

FOR THOSE WHO WOULD BE NEITHER RED NOR DEAD

INTRODUCTION

We come today to the final sermon in a series of three sermons all of which have been cast in something of the same form. Two weeks ago the sermon was entitled, "For Those Who Know Loneliness" Last Sunday, it was "For Those Who Are Tempted To Give Up". Today, as you may have already noticed from the bulletin, it is "For Those Who Would Be Neither Red Nor Dead"

DEVELOPMENT

Let me say this to you here in the beginning that it has been my practice in recent years on the Sunday before Thanksgiving to chose a topic that deals with our country either on a national, or international level. And this too - the foreground of Thanksgiving remains essentially the same from year to year (the foreground - composed of family gatherings, turkey, cranberry sauce, a church service, a football game, or perhaps the Macy's Day parade). The background, however, of Thanksgiving is not always the same. It changes from year to year. This year we shall be celebrating Thanksgiving against the backdrop of the tensions that exist between our way of life and the communist way of life.

On the surface, of course, life goes along pretty much the same as it always has, and we go about our businesses and pleasures as we always have, but just underneath the surface, and not far beneath the surface, there is an unexpressed anxiety - the anxiety created by the awareness of a threat to our life and to our world. Never before in our history has this threat come to close to us, never before has it been aimed so directly at us and those we love.

RED OR DEAD

Now if someone should come up to you and ask you whether you would rather be Red or dead, the chances are that a great many of you would be able to answer the question one or another without any hesitation. But some others of you might hesitate, and finally say something like this: "If I had my choice, I would prefer to be neither. I should prefer to remain alive and free" As you said it, however, you would know that you may not have the choice. If the West surrenders, if we do not remain firm, we may be Red. If the West fights, we may all be dead. And if China attacks Russia, we may both be Red and Dead. There is also this question in the minds of serious people, especially Christians: "What can I do, what should I do now while I am still alive and free and able to do it?"

It seems to me that the Church from time to time has a responsibility to speak to its people about the world situation - to help them to see it in the perspective of the Christian Faith, to help them to maintain their balance and serenity as they move through troubled waters, and to encourage them to do what Christ wants them to do. It is in such a spirit, and I confess it is with some fear and trembling and a great deal of humility, that I would attempt to speak to this question: "What can I now do while I am neither Red nor Dead, but alive and free to do it?" And what I say is in no way to be regarded as the official voice of the church, but only as the voice of one concerned churchman trying to find his way through the fog of world events.

REMEMBER TWO THINGS

You can begin by remembering two things that all of us at times are tempted to forget.

First of all, remember this that there are two worlds - for all practical purpose - the world of material existence and the world of spiritual values. Suppose we think about these two worlds for a moment or two. You and I live in the first world - the world of material existence. And next Thursday, when you and I sit down to our Thanksgiving Dinner, as a material object, as a body composed of flesh and blood and bones consuming material substances necessary to our physical well-being, we shall be very conscious of this material world. (I always am. Unfortunately, my trouble is, as some of you know, I become too aware of this particular world whenever I sit down to a good meal).

However, you and I will have contact with the second world, the world of spiritual values, if, before we eat we bow our heads in prayer and simply and sincerely express our gratitude to those who have made it possible, beginning with the Supreme Giver of all gifts, from whom all life is ultimately derived. You and I will be touching that second world - the world of spiritual values - if we share that dinner with others in the joy of human companionship, thus making it infinitely more than just another meal. You and I will be coming in touch with that second world, if we remind ourselves that there are people in other parts of the world who are not able to eat such a meal because they do not have the food in the abundance that we have it, people who go to bed hungry every night. If we remind ourselves of this and are willing to do something about it, sacrifice something we have for them, we shall be moving closer to that second world - the world of spiritual values.

Everyone lives in these two worlds whether he is conscious of it or not; whether he acknowledges it or not. But as a Christian you differentiate yourself from others in that you believe that both worlds are important. You do not bypass the material world because God once passed through it, and used it to reveal his great purposes to us. You believe both worlds are important, but that the second, the world of spiritual values is of primary importance.

For example, you know that if a child is brought up in the slums he may turn out to be a delinquent. In other words, you know that the material environment to which a child is exposed has a great deal to do with the spiritual values that he may have as an adult, and therefore, if you are at all consistent, you do what you can do to change his material world so that his development may have a better chance. On the other hand, you may know of a child brought up in the slums, or in circumstances that were difficult, but whose father and mother had one foot, so to speak, in the world of spiritual values. You may have seen that child rise above the circumstances of environment and master them. You therefore say to yourself: both of these worlds are important, but in the long run it is the world of spiritual values that makes and shapes and conquers the world of material values.

Beginning then with this belief in the primacy of the world of spiritual values, your attitude toward survival is not quite the same as it would otherwise be. Survival is not the chief aim of your life. If it ever was, and I imagine it was for many of you, it ceases to be when you begin to live in the whole world - in both dimensions of God's world. Your chief aim, then, as a Christian, is not merely to

survive, not merely to continue your physical existence; your chief aim is to be the kind of person who is worthy of survival. In other words, you are concerned not so much about the length of your days as the quality of them. You can go on and say to yourself: if in order to survive, I must become a brute, a party to the slaughter of forty to eighty million other human lives, I wonder if I wish to survive. I wonder if mere survival is worth that much to me.

And if you should not survive, if you should be killed in a nuclear war, you know that this is not the end of you; that there is more to life than meets the eye, for the world is far more vast than anything you can see, and once you taste life on this larger scale, death loses its power to frighten you. This then is the first thing to remember, to hold fast to - the material world is but the introduction to the world of spiritual values.

THE SECOND THING TO REMEMBER

I said in the beginning that there were two things to remember. The second is this: remember that military defense is no substitute for moral and spiritual power. As our President pointed out a few weeks ago in his address before the UN - "in a spiralling arms race, a nation's security may well be shrinking even as its arms increase." A military defense is no substitute for a moral and spiritual offense. And what should concern you is the lack of the latter in the United States at the present time, for in the last fifty years there has taken place a kind of moral spiritual erosion. The staunch Puritanism that gave our predecessors an amazing moral stamina has disintegrated and up to this date, nothing has taken its place. When Puritanism fails, paganism usually takes over. And you are deeply aware of the fact that no matter how strong our military defense may be, if this inner defense is weak, we will not stand for long.

You and I both know that the strongest people are the people who believe in the greatest things, and who believing in them are ready to live and die for them. We know this. Our leaders know this, and this is why they are so concerned for the tests made on our soldiers in the Korean War reflected this lack of willingness to live and die for something. You and I both know that what this country great is not its weapons or its armies, but its belief in a certain way of life. We know that the reason this country was able to win the Revolutionary War - to struggle against overwhelming difficulties in its early days, is that the people who came to the shores of this country believed in great things and were willing to live and die for these things. You may have the feeling, as I do, every once in a while, that while our people are ready to fight against communism because it is a threat to their very existence, you are not so sure that they know what they are ready to fight for.

This then is the second thing you can do: remember and hold fast to this thought - regardless of what you believe about military defense - bullets, bombs, missiles, fall out shelters, resumption of atmospheric testing - military defense can never be a substitute for great beliefs in great things.

ANOTHER THING TO DO

There is a third thing you can do, and that is to start a PEACE group. I must confess to you I have never seen one, and I do not know whether any such groups exist, but I do know that there are a great many prayer groups

in our land (one or two in our church), and I see no reason why there should not be peace groups. I envision them not as large organizations, but small groups of people who come together for one expressed purpose, namely that of making peace in the world. Let me suggest to you what some of the aims of such a group could be. First - to understand the world in which we live better than we do. Remember the world is changing rapidly in its political patterns and its social drives, and most of us living in one place, with not a very wide horizon at that, sometimes fail to see the things that are happening in the world. It would help greatly to belong to such a group (such as our own Social Concerns Commission) whose avowed purpose would be to try to understand what is happening in the world and to gather as much information about this as possible. It would be stimulating to start such a group in our church - a peace group - where we could have people coming together from such different and distant places as the Philippines, Japan, Korea, Argentina, Africa, Switzerland, British Isles, Germany, Canada and the United States.

Another aim of such a group might be to try to reduce the danger of the belligerent spirit that now seems to be rising in the country. Firmness and belligerency are two different things, and the belligerent person is the person who is likely to run amok and make terrible mistakes. Righteous indignation is one thing; hot headed anger is another thing. And anything that groups can do in various parts of the country to reduce the high blood pressure of this belligerent spirit would be a help toward making the of peace. To keep calm, to be patient, to take the long view is not an easy thing to do in times like these when tempers are so often touched off by sparks that we cannot avoid.

Another aim of such a peace group would be to study the Christian ethic. I know that many of you know it, but it may be that you need to refresh your understanding of it. In such a group you could explore what the Christian ethic is, and how far and in what way it can be applied to this complicated situation in which we find ourselves. You might honestly ask yourself in such a group questions like these: how binding on the followers of Christ are his commandments? "Thou shalt not kill. Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you and despitefully use you" Are these optional. Are we to take them seriously, giving them any consideration. Granted they're difficult to follow just personally, day to day, but how do they relate to international affairs. How binding are they upon the confessed followers of Christ, and in what sense?

One other aim of such a group, and this is difficult to put into words, would be to pray. I do not mean simply pleading with God that He come into the act and bring us peace. I mean by prayer the almost desperate and sincere attempt to see the world from God's panoramic view - to see our mistakes, our weaknesses, to see the possibilities which are hidden in other people and which have never been seen or recognized, and on our knees to ask God what His will is.

Neither Red nor Dead - but alive and free. It can come to pass. There is still time. Freedom and religion, it seems to me, are part of the same life. Essential to each other. Without religion, spiritual values, freedom will soon disappear. Without freedom, religion suffers. Men and women of strong, active faith are needed - faith in God, in

Jesus and his way, in freedom, in people. Our Pilgrims fathers had it. And we can not expect to hold on to this great heritage that is ours unless we live on in this same spirit. And so on this Sunday before Thanksgiving, when the condition of our country was never more prosperous, and the condition of our world never more perilous, let us be grateful, but let us also set ourselves to the task before us, exercising our faith - thinking things through in the presence of God, against the perspective of the Christian faith, in the reality of the realm of the spirit, and in loyalty to Jesus Christ who died to save me - not to destroy them.

PRAYER: Help us, Our Father, as we read the papers and listen to voices that are so often jangling in utter confusion, to find our way - to think the things that are right and true - to do the things that are in accordance with thy will, to stand for the things that are right, regardless of the consequences. We ask this in the name of Him, who came into world , lived and died in it, and rose again and now lives among us. Amen