

*Printed in the Pastor's Corner Column of the Brodhead newspapers on 10/6/10*

*Lord, make me an instrument of your peace,  
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;  
where there is injury, pardon;  
where there is doubt, faith;  
where there is despair, hope;  
where there is darkness, light;  
where there is sadness, joy;  
O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek  
to be consoled as to console;  
to be understood as to understand;  
to be loved as to love.  
For it is in giving that we receive;  
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned;  
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.*

*- Prayer of St. Francis of Assisi (1182-1226)*

St. Francis of Assisi is remembered and honored this week by many Christians of several denominations throughout the world. His story is an interesting one and his impact on the Church is rather significant. I will leave most of those details to your research (there is plenty of good information about him online, for those interested in knowing more) and reflect on a particular element to his story that I find most inspiring.

As the famous prayer above implies, Francis was deeply committed to serving others. His life began as a wealthy child in a wealthy family with wealthy friends. He had all he ever would need, a life with which most anyone would be content. But, as his friends and family enjoyed their lives of luxury, he saw the suffering of those they ignored. His awareness of the poor and their neglect, and the gross disparity of wealth in his society, led him to give it all up. He walked away from everything he had in order to live in poverty with the suffering and to make his life one of service to those in need.

His actions and faith practice began a new religious movement within Christianity, but also offer a profound and lasting example for us today. Living in a world where so few people control so much of

the earth's resources and global wealth, poverty remains as prevalent and powerful as ever. Being citizens of the nation that sits atop such a system, we all are wealthy and exceedingly fortunate by global standards. Are we willing to see the need of those who suffer in ways we cannot even imagine? Are we willing to suffer with them in order to serve them better? To give up something in our lives, that others might experience life more abundantly? Now, Francis' actions are a bit extreme, but there is something to his willingness to let go, to give himself away, in order to meet those in need where they are. His generosity, trust in something more than the ways of the world, and hope that things could be different, become signs of God's grace to a world that needs it desperately – signs that we too are invited to embody when we remember this prayer. All people have a place in God's work of healing this world. May you find joy and peace in finding yours!

I want to finish with a quick word of introduction, since I am a new face and voice to most of you. I moved from central Ohio to Brodhead in August when I accepted the call to serve as pastor at Bethlehem Lutheran Church. I want you all to know that I have experienced a warm and friendly welcome from this community and I thank you for that. I so appreciate the kindness of this town and the welcome you extend to newcomers like me! I am thoroughly convinced that this is a wonderful town, and I consider myself blessed to become a part of it!

Grace and Peace,  
Pastor Peder