

sound of her voice, but she kept walking. Meanwhile, she and I approached. The sheriff took out his pistol out of the holster and the crowd moved completely to one side, making way for us. I dropped back when we were at the outer stage of the group. Ma Walker kept on, repeating his name as she stood in his circular path. Then they met, their eyes held, and she said simply, 'Come, Kenchion...you must come home with me' And he did".

Howard Thurman goes on to say in his book, "Here was a woman who had the quality of personality that could make the gift of reconciliation to another human being - what it does is to introduce harmony into another life by sensing and honoring the need to be cared for and therefore understood. This is the miracle".

This is tied in with what we're think about this morning. We are able to be "reconciled" - that is, to become "whole persons"...able to handle life when we feel the renewal which comes to our spirit from knowing that we are held in love - in God's mind and in the heart of someone that we care about. And when we know this, we discover that the frustrations of life...the self-pity and the suffering...can be challenged because when the blues have done their worst, they still have not touched the place which is the reality of our life - that place where our lives are rooted and grounded in God and in persons who care.

CONCLUSION I close with a line from a letter written by a man who knew all about the frustrations and discouragements of life. He had his share of personal troubles; there were times when he felt he was at the end of his rope. Yet, he wrote:

"We should like you, our brothers, to know of something of what we went through....at the time we were completely overwhelmed, the burden was more than we could bear, in fact we told ourselves that this was the end."

That was written 2,000 years ago by Paul. He knew what it was to experience the "blues". But he also knew that this was not the ultimate reality about life. And when he wrote about that ultimate reality, he said this:

"For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, not things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus".

PRAYER O God, we know that though we walk through days that are dark, dreary and grey, thou art always with us, and that there is nothing to fear, but the loss of Thee. Knowing this, O God, may we go quietly forward from day to day, not looking too far ahead, taking each step with the confidence that what we are asked to do or to bear, for that Thou will give us the courage and the strength that we need. In the spirit of Jesus, we pray. Amen

frightened by a large piece of paper in the middle of the road. It was all the driver could do to keep the team from running away. On the return trip, he noticed at some distance the same piece of paper. Now he prepared himself. As soon as the lead horse saw the white object, his ears stood up. As he neared it, his body tensed in fear. At the crucial moment the driver "flicked" him on the tender part of his ear with the whip to avert a repetition of the event of the morning. The driver gave the horse something else to think about.

If you want to break the mid-winter blues, change something...whatever is easiest for you. Flick yourself into some new awareness.

MORE STRENGTH THAN WE THINK WE HAVE

A third thing to remember as we try to cope with the mid-winter blues is that all of us have more strength and stamina than we think we have.

We've often heard people say, "You never know what you can do until you have to do it, and somehow the strength is there to do what needs doing". This is how it works. Few of us ever exhaust the limits of our own endurance. We have more resources than we think we have and we need to take some security in that fact. The outer limits of the human spirit are still a mystery, but they are far more extensive than we have thought.

In addition to our own strength, there is the re-inforcement of strength from beyond ourselves - from others who care about us and from God who cares supremely. We may lack that sense of well-being which comes when we feel loved and cared for. When we no longer feel it, we may become deeply frightened, disturbed and disoriented.

Howard Thurman, in one of his books, describes an experience he had as a boy. He noticed a group of people gathering on a street corner in his town. He went down to see what was going on, what the commotion was all about. He writes,

"As I got to the corner, I saw that the center of all the attention was the strange, odd behavior of Kenchion Butler, a man who ran a barber shop. He was drawing a large circle around an oak tree. Each time he completed the circle he would then strike the tree with a huge ax that he had in his hands and call someone's name; he was clearly out of his mind. The sheriff had come to take him away to jail as a preliminary to sending him to a hospital, or as we called it at the time, the asylum. The sheriff could not get to him because of the ax in his hand. It was a game of waiting it out...."

"Then someone thought of Ma Walker, and they told me to go fetch her. She was a most unusual woman, distinguished for two things: her personal care for all kinds of people and for her beautiful rose garden - dedicated to God. From her garden came the roses for the altar table in our church and for funerals. I went to her house, told the story to her, and she came back with me.

When she was within earshot of the group she called the name of the man with the tortured mind. There was just a slight hesitation in his step as he located her and the

"Mental pain is less dramatic than physical pain, but it is more common and also more hard to bear. The frequent attempt to conceal mental pain increases the burden: It is easier to say 'My tooth is aching' than to say, 'My heart is broken'. Yet, if the cause is accepted and faced, the conflict will strengthen and purify the character and in time the pain will usually pass."

We need to develop the courage to be honest with ourselves about what is wrong. And it's hard to muster up the courage. Part of the reason we're in the doldrums is because we have lost our perspective. We need perspective to keep things in balance. Sometimes when we're down everything seems to go wrong and there seems to be little light or hope for us.

But this is not really the case. There's always far more to the situation than we can see. The mother caught in the apartment with her children who seems so down needs the perspective of knowing that there will be other times and other days - less stressful, more fulfilling - that these children one day will be gone from home and then there will be a different kind of situation to face. But it's hard to see the total picture at the present time. The "blues" can blind our perspective and put things out of balance.

I'm fond of the story told about Charles Francis Adams, the 19th century political figure and diplomat who wrote in his diary, "Went fishing with my son. A day wasted." His son, Brook Adams, also kept a diary which is still in existence. On that day the son made this entry. "Went fishing with my father. The most wonderful day of my life". Sometimes we get so far down that we lose our perspective of what we mean to others.

Sometimes a friend who can listen and understand can help us see - more clearly than we can on our own, where the troubles lie. Whatever the source or shape of your "blues" - be honest about what it is that's troubling you.

BREAK THE PATTERN The second suggestion for combating the "mid-winter blues" would be to break the pattern into which you have become locked or trapped. Manipulate the variables. There are some things that cannot be changed, but in just about every situation there are some conditions that can be shuffled, adapted or re-arranged.

I'm sure that you've had the experience of being in a meeting where things were not going well, or where it was dull, interest was sagging and people thought only of escape. Then suddenly somebody suggested that we all take a stretch, or that we open a window or that we change any one of the things that had us locked into that situation. Somehow things got shaken up and we were able to make a fresh start.

This can be a remedy for dealing with our present frustration. Re-arrange things. Perhaps there are some old habits that need to be broken. We may need to cut back on our spending. Perhaps our routine is too rigid, no time left for reading or relaxing. Lent is a good time to break a pattern in order to broaden or deepen life.

There's a story about a stagecoach driver who made a round trip each day between two towns. On a certain morning half way along, the lead horse was

"MID-WINTER BLUES"

INTRODUCTION

Just about this time of year, regular as clockwork, there comes a period in which so much in life seems to go wrong. There may be a temptation to blame it on the weather for it always seems to hit us at mid-winter....about the time when we've had all the cold, winter weather we want and we begin to long for the warm days of Spring. We feel weary....tired...depressed.

Here is a mother "cooped up" in her apartment with the children through the long Winter months, suddenly hitting a low point that her husband is concerned for her emotional and physical wellbeing. She tries to explain that she has "cabin-fever", that she needs a vacation from the family, that she needs more time with him - alone, that she needs a break from the daily routine of dishes, diapers and child care. Oh, for a week in the warm sun.

But in her frustration she fails to notice that she is hitting her husband at the time when he himself is vulnerable. He's having a hard time, too. Tired, over-worked, depressed, struggling to meet the pressures that all that Christmas spending put on the family budget. Now he hears his wife complaining and pressing him for a vacation. He thinks of those bills. He can't understand how she could make such unreasonable demands at a time like this.

Or - here is an invalid, bed-ridden for weeks, unable to be up and out, wondering what the future will hold for her. Or - here is a family facing how to live following the death of a family member....wondering how they're going to get along. Or - here are students caught up in a world they didn't help to make, with no idea of what to do with their lives, and a deep feeling that life's being manipulated for them and that they have little to say about it.

We could go on and name other life situations - perhaps your own. But they're all characterized by one thing - the feeling that somehow right now we're feeling stress, that we're tired, frustrated, weary.

TRANSITION

There are those times across the year when we feel "down". We can't quite put our finger on the reason "why". Something's wrong....we're unable to specify what it is. Depressed. We may feel waves of "self-pity". Our sense of well-being is challenged. No one's immune.

~~We add here our "down" days...no one's immune. We're more vulnerable to them at this time of the year than any other.~~ The spiritually mature as well as the spiritually bankrupt become afflicted and infected. And the question is not "how" to avoid these "mid-winter blues", but "how" to handle them when they touch us. Three suggestions.

I. BE HONEST

The first step in attacking the "blues" is to be honest about them, about what is the matter. This may be difficult for some. Some are reluctant to admit their real feelings; they may consider it a sign of weakness. Actually, it is the only way to strength.

If we are hidden from ourselves, it may be that talking with some one will help. This may reveal the source of our trouble. This is what friends are for. This is what counsellors are for. This is part of what prayer is about. We need some way to say, "Look, this is what I really feel". And this is particularly true when our trouble is emotional or mental rather than physical. C. S. Lewis in a book about pain, once said: