

## "A TIME TO MOVE"

### INTRODUCTION

This month we are preparing to move out into a task and a test upon the outcome of which rests the future of the pastoral ministry of the New York Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church. The time is at hand when we must give attention to the important matter of an effective pension plan for the ministers of the Conference.

I come to you today without the benefit of the "home-court" advantage to lift up this important concern. Phil Jackson of the Knicks would tell us that the "home-court" advantage is an important, intangible factor in a game, that it can make a difference. However, those who are coaching and mapping out the strategy of the pension fund drive thought otherwise. Hence, this pulpit exchange. Our coaches are hoping it will make a difference. I hope the guest preacher in my pulpit is able to score a few points, and I hope that I can do something of the same - here - for your pastor and our mutual friend, Edward Egan.

### DEVELOPMENT

I turn to the story of Moses for a launching pad for this sermon. Moses - that tall man of great faith back in Old Testament times. I reminded of an eight year old boy who was asked by his mother what he had learned at Sunday School. "Well" he said, "Our teacher told us all about Moses today. She told us how God sent Moses behind enemy lines to rescue the Israelites from the Egyptians. And then when he got them to the Red Sea, Moses called for his engineers to build a long pontoon bridge. After they had all crossed, they looked back and saw the Egyptians sending tanks. Moses then proceeded to radio headquarters on his walkie-talkie to send bombers to blow up the bridge and save the Israelites."

"Now...Bobby" exclaimed his mother. "Is that really the way your Sunday School teacher told the story?" "Well....not exactly" admitted Bobby to his mother. "But, mon....if I told it her way, you'd never believe it!" We smile at the story. It serves to remind us that sometimes we, too, fail to believe... to believe what faith and courage can do....what people deeply infused with great faith in God can accomplish!

Moses had brought his people out of Egypt, across the Red Sea, and under the guiding hand of God had led them not directly to the land of promise for which they were not yet fitted, but through the wilderness of Mount Sinai for training and preparation. There they pitched their tents and set up a temporary home. To be sure, it was a bleak, rocky country, unlike the lush lands of Egypt. But it was a free land. It was their land.

More than that - Sinai was a sacred mountain. It was, in their minds, the home - the sanctuary - the dwelling place of God. Jehovah, the God of Israel, lived in the smoke of it. It was there in the mountain that they received the revelation of God's glory. It was there that they received the Ten Commandments, the blue prints of the Tabernacle and the deep assurance in their hearts that this God - this God of the mountain - was their God - the God of Abraham, of Issac, of Jacob.

How easy it is to get attached to the sacred places of high spiritual experience and the customary way of doing things. They stayed around that mountain for a long time. Here they enjoyed freedom, self-respect and dignity - and then, into the midst of their contentment comes this sudden and disturbing word:

"Get up. You have stayed around this mountain long enough. It's time to move!"

It was a startling and urgent word that reminded them that they were under the government - not of Moses, nor of man, not even of this mountain god - but of the Eternal God whose dwelling place is everywhere and whose presence is not limited to any shrine or sacred spot.

A CONTINUING EXPERIENCE IN LIFE

To me, this dramatic movement in the development of Israel is a continuing experience in human life. How often in our personal experience the disturbing word has broken in:

"Get up. You've stayed long enough at this place.  
Get up. Move. Go on...."

And we have to leave the easy familiar for the uncertain unknown. Sometimes, to an entire generation this disturbing voice is heard - times of upsetting change, old molds broken up, new situations to be dealt with responsibly - and the God who makes the world, shakes the world, saying: "You've stayed around this mountain long enough. Get up. Start moving."

I think there's a "built-in" reluctance on the part of most people to move, to change, to risk new ways. We almost never do until we're pushed - and even then, we resent the pusher. It would be interesting to play around with this concern in general this morning, but for us this question has become particular - time to move.

For some time now we have been hearing that disturbing and uncomfortable word in the growing realization that the time has come for this NY Conference - our larger church family, if you will - to do something to meet the needs of a changed and changing situation. For a number of years, the leaders of our conference have known that the pension plan was not adequate to meet the long-range needs of an increasing number of retired ministers, widows and children. For a number of years, our leaders have known that our present system was a temporary, stop-gap measure at best....leaving us at the mercy of each year's income, always just one step ahead of a final day of reckoning. And now whether we like it or not, we have been jolted and jarred rather severely into the realization that something has to be done. In other words, we can't linger around this mountain any longer. The time has come for us to get up and move on and do something.

PUSHED BY A GREAT NEED

For one thing, we are being pushed by a great need. I could talk to you about the needs of our pensioners. I could talk to you about their selfless dedication to the church. I could name some of them for you - men like Roy Bragg who at one time served this church. I could stress their reliance on the Conference - on us - to carry out our obligation to them in the days of their retirement. I could tell you about my step-father who is a retired minister of this Conference.

However, I'm not going to play up that aspect of our concern, or take that approach. Chances are you know already of the great need that exists, how it will affect the future of the Conference in its recruitment program. My own church is being asked to raise \$25,000 over the next four years as its "fair share". Your "fair share" asking is probably about the same.

FUTURE POSSIBILITIES

First, we are being pushed by a great need. Secondly, we are being pulled by future possibilities. We don't

know what the future holds, but we are committed to a venture from which there is no turning back.

When God made man, he gave him equipment to go only in one direction. He gave him eyes in front to see ahead, hands in front to tackle his tasks, feet in front facing only toward the future, telling us in the very construction of our bodies that we must go on. Which, of course, is only another way of saying that we are to walk forward by faith. All we can do in a situation is to summon all of the facts we can - the wisdom, the experience, the foresight - however small it may be, and take the next step by faith.

That's where we are in terms of the pension fund drive. The ground work has been carefully laid across the past year and a half by our leaders. The Annual Conference reviewed and approved the plan last June after careful consideration. The expectations of the program have been presented to us. The next step is ours - to raise six million dollars throughout the conference over the next four years.

Someone has said that hindsight would be a valuable member of any committee. How true. We don't see the future. The element of uncertainty is in every venture we make. Nevertheless, we are obligated to take some chance on it - to live by faith, as the Bible says.

TIME TO MOVE Now the final word. Time to move. We are being pushed by a great need. We are being pulled by future possibilities. And I believe we are strengthened by a great promise. You may think we've forgotten about Moses, but we haven't.

Moses, in all probability, didn't want to leave that mountain. It was a place where God lived - the dwelling place of His presence. And Moses would not start out until he had heard that assuring word that God would go with them and before them. You see him down on his face before the Lord,

"If Thy presence goes not with us,  
carry us not out from heave".

And then he went on to discover what all spiritual pioneers have discovered that the presence of God can be counted on most when we are up and moving in obedience to His will. Moses had felt it before, at the shores of the Red Sea, when he said to his frightened people:

"Fear not. Stand still and see the  
salvation of the Lord".

What faith. What leadership. Back there at the Red Sea, Pharoah had everything on his side, except God. Moses had nothing, except God. In spite of the uncertainties tied into the future, and the peril involved in crossing the Red Sea, Moses was ready and determined to press forward. There he stood - massive and mighty - saying, "Fear not. Stand still and see the salvation of the Lord". And now, some years later, that same measure of faith was surging in his soul once again.

It is precisely that measure of faith with which we confront this great task of ours. No false confidence in the sufficiency of our own strength, yet no pious hope that the Lord will do for us what we ought to do for ourselves - but the steady faith in the promise that if we ask and seek and knock on enough doors,

God's answer will be there.

We have come to this drive for pension funds in what many would surely regard as an inopportune time. There's a great deal of discouragement in the air - as much on the Eastside of this city as on the Westside...maybe even more. Inflation, unemployment, church budgets feeling the pinch. And certainly we would not want to add to the hardship. But this is a kind of challenge for the people of our churches. If....we could succeed now, if we could do the best thing in a tough and difficult time, wouldn't that be a great victory - nobody begging off, but everybody doing his best, everybody practicing a bit of faith and a bit of sacrifice.

CLOSING Remember that great scene in Mrs. Miniver. Remember how the British had been defeated at Dunkirk, but the people didn't know it yet. They seemed never to know when they were defeated. All anybody knew was that the telephones were ringing in the dark of the night and every man who had a boat was getting up and pulling on his clothes. They were wanted somewhere - launches, tugs, outboard motors, everything that could float, that could move. From the little inlets and bays and harbors they put-putted down the river, down to the sea. And there they were told how things stood.

It wasn't a happy picture - and things were dangerous. They could go on or they could go back. But the huge fleet moved into the channel....the craziest looking armada that ever crossed the channel with the Spitfires flying overhead. It wasn't a miracle - or was it?

Every man with his little boat pulling his share of the load. The miracle wasn't God doing something for them that they could do for themselves, but God doing something - in them, through them, with them - and with every man doing his best, pulling his own share of the load. It made the difference.

Do you suppose we could have that kind of miracle in our Conference? I'd like to believe that we can. Anyway....now is the time for us to get moving on this in our local churches....all five hundred of them across the Conference... to cross the channel of some hard work, some tough effort, some sacrifice and see if we can't meet this great challenge. I believe we can. For there's no limit to what faith and work can accomplish. It was true in the day of Moses. It's true in our day, too.

PRAYER And now may that measure of faith that was in thy servant Moses, be also in each one of us. Make us willing to be challenged by this great need. Make us willing to move - to give - to share - always remembering that the tasks before us are not nearly as great as the power behind us. In the name and spirit of Christ, we pray. Amen