Sunday, January 28, 1979
THE NECESSITY OF FAITH (No. 2 in a Series)
Matthew 6:25-34

Last Sunday in Part I, of the theme, “The Necessity of Faith,” we dealt with the question: What are some of the reasons our country and communities like ours need the church? Today in Part II, on the same theme, we are going to look at two related questions: (1) What are some of the reasons individuals need the church and (2) What are some of the reasons the church needs individuals? To state the questions more personally, (1) What are some of the reasons you need the church and (2) what are some of the reasons the church needs you?

As I attempt to provide some answers to these questions, I also know that each one of you listening will have your own way of answering the questions as well.

1. To begin, each one of us needs the church because it is the one institution which keeps reminding us of the spiritual or transcendent dimension in all of life. Our Christian faith keeps telling us that there’s more to life than just the physical, more to life than what we can see, more to life than the here and now, more to life than the material world we deal with every day. There is a spiritual and divine dimension within and throughout all of life.

We need to be reminded of this because it’s so easy for us to get bogged down with the everyday problems we face, and we can lose all sense of perspective. It is the church’s job to help us see the creation as a whole, to lift us above the immediate, to remind us of our connection and relation with all of creation; to help us see the world from an eternal perspective.

Think of it this way. Life for many of us can be compared to goldfish swimming around in a bowl. We feel confined, limited and for many people the bowl is made of a kind of material which blocks their vision to the larger world outside the bowl.

But suppose like goldfish sometimes do, something causes us to take a leap. We jump above the water and into the air and our leap takes us for a split second above the rim of the bowl and in that instant, we see a whole new world which we never knew existed before. We cannot stay in that position of seeing the whole world very long because our basic life is back in the bowl. But having made the jump and having seen the larger world outside the bowl, we will never be the same again. Hopefully, of course, we will make many more leaps and will again and again experience that larger view of the world.

That is something like what the church and the Christian faith it proclaims can do for us as individuals. It can help us at times to have a larger view of creation; it can help us experience the eternal, the spiritual dimension in life — then we are aware that there’s more to life than just the little self-contained world in which we live most of the time.

Human life gains the greatest part of its richness from this capacity for transcendence, by the experience of stepping outside the taken-for-granted reality of everyday life, by an openness to the mystery and grandeur which surrounds us on all sides. This is a part of what worship should be and why it is so important for our lives.

A warning needs to be heard here. Some expressions of religion and of the Christian faith can have the opposite effect. They can blind us, hem us in, keep us from searching or seeing new

truth. Remember the faith which Jesus proclaimed and lived, pulls us, stretches our minds and emotions, opens us to new truth.

2. A second reason each one of us needs the church and the faith it proclaims is that our moral sense, our conscience, our decision-making needs constant attention and instruction.

Contrary to some popular opinion, we human beings are not born with an active and alert sense of morals. We are not born with a built-in conscience which instinctively knows the difference between right and wrong. We are not naturally able to distinguish between good and evil. We need reminders, we need a community of persons to call us to account in our behavior. Our conscience and our morals need continued nurture, just as our physical body needs nurture.

Do not misunderstand! Just as the church does not in any way have all the answers for the many complex issues which face our society, so also the church does not have all the answers for each one of us: as individuals in the issues and moral decisions we continually face. But the church and the faith it proclaims can at least point us in the right direction and help us to ask the right questions as we struggle for decisions.

Our faith gives us the basic foundation for our ethics and morals. “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and mind and strength, and you shall love your neighbor as yourself.” These two commandments are the foundation for all that we do as Christians. These commandments cause us to ask such questions as: Will this decision or action foster love of God and neighbor? Will it foster integrity in all individual and social relationships?

Our faith is filled with guidelines and questions based on these basic commandments. “If you say you love God and hate another human being, you are a liar,” says the New Testament.

Jesus said, “You have heard that it was said, You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called children of God. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things shall be yours as well. Do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will.be anxious for itself. Let the day’s own trouble be sufficient for the day.”

“No one can serve two masters, for either he or she will hate the one and love the other or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and the power of money at the same time.”

Is there anyone here who does not need his or her conscience and sense of morals nurtured? Each one of us needs the church to remind us of the kind of life that is possible and desirable.

3. Thirdly, each one of us needs the church and the faith it proclaims to help us at the turning points of life, birth growing up, coming of age, marriage, growing older, job changes, retirement, death. The church can also be of help in times of trouble, illness, divorce, tragedy, loneliness, grief and more. There are times in the life of each one of us when we need friends who care for us and who will be with us and there are times when we need words of comfort and hope.

Jesus Christ knew this and many of his words and actions were directed toward people in time of trouble or loss. “Come to me all you who labor and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light... I am the oread of life, he or she who comes to me shall not hunger, and the one who believes in me shall never thirst. I am the light of the world; he or she who follows me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life. I have come that you may have life and have it abundantly ...e. I am the resurrection and the life; he or she who believes in me, though that one die, yet shall he or she live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die.”

Sometimes the words of our faith proclaimed in words or in music can change a person’s life. Recently I had this note from one of our radio listeners. She wrote: “My husband and I listen to your good sermons before we listen our own church service. I want you to know that your sermon yesterday motivated my husband who is not well to give me the nicest Christmas gift he has given me in nearly forty-six years of marriage.” He said, “After hearing Dr. Young’s sermon, and since it is Christmas and all, I want you to know it has been hard for me to say, but you know I have always loved you.”

Of course, each one of our lives is different and changing and thus sometimes we as individuals need the church and what the faith offers more than we do at other times. Or at least the need is more conscious.

I remember when I first came to Lincoln and to this church, I was asking some of our older members what the church could do for them. One wise old gentleman said to me-- “There’s not much specifically that I require from the church right now. It’s always been very important to me for a number of reasons, and I’ve needed it sometimes a great deal and sometimes not so much throughout my life. I have many happy childhood memories of what the church did for me. I remember the church helping me struggle through my doubts and questions. Later I was married in the church. My children were baptized in the church, and it helped them get a good start in life. The church was there when I was sick and when I had troubles. It opened my mind to new ideas and helped me see the whole creation in a new way and all human beings as my brothers and sisters. It helped me think through some difficult decisions and is still doing that. It is still nurturing my spiritual life in many ways.”

He went on to say, “Right now I’m enjoying my retirement. And even though I’m no longer very active in the church in an organizational way, I want the church to remain strong and vital. I want it there when I need it again. I want it to be one of the most vital churches in this city. It’s for that reason that I’ve continued to support it financially as much as I can.”

This gentleman was expressing a healthy attitude. He noted how our lives change. Sometimes when people have their bearings, there is a sense of wholeness, power, and integration in a person’s life and then that person can simply be content in his or her faith, be creative and expressive and be a help to others. At other times, times of anxiety, or weakness in the face of difficulty, there is more of a need to reach beyond the resources available in oneself in order to regain a sense of well-being and to “get-it-together.” Then the person needs the church, the faith, in a different way.

There is this kind of oscillation in most of our lives, a kind of back-and-forth movement and we can see it in relation to the church. People will drift in closer for a time and then drift farther away for a while, then pull closer again.

All of this is to say that we need the church as individuals so that we can be born again, and again and again, and so we can continue to grow and mature and be renewed. We need the church to remind us that we can let go of the past and start over fresh, over and over again.

These are some of the reasons you and I need the church and these reasons also tell us why the church needs us.

They point to the answer to our second question. The church needs you because YOU ARE THE CHURCH! Without persons there would be no church. The church is people; people who acknowledge God as Creator and Sustainer; who acknowledge Jesus Christ as God's redeeming activity.

The church needs you because it needs people who care about each other and who care about what happens in this world.

The church needs you because this nation, this world and communities like Lincoln need strong churches and churches cannot be strong without faithful members. Each one of you is important to this community of persons we know as the Church of Jesus Christ. Amen.