

*B*raman *Foundation of Charities*



The Fultonham United
Methodist Church

The Sermons of Richard W. Braman Vol. 5

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Love Thy Neighbor

65 Country Colony Rd. | Queensbury, NY 12804

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Kindness

Scripture: Ephesians 4:17-32

Text taken from Ephesians 4:32: “Be, ye kind to one another.” We have a home with the husband and the wife are about to be separated, could this have been averted? Perhaps, a little bit of kindness, by a little understanding, by a little give-and-take by both parties. We have another home that is a nest of juvenile delinquents—students a delinquency tell us that most likely there was a lack of kindness, call it love, in the home. No family life of sharing ideas and thoughts, each one going their individual ways. No thoughts of Jesus Christ or Christianity.

We then have a group of Africans struggling any foreign country who break off their studies and return to their native land because their hosts were unkind. How far a little kindness would go toward the solution of racial problems in our own country and our world today. We need to put one another in the other person shoes before we start condemning and criticizing. Those who would become peacemakers in the world, even between nations, might well begin with the action of kindness in daily life.

This sermon is not a little homily or ethical talk about a virtue. Let us hope it touches the deeper issues of life and bears upon our most serious problems.

First of all kindness is original in man. That may not seem to be true, but the clue to this statement is found in three (3) places. First, it is found in the dictionary—the word ‘kind’ is one that roots back, like so many of our good strong words, into Anglo-Saxon speech. It is allied to ‘kin’, the kin of kinsfolk. Pushing it back still farther, it is related in our Latin tongue to ‘natural’: natural, kindred, kindness. By the dictionary, we might say, “it is natural to be kind because we are kin.”

Second, we find it in the Bible. The ancient story in the first part of Genesis tells us that, “God saw everything that he made and, behold it was very good.” Surely kindness was an element in that goodness.

In the story that tells of the woman being made from the rib of man, we find Adam using words which are recognition of kind, “this is now bone of my bone, and flesh of my flesh.” She is my kind. She is my kin. It looks like an expression of kindness. Does the Bible teach us that kindness was original in man? I believe it does.

Third, we can find it in a scientific treatise. Some decades ago the social scientist were seeking out the most elemental social phenomenon or act. One of these men turn their attention and of his students to “the consciousness of kind” as the first social phenomenon. Adam’s recognition of Eve, if you please. She is my kind, my kin—a short step to primitive kindness. Another word in the writings of sociologists was, “mutual aid”, inherent in kindness. These sociologists, apart from the farther discussion of their theories, did root kindness far back in the early days of the race.

“Be kind to one another”—touches something elemental in ourselves.

Second, kindness is characteristic of God.

If kindness belongs to the intrinsic nature of man, and if man is made in the image of God, it is reasonable to believe that kindness belongs to the nature of God.

In James 1:17 we read, “Every good endowment and every perfect gift is from above, come down from the father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.”

The book of Psalms enters deeply into the experience of man. It gives expression to man’s experience of God’s kindness. Note the Hebrew word that is translated “mercy”, “steadfast love” and “loving kindness.”

Is not “loving-kindness” the loveliest word in the English language? From Psalms 144:2 we’ve read, “Blessed be Jehovah, my rock—my loving-kindness.” Other passages from Psalms that are worthy of note, Psalm 36:7, “How precious is thy steadfast love, O God?” From Psalm 32:10 we read, “many are the pangs of the wicked; but steadfast love surrounds him who trust in the Lord.” And from Psalm 51:1, “Have mercy on me, Oh God, according to thy steadfast love.” Kindness is natural with men, whether we sometimes think so or not. Kindness is original with God.

Third, kindness is incarnate in Jesus Christ. In kindness there are two factors—sensitivity and response. One can never be kind unless one is aware. Jesus noticed that the multitude was hungry. He was aware. Just noticing is a divine act, catching the coming hunger before it has clutched at the vitals. Jesus made ventures in human relationships by his acts of kindness. He was not, “the glazed eye and the blunted heart.” How kind to women, to Zacchaeus, to Peter, to his fellow sufferers on their crosses, to the Roman soldiers at the foot of the cross.

Whenever Jesus spoke hard words to the scribes and Pharisees was it not because of their cruelty in placing heavy burdens upon others? He was protesting against unkindness. Unkindness mutilates life.

We who know the story of Christ often forget or take for granted some things that are very impressive to those who have just received the Gospel. The kindness of the Master is one of these. It has been noticed on some mission fields, for example in untouchable or low cast Indian villages, that recent converts to Christianity are often more immoral than they were when they held by their old faith. They do not remain so, but how does one explain such a fact? It is simply that they have discovered the kindness of Christ before they have been deeply influenced by the other ethical implications of love. Jesus it’s to them like a soft hearted and lenient parent. If I fall, if I do this, he is good, he is kind, he will forgive me. And the new converts falls into sin. It is the kindness of the Master that has made its impression on their childlike minds.

Christ is the gift of God to the race. Christ is the character of God made flesh that man might see and hear and touch the kindness of God. From Titus 3:4, we read, “But when the goodness and loving-kindness of God our Savior appeared.”

Fourth, kindness is necessary in the followers of Jesus Christ. If we are to be his disciples, if we claim to be Christians into live Christ-like lives, we must follow his example. Otherwise how can we call ourselves Christians. There is no halfway, you know. We have to go the whole route. We must take up our crosses, Jesus said, “If any man would follow me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.” I can hear a man saying, “I’d like to see any man becoming kind in the midst of the competitive business life I live.” Difficult? Yes. Necessary? Yes.

There is no time that a man hates himself more, I suppose, than when he has been unkind. He has denied something elemental in himself. So this is the cross that many a man must take up when he follows Jesus Christ. He has to lift the submerged simplicity of kindness into dominance of character and of life.

By his direct teaching Jesus places us under the necessity of being kind. He extends kindness beyond kinship. “If you salute your brethren only, who do ye more than others? Do not even the Gentiles the same?” Kindness is more than “kin-ness.” “If you love them that love you, what reward have you?” “Love your enemies.” A cup of cold water is the symbol of kindness. It is by their kindness and their lack of it that the nations are judged.

Kindness is more than the act of noticing something. We need to follow through and provide what is needed. Today too many of us become concerned and talk; talk about it but that is as far as it goes. We need to extend the hand of kindness to others and help provide them with love and kindness God would have us as Christians provide.

You know, it is easy to love those that love us. But how difficult it is to love those that wronged us, our enemies if you will. But I know this can be accomplished through prayer with our Lord and Savior. He will help us to soften our hearts, or rather open our hearts and genuinely feel love for them. For as Christians we cannot hate anyone. And besides our lives can be so much brighter if we can get along with everyone and be happy and gay.

“Brother” Bryan, of Birmingham, was held up one night on his way home.

“All right” said the old preacher, “I suppose you want my money. Here’s three dollars—it’s all I have. And I invite you to church. I’m Brother Bryan, my church is just around the corner.”

The man began to protest, “I couldn’t...”

“But I want you to have it. I’m only sorry that you have to go to all this trouble. Let’s have a word of prayer: Oh Lord, bless this man. Bless his dear wife and two sweet children and his old father and mother. Forgive us that we didn’t look him up and help him, what made him stand out here in the rain and hold people up. Good night brother”

The next Sunday night there came in the collection three-dollar bills can together with the note: “Dear brother Bryan, I couldn’t take your money.”

Fifth, kindness is redemptive in the world. Catch the significance and the implications of 1 John 4:19, “We love, because he first loved us.” He redeemed love in us. He showered us with kindness and the flowers and the fruits of kindness began to grow. So why shouldn’t we shower others with it too. In a situation that needs correction, how often the method of attack is used and to no avail. Or we meet an issue with argument, and with no success. Some persons seek to dominate, lord it over, their fellows or family, with good intent. This too, unsuccessfully. How often the redemptive secret is found in being kind.

What is real good?

Order, said the law—court;

Knowledge, said the school;

Truth, said the wise man;

Pleasure, said the fool;

Love, said the maiden;

Beauty, said the page;

Freedom, said the dreamer;

Home, said to sage;
Fame, said the soldier;
Equity, said the seer.
Then within my bosom
Softly this I heard:
Each heart holds the secret,
Kindness is the word.

All sorts of problems in the world, family problems, community problems, racial and even international problems wait for solutions. Kindness purchases kindness in the world. Love purchases love. As Christians and followers of Jesus Christ we might and must try kindness.

Astonishment
Scripture: Job 38:1-21

I have chosen my text from 60th Psalm 3rd verse: “thou has to made us to drink the wine of astonishment.”

There is no doubt that the phrase “wine of astonishment” as it is used in the Psalm refers to the ‘bitter wine’ which the people have drunk, the adversity and hard blows under which they totter. “The wine of astonishment” – is it not also sweet wine? We think of it as the wine of wonder, without which life would be scarcely more than mere existence.

Somebody told me some rather astonishing news the other day, and then said, “aren’t you surprised?” I replied, “I’ve got past being surprised at anything these days.” When later, I thought about the answer I felt uncomfortable, for surely it is a sign of old age when we are no longer astonished and surprised. I do not mean necessarily old in years, but old in spirit for after all the only old people are those who are old in spirit and outlook. If we are no longer surprised at what happens in the world, then it is a sure sign that we are getting old in spirit.

When we fail to drink of the wine of astonishment surely the fires have gone out. To live as God would have us live somehow we must keep the sense of wonder alive, for without wonder there cannot be true worship.

Yeats tells how John Davidson, the poet, said to him: “the fires are out, and I must hammer the cold iron.” His days of greatness were at an end. When wonder is gone, all is gone.

The classic expression of this loss of wonder is in Wadsworth’s Ode. We come into this world trailing clouds of glory from God who is our home, and then the shadows begin to close. Here are Wadsworth’s lines:

Shades of the prison house begin to close
Upon the growing boy.
The youth who daily from the East
Must travel, still is Nature’s priest:
And by the vision splendid
Is on his way attended.

At length the man perceives it die away
And fade into the light of common day.

Nature is certainly astounding. But do we keep it alive? Or, are we like Wadsworth's Peter Bell, the wagoner?

A primrose by the river brim,
Or by the cottage door,
A yellow primrose was to him,
And it was nothing more.

Can we look upon all the glorious spring and summer and harvest time and see in it nothing but the commonplace? Can we look upon a waterfall and see nothing but a power going to waste?

*A haze on the far horizon, the infinite tender sky, the ripe rich tints of the cornfields, and the wild geese chasing high, And over upland and low land the chosen of the goldenrod:
Some others call it autumn—and the others call it God.*

What do we call it? Are you still astonished at the wonder of seed time and harvest, and at all the marvels of nature?

Whenever I buy a pack of seeds and put them into the ground I can't help but marvel at the thought that one day they will grow into flowers of varied colors and scents, or beans or carrots or onions. Not very big beans or carrots maybe, but that is probably my fault and not the fault of the seeds, for from a similar packet my neighbor will grow vegetables as large as baskets. Any person who has a garden, or even a window box, or anyone who has ever put a plant or seed or bulb into the ground and has never marveled at the wonders of nature needs very badly to drink deeply of the wine of astonishment, for he is in danger of forgetting God.

There is a great pageant of nature on hand for watching. Henry Thoreau's aunt made a disgusted protest over the doleful fact that Henry would not read the biography of the Scottish preacher, Thomas Chalmers, which she pressed upon him, but he would stand for an hour in the river listening to bullfrog. But for Henry the bullfrog was much more eloquent than Chalmers. Watching was his profession as well as his recreation and he made it one of the world's great arts.

Jesus said, "consider the lilies." We had better consider and watch them far more than we do. There is much to send to prayer in the oft-told story of the man who said that what he feared about the Judgment Day was to have a great voice asking, "Well, what do you think of my world?" because he would have no answer, "I didn't really see it, I was busy telephoning."

Have we lost the wonder of the growth of human life? That newborn baby, so small and yet so perfect; tiny fingers, tiny feet, but in miniature perfect in formation. Completely helpless, but in a few years he will walk and talk, and have understanding— and who knows the possibilities for good or evil that are in that small bundle of humanity.

Second, science is astounding. And what about the wonders of scientific discovery? The

launching of earth satellites, the exploration of outer space; sending a rocket to the moon? I can remember when I was a small boy, there were comic strips with Buck Rogers in them. We all thought that it was fantastic that a person could dream up such stuff. Little did we realize that it would ever come to pass, rocket ships and flying around in outer space. But today we are very close to what we read in Buck Rogers years ago. We used to say when something seems impossible of attainment that it was like crying for the moon, but with the conquest of outer space it is more than likely that with in a few years we will reach the moon.

Much has happened down through the years of scientific discovery to really astonish most of us. We can recall the story of the Wright brothers and how they were called the nuts. But today we think very little of the airplane that flies over our heads. There are many other discoveries that we take pretty well for granted today that really were astonishing at that time.

John Dunford tells the story that, when he was 13 he squandered six weeks pocket money you see his first airplane fly. He walked 8 or 9 miles to the park where this wonderful event took place and considered his hard earned pocket money well spent, for he was spellbound and awestruck as he watched with astonishment the contraption of struts and canvas rise several hundred feet in to the air. "Now", he says, "when an airplane passes overhead, I scarcely give it a glance. All the wonder has gone; I am no longer astonished." He says, "I remember that wonder when 10 years later, I heard my first wireless program, and again when 30 years later I saw my first TV program." No longer do we regard radio and TV as an astonishing wonder; we only grumble if there is some technical hitch.

And of course many things are happening in the field of medicine to help us control and even in some cases cure diseases. It wasn't too many years ago that polio was a dreaded disease and today a vaccine can be taken to almost assure freedom from it. And we have hopes that gains and strides will be made in the fields of heart, cancer and many other diseases.

However, we view with either wonder or apprehension these feats of modern science, is there not a danger that we should forget the wonders of God?

We think it marvelous that man should be able to send a rocket to the moon; and so it is. But let us not forget the God is the Maker and Ruler of a vast universe. He created the world and the whole vast, mysterious, amazing universe with its millions of stars and it's illimitable spaces. Look up into the heavens on any starry night, and can you do so without a sense of awe and wonder? The vastness and order and wonder of the universe God has made—God has made, not man – is utterly beyond comprehension. But the starry heavens with all their mystery having become to us so commonplace that we no longer gaze up with the astonishment of the Psalmist, who explained, "When I consider the heavens, the works of thy fingers, the moon and the stars which thou has ordained, what is man that thou art mindful of him?"

Yes, how commonplace everything becomes to us. We take so much for granted, as if it has always been there, As if it will always remain there and as if we have no appreciation of the things that do surround us. In this valley we take the hills on both sides pretty much for granted and do we really appreciate the fine soil that is beneath our feet? Have we become so engrossed in our own lives, our own concerns that we don't have time for what God has given us? We need to stop, stand still and listen for there is beauty, there is wonder all around us. We need to take the time to be astonished because that which God has created is astonishing.

Third, love is astounding. Here is the greatest wonder of all; that God who is the Maker and Ruler of the vast universe is also interested in every individual man and women and child. This was the startling thing the Psalmist could not understand. Many of us cannot understand it. Jesus didn't come to tell us about a God who is the maker of the vast universe; he did not teach us to pray, "Our maker,"-but- "Our Father". He told us that God is interested in the common flowers and even sparrows, and cannot be less interested in his children.

"Could we bear a religion which had not wonder at the heart of it? Could we revere of faith which didn't exhibit such a view of God that every month is stopped by his greatness and holiness? Think of the wonder of the Father's love, in that he delights to pardon and by pardon makes us liked himself."

And to think that God loves us regardless of our actions, regardless of whether we deny him, regardless of what we do to try to make him dislike us. His love for us is astonishing and isn't it wonderful to know that he does love us? All we need to do is to respond to him. He is always there. But to think that God, who has created the universe and everything in it, is still interested and loves each individual, that, I say is the most amazing thing.

If we ever lose our sense of awe and wonder about this we are lost indeed. God made the world, he saw that it was good, but this is the most astonishing thing, that God so loved the world, (you and me), that he gave his only begotten Son. He made— he loved— he gave. In this marvelous universe is there anything more astonishing than that?

Religion Without Revelation Scripture: John 14:1-9

I have chosen (2) texts this morning—first from Job 23:3; " Oh that I knew where I might find him" and from Isaiah 65:1; "I am found of them that sought me not."

I have placed the texts side-by-side because I want the sharpness of the contrast to light up the problem with which I am dealing this morning. In the first text we hear the voice of human experience appealing to a distant deity that seems indifferent to its call. In the second we learned that there are men who are conscience of God's presence when they are not anxious to find him. One of the most pressing problems of the Christian life is the apparent unwillingness of the spiritual world to reveal itself to those who are living in harmony with it. Rare indeed is the Christian experience, which does not, sooner or later, feel the chill of the irresponsible silence of the stars. "God sits in his Heaven; and does nothing", says Thomas Carlyle; but he was not the only man who has uttered that bewildered cry. Every minister is continually meeting such people: men and women who long for a revelation of God as the Father of their spirit, but have never been granted their desire.

A friend of mine tells me that she has never experienced God in her life. That she knows what a Christian is and wants very badly to become one but God has not been revealed to her. I believe she fails to see God all around her in the presence of the love of her husband, in her friends, even in the air she breathes. She apparently wants God to speak to her and answer her that he loves and cares for her and she is looking for this revelation in the way others say God was revealed to them. There is apparently something between her and God that separates them and if this could be found she could say that God is real to her.

There can only be one answer to our problem of our desire for the revelation of God as the Father of our spirit. We must widen the conception of what we mean by God's presence and the manner in which it comes. We must recognize that what we call "a religious experience" is not the only medium through which God reveals his presents to the human soul. You see, God reveals himself to us in different ways. You say you can see beauty in nature; you recognize the sacredness of truth; you are conscious of the amazing goodness of which are common life is full; you know you could not live are day without the love that turns your house into a home—and yet you say you are not conscious of God's presence. The simple truth is that you are surrounded by countless evidences of his presence which you have failed to interpret these religiously.

We claim to be Christians and try to live a Christ-like life and if we really mean it, I do not know how we can lead a single day go by without thanking God for everything we have, especially our lives, our families, our friends. God has given us everything we have and he has given us so much that we could be on our knees all day all thanking him for it. And still we say that God has never revealed himself to us. I think it's about time we stop and look around for surely God is and has been revealed to us many times over.

Sometimes we fail to recognize the revelation of God. Take the case of a scientist, or mathematician, or a philosopher, whose life have been spent in the search for truth, but who says that he has never had a revelation of God. Take Julian Huxley, for example, who says in his "Religion Without Revelation": "the central motive of all my work is to widen the borders of the kingdom of truth." Well I think that his tests of truth are too narrow. When he says that he will not accept anything as true that cannot be scientifically verified, I think he has forgotten that you cannot get that kind of verification for spiritual realities. For the existence of God cannot be proven scientifically. But still his passion for truth remains.

If God is truth, (and the Bible teaches us that) then truth is one expression of his nature, and any man who feels the urge within himself to extend the truth is having a very real experience of God. Second—the same truth holds when we consider a goodness of the world. For in spite of all its evils, goodness is the light against which we become conscious of the darkness of cruelty and wrong. Regardless of what we say, goodness always wins out in the long run. It seems that it sometimes takes forever but we can definitely be sure of this. There are millions of people who recognize with gratitude the goodness of the human heart, yet they say they have never seen God, and, as a result are without religion. I'm sure all of us know persons that are good in that they are constantly helping others but these people do not associate themselves with God or the church. They say that they are not Christians and don't believe in the revelation of God. Now if there is a good God on the throne of the Universe, how to better could he reveal himself then in the goodness of men and women? When you read the lives of the good men and women of the world, or are yourselves the recipients of that goodness, or see its influence in the lives around you, how can you say you have no revelation of the Father? I simply cannot explain the goodness which flows into my life from the unselfishness and the kindness and the helpfulness of my friends except by seeing in their goodness the revelation of God.

Many of the most famous people of our time are unconscious of any divine leading, yet nothing wouldn't induce them to support any cause which they feel would hinder the coming of the Kingdom of Righteousness. Many of them can be found in the political world. There are members of all parties who would resign all hope of preferment to stand by some principle that is dearer to them than life. There are others in the ranks of commerce, waging continual warfare against the selfishness and materialism of our modern day. There are writers, musicians, painters, laborers, office employees, scientist, philosophers, doctors, lawyers, all

of them rendering splendid service to their fellows, but completely unconscious of any relationship with the internal and the unseen. The experience of these modern members of society faithfully following the light they see, hating with a burning intensity all things evil, and loving with a passionate devotion all things that are good—but have, nevertheless, to confess that they are without any sense of God’s presence in their lives, surely this is one of the greatest problems of the Christian faith. Most of us fail to recognize something when it is right before our eyes.

Third—in no human experience is God more surely present than in the very manifestation of human love. There is no one present in the church, I dare say, to whom God has not revealed himself in some measure in the loveliest of all divine revelations. In the unselfish love of a man for a maid; of a maid for a man, in the profounder of the love of husbands and wives; in parental and family love; in the sustaining and comforting love of life—long friends If you love be the truest name for God, how can he manifest himself more clearly than in the presence of love within the human heart?

Love at its best is indeed a revelation of the Father. The unselfish love of one heart for another is the most positive revelation of God this world will ever see. That is the secret of the abiding attraction the life of Jesus Christ holds for men, even when they have ceased to believe in the mysterious doctrine of his divinity. His life says to us: “have I been so long time with you, and have you not seen in me the revelation of the Father?” As I understand these words, they mean much more than conventional Christianity finds in them. I believe they mean that our faith in Jesus as Lord and Master will be of little value to us if it does not teach us that we are sons and daughters of the same Heavenly Father, and that, therefore, we must learn to look for the revelation of God in every unselfish life we know, and in every loving deed we share. If we can learn to do this, not a day will pass without the real presence being felt and known. With the many prejudices in our world today I sometimes feel that surely God has not revealed himself to us, for surely if he did the Negro would be free and the Jew would be free and we wouldn’t be condemning each others religions but we would work together in harmony and peace toward the goal of eternal life with our father.

Here’s a question to ask ourselves: “Is our love for the true and the good and the beautiful a revelation within our own personalities of the God who is the Father of all men, and who is himself the Source and the Fulfillment of all Goodness and beauty and truth?”

Bertrand Russell, in spite of his agnostic claims, wrote in, “The Impasse of Science on Society”, this amazing confession: “The root of the world’s problem is a very simple thing. An old fashioned thing. So simple that I am almost ashamed to mention it, for fear of the derisive smile with which the cynics will greet my words. The thing I mean—please forgive me for mentioning it—it’s Christian love, Christian compassion. If you feel this you have a motive for existence, a reason for courage, a guide for action. If you feel this you have all you need in the way of religion.” Do you have this kind of Christian love, this Christian compassion?

This is what I mean by religion without revelation. If these are the ways in which God reveals his presence, many people are more religious than they know. If any of us have been envying those who possess a more religious sense of the divine, let us envy them no longer, but look for God’s coming in our own high ideals of Love, Truth and Righteousness, for these are the reflection in the world around us and in our own souls, of the revelation we so greatly desire. May God truly be revealed to each of us in our individual ways.

A Workshop Bench
Scripture: Mark 6:1-6

Text chosen from Mark 6:3; “is not this the carpenter?”

I have read and reread the story in which a crowd of doubting and skeptical worshipers in a Jewish church listen to the preacher that morning and afterwards asked, “is not this the carpenter?” But it was only recently that those words sprang to life and I began to perceive their real significance. I closed the book and threw the reins upon the back of my imagination. And it certainly doesn’t do any of us harm at times to use our imagination.

I saw the shop opened to the cobbled street. Over the doorway is the sign: “Jesus Ben—Joseph, Carpenter.” Inside, the carpenter himself bends over a cedar plank, which is clamped to the bench. He wears a leather apron and hot sweat trickles down his face. He reaches for his knife. Now he takes up a mallet. The odor of newly cut oak and cedar drifted in from the opening doorway. A farmer enters and after conversing with the tradesman leaves. A shopkeeper, a householder, follows in turn. Now, he is sweeping up curly shavings from the workshop floor—they will serve, no doubt, to kindle a fire in the morning, for carpenters rise early in Nazareth to begin work before the full heat of the day.

I saw Jesus clearly for the first time in this unfamiliar setting; we seldom think of him as doing common labor or carpenter work. As a carpenter he spent six times as much of his life as he did in that other setting with which I was more familiar—“his public ministry.” For 18 years he toiled in his shop before going out to devote three brief years to the work in which we usually imagine him.

After leaving the workshop he received an anointing of the Spirit for the new ministry he was about to begin. But surely the peasant carpenter did not suddenly assume divinity at that sacred moment as though by some magic touch. It is impossible to think that this Jesus, mending a broken table, is less than the Jesus who mended broken hearts. During those 18 years he must’ve been working out in the hard school of experience the principles, which he was later to teach his friends. No! That Carpenter was the Christ. The Christ was a carpenter.

This is one reason why I feel it must be very difficult for a young man to graduate from school and go directly into the ministry. He is generally lacking so much experience; experience of working with and dealing with people. Seeing and trying understand how other people live and act and play. It seems to me that this experience is invaluable and cannot be gained unless you have lived it yourself. However I know there are exceptions, many men go directly into the ministry and are a success at it. But I still believe the man with the experience is much better qualified.

And so our Christ was a human man who knew hard work, and who knew people, their shortcomings and their better points.

The Carpenter! What a wealth of ideas the one word suggests. It suggests that, whatever else he was, “Jesus was a man.” This Carpenter hard at work, the strong muscles standing out on his bronze arms as he bends over the bench, is no phantom, no ethereal ghost. He is a real man of flesh and blood, living the life of a Galilean citizen. That was the way his customers saw him.

Ordinary toil was not beneath the dignity of this man. I wish that those good folk I hear complaining that their daily work is menial drudgery and beneath their dignity, would take a glance into this workshop. Perhaps they would take heart, and return to the task seeing a new meaning in them. A carpenter might remind them that's too soil one's hands and to bend a ones back over life commonplace task is not beneath the dignity of the Christ of God.

I know that each of us have our ups and downs and sometimes we complain about our jobs. Perhaps we feel we do not enjoy them. Perhaps we feel we deserve a raise. I myself feel this once in a while and when I do I always try to remember that God has given each individual different talents. All of us cannot be professional people like lawyers, doctors, etc., or we all cannot be managers. We have to settle for what we can best do and sometimes we have to settle for just a plain way of making a living. When I feel this way I also thank God that I do have a job and I ask him for guidance to do the best I can on the job I am working at and according to my God given ability and talents. I know that sometimes we start feeling sorry for ourselves and we think the grass is greener on the other side of the fence. Believe me, when this happens to you; ask God to help you. He will, you know.

Any customer employing this carpenter of Nazareth to do a piece of work could rest assure he was dealing with a conscientious tradesman.

This carpenter, of course, had business dealings with the public. It is all part of the daily round to chat with customers, work out an estimate, draft plans, quote prices, take down orders, enter a sales in his ledger, rendering his accounts, receive payments, make out receipts, and sign the name Jesus on them. In all these transactions his customers are sure they are dealing with an honest man. His prices are right. He is satisfied with a fair margin of profit. His accounts are correct in every detail. They know that there are no shady practices in the carpenter's dealings. He didn't think of money as some of the modern followers profess to do, as an evil thing. He must've handled a lot of it in his shop. He knew that money is neither moral nor immoral. It is non-moral. He knew that whether it is clean money or filthy lucre depends on whether it is gained by clean or unclean methods, and whether it is devoted to clean or unclean purposes, in short, whether clean or unclean men handle it. This Carpenter's money was all clean money.

In rustic lines, some carpenters express himself like this:

"I do not know right where his shed may have stood,

but often as I've been planning my wood,

I've took off my hat just when thinking of He.

At the same trade as me.

And I'll warrant he felt a bit proud like I've done.

At a good job begun.

So I comes right away by myself with the Book, And turns the old page and has a good look, At the text I have found that tells me as he. Were the same trade is me."

Often he might have been seen taking a Lebanon log, splitting it, hewing it, sawing it into the planks, fashioning from the some article for a Nazareth home. From that workshop air had gone out many a wheel, many a shaft, many a yoke which he had painstakingly shaped with his own hands— those very same hands which were to touch some suffer with tenderness and later, have nails driven through them on a cross. He was a Maker.

This is to live. Someone has said, To fashion something big or little, To feel it shape go under the hands,

to be able to say, after finish, “I made this,” It is to live.

“All things were made by him and without him was not anything made that was made.” This stupendous statement would affirm that, right back in the beginning, before the hills in order stood or earth received her frame, this carpenter was at work in his original home with his father, making things! He was a carpenter then.

Nor did he cease to be a maker when he left his bench at Nazareth. He is making things still. He who had built many of house, many a barn, many a stable, said one day, “I will build my church.” He began it then, and has been building it according to ever increasing dimensions, ever since. And he hasn’t finished building it yet.

The church, as one of his apostles put it, is a “spiritual house” build up of “living stones.” It is because he is building it with this living material that he must find a very great difference between building the church and building a home. When he built a home, he could fit every piece of material into its proper place according to the plan. Also he has a plan for his church however, he cannot place the pieces just where he wants them, for the reason that those pieces are living. They are personalities. They have wills of their own. He cannot fit them into the place for which they were planned unless they are willing to go where he wants them to go.

Sometimes we grow pessimistic about the church. We feel that we are not “extending” it very much. But it is not our work to build the church. That is his work. It is our work to be built. For the raw materials from which he is building it are the men and women.

Into the carpenter shop I see farmers drawing their broken plows, women sending their broken furniture, children hauling their broken toys. He was a mender. And in all this, coming events were casting their shadows before. The days came when “he went about doing good.” As he moved about from town to town, people brought to him their broken bodies, broken nerves, broken hearts, broken characters. His ministry was largely a ministry of mending.

An artist has portrayed a scene back there in the carpenter shop in which the boy is carrying a beam of wood across his shoulders in such a way that the light from the doorway cast the workshop wall the shadow of a cross. And the day came when other carpenters took wooden beams and made him a cross. With carpenter nails and mallet they nailed him up to die. But they did not stop him from mending broken things, for he is doing it still. And nothing is too badly broken that this carpenter can make it whole again.

Some bring him their broken hopes, crushed by disappointment or ruined by loss and he remakes them, giving them a new hope, which cannot fade away. Some come to him penniless, bringing their broken fortunes and he gives them a new evaluation of things and points them to riches which neither moths nor rust can corrupt. Some bring him broken hearts and “He binds up the broken hearted,” making it to beat again with a fresh courage and a new joy. Some bring him their broken characters, broken by storms of temptation or crushed under the weight of their sins and he remakes them, as he remade one could say, “If any man be in Christ he is a new creation.” All of these folks are proving that, after 20 centuries, this carpenter’s skillful” touch has not lost its ancient power. This man, this Maker, this Mender, is with them still.

Lifting the Level of Our Religion
Scripture: Matthew 25:14-30

Text is taken from Matthew 5:20; “For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.”

“And the heart of the eternal is most wonderfully kind.”

And what is our response to the wonderful kindness of God? It is intended that this sermon will help us to lift our religion to a higher level.

We might lift our religion out of and above the platitudinous. Platitudinous is the quality of being dull, insipid, trite, commonplace. Recall Job’s answer to the insipidness of his comforters. “Is there any taste in the white of an egg?” (Job 6:6) Religious platitudes are like a creeping plant in their affect. Stale religion is a stage in the process of religion growing sour.

“Insipid” is a good word to look at. The Church of Christ started in the world with a cutting edge to its truth. It came into the Roman life of the first century with a message so peculiarly different from the standards of life then current that it literally turns the world upside down. Then as it grew it became more reasonable, more sane, more strategic—in a word insipid. The glory and radiance had departed. So today the church has nothing to give but a weak sevenfold “Amen” of blessing on the standards of the world, if it has no skills revealed of alarm against the forces, which prey on human life, it is a mere bankrupt. If it has nothing piercingly Christian to say about the issues of the day, it is merely echoes in resonant, pious tones the safe generalities to be heard, everywhere thought throughout the land, what good is it? “Insipid”—a good word to look at, with a question in our hearts, “Lord is it I?”

First of all in lifting the level of our religion let us consider prayer. We might lift prayer out of the commonplace. The common place is immature, grooved, narrow prayer. Some adults still pray a “now I lay me down to sleep” type of prayer. The Lord’s prayer becomes as grooved as words in a phonograph record, requiring no thought in the utterance. Some prayers are too narrow. Several generations of students at Drew Theological Seminary will remember the prayers of Prof. John Faulkner. He began a chapel prayer, “Oh Lord, you ought to have seen the New York Times this morning.” One student remarked, “If the Lord was a little sleepy this morning, I’ll bet Uncle John woke him up.” On another occasion Dr. Faulkner prayed, “Now, Lord, there are three ways to fix up this matter (outing them), and I hope you’ll take the third way.”

Some of us have really never learned prayer only as a last resort after everything else is failed. And then we become disturbed when God doesn’t seem to answer them. Jesus Christ taught us to pray, “Thy will be done,” not “my will.” First of all, I believe prayer has to be a daily art, not out of habit, but because we feel the need and desire within ourselves to converse with our Lord. Each of us needs to spend a few minutes each day in silence with God and we have to learn to be still so that we can hear him talk to us. We definitely need to lift our prayers out of the commonplace so that they do have meaning.

Second, let us consider our giving. There is virtue in regular giving. But the habitual and regular may become the enemy of spiritual growth and a larger usefulness. A conference leader of youth told the group about the spiritual thrill he had as a young man when for the first time he put a \$5 bill on the collection plate at a church service. The next Sunday morning there were five, five—dollar bills on the plate at the

conference service.

Quite often our giving becomes a habit. We know that we are expected to give and we place our usual amount in the collection plate. But we really do not give because we have a feeling of gladness or because we want to. Little do we realize that everything we give to God's word will be returned to us a thousand times.

I know this to be a fact and to be true. Where is the pastor who does not know a person whose low morale would be lifted by putting a few extra dollars in the offering plate next Sunday morning? Many have lifted their sights and save themselves from the deadly grooves of meaningless habits by the practice of stewardship. In our giving and the amount we give, I feel we should consider and remember one thing; that we would not be able to give at all if it were not for God, for he gives us everything we have. The least we can do is to give back a small part of what he has given us.

Third—the amounts and way we serve our Lord should be considered. Many of us possess talents, that God has given us that we never use. We say that we cannot do something because we have never done it before or because it has never been done. Regardless of how little talents we think we possess, the Lord has use for each individual. Many of us should stop and think of how much time we actually spend in this kind of service. I'm sure we would be surprised for very few of us extend ourselves too much.

In our Sunday school, for example, wouldn't it be wonderful to have a surplus of persons that would be willing to teach a class? How many times have we started Sunday school on Sunday morning, having to double up classes because we didn't have enough people available to teach?

If the Lord absolutely demanded of us that we should spend at least one hour per week in his house, do you think this is too much to ask?

Why is it so difficult to get people to work for the Lord and the church? And why is there constantly a shortage of men going into the ministry? Perhaps the answer to these questions is that not enough people have actually experienced God in their lives and therefore do not have the sense of devotion that is needed for them these kinds of service. Perhaps we all need to ponder these questions and answer them in our own consciences.

Next let us consider worship. Halford Luccock once made a plan for what he called, "divine disorder" in the church. He called for church services with some spontaneous movement of the spirit in them. He wrote, "I dread the announcement on the bulletin boards, 'Service, Sunday morning at 11:00 AM as usual! Isn't that what is the matter with us—too much as usual?"

Some of you think since the pastor called on us, we had better go to church today, to pay back his visit. I'll say this, that regardless of how many calls a pastor makes, the people will not come to church if they don't feel within themselves the need for worshiping God in his house. I hope people don't come to church to merely please the pastor.

Fifth, let us consider morals. Remember the words of Jesus, "except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, yes shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven." The Pharisees had religion all right, but it was expressed in platitudinous words and stereotypical actions.

There is much insipid morality; afraid- your-go-to-hell morality, code morality, alms in-the-market-place

morality, Jack Horner morality. There is always a possibility of a little more of the extra-mile variety, also of the turn-the-other-cheek, love-your-enemy, and secret-service varieties. Perhaps we should start living what we say we believe, showing what we believe by the lives we live.

What would you say is the most deadening experience a human being can suffer, one that takes the light radiance, power out of life? What in your opinion takes “the first fine careless rapture” from us? Many people have discovered that it is the wrong they do in their lives, for which they have not sought forgiveness, made restitution, nor forgiven themselves. Guilt is the greatest of all depressants to enthusiasm. So if you have anything like that pressing on your mind, your conscience, your soul, get it off; cast it away. And you will rise like a bird, and life will be so exhilarating and thrilling that you will not recognize it. “For in him we live and move, and have our being.”

We might respond to the love of God by lifting the level of religion from the dull and deadening to the enthusiastic.

Religious enthusiasm once saved a nation. W. H. Fitchett, in his book, “Wesley and His Century”, describe the moral landscape of England in the early days of the 18th century: “England was exhausted of living religion. It was black with wickedness. It’s ideals were gross. It’s sportswear brutal; the public life was corrupt; it’s vice was unashamed—religion was for the most part morally impotent—it’s suffered from Arctic fog and was frozen with Arctic chills.”

Dr. Fitchett then asks the question, “What saved England?” He answers, “a spiritual revolution saved the people.” Faith was rekindled. How did that come about? By enthusiasm! One man’s religion glowed in his heart until it burst into flame—another man’s heart caught fire—the flame was contagious until England was saved.”

“The spark of heaven falls—who picks it up?” The love of God comes down upon us—who responds? How pitiable the person who never responds with enthusiasm! How dead the person who has never rooted for the team! Have you never been lifted up to the seventh heaven of delight because the Cause had won a victory?

Why should we not get into God’s big game? Why be like the children in the market place who refused to play either wedding or funeral? Does God’s intense enthusiasm for you leave you dull and blasé?

How uninteresting things became when they are routine and we have no enthusiasm for what we are doing. We definitely need enthusiasm in our religion, the way we live, the way we provide service, the way we worship and the way we play, otherwise eventually we have lost everything we have gained. In response to the love of God we might give our religion open and empathetic expression.

We recall Donald Hankey’s phrase, “Inarticulate Christians“, the words applied to many.

Some are fearful of exposing their religion because they do not want to be thought of as hypocrites. That’s good as far as it goes. God defies hypocrites. But why not be honest? There is hypocrisy of understatement, as well as hypocrisy of overstatement. Why not be honest? Acknowledge with gladness the goodness of God in your life. There is plenty to acknowledge.

We can give open expression by means of speech, manners of life, consecrated service. A great minister

described the church she was serving as “clogged by a glut of un-utilized grace.” How wonderful if we asked questions would open the valve switch let the grace of God flow through.

The president of a men’s club in a certain church announced to the group before him that he was determined that the club should do more than eat dinners. He outlined plans for service on a higher level. Why not use your Christian religion, talent, enthusiasm, to lift some worthwhile organization to a higher level of action and morale? Why should a group meeting in the church be dull and stupid? Eating meals and conducting parties are not adequate expression of the lives of Christian men and women. Give expression to your religion where you are. We need not seek some distant field.

Our testimony will inspire the group morale of the church and the home. Let us give expression to our religion so that our community may be salted. Where is the community that doesn’t need the salt of Christian men and women and salty salt at that?

Giving expression to our religion becomes a factor in saving the world. It needs saving! The scientist will not save it, only God will save it, and that through our prayers, our witness, our Spirit-inspired ideas, our spirit and powered deeds. We must be about that business.

Regardless of how unimportant as an individual we may feel we are; how you and I and every individual lives his life have a definite influence in our church, in our homes, our community, our nation and our world.

More should have been said about all this being in the nature of response to God’s love. We love because God first loved us. We rise above the platitudinous, kindle enthusiasm in our hearts, give expression to our religion experience, only as we give response of our lives to the marvelous love of God. Let us now begin to truly lift the level of our religious practices.

Rich in True Wisdom

Scripture: Colossians 3:12-17; 2 Timothy 3:16,17

Text is taken from Colossians 3:16; “Let Christ’s teaching live in your hearts, making you rich in true wisdom.”

There are many other things suggested by our Scripture reading this morning which enriches the lives of men and women who treasure Christ’s teaching in their hearts. That Christ’s teaching live in your hearts, it will make you rich in the spirit of forgiveness. Love will dwell in your hearts. Peace will abide in your hearts. Joy will rise in your hearts and find outlet in praise. A spirit of thanksgiving will marvelously enrich the life.

It is the making of us rich in the true wisdom that now engages our attention. The growth of wisdom is only one effort of Christ’s teachings when we let it live with in us. But it is vital.

First of all let Christ’s teaching live in your heart; it will help you build on strong foundations. That surely is wisdom, to build upon foundations that cannot be shaken. Jesus emphasized this point. He said that anyone who hears his words and do with them is like a wise man who built his house upon a rock.

A wise builder will make sure of his foundation. For we all know what will eventually happen if we don't build on a solid foundation. It is the same with the living. We need worldly wisdom, wisdom of the good businessman or the good craftsman, and Jesus did not despise these. Life can be a failure through mere carelessness or lack of skill or knowledge.

But there is another kind of wisdom, the insight that sees what is right and true; the spiritual mind that discerns the will of God and discovers the meaning of life. This wisdom grows and develops in all sorts of ways when the teachings of Christ are rooted in our minds and hearts. It is imperative in the right handling of life.

A good businessman certainly cannot remain in business very long if he does not make a profit. Nor can he possibly stay in business if he continually tries to exploit his customer; for eventually he will have no customers and no business. He therefore has to be honest and above board, being fair to his customers and earning a fair profit for himself.

Along the same lines, I'm sure that every successful person will sooner or later discover that he cannot keep everything for himself because it will be of little use to him when he is gone, for we cannot take it with us. We all learn that we need to share some of our good fortune with those around us that need our help. I'm sure that we will soon to discover that this is the will of God for our lives and that Christ would have us do this.

We will discover whatever we give in Christ name will be returned to us ten times over and the satisfaction of joy we obtain is a far more value than the returns.

We need wisdom in the problems of our own interior life. Would it be too much to ask ourselves to read the Sermon on the Mount, and then to ask ourselves again what would happen if we permitted this teaching to live in our hearts? Would there be enrichment of our lives by true wisdom? How many of the other problems of our inner lives would be solved? Do you think we would find that peace and contentment we are looking for? There is no doubt in my mind that the answer to all these questions is yes, for if we truly accept Jesus Christ into our lives as our Lord and Savior, we also accept his teachings and these things results in our lives.

Second, let Christ's teaching live in your hearts; it will keep you on the right road.

It is by the teaching of Christ that we have a lamp for our feet and a light for our path. A man wrote these simple words: "One night when driving, I turned left instead of right. The road took me for farther and farther from my destination. I had a hard time getting back on the right road." That simple experience is a parable of life. Let us say that sometime in your life you did not take an opportunity that came your way for a better job. You felt you had more security in your old job. Suddenly one day, you were notified that your old job was being abolished, and the new job you were offered had been filled by someone else. You find yourself without a job and have to take a lesser job in order to make a living. Several years go by before you are finally back where you started from originally. Several years have gone by before you get back on the right track. I know that sometimes we turn down opportunities because we have a feeling it isn't for us or perhaps we feel if we wait we can do better. But did you ever stop to think that Christ would gladly help you to make such a decision. He will guide you on the right road according to the masters will for our lives.

And I believe that this is true in many other instances. Sometimes we fall to temptation and sin, and our lives really hit bottom before we finally realize we are on the wrong road and it takes a long time to get back on the right road and living a Christ-like life.

If the teachings of Christ give us wisdom on the right road, how important is it that we should let them live in our hearts?

The road winds uphill. Christina G. Rossetti wrote,
“Does the road wind up hill all the way?
Yes, to the very end.
Will the day’s journey take the whole long day?
From morning till night, my friend.”

How often our problems come from our relationships with one another for these we need the wisdom of Christ. By His wisdom we would take the road of love. But the fact remains that no one does take the road of love until Christ has opened his eyes to see all men as brothers and children of God. This definitely is true in the racial situation in our country today. I know that it is easy for us to say we believe this, here, where the problem isn’t as deep as it is in the South but, still the fact remains that God has created all of us and we are his children, equal in his sight regardless of the color of our skin or nationality.

Third—Let Christ’s teaching live in your hearts; it will enable you to handle power. Modern knowledge has deepened our need for the wisdom of Christ. We need his wisdom to handle the power which science has put into our hands. In Tennyson’s words, “Knowledge grows but wisdom lingers.”

We definitely need wisdom and Christ’s guidance in the use of the atomic and hydrogen bombs. We need to develop uses to help him live instead of destroying it. And who knows where and what the exploration of outer space will lead us. We certainly pray for wisdom, for guidance, or direction as we probe deeper and deeper into the heart of this universe.

Our spiritual insight has not kept up with our modern scientific discoveries. This is the root of our troubles and our fears. There is only one way through: “Let the teaching of Christ live in your hearts, making you rich in true wisdom.”

This happens as we expose our minds and hearts to him without reserve. There must be no defense against his light, no armor of pride or fear against the penetration of his truth, and equally no mistrust of his guiding and grace.

Fourth—Let Christ’s teaching live in your hearts, “the truth will make you free. If ye continue in my word”, said Jesus, “Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free.”

How often do we live in the grip of false ideas, cheap views of life, wrong attitudes to one another and to God? Most people have habits which keep them in bondage to the past. We do the same things, think the same thoughts, maintain the same attitudes to people, maintain the same resentments and prejudices year after year. Only the truth as Christ reveals it can open our eyes, loose our chains and set us free. When Christ’s truth lives in our hearts, we possess the priceless possessions of freedom.

The mind that is open to the daily lesson, that morning by morning receives its portion, that sweetly

accepts the teachings of the master, the life that waits on God patiently, and appropriates each lesson humbly, ever susceptible to divine influence, ever be responsive to the touch of God, ever obedient to the voice of God—of such, not of the proved, the ignorant, the self assertive, but of such simple, inquiring, humble souls, is the Kingdom.

If to let Christ's teaching live in our hearts helps us build strong foundations, keeps us on the right road, enables us to handle power, and sets us free for Christian living, we might well ask how we might bring it to pass that his teaching indeed lives in our hearts. First of all, we should recognize that Christ teaching is a living thing. It is the seed of which Christ speaks in the parable of the sower and soils. In it there is no question about the vitality of the seed which fell upon the various kinds of soil. Christ teaching is vital: it will grow. It is the Bible which contains the teaching of Jesus. It is the Bible which is the "Word of God." This is the Book of Wisdom. How can it live in our lives if we don't read it? How can it live in our lives if the soil of our hearts is not receptive?

Do we read our Bible regularly day by day? "The Bible doesn't belong on the shelf but in your hand, under your eye, and in your heart."

The Bible has been the most liberating power in history. In the 1st World War the Japanese who then occupied Korea destroyed Bibles wherever they found them. We know, they said frankly, that no one who reads this book will live in servitude and we intend to be your masters.

With the guide book in hand, a person can hasten from room to room in an art gallery, attempting to acquaint himself with the various schools of painting. But if time is no factor, it will prove very rewarding to sit quietly before one great masterpiece only, until one feels the message which the artist has captured in his picture.

So also it is with the reading of the Bible. From time to time all of us find it most valuable to study a special section or book in the Bible. But it also proves very helpful to center our attention on just one choice verse of scripture, repeating it over and over again to ourselves until it's eternal truths become part and parcel of our lives.

Let the businessman possess these riches. The basis for justice is the moral law that we find in the Holy Scriptures. Superimposed upon the code is the love and goodwill taught by Jesus, who writes into the human heart the desire to be just, kind and merciful. Let the physician be wiser and more successful by the wisdom of the book. Serenity and faith are factors in the maintenance of health. Here are assets for the everyday living of all—the teachings of Jesus in the Word of God. If we accept the word in our hearts, there is no question but that the seed will sink into the secret places of the soul and grow. Why not try it?

Enthusiasm Without Fanaticism
Scripture: Philippians 4:4-13(NEB)

Text is taken from II Corinthians 4:6: "For the same God who said, out of darkness let light shine; has caused his light to shine with in us, to give the light of revelation the revelation of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

"Nothing great," said Emerson, "was ever achieved without enthusiasm." If we look around we see how

true it is. Skill, intelligence, devotion, genius, have never been sufficient to build the society, a movement, a work of art, a church, a nation. Behind all that has left a lasting mark on the human scene there has been the impetus of enthusiasm. Without it men and women of genius have limped into obscurity, and movements that might have swept the world have trickled to a standstill.

Think of the church. What was it that carried the convictions of a handful of first-century Jews across the whole Roman world, and turned a despised and fragmented sect into the worldwide Church of Christ? A burning and soaring enthusiasm that nothing could quench. And regardless of what anyone says, nothing worthwhile has ever been accomplished without the leaders showing enthusiasm. Enthusiasm is the driving force behind any movement, enthusiasm of the persons involved. Once someone shows this spark of enthusiasm it seems to rub off on those around you until nearly everyone shows the spark.

“Nothing which does not burn itself can kindle a flame in anything else.”

First of all let us think together about the enthusiasm in the New Testament. The enthusiasm that tingles in the pages of the New Testament is not of course a wild, boisterous, backslapping cheerfulness that tries to chignon us into the belief that all is well in the best of all possible worlds. Nor is it a kind of religious frenzy into which we are to be caught up, leaving all our new native caution and common sense behind.

Enthusiasm in the New Testament reveals the literal meaning of the word. For it comes from the Greek that means, “the divine in us.” Originally it expressed the idea that we can be possessed by a spirit that is not our own; ourselves can be transcended. As we put it in English, we become, “beside ourselves.” Every great and living movement of the human soul is rooted in such an experience. The ordinary personality is invaded by a power from beyond, and the drab limits of our humanity are overcome. In both the ancient and the modern world there have been remarkable examples of “enthusiasm” of a kind.

Such experiences are not always necessarily good. Our nations can be invaded by the vastly different kinds of powers. For example a person could be filled with enthusiasm for the communist movement and this definitely would be a hindrance to our country and our government. Let us also take the life of Paul. He was enthusiastic in his work against the Christian church, persecuting and condemning the followers of Christ. Always believing that what he was doing was right. Then suddenly one day on the road to Damascus he was struck blind and became converted to Christianity and became a follower of Christ. From then on this enthusiasm was used to further the work of Christ and the church.

Hear him say, “For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel.” Almost anywhere you catch a picture of Paul in the New Testament, “eager beaver” could be the caption.

The enthusiasm of the New Testament is simple, unmistakable, and utterly benevolent. For it means the entrance into our lives of the living God. This is the “God in us”—the Christ who comes to shape us in his own image, enter into the true sons and daughters of God.

Second, let us think together about the enthusiasm of a Christian.

There can be no real enthusiasm in the church, no throb of joy and purpose in our lives, unless somehow we have known the invasion of the living Christ. Easter, for the early Christians, was not simply a conviction that Jesus had risen from the dead. It meant that his living spirit had possessed them. Pentecost was fused with Easter in their experience. And this entrance of God into their lives they did not think of as some

wonderful spiritual achievement. They were not men and women of exceptional mystical gifts, but people like you and me. What happened to them was simply a gift of God. It is something that can happen to anyone. For St. Paul, to be possessed by Christ was such a dynamic act of God's grace that he could only compare it to the divine feat of creation. "For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

All of us here this morning are, I believe, oh where in some degree that this possession of our souls by the living Christ is the open secret of the Gospel, and that without his transforming presence the name "Christian" has little meaning. This is why he came—"that they might have life and have it more abundantly." "To as many as received him to them gave he power to become the sons of God." "I live; yet not I, but Christ lives us in me." The enthusiasm of a Christian is in exact proportion to our personal realization of this truth.

Perhaps we wonder what is wrong with the church. Why do we have a hard job raising enough money to keep the church operating? Why are there so few people in church on Sunday morning? We ask these questions because we all know what Christians are supposed to do. We know that all of us profess to be Christians so why do we have so much difficulty? I can't really answer these questions for who am I to judge other people, perhaps we all have good reasons or excuses. However, I do know this and I believe that if a person, any person has truly accepted Jesus Christ into his life as his personal Lord and Savior, there will be no question that he will be in church on Sunday morning, he will give as much as is humanly possible to God's work and he will strive to serve the Lord in every way he can. Any and every church needs these kinds of people; otherwise it cannot exist very long. And when we have these kinds of people there will be plenty of enthusiasm, there will be activities, there will be the spreading of the Gospel to others and there will be support for missionaries and the work of God.

There are times of reality in which to make a commitment—a commitment that will be lived out in the valleys, over a long dry stretches when the vision is gone, but the memory lives nonetheless.

Woe to us if the mountaintop moments find us saying, "I'll wait until I have more perspective." "I'm not the type to follow-through" or "I must have time to assess my needs and determine the practical response." Sometimes we even say, "I'll pray about this," when we actually mean, "I'll defer the hour of decision until I am not up against that which in this hour compels me to say yes."

Enthusiasm is not necessarily wild and noisy. When Pittsburgh hit the winning homerun in the last inning of the World Series in October 1960, what I saw on the television were certainly "scenes of indescribable enthusiasm." But I have also seen enthusiasm in the eyes of a man showing me in the quiet of his study some rare book from his collection or felt it in every gesture of a friend talking of what he deeply believed in.

The only the only enthusiasm and the Bible recognizes, the real enthusiasm of a Christian church, is the enthusiasm of "God within."

A real church cannot be reconstructed simply with stone and mortar. This chancel could be remodeled, but our lives cannot be remodeled by axe and saw. This organ could be replaced by new one, but the praise of God cannot be reborn in our hearts by any human instrument. A church is reconstructed by the indwelling Spirit of God. It is the Word and Sacrament, symbolized in our church; that remodeled the lives of each one of us. And the praise of God springs from hearts possessed by the living Christ.

Well since we know about the enthusiasm in the New Testament and enthusiasm in a Christian should possess, what holds us back?

I'm going to suggest that many are kept from the realization of the Christian Gospel, held back from the full commitment to the Christian church—and therefore deprived of this constructive power— because they have confused enthusiasm with fanaticism.

Where do we draw the line between the enthusiasm that we so obviously need and the fanaticism that could tear us to pieces? The answer comes when we confront fanaticism with true Christian enthusiasm and recognize the difference. Let me try to summarize.

First of all fanaticism is read in in the darkness. It arises in the half world where men and women have no real guiding light but are grouping for anything at all that will seem to give them stature and significance. Listen to the word of Christian enthusiasm in: “God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts.” The God who shines into the heart of a Christian is the source of all light and truth.

Second, fanaticism is always motivated by fear.

The light that breaks in on the Christian believer is a reflection of the glory that shines in the face of Jesus Christ. In other words, it is the light of a perfect love. And, “there is no fear in love; for perfect love casts out fear.” The more, therefore, we yield to the entrance of that love, the love of one who died for all men, and rose again for all men, the more we shall be delivered from this swamp of fear, the breeding ground of all fanaticism and hate.

I can truthfully say that I have never known a religious fanatic and I don't know if there is such a thing. A friend of mine became converted to Christ overnight. He went from a person who had never considered Christ in his life, to a person who had Christ constantly on his mind, and his thoughts and in his speech. This happen several years ago and his enthusiasm for Christ has never ceased to exist. His family said that he had become a religious fanatic because of the enthusiasm he showed for the Lord. But they called him this because they did not understand what had happen to him. They had never had such an experience in their own lives and thus they confused enthusiasm with fanaticism.

Enthusiasm—When our Lord himself went to the rescue of a sad and sinful world and brought his touch of healing and hope, they said he was “beside himself”. He was in fact possessed, possessed utterly by the Spirit of God. Is it that Spirit of who we are afraid to have too much? The risen Christ is with us today as he was with the first disciples. And he says to us what he said to them: “It is I: be not afraid.” Among all the excesses that are open to us today, there is one good thing of which we can surely never have to much—“the light of knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”

The Portable Sacrament
Scripture: Exodus 3:1-10

Text is from Mark 1:17; “And Jesus said to them, “Follow me and I will make you fishers of men.”

It is not my intent to use the word vocation in this sermon interchangeably with job, occupation, or careers. It does not designate the means of earning a living.

It carries a root meaning from the Latin word “vocare”, an answer to a call.

It is used in a Christian sense: following a vocation in making one’s life a response, an answer of obedience to a word previously spoken by God himself. It is a response to God in whole life service.

Though a man’s vocation is not defined by his occupation or calling, his occupation is included in his response, in his whole-life service.

The proposition that one can make life a response, an answer of obedience to a word previously spoken by God himself, carries with it interesting and inspiring corollaries. It also presents some problems. For example, it dignifies to the point of sacredness every useful calling of man. It carries with it the expectation that as a man follows out his vocation he will from time to time receive the sanction of God, an assurance that he is in the place where God wants him to be and doing the work that is pleasing to God. The problems that arise are difficult and perplexing, thou, for example, of the drudgery job, of unemployment, of displacement by automation, etc.

The person who has not had enough training in a particular field and suddenly finds his job abolished because of automated machines and methods is soon lost and discouraged. He finds that he must train for a new and different kind of job. And of course, we find that today in our fast growing modern world that retraining of men for new occupations is a must. And so many men sometimes wonder if the work we are doing is what God would have them do.

We are still faced, however, with problems of those that lack the proper education, those that are unable to be retrained and are thus unemployed. Certainly these people cannot feel reassured by God that they are doing what God would have them do. But regardless of all these situations and problems I believe there is a place for each individual and that eventually all of will find this place.

There are some jobs that depersonalize human beings. We find this more and more in our world today where machines are replacing men and where the various new types of machines are taking the skill out of jobs and out of the men who operate them. But we realize that this has to be a natural result of our increased standard of living when in order to keep cost of products low enough so consumers can buy them, new methods and means of manufacturing these products has to be developed to help reduce labor costs. The best example of this is the mass production of automobiles. If automobiles were produced the same as they were years ago, most of us could not afford to buy one. And thus as a result of this automation we are faced with many other problems the employment of human beings. Along with these problems we begin to realize the necessity for higher education specialized training in new fields as they are developing in our world today.

Somehow or other in this mass of economic and human problems we have to relate our vocations to what God would have each one of us do. At least we have to be assured ourselves that God would have us do whether it be a fisherman, Barbara, Farmer, lawyer, doctor, preacher or what ever.

Christian biography—including the lives of Old Testament characters such as Abraham and Amos, or New Testament characters such as Peter and Matthew, and of the modern Christian men and women such as William Colgate and Florence Nightingale gives us an abundant illustration of the workings of the doctrine and informs us that God’s methods are not standardized. God’s call to Florence Nightingale and her response to it is to a great degree different from the call to response Abraham.

First of all—how does God call a man? Some men have felt the Call of Being. Such men do not take for granted that they are. They believe there is a reason for their existence. They leap to the thought that God has placed them in this world for a purpose. In response they seek out that purpose, and in faith make a life commitment on the basis of their discovery.

Some men become aware of the Call of Nurture. They interpret a good home, open doors of school and college, the church prayerful and sacrificial, as putting them under the obligation to make response in consecrated and useful lives. The sooner we realize this our lives the better off we are going to be, for ourselves and for those around us.

Then we have the Call of Experience. Our experiences of nature and life are very different. Some of us are most sensitive to nature; a carpet of lupine is a fall clothed with the glory of God; others have found experiences of sorrow, loss or pain enriching; many of us have found the relationships of life revealing—fatherhood, motherhood, friendship. Some have heard the call of God in an experience of wonder and have answered Isaiah, “Here I am.”

Florence Nightingale when a little girl, cared for a sick puppy and in that experience the trend for life was revealed. Abraham Lincoln was deeply moved by seeing a Negro girl sold from a slave block. John Henry Jowett was directed toward his life work by Sunday school teacher. It adds fascination to the reading of biography to seek to discover the exact incident or circumstance, which turned life into that groove in which greatness was achieved. To each man the call comes in a different manner, yet the fact of the call is unmistakable.

I know we often wonder if some of the experiences people have had in their lives has really changed their course or direction. I am sure that many of us can recall the narrow escapes where possibly our lives may have been spared. We know that one split second could have made a difference between life and death. It makes us stop, listen and sometimes take another look and perhaps gain a different perspective of life, one that we have never considered before. Certainly God had a hand in these experiences; perhaps it was his call to you.

Next we have the Call of the Age. Recall the words of God to Moses: “I will send thee onto Pharaoh, that thou may bring forth my people the children of Israel out of Egypt.” The world wasn’t very big in those far-off days, but in every period of time some great cause stands. In every present age there is a great tyranny or rampant evil which calls men and women to cry out, “let my people go.” Is not this God’s call for the enlistment of life?

We then have the direct call of God. The call of Samuel as recorded in 1 Samuel 3 is an illustration. Samuel was a boy ministering to the Lord under Eli. The Lord called to him, “Samuel, Samuel” and he said, “here I am” and he went to Eli thinking Eli had called him but he had not. Samuel did not yet know the Lord and the work of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him. The Lord called him (3) three times and each time he thought Eli had called for him. Finally Eli perceived that the Lord was calling him. Eli told him if the Lord called again to say, “Speak Lord for thy servant hears.” The Lord did call again for the fourth time and Samuel answered, “Speak for thy servant hears.” Then the Lord said to Samuel, “Behold, I am about to do a thing in Israel, at which the two ears of everyone that hears it will tingle. On that day I will fulfill against Eli that which I have spoken concerning his house, from beginning to end. And I will tell him I am about to punish his house forever, for the iniquity which he knew, because his sons were blaspheming God, and he did not restrain them.” And Samuel kept this in his heart all night and was afraid to tell Eli. In the morning Eli commanded him to tell what the Lord had said to him. He did tell Eli and Samuel grew and the Lord

was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground. Samuel was established as a prophet of the Lord in all of Israel.

Gideon, as recorded in Judges 6:1-18, was flailing wheat in a wine press when a messenger announced to him that he was to save his people. God speaks to us in mysterious ways and when we least expect it. God does have a purpose for each one of us.

A few years ago, preaching the word of God was the last thing I ever expected to be doing but God did speak to me and I listened.

We think, too, of the call of Jesus to four fishermen and their quick response as recorded in Mark 1:16-20. This is when Jesus called Simon, Andrew, James and John to be disciples. Jesus said to them, as he says to us “follow me and I will make you fishers of men”. Immediately they left their nets and followed him. There was no hesitation on their part for the Bible says, “Immediately” they left their nets. Is our response to God that quick? Do we even recognize his call? Perhaps some of us do for thousands of modern men and women would claim to have heard the call of Christ and to have made response with a sense of vocation.

What about the problems involved in this call of God?

Here is an assembly line worker whose task is to tighten the third nut on the left side of an automobile chassis as it passes by. He’s been standing there during work hours for months and years, tightening that there third bolt. There are thousands of jobs that are done in “quiet desperation.”

Here is a steel worker who has lost his job because of automation; and office worker displaced by machine.

What about the concert pianist with the skill of a great artist in his fingertips who wraps packages in the shipping room of a department store?

There our young men and women who have prepared themselves in school and college for professional service. They graduate and find no opportunities for a career. Think of the thousands who turned to gambling as their way of excitement and exhilaration.

In considering problems like these and many others we recognize that each man’s problem stands alone. There is no blanket solution, though there may be helpful principles to apply.

It can be observed that knowledge and guidance, as well as inspiration, should be given to young people so they may recognize and appraise their talents, prepare for both occupations and leisure, and gather wisdom for wise choices.

Where does Christian doctrine enter into these problems? The Christian doctrine of vocation requires of a man to be sensitive to the call of God. An insensitive Abraham or a Moses that could pass by a burning bush without seeing it would have remained nomads in the desert, instead of becoming men of destiny. We have to recognize God’s call for our own lives.

We have to learn to lean on God for guidance for he will help us. The Christian doctrine covers not only a man’s work, but also his leisure. Many of man experiences drudgery in his work because he wastes his leisure. The call of God is a call to be and grow. Having been given a talent, investing of it is expected. No

useful service that a man renders in his occupation is to be despised; in leisure a higher service may be rendered for preparation may be made to render it. Under the pressure of automation men forced to attain higher skills; under the pressure of making life in answer to God, higher skills and nobler service will be achieved.

A man at work or at leisure, in every activity and relationship of life, is, under the doctrine of vocation, in fellowship with God; he is following the divine intention for his life; he has joy in being and becoming what God intended him to be. Not all of his problems may be solved, but light will shine upon them and he will know in what direction to go. Listen for God's call for your life. Jesus is still saying "follow me and I will make you fishers of men."

The Person Gap

Scripture: John 5:1-9; Acts 3:1-11

Text is taken from John 5:7, "Sir, I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me into the pool."

A crippled man lay near the pool of Bethesda in Jerusalem. The medicinal qualities of the spring gave rise to the popular superstition that at certain times the water was troubled by an angel. At such times the first person to enter the pool was cured. One day Jesus passed by and, noticing this worst case, asked the man whether he really wanted to be made whole. The cripple replied, "Sir, I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me into the pool."

This story illustrates perfectly what is meant by, "the person gap." The crippled man was there; the restoring water was nearby; but there was no man to put him in the water. A willing hand was wanting. A strong man was not there. There was a person gap. Jesus fill that gap, though not by putting him into the pool, and the crippled man was healed.

The Bible is full of illustrations representing the person gap. I'm sure you remember the story of Jacob and his family facing a famine. There was corn in the granaries of Egypt and the family is fed through Joseph.

The Egyptian Pharaoh enslaved the children of Jacob; a great leader set them free. Moses filled that role.

A government officer named Naaman and was suffering from leprosy; a young servant girl stepped into the gap between his condition and his cure.

Esther was one who had "come to the kingdom for such a time as this." Philip filled the gap from man of Ethiopia who could not understand the scriptures. Peter and John mediated the power of Christ to a crippled beggar.

This gives us insight into the life of Jesus. He filled "the person gap." On one occasion Philip said unto him, "Show us the Father and it is sufficient for us." Jesus replied, "He that have seen me have to seen the Father." He filled the gap between man and the knowledge of God, between man and God's love, between man and eternal life. Here is a key to the understanding of Christ. Gods love is sure; mans need is extreme; Christ makes God love immediate and available.

Christ can fill "the person gap" for you. Through Christ we can come to know God as our Father. Through Christ our sins are forgiven, through Christ we have the promise of eternal life with our Father. Through

Christ all things are possible for us. Without Christ life is meaningless and purposeless. Let Christ help lead you to God, to peace, to joy and happiness.

The purpose of this sermon is not to consider the meditation of Jesus, however desirable that maybe. It is to encourage us to be mediators. Of course, we do the service everyday and this makes life worth living. Here is knowledge; here is the child; the teacher of the knowledge to the child feels a person gap. Here is seed end soil, sunshine and shower; here is human need for food; the farmer is the essential person. How tragic the situation when a father fails to build the person gap in a boy's life.

Mediation is written deep into all of life. The resources of healing are vast and theoretically valuable too every person, but they wait for the physician to relate then to need. We have knowledge that illuminate minds and gives power to those who possess it, but millions wait for teacher who can help mediate that knowledge to them.

We are dealing with something very necessary and practical. Apply the idea to our spiritual needs. Any one of us might tell of his own experience. There comes a time when we need someone to embody an ideal; perhaps a teacher will do it. Perhaps the help we need comes from a Sunday school teacher, a minister or a friend. Sometimes we meet up with a task that seems too difficult, we don't have the strength and courage to face it; there is divine strength available; it could be given to us through a friend.

This is what any man can do, if he is on the one hand in touch with the power and grace of God. He can do it in a factory as he moves among his fellow workmen. You can do it in the office, the school, the home, in the casual contacts of the street, at the game, in the church. There are always spiritual gaps in the spiritual lives of the people around and about us. Many of them can be bridged only by another person, by me, by you, by any of us.

And most of the time we do not have to say anything about what we believe, about our Lord, about the church, for our actions generally speak louder than words. The impression we make on people around us is important and usually you can tell what kind of the person you are involved with without him saying very much. And while we are discussing this, the impression and example we set for our family, our children, is critically important. Quite often we act entirely different away from home than we do at home and our children wish we would act the same all the time. They cannot understand how we can agree with what the minister has to say on Sunday morning and the rest of the week practice just the opposite. Sometimes they come to believe that Christianity is just for church and Sunday morning and the rest of the week we can do as we please whether it meets with God's approval or not. Remember we are the one setting the example. If we want our children to grow up to know Christ and be good Christians we have to teach them. Our example is very important. How do we actually go about bridging the spiritual lives of people around us?

How do we actually go about bridging the gap in the spiritual lives of people around us?

It is written that when Peter and John helped a man at the gate—Beautiful, Peter took him by the hand. Well, every man has a handclasp. There no doubt are persons with unusual needs of spiritual help will go to church on Sunday morning especially to receive the handclasp of certain other persons. We actually give something to a brokenhearted man when we take him by the hand, either actually or figuratively.

We not only have a handclasp with which to passed God's power to a stricken soul; we have a word to say. It need not be a lengthy word or eloquent words—just an encouraging word, a steadying word, an

inspiring and stimulating word.

In a sense it is always a miracle what a word can do, for good or for evil. Born in the heart of one man, it finds its place, when well spoken, in the heart of another. And from that seed comes remarkable fruits. A word can enlighten a mind that is darkened, strengthen a will that has grown weak, re-live an experience already past, and anticipate an experience yet to come. A word can make men hate or it can awaken love. In short, a word is experienced in capsule form, reduced to its essence, impartial to another where it is restored as full experience.

Some people just have the personality that seems to lift you when you talk to them. A friend of mine is this way. When I am feeling low and down in the dumps, this is where I head, for I know that after talking with him I will be lifted toward Christ and I will be able to face my problems.

We fill a gap between a man and healing, between a man and hate, between a man and life, between a man and love, between a man and God himself—all these are person gaps—often by a deed. It may not be what we call a great deed, only so called by God; it is the deed of which the cup of cold water has become the token.

When Bill had to pass a salon on his way home from a men's club meeting, he could not withstand the temptation to enter. When Tom walked home with him he, he arrived home sober instead of drunk.

How easy it is for us to say kind word to another person. How easy it is for us to give another human being a helping hand when he needs it. Generally something thoughtful and kind takes very little of our time or requires very little of our energy but sometimes the results can never be measured.

A woman said to me concerning her husband, "Tommy has bought a truck." "What in the world," I replied, "does Tommy want with a truck?" She answered, "oh, I don't know, but he'll be doing a lot of errands for the neighbors. That's just Tommy's way. Let a neighbor be in need or distress of any kind, or facing a serious problem, you will find Tommy doing something about it in one way or another." I'm sure we all know persons like this, that actually go out of their way to give a helping hand to those in need. Our world certainly needs more people like this.

In many churches, this Sunday is known as Layman's Sunday. Every layman has a hand clasp, a word, the ability to do a helpful deed. He can stand in many a gap, if he will.

But this has deep roots. It is called the "priesthood believers." The priest, as you know, was one who stood in the gap between man and God, bringing to a man a revelation of God and reconciling with God. The priest was a person gap. He brought man and God together. Now that is the meaning of "the priesthood of believers." Any layman, any Christian, in touch with God can reach out and lift his fellow man. God's power can flow through to him. God's light can shine by him.

Involved in a more affective Christian witness by lay men and women is a fundamental rethinking of the meaning of the priesthood of believers. One of the underlying principles is that the role of laity is not merely to support the church as an institution, but to be the church—the church in its relation to secular society. What the layman does from Monday through Saturday in his occupational profession, not what he does on Sunday in the church building, is pictured as his primary opportunity of Christian service.

How marvelous it would be if all the ministers and all the lay men of the church would pray and study and

practice to become a true priesthood of believers. And so as Christians, we have the opportunity and the privilege to serve Christ by filling the person gap where we are needed. Others do need our help, extend to them your helping hand; it takes just a small token of time on your part.

In Such A Time As This
Scripture: Ephesians 6:1-20

Text is taken from I Peter 4:17, “For the time has come for judgment to begin with the household of God.”

The church people to whom Peter wrote we’re facing a crisis. Our text is related to that fact.

Not only the righteous (the church people are supposed to be righteous), but the impious and simple also, faced a crisis. In fact they face the greater crisis, for we read in 1 Peter 4: 17-18, “for the time has come for judgment to begin with a household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the end of those who don’t obey the gospel of God? And if the righteous man is scarcely saved, where will the impetus and the sinners appear?”

I definitely feel we need to judge ourselves, for we have no right to judge another. Remember we are all sinners, saved through the grace of Jesus Christ.

Those who live in the present time have almost become accustomed to crises. There are some who may even love a crisis. Prime Ministers and Presidents, generals and admirals, bureaucrats and cabinet members, though denying such emotion, may love it. They enjoy great conferences, banquets, decorations, etc., all spiced with a little danger. The common run of men and women may understand more clearly and feel more deeply the danger involved. These are crises that may bring war with all the losses involved, loss in human lives; the prodigious cost in money, the moral cost exhibited in lower standards of conduct and the deterioration of basic social institutions. We all know that nothing good or worthwhile has ever come out of war. The losses involved can never be regained or replaced. Is there any wonder why we pray for peace to come to this world of ours, when each side has weapons that can destroy the world and all human life? Wouldn’t it be wonderful if our young men, upon graduation from school, could go on with their education and their lives without having to spend a period of time in the Armed Forces? Wouldn’t it also be wonderful if just part of the money that is spent for defense purposes, could be used to find cures for diseases that take thousands of lives each year? I know that we truly do pray for peace and that God will grant that peace unto each one of us.

Getting back to Peter’s words, surely they are incisive. “The time is come for the judgment to begin.” He adds, “The place for judgment to begin is with God’s own household.” Let us take those words seriously as we apply them to our time and to ourselves.

The time is come for judgment. Whose judgment? Our own, for it is to begin with God’s own household and that’s what we claim to be. It should begin within the household of God because there the divine power is available to initiate judgment, carry it through and bring it to culmination. Divine help is given in all the disciples involved. Because within the household of God are felt the divine compulsions to face the world with truth, mercy, justice and righteousness.

What are we to judge? Who are we to judge? Judge ourselves, for we have been judging others all of

our lives, now it is time to judge ourselves. And if you think you don't need to be judged you are sadly mistaken for a time is coming when we all will be judged by our Father in Heaven.

By what standards are we to judge ourselves? We might as well make our judgment real and judge ourselves by the character of God himself. Then our own judgment of ourselves will also be God's judgment of us. By this we shall arrive somewhere.

The 89th Psalm, verse 14, gives us four active principles of God's character and sovereignty, which may be taken as for standards of judgment. Verse 14 reads, "Righteousness and justice are the foundation of thy throne; steadfast love and faithfulness go before thee."

Judging ourselves by these four standards of judgment—First of all, we should have a strong truth.

It is not true that in the crisis of our day we are in danger of becoming victims of lies? Our opinions, attitudes, acts are too often deflected from the straight and direct line by truth withheld, by falsification, by a deliberate propaganda of lies.

Such conditions demand cultivation of truth at the grassroots, and that is with each of us. We must know that little white lies become cumulative in their affect and bring us to disaster. We must know that as agents of the lie, which we may become, we become also the perpetrators of great evil. The lie enslaves men.

What are some examples of untruths we indulge in? Perhaps one of the smallest (at least many consider it small) is cheating on a test in school. If we get away with it, it will become habitual. And really whom are we fooling? No one but ourselves—because later on we are going to be asked similar questions and we will not know the answers. It really isn't fair to those students who have studied and prepared and do know the answers.

Then as we get older and find our places in the world, there are great opportunities for being or only speaking a half-truth. Perhaps we try to excuse ourselves for a mistake we have made by telling only part of the story and directing the blame toward another individual. This will throw the boss off your trail on to someone else's and the other person is left with the explaining and proving his innocence. Untruths are quite often used to help advance ourselves but eventually are found out and when we fall it really hurts our reputation, our career, and ourselves. Many untruths are used in social climbing. We pretend to be something we are and for what good is it really?

Beginning right here in the house of God and with ourselves we should develop a strong sense of truth. For what purpose do we come to the house of God, if not to establish ourselves in the truth, to be rid of the false and untrue, to come into the presence of the fellowship with him who said, "I am the truth, the way and the life," and to experience liberation which truth gives, to go forth and walk all our ways in truth?

Not long ago a college student attended a service of worship in an unfamiliar Protestant church. She entered the church in a mood of mild curiosity, which as she lingered grew into frank amazement. Her critical mind was perplexed, even a little shocked, by elaborate surroundings and appointments, the ceremonious behavior, and the solemn exalted language. When she returned she asked a friendly instructor the honest question, "do these people really believe all they say and do about God?"

The need of the hour is for men who worship in the house of God to carry out into the world a strong sense

of truth, truth spoken by Word and exhibited by deed. As Christians we have a great responsibility to the rest of the world. Christians are different; they live and act differently. Christ has to make a difference in our lives and others, to be able to see this difference and they have to want to be joined in the fellowship of Christians everywhere. If our faith and religion are not like this, then we need to take another look for we apparently do not practice what we say we believe.

Is liberty a byproduct of truth? It surely is for Jesus said, “you shall know the truth and the truth will make you free.”

Second, we should practice a broad loving-kindness. The King James Version uses the word “mercy”. We shall use the words interchangeably.

Mercy is a spirit of providence, also its practice. We certainly see a good site when we see a neighbor mailing a large number of care packages to needy people in distant lands. That is certainly mercy. And when we help the person in the community that is down and out, that is mercy.

Mercy is the practice of forgiveness. Forgiveness has its roots in the household of God. In the lives of men who themselves know the forgiveness of God.

I know that if we have experienced the forgiveness of God in our own lives, we will more readily forgive others. Certainly if we cannot forgive someone else for something they have done to us, we can never receive God’s forgiveness in our own lives. We have no right to judge another.

Jesus says, “why do you see the speck that is in your brother’s eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye?” We all are human and we all make mistakes but it behooves us to notice and correct our own first.

Mercy is the practice of redemption. Redemption is sacrificing for another’s good. It is believing in another through thick and thin until the other believes in his own better self. If we give up another person as lost we certainly aren’t any help to that person. The knowledge of redemption comes through one’s own experience of redemption. Redeemed men go forth to redeem.

Here in the household of God, let us judge ourselves as to our experience of loving-kindness, mercy and its practice.

Is security a by-product of mercy? It certainly is.

Third, we should seek a balanced justice.

How often a factor of crisis is ill will born of a sense of injustice! Injustice is the crux of the matter in many conflicts.

Justice is the key to a better day in many areas of human life, beginning in the home and extending elsewhere, even into the relationship between nations, people and races.

I think all of us expect justice. However sometimes our judgment of justice, for ourselves, is quite different than God’s. But when we are administrating justice we have to consider others and the best interest of everyone involved.

In the house of God, ever judging ourselves by this, God's standard, we should discover that self-knowledge, and becoming willing to accept self-discipline, which makes for the establishment of justice.

Is peace a by-product of justice? I believe it is.

Fourth we should achieve a splendid righteousness. The Christian religion is an ethical religion. But too often by piousness goodness, is made drab and dull. It should be made splendid. Someone says that goodness is the most winsome thing world. Some have made it so.

There is a divine goodness, which stands above the desires in hopes of men, as the standard by which they are eternally judged. In the house of God better and more splendid men should be made. If not, we face the charge of hypocrisy. They should be made by all the ways that God has of making good man. In the house of God, by the making of splendid men, whose lights shine in the world, the nation might be remade along the lines of truth and mercy, justice and righteousness.

Is prosperity a by-product of righteousness? It certainly is.

I have said many times, the world isn't going to get any better unless each individual in it becomes a better person through Jesus Christ. I believe that Christ and Christ alone can save our world and us.

What is the argument of this sermon? We are in a time of crisis. Crisis may lead to disaster. We must seek it to avert the disaster. We must do something. We definitely need to submit ourselves to judgment in the house of God. We will then come to four conclusions: we should develop a strong sense of truth; we should practice a broad loving-kindness; we should seek a balanced justice; and we should achieve a splendid righteousness. Judging ourselves fairly before God will definitely bring us to a realization that each one of us needs the presence of Jesus Christ in our lives. There is no substitute. There is no life without him.

What It Means To Be Protestant
Scripture: Hebrews 11:1-3, 39-40, 12:1-2

Text is taken from Galatians 5:1—"For freedom Christ has set us free: stand fast therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery."

Every year in October we celebrate the Reformation. Today Protestants all over the world are challenged to review their story and re-evaluate their faith. For certainly, to say we are Protestants because our fathers and grandfathers were is not enough. If this is all the interest we have in being a Protestant and in our faith than there is little wonder that we can change our religion without flicking an eye. We are Protestants; we should be proud of it and we should know why we are Protestants and what we believe.

I think perhaps a little history of the Christian Church will help us to understand our Protestant religion. We know that 500 years ago, speaking in round numbers, our fathers were Roman Catholics unless they belonged to the Greek Church or the Coptic Church in Egypt. We know also that 450 years ago our fathers left the Roman Catholic Church. The reasons for this departure may well be the answer to the question of what Protestants believe today.

Here is what happened during the 1st 1000 years of the Christian Church. The growth of the Christian

Church from the early days of the Christian Era when Christian people met in private homes to later days when the church became a highly organized institution known as Roman Catholic, with priests, prelates and a pope, covered a general period of 1000 years. During these years the Church made great advances in art, architecture, drama, scholarship and theology. We, through the Roman Catholic fathers, were a part of that great advance.

Along with these accomplishments the Church to which our fathers belonged was shaken by two storms.

First the Church was shaken by the separation of the Greek Church from the Roman or Latin Church, a separation that continues until this day.

Second, both the Greek Church and the Roman Catholic Church were shaken in the 7th century by the rise of Islam and its spread through the Mediterranean world.

In spite of these shaking experiences the first one thousand years of the Christian era saw the emergence of a strong Roman Catholic Church to which most of our fathers belonged.

The second one thousand years began with a conviction among many members that the Church-The Roman Catholic Church-needed disciples. The Church began to lose Christian purpose. In other words people were required to live to the letter of the law established by the Church, this made them a Christian, and believing in Jesus Christ, as their personal Lord and Savior became secondary. The pope became worldly. The priests became careless. The Bible was neglected. The Mass displaced the Communion Service. Because of this let down, many devout churchmen rose up to teach and preach the true Gospel.

In the 12th century, in France, Peter Waldo, founder of the Sect Waldenses, went out preaching repentance and affirming the conviction that the Bible and especially the New Testament is the sole rule of belief and life. Peter Waldo, a wealthy merchant of Lyons, who, from curiosity to know the contents of the Scriptures, which he was accustomed to hearing in Latin, employed two priests, the one to translate, and the other to copy into vernacular, large portions of the Scriptures. When it came to knowledge of scriptural truth he was not slow to put it into practice. Both personally and through his disciples, he taught the Scriptures to all who would hear throughout that region. The Waldenses were excommunicated by the Pope.

In the 14th Century, John Wycliffe, a Roman Catholic priest and a brilliant teacher at Oxford University in England, aware of the ignorance of the people concerning the Bible, sent out poor priests barefoot to teach and distribute the New Testament.

Wycliffe, from his past at Oxford University and from the rectory at Lutherworth, England, made his systematic attack on the established order in the Church. He believed the monks were the agents and instruments of oppression and extortion. As a means of counteracting their influence he wrote numerous popular treatises in English and appointed "poor priests" (Lollards) to evangelize throughout England. In 1380 he published his translation of the Bible, which was distributed by Lollards. Forty-four years after his death (in December 1384), Wycliffe was condemned as a heretic by the Council of Constance (1418) and it was ordered that his bones be removed from consecrated ground. They were burned and the ashes were thrown into the Severn.

In the 15th Century, Wycliffe's movement spread to Bohemia—now Czechoslovakia. Bohemian students from the University of Prague came to Oxford and carried Wycliffe's teachings back to their country. A

Roman Catholic Priest, John Hus, born in 1367, became an advocate of Wycliffe's teachings.

As a preacher in Bethlehem Chapel in Prague, which was established for the promotion of evangelical preaching in the Bohemian language. John Hus was able to make a careful study of the Scriptures. He came to feel that the great evils of the Church had resulted largely from the neglect of biblical study. His views finally led to his condemnation by the Council of Constance. He was burned at the stake in July 1415.

In the 16th Century, the smoldering embers of discontent broke into flame. Plans were laid for building the Cathedral of St. Peter's in Rome. It was ordered that money for construction be raised. A Dominican Monk of eloquence named Johann Tetzel was selected to secure money from the sale of indulgences, which indulgences were to shorten the sinners time in Purgatory.

At this point a priest came forward. His name was Martin Luther. This is where most of us think the Reformation actually started, but as you can see, this whole situation had been simmering for many years and finally boiled over in Martin Luther's time. Martin Luther was vigorously opposed to the sale of indulgences as he was opposed to other growing evils in the church. You remember that he wrote ninety-five (95) theses, or affirmations of conviction, and nailed him to the door of Wittenberg Cathedral that students might see them and debate them. These theses formed the basis of the Reformation. All of Germany rose with Luther. The people endorsed the principles that he enunciated which were mainly:

- (1) The centrality of the Bible;
- (2) Justification by Faith;
- (3) The Priesthood of all believers.

Thus Protestantism was born. The beliefs were basic to all the reformers whether in Germany or Switzerland or France or Scandinavia. These beliefs are still basic to Protestantism today. They form the core of Protestant affirmation. Let us briefly examine these (3) basic Protestant beliefs.

First the centrality of the Bible.

Protestants believe in the Bible and make it central in their lives. The Roman Catholic Church had bypassed the Bible. The Pope—not Christ—had become the head of the Church. The Church must have the Bible. Christ is known in the Bible. Christ's teachings are found in the Bible. When we need guidance for living our lives we go to the Bible. Whenever ministers are ordained they are ordained to preach the Word as found in the Bible. The Bible is central in the Protestant faith. We dare not neglect the Bible.

The Bible is our guide for living our lives. It certainly is has to be central to our religion and our beliefs.

Second, Protestants believe that we are "justified by faith", not by works alone. The Roman Catholic Church taught our fathers to pay money to gain salvation. The Reformation taught all of us that God saves us through faith in him—not by paying money or any other way. God saves us not because of our money or because of our deeds but because he loves us. We are saved by faith in God.

In our modern world of scientific discoveries and inventions, sometimes it becomes difficult for us to believe (really believe) something unless it can be proven. Christianity is a religion based on faith, based upon the love of God for us, and the promise of eternal life with our Father in Heaven. If we had nothing to look forward to except death, we would be pretty sad people, with purposeless lives.

We read in Romans 10; “The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart (that is, the word of faith which we preach); because, if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For man believes with his heart and so is ‘justified, and he confesses with his life and so is saved.”

Also, in Galatians 2 we read: “We ourselves, who are Jews by faith and not Gentile sinners, yet who know that a man is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ, in order to be justified by faith in Christ, and not by works of the law, because by works of the law shall no one be justified.”

And see if we believe what God tells us through his word, we are saved by faith in God.

Third, Protestants believe in the priesthood of all believers. The Church before the Reformation would have us believe that we must approach God through the priest. That is not the Biblical requirement. God welcomes each devout follower. He said, “Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest.” Protestants believe that God is approached directly. God is always available to us in sorrow, in joy, in every time of need. We are not dependent upon priestly intervention. We are our own priests.

Calvin pointed out that it is not necessary to enter a monastery, to serve God, for the whole world was God’s monastery. Therefore, one was to serve God within the world. This could be an ascetic life, in the sense that it involved disciplines and self-denial. Indeed, it was quite wrong to leave the world. The place to serve God was precisely in the midst of the world he had created as a dwelling place for men.

There is widespread misunderstanding of the Protestant Doctrine “The Priesthood of all believers”—the phrase does not mean that ‘every man is priest to every other man!’ It doesn’t imply individually. It necessitates community. Christians are to offer themselves to one another, to pray for one another, to sacrifice themselves on behalf of one another, so that through them all, the high priesthood of Jesus Christ may be more effectually communicated to them all.

Involved in a more effective Christian witness by laymen and women is a fundamental rethinking of the meaning of the priesthood of all believers. One of the underlying principles is that the role of the laity is not merely to support the Church as the institution but to be the Church—the Church in its relation to secular society. What the laymen do from Monday through Saturday in their occupation or profession, not what he does on Sunday in the church building is pictured as his primary opportunity of Christian service.

It is original basic Christianity that all of us are called to be witnesses. Not a single one of us is exempt. We are all expected to do our own believing. We are all set free to do our own thinking. We are all invited to take part in the ordering of the offices of the church. And we are all commanded to do our share of witnessing.

On the beliefs Protestants stand. On these beliefs the Church stands. When Martin Luther was on trial by the Roman Catholic Church he used these words: “Here I stand, I can do no other.” Do we who are Protestants say, “Here we stand. We can do no other.” Let us be proud of Protestant beliefs and proud that we are Protestants but never forget that first we are Christians.

The Garment of Compassion
Scripture: Mark 4:1-9; Colossians 3:12-17

Text is taken from Colossians 3:12—“Put on the garments that suit God’s chosen people, his own, his beloved: compassion.”

Think of the men and women across the years, who have worn the garments of compassion. Of course, we think first of Jesus of Nazareth. It was a hard, hard world in which he lived. He relied relieved that hardness by his compassion for men and women of every class and condition. It is easy to list them. On one occasion he said, “I have compassion on the crowd.” (This is recorded in Mark 8:1-2) his death on the cross was an act of compassion, whenever we put on a garment of compassion we follow his example and we do this in response to his love. We might well do it for his sake.

Others have worn this garment. No one could make a list of the multitude so appropriately dressed. We think of the Good Samaritan in Jesus’s parable. Certainly he had compassion for the man who had been beaten and left half dead. For the Gospel of Luke says, “but a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was; and when he saw him, he had compassion.” Peter and John had donned this robe on the day when they met the lame man at the Gate Beautiful. Adorned in this garment, St. Francis receives the reference of the centuries. We admire Florence Nightingale and all her kind wearing cloth of compassions. The list of persons having worn or wearing the garment is endless.

Leaving the figure of a garment, what is compassion? Literally it means to “suffer alongside someone”. A Christian of the early church said that a compassionate man is one who,” puts his whole soul in the place of that of his neighbor, and to become, if it were possible, a double man; and he must suffer, and work, and weep, and mourn with him as if he himself had put on the actual body of his neighbor, and as if he had acquired his countenance and soul, and he must suffer for him as he would for himself.” This is truly to become Christ-like. Not too many of us are willing to do this. We might show compassion for another person but only up to a certain point.

When Luna Brinker died in a great city, there must have been many for whom her death noticed carried a personal loss. She hadn’t been one of the great artists, but in the newspaper tribute was a line that even the most casual must have paused it to read it a second time. It said, “she played a thousand roles.”

Think what that meant in imagination, sympathy, understanding. A thousand roles! And so many people play only one—themselves. To enter to life as it is for another living, loving, struggling human being is an achievement. But a thousand! What a rich experience.

There is a definite need for Christian men and women to exercise compassion today. It was the need of men that sent Jesus into the towns and villages doing good. It was man’s need that sent Jesus to the cross to redeem them. It was not only need in general, but need in particular. In his parable of the Good Shepherd he affirms that his sheep are known by name. Jesus says, “I am the Good Shepherd; I know my own and my own know me, as the Father knows me and I know a Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. And I have other sheep that are not of this fold, I must bring them also, and they will heed my voice. So there shall be one flock, one shepherd.”

“Senior citizens” should not be an apt phrase by which we lose awareness of a certain particular person of advanced age who needs compassion. Many of us fail to realize that we are going to older soon soon

and we will fit into the same category of “Senior Citizens”. These people need our help, they need to feel wanted and useful and certainly everyone is useful. They have lived many more years than we. They had gained valuable experience that we can profit from. We certainly should not look upon these people as a necessary evil or burden that we have to take care of.

“Juvenile delinquents” should not become a term inhibiting us from becoming friends with certain youth on our streets or even within our own households. If are young people do become juvenile delinquents, we had better look at ourselves. As parents, it is our responsibility to raise our children to be good Christians and useful citizens. Most of the youth of this country are good and they are searching for answers to questions pertaining to life. We need to help and guide them to find the right answers. We might start by looking at our own lives and setting good Christian examples for them.

The need for compassion is all about us, and it is the need of individuals. We have to try to put ourselves in the other person shoes and try to understand their feelings, their needs and their desires. We all need this understanding and compassion sometime in our lives.

Compassion is a practical thing. Eric James points this out in these words: “Suppose this morning we were to take on the actual body of a prisoner for a moment. We are coming out of prison this very morning. Who is going to employ us? What employer is going to take the risk of trusting us? Who is going to help us catch up with things? Where can we get accommodations? What money shall we have to tide us over until we get a steady job?” These are real problems for the prisoners for we help to create them ourselves. Most of us are not willing to forgive and forget. We always have that doubt in our minds.

How many other categories of people need help! How about the alcoholic? The person that nearly everyone looks down his nose at except the person who hasn’t been through it himself. We know that alcohol is a disease that same as TB or cancer but we still are not willing to accept it as such. We would rather stay our distance and let them take care of themselves or let someone else help them. We need to consider the plight of the individuals in each category.

On the chapel wall of the Peking Union Medical College is a tablet. It is in memory of Dr. Hall, who died of plague. It was a grim time, and Dr. Hall was identified with his people. When the tablet was ready to go up on the wall, they inscribed on it, most fittingly, some words spoken by a Chinese who knew him well. “He took my sickness into his own heart.” Christian definitely need to wear the garment of compassion. How can we be Christians if we don’t have compassionate hearts? How can we get this garment? How can we learn to put ourselves in another’s place? How can we become really compassionate men and women? How can we become really compassionate men and women?

First of all—We can remember Christ’s own compassion towards us and give response to his love. We can find Christ compassion for us by reading his word. The Bible will tell us all we want to know about it. Through reading the Bible we will find how Christ gave his very life for our sakes, the greatest act of compassion ever performed. As we read the Bible, within ourselves we will want to respond to Christ’s love by extending it to others. We can also take Christ into our hearts, into our own lives. Once we have really and truly have compassion for others.

During the taking of the 1950s census, one of the census takers reported a conversation with a woman who must have read these words of Jesus: “I have compassion on the crowd.” She lived in an apartment in a crowded section of her city. As she talked with a census taker, four or five children were clinging to

her dress and apron. One of the questions was, “how many children have you?” The woman answered, “well let’s see; there’s Agatha and Jonathan and Cleo.” The man was a bit irritated and said, “never mind the names. Give me the number.” The woman drew up to her full height and with dignity said, “in our family, the children do not have numbers, they have names.” This is the gospel! In God’s family—all 2 ½ billion of them now; the children do not have numbers, they have names. And we who follow Christ will say with him, “I have compassion on the crowd”, until the blur of the crowd fades and we see faces, faces of persons who have names and who will claim and receive our compassion.

I have heard many people say why are we concerned about people in India, China, Africa, when there are thousands of people in our own country that need our help? This may be true but we have to remember the people in other countries are God’s people; we have much abundance and can well afford to help all people everywhere.

Christ told us that we have to go to all parts of the world proclaiming the Gospel and his Gospel in compassion for other people. We claim to be Christians and therefore must do everything that is possible to help.

Second, we can become real compassionate man and women by persistently praying for the grace to be given us. You notice I use the word persistence because we cannot pray once and forget about it or we cannot pray when we feel like it, but regularly. God will help us to become compassionate men and women, boys and girls, if we ask for his help. He will direct us towards people and he will show us how to show compassion, and at the right time. There is no more powerful force in the world in prayer. If we truly believe God will help us.

Third, we can cultivate and make use of our imaginations. By that we shall begin to put ourselves in another’s place. Such is that of the prophet Ezekiel as recorded in the 3rd chapter, “The Spirit lifted me up and took me away, and I went in bitterness in the heat of my spirit, the hand of the Lord being strong up on me; and I came into the exiles at Telabib, who dwells by the river Chebar. And I sat there overwhelmed among them seven days.” Putting ourselves in another’s place is important for we need always to try to understand another’s position if we are to help them.

Fourth, we can learn compassion by its practice. Regardless of what we do—Play the piano, play baseball, drive a car, the practice of actually doing something helps us to know how to do it. And the more we do something the easier it becomes, the better we become at it. We can read all kinds of books about a subject but if we never do what we have been reading about, we will never know how to do it. Practicing compassion whenever and wherever we have a chance helps us to learn it better.

We can begin and we shall begin that practice today. Someone needs our help right now. So why not begin now. Put on the garment of compassion that suits God’s chosen people.

Can the Gospel Save the World? Scripture: Romans 13

Text from John 12:47: “I came not to judge the world, but to save the world.”

The Gospel of Jesus Christ came to save the world. That is the claim of the church and the claim of all

Christians everywhere.

Ordinary men and women know well enough that they need to be safe. They know to what they need to be saved from. But when they cast about for the means of salvation they do not ordinarily turn to the Christian gospel.

What do they turn to? Some believe that democracy will save the world; but the people in a democracy must have beliefs deeper than that. Others believe that education will save it but there has to be something deeper behind the education. And still others believe that a particular system for producing and distributing of the world's goods will save the world. These people do not believe that the Gospel of Jesus Christ can save the world. They may admire it as a lovely idea but as a practical program it does not appeal to them. That's what is wrong with our churches today. There are the many members that do not believe what they profess to. They are willing to say it with their lips but they are not willing to live it in their everyday lives. You see the Gospel of Jesus Christ has to be taken on faith. It cannot be proven scientifically and that's what a good many people are looking for today—proof. If we do not possess the faith we cannot call ourselves Christians. That, I think, is so obvious as to require no argument.

What seems to me more serious, however, is the mood of discouragement with which the church today faces the world's indifference. Many of us in the church tend to overlook many of the conditions around us and in our world because we say they don't concern us and we do not want to become involved. Many of us do not care. We will go along with the majority regardless of whether it is right or wrong. It really doesn't matter to us and we do not want to stand out in a crowd, as a radical so we say it doesn't matter one way or the other. Or many of us use the argument that it is old fashion and we have to keep up with the modern times. We need to remember the Gospel of Christ does not change, only we change. The forces of materialism seem too strong. Believe me, they are strong. Money and material possessions are the god of many. What chance has love of man against love of money? Or reconciliation against rockets? Or brotherhood against pride of race? No wonder Christians have become discouraged.

But look at the facts! Christianity has not only repeatedly made the claim that the Gospel of Christ is capable of saving the world, it has repeatedly made the claim good. The Christian church began with eleven men who set out to perform the seemingly impossible task of converting the Roman world, and that world was quite as secular and irreligious and materialistic as our world today. It has lost its old faith and settled for the cynical belief that only two things really mattered—money and power. Yet those eleven men set in motion a force that was to overcome the Roman world. The Roman Empire is no more, but the Church endures. And what we call Western civilization is the new order, which the church erected on the ruins of the old. What is democracy but the political application of the Bible's teaching that all men are equally valuable in the sight of God who created them all and of Jesus Christ who died for them all.

Who needs to be reminded of the debt which education owes the church? In the dark ages it was the Catholic Church that kept the lamp of learning lit in Europe when all the other lights went out. In modern times it was the Reformation church that gave birth to the idea of universal education, so that every man might be capable of reading the saving gospel for himself. Who doubts the vital role of the church in the struggle for economic and social justice? It was the Christian conscience that brought about the abolition of slavery and its sequel, the emancipation of labor. In any great movement where men are set free to think and act for themselves the Gospel of Jesus Christ has been and will be behind it. The church, in short, has repeatedly made the claim that the Gospel of Christ has power to save the world, and it has repeatedly made the claim good.

What was the secret of the confidence with which the church made the claim in the other ages? It was surely not that of the world was less opposed to change than it is now. Kings did not favor democracy in 18th-century. Factory owners did not favor universal education in the 19th-century. And many do not favor equality of the races in the 20th-century. You see if man becomes educated and is able to read and understand the Gospel, there is a good chance he will believe it and be set free. Dictators, especially the Communist leaders, want to keep the people ignorant, then they will have less trouble ruling them. Once the people begin to learn and start thinking for themselves, the leaders are in danger of losing their power and leadership. This is why the communist are able to go into backward countries and gain such a foothold. The communist tell them what to do and how to do it. Democracy on the other hand requires that people do their own thinking, that they make their own decisions, that they choose their own leaders. These kinds of people are not ready for this because they need to be educated first. They definitely need to hear and learn the word of God because the word sets men free. This is our obligation and duty as Christians to help in the spreading of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

But opposition did not and doesn't even today discourage Christians. From the very first days of the church, confidence has been the Christians watch word. What were the grounds of this confidence?

It relied first of all on faith in God. The first Christians were not concerned to prove philosophically that God existed. They believed that God created the world and that it belongs to him. They also believed that God had a purpose for the world, not because they could prove this as a philosophical necessity, because it seems perfectly obvious to them that if God had made the world and its people, he must intend them to enjoy a good life of justice, peace and joy. And therefore when they proclaimed the Gospel of God's kingdom to the world, they proclaimed it not as the bright idea of clever men but as the truth of God.

What they preached was not their own gospel; it was the Gospel of God. Men who know that the Gospel they proclaim is God's Gospel can never become discouraged. Their confidence also rested on an experience of Jesus Christ that changed their lives.

That is what happened to the disciples when they met Jesus. Their lives were changed. He did not choose them because they deserve to be chosen, he took them as they were. But they were drawn to be like him. And in the end the change in them was so profound that they even faced the kind of death that he faced, rather than be unlike him. They were changed people, different from what they had been before. St. Paul was not theorizing but stating a fact when he said in a famous passage, "If any man is in Christ, he is a new creature." These people had been changed. They led change lives.

Those who have experienced the acceptance of Jesus Christ in their lives will testify to the fact that Christ does make a difference in your life. You feel and act differently; you live differently. Life takes on a new meaning. Your heart becomes filled with joy and happiness. There is no doubting and you are sure of what the future holds for you. You become filled so much with a presence of Christ that you were bubbling over and you want to share your experience with others. This is when Christ really makes a difference in your life and you actually become a new person in Christ.

The early Christians also had an awareness of the Spirit of God in their midst. Jesus told his disciples that he would always be in their midst. St. Paul you remember, talks about the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. What does he mean by that? He means a community held together by the Holy Spirit. It was a community of friendship. It was a community of forgiveness. It was a community of unselfishness. But more important than these things, it was a community without distractions. The alienation between men

was reconciled and the unity of God's family restored. This was a new community capable of embracing the whole world.

How could our world help but be saved if all men everywhere read and believed the Gospel of Jesus Christ? Peace would prevail throughout this world of ours because Christ love for us would shine through and towards all men. This is the aim of the Christian religion to make all men brothers in Jesus Christ. Those other things that made the difference—the belief that the Gospel was a message of God, the experience of Jesus Christ that had changed their lives and the awareness of the Spirit of God in their midst.

The obstacles that they faced are the same obstacles that we face today. The opportunities of which they availed themselves are the same opportunities that lie open before us today. And the confidence with which they spoke rested on the experience of God, which is ours also. And so I say, rejoice. For I know and believe that the Gospel of Jesus Christ, which has the power to save the world, will prevail. "Jesus Christ did truly come to save the world."

I'd like to say a few words about the Sacrament of Baptism.

In a very real sense the Christian church is the true sponsor of a child, and when receiving a child into its fellowship to see that the child is brought up in the Christian faith and with the Christian church. Baptism is not the act of a minister or the parents but is the act of God working in and through the church ordinance. It is the church that administers the sacrament, and anything that tends to separate this supplemental service in the life and worship of the church robs it of its essential meaning.

Baptism is not primarily the act of the parent, nor of the child, but of the church and of Christ in the church. Sometimes we wonder why we get wrong answers and it's because we asked the wrong questions. What good does baptism do me or that child? Instead of, what is the Active witness in service the church surrenders to the Active Word of Christ's Gospel in the baptism of young or old?

Baptism is not there primarily for the individual, nor for the family, but for the church, to confess before God and man the Word of Regeneration. When parents realize that if they fail in keeping their solemn vows their child will lose what he or she ought to receive, then perhaps they will not seek to evade their obligation. And when the church takes seriously its pledged sponsorship of the child, then it will provide an adequate teaching staff and adequate program of religious education.

It will not spend more money on little needed luxuries than it does in training children and youth in the Christian life, for it will do what Jesus did—take, "a little child and set him in the midst." Of course we all now realize the church is not this building or any other building. It is people—it is you. So when the vows are read and accepted by the parents this morning—you accept them also for you are the church.

Celebrating the Goodness of God
Scripture: Psalm 145

Text is taken from Psalm 145:7, "They shall abundantly under the memory of thy great goodness."

In the midst of this age, in the maelstrom of history in all its fury, in the muddled mess of this world, in the confusion and boredom and amazement, we ought to be able to spot something—an event, a person, a

memory, an act, a turning of the soul, the flash of the wings, the surprise of sweet compassion-somewhere we ought to pick out a glory to celebrate. There should be something somewhere hidden in the common day—to break the sky asunder, two ascend on high in song.

A Glory to Celebrate! We celebrate the goodness of God and give thanks!

First of all we celebrate the goodness of God by counting our blessings. We should do this often to remind ourselves where these blessings come from. But we do not count them as a materialist does: so many shares of stock, how many cars he owns, how large and how many deposits he makes in his bank. Not as the rich man in Jesus' parable, who could say, "Soul, though has much good laid up for many years." Perhaps it would be well to read this parable of the rich fool, as recorded in the Gospel of Luke 12:16-31 (read parable).

For after we have all these things, we cannot take it with us when we leave this earthly life. We do not count our blessings as an egoist counts theirs. The man in the parable used the first personal pronoun too profusely. The parable of the rich young ruler as recorded in Luke 18: 18 23, sets us thinking (read parable). He had riches, good character, position, and ambition. All these might exult a man's ego. Why did he want eternal life? Was he trying to secure an insurance policy for after death? Did Jesus try to break the shell of his ego and let the young man's true self out? If so Jesus failed. No, counting blessings in the manner that an egoist counts them is not celebrating the goodness of God.

Capacity to love and to be loved—a man might count all such blessings belonging to his essential nature, and in doing so fall short of celebrating the goodness of God. Of course, all of these blessings come from God, but this fact might be ignored.

Now let a Christian count his blessings. He might begin with a capacity for thanksgiving with someone to thank. Someone is not a good word; God is the word. A Christian is thankful that he can thank God. Make a list of the "unsearchable riches of Jesus Christ" which a Christian enjoys: release from guilt and fear. If we confess our mistake and sins to God, he will take our guilt away and we have nothing to fear for he is always with us. A Christian enjoys deliverance from sin, forgiveness, capacity to forgive, (this is truly a blessing to be able to forgive someone else for something they may have done to you), peace which passes understanding, serenity of spirit, comfort of heart, courage of spirit—Let us also include the unfolding of infinite capacities for knowledge, beauty, goodness, love. Without religion a man must finally set a period to his list of blessing; even the one who counts the blessings of the essential person finally ends with a period. But this is not so with the Christian who writes, "and it doth not yet appear what we shall be". You see the Christian knows that everything he has, everything that surrounds him, everything that he is, is truly a blessing from God.

There is a poem and entitled "Thanksgiving thought". It goes like this:

When lengthening shadows fall across the day
And peace of night blots out the weary way,
Somehow, as inner vision clears the mind,
We glimpse, truth to which we are oft are blind.
The things that really count
Are things we cannot count.
What value do we place upon a smile
That lifts the heart and makes our life worthwhile?

And what shall be the measure of a friend
In whom our daily joys and sorrows blend?
How count those little unremembered acts
Of kindness and of love—how get the facts
About such things as courage, faith and hope,
For lack of which we stumble, fall and grope?
We cannot estimate the values, sound and true
That we receive each day, the whole year through.
So, for the many blessings brought our way,
Our grateful thoughts on this Thanksgiving Day—
The things that really count
Are things we cannot count!

Take time to count your blessings, to know where they come from, to appreciate them. They are numerous.

Secondly, we celebrate the goodness of God by remembering that blessings are given.

The things that belong to our circumstances are given. We are dependent upon God for the sun as well as the rain. We are dependent upon others for our material inheritance and for increment in value. We find God written within our circumstances. He is all around us.

The things that belong to our egotism are there by little or no virtue of our own. How many of us might well discover that our virtues are moral momentums from our parents. Basically they are from God. The things that belong to our essential selves, all capacities and all possibilities of their fulfillment, are they not given? Are they not gifts from the divine hand?

Remember your blessings. Blessings are given.

Thirdly, we celebrate the goodness of God by taking our blessings seriously. Blessings are serious.

First, blessings are a judgment. You judge yourself by where you set the period when you count your blessings. Do you set it as a materialist? Egoist? An essential self? A child of God?

Secondly, we take our blessings seriously when we accept them as stewards. We also pass judgment upon ourselves, whether we accept them as steward or not. All blessings are given; use them only for the self and we become parasitical. Accept them in trusteeship and share them with others; we become channels of the grace of God.

Thirdly we take our blessings seriously as we transmute these blessings of earth into the treasures laid up in heaven.

Take your blessing seriously! Blessings are serious.

We celebrate the goodness of God by counting our blessings, by remembering that our blessings come from the hand of God, and by taking our blessings seriously. Now we celebrate by giving thanks in all the various ways we have of thanking God.

We give thanks to God in our church worship service where all Christians gathered together in fellowship to worship him. In our worship service we thank God through silence prayer and prayers together, to the singing of the hymns, to our offerings and our gifts. Outwardly this is one way of showing our thanks to our Father.

We also give thanks to God in our homes. As a family we thank God together for the food that is on our table, for the good helped we enjoy, for our children, for our mother and father and grandparents, for everything we have. We actually thank God for the example we set for our children, making our homes a place they will always cherish and remember, a place where they found God through mom and dad. What better place to thank God than in our homes, in the private fellowship of our families.

And we also thank God in our own hearts. We need to take time alone with God to talk to him and to give him thanks for everything we have. God knows what he has given us but he wants us to acknowledge our blessings by naming them before him. Certainly by our outward appearances and actions others can tell if we have God in our hearts. If we truly have accepted him into our lives, it cannot but help show fourth and make us glow.

Thanksgiving is a special time of year when we thank God for blessings. A time when we come closer to God but we should not fail to celebrate Thanksgiving every day of the year for God is always with us—in everything that we do and everywhere we go.

As a matter of fact Thanksgiving is the nearest way to God. Somehow or other the impulse of Thanksgiving stirs within us when we begin to count our blessings and then unconsciously, perhaps we say, “thank God”. In these days we are deluged with marvels of scientific intervention; but we forget that no human skill or genius can compare with a silent, creative power that turns a few seeds buried in the earth into a sheaf of golden corn. A miracle of wisdom, power and love is wrought year-by-year before our eyes. To call it the work of nature, as some do, takes us farther into the secret. The heart of the mystery only reveals itself when we see in it the self-offering of God, the God who came in Jesus Christ. “Bless the Lord, O my Soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name.”

Beneath All Human Joy
Scripture: Psalm 148
(Thanksgiving Eve)

Text is taken from Malachi 3:10: “Prove me now herewith saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.”

For many of us, (most of us) Thanksgiving day will not pass without a quiet prayer of Thanksgiving to Almighty God who has made and preserved us a nation.

We will not let the day go by without thanking God for those whom he has given us to love. (father and mother, children, grandparents).

And surely all of us will thank God for the food that he has provided for our table.

But it is the church, which reserves the deeper meaning of the day, for apart from the goodness of God

there is no deep foundation for our human joys. Everything that satisfies and cheers us must be qualified by this somber thought that the days go quickly, and all precious things are at the mercy of strange and ceaseless energies, unless beneath all cares and joys and beyond all hopes and expectations, the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting. It is in the church that we hear of the goodness of the Lord.

But is God really God? It certainly is a fair question to ask, an in—evitable question sooner or later, and it deserves a fair answer. This was the answer but an Old Testament prophet gave; “Prove to me now here with, saith the Lord, if I will not open the windows of heaven and pour out for you a blessing at that there shall not be room enough to receive it.”

We are to prove God— not as the philosopher sometimes tries vainly to do. All such arguments about God’s existence will get us exactly nowhere. A modern theologian writes: “next to denying God certainly the greatest is that proving him.”

Prove me now here with—not “prove my existence by argument,” but, “prove my nature.” Try me out and discover what God is like.

But how should we prove the goodness of God? First, by contemplation. The simplest way is by seeing and hearing. Throughout the Bible religious teachers lamented the failure of men to see what was before their eyes, to listen to what was spoken in their ears. Eyes have they but they see not, ears but they do not here. The great religious teachers of every age have been men and women who saw and listened. We, too, are sometimes blind to things right before us. Perhaps we fail to recognize the truth when we see or hear it. Jesus said, “lift up your eyes and look on the fields, so white for the harvest.” In a farmer plowing his furrow deeply, in a mother baking bread, in the sheep dotting the green hillside, in a hen gathering her chicks together, in flowers opening, in the rising sun and gentle rain, Jesus saw, and painted with words, the picture of God’s gracious ways.

Contemplation it’s a reliable key to the goodness of God and perhaps the one least known and used today.

If we have loved ones around us, if our parents are living, if our children are with us still, consider how precious, how wonderful they are today. For health and strength and daily bread toil and rest at night, for freedom’s holy light, for our creation, preservation and all the blessings of this life, but above all for God’s inestimable love in the redemption of the world through Jesus Christ—for all this, if we have eyes to see and ears to hear, let us give God our humble and hearty thanks. For there should be no doubt in your mind that surely God is responsible for everything we have, everything we are, everything that surrounds us. What a blessing God truly gave us through Jesus Christ. Without his blessing all others would be nothing.

Secondly, we can prove the goodness of God by our commitment. Moreover we prove God’s goodness by our loyalty to God’s ongoing purpose in the world. Life meets us with great gifts and also with high claims. We are not here to have our own way in life, to amuse ourselves and place safe and be sheltered and perpetuated with every kind of embalming fluid as though the end-of-life work to be well preserved. The end of life is to be well used, to give ourselves to something greater than we are, to stand and be spent.

We all know that God has given each of us talents, not to be preserved and stored away, but to be developed and put to use to help build his kingdom to help spread his gospel. You remember the parable of the talents. The one given five talents invested it and made 10 for his master and likewise the one given two (2) talents, made four (4). But the one given one talent went and dug a hole in the ground and buried it. He thus had

only one to return to his master. The master said, “take the talent from him and give it to him who has the 10 talents. For to everyone who has will more be given and he will have abundance; from him who has not, even what he has will be taken away.” You see, God wants and expects us to use what he has given us.

And so when we commit our lives to him, it must be a total commitment, not just partial, for God wants all of us. If we do give ourselves totally to him, are reward is great, eternal life with our Father in heaven. This is the goodness of God.

Thirdly—we prove God’s goodness by calm reliance on his power and love, or in other words, total trust in him. If there is one inner disposition which the Pilgrim Fathers had, and which we lack, it was a sense of Providence. Confronted with hardship, hunger and illness, facing a long winter, with a future no one could predict, they put their trust in God and gathered together to sing the Lords blessing, and joined in their wonderful hymn:

Unto the hills around do I lift up my longing eyes.
Oh whence for me shall myself station come,
My help arise?
From God the Lord shall come my certain aid;
From God the Lord who heaven and earth hath made.

When there was no other foundation or refuge, they turn to God, and God was there. A real and true thanksgiving. If we put our complete trust in the Lord, there is no doubt that he we’ll take care of us. Try it for yourselves. So prove God in contemplation and commitment and trust. And see how the windows of heaven are opened and God’s blessings are poured out on your life. On this Thanksgiving, not only should we be thankful and give thanks to God but let Christ really and truly come into your life. Let him change your life and help you to find that peace and joy and happiness for which we are all searching.

Three Dimensions of Christmas Scripture: Luke 2:1-20

Text is taken from Luke 2:10, “Be not afraid; for behold I bring you good news of a great joy which will come to all the people.”

About 30 years ago Gerald Stanley Lee wrote some words about Christmas, which are always in order. His plea was to keep Christmas at its original size. Here was the original size of Christmas.

“Behold I bring you tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people: it was for all people”. It was Christmas unlimited. Mr. Lee put it in this arresting way; “Why should Christmas, that stern, imperious moment in the world when with a child’s cry and a women’s smile, God turned the world over, and began in a minute a new human race—why should Christmas be tucked away in men’s minds as a feebly pretty country sentiment, a women’s holiday, a baby’s frolic, the sublimest event on earth thrust playfully in the bottom of a stocking.”

There is a danger that the very loveliness of Christmas as a home festival may imprison it within the home, and thus men may forget that it is a world festival, celebrating the truth that God so loved the world—all of it—“that he gave his only begotten son.” Christmas ought to be a time for widening the walls of the home,

of letting love stream out into the wider world. Christmas must be pulled out of the stocking and carried to the dispossessed, the defrauded, to the whole globe, as well as America.

“Christmas has and in-reach
To lift the soul of me,
A search of deepening joy
Like that of tidal sea.”

When the ocean tide rises, the pools in the sand are filled with water, the shoreline receives, the occurrence of the tidal rivers are turned back to flood their estuaries, the marshes and the flats become mirror lakes. So, too, is the surge of Christmas as it deepens in the souls of men.

As the ocean tide rises by an influence that comes from faraway, so the tide of joy that rises comes from long ago. Long before the angels above Bethlehem’s plain, Israel poets and prophets felt the tide rising. You remember what the prophet Isaiah says in 9:6, “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be upon his shoulder, and his name will be called “Wonderful Counselor”, “Mighty God”, “Everlasting Father”, “Prince of Peace.”

The tide was in flow when the shepherd’s return to their midnight vigil after kneeling at the manger. And ever since, Christmas brings deepening joy to the lives of men everywhere. This surely is not surface joy; it is deep and deepening joy that we speak.

It is joy that is deepened by mystery and wonder. For we know that God moves in mysterious ways, his wonders to behold.

It is joy that quickens the memories of men, and the gladness of childhood becomes the treasure of their souls. Jesus said we need the faith of a child. Faith that can never be shaken. A trust that is everlasting. The birth of Jesus Christ, which stands for peace to all mankind, brings us great joy.

It is joy that causes men to ponder the ways of God, as Mary in her joy at bringing a man-child into the world pondered the meaning of it all. It certainly is good for us to ponder, for us to ask questions concerning to Christ and seeking the answers. God did have a reason and the answer to it can be revealed in our own lives.

The in-reach of the tide is unto the heart of man. It rises above barriers. It flows around obstacles. It is the joy of salvation that cleanses the heart and redeems it from evil. Thus it comes about that gratitude and peace flow into the inner recesses of the heart.

The in-reach of Christmas sets free the high desires and hopes and energies of men as boats that are stranded on muddy flats are lifted by the incoming tide.

We read in John 1:11-12, “He came into his own home, and his own people received him not. But to all who received him, and believe in his name, he gave power to become children of God.” The in-reach of Christmas is that God will make us his children, he will guide and direct our lives, he will give us comfort, he will save us, if, we believe. God has all kinds of power available for us, waiting for us, if we really believe.

Galatians 2:20 reads, "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."

Paul is truly stating what happens to your life once you really and truly accept Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. You become a new creature in Christ. You are different and everything you do and say is in his name and to his glory. So the in-reach of Christmas is deep.

The joy of Christmas reaches deep within us and lifts us to new heights, to new ambitions, to new goals, that otherwise we could never achieve.

The first dimension of Christmas is in-reach.

Christmas has an up-reach
To touch the heart of God,
A burst of greening springtime,
Rejoicing from the sod.

On a Christmas Sunday morning ten thousand choirs across the land are singing "Hallelujah." Hundreds of thousands of voices are singing, "Joy to the World! The Lord is come." All through the week carols are in the air. Pageantry repeats the Nativity scene. Good will rises in the hearts of men. Human relationships become more brotherly. No matter how low the outdoor thermometer, there are sunshine and warmth everywhere. This is a burst of springtime. It is a quickening of grassroots. It is rejoicing from the sod "when the tender grass springeth out of the earth through clear shining after rain."

This is the up-reach of Christmas. This is Christmas in that dimension in which we think of God. God is our Father, said Jesus; then surely it must be that the Father heart of God rejoices in the joy of his children. The Father heart is not hard, but tender. It is not stone-like, but sensitive like a heart of flesh.

The up-reach of Christmas is our rejoicing in the salvation of Christ. For surely Jesus Christ is our Savior. He was born, lived, died and rose again so that our sins could be forgiven for all time.

The up-reach of Christmas is the gratitude to God that rises from our hearts. For certainly we are thankful and gracious to God for the birth of our Lord and Savior.

The up-reach of Christmas is the love of God and man it releases. For surely Christ, is the prince of peace. Because of God's love for us, Christ was born into the world.

The up-reach of Christmas is the sincere prayer that ascends to God.

The up-reach of Christmas is the hope of a better day that is quickened in human hearts. If we truly take Christ into our hearts, if we become Christians and believe in the Gospel we have the promise of eternal life with God, our Father. Christians believe that there is life beyond this earthly one and this is what we have to look forward to. If there isn't a life in the here after and if we believed death is the end, then our lives have no meaning.

The up-reach of Christmas is our pledge of loyalty and allegiance to Christ. We claim to be Christians and if we really are than we do pledge allegiance to Christ's Kingdom. We promise to witness to others

of Christ's teaching everywhere and we know if this happens peace will finally come to this world of ours because each one of us will have this peace within ourselves.

Christ is a gift from God—that is God's down reach: my life may be a gift to God— that is my up-reach.

A second dimension of Christmas is an up-reach.

Christmas has an out-reach
To bless my every brother,
From me good-will from God-
His presence in Another.

Much of the out-reach of Christmas may not be understood by those who come under its influence. Christmas goes out to the ends of the earth. It may even be misunderstood. Nevertheless it brings blessing, if only as a harbinger of a day when the tide shall rise to a higher level.

This is one world. Christmas kept in one place is Christmas Everywhere. Christmas In one heart is Christmas kept in all hearts. All are tied up in the bundle of life together. Christmas blesses every brother.

This blessing is our good will. Good will is an out growing contagious thing. It is like yeast, which has marvelous power to increase. Good will, too, is like a tide that rises. We tied good will into our gift packages to those who are near us; we send the good will to those farther away; we burden our prayers with good will for all. We actually become agents of good will. We certainly must always continue to be good will agents.

The out-reach of Christmas is the out reach of God's love. God so loved the world that he gave his son. Most certainly the out-reach of Christmas is that as recorded in the Gospel of John 3:16; "For God so loved the world that he gave his only son, that whosoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." "Whosoever" is the outreach word. It doesn't matter who we are or where we are, if we believe in Jesus Christ and accept him as Lord and Savior, we have the promise of eternal life.

God's presence in Another—it is the out-reach of the living Christ, God with us, Emanuel. "The word became flesh and dwelt among us."

Because Christmas is intended for the whole wide world it has an essential sadness, represented by the disturbing contract between what the world is and what it might be if the love and light of Christmas were lived continuously.

It is against the background of the stained and soiled life of the world that the light and love of Christmas can be seen in its glory and power. For despite the corrosion of time and this soiling of human circumstance, in spite of inhumanity and ill will, in the face of all efforts to obliterate any lasting image of amity, friendliness and good will, there is a message and a Messenger, which cannot be hid or taken away. Christmas is the glad announcement that Christ has come into a darkened world.

A third dimension of Christmas is out-reach.

These are the three dimensions of Christmas, in-reach, up-reach, and out-reach. They give these dimensions to our Christmas joy. Let the true spirit of Christmas come into your heart and may it last all year long.

Grateful Giving
Scripture: Psalms 116:1-14

Text is taken from Psalms 116:12, “What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits towards me?”

It is said that an earnest man, taking seriously the popular idea that he always should think positively, found himself put to the test one evening in his prayers. It had been one of those days! Any lesser man would have given in to complain on the spot. But after some searching, he came up with a positive prayer of one sentence, “Oh Lord, I thank thee that not every day is as bad as this.” In every situation we can find something to be thankful for.

The instinct to be thankful is a sound one. If you’re looking for a single test of our spiritual health, you probably will find it here. Thankfulness is the mark of a healthy mind and a trusting heart it’s the most fruitful relation to God. The more we know of God, the more thankful we become. More thankful we become, the more we know of God.

It is only natural then that the Bible should sound the note of thankfulness again and again. It tells me men found the grounds for gratitude even in the most difficult circumstances of life. It is to one of those expressions that we turn to today for our thought on this Stewardship Sunday.

Scholars tell us that most Psalms were written for use on specific occasions. They cover the full round of human experience so that a man could find the Psalms to fit the mood of the moment or the need of the day. The 116th Psalm is one, which was written for such a specific time. After recovering from an illness, when the worshiper had to return to the congregation, this song was to be his expression of thankfulness. So the Psalmist recalls how he had called upon God and God had heard his prayer. He confesses that his life was in danger, and God and his grace had saved him. Then counting these blessings, he comes to a question which is inevitable in the hour of Thanksgiving. For the Psalmist cries, “What should I render unto the Lord for all his benefits towards me?”

That’s the real question in any thanksgiving. I am well in the bounds of experience when I say that the moment you ask that question is one of the most important in your life. It is an important hour because it leads to some of life’s greatest experiences. To ask, “What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits towards me?” First of all, it is an hour of real awakening. We see something fully which we had seen only partially “all his benefits towards me,” said the Psalmist. Undoubtedly he had seen some of them before. It wasn’t that he had never known moments of thanksgiving or passing times of gratitude. But somehow in this hour all these benefits join together to bring him a new sense of God’s presence.

By the very nature of human experiences we know that some of us will truly come to such an awakening during this season. One of the most common and most important expressions a pastor hears is the gratitude of the person who has passed through crises and had his eyes opened by it. An illness is passed, or a separation is ended or a crisis has been resolved by decision. How often this brings a new note of thankfulness in the lives of those who have passed through. “How thankful I am,” says someone. Or, “How much I have taken for granted. God help me to be more grateful.” The benefits have been there all the time, but the experience was an hour of awakening. These benefits are known and cherished. In every situation, some good will come out of it. We can trust God for that.

Awakening comes in many ways. For Brother Lawrence, the saint of the kitchen to practiced the presence

of God, it began one day when he looked out the window and saw a branch which had been dead for weeks coming to life with the approach of spring. It reminded him of God's power to bring new life. For Dr. Bernardo of England, it came when a red-headed boy knocked at his door having heard that he took in boys from the street. And when Dr. Bernardo had to tell the lad there was no place for him, his conscious and compassion were like fire within him. He saw how many benefits he had, and knew he must use them for the boys.

You see, once the moment of awakening has come, you have crossed a great divide. You are like a man who sees after he has been blind. You have discovered springs in the desert. Life has extended into a holy new place.

Let us look again at the Psalmist words. These words not only reflect an hour of real awakening, but in the second place, an hour of sincere offering. "What shall I render unto the Lord?" asked the grateful man. Giving in gratitude is one of the deepest and most enduring motives in any life. It isn't the act of giving which makes for spirited growth. The reason why we give or why we want to give makes for real spiritual growth. There are many ways in which we give. There is duty-giving, as all of us know. Then there is investment—giving in which we give a little in the hope of receiving much more later. But this kind, which is in the word of the Psalmist is thanks-giving. It is born of gratitude. You give because you must. Your heart is overflowing.

But how do you render anything unto God? How can you give to him, who already has all? How can we give to God whom we have not seen? Here the Bible has a constant and clear answer. Whenever we want to render something to God in return, it is as though he says to us, "pass it on to others of my children." Jesus reflected it exactly once when three times he asked Peter, "Do you love me?" And when the answer was yes, Jesus said, "Feed my sheep." It is passing along the blessing, which is our way of rendering unto God our thanksgiving.

When the Mayo brothers made a magnificent gift to the University of Minnesota for graduate medical study and research, the gift was accompanied by a letter from Dr. William J Mayo, in which he said, "Our father recognize certain definite social obligations. He believed that any man who had better opportunities than others, greater strength of mind, body or character, owed something to those who had not been so provided; that is the important thing in life is not to accomplish for oneself alone, but for each to carry his share of collective responsibility." Surely this is what Christ wants us as Christians to do.

We pass along our blessings as Christian stewards. Christian stewardship is the practice of systematic and proportionate giving of time, abilities and material blessings, based on the conviction that these are a trust from God to be used in his service for the benefits of all mankind.

Today is stewardship Sunday in our church. Whether we think so or not it takes money to keep this church operating. There is only one place this money can come from—You, the members of this church.

Perhaps we need to remind ourselves why it is important to keep the church operating and alive in Fultonham. We all know that it is becoming more and more difficult for small rural churches to remain open. Most small churches cannot afford a full time pastor and few pastors are willing to share their time and few larger churches are willing to have their pastors share their time. The youth group dwindles and finally disappears altogether. The maintenance and upkeep is beyond financial reach. Some people want to belong to a church that has more members, that is active, that is growing, instead of one that is standing

still or falling behind. Most people today do not mind traveling a few miles to attend church.

But considering this church in the community I feel we need to take a look at what we have. For a small church, this is kept up better than most. There are enough people here to keep the church operating. You have some of the best and finest facilities any church could have. People belong to this church that have the God given talents and abilities for leadership, for teaching, for music, etc. There is no doubt in my mind that this church can stay alive and active in this community. We need to remember that stewards of God, which all of us as Christians are supposed to be, give more than money to support the work of God. They give of themselves, their time, their talents; they dedicate their lives to advancing God's kingdom and that's exactly what is needed in this church.

I wonder how many people would make the effort to go to Middleburg or Breakabean if this church were not here. I dare say that less than 50% would not go to church at all. But more important, how many of our children would attend Sunday school? Very few I'm sure. Let us remember the faith of the people who were responsible for the existence of this church in the beginning. They had nothing to start with except faith and trust in God. It seems to me, we should have enough faith and trust in God to keep it going. Your help is needed financially and otherwise. You are members; you made the pledges and vows when you became members of this church. Renew those vows now.

Jesus said, "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be." If your treasure is in acquiring material possessions your heart will be there also. We all need to stop and do a little thinking and praying for if we do, we will know that everything we have comes from God. Once you remember this you will want to give to God's work because of your gratitude to him. I have said this before and I am going to say it again because I know and believe that this is by far the first and foremost important parts of being a Christian. If a person, any person, has truly accepted Jesus Christ into his heart as his personal Lord and Savior, there will be no hesitation on his part for he will give his all in money, time, talents to God's work. And that's what is needed in every church, people who have dedicated their lives to Jesus Christ.

God also loves a cheerful giver. The cheerfulness with which we give to advance God's kingdom is a good measure of the spiritual life within us. If we just like to give, it is a danger sign flashing its signal across the path of life. It shall send us to our knees in renewed searching for that which is most significant, most worthwhile and most closely intended to God's plan for our highest fulfillment and greatest satisfaction.

Getting back to the church budget, it is a plan the church hopes to carry out next year. I know that we all plan ahead and this is what the church board has attempted to do with God's help and with yours. If not enough financial initiative is received next year some of the plans will have to be laid aside. It is always good to know how much you can plan on for the coming year and the only way is for the members to pledge a given amount, whether it be weekly, monthly or annually.

Perhaps many of you hesitate to make a pledge for fear that you will be unable to keep it. Many of us however do not hesitate when we go out and buy a car on credit. We actually pledge to pay a certain amount each month and we also know if we fail to make two payments our car will be taken away. If you cannot keep your pledge to the church, you will not lose your membership, God will certainly forgive you if you have done the best you could. In making your pledge you need to consider the blessings God has given you and you should be willing to give back a small part of what he has given you.

And so before you decide how much to give to the church (this is between you and God, no one can decide

for you) ask yourself this question, “What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits towards me?”

The Stable and the Star
Scripture: Matthew 2:1-12

Text is taken from Matthew 2:9, “And lo, the star, which was in the East, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was.”

“And lo, the star, which they saw in the East.” On this night a star shone more brightly than the rest, in fact it was brilliant and attracted the attention of the shepherds and the Wise men.

An Angel appeared to them and told them to follow to the star to where the Christ child was born. We truly believe that God guided them.

“The star went before them.” They had no trouble for the star directed them to Jesus. The star was good for guiding because of its brightness. The star was also good for pointing for, “till it came and stood over where the young child was”, there was no doubt in their minds that the Christ child was there for the star pointed to the exact spot, the stable and the manger in Bethlehem.

The star, which shone so brilliantly that night was for all men’s seeing. Such a star cannot be hid except by the blindness of men. Men whose eyes conceal and reveal wonder, men on quest for greater knowledge, men who seek to worship the Highest will see the star. Others may see the star and ignore it. Still others may not see it at all.

But let it be known that whether they see, whether they catch meaning and direction from it, or not, the star still shines up all.

Jean St André, one of the leaders in the French Revolution, said to a peasant: “I will have all your steeples pulled down, that you may no longer have any object by which you may be reminded of all old superstitions.” The peasant replied: “But you cannot help leaving us the stars,” Man cannot tear down the stars, God will see to it that they shine upon us and what we have in our hearts and in our memories, no one can take away from us.

God’s lights do not shine only upon the wise, nor only upon the good, nor only upon the worthy, as his rain does not discriminate between the just and the unjust.

In these days there is much talk about the religious and secular worlds. There are activities such as worship in a church, which are considered to be religious, while a game on the football field may be considered secular. There are religious places and secular places, religious occupation and secular occupations. Those who are engaged for the most part in church activities are separated in thought from those who are engaged in so-called secular occupations. So we have the clergy and the laity.

I believe that most of us are coming to realize that we need to carry our religious beliefs into our everyday lives. Christianity isn’t just something for Sunday morning in church but should be practiced everyday of the week, in our work, our play, especially in our family life and in our church. We realize that if we do carry these beliefs into our occupations that everything is going to go more smoothly, labor

and management will begin to agree and fair and just settlements will result. There will be fair dealings in our businesses. There is bound to be less tension and fewer headaches than we now have. More productivity will result, better quality will result and people will really become centered in their work and they will want to do their very best. I know this to be a fact because this how a Christian acts and believes. We have no reason to set the minister apart to be admired and cherished. He is doing his job the best he knows how with God's help. Lay people do have a responsibility to God, to themselves, and the lives they live should be as just and right in the sight of God as the minister's.

There is an awareness that the star shines on both the minister and the layman. It would seem that under the light of the star there is no division such as that made between the sacred and the secular. As Joseph Jefferson once said, "There is no place in my theatre where God cannot enter." So there is no place where God's light cannot shine. And so there should be no place in your life where you have not lived and acted according to God's will.

The common place of the market and factory and shop and stable may catch the light of God's favor and become sacramental, even as the bread and the wine upon the altar become sacraments.

The light of God shines upon the evil world. Was there ever a man more wicked than the Herod who was in those days upon the throne of Jerusalem? That star was shining above the palaces of the city. Above every haunt of sin and shame the star was shining. It is not only where righteousness rains that it is God's world, but also where sin is rampant. Certainly God does not like all the sin that is around us. He doesn't like it when we are tempted by sin and finally submit ourselves to it. But this is our choice to make. God is there willing to help us, if we want him to. The light of the star is sometimes the suffering of God. The cross shines in the star.

How vividly the thought of the universality of God light and of God's love is expressed in the Gospel of John! John writes not of the star but of the Son, in terms of light. "That was the true light, which lightest every man that cometh into the world; (John 1:9), not that all men received him, but he came to all. It is true that Christ is here for all of us but not all of us really accept him. Jesus says in John 8:12, "I am the light of the world."

And so above the inn and the stable, above the palace in Jerusalem and the fields of Bethlehem, the star was shining on that first Christmas, symbol of the light and love of God which shines and broods over the lives of all men in the great wide world, for this is indeed God's world.

Here, in it, he rejoices; there, he suffers.

God's light and love are universal. They are particular. They are for all man; they are for each man, each one of us individually. For in spite of our religion, Christianity being universal for everyone, it is up to each one of us whether we believe it, accept it and practice it.

Strange, isn't it, that the Babe should be born in a stable? Even the servant beasts are blessed by his coming. God's light and love, as revealed in Jesus, as reflected by him, as channeled through him, are for each man's reception. God so loved that "whosoever" believeth—that "whosoever" particularizes. Does it not mean each one? "As many as received him, them he gave power to become sons"—each one a son.

We can put this particularization into vivid figurative form by placing halos above the head of all the

principal characters in the stable scene. These halos stand as reflections from the Baber, the center of light.

Name those who were crowned with lights in the stable. First there was Mary, his mother. Second Joseph, who, in the home and in the carpenter shop, would so influence the young child that when he became a man he could and would call God by the name of Father. Third the shepherds, the child in the stable placed halos above the heads of men of common toil. As Dr. John H Jewett wrote, “some of us can see the light resting upon a Bishops crosier, but we cannot see the radiance on the ordinary shepherds staff. We can discern the hallowedness of a priest vocation but we see no sanctity in the calling of a grocer, or the sweeper in the street, or the farmer in the field. But the very first hour of Christianity irradiated the humble doings of humble people.”

Fourth, the wise men were crowned with light in the stable. These men of old were on a spiritual quest. In our Christmas pageantry, and most rightly so, each of the three “Kings of Orient” is represented in his own distinctive garb. Tradition says then they came from different parts of the East. The light of the star encircled them together; the light of the stable encircles each man’s brow.

The visit of the shepherds and the Wise men to the holy Child were equally blessed. Both of those who were steeped in the wisdom of that ancient East and the simple-minded sons of the Desert stood at the shrine of a holy personality as naked souls, divested of all artificial human distinctions. There were no “assigned” pews in that little shrine. All those who came into it by way of the heart receive a blessing and went away praising God. Here we have a fore-gleam of that longed for Kingdom of God— the home of all inspiring and seeking souls, regardless of rank and station.

Christ was born in plain, humble circumstances and I believe God surely intended it to be this way. Christ can come into anyone’s heart regardless of his social position, whether he is poor and ordinary, or rich. We cannot buy Christ with money, gifts, with gratitude, with good deeds. We have to accept him ourselves. That’s why Christianity is an individual religion and each person must come to Christ of his own accord. Once we have become a Christian then we are united in fellowship together with other Christians. This is why prayer alone with our Lord is so important. We can listen to others talk of Christ, his leading and his love but alone we have to feel him in our own lives experience him for ourselves. Once we have this experience we will want to go out and share this experience with our families, our friends and our associates.

It is pleasant to think of these people, the shepherds, Wise men, Mary and Joseph, returning each to his own home, carrying the radiance of the stable each to his own family and friends and other people. There is a light which given in one place is carried to another; given to one person is made visible to others.

What we are trying to say is that the light of love of God shines in a universal matter like a star in the sky; at the same time the light and love of God are given to men and women, to boys and girls, in a particular way as to those who visited the stable in Bethlehem.

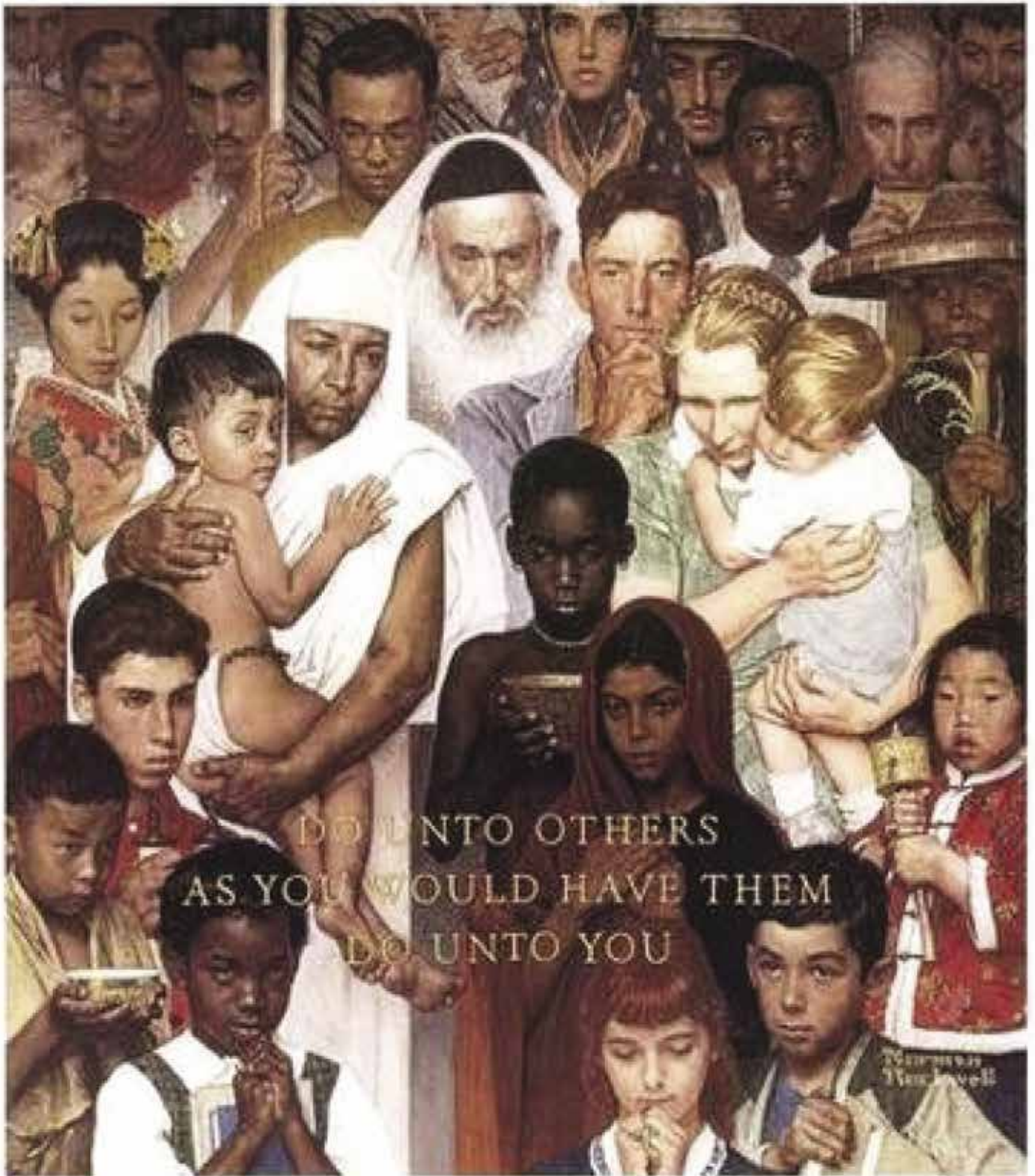
Jaroslav Pelikan says that the wise men of the present-day no longer come to the churches. “At one time the wise man lived in the church and by the church. Her nurture in the sacraments gave them sustenance, the fellowship gave them support, her traditions gave them continuity and direction.” Now they do not come. If this is a fact, it might well cause the church humbly to restudy its theology and scrutinize itself.

But the discernment of this hour is that the Wise men of old came not to a church, but to a stable, where the young child was found and where they were crowned with his light. Wise men are still humble, Wise men still bow in worship and open their treasures, Wise men still wear their crowns. If this is not so, they, it seems to me, would not be wise. We shudder at the thought of even a single church where the Bible is not to be found, to receive the homage of the wise.

We all know that every church has members who are not sincere, who use the church for social games, for their own advantage. We have seen people accept their vows when they become members and never again to darken the doors of the church. We also know that the church has to be more than a social organization. It has to have Jesus Christ as its head. Christ must be in the hearts of its members otherwise it will not survive. We all remember that old familiar hymn, "The Church is One Foundation is Jesus Christ her Lord." There is no question about that.

This Christmas: "There is a star in the sky." Hail the Universal light!

This Christmas: "There's a baby's low cry." Bow down and worship!



NORMAN ROCKWELL
"DO UNTO OTHERS"