

## "A MINISTRY OF RECONCILIATION"

### INTRODUCTION

Today is Father's Day.

The comedian, Dick Gregory, grew up without a father. In his autobiography he tells this story.

"It was a Thursday....and the teacher was asking each student how much his father would give to the Community Chest. On Friday night, each kid would get the money from his father and on Monday he would bring it to the school. I decided that I was going to buy me a daddy right then. I had money in my pocket from shining shoes and selling papers, and whatever Helene Tucker pledged for her daddy, I was going to top it. And I'd hand the money right in....I wasn't going to wait until Monday to buy me a daddy. I was shaking and seared to death."

"The teacher opened her book and started calling out our names. 'Helene Tucker?' 'My daddy said he'd give \$2.50'. 'That's very nice Helene - very, very nice, indeed.' (That made me feel pretty good; it wouldn't take very much to top that. I had almost \$3.00 in dimes and quarters in my pocket. I stuck my hand in my pocket and held on to the money, waiting for the teacher to call my name). But the teacher closed her book after she called everybody's name in the class. I stood up and raised my hand. 'What is it now?' 'You forgot me'. She turned toward the blackboard. 'I don't have time to be playing games with you, Richard.' 'My daddy said he'd give \$15.00' She turned around and looked mad. 'We are collecting this money for you and your kind, Richard Gregory. If your daddy can give \$15. you have no business being on relief.' 'I got it right now, I got it right now - here in my pocket. My daddy said to turn it in today'. 'And furthermore' she said, looking right at me, her nostrils getting big, her lips getting thin, and her eyes opening wide - 'we know you don't have a daddy'.

'Helene Tucker turned around....her eyes full of tears. She felt sorry for me. And I couldn't see her too well because I was crying, too. I walked out of school that day and for a long time I didn't go back. There was shame there.'"

### DEVELOPMENT

And God said, "As a shepherd seeks out his flock when some of his sheep have been scattered abroad, so will I seek out my sheep. And I will rescue them from all the places where they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness. I will seek the lost and I will bring back the strayed and I will bind up the crippled, and I will strengthen the weak"....and the fatherless"

The mission of God's people is to go to the Richards of this world - the lost, the weak, the crippled, to those who eat daily the bread of shame or poverty, to those who know what it is to be despised and rejected of men and to say to them: "You do have a father, and we are your brothers. We, too, in our way are lost and crippled and blind, but we bring you the good news that we all have a father, a father that loves us, loves you, loves the whole world. Oh Richard - be reconciled to us, to yourself, and to our God".

### GOD IS RECONCILING THIS WORLD

This morning I would like to explore with you the mission of the people of God - the God who in Christ is reconciling this world to himself.

Remember, first, that God is reconciling THIS world to himself - not another world - but this world - the real world of Jimmy Hoffa, Arnold Palmer, Mickey Mantle, Ho Chi Minh, Nasser, John Lindsey - and all the Richards, young and old who walk the

PARK  AVENUE METHODIST CHURCH

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AT 9-6997

106 EAST EIGHTY-SIXTH STREET, NEW YORK, NEW YORK 10028

*Philip A. C. Clarke*  
MINISTER

*Harold C. Metzner*  
ASSOCIATE MINISTER EMERITUS

face of this earth. Not so many years ago I thought that God was reconciling only part of the world to himself - that part known as the Christian Church. And I thought that church history, not world history, is what really mattered to God. And then somewhere along the way, I had a second conversion. Every person needs two conversions - a conversion to Christ and a conversion to the world of Christ. And when we are converted to the world of Christ, it begins to dawn upon us that God does not love just the Methodists, or the Protestants, or the Christians, or the Americans, or the westerners - but that he loves all people. "For God so loved the world.....that He gave..."

Sometimes our parochialism in this respect can be disturbing. A Roman Catholic priest who is a friend of mine was telling me earlier this year about a headline he saw in a Catholic newspaper in Kansas. There had been a tornado in Kansas that had killed over a dozen people and he said the headline read, "Tornado Sweeps Kansas. Three Catholics die". And I suppose that something of the same kind of parochialism is reflected in the headlines of the papers we read daily where the death of a hundred or more men - our men - is presented to us as of far greater importance than the death of hundreds or thousands of Asians or Africans. I think that when we are truly converted to the world, we no longer need to separate ourselves from the world or feel superior to it. We can celebrate its joys and mourn its sorrows and, above all share in its alienation as men who are being reconciled to God in and with this world. First, then, remember that God is reconciling this world to himself.

GOD - AT WORK IN THE ALIENATIONS OF THIS WORLD

Second, remember that God is at work in the alienation of this world - with all of the Richards - the lost, the crippled, the weak - with all who are alienated from themselves and from others and who need to be reconciled. And where should a work of reconciliation be carried out but in the midst of alienation. And so, the people of God - the church - are to join God at the points of hostility in this world, this country, this city - there to work for reconciliation. The church will go then wherever there is trouble, for the church is God's trouble shooter in the world.

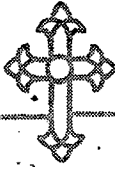
Now this may seem to some a new and different view of the mission of the church, and certainly it is different from that view of the church which has been prevalent in recent decades - as a sanctuary of peace, apart from the world's turmoil and enmity; as a harmonious, homogenous, unanimous fellowship, apart from the antagonisms and hostilities of the world.

illustrate

To caricature for the sake of clarity, the church in these terms has been viewed as an IN CLUB - sociologically defined as the place where the "right" people go and where the minister fits into his environment in cameleon fashion as Dr. Dignity, or Dr. Backslap, or Dr. Comfort, or Dr. Status Quo. Or the church may be viewed by some solely as an IN CLINIC - psychologically defined as the place to go to get rid of your anxieties and to find solutions to your own personal problems. Or the church may be viewed by some as an IN CROWD - religiously defined as the company of those who have been saved in a world that is going to hell and you had better get on board before it's too late and believe in the Lord Jesus or you'll be left out. Each of these three views of the church distorts a valid insight into the nature and mission of the church, but all of them err in the common supposition that the people of the God of ~~Abraham~~ and of Jesus Christ can somehow live out the gospel of reconciliation in a Currier and Ives "church in the wildwood" apart from this world's anguish, tragedy, and bitterness. Dear friends - the symbol of the church is not a couch at the club or in the psychiatrist's office or in the church parlor - but the symbol of the church is a cross thrust deep into the alienations of this world.

As George Mac Cloud has reminded us in one of his books and I quote his words to you again (I've used them before) -

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the left and the old codgers on the right. It's not entirely a matter of age because I know some very young codgers and some very old whipper-snappers. The clergy find themselves in a fix reminiscent of the Charge of the Light Brigade. Codgers to the *Right* front of them, whippersnappers to the left of them - codgers and whippersnappers in front of them, into the jaws of death, into the mouth of hell rode the clergy.

And here is the pastor's anguish, and I mean it quite seriously: the pastor has a dual calling - on the one hand he is to lead the sheep, to speak God's word to them as best he hears it and understands it, in a prophetic ministry; and on the other hand, he is to gather all the sheep and not lose any of them in a pastoral ministry. He has what might be called the Moses-misery - that is he has to get the whole crowd to the Promised Land and not just a bunch of commandos in the crowd. And he finds that one phrase in a sermon or one action which he felt to be inherent in a prophetic ministry may disrupt and in some cases destroy his pastoral ministry. "You always hurt the one you love" is not only the title of a song, but a fact of life for many a minister today. Some of the hardest and some of the saddest moments in my own ministry have come when I have alienated someone dear to me by something I \* said or did, but some of the richest and most joyous moments in my ministry have come when an alienated one and I come together and have been able to hear God's word to us both - "be reconciled". For the Gospel of God to all and to each of us is this: be reconciled....

LET US PRAY: As we direct our thoughts to the great problems of life, help us,  
O Lord, to think clearly, and then lead us out of ourselves toward  
Him who is the purpose of all men, that we may show forth in our lives something  
of His life, that the world through us may be reconciled to thee. In the spirit of  
Christ, we pray. Amen

\* ...sometimes unnecessarily, injudiciously, sometimes, as it seems, unavoidably..

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