

*B*raman

Foundation of Charities



South Harpersfield
United Methodist Church
Geneva, Ohio

The Sermons of Richard W. Braman Vol. 15

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Love Thy Neighbor

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

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



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

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

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

**In Christ,
The Braman Foundation**

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Words for All Hearts

Scripture: Ephesians 4:1-16

The text is chosen from John 6:33; “The bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.”

In the Holy Communion Service we take the bread and wine – man’s industrial and commercial life in symbol – and offer it to God. Because we have offered it to him, he gives it back to us as a means of nurturing us. And as we receive it back from him, we share it with one another in true fellowship. If we think of the service in this way, it is a perfect picture of what secular society ought to be.

We come today as our brothers in Christ around the world shall come their way and in their time. What do the bread and the cup mean? What do these simple and eloquent elements say to the human heart?

First, they say to us, Remember and take hope. “This do in remembrance of me.” Why do we remember Christ? That by looking back we may look forward again with new understanding. We need to remember Christ so that the words of the hymn may be fulfilled: “Mine eyes have seen the glory of coming of the Lord.” Once we have seen it, we look forward with new hope and new confidence.

Right now as you prepare yourself for the Communion service many memories may be crowding in upon you. They may be God’s way of restoring your faith in the future. You will think of those who have touched your life in the past and of those hours when thinking of yourself as being at the end of your reserves you found that “our Father’s full giving had only begun.” These are but ways of helping us to remember Christ. Having looked back in memory, look forward now in hope.

Second, they say to us, Believe and so receive. “He took bread, and gave thanks, and broke it and gave unto then saying, this is my body which is given for you.” Here is a time when we are not asked to give but only to receive. In some ways to believe in order that we may receive is one of the most difficult things asked of us in the modern world, but for a few moments we must set aside the modern mood of skepticism, for it will close the doors to receiving the free gift of God.

God’s gifts are given because he wants to give them. He has only the ulterior motive of saving our souls. He gives because of the joy he finds in giving. That is the remarkable news of the Gospel. You do not need to persuade God to bring his greatest gifts into your life, you need only to ask him to help you believe in order that you may receive.

Third, they say to us, Come and be one. This is the invitation as we observe World Communion, for here we are one people in Christ and here we must make our peace with each other.

Sometimes people feel themselves troubled by the invitation we use; “Ye who do earnestly repent of your

sins and are in love in charity with your neighbor.” They have tried to be in love and charity with their neighbor and found it exceedingly difficult. Yet of one is trying to be the fullest of his ability he right to come. “As much as lieth in you, live peacefully with all men.” to come to this table that we may restore our relationship with our brother is one of the deepest of its meanings.

In the mystical body of Christ there is neither Jew nor Aryian, slave nor freeman, white nor colored, but all are one. It is to be found all over the world, and there is nothing else in the world that really resembles it. Men of every tongue and race and nation are here found worshiping the same Lord, being baptized with his baptism, breaking bread at his table, praying as he taught them to pray and trying to live as he taught them to live. They are all fallible men, there are among them many “unhappy Christians”, and nowhere can they claim to be worthy of the calling where unto they are called. Yet even in a time of war and rumors of wars the Christian Church, regarded merely as an association of men, is doing more to bridge the gulfs that divide nation from nation than any other association on earth. In a broken and shattered world it still retains something of the character of a universal community. It can transcend our human relatives only because it’s obedience is to the absolute and eternal God.

Truly at our Lord’s table we come in equality. Have you ever thought that this is pictured in the very elements we receive? We all receive portions here, a bit of bread for every one of us. There are no large cups and small cups. You may be our child or one blessed with the fullness of years. You may have wealth or you may be penniless. You may be one who has known the grace of God over many years, or you may be a new convert. It makes no difference. At this table we all will receive the same portion. So, too, will we receive of the grace of God. You cannot buy it, demand it, insist upon it, or set out by a crusade to gain it. It truly is God’s gift. It makes us all brothers in him. Around the world today men shall hear the word: Come and be one.

What God Needs

Scripture: Romans 12

The text is from Ephesians 4:7,11,12; “But grace was given to each of us according to the measure of Christ’s gift. And his gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the building up the body of Christ.”

To each of us grace has been given, not as a treasure to keep for ourselves, but as a living thing to share with others. The great opportunity for the church to fulfill God’s expectation in our generation is in helping laity to become aware of the gifts which they have received and in equipping them to carry out the ministry which has been committed to them.

Within the church the ministry of the laity expresses itself in a pastoral concern for individuals and in creation of a corporate life in which people are free to learn and grow in their relationship with God.

In the world, the Ministry of the laity expresses itself in one’s daily work, in the organizational life of society, and in informal, personal contacts.

We are actually saying that God needs something. To speak of God needing anything may sound blasphemous, but with all reverence it can truly be said that God needs people of certain quality of soul and spirit.

The word “laity” comes from the Greek word “laos,” meaning “the chosen people of God.” In short, it means everyone within the Church of Jesus Christ - and that most definitely includes you.

The laity are the means by which the ethical teachings, the insights and the life giving power of the Christian faith are going to be inserted into the life of the world. For the fulfillment of his purpose God needs more than priest, bishops, pastors, and missionaries. He needs farmers, mechanics and chemists, gardeners and street sweepers, dressmakers and cooks, tradesmen, physicians, philosophers, judges, and typists. Having a vocation means approaching everything one does in a spirit of vocation, looking upon it as an absolute shared adventure shared with God.

Whatever a person’s ordinary vocation in the world, whether salesmanship or homemaking or farming, the ministry can be his other vocation and perhaps his truest vocation. The laity of any church has a great responsibility and need to join within the pastor in ministering to other people.

Indeed God does need men and women of certain quality and of soul and spirit.

First of all - God needs men and women of faith. The Bible makes it plain that God can only use people

who enjoy the substance of things hoped for and who possess the evidence of things not seen. The faith which God requires of people is a total faith, which believes in him regardless of all else. This is a rewarding faith because it is anchored in belief in the sovereignty as well as the love of God, and anchor to the soul in the midst of an uncertain and shifting world situation, an anchor which reaches into the eternal while we yet live in the temporal. This faith is centered in the divine revelation and accepts at face value the spiritual statements having to do with the eternal verities; it is belief without question in the finality of the person and the work of Jesus Christ, the son of God, and a looking to him not only as the author of our salvation but also the giver and perfecter of our faith.

We need the kind of faith Job had, a faith that regardless of what happens to us, we still go on believing that truly there is a God who cares. I realize that perhaps at the time this is difficult to believe but most certainly it is true. If we do not possess this kind of faith, then God has no use for us anyway.

Second - God needs men and women who are obedient. Faith and obedience cannot be separated, for faith in God's revelation requires an obedience to that which is revealed. Obedience is the very foundation of a Christian's life, and men and women are not left in doubt as to what God requires of them. Discipleship means the voluntary renunciation of self and the taking up of the cross which is the burden of every Christian. As one grows in faith and in willingness to surrender everything, the will of God becomes increasingly clear, not only for immediate task but for whatever the future may hold, and obedience to the heavenly vision validates our faith.

There is nothing wrong with having all the luxuries of life, in fact wanting them and working for them. But when these desires become the uppermost thoughts in our minds and hearts, then it is against God's will. God says we are to have no other gods before him. This drive that many of us have to become millionaires so that we can have these luxuries of life is wrong because we leave God out of or he becomes secondary in our lives. Acting this way, we are not obedient to God and God does not need such people.

And if you think you can worship God without coming to church you are mistaken. Sometimes it is necessary not to be in church, but this is the place where we can find God most readily and I firmly believe if we are obedient to him and we are true Christians we will be in church on Sunday morning and we will continue tribute to his work with all the means we can afford. God needs men and women who are obedient.

Thirdly, God needs faithful men and women. Faithfulness is putting into practice God's leading in our own lives. God requires faithfulness of stewards, and we all are his stewards. God requires steadfastness when the going is hard and when the walking is tiring and the outlook drab. We live in times when the souls of men and women are being tried, but what a grand and glorious opportunity God has given Christians to show that our hope is fixed to the one who never changes and is sovereign among nations as he was over the forces of nature.

We need to remember, God never changes but people and times do. Many have doubts morally and otherwise about how they should live their lives, but God has no doubts, his principles are the same as they were 2000 years ago. People can make all kinds of excuses for living their lives the way they do but in the sight of God his standards are the only ones that count.

Being a faithful steward isn't easy, however being anything that is worthwhile isn't easy. We have to work at it, spend time at it and believe in what we are doing. We all know the requirements and vows for becoming a member of God's church and we are expected to live up to them. God needs faithful men and women.

Fourth - God needs transformed men and women. Christ came into the world to make new creatures in himself. Even to the unbelieving world there is no argument against a changed life. How can Christianity, a faith to believe, be relevant or valid unless it also becomes a life to be lived. It is at this point that so many of us fail, but it is also here that Christ wants to show himself all-sufficient for our needs.

Jesus Christ can transform your life. He can change your life. This is one purpose of the Christian faith, to transform and change lives. Men and women whose lives have been changed are the kind of people God wants because firsthand they know what God is like. They know what the Christian faith is all about. They want to tell others of this transforming power. Never say that a person cannot be changed because quicker than you can wink your eye Christ can change them and he is doing it every day. Never give up hope for anyone because where Christ is concerned there is always hope.

Mr. Modernized Layman feels that he has no specific task as a Christian. He understands that he should attend services and contribute from his finances, but unfortunately these two tasks do not connote real participation in the work of the church to many people. And most unfortunate of all, it rarely occurs to him that his confirmation vows have in fact committed him to a vigorous ministry. He has promised to be a faithful disciple of Christ; declared that he will put his whole trust in Christ; promised to make diligent use of the means of grace, to share faithfully in the worship and service of the church, to give his substance, to give his whole heart in services to Christ, and to continue in the peace and fellowship of the people of God. It remains only to translate these vows into specific deeds. Yet in spite of this, our laymen sometimes feel they have no task in the church because they are not officers. Remember if it were not for you lay people there would be no church and the church couldn't function as Christ's body without you. Your task is much greater than you can even imagine.

Fifth - God needs far-sighted men and women. We are all surrounded by the temporal and the immediate. Only those who see the celestial city with the eyes of faith have the perspective which is so desperately needed. Our concern for gracious living, security, peace, and the advantages of a materialistic age can lead us into multiple follies. Our Lord knows this and gently pleads with us to look at everything in the light of eternity.

Sixth - God needs instructed men and women. Every Christian owes it to himself to take full advantage of the means of grace God so generously gives. We should be able to give a reason for our faith. Only in the Bible can we receive the spiritual food that he has prepared for us. Rather than spiritual morous, we should be strong in the wisdom God offers to his children.

We can become instructed men and women, by reading our Bible, praying to God for understanding as we read his word, associating with others who have Christian experience to relate to us, reading Christian books written by those who have special insights, and just plain taking time for meditation with God, letting God talk to us. You know it isn't necessary for us to always do all the talking. Perhaps we just might learn something if we took time to listen.

Seventh - God needs men and women who witness. Not only should we receive that which God has given us through his son, but we owe it to him and to those around us to witness to his saving power. This witness is through a godly life and also through words spoken at the leading of the Holy Spirit. How often those around us have hungry and anxious hearts, and how readily some of them will respond to a spirit-directed word of testimony.

We never know who is looking at us, we never know when someone is observing what we are doing. To witness effectively we have to live our lives the way God wants us to live them. We need to practice what we say we believe. It is true that everyone cannot get up and talk to the other about their Christian experiences and beliefs, but we can witness by the way we live our lives. We can speak out against those things we know are not right and according to God's principles. We cannot witness for Christ by keeping quiet and letting things go by.

Sometimes layman are bound to propagate their religion by speaking about it, by preaching it, in fact. Telling people the Gospel, explaining what Christ can be to a person, is preaching as scriptural by any preaching can be made. It makes no difference if it is done haltingly. A broken testimony to a friend may, be more effective than a smooth and conclusive Sunday morning sermon. The true ideal of Christian evangelism is the propagation of Christianity, not by preaching so much as by private conversation and the testimony of common people.

Here is a layman's testimony. Up to a few years ago I had followed, with fair regularity the Christians practices of my birth and ecclesiastical breeding. Now I realize they lacked something. The new start did not come until (1) I ceased thinking them a private concern, which need not be discussed, and (2) I began telling other people about the joy, peace and strength that's sprang from intimacy with our Lord. Since then each of these has become a major concern.

Indeed God does need men and women of faith, men and women who are obedient, faithful men and women, transformed men and women, far-sighted men and women, instructural men and women and men and women who will witness. God needs each of us and he has a purpose for each one.

There is a conversation between Jesus Christ and Gabriel in heaven about the plans Christ has made.

Gabriel: Master, you died for the whole world, did you not?

Christ: yes.

Gabriel: you must have suffered very much.

Christ: Aye, Gabriel, I cannot talk about it, even to you. It goes to deep.

Gabriel: And do they know about it down there?

Christ: Oh no, just a little handful in Syria know about it thus far.

Gabriel: Well, Master, what is your plan? What plan have you made to tell the world that you died for them? What arrangements have you made?

Christ: Well, I asked Peter and James and John, and some more of them down there, just to make it the business of their lives to tell others; and the others, yet others, and still others; until the last man in the farthest reaches has heard the story, and has been caught, thrilled, and enthralled by the power of it.

Gabriel: Yes, but Master, suppose that, after a while, Peter forgets. Suppose that John, after a bit, loses his enthusiasm, and simply doesn't tell the others. Suppose their successors away down there in the 20th century get so busy about things that some of them good things, church things maybe- suppose they get so busy that they do not tell the others, what then?

Christ: Gabriel, I haven't made any other plans, I am counting on them.

Yes, indeed God is counting on us find out where you fit into God's plan and become a dedicated layman and help him to spread the "good news."

Prescription for Peace

Scripture: Luke 19:37-48

The text is chosen from Luke 19:42; “Would that even today you knew the things that make for peace! But now they are hired from your eyes.”

A modern artist might portray Jesus on a spaceship, looking down upon the whole world in its sin and agonizing fear, and speaking again, the words of our text. (1) Our Lord would see nations preparing for a suicidal holocaust. (2) He would see the races of man at enmity. (3) He would see management and labor behaving as though each was self-sufficient. (4) He would see neighbors at swords point, homes broken by disloyalty, drunkenness, pettiness, and sin. (5) In individual hearts, he would see another battlefield and man at war with himself as with God. (6) He would see many, many young people, searching and seeking purpose and meaning to life. He would see them trying many different ways of finding this meaning.

Act 17:6 reads; “these men who have turned the world upside down.”

We are today and one of the great revolutionary periods of the world. We see evils that go along with these revolutionary moments; the killings, the hatred, the bitter struggle, the recriminations, and we tend to turn our backs upon the entire business. Never forget that Christianity is a revolutionary faith. The way of wisdom, remembering the genius of the Christian faith, is to acknowledge the revolutionary movement, to glory in it, to be glad that people want their freedom and their equality and the dignity of their lives, but at the same time to seek to guide the revolutionary movement aright so that it will not go into the dangerous and cruel aspects, which a revolutionary movement will enter unless it is guided by the Gospel.

If we were obedient and responsive to the way of Christ, what would we find to be that which makes for peace?

First of all, we would find recognition of the sovereignty of an eternal God. Presidents and rulers, as well as the common man in the street and home, must put God upon his throne. Instead, we have placed these things: gadgets, speed, and success in a word, man himself. If we do not worship God, we shall find ourselves, worshipping something less than God, for man cannot live without some center of devotion. We are determined to become like that which we love and serve.

Our society has become so materialistic that the spiritual side of life is ignored. We are leaving Christ out of our lives, except when we need him when everything else we have tried has failed.

If we only knew how much better our lives would be with Christ at the center of them, there would be no question about it. You can tell a person of this kind of experience, but until he feels it in his own life, he will have no appreciation for it.

In Germany, one can observe that the terrible Nazi flood had produced a completely unexpected result, namely, that of forcing the church out of its reserve and obliging it again to accept its full responsibility to

society. Here you can observe and gauge the seriousness of that rift between the church and the world. One German said, "One day you may perhaps be thankful to us for having gone through this tragic experience, which had to be gone through in order to understand what the modern dream of building a society, detached from its spiritual foundations can lead to." And another German said, "Medicine, which is called to save life, allowed itself to be forced to put its skills at the service of death. This could never have happened if it had not previously lost its Christian motivation."

The Nazi catastrophe was a sign of the bankruptcy of the modern ideal. The church had been shut up in its own chapels. It was tolerated, provided that it made no further claim to govern society. Men believed that they could regulate society without any transcendental principle, purely on the basis of a science which proclaimed its moral neutrality. But under the circumstances, it was possible for another power to arise, which did not hesitate to bend law, medicine, education, and everything else to its pagan ethics.

After the catastrophe, the German church, whose most eminent representatives had been the first victims of the regime, understood this very well. There can be a fruitful transformation of the German people only if a new Christian elite is established, consecrated men, who, in every domain will apply themselves to the reconstruction of a society inspired by Jesus Christ. Christ can be the only basis for any society.

In the world of Amos' Day, each nation had its own god and its own moral code. But to Amos came the germinal insight that there was one God, a just God, above all the nations, and one moral order to which all should conform. The United Nations is an expression today of that same outreach towards the universal that we find in Amos.

Indeed, if we were obedient and responsive to the way of Christ, we would find that recognition of the sovereignty of eternal God indeed makes sense.

Second, we would find that recognition of the sacredness and the supreme worth of the human personality makes for peace. Jesus said in Matthew 12:12; "Of how much more value is a man than a sheep!" Jesus fed and healed, loved and forgave men as if they really mattered. It has been said that our great problem is that we love things and we use people instead of loving people and using things. This ends in futility, slavery, or war.

Many people work themselves to the top by using other people, associating only with those who can help their career and then throwing them aside when they have no further use for them or they can be of no further use to them. Actually, if we move to the top by our God-given abilities, this would be a much happier and more peaceful world in which to live.

Acquiring of things become the desire and aim of many. The concern for others becomes secondary.

Since war began in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defenses of peace must be constructed.

Thirdly, from these comes an attitude towards people which makes hatred and enmity impossible and makes people brothers and sisters in one great family. When individuals in a home do not treat one another as brothers and sisters, a home because becomes a kind of intolerable purgatory. When people across national and racial lines do not treat each other as members of one human family under one Father God, the world becomes just such a hell of cruelty and fear as we are now experiencing.

To exert every possible effort to eliminate undemocratic practices and undemocratic attitudes, to do all that we can do to close the gap between our profession of democracy and our practice of it, it is the only way that we can achieve one our maximum national strength and unity and fully discharge our international responsibilities. In these critical times, this we must do. We cannot afford to do less.

The prescription for peace is burdensome and costly. Stubborn human nature will not quickly yield its prejudice and its selfishness. Real human brotherhood calls for the overturning of a lifetime of pride and egotism.

Order is a universal law. Without order the planets would spin crazily, the seasons would be jumbled, our whole world would seem strange and upset. Order is an essential factor in satisfying living, and it can also be a source of spiritual contact with God.

True Christians are lovers of concord, promoters of unity, healers of breaches. They delight to pour oil on troubled waters, to reconcile those who are strange, to right wrongs, to strengthen the kindly ties a friendship. As the sons of peace they bring into the fetid atmosphere of the world, a breath from the pure and placid air of heaven. How much the world is indebted to their presence, only the day to come will show.

In the Gospel, according to Matthew chapter 18, Jesus told the story about a servant who stole \$10 million from the king. When the king wanted to have the servant put in jail, the servant asked to be forgiven and promised to pay back all the money he had taken. The king forgave his servant, although he knew the servant could never pay back so much money.

But when the servant left the king, he met a fellow servant who owed him \$20. He asked for the money, but the fellow servant was not able to pay and asked to be forgiven. He promised to pay all he owed as soon as possible. The first servant would not forgive and had the man who owed him \$20 put in jail.

When the king heard what it happened, he called the servant whom he had just forgiven, and said, "You wicked servant! I forgave you the million dollars and you would not forgive even \$20." So the king put him in jail.

Don't you think it is silly to put someone in jail for \$20 when he promises to pay for it? Jesus thought so too. He told the story to show us how wrong we are not to forgive someone for little unkind or unjust things when God forgives us for all the big things we do if we are sorry and want to make things right.

A little forgiveness would help in large ways to establish peace in our world today. It's too bad we aren't big enough in our hearts to forgive someone else.

The words Jesus spoke when he wept over the city sounds as if even then there was still a chance. And we do not need to be defeatist. There is a chance for us, too "even today". It isn't too late if we would repent of our sins and again seek God and make him the center of our lives.

Immediately, after Jesus wept over Jerusalem, "He entered the temple and began to drive out those who sold." So we, too, can do the next thing needing to be done. Our prescription for peace implies many things for nations, races, and others. Most of these things are a long way removed from us. But we can do what may be the most important thing of all: take Jesus seriously in your own life and straighten out your own disordered self. In thought, work, attitude, and deed, pursue the things that make for peace that you and I can do "even today".

Christians must live with unresolved tensions within themselves. There are only tentative and temporary adjustments by which we hope that the worst consequences of the problems will be avoided. I see, for instance, three tensions in respect to the problem of war and peace. (1) The tension between nation and the Kingdom. (2) The tension between the blessings of God and the judgment of God, and (3) the tension between power and love and sometimes between justice and love.

We can talk about wanting peace in our world and I am sure we all desire this. We can pray to God for him to establish peace upon earth. We can belong to the United Nations. We can negotiate with other nations until war is finally ended. But unless each individual really and truly finds the peace we all desire within himself, we will never have peace in our world. The only way I believe we can obtain the peace is by accepting Jesus Christ into our hearts and lives and then making him the center of our lives. Christ and only Christ can give us the peace we desire. Therefore I believe the main prescription for peace is Jesus Christ and as Christians we should always be working towards helping others come to know Jesus Christ and eventually we will have the peace all of us are talking about. Let us not waste any more time but let us spend our time witnessing for our Lord.

Villains on White Horses

Scripture: Romans 7:13-25

The text is chosen from Romans 7:19,21; “For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand.”

Contrary to the oversimplification that we expect in our “horse operas,” in real life villains do not always ride the black horses. Sometimes, in fact more often than not, in real life they ride the white horses. The problem of evil is not simply put into easily recognized and sharply distinguished categories; rather, the problem of evil in real life is very complex and often confusing.

It was this problem with which the apostle Paul wrestled in the 7th chapter of Romans. This, as I understand it, is what he is saying: “What shall we say about this problem of evil? It is not simple; It is not open and shut; It is not clear cut. You cannot just put everything into two categories and say, ‘this is good’ and of everything else say, ‘all of this is evil’. No, out of actual experience I know that this is a very involved and difficult matter. I want to do good and yet, even in my trying to do good, I find that I wind up having chosen and having done the evil. “So I find it a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand.”

This is the Testimony of one of the godliest men; It is difficult to make the necessary moral choices in life between good and evil because in any situation, very close to the best, evil lies close at hand.

Isn’t this all the more reason for us to have someone to help us make these choices. I firmly believe that Jesus Christ will guide us down the right path and help us to choose between good and evil. In fact I do not see how you can live your life without him as your guide. I believe we need Christ constantly at our sides.

If we had only to choose between black and white, it would all be very easy. If evil were always evil, if sin were always clearly marked, and if you had no trouble knowing exactly what is wrong, there is not one of us who would deliberately choose to do wrong. But these choices in life are not easily marked as right and wrong. We do have a choice, and the temptation is very great.

Take, as a specific illustration, the matter of drinking an alcohol beverage. Alcohol is presented by distinguished and well known personalities. It is presented with colorful packaging. It is shown as the choice of deer, sweet grandmothers. It is presented as the essence of good taste and refinement, with everybody and I stress everybody drinking in moderation. In fact, doctors, nowadays, are recommending to expectant mothers who are experiencing severe labor pains, to get drunk and stay drunk to help relieve the pain. There is not an alcoholic in any hospital ward who started out to be an alcoholic. They all started out to take one little drink that would not bother them. The trouble is that alcohol is exceedingly habit forming. One social drink is dangerous because of that to which it can easily lead. But the brewers and the distillers do not tell young people that. So here is “danger riding a white horse.”

Alcoholism and Alcoholics form one of the worst and largest problems in American society today. That indeed is a fact. Alcoholism has more direct victims, last longer, more dramatically injures the very structure of society and entails enormously greater costs than most of the ills that receive concerted attacks from voluntary groups, foundations, and government, indeed more than most of them combined.

The tendency today is to blame alcoholism on everything else but alcohol - frustrations, unhappiness, anything. The truth is that perfectly normal, happy people can become addicted to alcohol through chronic consumption, or, in plainer words- too much social drinking. You do not have to take my word for it, ask any alcoholic. I firmly believe the way to solve this evil is to stay away from it. Don't take even one drink socially. From my own experience I know you can be just as successful and a lot happier and have more fun without it. If we have to resort to alcohol to give us a lift, then our lives have become pretty stagnant. As a second example take gambling. Nobody ever started out to be an inveterate, irresponsible, dead-beat gambler. Instead people start out to have just a few innocent bets with sodas or no quarters on football games or a penny a point at bridge or canasta. That is exactly the way the gambling mania begins. Too often we see only pleasant temptation, but the beautiful snake ultimately turns out to be the deadly ordeal.

There is a story of two gamblers, both of whom felt they should quit gambling. But here is where the similarity ended. The one gambler said: "I must quit gambling. Tonight I am going to have my last fling at it and get it out of my system, and tomorrow I will be through with it." This man will never quit. The other gambler said: "I mean to stop gambling. I cannot speak for tomorrow because tomorrow is not yet here. But as for today, I am not gambling." This man will quit. By drawing this difference between these two gamblers we have put our finger upon one of the major causes for our inability to carry out our good intentions. What we are really serious about, we will do today - now. What we say we are serious about but really are not, we plan to do tomorrow. But this tomorrow never arrives. Only today is real.

For yet another instance, consider this matter of trifling with sex. What is wrong with kissing your best girl goodnight? What is wrong with parking around the lake at midnight? Well, then what is wrong with promiscuous sexual relationships? Oh, we did not intend that at all. No, but that is the ultimate outcome: lives wrecked by nervous strain, reputations ruined, and the chances for a stable and happy married life later on greatly reduced. But that is not what you see at first. It all looks pretty exciting, fun and glorious until something unexpected happens.

Perhaps some of our young people can see nothing wrong with our college boys and girls living together in the same dorms. But I would ask you this question, what boy wants a girl for a lifetime partner who has been intimate with many other boys and certainly the vice versa is true. And after all we have to look further into the future not just at the immediate.

Temptation threatens to sweep us all off our feet. No one is exempt. Never were so many temptations, in such alluring and plausible forms, loose upon the world as at present. No longer confined to the haunts of the victims, temptations of the world of the vilest sort now appear in the halls of cultured and respected

people; and participation is almost prerequisite to admittance.

Clarence Edward Macartney was attempting one day to fix an electric lamp in the cellar of his home, but whenever he touched the lamp, he was severely shocked by the electric current. He called an electrician who tried with the same result until he placed a heavy piece of wood on the floor on which he then stood. The damp earth on which they had been standing was congenial to the play of that electric wire, and when the electrician got off the ground, he was safe. Here is a parable of the reason why it is impossible for the spiritually alive person to avoid temptation.

Most evils in life start out on a very simple “white horse bases” and then somewhere along the line, they wind up riding a black charger.

Samson was a Nazarite, which means that he had to strictly obey a number of rules, one of which was that he must not allow any razor or scissors to touch his head. (Something like our boys to day.)

When he grew up, he had extraordinary strength and was able to perform many deeds requiring great courage and power against the Philistines, who were oppressing his own people. Do you remember how he fought with a lion? And how he pulled down the pillars of the temple? And the secret of his greatest strength, known only to himself, was his long hair which had never been cut.

Samson loved Delilah, a Philistine woman, who was tempted by the leaders of her people to find out the source of his great strength. Sampson, however, was alert and only pretended to tell her. But Deliah tried again and again to get the secret from him, and at last Samson told her. Immediately she sent word to her fellow countrymen, telling them to come and lie in wait for him. Then she persuaded him to go to sleep, and while he slept one of his enemies came in and cut off his hair. Delilah woke him calling out, “The Philistines are upon you Samson.” Samson jumped up, saying in jest, “I will go out as at other times, and shake myself.” But his strength was gone, and the Philistines seized and blinded him. Then putting fetters of brass upon him, they made him grind corn.

How many of us are sound and strong, but have a weak spot somewhere, because of which our soundness and strength are not of great use to us? How many people there are of whom we can say many fine things, but of whom we must, if we are to be quite honest and to tell the truth about them, end up with an “if only”! What a fine fellow he would be, we say, if only he were not so lazy. What a nice girl she would be, if only she had not such a terrible temper. How much that one could do for other people, if only he would not insist always on having his own way. That little “if only” implies a fault which, when compared with so many fine qualities, may not appear to be very important, but it may be just the one thing that prevents someone’s fine qualities from being useful to another fellow traveler.

Secondly, there are three things which Christianity very definitely has to say with regard to evil in the world. (1) Christianity takes a realistic and mature view of evil. (2) Christianity offers an example in

Jesus Christ. This is, in part, is why Paul can conclude his disclosure of the torment of his own soul over the problem of evil with a shout of Thanksgiving. Paul says in Romans 7:21; “evil is present,” and then in Romans 7:25; “I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord.” Through Jesus Christ we mortals have an example which can give us wisdom to cope with the complex problems of evil in our lives. By following his footsteps, by choosing as well and prayerfully as we can upon the basis of his spirit within us, by walking in his way of love, we have an answer to the problem of evil.

(3) The Christian religion comes to the rescue, for it offers, when we falter and fail, the forgiveness of God through our Lord, Jesus Christ, who said that all manner of sins would be forgiven men upon the grounds of repentance.

I truly and firmly believe we can overcome evil with good and that if we truly have Christ in us, he will guide and direct us our thoughts, deeds, and actions. Make him the center of your life now.

Seeing Ourselves As Christ Sees Us

Scripture: John 8:42-45

The text is chosen from Malachi 3:10; “Bring the full tithes into the storehouse.”

Jesus Christ emphasize stewardship for two reasons: (1) He knew that stewardship, especially that which we give to God of our own substance, is the acid test of discipleship and (2) He knew that this is the point at which many Christians fault and fail.

You remember the story of the rich young ruler, who asked Jesus what he must do to inherit eternal life. He said that he had been good and obey all the laws. Jesus told him to sell everything he had, give it to the poor and come take up his cross and follow him. But you remember what happened. He went away, sorrowful for he could not part with his riches.

As far as stewardship is concerned, it would be a wholesome thing for us to take a very frank look at ourselves in this matter. Perhaps we need to exercise our imaginations and try to conceive how we appear to the eyes of Christ.

Arthur Pinero, the English dramatist said, “a financier is a pawnbroker with imagination.” So often the difference between the stingy man and the generous man is simply imagination. It is the difference between the man who can say with John Wesley, “The world is my parish”; and the man who is so parochial that he cannot see beyond his own local church or community.

What would Christ say about us, if he were standing among us in the flesh?

First of all, probably Jesus would not call us whited sepulchers, hypocrites, and sons of Satan, but might he not call us, tramps, robbers, and atheist? We need to ask; is there any tramp-like, robber-like or atheistic quality in me?

What is a tramp? He is a person who refuses to carry his share of the load. It seems to me there are plenty of us to fit into this category. Many are looking for something for nothing. Many think the world owes them a living.

Who is a robber? He is a person who takes what belongs to someone else and uses it for himself: Malachi 3:8 reads, “Will man Rob God? Yeah you are robbing me. But you say, “how are we robbing you?” In your tithes and offerings.

Oh how we hate to part with our money, especially if we can see no immediate benefit to us. Little do we realize God has made it possible for us to earn our living and if it were not for him, no one would have anything.

Who is an atheist? He is a person who does not believe in God. Is God merely a theory with us, or do we believe in him enough to fulfill his requirements respecting stewardship, as those requirements are set forth in the scriptures?

Oh, it's true very few people would say that they don't believe in God if you ask them directly, but they don't do not really feel this belief in their hearts otherwise there would be many more people in church on Sunday morning, in fact, our churches would be overflowing, there would be no problem with financial help with God's work, we would have an over-abundance of leaders volunteering their help and support. We would start putting our hearts where our mouths presently are.

Here Is a modern American's creed.

I believe in gold-the dollar almighty, maker of nearly everything desirable on earth. I believe in 7% and in as much more as I can safely get. I believe in success measured by salary. I believe in getting ahead. If this means of getting ahead of the other fellow-well, I am sorry for him, but it can't be helped. I believe in religion, but not too much of it. I believe that business is business. I believe in doing good in the world, but not to the extent of giving till it hurts. I believe that my own sins, which are not many, ought to be forgiven by a just and merciful God; but if anybody sins against us, he had better look out. I believe in loving people who love me and being good to people who are good to me. I believe first and last and always in having a good time. I sincerely hope that my time won't rob somebody else of their good time; but if it does, well, once more, I'm sorry, but it can't be helped.

A creed that is rather harsh perhaps but very true. All of us should take time to take a good long look at our own lives, perhaps they are not as lily-white as we think they are on the surface.

Secondly, the Bible is a very practical book. It doesn't leave us in the dark as to the definite suggestion in the matter of stewardship. That suggestion is called the principle of the tithe; it calls for giving of 1/10 of our income to God and to his church. There are several wonderful things about tithing; (1) it is possible. Regardless of what anyone says, I know from my own experience it is possible. Perhaps even the thought of it might hurt you, but I know it is possible, especially if we give to God first from our income, then use the remainder for ourselves. (2) It is proportionate. If we really know and appreciate where our ability to earn our living comes from, if we give God 1/10 of our income, it is still a small proportion of what he gives to us. (3) It is progressive. Once you start it, you will wonder why you never did it before.

Why should I be a tither? (1) Because the preacher under whom I was saved, taught it and practiced it. (2) Because God owns all things. (3) Because it is a biblical principal. Leviticus 27:30 says, "All the tithe of the land, weather of the seed of the land or of the fruit of the trees, is the Lord's; it is holy to the Lord." (4) Because God is my first creditor. (5) Because it is proportionate payment. (6) Because paying the tithe enables me to do more for the kingdom through my church. (7) Because Jesus commended it. (8) Because

the eighth Commandment says, “Though shall not steal”, and withholding the tithe is for me a violation of this commandment. (9) Because Jesus gave ten-tenths, not one-tenth. (10) Because I want to lift the level of my spending for Christ’s kingdom.

I know that your giving will be returned a thousand fold, if it is given in the right spirit and from the bottom of the heart. God truly will bless you for your generous giving.

There once was some barnyard conversation. “You only give milk,” a pig said to the cow, “and I give bacon, ham, pork chops, and roast. I give more than you do.” “Yes”, replied the cow quietly, “but I give while I am still alive.”

There are many people whose imaginations play about the thought of what they could do if only they were in possession of certain things. They are always purchasing something with other people’s money, serving the community with a time and talents of others, and making their relationships more vital if they had the personality of some dynamic soul. Our responsibility is not to use that which we don’t possess, whether it be large or small. Instead of being concerned about how much John Jones contributes to the church, we should make sure we are contributing what we know to be a satisfactory amount, this we can know for sure. What John Jones gives we can only guess at.

The Kepler family had moved to town about September 1st, and a few days later Barbara Kepler enrolled in high school. It was observed by both her teachers and fellow students that she was an unusual person. She had a certain independent spirit that attracted attention, and she was also a talented girl.

When the officers at the high school society of one of the towns churches met to make plans, someone mentioned Barbara as a possible member of their group. George Bailey was given the responsibility of calling her on the telephone and giving her an invitation to attend the meeting.

The next day, George called Barbara, told her about their society, and gave her the invitation.

He didn’t quite expect her answer, which was, “What’s in it for me?”

He mumbled for a few seconds without saying anything and then replied, “What’s in you for it?” That was the end of the conversation.

That was a queer question, thought Barbara. “What’s in you for it?” For several days, Barbara could not forget the question. She began to apply it seriously to herself. What is in me for it? She thought about the family and Home. She began to help her small brother with his arithmetic. Her mother was surprised to find Barbara volunteering to do household task that she ordinarily left to her mother. Her father commented to Mrs. Kepler that Barbara was becoming a thoughtful member of the family.

Barbara began to make the same application at school. "What's in me for it?" She began to think, not just how to get something out of it, but how she might give more of herself.

Her whole life seem to change. And she did go to the young people's meeting. She had a firm desire to give something to it. She felt it was a great idea. One day it dawned upon her that this is the Christian Way, Christ's way, God's way, the way of giving.

"What's in you for it?"

Isn't this the way we should feel about all of life especially to God and his church, what is in you for God and the church. What do you have to give God? Not what can I expect from God if I do this or that. Too many of us give with the thought of receiving something in return.

Perhaps God does have some large contributors but what do they expect out of it, a good tax exemption? Do they give because they want to because they enjoy giving? Do we give for these reasons or because we feel it's necessary?

Thirdly, the doctrine of stewardship is undergirded by half a dozen facts. (1) God made us. We did not make ourselves. (2) God owns us. We do not own ourselves. (3) He gives us the strength and wisdom with which to earn whatever material wealth we may acquire. (4) We are trustees of all that we have received. (5) A reasonable and worthy proportion of all that we receive must be set aside and given to God. (6) The balance that remains must also be used according to God's will.

The church budget will be made and presented for 1976. What is a Church budget anyway? It is a goal, a plan, a map, a picture, a ladder, and operation, satisfying, progress, a result of prayer and God's program. It will have been made to the best of our abilities. We are now asking for your help, your pledge, your contribution; for without it, our goals cannot be achieved. Everyone in the church will be contacted and asked to contribute what he feels he can afford. Think about it, pray about it and finally reach your decision with God's help.

Let us also remember stewardship is more than the giving of one's financial support. It is the giving of yourselves for God's work. Every church, and this church is no exception, needs devoted people to work in the Sunday school, United Methodist Women, and many other areas. It also means giving up some pleasures, perhaps to put God first. It means attending church and Sunday school if it all possible. It means serving our Lord in any way that he sees fit for us to serve him. Let us hope that when Christ looks at us, he shall see us in a way pleasing to him and to ourselves.

Mandate for Gratitude

Scripture: Colossians 3:1-17

The text is chosen from Colossians 3:15; “And be ye thankful.”

Gratitude is a becoming trait. It sweetens life, cements bonds of friendship, gives cheer to fellowship, and makes benevolence a joy.

In superior men love is stronger than hate, friendship stronger than selfishness, and gratitude is stronger than envy. It is part of morality and wisdom for anybody to be grateful to parents who have cared for him, friends who give him companionship, the community which protected him, educates him, and gives him a chance to earn an honest living. We should be grateful to all decent people who keep the peace, do honest work and pay their bills. Let us express our gratitude by initiating imitating them.

We are long on our demands, even our complaints; we are short on our thanksgivings. But it is no fault of the apostle Paul's. If the world had in it more people possessed of his spirit, there would be no scarcity of praise. Indeed if more people in our world really and truly accept Jesus Christ in their lives and if they live their lives guided by God's Holy Spirit, we would have much more peace, understanding and love in our world. Listen to the music of gratitude that plays through the epistle of Paul's chapter 1: 3, he says, “We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you.” Again in verse 12; “Giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of this saints in light.” Chapter 2: 7; “Rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught abounding in Thanksgiving.” Chapter 3: 17; “And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.” Chapter 4: 2; “Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.”

Wherever Paul went, he appeared in “the garment of praise”. Some people, if they ever wear thankfulness at all, wear it as you do a boutonniere on Mother's Day or at a wedding. Paul wore gratitude as a man wears his everyday suit. Praise was woven into the fabric of his life. He wanted it to be so with his Christian brethren everywhere. Hence this strong imperative word of our text. “And be thankful.”

First of all, gratitude is a required grace. Paul doesn't locate it among the luxuries of a Christian life; he gives it a place among the necessities. “Never forget to be thankful for what God has done for you.” Yes, God has done much for each of us whether we think so or not and it's about time we started realizing what these things are. How did so many of us come by the fanciful notion the gratitude is a matter of emotion and inclination? Christian thankfulness is far more a matter of humility and duty. (1) I owe it to God to be grateful: he has given me my being, my savior, Christ, and my opportunity to do something with my life, other than whining about it, or flinging it away. Indeed God did not intend for us to waste our lives or our talents he has given us, we owe it to him to do something with our lives. (2) I owe it to others to be

thankful: a sunny, songful soul spreads an embracing contagion. (3) I owe to myself to be thankful: the meanness and sourness of in- gratitude are injurious to good health, whereas thankfulness and praise have a healing and true effect. We can feel sorry for ourselves, but all this does is make us miserable, and those around us also. How much happier we can be, how much more useful we can become if we can be thankful and grateful for what God has given us.

Let us recapture the glory of our inheritance. Let us recall this strength of the Pilgrim character. Let us accept the challenge to rededicate ourselves.

John 15:13 reads, “Greater love has no man than this that a man lay down his life for his friends.”

The first Thanksgiving demonstrated a truth: to have friends, to be friendly.

Here is the story. The Pilgrims dispatched an invitation to Chief Massasoit, asking him to bring his braves to a feast. They thought he would bring about a score. But he brought nearly 100! Watching the crowd approaching- “Indian file” one of the pilgrims called: “It looks like all the Indians in the land are coming!” but neither by word nor look did they let the Indians know how surprised they were.

The Indians, too, did their part to create friendliness. They brought large gifts of such things as they had- skins, dried venison, wild turkeys, corn seeds.

The Pilgrims worked hard, giving the Indians their best. The men kept the fires going, and fixed extra tables and benches. The women baked larger quantities of cornbread, barley cakes and kept the kettles boiling with savory food.

The food dwindled, but the women kept on cooking and baking and giving thanks that there would still be enough of the bountiful harvest for the entire winter. They were thankful, too, for this opportunity to show friendship to such a large number. Are we, today, really thankful and grateful for what God has given us? Let us take time to think about this and recapture the spirit of these early pilgrims. Gratitude is a required grace.

Second, gratitude is a reasonable grace.

It is reasonable because on the lower, ordinary levels of life, it is just plain natural for us to feel gratitude. For the apostle the reasonableness of thanksgiving lies in an attitude that Christ forms and fashions within the Christian soul. If thankfulness arises through prosperity, well and good; but when prosperity fails, will you then be thankful, tempted to feel that you have no reason to offer thanks? If thankfulness springs up through health, well and good; but when an accident maims you or disease makes you bedfast, must you then become gloom and bitter, feeling that you have no reason to sing a song of praise? But now, supposing it is through our dear Lord Christ that you cultivate the fine art of thanksgiving, then what? If it

is in him and through him that I am to be a thankful soul, then money in the bank or physical health does not have me at its mercy. If I lose the one or the other pails into disease or suffering, I can still be grateful. If we place the value on the right things in life, when tragedy does stake our lives, we can still be grateful for what we have.

1st Thessalonian 5:18 says; “In everything give thanks: for this is the will of God in Jesus Christ concerning you.” It is true that the wealthy person is not always the most grateful. Some of our wealthiest people have used devious ways; they have used other people to gain their wealth; they have made the acquiring of wealth the center of their lives and then left God entirely on the sidelines. How could they be grateful except to themselves, believing that what they have acquired is due to the fact entirely to their own abilities.

The grateful person is always the happiest. He is happy because he knows where everything he has, has come from. He realizes without God at his side, the world would be nothing, and he would have nothing. He has taken the self out of this life and replaced it with God. Self-retentiveness has been removed from his life and when a person does this, he greatly gains happiness beyond belief.

The happy person is he who has learned to express his things in terms of giving. The giving isn't necessarily in terms of money. It generally is in terms of the giving of self in service to others, and especially in service to God. You know, regardless of how poor we may be in terms of wealth, we still have plenty to give in terms of oneself. The grateful person is happy and has learned to express his things in terms of giving of himself to God and his works.

Third, gratitude is a ripening grace. The full meaning and measure of it does not come all in an instant. What Paul is really saying is this: “Brother, Christians, I know you have the flower of gratitude planted in your hearts. But I want you to cultivate it. See to it that it grows. JB Phillips takes Colossians 2: 7, “Abounding with thanksgiving,” and draws it out in modern English thus: “Grow out of him as a plant grows out of the soil it is planted in, becoming more and more sure of your ‘ground’, and your lives will overflow with joy and thankfulness.”

Psalms 107:1-2 reads; “Oh give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever! Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, whom he has redeemed from trouble.” We should be living thankfully, and we should be giving thankfully

You should live thankfully for your parents. Thank God for them and let them know of your thankfulness. Too often we take our parents for granted, never stopping long enough to thank God for them and appreciating what they are doing and what they have done.

Live thankfully for your peers, your friends and companions with whom you feed and have fun and fellowship, giving thanks to God for them.

Live thankfully for the privilege of pardon and petition the Lord to forgive the many sins that continue to plague our souls. What a privilege we have as Christians; the privilege of forgiveness, granted to us by our Lord. Be thankful for it.

Live thankfully because of your problems, and face them head on, making them steppingstones. Life is not, and never will be, free of problems. If it were we would have no challenges. Accept the problems. Work them out and from the experience gain wisdom for the future.

Live thankfully because of your potential and for the opportunities to develop your church life, Christ life, business life, and home life. God has given each of us individual talents and abilities. It is up to us to put them to work for the establishing of his Kingdom on this earth. Thank God for them and that we are able to use them.

Live thankfully because of the privilege of preparing for the coming of the Prince of Peace. Indeed we should be preparing for Jesus is coming again; for he is coming and if we are not prepared, we will be lost. Being thankful for everything in life and every part of our lives will give us joy and peace and happiness.

Fourth, gratitude is a rewarding grace. It is this on three counts. (1) It exalts God. Ingratitude is an insult to the Almighty. Thankfulness glorifies God and by mysterious reflex action, glorifies man. (2) Thanksgiving expels gloom. We are to be transmitters of Jesus' joy. (3) Gratitude encourages graciousness. "Let your speech always be gracious." Away then with whispering. Away with the rasping voice of complaint and the judicial eye of fault finding. Away with the rudeness that can find more things over which to be bitter than of things which to be praised. Thanksgiving is the politeness of the soul.

Thanksgiving is the time to highlight all of our thankfulness, but it certainly isn't the only time to be thankful. Our hearts should be thankful constantly for everything God has given us. Try to be thankful and see what a difference it makes in your life.

The Deeper Meaning of Thanksgiving

Scripture: Psalm 100

The text is chosen from Psalm 100 “Enter His gates with Thanksgiving, and His courts with praise!”

We become so busy asking, “What do I have to be thankful for?”, that we forget that Thanksgiving is not an audit or an inventory but a fundamental attitude toward life. The important questions are these: Is my nature one of thankfulness, Am I as thankful in bad times as in good? When our hearts are truly thankful, we don’t say: “Oh God, I thank Thee for this or that rather, Oh God, I thank Thee for Thyself.” First of all, the highest gift of all for which we ought to be thankful is God. God is not dead but very much alive and all we have to do is look around us to know this. He is a personal God who wills, thinks, cares, loves creates, and continually acts within His world.

This means that God knows me, loves me, guides me, and never leaves me alone. He is forever at my side. God is the same yesterday, today and forever. He never changes. Only people and times change, not God. God is trustworthy, fulfilling his promise and is everlasting in His forgiveness, compassion, and love.

Without God there would be a pretty sad world in which to live. Certainly, all the good that comes from life and living we can accredit to God. We regret to be thankful to God in two ways. First, by His creation. Psalm 19 verse 1 says: “The heavens are telling the glory of God.” All we must do is look around us to see God’s Creation. Look at the birds, the trees, the flowers, our friends, our neighbors, our families. This beautiful Valley in which we live is also a part of God’s Creation. Indeed, God does show His love by His creation of the things & persons we can enjoy and make us happy. Jesus assures us that God knows and feeds the birds, clothes the grass of the field, and makes the sun shine. We all have and know there a great spirit, a loving heart and universal truth. Supremely, the love of God is shown in Jesus Christ as the redeemer. In His teachings Jesus proved that God is a living God, compassionate Father. In His death he demonstrated just how far the love of God would go to call back His wayward children. God sacrificed His only son so that our sins could be forgiven. Regardless of how sinful and bad we have been, if we truly are sorry for our sins and if we admit them and want to love a better life, God will forgive and help us change our lives from this point on. What greater thing could we have to be thankful for than the love of God, the love He has shown toward us.

Third, we ought to be thankful for His Fatherly goodness. He loves all of His children. Every human being is made in the image of God, and he is as concerned with one child whether white, black, rich or poor, American or otherwise. His goodness shows no partiality based on superficial qualities but loves each man as though there were no others to love.

Many people lose their way in life because they are not grateful to God. Paul associated the most spiritual and moral losses with an ungrateful spirit as evidenced in Romans 1:21, “For although they knew God they did not know Him as God or to give thanks to Him, but they became futile in their thinking and their

senseless minds were darkened.” Failure to thanking God results in failure in thinking. Awareness of God becomes blurred, wisdom turns to folly, worship is transferred from the creator to the creature, and values are so distorted that the possibility of sanctity and beauty in sex and the hope of social justice and domestic happiness may be wholly canceled.

Fundamentally, we begin to fulfill God’s purpose for our lives by offering praise, while many of the psalms celebrate God as the redeemer. Over a hundred psalms sing of Him almost wholly as creator. Man was made to rejoice in his maker. John Calvin was attached to these three commandments: Adoration, Trust, Invocation, and Thanksgiving. Man was put on earth to give thanks to God.

If thanksgiving is a clue to life’s meaning, it must be relevant to pain, frustration, and loss. Unless it can stand up to life’s cruel blows and denial, it is as frothy and transitory as the foam in an ocean wave.

We know too well to suppose that the Hebrews were exempt from suffering. Yet listen to this ringing affirmation from the 84th Psalm Verse 11. “For the Lord God is the sun and the shield, He bestows favor and honor. No good thing does that lord withhold from those who walk uprightly.”

Paul in chains wrote his epistle of joy to the Philippians. He saw calamity as serving to advance the hopeful. This proved the possibility of remaining thankful and peaceful under trials. Paul also says in 1 Thessalonians 5: 16-18, “Rejoice always, pray constantly, and give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus. For you.”

John Calvin has sorted out the difference between giving thanks in something VS giving thanks for something. It may be impossible to give thanks for some towering tragedy, it may not, however impossible to be grateful in it. This is the crucial test of the thankful approach to life.

Let us thank God for Himself. This is the fundamental attitude, and all thanksgiving grows out of it. We show our gratitude by doing what He has taught us to do, by surrendering ourselves wholly and completely to His way. Through telling Him in prayer of our love for Him, and by serving those whom the Father loves. This I believe, is the deeper meaning of Thanksgiving and the kind of attitude each of us should have as we sit down with our families at our Thanksgiving tables this year.

Wherever Paul went, he appeared in “the garment of praise”. Some people, if they ever wear thankfulness at all, wear it as you do a boutonniere on Mother’s Day or at a wedding. Paul wore gratitude as a man wears his everyday suit. Praise was woven into the fabric of his life. He wanted it to be so with his Christian brethren everywhere. Hence, this strong imperative word of our text. “And be thankful.”

First of all, gratitude is a required grace. Paul doesn't locate it among the luxuries of a Christian life; he gives it a place among the necessities. "Never forget to be thankful for what God has done for you." Yes, God has done much for each of us, whether we think so or not, and it's about time we started realizing what these things are. How did so many of us come by the fanciful notion the gratitude is a matter of emotion and inclination? Christian thankfulness is far more a matter of humility and duty. (1) I owe it to God to be grateful: he has given me my being, my savior, Christ, and my opportunity to do something with my life, other than whining about it or flinging it away. Indeed God did not intend for us to waste our lives or our talents he has given us, we owe it to Him to do something with our lives. (2) I owe it to others to be thankful: a sunny, songful soul spreads an embracing contagion. (3) I owe it to myself to be thankful: the meanness and sourness of in-gratitude are injurious to good health, whereas thankfulness and praise have a healing and true

The Book to Live By

Scripture: Psalm 119:9-16

The text is chosen from Hebrews 1:1-2; “In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son.”

The Bible is the book of life; it is the book to live by. The Bible has never been held in higher esteem than at the present hour, has never been available in so many different languages and tongues, as now, and has never sold in such quantities such as it has this year. Yet many people who sing its praises and claim it to be the world’s most important book read it very little, if at all. In many of our homes today, all the Bible does is gather dust on the shelf. Many of us are seeking answers to questions concerning living our lives and all we have to do is look into the book, read it and ask God for understanding as we read it. The truth is right before us, and we are not interested enough to find out. Perhaps it doesn’t cost enough, it’s too cheap; perhaps we think it’s too easy to be true, but the fact is the Bible is our textbook for living our lives. “The Bible can stand question, criticism, opposition, everything but neglect.”

What is the Bible? The Bible is a book of faith, and a book of doctrine, and a book of morals, and a book of religion, a special revelation from God; but it is also a book which teaches man his own responsibility, his own dignity, and his equality with his fellow man.

Ask anyone who said the words, “of the people, by the people, and for the people,” and he will likely respond, “Lincoln in his Gettysburg address.” Yet in John Wycliffe’s introduction to his 1382 translation of the Bible, these words occur: “The Bible is for the government of the people, by the people, and for the people.”

Generations follow generations, yet the Bible lives as a lamp to our feet, a light to our paths, the gate to heaven, a standard for childhood, a guide for youth, and inspiration for the natural, a comfort for the aged, food for the hungry, water for the thirsty, rest for the weary, light for the lost, salvation for the Sinner, and grace for the Christian. Indeed the Bible is the book for us to live by.

But for the Bible to become the book to live by, it must be read. To be read, it must be understood. To be understood, we must see it is not as a file of books but as a line of men and women to whom the living God spoke and for whom God was a reality. Karl Barth said, “My experience has been that if I simply try to say, to repeat, what the Bible says about God, the people understand. Many clergy men fail to do this. We must simply accept the fact that human beings are loved by God, even in their faults and hostilities. We must tell men that he is a loved one.”

As the living God, he has been forever speaking to man, anxious to reveal himself to man that his creature might enjoy life to the full, even here and now.

The living God who spoke of old to the people through the prophets has spoken through his son and has

even yet another word to speak to those who have ears attuned to hear, not a different word but a clearer insight into what God has been forever desirous of his children knowing.

One way to let the living God speak to us today is by exposing ourselves to his voice as we read the Old Testament in light of the New Testament and in the light of the spirit and teachings of Jesus Christ.

Psalm 119:105 says, “Thy word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.” Yes, the Bible does speak to us.

Ray had his radio turned on, and the music made a soft background as he read the Bible. He was studying his Sunday school lesson when he thought he heard a soft voice near him. He listened. It probably was the radio. But as he glanced up, the leaves of the Bible rustled, and Ray heard the voice again. The Bible seemed to be speaking to him: “I am a very old book,” it began with its soft voice. “I am old and yet I am ever new.” Ray wanted to ask just what that meant, but the Bible went on: “Many men wrote me, and many men gave their lives to preserve me. I was first written on stone tablets, and later I was copied on scrolls.”

“I was growing, for God walked with men and spoke through his prophets. Their sayings were written down. God spoke to men’s hearts, and they wrote down the thought he had given them. These became books of the Bible, all part of me.”

“I belonged to the Jewish people then, and the part of me which is called the Old Testament is the Bible of the Hebrew people. The Jewish people who spoke only Greek could not read me, so I was translated from the Hebrew into the Greek language by 70 scholars.”

“I had often spoken of God’s son who was to come to earth. When Jesus Christ came and was upon earth he had many followers. Some of them wrote down his words and deeds, and later others wrote letters to the new churches which were springing up across the land, and those writings and letters became the New Testament. By the year 400 AD, the Old and New Testaments had been put together, and I became the Bible.”

“The Romans wanted to read me, so I was translated into the common, or ordinary, tongue of the people, and this translation by Jerome is called the Vulgate which means common.”

“My first English translation was made about the year 700. A lay brother who lived at Whitby Abbey heard my story so often that he began to sing them like songs. The people, who could not read because I was written in Latin, loved the sound of the words, and later a great English scholar, the Venerable Bede, began translating my pages into the language of the people. In 1383 John Wycliffe translated both my Old and New Testaments into English. I was an expensive book in those days, costing about \$150.00 per copy. One man gave several loads of hay for just a few pages.”

“In 1456, I was printed period up to that time I had been handwritten period now my letters were shiny and black and although they were printed in Latin, they were easily read. Martin Luther translated me into the German language in 1534. The people of Germany read me to learn more about God’s words and ways.”

“In 1525, William Tyndale translated my New Testament and part of my Old Testament into English. The Tyndale translation was so accurate and sure that it has largely survived in most of my translations since then.”

“In 1535, my translation into English was completed by miles Cloverdale.”

“In 1537, I was reprinted from a manuscript left by William Tyndale. I was called Matthew’s Bible because I carried a dedication signed by a Thomas Matthew. In this form I became the basic text for our present English Bible.”

In 1539, the great Bible was printed and became the official Bible of England. I was called the Great Bible because of my size.”

“In 1560, I was reprinted in a smaller size for use by the people, and I was called the Geneva Bible, the first English Bible with verses.”

“In 1568, I was again revised for use in the churches, and I was called the Bishop’s Bible.”

“In 1609 I was printed in France, and this was the Roman Catholic version.”

“In 1611, I was translated again from all the manuscripts then available. This time I was called the King James Version, because King James was then king of England. So I have come down through the years. I have been translated many times from the ancient writings and from writings which have been found in caves and vaults. The languages changed and the scholars retranslate me, so that many people may better understand my words. I am God’s word to men. I speak the truth. I am known and loved in every country of the world.”

“Now I am translated into many languages so all people may read my words. Men take me to the far corners of the earth, and wherever I go I am read and followed.”

The Bible pages ruffled in the breeze for a moment and then lay still. Ray lifted his head. “I’ve been asleep”, he thought. “I must have been asleep, books can’t talk.” The Bible was open on the table. But the words were still in Ray’s memory, and the voice had been so clear, perhaps it was not a dream after all. Ray picked up the Bible and began to read again, slowly and with great interest. A book with such a wonderful history, he thought, must be read every day! Indeed if the Bible is to become the book for us to

live by it must be read.

Secondly, for the Bible to become the book to live by, we should read the Bible for pleasure, inspiration, and power for noble living. The Bible brings God to men and men to God. It brings man face to face to himself, with what he is, and with what he can become by the help of God. It searches our consciences. We find ourselves in what God dreams we shall be, so that we are dissatisfied with our achievement and feel impelled to move on “until we grow up into the likeness of Christ.” We find here “all we have been called, or hoped, or dreamed of good.”

There is no other book I know of which will tell us so much about how to live our lives, if we really take time to read it and ask God for understanding as we read. I know there is an illustration in the Bible for any situation which has ever existed or will ever exist. Why more people do not read it, I’ll never know. Why more people don’t live by it, I’ll never know. We are seeking long and hard for peace and the answer is right in front of us, in God’s word, and in Christ teachings.

Contrary to many people’s opinions, the Bible is an interesting book, and it is not dry reading, quite the opposite.

Thirdly, for the Bible to become the book to live by the central figure must become our Master and Friend. It is when we think of the Bible in terms of Christ we best understand what it is and what it is not. We need not read with idle curiosity, nor for argument, nor to have the religious glow, as though there is some virtue merely to be found in reading a sacred book. We should read for life in order that God may become a reality to us, that Christ’s spirit shall come to dwell within us, and that we may be empowered to meet all of life’s difficulties with God’s help and thereby may be victorious, even in the midst of problems. Of old God spoke by the prophets; to us he speaks supremely by his Son.

The Bible becomes a living book as we translate its teaching into our experiences and life in the 20th century.

The Bible becomes a living book as we come to love its word and its everlasting truth.

The Bible becomes a living book as we permit its creative power to change our lives.

The Bible becomes a living book as we find in its pages the spirit of the living God.

The Bible becomes a living book as we allow the light of the Resurrection to shed its rays upon our common tasks.

The Bible becomes a living book as we become missionaries who interpret its great words in our lives and bring its words to others.

Why should we read the Bible? Within its pages is power for the ordering of our inner lives; Psalm 119: 11; “Thy word have I hid in my heart.”

The Bible offers a way of escape from the inner perils which threaten our modern life; Psalm 119: 97; “It is my meditation.”

In its pages are found the secrets by which men walk the pathways of light, hope, and freedom; Psalm 119: 130 says, “The entrance of thy words giveth light.

The Bible assures us that man is supremely dear to God: Matthew 10:31 says, “Of how much more value is a man?”

The Bible points the way to world brotherhood: John 10:10 says, “That they may have life and have it abundantly.”

The Bible tells us whither I am bound and why: Psalm 27:11; “Teach me thy way O Lord.”

The Bible offers us a sound social philosophy: Micah 6:8; “He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good.”

The Bible teaches us “the lesson of life is to believe what the years and the centuries say as against the hours.” Revelation 21:1; “I saw a new heaven and a new earth.”

Yes, we should read our Bibles. We do not have to visit the psychiatrist; the Bible tells us how to live our lives. Brush the dust off your book, open it and start reading it regularly. I guarantee your life will change. Indeed the Bible is the “book to live by.”

Christ's Call to Awake

Scripture: Romans 13

The text is chosen from John 9:39; "Jesus said, for judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see; and they which see might be made blind."

Christ came once to save the world; he will come again to judge the world. St. John would have us understand that the two offices of Savior and Judge cannot be separated. Christ is always Savior, and he is always Judge. By the mere fact of coming into the world, he winnows the wheat of humanity from the chaff. Wherever Christ is, there is salvation and condemnation.

The call of Jesus Christ leaves no one where it found him. It forces upon us a choice which, but for that call, might not have come to us in so decisive form. Every Advent we hear the same trumpet call. As we read from Romans 13:11; "Now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed." Our salvation - so we hope; but our judgment certainly, the final judgment to be passed upon our lives, is twelve months nearer than when we last heard those words in the Epistle for Advent Sunday.

George Bernard Shaw once said that the theory by which people are sometimes divided into two classes, religious and irreligious, is entirely false. There are the few, he said, who are thoroughly religious and the few who are thoroughly irreligious. But the great majority of people who eat, drink, and marry live a kind of vacillating, lukewarm mid-world between the two.

Too many of us today are luke warm concerning our religion, our beliefs in Christ. We do not want to become unpopular with our friends. We do not want to become too deeply involved with the church of Jesus Christ. However, we know and believe in God. We know we need God, especially if we got into trouble. Perhaps, even for prestige, we want to belong to the church, we want to attend once in a while. We want to contribute a small amount but let us not get too involved. We have more important things to do and consider.

I would like to know what is more important than our souls? What is more important than where I end up after death? Perhaps if we really thought about these things, our values in life would change. You would realize that earthly life it's a very small and minor part compared to our eternal life. Indeed it is about time that we awoke from our sleep and start considering the things in life that are important.

Think what it must have been to the first disciples of Jesus to find that the Kingdom to which they were invited was not of this world. Think of the shock at being bidden to welcome to the society of the redeemed the uncircumcised Philistine, the heretical Samaritan, the barbarian, and the Scythian. And what rare greatness there was in Saint Paul that he realized nearly all that it meant: the spiritual Israel instead of the nation; the indwelling Spirit of Christ instead of the priest and temple; the entirely new standard of values

- the loving, unselfish heart, which, in having nothing, possesses all things, the law of living sacrifice, of gain through pain, of life through death, the sublime tread of faith, hope, love, joy, peace. All these things in which the originality and far reaching import of the gospel mainly consist, were seized and realized by Saint Paul as they have then by few since.

Christ has come, the Light of the world. Long ages may yet elapse before his beams have reduced the world to order and beauty and, clothed a purified humanity with light as with a garment. But he has come: the Revealer of the snares and chasms that lurk in darkness, the Rebuker of every evil thing that prowls by night, the Still of the storm clouds of passion, the Quickener of all that is wholesome, the Adorer of all that is beautiful, the Reconciler of contradictions, the Harmonizer of discords, the Healer of diseases, the Savior from sin. He has come: the Torch of truth, the Anchor of hope, the Pillar of faith, the Rock of strength, the Refuge for security, the Fountain for refreshment, the Wine for gladness, the Rose for beauty, the Lamb for tenderness, the Friend for counsel, the Brother for love.

Fourth, the Incarnation has altered everything, and it is surprised Paul that others did not see that it had altered everything. It is strange to Paul that people can go on living as if the light of the glory of God had not shown upon them in the face of Jesus Christ. In Ephesians 5:14 Paul says, "Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give the light."

What would Saint Paul say to us today? Is the world a different place to you and me because Christ has lived in it? Is our hope in Christ the decisive factor in the principles that we live by, in the things that we desire for ourselves and our children? Is our faith awake, or is it lying bedridden in some dormitory of our soul?

If I look at a fine piece of fabric through a magnifying glass, I find that it is perfectly clear around the center of the glass, but around the edges it tends to become distorted. But this does not mislead me into thinking that the fabric itself is confused at this point. I know that this is caused by an optical illusion and therefore by the way in which I am looking at it. And so it is with the miracle of knowledge which is bestowed upon me by the Christmas event. If I see the world through the medium of the good news, then the center is clear and bright. There I see the miracle of the love that descends to the depths of life. On the periphery, however, beyond the Christmas light, confusion, disorder and distortion prevail. The ordered lines grow tangled and the labyrinthine mystery of life threatens to overwhelm us. Therefore our sight, which grows aberrant as it strays afield, must recover its perspective by returning to the thematic center. The extraordinary thing is that the mystery of life is not illuminated by a formula but rather by another mystery, namely, the News, which can only be believed and yet is hardly believable, that God has become man and that now I am no longer alone in the darkness.

Hebrews 1:1-2 reads, "God, who at sundry times and in diverse manners spake in times past unto the fathers of the prophets, hath in the days spoken unto us by his Son."

The purpose of creation, so far as man is concerned, was itself incarnational. Man was in the image of God, and it was God's will to manifest himself in man. As Adam is the natural heir of creation, so Christ is the spiritual heir of creation. The spiritual destination of man is manifested in the Incarnation of Christ.

I believe that the Incarnation was always a part of the eternal counsels of God. For in the life of humanity God must surely have designed to manifest himself not only as power and wisdom but as love, and the perfect expression of love is to oneself and give oneself entirely. The best that human nature is capable of is the Christ-life, and this God must have willed quite apart from the need for redemption. The Incarnation has two aspects: (1) it is the perfecting of human nature, and (2) it is the redemption from sin and its consequences. In the former aspect it is independent of human sinfulness. It is only in the latter aspect that it takes the form of atonement. I believe that if man had not sinned there would still have been an incarnation to reveal and achieve the perfection of human nature.

For we are called to reenact in our own experience the whole process of the Incarnation, the new birth, the spiritual death and resurrection. But without the objective incarnation it does not seem as if we could have been drawn out of ourselves in awe, love and wonder, or filled with the desires to put off the old man and to put on Christ. The author of Hebrews says that Christ is the image of the invisible God, the pattern of deity for us to adore and imitate.

The New Testament takes a higher view of redeemed human nature than we do. We fear to be presumptuous, and so we separate Christ too far from ourselves. The language of the Greek fathers, "God became man that we might become divine," is a little beyond what we should like to say, but when we speak of the Christ-life we need not whittle down the meaning of the words, for the Christ life is what we pray Christ to give us.

Fifthly, let it be our special business this Advent to make our religion alive and wide awake.

(1) To begin with, let us make sure what we really believe. Surely what matters is how deeply we believe, not how much we accept. This is one of the basic problems with Protestants. Many are confused about what they believe, and they are not sure. This is why some are converted to Mormonism, 7th day Adventists, Jehovah witnesses, and etcetera. Take time to determine what you really believe. Think about, meditate upon it and ask God to help you. We have to have beliefs to have faith and faith is what will sustain us in the days ahead. (2) We need to quicken our feeling of the truth of our religion. If we give about 16 hours a day to this world and about 5 sleepy minutes to the other, it is no wonder if God and heaven seem rather shadowy things to us.

Our religion and our beliefs do not come automatically to us. We have to devote time and study to them. We are all busy but when our laziness excludes Christ and God, our lives are really lost. God deserves more than 5 minutes of our time period he deserves our attention more than just when we are in trouble. He is constantly at our sides. Put God into the center of your life and activities. I know and guarantee,

from my own experience, your whole life will be changed, your attitude towards life will change, things you had trouble with will change, those around you will also change. The world will definitely become a better place in which to live. Give God a chance and I know that you will never regret it. Spend time each day with God.

(3) We must act as persons who are awake. Our consciousness of the great revelation of the Gospel must show itself in the consecration of our whole life. It must deepen our love to God and to our neighbor. If we are to save our souls and save our world we must do as Paul suggests in Romans 13:11; “Now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed.” It is not too late, now is the time for us to save ourselves in the world and this is why Christ was born on this earth. This is the meaning of Christmas. This is why we celebrate Christmas.

Critical Christian Certainties

Scripture: Luke 2:1-20

The text is chosen from Luke 1:4; “That thou might know the certainty concerning the things where in thou wast instructed.”

Christmas Day is our Lord’s in a peculiar way. The calendar of Alexander the Great is gone; that of Julius Caesar follows it to oblivion. Yet all acts of Congress, all checks of commerce, and all letters of love are touched with the chronology of Jesus Christ. The calendar went down from Bethlehem glorifying and praising God. The almanac was converted so that it dates thenceforth were to bear the name of the Lord. Christmas means that all time belongs to him of whose kingdom there shall be no end. Christmas is the ceaseless festival of divine love, the revelation of the Eternal Heart to old hearts.

Men always have hope of a better world when they see the miracle of Christmas. All selfishness, bitterness, and hatred pause, and for a day surrender to the sweet charm of a little divine Prince who cast his spell over the earth 2000 years ago, a spell that has not been broken, a charm that has increased to become a splendid dominion, stretching around the earth and from pole to pole. There are some certainties as a result of what happened nearly 2000 years ago at Christmas time.

First of all, we have the certainty of historical fact. Luke’s intention was to write history; fully, accurately, convincingly. He claims to be believable because of the accuracy of his research among the best authorities: “It was his aim to show all Christians, and especially Gentiles, on how firm a basis of fact their belief was founded. The Savior had come, and he had come to save the whole human race: hence Christmas is historical fact. We may know the certainty of the precious and beautiful things of Christians, which we have believed in which we cherish everlastingly.

Secondly, we have the certainty of divine Incarnation. Luke’s account is given that we may know of a certainty that the birth of Jesus marks the Incarnation of the Son of God. The angel Gabriel, and his annunciation to Mary, said of her promised ‘, Jesus, “He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Most High,” “and the holy thing which is begotten shall be called the Son of God.” In the angelic communication to the shepherds, Mary’s child is referred to as “Savior” and as “Christ the Lord.” In the presentation account, he is referred to as “the Lord’s Christ.” These names describe his person, nature and character. They indicate his divine nature, his deity. He is the eternal Word of God incarnate. He reveals the glory of the only begotten Son of the Father; the fullness of God’s grace and truth. The incarnation of the eternal Christ means that God has fully come into human life, that we might know him, have fellowship with him, receive his salvation, and do his holy will. “The Word of God, Jesus Christ, on account of his great love for mankind, became what we are in order to make us what he is himself.”

John 1:14 says, “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory of the only Son from the Father.” God sent his Son to dwell among us so that we might have an example to know how God wants us to live our lives. We have an example in Jesus Christ of how

we should go about doing good. As Christians, we have a great responsibility to them in our world that need our help.

Thirdly, we have the certainty of supernatural relevant revelation. What would Christmas be if there were no angels with their good tidings of great joy and their heavenly music of glory and peace? If there were no “star of wonder, star of night;” to guide wayfaring men to the infant light? If there were no exultant, spirit born songs of priestly preparer, Virgin Mary, the temple saints to greet and welcome the Messiah? If there were no Christmas miracle of the infant Son of God lying in the manger? But all of these are an integral part of Christmas.

There is a poem entitled “Always a Star”
There’s always a star, If the eyes wish to see.
For the wise travel far, When their vision is free.
There is always a child, In a manger so bare,
But the angels of God, Stand guarding Him there.
Wise men of today, From near and afar,
Seek light through the Child, In the peace of the Star.

Dr. Clovis Chappell preached about the shepherd of Christmas who saw but did not follow the star. Decades later he held a grandson on his knee. He told the steering story of that night. When he finished the boy said: “Is that all? What did you do when you heard the good news? Was it true? Was the Christ Child really born?” And, the old man shook a pathetic, snowy white head and answered: “I never knew. Some say it was true; some say it was all a myth. I did not take the trouble to go and see.”

Is that the way it is with us, do we know the truth of the Christmas story or have we not bothered to go and see, have not bothered to find out for ourselves what the truth of the story is? If we haven’t, we’ll never know for sure. When we think we are so busy that we don’t have time for God, when we have placed high values on the wrong things in life, then we too will never know the truth of Jesus’ birth and why God’s Son was born on this earth.

All of the reverent and faithful souls who had anything to do with the reception of the infant Savior received divine revelation by supernatural signs. Zacharias, Elizabeth, Mary, the shepherds, and Simeon and Anna.

Martin Luther said, “Surely, we should read that the shepherds shaved their heads, put on cowls, and went into the monasteries. But no, we read that they returned. Where did they return? They returned to their sheep and a good thing for their sheep that they did.

The revelation in Christ Jesus is more than a revelation in word. The Word became flesh, and it was not only something we can hear; it is something we can see. He not only startled men’s ears, as with music

which had never before been heard in their gray, unlovely streets, but he also startled men's eyes as with a light which had never before fallen on sea or land. He not only talked about the heavenly life; he lived it. His life on earth was a transcript of the life in heaven. As we gaze upon him, we can watch the process of incarnation. The heavenly is imagined fourth in the earthly, and it is taking form in human life and story.

Every movement of Jesus spells a word of the heavenly literature.

Every feature in Jesus is a line of the invisible life

Every gesture tells a story.

Every one of his earthly relationships unfolds the nature of the heavenly communion. The eternal breaks through every moment, and the light is tempered to our mortal gaze. The revelation never ceases. Everything in Jesus is a ministry of revelation. He is revelation; "Jesus said "I am the truth." His earthly life reveals the landscape of the heavenly fields.

If, therefore, I would know what heaven is like, I must listen to the word of Jesus, and with eager reverent eyes, I must follow the word made flesh.

Fourth, we have the certainty of human redemption. The purpose of Luke's Gospel throughout is to declare the certainty that Christ has come to be the universal Savior of mankind. Christ came into the world to save us from our sins. Not only the Infancy Gospel, but also the Gospel of the later life and ministry of Jesus, "the friend of sinners," and supremely, the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus show how he fulfilled his God appointed mission of becoming the Savior of the world. Many of the teachings of Jesus that emphasize his compassion, love, and mercy for all men, such as the parables of the Good Samaritan and the Prodigal Son, are found in Luke's Gospel alone. In addition, Luke wrote his other great history, the Book of Acts, to show how Christianity was destined to be carried to all men and nations.

If Jesus Christ were to be born in our town and our community today, what would happen to him? There is no doubt that by some he would be crucified again. This is evidence by the fact that some of us are crucifying him daily by the way we act, the way we live our lives, and the way we treat our fellowman.

There is no doubt that for some he would not seem sufficiently important to provide room for him in the end. Some people, regardless of who a person is, would do nothing to help him. We are not about to be inconvenienced. If the other fellow has a problem, that's his worry, not mine. I'll take care of myself, you take care of yourself, whether you are able or not.

There is no doubt that some few would welcome and adore him. Some of us are prepared. We know and believe. There are too few that would indeed welcome Christ if he were to be born here in Fultonham. Not enough of us take our Christianity seriously. We do not put Jesus Christ first in our lives because of the

many other things that interest us. How do you get people to wake up? I've asked myself this question a good many times. I know you don't give up, even though sometimes we would like to. I do know you keep on trying. You ask God for help and guidance. You pray that his spirit may touch other people's lives and help them to become alive again. Really this is what the Christmas season is all about. We are supposed to stop and listen to God's message to us. It's a good time also for re-evaluating our own life; which way are we headed?

If I were to ask you whose birthday we celebrate on Christmas, you would say, "It's Christ birthday that we celebrate." And that would be the right answer, for Christmas is Christ day. It is his birthday. That is the most important thing to remember about Christmas. It is his day, and not ours.

That is something which is easy to say, but it is not as easy to live by. A minister was visiting in a home of some friends on Christmas Day. Naturally, he expected to find a scene of merriment and jollity. But he was disappointed. The little boy in the home had not received the present he had set his heart on. He had wanted a bicycle and, although he had been given many splendid and wonderful gifts, he was sulking and wrathful. His behavior greatly distressed his parents, and they, too, were saddened. They had thought carefully about the matter and have felt that the boy was not yet old enough for a bike.

This little boy who found no joy in Christmas, had forgotten one thing which is necessary to have a happy Christmas. He had forgotten that Christmas is Christ's day, not his day.

Let us remember Christ on his day. We must remember how he came as a tiny baby, how he grew up in a little village, where he worked in his father's shop, how he went out among men as a teacher and a friend, a healer and a helper, and at last, how he gave himself on the cross to save us, and then rose from the grave in eternal triumph! No wonder the heavens opened, and the angels sang at the hour of his birth! Let us think of him and not of ourselves and praise him with happy songs and cheerful spirits. For Christmas is Christ's day not ours. Indeed we shall then have the true Christmas spirit which Christ came to impart.

The Christian Message

Scripture: Isaiah 9:6-7; Luke 2:1-14

The text is chosen from Colossians 1:17; “He is before all things, and by him all things consist.”

Christmas is the story of heavenly love in action, aiming at assisting helpless humanity to attain that heavenly state for which it had originally been planned. Christ birth was no afterthought on God’s part. It had been planned and prepared for over many centuries. God created both the hope and hunger which Christmas inspires, and he satisfies the hope and fulfills the hope in his Incarnate Son.

First of all, God satisfies the hope and fulfills it in prophecy. As we listen to the voice of Messianic prophecy, we know that those which carried divine hope to the soul of Israel have their complete fulfillment in the soul of the new Israel, which is the Christian Church. The divine Redeemer has come to earth and fulfilled his mission for men. He is our Emmanuel, “God with us.” The prophecy, limited in meaning in the age which first received it, is now fulfilled to us in Jesus Christ, who has completed it in himself.

Secondly, God satisfies the hope and fulfills the hope in time. Christ, the eternal Son, stooped to our human level to be born as a helpless babe. It was not birth into the appearance of human flesh. But unto its reality with all its present limitations. Christ is both perfect God and perfect man born of the earth, earthly, yet God’s only begotten Son; Human and divine; Deity in the form of human flesh. The Lord of heaven is seen in the form of a servant, and Infinity is pressed into the hurrying hour of a mortal life.

He who was before all things and in whom all things consist, became man for us and for our salvation.

Thirdly, God satisfies the hope and fulfills the hope in humanity. The essence of the Christmas message is that the child of Bethlehem “be born in us today.” this means the rebirth of our fallen humanity into the perfect humanity of God’s Incarnate Son. Such a spiritual experience is no longer a hope, as it is under the Old Testament, but rather now a glorious possibility. We can begin a new life in Jesus Christ, for all things become new to those who truly believe in him and try to follow him.

Your life can be changed, right now, by truly accepting Jesus Christ into your life. This is what the Christian faith is about. This is the central theme of the message of Christmas. Let Christ be born into your heart now. Become a changed person and for the first time know a real peace and contentment in your heart.

Fourthly, God satisfies the hope and fulfills the hope in action. Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace, came to guide our feet into the way of peace with God and man. This means the acceptance of the divine forgiveness in Christ, and fellowship with our brethren throughout the whole human race. We must become God’s messenger in telling the truths which we have received to a waiting and a needy world. We ourselves must live the Gospel in our lives.

2nd Corinthians 4:6 says, “For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”

There are many attitudes towards Christians. (1) That of hard-pressed souls who say, “I’ll be relieved when Christmas is over.” Delivery man, sales workers, lovely folks, planning and preparation, it’s too much. (2) That of the business opportunist who tries to extort everything they can out of Christmas while it last. (3) That of the dreamy eyed creatures from whom Christmas is merely an excursion into the land of make believe.

What is the underlying weakness in these attitudes? Simply that these people have missed somehow the true meaning of Christmas. That’s what is wrong with too many of us; Christmas is the same as any other holiday and we haven’t grasped the true meaning of it. We have seen one of the highest and holiest days of the year turned into a secular holiday. Why has our Christian conscious not been outraged by what we see? What are we, as servants of the Prince of Peace, doing to make Christmas a holy day in our community? We shall put the Gospel into Christmas when we rediscover the fact of Christmas. When we strip away the holly, tinsel, and evergreen, we come face to face with the fact that something happened 1969 years ago which has made everything different ever since. No one can read the Old Testament without being convinced that Christmas originated not merely in the stable at Bethlehem but was in the intention of the Father from the very time his creation had gone astray. We celebrate an eternal fact that became real in a historical event, in a person, Jesus Christ.

We shall put the gospel into Christmas when we rediscover the purpose of Christmas which is to bring the light of God closer to the life of man. At the very heart of Christmas is God who became man in order to put sense and meaning into life and to tell us the truth about it.

We shall put the Gospel into Christmas when we rediscover the note of sacrifice. Christmas cost something. To take seriously the fact and purpose of Christmas and translate them into daily living will be costly.

The first Christmas service was conducted, not in a temple or cathedral or synagogue, but in the great out-of-doors, out in the fields. The tidings of Christ’s birth echoed from the skies.

The first Christmas congregation was not composed of the priest, the scholar, or the pharisee. The priest was probably too preoccupied with his ritual, the scholar too steeped in his experiments, and the pharisee too absorbed in his creeds, to hear the heavenly announcement. But God always speaks to those who are prepared in their hearts to listen. The shepherds of Judea were the first to hear this sermon from the skies.

The first Christmas service was at night. It was night not only because the sun had gone down; the world itself was shrouded in spiritual and moral gloom, as it is today. In every area of life it was night when Jesus came. But it is often when things are darkest that God reveals himself. (1) It was night in Egypt when the children of Israel were released from the bondage of Pharaoh. (2) It was night when Samuel discerned the

voice of the Lord calling him to be a prophet to his people. (3) It was at night that God gave David some of his most beautiful songs. (4) It was night when Paul and Silas prayed and sang their way out of the Philippian jail. (5) And it was night when God was born at Bethlehem.

Emerson said, “the only gift is a portion of thyself.” “God so loved the world that he gave.” only by giving our substance in ourselves to him in response to this gift of his Son’s will his glory to shed abroad the Christmas- tide.

There is nothing wrong with Christmas trees, gift exchanging and all the other traditional things we do at Christmas time, however, if these things become the main reason for celebrating Christmas then we have missed the whole meaning of purpose of the birth of Jesus Christ. Let us this Christmas give ourselves wholly and completely to Jesus Christ. Let us become the kind of persons and Christians God wants us to become. If you do this, I know Christmas will have far more meaning than ever before in your life.

Abiding Realities in a Changing World

Scripture: Isaiah 9:6-7; Luke 2:1-14

The text is chosen from I Corinthians 13:13; “Now abideth faith, hope, love, these three.”

“The old order changeth.” One never needs to take time to prove that. It has always been changing; it is now changing; and it probably always will change.

Psalms 102: 26-27 says, “They shall be changed; but thou art the same.” One of the undeniable facts of life is the fact of change. Everything changes; the city, the town, the world, our way of life, the church, and each of us.

The fact of change is not new. Things do not always change for the better. Keep your mind open to the fact of change and to the possibility that it may be for the bitter. Some people like to change things just for the sense of change, not especially to make conditions better.

However there are some things that do not change: natural law, the sense of proportion, the basic principles of life, and Jesus Christ is always the same and he will always be the same. We may change but God does not.

Our chief concern is this: in all the flux of life, the change, the decay, is there anything that abides? To that question great religion has a ready and certain answer. And in no place has it been more simply, or more effectively stated than in the words of Saint Paul in our text this morning.

First, there is faith. Ultimately, we must all have faith in something or someone. Life would break down completely without it. It is not a question, then, of faith or no faith; the question always is: in what or in whom shall we put our faith?

Vital religion, life giving religion, is grounded in an adventurous faith- the faith that at the heart of the world there is a good and just God; the faith that life has meaning and purpose; the faith that we human beings, frail and limited as we are, are nevertheless something more than mere puppets- dangling at the ends of wires manipulated by some celestial monstrosity; the faith that the cross of Jesus Christ is no mere incident or accident of history, but the revelation of what is deepest in the universe.

In a very real sense, the measure of man and the health of a man depend, first, upon the magnitude of his faith and, second, upon that in which he puts his faith. Great faith in the wrong things or a little faith in the right things spells emptiness and asks, if not tragedy.

How does faith in God enable one “to stand up” against anything that can happen to one in the universe? Such a faith gives meaning to life as well as direction and purpose. If we have no faith in God; if our lives

are empty as far as religion is concerned, our lives become meaningless and purposelessness. Without God we cannot possibly know what direction to go in.

Such a faith gives us something enduring to live by. When everything around us is cracking and sagging and giving way, such a faith undergirds us with unyielding foundations. Faith in God gives us the foundation we need especially in the days when we as parents are trying desperately to raise our children to the best of our abilities. The many obstacles that are placed in our ways; the many temptations that are placed before our young people, we need faith in God to see us through. Our young people need the same kind of faith to see them through also.

The world today is long in knowledge and woefully short on things that make us wise unto salvation. We can read the story of the evolution of our planet in the rocks, but that does not save us from the threat of destroying ourselves. We can travel through the air at the speed faster than sound, but that does not save us from hatred and fear. We can surround ourselves with comforts that no previous generation dreamed of, but that does not save us from sin. We can pour over the written record of the wisdom of the past, but that does not create new life in us. The answer is faith in God, faith in Jesus Christ who cares for each of us.

The second abiding reality is hope. As a matter of fact, where there is vital and vibrant faith, there will always be a profound hope. Faith is the mother, Hope and Courage the twin daughters.

Tennison speaks of “the mighty hopes that make us men.” In one respect at least, life may be represented by an ellipse with its two foci. At one focus is experience; at the other is hope. Take hope out of life and we would all be crushed by the experiences of life.

1 Corinthians 15:58 reads, “My brethren, be steadfast- knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.”

The scripture leads us to believe that there is a future in our efforts when we work for the God of justice.

In the light of our religious faith there is a future in our efforts when we work for the God of truth.

There is a future in our work when we work for the God of hope.

If we had no hope for the future, our lives would be pretty pointless and meaningless and there would be no need for us to go on. We would stop right where we are, but God does give us the hope we need.

The more desperate the situation in which men find themselves and the world in which they live, the more they want and need the hope that present difficulties will not last forever and that the day will come when righteousness shall be exalted and truth enthroned, when justice shall flow down from the mountains and men shall unite under God’s spirit to create the Kingdom of good will and peace. As Christians this is what we have to look forward to. There will be no sadness, sickness, wickedness. Nothing will prevail but peace, happiness and contentment.

To know the thoughts and deeds that have marked men's progress is to feed the great hearts that of humanity through the centuries, and if one does not feel the pulsations a heavenward striving, one must indeed be deaf to the harmonies of life.

The third abiding reality is love. Above every period of history and every passing world scene there towers a Cross, and hanging on it is a man, who out of love, keeps crying, "Father, forgive them, forgive them, forgive them." And always over mankind there rules, the everlasting love of God, haunting the hearts of men, saying to them, "Come to me, Come to me." John 3:16 says, "For God, so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him, should not perish, but have everlasting life." What greater love could be bestowed upon us than the love which God has shown towards us. There is no greater love. God gave this all his all that we might live.

And now, abideth faith, hope, love, these three. That faith, that hope, that love, get their meaning because they forever point us to someone beyond ourselves, even to the God of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Hebrews 13:8 says, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever."

This was one of the great convictions on which the early church was built. Like other convictions, it sprang from experience; it was one of the amazing discoveries the first disciples made at the resurrection. Jesus, in the "Upper Room", said to his disciples, "Remember, whatever happens, nothing will stop me from loving you. My death will not stop me; your sin will not stop me."

Throughout the centuries the Christian faith has run in various channels of creed and ritual. But Jesus does not change.

He awakens the same love and admiration in men and women of every age.

He makes the same call on their faith and loyalty whatever their time or place.

Doctrines may differ, but when faith breaks into music, the melody is the same. When men come to sing about Jesus Christ, their voices blend because at that point their hearts are one.

During the years leaders of thought and action have arisen in plenty, each with some new facet of Christian doctrine. Groups of Christian at various times claimed to have found some fresh truth breaking out of God's Holy Word; but when we reach down to the root of the faith that gives them heart for living and light in darkness, we find it in Jesus the Word made flesh, the same yesterday, today and forever. Our ways of stating our faith may differ. Theology may divide us. The rituals some of us use in worship may be unintelligible to others, but at the name of Jesus every knee is bowed and beneath the surface we are one.

There are other problems besides the those which meet us in our private lives. This is a changing world. Has Christ the word for the conflicting relationships that arise in industry today and in the international antagonisms that bring down on us all the shadow of universal destruction? Some people think that science has the answer, or politics, though they are not so sure of this as they were. We are beginning to see that with all our knowledge and industrial skills there are old roots of selfishness, few, and suspicious in human heart that need to be slain if, with all our wisdom, we are to find the secret of unity and peace. Jesus alone has the key to the locked door behind which these evil things lurk in the darkness. The trouble is that we keep him standing there unrecognized or unheeded. He has no cut and dried ruler to give us; but he has principles that give us light to see the road. These principles still hold the secret for which we are groping. "Heaven and earth shall pass away," he said, "but my words shall not pass away." They are the same for today as for yesterday.

So it is also for the unknown future. What lies across the frontier in the undiscovered country? We do not know. Pictures have been drawn but they are all inadequate. "We see through a glass dimly" when we peer into the future and in our depressing moments we guess and fear. But Jesus still has the illuminating word that lights of the darkness.

Therefore to the line, "Change and decay in all around I see", we must add another line even as Henry Lyte added it, "Oh thou who changes not, abide with me."

Indeed, God does abide with us. People change, conditions change, times change, but the things in life that really matter do not change and they will never change. God does not change and will never change. We can thank God for that.

Luke 11:9-10 reads, "And I tell you, ask, and it will be given you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who ask receives, and he who seeks finds and to him who knocks it will be opened."

A man told the story concerning himself. "For a few days my wife and I journeyed through New England. One night, after getting comfortably settled in a Boston hotel, I went down to the hotel lobby for an evening newspaper. When I returned to our room, the door was locked, and my wife did not respond to my knock. Finally, it occurred to me that I was at the wrong room. With some sense of confusion and embarrassment I made my way back to the lobby and asked the desk clerk, "Can you tell me the room number for Mr. Peterson?" "How do you spell the name?" was his response. And then he asked, "Is that Mr. Peterson from Atlanta?" We agreed that we were talking about the same person. "The room number for Mr. Peterson is 672." Keeping my identity concealed from the desk clerk, I left the lobby with as much dignity as I could command under the circumstances."

Mr. Peterson later confessed that this episode set him to thinking, and it might well set us to thinking. He said, "It is an empty feeling to realize that you do not know where you belong. 600 rooms in the hotel and

only one is the right one. Long corridors and many doors, but only one bears the correct number for you.”

Isn't it a great feeling to know exactly where you belong? There is a place for each of us in the community, church, and family. There is some work in the world that can best be done by me. My own place and my own work I must find. This I must have for a sense of security and satisfaction as a human being.

Then Mr. Peterson, after the clerk had established the identity of the person whose room he sought, felt as though he were going to meet himself. “What would I look like? How would I eat? What kind of a person would I be?”

I suppose that we will meet ourselves occasionally this year. Let us imagine meeting ourselves on the last day of 1973. I wonder what kind of person I will be.

Indeed 1972 is nearly over. If you had planned on accomplishing something during the year and did not, I'm afraid it's too late. Sometimes it's good to look back and take inventory. But more important is the present and plans for the future. God is interested in us from this moment on. Our lives may not have been too rosy up to this point, but if we realize our mistakes and sins, confess them, and really and truly want to live or try to live the right kind of life, God will forgive you and help you from this point on. This should be our goal as we approach the new year. It is true that everything around this is changing, including people. You can change too, for the better. We can look forward to 1973 with faith, hope and love because God has sacrificed his only son for our sakes. It is never too late to become a follower of Jesus Christ. Let Christ into your life. Make this your New Year's resolution now.

The New Calendar

Scripture: John 15:1-17

The text is chosen from Psalm 90:12; “So teach us to number our days.

The calendar is one of God’s splendid gifts to us what a blessing it is: it helps us in handling time.

It is our way of keeping up with the days, weeks, months, and years.

It makes possible a record of our activities.

It is a great aid to memory.

It enables us to make definite plans for the future and to meet our engagements.

First of all, the calendar is handed to you. You did nothing to get it. It was freely given.

The calendar symbolizes the year God has just allowed us all to enter. Sometimes we take our years for granted, but God gives them to us freely and by his mercy and grace, not by our merit.

God expects us to be grateful. He wants us to regard time as a sacred trust and to be good stewards of every day. Often, we waste our time with trivial things when we could be using our time to help God.

Secondly, the calendar is yours. It is personally, intimately your own. You can do anything you please with it. Significant experiences may attach themselves to the days and months. Your calendar will record your thinking, speaking, and acting. Be they good or bad, they will be your own.

Basically we can make of our lives exactly what we want to make. God has left the free choice to us. He is more than willing to meet us halfway and help us in all of life.

Thirdly, the calendar is brand new. We all like to get something brand new and we have this opportunity each year, in fact each moment of each day.

The calendar is not stained, blotted, blotched, marked up, ragged, and torn like the old 1969 calendar.

There is a human tendency to want to start things anew. The fundamental reason is that we are all imperfect. The essence of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is that God will allow us to wipe the slate clean and take a fresh start.

1969 has come and gone everything that happened, everything we did is behind us. 1970 is a new year and a time for profiting by our mistakes, a time to resolve to be better persons and to live better lives. We should start from this point, putting behind us the past and putting the future in front.

We can make a fresh start anytime a man anywhere determines that he is through with straining, ineffective, shotty, shameful living, and throws himself on the mercy of God. What a wonderful gift we have from God, the gift of forgiveness. It is strictly up to us individually what kind of lives we want to live. God will forgive us and help us to live the right kind of lives, if we really want to.

Fourth, the calendar is just for 1970.

It does not have attached to it old, blotted sheets from 1969. It does not contain pages from future years.

The fact that God is giving us a calendar just for 1970 certainly means this: he wants us to live to the fullest in 1970, he does not want us to try to live 1969 all over with its mistakes, failures, and grudges. He does not want us to pull into 1970 possible future worries, strains, and sorrows of 1971, 1972 or 1973. God wants us to say, “forgetting the things that are behind in 1969, and ignoring the possible troubles in 1971, I shall live faithfully in 1970.

1970 is the year we should be concerned about now. First things come first. The past is gone. Let us live the present.

Fifth, the calendar and the year it represents are going to be used by you. You cannot escape doing something. The daily experiences will make or break you. Here is, for instance, February 10. Will that be a day when you will be unkind, lazy or do a shameful thing? Here are 52 Sundays. Will you on these days ignore the church, God, and the welfare of your souls? Here is March 5. Will you on that day try to drive a sharp bargain or attempt to hurt someone? 1970 has 365 days, how many days will you live without talking with God?

The Daily experiences may bring you opportunities to serve, to make right your relationship with your fellow man and God, and to live abundantly and gloriously.

How can you live rightly in the new year?

The primary requirement is your determination to live at your best.

It is important to take stock of yourself. In the light of Christ examine your heart.

Repent of the wrongs you have done.

Give yourself to prayer, Bible study, public worship, and service. I am not saying you have to spend your entire life and study for we all know this is impossible. I know once you become interested you will want to spend many free moments in it.

Dwell daily in the presence of Jesus Christ and ask him to be the companion on your way. There is no better way to start each day than in prayer to God. The whole day is brighter, things work out better, your

attitude is different, and God will give you guidance for that day. Start each day in the presence of him who has given you each glorious day.

I cannot think of a better way to start the year than in Holy Communion with our Lord.

John 15:5 says, “I am the vine, you are the branches; he that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bring forth much fruit; for without me, you can do nothing.”

Branch and vine are living things, and the branch depends upon the vine for life. Jesus was not talking about vineyards, but about people in relation to him and each other. He is the vine, the source of life, strength, and productivity.

John 15:5 says something of the organized church today and of the parish, the basic unit of church life. As Jesus is the true vine, source of life we are granted by baptism, and we are expected to do two things: to grow and to produce. The extent of our growth and the productivity is measured by our actions.

Every now and then some unthinking church man asks, “What has the church done for me?” Can you imagine a branch, had it the human capacity of self-awareness, asking, “What has the vine done for me?” Jesus reminds his hearers that every branch which does not bear fruit is pruned out and burned, that the vine may become stronger and that the other branches may be more productive. Could not this be a judgment upon indifferent, unproductive Christians today?

Ask yourself what you have done for the church lately. Ask yourself not what the vine can do for the branches but ask rather more, what the branches can do for the vine and what you and I can do to glorify our God.

As we partake in our Lord’s Supper this day, let us put away our faults, our sins, our mistakes. Let us take on a new life with Jesus Christ at the center. Let us come prepared to meet our Lord at his table this day. Let us start 1970 off right in the sight of God.

You Live What You Think

Scripture: Matthew 6:25-34

The text is chosen from Proverbs 23:17; “for as he thinketh in his heart, so is he.”

You live in the direction of your thoughts. Christianity is a way of looking at life which results in a certain kind of living. Jesus Christ was born on this earth to show us the kind of example we shall live by. Christ put things in the proper sequence when he spoke of the way, the truth, and the life as recorded in John 14: 6. Christianity is what you conceive to be the ultimate nature of things, putting forth in it and giving your devotion to it. Your living is determined far more by your attitude than by your ancestors. What you are doing now in your life is determined by what you think about life itself. Great living is the results of great thinking. Philippians 4: 8 says; “Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.”

Ephesians 4:2 reads, “Accept life with humility and patience.”

Colossians 3:13 says, “Accept life, and be most patient and tolerant with one another.”

We can run away from life. Many have tried to do just that by drinking, by taking drugs, by physically running, by suicide.

We can take the path of least resistance. Many times, we know persons who do enough to barely get by because they do not have to exert too much effort. Sometimes we are not willing to go out of our way to help someone else because we are selfish and self-centered. The path of least resistance is easier and often times we think it, even if it means sacrificing a principle. We should be willing to stand up and speak out for what we know and believe to be the right way.

We can manage life for some selfish purpose. If I think a certain way of life is to my advantage, and I will profit from it, then that is the way to go.

We can accept life by giving it to Jesus Christ. If we do, he will give us the guidance at all of life. We certainly all need his guidance. To accept life and so live it that we count in God’s plan for his universe, at least three things are necessary. 1) Life must be planned and purposeful. Each of us needs a purpose for our lives. 2) Life must be disciplined. We can’t always do the things we want to on the first impulse. There are others to consider, especially the members of our families, our community, our nation, our world, and our God. 3) Life must be dedicated and consecrated. If we dedicate our lives to Jesus Christ, he will be there constantly at our sides, showing us how to live our lives and we will definitely have a purpose to them. So, accept life and live it to the best of your ability with God’s help.

First of all- life is more struggle than reward.

Many people want to succeed without effort. This may be possible for a short time, but eventually little effort deserves little reward. We must give before we get. Matthew 6: 33 reads; “But seek first his Kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well.” If we put God in the center of our lives, the things we are concerned about, that we worry about, will become trivial; in fact, the material things of life, will be much easier to straighten out when God becomes first.

In the beatitudes Jesus is saying that you must struggle before you obtain. You must feel deeply before your heart is comforted. You must give yourself in mercy before you obtain mercy before you can see God or good than anything; You must struggle to be pure in heart. Many are under the impression today that the world owes them a living. They feel that nothing is required on their parts, that everything will be handed to them for just the asking. They really become quite upset when this doesn’t come to pass. But they soon find that this is not the case. We have to give in order to receive.

Many people are trying to figure out how little they can do. They are thinking of the recognition, appreciation, and respect they can claim and not of the struggle.

In 2nd Timothy 4: 7-8, Paul says, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.”

Paul put struggle first and reward second. First, he achieved and then he obtained.

Better to try all things and find all empty, then to try nothing and leave your life a blank.

Secondly, life is more mental than environmental.

We Christians are meant to be greater than anything that can happen to us, to be superior to our environment, to rise above it and win a victory over it. We should be reminded of what Jesus said to John in his gospel chapter 16:33; “I have said this to you, that in me, you may have peace. In the world, you will have tribulation; but be a good cheer, I have overcome the world.”

Paul reminds us that we are not to conform to the world but that we are to be transferred by the renewing of our minds as we read in Romans 12:2; “Don’t be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may have you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

We have in our Christian faith the resources to remake the world and not to let the world remake us. That’s why it is important for us as Christians to stand up and speak out against those things that are happening around us, we know are wrong. This is our responsibility. We cannot be indifferent. We cannot close our eyes and ears to things that are non-Christian.

One of the greatest things ever said about Christian people was said of those first Christians in Rome, as Paul says in Philippians 4:22; “All the Saints salute you, chiefly, they are of Caesar’s household.” Of all places to be a saint, Caesar’s household was the worst. Yet they were saints in spite of their environment.

I wonder what Paul or Jesus Christ would say of us? We have the opportunity to be of Christ’s kingdom, and we can be of his kingdom, it’s our choice. We certainly do not have to conform to the world around us.

To some Christians, a difficult environment is a challenge which unifies their inner life, puts them on edge, arouses their faith, and releases within them resources which make them superior to their environment. If you think of life as mental more than environmental, you will work upon it to change it, to improve it, to rise above, and be superior to it, and you will win a victory over it. This is what Christ wants us to do, and he is willing to help us do it.

Opportunities do not come with their value stamped upon them. A day dawns quite like other days; in it a single hour comes, quite like others but in that day, and in that hour, the chance of a lifetime face is us. To face every opportunity of life thoroughly and ask its meaning bravely, and earnestly is the only way to meet these supreme opportunities when they come, whether often-faced or disguised.

Thirdly, life as more spiritual than material.

To live up to your best, think of life, a spiritual rather than material. Then your life will be centered, not in fear, but in faith, for the spiritual is stronger than the material. Many people today live constantly in fear of something because they have not yet learned that the spiritual life is stronger than the material. That’s why people can have all of the material things they can possibly have in the world and still, they are not happy and content. They are still searching for something to fulfill their lives. The answer to life is right in front of us, but sometimes we cannot see the forest from the trees.

To believe that life is spiritual, is to believe that the universe is our home and God our Father gives your life backing. In your life, our hidden sources for great living, horizons around it, and purpose running through it.

Fourthly, life is more external than temporal.

Too many people who have linked to their lives with the life of the church, we can say; “You have now entered a great stream of life that has flowed out of the past and will flow into the future. You will become a part of that stream, and it is for you to so live that the stream of the church will become pure, stronger, and better for your children and children’s children than when you entered” Greatness in living is linking your life with something that’s belongs not merely to your age, but to all ages and that will last on after you have left the world.

I have heard people use the excuse they do not come to church or belong to a church because the church is filled with a bunch of hypocrites. If everyone felt that way, there would be not church. We have to become a part of a church and help to make it better by God's standards.

Greatness is living as though you expect to live forever. Greatness is not merely living for those things which are here today and gone tomorrow, but for what is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

It may be a mother who brings up her child in the faith and conviction that she is molding life not merely for a few earthly years, but for all time eternity.

It may be a politician, who makes a speech, not merely to get votes, but because he desires, really desires a better country of which God need not to be ashamed. We certainly could use more of this kind of politicians today.

It may be an artist who writes a poem or a book or build a statue which will outlast his few brief years, and which will receive recognition not merely of time, but of eternity, the praise not merely of men, but of God.

When we have truly accepted Jesus Christ, into our hearts as our personal Lord and Savior, we can think of life as eternal because this is one of the great promises we have to look forward to. We also begin to build a faith that is unshakable and will see us through all the tragedies and hardships of life.

II Timothy 1:12 says; "I know whom I have believed."

Charles Blondin, the famous tight rope walker, upon one occasion, waiting to commence his performance when he noticed the school boy standing by, all go with interest. Addressing him, and pointing up to the rope, he said, "Do you believe I can walk across that rope?"

"Yes, I do; was the reply.

"Do you believe I can carry you on my back and walk across?"

Unhesitatingly came the answer, "Yes, certainly."

"Very well then," said Blondin, bending down, "Jump on my back."

But the boy had disappeared. He said, he believed, but he would not trust.

So many times we Christians are like the little schoolboy. We tell Christ that we have faith in him, but we

are not willing to step out on his promises and trust him.

Faith without trust is dead. It is necessary that Christians have a working faith before God can use them to full advantage

Indeed, we do live in the direction of our thoughts and being true followers of Jesus Christ, our thoughts in our lives will be in God's direction. Let us become the kind of people God can really use in his church.

Ye are Witnesses

Scripture: Matthew 28:16-20

The text is chosen from Acts 1:8; “Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Spirit is come upon you; and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth.”

Names of three missionary martyrs, who died during the Boxer Uprising in China, are carved on a monument on the campus of Oberlin College. On the arch above the names is this verse. “Not that I count to my life, dear to myself.” At the center of the monument on a piece of blood red marble are the words, “Ye are witnesses.” I do not think we have to go quite that far to be Christ witnesses, but we certainly have to start taking our Christian responsibility more seriously.

The church originated with Jesus, not merely because he gave the impulse which led to its formation, but in a more definite way. It consisted at the outset of his personal followers, who aimed at continuing, after he was gone, the life which they had known in his company. They believed in his promises. They sought to obey his precepts. They maintained the brotherly relation into which he had brought them. They perpetuated his custom of a common meal and thought of him as still presiding. The church was simply the group of Jesus’ followers seeking to continue as they had been before. Their members grew, but they went on observing the fellowship under Jesus’ direction, and in this manner, the church arose.

We are witnesses, not only by a divine commission, but also because of what we know about Jesus Christ. (1) A witness knows something through personal experience. If we haven’t had this personal experience with Jesus Christ, we cannot be witnesses because we have nothing to witness for. All those who know Christ as Savior and Lord, we have a responsibility to be witnesses to his truth, and to share with others, the good news of salvation and life in Jesus Christ. (2) We have a divine commission that has never been repealed to give the Gospel to all the world, and to relate it to all of life. (3) All our witnessing is not to be done somewhere else. We are witnesses where we are, hour by hour and day by day. We do well to ask ourselves about the kind of witnesses we bear daily as Christians. Will others accept or reject our Savior because of the way we live and serve?

We are witnesses every day wherever we are whether we think so or not. The kind of witness you are depends upon you. If we profess to be Christians, then we had better start living and acting the way Jesus Christ wants us too.

A good example of the kind of witness we should be, and the kind of dedicated persons we should be is revealed in Henry Martyn’s life, an English missionary. With his brilliant student career at Cambridge behind him, then came the call of the Lord to the mission field. Though several attractive, lucrative vocations were open to him, he said: “Here I am Lord; send me to the ends of the Earth; send me to the rough, the savage pagans of the wilderness; send me from all that is called comfort in the Earth; send me

even to death itself, if it but be in the service and in the kingdom.”

When he felt deeply in love with a girl named Lydia, he told her of his call from God to live and minister in India. Was this agreeable to her? It was not. If he would stay in England, he could have her as his bride. If he went to India, it would be without her. Hence the question, like a drumbeater in his brain, “India or Lydia? Lydia or India?”

But Martyn was a mastered man – mastered by love and love’s master, therefore, the mastery was his in a crisis of poignant choice. Pain-drenched yet triumphant was his witness: “My dear Lydia and my duty call me different ways. Yet God has not forsaken me. I am born for God only. Christ is nearer to me than father or mother or sister.” There aren’t very many of us who would make the same choice today, I’m sure.

Secondly – we are not alone in witnessing. (1) We face a variable war of beliefs in the world in which we live. Others bear witness to their faith, and powerful forces are seeking aggressively to win the world for their ideology. Why are we afraid to stand up and speak out for what we know to be the truth? Why don’t we take the time to back our beliefs? Let us not be indifferent to the happenings around us. (2) We are not the only witnesses to our Christian faith. We are a part of a world-wide fellowship. Millions of Christians of many races, nations, and colors join with us in a belief that Jesus Christ is the only hope of the world. If we really believe this, (and we should as Christians), then we should join with the other Christians in witnessing to others of this fact. This is the only way we can obtain the peace we all desire. (3) We are part of a glorious company of those who have lived and died for our faith in the long years of Christian history. Hebrews 12:1-2 says, “Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the pioneer and protector of our faith, who, for the joy that was set before him endured despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.”

Thirdly- we may well ask ourselves of whom and to what we bear witness. (1) Our text makes it clear and Acts 4:12 says, “And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” John 6: 68 says, “Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.”

(2) In his name we are to preach “repentance for the remission of sins.” Mark 1:4 says, “John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance with the forgiveness of sins.” We are to repent and bring forth fruits worthy of repentance. This we never can do alone. But with his help and by his forgiving and redeeming love we can.

I John 1: 9 reads, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” Psalm 103:12 says, “As far as the East is from the West, so far does he remove our transgressions from us.”

(3) There is much in the world today to give us concern. We have many complex problems to face. Grave

social issues challenge us. All must be faced in the light of the truth as we know it in Jesus Christ and in the spirit in which he first bore witness to the truth.

We certainly cannot turn our backs on these problems facing our world today. We cannot be indifferent to them. We cannot ignore them hoping they will go away by themselves. We need help in facing these challenging issues and I believe Jesus Christ is the only source of help we can possibly hope to achieve.

Fourthly – where are we to witness?

Judea was the homeland of those to whom Jesus spoke. So we are to be witnesses in our homeland for Jesus Christ. We must make America more truly Christian, but we must frankly face the fact that our land will not be more Christian until we ourselves and other like us are more Christ-like. We must practice what we preach otherwise our preaching is ineffective.

Samaria was a foreign land and a hostile country. Does it not represent to us those who live on the other side of our man-made barriers? Does it notify the hard areas where it is difficult to witness?

Ours is a worldwide Ministry: “The uttermost part of the earth.” There is no limit to the great commission. We are to go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature. All souls are precious in the sight of the Savior.

Our witness is not to be limited to the geographic world. We are to seek to bear a faithful witness, and to win others in the business world, the social world, the world of sports, and the world of music, art, and literature. No part of life should be untouched by the gospel, and there should be no area in life where we do not seek to apply the principles of our Lord.

Fifthly, how can we bear a more faithful witness ourselves? Our text gives us the answer: “He shall receive power, after the Holy Ghost is come upon you.” How much we need this power beyond ourselves that works for righteousness! We are weak, sinful, and selfish. Alone, we cannot possibly bear a faithful witness, but we are not alone. We claim the promise of one who said, “Lo, I am with you always.” Here is the secret of those who have been “God’s expendables” all through the years and those who have put their lives in his hands to be used as he will. We serve a living savior, and we bear our witness in the light of a cross radiant with his redeeming, love, and an empty tomb, bearing witness to his redeeming life.

How can we bear a more faithful witness? By becoming involved, totally involved. Colossians 3:23 reads, “Whatever you do, do it, hardy, as to the Lord, and not on to men.”

How involved are you with God? Is Christianity a dutiful, cold routine of rituals, such as attending church, daily devotions, table graces, which you mechanically “render” to God? Or are you more involved with your ideas about God and how you think one ought to serve him then with God himself?

How involved are you with God's children? Not how many Christian friends do you have or how many minutes per week you visit with Christians, but with how much sharing, listening, helping, and interceding is a part of your lives? Is the involvement shallow and based on chitchat which one could have with any neighbor, or is it truly Christian? Have you really had an experience with God lately that you can share with others?

How involved are you with non-Christians? Do you seek, or at least welcome, opportunities to share Jesus Christ? Have you entertained anyone in our home during the last six months with the purpose of witnessing to one outside your faith? If and when you meet non-Christians, do you have anything to give spiritually? What is the quality in nature of your contacts with non-Christians? Are they aware of someone who grudgingly puts in many hours in church work or of one where Church stimulates him? The example you set for other people is important to your witnessing and you are constantly being watched whether you know it or not, watched by those outside the church.

We are all involved with something or someone. Maybe high aspirations in our careers or worthwhile goals in the home which are good but not worthy of total involvement. Maybe we are involved only with ourselves-how we appear to others or how inefficient we are or how paralyzed we are with personal fears of one kind or another. Is involvement a schedule or a state of mind? Is it another word for love? Do I want to be involved? If so, how much and what and with whom?

We cannot be witnesses for Christ and his Gospel if we do not have a personal experience of our own, this comes first. Indeed our Savior is alive in us and others know if this is true. We cannot hide it. Christ has given us this great commission to go into all the world and witness for him. Jesus Christ requires our total involvement if we are to be effective witnesses. It's time for us to take our Christianity seriously and go out into the world and proclaim the Gospel to others.

When Prayers Make a Difference

Scripture: Matthew 17:1-20

The text is chosen from Matthew 17:19; “Then came the disciples to Jesus, aghast, and said, Why could not we cast him out?”

The disciples of Jesus had watched and wonder as he healed a blind man and turned a hated tax collector into a humble servant. Jesus was making a difference. Then the day came when a father brought to them his son who had been ill for a long time. “You are his disciples. You walk with him. Heal my son.” The disciples were forced to say, “We are not able.” Those words strike a note in each one of us! Why are we not able to help someone who is in trouble? We belong to the church. We believe in God and in Jesus Christ.

When Christ arrived, he healed the boy. The disciples asked, “Why could not we cast him out? (The devil that was tormenting the boy). And Jesus answered, “This kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting.”

What is prayer? Prayer is the response of the soul in its longing to be united with God. However, and whenever the spirit is lifted to God to be rekindled by contact with him, that is prayer. Prayer is the recognition of the power of God and the realization that we can get power from no other source. It is recognizing that we have no power within ourselves to help ourselves, knowing our utter dependence upon God for every good thing. Prayer is opening the heart to God that he may come in; it is letting down the drawbridge, which stands the space between us and God. We must let it down, but when we do, God crosses over it to us and aid us in crossing back to him.

In Matthew chapter 7:7, we read, “Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.”

Little Annie was struck with wonder when she watched her father calling by telephone. “Daddy, she asked, why do you talk with the wall?” Her father patiently tried to explain to her that by means of the telephone phone one is able to speak to persons over a great distance. But little Annie did not think this could be possible and then her father let her use the telephone by herself.

In regard to prayer, we are sometimes very much like the little girl was in regard to the telephone. It is hard for us to believe that we can talk with God. At times, we cannot imagine that our prayers reach our heavenly father over such an unmeasurable distance. Yeah, Jesus assures us that God is listening to our words. They are not spoken to the wall, but they reach God at the same moment they are spoken or even thought. Indeed we can think a prayer as well as literally talk one to God.

First of all prayer is our answer to God’s question “Where are you?” Prayer is saying, “Here I am, Lord.” Prayer is becoming God-conscious and putting ourselves in his presence. Real prayer, the prayer that moves mountains, that does heal, that does make a difference, is not a speech; it is an act by which we become God-conscious. 1) in such prayer, talking is necessary. We have to unburden ourselves, expressing our things, our wrongs, and our own longing. Words are the means by which we break through to God. 2) but prayer is also waiting for God and an opening of our lives to God.

In prayer, we behold the greatness of God and become partakers of that greatness.

In prayer, we see the patience of God and become partakers in that patience.

In prayer, we understand the purpose of God and make ourselves servants of that purpose.

In prayer, we discover the creative joy and power of God and become endowed with his creative joy and power.

In prayer, we feel the love of God for the world and begin to taste something of that concern which lifts us out of our smallness and narrowness, out of our self-concern and indifference and into a broadening and deepening compassion for others as individuals and as society.

Secondly, such prayer, as we have been talking about, does make a difference. What a difference it would make if we would really pray for the church, saying: "Oh, God, here am I. Use me in this church. Work through me in building this church." Then God will begin to use the church to change this community. Such prayer does not use God as a tool to do our work, nor does it claim that we can do the work ourselves. Rather, it puts us in the position where God can work through us. God will help us do his work if we ask him, and if we want to do what is required of us.

What a difference it would make if we would pray daily for our community and those around us which faces a breakdown a family life and morality. If we pray, "Here am I, Lord, use me to meet the problems of our community." God will work through us and bring healing to this community. 3) what a difference it would make if we would pray for peace, saying, "Let it begin with me." We have at our disposal, a true internationalism, when Christians around the world unite and praying for peace.

We all desire and seek peace for our world, but we are not really willing to do anything about it except talk. Let us each find the peace we seek in our own lives first and then let us spread this good news to others. Let us join with other Christians around the world in praying for the peace we desire. Prayer is powerful and will bring results if we are willing to be persistent.

E. Stanley Jones said, "If I had one gift and only one to make to the Christian church, I would offer the gift of prayer. For everything follows from prayer. Prayer tones up the total life. I find by actual experience; I am better or worse as I pray more or less. If my prayer life sags, my whole life sags with it. If my prayer life goes up, my whole life goes up with it. To fail here is to fail all down the line. To succeed here is to succeed everywhere.

Thirdly, why do our prayers not make such a difference? 1) We do not really believe that prayer will make such a difference. We say with our life that we believe, but in our hearts, we have doubts, we aren't sure and consequently our prayers are ineffective, and we become discouraged and say, what's the use. The reason for the impotence of the disciples was their lack of belief that healing would really be done. In our churches today, we fail to believe that God will really work through us. But if God doesn't work through his

followers, who will he work through? Our faith often is too shallow. We do not put enough faith and trust in God. If we love or have a problem, we often don't turn it over to God because we do not really believe he will take care of it. We need complete confidence and trust and faith that God will take care of us. Too much prayer is ineffective because we have made it look harmless.

There is mighty power in effective prayer. There is a water spider found where some of our country brooks run swiftly among the rocks. This spider has learned way of living without disaster from cascading rapids and without taint of scum of stagnant pools. It creates about itself a tiny bubble of air and in the security of this air chamber, lives its life right in the midst of those forces which might overwhelm it. I have known Christians who summoned themselves with an attitude and atmosphere a prayer. They are not isolated from the hardships of life, but the power of God through prayer gives them a protective armor.

Sometimes we do not really believe that God can accomplish these things through us. Mark 9:23 says; "All things are possible to him that believe it." The disciples had a hard time believing that God could work through them, but the miracle of the Christian faith is that God takes ordinary lives that are surrendered and through them heals the world. The secret I believe is the complete surrender of your life to Jesus Christ. It cannot be a halfway thing. It is either all the way or nothing. This is what the Christ asks of us in return for giving us our salvation.

Why do I believe in prayer?

I believe in prayer because prayer met so much to Jesus Christ. You remember how he went apart from his disciples to pray to his Father. He prayed not only when he was in need of help but at regular time intervals during each and every day.

I believe in prayer because the best of our race has believed in and practiced prayer. Over many years persons from the lowest to the highest in position have practiced and believed in the power of prayer.

I believe in prayer because the best and finest of our race have found in it one of the means to be the development of their talents. We too can develop our talents through prayer. In fact, we may find that we have God given talent. We know nothing about until God shows us.

I believe in prayer because of what prayer has meant to me and what prayer has meant to you. In my own personal life, I know that I would not be standing here today if were not for God and prayer. Prayer to God helps me to get through each day and I know from my own experience that prayer helps each of you too.

Sometimes our prayers do not make a difference because we have yet to make prayer something more than mere talking. To listen is more important than to talk. That's what is wrong with most of us today, we are not willing to listen to God. We want to do all the talking. Let us truly experience what it means to listen to God.

Regarding prayer in your own life, perhaps some test questions if answered truthfully would help you.

Has prayer been more of a duty to you than a privilege? Do you pray because you think it's required of a Christian? Are you conscious of the presence of God when you pray? You never will be unless you learn to listen to God.

Have you definite answers to prayers in the past week?

Does the element of adoration enter sufficiently into your prayers?

Has Thanksgiving had its true place in your prayers?

Have you in your prayers made a constant use of the promises of the Word of God?

Has your prayer life been hindered by any of the following: haste, irregularity, indolence, lack of defensiveness, or wrong attitudes?

Has your prayer life been restricted to certain times of day? Or have you come to know from experience what it means to pray without ceasing?

Has your prayer life been powerless because of disobedience? Do you consciously use a prayer list?

Do you hear the request of others for an interest in your prayers?

Have you ever devoted your daily Bible study for a month to letting the Lord teach you to pray for his example, commands, and promises about prayer?

I do not believe you can be a Christian without prayers. Jesus Christ taught us to pray and we should pray constantly. Don't be ashamed to pray and ask God for help in your life. Don't be afraid. Be frank with God. Don't hold anything back. Put prayer into every part of your life, every moment of every especially start off each day in prayer to God and see the difference it makes during that day. Take time to listen to God so he can give you the guidance you need. Prayer, I believe, is the only thing that will save the world we now live in. When we really start praying as if we meant it and believed it, then prayer would make a difference in our lives and in our world.

God Is So Loved

Scripture: John 3:16-21; I Corinthians 13:1-18

The text is chosen from John 3:16; “God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believed in him, should not perish, but have everlasting life.”

Let it suffice us to concern ourselves with several implications of the words, “God so loved,”. The rest of the text is important, but not unless these words are true.

Henry Ward Beecher said, “I never knew my mother. She died when I was three. One day I was in my father’s study, looking through an old trunk, and came across a group of letters tied together. They were the letters my mother had written my father from the very first day they fell in love. As I sat reading those letters from her to him, I came to know my mother, and once I came to the first letter in which she wrote quite freely and frankly of her love, I thought, of course, why that is the Gospel of John-God’s love letter.”

Indeed this is the kind of love we are talking about.

The first Implication is that “God so loved” is because man, despite his unworthiness, has need of God’s love. When the psalmist wrote as recorded, Psalm 27:9; “Hide not thy face from me; put not thy servant away in anger,” he was giving voice to thoughts and longings dwelling in the depths of his sensitive soul. He was desirous that God would not turn away from him for any reason whatsoever. The psalmist beseeches him that he will not refuse to care. There is no description of the love, no requirement of gifts or deeds, but just the simple fact of the desire for God sentimental affection.

The measure of God’s anger against him Is the measure of the love that is prepared to forgive the sinner and to love him in spite of his sin.

Like the Prodigal, all we wish to see is God’s face of forgiving love turned towards us, despite our unworthiness to be so honored. Despite our iniquities and transgressions, we hope that the Father of love may be “moved with compassion” to accept us into his heavenly household. Loving us all the while, God stands by ready to make us aware of his presence, love, and tenderness as soon as we sent our great need of his grace and love.

A young artist, who was studying under a great artist, one day came to the studio and begged for his master’s brush. The request was granted, and with high heart, the young man went away to his own painting. A short while later, he returned with the brush, complaining that he could do no better with it than he could with his own brush. A servant in the studio, hearing the young artist complaint, said to him, “It’s not just the master’s brush you need, but the master’s spirit.”

These beliefs and feelings that we as humans being have toward God, and that God has towards us we may

consider as sentiment, but it makes up a sentiment that is imperishably imprinted upon the very core of our being. We can stand anything, but the thought that God might turn his face forever away from us.

A group of young theologians were talking about the obscurity of God's operations. One of them said, "But the Christian thought about God has always had mystery at its center." "No", reflected another. "Christian thought of God has always had mystery at its periphery. But at the center, the face of Jesus Christ."

A second implication involved in God's love is that it is so great that he wants us, of all his created creatures, to share eternity with him.

We do not put, I suspect, enough emphasis these days upon the eternal provisions God out of his infinite love has ordained for every individual who will believe in Jesus Christ as redeemer and Lord. After we have "shuffled off this mortal soil," "God himself hopes that he can greet us with a smile and shower us yet more abundantly with his love and affection throughout the endless ages of eternity.

When we say yes to God, it is the fact that we have faith in his love that wins us. You and I are divinely wooed to our salvation. We are not advised into it, not frightened into it, not legislated into it not, not impressed into it, not threatened into it. In our hearts we will accept it, consent to let God come there to dwell. Whatever else we may credit our salvation to, this great love of God for us is the primary factor.

The third implication evolving from God's love manifests towards us consists in the fact that as a result Christ once dwelt among us. He has taught us how to glorify all our tasks and duties, from the simplest to the most complicated. This we can do by giving ourselves to them in a spirit of love like unto the spirit in which he himself went about doing good.

At times all of us have tasks to do that are not pleasant. I assure you that hating to do something will not make it go away. We have to face up to our task and make the most and best of them. This is where God comes into our lives to give us the help we need to get over these rough spots. How much more enjoyable and pleasant our jobs are when we do them in the right spirit and as if we are really wanted to accomplish something. There are the many of us today that want to get paid the full amount for doing half the job.

Thinking along the lines, putting love into our lives, there is a sort of parable which I found interesting to read.

At the end of time all people were assembled before the great throne of God to be judged for their life on earth. But they were mumbling among themselves and were not ashamed of the wrong things they had done. Rather they had complaints to make.

One of the groups were Jews who had suffered persecution and died in the gas chambers and concentration camps. How could God judge them? What could he know of the suffering they had been through?

Another group were slaves, black men who had brands on their brows and had suffered indignities at the hand of those who called themselves “God’s people.” How could God judge them?

And there were long lines of refugees, poor workers who had never been able to make ends meet, and the sick and suffering. What could God, living the protected life of paradise, know of what they had been forced to endure?

From each group a leader was chosen and a commission appointed to draw up the case against the Almighty. Their conclusion was that before God would be qualified to be their judge, he must endure what they had endured. So instead of God judging them, they judged God.

Their verdict was that God should be sentenced to live on earth as a man having no safeguards to protect his divinity. And here was their bill of particulars: 1) Let him be born a Jew and poor. 2) Let the legitimacy of his birth be suspect. 3) Let him know hard work and the pinch of poverty. 4) Let him be rejected by his people, given for friends only those held in contempt, and betrayed by one of his friends. 5) Let him be indicted on false charges, tried before a prejudicial jury, and convicted by a cowardly judge. 6) Let him be abandoned by his friends and left in utter loneliness to be tortured and at last to die at the hands of his enemies.

After each group had announced its sentence on God, there was a long silence in heaven for everyone there knew that God had already served that sentence.

This spirit of love is very needful today in our homes. In the spirit with which God loves us, we must therefore love one another. The first thing needed is to have a home in which the mood of affection runs like a swelling an engulfing tide of spirit among all the members, in which the smile of the soul speaks in the silent overtones of love and God.

The spirit of love like unto God’s as manifest in Jesus Christ, is also critically needed in a practical way in the world at large. Some people contend that such subjects as social, economic, and political life have no place in the pulpit. Such faith never begins to get its hands dirty; never gets down to the street where men are shivering, suffering, dying; never comes to grips with half the contents of the Bible; and has never faced the cross of Jesus Christ.

“God so loved” says something vital to us about our care for others. The reformer who dares to undertake his work more from a sense of duty than out of love for the human beings involved sets about his task with a spirit alien to the Spirit of God. It is necessary to show affection, manifest to other classes, colors, nationalities, and creeds, a smile of the heart, and to exercise the steady glow of the brotherhood that not even persecution can remit. God so loved that on the cross he prayed forgiveness for them that did the wrong against him. God so loved that he did not seek to gain mere respect through exercise of any manner

of force.

The amount of love, like unto God's, that we have practiced among men so far has been meager enough to cause most of us to sense that we are yet living in a lonely and uncertain world, almost a beastly world. When shall we begin loving people close about us and the people of the world around us in the Spirit with which God continuously loves us all?

All we need to do is show a small part of the love God has shown unto us, to others and we would be doing much better than we are now. This is what God wants us to do, to love one another as he loved us.

"God so loved", and he gave the best he had, himself, for us. There is no sentimentality in the love of God. It is his affection first, but that affection is made real by his gift, his deed, his act.

This is the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and it is the gospel of the event evangelical Christian churches in all its simplicity. In this lonely world roundabout, mankind is eager for his smile. We need not suffer disappointment in our thirst for his love, for we can see his tenderness, his affliction for you and me. "God so loved" that he gave. Do you find it in your heart to so love?

Belonging To a Minority

Scripture: Isaiah 53

The text is chosen from Isaiah 53:3 “He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not.”

Every human now alive on earth belongs to a minority of some kind. Christians are a minority, not only in relation to the total world population, but also even in countries that were once predominantly Christian. It is safe to assume that Christians who take their religion, seriously, trying really hard to live by its teachings, are today a relatively small minority in this and every other country. Oh, there are plenty of us who claim to be Christians, but few of us who actually take our Christianity seriously and try to live our lives the way Jesus Christ wants us too.

First of all concerning this minority, there are several things to be noted.

It is not a minority into which a man is born without choice or possibility of escape.

If you discriminate against me because I am dirty, I can make myself clean. If you discriminate against me because I am bad, I can reform and be good. If you discriminate against me because I am ignorant, I can learn. If you discriminate against me because I am ill mannered, I can improve my manners. But if you discriminate against me because of my color, you discriminate against me because of something, God himself gave me an over, which I have no control.

It Is a minority which you can join if you want to.

It is a minority to which you can belong, even though you are at present the only person in your community who is prepared to “join up.”

We have been raised in the church during a period when it has been a rather blank “chaplain to the middle class.” We haven’t had to suffer for our convictions, as did the Old Testament prophets, the early Christian the reformers-and as did Christ. We would rather be liked. But as we begin to speak up for those who suffer, we also will suffer. If we are truly to be the servant church, we will have to begin to speak out against injustice and to take risk no one prefers to take. We will have to get used to tension, disagreement, and open hostility-within our own congregations as well as our communities and among our friends. And we will have to decide whether it is popular acceptance and numerical success we want for the church, or relevance and renewal. The time has come when as Christians we no longer can afford to keep quiet or standby and let things go around us we know are wrong. We can no longer be on the fence. We have to decide what we want to be, not what we want to do, and we have to take a stand on the important issues of our day.

The function of a devoted minority is to take a position in advance of the one commonly held and then to hold that position despite opposition, misunderstanding, even persecution, until growing numbers of people come to accept. We certainly have to stop being wishy washy about things and take a definite stand. We cannot trade good, sound Christian principles for popularity and even friendship. The taking of an advanced position undoubtedly exposes a man to certain temptations.

First, there is the temptation of self-righteousness. Often when we start work wholeheartedly for a cause we begin to think the only ones that are right are those who agree with you. All others are wrong and bad. The cure for this attitude and feeling is the vision of God and his righteousness. For indeed only God is the righteous one.

Second, there is temptation of complete self-distrust. The cure for this is the knowledge, which a man may gain through personal experience, that God can and does work through anyone who truly desires to be his servant, and is not puffed up with a sense of intellectual or moral superiority.

Three, there is the temptation to yield under pressure. Sometimes we can be threatened by outside influences in our lives, and we become weak and yield to it. The cure for this is full personal commitment to the divine purpose in history, reinforced each day through adoration of God and earnest prayer for his guidance and help. Prayer with God will help us in all of life.

Fourth, there is the temptation to despair. The cure for despair is the faith that the kingdom of God is forever, that the divine purpose, for mankind is not confined to this present world, and that, whatever happens, the Almighty and everlasting God is ultimately beyond defeat.

Is the beginning of Brotherhood week in the Christian church and we all know the problems we are facing in this country and around the world concerning race relations and minority groups. We as Christians need to search our conscious about this problem. I Timothy 4:7; says, "Have nothing to do with godless and silly myths."

A Christian must have nothing to do with the idea that Black people are inferior to White people. There are differences, both of individual and group characteristics, but differences, particularly with occasion by cultural conditioning, spells neither superiority nor inferiority.

A Christian must have nothing to do with the notion that Black people in the country really have as good a chance as do White people and that we actually have a society offering liberty and justice on an equal basis for all.

A Christian must have nothing to do with the comfortable fiction that good intentions relieve us of responsibility. Most of us within the church have never wished harm to another man, and in a vague way, we have thought of ourselves as being on "his side" but being polite and merely having good intentions at

a distance have contributed to our racial crisis.

A Christian must have nothing to do with the idea all of our racial trouble is a part of a “communist conspiracy”. Of course, Communists try to stir up all the trouble they can and do their best to take advantage of any kind of trouble there is, but one of the most evident things about communism is that it has never enjoyed much success in this country. J. Edgar Hoover said, “One of the bitter disappointments of the Communist has been their failure to lure any significant number of Negro citizens into the party.”

A Christian must have nothing to do with the unspoken, complacent assumption that it is other people who are prejudiced and keep the institutionalized forms of racism alive. One of the phrases the Bible uses to describe people who cannot see their own iniquity is “hardness of heart”. The pharaoh had “hardness of heart”, as did the Pharisees who criticized Jesus, and at times even the disciples. This, I fear, is the condition of most of us.

Romans 2:11 says, “For there is no respect of persons with God.”

We are all together too prone to be respecters of persons. Whereas in our admiration we honor some individuals and our utter disregard for others leads us to undervalue them.

Only God knows the actual worth of every human being. He fashioned each one with his own hand and made each after his exalted pattern. Through the immortality of the soul, he gave immeasurable value to each. With God all men are equal, for to him their spirits are of supreme concern. In anxiety beyond our understanding God yearns for the salvation of every soul.

Let us, as Christians, keep so close to God that beneath the outer covering of sin, in the most wicked of human creatures, we may discover a soul worthy of our most strenuous and prayerful efforts.

Thirdly, devoted minorities are, under God, the hope of the world.

This was the insight of the prophet Isaiah long ago.

History repeatedly bears witness to the significant and might of a devoted minority. The early Christians were few in number and apparently quite influential. I Corinthians 1: 26 reads, “For consider your call, brethren; not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth.”

Indeed if we speak out on the issues of our day and take the stand we feel is right, we probably will be in the minority. We won’t be very popular with the rest of the crowd and perhaps we do not have too many friends. This is what the early Christians faced but they were willing to make sacrifices for Christ’s sake.

Significant is the part played by minorities in the United States who drew up the Declaration of Independence, framed the Constitution, and fought for religious liberty, popular education, pure food laws, a living wage, among others. So if we think we are alone in our fight for right and justice, we are mistaken. We certainly are not alone or the first ones to be in the minority. It has happened all through history and will continue in the future.

Sometimes we wonder why bother to stand up against all kinds of odds for something we believe to be good and true. When it would be easier and more popular to go along with the crowd. As Christians we are a part of God's Kingdom. We belong to the family of God.

In the old days of New England, when families owned their own pews in the churches, it was evidence that there was need for a roofing job on the church building in a little Connecticut town, but a family refused to pay for its share in the shingling. "Why should we pay?" asked the father of the family, "it doesn't leak in our pew." This is what happens when our vision becomes narrowed. We cannot see how we fit into the total picture. We cannot understand why we should be helping people around the world who are in desperate need of help. We cannot see why we should help others come to know Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Perhaps we do not understand the total mission of the church to which we belong. We need to think about these things and where each of us as individuals fit in.

Fourthly, in this hour of crisis, let us highly resolve to do our part by joining that Christian minority, who, in the face of heavy odds, refuse cynicism, and despair, and are doing what they can understand God to bring into being a new world of justice, brotherhood and peace.

If you were studying Pharmacy, there is one course you would take entitled "pharmaceutical incompatibilities." It is a course in which you study substances, which, under ordinary circumstances, will not mix. In most cases some outside ingredient is necessary if two substances are not compatible. Water and oil, two common substances, do not mix. To them acacia must be added. It is the ingredient added to bring these two into agreement with each other. There are compatibilities in life as well; and, as we have learned from sad experiences, we cannot usually resolve them by ourselves. Some outside ingredient must be injected if we hope for agreement. We are helpless by ourselves; we need the soothing, compelling, "mixing power" of Jesus Christ. His spirit is that ever present ingredient, which will bring to reality our dreams of racist, mingling together and brotherhood and harmony. He brings the reality our dreams of a world of peace, and goodwill, of happy home lives, and worthwhile business relationships. Christ Jesus brings these desires, ideals, and fond hopes to fruition. He is the only hope we and the world have.

Wednesday is Ash Wednesday and the beginning of another season of Lent. Let us take a good look at ourselves in relation to Jesus Christ and how we can change our lives. Let us accept Jesus Christ into our lives now. Certainly one way to change is the way we think about minority groups and what our attitudes should be towards them. Let us start our own self evaluation program of our lives and then do something about it.

The Face of Jesus

Scripture: II Corinthians 4: 1-12

The text is chosen from II Corinthians 4:6; “The light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”

What would we not give for one look at the face of Jesus? No face in all history has evoked so much human interest. The physical contours of that face, we cannot know, but the lines in that holy countenance mean little compared with the divine spirit of which it was a medium. As we learn that spirit, and as we follow its lead, the face of Jesus will be printed in our own, and men that may see somewhat of him there.

The Gospel writers have given us four portraits of Jesus face which tell us more of him than any physical lightness could do. If it is true that the soul shines forth through the face, we have here the outline of that soul divine.

First of all, we have the transfigured face. Matthew 17:2 reads; “And he was transfigured before them, and he was shown like the sun, and his garments became white as light.” Upon the mountain in prayer, the Master is transfigured before his disciples, “and his face did shine as the sun.” The transfigured, glowing face of Jesus is one window into that great life. His face was transfigured because his life was transfigured, for no more can shine through the face, than lies back of it.

I’m sure all of us have noticed this in other persons. You can see the light bearer from persons who have really accepted Jesus into their lives. They are alive and glowing all more with vim and vigor. We can pretend or try to put on an act, but this usually doesn’t fool anyone except ourselves.

This mountain top experience of Jesus is but an isolated picture of the nature of Jesus’s soul. His feet moved among sick and sinful and needy human folk, but that soul was ever in the presence of the Father. In him were heaven and earth joined. That is a glorious combination: a life busy with the needs of real men and women and a heart in touch with a divine Lord of love. I think you may test whether or not you have known Jesus as the transfigured son of God by what you were willing to do for him.

In that great scene in “A Tale of Two Cities”, when Sydney Carton went to the guillotine, taking the place of another for the love he bore for a woman, it was said about the city that night that “his was the most peaceful man’s face ever behind at the guillotine.” Many added that he looked sublime and prophetic. Love transfigures the countenance.

Secondly – we have the steadfast face. In the Gospel of Luke chapter 9, Jesus is leaving the north country of Galilee for the last time to make his final trip with his disciples to Jerusalem. Luke 9:51 says; “He steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem.” Again the soul shines through the countenance. The face is set because the soul is set. There is unshakable determination that the course will be finished wherever it leads. There is the sense of duty that will not brook neglect. There is the portrait of consecration to an unfinished task.

Luke 9:62 reads, "Jesus said to him, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."

This might well have happened on any day, for he was always about his Father's business. But it has double significance on this day. Jerusalem was the city of rejected prophets, the seat of hostile forces, and the place near whose walls he could already see a cross becoming clearer and clearer.

I know there are too many of us today who start something and then because it becomes difficult or we decide we don't like what we are doing, we just plain give up. We have come to the point in life where we want things given to us for the asking. We are not willing to work for it. Determination and fastness are what we have to practice in our lives.

In Matthew 16:18 Jesus says, "I will build my Church." What do you think of the Church? What do you think of this organization that Jesus so loved as to give his life to the building of it? Upon the worth of the Church, we do not all agree. There are those who are antagonistic to the church.

There are those who are indifferent. Some of these do not speak meanly of the Church; they rather fail to speak of it at all.

Some of these are those who once belonged to the Church, who may have their names upon its rolls even now, but their indifference is worse than open antagonism. They do nothing but harm, for they lie like huge stones across the mouth of the sepulcher, where our Lord is trying to raise a half-dead circulation into life.

There are those who while not entirely indifferent, are merely lukewarm. There are the folks that are half-and-half. These seldom come and seldom give and never work. They are possessed of a cheap religion, one that neither satisfies God nor man.

There are those who are avowed friends of the Church. These in a true sense belong to the Church, and in consequence the Church belongs to them.

What is this institution that is so dear to our hearts? The Church is a company of learners in the school of Christ.

As members of the church, we are a brotherhood. The church is far from a perfect brotherhood, but it comes the nearest to it of any other organization.

The Church is the body of Christ. The Church is the body through which the living Christ is to express himself. The Church is his way of reaching men. The Church is to make it possible for our Lord to carry out his plans.

What is the purpose of this organization we call the church? It is to salt the Earth. What is the good of salt? It gives a tang to the feast of life, and it is a great preventative, standing in the way of invading rottenness. The Church is that saving salt without which civilization rots down.

It is the work of the church to win the individual to Christ, and thus to remake the world through witnessing.

We are to witness by our personal testimony.

We are to give our testimony by what we say.

We are to give it most of all by what we are.

We are to speak under a compelling sense of duty.

We are to speak spontaneously.

The Church is to help foster and keep alive in our hearts, and in the hearts of others a bracing sense of God. I love to see a church standing “where cross the crowded ways of life”, because by its very presence it constantly proclaimed the great truth that men shall not live by bread alone.

All we say, all we do, is to be done with the purpose of building the Church of Jesus Christ.

This we are to do in the realization that our Lord builds his Church through us. Jesus is to build the Church out of faulty men and women like ourselves. Not only are we the material out of which the Church is built, but we are also the builders.

Our Lord builds his Church in the face of opposition. “The gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” By this Jesus means that the gates of death will fight against it. Building is always costly.

Our Lord tells us that he will build his Church in spite of opposition and the forces of evil.

We need this not in a day like ours when so many are afraid of the Church.

We need it when so many are sitting in the seat of the scornful and so many in the seat of the mournful.

We need it when so many are consulting the second instead of the centuries.

We need the bracing conviction that has members of the Church of Almighty God we belong to an institution that is facing toward and even growing victory because of Christ determination instead fast men.

Thirdly, we have the face of love.

The Master is inside the judgment hall. Frightened, yet unwilling to flee entirely, Peter stands outside in the court. Accused by a sneering girl of being a disciple, Peter impulsively does the disgraceful and shameful thing. He denies, “I know him not.” Three times Peter swears ignorance of Jesus. Luke alone explains as we read in Luke 22:61; “The Lord turned and looked upon Peter.” The Master’s heart was not in the wicked

trial within the judgment hall. Rather it was in that trial going on outside in which Peter is the weak and tempted victim.

You can imagine the look of agony on the Master's face as he looks out and sees a trusted friend denying him. What infinite disappointment, what vast pity, what unshaken love, what redeeming grace! I know it was all there because of what happened: "And Peter went out and wept bitterly." The face of Jesus saved Peter that day. And that face has saved thousands since that day. If we remain close to him, then we shall see that face of disappointment, pity, and withal, love and be drawn back to better selves and God.

One day, a rich man of a miserly disposition visited a rabbi, who took him by the hand and led him to the window. "Look out there", he said. The rich man looked out into the street. "What do you see?" "I see men and women and little children." Again the rabbi took him to a mirror "What do you see now?" "I see myself." "Behold in the window there is a glass, and in the mirror, there is glass. But the glass of the mirror is covered with silver, and no sooner is silver added than you cease to see others and see only yourself."

Fourthly, we see the face of suffering. The last picture is one which will melt your heart and send you to your knees. It is a face beaten and spit upon, swollen, dust covered, blood stained. In the courtyard they had struck him. The soldiers had put a thorn crown on his head, and at last he was made to bear his cross through the dirty streets to the place of crucifixion. It is the face of intense suffering, glorious because it was suffering for the world.

John Sutherland Bonwell said, "Shortly after I became a minister, I visited George H. Morrison, who told me that he had just come from the Children's Hospital where he had visited a little parishioner who 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 sufferer. There was a pause. Then his face lighted 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 lays hands on the sick and healed them." "That's all you need to know, Jimmy," said Doctor Morrison. "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.

This last picture is the other three completed and made perfect. It is the transfigured face made perfect in suffering. It is the set face which has completed the task. It is the redeeming face melting the heart, not of Peter alone, but of all who have beheld it and consider its meaning.

Romans 8:37 reads, "In all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us."

When we face life with Christ, we inevitably become concerned about the things he wants done.

When we face life with Christ, we do not make excuses for ourselves, because through him, "we may become more than conquerors."

When we face life with Christ, we may welcome each advancing year, and especially the great moment when it becomes our turn to enter into the life, which is beyond this life.

The Life Eternal

Scripture: John 1:1-18

The text is chosen from John 17:3; “This is life eternal, that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.”

Today is the beginning of the Advent season. Advent is the near approach of the Son of God in the flesh, for which one must prepare oneself with greater watchfulness, and by the practice of works of charity. It is the voice of the prophets announcing the Messiah who comes. It is the world awaiting its Redeemer, sighing as the parched ground for the dew of heaven. It is Saint Paul exhorting the faithful, awakening them from their sleep upon the vigil of the coming of Christ. It is John the Baptist, the last of the long line of prophets, who cries in the wilderness, “Prepare ye the way of the Lord.”

John Wesley said, “Christ’s mission, the Son of God, who came from heaven, is here opening up to men, the very way that leads to the glory he had before the world began.”

First - life eternal was the quest.

It must be acknowledged that the truth of greater worth had been sought long before the Incarnation. It had even been glimpsed, now and then, like a mountain that peers through the mist, but the Great Eternal one remained unknown.

The genius of the Jews gave the world new hope. That nation had been called by Jehovah to become the medium by which the Almighty might reveal himself. He was partially reflected in the mirror of nature. The star-spangled dome revealed his power, and the steady march of the seasons, his faithfulness. But man’s mind was perplexed, even by nature’s frowns and omnivores’ tenderings. So the old question from Job 11:7, was not without its story, “Canst thou by searching find out God?”

There were some choice souls to whom God was able to speak. They were in tune to the voice of the Almighty and could receive the council God was waiting to impart. By slow degrees, the eternal will was expressed. Ruskin said, “There is a need, bitter need, to bring back into man’s mind that to live is nothing, unless to live is to know him by whom we live.”

But it was not until the coming of Christ that the full light was possible. As we read this morning, John 1:17 says, “The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.” What was at first external to man, understood only in part, became an altogether different thing when the perfect life was manifested. Then it was as clear as it was convincing.

Luke 1:78 reads, “The day shall dawn upon us from on high.” Spiritually before Christ’s advent only scattered rays of light pierced the gloom of human experience. As the sun recharges with light the early morning sky, so is the coming of the Son of Righteousness.

For he brought the light of God into the world. The dayspring from High has visited us.

Our Lord does for the soul with the sunlight does for the world. As Savior of the sunrise, Christ brings life, hope, and sanctification.

Christ is the Savior of the sunrise eternally. There is coming a time when there shall be the sunrise of a great new day when sin and sadness, tears and terror, shall be no more. This eternal sunrise with the Savior becomes a purifying life in the darkest days in which we live.

To walk staunchly by the best light one has, to be strict and sincere with oneself, not to be of the number who say and do not, to be in earnest - this is the discipline by which alone man is enabled to rescue his life from thralldom to the passing moment and to the bodily senses, to ennoble it, and to make it eternal.

When we truly confess Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, we get a saving principle, a saving purpose, and a saving power. We can crown our quest with conquest. (1) Christ gives power to overcome our evil desires. (2) Christ can "break the power of canceled sin and set the sinner free" from the weight of guilt by imparting the grace of God's forgiveness. (3) Christ can pluck from the breast, the rooted sorrow as well as free the man from remorse. (4) Christ can give us conquest over pain. (5) Christ can help us conquer the frustration due to untoward circumstances and failing health.

Secondly - the abstract was made concrete by the coming Jesus Christ into the world.

The knowledge of God, which had been largely intellectual obtruse, was translated into terms of life. The requirements of the Eternal Father were seen to be not only reasonable, but also practical. John 1:4 says, "The life was the light of men."

He daily demonstrated before the astonished eyes of the people facts which before had been only abstract truths. Here is one who can read the secret struggle, the unexpressed repentance, the unsatisfied desires of the soul, and met its needs. Here was one whose mission was to make God real to mankind, and to bring words that we both intelligible and helpful to human hearts. Men had listened for some word from the Almighty without being able to interpret what they heard, as John 1:4 says, "The word was made flesh," and then the sincere hearted began to grasp that the remote was brought near.

The Savior did more. While man was bound with the chains of evil, or fettered by sinful indulgences, he could never hope to reach the land of life eternal. Christ's work was to set him free so that he might know God aright, and in that knowledge, mediate through the Eternal Son, find life eternal.

Thirdly - the true life comes through the life giver.

Jesus Christ brings the soul into perfect correspondence with God, who is the soul's environment, and thus life is made possible. Without his help man is impotent. He found men and women who had been thrust out of the mainstream of life by some ugly sin or shameful experience and left impotent on the banks of time. He gave help to the impotent, so that no longer were they confined to the heartbreaking inactivity of the backwaters. Thus life was directed into deep channels that led to the vast expanse of ocean and the

place of peace.

A vital experience of God, mediated through Jesus Christ, and realized in conversion, is the beginning of life for the human soul. Showing the infinite tenderness of the divine heart towards mankind, the sacrificial love of the Redeemer, it places a new value upon our days. The burden of sin removed and the sense of acceptance born in the soul, we are free to pursue that purpose which God had revealed with rekindled and quenchless faith.

What shall redeem life from destruction, making it a glorious possession, that can enrich the whole race? What shall nerve the soul to high endeavor in the midst of these materialistic times? What shall give it power to conquer circumstances, and to keep itself true to the heavenly vision? The knowledge of God, as the loving Father, whose care is unfailing and who's aim for his children is beneficial: the knowledge of Christ as the Savior, whom grace is available for every heart: the knowledge that faith in him enables the soul to triumph over life's disabilities with a certainty that it's trial shall lead to triumph.

Once we know, really know, there is a Christ, who cares for us individually, a Christ, who is concerned for every moment, our whole outlook and attitude towards life changes.

The world with its deep shadows, flung by sorrows clouds across the path of hoped for progress, with its restlessness and sense of any efficiency, with its misery and madness, is like a lake in which every human heart is mirrored. Where Christ's earthly life ended, man's life begins. It is at Calvary's Cross. There God and man are reconciled. There the divine aim for man is revealed, a life of fellowship and of ultimate victory. And because Christ came to give life abundant, there also we may see with George Matheson: "From the ground there blossoms red, Life that shall endless be!"

I John 3:18 reads, "little children, let us not love in word or speech, but indeed and in truth."

This being the first Sunday of Advent, it is not too early to think about Christmas. In fact, this is the beginning of the Christmas season. This year, I hope that all of us will take an active part in the celebration of our Lord's coming. How can we do that?

I am going to try to tell you how you can do this by relating an experience of a man named Dr. William Barclay, who went to church to see a Christian play and then made some interesting comments about it.

The play was very good, Dr. Barclay thought. It was moving and beautiful, especially because the young people were doing the acting themselves. In other words, they weren't just looking at a play; they were participating in it. They weren't spectators; they were participants. They put themselves into it.

We are custom to permit the other fellow to entertain us while we just look on. Radio and television and competitive games permit us to look on, but they do not give us an opportunity to participate. And because of this, we miss a lot of life.

Christmas is coming. An important question is this: Are we only going to look, or are we going to take

part? In church during the Christmas season, shall we just listen to a prayer, or shall we also make music in our hearts? Shall we just listen to a sermon, or shall we also meditate upon the Christmas story?

The play that Dr. Barclay saw was put on by amateurs, not professionals.

An amateur really means a “lover”. An amateur does things for the love of them. An amateur in sports is a person who plays for the love of the game, as opposed to a person who plays because he is paid to do so.

In the case of this nativity play, Dr. Barclay says: “I have no doubt that professionals could have produced and acted with more polish and art and technique, but this play had something that no professional performance could have had. It had the quality of love. The performance of these young people had sincerity.”

“One last thing I noted”, says Dr. Barclay. “The young people were ordinary people, but somehow in the nativity play which they were acting, they became clothed with the greatness of the character which they were portraying.”

Then Dr. Barclay adds these words: “Paul uses a strange expression about putting on Christ from Galatians 3:27, “For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.” And our human nature is such that it can, even if only for a moment, to be touched with greatness.”

Indeed, each of us needs to put on the nature of Christ and see what a difference it does make in our lives. Let us take time to get into the real Christmas spirit and let us take part in it and instead of just observing.

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



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

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

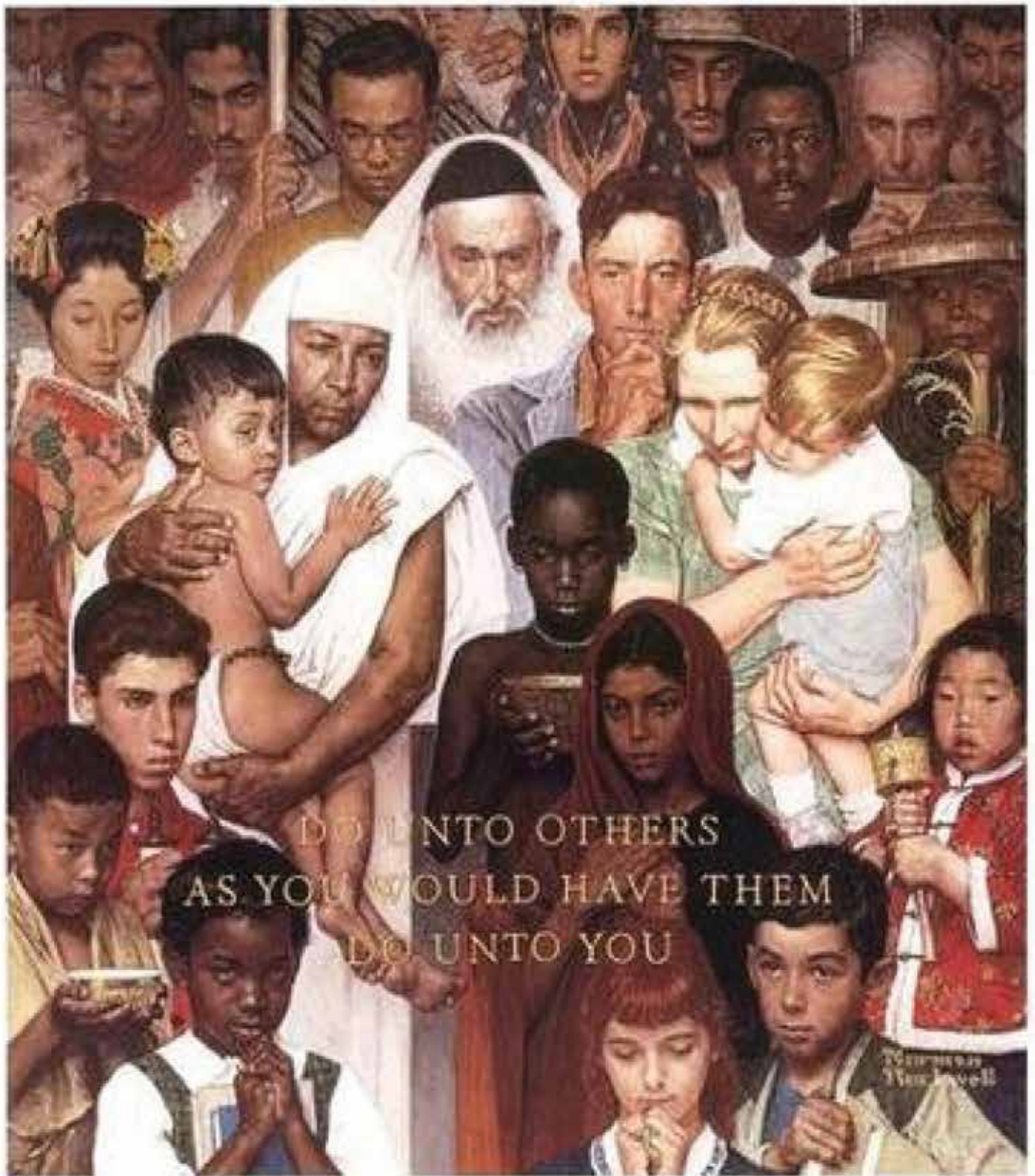


Millions of us suffer needlessly from addiction & depression. The reasons for this are many. In this program we emphasize the 12 step method of Recovery, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, and Meditation techniques to overcome difficulties. We also rely on God's grace to help you be lifted from your dilemma.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

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



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



NORMAN ROCKWELL
"DO UNTO OTHERS"