

## "FROM SECURITY TO TRUST"

### INTRODUCTION

Last Summer, walking along a sandy beach, I came across a crab who skittered sideways away from me, afraid of my strange intrusion into his world of sand and sea. For several moments I watched his erratic errands across the sand and among the rocks with the waters rushing in, as they have been rushing in there for centuries, long before there was any human eye to see the water or hear its roar.

Standing there I thought about the fate of men and of crabs. I remembered from a zoology course that a crab in order to live and grow must from time to time discard its shell with its familiar creature comforts, and that until it succeeds in creating a new shell, it is extremely vulnerable. Its life story is a passage through successive shells until one day it succeeds too well and makes a shell so strong and rigid that it can't escape from it. That is the shell in which it dies.

### DEVELOPMENT

You and I, too, live under the shelter of shells - belief systems, moral codes, life styles which provide us with security. And when those shells crack or break into pieces, we, too, are left skittering sideways on some windswept beach, vulnerable until we can create some new belief systems, some new moral directives.

We live and suffer in a time when ancient theological and ethical shells have been cracking. Many of the old and familiar landmarks and guideposts have been swept away by the forceful currents of contemporary life. We don't have the new ones fully formed, so we are vulnerable - in between the shells - in between the times. Johnny Mercer warned us years ago about such a condition in a popular song. Remember his bit of philosophy,

"Ac-cent-tchu-ate the positive, e-lim-my-nate the negative.....don't mess with Mister In-Between".

But that's where we are - in between, coming out of one time in our lives, but not yet into another time - in between the times, on the way in the wilderness like the people of Israel that Mr. Blanton read about in the Scripture. They were in the desert...vulnerable....worshipping a golden calf...anxious..

### THE GOLDEN CALF

It's easy for us to condemn those people for making a golden calf, but we need to remember that they, too, were "in-between" times. Out of Egypt....not yet into the Promised Land. And where was Moses, anyway, and his strange God who had put them into this tough situation? There were times when they wanted to go back to the dependable safety of slavery, afraid of the risks ahead, afraid that they wouldn't make it through to the Promised Land. Like many of us, they wanted to curl up in front of some fire against the cold unknown, snuggle under the covers, those security blankets which shelter us against our vulnerability and protect us against the terrible freedom to decide. What did they do? They made for themselves a golden calf. Something tangible. Something they could see and touch and worship. You can depend on a golden calf.

In a sense, a golden calf is any security system we make to protect us against the strange God of Moses who intrudes on our world of sand and sea, with that terrible risk of being responsible for our lives.

I want to explore one of those golden calves here this morning and suggest how we may move from needing that kind of security to being ready for a different kind of trust.

FROM SECURITY IN OUR BELIEFS TO TRUST IN GOD

I believe that we need to move and can move from security in our beliefs to a deeper and more dynamic trust in God. I think that all of us want to be secure in our beliefs, to feel "safe" in the universe, comfortable with God, to get relief from that awful sense of contingency that sometimes comes upon us in the darkness of the night.

We live in a time in which there has been a marked resurgence in a number of forms of this human search for security.

For one thing, there is a rapid growth of fundamentalist religion evident in the country today. Fundamental religion offers THE truth, THE way, a kind of unconditional security as lure and reward. It makes its appeal. Then, too, there is the wide curiosity in astrology, in the occult, in horoscopes, in any dependable determinism which can relieve us of the burden of deciding for ourselves and taking responsibility for our lives. It's a kind of determinism that takes away our freedom and gives us a sort of "fake-filled" security. It, too, makes an appeal to many.

Or, there's the yearning among many of us for the comfort of the Church in the Wildwood, the Little Brown Church in the Vale - the Currier and Ives time when God was in his heaven and all was right with our world. "Those were the days" as Archie and Edith Bunker sing it every Saturday night. Or, there is the frantic attempt of some who are younger to latch onto the newest idea, that new experience, that new product, that new new group, that new swami, that promises to make us safe and secure from all alarms in six easy lessons or six brief encounters for \$25.00.

We all need security. All of us are searching for it. Think for a moment: what golden calf of security glitters for you? What makes its appeal.

I believe that all of our attempts to make ourselves secure are expressions of that deep cry from every one of us calling into the void: "Do you love? Do you love me?" We need security. It's difficult to live creatively for very long in a state of vulnerability. One mark of health is a minimum need for security and the capacity to cope when one's particular shell breaks and crumbles.

I remember a sermon by a seminary professor entitled, "Don't Knock Out the Bridge" in which he warned seminary students against storming into congregations with all of their new learning and destroying people's faith systems without helping them to build new bridges of faith. Walk on whatever bridges are still able to support you. Remember that bridges of faith - like most human constructions - when the pressure gets bad crumble and fade, break and chip. So don't be surprised if times come when you find yourself in between bridges.... shells.... "in-between" times.... vulnerable.... not at ease.

YOUR BRIDGES

How are your bridges holding up these days? Do you sometimes feel that you're skittering sideways along the beach of your life-line in some erratic way like that crab I watched on the beach?

In his book, After Auschwitz, Rabbi Rubenstein, a rabbi, confessed that he could no longer believe in a God who was supposed to be protecting his "chosen people" because he had not done so in that terrible experience. Thinking about what he had to say made me realize that our own little Aushchwitz experiences, our

own personal tragedies, which are not little to us and which shatter our own comfortable shells, may leave us with a radical kind of questioning.

And the answers to those questions - the traditional answers, the answers of conventional wisdom, even the Biblical answers - don't always satisfy our appetites to understand completely and our longing to know. There may be no answers for us, as there were no answers for Job, apart from our personal encounters with God where, from within, we may discover that it is possible to trust Him in the dark without evidence.

Being human, we have to keep trying to construct answers. We have to try to understand even though we know that our answers are partial and ephemeral. Loren Eiseley helps me. He writes,

"It is not sufficient any longer to listen at the end of the wire to the rustlings of galaxies; it is not enough even to examine the great coil of DNA in which is coded the very alphabet of life...but beyond lies the great darkness of the ultimate Dreamer who dreamed the light and the galaxies. Before act was, or substance existed, imagination grew in the dark".

O to be able to trust God - to let your imagination "grow in the dark" of your own experience, your own Auschwitz, and maybe to meet the Dreamer from time to time in the depths of your own being. Someone has put it this way:

"When all human props fail and all the bridges are out, and there is nothing to hang on to any longer, then deep down in me there is something".

There is "Something"! Something that makes life possible! Something that starts me building another bridge! Something that calls for a "faith without evidence". Something in you and in me.... Over the years of my own life, one belief or doctrine after another has been shaken and shed as I have tried to come to a deeper and more dynamic measure of faith in my own life. And each time I felt my faith threatened only to discover that deeper down at another level there was a place where I could stand and take hold.

CONCLUDING SECTION Today, I feel less need of security in a set of beliefs, in the human constructions by which we attempt to formalize and interpret our experiences. Because...in a small way, I feel free to trust in God. Perhaps I have not been very severely tested, but I do feel the confidence of Paul that "nothing in creation....nothing that I can do....that nothing that can be done to me....even nothing that can happen to those who are most precious to me.....nothing can separate me or you from God's love" which is in you - in me - and the trees and the crabs, and which comes most clear for us in Jesus.

I believe that God's love for you and me is unconditional. His word comes to us in the words of that hymn we sang before the sermon - "That soul, though all hell should endeavor to shake, I'll never, no never, no never forsake". That's not a lot to believe, but there is someone to trust. As James Pike put it in one of his books about ten years ago, "We need fewer beliefs and more belief!"

When we are free of the need to be secure in our beliefs, then we are ready for the wilderness journey.

Such a journey is described in the story of the Bedouin guide who led a traveler over a mountain pass after a night spent in an oasis in the valley now far below them. As he stopped his mount at the top of the track, he contemplated for a long moment, and then looked out at the new vista of sand wastes that had just opened up ahead of them.

Inhaling deeply the pure, dry, clean, empty and odorless wind of the desert, he said, "Can you still smell the exquisite fragrance of the orchards behind us? Its headiness is that of wine and its warmth a woman's. But now, do you smell the wind of the wilderness? That is the breath of God".

FINAL WORDS     ~~We no longer need the security of our beliefs when we are able to really trust in God.~~ Our search for security, our making of a golden calf (and we all do it) is our way of asking God and each other, "Do you love me?"

Can you smell the wind of the wilderness? It is the "breath of God" whispering to you and me, "I love you, I love you, I love you".

PRAYER     Make us sensitive to thy nearness in these moments, O God, that comes at the end of this service of worship. Make us adventurous in our faith, ~~and in~~ Remind us that we can never drift beyond the circle of thy love and care....that nothing can separate us from thy love, revealed to us in the person of Christ. Amen