

"DISAPPOINTMENT AND FAILURE"

TEXT: "He shall call upon me, and I will answer him: I will be with him in trouble". Psalm 91:15

INTRODUCTION The meditation this morning begins with this observation that sooner or later, into every life, there comes some measure of disappointment. Plans are made, and sometimes made extremely well, but then something unexpected happens. Trouble of some kind confronts us; the results are not what we had hoped for. There is little to be done; the situation must be accepted as it is.

It has been said that: the measure of our maturity is the way in which we meet disappointment. Certainly most adults have learned "to take it in stride", and to keep on striding. At least this is the case with so many of the routine disappointments which come into our lives in the course of the day. But sometimes a disappointment is extremely keen, especially when it seems to indicate failure on our own part. It takes courage and character to overcome it, to keep on going, to rebuild our morale.

DEVELOPMENT We may take the trouble first of all to the quiet place within, where God waits to restore our confidence. We can look at the whole situation in his presence, asking for alertness, insight, strength, renewed perspective to keep going. For one of the first things we can do with a great disappointment is to learn from it. This is the scientist's necessity. Most great scientific achievements are the results of endlessly repeated efforts and painstaking study of efforts which have failed.

Perhaps it would be well then for us to cultivate a scientific attitude at this point. How was our planning at fault? What were the circumstances that we failed to take into account? Did we depend too much on factors unknown to us? How can we change our methods so that we will be more successful another time. Did we rely on others more than was right or necessary? Was the failure due to some lack in right relationships?

And then another thing we can do with what seems a failure is to make it a means of spiritual growth. Patience is a virtue most of us need to practice. Patience and hope may be renewed by beginning over again. I think we must exercise faith and seek the way to new planning, always turning inwardly toward the creative source of all life. Listen to the lines of the poet:

"Lord, I have failed. Here are the scattered things,
The plans I made but could not carry through.

The hopes that soared, but fell with broken wings
To earth again - I bring them all to you.

Take them and me to your creative care
And use me somehow, Lord. This is my prayer."

I hope you will excuse a personal reference. Several years ago, about ten years, when I was in seminary I was responsible for a project which included planning and working with several others over a period of time. Things did not go well, and there were some very discouraging aspects which caused me concern and worry. I felt a need to talk things over with some other person. I made an appointment with one of the professors, and in the course of our conversation together I received some wonderful advice, some counsel which I have never forgotten and have since passed on to others in the intimacy of the counselling room. In essence he said:

"Remember two things. First, that you are not responsible for your success. That depends on many circumstances, some of them quite outside your control. You are responsible for your best and most conscientious efforts. Second, what you see as failure may not be failure in the larger sense. This project is too near to you. Try to look upon it not as all important in itself, but as part of a larger plan, with many elements hidden from your view which may be more important than some which you see. Take the long look, do your best, leave the rest to God".

After all, when you do stop to think about it - failure and success are man made criteria and are merely relative. Life moves along with disappointments, and triumphs in balance. Every life has its share of both.

Thornton Wilder has a three minute drama based on the Gospel story of the pool of Bethesda. The chief character is a doctor who is himself sick with a wound he cannot heal. Along with the other sick people around the pool, he stands waiting for the moving of the waters, that he may get in first and be made whole. But the angel stands there, saying:

"Draw back, physician; healing is not for thee. Without your wound, where would your power be? It is your very sorrow that puts kindness in your face and makes your low voice tremble into the hearts of men. The angels themselves cannot heal the wretched as can one human being broken on the wheel of life. In love's service, only the wounded can serve"

So, in his disappointment, the doctor turns away to live with his wound, never to be cured. But even as he turns, a man comes running to him. "Come home with me sire, if for only an hour. My son is lost in dark thoughts, no one understands him, and only you have ever lifted his mood. My daughter, since her child died, sits in the shadow. She will not listen to us. Only you, who are wounded, can help her."

Perhaps, you too have to live with it.....with that cross whatever it is, with your disappointment. Perhaps there will come no miracle to make it easy, no angel to help you out of it. But because you are wounded, because you belong with the wounded, the people who sit in the shadows of disappointment will turn to you for that intangible something that puts hope into life.

Friday, the 1st of November, was All Saints' Day. All Saints' Day is the day on the church calendar when we pause to remember the men and women of the faith whose lives have been remarkable in terms of Christian stature....people like Paul and Barnabas, Augustine and Aquinas, Calvin and Luther, Wesley and Whitefield, Lincoln and Lee and scores and scores of others, some well-known and some not quite so well known. I think we would discover if we were to carefully examine the lives of these "giants" of the faith that most of them at various points at their share of disappointments and failures. And yet they managed to rise above them and overcome them and keep on going. These people have gone on to the world beyond this, and you and I are surrounded by these witnesses to the faith. Their influence is still felt today and they are saying to us something like this:

"Refuse to accept defeat. It can be done.
We have done it. You can do it too. Only
keep your eyes on Him who is the center of
our faith. Keep close to Christ. This is what
we did. We hope you will do the same"

PRAYER:

Our Father and our God - be near to us in the moments of bitter disappointment. Let us not be long cast down, but lift our hearts to a higher level of hope and use us in thy larger plans.

As we come to thy table this hour,
Help us to come humbly, thoughtfully, at peace with
on another.

Forgive us for those doubting moments when
we have strayed from thy path.

Forgive us for our lack of faith, and for our
slowness to see the virtues of each other and
our quickness to see the faults of others.

AND as we rise from thy table, may we
depart:

Determined to live each day as it comes.
Determined to do our very best and to
leave the rest to Thee.

In the spirit of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen