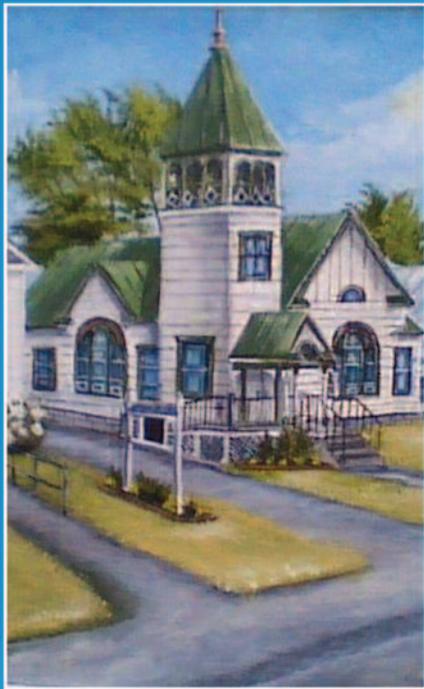


# **Braman**

*Foundation of Charities*



Central Bridge  
United Methodist Church

## The Sermons of Richard W. Braman Vol. 3

“

Love Thy Neighbor

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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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## **Complete Baptism**

### **Scripture: Luke 19:1-10**

A Methodist minister, when conducting a revival, was challenged by a leading citizen generally known as the Squire. The Squire dared the minister to preach on a text he would give him. He gave the minister one of these impossible texts, with difficult proper names and little else, but the preacher handled that matter with such sincerity and such earnestness and with such agility of intelligence that the Squire remained to listen with deep seriousness and that very night was converted to Christ. A little later it was decided that there would be a general baptism of all those who were converted, and since it was a Baptist community it was decided to have the baptism by immersion in the river. On the day of the baptism the Squire himself came down to be baptized. As he was about to walk into the water, he took his pocketbook out of his jacket and handed it to his wife. But the minister saw it and said, "Not a bit of it Squire Conrad. If this minister of the Gospel baptizes you today, he baptizes pocketbook and all." And this is the way it was done. He was baptized "pocketbook and all."

Baptism symbolizes the cleansing, renewing, and revealing grace of God. It signifies a new life in Christ. In the case of children being baptized it signifies the promise of the parents and the church to raise the child in Christian teachings and beliefs. How completely are we baptized? We think of the head as being baptized. The life of the mind must be baptized and brought into the service of Jesus Christ. If we should always feed our minds with things that are good and true and right so that our minds would always give glory to Christ, how wonderful it would be.

It is not possible for one part of our lives to be consecrated to Jesus Christ without the others. We have to give our hearts, our minds and our souls to Christ. He requires all of us.

Again, how wonderful if we could baptize our hearts. If our emotions and our enthusiasm could be dedicated to Jesus Christ, we would serve a deep need in the Christian church. Very often we have the form of loyalty to Christ without enthusiasm. We have activity but our heart is not in it. Quite often our outward acts are acts of show – we do something because it is expected of us. Sometimes we wonder why things we attempt, flop. They flop because we do not put our heart into them, because we don't have the enthusiasm within us to do a good job. This is true in our church too. If we do something in our church because we feel it is our duty, because others will criticize us and not because we get joy from doing it, joy

from serving Christ then it will definitely fail.

It certainly will not last and will soon fade away. The heart must be baptized too, so that when we serve Christ and the church, we serve with enthusiasm. We love Christ because he first loved us. We give ourselves to him heartily, because our heart is in it. We need to baptize our hearts. Once Jesus Christ comes into our hearts, we will want to serve him. There will be no stopping us regardless of the obstacles that confront us. Once that happens, our hearts will then be baptized.

For people to have talents and not to dedicate them to Jesus Christ, to have hands that are able to do things well, able to serve efficiently, and then not give these talents to the service of the church – this is tragic both for the individual and for the church.

How many things we can do with our hands. Actually our hands are very important in the serving of others. We say that we can give a helping hand to those in need. With our hands we can play the piano or organ. Perhaps we can bake a cake or pie for the church supper. We can drive a car to help take the Youth Fellowship somewhere or to drive a neighbor to church on Sunday. With our hands we can write a note of encouragement to someone who is in trouble. But if an individual has talents and hands and does nothing with them, it certainly is a waste of everyone's time including God, for God has given us all talents that can be used and he expects us to use them to help his church, our church.

But we can't stop here, can we? We must include something else, something that often occupied the mind of Christ. We have to baptize not only the head and the heart and the hand, but we have to baptize the pocketbook as well.

And now we are ready for our text. Taken from Luke 19:10, "For the Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which is lost." If you read the verse out of context, you would say that it does not have anything to do with money. But if you read it in context, you realize it has everything to do with money. For this belongs to the story of Zacchaeus and it tells us something about the purpose, the evangelistic purpose of Jesus, who has come to seek and to save that which was lost. Has he come to save the head, the heart, and the hand? Of course! But he has come to save the pocketbook also. In order to save, Christ seeks not only the person, but also the purse. This is the very heart of the story of Zacchaeus – what he did about his money. His money was an obstacle, not an opportunity. His ill-gained wealth blocked his way to his true life. It lead him astray in ways of selfishness, unconcern and dishonestly.

The wonderful thing about the purse is that it can help you be a better Christian. It can extend all your powers. Your money can travel for you all around the world and do good. It can go where you do not have time to go personally. It can serve people you will never even be able to meet. It will serve a variety of causes although you could not possibly have time, strength or energy to deal personally with all of them. Your money will do so much for you. It will extend your enthusiasm. It will extend what you know and how you feel and your passion to serve. It will become an instrument of God's holy purpose if you give it a chance, by dedicating it to Christ.

Jesus said, "For where your treasure is there will be your heart." He tells us that as you place your treasure so you place your enthusiasm. Your use of money opens the way of opportunity for your heart. Your use of money may lead you into a good life or into a bad life, into a life of service or into a life of hard selfishness.

It is not a question of how much treasure you have, it is a question of where you place the treasure you do have, what use you make of it, because the enthusiasms of the heart are going to follow your treasure. Jesus was very much interested in what people did with the golden opportunity.

Why do we give our money? For one thing, Jesus is inviting us to the way of faith. We are asked to put our faith in God and we are asked to believe in the Kingdom of God. It is because you believe in it that you want to invest in it. If you believe in a business enterprise, then you want to invest in it. And if you believe strongly enough that this business is really going to grow and expand and make money, then you will want to invest a lot of money in it. This matter of belief is very important to our use of money. And if you believe the Christian church is the hope of the world and that the world is desperately in need of what the Christian church has to give, then you will want to invest strongly in the Christian church. If a person does not believe in the church, of course, he will not care about investing anything in it. Your pledge reveals your faith.

How shall we give? Christian giving is giving in the spirit of love to God. It is a loving response to his gracious gospel.

The story is told of a lady who went to an auction and bought one of those surprise bags which do not reveal what is in the bag. She bid \$2.50 was given the bag, but in it found nothing but stubs of a checkbook. She was about to throw it away when she thought, "no, I'll take it home and read the stubs." She did read

those check stubs, and the story of a life began to unfold before her. She read of money spent on food and clothing, of money spent on the theatre, of money spent on illness, on college, on travel, on vacation. A life unfolded before her. The more she read the stubs the more thrilling it all became because a life story was being told by a person's use of money. A story is being told about you and me by our use of money. God is reading that story everyday. What does he want of us, and what does he think of us? What he wants of us is that we should give worshipfully in the spirit of love. God loves a cheerful giver. He seeks out of our love and rejoices in the glad giver. How should we give? In the spirit of happy love, praising the Savior who gave himself in love for us.

What shall we give? Many believe that the Bible gives us as a guide the standard of tithing. This is giving the first tenth of your income to God. The only people I ever heard object to tithing either theoretically or practically are the people who do not do it.

It is a great thing for many reasons. For one thing it is intelligent. It is planned giving. You are setting aside a reasoned proportion of your income for the best investment in the world – the investment in the Kingdom of God. You are giving regularly and sensibly to an incorruptible investment. If you set aside an intelligent proportion of your income to God, you always have money to give to the most worthwhile cause in the world. Therefore you have a sense of worth all of your life. You may not be rich toward men, but you are rich toward God. You are always being involved in something greatly worthwhile. Because your enthusiasm follows your treasures, because ‘where your treasure is, your heart will be also’, therefore you enjoy a wonderful rewarding sense of worth. You belong to the world of the future, that world of the Kingdom of God where God's rule is all in all and where your contribution strengthens the deathless hope of mankind. Real giving is real living.

The end of the story of the Squire is interesting too. Twenty-five years later the Squire attended a church service where the Rev. Mr. Mare was serving as guest preacher. A new church had been built. The raising of the money had been something of a problem. People had subscribed all the money they thought they could subscribe, but it was not enough. At the worship service, it was announced that there was still needed \$350.00. The Squire stood up and said, “the man who preached to us today is the man who first taught me that I must be baptized pocketbook and all. Before the service began I had given all I could possibly give to this new church. At least I thought so. But because I was baptized pocketbook and

all, I am going to complete this building fund right now! And he did. (Page 284 of 1964 Manual)

Let God baptize you completely – pocketbook and all, so that you can contribute to the building of his Kingdom on this earth.

## **Draw Near With Faith**

### **Hebrews 10:11-25**

We gather at the Lord's Table at our Lord's invitation. Communion should be a conscience experience of the presence of God and not just an observance. Today I should like to say a few words about a phrase that is found in the invitation – the phrase, “draw near with faith”.

We remember that the sacrament of Holy Communion is the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. One has certain questions in one's mind when invited to a great dinner, especially if one is to meet a distinguished person – and we definitely do meet a distinguished person if we come to his table in the right spirit. We wonder how we should behave, what we would say, in what spirit we would come to that dinner? I think that a Christian might very well search out his own spirit as he comes at the invitation of Jesus Christ to the table of the Lord. How are we to feel and what are we to think; in what manner of spirit are we to approach our living Lord, Jesus Christ, who is the host of this meal? The answer is given in this phrase of the invitation; “draw near with faith”.

First, certainly we do not draw near with pride, as if we had made a mental calculation of all the good things that we have done in the past several weeks, and decided that we have a credit balance. For regardless of how many good things we have done in our lives, Jesus Christ says that we cannot be saved by good works alone. We don't come to the table of our Lord with pride, as if we were doing something for him. The best that we can do for him is as nothing compared to what he has done for us. The Christian religion is central in this one great fact – that the great things in life have been done for us by Jesus Christ. They are not the things that we are able to do for him.

We should “draw near” to our Lord's table with a feeling of humbleness, with a feeling of thankfulness with a feeling of remembrance. We should remember that God has sacrificed his only son so that our sins could be forgiven, so that we might live.

Often when we hear these familiar words, “this do in remembrance of me”, we think that they mean remembering the Christ who walked for a few years upon the face of the earth centuries ago and gathered around him a band of disciples to be the foundation of the church. Now that event in itself is greatly to be cherished in

our thoughts and in our memories. Then it was, that God moved mightily among us.

But we miss the deeper meaning if we let this be the whole memory. The fact of it is, every one of us have his own experience to remember about Christ. It may be the loving word of one who first told about him. It may be some great moment of fellowship when we were especially close to those who loved him, too. It may be some mystic moment never to be forgotten when Christ became so real to us that from then on life moved to a new level. All of these things together are a part of remembering Christ. Who could help being thankful?

I should like us to see that remembering Christ returns us to a very personal experience. The only kind of devotion we can give to him comes from a personal decision. No man can make that decision for you. It is one of the few things that cannot be done by a majority vote. You simply cannot carry your faith in another person's name. Christ becomes real only by your own personal decision. This is a wonderful hour in which to make that decision which is your heart to make. We should think of these things and ask God to forgive us. We do not draw near with pride for we really have nothing to be proud of.

Nor do we 'draw near' with dread. Our spirit is not the spirit of complete self-abasement. Some people will probably be disappointed when I say this. Recently at a dinner of psychiatrists and ministers the point was made again and again, that in our day people seem to want to punish themselves to ease the sense of guilt. And, perhaps you want me to say that you must punish yourself and come in a feeling of self-abasement; to heap metaphor upon metaphor in describing how unworthy you are. But you will not hear that from me. For what the Bible tells us is not to come with dread or self-abasement but with faith.

By punishing ourselves for something we have done wrong, we apparently feel that others will feel sorry for us and actually forget what we did wrong. Perhaps we feel that God will forgive us more quickly or overlook what we have done.

As we examine our own lives, we will find that we are unworthy to eat at the same table with our Lord. However, we need to realize that Christ knows we are human, that we do make mistakes. The important thing for us to recognize is what our mistakes are, admit them to God and ask him to forgive us. Because of God's grace and His love for us we can eat with Him and he does invite us to his table.

We need to have a feeling of confidence within us that God will forgive us, God will make us clean and we will be right with him. We should realize that partaking of the Holy Communion is the beginning of a new life in Christ; life that will reach out to those around you in need and a life that will fulfill the desires and wishes and will of God.

We have to have faith in Jesus Christ; that he will help guide and direct our lives; that he will be there beside us when the going gets rough. He will be there for us to lean on when we need someone. We all have things that happen in our lives where we need this divine comfort, strength and faith – tragedies happen to us, loved ones pass on and we cannot understand why.

God will comfort us and help us to reconcile ourselves. We ‘draw near with faith’. It means that we are reminded of our great heritage, as having been created by God, and made for him. It means we come at his invitation and therefore we come with confidence – not because of anything we have done, but because we have been able to hear his gracious call.

Come, with the comfort of his love;  
Come, with the sense of his grace;  
Come, with the knowledge of his wisdom;  
Come, with the sureness of his power;  
Come, with the joy of his presence;  
Come, with the hope of his promises;  
Come, and partake of his sacrament.

## **Give Him Room**

### **Luke 2: 1-7**

Test is taken from Luke 2:1-7. “There is no room for them in the inn.”

No Room! The Lord was crowded out. And I suggest that this incident at the birth of our Savior is symbolic of the tragedy of the whole of his life, and the continued tragedy of our relationship to him today. For many of us have no room for Jesus Christ in our lives. They are filled with too many other activities and things that occupy our time. He has been excluded from the central place. He has been hustled into the outer courts. No room has been offered him in this inn. He was crowded out! And I further suggest that the only in place in which he can make his home today is the inn of the soul, the one of the most tender and gracious of our hymns, “O make our hearts thy dwelling place” and that is just what the Lord is willing to and waiting to do. “Oh make our hearts thine inn.” But when he moves toward us he finds the inn already occupied. There is no room for him and he is relegated to the cold and grudging shelter on the outside of our lives. He is crowded out.

I think we all see clearly that Holman Hunt’s great picture, “The Light of the World,” depicts an ever-recurring spiritual tragedy. You remember the picture. The Lord stands outside the door, at night, among chilling dews and beneath the cold light of the moon, and he is knocking, knocking. And the door has been so long closed that weeds have clambered about it and even the very flowers have become obstructive to his entrance. And his is knocking, knocking! But there is no opening! What is happening on the other side of the door I cannot tell, but clearly there is no room for him in the inn.

The crowded inn becomes an eternal parable of the human soul. Therefore in that everlasting present tense, why was there, - why is there – no room in the inn for the Christ Child who is at it’s doors?

Now what do we offer that Lord in place of the room in the inn?

We build him stately material temples. We expend boundless treasure in their erection. How much money is spent for new church buildings each year by thousands of congregations across this land of ours? Then after the building has been built, we become so engrossed in how we are going to pay for them that we loose sight of the reason why the building was erected in the first place. Sometimes in

those large and beautiful temples that are built, the true word of God is not taught because the people have become so taken up in the modern day theology and beliefs that they have forgotten how to really worship God. The Lord of glory seeks the warm inn of the soul and we offer him a manger of stone.

Or in place of the home, which he seeks, we spend infinite pains in designing dainty and picturesque ceremonials. We invest an elaborate and impressive symbolism. We engage the ministry of noble music for the expression of our praise, and we sing the fragrant ceaser for the expression of our prayer. Or perhaps we discard the color and the glow. We banish everything that is elaborate and ornate. We go to all kinds of extremes in our worship services hoping that God will be with us, hoping that we will be able to attract Him and believing that our way of worship is the only way that God listens to.

But whether our ceremony be one or the other, whether it be laden with Roman Catholic profession, or lean with the Quaker simplicity, whether it be bewitchingly poetic or bold or severe, the soul virtually says to the Lord, "Here is a ritualistic house I have built for thee, O Christ! Take up thine abode in the dwelling which I have provided." Many of us believe the worship service should follow a very ritualistic form and certain words have to be spoken and certain actions have to take place to worship our Lord. Some kind of order is necessary in our worship service but I believe that God will hear us whether we are kneeling, sitting, standing or lying down. The important thing, I believe is that we have truly taken Christ into our lives and that we worship him because as Christians we want to worship him not because everyone else is doing it or because it's the right thing for me to do. If the soul would only listen, it would hear the Lord's reply. "My son, give me their hearts." He seeks the inn of the soul; we offer him a ritualistic manger.

Or once again we build a massive house of a stately creed. The building is solid and comprehensive. All its parts are firm and well defined, and they are mortised with passionate zeal and devotion.

We can repeat the Apostle's Creed a dozen times a day. We can know this creed backward and forwards. We can know its exact meaning (don't get me wrong as Christians we should know the apostle's creed.) But if we do not believe the creed with our hearts, minds and souls then the word are meaningless and useless. It's like coming to church each Sunday because we want to impress someone, which actually doesn't make us Christians. Accepting Jesus Christ into our heart as our Lord and Savior makes us Christians. At least this is the first step. After the first

step the other requirements of a Christian will follow.

One dark night a young soldier posted at a sentry box, before the barracks heard the hoof-beats of his captain's horse. He went quickly out and offered his salute, and then stood there like a marble statue until the captain called out, "what good is a salute on a dark night? Open the gate, so that I can ride in!" Of what use to our Master are all the honors we pay him at this Christmas season if we do not give his entrance into our hearts?

He seeks not our creedal statements but our personal faith. He solicits not our creed but our person, not our words but our hearts.

Let us now look even more closely at the kind of entertainment that the Lord desires and let me quote for our guidance the word of the Apostle Paul. "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God," This is the house our Redeemer seeks, the wonderful inn of the soul. I would like to look into that inn, for it has many rooms, housing many varied interests, and we may exclude the Lord from them all. Let us walk through a few of the rooms.

First of all there is the room of the mind, the busy realm of the understanding. Do we try to understand why Jesus Christ was born into this world? Do we try to understand what God says to us through his word in the Bible? Do we understand that the world needs the saving power of Jesus Christ? That the only answer to a lasting peace in this world is the peace that each individual seeks within their hearts and this peace comes only through the true acceptance of Jesus Christ in our lives? Let us try to understand some of the important things in life instead of saying "that's too deep for me" and then we overlook or forget about it.

The second room is the room of personal affections and desires. Most of us let our personal desires come ahead of everything else in the world. We say that all I have worked hard and I deserve some of the luxuries of life. We are selfish this way and I suppose it is part of being human. We need to realize that others do have needs and desires and we should consider them along with our own and then make a decision.

Let us pass into another room in the inn of our souls. I will call it the room of imagination. It is the radiant chamber of ideals and fancies and oceans and dreams. In this room we may find Prospect Wisdom and the Window of Hope. It is here that we look out upon the morrow. And it is here that life's wishes and plans may

be found. All of us have goals and plans for our lives. And this is just as it should be, for if we do not have goals we will generally stand still or start to fall behind. Is God included in your plans and goals or have you left him out? The Lord delights to abide in that bright chamber of purpose and dreams.

Not far from this room there is another that I will call the chamber of mirth or merriment. Along with our work we need play and engagement too. For none of us was intended to work steadily all of our lives; God doesn't expect us to. We really make a 'joyful noise unto the Lord' if we have truly accepted Jesus Christ into our hearts. Real joy comes from having Christ with us no matter what we are doing or where we are. There is also the room of conversation. Most of us have plenty to say except when the subject turns to God, Christ and our faith. Then our mouths really close up for we apparently feel this subject is not open for conversation. Do you ever stop to think how many times during the day your conversation leads to God? Not very many, I'm sure. Why don't we try being an authority on God and our faith like we are everything else? If our faith is any good at all it certainly is worth talking about. Let's not leave him out of the conversation.

There is the recreation room too. We all need recreation, a change from our normal routine. Many of us go bowling, skiing, skating, playing ball. We all find some sort of recreation for our selves and our families. We do not have to leave Christ out or behind like we would grandma and grandpa. He wants to be in every part of our lives. Don't leave Christ out in the cold. Make room for him in the room of your soul.

I have thought it well just to turn into some of the rooms in this famous inn, in order that it may become clear to us that Christ's experience in the first Christmas may be repeated in more tragic form today, for the Lord may still be crowded out and there may be no room for him where most he wants to be. Now why do we shut him out? I would like to select two or three reasons which perhaps are the most common.

First we may keep him out because we would not care for him to see what there is within. I mean, that we do not care to consciously meet him inside the inn. And so our very sins make us shut the door and keep it closed and "there is no room for him in the inn." Perhaps we do not want to change our lives. Maybe we feel that Christ will demand too much of us. We will not be able to have a good time any more, we will not be able to pull those shady business deals, we will not be able to cheat on a test. Well, Christ does demand much of us and all we can do is ac-

cept Him and strive toward a perfect goal. He will help us, he will forgive mistakes if we are sincere and want to be forgiven, and our lives will be more peaceful and more joyful, for Christ is with us.

Then again we may keep him out by thronging multitude of our cares. Perhaps we feel that our lives and the way we are living is all right and that we are getting along fine the way we are. Perhaps we have never stopped to think of eternal life, life beyond this earthly one.

In the third place we may crowd the Savior out of the inn by the multitude of pleasures that we are entertaining as our guests. That is to say, a merely sensational life can make us numb to all that is spiritual, and the unseen world becomes non-existent to our souls. We become so wrapped up in gaining material possessions and money that we have no room for Jesus Christ in our lives.

But suppose we open the door and make room for him in the inn. What then? Well, what does he himself say about his coming? "I am come that ye might have life, and that ye might have it more abundantly" that cannot be said of every visitor, who is allowed to enter our souls. "The thief cometh that he may kill and steal and destroy." The thief comes to share our joy, but he spoils it. He makes a promise to deepen our peace but he creates disorder. But the Lord himself will not steal away a single treasure. He will not kill a single innocent pleasure. He will not destroy a single lovely thing for he is the creator of all things.

Try him! At this Christmas time let us really have the true Christmas spirit, open the door and see what will happen if you allow him room in the inn.

## **How God Test Faith? Genesis 12:1-9; 15:1-6**

Text is taken from Hebrews 11:8,9,11-12,17. Read from the Bible.

Before we see how God tests faith, perhaps we should take a look at what faith is.

What is faith? Faith is the state of being ultimately concerned: the dynamics of faith are the dynamics of man's ultimate concern: It is not only the unconditional demand made by that which is one's ultimate concern, it is also the promises of ultimate fulfillment which is accepted in the act of faith. Faith is believing with our whole hearts, something even though there is no proof, scientific or otherwise. As Christians we believe there is a God and that he takes care of each of us. Maintain this belief regardless of what happens is real faith.

Faith, for the men of the Old Testament, is the state of being ultimately and unconditionally concerned about Yahweh and about what he represents in demand, threat and promise.

Four times in the verses of our text, which recount the story of Abraham, occur in the words, "By Faith". Each phrase introduces a cardinal test experienced by Abraham.

First, verse 8: Abraham when he was called – went to, not having whither he went; the test of the 'unknown.'

This is the first and simplest, so common and simple as almost to be essential, test of faith.

It is not that Abraham did not know who called him, or whether or not he ought to obey. He didn't question that. But he knew what he had to do because he had faith in the one who called him. This test of faith is different from our daily experience of ignorance or uncertainty. True, indeed, "we know not what a day may bring forth" and are sometimes glad, sometimes sad, that it is so. The test of the unknown is not a mere test of uncertainly and trust in uncertainty.

The test of the unknown involves a definite choice. It is the experience which comes to a man when, like Abraham, the voice of God speaks to his soul and bids

him follow God's guidance only-giving up as determinants of his conduct, his previous association and plans and motives and habits.

The call comes to men who already know God well enough to know he is to be obeyed. It comes to men who can possess a confidence in God like that of Abraham. His confidence was that God was everywhere in the unknown future, and wherever Abraham went he built an altar unto God. The God he had come to know in part, and to believe in is available anywhere, and always, was the God whom he obeyed and followed. Such is the attitude and method of faith.

The first, simplest, fundamental, and therefore abiding test of faith often gives us a sense of adventure with God. But it may happen, too, as it did with Abraham, that upon our high choice follow long days of simple routine, when nothing worthy of our new purpose to follow God's guidance rather than our own will seem to happen.

Second, verse 9 – He became a sojourner – with Isaac and Jacob: the test of 'delay' Abraham did indeed come to know whether he was to go – "This land will I give." But the promise was not at once fulfilled. Instead, he sojourned – not he alone – with Isaac and Jacob, for three generations, and yet the land of promise was not theirs. It was God's test of their faith, by delay. They might have given up. They could have returned. But they tarried, as sojourners, waiting God's time.

In passing, we may note that often the test of delay comes in connection with prayer. How often, because the answer does not come, we are tempted to say, "I'll not pray anymore." Remember then the experience is not new. It appears to have occurred often even in the Old Testament times, so that a common expression for prayer in the Psalms is "waiting for the Lord."

I wonder how many of us have faith, trust and patience enough to "wait for the Lord." We feel our prayers have to be answered immediately and if they are not then God has forgotten us and we will have to "go it" alone. Do you think we could wait three generations for a promise from God? I doubt it.

Science knows delay of attainment of its objectives. "Microbe Hunters" and "Hunger Fighters" knew how to try over and over again, and test their findings again and again, to be absolutely sure they were right. In Edison's biography, the story of the long search the world over to find the exact substance among a thousand and more that were tested for the filament of the incandescent bulb is of ab-

sorbing interest. So much effort undismayed by delay, so much of research based on faith that if a demonstrable human need exists, there must be some way in the universe whereby it can be supplied, lies back of our common, universal, apparently simple, everyday, cheap electric bulb. Science never gave up the search and success came.

In days when our hopes are delayed, and the consummation of our plans and prayers put farther off by new developments, shall we not remember the words, “therefore will the Lord wait, that he may be gracious?” Blessed are those who wait.

Thirdly, verses 11,12 – there sprang of one as good as dead (seed) innumerable: the test of the ‘impossible’. Abraham had been promised a son by Sarah, in whom his seed should be counted – and God waited so long to give the lad that humanly speaking it was no longer possible. Yet Abraham continued to remember how God had led him out under the stars , and assured him, “So shall your seed be.” So, despite the lapse faithfully recorded in the scripture, in the end Abraham did hold fast to God’s word, and when it was entirely clear that Isaac was to be born not by human planning but God’s will and power, the promise was fulfilled. Abraham believed the impossible – and God performed it. Missionaries to Islam have called Jesus “the master of the impossible”. The Christian faith is faith in a God with whom all things are possible.

Someone has said that they cannot understand what faith is. That it is impossible. Faith trades on three things: (1) the unknown future, which no man is wise enough to predict; (2) the almost infinite power of the human body and spirit to survive and recuperate; and (3) the unlimited power of God himself. We make no boasts or promises, even about believing prayer; but we will have nothing to do with despairing finality, and cannot understand the word ‘impossible’. For nothing is impossible with God. General William Booth, founder of the Salvation Army said, “God loves with a great love the man whose heart is bursting with a passion for the impossible.”

Fourth – verse 17 – Abraham being tried, offer up Isaac: the test of “apparent contradiction in revelation of God’s will.”

The son of promise grew toward manhood. Daily before his father’s eyes is a visible proof of God’s loving purpose, of his power to bring to pass what he has promised. Then, one day, the blow falls; and contrary to “In Isaac shall thy seed

be”, comes the word, “slay Isaac.” How the word came, we don not know. We only know that accepting it, fully conscious of the contradiction involved, Abraham proceeds to immediate obedience to the clearly revealed will of God for that hour, believing “he will make it plain.” And he did, says Genesis. But, adds Hebrews, Abraham’s faith had won the victory even while it could not see just how.

Whenever we stand in the presence of apparent contradiction in the revealing of God’s will, we must not forget that our Lord, too, experienced its grief and pain to the full. We see it expressed in his unique cry on the cross; “My God, why hast thou forsaken me?” For once, the name Father does not rise to his lips. For once, there is the sense of utter desolation and separation from the One who had always been with him, so that he was never alone. Without attempting just now to interpret this cry of desolation, let us remember its evidence that Jesus, too, knew and experienced the contradiction of the cross.

Here is an industrialist’s faith as stated by Henry J. Kaiser; “Faith, it is my conviction, is the key to the unlocking limitless powers of the mind, the heart, the soul—faith in God, faith that right triumphs over wrong, faith that you can even out over all disasters and set backs, faith that smashes fear, faith in the ultimate realization of your hopes.

Again and again I have seen the tremendous power of faith. Only a faith that it could be done led to the construction of the Bonneville Dam in the lower Columbia River in Oregon. We were warned that the raging waters of the Columbia would rise 20 to 30 feet within a day or two, ripping to shred any puny works of man to dam it. The native Indians had a legend that no man would ever walk across the Columbia. Government engineers were doubtful that it could be done. The bonding companies refused to take the risk of the hazardous project. But undaunted faith answered the skeptics and proved that what men can dare and imagine, they can find the ways to accomplish.”

We are ready now for two questions. First, what are we to do when tests of faith come? One thing is clear: the solution does not lie in saying farewell to God. Do not give God up. And the next is this: Depend upon it that there is always one clear step to take at any one moment. Take that clear step, and be not anxious for the future consequences.

Why does God permit – no, why does God send these tests of faith? There is the purpose of disciplining, testing for service, as fabrics, and automobile tires and

bridges, and sea-going vessels are rigidly tested in our day before being put into service. God's discipline is his testing for service.

There is further God's wish, that his people may come to know him better. Scarce should we know God's omnipotence, were we not called into the unknown; his faithfulness and patience, did we not meet the test of delay; his omnipotence, until we stand before the humanly impossible; his unchanging love, until we trust him, though we cannot see the reconciliation of his providence.

And finally, in sending us these tests of faith, God wishes us to grow into a deeper realization of the reality of the fellowship of the Christian with his Lord. The finest criterion of the validity of any test of faith is the fact that Jesus, whom we call Lord also knew and experienced it. And so the final glory of these tests is that they make us know fellowship with him. Has your faith been tested and could it stand these tests?

## **Is God Responsible for Life's Tragedy & Pain**

### **Luke 13:1-17**

Text is from Job 23:10. "But he knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold."

Each successive day that dawns on our world brings some fellow creature tragedy and heart breaking sorrow. One generation after another asks the same questions: Why are terrible things permitted to happen? Does God will them? Are they punishment for our sins? Do they not flat contradict the Christian teaching that God is love?"

As we grapple with these profound issues, perhaps we may best begin by correcting some of the false notions that have persisted across the years in many discussions of the problems of suffering and pain. First, "It is not true that tragedy and pain are meted out to mankind by specific acts of God." Moreover, it is cruel and false to say, for example, that God would take away a child from its parents from motives of jealousy or revenge. Such ideas contradict the noblest teachings of the Bible in both the Old & New Testaments and are 180° apart from the revelation of God given to us by Jesus Christ.

Throughout the Old Testament the darkness and tragedy of human life in this world is never hidden. But a light is always breaking through which changes the whole picture- the light that flashes from the hidden face of God. It reveals God's holiness. But it also reveals God's compassion.

The compassion of God is not a mere feeling, as it often is with ourselves. It is a shared experience of suffering and pain. From the first page to the last, through the whole story of human tragedy and pain, God is in it with his world.

Our Lord has taught us that not even a sparrow falls to the ground unnoticed of God and his human children are of far more value. Speaking of children, Jesus said, "It is not the will of your Father that one of these little ones should perish." If an automobile kills a child it is false and blasphemous to suggest that God willed it.

Intelligent Christians will not succumb to the fallacy of fatalism or to a rock-ribbed predestination by believing that all calamities or misfortunes are due to the

will of God.

It has been said that it has become almost a habit with me to feel that the real solution of every problem can be found by those people who are hurt by it, if they will take hold of life where it hurts, and find out not how they themselves can escape from that hurt, but how they can prevent that hurt from becoming a permanent factor in the lives of their brothers and sisters.

Of course, since we are human beings, we like to blame someone for something that has happened rather than to face up to the situation ourselves. Instead of blaming God we should be turning to him for understanding and guidance.

Second, it is not true that all tragedy and pain is the result of sin and is God's way of punishing our misdoings. It is true of course; that sin has brought much suffering to the world and always carries with it its own penalty. But any honest estimate of human life will readily admit that not only sinners but the righteous also suffer.

It is unfortunate that often the innocent must suffer with the guilty. A drunken driver hits and kills another person. The family of the person had absolutely nothing to do with the tragedy but they must suffer at the loss of a loved one. But we need to remember the driver suffers too. He has to live with what he did, all the rest of his life. Many tragedies happen in life that are directly or indirectly caused by the sins of other individuals.

The book of Job was written to refute the idea that righteousness guarantees prosperity and well-being. Jesus Christ did not guarantee this to us either; however he did promise us eternal life if we would be his disciples and come follow him. There are and will be many trials and tribulations in our lives even though we are Christians, but when we are Christians we have someone to lean on, someone to guide us, someone to give us understanding and faith which will help us through these tragedies.

By means of this religious drama depicting the life of Job, this Hebrew philosopher shows how a good man can face the sternest adversity and still maintain his integrity and his faith, even though he can find no reason in his character and conduct why disaster should have been visited upon him.

If we today could have half the faith Job had, we certainly could call ourselves

good Christians. Even though Job had to face all kinds of tragedy and pain in his family, to suffering to his own body, he would not deny his Lord. Most of us could not withstand a small part of what Job did.

Jesus too faced these issues. The disciples reminded him how Pilate had mingled the blood of Galilean pilgrims with their sacrifice in the temple. In reply, Jesus asked them, "Were these men sinners above all others in Jerusalem?" And the answer to his own question, he said, "I tell you, Nay." He gave a similar reply with respect to the eighteen men on whom the tower of Siloam fell.

So when someone says to you, "I wonder what wrong I have done that this evil or this bereavement should come upon me?" Tell them that they are reasoning on a sub-Christian level; that an informed Christian would never talk that way; that God would not be guilty of putting punishment on any such mechanical level.

When something tragic happens to us or our family or if everything seems to be going against us, we often get discouraged and wonder, at least to ourselves, what we have done wrong to deserve all this. At a time like this our sins come before us and we realize what we have done wrong and finally we realize that God has not caused these things to happen but instead God is there with us, we can turn to Him for the comfort and guidance we need. God is not the kind who dishes out punishment. God is love, and once we realize this we cannot possibly blame Him for our misfortunes.

Yet in almost any group of people who discuss this matter, you will find those who think that God is unfair because they know of wicked people who are enjoying material prosperity. And I'm sure we all know people who fit into this situation, at least by our standards. Perhaps we refer to people who never attend church, people who enjoy immoral living, people who carouse and drink constantly, people who let their children raise themselves. We look at such people; they have everything they need (material wise) no tragedies happen to them, their children are happy. In other words we are judging these people, comparing them with ourselves. We feel that we are better than these kinds of people and deserve more and better things than they. We cannot understand why we must endure suffering and pain while they go untroubled. First of all would you want to trade your life for theirs? Would you want to live that way? Would you want your children growing up that way? Second, if life were easy, with everything going smoothly, would it really be worth living? If really wouldn't. Sometimes we need pain and suffering and tragedies to help us see the light.

Our understanding of Christianity has reached a low ebb if we equate worldly prosperity with a life inspired by the spirit and teaching of Christ. Jesus would have none of this, and he emphasized the divine impartiality in the natural order by reminding us that God “makes his sun to shine on the evil and the good, and sends rain upon the just and the unjust.”

“We suffer alone”, wrote Amiel in his journal. It may seem so to those who enter some shadowed valley with its enveloping darkness. But it is not so. God is always there. He is in it all. He suffers, too.

But someone asks, “How shall we explain the existence of tragedy and recurrent disaster in the world?” The truest answer, it seems to me, would point out the possibility that misfortune and other evils often stem from the source of mankind’s greatest advances and the deepest joys of the human race. There are a number of factors in the universe from which come all the tragedies that afflict mankind.

First, there is the existence of fixed, dependable, and predictable principles and laws that govern the natural order. A fixed system of natural law always involves certain perils, but a dangerous world is preferable to a stagnated and irresponsible or a dead one.

Second, the deepest joys that man can know in his brief existence come from such kinships as family ties, friendships, the love of a man for a woman, loyalty to home and country. But all these would be impossible if it were not for the interdependence of the human race.

Yet, not many of us, if we were given the power, would want to build a world in which there would be neither abiding natural law nor human interdependence? Instead there would be chaos and each human life would be a law unto itself with no more relationship one to another than a handful of marbles. Yes, our calamities emerge from the same factors that provide our advantages and our joys.

In a ward bed of a far western hospital lay for years a man who was utterly helpless, a victim of almost complete paralysis. Yet this man had so triumphed over his infirmity and pain that he was the inspiration of all the hospital personnel – doctors, nurses, interns, and orderlies. His infectious cheerfulness lifted everybody’s morale. Men and women came from every walk of life to tell him their troubles and to gain the necessary courage and strength with which to face life.

Adversity and pain may indeed be sharp instruments, but when they are met in the spirit of Christ, they create noble character.

Dr. John Henry Jowett once referred to a character in one of George MacDonald's novels who was faced with tragedy and pain, said rebelliously, "I wish I had never been made." Her Christian friend replied, "My dear, you are not made yet; you are only being made. This is the Maker's process." No one of us is yet made. We are all in the process of being made. And what we shall be in the end will be determined by the attitude and spirit by which we meet life's adversities.

When everything has been said that can be said on this problem of suffering, there are left many unanswered questions. Jesus made no attempt to resolve the mystery of pain in the world, but he gave us the means to triumph over it. "In the world", he said to his followers, "ye shall have tribulation" (in other words, you shall be beaten with the flail of adversity), "but be of good cheer, for I have overcome the world." We too, should be of good cheer for Christ is always with us.

## **Men Made Here Romans 8:14-20**

I've chosen the text from Judges 8:21. "As the man is, so is his strength."

In London there is a mission church in West Hain that has ministered for over half a century to the down-and-out. Over the entry there is an unusual sign. "Men Made Here" Through the years, thousands of men, women and families have learned the meaning of that sign. Men who were not men at all, who were, rather, existing on the animal level of nature, who had exchanged their manhood for a mess of pottage, found within those doors the means of having their lives remade by Jesus Christ. What a motto and ideal for a home! "Men Made Here" There are homes that follow this ideal. Such homes are not interested in keeping up with the Jones' next door, nor in supplying the house with the latent gadgets on the market, nor in collecting or amassing a large future: they are engaged in the nurture of children, that they may grow up into persons of good character and strong personality, useful in the world. Look carefully about you. Many homes are successful in this. They pay the price. They make the necessary sacrifices. They study the method of character nurture. The good example principle is applied. They produce strong men and women.

What a tragic thing it is when both parents work to provide all the unnecessary things of life, while the children are left to shift for themselves. They have no one to talk over their problems with because mom and dad are too busy or too tired, The family isn't able to do things together, each going their separate ways. In our days much importance is placed on having a beautiful home with all the furnishings, a new automobile, all of the material possessions, but doesn't it make more sense to spend the time to raise our children to be useful citizens, with good character, and strong personalities. Isn't it about time to start thinking about our spiritual lives?

What a motto for a school, "Men Made Here" I heard a conversation between two people recently. The one asked the other, "What is your business?" "Teaching", the other replied. "What do you teach"? "Boys". It's an old idea, of course, that the person taught is more important than the subject taught. The little red school-house of another period gathered much prestige because in so many instances it produced stalwart men and women.

I attended one of those little old country schools for 7 years. Although I'm not advocating we should go back to them, I do believe that children learned how to get along better together. Everything was not handed to us on a silver platter. The teacher paid more personal attention to each individual. I believed we learned to appreciate what we had and everything wasn't taken for granted as it is now-a-days. I also believe we learned more about life and what it is all about.

Today much emphasis is placed upon the child to learn what is required regardless of the child's reaction to it. In other words it is necessary to cover what is required regardless of what the child understands and absorbs. Regardless of what anyone says everything is not learned from books and I'm sure most of us have found this out.

"Men Made Here" – what a motto for a business. Of course profits are necessary; otherwise the business could not exist. But there are businesses, small firms, and large corporations, where the more important product is not the manufactured article, but the men who are developed in the business. Not long ago we had on the front pages of our newspapers examples of great American corporations, which were producing very fine products and making satisfactory payments to their stockholders, some of whose employees in high positions had to be sent to jail by the courts.

Most of us realize that men do have to be trained to take over the business; these men don't naturally know how to do this. Men have to be trained on skilled jobs otherwise the products cannot be produced. Training has to take place in all cases and more emphasis is needed on the individual man rather than how cheaply we can make something.

And the great cry that goes up from our manufacturing cities is all in very deep for this, that there we manufacture everything but men. We blend cotton, we refine sugar, we strengthen steel, we shape pottery, but to strengthen, or to refine, or to shape a single human soul does not enter into our estimate of advantages.

Is it too idealistic to expect a business to be as proud of its men as it is of the fine product it makes or the excellent service it renders? It is often said that a man can get lost working for a large corporation, that your abilities go unnoticed. Some say it isn't what you know as much as it is who you know. All of this to some extent is true, but in general the policy of nearly all companies is to advance its people and to give recognition for average or above ability performance. But again the poli-

cies are administered by people; human beings that are not perfect, and they apply their own interpretation to the overall company policy. Some men take pride in seeing the people under them advance and receive recognition while others tend to want to hold people down. In my own experience, I have found that if you really try to do your job to the best of your ability and put forth some effort, eventually you will be recognized and compensated. Of course we need to realize that more effort is placed on a business making a profit for if it doesn't, it will not exist very long.

What an ideal for a community; "Men Made Here" – Sometimes the same placard, perhaps of little consequence, is posted in the window of every shop, on the bulletin board of every organization, until it enters into the consciences of every member of the community, and the project becomes a community enterprise. What a community that would be if all the homes, churches, businesses, professional offices, schools, clubs, fraternal organizations, societies, movies houses, etc., were co-oriented under this motto. As the superior men appeared they would be able to strike down the evils in the environment even as Gideon was able to strike down Zebah and Zalmuana in the story of our text this morning.

This community motto might spread to the county, the state, and the nation. The government should be more concerned than it is about the people it makes. The call is for men who can strike down the evils of the nation. The call is for great men. Where are they to be found?

Again this whole thing of Christianity starts with the individual person. (You and I) If anything is going to be changed, if we want our children to grow up to be good Christians, worthy citizens, if we want our homes to be a decent place to live, our church to be an example, our community to be a decent place to live, our county, state, nation, world, it definitely is up to each one of us individually. We can't sit back or stand by and say, "It isn't up to me, let someone else take care of it." As long as we have this kind of attitude nothing will get any better, in fact it will get worse.

What a motto for the world! You say, "Now that's too much!" that is idealism running riot - not at all! Paul hung the placard on the planet. "Men Made Here" Here is his words. "The created universe waits with eager expectation for God's sons to be revealed." The imagination of Paul was not out of bounds. His insight was inspired by the Spirit of God. The world is making men for whom God's whole creation is eagerly waiting. The whole universe waits expectantly for men who are

sons of God. Put the sign on the planet – “Men Made Here” Let our astronauts, when they fly through space tell us that the sign can be seen and read. If there be inhabitants on other planets, let them know that on this planet men are made. This is the human and the divine enterprise – making men is what the universe is all about. This is what God is busy doing, making men, God’s sons, and men with eternal destiny.

“Man is God’s creation. Everything else is the nursery and the nurse of man.” A rhinoceros doesn’t go up to another rhinoceros and say “Be a rhinoceros, but a man does go up to another man and say, “Be a man”

We have not mentioned the church. The church forgets sometimes. It becomes busy building it buildings, elaborating its liturgy, deepening its theology, perfecting its polity, and its main objective comes obscure. Sometimes we become so engrossed in ourselves and our problems that we forget what the church stands for; what its outreach should be and who the head of the church is. What is the church’s task but to bring men into relationship with God as God’s sons! Its task is one of nurture. Its task is one of redemption. Men and women, who are lost, fallen, are to be brought back to God, redeemed men and men made new. Men are to become spirit-filled children of God. The church is to open up the channel of grace to all men.

Let the church put up, in truth and reality, the sign “Men Made Here”! It is a God written sign. The church will then stimulate the home, the school, business, community enterprise, and the government, to share in the glorious enterprise of making men. This is a kind of grand alliance between God and his people, an alliance of consecration and sacrifice and endeavor. It was for this that Christ died, that men might become men. No man has attained to his true servanthood until he becomes a son of God, knowing God as his Father and every other man as his brother, and filled with the Spirit of God. Our lives are never fulfilled until we have come to know God as our Father.

“We are God’s workmanship. That is where the song of hope and comfort begins.”

What is the end product? The question can be answered only in terms of the manhood of Christ. It can be answered in the words of I John 3:2, “Beloved, now are we the Sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.” When a man gets this vision he stands up erect in all his manhood. Or as John puts it, “And every man that hath this hope purifieth himself, even as he is pure.”

## **SAVE Yourselves**

### **Acts 2:14-24, 37-48**

Text is taken from Acts 2:40. “And with many others words did he (Peter) testify and exhort, saying, “Save yourself from this untoward generation.” The Revised Standard Version says, “crooked generation.” Phillips translates it, “perverted generation.”

This is the theme of Peter’s preaching. Why did he call it a crooked generation? Because they had killed the Christ. The whole populace was guilty.

To whom was Peter speaking? He was speaking to his times and the people of his times. “Save yourselves.” It looks weak. It isn’t Peter is not pleading for selfishness or cowardice.

“From this untoward generation,” crooked, perverse, perverted, twisted. Was Peter’s bile running a little strong in those days? Was a choleric (kol ēr ik) mood getting the best of him? Was Peter nothing more than a grumbler? Was he simply holding his generation in contempt? We raise these questions, but do not answer them until later. Enough of the 1<sup>st</sup> century and Jerusalem and Peter. This is the 20<sup>th</sup> century and our own town and community and ourselves.

“Save yourselves from the untoward generation.” Untoward means disoriented, no sense of direction. Such a generation does not know where it is going. Is this an untoward generation?

“Save yourselves from this perverse generation.” Perverse means off the track of righteousness, going in circles, off in a blind alley. Is this a perverse generation?

Then we have crooked, immoral, corrupt, not straight, impure, dishonest. Is this a crooked generation?

Twisted, distorted values, false perspectives, prejudiced. Is this a twisted generation?

Dr. Robert J. McCracken classifies us by our answers to questions such as these.

First, we have persons who are classified as grumblers. Dr. Halford Luccock

writes of grumbling and the grumblers. “There are (3) reasons why we should hesitate even lightly to indulge in the emotional luxury of damning our tie as a crooked generation. One is that contempt for one’s times is the easiest from of contempt into which one can fall. It is also the most futile. There is nothing easier than to grumble, use adjectives, or call names. These are questions where the rumble of the grumble rises like thunder.”

Dr. Luccock adds, “This vice is the peculiar liability of middle age and old age and few there be that escape it. Very often it is a mark of nothing but hardening of the arteries and rheumatism of the minds.”

Then too, the grumbler often uses the grumble as an escape mechanism.

All that some of us do is grumble. We read the newspapers with its shocking disclosures or unscrupulousness and venality and as soon as we can get anybody to listen we pour out a torrent of complaint. We often hear people complain about local and national politics and politicians. They work themselves up into a frenzy over the sordid, seamy side of the government. But after they have had their say, if somehow we can inquire about whether they voted or not, they usually do not bother. Of course this is the trouble with a good many grumblers. All that they do is grumble. They make grumbling a substitute for action. They don’t like what is going on but beyond voicing a complaint they do nothing. They shrike responsibility. They play the easy and comfortable role of spectator. They don’t enter into politics themselves, or take a hand in the selection of those who do enter into them, or contribute anything like solid, steady support to men of character and principle who are putting up a fight for clean government.

We do not see the vital point  
That ’tis the 8<sup>th</sup> most deadly sin  
To wail the world is out of joint,  
And not attempt to put it in.

And the same is true in our churches today. We have people who sit back and criticize everything that goes on but they are unwilling to participate themselves, or to voice an opinion in a meeting where they can be heard by everyone. If we have anything to say we should say it in the proper places when all can hear it and perhaps listen.

Secondly, we have persons who are apathetic. These people may disagree that this

is a crooked generation. They may use derisive names to describe the grumblers, calamity- howler, sourpuss, long faced.

The grumbler might answer back. Those who disagree with them are void of feeling, unsusceptible to deep emotion, thick-skinned, callous. These apathetic people are of the type who passes by on the other side of the road when another is in distress. They have little or nothing in the way of contribution to deduct from their income tax returns.

There are many of us who don't want to get involved with a situation if it means a sacrifice of our time or effort on our part. We often say that we heard or saw nothing and this way we can overlook the situation.

Who of us does not fit at times into this classification of the apathetic? We hear of millions starving in the world. It doesn't hurt my ears and my heart, as it ought. It doesn't cause me to share my prosperity to any serious degree. These people aren't here and we can't see them so why should we be concerned about them.

Even with a war on we do not let it bother us too much. "the country is prosperous, isn't it?" We don't even grumble. We let no man's hunger spoil our dinner. We lose no sleep. If grumblers have hardened arteries, the apathetic have calloused skin.

David Lawrence, editor of U.S. News & Report, published a letter written by an enlisted man serving in a medical battalion in Korea, under date of February 1, 1952. Here is a paragraph from that letter: "My pains are real. I've been wet with the warm, fresh blood of a dying boy. I've watched it make thick pools on the ground and seen the color fade from once smiling and hopeful faces. I wished to God I could have given answers to the imploring questions I read on the silent lips. It is tragic that such a supreme sacrifice cannot gain consolation, if not merit from the recognition of clearly defined issues for which it is made. To me, death deserves, at least a reason. I see none in the beclouded and warped diplomatic volleys of contemporary and widespread popularity. These young men – is this our secret weapon? Our productive know-how? Our power punch? I think not."

Third, we have the cynics. Another attitude is possible. One can sneer. One can lift one's eyebrows and remark, "the generation is always crooked. Even back in the horse and buggy days, when Harding was president, and even in the days of Abraham Lincoln, the reformers and impractical idealistic are always with us. Hu-

man nature can't be changed.”

Dr. McCracken tells of a report turned in to the Commissioner of Investigations in New York, a report with the comment, “It may be said that the over-all impression of the philosophy of the police department in regard to gambling seems to be that nothing can be done-so why try?”

That is pure unadulterated cynicism, though the police department would very likely have defended it as realism. “Your might just as well leave graft and greed and exploitation and corruption alone. If you root them out in one place they will spring up in another.” That’s cynicism, that’s sneering. Robert Louis Stevenson wrote, “I hate cynicism a great deal worse than I do the devil, unless perhaps the two were the same thing.”

It’s rather easy for any of us to be cynics. We see all sorts of things going on around us that we know are not right, that are universal, that are corrupt and perhaps some of our good friends might be involved and rather to expose them and the conditions and bring them out into the open where they can be cleared up, we take the easiest way out which is to do nothing and say nothing can be done. Certainly nothing can be done unless we are willing to do it. The people who are involved actually will do nothing to change it because they are the ones reaping the benefits. (If that is what you want to call them).

Fourth, we have the people who are the compromisers. This is another attitude. Some people grumble, some are apathetic, some are cynical – some are compromisers.

They say, “they are getting theirs in Washington; I’ll get mine right here on main street.” That’s the spirit of compromise.

The union leader says, “management used to gouge us, now I’ll gouge management.”

“What are you in business for”, says a college president to an alumnus. With extraordinary candor the alumnus replied, “To make my pile and get out.” It is a prevalent attitude-the acceptance of low standards, values, ideals, no disposition to alter or amend the status quo; instead an easy going tolerance and complacency which is undisturbed by it and not averse to profit by it.

Why should we stick our necks out and perhaps get them cut off? Why should we make ourselves unpopular? It's much easier to overlook situations, ignore them as if they didn't exist. Perhaps they will go away by themselves, then no one will get hurt. This attitude is not uncommon in our country today. All you have to do is keep quiet and listen to people talk and you will hear these kinds of attitudes no matter where there is conversation among people. We have these same attitudes in our church today because churches are made up of people, all kinds of people.

How do we face this crooked generation? Do we grumble, do we forget it, do we sneer at it, do we compromise with it?

Peter preached that the crooked generation of his day had killed the Christ. Read his sermon found in the 2<sup>nd</sup> chapter of Acts. He speaks, "Ye men of Israel – "him" – ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain."

Are we crucifying the Christ afresh in these days? I am not sensitive enough to judge that; but are we not fearful that this crooked generation to which you and I belong is killing the nation?

We are killing our country. We are lowering our ideals. We are corrupting the people. We are wasting our wealth, our actual resources. We are casting away our heritage. There is no magic in the name of our country to save the country. There is no virtue in any party to save the nation.

We must save ourselves. We must save ourselves from the untoward, crooked, perverse, twisted, killing, generation. We must rise above grumbling to courage and fortitude.

We must despise the cynical spirit and bold face to our heritage, treasure the good in it, hold faith in ideals and determine to follow them.

We must refuse to compromise, become honest and sincere, stick to our convictions, and repudiate the insincerities and dishonesties in our national life.

If I were to ask you directly who is making the standards by which you live, you would probably reply-with some impatience-"why, I am, of course," And perhaps you would be right. So the question may be restated. What are the influences that are playing upon you as you make your standards? What are the decisive persuasions by which you decide what is right and what is wrong?

A Christian cannot constantly and uncritically accept the standards that happen to be prevalent or popular at any given moment. A Christian cannot casually live by the ideals of his society. A Christian must ask, "What are the standards by which I must live? If you are Christ's person, then you are not your own. You cannot do just as you please either with your possessions or your person.

This we must do. Save ourselves. Pull ourselves up by our bootstraps? It can't be done.

Peter himself did not believe that it could be done. Who has ever seen the bootstrap method succeed? Listen to the 1<sup>st</sup> century preacher: "repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is unto you and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call."

Repent! Change your mind! Come out of this corrupt generation; in the name of Jesus Christ come, follow him, accept his spirit, work for his cause-and it will come to pass that Jesus Christ will win, and even as he himself rose from the dead when the crooked generation killed him, so will this nation which is undergoing crucifixion.

## **The Man in the Middle**

### **Matthew 25:14-30**

Today's text is taken from II Timothy 1:6 and 7, "Stir up the gift of God, which is in thee – for God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind."

This sermon takes its name from the man in the middle of one of Jesus' most familiar parables. In most expositions of the parable of the talents he is the forgotten man. We don't ordinarily concern ourselves with him. It can safely be regarded that you've heard many a sermon contrasting the five-talent man who doubled what his master gave him, and the man with the one talent who returned it without either profit or lost. But what about the two talent man in the middle? He did his work, what was expected of him. According to the story, his industry was no less than that of his more famous brother. His praise was the same. Nonetheless, he like the third stanza of a four stanza hymn at a prayer meeting, goes unnoticed and unsung.

He is of interest to us because most of us are in his position. We're men in the middle: neither wealthy nor poverty stricken, neither famous nor infamous, neither great saints nor great sinners. We do our work, rear our children, say our prayers, pay our taxes and go to our graves in relative obscurity. Sometimes life even seems to take away some little credit we have coming. In other words, most of us are just plain, ordinary people and what ordinary people do, how we live our lives, what kind of example we set for our children and others, has a lot to do with the type of community, state and nation we live in.

Regardless of how unimportant we feel we are, our influence is definitely felt and seen. Now the fact that most of us are men in the middle, when the world will 'little note' nor 'long remember', often times give rise to difficulties. Some people unable to accept secondary or minor roles in life, who have ambition for greater social standing or prestige, become finally unhappy and embittered. Some of us cannot and will not ever raise our social standing or our importance for numerous reasons. We are unable to understand why or at least we don't want to believe why and we are willing to knock those down that do make a higher level than we. We apparently are not willing to be satisfied that we have gone as far as we can go and so we want to hold others down with us.

Perhaps it's jealousy or pride. More serious than that, however, is the fact that this condition helps to make people feel that they are failures. Every now and again people in the middle years of life get the feeling that their lives haven't really counted for much. To the outward obscure observer nothing appears to be wrong. They have jobs, paid their bills bought a house. Reared a family, gathered a circle of friends. But deep inside themselves they have haunting questions and they doubt their own usefulness. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why a person takes his own life. We wonder of what use has my life been? What – when you are average?

First of all we have to accept the situation. Not in the sense that we should become lazy and content. Of course everyone must make the most of what he has. I mean this in the sense that realism about one's own life is a very wise attitude. We should realize that we all do not possess the same talents and therefore cannot do all things equally well. We have to resign ourselves to this fact of life and stop being discontented with ourselves. We need to recognize and accept our limitations and learn to appreciate others talents.

Second, we should note carefully what is important. We have forgotten that being someone is important, too; that a decent, contagious kind of living is one of the greatest needs of the world. We do not have to have our names on the social register. We cannot always be the nice guy who sits on the fence and then falls whichever way will benefit him most. We need to stand up and speak out for what we believe.

Third we need to observe that average people like you and I, two talent folk, are the ones who keep the world going. The five talent and one talent folk are in the minority and God has given us different numbers as well as types of talent. It is more important that we put to use the talents God has given us and stop worrying about the ones we do not possess. This morning let us take time to consider two or three things of comfort and encouragement.

First of all we in the middle ought to take heart from the conviction that God's recognition is relative not to others, but to one's self alone. His question is not simply, "what have you done?" but, "what have you done with what you had?" The world tends to judge our success or failure in comparison with the records others have made; God judges us in comparison with our potentiality. If we've made a maximum return on whatever abilities and opportunities we've had, he's satisfied. God wants us to use our abilities and our talents to the fullest extent. If

we are lazy and for some other reasons do not want to use our talents, then there is no excuse for us. Jesus once pointed out that the widow who quietly slipped a couple of coppers in the temple offering box was giving more than the rich whose offering sounded like hail on the tin roof. I have no doubt, the temple finance commission rated the givers on the basis of their total giving in relation to what others gave; but the Master judged the givers on the basis of what they were able to do.

I think perhaps in our churches today we somewhat do this. We feel that the person who gives the most has the most to say about how the church should be run. Actually if we analyze some of these conditions, we will find that sometimes the wealthiest person does not give in proportion to the person of lesser means. Then again it is the attitude in which we give that really counts. Perhaps the person of lesser means is giving more of himself. I believe that God takes all of these things into consideration.

Circumstances alter cases, and God, who knows all circumstances, and take them into consideration. Not only does he know that some of us are five, some two, and some one talent persons, he also knows that life may have kept us – through no fault of our own – from the full use of the talents he has given us. There are many cases when a person may have to care for a person in the family that is disabled, or not, for many years and therefore not able to serve the church with the many talents he or she may have been given. I believe that God does take such circumstances into consideration.

Second, we in the middle can be sure that whatever one may be, God has something for him to do. As the blind poet put it, “they also serve who only stand and wait,” if they do it in a spirit of trustful dependence upon God. There is no person and no place in life for when and in which God has nothing to do.

But what mother whether or not she may be a Miriam tending the cradle of some future deliverer of the race? What teacher can measure the influence he has for good or ill? What office worker knows when some minor decision faithfully made will have far reaching effects? Because human life is tied in one bundle there moves out from each of us like a chain reaction, a stream of influence with unpredictable consequences. “We may not be, quantitatively speaking, great in ourselves, but we can be a switch that connect and releases mighty power. We can be a fulcrum on which great burdens are lifted or gross evils pried loose”.

One generalization is possible, I believe, about what God has for us to do wherever or whoever we may be. He wants us to engage in some forum of direct helpfulness. "No one finds himself in the position," says Albert Schweitzer. "of having no possible opportunity of giving himself to others as a human being. Anyone can rescue his human life, in spite of his professional life, who seizes every opportunity of personal action, however unpretending, for the good of fellow men who need the help of fellow men. Such a man enlists in the service of the spiritual and the good. No fate can prevent a man from giving to others this direct human service side by side with his life work.

Regardless of how untalented we may think ourselves to be, God has given each of us some kind of talent that can be used to help build his Kingdom. Certainly all of us cannot play the organ, or we can't all sing in the choir, we can't all be teachers in Sunday school, all can't be leaders in our church but there is a job for each of us regardless of how small it may seem. Think about your talents, are you using them to the best advantage? Let God guide you in putting them to use.

There is the story about a man who stopped for a moment at a building project and fell to talking with a rod-carrier. As he watched him load his mortar he said, "Say, isn't your brother a bishop?" The laborer nodded in agreement. "God surely divided the talents in your family, didn't he?" remarked the passer-by with sympathetic condescension. "Yes," said the rod-carrier. "My brother couldn't do this job to save his life." Doesn't that make you want to shake the rod-carrier's hand? He was a man in the middle who will never be famous but who never lost respect for himself, who never thought that he and his job were unimportant in God's economy.

In the third place, let us who are in the middle never forget that the good of life is not to get, nor to win, or even to accomplish, but to be. As Kipling so wisely ends his poem, "IF": "Yours is the earth and everything that's in it; and - which is more -you'll be a man, my son."

God did not put us here to amass fortunes, or fill record books and halls of fame, but to become mature and loving persons capable of fellowship with him.

In some of the darker days of World War II, after Gen. Wavell's troops had been defeated and the Batch Commander might well have expected a reprimand, or even been relieved, Winston Churchill wrote him a letter. In it the great Prime Minister said this, "We shall stand by you irrespective of result, because no one

can guarantee success in war, but only deserve it.” So the Almighty talks to us. “No one in this life can guarantee that anything he does will last.” “For when the one Great Scorer comes to mark against your name, He writes not what you won or lost, but how you played the game.”

During the hectic baseball season of 1934 when the Dean brothers, “Daffy and Dizzy” pitched the St. Louis Cardinals to one pennant and the Series’ victory, the two were traveling in a train. Daffy had just taken a gulp of soda pop when the train roared into a long tunnel. “Diz”, said he in alarm, “have you tried any of this?” “Just fixin to” came the answer. “Why?” “Don’t”, cautioned his brother, “I did, and I’ve gone plumb blind.” It is not the first time, I suppose, that an outer condition has been mistaken for an inner failure. Let us not repeat that mistake. Let us rather so live, whatever our station in life, that he who looks on our hearts may one day say, “well done thou good and faithful servant.”

## **The Religion of Abraham Lincoln**

### **1 Kings 3:5-15**

Text is taken from Romans 4:20. “He (Abraham) drew strength from his faith.”

It is important, I believe, that we understand what gave direction and meaning to the lives of those men who have shaped our inheritance and our institutions. I know that most of us wonder what kind of a person important people in our own day must be. We wonder what and how they believe and do they have a faith to rely on. Among these men in our history, no one had a more formative hand, and no man is more highly revered than Abraham Lincoln.

In the nearly one hundred years since his tragic death, many and diverse claims have been made about Lincoln and his attitude toward the Christian faith. Today we shall think together about the religion of Abraham Lincoln, for Lincoln’s religion mean far more in his life and experience than present day historians are acknowledging.

Lincoln’s four basic problems were (1) the question of slavery. He had a passion for equality as declared in the Declaration of Independence. (2) He believed that the preservation of the Union was a major Christian responsibility. (3) He had a passion for the reconciliation of the North and the South. (4) He wanted the vindication of democracy in the eyes of the world.

There are few more moving utterances than that of Lincoln when in Springfield on a cold, drizzly day in February, he stood on the platform of the special train that was to take him to Washington, to the White House. He said, “Without the assistance of the divine Being whoever attended him I cannot succeed. With that assistance I cannot fail. Trusting him who can go with me and remain with you and be everywhere for good, let us confidently hope that all will yet be well. To his care commending you, as I hope in your prayers you will commend me, I bid you an affectionate farewell.”

First of all, we will look at Lincoln and the Bible.

In the frontier area where Lincoln was born, often the only book that was owned by a family was the Bible. Of this book, Lincoln said, “My mother was a ready reader and read the Bible to me habitually.” It was the same worn family Bible

from which Lincoln was seen reading when he was in the White House.

On November 4, 1841, Lincoln married Mary Todd and settled in Springfield, Illinois. There they became attendants at the Presbyterian Church. Lincoln's pastor and a friend in Springfield, the Reverend James Smith, had some years before writing a book, "The Christian's Defense". He gave a copy of it to Lincoln. Lincoln studied it carefully. Afterward he said of the Bible, "the argument in favor of divine authority and inspiration of the Scriptures was unanswerable. It seems to me that nothing short of divine wisdom could have devised and given to man this perfect moral code. It is suited to men in all the conditions of life and inculcates all duties they owe to their Creator, to themselves, and to their fellow men.

In one of the Lincoln biographical studies (by Charwood) it is said, "the second inaugural address was to be the climatic expression of his Biblical faith. It reads like a supplement to the Bible. In it (and it was a very brief address) there are fourteen references to God, four direct quotations from Genesis, Psalms, and Matthew, and other references to Scripture and teaching. The English "London Spectacular" said of this address, "we cannot read it without a renewed conviction that it is the noblest political document known to history, and should have for the nation and the statesmen he left behind him something of a sacred and almost prophetic character. Surely none was ever written under a stronger sense of the reality of God's government."

Second, we will look at Lincoln and the church.

In his young manhood, Lincoln refused to become enmeshed in the distorted interpretation of Christianity which were current in the narrow religious sects of his day; and he refused to set limits around the love of God, or his salvation to all men made available through Jesus Christ.

In 1846 he made his only public statement concerning church membership: "When any church will inscribe over the altar as its sole qualification for membership the Savior's statement, "thou shall love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy mind", that church will I join with all my heart and soul." He was always against creedal tests for church membership.

Later when he became president of the United States, he attended the New York Avenue Presbyterian Church in Washington and year after year rented a pew in that church.

Third, let us discuss Lincoln and prayer.

John Nicolay, who was one of Lincoln's secretaries, has said, "Mr. Lincoln was a praying man. I know that to be a fact and I have heard him request people to pray for him which he never would have done if he had not believed that prayer is answered. I have heard him say that he prayed."

For Lincoln, the purpose of his praying was not to get God to do his bidding, but to place himself where he might come to see God's purpose and to know the strength of relying on "those everlasting arms." During the days of war, prayer became increasingly a source of strength for Lincoln. "He began to speak more openly and in an unembarrassed way about it." And to Noah Brooks he once said, "I had been driven many times to my knees by the overwhelming conviction that I had nowhere else to go."

When a delegation of ministers had visited him and had pressed him for action in a way that he should not have been pressed, he said, "Amid the greatest difficulties of my administration, when I could not see any other resort, I would place whole reliance in God, knowing that all would go well, and that he would decide for the right."

Fourth, let us discuss Lincoln's religious convictions.

One clear expression that we have of Lincoln's view of personal immorality came from about a year after the death of his second son, Eddie, in a letter to his step-brother, written when he heard of the serious illness of his father. He wrote in concluding the letter, "I sincerely hope father may yet recover his health; but at all events, tell him to remember to call upon, and to confide in, our great and good and Merciful Maker, who will not turn away from him in any extremity. He notes the fall of the sparrow and numbers the hairs of our heads; he will not forget the dying man who puts his trust in him."

God guides history. Lincoln came to see through his biblical study and his own Christian experience that God himself guided history. He sought consistently with humility and with patience to learn what his part was in this divine human drama. His faith in God, his reliance upon God, freed him from any false pretensions and any imaginings that he was a greater and more important man than any human being has a right to assume. And many a time he told those who called upon him

with advice that his concern was not to get God on his side, but to be sure that he and man and the American people were on God's side.

Concerning the question of slavery. Lincoln, because of his study of the Bible and his increased understanding of the Christian faith, acquired a moral sensitivity about the question of slavery, which faced the nation. His speeches were vibrant with indignation over Douglas' indifference to the moral issue involved in slavery. He was deeply disturbed about this moral indifference when it was suggested as an adequate, calculated policy for political action.

Let it never be forgotten that Lincoln's own moral standards were derived from his Christian religious belief and experience. Lincoln said, "I am struggling to maintain government, not to overthrow it. I am struggling especially to prevent others from overthrowing it."

Here is Abraham Lincoln, so like us, and yet so different from us- a man of the people and from the people, and yet because he was the willing servant of the best and of what he believed to be God's way, he transcended the limitations of his physical circumstances that could so easily have hemmed him in, within the ordinary and the common place-even in the White House. Here in Lincoln, we see the transformation and the power that comes in a man as he is in truth a seeker after God. And who are we lesser folk, in our difficult day that we should feel that his example and practice are not for us? His example is for our inspiration and guidance.

We need leaders in our country, and in our world that set examples by leading the people to God. And of course in order to help people find God, the leaders themselves need to know God. Such a man was Abraham Lincoln who relied on God for guidance and direction in his position as president of the United States.

As I said before, he believed that the people had to be led to God not God to the people.

For a few moments let us consider our own spiritual lives. Of course any leader can only do just so much, he cannot force the people to accept Christian beliefs. He can only talk about them and live a life of them as an example.

I wonder if most of us are ashamed to admit to others that we do read the Bible. How many of us are ashamed to be caught by a friend reading our Bible? Do we

feel that this is childish and of little benefit? If we do, we had better take another look for this is the only book I know of where we can find how to live our lives. For God speaks to us through his word if we take the time to read it and absorb it.

I do not especially agree with Lincoln's belief about not joining a church. It is true that all churches are made up of people, human beings, like you and I. We are not perfect and never will be in this earthly life. But if we do not join the church because the church has people who are hypocrites and sinners then we are wrong because if we think we are so good then our influence is definitely needed. We certainly cannot increase the spirituality of any church by sitting back and criticizing the other people and the activities that go on in it. We should become members and let our influence be felt by those around us. Attending a church is not enough, we have to become part of it and work together for its building up God's kingdom.

Do we really believe that God hears our prayers? Did you ever try conversing with God through prayer? Perhaps we feel that prayer is a waste of time and God cannot or will not hear us. Perhaps we are again, ashamed, to pray especially in the presence of other people. Well, I tell you one thing, I wouldn't be here talking to you today if it were not for God and prayer. For I believe that God gives me the words to say and helps me to get them across to you. Believe me, when I say, God does hear our prayers. It is true he does not always answer them the way we feel they should be answered, but they are answered according to his will. God will guide you and direct you if you ask him. Try it.

Concerning our religious convictions; Do we have any? Do we know what we believe? Are our beliefs something that has been passed down to us through our parents? Don't get me wrong, these beliefs aren't bad, they are good, but we have to have our own Christians experience in order for us to believe. Jesus Christ has to come into your life and he has to make a difference in your life. Then you can really say that God has touched your heart and you will know when this happens because your life will be different.

Our spiritual lives are continually growing and has no relationship to our age, for God always reveals more and more to us as we converse with him, as we read and study his word, as we have experiences of our own.

What I have been trying to say is that a people can have a spiritual leader such as Lincoln was, but he can only do so much. The rest is up to the people themselves.

Christianity is a personal religion and has to be accepted by each individual person. Take time to ponder your spiritual life. Let God talk to you. Accept the role of Christ's disciple and be his witness.

## **The Shortest Way to Happiness**

### **Philippians 4:4-13**

Text is taken from I Thessalonians 5:18. “In everything give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.”

One ceaseless quest of human beings is the quest for happiness. All of us are always searching for the happiness we desire, always hoping there is some secret formula that we can find. Life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness are among our inalienable rights.

What is the surest road to happiness? Devious are the routes explored: many prove to be dead ends. A wise and noble Englishman, named William Law, in a book which has lived more than two centuries, wrote, “If anyone would tell you the shortest, surest way to all happiness and perfection, he must tell you to make a rule to yourself to thank and praise God for everything that happens to you.”

Perhaps we should make a distinction between “in everything” and “for everything”. We are to think and praise God in everything. “In everything” that we are to do – see, hear, feel, taste, smell – we need to thank God “in everything” that we do. As children, because we are able to run and play with other children, because we are physically and mentally able to go to school and learn; as adults because we are able to participate in civic activities in our community, town and county, we are able to participate in church activities to build his kingdom. “In everything” we do regardless of where we are or whatever we are doing, we need to praise and thank God.

We need to thank God “for everything” that he has given us. For all the beauty of nature that surrounds us, for the four seasons of the years, for life itself (our lives), for the air we breathe, for night and for day. “For everything” that we have we should be thanking and praising God because if it was not for him we would have nothing or we would be nothing. Getting back to this rule of William’s Laws in which he says we are to thank and praise God for everything that happens to us. Isn’t this rule for happiness just a bit too simple? But the testimony for it is too massive to dismiss. History’s radiant, joyous souls have been men and women who lifted grateful hearts to the Lord of all good life

Thanksgiving calls us to take the road of the grateful heart – the shortest, surest

way to happiness. Let us give thanks. We can really be much happier if we actually and truly appreciate everything we have. How miserable some people must be, who feel the world owes them a living and that they do not have to work or earn what they get out of life. How disappointed they must be become, how disillusioned they must be.

When one travels across an international border, one is apt to be greeted by an official of the Customs Department – if you travel by train – who puts a searching question: “Have you anything to declare?” Well have you in your mental and spiritual luggage, anything to declare with Thanksgiving?

On this November night we can declare our humble and hearty thanks for the ever-new, lavish beauty of the world. We live in one of the most beautiful valleys in this part of our country. Do we really take time to appreciate this beauty? For the soil that is perhaps some of the best in the county, are we grateful? Do we take time to thank God for this valley in which we live? Or are we too busy with our own lives to really appreciate and be grateful for what we have.

We can declare our thanks for the harvest and for those who join God in bringing it in. Even though we have had a lack of rain this past year, men have found ways to grow crops with the aid of irrigation. We can thank God that there was enough water to do this irrigating and that we had sense enough to do it. We are all thankful for those who have worked hard and long to bring the harvest in, for without their hands and their efforts, only half the job would have been done.

We can declare our thankfulness for this land in which we enjoy a great measure of freedom and justice and security. This country of ours is the most prosperous, a larger majority of the people enjoy a higher standard of living than any other countries in the world. We have a freedom to offer those people and views we do not agree with. We can vote for the candidate of our own desire. We are free to worship God in the manner in which we believe. We thank God for those who came to the land many years ago and worked hard, suffered much hardship, and died that we may enjoy what we have today.

We can go on and declare our thanks “for everything” and “in everything”. We could prolong our review of God’s mercies indefinitely if we would list them all. Health, friends, music, great books, arts, games, the responsibilities to help one another and to help other peoples in other lands to stand upon their feet. Tomorrow when we have abundance of food on our tables, so much that will go to waste

and be thrown away, let us think of those in our world that are less fortunate, those that are starving, those that do not know a Thanksgiving. Let us ask God to bless them, ask God to help us, to provide some help, however small it may be.

Shall we not thank God for the Church of Christ? Our church – right here! The world church? For the church universal? Consider all blessings wrought out for us by the life and death and resurrection of Christ. For all those things we are thankful and praise God for them. We take most of these things pretty well for granted, as if they had always been here and they just naturally belong to us – automatically. I think we shall remember this – God bestows these blessings upon us regardless of our social position, regardless of our wealth, or regardless of how important we think we are.

We can declare our thanks for everything that happens to us. The great masters of the art of Christian living insist, “praise and service are great healers.” Should we thank God for defeats and bereavements? It seems too high, to incredible – until you tip toe to where Jesus is praying. “At that time” says Matthew, when many of his own people rejected him, and he foresaw the ruin, which would result from their willful disobedience to the vision of God’s purpose; at that time when it seemed black ahead and around, Jesus answered and said, “I thank thee, O Father, Lord of Heaven and earth.” But in them he sends the chance to fight and overcome. On this Thanksgiving Day let us open our hearts and our minds and souls to God and thank him for everything and in everything that happens to us. This I believe is the shortest and surest way to happiness.

## **What It Means To Be Protestant**

### **John 8:28-36; Romans 5:1-8**

Text from Galatians 3:11 – “But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, the just shall live by faith.” Wednesday is Reformation Day – the 456<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the breaking of the iron grip of the Medieval Roman Catholic Church on the life of the Western World. It is the festival celebrating the Protestant reforming of the Church; it’s our spiritual “Fourth of July”.

We would not be celebrating Reformation Sunday if Martin Luther had not done what he did on October 31, 1517. He posted a notice on the door of his church. It was an invitation to scholars to debate and discuss (95) propositions, or theses, about the church. These theses had to do with Indulgences and they caused the well known split in the Christian church over 450 years ago. It divided the Church in to Protestants and Catholics.

The Reformation was not so much a rebellion as a recovery. True enough, this historic movement was complex; a person can interpret it in many ways. But the only way to understand Protestantism is to see it not simply as a rebellion against the Roman church, but as an attempt to recover the original intent and control of Christian faith.

Our subject today is of immediate and practical importance to us all. It is of interest to the young person who is wondering about dating and possibly marrying a person of another faith; it is of interest to the citizen who follow politics and who is trying to weigh the merits of potential candidates for office; it is of interest to the parents interested in maintaining adequate public schools; and it is of interest to the average Protestant who doesn’t quite know why he is a Protestant, other than that he was born of Protestant parents.

What does it mean to be a Protestant? Fundamentally it means to be a witness for something. Pro (in Latin) means “for” and testari means “to testify” to be a witness. A Protestant, therefore, is one who stands for certain great ideas, who champions certain positive beliefs, one who lives on the basis of definite high religious ideas. What are the basic Protestant convictions? Let’s look at a few of the most essential ones.

To begin with, a Protestant is one who believes in what the theologians call

“justification by faith”. It is the great principle that Paul labored to establish and which he expresses in the letter to the Romans and to the Galatians. It has to do with the fundamental concern of all religion, the relationship between man and God.

Broadly speaking, all religions can be classified into two groups – religions of attainment and religions of reliance. In a religion of attainment a man must satisfy the demands of an inexorable God. God is conceived of as setting certain standards: if a man attains them he is religious, and if he fails to attain he sins. After establishing the standards, God’s main purpose is to act as judge and bestow rewards and punishments in proportion to merit. The Pharisees of Jesus and Paul’s day is a good illustration. The elder brother in the parable of the Prodigal Son was trying to live by that idea.

In a religion of reliance, on the other hand, a man starts from an awareness of his own inadequacy. Realizing that life is too much for him to handle by himself, that he never is as good as he knows he would be, that his attainment is always less than his ideal, he relies confidently on God for help and strength and forgiveness. That was what the Prodigal son did. Paul’s experience on the Damascus road was the transition from one kind of religion to the others. The ground of his confidence was no longer personal achievement in keeping of regulations, however “holy and just and good” (as he says of the Jewish law) they might be. His whole reliance was upon the character of God as it was revealed in Christ.

Now, the Roman Catholic faith, like ancient Judaism, is a religion of attainment. Protestantism, on the other hand, is a religion of reliance. We believe that by no merit of our own can we be good enough to be worthy of God’s good gifts. God is “our Father”. We can no more repay him for what he has done for us than a two-year old child can repay its parents. And he doesn’t expect it any more than the parents expect it. All they and he alike want is the personal, confident, trustful reliance of the child.

In the second place a Protestant is one who believes in the “priesthood of believers”. “Priesthood of believer” means that every good man has equal and direct access to God.

A priest in most religions is a worshiper who can approach God. Protestants believe that every man can approach God. All believers are priests whether they preach sermons or dig ditches. In Luther’s words, all believing layman “are wor-

thy to appear before God, to pray for others, to teach each other mutually the things that are of God.”

This is diametrically opposed to the Roman Catholic point of view. To the Roman Catholic, the priest wields a divine power denied to ordinary men. In the Roman Catholic communion the priesthood alone has immediate access to God; only through the priest and the church does the Roman Catholic expect to be saved.

Applied to social relationships, the priesthood of believers means that each man has a mutual ministry toward his fellows.

Applied to church government, it means that all should participate in it. The Roman Catholic layman has no voice or vote in the administration of his church – its money, its officials, or its teaching. He has only one duty – to submit to it. The Protestant however, has the privileges and responsibilities of mutual control. Applied in the political structure of the nation it has involved the principle of religious liberty, and the principle of separation of church and state.

Some years ago when the US Senate began a new legislative day, it found it was without a chaplain to begin with prayer. For the first time in Congressional memory the Vice President took over the duty. Said Alben Barkley: “I can pray. That’s every man’s prerogative”. Then asking the Senate to join him, Barkley prayed: “Lord, in these days of uncertainty, we ask for and thank thee for the boom of thy guidance and direction. Endow us with wisdom to see the path of our duty and courage to keep our feet within it, Amen.” Well Alben Barkley was a Protestant, and that is a Protestant’s prayer. It is the living example of the priesthood of believers. The attitude is Protestant “I can pray”. That’s every man’s prerogative.” There is no appeal to anyone else except God himself. Mr. Barkley spoke directly to God, confident that God would hear him as surely as he would hear the Master himself.

In the third place, a Protestant is one who believes in the supreme authority of a scripture-enlightened conscience. All of us need some kind of authority by which to live, a standard to judge the true from the false, the right from the wrong. For the Roman Catholic that authority is the Church, personified in the Pope. In matters of faith and morals he must be obeyed without question.

It is sometimes rather loosely maintained that the final authority for Protestants is the Bible. That is not quite accurate. The final authority for the Protestant is his

own conscience, illuminated by scripture and undergirded with prayer.

Conscience, however, is a strange thing. To one brought up in the slums it will countenance stealing to one man it says, “thou shalt not drink”, but to many another it apparently raises no protest; many Germans were conscience stricken at the Nazi slayings during World War II but many were not. It is not, therefore, shifting sand? May it not be, as one modern has said: your conscience is only ‘what your mother told you before you were six years old?’ Surely that is not adequate authority, for if it were we would all be doomed.

No, we believe in a scripture-enlightened conscience, an inner voice purged, corrected and directed by the Bible. Only then do we live by the light that is light indeed. To be sure, it is no absolute sort of thing. Our scripture-enlightened conscience now forbid some things Luther himself did. And God has still more light to break out from the Bible. As we read and study God’s word we will learn more and more truth about life. We will find more answers to questions where we now have doubts. The Bible will be our guide for living our lives. It is the highest standard a man can know and the only one which permits growth. We believe in the authority of a scripture-enlightened conscience.

Finally, a Protestant is one who believes in the separation of the Church and the State. The first reformers, were they to visit the twentieth century, would be amazed to learn this, to be sure. But that’s a part of the genius of Protestantism; it is able to grow and learn as new occasions teach new duties. Actually, the separation of Church and State is a distinctively American contribution. From the year 325 A.D. until 1776 A.D., every Western state either dominated the Church or was dominated by it. The ideal of the Roman Catholic Church was realized in the 13th century by Pope Innocent III who virtually controlled the known civilized world. But North America was settled by people who rebelled against the idea of anyone telling them how they must worship and soon the corollary idea – that a Church might tell a State how it must legislate. The very first amendment our forefathers wrote into their proposed Constitution was that the State should make no law respecting the establishment of religion.

By “the separation of Church and State”, Protestants do not mean separation of the state from religious principles, nor separation of religion from politics. It does not mean that we believe one religion is as good as another. It means simply that we believe that the only way to safeguard the God-intended freedom of the individual- the freedom of speech, of assembly, of the press, of worship, is to keep the functions of political government separated from the functions of organized reli-

gion. This each is a check upon the power of the other. For “power tends to corrupt, absolute power corrupts absolutely.” It corrupts churches as well as states and bishops as well as politicians.

In Oxford, England, the spot can still be seen where in 1555, at the behest of Mary Tudor, the Roman Catholic queen, two Protestant bishops paid with their lives for the loyalty to the ideals we have been discovering. As these devoted men stood alone in the public square, each chained to a stake, an executioner brought a lighted faggot and threw it down at Ridley’s feet where the wood was piled around him. Bishop Latimer turned to his comrade in martyrdom and said, “Be of good cheer, Brother Ridley and play the man. We shall this day light such a candle, by God’s graces, in England as I trust shall never be put out.” The light that was kindled that day in Oxford town has grown from a candle flame to a mighty beacon of truth, at which many a torch has been lighted down the centuries. It is now in our hands; may we be found worthy of so high a heritage.

## **Another Side of God**

### **John 3:1-17**

Text is from John 3:16. “For God so loved the world that he gave his only son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”

The words of John 3:16 have been the breath of life to men and women for two thousand years because in them they have caught something that they felt in their bones to be true; that if God was God, then he cared for his world and people in it, and that if he cared and loved, love must always love in concrete and specific, not in the general and abstract and therefore he must do something, and this he did when Christ died the way he died, and rose to life the way he rose.

There are no words in the New Testament such as those in John 3:16 which through the years, have said so much to so many people. Martin Luther called them, “the Gospel in miniature.”

Listen first to the nouns that hold the live together, the way the “choiring strings” of the Brooklyn Bridge hold it in place. “God”, the Ground and Meaning of existence. The “World”, the condition of existence; time, space, sin; wind, sand and stars; blood, sweat, tears; people, business, beauty; birth, death, and transfiguration, all these things, the intricate weaving together of the condition of existence – the world. And “life” – the fulfillment of existence; not simply bodily existence, but life stripped of its shackles, flowing naturally and luxuriantly, finding itself always as it is lifted up from one level to another, “eternal life.”

These three things are basic things. Nothing could be more substantial in the sense of being elemental than these three things. They are the concern of every human being to some degree or another-the Ground and Meaning of his existence, the conditions of his existence, and the fulfillment of it.

Now listen to the verbs. Two describe the action of God. He “loved” and he “gave”. These two acts go together invariably and inevitably. There is no real love without giving. You cannot imagine love in the abstract. Love must move out into the concrete and the specific to spend itself upon the object of its love. And there is no real giving, especially between people, without love, except it be condescension or patronage. Two verbs describe the response of men and women to what God did. They “believe”, not in the sense that they assent intellectually to a

formula or statement of fact; but they believe in the sense that they accept what he did as a person gladly accepts and receives a gift from a person who loves him greatly. And the other verb is “have”. They possess something. They hold something in themselves as a result of their accepting what God did.

There is one word that we have not mentioned, “Son”. This is the center beam without which the whole sentence would collapse.

The meaning of these words has never yet been completely expressed by anyone, though it has been felt over and over again. I would like to set these words besides the words that we were thinking about last Sunday were these, “God is Spirit; and they that worship him must worship him in Spirit and in truth.” Those words, last Sunday’s words, declare that God is something. God is Spirit-intangible, invisible; he is everywhere; he cannot be caught and held in a local place such as this, for he breathes into everything that exists the breath of life. Those words make plain that God is something. These words declare that God did something. God who is spirit, revealed himself in a person, at a particular time and in a particular person. He revealed the depth of his divine love in the love of Jesus.

These two things are not mutually exclusive. The universal is always expressing itself in the particular. Universal beauty is always yearning to express itself in a beautiful building; universal truth is always striving to express itself in a true proposition. And, on the other hand, the particular is always revealing the heights and depths of the universal, as a particular person can reveal the nature of man in a way that is completely surprising and disarming. Likewise, God, the universal spirit, expressed himself in a particular person; and the particular person revealed the wonders of God’s nature.

The idea we were thinking about last Sunday showed us the side of God needed to be seen by a woman puttering around in the secondary things of religion. And we too need to see that side as we immerse ourselves in the relatively unimportant things of religion. Such as, how our church building should be decorated.

These words show us a different side, the side that a man, who was fumbling after life, trying to find it in the intricacies of the religious law, needed to see. Jesus said to Nicodemus, “this is possible.” Life abounds only when it is exposed to love, and God so loved life that he brought it into flower.

The other contrast is this. Those words last week led us outward to the things that

we have in common with all men. They influence us to move outward in our understanding of people who worship differently from the way we worship, realizing that they were reaching after the same God, that the same spirit of life is animating them that animates us. That was one side of God. These words of today's text lead us inward to the things that make us different. For what God did, made a difference; and the difference makes an inevitable division. There is a line in life, and you cannot get away from it. One side of it is those who accept what God did and on the other side are those who reject it. This is one of the points to which a great many modern Christians come with difficulty. The universal side of God puzzles them.

Perhaps this illustration in an altogether different realm, and of course on a far lesser scale, will show them at least what we mean. When Galileo revealed the sun as the center of the solar system, it made a difference. People could accept it, or reject it. If they accepted it, they had a freedom to move about not only in the realm of the earth but in outer space that those who rejected it did not have and can never have. A man may choose to reject it, but he cannot say that the revelation did not make a difference.

When God, through Jesus Christ, revealed his love as the center of the spiritual universe, it made a difference. You and I can accept it or reject it, either way; but you cannot be indifferent about it, and you cannot say that it doesn't make any difference to the rest of the world. And you can not say that all the religions of the world are essentially alike, because here is something that came right into the heart of the world, something that God did, and in a way divided people, as the sun divides the night from the day. If you accept what he did, you can have a life that is free from many of the things that restrict and inhibit life otherwise. And if you reject what he did, you go in darkness, which you might otherwise avoid.

This comes right down into our midst, you see. This is why Christians who have really been confronted with this and who feel that in this event that took place in Jerusalem so many years ago something decisive happened, feel that they must tell the world about it, talk about it, not to impose it upon other people, but to show it to them and give them a chance to accept it or reject it.

When a person becomes a 'reborn' Christian and Jesus Christ truly comes into your life, he has to witness to others for Christ's sake. The Holy Spirit within them is driving them to become true disciples and witnesses for Christ. I know that religion, Christianity, cannot be forced on another person. For human nature

is to reject that which is forced upon us. Christianity is a personal religion and has to be accepted by each individual. However in some way we should always try to get our message across to other people. Every person isn't going to accept our religion or our beliefs, but they should have the opportunity to make up their own minds. God "sent" John the Baptist, but he "gave" his Son. Giving us at once a more complete and a more costly thing than sending.

It is a more complete thing. You may send a thing and withdraw it. But when you give there is no withdrawal. Well God "gave" his Son – He gave him, entirely, absolutely, unreservedly.

Ralph Vaughan Williams, the great English composer, not long before he died, made a speech about music and said, "music must be offered to all, though it will not be accepted by all," I feel something like that about Jesus Christ. What God did in Christ, the love that was expressed in that on sublime, yet elemental simple act, must be offered to all, though all will not accept it. Some will draw back, close their minds, shut their hearts to it; some will not want to give what they need to give in response to it, but it must be offered to all. This is our task; this is our ministry in the world.

Taken, then, these two great lines from St. John's Gospel and hold them right together as expression of one great idea about God. "God is Spirit." "God so loved you (for that is what it means) that he gave himself in his son for you, that you might not be lost", but have life and have it more abundantly.

## **Days of Destiny**

### **Isaiah 6**

Text is taken from Mark 1:15. "Jesus said, the time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is at hand, repent, and believe in the Gospel." This text is what Jesus was preaching as he started this ministry in Galilee. This same text can be preached today for thoughtful men everywhere feel that these days in which we are living are days of destiny where the world is being overcome with evil forces. Perhaps each generation has felt the same. In 1517 when Martin Luther seemed to be destroying the foundations of the Kingdom itself; in 1789 when the French revolutionists apparently were undermining civilization; and again in 1861 when the American Union began falling apart, it surely seemed to many that those were fateful days. And they were. So are these.

Our Lord was no stranger to crucial times. It was a day of destiny for him and the world when he stood in the crowd and decided, perhaps while listening to the rugged John, to be baptized at his hands.

It was a night of destiny when Jesus looked up from his prayers in Gethsemane and saw the torches of those who had come to arrest him. It was a night of destiny for the world. He did not flee and save himself. Rather he volunteered to die that streams of healing grace might flood the ages.

It was a day of destiny when Paul reached Troas on his second missionary journey. His decision at Troas is one of the pivotal decisions of history. If he had turned east, Christian missionaries would be coming to us from China, Japan and India. But by God's grace he turned west toward Europe and the Americas.

Who can tell but that in these days in which we now live will be momentous in the light of centuries? One of our radio preachers has said again and again that historians for a thousand years will be saying, How would it have been to have lived, for example in 1945? In that year two great dictators were defeated, the atomic bomb was discovered and used, and the United Nations came into being. What a year! Days of destiny.

A captain in the army was standing on a platform of his Pullman car waiting for his train to pull out of the station. On an adjoining track there stood a private car with the shades drawn. His attention was called to it as a limousine drew up be-

side it and some men entered the private car. He waited for a moment, and suddenly the shade was raised and he found himself standing face to face with Winston Churchill. The Captain said he was so confused that he simply waved, forgetting to salute. Mr. Churchill waved back, and then his train was gone. The officer said he felt as though, in that brief moment in 1943, he had been face to face with destiny.

In days of destiny what shall religion do? Does the church have anything that is dynamic and creative and redemptive to say? Shall we be escape artists and flee to some otherworldly theology? Shall we busy ourselves with organizational details so that the groans of the world will not disturb us? Shall we bury our heads in the sand and refuse to see the earth in travail? The church has followed these courses to other ages, and wherever it has done so, its influence has declined and men have looked upon it with contempt for its shameful failure. There are some stern truths we must declare in these days without fear and without hesitation. For the good of our own souls we must preach these verities that all men everywhere may hear.

In the first place, we might realize that days of destiny draw out of us either the demonic or the divine. We are on the side either of the devil or the angels. We stand wither for the hurt or the healing of the world.

We stand in a day that shakes the foundations of the world. Demonic forces hem us in. The threat of inflation, strikes, industrial strife, racial tension, the rising tide of divorce, fifty million drinking Americans, and many other declining morals in this country and the world – here we stand amid the flood of evil. What it does to us depends upon what is in us. If we are unregenerate renegades, then we will turn to personal immoralities and have an orgy of self-indulgence. But if we are the redeemed of the Most High God, then we will offer ourselves for the redemption of the world through Jesus Christ.

As a church, as Christians, are we to overlook these evil conditions about us? Are we to ignore them as if they do not exist? Are we going to say, “What can I do?” Or, as a church are we going to stand up and speak out for what we believe and what we know is right and good? As Christians we cannot stand by and tolerate the moral decay that is taking place. God will not let us.

In the days of destiny, I want to walk with my Lord very closely that these Christian virtues, fortitude, temperance, justice, mercy, purity, love-may shine under

the intense pressure of the events of the hour. My little candles, in the tornado-like winds of these evil days, may flicker but it will never go out, for it is lighted by the Light of the World.

In the second place, the days of destiny demand a double devotion to duty. That word “duty” is treated badly because we look upon it as meaning some dark sinister force which is driving us to do tasks which are repellent and which we do not want to do.

It seems that we often come at the matter of duty from the wrong end. We think of it as a compulsion driving us rather than as an opportunity challenging us.

Days of destiny such as these make us wonder what the will of God is for our lives and the life of the world.

Frankly, sometimes I have trouble knowing what the will of God is for my own life or for the lives of others around me. However, I know that if I would stop long enough to listen to God I would know this. But I do know this: I know within reasonable limits what my duty is to my children-that clear duty is the will of God. I know within limits what my duty is to my mate-that unmistakable duty is the will of God. I know with a fair degree of accuracy what my duty to my church is in these times-that obvious duty is the will of God. And to be sure, I know with reasonable clarity my duty to my generation and that duty is the inscrutable will of my Heavenly Father. Carlyle said, “Do the duty which is nearest thee, and which thou knowest to do and thy second duty will already have become clear.” I truly believe that God does speak to us, that he will guide and direct our lives if we want him to.

We may have intellectual difficulties with the will of God, but really I have no intellectual difficulty in the area of my duty to the world. Something deep written me tells me that there is an “ought”, a duty that thrusts me into the midst of the world’s woe, a duty that is synonymous with the will of God.

Days of destiny demand a double devotion to duty in the matter of purity of character, selfishness in service, loyalty to my mission as a disciple of Jesus, and especially in the area of faithfulness to the privilege of prayer and worship.

In the third place, days of destiny ought not to dull our dreams.

When something happens to us that is unexpected, when something comes to us that we are unable to understand, we often say, "if I had only known" but we do know, we should know, we can know. For God tells us in his word. We need to read his word and ask him for understanding for the Bible is the book of life. God also speaks to each of us individually and we would know if only we would listen to him.

We must keep on dreaming. The world is hungry. In our dreams we must see a world that is fed. The world is suffering-in our dreams we must visualize a world in which men are not in pain. The world is full of prejudices, in our dreams we need to see men set free, living together in harmony and peace and love. And while we are dreaming, let us dream of the Holy Spirit penetrating the hearts of all persons everywhere so that all our dreams may come true. For I am convinced that once we have accepted Jesus Christ into our lives all of these dreams will certainly come true.

A Negro preacher in St. John's Cathedral in New York selected as his theme for Brotherhood Day, "Apostles of Sensitiveness." Dr. Charles Lever added, "One of the great things the church can do today is to keep the world sensitive to pain." The world is dying-lost-and in our dreaming we must see a world that is as our Lord dreamed of it, "Kingdom come, they will be done on earth as it is in Heaven.

"Dreamers are they-but they are God's dreams."

Days of destiny rather than dull our dreams, must sharpen them, for it is out of vision that action comes. "When there is no vision, the people perish." They do nothing about the world's woe. And remember this also, if all we do is dream then we all are lost for we need action along with our dreams to help them come true.

In the last place, in days of destiny we shall meet destruction and deliverance, individually and collectively.

Theses days of destiny have brought us to the crossroads; we can either destroy one another or save one another. What shall it be?

Kirtley F. Mather, professor of geology at Harvard, has said, "with one accord the experts in atomic physics tells us that there can be no adequate military defense for us or anyone else against death and destruction from atomic explosions and the products of nuclear fusion.

It's our duty then to develop these forces for the good of mankind instead of developing weapons for its destruction.

Here then stands our generation, poised upon the brink of a bottomless pit. Individually and corporately we are lost without that Great Man of Nazareth, the Savior of the world, who came to "seek and to save." To individual men, in days of destiny, he cries with dutiful voice. "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest."

And to us collectively, else we destroy one another, God says, "love your enemies... Go ye into all the world and teach the Gospel... Ye are all on in Christ Jesus."

This may sound like a dim picture of our world, and it is. But it can be brightened by Jesus Christ. Accept him as your Lord and Savior.

## **Real New Year's Resolutions**

### **Phil. 3: 7-16**

Today's text is from Phil. 3:13-14. "I do not consider that I have made it my own; but one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and striving forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."

It is exhilarating to meet a man who knows his own mind, who is capable of making decisions, and has the moral stamina to put them into action. Such a man not only plots his course for the future, but also launches himself on it with a mighty resolve. The Apostle Paul was this kind of a man. "One thing I do." He was nothing if not decisive. Indecision is the sworn enemy of true performances. Those of us who work for someone else knows that if you can not make decisions, management does not want you. Of course, good judgment has to be made in making all decisions. The boss doesn't want to know every little detail, that's what he pays you for.

And so it is with making New Year's resolutions, for there are those who treat this subject as one fitted for wisecracks and jokers. The old saying is that New Year's resolutions are made to be broken. Generally the scorer is himself lacking in the powers of decision. He has never learned how to mobilize the constructive forces of his own life. He dissipates his energies, scatters his resources, and executes nothing. He cannot hold to one course long enough to bring it to success. He has never been able to say, "one thing I do."

To make a thoughtful and sincere resolution for the New Year is in itself evidence of capacity and courage.

Among older persons only the young in heart talk and plan for the future. Such a man was Paul. He was already a prisoner when his epistle was written. Thirty years of ravel, hardship, labor and suffering in the service of Christ lay behind. He knew that as the prisoner of the Emperor Nero the end could not be far off. Yet from his prison cell in Rome he writes, in effect, "this one thing I do, forgetting the past with it achievements and its failures, old, worn, and broken as I am, but with the light of unquestionable hope in me, I press forward like an athlete in a race, straining with all my energies toward the goal where the victor's prize waits me, the upward call of God in Christ Jesus and my Master's 'well done'."

This is what Jesus Christ in our lives can do for us. We will not know defeat for he guides and directs us in victory. He gives us strength, courage and faith when we most need it.

For our first resolution this morning we might well begin with the past.

Let us therefore resolve to remember of the past only that which is useful for the future. The close of the old year is an excellent time at which to take a spiritual inventory of our losses and our gains.

Not one can possibly be at peace with himself in the new year if his conscience is continually presenting him with unsettled accounts from the old.

The awareness of unforgiving sin has a blighting, dulling, paralyzing effect on the individual. It prevents him from living at his best. Paul had hateful memories that might well have continued to rankle in his breast and to torture him even after he had made his surrender on the road to Damascus. But their power over him was broken because he had sought and found God's forgiveness.

There are some men who, had they killed a lion and a bear as David did, would have lived on the reputation of it to the end, and been insufferable. But David said, "the Lord who delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and the Lord who delivered me out of the paw of the bear, will give me victory over this Goliath!" And the memory of the almighty made him strong. Forget past triumphs if they make you proud. Remember them if they make you strong. Forget past failures when the trumpet calls. Remember them when you are prone to boast. Have you no Red Sea crossed? Have you no lion slain? Have you no token of the love of God in the year that is driving to its close? Bind that upon your heart? Set it as a frontlet upon your brow! There is a moral power in remembrance when we remember the bounty of God.

It is dangerous to try to forget the past if sin lies in it unconfessed and unforgiven. But when we have turned the past over to God and left it in his hands, we are emancipated (freed). The ball and chain has been struck off our ankle. We are free. This is the promise of God.

"It is easy for a man to get stuck in his own yesterdays."

There are right and wrong uses on our part. In Deut. 8:2 we read “thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God lead thee.” and Paul says, “Forgetting those things which are behind.” Paul wasn’t contradicting Moses. For all apparent contrasts, Moses and Paul are in true harmony. They are forging out a doctrine of the past and it takes prophet and apostle to do that. The one turns round and looking down the past, he cries remember! The other turns his head and cries forget! There are some things then, that I must remember, and there are some other things that I must forget.

Let us then one by one say: “this one thing I resolve to do...” I shall forget the past, save for those memories that may minister to my soul’s upward progress.

Secondly, as the old year slowly draws to a close, let us resolve to cultivate a character that rises about resentment and unforgiveness.

Some people treasure the memory of the past hurts and offenses as a miser hoards gold – the wrongs that have been done to them, the conflicts with other personalities, the annoyances and troubles of life.

As a result these unhealthy memories becomes despotic and dominant, destroying the peace and happiness of their victim. Self-pity and wounded self-esteem causes human character to shrivel and wither. Our grievances against our fellowman towers like mountains and beside them we stand poor, dwarfed, blighted personalities.

It must be terrible to constantly have on one’s mind the feeling of resentment, the feeling of wanting to get even with someone for something he has done to you, for all of thoughts and time can be taken up in such activities; activities that are useless, activities that will benefit no one including ourselves. If we cannot forgive others for something they have done to us, then God cannot forgive us.

Thirdly, Let us resolve to keep our finest friendships intact and to strengthen the ties that bind us to them we love.

True friends are not a luxury in life; they are indispensable.

A friend tried and true is one who constantly challenges us to rise into something noble and better than we have yet attained and whose example inspires us to greater effort.

Friendship must be reciprocal. It cannot be all one way for friendship is a two way street. It ought to be on a mutual give and take basis. Each should contribute to the other. True friendship means complete relaxation and a frank exchange of ideas without fear of misunderstanding. In this happy relationship one can be one's natural self, for as it has been truly said: "A friend is one who knows all about us and loves us just the same."

Some of us have friends that we cannot afford. As long as we go out of our way to help them, to furnish them with something to eat, to furnish transportation for them, they are our friends but as soon as something happens to stop some of this we do not see them anymore.

A friend is a person we should be able to talk with, a person who understands our problems, a person who is not afraid to tell us what our faults are, to offer advice. A person who constructively criticizes our lives and offer suggestions for its improvement.

A friend isn't someone who goes along with everything we say and do. A friend isn't someone who cuddles us constantly, who tries to smooth over our rough spots.

Friendship is one of God's richest gifts to a lonesome world. We should always cherish it.

Fourth, let us resolve to keep ever before us the highest possible goal.

That was true of Paul: "One thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."

These words are not a mere echo that comes to us across "dim tracts of time." They are true for our own day and generation. Faith in God as Christ has revealed him can make us undefeatable. Professor Rufus Jones states the issue in understandable words. "Let a person's inner being be fortified with faith in God and all his creative powers are quickened, his marching strength is heightened and his grip on everyday things is immensely increased. It is as though he has tapped a hidden reservoir of power."

Thorwaldsen, the great Danish sculptor, feeling one day his freshness of concep-

tion decaying, said to a friend: “My power is on the decline.” Asked what he meant, he pointed...(text not available for translation).

About all of us have goals and plans for our lives. We are always trying to better ourselves so that we can provide more material security for our families. Of course some people try to raise their standards merely for social prestige, for recognition. I don't see anything wrong with each person trying to better himself but how about our spiritual lives?

Are you trying to better your spiritual life? For what good is all the material possessions, all the money we can possibly make if God is not with us? We certainly cannot take it with us when we die but when Christ is within our hearts the money we make can certainly be a blessing if used to help build God's kingdom on this earth. If you haven't included God in your plans and goals, you had better evaluate them and include him.

“My God shall supply all your needs”, says Paul. We are not alone. We can face the New Year with confidence and courage when we face it with God. This year make some real New Year's resolutions that will be meaningful for your life.

## **Real Worship**

### **John 4:5-26, 39-42**

Text is from John 4:24. “God is spirit and those who worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.”

If only we had a moving picture and a tape recording of the scene at Jacob’s well when Jesus had the conversation with the Samaritan woman. It might tell us whether the woman was just trying to ‘change the subject’ when she asked the old question, which is the right place to worship, on the mountain in Jerusalem, Mt. Zion or as her fathers had told her, Mt. Gerizin? To avoid something that goes to the heart of your own situation and which is difficult for you to face, you go skirting off in another direction and bring up a religious controversy to which there seems to be no answer at all. When someone tries to pry into one personal faith and beliefs we often ask questions that will tend to divert the subject from ourselves. We never seem to want to face up to our own situations and our inward feelings regarding our faith and beliefs. Perhaps we do not know what we believe and therefore are not willing to discuss it.

The answer that Jesus gave to the woman is familiar to most of us. Jesus said, “the time is coming, when ye shall neither on the mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem worship the Father. The hour cometh and now is when the true worshipper shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is spirit and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.”

What Jesus was trying to say to the woman was, it doesn’t really make any difference where you worship God. That isn’t the real thing in religion, and it is time you came out of those shallow pools of religious controversy about secondary things in religion.

Set against the background of religious prejudice, these words spring into life. Jesus was saying that the real question in religion is not where man worships but whom he worships. He was saying to the woman, it doesn’t make any real difference whether you worship God on one mountain or the other, for God is everywhere. The important thing is that you worship the Father, the God who is Spirit, the God who is present on both mountains, who is in all places, animating all lives; not only Jews and Samaritans, but Greeks and Romans, and people in all parts of the earth. And it is true isn’t it, that if a man worships a small local God,

his worship will be small, shrinking life to fit the small pattern. If he worships the American God, or the Western God, or the Russian God, or the Eastern God, his religion is bound to breed hatred and misunderstanding, as it did in those days when Jesus was alive in Palestine.

I think here we can talk for a moment about people who say they do not have to come to church to worship God. This is very true that you need not be in a church building to worship God. Men who like to hunt say they can worship God in the woods but how many hunters take the time from their hunting to worship God. How many hunters actually think about God while they are out in the woods? I can only say this, that if a person is really a Christian, having accepted Christ into his heart, he will want to be in church on Sunday morning worshipping God with other Christians, and all the excuses people make will not replace the actual church worship service. I also believe that we certainly can and should devote at least this (1) hour per week to God. I certainly believe we should worship God when we are out-of-doors because everything that surrounds us is his creation.

If a person worships the Father, the Spirit, his religion will undercut the barriers and help him pass over into the lives of other people so that instead of his religious life separating him from other people, it will draw him close to them. One mountain or another will make no difference; one church building or another will make no difference. This is one of the things that Jesus is saying to us; detach yourself from the little local pattern of worship and reach for the Great thing, the spirit of the living God who is Father of all.

Think about some of the things that separate people in religion. One man says, "you keep Sunday as a day of rest; we keep Saturday." Another man says, "You have two candles, or six candles on your alter, we have sixty or we have none." One person says, "you kneel at the rail when you receive communion; we remain in our seats." One person says, "you have Bishops, and you insist that there must be Bishops if there is to be a church; we have no Bishops, and will have none of them." You could go on and on. Is Jesus saying to us that these things, important though they may be in their place, are not the things that really matter? I know he is. First we need to accept Christ in our hearts and we need to know who and why we worship. The rest of the things are aids to our worship and to our serving God better.

The words of the text have an air of greatness about them-just as they stand, without any explanation or any word of interpretation. Even though you did not know

who said them, or under what circumstances or exactly what they meant, you would know instinctively that they were important, that they said something that was significant. These simple words, not one of them with more than two syllables, yet neither trivial nor trite, and as you hear them, you can feel the pulsation of a great idea in them.

“God is Spirit.” No article, not “a” Spirit. God is spirit. Spirit is, most elementally, breath, the breath of life. Think what that means. “God is spirit.” It is impossible to exhaust the wealth of this great declaration. That is the most fundamental proposition in theology. God is not the totality of things – the all; nor is he an imminent principle to which all things conform; he is Spirit, active energy, alive and with purpose, but free from the temporal and spatial limitations which are characteristic of matter. Consequently, there is no need to seek him in a local habitation.

A gifted actor or director takes a play that has been neglected for many years and laid dormant on the shelf. He sees hidden possibilities in it; he brings it out; produces it, breathes into it the breath of life, his own spirit. He revives the play. A team in an athletic contest rises to unsuspected heights when the stands cheer and breathe into the team the spirit of the school.

God, the ultimate mystery, the indefinable One, the Ground of our very being and existence, about whom so many speculations have been made, wisely and unwisely; God to whom we all in some way instinctively reach out, and apart from whom we can find no rest, this God is the breathe of life. God is that which makes everything else live. God is not a material substance, is not like a tree, or a river, or the sun or even a person. He is greater than that. He is Spirit, he is the breathe of life, the energy, without which there would be no tree, no rice, no sun, and no person.

God, in this very elementary sense, is that which animates. And to make it real to you, God is he who animates you, who is the breath of life in you, without whom you would be nothing but a limp, inactive, unthinking, imagining lump of clay. God is spirit.

“And they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.” That is, those who worship him, who respond to him, who turn instinctively and almost impulsively toward him as a plant turns toward the sun, those who find in him the very center of their existence, even though they do not know quite how or why; those who bow down to him in recognition of their complete dependence upon

him-those who worship him must do so, remembering who he is. He is Spirit; he is in no particular place; he is invisible and intangible; he transcends all the ups and downs of historic existence. He is everywhere. He is in everything that exists. They who worship him just approach him in Spirit and in truth, or as some translators have told us, the word truth means reality.

If we were to translate this, we might say that real worship is and always must be a deep calling into deep, the deepest thing in you calling unto the deepest thing in the nature of the universe; not simply that which is on the surface of your mind, not simply your bodily movements in an act that you can perform almost automatically, but that which is deepest and most real in you, reaching out to that which is highest and most real in the universe.

On the day when Christ pronounced these words ‘the true worshipper shall worship the Father in Spirit and in truth’, he was indeed the Son of God. He for the first time gave utterance to the idea upon which shall rest the edifice of everlasting religion. He founded the pure worship, of no age, of no chime, which shall be that of all lofty souls to the end of time. Not only was his religion, that day, the benign religion of humanity, but it was the absolute religion: and if other planets have inhabitants endowed with reason and morality, their religion cannot be different from that which Jesus proclaimed at Jacob’s well. Man has not been able to abide by the worship; we attain the ideal for a moment. But the gleam becomes the full day, and after passing through all the circles of error, humanity will return to these words, as to the immortal expression of its faith and its hopes.

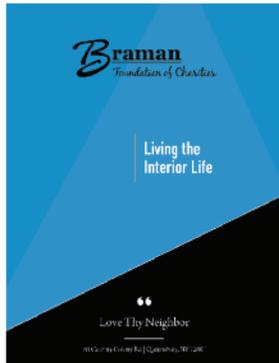
Real worship is man standing before God in the spirit of real gratitude, thanking him for the very wonder of existence, with its difficulties, hazards, and danger; nevertheless, thanking him for the opportunity of life, and for the beauty and wonder of the world, in spite of its ugliness, and in spite of the things which sometimes make it almost unbearable.

Real worship is man standing before God in the spirit of real gratitude; also in the spirit of real penitence, knowing deep in himself that he falls far short of that which he might have been and God hopes him to be; standing before God in the Spirit of real trust and confidence; willing to go forward into the future, no matter how dark and forbidding it may be at the time, because he believes that the strength that he needs to meet any situation will be given him by the Source of all strength.

Worship like this is not something that you can perform automatically, going

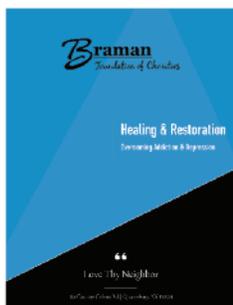
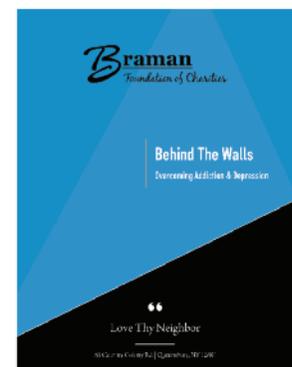
through the motions. It is something that represents the offerings of your whole life. “God is Spirit”: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.

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



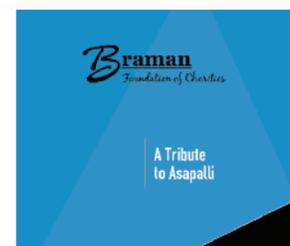
Many of us struggle with stress, depression, our weight, and other debilitating issues. "Living the Interior Life" is a program that teaches the individual affirmative prayer, meditation techniques, cognitive behavior therapy, overcoming addiction, physical exercise and proper nutrition. In addition, 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.

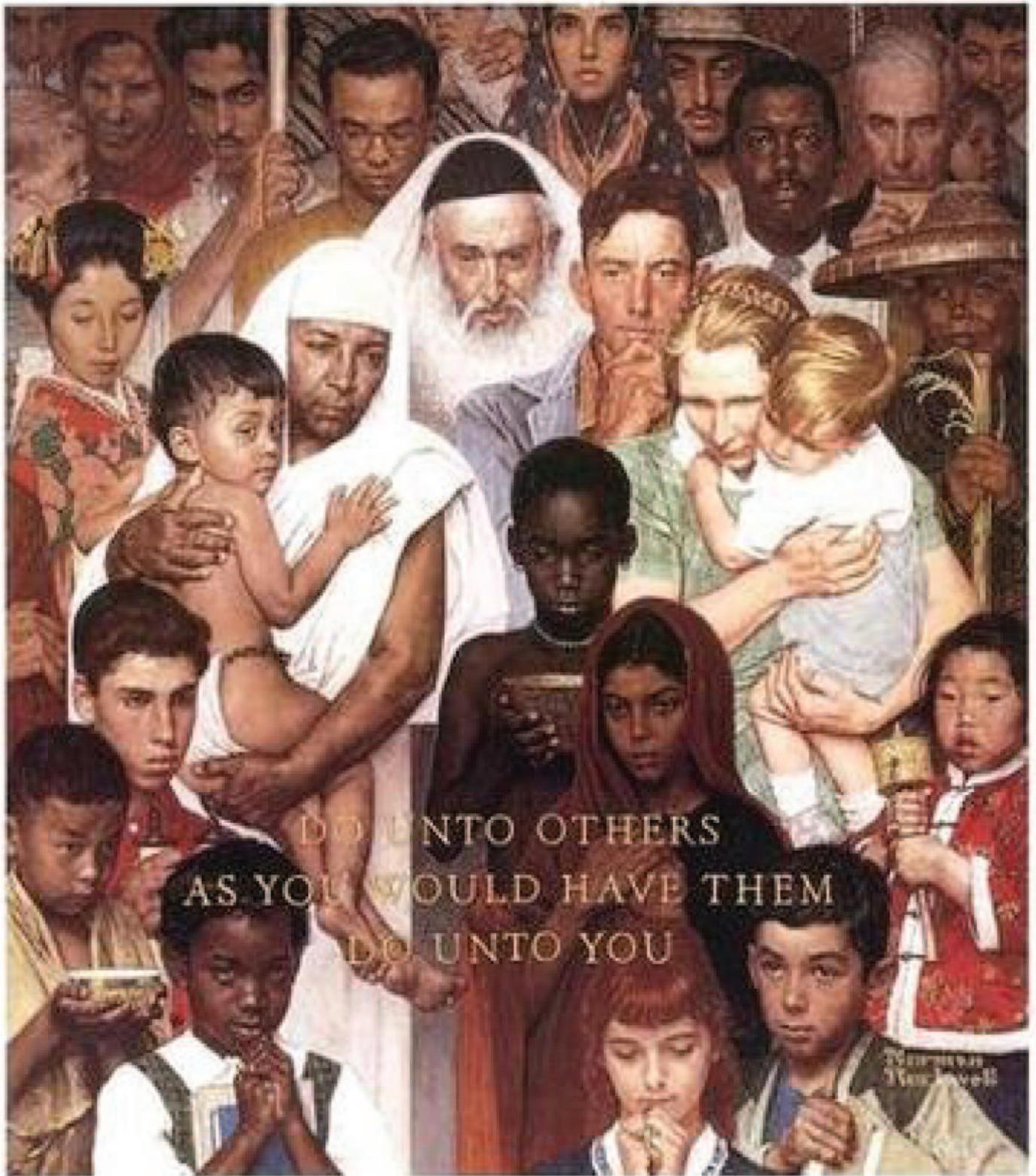


Millions of us suffer needlessly from addiction & depression. The reasons for this are many. In this program we emphasize the 12 step method of Recovery, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, and Meditation techniques to overcome difficulties. We also rely on God's grace to help you be lifted from your dilemma.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