

"DON'T WEARY IN WELL-DOING"

TEXT: "And let us not grow weary in well-doing, for in due season we shall reap, if we do not lose heart"

(Galatians 6: 9)

INTRODUCTION

In the little dressing room off-stage there was a large placard next to the door which read something like this:

"Don't cut your act! The people in this audience have paid good money to see your show, and the management expects you to give them the best you've got".

When I read those words, I wondered why the manager had printed that sign and had it placed there near the stage, and my curiosity set me off on an imaginary excursion with a theatrical company.

The members of the troupe, I surmised, had been glad to join the organization...had studied their parts well...had rehearsed faithfully for days on end. The time arrived when they were to take the show "on the road". Every night they performed with greater ease...picking up their cues better and better...with the result that the show got better and better. Finally, opening night. Good reviews. In the weeks that followed, capacity audiences in that theater.

But then after a couple of months, it got to be something of an old story. It began to drag. For one thing, the actors knew their parts so well that they could carry on without much in the way of effort. Rehearsals were virtually abandoned. Slowly, but surely...a kind of blight settled over what had been only several months before a very spirited, exciting moment in the theater. Members of the audience were seen making for the exit before the performance was over and some were heard to say as they walked out on to the sidewalk, "What a waste of time...dull...boring...what happened in there"

Now, all of this was just imaginary in my mind. This need not be the case and in most instance probably is not, but it can happen.

DEVELOPMENT

What we're talking about here can happen - not only in the theater but in most areas of life. It can happen in our own lives, our own work, in churches as well as in theaters.

It happens when people allow what they do to become routine and monotonous. And there is that sense in which a theater serves as a miniature model of the human scene. Remember Shakespeare's word that "All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players". ~~And don't you agree that perhaps there is no other time in an actor's life when his enthusiasm for a play is so great as when he first starts practicing for it. And what's true there is true in most vocations and professions.~~

It's true in the ministry; it's true in medicine. I imagine that teachers find it to be true, although teachers are often protected against those subtle penalties of getting tired and bored with their jobs because they are closely checked up on by their principals. They're obliged to keep abreast of their profession as long as they remain it. Doctors and ministers and lawyers don't have principals and headmasters checking up on them. Might be a good thing if we

did. Right?

For the large majority of the workers of the world - whether in a business or a profession - there are not period check-ups and examinations once they are safely launched. They go on their own gait, after the period of training is over. And, if they slump, they do this so gradually that they hardly realize this themselves, until failure or dismissal or rebuke stirs them to the awareness that they're slumping.

There's not much to be done with or for those people who have cut deep grooves in the now solid cement of their routine that they are up to the hub, with no prospect of getting out. People can think their old thoughts just so long, indifferent to any new ones, and then the time arrives when celebration is not merely fatiguing, but increasingly painful.

WHAT'S NEEDED Now, I believe that if this problem of slumping is to be solved, it will have to be taken under consideration by persons whose enthusiasm is still keen, whose inquisitiveness about the world is still unabated, and whose inner life is saturated with the belief that what they're doing is important.

And this is not a matter determined by age. I've known persons at sixty and at eighty who are in less danger of slipping than many at twenty or at thirty. So the point is to be on the alert for the arrival of that time when if you're a typist (for instance), you just don't go to the bother of erasing that accidental "N" that you struck when you meant to strike an "M", but content yourself with going back and whacking an "M" vigorously on top of the "N" and thinking to yourself,

"Aw...what the heck....nobody's going to notice it...."

It's certainly not a major crime; you're not going to have a meter maid come along and put a ticket on you, but, mind you - it's a bad sign. It's a sign that you're no longer on the way up, having demonstrated those early symptoms of fatigue, indifference, and who knows...a trace of shaky integrity.

You may be saying to yourself, "Oops...I'm still in my twenties or my thirties and I'm already doing that". You can start your toboggan ride to now-- where in your twenties if you aren't careful and you can arrive there by pay-day. So, part of the message today is to say to you - whoever you are - be on the alert for the arrival of that time when you no longer care....when you're beginning to slump.

One act certainly has not established a habit, but if this attitude of apathy should become a fixation, then you might just as well face it: you've gone about as far toward that longed-for promotion as you're likely to go. The rest of the trip will find you "hanging on" to your job, perhaps in jeopardy of losing it altogether.

BACK TO PAUL'S WORD When a minister has a keynote message in his bones, a Sunday like today is surely the time to turn it loose. Summer's past. A new season beckons. Anticipation runs high in our fellowship. The words of Paul that I put before you as a text are the words I've been carrying around with me for several weeks, just wanting to say them to you.

"And let us not grow weary in well-doing; for in due season we shall reap, if we do not lose heart"

That's the word that I believe we need to hear in our lives, in our Church, in our city. I believe that Paul would say to us if he were here to watch out for that critical time when life ceases to stir you; when you really don't care whether you bother to make new friends or not; when you make no effort to hold on to the friendships that you think you're sure of.

I think Paul would say to us in this Church, "You've done well so far this year....don't grow weary in your well-doing...you can do even better....take hold once again...cling to that vision....let those memories of past days here stir you...let those dreams you have for this church stimulate you to even greater heights." What a Church. What a congregation. What people. What opportunities have been given to us. Yes..."the management here expects you....to give..."

I only wish I could convey to each of you something of my own feeling and enthusiasm for what I feel and see happening in this Christian family. It's going to be a great year. The spirit of the Lord is really moving in lives and in ways we didn't expect.

SLUMPING...LOSING INTEREST

When people have begun to lose interest in the chief responsibilities of their life, then the liability to disease is increased because the resistance that had previously fended it off is now relaxed. I don't mean that everyone who is sick has become so through loss of zest and enthusiasm and faith; some of the most radiant souls have been housed in very inadequate bodies. But generally speaking, aches and pains, anxieties and fears, psychoses and irritabilities increase in almost direct proportion to one's fatigue and boredom over his tasks.

The main trouble with such persons may be that they have not had a life motive big enough to stand the strain of their daily work and the drain of continuous responsibilities. Life for them is just more or less a succession of unrelated events into which they are propelled by circumstances. Those events are not integrated; they have no meaningful continuity; there is no program, no goal, no cause greater than themselves.

It is at this point that idealism proves to be of such great benefit. And of all the uplifting idealisms that have helped to sustain the courage and the enthusiasm of people on this earth, there is none better than the way of Jesus. His style of living is an insurance against slumping, against what the Bible calls "weary in well-doing"....against "that destruction that wasteth at noon day".

Jesus long ago reminded us that this Universe which is our home is solvent, that it's trust-worthy, that it consistently registers on our side. His evaluation of human existence reminds us that our lives are precious and that there's meaning behind it all. This universe will never let you down. And if you accept it as a longterm proposition for your life, backed by a motive dynamic enough to preserve its integrity in all of your dealings, you will not grow "weary in well-doing". You will find that keenness of expectancy, that joy of enthusiasm and will inherit what Jesus long ago described to His disciples as "The Abundant life"

PRAYER

Lord, we remember now the words of Jesus: "I am come that they might have life....and have it abundantly". We know it is ours for asking....help us to receive it...to build on it....to make it ours... for then we shall never grow weary in well-doing. Help us to once again "fight the good fight"...

I think you could even say that the management of the Universe even puts up with our "over-drafts"....for which there is healing...forgiveness.

"Fight the good fight...with all our
might...knowing that
Christ is our strength and
our right"