



REV. EARL PALMER

The Rev. Earl Palmer, University Presbyterian Church:

So smooth that admirers call him "Earl the Pearl," Palmer packs the house at U Pres with his erudite, witty sermons. He takes on big topics, like multiple-part series on Christ and the city, or the family in today's world. He is in international demand as a speaker, lecturing at Oxford University on C.S. Lewis, the British writer who abandoned atheism for Christianity.

Full of ebullience, Palmer watches people's eyes, feels their reactions, recrafts his sermons between services to better connect with his listeners. He's more the stage actor, feeding off an audience, than a televi-

sion performer. Once invited to Chicago to deliver a sermon on a widely-watched TV program, Palmer finished only to see the floor manager signaling he had *five* more minutes to fill. Never a slow wit, Palmer intoned, "Now, let's go over those points again." He laughs now. He was sweating then.

With his trademark black horn-rimmed glasses, Palmer would look at home on the adjacent University of Washington campus. But it is the professors and students who come over to hear him. He layers his sermons with Bible history, context, explanations of Scripture in their original Hebrew or Greek. Scripture comes alive. Misconceptions wither. On the adage "Spare the rod, spoil the child," Palmer reminds the congregation that

the rod of biblical times was used to guide sheep, not hit them.

On paying attention to the original language of Scripture: "Imagine 20 centuries from now some archaeologists trying to make sense of a headline from 1994, 'Oregon Ducks Smell Roses.'" Maybe they'd conclude it was a nature story about ducks in Oregon loving roses. But people today would know it was about the Oregon football team hoping to go to the Rose Bowl. Similarly, Palmer noted in Philippians 1:27 that the Apostle Paul wrote of Christians "striving together for the faith of the gospel," unfrightened by their opponents. Should a minister grab that as a military metaphor, like soldiers marching to war? That would be inappropriate,

said Palmer, because the word Paul uses for "striving together" is *sunathlountes*, from the Greek *sun-athleo*, meaning to compete in a contest with. "It's an athletic image. He's talking about people working together as a team."