

"A TWITTER OR A SONG?"

A Sermon By

Philip A. C. Clarke

Park Avenue United Methodist Church
106 East 86th Street
New York, New York 10028
October 6, 1991

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INTRODUCTION Ted Loder, a Methodist minister down in Philadelphia, is the author of a little book called, Footprints in the Straw. It has to do with the birth of Jesus and the animals and other creatures that were there. He suggests that one of the birds present was a swallow.

Now, as some of you know, a swallow can't sing. It can only "twitter". But this swallow was different. It sang a beautiful song and the swallow, speaking from the pages of the book to the reader, offers this explanation.

"When I looked into the eyes of Jesus,
He turned my twitter into a song."

And then he turns to the reader and asks this question,

"Now, my unfeathered friend...what about you? Do you only twitter, or has Christ turned your twitter into a song?"

A twitter or a song? That's the title of today's meditation. Not the most powerful title I've come up with, but stick with it and let's see how it goes.

DEVELOPMENT Over in the Old Testament, when the Israelites were being led away into captivity, they were afraid and deeply concerned that there in Babylon they would lose their identity...their faith. And they asked themselves this question:

"How can we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?"
(Psalm 137; 4)

And it's a question that people today will often ask in one way or another. How do we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land - in a land of poverty and despair. How do they sing the Lord's song in that strange land where accidents occur and disease attacks and divorce and death take place. Singing the Lord's song in a strange and foreign land is not always easy. Some of you know this.

A church mission team recently returned from visiting Porac, Pampanga, a small farming community near the slopes of Mt. Pinatubo. Heading up the team was Randy Day, a friend and former District Superintendent. Sent there by UMCOR, I remember seeing Randy in Singapore following his tour of that area where the biggest volcanic eruption of this century has occurred. One thing he said that has lingered with me. It went something like this,

"As the rumblings of Mount Pinatubo continue to threaten the Philippines, the half million Filipinos directly affected are trying to deal with the destruction of their homes and farmland. In the face of one mother I saw all the poverty and hardship of a refugee camp... but in the singing of a little boy who clutched her hand, I heard the song of hope."

I liked that. And that, you see is the Lord's song - the song of hope. And you can sing it wherever you are....in the midst of poverty, heartache, sadness and loss. You can sing it at night, when darkness surrounds you.

The mission team reported that the people of the Philippines, though poor, laughed a lot. They were happy, for despite their hardships and their suffering they had learned how to sing the Lord's song. And all around our world, there are refugees and people who are having to move from place to place...sometimes in fear for their lives...but they dare to sing to the Lord that song of hope. We can help them with our gifts through our special appeal this day.

WHAT ABOUT US?

Now, what about us? "My unfeathered friends...." Do we merely "twitter" or do we sing the Lord's song in our hearts? Do we give back something of all the blessings that God has bestowed upon our lives or do we "twitter" about our nice homes and our fancy cars, our status in the community or our place out there in the work-a-day world?

Do our children understand the meaning of service, of giving love, or do they twitter about "what is the church doing for me?" Or "what fun thing have you planned to keep my interest and my attention?" Are the children being brought up to twitter about their designer clothes, or who's the most popular at school or how much money "my daddy" makes? Are we teaching them to look into the eyes of Christ and to let Him turn their twitter into a real song of love and service and giving.

Yes, are we twittering or are we really singing?

You know, one of my favorite stories (and some of you have heard it before, but not in the past five years)...a story about a young lady living here on the upper eastside of our city who one Saturday morning was busy vacuuming her apartment and accidentally vacuumed up her pet canary. Think of it. Just imagine. But, the amazing thing is that that little bird survived that...and came through it. But said the young lady, "He doesn't sing much anymore...mostly sits and stares".

That's the way it is with many Christians....they don't sing much anymore, mostly just "sit and stare". We are made for so much more!

CHALLENGE

My friend, whoever you are...if your life is filled with nothing more than some superficial "twitters"...if the Church of Jesus Christ is nothing more to you than a social outlet or a source of business contacts, I challenge you this morning - as you receive His body "broke for you" and His blood "spilled out for you"...that you look into His eyes and let Him turn your "twitters" into a real song. Will you do that?

I once read somewhere that in Europe there is a bird, a type of "finch" called the "chaf finch" that's about the size and the color of a robin. It has a beautiful song and people keep these chaf finches in their homes to hear them sing.

But this chaf finch has a peculiar characteristic in that it can forget how to sing and it has to be taken back into the woods where the wild birds sing in order to be re-taught. If it does not learn how to sing again it becomes depressed and eventually dies.

Maybe you're something of a chaf-finch. Perhaps you have forgotten how to sing the Lord's song? Come in here with us and share life on the upper levels and let this Lord of ours re-teach you to sing His song of hope, love and service.

Look into the eyes of Jesus here this morning. It may be time for you to give something back. Let Him turn your "twitterers" into one glorious son of hope, of joy, of peace, of love. As the bumper sticker of the sixties once put it, "Let go. Let God".

PRAYER

Now make us sensitive to your nearness and your presence in these quiet moments, O God. Heal us in the broken places of our lives. Wrestle with each of us in the deep places of our lives and touch with healing loved ones and friends whom we now remember before you.

Lead us, O Lord, ever more deeply into the mysteries of life and of death as we see them revealed in the bread and wine of the Last Supper....of Your Son, Jesus. May we see there plainly, clearly and so simply stated, the meaning of our existence and of Your purpose for us and all your children everywhere.

Bind us more closely to each other and to Him and lift us up that we may go out of here renewed in body and soul - fed, nourished, forgiven, restored....made new. In the name and spirit of Christ, we pray.

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