

## *An Easter Message from Pastor John*

When I finally reached the point where I was actually ready to give seminary a try, I made a visit to Chicago for a two-day recruitment affair hosted by the school. A goodly number of prospective students would be there and so they, along with me, would be treated to a taste of seminary life.

Most of my fellow inquirers were assigned to student housing, so I was a bit disappointed when I was yoked with a really, really old professor. As events of the first day wore down, the Rev. Dr. Joseph Sittler prepared to drive me to his, and his wife, Jeannie's apartment. The hour was late as Dr. Sittler and I headed out into the snow and cold of the February Chicago night.

I was nervous as I got into his car not just because I was going to be staying at a professor's house and he, essentially, a relative stranger to me. But I was also nervous because the aged Dr. Sittler had already retired from the University of Chicago before crossing the street to teach at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, and because the dominant feature of his aged appearance was the eyeglasses upon his face. The lenses on the glasses he wore were the thickest I had ever seen! I don't think I exaggerate any when I say that the fictional Mr. Magoo has nothing on old Dr. Sittler. (and, as an aside, by the beginning of my second year of seminary, Professor Sittler required a reader because he could no longer see print at all).

Somehow, (thank you, Jesus!) we arrived safely at the Sittler apartment. Joe & Jeannie, as I was encouraged to address them, were simply wonderful and delightful hosts. And, oh my goodness! The abundant works of art (Jeannie's profession) and the shelves upon shelves upon shelves of books that walled their home was another sight I had never seen before and something truly remarkable to behold.

Well, as I learned from other people the following day, Dr. Sittler was a name that was world famous! I had no idea! I thought he was a "mere" Lutheran seminary professor. But, on that day, I discovered that I had been hosted by a man who had set the theological world a-buzz when he presented a paper for the World Council of Churches as they met in New Delhi, India. (I suspect you can google this on the net if you want to pursue it further.)

In the four-volume set of For All the Saints which serves as my main devotional study/reading, there is a piece that Professor Sittler authored entitled, "Aging: A Summing Up and a Letting Go." As the Easter season will arrive at the end of the month, which makes what Joe this great man penned, very pertinent to the time – I'd like to share with you what Joe once write.

"If I were a young preacher again, I would preach the Christian gospel of eternal life in God, but I would preach it sooner in my ministry, preach it throughout, and I would preach it more realistically. The Bible really has nothing to say about eternal life. That sounds like a shocking statement, but it's literally true. There is not a single clear and concrete word in the Bible about life after death. It affirms that life with God is life with that which does not die. But any speculation about life after death is steadily avoided by the biblical writers.

"Paul made an effort to address the question, but it's a bum effort. 'What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. And what you sow is not the body, which is to be, by a bare kernel, perhaps of wheat or some other grain. But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body. For not all flesh is alike, but here is one kind for man, another for animals, another for birds. And another for fish! (1 Corinthians 15:36-39) He tries by natural analogy to say something. Interestingly, he never tried it again.

"In Romans, the most mature of Paul's epistles, he says, 'If we live, we live, to the Lord, and, if we die, we die to the Lord, so then whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's.' (Romans 14:8P) Period!

"That is the fundamental and absolute work of scripture. But that word is immensely satisfying to old people. I never try to give any blueprints of eternity or heaven or eternal life, since by definition it is utterly impossible. I think instead of trying to answer all the questions about death, we ought to follow the example of Paul and the New Testament and say, 'Eye has not seen nor ear heard', 'By faith we are saved,' (For All The Saints, Vol 1, pp.1059-1060)

"Whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's." Period!

***Christ is Risen! He is Risen, indeed! Alleluia!!!***

*Pastor John Thompson*