

## "ISLANDS, BRIDGES AND PEOPLE"

TEXT: "He has put my brethren far from me, and my acquaintances are wholly estranged from me.

My kinsfolk and my close friends have failed me; the guests in my house have forgotten me; I have become an alien in their eyes"

(Job 19: 13 - 15)

INTRODUCTION I didn't have a title for this meditation when the bulletin went to press on Friday morning. I still haven't settled on one, but the words "Islands, Bridges and People" come about as close to what I have in mind as anything I can think of....so we'll go with that as a title.

Remember that great movie of the 1940's about the Spanish Civil War. Ingrid Bergman and Gary Cooper...."For Whom the Bell Tolls". I thought about it this week as we read about Franco's anticipated death. "For Whom the Bell Tolls". Remember where those words came from? Not Hemmingway. He borrowed them from John Donne, that great divine of 16th century England. Said Donne,

"No man is an Island intire of itselife; every man is a peece of the Continent, a part of the maine; if a Clod be washed away by the Sea, Europe is the lesse, as well as if a Promontorie were, as well as if a Mannor of thy friends or of thine owne were; any mans death diminishes me, because I am involved in Mankinde; and therefore, never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee".

Or, to use another metaphor, humanity is like an enormous spider web, so that if you touch it anywhere, you set the whole thing trembling.

DEVELOPMENT Sometime during that extraordinary week that followed the assassination of John Kennedy in Dallas twelve years ago this November, the newspapers carried the story that when that crusty old warhorse, Andrei Gromyko, signed the memorial volume at the United States Embassy in Moscow, there were tears in his eyes, and I do not think that you have to be either naive or sentimental to believe that they were real tears. Surely it was not that the Soviet Foreign Minister had any great affection for the young American President, but that he recognized that in some sense every man was diminished by that man's death.

In some sense I believe that the death of Kennedy was a kind of death for his enemies no less than for his countrymen. Just as John Donne believe that any man's death, when we are confronted by it, reminds us of our common destiny as human being - to be born, to live to struggle a while, and finally to die. All of us are in it together. Nor does it need anything as world-shaking as the death of a President to remind us of this. As we move around this world, and as we act with kindness perhaps, or with indifference or hostility toward the people we meet, we too are setting the great spider web a-trembling.

There was a cartoon a few years back that spoke volumes about human nature in this regard. It was in four sequential sections. The first picture portrayed

a business executive angrily denouncing a subordinate in the office. The second picture revealed that "denounced" employee at home berating his wife. The third picture showed the wife impatiently scolding their little six year old boy. And the fourth picture disclosed the boy punishing the family dog. A vivid demonstration of the chain reaction to frustration and hurt.

The life that I touch for good or ill will touch another life, and in turn another, until who knows where the trembling stops, or in what far place and time my touch will be felt. Our lives are linked together. No man is an island!

EVERY MAN IS AN ISLAND

But there's another truth - the sister of this one - and it is that in a sense, very man is an island.

It's a truth that often the tolling of a silence reveals even more vividly than the tolling of a bell.

We sit in silence with one another.....each of us more or less reluctant to speak, for fear that if he does, he may sound like a fool. And beneath that surface fear, there is of course the deeper fear - which is really a fear of the self rather than of the other - that maybe the truth of it is that indeed he is a fool.

The fear that the self that he reveals by speaking may be a self that the others will reject....just as in a way he has himself rejected it. And so either we do not speak, or we speak not to reveal who we are but to conceal who we are, because words can be used either way. Instead of showing ourselves as we truly are, we show ourselves as we believe others want us to be.

Once again, the masks came out....but let's face it:

Friday night was Halloween. ~~Many children and some adults put on masks.~~ They are a lot of people who wear masks all year long. With practice, we do it better and better and they serve us well - except that it gets very lonely at times inside that mask, because inside the mask that each of us wears there is a person who both longs to be known and at the same time, fears to be known. Yes, we're like Georgy Girl in this respect. Remember that song...."Georgy Girl - swinging down the street so fancy free...nobody can see the loveliness but me... there's another Georgy Girl deep inside".

Somebody has said that half of life is putting on a mask and the other half is living up to it.

In this sense, every man is an island separated from every other person by fathoms of distrust and duplicity. Part of what it means to be is to be you and not me, between us the sea that we can never entirely cross even when we would. "My brethren are wholly estranged from me" Job cries out. "I have become an alien in their eyes".

PARADOX AND CONCLUSION

The paradox is that part of what binds us close together as human beings and makes it true that no man is an island is the knowledge that in another way - every man is an island! Because to know this is to know that not only deep inside of you is there a self that longs above all to be known and accepted, but that there is also such a self in me, in everyone else the world over.

So when we as strangers, when even friends look like strangers - it is good to remember that we need each other greatly - you and I - more than much of the time we dare to imagine, and more than most of the time we dare to admit!

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Island calls to island across the silence, across the void, and once - in trust - the real words come and a bridge is built. Love is done - not sentimental, emotional love, but love that is bridge-builder. Love that speaks the healing, helping word which is: God be with you - stranger....who is not a stranger....I wish you well. And the little islands become an archipelago, a continent....they become a kingdom, a kingdom whose name is the Kingdom of God! ARC KA-  
PELAGO

We came in here a few moments ago singing that great hymn, "For All the Saints Who From Their Labors Rest". Yesterday, November 1st, was "All Saints Day" and the Christian Church paused to remember the "A" students of the faith, the honor students, if you will. They "fought the good fight; they kept the faith; they finished the course". And what great bridge-builders they were! Building bridges between people so that the traffic of love could pass.

They did it, they would tell us, by keeping their eyes on Him....by "looking to Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our Faith".

"Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight....and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us...looking to Jesus."

And as we share in the meal that honors his memory and which embodies His spirit, we remember the words He spoke to his disciples,

"Greater love hath no man than  
this....that a man lay down  
His life for His friends...."

LET US PRAY     Father and Lord - most near and most far - listen to our silence before Thee as well as to our prayers, because often it is the silence that speaks better of our need. Speak thy joy into our silence. Breathe thy life into our less than life - not for our own sakes only, but also for the sake of those to whom, with thy life in us, we may ourselves bring life.

Much as we wish, not one of us can bring back yesterday, or shape tomorrow. Only today is ours, and it will not be ours for long, and once it is gone it will never in all time be ours again.

Only Thou knowest what it holds in store for us, yet even we know something of what it will hold. The chance to speak the truth, to show mercy, to ease another's burden. The chance to resist temptation and evil, to remember all the good times and the good people of our past. The chance to be brave, to be strong, to be glad, to be compassionate.

Speak to us in this service of Holy Communion. Give us ears to hear thee speak. Give us hearts to quicken as thou drawest near. Touch us. Melt us. Mold us. Use us. In the spirit of Christ, we pray. Amen