

Braman

Foundation of Charities



Central Bridge
United Methodist Church

The Sermons of Richard W. Braman Vol. 7

“

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 Great Task

Scripture: Mark 16:9-20

Text is chosen from Mark 16:15,19-20. “And he said to them, Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation... So then, the Lord Jesus after he had spoken to them was taken up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God. And they went forth and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by the signs that attended it.”

Next Thursday is Ascension Day in the Christian calendar. 40 days after Easter the risen Christ finally parted from his disciples and returned to the Father. The record indicates a bodily disappearance by an upward movement into the sky. The event took place at the Mount of Olives as the apostles were discussing the Kingdom with Christ.

Our text is appropriate for this beginning of this week since it mentions the departure of Jesus. It should be noted that the original Gospel of Mark ended with the eighth verse of this chapter and the conclusion has been written by another hand, approximately at the end of the 1st century. This suggests that the life of Christ is always an unfinished story. It is going on still in the lives and deeds of all who follow him.

Before his ascension Jesus gave his disciples a great talk: “You must go out into the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature.” The task was interpreted as including teaching and preaching, baptizing and establishing the church. By the influence of Jesus’ words and example, the task now includes great tasks of feeding the hungry, healing the sick, opening the eyes of the blind, releasing the captives, setting at liberty those that are bruised, and healing the broken hearted. To do all or even part of this was certainly a task that would take faith, courage, strength and endurance. This is what Christ believed he had given his followers and what he would give them during the performing of the great task. What reasonable explanation did Jesus have that the work would go forward?

First of all, he had the men to take up the task. They were few but they were trained. They were the ordinary run of men, with the capacity of becoming extraordinary. A few could preach affectively. They could teach, heal the sick, manage the affair of the church. In his own way, each follower had some talent that could be used for helping with the great task. The same way, today, each one of us has some talent that can be used in God’s church and to help in witnessing in his name.

As this company of people grew, some men and women became gifted witnesses; in inconspicuous places and with inconspicuous manners, they proclaimed the Gospel to their friends and neighbors. Christ’s men and women caught the spirit of martyrdom. They could be, and many were, loyal unto death. To use Doctor Walter Bowie’s phrase, they became “Men of Fire”. It is true today. Christ has the men for the great task. On these, on us, he depends. You know we do not have to stand on the street corners and shout to the top of our lungs to proclaim Jesus as the Christ (although sometimes I feel it would be a good idea.) But we really can witness in many ways, by the way we live our lives, practicing what we preach and talk

about is a great living example.

All of us have friends and neighbors. Perhaps one or some of them are seeking God and we can help them to find the right path. We can enter into local civic offices that requires good, Christian participation. We can speak out and stand up for what we know to be good, and true and right. Christ can show us many ways to witness effectively and dependably. Do we belong to the dependable?

Second, great enterprises require management. No man can do such a task alone. Many are engaged in it. This great task had a Master. Our test says, "the Lord works with them." Their task was Christ-given and Christ-supervised. Those early disciples saw the physical presence of Christ depart; They knew that his spiritual presence would remain. Their expectations were fulfilled. He kept his promise. He never failed them.

It is so in our day. The great task to go out to the world and proclaim the Gospel to every creature, in all its Christ-inspired involvement, goes on under the direction of Christ as Lord and Master. As Christian we believe, we trust and have faith, that Jesus Christ actually is here beside us to give us guidance and direction if we really and truly ask him. He can help us to become effective witnesses. He knows how and where and when we should be someplace. He knows the right time for us to be quiet and the right time for us to speak up. He can tell us this if we want him to. We cannot hope to be witnesses effectively alone but with his help and working together this great task can be carried out even today as it was nearly 2000 years ago.

Third, the great task had the men and the Master. It included a method. Its method was proclamation. The method was communication - by preaching, by witnessing, by writing, by living and dying in a manner that became conspicuous in a non-Christian environment. Not all could be preachers, not all could write New Testament books; but every Christian could love his neighbor and friend in the Christ-given manner of loving. The method of proclamation is still ours to use.

We must not disparage preaching. However not all people can be reached by preaching, for not all people come to church and some that do, do not listen to what the preacher has to say. At least they think he must be talking about someone else and not me. We therefore must find and use other means of proclaiming our Lord and Christ. One way of direct communication is the television. Most people have TVs and few turn them off, so perhaps some Christian programs would and can reach people. There are many good and excellent Christian books on the market today. Some people can be reached in this manner. Newspapers and magazines are other means of proclaiming Jesus Christ.

We should not forget that there is a quality about a Christian life and also about the way a man earns his daily bread and lives his life in his home and community while proclaiming the gospel. The example we live is very important, not only to our families but our coworkers, our friends, our neighbors, our acquaintances. We can never tell who is looking at us and one Christian act on our part could influence

another person.

I am not saying that we have to preach the gospel on every street corner or quote verses of scripture every chance we get, (but sometimes I believe it might be good for us and our friends) but the lives we live certainly have a big influence on those around us and with those we come in contact with, especially our business dealings. Whether we attend church regularly and take an active part in the office of the church certainly helps to proclaim the gospel. We can meet the great task of Jesus in very practical ways as far as from today day today we communicate with our fellow men. We must take advantage of each opportunity we have to proclaim the Gospel to others. This is our duty and responsibility as Christians. Doctor Fosdick tells of a surgeon in a certain community, who, when asked concerning his faith, replied: "if you want to know what my religion is, come and see me operate."

Fourth, motivation in mobility were involved. The disciples were to go. They were to go everywhere. They were to leap barrier and crossed frontiers. Paul became the great example of a mobile person. He was a mobile man, motivated by the Spirit and controlled by the Master, with a message and admission to the whole world. Since then, the history of Christian missions is the story of Christ men going everywhere. And certainly, this is the reason we need to support our missionary program. Christians have this responsibility to help proclaim the gospel message to all people everywhere. Our obligation is our prayers for our missionaries in our financial aid, both of which are important to carry out a successful missionary program.

Fifth, a most vital element in bearing this great task is maintenance. In a great construction task, there must be 'availability of equipment'. The men and means of meeting the great task must be made available. In heavy construction men are important. Men who drive the tractors and the trucks, operate the shovels and the draglines. Men who run the cable ways, layout and build the forms for concrete and clean up and pour cement. Men who plot the schedule. Men who layout and plan the work. Men who compute the quantities and make out the estimates. Men who inspect the materials and workmanship. Men who repair the equipment and labor to maintain it, who warehouse the supplies and parts, who string the lights and man the pumps and clean up the work area, and the cooks who feed the men who do the work and the inspectors who check it. The men who keep the time and keep the books and the men who buy the supplies and equipment. All these and many more are needed and must be present, ready, willing and with energy and drive to make the job go. These men are the true backbone of heavy construction, and they make up the elements that make it go.

Those who pray in the secret place and channel the power of the Spirit belong to the department of maintenance. What of those who prepare the children in homes, schools and Sunday schools to take up the great task. Every Christian, the most humble as well as the most conspicuous, has his place in the work of fulfilling the great task. We all have the responsibility and we all can do something to aid in this cause; God knows it is needed and that it counts regardless of how small we may think our part is.

Preparing children and young people for the life ahead is a very big assignment and one that cannot be

taken lightly for we are dealing with God's children. Without them his progress cannot succeed and will soon come to a standstill. "The Spirit entered into me when he spoke unto me, and set me upon my feet", wrote Ezekiel, of God's words to him as he faced the task of encouraging the captives in Babylon. It can happen again. It can happen to the discouraged preacher. It can happen through him and those who hear him. Nothing should make us forget what God can accomplish through the spoken word when the preacher becomes the channel of his Spirit. This is true with the Sunday school teacher. We always need to be alive and full of enthusiasm when speaking of God's word, so that other people can feel our enthusiasm of God's Holy Spirit through our help in our aid.

Sixth and finally, but not least, money is another element in bearing the great task. Even in the early years of the church, Paul took collections in the mission churches and carried the money to the church at Jerusalem, which was very poor. Money is definitely needed to carry on Christ's great task. Money is needed to support the mission programs of the church. Ministers need to receive money to support their families and this money must come from us Christians. This is part of our stewardship and giving to God's work. In an address by Mr. J.B. Bonney, the president of Morrison-Knudson, a company which builds great dams and power plants in many countries of the world, gave these as the seven M's of heavy construction: "Men, Management, Methods, Machines, Mobility, Maintenance, Money."

Facing this great task of Christ, we see a parallel: Men, Master, Method, Motivation, Mobility, Maintenance, Money. This we need to effectively proclaim the gospel message. Each one of us fits into the plan someplace and Christ is depending on us to carry out his plan. Become his witness and thus fulfill your life.

A Message and A Mission

Scripture: John 21:1-19

Text chosen from Matthew 28:19-20. “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age.”

When Jesus departed this world six weeks after his resurrection, did ever a great character leave so little? His legacy from a modern and materialistic point of view must be decided in the negative: no money, no house, no lands, no personal property, no writing, no books, no organization, no institution. Did ever a great character leave so much? He left a message and he left a mission. To whom did he leave this legacy? To the 120 as recorded in Acts 1:15, “to a few obscure and insignificant people from the lower strata of Jerusalem society.” To the eleven; by friendly intimacy he re-educated them as we discussed last week. Jesus Christ left them a message. He left them the message of his resurrection from the dead; “this man is the living Christ.” He left them the message of reminiscence. Reminiscence is what we all had leave. He was fine and noble - his stories, his pithy sayings, his deeds, his prayers, his death, his victory over death. He left them a message of his spiritual presence, a message of promise, “Lo I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.”

This message is not like an antique-not something related only to the past, like an old chair, an old dress, or an old book. His message would belong to every time and place and experience. The ever-present Christ would make it vital, creative and redemptive. It was a message of the living Christ, the historic Christ, the spirited Christ, the present Christ. His legacy included a Christ-centered message. The pagans noticed the new fortitude of the Christians in face of death. Tertullian himself was immensely impressed with it. He had never troubled to look at the Gospels. Nobody bothered to read them unless they were converted already, he said. But he seems to have seen these Christian martyrs die. “Every man”, he said, “who sees it is moved with some misgiving, and is set on fire to learn the reason”; he inquires and he is taught; and when he has learned the truth, he instantly follows it himself as well. No one would have wished to be killed, unless he was in possession of the truth.

Even though the message may be old, it is ever new to us and most definitely applies to all of us today, right now. This is the type of universal message Christ left to us. If we really take this message sincerely and seriously, we cannot help but live our lives by it. We cannot help also, but to tell others of it. We want to share it with our friends and acquaintances. We have an advantage in that we can read this message from our Bible this the first disciples did not have although some of them actually had the privilege of living and walking this earth with our master. What other message could have endured the age of time, none other than the message of our Christ and our Lord. Truly Jesus Christ lives forever in our hearts and minds.

He is the ever-living Christ who conquered death on a cross. In one of the villages of northern India a missionary was preaching in a Bazaar. As he was closing a Mohammedan came up to him and said, “you

must admit that we have one thing you do not, and it is better than anything you have.” The missionary said courteously, “and what is it that you have?” “When we go to Mecca, replied the Mohammedan, we at least find a coffin. But when you Christians go to Jerusalem, which is your Mecca, you find nothing but an empty tomb.” The missionary smiled and said, “that is just the difference. Mohammed is in his coffin. And all false systems of religion and philosophy are in their coffins. But Jesus Christ, whose Kingdom is to include all nations in all kindreds, and tribes is not here, he is risen. And all power in heaven and on earth is given to him. He is alive forever!”

Yes. Jesus Christ indeed has risen and is alive within each of us. He is here beside us always for our guidance and direction. We truly do worship a living Christ. What a message this is. The greatest message ever given and ever spoken. Jesus Christ also left them a legacy of mission. Message alone is not enough. A message must be told and if it isn't it does not amount to very much. Until it is passed on it really is not a message. A message must be told: the teacher must teach, the preacher must preach, the example must be lived. How true that last statement is for we can teach all we want, I can preach to the very best of my ability, but if I don't live the example then all the teaching and preaching has been in vain. The examples we live are very important. Jesus Christ gave his followers a mission. Let us call this mission by a modern word-a job. How did he do it?

First of all, he framed their job in terms of the ideal. The Kingdom was an ideal with which he had impregnated their minds. He had taught them concerning its nature and growth: “the kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed.” Concern for the Kingdom would now become a motive in their lives. The kingdom is always here and always coming. A man can live in the kingdom while working and waiting for it. A man can also live-in hell if that's what he wants to make out of his own life.

How many strong men of the church have lived life usefully and well, because they have been motivated by the kingdom ideal? How many men have been unable to get on in life, becoming mediocre in character, because they have no motivating ideal? We certainly cannot do anything well unless we have some motivating ideal or force behind us to keep us moving forward. If we always work towards the final goal of the Kingdom of God and keep it uppermost in our minds, we will have more than enough motivation to keep us going.

A rich man was down at the waterfront waiting the departure of an ocean liner. He was joined by an acquaintance, who said to him, “you seem to be much pleased about something.” “Yes”, said the rich man, “I do feel unusually good today. Do you see that vessel at anchor in the North River? Well, I have on the vessel \$10,000 worth of equipment for a hospital in China, and I just came down to see the vessel safely off.” “Well, that is interesting, and I am glad you made that gift,” said the friend. “But you know I also have a gift on that ship. My only daughter is on that vessel, going to China to give her life as a missionary.”

Second, he vested the authority of their mission in himself. Matthew 28:18 reads, “all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations.” Certain tasks are often

impossible to do except with authority. Self-initiated actions is often very difficult. A man who goes it alone often meets maximum resistance. Who is behind him makes a difference. We all know that from experiences we have had in our own lives concerning civic and personal affairs. If we can have someone behind us that is well respected and known our job becomes easier. People become convinced more easily. And so it was with these first disciples who had the complete backing and authority of Jesus Christ. These disciples did not have to go it alone. The changing of the kingdom of this world into the Kingdom of God and his Christ is cooperative movement. Man cannot do it alone. God cannot do it alone. But God and man working together can accomplish it. Therefore, our Lord said, “Ye shall receive power, after the the Holy Spirit is come upon you.”

The missionaries working in foreign lands as well as in our own could not spread the good news of Christ if they did not have God’s help and our prayers and financial aid. It takes all of us working together with a dedicated effort to be successful. Most ministers believe they have the complete backing and support of Christ, otherwise they would not be able to bring the word of God to their people. We know that Christ is here beside us to give us the guidance and direction we need in everything we do in his name.

Third, Jesus defined their mission by telling them what to do and where to go. He said, “Ye shall be my witnesses.” You shall witness to what you say. The Christ himself was the message; to proclaim him was their mission. They were to witness by what they did. They were to lift men up to newness of life, as Peter and John lifted up the crippled beggar at the Gate Beautiful. (As recorded in Acts 3:1-11) And, of course, they were to witness by what they were. They would out-live and out-die the world around them, and by that they would witness effectively to many. Where should they go? They were to witness at home-in Jerusalem; in the close-in community, Judea; across barriers-in Samaria, unto the uttermost parts of the earth, a- cross frontiers.

There is an old story told of the Duke of Wellington. One day a minister came to him and asked if he thought foreign missions should be carried on. The Iron Duke said, “what are your orders?” The ministers quoted the Great Commission. “Ye shall be my witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.” “What! exclaimed the Duke, “These are your orders and you discuss doing it?” To a man whose first instinct was to obey an order, it seems treason to debate the matter and so it is. We should think of this Great Commission when we start questioning whether or not we should give to foreign missions. For we all have an obligation and since most of us cannot go to foreign lands ourselves the next best thing is support through our prayers and our giving.

Doctor Clovis G Chappell told this story. “Years ago, I crossed the North Sea on the same ship with a man who was a missionary in China. This man was said to be the more familiar with things Chinese than any man at that time. Because of this, a great oil company sought to obtain his services. It sent a representative to offer him a salary of \$10,000 a year. When he refused, the representative went up to \$20,000, then \$25,000; then invited him to set his own salary. In reply this missionary said, “the salary you offered first is large enough; I am making only \$1200 a year. It is not your salary that is too small; it is your job. I have

a bigger job than you can possibly offer”, Doctor Chappell adds, “so has every man who takes the Lord seriously, however he earns his living. Ours is the biggest task at which any human soul can work.” We do not have to be directly connected with being a minister or a missionary to witness to our Lord. Too often we leave the Christian living to the minister while we go merrily on our way.

Christ was speaking to all his followers and disciples and this message still applies to us today as it did to the first disciples; “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age.”

A Very Rich Faith

Scripture: John 14:1-11, 25-27

Text is chosen from II Corinthians 13:14; “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.”

The first Sunday after Pentecost or Whit Sunday is emphasized by several branches of the Christian Church as Trinity Sunday. It has rightly become a day toward which the whole Christian year leads. The journey that starts at Advent, and proceeds through Easter and Whit Sunday, reaches its triumphant on Trinity Sunday; the score or more of Sundays that follow are dated “after trinity.”

Trinity Sunday celebrates a mystery in the sense of being beyond all human knowledge. If the last great festival of the Christian year leads us to worship a God whose nature could be fully comprehended, it would lead us to one who would be too small to be God. Those persons who are nearest and dearest to us, who are by our sides every day of our lives, are not fully known by us. Each one of us is sometimes mysterious to others. This is a fact which does not separate us from one another. We rejoice that each of us is a unique personality. How much more is God a mystery?

Trinity Sunday calls us to rejoice in the mystery of God. An old missionary woman once made this remark to a minister. “I have a very rich faith.” Have you got a very rich faith? She did not mean only an intense faith, she meant a faith wealthy in its variety and fulness, as if one lived in a palace where one could go from room to room, enjoying it one part at a time. Some of us believe very much in one little piece of faith which we call “ours”. Well and good that we have made it ours - but not if it means we have cut ourselves off from the great, rich, central stream of the faith as that has been given to the church.

Consider the richness of the faith which is which is expressed in the Apostolic benediction, which is our text this morning. “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.” There is richness of faith in the Trinity. Not that we shall understand fully the nature of the Trinity. God is infinite, far beyond the understanding of our finite minds. A God defined would be a God lost, as a French proverb suggest. How rich is the faith in God the Father, and in God the Son, and in God the Holy Spirit! This seems to be sort of a progressive revelation. We characteristically believe first in a creator, then in Jesus Christ, and then in the Holy Spirit who came into the lives of the disciples at Pentecost. For richness of faith, you cannot stop at the end of the Old Testament and not go on to Christ, so you cannot stop with Christ and not go on to the Holy Spirit - not if you are going to be a full-fledged Christian.

And besides we cannot take out of the Bible what best suits us and leave the rest. We have to take the whole Bible and apply it to our lives today. How rich is our faith in God, the Father! We are led by reason, by intuition, by logic, by illumination, to believe that this universe did not happen. Even if you call it a machine, you recollect that a machine is highly complicated affair, a life did not create itself, and requires

some kind of creator. So it is with the universe. We believe that this universe was created, that is it did not just happen, it was made by someone. The discoverable laws in it seemed to prove that.

The feeling of purpose that we have running through our lives seems to prove it. Even if faith is hard to come by, we say it is more reasonable to believe that so orderly a universe as this was the design of some Infinite Being than to say it just happened. So, we come to believe in God the creator. We find God in nature which is certainly evidenced by the beautiful valley. We find God in history, too. And we say, "I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth." If we believe the Bible, it tells us exactly this. And so, we come to know and believe in God as creator. How rich is our faith in Jesus Christ! But then in the coming of Jesus something more took place. This God manifested himself in a new way.

First, they met him and knew him, heard him preach, saw him heal, were aware of the special and indeed unique power within him. When later they tried to figure out just what had happened in the coming of Jesus, they were forced to say that in him God had manifested himself fully and perfectly. This had never been done before, it has never been done since. Within the life of this simple Galilean peasant, they believed God had revealed his own essential nature, undiminished and whole. They were a while coming to that conclusion. When you are right up under the side of a high mountain, you are too close to see how high it is, but when you get away from it at a distance, you gauge its height more accurately. It is so with Jesus Christ. What he was, and what he did, and what he accomplished by what he did, would fit no merely human category, though we believe him to have been so perfectly and entirely human.

As they felt forced to read God into Jesus, they also felt forced to read Jesus into God, and say that he was essentially God. When he claimed (as I think he clearly did claim) eternal preexistence with the Father, he did not seem to mean that he had, as it were, scooped out from the Deity, to be later returned into it, like a drop of water into the sea; but that he had always been one party in the Divine God-head. The more you think about his words, his life, his efforts, the more you come to this as being the only conclusion that you can reach. For once in this skeptical world the most that you can believe seems to be the only thing that you can believe. And we say, "I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son our Lord."

The Christians first contact with the persons of the Godhead is through Christ. In our experience of the Trinity, we must start with Jesus of Nazareth. He reveals the Father. He sent the Holy Spirit and Christ is the focus. Get to know him personally as your Lord and Savior and he will introduce you to the other members of the Godhead. If we do not believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, then we are not Christian, for this is the basis of the whole Christian religion. God revealed himself through the earthly human person of Jesus Christ. But as the Old Testament had described this coming Messiah, and given a good deal about it what he should be like, so Jesus, when he was here in the flesh, said a great deal about the coming of the Holy Spirit, whom he promised, and who came at Pentecost.

We draw together the teachings about the Holy Spirit in the Gospels, and from them can form at least as

distinct a picture of him, as we could form of Jesus from the Old Testament, indeed rather more so. By what Jesus had said, and by the distinction of the experience at Pentecost, they came to believe, that here God had come again, and in a new mode and in a new manifestation which he spoke something hitherto, undiscovered about the nature of God. The Holy Spirit was himself, like Jesus, a constituent part in the Godhead. This was not only a manifestation of God, but like Jesus here was one who is himself God. And we say, "I believe in the Holy Spirit." Do you know Robert Barclay's famous passage? He was one of the early Quaker theologians in America.

He said, not by strength or argument or by a particular disquisition of each doctrine-came I to receive and bear witness of the truth, but by being secretly reached by the Life. For, when I came into the silent assemblies of God's people, I felt a secret power among them, which touched my heart; and as I gave way to it, I found the evil weakening in me and the good raised up-and indeed this is the surest way to become a Christian. We truly know that the secret power was the power of the Holy Spirit. This same Holy Spirit can lift you up and give you power that you never knew you possessed, if you are willing to accept Jesus Christ into your life as Lord and Savior. It is very hard to mark the differentiation within the godhead without managing to suggest that there are three Gods. Very precise language is difficult here

A learned clergyman was pacing back and forth in the sacristy of a notable church in New York before preaching on Trinity Sunday; The rector remarked that he seemed agitated and asked him what was troubling a scholar like him, when about to preach on the Trinity. He replied, "I am so much afraid I shall be preaching heresy if we keep in our minds the differentiation between the three persons of the Trinity and remember the functions of each, we shall do well to let the language of our faith be the language of worship, rather than the language of technical theology and scholarship." It is important that we worship the God whom we believe to be, because of the Christian revelation, then that we should know all there is to be known about him. And I prayed to God that this morning I have not left the expression that there are three gods, for there is only one God, who is Father of us all. I would ask that we might try more consistently to live in the grandeur of this truth, the ultimate truth, about the Trinity. It can matter intensely to us that we believe in the Holy Trinity and live out our lives under the grandeur of this truth-with a very rich faith.

In all the days after Trinity Sunday, we must be exploring the meaning of this God, not only by thinking about him but, also and especially, by allowing him to do for all of us that he does as Father, Son, Spirit. We shall not finish that task before Advent comes around again; we shall not finish it even if we lived for many years, until we meet him face to face, and discover what it really means to have had our access in Christ through the one Spirit unto the Father.

Perhaps I can best explain the meaning of the Trinity by repeating this illustration that Doctor Fosdich employed as he sought to make the Christian Trinity intelligible and meaningful, not to theological scholars, or to 'grass root' preachers, but to American school boys. He took, as his illustration, Theodore

Roosevelt. There were at least three ways in which Theodore Roosevelt could be, and was in fact, known by his contemporaries. There are at least three avenues in which anyone today desiring to comprehend that rich and dynamic person in his fullness must follow; there are three contrasted sources of understanding of him on the basis of his own self-disclosure in his writings. The separate avenues seemed to lead to three persons, three Theodore Roosevelt's. And so it will appear unless one recognizes that he is being introduced, not to three persons, but to one person, in three aspects.

In the first place there was Theodore Roosevelt, the public figure, the politician, the statesman, the president of the Republic - that Roosevelt is portrayed by his own pen in his autobiography. And there was also Theodore Roosevelt - the sportsman, the huntsman, the military campaigner, the explorer - a robust, tough, virile man-among-men. If you would be introduced to that Roosevelt by himself, read his, "Winning of the West." But there was a third Theodore Roosevelt, known to few, but with what precious memories and in what contrast to either the forbidding statesman or the rough plainsman - gentle, winsome, boyish. If you would meet him, turn to his, "Letter to His Children."

If this can be true of almost any finite person - and one hundred others might be substituted - how much more of the Infinite Person, the living God. Perhaps this has helped to illustrate the Trinity - God in three persons - blessed Trinity. This is what we believe. This is our faith. Do you have a very rich faith?

Does God Touch Every Life?

Scripture: Mark 1:35-45

Text is chosen from Matthew 10:30-31; “But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore, you are of more value than many sparrows.”

Does God touch every life? My answer most naturally is, yes, I do believe that God touches every life, not just in general, but in particular. While he most clearly does not deal with all men in the same way, he most certainly does deal with every man. In the hope that our faith may be stronger, let us consider this morning ways in which God does touch every life.

First of all, we have God in the ordinary. To begin, we should see that the ordinary ways of life may be God’s way of coming to us. Whenever we speak of God touching our lives, we most readily assume that it will be something very special. But why does God need a special act to make himself known.

The late Rufus Jones often illustrated this by telling of a class he taught one summer on the coast of Maine. It was a group of small boys who had lived there all their lives. When he wanted to begin a lesson with a picture in mind, he asked how many of the boys had ever seen the Atlantic Ocean. Not a hand went up. Then he realized that they had been swimming in it, playing beside it, throwing stones into it, and watching the waves come in all their lives. Yet to them this wasn’t the Atlantic Ocean. This was just ‘the shore’ or perhaps ‘the cove’ where they went swimming. It wasn’t that they needed to see the Atlantic Ocean. It was only that they needed to recognize it.

Perhaps the illustration remains because that is so constantly true for us all. Like the boys at the shore, it’s that we need to recognize the touch of his hand. Certainly, the touch of God’s hand is all around us as is evidenced in this area in which we live. The air we breathe, the trees, flowers, everything that surrounds us is the creation of God, our Father. The sooner we recognize this and realize that we couldn’t exist without God, the better off we’re going to be and the better off those around us are going to be.

In Jesus’ ministry on this earth the disciples, day-by-day associations with him were pretty well taken for granted. Only with later reflection did they fully comprehend that to which they had given slight attention. In the Gospel of John 12: 16, we read when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered. They took his presence for granted and they didn’t know how they could carry on when he left them. But of course, they all were endued with power from on high. Jesus Christ left them the presence of the Holy Spirit. And this same Holy Spirit is available for our lives if we are willing to accept Jesus Christ into our lives. And so, we take for granted all things that surround us, and we really do not take the time to appreciate what we have or realize where it came from. But God most definitely came to each of us in the ordinary ways of life.

Secondly, we have God in the personal. In addition to these ordinary ways we have mentioned, consider also that there are some deeply personal ways by which God touches each life. Some of you would see that

in the hour when a hand seems to restrain. God not only holds us, but he also sometimes holds us back. Let no one suppose that he has never been on thin ice. It can happen to any of us. Every person has within the capacity for sin, for the kinds of surrender and behavior which mean the breakdown of life. Then, what is that experience of restraint, the hand raised as though to say no in the hour when we are tempted to go off on some by path of life that looks so appealing but the end of which is tragedy and pain?

I can recall a person talking to me about an experience he had in his life. He said he was scheduled to take a certain airplane to someplace he was going. But circumstances surrounding the time he was to be at the airport led him to be late enough to miss the plane. It just so happened, that particular plane crashed and everyone on board was killed. This person truly believes that God in some way made sure he wasn't on that plane. This experience has changed this man's life. Some modern skeptics would say that it was coincidence. Whose hand was it? Our modern time has new words. Some would speak of it scornfully as mere inhibitions. Others would look upon it as a fear which ought to be overcome that we might be free. Many a sophisticated person looks up on it as only a social custom to which he has been conditioned.

But the issue of life is so serious that the name you use really doesn't matter very much. The fact of it is that there are times when only a hand reaching out, as though in warning, has saved us from tragic waste and a pain beyond our knowing. Every person meets the temptation of body and mind and spirit, and often it is in that very hour that he knows full well that God has touched his life. He wouldn't have made it otherwise. On thinking again of the personal ways that God touches life, you would certainly speak of the hours when he has especially upheld you in a time of testing. Certainly, when a loved one dies, God gives us the strength and courage and faith we need to bring us through. A person who comes through a serious illness in most cases is thankful that God has touched him and spared his life. Any accident may have happened to us through the years, resulting in our lives being spared, is God touching us personally.

Henry Drummond once said in a fine phrase, "Peace is the possession of adequate reserve." It is when we feel that our resources have run low, that we are given to panic. Drummond said that if he could be given 10 minutes a day for quiet prayer with God, he could face all the stresses and strains that come. He was not a man of great natural stamina, but he carried it day by day because a hand especially upheld him and he reached out to accept it.

I myself have found that prayer with God, honest to goodness, real sincere prayer, will give me strength to endure situations I know I could not have endured without God's help. Through the years I have come to rely more and more on God, for guidance and direction, for strength, for courage, for faith. It is an experience never to be forgotten when you discover that you have been made sufficient when you thought yourself insufficient. You have been given comfort in the midst of bereavement. You have found strength to rise above a disappointment which you thought would shatter you. You have found renewal in the hour of exhaustion. Those are the times which make it so vividly clear that God does not abandon any life. Whatever the circumstance his gift is sufficient for it. God touches our lives when we need him most.

It may be a time to recall the wise words that once were written by Susanna Wesley, on the flyleaf of the Bible of her son John when he left for Oxford University. She said, "My son, would you judge of the lawfulness or the unlawfulness of a pleasure then take this rule: Whatever weakens your reason, impairs the tenderness of your conscience, obscures your sense of God, increases the authority of your body over your mind; whatever takes the relish off spiritual things, this for you, my son, is wrong." It was a wise mother who gave such counsel to her son, and the story of John Wesley is to reveal that he, like all the rest of us found himself often up against exactly that kind of experience, the things that weaken or impair the tenderness of the conscience and take the relish off spiritual things. Can you see, of course, that it was the influence of his mother which proved a guiding hand at that time.

But it is only another way of saying that God uses those who love us to raise that hand of restraint. I truly believe that God does use us to help others. He can tell us exactly what to do to help someone in need or trouble or even to guide someone who may be tempted down the wrong path. I think what all of us want to know most is "that there is love at the heart of the universe and that it is personal." We all need to be loved. We need to know that someone does care what happens to us, that what we do does make a difference to someone. If we can sense and feel this, our lives do take on new meaning and purpose.

As far as I am concerned God definitely is that someone who cares about each individual, of what he does with his life, what he makes out of himself. Of course, our duty and responsibility is to show forth this same love and concern for others. If we only did a small part of this, what a much better world this would be to live in. We wouldn't have to be concerned about fighting wars, for we would obtain this peace that all of us are working toward.

Third, we have, "In Christ, God lays his hand on me." One thing more should certainly be added. It is the flaming conviction of the New Testament that in Christ, God had come especially close to us all. Brummer, the theologian, summarizes it by saying, "In Christ God lays his hands on me."

A young woman who recently died after a long period of illness, left the following note: "In a few weeks or maybe a few days I shall die. I shall leave my husband, my two teenage girls and my son who is only 12. Every relentless tick of the clock measures off what remains of my life. Yet I am a happy woman - I would rather live full rich years than twice that long in dull tempo." The real struggle, of course was in the separation from her family. But she learned a prayer which she used each day, "I am content to leave all my dear ones to thy care, believing that thy love for them is greater than my own." Those who knew her could not doubt - nor could she - that the hand of God was touching her life with special care. She closed her article, "I have no regrets my life has been rich and full, and I have loved every minute of it." There are hours like that which make us so resplendent sure.

No life is abandoned. The hand of God is upon it. It is not so difficult to defend the Christian faith. In its simplest explanation it says to mankind, God knows, and God cares. The crucial point of this plain-spoken message is the response we make of it. I believe it can be said that the major influence in a life is whether

he has come face to face with Christ. What a man wants from life, what a man holds to be in the time of strife, the way in which he deals with his fellows - all of these are profoundly affected by the encounter we have in our lives with Jesus Christ.

It is so much intertwined in our lives that it would be impossible to remove that influence from us. It is very true that in Christ, God has laid his hand upon us. Those who have truly accepted Christ into their lives as their personal Lord and Savior can testify to that fact. The only way you will know is to accept him yourself, then you'll find this experience to be true and real. As Christians we therefore most definitely believe that God does touch every life.

Go Into All the World

Scripture: John 9:1-15, 24-25

Text – Psalms 107:2; “let the redeemed of the Lord say so, whom he has redeemed from trouble.”

Say so! If the Lord has been good to you, say so! If you have experienced victory through the power of the Christ, say so! Let the redeemed of the Lord, say so!

The Psalmist is giving a divine command. Let a false sense of reticence in manners of religion dissolve before radiance which is sincere and spiritually powerful. The best advertisement for the Christian religion is that of a firsthand witness. “Ye are my witnesses-go ye into all the world and witness”-there we have the command straight from the lips of Christ himself.

The Christian enterprise languishes today for lack of genuine religion, couched in first person singular, and reaching out to redeem our unregenerate society and world. “Don’t quote”, said Emerson to a friend, “Tell me what you think!” It is exactly when the redeemed of the Lord are in the witness stand that we retrieve the native spirit and temper of New Testament Christianity!

Early Christianity, whatever else you may say of it, was at least this: an epidemic that spread. Whenever genuine spiritual experience becomes articulate, then the vital becomes vocal. Surely, he who will scan the inspired pages of the New Testament will sense that it is primarily a book of witness. Men are bearing testimony concerning the word of life which they themselves seen, heard, and handled. They have a story to tell. And what a gripping, convincing testimony they gave! It was none other than the reliable testimony of spiritually changed lives that went into the making of the New Testament.

Remember, the Gospel of Jesus was living witness and experience before it was historic document. Listen: “If a man be in Christ, he is a new creature; former things have passed away and all things are new.” Who is that speaking? Why, that is a man named Paul whose cup of experience overflowed in contagious witness. We are all concerned about how we can witness to others for our Lord. And we bear many ways that we can do this.

Little do we seem to realize that we certainly cannot tell someone else about Christ unless we have actually experienced him in our own lives. We say that it is difficult to talk to others about Jesus Christ and what we believe, and it is difficult. But certainly, it is much more difficult if we do not know what we are talking about. If we are truly concerned about witnessing, then we will honestly look at our lives and find out our own personal relationship with our Lord first. Then we can proceed from there. We need to have felt and experienced Christ in our lives before we can tell others about him. We cannot live out our lives on what our parents or grandparents believed. We have to live our lives based on how we believe in how we live.

A golden thread of testimony and witness can be followed through the Bible. We find it in the 40th Psalm:

“He brought me out of a horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet up on a rock.” The thread appears again when a man who had been cured of blindness by Jesus says, in John 9:25, “One thing I know, that whereas I was blind, now I see.” The alerted Pharisees tried to engage the blind beggar in an argument on the doctrine of person of Christ. The beggar could not even talk their language, but he presented the one unanswerable argument: “One thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see.” When have we felt Christ in our own lives? There can be no argument because you know the facts and have experienced it first-hand.

In John 3:11, Jesus says, “We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen.” This is the only way we can be a true witness, to have experienced it ourselves rather than from hearsay. Nothing could so rekindle the mood of spiritual enthusiasm and passion in the contemporary church as a rebirth of effective Christian testimony. Life within the churches today lacks the element of flaming witness. It is not likely that the cynical, pagan world beyond the church door is wondering if there are any “redeemed of the Lord” with a story to tell? In fact, can’t you just imagine the false Antichrist of our day conniving together in the manner: “if we can just get these Christians from spreading abroad their dangerous, radical doctrines, our victory is assured!” How we of the modern church do need to return to this witnessing aspect of our faith! For the gospel is just and foremost an evangel, a veritable good news which we have too long silenced, and which waits to be heralded and proclaimed in a lost, sinful and sorrowful world. I have said this many times; We are able to talk about any other subject in the world except when it comes to our faith, what we believe, and Jesus Christ, very rarely, if at all, does the subject ever turn to God and our faith. We become tongue tied, embarrassed, and apparently ashamed to talk about it. Of course, as I said just a moment ago, if we have not experienced God in our lives, then I’m afraid we do not have anything to talk about.

Most of us are not too anxious to be different in a crowd. We do not want the rest of the people to think we are some kind of nut, that we have become a religious fanatic. I know one thing, we certainly couldn’t be spending our time in any better conversation and discussion because being saved, knowing God personally, is the most important thing that can happen in our lives. We should want to talk about it and let others know what Christ means to us.

In our modern world the Christian people are too willing to let non-Christians lead the way, perhaps because we don’t do not want any trouble. I think we need to take a stand and put our beliefs and our faith first and let the chips fall where they may. Christians do not have to take the backseat for anyone, and we should be leading the way, setting good Christian examples for others, and letting others know that Jesus Christ in our lives does make a difference. This is real witnessing. To be sure congregations will rise and sing: “Christ for the world we sing, the world to Christ we bring,” but there is nothing in their singing to set the pulses drumming and hearts on fire.

A contemporary theologian says that our greatest need is for at least a small representative group of us “to return to God decisively enough, radically enough, so that the power of the future may rest upon us, and our reshaped lives and institutions may be fit to pass through the ordeal of fire which is ahead, and

become the nucleus of the new order in the age to come.” True! And one almost feels like crying out from the housetops to the tame, tepid Christianity of the contemporary church: “Speak up, you who say you believe in Jesus Christ and his revolutionary mission for humanity; break this revolutionary mission for himself; break this conspiracy of silence and indifference which engulfs us in futility. If you claim to be a Christian, then act and live your life as a Christian should.

We are so effusive and gregarious about secondary matters, and so tongue-tied about essential matters period of course this seems to be a general fault with Americans today, we are complacent, indifferent, and willing to go along with almost anything as long as it doesn’t affect us directly. A lot of us are fence straddlers because we do not want to become involved with anything too deeply and most of us never become concerned unless it affects us directly.

A man who had said to his pastor, “OK, I can’t do that!” when asked to go and speak to another about the Christian life, spoke as follows to his pastor about a new car he had purchased: “You ought to see it! I’ll come right over and take you for a ride in it!” This is the same for most of us when it comes to talking to others about our Lord.

Too many laymen in our churches have delegated the glorious privilege of witnessing for their Lord to professional men whom they call ministers, and so washed their hands of the matter. The Church of Christ can get along without the old-fashioned “mourners’ bench”; but the witness stand- that is indispensable to a healthy, alert and growing church. Do we need to be reminded that Christianity made its debut in a topsy-turvy world as a layman’s movement? That the taint and onus of professionalism was not in it? He who gave the command, “Go ye into all the world”, was speaking to a handful of twice born and spiritually awkward laymen, with the high confidence that they would go out and gratefully tell others the Good News of the Salvation of God. “Let the redeemed of the Lord say so!” And they did!

The company of Jesus is not people streaming to a shrine; and it is not people making up an audience for a speaker; it is laborers engaged in the harvesting task of reaching their perplexed and seeking brethren with something so vital that, if it is received, it will change their lives. The humblest, plainest man among us can never calculate the spiritual benefit his Christian witness maybe bestow on others who may be in dire need of it.

In a group of twenty-five lay Christians meeting recently, each told what was the major influence which had helped him to move over from nominal Christianity to a committed faith. Every one of the 25 mentioned a person. Not one mentioned a public occasion. And the surprising part was that all of the persons mentioned as thus affective in personal ministry were inconspicuous. Most of them had made a conspicuous witness without knowing it.

Generally, we do not need to stand on the street corner and make a loud noise. We do not have to make nuisances of ourselves. We do not have to become overbearing so that others just naturally shy away

from us. Sometimes, by just plain living our daily lives according to God's will and as if God truly is an influence in our lives is all that is necessary.

Other people have eyes to see, and they have ears to hear you need not mount a pulpit or a rostrum to declare the faith to which you owe so much. I'm thinking now of persons who are a power for good in the church. Their pulpit? - the homes in which they live - you live, the streets you daily walk. In short, anywhere you may reach - for Christ. This broken-hearted old world is in desperate need of the Christian message you alone can bring. Their, "let the redeemed of the Lord say so"; let them speak up, now today. Let others know what you believe and what a difference Christ has made in your life. "Go into all the world and preach the Gospel."

God and Our Homes

Scripture: I Corinthians 13

Text is taken from Matthew 18:20. "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."

There is no place like home if God is there; but there is no place more difficult if he is not there. How much more joyful our family lives can be if we share them with God. All self-centeredness, conceit, selfishness, gossip is removed from our minds in our lives if we take on the feeling of love, charity, happiness and joy. And what memories we will have with such an environment. No group in human society offers greater opportunity for spiritual venturing than the family, but at the same time no group involves greater hazards.

On one hand two or three or five or six, in one home provide a reasonable facsimile of the "beloved community" united in love for one another. On the other hand, the members of a household may be divided and in conflict, separated by barriers of hostility and even bitterness. Sublime possibility always invites its opposite. Home, with Jesus Christ at the center of it, is a place where members of the family sustain and support each other in love. In our world of competition, struggle in business, school and society-at-large, the home in which we find not competition, but sustaining encouragement and support, is a priceless resource. We do not have to pretend at home. We can be ourselves and know we are loved for who we are. We do not need to be on guard, lest someone get ahead of us. We can relax in the security of mutual confidence. And of course, the one who leads the family displaying this love is mother.

None of us can forget the affection and appreciation our mothers have always shown us. For mom is the one that actually teaches us what love means by the way she treats us. We all know what it means, to have someone standing by to love us and to believe in us when we fail; someone to encourage us when things are going wrong when love and faith take hold in the time of our need, we meet God and find grace and strength to go on. One man said thoughtfully concerning his wife, "her faith in me kept me from failure more than once." So, "where two or three are gathered together in my name," in the name of love and integrity, "there am I in the midst of them."

The mother of a small child was planning a trip. "If you go," he said to his mother, "who will I show my homework to?" The boy was able to do his homework and his schoolwork, but there was a need in him for some beloved to approve his toil. It added something to his security in confidence and this is what mothers do for little boys and girls and for big boys and girls, too. There is a deep craving in the children for love that sustains and supports. When a college girl from California visited an orphanage in Japan a little boy approached her hopefully with the question, "Are you going to be my mother?" "No", she said, "I'm sorry ". Then he asked, "Will you kiss me anyway?" Another orphan is reported to have slipped a note through the fence surrounding the institution in which he lived. The message read, "Whoever finds this, I love you. "

These youngsters were simply being human in their bewildering world. They were giving unsophisticated expression to the need for love. We all need that love and the affections of a mother in our lives.

Second, home with God in it, is also a place where members of a family sustain and support the values that endure. It is at home that our children learn to respect the ultimate values of Christendom and come to feel the significance of the things that make life worth living, if we parents have embraced them ourselves. We certainly cannot expect the public school, the Sunday school, and the church to raise our children completely. All that they learn in church will not sink in if they don't see the parents living Christ-like lives. We as parents need desperately to set good examples for our children by living the kind of lives God would have us live.

A young father was asked to look over a list of qualifications for being a father. He did so, then handed it back with the discouraging comment: "What am I supposed to be-the college faculty?" The list suggested that a father should bring to his task six major qualifications: patience, usually in short supply at the day's end; sensitivity, a capacity for understanding why children and others behave the way they do; imagination, with which to expand the vision of children; good deportment, that is to say, dependable character; sound social attitudes, including freedom from mass prejudice and emotional responses to social issues; love, the thing that is indispensable in any household. Do you always notice that love comes into the picture someplace for nothing can replace or displace love? Of course, these qualifications are valid and good for mothers too. A very good list, I would say. How do you stack up against them? They suggest something about the nature of God; and help our children to understand that God is close to them. If we follow this list, we would be living our lives according to the way we teach and preach. We would be setting an example that could never be overlooked or forgotten.

Third, home, with Jesus Christ in it, it is a place where members of the family find resources for venturing. We always make our own best adventures into the unknown from a dependable base of love and trust. Youngsters push out into the wide world with confidence when they know their base is secure, they leave with rejoicing, but their rejoicing is conditioned by the possibility of returning. They venture with confidence when they know they are secure in what Hosea called, "the bonds of love." We as parents also have more confidence in our children if we know we have tried to teach them to the best of our ability and with God's help. We realize we can trust them, and our concern is lessened. Recall the orders given the little boats at the evacuation of Dunkirk-one of the most gallant naval operations ever carried out - "steer for the sound of the guns." When youngsters mature in homes grounded in love and in loyalty to lasting values, they move out into the world not afraid to venture and steering "for the sound of the guns" they are ready for venturing into a world of both good and evil without fear of failing. We need always to remember that our business is to make our children adequate to stand on their own feet without fear or failure or defeat." As parents it is our task to provide resources of spirit and faith for great venturing.

Fourth - home, with God in it, is a place where members of a family lay foundations for the future. The ideas and attitudes, prejudices and feelings, that grow in our homes inevitably shaped the future. One

young man, a high school leader, who led a Chapel service, concluded with a prayer that gives voice to deep insight; “O God; through the confusing years of our youth and growth, put out thy hand to us now and again through some beautiful thing, some selfless human act, or some friends good counsel, that our confidence may be restored, and that we may find our full strength to do thy will. Amen

We meet God in selfless human acts, in beautiful things in the warmth of caring friendships, and in love, integrity and trust. Unfortunately, we have a way of indoctrinating our children with the ideas that are native to our particular generation, often confusing abiding values with passing opinions. We pass on our prejudices, quite intent as if they were ultimate truths. What is more, we often are scandalized when our children are exposed to the ideas that are at variance with our own. And yet, our task is not to make our children think the way we do. It is rather to make them think and to arrive at their judgments in the light of the abiding standards which share in the person of Jesus Christ. We might never to forget that Jesus broke with many of the traditions of his time in the name of freedom under God.

Two young parents leaned over the crib of their sick child. The doctor had suggested that the child might die. Their words to each other mingled with their restrained sobs and among them were these, “nothing else matters!” The child lived and the words then spoken and continued with them all their lives. What is the value of a child to good parents? “Nothing else matters.” By their walking together (and at first the child cannot walk alone) the child receives love. How many problems this statement brings to our attention. Even the agents of the law know that the delinquency of youths often comes about because of lack of love in the home. How great is the problem of mothers who are absentees in their homes for a large part of the day? The child needs to be loved and the child needs to love.

By the child and parents walking together the child gains liberty. How precious to the father or mother are those moments in a child’s life when they are utterly needed by the child! How precious the moments when the child walks alone, does things all by himself. There is a curious paradox involved in the bringing up of a child; dependence and independence have to go hand in hand. The parent and child walk together so that the child may walk alone. We as parents have to be a living example for our children. By their walking together the child also learns wisdom. How often we hear men and women remark, “as mother used to tell us” or, “as father used to say”. This is but a memory of the days by when walking together the children gathered wisdom from their parents. By their walking together the parents pass on the divine wisdom to their children. What is the divine wisdom if not the Christ himself?

A man who had worked all day at physical labor was out one evening playing ball with his small boy. A neighbor who knew how heavy the man’s walk had been said, “why don’t you go home and rest?” The man replied, “well, I guess it’s this way, I’d rather have the backache now than the heartache later on.” How very true this is, for our children need us for teaching and for playing, for just plain being together and doing things together as a family. We should never get so busy that we do not have time to spend with our families. Old customs and systems are dissolved around us like sandcastles in the rising tide of new things, but we still need enduring principles to guide us.

We need men and women and young people who are searching for knowledge, dedicated to the quest for sound values by which to test and use the gifts of our material civilization. We need parents and children who know how to think with reference to the mind of Christ. There is a poem entitled "Home".

It is more than brick and mortar with a roof to shed the storm;
it is more than walls and windows with a heart to keep us warm.
It is more than just a tavern where the hungry mouths are fed;
or when the journeys ended where we rest a weary head.
It isn't just to hang out when there is nothing else to do;
or to which we slowly wander when the nightly dates are through.
It's a haven when we're battered by the tempest of the day;
where there's peace and understanding that will chase the cares away.
It's the place our hearts return to, though our errant feet may roam;
it's our earthly bit of heaven; it's that paradise called home."

We have a task at home, you and I, sustaining each other in love, learning to support the values that last, providing a springboard for great venturing, and laying foundations for a worthy future. As parents we have great responsibilities to our children and to God. Our task is a great one and with God beside us we can succeed in spite of all the difficulties we face today. Let's make our homes real ones to be remembered and cherished.

God's Secret Strategy

Scripture: I Corinthians 1:26-31

Text is chosen from 1 Corinthians 1:27; "But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise, God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong, God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God."

if you and I are to make our lives count for something in the present time, we need to learn something of the secret strategy of God.

The first thing to know about God's secret strategy is that he achieves his mightiest acts by the humblest means. This is a basic doctrine in the Bible. It was clearly stated to the Israelites in the time of their deepest despondency when they were captives in Babylon. The prophet Zachariah heard the promise that it was not by might, nor by power, but by God's spirit that he would overcome. The same theme is given by the gospel writer, Luke, when he described the song of Mary, the mother of Jesus, at the time of his conception. Let us read Luke 1: 46 - 55.

Since so many young people are singing folk songs, I have come to have an appreciation for the overtones and the depth of meaning in the popular pieces of old music. With this background I read again The Magnificat which we just read and suddenly perceived that what Mary was singing was similar to a religious folk song and concerned itself with the strategy of God. You can almost see his strumming a guitar as she says, "He has put down the mighty from their seats and exalted them of low degree. He has filled the hungry with good things and the rich he has sent empty away."

It was this magnificent doctrine, that God accomplishes the mightiest things by the humblest means, which Saint Paul explained to the Corinthian people. It was this message which carried the humble disciples up against the might and corruption of the Roman Empire and saw them affect the transition which are a part of our historical inheritance.

It seems that God has always moved in this fashion. When Saint Bonaventure was asked what the power of his learning and influence was, he picked up the cross which hung about his chest and silently held it up to the questioner. The cruel cross, which was used to execute our Lord, has become the instrument of healing and hope for humanity. When God wanted to raise up a leader, he has chosen the humblest ones of the earth to affect the mightiest ends. When Saint Francis of Assisi confronted the luxurious deadness of his generation, he overcame it by the incarnation of simplicity and love in his own life. Joan of Arc earned the title of 'the Terrible Meek' because of her simple trust that God would bless her cause. We could go on with other examples of simple, humble folk that have been greatly blessed by God and aided in their cause to help humanity. It doesn't take a genius to come to know God, but it does take a person who is willing to swallow his pride and humble himself before God.

I'm sure all of us have been known the loudmouth person who is always talking and trying to impress us with his ability and who is constantly bragging of what he can do while the meek - low - loved person is quietly going about his work and his task, getting his job done. It may be that outwardly he doesn't impress anyone, but I could assure you if I had a job to be done, I would rather have a half dozen of these kind of people rather than four dozen of the loud mouths. And I believe this is exactly what God is referring to when Jesus says, "The meek shall inherit the earth," and this is definitely part of his secret strategy.

Like the Corinthians, the modern world scorns the secret strategy of God whereby he uses the humblest means to accomplish the mightiest acts. When the religious leaders heard that Jesus of Nazareth was the son of God they retorted, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" In our day many say the same thing in different ways. We have heard the remark that, 'God is dead' and 'why do we need God anyway as long as we have science to rely upon'?

But still some of our well-known scientists are finally admitting that God does exist, and they are beginning to realize without God, science would be lost and have little value to anyone. Many people cannot put their faith and trust in something or someone like God who is invincible and intangible. But we most definitely need to realize God is visible to each of us in the creations of everything around us, including Christian people who have truly come to know Jesus Christ as their personal Lord and savior.

God intended that we should get closer to him through Jesus Christ and Christ really shines through others. Many have lost their spiritual anchorage and are floundering. They no longer have a conviction that God has a secret strategy to guide us through the struggle of existence to an assured conclusion. But when we lose that foundation of our sense of moral order, and doubt the worthwhileness of righteousness, then we do not know where to turn. The loss of conviction of God's support of the moral order is behind the present loss of respect for law and principle. Much of the violence and rowdiness of life today can be attributed to the fact many have lost any confidence in the secret strategy of God to affect his Kingdom and his righteousness and have given themselves to hopelessness.

Without God or belief in God we can have no hope, no future no purpose to living. With God life becomes meaningful and alive with purpose. I really wince when I hear ecclesiastical leaders referring to this or that church as 'great', because they are almost always speaking of churches with a thousand members or more, churches with imposing buildings and budgets. Greatness is defined in secular terms. But the truly great Church of all time was a loosely organized collection of lower-class people who met in one another's houses for worship, prayer, study, and fellowship together. They had no buildings, no relish for ecclesiastical titles or privileges; there was not a "DD" among them. They could have cared less about worldly statues or power. They had found life in Jesus Christ and as far as I'm concerned that is the whole secret to living.

The application of the secret strategy of God is that there are ways in our daily lives where we can serve

the progress of mankind and fulfill the intentions of God for society. One of the ways in which God takes the humble things of the earth to accomplish the mightiest deeds is by the embodiment of excellence in our conduct or our work. A visitor on a farm once looked across the growing fields and saw the wild poppies beginning to surface surpass the wheat. He asked the farmer whether they would not overshadow the crop and ruin it. The owner replied that if the visitor would wait a few weeks, he would see the wheat eventually shoot higher than the poppies, which then would languish away in the shade of the towering grains.

Sometimes our best strategy is to put our strength into growing clean, strong lives of faithful obedience, rather than running about trying to pluck out the tares from among the wheat, which is at best merely a defensive action. There is no better way to clean a dismal city street than by painting one's own doorstep and putting geraniums in a flower box.

Jesus pointed out that light overcomes darkness. A philosopher said that it is better to light a candle than to curse the darkness. Another way that we can embody the secret strategy of God in daily life is to use the expulsive power of goodness. Regardless of what anyone says goodness will always win out in the long run. It may seem that evil has the upper hand and perhaps it does for a time but eventually good will prevail. A third way is by the exemplification of our faith. God works by deeds and not debate. God employs the leverage of the specific. God's secret strategy is to use the power of any available response by his people. All forward movements of mankind have had to suffer scorn and rebuff. This happened to Galileo when he discovered that the earth was not the center of the universe. The early flights of the airplane constructed by the Wright brothers brought forth sneers from people in the same century that now sees the ocean spanned by jet propelled craft.

But certainly, in all of this, Christianity has not been defeated. Gilbert Chester said it well; "Christianity has not been tried and found wanting: It has been found difficult and not tried." The secret strategy of God is to use the little things in order that no man may boast in his own self-righteousness or pride. The secret strategy for a personal life today, and for the ultimate victory in the social struggles which now engulf us, is that God always achieves the mightiest things by the humblest means. Wherever you are, you may be doing more for the present situation than you realize as you embody excellence, as you show the expulsive power of goodness, as you exemplify Christian faith. Remember, when you are tempted to give up, it is always better to light a candle than to curse this age of darkness.

Guide Posts to Happiness

Scripture: Philippians 4:4-13

Text is chosen from Titus 3:15, “All who are with me send greetings to you. Greet those who love us in the faith. Grace be with you all.”

In the Revised Standard Version of the Bible, the letter to Titus ends with these words, “Grace be with you all.” The Schoenfeld translation makes its end, “Wishing you all every happiness.” Happiness is what we wish for everyone, especially God wants all his children to be happy. For when we are happy life means so much more to us, people that are around us can appreciate the happiness too. Our lives can be lived much more easily when we are happy. Happiness has been called a barometer which tells us whether our relationships with life are right or wrong.

Happiness is always a result. It is the result of our being in right relations with the grain of the universe or speaking religiously, with the will of God. In the Gospel of John we read, “If you know this, happy are you if you can act upon it.” Happiness can be our possession if we follow the guideposts of happiness.

I generally do not like to lay down certain rules to follow in our Christian lives because this makes it seem that if all the rules are followed, like laws are obeyed, that’s all that is necessary. But sometimes guides to help us live the right kind of life can be very helpful and I believe in this case. The guide I’m going to discuss will help us to obtain happiness in our lives. One guidepost to happiness is a right inward attitude.

Many people are forever at the mercy of circumstances. If the weather is right, they are happy. I doubt if the weather is ever exactly the way we would have it, if we had our way. If they are appreciated, they are happy. This sounds familiar for we all want to be appreciated but some people need to be constantly reminded that they are appreciated. If the days’ work and activities go well, they are happy. But let the outward environment change from one that is pleasing to them to one that is unpleasant, and they become unhappy. This sounds rather familiar to most of us, does it not?

Everything is fine and we are happy as long as things go according to our desires and wishes. Attitude is a matter of inner posture. Happiness and happen are from the same root word. We don’t need to let circumstances determine the quality of our life. By our inner posture we can be the victim of events, or we can be victor over events. It is all determined from within.

The kind of inner attitude we have toward anything in life has everything to do with our happiness the attitude we have towards our daily work can make it a drudgery or pleasure. The same is true of our leisure time and the time we spend working directly for our Lord through our church. If our attitude is such that we want to do something, then we can really do a much better job, more efficient, better suited to everyone involved. We most definitely need the right attitude to make some good come out of every situation. Where is this mastery over circumstances better illuminated than in the life of Paul?

In a Roman prison he wrote, "Not that I complain of want; for I have learned, in whatever state I am, to be content. I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound, in any and all circumstances. I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and want." We all need to take special attention from Paul and to be more satisfied with what we are and what we have instead of constant criticizing and complaining.

A man who was facing some real setbacks and disappointments said, "It's enough to make a man lose his religion." His pastor said, "It's enough to make a man use his religion." This is what the religion should do for us, give us a new spirit, a new attitude, the readiness to confront adversity and use it as a fact for spiritual growth and happiness.

Balthus reacted different to his imprisonment after he concluded that, "all fortune is good- be it harsh or be it pleasing." Our inward attitude is in all things crucial.

Doctor Fosdick has said that freedom is not living an unmastered life. Freedom is being mastered by something that it is worthwhile being mastered by. And this is also a secret of happiness. The truly happy people are those who have been mastered by a great loyalty.

When Nina and Darrell, in Eugene O'Neill's, "Strange Interlude", what makes him so young and alive, he says, "That's easy. Work! I've become as interested in biology as I once was in medicine." And not all selfishly interested, that's the difference. A second guide to happiness is a concern for others. No man can be happy caring only for himself. We must lose ourselves in a genuine concern for others.

Give yourself in true friendship to another human being and your life begins to be richer and happiness is yours. I, myself have found that I am much happier being concerned about others and showing more than concern, doing something about the concern. I was always independent and felt I owed no one anything and therefore could take care of myself. Let others take care of themselves. I suppose this sort of attitude grew out of the fact that it was difficult for me to make friends because I was shy and not forward enough. But I have found out you do not live your life with that kind of attitude toward others. I have found out that other people do matter and if I can help someone, the happiness within me is beyond explanation and description.

Perhaps some people just naturally have this concern for others but for those of us who do not, I know that coming to know God and getting close to God will help you to change your whole outlook on life, to start showing concern for other people and actually doing something about that concern. I think perhaps many people today have become so busy with themselves and doing things and going places that they just plain do not take the time to be concerned for others. It might seem to some that such concern and involvement, that we've been talking about, must destroy happiness. Logically it would appear so, but actually no. It is a strange paradox that we must lose life to find it. And I'm sure if we stop long enough to think about this, it will make sense. For when we become involved in other's concerns and problems we forget about

our own and perhaps by helping someone else, we are better able to eventually look at our own.

The priest and the Levite, in the parable of the Good Samaritan, did not wish to become involved in a human need and by their unconcern something missed the happiness involvement could have brought them. Love is to care. And caring and involvement, strange as it may seem, brings the inner glow with happiness and peace of mind. Too many of us today do not want to become involved with anything. We are satisfied to sit back and let the other fellow do it all. Then all we have to do, is to criticize him for what he is doing.

Politics, I believe is a very good example. Many of us say I do not want to get involved with politics because it is all crooked and most politicians are crooked. I do not believe this statement is true but if it is, it's because we have let it get that way with our indifference, complacency, and lack of concern. We have to start waking up and taking a stand on issues in life instead of straddling the fence. It's for our own good to take a stand on the issues, to show concern because it's our lives and our families lives that are involved. Perhaps I am getting ahead of myself for the third guidepost to happiness is finding a cause and saying, "I belong to that."

Dean Wicks, when at Princeton University Chapel said, "That the sure sign that a boy has passed from immaturity to maturity, from being a boy to being a man, is having him say concerning some field of study or career or cause, "I belong to that." when we become more interested to do so to put something into life than to take something out, we know happiness.

I'm sure most of us know or have known people, who think the world owes them a living and they are only interested in getting everything out of life but putting very little or nothing into it. I'm sure if you can picture these people, they are not happy either, for they are always griping about something. But more important, I believe, is to find your talent and develop it. There is only one fault, one offense, disloyalty to one's own life. The Greeks defined the good life as one that does what it is built to do. Find your talent and develop it for service to mankind, not for personal advancement or aggrandizement.

Perhaps it seems that some people have many talents and others have few if not at all. I believe that God has given each of us talents to use in his work which involves other people. We just need to find it and develop it. Of course, the saddest thing is when a person has a talent that goes unused which could be used to help others in this world of ours. I also believe God can help you to find the talent. Kierkegaard said in, "Purity of Heart", that at birth there comes into being for each of us "an eternal vocation." To be true to that vocation is the highest thing a man can practice.

The fourth guidepost to happiness is in the assurance of God's care and love for each of us. Calvin said that happiness flowered from a knowledge of God. It must not be an abstract, intellectual knowledge, but knowledge made real and personal by the spirit. I believe and know it is true that the closer we get to God, the more we know him, the happier we are going to be. God is that someone, that is personal to each

of us as individuals. And he does care what happens to us and what we make out of our lives. God most definitely will help us to make decisions and choices that we must make, and we can be assured if we let God help us, that the decisions will be right ones. This will certainly lead to happiness.

What is in the background of our consciousness day after passing day is the main source of happiness or the reason for its absence. When faith has confidence in the goodness of God and the reality of his presence is with us, we should be happy. Daily feeding of this conscious background by meditation, prayer, devotional reading, weekly worship, makes for a background of trust, assurance, and confidence. The blessed are those who know in their hearts that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor power, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

We can truly know this if we will accept Jesus Christ as our personal Lord and Savior. Happiness really and truly does come to those of us who know Jesus Christ. Jesus doesn't really ask too much of us and this Christian life isn't a straightlaced as many would suspect. The advantages far outnumber the disadvantages and it's about time we that call ourselves Christians, start living as Christians. Then and only then will you really know true happiness.

Mid-Summer Re-creation

Scripture: II Corinthians 11:23-32

I have chosen my text from Psalm 46:4; “There is a river, the streams whereof make glad the city of God.”

In the words of invitation to partake of the Lord’s Supper, ministers sometimes include this sentence; “Let us therefore so come that we may find refreshing and rest unto our souls.” Most of us plan for a summer, or some other period throughout the year, of refreshing and rest. Those are wise and happy persons who can make a summer vacation, or any vacation, a period of re-creation, and then return to their accustomed duties stronger for body, invigorated of mind, with spirits rested and souls refreshed. It is wonderful to have a period when we can get away from it all and just have a good rest but of course most of us find rest in different ways, mainly I believe a change from our normal routines will certainly help to give us a new refreshing start and a new outlook.

Our text recalls to us the charm of a clear watered river, a stream which makes glad the country through which it flows. Resting by such a river we know the silver of its flow in the shallows, the bronze and the purple of it in its pools, the deep channels of molten lead. I know that many of us can recall some happy days that we have spent by the river or the lake or the ocean. We seem to be able to find calm and peace and rest by the water. And in nearly all cases people today want to spend their vacations by the water. Many of us have fond memories of times we have spent by the water which brings to mind that memory can be re-creative.

The gold of blessed memories will purchase far more than metal gold. However, it is one of the precious qualities of things that we can use them for their memory and value. The schoolgirl’s memory book may later be abandoned, but she misses much if she does not have some things which are the receptacle of yesterdays, which recapture the days of yesteryear and bring the re-creation of her soul. How many people spend their days running away from life, because they failed to capture life in days filled with the stuff of golden memory. They gathered and kept no tokens of larger things and more spacious seasons.

Those of us who have no precious memories, perhaps of our childhood, certainly are missing something precious to living our lives. What memories a person can have if they truly had been brought up in a Christian home with the whole family doing things together, fun, play and work. Today we use the simple tokens of bread and wine. They carry us back to the Upper Room; they go out to the cross; we are thrilled again by the resurrection of our Lord and Savior. These elements recalled days of covenant and conviction. They are a river of memory. They recall faces of yesterday. Joseph Forte Newton wrote in his autobiography; “Given good memories and nothing - not even death -can take from us the blessed and lovely things that we have had. When we read the past a right, in do perspective, with the aid of the Interpreter, Memory, we see that we have been led in a way we know not by One who knew the way.”

So this day we may be made re-creative. There is within this sacramental experience refreshment and rest for our souls. Like the memory of a lovely river, we can keep it for refreshment and rest on some

future tired and burdened day. The paradox of an event genuinely belonging to history, but being eternally experienced as a new thing, is expressed in both Testaments by the word “memory”.

Israel remembers how the Lord brought her out of Egypt as recorded in Deuteronomy 8: 2, and the Christian takes the bread and wine in remembrance that Christ died for him. If memory is merely the recalling of factual information, it is obviously an inadequate word to use in connection with such important matters. Some uses of the English word ‘memory’, however, suggests the force it possesses in the Biblical languages. To remember an event is to say, “It happened to me, and therefore I am committed to the consequences of the event.” This memory means personal involvement and personal commitment. In a closely analogous way, the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper is a memory of Christ’s death. In its ritual, the worshipper identifies himself with that event so completely that he can then say with Paul, “I have been crucified with Christ.” Having come to the point of personal involvement in Christ’s death, the Christian must go on with Paul to the point of commitment. Paul said in Galatians 2: 20, “The life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me”

Second, Fellowship can be re-creative. Our communion satisfies our hunger for divine and human intimacy. That hunger is too often left unsatisfied. Today as we are given the cup let us hold it and partake together. While we hold it let us be centers of real fellowship. Holding the cup, let us forgive all who have sinned against us; let us think of the unlovely and unlovable persons that we know and in a mystic manner give them something of love; let us draw close the intimacy of our Christian brethren; let us tighten the ties of friendship; let us love our dear ones and love the Christ. This can be done. And in doing this our fellowship will be marvelously re creative. Communion is not intended to create fellowship in Christ but to embody it, to represent it, to express it. When communion is shared by people who are already bound together as members of the family of Christ, it is indeed the great sacrament of his presence.

Third, Faith is re-creative. Walt Whitman called faith, “the antiseptic of the soul.” Faith in Christ cleanses from guilt. This is the off reflected message of Communion Sunday. Faith drives out fear. Re-creative faith may be in your life and mine like the flow of a refreshing, cleansing, empowering, fertilizing, buoyant, beautifying river that moves out into the great ocean of God. The sacrifice that our Lord made of his only son, who died on the cross for the remission of our sins, surely helps us to see clearly and completely the true love and concern he has for us.

How can we but have true trust and faith in such a God? And once we do possess the faith we can be re-created. And so, we have much to be thankful for, much to think about and much to pray about, as humbly as we come to the Lord’s table this day. We can be re-created, re-created in Jesus Christ by truly accepting him into our lives as our personal Lord and Savior. Christ has told us that we need to be reborn again if we expect to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. So by the cool, refreshing water, this summer, let Christ re-create you and become a true disciple of his.

Nourishing the Roots

Isaiah 5:1-7, 24

Matthew 13:1-9

Text is chosen from Job 29:19; “My roots spread out to the waters, and the dew lay all night upon my branch.”

The text from the book of Job occurs in one of Job speeches, after his afflictions had come upon him. He is reviewing the best days of his life. He tells of the ripeness of his days when his life was full of happiness and dignity and usefulness. Anyone who knows brooks and creeks and rivers will find Job’s words as vivid figures of speech. As a friend of mine has told me of the ‘ole swimmin’ hole’ when he was a child. He said, “We kids used to dam up the brook, and that was a job with fun in it. Then we’d watch while the dam filled up with diving depth. There’d be a spilling and in our swimmin’ hole the water changed every few minutes, pure spring water, cooled for summer use in some secret place in the earth.” He said, “We shared the hole with minnows and frogs. The meadow grass would tickle our feet as we posed on the bank ready for another dive.” He went on to say, “But what I remember now about that old swimming hole was the marvelous and lovely lacework of the sides. The turf above would overhang a bit and beneath the overhang, extending from the surface to the bottom of the pool, was the beautiful smooth, flowing network of roots. Behind them in the darkness lay the minnows while we possessed the pool. They would take it again when we were through swimming.” He said, “I cannot tell you how lovely the fringe work of the roots was, how pleasant the eye, and almost velvet to the touch.”

The grasses and the flowers, the bushes, the spire-wood and elders, the maples and the ash were illustrating our text, my roots spread out to the waters. Well, I never had the experience of my friend of damming up a stream to make an old swimmin’ hole, but I can well remember what it would mean. Still, I think perhaps the day of the old swimmin’ hole is pretty well gone for most of us would not want to swim in some of our streams today because of the pollution.

It has been pointed out that most people are too indifferent to their roots. We are not to be as the stubble that the summer fire devours, as the dry grass that sinks down in the flame; our roots are not to be as rottenness, nor are our blossoms to grow up as dust. We are to be like trees planted by the rivers of water that bring forth their fruit in the season, like vines whose branches run over the wall; we are to be like vines that bring forth good grapes, not wild grapes; we are to be trees of righteousness.

Our spiritual roots must be rooted deep, deep in a faith that is unshakable, a faith that will carry us through thick and thin, through any situations; otherwise, our lives will wither up and die and blow away. However, we are indifferent to roots because we are indifferent to becoming trees. We find the important things of life to be in the realm of having, not in the realm of becoming. Have you ever noticed that many of our young people fresh out of college today want to start right at the top? They want to make large salaries

because they apparently are not willing to take the time to gain experience. Most of us want everything, immediately. Too few of us realize that some things cannot be bought or obtained by formal education; that we must gain wisdom through experience, through working with and among other people. Many of us are just plain not interested in growing spiritually and too few of us really know what spiritual means. Why grow a spiritual value when you can buy a new car? Why spend time on a great book when you can be entertained by a boxing match on TV? Why bother about consequences in personal character? Why bother about luxuriating into a tree, when you can be a tumbleweed that whiffs its way happily along without any roots at all? Tumbleweed folk believe in nothing, care for nothing, seek to know nothing, interfere with nothing, enjoy nothing, love nothing, hate nothing, find purpose in nothing, live for nothing, and only remain alive because there is nothing to die for.

Do you know anyone like this? There are some around that are nothings. Don't think these people don't have pep and hustle. Did you ever see a tumbleweed driven by the wind? Don't be a tumbleweed person for their lives are lonely, unhappy, and full of no purpose. Let Jesus Christ lead you to a full life, with one meaning and purpose, joy and happiness, love and concern. We are indifferent to roots, but for a moment let us look at Job's testimony as he looked back on his happier and more spacious days. "My roots spread out to the water," said Job. This statement is thrown into the vivid context by another verse from the same drama, "his roots twine about the stove-heap." (Job 8:17)

I have noticed this contrast; two white Birch trees, one near the water's edge bathing its roots in a stream, healthily, tall, lovely; the other, a few roads distant, grasping a stone-heap, scrawny, struggling, living only half a life. These birch trees had no choice as to where they grew, but with men it is different. We choose to bathe our roots in life-giving water or use them to grasp a stone-heap. You see, God has given man, you and I, the freedom to choose what kind of life we are going to live and that's one of the main differences between us and animals. How deep our roots go and to what they are connected to is up to each individual. And how we nourish these roots also depends upon us and the kind of lives we live.

The place of the stone-heap may have been that of an old well, but now the spring has dried up. There is no nourishment in old stones. There are very definite contrasts to the kind of roots we have and can develop.

First, we have the stone-heap versus the fountain. There most definitely is no nourishment from a heap of stones; no fertilizer at all nothing to make us grow. But near the fountain the water makes us spring up, come to life and show forth our strength and radiance.

Second, we have the contrast of surface versus depth. You know what happens to plants and flowers that are merely planted on the surface. They have no roots at all and the hot sun withers and dries them up. They have no place to hold moisture or nourishment. Plants however that are planted deep have deep roots in which to obtain moisture and food for nourishment. The same is true with our lives. A deep faith in God will bring us through all kinds of storms but one that is just surface or for show is too shallow and in time of need we will have nothing to lean on.

Third, we have neglect versus cultivation. You know what happens to any plant if we neglect it and let it grow wild. Soon the other foods will grow around it, take all the nourishment away and the plant will finally die. On the other hand, if we cultivate the plant, it will obtain more nourishment and thus live and flourish to greater heights. This is exactly what we have to do with our faith, our beliefs. It is well and good that the first step to becoming a Christian is truly saying I accept Christ into my heart as my personal Lord and savior, but this is just the beginning. we then must cultivate believe by studying god's word, praying, witnessing, working in God's church otherwise if we don't our first commitment is stale and stagnant.

Fourth, we have failure versus fruitage. If a plant is planted in a stone-heap, surface deep and neglected it most naturally will be a failure. It will die. But if we take the very same plant and plant, it by a river or a fountain, in deep rich soil and cultivate it will grow into a vigorous lifegiving, fruitful plant. It is the same way with our religion, our beliefs, and our faith.

Our first step is commitment to our Lord, true and honest from within our hearts. This means that our faith goes deep. If we then try to learn more about God, about Jesus Christ, about how we should live our lives, in other words cultivate our beliefs; our lives definitely will be fruitful, and we will become true Christian disciples.

"My vine goeth deep in the soil", Psalm 80:9 gives us this suggestion. Here is contrast with the desert plant that spreads out its roots on the surface when the heat comes and the wind blows, it becomes a tumbleweed. Shallow rooting makes tumbleweed Christians. A prominent minister in a city church said, "I must take three members into the church to get one." Too many root their interest on the surface of the church's life, the sociability, the friendliness, the appeal of a minister's personality, programs for youths and children. All this is good, but it is not the rootage that brings forth fruit or talent or money, shallow routing does not meet the test. The Christian life calls for "rooting and grounding" in love.

It is not an instantaneous or ephemeral growth. It is routing and grounding in faith. It is not being rooted in the beautiful phrases and comforting sentiments and vague aspiration's to loving kindness and uplift - those things which encourage shallow Christians to say, "that was a lovely sermon." Deep rooting is required - a taproot put down into the knowledge of God. Let your vine go deep into the soil. My soil is made fertile by labor. There is a text from this from Proverbs 28:19, "he that tilled his land shall have plenty of bread." Notice, in contrast, that the untilled land goes to weeds. Jesus' parable of the sower and the seed, which might be called also the parable of the four soils, stimulates our thought, as we consider placing the soil of our lives in good condition.

I am God's farm - what a task is mine to make its soil fertile and productive of a good harvest. We must not be discouraged when the tilled land of our lives sometimes grows weeds. The fertilizing of a plot, a life, may have strange effect - it may bring up an ugly weed from a seed we did not know was there. The same stimulus which produces a saintly quality may intensify an ugly trait. I see a man whom I admire greatly for his enthusiasm for righteousness but with it the weed of a bigoted intolerance has grown. I see

a person who has a remarkable consecration of gift, but the weed of unlovely pride has grown up beside it. God alone can deal with these weeds.

Fourth, my branches run over the wall. It was said of Joseph by his father Jacob, as quoted here from Genesis 49:22, “Joseph is a fruitful bough, even a fruitful bough by a well, whose branches run over the wall.” The contrast to one like Joseph is one who brings forth wild grapes as in Isaiah’s parable, chapter five, which we read this morning. The fruitfulness of the running branch, offering its favor to the passerby, can be expected of the vine that spreads out its roots to the waters, sends them deep into the soil and accepts the labor that brings fertility.

And so, we believe that the first step to becoming a Christian is confessing and accepting Jesus Christ into our lives as our personal Lord and Savior. But this is just the first step. Our roots are only as deep as we want to make them. Certainly, if planted by the fountain of life they will grow. They need to be deep. We need to have conviction and faith in our Lord. Our faith, in order to grow, must be cultivated and to do this we need desperately to read and study the Bible, we need regular periodic prayers with God, we need to make God central in our lives, the most important thing in our lives. If we do this, our faith will be fruitful and produce much for our Lord by witnessing and bringing others into his fellowship. So, you see there is much beyond the first step. But many persons have not even made this first commitment. Perhaps they say it with their lips but not with their hearts. Have you made the first essential step on the road to becoming a Christian? How deep do your roots go?

Qualifying for the Kingdom

Scripture: Matthew 18:1-6

Text is chosen from Matthew 18:3 “Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the Kingdom of heaven.”

What did Jesus mean when he spoke of becoming like children? It seems too simple doesn't it, to become like a child. Some of us overlook this passage because we have become too sophisticated, and too high and mighty.

First of all, I think he meant, for one thing a constant compulsion to grow. I have tried very desperately to learn something new every day, for when the day comes that we fail to learn and we think we know everything there is to know, then that is the day we are lost. One who lives around children must be impressed by the constancy and consistency of their growth. We leave a child who has just learned to crawl with proficiency, and we return after a week to discover that same child walking laboriously around his playpen. Or we leave a child who has just learned to speak disconnected words and we return after a week's absence to discover that he is putting an occasional sentence together. And so irresistibly he pushes away at the walls of ignorance and helplessness, ever continuing that unceasing process of growth that has been at work since he was first conceived in his mother's womb.

How desperately we need to transfer that same process over into the Christian life. Somehow the idea has gone abroad that one either is or is not a Christian and that the matter stops there. If he is a Christian, there is something left to be done. I can't understand why we are constantly studying in our particular fields of endeavor, trying to grow in our abilities but we seem to take our religion for granted as though we either have it or we don't and if we have it that's all that's necessary.

It's easy to say with our lips that I am a Christian but to actually be one and to feel it in your heart is another story. The Christian stands under a divine compulsion to grow in his Christian life equally as much as the child is called to grow in his physical life. Encountering Christ and saying, “Thou art my Lord”, is only the barest beginning of the Christian life. That confession is the essential first step. But it is only the first step. The Christian must grow in an understanding of what the lordship of Christ means to him. You know we are going to get out of life exactly what we put into it. God and you know how much effort you are putting into your Christianity and your rewards in the life eternal will be proportionate.

Secondly, I think that Jesus must have been referring to the expectant eagerness of children. Nothing is more charming in children than the expectant eagerness with which they feel that something quite wonderful and quite delightful may happen any minute. The little boy fishing in the pond wants to make sure that his pole is strong enough to land a 15-pound fish. For him nothing is too big to be true. The little girl seeing a candle on the table cries, “Happy Birthday”. This must be a party and not just another dinner. And so, it is with all children, expecting almost anything to happen, whether it may seem impossible or

not. And we should be expectant of anything in our Christian lives, for with God nothing is impossible. This element of childlike expectation marked the early Christians. Paul writes as a man under a spell of enthusiasm at the thought that Jesus was coming again, soon. Luke mentions “a man named Joseph who lived in expectation of the Kingdom of God.” One who has studied the Apostolic Church has remarked that those early Christians lived in “tiptoe expectancy”. How many of us live in a similar expectancy today? How many of us live as though the Kingdom of God were really at hand? As though all things are really possible with God? I’m afraid we have become far too smug in our own enlightenment.

We have studied conversion in terms of psychology so long that we don’t really expect a man can be turned about-face, can be translated from the Kingdom of darkness to the Kingdom of light, can be transformed from a creature of this world to a citizen of the spiritual world - all by the mysterious working of God. We had better start believing in conversion and we had better start defining conversion in terms of our own lives and not thinking that it was something that happened years ago to people in revival meetings; for it is a living reality that God can make happen to us today right now. Today everything is modern and in terms of our times, but some things cannot be changed. We have translated the Kingdom of God into social and economic terms so long that we really don’t expect a new heaven and a new earth or the discovery of another kingdom which we can enter at any moment.

In the index of a certain book, “Kingdom of God”, is listed with the reference, “see under democracy”. There can be little expectation in that mood. James Russell Lowell once passed a place where there was a sign reading, “Home for Incurable Children.” “They’ll have me in there yet”, said Lowell. Among the most charming and powerful people on earth are those who, like Lowell, by their childish belief in impossible help keep the impossible happening. The great things of earth have largely been accomplished by those who with a childlike expectancy believed in the great impossible. When Richard Cobden was advocating for the repeal of the Corn Laws his less courageous friends cried, “Impossible”! “Impossible”, asked Cobden. Impossible? If that is all that is in the matter, I move we go ahead!

And thirdly, Jesus was probably aware of the humble trust of children. Little else stirs a father’s heart more than the awareness of the trust his children place in him. A child who would not jump from the porch to the ground for fear of falling will unhesitatingly jump from the same porch if the father’s uplifted arms are there to catch him. There never seems to be any fear that the father will capriciously drop his hands at the moment the child jumps or any suspicion that the father may not be able to catch the child. The child just jumps in the sublime assurance that the father’s arms will be there and that they will be strong enough to hold him.

A New Jersey lawyer took his four-year old son in to New York City for the first time. The boy emerged from the subway swaggeringly set to conquer the town. He had boasted how he would climb up the outside of the Empire State Building and how he bet he could jump out and not get hurt. As they walked along, the jamming of brakes and the crashing of gears and the sounding of horns, bore on the lad. He was more often

than not lost in a forest of legs. But still he swaggered on. Then he happened to look up - to see a towering wall of concrete and windows that seemed for all the world to be toppling in his direction - it was his first dizzy sight of the famous skyscraper. It was then that he reached out his tiny hand into his father's large palm and said, "I guess you'd better hold me now." A true example of the trust a child puts in his father.

Truly can you see how important the example we adults set is to our children? The impression we make, the time we spend with them, in play, in work, in enjoyment, definitely does leave a lasting impression on them and is important to their growth. A family needs very definitely to stick together and do things together including coming to church and Sunday school. It seems too bad when we don't even have life enough in us to bring our children to Sunday school and certainly a much better example would not only to bring but stay to Sunday school ourselves. We really cannot expect any more out of our children than we teach them or set an example for them.

One who would enter the Kingdom of God must come with a faith in God similar to what children have in their parents. "The eternal God is thy dwelling place and underneath are the everlasting arms." In God he will now live and move and have his being. He is a sure God above all other gods. He will neither slumber nor sleep, but he will keep his children. "Tell me", said one of Luther's enemies to him sneeringly, "tell me when the whole world turns against you - Church, State, princes, people - where will you be then?" "Where shall I be then?" cried the great soul. "Why then as now, in the hands of almighty God."

Childlikeness opens the doors and windows in the incoming of the Almighty. The childlike is the trustful, and no barriers of cynical suspicion block the channels of spiritual communion. And the child-like is the docile, and no boulders of arrogance or self-conceit block the channel of the invigorating waters of life. And so the childlike become the God-like, and, of course they are the greatest among the sons of men. The little child enshrines the secret of the God man, and we should be infinitely wise if we had a little child always in our midst.

Our scripture reading this morning as recorded in Matthew 18: 1-6, pretty well sums up our Lord's true estimate of greatness. How infinite is the contrast between his standards and the standards of the world! The world measures greatness by money or eloquence or intellectual skill or even by powers on the field of battle. But here is the Lord's standard as recorded in Matthew 18:4. "Whoever humbles himself like this child, he is the greatest in the Kingdom of heaven." So, unless we are willing to humble ourselves before God, repent of our sins and ask for forgiveness, to accept Jesus Christ in our hearts as our personal Lord and Savior, we will never get into heaven. I really believe this as a standard God has set for us. I can see no in-between. Are you ready for the Kingdom of heaven?

There is a fine passage from John Bunyan in which he describes his experience in Bedford jail. He was not sure that his imprisonment would end on the gallows, but he did not fear being hanged so much, as he did the possibility that in a moment of fear he might deny his Lord. He made up his mind that whatever happened he would still be true to his faith. These are his words: "Wherefore, thought I, I am for going on

and venturing my eternal state with Christ whether I have comfort here or no. If God does not come in, thought I, I will leap off the ladder ever blind folded into eternity - sink or swim, come heaven, come hell. Lord Jesus, if thou wilt catch me, do; If not, I will venture all for thy name.” Citizenship in the Kingdom in its highest form will always call for that kind of commitment. Not until we are ready to bet our lives upon God, have we shown ourselves worthy of our Christian heritage. Have you made a definite commitment to your Lord? If you have not it is never too late for Christ is willing to accept you as you are and then go from there. Accept Christ and become a new person, a reborn person in Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Sermon - The Young Surveyor

Scripture: Revelation 21:10-17

I have chosen my text from Zachariah 2: 1-5; “And I lifted my eyes and saw, and behold, a man with a measuring line in his hand! Then I said, “Where are you going?” And he said to me, “To measure Jerusalem, to see what its breath is and what is its length.” And behold, the angel who talked with me came forward and another angel came forward to meet him, and said to him, “Run, say to that young man: Jerusalem shall be inhabited as villages without walls, because of the multitude of men and cattle in it. For I will be to her a wall of fire, round about, says the Lord, and I will be the glory within her.”

Zachariah was probably a young preacher born in exile and brought to Jerusalem under the divine leadership for this specific task of helping to spur the builders to action. His name seems to mean “he whom God remembers.” His sensitive soul was strangely moved by the consciousness that God’s house was still in ruins. When Haggai began preaching, he could restrain himself no longer. Eagerly and with reckless abandon he threw himself into the work of helping his great friend. God had called him, and the time was ripe for preaching. He did not hold back but gave his all to the proclamation of the message. He does not rebuke or condemn or berate the people. With striking colors and vivid imagination, he paints glowing pictures of the presence of God to strengthen and help. Words of inspiration flow from his life. His hope for a new kingdom rest upon the faith he has in his own people to respond with willing hearts to the wishes of God.

Obedience will bring rich blessings. Catch just a glimpse of this young surveyor in our text this morning and I’m sure you’ll like him. He has his measuring tape in his hand. He’s going about his business. And it is urgent business, he’s running, or at least others have to run who want to catch up with him. The prophet asked him, “where are you going?” His reply, “I’m going to measure Jerusalem, to find out the length and breadth.” The issue of the day was the rebuilding of Jerusalem. This young man was relating his vocation and life to that issue. He wasn’t dawdling; he wasn’t bored; he wasn’t proving himself a drag on society. He looks like a leader. He’s serious; he knows what he’s doing; He has his task in hand.

It seems to me that he’s one of the finest examples of young manhood that the Old Testament gives to this modern age. Our English Bible shows a rather subtle difference between the young man’s point of view and that of the angelic messenger. “I’m going to measure Jerusalem to see what is the length and breadth,” said the youth. The messenger said, “Jerusalem shall be inhabited as villages without walls, because of the multitude of men and cattle in it.” Of course, this exemplary young man, about to measure his city, was not out to get the length and breadth of the status quo; he was looking towards the new city. God’s messenger wanted only to emphasize the point. The issue lies in the future.

Many persons, young and old, have been entangled and lost in what is. Young men are expected to see visions, and old man to dream dreams. Many of us today cannot see beyond our noses. Our dreams and

goals are too small, and we have a little or no faith in the future. This matter of God's interest in church programs is not some vague, visionary, idealistic, feet-off-the-ground, and head-in-the-clouds, magic, mystical matter. It is the essential, real, down to the earth important factors in this situation. "Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it." Take God into every plan and expect great things from him while attempting great things for him. Yes, God will help us to do whatever we want to do in his name, as long as it is according to his will.

You know that's what's wrong with most of us, we do not take time to let God in our plans regardless of what they are. Perhaps we want all the glory for ourselves or perhaps we think we shouldn't bother God with such trivial things, but believe me when I say that anything that has to do with each of us, God is interested in and he wants to help us, if we will let him.

Getting back to our young down-to-earth surveyor, he said, "I'm going to measure the breath of the city and the length." What about the height young man? He might have replied, "I'm not one to get my head in the clouds! You see the young man might have been a surveyor and nothing more, one who measures walls and walls only. Or, on the other hand, he might have been a city planner with faith-inspired dreams; Or a city father, the word 'father' used in the true sense, with concern for the boys and girls who would play in the streets of the city; concern for the happiness and welfare of the people. A city has something more than length and breadth. And I believe any community, even an individual home has more than length and breadth; or least it should have. It should show love and concern for its people. There is more to just plain living in a certain place for, if that's all we do, I'm afraid our lives are rather empty. Life- fullness of life, means helping and showing concern for other people, becoming involved in situations and activities in your community.

Actually, what are we measuring? Every enterprise is a spiritual as well as a practical task. The practical must not push aside the spiritual period nor should the spiritual entirely overwhelm the practical. The two go together. I, sayeth the Lord, will be the glory, in the midst of Jerusalem. Measurement overwhelmed with God's glory - there's an ideal for whatever you're building. Regardless of where we are or what we are doing, God should always be with us. "For I, sayeth the Lord, "will be unto her a wall of fire round about and will be the glory in the midst of her." "Run, tell that young man that God's an interested party." He might forget that in the business of surveying.

Youth, with that supreme audacity, which is one of the choicest fruits of the lack of wisdom, will measure everything and everybody, and in half an hour will put the universe into a desk file. And so, the young man frankly affirmed that he was going to measure Jerusalem. Measure Jerusalem, just think of it! Measure this city of the living God! Set down on paper, in yards and feet and inches, all that is gathered in the word "Jerusalem"; all the tears that have been wept in it - all the songs that have been sung in it - all the crying of broken-hearted men in it that have gone quivering to the ear of God.

There are some things in life you cannot measure, for example, the love of God. Young men, engrossed

in an enterprise, forget that their fathers are naturally interested. The young men give their elders little information concerning the matter at hand. God's interest is like a father. He would like for us to talk things over with him before we make a decision. What an excellent policy this would be for all of us regardless of what we are going to do. Much vain labor might be spared if the Lord helped in building the wall, the house, the home, the life. God gives the protection, the wall of fire, the glory, the spiritual blessing, that are needed. God gives wisdom for measuring and building: "Speak to this young man, "Jerusalem" shall be inhabited as towns without walls for the multitude of men and cattle therein."

We may admire the young surveyor for his ability, his energy, his zest, his idealism; but what if he lacks wisdom? In most cases building walls is an enterprise of folly. God is interested. God gives wisdom. It might be wise to check and double check with God. John Wesley had global vision. He said, "the world is my parish." He made big measurements. He measured out the whole great Methodist Church in the world as he measured out his parish. Doctor David Livingstone had a continental vision and measured accordingly. He went to Africa to evangelize the native races, to explore the undiscovered secrets, and to destroy the devastating slave trade. There was William Carey who went to India expecting great things from God and attempting great things for God. "He set the gospel broadcast through the length and breadth of that vast land, built up the finest college in the Indian empire, and gave the people the word of God in their own tongues." Concerning Jesus, Charles Jefferson wrote: "He had eyes looking along extended times into eternity; he had sympathies wide enough to cover humanity to its outermost edge; he had a purpose which included all lands and ages." By the measure of Christ measuring line, and by the measure of his life, we have a Kingdom of God which shall have no end, a universal Kingdom as high as heaven.

The true promise of everlasting an eternal life by Christ measurement is what we are guaranteed by the acceptance of Christ into our personal lives. Our mind now leaps from the passage in Zechariah to one in the Book of Revelation. The 21st chapter of this book describes the new Jerusalem. The book of Exodus comes to an inspiring climax. After describing the tabernacle in tape line terms – "the length of one curtain was twenty and eight cubits, and the breaths of one curtain four cubits," - the writer continues, "then a cloud covered the tent of the congregation, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle - and the cloud of the Lord was upon the tabernacle by day and fire was on it by night, in the sight of all the House of Israel." The New Jerusalem like the ancient tabernacle is first to be measured, and then to be filled with the glory of the Lord. It was a New Jerusalem that the young man set out to survey. But note this passage: "and he measured the wall thereof, a hundred and forty and four cubits according to the measure of a man, that is, of the angel. Mark that phrase, "according to the measure of a man", which means by human measurement. The angel was using human measurement. But in another sense, everything that is built is according to the measurement of a man.

What a man is measures what he builds. The size of the man determines the size of the city. A man of great faith will take long measurements; a man of great love will build on broad lines; a man of great hope will build a city that is high. And the Lord, "will be unto her a wall fire round about and will be the glory in the midst of her."

What is your measure? Do you have great faith, great love, and great hope? Or are your measurements in life short, and low? God in your daily life makes the difference. Try it and you'll see what I mean.

Some Standards for Us as Children of God

Scripture: Proverbs 3

Text chosen from Philippians 4:9 “What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, do; and the God of peace will be with you.”

One role of Christians and of the Christian family is to champion standards of goodness and excellence. Our Christian concern is these matters may begin with the affirmation that “we are, and we want to be God’s persons or children of God.” We are made by God. His purposes for us are good. We may not be able to spell out our Christian standards in specific details in a single sermon, but these are standards to be suggested.

First is the standard of excellence. We are thinking especially of excellence in cultural and intellectual matters. I think it is the philosopher Whitehead who once defined education as the habitual vision of greatness. It may be said that it is one role of the Christian family to give its children and young people glimpses of greatness in art, in music, and in literature. To allow the tastes of our children to be determined by the local disc jockey or by Broadway or Hollywood is a dereliction of Christian duty. I have always been a little shy of the text, “train up a child in the way he should go...” It smacks somewhat of unusual training, by means of discipline, punishment, rewards. However, I recently discovered from the Interpreter’s Bible that the word “train” translated means “dedicate” – dedicate a child to the greatest cause, to the most glorious enterprise, and he will not succumb in later life to what is mean and trivial. It really is something today, the way we are living our lives, the way we are raising our children, perhaps.

It is too old fashioned, but I believe we have to train our children in the proper arena for their lives. There are certain things which they are not going to pick up by themselves. They need our help. The formal living room has in many houses been transformed into a small movie theatre with chairs set in regular rows before the TV set, where the mighty orgy of murder, mayhem, monsters, and what-have-you is delicately set forth.

Marco Bozarris once cried in a powerful appeal, “Strike for your altars and your fires.” Today many would cry “Strike for your 21’ screen.” For that is the only altar or hearthstone that many a family knows. We cannot turn back the clock, but at least we might by strenuous effort save some of the magical binders which in the past bound many a home together—for instance, the pure magic of the alphabet and the musical scales. In other words, reading and music.

Today many families do not even talk to each other. Everyone has to be quiet and listen and look at the TV. Many of us can remember the days before TV and even though TV offers many informative and educational programs of interest, I believe the average American family would be by far, much happier without it. In all our talk about “underprivileged children” we often forget that some of the most under-privileged

children are found on our most fashionable streets – the children who have never known the thrill of imagination brought by family reading. And who will put into immortal poetry the part played in many a true home by the parlor organ? And believe when I again say we cannot and, I do not want to turn back the hands of time, for I believe we have to live our lives in the present and looking to the future.

However, I believe we have and are living our lives too fast. We are getting too smart for our own good and we have left behind some of the good old things that we should have continued to this present day. We are lacking in our teaching some of the cultural background that I feel is important. We are pushing the real intelligent children, giving them what they need, and ignoring the average and below average children and allowing them to shift for themselves. I believe we fail to realize that the largest majority of children and youth fall into the average intelligence class and the very intelligent are few in numbers.

The kind of cultural confusion, the kind of ethical uncertainty in which the United States is at present caught could not have occurred, unless adults had already surrendered or questioned the standards of excellence and of moral achievement which had-at certain points at least – exercised some influence in our culture. There could not be any such things as the tyrannizing of our culture by teenage tastes, if there had not already been a surrender of standards, a confusion of beliefs on the part of adults. So that the problem is not with the teen-agers. The problem is with the so-called adults, you and I. And this is generally what any problem boils down to because we adults are too busy. We do not want to take the time, we just plain do not care what our children are doing, what they are learning, how they are doing in school; we are not interested enough in them to see that they get to Sunday School. We do not even set a good example for them by coming ourselves.

We are not willing to put our foot down and insist that our children do something or learn something that will be of benefit to them later on in life. We are not willing to teach them that sometimes they have to do things they do not like to do because it will be to their benefit. We apparently are willing to let them set their own standards without any guidance or direction and then we say what is this latest generation coming to?

I believe considering the times and what has happened and what is happening, in general we have a fine group of young people that all of us can be proud of. They need adult guidance and direction. We have to take the time to help them. I believe that is why our cultural organizations are important. Every Christian man and woman ought to be behind these cultural concerns. This is broader and deeper than simple morality. This is the whole matter of excellence, in things creative, cultural, beautiful. We all need an appreciation of things beautiful, art, music, literature and we need to instill this same appreciation in our children.

Second, closely related to excellence is the standard of chastity. This may sound old fashioned, too. It's at least as old-fashioned as the Ten Commandments. But we haven't any official word that the Ten Commandments have been repealed. The relevance of the Commandments is not so much that they are of divine origin. Their relevance is that they are for our good. We are made for chastity. Unchastity is a vio-

lation of our integrity. We are made for honesty. Cheating is a violation of our integrity. The standard of chastity may run right into the face of much of our contemporary practice, both popular and sophisticated. But it is expressive of our truest existence, the meaning of our existence.

Christians must affirm the notion of chastity not as something that has been handed down, but as something that is continually relevant to our integrity as persons. Chastity or purity refers to many areas of our lives. We most certainly need purity in our lives and in our world today.

Third, to excellence and chastity should be added temperance. The standard of temperance certainly has a relevance in our time. In the past we have always connected temperance with the use of alcohol, but we are beginning to realize that temperance needs to be applied seriously to all areas of our lives.

There are two aspects to this matter of temperance which I believe are worth mentioning. One is the care of our bodies. Some time ago I heard a man say, "Well, if I like to smoke and I want to give myself cancer, that's my business." I said, "I'm not so sure you have a right deliberately to inflict upon your body some ill. If you are Christian, do you have the responsibility to take as good care of your body as commonsense dictates.?" Well, he never did answer the question, but I question whether we Christians have the right to do as we please with our bodies.

Norman Cousins was talking with a doctor friend about smoking. "I am very realistic," the doctor said, "in telling my patients who are smokers, that their chances of dying from cancer are about (10) times greater than if they don't smoke. But they really don't care." "And you feel the same way?" "Just about." The conversation has suggested some fundamental question which Cousins pointed out clearly. How sensitive are people to the preciousness of life? How keenly aware are they of the potentialities of a fully awakened human being, and to the connection between a respect for life and a healthy development of society? Most of us are not too concerned until we ourselves become sick and realize we could have taken care of ourselves much better.

But we need to apply temperance in other areas of our lives also. Over nothing, over work or overindulgences in anything can cause harm to our bodies. If we are going to be Christian, we must recognize that this body is part of God's gift to us, and we must take care of it. Temperance is also a matter of stewardship, the use of our possessions. If we spend more money in private indulgence than we are spending in the work of God, this is intemperance. We are using for private indulgence what God has given us for his purposes. I do not plan to stand here and tell you; you are living your lives wrong. We are adult people. I'm sure we understand the love God gives us and the blessing he has bestowed upon us. I'm sure we have sense enough to know what kind of lives we are living, and we all have a conscience to live with. I'm just trying to point out what our standards of living should be according to our Lord. You can decide for yourselves how you measure up.

To what purpose are excellence, chastity and temperance? Self-fulfillment, the fulfillment of the self, I

believe is the purpose. I use this phrase with some hesitancy, because it can be misinterpreted. But if we keep the ideal of self-fulfillment in the proper context, it has validity. To say that we are God's persons and that God's will is for our good carries the implication that we find our fulfillment only in his purposes. To be a real person is to be what God wants us to be, and to discover his purposes for us. So we dedicate ourselves to the development of all our powers and to their continued use. We accept the importance of material achievements. We are not saying that material goods are to be discredited. They just have to be kept in their place. And each one of us must discover what this place is. This will affect our vocational decisions, particularly you young people who are now determining what you are going to do with your lives. Your vocational decisions will be determined in a large part by this sense of personal fulfillment.

On the great plains of the Midwest, we use iron rods driven deep into the ground to work established survey points and corners of property. Often these rods become covered with blowing sand and weeds. When it becomes necessary to prove our property lines, we find that some our landmarks have been neglected so long and covered so deep that they are lost. It is then necessary to have our property surveyed again to find the landmarks. We have also inherited religious and moral landmarks. But these landmarks so vital to us have become lost in some homes by neglect or compromise. We cannot compromise our Christian principles. We have to stand up for what is right and good and true. There is no simple Christian prescription for what it means culturally to be God's person. There is this profound motivation that we are his and that our deepest concern is to be and to do what he wills for us. We are not to be tyrannized by our culture, but to support our culture when it is excellent and to criticize it when it is weak and tawdry. And we are to encourage those whom we love and for whom we have some concern – encourage them to standards of excellence and of chastity and of temperance, which will lead them to the fulfillment of God's purpose for them. We truly are children of God and he expects us to live our lives according to his will for us.

Let us set our goals and standards high enough to agree with his will.

The Church Then and Now

Scripture: Acts 2:1-5, 14-21, 37-40

Text is chosen from Acts 2:1; “When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place.” Today we are celebrating the Church’s birthday. Just as on the 4th of July we celebrate the birth of the nation, so on this 50th day after Easter we celebrate the birth of the Christian Church.

The first thing we do on a person’s birthday is to thank God that the person was born and that we have had the joy and happiness of knowing this person over the years. When a person has a birthday, he is almost sure to look backward, not only to the particular day on which he was born, but to the place where he was born, the era he was born in, the neighborhood in which he was reared, and then he moves forward through the years and looks at himself as he now is, sees how far he has come, how far he might have come, how much he has made out of what he has been given, and he then looks forward and wonders what the future may hold.

Perhaps you say, I don’t do that on my birthday. Well, perhaps you do not do this in the same order, but I would venture to say that subconsciously you ask yourselves very similar questions; for we all do sometime or other take a look at our lives and wonder where we are going from here. Why shouldn’t we do the same thing on the birthday of the Church? Therefore, the subject of our thought on the day of Pentecost is the Church, then in now.

First, the Church then was small, hardly more than a handful of people, meeting in a single room, in one city of the world, in a conquered nation. I wonder how many of us today would be willing to sacrifice our all to keep God’s word alive as did the early apostles. I’m afraid many of us would take the easy way out and not resist any evil forces but go along with them to make our living easier and perhaps more comfortable. Can you picture this small group of people doing everything possible to proclaim God’s word as had been revealed in the person of Jesus Christ? Struggling, enduring hardships, giving their all for their Master and Christ.

The Church now is large. The latest report tells us that there are approximately 742,000,000 Christians in the world, and they are found in every part of the world. Which is what Christ told his disciples to do. Why did the Church spread so fast? And even though we may think it a long time, it is relatively short, less than 2000 years.

I can think of at least three reasons which partly account for the tremendous rapid growth of the church.

The first reason why the church spread so fast is that there was something irresistible about Jesus. You can remember how crowds followed him during his ministry on the earth. Children loved him, people who were down and out, people who needed healing and other help loved him. I believe this was true because the quality of God himself was revealed in the person of Christ, what he had to say to people made sense,

it made them stop and think, their lives took on a new meaning, they became reborn persons with purpose, with enthusiasm, with meaning.

Second, there was something enormously appealing about his followers. And why shouldn't be there because they had come to know Jesus as their personal Lord and Savior. Their lives were changed, they were changed persons. Their radiance, and enthusiasm for the gospel message showed forth through them to those whom they came in contact with. People who listened to them knew they believed what they were talking about because they had conviction, something most of us lack today. We aren't convinced ourselves that Christ is our Lord and Savior, so how can we convince anyone else. We are too willing to take our religion and beliefs for granted. We say we believe something with our life but in our hearts, we have doubts or we have no feeling at all.

And the third reason was that there was something crucial in the teaching of the church. The church went to the Pagan world and said, "Christ is the way." The church, when it has been at its strongest, has always said, "Christ is the way", and all the other ways to the degree to which they find God are somehow caught up in this one way, thus making Christianity not an option, not something you can take or leave, but something which you decide against to your peril.

This either-or-ness of the Church's message bothers many a broadminded person today, but before he lightly discards it let him remember that he need not be proud, arrogant, or intolerant of others in order to say that he has come to the ultimate dividing line in life, in that in Christ he has found something with which all other things ultimately have to come to terms.

You know, we had better start thinking that the teachings of the church are crucial in our lives before it is too late. Jesus Christ and only Christ, is the only way of salvation for us. Perhaps we think that everyone is going to be saved regardless but you had better believe that there are two distinct places where you and I are going. Whether we accept Christ into our lives as our Lord and Savior will depend upon whether we get to heaven or not. And if we do not get to heaven then we most definitely will go to Hell. And don't think for one moment that the devil is not looking for people for hell as much as Christ is showing us the way of eternal life with our Father in heaven.

Getting back to the early church, it was then united. The story in the book of Acts reports that "they were all with one accord in one place." Not only were they all under one roof, but they were all bound together in one life. And all that believe were together and had all things in common. They shared not only their beliefs and affection, but their property. Their whole life was a life in unison with Christ. This is what you might expect. For as an organization grows, it almost inevitably becomes more complex. A healthy organization grows. An acorn grows into a tremendous tree. A baby boy or a baby girl grows into a man or a woman. The 13 colonies hugging the Seacoast grew into the 48 states, stretching from sea to sea. So, the church, being a healthy organization, grew from a small movement in Judaism to a worldwide fellowship of all sorts and conditions of people.

Now the church is divided. This is what you might expect. For as an organization grows, it almost inevitably becomes more complex. As it ministers to more and more people coming from different cultures and backgrounds, it will inevitably minister to them in different ways, because not all people are alike. I believe this can be pointed out by the fact that certainly the church will minister differently to you and I, then it does to the people in India. That's why it takes trained missionaries for their areas that know how to effectively bring God's word to them. In the same way, I believe a minister must know the problems and conditions that exist that affect his congregation, otherwise he cannot minister to them effectively. Certainly, here in Fultonham, a minister would not minister to his people as he would to a group in a large city.

Generally, each group or community has problems and conditions that are unique to that community and therefore must be handled differently. To my mind, no one person, and no one church is big enough to grasp the totality of the Gospel of God. We see it from our particular angle, and we minister to people who see it from the same angle. On the other hand, you can have diversity with divisiveness, but you cannot have it if one part of the church says, I am the church and there is no other church beside me. Complexity as we grow, yes, but not competition. I know one thing and that is, we Protestants had better start deciding and knowing what we believe because if we do not, we are going to eventually lose what we have.

Recently the Mormon church has been having a big drive in this area to obtain new members and no doubt you will hear of some of your friends and neighbors joining the Mormon church. The person who has doubts or who does not know what he believes is easy prey for this church. If we do not actually know what we believe, all we have to do is to repeat and study the Apostles Creed. This Creed tells us what we believe. Sunday after Sunday we repeat this as routine and as a part of our ritual but too few of us actually take the time to study it and realize what it means. Try it and see if you can get a better understanding of what your church and what you believe.

But of course, repeating something in church each Sunday really means very little when we do not have the conviction in our hearts. Pick up your Bible and read it. It will tell you exactly what you believe. Ask God, pray to God for understanding, and help and guidelines. He will give it to you. You know our faith and beliefs can mean very much to us or they can be taken very lightly. What you make out of your religion depends entirely on you, no one else.

The third contrast between the church then and now is less flattering to the Church of the present day. The church, then, was on "fire". Saint Luke, as he described the first Pentecost, did it in terms of wind and fire. There were tongues of fire which came down from above and "sat on each of them." There is a figurative way of saying what everybody knew; that they those early Christians were enthusiastic, full of vitality and concern, and were ready for anything because what had happened to them had done such tremendous things for them. Whereas the church then was on fire about the most you can say for the church now is that it is smoldering, and to smolder means to burn or smoke without flame. Let us remember this that when I

speak of the church, I am referring to people, you and me. People make the difference in most situations as it did in the early church and as it does in the Church of today. I would like to make three comments about this situation.

First it is almost impossible for any movement to keep its first, fine, careless rapture. In the case that something is new, the very novelty of it generates an excitement that cannot be continued endlessly through the centuries.

Second, if any movement loses entirely the power to recapture that first, fine, careless rapture, it is dead.

3rd, the church has not lost that power. There are people brought into the church today who have found the same thing that Paul the Apostle found. And while they may not have the genius of expression that he had, nevertheless, if you talk to them, you will find them saying the same thing, that they had been set free by the following of the church through which God has come to them. "Let the spirit of life dwell in a man, permeate his being, sanctify his nature, quicken his faculties, vitalize his mortal body, and the man will live-really live! He will live the life that is life indeed."

If you haven't experienced Christ in your life, let him in and I guarantee your life will be charged with new energy, power, joy, that you have never experienced before. If you are looking for signs of life in the church, don't look at the buildings, or the budgets, or the good works; see if you can find a person who is walking on his toes with excitement and joy. If you can find one in a congregation, that congregation is alive. On the birthday of the church, therefore, we thank God for what the church is. We thank God for the birth of Jesus Christ and that he came into the world and stayed in the world. And we sincerely ask God to make it grow, to draw it together in real unity, and above everything else, to set it on fire. How about you couldn't you stand a little flame?

The Experience of Meeting God

Scripture: Daniel 10:1-19

Text is taken from Daniel 10:19, “Oh man, greatly beloved, fear not: peace be unto thee, be strong, yea, be strong. And when he had spoken unto me, I was strengthened.”

The 10th chapter of Daniel is a page from the biography of a man who turned a corner of the road of life one day and came upon a new vision of God. Emerson said that the greatest hour in a man’s life is when he turns the corner of a street and meets a new thought or impulse or idea. But just think how supremely great the hour if that new idea is the living God himself! That is what had happened to Daniel here. He had turned a corner on life’s pilgrimage and there in front of him, was God.

There are some things about this page of Daniel’s biography which may seem uninteresting to us, but we must not dismiss them as fancy or imagination. If ever there was fallen across your path some gleam of a light that never was on sea or land then, I beg you, give that experience its due name. Call it fancy or imagination and you will be disastrously mistaken. Call it the revelation of God and you will be gloriously right. God most definitely does come through his messengers. There are certain aspects of Daniel’s experience which give it the mark of genuineness. It was not by random chance that this great hour came to Daniel. It came as a definite answer to a deliberate quest on the part of the man himself.

Let us look at verse 12. “From the first day that thou didst set thine heart to understand, and to chasten thyself before they God, thy words were heard.” That is what the vision said. What does it tell me? It tells me that if I want a vital religion - if I am sincerely desiring a vivid experience of God, I must not sit down passively, hoping that somehow something will happen to me someday. I must take action. I must discipline my life for it. I must make time for prayer. And here is God’s assurance: from the moment when I began to do that, from the hour in which I set my heart to this, my words will be heard, and a vital experience of God will be on the way.

God comes into our presence when we least expect him. For example, God met Jacob in the night when he least expected it. This is recorded in Genesis 32: 24. In 1 Kings, Elijah, met God when he didn’t expect it. Isaiah met the Lord unexpectedly in the 6th chapter of his prophecy. The old familiar story of Saul and how he met the Lord on the road to Damascus and later became Paul. The shepherd in the fields - when the shepherds least expected it, there came an angel of the Lord with a message for them. These situations which I have just mentioned are different, of course, and some today would perhaps say difficult to accept. The ears of the 20th century don’t take kindly to talk about visions and angels and ladders to the sky. But however you choose to interpret these visionary experiences, note the threads of similarity which hold them together.

First, God spoke to them when they least expected it. Second, they were alone, off by themselves, out of the crowd, or were met individually wherever they were. Third, when they saw the vision, they were

changed. Fourth - as far as we know they made a decision and endured it to the end. God is with them - the man of courage who is willing to wrestle all through the night, if necessary, as Jacob did. God is with a man who was willing to work until cities lie waste, as Isaiah did. Getting to our own lives and our experiences with God and life, let's stand away from the crowd for a moment or two, and take a good look, because when you least expect it, God may be trying to tell you something-something which may change your life and perhaps even change the world.

We have become so busy in our lives, that we don't take time to even think or meditate so how can God touch us. We have to want to be touched and we need time for quiet meditation with him. Getting back to Daniel's experience, secondly, I believe what made it genuine was the immediate reaction upon the man himself of this sudden encounter with God. It was an overwhelming sense of personal unworthiness. Look at Daniel verse 8: "I was left alone, and saw this great vision, and there remained no strength in me; for my comeliness (vigor) was turned in me into corruption, and I retained no strength." The 1st result of seeing God is utter humiliation, freedom from pride. That is inevitable.

If I am self-approving and complacent; if I have never yielded up that central citadel in which the natural man takes refuge, the citadel of pride; if I am asked to stand upon my dignity, not deigning to speak a word that might remove misunderstanding; if I imagine that I have any goodness or grace which entitles me to judge or criticize another soul-then that spirit is going to receive a terrible shock when, in some hour of real experience, I meet God face to face!

The first reaction of a real religious experience is quite devastatingly humiliating. From my own experience, I felt that I owed no one anything, that I needed no one, that what I was, I did myself. After meeting God, I realized what a small person I was and how much I need everyone around me, especially God. We definitely become more humble after meeting God face to face in lives and it certainly will do all of us a world of good.

Isaiah, the gay young courtier, met God in the temple, and next moment he was crying "Woe is me! I am a man of unclean lips." Saul of Tarsus, the correct and consciously immaculate Pharisee who had kept the whole law unbroken, met God on the Damascus Road and fell on his face, abashed and utterly ashamed. Simon Peter, the decent, hardworking fisherman, met God in the midst of the morning; And there in his boat, he flung himself at Jesus' feet, exclaiming, "Depart for me, for I am a sinful man, oh Lord." Daniel met God and immediately, "There remained no strength in me, and my vigor was turned into corruption." So, we do lose some of our pride and we become more humble when we meet God.

That overwhelming sense of personal unworthiness was Daniel's first reaction. But God led him beyond that. God always does. Listen to the first words he heard God speak. From verse 11 we read, "And he said unto me, O, Daniel, a man greatly beloved! - that is greatly beloved by God. And again, in verse 19, "Oh man, greatly loved, fear not." How that changes everything! To know that somebody loves you, that someone knowing you exactly as you are, and knowing everything that may ever happen in your life, can

and does most truly love you - that, even on the human level, can change life forever.

We never need to pretend before God for he knows more about us than we ourselves do and he is willing to accept us just as we are with all our faults. It is a wonderful feeling to really believe this and know that it is true. Have you never seen a lad, growing up to manhood feckless and unreliable and unstable, and then quite suddenly lifting his head and pulling himself together and marching on through life with a new step, becoming a real man, and all because somebody - somebody good and loving, and of the right kind - had come into his life? Yes, even in the most unlikely places, the touch of love works miracles.

Just think what a wonderful world this would be if we showed the same kind of love toward each other that our Lord shows forth to us. Finally, a genuine experience of God has always certain distinguishing marks by which you can recognize it, characteristic effects which it produces in a man's life. Look at the words of the vision: "Oh man, beloved, fear not; peace be unto thee; be strong, yea, be strong."

These are the three results of getting to know God. The first is courage. "Fear not!" Today the world is full of people living far below their best, and functioning far beneath their true level of efficiency, and the major cause of it is just fear - fear of the unknown, fear of the future, fear of ill health, fear of the world's opinion, fear of being left on the shelf, fear of growing old, fear of death. But if you in your own way have made the great discovery, if you know that your soul is greatly beloved, what is there left to fear? If God be for us, who can be against us? Certainly not life, cried the Apostle, and certainly not death! You are more than conquerors in your courage.

From Daniel we read, "His body also was like the beryl." Samuel Rutherford was a Scottish Covenanter who was thrown into prison. He was cold and hungry and in great doubt of ever coming out alive, but he wrote to a friend, "Jesus Christ came into my cell last night and every stone shone like a ruby." Jesus Christ is just waiting to come into your cell and then you will have courage to face all situations in your life for he will give you the courage you need.

The second result of knowing God is peace. "Oh man beloved, fear not; peace be with unto thee!" What a devouring thing worry is! There are few people who get through this world without suffering at one time or another from this commonest of all the maladies of the soul. There is a way out of worry into absolute release and freedom. Why worry, when one who loves you is in control? Where God comes, an army will with banners marches into garrison the citadel. God's fellowship is peace. A lasting peace and calm that cannot be described but must be explained to know what it truly is.

The third mark, the final distinguishing characteristic, of the life that it has found God is power. "Be strong, yea, be strong." And this is the heart of religion - not an intellectual discovery, but an experience of power; not something that we achieve, but something God puts into us. Jesus Christ gives us strength and power to do things we formally thought were impossible, power that we can only possess by actually coming to know God ourselves. People can tell us about this experience, but we can never fully appreciate

it until we have experienced it ourselves. Therefore, to know God is courage, and it is peace; but above all it is power. And I think that when I have bungled things and been defeated and made a sorry failure of my hopes, Christ does not come to me and say, you must try again! You must try harder; you must try as hard as ever you can - for there would be no gospel in that and it would only drive me deeper into despair. But Christ words are, "Get closer to God; and he will do it for you! Come closer to me, and my strength shall be yours."

Let us get to know God better and we can do this by getting to know Jesus Christ. Accept him into your life and become a true disciple with courage and peace and power beyond your knowing. "Oh man greatly beloved, fear not; Peace be unto thee; "Be strong, yea, be strong."

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 degree 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 20th 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 I 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 Gospel for the Age of Automation

Scripture: Romans 14:7-9, 13, 21, 15-1, 2, 5, 6

Text is chosen from Romans 14:17, "For the Kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit."

A new word has been born into our language in recent years. It is the word 'automation'. It refers to the automatic handling by machinery and electronic control of what used to be done by human hands and the human brain. We need to become familiar with the word automation. It will profoundly affect our lives. It will affect even more the lives of our children and grandchildren. The ultimate issue will depend upon how we think of God: as to whether we have an automatic, mechanical, technological God only, or the God whom Jesus described as our loving Father in heaven.

Let us consider automation in the factories. One of our leading glass works, for example, has 14 machines which make 90% of all the glass bulbs for all the electric lights in the United States, plus the bulbs for all the radio and TV tubes except the picture tube. Each machine, operated by one man, blows glass bulbs like a machine gun shoots bullets, at 1800 per minute. The machines work so fast that they cannot be kept busy all year round. So, in their spare time they make Christmas tree ornaments. Still, they do not have enough to do. I could go on with another example of automation in area in which I, myself am directly connected, but the point is, machines are today taking the place of human beings, doing more of the work and producing better quality products.

Many today would say that automation has not invaded the farm, but I believe this is false for very seldom do we see horses to do farm work anymore. They have been replaced with tractors. Perhaps the best example of automation is on the poultry farms. Somebody has said, "but you can't mechanize a hen." You'd be surprised. On some of the big poultry farms even the hens are so mechanized they have become a little more than units in our egg production lines. The chicken feed is carried past a long line of cages by endless chains, automatically stopped and started by time clocks. Water is piped to automatic watering devices. As eggs are laid, they roll onto a moving belt which delivers them to automated grading machines. Some egg lines are equipped with a counter for each hen. Any hen that fails to run up a good score is tapped for the meat market.

There are other examples of automation in different kinds of farming, all aimed at reducing labor costs and producing more in the same length of time. The Gospel for the age of automation will be the eternal gospel of Jesus Christ seeking to save men from emptiness and sin. And yet, it must plunge new spiritual depths and dare new frontiers as ministers to the human problems created by automation.

There are many problems connected with automation. Men being replaced with machines, men skills being reduced to practically nothing, goods being produced faster than they can be consumed, all of which

results in a problem for the worker. Thus, I believe the Christian Church can certainly help the individuals that are involved by automation.

First of all, we have a Christian doctrine of work. Man was made in the image of God, and part of his glory is to be able to work. Do you remember the great depression? Men, forced into idleness, often spent their days on the porch staring blankly at the horizon. The demoralizing factor was the feeling of not being needed. Without work, life was empty and mean. The results of the depression definitely left marks on men's lives that could not be erased. The feeling within a person who is healthy, able to work, wanting to work and being unable to find that work to support his family cannot be described but only felt by those who were a part of it.

To have a family and to be unable to support that family certainly is enough to leave an irrevocable mark on that man. This I believe will be just as true in the age of automation as it was in the depression. No one expects automation to bring back the poverty and hunger. But if men are denied the privilege of contributing something of themselves to the world, life loses its meaning, whether being rich or poor. This can mean only one thing. As toil becomes less and less necessary to the sustaining of life, we must find ways and means whereby men can give themselves to projects which still need their labor.

Christian faith has always exalted this aspect of work. The Christian concept of service is a special view of work. It is the investment of oneself of one's talents and energies for the sake of others. Christians have always held that the work in which men find true satisfaction is service. That will be no less true in the age of automation than it has been hitherto. The question will be not whether man have toil or not. It is whether we find ways to be of service to humanity. I assure you that no person is truly happy and successful unless somehow, he has found ways to be of service to humanity. For if we really are Christians the way we proclaim to be than we will be giving our lives in service to other human beings.

There is no joy in work or in pleasure apart from a personal, righteous, loving God. If he is only a technological automation God, with no heart of compassion, then we will have a cold, joyless, impersonal world, a world of stainless steel, but with no tenderness or affection. Then we would have to say indeed, "What has a man from all the toil and strain with which he toils beneath the sun?" But if God be the God of Jesus Christ, a loving heavenly Father who knoweth what we have need of before we ask him, then we can work eagerly and joyously, knowing that at the end of our striving we shall hear the words, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundations of the world."

Second, we have a Christian doctrine of leisure. A second phase of this problem has to do with the great increase in leisure time. A century ago, the average workweek was 70 hours. Today it is a little under 40. In several industries already, unions have indicated the desirability of a 35-hour or even a 30-hour week. Naturally I'm talking in general, and I realized that farmers and other people in business for themselves work, even today, close to 70 hours a week. But the majority of the people in this country fall into the 40-hour week or less. As a direct result of this shortened work week, spare time has already become the major

factor of man's waking life. Thousands of our fellow citizens regard spare time as an opportunity for new activities, for part time jobs, for education and study, for taking part in social and community projects. The Christian doctrine of leisure is not satisfied with this approach. Leisure used only as an opportunity to crowd more activity into the day is not really leisure at all. It's an illusion to believe that the faster we move the more we accomplish. In the Christian view, leisure is an opportunity for taking time to pause and think, to draw from the depths of life, a beauty and strength we otherwise lack. Of course, that's what all of us need to do, to take time to pause and thank and really start appreciating life and understanding the meaning of life.

I'm sure that everyone who has been really active and suddenly has a serious illness where he has to calm down will tell you that they had never really had the time to think about life and suddenly life takes a new meaning and purpose because they have seen it for the first time. It's unfortunate, it takes a serious illness to make us see this. As man's working day becomes less creative, his leisure hours must become more filled with creative activities. His leisure, on the other hand, may be the gateway to realms unknown, to all the treasures of literature, art, and even science itself. After all, man's creativeness lies in thought, it is by thought he reaches up to God; indeed, it is by thought that science itself has grown the deeper and the wider an individual's thought life is, the more his creativeness is preserved, and his personality enriched. Today it's rather easy getting into the old rut of sitting down in front of the TV and that takes care of one's leisure time. Books, art, and other literature go by the wayside because the entertainment is provided for us. In order to make this country and this world a better place in which to live we have to do more than look at the television set.

In Milan, tourists are taken to the little church of Santa Maria delle Grazie, where Leonardo DaVinci painted the 'Last Supper'. According to history, the great painter spent many hours in the cloister meditating. Some of the monks resented his seeming idleness. They wanted him to get on with the work. One day they remonstrated with him, but Leonardo answered, "When I pause the longest, I make the most telling strokes with my brush." The Christian doctrine of leisure holds that spare time is an opportunity for simpler living, for pruning the tree of life, and for choosing in an uncrowded and unhurried way what ends one will serve.

Thirdly, we have a Christian doctrine of consumership. As automation progresses, we shall increasingly be surrounded by an economy of abundance. Mass media will contain hidden persuadence, seeking to make us consume all the products coming off the production lines. In the age of automation, it is going to take a special kind of character to stand up to this presence, to resist these false images of success, to hold more exalted assumptions about life than those which will become common.

Biblical religion does not object to material progress. But it does object when possessions become the principal source of meaning in this life. This, I believe we are coming to today. Success apparently means to many the amount of material possessions we have acquired this of course is a very wrong assumption. Eventually, our physical wants may be supplied without need for toil, but we shall never have the option of getting along without righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. Today we stand at the beginning

of the age of automation, on the frontier, as it were, of the never-never land of unbelieving material abundance and wealth. I should like to recall to you something, which forgotten, would imperil our souls. "The Kingdom of God does not mean food and drink, but righteousness in peace and joy in the Holy Spirit." He who thus serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men. Let us then pursue what makes for peace and mutual upbuilding. Regardless of what happens we will be a part of it and we as individuals have to make the best out of the circumstances. Keeping God with you always will certainly help the situation.

The Little Things in Life

Scripture: Matthew 13:31-33, 14:14-21

Text is chosen from Matthew 13:31 & 32; “Jesus said, the Kingdom of Heaven is like a grain of mustard seed which a man took and sowed in his field; it is the smallest of all seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nest in its branches.

Few of us today escape the error of confusing size with significance. How many of us mistake quantity for quality! Our imaginations are so victimized by bigness that we are likely to think that bigness is equivalent to significance. We need to remind ourselves of the importance of the little things of life. We are constantly victimized by bigness.

Our banks claimed their millions in deposits. Our buildings, like the tower of Babel, must “reach into heaven” and “make us a name.” Every village pathetically passe, is eager to disfigure its beauty with factories. Every city, not hopelessly moribund, is ambitious to double its population. Meanwhile, our crass Chamber of Commerce is philosophes, ignore the leading fact that a bigger city does not therefore breed better people. Even the church brings forth most movements which flourished for a day like a green bay tree and then die, having printer’s ink for sap and being stricken by the blight of statistics. We have pretty much forgotten that the little things in life have their own significance.

The little things very often caught the attention of Jesus and occasioned his comment, the fall of a sparrow, the growth of a seed, the cry of need in a noisy crowd. A cup of cold water given in his name wins his praise. The widow’s mite does not go unnoticed. Significantly, Jesus spoke often of the infinite of the ‘little’ - the one talent, the lost coin, the kindness done unto “one of the least”. The little things in life that we very often overlook were important to Jesus and he emphasized them. One thinks of Jesus speaking about the mustard seed, so small in its beginnings, so large in its consequences. In the moral world, the mustard seed is the choice that is made by an individual. A little choice may have great consequences. Not just the great dramatic deeds of moral heroism possess significance, but the undivided choices of our daily life.

Indeed, the individual choice is the matter of central importance in the life of any person. Dante said, that “virtue is a habit of right choice.” Picture it if you will - a person makes a right choice and then another and still another. Right choice becomes a habit. The habit weaves something good into the pattern of life and we call it virtue. Dependability in the moral world is simply the habit of making right choices. It begins with a free decision when a person chooses something right, when he had the power to choose something wrong, and then does it again and again. It is these little things that build gigantic moral strength into the life of the world. Conversely if a person chooses wrong, when he has the power to choose right, he then finds it easier the next time to choose wrong when he has the power to choose right.

It is still easier to choose wrong the third time and the sense of shame begins to disappear. So, the habit of wrong choice becomes bad character. The cumulative consequence of the little choices is something big. The temptation, “do it just this once”, is seen to be a dangerous and terrible one, for it is the little things that build virtue or evil into the fabric and pattern of life. We might say that every decision is like coming to a crossroads when we must go one way or another. And if we go the right way we will move toward our desired destination, but if we go the wrong way we will go farther and farther away from it.

How great the power of choice in the moral world! Young people today, especially in college, have great temptations put to them every day. It really might only be a little thing but, done wrong over a number of times can become a major mark on your character. Perhaps our young people today feel that it is difficult to be different. (For, believe me because the majority is doing it, does not make it right.) Sure, it isn't easy to be different but, I really know and believe that if you will take Christ with you wherever you go and in whatever you do, he will help you to make those little decisions in your life that will really matter later. He will help you to be different, there isn't any question about it.

Secondly, little deeds of kindness go further than we can imagine. Shakespeare wrote in ‘The Merchant of Venice’: “how far that little candle throws its beams!” So shines a good deed in a naughty world. Most of us are in such a hurry nowadays that we do not take the time to show other people any kindness. Many of us are too concerned about our own selves and we have no concern for others. Naturally I'm talking in general, but it seems that everything must be done in a hurry, and we just gait ourselves and our families to this fast pace. Sometimes I wonder where we are going and what we think we are going to do. But definitely, one little act of kindness can mean much more to a person than most of us can possibly imagine.

Yes, you can also start a chain reaction of kindness, one good deed of kindness causes another. One good deed that shows goodwill will bring a response of goodwill. One good deed of love will bring a response of love. The power of a moral chain reaction is greater than we can imagine because God's blessing is upon it. The little unremembered acts of kindness and love are a power that we must never underestimate. It is the responsibility of Christians in their daily decisions, in their words, their thoughts, their purpose, their deeds, to gather up in these little things of life; the very quality of the spirit of Christ so that they make the world a brighter and finer place because of the good will that they have and after all, isn't this really our main purpose in living, to try to make the world a better place in which to live? And I believe we can do this through the spirit of Jesus Christ.

There is a little poem entitled Chain Reaction - it goes like this:

For want of a nail the shoe was lost,
for want of a shoe the horse was lost,
for want of a horse the writer was lost,
for want of a writer, the battle was lost,
for want of a battle, the kingdom was lost,

and all for the want of a horseshoe nail.

So, you see the little things in life do matter and so of the little acts of kindness we do can cause a chain reaction.

Thirdly, again in the spiritual world the little things of life are so very important. For instance, the way we are related to life and to our work is so much more important than we commonly understand. There are people who are doing right things in a wrong way. A wrong way of doing things is dangerous for mental and spiritual health. How important to be right with God! The Bible tells us to rejoice in the Lord. It tells us that the Lord that God loves a cheerful giver that is, a person who gives in the right spirit. It tells us to have courage and confidence and faith and enthusiasm and to rise above the constraints of law into the large liberty of God's world of love.

How we are related to the obligations of the Christian life is very important, although it may seem a small thing. Being a member of this church, important as it is, is but a symbol of your happy and full personal commitment to Christ as Lord and Savior. It is outward evidence of an inner spiritual loyalty. It is evidence that you are happily serving him and doing his will. But it is the spirit in which we do what we do that is important! Doing the right deed for the wrong reason may be the ultimate treason. I truly believe this is true throughout our earthly lives that if we do anything and do it in the right spirit it will benefit others and ourselves. However, if we are doing something for show because it is the right thing to do, because others are doing it, I'm afraid we ourselves gain very little from it and I'm sure others do likewise. And certainly, if we think we are fooling or kidding God, we ourselves are the ones we are kidding for truly God does know our innermost thoughts.

Lowell M Atkinson has related this story. "One time when I was the guest of a friend in British Columbia, we paused to look at the logs in the Fraser River, thousands and thousands of them. I said, "Is it true that a single log in a wrong position can cause a jam? And if a man releases that one log from its position the other logs will be freed and will then move on down the river?" He said, "Yes, it's true." A little thing - one log among so many thousand - but what great results for evil or good! One wrong decision can do so much harm; one good decision can do so much good, and I believe God in our lives can help us to make the right decisions.

Fourthly, a person's relation to his work is so very important. How many people in America today have a right relation to their work? Not as many, I'm sure, as we would like. For some it is drudgery and for others it is a perpetual holiday. To enter upon our work with eagerness and enthusiasm and a desire to be creative, to bring joy to our work, to have a right relationship to it, this is so important, although to many it seems a very little thing. I firmly believe that if a person is going to do something, he should put his whole heart and soul into it, give it everything you have. I believe if a thing is worth doing, it is worth doing right. Perhaps I am too much this way, but this is my belief, and this is the way I try to live my life and I believe it's the way God wants me to live my life.

Fifthly, for the Christian whose life centers in worship, how true it is that the many little moments of consecration and devotion have such eternal significance - the moments of prayer that become wonderful habits of devotion, the moments of worship and praise that becomes such a custom in your life that without self-consciousness you sing God's praises and lift your prayers and find the strength you need for daily living. Let us not underestimate any particular moment of devotion, for it has an importance far greater than anything we can comprehend.

It still remains true that no scientist has ever seen an atom. A new age is centered in the discovery of things so little they cannot even be seen. The power of a split atom defies all description. Let us suffice to say that the little things in life today have come into a significance that has nothing to do with size, and the energies that are being released from these tiny things have power that can be employed by man either to destroy the world or to give the world a new era of hope.

Let us pray to God it is the latter. But far greater than all the energies being released now from the mysterious universe in the realm of physics, are the energies that can be released into the world through spiritual chain reaction as we give our attention to the little things in life. Let Jesus Christ guide and direct your life and let us pray that others may come to know him as their personal Lord and Savior.

What Do We Really Need?

Scripture: Philippians 4:4-20

Text is chosen from Philippians 4:19, "And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Jesus Christ."

What do we really need in life? Do we need a new house, a new car, new clothes, more than enough food to eat? Or is there are more to our needs than material things? Perhaps we will be able to answer these questions by the time we finish our discussion this morning.

We are constantly bombarded with attempts to create in our minds an image of what we really need. Not long ago, Edwin W. Ebel, marketing director of General Foods, made a speech in which he mentioned advertising's impact on the average urban American household. He suggested we take a look at John and Mary who live in the New York area. On a typical day John and Mary would read newspapers which contained 510 display ads. John would catch a bus to the railroad station on which there would be 23 ads seeking to catch his eye. In the railroad car he would see 41 advertising cards and along the way he would view 40 posters. Walking through Grand Central terminal to catch the subway there would be 63 more posters and on the subway 49 cards. When John and Mary turned on the radio for short periods during the day they would hear 53 commercials either spoken or sung. While Mary managed to look through two magazines, she would be confronted by 447 more ads. If the children looked at two comic books, they would see 50 ads. Turning on the television in the evening the family would be exposed to 64 commercials. All together in a 15-hour day the family was bombarded by a total of 1340 advertisements.

I would expect that we here in the country would be exposed to somewhat less advertising, but the point is all of us are constantly bombarded by advertising of material items, items to make our living easier and supposedly happier. All this tremendous emphasis upon material needs tends to make us forget that our greatest needs are not material at all. We have spiritual needs which must be met if we are to live a good life you will notice that there is very little advertising to fill our spiritual needs.

99% of all advertising is concerned with material needs. This is where we American people are wrong. We desperately need to advertise our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ and what he can do for our spiritual needs. That's what is wrong with us so called Christians, we are very lax in our witnessing and even though we are Christian we constantly need to be reminded of our spiritual growth. We need to remember what Jesus said in Matthew 4:4; "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God." Ultimately, we must turn to God as the resource for our needs.

This was what the Apostle Paul saw as he wrote from a jail cell to the church he had started in Philippi. At the close of his letter he said, "My God will supply all that you need from his glorious resources in Jesus Christ." These are strange words of assurance to come out of a jail cell where the simplest of physical needs

are usually not adequately provided for. Possibly it takes the deprivation of a jail cell to get a perspective on what ones needs really are. I know it is difficult for us to see and understand what our real needs are when materially we have everything we need, in fact most of us have much more than we really need. It becomes difficult when everything seems to be going OK in our lives without the seeming presence of God in our lives. Why do we need to turn to God? Why do we need to support a church? Why do we need to believe in Jesus Christ? Why do we have to go through all that junk when we are happy and have everything we need without it?

These are very good questions that deserve an answer. At this point I would like to say that perhaps you seem happy but actually unless you have God with you, you aren't happy, and you will find this out when a tragedy happens in your life. You will have nothing at all to rely on. Life will have no meaning and purpose and you will start wondering what life is all about. If you haven't had this experience yet, you will have, for we all come to the time when we need something more than food and drink to rely on. Most of us have not really been deprived of anything and so perhaps we cannot understand Paul's position. But we do have needs that perhaps are not so plain and visible as our physical needs.

Undoubtedly the greatest need of men both in Paul's day and in ours is for a real purpose in life. Of course, we need food, clothing, and shelter to keep our physical bodies alive, but why bother unless there is a purpose to living? God, our Creator, has set this hunger for purpose and meaning in our hearts. It is Christ who supplies the answer for which we search. In Christ we see that man is made for love. It is love which lies at the center of Jesus is life. It is love which makes his life shine down through the darkness of the centuries. Here in Jesus, we see life with a purpose - life with a tremendous meaning.

During a prison riot some years ago a group of local citizens appealed to the prisoners to lay down their weapons and release their hostages. Suddenly, the leader, an unusually vicious criminal, said with tears, "I've done a lot of bad things-evil things. My only wish is that sometimes I might do a good thing; like giving my eyes so that a blind child might see, or my body so that men could understand disease better. Isn't there some way I could do something good?" In the end God always makes sure that some good comes out of every situation. I really and truly believe this.

Our purpose here upon earth is to become loving and to express this love in all our relations with others. It is this hunger for doing something meaningful, good, and loving that must be satisfied if we are to truly live. Without the satisfaction of this need in our lives we do not fulfill our true humanity.

T.H. Huxley, the English biologist, once said, "The sense of uselessness is the severest shock that any organism can sustain." I know it is true that we all need to feel needed and useful. Once we find a real purpose for life and living, we will fulfill many of our other needs in life.

Another basic need of man is power to accomplish. The sense of purpose must be geared to action. Paul felt this urgent need before he came to know Jesus Christ. Describing his condition, Paul wrote the church at

Rome: "I often find that I have the will to do good, but not the power. That is, I do not accomplish the good I set out to do, and the evil I do not really want to do, honestly I find I am always doing."

Paul knew what was good but lacked the power of accomplishment. I think this is true with most of us. We know what it is good and right but somehow is easier to do the opposite. We lack the power of actually doing what is right and good. John Stuart Mill, in describing the results of the stern education he had received from his father, said, "if I had a rudder, but no sail."

Many of us have a good guide. We know what we should do but we just don't seem to have the power to keep going the right way. We need something more than high ideals and good intentions. We need the power to do. And this is something that Paul knew God could supply his friends at Philippi from the glorious resources in Jesus Christ. Paul knew that the resurrected and living Christ could dwell within men in such a way that they were empowered to fulfill their purpose in life.

The latter part of Paul's letter to the Philippians is a thank you note, expressing appreciation to the church for having sent one of their members some distance to him with gifts. Notice, however, that the thing for which Paul was deeply appreciative was not the physical gifts, but the love and thoughtfulness behind the gifts. His friends cared about him. Friendship is a spiritual thing-it meets a need which cannot be filled by the accumulating of nationally advertised brand products. This loving concern was a gift which had come to Paul and the church at Philippi because of God's gift to them of Jesus Christ. It was because of their common loyalty to Christ that they shared this deep concern for one another. It is the gift that Christ can bring to life that fulfill our deepest needs.

Third, man has need to endure. There seems to be a built in us an instinct to preserve our physical bodies. Great studies are being made these days to increase our physical endurance. But what of our spirits? They, too, must endure. In Matthew 10:22; Jesus said, "He who endures to the end will be saved." The power to endure comes from the great resources of God. It comes from close and loving associations with Christ who endured the cross rather than forsake his Father's will.

I doubt if any of us will really have this much power to endure as Christ did, but we certainly need more than most of us exhibit. I believe that Christ can give us this power if we accept him into our lives. What do we really need? Well, there are lots of things we think we need. The pressures are constantly upon us to accumulate more and more material possessions. But there are others needs in our lives which are much more fundamental. They are definitely needs of the spirit.

We need a consuming purpose in life. We need the power to accomplish that purpose. We need the ability to endure to the end in abiding by that purpose. Paul said to the Philippians, "I know how to be abound and I know how to abound." Different as are the conditions of excessive wealth and bitter poverty, the mastery of both is a matter of learning one lesson, that of the dominance of the inner life. If we give preeminence to the things of the spirit, wealth will not debilitate us, nor poverty degrade us. Externals cannot ruin the

soul of him who lives the life of the spirit. The God whose strength is around our weakness will help us overcome the temptations both of adversity and of prosperity.

Paul's life is evidence that it is possible to know how to abase and how to abound. Sometimes these needs of the spirit are lost from consciousness in the roar of the advertising hucksters hawking their wares. But in our hearts, we know that these needs are desperately important. They must be met. Without some kind of resource to meet these needs, life falls apart. Jesus Christ is the resource we need. This is what Christians know and this is what we believe. Paul truly says, "My God will supply all that you need from his glorious resources in Christ Jesus.

Why The Church

Scripture: 1 Peter 2:1-10

Text is from 1 Peter 3:15; “In your hearts reverence Christ is Lord. Always be prepared to make a defense to anyone who calls you to account for the hope that is within you yet do it with gentleness and reverence.”

Why does this church stand here? What is its function in the community? Is it simply an architectural monument? Is it a place mainly useful for marrying and burying? Why is it here? A full answer to these questions would take a long time, but I suggest three reasons for the presence of a church in any community.

First of all, it stands for worship. I make bold to state that the man who does not carve out a regular place in his life for the worship of Almighty God is not living as God intends him to live. I know we hear the arguments that you can worship God wherever you are whether it be in a field, plowing; woods, hunting; or stream, fishing. It is true you can worship God wherever you are, but I also believe if you really want to worship God and are really a Christian you will be in church, God’s house, on Sunday morning. There is no doubt in my mind. Ideally all our life should be worship, an offering of our work, our leisure, our love, our talents to God. So, we prepare for that life eternity when the ideal should be fulfilled, and from Revelation 22:3, we read, “his servants shall worship him; They shall see him face to face.” but that ideal will not even be approximated in this life unless, systematically and thoughtfully, regular periods are carved out of our busy lives for the purpose of worship.

When I worship, I stand in the presence of the all-holy, the all-loving, the all-powerful, the Father who creates me, the Son who redeemed me and the Holy Spirit who satisfied me. I do not worship in order to get something out of God - I worship him that he may have a chance to do with me what he will. I look at him, and he looks at me.

Many of us so called Christians do not know why we worship or what a worship service is for ourselves. I’m sure there would be more of us worshipping our Father each Sunday morning. It seems too bad when we get so busy in our lives that we cannot take the minimum of one hour per week to worship God. Again, I go back to the statement that we have not experienced Christ in our lives and therefore cannot place the importance on the things that really matter. We have not learned to put God first in our lives and therefore let other minor things take his place.

Douglas Horton relates the hearing of the noise of drums as he passed a Temple in India. He asked what it meant and was told that the drums were beaten every day at that time. The noise was to wake up their God that the people might worship him. We do not worship that kind of a God. We worship a God “who neither slumber nor sleeps”; who is mindful of our going out in our coming in, and invites us through Christ with the words, “Come unto me, all Ye that are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” Many have come to church

and found that promise is not vain and, helping in the fulfillment of it is one of the glories of this house.

Donald Cogan has this to say, “Nearly six years in Yorkshire, traveling up and down its lovely dales and woods, have taught me much about sheep, about shepherds and about sheepdogs. How almost unbelievably intelligent those dogs are! How responsive to the slightest whistle of the Shepherd! How gentle in their contacts with the sheep! What is it that makes them all like that? I do not know. But I note that they spend a great deal of time sitting at the shepherd’s feet and looking into his face.” I do not think I need to apply the picture for all of us could surely do a little sitting at our Master’s feet. Getting back to our text. “Hold the Lord Christ in reverence in your hearts. Be always ready with your defense whenever you are called to account for the hope that is in you; but make that defense with modesty and respect.”

Such a relationship to Christ and such an attitude to men begins with an act of commitment to our Lord, which in turn leads to an attitude of daily discipleship. All this is fed and stimulated by worship, meaningful and purposeful worship. This building is here largely because men in the past met God in Christ. As he met them or they met him, they found a mystery about him and about his person that to them was the mystery of the divine. They found in him a power that could raise the dead, and it was the power of God. They found in him an inexpressible beauty that they recognized to be the beauty of holiness, and they found above all a goodness and a love that was the very love and goodness of God himself. They had to do something, they had to say something. They built buildings like this one to his honor and glory, they tried to make the building a sign and symbol of what they believed about him, and to use it in order to bring their lives more nearly into conformity with his life, so that through them his light might shine in the world. We certainly need this same kind of spirit today to keep this church operating, alive, active, a living witness of Christ to all people that surrounds this area. We need to let others know that our Christ and our Lord does matter to us, in fact, that he is the most important thing in our lives.

Second, the presence of this church in the community stands for study. There are many Christians who are tongue-tied simply because they don’t know the faith. They are not ready to give an answer, “to account for the hope that is in them;” nor will they be, until they have a firmer, surer foundation of knowledge. Of course, this knowledge comes from constant study of God’s word, the Bible, and from personally knowing our God. Knowledge is, broadly speaking, of two kinds.

First, there is knowledge of the facts. It is here that so many of us are deficient. What is the faith? Why do we believe that Jesus lived, died, rose again? Why do we believe in an afterlife? Why are we Anglicans, or Baptists, or Congregationalists or whatever we are? How many of us really know why we are what we are? Very few. We have nothing to fear in examining the foundations of our belief. But we shall never be able to give a reason if we do not take the trouble to learn the facts.

Second, there is knowledge of a person. It is possible to take a degree in Christian theology without being a Christian; to know the facts without knowing the person of Christ, just as it is possible to know much about the Queen of England without ever having met her. Christianity basically is a friendship with the Lord

Christ. But I submit to you, that it will not take you very long to find this out whether or not a person has personally met his Lord, for if he hasn't, he will have no enthusiasm for the Lord's work, anything he does for God will just become routine and will be just a job to him. Petty things pertaining to church ritual, etc., will become major to him and generally his life will be empty with little substance, little to give to others and uninteresting please.

But both kinds of knowledge are called for, if we are to be equipped to obey the injunction of our text. And that calls for the devotion of time, prayer and thought to study, and particularly, just study of the Bible. This is part of the cost of our discipleship. Be ready with your defense. And I'll tell you one other thing and that is that you will not be ashamed of what you believe and when others ask, you will be able to give them an answer from within your heart. You will not be convinced easily that what you believe is false or that you have been wrong about things because God has guided you down the path that leads to his Kingdom. Ask God to help you understand as you read his word and believe me, he will help you.

This is a poem entitled, "This is My Church".

This is my Church - I love it's every stone.

I love its family - is it not my own?

It eases loads I could not bear alone.

This is my Church.

This is my Church - the dwelling of my Lord,
eternal fountain of his living word,
where those who love him dwell in full accord.

This is my Church - this is my Church,
it must attain its goal of giving food to every famished soul,
of helping blind to see - the sick made whole.

This is my Church.

This is my Church - I must give earnest heed,
to its great programs and it's every need,
else I must feel that I had failed indeed.

My Church - Christ's Church

Third, another reason for the presence of the church here in this community is that it stands for evangelism. We are surrounded on all sides by puzzled people, people who are perplexed by the problems of pain and of death and of fear. Many of us have not really accepted Jesus Christ into our lives as our personal Lord and Savior. Perhaps we lead good lives and come to church, but we still have not experienced Christ. We are not reborn Christians. For this the Church of God exist - to show forth the life and love of God, and to bring men and women within its radiance. God has rescued those of us who have accepted Jesus Christ into our lives in order that we may rescue them. We, like John the Baptist, are to finger-pointing men to "the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world."

There is a poem entitled, 'Evangelism Needed'.
Where the sun shines in the street,
there are very many feet,
seeking God all unaware, that their hasting is a prayer.
Perhaps the feet would think it odd,
(who think they are on business bent)
if someone went and told them: "you are seeking God."

What makes a church great? A great church will always be a congregation of true worshippers. The church is first and foremost a congregation of people gathered together to worship God. A great church is also a community of friends. Jesus said, a new commandment I give unto you that you love one another. A great church is also a college for training disciples. No church can ever dissolve its responsibility unless it is a school. A great church is a core of witnesses.

Henry Drummond once said, "Christianity does not need more advocates, it needs more witnesses." Worship: study: evangelism. There are other reasons for the existence of this church, but these come pretty near the top in priority. These are reasons for the existence of any church in a community, at least they should be the reasons. I have often said that a church needs to be more than a social organization. A church has to have something to hold its members together under one head and that central head is Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Let us remember there are reasons for the existence of this church here in South Harpersfield; and let us consider these reasons when we make decisions that affect this church. And then ask yourselves these questions. Do I really believe this is why my church exists and am I helping to maintain the church for these reasons?

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.

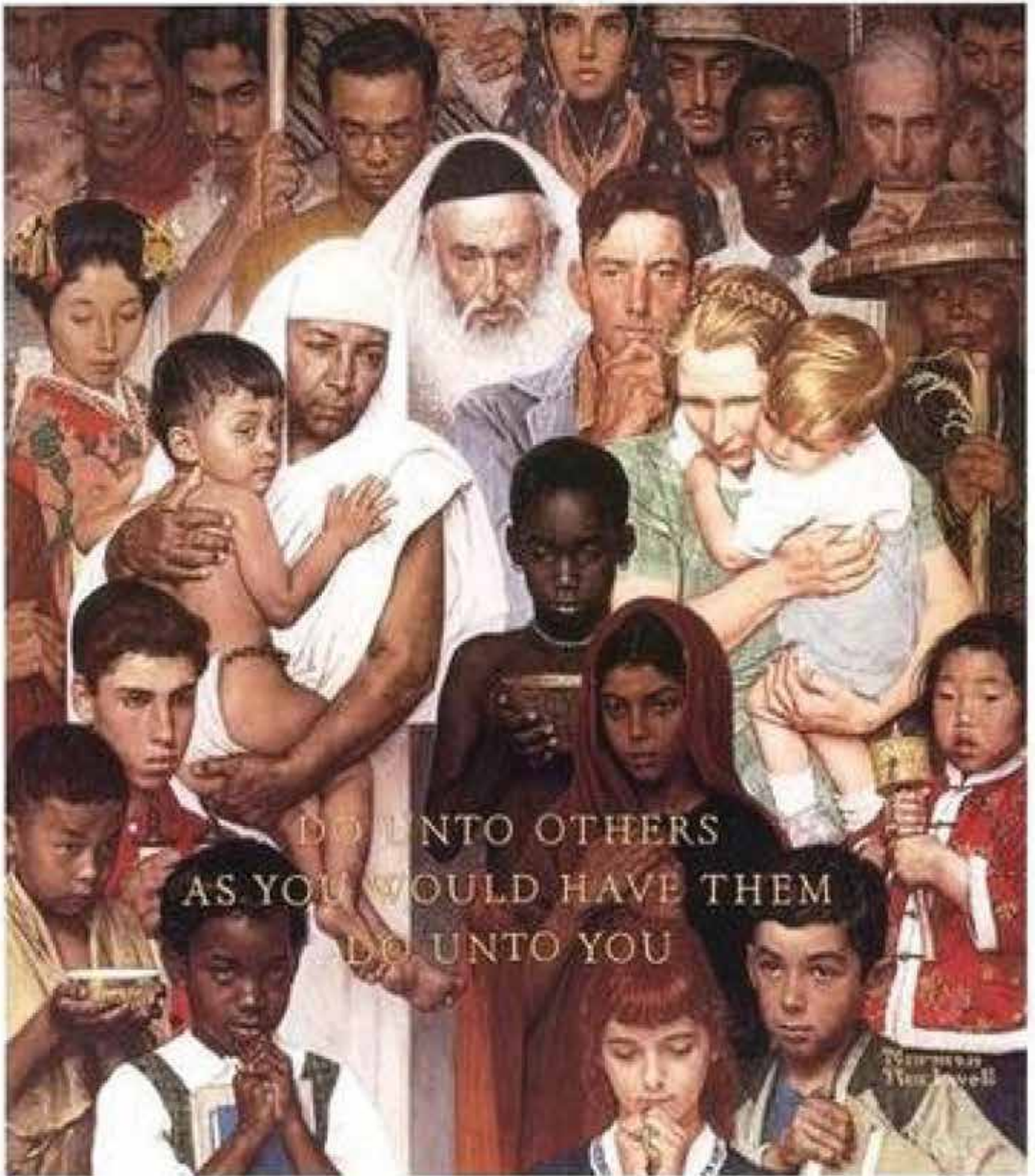


Millions of us suffer needlessly from addiction & depression. The reasons for this are many. In this program we emphasize the 12 step method of Recovery, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, and Meditation techniques to overcome difficulties. We also rely on God's grace to help you be lifted from your dilemma. 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"