

Twenty-fourth Sunday after Pentecost
November 15, 2009

Bishop Dave Brauer-Rieke ELCA

Sisters and brothers in Christ, God's grace to you in peace through our Lord and Savior Jesus, the Christ. Amen. My name is Dave Brauer-Rieke. I serve the church as the Bishop of the Lutheran Church here in Oregon. It is a great privilege to come and talk with you today about wars and rumors of wars as the text goes. Part of the privilege of being a Bishop is to be in congregations of our church, and especially for me in Oregon and especially usually Lutheran congregations, although two weeks ago I was in Madras at the combined congregation of St. Mark's Episcopal Church and Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, two small congregations which worship together under the able leadership of Pastor Dan Kozak. And then last week I was in Colton Lutheran Church in Colton, Washington. Now when I go to places I try to stitch congregations together, so I told the thirty some people who were at Colton Lutheran that I would be here at the Cathedral today. I asked if I could bring you their greetings and they enthusiastically said that yes I could, so "Greetings to you good people at Colton Lutheran Church, among whom are the widow and granddaughter of Father John Cantelon, whom they know here at the Cathedral as a visitation pastor, so a little extra hello to you from them. And next Sunday actually I'll be at Our Savior's Lutheran Church in Lake Oswego. May I take your greetings to them? That's great! All right, I'll do that! Thank you very much. I'm told that you are near the end of your fall campaign and that today especially you are thinking about the blessings that you have been given by the Lord in your daily life and for this church as we think about stewardship issues. It's been good for me to think with you this week about the blessings that I receive in my life and tally those in what sometimes seems like a sad and overwhelming life. It's good to sit and think about those things. I'm curious as what you project on the screen of your life and as you bring cards forward today with the blessings in the offering plate, the sorts of things you would list. Last week's Gospel lesson from Mark chapter 12, if you were here last Sunday you may remember that Jesus and the disciples were sitting in the courtyard of the temple watching the treasury. Maybe you do people-watching sometimes and go to Lloyd Center and just sit and watch what folks are doing. That's what Jesus and the disciples were doing and the text says that they saw many rich people putting large sums into the treasury. Now it does the heart of a Bishop good, or priests or deans or senior wardens to see people of means making large contributions to the treasury. You could use them perhaps to pay your electric bill or things like that. And as we count our blessings today, those of you who are people of means, those of you who have a home to live in, who have food on the table on a daily basis, those of you who have jobs now or pension plans; I hope and I am sure that you have listed those among the blessings that you give thanks for in this time. And I know from your generous heart will indeed come gifts for the ministry of Jesus Christ through this place. It's a delight to not be your Bishop, I can tell you with candor and no conflict of interest, **give money to your church, for heaven's sake!** I will not benefit from any of it, but do that and in days which you know are hard for more and more people economically. It's a time for people of means and giftedness and blessings to give more not less, so that all God's children might be

cared for, so thank you for doing that. So Jesus and his disciples see these people putting in large sums in the treasury, but that's not the point of last week's Gospel lesson you may remember, there's also a poor widow who puts in two small copper coins which should equal a single penny. She puts a penny in the plate. Jesus says to the disciples "Did you see that? Did you see what just happened? That woman has given more than all of the others combined." Now what I learned from that conclusion is that Jesus never sat on the vestry of a church, because it takes a lot of pennies to tune the organ. For that of course is a spiritual observation about the giftedness and the sense of blessing that one has of their lives. And when I reflect on the widow's gift, I think and I give thanks for the fact that she did not let her poverty stand in the way of her intent, that she wanted to be a part of the kingdom, she wanted to give and even out of poverty she stood strong spiritually and her decision cost her all that she had. In the decisions that I make as one of the rich people comes out of my abundance. So Jesus says because she gave all out of her poverty all that she has that's a different gift than all those others who gave out of their abundance and were really not seriously inconvenienced in their gift. So we see from last week's Gospel lesson that this list of blessings, which includes abundance, generosity, faithfulness, intent, and integrity and I hope that some of those things appeared on your cards today of things that you count as blessings. Well, that was last week's; this week Jesus' disciples in Mark 13 leave the courtyard to go across the street up the hill a little bit and now they're looking over the temple and the city as a whole still watching and the disciples say to Jesus: "Teacher, look, what large stones and what large buildings." This is a different observation. This is an institutional observation. It is not about individual people and their generosity, or lack of it; it is not about the human heart and the decisions we make or don't. This is about Trinity Cathedral as a symbol of the presence of God here in Portland. Look teacher at the size of the house; look Lord at presence we give here; look Lord at what we're trying to do and how we've been successful. Now on my list of blessings are also institutional cares and thanksgivings. I'm thankful to be part of a church, both a congregation, a denomination and a global fellowship of believers so that together we could do things that could never ever happen alone. I'm thankful to be a part of a free country where I can pursue my passions, my hopes and my dreams, a country full of opportunity. I'm thankful for colleges and universities of the church that my children attend – less thankful for the tuitions bills, but that's a different issue. I'm thankful for roads to drive on, medicines and healthcare facilities like Good Samaritan Hospital. Many, many institutional things that support my life and the lives of others of which I can be a part of and contribute to and the disciples say "look, teacher, what large institutions and wonderful things"! What does Jesus say? "I know but the day will come when those will fail you and not one stone will be standing upon another." As I count blessings, I do so on the blank pages of the written pages of scripture and project things and as a preacher I was taught to always to look at the scriptures and look for two things; one is the blessings and one is the trouble. I look for the blessings and the concerns; the good news and the nuisance because the scriptures are always both in my life. Amen. This is more of a nuisance text feeling. But what we know from the word and the teachings of our Lord and all through the scriptures is that there is an inextricable mixture of blessing and sin in everything and the best of our intentions and our wills are interwoven with the worst that we can do to each other. What we know is our institutional expressions of anything give some hope and just plain tick off

other people. The beautiful red doors of this Cathedral which promise sanctuary and hope and do give that to so many people, none the less are locked at night – right? Of course. And people come and say the church is not here for me, because we cannot be there for everybody. Our institutional expressions will not stand, says Jesus; they cannot stand because they are not good enough; they're not blessings enough; they're not hopeful enough. So we recognize that as we count our blessings today, that among those blessings are not only the personal gifts that we have but the institutional expressions that we have and we also recognize in this text that it is not enough, so Jesus says, the day will surely come when not one stone will stand upon another. As I prepared to preach today I read through some commentaries. One of the gentlemen that I read for Lutheran Seminary said this; He said "When I am sitting in the congregation on Sunday I would like to hear about the end. I would like to hear about the end. You preacher can decide how literal, spiritual or metaphorical you want to be, my desire however is to be reminded that our faith is always orientated towards fulfillment. My desire, however, is to be reminded that our faith is always orientated towards fulfillment. The mixed word today is that we are spiritual meth addicts; functional, loved and accepted, but wayward and strange. There is no way to get clean without pain. The image Jesus gives us is of a woman in labor and says this woman will cry out in labor pains to give birth to new life. There is no way to get from here to there without the crucifixion and death. Now my wife who is a retired midwife sat with many women in pain. She would say: "You can do this, because it leads to a new birth and a new life. You can do this. The days are coming says the Lord when you will hear wars and rumors of wars, when the very earth itself will turn upon you with famines and earthquakes, but it has to be so, because you can't get from here to there. The life we know is full of blessings and I hope you listed those but they are not enough blessings for enough people; it is not good enough for the Kingdom of God. It is not a full enough reality that God can let it stand. "I should like to hear", says my commentator, "about the end and be reminded that life moves towards a greater fulfillment." So be it. There's the Word of the Lord today. So our blessings are bright spots against a dark background, are they not? The things that you list are the grain culled out of the chaff. I am thankful that I have food to eat but I pray for, remember those who do not. I am grateful for those who serve in the name of my country to bring peace to other parts of the world, but I know it's not enough. I give thanks for the Word, my community of faith and the church, but I know we are only a shadow of what is to come – only a shadow of what is to come. So as you list your blessings today, as you remember the things you have and let them stand in stark contrast to the things that you don't have or others don't have, as you take a moment to remember how deeply fortunate you are. We are invited once again to take those blessings and ask how they can be used in service to our neighbor, and our world, of our family and of our community and I know, you know it's not enough, but I know you know it makes a difference, so give thanks among that list for the opportunity to be the hands and heart of our Lord Jesus Christ. Feed hungry mouths, hungry hearts and hungry spirits and do so in generosity and care and compassion and in faith, for the greater fulfillment comes when all will be blessed. In Jesus name. Amen.