

GREETING TO THE CHILDREN

INTRODUCTION

Again this morning we have the joy of greeting some of the children of our Sunday School. It's always something of a special Sunday, boys and girls, when you're with us down here for the first part of the worship service.

Don't forget that this afternoon we are having a Halloween celebration, and we hope that you'll be able to be with us. The party begins at three o'clock. Bring a friend with you. It's going to be a wonderful time.

DEVELOPMENT

Actually Halloween comes on Tuesday, doesn't it? - on the 31st day of October, the last day of the month. We also celebrate something else on the last day of October. I wonder if any of you know what it is. It's Reformation Day. Many, many years ago a man by the name of Martin Luther did some very important things in the church on the last day of October. When you're a little older we'll tell you what he did. For now, remember his name: Martin Luther, and remember that next Tuesday is Reformation Day as well as Halloween.

One of the great men of our time was named for Martin Luther. His name was Martin Luther King.

Now Martin Luther wrote one of the great hymns of the church. It's called "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God", and last Sunday Mr. Woodside, our choir director, spent some time with you upstairs teaching you that hymn. Did you recognize it when we sang it here a few moments ago at the beginning of the service? This is one of my favorite hymns; we always sing it in this church on the last Sunday of October. I hope as you grow older you'll come to know this hymn and love it as much as I do.

Mr. Woodside also taught you another hymn, called "We Gather Together". This hymn is one that we sing around Thanksgiving which isn't too far off. We'll soon be celebrating it. But we don't have to wait until Thanksgiving to give our thanks to God. We can do this any time, and we can sing this hymn any Sunday of the year.

Think for a moment about some of the things for which you're thankful: your homes, your mothers and daddys who love you, your brothers and sister, your teachers, your friends at school and also here at the church. Oh, we have so many things for which to be thankful!

We're going to sing this hymn "We Gather Together" in a few moments. ~~We'll sing it again on the Sunday before Thanksgiving when you join us once again.~~ Now Mr. Woodside will play it through for us, and I want to hear you really sing out with all of your friends here in the church. On the last verse your teachers will take you back upstairs for your Sunday School lesson.

It's been wonderful to see you again, and I look forward to this afternoon's party.

"SOLOMON - A SYMBOL OF OUR TIME"

INTRODUCTION

It's interesting to note that when Jesus wanted a word picture to describe the rich splendor of the flowers of Galilee, he stretched back across seven centuries of time to recall a name that was familiar to all of his listeners. "Even Solomon" he said, "in all of his glory was not arrayed like one of these". And when we, in the 20th century, want a person out of the pages of the Bible who portrays power and prosperity, we would find it difficult to come up with a more fitting symbol than this royal figure who ruled over Israel at the height of its glory.

How much do we remember about this man whom Jesus hailed as an emblem of elegance? Some of you may recall that he was David's son and that he gained a reputation for his wisdom and his wealth. You may remember, too, that he built the great Temple in Jerusalem, but from there on our recollections begin to fade into the foggy impression that somehow Solomon never really fulfilled the promise of his privilege and ability.

REVIEW HIS LIFE

Let's review his life for a few minutes before we consider his legacy. Certain it is that no ruler ever began his term of office under more auspicious circumstances than did Solomon. We read in the Book of Kings that his father, David, gave him his blessing and said to him:

"Be strong in the Lord and show yourself a man,
and keep the charge of the Lord your God, walk
in his ways and keep his commandments".

Peace prevailed in the kingdom as he took office. There were few internal or external problems in the land. It's interesting to note that Solomon began his reign in prayerful partnership with God. The prayer which he offered was repeated by a President of our nation upon his sudden induction into high office:

"I am but a little child.....give thy servant
therefore an understanding mind to govern thy
people, that I may discern between good and evil".

And it would seem that Solomon's prayer for an "understanding mind" was answered for word soon spread far and wide about his great wisdom. Even the Queen of Sheba heard about it and had to come to see for herself. And after she ~~had~~ came, ~~heard about it~~, she was convinced. "Your wisdom and your prosperity surpass the report I have heard" she said to King Solomon. Solomon's claim to fame rested not alone on his wisdom, for it was he who master-minded the building of that magnificent Temple in Jerusalem that was for centuries the focal point of the faith.

The early chapters in his life's story suggest to us a man who was destined for greatness - for he possessed a great mind, a great soul, great wealth, but somewhere along the way he slipped up and that potential for greatness was never completely realized. You begin to sense this as you read along through the narrative...you feel him losing his footing. For instance, in referring to the building of the Temple, it says:

"He was seven years in building the Temple of
the Lord, but he was thirteen years in building
his own house".

The story of his later years is a study in sensuality and selfishness. Luxury and the gratification of his sensual appetites became his chief aim. And the climax

comes when Solomon became so accomodating in his religious views that the object of his worship was determined by the fancy of his particular wife of the moment. He started with one of the most promising and privileged beginnings on record, but something happened along the way and his life's story seems to end in the misty flats of comfort and compromise and conformity.

HIS WISDOM There are two reasons why Solomon seems to be a symbol of our time. First, he did possess great wisdom. He had this "understanding mind" and apparently used it to probe deeper and push further than any man up to that point. The Temple he designed was a remarkable engineering feat for that time. Moreover he was wise in his dealings with people - that rare and brilliant combination of scholar, psychologist, diplomat, sociologist. Remember how he solved the riddle of the two women who both claimed to be mother of the same child. "Cut the child in half" said he, "give half to each mother". "No" screamed the mother. "All right" said the other. And the child went to the mother who screamed "no".

We, too, live in a time that possesses great wisdom. We, too, have probed deeper and pushed further into the mystery of life and the nature of the universe than any other generation before us. 75% of the drugs in the pharmaceutical industry today were not in existence twenty years ago, and 90% of the drugs used by doctors today were not known in 1944.

Remember the conversation of the two six year old children. "Do you think" said one of them, "that these thermonuclear projectiles will pierce the heat barrier?" "No" said the other. "I don't because you see once the force enters the stratosphere....." - but then they were interrupted by the ringing of the school bell. "Gee.....too bad.....now we've got to go in and string the beads".

But knowledge will not say us any more than it saved Solomon. We can conquer space, but what good will it do if we cannot conquer human sin and selfishness. We can travel faster, but what good will it do if we don't know where we're going? Our world needs light, but it also needs warmth, compassion, understanding. I say "amen" to those words inscribed on the wall of the lobby of the RCA building here in our own city:

"Man's ultimate destiny depends not on whether he can learn new lessons or make new discovers and conquests, but on his acceptance of the lessons taught him close upon two thousand years ago".

As word came to us several days ago that the long awaited peace settlement was now close at hand, I was reminded of those words of General Douglas MacArthur spoken at the end of another war, in August of 1945, as he stood on the deck of the battleship Missouri:

"The problem basically" he said, "is theological. It involves aaspiritual recrudescence. It must be of the spirit if we are to save the flesh".

HIS WEALTH Not only is Solomon remembered for his wisdom, but he is remembered, too, ~~because he was a possessor~~ of great wealth. In this regard he is also something of a symbol of our time. Solomon was brought up in the palace with all the things money could buy. What a contrast between his early years and those of his father, David, who was brought up with austerity and discipline.

We, too, are a privileged people, living in a prosperous land, in a world in which hunger and poverty and suffering have become the dominating issues and on the solution of which the future of mankind depends. It's hard for us living here on the East side of Manhattan to realize that three-quarters of the human race lives in a state of poverty bordering on or below the subsistence level. A few years ago Henry Smith Leiper, formerly with the World Council of Churches, brought our world into brilliant focus in his study of an imaginary city of 1,000 people representing the entire world. If, in our imagination, we might compress the total population of the world, now more than three billion, into a community of 1,000 persons living in a single town, this is how it would look:

"Sixty persons would represent the present US population; the rest of the world would be represented by 940 persons. The 60 Americans would be receiving half of the total income of the community; the 940 other persons would share the remaining half. In the town as a whole about 330 would be classified as Christians, and 670 would not.

And classified as to skin color, 303 people would be white, and 697 would be classified as non-white. The 60 Americans would have 15 times as many possessions per person as all the rest of the people. The Americans would produce 16% of the world food supply, yet would eat 72% above the minimum food requirements of the rest of the world. Most of the non-American people in this imaginary compressed community would be ignorant, poor, hungry and sick. Half of them would be unable to read or write."

"To whom much is given, much also is expected". We need to be far more concerned and active on behalf of the have-nots of our world than we are. Those lines of Robert Abrahams come to mind:

"Tonight Shanghai is burning, and we are dying, too.
What bomb more surely mortal than death inside of you?
For some men die by shrapnel, and some go down in flames,
But most men perish inch by inch in play at little games"

There is much to be done for God and for humanity in our time, much that demands our best efforts. So often, our "play at little games" takes our attention away from these pressing things that cry forth for involvement. "Most men perish inch by inch in play at little games".
our concern.

A LOOK AT OURSELVES On occasion it is well for us to look at ourselves in light of all this. This is the stewardship season that we are now moving in to - not just for this church - but for most churches around the country. What is at stake in every case is next year's budget, but to me the budget is not the most serious matter at stake. I may be fired by the canvass committee for saying this, but if we don't make our budget, somehow we will scrounge and scrape and cut and groan until we do. What is at stake is whether the members of this body will learn through stewardship to come to terms with their wealth, privilege, their possessions. This is what is critical!

I heard that a layman recently in this city asked his fellow members in a great church, "If God were to give you back a dollar for every dime you gave him in a year, could you live on it?"

To me it's not just a matter of making a budget. It's also a matter of what is happening to us. It's tied in with our values - how deeply we care, and how concerned we are for others. Like Solomon, we have been blessed with so much.

I read about a six year old child who met with an accident and was taken to the emergency ward of a large hospital. In his record, it was noted that he was one of seven children at home, all supported by his mother. After the wound was stitched and the pain was subsiding, one of the attending nurses brought him a glass of milk. He took a few sips and then asked the nurse, "How deep shall I drink?" The boy had been raised in a family where only part of the milk was for himself, ~~himself~~ and the rest was shared with others.

The example of this small boy becomes a searching question for affluent Christians. "How deep shall I drink" is a question of concern for others and of our own appropriate share. How much do we really care? How much are we willing to give? Can we in this nation, in this church fulfill the promise of our inheritance, or will we too end up on those misty flats of comfort and conformity. We have a difficult year facing us in this church, and I ask for your dreams as well as for your memories as we enter the time of stewardship. What happens in these coming days will determine what will happen here in the coming year. God grant that we will have the wisdom to share our wealth that this outpost of the faith may continue to flourish and prosper in days to come. "How deep shall I drink" - the answer is yours.

"To every man there openeth a way and ways
and a way.
And the high soul climbs the high way and
the low soul gropes the low.
But to every man there openeth a High Way
and a Low,
And every man decideth the way His soul
shall go."

PRAYER O Thou who art the giver of all good things, who hast given unto us privilege and prosperity, wisdom and wealth, grant that we may use these gifts wisely. Bless that which in thy name we attempt to do in this church. Remembering the words of Jesus,

"inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least
of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me".

In his spirit, we pray. Amen