition. The suggestion above is that South Africa is a laboratory for the world. Let's compare it not only to the Oslo Accords, but also to present day Korea. Models 2, 3 and 5 show love as a key ingredient for macro conflict resolution. Models 1 and 4 suggest that its lack prevents resolution. There is the evidence of another contemporary, long term, unresolved, unreconciled, loveless conflict being solved with love: Korea. The unsuccessful threatening Cold War rhetoric of the past 50 years has not worked. The recent summit between North and South Korea was brought about by South Korea's Kim Dae Jung, using a mix of Christian compassion and Confucian sincerity. If this continues, this country could also be reconciled, using the "politics of love."

Conflict resolution (1) between individuals and (2) between institutions and (3) between individuals and institutions, requires love and forgiveness (allowing trust and promise keeping and loving forgiveness to lead us, rather than enabling the prevention of letting the fact that our words and actions are irreversible from devolving into chaos and hardened hearts). **How do you resolve the conflicts in your life with you self and with others at home/school/work/community?** Christians used love to re-order German after W.W.II (in the Evangelical Academies) and to end apartheid in South Africa (through similar representative meetings including both whites and blacks). How do you resolve conflict? With love or not?

During the month of May after you were confirmed, the 7th graders who attended studied **the New Testament model of Jesus: love.** Recall our earlier discussion from St. Paul, when he talked about the "the more excellent way," which we put on a large poster, and which is on p. 21 of your Spiritual Tool Box, and backed up with similar verses on pp. 12-13 ("Growing Through Life in Relationship With God"). Here are the additional lessons we studied after you were confirmed, taken from our series for the year, The Whole People of God:

May 14, 2000

OT lesson: Acts 4:5-12: compassionate witness to Jesus' saving power and presence.

NT Epistle: 1 John 3:16-24: **love** is the mark of Christians: "**in truth and action.**" "Just do it!"

NT Gospel: John 10:11-18: Jesus "I am the good shepherd" - gives life for His flock. Utter name J

Discussion: Disciples as Witnesses; being a witness to Christ; Greek witness = martyr. **St. Francis: witness by action; words if you must:** "Do it, don't just say it." If you do it (live it), you don't have to say it.

d. Key verse: 1 John 3:18: "Let us love, not in word and speech, but in truth and action."

May 21, 2000

OT lesson: Acts 8:26-40: to understand: "how can I, unless someone guides me?" a Gentile. The answer: get guides. There are no barriers. Jesus is open to all: gentiles, soldiers, female slaves, or any other category of person. The only barriers are the ones human beings have erected. To grow, we must bring these barriers down, or, at the least, not follow others who live by them.

NT Epistle: 1 John 4:7-21: **how are we to live: with love** (see Cassidy piece). Loving action = guiding principal and criterion to discern whether or not we are living in communion with God. Loving others is a response to God's love for us. Love = communion with God, intimacy with others, evangelism to those outside the community, the basis of justice within the community.

NT Gospel: John 15:1-8: God as gardener/vinegrower; Jesus as mediator of God's love; we as the fruit of the vine: v. 9: "As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love" = the

fruit. Love is the fruit showing the branches are living from the vine, in communion with Christ, cared for by the gardener. Bearing fruit does not = growth/success/numbers, but whether one is showing love for one another or not.

d. Key verse: 1 John 15:5a: I am the vine, you are the branches.

May 28, 2000

[OT] lesson: [Psalm 98] - Acts 10:44-48: Gentiles receive the Holy Spirit: God's **love** is for all

NT Epistle: 1 John 5:1-6: Faith conquers the world. As God is **love**, live with love ourselves.

Written to a schism community; it encourages not revenge or bitterness, but love. **Loving** each other, not nursing old wounds, conquers the world.

NT Gospel: John 15:9-17: What does it mean to abide in each other in **love**? To keep the commandments (v. 12; **gifts**). Jesus says **agape**: unconditional **love**, generous concern for others and faithful in devotion; it is this **love** that lets Jesus call them **philos**, friends: those he **loves** in a generous, compassionate, and self-giving way. **Loving** each other this way enables continuing to abide as a community. **Eros** is the **love** most mean by "love" in popular and mass culture.

a. Theme: Unexpected Companions [**we then talked about books for use as "bibliotherapy"**]

b. Purpose: To share the vision of God's inclusive community.

c. Theme conversation: All creation praises God.

d. Key verse: Psalm 98:4a: "Make a joyful noise to God all the earth."

"The good news spreads"; A community of acceptance and welcome. How?

One way: create closed communities to avoid other cultures and peoples, excluding any who are different.

A second way: create communities which coexist by demanding nothing that requires any change.

Christians' 3rd way: extend community to those they neither choose nor expected.

Major shift: break bread with others (gentiles): "companions" (literally: those with whom one breaks bread).

Conversion of believers (has to be done over and over): to get them to admit that they were mistaken to believe that God was only for their own religious/cultural community and not for that of others.

June 4, 2000

NT Epistle: 1 John 5:9-13: To the remnants of that schism. Credible testimony again. "in their hearts." Witnessing was central to who they were. John repeatedly states: **credible** only **if they love** one another practically and consistently.

NT Gospel: John 17:6-19: Jesus prays to God to show the disciples the way forward, after he is gone. Choice: be shaped by the destructiveness of life or by the transformative power of God's **love**. Christ reveals the identity of God in human life just as they/we are to reveal God's character in our lives together "that they may be one as we are one," so God can sustain us in the truth and **love** we know to be very real. Or, as in the popular Christian rock song, "I see Jesus in you."

SUMMER GUIDES

Finally, some thoughts by **our "guides"** regarding reading and friends, as you determine your reading this summer, and prepare to make new friends along with old friends in school in September. Remember what we learned about the power of reading and of association. Who will you associate with? What will you read?

Mary Pipher says that her grandmother taught her to choose the books she reads as carefully as she chose her friends.

Charles "Tremendous" Jones says that "One of the greatest thoughts I've ever heard is "You will be the same in five years as you are today except for the people you meet and the books you read."

Tony Robbins reminds us to "Remember we become who we spend time with. The quality of a person's life is most often a direct reflection of the expectation of the peer group. Choose your friends well."

Robert DuPont states that "Healing through reading books is called bibliotherapy. Books tell good stories, they contain useful ideas, and they offer workable plans for living better lives."

Finally, remember that **success in life comes through being able to read and write well**. Generals Grant, MacArthur, and Eisenhower were promoted because they could write. Asked what the greatest skill of a soldier is, MacArthur answered "being able to write." Remember, "leaders are readers." And, "writers are readers too."

Here are a couple of **other suggestions for summer reading**, going beyond the list in the original "Spiritual Tool Box," pp. 36-37, of which the last three are new books recently published:

- Meditation on this and the May 7 piece to be included in your Bible reading
- Spiritual RX: Prescriptions for Living A Meaningful Life, by Frederic and Mary Ann Brussat
- Lists to Live By: For everything that really matters, Compiled by Alice Gray, et al
- Letters to My Son: A Father's Wisdom on Manhood, Life, and Love, by Kent Nerburn.

Have a great summer. Know who you are. Read and befriend well.

Bless you and be a blessing to others.

Peter Jessen

7-11-00 P.S. Adding more "reasons for going to church," (see p. 40 of my 5-7-00 "Spiritual Tool Box" to you) are Princeton University criminologist John J. DiIulio, Harvard economist Richard Freeman, the journal Criminology, and an earlier confirmation curriculum: (1) divorce rate among couples who attend church together 3 Sunday a month: 2%; (2) among black urban youth, church attendance was a better predictor of who would escape drugs, crime, and poverty than income, family structure or any other variable; (3) church-going youth are more likely to behave in socially constructive ways; (4) substantial empirical evidence that religion serves "as an insulator against crime and delinquency;" (5) the most effective substance abuse prevention and treatment programs, both in society and behind bars, are either explicitly religious or quasi-religious in their orientation, and, hence, "build churches, not jails" (not that government should build churches but that they should get out of the way of the faith community and let it do its work, which has proven to be far more effective.