

EASING THE STRAIN

INTRODUCTION

As I was preparing this sermon this past week, I was reminded of an incident that happened to me several years ago while I was studying in Boston. This particular incident that I refer to took place late one evening in the fall of 1954. I got lost. Not seriously or dangerously, not on the slopes of Mt. Washington in sub-zero weather, not for a week in the Maine woods - nothing quite as spectacular as that. Actually all that happened to me was that I got lost late one evening while driving along the back roads of New Hampshire. I had spent the day with some close friends at their farm house back in the hills of New Hampshire. When I left their place around ten o'clock in order to return to Boston, it was rather foggy; there was no moon; there were no stars and about three miles from the farm house, I took the wrong turn. I went on driving through the night, and after some time it seemed to me that I ought to have been coming into the familiar Boston suburbs; but the further I went, the further away I strayed from my destination. In fact, no town of any kind - familiar or unfamiliar appeared.

Suddenly a sign ahead of me said Concord 11 miles. I began to breath a sigh of relief, but the only trouble was that it was Concord, New Hampshire, and not Concord Massachusetts. I was looking for Concord, Massachusetts. At that point I figured that I was some 100 miles away from where I ought to have been. I turned around and began retracing my steps. There were no lights along the road; and all of the houses along side of the road were in darkness. By this time it was about midnight, and those folks living up there go to bed early. I remember looking at the pointer on the gasoline indicator, and it showed that under normal circumstances I had enough gas to get back home, but not enough to spend the night touring New England. I remember stopping to take a look at the road map, but the light in the car was dim, and the print on the map was so small, and I was in too much of a hurry to really examine it carefully. The more I twisted and turned and tried to find my way back to the main road, the more I had the feeling of being something of a lost person, and perhaps on a small scale I had the feeling that a person is apt to have when he gets lost morally or spiritually. After about five hours of touring the lovely countryside in darkness, I finally made my way back to Boston, and as I parked the car I somehow thought of those words of Jesus: "The Son of Man is come to seek and to save those who are lost".

DEVELOPMENT

Of course Jesus wasn't referring to those who get lost geographically, but rather he was referring to those people like Zaccacheus, for instance, who was lost in the underbrush of wealth and the swamps of inferiority; people like the anonymous woman who rushed into the dinner party and anointed his feet in an outburst of emotion and affection, a woman who was lost in the wilderness of the flesh. He was thinking of people like the Pharisees, lost in the ecclesiastical red tape; people like the young man for instance lost in the far country of excessive and extravagant living. Or a person like Martha who was lost in a multitude of unnecessary activities. These were the people you see that Jesus came to save, to somehow bring them back to the center of things in one way or another, to reach them and bring them back to the place where they could be at home.

These are the people who are really lost in life, and mind you the world is full of them - in every generation and ours is certainly no exception. They are all around us; you can see them if you look hard enough - in cocktail lounges, in hotels, on trains, walking the sidewalks, wherever you get to talk to people. Perhaps you see young people who normally would be facing life with all of its possibilities ahead of them, moving aimlessly along without any great incentive, conviction or purpose to which they are directing their energies and ambitions. Perhaps you see middle aged people with their futures behind, withering away gradually before they bloom; and perhaps you see old people with nothing much to look forward to, no home to settle down in. I don't mean an actual home in which they live, an address on the street; but rather a home where their minds and spirits, their hearts and bodies are at rest.

For all I know there may be some people here in our congregation this morning who fall into this category. I won't be so bold as to describe them to you, but there may be some here today who are lost at least temporarily, bogged down in the stream of events that may have moved to fast for you, bewildered by thoughts that pour into your mind from every direction and which you cannot digest. You may somehow be managing to keep the life process going, but you're lost temporarily, moving around in circles. It's people like you that Jesus came to save.

From my experience which was so slight that I wouldn't have you think that I am magnifying it out of all proportion, but from that simple experience, I did learn, or at least see with greater clarity, at least two things which may help to ease the strain or the pressure in the event that you're lost at the present time.

YOU DON'T ALWAYS GET LOST
BY BEING TOO RECKLESS....

The first thing that this experience reminded me of was this that you don't always get lost by being too reckless.

Under normal circumstances you assume that a person who gets lost does so because he is careless and reckless. For instance the two young men who lost their lives this past week on the slopes of the White Mountains in New Hampshire did so because they did a foolish thing, climbing the mountain without proper equipment, food and clothing. They went where they should not have gone and that is why they lost their lives. And mind you, there are a great many people who get lost in life because of the same foolish approach, playing the game of life too fast and hard, taking chances that are too great and running risks beyond all reason.

But in my own case, this was not so. I got lost because I had been too cautious, not too reckless. About three miles from the farm house, the road went off in two directions. My friends had told me that the road branching off to the right would take me back into town and head me back in the proper direction. The other road pointed to another town, one that I had been through before, one that I thought I knew. It was a better road, better marked, better paved, and I thought I could find my way just as well along that road. It was a foggy night. I knew it would be a great distance, but because I wanted to be safe, because I was cautious, I didn't turn to the right, but rather to the left and ended up getting lost.

From time to time you see people like that. You often see them in childhood. Last month when we were at the beach I noticed some

children who kept going out too far in the water, and it bothered me, frightened me, because I thought that some day they may go out a little too far and not be able to get back in. But then on the other hand, you also see children who never want to go near the water at all. They insist on staying right where they are, on the warm sand, where it's safe and dry and familiar. What you're afraid of when you see children like that is that they will grow up losing out on a large part of the excitement and pleasure of life simply because they are too cautious. The timid spirits that they show on the beach will be their spirit all through life and they will lose out on so many of the things in life that are wonderful and valuable.

There are some people who get lost because they are reckless with their emotions; they scatter them abroad without any consideration for other people. They love, but not wisely. On the other hand you find people who get lost because they are too niggardly with their affections; they are afraid to let themselves go. They don't want to get involved in any emotional experience with anybody who might make it difficult for them. They want to stay quietly and safely on the beach with the warm sand that's familiar, without any involvements so to speak, and ultimately they find themselves lost by their very caution in a vacuum of loneliness.

Just as there are people who get lost because they're too reckless with their emotions so there are those who get lost because they are too reckless in their beliefs. They will believe anything that anybody says to them - the wildest ideas. They'll invest money in them, sometimes their lives and they lose out in the long run. On the other hand you find that there are people who get lost because they are too cautious with their minds; they're afraid to believe anything that cannot be confirmed in the small realm of science and mathematics. They stay on the beach where the beliefs are simple, and calculated, things you can put down on paper and prove, and they miss out on all of the wonderment and excitement of those who launch out into the depths and believe great things. They're not willing to believe in a God that makes sense even in a world that sometimes doesn't make sense, that there is a dignity in human nature even when human nature acts like wild animals. These things take risks and when a person isn't willing to take those risks, when his life is timid and shy, morally timid and intellectually shy, he soon finds himself lost in the greater game of life.

I'd like for each of you to ask yourself now, if you can put your mind on it, or perhaps when you get home, which sort of person you are. If you're the kind of person who is more likely to get lost because of your recklessness, then as you grow in your association with Jesus, let him restrain that recklessness by the discipline of his yoke. If on the other hand, you are the kind of person who is more likely to get lost in the long run because you are too cautious, too tied up in your own self, then let Jesus lead you out into the deeper things of life and give you the courage and the will to move more and more out into the arena of human life - to run some risks, to spend yourself, to let your love go and not be embarrassed or shy. Let him take some of the inhibitions that may have tied you up into a tight bundle, and let him release you so that you can live like a human being. This is one way that Jesus can save you from getting lost.

PEOPLE ARE ALWAYS
READY TO HELP YOU

I said that there were two things that this experience of mine helped to clarify. The second thing was this that when you get lost you'll find that there are always some people who are ready to help you. Finally when I got back on what I thought was the right road, I was still in a state of mental uneasiness. Then, for about the first time in an hour I saw another automobile approaching. I thought to myself "what's the use of trying to flag them down, they'd never stop anyway....too late, too dark." Anyway I thought it was worth a try, so I flashed my headlights, put my hand out, and stopped, and much to my surprise they stopped too. Two men sitting in a black cadillac looked over at me, and I said to them "Sorry to stop you, but I wonder if you could tell me whether I'm on the right road to Boston". They told me I was on the right road. "Keep going straight ahead, and you'll find your way".

The point is this that there are always people who are willing to stop and help you. They may not be able to help you find your way, but if the first ones can't, perhaps others will. There are always people in a place like this who are willing to help you get back on the right road. And it's a great reassurance to know that there are people who are willing to help, at least in some small way to get you back on the right track.

And I think that we might go one step further and say this that God through Jesus is also more than willing to help you, if you'll give him the opportunity. Some time ago there was a wonderful story in the Reader's Digest about a Dutch boy named Jerry Brans, 27 years old. He came to Canada and got a job in the Air Force, and his assignment was to service the American and Canadian radar bases in the Arctic Circle. Coming back from one of his supply trips to the base, way up near the North Pole, he and his co-pilot realized that they were running out of gas, and that the engine of their plane wasn't working properly. They decided to ditch the plane on a frozen lake. They crashed; their supplies which they had carefully assembled were lost in the crash; they climbed up onto the wings of the plane as it began to go beneath the ice; it was freezing cold. The co-pilot died the first day. Jerry Brans somehow managed to hold on for ten days and this I think is the line that indicates something of the strength that kept him going: "Somehow Jerry knew that his fellow pilots were out searching". And on the 10th day "as he sat crouched and helpless in the wilderness of the frozen lands of the north, he heard a new sound that was not the wind of the trees in the distance. A plane was overhead. In an hour, Jerry was back in a world that was warm, pleasant and dry"

The story serves to remind us that if we are ever in danger of getting lost, in danger of losing our way as we go through the confusing and bewildering experiences of life, that God is always out looking for us, sweeping the seas with his great search light. And God through Jesus brings that love and seeking energy of God right down here into our own lives, and if we allow it to, it will bring us gradually back to the land that is warm, pleasant and dry.

LET US PRAY: God, Our Father, we would remember before thee this morning those who are in danger of losing their way in life. Be thou their stay, their strength, their shield, and that trusting in thee, they may find their way back to the reality. Amen