

From the Pastor's Desk

Nonresistance

Our summer bus trip must come to an end as fall is upon us and our students need to return to school. We never did make it to Pagossa Springs, but had a wonderful stay at the Great Sand Dunes National Park where we discussed the problem of evil and the topic of hell. If you missed any of these discussions, you can find them on our web site at www.sothlutheran.com and click on "Lutheranism 101", or refer to the last three newsletters. We hope to continue our trip again next spring or summer.

Recently, I met with members of our church who are bereaving the loss of a loved one. I found our conversations to be inspiring and faith-filled. One thing we learned about the bereavement process is that it's very hard work with no easy way out. While playing on my high school football team, I would occasionally do an "end run" play around the big bruisers on the front defensive line. It was great to avoid those gorillas and run ten, twenty, thirty or more yards at a time. But, to win we had to mix up the plays, which meant sometimes having to run "up the middle" into the gorillas. I remember one time when I saw stars after colliding head on with one of them. They didn't have to carry me off the field, but it took some time before I was able to stand up and get my bearings. Unfortunately, in healthy bereavement, there are no "end runs". You have to "go up the middle" into the pain of death and loss and it takes months and years to regain your bearings.

A principle I have grown to appreciate is "nonresistance", but you don't hear much about it because it's so easily misunderstood. The misunderstanding occurs when people think nonresistance means not taking responsibility for their lives and being carried along with whatever comes their way in a life of hedonism. Therefore, the principle of nonresistance is for spiritually mature people who are taking seriously their imitation of Christ.

In the case of the bereavement process, nonresistance means going with the flow of the loss and not trying to fight it. In other words, you allow yourself to feel the loss and enter fully into it. It may mean collapsing in sorrow and weeping rather than repressing it. Or allowing your anger to be expressed in constructive ways and not buried. It may mean letting God know what your feelings are, even if it involves a few four letter words. God can handle your anger and honesty.

Like the Arkansas River, our lives have a movement that must be respected. Sometimes the movement is into territory we would rather not go. Death, sickness, relationship or job problems, etc. all are part of the flow of life. At some point, like a river, you must let it go where it is going to go and accept it in nonresistance. When you let go of trying to control the uncontrollable, you find peace. Several years ago I went through a difficult time, although now I don't even remember what it was about. At any rate, I was watching the news about a hurricane going through Florida and saw a palm tree nearly bent horizontal in the wind and felt the Spirit say in my heart, "Bob, you need to be like that palm tree, either learn to bend or you're going to break!" I learned to have nonresistance in the storm and found peace.

What this is really about is trusting God and believing God is guiding circumstances, even though painful. It means letting go of control, which is frightening for us who like having all circumstances of life under control.

We see in Christ's life the principle of nonresistance during his arrest, trial and crucifixion. Jesus says very little as this grizzly drama unfolds. Sometimes, we too find ourselves at the foot of the cross, or, perhaps on the cross. Like Christ, we trust God that resurrection is coming.

Nonresistance is best practiced in a faith community. A couple of years ago, I was asked to visit a lady whose husband had died. She had no family or faith community and sat alone in her grief. I felt sorry for her and saw the importance of developing relationships of faith and trust. These relationships don't just happen. They need to be intentionally developed and nourished. This is central in our Church and seen in our mission statement "Inviting, growing and serving through Christian relationships."

Let's continue to keep our arms around each other. Life is better that way.

~PB