

PARK



AVENUE METHODIST CHURCH

AT 9-6997

106 East Eighty-Sixth Street, New York, New York 10028

Dear Friend,

We'll be holding our ANNUAL MEETING on Sunday, the 25th of March. After a light lunch and a bit of birthday cake (we'll be 153 years old), we'll come together around 1:00 pm in the Russell Room. If the speeches are short and all behave, we'll be on our way home by 2:30.

A good turnout always helps to generate enthusiasm and stirs up interest. Let's shoot to have 100 people here for it. Put a hold on this Sunday for the Church and plan to come. All good wishes,

Philip Clarke
Minister

"IS THAT YOUR BUSINESS, PETER?"

INTRODUCTION

More than once I've found myself standing in admiration of the gentleman who's in charge of complaints over here at the 85th Street Gracie Square Post Office. What a workout he gets each day: absorbing indignation and abuse, pouring oil on troubled waters, rendering to no man or woman evil for evil, patiently paying lip service to the axiom, "the customer's always right!" Watch him operate some time...especially on the rainy days.

But complaints about postal service and such are child's play compared to man's complaints about life. How many mad looks, desperate prayers and outright curses are directed toward the management of the universe in any given day - only God knows. A contented human being is a rarity. All of us some of the time, and some of us all of the time are possessed of a covetous, envious and complaining spirit. The well-being of others can often provoke us and unsettle us. ~~"Why hast thou made me thus?" is the deeper question that troubles us.~~

Remember the fable about the Devil stalking the desert. He came upon a group of friends who were trying to tempt a pious, holy hermit. They tried him with the seduction of the flesh. They tried to sour his mind with doubts and fears. They told him that all of his suffering was worth nothing. But the holy man did not flinch. Then said the devil as he moved into the scene, "Have you heard the news? Your brother has been made the Bishop of Alexandria". And with that word a scowl of malignant jealousy clouded the serene face of this holy man.

PETER ACTS OUR PART

The disciple, Peter, acted out our part that day long ago on the beach that fronts the Sea of Galilee. It was after breakfast that the Risen Christ turned to Peter and asked Him three times, "Simon, Son of John, do you love me?" And answering "yes" each time, Peter was recommissioned and forgiven for having denied His Lord on Good Friday. He was back in good standing, but there was more.

Jesus went on to indicate what was ahead for Peter. Here it is in the words of the Gospel:

"When you were young, you fastened your belt about you and walked where you chose; but when you are old you will stretch out your arms, and a stranger will bind you fast, and carry you where you have no wish to go. Jesus said this to indicate what manner of death by which Peter was to glorify God."

Over the years to follow, Peter would gradually surrender his self-will, and eventually die as His Lord had died, on a cross in the city of Rome.

Now this was a heavy word and Peter responded by saying in effect, "Why me?" As he saw John - that most intimate of the associate of Jesus - trailing them, Peter could not resist playing "comparative Providence". He turned to Jesus and asked, "Lord, what about this man?" Jesus replied, "If it is my wish for him to stay until I come, what is that to you". Or, as the J. B. Phillips' translation has put it, "If I wish for him to stay until I come, is that your business, Peter?" And then these two words: "Follow me!"

DEVELOPMENT

I think that the roots of some of our discontent comes from comparing ourselves unfavorably with others. There's always someone around us that we point to whose lot seems far happier than ours. In

so many different ways we find ourselves pleading with God, "What about him, Lord?" or "what about her?" And back comes the answer, ever the same, "Is that your business, Peter". "Follow me."

Have you ever questioned the right of the 10th Commandment to be there? I mean after all those juicy sins like stealing and adultery and murder. Whoever put those commandments together didn't have much of a sense of climax. He should have started with the throw-away sin of coveting and worked up to the bigger stuff.

And yet it is true that this commandment, "Thou shalt not covet" finds us all at some point or time. Whatever our bag may be - whether we're a hard-hat or a home-maker, an accountant or an actress, whether we work the academic field or the financial field, we can testify from experience that the covetous spirit, the jealous attitude, the envious disposition can render us unable to step up to life and enjoy it for all it's worth!

OTHERS ARE NOT AS TROUBLE-FREE AS THEY SEEM

management about your lot in life there are a couple of things that you would do well to keep in mind.

Next time you're tempted to lodge a complaint with the

One is that other people aren't as well off and as trouble free as they might be. Mind you, appearances can be deceiving. Albert Camus has found us by suggesting that we are all addicted at times to what he calls "nostalgia for other people's lives". He explains,

"This is because....seen from the outside, they form a whole, while our life, seen from the inside, is all bits and pieces."

"Nostalgia for other people's lives". For instance, Peter's nostalgia for John's future. The almost incessant desire to swap our providence for somebody else's. To play the game, "what if...." if not "why me?"

I believe there is some truth, if not a great deal of poetic worth, in these lines,

"If every man's internal care were written on his brow,
How many would our pity share, who have our envy now!"

I recall a number of years ago calling on a gentleman here in the city who mentioned in the course of our visit his hobby and love for collecting stamps. I shared his enthusiasm for many years ago I enjoyed the same hobby, to a lesser degree. But his idea of stamp collecting and mine were poles apart. He reached up to some high shelves and pulled down several expensive, hand-tooled, leather albums to show me sheet after sheet after sheet of perfect stamps. He went on to explain that he had a standing order with the Post Office so that every time a new issue was released he got himself several blocks in flawless condition. I could not help comparing his method of stamp collecting with the one we had in our home. With us, if someone got a letter from a friend in France or a relative in Great Britain, even though the stamp was cancelled and partly mutilated, we cherished the inclusion of that stamp in our album.

The point is that much is not always better. And all that glitters is not gold. Who was it who said, "poverty is the greatest wealth and obedience the

ANNOUNCEMENTS: April 13, 1980

GREETING TO THE VISITORS

We greet the visitors in the congregation this morning. We're pleased to have you with us and we hope the opportunity will be ours to greet you personally following the service - either at the door or downstairs in the Russell Room where tea and coffee will be available.

Be free in the sharing of your name with us. Sign one of the Guest Books or the "Welcome Visitor" cards. Accept the invitation to worship with us on other Sundays across the year. I like to mention that you worship in a Church that has been ministering in the name of Jesus Christ to the needs of people in this city since 1837. It is in His name - the name of Christ - that we bid you welcome today.

PICK UP A COPY

Don't forget to pick up a copy of the parish monthly newsheet...the April issue of "A Word In Edgeways". It will help to keep you up to date on the things that are happening around the Church this month.

TODAY

You'll note that the United Methodist Women have a meeting scheduled for today following the coffee hour. Evie Bekker, Director of the Volunteer Service Department of the Methodist Hospital in Brooklyn, will speak. All women of the congregation are invited.

NEXT SUNDAY

Next Sunday is CONFIRMATION DAY for a number of boys and girls of our Church. It's an important Sunday for all of us, and I hope all of you will make an extra effort to be here to share in the confirmation of these young people. It's a special day in their lives and in our lives, too.

Incidentally, the Sunday School is planning to have a Bake Sale as a part of the coffee hour...the proceeds from which will help to undergird the expenses of our June - "All-Church Picnic". We plan to have three Bake Sales between now and the picnic, so come with a bit of extra money to help nudge a very good cause. The "All-Church Picnic" of June.

CONVERSATIONS

Two weeks from today we shall receive a number of adults into membership of our Church. As a step in that direction for those who are interested in strengthening a tie with the Church this Spring we shall hold another of our "Conversations in Membership" next Sunday night. Sponsored by the Membership Committee, it's a good way to learn about this Church. Next Sunday at 7:30 pm in the Russell Room.

PASTORAL / PEOPLE CONCERNS

You will be pleased to hear that Helen Breit returns to NYC this coming week after a three and a half month illness in Washington, D. C.. George Leopold who suffered a very bad skiing accident in Vail five weeks ago tomorrow is a patient in NY Hospital. Internal injuries from the skiing accident ~~have~~ necessitated major surgery this week. Chances are, George will be hospitalized for another two weeks. 17th Floor. Baker Unit. NY Hospital. Visitors will be appreciated...

JESUS SAID:

~~"It is more blessed to give than to receive". In this spirit...~~
We thank all of you for your Easter gifts as well as your gifts to the VFC Fund...\$50 short of reaching \$2500 for the VFC appeal. \$100 short of reaching our goal of \$1800 for the Easter appeal. Additional gifts today will put us over the top in both categories.

PASTORAL PRAYER: April 13, 1980

O GOD, OUR FATHER - from a world filled with noise and strife, and a city...
tension and turmoil, we have come to this
quiet place this hour - here to be quieted,
to be guided and strengthened, as we ready
ourselves for the tasks of another week.

FAR FROM US Thou never art! - but by the busyness of our lives,
and by the insensitiveness of our hearts, we shut
Thee out. We keep Thee distant.

HELP US, O GOD, to open our hearts,
to open our minds to Your word and will,
And speak to each of us present that word
we need to hear. And heal each of us at the point of our
deepest need!

OFTEN WE HAVE BROUGHT to Thee our weaknesses - sins to be forgiven,
fears to be allayed, anxieties to be overcome,
discouragements to be driven out.

AGAIN, this hour we come into Thy Presence with our
many needs -

Steady us in our sickness;
Comfort us in our bereavement;
Befriend us in our loneliness;
Be near as we struggle to overcome temptation;
Let not the concerns and worries of the week
day destroy or overwhelm us.

OUR PRAYERS in these moments reach out to include friends and
loved ones...from whom - in these moments - we are
separated by distance, but from whom we are not
separated by love and concern.

WE HAVE COME HERE not only with our needs, but also our strengths, and our
desire to put our convictions on the line and into action.
Therefore, in the spirit of the Risen Christ:

LAY HOLD, we pray, upon our courage and good will. Forgive
us that we use brotherly love so poorly and
cautiously.

LAY HOLD, we pray, upon our faith. Make us aware of what we
can do when we do it with Thee. Remind us that all
things are possible to those who believe.

SEND US FORTH into the ways of this city with courage, conviction and com-
passion in our hearts and on our lips. In the spirit of Christ,
we pray.

Amen

greatest freedom?" Really, who's to say whether John or Peter had the easier lot. Indeed, it may be more difficult to live for Jesus than to die for him. "Lord, what about him?" "Is that your business, Peter?" "Follow me!"

HAPPINESS COMES FROM INSIDE OUT

Related to this observation is this word.

I believe that authentic happiness comes primarily from the inside out, and not from the outside in. This is not a popular word in a day when so many are working hard to alter the external conditions of life. And yet, the fact that it is not popular adds to the urgency to say it. Authentic happiness comes from the inside out, not from the outside in.

In a very helpful book called, Psychotherapy and a Christian View of Man, David Roberts describes a tendency we all have to fix the blame for our unhappiness on outside forces. He writes:

"When an individual is not aware of the seriousness of his conflicts, this may be due to the fact that he has projected them on to people and circumstances outside himself. Then the trouble always lies in his opinion with his wife, the boss, the world situation, the Jews, the communists, etc.. And if these external annoyances could be straightened out, he assumes, everything inside himself would form a serene harmony"

Whatever it is that represents our assignment in life, there are plusses and minuses to it. The big thing, as I see it, is to take this combination of the "yesses" and the "noes" and make them stand up and serve the glory of God and the needs of others - to the best of our abilities.

TAKE PLEASURE IN THE BLESSINGS OF OTHERS

Happiness is something of an inside job. My final word would be this:

as mature Christians we must learn to take pleasure in other people's blessings. And I concede that this is easier said than done.

I believe a certain sharing of talent and experience belongs to our Christian faith. Those early Christians back in Jerusalem following the resurrection did some experimenting in sharing. You'll recall that on Pentecost after the Holy Spirit came those early believers held all things in common. In those early Churches the attempt was made to have each member enjoy the talents and the blessings of others.

One of the sadder parts of our American legacy is that we do often see each other as competitors. We so often assume that some one else's capacity implies an incapacity on our part. Thus we have a tendency to debunk others in order to shrink the difference between their gifts and our own.

I was talking with a clergy friend the other day whose predecessor two back was a man widely acclaimed for his pastoral care. He was an outstanding shepherd to his flock. The younger man who is now in that place dismissed the whole achievement with one short comment. He said, "It filled a deep need in his life to do that sort of thing". I thought to myself, "how cruel". That's the way - a very subtle way - in which we write each other off and put each other down to build ourselves up.

When you find someone who surpasses you in the ability to give, in the ability to sing, in physical appearance, in longevity, in family situations, or what have you - be thankful that we have these gifts in our midst. Get into the habit of building up the other person instead of tearing him down. Paul laid this procedure upon the Christians in Corinth who were seriously divided. They had several "fan" clubs going in that Church. There were some who thought that Cephas was the man. Others thought that Apollos was. Some thought Paul was the man. A holier than thou contingent announced that they belonged to the "Christ Party". The Apostle Paul pleaded with them saying:

"All things are yours - whether Paul or Appolos or Cephas or the world of life or death, or the present or the future - all are yours; and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's."

CLOSING

"Lord, what about him?" asked Peter. "Is that your business, Peter?" Then came that redeeming imperative. "Follow me".

It was back in the 16th century that a Polish astronomer discovered that the earth was not the center of everything with all the heavenly bodies rotating around us. Called the Copernican revolution, it revealed the truth that the universe was found to be heliocentric - with the sun at the center and all of us revolving around it.

It may be that the best cure for that covetous and anxious spirit which occasionally invades our heart is a "copernican revolution" of the soul. We must come to see that the world does not revolve around our little axis, but that we were made to revolve around the purposes of God. How true it is, too, as someone once remarked,

"You can do a lot of good kingdom building in this life if you don't have to worry constantly about who's going to get the credit for it!"

Friend, the ultimate question is not the state of our own pleasures, or our own wealth, our conveniences, or the massaging of our egos, but rather it is the quality of our obedience to Him whose will is indeed our peace, and in whose service we find our salvation. The words of the Risen Christ to Peter that morning long ago after Easter still echo across the centuries and provide us with the text to take home:

"Peter, lovest thou me? Feed my sheep. Follow me!"

PRAYER

Let the life that was in Christ Jesus, Our Father, be also in us, and let it be radiated from us to others. Give us the power and the peace to go out into the world and to live as though Christ were living in us. Help us to follow Him in all we do and say and think...that our world, like Him may be raised up from death to new life. Amen