November 1954

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Dear Brother:

These lines are being written late on a Sunday morning. At this moment you are probably standing in your pulpit preparing your people for the end of another year of grace and the coming of Advent and Christmas. Whenever I have a chance I like to take a few moments on Sunday to swing my memory from coast to coast, remembering the unimaginable power of all our voices saying something true and good, however human and stammering, about our Savior and His work for us. I recall a little white church in Minnesota, a mission in California, a quiet church in New Jersey. All of them are saying the same thing to the world this morning and their witness, under the view of eternity, is infinitely greater than all the headlines and the noises of the market place.

If you weary of your task now and then (as we all do), you ought to close your eyes for a moment and remember that our message makes us a part of the greatest line in the history of men. Our fathers in God are Isaiah and Jeremiah, Peter and Paul, Augustine and Luther. Only because of our message does God permit the world still to roll on its strange way. When we have finished our work, the clocks of the universe will stop. God has permitted us, in our own way, to be the hand of the Bridegroom, the shadow of the Cross, the trumpet of the King in a dark and difficult hour.

All this I remembered on this quiet Sunday morning in early winter of the year of our Lord 1954. Soon you will be working on your Advent and Christmas sermons. Once more in a world in which things are endlessly fading and passing away and the years come and go you will be able to say to people — anxious, lonely, forgetful, dying—that God took on the hard garments of our mortality in order to redeem us from sin and the black hopelessness of change and decay without Him. Christmas — Easter — Pentecost — these are the days above all others when it is good to remember just how great it is to be a Christian preacher.

** Other Matters: While it is still Sunday morning I should like to tell you about a problem that has disturbed me greatly. I have just returned from the 9:45 service at our church in Valparaiso. As usual our preacher had a good sermon, solid and thoughtful. I must confess, however, that I was restless. I got to church ten minutes ahead of time, went in through the Sunday School rooms and left the same way. Outside the door one of our students told me that about fifty people had again been turned away from this service. That has happened almost every Sunday since September. The arithmetic is simple: We have about 2,500 people in Valparaiso who ought to be in Immanuel Lutheran Church on Sundays. Our church seats about 400. Most of our students are children of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. They are trained to go to church on Sunday morning. Result: An impossible situation, even though we have three morning services, plus vespers each Sunday.

The same thing of course, is true of our daily chapel. About 1,700 or 1,800 ought to be there every day. Our auditorium has 1,004 seats. We have now begun a second chapel service in Kroencke Hall on the edge of our East Campus. I must say, however, that we did that very reluctantly since it splits the University family into two sections. In addition, it is somewhat difficult to worship in an auditorium which is essentially a theatre.

Question from a brother in the front row: "Why do you not conduct Sunday morning services in your auditorium?" Of course, that could be done. There are, however, two very valid and powerful reasons against such a plan, at least as a permanent arrangement. In the first place, our students want to go to church on Sunday morning and not merely to an auditorium where they have been all week and where there are the tawdry remnants of a recent dramatic performance. The second reason, however, is even more important. Our students, we feel, should be taught to worship Sunday after Sunday in a congregational pattern and framework. Sitting next to them on Sunday morning should not be a professor or a fellow-student, but Johann Schmidt, the carpenter from Main Street, or Mrs. Holzapfel, the secretary of the Ladies Aid Society. I have long viewed with misgivings the so-called "University" congregation in which all members are part of the academic community. Inevitably the sermons are pitched in a different key, and the task of integrating the student into his home congregation after he leaves the campus becomes more difficult. It is true, of course, that many of our student-pastors who face this situations have avoided the evident dangers by hard organizational work and by reproducing just as

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thoroughly as possible the day by day life of a congregation. On a campus, however, where 80 per cent of the students are Lutheran, this solution of the problem would be very difficult. There are just too many people. We must build our campus life around our Sunday worship.

MORAL: The $750,000 which The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod has included in the “Building for Christ” collection for a new chapel on our campus will be a great investment. Immanuel Church here in Valparaiso will conduct some of its services there. Since approximately one-half of the local congregation lives on this end of town, we shall be able to have a parish with two churches. In terms of the University’s service to the church this $750,000 for a new chapel will pay rich and long dividends. It is evident, too, that it will be used for many other purposes. Its major objective, however, at a Lutheran university should be the weekday and Sunday worship of God in a setting which is thoroughly Lutheran.

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MEMORY SECTION: Perhaps you will vaguely recall that last spring I devoted a few nostalgic lines to the old days at Springfield, the Lenten services there and other stray memories. I was very much pleased over the fact that some of the brethren took time out to join me in talking about things past. One wrote an eloquent and moving letter after a Lenten service in California; another who has gone through deep and dark valleys since we were together thirty years ago wrote of the strange and good things God had done in him, with him and through him. I was moved by his report, but to my answer I had to add the postscript that the Lord had done nothing for his handwriting in three decades.

Now yesterday the first snow of the season fell here at Valpo. Since it was the kind of snow that usually fell at Springfield thirty years ago — heavy, wet and slow — I suddenly fell into a reminiscing mood again. In June this year thirty years had come and gone since a patient St. Louis faculty had handed some of us a diploma and hoped for the best. I thought of some of the names of the men, now scattered all over the world, who were in church with me at the baccalaureate service. I recalled what has happened to some of them. I caught a glimpse of the valleys through which they had come and the great things some of them have done for God, most often in forgotten and hidden places. There will be many surprises in heaven. One of the greatest will be that we will discover that there is a vast difference between the human measurement of success in the holy ministry and the divine, final and eternal appraisal of the things we have done in the Church of Jesus Christ.

My reminiscences last spring brought all manner of strange echoes. One of them came a few months later when a good brother from Wisconsin wandered into the office and handed me copies of two sermons which I had preached at Trinity Church in Springfield about 1927. In those days a few students had the polite habit of asking all professors for their manuscripts, no matter how bad the sermon had been. As I look back upon the procedure now, it is very probable that the motives for this strange action were somewhat mixed, with about 75 per cent consisting of “apple polishing”.

At any rate, my good friend discovered these two sermons in his attic and now wanted to get rid of them as fast as possible. I thanked him, took them home, and devoted a painful hour that evening to a careful reading. In one way they were not bad. There was no herey in them. But that is about all that can be said for them. They are cold, remote and obviously derivative. Most glaring to me after these years is the continuous use of “pulpitese”. By “pulpitese” I mean the use of language which none of us would ever use in normal speech. Now it is true that the language of the pulpit ought to be somewhat elevated in keeping with the great themes which it presents. It cannot entirely be the language of the football field or the factory. By “pulpitese”, however, I mean the use of artificial words and phrases which are put in solely for effect. My manuscript is sprinkled liberally with such things as: “Alas, my friends,” “Nay, my friends,” “Ohs,” roaring rhetorical questions, carefully built climaxes and so forth. Suddenly I laid the manuscript down and remembered the hapless brother in preaching class at the seminary thirty years ago for whom— to his dismay — the entire class answered all rhetorical questions. When he asked dramatically: “Shall we, my friends, do this?” we all yelled, “No.” It was an amazing and instructive hour.

It should be perfectly evident that in this day of constant speech, simple and clear, on television and radio, “pulpitese” is more obsolete than ever. Even Bishop Sheen has recognized this. He has steadily moved toward the language of the common man since he first appeared on radio and television. Our sermons must be in the simple, honest, powerful speech of the parables and the Sermon on the Mount.

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FOOTNOTE TO HISTORY: Sometimes I wonder if some of us have not been touched too much by the prevailing notion that our world of science and technology has made tremendous progress, and that the human race is better off today than it has ever been. That is only partially and spotlessly true. It should be noted again and again that our worldwide economy is still far below anything that would be cause for rejoicing. In a foreign journal I noted with something akin to dismay that “developed, semi-developed, and under-developed regions contain respectively one-fifth, less than one-sixth, and two-thirds of the
world's population. The average annual per capita income of the first group is $461.00; that of the second $154.00; and of the third, forty-one U. S. dollars. Two-thirds of the world's population is still weighed down with death, sickness and ignorance. Many of them live like hunted beasts. Life, health, and the disposition to knowledge are cruelly measured by U. S. standards. The life expectancy at birth — sixty or more years in the United States, Germany and the United Kingdom — is about thirty-nine years for Brazil, thirty-seven for Mexico, and twenty-seven for India. The infant mortality rate in India is one hundred and thirty-six out of every thousand; one hundred forty-one in Ceylon; one hundred fifty-three in Egypt; and one hundred sixty in Chile. Three hundred out of every thousand deaths in India and the Philippines result from tuberculosis. In China and Indonesia the rate is four hundred and fifty per thousand. More than seventy-five per cent of the inhabitants of Turkey, Egypt and India are illiterate. In Mexico, Peru, Venezuela and Brazil the illiteracy rate is more than fifty per cent. Approximately two-thirds of the world's population lives in constant dread of hunger. Forty per cent of the so-called free world consumes two thousand calories a day, which is twenty per cent less than the minimum of two thousand five hundred and fifty.

Amazing figures! It should be perfectly clear that a century and a half of scientific progress and intensive intellectual endeavor have not yet enabled humanity to set up an economic system which would bring food and health to large sections of our planet. I think it should be noted again and again that our proud scientific civilization has not even kept the promises which it thought it would be able to fulfill. We are not happy and we are not well. Many of us are still hungry, lonely and afraid. Science has not been a success in human terms — and that is what counts.

* * *

BFC: The beginning of the "Building for Christ" offering demonstrates the fact that there is still much lack of knowledge among our people concerning the program and work of our Lutheran university. Apparently our publicity still leaves something to be desired. Very often even the bare facts are completely new to those who are being asked to take part in the collection. Permit me to present the current status of the University in terms of facts and figures.

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<tr>
<td>Total Evaluation</td>
<td>$6,124,621.10</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Consolidated VUA &amp; LUA)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Number of Buildings</td>
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<td>24 permanent</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6 temporary</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14 trailers</td>
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<td>Number of Students</td>
<td>1,946</td>
<td>495</td>
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<td>Number of Faculty</td>
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<td>45</td>
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<td></td>
<td>23 part time</td>
<td>6 part time</td>
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<td>Number of Colleges</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Educational &amp; General Expense)</td>
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I am sure you will agree that these figures are evidence of the manifest blessing of the Lord of the Church upon the work which our faculty and Board are doing.

Above all, however, it should be said again and again that we would like to build a Lutheran university for The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod. We have always said that, but it seems to have been lost in the ecclesiastical shuffle. To develop merely another Christian college would not be worth the time, effort and money which many of us are putting into the building of Valparaiso University. In my own time in the academic world I have seen too many of these so-called "Christian colleges" that sail under false colors. Very often they are a secular school with a thin frosting of religion courses and chapel twice a week. Nobody in The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod wants that; least of all the men and women who are giving their lives on the campus.

On the other hand, it should be said very definitely that the building of a Lutheran University has been and will be a difficult task. There is just no precedent for it in our history. Essentially, of course, it means that all teaching is done within the framework of the inspired Word of God and the Lutheran Confessions. It also means that the institution must never succumb to any pressure group within the Church or beyond its borders that might want to use it for its own purposes. The University must continue to find instructors who are aware of its basic purposes and objectives and are willing to subscribe freely and wholeheartedly to the announced and avowed purposes of the institution.
I am deeply persuaded that this can be done even in our generation. At times when I wonder whether we are moving rapidly enough toward our announced goal I suddenly receive a bit of encouragement which makes me happy. Not so long ago the following letter landed on my desk. It was written by a non-Lutheran in the neighborhood of Valparaiso. He writes:

"My son, .................., who is enrolled as a junior at Valparaiso University was confirmed as a member of Immanuel Lutheran Church last Sunday.

"Frequent discussions with my son have led me to believe that your courses in religion have provided him with an intelligent and thorough background which will allow a more purposeful acceptance of the faith that he has elected to follow. Allow me to commend the good work which your colleagues are doing at Valparaiso University.

Sincerely,

JOHN DOE"

* * *

And now back to Advent and Christmas for a moment... I wish that you could come to our campus between December 1 and December 18. You would see the University at its best, clearly reflecting, in Chapel and caroling, in speech and in song, its distinctive character and its final purpose.

Of course, I know you have that in even fuller measure in your own congregation. Recently I read somewhere that there would be little left of the Old Testament if we would eliminate all the stories of God's visits with men and their reaction to these meetings. It is amazing how frequently and dramatically these conferences are described in the Bible — Adam in the Garden, Noah before the Deluge, Abraham's visits with the Lord, Moses on Horeb, Amos among his herds, Isaiah in the temple, Jeremiah in ruined Jerusalem... and many, many more.

Now it is our honor to say again in the year of our Lord 1954 that the Incarnation is the last and greatest visit of God with men — the meeting of which all earlier meetings are only shadows. "The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us" — the power and meaning of these words is still not as clear to us after nineteen hundred years as they ought to be. They divide our lives into "before and after" just as they have divided the history of the world. As we look back over the days of the waning year, there are undoubtedly some things we would like to forget — mistakes, failure, some besetting sin, an unkind word, malicious gossip, jealousy — and then beyond these, the world's cruelty and the world's selfishness, the great and cunning power of evil in our time. Perhaps there is in our lives, too, some hidden unhappiness or personal dissatisfaction.

As dusk comes down over the land on Christmas Eve, we as servants of the King of Kings, with all these things in our hands and hearts, come to the manger once more. And suddenly all of them — all of them — disappear. The Child reaches out from the manger and takes away from our lives everything but forgiveness and peace and the new song in our hearts which will make it possible for us to conquer life and time and the burden of uncertainty and fear.

Nobody knows better than the Christian preacher that it is dark and noisy in our time — much noisier than it was at Bethlehem on that first Christmas night. It is our task, our destiny, and our glory to tell our people once more that the stars of Christmas shine as soon as it is dark enough and the angels sing as soon as we are quiet enough. To the Child at Bethlehem and His holy angels I commend your life and your ministry.

Very sincerely yours,

O. P. Kretzmann