

“AND IT SHALL NOT COME NIGH THEE?”

by Lester J. Start

May 25, 1980

First Baptist Kalamazoo

Somehow one thought it couldn't happen here — the tornado. Of course, we knew they occurred round about us on occasion — but not in Kalamazoo; maybe long ago when it was a village but not in living memory. Somehow we felt favored, protected. Life is good in Kalamazoo. And many of us cherish that sense of protection suggested in the 91st Psalm, that those who trust in God dwell under the shadow of the Almighty; those who say, “God is my refuge”, will be saved from the raging tempest; though thousands fall round about, those who have God as their shield and buckler will not be touched. No evil will befall them, nor any calamity come nigh their dwelling. It shall not come nigh thee.

But it did come nigh. Too close. And we bemoan, lament, deplore the loss of life, the destruction of property, the shattered glass and scattered shingles of our church, the downed trees in Bronson Park and elsewhere, and wonder how to respond to the words — it shall not come nigh thee?

The problem is as the tragic events of Tuesday show that there doesn't seem to be any cosmic insurance against disaster occurring, and at any time there can happen an unexpected collapse in our lives, events piling in on us, threatening to destroy and uproot us. This is the first impression, I think, in our reaction to the storm. It is seen in the way we ask others: where were you, what were you doing, when the tornado struck? When we tell others what we were doing when it happened, we are showing how the smooth flow of our lives was interrupted, threatened by something completely out of the blue, the dark, blue-black in this case, completely out of our control.

At Kalamazoo College in the Friday Morning Chapel after that tornado Tuesday, the sermon gave eloquent expression to this experience. The speaker, a senior religion major, described what happened to her.

At 4:00 Tuesday afternoon, my friend and I were talking about going downtown. We turned on the radio, and the station we were listening to reported that the danger was over for Kalamazoo. So we got in the car and drove downtown. Of course, I wanted to park near the Mall, since it was raining. So I pulled into one of those angle parking spaces on Academy Street at

Bronson Park. It was about 4:10 by then. We thought we would sit in the car a few minutes until the rain subsided. I remember saying (it was a brilliant observation) “It’s really windy out here” — when, all of a sudden the back right window broke. We screamed and looked out and saw chaos: the park was full of violent activity and movement, the most frightening of which was the tree that seemed headed for our car. At that crucial moment, my friend exclaimed, “Why us?” And I replied, most poetically, “We’re doomed. We’re doomed” — comments that sounded like the script to a low-budget horror movie.

But the terror was real as we ducked down on the seat.

We heard tremendous noises — and two more windows broke in the car. Finally it was quiet — unbelievably quiet — and we got up and looked around. The big oak tree that we had seen falling had landed on the hood of the car next to us, and it had completely destroyed the next car over.

An unexpected and horrible interruption. And it does not sound corny when this student says she has had a new lease on life, really looked at people, and felt a new sense of aliveness after the initial shock and numbness. One is made aware of how fragile our hold on life may be and made more grateful for its richness.

My own experience of the tornado is not nearly as dramatic, but I shan’t soon forget it. I looked up — I was driving up Academy hill at the time — I looked up to see a 4 by 8 foot piece of

plywood spinning and wheeling like a falling leaf, but that almost gentle leaf-like motion, I knew, was a sign of destruction that had rained from the skies.

As Jonathan Edwards, the Puritan preacher, would say, this shows how the smoothness of our lives hangs by a thread, dependent on God's grace and good pleasure. Indeed, the sobering effect of such an experience — and this showed the wrath of God — is that we are dependent and we are not immune.

Indeed the disaster of the tornado does show our close relationship to God, not that God is reminding us of His sovereignty by striking terror in our hearts, but rather the heightened awareness of the goodness of our lives is now seen as dependent on a higher power.

The scripture story of Elijah is instructive here. Elijah is called to stand on the mountain to see the Lord pass by. A great and strong wind came, shattering rocks before him — but, the scripture says, the Lord was not in the wind. And after the wind was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. And after the earthquake, fire — but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire, a low murmuring sound — a still small voice — the voice of God.

It is after the storm that the quiet voice of God speaks. It is after the storm that we find the evidences of the constructive powers of God working to bring order out of chaos, help to the stricken, relief from destruction. And we can be proud of the way our community rallied in the emergency. An article in today's paper by an out-of-town reporter bears eloquent testimony to the marvelous way our community responded. Emergency vehicles to aid the injured were almost immediately dispatched. Within twenty minutes to half an hour heavy equipment from the city was on hand clearing trunk arteries, clearing debris; the Red Cross and Salvation Army were at work; telephone and electric linesmen were restoring power and communications. And the next day found not only the National Guard at work assisting in the clean-up, but a volunteer group of Mennonites who believe literally in the Biblical injunction to share one another's burdens.

Technically, legally, we call such a disaster as the tornado an act of God. In so far as it is an event stemming from the operation of the laws of nature, God's creation, we must see it as such, unexpected as it is. But as a deliberate willful act of vengeance, as a punishment to a selected few, as an example to a wicked city — and there are those who see the event as this — it is not an act of God. God, I think, was not in the tempest. There was no divine intent to remove the roofs of the Catholics, shatter windows of the Baptists, topple the cross of the Methodists — to strike some and save others. The purpose of God is found rather in the quiet dedication of acts of concern, mercy, and love — the still small voice of divine conscience and commitment.

So, how do we understand such an event? How do we read the promise of the 91st Psalm, assuring us that the evils will not come nigh thee? In part, the answer is to be found elsewhere in the Psalter, the 77th Psalm, where the Psalmist proclaims that God's way is in the sea, His path in the great waters, and in the midst of the thunder and wind and lightning and trembling of the earth. This is not to say Jehovah is a God of thunder or lightning — Elijah made that clear — but rather in the storms of life, in the lonely dangerous sea — not just in the pleasant valleys, not just

in the sunny hours — God is to be found. And as Paul said so powerfully, “In all things God works with those who love Him to bring about that which is good”.

It is this which gives us confidence to believe that good can come out of evil — that “though the cause of evil prosper, yet ’tis truth alone is strong, truth forever on the scaffold, wrong forever on the throne; yet that scaffold sways the future and behind the dim unknown standeth God within the shadow keeping watch above His own.” In all things there is the presence of God. This is what can give us the confidence of faith that with God, no evil can touch us, can destroy us, can separate us from our being in God — even death itself. This is a courageous faith that is ready to take on suffering in the knowledge that there is a power of God at hand, a love of God, to sustain us and emerge triumphant. “In the world you will have tribulations,” said Jesus. “But be of good cheer. I have overcome the world.” The promise of God’s presence can not be taken away. In all things He is at work bringing about that which is good.

There is that marvelous story from Daniel of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego who were ordered to worship a golden image made by King Nebuchadnezzar on pain of being thrown into a fiery furnace if they refused. And as the King said, “Who is that God who can save you from my power?” And they answered, “If it be so, that there is such a God, then our God whom we serve is able to save us from the furnace, and He will save us from your power. But if not, we will not serve your god.” This is what one might call the “nevertheless” of faith — to have confidence in God’s goodness and saving power, even when evils seem to overwhelm us. The promise of God’s presence in the midst of the evils is still there, working to bring good out of evil.

There is that ancient teaching of the Stoics we might remember, a teaching incorporated into Xian belief: The meaning of an event lies in our response to it. Troubles, ills, defeats come to us all — but we need not be destroyed by them. Nothing can touch the inner citadel of the soul. If we suffer loss, it can be the occasion of rebuilding better than before; defeat, disappointment can be the beginning of a new effort, trusting that in all things there is a power of God to bring good out of evil.

It will not come nigh thee, says the Psalmist. It will not touch you. But the evil did come, we say, in spite of our prayers, our faith, our attempts to serve what is right and good. “Why us?” is the natural cry. As Bacon once said, it was a good response when someone was shown a picture painted of those who had been saved from shipwreck after praying to God; he asked, where are those pointed who drowned after paying their vows?

The distribution of evil is a mystery — like the crazy pattern of the tornado. But some are hit, some are spared. The rain falls on the just and the unjust. How can we say it will not come nigh thee, touch thee? The answer, of course, has to be in terms of faith in the power of God — not to avert the evil — but to overcome it, bring good out of it. That is why the most terrible-seeming events can be the occasion for the triumph of good. This is God’s way — and it is up to us to respond to it. May we come in some measure up to the level of Paul’s supreme confidence.

What can separate us from the love of Christ? Can affliction or hardship? In spite of everything, victory is ours through God's love. "I am convinced that there is nothing in death or life, in the realm of spirits or superhuman powers, in the world as it is or the world as it shall be, in the forces of the universe, in heights or depths — nothing in all creation that can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

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[Mother's Day](#)

May 11, 1980, 11:13 am

1MOTHERS' DAY

L. J. START

05/11/80

First Baptist Kalamazoo

The title of the sermon seems pretty tame — Mothers' Day. Let me explain. Originally I had planned it to be Mothers' Day and ERA — a bit livelier, you'll have to admit. But then, I thought with the extras in the service I wouldn't have time to do justice to the subject; besides, an issue like ERA requires one's own political conscience and any brief comments are easily misconstrued — so my remarks will apply to the issue of the proposed equal rights amendment only tangentially.

And to be quite honest, Mothers' Day is an occasion that makes me a trifle uneasy. The reason goes way back to the time when my wife and I were newly married — two or three years. Our first child was just two months old, and it was Mothers' Day; as the day moved into evening, I noticed Clare became quieter and quieter. I sensed something was amiss, but couldn't quite figure out what, until she told me quietly — with restrained tears — "You know, I'm a mother, too." My response was logical, but ill-advised. "But you're not my mother," I pointed out, truly enough. "And the baby's too young to know."

It wouldn't have been so bad if I hadn't forgotten her birthday a month earlier, and if I had forgotten our anniversary a month later — well, I hate to think what would have happened. Anyway, this famous Mothers' Day was what we call in the business a learning experience.

And it has left me with several deep convictions. First, wives and mothers are too often taken for granted. We forget the enormously important roles they play, just assume mothers are by nature like that and forget to call attention to our gratitude for their being as they are. Essentially, what happens is we take for granted maternal love and devotion, and fail to call attention to the personhood that underlies this maternal spirit.

That is why the passage from Proverbs read in the Scripture lesson this morning strikes one now as being so impersonal and sexist. The New English translation strikes the accurate note in its heading of this section — A Capable Wife. “Who can find a capable wife?” the passage begins. And then the verses describe how valuable she is; because of her work, her husband and children lack nothing. She toils willingly — and provides for the family like merchants’ ships bringing food from afar. She gets up before dawn while it is still dark to prepare food for the family. But a careful reading suggests that somehow not only does she work at home but she is able to buy fields and vineyards and work them with her earnings. Presumably, her husband is busy the while talking within the gates — she is the provider, the breadwinner, and the household slavey as well. She is praised for her energy and strength — and “her candle goeth not out by night”. The poor woman — the virtuous, capable woman — never puts out her lamp at night. She works all the time. One wonders how she provides all her services. She’s really good with the distaff and spindle, so she doesn’t worry about the cold. She makes plenty of coverings for the family and has enough left over for the poor and needy without. All of this somehow makes her husband important and well-known when he is sitting with the elders of the land. If she is working so capably, why shouldn’t he sit? She is weaving linen and selling it — God only knows when she finds the time — and making sashes to supply merchants. She eateth not the bread of idleness — it is hard to see how she finds time to eat anything besides the fruit of her toil and labors.

Now this may be a slanted appreciation of this section of Scripture. But this much is fairly said — it does reflect a sexist viewpoint from our perspective; but it also reflects a better image of woman, a freer, more respected view than would be reflected in other cultures surrounding the Hebrew tradition. The God-fearing woman is the capable woman who takes over even the tasks of the husband in being a good provider for the sake of others — even the stranger within the gates.

It is, I think, against such a picture of woman as subservient, as a second sex, noted primarily for her service to men and the family that women’s rights movements are directed. And I think there is a need to assert the value of the personhood of a capable, good woman, beside her utilitarian values. There are claims to dignity, attention, self-worth apart from the recognition of the menial and sacrificial roles of the ideal woman. There is good reason for women to demand equal rights, especially when there is not equal recognition in terms of pay or praise for the self-effacing contributions they make not only to the family but also to the general welfare. I can remember when college administrators thought it obvious that single women instructors were not entitled to the same pay as a family man — but single men should get more because they might become heads of family. There is reason to demand equal rights.

But there is a deeper problem in all of this. And the problem is that human solidarity as seen in the family and the larger society does not seem to be built successfully on the separate insistence of individual rights. There seems to be needed some insight into, some commitment to the larger cause of the family, or society. It is a sense of this larger commitment that shines through the description of the good woman in Proverbs. The problem seems to be that she is the one making all the commitments — and getting few of the rewards. This is probably why in the old middle-east tradition — and it is still a Muslim practice — a woman is paid a dowry when she marries.

If it doesn't work out, and she is divorced and rejected, at least she has some economic security to turn to.

But that marvelous 13th chapter on love in Paul's first letter to the church at Corinth shows a deeper basis for the family and society — and that is the spirit of love: love that is kind, patient, that doesn't always insist on its own way, love that does not take offense easily, or keep score of wrongs done, love that is not envious of others or boastful, or rude, or crude, or selfish. As Paul says, there is nothing such love cannot face —there is no limit to its faith, its hope, and its endurance. It will never fail.

And this, of course, is the spirit of love we honor and praise in the ideal of motherhood. It is this that underlies the praise of the good capable woman of Proverbs. But it is a quality that should be shared by all in the family, and ultimately to some degree in the larger human family if we are to live together in the peace and promise of God's plan for His kingdom. It is the spirit of cooperative and mutual love and concern for children —called by some today "parenting". This is not just, as the movie KRAMER VS. KRAMER showed, a function of motherhood. And clearly there is a difference between biological generation and the parenting concern of love. Similarly, children in a family have rights — they have a right to health care and education, for example — and the state properly insists they have them — but a child's relation to his family is surely more than a means of enjoying his rights! It is the message of the Bible, and the Gospel in particular, that reflecting the love of God is the only true basis for living together. And we honor mothers because they seem to be so faithful in reflecting that love.

In ancient China the Taoist religion taught a natural virtue, fellow feeling, on the basis of man's ultimate relation to the principle of the order behind nature. Taoists attacked Confucian concerns with rules of morality, mutual obligations and rights, by saying when the Tao is lost, when virtue is lost, then there is talk of rights and obligations. And, I suppose, as every marriage counselor can attest, when the love is lost in a marriage, the mutual, self-less commitment to a higher principle than the self, then there is talk of lists of mutual obligations, responsibilities, rights, and duties, in order to live together for the sake of the children, perhaps. When love is lost, then there is concern for rights. But love transcends such particular demands.

Love does not abrogate rights — it does not wipe them out. Love must never degenerate into masochistic, slavish devotion, just as it must never be corrupted into sadistic interest in controlling the other. The failure of love results in the love of failure, and preserving one's personal rights is an essential defense against that. Love does not negate rights, but it dethrones them, and elevates the self into a higher relation with the other, and with God. It is love that reconciles the desire to gratify our own interests with the sober sense of duty to others. Love lifts up, and purifies, and reconciles our motivations. Faith, hope, and love are the three things that keep our spirits high in energy and aspiration. But the greatest of these is love.

There is a text I find most haunting when I think of the theme of Motherhood. It occurs in the Christmas story when the baby Jesus is born, and the shepherds appear recounting all they have seen and heard from the angelic hosts. We read, "And Mary treasured up all these things and pondered over them in her heart." Somehow this reflects to me, the mystery, the creative depths

and silences of the eternal feminine — a reflection of God’s love. This we remember on Mothers’ Day.

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[The Bread and the Vine](#)

May 4, 1980, 11:12 am

v1THE BREAD AND THE VINE

05/04/80

L. J. START

First Baptist Kalamazoo

Consider with me this morning the symbols that are so prominent in the Communion — namely the Bread and the Vine — for it is the fruit of the vine that Jesus refers to in that first celebration of the Lord’s supper. Both have a prominent role in the history of the Bible and both symbols are stressed in the Gospel of John, where Jesus identifies Himself as the bread of life and the true vine.

Let us first consider the bread. It is the staff of life, the very basis of human nourishment. It was carried in an unleavened form in the hasty flight from Egypt. When supplies failed in the wilderness, God provided manna from heaven to keep His people from starving. Jesus tells us in the Gospel of John, 6:48, that He is the bread of life. Unlike the material sustenance of manna which fed the people for only a time, Jesus calls Himself the living bread which came down from heaven, the bread that feeds the spirit into everlasting life.

I think it is important to understand this scripture metaphorically, as a figure, not literally. For the passage in John, literally taken, suggests the traditional doctrine that one is actually eating the flesh of Christ in the Communion, and this is not only unacceptable in Baptist tradition but also representative of a primitive mode of religious thinking out of keeping with the lofty spirit of the Gospel of John. To take this literally would be like taking the statement, “I am the door of the sheep” as a literal identification of Jesus with the physical gate of a sheep pasture. Clearly Jesus is the point of entry to the way, the truth, and the life — but no swinging gate to an ethereal pasture, and just as clearly He is the means of man’s attaining spiritual sustenance and the power of the spirit — but this involves no literal eating of the God. It is a remembrance, and a spiritual identification. As Paul said to the church at Corinth (10:16), “When we break the bread, is it not a means of sharing in the body of Christ? Because there is one loaf, we, many as we are, are one body.” Sharing in the bread is celebrating the spiritual unity of those who are committed to the gospel of Christ — it is not eating His flesh.

It is in this spirit of appreciation of the metaphorical significance of the bread that the early church liked to meditate on the meaning of the Communion. Two themes were contrasted: brokenness and wholeness, separation and oneness. They meditated on the making of the bread — first, the grinding of the wheat and they saw this as symbolic of suffering, the suffering of Christ, or the grinding experience of suffering in our own lives, when we feel ground down by toil or trouble, fragmented, torn and divided. But then they meditated on the leaven of the spirit of faith and saw how the leaven transformed the ground grain into a new being, a useful and attractive source of sustenance symbolizing the bread of life. This represented, too, the wholeness of the church, as Paul taught — when we break the bread are we not sharing in the body of Christ? Because there is one loaf, we are one body, many as we are.

But further, the breaking of the bread symbolized the breaking of the body of Christ in the crucifixion, yet with the understanding that this is made whole by the power of the resurrection. In terms of the church, as the body of Christ, it is suggested that it must be broken up in different tasks, different ministries, different roles, but all united in the service of the creative spirit of God. The metaphor of the bread teaches that it must be broken into individual bits if it is to nourish the members — so the church cannot nourish the world until it is broken into different acts of service, as individuals witness to their faith in Christ in their various walks of life.

In the spirit of this figure, we bring to the table of the Lord bread broken in remembrance of Christ. And we bring ourselves with broken hopes, shattered dreams, divided aims, and weakened energies — in the urgent faith that we can emerge, thanks to the leaven of the Spirit and the mystery of the Presence, restored, whole, renewed. This is the living bread, the bread of life, which we celebrate in the Communion.

Then there is the wine, the fruit of the vine, and we come to perhaps the most important image in the Gospel of John: “I am the true vine,” says Jesus, “and you are the branches.” As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it is connected with the vine, no more can we bear the fruits of faith unless we abide in, connect, relate to, identify with Christ. “For without Me,” says Jesus, “you can do nothing.”

Now the vine is an old symbol for Israel. It is portrayed beautifully in the 80th Psalm where we read, “Thou didst bring a vine out of Egypt; thou didst drive out other nations and plant it; thou didst clear the ground before it, so that it made good roots and filled the land.” Israel is the vineyard of God. “The vineyard of the Lord is the house of Israel,” says Isaiah. “I planted you a choice vine,” says Jeremiah. Ezekiel likens Israel to a vine. And the vine actually became the symbol of Israel. It was the emblem on the coins of the Maccabees. The temple had a great golden vine as an ornament before the Holy of Holies, and many an important person provided gold to mould new grapes to the vine. The vine was the very symbol of Jewish identity.

It is in this context that we must understand Jesus saying, “I am the true vine.” For the curious fact is that whenever we find reference to the symbol of the vine of Israel in the Old Testament, there is the suggestion of a degeneration of the original planting. The point of Isaiah’s picture, as read in the scripture lesson, is that the vineyard has gone wild. Jeremiah complains that the nation has become degenerate and turned into a wild vine. And the Psalmist, after describing

how richly the vine grew, asks, “Why hast thou broken down the wall round it so that every passer-by can pluck its fruit?” So when Jesus says, “I am the true vine,” He is saying: the old vine of Israel is degenerate; being a Jew does not make one a branch of God; and one might say being a church member doesn’t make one a branch of God. Only a new relationship to God through Christ will save. The branch needs the true vine to reach the source of being and life which is in God.

The problem lies in the fact that the children of Israel forgot their relationship to God. The warning is clear in Deuteronomy 8th where it is stated that God has led His people to the land of promise and plenty, yet the temptation is to feel when one has prospered, when one has eaten and is full, and built good houses, and dwelt therein, and has herds that have multiplied, and silver and gold — the temptation is to say, “My own energy and strength have gained me this wealth”, forgetting that the Lord God gives us strength to become prosperous, to endure. The vineyard of Israel grew wild as it forgot its source in its planting by God.

And so we understand the imagery of the true vine. Apart from our relation to the source of our being, we are nothing. Apart from the vine, the branches wither. And generations have sought to separate themselves from God and still flourish. But the branch cannot bear fruit of itself. Broken off from the source of our being — separated, fragmented, alienated — we cannot express the spirit of life, create anymore, enjoy our being as children of God.

There is more to the imagery of the parable of the vine. Jesus Christ is the vine; we are the branches. Through His spirit we have contact with God, the source and sustenance of our being. But God plays a dual role — He is also the vinedresser. “I am the true vine,” says Jesus, “and my Father is the vinedresser” or the husbandman or the gardener.

You see, what is needed for the branch is not only the contact, the connection, the intermediary with the source of our being for sustenance and life. What is needed as well is the training, the discipline, the pruning to keep the vine from going wild. The vine grows luxuriantly and drastic pruning is essential. A young vine is not allowed to fruit for the first three years, and each year is cut back to develop roots. When mature, it bears two kinds of branches: one that bears fruit and one that does not. The branches that do not bear fruit are pruned back so that they will not sap the strength of the plant needlessly and for no purpose. Further, the wood of the vine is worthless; it is too soft to work as wood. It was not even permitted as an offering of wood to the Temple for altar fires. It was fit only to be burned as trash. All of this adds to the parable of the vine.

I am not that committed to old-time Calvinism to read off the obvious conclusion — separated from Christ, cut off from God, purged because they could bear no fruit, certain branches — and even those from young shoots — are doomed to the destruction of fire by the pruner, to hell-fire by God. I know that John Bunyan, the author of Pilgrim’s Progress, said, “I do not doubt that the floor of Hell is crawling with infants.” But I would rather read this parable as judgment against the unworthy, the fruitless, the parasitical spirit in the individual spirit. If I have trouble with double pre-destinarianism, I have even more trouble with the Universalist spirit that it is the business of God to save everyone, no matter what sort he is. It is like the caucus race in Alice in

Wonderland, the race in which everyone has won and everyone must have a prize. Life is not like that, nor, I think, in the justice of His love is God.

But this message is clear: as the branch cannot bear fruit except it abide in the vine, so we cannot bear spiritual fruit cut off from Christ. Further, when we seem to be flourishing with the might of our own hands only to find by some accidental event that our whole world has come to an end, our whole enterprise lost, our dream gone like a puff of smoke — perhaps it is the vinedresser at work, lopping off a rank development that can bear no real fruit in our lives. Perhaps like the grinding of the grain, the breaking of the bread, the lopping off of a branch of behavior, even though it be aimed at a dream of destiny — if that be separate from our being in God through Christ, then that pruning will be in the long run good for our souls. It is by testing, by pruning, that we are disciplined to cut off the idle and offensive to let the creative and loving spirit of Christ be expressed in us as branches of the true vine.

And when we do so, there is that deep and abiding dwelling in the presence of God in Christ expressed by love. To abide in the love of God is the promise of the parable of the vine — the experience of the symbolism of the Communion. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. And God's love is so great, He loved the whole world — for God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that everyone who has faith in Him may have eternal life. This gospel of love is our promise: "If you keep My commandments," says Jesus, "you shall abide in My love." Keeping the commandments involves some discipline, some pruning of the wildness of our vines; but these things are promised, says Jesus, that His joy may be in us and our joy made complete.

This is the message of Communion. It involves broken bread and vines drastically pruned — but the wonder of the Communion is the love of God shining through, making whole what was broken, and bearing the fruit of the spirit in our lives centered in Christ. This is the commandment: as God so loved the world, as Christ laid down His life in love, let us love one another, abide in love, in the true vine — and so share the bread of life.