

Braman

Foundation of Charities



South Harpersfield
United Methodist Church
Geneva, Ohio

The Sermons of Richard W. Braman Vol. 6

“

Love Thy Neighbor

65 Country Colony Rd. | Queensbury, NY 12804

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

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



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

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

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

In Christ,
The Braman Foundation

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A Page of the Bible

Scripture: John 14:1-9, 12-14

Text is chosen from John 14:21: “He who has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me; and he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him.”

Suppose that you were captured by some evil power and that he was to separate you – imprison you, perhaps – from everything that you hold dear. In that situation he permits you to keep just one page of the Bible. What page would you choose? What page would hold the best words at that worst time? What words would make the most difference?

Some persons could not make a choice because they do not know their Bible at all. Others would have to search their most precious chapter. At any rate it certainly would not be easy to make such a choice. However, I feel sure that a good many persons would agree with me and choose the page which contains the 14 th chapter of John’s Gospel. In my Bible it covers approximately one page. Why is this such a valued chapter in the Bible? I believe it is valuable because these are sermons in nearly every sentence of it but we shall scan the whole chapter this morning and try to answer the question.

First of all– with the exception of three questioning sentences these are the words of Jesus. That point alone marks the words important. These words were spoken and when he was approaching the greatest crisis of his life (that of being condemned, crucified on a cross, and his resurrection, and his ascension to God the Father).

These words were spoken to men whom he deeply love and upon home he defended Carry on his work. For nearly 3 years his disciples had been with him, listening to him teach, creech and Gray, seeing his miracles and marvelous works, actually receiving training to carry-on gods work on this earth. Jesus knew that he must leave them physically and that they needed all the training he could possibly give them. They would need all the faith they could muster to indoor the road ahead which wasn’t going to be easy. The disciples were spoken with awareness that they were divinely inspired. The 10 th verse reads, “Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father in me? That words that I say to you I don’t speak on my own authority; but the Father who dwells in me does his works.” All of us would be much better off if we let God direct our lives.

Second, these words in the 14 chapters of John tells men what they really want to know. All of us want to know and we are concerned about the future. We are all planning for retirement in later years and we want to know that we can take care of ourselves. We also want to know as did Job of the old, “If a man die shall he live again?” That question reappears in every generation. Here Jesus gives an answer: Life is a journey and a final arrival. He says, “I am the Way.” He tells them that there are many dwelling places in the Father’s house, and that there they are ultimately to dwell.

It is reassuring to know that death, that's the end of life on this earth is not the end but really the beginning of a beautiful and wonderful relationship and dwelling place with God, our father. There really would not be much purpose to this life if we were not assured of this fact and given the promise of eternal life with God. All we have to do is to believe and have faith in Christ then we want to know God. The deepest yearning of the human heart is, "Lord show us the father, and it sufficeth us." That is the craving which alone causes all our restlessness. It is much to learn that this is our great need. We can surely know the Father if we really come to know Jesus Christ as our personal Lord and Savior. Phillip's earnest plea was, "show us the Father." A system of propositions would not suffice; he wished to see the personal being of God. We sincerely believe that Jesus met Phillip's desire. Jesus said, "He that hath seen me have seen the Father." He that hears the words of Jesus hears God speaking. He that sees the works of Jesus sees God in action. Here is where our Christian belief of the Trinity comes into being. Jesus said, "the Father and I are one" And we are left with the presence of the Holy Spirit, which is God's direction also. We never have to be concerned for God is always present in our lives willing to give us direction and guidance.

Serious men want to know that their own lives will be meaningful and useful. Jesus gave this assurance to his disciples. The chapter becomes, from verse 12, like a strand of four colors which by their loosening maybe more clearly seen and followed. We receive with the disciples four hardening and assuring words from the master. First, his disciples will do greater works in his name than he was able to do, if we believe in him and have faith in him. And his power will be available with which to do them. In quantity, at least, the works of his followers have far exceeded the works of Christ himself. For example, Jesus may have open the eyes of a few score blind folk, but Sir William Wanless restored vision to tens of thousands in India. A few lepers were cleansed by Jesus, but thousands have been healed in the Christian leprosariums of the world. The works of Christ are not now limited to Palestine but are diffused throughout the whole earth. Whatever works are undertaken in his name and unto the glory of God, there his power to do them will be given for the asking.

Of course, when we are looking at how good we are and how many works we have done as compared to Christ, we need to remember that this is nearly 2000 years later and God has allowed us to learn many things pertaining to healing. We have been allowed to discover many cures for diseases that were once considered fatal and crippling. We have had the advantage of studying God's word all these years. He has given us the opportunity for understanding. If we have not or are not studying God's Word, it surely is our own fault, for all of us especially in this country do have this opportunity. All we need to do is to take time in this busy world of ours. We most certainly have the advantage of Christ's help, also.

Second – the lives of Christ followers will be meaningful because of their intimate relationship with him. Love and obedience will bring them into vital communion with the Father and their Lord. It will be as if the Father and the Son abide with them in their homes. Their Lord must go away, but there will be no interruption of his spiritual presence. Leonard Griffith has this to say, "Walking along Piccadilly one day I suddenly heard a broad Scottish accent saying to me, "can you show this man the way to Trafalgar Square?", and turning around I saw the speaker accompanied by a dark-skinned Indian. It is just as well that they had

not asked a Londoner for directions. He would have said, “take the first to the right, and the second to the left. Cross the Square and go past the church and take the third on the right and the road you want is the fourth on the left. You can’t miss it.” For all I know he may still be wandering around Piccadilly. Suppose I had not been in a hurry however and had said, “look, I’ll take you there,” in a very real sense, I should have been “the way” to Trafalgar Square.”

And in that sense Jesus Christ offers himself to us as the way to God. Jesus Christ is the way and the only way we can get to God. Christ is always present in our lives because of the presence of the Holy Spirit. If we want to be Christ followers and live a life worthy of God’s grace, we certainly can’t because God’s Holy Spirit is always here. We are therefore never alone. We always have someone to help us make decisions, someone to give us advice, someone to guide our thoughts and actions.

You know the sooner we start relying on the Holy Spirit for these things the better off we are going to be because most of us can complicate and mixup our lives alone by ourselves. We not only make our own lives miserable, we really foul up with the lives of those around us. The price is not too high for this guidance. We claim to be Christians anyway so why shouldn’t we start living Christ-like lives.

Our lives will be enriched by the presence of the Holy Spirit, who will come to us and abide with us as the Spirit of truth. Jesus Christ will be our Comforter, our Strength and our Fortress. He will bring to our remembrances all that Christ has set unto us. He will be our teacher. By the presence of the Holy Spirit we will know and understand and receive the presence of Jesus Christ. “The Comforter— will bring all things to your remembrance.” Their memory would play flashbacks of every event in the ministry of Jesus. Back to the day, when he called four of them from the fishing boats beside the Sea of Galilee. Matthew would look back to the custom seat and look also at himself, at his own changed life. And we should look forward to what our lives can be if we follow Jesus Christ.

He bequeathed the promise of a “Living Companion on the Christian journey.” The promise of a “Living Teacher in the Christian truth.” The promise of a “ Living Authority in the Christian faith”. And the promise of a “Living Helper” in the Christian faith. The lives of Christ followers will enjoy of legacy of peace, which shall take anxiety and fear from their hearts, from our hearts.

I wonder if we really know what peace is. Believe me when I say you do not, if you have not accepted Christ into your life as your personal Lord and Savior. Christ and only Christ can bring peace to your life. Everyone is concerned about the peace in our world and many feel that we will never obtain it. Still many feel that peace is the ceasing of wars and fighting. Peace goes much deeper than that. Peace is within each of our souls. A calm that gives us a feeling of satisfaction, of not wanting something because the next-door neighbor has it, not being afraid or having a fear of everything that surrounds us. We are at peace because we know Christ will protect us. He will give us everything we need. When we obtain this and spread it to all people everywhere, then we will have a true peace in our world.

Mansions, Dwelling-places, Resting-places. William Temple uses resting-places in his book, "Readings in St. John's Gospel." He says, "they are wayside caravanserais—shelters at stages along the road where travelers rest on their journey. It was the custom in the East – and still is, where railways and motor cars had not yet penetrated – for travelers to send a dragoman forward to make preparations in the next of those resting places along the road, so that when they came they might find in it comfort as well as shelter. Here the Lord presents himself as one spiritual dragoman, who treads the way of faith before us, the captain and perfecter of faith and makes ready to welcome us.

Yes Jesus Christ has paved the way for us. All we have to do is follow him. The last words of this page in the Bible are, "Arise, let us go hence."

"Hence"—he would confirm these words by his death and by his resurrection, and later by his spiritual presence, "Lo, I am with you always." "Arise, let us go hence." from this service, I mean.

If you do not own a Bible, buy one; if for no other reason than to scrutinize this one page of John's Gospel. However I believe your life will be much fuller if you read the Bible regularly. But as you read the 14 th chapter of John meet it with any doubts that you may have. Read the page and put it to the test, any sincere and honest test. I challenge each and every one of you to read this chapter in John when you get home today. Perhaps God will truly speak to you as he has spoken to many people through the centuries. I truly believe he will."

A Newly Discovered Parable of Our Time

Scripture: John 14:1-9, 12-14

Text is chosen from James 2:17; “so faith, by itself, if it has not works is dead.”

New Testament scholars have been intrigued recently by the discovery in upper Egypt of an ancient papyrus book entitled, “The Gospel According to Thomas.” This volume purports to be a collection of James’s sayings. Some of the teachings are the same as those found in our familiar gospels; others are sayings of Jesus which are not found in the Gospels but which has been known through other sources. In addition, there are sayings that have not been found anywhere else, some of these don’t sound like Jesus and are clearly not genuine. Others may well be additional sayings of the Master. Scholars are still debating the question.

One of the new parables concerns the kingdom of God. As to whether it is a genuine saying of Jesus I am in no position to say, but in any case it is highly suggestive of a significant truth. It certainly is worthy of consideration.

The parable goes like this: “Jesus said, the Kingdom of the Father is like a woman who was carrying a jar full of meal. While she was walking on a distant road, the handle of the jar broke. The meal streamed out behind her on the road. She didn’t know it; she had noticed no accident. After she came into the house, she put down her jar and found it empty.”

This has the marks of a vivid homely picture stories Jesus told. One can see in the mind’s eye the meal silently drifting out behind a woman who is preoccupied with other matters as she carries home the broken jar. One can imagine that disappointment of the woman for ride home only to discover she had lost on the way the meal she thought she held secure in the jar. The kingdom of God is like that. You take the great spiritual realities of the kingdom into your life, and you think you hold them securely. But as you go through life, if you are not alert, they drift silently out of your life and are gone. They disappeared before you are aware that they are missing. No one steals them from you; they just leaked out along life’s journey.

This is life isn’t it? It is not likely that anyone is going to shatter our Christianity by direct assault. Rather we tend to lose it almost unconsciously as we go through the daily routines of life. Along life’s way our spiritual resources are dissipated. Our attention becomes directed towards other than Christian ends, and in our preoccupation with these matters, the concerns of the kingdom drop out of life without our notice. Yes, this newly discovered parable is tragically true to life.

I listened to Billy Graham a few years ago preach a sermon about Communism. He said there are only 50,000 registered persons in this country who belong to the Communist Party. Now this figure isn’t enough to get concerned about but every known communist there are twenty more who have tendencies that lead towards that belief and this brings the figure up to 1 million. This we need to be concerned about

because we are complacent people and we really don't get concerned about something until it's too late. He reminded us that Khrushchev said he would bury us. Not with the weapons of war but from within ourselves. We have come to the point in this country where we do not take Christianity seriously, as evidenced by the way we live our lives. This is how Communism will take us over because we will let it happen. Our Christian principles and ideals will just slip away and finally one day we will wake up and find them gone.

One thing is certain, we cannot just say with our lips that we are Christian and we believe, and that's as far as it goes. Nor can we become converted to Christ and then let it die. A Christian has to grow in Christ, he has to live the Christian life constantly, always striving to live a better life, he has to witness for Christ; otherwise he will lose what he has gained in the first place.

For if we say we believe and say we have faith but do nothing about it, then our faith is dead. We cannot keep our Christianity wrapped up in ourselves. We need to share it with others. Christianity is an outgoing religion.

Let us now consider some of the ways that our generation is losing out of life the treasures of the kingdom. We can begin by observing that our generation has become so preoccupied with trivialities that it has little awareness of having lost out of life the big things that matter. When life centers upon them, they push the larger concerns of life out of the picture.

Today many churches become so engrossed in how the church building should be rebuilt, or redecorated, or what location we should have for a new church building, that the people concerned tend to put so much emphasis on these things that they lose sight of the real purpose of the church. Many congregations are so concerned about increasing their memberships that they are not concerned about the people who are becoming members and whether or not they know why they are becoming members of the church. In other words the increased numbers of people makes a big impression on them.

I know of one church that had a division in its members over whether to use wine or grape juice in their communion service. It seems to me that these people really didn't understand the meaning of the Lord's Supper and they apparently obtained very little from partaking of it.

Sometimes in our personal lives, we pursue the trivial things and let the major things that really matter in life go right over our heads. Something is wrong when the pursuit of trivialities becomes a dominant passion. They will rob us of a proper sense of proportion as empty as the woman's broken jar. We need to get back to the primary concerns of the kingdom. Purity of heart, outgoing compassion to friend and foe alike, unbreakable bonds of love to God and neighbor; these are matters which must be central in our lives. Consider further that we are a people who are in danger of losing the Kingdom as we become more and more preoccupied with the sensual or over indulgence of physical desires. Jesus was neither a prudent nor a puritan. He was no aesthetic who looked upon human flesh as evil. This world of ours comes

from the hands of a loving father who created all things good. The drive which attracts man and woman to each other is among those good things. The danger lies in becoming so preoccupied with the physical attractiveness that we fail to center attention upon the spiritual aspects of personality. In our present culture we tend to exalt physical beauty to the neglect of all else. We certainly know that real and true beauty is more than skin deep.

Today great emphasis is placed upon sex education in our public schools. I believe our young people should know and learn about sex and how it relates to our lives but some of the books our young people are required in college go far beyond the realms of sex education. In fact, most of us are concerned about some of the magazines and books that are sold on the newsstands what actually these kinds of books, which have been approved for reading, are far more amoral than any we find on the new stands.

In some cases, some of the things that go on, on our college campuses, should make us wonder what higher education is doing for our young people and what kind of country morally this higher education is going to produce.

Meaningful family life, with all of its potentialities for strengthening and transforming society, is sometimes more than a physical relationship. God needs those who will put life into a proper perspective and work for a responsible society. That is a real concern of the kingdom. Is it being lost from our lives unnoticed, like the woman's meal, which silently drifted out behind her as she walked down the way? I believe it is. Another insidious preoccupation of our present society is with the material things of life. I know that the term material possessions sometimes gets overworked and we get tired of hearing about it. Jesus never taught that material things in themselves are evil. However, he did warn continually that preoccupation with things material can make one callous to the demands of the kingdom. The man of affluence tends to ignore the needs of the beggar Lazarus at his door. When this happens the meal of the kingdom silently drifts out behind us without our notice.

A British economist says, "these are the true penalties of affluence— that nothing bites through the layers of expected comfort and accepted ease; that we remain, with our cars, our high calorie diet, our healthy children, our magazines and our television, cushioned almost totally from the needs and hope and frenzies of the man on starvation wages in the hideous shanty towns of Africa or the East." It is true that when we hear about the basic needs of the world we are not calloused or lacking in good intentions. The trouble is that we just don't bother to think about these matters at all. I'm sure that most of us know from our own experiences that "where your heart is, there will your treasure be." If we are constantly wanting and to acquire more and more material things like a bigger and newer house, a better automobile, more of the luxuries of life, these will finally become our goals in life. If however, along with the acquisitions of material possessions, God is first in our hearts, and we constantly are thankful and realize that God gives us everything we have and that we need to give back a proportionate share to God's work, then I can see nothing wrong in it. To me it is all a question of what we place the greatest importance on and what comes first in our lives that really matter.

For unless we place God first, all other things become purposeless and useless. Many a person preoccupied with gadgets and other goods seem unaware of that “the unsearchable riches of Christ” that are being lost by the roadside.

In the midst of our nation’s unprecedented prosperity we have lost out of our lives a concern for the intangible spiritual realities of truth, beauty and goodness. Look what we have done and are doing to ourselves. Why do we need to be reminded and pass laws and be fined if we are caught littering on our highways? Why do we want to make our highways look like a dump? And why do we cut all the trees and never replace them? The thing that really bothers me is why do we insist on murdering ourselves on the highway by disobeying the rules of good driving and the road. All of these things are pointed out to us constantly and still we go right on our merry ways, concern for who? Ourselves and only ourselves— We really do not care about anyone else except ourselves, nor the next generation. We will get all we can out of this life and this world while we can enjoy it.

Let us look at some more things that are happening in our country today. The largest percentage of people (ever) in this country are members of churches. More and more new church buildings are being built each year. In many churches to worship services are necessary each Sunday morning to accommodate the worshipers. And still on the other side of the story our crime rate keeps increasing, the number of divorces are increasing, there are more and more unwed mothers each year, alcoholism has become one of the major diseases in this country and morally many other things are happening. Apparently our church membership is a safe front, perhaps we say with our lives we believe but with our hearts we do not. We certainly are not kidding anyone but ourselves for God knows our every feeling. And so our faith without works is dead. We are taking our Christianity seriously. Unless we are constantly alert we shall one day awaken from reveries to discover too late that the spiritual realities we want treasured are gone. Just like the woman in the parable who lost all the meal from the broken jar if we say we are Christians, let’s act and live our lives as Christians. Let’s train and teach our children in the Christian way of life. Let’s hold onto what God has truly given us.

Black and White

(Race Relations Sunday)

Scripture: John 14:1-9, 12-14

Text from Ephesians 4:4-6; “There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, who is above all, through all and in all.” I think perhaps a verse from Malachi 2:10 applies also, “Have we not all one father? Has not one God created us? Why then are we faithless to one another; profaning the covenant of our father?”

If you say you put something down in black and white, you mean that you have made it as clear as you possibly can make it and have removed from it any possible confusion. But if you begin to talk about black and white people, there is no clarity whatsoever, nothing but confusion; and around the subject gather clouds of either prejudice or sentimentality. The principle may be clear enough in your mind, but when you begin to practice the principle; the confusion is worse confounded.

First of all, then, what is the principle? The principal, as it was once magnificently stated is that all men are created equal. And what does that mean? It surely doesn't mean that all men are alike, because they are not. It means that all human beings are human, that all human beings must be treated as human. No human being is given the right by God to treat any other human being as less than human. They may treat him as stupid or ignorant, wayward or dangerous, sick or insane, pleasing or displeasing, but not as an animal, with no soul or imagination, no inalienable right to life, liberty and the pursuit of his own happiness. Racial prejudice and discrimination deny the dignity of man. Man wasn't created by God to be a slave to man. We were created equal in the sight of God and we are all equal as human beings. Racial prejudice and discrimination subvert our unity in Christ. How can we be united in Christ and still treat other human beings' the way they have been and are being treated in this country? Racial prejudice and discrimination stultify the mission of the church. The mission of the church is to bring all people together in Jesus Christ.

If this is the churches mission, then all men must be treated as equals, otherwise we do not believe what we say we do. Where do we find this principle written down? You will not find it spelled out in so many words in the Bible that all men are equal. It is implicit in the Bible, as the flower is implicit in the seed, though not yet visible, not yet in existence, only potentially existent. It is implicit in the idea that there is one God and that he has made all men in his image, and when the Jews first grasped that tremendous idea about God, they had the seed of the principle we are talking about. Our text from Malachi pretty well covers this principle, “have we not all one father? Has not one God created us? Why then are we faithless to one another; profaning the covenant of our father?”

Even more implicit is this principle of the Christian experience, for in that experience there is, among other things, the conviction that Christ died for all men, not only for the people of his own country, not

only for the people who were living at the same time he lived, but the Son of Man, the God– man, died for all men in all ages everywhere.

I do not know of any place in the Bible where it says Christ died for the people of the white race only or the black race only, or the yellow race or whatever other race there may be. It definitely says for all men and I believe that's what it means. I have never been able to understand why the white race has always felt they were superior over every other race. It's true that the white race has made many gains in science, medicine and in nearly all other fields of endeavors but have we made these gains at the expense of other races, holding them back, exploiting them and not treating them as human beings and as God's children?

When St. Paul was writing his letter to the Romans, the most shocking thing that he said in that letter (and we read it now with so little excitement because we have read it so many times) was that there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek! It was incredible that anyone should say that, especially a Jew. No difference? They didn't eat with each other, they didn't meet with each other, they didn't marry each other, and yet Paul was able to say that because Christ died for both the Jews and the Gentiles, he was therefore Lord of both, and that this common life that they both had in him wiped out the distinctions between them. That was a strategic step forward.

Where then, do you find the principal written down? You find it, of course, in our Declaration of Independence. But most unmistakably it is written in the history of our time, on every page of every day's newspaper, and if anyone takes seriously at all the historical experience of the last 50 years, one thing is extremely self-evident, and that is, there can be no master race, and whenever one race presumes to assume the supremacy over another race, there is nothing I but disaster for everyone concerned. We all know what happened to Hitler and the Germans who thought they were the master race. We remember what they did to the Jews. The Germans are intelligent people who have made great gains in science, medicine and other fields but because of this they have no right to feel they could rule the world and all other people. We have no right to feel we are supreme, or that we should be the leaders and the rest of the world should be our servants. I do not believe that God intended for this to be. The principle of which I speak is written supremely less legibly but no less clearly, on our conscience. It is the conclusion to which the Christian conscious has slowly and laboriously come as a result of what happened in Palestine nearly 2000 years ago. Most of us do have a conscious and usually when we do something wrong, we immediately know it, no one has to tell us. I do not know how we can treat a person of another race less than human. I do not see how our conscious, if nothing else does, can let us do such things that are happening right here in our country today. What right do any of us have to say that we are better than another person regardless of what color our skin is or what language we speak? I do not believe we have any right at all and I'm sure that God would not and does not condone such actions. In answer to some man's statement that always was good for some people, Lincoln responded with a sentence, after which are three exclamation points in the manuscript: "Slavery is good for some people!!! As a good thing, slavery is strikingly peculiar in this, that it is the only good thing which no man ever seeks the good of, for himself." If segregation is a good thing, it's strikingly peculiar in this, that no man has ever sought it for himself. The principal, all human

beings are human and must be treated as human, is clear but when we begin to apply it, then we run into difficulties. On one hand, you see the enormous difficulties that ensue when you try to apply it. So, you begin to think; and you become bewildered. I sympathize with you in your bewilderment. For one thing, the two races in the country have been separated for so long that the gulf between them is enormous –the cultural gulf, the educational gulf, the social gulf is tremendous.

It is a fact and most of us know the American Negro, in general, is not highly educated. He is not trained to do skilled work nor is he trained in a trade. This in itself presents a great problem in the standard of living for these people. They must therefore be employed at non-skilled jobs that pay less and therefore they cannot enjoy the same standard of living the rest of the people do because their wages are lower. What does this mean? To me it means that we must give the Negro the opportunity to be trained in skilled occupations. We must allow their children to become educated as the white children do; and why shouldn't they have the same opportunities? They are human, they have been created by God the same as you and me, and it will certainly help our country morally, socially and economically to have its people educated. I am thoroughly convinced that in the long run you can never help yourself by holding other people down. I believe we also need to remember this condition has existed for many years, that the past cannot be changed, it will do us no good to blame someone else and that we have to start from where we are and try to do

what we think is right through God's help.

But after trying to be reasonable and understanding, some may still say," and I say, in nothing that I know of, will we ever achieve perfection, nothing that amounts to anything. But this fact, as I understand the Christian religion, in no way excuses us from the obligation to strive in that direction. We have no right to sit back and say that something will not work. At least we have to make every effort to make it work, especially if we believe the principle to be right and according to God's will.

Perhaps you say, "Well I do not have any prejudices and I believe what you say," or perhaps you say, "It's easy for you to say such things and have such beliefs because you have not had any experiences with the problem." I know that it is easy to sit back on the side-lines and criticize but regardless I still believe that such a principle is God's will and besides it makes common sense to me. We always need to try to put ourselves in the other person's shoes and ask ourselves if we would want to be treated the way the Negroes have been treated? I doubt very much if we would want to.

Even though we agree with and believe in the principle we always need advice in applying it. First—ponder the principle, think about it, try to see it clearly, now when there is no confusion, when the issue is not sharply raised in your own life. Canon Sheeter once wrote, "I define a principle as that which I accept in cold blood to stand by me when the blood is hot."

Second, apply it partially, even when you cannot apply it completely. Let no lesser one than Abraham Lincoln be your guide. He did not apply it completely, all at once; but here in there, where and when he

could, as the times allowed, he applied it.

The racial struggle needs Lincoln's who with "malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right, bind up the nation's wounds." Third, when you cannot apply it completely – and you will not always be able to apply it completely, perfectly – when you cannot apply it completely, be honest about it. Do not try to hide behind the Bible, behind some obscure line or verse that seems to sanction your behavior. Be honest and say, "Lord, I have gone a few steps, help me to go a few more; I have done what I could, pardon the imperfection of my service." One of the most famous badges and coats of arms in the world is the badge of Achimota College in West Africa. It was designed and conceived by the great soul, Aggrey. The badge of Achimota is the picture of a part of the keyboard of a piano with its black and white notes. And the symbolism of it is this; you cannot extract some kind of tune, by playing only the black notes; but if you are ever to produce a real tune and real harmony, you must use both black and white notes. Therein lies the simple truth and never forget that people who are struggling for freedom, are seldom patient, although their leaders sometimes have cultivated a patience that is far beyond one's understanding. The burden of patience lies upon those who now walk freely along their way, with the liberty to think and do as they please.

Christianity is a Christmas Faith

Scripture: Luke 2:11-35

Text chosen from 1 John 1:5; “This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is Light and in him is no darkness at all.”

There is an incident tucked away in the second chapter of Luke’s Gospel that we commonly overlook at Christmas. The destined child of God’s giving has come. The caravan of adoration– the shepherds and Wiseman, the great and humble of the earth– has gone its way. There comes a day when the parents of Jesus take him to the temple at Jerusalem for consecration. As they stand at the altar before the priest, an elderly saint prophet of God, Samuel by name, who had been awaiting the “consolation of Israel,” joins them there. Dramatically he takes the child in his arms, looks up to heaven, and makes that sublime utterance known as the “Nunc dimittis” as we read in Luke 2:29-32. There is a majestic sweep in the words as they are spoken:

“Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation!”

For this is not just an ordinary child that he holds in his arms at the altar; there is something portentous about this life. “This Child”, cried the aged saint, “should be for the rise and falling of many in Israel!” This little life is to constitute a watershed in human history, is to get a new date to time, and a new dimension to the human soul. Man will either receive this child unto the salvation of their souls or reject it at their peril. One thing is certain– they cannot ultimately be indifferent to it.

Let us set down a few of the ramifications of the Christmas fact.

First of all, we note that Christmas is preeminently an event, a startling happening within history, the actual advent of the life and love and light of God into a world of sin and pain and woe and death. Its sublime significance is contained in the word ‘Emmanuel’ which means, “God with us.” For God surely is with us in Jesus Christ.

How uniquely the Eternal made his entry into time, the heavenly into the realm of the human. Someone has said that when God wanted to give us music, he didn’t hand us a book on technicalities. Rather he wrapped a song in feathers, set it on a bough and bade it sing! So, at that first Christmas, God wrapped his glory up in the tender loveliness of a little child, and offered himself to the humanity that so needed him.

Would it be irreverent to suggest that there is a “method in God’s madness”, in the revealing of himself? All other avenues of appeal seemed closed. The adult world had proved cross and cool and cold. One door remained open! A little child–pray who could refuse that? Through what a lowly door the Savior bestrides our humanity and comes upon the stage of history! There was a mother who had adopted six or seven children. Every now and then the social worker would stand at her door with still another child for

adoption. That's social worker was very wise, "Just hold the baby in your arms for a moment", she would urge, which, when it was done, secured still another child for a loving home and a loving mother.

Perhaps God figured the world could not possibly reject the baby Jesus. The elderly Simeon, the child clasped in his arms, is aware that the Word has become flesh that the Divine has entered into history. He, therefore, exclaims with prophetic insight, "mine eyes have seen thy salvation." We know this for we read in the Gospel of John 1:14, "and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth."

Simeon and Anna did not even live into the angry dawn of their world's new day. The first faint glow of it was all they caught; but they were willing to leave it at that, and die as men have died from time immemorial with no other certainty than this bear edge of a vision. "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace." There was only a hint of God, a nod, a glance— but they got it; because they knew as Jesus knew on Calvary, what God was like: that he would always be alive; Breaking through in quiet corners that he would always be standing most surely in the very center of things most desolate.

And how much more advantage we have today than did the people at the first Christmas. We can read of the experiences of others all down through history. Our Bible, the word of God, gives us these experiences. We know that God did truly give to us his Son, as our Lord and Savior. He came to save the world. We can be saved if we believe. We do have something to look forward to, eternal and everlasting life with our father in heaven. This is one of the advantages of being a Christian.

But if we look deeper still into the heart of Christmas, you see not only an unveiling of himself on the part of God, but what is more, a measuring rod, a word and spiritual barometer for what we call our civilization. This is a cosmic child, and is for the rising and falling of humanity! It smites our so-called progress in the arts, science, and religion on the cheek. It inserts a live demarcation between what is false and true, evil and good, in our makeshift human progress. Christmas is a child—Potentate, set on the throne, meeting our judgment upon the sons of the earth.

How our almighty the child is! It is fitting that we should freely face the sterner aspect of the Christian message, lest the tinsel skewer the reality. As Christians, our task is the basic one at helping to shape the kind of world in which our children may safely live and grow and know happiness. We indulge no sentimentality when we say, "We must make the world safe for the children."

You may say, "I am only one person; what can I do alone" if everyone felt this way, certainly, nothing would be done to make the world a better place in which to live. Each individual needs to start with his own life. He needs to make sure he is living his life according to God's will for his life. He needs to set a good example for his children, for his family, for his friends, for his associates, for everyone he comes in contact with. He then can go out to proclaim the right kind of lives and how they should be lived.

Jesus Christ has taught and is teaching us each day what kind of lives to live. God's word gives us direction

and guidance. Prayer with our Lord, helps us to live our lives according to his will. Certainly building more weapons of war is not going to make the world a better and safer place in which to live. Perhaps we do have to keep our defenses up but this is only a temporary answer and not a permanent solution. The answer I believe it's for each one of us to find that peace, goodwill, happiness and joy which Jesus Christ brings. This— I believe will make the world a safer and better place for us and our children to live. We need to accept Christ into our lives as a personal Lord and Savior and we will find that peace which the Christmas message proclaims to all mankind.

Once we find this piece, we can and we will want to share it with others until the world truly becomes the kingdom of God. This and only this will provide us with a safer world for us and for our children. We are concerned about security in the future. This is the only real security we can know. The Child is not only our judge, but also our best hope. This broken battered world of ours can be rebuilt about a manger crib! Regardless of what our particular nationality, or color, or creed maybe, the fact remains that all of us love our children. And there is also help for our riddled humanity in that fact. There is a power in the tiny fingers of one of Christ's 'little ones', that can reorder our distraught world according to "the patterns revealed in the Mount". The aged Simeon is aware of the fact that the Child is cosmic. It is for the rise and falling of nations.

And then we have another thought: Christmas is an event in which a child becomes a signpost and a road leading and guiding us into the Kingdom of the Life Abundant most likely it was the vivid realization of this which thrilled at the heart of Simeon. He has been on the alert, on spiritual tip toe, waiting for the "consolation of Israel." And now that salvation has appeared, he opens wide the hospitable union of his own heart to the Child, exultantly explaining as he does so, "for mine eyes have seen the salvation." Personal quest ends in personal discovery.

A father took his little daughter to see the famous painting, "The light of the World". For a long while parent and child looked in reverent silence at the blessed Master, lantern in hand, knocking gently at the door which could only be opened from within. As they walked away the child asked the essential question: "Daddy, did they open the door?" It is our willing response to God's gracious offer of life in Christ that brings our salvation. I wonder if we would open the door? Have we let Christ in?

Halford Lancock writing in his book, "Living on Tip Toes" quotes Arthur J Gossip concerning lives "lived in expectancy". He says, "they are the kind of folks by whom the world moves forward; who live in a qui vive of expectancy, always standing on tip toe, always sure that something big may happen at anytime. With people like that God can do anything. But you and I keep thwarting him by sheer dullness of spirit. We are listless, apathetic, blasé, bored; our hopes are small and thin. There is no audacity in our expectation."

Christ gives meaning to our lives. We have a reason for living the best possible kind of life. We need to live our lives in expectancy, waiting for something big to happen, for it surely will if we live this way. We can

never come to the point where we are satisfied with the kind of life we are living or if we do, we have missed the real meaning of life. How this Advent – Child does need to lay hold of our desperate, weary and saddened hearts! How it needs to guide our vagrant footsteps to that kingdom which is righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. We often hear that Christmas is for children; but the fact remains that we adults need it the most. It were as though the Eternal Himself were saying to us, never mind your possible doubts with regard to the Nativity narratives. No words of mere man can possibly be adequate vehicles to set forth the wondrous event. There are depths in which no human mind can fully grasp. Rather consults your deep needs, look into the eyes and hearts of the little child and behold anew the glory in reality of Christmas! A man, speaking with a close friend of his, was overheard to say, “our heads maybe coldly logical, but our hearts never are!” None other than the Lord of life stands by saying, “I tell you truly, unless you turn and become like children, you will never get in the Realm of Heaven at all.

Re-Educating the Disciples

Scripture: Acts 1:1-14

Text chosen from Acts 17:6; “These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also.”

A few years ago, on the Monday after Easter the radio station broadcast this comment: “On this Easter more people worshipped in Christian churches and in the name of Christ than upon any other day in the history of the world”. That was a significant fact, especially when we look back to the first Easter. The first Easter really wasn’t so long ago. Counting three generations to a century, only about fifty-eight (58) generations. When the astronomers tell you that the light from a certain star which falls upon our eyes started on its way to earth 30,000 generations ago, 58 seems a short time.

We know, too, pretty well what happened since the first Easter. From the standpoint of Christianity, let us consider what there wasn’t in the world at the time of the first Easter. There wasn’t a single Christian building in the world. There wasn’t a single Christian book in the world. The world of A. D. 33 had the Jewish book of the Old Testament; The Greek classics, Homer, Plato, Euripides, Sophocles; the Confucian writings, the sermons of Gautama Buddha, the Hindu Vedas- but no Christian book or books. There was no Christian architecture or art in the world. There was the Jewish temple, the Greek Parthenon, the Egyptian Pyramids-but nothing Christian, not even in the graphic arts. And so, we could continue; no Christian School, no Christian hospital, no written Creed or covenant that was Christian, no so-called Christian government or nation. The contrast between then and now is very strikingly, for most of us cannot imagine living in this world without the influence of the Christian religion in all areas of our lives.

What was there in the world? There most definitely was a unique person in the world. His uniqueness was evident in his life, his character, his crucifixion, and most significant, his resurrection from the dead. There were eleven devoted followers of the unique person; they were fearful and despairing, often mistaken persons, but they were there. Others made a small company of a few hundred who followed Jesus. They were a fellowship and had a place to meet. They also had a sacrament to keep. Yet from the small band of people, who believed in Jesus Christ, in what he taught and preached, who believed in the way he treated people as human beings, the world was to be turned upside down.

Perhaps the most important thing was that they were going to do this without the physical presence of Christ himself. They would certainly use the training he had given them in his brief ministry but even more they would need the faith and trust he had shown them over this period of time. They had no idea of the pain or suffering they would be able to endure over the years ahead on behalf of their risen Lord. Could they communicate the message of Jesus Christ? They were without money. They had given all their possessions away when they became his followers and disciples. They would have to depend on the kindness and help of others. They were without literature, that which today we consider indisputable to getting a point across to others. At this point in time nothing had been written concerning the teachings

of Jesus, at least nothing they could use in teaching others.

This brings to mind the story of Robert Freeman and how he recalled his helplessness in 1917 in France when it was expected of him to promote religion throughout the army there without testaments, without hymnbooks, without pamphlets of any sort. This job wasn't easy for him but with God's help he tried and was able to succeed. It would be like us, here this morning, trying to conduct a worship service without the help of the Bible reading, without hymnals, and without the organ and help of the choir. We would have a pretty hard time. Jesus had written nothing. None of the apostles had at that time written anything; and if they had there were no printing machines, no multipliers. They were without social backing, save only from a few generous women who offered occasional lodging and made contributions to the treasury. They were no doubt courageous. They left all; and though that they may seem little to us, any man's all is a lot. I wonder how many of us would have that kind of courage today if we were in the same circumstance? The Christian life to us seems too difficult to live let alone trying to convince other people they should follow Christ.

When you get feeling sorry for yourself, think of these first apostles and what they endured for Christ sake. After his resurrection, Jesus had 40 days in which to prepare them for their great task. His task was to re-educate them. How did he do it?

First of all, Jesus re-educated his disciples by bringing them intimately into contact with himself. He had been intimate with them before, but now a new intimacy developed. He began with Mary Magdalene. In John 20:16-17 we read, "Jesus said to her, "Mary". She turned and said to him in Hebrew, "Rabboni", (which means teacher). Jesus said to her: "Do not hold me for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brethren and say to them I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God in your God." "He spoke to the disciples as they walked along the road to Emmaus. This is recalled in Luke 24:13-32. You remember that Jesus talked and walked with them and they were kept from recognizing him. They told him of Jesus death and resurrection and how they could not believe he had risen from the dead. Jesus then said, "Oh foolish men, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory? He then told them all the things in scripture pertaining to himself from the time of Moses and all the prophets. He stayed with them that night to eat and while at the table he took bread and blessed it and broke it and gave it to them and their eyes were opened and they recognized him; and he vanished out of their sight." They said to each other: "Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the scriptures?"

He also met with his friends in the Upper Room. He gave special attention, you remember, to Thomas and Peter. At a seashore on a mountainside in Galilee he spoke with them on most intimate terms. From Matthew 28:10, we read, "Go tell my brethren to go into Galilee and there shall they see me." Just why go back to Galilee? Because their hearts will be more tender back home; Galilee was home to most of the disciples. And there are always some things back home that need to be perpetuated. Galilee was also where they had first met the Master. "When one goes back home it is a notable event in the soul's

secret history only when one focuses his anticipations on the essential rather than the accidental. “There shall they see me.” Go back to a great Christ for this was after the crucifixion and the resurrection. Go back to be saturated again with his personality. Going back to Galilee was a significant factor in the re-education of his disciples.

Second, by this intimacy he confirmed his Resurrection. The Resurrection became a fundamental fact upon which the Christian Church could be built. The disciples had to be related to the basic fact of the Resurrection. Christ was alive. It is important for us as Christians and followers of Jesus Christ to realize that Christ is alive. It was not the end but the beginning. Christ is always here with us. In spite of many people today saying God is dead, don’t you believe it because he is very much alive; and he can be as alive as we want him to be. Belief and faith in the living Christ is what the first disciples needed and this is what we ourselves need today.

Third, by his intimacy he quickened the memories of his disciples. He made a rendezvous with them in Galilee as recorded in Mark 16:7, “But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him, as he told you.” He wanted them to work with him again amid the old scenes. There they would recall words that he had spoken and deeds that he had done. When Matthew and John should write their books, the old scenes, with their accompanying words and deeds, would come to mind. I believe it is true if we can go back to familiar surroundings and old friends, we can remember the words that were spoken, and they begin to take on new meanings. This is why Jesus wanted to meet his disciples in Galilee.

Fourth, by this intimacy he taught them concerning his spirited presence. His physical presence was now intermittent. He appeared to them in the Upper Room, at Emmaus, at Galilee; but there were times when he was not present in person as we say. Yet his spiritual presence was not intermittent. He taught them: “Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.” This was a proclamation of the divine presence.

The teaching conveyed by Jesus was fitted to make his disciples what they were required to be as the apostles of a spiritual and universal religion: enlightened in mind, endowed with a charity, wide enough to embrace all mankind, having their conscience tremendously sensitive to all claims of duty.

Fifth, in this intimacy Jesus promised his disciples to be with them always as recorded in Matthew 28:20. The disciples were given a message with which to turn the world upside down and established the church. It was not always a message theological, physiological, psychological, sociological-nor skeptical. This message was that of the living Christ, the Christ of history, the spiritual Christ, the present and the eternal Christ.

S. O. Gordon conceived an imaginary conversation between Jesus and Gabriel at the time of our Lord’s return to heaven. “Master, you died for the whole world down there, did you not?” asked the

Archangel. “Yes.” “You must have suffered much.” “Yes.” “And do they all know about it?” “Oh, no, only a few thus far.” “Well, Master, what is your plan? What have you done about letting the world know?” “I asked Peter, James, and John, and little Andrew and a few of them, just to make it the business of their lives to tell others and so to pass it on.” “Yes, but suppose Peter fails? Suppose after a while John grows weary in his well-doing, and neglects to tell others? Judas failed, and all the rest may too. Suppose their descendants in the 20th century get so busy about machinery and fortune hunting that they cease to pass on the good word?” Then came the quiet voice of Jesus, saying: “Gabriel, I haven’t made any other plan. I am counting on them.” That was the great presumption. And I believe it has worked thus far. Let us as Christians and his followers pass Christ message along to our children and families and friends, as it has been passed on since the first Easter day.

Examples of Momentum

Scripture: Luke 19: 29-44

Text is from Luke 19: 41-42; “And when he was come near he beheld the city and wept over it, saying, if thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto peace; but now they are hid from thine eyes .”

A heavily loaded truck is coming down the highway at high speed. Suddenly the driver realizes that there is danger of a crash ahead. He lifts his foot from the accelerator. He applies the brakes. But the truck plunges on. It’s heavy mass and its speed carry it beyond the control of the driver, resulting in another road disaster. All of us are familiar with this and other examples of mechanical momentum. We strap ourselves in our car seats and decrease the momentum of our bodies when an emergency occurs, and the car is suddenly stopped.

In physics, momentum is studied under the property of matter known as inertia. The story of the first Palm Sunday and the following week gives us vivid examples of momentum in the spiritual realm. Let us consider them now.

First is the momentum of Ignorance. To observe this, we stand with Jesus on all of that and lookout beyond the intervening ravine to the walled city of Jerusalem. It was one of the most interesting sites in all the world. There were the ancient walls, the gleaming temple, the majestic fortifications of the Roman Rulers, the mansions and palaces of elite Jews and Romans, set among the houses and hovels of the common citizens and the poor.

At this point in his approach to the city we read that Jesus wept over it. The reason for his weeping was this – the momentum of ignorance. Those of the city did not know the things that belong to peace. If only they had known! If they knew even now. It is now too late. They do not know. Ignorance drives on. Ignorance has sufficient momentum to carry that city ahead through (40) years to a head-on collision with Rome. The Master sees it all as is evidenced by his remarks in Luke 19:43-44; “The deep shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round and keep thee in on every side, and shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children with thee; and they shall not leave thee one stone upon another; because thou knowest not the time of thy visitation.” And thus, it was that this great and might city would be ruined and crushed.

You remember what happened. “Now as soon as Titus’ army had no more people to slay or to plunder, because there remained none to be the objects of their fury (for they would not have spared any,) Caesar gave orders that they should now demolish the entire city and temple – this was the end which Jerusalem came to by the madness of those that were for innovations, a city otherwise of great significance, and of mighty fame among all mankind.” How many tragedies might have been averted in the lives of men and nations, “if only they had known!”

Look about you in the modern world and seek knowledge of the forces that make for peace. Let not the mighty machine of ignorance roll on! The Tragedy of “it might have been.” And now, as Robert Louis Stevenson once said, “We all sit down to a banquet of consequences.” We remember what might have been. All of us are good second guessers or Monday morning quarterbacks. As we read the story of this great city we can see where they made their mistakes and we say what they should have done. How could they not believe what Christ was preaching about, about what he was saying? But how many of us today do not believe his teaching at least we do not live our lives as such. I really do not know how we can blame it on ignorance for we all have the same Bible and the same opportunities to live a life worthy of God’s grace.

Second is the momentum of hate. In Luke 23:21 we read, “But they cried, saying, Crucify him, crucify him.” Was there no stopping this crucifixion of an innocent man? There was not. He would be crucified. Hatred rolled on. It was found first in the hearts of a few Pharisees. It gathered momentum, as we say. Scribes, officials, priests – and now an ignorant populace. The crucifixion of Jesus was not inevitable.

Students of those times have gone to the limit in trying to fix the blame for the crucifixion of Christ. Who were those who crucified Jesus? The Roman Catholic Church in these later days discusses this question. Whoever they were, religious leaders, Romans, populace, each added to the momentum which sent Jesus to the Cross. It is significant that the national and ecclesiastical capital (Jerusalem) is the slayer of prophets. Evil organizes itself with this inherent solidarity and possesses a group – a church, a nation, a race. These forces were present in the village and towns of Galilee, but they came to a focus where the organization of the Jewish church and the Jewish nation had its seat, and where the representative of imperial government exercised his power.

Wickedness is a racial force. It propagates itself generation after generation. There is a momentum of hatred, of evil, of false ideas. The assassination of President John F. Kennedy and the inquiries which followed are a study in the momentum of hatred. This a serious matter to those who look out with concern upon this modern world. To what causes are we giving weight? Are we adding to the momentum of any evil? What thrust are we giving to false ideas and unworthy ideals that drive society and the nation toward catastrophe? What are we going to do about it? Civilizations that forget morals collapse of their own rottenness. Churches that forget people collapse of their own uselessness. These things have happened again and again in history. They can happen here. Once again Jesus comes into our midst and offers us a kingdom that endures.

Certainly this racial situation in our country today with its prejudices adds to this momentum of hatred. We need to remember, regardless of race or creed, we were created equal in the sight of the Lord. But in spite of these two momentums that carry us deeper into sin and away from Jesus Christ and the Cross, fortunately, there is another momentum that give us hope.

In those days Jesus was marvelously exemplifying the momentum of love. He had given his people a ministry of love and service and had stimulated a loving response. He set his face toward Jerusalem and entered the city as a peaceful king. Some killed him and others rejected him. He went to the Cross as the loving Savior of the world. He broke the bonds of sin and death in loving obedience to a God of Love. He placed responsibility upon his followers to become loving men and women. This love nothing can stop. By its own momentum and by the perpetual acceleration given by the Master, love goes through, even as Christ went through the crucifixion to the resurrection.

Where is Christ now? What if that at Golgotha, near Jerusalem, was but a wayside matter, a thing done as it were in passing? What if He goes on and on, and suffers and dies and conquers, again and again, from world to world.

There was a popular monk in the Middle Ages who announced that he would preach one day on the love of God. On the day appointed, the cathedral was filled with eager listeners. He waited till the setting sun caught the stained glass windows, flooding the place with its lovely coloring. Then when the last bit of light had faded from the windows he went to a golden candelabra, took a lighted candle, and walked to a statue of Christ hanging on the Cross. He held the candle beside the wounded hands, then the wounded feet, then the open side, and finally the brow which had worn the crown of thorns. The great assemblage, deeply moved, sat still. They had come to hear a sermon on the love of God. They did not find what they had expected, but far more. They saw for themselves the love that bears wrong, and bears it in such a manner that it bears it away.

When a person gives his or her life to Christ, he or she adds momentum to knowledge, to ideals of morality and service, and including all these, he adds momentum to love. Give your life to Christ now. Become his follower and his disciple and then add momentum to your life with love and peace, and joy and happiness and service.

God's Gifts Bring Joy to All

Scripture: Luke 2:1-20

Text chosen from Luke 2:10; "I bring you good news of a great joy."

Was there ever a day that we needed some word of joy more than ours? What is this joy of which we read the Gospel of Luke? Apparently there is something very distinctive about it. It is in the parables of Jesus over and over. It is also in the events of the New Testament. It is clearly stated that when the seventy went out at Jesus' command to preach, they, "returned with joy." And most amazing of all are the words in Hebrews, where it speaks of Jesus, "who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross." What on earth is this Joy? It stands in contrast to our ways. We use at least three words that seem alike but are vastly different. Sometimes we speak of pleasure; but do we really know what pleasure it is? Or, we speak of happiness; but I doubt if we know exactly what we are talking about. But joy of the Christian faith is deeper than either of these. It comes not in escaping from the realities or being protected from the shocks of life. You know we try to amuse ourselves in many ways to escape the realities of life. And today, of course, the most common is the cocktail before dinner in the evening. We say this is a fine way to relax after a hard day at work. And we say we need to relax and relieve our tensions so we go bowling or we do something else to take our minds off our problems. Many of us as parents try to protect our children right up to the very end from the hard knocks of life. We say we want our children to have the opportunities that we could never have in our childhoods. Wouldn't it make more sense to prepare them for the shocks in life, so when they came, they would know what to do and how to handle them? You know, it's true for us to realize that we cannot possibly face this life alone, by ourselves. We cannot divert our lives and the lives of our families around something, nor can we escape from life. Sooner or later we are going to have to face life and the better prepared we are, the better we will come out of it. Joy is looking at life full face, head on and finding the countenance of God in it.

Sometime sit down and think of the times when you have seen real joy. I've tried that this week. I have seen joy and so have you. It is in the moment when a child growing into a life passes another milestone of achievement and looks at you with a light on his face. It is in the moment when after anxiety about a loved one you hear the word that all is well. It is in the return of someone who has been away. It is in the hour when a guilt long carried has been lifted. It is in those times of life when fulfillment has come. It is given when one discovers that he has a power, which God needs for him to use. It is in the times when we know we are loved. This is joy and it surely is the gift of God. There are gifts that come to all of us in Jesus Christ, which brings joy into our lives.

First, there is the gift of knowing. Because of him we know what we do not know. You see, whenever we speak of Christ as the Son of God we thereby confess that it is through him that we know about God. Doesn't the very word give us a picture? Suppose a man appears one day to you and says, "I am the son of one who wants you to know him. I want to tell you about him, his will and his ways, his love and his compassion. More over I am like my father. If you see me, you will see what he is like." Isn't this what

Christ is saying to us? Isn't this what he said to his disciples?

All of this seems so clearly implied in our belief in Christ as Son of God. You want to know what God is, what he wills and what he wants for us. Then we have a way of knowing. When Christ comes we know what we did not know, namely, the nature and love of God. Surely, this gift of knowing God through Jesus Christ brings us great joy. Second, we have the gift of becoming— More over, we become what we have not been. The gospel of John says that, “to all who received him he gave power to become the Son of God.” Now that power to become is one of the greatest in the world. Through God we have the power to become anything and everything he intends for us to become. We have power at our hand and we are discovering more. We have a power to hurl satellites into the sky, the power to destroy a city with the dropping of a single bomb. We often have power to heal our bodies. But there is no other power that can be discovered that can help us become the sons of God. That was only given to Jesus Christ. It is given to all who received him. All kinds of power is available waiting for us through Jesus Christ. Certainly this is one gift that cannot be wrapped in Christmas paper and ribbon. It is too big for that but what joy we experience in our lives when through Jesus Christ we have the gift of becoming.

The most amazing gift that God has given us is the power to become, “Beloved, now are we the sons of God. And it does not yet appear what we shall be.” We are here this evening because we believe that it is possible to be better than we are, to have more of God in our lives, to possess a faith that is both radiant and relevant.

Certainly all of us realize we are sinners. We know that God does truly forgive us, if we repent and promise to lead a better life. We realize we can become a better Christian by reading his word, by prayer with him, in witnessing in his name. As Christians we realize that we need to worship God in his house regularly with other Christians. That's why we are here for we intend to try to lead a better life. Here we know that we do belong for Christ is with us and God has given us the power to become a better person.

Third, Jesus Christ brings to us the gift of hoping. Again, we hope where we had lost heart. Hope does not come easily for us. We have had it in earlier years of our century. But the shocks have been great, and our hopes have been shattered often. Can we hope again?

A friend of mine related the story to me. “One Sunday morning some years ago we walked down the ruins of the street which once had been a great Boulevard In Europe, the Unter den Linden. We passed the rubble of a great building where but a few years before Hitler had had his headquarters. It was almost literally true that not one stone was left standing on another. Here was the mark of an era of violence, hatred and destruction. One felt that the hand of God had reached out in judgment. But for a moment there was a passing scene. Walking toward the rubble, I saw, a mother with a small child holding her hand. It seemed a symbol.

Here in the face of a terrible pass was life beginning, again. The wonder of our hope is that life always

begins anew.

Here, on the one hand, were the rubble and destruction of our hatred and violence, and then a child, a new generation of life, begins all over again with all the possibilities for good and evil, with all the choices that make up the future.”

Regardless of how bad the situation, how low we may feel, there is always hope through Jesus Christ. Life can be started a new. We have the hope that someday all men will live in peace and harmony. We have the hope that regardless of the color of our skin we all will be treated equal in the sight of man as we are in the sight of God. We have the hope that Christ will come to earth again and that we will be ready for him. We have the hope of eternal life with God, our father in heaven. Christmas is a time to remember that in the gift of a child God reminds us that life always starts over and so there is hope. What a wonderful gift hope is.

Too profound in its simplicity, too wonderful in its holiness, Christmas is truly God’s gift for all mankind. Only childlike eyes - trusting, wondering, and believing – can see the real meaning of Christmas for it is not fiction or fantasy, it is a fact and it is a faith. At Bethlehem there is an open invitation to worship and to adore, by which the fires of faith are rekindled and life is made new. Hear great words like incarnation, redemption and eternity come alive and are made real for all men and to all ages. And finally we have the gift of belonging. We belong where we have been alone. There are so many things that separate us from one another in our world. We let things that really do not matter separate us.

Socially we are separated and usually wealth goes along with this. Most assuredly the color of our skin separates us and our religion in many cases also separates us. In many cases the type of occupation we are engaged in separates us one from another. We do not have anything in common. But there is one thing all of us have in common and that is Jesus Christ and being a Christian. This will surely bring us together regardless of all the rest of the reasons I have mentioned. Christ brings us together and gives us a sense of belonging. Some years ago there was a lad who was spending his first Christmas away from home, and a long way he had come. He left his family in Nigeria and days later stood for the first time as a stranger in the heart of an American city. Everything was different. The faces were strange. The way of life was like another world. He had on his face the tribal markings that identified him, but there were no other faces marked like that. How could a man endure so far from home in so strange and setting? It was just one great hope. The greatest hope of all. He was a Christian. And when he went into his church he was at home again. It saved him from the weighty loneliness. Alone in many ways but still belonging to Christ he belongs to all others who love Christ too. Is it surprising that the birth of the Christ was the news of a great joy?

Think of all that came to us in Jesus Christ. We know what we did not know. We became what we had not been. We hope where we had lost heart and we belong where we had been alone. Small wonder that we can hardly think of him without breaking into song, “Joy to the World, the Lord has Come.” Yes, we

experience real joy in our lives by the presence of Jesus Christ. The gifts he gave to us cannot be measured and added on an adding machine. None of them have been wrapped in fancy paper and placed under the Christmas tree. Nor are they gifts that are soon forgotten and discarded. These are true gifts and if we accept Jesus Christ as our personal Lord and Savior, they will be from everlasting to everlasting. Accept Christ, let him come into your heart and experience real Christmas joy.

Most Gallant Words

Scripture: Matthew 9:1-8; 14:22-33

Text is chosen from several passages in the New Testament, for Jesus Christ use these words often. We find them in Matthew, Mark, John and Acts: “be of good cheer”.Of course, gallant words like peace must come from a gallant heart to reach the heart of another. This is no passing “Cheerio”. The words absolutely reveal the soul of Jesus Christ.

The first thing that Jesus noticed about the man sick of palsy (in our scripture lesson this morning) was his apathy and listlessness. Though the sick man’s bearers were men of faith, he seems to have been in the doldrums. You really can’t blame him. You can imagine how you your self would feel if you were paralyzed and unable to walk. If you had to be carried wherever you wanted to go. Certainly, you wouldn’t have too much to look forward to. And so, it was with the man in our scripture lesson this morning. However even before he received forgiveness and bodily cure, Jesus gave him a shot in the arm– “Be of good cheer.” We read in Proverbs 17:22, “A merry heart doth good like a medicine, but a broken spirit drieth the bones.” How very true this verse is for our mental attitude toward anything whether it be a physical condition or whatever certainly has a lot to do with the cure and how soon we are going to be back on our feet again. Jesus was saying “come out of it, be of good cheer.” We have had people drive us deeper into the doldrums by their platitudinous exhortations to cheer up, but here was a sincere and genuine spirit that was contagious. We are sure that the man departed to his home that day with three blessings, forgiveness of sins, a restored body and a spirit of good cheer. No one of us could ask for anything more. The good cheer of Christ is inspiring, that is, we breathe it in. It is an atmosphere, indeed the atmosphere of the New Testament. For certainly this is what we notice all through the ministry of Jesus Christ and on into the active ministry of his disciples in the early Christian church. The Christian life today is a life of good cheer. As Jesus passed on good cheer as a good medicine, a good contagion, and a good atmosphere, so shall we if we are truly his followers. The presence of Jesus Christ in our lives, our faith of hope and our belief in him is the best medicine we can receive. His presence in our lives will help us through any situation regardless of how difficult it may be. Something of the spirit that conquers appeared in our time in Franklin D Roosevelt. A man who live with physical exuberance and vitality; he was stricken with acute anterior poliomyelitis while on a vacation at the Bay of Fundy. No one knows what went through Roosevelt’s mind during the days that followed. Lying awake at night, broken and helpless, brooding on that brilliance of the past and the bleakness of the future–think what agonies he must have endured! Yet he would not let others see his fears. His doctors reported that he was cheerful and hopeful. It was as if he heard in an inner ear the voice of another sufferer, saying, “Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.”Secondly– Good cheer has the lifting power. As we read in the second part of our scripture lesson this morning, when the disciples were caught in a strong sea and were in danger of losing their boat and their lives, Jesus appeared and said, “be of good cheer.” It was at this time that Peter tried to walk on the water and Jesus took him by the hand and saved him from sinking. “Good cheer” is a strong word for man in danger and a lifting word for men in distress. Of course, it needs to be spoken by us sincerely and reverently. One morning when World War I was on, an American Army Corporal walked down the road from St. Juvin to Fleville in France. He

was facing an enemy barrage. He was whistling a merry tune. When he saw a fellow soldier crushed in a ditch, he called to him cheerfully, "I prayed all night last night." The gallant spirit of the corporal lifted the second man from the ditch and the two went down the road together as though they were walking down a country lane back home. Certainly, these words spoken at the right time and in the right spirit can lift us to new heights. When they are spoken to us by our Lord, they can lift us to new heights we never dreamed of. The kind of lifting power they give to us is beyond all explaining with words. We can only feel what the words mean to us.

"Be of good cheer"— Nothing can so transform drudgery into creative employment, duty into privilege, or substitute wings for weights, as a heart brimful with the good cheer of the Christ.

Third— "Be of good cheer"— these words have been called the most gallant words in literature. This statement refers to them as spoken by Jesus to his disciples just before his betrayal. From the Gospel of John 16:33 we read; "In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." He spoke as though good cheer was itself the spirit that conquers. How can a man "get down" as we say, when he is building on the eternal, trusting in the unshakable love of God, and thoroughly aware that in the long run evil cannot win, truth cannot be toppled over? By contrast we build so often upon the ephemeral, trust in the expediency of the hour, giving credence to the false, even to the flimsy. Is it any wonder that we lose the unconquerable spirit? Many of us really doubt if the truth will win in the long run. We see many conditions around us each day that are filled with evil, persons who do not process the truth or the good, but still they seem to prosper. In fact, many of these people appear, outwardly at least, to be much better off than we are, and we are trying to live a life worthy of God's grace. We have doubts within ourselves if it really pays to be honest, trustworthy, and true. But let us consider how these Disciples of Christ must have felt when the Roman soldiers came to take him away. They knew that he truly was the Christ and the Son of God. They knew that what he spoke was the truth and still he was to be crucified and die on a cross. How would you feel if this happened to your best friend? But then hear Christ's last words to his disciples again before he goes to his death, "be of good cheer." Perhaps at the moment these words really didn't matter that much but later they began to realize what these words meant, and their faith carried them through many circumstances they otherwise could not have withstood.

Prof. William James had long fits of melancholy when he was a youth. When his son edited his letter after his death, large numbers of them had to be omitted, so morbid were they in their sadness. "All last winter", runs one letter, "I was on the continual verge of suicide." Later on, in life, William James learned the secret of abundant and happy living, and wrote it into what is perhaps his most famous essay, "Is Life Worth Living?" To that blank question, he replied with an unequivocal "yes", provided a man is willing to learn the art of making it so. In his essay he gives us a clue to that fine art when he says, "my final appeal is to nothing more difficult than religion's faith." Though never known among his intimates as a Christian in the formal or orthodox sense of the word, yet he had caught up into his life the secret that flamed at the heart of One who said, "these things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you and that your joy might be full." Genuine Christian cheer is often times wrought from the very stuff of adversity!

The early Christians were joyful in spite of persecution, tribulation and suffering. The very inscriptions in the Roman catacombs testify to an inner joy that was not dependent on creature comforts or good fortune in the world.

Today we do not know these words of Christ because we seem to think we need much more to be of “good cheer.” We think we need money and material possessions to make us feel cheerful, but we need to remember and actually place Christ first in our lives, then these other things will be added unto us. Robert Louis Stevenson wrote, “A happy man or woman is better fine than a five-pound note. Their entrance into a room is as though another candle had been lighted. They demonstrate the great theorem of the livableness of life.”

Let us think too of Jesus as he knows he is going to his eventual death and is gallant enough to remind his disciples to be of good cheer, to be lifted up, to not become discouraged, but to always stand up for what is right and good regardless of the consequences.

Today there are not too many of us willing to stand up and speak out for what we believe in and know to be right if it means adverse consequences for us. We will speak up if we are in the majority and if that’s the way the crowd is going. We do not want to be left standing alone by ourselves. We do not want to lose our popularity for a silly principal or a simple truth. We would rather compromise or overlook some of these conditions as long as they do not affect us directly. Well, I think the time is just about here when we are going to have to get off the fence and decide which way we want to go. You can be sure if it is God’s way, we will have his help; he will be here beside us. Christ will say to us, “Be of good cheer for I have overcome the world.”

In Acts 23, we read I want to occasion Paul was taken prisoner and confined to a barracks in Jerusalem. His plans to lay the foundation of a Roman mission were being knocked in the head. Acts 23:10 and 11 read, “and then night following the Lord stood by him and said, be of good cheer, Paul; for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also in Rome.” How did Paul respond to these words? The cheerful courage of Christ never deserted him! If you do not believe it all you have to do is read the scripture, which Paul wrote from Rome to confirm that statement.

Christ has said and is still saying to us today: be of good cheer; thy sins are forgiven. Be of good cheer; it is I, be not afraid. Be of good cheer; I have overcome the world. And be of good cheer; you must bear witness at Rome.”I have been standing here in this pulpit many Sundays preaching to you about Jesus Christ coming into your lives. I know from my own experience what Christ can do for a person. I have felt and am feeling his power in my own life. He has changed my life, definitely I believe for the better. He can change your life too. There is no doubt about it. He can give your life and you’re living a purpose. And believe me when I say that he will stand by you through thick and thin, through darkness and light, through sickness and health. He will keep saying to you, “be of good cheer” and these words will actually mean something to you. But regardless, if I stand here and preach this for 50 years, it will mean very little

to you until you yourself actually accept Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior. Give your life to Christ. Try it and then tell me whether what I have been saying and preaching about is true or not. I know it is true. Do you know it to be the truth?

Religion – And Remaining Human

Scripture: II Samuel 18:5-17

Text is chosen from I Samuel 18:29, “ And the king said, is the young man Absalom safe?”

Here is King David at a critical moment in his reign. The rebellion, headed by Absalom-one of these court revolutions that still happen in that part of the world – had come to a head. David’s throne hung in the balance. And he waited for the news of the decisive battle. What else mattered? Only one thing. The rebel was his own son, his Absalom. So when the dust announced the coming of a dispatch bearer from the battle field toward that lonely figure on the city wall, there was only one question, twice repeated: “Is the young man Absalom safe?” And when the news was broken, news of the complete triumph of the king’s loyal armies, the safety of his throne, the fulfillment – as he felt – of the will of God for his people, we might expect the chapter to close on a note of savage triumph in the victory of the cause. But at this point no cause mattered compared with one human life. “And the king was much moved, and went up to the chamber over the gate, and wept: And as he went, this he said “O my son Absalom! My son, my son, Absalom! Would God I had died for thee, Absalom, my son! My son!”

This story from the Bible indicates why the Bible lives. Here is the human touch.

The Bible tells us that people do matter. Nine tenths of the Bible is stories about men and women. If the churches of the today had no Bible and set out, as a great ecumenical project, to construct an authoritative holy book, can you imagine what it would be? Think of the pages of doctrine and explanation; the thicket of rules and regulations; the great mass of ritual and organizational material. Would there be any stories like Cain and Abel, David and Absalom, Daniel and the lions, Elijah and the prophets of Baal, Peter and the servant girl, Paul and his shipwreck – or Jesus and the woman at the well? Even the dullest parts of the Bible witness to the concern of human beings. Why else should the interminable genealogies be included but that people matter? Even the most solidly theological book in the Bible, the Epistle to the Romans, ends with a string of names of the men and women to whom Paul sent his love.

Dr. Halford Luccock related this incident: “A missionary friend of mine once told me of being called into a textile mill in China, to identify a child worker, just eleven years of age, who had fallen asleep at a machine and been mangled to death. He said that as he looked at the pitiful body, he realized that the whole affair was a profoundly theological question: What is she? Just one of four hundred million things in China; things which were very useful in producing 200 % profit. Or is she a child of God, endorsed with eternal worth? It makes a difference. But we do not have to go to China for examples. We must ask the same question wherever things are set above a person in value.

When we ourselves get into a position where people just become a number or a thing and the individual doesn’t matter anymore, then we are lost and we will soon fall on our faces. We need to remember, Jesus Christ dealt with people, human beings. Salvation, which Jesus Christ gives to us, relates to human beings,

people (you and I) not things. God is concerned with what happens to us as human beings, not as members or as a card in the computer.

I have and I presently am experiencing this lack of “people matter” in the business world. The General Electric is a large concern with hundreds of thousands of people employed. When a company becomes this big, the human being side of people is quite often neglected. I notice, especially younger men, right out of college, who are anxious to advance themselves, do not hesitate, even lightly, to step on people as if they were flies or ants. They have the knowledge and they are intelligent but they have not learned that people are human, that people working for them can make them or break them. They lack experience and wisdom concerning people, how to handle them and how to get the best out of a person. I know that unless they change their thinking and starting considering people as human beings instead of machines, they will never get very far. All of us like to be treated as human beings and unless we are treated as such, our enthusiasm, our incentive and our abilities are greatly reduced.

It is a constant fight on our part to remain human.

It is surely a part of our Christian duty at this moment in history, to identify, if we can, the forces that are undermining the integrity and unique value of each human being and to resist with all the spiritual resources at our disposal. In the fight to remain human, Christians have a supreme instrument of victory in this gospel of Jesus Christ. Wherever there is a man or a woman who can still listen to this ancient story and respond with understanding and sympathy to the question of the old warrior– king: “is the young man Absalom unsafe?” – there is an ally.

There are many forces that threaten the human spirit. First there are political tyrannies such as communism. The human being really doesn’t matter in Russia. People are used to work for the state. Their feelings, their positions in life, their families aren’t considered and when they are no longer useful to the state, they are disposed of. These people certainly aren’t allowed to think for themselves and if they do, they must keep their thoughts to themselves.

Second, there is the sheer bigness and complexity of the social and economic units in which we are all entrapped. This is where individuals are being numbers. We all have a Social Security number and we are considered by that number all our lives until we die. At work we all have pay numbers and we are considered by these numbers. And of course with the introduction of increased ease of computers, numbers become more and more important. Numbers are important to us today in our complex society but we shouldn’t let numbers replace the human being or we should forget that behind every number there is a person– a human being.

Third, there is automation, with its suggestion that there are many things a machine can do more efficiently and quickly and cheaply than a human being. This is true to a certain extent but it is also true that there are a great many skilled jobs that cannot and perhaps never will be done by a machine. We need to remember

that men have developed automation and it takes men to keep the automatic equipment going because an automatic machine cannot repair itself when it breaks down. In fact, today, in our automatic world, men and women become more important than ever to keep the automatic equipment going.

The creatures of George Orwell's book "1984", although they walk and talk and plan and struggle like men and women of today, are really monsters who have lost the basic elements of humanity. It is worth remembering that a baby born today will be 11 in 1984. Will that young man be safe? Will he live and work as a real person, with the dignity of a free and creative spirit? Will he be a robot, responding mechanically to external controls? We need to stop sometimes and ask ourselves where are we going? What direction are we headed in? Today everything must be done in a hurry. Sometimes, I wonder where are we going?

There was a day a few years ago when there was only one question on everybody's lips: "is the young man, John Glenn safe?" If the time should ever come that this question would not be asked, a time when in astronaut would be regarded as expendable, of less value fender machine he operates, and something will have happen to the human race of the infinitely greater importance than any discovery in space. I missed all the glamour and excitement, the hopes and fears, of the new age of exploration, we need above all to fasten our attention on humanity itself, on the man behind machines, on the development, the direction, the purpose, and the value of human beings like you and me. Even many of the larger churches have to fight the organization machine every day, and struggle to retain the human touch. When a church becomes so wrapped up in its organization and the many committees that are required and loses sight of why the church is there in the first place, then it's time to take a good, long, hard look at its organization. Again the church can become so overall organized that the human being is secondary and the organization comes first and this is as far away from Christ as you can possibly be. When we are close to Christ we are most human. The Bible tells of the infinite concern of God for each of his human family. "Is the young man, the old man, the young woman, the old woman, safe? So long as Christ is at the center of the church's life we can never lose the human touch. For it is this God we worship, the God who is seen in the touch of Christ's hand, one little child, on one despairing cripple, on one bruised and rejected center; the God who is seen as a father's longing love reaching into a far country for the prodigal, to know if the young man is safe; the God who is seen in the Man whose human passions throb in the agony of the cross, a compassion that speaks directly to every human heart.

Jesus taught that God wants us to keep in mind how precious to the heavenly father are the lives of his children. The atheist may call this word for egotism. All right, let him. If to claim that I had a particular place in my mother's heart is egotism and not ordinary common sense, this is true. It is not egotism; it is an inevitable implication of our Christian faith. If we read and study the Bible, we will know God is concerned for everyone of us. We know what great love he has for us in sacrificing his only son on the cross. As his children, he asks us to reflect this same kind of love toward other people. And if we really stop and think about this, I'm sure you will realize that this should not be too difficult if we are willing to swallow our pride once in a while, if we are really grateful and thankful for God's love, if we really want to be the Christians we claim to be. It certainly helps us to remember that Christ came to this earth and

lived and died as a human being. He was not some super in human being that didn't exist. He was human. He felt as we do, breathed it as we do, got tired as we do, and in every way was like we are. None of the inhumanity of our days can break the spirit of those who worship him. Not even the terrible inhumanity over religion itself. For whenever we are tempted to make even this worship, even this faith, a hard, cold, regulated mechanize way of life, he comes breaking in with his one disturbing, re-creative word of love. To come together in the fellowship of the spirit is not to have our individuality swamped in some commonly motion to rediscover it in the family of this God. It may be difficult for us to remain human in the world of ours but Jesus Christ can help us to do so. Let Christ help you, let him guide you. He is just waiting for your response to him.

Some Meanings of the Cross (Maundy Thursday – Holy Communion) Scripture: Luke 22:7-30

Text is chosen from Luke 22: 15; “And he said to them, I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover meal with you before I suffer.”

It has been said that any attempt on the preacher’s part to define the Cross is like, “trying to wrap a package with a piece of paper that is too small.” For the love of God is broader, than the measure of man’s mind. But though we can only imperfectly unfold the meaning of the Cross, we must unfold such meaning as we find and believe. Because we do not know all truth, it does not follow that we do not know any truth. We do see through a glass darkly, but we do see something. “Now I know in part,” wrote Paul, but he did know, even though not everything.

What then are some meanings we find in the Cross? The first meaning of the Cross is that God takes sin seriously. Sometimes people ask, “why can’t we just forgive sin and let it go at that?” If forgiveness is as cheap and easy as some people think it should be then sinning would not be very serious. But Christians have always seen in the Cross the awfulness of sin and its terrible cost to God. The Cross reminds us that forgiveness and reconciliation with God has nothing in common with moral laxity or indifference to evil. The religious word for wickedness is sin, and for us Christians sin is disarming with the purpose of God revealed in Christ. All of us have the common habit of passing on our opinion about other people or let’s just say plain gossiping. We believe gossip to be a sin.

What is Calvary but the result of an accumulation of such opinions, rumors carried to Jerusalem, judgments formed without investigation, impressions taken at second-hand and let harden into prejudices so that a subsequent first-hand impression is discolored and distorted. This actually brought Christ to his Cross, the same as pure and plain gossip can harm any one of us. Here today we have racial prejudices - the feeling of so-called Christians that Jews are inherently their social inferior whom in various ways they may ostracize, or the feeling of white folk that are a race to be permanently kept in a subordinate position as our servants. This is just another example of what drove Christ to his Cross. So, you see there are all kinds of evil and sin around us. Temptation is great for us.

All the sins that surround us today are the same sins that Christ died on the Cross for us.

A second meaning of the Cross is its power to shake our lives to their roots and move us to repentance. On the Cross we see a God not angry at us for our sin and disobedience but sorry for us and taking upon himself its consequences. “God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself.” “With his stripes we are healed. He came in his own love to suffer, counting on this sacrifice to move us to come to him in penitence and love. The moment we are willing to call ourselves sinners and see God suffering for us, our

despair turns to tenderness. The goodness of the Cross and what it reveals about God melts our hearts of stone: “God be merciful to me a sinner.”

Surely the first step towards becoming a Christian is the realization that we are sinners, that we need to repent and ask God for forgiveness. I believe the Cross shows us the way and the how and why of it. We can be saved and have eternal life with God our Father if we repent of our sins and ask for forgiveness.

The third meaning of the Cross is that good can come out of evil. The Cross is a strange paradox: one side of it is evil; evil men doing to death the world’s best man; on the other side, it is the divine love laying down his love as atonement for the very sin displayed in the crucifixion. Out of the evil of the Cross has nevertheless come the redemption we sing about.

And as God the Father used the evil of the Cross for redemption from sins bringing good out of bad, so by his grace can we. How often men have faced the worst and turned it into the best - spiritual gain, moral growth. The evil of the people involved led to Christ’s death on the Cross but by his death and his resurrection we are assured of everlasting and eternal life with God, our Father (the best good ever). Throughout our lives many things happen to us that we consider evil at the time but generally in the end some good will come of it. Perhaps we feel that the death of a loved one is one of the most evil blows that can happen to a person. But perhaps by this incident in your life you and your family are drawn closer to God. Perhaps you really come to know Christ as your personal Lord and savior. This certainly is a good.

I wonder if we have ever stopped to think about (perhaps the greatest act of evil ever committed) the death and crucifixion of Christ; if it had never taken place, that we could not have been forgiven for our sins. We would not have the promise of everlasting an eternal life with our Father. Certainly, the greatest act of evil produced the greatest results of good. This is where Christ can help us by giving us the faith and courage and strength to endure the evil forces in the world and come out of it better off than when we started.

A fourth meaning of the Cross is a sign of perfect obedience. With far deeper truth than the Psalmist, Jesus could say: “I delight to do thy will, O God.” In the Garden of Gethsemane, he said, “not my will, but thine be done.” Christ did not want to go to his death and the Cross, but he knew it was God’s will and thus being God’s Son, he obeyed. Being Christian now is something more than a comfortable affair of going to church and trying to be mildly decent. The church is more than a cult to make us happy, with peace of mind and all that sort of thing. The church has to be more than a social organization. The church has to have Jesus Christ as its head and Christ has to be in the hearts of its members. It isn’t easy to be a Christian but with Christ’s help and guidance we certainly can do it. At least we should try. We’ll never know whether we can or not if we do not try. Until we learn that discipleship is a costly affair, calling us to perfect obedience to God’s will; in all areas of life - business, politics, race relations, the home, the school, our leisure time - we will not be “the salt of the earth” nor “the light of the world.” But this is what, as followers of Christ, we are meant to be.

Tonight, as we partake of The Lord's Supper, let us remember the supreme sacrifices our Lord made so our sins could be forgiven. Let us come to his table with humble hearts, with enriched spirits, and a feeling of honor and majesty to be able to dine with our Lord.

A young child was once sent up into the balcony of a large church while the sacrament of the Lord's Supper was being celebrated below she was too far away to hear any words; but the sight of the congregation, absorbed in the act of worship - of her parents, lost in some reality greater than themselves - the slow reverent movements of the officiating minister, and the Elders as they moved quietly from pew to pew, the whiteness of the "fair linen cloth" on the communion table, and above all the silence, made a lasting impression on the young mind. Dimly and perhaps consciously, she was already aware that God was here, acting and living in this "brief grave and still sacrament." The quality of this silence at the Lord's table is like no other silence; It is a living stillness palpitating with healthy life. Let us be still this night so we can hear and feel the presence of our Lord.

The Glory of Man

Scripture: Genesis 1:26-31

Text is chosen from 8th Psalms: 4-5, “what is man that thou art mindful of him, and the son of man that thou dost care for him? Yet down has made him little less than God and dust crown him with glory and honor.”

What is the man? First and most obvious, man is an animal. The Bible sees man in other dimensions, but it never forgets that man is part of the natural order.

Second, man is a creature who can “go beyond.” He can step outside himself. In this capacity man has self-awareness, selfhood. I believe this is evidence today by the great things science is discovering and doing.

Thirdly, man is a creature of “oughtness” and “obligation.” We are definitely “obligated” to God for our existence; for he has created us. So we “ought” to be thankful and grateful to him.

Fourth, he is a creature of anxiety and fear. Behind Augustine’s famous prayer was the awareness of our anxiety and dread that only God could cure: “Thou has made us for thyself and our souls are restless until they rest in thee.” Here is man’s enduring peace.

We are restless, we are afraid until we have found God through Jesus Christ. Once we find him, we find our peace and contentment. The Bible, the wisest book of the ages, sees man in the dimensions of the comic and the simple, but also in the dimensions of glory. The Bible doesn’t paint man in one color. It knows the depth of evil in him. It speaks of his evil inclinations and of the demonic. Paul writes in Romans 1, “Claiming to be wise, they become fools, and exchange the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal men or birds or animals or reptiles.” He continues, “They were filled with all manner of wickedness, evil, covetousness, malice. Full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malignity, they are gossips haters of God, insolent, hot tea, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedience to parents, foolish, faceless, heartless and ruthless. Though they know God’s decree that those who do such things deserve to die, they not only do them, but approve those who practice them.” I suspect that all of us can pick out of the list some of our own characteristics, for none of us are perfect. Jesus said in Mark 7:22-23, “Out of the heart of man proceed evil thoughts, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander.” But in Luke 17:21 he also said, “The kingdom of God is within you.” Man has been exalted to the stars and degraded to the gutter. He is a many sided creature. He has been called, “A miracle clinging to a grain of sand.” Some cynic has written: of all the animals that play or swim or creep, on earth or in the air or in the ocean deep, from Paris to Peru, from Rome to Japan, the silliest, I think, the most absurd is man.” He apparently did not think too highly of himself. We do man a great injustice when we see him only as evil and vile. This is the half-truth. It was the great Pascal, a French mathematician and religious writer who wrote, “It is dangerous to make man see too clearly his quality with the brutes without showing him his greatness.” And seeing our greatness we must not forget our vileness. We are a paradox. We must see the whole man,

not one half. From your own experience and from mine, we know that we like to hear about some of the good things we have done and some of our good points along with the wrong we have done. All of us need to be patted on the back along with the criticizing. We all know that every person, regardless of how bad he seems, has some good points and we always need to bring out the good in all persons and therefore need to look at the whole person, not just half.

The first mark of our glory is that while we have “all sin and come short of the glory of God”, this isn’t the whole truth about us. It’s true that man is a sinner. He forgets that God is the Creator. Then he begins organizing life about himself. Man sometimes feels that he can handle his own life without the help of anyone else. But finally he realizes that he does have the capacity to surrender his life to God’s love and care. Thereby he achieves his true destiny and fulfills his life. We may be dust, but a strange kind of dust that knows it is dust. How could we know that we are sinners except that we are also something more? How could we know that we are dust unless there is a glory about us that we forget or deny? There is an aspect of the Infinite about us, else we could not know we are finite.

Even though we are sinners, if we recognize this fact, we can turn to God and seek his forgiveness. God is willing to forgive us and give us another chance. Our aim and goal is to always strive to live a better life, a life worthy of God’s grace. Jesus Christ lived the perfect life and this is our goal, as Christians, to achieve, even though we will never totally make it. A religious teacher today would never accept Thorstein Veblea’s acid utterance: “one of the essential marks of decency today is to be ashamed of being a man in the 20 th Century.” One may be ashamed of individuals, but never of man. Contempt for man is an insult to God, who created man in his image. Recognizing that human beings are subjected to temptation and unworthy desires, the evil urge constantly beguiles man, but God granted the freedom of will, abetted by the “good inclination”, to enable him to rule over it.

A second mark of our glory is our freedom. Our freedom is limited freedom. We’re limited by heredity, by social conditions, by habits. But man, as William Ernst Hocking, the Harvard philosopher said, “is a creature in whom heredity counts for less than conscious building forces.” Albert Camus wrote in his book, “The Fall”, “Being master of one’s moods is the privilege of the higher animals.” We do not need to remain as we are.

Most of us place great importance on heredity. That is, if a child is born to a family that really has never amounted to anything, materially or spiritually, then this child will never amount to anything. I really cannot go along with that at all because if the child is taken out of this kind of surroundings and placed in more desirable ones, this has a much bigger influence on how that child turns out. I really believe that. I also believe and know that God’s Holy Spirit can, and will change a man’s life. The true acceptance of God in our lives really changes us. We are persons, not puppets. No one has to pull the strings for us. We are never wholly irresponsible. We are free to choose God or reject him. You’re free to surf him or not. No one is forcing us either way. Perhaps there are people trying to persuade us or influence us but certainly not forcing us. A little boy was asked: “what is the chief end of man?” He answered, “the chief end of man is

to glorify God and annoy or enjoy him forever.” We can annoy God and often do.

It may be that God could have prevented soon in a moral system. I doubt that he could have done so in the best moral system. Freedom is indispensable to the attainment of the highest virtues, willing service, un-coerced affections.

I’m sure that none of us would want God to choose the kind of lives we should live and then have him make sure we lived this way. Nor would we want God to do our thinking for us. God has given us minds to determine, with his help and guidance what is right and what is wrong. We are due to choose which way we want to live. God is our God and help if we want him. Freedom is certainly one of our glories.

A third mark of men’s glory is that he can, does and must philosophize, and theologize. It is never a question of being a philosopher or being a theologian, the question is whether we will be intelligent or stupid philosophers and theologians. Every man and woman, everyone here, is a philosopher of a kind and they a wise or an unwise theologian. Our minds are so constructed that we instinctively organize and unify facts into some kind of order and into some kind of meaning. Man must try to get account of things, as Plato said, “Because he is man.” To be a man is to think. It is too reason. Man has been called the “question– asking creature”. And to think clear and straight and honest and hard is a moral requirement. Even God, Jesus said, was to be loved with all the mind.

This is why man is higher than the ordinary animal because he has been given the ability by God to think and to reason things out. Most animals can be trained to do what we want them to and this is as far as they can go. But we humans have the ability to do the training, to know why and how we want the animals trained. We certainly would not want to be lead around buy a leash, like a dog or a cat. We want to do the leading. If something appears the way it is, we want to know if it has to be that way. Can’t it be changed to make it better for everyone. And so this is another glory of man?

The fourth mark of our glory lies in the historic fact that “the Word became flesh”– human flesh. Is there any glory comparable to the love of God taking on our likeness of flesh and becoming incarnated in a man? Both the incarnation and the Cross bespeak God’s estimate of us. Part of our glory lies in the nature that could enable God to be incarnated in it. And when we despair of the man let us remember, “the Word became flesh.” That his city rabbi shalom oh asked: “What is the worst thing that evil urge can achieve?” He answered: “To make man forget that he is the son of a king.”

If the idea of God as creator gives dignity to the body of man, the idea of God’s incarnation in Christ further adds to that dignity. In the human life–body, mind and spirit of Jesus of Nazareth, God came in our midst. It be-speaks our glory that “The Word became flesh.” Where shall we go to discover our real words, the only true grounds for the dignity we prize so much? Shall we consult our banker? Are our payments to the Bureau of Internal Revenue the sole standard of R-value? Are we to be measured only by what we can earn as a “hand” in the cotton field or in the factory, or by what we can get as a professional baseball

player or as a member of the law firm? Robert Browning writes:

“All I could ever be,
All, men ignored in me,
This, I was worth to God”

Centuries before Browning, a man ready to die for his faith set down this timeless conviction: “See what love the father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. It does not yet appear what we shall be.”

This is our glory; while sinful we know it, and are dust that knows it is more than dust; we have responsible freedom; we are “question asking creatures”; we are of such a nature that God could and did become incarnate in our flesh. We are a little less than God and crowned with glory.

The Good News of Easter

(Easter 11:00 A.M. Service)

Scripture: John 20:1-18

I have chosen a text from John 20:18, “Mary Magdalene went and said to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord.”

From that day to this, the Resurrection of Jesus has been told and heard as Good News. We are well aware that some people disbelieve in it. No man or woman claimed to be a witness of the event. They did see the empty tomb, as we read in our Scripture lesson this morning, and they saw the living Christ also. They bore witness to the Resurrection, if not of the Resurrection.

The Good News of Easter was passed on from disciple to disciple, from generation to generation, until it reaches us at this very hour. What difference does it make? It makes a difference in the life I now may live. Consider these words: “the life I now may live.” The word “I”, each person present is asked to take the word upon himself. The word “may” expresses possibility: I may live does not mean that I am living or will live in a certain manner; no, only that it is possible for me so to live. ‘Now’ means more than it seems to say: let it mean now in the sense of after the first Easter; I am living after that event. “Life” is something we cannot and do not try to define; we just live it.

There is new and eternal significance to our “now”. For the serious Christian (all of us had better start being serious about our Christ) today there must be withdrawal to the place where Christ meets with those who believe in the quiet of our hearts, at Holy Communion, in the worship of the church. It is there that we can realize afresh the startling fact-not just that once upon a time Jesus rose from the dead, but that he is really alive now. This can often be the forgotten factor in our Easter celebration. Our message is not just that “he rose”, but that “he is risen.” This is what we know again as saving truth in the quiet place, the garden, the sanctuary. Our sermon this morning is concerned with possible experience now.

First of all – The Good News of Easter is that I now may live in the “truth” of the Resurrection of Christ. That’s what the disciples did. We know from the Scriptures that Thomas doubted for a time, but he was finally convinced. Living in the truth, they gave it a sort of pragmatic test. It was a truth that worked, as we say. The disciples of Jesus went out and bore witness to the Resurrection. It was convincing to many and it not only changed men’s minds, but their lives; bad men became good, weak men became strong, ordinary men became great. The message of the Resurrection produced a church; the church produced the New Testament. The influence of the New Testament in the world is immeasurable. By the acceptance of the Easter Gospel millions at this hour live in the truth of the Resurrection. Yes, we certainly can live in the truth of the Resurrection. We can read in the Bible how this truth changed men’s lives. We can see people around us whose lives have been changed – because of the truth of the Resurrection. Each of our lives can be changed if we accept the truth. Actually accept it in our hearts which is more than saying it

with our lips.

Second, the Good News of Easter is that I now may live in the liberty of the Resurrection. The stone was rolled away from the tomb setting the Master free. The living Christ unlocked the doors of the Upper Room where the disciples were crouched in fear. Since that day, freedom from the law (Paul's experience), freedom from death as a blind alley, have been the experience of Christ's followers. Wherever the Easter Gospel has been heard and accepted, there is love of freedom. Prisons have been unable to hold the spirits of men. Error has been unable to shackle their minds. Races and nations have refused to bow to tyranny. Not even death can capture or stop us when we really believe in the resurrection of our Lord. Death is not the end, but the beginning of an entirely new and wonderful relationship with our Lord. The Easter story really sets us free and gives us real liberty and freedom.

Sir Wilfred Grenfell, the physician who spent his life in the services of the Labrador fishermen, wrote, "It has been my lot in life to stand by many death beds and to be called in to dying men and women almost as a routine of my profession. Yet I am increasingly convinced that they never die at all. I am sure that there is not real death. Eternal life is the compliment of my unsatisfied ideals. And experience teaches me that belief in it is a greater incentive to be useful and good than anything I know." This is our reward, the promise of eternal and everlasting life with Our Father.

Third, the Good News of Easter is that I now may live in the joy of the Resurrection. Luke gives us an interesting insight into the disciple's experience when Christ appeared to them in the Upper Room. In Luke 24:36-41, we read, "As they were saying this, Jesus himself stood among them. But they were startled and frightened and supposed that they saw a spirit. And he said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do questions arise in your hearts? See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself; handle me and see; for a spirit has not flesh and bones as you see that I have." And while they still disbelieved for joy, and wondered, he said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?"

We can understand their feelings; have we not had experiences that were too good to be true? This is the beginning of the joy of the Resurrection. Possession of truth and the experience of liberty are the precursors of joy. Is not joy itself a rather Christian word? The news of Easter is that the road we travel is not a blind alley; we are on the open highway, with direction known and meaningful destination. We are on the way. We sing as we go. Being a Christian and living a Christ-like life is the only road for us to follow, the only road for us to be on. It definitely is not a blind alley; for this road leads to our Lord. This is what the Easter story is telling and showing us.

Fourth, the Good News of Easter is that I now may live in the power of the Resurrection. Philippians 3:10 reads, "That I may know him in the power of his Resurrection". The Resurrection has power to change what we might call the quantity of life. The mortal puts on immortality. This life puts an eternity. Life becomes wider in scope and deeper in meaning. Earth reaches to heaven. The quality of life is changed also. Life becomes hopeful, happy, holy. Real hope would die with the belief that the souls of all who have

ever lived have forever perished; that now all whom we now love, with ourselves, shall likewise pass into oblivion. Happiness might sometimes be the experience of a moment or a day, but not the quality of life's living. Who would be brave enough and enduring enough, without hope of eternity, to purify himself and achieve high character? 1 John 3:3 reads; "And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure." The power of the resurrection becomes like life-blood coursing through one's arteries and bringing true joy and happiness.

Fifth, the Good News of Easter is that I now may live in the hope of the Resurrection. The power merges into the hope. By hope the life merges into life eternal. Life is no longer temporary, it is permanent. The love and grace of God become permanent. We claim all internal things to be ours now, because we are Christ's and Christ is God's. The resurrection validates all Christ promises and by that also validates our hopes.

Sixth, the Good News of Easter is that I now may live in the victory of the Resurrection. Of course, we are not thinking of any little petty victories upon which we humans may pride ourselves. This is a victory over the sin that drives crucifying nails into a man's hands and feet; a victory over death that buries a man in the earth and rolls a stone before the tomb. "Sin be not proud! Death be not proud"! Jesus Christ conquers! Christ is risen!

When Doctor A.J. Gordon, for many years, the beloved pastor of Clarendon Street Baptist Church of Boston, lay on his sick bed, his physician entered his room one afternoon with the words, "Doctor, have you a word for us today?" To which the radiant Christian, knowing full well that he was not long for this world, made reply, "Yes - Victory!" That is the word with which we professed followers of the Risen Lord should greet each other, not only on Easter day, but on every day. Victory! The word peels like above through the entire New Testament. "Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Again, not our victory! Not victory achieved! Victory is a gift of God wrought out for us by Jesus Christ. By our own victories we might become little conquerors: by his victories we are more than conquerors. We "have become absolutely convinced that neither death nor life, neither messenger of Heaven nor monarch of earth, neither what happens today nor what may happen tomorrow, neither a power from on high nor a power from below, nor anything else in God's whole world has any power to separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ our Lord." If there is anything in the universe that will make men equal to the challenge of this hour in history, it is the same conviction that gripped the early Christians. Christ is not dead, he is alive; And over him death has no dominion. And regardless of the many claims today that God is dead. All Christians everywhere can testify to the fact that he is very much alive. In the truth, the liberty, the joy, the power, the hope and the victory of the Resurrection of Christ you and I may live. Don't you wish you could? It is possible. You can if you will. Easter is God's call and challenge to live, even as springtime challenges the seed to burst the bonds of its imprisonment. "Because I live, you shall live also," said Jesus. Could it be that we are afraid to live? Accept Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior and

start living a life with meaning and purpose, a life of joy and happiness, a life so full that it will overflow and touch the lives of those around you. The Easter story is the message of life and the living Christ that can live in you now.

The Main Business of Living

Scripture: Matthew 6:24-34

Text is chosen from Matthew 6:33: “But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well.” These words of Jesus have made now and much a difference in a countless number of lives because they point out the main business of living.

Life to be worth living must have a purpose, a larger purpose than its own preservation and comfort. We all must go through the motions of earning a living and providing ourselves and our families with the basic necessities. If we make these things the main business of life, however, we insult our personalities; we treat ourselves as something less than human beings. Jesus meant that when he said to his disciples, “Is not the life more than food and the body more than clothing?” We require food and clothing and shelter in order to survive, but we cannot devote our God-given capabilities simply to the provisions of bigger and better survival kits, any more than soldiers can win a war by lounging about the kitchen and filling sacks with rations. Life must have a larger purpose than the pampering of our bodies and the accumulation of grown-up toys, else it is not life at all.

In his recent biography of Albert Schweitzer, Norman Cousins says, “That much of the ache and brooding unhappiness in modern life is the result of man’s inability to use himself fully. Rarely do we realize our God-given potential; rarely do we release the yearning and the powers of our personalities; rarely do we have a sense of fulfilling ourselves through total contact with total challenge. Therefore, happiness eludes us.” He then describes Schweitzer as a man less concerned with happiness than with purpose. “Where is the Kingdom of God now,” asked Cousins. “Right here at the hospital”, replied Schweitzer. How can one live well who does not know values? By establishing the first value.

I’m sure there are a good many people in our world today that really do not have a purpose for their lives. Many of us have set goals of becoming millionaires or at least to be financially well off. Apparently, we feel that money or the acquiring of it for our own purpose is the main objective for being. But have you ever noticed that generally after a person has become wealthy, he still isn’t satisfied, he must keep going to make more money and he also is not as happy as he anticipated he was going to be? But he still lacks something in his life, and he keeps searching and perhaps one day will find happiness and what he unconsciously is looking for; God.

Even a wrong purpose for our lives can redeem life from futility, as is evidenced in the Communist world of today.

It is difficult to find any great sense of purpose in our Western society today. Except for a few visionaries, a few dedicated statesman and journalists and artists and prophets, we do not as a people give the world the impression that we know where we are going. We have goals to be sure, but such limited goals. Our

characteristic words are “preserve” and “defend.”

If life for any one of us is going to be meaningful, then very early we must decide what shall be the main business of living. We must ask the question, “Where am I going?” “What am I living for?” To what purpose can I dedicate my highest energies regardless of what happen to me, regardless of riches or poverty, sickness or health? Some people today really cannot answer these questions because they do not know in which direction they are headed, the do not know why they are living and perhaps do not care. Usually when a person cannot answer these questions he begins to think and wondering and sometimes he can’t find a purpose for his life, he might feel better off gone from this world (at least he thinks so) and he then takes his own life.

There are many tragic figures who resigned from the human race because they can see no further reason for belonging to it. Sometimes we wonder what purpose some of these beat Nick’s must-have for their lives. We wonder where they are going and what they are living for. Perhaps they wonder this about us also.

The supreme contribution of ‘vital’ Christianity to a man’s life is that it invests that life with a larger purpose than his own comfort and security. I say ‘vital’ Christianity, because nothing comes of a mere interest in religion or a mere conventional church relationship. Something happens, however, when a person goes beneath the level of respectable piety to a deep, genuine, firsthand saving experience of God in Jesus Christ.

Our real security for the future is not in how much pension and social security we are going to receive at retirement age but it rests in Jesus Christ. Accept Christ, becomes saved, become his follower and disciple; this is the only real security, the only real future the only real purpose and goal in life.

To this kind of person Jesus Christ is an all-consuming purpose, the very purpose that motivated his own life upon earth, the shining goal toward which he moved, about which he preached, for which he strove and lived and died and which in his own person he incarnated. He calls it the “Kingdom of God.” “This kingdom”, he says, “is the highest good in life, like a treasure hidden in the field or a pearl of great price.” We should not be vague here. What gives meaning to life? What goal, what purpose can so absorb us in the totality of our being that life is shot through meaning and radiance and becomes pre-eminently worth living? The Christian answer comes back, “Seek ye first the Kingdom of God,” but what is the Kingdom of God? We can define it theologically as the reign of God, his sovereignty over all life in this age and his righteous rule in the age to come. What does it mean, however, as a personal, present, practical reality, a goal which the individual can seek and enter and possess here and now?

First, we can say that a man begins his search for the Kingdom by choosing a vocation that allows opportunities of usefulness and service. To be sure, all of us cannot work directly with people, many of us must work with machines and merchandise a long way removed from the product of our labors.

Not all of us can be ministers, evangelists, missionaries, etc., that are directly connected to God's work as a profession. However, all of us in our own way can render a service to the Lord's work through our church, through civic affairs in our community, through our association with people. Too many young men and women exclude the dimension of service from their thinking even when they plan their life's work. Generally, the first consideration to any vocation is "how much money can I make and how far can I advance myself over the years." Too few of us are concerned with what service can I render to humanity and to God? We, ourselves, come first and other people and God come second. This is because we have placed the greatest emphasis on ourselves and money. Other things and people become secondary. We have lost our perspective of life with our goals and aims in the wrong direction.

Today there is a great shortage of men going into the ministry and this is mainly because the training requires many hard years of work and study and afterward the salary is rather low compared to the professional career. There are many other fields more attractive such as doctors, lawyers, engineers, etc. Many people do not want to become involved with other people, with their problems and their personal affairs. I also believe that not enough people are seriously considering their religion. They consider it a nice thing to have but they do not want to become too deeply involved so that it takes up too much of their time. In other words, they want to be considered Christians, but they are not willing to live a Christian life or to put themselves out of the way any more than they must.

Second, a man's decision will be shaped by the sense of purpose running through his life. If he seeks the Kingdom of God, he will be a man under obedience to God, a man who in every situation tries to learn the will of God and live according to it.

C.S. Lewis pictures the devil insinuating his minions: "Above all, take all sense of purpose and dedication out of his life and he will become the obedient servant of hell." Perhaps many of us are obedient servants of hell.

A man who seeks God's kingdom will ask one question, not, "What do I want?", but, "Lord, what will thou have me do?" That one question will touch all the decisions of his daily life and how he votes at a board meeting, his support of political candidates, the budgeting of his income, the use of his leisure, the upbringing of his children, the choice of his friends. There is nothing to describe the acceleration that floods your soul when once you have clearly discerned the will of God in a situation and given it priority over your own will; in that moment you feel yourself very close to the Kingdom of God.

I understand that this isn't always easy. Many things come along each day to tempt us. Sometimes we do something, even though we know we shouldn't, and we try to console ourselves to try to twist God around to all our way of thinking. We learn the hard way that we must never do this. There is no doubt in my mind that Christ is always there, always willing to help us make choices and decisions if we ask him.

This excerpt is taken from one of Phillip Brook's sermons; "Bad will be the day for every man when he

becomes so absolutely contented with the life that he is living, with the thoughts that he is thinking, with the deeds that he is doing, when there is not forever beating at the doors of his soul some great desire to do something larger, which he was meant and made to do because he is still, in spite of it all, the child of God.”

Third, the kingdom seeker will make his life a center of Christian influence and he will do this without any regard to the circumstances in which he lived.

We can influence those with whom we encounter. Start with your own family and children, your coworkers, your friends, your neighbors. Generally, we don't have to do a lot of talking. Just by living a good Christian life we have a great influence on those around us. People notice how you live your life whether you think so or not. Then they start asking questions and then you can start giving them the right answers.

Fourth, whoever seeks the Kingdom of God who want to have a share in some corporate Christian virtues. It is not true that people who love the Church, its' worship, its' fellowship, its' witness and its mission are the people who in your experience live lives that are radiant with meaning and purpose? Why? Because they have a sense of going somewhere, of moving towards goals that are not limited goals. They seek the Kingdom of God first.

How wonderful it would be to have a church filled with persons overflowing with the love of God in their hearts. Do you realize what a Christian witness this would be? How wonderful to lead such a group that were always seeking to bring God's word to someone, seeking to help someone in the world of ours, seeking always to reach the goal that Christ has set up for them.

Seeking the Kingdom of God first is the most important goal of our lives. If we do this, we will not have to be concerned about these other things that people steal for, that people murder for, that people take their own lives for. We will have security, the best and greatest security ever. And I truly believe that God will take care of you. There is no doubt in my mind. “Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things shall be yours as well.”

The Master's Legacy to His Friends

Scripture: Philippians 4:4-13

Text is chosen from John 14:27: "Peace I leave with you."

We are strangely lazy in the use of words and the proof of it lies in our using the same word for, it may be, a half dozen meanings. We use the words without thinking of their actual meaning, and sometimes they are used where they shouldn't be. This word "Peace" is one of these words. You and I toss the word about in the most careless and haphazard ways. As a result we miss the inner strength and beauty of what is really one of the noble words of the language. We talk of peace, generally, for example, when we wish to refer to the absence of war.

We use the word after another fashion when we speak of the peace of mind. The dictionary says that peace is and means: "a state of tranquility; absent of war, a pack to end war; freedom from disorderly disturbances; freedom from fears and worries." So you see there are several meanings for it.

I think that if we could see it deeply enough and far enough into the thought of God we would discover that one of the purposes that lies behind the giving of this beautiful word to us is that through it we should reach to a certain rich tranquility of spirit. And I believe this is what Jesus was referring to when he said, "Peace I leave with you."

Perhaps if more of us possessed this peace we wouldn't have to take tranquilizers and other pills to slow us down, to calm us down. Jesus Christ is the best tranquilizer you can possess. Now the "Peace" that Jesus is leaving as a legacy to these friends of his is something very different from the quietness of heart or absence of war. And it definitely is something fresh and new as well. Love and joy and laughter and tears are old, old as creation itself, but the peace which the great master promises is wonderful and new as the dawn that broke over the eastern hills this morning.

Two English explorers, happened sometime ago, upon an Egyptian tomb that was shut by the iron silence of 3000 years. When they opened it, what they saw was a finely carved stone coffin of a little child and over it an inscription. This is what was written: "O my life, my love, my little one, would God I had died for thee." They uncovered their heads, and with dim eyes stepped into the light. They sealed the tomb, leaving love and death to their eternal vigil. How old is love! But the peace of Jesus is a gift with the dew of youth upon it. Yesterday you were without it. Today it is yours; and a miracle, is born with in your heart. There is a change beyond measure astonishing.

Jesus says, "Open and let in the power of my peace." And you do so, and in a moment you are ushered into a new universe of gladness and a calm. You have money and financial problems. You have clouds darkening the horizons of your home. You vex yourself about your children's future. You have secret forebodings

about your own health. You are getting old and not so fit for your job, until Jesus whispers, “here brother; here sister; here is what you want– my peace, take it and be at rest.”

And are you at rest? The answer of all who have ever trusted is “yes; undoubtedly you are.” You have still to do your work in a workaday world. You have to take knocks and sometimes hard ones. You have to shoulder burdens and sometimes bear crosses. No one is going to do this for you. You have to walk with the north wind in your face, and struggle and fight and fail and rise to the end. But at the center of your being there is a sense of calm that makes you victorious over all. There is an inner voice that whispers; I am with you and all is well. And the voice is the voice of God.

We are never alone. God always walks with us regardless of what we are doing or where we are doing it. Here is a short excerpt from the book, “Legends of Northern India”; “And wherefore, friend?” ask the farmer heartily. The old man sighed as he answered; “On my way to a town by the name of Quietside.” The farmer shook his head, “there’ll be none of that name ‘bout here.” Perhaps there would be more towns by the name of Quietude if more of us possessed the peace of God within our own lives. Many of us think we can make a big impression on other people by using raised and loud voices, and making a lot of noise. If we were a little more quiet and could keep our mouth shut long enough perhaps we will hear God talk to us.

All of us can obtain this peace that Christ is talking about. We do not have to possess a lot of wealth, we do not have to hear someone with influence; we do not have to do a lot of mighty works; Jesus Christ will except us as we are if we have a sincere desire to see him and his kingdom. Again Jesus Christ comes to each one of us individually. He does not come to us as a group, collectively. This is an individual commitment and decision that you have to make. No one else can make it for you and it definitely has to come from within you. That’s why I have always said Christianity is an individual religion, which can be shared by all of us. But definitely the first step is up to each one of us individually. But we need to remember that accepting Christ into our lives as our personal Lord and Savior is not a cure-all, is not something that will put us on the road of ease, something that takes care of our problems and cares, and we will have no more worries or concerns. This is not so. But Jesus Christ will give us strength, courage and faith to meet all situations in our lives that otherwise we may have failed and we could not have endured. What a wonderful feeling it is to know that God is always there beside us to give us the support we need. We will still have the same problems and situations in our lives. The difference is we will have a new perspective; we will have new strength to face these problems as they arise and most definitely we will know that we do have help, which we never had before. Believe me when I say this feeling is something you have never had before. This is what Christ can do for you.

I read a very dull book recently on weather lore. I forget the name and author of the dreary thing but I remember one shining sentencing in the book. The author was talking about tornadoes and what he noted about them was this. Let it be shattering of beyond imagination, let it blow up town into ruin, let it tear the skin from your face– as bad as that– and yet in the heart of that tornado there is one place so still that a feather plucked from the breast of a swan lies motionless, and where a bird will trill in song. The peace of

Jesus Christ carries the same magic spell.

Circumstances and conditions about an around us can be something fierce but within we are calm and collected, we are still and peaceful because we know that Christ is there beside us. We can think through a situation much more logically and calmly because of this peace which he gives to us. There is a storm without and the fierce buffeting of circumstance, but within there is calm.

From Philippians 4:7, Paul speaks of God's peace. What a lovely phrase, "God's Peace." It means the very peace that dwells in the heart of God himself. Nothing less than that is the promise. It shall "stand as sentry" to your soul. The word Paul used was military; and it must have had a special force for his readers. For Philippi was a Roman colony, and there was a garrison in occupation; and many a time has readers had watched Roman soldiers mounting guard, and patrolling the gates. That, declares the apostle, with his vivid imagination, is what the peace of God will do for you, once you really possess it in your heart. It will guard the entrance. It will hold the fort against every threatening intruder.

"The peace of God shall keep or guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." There is the ultimate secret- not fine resolution; not laborious efforts at self-improvement, but the transfiguring influence of a friendship with the noblest, strongest, and most understanding friend in all the world. Regardless of what we do either in living our lives, deeds of kindness and all other things, the most important is an acceptance of Jesus Christ in our lives. This is the first and most rewarding step and the only way actually to obtain the God-given peace we have been talking about this morning. Christ and only Christ is the one that can lead us to God, our Father. What is the heart-peace? You coming to the secret of Jesus when you have the courage to take the road which Jesus took.

What was that peace? He went with his Father, God. He loved the things that God loved, whatever is fair and good and high. He loved to be true and gentle and exceedingly kind. He loved every man as brother and every woman as sister. He forgave everyone. He believed that in the poor stuff of our human clay an angel is hidden somewhere. So was he never frowning to natural weakness, but pitied it and buy his pity redeemed it. He hated deliberate sin, but the sin – doer he loved, and loves his still. Did he not die for us on his cross?

We too can take this road that Christ took. Certainly it will mean sacrifice on our parts and it is not easy but we have Christ to help us. Being a Christian and following Christ involves much more than saying so with your lips or coming to church on Sunday. Being a Christian is a full time job that requires great strength, courage and faith on our parts. But it is definitely worth it for him we all know what the rewards are eternal and everlasting life with God, our Father. We will become discouraged and want to give up. This is natural but let us always turn to Christ in prayer, earnest, down-to-earth, prayer and give it another try. I know you can make it.

What is this peace? I like Columba of Iona's description: "The peace of Jesus is the joyous quiet of a man

upon a rock.” A curious way of putting it and yet if any of you have ever been to Iona you will understand that it is not quaint at all. Iona looks to the West and bears up against the onset of the Atlantic from century to century. It’s rock barrier hurls back the thrusting waters. A man stands on one of them and he is filled with a quiet thankfulness. Yes, Columba put it well, “the peace of Jesus is the joyous quiet of a man upon a rock.” There is no profit or purpose in pushing at an open door. The secret of Jesus and his peace is plain to all the humble of heart. Whatever you have been in the past, live as he lived, in the future. Turn your feet to the way of God. Cherish truth and goodness. Love everyone and the boon is yours– the joyous quiet of Jesus Christ.

The Practice of Brotherhood

Scripture: I John 3:11-24

Text is chosen from 1 John 4:7-8: “Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God, and he who loves is born of God and knows God. He who doesn’t love does not know God; for God is love.”

The time has arrived when talk and debate about human brotherhood is not enough. The time has come for us to put our beliefs into practice. For we can talk all of our lives but if we never do anything about it we might as well have not talked at all.

Nor is there too much need to consider how we may practice brotherhood. We know how more than we do, and by this fact some of us may have very bad consciences. We may carry guilt that needs purging.

The purpose of this sermon is to relate some of the values of the practice of brotherhood. And these are not to be considered as values of expediency, but as values at deeper and more fundamental levels. The practice of brotherhood is a reaffirmation of our Christian faith.

It really declares our faith in the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man. The phrase falls completely and slightly from our lips. But talk and action are two different things. A handshake at the church door may express this Christian faith far more forcefully than the mere recitation of a creedal sentence by the pulpit or the pew. A kind word and its kind deed may be even more effective.

Tradition gives us this story about one of the early saints. As he walked along the streets of his city, a beggar lifted his hands to him and asked for charity. The saint replied, “my brother, I regret that I have no coin to offer you.” Where upon the beggar, with tear-filled eyes, said, “but you have just given me the greatest gift you could have bestowed upon me. You called me brother.

The practice of brotherhood reaffirms our faith in the universality of Christ, who died for all man. His love is reaffirmed by the brotherly action of a single Christian at a definite place and at a particular time. Every man includes this man. The whosoever of the gospel includes the man farthest out.

Jesus Christ did truly die for all of us, regardless of our race or our creed. None of us can say that Christ died for me alone. If we do, we are reading something into his word for our own convenience.

The practice of brotherhood in any land would give that land an honored name among nations of the earth. A single instance of unbrotherly attitude has brought enmity toward another people into the councils of a nation. Even a fictional deed of kindness, as in the Good Samaritan parable, has gone out into the world and given name to scores of houses of mercy.

If we are really Christians, which we claim to be, which principles of this country was established upon, then we must practice brotherhood to all people everywhere and above all we certainly need to straighten out the racial situation in our country before we try to convince other people in other countries that we really mean what we say we do. Don't believe for one moment that the people of other countries are not constantly looking at this racial situation, at how it is handled, what the results are going to be and whether or not we are going to settle it peaceably without bloodshed or violence.

There is no doubt about it, the practice of brotherhood will strengthen the country we love. Nor do we look at this as a matter of expediency. It may be expedient to take down the barriers between nationalities, race and classes but more fundamental than action for expediency sake is action because we hold in our hearts deep love for the country of which we are a part.

For pure patriotism's sake we might practice brotherhood.

Since we are a part of this country, which was originally founded on Christian principles, I'm sure that all of us want our officials of this country; all of us want the policies of this country to operate on the brotherhood principle. We certainly have to do more than talk about it. We have to show what we mean and believe in. Above all we need to set a good example because we are one of the largest and most prosperous countries in this world. We have enough know-how, we have enough natural and material resources to help other people, less fortunate than we are, all over the world. Of course to help someone means to give more than material things. We desperately need to bring the Word of God to all people everywhere because I believe once a person has heard God's word and really comes to know him he will want to make progress and improve himself, his family, his friends and neighbors and finally his country. Knowing and loving is basic to all things.

I therefore believe that we definitely need to practice brotherhood now. We have talked to long without enough action in what we believe.

Thus we would reassert the declaration that, "all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." Are not these words from our Declaration of Independence precious to Americans? Are they not a charter of rights for all men, all over the world of ours? The practice of brotherhood in our land would overcome many divisions and heal many hurts. By this we would become a more united and happier people.

The practice of brotherhood in our world would certainly overcome many of the difficulties that separate men today; I'm coming that cause wars and results in many lost lives. And I truly believe it is the only way to overcome the threat of communism in the world. If people really come to know Jesus Christ as their personal Lord and Savior we will not have to fear communism or any other kind of political tyranny. For Jesus Christ can set us free, give us liberty and happiness that we have never known before.

”The eye can see a thousand things,
a sunset cloud, a cardinal’s wings.
Would that the inner eye could find
The bridge uniting all mankind.”

The practice of brotherhood shows reverence for personality. Among resources, and one of the most important available to man of faith in their struggle to realize the ideal of human brotherhood, is that sometimes powerful, sometimes weak, but always inextinguishable and divine implantment in human nature—the veneration for that which is called personality. This is the common ground on which the most diverse may stand together; on this ground, if the issue is made clear enough, all kinds of men will stand with us. I believe the greatest skill is required in making clear the issue; and I believe that where Great skill issues, there will stand great numbers on the common ground, because of the irresistible power of this principle to move the human heart.

Let us remember that Discovery of personality is by some people and many persons a most recent experience. There our language is in which the equivalent of the English word has only lately appeared.

We show reverence for the personalities of others by the practice of brotherhood. By this they achieve dignity and ambition. By this they gain a love for freedom and seek their own advancement. By being a brother we make brothers.

I wonder if the Negro in this country really think this is a land of freedom and liberty, a land of opportunity and advancement? How could he feel this when for many years he has been held back and held down because people (us white people) did not like the color of his skin? We figure he is different and less than we are. I wonder where our practice of brotherhood has been all these years? Apparently it has been in the talking stage with little or no action being spent since Abraham Lincoln freed the slaves.

I’m sure that many people of the backward countries of our world feel the same way the Negro in this country feels. Many of the larger nations including our own have used in these countries, actually exploited them, by obtaining their national resources for our own advantage; hiring the people to work for them in the mines, oilfields, etc., at meager wages because they did not know any better while we and other countries made money at their expense. Certainly we have not practicing brotherhood in these cases.

By the practice of brotherhood, we show reverence for our own personalities. We recall Booker T. Washington statement, “I will let no man drag me so low as to make me hate him.” It must be a terrible feeling to actually have hatred in your heart for someone. I think perhaps rather than letting person affect you this way, it would be much better to actually come right back stronger than ever with the practice of brotherhood. In other words we have to turn the other cheek. I know this isn’t always as easy as it sounds. Our first and most natural instinct is to strike back in the same way a person has dealt with us. But again I say that Christ can help us to turn the other cheek, he can help us to use the practice of ‘brotherhood’

instead of the practice of an eye for an eye and a tooth for tooth. I can assure you that if you do use the brotherhood approach you will sleep better at night, you will have no regrets and the results will be more satisfactory.

From the day that the Samaritan traveler became the good Samaritan, wherever the Christian gospel has gone, it is by the exercise of love indeed of kindness that men have exalted themselves. This truly was the way of Jesus and it should be our way also.

The practice of brotherhood reaffirms, not only the Fatherhood of God and the Saviorhood of Christ, but all that gospel which comes to us through the life, death and resurrection of Christ. Touch the gospel story at any point; it requires the immediate reaffirmation of actions in human brotherhood. If we believe in Jesus Christ and his ways, then we have to practice brotherhood. We have no other choice.

This Wednesday is Ash Wednesday and the beginning of the Lenten season. I believe this can be tied into a brotherhood theme today.

Lent very often coincides with spring training for baseball players. The players gather in their various camps, located in warm climate. They start with running to loosen their muscles. Even a star player cannot afford to miss spring practice. So it is with Lent. It is the spring training of religion. Lent is a time for spiritual spring training, and, to mix our metaphors, a time for lubricating our souls. It is a time for resetting the gage in our spiritual spark plugs.

Jesus did not come to his mission unprepared. The 40 days of Lent are based on the story of Jesus is 40 days in the wilderness. He was tempted to misuse his power and he needed to make explicit his vocation as the one sent by God for a special task. The last week of Lent parallels Jesus' final preparation for his death. The whole drama from Palm Sunday to Good Friday is a pageant of preparation for the victory of the cross and the subsequent resurrection.

For us, also, Lent is a means of preparation for sharing in the resurrection power that comes from faith in Jesus as the Christ. First, we reaffirm our loyalty to God's will. Man's wholeness of being lies in God. Without God, man is nothing. So we come to our second task, which is the realization of our own failures. Lent is the time for the emphasis on the acknowledgment of sin. Lent is a call to repentance, when we turn from our past way of life and see the power of the Spirit to help us to do better. Our third task is to seek forgiveness. So we turn to God. We confess our sinful motives and actions.

Then, this, is what Lent means: it is this special effort to be more devoted than ever before, more honest with ourselves and with God, and less central in ourselves. This takes time and effort. Lent provides the opportunity, but we must make the best of every moment of it.

Plus I believe we certainly need to prepare ourselves. We need to be right with God. First, before we can

believe in and go out into our world in the practice brotherhood. I believe the Lenten season will help us to do this through Christ help. I also believe we must just stop talking about brotherhood and start acting. "The time is now." Our heritage of Christianity, our love of democracy, our respect for human personality—these call us this day to the practice of brotherhood according to the gospel of Christ. And so we again approach this season of Lent, let us take advantage of the opportunity to preface ourselves for the one great importance test of practicing brotherhood in our world.

The Resurrection Gospel (Easter Sunday Service) Scripture: Mark 16:1-8

Text is chosen from 1 Peter 1:3; “Bless it be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy we have been born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.”

When we open the New Testament, we are reading what has been written by men who knew what they were talking about. There rings through the New Testament a confident authentic “I know.” His confident, “I know” can be heard in the words of Jesus. This same certainty sounds through the writings of the Apostle Paul. The first epistle of Peter vividly illustrates the truth. Behind it lies the assurance of a man who had lived with Jesus and witnessed the events of his life and death. He knew what he was talking about and his own transformed life corroborated what he said.

First of all, there is one thing perfectly clear about the Christian Gospel - it is the message of the Resurrection. That message is the heart of the Gospel. The Resurrection is not an appendage to the Gospel, it is its essence. It is not an afterthought; it is the main theme. Without the resurrection there would be no purpose to living or to our lives. The main theme and whole objective of Jesus Christ is the Resurrection.

A saintly Indian Bishop Azanib of Dornakal was once asked, “If you were in a village where they had never heard of Christ, what would you preach about?” Unhesitant, he replied, “the Resurrection.” The heart of the Gospel is in these words, “He is Risen.” Some of the Hebrew responses in the “Jewish Union Prayer Book”, used week by week in temple worship by our Jewish friends, are arranged phonetically in English, so that worshippers who do not understand Hebrew can speak or sing the words with correct Hebrew pronunciation. Thus, while they use the words, they do not understand what they’re actually saying. I have often thought that in the great Easter hymns and readings, many of us are in a similar position of using the words without really understanding what we are saying. Until we know what the Resurrection actually means in the Christian faith and for us personally, we will miss the greatest assurance that God has given us.

Second, the challenge of scientific discovery has been met by a scientific study of the documents, the history, the cultural background of the Bible; and as a result of that inquiry the fact of the Resurrection is established. The form, the nature of it, remains a mystery, but the fact is beyond doubt. It is this fact which lifted his followers out of despair and transformed them into courageous messengers of the gospel who were prepared to die rather than deny what they had seen and known. It was this experience which converted Saint Paul. It was the fact which the authorities in Jerusalem could not deny; they would certainly have done so if they had been able. It was this fact that brought the Christian Church into being. It is this fact that can change our lives and give our living meaning and purpose. But this fact, however, is no isolated peek in the panorama of history. It is not just a luminous bubble on the ocean of time. It is not one flash in

the darkness of existence which has made the darkness even deeper. This is the fact that gives meaning to history, and to life. The Resurrection means that our world, our lives, are in the hands of God.

Put it another way: it means that we understand our world, our lives, only when we acknowledge that we are subject to God's will and purpose. If in the end we succeed in destroying ourselves, that will not be proof that God does not exist, or if he exists, he doesn't care. It is the consequences of our proud and vain attempts to do without him or ignore him. God raised Christ from the dead. In that fact is our hope. In denying it or ignoring it, we bring ourselves to judgment and condemnation.

Henry Sloane Coffin said that every man needs two things: a home and a horizon. This is a true picture of our basic needs and reveals a rare understanding of our fundamental nature. And if perchance our lives are with either one of them, our souls are impoverished. We need a home. Within our little homes here on earth, we need more and more awareness of the Eternal Home. We need a horizon along with the home. What is a horizon? Is it not another word for hope? A road without a horizon is a hopeless thing, a deadend alley. A day without a horizon is a day without hope, a meaningless, time bound thing. A life without a horizon is no longer a life, it is no more than mere existence. That is the glory of earth for one who believes. God has given us a home and a horizon.

Sometimes in the advertising columns of the newspapers are seen notices inserted by lawyers, inviting certain persons to inquire at the lawyer's office, "when they will hear something to their advantage." I have often wondered whether such announcements meet with response. How many inheritances are there unclaimed? It is sad to think that there are people struggling along in poverty because they have not learned that a fortune is theirs for the asking. So, this day returns with its good news - there is no need to go stumbling on in our own strength, hoping against hope, striving yet defeated again and again by evil. Here is certainty, assurance, victory, an inheritance which can be ours for the asking. Yes, Jesus Christ is just waiting for us to ask him for the guidance and direction we need in our lives. All we have to do is to ask.

Fourth, the Resurrection means that evil has been defeated. In that perpetual conflict which goes on in the arena of history between good and evil, righteousness and unrighteousness, truth and falsehood, we have seen that the last word is with God. In every great contest there comes a turning point, where one contestant or another comes the assurance of victory. The contest may continue, its end may not be in sight, but its issue is settled. That's what the Resurrection means. The issue is settled - the last word is not with evil, with darkness, with death. The last word is with God. The Cross would have been the end but then Easter came, and Christ arose from the dead and conquered death. Many times, in our lives it looks as though evil has the upper hand and that it does not pay to be good, to be trustworthy and true but then we remember what happened to our Lord and we realized that evil and falsehood will never win.

Fifth, the significance of the Resurrection lies, too, in its message that the power which raised Christ from the dead is available here and now. We may live in the power of the Resurrection. Here and now, it is remaking men and women, giving new purpose, power and point to their lives. When the apostles

preached the Resurrection, they could point to evidence in their own lives. The same is true now. It is in fact happening. Wherever there is a Christian community there are to be found men and women living in that power; there are to be found men in women whose lives are being transformed by it.

It is possible to produce evidence gleaned from all over the world to illustrate the truth. The best evidence of the truth of the Resurrection is the change that came on the disciples. Modern astronomers do not look at the stars directly. They study them in the mirrors within their telescope. We cannot see the glory of the risen Christ by direct vision. But we can see him reflected in the spirit and the lives of the disciples. Before he rose, they were a little bunch of frightened men, heartbroken and hopeless, huddled together behind closed doors. But in a flash, as it seemed, they are not in the world, whispering to their friends the amazing news, and later on with all fear gone they are shouting the truth in the face of their enemies and in the open street.

We may have the power of Christ, here and now. The promise of the Resurrection is not only for some distant heaven. The promise of the Resurrection is here and now - that we may have the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, as our present possessions. We may be drawn by him into an ever-deeper relationship with God and an ever more satisfying relationship with one another. So that our life begins already to partake of the quality of eternity.

Beset as we are by imperfections and tensions, we may nonetheless live in the midst of this present world a kind of life that belongs to eternity. Death will merely be an incident, as we shall pass into a perfect expression of the life which God has already given us. And if perchance you who are listening are at the point where you have given up hope for your world or for yourselves, be sure of this - that he who raised Christ from the dead is not going to be baffled or defeated by your despair or its cause. He can bring you to birth again with a living hope and lead you into an inheritance which is incorruptible and passeth not away.

The promise of the New Testament is that we can increase in our knowledge and love of God here and now. We can go on from strength to strength even now. We may dare to believe with John Wesley that we can go on to perfection. The new life has now begun through the power and presence of the Holy Spirit. And we live in the glorious hope that we shall go on from strength to strength in the life of perfect service in God's eternal Kingdom. This is our faith which gives hope; And it is by this hope that we live. Jesus Christ has truly risen!

What is the Gospel?

Scripture: Luke 24:13-32

Text is from John 20:28; “Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God.”

What is the Gospel? This is the question, asked, I hope, at the right time.

We celebrated again the birth of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. This child grew in stature and wisdom until he came to the age of thirty (30). He then entered into his ministry. Let us look at this man.

Look at his clothes first. He wears the garb of a carpenter for he works with his father in his carpenter shop. Look at his hands. With only his hands to observe, one might write this man's biography. A carpenter's hands submit to the pattern or the blueprints. Then follow the grain of the wood. They know the hurt of the human's erratic blow, the saw's ugly cut, the chisels gorge. His hand became healing hands. They became strong hands; once they rescued a man who was sinking into the sea. But these carpenter's rough hands were gentle and finally they were wounded with nails driven in them on a cross.

Now let us lift our eyes from his hands to his face. Let us study the mind of this man. We know that he showed compassion for people, people who needed help. He didn't pass them by because they were lonely and sunk deep in sin. He went to where these people were. He heals those who were sick, and those with incurable diseases, those that were not only sick physically but mentally as well.

Now let us discover his heart. Begin with his approachability. He certainly has the ability and talent to attract people to himself and why shouldn't he, he was truly the Son of God. He said, “Come.” By close approach to him one discovers his compassion and receives his grace. He has the strong heart of a friend. Oh – if only all our friends could be like Jesus Christ. He wasn't looking for anything in return. He was a true friend in a way a friend should be.

Now let us consider the soul of this man. Note his simplicity. Jesus wasn't highly educated. He did not use words that the people could not understand. In fact, he spoke in parables so that people could understand. He was a plain, simple man, who loved people. Find out his intentions. Meditate upon his loyalty. Study his sense of destiny. His soul was one with the soul of God so that he could say, “I and the Father are one.” He truly had a Godlike soul. All we have to do to know what God is like is to find out what Jesus Christ is like. We can do this by reading and studying God's word and of course first-hand experience is the best teacher and that is by truly accepting Christ into our own lives. Then we will know exactly what Christ is like and what a difference he makes in our lives.

Jesus was more than a teacher or preacher. He was a personality. His personal experience is far greater than anything he said or could say to his public. All he said rose, indeed from his own experience; for he was no

lecturer. But also it is all less than his experience. He received from none the gospel he spoke. He found it himself. Indeed it was himself.

Do you ask, "What is the Gospel?" You have asked the wrong question. "Who is the Gospel?" There, you have the right question. Jesus of Nazareth is the Gospel. The man of Galilee is the Gospel. Jesus Christ is the Gospel.

Christ himself was Light. One is for profoundly grateful of John's insistence that the gospel was not a clever intellectualism, nor emotional excitement, nor enslavement to Scripture, but only the light that shone from the face of the person of Christ. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. Not an interpretation of him, not a book telling about him, not a church, which sought to keep him alive, but Christ himself, was the light that lighted every man.

When reading a novel, or when watching a drama, the skill reader or observer will be on the lookout for "plants" in the story. The author put something into the drama, which comes out later in its full significance. It is by means of 'plants' that the plot is developed.

We read the drama of the universe and the world by noting the plants which were made by the author.

700 years before that time of Jesus we discover a plant in the drama. Here it is in the book of Isaiah, chapter 53: (read Isaiah 53:4-12.)

This idea of one person suffering for another was planted in Jewish prophecy and history. The idea of vicarious sacrifice was planted in Jewish religious ceremonials.

As we read the word of God and on into the New Testament we now see the consummation, the denouncement of these plants. Jesus of Nazareth goes to his cross and his death. The drama is ended! No—it is not ended! The story of Easter follows. "My Lord and My God", cries Thomas. He has come to realize that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. He is facing a living Christ. "See if the Christ stand!" There is a Gospel— The living Christ.

Jesus of Nazareth is the gospel! The living Christ is the gospel! This is the gospel message that Christ is not dead but that he lives for all of us always. This is the gospel message and we are to bring it to all people everywhere.

Doctrine doesn't appeal to some people. Dogma does not interest of others. The word "revelation" sounds theological and has a little appeal. Begin been with a full statured man and gaze upon a person. You may discover the person of Jesus to be the word of God to you and to the world, "Full of grace and truth." That would be news. He would be the gospel.

When we want definitions of virtues and principles, even condensation a passages of Scriptures and sermons, we often think of people. It was written of John the Baptist, an English statesman once said that, "He became the Sermon on the Mount." Another said, "When I want a definition of salvation that comes by faith, I like to think of Thomas Chalmers." In my own thinking, honesty is not an abstract word; honesty is a very close friend of mine. Bravery is a soldier in Vietnam, with enemy snipers all around just waiting for the opportunity to shoot someone. Compassion is a person whom I might know. As George Eliot said, "ideas are poor ghosts until they become incarnate." The gospel just had to become incarnate. The gospel is Christ.

But that is not all. Jesus himself "plants" something. He adds to the plot. He says, "Low I am with you always, even until the end of the world." Then he leaves his disciples. The Christ who says he will always be with them leaves them.

Does the story end with the promise? It most certainly does not. Does the drama come to a consummation by Christ becoming an influence in the world? It does not. Does he keep his promise by becoming a "directional beam" that brings a man to his haven as an aviator is brought in to the landing field? He does not. Does he keep his promise by giving a mystical experience of his presence to a few? He does not.

Influence Jesus Christ has. This is evidenced by the fact of the Christian religion, which is nearly 2000 years old. All down through history men have felt his influence and many people today are certainly feeling it. Guidance Jesus Christ gives. All Christians can testify to that fact. He warms men's hearts. Once Christ really comes into your life you can feel the warmth. But there would be poor fulfillment of that promise. His pledge is more than a faint glow or even a bright glow that comes from faraway Palestine on a distant Easter morning. Jesus is the living Christ. He is the present Christ. He is here as very Savior and friend. He comes to personal focus.

He comes to personal focus in our lives slowly: first he is Jesus of Nazareth, garments, hands, eyes, mind, heart, soul. Then is the Christ: the Christ on the cross, Christ risen from the dead. The living Christ.

Then – perhaps when you least expect it, as it happened to two men on the Emmaus road– Jesus becomes the companion of your daily walk. He fulfills his promise. The Lord of your daily road is the gospel period.

What is the one truth above all others that you and I crave after? It is not the assurance that no hurt or harm will come to us on this earthly pilgrimage. It is not the promise that nature will be gentle and benevolent. It is not even that we may be fully released men and women, the master of our fate and the captains of our souls. The deepest most passionate longing in the human soul is to know that God is, and that God is good. That is the truth above all others. Jesus said, "I am the truth."

Many of us do not realize his presence in our lives but he most certainly is there. But I can assure you of one thing, went you realize his presence is in your life, you will have a feeling that you have never felt before.

You will become new person in Christ. You will become a reborn person and then everything you have heard, everything you have read will become real to you. You will truly know the answer to the question, "What is the gospel?"

Where To?

Scripture: Romans 12

Text is from Acts 2:40; “Save yourselves from this untoward generation.”

The words “this crooked generation” may be the expression of one of the most pernicious mistakes of religions history, a sweeping, indiscriminating contempt for the ruling ideas and spirit, the new understanding and valuations of the whole generation. Or they may represent, as they do here and often have done, a prophetic insight into the focus of a generation’s perverse thinking, which may vitiate its greatest goods and achievements.

There are three reasons why we should hesitate even lightly to indulge in the emotional luxury of claiming our time as a crooked generation.

One is that contempt for one’s time is the easiest form of contempt into which one can fall.

A second reason is that the vice is the peculiar liability of middle age and old age and few there be that escape it.

A third reason for guarding against contempt for one’s time is that such contempt is usually in truth a form of escape from the time’s complexities and difficulties.

Yet when all this is clearly in mind, there remains in a deep and permanent sense of the need for escape from one’s own generation. Our minds need to flee from the crippling provincialism of one particular day and one particular situation into the general truth of all the generations; from the village of the merely timely into the universe of the timeless. Our thinking needs to be set in a long-time frame.

It is also true that our present generation may be called crooked or perverse, not in a spirit of dull-witted or aging contempt, but through the thoughtful insight, which measures it by divine standards. And so I believe each one of us needs to look at our own lives in terms of God’s will for us.

A chaplain in a camp for migrant workers quotes one of them as telling him, “I can read figgers but I can’t read writin’, so when I’m on the road I know how far but never where to.

There is a single word in the King James Version of the Bible, which has this sermon in it. It is the word “untoward”. When Peter preached his great sermon, proclaiming Christ as the way of salvation, a great many said to Peter and the other apostles, “What shall we do?” Included in Peter’s answer was the exhortation, “Save yourselves from this untoward generation.”

The word “untoward” is a perfect translation of a Greek word, “skolios”, which means ‘crooked’, that is, not pointing toward anything, meandering in all directions. An ‘untoward’ generation is a generation that has no aims, no purpose. Peter was putting his finger right on the real problem of that confused, heart-hungry, frustrated, pagan first century. The prevailing mood was a deadly aimlessness.

In Old English the word, “toward” is a complementary adjective, which describes someone from whom a great deal can be expected. A ‘toward’ boy is one who is teachable, who is obviously going somewhere.

Are you a “toward” person, pointed toward something? Or are you aimless, untoward? Peter’s implication comes straight to us. Do you start every day with the exciting sense that it will have something of great importance? Do you look forward to this new year, knowing what you want to do and why?

You know we all need to have goals in our lives, we need to have a purpose, something we are always working toward. And so to start each day with expectancy, and looking for something important to happen is the only way to live. If we live this way something important is bound to happen. Too many of us are satisfied to sit back, to take each day as it comes, then we get into a rut and stay there and each day becomes routine. We need to be creative, use our imaginations, and set goals for ourselves based on our God given talents and abilities.

We shall now follow one of the great chapters of the Bible, the 12th chapter of Romans, for its practical, down-to-life way of telling us how to live a life, which will get us somewhere. It is not an exhaustive treatment but its directions are good. Verse 1 begins with a more or less general admonition. Then come particular suggestions.

Verse 2 reads: “Don’t be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind.” A person in Christ is to be transformed, original, different, because in Jesus Christ he does a different form of thinking.

How easy it is for all of us to conform to what is going on around us whether it be right or wrong. Most of us do not want to be different because this draws attention to us and perhaps others will say we are peculiar. Christ intends for us to live our lives according to his will for us.

Many people join a church or belong to a church because it’s the right thing to do. But we very seldom see these people in attendance except perhaps on special occasions. They did not join the church because they wanted to be in fellowship with Christ and other Christians. These kinds of people are not interested in supporting their church financially or otherwise. I’m sure if we checked the actual figures, the largest percentage of church members falls into this category. And so if you attend church regularly, support it with our prayers, service and gifts you are not conforming to the majority.

A traveler in London was describing his sight of a Quaker swimming in the Thames River. When he was

asked how he knew the man was a Quaker, he said, "Because he was swimming against the stream." Not many of us are like the non-conforming Quaker; we prefer to drift, or swim with the stream. "Once a man was crucified because he swam upstream while all others were swimming down."

If a man always compromises, always give ground, he will soon come to the place where he has no ground to give.

There is no compromise where Christian principles are involved. In verse 3 we read that, "vanity can keep us from finding the best use of our lives." We may be inclined to think, "that a rose like I am should not be placed between two thorns." Pride can keep us from the place where we might give God the greatest service.

I certainly believe that we should not degrade ourselves or think negatively of ourselves but we should not think, "I'm better than he is because I have a larger and better house, or my car is newer, or I have more money in the bank, or I have a better job. There are excuses we use for judging people and they relate to material possessions or the standard of living we enjoy and they in no way relate to the good or importance of a person in this world of ours. I'm sure that God judges none of us because of these reasons. It's what kind of lives we live, how we live them and what we actually have in our hearts that count.

I've said before, we let all of the above things and reason separate us from one another when actually we can all be united in fellowship together with Christ. Christ brings us together as his children regardless of the color of our skin, regardless of our occupation, regardless of our social position and regardless of our wealth or poverty.

I think we need to realize (and we will realize once we have accepted Christ into our lives) that not all of us can be bankers, lawyers, doctors, that we work best and are happiest working at our fullest capacity with the abilities and talents God has given us. We cannot, at least for very long, put on the dog (so to speak) or pretend we are something we are not. If we do, we are only kidding ourselves and making ourselves, and those around us miserable.

In Verse 5, we find our purpose is life through loving service to the whole body of which God has made us a part. If you are making a contribution to the body of humanity that is what you are for.

God knows, there are plenty of people in our world that need our help. It's true that all of us cannot be missionaries, or doctors, or nurses or in some way be directly in contact with helping people, but we certainly can try to understand the conditions under which people have to live in our world. We can join in prayers these people and for the persons who are directly trying to help them. We certainly can help financially, for a little money goes a long way in some of the backward countries of our world. To believe that we should let these people take care of themselves and that we should stick to our own business is definitely wrong. As Christians we need to be concerned and to show action along with our concern for all people everywhere. There are many people in our world who would have never heard God's word and it's

our responsibility to bring the Gospel to them. We are all God's children and we all belong to the household of God. How can we help but be prayerful to God when each night we know there are millions of people who go to sleep hungry, and without a roof over their heads; children, homeless and without the love and affection and care of parents. And of course we have conditions in our own country that are not good; people who are in the same situation as those in far away lands. There are plenty of agencies in our own country that are trying to help these people that we can support.

Perhaps we need to reevaluate the churches responsibilities.

In Verse 6 we read, "having gifts that differ- let us use them." Find out what it is that you do best, then do it. It is marvelously reassuring that the right goals for our lives are set, not in terms of our ambition, but of our abilities. Too many of us flounder around all of our lives, trying this and that, and finally ending up nowhere. What a waste it is when our whole lives have been spent on something that does not suit us and we do not enjoy. Our lives can be so much more useful to ourselves, our families and to the whole world when with God's help and guidance we find our place in the world according to our God given talents and abilities.

We all have gifts that God has given us that are different from each other's. Each one of us can help in his own way in the spreading of God's word whether it be teaching, singing, playing the piano or organ, or being a leader in our church and community. It certainly is a waste when we do not use them. God has given us these talents and intends for us to use them.

Verse 9 reads, "Let love be genuine." Love gives us our great purpose in life because love is the theme of all existence. "God is love" and he puts us on earth to reflect his love. "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten son." This is the greatest example of love. Jesus had compassion and love for the people he came in contact with. Because of God's great love for us, we are to show the same kind of love toward other people. Love goes much deeper than the outward show of affection. Love for one another helps us to stand by that person through thick and thin, through all trials and tribulations regardless of how difficult. Love can bind us together as one household of God.

Verse 11 reads, "Never flog in zeal, be aglow with the spirit, serve the Lord." God intends for us to serve him. Being a Christian involves much more than coming to church and Sunday school. Living a Christian life is a full-time job and anyone and everyone can live this kind of life regardless of what he's doing or where he is doing it. Any player in the game of life whose wandering about the goal posts and the rules will do well to read and study this 12th chapter of Romans.

A college faculty was about to expel a student from college. The dean of the men pleaded for the young man. Finally the dean was permitted to interview the student and give him one more chance to make good. The interview took place and the young man's deportment became exemplary. When the dean was asked what happened at the interview, he said, "I showed him the goal post."

In the play, "Death of a Salesman", Willy Loman has pursued some very superficial purposes with great devotion. He was intent on being a super salesman. He wanted to be, not only liked, but well liked. He wanted to have fun. But his business slipped, and his friends were not very permanent and the son on whom he doted caught him in a sordid affair in a cheap hotel, and despised him. When all the show collapsed like a balloon, Willy cannot face it and he does away with himself. In the last scene there is only the mound of Willy's grave on a dark bare stage. His wife and sons are standing around it. There is a long silence, then one of them says, "Poor guy, he had all the wrong dreams. Poor guy, he didn't know who he was." Then the curtain closes.

Unless you find out who you are, you will be an untoward person—not aimed at anything. Jesus Christ has told you who you are, and while you are on earth, and what life is for. You do not have to have the nightmare of playing a game without knowing where the goal is. You do not have to wonder whether your life is being wasted. You can find yourself, and be yourself, and fulfill yourself in the rich satisfaction that God gives you each and every day.

Words That Make A Difference

Scripture: Matthew 11:1-6; 25-30

Text is chosen from Matthew 11:28-30; “Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart; and you shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

“Words Make a Difference”, is not only the subject of the sermon, but the title of a series of Lenten sermons, of which this is the first.

Of course we cannot measure the difference that these words of our text make by imagining their erasure from the gospel narrative. What would be lost if they had never been spoken? May I venture of figure of speech?

I look up from my room window to the foot of the mountain range and a mountain peak named Baldy. Baldy dominates the whole area. It's snow brings fertility to the otherwise desert plane. It is a factor in the uniform climate. “Did you see Baldy today? Is that query of your neighbor which bears witness to its beauty. And the skies stopped to passing cars indicate that fun and frolic can be found on the slopes of Baldy. Now suppose that some morning I should look out of my window to discover that Baldy was not there. Something like that would happen, a thousand times more spiritually devastating, if we were deprived or robbed of these words of Jesus, “Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden.

Is there any other person in the world history that could have seriously spoken these words, which begin with “come unto me” and end with “my burden is light?” Could Socrates or Plato have said them? Could any of the poets have spoken them? What becomes of the self-authenticated saviors who sometimes imitate this call? They disappear and are soon forgotten. But the words of Jesus Christ have not been forgotten all of these years.

We are at Hippo, in North Africa. It is the 5th century. Augustine bends over his desk. Let us glance over his shoulder. What is it that he is writing? “I have read in Plato and Cicero,” he says, “many sayings that are very wise and very beautiful, but I never read in either of them such words as these: “Come on to me, you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” “These are good words”, says Augustine, as he contrast them with the wealthiest treasures of heathen minds.”

Why were these words of Christ not forgotten? As the verses are given us, they hang from a preceding verse, Matthew 11: 27, “All things have been delivered to me by my father”. These words come out of Christ intimacy with the Father. They are God's own words. That makes a difference and that's why these words have not been forgotten. Regardless of what you say, it will soon be forgotten but that which God says will always be remembered and heard.

These words not only reveal the intimacy between the Son and the Father; they speak intimately to us; directly to us. The, I–You relationship is very close: “Come on to me”; “I will give you”, “Take my yoke upon you.” Here are inviting and appealing verbs; “Come”–“Take” – “Learn”– “Find.”

Today I may not be heavy laden, but tomorrow the burden may be crushing; for who knows what tomorrow may bring. But whether it be today or tomorrow that life becomes burdensome, there it stands– this invitation it is my strength and comfort. I also believe and know it means that, why should we wait, let us accept Jesus Christ into our lives now and he will always be with us to help and guide us. Sometimes we try to carry all our burdens ourselves and we are not willing to let Christ help until it is too late. Let us not wait. Let us surrender our lives to him now.

Think too, of the intimacy involved in sharing the same yoke. Since a yoke is a device for carrying heavy loads, Christ is saying that he wants to help carry our load by sharing the same yoke. There are not too many people willing to do that today. This actually shows God’s love for us through the help Christ is willing to give us in all kinds of circumstances and conditions.

Here are some words from a prayer by S. Robert Bellarmine: “What command Lord, dost thou lay upon they servants? “Take my yoke upon you.” And what yoke? “My yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” Who would not willingly bear a yoke that does not overburden, but supports, a load that does not crush, but gives relief? With reason thou didst add: “What is that yoke of thine which brings not weariness but rest?” It is that 1st and greatest Commandment: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart.”

These words of Christ make a difference because they can be so widely and personally and effectively applied.

It seems that the burden of which Jesus was speaking was that of the law. The legal requirements, which the scribes and the Pharisees laid upon the people, were heavy and grievous. It must be remembered that this was a burden imposed by religion. They had to carry their religion, as many people do today; they never had the joy of being carried by their religion. The burden of the law crushed a man; the burden of Christ’s yoke is easy and light.

There is an ancient legend, which holds that when the birds of the air were first created they had no wings. They hopped around on their two legs as best they could, pecking and jumping in the grass and on dead trees lying in the woods, but never getting up very high, never knowing what it would be like to soar to the highest treetop or move with graceful rhythm into the setting sun. They just hopped around narrowly, limited in range of movement and defenseless in the midst of many earthbound perils. Then one day the Lord God fashioned wings on their backs – wings to carry them far and wide above the grass and the stumps and the dangers of the ground, up and away with freedom and release and power, opening up a mighty new dimension to their existence. But the birds rebelled. The wings we’re a burden. They were heavy. They were cumbersome. They were just more feathers and bone for them to carry around. When

they finally accepted the weight of the wings, they discovered that what seemed at first only a burden was designed not just for them to carry, but to carry them.

If we were able to discern accurately the religion people possessed, I suppose we could establish two distinct groups. On one side would be all the people who carry their religion and on the other side would be all the people whose religion carries them; on one side religion that is burdensome and on the other, religion that carries burdens.

In Isaiah 46:6&7, we read of an example of people carrying their religion; “they lavish gold out of the bag and weigh silver in the balance and hire a goldsmith; and he maketh it a god: they fall down, yea they worship. They bear him upon the shoulder, they carry him, and set him in his place and he standeth: from his place shall he not remove: yea one shall cry into him; yet can he not answer, nor save him out of his trouble.” The burden of the law crushed a man; the burden of Christ yoke is easy and light.

Our religion, our beliefs it should be a joy to us, not a burden. Christ wants us to be happy, he’s willing to help us be this. All we have to do is turn to him and let him help us. Why should our religion become such a burden that we become as outcasts, that people look upon us as religious fanatics, that life becomes unbearable? It should not be this way and still we cannot compromise our Christian beliefs for popularity and notoriety. Christ is here waiting to help us work this out. We do not have to do it alone.

You hear some people who get discouraged about their religion because they say they cannot live up to (completely) the 10 Commandments. I believe they fail to realize that we are human and therefore subject to mistakes and sin. We cannot be perfect or live a perfect life. If we are willing to acknowledge that we have sinned, and we are willing to repent and asked for forgiveness and promise to live a better life, God will forgive us and give us another chance. This is possible because Christ died for our sins and so we could be saved. Perhaps this really doesn’t make it any easier but at least we have a chance and even though we make mistakes we can still have another chance.

Many of us have the burdens as a result of other things. Deep weariness of spirit may come with great sorrow; how many have found rest by coming to the comfort of Christ in response to this invitation? How many lives have been lived in strain and stress until one day they found rest and peace by coming and taking and learning.

When we lose a loved one, Jesus Christ is our only comfort that we can find. Generally we can see no logical reason for the death of a loved one; perhaps we are not supposed to understand. Believe me when I say, the only comfort is from Christ. He can calm us, give us peace and comfort and understanding that is permanent, if we put our trust in him. We can go on all of our lives suffering this loss by ourselves and we will never find the answer. We will never find peace. Let Christ help you. He wants to. He is willing to. He wants to make life easier for you and he most certainly can if you let him.

These words in all our text today make a difference because they are an invitation to grace: “Come on to me-I will give you...” some men may have come; but others did not understand. Many of us do not understand grace today. Grace is something that God gives to us. Jesus Christ has fulfilled our obligation of sin by his crucifixion on the cross. God shows us mercy, gives us compassionate treatment. This is the grace he gives us. He gives us this without obligation on our part. But even though we may not understand this, the offer is still made; not a cheap grace, but the grace that is found in the sacrifice of Christ upon the cross. Yet let it be known, the invitation of Christ does not wait for our understanding of the cross before response can be made, nor does it wait for great faith or many works. Just “come”, “take”, “learn”, and you will find.

The invitation of Christ is always open to us; we can come to Christ as we are. All we have to do is show an interest and want to become his follower and be sincere; he will help us to do the rest.

These words of Christ make a difference because of their promise, “I will give you rest.” But who wants flowery beds of ease? They may seem pleasant for a day, but not for long. Another ask, “Rest”? How can one rest if his loyalty to a leader makes him sensitive to the cry of every hungry child in the world? How can one rest if he has bravely decided to walk with one who is unswervingly obsolete in justice and truth and mercy? But the question is wrongly placed. Rather –how can one find strength to be obedient if he doesn’t rest?

Hear Bernard of Clairvoux sing: “ Oh blessed burden that makes all burdens light. Oh blessed yoke that bears the bearer up.”

The words of our text are addressed to the weary, the tired, and the worn, not tired so much by the toil of life as by the tension of it. They are addressed to the world– weary; they may be old or they may be young, but they are people who are weary of life, tired of thinking, tired of pressing, tired of struggling, tired of working things out. In other words they are addressed to us. More often than we like to admit we are loaded down with our cares, sometimes with the lead in our shoes, staggering onward in the sun. We are not always cast in the mood, but there are few of us who have never been in it, and not many who are strangers to its darkness.

A time will always come in your life when you cannot bear the strain and I know that giving your complete life to Jesus Christ is the only answer. He can and will give you the strength, courage and faith to endure all situations in your life. If you think this is not so, then try it; it really does work.

You Never Walk Alone

Scripture: Matthew 28

I have chosen my text from Acts 17:27-28; “That they should seek God, in the hope that they might feel after him and find him. Yet he is not far from each of us; for in him we live and move and have our being; as even some of you poets have said, for we are indeed his offspring.”

That some of you probably know that the title of the sermon is the title of the song from the musical comedy “Carousel”.

As it applies to us at the beginning of this new year let us ask a straight question. Is it true that we never walk alone? Is God really with us everywhere and all the time? Does the Master walk by our sides?

First of all, that we never walk alone is attested to by poets for we read in the 23rd Psalm verse four; “even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil; for thou art with me; thy rod and my staff, they comfort me.” The 139th Psalm like wise tells us that regardless of where we go or what we do God is here beside us. Also Isaiah tells us of God’s continual presence in our lives. And so from God’s own word we know that he will always be with us.

In modern times explorers add their testimony. Sir John Franklin, seeking the Northwest Passage, “found the Lord walking on all the waters.” Sir Ernest Shackleton experienced his presence amid the icy mountains of Antarctica. Christian missionaries bear witness to a sense of nearness to the Master as they ventured into the jungles of South America and New Guinea. The list of their names could be greatly extended. I cannot believe that such men and women were deluded. It would be almost impossible to believe that if they were deluded, they could all possibly have been affected with the same delusion. Secondly, that we never walk alone is attested to in the practical working religion of every day Christians. Leslie Weatherhead writes that the nearness of Jesus Christ in the lives of ordinary persons is evidenced by certain signs.

First, there is an inward reinforcement of personality. Paul says in Philippians 4: 13; “I can do all things in him who strengthens me.” Thousands of Christ’s followers know that they have done better than they themselves acting alone could possibly do. They have faced difficulties, trials, tribulations, which they could not have faced alone. From football players to poets, all sorts of men have known the reinforcement of personality, which comes from Christ’s nearness.

From my own experience I know that I could not stand here before you if it were not for God’s help and guidance.

Second, according to Weatherhead, true gaiety of spirit is a mark of men and women who know that they do not walk alone. Christians are joyful people. They are gay and happy for Christ is with them whatever

they do.

Third, another mark is deep sincerity of spirit and still another mark is outgoing love. Love that reaches out to all people everywhere. Christians have received the love God gave through Christ and they must share this love with other people. Scrutinize the lives of men and women with these marks upon them. They will bear evidence to the fact that Christ is with them as they make their daily rounds. Our Christianity is not just a Sunday morning religion, it is an every day religion regardless of where we are or what we are doing.

Third, you never walk alone– the words of David Livingstone in his journey on January 14, 1856, are of unusual significance: “I read that Jesus said; lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.” It is the word of a gentle man of the most strict and sacred honor, so there is an end of it.”

“You never walk alone.” This is the essence of the good news that came into history 2000 years ago. It is still good news today. Hear it without a surge of joy, if you dare! How can we help but rejoice to know that he whose spirit overarches eternity and undergirds the universe walks beside us. Who would not be strengthened and calmed by such fellowship? Who can remain lonely in such company?

As we come to our Lord’s Table today and partake of the bread and wine let us know that Christ is here with us. Let us feel his presence in our lives.

One of the most satisfying of all human experiences is participation in the Lord’s Supper, when it is done in the right spirit. Center your mind upon the joyous possibilities of this act. The congregation has assembled for the purpose of worshipping God, enjoying human fellowship, gaining strength and faith and love for the responsibility of life. The hour of devotion deepens our sense of solidarity, kindles awareness of the priceless worth of every person, and makes vivid the recognition of kinship with every soul in the sanctuary.

Before the emblems of broken body and shed blood memory brings a surge of thanksgiving, gratitude to God for Jesus Christ, his life and living presence. Thought is fixed upon his fidelity, how he wanted to live, but even more he desired to do his Father’s will. Once more the agony of the cross is envisaged. Again comes the thrill of realization that Jesus broke the bonds of death and at the moment is a living promise presence in our midst. Then comes self-examination with gratitude props confession. Unworthiness, failure, sin are acknowledged and the soul reaches out for forgiveness and power. The bread and the wine are taken in thankfulness contrition, and commitment. God becomes more real, communion with the living Lord more vital, and fellowship with other members of the holy family throb with a warm sense of solidarity. There are enough names on the rolls of the churches to provide adequate instruments in God’s hands and human institutions, if members of the body of Christ would avail themselves of the resources of the Lords Supper.

Partaking of the Lord’s Supper is one way for us, as Christians, to actually know the presence of the Lord. He is here among us today. He is the host and the head of the table. We are his guests. Let us always remember his words, “and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age.”

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



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

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

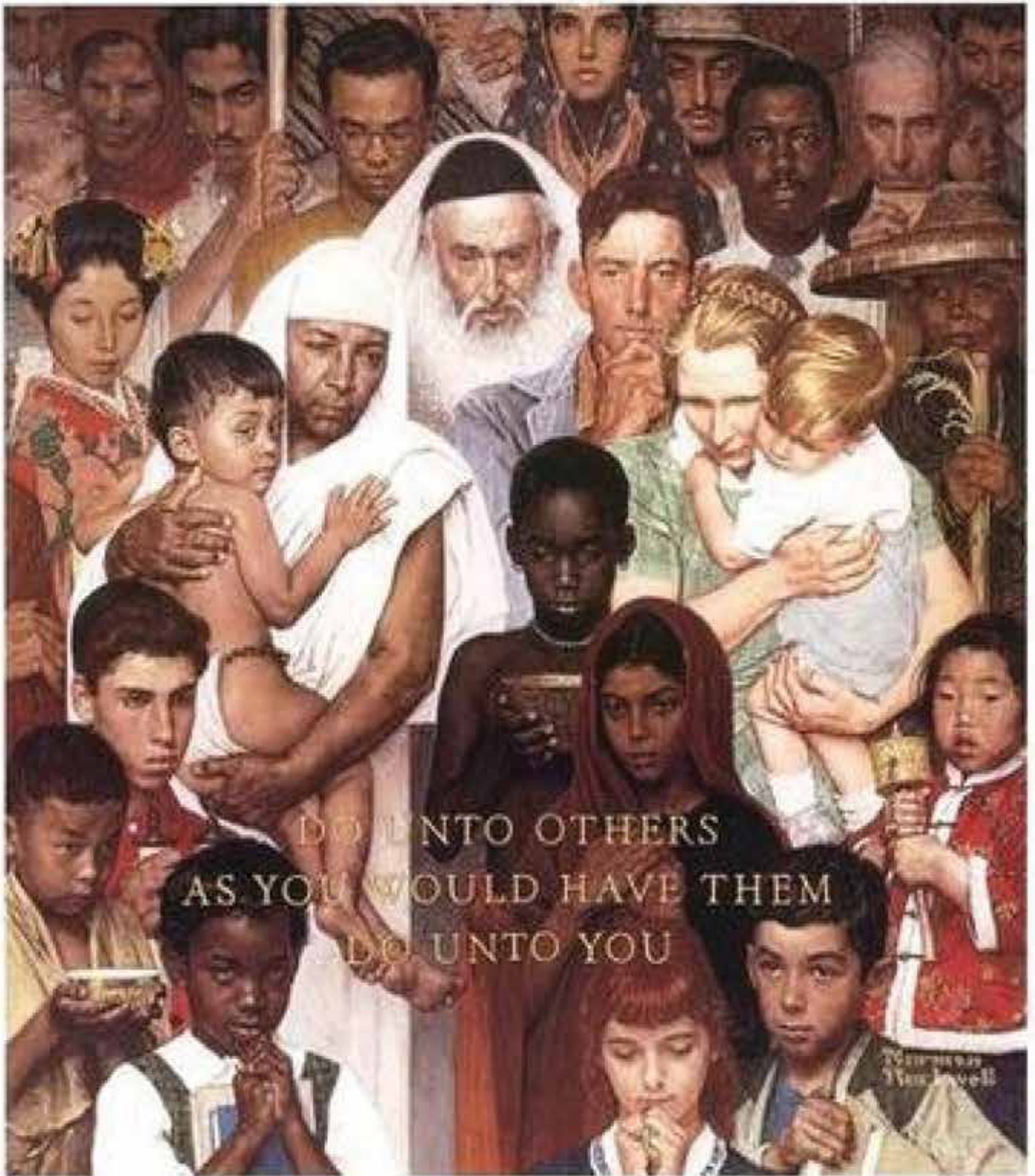


Millions of us suffer needlessly from addiction & depression. The reasons for this are many. In this program we emphasize the 12 step method of Recovery, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, and Meditation techniques to overcome difficulties. We also rely on God's grace to help you be lifted from your dilemma.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

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



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



NORMAN ROCKWELL
"DO UNTO OTHERS"