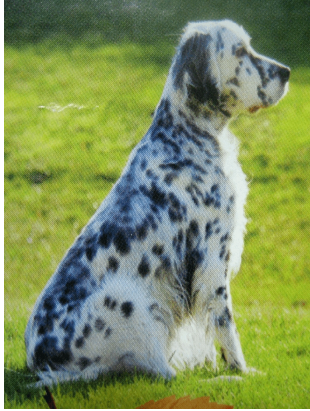


ON CONTENTMENT

by Rev. Dr. William Utech

A Root of Evil

There's a beaver living in the manhole of the storm sewer in my backyard. "Lucky", an English setter, is a bird-hunting machine. The aroma of a nearby beaver is both enticing and addictive - a sort of doggy



crack cocaine, if you will. That beaver is on Lucky's mind all the time! She doesn't want to eat. She doesn't want to sleep. She doesn't even want to come inside to hang out with the family. She just wants to sit next to that manhole and smell that beaver. She is target-locked on it and life is passing her

by. Sound familiar? "People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs." (1 Tim. 6:9-10) In this country and culture we are all at risk to be target-locked on money. It is precisely in a time of economic downturn that a sinful love of money can take hold.

In this country and in this culture we have more than most, and the problem with that is that when fallen sinful people have more, they also tend to want more.

We look at 401Ks and 403Bs and we see how much we've lost, and we're sick about it. It doesn't seem possible that a whole decade of hard work and disciplined planning for the future could disappear just like that! "It's not right, and it's not fair!" we say to ourselves. We feel cheated and put upon. But are we? In "Jesus Wants to Save Christians" Rob Bell offers some startling statistics about America's affluence:

* America, with less than 5 percent of the world population, owns a fifth of the world's wealth.

* Every seven seconds, somewhere in the world, a child under age five dies of hunger, while Americans throw away 14 percent of the food purchased.

* More than half of the world lives on less than two dollars a day, while the average American teenager spends nearly \$150 dollars a week.

* Americans spend more annually on trash bags than nearly half of the world does on all goods.

Wanting More

All of us have this innate ability to be dissatisfied with what we have and to always want more. In a recent Christmas movie based on Dr. Seuss' book, "How the Grinch Stole Christmas", the Grinch confronts all the Whovillians with their sinful need for more: "The avarice! The avarice never ends! 'I want golf clubs. I want diamonds. I want a pony so I can ride it twice, get bored, and sell it to make glue!'" Just like my dog, Lucky, we get so focused, so obsessed, so target-focused on stuff, that it hardly occurs to us that the good life God wants for us may be passing us by. For example, the joy of being a son or daughter, a husband or a wife, a mother or a father, a friend and colleague, a part of a Christian Church, a child of God. Are you missing out on the real joys of life - on the joy of all your God-given vocations - because you want more stuff? And the answer, the antidote for all of this? It is, as St. Paul says in 1 Timothy, "the great gain of godliness with contentment."

Everything We Need

Rom. 8:12 says: "He who did not spare His own Son, but gave him up for us all - how will He not also, along with Him, graciously give us all things?" You can wake up every day and say to God, "Good morning, Dad, it's me," and He absolutely loves it, because He absolutely loves you! Because He loves us, we won't get everything we want, but we will get everything we need. And that is all we really need to be content in times of economic uncertainty or all the days appointed for our earthly life.

Dr. William Utech is associate professor of practical theology and director of resident field education at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis. A member of the SELC District, he currently serves on the Board of Trustees of the Lutheran Haven. By permission, a condensation of his article on contentment was written by Rev. Thomas Soltis, SELC Stewardship Director. The article appeared in the Nov., 2009 issue of the "Lutheran Witness", a monthly publication of the Missouri Synod. Excellent articles of practical and current interest as well as historical and doctrinal nature may be found in the magazine. Individual or congregational subscriptions for distribution may be obtained by contacting Concordia Publishing House:

1-800-325-3381 cphorder@cph.org