

PATCHES ON OLD CLOTH

INTRODUCTION

I know of a man who becomes worried whenever he has to buy something new. He is not a poor man, but apparently the idea of purchasing a new suit, or a new pair of shoes or a new piece of furniture is just enough to send him into the depths of depression. He can't stand the thought of something wearing out, nor can he stand the sight of something being discarded. He's forever dropping in at rummage sales; he's forever bringing home old radios and broken down pieces of furniture. His home is apt to be cluttered up with what appears to be a lot of odds and ends. Undoubtedly this man is something of a problem to his wife. But when you come right down to it, it seems to me that this man is struggling with a problem that a great many people face in life, a problem that centers around the relationship between the old and the new. ~~For~~ the idea of change is something we must live with, but something that few people ever learn to accept gracefully. What is to be discarded and what is to be maintained? This is something that we face continually in almost every area of life.

Jesus had something to say in connection with this. As a matter of fact, his attitude along this line disturbed many of his contemporaries. They wanted to hang on when he thought it was best to let go. They thought they could drop some matters which he in turn considered to be quite vital and important. Reading through the Gospels, we find that there is a sense in which Jesus came to tell men how to (solve) this relationship between the old and the new. We find he told two parables which deal with this theme. They were read to you a few moments ago. Let me just pause and bring them to your attention once again. What exactly was Jesus trying to say to us. Reflecting upon these parables and reading between the lines of them, it seems to me that he was trying to say several things to us.

WE PREFER THE OLD AND FAMILIAR

In the first place, I think Jesus would have us see that there is a tendency on the part of people to cling to the past. He would point out to us that there is a tendency within all of us to prefer the old and familiar. He's telling us the truth about ourselves. For the most part, we approach new things and new ideas cautiously, with a degree of uncertainty. We feel more at home with known situations and familiar faces. *In the next part.*

Perhaps an illustration will let the light in on all of this. During World War II, many of the children of the city of London were moved from London into the country, into the suburbs of that great city. The blitz was going on and it was assumed that the terror and the havoc would be destructive to their health and growth. But strangely enough, it was discovered that the children seemed to get along much better when they stayed in their own homes in the city. Apparently they were able to face the dangers better and more bravely when they were not thrust into new and unfamiliar surroundings at the same time. Something of this same sort of thing is true even with adults. We do better in familiar surroundings. We tend to prefer the old and familiar ways and dislike changes.

Now much of this human tendency to be sure is good and necessary. But Jesus would remind us that like every good thing, however, this

tendency can be carried too far and thus with the passing of time it can hamper growth, impede progress and perhaps in the long run destroy rather than create. Too much affection for the old and familiar patterns will find us clinging to the past when we should be marching forward. *with Christ*

This relates itself, in my own thinking, to many areas of life today. We see it in our own national life - in the tension between the old pattern of segregation as over against the new, emerging and Christian pattern of integration. We see it in world affairs - in the tension between the old pattern of colonialism as over against the new pattern of independent nations. We see it in our religious life - in the tension between the old pattern of denominationalism as over against the new, emerging patterns of the ecumenical movement. And let's be honest about it - just as there were those back in the time of our Lord who wanted to hang on when he thought it was best to let go, so there are those who would have us do the same today.

As churchmen we are ^{continually} facing these ^{of this nature} problems continually. We find there are people who find it difficult to believe that old ways demand revision. They are apt to sing out "Give me that old time religion.....it's good enough for me". They fail to see that perhaps the patterns of behavior and thinking which worked well enough fifty years ago, do not quite fit the urban life of the nuclear age in which we live. ^{come} ^{act. 55} ^{complexity} ~~The church with a flexible approach will find the right method for the present proclamation of the eternal Gospel.~~

Gerald Kennedy, one of the Bishops of our Methodist Church, tells us in one of his books how several years ago he attended a service of the Eastern Orthodox Church in Istanbul. It was of great interest to him in spite of the fact that the service lasted close to three hours. There were very few young people present. After the service was over he talked about this with the Ecumenical Patriarch who confessed to him that he felt that the service was in need of revision but that such a thing would demand the calling of an Ecumenical Council. Kennedy then went on to ask him when the last such council was held and the Ecumenical Patriarch said it was in the 8th Century. Then he asked him why they did not call the council into session and he replied that it was because they were not quite ready for it. Kennedy went on to say that to a Methodist Churchman who is use to a General Conference with full legislative powers meeting every four years this seemed a little on the conservative side.

General

I don't know whether or not you have heard the story about the Arab who felt quite hungry one night. He struck a match to light a candle and then he proceeded to open a date. It was wormy and so he threw it to one side. He tried another date, and it to had worms. So he tried a third one and it too had worms. Whereupon he blew out the candle and ate the fourth one. Rather than face unpleasant realities, we often find it easier to stay with things as they are and hope for the best. We all are guilty of doing this. But Jesus would remind us that it hardly ever works. Either you go forward or you fall backward. It is a law of life. You cannot stand still for life is continually moving. We have a tendency to prefer the old and the familiar. Some of this is good, but when it is carried to an extreme, it can hamper growth and hinder progress.

THERE ARE TIMES WHEN WE CANNOT
PATCH UP THE OLD CLOTH.....

In the second place, I think that Jesus would have us see that there are times when we cannot patch up

the old cloth, that there are occasions that demand an entirely new garment. This too is a law of life. And to be sure, these experiences are often painful, but in the long run they mean growth.

think of it This law of life, too, relates to ^{to many of} ~~almost all areas of life,~~ *in terms* but suppose we ~~limit our~~ consideration of it here this morning to the patterns of personal growth and maturation. The painful experience of growing up is caused by life forcing us into periods of radical change. I expect it works differently for different people, but no life is quite free from crucial periods of adjustment that hurt.

We see it first of all in the little baby as it moves from crawling to walking, and all of the painful bumps and bruises that accompany those first few steps. We see it, for instance, in that famous period known as the teen-age. We think of the turmoil that accompanies that age. I remember my own adolescence and not with any great pleasure. It was a rather stormy, strained time when life would look beautiful one day and quite hopeless the next. I remember wavering between periods of great confidence and times of agonizing inadequacy. Ecstasy and despair. It was the dividing line between childhood and youth. I suppose there are people who never quite pass through adolescence and in their later years continue to show the emotional instability of the teen-ager. But, if it works properly, one goes through it and puts on another garment.

A marriage is another one of those crucial experiences. To start a new home is difficult enough under the best of circumstances. But if a well meaning parent tries to keep a son or a daughter bound within the old familiar circle, trouble will surely come into that new home. It is difficult for a parent to let a child go, but if the parent fails to do this, a conflict and a tension is set up that can ruin lives. Marriage, you see, is something new and not just a patch on something old.

In religion, the old argument still goes on between those who believe in sudden conversion as over against the champions of gradualness. Does a man find God on a Damascus Road, or is the encounter made without any emotional manifestations. More and more as I go on in my ministry, I become convinced of the fact that religion, like every great experience, finds a man according to his temperament. But at the same time, I am convinced of this that when Christ finds us we are aware of a turning point that makes all things new. The Christian experience changes lives. It is devastating and uplifting. It is shattering and creative. It is not just a patch on an old cloth. It is a new garment.

In the 1925 Rose Bowl Game, Notre Dame beat Stanford 27 to 10 in spite of Stanford's making the most first downs. Pop Warner, Stanford's coach, suggested that his team should be considered the winner in spite of the score. Knute Rockne's famous reply was, "Right and next summer we'll decide the baseball games by the number of men left on base". It reminds us that life is not a matter of running back and forth on the field, but of crossing the goal line. And when that happens, there is a new situation, a new possibility. No patch on an old cloth will suffice. It must be a new garment.

New wine in new wineskins

CHRIST UNITES THE OLD AND THE NEW

And finally, in the third place, let us note that Christ unites the old and the new. There is something about this man from Galilee, something in the quality of his life, that brings into men's lives and their societies the proper balance between the old garment which sometimes have to be patched and the new garments which must be put on.

Let me remind you that life has continuity as well as crisis. Let me remind you that we cannot afford to ignore the wisdom of yesterday. It is one of our most precious possessions. Jesus would remind us that he did not come to destroy but to fulfill, and he was never unappreciative of the accomplishments of the past. Let me remind you that no generation ever outgrows its need for the Bible. Its wisdom undergirds all of our past history and all of our future hopes. The men of the past must still speak to us with authority. No person can ever go wrong in building his or her life on the ten commandments. Modern techniques and ancient wisdom make a fine combination which is impossible when either one ignores the others. This faith we proclaim and profess has living and vital values for the present. This Gospel which is the same since the beginning also promises to make all things new. Christ unites the old and the new.

CLOSING SECTION

A story has been told about a social worker assigned to distribute used clothing at a center in a city slum. A mother brought her 12 year old boy to get him an overcoat for the cold winter weather. The boy was sullen and perhaps somewhat embarrassed. The social worker in looking through the pile of clothing found a boy's coat that seemed entirely new with no sign of wear. Some well-to-do family had apparently put it aside and forgotten about it. "Son" said the social worker, "try this on." The boy put it on slowly and then began to touch it and look at it. His eyes grew wide with a quiet excitement. "Why" he gasped "it's just like new". Perhaps you can imagine what it must have meant for that boy to wear something new for the first time. He had known only the worn out clothes of other children and the outgrown garments of older boys. But this was a new coat.

It seems to me that something like this happens when a person "puts on the spirit of Christ" - the spirit of love, forgiveness and concern. It means a new life, it means new hope, new confidence. It means a garment of freedom. You call yourself a Christian. Do you have on the garment of Christ. On this first Sunday of Lent, I would put this to you and invite you to do this. In the word of Paul:

"Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all to stand. Stand therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the equipment of the gospel of peace; above all taking the shield of faith. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God"

PRAYER:

PATCHES ON OLD CLOTH

INTRODUCTION

I know of a man who becomes worried and upset whenever he has to buy something new. He is not a poor man, but apparently the idea of purchasing a new suit, or a new pair of shoes, or a new piece of furniture is just about enough to send him into the depths of depression. He can't stand the sight being discarded; he can't stand the thought of something wearing out. He's forever dropping in at rummage sales, forever attending auctions, forever cluttering up his home with what appears to be a lot of old odds and ends. To be sure, this friend of mine is something of a problem to his wife, but when you come right down to it, it seems that he is struggling with a problem that many people face in many different areas of life, a problem that centers around the relationship of the old to the new. What is to be discarded? What is to be maintained? The idea of change is something we must learn to live with, but something that few people ever learn to accept gracefully.

Jesus had something to say in connection with this. As a matter of fact, his attitude along this line disturbed many of his contemporaries. They wanted to hang on when he thought it was best to let go. They wanted to drop some things which he in turn thought were vital and quite important, matters which he thought would mean the loss of soul. Reading through the Gospels, we find that there is a sense in which Jesus came to tell men how to work out this relationship between the old and the new. He told two parables which deal with this theme. They were read to you earlier in the service. Let me bring them to your attention again. What exactly was Jesus trying to say. As I have reflected upon these parables this past week, as I have tried to read between the lines of them, it seems to me that he is trying to say at least three things to us.

WE PREFER THE OLD AND FAMILIAR

In the first place, I think that Jesus was trying to say that there is a tendency on the part of people to prefer the old and familiar. I think he's telling us the truth about ourselves. ~~For the most part, people approach new ideas, new situations, new things with a rather cautious and uncertain attitude.~~ For the most part, we feel more at home with known situations and familiar faces.

During World War II, for instance, many of the children of the city of London were moved from London into the country, into the suburbs surrounding the city. The blitz was going on and it was assumed that the terror and havoc would be destructive to their health and well being. But strangely enough, it was discovered that the children seemed to get along much better when they were permitted to stay in their own homes, with their own parents, in familiar surroundings in the city. Apparently they were able to face the dangers much better and more bravely when they were not thrust into new and unfamiliar surroundings at the same time. Something of this same sort of thing is true even with adults. We always seem to do better in known situations, with familiar faces, and we prefer the old and familiar patterns and routines and we dislike change, and we dislike anything that interrupts our normal routine.

Now much of this human tendency to be sure is good and necessary, but our Lord would remind us that like every good thing, however, this

tendency can be carried too far and thus with the passing of time it can hamper growth, impede progress and perhaps in the long run destroy rather than create. Too much affection for the old and familiar patterns will find us clinging to the past when we should be marching forward. This, it seems to me, was on the mind of Jesus when he told these parables.

Now this relates itself so easily to so many different areas of life today. For one thing we see something of this in our national life - in the tension between the old pattern of segregation as over against the new, emerging, more Christian pattern of integration. We see it in world affairs - in the tension between the old pattern of colonialism as over against the new pattern of independent nations. We see it in our religious life - in the tension between the old pattern of denominationalism as over against the new, emerging pattern of the ecumenical movement. And let's be honest about it - just as there were those back in the time of our Lord who wanted to hang on when he thought it best to let go, so there are those who today would have us do the same, those who would have us cling to old and familiar patterns, and judging from an article that appeared in the Religious section of TIME magazine this past week, there is even a Methodist Bishop included in this latter group.

Yes, as churchman we are continually facing problems of this nature. Occasionally we do come across those people in our churches who find it difficult to believe that old ways demand revision. They sometimes fail to see that patterns of behavior and thinking which may have worked well enough fifty years ago, do not quite fit the complex problems of urban life of the nuclear age in which we live. This brings to mind a story that Gerald Kennedy tells us in one of his books. It seems that several years ago he attended a service of the Eastern Orthodox Church in Istanbul. It was of great interest to him in spite of the fact that it was nearly three hours long. There were very few young people present. After the service was over he talked about this with the Ecumenical Patriarch who confessed to him that he felt that the service was in need of revision but that such a thing would demand the calling of an Ecumenical Council.. Kennedy went on to ask him when the last such council was held and the Ecumenical Patriarch said it was back in the 8th Century. Then he asked him why they did not call the council into session and the Patriarch replied that they were not quite ready to do it. Kennedy went on to say that to a Methodist Churchman who is use to a General Conference with full legislative powers meeting every four years this seemed a little on the conservative side. The point is of course that from to time we come across people like this in our churches who find it difficult to believe that old ways demand revision.

I don't know whether or not you have heard the story about the Arab who felt quite hungry one night. He struck a match to light a candle and then he proceeded to open a date. It was wormy and so he threw it to one side. He tried another date; it too had worms. He tried a third one; it too had worms. Whereupon he blew out the candle and ate the fourth one. Rather than face unpleasant realities, we often find it easier to stay with things as they are and hope for the best. All of us are guilty of doing this. But Jesus would remind us that it hardly ever works. You either go forward or you fall behind. You cannot stand still for life is a swiftly moving stream. We prefer the old and familiar. Some of this is good, but when carried to an extreme, it can hamper growth and hinder progress.

THERE ARE TIMES WHEN WE CAN-
NOT PATCH UP THE OLD CLOTH

In the second place, I think that Jesus was trying to say this to us that there are times when we cannot patch up the old garment, times when we need to get rid of it, times when we cannot put new wine into old wineskins. In other words, there are occasions in life when we must put on an entirely new garment. To be sure, these experiences are often painful, but in the long run they mean growth.

Once again we find that this relates to so many different areas of life, but in our consideration of it here today suppose we think of it in terms of personal growth and maturation. Think of it in terms of that famous period known as teen-age. We think of the inner turmoil that accompanies that age. I remember my own adolescence, and not with any great pleasure. It was a rather stormy, strained time when life would look beautiful one day and quite hopeless the next. I remember wavering between periods of great confidence and times of agonizing inadequacy. Ecstasy and despair. The dividing line between the world of the child and the world of the adult. Perhaps there is a teen-ager here this morning who knows of the painful experiences that accompany this process of growing up. And I suppose there are people who never quite pass through adolescence and in their later years continue to show the emotional instability of the teen-ager. But if it works properly, one goes through it and puts on another garment.

And then too I was thinking that a marriage is another one of these crucial experiences. To start a new home is difficult enough under even the best of circumstances. But if a well meaning parent tries to keep a son or a daughter bound within the old familiar circle, trouble will surely come into that new home. It's terribly difficult for a parent to let a child go, but if the parent fails to do this, a conflict and a tension is set up that can ruin lives. Remember - marriage is something new and not just a patch on something old! Perhaps there is a parent here this morning that needs to have this put before him. Perhaps there is some young person here who needs to be reminded of these things.

Something of this relates to religion. We find the old argument still goes on between those who believe in a sudden conversion experience as over against the champions of gradualness. Does a man find God on a Damascus Road, or is the encounter made without any emotional manifestations. More and more as I go on in my ministry, I become convinced of the fact that religion, like every great experience in life, finds a man according to his temperament. But at the same time, I am convinced of this that when Christ finds a person, really finds him mind you, that person is aware of a turning point that makes all things new. The Christian experience changes lives. It is at the same time both devastating and uplifting, shattering and creative. It is not just a patch on an old cloth. It is a new garment.

In the 1925 Rose Bowl Game, Notre Dame beat Stanford 27 to 10 in spite of Stanford's making the most first downs. Pop Warner, Stanford's coach, suggested that his team should be considered the winner in spite of the score. Knute Rockne's famous reply was, "Right and next summer we'll decide the baseball games by the number of men left on base". It serves to remind us that life is not a matter of running back and forth on a field, but of crossing the goal line. And when that happens, there is a new situation, a new possibility. No patch on an old cloth

will do. It must be a new garment. New wine, Jesus said, must be put into new wineskins!

CHRIST UNITES THE OLD AND THE NEW

And finally, in the third place, let us always be aware of the fact that Christ unites the old and the new. There is something about this man of Galilee, something in the quality of his life, that brings into men's lives and into our societies the proper balance between the old garment which sometimes has to be patched and the new garment that must be put on.

We cannot afford to ignore the wisdom of yesterday. It is one of our most precious possessions. Jesus himself would remind us that he did not come to destroy, but to fulfill. He was never unappreciative of the accomplishments of the past. Let me remind you that no generation ever outgrows its need for the Bible; no generation ever outgrows its need to follow the ten Commandments. Modern techniques and ancient wisdom make a fine combination which is impossible when either one ignores the others. Life has continuity as well as crisis, and this faith we profess has living and vital values for the present. Christ unites the old and the new; he brings them together into a proper balance and a forward thrust is felt.

CLOSING SECTION

A story has been told about a social worker assigned to distribute used clothing at a center in a city slum area. A mother brought her 12 year old boy to get him an overcoat for the cold winter weather. The boy was sullen and perhaps somewhat embarrassed. The social worker in looking through the pile of clothing found a boy's coat that seemed entirely new with no sign of wear. Some well-to-do family had apparently put it aside and forgotten about it. "Son" said the social worker, "try this on". The boy put it on slowly and then began to touch it and look at it. "Why it's just like new", he exclaimed. Perhaps you can imagine what it must have meant for that boy to wear something new for the first time. He had known only the worn out clothes of other children and the outgrown garments of older boys. But this was a new coat.

It seems to me that something like this happens when a person "puts on the spirit of Christ" - the spirit of love, forgiveness, understanding. It means a new life, new hope, new confidence. You call yourself a Christian. Do you have on the garment of Christ? Perhaps you have. Perhaps you haven't. If you're not wearing the garment of Christ, let me invite you to put it on and wear it. You'll discover as so many others have discovered that it makes all the difference in the world!

LET US PRAY: Here in the quietness of this place on this first Sunday in Lent, Our Father, we would renew our pledge to thee. Once again we would offer unto thee, ourselves, our time and our talent. And we would put on the garment of faith trusting in Thee at all times and in all places. To thy keeping we commit ourselves. Do with us as Thou wilt. Amen