

1  
2  
3  
4  
5  
6  
7  
8  
9  
10  
11  
12  
13  
14  
15  
16  
17  
18  
19  
20  
21  
22  
23  
24  
25

BETHANY LUTHERAN CHURCH`  
ELKHORN, NEBRASKA  
SEPTEMBER 24, 2006  
BISHOP DAVID DEFREESE

1           BISHOP DEFREESE: Thank you. The scripture focus  
2 for today comes out of Deuteronomy.

3           This is a special passage that is called the Shema.  
4 It was the creed of the early Israelites as they recognized  
5 who God was and then understood their own self-identity. I  
6 invite you to listen well.

7           "Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our God. The Lord  
8 alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart,  
9 with all your soul, and with all your might. Keep these  
10 words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite  
11 them to your children. When you are at home, talk about  
12 them, and when you are away, when you lie down, and when you  
13 rise up. Bind them on a sign on your hand. Fix them as an  
14 emblem on your forehead and write them on the door post of  
15 your house and on your gates. Hear, O Israel, the Lord our  
16 God is one."

17           Thank you. Thank you. I'm delighted to be invited.  
18 Please know that I count this my joy, my honor, and my  
19 privilege to be with you.

20           I've looked forward to this time. I greatly  
21 appreciate the church family and the faith community that is  
22 Bethany and the difference you make.

23           I like Pastor Mark and Wenda Fry, too. They are  
24 marvelous partners in the Gospel, and so it is truly my joy  
25 to be with you.

1           Please be encouraged, as you are the church, as you  
2 proclaim the good news of Jesus's love and hope, and as you  
3 share the difference that this Gospel good news calls us to  
4 be in a society that truly doesn't understand and yet is  
5 hungry for it. Please be encouraged.

6           My assigned task is to speak on the importance of  
7 establishing values and priorities as families designed by  
8 God.

9           That is a great, great assignment. One for which I  
10 am grateful.

11           I want to walk through that Shema, that passage, one  
12 more time, because in it you hear our calling to be God's  
13 people.

14           "Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our God. The Lord is  
15 one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart,  
16 all your soul, and all your might. Keep these words, recite  
17 them to your children. Teach them at home and away, when you  
18 lie down, and rise up. Have them as a sign on your hand, on  
19 your forehead, and all over your house. The Lord is our  
20 God."

21           It's a great focus. How important it is in the  
22 midst of a society that longs for you to make sure what you  
23 give your children on the outside, we have the church saying  
24 stop, it is vitally important what you give your children on  
25 the inside, the nourish and nurture of that which is the

1 soul, the character, the very being, know that that is  
2 important.

3 You see, we as Christians believe that the family is  
4 more than biology. It's about God, and ourselves, and  
5 others.

6 This morning I would like to look at four focuses  
7 that I think follow in line with both the drama and the Bible  
8 passage and then the assignment on God's design in the  
9 family.

10 I want to try something, though. Will you repeat  
11 after me, perspective.

12 CONGREGATION: Perspective.

13 BISHOP DEFREESE: Now, as you say that, will you  
14 hold your hand like this and then look around and let's say  
15 it again. Please try this. Perspective.

16 CONGREGATION: Perspective.

17 BISHOP DEFREESE: Do you realize how important  
18 perspective is?

19 Perspective gives us insight and understanding and  
20 it shapes our behavior. It's how we see things in this  
21 world.

22 I don't know if you know the story of the young  
23 couple who were in the midst of a strong disagreement and it  
24 had gotten kind of nasty in this argument and the young wife  
25 offered her husband perspective.



1 the wonder and amazement of what God has done with that  
2 through Jesus our Christ on the cross, who would rather die  
3 than live without us, and has taken all of that sin and  
4 selfishness and nailed it, put it death.

5 And God's love that death could not hold, and so we  
6 receive grace, unconditional love, unmerited, unearned,  
7 undeserved, and yet given to us.

8 And what does that do to our perspective? We are a  
9 grateful people.

10 A grateful people who see life as a gift and  
11 acceptance from God and forgiveness, thankfully received.

12 Say it with me again, hold your hands up,  
13 perspective.

14 CONGREGATION: Perspective.

15 BISHOP DEFREESE: Thank you. Number two, if you  
16 will, make a fist and let's pump. Will you say with me  
17 purpose. Ready? Purpose.

18 CONGREGATION: Purpose.

19 BISHOP DEFREESE: You see, from perspective, then we  
20 are given a purpose.

21 Why are you here? Why did you God create you? Why  
22 were you given life?

23 Christ has shown the light of love and hope into a  
24 darkened world.

25 And you and I are called to reflect that light, to

1 share that light, the kindness, the care, the hope of our God  
2 for all people.

3 We are to be a people who understand their purpose  
4 well.

5 I was raised by very good parents that I'll always  
6 be thankful for.

7 When I was in high school I came home and announced  
8 that I was going to buy a motorcycle, and my mom in  
9 tenderness and gentleness said, "Over my dead body."

10 So I never got one, but lo and behold when I went  
11 away to college the guy who roomed right next to me in the  
12 dorm had a motorcycle

13 And every Saturday afternoon out we would go and he  
14 shared so generously.

15 He would let me take my turn driving and we would  
16 hit the blacktop highways and go.

17 One Saturday afternoon we were out, and I don't know  
18 how long we had been out or how far we had gone, and it just  
19 quit. That motorcycle just broke down.

20 Now, I'm a mechanical idiot, and he was equal to me,  
21 and so two dumb college clueless boys standing on the side of  
22 the road next to a broken down motorcycle and cars went back  
23 and forth.

24 After quite a while we saw in the distance this huge  
25 motorcycle coming at us.



1 you. Thank you so very much. What do we owe you?"

2 And his face turned red and his vein in his forehead  
3 started throbbing, "Owe me? Owe me? You're bikers aren't  
4 you?"

5 (Laughter)

6 "We're bikers, yeah."

7 He said, "What you owe me is that you don't ever  
8 pass another biker in need."

9 Isn't God amazing and marvelous? In the most  
10 surprising of places, from the most fascinating of people,  
11 I've never heard the purpose of a Christian stated with more  
12 clarity and insight.

13 What do you owe God? That you don't pass another  
14 person in need.

15 Part of being here today is my longing to say thank  
16 you to Bethany.

17 You're a good church family, and you're a church  
18 family that understands that it's not a country club with a  
19 cross on top.

20 That you for the purpose of God are called beyond  
21 yourselves to overcome the selfishness and to make a  
22 difference reflecting the light of Christ in this darkened  
23 world.

24 Thank you for the gifts of your resources that will  
25 be shared with the greater church and please, please know

1 what a difference it will make.

2 Because of you this morning right now at this time  
3 in Scottsbluff Pastor Will Voss is circling the town four  
4 times in an old van.

5 He tells me, "A lot of pastors talk about being  
6 shepherds, but I really herd them in on Sunday morning."

7 And there they will gather at Lakota Lutheran Chapel  
8 & Center.

9 It's the poorest of the poor here in Nebraska, a  
10 very transient population, but around word and sacrament they  
11 will worship God

12 And then they have a marvelous tradition. After  
13 worship is over they push away their chairs and they bring  
14 out round card tables and they have a soup lunch.

15 But more than physical nurture, they spiritually  
16 undergird each other.

17 They will go around at their tables and they'll look  
18 everyone in the eye and say, "Tell me, how were you a child  
19 of God this past week?"

20 And they listen.

21 And then they ask, "How will you be a servant for  
22 Christ in the week to come," holding each other accountable  
23 for living the life that they were called.

24 A few years ago the president of that congregation,  
25 his address was under a bridge on the highway.

1           They couldn't be the church without you. Thank you.  
2 Thank you for making a difference.

3           Thank you for undergirding and supporting our  
4 ministry together up in Dakota City for Southeast Asian  
5 immigrants.

6           These are families who have come to make a better  
7 life for their families, just as our forefathers and  
8 foremothers, from Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam.

9           Their ministry leader is named Soriya Roeun. He's a  
10 Cambodian man, who when he came to the United States was a  
11 Buddhist.

12           And then he was introduced to Jesus, his Christ, and  
13 he fell in love and now he's preparing to be an ordained  
14 pastor.

15           He recently had to take a stand against mail order  
16 brides, because that's a part of that society

17           And he had death threats, because that is very, very  
18 frightening. That is just a part of their culture

19           And he said, "As Christians, that can't be a part of  
20 us, because we do not objectify people. We do not make  
21 possessions out of women."

22           Also know, it was a year ago, that in that small  
23 little church family they had a young woman who was the  
24 valedictorian of her graduating ing class

25           And she gave a speech and at that time she said,

1 "I'm so thankful for my church, because they have helped me  
2 to know Jesus, my Christ, and that gives me purpose for every  
3 day and hope for every tomorrow."

4 Do you hear the difference that makes?

5 I could go on and on, but I long for you to be  
6 lifted by knowing that your gifts, your being the church,  
7 truly makes a difference.

8 That's the purpose. Say it with me one more time,  
9 hands pumped. Purpose.

10 CONGREGATION: Purpose.

11 BISHOP DEFREESE: And, third, priorities. Will you  
12 do this with your hands? Priorities.

13 CONGREGATION: Priorities.

14 BISHOP DEFREESE: In this world you and I are pulled  
15 in so many different directions.

16 So many things are important and good and we want to  
17 be a part of, so much that we just get frazzled. It's too  
18 much and not enough time.

19 I loved it, I read my first invitation for getting  
20 Christmas gifts. There was an advertisement that said if you  
21 really care for somebody, give them a meaningful gift. Give  
22 them a phoneless cord? Did you hear that? A phoneless cord.

23 Too much. We're pulled in too many directions.  
24 Everybody is after us.

25 We need to be honest today. The reason that you

1 don't have enough time for everything you want to do is that  
2 there isn't enough time, period.

3           You can't do it all, and that's why priorities are  
4 so important.

5           You are going to have to cheat something. That's  
6 just simply the truth.

7           You and I have to pick and choose and something will  
8 be left undone. That's life. Something will be cheated.

9           But the decision is, is it career and wealth? Ego  
10 enhancement?

11           Or is it God and family and church?

12           What is going to be cheated and how do we decide?

13           When I was first elected bishop I got a wonderful  
14 letter from a dear friend who simply said, "Now you've got  
15 the perfect job to put you in your grave. You are a  
16 workaholic and you want everybody to be happy. I ask two  
17 things of you," this is a dear friend, "simply remember that  
18 God has called you, and remember those who will be standing  
19 around at the cemetery when you are done."

20           That was a gift to help me prioritize who I am and  
21 what I will be about.

22           If you truly want to know your priorities, look at  
23 your date book and your checkbook and that will tell you,  
24 what is it that you are cheating, because something will have  
25 to be cheated, and we are people with perspective and

1 purpose, and need to work away at our priorities.

2 Say it with me one more time, will you? Priorities.

3 CONGREGATION: Priorities.

4 BISHOP DEFREESE: Fourth and last, put your hand  
5 over your heart and will you say with me passion. Passion.

6 CONGREGATION: Passion.

7 BISHOP DEFREESE: You and I have been gifted by the  
8 God who created us to live with purpose, priorities, and  
9 perspective that gives passion; that truly, truly makes a  
10 difference in how we live and who we are.

11 I love the writing of one theologian who said it  
12 well.

13 "Life is less about making something of ourselves,  
14 than finding something worth doing and losing ourselves in  
15 it."

16 I long to get lost in that which is important. I  
17 long to get lost in that which will outlive me. It is so, so  
18 important.

19 When I was just a child my family camped before it  
20 was real popular.

21 We had a homemade little trailer and we would go to  
22 such exotic places as Fremont and Council Bluffs.

23 (Laughter)

24 And one year we went to Glenvil, Nebraska. Does  
25 anybody know where Glenvil is?

1           It is a small little tiny town where my father's  
2 family came from.

3           We stayed in a church parking lot in our camper. On  
4 Sunday morning we went to worship in a little small white  
5 clapboard church, and one of the most fascinating things  
6 happened.

7           A young man at the beginning of worship stepped out  
8 into the sanctuary, he was wearing a white robe, and had his  
9 candle lighter, and he had a flame on it

10           And he bowed in front of the altar, but they had  
11 ceiling fans and out went his flame.

12           And I could feel him sinking. Then he went back  
13 into that side room and a moment later came back out with a  
14 new flame.

15           But he really had been trained well and he bowed one  
16 more time in front of the altar and out went the flame.

17           And then he did a most amazing thing. He pretended  
18 to light two candelabras, seven candles each, and my brother  
19 and my sisters and I got the giggles and we laughed  
20 throughout worship.

21           That was the most bizarre thing we saw, until at the  
22 end of worship the pastor gave the benediction, and do you  
23 know what happened?

24           Out of that side room came that young boy, bowed in  
25 front of the altar, and he put out candles that had never

1     been lit.

2                                 (Laughter)

3             Do you know how dangerous that is, to let our faith,  
4     our religion, just be going through the motions, to kick into  
5     auto pilot and not have it make any difference.

6             Jesus Christ came and died so that we might live and  
7     have life abundantly.

8             We are to be filled with passion, to truly make a  
9     difference in this world that is so hungry.

10            Will you repeat them after me?   Perspective.

11            CONGREGATION:   Perspective.

12            BISHOP DEFREESE:   Purpose.

13            CONGREGATION:   Purpose.

14            BISHOP DEFREESE:   Priorities.

15            CONGREGATION:   Priorities.

16            BISHOP DEFREESE:   And passion.

17            CONGREGATION:   Passion.

18            BISHOP DEFREESE:   One final thought.   In my home  
19     when I was growing up there was a little verse that was said  
20     all the time, and I thought it was biblical, and I thought it  
21     was great.

22            And so when it came time to be confirmed I asked the  
23     pastor if this could be my Bible verse at confirmation, and  
24     he said that would be fine, except it's not in the Bible.  
25     But it should be maybe.

1           "Only one life, it will soon be past. Only what is  
2 done for Christ will last."

3           That is the calling of you and I. A God who loves  
4 us beyond our understanding, but gives us a calling to be a  
5 different people, designed by God in our families. May God  
6 bless you and use you. Amen.

7

8

9

10

11

12

13

14

15

16

17

18

19

20

21

22

23

24

25