

"CELEBRATE TODAY"

A Sermon By

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"TO CELEBRATE TODAY"

INTRODUCTION

Back in the month of January I began reading a book that had been put into my hands. Entitled, "Celebrate the Temporary" by Clyde Reid, it helped to put a bit of light into those dreary days of Winter. And, as I've thought about its message, I've had the feeling that it would help to launch a sermon. Today is the day and this is the sermon.

Let me share with you a few "key" sentences from the book, which is written in a Christian perspective by a professor in a theological seminary.

"To celebrate the temporary is to let go of worrying about yesterday and tomorrow long enough to be here, now. It is to give your attention, your awareness, to smelling, feeling, seeing, tasting and hearing the myriad delights around you. To live today. To live in the "now" with all of its problems and its agonies, with its joy and its pain."

And here is a passage that is especially seasonal.

"Lilacs are a delight, and we tend to walk past them each Spring without really stopping to see them, feel them, smell them and appreciate them. We say 'oh'....'isn't that nice. The lilacs are out again.' When we think next about them, they're gone. Lilacs come and go very quickly and to appreciate them fully, we must celebrate the temporary, giving some of ourselves to the lilacs."

Then, talking about human relationships - family, friends, even casual acquaintances who light up a day so brilliantly for us, he writes:

"So why not celebrate those relationships now while we have them? Even if we have them just for a day, or a week, or a year?"

And almost as though to answer someone who is thinking in his mind..."Yes, but it's too late for that", he asks, "Why not celebrate what we did have rather than grieve what we cannot have?"

"To celebrate the temporary is to let go of worrying about yesterday and tomorrow long enough to be here now." How difficult it is for some to fully absorb and appreciate today! We can become so nostalgic about yesterday, or so apprehensive about tomorrow that today ends up being largely lost.

DEVELOPMENT

Have you ever taken a vacation trip, and at its end somehow felt that along the way you had failed to fully savor all of its days and delights...until only in retrospect you realized what privileges had been yours? It's so easy for us, on such an excursion, to fret about schedules, to worry about tomorrow's problems or prizes, and so to miss so much of the glory of today.

And, in more serious ways, something like this often happens in the journey through life. We fail, at times, to appreciate the present moment because we're concentrating on the next. We cannot savor the splendor of Spring, because we're thinking about Summer or Winter plans. We cannot really enjoy our home, because we have an eye on the next move or the next purchase.

We cannot appreciate our children, because we're concerned to see them in the next stage of their development. Wait until they're in school...wait until they're out of school...wait until they're in college...wait until they're married and settled down. We are restless for some tomorrow that never quite becomes the today we had anticipated.

I can remember once as a boy, loudly proclaiming at home my impatience for some event that loomed large far down the pike. My mother - as I recall - got after me. I've forgotten the precise anticipation, but I have not forgotten her advice. She said, "Stop wishing away your life"....which really is another way of saying, "Look to your present. Look well to this day. Focus on the now."

Now as you know, this deeper sense of the "now" that we're talking about could easily be perverted into a selfish philosophy of life - a self-centered, self-indulgent wallowing in the present, akin to that old formula, "Eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die." But this sermon and the little book that helped to launch it are talking about something quite different and much deeper than that. There is a perception and an appreciation of today that is nourished by the Christian interpretation of life. In this awareness of the present, a person has some deep and grateful roots in the past, and he also has a glad confidence about tomorrow, but in between he also senses that there is a meaning and a beauty in today which he neglects to his own impoverishment.

JESUS PROVIDES US WITH A MODEL

It seems to me that Jesus is a model for what we're talking about here. He had a great sense of history and a heritage, and He had a clear faith in the future. But in between those two points, He was in the best sense of the word a "now" person. He kept the two in a God-given balance. He knew how to celebrate today, to find the joy and the meaning there in the present moment.

As a youth, when all of the problems of supporting and sustaining the family in Nazareth settled around Him, there is much evidence that He found so much that was good to see, to sing and to celebrate. How many of his later thoughts and words must have had their roots in the habits of those formative years in Nazareth.

"Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow...even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these...the birds of the air have nests...foxes have holes...not a sparrow falls....a certain farmer had a hundred sheep, but one was lost...and when he found it, he laid in on his shoulder rejoicing...a certain woman had ten silver coins, but she lost one...and when she had swept and found it, she called together her friends and neighbors, saying, 'Rejoice with me'".

Somehow such lines reflect to me the personality of a "now" person.

But I think you see it and sense it even more in his mature ministry. Like that day when He stopped to pick up a child in his arms. His disciples were fretting and fussing, thinking only of their schedules and plans and prospects. So, as the Gospel says, "They rebuked Jesus". And Jesus in effect said to them in so many words, "Wait a minute now...let's get our values straightened out. Nothing is more important than these young lives in this moment." So, "Let the little children come unto Me, and do not hinder them for of such is the Kingdom of God."

There's ample New Testament confirmation for the conclusion of Clyde Reid, author of the book which helped to launch this sermon. He writes,

"I find Jesus to be a man who knew how to celebrate the temporary. He taught us not to be anxious about tomorrow, but to let tomorrow take care of itself."

EFFECT OF A CRISIS EVENT

I think that this greater sensitivity to the present moment sometimes comes with a crisis event.

How often we have made our way back from an illness detour with a new and deepened appreciation of the present tense. This awakening and awareness is something most of us have experienced. As with any crisis or illness or detour, you discover that others have traveled the same or similar path and you listen carefully and read and reflect what some of them have said. One man related his feelings to another, who put it down in these words:

"He was overcome with a sense of the freshness of life such as he had not known for many years. In the hospital, he looked at the fabric of the bedclothes and at his own hands, thinking how marvelously they were contrived. Every object on which his eyes fell, every experience, was remarkable and new...and later at home - 'to him the sudden flattening of a patch of grass in the wind could be the very footsteps of God. To him the coming of Spring and Summer was not the logical result of the ponderous wheel of earth, an annual occurrence scarcely to be noticed, but an enormous personal gift that could bring tears to his eyes."

There are all kinds of special events in life that stir this sense of the freshness of life and the preciousness of today - separations, reunions, deep joy, deep sorrow. Each of us can think of instances which have produced within us the feelings of gratitude for the wonder of the present moment.

A CHRISTIAN HAS A PAST AND A FUTURE

But the great point is that the Christian Gospel helps a person to make this celebration of today something more than a fleeting, occasional reaction to a crisis event.

A Christian does have a yesterday. He has a sure sense of history in which he sees God's guiding hand at work through the ages, His revelation in Jesus Christ, and most personally, His sufficient grace and guidance in the yesterdays of his own years.

A Christian has a tomorrow, too. He has a sure confidence that God's hand will continue to work in the affairs of men and nations with justice and with mercy, and that there is a "grace-full" future worth the having, both here and beyond what we call death. But the Christian should not be captured by the past, nor be mortgaged by worry to the future.

I believe there is something about the experience of getting acquainted with Jesus Christ - of receiving His word of God's love and acceptance and personal significance that gives a person this dimension of entering eternity here and now and thus redeeming the present moments from emptiness and triviality and of entering into a deeper awareness of the glory that is today.

Let each of us this morning think of those dimensions of his own - the symphony of sight and of sound and of smell in this Springtime that is taking us to Summer - the wonder of love and trust in family and friends - the very gift of life itself - the uniqueness of every life - and the glory of God's continuing authorship and partnership in every life.

A friend of ours - a young widow left with two small children - wrote these lines and sent them along to us sometime back. She headed them "Wonder", and I share them with you in these closing moments:

"I am always astonished when the phone rings,
and I hear the voice of my friend.

I am always astonished when I really look
at my children's faces or watch them at
a distance - running, playing, yelling,
laughing.

I am always astonished at the smell of the
earth after a rain when all is fresh and
new and everything seems possible.

I am always astonished that my tears and loneli-
ness, my emptiness and longing do not
overwhelm me and life is unexpectedly
glorious.

I would like to know better the Giver of all
these gifts.

I would like to experience more fully the Source
of all that I have and am.

Funny, I used to think of God as separate from
His gifts. I now believe He is in them.

Give me, O God, eyes to see you more clearly,
and a heart to love you more dearly in all
things, even tears, loneliness and another's
sorrow.

Amen"

Very well then.

"This is the day which the Lord hath made. Let us
rejoice and be glad in it."