



# Pinewood Lutheran Church

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What monument of modern society is being built today? 500 years from now, what will people remember us for? Will it be the rise of technology, computers, and the digital age? Will it be the replacement of churches as the cultural and intellectual centers of society with ever-expanding sports venues? Will it be the discovery of a new type of energy source which will render "power plants" and carbon emissions to the dustbin of history? My vote is for: none of the above. Instead, I believe right now that we'll be remembered for the mountains of trash which we generate! Globally, we are a "trashy" culture.....

I've heard about the huge amounts of trash that has been dumped into the oceans and floats around, caught up by the ocean currents. When the tidal wave hit Japan a few years back and obliterated Fukushima and its nuclear power plant, this "problem" was widely reported. (FYI, did you know that the reactor there is still leaking deadly radiation into the Pacific, they have sent robots in to monitor it but they cannot survive the radiation for more than a few minutes, and the robotic technology won't be invented to clean up that mess for another 30-40 years!—Talk about trash....!) Anyway, it is now reported that between Hawaii and California, caught up in a vortex of ocean currents, the great Pacific floating trash pile now is over twice the size of Texas!!! Most of it is comprised of plastic.

Earlier this summer I saw a local news report on TV. It was about recycling. You know, the stuff we wheel out each week to the curb after dutifully filling our bin to "save the environment." It seems that in the past much of this trash was sold to China where they went through it and reused what they could—the rest being relegated to landfills there. But it seems the market has dropped and no one wants to buy our trash! So, much of it either gets burned via local incinerators or trucked off the landfills in the hinterlands. And since the local landfills are full, other areas where land is cheap (read: rural, pristine areas) are being bought up and used for this purpose. It reminds me of that old "70's" song: "Take paradise and put up a parking lot." Couple all that with suburban sprawl and the gobbling up of prime agricultural land across the entire world and you have to wonder: "Where will the food come from in 100 years?"

Trash has always been a problem, but our modern culture has exacerbated the problem in huge multiples. Archeologists love ancient trash piles as they give great insight into those cultures. I recall from my youth visiting Midwest farms where all that was left were the foundations and steps of the rotted house. But right out behind where the house stood was also the remnants of that family's personal dump. Bottles, rusty cans, and assorted junk lay buried in the weeds. They burned what they could in their wood stove and the rest went "over the hill."

Modern trash is vastly worse than ancient trash for a variety of reasons. One, plastics don't break down in the environment for years and years, if ever. Two, chemical concoctions are dumped, go into the water supply, and are a huge and growing health issue nationwide. For example, most Midwest farm wells are polluted with Atrazine, sprayed on the crops. It is almost impossible to remove and causes a whole host of health problems. Filtration doesn't really get rid of much of such pollutants. So, do people like drinking or eating weed and bug killer?

I think back to my youth, which wasn't without pollutants such as spraying the entire town with truck foggers belching out a cloud of DDT for mosquitoes. We bought items in a local store and took them home in paper bags. Grocery shelf packaging was minimal—usually comprised of card board or wax paper. If you had anything shipped to you via a trucking service like UPS, it was very rare and Styrofoam cartoons were saved and reused by the recipient because they were useful and dare I say, rare. Contrast all that with today. Everything seems to be hermetically sealed with plastics. With the rise of online shopping, more cardboard, more Styrofoam, and even more plastic encases everything we buy and it all must be thrown away. Trash on top of trash. My sainted mother railed against our "throw away" society. She was right. Our legacy will be: trash. I wonder what God thinks of all this?.....

There is a parallel in the Old Testament. It is found in Genesis chapter 11 and deals with the infamous Tower of Babel. It was sometime after the great flood. The human race had multiplied enough to create a great civilization in the Fertile Crescent, the area of Babylon or Iraq/Iran today. They had but one language and wanted to build a monument to themselves in the form of a great city with a tower reaching up into the heavens. All this "so that we may make a name for ourselves and not be scattered over the face of the earth." In other words, human pride arrogantly assumed they didn't need God because they had themselves to rely on. And they wanted to assume pre-eminence over their world. Of course, you all know how that turned out. God went down and confused their tongues so that communication became a huge problem and their monument to human greatness ceased and eventually tumbled into oblivion.

I guess the point of all this is that humans always want to build monuments to themselves. We want to not just be like God, but we want to be our own gods. And it appears to me trash will be our legacy. In a sense, I find that fitting. It matches and illustrates the downward spiral caused by original sin in our lives. Unlike the modern Darwinian approach to life which says humans advance and evolve to a higher plane, we're actually going in reverse!!! Moreover, we believe our brainpower which spawns technology is up to the task of pulling us out of this tailspin.—But the mountains of trash around the world and the Pacific "trash" vortex seem to say otherwise. In any case, I'll continue to put my confidence in my Lord. He saved my trashy soul on a cross. He provides happiness and fulfillment not in "more things" but in simplicity. After all, Jesus did say: "Godliness with contentment is great gain, for we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out of it. But having food and clothing, let us be content with that."

Pastor Thomas H. Fox

