

Ageless

Timeless

Wisdom

of

The Reverend Robert Donald Gerhard

1929 - 2010

The following excerpts are from the Tidings articles and Sunday Sermons written by The Reverend Robert D. Gerhard, during his twenty six years as Rector at St Thomas Episcopal Church in Terrace Park, Ohio. He served from 1968 through 1994.

In January 1969 Bob Gerhard commented on his approaching institution as follows:

“ An institution is like a marriage service. That is, each party to it delivers over to the other enormous responsibility. The Rector takes responsibility for the Parish, and the Parish takes responsibility for the Rector. The point being that it takes the commitment, and consecrated effort, of both to serve God effectively as a parish family.”

In May 1984 Bob wrote about the parish, St Thomas, this way:

“...St Thomas Church ...is 3 congregations with at least 3 mind sets and 3 variations in the way God is approached in worship. We have everything: From the contemporary music and warm informality of Prayer & Praise to the strictly traditional. From guitar to organ. From the religious expression of young families to the quiet piety of elderly singles. From the vigorous youth fellowship to the warmth and support of the retirement group. “Indeed, we are a varied group of people with different tastes and needs. To an outside observer, it is miraculous that we all hang together as well as we do. But the miracle can be understood when we see each and every unique and distinct person of this congregation standing before the Altar with joy and gratitude....”

There are few men and women known to me who could not profit from some time off alone. People in these parts seem to be very busy about everything: their business, their homes, and their families. Have we considered how we spend our leisure? Some work very hard at being leisurely and many a sunburn and aching back is brought back to an office on a Monday morning. But what is more serious, many a person returns to his daily life at best half rested and at worst exhausted after a weekend at home.

Activistic though we may be, still most of us reverence the qualities of thoughtfulness and personal tranquility in those we know. Many of us have very little idea of how we might gain them for our own lives.

As with most other things, there is a price to pay. The price may mean a revision in our style of life to build in, as it were, the time to be quiet and alone. It means going over our lives and pruning away the superfluous ruthlessly.

If you want your home to be a haven rather than a hostel, you must cultivate the virtues. If you want your home to be a source of strength to every member of your family, then you must build your life on Christ, in the sheltering arms of His church. It is literally impossible to do this without finding time to be re-created at the altar as well as finding time to be re-created in the quietness of solitary prayer. If your weekends are well spent, you should come back to Monday closer to God and to each member of your family. You should come back rested from some quiet time being by yourself. You should come back, in short, re-created and hence closer to the truth of your life.

1969

Reflections

St. Thomas shares with only a few other churches I can remember, a certain atmosphere which is exceedingly rare in an age such as the present.

The quality of that atmosphere is hard to put into words. Rudolph Otto in his book entitled *THE IDEA OF THE HOLY* has called this quality "the numinous". Adjectives such as awe-inspiring; mysterious, fascinating and so forth do not describe what is numinous, yet at the same time each word participates to some degree in its meaning.

Certainly, for most of us who would sit alone in the nave there is a feeling of peaceful apartness. Then, I suppose, one is next aware of the quiet of such intensity and duration which is alien to much of our lives. Old churches have a smell about them too. An odor of long extinguished beeswax candles, just a trace of the smell of wine, faded flowers and old books. Then there is the faint residual smell of people; many, many people over a long period of time. Each of these add to the total experience of the numinous.

Many people have sat where you are sitting in the dimness. They have wept here, prayed here, agonized here, felt pain here and dozed through countless sermons here. A young woman anticipating her coming wedding has sat in this pew filled with love and hope and happiness. An old man has sat here pondering his rapidly approaching death. Children have scampered in the aisles and the floor is pitted by their slamming down the kneelers. The varnish is worn on the floor from the shuffling of many feet and by human knees bent in prayer.

More than anything else, however, there comes to you the overwhelming awareness of God. Everywhere there is God. Not just for me now, but for countless others; those who have gone before; those that are living still; and those who will live tomorrow. The numinous charged sanctuary, dim and silent, happening in many times and many lives, a crossroads, a way-station on a journey—and everywhere there is God.

1970

Christian Maturity

The Greek words *Sophos* – wise – and *Moros*-foolish- have been combined in the English language to form the word *sophomore*. This is a word we usually understand as referring to a second year college or high school student who often, combines these two basic qualities of wisdom and foolishness to an unparalleled degree—inexperienced, untested, yet arrogant in their firm possession of 1000% of the truth. Pharasical in that sophomore mentality measures the creation and all that is in it with their dimestore ruler.

Amusing, you say, and you are partly right. In the words above, perhaps, there is a caricature that many of us can identify with only a twinge of embarrassment. Yet not amusing at all for the sophomore mentality the way it seems to be celebrated on college campuses these days, supported and abetted by those who run such establishments and who are fixating a kind of behavior that has all the political and social potentials of a neo-brownshirt movement. The foundations of unreason in the temple of violence are being laid before our eyes.

What does this mean to the Christian Church? Only that there arises the spectre of one more power which will try to use the Church for its own end and, win or lose in that attempt, will shortly consider disposing of it altogether.

The Church in every century has suffered persecution somewhere. There are some who believe that the late 20th or the 21st centuries will be the turn of Christianity in the West to bear this terror. The Christian Church does not co-exist readily or for very long with barbarians or tyrants. It does not live well with those who attempt through ignorance to pervert the Gospel. But it cannot live at all with the human products of a sophomore civilization.

1970

Faith in Action

I would call what is happening the "ARMAGEDDON MIND" of an enormous number of people in America today. The "ARMAGEDDON MIND" is a kind of pessimism about and fear of the future which has become an endemic response of people to social and economic change. It causes people to think negatively even disparagingly of our ability to manage anything in a world such as ours has become.

People strike out or focus their pent-up frustrations on some sort of scapegoat, a person or a cause. They vote down school bonds, avoid problems regardless of the destructive social consequences and even stop going to church because even Christianity is "going to hell in a handbasket" and God has obviously failed to do anything about it.

This is a time when we must see the "ARMAGEDDON MIND" for what it is—destructive! This is a time to make a special commitment to those institutions and causes you want to see survive because clearly they will not make it without you and millions like you. Disagree – argue, protest – fight, but don't cop-out. In our time that has got to be CULTURAL SUICIDE.

1971

Human Reflections

A fulfilled person, one who has managed his time and talent to find many areas of satisfaction, is never bored whether he is 35 or 75 years old.

Happiness, like satisfaction, is similar to running across swampy ground. To stop jumping from stone to stone and merely to stand on one means to slowly sink into the morass.

If you are depressed by the weather, or other factors beyond your control, the Christian question might be to ask yourselves how many stones of satisfaction you have to jump on or, in other words, how have you managed your time and talents in the light of the Christian goals of wholeness and fulfillment.

1971

Certainty of Life

The recent foul-up of the NORAD warning system reminds us all once again how close Armageddon could be. "Murphy's Law" states that if anything can go wrong it will sooner or later. It is ironic, I think, in this highly technical age where so much is computerized and programmed, where human efficiency has reached its historical apex, that we should be so frighteningly vulnerable to human error, stupidity, or depravity.

The scriptures say that the foolishness of God is greater than the wisdom of man. A human being who doesn't comprehend this truth is almost dangerous to his fellow man. Our working assumptions for life are that the world will be around for a very long time, and that what needs to be done to keep the whole clanking apparatus of human society going will be done by someone else, somewhere else, with sufficient competency to get by with.

When the alarm goes off, however, we realize that these are only assumptions and that we really have no certainty about any of them.

On Ash Wednesday when we kneel to receive a small spot of ashes on our forehead the officiant says: "Remember O Man, that dust thou art, and to dust thou shalt return." A little thought on the matter would reveal that the assumption that underlies this bald statement is absolutely true. There are no statements about when or who – only the basic fact of human existence in time and space.

1971

Christian Growth

God's choice gift to man – the point of creation where we are at present – is the point of infantile human consciousness. We are in the process of growth and transformation into something else. God, like parents to small children, loves us as much for what we are as for what we are becoming and shall someday be. The Christian joyfully and confidently trusts in God's plan for the world and has cause to rejoice in the "dangerous gift" of consciousness as a sign of blessings to come.

1972

Christian Behavior

Just as many alcoholics allow the remorse of yesterdays to poison their todays, or put off to some hypothetical tomorrow that which should be faced today – so many Christians behave.

We often think our religious failures of yesterday, our apostasy and petty self-seeking will preclude God's forgiveness and restoration today. Secure therefore in that poisonous distortion, we dare not live creatively in His Spirit in the NOW – passing up the greatest of all conceivable opportunities.

Or else, we Christians often say to God, like St Augustine: Make me a Christian – preferably the day after tomorrow, putting off to some future day the foreseeable crises that would disturb our equanimity if we were to let Him in NOW!

Dr Jung once said that neurosis in a person was always the result of not facing legitimate pain. Spiritual neurosis and psychosis in like manner is the result of not facing God in the now – in the today – "Copping out" in both

I believe, center around the question of what the contestants think the church is and believe it should be doing.

To base your churchmanship solely on tradition provides you mainly with a rear view mirror.

To base your churchmanship solely on responding to issues ahead blinds you to the wealth of experience that may prove valuable from the experience of former generations.

The human dimension of the problem is just this: The cardinal sins of today among otherwise good Christian people are Impatience and Self-Righteousness.

The church of which we are members really does not belong to us at all. Jesus is the Lord of this church and that means it belongs to Him and not to us. He has promised never to abandon it and He won't. His Will will prevail and be made known among us all -- clearly -- if we but give Him a chance. I would commend to each of you and to myself the virtues of patience and humility.

Pray for this church and for all the other families of Christ that we may proceed closer to the Master. We know that as we come closer to Jesus we come closer to each other in His Holy Spirit.

1980

Community

Outside my study window is a tree, its branches bare now in mid-winter. As I look out this cold February morning, I see two mourning doves with fluffed up feathers, sitting in my tree, passing the time of day. Have you noticed that one rarely sees one of these creatures alone? This pair resembles an elderly married couple rocking on the front porch passing the time away, contented just to be together.

The almost universal need of all life, expressed in different ways and in different degrees, is to be together with its own kind. One could not really understand the species of mourning doves without seeing them together. In the same way, to understand human beings completely, one must see them in their context with other human beings. Marriage, parenting, friendship, work, and our social relations -- all are expressions of that universal need to be together with someone which imparts particular meaning to human life.

It must follow that in choosing whom you will be with in life, in whatever relationship, you create your particular meaning in life -- provide the central clue by which you are understood by others and yourself.

The assembly of Christians for worship on any Sunday must be seen in this general context. It is a master human activity, the purpose of which is to impart meaning in life. Not just to the solitary worshipper or the single family, but to the community and to all mankind. The values by which we human beings live our lives are not objects or things. They are targets we reach for every day of our lives, and we strive always in human context. Being together with someone makes it easier when we are tired, distracted or just plain confused.

No one can successfully worship God for long as an exclusively solitary pursuit. We really do need to be together to give and to receive, but most importantly to find together the meaning that God imparts to His very body, the church, right now.

1980

Lent

Our spiritual forefathers, as demonstrated repeatedly in Holy Scriptures, turned to God in times of crisis by fasting and repentance. This age-old spiritual practice was not undertaken to cause God to have pity on his people as much as it was for us to reestablish the kind of relationship with God that mankind always seems to forget. That relationship was and is one that is based, first of all, on just such a conscious putting aside of everything else in life temporarily to acknowledge God's sovereign Lordship. That moment of acknowledgement is quickly lost unless it is given substance in actual repentance, that is, in addressing and correcting in our own lives that which has fallen away from the knowledge and fear of the Lord--those things, practices, ideas or dispositions that are obstacles to our relationship with God.

It has always been known that unaddressed sin in human life destroys our ability to pray and to listen to God. Self-centeredness, sloth, anger, greed, envy, indulgence and other sins preclude any communication with God.

It may be that we as the people of God need to take this ancient practice seriously to heart as we never have done before. It is the guidance of God's Holy Spirit and the inexhaustible strength of God that we need to face the decade of the 80s opening to us this Lent.

1981

Language and the Bible

I received a letter from a lady several weeks ago which was written to comment on a sermon she had heard at a service at St. Thomas. However, she added several short paragraphs in which she shared with me how alienated she felt because of the language used in the service, and especially in the sermon itself, which was couched in terminology suggesting that God had to be conceived exclusively in masculine terms.

I think this person is putting her finger on something that is quite important, and I respond with sympathy to her sense of pain on the matter of sexist language in traditional religion. I think it is clear, however, even in the mind of my correspondent, that God's offer of salvation and His gifts to us are given with no particular sexual distinction. And that in Christ there is no East or West, North or South, slave or free, male or female.

What is at issue is the integrity of the message delivered. To expunge the Holy Bible of its masculine bias

would be not only to mutilate the intent of its human authors but to distort the biblical statement.

What can and should be done is to make it clear from time to time that much of the language we have inherited does have what many today would see as an anti-feminine bias. This is largely cultural and unconscious. It is also to be understood that when God made us male and female He created both sexes in His image. In the nature of the being we know as God, there is both the masculine and the feminine.

I feel that to rewrite the Holy Scriptures and to interpret away the tradition is not the way to go. God's revelation did not stop in the last chapter of Acts. Even in these times He vouchsafes us new glimpses of Himself and His plan for humankind.

I, for one, am content to understand the new insights about women and their place in religion as just that – a new insight. New insights like this, no matter how profound, are not reasons to rewrite the Bible and totally dismiss the richness of a long tradition of Christian life, worship and preaching.

1981

Resurrection and Memories of His Grandfather

The whole drama of Lent and Easter joy has been made more poignant for me this year since receiving a battered package of old photographs that had belonged to my deceased mother. All of the photos were meaningful and brought back a host of childhood memories, but none more than several pictures of my grandfather, which I had never seen before. He was one of the most important persons in my childhood. I lived in his house for three years and his firmness, constancy and care gave me that steadying that most adolescents definitely need and all certainly crave. He was a great man and didn't need to say too much. He had an interesting and varied life in spite of the fact he was always poor and worked desperately hard for all the family had. He loved me, believed in me and was proud of my accomplishments.

But I never really knew him as a man. That part of him, which in the years since he has been dead I would love to have known and understood as I faced the problems and challenges of my life, was impossible to claim.

The Christian celebration of Easter – the queen of all feasts, as someone once said- has a tremendous cargo of meaning and significance for each believer. For this believer, however, part of the meaning of that bright and shining figure in the garden standing beside the tomb is the certain reminder that the relationship between my grandfather and me is not over. Nor are such bonds ever lost or forgotten for any of us in Christ. Easter joy is that love never gets lost and that in Christ there is no ultimate separation. Life and love triumph even through the painful separation of death.

1982

Prayer in Lent

This Lenten period we will offer several significant programs one of which will be a WORKSHOP ON PRAYER . Why ? Because it is at once the most vital aspect of Christian living and the most misunderstood! Everyone who prays must vaguely realize that the activity in which he or she is involved is supposed to be a dialogue – an activity involving two persons. Yet, for many, prayers are in fact monologues: A stream of requests for things that we from our situational humanity have decided we need or that people we know, and sometimes love, need. God in the person of Jesus is often judged as merciful or indifferent, interested or apathetic, depending upon how he responds to our personal diagnosis of need – our expectations.

The problem for many is that their praying stops half way. We make petitions and we intercede, which really amounts to informing God of what he knows already – we are commended to do that not for God's sake but for our own.

But what about the prayer of penance where we look at the quality of our own moral and spiritual lives by owning up to the realities of how we behave and think?

What about the prayer of thanksgiving where we celebrate what God has done, is doing and will do in the future? (Again, God knows what he does, but often we in our self-centeredness do not.)

And then there is the prayer of adoration – where we verbalize what and who God is.

And lastly, the most important ingredient in any dialogue – silence. Silence in which we make ourselves available for the still small voice of God. When we hear that, then we know that the dialogue has begun and that we are truly on the way to the wholeness so passionately desired for us by our Creating, Sustaining and Redeeming Father.

1983

Thoughts in Spring

I have come to understand that adult life has its own rites of spring – the arrival of the seed catalogue, the lawnmower's check-over, and the first things beginning to grow in the backyard cold frame. As a 'mature' adult, I often ask myself whether the cycle of the church year – the rites of spring, but also of fall and winter – have left me any different, this year as compared to last. Am I merely traveling in a circle or at worst, a slow spiral downward that will eventually end in the grave?

A little reflection will produce the answer to this question. It is "That depends!" For a Christian it depends on how seriously one has taken in the various elements that constituted life in the church during the past year. If we have been merely spectators, we are probably in the same place or worse at this present moment. If, however, we have allowed God to enter new areas of our heart or minds or lives this past year, surely, we are in a different and better place than we were, because we are that much closer to Christ.

1983

Lent Technology and Change

One of the more spectacular changes of recent times is the revolution in communications our society is experiencing.

As we see and hear what is newsworthy from around the world (mainly disasters), there is a strong disposition to retreat in confusion and disarray from this constant barrage of bad news. "What on earth can I do about that?" we ask ourselves. Often the answer is "Nothing!"

But for the more conscientious among us there remains a nagging fear that things are almost out of control, and a nagging sorrow for our seeming impotence to deal effectively with what is wrong in the great world out there.....

Instead of being overwhelmed and "afraid in a world we never made," Christians have always founded their sense of security in a faith in God, who has revealed Himself to be the creator and sustainer of the world and therefore the Lord of history. The Lenten insight is that - God being sufficient - our task and responsibility is to become better channels of His grace in the world we live in, to serve Him better where we are and to become more available to Him where He chooses to use us.

Lenten discipline reminds us in a very straightforward way that one of the chief responsibilities of being Christian is to grow in personal grace. If we can do that year by year, our faith tells us that there is that much more hope for this complex and bewildering world of which we are a part. And that, always, personal Christian discipline is the way we must begin.

1984

Prayer for Peace

This Easter will be somewhat different for some members of the parish family. Reports are that many people took seriously by request on the Sunday before Lent began, to pray specifically for the peace of the world. Few of us really know the power of prayer even though we have been praying for years. Sceptics discount prayer as a fetish reaction to anxiety and I must admit that at one time that was my opinion as well. But much water has passed under my particular bridge since then and I have drastically revised my appreciation for prayers' positive power.

The purpose of prayer is not to influence future events or circumstances favorably for ourselves and for our loved ones, but primarily to share our interior selves with God in order that we may grow closer to Him. What we think we want, and what we think we should receive in life, in retrospect often proves to have been wrong or illconceived. The fact is that we do not know what is best for us, so to discount God on the basis of some kind of score - balancing gifts received versus gifts asked for - is not only infantile but sabotages the very reason God wants us to pray in the first place.

So our prayers do weigh in on the balance of history because of God and not because of us. He takes our feeble efforts in prayer and perfects and uses them somehow for His ends. Because each of us is a never-to-be-duplicated and absolutely unique creation of God no one else can pray or contribute to the life of the world as each of us does. May this Lent be a new and powerful experience of prayer for each of us! It is never too late to begin.

1985

Lenten Lectures

St. Thomas Lenten Program will run for six consecutive Wednesday evenings with our guest lecturer, Mr Hawley Todd, one of our own members. Mr Todd graduated from Kenyon College in 1975, Phi Beta Kappa, received a Master of Arts degree in religious studies from McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario, and remained to work and teach at McMaster in the same field for a number of years. His major interest was man's relationship with God and he specialized in two disciplines: Hindu Religious History, and Religion and Modern Western Society.

The purpose of the Lenten series, in Mr. Todd's words, is to "show some aspects of my pilgrimage with Jesus Christ through Hinduism and Buddhism." In a time such as our own - with widespread interest in eastern religions attracting many devotees among college age Americans - Mr Todd's topic this Lent is particularly relevant, and I hope it will generate widespread interest. Our Christian faith can only be made deeper and richer as we come to understand these differing and yet sometimes very similar religious strivings on the part of millions of human beings with whom we share our lovely planet Earth. Please mark you calendars and be sure to be with us in Lent.

1985

Traditional Family and the Parish Family

The "traditional" family is in trouble today. What is at stake is the stability of life - and that is not in the category of something optional but is highly necessary for our wellbeing. We need some form of stability -- a place or base we call "home".

When I grew up "home" was the best possible place - where one in the painful process of growing up could find love, support, discipline, comfort and meaning. It was in my home that I knew I was loved, wanted and meant to amount to something. It was in that house I learned that I belonged to another, larger family -- the parish church. I knew the meaning of the "extended family" before that became a buzzword.

Far from being on its way out today, the parish family is proving to be a necessity in our highly scattered, rootless "family life" for so many.

If you take a long hard look at the way a parish like St Thomas operates, you will see its family structure. Our center here, however, is the Altar, and from the Altar all that we do or plan takes its meaning.

We know without asking that the things which really matter to us, even if they do not always excite us, are stability, home, friends we can depend on, family cohesiveness, love, productivity and growing.

All this the parish church provides. The parish family is not a perfect one, and we would not expect it to be advertised as such. Our Head and Center is perfect, but the operation is a fallible one – very human with flaws and failures, disagreements sometimes, and misunderstandings to be sure. But it is here in the parish church that the potential for “newness of life” exists – for all—ready to be learned, known and lived out.

I hope you and your family will become an active part of the larger family of Christ here at St. Thomas. Welcome Home!

1986

Pentecost

Pentecost, called the birthday of the church, is the celebration commemorating the Holy Spirit descending from Christ after His ascension into Heaven. The Spirit of God that was with Christ was sent to dwell in Christ's new body – the church. By our baptism we are part of that body. Christ's life was breathed into us.

What does it mean to be part of Christ's body? How is the Spirit of God inside us and part of us? Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 12 and following that by baptism we are members of the body and that the body does not consist of one member but of many. Whether my function is that of an ear or an eye or a foot, it doesn't matter because we must work together.

Dr. Paul Brand, author of “Fearfully and Wonderfully Made and In His Image” says that today we need a slightly different analogy. He augments in this way: “The body is one unit, though it is made up of many cells, and though all its cells are many, they form one body.”

Dr. Brand goes on to say that that analogy has more meaning for him because, although a hand or foot or ear cannot have a life separate from the body, a cell does have that potential. It can be part of the body, it can cling to its own life. Some cells do choose to live in the body, sharing its benefits while maintaining complete independence – they become parasites or cancer cells.

In keeping this analogy, then, the Holy Spirit to us is like DNA, that coded substance in each cell that contains our entire genetic code. DNA is the stuff that coordinates the body's cells and allows them to work as one unit. The spirit of Christ in us is like that mystery of life in which DNA passes on a unique identity to each new cell. Christ has infused our very core of being with His Life. Because of His Incarnation as Man, our very genetic code is different! We carry within us not just the image of, or the philosophy of, or faith in, but the actual substance of God. We have the Spiritual Genes of Christ.

As Christians, we are one body bound together by Jesus Christ. We get our support and nourishment from one another. This “body” born almost 2000 years ago still grows and matures as its members attain unity. Dr Brand uses the medical term homeostasis, meaning a balance between different but interdependent part of a group or organism, to describe this unity. The corresponding biblical word is Shalom – Peace.

Isolated Christians cannot attain the fullness of Christ because they are but one cell. They have all the genetic codes but they can't perform all the functions. We can only attain the fullness of our creation by working together in love to do what God created this “body” for: to be Christ on earth.

1988

Easter

When I was a very little boy Easter was important in my limited understanding . That was the time of year my mother would dye Easter eggs, and I was given the opportunity to help out and to color a few eggs myself.

When I was a young man, the chief image conjured up by Easter was a spring vacation where one, if he were very lucky and had saved enough money, took off southwards with friends in the perennial hope of meeting that perfect girl on a sun-splashed beach.

When I was a grown man in the midst of a nasty war, Easter came to mean a marvelous hope that in the midst of carnage, pain and loss there as a God, after all, who suffered and died and then triumphantly rose from the wreckage and injustice of history. East was the eternal symbol that at the last, God always wins.

Now I am an older man just catching the ground swells of that approaching continent where by voyage will end. Easter has become the keystone of all joy, all hope and all understanding. For me, year by year, it has become the powerful symbol of just how much God loves us all and to what lengths He will go in that love to call us to Himself. Easter has become the symbol of life – a new life with Christ that will be mine and yours on those approaching continental shores where all voyages end.

1988

Resurrection

John 20:15: "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom do you seek?" Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away." Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned and said to him in Hebrew, "Rabon-ni".....

Mary was looking for a corpse—death—and she found a radiantly alive man who was and is life itself: Jesus, the Christ of God. This is one of the most hopeful passages in the Bible because Jesus taught that where He is we will be also. If this encounter between Mary and Jesus is the prototype of the new life in Christ made possible by the Resurrection, we see that our personal uniqueness survives the experience of physical death. The transformed body that Jesus showed Mary and His other disciples will be like our own transformed body in the life to come. Personality is intact. Loved ones can and will be recognized. In the great love of God in Jesus Christ our lesser loves are not lost. No one lives in eternal darkness away from the radiant presence of Christ unless he or she has chosen to do so.

When Christians speak of Easter Joy they are celebrating the new life that is offered to each, personally, in the stunning victory of the cross. That Joy far surpasses and severely stretches what we ordinarily understand when we use the word at all.

1989

Evangelism

The Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church has proclaimed the 1990's as being the Decade of Evangelism. To be sure, Episcopalians have never been notable for their practice of overt evangelism and there are some of you who, in your heart of hearts, wonder about the necessity or the effectiveness of such an effort. I must confess that for many years I had the same misgivings.

But the world has changed. People are hungry for something to live by. They are thirsting for meaning. Our world in many respects is darker than it has ever been. The demarcation between believers and nonbelievers is ever more starkly evident. Dissimulation in matters of Faith--what you believe in--has become almost impossible. People must choose, and it is a matter of life and death. For these reasons we must reach out to the world. For these reasons we must obey the Gospel mandate to evangelize the unchurched and the lost.

1989

The Resurrection

Death, Resurrection and Vindication are the themes the Gospel dealt with long ago. But those same themes are a part of each of our lives as we live them today. For we live in the presence of both death and resurrection in each moment of our lives. We were born and we are dying, physically, as each day passes.

The same pattern exists in our inner lives. We are always on the move, leaving one thing - one phase of our lives - and accommodating ourselves, sometimes under protest, to what is new - the next thing we are called upon to face. We die in order that we may live, and that is one of the basic patterns of what it means to be alive.

But, what of vindication? The story on Good Friday ended with Jesus lying dead and seemingly defeated in the tomb. The bad guys won. The struggle had proved futile. All was lost. And then came the stunning vindication of Easter Day. Vindication comes through God for any life. The promise of vindication is a promise to us because we are believers in Him who was vindicated supremely on the first Easter. God's vindication comes no other way.

1990

History - Easter - Resurrection

We have just lived through the virtual dissolution of a world empire within a few months and from that death we see hopeful signs of new life - new configurations that promise a better and happier world. This is a kind of political resurrection of nations not unknown to history. Certainly, such events serve to remind us again that God is the Lord of history, and that He is leading us all somewhere.

Personally, Resurrection is for each of us who claims Jesus as Lord and Saviour the principal ground of all hope. Death is not the end. Our loved ones do not disappear into nothingness. All of the uncertainties, all the pain and suffering that attend life have ultimate meaning in Him who died for us and rose again. He has triumphed, and so shall we if we are His. Only in the light of this truth can we face down the darkness that seems, often, to surround us. Only in this certain knowledge can we live confidently in a world where evil and death seem to have won, where injustice seems to have carried the day in so many places.

This is the Lord's world, and He rules it. Because He loves it, he will never abandon it. That is the quintessential meaning of Easter.

1990

Stewardship

It is true that from the viewpoint of Christian stewardship we own nothing and never will own a thing. We are only stewards over what God has given us. That goes for our money, our bodies, our children, and the part of the world God has lent us to live in.

This is a hard idea to live into. For it is human nature – particularly in this age—to be concerned about what we lack. The god of this age is SECURITY, and we worship this god in the spirit of fear – obsessed by what we lack. There is never enough money, never enough of the good things. Never enough time or enjoyment. “Just a little bit more and then I shall be satisfied” is the prayer we pray.

Once this demon god SECURITY is faced in the light of the Gospel, our shackles are struck away. Something new and wonderful happens to our lives. Life becomes what it is meant to be: a gift. And all of the things we so assiduously hold close to our breast—our possessions, our money, our futures, our relationships—become what they really are as well: undeserved gifts from a loving and provident God.

It is only in the light of the Christian understanding of God and His gifts to us that we can offer back to Him in love what He has already given us.

To get right with God always involves this understanding. To get right with God always involves the love offering in return, to show that you do understand and that Jesus Christ is you Lord as well as your Saviour.

1991

Dedication of Thomaston Woods

This month of May is a very special time in the life of St Thomas Church. On the 4th of May we will dedicate Thomaston Woods, our 100 – unit low – to moderate – income housing project in Clermont County. This achievement is unprecedented in the long life of this parish and in the life of the Diocese of Southern Ohio. It happens because of the dedication and hard work of dozens of people and the willingness of a few to devote uncounted hours in face-to-face negotiations with bankers, government bodies, builders and many others. Above all, it happen because of a faith in God and a willingness to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit into uncharted territory.

Now we are again pioneering. This time, it is in the area of a parish church owning and operating a rental property which is the size of a small town. We do not know what lies ahead, but we are committed to the enterprise of proving that a small church in dedicated service to the Godpel of Jesus Christ can make a big difference in the lives of a hundred families who will live in the units we have built.

Our task is to continue to support this project as it unfolds with our prayers, our substance, our time and our talent. With the Lord leading us, what we have to offer will be sufficient.

By the way, the Thomaston Woods project should provide an answer to the often-asked question of why a parish needs an endowment fund. The front money for this project and the salary for our on-site Coordinator of Resident Services, Hope Webster, came from endowment income. A large endowment income can be a curse. In this case it is and will be a great blessing. I ask you to remember St Thomas in your wills.

1993

Time to Take Stock

Lent is the church's premier season of preparation. For us modern Christians, undertaking a ciscipline during Lent is particularly significant, because –for all of us—managing our time is as significant a spiritual decision as managing our money or our relationships with others. Stewardship of our time is also one of the most difficult skills for us to master; it involves how we prioritize so that our values—(of) who we are—are truly served.

“The unexamined life is not worth living.” Yet so many of us are so busy marching to some other drumbeat that we cecome unable to find our own—and the drumbeat that God calls us to march by...

All comes down to gratitude

By Barbara Lyrhtel Rohrer



On Trinity Sunday, June 3, the congregation of Christ Church Cathedral will celebrate the 50th anniversary of Canon Bob Gerhard's ordination to the priesthood and his and Ernestine's 50th wedding anniversary. Canon Gerhard will celebrate at the 8:00 and 10:00 a.m. services. Receptions will follow each service. A larger reception will be held in honor of both events that evening immediately following the Evensong service.

Through 50 years of ordained ministry, the Rev. Canon Robert D. Gerhard has seen a lot. Much of what he has seen has involved change and growth for himself and his church. The changes have followed a consistent pattern, an ever widening circle of inclusivity. When Bob was first ordained, blacks and whites did not worship together. That changed. Women could not be ordained priests. That changed. Now, the status of persons who are homosexual within the Church is changing. Some within the Anglican Communion resist this change. Canon Gerhard has learned not to be troubled by such resistance. "We're going to bear witness to what we think is right," says Canon Gerhard, speaking of the Episcopal Church. It is a witness he regularly sees borne forth by the cathedral. "I feel like I have seen a literal miracle at Christ Church Cathedral," he says. He is referring to the changes he has seen in the congregation over the 12 years he has served as the cathedral's pastoral assistant. Today the congregation includes a range of members from different backgrounds, holding different opinions. More importantly, the congregation has recaptured its urban character. "What we have become is consistent with the role of a cathedral a city's church. In terms of getting involved (within the city), we lead the pack. I feel privileged to be part of this of change." But he hasn't always found new ways easy. "It took me four years to get the St. Thomas congregation (where he served as rector) to use the new Prayer Book comfortably," he says. Was he one of those uncomfortable? He smiles and says, "I've been a slow learner, but eventually I get the point. I came to love the new prayer book. The old one is simply not culturally appropriate for America." He once wrote beautifully of another time when he "got the point" (The Cathedral Tower, August, 2003). In 1976, the issue of women's ordination was before the General Convention of the Episcopal Church. Canon Gerhard attended the convention convinced that he knew the truth. "The ordination of women would be a catastrophe for the Church," he wrote. Still he listened carefully to both sides of the argument, and he prayed. The time came for a vote. The convention chair called for five minutes of silence first. "Never in my life have I experienced a deeper or more profound silence ... one could feel the presence of the Holy Spirit ... And it was in those moments that I changed my mind. I became convinced that ordaining women to the ministry of this Church was what God wanted. I surrendered." He tells of another surrender more than 50 years ago, when he first realized he had a call to the priesthood. Canon Gerhard was raised in the Episcopal Church, but as a young man had stopped attending services. Then came the Christmas Eve while he was a lieutenant in the U.S. Navy. He was stationed in Osaka, Japan. His brother sailors were hitting the honky tonks for the night. That didn't quite set right with him for Christmas Eve. He hopped into a taxi and said, "sei ko kai" Japanese for Episcopal Church. The service was Japanese. The hymns were in Japanese. But he recognized the music. "All of the sudden, I discovered I was home again," says Canon Gerhard. "That was the experience that made the difference." When he completed his tour of duty in the Navy, he entered the seminary. He graduated from Seabury Western Theological Seminary in 1957. That summer he became a priest and he married Ernestine Banker, a former psychiatric social worker whom he still calls "his bride." He retired from active full time service as a priest in 1995. He now works part time at the cathedral as an assistant. "The satisfaction is now to serve," says Canon Gerhard. "I don't have to be in charge." Reflecting on change and even loss, Canon Gerhard says, "The things you lose are just preparing you for the great gateway that is death. Death is a gate, and you're going to go through it. I no longer (can) play tennis or golf, but I can swim. And each time I do, I say, 'Thank you, Lord.'"