

"ON BEING FINELY AWARE AND RICHLY RESPONSIBLE"

TEXT: "On entering the house of Peter, Jesus noticed that his mother-in-law was down with fever" (Matthew 8:14)

INTRODUCTION

Jesus noticed. It was so characteristic of Him. Wherever He went his alert eye took in all that was happening. Many there are today who move in and out among their friends and neighbors wearing blinkers. That is to say - they fail to notice. They are oblivious to the diversity and the desperateness of human need. They are detached and unobservant because they are self-absorbed. It was never so with Jesus. He entered into the lives of people, He put himself in their place, saw with their eyes, felt what they were feeling. Intuitively, with a rare clairvoyance, He realized their problems, sensed their needs, reached out to them a helping hand. He noticed.

CHRISTIAN'S CALLING

To live in such a fashion is not always easy. To have a responsive and understanding heart is not, as one goes through life, to tread a primrose path. Yet fellow-feeling and self-involvement are deeply satisfying. It is a great thing to be keenly aware of the people around you - the people with whom you live and work - to notice how things are with them, whether they are up or down, sick or well, happy or sad. It is a great thing to keep the imagination alive, the capacity for feeling strong, not to allow our sympathies to become hardened. The calling of the Christian (to borrow a phrase from Henry James) is to be finely aware and richly responsible.

DEVELOPMENT

Life is a toughening process. Those who are young ought to be careful in looking out for their ideals - those they cherish about themselves, their work, the home they wish to make, the contribution they wish to make to the nation as a responsible citizen. Ideals are native to young people. If one doesn't have them in his twenties, if the status quo doesn't concern him then, if he is not a crusader for some just cause, some sorely needed reform, what in heaven's name will he be like when he enters into the fat forties. And even if a young person does have ideals, even if in his teens and his twenties he participates in debates, passes resolutions, feels led to take part in demonstrations, he will require as he grows older to be on his guard against two very subtle and corroding tendencies: one of them compromise and the other cynicism.

According to a recent article in one of our national magazines, we are told that the middle years of life are the testing time - the years from 40 to 60. It is not uncommon for idealism to fade - idealism about one's marriage, one's profession, one's politics, one's church - to give way to some disillusionment - then skepticism, then cynicism, and finally indifference.

It's reported that a college president recently asked an alumnus: "What are you in business for?" And without a trace of embarrassment, the man replied, "To make a pile and then to get out". One wonders what that man was like in his college years. We should like to think that he was hotly dissatisfied with the world as he saw it. Perhaps he felt that he could do something to improve it. But see him now in his late forties, going on to his fifties - the organization man - somewhat fleshy, flabby, easy going, accommodating himself without discomfort or strain to the world and its ways.

John Kennedy, you may recall, was told by an older man when he first went to the Senate, "The only way to get along is to go along". Certainly that is the path that leads to compromise, then on to cynicism, and slowly to the death of one's ideals.

Life can be a toughening process. The longer men and women live the harder they can become. Because to be finely aware and richly responsible is expensive they can grow a protective shell about themselves, a shell so thick that self-interest becomes the one mainspring of action and the gratification of the sense the chief end of life.

A novelist summed up one of his characters in this sentence: "Edith was a little country - bounded on the north, south, east and west by Edith". I wonder if they say that of any person in this congregation this morning. A man from the middle west put an advertisement in the newspaper which read:

"I am 58 years old. Would like to marry a young woman of 30 who has a tractor. Please send a picture of the tractor".

Now what has happened to Edith and the farmer and to their types among us is quite obvious. They have allowed life to narrow down their interests. They were wrapped up in themselves. Certainly as types they are extreme, but they do illustrate a tendency that exerts pressure on all of us. The point is this: there are many fine and respectable people who have ceased to notice - who no longer care greatly or feel deeply about anything - husbands living year after year with their wives and never really discovering with whom they are living, parents with children growing up in their homes whom they do not really notice or understand - so many good, respectable people in whom imagination has died, sympathies hardened so that their judgments are apt to be harsh, stern, perhaps prejudiced and without any feeling for their fellows.

When Muriel Lester was twelve years old and appalled by the sight of the slums of London her well-to-do father, full of solicitude for her said: "It's all right. They don't feel things the same way we do. And if they do, they've only got themselves to blame. They get drunk. That's why they're so poor". A man you see with a protective shell around himself and trying to put one around his daughter. He meant well, but thank God, he didn't succeed. For Muriel Lester grew up to be a woman - "finely aware and richly responsible"

WE LEAD TRIVIAL LIVES

Finely aware. Richly responsible. Apply it to your life. How do you measure up. As I see it, one of the troubles with so many lives is not that they are vicious or unconcerned, but that they are so often apt to be trivial. So many lives become immersed in shallow, narrow, petty, self-regarding concerns.

A man made himself famous in the catering business. He established a chain of restaurants right across this continent. As he lay dying, his relatives gathered round his bed. They bent over to hear his final words. His last whisper was "slice the ham thin". Upon my soul. Think of a man going to meet His Maker with these words on his lips, "slice the ham thin!". We smile. We better be careful, for we could be smiling at ourselves. "slice the ham thin". Do you happen to know Phyllis McGinley's poem, "Occupation: Housewife?" It's a poem about what happens to a woman in her middle years:

"Her health is good. She owns to forty-one.
Keeps her hair bright with vegetable rinses,
Has two well-nourished children - daughter and son,
Just now away at school. Her house, with chintzes
Expensive, curtained, animates the caller,
And she is fond of early American glass,

Stacked in an English breakfront, somewhat taller
Than her best friend's. Last year she took a class
In modern drama at the County Center.
Twice on Good Friday she's heard "Parsifal".
She often says she might have been a painter,
Or writer, perhaps, except she married young,
She diets, and with Contract she delays,
The encroaching desolation of her days."

The sting is in that last line: "the encroaching desolation of her days". Why do people become disillusioned about life and bored by it. Time again it is because they are hoarding what they should be giving away. They spend too much time fussing over themselves: their health, their diet, their figure, the impression they make on other when with their education, background, training, opportunities, they should be spending themselves and devoting their time and skills and more of their money to people and causes. They think they are on earth to be served. They're wrong; they are here to serve.

FINELY AWARE AND RICHLY RESPONSIBLE

Dr. Benjamin Tenney, a Boston surgeon,
said this:

"It has taken me half of my life to discover that my business in the world is not to try to make something of myself, but rather to find a job worth doing and lose myself in it".

This is what it means to be finely aware and richly responsible. It means to get out of your own light, to cease measuring existence in terms of what it gives you or does not give you. It is to care greatly and to feel deeply. It is to expand your interest and push out your horizons. It is not to keep out of things, but to get into things that are worthwhile. It is to resolve decade by decade to put more into life than you take out of it. For life finds its real meaning, climbs its loftiest levels, not in protecting the self, coddling and shielding it, but in the fulness of our personal relationships - in self-forgetfulness, in caring for others.

Take this phrase that forms the title of this sermon and put it into that place where you keep the things that are most important, to be taken out and remembered at other times across the year: finely aware and richly responsible. This is the calling of the Christian. Albert Schweitzer wrote some words which might well have been written expressly for Americans:

"You are happy, therefore you are called upon to give much. Whatever more than others you have received in health, natural gifts, working capacity, success, a beautiful childhood, harmonious family circumstances, you must not accept them as being a matter of course. You must pay a price for them. You must show more than an average devotion of life to life."

And what is that price - you ask? The answer is in these lines:

"God - let me be aware.
Stab my soul fiercely with others' pain
Let me walk seeing horror and stain.

Let my hands, groping, find other hands.
Give me the heart that divines, understands.
Give me the courage, wounded to fight.
Flood me with knowledge, drench me in light.
Please, keep me eager just to do my share.
God - let me be aware.

LET US PRAY

Our prayer, Our Father, is a silent searching of our own hearts and minds and consciences. Help us, O God, to lay these things to heart. Keep our eyes ever alert to scenes of human need; our sympathies broad and deep, always remembering the example of Him whom we call Lord - how he realized human need and then did something about it. In his name and spirit, we pray. Amen

INTRODUCTION TO THE PASTORAL PRAYER

The Committee of Religious Leader of the City of New York has called for a "WEEKEND OF PRAYER FOR NEW YORK'S CRISIS". This is the weekend that has been designated.

At a special news conference on March 5th, Archbishop Terence Cooke, Dr. Norman Vincent Peale joined Rabbi Klapperman in an appeal to all citizens to join in this period of prayer.

A special prayer has been composed by this interfaith committee of religious leader, and in place of our customary pastoral prayer in our own worship experience, I should like to use this prayer.

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P R A Y E R

ALMIGHTY FATHER, LOOK FAVORABLY UPON US GATHERED HERE AND THROUGHOUT OUR CITY ON THIS WEEKEND TO SEEK ~~YOUR~~ ^{THY} ASSISTANCE. AS ~~YOU~~ ^{THOU DOST SO} SO OFTEN FIND THAT WE HAVE NO TRUST IN ~~YOU~~ ^{THEE}; WE ARE FINDING THAT WE DO NOT HAVE TRUST IN EACH OTHER. OUR GRAVE PROBLEMS HAVE BECOME ISSUES THAT DIVIDE, RATHER THAN UNITE.

MAKE US A BAND OF BROTHERS; FILL US WITH THE TRUE SPIRIT OF THE TOWN WHERE ROADS AND PEOPLE AND INTERESTS COME TOGETHER; LET NOT THE SPIRIT OF CITADELS AND FORTRESSES LOCK US INTO NARROW GROUPS, SUSPICIOUS, DISTRUSTFUL, PRONE TO HATE. WE PRAY THEE, ALMIGHTY GOD, THAT OUR HEARTS AND MINDS BE CLEANSED FROM THE DARK DRIFTING MISTS OF EVIL. HELP US TO TALK TO EACH OTHER, TO UNDERSTAND, TO TRUST, TO LOVE, TO WORK TOGETHER. OPEN US TO THE WORKINGS OF CHANGE SO ESSENTIAL TO LIFE AND GROWTH. MAKE US KNOW THAT THERE IS NO PLACE FOR HATRED, BIGOTRY, AND RACISM, OVERT OR SUBTLE. GUARD US AGAINST MAKING ANY VERBAL OR MENTAL SLIGHT OR INSULT, GROSS OR SOPHISTICATED, AGAINST ANY PERSON OR GROUP. KEEP BEFORE OUR MINDS HOW THIS AFFRONTS THY IMAGE IN EVERY MAN. MAKE US INDEED A COMMUNITY, NOT A SCATTERING OF ENCAMPMENTS.

^{THOU HAST}
O GOD, CREATOR AND FATHER OF LIFE, ~~YOU HAVE~~ GIVEN US TEMPORAL LIFE THAT WE MAY ALL WITHOUT EXCEPTION ENJOY THE FRUITS OF THE EARTH -- SHELTER, EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION, A SENSE OF PERSONAL DIGNITY -- AND THAT WE MAY GROW AND PERFECT OURSELVES AND OUR INSTITUTIONS IN THIS PURSUIT.

^{THOU DOST}
GIVE US THE MATURITY THAT IS CAPABLE OF RECEIVING THE LIGHT ~~YOU~~ GRANT AND OF ^{THOU DOST} ASSUMING THE RESPONSIBILITY YOU ENTRUST. HELP US TO FIND THE THINGS THAT ARE TO OUR PEACE, THE PEACE OF ALL, AND MAKE US ALL INSTRUMENTS OF THAT PEACE.

AMEN. In thy name and for thy sake, we pray.

Army's 140 services in Greater New York of Operations, said the figure set a record for local financial campaign.

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), who can most always be counted on to solve the nation's fiscal problems, will address the city on Tuesday, March 11. Part of the Colles, the address will center on the important financial problem which is scheduled for 11 A.M. in the

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performer has been appointed to the position of Justice Bernard Botein. He is a well known leader in the Madison Avenue

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town Service to be held at Radio City on Thursday, Dr. Ernest Campbell, Senior Minister of the Protestant Church. The city-wide high school chorus will sing at his important program—the "Fiftieth Anniversary of Protestant Church

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Crusade has announced a series of "teen classes" to be held in three different parts of the city. Classes will be held at the Cathedral of St. John the Evangelist, 11th St. and 5th Ave. On Thursdays, March 6, 13, 20, 27, at Grace Church, 45 Hazel Street, at Trinity Baptist Church, 250 East 61st St. on Thursdays, March 9, 16, 23, from 2:30 to 3:30 P.M. These classes, but this special teen series course is open to all church young people who wish to serve in the Crusade and will be supervised by Rev. Don Tabb.

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