

Braman

Foundation of Charities



Central Bridge
United Methodist Church

The Sermons of Richard W. Braman Vol. 10

“

Love Thy Neighbor

Let us give thanks to God for the life and work of the Rev. Braman. Richard born in Aug. of 1929 wrote and delivered over 360 sermons in which this volume contains the beginning of his preaching and writing. Although, not born to a particularly spiritually or religious family he wrote in his memories of a calling to serve the Lord at an early age of 18. He married his wife Gladys in 1948. Mrs. Braman was saved at the age of 14. She began to pray for Richard and in 1955 Richard had a conversion experience in 1955 as the result of a Rev. Graham crusade. His first sermon called "A Conversion Experience" speaks volumes of his personal conversion.

Rev. Braman began a home Correspondence course through the United Methodist Church in 1956. He worked on his studies for several years until ordained in 1962. He continued to study the Correspondence course in addition to many Cokebury publications until his passing



The Rev. Braman was a writer of Evangelism. He felt strongly that all his sermons and writing should be directed by scripture or several scriptures. As you read his sermons this will become evident. His style was direct and to the point.

Richard believed that Jesus Christ was Gods only son and that who ever believed in Him shall have eternal life. In fact John 3:16 was his favorite Bible verse. He preached not only in the Fultonham United Church, but also in two churches in Ohio: South Harpersfield United Church and the United Methodist Church in Cork, Oh.

As you read these sermons may the Holy Spirit continue to guide your path and may the Grace of our Lord continue to bless your life and your families' lives. If you have never had the experience of realizing Jesus as your personal Savior just ask him to come in your heart and He will. Let us thank God for the life of the Rev. Richard Braman and give praise and thanksgiving.

In Christ,
The Braman Foundation

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Three Pages of Christian History

Scripture: Hebrews:1-3;6, 32-39; 12:1-2

The text is chosen from Psalm 145:13; “Their kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and thy domain endures throughout all generations.” Many of us have favored hymns, poems, or other writings. Perhaps. We know most of these favorites by heart, but still from time to time we like to get them out and reread them again. The words, perhaps, are a part of our spiritual treasure, a token of our deepest conviction and resolve, a symbol of that which is beyond our grasp. All of us perhaps have such treasures in various forms. The nation treasures its constitution and its flag. There are pages of history that are its pride and lasting inspiration. The church treasures the book. We read from its pages in every Sunday service. They bring us to the feet of our Lord, whom we worship and serve.

There are pages of Christian history which we might well treasure. They would strengthen their faith, keep bright our hope, and deepen our love. I would like to point to three such pages.

First of all, let us turn to the page of Christian history which tells of the Early Church. How often the preacher refers to the Early Church in his sermons. The phrase covers the story of centuries rich in events and personalities and tradition. We take a certain pride in the men and women of those early days and sometimes try to emulate them. Christian denominations lay claim to patterning themselves after the pattern of the Early Church.

Look at this page of Christian history. How close those early Christians were to their Lord; some of their leaders belonged to the Twelve. Without their labors we would not have the New Testament.

The Lord’s supper is passed to us by their hands. We glory in their martyrdoms and rejoice in their virtues. Not that these men and women were perfect; they were not, but they did “out-think, out-live, and out-die the Pagan world.” This three-fold fact is our present joy and inspiration. They confessed “that Jesus Christ is Lord” and the page which records their faith and works moves us to the same confusion.

The chief agents in the expansion of Christianity appear not to have been those who made it a profession or a major part of their occupation, but men and women who earned their livelihoods in some purely secular manner and spoke of their faith to those whom they met in this natural fashion. In the commerce and the travel which was so marked a feature of the Roman Empire, the faith must have made many new contacts through Christian merchants and tradesmen. It is significant that Christianity appeared very early in Puteoli, on the Bay of Naples, on the route to Rome, and that while we do not know of the beginnings of the church in Gaul, when we first meet it there, it is in a section which had commercial connections with the Hellenistic East. Involuntary travelers such as slaves and Christians deported for their faith were also agents. Martyrs by their example impressed many.

And so, we certainly do treasure the pages of history that tell us of the courage, strength, faith of the first

Christian people, who were not afraid to die, if necessary, for their Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. What an example we can take for our lives today. Even though we profess to be a Christian not too many are willing to have sacrifices and even give their lives for Jesus Christ.

Another page of Christian history tells this story of the Protestant Reformation. Next Tuesday is the 460th anniversary of Martin Luther's public challenge of the scandalous practices of the Roman Church of that day. This event led to Luther's appearance at the Diet of Worms on the 17th of April 1521. "This appearance", wrote Thomas Carlyle, "may be considered as the greatest scene in modern European history; the point, indeed, from which the whole subsequent history of civilization takes its rise." This is Thomas Carlyle estimate of Martin Luther. "I will call this Luther a true great man; great in intellect, courage, affection, and integrity; one of our most lovable and precious men. Great, not as a human obelisk; but as an Alpine mountain- so simple, honest, spontaneous, not setting up to be great at all; there for quite another purpose than being great! Ah yes, unsubduable granite, piercing far and wide into the heavens; yet in the clefts of its fountains, beautiful green valley with flowers! A right Spiritual Hero and Prophet; once more, a true Son of Nature and Fact, for whom these centuries, and many that are to come yet, will be thankful to heaven."

There are blemishes and blots upon this page. This all will admit, but the permanent treasure of the page is beyond value. We think of the men of the Reformation, the re- reformers" as they have been called: Saint Francis, Peter Waldo, John Wycliffe, John Hus, William Tyndale, and a host of others. Those who followed Luther were no less distinguished comma Calvin, Zwingli, John Knox, on down to the notables of the evangelical revivals who were no less sons of the Reformation.

How precious to Protestant thought in life are the affirmations which were written on this page of history, for the inspiration and direction of the Protestant church. Robert McAfee Brown in "the spirit of Protestantism" list them as follows: 1) The Centrality of Grace and the Life of Faith. This comes from John 1:17; "For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ." 2) The Authority of Scripture, 3) The Sovereignty of God, 4) The Priesthood of All Believers as we read in 1 Peter 2: 9-10; "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you and out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were no people but now you are God's people; Once you had not received mercy but now you have received mercy." 5) The call of the Christian Man, as read in Ephesians 4:1; "I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called," 6) Loving God with the mind, 7) The Worship of God (before the Reformation, congregational participation in worship had practically disappeared), 8) The Sacraments (the word is made visible).

No such affirmation should lead to idolatry as perhaps the second has led some into Bibliolatry. The spirit will guide us into all truth.

The Reformation was not completed in the 16th century; it is never completed.

The church must be faithful to Jesus Christ, no one else. It is no part of the spirit of Protestantism to be anti-Catholic. Protestants who still fear the word today should recall that the reformers used it without qualms. 9) Indeed the true Protestant considers himself a member of the Catholic Church of Jesus Christ, reformed; the universal church that was reconstituted so as to be faithful to its Lord; the church that was rescued at the time of the Reformation from many corruptions by the renewing power of the Holy Spirit; the church that must continue to be rescued in every day and age from the new corruptions that constantly threaten it. Members of this holy Catholic Church, reformed, looked to the future sure of only one thing—that the church must be faithful to Jesus Christ (no one else). When anything stands in the way of fidelity to him, whether it be the medieval indulgence or renaissance Pope, Protestant pride or maltreated scripture, it must be judged and purged by the redeeming activity of the Holy Spirit who is a consuming fire.

I believe the main thing we have to remember about the Reformation is that we no longer live under the law of a church or a Pope but through the grace of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the one we all have to answer to, no one else.

It would be well if all of us would remember, yes even perhaps know why we are Protestants. I'm sure any of our Catholic friends know why they are Catholics and can readily tell us too. There are basic differences, and we should know what they are. It's part of our beliefs.

A third page of Christian history holds a record of Obedience to Christ. Especially in the 19th century did the church respond to his communion, "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." with expectancy that the power of the Holy Spirit would be given to its missionaries. Read Acts 1:8, "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and ye shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth."

The record doesn't reveal a perfect response. There were open doors to mission fields that the churches refused to enter. Many Christians were stingy in their giving. Nevertheless, under the Lord's commission and William Carey's slogan, "Expect great things from God; attempt great things for God; this exciting page of Christian history was written. It is still in the writing, for like the Reformation the Christian mission is constant, continuing, and forever new.

We cannot live without Christ, and we cannot bear to think of men living without him. We cannot be content to live in a world that is un-Christlike. We cannot be idle while the yearning of his heart for his brethren is unsatisfied. Since Christ is the motive, the end of Christian missions fits in with that motive. Its end is nothing less than the production of Christ-like character in individuals, and societies, and nations, through faith in and fellowship with Christ, the living Savior, and through corporate sharing of life in a divine society. Christ is our motive, and Christ is our end. We must give nothing less, and we can give nothing more.

We do not have much time to proclaim the gospel in relation to the present generation, we have no time at all. They are passing away like leaves on a tree. We say that it is the birthright of every single human being that he has been redeemed by Christ, and to have the opportunity freely to accept or reject that salvation. And half the people in the world have not heard the name of Jesus Christ. Doubtless God's plans are faster than our best imagination of them; doubtless he has means of working of which we have no knowledge at all. But as far as the proclamation of the gospel to all the world is concerned, he seems to have only one method. He has committed the eternal gospel to men; if they preach it, it will be preached; if they don't preach it, it will not be preached. He is prepared to trust us, and to allow himself to be frustrated almost without limit by our disobedience, our blindness, and our folly.

Truly the time is now, and we have been instructed to bring God's word to all people everywhere. As Christians we are obligated and more important, we should want to help in the spreading of the gospel message. We can go on writing more pages of Christian history.

These three pages of Christian history hold together; "the Early church", Protestant Reformation and Obedience to Jesus Christ. They are bound together by many strands. We mentioned but one: on all three pages we find that men and women who love the Christ stand willing to die that his Kingdom may be advanced in the world. Are you willing to give your life for the cause? Truly Jesus Christ does conquer.

How Much is Enough?

Scripture: Luke 12:15-21

The text is chosen from I Corinthians 8:6; “Yet for us there is one God, the Father from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.” How much is enough? The rich man of the parable we read this morning would answer, “a little more.” A villager in India whose family exists on one meal a day, whose children go to bed hungry every night; what answer would he give to the question? He would answer in terms of his need. Another man might answer in terms of his acquisitions. And here is one who wants to keep up with the Jones. Vanity and love of power give their answer. For everyone the answer may be at a different point.

The question arises in department of government when the standard of living becomes their concern. It is discussed across the tables where industrial management and labor meet. Institutions for human welfare, schools, and hospitals, etcetera ask “how much is enough?” Churches facing responsibilities to serve the peoples of the world and advance the Kingdom of God require large answers to the question. It is a family question and a personal question asked on any number of occasions.

First of all, how much is enough to get? Some, like the man in the parable, might well stop getting before the acquiring of more becomes the chief incentive of life. The service of mammon is a frustrating life, with always more barns to build, when in fact life was to be something more than building barns. The man was born a human; he died a barn builder. Born a human, engaged in a rat race.

In fact, isn't this what many of us are engaged in today, a rat race? It's like being on a merry go round and not being able to get off and finally someday our earthly lives will come to an end and we will have accomplished nothing that really matters. If we were ignorant people or if we didn't know the difference perhaps there could be 1/2 an excuse for us but we are not ignorant or stupid, only perhaps when it comes to our salvation. For truly no one will ever find salvation for himself in material things. Why can't we see, why can't we hear, that truly if we put God first in our lives, the other things will come automatically. How much really is enough to get?

And yet getting is necessary, isn't it? That Italian villager ought to get enough to feed his family, and many worthy ambitions are served by getting more. And how can a man give who does not get?

“How much is enough?” This is a question related to how much do we spend? For what do we spend? A man may get all out of line in his spending, as indicated by the statistics of expenditures for tobacco, alcohol, entertainment, luxuries.

I know one man who is not in good health. He has made a fortune. But he wants to work just one more year- then he is sure he will have everything he needs. And I have reminded him of the six-year-old boy who asked his grandfather the question, “How much money does a man have to have to be rich?” and the

old gentleman replied, “Just a little bit more, and no man ever gets that much.” And of course, he ends up as one of the richest men in the cemetery.

We leave the answers to the question, “how much is enough to get?” in order to ask another question.

Secondly, how much is enough to give?

We hear someone asking this question in terms of how little can I give and get away with it. How little can I give for others means how much I can keep for myself.

There are other ways of putting the question. How much is enough to make adequate response to God’s goodness to me? How much is enough to measure my thankfulness to God for all the blessings of my life? How much is enough to implement God’s program in the world, as presented to me by my church? How much is enough to give for the sake of the Kingdom of God? Jesus commended a woman who gave all that she had into the temple treasury. Is that what I should do? How much is enough to give is a perplexing question.

John Holmgren, secretary of the American Bible society, puts it rather graphically, that statistics are people. He asked us to imagine that we heard a knock on our front door and when we opened it, we saw standing in tattered rags one of the emancipated diseased men of the earth. And as we were about to offer him something to eat, we would notice another standing just behind him. And behind him still another and another. That line of hungry men and women would keep on coming until they numbered 2/3 of mankind. How much is enough to give?

This is Stewardship Sunday in our church. These are questions we should ask ourselves when we sign the pledge cards for next year. The church or any church cannot operate without your financial support. How much you give is between yourself and God. No one can tell you what to give. Certainly, on Stewardship Sunday, especially, we should consider more than money for stewardship is more than that. It is the giving of your time, your talents, and your wealth. There are many jobs that have to be done in the church to keep it going, active and alive. As stewards of Christ when we are asked to do something we should do it gladly if it possible. We all have some kind of special talents God has given us. The least we can do is to use those talents in God’s work. Let us work together as good stewards of Christ to further his work here in Fultonham and in the world.

The questions we have asked, and the problems suggested can be answered and resolved in the light of Jesus teachings and Christian experience.

All things, all possessions of man, all wealth, really belong to God.

All that which is in any man’s hands should be held by him in trusteeship or stewardship. It should be accepted and used by him as a responsible steward.

Recognition of this stewardship should be shown by giving a proportion of one's income directly for the advancement of God's Kingdom. All, not so given should be used, served, invested, or spent, also, in a manner to advance the purposes of God.

A Michigan poll taken among practitioners of tithing garnered almost incredible proof that tithing changes people inside, endowing them with new confidence and peace of mind. Tithing changes people's relationship to the church. Tithers' declarations on this are empathetic. "It has made the church a part of us." Tithing changes the tither's relationship with others. "A feeling of belonging" develops to a degree hitherto unknown.

From my own experience tithing changes your whole outlook on the church and the work of God. For myself, mentally I feel better, things in everyday living just naturally go better and fall into place more readily. Try it and find out for yourself. That's the only way you will know the difference.

By the application of these principles of stewardship, not only for money, but of true time and talent, the life of a man may become completely changed, and at the same time many such questions are answered in many problems solved.

Again, I have found this to be definitely true in my own life. I'm not saying I do not have any more problems for I do have, but I believe I am better equipped to handle them and even to look at them objectively. Becoming a Christian and a good steward of Christ does not eliminate one from the everyday problems of life, but I assure you, you can handle these problems and come up with solutions to them that otherwise would have driven you crazy.

Do you recall the old story by Leo Tolstoy of the man who was offered as much land as he could go around on his feet in a day? The one condition was that he must return on the same day to the spot where he started. So, he went a considerable distance in one direction and made his turn and continued to walk. At noon he was fatigued but he was afraid to lie down lest he fall asleep. He ate a bite and then went on again. He knew that he should turn but he perceived a damp valley and felt the compulsion to include that because flax would do so well there. On and on he went until he made his third turn and was on the way home again, but he had a great distance to go, and it seemed to him that the sun had just set when he was within sight of his goal. However, he had started from a hill, and he heard the people on it beckoning him because the sun could still be seen from there. So, he struggled on, reaching the top of the hill, but he died from the exertion. And the only land he could use was that which made-up his 6-foot grave. That is an old story, but it is a very modern in the question it poses. How much is enough?

Truly it seems that the more we have, the more we want. We keep on acquiring more and more and where is the end? Little do we seem to realize we cannot take it with us regardless of what we do.

The story is told of two men in a Philadelphia church who were discussing their church's unsuccessful drive for capital funds. One felt that he had done more than his share by contributing \$100, and his inference was that the fault lay with the other members. He pressed his friend to tell him how much he had given and was shocked to learn that this man with a comparable income had contributed \$5000. The first man could have done much better, but he sincerely thought he was doing more than his share. How much is enough?

I certainly pray that each one of you will ask yourselves this question before you sign your pledge cards. Perhaps all of us feel we are doing our part and perhaps we are. I certainly cannot tell you what you should give, and I do not intend to. However, I do ask that you prayerfully consider your giving and let the decision you make rest between you and God. Then I truly know you will be giving to your utmost. Let us also enter into all phases of stewardship prayerfully- time, talent, and wealth.

How much is enough to get? The teaching of Jesus is that God gives to those who are responsible trustees. They get, that they may give. They did not spend life building barns to hold more wheat; they use the wheat to help that Indian villager. God's steward becomes a thoughtful, prayerful, responsible, purposeful, generous person. He finds the true satisfaction of life because he knows true values. It seems that the more he gives the more he gets, if not in tangible wealth, in the treasure which is eternal. This is his possession both now and hereafter. He has treasure laid up in heaven.

And so, when we consider what our stewardship should be let us remember "Yet, there is one God, the Father, from whom all things and for whom we exist and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist."

Those Pilgrims

Scripture: Deuteronomy 8:6-20

The text is chosen from Ephesians 5:20; “Always and for everything giving thanks in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father.” Three hundred and forty-seven years ago a sturdy little ship, the Mayflower, came in sight of land. The men and women on that ship were the rock from which America was hewn. They were not yet ancestors, Pilgrim fathers and mothers, but men and women like ourselves. They were ordinary human beings. Have you ever wondered what made them great?

First of all - to begin with, these were men and women with a compelling vision. William Warren Sweet, Dean of American Church Histories, has said that “religion was responsible for the founding of more colonies than any other single factor.” Why so?

These people who came to New England were rigorous Protestants who believed in biblical Christianity. They believed in baptism and the Holy Communion but laid special stress on preaching. Their vision of the ideal life was best lived in simplicity. They believed that a man gained salvation, not by meritorious works of his own, but only by faith in Jesus Christ. They felt bound to protect against the prevailing low standards of morality. They rejected ritualistic ways of worship and complicated forms of church government.

These were Puritans, the left wing of the Protestant Reformation, and for their views they endured persecution. They were only few in numbers, yet James I considered them dangerous to the realm and vowed to “hurry them out of the land.” Some met in secret, in houses and cottages, worshipping God at the risk of their lives. Others were forced to flee England and found asylum in Holland. But then, as the clouds of war began to lower, and as Spain and Holland armed, they decided, “this is not Zion.” So, they turned their faces to the new world, envisioning the realization of their hopes, a new nation under God.

These are not the kind of people that came to America to establish a new government with freedom to worship God as they chose.

Second, these men and women lived with a competent faith in God. Theirs was a faith that seemed able to endure anything and to embrace everything.

You can see their faith in the kind of society they built. The central institution of their Commonwealth was the church. These early pilgrims sought to bring their entire life into a cohesive form under God. Social affairs, political debates and government, intellectual adventure, and cultured life - all were brought into the churches and developed there. Was it because they had no other buildings? Not at all, it was because they saw all life as lived under God and his providential care. They did not think of themselves as founding the USA. Not one of their numbers could possibly have imagined the future that was to be. Yet in the most literal sense of the word, they thought of themselves as forming one nation under God.

If there is one thing that can be said about this country, it is this: it was founded through faith in God. The

answer to the dialectical materialism of the Communist ideology lies all about us. They say that the only creative forces in human history are those of economic determinism. One glance at the early history of our people shows the theory to be false. The primary force which led to the founding of New England was not economic; it was a humble, obedient faith in God.

But one more basic color is needed to paint this canvas: the pilgrims lived with consummate courage. Think not that they fled Holland not knowing whither they tended. It was not so. The decision to go to America was made only after much prayer and discussion. Certainly these people knew that life in the new world was not going to be easy. They also knew that they would need all the faith in God that they could muster. None of us truly would be anxious to go to the land that was virtually unexplored and inhabited.

In New England they faced the dangers they had anticipated, and others dreamed of. There were savages who might bring life-giving corn one day and piercing arrows the next. There were wolves in the region, great, gray, gunning creatures whose howls turned the blood to ice. These dangers tested their courage, but their greatest enemy proved to be the winter. They began to die. Starvation stopped them. At one point, the daily ration was reduced to five small grains of corn per person. Diseases ravaged them, especially the scurvy and the sickness of the cold- till only seven were left who could walk. All through the dread winter they died, first one and then another, now a woman, now a little child, now a man, and they laid their loved ones away.

There is a poem that illustrates that winter entitled, "Write It on Iron":

"Write it on iron. Write it on iron and New England rock,
the story of those four months when they built the town,
for they built it with the dying and the dead.

They built it upon the bones of fourteen women- who had come for life, not death.

They built it upon the bones of their friends they knew."

Of all the pilgrims acts of courage the most vivid is this. When the warm breeze is blue, and the sailors hoisted the sails to take the Mayflower back to England, every last one of them was still determined to stay in New England. After all they had endured, they refused to surrender. Can your imagination see them that day down by the shore? As the sails filled and the ship sailed from Plymouth, the pilgrims watched, weeping till her mast dipped forever beyond the horizon. Would you say that took care courage? Certainly more courage than most of us have today.

There is another poem entitled, "Five Kernels of Corn":

Tw'as the year of the famine in Plymouth of old,
The ice and the snow from the thatched roofs had rolled.
Through the warm purple skies steered the geese over the seas,
And the woodpeckers tapped in the clocks of the trees;
The boughs on the slopes to the south winds lay bare,
And dreaming of summer the buds swelled in the air,
The pale Pilgrims welcomed each reddening morn;

There were left for rations but Five Kernels of Corn.
Five Kernels of corn!
Five Kernels of corn!
But two Bradford of feast were Five Kernels of Corn!”

When the cold spring broke, they looked into the faces of those who were left and they remembered God’s promise to Abraham and to them, “I will make of thee a great nation.”

So, the spring began in 1621. A friendly Indian by the name of Squanto showed the settlers how to plant corn and how to use fish as fertilizer. They plowed and planted. The wheat and the peas they brought with them failed to germinate, but the Indian corn produced an excellent crop. Without that, they would all have perished. They hunted and fished and prepared their buildings and firewood against the returning winter. When fall came, and it was clear that they would have enough food, Governor Bradford had the happy inspiration of writing the Indians to share in a festival of prayer and gratitude. And that was how “Thanksgiving Day” was born. As O. Henry says, it is “the one day that is purely American.”

Thanksgiving is a holiday that commemorates no hero, celebrates no battlefield, no lobby is behind it, no group, or sect or party. Christmas cannot dim it, nor July 4th steal its glory. And all Americans love it with a quiet intense affection that is reserved for no other day of the year.

What makes Thanksgiving different? What makes it beloved? What makes it real?

Perhaps the answer is simple: Thanksgiving is an affirmation. It is our hearts testimony to a deeply held conviction- the conviction that these things we call free and decent and American did not just happen to us. We did not get them because we were wiser, or more clever, or even luckier.

This conviction is the same as many beliefs and experiences, the belief in the dignity of every human being. They believe in a real right and wrong. The belief in decency and honesty and integrity. The belief in responsibility, under God, to our fellow man, wherever he may be.

For them beliefs, and the American way of life, Thanksgiving Day is our joyous affirmation to a kind of Providence for his blessings and guidance.

Tomorrow as we sit, we are families enjoying the day with plenty to eat, let us actually take time in quiet to remember everything we have to be thankful for. Let us truly give thanks to him who does provide for us. Let us also remember that many thousands of people would be glad to eat the scraps that we throw away from our tables. Let us not forget them these people by prayer and by our help through our missionary efforts.

Truly we do have much to be thankful for. “Always and for everything give thanks in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father.”

Stir Up Your Self

Scripture: II Timothy 1:1-10

The text is chosen from II Timothy 1:6,7; “Wherefore I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of God, which is in thee by the putting of my hands. For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power and love, and of a sound mind.”

Adherents of the Church of England sometimes refer to the Sunday before Advent as “Stir Up Sunday.” It receives this name because in the Book of Common Prayer, the collect for the day begins, “Stir up, we beseech thee, O Lord, the wills of thy faithful people.”

This is a good prayer and one no doubt greatly needed to be answered. It is not only the wills of Christians that need to be stirred, but also their minds and hearts, their souls, their whole personalities.

I’m sure we all agree that most of us from time to time need to be stirred up, awakened, and brought back from that day-by-day routine of which we have gotten used to and that right we cannot get out of. To most people God, Christ, the church, aren’t very exciting. We take it as “matter-of-fact”, something we need but not too much of. At least this is our attitude until finally we get into a spot we cannot get out of alone and we start crawling to Christ for help. We tried to make deals with him like, “if you will help me just this once, I’ll go to church every Sunday.” I know we need to be awakened to be stirred up and act as if we were alive in Christ.

Paul’s advice to Timothy suggests that the whole responsibility for stirring up does not rest upon the Lord alone. Timothy is to do some stirring up of himself. He should do this because by God’s grace he has a sound mind, love in his heart, and spiritual power.

This suggests that we might begin on this Stir-Up Sunday, a little stirring up of ourselves period. Of course, this is always a good place to start anything and that is with ourselves. We certainly cannot expect anyone to be enthusiastic or excited about something if we ourselves are not that way.

So, on this Stir Up Sunday let us start by stirring up our awareness. Deadness, stagnation, vegetation, are not for us. The life of man is awareness. He has moved up in the scale from lower forms of life by the appropriation of awareness. The man standing upon the bank of a mountain brook is far more aware of his environment and its meaning than the trout swimming in the stream below him or the deer hiding in yonder thicket.

There is a little poem entitled “Unaware” by James Reid. “They con the ritual of routine, their minds to one dull passion bent, and never, even in dreams, have seen the things that are more excellent.”

This marvelous time in which we live should stimulate our self-stirring. As the universe expands, our

minds should not become benumbed by its very greatness, nor should we show a “spirit of fear.” The scientists among us seek to know and understand, but is this not the prerogative of us all? If we live in a wonderful world, why should we not wonder? If we become aware of awe- full space and time expanses, why should we not stand in awe? Our awareness will exalt our ideas of God, which are always too low and too small. Often, we fail to realize the power and vastness of God, that he is all powerful and everywhere in every living thing we come in contact with.

The prayer of the Stir Up Sunday asks for a stirring up of the wills of God’s people. Is this not a prayer for men to show creative activity? It is Paul’s suggestion to Timothy to use the gift that God has given him. There is pressure upon us to establish security, justice, and freedom in the earth. Let this engage us lest we slip in the scale and become we are vegetables or things.

How can any of us have security, justice, and freedom unless we find it in and through Jesus Christ? Each of us has to find the first in our own lives before we can hope to help someone else. We need to become more aware of this in our own lives. So let us stir ourselves to awareness.

We find that the decisive factor in choosing the better rather than the worse lies in awareness. Awareness as such is not effective unless it is accompanied by the will to act. Once we are aware of something we then need to do something about it. It requires an act on our part.

After his cancer operation, Arthur Godfrey had something he wanted to tell the press and everybody else who would listen. As he left the hospital where a portion of one of his lungs had been removed, he told reporters how grateful he was to be alive, how earnestly he wanted to justify the existence which had been extended by the surgeon’s skill. He was deeply moved. Without shame he dried his tears and praised God and his doctors and nurses. The knowledge that he had been very close to death suddenly threw life into a perspective full of wonder and thanksgiving. Wholehearted gratitude for life itself is not all that is required of men and women who have faith in the living God, but it is, as Bishop Hanns Silje has said, a good place to begin.

Sometimes it requires that we almost see death before we can come to a realization of what life is all about. Certainly, we have to have this appreciation for life first, but to have it and let it die, this is wrong too; for we have an obligation to help others learn what we already have found out and know.

Secondly- let us stir up our involvement. Awareness is not enough. It might be possible to live in an ivory tower or before a TV screen and develop a certain kind of awareness.

As Christians becoming aware of things around us is the first step. For example, I’m sure most of us are aware of the immoral conditions around us but being aware is not enough. We should be doing something to improve those conditions. If we do nothing to make our world a better place in which to live, I’m afraid nothing will be done to improve it. We cannot take the attitude of let the other fellow take care of

it, it doesn't involve me why should I be concerned. it's time we started taking an interest not only in our faith but our government, school, everything that affects our daily lives. It is time for all of us to become involved. Each person can contribute something to each situation in his own way. So, once we are aware of a situation let us become involved in it.

We should involve our minds. Paul reminds Timothy that he has a sound mind. It is a gift of God. He should use it. And we should use our minds since God has given them to us.

We should involve our hearts. We should stir up our Christian love. The new evaluation of people which Jesus called for climaxes in his second great commandment, "thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself."

Truly we should show forth the same love towards other people that God shows towards us. I'm sure once we discover Christ's love in our own lives, we will start to show forth the same love towards other people. All of us can start practicing the love of our neighbors instead of saying it doesn't involve me. I'm going to stay out of that situation. Perhaps things would turn out a little differently if we showed some concern and love for our fellow men. I'm sure there are some situations right here in Fultonham that could stand some Christian love and concern instead of the present attitudes. People do not just automatically become better persons. They have to have someone to care, someone to show concern and love. We are that someone who can help and as Christians this is a part of our responsibilities.

On the night of March 16th, 1964, a 28-year-old woman was stabbed to death outside her home in a large middle-class borough in New York. The police discovered in their investigation that 38 of her neighbors had heard her cry for help. Some switched on their lights. Some drew their curtains. One man even shouted, "leave that girl alone." but no one went to her aid. No one rang the police. When help came it was too late. The girl was dead. The journalist who wrote up the story asked the experts for comment on the fact that 38 people had watched a woman being killed and not one did anything. Said a psychiatrist: "They have a nice life, these middle-class groups in a city like New York. What happens in the city itself, in the streets, is another matter."

Said a theologian: "Perhaps depersonalizing in New York has gone farther than we thought. But," he added, "don't quote me." "I shall treasure that theologian," added the journalist." "A bit of handy jargon and then "don't quote me." Avoid involvement at all costs."

The word that God is addressing to his church today is as simple as this: "Speak up and be quoted; Stand up and be committed; Rise up, move out get involved."

Talking about people being unconcerned about their neighbors I heard this true story.

And occupant of an apartment in the modern housing development while her husband was away on a long business trip, decided to see how isolated she was from her neighbors. So, she's stocked her cupboards

with essential food, then bolted the door. Outside the door, milk, mail and newspapers piled up. Finally, after ten days a neighbor rang the doorbell to see if she was all right. This is what real unconcern is. This is how much people want to become involved today. Certainly, plenty of things could have happened long before the end of ten days. It could have been too late.

We should involve our wills. Without that all the things I have mentioned would be little more than talk. Matthew 25: 31-46 has much to say about awareness and involvement of will. (Read this scripture) certainly these words of Jesus should help us to involve our wills.

There are suggestions for self-stirring. For we are going to have to start with ourselves first. Shall we not expect that with such stirring on our own parts, God will answer the prayer of stir up Sunday, and in our awareness and involvement bless us with keener minds, more abounding love, and empowered wills open? He will answer our prayers if we want him to.

Advent: Desperation or Celebration?

Scripture: Isaiah 40:1-11; 28:37

The text is chosen from Ephesians 5:16; “Make the best use of your time, despite all the difficulties of these days.”

Please don't gasp! I know, as well as you know, that it's just 23 days till Christmas. Get busy! is not my theme.

The message of the sermon resides more perhaps in the verse preceding the text than in the text itself. “Love life,” it says. “23 days till Christmas- we may be bored by then or we may become frustrated in them, or we may love them. Love life! - 23 days of living- and this is not a matter whether we are busy or not. Business is one of “the difficulties of these days” which we may ignore or transcend, that is, rise above it. Certainly, we can be as busy as we want to make ourselves. Our business can be worthwhile, or it can amount to absolutely nothing. This is according to what we place importance on in all our lives.

There is a small poem by PJ Bailey entitled “The True Measure of Life”

We live in deeds, not years;

In thoughts, not breath:

In feelings, not in figures on a dial.

We should count time by heartthrobs when they beat,
for God, for man, for duty.

He most lives- who thinks most, feels noblest, acts the best.

Life is but a means unto an end-

that end, beginning, mean, and end to all things, God.”

We may transform clock time into “Kairos”. “Kairos” is a New Testament Greek word for “time”. Will you please put it in your vocabulary-Kairos.

Another Greek word for time is Chronos. We know that word. We use it in such English derivatives as chronology and chronometer. Chronos is clock time; by that we may sometimes be bored and at other times frustrated.

Here is an example of Chronos found in Genesis 5:27; “And all the days of Methuselah were 969 years, and he died.” If the old writing was really referring to moons or months instead of years, divide by 12 and you still have more than 80 years, which is those days may have been a good old age. Now let us turn to Mark's gospel chapter 15:25 and 15:33. “And it was the third hour and they crucified him - and when the 6th hour was come, there was darkness over the whole land”. Those were not three hours of Chronos; They were three hours of Kairos. Methuselah's time was measured by duration of life; Jesus' hours on the cross were measured by intensity of life.

In our text, “make the best use of your time”, Paul does not use the word Chronos, he uses Kairos. He is not thinking of hours and minutes; he is thinking of opportunity, he is not suggesting early rising to meet a daily drag; he means rising to an occasion. Have you not at all, sometime become so absorbed in a task, so lift it up by great music, so excited by an event in the stadium, so shocked by tragic news, so entranced by a beautiful garden, so lifted up by a service of worship, that clock time stood still? Then it was that you experienced Kairos.

Perhaps another illustration will serve to show the different meaning between Chronos and Kairos. You read through a lot of circulars in your morning mail: that is Chronos. You pounce on a letter from a friend that you have been waiting for: that is Kairos. A boy spends an evening with his parents: that can be Chronos. He goes out with his girlfriend: that can be Kairos. More seriously, a nation can write its history in Chronos, but now and then Kairos comes. It may be called Dunkirk, Pearl Harbor, Korea, or Cuba: we know that, for good or evil, it is a moment of decision.

And so, we may transfer these 23 days until Christmas into celebration. Let us follow through this Chronos-Kairos suggestion.

Paul’s words to the Ephesians came with particular force: transform Chronos into Kairos, despite all the difficulties of these days. He knows that this is no easy task - there are difficulties. The King James version of the Bible uses an old word; it speaks of “redeeming the time, because the days are evil.” Redeem means to repurpose, to sacrifice for, to bring the best out of the worst. That’s why we speak of the redeeming power of the Lord. He can redeem us; bring out the best from the worst. We can deliver the Kairos from the Chronos. Here are two ways of doing this.

First, remember that Christmas - these 23 days, is a celebration. And a celebration is first of all a commemoration. Despite all the difficulties of tinsels and candy, of commercialism, of Christmas without Christ, we redeem the time by remembering. “When the fullness of time (Chronos) was come, God sent forth a son.” (Galatians 4:4). That day in chronology became Christmas, an event in the ongoing history of the race. Remember the day in time; remember the ongoing event. Cherish the stories which surround the event- the star, the wise men and the gifts, the shepherds, the angels and the song. These become symbols which carry meaning and significant to the hearts of men. They became symbols of celebration.

Truly it should be that time for us to remember why Jesus Christ was born. That he stands for peace on earth and love written within our hearts. When we become so busy trying to purchase gifts, decorate, prepare food that it becomes just another holiday, I’m afraid we should stop and back up and remember the day and what it should mean to us.

There is a poem entitled, “Christmas Celebration”

“Twine the evergreen and berry,

Hang a wreath on every portal;
here again is Christmas merry,
Joy of earth and hope immortal.
Fashion halos from His glory,
Rest a crown on every creature;
All the light of Bethl'em's story
Make Divine the human feature.
Widely draw, with heart's devotion,
Circles compassing our brother;
Spare no love, Divine emotion,
Channel grace to every other.
Kneel! Adore! Unlock your treasure!
Join the host around the Manger.
All the world in broader measure
Worship him who once was stranger.”

A celebration is also a proclamation. Christmas is for some a true proclamation of joy; they are truly glad that Jesus came. Are you glad that Jesus came? Do you really know why he came to earth? We certainly cannot celebrate his birth in the right fashion if we do not know the answer to these questions.

Christmas is a proclamation of goodwill, and even if our thoughts and actions belie our desire for peace, deep down in our hearts there is the longing and urge for a better day.

Let Christmas proclaim good will and peace, the love of God for man, and our love of the Christ - thus we shall change clock-time into event, duration into celebration.

Christmas is like the rising of the sun. It happens. The sun rises every 24 hours, and in spite of anything we do or do not do, when it happens, it can be of great benefit to us, depending upon how we respond to it. We can lie in bed with all the blinds closed, and the rising of the sun won't mean anything to us. Or we can get up, and go out about our way, enjoy the brightness of it, and live in the wonder and power of it. But remember, we do not make it rise, nor can we stop it from rising- and the fact that it does rise makes no difference to us unless we choose to rise to meet it. Christmas is something like that. It happens every year whether we want it or not. What we make out of the Christmas celebration is strictly up to us. It can be just another holiday, or it can become a special day of rejoicing with meaning and purpose. I believe this is true of all life, we can make it exactly what we want to make it.

Perhaps because of the commercialism of Christmas and the earliness of this season starting in the stores we tend to take it for granted and sometimes even get sick of it. If we can remember what Christmas means all the difference it has made in our lives, I feel we can learn to appreciate it. Truly Christmas can become a celebration that will lift our hearts and lives enjoy and peace.

Is there not something more? Let me ask a question. How many of your birthdays do you remember? Very few perhaps. You forget the birthdays that belong to Chronos; you remember the birthdays that were transformed into Kairos. The latter belong to you forever. They are treasure laid up in your life. You will always remember them.

Isn't that what we may do? We may so transform time into experience that we shall never forget the event. Is this not the laying up of a treasure, even in heaven? Is this not finding eternity in time? Is this not seeking the Kingdom of God?

Truly if we do seek God's Kingdom, life will have meaning to us. It will be more than just plain living from day-to-day. We will begin to have experiences in our lives that will have meaning beyond belief. We will remember these experiences in our lives because they have made such a deep impression on our lives. The experience of feeling the true meaning of Christmas in your life for the first time will be last a lasting experience. One that is unforgettable.

What is Kairos? Doctor David HC Reed points to the new English Bible as giving us the definition of Kairos. It reads, "use the present opportunity to the full." Kairos is opportunity.

All of us do have the opportunity to accept Jesus Christ into our lives as our personal Lord and savior. If we accept this opportunity our lives will become changed. Life will be lived for an entirely different reason and purpose. Our lives will become more full and meaningful. Even our daily jobs will become different. We will look upon our neighbor in a different light. Our hearts will become full of joy and peace. We will look upon the peoples of the world in a different perspective it will be an experience that we will always cherish. Isn't this really what we are all searching for? It's right beside us and we cannot feel it. Christ is waiting for you. Accept him in your life.

If you want to live in the dark you can, for the rest of your life. You can let Christmas pass over you and not leave a single trace of its passing. But we pray that you shall take advantage of the opportunity that Christmas presents to us all.

The Bible and Modern Man

Scripture: II Timothy 2:15,16; 3:14-17

The text is chosen from 2 Peter 1:21; “No prophecy ever came by the impulse of man, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God”

Why isn't the Bible thoroughly out of date? Imagine a modern farmer reading in this book about a sewer going forth to sow - about the oxen and the ox cart- it all seems so far away and long ago.

In the Bible days it was assumed that the earth was the center of the universe and that the sun goes around it. School children know better now. The astronomy of the Bible is out of date.

The biology of the Bible is out of date and the Bible has no scientific approach to many subjects. Great parts of it were written at a time when people had no clear notion of the relation between cause and effect as this applies to happenings in nature.

We'd need not labor the point. If you read the Bible as an agriculturalist, astronomer, biologist, scientist, you may find the book quite outmoded and irrelevant. But that is not the way the Bible is to be read. The message of the Bible is addressed to man as man-and modern man is still man. Regardless of how modern we may have gotten, we are still men to God and that's the “who” the message of the Bible is addressed to. An editorial in “Christianity Today”, reads in part: “What is central to a proper understanding of the Bible and it's message is the recognition that inwardly, at the vital core of his being, man has not altered over the centuries. His deepest needs today are the same as they have ever been- whatever the circumstances of its writing, the Bible in its scope is not limited to times and places long past: it embraces the whole sweep of the history of humanity-in its pages man is set in the light of eternity. Is that not relevant to us today?

indeed the Bible is relevant today. The Bible proclaims the sovereignty of almighty almighty God over all the affairs of mankind. Regardless of how much we try to get away from God he is always there to guide us. He rules our lives, perhaps indirectly, at times but if we boil it all down God does rule our lives as is illustrated in the Bible and all down the ages to the present time.

The Bible is a veritable mirror of man, the supreme and original textbook of depth psychology, which reveals man to himself as he really is in his inmost essence. Our inner most thoughts, actions, and our minds are revealed to us through God's word.

The Bible tells how God has acted in Christ so that men may be reconciled to God and to each other. By reading the Bible we can discover how Jesus Christ fits into the salvation of mankind and how God tried various means to save mankind and finally his last effort was the sacrifice of his only son. Christ died that our sins could be forgiven. Christ is the only way to God. Christ is our intercessor, a go between, between God and man. The Bible reveals this to us. Where else can we find out about salvation, about faith, about

the goodness of God? Nowhere but in God's holy word.

Bishop Gerald Kennedy emphasizes the relevance of the Bible to modern man under three headings. First of all, "the Bible ask the right questions."

This generation asks the wrong questions. It begins with: "How can I be happy?" Because it assumes this is legitimate, it turns its back on duty and obligation. Doesn't it seem that in general people are looking for something for nothing? Men want to earn big wages but still they are not willing to assume the responsibilities that go along with it. People want to belong to the church, but they do not want to assume the responsibility that goes along with church membership.

We ask: "How can I get what I want?" But we ought to ask: "Who will teach me to want the right things?" Isaiah's question from Isaiah 55:2; "Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy?" This is a good question to ask ourselves these days.

We ask: "How can we be comfortable?" We are constantly looking for the easy way out. Little do we realize that nothing in life is easy, at least if it is worthwhile.

Somehow it does not seem to work. We want something we have missed. The questions, you see, are all wrong.

The Bible begins by asking: "What is man?" And it explores human nature with greater depth and breadth than the modern psychologists with all their jargon and machinery. There is no lack of looking down into the depths of depravity and sin on the part of the biblical writers, but after beginning with the worst, they come to the great affirmation of the 8th Psalm verse 5; "Yet thou hast made him little less than God, and dost crown him with glory and honor."

Or turn to the New Testament and read John 1:12; "But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God."

Or consider Paul's sharp and dark analysis of human nature's frustrating weakness, and then hear him declare, as is recorded in Romans 7:24-25; "Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I of myself serve the law of God with my mind; but with my flesh I serve the law of sin."

The great question in the Old Testament is "What does God demand?" This is the issue for men and their societies, and it is the burden of the message of the Prophets. Micah sums it up in 6:8; "He has showed you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God."

Jesus startles us by putting his emphasis on giving, assuming that we ought not to ask what we can get but what we can give. He summed it up in a paradox: from Mark 8:35-36 we read; “For whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospels will save it. For what does it profit a man, to gain the whole world and forfeit his life?”

Secondly, the Bible has the right answers.

The God who spoke to the ancients through this book, speaks to me through it also, and the answers are as valid and true now as they were then.

God speaks to each of us as he did to people of the Bible days. Mainly what we have to do is to be still long enough to hear him. You know that’s what is wrong with most of us today, we are so busy we do not have time to listen to God even if we did hear him.

It will seem strange to some that the Bible deals with answers in any case. For them the book is philosophy or speculation. They think it deals with private esoteric matters and talks about ideals or other worldly considerations. Not so! The Bible is the most practical of books and never strays far from the day-by-day issues. The God of the Bible is not the God of philosophy. He is not the “unmoved mover”, or the “ground” of being, or the “tread” toward righteousness. He is the God of history who reveals himself in actions and confronts us with the demand of decision. He leaves the decision up to us whether we want salvation or not. He doesn’t decide for us nor does anyone else.

How sharp are the biblical answers. For example, if we read II Samuel chapters 11 and 12, we learn of David’s sin against Uriah and Bathsheba, Uriah’s wife. Nathan was sent, as a messenger from God, to tell David of his sin and his punishment. That his child to be born would die. And the child did die.

A lawyer tried to engage Jesus in a general discussion of the idea of neighborliness. “Who is my neighbor?” he asked, assuming that they would philosophize awhile and keep everything safely general and cozy, and Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise.” That was plain enough and that the answer has been the right one for nearly 2000 years.

The Bishop of Winchester tells a grand story of two officers who were lying badly wounded in a war hospital. One said to the other, “Well I really don’t care whether I get through or not. It is a world hardly worth living in. I have no job to go back to and it will be impossible to get one anyway. What is there to live for?” “Well,” said the other officer, “I feel rather like you, but with me it is different because I have someone who very much cares whether I get through. There is a girl up in Scotland and she cares.” If this were a psychological lecture instead of a sermon, I should bring in some other evidence at this point to show that the physical resistance to disease of the second officer was immensely greater than that of the first. At times of strain, our minds find both anchorage and sustenance from the caring of another person. How much more does the caring of God mean! Truly the Bible reveals a God who cares.

Thirdly-the Bible gives us the right vision.

We seem bent on leveling off all human life on a low plane. We have analyzed all the tragedy of sin away and made it merely sickness. The pursuit of excellence has become something merely intellectual with all moral connotations left out. We talk about “outer-directed” and “under-directed” persons, but there is no familiarity with Saint Paul’s great word as recorded in Romans 12:2; “Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.” It was a modern philosopher, Whitehead, who spoke of the necessity of some “habitual vision of greatness.”

Certainly the Bible is not easy to take. It is a good deal easier to read and understand the Bible today with all the various translations and helps that have been developed to help us understand the meaning. But the Bible is still a difficult book. Like most great books it will demand more of you than television and comics, but it will repay your expenditure of time and effort. For it will give you the answers to these questions: Where do I come from? What am I doing? Where am I going?

Katherine Mansfield was in one of her periodic exiles, living in the mountains, fighting her losing fight against tuberculosis. While she faced the tragedy talent frustrated by illness, “she found the Bible for the first time period” she wrote, “I feel so bitterly that I have never known these writings before. They ought to be part of my very breathing.” The Bible spoke to her condition, flinging the wisdom of the ages into the sear of her own experience she found meaning and hope in her pain.

We too can find hope and meaning in the words of the Bible.

We had better open the Bible again and read about Abraham, who by faith “obeyed when he was called to go out to a place which he was to receive as an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was to go.” We need to stand with Jeremiah who does his job though his heart is broken. It will be well to watch Nehemiah rebuild the walls of Jerusalem under the attack of his enemies. But beyond all of them, let us once again look at Jesus Christ who whose gentleness, power, and grace shine like a beacon through all the gloom of history. Let him touch us with his glory and raise us to our status as heirs of the King. Let him heal us of our contentment with mediocracy. We can do nothing better than to become people of the book, the greatest book of all time.

Amending the Defective

Scripture: Titus 1:1,4,5, 12-16; 2:1

The text is chosen from Titus 1:5; “This is why I left you in Crete, that you might amend what was defective.” Titus was a young man just beginning his Christian ministry. Paul had given him a rugged assignment. Crete was not a comfortable parish. That is why Paul began his letter to Titus bluntly, “This is why I left you in Crete, that you might amend what is defective.”

The preacher is at some disadvantage in using this text. Note that it is a young preacher that is sent to Crete to put things in order. A modern tendency in the church is to let the preacher do it. “That’s his business.” But the text is taken to give an example of what is every Christian’s business. Please do not apply it to ministers only. Rather, catch the idea of the 4th beatitude in the New English Bible, “How blessed are those who hunger and thirst to see the right prevail.” That right shall prevail is not only the preacher’s business; it is everybody’s business.

We can take it for granted that a man should amend what is defective in his own life. Paul is not unmindful of this. He writes to the young man, “Show yourself in all respects a model of good deeds, and in your tending show integrity, gravity, sound speech that cannot be censored, so that an opponent may be put to shame having nothing evil to say of us.”

To those of us who are Christians, the first kind of witnessing we can do is by the kind examples we set in our everyday lives. Those who are searching, are looking at us whether we know it or not, judge the whole church and the Christian religion on the way we live and act in our lives. If we are hypocrites, liars, cheats, drunkards, then those on the outside feel this is what the church is, and they do not need any part of it because they can be this without going to church and being a Christian. How very important this example of our lives is to those around us.

Getting back to Titus, what was wrong in Crete? Paul made no bones about the fact that the Cretans were “liars, evil beast, lazy gluttons.” He wrote that, “one of themselves, a prophet of their own,” says this. “This testimony is true.”

When a metallurgist offered to cure Big Ben, the clock on the tower of Parliament in London, of its stuttering, a Minister of Works refused the offer because “the world has got used to” the cracked sound. Maybe Crete was used to its moral crack.

Perhaps that’s what is wrong with America today. We have gotten used to our corruption, gambling, immoral behavior that we do not want it changed. We want God to leave us alone and we certainly do not want anyone reminding us of what we should be doing.

What does our daily or weekly paper say about the place in which we live? Oh, I don’t mean specifically

Fultonham or Middleburg, but one general area. We have only to look at stories of murders, divorce, moral corruption that will suffice to suggest that Crete and Fultonham or our general area, though separated by centuries, are neighbors under the skin.

Paul writes to Titus, "There are many insubordinate men, empty talkers and deceivers." A famous politician set the pattern a generation ago when he told a rally of precinct workers, "Promise everything!" The modern world certainly is not without empty talk.

We have all known and probably still know people who do a lot of talking but they have no action and deeds to back up their talking. In business, especially, we find plenty of such people. Oh, perhaps, they advance on their jobs for a time until finally someone catches up with them or until they get into a situation they cannot talk themselves out of. It really is bad for a group when the majority of them are talkers instead of doers.

When Paul got around to the religious people of Crete, he said, "They profess to know God, but they deny him by their deeds." It was a harsh indictment, but no doubt it was true. If Paul were here, he might be as severe with us.

It is hard to tell what he might say about us, but, to some greater or less degree, what was wrong in Crete is wrong also in Fultonham. What was defective on the Mediterranean island is defective also where we are.

We all profess to be Christians, at least we associate ourselves with the Christian Church. But what about our daily lives? Our business deals; are they on the up and up? Do we show concern for our neighbor who is in trouble and needs our help? Are we afraid to speak up for what we know is right while the wrong keeps going right along its merry way. How much, actually, do we give to God's work, our time, talent and money? How about our families, are we letting them grow up by themselves because we are too busy being important on our community? Oh, we can go to church on Sunday, when something else doesn't interfere. We can put our measly offering in the plate but do those acts make us true Christians? I doubt very much if anyone will get into heaven with just those two acts.

Crete was a miserable place when Paul left Titus there "to amend what was defective." The "liars, evil beasts and lazy gluttons" of the place no doubt made life miserable for the young man just beginning his ministry. But Titus preached the gospel and rested his case in the hands of God. How he fared, we do not know, but in recent years excavators have uncovered the ruins of a great cathedral on the island of Crete, testimony to the fact that there were those on the island who joined with Titus in the task of "amending the defective" in the name of Christ.

After painting a grim portrait of the Cretans, Paul might have shrugged his shoulders and said, "What will be, will be," as if Cretans, being disreputable, were doomed to remain as they were. Paul might have adopted the theme of a contemporary play and said indifferently, "Human beings never have changed and never will."

That I dare say, is our contemporary mood. We are disposed to think that people are people and there's nothing much to be done about them. But the problem of human nature is not insolvable. That is the testimony of Christian experience all through the centuries. Human nature can be changed by the powers of Jesus Christ changing the heart of human personality. Look at Paul himself. How he prosecuted the Christians and actually worked against the Christian church but one day God chose him to be one of his major apostles and his life and personality was immediately changed.

When we ourselves had tried to convince someone that Jesus Christ is the way and the light of the life and he refuses to listen, we can still pray for truly God has does answer prayer. No one regardless of how helpless he may seem to us is actually hopeless. Christ performed many miracles while here on earth this earth and he is capable of the same today.

This was Paul's hope in Crete. It is our hope for us here in Fultonham.

God only knows what an impact we might have on our own town and community and on our nation if we had the courage to share our faith with others. Our silence too often suggest we are quite willing for others to ruin themselves in their own way. We seem like a part of "the carefree multitude" with nothing to believe in or to make life significant and meaningful. Paul, however, cared profoundly for the Cretans, despite the way they lived, regardless of their sins and spiritual failures. He had heard Christ call in the midst of the careless crowd, and as a responsible follower of his Lord he resolved to do what he could.

Actually, the Gospel message is one we need to get across to people. The Gospels light up the truth that the world is not changed by big events and mighty issues so much as it is altered by the small events and unimportant people in everyday life. The Kingdom of God reaches into the life of the world in the dedicated teaching of the schoolroom and in the spiritual concern of the salesman making the rounds of his customers. It is in the mood of Andrew Jackson, lawyer and judge, saying: "Do what is right between these parties that is what the law means." It is in the gentleness of mothers revealing in their their lives the meaning of their faith so that children learn by example. "The Kingdom of God cometh not by observation. Neither shall they say, go here or go there, for the Kingdom of God is in the midst of you."

Others outside the church are watching us. They want to determine the difference Christ makes in our lives and whether they want to become a part of it. It's very important and necessary that we are Christians always and not just on Sunday.

The simple truth is that Christians belong where things are "out of joint." "Amending the defective" is the high calling of the follower of Christ. Professor Hawking of Harvard wrote that putting things to right is, "life's ultimate objective."

By the light of the cross, we are beset by a deep feeling of disquietude with things as they are, while at the same time the feeling of the wrongness of things is a spiritual challenge. On one hand, Christ makes

us aware of the defective, and on the other he drives us in quest of power to “amend the defective.” The more we are in touch with the Spirit of Christ the more we are aware of and troubled by the gulf between what is and what might be.

Complacency and indifference are tokens of our separation from Christ while concern is evidence of our fellowship with him. He stirs us with “divine discontent” that is an impetus to action.

Paul seems to be saying to Titus and to us: you belong where things need to be set right. If there is racial conflict in your community, you belong there to speak in the name of Christ. If there is conflict in your business, you are where you belong as a Christian. “Blessed are the peacemakers”. You belong where there is responsibility to be assumed and where courage is needed. God wants you to be part of the solution to what is wrong, not part of the problem.

Will Rogers said it the time of a disarmament conference after the First World War, “there is only one problem at the disarmament conference- human nature.” And of course that’s what’s wrong with our world today as it has been in the past. There was always someone who wants more than his share. He has to be greedy.

Obviously if life’s objective is to set right the things that are wrong, we are constrained to become involved in situations of potential conflict.

During the Civil War Lincoln was vastly troubled by the avoidist tactics of General McClelland. The cautious general kept his army spick and span and thoroughly trained, but he would never risk it in a major encounter with the enemy. He sought by every conceivable means to avoid battle. General Grant, however, involved his army in decisive struggle. After he had met a temporary defeat, Lincoln responded to criticisms of Grant by saying, “I can’t spare this man. He fights.” Paul was not an avoidist. He set his course on obedience to what he called “the heavenly vision” and he was not disloyal to it. He engaged in battle not with fists or swords, but with the spirit. He challenged what was wrong and struggled in the name of Christ for the truth that makes men free. He would not be silenced. He would not cease from serving the Lord in the human arena.

Thank God, there are those like Saint Paul in every generation who do more than move with the tide of the culture. They succeeded in transcending things as they are, thereby altering them. They take their stand beside one who went about doing good, speaking the truth, challenging entrenched evil until he was crucified between two thieves. Their Lord put his trust in God the Father and faced Good Friday in the certainty there would be an Easter dawn. Truly God has put us here to “amend what is defective” as Paul did with Titus on the Isle of Crete

Put your faith and trust in God and you will be able to stand up and speak for things that are right without fear.

Being Up To Date

Scripture: Proverbs 2:10-22

The text is chosen from Proverbs 2:22; “The wicked will be cut off from the land.” One of the driving forces in human life is the desire to be up to date. We fear nothing quite so much as to be called a back number. We want to be abreast of the times. A few people want to be ahead of the times.

Parents are dreadfully afraid that their children will think of them as has-beens. Because they are afraid of being called old-fashioned or old fogey, they permit their children to do things which they regard as wrong. Inwardly insecure, they must be up to date in the eyes of their children.

There is a lot of confusion about the meaning of up to date. Very few of us really know what it means to be up to date. Perhaps we tend to confine up to datedness with conformity or doing what the rest of the crowd is doing. This sermon will be an effort to clear up some of the confusion that exists.

First – in some quarters it is considered up to date to drink excessively and I do not mean water. In some college circles it has become “the style” to participate in beer blasts and pass out. Some students dislike this practice and know that it is false sophistication; nevertheless, they follow the crowd and the style.

Let me say, right here, that we hear plenty about college students and most of it is bad, but I feel that like everything else the bad actors are in the minority and always manage to get all the publicity. I think perhaps many follow this minority instead of being criticized and belittled – in other words it is easier to follow them than to resist. I do not want to leave the impression that all college students are drunks because I know they are not.

What is new or up to date about excessive drinking to the point where you pass out? What is new about drunkenness? This is as old-fashioned as Noah and goes back to the flood. In the ancient book of Genesis 9:20-21; we read, “Noah was the first tiller of the soil. He planted a vineyard; and he drank of the wine, and became drunk, and lay uncovered in his tent.” The person who drinks to excess is as old-fashioned as Noah who planted a vineyard, drank of the wine, and blacked out.

Charles Crowe writes of a young fellow who attended a party where there was much drinking. Suddenly, realizing that if he didn’t do something quickly, he would be the only one not drinking, he spoke out clearly. “Make mine tomato juice.” Eight or ten others followed suit; young men who would not have dared to be different by themselves. It wasn’t they that found pleasure in drinking; it was that they were afraid not to drink. Caught in a pattern, they were no longer strong enough to stand on their own feet and express their own moral judgment. Many people, especially young people are caught in this situation and believe if you can get by that first hurdle you can make it. It takes courage, strength, and faith because often you are putting your friendship on the line but believe me it’s worth it.

There are those parents who think that drinking is the expression of modernity. This was the attitude of those parents in Darien, Conn., who served liquor to teenagers at a house party. Imagine employing a high school teacher to serve liquor to minors. Imagine a schoolteacher accepting such a job. Where was his moral character? And where is the character of parents who push their teenage children toward such adulthood?

Whatever else we might want to say of such behavior, it isn't being modern. It is as old as Noah. Let's call it what it is – being very old-fashioned.

There are so many bad results of drinking that I do not see how any Christian person can even consider it to be acceptable in our society today or ever.

Secondly- is it being modern and up to date to gamble? Gambling was practical at the crucifixion of Jesus when the Roman soldiers threw dice for his seamless robe.

The archeologists have dug up the ancient city of Nineveh which dates back to about 3700 B.C., and there with the temples, seals, utensils, and art objects they have found what they think to be the oldest dice in the world.

Gambling is no recent, up-to-date practice. When we throw the dice or bet on the horses, or play the numbers, it is not being moderate. We are as old-fashioned as the dice players in Nineveh, 3700 BC.

It's true, we do now have a form of legalized gambling in our state in the form of a lottery. It's too bad we have to resort to this sort of thing to pay for our children's education, but I suppose some people think this is the modern way of doing things. Some states like Nevada, do have legalized gambling and their taxes are very low because people from the other states come and pay for the running of their state and local governments. To me, my money is earned the hard way and I cannot see throwing it away by gambling. This, of course, aside from the moral aspect of it.

Thirdly - what about sensualism and lax sex practices of our time? Some think that emancipation from the Ten Commandments and sex inhibitions is modern. Have these people never read "The Arabian Nights"? Have they never heard of Nero and his predecessors? Have they never read about the Roman sex orgies? Everything a modern man can do, think, feel, was experienced long before the modern era by these sophisticated ancients.

Hollywood prides itself on its modernity and sophistication. It exhibits its "serial polygamy"- many husbands and many wives, but only one at a time. Lonesome, insecure, frightened, many actresses have had five husbands, and many actors four wives. Of course, we hear very little about those Hollywood people who have been happily married for many years and have fine families. This doesn't make the news. If we think this is being modern, think of Ovid in Rome, born 43 B.C. and was married three times.

Caesar was married four times and Pompeii five. Roman women were said not to be 30 or 40 years old, but four, five or six husbands old. So where are these sophistications and modernity in serial polygamy and divorce?

In all of these things, which today people consider modern and up-to-date, read your Bible and hear what Jesus Christ has to say about them. Not only hear it but absorb it into your own life.

Fourth - what about totalitarianism being the wave of the future? Is dictatorship an up-to-date phenomenon? Anyone even superficially acquainted with history must see that dictatorship, totalitarianism rule is as old as the Egyptian Pharaohs and their inhuman rule over the masses.

To be up to date is to take the recent tender plant called political freedom and democracy seriously. Anyone who looks back over man's long trek from the caveman to civilized community living, from human slavery to labor unions, from cruel kings to democratic elections and the free ballot, must realize how precious our progress has been and how recent.

Let us be truly up to date: believe in political freedom, the secret ballot, democracy. It is more recent than we think.

It's time we stop taking freedom and liberty for granted. It's true we have earned it over the years, but it can also be taken away more quickly if we continue with a complacent attitude. We have to fight for what we believe to be good, right, and true. No one is going to give it to us for the asking. I'm sure we are going to have to continue to make sure it is maintained.

Fifth - are we up to scorning belief in God and the practices of worship? Are these only wishful thinking and fear projection?

Most communists think themselves up to date because they are atheists. But here is Togliatti, the Italian Communist, who died a few years ago, telling Khrushchev that atheism is "archaic and inappropriate to modern enlightenment." "The masses," he said, "are not trying to get away from religion, but to find a deeper meaning in existence." "The atheist program", said Togliatti, "is old-fashioned and out of date. These were his words, "old-fashioned" and "out-of-date."

There is a poem by Charles A Pennington entitled "What must God think?

What must God think

as he hears himself

politely bowed out of the universe,

can sign to the limbs of outworn creeds.

Along with theories and spook sandwiches?

some say he laughs The times of this ignorance,

God winked at
or is it pain that so can sort towards his face?
How would you like to be asked
To leave the house you built?
To be dismissed from minds you shaped?
laboriously, down endless years?
To be expelled from hearts you loved;
you taught to love, by giving love?
It would be funny.
it would not.
If it were not so ludicrous
if we're not so sad.

We really do not have to be a communist not to believe in God. There are plenty of people who consider themselves Christians, and I wonder if they really believe in God. God, Jesus Christ and the church seemed to mean very little to many people, At least this is the implication I get because we never see them in church. I've said this many times, it's true, God can be worshipped regardless of where you are. But I've also said that if you really love Christ, you will make every effort possible to be in church because you want to be in his House of worship on Sunday morning. And that's what I cannot understand about people who say they believe in God but show no visible means to support their belief. It certainly isn't for me or any other human being to judge another, but I have to believe what I read and what I see.

There is something tragic, and therefore discouraging about this to the serious and especially to the Christian man. Drunkenness, gambling, lust, tyranny, and atheism have a long history. They have done so much hurt in the world. Many evils and much misery follow in their train. What is one to do about it all? The quest for up to datedness is a false and non-rewarding quest. The thing to do is to be an act ahead of one's time times. This will mean a refusal to accept the old-fashioned evils, even though they were a modern guise. It means action upon the principle of overcoming the evil with the good.

Old-fashioned, behind the times, square, do gooder, pride, killjoy, are labels hung on good people who stand for principles of morality and righteous living. Correcting themselves for any self-righteousness, such as that to which Jesus showed antipathy, they might well accept the labels and live so that the name which was held in scorn becomes a symbol of respect. The word "Christian" was once used in derision. "Quaker" was a term of disrespect.

Out of datedness, old-fashionedness, up to datedness and modernity are out. There is only one practical course for a good man to follow- be ahead of the times. Jesus is a good example of one who followed this course. Why don't you follow Jesus is example and become the Christian he expects you to become. And you will not have to be concerned about being up to date or modern.

Developing An Adequate Faith

Scripture: Hebrews 11; 1-3,8,11,17,23-24,29-30,39; 12:1-2

The text is from Luke 8:25; “Jesus said to his disciples, where is your faith?” This versus follows Luke 8:22-24: One day he got into a boat with his disciples, and he said to them, “Let us go across the other side of the lake.” So they put out, and while they were sailing he fell asleep. The windstorm swept down on the lake and the boat was filling with water, and they were in danger, they went to him and woke him up, shouting, “Master, Master, we are perishing!” And he woke up and rebuked the wind and the raging waves; they ceased and there was a calm.

Some ways this is a strange story. There is a miraculous element in it which may puzzle or disturb us. Let us know, however, that Jesus saw the incident not so much as an opportunity for him to perform a miracle as an occasion to speak to the disciples concerning the quality of their faith. Jesus clearly implies that the disciples could have met the crisis on the sea without bothering him at all if they had only had sufficient faith. We shall miss the point Jesus sought to make if we center attention upon the miracle. Jesus turned the disciples’ thoughts, into words, seeking to help them learn something about their spiritual poverty. “What has happened to your faith?” he asked.

This stormy crisis raised a fundamental question about the faith of these men. In a time of stress, they found themselves panic-stricken. Their trust and confidence in God had evaporated. No longer could they put their reliance upon a God who loves and cares. There, on the stormy sea, God seemed too frail and inadequate to meet the stark realities of the hour. Their interfaith was no match for the outward storm.

As we think of ourselves, we are aware that we are not immune to this sort of experience. We may have our sunny days when our faith seems adequate enough. At such moments, we may well feel that truly “God’s in his heaven- all’s right with the world!” But how shall we fare if the dark shadow of adversity falls over us and our faith is put to the test? Would it carry us through the darkness to the light of triumphant victory? Or would we be engulfed by the waters of despair?

If our faith is real, we shall be able to meet any adversity with the knowledge that God is adequate to meet our needs. In the face of ill health, moral failure, broken trust, excruciating pain, economic disaster, ultimately death - whatever the circumstance- the key to triumph is sufficient confidence in God’s adequacy to help. The ultimate tragedy of life is to despair of God’s ability really to see us through regardless of circumstance. This is the problem of faith.

Faith is both a gift and an achievement. My intelligence is both a gift and an achievement. It is inherited and yet developed by me. Faith is part of the potential of every child, just as the sense of moral responsibility is part of the potential of every child. And yet morality is an achievement. Experience can elicit faith, the capacity for direct insight, for love and hope and morality. We have to exercise the gift.

What can we do, in a practical way, to develop a vital kind of faith in God? Adequate to meet the stresses of life? Let us be suspicious of easy answers proffered us with guaranteed results. The problems of faith are too complex to be caught up in some simple formula or prescription. Here, however, are some thoughts as to the direction we might want to go as each works out for himself this problem of developing an adequate faith- a full blown confidence in the power of God to help us and see us through.

First of all, I believe regular fellowship with God will help us. If we would develop a faith adequate to meet life crises, then we will do well to keep contact with God in more peaceful times. It is through day-by-day fellowship with God that our confidence in him grows. Faith is strengthened through the discipline of daily devotions and prayer. Faith is fortified through becoming more consciously aware of God's presence and power in our daily routine of living.

No suddenly acquired foxhole religion can give one the strength for a time of crisis. Then, we need a long-standing fellowship with God.

How do we know whether we have an adequate faith or not? If our faith has never been put to the test, I'm sure we wonder what our faith can withstand. Sometimes I believe our faith is put to a test by tragedies, by the passing of a loved one, etc. We realize that without faith in God, we would have absolutely nothing to rely on in these cases. These incidents do help to strengthen our faith. Certainly, a faith cannot be inherited from our parents. Faith is something we have to build ourselves with God's help.

Walter A. Graham had these remarks to make. "One day I was sitting in a room on one of the higher floors of a Chicago hotel. I glanced out my window and saw a window worker hard at work on the windows of a nearby office building. He was at the same level as my hotel window.

This window worker went about his almost daredevil, thrilling kind of work, he moved cautiously from a window, from one window to another, always making certain his safety belt was securely fastened. He had faith in his safety belt, and thus with confidence, without fear, carried on his work.

We too can carry on our work and live our lives without fear if we truly have God and Jesus Christ within our lives. Our faith, then, is adequate to help us take care of our problems, regardless of how big they may become.

Secondly, by studying life perplexing questions, we can help develop an adequate faith. Another thing we can do to ready our faith to meet adequately the storms of life is to think through ahead of time the puzzling question these stories bring with them. The storms of life pose puzzling questions to us concerning God. We may ask ourselves: how can a good God permit suffering? It is God's will that a child be run over and killed? Is this really our father's world, filled as it is with wars of rumors of wars? Will God cure my illness? Does God really answer prayer? What kind of help can I expect from God when the chips are down?

I certainly cannot give you answers to these questions, for each individual has to work out these problems for themselves. But having thought about such questions ahead of time and having sought answers, we develop a faith more adequate to meet the storms of life. Faith is strengthened as we work our way through the ultimate questions of life.

I'm sure we will not find the answer to all these questions, but I believe as our faith develops, we will not need the exact answers to all of life's perplexing questions, but we will begin to leave these problems in God's hands and have faith that he will handle them and they will turn out, in the end for our own good.

Thirdly., it's certainly will help us in developing our faith to start with others in their crises. We can fortify our faith. For times of stress by standing with other people. When the problems. Of life become too much for them. In their times of crisis. It is strange but true that our own souls are strengthened as we seek to help others. When? We join with a friend in facing his own personal tribulation. We are compelled to rethink the problems with which he is confronted.

On September 1, 1923, Tokyo, and its surrounding communities were almost wiped out by an earthquake and fire. In this space of only a few hours, the fruits of patient missionary work over more than 50 years appeared lost. In the midst of the ruins, missionary, Bishop John McKim sent this message back to the United States: "all gone but faith in God."

Inspired by this message of faith, Christians in Japan and in America joined hands to rebuild what had been destroyed. Out of the ashes arose schools and churches and hospitals better than those which had been lost.

It most certainly does strengthen our faith to help someone who is down but who never really gives up. It not only helps us, but the other person as well. Usually in the end we bounce back stronger, and better than we were before, but we had faith in God and our faith never faltered.

If we seek earnestly to know Jesus Christ, our faith will become more adequate. We nurture our faith by doing everything possible to know Jesus Christ. To know Jesus is to find a tremendously powerful resource of faith. To meet life in Christ's Spirit is to triumph over every circumstance.

Jesus is the revelation in God. In Jesus we see what God is really like. In Jesus' words, we hear what God will say to us about life.

The most helpful thing we can do in the midst of adversity is to see it in the presence of Christ. We can listen as he interprets suffering to us. We can let Christ reveal God's love to us even though evil men plot and execute their crucifixions. Christ can speak to us authoritatively concerning death and resurrection. Christ can interpret God's ways to us.

There is no better way for our faith to be strengthened than through the saving and renewing powers of the Living Lord. If we come to know and love Christ with our whole hearts, we will not fear death because we know that with Christ death is not the end. But the very beginning of a more full and joyful life with our Father in heaven. What security, what a wonderful feeling we have within our minds and bodies, when we accept Jesus Christ into our very hearts, what faith we begin to build.

A man who carried on his business in Manchester, England about whose integrity certain rumors were abroad, was asked, "Do you never fear you will break?" he replied emphatically, "I shall break when the 50th Psalms breaks in the fifteenth verse, "Call upon me in the day of trouble, I will deliver thee."

What is happening to your faith? Is it growing or diminishing? It never stands still, you know. Jesus' most intimate disciples one day suddenly discovered, as a storm descended upon them, that their faith was gone. How will you fare when the storms of adversity speak? Each day we can work to nourish and strengthen our faith, so that whatever may befall us, we shall be equipped to triumph, so that we can weather the storm and come out stronger than when we went in. Make your faith adequate to meet life's demands. Walk with God always, day by day. Take him into every part of your life and feel the difference.

Getting Hold of Something Solid

Scripture: Job 23:1-10

The text is chosen from the Jeremiah 29:13; “You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart.”

Many people, especially today, are eager to get hold of something solid. They feel that they are improvising from day today, with no clear principles by which to live. Their days are like beads rolling around on the floor when they need to be strung on some thread. It is said that the massive organizations of our day - big business, big government - have robbed the individual of his significance. People long for the imagined securities of a simple time. The vast explosion of knowledge and the means of communicating knowledge upsets us with a little information about everything, with no real understanding.

The frustrated groping of our generation is not some new space age condition. We find it in Job’s despairing lament as he seeks for God. “Oh, that I knew where I might find him! That I might come even to his seat! I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him; n the left hand - but I cannot behold him; the right hand, I cannot see him.” There are many in our day who, in one way or another, feel what Job was feeling. All of us at some time in our lives are searching for something and some of us never really do find what we are searching for. Little do we realize that God is the one who will end our search, the one that will guide us in all of life. Many are frantically searching for God, but they never really find him, like Job in our scripture reading this morning. But note that Job’s search was so frantic because he knew that God was there. As Pascal recognized, Job would not have been seeking God so urgently if he had not already found him.

That is what gives poignancy to our groping. We would not be so troubled by our failure to get hold of what is solid, if we did not feel that we are missing something, something that we, however dimly, have sensed is there. We give evidence of that even in our doubts. If I complain bitterly that life seems so pointless, I am raising the strange possibility that life may have a point. On the face of it, that is a presumptuous assumption. Where did I get the idea that this maelstrom of stones, cells, and forces might have any point of at all? The fact that I raised the question, and the even stranger fact that I complain about my failure to understand what the point is, can be explained only by my having some inkling that life is supposed to have a point.

Or consider our wild indignation at the injustices in the world. We have deep conviction that these things are wrong - not just inconvenient, not just untidy, but wrong- and affront to the order of things. To whose order? We would not so seek for a moral order or be so enraged by what seems to be its lapses if we had not already found it.

If today, you are complaining that life is an absurd, cruel, ugly thing, you are confessing your faith in meaning and love and beauty. You would not be seeking for these if you had not already found them.

Job's complaint was not that there is no God, but that he could not make any satisfactory connection with him. "Oh, that I knew where I might find him," was Job's cry. In the prophecy of Jeremiah (29:13) we find an answer to that cry, "You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart." Truly, if we seek God with our whole hearts and being, we will find him, for he is there. It is up to each of us to seek and we will find.

The first answer for anyone who says, "I do not seem to have any sense of God; I would like to have a religion" is, "How much do you want it? This is just a notion that crosses your mind sometimes. When you are feeling low, it will take more than that." The promise is "you will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart." There are ways that will help us to seek and find God if we are really serious and truly desire him.

First of all, by association we can find God and help us to develop our Christian lives. The knowledge of God is often meditative to us horizontally through other people. Jesus said, "where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." There is a glow which kindles from heart to heart. There is a sense of his presence, which we catch from others.

It is difficult to be a Christian in solitude. That should be expected. The keyword for Christianity is love. If you want to be a Christian, then get with others who are seeking the same thing. The church is charged with making this possible, and this is one reason why we come to church. Take one who all alone is finding the sense of God discouragingly dim and put him in a room where people are expressing their faith in exultant song; let him feel the awe of the crowd that is bowed in prayer; let him be wrapped around by the sense of believing hearts, and something may stir within him that he never would have felt into isolation. Let a person meet with others in the intimacy of religious discussion or Bible study or prayer, and he may catch the feel of religion. As he never would by himself.

As Christians, we need the association of other Christian people. We need prayer, Bible study, and frank open discussion of our Christian lives. A true Christian just needs this important association with others of his own desires in order to develop his own life. That is why prayer groups and discussion groups concerning these areas of our lives are important to the growth of any church. Spiritual guidance and leadership are important and very necessary in keeping the church alive and meaningful in each individual's life.

The best argument for Christ is a Christian. When the noted newspaper reporter, Henry M Stanley, went out to Africa to find David Livingston, he was a man without much specific religion, looking only for a story. But after he found Livingston in associated with him in his mission in the African jungle, Stanley became a Christian. As his biographer explained it, "Livingston is, seemingly, so eminently one of Christ's men that Stanley can believe there is a Christ because there is a Livingston."

Secondly - A second requirement for finding God is attention. Those who really want to get hold of

something solid have to put some solid attention on it. They must at least decide what it is they are looking for.

Here Pascal is in lightning. He said that God does not force himself on those who do not seek him, but he gives abundant knowledge of himself to those who do look for him. The person who is not earnestly looking for it can say with perfect truth, "I can find no evidence of God." "God has willed to redeem men, and to open salvation to those who seek it."

We need to be stimulated and guided by those who have sought for God and found him. We need to discuss and ponder and try. We have to throw ourselves into our religious quest with fierce determination. The promise is, "You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart."

It is amazing how many people say they just cannot get much out of Bible Reading when the fact is that they have never really tried. The Bible does not open up its riches to halfhearted seekers.

Truly, the Bible is not dull reading, quite the opposite. It is really an exciting book, especially when you can feel God speaking to you through his own word. Did you ever ask God for understanding as you start to read the Bible? Try it and see what amazing results will be accomplished. Earnestly seek to find God in his word, and you will find him there, for truly he is there.

A third requirement for finding God is action. "Act as if you really meant it and believed it.

It may seem strange that often at the outset people do not act religiously because they have faith ; they have faith because they act religiously. Do you want to know whether there really is a Jesus Christ? Do not start out by weighing the evidence or studying the records. Start out by acting as though there is a Jesus Christ. Act for one week as though he is your living Lord. Then see whether you are beginning to discover him.

C.S. Lewis, after his conversion, looked back at the time when he had been in agnostic professor at Oxford and recognized a queer gap in his thinking. He had thought of himself there as a "realist.", meaning that he accepted as real only what he knew through his senses- touching, hearing, and seeing. At the same time, he accepted certain other things as real without admitting it, or even noticing it. He was quite sure that the processes of abstract thought gave him "Truth", without even bothering to ask why. He assumed that his moral judgements were valid. He believed that his aesthetic sense pointed to real values. All of these were spiritual perceptions quite apart from the senses. In accepting these he had tacitly admitted the validity of spiritual things without ever recognizing that he had done it.

A famous Scottish preacher of the last century put a whole sermon into its title, "Obedience is the Organ of Spiritual Knowledge." It is a notable sermon, but the title is all we really need to know. You do not obey God because you have found him. Try living like his man, like his woman, then see whether you have

found him. "Obedience is the organ of spiritual knowledge." Carlyle put almost the same truth in his well-known saying, "Doubt of any sort cannot be removed except by action." The Bible doesn't say, "blessed, are those who see God, for they shall be pure in heart." That is logical, but what Jesus said was, "blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."

Doctor Schumacher told of a thought skeptic who came to see him because he was in pain. He was a businessman of great abilities who had made a fortune and lost it and made another and lost it. Now he could not pay his rent, and he was having to take sedatives in order to sleep. Doctor Shoemaker suggested that he pray to whatever might be there for power and guidance. The man said that, since he did not believe in God, it would be a foolish sort of performance. But half laughingly, he got to his knees and said, "Oh God, if there is a God, send me help now, because I need it." then he got back in his chair and said, "I don't feel any different." Doctor Shoemaker asked him to keep up, saying every day whatever was honest about himself to whatever might be there. He also proposed that the man read a chapter from the Gospels every night before going to bed and come to church on Sunday. The man began it, as a half quizzical experiment, fighting against it, but still willing to try anything out of desperation. Later he did not need any more prodding but was doing it in earnest. His mastery of himself and his situation began to build up. Doctor Shoemaker's conclusion to the story is, "The skeptic was baptized and confirmed, and later became a vestryman of my church." And so, I believe association with believing people, attention to religious matters, action in the direction Jesus points - try these and you may find that you really are getting hold of something solid. We certainly pray that everyone will.

Getting Off Dead Center

Scripture: Exodus 14:10-15; Deut. 2:1-3

The text is chosen from the Joshua 1:9; “Be strong and good courage; for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.”

In the old story of the Israelites journey in the wilderness, we find the graphic portrayal of a common problem.

Twice on the journey, the people of Israel got bogged down, stalled on dead center, wheels spinning, but getting nowhere.

The first time was just before they reached the Red Sea. Discovering that the Egyptian army was after them and with the barrier of a narrow area of the Red Sea ahead of them, they thought they were done for. They cried to Moses, “What have you done to us, in bringing us out of Egypt? Is not this what we said to you in Egypt, let us alone and let us serve the Egyptians?” For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness.”

Moses took the people’s case to God, but God said to Moses, “Why do you cry to me? Tell the people of Israel to go forward.”

Turn now to a second episode. By this time, the Israelites were much farther along on their journey. Many years had passed, and they were 2/3 of the way to the Promised Land.

But again, the difficulties ahead loomed large. Their problems seemed insolvable. In the mountain country of Seir, on the boundaries of Edom, the Israelites ceased their forward journey. They turned back towards the Red Sea. For days they went literally in circles, getting nowhere. Once more, they found themselves spinning their wheels, stilted on dead center.

Then the Lord said to Moses, “You have been going around the mountain long enough; turn northward.”

In another account of the wilderness pilgrimage. From Numbers 21:4 we read, “The soul of the people was much discouraged because of the way.” It was a discouraging experience, traveling far and arriving at no destination, spinning their wheels, getting nowhere, stalled on dead center.

Is not this a familiar experience for us all?

First of all, take the church for example. There are times when the life and the work of the church seemed to be on dead center, with small growth. In membership, in attendance, in the various organizations. And really, I am not too concerned about increased membership, as I am the life of the members we do have.

I often wonder if God's true word is penetrating our hearts. Is it being spoken rightly, and with enough force to help people to understand its meaning? Does the church really fulfill the needs of the people in the community? I sometimes feel that the answers to these questions are no, at least as observed from outward signs. However, we cannot always judge the results by outward signs. And really the only thing we can do is pray to God that this church does mean something to the people here in Fultonham, and that I, as your minister, truly ask God's guidance and direction in spiritual matters, and this truly is what I try to do.

Secondly- we look upon a grave world situation. Where are we headed; toward justice and peace, or towards a third World War and the annihilation of hundreds of millions of human beings? Can we buy peace the way we are trying to give the peoples of the world what we call a civilized culture? Can we force democracy down these people's throat? I really wonder if this is the right approach. I believe it would be better to spend one 10th of our present spending on bringing the word of God to the people. It has been proven time and time again down through the centuries, once a person accepts Jesus Christ, his whole attitude and outlook on life changes. He begins living his life for entirely different reasons. People automatically begin to want to advance in their culture and technologically. I believe, if we ever hope to obtain world peace, Jesus Christ will have to be in the center of it.

In some areas of life, we are, of course, making progress. Our technological breakthroughs are nothing short of miraculous.

But morally and spiritually, where are we going? The divorce rate keeps going higher and higher. There is an increase in the number of unwed mothers. More and more people are becoming alcoholics. Dope is now getting into our high schools. Crime, in general, is increasing by leaps and bounds. In all our advancements, what are we doing to curb these areas of our lives, yes and even reduce them. With our many scientific advancements, we have seemed to left Jesus Christ out and we seem to be living our lives the way we want to, not the way God would have us live them. Civilized man, and we consider ourselves as such, seems to be spinning, his wheels, stilled on dead center.

Thirdly - what about our personal lives? Here is where many of us feel the problem the most. And it can happen to any of us. We rush home at night, so we can rush to the lake or the golf course. We rush here and there, and do we really know where we are going? Why are we in such a rush? I could understand if we rushed to church. Because maybe it might be too late for us. I wonder if we really know where we are going and why. Many of us are not too concerned about others. As long as we do not have to become involved, it's OK. Not many of us here are concerned about these riots and demonstrations that are taking place all over the country because we are not involved.

I really believe that each individual has to set certain goals for himself. We have to know where we are going and why we are going there. There is so much aimlessness and purposelessness in the world today that people are led in different directions because they have no goal for their own lives.

A mountaineer was bewildered by some road signs at a crossing. The signs were of no practical help to him. He said, "I can tell the figures, but I cannot read the words. I know how far, but not where to." And many of us with much more education, are in the same boat. We know "how far" but not where to. Bill tells the story of a young man he once knew. He said, "I did everything I could to help him enter the University. He was interested, but he never quite got around to making his application or writing the letters that would have provided the financial assistance he needed. Several years passed. Finally, he was actually enrolled as a student. Today he has his doctor's degree from Columbia University. Here is a man of character, sensitivity, creative ability, who was stalled on dead center for several years between high school and college and might never have become the outstanding person he is today. He said, I shudder when I think of how much he and the world- would have missed had he not got off dead center and started moving toward a worthy goal.

This young man finally moved off dead center and started moving in the right direction, but just think of all people who never really do find their place in the world and what they and the world are missing.

Each one of us has different personal involvements that require different specific solutions. Even though there are no general rules to follow that apply to each one of us, there are some things that we can do about our own personal situations.

First of all, we can analyze our personal situation. What is our personal mountain that we have gone around and around? Does it concern our education, or our family, or our job?? Does it have to do with taking a stand on a personal moral issue or our relationship to Christ or the church?

Many of us want a good education, but we cannot seem to settle down and put our mind to it. Do we really take time to be together as a family or are we too busy trying to make that first million dollars that we do not have time for family life? And how about our jobs? Are we really happy with our daily work or is it just a way of earning a living? You know, we could do a much better job and be a lot happier at work if we really enjoyed our jobs and working at what we like. Few of us are willing to take a firm stand on the moral issues of our day. We like to straddle the fence and drift with the crowd. Too few of us have a real relationship with Jesus Christ and the church. We are glad there is a church, but we certainly don't want to be tied down to it or go out of our way to serve him who serves us.

God may be saying to some of us, "You have compassed this mountain long enough, turn northward." Inertia is a characteristic embedded in humanity. No matter how radical we consider ourselves, we are inclined to follow the routine of yesterday rather than to blaze new trails. It is always easier to dream over the gilded memories of other years than to face the stern realities of today. So let us really and truly analyze our own personal situation.

Secondly - we must realize that our initiative and willpower are necessary to any real breakthrough.

Gumption is important. We cannot expect God to do everything while we do nothing. God says to us today: “Why cry to me? Tell the people of Israel to go forward.”

Doctor E. Stanley Jones tells us about a time in his life when he faced a heavy drain on his physical resources, with a six-month speaking tour where he was to address large audiences four or five times a day, and almost every day. A friend of his had been doing research with vitamin pills. He had discovered that when wheat was four inches tall, it seemed to have the highest concentration of vitamins that could be found in any plant. So, the research scientist told Doctor Jones that if he would take twenty of these grass pills every day, he would have all the vitamins he needed. Doctor Jones took them religiously and ended the six-month speaking tour in abounding health. When asked for the secret of his amazing vitality, he would answer: “grace, grass and gumption- the grace of God, which enabled me to do more than otherwise I could have done, my own gumption and willpower, and grass pills.”

Doctor Jones said that the people in his audience almost never asked about the grace or gumption, but where can we get the grass pills?

Someone said to Augustus Saint-Gaudens, “Mr. Saint-Gaudens, is not your status of Lincoln your greatest work?” Without a moment’s hesitation, the sculptor responded, “My next work is always my greatest.” Here there was no tarrying about the mountains of the past, but a spirit of facing the future and its opportunities.

Thirdly - we also need faith in God when God says, “Turn northward”, we must believe there is a purpose in our so doing and if we follow his leading, we shall arrive in no dead-end road, but in the Promised Land.

“Be strong, and of good courage, be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the Lord thy God is with thee; Whithersoever thou goest” with our faith in God, we shall go forward. “You have compassed this mountain long enough; turn northward.” So may we do, by the grace of God.

Giving, Forgiving and Thanksgiving

Scripture: Psalm 103

The text is from the 100th Psalm, verse 5; “For the Lord is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations.” Peter Parson, columnist, writes in the British weekly, “I sometimes think that the three most important words in life are giving, forgiving and thanksgiving. They are all liberating and cleansing activities; giving enlarges life, forgiving purifies it, and thanksgiving energizes it.”

These are not only words of action; they are also strong foundation words. An action may prove to be a foundation. The declaration of independence, the Revolutionary War, and the adoption of the Constitution of the United States were actions which became the foundations of the Republic. The spirit of an action may continue after the event, bringing further action in the history of a nation, or in the life of a person. The spirit of the Revolution may continue in the land. Think then of these words as basic, fundamental, permeating words.

First of all, let’s talk about giving. Giving is God in action. God gives Jesus Christ. The action of God in giving his son - upon this rest the Christian faith. God’s action is basic for Christianity.

The giving character of God became Incarnate in Jesus Christ. The giving character of God is revealed in Christ. From Mark 10: 45, we read; “The son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life.”

The spirit of giving is the mark of Christ disciples. This was the Master’s teaching when he spoke of the last judgement. The great commandments of Jesus are to love God and one’s neighbor; love is the greatest motivation of giving. From Luke 6: 38, Jesus picturesquely describes the manner of a disciple’s giving; “give, and it will be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, shaking together, running over, will be put into your lap. For the measure you give will be the measure you get back.” Though his words; “It is more blessed to give than to receive” were not written in the Gospels, they were remembered in the Early Church as read In Acts 20: 35. Christ’s example and teaching inspired the giving spirit which is characteristic of the true Christian and the Christian Church.

Giving enlarges life. The life of the giver and the life of the receiver are both enlarged. The man who enriches others enriches himself. This is true very often, even in the realm of things. But we are thinking especially of such gifts as Jesus gave (he had no material things to give), gifts of thought, gifts of heart, gifts of the spirit. By giving and receiving these, life becomes abundant.

A king who wished to express his affection for a private soldier of his army gave him a richly jeweled cup, his own cup. The soldier, stepping forth to receive the gift, exclaimed, shamefacedly, “This is too great a gift for me to receive.” “It is not too great for me to give,” the King replied.

There are spiritual gifts that are as effective as money and they cost no money; but in the very act of giving them, your store of these selfsame gifts is increased, never diminished. They never fail to work, never fail to sell your ideals, but the only trouble is that they are just as hard to part with as real money. Here they are: attention, praise, service, inspiration, concession, consideration, gratitude, physical presence. They really don't cost money, but perhaps in most cases they are worth far more than money, and most of us appreciate them more than money and we certainly hate to part with any one of them.

Secondly - let us consider the word forgiving. This, too, is an action word, which becomes a foundation word in the Christian life. Forgiving is an intensification of giving. If giving enlarges life, forgiving cleanses life.

God most definitely forgives. This is the very heart of Christianity. The 32nd and the 51st Psalms show us the forgiveness of God in the life of man. God's forgiveness of repentant men cleanses their lives of guilt.

Jesus Christ forgives. Christ, the revealer of God, is under this necessity if he is to reveal God truly. What a loss it would be, and how weakened the Gospels would become, if the stories of his forgiveness were deleted from their pages. We refer to such stories as the cure of the man with the palsy, the woman taken in adultery, the prayer of Jesus for the soldiers at the cross, and the restoration of Peter after his denial of his Lord. Without its consciousness and experience of the forgiveness of sin by the Savior, Christianity would, I believe, perish from the earth.

Reading from Colossians 3:13, God's forgiveness and man's forgiveness are linked. "Accept life, and be most patient and tolerant with one another, Always ready to forgive if you have a difference with anyone. Forgive as fully as the Lord has forgiven you."

Also from Ephesians 4: 32, we read, "Be kind to one another; be understanding, be as ready to forgive others as God for Christ's sake has forgiven you.

And again, from James 1:17, we read, "Human forgiveness has a divine forgiveness behind it."

Christian men do truly forgive one another. How could they pray the Lord's prayer if this were not so? The whole fabric of Christianity is held together by strands of forgiveness, God's, Christ's, man's. The forgiving spirit lifts men out of the jungle savagery. They rise above the spirit of revenge by the forgiving spirit. They are lifted to the giving spirit, a spirit which feeds one's energy.

By the spirit of forgiveness permeating the lives of men in their relations with one another, and likewise active in the affairs of peoples and nations, the world may be held together, and civilization saved.

Certainly, if we cannot forgive one another, we cannot expect Christ to forgive us. We are all human beings and therefore not perfect. We all make mistakes, and we are entitled to another chance. We as Christians

should be willing to give others this second chance. Christ tells us we are to forgive our brothers seven times seventy. Some people seem to like to have revenge and carry a grudge for years and years. The feeling within them must be something that cannot be described for their lives must be miserable. If we forgive someone for something he may have done to us, I am sure we are not letting that person get away with anything, for each individual has to live with himself, and sometimes this becomes pretty difficult.

If this forgiving feeling and attitude could be cultivated in each person's life. Our world would be a better place in which to live. All of us would be happier and more joyful. I'm sure this is one step on the long road to peace all of us are seeking for our world.

Thirdly - Let us discuss the word "thanksgiving."

Peter Parson says that thanksgiving energizes life; forgiveness purifies life; giving enlarges life. Is it true that thanksgiving enlarges life? Test the matter by experimentation. Be thankful, express thankfulness, does it follow that life is energized? Try it and find out.

The first settlers in America expressed thanks to God for what he had provided. For them, even though they endured all kinds of hardships and tragedies in their lives, they realized where all their blessings came from. Too few of us today realize where our blessings come from. Many of us take these day-by-day blessings for granted and some feel they have really earned them. We are not thankful enough for what God has given us. We truly need to get on our knees before him and offer him our thanks. I'm sure if we do humble ourselves to give thanks to him who does provide, we will be filled with new energy to carry on in spite of all hardships and difficulties. This feeling of thankfulness will give us a new lift, a new outlook on life and it will give us the extra strength and courage to carry-on.

Can a man demand thankfulness from himself? He can if he thinks. Think and thank are related words. Think and you will thank.

Think of what has been given you and you will be thankful. No demand needed.

Probably this is what is wrong with most of us nowadays, we do not take time to think. We are in such a hurry that we try to make things fall in place for us and if they do not, we get upset and angry at the world.

I believe one of the most important parts of our Christian life is taking time each day to be alone with God, call it a quiet time if you wish, but it is a time set aside each day when you can talk alone with God. During such a period of time, I'm sure we will begin to think and thus we will begin to be thankful to him. The mental habit of thinking thanks has provided millions of people with the precise lift they needed in the midst of crisis. It has been the escalator that has carried many a man out of despondency and into victory.

Such an attitude does not happen. It takes a lifetime of right thinking to achieve real mastery over

circumstance and things, but even a few minutes of thanks-thinking each day can make a difference in life. Firmly fixed and carefully cultivated, the habit can redeem life.

The art of thanksgiving is “thanksgiving”. It is gratitude in action. The feeling within oneself that is obtained from giving thanks cannot be described, but only felt as you open up your whole heart. Your whole being to your Lord.

Now the three words, giving, forgiving, and thanksgiving turn upon themselves. As giving and forgiving stimulate thanksgiving so, thanksgiving stimulates giving and forgiving. Think of all the things that have been given, built, and done in the world because men became thankful.

You should notice that all these words contain giving, not receiving, not taking, but giving. In all cases a Christian must give all his whole being. It cannot be partial and certainly, as Christ said, “It is more blessed to give than to receive.” Try giving of yourself to God and those around you, forgive those that have done you wrong as Christ forgives you, be thankful for what God has provided for you and see what a difference it makes in your life.

Keep On Singing

Scripture: II Chronicles 5:1-5; 11-14

The text is chosen from Psalm 95:1; “O come, let us sing to the Lord; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation.” Today we have set aside as choir recognition day. A day when we honor the members of our choir and the choir director.

Whenever men and women have come to a new hope and trust in the everlasting mercy; whenever they have sensed again beneath the shifting sands of human events, the solid rock of God’s presence and power; whenever the savings acts of Christ - his life, his cross, and his resurrection - have loomed out of the past to become vivid, real and present to his people - then music and song have surged again from the church militant on earth.

So it was with the first Christians. Not only did the old psalms spring to new life for them, but their new and shattering experience of Christ found a common voice with the birth of the Christian hymn. One of the earliest fragments of evidence that has survived outside the Bible concerning the nature of the primitive church is a note from a provincial governor to the empire at Rome. In it he describes the activities of the new sect, with the request that he be instructed what to do about them. And in his description of the worship of these, our Christian ancestors, he says, “they sing a hymn to Christ as God.”

At the time of the Reformation, music for the organ, music for choirs, and music for congregational singing were stimulated by both Luther and Calvin, and psalms, hymns, and chorales rolled across the churches of Europe in a tide of praise and adoration.

When, in the 18th century, a pallid Protestantism flared into new life, the evangelical message sang its way into man’s hearts.

New faith begets new music in the Christian Church. And to this day, the strength of a congregation can, to some extent at least, be measured by its song. So, let’s sing out when we have the opportunity and chance.

It is true the man that has no music is a man who is unhappy. Perhaps we would not put it as strongly as does Lorenzo in Shakespeare’s “Merchant of Venice.”

“The man that hath no music in himself, nor is not moved with a with concord of sweet sounds, is fit for treasons, strategies, and spoils; the motions of his spirit are dull as night, and his affections, dark as Erebus. Let no such man be trusted. Mark the music.

Do you know the Negro spiritual, “Lord, I want to be a Christian in my heart?”

Lord, I want to be a Christian in my heart, Lord, I want to be more loving in my heart, Lord, I want to be more holy in my heart, Lord, I want to be like Jesus in my heart.”

The characteristic music and sincerity give it a haunting quality. But think of the words. Whatever other area of ones being must be captured for Christ, one cannot begin to be a Christian unless one is moved in the heart.

In the Eastern Orthodox churches, the entire service is sang- even to the scripture reading in English in some instances. These churches have survived inward stagnation, political persecution, transplantation to an alien land, and have held the loyalty of their people to a surprising degree. Their power lies in the emotional associations, which the people have with their glorious music.

But in order to be a Christian, we must be moved more than in our hearts. It cannot stop there. After one has learned to sing meaningfully, “Lord, I want to be a Christian in my heart,” one must sing also, “Lord, I want to be a Christian in my head.” It isn’t enough to feel this new life - one must think it out, as well. Blaise Pascal was fond of saying, “man is only a reed, the most feeble thing in nature, but he is a thinking reed.” Not that one is easily, nor always ready to face the toil this involves. Sir Joshua Reynolds was right when he said, “There is scarcely any expedient to which man will not resort in order to evade and snuffle off real labor - the real labor of thinking.”

But it is essential, of course; and in no part of our living more than in religion. Without honest, sometimes painful, unsettling thought, no Christian experience is safe. The mood of the moment can move the heart, and one needs more than that. Otherwise, the first caller to knock on one door, and open his little bag of books, will spell uncertainty. With the warmest heart possible, one becomes gullible, without honest thought. It is true, Christ cannot do some things with us until we feel, but it is equally true that there are things he cannot do with us until we think. As we read from one Peter 1:13; “Therefore gird up your minds, be sober, set your hope fully upon the grace that is coming to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”

For the mass of people these days, it almost seems that news- coming to us continually in the dozens of ways it does- has taken the place of thought. Is this true of us as individual Christians? How long is it since you sang, “Lord, I want to be a Christian in my head?”

We pretty much nowadays are willing for others to do our thinking. We let our government tell us what to do and how to do it, or we let some friends or relatives. It’s easier. We do not have to exert any effort. We just follow directions like a robot. After all, this is the age of mechanization. Being a Christian, however, requires thought on each person’s part. It is true emotion will carry us away sometimes, but then quickly the emotional reaction is gone, and we soon forget what or why the emotion. That’s why we have to start thinking why I want to be a Christian and why Christ died that my sins could be forgiven. We really have to think about it, dwell on it, live it day by day. Many people today are guided by emotions or an emotional experience that has happened to us. Many of the sect groups, such as Jehovah Witnesses, prey upon our emotions and we really feel we have found the true thing. But how much thought have we given to it? Really, how hard we try to get something out of our original religion and faith? So when we sing, let us

also sing, “Lord, I want to be a Christian in my head.”

Nor does the matter end at this point; for there is another petition waiting to be prayed: “Lord, I want to be a Christian in my doing.” Without doing, one’s Christianity falls by the wayside.

Let us read a few verses from James 2:14-17; “What does it profit, my brethren if a man says he has faith but has not works? Can his faith save him? If a brother or a sister is ill clad and in lack of daily food, and one of you says to them, “go in peace, be warmed and filled,” without giving them the things needed for the body, what does it profit? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.” Really, it’s like a man who comes to church every Sunday and really professes to be a true Christian but the rest of the week he is shady and his business deals, doesn’t treat his employees right, isn’t concerned about his family, is always looking for the almighty dollar. Do you think such a person is a Christian? Perhaps we can say, a Sunday morning Christian.

Is it any different for a person to possess untold talent in the field of music, can sing, play the organ and piano, but still will not share this talent in God’s house? The church needs an organist and choir director badly, but this person will not give up of herself to the Lord’s work. Is this person a real and true Christian?

We then have the person who has been fortunate and shrewd in his business deals over the years, has a nice nest egg, and a good income, but refuses to share any of it for God’s work. Or perhaps he contributes \$25 a week, but still he wants his name associated with the church and on the membership rolls. A true Christian?

We are being taught a good deal about stewardship these days, and that is all to the good. This teaching might suggest a line for the spiritual, “Lord, I want to be a Christian in my purse.” There is a surprising amount in the Gospels about money when warm hearts and thinking heads have been dealt with. Jesus never underrated a man’s purse. He belonged to a poor family. He was a craftsman taking orders. He told the story of the good Samaritan giving two pence, with the promise of more, to care for a badly beaten-up neighbor. He also tells the story of the poor widow who put in two copper coins. Certainly, more than she could afford. I doubt if God wants us to let our family starve or go without clothes. But I do feel all of us from time to time need to really search our hearts and consciences regarding our giving to God’s work. When it really becomes an agreement between ourselves and God, then we will be giving to our utmost.

Today, however, we are emphasizing the stewardship of more than money, for stewardship is more than it involves. It includes talents, times, and even life itself. Today we honor and thank those who consecrate their talent for music to the service of our Lord.

Music has no other purpose of final reason than this; it should exist for the glory of God and the recreation of the human spirit.

Music speaks not to our thoughts, as do words. It speaks straight to our hearts and spirits, to the very core

and root of our souls. Music soothes, stirs us up, puts noble feelings in us; it melts us to tears, we know not how- it is a language by itself, just as perfect as speech, as word; just as divine, just as blessed. Music has been called the speech of angels. I will go even further and call it the speech of God himself.

I'm sure I'm speaking for the entire congregation when I say how very much all of us appreciate our fine choir. There are not many churches who have a choir of young people who are as devoted as our group. It does take time and effort on their parts and indeed, we are thankful and appreciate the fine work of our organist-choir director. The choir adds so much to our worship service and it would not be nearly as effective without them. So today we honor you for your time and effort spent in God's work. We rejoice with those who sing, "I want to be a Christian in my doing." Truly, this is a part of a Christian's doing. May we all keep on singing praises to God! "Oh, come, let us sing to the Lord; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation."

Livelihood or Calling

Scripture: Romans 12

The text is chosen from the Psalms 90:16; “Let thy word be manifest to the servants, and they glorious power to their children.”

If we needed reminders that there are various ways we approach our daily work, we certainly find them in the words we use. Sometimes we call our work “an occupation”, which suggests that this is the way we fill our time. Then, of course, it sometimes is called “a livelihood”, which reminds us that thus we earn our living.

But no word is more reflective of the Christian view of life than one born out of religious practice. It is the term “vocation” which, of course, means a calling.

It isn’t enough to say that a student is preparing for life. As a student he has a calling to bring a quality of life to his study and to his place in the academic community. He must be marked by diligence and reverence and a respect for the opinions of others. He must show his loving concern for those who have come to the campus, often greatly needing friendship and understanding. This is the vocation of a student.

We also have the vocation of a parent. Every discovery we make about the formation of human life reminds us that there is no influence comparable to that given in the first few years of a child’s life. This is important for us as parents and certainly we can see the necessity for the right kind of influence in our children’s lives.

We might ask ourselves what is a Christian retirement? A year ago, one of our finest doctors in the Midwest, coming to retirement, went out for three years to teach in a mission medical school. Another man, after thirty-five years of experience with a great business organization, has gone to work for the cause of Christian journalism there is much evidence that one of the great chapters opening before us is the service rendered by those who count their retirement to be a calling from Jesus Christ and not a conclusion of their active life.

Many people upon retirement go into their own little shell and do absolutely nothing and wither up and die but still others realize that they have to do something to help wherever they can. These people continue until they are unable to move and pass away happy, joyful, contented, peaceful with the feeling that truly they have tried to make their earthly lives useful. And so even in retirement we all have a vocation.

The term ‘vocation’ is well grounded in the Bible. In the Bible view of things there is no part of life which is apart from God’s government, certainly not our daily work. Many of us seem to try very hard to separate our daily lives from our Christian ones. They seem entirely separate but as I have said many

times Christianity is a full-time job, every moment of everyday, regardless of where we are or what we are doing. If we can remember this and start practicing it in our own lives, we would be happier and certainly we would tend to influence those around us.

It seems that there are at least four special qualities which the Christian seeks to bring to his daily work as far as it will allow. These are the distinctions of a Christian turning his livelihood into a vocation.

First of all, we have the choice. That begins by affecting the choice of our daily work. Immediately we would admit that for some the choice seems very limited. But in this, as for other matters of Christian living, we begin with the preface, "As far as in you lies." And usually there is a far greater degree of freedom than we first would suffice.

To acknowledge that there are some kinds of daily work which are incompatible with a Christian vocation seems to be essential and honest. The fact is there are some ways of work which are definitely harmful to too many people. They rest upon exploitation or deception or dishonesty. For example, a bar tender, a dope pusher, a gambler or bookie, these kinds of work cannot be a Christian vocation. In fact, any work that is harmful to oneself or to another certainly cannot be considered a Christian vocation.

The Old Testament deals in detail with our way of common life, including the daily task. In Proverbs 16:11 the writer makes this clear in a vivid figure of speech. "A just balance and scales are the Lord's; all the weights in the bag are his work." The words sound strange to us, for we never saw the everyday sight to which they refer. But the keeper of the weights was an important man in the commercial life of his day. He carried in a little bag; the stones which has been carefully chosen because they represented exact weights. God's concern reaches even to the honesty of the weights a man carries with him for his daily commerce.

For young people who are choosing a vocation in life, God can play a most important part. If you truly believe in God and have faith in him, he can help you to make the right choice in life, the choice that is a very important one. Let God help you to make this choice.

The second special quality the Christian seeds to bring to his daily work is the "quality".

There most definitely is a distinctive quality of workmanship in the Christian vocation. No concern for spiritual things gives us freedom from the necessity of doing the work we do thoroughly and to the fullest.

In the realm of art there is a long-standing custom for each man to initiate the work he has done. So, there it stands associated forever with his name. We may not initial our daily work, but there is a sense in which it always stands associated not only with our name but in a broader sense with the name of Jesus Christ.

If it seems to you that this is going against the stream of our present attitude toward such things, so be it. This is not the first time Christians were meant to go upstream. Where else shall we turn for the restoration of integrity of workman ship if not to those who coming to the daily task, feel it is not only a matter of

earning a living, but of offering the best we have and full measure for what we are called to do.

I'll never believe that a person isn't proud of the quality of the work he does. Of course, there are some people who turn out a job anyway they aim to get it done but for each person this way I believe there are then others who do care and to their work to the best of their abilities and with what they have available.

There is a story which tells of a man who purchased a bolt of cheap cloth and took it to a fine tailor. But no matter how much the customer offered to pay; the tailor refused to make the seat. When the prospective client became exasperated, the tailor explained quietly that he would not handle a shoddy piece of material. He added that his name Tavistock had not been on a piece of shoddy cloth for three generations, and he did not intend to begin now.

The third special quality which the Christian seeks to bring to his daily work is the right attitude. The Christian in his work will be known by his attitude at the points of tension.

Every day we are engaged in conflicts of interest. There are those always ready to set one side against another, labor against management, consumer against producer, big business against little business, region against region. But in all of this there must be some men and women who recognize that we are all bound together in the bundle of life. And it takes a great deal of understanding to hold life together in health and harmony. The early Christian on the other side of the economic line, knowing that where Christians meet it is possible for men to disagree without distrust.

In all of these dealings between people, if both parties are Christians, it is known that a satisfactory solution can be achieved without radical things such as strikes, lock outs, etc.

But this is true in all of life, the kind of attitude we have toward our work especially makes a big difference in our outlook and in the results that can be accomplished.

Finally, the fourth special quality which the Christian seeks to bring to his daily work is "a word of Christ." It is really our readiness to speak a word for Jesus Christ. This is not easily said, nor is it easily done. We have a reticence about the deepest things in our lives. But if we really want to, there will come a time when judgment says: Speak now.

Truly there is a time to speak and a time to be quiet and when we learn to do this with God's help then we will really be witnessing for Christ.

What an example Christians can set at work, enjoying their work, doing it to the best of their ability, and with the right attitude. Sometimes and perhaps more often than not – action really speaks louder than words and penetrates deeper than words. Sometimes words are really not necessary if we are living examples of a real Christian.

But I'm also convinced that if we really have a conviction, it is difficult to keep quiet about something that is really news. Haven't we all felt the compulsion to tell something we know that another does not know? In many ways when the news is real and you have it, it takes more work not to say it than to say it. We can hardly bear to keep quiet. Then may we not suppose that when the good news touches our lives, we will feel the compulsion to tell someone about it.

Many years ago, a captain on a seagoing vessel had a Chinese cabin boy whom everyone called Charlie. Many a man would have let Charlie go about his business, and when the voyage was done, paid him his wages and let that be the end of the matter. But not this captain. As a Christian he believed that Christ was for everyman he met. So, in due time he spoke to his cabin boy about Christ, and in due time the word took root and bore fruit. Charlie became a professing Christian. After some years he returned to China, married, and established a Christian home. His last name was Soong, and his family has become one of the distinguished Christian families of China. One of the daughters is Madame Chiang Kai-shek. Another was the wife of Sin Yat-Sin. Could anyone foresee how far-reaching a word spoken to a cabin boy would be? That, you see, is a recurring miracle of the Christian life. The word spoken for Christ continues the work of Christ.

It is true that the example we set, the words we speak perhaps we will never see the results in our day and perhaps there will be results immediately. At any rate, when we do know the good news, we cannot but help tell someone about it.

That's the way the early Christian church won its battle in the Roman world. Dr. LaTourette sums up the story of the early expansion of Christianity in these words: "the chief agents in the expansion of Christianity appear not to have been those who make it a profession or a major part of their occupation, but men and women who earned their livelihood in some purely secular manner and spoke of their faith to those when they met in this natural fashion." And so, our daily work can be just about what we want to make it. With Christ's help it can become our vocation or calling instead of just a plain livelihood. Let Christ help you with your work, he can, you know.

Love Came Down at Christmas

Scripture: Isaiah 9: 6,7; 11:1-9

The text is chosen from John 3:16; “God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son.” We sometimes get blasé about Christianity, and even bored by it because we confuse love with sentimentality. For sentimentality is a sickly thing. A bit of it now and then may not do much harm. But too much of it is nauseating. Not so with real love. Love is a great, strong, muscular thing.

First of all, when love came down at Christmas, God met man’s most basic need. We need love and cannot live without it. True, we can exist, but not live. And many of us are existing because we have not really discovered the love of Christ in our own lives.

Love is necessary from the first moment of our lives until the last. To emphasize this point let me quote Ashley Montague, the anthropologist: “Loves real significance can best be understood when we consider a disease from which, but half a century ago, more than half the children in their first year of life regularly died. This disease was known as marasmus, from the Greek word meaning “wasting away.” The discovery was made that babies in the best homes and hospitals were most often its victims, babies who were apparently receiving the best and careful physical attention, while babies in the poorest homes, with a good mother, despite the lack of hygiene physical conditions, often overcame the physical hardships and flourished. What was wanted in the sterilized environment was mother love.”

So we are born with a need for love. “God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son.” Think of what that means. It means, to begin with, that he loved you, and that his son gave himself for you. He met your most basic need. It is as personal and intimate as that. It does not say that he will love you if you are good and worthy of his love. It says that he loves you as you are - even if you are in the despair of yourself and have forfeited the love of those nearest and dearest to you. Such is the love of God for you. Regardless of your feeling for him or your fellow man, God still loves you, just the way you are. And that he loves the world means that there is no one outside the sphere and scope of God’s care. He loves them, whether they belong to East or West, whether they are conservative or communist, whether their color is black or white, “all” are dear to him, inasmuch as Christ thought all precious enough to die for them. The implications of that are, of course shattering.

I’m sure sometimes we think to ourselves, “How can God love that fellow? Look at his actions. Look at the way he lives his life. Certainly, God must love me more.” Perhaps you may think this, but you are wrong. God loves everyone and it’s when we begin to realize this and feel and know it in our own lives that it begins to make a difference with us. Just think, if we could show forth just a small part of the love Christ shows for us, toward each other what a different world this would be to live in.

“God so loved.” in that ‘so’ lies the whole motivation, if we so speak, of the incarnation. So compassionately and understandingly was God concerned about the world, that he loved up to the point of giving his own

Son. If we really think about this great gift we will understand somewhat, what the greatness of God's love for us really means and is.

Secondly, when love came down at Christmas God became involved in all the problems created by our sin and selfishness.

That is why we called love a great, strong, muscular thing. "Love came down at Christmas." "Came down" for us and for our salvation. "Came down" and got all mixed up with the problems created by our sin and selfishness.

Love- of that quality- can never be uninteresting, for it is so close to life, life as it is all around us, life in the raw.

What is the power of love? Nothing can endure which has not its foundation in love. For love alone diminishes not but shines with its own light; makes an end of discord, softens the fires of hate, restores peace in the world, brings together the sundered, redresses wrongs, aids all and injures none; and who so invokes its aid will find peace and safety and have no fear of future ill. This is the power of love, the kind of love God has shown for us through the birth of his son, Jesus Christ. This is what Christmas means. This is what Christmas stands for. This is what Christmas is. Regardless of what happens nothing in this world can change this meaning. Certainly, there will be things that distract us from the real meaning of Christmas but as Christian parents it is our responsibility to instill the true meaning in the lives of our children.

Love is concerned, deeply concerned, with the things like the mess some people are making of their marriages; with the selfishness which results in millions of dollars every year being spent on cosmetics and drink, while the agencies which look after the refugees and other poor in the world have to make do on a shoestring. Love is concerned with the fact that tens of millions of people will go hungry this Christmas season. Love is concerned with the homeless, with the millions who cannot read, with a refugee, with a leper (two million of them in India alone), with the Christless. Love is like that.

Perhaps we ought to ask ourselves if we have these same concerns in our hearts. If we do, then we know what and how the love came down at Christmas. If we have this love, then we will also need to spread it to those around us. We have to have more of this love in our world today. We have to if we want this world to survive. Many of us go around professing to know what this love is but we are only kidding ourselves for we have never really experienced it in our own lives for when we do, we will act differently than we do now.

Let us look again at the Christmas story. Here is one whom St. John calls "The Word", that is to say, the very heart and mind of God disclosed for men to see and handle. "The Word; and yet unable to speak a word."-so Lancelot Andrews described the impotence of the Babe of Bethlehem. Look at the stable, not through the eyes of a medieval artist whose colors make angels, eastern kings, and even animals, glitter with glory; but through the eyes of a realism which see the pathos of a pregnant

woman with nowhere but a stable in which to give birth to her Son. And watch that little Son taken, soon after his birth, as a refugee to Egypt, there to be safe from the wrath of the dictator -king. This is what is involved when we speak of God becoming man, of God loving man. And it is but a prelude to a life in which he refused the way of power and accepted the way of suffering. So, people said of the Christ: "Himself bore our griefs and carried our sorrows." He did - right up to the day when he carried our sins to the cross.

Did we ever stop to think of the personal problems we have in our lives and also the personal problems we know other people have, and what love, really genuine love, could do for these institutions? What a difference it would make in our lives, what a different world this could be to live in. Basically, all of us are selfish. We pretty much look out for ourselves first and then perhaps we might be concerned about others. Many of us do this with our giving to the church and other worthwhile causes. We make sure we have everything whether we need it or not. If we have anything left, we then think of the church and other worthwhile causes. Little do we realize that God should come first, then these other things would disappear we desire will come automatically. Believe me, they will. This is returning just a part of the love God has given us.

At Christmas time, in many churches, gifts are gathered in the name of Christ- child and distributed to the least fortunate.

A legend comes from a remote village in Mexico. It had long been the custom in this mountaineer town to honor the Christ child on his natal day with the purest of gifts. The people loved colors, bright splashing colors, but not for this occasion. In every home the white gift was discussed. Would it be a small lamb; brushed clean? A pair of doves from the rafters above the house? A basket of cotton carefully picked? An embroidered altar cloth that had been in the making for months? A tall white candle, molded to perfection, or a white flower?

The white flower might be given by the poorest of the peasants, yet it would be a labor of love. The children would have to search along the rocky hillsides for a perfect blossom. And somehow it must be kept from losing its freshness on the trek to the church.

Years ago, this village, far from the laws and rules of the large cities, formed its own set of laws. One item of the code was that those who committed certain sins during the year must face the humiliation of laying a red flower on the church altar at the time of giving of the white gifts. The scarlet blossom among the white would serve as a reminder to the people of the wages of sin.

So it came to pass on a certain Christmas that a member of the village came with a red flower. It was the time of the blooming poinsettia; there was no trouble finding a red blossom.

The Church was filled with people, it had been rumored that someone would lay a red flower on the altar. The hum of low prayer came to a stop when the sinful one came there came through the entry way

and advanced slowly down the aisle, holding a bright red poinsettia blossom. Kneeling, weeping, and stretching forward, the flower was laid upon the altar. Those who were near heard the words, "Father forgive me."

Then the wonder of wonders, the scarlet poinsettia turned to a dazzling white.

The priest lifted the prostrate forgiven one with the words, "Go in peace, your sins are forgiven."

The legend says that on every Christmas in the village one will find a white poinsettia blooming among the red. Truly a symbol of God's love and forgiveness towards us.

Thirdly, when love came down at Christmas God laid claim upon us to become loving men.

The love of God has not gotten far into our systems, if we are not concerned about those people who are God's concerns. Then it is no wonder that we heartily give a thought to the Christian message-that we get blasé about it or even bored by it.

There is one thing to which all of us have grown accustomed. In fact, we hardly give it a thought - the central event of Christmas. Notice, will you, just how I put that. I said, "the central event." For, of course, to millions of us at Christmas means family reunions, and turkey, and presents and a tree lit up; and for some of us, it means snow, and for others of us, in Australia and elsewhere, heat. To some of us, there may be passing allusions on the Christmas cards to "peace on earth and goodwill among men", but it amounts to little. And the angels and all that which forms part of the decorations means a little more than Santa Claus and the reindeer. But all these are the trappings- the good trappings, good fun, but trappings nonetheless! I am talking about the central event of Christmas-and it is this which so easily gets forgotten, and it is this which so easily we get accustomed to, and about which we get blasé. Truly it is the showing forth of God's love towards us.

But we must become aware this Christmas of the Gospel of Love as set forth by Jesus Christ! The central event of Christmas- "God so loved the world that he gave his Son"-the essence of Christmas breaks through to its wrappings and reveals its meaning for you and me and the world we live in.

Yes, love is more than just a sentiment; It is, instead, the very stuff of life. Do we not know that love is something more than a frail and flimsy ideal? Rather it is the very meaning of life. By the presence of Jesus among us and with us- Emmanuel, God with us- we know love and knowing love, know God; we open our hearts that they may be quickened by God's love; we recognize that the greatest claim that is made upon us is by the love of God; "we love because he first loved us." Prompted by love that came down at Christmas, we surrender our wills to the purpose of God. We rejoice to give response to his claim upon our lives. Truly let us take the time, today and all year long, to feel this love in our lives and then go out to love our fellow men in the same way.

Pressure

Scripture: Micah 6:30-46

The text is chosen from Isaiah 30:15; “In quietness and confidence shall be your strength”

in the northern hemisphere. Summer has arrived. For many, vacations will be in order. This may be a good Sunday in which to consider the pressure on our lives. This has come to be one of the most characteristic problems of our 20th century. In this summer vacation period, we may be able to think the matter through and perhaps make some adjustments in our lives.

A woman said, “It’s like spinning on the edge of a whirlpool-faster and faster, till I wonder how much longer I can keep from being sucked down.” Pressure is the pattern of our times.

Whether we like it or not, we live in a fast- moving world. When I was born it took about two months to go around the world. It took Colonel John Glenn less than two hours. We are living in an age of tremendous advances, but we are paying a price in tranquilizers, frayed tempers, and nervous ailments. Many of us use our resources faster than they can possibly be replenished. Pressure claims many victims.

What can we do to keep the pressure within healthy bounds?

First of all, we can reexamine our ideas about life. One of the most prominent causes of undue pressure is immature thinking. Out of date, unexamined ideas tend to hold us in a kind of tyranny and force us to live in ways that waste our powers. They are out of touch with real life.

Take for example, the matter of responsibility. One of the highest marks of personal character is a sense of responsibility. The proper caring of responsibility fills out and builds a man’s character to the very end of life.

Sometimes, however, unrealistic ideas of responsibility will do untold damage. There are some things in life which are not subject to our control, and it is unrealistic to feel responsible for them. For example, we are responsible to give our children as promising a start in life as we can, but there comes a day when we must set them free to live their own lives, to assume their own responsibilities. If then, they make their choice, contrary to our advice and example, that is their affair. It is not possible for one person to be responsible for the sins and failures of another, even when that other is his own child. The father may yearn over the prodigal son, but he is not responsible for his son’s disastrous choices.

Many men need to reexamine their attitudes towards work. The man who really rises high in the world is always the man who is willing to work hard. Nevertheless, the intensity of man’s work can be overdone. The urgency of our affairs does not alter our need of rest, exercise, recreation, and sleep. Life has an iron law. It

says to us: learn to operate within the limits of your capabilities or pay the price! Here's another area where our thinking may need to be more mature.

Many a man needs a new philosophy of defeat. To some people, defeat suggests that there must be something wrong with them. But that's not necessarily true. There are times when the very best we can do is to keep the flag flying while the ship goes down.

You can measure a person by the way he handles defeat. The best lived personality in American history was never more triumphant than in his hours of defeat. In business, in politics, and in love, he met with demoralizing failure. Yet no where can you find that Abraham Lincoln gave up. He accepted his defeats and went from there. Someone tells a little girl, who said to me one night at bedtime, "Mother, I've had such a happy time today."

"Really?" The mother said with a smile, "what made this day different from yesterday?"

After a little thought, the girl said, "yesterday my thoughts pushed me around and today I pushed my thoughts around."

Secondly- to keep pressure within healthy bounds, we can take time for quiet in prayer.

This is what Paul had in mind when he said, "May the Lord of Peace himself give you peace continually - whatever comes." Those who know what silence is and how to wait for it, know that quietness brings healing in the very midst of turbulence and distraction.

Few things are more important than those moments when a man opens his soul to the silence of eternity. Yet, how easy it is! Is there anything to prevent a businessman from shutting his office door in order to spend two minutes at his desk in quiet prayer? Anything to prevent a housewife from stopping in the midst of her duties to sit in a comfortable chair for two minutes to pray; anything in the rule book which says a truck driver cannot pull his truck over to the side of the road for two minutes of quiet meditation; or the farmer stop his tractor long enough to converse with God?

At first, the ears continue to hear the confusion of the world. The mind continues to tremble and turn with problems of the day. But more and more, and yet more, as one enters into the spirit of silence, the floodgates open and the life-giving powers of the spirit begin to pour into one's life.

Prayers such as these spontaneous moments of quiet and meditation are "refresher experiences" in which a person receives spiritual energy and insight. When we pray in this manner, we become capable of carrying burdens which we thought were too heavy, of enduring hardship much longer than we could have thought, and the pressures which seem really to break us become light enough to be carried with confidence.

The only way to withstand the external pressures that would push us in one direction and pull us in another is to nurture the inner life. Public life needs to balance of private life. Social existence needs the corrective of personal existence. We cannot achieve and retain wholeness unless there are strength-giving sanctuaries. It is not possible to speak effectively without periods of silence. It is difficult to serve without periods set aside to strengthen the inner self.

A life without regular periods of silence is a life without essential nourishment. For the both the spirit and the functioning intelligence dash. We live at a time when thought alone. Represents the difference between safety and total madness. One of the prime requirements of such thought is privacy and a little silence, at least now and then. We will get it once we attach value to it.

Thirdly, to keep pressure within healthy bounds, we can take a day at a time.

I have found help in a few famous words from Robert Louis Stevenson. "Every man can get through till nightfall." It isn't necessary to wear oneself out by looking at the responsibilities of the 'morrow. Tomorrow is another day, next month another month.

Jesus was no stranger to pressure. During his ministry, he poured out his energy constantly in the work of helping people, healing them, preaching, and teaching. As the months wore on and the opposition to his ministry darkened, the pressure grew relentlessly. How did he deal with it? He thought matters through until he saw clearly whether he ought to be involved and, if so, how? For example, on one occasion, when two brothers appeal to him in a dispute about their father's estate, and asked him to decide between them, he declined to take the responsibility. He said, "Who made me a judge or a divider over you?" He did not feel it was part of his ministry to be a judge. On one occasion, when he was tired, he would take his disciples aside into a quiet place for prayer and meditation. And as the pressure became hard to bear, he said, "I must go on my way today and tomorrow and the day following," as if to say, "I presume I can see my course one day at a time."

A Hebrew pilgrim of ancient days, traveling to Jerusalem so that he might worship in the temple, discovered an amazing thing. Despite the difficulty of his journey and the physical demands placed upon him for making it, this traveler felt his strength renewed, instead of diminished, as he went along. He discovered that God, the object of his worship, gave him strength for each stage. He moved, as it were, from strength to strength.

Out of this experience of spiritual renewal came a Psalm of joy and praise. (Psalm 84). These verses reveal that the Psalmist was looking homeward. Long absent from Jerusalem and the beautiful temple, the author of the psalm found occasion to return, possibly at a festival time. His consuming thought was on the magnificence of God's dwelling place. His understanding, his faith, told him that God was to be found in the temple of Jerusalem.

The question one is tempted to ask of modern pilgrims is this: Have we a comparable yearning for the courts of the Lord, for the presence of God?

Of course, as Protestants, we refuse to localize the presence of God. We say God is everywhere present, and not limited to this building or that room. But our very recognition of his omnipotence carries a danger. The danger is that we fail to identify God as being anywhere. This may well be the reason why the roots of personal religion are shallow in many lives: God is not associated with time-and-place experiences. He is simply nebulous.

And this is the one thing needed in religious life: and experience of the presence of God. In his presence is found strength for each stage of life's way. The presence of God, and thus the strength which he imparts mediated in one way through the broken bread and the shared cup of communion. A traditional call to communion worship tells us to come to the table, not to express an opinion, but to seek a presence. Here is time- and- place experience where the worshipper can say with a psalmist, "my heart and flesh sing for joy in the living God."

Experiences such as these, appointments with God make the Christian life. From the busy, hustling worldview, the life of the spirit seems a waste of time. Finding joy in the house of worship may appear to some absurd. Not so with one such as the Psalmist. When the joy of worship can be made to accompany your life and mind, the result can be a new creation: a realization of the presence of God in the life of man. What greater strength is there by which to live? No summary of the matter needs to go any further than the inclusiveness of the closing words of the 84th Psalm. "Oh Lord of host, blessed is the man who trust in thee".

So with all the outside pressures on us, taking time to talk with God, will help to relieve them. This summer, even though this particular. "house of worship" will be closed, take time to worship the Lord. Never become so busy that you do not have time to remember the supreme sacrifice Christ made so that we might have abundant life.

Standing for Honors

Scripture: Matthew 20:20-28

The text is chosen from Matthew 22:14; “For many are called, but few are chosen.” These words, “many are called, but few are chosen,” give every impression of having been quoted by Jesus. They look like a proverb. They belong to the wisdom of the race and have many applications.

The late Dean Inge, in a radio broadcast from London said, “Christianity is not a pass examination, it is an honors course. There is not a syllable in the Gospels to indicate that it will ever be the creed of a majority. Straight is the gate and narrow the way that leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it. An unwelcome conclusion? Yes, very; but we are warned that so it must be, and so, as we all know, it is, and always has been. We must make our choice whether we want to follow Christ or not; and if we decide to follow him, we must be prepared for a hard and difficult journey, uphill to the end. We shall not be unhappy, far from it. But to put it plainly, it is a call to heroism; and when Christ told his disciples that they must take up their cross and follow him, he was speaking to men who knew what that horrible instrument of torture meant. So do not let us be surprised or disheartened if the crowds prefer, as it always has, the broad way, the flowery path, leading gently downhill. To us the call has come “to lay aside every weight and the sin that doth so easily beset us, and to run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the Author and Perfecter of our faith.” Following the Christian way of life a man may fail, just pass, or win honors. “Many are called, but few are chosen.”

The teaching of Jesus was undoubtedly that all should be called. Two great texts, John 3:16 and Matthew 28:19 are proclamations of the universality of the Gospel call.

Is it not true, however, that Christianity is an honors course? It makes heavy demands upon us.

First of all - it requires discernment to choose the course.

It is an elective course. In the curriculum of our colleges, we find prescribed and elective courses. Christianity is not a prescribed course. One does not have to take it. No one is forcing it down our throats. We can always turn our heels and forget about what Christ has taught us.

I may live in profit by the influence of Christianity without taking the course, as I do under the influence of electricity, while knowing little or nothing about it. Certainly, all of us do profit by what good influence Christianity has had and does have on the world.

A lack of discernment is shown by those who refuse to take the course. Because other persons have flunked it. A man of discernment will judge a course by the men who have passed the examination and taken honors. Most of us know from our own experiences in life, if we know another person has failed at something, we

tend to shy away from it because we fear that we will fail too. Many times, however, that person may have failed for reasons we cannot determine or that he has been unable to determine. We need to look at all of life objectively and go on from there. Truly, there are many times in our lifetimes that we cannot clearly see the way. And this is where our faith in God and in guidance and direction come into being.

It requires discernment to choose the Christian way of life because one must weigh values.

it was no fault of Esau as we read in Genesis 25:29-34, that he was hungry, but when he was willing to sell his birthright for a meal, it shows him up as a man of poor judgment.

Many times, when we get in a jam, we are willing to do almost anything to get out of it easily. However, if we could settle down and think through the situation, there would be a solution without having to give away something valuable to us. Perhaps the right solution would not be so easy and it would probably take longer, but in the end we would be further ahead.

It requires discernment to choose the course in Christianity because one must see the spiritual as higher than the material. Not all men see that integrity of character is worth much more than a million dollars.

In our material world, it becomes difficult to place values on the right things in life. Much emphasis is placed on our standard of living and pertaining to material things and since material things can be seen, heard, and felt we tend to emphasize these rather than the spiritual, which is more or less invisible.

Jesus applied this test of choosing spiritual over material things to the rich young ruler as is read in Mark 10:17-23. The young man couldn't quite see it and refused to elect the course for Jesus said in answer to what he must do to inherit eternal life. "You lack one thing; go, sell what you have, and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come follow me. At that saying, His countenance, fell, and he went away. Sorrowful; For he had great possessions."

It requires discernment to choose this course because one must envision the ideal. This requires imagination. Many people let their imaginations die. Many of us are willing to accept things the way they are and because it's easier and does not require any effort on our part. Life can be exactly what we want to make.

One day I noticed where the wind had swirled into a corner, a great heap of the seeds of the cork elm tree. Of all those tens of thousands of seeds, it would probably come to pass that not even one would germinate and grow. The spawn of certain fishes is so large that one would think the streams not to be large enough to hold the mature fish, did one not know of the high mortality rate. "For many are called, but few are chosen."

Secondly- It requires discipline to follow the course. "This is an honors course"

An honors course is based upon discipline. From Matthew 7:13-14 Jesus said, "Enter by the narrow gate;

for the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard That leads to life, and those who find it are few.”

It is so in the arts, music, and painting; It is true in Christianity. In order to become a great artist or a great anything discipline is necessary. Plenty of study and hard work with a sincere desire to become what you have set for your goal in life.

Ask any great violinist whether he has mastery of his violin by twanging the strings in any way he liked, practicing self-expression. He will answer, as did Fritz Kreisler, that, “he has ease and mastery, feels himself at home in the realm of harmony” because, “he became the obedient slave of the laws of music;” he entered into his place of creative freedom by a narrow gate and a narrow way.

An honors course requires concentration. One must plunge in. It is a. Disintegrating experience to follow this subject and direct the mind elsewhere. He that loseth his life shall find it was the teaching of Jesus.

This honors course demands self-denial. Again, the teacher speaks, “If any man would come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me” And man’s cross is not some pain or infirmity or burden taken up for his own sake. This is a burden which you bear because you have advanced in the course to the place where you have love in your heart. You take up a cross for Love’s sake.

Perhaps you have? A crippled child or a disabled husband or wife that requires your care. You do this because you love them and even though. To outsiders, this might look like a burden or a cross to bear. We seldom think of it in this light. Perhaps it’s because we are thankful for their presence in our lives and the joy of helping. Those that need our help. Jesus says, “Pick up this cross or burden and follow me”. He will make the load lighter and easier to carry.

There are other things to learn in this honors course: Things which Jesus Christ has taught us, and all we have to do is read them in the Gospels. The extra mile lesson, the golden rule lesson, the investment of talents lesson, the secret chamber lesson. All require discipline. We cannot possibly follow Christ’s teachings without discipline in our lives because there are too many temptations today to sidetrack us. “truly many are called, but few are chosen.”

There are many men who took honors in this honors course. Paul, the apostle; Gladstone, the statesman.; Livingston, the explorer; Florence Nightingale, the nurse; Albert Schweitzer, the physician; Kagawa, the social worker; Mott, the religious statesman. If great names have no appeal, it is not difficult to list the names of men and women in any Christian community who have taken the course in Christianity and now carry honors. A list could be made, too, of those who have flunked.

Thirdly, it requires decision.

To accept the honors, study the parable of the talents. It is in the Gospel of Matthew. 25:14-29. On one occasion, a man gave talents to his servants, one, five talents; one, two talents; and to the third one talent. On his return, the one who had been given 5 talents brought ten. He had made a successful investment. This man was given honors. His Lord said, "Well done, good and faithful servant; Thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will set thee over many things; enter then into the joy of thy Lord."

Christianity does not stand still. It is a moving religion. And those who really and truly choose it, are always moving forward. Christians do not have time for laziness or illness. Life is too meaningful and purposeful.

Follow this honors course, prove faithful- receive honors! What honors? More responsibility! Christian honors-added responsibility! Of course, that weeds people out. For truly not too many of us are willing to take the added responsibility. We are willing to go along the way things presently are, but the course does require the added extra things in life, and you will never pass it unless you are willing to accept them and the consequences, good and bad, that go along with them. How few make the response of James and John, "We are able." They, of course, did not see the full consequences of their decision; who does when he decides for heroic enterprises?

Perhaps we should be willing to answer the question when we sing that great hymn, "Are you able said the master, to be crucified with me?" But honors are given to those who choose with discernment, follow through under discipline, and then with decision to accept responsibility.

This honors course is given under a great teacher, the best in the world. It requires discernment to choose it. It requires discipline to follow through. It requires decision to accept the honors. "Many are called, but few are chosen." Do you choose to be one of the many who do not pass or one of the few who succeed? Do you stand for honors? It is a decision related to your destiny.

The Christian in the Voting Booth

Scripture: Acts:22-30

The text is chosen from Acts 22:28; “The tribune answered, “I bought this citizenship for a large sum.” Paul said, “but I was born a citizen.” As we read from our scripture reading this morning, Paul never forgot that he was a Roman. He claimed the privileges of Roman citizenship. Just as we should claim the privileges that go along with being a citizen of the United States. Today one of our greatest privileges, the right to vote, is what I would like to discuss for a few minutes.

But first I would like to say that some people object to the pulpit being used as a sounding board for many things in our lives that doesn't directly pertain to the Church of God. It is true that this country was founded, as the First Amendment states, on the principle of separation of church and state. This was mainly because the people who founded the country has come from Europe where the church more or less ran the entire show. There was one religion or faith that controlled the government and country, and this was what all citizens were expected to be. These people were fed up with this situation and therefore believed a man had a right to choose his own religion or faith without any help or otherwise from the government. Freedom of religion was one of the main reasons why people came to America and thus we have the very first amendment to the constitution which calls for separation of church and state.

However, in spite of this I have certain convictions concerning all of our daily lives which I will try to convey to you today. I firmly believe that anything pertaining to our daily lives is a fitting subject to be preached from the pulpit. I firmly believe that all Christians have to take a stand on the issues that affect our lives and the lives of our families. I do not know of a better place to expand on them than from the pulpit of the Christian Church. To many of us so-called Christians today, are only Christians on Sunday morning and only when we are in God's house and the rest of our lives we live to some other creed, perhaps the dog-eat-dog creed. Most definitely if we are going to be Christians, it is a full-time job regardless of where we are and regardless of what we are doing. And so, with these principles and beliefs, I believe I have a right to preach on any subject pertaining to our lives because I also believe all of life can be applied through God's written word.

And so today I would like to speak out about our privilege, as citizens of the United States, the voting in elections.

Indeed, it is a high privilege for a citizen of the United States of America to step into a voting booth, as many Americans will do next week, and register a choice of candidates and issues. Though all of us were born free, the exercise of the right to vote should never be taken for granted. We have this privilege because other men held liberty close to their hearts, suffered for it, even died for it. This privilege of voting was not achieved by ourselves; It is a part of our heritage.

Men down through the years from the time of the first settlers in this country have fought and lost their lives that freedom and liberty could be maintained. One of our greatest faults in this country is our complacent attitude and an attitude of not caring. We say what can one person do but did we ever think of what would happen if all people had this same attitude. There would be no official to vote for because that's how dictators start taking over.

We should accept this privilege with the appreciation, which is the recognition of its great value, with the appreciation that is thankfulness, and with the appreciation which increases the value of our act of voting.

Indeed, it is a privilege and if we do not think so perhaps, we should talk to someone who has lost this privilege. Perhaps we ought to live in a country where we have nothing to say about who runs our government. I'm sure we would change our attitudes and minds real quickly. As Christians, I know we feel this privilege more than a person that is not a Christian and rightly so. I'm also sure being a Christian, we would not want to live in a country where the people could not have the privilege of voting for the candidate of his own choice.

Secondly, voting is a great and serious responsibility. Jesus laid down the principles that his followers should "render unto Caesar the things that belong to Caesar." To our nation belongs our serious consideration of its welfare, our intelligent vote, and our patriotic service. Slackness or negligence is treason to our country's best interests.

I wonder how many of us really consider the issues, try to find out what the candidates stand for or what the other issues besides the person running for office are all about. Nearly every year there are amendments, bond issues or some other issues to be voted on by the voter and every year there are thousands of people who never vote on them at all and still many others vote 'no' on everything because they feel this is the best thing to do since they do not know anything about them. How many of us try to make any effort to find out what these issues are about and then voice our opinion by our actual vote? Not too many, I'm sure. Don't you think that since we are exercising our privilege the least we can do is to do it to the best of our abilities? This is why in a years gone by, votes could be bought because people (you and I) are too lazy to find out the truth or we just plain do not care. I tell you we had better start caring pretty soon or it's going to be too late.

This year with permanent registration going into effect, the people have to be begged to register. Do you think persons should bug us to register so we can exercise our privilege of voting? We should draw enough concern and interest in our communities, states, and nation without someone prodding us. This is our country we have the privilege of choosing whom we want. What more could we ask for?

As Christians our responsibility is great when it comes to voting. We should be willing to study the issues that are involved. This year there are two (2). The bond issues for new highways and the new state constitution. Don't form your opinion from hearsay. Check the issues for yourself. Make up your own

mind. Let your conscience be your guide. Know how you are going to vote before you go into the voting booth.

You know some of the ridiculousness things that happen nowadays would not have happened if we had taken an interest and knew what the issues were about. We have no one to blame but ourselves.

Thirdly, the Christian enters the voting booth with the awareness that “righteousness exalteth a nation and sin is a reproach to any people.” He knows that a nation that is not supported by morality will not stand. He knows that a true morality is undergirded by religion. He knows that in the voting booth his own life comes to a focus as he cast his vote. He uses his vote as an opportunity to exercise the mandates of his truest self.

As Christians it is our responsibility to know the candidates and what they stand for and then our responsibility to exercise our vote. If ever there was a place where we need Christian people, it’s in our public offices. These offices from the town through the county, state and nation are all important and deserve the very best people as candidates in them. The way they conduct themselves in the offices of responsibility and the examples they set for the rest of the people are important. We certainly do not need drunkards, gamblers, and dope addicts in any of these offices. These people are responsible for making and enforcing the laws that will govern the people and we need the best kind of Christian persons we can possibly get. We need people who will stand up for what is right and fight for it. We need people who will do something about some of the moral decay that is taking place in our country today realizing that the basis of a true morality is our faith and belief in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. Let us stand and vote for people whom we know are Christians and will always stand for what is right and good. Let us make sure that truly this nation is a nation under God as is stated in our Pledge of Allegiance to the flag. As we go into the voting booth to cast our vote the decision we make is up to us with God in our conscience as our guide.

Fourth, “where there is no vision, the people perish.” With vision then the Christian enters the voting booth. He truly seeks a better community, a better nation, a better world.

It’s true that people who seek public office should have vision. They should be looking forward to the future with new hope and new dreams of how this country can become a better place for us to live and for our children to live in years to come. These people have to be able to look beyond today to what tomorrow is going to bring. Certainly, they are not always going to make the right decisions. No human being can be perfect in his judgment. If he was, he would be God.

However, it’s our responsibility as Christians to enter the voting booth with visions and dreams in our minds too. Visions to see what a yes or no vote on the issues will mean now as well as in the future. Visions to see what a vote for a particular candidate will mean. And we should have visions of how we think our governments should be run. We should continually be seeking to find ways to make our community,

county, state, nation, and world a better place in which to live. This is our responsibility as Christians and as citizens of the United States. If we do not do this no one else is going to. It is up to us.

I firmly believe we cannot take this privilege of voting lightly. It is important to us all and as Christians we have even a greater responsibility.

There are many issues in this coming election on Tuesday. Study them. Know both sides and then decide for yourself what you think is right. Then exercise your privilege by voting.

Art thou a Roman? Art thou a in American? Art thou a Christian?

We Would Be Building

Scripture: II Chronicles 6:1-17

The text is chosen from Psalm 127:1; “Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that built it.” “Except the Lord build the house”- What does that mean? An architect planned the house. Contractors, carpenters, masons, plumbers, electricians, roofers, and others erected the house. The church goes forward by gifts of money from the hands of men and women. Is it not religious sentimentalism to say that the Lord built the house? What did he have to do with the building of it? I should like to answer that question, so that we may indeed see his share, be thankful to him, and be drawn closer to him in the forward movement of the church.

First of all, the Lord builds the house because he gives us “the spirit essential to cooperation.”

Our house is not built by the imposition of someone’s will, it is not the prolongation of someone’s influence, it is not a monument to human pride, it is supported by no taxation; it rests upon the voluntary contributions of time, talent, and money by people. This company includes little children and the aged, some who are poor and others with large substance, people of various temperament, diverse in the talents, varied in their vocations, strong in his own opinion. Each one varying in thoughts and desires, but altogether with one purpose in mind and one God to guide us.

Yet in spite of these differences, we build together - in unity and harmony. Our differences are lost in the common enterprise. There are no divisions among us. The lines of a hymn express our spirit. “Blessed be the tie that binds; Our hearts and Christian love; The fellowship of kindred minds; Is like to that above”.

We have “cooperative affection”. And this is placed in our hearts by Jesus Christ. This is the Lord building the house. To take a group of people as diverse as we are and to build or carry on the church, without income from taxation, without catering to the prestige and the pride of individuals, without any imposition of any kind, is almost impossible, except the Lord give us the spirit essential to cooperation. He gives this spirit to the group. He gives us this spirit individually. Those without it do not share in the enterprises. They drop out. We build because God’s touch is upon our hearts.

Truly, God’s touch and spirit must have been upon those of years gone by, those who work together in establishing this House of Worship in Fultonham. This very same spirit has persisted through the years in order to keep it going, and we pray it will certainly continue for many, many years to come.

Secondly - the Lord builds the house because he gives us “the vision essential to progress.” This vision is received when his people pray. Without such vision, the enterprise perishes. Progress is not automatic. No more can people go forward to build a church, without a dream in mind, than a contractor can build without a blueprint.

Words that Isaiah spoke in Isaiah 56:7 were repeated by Jesus as is recorded in Mark 11:17; “Mine house shall be called a house of prayer.” Truly any house built by the God should be a house of prayer. For without God’s help, we could have no church building, We actually could have nothing worthwhile.

Recall also the word spoken by God through the prophet Joel and quoted by Peter at Pentecost, “your young men shall see visions and your old men shall dream dreams.” It is by God’s working that the vision of Christian men is inspired, and the work goes forward. In this manner, the Lord builds the house.

If the young people of a church don’t see visions, I’m afraid that church will be headed for a fall. We need to be inspired, we need to use our imagination, we need to act, and we will if we really have God and Jesus Christ in our hearts. We will be doing things to attract other people, to hold on to ones we have and to especially keep our young people informed and educated about the Christian way of life. Without saying a word, what an example we can set by the way we live our lives each day, the kind of attitude we have towards life, the way we react to various situations that come up in our lives. This is the best possible teaching we can have, living examples of the Christian way of living.

And so, in a sense the Lord builds the home because he does give us the vision essential to progress. Solomon wished that the House of God might be magnificent, “great is our God, above all gods” but Solomon realized that God could not be confined to four upright walls.

From II Chronicle 2:5-6 we read; “Who is able to build him a house seeing heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain him?” The king’s spiritual perspective was right for “the whole earth is full of his glory” and even the human heart may be his temple.

Thirdly – the Lord builds the house because “he gives us the faith necessary to perseverance.” Anybody can begin a building, but not everybody can finish it. It is faith that lifts us from a low level of achievement to a high. It is by faith that obstacles are overcome, frustrations are refused, issues are met with high decisions, and the task is finished. It is by faith in God. By such faith anything can come to pass. In such expectancy great plans can be followed through to great accomplishments.

Such is God-given; it is God’s hand in the task.

Paul wrote to the Philippian Christians, “We are a colony of heaven.” (Phil. 3:20). Each church is a frontier settlement in the divine expansion which shall continue until “Jesus shall reign where-er the sun does his successive journey run.”

It certainly took plenty of faith in God for the forefathers to build this church here in Fultonham and kept it going since 1878. Oh, the building could have been built without God but there certainly would not have been any purpose or reason for building it.

Faith can move mountains. It certainly can if we have enough of the right kind. It's going to take plenty of faith in God on our parts to keep it going and alive in the future. Many people today are interested in getting into larger churches where generally the facilities are more varied, and the educational and recreational program can include more activities. But all in all, I feel we can be proud of our church and its programs, and we certainly pray that God is proud of it, also.

Fourth – the Lord builds the house by giving us the wealth necessary to pay the cost.

The house is built, the enterprise goes forward, under a Christian philosophy of wealth. This is known by us as Christian Stewardship.

The resources are God's; we are trustees of the wealth that comes into our hands. This trusteeship makes for a wonderful way of life. How it takes the sordidness from money! How enriching to life- to use everything, to earn, spend, save, give as a trustee under God's ownership! What an intimate relationship this becomes.

I'm sure that God does not want us to give him everything we earn so that our families can not survive but I'm sure he does not want us to have all the luxuries of life and give absolutely nothing to him. We all have to establish a goal in giving to God's work and stick by it regardless of what comes. Believe me if we will establish this goal and take it out first, I assure the rest of the bills will get paid. God does and will provide for us if we are willing to meet him even part way. Of course, the old standard of 10% is a good place to start but let us remember too that even tips for waiters and waitresses has gone up to 15%. We have to decide ourselves with God and our own consciences. Let us remember we would have nothing or be nothing if it were not for God and the least we can do is give back a small part of what he has given us.

So it is that God builds the home through the wealth in our hands, so essential to pay the cost. Don't forget this church or any church could not exist very long without money.

Fifthly – God gives us the love essential to expendability.

A woman came to her pastor and said, "Will you help me? I used to say that if I had the money I would do so and so – I had the vision, the dream of doing good with it. Now I have the money. I feel that I ought to use it as I said I would, but I just can't give it up. I can't let it go. What is the matter with me?"

How often people, you and I, find ourselves in a similar condition. Here is a person with an assured life pension; besides, he has an accumulation of some thousands dollars. This person is aged. Not yet can he part with any of his money. It is not expendable.

Here is a person with talent. The church asks again and again for its expenditure, but it is not expendable.

You have the vision, you have the wealth or talent; how much you lose if it is not expendable. Love. Let a man love God and let him love man, then money, God's wealth in his hands, becomes expendable. It is God's own love that kindles in our hearts, the love essential to expendability of wealth, talent, life itself.

Begin with Noah and his ark. Consider that early attempt at what might be called sublime architecture when men said, "Come, let us build us a city and a tower, where top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name."

The Pyramids are old and interesting. On a trip around the world an old man refused to be interested in them. He dismissed them with these words, "the tombs are tyrants, built by slave labor."

How little influence the pyramids have had compared with the Parthenon in Athens; "the world's finest building on the world's finest site." It was built to the glory of Greece.

St. Peter's at Rome was built by exploiting the fears of men. Someone asked, "Why don't we build today great cathedrals like those built before the Reformation in Europe? Someone else answered, "Because we no longer believe in the hell of fire and brimstone." "The cathedrals we build today are built with higher motives than escape from hell.

How many build to enlarge their name and extend their influence beyond their death. The Taj Mahal built by Shah Johan as an experiment of love for his queen. With what great motives do we build today?

And so, this house of worship would not be standing here for us to worship in if it were not for God and the way he has guided people in the past. Let us pray that he will continue to guide and direct men's lives in the future. (our lives) Truly this is a manner in which the Lord builds the house. Let us continue to build in the future.

Wider Horizons

Scripture: Romans 10: 9-18

The text is chosen from Isaiah 43:9; “Let all the nations gather together and let the peoples assemble.” On this World-Wide Communion Sunday, let us realize that all Christians everywhere are partaking of the bread and wine as we are about to do. This is the one thing in this world that brings us all together in Jesus Christ.

William Barclay relates this story. I was at a conference of ministers in a holiday home in Ayrshire, not very far from Glasgow. Before the conference began, I was checking up on the lectern from which I was to speak. Now it so happens that I had been in this holiday home often before, and I think I must have used the lectern before, but for the first time I noticed a little plate on it. This is what it said: “This church furniture including the brass-work was made by the member of 159 MU during their spare time for the Church of St. Christopher. The church traveled from Egypt to Italy during the North African campaign 1947-48, when it was set up in Ismailia, Tripoli, Grove de Colle, Bruidin and Naples.” And when I read that, two things happened to me. I touched that lectern with a new respect and suddenly I had a vision of the wider horizon of the Church.

Here I was standing in a peaceful Ayrshire sea-coast town in a quiet and lovely house, but my hands were on a lectern which had seen the sands of Egypt and North Africa, the blue water of the Mediterranean, the cities of Italy and had gone with men who had fought and prayed and maybe died. It is good for us sometimes to get a glimpse of the wider horizons. It may be that one of the great dangers of the Church is the wrong kind of congregationalism, the kind of congregationalism that cannot see beyond the walls of the building in which it worships and the congregation of which it forms a part. The Church is bigger than that.

This, we are especially reminded of on World-Wide Communion Day.

We have to think of the world-wide nature of the church. I suppose that it is a literal truth to say that the church is the only institution in the world which has in its members of every nation and country under the sun.

Men dream of world government in the political sense of the term. The only place in which world government comes anywhere near to realization is the church. The church is not the possessions of a nation or a country or a color; the church is as wide as the world, and even the tiniest congregation is the smallest village or hamlet is the most remote place is part of something which has gone out to the ends of the earth.

World-wide communion cuts across political disagreements, economic dislocations, racial tensions, and all

other divisions and misunderstanding, that separate men from one another. When we as a people actually put God first in our lives, these other things I have mentioned became trivial and actually have a solution for them. God is bigger and greater than anything and all things can be worked out through his power and guidance. Partaking of the Lord's Supper together throughout this world of ours, we will begin to realize this and appreciate the virtues of the Christian Church.

Second, we must think sometimes of the history of the Church. It is the simple truth that the Church existed before most of the nations which exist today.

When we sit at the communion table it is well to remember that we are sharing in the only ceremony in the world which has been observed somewhere every single day for something like the last nineteen hundred and thirty years. There is no continuity in the world like that. Nowhere are we so much in touch with history as we are in the church.

Through the observance that began at Christ's own table, Christians are able to sense their union with the earliest disciples, with the great figures of church history, with all who have partaken of the sacrament through the ages.

We who live in a rational universe, where real results come from real causes, must ask what is the power that has carried the Christian church to victory over paganism – Is the Greek church – a suffering church – on the round sacramental wafer there is a cross and the words, "Jesus Christ conquers." That is the story of the Christian Church.

Once a church, which possessed no paid ministry, no priesthood, no cathedrals or church buildings, no endowments, no salaried bishops or secretaries, and no publicity except the lies told by its enemies, held a disintegrating world together and laid the bases of a new civilization. Its power was not its own. What it had was a gift. The gift was given in meetings of little groups who assembled before dawn in houses on back streets and in caves under Rome. Those who gathered heard sermons only infrequently when men like Paul, the sailmaker, came their way. But whenever they met, they broke bread with gladness and singleness of heart, and shared the cup of their covenant with Christ. What did that church have that we do not have today?

Thirdly - we do well to remember that in the church we are more than in touch with the whole world, we are more than in touch with almost 20 centuries of history; we are in touch with eternity. In it, we are always compassed about with the great cloud of witnesses. In it, we are surrounded not simply by the greatness of time, but also by the infinity of eternity.

Hidden in the haunted headwaters of the Amazon in a dense jungle area lives Tariri. He speaks before his conversion, "I hate the white man and stand ready to kill any who come into my domain. I am ruler of the Seven Rivers." Tariri was baffled when he saw this half bird, half canoe, swooped down from the sky and invade his domain. He was even more mystified about the motives of the strange arrivals, including the two

women who were going to live with his people.

They brought God's word to him.

Tiriri speaks, after his conversion, "take God's word everywhere, showing that you love him! We want to send many people to those who were our enemies. We will teach them about God, and as he has asked us to do." Truly God is in touch with all places of this world, including the farthest places.

It may be that our whole conception of the Church is far too small. And far too local and far too parochial. Most of us are really pretty smug with us? We make sure we have everything that is needed, and we are not too concerned about others. This is not the purpose of God's church. Missionary work in this country and abroad are important. As Christians, we have been charged with the responsibility of bringing the gospel message to all people everywhere. Since all of us cannot be missionaries, we have to support those who are with our prayers and money. Truly, God is not just in the USA. As John Oxenham wrote of the worldwide church: "in Christ there is no East or West."

There is suggestiveness in the fall scene following the Battle of Fredericksburg, defeated by John J Pullen. In his historical study, "The Twentieth Maine." at Fredericksburg, the regiment which was to become one of the great units of the Union Army, drew its first fire as a raw, undisciplined mass of recruits - and its losses were heavy. Pullin records how they buried their dead, and then suggest that on this field, where they had been sheltered by the dead, they found their sense of obligation. During the ensuing months of battle the roster of the living, decreased, and the roll of the dead grew longer, but together the living and the dead were "part of whatever it was that made-up the consciousness of the regiment."

How truly a parallel picture, etched on the memory of time, portrays the Christian fellowship: As we read from Hebrews 12: 1-2, "therefore, since we are surrounded by so great, a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and every sin which clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance, the race that is before us, looking to Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God."

Let us at least sometimes lift up our eyes and look to the wider horizons for truly. They are wider and broader than most of us realize.

May all Christians this day truly feel the presence of our Lord and Savior as we sit at his table and partake of the bread and wine in remembrance of him who died for us.

Ways In Which B.F.C. Serves the Community



Many of us struggle with stress, depression, our weight, and other debilitating issues. "Living the Interior Life" is a program that teaches the individual affirmative prayer, meditation techniques, cognitive behavior therapy, overcoming addiction, physical exercise and proper nutrition. In addition, we offer guidelines on how you can learn to effectively apply these principles in your life daily & with God's grace overcome many of life's difficulties that until now you just simply believed you had to live with. Learn to overcome many difficulties and be liberated from them forever. We offer monthly workshops that are available in your church or organization. Call for our free booklet or schedule a convenient time that we can meet to discuss the benefits of this program to your congregation or organization. We are available anytime to serve your needs.

In 1985, Braman began to witness his recovery from addiction in the New York State Correctional Facilities. Braman has presented programs since that time in many facilities including : Greenhaven, Fishkill, Downstate, Summit, and several local and county jails. It is a thorough program using the 12 step method of recovery, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy and Meditation techniques as well as a program for dealing with violent behavior. In addition, our program helps to provide clarity concerning the negative learned behavior that unfortunately comes out of some families. If you are a correctional facilities administrator please contact us to schedule a convenient time when we can meet to discuss the program. If you are an inmate please contact your counselor to request a copy of our free booklet. There is no need to continue to live in a manner that does not contribute to the well being of yourself and society. Write, call, fax, or email us. May your lives be blessed as you seek greater heights of awareness. Peace to you.

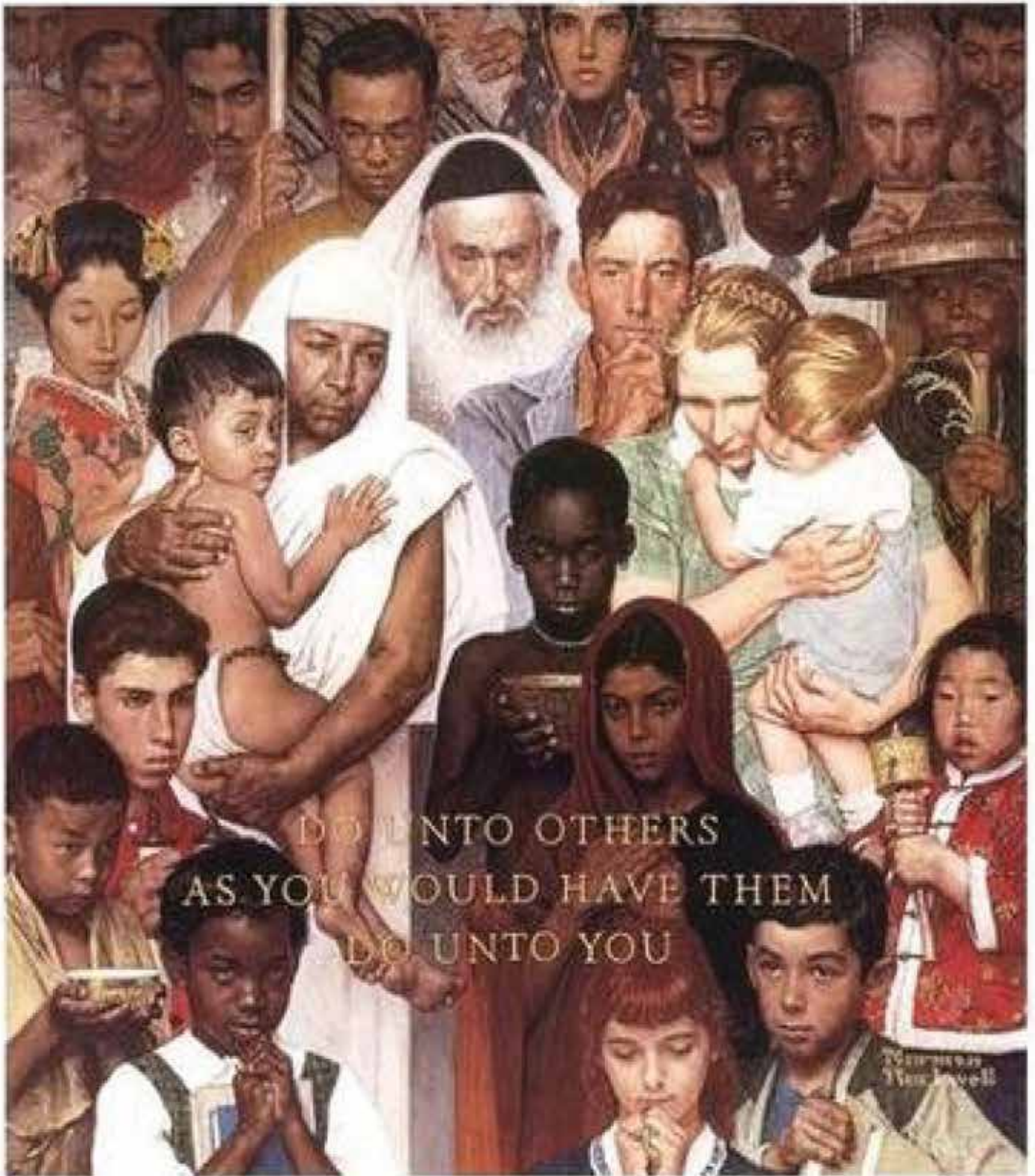


Millions of us suffer needlessly from addiction & depression. The reasons for this are many. In this program we emphasize the 12 step method of Recovery, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, and Meditation techniques to overcome difficulties. We also rely on God's grace to help you be lifted from your dilemma. If you or a friend or loved one suffers from difficulties surrounding addiction or depression please contact us for our free booklet. In addition we are available to schedule a convenient time when we can present a workshop for your organization to study these principles. All of the principles really are not new, but when presented together in one workbook and when applied in one's life, miracles can occur. Be sure to call, email, write, or fax us. May you be blessed as you seek greater joy & a truly happy life.

Learn about the journey of Love for some of the children in the state of Assam, India. In 1944 the late Julia Rose founded a school and boarding facility called Asapalli (A Village of Hope). Learn how you, your church or organization can donate to support the children of Asapalli. Write, fax, or e-mail for your free booklet: "A Tribute to Asapalli". In addition, it would be our pleasure to talk with you or give a presentation to your church or organization. Call us anytime. Many blessings to you.



Located Southwest of Calcutta, India, Orissa is the home of "Human Care Trust". Learn about our fellow brothers and sisters who struggle to provide education, healthcare, and economic enlistment to the people in the state of Orissa. Read about a few young individuals who have formed "Human Care Trust" and have devoted their lives to helping their fellow brothers and sisters. A free booklet is available upon your request by email, letter, fax or phone. We would be happy to schedule a convenient time when we can meet to present "Our Friends of Orissa" to your church or organization. We thank you!



NORMAN ROCKWELL
"DO UNTO OTHERS"