

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church  
Pentecost 21  
Quincy, IL  
Rev. Larry D. Troxel

Saturday, October 17, 2015 at 5:00 p.m.  
Sunday, October 18, 2015 at 9:00 a.m.

# “What Will This Become?”

Matthew 13:31–32

In the name of Christ Jesus. Amen.

On a Sunday morning during the 1930's, two young boys were seen sitting on the curbside near 24<sup>th</sup> and Broadway. They were waiting for Sunday School to start at the Durst Dairy Store. That beginning is comparable to what Jesus said in Matthew chapter thirteen: “The reign of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his field. It is the smallest of all seeds, but when it has grown it is larger than all the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.”<sup>1</sup>

When the members of Saint James congregation decided to open a mission Sunday School in the northeastern portion of Quincy, I'm sure that some of them wondered what would become of such a seemingly small start. A succession of vicars from our Saint Louis seminary assisted the aging Pastor Titus Lang, gathering children for Sunday School and eventually gathering their parents for worship. Even as Pastor Lang's eyesight was failing, I wonder if he ever foresaw or dreamed of what would become of that mission Sunday School.

This year Our Redeemer congregation gives thanks and praise to God for the marvelous grace He has poured out through Word and Sacrament, taking a mustard seed-like beginning and bringing it to the fullness that exists today. In the history and in the continuing life and work of the people of God who comprise this congregation there is abundant evidence of the effects brought by the grace of God. Most significant of all is the fact that God the Holy Spirit has been at work among these people, keeping you faithful to His Word through times when being faithful was not easy.

Certainly we give thanks to God for the tireless, faithful work which He carried out here through the Rev. Dr. E. J. Otto. His forty-two years of service in Word and Sacrament ministry were richly blessed by our God and Savior. He would remind you that he and all pastors are merely “hod carriers in the

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 13:31–32

Lord's building project."<sup>2</sup> Always all credit, thanks, and praise belong to our Savior Christ Jesus and not to any human beings. In his service as chairman of the Board of Regents of Concordia Seminary in Saint Louis, Pastor Otto brought that fact home quite pointedly when he participated in the installation of new seminary professors. He always quoted what the Apostle Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians chapter four. "For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord. . . . We have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us."<sup>3</sup>

Mustard seed, hod carrier, and clay pots – there is no room for anyone who desires personal honor and glory. For the fact is that none of us have anything about which we ourselves might boast. The prophet Isaiah says of us pastors and members of congregations that "we have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment."<sup>4</sup> Our pride hates that verse of Holy Scripture. Not only does it leave us with nothing for which we can take credit, it actually leaves us under the condemnation of divine justice. Christ Jesus made the same point when He said, "So you also, when you have done all that you were commanded, say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty.'"<sup>5</sup> Think of it! If we could be absolutely perfect even for one minute, we still would have nothing about which to boast. We simply would have done what God expects of us, nothing praiseworthy at all.

That is why the celebration of this congregation's 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary is a celebration of God's grace in Christ Jesus. For whatever has been accomplished is what God graciously has done in and through those who have gathered here to receive Christ Jesus who comes to us through His Word, through Holy Baptism, and in the Lord's Supper. He is the One whom we confess. He is the One whom we praise. For He has poured out in abundance upon the people of this congregation all that He won for us through His life, death, and resurrection.

In His grace Christ Jesus proclaims every weekend to all who gather here the full and free forgiveness of all your sins. In His grace every weekend

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<sup>2</sup> Salutation in his personal letter to the Rev. Larry D. Troxel, accompanying the call to Troxel to become the next pastor of Our Redeemer in the fall of 1982

<sup>3</sup> 2 Corinthians 4:5, 7

<sup>4</sup> Isaiah 64:6

<sup>5</sup> Luke 17:10

Christ Jesus equips you through His Word with all that you need so that you live in His peace, in His presence, and with spiritual equipment for your daily lives as His disciples and witnesses. In His grace Christ Jesus assures you that God graciously does hear and does answer every one of your prayers. Christ Jesus assures you that He continually speaks to His heavenly Father on your behalf. You are the richly blessed children of God in Christ Jesus.

This is a great year to look back with thanks and praise to God. It also is a good year to look to the future with confidence in God's grace and to ponder the question, "What Will This Become?" What is God's plan for Our Redeemer in the decades to come?

God calls you to remain faithful to His Word and He promises to work that faithfulness in you. Let His Word dwell in you richly.<sup>6</sup> Make time for God's Word in your life every day. Jesus comes to you through His Word with His power and His peace.

Look for the opportunities that our Lord is placing before you to serve others with His saving Gospel and with Christian love in action. Our Lord has blessed you with wonderful resources, gifted men, women, and children, time, abilities, experience, and treasures with which you can bring Christ's love and His Gospel into the lives of people both in this community and around the world.

Jesus spoke of "the birds of the air making their nests in the branches" of the full-grown mustard tree. Those birds are not essential parts of the tree, but they derive great benefit from it. How will this community benefit from the presence of this congregation in the years to come? How will the church at large, even in all the world, benefit from the ongoing life and work of this congregation? Seek out our Lord's guidance. He has placed you here to serve in His name with His saving Gospel.

This community and our nation and world have changed dramatically since the days of those two boys sitting on the curb waiting for Sunday School to begin. We face ever new opportunities to touch the lives of others with the Good News of our Savior. We face ever new challenges and opposition to the Gospel just as our Lord said we would. Yet we face this future with confidence because Christ Jesus has promised us that He is with

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<sup>6</sup> Colossians 3:16

us always<sup>7</sup> and for that reason not even the gates of hell will prevail against His Gospel and His Church.<sup>8</sup>

When this congregation was organized in 1940, the clouds of worldwide war were looming large on the horizon. Members of the congregation gathered building materials in their garages, anticipating the restrictions and rationing which would come when war was declared. And so it happened, yet the construction of the first church building began and was completed because the members looked ahead.

Ministry to people is even more important and needs the same foresight. God does give you leaders with such vision and understanding. Seek our Lord's leadership as you consider what this will become. Because Christ Jesus has won the ultimate victory for us over sin, death, and hell, He encourages us with these words: "Be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain."<sup>9</sup>

This congregation can trace its beginning to two boys sitting on the curb, waiting for Sunday School to open. They were Walter and Kenneth Sheer. Our Lord graciously has called them from this life to Himself. But look at what the Lord has done with such a small beginning. What this congregation will become does not depend upon one pastor or another. It does not depend on any one member or small group of members. What this congregation will become depends upon the grace of God working in each and every one of you through His Word and Sacraments.

One of the prayers which is a regular part of my devotions each week includes this petition: "Bless all pastors and those who administer the Church in the building of Your congregation; grant them success in all things. Equip Your whole Church with the power and proof of the holy faith. Stand by Your witnesses among the nations and further the course of Your Gospel in all the world."<sup>10</sup> Amen.

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<sup>7</sup> Matthew 28:20

<sup>8</sup> Matthew 16:18

<sup>9</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:58

<sup>10</sup> *Treasury of Daily Prayer*, (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2008), page 1310.