Septuagesima Carl F. Thrun

OUR GREATEST NEED

Luke 10: 38-42 Now it came to pass as they went that He entered into a certain village; and a certain woman named Martha received Him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, which also sat at Jesus' feet and heard His Word. But Martha was cumbered about much serving and came to Him and said, Lord, dost Thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? Bid her therefore that she help me. And Jesus answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things, but one thing is needful; and Mary hath chosen that good pa rt, which shall not be taken away from her.

What, would you say, does the United States and its 165,000,000 people need most of all today? Would you say, perhaps, that we need greater prosperity -- higher wages, more jobs to put the unemployed to work, a better and more efficient farm support program? Would you say that America needs greater security for peace in this tense and nervous world? Would you say that we as individuals need more luxuries in our homes to make our lives more comfortable and more enjoyable? Would you say that we need more medicines, more cures for diseases, more skilled doctors to perform delicate operations?

What, would you say, does St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Aberdeen, South Dakota, need most of all today? Would you say that we need more money in our treasury, both for our own use and for the support of missions? Would you say that we need a ~~new~~ larger building for our Sunday School, better facilities so that our young people can enjoy themselves? Would you say that we need more ladies to take an active part in the Ladies' Aid and Mary-Martha Guild, more young people to participate in our Walther League, more ~~people~~ ADULTS to serve the Lord in our Christian Fellowship Club? Would you say that we need more active workers in our church who are willing to sacrifice their time to bring delinquent members and prospectives members into the Kingdom of God? Would you say that we need more choir members to sing praises unto Christ, our King?

YES INDEED, our country, our church most certainly need these things. But what, I ask again, is our GREATEST NEED? What do we, our nation, the whole world need the Most? Come, let us in spirit go back some Nineteen Hundred years and ask Jesus Himself. He who is the sure Way, the errorless Truth, and

the eternal Life, clearly shows us OUR GREATEST NEED, our supreme necessity for time and eternity.

We enter upon a domestic scene in the household of Mary and Martha. Our text reads: "Now it came to pass as they went that He entered into a certain village; and a certain woman named Martha received Him into her house." I hope that you are just as willing to receive your Redeemer, the sinless Son of God, into your home; that you never sit down to any meal without asking, "Come, Lord Jesus, be our Guest;" that you never begin any task without asking Him to guide you; that you never begin or close the day without praying intimately and confidently with your Savior as though He were present in person, a very special guest in your home. If your home is not dominated with consideration, compassion, self-sacrifice -- then Jesus is most certainly not the center of your household. If your family circle is plagued with impurity, unfaithfulness, quarreling, anger, hatred -- then Jesus is most definitely not an invited Guest. May the Holy Spirit so bless this message that each of you will resolve, God helping you, to write this invitation in bold letters of faith - "WELCOME, LORD JESUS" - upon the walls of your home and your heart.

Hardly had the Savior entered their home, when Martha, the elder of the two sisters, began to make preparations for His entertainment. Nothing was to be spared for making the Lord's visit a pleasant one. But soon Martha in her eagerness to serve Jesus well had more preparations under way than she herself could possibly attend to. In her busy rush from one duty to another she became irked to see that her younger sister had seemingly forgotten her share in the responsibilities; for as our text says, Mary, oblivious to everything else "sat at Jesus' feet and heard His Word." Martha could stand Mary's failure to share in the duty of hospitality just so long. Finally, she came to Jesus and demanded: "Lord, dost Thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? Bid her therefore that she help me!"

Yet, Jesus refused to comply with her wish. Instead, He gave her a gentle rebuke: "Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things, but one thing is needful; and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her." At first we may be inclined to sympathize with Martha who had been so energetic in trying to please the Lord. --"WHY DID JESUS REPROVE HER?" -- Certainly not because she was busy, nor because she was anxious to please Him with a memorial meal; but because she did only that. Here was Christ, the Son of God, the Teacher of eternal truth, right there in her home! And yet, He might have been a million miles away for all the good she derived from His presence. Here was Christ, the greatest Instructor of all time; and yet, Martha was so occupied, so troubled about material things -- food for the body that she could find no time to join Mary in receiving food for her soul. She had neglected the "one thing needful" -- her soul, its instruction and salvation.

While our nation is busy laboring, striving with untold zeal to accomplish its needs -- peace, prosperity, progress; better homes, schools, government; health and wealth -- it is disregarding the ONE THING NEEDFUL. The latest census report states that there are some 90 million people on the church rolls in the United States. But I am wondering how many of those 90 million are truly Christian; and that still leaves the appalling figure of 75 million outside of the church. And yet, our nation dares to boast of itself as a "Christian Country." If you have ever seen a spider in a milk bottle; working, striving ever so earnestly to get itself out -- you will know how utterly foolish and useless it is to try to accomplsih anything without Christ. How necessary that we, the whole world believe Jesus when He says, "Without Me ye can do nothing!" That is why the whole world seems to be sitting on a powder keg, why there is so much crime, why there are so many divorces, broken homes, and unclean living in America today. We as a nation and as individuals have neglected the one thing needful. Our nation NEEDS to "sit at Jesus' feet and hear His Word."

Here is the one and only power that can keep America truly great. Here is the one and only force that can purify the heart and cleanse the soul; stifle blasphemy, unbelief, profanity; destroy the passions of greed, hatred, lust, and falsehood. Here is the one and only energy that can change men and make them entirely new creatures. God help you and me to make an earnest effort to bring those 75 million lost souls in our own land besides the untold numbers in distant countries -- God help us to bring them to the feet of Jesus through our Church's missionary endeavors. God help us to make the world achieve its GREATEST NEED. God open up our hearts, our mouths, our pocketboods to accomplish it.

Similarly, the supreme necessity in our church is nothing external. It is not that we have a new building, modern equipment, larger financial balances; it is not that we have more ladies who are willing to help serve church suppers; ~~it is not that we have more men willing to go on a rabbit hunt~~. Indeed, these things are all well and good. They are truly services to the Lord and very necessary services at that. Let's not forget that Martha was performing a service to the Lord. The Lord appreciated her work. And yet, Martha was passing by the one thing that was necessary. What St. Paul's needs is to have all of its members sit constantly at Jesus' feet, humbly and worshipfully drinking in all of His Words and Teachings. What St. Paul's needs is to have its members take advantage, as did Mary, of the opportunities they have to hear the Word of Christ. This would mean that every Sunday, 52 weeks a year, St. Paul's would have between eight and nine hundred people within its sanctuary, sitting at Jesus' feet and hearing His Word. This would mean that every week all the members of St. Paul's would attend Bible classes. Isn't that a far cry from the present attendance of little better than a hundred. And I don't imagine that there are very many more who take time out daily to have devotions and fill their souls with the thrilling story of the Gospel.

This is the ONE THING NEEDFUL! More than all else, you need this regenerating force to combat the forces of sin, the Devil, and your flesh. You need the

Power of Christ's Word to save you from hell, destroy your fears, and give you the strength to face each day. You need His Word to bring peace and assurance into your heart, to cause joy and happiness to overflow in your soul. You need His Word to change you into an entirely new being and give you confidence to meet death.

Thank God with me today that you have this opportunity to sit at Jesus' feet and hear His Word. There are many, many millions who are not so fortunate, who know nothing of Christ and His saving atonement. Thank God with me that you are members of a church which teaches the Word of Christ in all its truth and purity, which holds Jesus up for what He is -- The eternal Son of God who became true man, Who suffered the eternal torments of hell there on Calvary's holy hill and thereby became man's sole Redeemer from sin. Thank God that you know Jesus as Savior; and not merely as a great moral teacher whose accomplishments can be held up with those of Socrates, Plato, or Mohammed.

God grant that, like Mary, every member of St. Paul's begins soon -- TODAY -- to value and appreciate the soul-saving instruction of Jesus. God give us men and women here at St. Paul's who, like Mary, will hear His Word and follow what He says, no matter how many temptations seek to distract them. God give us parents who are not so wrapped up in the cares and troubles of this world that they can find no time to let Christ into their home, no time to bring their children up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. God give us youth who are dedicated to their Savior, who love to sit at His feet, who regard the purity of their bodies as well as their speech as sacred. God give us a congregation which can, no matter what, find time daily to be guided by Christ's truth.

Need I say more about the supreme necessity of sitting at Jesus' feet and drinking in the eternal truths of His Words? What can I say to warn you of the eternal anguish which will be yours, if you persistantly refuse THE ONE THING

NEEDFUL? Your soul, precious beyond price, will be lost forever. Outside of Christ's instruction, outside of His cross, outside of His Grace -- there is no salvation.

As we approach the sacred season of Lent, and as we once again prepare to kneel down before that Old Rugged Cross on which the Prince of Glory died, let us examine our faith and our lives. And if we find that we have been distracted from sitting at Jesus' feet and hearing His Word, if we find that our lives ~~hives~~ have not been wholly didicated to Him -- then let us in true humility and with a penitent heart approach that cross of Love, seeking His grace and pardon. And He who in the midst of pain and torment did not hesitate to grant forgiveness to the dying thief will likewise forgive us and give us peace. And He will send His Holy Spirit to endow us with greater love for His Word and greater zeal to live our lives completely in His Service.

O Holy Spirit, grant us grace
That we our Lord and Savior
In faith and fervent love embrace
And truly serve Him ever,
So that when death is drawing nigh,
We to His open wounds may fly
And fin in them salvation.

Help us that we Thy saving Word
In faithful hearts may treasure;
Let e'er that Bread of Life afford
New grace in richest measure.
Yea, let us die to ev'ry sin,
For heav'n create us new within
That fruits of faith may flourish.

And when our earthly race is run,
Death's bitter hour impending,
Then may Thy work in us begun
Continue till life's ending,
Until we gladly may commend
Our souls into our Savior's hand
To rest in peace eternal.

Amen.