

Dr. McCracken told us a story in the classroom not long ago which has lingered on in my mind. It seems that a man (perhaps a member of his church) was taken ill and removed to one of the hospitals here in NYC. One day, his doctor, who had been a missionary, began to talk to him about the difference, as he saw it, between the all out keenness and enthusiasm with which medical resources are mobilized for the humblest person and the apathy and the unconcern of Christians in the Christian cause. He went on to tell the man who was a patient of something that had happened a few nights before in the emergency ward of that same hospital. It seems that a man, best described as a down-an-outer, under the influence of alcohol had been brought into the hospital, dangerously wounded from a fight. He was known to be something of a trouble maker, and he was dying of a knife wound in the stomach. The hospital, though it had no hope of saving him and though he was a poor specimen of a man, used its most expensive equipment for him and did all it could for him - and this out of professional dedication and loyalty. Said the doctor, "I only wish that churches and Christians were as unlimited in their sacrifice and their commitment"

Let the church get out from behind its closed doors. It is only a true church of Jesus Christ if it has a quickened social conscience, if it makes the sort of impact on the life and thought and practice of our century that the early church made on the first century.

TAKE THE RACE ISSUE

Take the race issue. Believing as it does that God is no respecter of persons, that He is the Father of all men and that irrespective of color or nationality all men are brothers, it has a prophetic role to fill. The place for the Church is on the moral frontier, pioneering in the mutual relations of people of different classes, colors and nationalities. It needs to get beyond pious platitudes and vague generalities. It has to practice integration in its own life as well as support it in principle and the practice has to be genuine and whole souled, not a mere token gesture. The Apostle Paul was a strong racialist, and a narrow minded nationalist, but Pentecost and what happened thereafter made an integrationist and an internationalist out of him. At one time a segregationist who would not eat with Gentiles, even Gentile Christians, he rid himself of that un-Christlike prejudice and put himself on record declaring: "Truly I perceive that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears Him and does what is right is acceptable to Him"

TAKE ECONOMIC ISSUES

Or take economic issues. The Bible says: Christ came to preach good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed. In other words a true church of Christ must concern itself with the conditions under which people live, it must set its face against poverty, disease, ignorance, bad government, It must devote its resources to wiping them out. First and foremost an evangelizing agency, the church is also a social agency with schools, printing presses, hospitals, homes for the aged, agricultural farms. The poverty ridden peoples of the world are looking for release and deliverance. Has communism more to offer them than Christianity. Are wealthy Christian churches exerting and straining themselves to improve the lot of these people. Has Christianity a social gospel as well as a personal gospel? Has

it a way of life to offer them which will provide a basis for an order of society more just, intelligent and stable than either our existing order, or the alternatives offered by Communism. In principle, yes, but the practice lags behind the principle. Here too, the church must get out from behind its closed doors, and it must demonstrate that Christianity is a faith for living and that nothing human - politics, science, economics - falls outside of its domain. The Gospel of Christ is reduced to irrelevance if it is divorced from the crucial issues of our day.

WHAT WE SHOULD BE DOING?

Let's bring some of this down now to the level of our own local church. I remember well a remark that was made to me a few years ago when word got around among my friends that I was to be appointed to a church in NYC. At the time I was living a quiet and peaceful life in the hills of upper New York State. One friend offered this comment, "So you're going into the mission field". He went on to explain that in his judgment, NYC in many ways represented one of the great mission fields in the world. I had never really thought of it that way, but I have come to realize that there was truth in what he said.

Our mission field rests on the doorstep of our church. And I think that the time is coming when we as a church should be making more of a thrust into our community than we now are, when we should be more and more concerned with external affairs and less and less concerned with our own internal affairs. In recent years, we have given a great deal of thought and consideration and spent a great deal of money in renewing our facilities, in refurbishing and refurnishing our own building. With each passing month, our building becomes better equipped, more beautiful, more magnificent. The time is not far off when we should be opening the doors of our church letting this life that we have experienced together "in Christ", letting this life flow out to other people who are in need, and whom we are in a position to help. Unless we do this, the life will no longer flow. It will stagnate within us.

We have been told that Yorkville, for instance, has an unusual number of elderly, retired people who have very little with which to fill their lives. We have been told that there is more juvenile delinquency in the area between 86th Streets and 96th Streets, than there is in the area from 42nd street to 86th Street. We have been told that more and more people are moving into this part of the city as these great projects of urban renewal come to pass. What is our church doing to minister in these areas. Two weeks ago a man living directly across the street from this church called and told me that a "AA" that he knew of was looking for a meeting place, could we offer anything. I felt terrible in saying to him, "No Sir, I'm sorry, our facilities are crowded to the point that we can't help you out".

I have several ideas as to what I should like to see our church do. I'm sure some of you have your ideas too. I'm not going to take the time here this morning to put my ideas before you. I can do this at another time, perhaps in the way of recommendations to our official board. What I want especially to put before you here today on this Festival of Pentecost, the birthday of the church, is this: unless you and I are willing to think in terms of our church stretching out more and more into its community, existing not only for those who are in it and who support it, but also for those who are outside of it, then we cannot truly regard ourselves as a Christian Church! Let us never forget that the church which seeks to save its life by

harboring its resources in plant, personnel and program will lose it. And that church which is willing to lose its life for Christ's sake and the Gospel's will surely find it.

How do these things get done? Not by any kind of self-propulsion. Not merely by telling one another of what we should be doing. There is a higher power available that we ourselves can generate - the power of the Holy Spirit, the spirit of the living God - transforming, energizing, revolutionizing. This is the power that moved mightily over the apostles at Pentecost. This spirit is still very much alive in the world today. It can be experienced in our churches. It is being experienced in our churches. Lives can be changed. Lives are changing. More lives lives can be changed. It is God converts. It is the task of Christian laymen and Christian minister, alike, to create the conditions for conversion within the local church. And it is the task of Christian layment and ministers alike, to open the doors of the church in order that this new life in Christ may flow out into surrounding community, and beyond that to the world at large.

LET US PRAY: Pour thy Spirit upon thy church, O God, in every land. Make it an agency whereby evil shall be cast down and righteousness exalted. Make us worthy followers of Him who cared for the poor and oppressed, and who could never see suffering without seeking to relieve it, or any kind of need without turning aside to help. In His Spirit, we make our prayer. Amen

"OPENING THE DOORS OF THE CHURCH"

INTRODUCTION

PENTECOST, the Festival the Church this day celebrates, wrought in the first century Christians a miracle of transformation. Cowardice gave way to courage; weakness gave way to strength; faith sprang up and dispelled despair. The Upper Room in Jerusalem instead of a hideway became a power center from which they went out to broadcast to the world the good news of Jesus Christ.

Read the Book of Acts for evidence. The Church didn't remain behind closed doors for a very long time. Its members took quickly to the streets and highways of the world of that time, and in an astonishingly short period of time they blazed a trail from Palestine to Asia Minor, from Asia Minor to Greece, from Greece to Italy, and from Italy on to the farthest reaches of the Roman Empire. And they made a tremendous impact upon the life, the thought, and the social practices of their century. Everywhere they went people began to talk about them. Listen to some of the things that were said about them: "Why, these Christians are turning the world upside down!" "How these Christians love one another" "Heavens, what women these Christians have!" And the power that got them out from behind the closed doors of their little upper rooms and loosed them and their message into the world was the power of the Holy Spirit, symbolized in the Book of Acts by tongues of fire.

LOOK AT THE CHURCH TODAY

Look at the Christian Church today in our country. There is a disturbing discrepancy between its size and its influence on everyday life. Sooner or later we are going to have to face up to the fact that the religion of our land is not that of Protestant, Catholic or Jew, but rather it is the religion of some secular idolatry - call it what you will - the Almighty Dollar, the God of Getting-Ahead, the Spirit of Security. Is the Church having any real impact upon the life, the thought, and social practice of our time? What influence does it have upon labor unions, big business, on students, on the emancipated intellectuals, the scientists, the militarists, and on the government administrators in Washington? Robert Raines, in his book, "New Life in the Church", has this to say:

"The world pays little attention to the church. Russia is able to allow some measure of freedom in the church there because the church has been rendered harmless. The awful truth is that despite all our freedom, the American Church seems as powerless to affect American materialism as does the Russian Church to influence Russian materialism. The world believes it has tamed and domesticated the church and can keep her busily occupied in cultivating her own garden. The world has pulled the teeth of the church, and no longer listens to her enfeebled message"

It seems to many thoughtful and serious people that part of the trouble rests in the fact that the church carries out so many of its operations behind closed doors. There are too many congregations that make no vigorous effort to reach out to the strangers that come within its walls, let alone reach out to the non-church goer, to the community, or to the world. Self-contained, ingrown, they more nearly

resemble a club than a cause and are dedicated, as Howard Mumford Jones has put it, "to maintaining a good time more decorous than that of a country club, but not essentially different".

As someone has said, "The Church is like Noah's Ark; if it weren't for the storm outside, you couldn't stand the smell inside" To be sure, there is a storm raging outside, and the church, pervaded as it is with the smell of genial paganism and sociability, is doing very little to change the climate outside where the storm is raging. In other words, too many of our church members have slipped into the dangerous luxury of thinking that the church exists for the sake of those who are in it and who support it, instead of for the sake of those who are outside it. To be sure, the church is a fellowship with members who belong to it and as such it has a responsibility for their spiritual welfare. But that responsibility is discharged not by taking its people apart into an upper room and walling them off from the rest of the world, but by teaching them and fitting them for their true calling, which is ever to be moving outward to the community, and beyond the frontiers of the community to the world at large with the passionate desire and active will that others shall be given the opportunity to seeing the truth of Jesus Christ and receiving it.

THE CHURCH AFTER PENTECOST

Think of the Church after Pentecost.

It was a church in action. It was a church that was engaged in a great pioneering venture, breaking ground, making experiment after experiment. To be sure, it had anxieties, plenty of them, as to its stability and survival to give every excuse for preoccupation with its own internal affairs. "The care of the churches" weighed heavily on Paul's mind but it was not his primary concern. His heart was not so much with the home base as it was with the mission field. And as one reads and rereads the story of the early church in action, one fact stands out quite clearly. The power of the Spirit of God is made known and available to those who feel their need for it because they are engaged in a task which is wholly beyond their powers, because they are really doing it - not just appointing committees or passing resolutions, but doing it and bringing to bear upon the doing of it all of their powers of initiative and inventiveness and resourcefulness.

GETTING THE CHURCH OUT FROM BEHIND CLOSED DOORS

More and more as I go on in my own

ministry I see that the church of our own time needs to get out from behind its closed doors. Remember - the early church won all of its victories by informal missionaries. And there was no place within the early church for the sleeping partner, the back-sliding brother, the person who didn't carry his share of the load. By comparison, the churches of our day have too many people on their rolls and record books who are not at all concerned about their responsibility to the work of the church and the cause of Christ in the world. Every church has them. We have them; perhaps not as many as other churches. But I suspect that few churches are without them - honest, genial folks who stopped going to Sunday School when they were ten years of age, and thus who have a foggy, halo-ridden picture of a Jesus preoccupied with lambs; folks who were swept into church membership around the age of 12 because it was the thing all other children were doing, folks who perhaps never once have been challenged to make an adult commitment of life to Jesus Christ, with all of its implications.

Dr. McCracken told us a story in the classroom not long ago that has lingered on in my mind. Since it ties in here, in a general way, with the things we're thinking about, I thought I would share it with you. It seems that a man (perhaps a member of his church) was taken ill and removed to one of the hospitals here in the city. One day while he was in the hospital, his doctor (a former medical missionary) began to talk to him about the difference, as he saw it, between the all out keenness and enthusiasm with which medical resources are mobilized for the humblest person and the apathy and the indifference of Christians in the Christian cause. He went on to tell the man of something that had happened only a few nights before in the emergency ward of that same hospital. A man, best described as a down an outer, under the influence of alcohol was brought into the emergency ward, dangerously wounded from a fight. He had the reputation for being something of a trouble maker, and he was dying of a knife wound in the stomach. The hospital, though it had no hope of saving him and though he was a poor specimen of a man, used its most expensive equipment for him and did all that it could for him and this out of professional dedication and loyalty. Said the doctor "I only wish that churches and Christian were as unlimited in their sacrifice and commitment!"

The church needs to get out once again from behind its closed doors. It is only a true church of Jesus Christ if it has a quickened social conscience. It is only a true church of Jesus Christ if it has a social gospel as well as a personal gospel. The Bible says: "Christ came to preach good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed. In other words, a true church of Jesus Christ must concern itself with the conditions under which people live, it must set its face against poverty, disease, ignorance, bad government, segregation. It must devote its resources to wiping them out. The church must demonstrate that Christianity is a faith for living and that nothing human - politics, science, economics - falls outside of its domain. The Gospel is reduced to irrelevance if it is divorced from the crucial issues of our day.

WHAT SHOULD WE BE DOING?

The chances are that the majority of you do agree with this in principle. Let's bring this down to the level of our local church, and try to make it more relevant. I remember a remark that a friend of mine made to me several years when word got around among my friends that I was to be appointed to a church in NYC. There were those who claimed that the only reasons I took this church were because of its proximity to Yankee Stadium, and the fact that for my wife it was a little bit closer to South Carolina. At the time we were living in the hills of upper New York State. One friend said this, "So, you're going to the mission field". He went on to explain that in his judgment, NYC in many ways represented one of the great mission fields in the world. I had never really thought of this city in that way, but since then I have come to realize that there was truth in what he said.

Our mission field rests on the doorstep of our church. And I think that the time is coming when we as a church should be making more of a thrust into the community than we now are, when we should be less and less concerned with our "internal" affairs, and more and

more concerned with "external" affairs. In recent years, we have given a great deal of thought and consideration and spent a great deal of money in renewing our facilities - in refurbishing and re-furnishing our own building. With each passing season, our building becomes better equipped, more beautiful, more magnificent, and even better staffed. In the past four a half years, in the time I have been your pastor, our energies and attention have been for the most part directed inward toward ourselves. The time is not far off when we should be opening the doors of our church letting this life that we have experienced together "in Christ", letting this life flow out to other people who are in need and whom we are in a position to help. Unless we do this, the life will no longer flow. It will stagnate within us. We have come a long ways in recent years, and we still have a long ways to go.

We have been told that Yorkville, for instance, has an unusual number of elderly, retired people who have little more than "Horn and Hardat" with which to fill their lives. We are told that there is more juvenile delinquency in the area between 86th Street and 96th Streets, than there is in the area from 42nd to 86th Street. We have been told that more and more people are moving into this part of the city as these great projects of urban renewal take place. We have a common ministry to perform in these areas. Two weeks ago a man living directly across the street from the church called and told me that an "AA" in which a friend of his was involved was looking for a meeting place. Did we have a spare room that they could use? I wasn't at all happy to tell him "I'm sorry, but our facilities are crowded to the point that we can't at this time help you out". Perhaps we'll be in a position to help such a group a year from this fall when we get our basement area re-done.

I have ideas as to what I should like to see the church do. You have your ideas, too. I'm not going to take time here this morning to put my ideas before you. I can do this at another time, perhaps in the way of recommendations to our Trustees and to our Official Board. But what I especially want to put before you today is this thought: unless you and I are willing to think in terms of our church stretching out more and more into its community, existing not only for those who are in it and who support it, but also for those who are outside it, unless we think along such lines together, we cannot think of our church as being truly Christ-like. The church which seeks to save its life by harboring its resources in plant, personnel and program will lose it. But that church which is willing to lose its life for Christ's sake and for the Gospel's will surely find it.

How do these things get done? Not by any kind of self-propulsion. Not by telling one another of what we should be doing. There is a higher power available that we ourselves can generate - the power of the Holy Spirit, the spirit of the living God - transforming, energizing and revolutionizing. This is the power that moved mightly over the Apostles at Pentecost. This spirit is still very much alive in the world. It can be experienced in our church. It is being experienced in our churches. Lives can be changed. Lives are changing. More lives can be changed. It is God who converts. It is the task of Christian laymen to create the conditions for conversion with the local church. It is the task of laymen and minister alike to see to it that the doors of the church are opened so that

the life "in Christ" can flow out to others - in the community and on into the world at large. This is the mission of the church and it is to this cause we are called when we identify ourselves with the church.

LET US PRAY: Pour thy spirit upon thy church, O God, in every land. Make it an agency whereby evil shall be cast down and righteousness exalted. Make us worthy followers of Him who cared for the poor and oppressed, and who could never see suffering without seeking to relieve it, or any kind of need without turning aside to help. In His spirit, we make our prayer. Amen