

"GETTING READY FOR GOD"

INTRODUCTION

Every Sunday morning from seven-thirty to eight o'clock, CBS radio in cooperation with the Protestant Council of the City of New York presents, "Morning Meditations". I don't know how many of you are up at that hour on a Sunday morning and have opportunity to listen. It's one of my favorite radio programs.

grandfathers

I suppose our ~~forefathers~~ - the people of one hundred years ago - would have been astonished to have been told that the day would come when, sitting in the privacy of their own living room, they could flick a switch and turn a knob and listen to a preacher. By the same token, they would have been relieved to know that by reversing the process they could also turn him off.

AUTOMATION

It's all so recent - this pushbutton society in which we live. With the flick of a switch, we can have everything from the latest stock market quotation to a nuclear holocaust. We can have the answer to a complicated mathematical problem or have our carpets swept and our dishes washed. Automation we call it. And we're grateful to science for the relief from routine mechanical chores it has given us, grateful, too, for giving us more time to pursue those human enterprises that cannot be undertaken by machines.

even find a mate through IBM.computers..

DAMAGING SIDE EFFECT

There is one side effect of automation that can be damaging to our religious life.

I'm not thinking of the dreadful possibility of the machines taking over everything, so that instead of having more time to be really human we sink into the helpless passivity of a robot. That, of course, would be the end - not only of religion, but of art, and of all the humanities - and eventually, I suppose, of science itself.

What I am thinking about here this morning is something less obvious in its threat to our human life, and it is something that has already invaded our thinking about God to a certain extent. It is the growing belief that religion itself can be subject to automation - that the Divine should be immediately available to us - at the flick of a switch, or the dialing of a number.

If I can dial a number like 400-1234 and find help at the end of the line, why can't I dial another number and find God? Or if I can flick a switch and have my carpet cleaned, why can't I flick another switch and have my soul cleansed? If I can press a button and release the immense power of a modern automobile, why can't I press another and release the spiritual power that I need so much? To be sure, few of us would put it as crudely as that, but there is a lurking desire in the hearts and minds of many persons to have God a little more at our disposal than He is. We have become so accustomed to having commodities and services at our finger tips that it is easy to imagine God should be at our disposal. A man stopped by to see me on Friday. I was involved. He left his card and it said: "For a Daily Bible Reading - Dial PL 5-55500" Psalm 71 - first five verses.

Yes, we live in this wonderful age of automation. Our lives are conditioned by it. We expect everything to be immediately available to us - when we want it and need it. And if it isn't, then we suspect that we are using the wrong techniques, and pressing the button, dialing the incorrect number. However, when it comes to God, I think we need to go back to the Bible and refresh our minds in the thought and language of it. As we do, we are reminded that God is not a commodity, that real religion is not a technique for getting immediate contact with the Divine, that our faith is or ought not to be some kind of ambulance service for times of emergency. True religion is being related to a Person. And it is seeking to know and to do His will. It is the cultivation of a friendship.

What has happened is that automation has edged us back toward magic. To think of God as being at our beck and call, to look for techniques to control and to use his divine power, is magic. I think our Lord was speaking about magic when he referred to the practice of gabbling prayers in order to influence God. "When you pray" he said, "Get absolutely alone and then say - 'Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name'". Waiting for God. Realizing that we are dependent upon a Person. Seeking to know him and to do His will. This is the channel of approach to real religion.

WHAT CAN WE DO

Is there nothing then that we can do? Must we just drift along with our troubles, our problems waiting until God pleases to make himself known to us.

That doesn't follow at all. Even though we cannot summon God like a servant when we want him, we can however prepare for His coming. This happens in human relationships. Suppose I want very much to get to know a person whom I have long admired from a distance. I can't force him to be my friend. I can't whistle him up just because I feel I need him, and order him to do what I want done. Friendship doesn't work that way. But there is a great deal I can do. I can prepare for his friendship. I can interest myself in the things for which he stands. I can arrange to be where he is most likely to be found. I can discover whether or not he is an outgoing, approachable person. I can be ready for the moment when he comes near and speaks to me.

I'm reminded of that man down in the Times Square area. You may have seen him from time to time, that bearded man carrying a large placard which has these words inscribed on it: "Prepare to meet Thy God!" People pass him by with complete indifference or make a wise crack for somehow his text carries with it a threat of doom. But actually his text, when you come right down to it, is sensible. It's straight-forward advice for all of us. "Prepare" - and then you will be ready for the moments when God comes near to us.

Every farmer knows the difference between rain falling on prepared ground and unprepared ground. The same sort of thing holds true for God's grace - for his friendship - and we need to prepare ourselves for his approach, for his coming to us.

ADVENT

I have chosen to preach on this particular theme because today is the First Sunday in Advent. The Church today begins to get ready for Christmas, for the coming of Christ. The secular world has been at it for a few weeks already. And again, the words from Isaiah that we associate with this first Sunday in Advent come to mind:

"The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, prepare ye the way of the Lord. Make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain".

These words come to us on the soaring wings of music and poetry and usher us into this Season of Advent. The figure of John the Baptist broods over this Advent Season - John, with his stern, stiff and uncompromising message of repentance. The voice crying in the wilderness. Prepare the Lord's way. Build God's highway in the desert. Fill up the valleys. Level off the hills. Get rid of the dangerous corners. To be sure, in every state of the Union today this highway operation is going on - men are cutting into the hills, filling up the great cavities, rounding off corners, creating great highways and bridges for the heavy traffic of our day.

However - the road that the prophet of old was concerned with was that road leading into the wilderness of your life, the road leading into your heart - the highway upon which the traffic of righteousness, goodness, gratitude, kindness and compassion could flow in ever increasing amount. This was the highway the prophet was concerned with. "Prepare ye the way of the Lord".

PREPARATION

We often say that we want the peace and power of God in our lives, but how much preparation do we make to see this happen. You and I spend a lot of time and trouble preparing for a new home, or a new job, or preparing for old age? Do we prepare for something new to happen in our religious life? We prepare ourselves handsomely and beautifully on the outside to come to church, but what about our inner preparation. The chances are that there is no inner preparation at all for something significant to happen. We prepare carefully for a Christmas party. Do we prepare our hearts as carefully for the coming of Christ?

We stand today in the afterglow of Thanksgiving. We have received countless blessings, but do we bother to express our gratitude. Few do. I'm reminded of the life and work of a famous criminal lawyer who later became an equally famous judge. During his days as a trial lawyer he pleaded the case for 78 men charged with murder. He literally gave them back their lives. How many would you imagine took time to thank him for his gift of continuing life, or even remember him at the festive season of the year with a greeting card. Guess - not one. This incident should fill us with revulsion. A life regiven and no gratitude; but then in how many ways do we fail to express gratitude for life given to us.

Has the old highway of our religious life become obsolete, with deep valleys, lumpy hills, dusty corners, rough surfaces?

We had a Thanksgiving Eve Union Service here on Wednesday night. The response was poor. With the choir present, with six ushers on hand to help, and three ministers to lead the worship - why we had almost as many up front here as we had in the congregation. And this represented two congregations, two churches. Granted the weather was poor; the wind was blowing, and it was wet under-foot. How our forefathers would scoff at our softness. I'm sure if you had had tickets to the theater, the weather would not have interfered. A marvelous opportunity to witness to the growing unity of the churches in our time. And only a dozen or more of you bothered to come and return thanks. There should be another beatitude: "Blessed are the truly grateful, for they shall know God".

I think if John the Baptist were with us this morning he would say something like this to us:

"You are right to believe that God is our refuge and strength.....a very present help in trouble. But you are wrong to take him for granted. You are wrong to think that you can ignore him when life is smooth and then ring for him like a servant when the going gets rough. You are wrong to assume that while every other important activity needs care, cultivation and preparation - that the inner life, the religious life needs none. It just doesn't work that way"

GETTING READY FOR CHRISTMAS

We now have four weeks in which to ready ourselves for Christmas. Are we going to rush around - half in panic - half in seriousness - in order to get ready for something that really has nothing to do with the coming of Christ?

Prepare the way for his coming in your life by sorting out your priorities - activities, spending, time - prepare the way so that you may be ready to receive the richness and the fullness of the glory of God in the infant child of Bethlehem.

LET US PRAY

O Lord Jesus Christ, who at thy first coming didst send thy messengers to prepare the way before Thee - grant that those who bear thy name in this day may so prepare and make ready for thy coming in their lives and in the world by renewing their loyalties and turning their hearts to Thee - that they may later this season hear the song of the angels - "Glory to God in the highest and peace and goodwill to men on earth". Amen

This is the first Sunday of another church year....we begin the liturgical church year with Advent. As such, it is good to make a New Year's resolution: resolve this year to get all of your shopping and preparations for Christmas done between now and the 20th of December - within the next three weeks so that you can give time this year, as you never have before, to entering into and considering the deeper meaning of Christmas.

FIRST SUNDAY IN ADVENT
November 29, 1964

ORDER OF WORSHIP
11 A. M.

ORGAN "Complainte and Epitaphe" Vierne

CALL TO WORSHIP

HYMN NO. 83 "O come, O come, Immanuel"

PRAYER OF CONFESSION (Seated)

Most merciful Father, we have done little to forward thy kingdom in this world, to foster the brotherhood of man, and to establish love as the law of life. We have allowed self to blind us, pains to embitter us. Pardon our shortcomings; forgive our neglect; give us a pure heart intent on pleasing Thee. Help us in all our seeking to seek first thy kingdom and thy righteousness. And make us to come, as came Thy Son, not to be ministered unto, but to minister. We ask this in the spirit of Jesus Christ. Amen.

SILENT MEDITATION - WORDS OF ASSURANCE - LORD'S PRAYER

RESPONSIVE READING "The Way of Holiness" Page 616

GLORIA PATRI

APOSTLES' CREED Page 512

ANTHEM "Springs in the Desert" A. B. Jennings

SCRIPTURE Isaiah 40: 1 - 8

VERSIDES AND RESPONSES

PASTORAL PRAYER Choral Amen

OFFERTORY SOLO "Come Thou and With Us Dwell" W. Byrd
(Mr. Keith Cota, bass)

PRESENTATION OF THE OFFERING WITH THE DOXOLOGY

HYMN NO. 84 "Come, Thou long expected Jesus"

SERMON "Getting Ready For God" Mr. Clarke

HYMN NO. 85 "Hail, to the Lord's Anointed"

BENEDICTION Choral Amen

ORGAN "Partita - Humbly I Adore Thee" F. Peeters

*** Interval for ushering

AN INVITATION

You are invited to Fellowship Hall following the service where coffee and tea will be served. The hostesses today are Mrs. Bruhn, Mrs. Kauffmann, Dr. Nicholson, Mrs. Russell, and Mrs. Greenough.

USHERS

The ushers for today's service are Mr. Raeburn, Mr. Bush, Mr. Burr, Mr. Patten, Mr. Siddle, Mr. Weber, and Mr. Thompson.

NURSERY, KINDERGARTEN, AND PRIMARY SESSIONS

Nursery, kindergarten, and primary sessions of Sunday School meet from eleven to twelve-thirty on the fourth floor.

PLEDGE CARDS ARE STILL COMING IN

Pledge cards for the 1965 financial program of the church are still being received. If you have not yet turned in your pledge, may we invite you to do so today.

THE CHRISTMAS FAIR AND DINNER

The Christmas Fair and Dinner of our church will take place this coming Friday, December 4th. The doors open at three o'clock. The dinner will be served at six-thirty. The church office is handling the few remaining tickets for the supper.

OFFICIAL BOARD DATE CHANGED

The Official Board will meet on Tuesday evening, December 8th, instead of this coming Tuesday. Commission meetings (Finance, Education, and Missions) have also been changed. Members are asked to note this change of date.

PARK AVENUE METHODIST CHURCH

106 East 86th Street
New York 28, N. Y.
AT 9-6997

CHURCH DIRECTORY

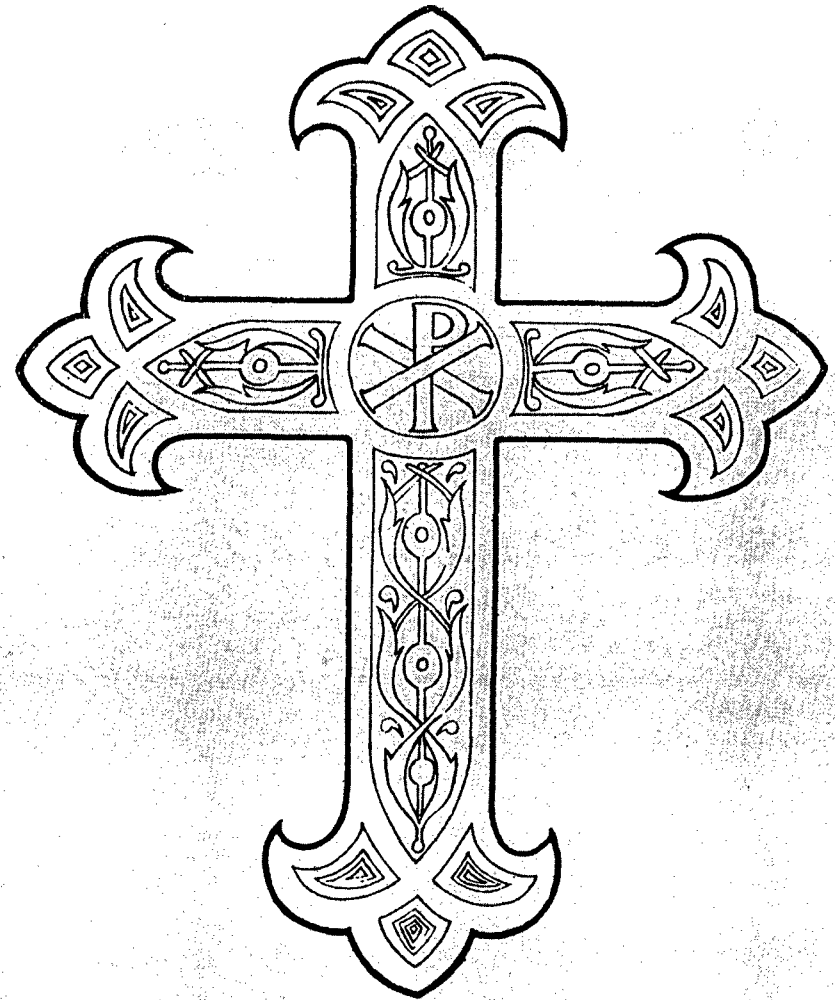
Rev. Philip A. C. Clarke.....Minister
Dr. Harold C. Metzner.....Associate Minister, Emeritus
Mr. Thomas B. Stribling.....Student Assistant
Mr. Mark A. Else.....Choir Director
Mr. J. Earl Weatherford.....Organist
Mrs. George Leech.....Day School Director
Mrs. Richard Morley.....Church Secretary

GENERAL OFFICES

Lay Member, Annual Conference.....Mr. Paul R. Russell
Lay Leader, The Church.....Mr. Mark A. Else
President, Trustees.....Mr. Paul R. Russell
President, Woman's Society.....Miss Allene Ford
President, Young Adults.....Mr. James Davis
Education Commission Chairman.....Mr. Thomas Stribling
Finance Commission Chairman.....Mr. Glenn Lowry
Membership Commission Chairman.....(To be filled)
Missions Commission Chairman.....Dr. Harold N. Brewster
Social Concerns Commission Chr.....Miss Nancy Curtis

STATED MEETINGS

Sunday Services: 10:00 a.m.Sunday School
11:00 a.m.Morning Worship
12:00 noon.....Fellowship Hour
7:00 p.m.Young Adults
(2nd and 4th Sundays)
Official Board.....First Tuesday, 8:15 p.m.
Woman's Society.....Second Monday, 8:00 p.m.
Choir Rehearsal.....Every Wednesday, 7:00 p.m.
Day School.....Every morning (9-12)



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