



LUTHERAN
CHURCH OF **HOPE**

By Pastor Merv Thompson

Pastor's Update

Mike Housholder & Merv Thompson, Editors

925 Jordan Creek Pkwy ■ West Des Moines, IA ■ Dec. 9, 2005

"Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord." I Timothy 1:2.

All of the 4,500 or so who were in attendance at worship on the weekend of December 3-4 were simply amazed and thrilled by the overwhelming response of the congregation to Building Hope 3-D. I am not completely sure, but I do not imagine that there has ever been a Lutheran congregation which has experienced such an outpouring of commitment, passion and generosity as was in evidence last weekend at Hope. No superlative could possibly do it justice, words will always come up short. But more about this later.

On the one hand, we should not be totally surprised. Jesus was consistently on the side of multiplication. Time and again he proclaims that the kingdom of God is all about multiplying, all about dramatic and miraculous growth. Jesus is not against addition, but is much more affirming of multiplication. From the miracles to the parables to the experience of the early church, the Bible is always challenging us to multiply.

Consider the Parable of the Talents in Matthew 25. The master takes three trusted servants aside and out of grace gives them each very valuable assets. To one he gives five talents, to another two, and to another one. The purpose of these gifts was not to make these men more wealthy, it is not for them, but it is to grow the talents, to invest them, yes, even to multiply them. Talents and resources are given to be expanded, to be invested.

When the master returns and asks for an accounting, the first servant returns double what he had been given. Five has become ten, he has multiplied his talents. The master is thrilled with such an entrepreneurial spirit and says, "Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness." What a compelling picture of God, smiles and laughter, high fives all around. Come and share your master's happiness.

The second servant also reports that he has doubled his money, two has become four. Again there has been multiplication going on. The master is equally as thrilled, and repeats the same powerful refrain, "Well done, good

and faithful servant. You have been faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness. It seems as if the master is almost giddy with the good news.

But the third servant lays a bomb. He says that he was afraid that if took any risk at all with the talent, he might lose it, so he buried it in the ground. The master is apologetic at the waste of it all. He comments that the least this servant could have done was to put the money in the bank, some interest is better than nothing. Burying the talent produces a loss. So the servant is kicked out of the master's employ. Jesus is not subtle here, he is on the side of multiplication.

Or consider the feeding of the 5000 in Luke 9. After a long day of listening to Jesus' teaching, the crowd is growing hungry. The disciples recommend to Jesus that he send them away, let them find their own food. But Jesus asks his disciples to go out and survey the crowd, see how many people might have brought along food that they might share. But the faint-hearted twelve can only discover the lunch of one small boy that his mother made for him, five loaves of bread and two fish.

But Jesus, who is always filled with an attitude of abundance rather than scarcity, begins to pray, then blesses the food and instructs his team to distribute it. Miracle upon miracle, there is suddenly enough food to go around all 5000 people. The Gospel writer makes this astonishing statement, "They all ate and were satisfied." When has that ever happened before or after, they all ate and were satisfied? And one thing more, twelve baskets were left over when everyone was satisfied. Talk about multiplication.

We have a nine-year-old granddaughter who is a whiz at math. So of course Grandpa loves to tease her. Over Thanksgiving I told her the old joke about the man who had become wealthy, made a fortune in business. When the man was asked how he did this, he replied, "I invented a product that I could manufacture for \$1 and could sell for \$5 and that 4% really added up."

Linnea rolled her eyes and replied, "Grandpa, 4% would have been \$1.04, the man was really talking about 500%." I don't think I can put one over on her anymore. But as the silly story shows, multiplication always creates exponential growth.

The early church practiced multiplying as well. Remember Acts 2 when the Holy Spirit has descended on the disciples and they go out into the streets of Jerusalem to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ, his death and resurrection. We are told that 3000 people were baptized in a single day. To me that is kind of impressive, more impressive than if it were 3 or 23. These were the same traumatized men who had been hiding in a locked room, but now empowered by the Holy Spirit they created a mega-church in one day. I would call that multiplication.

This was only the beginning. Later in Acts 2 we read "everyone was filled with awe and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles...And the Lord added to their number daily those being saved." It sounds like the language of addition, but since it was daily it quickly became multiplication.

Unfortunately the larger church has largely lost its vision of multiplying. Presiding Bishop of the ELCA Mark Hanson writes in the latest Lutheran, *"I am haunted by recent reports that the average worship attendance and membership in many congregations continues to decline. Less than 30% of ELCA members regularly worship. Adult baptisms are few in number. Members become active and drift away. Visitors go unnoticed and do not return. What keeps us from reaching out to them?"* He is asking the right question.

What I have enjoyed so much about Lutheran Church of Hope is that it has always been about multiplication. Our vision says little about addition and nothing about subtraction, the key element is always multiplying the kingdom. This multiplication vision is never about us, never about our own status or success, but rather always for the sake of mission and outreach.

Two of the most obvious examples of multiplication at Hope are the worship services and the Alpha Ministry. We have gone from one service with 15-20 in attendance to ten or so worship services every weekend with many thousands. This year we doubled again the number of services so that we can continue to be faithful to the vision.

Alpha has been nothing short of a phenomenon at Hope. In early years the numbers were small, but now it welcomes some 1,000 people each year. Because Alpha is the most transformational ministry that I have seen in the Lutheran church in my 94 years of ministry, no wonder we continue to multiply and make new disciples.

Last weekend we saw evidence the multiplication principle also extends to giving. In fact, it was just like the Scriptures describe it as "pressed down, shaken together, running over." Several goals were transcended. We hoped to raise \$100,000 to start satellite congregations, more than \$260,000 was pledged. The goal was to have children participate, they gave more than \$10,000. A one-time, up-front gift was encouraged, reducing interest costs and paying down the mortgage, an incredible \$1.8 million was given.

Of course the big number came for the construction of a new worship center, with a Victory Goal of \$8 million and a Miracle Goal of \$10 million. The actual pledges are over the \$10.5 million mark and still climbing as more pledges continue to flow in. Praise God.

Writing as one who has experienced numerous building fund campaigns, I would affirm up front this was a God thing, truly a miracle of God's. But at the same time I would suggest the entire campaign was brilliantly conceived and brilliantly implemented. Leadership matters and the leaders in this effort were exemplary. Special thanks should go to Co-Chair Couples: Chris and Denise Gunnare, Mark and Jill Oman, and of course to Mike and Sally Housholder. In addition, the entire steering committee and the church administrative staff should be commended.

Groundbreaking should be in the spring of 2006 with completion in the spring of 2007. The best is still yet to be. Praise God.