

"LEST WE FORGET"

INTRODUCTION

There's a phrase that keeps sounding like the tolling of a bell through the Book of Deuteronomy: "Beware, lest you forget"....(r)

This is part of the reason we have speeches on Sunday mornings in our churches called "sermons". This is part of the reason we have bands playing and people marching this weekend in what we call "parades". We need to be reminded from time to time of things we so easily forget - of battles fought, of sacrifices made, of lives given. It isn't easy to remember.

And this is why Moses made a speech long ago - the influence of which we felt two weeks ago this morning as our Jewish friends marched up Fifth Avenue and down 86th Street commemorating the establishment of the state of Israel. Moses had brought the Israelites out of Egypt to freedom and had fused them into something of a nation. And now with statesmanlike insight, he pictures for them the life that lies ahead. He warns this new nation in the making against forgetfulness. Their days of wandering are over; soon they will come out of tents and dwell in houses. Soon they will become a settled people. He said to them:

"Beware then, lest when prosperity comes, when you have eaten and are full, when your herds and flocks and all you have are multiplied, that your heart be lifted up and you forget the Lord your God who brought you out and established you in the land".

Remember! Remember your beginnings! Remember your yesterdays!

DEVELOPMENT

On Thursday of this past week, New York City officially opened its own eighteen month bicentennial celebration with a parade and a ceremony down at City Hall. The date of May 22nd commemorates the gathering here of the first Provincial Congress 200 years ago.

I believe it is important for us to pause and remember our origins as a nation: where we came from, and how we got here. Origins are to events what roots are to a tree...the source and the impulse of its life. It's easy for us to forget our linkage with the past and the rootage that we as a nation have in the soil of other cultures.

America didn't start at Plymouth Rock or Jamestown. "America was born" Calvin Coolidge once said, "in a religious revival". By that he meant that America was made out of the religious ferment of the Old World. This land was settled when the nations of the Old World were waking out of a sleep. The fires of the Reformation and the Renaissance were burning. New ideas were springing up in the minds of people, new vitalities were breaking through old crusts and clashing everywhere with the old order entrenched for many generations. There seemed to be no place in the Old World where these dynamic new ideas could be worked out without bloodshed. This is why New England. This is why Plymouth Rock. ~~They came here.~~ This land was God's answer, so it seemed, for their hopes and prayers. Ships and more ships came - all sorts of people...

They didn't have much. They didn't bring much with them. All they had, in fact, was something they brought within themselves: ideas, dreams, visions, and hopes....germ seeds of a new kind of civilization. And here in this new land was the garden where those seeds could germinate, grow and blossom.

What were the dreams they brought with them? Vague, shadowy, shapeless they were....as all germ ideas tend to be...but we can trace them for through the maze of confusion and contradiction, they did take shape. James Truslow Adams once called it "The American Dream". And on this Sunday, nearest to one of our national days of remembrance, suppose we review some of those ideas that helped to make this land a greattland, that we need to keep in mind in the days of confusion and conflict through which we are passing.

A DREAM OF UNITY Put down first: "A Dream of Unity". Here, in this new land men could be united. They could live together on a new basis of equality. Granted - it wasn't clear at first. Granted, it still isn't clear to all Americans even today.

There were those pages in the early days of our history when it seemed that all of the old hatreds and divisions from which they had fled would take hold even here in the new land. They brought their prejudices along with them and carried them around just as people do even today. Artemus Ward said:

"We've descended from the Puritans who nobly fled from a land of despotism to a land of freedom where they could enjoy their own religion and prevent everybody else from enjoying his".

But gradually it became clear to those who came and settled here that the feuds and old animosities of the Old World must be left behind. Here was a new beginning. Here was a New Land where a man must be judged not on the basis of his accidental background, but on his more fundamental rights as a person. Here was a new beginning. Here was a new land where a man must be judged not on the basis of his accidental background, but on his more fundamental rights as a person. Here was a big land where nobody was a foreigner, for everyone was a foreigner.

Franklin Roosevelt was never more right than when he began a speech to the Daughters of the American Revolution with two words, "Fellow Immigrants".

America called her children here from everywhere. From Norway and Italy,, from the Balkans and the Baltic, from the fogs of England and the bogs of Ireland. It said: "Here in this new land you are not races - you are a race; you are not classes - you are men, human beings; you are not Russian, German, Anglo-Saxon, or Jew - you are people". And they began to write that in their documents - Massachusetts, first. Referring to the Constitution of Massachusetts, Charles Sumner said:

"A man is not a Caucasian, Jew, Indian or Etyiopian. He is not French, German, English or Irish. He's a man - the equal of his fellow man."

At least, in their aspirations if not always in practice, there was this germ concept of unity on a new basis of equality.

It came later to be written in a larger document: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights". And where did that idea come from? "Hear, O Israel" said Moses, "The Lord, our God, is one God". "And when you pray" said Jesus, "say, 'Our Father'". It was that idea that took root here and got a chance to grow. Out of the minds of thésHebrew Prophets, out of the revelation of God in Jesus, this great concept came to germinate in men's minds until they

had to find a place to put it and coin new words to express it.

Unity in variety. Out of the many, one. All men created equal. This is the essence of America, our heritage. All men created equal. Granted, there are some today who have trouble with the word "all" - but deep within us, we know that this concept is right, and we believe that the instinctive fairness and the Christian conscience of the people of this land will continue to be felt, that we shall go on saying, "All men are, indeed, equal before the Lord".

A DREAM OF LIBERTY Another dream they brought with them as a passion for liberty. This was the chief explanation of their presence, as it has remained the most basic of our traditions. Freedom. And this passion for freedom, thank God, is as strong and vigorous in America today as it ever was!

We must not forget its origin, and how it came to be a part of our lives. Central in the religious ferment of the 16th Century Reformation was the re-discovery of man's moral dignity, his innate freedom, his right to think, to choose his way, the freedom with which God had made him free.

When Martin Luther revived that ancient faith, he started something dangerous and dynamic. He set going a force that made thrones totter and old autocracies crumble. And it's interesting to watch that idea as it moved out of the spiritual realm and into the political realm, move on from its challenge of the divine Church to the challenge of the Divine State where kings had always ruled by divine right and commoners buckled under and bowed low.

You see it dramatized in the story of John Knox and Mary, Queen of Scots. James the First it was who said: "Presbyterianism is no religion for a gentleman" - and he was in a position to know, for both he and his mother had some adventures with Presbyterianism in and around Edinburgh. John Knox was a Presbyterian. He was the sort of Scotsman who had to pray every morning: "Lord, help me to be right for Thou knowest I'm hard to change". Knox also had a conviction that not only a "cat could look at a queen" - but that a man could look at her, too - look her straight in the eye and challenge the whole fictitious system upon which her authority rested. In fact, he believed that a man could look at a king, and as Luccock once said, "Plant his Presbyterian foot on the neck of a king if that seemed the foreordained place to plant it at the moment".

"What right have ye to speak to me?" said Mary, Queen of Scots to John Knox. "What have ye to do with my marriage and what are ye within this commonwealth?" And that crusty, old stubborn Scotsman said, "A subject within the same, your Majesty". "And although I'm neither Earl nor Lord nor Baron - yet has God made me a citizen of this land".

America was born in answers like that. Democracy had its roots in the minds of some stubborn folk who just got tired of being pushed around. We need to remember this, as we see people today in our land and in other lands, who - tired of being pushed around, now reach for their liberty and freedom.

A DREAM OF DESTINY Unity. Liberty. And this final word. Remember, too, "They brought with them the dream of a great destiny". That is, they had a sense of belonging to something bigger than their own moment. They had no clear idea of the magnitude of what they were undertaking. But you feel and trace a sense of destiny. They spoke and acted like men who

felt something big beginning to happen through them, something full of hope and promise for the future. You sense this in the writings of those we call the "founding fathers".

The Pilgrims felt it. When they left Delft Harbor, John Robinson led the procession from the Church to the harbor, reading aloud from the open Bible God's call to Abraham:

"Get thee oft of thy country, and from thy kindred...into a land that I will show Thee, and I will make of thee a great nation...and in these shall all the families of the earth be blessed."

Certainly the feeling of being in the plan of God - of holding in trust something special for the whole world was a part of this American dream that we shall be celebrating in the coming months. And when a nation loses its sense of responsibility under God, when a nation loses its faith, when it forgets its origins and loses its sense of destiny, then it is in trouble. Max Lerner in Friday's Bost put it this way:

"The strength of a people depends greatly upon their myths about themselves, in the best sense: where they feel they have been as a nation, where they are going, and what they think ~~about~~ they are like.

If you don't believe it, look at the British, who have lost the vision, and the Israelis, who have never lost it. Look at the Russians, where the vision has become dusty, and the Chinese, where it is still fresh".

The time has come for a great forward thrust of the great ideas and concepts that this country was founded upon. We are the people who should be singing the rousing songs and lifting up the great dreams. If only we could get hold of it again and bring it back to mind: this dream of the unity of mankind, this passion for liberty and freedom, this sense of responsibility under God, we could recover our own moral strengths and understand that we have a dream to offer mankind that is far more exciting and dynamic than anything currently being advertised elsewhere in the world.

CLOSING One of our Bishops took his little daughter to see the Statue of Liberty. She was awed by the sight and size of it, looked with wonder at the great arm holding up the torch. That night she was restless and couldn't sleep. Her mother went to her room and said, "What's the matter, Josephine?" She replied, "I keep thinking of the lady with the lamp. Don't you think somebody ought to help her hold it up?"

Let us in the coming months spend time remembering our beginnings: what we started out to do, fully appreciate our heritage, and with a ~~continuing~~ sense of responsibility under God - help "that lady with the lamp"....to hold up ~~the~~ torch of unity, of freedom, and of responsibility as a nation "under God".

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This is part of the reason why we have speeches on Sunday morning called "sermons". This is part of the reason we have bands playing and people marching this weekend in what we call "parades". We ~~must~~^{NEED} be reminded from time to time of things we easily forget - of battles fought and lives given. It isn't easy to remember.

And this is why Moses made a speech long ago - the influence of which is being felt this very hour as our Jewish friends march up Fifth Avenue commemorating the establishment of the modern State of Israel. You will remember that Moses had brought the Israelites out of Egypt to freedom and had fused them into something of a nation. And now with statesmanlike insight, he pictures for them the life that lies ahead. He warns this new nation in the making against forgetfulness. Their days of wandering are over. Soon they will come out of tents to dwell in houses. Soon they will become a settled people. They will be a nation in the world in relationship with other nations in the world.

"Beware then" he said, "lest when prosperity comes, when you have eaten and are full, when your herds and flocks and all you have are multiplied, that your heart be lifted up and you forget the Lord your God who brought you out and established you in the land". Remember! Remember your yesterdays. ~~Remember where you came from. Never forget your beginnings.~~

DEVELOPMENT

It is important for us from time to time to pause and remember our origins: where we came from, how we got here. Origins are to events what roots are to a tree - the source and the impulse of its life. How easy it is for us to forget our linkage with the past and the rootage that we have in the soil of other cultures. as a nation

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They didn't have much. They didn't bring much with them. All they had, in fact, was something they brought within themselves: the ideas, the dreams, the hopes - the germ seeds of a new kind of civilization. Here in this new land was a garden where the seeds could grow and eventually blossom.

What were the dreams they brought with them? What were the germ ideas in their minds? Vague, shadowy, shapeless they were, perhaps, as all germ ideas are. But we can trace them for through the maze of confusion and contradiction, they did take shape. James Truslow Adams once called it "the American dream". Others have called it "the American way". On this Sunday, nearest to one of our national days of remembering, suppose we review some of those ideas that have helped to

make America great, ideas that we need to keep in mind in these days of confusion and conflict through which we are now passing.

A DREAM OF UNITY Put down first: "a dream of unity". ~~How important to remember this!~~ Here in this new land men could be united; they could live together on a new basis of equality. Granted - it wasn't clear at first. And granted - it still isn't clear to some Americans even today. There were those pages in the early days when it seemed that all the old hatreds and conflicts from which they had fled in the old world would have to be fought all over again in this land. They brought their prejudices along with them and carried them around just as people today carry theirs around with them. Artemus Ward said:

"We've descended from the Puritans who nobly fled from a land of despotism to a land of freedom where they could enjoy their own religion and prevent everybody else from enjoying his".

But gradually and inevitably it became clear to those who came here and settled this land that the feuds and the animosities of the old world must be left behind. Here was a new beginning. Here was a new land where a man must be judged not on the basis of his accidental background, but on his more fundamental rights as a person. Here was a big land where nobody was a foreigner, for everyone was a foreigner. Franklin Roosevelt was never more right than when he began a speech to the Daughters of the American Revolution with two words: "Fellow Immigrants".

America called her children here from everywhere - from Norway and Italy, from the Balkans and the Baltic, from the fogs of England and the bogs of Ireland - and said: "Here in this new land you are not races - you are a race; you are not classes - you are men; you are not Russian, German, Anglo-Saxon, or Jew - you are people". And they began to write that in their documents, Massachusetts first. Referring to the Constitution of Massachusetts, Charles Sumner said: "A man is not Caucasian, Jew, Indian or Etyiopian. He is not French, German, English or Irish. He's a man, the equal of his fellow men". At least in their aspirations, if not always in their practice, there was this germ concept of unity on a new basis of equality.

It came later to be written in a larger document. "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights". Where did that idea come from? If didn't come from or start in Massachusetts. "Hear, O Israel," said Moses, "the Lord our God is one God". "And when you pray", said Jesus, "say, 'Our Father'". It was that idea that took root here and got a chance to grow. Out of the minds of the Hebrew prophets, out of the revelation of God in Christ, this great concept came to germinate in men's minds until they had to find a place to put it and coin new words to express it. The making of America was a kind of new creation for which the world had been waiting and preparing for centuries.

5/20
Unity in variety - out of the many, one - all men created equal. This is it. This is America. This is our heritage. We live in a time when we are having trouble with the "all". We're saying some men are created equal, and we're in for a hard time, a time of trouble at this point of race. But deep within us we know that this idea is right, and we believe that the instinctive fairness and the Christian conscience of the people called Americans will find the solution and one day stand up before all the world, saying: "All men are, indeed, equal before the Lord".

A DREAM OF LIBERTY

Another dream they brought with them was an instinctive passion for liberty. This, of course, was the chief explanation of their presence, as it has remained the most basic of our traditions. Freedom! And this passion for freedom, thank God, is as strong, healthy and vigorous in America today as it ever was. But we must never forget its origin, how it came to be part and essence of our lives. Central in the religious ferment of the 16th century reformation was the rediscovery of man's moral dignity, his innate freedom, his right to think, to choose his way, the freedom with which God had made him free.

When Martin Luther revived that ancient faith, he started something dangerous and dynamic. He set going a force that made thrones totter and old autocracies crumble. And it's interesting to watch that idea as it moved out of the spiritual into the political realm, move on from its challenge of the divine church to a challenge of the divine state where kings had always ruled by divine right and commoners buckled under and bowed low.

You see it vividly dramatized in the story of John Knox and Mary, Queen of Scots. This is but one of the many illustrations we might use. James the First it was who said: "Presbyterianism is no religion for a gentleman", and he was in a position to know, for both he and his mother had some experiences with Presbyterianism in and around Edinburgh. John Knox was a Presbyterian. He believed in pre-destination, foreordination and all the rest. He was the sort of Scotsman who had to pray every morning: "Lord, help me to be right for Thou knowest I'm hard to change". John Knox also had a conviction that not only "a cat could look at a queen" - but that a man could look at her, too, look her right in the eye and challenge the whole fictitious system upon which her authority was based. In fact, he believed that a man could look at a king, and as Halford Luccock once said, "plant his Presbyterian foot on the neck of a king if that seemed the foreordained place to plant it at the moment". "What right have ye to speak to me?" said Mary, Queen of Scots to John Knox. "What have ye to do with my marriage, and what are ye within this commonwealth". And that old stubborn Scotsman said, "A subject within the same, your Majesty". "And although I'm neither earl nor lord nor baron, yet has God made me a citizen of this land!"

America was born in that answer, and in answers like that. Democracy got its roots in the minds of some stubborn and courageous men who just got tired of being pushed around. We need to remember this, as we see people today in our land and in other lands of the world, who - tired having been pushed around - now reach for their liberty and freedoms which have been denied them for centuries. Which leads to this final word.

A DREAM OF DESTINY

Finally, remember: "they brought with them the dream of a great destiny". That is, they had a sense of belonging to something bigger than their moment. We know, of course, that they had no clear idea of the magnitude of what they were beginning. They were prisoners of their time as all mortal men are. But, in American beginnings, you can trace a sense of destiny. For they spoke and acted like men who felt something big beginning to happen through them - something that was full of hope and promise for the future. You can trace that sense in the writings of those men we call the "founding fathers".

Even the earliest pilgrims felt it. When they left Delft Harbor, John Robinson led the procession from the church to the harbor, reading aloud from the open Bible God's call to Abraham:

"Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred....into a land that I will show thee; And I will make of thee a great nation.....and in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed".

Certainly the feeling of being in the plan of God - holding in trust something special for the whole world - was a part of this American dream. Some will argue with us about that and say it is nothing but the egotism of all people to think that they are the chosen of the Lord. But we answer: when a nation loses its faith, its objective, its sense of responsibility under God, it ceases to be a nation and is nothing but a lot of people milling around and going nowhere. And it is this thing that needs to be revived in us: a sense of responsibility under God, holding in trust from Him something full of promise for the whole world.

The most important battle taking place today is the battle for the minds of men - the struggle for ideas. If we are to emerge successful in our battle for the minds of men in our struggle with world communism, then we must expand and sell democracy abroad in better fashion than we now are. We're not doing too well with that, and one of the reasons, I fear, is that we are not and have not practiced it as well as we can here at home. Another reason is, we are not really putting our hearts into it.

The time has come for a great forward thrust of the great ideas that this nation was founded upon. We are the people who should be singing the rousing songs and lifting up the great dreams. And if only we could get hold of it again: this dream of the unity of man, this passion for liberty, this sense of responsibility under God, we could rediscover our own moral strength and understand that we have a dream to offer mankind that is far more exciting and dynamic than anything advertised by any other country.

One of our Bishops took his little daughter to see the Statue of Liberty. She was awed by the sight and size of it, looked with wonder at the great arm holding up the torch. That night she was restless, couldn't sleep. Her mother went to her room and said, "What's the matter, Josephine". She replied: "I keep thinking of the lady with the lamp. Don't you think somebody ought to help her hold it up?"

We must remember our beginnings - what we started out to do, fully appreciate our heritage, and with a continuing sense of responsibility under God, help, "the lady with the lamp" to hold it up.

LET US PRAY O God our Father, on this weekend of national remembrance, look upon the unrest of the world and be pleased to complete the work of thy healing hand. Send peace upon the earth, a deeper and more lasting peace than the world has ever known. Draw all men unto thyself and to one another by the bands of love. Unite the people of this land and grant that justice, mercy and faith, freedom and truth may flourish, so that the sacrifice of those who have died protecting this land may not have been in vain. In the name and spirit of Christ, we pray. Amen