

"BE CAREFUL HOW YOU WALK"

A Sermon By

Philip A. C. Clarke

Park Avenue United Methodist Church
106 East 86th Street
New York, New York 10028
August 11, 1991

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INTRODUCTION

The head of the company whose work required frequent travel decided to buy his own plane. He took the necessary flying lessons and soon had his license. He grew to enjoy this more convenient way of getting around. After a few years he decided to purchase a pontoon plane so he could fly back and forth from his beautiful summer home on the lake upstate.

On his first flight in his new plane, he started to head for his customary landing strip in a nearby airport, just as he had always done. Luckily, his wife was with him. When she saw what he was doing, she chirped,

"Pull up, George...pull up! You can't land on a runway. You have pontoons! You don't have wheels!"

Looking somewhat flushed and humbled, this prosperous executive quickly hit the throttle and veered off toward the lake. Landing safely in the still, blue water, he shook his head and said,

"I really don't know where my mind was....I just wasn't thinking. That's one of the dumbest things I've ever done!"

And with that he opened the door and stepped out into the lake.

DEVELOPMENT

There are times when my mind operates that way. How about yours? Some people have it so altogether. They never commit a faux pas. They always know the right thing to do and to say. But then there are the rest of us. Those of us who step absentmindedly into the lake.

Actually, if you're a bit absent-minded, pat yourself on the back. It simply means that you're preoccupied with great thoughts...at least I trust they are great.

Albert Einstein was so absentminded, they say, that he once used a \$1,500 Rockefeller Foundation check for a bookmark...and then lost the book. So just tell people you're another Einstein if they wonder why you've misplaced your glasses for the 100th time! Actually, being absent-minded is not all that bad - as long as you watch where you walk. And this brings us to today's scripture.

Now St. Paul wasn't addressing his remarks only to the absent-minded, though, when he wrote in our text for the day,

"Look carefully how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, making the most of the time, because the days are evil...." (Ephesians 5: 15)

What does Paul mean when he says, "Be careful how you walk..." Fortunately, he tells us. Three thoughts to listen for...

HE SAYS TO USE OUR HEADS

First of all, he says to use our heads. He writes,

"Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery."

In other words, use your head! Don't do anything stupid! Don't foul up your life! I sound like a nagging parent, don't i? I hope I sound like a loving parent.

You see, there are all kinds of foolishness. Some kinds can be avoided, and some can't.

A colonel frowned impatiently as he watched a young lieutenant drill his platoon. Sweat was beginning to bead on the young lieutenant's forehead. His voice showed the strain of his superior's scrutiny. He attempted to direct his men through an intricate maneuver. Eventually, the poor lieutenant had his troops marching eight abreast toward the edge of a cliff. Completely unnerved, he froze...unable to speak.

Finally, the colonel barked,

"Good heavens, man...at least tell them good-bye!"

That's an example, perhaps, of unavoidable foolishness. Any of us might panic in such a situation. But there's another kind of foolishness, though, a kind that is avoidable. It consists of those little, stupid thing in our lives....those little things that so often bring us down. Those things that we know need changing but somehow we never get around to. And all the time those "little" things are keeping us from being all that God has created us to be.

We ought to learn a lesson from the Goodyear blimp Columbia. The giant 192 foot long helium blimp was recently punctured by a small radio-controlled model airplane. The damage was too slight to cause the blimp to crash, but the hole in the blimp was big enough to cause a constant loss of helium. Hence, the blimp couldn't function the way it was supposed to and could only limp along until the hole was repaired.

Some of us are limping along. We have holes in our lives that we try to ignore. We need to face our problems and get them fixed.

It's been interesting to watch the slowly changing attitude in our society toward alcohol. This new attitude isn't coming from the churches or the schools, but from society itself. Even Budweiser is telling us to "know when to say when". Society is starting to wake up.

Don Imus, once one of our city's leading radio personalities, spoke at Queens College sometime back at the school's Drug Awareness Day. Imus was simple and direct. "I'm an alcoholic and drug addict" he said.

Imus had lost his job in the city in 1977 "for drinking Scotch and doing coke". Imus related how his father drank away a fortune before dying in 1954 "with \$13 in the bank". "I swore that I'd never be like my father" he said. But he was wrong. He became, by his own admission, a "violent, awful drunk..." He was spending \$3,000 to \$4,000 a week on cocaine. He said that while he was lying in a stupor in his office, a friend suggested that he might have a drinking problem and should attend Alcoholics Anonymous. He did and was able to get his life back together. Jim Jensen's another whose testimony has also been heard.

Not everybody who abuses alcohol or drugs is that fortunate. Some don't get smart until it's too late. "Do not be foolish" Be careful how you walk.

HE SAYS TO OPEN OUR HEARTS

Use your head. But then Paul goes on to say that we are to open our hearts. We

read,

"....be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs and making melody to the Lord with all your heart...."

That sounds like a description of the early church at its very best. Gathering in each other's homes, rejoicing in their faith, sharing all things in common....the early church experienced God's spirit in power and in fellowship. That is when God is most real in our lives....when we open our hearts to His Spirit and to each other.

John Westerhoff tells a story about the three little pigs. Years had passed since the crisis with the wolf. The family of the three little pigs had settled down comfortably in their brick house out in the suburbs. Gradually, however, boredom set in. Something was missing in their lives. The three pigs decided that what they were missing had to do with love. They determined to go out and seek love's meaning.

The first little pig went to the university library and read all she could on the subject of love. When she had finished she had learned a great deal about love, but her life was still empty. She read.

The second little pig read in the newspaper that a famous pig was coming to town to deliver a series of sermons on the subject of love. The second little pig attended all the sermons and was filled with enthusiasm and emotions. His emotional high last about four days and then his life became pretty much as empty as it had been before. He had listened.

The third little pig invited two other pig families over to their house one evening and all the little pigs began to share their life stories, continuing until late in the night. They found this so interesting that they decided to meet together regularly to share experiences and life together. In time they came to care about each other very deeply. One evening, after the other families had left, the third little pig said to her siblings,

"Now I know what love is, for I have experienced it!"

And that's the kind of love that happened in the New Testament church. That is the kind of love St. Paul yearns for each of us to experience. When the church really is the church, we are visiting in one another's homes. We are breaking bread together. We are worshipping and studying and singing with one accord. Life cannot beat us down when we are joined together like that. Sin cannot mar our lives. Despair cannot take up residence in the open heart. Be careful how you walk. First, use your head. Second, have an open heart....open to God and open to one another.

HE SAYS WE ARE TO LIFT OUR HANDS IN THANKSGIVING

Finally, St. Paul says we are to lift our hands

in thanksgiving.

"Always and for everything giving thanks in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father."

That's a great secret of life - to develop the gratitude attitude.

John Killinger tells about one of his parishioners - a man by the name of Ralph Kelly. Killinger describes him as a tall, handsome, white-headed man - a Purdue graduate, an engineer, a businessman, a counsellor, a friend bubbling with energy all the time. Killinger's description of Ralph is a winning one. Do you know the first thing Ralph does when he drops a pencil? Pick it up? No. The first thing he does is to look up and say, "Thank you, Sir!"

Then he tries to figure out what he's thankful for. In the case of the lead pencil, he says,

"The first thing I think of is that I'm thankful for gravity. If it hadn't been for gravity, my pencil wouldn't have fallen down there where I could get it. It would have gone off up there somewhere, and I would never see it again".

Then he says,

"Thank you for graphite. If it weren't for graphite, we wouldn't have lead pencils."

Then he's thankful for trees from which we get the wood that makes pencils. And he's thankful for the engineering that makes pencils. And he's thankful for chemical engineering that made possible the eraser that crowns the lead pencils and takes care of the mistakes he makes.

Ralph does that for everything. If he has a flat tire he pulls off to the side of the road and after he says, "Thank you, Sir", he thinks of the things he's thankful for. Maybe it's because he found a wide place in the road where he had his flat tire and he could pull off without any threat on the highway. Maybe he's thankful that he got only one flat tire and not two or three. Maybe he's thankful that when he gets out of the car he gives his back a rest and can get a little exercise.

But whatever it is, he looks up and he says, "Thank you, Sir!" And then he thinks about all those things for which he is thankful. He says,

"If you can think of one or two, you're going to feel better. If you can think of four or five, you're doing well".

Now some of you are going to dismiss Ralph Kelly as an unrealistic Pollyanna. But what is the alternative when things foul up as they sometimes do? Raise your blood pressure a few degrees as you curse your luck? Shout and scream and give everyone around you an ulcer? Bottle it up until you have a cardiac arrest? Wouldn't it be better to do as Ralph Kelly does and as St. Paul suggests in First Thessalonians, chapter five and verse 18: "Give thanks in all things"? You and I would live longer if we did. And we would enjoy life more than we do.

So, be careful how you walk. That's good advice. Use your head. Open your heart. Lift up your hands in thanksgiving and praise. In other words, walk like Christ. Follow His example. Watch how He walks and then try to walk the same way.

PRAYER Help us, Lord, to walk with all throttles open: open to You,
 open to all kinds of people and experiences and situations.
In so doing we know that we shall be richly blessed beyond measure.

Dismiss us now with Your blessings. And as we depart and go our separate
ways...go with us...lifting us and supporting us...and may we walk the High
Road of life as did Paul....walking in the steps and in the example of our
Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen.

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PASTORAL PRAYER: June 30, 1991

O GOD, OUR FATHER - Father of our spirits...Father of all mankind. We thank You for the quiet moments of life...for the joy of a Summer Sunday...for all that it can mean to us in the way of inspiration and reassurance, forgiveness and a better perspective on life.

WE ARE THANKFUL for the devoted hearts that have gathered here this hour to worship YOU...to hear YOUR Word, to try to follow in the footsteps of Christ...and we are grateful for their good works...in other places and in other times.

WE ARE THANKFUL, TOO...for those many blessings that have touched and lifted our individual lives...the joys of friendship with others...the fellowship of this church family.

OUR LIVES are filled with gratitude for the lift that we receive from sharing in the wonders of YOUR handiwork -

- the warmth of the sun.
- the shade of trees in the park.
- the green of the grass.
- the grandeur of the seas.
- the majesty of the mountains.

IN THIS TIME WORSHIP, we would try to turn aside from the pains and the problems that have been troubling us...and here in the silence of Your sanctuary rest our tense and troubled spirits in that love that rests at the heart of all life...that will never let us go, nor let us down...no matter what.

HERE WE WOULD SEEK to gain a new insight.
to see life from higher ground.
to see You at the heart of all things.

HERE WE WOULD PRAY, too - not only for ourselves, but also for our fellow man -

- the less fortunate...the poor and hungry, the distressed diseased, the burdened and the bereaved.
- forgive us our sins...keep us calm within. Speak to each of us your quiet word of peace and love.

TO YOUR GUIDANCE, WE COMMIT OURSELVES - our Church, our nation, our world. Do with us as THOU wilt. In the name and spirit of Christ, we offer this prayer.

SURROUND US with your spirit. Surprise us with Your joy. Strengthen us in your word. Send us forth renewed and committed...

"And all things...whatsoever you shall ask in prayer, believing...you shall receive. And as many as touched : Him were made whole!"

"Wait on the Lord. Be of good course and He shall strengthen thine heart. For we dwell in the shelter of the Almighty. He is our refuge and our strength."

"We know that in everything, God works together for good with those who love Him!"

"But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength. They shall mount up with wings as eagles. They shall run and not be weary. They shall walk and not faint".

"God so love the world that He gave His only Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life".

"Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits: who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases".

"Thou wilt keep Him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on Thee: because he trusteth in thee".

"In the name of Jesus Christ, I share with you the Good News: We are forgiven".

PRAYERS / LORD'S PRAYER

O Thou, who hearest prayer, hear our prayers...for others, as well as for ourselves. Touch with healing, O God...Father of us all, those whom we mention in our prayers this hour:

- | | | |
|------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. <u>Karen Oldham</u> | 2. <u>Clelus Van Raalte</u> | 3. <u>Tselang Ramothibe</u> |
| 4. _____ | 5. _____ | 6. _____ |

Joanna Perla ...beloved members and friends of this congregation. Comfort the bereaved and the broken hearted among us...and especially be close to Anna Delson who in recent days has lost a loved one. Abide among us as a healing benediction. Heal each of us at the point of our deepest need.

Answer the upspoken prayers now offered to thee on the altars of our hearts, spoken in the name and spirit of Jesus, who taught us to say when we pray.... For we ask all of this in the powerful name and lifting spirit of Jesus who taught us to say when we pray...

"Our Father, who art in heaven. Hallowed be Thy name. Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for Thine is the Kingdom, and the Power and the glory, forever. Amen"

FIRST INTRODUCTION

The week of toil has ended. Our day of rest is at hand. May the rest and the quiet of this hour of worship refresh our inner life. And may it renew in all of us a sense of God's holy and abiding Presence.

In silence, let each now pray as the heart may prompt.

SECOND INTRODUCTION

Remaining in a prayerful spirit, let us enter now into a time of silent meditation...a time in which we prepare ourselves expectantly...that the Spirit of the living God may be made real to us in this hour of worship.

In quietness, let each now pray as the heart may prompt.

THIRD INTRODUCTION

Remaining in a prayerful spirit, let us enter into a time of silent meditation as we come into the Presence of Him whom our faith declares to be the Source of all life and love, all peace and power, the Source of all hope and healing.

In silence, let each now pray as the heart may prompt.

FOURTH INTRODUCTION

Remaining in a prayerful spirit, let us enter now into a time of silent meditation. In these moments, let us ponder the pattern our lives have been weaving as we come into the Presence of Him whom our Faith declares to be the Source of all life and love, all peace and power, the Source of all hope and healing.

In silence, let each now pray as the heart may prompt.

MEDITATION

We rest our hearts in the Promise of Jesus who said:

"Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of Me, for My yoke is easy and My burden is light".

"Ask, and it will be given you. Seek and you will find. Knock, and it will be open unto you."

"I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father, but by Me. If you love Me, you will keep my commandments"

"For I tell you...do not be anxious about your life, what you shall eat...or drink..nor about your body, what you shall put on. Is not life more than food? And the body more than raiment."

"But seek ye first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well."

"For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present...to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature - shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus, Our Lord."

ANNOUNCEMENTS: Sunday, August 11, 1991

GREETING / VISITORS

- A. Even on a quiet Summer Sunday morning, we're apt to have some visitors in our congregation. A word of warm welcome to those of you who are worshipping with us for perhaps the first or second time. Join us for a bit of fellowship downstairs following the service. Share your name with us. Fill out a visitor card. Sign one of our guest books.
- B. Come and worship with us on other Sundays...work with us, too, in the outreach concerns of our church.
- C. Doing the LORD'S WORK here since 1837...at this busy corner of God's Kingdom. We minister in the name of Christ and it is in His loving spirit that we greet all of you on this August Sunday morning - visitors and regular members. And members: remember to wear your name tags downstairs and make at least one new friend in the time together.

PARISH CONCERNS

- A. Parish concerns are lifted up in the bulletin. These quieter weeks of the Summer provide us with an opportunity to do some building maintenance. Main project - laying of new tiles downstairs....about to begin. We need your financial support and hope that if you haven't responded with a gift for some new tiles that we can encourage you to do so. To date, we have received _____ toward a goal of \$ 8,000.
- B. This is my first Sunday with you since the last Sunday of June...since then we've been up in the Adirondacks where I preached two Sundays at the Caroga Lake Chapel...250 to 300 people each Sunday in that lovely setting by the lake. And then last Sunday night, Lynn and I returned from the World Methodist Conference in Singapore....eight days there...and side trips to Bangkok, Hong Kong and also Bali where we made a pastoral call on member, Leroy Coffman, at the Bali Hilton. Leroy wishes to be remembered to you all....
- C. This isn't the time or place to report to you on this trip and the conference, other than to say thank you for making it possible for us to be there...to be "in touch" with Methodist Christians from many of those countries around the earth that have sent dear friends into our lives in this church...deeply moved by the opening procession of banners representing 60 different countries...and I thought of the many friends we have known and loved who have sat next to us in the pews here.

(over)

OUT
OUT

- D. People from Fiji...Singapore...the Philippines...Kenya... Ghani...Nigeria...Zambi....South Africa...England.... Australia....Burma...and on and on...we're probably one of the most "international" Methodist Churches in the world.
- E. Thank you for making it possible for us to be there and I lookin forward to sharing much more with you further on down the line.
- G. Next Sunday the Rev. Stephen Goldstein will be here to lead us in worship. Two weeks from today, the Rev. Barber Waters will visit us. Lynn and I leave at the end of the week for several weeks of rest and relaxation in Ocean Park, Maine - a bit of golf, sea food, sunshine and ocean...things are going so well in my absence and I'm grateful for the leadership Duane Thompson is giving the church in my absence.

WHILE AWAY

- A. ~~While we were away,~~ **we** learned upon our return last Sunday evening of the death of Morton Delson...beloved husband of Anna and a dear friend of many years to so many of us. I had known Morton about 22 years and our prayers and condolences go out to Anna and Joanna and Perla. We are here to be of help and support in any way we can at this difficult time. Flowers on the altar today are in his memory given by Dr. and Mrs. John Lombardo.

OFFERING

- A. Jesus said: "It is more blessed to give than it is to receive". In this spirit, let us worship God with our morning offering.

LAST SUNDAY

- A. You would want to know that this is the last Sunday with us... for a while...for Charles Wire...who read the scriptures for us a few moments ago. Chalire is leaving the city this week... heading back to his native state of SX...and will be working on a Master's Degree at Clemson.....our thanks to you, Charles, for a great ten years here in our midst...your many good works... teaching the Adult Bible Class in recent years...in the Adult Fellowship...God bless you, Charles...come back when you can. Many of us, hopefully...will be here.

TODAY'S SOLOIST

- A. Our thanks to Michael Hajek for his solo work here today... blessing us with a lovely voice...member of church and former member of our choir.