

"OUR HOPE FOR A BETTER WORLD"

INTRODUCTION

As you know, the World's Fair opened on Wednesday of this past week. In an effort to make this sermon relevant to the current scene, to "the week that was" (if I may borrow a phrase from NBC...or is it CBS), I have chosen as my text words from the last book of the Bible, from the 21st chapter of Revelation:

"Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away"

DEVELOPMENT

"Peace Through Understanding" - you recognize this, I'm sure, as the theme of the World's Fair. Is it possible? Is there any real hope for peace through understanding among all of the people of the world? I want to gather our thoughts around that question this morning. As I listened to the radio report on Wednesday morning, I couldn't help but be aware of the fact that there was not as much peace and understanding at Flushing Meadow among our own people, our own citizens - not as much peace and understanding as we should have liked there to have been.

The struggle for human rights continues. We cannot avoid it. We cannot separate ourselves from it. We face it in the community. We face it in the church. Methodism's General Conference opens today in Pittsburgh, and the great issue it faces is the matter of the Central Jurisdiction - the symbol of segregation in our Church. It must be eliminated, I believe, once and for all, one way or the other. This is a moral issue. As Christian people we must do what is morally right. We must continue to change the atmosphere where we work, worship and live with a Christian conscience and conviction at this point.

"Peace Through Understanding" - is there hope for a world without crime and cruelty, without poverty and prejudice, without delinquency and nuclear destruction, without hostility and animosity in human relationships? The Fair is going to bring the world closer together. We hope and pray that it will be instrumental in leading the peoples of the earth in the direction of that "new heaven and earth", that "promised land" described for us in the Book of Revelation.

HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT IT

Is there hope for a better world? How do you feel about it? Different people, of course, respond to that question in different ways.

Some say quite flatly, "No...there isn't any hope for a better world. The world has always been in trouble and always will be in troubled. There has always been war and there always will be. There has always been a certain amount of crime and immorality and there always will be. You will never get people to live together peaceably. You will never be able to mix the races and see anything good come out of it." And so they spread their predictions of pessimism, modern prophets of doom, and mind you - not all of them are outside the Christian Church.

However, most people are not quite as pessimistic as that. Some are apt to answer the question like this. "Even though there is little hope of making the world better, we can at least stop it from getting worse. If the dike breaks, we can always build a new one. If crime increases, we can take steps to decrease it. We may not be able to make our world any better, but we will do our part to see to it that it doesn't get any worse. We may not be able to make a Garden of Eden out of the earth, but we will do our best to keep the weeds down".

* You May have noticed in yesterday's NY Times an article by George Dugan entitled, "The Methodist Face Racial Decision".

Some are even more optimistic than that. Some believe that the world is better now than it once was and therefore can be even better in the future than it is now. Such people take a long range view of things. They do not look just at the last fifty years of history and make their judgment. They look at the last five hundred years, or the last five thousand years. And as they do, they see the great progress made by man in so many areas of life. To be sure, they are apt to see greater progress in some areas than in other areas, more progress in the area of scientific and technological advance than in the moral and spiritual area. But the energetic optimist says that if that much progress has been made over the years, we can still make even more progress and we will do everything we can to improve the world in which we live. This was the tone of the President's speech as he opened the Fair on Wednesday. Let me repeat some of his words:

"I prophesy peace is not only possible in our generation; I predict that it is coming much earlier. And if I am right, then, at the next World's Fair, people will see an America as different from today as we are different from 1939. They will see an America in which no man must be poor. They will see an America in which no man is handicapped by the color of his skin or the nature of his beliefs....and no man will be discriminated against because of the church he attends or the country of his ancestors."

Thank God for such statesmanlike words, for such high, lofty and eloquent optimism. Without it, our world would be poor and forlorn.

NEW TESTAMENT CHRISTIANITY What about this hope for a better world? What does New Testament Christianity have to say to us. Does it give us guidance and direction at this point.

Turning to the New Testament, we find that when Christianity was young and fresh, when it was just getting a foothold in the Mediterranean world, it had virtually no hope for a better world. They seemed to have no hope of improving the world they lived in. We find that they never talked about getting rid of slavery (and this might please some Christians in our land); mind you, they simply treated a slave as though he were a brother. They never tried to get rid of the Emperor; they just refused to worship him, and if for that he wanted to kill them, they let him do it. They never tried to get rid of the vice and corruption that made Corinth notorious. They simply refused to participate in it.

This may seem strange to us. We find ourselves in an entirely different position from those early Christians. For one thing, we are responsible in a way they never were for the government of the world and, because of this, we cannot afford to be indifferent to the state of the world. We have been brought up with the idea that as Christians, it is our duty to see to it that the world is made better than it is.

We may wonder, "How could they possibly live without hope?" They didn't. They had hope, but they didn't hope for a better world. They hoped for a NEW world - not another world, beyond this, after death, not a different world without any of the familiar landmarks, but a "NEW" world....the same old world, completely transformed and transfigured....not by them, but by God. This is what they hoped for. Some believed it would happen in their own lifetime, all at once - "in the twinkling of an eye". Paul, the Apostle believed this and his early "Letters" were written under the belief that this new world would come to happen in his own lifetime. It didn't happen; it hasn't happened. Whether it will at some future time, we have no way of knowing with complete certainty. Some say they know and perhaps they do. But

MORE IMPORTANT!

this we do know: wherever there is a "new" person "in Christ" as Paul put it, there is the possibility of a new world emerging at that point.

Our hope then of a new world, a better world, is directly related to "new" persons. You cannot have a new world until you have new persons. New people can bring new life into hopeless situations.

WE HAVE SEEN THIS HAPPEN

We have seen this happen many times. We see it happen in different areas of life. For the purpose of letting more light in on this, occasionally one may see it happen in the world of sports. I was reading the sports page the other evening to see if there was anything there that might make the world appear a bit brighter. I looked to see how the Yankees were doing, and then the Mets. Both teams were near the bottom of the league. I looked to see how the San Francisco Giants were doing. I use to follow them before they left the city. I read that Willie Mays is off to a great start this season. Already he has more home runs than the Yankees and the Mets put together, and a batting average of over .450. Remember how Willie Mays, as a nineteen year old boy back in 1951, lifted the New York Giants and sparked them to a pennant and a world championship. One man - with spirit, with life, with enthusiasm, with determination - can lift an entire team and put new life into it. By being the kind of person he was, he transformed and transfigured the entire team and brought about what some often speak of as "The Miracle of Coogan's Bluff". Who knows - perhaps Moses (Robert Moses and Casey Stengel) will work a miracle for the Mets now that they are on the dry grounds of Flushing Meadow.

Such miracles of transformation and change are not limited to the world of sports. It can happen in all of life's areas. It can happen in the life of a man; it can happen in the life of a church. It's possible for a church to die. I remember ten years ago worshipping one Sunday night in London, in that great church to the north of Trafalgar Square - St. Martin's in the Field. The church was packed that night. From what I know and understand about that historic church of London, when the First World War began, it was as dead as a doornail. There wasn't anybody in it. Then in 1914, one "new" man, a man claimed by Jesus Christ, stood up and began to tell all of the people about the love of God and the church was made "new" - and still is "new" - the same old, historic building in Trafalgar Square, but it is a "new" church.

If one person can do this, think of what a group of persons might be able to accomplish in the spiritual realm, in the name of Christianity, in creating a world - a "new" world along the lines of those described to us by our President on Wednesday. But before a group of person can make a "new" world, they too must be changed and made "new"....as Paul put it, they too must become "new creatures". For only people who themselves have truly been changed, can make these changes that are needed. We know this.

Herbert Butterfield, a Professor of History at Cambridge University, a layman in the Methodist Church and a devout Christian gentleman, says this in one of his books:

"The profoundest effects on our civilization have been produced by people who were not thinking of affecting the course of human affairs at the mundane level; they have come as unanticipated by products of lives that have really been intent on spiritual things".

He doesn't take time to give us names. I can think of names just as you probably can, and perhaps there is some person present today who in future years will be counted among those who by "being intent" on the things of the spirit will make the world not only better, but "new" - giving it a new spirit, lifting things to a new level of thinking, understanding, and behaving so that people face the same old problems - but do it in a different key, in a new key, a higher key.

I cannot help but wonder, at times, what our descendants will say several thousand years from now when they open the time capsule that is to be buried in the ground at the close of the Fair. What will they say about our time....what will they think about us....what will they think about the Church. Will they say that the Church...that Christian people failed at that hour. Or will they say that this was one of their finest hours....that the people who bore the name Christian...understanding the demands of that hour and the opportunities before them...rose up and with one accord did the will of God. I wonder. I wonder what they will say and think.

We take leave then in our thinking from what Ogden Nash has called the "Promised Land of Mr. Moses"....hoping and trusting that mankind in the future will not drift aimlessly about in the wilderness of injustice, poverty, indifference, indecision for forty or more years, but will enter soon into the promised land of peace, prosperity, justice and equality for all men.

"Peace Through Understanding". Is it possible. I, for one believe with all my soul, that it is possible. Such a hope rests with "new" persons who are intent on learning and living out old lessons for

"He has showed you, O man, what is good:

And what does the Lord require of you -

But to do justice.
to love kindness.
to walk humbly with your God"

LET US PRAY: We live in a World, O God, that is full of tension, trouble, sin and strain. Grant that we may be so renewed ourselves that we may be like the leaven in the lump, the light that shines in the darkness, and that in the world we now live in, we may have glimpses of that new world that is yet to be. Amen

METHODISTS FACE RACIAL DECISION

Church to Act on Proposal
to End Negro Division

BY GEORGE DUGAN

The 10-million-member Methodist Church will be called upon next week to decide whether to retain or abolish its all-Negro, nongeographic Central Jurisdiction. The occasion will be the church's two-week-long quadrennial General Conference opening in Pittsburgh tomorrow.

Four years ago, in Denver, the Methodists rejected overwhelmingly efforts to abolish the segregated jurisdiction. Instead, they settled for its gradual elimination over an indefinite period.

At the time it was pointed out that the compromise helped to preserve the unity of the church. And there had been hints that if the Central Jurisdiction were summarily abolished, some Southern church groups would withdraw from the denomination.

But since 1960, pressure has mounted for the abandonment of what has virtually become a symbol of segregation within the church. There are reports that some of the delegates have planned picket line protests to demonstrate their unwillingness to tolerate any longer the Central Jurisdiction.

5 Geographic Divisions

The Methodist Church functions through five geographic jurisdictions and the catch-all Negro jurisdiction. In the latter there are more than 370,000 Negroes. About 25,000 are members of churches in other jurisdictions.

The church may also revise its adamant stand for total abstinence for all members.