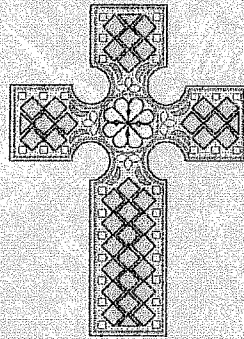

Behold What The Lord Can Do!

The Life and Ministry of
Pastor G.E. Schmeling



May 1, 1997
Jeff Halldorson

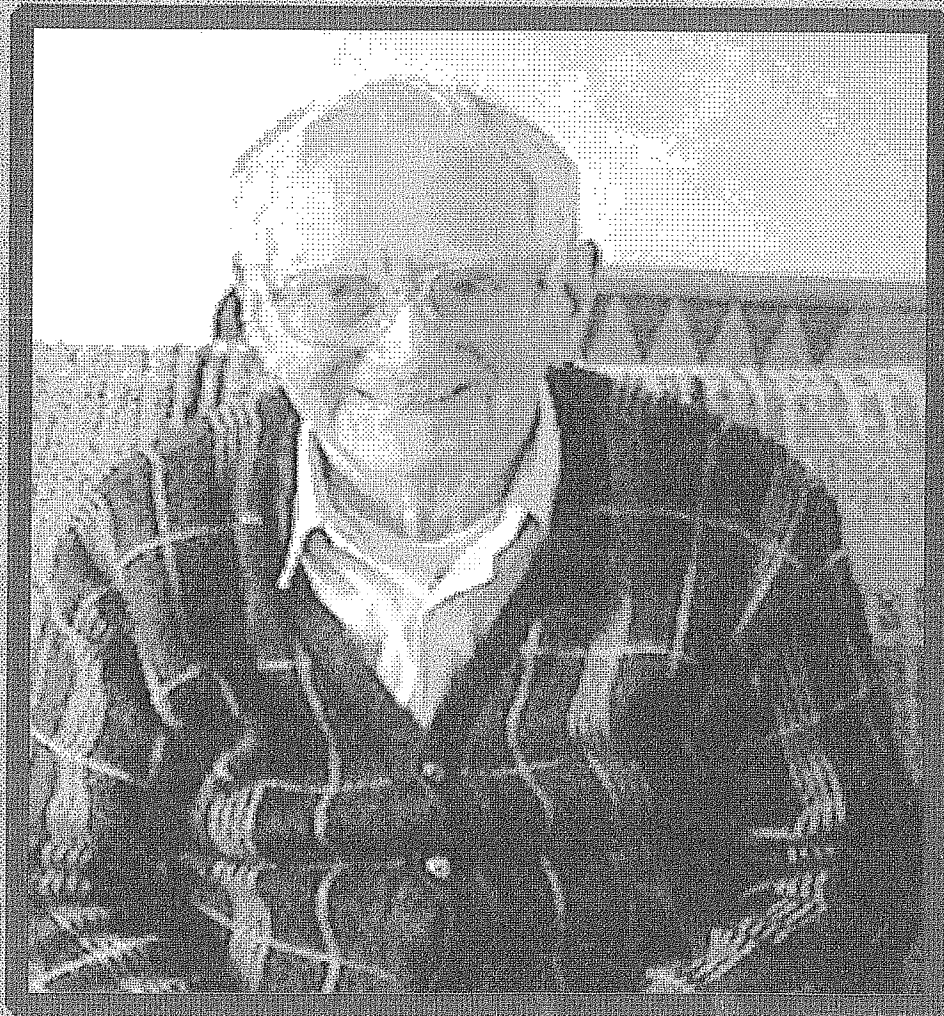
Behold What The Lord Can Do!

A Historical

PRESENTATION

On the Life and Ministry of

Pastor G.E. Schmeling



J. Halldorson 5-1-97

Behold What The Lord Can Do!

What are all histories but God manifesting himself?

When I first approached Pastor Schmeling with the idea of writing a history of his life and ministry, I was not sure what to expect. Who was Pastor Schmeling? What were his experiences? How would he feel about being interviewed? What could I learn from this man's past? What historical treasures would he offer? These thoughts and many others flashed through my mind as the doorbell rang.

I was met by a gentleman. As we sat and spoke of a ministry filled with hardships and humor, successes and set backs, my perspectives concerning this assignment changed. The words of the man sitting across from me had, in his wisdom, taught me a great lesson concerning history: The Lord and his work is history. The history I was listening to was not one of famous firsts, great turning points, nor monumental accomplishment (as the world defines them). His history was not even his own. His history was the history of the Lord of Mercy working his will through a man by the name of Gehard E. Schmeling.

*"The remembrance of past events supplies
faith with comfort and nourishment."*

The above words of Martin Luther serve as the main purpose of this presentation. History is edifying to faith. Behold what the Lord can do!

Behold What The Lord Can Do!

I.

Abilities

Pastor Schmeling spoke very openly of his academic difficulties as a student of the German language. This was a frustration to himself and a

disappointment to his father whose dream it was for his son to become the pastor he himself had wished to be. This struggle led him from Concordia in Milwaukee to Northwestern in Watertown where he graduated with grades that were, as he put it, "not something to rejoice over." When his father asked him if he were willing to enter the seminary with such a record, Gerhard Schmeling stated that he was.

The years of hard work and determination continued through graduation while his struggles with German followed him into the parish. Pastor Schmeling spoke of the hours he spent faithfully and, I'm sure at times, tediously preparing his German sermons. He studied the sermons of Martin Luther and Sunday after Sunday, week after week he worked hard to overcome his perceived lack of German abilities. From South Dakota to South-Eastern Wisconsin he preached German sermons.

The Lord blessed the faithful work of Pastor Schmeling. Standing under the hot lights, facing the large Bethel congregation in Milwaukee, and preaching in German to scholars of the language he had once failed in school, this became so clear. With the words "Pastor Schmeling you need not be ashamed of your German," we see the blessings God gives to his faithful and humble servants.

Behold what the Lord can do when it comes to the abilities of his servants. God gives gifts to his people and to the overseers of his flock. These gifts cause the body of Christ to function. No man has all gifts for every area of ministry. Don't give up. Let all Christians do as Pastor Schmeling did and work diligently with what the Lord has given us to the glory of God and growth of his kingdom for the man who is faithful with a few things will be given more.

Behold What The Lord Can Do!

II.

Inexperience

How can a young called worker not feel overcome by his inexperience when stepping into his first assignment? Pastor Schmeling was not immune from this same fear. After receiving the Holy Spirit's call to Henry and Clark South Dakota, he packed up his Model T and headed west. Pastor Schmeling's education was about to continue as he boldly faced the commission that was his. Several times he mentioned "the Lord took me to school in South Dakota." The educational program that young pastor was enrolled in is one many have faced and will face as they arrive at their first assignment. How can I do it all? What can I do? What can't I do? How do I do it?

Pastor Schmeling's example is one that all young called workers would do well to follow. Hard work; prayer; and because "a young man needs a little guidance," a mentor and friend found in an older colleague or two. With the help of God's word, time and these men, Pastor Schmeling grew in confidence, experience and wisdom. He implemented new programs within his congregations and refused to back down from the challenges he faced. He boldly preached Christ and the words he preached worked miracles of faith. Behold what the Lord can do, he grants wisdom and experience to the inexperienced.

Behold What The Lord Can Do!

III.

In Times of Need

The Schmeling family was not immune from the hardships that seized our land in the days of the Great Depression. The financial problems that forced so many out of work in our cities together with the "dust bowl" conditions of the early 1930s devastated the prairies. Farm after farm was turned over to the banks or abandoned to the winds. Farmers drifted into towns looking for work but few found any. Some of the lucky ones found work with the WPA and were thus able

to feed their families with the produce with which they were paid. This, of course, hurt our congregations together with our pastors. Pastor Schmeling's salary was cut in half as the Synod found itself all but bankrupt.

Behold what the Lord can do in times of need. The farmers who were able to keep their farms freely shared what they could with their pastor and his family. When Pastor Schmeling needed cream to treat his ulcer, the canisters of cream piled up at his home. When the washing machine (that doubled as a freezer) was brought into the house to thaw out there was meat to be canned for the family. When those who worked for the WPA received produce as payment some went to the Pastor whose love for his people was returned generously. In these times of need the Lord provided the Schmeling's with what was necessary. One blessing in particular was the strong spirit of Mrs. Schmeling who made the best of what was available to provide for the needs of her family.

In times of need let us not despair but trust the Lord who provides not only for the soul but also for the bodies of his dearly loved and redeemed children.

Behold What The Lord Can Do!

IV.

In shrinking communities

The areas in which Pastor Schmeling served were generally not the areas in which we typically begin mission work today. One of the congregation he served in South Dakota was a tiny group of souls in the town of Clark. These were basically a handful of people, many of whom were widows, who rented the Norwegian Lutheran church and held services in the afternoon. In fact, the mission board had, at one time, recommended that they be dropped from Pastor Schmeling's duties. How did Pastor handle this tiny group? He did not give up on them but continued to serve them for as long as he was there.

In Milwaukee he faced the same challenge on a much greater scale. Bethel was a large congregation located in an area from which many members and their children were moving away. Pastor Schmeling, again, did not give up but continued to reach out and nurture those who remained in order that, whether or not they too would leave the area, they would never leave their Lord.

Pastor Schmeling knew then what all pastors need to remember no matter where they serve, the Lord blesses faithful service regardless of what the human eyes perceive or the membership roles reflect. Behold what the Lord can do in any and every community.

Behold What The Lord Can Do!

V.

In Retirement

When Pastor Schmeling approached retirement age, he accepted a call to two rural congregations in Rib Falls, Wisconsin. Here he served faithfully until it seemed time to pass the reigns on to a younger man. The Lord, however, was not yet finished using Pastor Schmeling's gifts in the service of his kingdom. He went on for many years to serve as chaplain at WLCFS before retiring in order to spend time with his ailing wife. Even then, there was work to be done so Pastor Schmeling continued to serve well into the 1990s as a visitation pastor at St. James and St. Matthew. Behold what the Lord can do with his servants not only in youth but also after retirement as they continue to be a blessing to the people of God.

Behold What The Lord Can Do!

VI.

In times of doubt

Pastor Schmeling stated that several times throughout his life he found himself asking whether or not he had accomplished anything in his ministry. A

question I believe every called worker asks of himself in times when the fruits of his labor do not seem overly apparent. Pastor shared how the Lord, upon several occasions such as his fiftieth anniversary in the ministry and his beloved wife's funeral, lifted the corner of the sheet to reveal the tremendous support and love shown by so many from so far who were touched by his humble service. This, only a fraction of those eternal friends the Gospel has made of him who will worship the Lamb with him for all eternity in Paradise. Behold what the Lord can do in spite of us and our personal doubts.

Behold What The Lord Can Do!

The history of Pastor Schmeling is the history of God's work through a special man with special gifts. May God grant us all such a history! All Glory is God's.

*By all your saints still striving, For all your saints at rest,
Your holy name, O Jesus, Forever more be blessed.
You rose, our King victorious, That they might wear the crown
And ever shine in splendor Reflected from your throne.*

*Then let us praise the Father And worship God the Son
And sing to God the Spirit, Eternal Three in One,
Till all the ransomed number Who stand before the throne
Ascribe all Pow'r and glory And praise to God alone.
(CW 552)*