

*B*raman *Foundation of Charities*



South Harpersfield
United Methodist Church
Geneva, Ohio

The Sermons of Richard W. Braman Vol. 2

“

Love Thy Neighbor

65 Country Colony Rd. | Queensbury, NY 12804



Sandra Torrant owes everything in her life to her Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Assisting with the perpetuity of Rev. Richard Braman's sermons is a service to our Lord and provides a constant source of inspiration as she continues on her Christian journey.

Sandra was baptized in the Lord on July 9, 1950 and until 2017, she had been a lifelong member of the Reformed Church in America since 1963. She has felt the presence of the Lord in her life since receiving him as her Lord and Savior at that time. Throughout her life, the spirit has led her to serve the Lord in her church both as a Christian educator and an Elder, as well at the regional synod level.

She is currently a member of the Presbyterian Church, USA, in Cary, NC. He continues to open her heart to serve him in new and different ways, recently serving him in a Guatemalan mission. To God be the glory!

XOXO
Sandi

TABLE OF CONTENTS

A Big Offer	Page 4
Can it Be Done Alone	Page 8
Differing Gifts	Page 13
Following by Faith	Page 17
Four Highways to God	Page 21
Hope Our Heritage	Page 25
Jesus is Lord	Page 28
The Trinity	Page 32
True Success	Page 36
Vital Experiences	Page 40
Working With All Your Heart	Page 44
Believing in Easter	Page 48
Conquering Inner Space	Page 54
Greatness of Life	Page 58
If Babies Could Vote	Page 62
Making God Real to Us	Page 66
The Human Cry That is Prayer	Page 70

TABLE OF CONTENTS

A Big Offer

Scripture: Ephesians 1: 1-14

Offertory Sentence: 1Peter 4:10

My text this morning is from Ephesians 3:8, “To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.”

The president of a great university in a public address criticized his pastor. There was nothing acid in the criticism. It was constructive. I feel sure that the eminent gentlemen would have made it to his pastor face to face. He said, “in his preaching he never makes a big enough offer. He doesn’t promise enough. His promises are too small.”

A minister called a phone number to invite a family to attend the church that he served. He was thrown off balance by a woman’s blunt inquiry, “what do you have to offer?”

Well, what do we have to offer? The church, this church, of itself has nothing to offer. We can offer only what has been given to us. And that is a very big offer!

First of all, we offer God as a personal friend. We offer Him in his greatness. We offer him in his nearness. He is a friend who is close to a person and closest to him in his time of need and crisis. All in all, we offer God to you. We offer God as a personal friend who will not invade your personality. For friendship a man must give a response. That is your great privilege. Yes, we offer God as a personal friend.

God can be a personal friend to each one of us. What is a personal friend? A personal friend is someone we can talk with, someone we can talk over our personal problems, someone who will give us the kind of advice and guidance we need. Someone who will not tell others of our confidential business, someone we can trust and someone we can put our faith. This is what a personal friend is and this what God is if we are willing to accept him as our personal friend.

Secondly, we offer Jesus Christ as a Divine Redeemer.

This is an offer of God’s ultimate friendship. “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.” God’s friendship was revealed in Jesus Christ. Jesus revealed it. Through the reading of the Gospels we can see that Jesus was a friend to all those who believed, to all those who truly repented of their sins. Jesus taught that you cannot live by the law alone, that something additional is needed, faith and trust in God. The scribes and Pharisees were living according to the law but they didn’t have the love of God in their hearts. This Jesus revealed the love and friendship of God to us. Maybe some of us think the Bible cannot be applied to our times but I’m sure if you read and study the Bible you will be convinced that it can and that the teachings of Jesus are as good today as they were nearly 2000 years ago.

As a friend, God discovers us as we are. He discovers us, as we ourselves know ourselves to be. We are sinful. When we truly admit that we are not perfect and that we are sinful, then God can really start to help us. God doesn't deny these facts. Yet, he doesn't swat us as though we were undesirable flies. He is not a sentimentalist who would cover up a bad smell with rose water. Instead, he redeems us at a cost. We cannot expect to obtain anything worthwhile for nothing. A life devoted to God costs us in personal sacrifice.

Jesus Christ gives his blood for us. We should not react with a negative attitude to the word blood. It is, we admit, often used unworthily, sentimentally and obnoxiously. But remember that it is used nobly too. Men do give their blood for their country, for the cure of disease, for the blood bank. Christ died for us, for the forgiveness of our sins. By Christ's own deed and his own offer the church offers Christ as your Divine Redeemer.

We offer the Holy Spirit as a creative power. Now you can see that we have offered the Trinity. We should not be perplexed about this but we should accept the offer as it has been given; we offer God as your personal friend, Jesus Christ as your Divine Redeemer and the Holy Spirit as a creative power in you.

We need God's power. We need his power to make something new out of us. As we are, we are too animal; we are too human. We need to become as children. We need to be born again. We need regeneration. Life has to have a purpose. We have to have a reason for our lives. God gives us this reason, this purpose, through the promise of eternal life in his kingdom.

We need to be put into process. We need to have a good work begun in us, which will be carried on to completion. It doesn't yet appear what we shall be. A man must always be exceeding himself.

It is that, that while Dr. J.H. Jewett was ministering in England, he once decided to preach on the text, "the wind bloweth where it listeth." Upon studying the text he realized that he knew nothing about the wind. He decided to consult a sailor about the actions of the wind. When he went to the harbor he approached a sailor and asked the question, "Can you tell me something about the wind?" The sailor looked as if he thought the man was demented and said "no". He pressed the question and said, "But you have been sailing the seas all your life, you must know something about the wind." "I repeat sir that I do not know anything about the wind. All I know is that when I feel the wind blowing I raise my sails and I am wafted to my post." Dr. Jewett hurried back to his study – he had his sermon.

We need God's truth. The Holy Spirit is a Spirit of Truth. Jesus said, "you shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free." All advance is advance in freedom.

We need God's comfort. We need one to be alongside us to help. The Holy Spirit is the Comforter. We have many decisions to make in our lives; decision that are important. Many tragic incidents happen in our lives and we need comfort. We need someone to guide and direct us. The Holy Spirit provides these things that are important and that each of us needs. And so we offer the Holy Spirit as creative power.

We offer faith as a means of victory. In 1 John 4:5 we read, "this is the victory that hath overcome the world, even our faith."

The victory over fear: "Fear imprisons, faiths liberates; fear paralyzes, faith empowers; fear disheartens, faith encourages; fear sickens, faith heals; fear make useless, faith makes serviceable; fear puts hopelessness in the heart of life, faith rejoices in God."

Dr. Jung once said to a patient, "You are suffering from loss of faith in God and a future life." "But Dr. Jung", said the patient, "do you believe these doctrines are true?" Dr. Jung replied, "That is no business of mine. I am a doctor not a priest. I can only tell you that if you recover your faith, you will get well. If you do not, you won't."

The object of faith is God as a personal friend; Christ as a Divine Redeemer, the Holy Spirit as Creative Power.

We offer service as a way of abundant living. Jesus said, "Faith without works is dead." This is no negative life we offer, no neutral life. This is life in gear.

All life is to be geared into human need and service. Thereby all vocations are glorified. Regardless of what we do for a living, from digging ditch to the highest professional job, it should be for the glory of God. All talent is to be consecrated to God. There is much talent going to waste because we have not discovered the God given talents we have. Much talent is misused and not for God's purpose. All time is to be redeemed by good works. How much time is wasted on useless things that are unimportant and much of our time could be spent in helping to build God's kingdom. All wealth is to be held in stewardship. How much of our money and material possessions could be used to help those who are in need. The big offer includes the offer of tremendous tasks.

We offer a fellowship that is heart-warming joy. When a church strikes the distinctive note that a church ought to strike, how could the fellowship be other than heartwarming?

Judge by the offer. The offer must be in some small measure also the experience of the church. If this is our experience we have a heartwarming joy. Don't judge our offer by the nominal member of the church. Don't judge us by the neutral member. Judge us by the inner circle, large or small, of men and women who have the burning heart. Judge us by the love and compassion of him who set human hearts afire.

We offer everlasting life as a glorious adventure. Eternity is set in our hearts and we can't deny it. "If a man die, shall he live again?"-the old and great perpetual question. We answer in Christ's name. "He shall."

Earthly riches can be searched into and found out exactly. The riches of Christ are incalculable. The unsearchable riches of Christ are his love, his pardon, his comfort, his truth, his hope, his joy.

Accept our previous offers and you will have to accept this one: It is the offer of God as your personal friend; it is the offer of Jesus Christ as your Divine Redeemer; it is the offer of the Holy Spirit as creative power; it is the climax of victorious faith; it is the ultimate meaning of service as a way of abundant living; it is a natural outcome of our fellowship with one in Christ.

We offer everlasting life as a glorious adventure.

This is but a grain of the Christian gospel. Just a grain. As a grain of what is to be the great wheat crop of America, so what we have offered is to the unsearchable riches of Christ. A big offer. It is Christ's offer. Will you accept it?

Can It Be Done Alone?
Scripture: Luke 10:1-12

Our text is chosen from Luke 10:2. Jesus said to them, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.”

Speaking from past experience, I know that most of us have the idea that we hire the minister to take care of our church. We feel that all we have to do is attend church (if we feel like it) and give of our money (if we have any leftover after we have everything we want). However, I believe there are more ways to serve God and the Church than the two (2) I have just mentioned.

I believe it is true, the minister is hired to be the head of the local church, to guide and direct the spiritual lives of its members but I think you should realize that this building belongs to you, you are members of this church and most of you will remain here long after the minister has left.

I believe there are certain responsibilities that you feel the minister should respond to. I can list these responsibilities because I know that I expected my own minister to fulfill them. For example: the minister is expected to preach a sermon each Sunday and certain special occasions, and it is expected it will be somewhat of a good sermon, something that each person can take home with him to think about. If the minister does have a half way decent sermon, you can believe that he has spent several hours that week preparing it.

Secondly, the minister is expected to visit each family in the church regularly. Now-a-days there are problems in visiting people like competition from TV, quite often it is difficult to find both husband and wife home at the same time. However, I feel the minister should visit each family and become a part of the community.

Third, if someone is sick at home or in the hospital, the minister is expected to visit them; which is rightly so. Fourth, if there is a meeting of any organization in the Church, the minister is expected to attend; otherwise we say that he isn't interested in the church. Fifth, if there are any personal family difficulties, the minister is looked to for guidance. Sixth, the minister is expected to help with the financial matters of the church. If additional money is needed he is expected to make a special appeal. Seventh, the Sunday school needs the guidance of the minister, helping to acquire teachers, the right kind of materials, etc. Eighth, the youth fellowship needs the direct contact of the minister. He shall have the ability to attract and keep the interest of the youth of the church because they are the future church members and the ones who will be running the church in the near future.

There are some things any congregation expects of their minister and I believe that they are justified in their expectations. However I'm sure you will agree with me that it is almost impossible for one (1) man to accomplish all of the responsibilities alone. The minister needs your help, the help of the lay people of the church. It is a two way street. (The minister needs the lay people and the lay people need the minister – both working together as a team.)

Jesus needed people (ordinary lay people like yourselves) to assist him in spreading the Good News of the Gospel. In our scripture lesson this morning He sent them out in twos before him to tell others of his coming. After Christ was crucified, the disciples had to carry on. They were able to do so because of the presence of God's Holy Spirit in their hearts. The Holy Spirit provided them with the guidance and direction they needed. This same Holy Spirit is present with us today (right now) to guide and direct our lives. All we have to do is be willing to accept it.

Speaking from a layman's point of view, I believe there are many privileges we as Christians have and can and should do. Also speaking from the other side of the fence there are many things a minister expects of congregation.

Preaching, I believe, is definitely the minister's responsibility, however, I believe he can be assisted by the suggestion of sermon topics, asking questions pertaining to our Christiana faith, etc. It is about impossible for one man to be an expert in all of the fields I have mentioned. Usually there are qualified people in each field who belong to the church who can assist the minister. In fact these qualified persons an often take up the leadership of these particular phases.

I don't know how anyone can call himself a Christian and merely be satisfied with attending church and donating money. I know that each person has God given talents that can be used for the benefit of others and God expects us to use these talents in helping to build his Kingdom here on earth. When we serve God through our church we obtain a feeling within ourselves of peace and joy and unless we do obtain these feelings, I'm afraid our acts are for show purposes, only surface deep and not from our hearts.

When you joined the church, you took certain vows that I believe should be renewed periodically. These vows were: (1) We agreed to renew the solemn promise and vow that was made for us at the time of our baptism; which was; a) to truly repent of our sins and accept and confess Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord, b) to earnestly endeavor to keep God's Holy will and commandments. These two vows alone give us plenty to think about. If we truly believe in Jesus Christ, the church will not have to be concerned about finance, leadership or spiritual life of its members. (2) We agreed to pledge our allegiance to Christ's kingdom – to pledge means to be loyal and uphold its beliefs. (3) To receive and profess the Christian faith as contained in the New Testament of our Lord Jesus Christ. (4) To be loyal to this church and uphold it by out prayers, our presence, our gifts and our service.

These are very serious pledges and I believe all of us should ponder them over in our minds and ask ourselves this question. “Have I carried out the agreement I made?” Naturally the answers you get from this question is between yourself and God for no human being can judge another in this matter.

As Christians I believe we have an obligation to God and ourselves to study “his word”, not when we feel like it, or when we have a few spare moments but regularly. The Bible can and should be applied to our lives. We should be bowing our heads and kneeling before God in prayer and we shouldn’t just be doing this when we need his help. We have much to be thankful for, other people need our prayers and we need to confess our sins and mistakes to God. I don’t see how we can possibly converse with God unless we are willing to take a few minutes each day in silence with Him. As Christians our faith never stands still. We either go backwards or forward and we should be going forward. We need to learn more about our faith, about Jesus Christ, about God, about what we believe and why we believe it. If someone was to ask you “why do you believe in God?” Could you answer this question?

We can grow as Christians by showing our daily experiences with others. Each of us can benefit by other experiences.

We need to be concerned about the needs and desires of other people. We all know about situations that exist that should be corrected. We have to stand up and speak out for those things in which we believe. The first way to show our concern is through prayer. Sometimes this is the only way we can help but other times we need action along with our prayers.

As Christians and members of this church you are expected to attend church worship services regularly unless you have a very good reason for not attending. We cannot let our desires and pleasures come ahead of our church. We shouldn’t forget our Sunday school either. We are in the process of trying to get an adult Sunday school class started. We are never too old to attend Sunday School, in fact I’m sure that often times the discussion that takes place in Sunday School is more beneficial than the worship service.

Giving to God is a privilege that we as Christians should enjoy. Our church has expenses that have to be met and each person is expected to give according to his means. We should not let luxuries we want interfere with one giving to our church. This is like the widow who put in two (2) copper coins (equal to one penny) and the rich putting in their money. Jesus said, “Truly I tell you, the poor widow has put in more than all of them; for they contributed out of their abundance but she out of her poverty put in the living that she had.”

While we are on the subject of giving let us consider other types of giving besides money. We need to give of our time to help in the spreading of the Gospel to other people. One way to serve is by teaching in our Sunday school. Trying to acquire teachers for Sunday school is perhaps one of the most difficult tasks we have. People use all kinds of excuses why they cannot teach. Actually I have found from my own experience that the person who tries to do a good job teaching obtains much more value from preparing the lessons than the students receive. Most people have to dig a little and study in order to get the lesson across and we know we have to do this each week in order to do a good job. This is actually what each one of us needs to learn more about the Bible and God.

Our youth groups need guidance. Every church seems to stick those persons with a job the rest of their lives as long as they are willing to do it. Maybe if some of their jobs were passed around more often it wouldn't become such a dreadful task.

As lay people if you do not want to visit people who are sick and shut in, I feel at least you can tell the minister about them so he can visit them. Of course the minister should visit them anyway. However, I still feel it's a wonderful opportunity for lay people to witness for Jesus Christ by visiting these people. But also remember before we can witness for Christ, we need him in our own hearts. It's like the old saying, "you can't sell something unless you are sold yourself."

In the Gospel of Matthew Jesus says to Peter and Andrew, "Follow me and I will make you fishers of men." Jesus Christ is saying the same thing to us today if we would stop long enough to listen to him.

There are many ways we as Christians can witness for Jesus Christ and ways we can serve him:

First, we can talk about Christ to other people we work with, people we socialize with, and people we do business with. It seems we can talk about any other subject except our faith, what we believe and about God and Jesus Christ. Second, we can serve Christ by setting an example in our every day living, not for just one or two hours on Sunday morning but seven days a week, every moment of our lives. Third, being concerned for our neighbors, for their needs and their problems – not only concern but some action along with our concern. Invite them to church with you and offer transportation if necessary. Fourth, by being active in the various organizations of the church. I don't think that you have to take up every moment of your life with church activities but I think its about time we began working Jesus Christ into the center of our lives and then we wouldn't be concerned about spending too much time in our church. Sixth, by being a teacher or officer of our Sunday school. I know that not everyone can be a teacher but I also know there is a place for everyone where you can contribute to the overall program of the church. I believe and I feel that Sunday school is by far the most important function of any church. Here our children, youth and adults, learn about God and Jesus Christ and how they are related to each individual's life.

This is the only place beside the home our children receive religious instruction and I feel it is important and necessary to give them the best we can.

In the early Christian church ordinary lay people like you spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We still need to spread this 'good news' today.

This morning I have tried to teach on a few of the things a minister expects of the congregation, and what the congregation expects from the minister. I believe that both are justified in their expectations. I have tried to point out that the minister cannot do it without leaders. It requires the efforts of both.

I would like to leave you with a couple of thoughts. The church, this church, has to be more than a social organization otherwise it will soon fade away. To make it more than this requires the efforts of its members. Its members have to start putting Jesus Christ first in the lives and start making the church the center of their activities. I feel its time now to dedicate our lives to Jesus Christ if we haven't done so and if we have, we should rededicate them now to Him, who died that we might be saved and we should all renew the vows we took when we joined this church.

Jesus Christ said, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things will be added unto you."

Differing Gifts
Scripture: Romans 12:6
(English version)

My text this morning is from Romans 12:6. “The gifts we possess differ as they are allotted to us by God’s grace and must be exercised accordingly.”

I doubt, in the entire world, we can find two persons that are exactly alike in all characteristics, even identical twins. We are beginning to acquire some knowledge of chromosomes and genes, which by the laws of heredity carry our potential persons and personalities. They tell us that no two of us are the same in our basic make up. If identical twins seem to be an exception, they too will develop differences because of their differing environments. I’m sure that anyone who has anything to do with people will agree that each person has to be handled or dealt with differently. Yet it must be said that within the wide scope of our difference we have many likenesses that belong to our common humanity.

It is an element of our likeness that God has given each of us some gift or talent. It is an element of our difference that these gifts differ. Concerning these differing gifts our text put us in touch with certain truths.

First, “the gifts we possess are allotted to us by God’s grace.”

Eventually in our lives each one of us becomes aware of something that is far beyond our ability or endowment to do. Even though we might believe that old saying, ‘you never can tell till you try’, one man knows that he cannot write a poem. While the man who does write poetry realizes he cannot be a civil engineer. I believe its true that each person has natural ability or God given talents to do certain things in life. These are usually proven by certain tests that are given in our youth to determine our abilities or what field we would best be suited for.

Our gifts are allotted to us. What might be called the raw abilities of a man are not self-acquired. They have been given to him and should never be the occasion for his pride. Rather they should be a reason for his humility and thanksgiving to God for the allotment of his grace.

C. G. Jung wrote concerning the ultimate things in a man’s life. “We must take them as we experience them. And if such experience helps us to make our life healthier, more beautiful, more complete and more satisfactory to yourself and to those you love, you may safely say: “This was the grace of God!” These words of Jung might well be applied to the gifts of God of which we speak.

“The gifts we possess must be exercised accordingly.” A gift can be accepted or rejected. Non-acceptance is rejection. The talent, which is not used, is lost. I am sure we remember the “Parable of the Talents”. The master, who was going away, called his servants to him and gave them his goods. He gave one five talents, another two talents and the other one, one talent. Each according to his ability and the master went away. The one who received the five talents sent and traded with some others and made five additional talents. The one with two talents went and did likewise. But the one that received one talent buried it in the ground and hid his Lord’s money. After a long time the master returned and asked of the servants how they had made out. The first servant told of making five additional talents and the master said, “well done thou good and faithful servant; thou has been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things; enter thou into the joy of the Lord.” And likewise the servant receiving the two talents gave his story of making two additional talents and the master told him the same as the first servant. Then the last servant came to the master and said, “Lord I knew thee to be a hard man, reaping where you don’t sow and gathering where you do not scatter, so I as afraid and I and hid your talent in the ground. Here it is – you have what belongs to you.” The master said to him, “you lazy and wicked servant, you know what kind of a person I am, therefore you should have deposited my talent so I could have collected interest.” Then the master said, “take the talent from him and give it to the one with ten talents. For the man who has will always be given more, till he has enough to spare; and the man who has not, shall it be taken away even that which he already has. Fling the useless servant out unto the dark, the place of wailing and grinding of teeth.”

Here we can see that the man, who did nothing with his talent, was useless. The master wanted nothing to do with him. I believe the main purpose of this parable is to impress on the followers of Jesus Christ the importance of the conservation of the gifts God has entrusted to us and to show that though we vary in our several capacities, the spirit of faithfulness and dependability in the performance of our trust is equally required of all. Such a quality of character enriches our endowments and qualifies us for larger trusts; while negligent and laziness result in loss and deterioration of our original endowment. The unused capacity, the unused talent, mental and moral as well as physical, becomes the lost capacity or talent. I believe we can apply this to our modern churches today. The churches are made up of a majority of people who have been endowed with moderate talents and it is the indifference of these people that is deploring. Indifference in any organization or government is eventually what leads to its downfall.

No one will ever know the loss for the individual, the church, the nation, even for the world, that comes from an unused talent. Suppose Shakespeare had not used his talent? Or Michelangelo? Or Beethoven? What tremendous losses to persons and communities by the nonuse or the misuse of even the more ordinary gifts of the hand and heart and mind.

The gifts must be exercised accordingly. Paul goes to pains to elaborate on this. For example he says, "If your gift is preaching, then preach to the limit of your vision; if it is teaching, let us give all that we have to our teaching." Or as he writes to the Christians at Corinth, "each man is given his gift by the Spirit that he may make the most of it." I believe this would be revolutionary. Sometimes when you meet someone in the course of early conversation you will say, "what do you do for a living?" How surprised some would be if we changed that to "what do you do with your living?" When thousands of Christians begin to answer this question in terms of the Christian impact on life, then believe me, we have come to a revolution of tremendous proportions. I am sure we have all known persons who have been thrust into fields of work for which they were not suited and were not happy with because of various reasons. There are probably millions of persons in this world who would make good teachers and preachers but perhaps financially they were unable to get the required education or perhaps they chose some other field because their professions didn't provide enough financial rewards. We can say that this is a large waste of talent. Some of us have hidden talents that we don't find until late in life and perhaps we never find them. Other people sometimes help bring some of their talent out in the open. Quite often God helps us to find the talents he has given us.

Differing gifts emphasize the fact of our human interdependence. Paul applies this idea to the Christian church. Both here in Romans and in his letter to Corinth he uses the figure of different organs in one body: "A body is not a single organ, but many. There are many different organs but one body."

Our differing gifts with our sense of interdependence should breed in us that warmth of mutual affection of which Paul writes. As we realize that God is the source of our gifts, we can be thankful for the gift he has given another person, as another person can be thankful for God's goodness to us. The envy and comparison of God given gifts is thrust aside, for the mutual rejoicing in one another's gifts and the warm Christian affection which results. We need to realize that each one of us cannot be number one in the same thing. God has given one person more talent than another in a certain field and come to admire and appreciate the ability of that person rather than envy or trying to belittle them.

A radiant spiritual glow suffuses our lives as we use our gifts in the service of the Lord because we have learned to appreciate them and exercise them accordingly. God has given us these gifts so that we can help in his work and so we can help our fellow man. In doing this, we help ourselves as well and gain reward from our Lord.

It was many years ago that a minister said a word of thanks to a woman who was washing dishes after a young people's party at the church, and today he still remembers her with a peculiar warmth of feeling because of her reply: "I have a gift for drudgery." That being so she kept her spiritual glow by using her gift in the service of the Lord. Most of us have never thought of drudgery as a gift. Perhaps if we did, so much of our lives would not seem to be such drudgery.

God has given some few people great talents. Many of us have few and rather ordinary gifts. They are gifts in the use of our hands to help others, or in the use of our feet to go on errands of love and mercy, or in the use of our life to say the right word at the right time. Some have a gift in themselves. They send others away inspired and happier and better simply by being themselves. I can truthfully say I know a person who inspires me to be near him. Whenever I feel down and out and I feel the whole world is against me, this person can inspire me and help to get me back where I should be. He has a real gift in himself. There are also gifts of faith and prayer that are of great use when consecrated to God's service – useful to God, useful to others. What are your gifts?

Following By Faith
Scripture: Luke 22:7-8, 13-20, 24-30

Chosen text from Luke 22:28 – “you are those who have continued with me in my trials.” These are great and gracious words spoken by Jesus on a memorable occasion at a critical time with his little band of disciples. We might paraphrase his words, “When the going was hard you stuck by me.”

In the group were Andrew and Peter, James and John, the four fishermen of Galilee whom Jesus had called from their nets. I am especially thinking of them. Why did they leave their fishing in the first place? Why did they never go back? They had “continued”, but, why?

There are some answers to these questions. They followed because they were aware Jesus was a superior person. They continued to follow because he included them in his plans and purposes. They followed because they felt the vital spark of sympathy pass from his life to theirs. They had within themselves the capacity for response; this he must have recognized.

And so he spoke these words to them. They would cherish them all the days of their life, however undeserving of them they may have felt themselves to be.

It is not easy to follow the Master. Continuing with him, sticking to him, is against resistance.

Continuance as a follower of Christ is against the pull of the horizontal. On one occasion a man wanted to follow Jesus but Jesus warned him: “The foxes have holes, and the birds of heaven have nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay his head.” Peter, if you’re concerned about life on the horizontal level – comforts, income, getting on in a worldly way – you’d better go back to your fishing.

The horizontal level is the secular level, where there is much concern about getting on in the world. It is the materialistic level, as over against the spiritual. It’s the grabbing level, the self-level. It’s the in-come level, not the out-go level. It’s like the world we are living in today. Most of us are concerned about the amount of money we earn so we can buy the material possessions we want, so we can keep up with the Jones. It’s the bettering of ourselves and not worrying about anyone else or how we get there or whom we step on to get to the top.

It is like the rich young ruler who asked Jesus what good deed he must do to have eternal life. Jesus said to him, “Why do you ask me about what is good? One there is who is good. If you would enter life, keep the commandments.” The ruler said, “which?” And Jesus said, “You shall not kill, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not bear false witness, honor your father and mother, and you shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

The young man said to him, “All these I have observed; what do I still lack?” Jesus said to him, “If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in Heaven; and come, follow me,” When the young man heard this he went away sorrowful for he had great possessions.

Continuance as a follower of Christ is against the pressure of the crowd.

On one occasion in the life of Jesus it is written, “Upon this, many of his disciples went back and walked no more with him. Jesus then turned to the twelve and said, ‘Will you also go away?’” “No”, said Peter.

When “everybody’s doing it”, it’s hard to stick. I can imagine those four fishermen getting their heads together saying, “The Master’s slipping – we’d better get away from here while we still have a chance. You can see what is in store for us, John, the Baptist has been beheaded.”

Mass thinking often crushes continuance along a distinctive way of life. Somehow everyone thinks we should conform to what others are doing and what others are thinking or they say we are different or a radical or a fanatic or something else. Because everyone is doing something, doesn’t necessarily mean that it is right. If a crowd is rioting in the streets, it doesn’t mean they are doing the right thing. A crowd pushes a man down to the horizontal, to standardization. It flattens out individuality. Everyone else does our thinking for us. We don’t have to think for ourselves or make our own decisions. The mass mind makes of a man less than he is.

The words of Thomas when Jesus was called to Bethany because of the death of Lazarus were against terrific horizontal pressure: “Let’s go with him that we may die with him.” (John 11:16)

Continuance as a follower of Christ is against the perversity of the self. It is not easy to follow Jesus if you have an ego that must be preserved at all costs. There are some things that are not easy to take. Did Jesus run the chance of losing the Big Fishermen on a certain occasion? In Mark 8:32-33 we read, “And he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders, and the chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. And he said this plainly. And Peter took him, and began to rebuke him. But turning and seeing his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, “Get behind me, Satan! For you are not on the side of God, but of men.”

By the perversity of the self a man’s ego must be rubbed the right way.

By this perversity one becomes set in one’s way. That is the royal road to Phariseism which Jesus loathed and condemned.

By the perversity of the self one may block the advance of the Kingdom. As someone has written, “there is no project for the betterment of life, for an advance on any sector of the Kingdom of God which cannot be obstructed by plain, old fashioned obstinacy.”

There was a man who did not continue. His name was Demas (Col. 4:14). He quit the fellowship of Paul. He didn't do anything disgraceful. He did not betray Paul. He did not openly denounce the Christ whom he had formally served. He just moved away to Thessalonica. It would not be surprising if Demas joined the church there. He may even have been elected an officer. He may have just settled down into the formal life of a decent, conventional, none-too active churchman. (Like some of us today.) The point is that he gave up the real thing. He moved out from the danger zone. He retired from the active life of a disciple. He became an alumnus of the Christian Church.

What are the positive values of continuance to follow Jesus Christ?

Continuance is the pathway to knowledge. Continuance is following Christ brought by the shared experience which brings knowledge of another.

The disciples of Galilee were aware of the superiority of Jesus; their awareness changed to knowledge by their continuance with him. It is what you go through with another that gives you knowledge of him.

An oriental Proverb says: “Know a man three years.” It means that only after three years does acquaintance refer into friendship of mind-to-mind and heart to heart.

Continuance is a secret of revelation. After they meet the test of continuance, the Master says, “I have many things to say unto you.”

Continuance, especially that form which is endurance, produces character, and character is a means to higher knowledge. “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” Continuance as a follower of Christ is a pathway to the knowledge of God. The more we follow Jesus Christ, the closer we get to God and the more we are able to understand his will in our own lives.

Continuance as a follower of Christ is a test of fitness for the Kingdom of God. We have Jesus' own words for this. (Luke 9:62) “No one who puts his hands to the plow and looks back is fit for the Kingdom of God.”

The Old Testament story of Joshua's entrance into the Promised Land provides us with a good illustration. (Deut. 1:35-38). The Lord said, “Not one of these men of this evil generation shall see the good land which I swore to give your father, except Joshua the son of Nun, who stands before you, he shall enter; encourage him, for he shall cause Israel to inherit it.”

A man must plow straight, must have his eyes set forward, must press on for that which he has laid hold on my Jesus Christ, to be in any degree fit for the Kingdom of God.

Continuance as a follower of Christ culminates in friendship with him.

There is progress in relationship – follower, disciple, servants, friends, “Henceforth I call you not servants but I have called you friends. (John 15:15)

There is growth in friendship by the warm glow of sympathy, by the vital spark of comradeship, by the developing affection of friendship.

These disciples walked the road of Galilee with him; went up to Jerusalem with him; set at the table with him; slept under the stars with him; crossed the Galilee sea in a boat with him; they distributed the bread he blessed unto a multitude; they watched him gather little children into his arms; they felt his touch when he worked their feet – they continued with him, they experienced him, they knew him.

Do we have the capacity for response? Do we have the capacity to resist against the pull and the pressure and perversity? Do we have the positive stick-to-tuitiveness which brings us knowledge of God, fitness for his Kingdom, the friendship of the Master?

There is a secret by which we can answer “yes”. We can stick by Him, because He sticks by us. He never fails us. He will continue with us in our temptation. When the going is hard he will be right by our side to help.

If Christ calls a man to follow him, it is not only for a day, a week, or a year. If Christ called you to follow him in an old Home Town in New York, you must continue to follow him when you have moved to California. If he called you in youth, he wants you to follow him in maturity. If he called you to follow when life was full of idealism, he no less wants to you to follow when life is full of realism. If he called you to follow when you were on the mountaintop, he no less calls you to follow in the valley. In other words, regardless of where you were, or what you were doing, Jesus Christ called you and expects you to continue to follow him regardless of what happens. This is where our faith in him comes into being. Are you following Jesus Christ and is your faith strong enough to allow you to continue to follow him regardless of what happens?

Four Highways To God
Scripture: 1 John 4:7-16

I have chosen my text from Luke 10:27 – “Jesus said, “you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and love your neighbor as yourself.”

A young woman rapped on the minister’s study door and came in. A few months before she had given herself to Jesus Christ. She said, however, that it didn’t make a great deal of difference to her feelings. She said, “I am sure that I am perfectly honest in saying that I believe in God, and that I am sincere in committing myself to Jesus Christ. Yet it bothers me that I don’t feel the way some people say they feel. So, I wonder, what is wrong with me or my religion?” This young woman was anxious because her experience did not follow the right pattern, or at least what she had been led to believe was the right pattern.

She was not and is not alone. Many of us, I am sure, have wondered about our religion because the way in which we relate ourselves to Jesus Christ is different from the way other people, our friends and acquaintances, relate to Jesus Christ. Sometimes we feel that we have the only true religion and if others do not agree with us their religion is no good. Our religion is the response of our personality to God. God is always, everywhere the same God. But every one of us is different. Each one of us here today is a unique personality with gifts and opportunities and talents that no one else shares.

Our Master Lord knew this. This is why he made the statement of the great commandment, “thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength.” You hear it said sometimes that the Great Commandment sets forth the sum and substance of our religion. It doesn’t at all. It sets forth only the sum and substance of the part we can play in it. The part God plays in it is more than a little necessary. And the part he plays is prior to this importance, and being from all eternity, is antecedent to it in time. “God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son.” You have to write that in ahead of everything else if you want anything at all. “Therefore thou shalt love the Lord thy God and thy neighbor as thyself.” Get them back, these two commandments, where Christ put them, in front of the cross. Out of this text, arise four differing patterns of religious experience.

First is the highway of transforming emotion. Jesus said, “thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart.” The heart is thought of by us as the seat of emotion, the center of feeling. Now we know that in some quarters today emotion is being disparaged in matters of religion. There is some justification for the disparagement. But quite often if a person becomes emotional over his religion, over the true acceptance of Jesus Christ in his heart, we say that he is crazy and a fanatic and it isn’t necessary for a person to act this way.

Have you ever attended a worship service of a different denomination where the congregation said, "Praise the Lord", to something the minister has said or "Amen." Perhaps we don't approve but there are many ways of experiencing their approval to a statement the minister has made. Maybe we need more of this sort of thing in all church services.

Feeling is, nevertheless, of the greatest importance. There is no better way of being convinced of the reality of something than to feel it. How do you know that Beethoven's First Symphony is great music? You can't prove it. But when you listen to this masterpiece, you feel it, and because you feel it, you know it. So it is with our religion. For some men their love of Jesus Christ is the deepest thing about them. Their way of life is utterly transformed by the power of an affection that drives out every base motive from their lives. I'm sure we have all known persons whose lives have been transformed by the acceptance of Jesus Christ. We call them reborn Christians or converted Christians. All of their lives they were going around aimlessly and without purpose. Now suddenly the presence of Jesus Christ in their lives give them direction and a reason for living. These people travel what I have called the highway of transforming emotion, and it brings them to the very heart of God.

Secondly is the highway of inspiring morality. Jesus said, "thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy soul." The soul is the locus of morality, the center where mind discriminates between right and wrong.

There are those who decry morality in religion. They suggest that the moral approval to religion condemns you without understanding, that moralism fails you at the point where you need help in that it does not give you the power to do what you ought to do. Nevertheless, I believe that what we need today is not less morality in religion, but more. Everywhere that we go we can hear business men and educators complaining that our sense of responsibility is weak and dying, that the moral stamina of our civilization is not what it ought to be. I think it is pretty well evident that the moral standards of our country are considerably lower than they used to be evidenced by statistical facts about divorce, alcoholics, dope addicts, and unwed mothers in our country. Also about the happenings and conditions that exist on some of our college campuses. But we need to remember that anyone can talk about these conditions and we can deplore them but what are we doing as Christians and individuals to help reduce them?

Morality has always been central in the Christian tradition. At the very basis of Hebrew – Christian tradition are the Ten Commandments. I can hear someone say, yes, but that in the Old Testament. The New Testament transcends all that. Does it? Is there any authority in religion that transcends the authority of Jesus Christ? Yet Jesus Christ says, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled." This is the highway of inspired morality.

Thirdly is the highway of penetrating thought. Jesus said, “thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy mind.” I am sure that you know many people who have come to Jesus Christ head first.

Occasionally you will hear criticism of intellectual religion, that it is sterile and proud and only interested in ideas and not at all in people. But the positive side of this picture can be seen as you meet a man who loves Jesus Christ with his mind. To him to love Christ with the mind is to pursue truth wherever it leads without regard for consequences.

Truth is sacred because God is truth. Sometimes if you are one of these people, you follow a lonely trail, pursuing the truth of God as faithfully as Sir Galahad followed the Holy Grail. But when you find it, there is a logical coherence to your religion, a staying integrity. You know what you believe and better than that, you know why you believe it. The result is that you are one of those Christians who are not easily shaken. You hold a steady course. More of us certainly need to be surer of our faith, more sure of what we believe because the first strong wind that blows, shakes us up and then we aren't sure of anything for that point on. It's true, I believe, that most all of us are doubtful and ask questions regarding our faith at times, but I also believe that this proves we are growing in our faith and the stronger it becomes within us the less apt we are to be shaken. Some of us spend nearly all our lives saying we believe this and so and saying we are Christians but nothing really ever happens to us so our faith can be tested.

The fourth highway is the highway of faithful services. Jesus said, “though shalt love the Lord thy God with all they strength.” Strength refers to service. This is the highway of the big majority of church people. Most of us believe in carrying some responsibility for Christ's work wherever we happen to be. Most of us feel that we ought to be doing little acts of kindness to other people.

Along with you, I have heard about the criticism that American religion is just pious activities. In other words we are always busy doing something but not really knowing why. Don't you believe it. Without Christian action, without public responsibility for your faith, without spelling out your discipleship in terms of carrying responsibility, giving leadership, being a good follower, being a friend to someone who needs you, your Christianity won't get very far. Somehow it is the active, steady fellow, who lives in peace with his neighbor and carries his responsibilities quietly, who gets farthest up the road. one who has understood the Master clearly and well. Jesus said, “Not everyone who says unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the Kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father who is in Heaven.” I believe it is also true that not all of us can be doers and not all of us can be just believers. And so I believe that God wants us to be a combination of both. For there are many people who do good for others but are still not Christian. I believe this, “If a person is really and truly a Christian and believes in Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior, he will be doing good for others, he will be giving to his church, he will be attending church and Sunday school and I don't believe there is any question about this.

Now there is an interesting thing about these four highways. They all converge and they all lead to the feet of Jesus Christ. If your Christian experience is sincere and true to your best self, it is firmly attached to Jesus Christ as the Lord of your life, there is only one question that stands before you, a personal question, a question to which you alone have the answer. And it is this: No matter which highway of Christian discipleship you may be traveling, are you moving ahead? As Jesus Christ seeks to lead you to the height of life, are you actually following him? In terms of your own personality and your own gifts, are you forging ahead in the direction Jesus Christ beckons you?

Hope, Our Heritage
Scripture: Hebrews: 11:1 – 12:2

I have chosen my text from Hebrews 12:1-2. “Therefore since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside the weight of sin which clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.”

Practically every civilized country has set apart days upon which to honor her illustrious sons. We commemorate the sacrifice of those who fought and died on the field of battle.

We honor too, those of our loved ones and friends who have gone before. It would be hard indeed to over estimate our debt to preceding generations. We are heirs of all the ages. The blessings we enjoy are due to the toil, the sacrifice and the vision of those who blazed the trail ahead of us.

Today we think of them as a great cloud of witnesses. We think of them as witnesses watching and encouraging us in the Christian way; also as witnesses in that the testimony they gave on earth, now they are giving in Heaven, a testimony that ours is a great and glorious faith. In this faith is found strength to believe and power to carry on in the name of the Lord.

To those who feel the sadness of bereavement, I hardly need say that we have in our Christian faith such a resource of hope and encouragement as can make our spirits strong. I need only to remind you of the wonderful richness of love which is all about us and which is our light by day and our hope by night. Sometimes we need to gain a fresh perspective in order to understand the things that we already know.

When we look at an experience, which is in itself, tragic and could possibly be blighting, from a different perspective we see that it can be a means of blessing. This is the very essence of our Christian belief. We dare to look at the worst and believe the best, because at the center of all our belief, we see the cross of Jesus Christ. When earth has done its worst, God’s best has not yet even begun! And so I am asking today that we think of what those who have departed want of us as we carry on this great tradition of faith and worship and service in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

First of all, faith puts foundations under our hopes. Would they not want that we should put underneath life’s hope the undergirding of a tremendous faith? As we read the 11th chapter of Hebrews, we come upon a statement of what faith is – “Faith is the substance of things hoped for.” The word substance means, “that which puts a foundation under.” Faith is that which puts a foundation under our hopes and gives them the secret of permanence.

The person who lives without expecting and without the dynamics of hope, the person who doesn't build castles in air which embody the dreams of good and truth and righteousness – that person is already dead. Somebody once complained to Professor Irving Bobbitt about romanticists that build castles in the air. Strangely enough, Professor Bobbitt, who was a friend of romanticist, answered with great understanding. He said, “Why do you object to those who build castles in the air? Where else could you build them? If you build them in the ground they are dungeons. It is all right to build castles in the air, but you must know how to put foundations under them.”

But when you dream great dreams, let the grace of God come through you, into the life of the world; you build foundations under the things that deserve to endure.

What of people who find it very difficult to start building these foundations? My thoughts about them could be this: there is no place in the universe from which there is not a road, which leads to Jesus Christ, the Savior. There is no experience from which there is not a pathway straight to Christ. He is the answer to every question and the goal of every true quest, and the one who provide what we need in every time of stress. Jesus Christ is always here waiting for us to ask him for help and guidance in our lives. Regardless of where we are or what we are doing Christ is with us.

Jesus Christ should be our hope and our goal in life because a life without him is meaningless and purposeless. Our life should be for a true life with our Lord and Savior, a life of service to others, a life filled with love and concern for our fellowman, a life of joy and peace that can only come from actually knowing Jesus Christ.

Secondly, purpose gives confidence to our hopes. Then there is the question: How can we live on with strength and sturdiness of spirit and character, in the days when faith is sorely tested? The only answer I want to give to that earnest question today is this. It has been done! It has been done! We do not have to theorize about it. It has been done. And the testimony of the witnesses across the Christian years who have lived out their faith in confidence and trust and hope in time of persecution and distress – this can encourage us to live through any experience if we really put our confidence in our God.

As you read these stories of heroes of the faith, in the 11th chapter of Hebrews, you recognize that they had no easy time of it. How candidly the author says it, “these all died, not having received the promises.” How starkly honest that is. “But” – and what a ‘but’ that is! – “But, they had seen them, they had greeted them from afar, they had been persuaded of them; wherefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God.” If we can so live for God in any type of experience, not measuring our cause by our success, but our success by our cause, God will not be ashamed to be called our God.

When we think of the way in which men have been able courageously to endure pain and suffering and tribulation when they have a sense of purpose and a proper scale of values, we realize that it isn't the pain that we can't stand, it isn't the sorrow that we

cannot endure, it isn't the tribulation that we cannot live our way through, but pain in which we cannot find any purpose and tribulation which seems to be united by any great truth. These are the things that distress and wear down the soul. But if we can just keep our minds open to God and our spirits livings in the truth of God, and the channels of faith and prayer open to the grace of God all the while, then into every experience God can pour his wealth of meaning, and his voice sounding like a trumpet in our soul, wakes the slumbering hero there. There is hardly a limit to what a human person can do, or can endure, once his life is dedicated completely to the living and powerful God. Once Jesus Christ has really and truly come into our lives and once we have truly accepted Christ as our Lord and Savior (not said it with our life but with our heart), he will help us over all the rough spots in life. He will give us understanding. We will be able to endure the tragedies in life.

Thirdly – the unfulfilled puts a challenge in our hopes. You recall that the heritage of the faithful is said to be incomplete – unless, unless you and I carry it on! For ‘they, without us, cannot be made perfect. That is to say, their work cannot be complete, their lives are truncated, and their destiny is unfulfilled, unless you and I run the good race. “Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith.” And so the way we give true honor to those who have gone before, is to carry on in the great tradition that meant so much to them. What do we actually owe to yesterday? We can pay our debt to yesterday by being faithful to tomorrow.

There is a tombstone in New England written by a father to his son. It reads, “My son, that which I bequeath unto you, you must earn anew, if you would possess it.” None of us can live on our family's reputation. We have to earn the name for ourselves. Certainly in the sight of God we cannot expect God to look upon us the same way as our father or mother unless we feel the same way toward God as they did.

We are to see to it that those who have been marshaled of God in the great onward march of mankind shall not lose heart or hope, but renewed with fresh vigor, shall keep the glorious goal in sight, and find the inspiration which comes from Jesus Christ a constant experience in their minds and hearts.

Jesus is Lord
Scripture: I Cor. 12:1-11

Chosen text today from I Cor. 12:3 – “No one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ except by the Holy Spirit.”

There comes a time in a man’s life when his creed, whatever the creed may be, seems to be spiritually sterile. The forms of religious devotion seem to be inadequate to satisfy his soul. It is not that he is overwhelmed by doubts: he is not ready, not even tempted to throw aside his religious beliefs and practice. It is only that his religion has become half mechanical. He might say that he is in a rut and he is unwilling to stay there.

I believe that most of us are probably in a rut as far as our religious life is concerned. We attend church and support it because it’s the right thing to do and as part of the community we should be doing these things. We say that going to church is a habit and once we break this habit, it is hard for us to get back in the rut again. I believe, perhaps going to church is a habit but if that is all that it is then we might as well stay away. If we do not come to church because we want to worship God and as Christians, we feel within ourselves we need to be in church on Sunday then I’m afraid our beliefs are rather shallow and our church attendance is rather mechanical and not spirited.

Our text this morning may bring help and inspiration to such a person – “no one can say, ‘Jesus is Lord’, except by the Holy Spirit.” The short swift formula, ‘Jesus is Lord’, was the earliest form of a Christian confession of faith, and was repeated by every convert as he took his first decisive step along the road of Christian discipleship. Thus Paul is saying in effect that no one can take even the first step on the Christian way without the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The fundamental faith of the Christian is a mark, just as the graces and virtues of the Christian character are marks of the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

We cannot compel the spirit. We can only expect him. “Tarry ye in Jerusalem,” said Jesus to the disciples, “until ye be endued with power from on high.” This doesn’t mean that we any do nothing. Moses made the Tabernacle; he set it up and placed there the altar. He could do this. But then he must wait for the glory of the Lord to fill it. Elijah could set up twelve stones for an altar; he could lay on it the wood and the offering, but then he could only pray for the fire from heaven. We can do our Bible reading, our praying, our worshipping: we can meet together for fellowship; but there is this last thing we cannot do. We can but look to heaven in faith and wait for the promise of the Father. But is not this very expectancy, the waiting, this recognition that, when we have done all, the gift itself is beyond our power and outside or contriving – that it is a gift, and not something that can be earned or demanded as a right – is not this just the necessary acknowledgement that the Spirit lives and is free, that his relationship with us is personal and spontaneous.

This man, whose problem of ‘dryness’ is our concern, would still assert, ‘Jesus is Lord’. Then, says Paul, the Holy Spirit is active in the man’s life. This is an experience of the Holy Spirit, just the affirmation in truth that Jesus is Lord. That brings God near to the man, for the Holy Spirit is God – Man and God Potent. It brings the Holy Spirit into the man’s life. This is the very principle of personal religion.” There need be no vagueness or confusion about the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is God present, lifting a man above himself, out of his rut, if you please, when he says with Thomas, “My Lord, and my God”, or, ‘Jesus is Lord’.

You meet a friend, someone you think you know fairly well, who has faced a crisis and met it with fortitude and transfigured it into something good. You say to him, if you know him well enough (and if you don’t you say to yourself), “I didn’t think you had it in you.” If he knows himself at all and understands the experience, he will say, “I didn’t have it in me – it came to me from somewhere else.” I’m sure we have all known such power and we know where it came from.

Phillip Brooks says, “The doctrine of the Holy Spirit is a continual protest against every constantly recurring tendency to separate God from the current world. A God who made the world and then left it to run its course under the tyranny of force and law; a God who redeemed the world eighteen centuries ago and left it to be blessed by or to miss the blessing of the redemption which he provided – neither of these ideas of Deity can comprehend the truth of God, the Holy Spirit. A present God, an ever-living God, an ever-pleading, an ever-helping, ever-saving God- this is the God whom Christ told of and promised, a God who came in the miracle or Pentecost and is forever here.”

The confession, “Jesus is Lord” is in itself the expression of a creed. Does a creedal statement confuse anyone? Here is a declaration of faith that is simple, clear unambiguous.

Here is the confession that unites all Christian people, at a level deeper than that of all the traditional and denominational difference that may separate them. Here all who call themselves Christians must surely be of one mind and heart.

One makes this confession by the touch of the Divine upon the inmost soul. Many persons of undoubted honesty and integrity hesitate to commit themselves in joining in the full Christian confession, insisting that they cannot do so until their reason has been fully convinced of its truth. Such intellectual honesty commands respect, but we need to point out to such people that their reason will not, and cannot, be convinced of the truth about Jesus Christ until it is enlightened by the Holy Spirit itself, who alone can take the things of Christ and declare them to men. Everything about the Christian religion and Christian beliefs cannot be proven like a scientific discovery it has to be taken on faith. Once the Holy Spirit has been received into our hearts, we start to obtain the faith we need to believe in Jesus Christ and what he can do in our lives.

“Jesus is Lord” – making such confession. God is near and God is influencing your soul. Your religion is not half mechanical, it is fully vital.

The intense research into how the mind works is being used to enslave our minds and to rob us of rational judgment. By brain-working or mental conditioning men are compelled to confess things that they have not done. But when these men get free they become ‘reconditioned’ and naturally deny what they confessed.

No conditioning can create a true conversion. The ability to say in truth, “Jesus is Lord” ruled from above by the Holy Spirit permeating the person’s mass of desire, impulse, sentiments and ideas. The man is not pushed around; he is lifted. He has the experience of new life. We are ignorant as to how it happens, just as we are ignorant of the origins of life itself. Goodness is the fruit of the spirit that flashes upon our minds is which the life we are living is seen in compassion with the life God would have us live is the work of the Spirit. There are experiences which cannot be accounted for better than by invoking the doctrine of the Holy Spirit.

The confession is an act of worship. When a man comes to believe in Jesus Christ as Lord and God, the inevitable consequences for that man is to worship Christ. So it happened in the Early Church; the confession “Jesus is Lord” was as central to the church’s worship as it was to its doctrine. That’s why when a person has truly accepted Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior he will be in church on Sunday because he must worship God and be in his house with other Christians. Attending church and worshipping God has to be more than a habit or mechanical otherwise it really has no meaning and a person will soon loose interest.

Our text suggest the vital truth that no one can truly worship Christ except he be guided and inspired by the Holy Spirit. “God is Spirit”, says the classic text on Christian worship (John 4:24), “and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth,” but to worship “in spirit and in truth” is only possible to those whose hearts and minds and souls are open to the gracious influences of him whom St. John elsewhere call “Spirit of truth.” We must never forget that worship is not an activity to be engaged in in any careless, casual or unprepared manner. It is a solemn and sacred act, before engaging in which (whether in public or private) we need always to invoke the illumination, guidance and power of the Holy Spirit, as does the familiar Collect which includes the words: “Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love thee and worthily magnify they holy name.”

No one can say “Jesus is Lord” in an act of worship and really mean it except by the Holy Spirit. I believe that’s its necessary to have the ‘order of worship’ such that it will be meaningful to those who attend the church worship service. It should prepare us for the true acceptance of the Holy Spirit in our hearts. But we should be prepared to accept the Holy Spirit. It also takes preparedness on our part as well.

The confession is an oath of loyalty. To confess Jesus Christ as Lord involves more than the expression of a belief about him and the offering of formal worship to him. It means nothing less than to recognize and acknowledge his unconditional claim upon our loyalty and service. The word ‘Lord’ on the one hand (as used in the first century) implies the word ‘bond-servant’ on the other. To address Jesus as Lord is to own oneself his slave; it is to take a solemn and sacred oath, upon which one promises to serve him loyally and unswervingly. This is usually where we human beings fail to meet our oath. Many temptations come into our lives and sometimes we are convinced we are doing the right thing when actually we know it is against the will of God. This is where God’s forgiveness comes into our lives. God realizes we are human and that we do make mistakes. We actually have to recognize our mistakes, admit them to God and ask for his forgiveness. This doesn’t mean that we can go right on making the same mistakes and keep asking for forgiveness. We should learn and profit by our mistakes.

As for service to our Lord and to our church, I believe this; once we have truly accepted Jesus Christ into our lives there will be no question of service. We will be attending church; we will be serving our church and God whenever our abilities and talents allow us to serve. It may be an officer of the church if we have leadership abilities, it may be playing the organ and piano, it may be singing in the choir, it may be teaching Sunday school, it may be guiding and directing the youth fellowship, it may be ushering in the church worship service, it may be just greeting people, it may be helping those that are less fortunate. I believe that God has a job or something that each one of us can do to serve him and to help advance his kingdom here on earth.

The first Christians were aware of this and they never treated lightly this oath that they had taken. They treated it with the utmost seriousness, even when that involved privation, torture, imprisonment, and death itself. What was the secret of this shining, fearless, unswerving loyalty displayed by those early Christians? There can be only one answer and it is summed up in these words of a second-century writer, “Do you not see them flung to the wild beasts, to make them deny their Lord, and yet unconquered? These things do not look like the achievements of man; they are the power of God; they are the proof of his presence.” No one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ as an oath of loyalty, and remain faithful – unto death itself – to that oath, except by the Holy Spirit.

In these times and days it probably will not be necessary for us to die for Jesus Christ or our beliefs but we should be giving our spiritual lives to him which will in turn guide and direct our physical lives. Have you really and truly accepted the presence of the Holy Spirit in your life and can you truly make this confession that ‘Jesus is Lord’ through a creed, through an act of worship and through an oath of loyalty?

The Trinity
Scripture: John 14:1-11

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

That is the last line of one of the finest letters of antiquity, the second letter that Paul wrote to the people of Corinth, and it comes as close as the New Testament ever comes to a doctrine of the Trinity. As a matter of fact, it isn't a doctrine at all; it is a reference to three facts of experiences. “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.” “The Love of God.” “The fellowship of the Holy Spirit.”

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

Trinity Sunday celebrates a mystery, in the sense of being beyond all human knowledge. If the last great festival of the Christian year led us to worship a God whose nature could be fully comprehended it would lead us to one who would be too small to be God.

Those persons who are nearest and dearest to us, who are by our side everyday of our lives, are not fully known by us. Each one of us is sometimes mysterious to others. This fact that does not separate us from one another. We rejoice that each of us is a unique personality. How much more is God a mystery? Trinity Sunday calls us to rejoice in the mystery of God.

All of us know what the Trinity is but most of us would have a hard time explaining the doctrine of the Trinity to someone else. We know that it says there are three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, in one God. Wherever you go among Christians you will find that one of their favorite hymns is ♪ Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty, God in three persons, blessed Trinity. ♪ But stating the doctrine and explaining it are two different things. Therefore, I would like to attempt an approach to the doctrine of the Trinity that I believe will help us understand it more fully.

First, let me introduce you to a famous scholar. The particular field of scholarship in which he has distinguished himself is the historical study of the New Testament and the life of Jesus. His work, which was published about seventy (70) years ago, is still standard. Now all one has to do, I think, is to say the word ‘scholar’ in order to have a picture of a definite kind of personality. He is a man that works by himself rather than on a team. His eyes are turned toward the past rather than the present or the future. He tends to be bookish. You can picture him early in the morning and late at night sitting in his

study surrounded by dusty volumes. This, at any rate, is the popular image of the typical scholar and it is probably fairly accurate. Our scholar is a man like that.

Now let me introduce you to a very different kind of person – a great musician. This man is one of those people whose feelings and perceptions are sharper and deeper than those of the general run of us, who knows through indescribable self-discipline how to turn himself into an instrument by which the beauty of a great creator can be made available to your ears and mind. He is the world's leading interpreter of the works of Johann Sebastian Bach. When someone speaks of a great musician, we immediately think of a definite kind of personality, one that combines discipline and technical skills with a very special gift of temperament. We all know enough about musicians, I think, to have a fairly good picture of the particular musician in question.

Now let me introduce you to a doctor. He is a man of science. He is also a great humanitarian. He is the head of a hospital that he himself founded in an out-of-the-way corner of the world in order to provide medical care for a large population who but for him would have lived and died without ever seeing a doctor. I think it is not difficult for you to imagine the kind of personality I am talking about. We know the qualities that make a good doctor and therefore we can picture the particular doctor in question.

Here, then, are three quite different personalities – a scholar, a musician and a doctor. Yet, as most of you have guessed long ago, the scholar, the musician, the doctor about whom I am talking are one and the same person. His name is Albert Schweitzer. In 1903 he published a book called, "The Quest of the Historical Jesus", which will always rank as a masterpiece of scholarship. He is the world's greatest interpreter of the works of Johann Sebastian Bach. He is also the head of one of the most famous hospitals on earth. Now the distinction between his different personalities is very easy to make if you stand at a great distance from the man.

But suppose you stood not at a distance from the man, but very close to him. Suppose you were an intimate friend of his or a member of his family, you would find it quite impossible to separate the three distinct personalities. You would know him as one man. If you were Mrs. Schweitzer, he would just be Albert.

Now the doctrine of the Trinity is an attempt to say something like that about God. Different people come upon God, so to speak, in different ways. Some people are an inquiring turn of mind. They like answers to questions. They look at the universe and ask themselves whether it always existed or had a beginning. They suspect that it had a beginning. Then they ask another question, whether it began by accident or by design. Most of them choose the second of these possibilities: they infer from the orderliness of its operation that it reflects a design. From this they conclude that it must have had a creator. Thus they arrive at the idea of God. When they walk outdoors on a starry night and look up, they cannot resist saying with the Psalmist, "the heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament shows his handiwork."

But not all people arrive at the idea of God is this way. Most Christians have arrived at the idea of God by being introduced to the person of Jesus Christ. In the first instance this happened to people who saw Jesus in the flesh. They listened to him teach, they saw him heal, and as they came to know him better and better, they began to have a strange sense that he wasn't just another human being but that there was something divine in him. To come to know Jesus, they said, is to come to know God. That experience has been repeated over and over again, even with people who did not see Jesus in the 'flesh' but came to know him through the testimony of others. It is, in fact, the normal Christian experience. To Christians God is like Jesus.

The minister was visiting a little parishioner in the children's hospital. The boy was seriously ill and in great pain. "Jimmy", said the minister, "have you prayed to God today?" "I don't know God", said the little boy. There was a pause. Then his face lit up and he said, "But I know Jesus. I learned in Sunday School that he liked little children, and I read stories of how he laid hands on the sick and healed them." "That's all you need to know, Jimmy", said the minister. "When you are talking to God, keep the face of Jesus before you." "I like the Jesus God", murmured the little fellow as he turned his head on the pillow and fell asleep.

Still other people, and they are not Christian by any means, have arrived at the idea of God by experiencing what, for want of a better name, we call the things of the spirit. As children we notice that our parents love us without asking anything in return. They are willing to sacrifice themselves for us, to accept us back when we have disobeyed them, to forgive us when we have fallen short of their expectation of us and offer us a second chance. Jesus explains this in the parable of the "Prodigal Son". Quite often, as human beings, we have to go off an experience something for ourselves and when we finally realize that the grass is not always greener on the other side of the fence, we settle down to what is real. Our parents usually have the patience to see us through these experiences and of course God does as well. Once we have found out our mistakes and repent, God is willing to forgive us and help us to start anew.

As we grow older we become aware that this spirit of love and forgiveness and self-sacrifice is found not only within the family, but countless men and women have laid down their lives for total strangers. When this happens we find it impossible to say that it is just a foolish waste of life. Instead, we feel instinctively that such behavior on the part of human beings is a revelation of the spirit of God.

God has more than one way of being God. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is our Christian way to say so. And these terms are not arbitrary or ideological only, since they are required by the very nature of what happened to and for the world in Jesus Christ. They are also, of course, emphatically and wholly biblical.

The being of God is altogether incomprehensible to us mortals: but out of the darkness and the mystery God has spoken: we are sure of that.

It is not difficult to find parallels from the physical world. We know a great deal about electricity, but our scientists would be hard put to it to tell what electricity precisely is.

Now what the doctrine of the Trinity means quite simply is this: that no matter where people are when they first become aware of God – that is to say, whether they find him at the end of an inquiry about the nature of the universe, or find him in the spirit of love and forgiveness and self-sacrifice – they are not discovering three different Gods, but rather three different personalities, so to speak, of the same God. The closer you get to God and the better you know him, the more difficult it is to think of any one of his personalities without the other.

True Success
Scripture: Luke 12:13-21

Chosen text from Luke 12:15 – “Jesus said to them, “Take heed, and beware of all covetousness; for a man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.

In Channing Pollock’s play “The Fool”, when Mr. Goodkind, a man of enormous wealth, says to Daniel Gilchrist that he is a success, Daniel replies, “Are you? What is success? Money? Yes, that’s what our civilization tells us. Money! But where has that brought us? Only to the elevation of the unfit, the merely shrewd and predatory. All around us we see men of wealth who have nothing else – neither health nor happiness nor love nor respect; men who get no joy out of books or pictures or music or even themselves. Tired, worried men who are afraid to quit because they have no resource except to make money with which to buy vulgar excitement for their own depraved souls. Why Mr. Goodkind, I have an income that you wouldn’t suggest to your bookkeeper, but I have peace and health and friends, and time to read and think and dream and help. Which of us is the rich man?

Well, who here is the rich man? Which of these men is the true success? What is success anyway?

Obviously, success is related to one’s standard of values. For many of us it means prestige, a good salary, property, a large bank account, your name in the social register, owning and driving the latest and most expensive automobile. We seem to think success is directly related to money and material possessions. As long as we have enough money everything else will be OK and we will be able to buy anything that we want.

Once a man remarked after a public banquet, “Do you know there was represented at the banquet wealth to the amount of thirty million dollars?” And the man to whom he was talking said, “Yes, and conversation to the amount of thirty cents.”

Another kind of success is inward and unseen. It is gaining of wisdom, understanding the universe, and one’s place in it; seeing and appreciating beauty, the service of mankind and the experience of the love of God. This is the standard of success in the framework of the Christian faith. Here true success is in one’s own soul – not in purse or title deeds.

In more detail, let us think about true success. First let us consider that success means to be something rather than to have something. Jesus said, “A man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of things which he possesseth.”

In our scripture reading this morning, in the parable of the rich man who tore down his old barns to build greater ones because of his increasing wealth, Jesus called such a

man “thou fool.” How real was his inward poverty! “What is exalted by men may be an abomination to God.” Too many people think of success in terms of conjugating the verb, “to have”. Our religion would have us see it as conjugating the verb, “to be”.

Certainly too many of us are guilty of putting the emphasis on having rather than being. We belong to a society that is mainly interested in acquiring things for themselves. Money and all sorts of material possessions; a society that looks out for one’s self first and then if we have time and the means left over we will help others.

Thomas Carlyle was preaching against the acquisitive society when he said that in reality we say ‘good morning clothes,’ ‘good morning medals’ and remain oblivious to the only thing that matters underneath, the man himself, the soul. When we become truly religions we will say, “Good morning soul.”

There is a passage in Ecclesiastes, which teaches a story similar to the one Jesus taught in the parable of the rich fool;

“One man grows rich by carefulness and greed,
And this will be his reward:
When he says, “Now I can rest,
and enjoy my goods,”
He does not know when the time will come
when he will die and leave them to others.”

When a man is accustomed to living from hand to mouth finally achieves property, he has reached a critical fork in the road; thereafter he will walk either in a sturdier manhood or in the folly of an acquisitive life. Possessions may fulfill their perfect work, or they may smother him. It is a brave sight to see a man stake out his own claim in the common freehold and thereby learn independence, responsibility, and the joy of giving.

Emerson said, “true success is the up building of the man.” It is measured by what we are and less by what we have. Let us be more interested in conjugating the verb, “to be”.

Second, true success is deepening our capacity for the enjoyment of life. There are not very many of us who really enjoy life. We are by far too busy to really enjoy it. We are too busy making a living to enjoy what surrounds us. Do we really enjoy the beauty of nature that surrounds us in this beautiful valley? I think we take it pretty well for granted. Many of us are so busy that we do not even know how to relax. In our busyness we forget to thank God for what we have. We forget that we owe everything we have to God. And we are always in such a hurry. Where are we going? We do all this rushing around and finally one day we are gone and everything still continues without us. Vash Young, author of *Fortunes For All*, once said, “I managed to make a living while failing to make a life.” Success is making a life.

Some years ago, Elisha Root, a great international lawyer, spoke to the students of Hamilton College. He talked to them about success. "Cultivate," he said, "your taste to receive joy from a thing of beauty; cultivate your powers for the joy you may obtain from their employment; cultivate friendship; and those other simple virtues. No man is truly happy who must depend on outside things for happiness."

A little girl once said to her daddy, "I am having an awfully good time with myself." Perhaps we should become as children and start having a good time with ourselves instead of depending on others.

If we have to drive 1000 miles before we can enjoy the scenery, then why do we live where we do? If we have to do our job only because it affords us a living, then why don't we find a job that will give us enjoyment too. It is a known fact that we do our best at something we find enjoyment in.

Third, true success lies in service to our fellow men, not in service from them. Here again Jesus points the way: "Whoever wants to be great among you, must be your servant." "I came not to be ministered unto but to minister." "The only superior among you is one who serves others."

How can we say that a man who acquires much money, material possessions, land, etc., throughout his lifetime and actually does nothing to help others with his wealth, is successful? What good is his wealth to him? What satisfaction does he gain from having all of these things while others around him are struggling, while some are starving and do not have a decent roof over their head? How can he enjoy his life? How can he find peace and contentment?

One of the world's greatest immortals is Louis Pasteur, France's greatest citizen. In 1892 when Pasteur was seventy, a medal was given to him at a meeting in Paris, to honor his great work. Pasteur came limping to the platform on the arm of the President of the French Republic. The closing words of Pasteur spoken on this occasion deserve to live forever. "Don't," he said, "Let yourselves be tainted by a barren skepticism. Live in the serene peace of laboratories and libraries. Say to yourself first, 'what have I done for my instruction?' and as you gradually advance, 'what have I done for my country?', until the time comes when you may think the immense happiness of thinking you have contributed in some way to the progress and good of humanity."

Finally true success may mean present failure. There is such a thing a "successful failure."

Was Paul a success? From a biological point of view he was a failure; he was beheaded. But from what he planted and nurtured in growth - the Christian Church - what a success! But he never made "Who's Who in Rome. And he wasn't" in Rome's social register.

What about Socrates? He ended his life in jail, where he drank the poison hemlock. His wife and many others thought him a failure. HG Wells said, “the historian’s test of an individual’s greatness is ‘what did he leave to grow?’” By this test how great and successful were some of history’s great failures?

Don’t be afraid to fail for a big and worthy cause; be afraid to succeed in a small and unworthy one. Probably very few of us here today will be considered great or successful after we have passed on and most of us will soon be forgotten. However, I feel it is by far more important to be a success while we are here. I know that we can only be truly successful with Jesus Christ along side of us to guide and direct us.

We cannot forget how a Galilean peasant looked one day at a man who we would call imminently successful, and said to him “Thou fool.”

I have said “True Success” is to, (1) be something other to than to have something, (2) deepening our capacity for the enjoyment of life, (3) service to our fellowmen, not in service from them, and (4) it may mean present failure. Not too many of us use these standards to judge whether the person is successful.

Let each of us truly take him into our lives so that we can know what true success is.

Vital Experiences
Scripture: John 15: 1-16

The chosen text this morning is from 1 Thessalonians 1: 4-5. “We know that God not only loves you but has selected you for a special purpose. For we remember how our Gospel came to you not as new words, but as a message with power behind – the effectual power, in fact, of the Holy Spirit.”

The Christians at Thessalonica were the real article, the real thing. They were marked ‘sterling’. They were God’s men and women. They exhibited faith, love and hope – the eternal virtues. In faith they made solid achievement. In love they worked hard. In hope they showed sheer dogged endurance.

So much for their virtues, what were their experiences? Men and women of such virtues must have had vital experiences.

First as God’s men and women they experience God’s love. Read the text, “We know that God not only loves you” – Stop! That’s far enough! God loves you.

That’s human. If you had a child and he had the endurance to stick at a good thing against all odds; if he worked hard, not counting the burdens or the cost; if he made solid achievement; if he had faith and hope and love – wouldn’t you love your child? Is God’s fatherhood less than human fatherhood?

And there need be nothing slushy or falsely sentimental about that love. Nor should the recipient of the love of God become self-admiring and self-satisfied and complacent. Usually when we start admiring ourselves, satisfied with ourselves, and what we are doing and complacent, we are soon headed for a big fall. A person with these traits certainly isn’t very popular with his friends; in fact, he is probably less popular than any other kind of person I can think of.

In the order to converse with God we have to be willing to really and truly, admit that we are not perfect, that we do have faults and that we need His help.

God loves you. How do you know that to be true? Because you have a guilty conscience! Because you are ashamed of yourself!

“My son, regard not lightly the chastening of the Lord. Nor faint when thou art reproved by him; for whom the Lord loveth he chasteth and scourgeth every son when he receiveth.”

As Paul says in Hebrews, “no true son ever grows up uncorrected by his father. For if you had no experience of the correction which all sons have to bear you might well doubt the legitimacy of our sonship.”

The day that you do that mean act, or think that ugly thought or hug that low passion to your breast, without regret, remorse, heaviness of spirit, shame; that day God has let you go. If you can do a mean act to another person and not be sorry; if you can really hate another individual and show no compassion for that person, if you can truly and knowingly commit an immoral act without any regret and without your conscience bothering you; if you can be a part of a shady business deal in which harm comes to another person financially or otherwise and you are not sorry for it, than you had better believe that God has left your life completely and you are strictly on your own.

The person who feels that a guilty conscience or a sense of shame is a sign that God no longer loves him is to the greatest degree mistaken. That is the indication that God loves you and will not let you go. When you do something that pricks your conscience, that makes you think twice, that makes you have a feeling of regret and an urge to apologize, then you can be sure that God has not let you go but rather he is there beside you.

We’re getting along so very well,” said a woman, “we must be living right!” The hearer of the remark was shocked. Living right? Getting along well? Under the blessing of the God? With her children appearing in the courts for delinquency – with the neighbors wishing that the family would move from the community – with her own character such that her friends had to make excuses for her all the time – under the blessing of God because material things were abundant? She thought that her accumulating of wealth was a sign of God’s favor. The fact was that it looked as though God had abandoned her. Complacency, self satisfaction, self-pride and selfish exaltation are not signs that God loves you.

Another sign of God’s love for his children is that their faults and failures hurt him. The sin of the child hurts the father. A good example of sin of the child happened to me recently. We have a crab apple tree on the side toward our neighbor’s house. I came home from work one day and heard that my son had been throwing crab apples at the side of the neighbor’s house and splattered the whole side. At first I couldn’t believe that my son would do such a thing. (The first reaction of any normal parent) But I finally realized that he had done this and I was hurt because I felt that some how I had failed to teach him properly. He could have broken windows and the thought of ruining other people’s property bothered me. But I also realized that he is a boy and perhaps I had done some foolish things in my own life. Philip ended up apologizing to the neighbors (which was perhaps the hardest punishment) and picking up all the crab apples. This is just a small example of how a child’s mistake or faults hurt a father and mother. The message from the cross is the sin of the child hurts the Father. That was revealed by Jesus in the pain and agony of the crucifixion. God loves you – see how he bears the pain for your sin.

God loves you. Is all of God's love chastening? Is it shown only in bearing pain? No, God gives gifts to his children. "Fear not, little flock, it is your father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom." "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you." "Thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. God's men and women know, that all material possessions are ultimately gifts from God's hand, and they are thankful. We need to realize that all we have we owe to God's grace and love and without it we would have nothing.

No chastening seems pleasant. It is in fact most unpleasant. Those psychologists and psychiatrists who find the sense of guilt and shame to be conditions that need to be disparaged, complexes only to be eradicated by false means, only so called negative, are mistaken, to say the least. When the sense of guilt and the chastisement are accepted as the kindness of God, as the loving discipline of God, then they quietly produce the fruits of goodness in the souls and the man becomes a more worthy and more loving son.

God's men and women experience God's love.

Secondly, as God's men and women they experienced God's selection. In our text this morning, "God has selected you for a special purpose." It is a great and vital experience to know that you are selected by God for a special purpose. There is nothing that makes life more meaningful. Nothing makes life happier.

Our text in the King James Version uses the word election instead of selection. Election: "yes, there is an election – whether you are saved or not – God has one vote, the devil has one vote, and you have one vote. God votes for you. The devil votes against you. And you vote. Majority wins.

The doctrine of selection runs all through the Bible. The Hebrew people were God's chosen people. The Bible heroes were God-chosen: Moses, David, Solomon, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Stephen, Paul.

Jesus said to his disciples, "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you, that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide. Jesus Christ has chosen each one of us to be his disciples, to be Christian witnesses and to spread his Gospel throughout this world of ours. We cannot be Christian unless we do these things.

The nature of the experience brings a sense of humility. It brings a sense of testing. Words said to Esther: "who knows whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" Abraham Lincoln is an example of a man who had such a sense of humility and such a sense of destiny.

When men and women with seemingly, minor responsibilities feel that God has selected them for that certain task, how exulted the task becomes. God has selected me for this task – how the task is magnified! How great it becomes, how practical, how meaningful, how personal! What ambition it puts into a man's soul when his vocation becomes his response to the call of God! What aspiration to become what God wants him to be. A Christian vocation is not necessarily directly related to being a minister, a teacher of Christian education or missionary. Each of our vocations whether laborer, farmers, doctor, lawyer, engineer, secretary or housewife, should have Jesus Christ in the center of them and all of us can do our work to the glory of God and as if God were our employer.

Thirdly – As God's men and women, the Thessalonians experienced God's empowerment. Again in our text, "our gospel came to you not as mere words, but as a message with power behind it – the effectual power, in fact, of the Holy Spirit." We need to note that the Disciples of Christ were empowered. And we too, right here this morning, can be empowered by the Holy Spirit. We have to sit still long enough and be silent long enough to listen to him speak to us. Once the Holy Spirit has been received we will find it less difficult to do some of the things that we now feel are impossible. We will find that material possessions are not as important as before but rather helping those in need throughout our world is by are much more important. There will be no question of how much we should pledge and give to our church and to God's work. There will be no question of where we will physically and mentally be on Sunday morning. Suddenly God will become the center of our lives.

In a hostile world the Thessalonians had no fear. They had positive courage.

In a needy world they had adequate resources of power.

In tremendous tasks they had the divine companionship. It is so down to this present day. Every God given task is a tremendous task. It has universal implications. This too is a vital experience: God empowers you.

God's men and women have the vital experience. Have you had a vital experience of God's love; a vital experience of God's selection; a vital experience of God's empowerment?

Let each of us go forth. Not to meager, unworthy, ineffectual lives but let us go forth as God's men and women. Go forth to hard work, with dogged endurance, unto solid achievement.

Working; With All Your Heart
Scripture: Colossians 3:12-4:1

My text this morning is chosen from Colossians 3:23,24: “Whatever you are doing, put your whole heart into it, as if you were doing it for the Lord and not for men, knowing that there is a master who will give you your heritage as a reward for your service.”

There was a man who was nicknamed “Happy” by his schoolmates. He bore the name well. He knew how to be glad and stay glad. The nickname followed him into experiences of extreme suffering. His secret of happiness was found in the text I have chosen this morning. His daily prayer might have been that of Robert Louis Stevenson: “If I have faltered more or less, in my great task of happiness, stab my spirit broad awake.”

“Whatever you do, do it heartily.” Paul centered his appeal upon a person. Had he been writing in some quiet academy, the text, I dare say, might have read like this: “Whatsoever you do, do it heartily, for the best work is always done that way.” But Paul did not write in any quiet academy. Paul wrote for the masses. Paul wrote for the great world. And he knew that nothing abstract, nothing cold, would ever inspire the enthusiasm of thousands. A cause must be concentrated in some powerful name, it must live in the flesh and blood of personality, if the hearts of the many are ever stirred, and the lives of the many are ever to be won. So Paul, with the true instinct of universal genius, gathered all abstract arguments for zeal into the living argument of Jesus. And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as what? As to the Lord.

‘Sour puss’ is a bit of a ‘spiced tongue’, which we can place opposite the word ‘heartiness’. Who really loves a person who is constantly griping about everything? Who really admires the person who goes about his duties with an air of religious resignation? I’m sure there are many people who go about their work, their daily tasks not really glad or happy about it but with a feeling that it is necessary for them to do their work because they have to earn living for their families. How much more enjoyable it can be for us, and everyone around us, if we really enjoy our work and are happy with it. The attitude we have in life and what we put into life has a lot to do with what we get out of life.

Two friends met and the first one said, “I suffice you have heard that ‘so and so has failed?’” “No”, said the second. “Well”, he has and little wonder, for he starved his business. He did not even put himself into it.” He did not put himself into the work; he did not do it heartily as to the Lord. And could we trace the history of failure, that long, sad story of the world – I think we should find that for one who went to the wall through want of intellect, there were a score who reached that pass through want of heart. To concentrate, as the apostles did; to have the resolute enthusiasm of Jesus, that spirit has something congenial to success in it; and I use success in its best and noblest sense, some of which the world might call defeat.

How can a person, “you and I,” be glad, genial, gracious, put heart and soul into life, meet one’s “great task of happiness?” Every Christian might exhibit naturally and spontaneously a heartiness and gladness, which also is a real goodness. This morning let us consider this in terms of true religion.

True religion personalizes all activity.

There was an exhibition of arts and crafts at a local YMCA. Among the many exhibits was a hobbyhorse. There was never a hobbyhorse with such form and color. And what a tail it had. This was a ‘super duper’ hobbyhorse. A soldier had made it while in service, in his spare time, in his off moments. Maybe some of us would say, “how foolish to spend time making a hobbyhorse?” But you see that hobbyhorse was personalized. He made it for his little boy back home.

We see the importance of this by noting how depersonalization makes heartiness give way to heartache. Mom finds it hard to bake one of her famous pies after she learns that her son will never come home again. I suppose that many a man becomes an alcoholic and many a woman, too, as a means of escape from depersonalization in the house.

Paul’s phrase “doing it for the Lord and not for man” does not turn us aside from personalized activity toward others. It carries us only a little deeper in. Paul’s whole paragraph in our scripture lesson this morning, relates our activities to other persons – wives, husbands, children, fathers, masters, servants.

The importance of this is recognized by business and industry, which today is far removed from the old personal master and apprentice days. Now-a-days they place the name of the workman on his desk or machines. How many problems could be solved in education if we could turn back, not to the old country schoolhouse, but to the teacher-pupil itinerary that existed years ago.

Duty is a noble word, and as Archibald Alexander wrote, “set a man a long hard task, and tell him that it is his duty, and he will sometimes do amazingly well. But let him understand that it is for someone who counts supremely; wife or sweetheart, mother or child, and he will stick at it with glad heart until he either winds or drops.

Any abstract principle and any coded law may receive adherence because right is right and the right must be done, but let the law be personalized, let fear of consequences be transmitted into passion for the ideal as seen in another, how differently the battle is won. It is possible to be glad and gay in the keeping of the law. We keep the law with high spirits.

The rulebook, an anatomical chart and the old commandment, “thou shalt not commit adultery” may keep a youth morally straight; but with imagination to see an unspoiled

marriage, a babe born as purely as the unfolding of a flower and the love of God revealed in the law – then the “those shalt not” is not longer drastic and dull. It no longer should be liberty. Personalized, it becomes a thing lovely enough to be loved. The Psalmist cried out, “Oh, how love I thy law.”

It is such personalization that our Christian religion brings to pass. It relates life to a character and a person – a person who is lovable and himself loving. Whatever we do, we do it heartily as to the Lord. That person, when upon this earth, was attractive to little children; women hung upon his words; men followed him and after he was gone, died for him. He personalized religion. He taught that God knows everyone of us by our names. No one of us was lost in the crowd. He went to his death that he might save men. He placed the words, “for his sake”, upon the life of men and they were drawn out of themselves and unto him.

When any man finds Jesus Christ in a personal way and when Christ comes to him in a personal way, they you have the personalization of all life toward him, and life becomes glad, happy, hearty at its very center. As I have said many times, Jesus Christ is just waiting for us. All we have to do is truly turn to him and he will respond with all of his love and compassion.

Secondly, true religion consecrates our vocation.

We meet our great task of happiness by the consecration of our vocation. We can read the vision of Zechariah. “And on that day there shall be inscribed on the bells of the horses, “Holy to the Lord. And the fate in the house of the Lord shall be as the bowls before the alter; and every pot in Jerusalem and Judah shall be sacred to the Lord of hosts, so that all who sacrifice may come and take of them and boil the flesh of the sacrifice in them. And then shall no longer be a trader in the house of the Lord of hosts on that day.” It is a beautiful dream. It is a glad and gay dream when ‘holiness’ is not confined to a corner of life.

Again I quote from Archibald Alexander, “Do not let us think of holiness as a small, narrow thing confined to one corner of life. Holiness is the same word, after all, as wholesome and health, and means the happy working of every department of life. Holiness is a thing so big that it needs all the days of the week to show the different sides of it. It should be written on the minister’s robe. It should be written on the bells of the horse, too, on the ledger of the businessman, on the tools of the workman, on the books of the students. It should be written on every pleasure we enjoy. And where it cannot be written there we should not be found.”

How marvelously this consecration of vocation applies to the practice of stewardship, and the happiness, which comes from this practice.

“Why take all that trouble carving the hair on top of the figure’s head”, asked the on-looker to a famous Greek sculptor long ago. “The figure is so high that no one will see the head.” “Ah”, replied the sculptor, “but the God’s will see it.”

Thirdly, - Hearty and true religion consecrates the margins of life.

The margins of life when related to Jesus Christ can bring us great happiness.

A Lt. General Commander of the allied troop in Italy during World War II announced that he would devote himself to working for his church when he returned to the US. He had a big margin to give to his Lord.

A man retired at 69 years of age. He devoted his margin of life to a new enterprise in the name of Jesus Christ. He lived to be ninety-seven (97). He had a glorious margin of twenty-eight (28) years of activity.

Think of the joy that some men realize through the consecration of their marginal money in good works.

Some men meet their marginal task of happiness by developing marginal and casual contacts into productive and joy giving friendship.

What marvelous stories could be told of leisure transmitted by its consecrated use into happiness?

So there are the ways to live heartily as unto the Lord and to meet our great task of happiness:

Personalize all activity as unto the Lord.

Consecrate your vocation unto the Lord.

Redeem the margins of life by relating them to the Lord’s work.

Are you, sir, a sour, irritable, narrow, long-faced, dour soul? - by these means - in a little time - you’ll change!

Are you, madam, a critical, peevish, selfish person, easily hurt, hard to get along with? - by these means – in a little while – you’ll change!

How good is heartiness, gladness, happiness, geniality, grace, good temper, thoughtfulness, high spirits! Let us fulfill our task in Jesus Christ’s name!

Believing in Easter
(Scripture: John 20:1-23)

“The Lord has risen indeed.” Easter is one of the greatest hours in the experience of man. I am sure we all know what it means to observe or celebrate Easter, but how many of us really know what believing in Easter means?

First of all, to believe in Easter is to believe that God is supreme and rules the entire universe. It is to believe that God is the beginning and the end and above all, it means not only to believe in personal survival after death but also to believe that God, who created heavens and the earth, is alive and unconquerable. Even though sometimes we might feel that his plans seem to go astray, it is to believe that God will rule supreme in the end. Regardless how dark things may look to us, they will turn out for our best because God is the ruler of all.

It also means that we can be confident that we do not walk alone but that God is with us always to help us and guide us if we are willing to let him. Regardless of how sinful we may be or may have been, if we truly repent of our sins from the bottom of our hearts, God will forgive us and be at our sides always. It is to ‘walk into the valley of the shadow of death and fear no evil.’ To believe in Easter, is to believe completely and thoroughly in God.

Secondly, to believe in Ester, is to experience complete joy and peace within us. We can go back to our scripture lesson this morning and experience the emptiness, loneliness and sadness the eleven (11) disciples must have experienced on that first “Good Friday” nearly 2000 years ago after Jesus Christ had been crucified. Not only did the disciples experience these feeling but the two Marys and the other followers of Christ did too. Gloom did prevail because they had lost their beloved leader, their master, their teacher, their King. This gloom prevailed until Easter morning when the two (2) Marys found the tomb empty. When these people receive the news that Jesus Christ was gone and had risen, can you possibly imagine the joy that filled their hearts. Their Lord had risen and would be with them always. Think for a moment of the first meeting they had with Christ in Galilee. All of the doubts that existed vanished as Jesus Christ appeared to them and filled their hearts with the Holy Spirit. Jesus Christ can fill each of our hearts with the Holy Spirit if we want him to and if we are willing to commit our lives to him and be his followers and disciples. This is the best way, the only way to celebrate Easter; to let Jesus Christ come into your heart and fill it with loving concern for other people instead of selfish desires and wishes for ourselves. If you have accepted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior before, now is the time to renew this acceptance.

Third, to believe in Easter is to believe that Jesus Christ is alive forever to bring light and life to all. We can all have the experience of really knowing our Lord if we will let him come into our lives and we can know the power of the living Lord.

Today in our modern world we hear about all kinds of physical power which man is trying to harness, especially atomic energy. Man has invented and devised all kinds of means to harness this power. This power can be used for constructive purposes or destructive purposes. Science has placed this power in our hands but it does not tell us how this power is going to be used. Only God can help us decide this. Actually to believe in Easter, is to know what spiritual power is. This power is found in the living presence of Jesus Christ. In the days of Jesus' earthly ministry this power was only known by his physical presence. On the first Easter morning it was discovered that this power was still alive although Christ was not physically there. Paul called it "the power of the resurrection." This renewing power is available to everyone. We can never sink so low in sin that God forgets us, as long as we are willing to accept it and let Him help us. Everyone regardless of color or creed can be saved through the saving power of Jesus Christ.

Fourth – To believe in Easter is to hear good news about man as well as about God. Man can be saved, he can be redeemed, he can be reformed and he can be born anew - this is done by the saving power of Jesus Christ.

Of course to believe in Easter, is to believe in life everlasting. To observe Easter is a social matter confined to the activities of a single day. To believe in Easter is to know a life that conquers death. The risen Lord says to each of us facing death, "Let not your

hearts be troubled; ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms and I go and prepare a place for you; let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid." If there had been no Easter, the Christian religion would have ended with the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. But Jesus was crucified, he did rise from the dead and he is with us always, which is a promise for everlasting and eternal life. If we do not believe in eternal life then there would be no point to living at all.

To believe in Easter is to live in a new kind of climate. "Old things are passed away, behold all things become new." Maybe as children we wondered what happened to or how we got rid of the old dinosaurs and monstrous reptiles that once roamed this earth. Then as we grew up and went to high school and on to college we found out. The climate changed; the old beasts could no longer survive; and a new kind of life came upon the earth. And so it is with you and I, when we truly accept Jesus Christ into our hearts, the climate changes, our lives change and all of the wicked things we use to do and be, will vanish because there is no longer room in our lives for worthless and useless things that are not important. Jesus Christ became important to us and He becomes first in our lives.

(1-A) A traveler in Russia found written across the door of a church the words, "God is not here." Someone disillusioned with the pretentiousness and hypocrisy of the church could have written this. But the unknown author could have meant more. He could

have meant that as he looked upon life – as he studied science, anthropology, biology and physics, as he noted the human scene and observed man’s inhumanity to man; visited the sick and dying, noted life’s blind and crushing fate meted out to man – even Jesus’ death upon the cross – he could have said, taking it all into account- “God is not here. There is no God.” But to believe in Easter is to have a different view of the universe. On Easter there came to men, as realistic, as earnest and as concerned for truth as any of us, the absolute assurance. “God is here.”

(2A) Dr. Wernher Von Braun, a scientist, has this to say about God and science. “Many people seem to feel that science has somehow made religious ideas untimely and old fashioned. But I think science has a real surprise for the skeptics. Science, for instance, tells us that nothing in nature, not even the tiniest particle, can disappear without a trace. Nature does not know extinction. All it knows is transformation. Now, if God applies this fundamental principle to the most minute and insignificant parts of his universe, doesn’t it make sense to assume that it applies it also to the human soul? I think it does. And, everything science has taught me – and continues to teach me – strengthens my belief in the continuity of our spiritual existence after death. Nothing disappears without a trace.”

Unless we care for the Father whom Jesus revealed, unless we share his interests and likes, the purpose on which his heart is set, Easter must be anything but a happy festival with Easter eggs and Easter bunnies. Its victory long ago declares so mistakenly who rules the world and who succeeds in his world.

So if we are to believe in Easter we have to, (1) believe that God is supreme and rules the entire universe and to believe completely and thoroughly in God. (2) To believe in Easter is to experience complete joy and peace within ourselves by the true acceptance of Jesus Christ in our lives. (3) To believe in Easter is to believe that Jesus Christ is alive forever to bring light and life to all and to know what spiritual power is. (4) To believe in Easter is to hear good news about man as well as God and to believe that man can be saved, redeemed, reformed and born again. That life is everlasting and eternal. To believe in Easter is to live in a new kind of climate with our lives changed and turned to God.

Jesus Christ not only wants us to believe but to live the right kind of life according to his will. We are to be his followers, his disciples and to show concern and compassion for others. We are to be witnesses to these facts that Christ has changed our lives and he can change the lives of everyone. We will want to have fellowship with other Christians and we will want to share our Christian experience with those around us. This new life we have found with Christ will be a joyous, happy one. So this Easter day let us truly accept Jesus Christ in our lives.

How vain is our faith, if the Christ be not risen;

How dark is the tomb, if the Lord is still there!

How heavy our burden of grief and transgression,

How deep our despair!

O' justified faith in a finished salvation;

O' sure resurrection that comforts our lives!

O' Glorious light in the valley of shadow-

Because Jesus rose!

Conquering Inner Space Scripture: Psalm 8

In our world today we seem to be running a race to see who can conquer outer space first. We are spending, or our country is spending, billions of dollars each year on the “space program.” Our goal now is to land a man on the moon and possibility to establish an outer space rocket station. We apparently don’t know whether there is life on these other planets. I believe, that regardless of the importance placed on the space program by our government and other governments, man’s prime adventure is still the conquest of inner space of himself. The New York Times expressed this succinctly two days after the appearance of the first Russian satellite with these words, “the creature who descended from a tree or crawled out of a cave is now on the eve of incredible journeys. Yet it is not their journeys which chiefly matter. We’ll be any happier for seeing the other side of the moon or strolling in the meadows of Mars? The greatest adventure of all is not to go to the moon or to explore the rings of Saturn. It is rather to understand the heart and soul of man, and to turn away from wrath and destruction towards creativeness and brotherly love.” A good space project would be to send out satellites to probes the infinite darkness around the human heart.

It seems that we are not able to get along as human beings here on earth without going to other planets. Right here in our own country we still cannot live together because of the difference in color of our skin. For what is gained if man conquer the whole world and outer space and loses his soul?

Truth is conqueror number one. Jesus said, “if you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples and you will know the truth and the truth will make you free.” This kind of truth, which covers one only by being a follower of Jesus Christ, liberates the mind of man and sets him free to fulfill his destiny. This truth enables man to think thoughts after the thoughts of God and to live his life after the life of Jesus Christ.

Love of the truth – the deep abiding spiritual principle of life – is essential for the conquest of inner space. For truth clears away the debris of ignorance and misconception and plants men’s feet firstly upon the road of reality. And for the man of faith, truth from any field of knowledge is a finger that points to the living God of truth.

A man who conquers inner space needs to be committed to truth. He is gripped, captivated and enthralled by truth. In fact, he fulfills the commandment to love God with one’s mind.

Love is the 2nd conqueror of inner space. Love is the conqueror of fear, the healer of heart break, the bridge across loneliness, the union of men with men.

Love is the purifying spirit of the emotions. How much of the darkness of our inner space is due to our lovelessness. Jesus Christ gave us a new commandment “we are to love our neighbors as ourselves.” I doubt very much if most of us really knows or understands the meaning of this commandment. Christ realizes that we cannot love other people (friends, neighbors) the way we love our husband or wife or family. He expects us to love these people in the way of showing concern for them, being interested in the kinds of lives they live (not only interested but doing something to help them understand the kind of lives they should be living). To live our lives separated from the lives of other individuals is definitely unchristian because as Christians we have to share our experiences and join with others in Christian fellowship. We need not only to be concerned for those near to us but for people who are suffering through out the world. It is true that we cannot care for these people ourselves personally but we can pray to God for their needs. We can contribute to the missionary program of our church and in some cases we can support missionaries who help improve their standard of living, care for them medically, show them to grow crops and show them how to manufacture products that will help them economically. But all through these other things we should not loose sight of the fact we need to bring them the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

It's true that if all the hungry and starving people were standing in single file, they would encircle the earth 2 ½ times. And we shouldn't forget that 1/5 of the population of this country is living in poverty (which our government considers income less than \$3000 a year). Right here in our own location, Albany, Schenectady, any of the cities, there are people who live under conditions that are deploring, that should be non-existent in the land of abundance. We cannot ignore these situations; we cannot turn our backs on these people. We have to be concerned and we have to help them. This is what he means when he says, “we are to love our neighbors as ourselves”.

Our age has been characterized as the age of anxiety, of estrangement, when men feel separated themselves, from each other, from their world and from their God. Alienation and separation are keynotes in the description of modern man. How do men bridge the gap today? Some try conformity, feeling one with others by doing what others do. What do people do to satisfy themselves, their inward being? Some people are slaves to material gain and wealth. They feel that the more money they can earn and riches they become, they will be able to buy anything they want and by doing this people will look up to them and respect them. They forget that money or material possessions cannot buy happiness, or peace of mind or contentment. Money will not buy them good health to enjoy life.

Other people try to build themselves up socially. They feel if they can be socially prominent and lots of friends and popularity, this will make them happy and they will be contented with life. But they find that this does not give them the peace of mind they need.

Others try to join every organization that is available for membership. They try to make themselves busy and active. In this way they will meet and make more friends. They feel that this will make them happy but it usually doesn't.

They feel that these organizations are good, they do good in the community and they can be associated with them. So we try to conform our lives to what others are doing, hoping to find what they are looking for in life.

Still others try to loose themselves in work. They live for their jobs and being a success at what they are doing. They soon realize that in this way they loose contact with themselves, with their families and with their friends. They realize that this is not the answer to life either.

Man tries all sort of means to help him bridge the gap of separation from themselves, from each other, from the world and from God. Mature people however find that the only thing that truly bridges man's sense of isolation and estrangement is love. Love unites that which has been separated. Love conquers the dreaded darkness of inner space that one has known as estrangement. Love of others as well as love of God is the second conqueror of man's inner space.

The third conqueror of inner space, which is probably the most essential and the least understood, is prayer. Prayer is the open window of the soul through which the Spirit of God permeates one's life. Prayer is not just uttering of words to God. Prayer is essentially the whole relationship to that in which man places his ultimate faith and trust. Prayer is the bridge of relatedness between God and man. One's life of prayer reveals one's life of religion. One's life of prayer is a yardstick measuring how he has allowed God to be the Lord and Master and Conqueror of the inner space, which is his soul, his essential self.

Our prayers to God are not just when we ourselves need help but rather our life of prayer has to be constant, continually uniting our hearts and souls with God. Prayer is conversation and meditation with God. How can God help us and guide and direct ourselves unless we are conversing with him through prayer. We can never get to know God and he can never get close to us unless we are willing to spend a few minutes each day in prayer.

The conquest of outer space may have far reaching consequences for the life of man. But as we reach toward the heavens, we should not forget the exploration of inner space through prayer. For though the starry heavens be out there beckoning to man, we are assured that the Kingdom of Heaven is within and calling man to himself and to his God.

The conquest of inner space through prayer is so essential because the Kingdom of God is within. Prayer is the golden key which opens the doors to this inner kingdom of god's truth and love. Prayer leads us into the deepest truths about life and finally into the presence of Him who is Truth.

Prayer opens the flood gates to the surging oceans of God's love. It enables God to pour into our lives the boundless ties of his love, that we may pour out on others, these same waters of Christ-like love.

What a pitiful lag exists between God's vision and purpose for man and our faulty realization of it. The Creator gave man the right of dominion over the world and all it contains, but the tragic truth is that man, because of his rebellion and sin, has not even learned to control and discipline him self. He fills the world with misery and madness.

Let us be concerned with conquering inner space (our inner selves) so we can find our place in life, as well as outer space, for Christ said, "what does it profit a man if he conquers the whole world and loses his soul?"

Greatness of Life
Scripture: John 13:1-17

Today most of us think, I am sure, that all we need in life to achieve greatness is prestige. When we use this word, prestige, we cannot define it clearly. However even though we might not realize it, it is an end most of us seek. Most of us work, and plan, and struggle to achieve our measure of prestige because everyone needs to feel that he is somebody. It is definitely one of the driving powers in our way of life.

This is one of the points at which Jesus had a disturbing way of turning things upside down or rather I think we should say, right side up. For example, there was a time as John told the story, a time, intimate and poignant, when Jesus taught his disciples an unforgettable lesson. It could hardly have come at a more critical moment. In John's account, Jesus had come to that night when he gathered his disciples for the Last Supper together. Jesus had sensed the opposition of his enemies. He knew what was coming. Now, he wanted these last moments with those he had known and loved best. They came into the room where the meal was to be. Each found his place. If it had been in a house where there were slaves, at this point, each guest would have been refreshed by having the slave wash the dust of the road from his feet. But since they had met together as equals, who would take this task, this humble task, this work of a servant? Then it was that Jesus arose. And the next words strike us unaware. John says, "Knowing that he was come from God, he took a towel and girded himself." What a turn there is in these words! What would you expect to follow in a sentence that starts out, "knowing that he was come from God?" I think we would expect it to say, by our ordinary standards, "He expected all others to wait upon him" or "He insisted upon the best place at the table." But this is not so. Here is the essence of a tremendous truth about Jesus Christ and an insight into the Christian life itself. "Knowing that he was come from God, he took a towel and girded himself." In this very simple act, Jesus Christ gave us a timeless picture and it helps us to understand one or two important insights into our faith. Do you think there are any among us today that would humble ourselves to wash another person's feet? I doubt very much if there is one among us. We would all be at home if some one would wait on us hand and foot. We all like to be waited on but few of us like to do the work.

How does life become great? First this is the way any life takes on real greatness. Like a theme in a symphony, this truth runs through so much of what Jesus taught and did. He had a new kind of aristocracy. Men had had almost every standard for determining their prestige. In the earliest societies it was probably an aristocracy of strength. Of course, then there were aristocracies based on family. Many times in history we have had an aristocracy of wealth and property. But look at the amazing way Jesus approached the matter. In washing the feet of his disciples he was teaching them by actions what his words had professed. In other words he was practicing what he had been preaching about. He wanted them to know that the real aristocracy in God's sight is the aristocracy of servants. "He that is greatest among you shall be the servant of all."

A man comes to his real greatness when instead of taking from life he gives. There are some of us who feel that world owes us a living and we are going to get out of life or take out of life everything that is humanly possible. These kinds of people aren't willing to give anything in turn. They are not concerned with the needs of others, they are not willing to help those in need or to give one little bit of themselves to improve their communities, their state, their nation, their church. It is the ability to know one's divine gift, yet, take a towel and come to the humblest needs of life with confession and concern. I know that many of us would rather contribute money to pay someone else to take care of a bad situation rather than to be bothered or to love ourselves to help straighten out some condition. Many of us in our church are this way. We would rather pay someone else to do something to improve our church rather than to be bothered with it ourselves.

It is not that Jesus forgot himself in doing this humble act. In fact, he fulfilled himself. It was the very fact that he had come from God that led him to take the towel and to teach the lesson. His service was born out of an awareness of what he was and of the gift God had entrusted to him.

Only a mother or slave would have done what Jesus did that evening. The mother would have done it for her little children, but for no one else; the slave for his master, but for no others. The mother would have served joyfully because of her love, the slave would have resigned through obedience. But the twelve were neither Christ's children nor his master. And yet he was willing to wash and wipe 24 callous and sweaty feet, in order to engrave on their unwilling hearts, still swollen with vanity, the truth which has lips so long vainly pronounced "and whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted." Jesus had not only given them a memory of complete humility, but an example of perfect love.

Jesus' spirit of humility needs to deeply penetrate our present ways of thinking and working. The aristocracy is a basic invitation at which Christ touches so many lives. It speaks to the businessman who has been given the ability for organizing a business and carrying out a successful enterprise. He has the ability for a successful enterprise. He has the ability for a successful career. Having this, he can insist upon his right to use it for his own purposes and the accumulation of wealth. Or he can look upon it as a gift. Knowing that he has it and respecting the gift that is in him, he too can take a towel and minister to life. I'm sure that all of us have known both types of businessmen. Although the type that uses his position for his own purpose seems to get along fine for awhile, the other type who is an asset to his community and his fellow man will be much richer in the end.

This same spirit speaks to the physician. We have known doctors that take their oath lightly, that treat only patients that can pay their fees. But these types of doctors last for a short time and usually move to different communities because they find their practices getting smaller.

And this very same spirit speaks to the minister too. Again, I'm sure we have known ministers who use their profession to intimidate people or as a front for what they really are. There are some men who become ministers because it is a good place to hide and actually it can be a very easy life if a man does just enough to get by. Being a minister of God and to people involves much more than preaching on Sunday morning. He can certainly be one of the busiest persons in the world if he is truly fulfilling his ministry. He can be a definite influence in a community or he can overlook conditions and leave them as they are. Actually if a minister is truly ministering to his people he will never be satisfied that he is doing enough because there is always more he can do if he has the time. I believe that this is true regardless of what kind of a job we have. We should never be satisfied because we can always do more and do it better.

The question is whether from possession you move to privilege or to responsibility. We certainly wish that our young people can catch now for all the years of their lives, the understanding that the more you have the more you owe, that the higher you go in your chosen field the more you need to keep touch with our common life. Unless your life has both these dimensions, recognition of the gift and the humility in the use of it, you have yet to find fulfillment. All of us need to realize that God has given us our ability and our talents, regardless how high in life we may go. There are people who are less fortunate than we and we should not overlook them. The majority of us of just average, common ordinary people and without these kinds of people the more fortunate ones would be nothing.

How did God become near? Again this is a wonder of Jesus Christ. The majesty of Christ is in the way in which he could know that he came from God, yet walk in the humblest situations of life, not asking but giving, not demanding but offering, not seeking but serving. It is no wonder they found it difficult to believe that God had especially come to them in Christ. Men had never understood God in quite these terms. They had understood his majesty. They could not understand his humility.

If he had come in a way that had only majesty without humility, they would have understood that. If he had come insisting upon all of the outward show of power and prestige, they would have understood this, too. But to come as he did, born humbly, living for years in a common way and dying in seeming shame upon a cross, can you blame them for not understanding? Over and over they were confronted with the same truth that was unfolding before them. When Jesus spoke of himself as one sent of God to save them, they asked the inevitable question, "Is this not the carpenter's son?" Or again, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" Here was a king that rode not in a chariot but on a donkey's back. Here was a Lord who made himself a servant. Here was a Savior who took not a sword but a cross. Here was a victor who had no army but only a handful of men drawn from the ordinary walks of life. It's a small wonder that men did not understand him.

And yet this was the wonder of Christ. Men knew that he had come from God yet, he could take a towel and touch the most menial tasks of life with dignity. Never was there majesty so singular. Here was the glory of God touched with modesty. Here was divinity that had humility. This was the Son who became a servant. In short this was the incarnation. Here God was in Christ.

But the wonder of all this goes deeper. When you think of Christ taking a towel, you would suppose that God somehow thereby lowered himself. This is quite the contrary. In such a time it wasn't God lowering himself, it was his lifting us to him. As he worked in the carpenter shop, it did not take away the dignity of God; it only added dignity to the daily work. When he ate with sinners he did not cheapen himself, he only ennobled the sinner. So man, looking at this Christ who came from God and took a towel, were led to say not, "See how low God has become" but rather, "See how high he has lifted us by his coming." In Christ, God stooped to conquer, and the wonder of it will never leave us. This indeed, is the meaning Christ, and when we realize this our lives really become great.

If Babies Could Vote
Scripture: Proverbs 31:10-31
(Mother's Day)

Whenever you may have been to the hospital to visit a friend, a daughter, a wife, a niece who has given birth to a baby, I'm sure you couldn't wait till the time came for the viewing of the baby. As you looked through the glass at the babies, some of them were crying, some were smiling and some were sleeping. Perhaps as we viewed these babies we thought of some babies who were born into this world whose mother was undernourished, who had no clean clothes, who didn't have a clean, efficient place to be born. Perhaps we thought how fortunate these babies are to live in this country and perhaps we silently thanked God for a strong, healthy child and that the mother was all right.

Perhaps we even thought it must be thrilling to be a baby. Here is an individual that was never before. And we can never be sure that this baby will grow up to be so and so. We can never say that this baby has done so and so because it has never done anything before. The only thing you can predict with confidence about the child is that it will do things that were never done, or never done in the same way since this old world of ours began. Here is novelty, originality, and an infinite of bewildering personality. Each mother thinks that there never was a baby like her baby; and most certainly she is right, there never was.

In view of all the years ahead for babies, their infinite possibilities, their power to change the world, they ought to vote. The franchise should be taken from all those elders who can't change the world because they have lost the possibilities of changing themselves or being changed. How can you expect an old duffer to change the world, who can't be changed himself.

Midlife age is handicapped. You see middle age must get on in a world, get on with the rest of the late years, when capacity for change is gone.

It is babies who should vote and I would like to do a presumptuous thing. I would like to register to vote of babies.

If babies could vote, they would vote for happy homes. They would vote for this because no baby wants a twisted personality. The baby that doesn't have a happy home gets twisted.

Before the age of seven (7) a child may gather inappropriate fears, anxiety, a deeply rooted sense of guilt, inferiority, overdependence, obsessions, strange worries. The abundant life is repressed, thwarted, submerged, made almost impossible by carrying these through the years.

I know that babies would vote for happy homes where affection is put into love, where discipline is an expression of caring, where fatherly love gives companionship which engenders the trust and confidence of the child, where motherly love kindles the child's idealism.

Dr. Karl A. Menninger has this to say in discussing the case of a man who found it painfully difficult to adjust to adult life; "this difficulty arises because of the prejudices, misapprehensions, shocks, rebukes, experiences and parental examples of early childhood." He needed a happy home when he was a baby.

Mr. Alfred Landon declared that there is a home for children in the West where the superintendent asked the visiting minister not to use the Lord's Prayer because it would shatter the faith of some of the people in God. Brutal, drunken and cruel fathers had spoiled the conception of God's fatherhood for them. It would be necessary for someone to reinterpret the meaning of fatherhood to these children – their lonely little hearts would have to be warmed with a genuine touch of fatherly love – before it would be wise to picture God in the concept of a father.

As parents we apparently aren't aware of the damage that can be done to a child by constant bickering and arguing in the home. A child's whole life can be ruined and wasted. If babies could vote, they would vote for a truer education. A boy complained because his school pushed him about. That boy's school did just that – he had no time or energy left to think and to dream.

"I'm so confused", said a weeping schoolgirl to her grandmother who heard her sobbing in the night. "I am so confused"! "And I too am confused," said her grandmother, an honest confession, but rather tragic to make. The child needs an education, which makes for simplicity rather than confusion.

The child would vote for an education that is basic. Very often what the home will not do, the school cannot do. Basic education is lost. The basic manner, morale, appreciation, and evaluations, which enrich life, which make it sweet and wholesome and lovely – I think the babies would vote for them.

This education should teach morality and religion. Without this education the deepest questions of the individual are left unanswered. He is not given adequate help in the formation of character. Such education sharpens the sense of individual responsibility. It enables the relations between man and man by teaching that we are all children of God and therefore brothers.

We certainly need more concern for our Sunday Schools. Here we teach our children the basic beliefs of our faith, of Christianity. It is our responsibility and no one else is going to do it except you and I.

If babies could vote they would vote for a cherishing church because no baby likes to feel insecure. The word cherishing is chosen with considerate care. To cherish is a great function. In exercising this function the church should be a great mother. A mother's arms are a barrier to fear.

During the first six (6) years of its life the child must be made to feel at home in the universe, its eyes must be filled with wonder, but never with fear. When fear arises there should always be waiting the calm comfort of the mother's arms. It therefore follows that we should have Mother's Day and honor all our mothers. The mother's role is important and has been important in each of our lives. It's hard to imagine a home without her because she is the main stay of any family. She is the one that has to listen to the complaints of the whole family and try to help each one. Her work is never done because there is always something more to do.

A lad made his way to the lingerie section of a big department store to buy a Mother's Day gift. "I want to buy my mom a slip," he told the clerk, but when it came to giving the information as to size he was at something of a loss. "It would help", the clerk suggested, "if you could tell me whether your mother is tall or short, fat or slim." "Oh", said the boy, "she's just perfect." So the clerk wrapped up a size 34 for him and on the Monday after Mother's Day, mom herself was in to change it for a size 52. I'm sure that's the way all of us look upon our mother because regardless of what she looks like or her size, she is still just our mom and perfect to us.

From infancy to old age all men need the cherishing ministry of a cherishing church.

Naturally if babies could vote they would vote for a peaceful world because they do not want their backs broken and their hearts broken and their dreams shattered and their lives taken. They realize that all men are children of God and they can live peacefully if each of us has the true love of Jesus Christ in our hearts. Peace has to come to each of us first before we can have peace throughout this world of ours.

Babies would vote for the Kingdom of God because little children see visions and dream dreams.

It ought to be the heritage of every child to have a dream higher and nobler than it can grasp. We are ever seeking to put our babies' feet upon the ground; how little words to put their feet in the sky and set their eyes upon a high vision. Unless we do this how are we going to have a better world? Unless they have the architect's sketch how can they lay a single stone or timber?

But a child cannot vote. A baby doesn't have the franchise. But you do. How do we decide and act when issues arise? Of course I am speaking in a broad scope than going to the polls on Election Day.

I shall vote for happy homes, simpler schools, cherishing churches, a peaceful world, and for the Kingdom of God, because I am on the side of the babies. Whose side are you on and how are you going to vote?

What is God like? Here is a blind girl's answer.

I know what mother's face is like,
although I cannot see.
It's like the music of a bell;
it's like the way the roses smell;
it's like the secrets fairies tell;
all these it means to me.

I know what Father's face is like,
I'm sure I know it all.
It's like his whistle on the air;
it's like his footfall on the stair;
it's like his arms that take such care,
and never let me fall.

And so I know what God is like;
the God whom no one sees.
He's everything my mother means;
he's everything my Father seems;
he's like my very sweetest dreams;
but – greater than them all.

Making God Real To Us
Scripture: Col. 1: 9-17

I have chosen my text today from Matthew 5:8. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."

I believe that it is useless for us to talk about God unless we know him; yes, unless we know that we know him. We will never know him unless we are aware of him. Many of us are not aware of him or his presence. We see God daily in a haze. He seems never to be quite real to us.

What is it that keeps us from this awareness of God? What keeps us from knowing him as we might and as others say that they do know him. What is the gulf or gap between him and us? Why do we have this feeling of unknowing, this sense he is unreal. For a long time theologians have painted men, all men, as the natural enemies of God. If this were not said by men who were serious about their faith and about wanting to know God, it would be tragic. It is tragic enough as it is. We are not God's enemies; we are strangers. It is our inability to conceive of him as a vital, energizing force and an influence that makes its self felt through every day and in every circumstance. So the question invariably remains: How can we think of him in a meaningful and empowering way?

If we are honest with ourselves we will probably confess that we speak of God from hearsay. Other people have said that God is love; as we say that God is Love.

In his first letter John writes, "Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed on us. Beloved, now are we the sons of God. And every man that hath this hope in him purified himself as he is pure." Do we know God like that, and is that why we speak of him as Love?

Others have said that God is Almighty, and so we say that God is Almighty. And again we are confronted by this same question: What do we mean by that and why do we say it? Is it because at the thought of God we feel ourselves grow, we felt the surge of strength and the inflowing of confidence? In one of the greatest passages of Isaiah, he says, "He giveth power to the faint, they shall mount up with wings as eagles." Do we know God like that and is that why we speak of him as almighty? When we say that god is all-powerful, or that he is all-wise or that he is all-present, what have we done? Have we uttered empty words or have we expressed meaning? Have we related something we have heard or have we revealed something we have experienced? We frequently speak of God as we speak of something science has pushed into the orbit of our knowledge. These days, for example, all of us speak of atomic fission, yet most of us have only a faint idea of what it is. All of us as human beings are quick to pick up words and expressions that appeal to us, especially if these words can help us to make an impression on someone else. All of our lives we have heard words and expressions regarding God, from our families, our friends, our minister, but unless we have experienced

God in our own lives these words are just words that others have been using and they have no meaning to us and they are not real.

Other people have said that God forgives; and so we say that God forgives. None of us are strangers to forgiveness. We have experienced forgiveness because our parents have forgiven us many times for misdeeds we committed in our childhood. Forgiveness by others has given us joy many times over. We have truly been forgiven many times in our lives. But is this how we think of God's forgiveness? The Psalmist wrote these words in Psalms 105. "*O give thanks to the Lord, call on his name, make known his deeds among the peoples. Sing to him, sing praises to him, tell of all his wonderful works. Glory in his holy name; let the hearts of those who seek the Lord rejoice. Seek the Lord and his strength, seek his presence continually. Remember the wonderful works that he has done, his miracles and the judgment he uttered.*" Do we know God like that and is that why we speak of his forgiveness? And so we ask again, why is it that we are so rarely aware of God's presence?

How can we find this awareness of God? Did Jesus Christ have no answer? He insisted that he did. In language beautiful in its simplicity he said, "*Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God.*" Nowhere in the world has anything more meaningful been said in such a simple and tender way. These words open a new world to us. They reveal things we have never dreamed of. The man who is pure in heart sees God in the impossible pageant of the past and in the wonders of today. His history books, his current magazines and newspapers are among his most practical commentaries of his Bible. He sees God in all the affairs of life, in all its appointments and its disappointments. He sees God in every means of grace. To him the Church is none other than the very house of God; to him every hymn is the outward expression of the inward gladness of a purified heart; to him the Word of God is ablaze with the glory of the Holiest, like the bush unconsumed in the midst of the flame. And when he kneels in prayer, it seems to him that God is nearer to him than breathing, closer than hands or feet. We could rephrase the words of Jesus, "blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God" and say that we are kept from an awareness of God because we allow things to lodge in our thoughts, which make it impossible for us to see clearly. Where there is resentment, where there is anger, where there is self-seeking, where there is jealousy, the heart is no longer pure. Do not some of these words express our feelings at times? Quite often we are resentful of what other people can do. We resent the fact that others can do something better than we can. It might be that a person can bowl better than you or maybe someone else can talk and express himself better than you. Many of us are not able to control our anger and we often say and do things while we are angry that we are sorry for later.

Uncontrollable anger is dangerous to ourselves and to those around us. And how many of us are seeking things to better ourselves? We do not worry or we aren't concerned about anyone else but ourselves. We say, "I have to look out for myself because no one else will." And we don't care who we hurt or what damage we do as long as it satisfies ourselves. Many of us do all kinds of things on our jobs to assure our advancement and

we aren't concerned about hurting someone else on the way up. How about jealousy? How often we are jealous of other people because they have more friends than we do or because a person has more talent than you do. All of these feelings can so fill our hearts and our lives that we don't have the time or the place for thoughts that are positive, for thoughts that will lift us up or for thoughts that are pure. We say that a man is "blind with rage" or that he is "green with jealousy." So anger brings upon us a human madness that makes us incapable of understanding those who are around us. So resentment keeps us from judging another man fairly. So self-seeking forbids us to give another man an equal chance. So jealousy makes it impossible for us to see ourselves as we really are. Well if it is so with us and our fellow man, how then is it with us and God? If resentment and anger and self-seeking and jealousy keep us from seeing those with whom we work and live, what will they not do to us when we seek to see God?

We must know that until we come to this awareness we will never be happy; our religion will be pointless and fruitless; it will create nothing and lead to nothing; there will be no aftermath, no power to be, and no power to become; there will be no inflowing tide of strength and no outgoing reach of helpfulness.

What will awareness of God do for us? What will come of it? It will do many things.

When we are aware of God, when God is poignantly real to us, history becomes contemporary. It then matters much to us what happens in other parts of our country, in other parts of the world not because it is a matter of politics and not because it is a matter of diplomacy but because it is a matter that concerns men and what happens to them. It is a human trait and most all of us are concerned first for ourselves, what happens to our lives, then our families, our friends, neighbors and finally what happens to people in other parts of the world. When God becomes real to us we are concerned for all men regardless of where they are.

When we are aware of God, when God is a constant daily reality, prayer becomes a spiritual opportunity. I am sure that all of us pray. I am also sure of this, that the less aware we are of God, the more we pray for mere things; and the more we are aware of God, the more we pray for something to happen to us, the more we pray for depth, the more we pray for spiritual substance.

Again when God is not real to us, our prayers to God are completely for ourselves. Perhaps we pray that God will help us to get through some financial problems we have or to help us get over a sickness we have, or to help us do better on our job. When God is real to us and we are aware of him, our prayers are directed toward helping us to seek spiritual depth, helping us to understand his word and how we can make our lives better according to his will. We also seek to have God help other people with their needs. The less we know of God, the more we pray "to have", the more we know of God, the more we pray "to be".

When we are aware of God, Christianity becomes exciting. I'm sure that we all know that religion is not exciting to many people. Most of us can take it or we can leave it alone. There is nothing strange about this. It never makes much sense until we come to a meaning of God, until we know that he is with us. Once we come to this awareness, strange and wonderful things happen in our lives. Time stretches into eternity, our relationship to men and women is lifted to a higher level. We become aware of all our failures and sure of our hopes. Our awareness of God helps us to eliminate gossip from our conversations with others, petty things no longer fill our minds and hearts and we soon discover we have found more important things to talk about and read about. We also become aware that we are not perfect, that we do have shortcomings and we are sorry for them, we repent and promise to improve our lives through God's help. We are more confident that we do have someone beside us always to help guide us and this seems to make our goals in life a little easier. We realize that this new life with God will not be easy and that there will be detours but we also realize that we will keep on trying even though there are sometimes obstacles in our way. At long last our faith becomes alive in our world. It takes on meaning in the world in which we live from day to day. Others will know it. Others will feel it.

Sometime ago one of the senior editors of *The Readers Digest* sat in the study of a minister and asked a disturbing question. He wanted to know whether this minister would send him the names of three or four businessmen in his congregation who have let their religion vitalize their business so that the city was aware of it. The minister wondered how he would answer that. He thought; to speak of a man to whom God is so real that everyone knows it, his employees, his associates, his friends, the whole city. He said to himself, "am I going to write that letter?" And I ask you this question, "would you know such a man?" Would it be you?

The Human Cry That Is Prayer Scripture: Psalm 143

My text this morning is from 1 Thessalonians 5:17 – “Pray Constantly”.

Without realizing it, when we have tried our level best to accomplish something to no avail we cry out, “Help me, Lord!” This human cry is prayer. Whether we think so or not.

A schoolboy has struggled for hours with an algebra problem which he cannot solve and finally he cries out, “Help me Lord!”

A young man is on the battle line; for a moment the mass psychology and the mass pressure is released and he stands alone. He is afraid and regardless of how brave he wants to be, he still doesn't want to die. Will he prove himself brave or cowardly? How can he go forward? “Help me Lord!”

This man is confronted with a hard decision: on the one hand is wealth and prestige, that is, if he lowers the flag of his ideal just a little. If he forgets about being honest and doing what is right. On the other hand he keeps his self-respect, keeps faith with his Christian heritage and with Jesus Christ himself. He doesn't know which way to turn and he doesn't want to pass up a good opportunity. He cries out, “Help me, Lord!”

Another person has come to the end of his rope. He has found that he doesn't have what it takes to accomplish what he started out to do. It means he must give up his plans for an education and an honorable profession. He kneels and prays, “Help me, Lord!”

Again, a man is engrossed in his work. It is a work of true service to his fellow man. He is very busy. He doesn't have much time to think about religion. But he never fails to start the day with the prayer, “Help me, Lord!”

It is definitely a human cry I'm sure all of us have said one time or another in our lives. It is a cry unto God. It is a prayer to God.

When a person cries, “Help me, Lord”, he recognizes that God is, that God is compassionate, that God is loving and willing to help. A person opens up the channels of his life that God's grace may be given him. There is communication between this person and God. This is definitely the first step to prayer - communication between yourself and God.

Does God answer? Yes, God helps. If we are thinking of the prayer of convenience when you have time or when you are in trouble, this is not a prayer at all. There is the example of the girl in school who was asked the question, “what is the capital of Vermont?” and who wrote on her paper ‘Boston’. That night at home she discovered her

mistake and she turned to God for help. “Oh God”, she prayed, “make Boston the capital of Vermont.” Sometimes our prayers are as useless as this regardless of how long and hard we pray God isn’t going to charge something for our convenience.

“Help me. Lord” can become “Help us, Lord.” Where two or three are gathered together, all aware of the same need or facing the same decision, “Help me, Lord”, is the prayer of a man who knows and feels that he is bound up in the bundle of humanity and recognizes the need of all. We all have personal needs that God can help us with and I believe we have the right to ask him for help. I’m sure we also know the needs of others and therefore have a right to ask God to help others with their needs. Always praying that ‘thy will be done’ because he doesn’t always see situations and the solutions the way you and I do. “Help me, Lord” and “Help us, Lord” are genuine prayers.

Another human cry we say is “Forgive me, Lord.” “Have mercy upon me, Lord.”

When we say this we are not trying to cover up a mistake or we are not trying to dry tears of regret for something we have done. Nor are we thinking that by it we can put salve on a wound caused by the rubbing reaction of a sin committed. Nor are we thinking of relieving the gnawing in a man’s soul after he has done an evil deed. Regret, attrition, and remorse may incite the cry “forgive me, Lord.” Whether such a cry opens up the channels of grace is within the will and wisdom of God.

We can be sure that the true cry of the soul for forgiveness is heard. It is actually a cry of confession. We really confess to God ourselves. It is a cry of sincerity. Perhaps you have sinned against your neighbor, against a friend, against a co-worker or business associate. You say, I will try to make amends through God’s help. It is a cry of contrition. You may have sinned against God himself. Perhaps you have used the Lord’s name in vain, perhaps you have known “his will” in your life and you haven’t followed it. Perhaps you have cursed him and blamed him for some tragedy in your life. You cry out, “I have sinned against thee, forgive me.” It is also a cry of true repentance and you say “God help me, I will follow the right way.”

“Forgive me, Lord.” When it rises from a contrite heart, it is a noble prayer. Joined in the bundle of life with others, we pray with our fellows. No one of us are alone in our sin. Each of us has been influenced by others, by outside influences, and/or by misleading circumstances. Each one of us influences those with whom we come in contact. We therefore cry out “forgive us our sins”. Thus each of us may cry out sincerely and contritely for the forgiveness of God to be granted our families, our communities, our church, our nation, our world. “O, God, forgive us our sins.”

This human cry is prayer.

“I thank thee, Lord” - this is our human cry too. We may not realize it, by being so engrossed in our work, in our business, but we may say this a hundred times a day. Each

time that something turns out for our best, each time that we get over a difficult spot in the say, we unconsciously thank God. In a second a person may think, “I thank thee, Lord.” The communications are all open between a person and his God.

This may become the spirit of a man, pervading every action of his daily living. This may become prayer without ceasing.

“I thank thee, Lord” – though it is not a petition, God uses it as a channel for his gifts, especially the gift of the larger appreciation of his providence, his beauty, his wisdom and his love.

This simple human cry opens the communications between God and man as he does the lifting of the doors which hold back the water from the irrigation ditches which pour fertility and beauty upon the land.

“I thank thee, Lord”, rises in ecstasy when it follows our other ones, “Help me, Lord” and “Forgive me, Lord.” God’s help given and God’s forgiveness received, then the soul is lifted into an ecstasy of thanksgiving.

“We thank thee, Lord.” How wonderful it is to join with others, like ourselves who are truly grateful and to express our thanksgiving together by prayers and hymns in the house of God.

There are other human cries which are true prayer. There is the prayer of intercession for another person’s needs. The child begins to pray, “God bless Mommy and Daddy.” Beginning so simply and all throughout man’s life, prayers may rise incited by compassion and love for one’s fellow man. So a man’s prayer may deepen and broaden. It is possible for him to develop the heart of Christ and the mind of Christ as he makes the Word itself the object of his prayer and his sacrificial life.

Still there is another prayer that rises from our life. “Bless the Lord.” Here again the communication channels between man and God are all open. “Bless the Lord, O my soul”, is a prayer of adoration and communion.

We can hide the words of other men and other times in our memories and hearts and use them to lift our souls in adoration with God, as when we cry out with the Psalmist, “Bless the Lord, O My Soul and all that is within me, bless his Holy name. Bless the Lord, O My Soul, and forget not all his benefits.” (Psalm 103:1-5)

Prayer is spiritual commerce. Whenever there is real prayer, the soul is enriched by divine appropriations. Whenever the soul is engaged in genuine prayer, there is a formation of godly character, and the suppliant adds cubits to his morsel and spiritual character. But the issues are greater still. A life in prayerful fellowship with God can never be like an imprisoned lake, shut away in the lovely seclusion of an isolated mountain. The

character formed by prayer becomes a river flowing out on every side of the fertilization of the national life. Jesus said, “He that believeth in me, out of him shall flow rivers of living waters.”

A radio broadcaster made this unforgettable statement: Sometimes I get to broadcasting, when I ought to be tuning in. Do we not all do this often within our prayers?

Conscious touch with God should be carried out at frequent intervals throughout the day, but by far the most important time for prayer is early in the morning before one’s consciousness has been disturbed by thoughts about temporal events. The man who learns to order the first half hour of every day so that his mind will be centered on Him and not on the radio, the newspaper, or the office; that man soon finds that God breaks into his awareness at frequent intervals throughout the day. The command of the morning for spiritual contact is the surest way to maintain conscious contact with him throughout the day and that is the key to victorious living day by day.

Thousands of books have been written and tens of thousands of sermons have been preached on the subject of prayer. Many of these have been wise and inspiring. But we do not always have them at hand to follow their advice and direction. A simple procedure may be all that we need to develop a life of prayer. These human cries of ours, “Help me, Lord”, have indefinite possibility of expression until it might be said that we pray without ceasing. By expanding our prayers we may learn how to pray. We need to remember that God is waiting for us to respond to him. He has already made the first move; the second move is up to us.

As Paul taught, let us “pray constantly.”

