

## "STANDING FIRM IN FAITH"

### INTRODUCTION

The sermon this morning begins with this observation: the search for security is as old as the Book of Genesis, and as fresh as the headlines of today's newspaper. Air-fields dot the landscapes of many of the nations of the earth. Budgets of governments are burdened with heavy defense expenditures. Submarines patrol the shores of continents. And you and I sitting here quietly this morning in this place of worship are concerned about security against old age, illness and unemployment. The search for security is as old as the Book of Genesis and as fresh as today's newspaper.

When we turn to religion we find that there are some who will say that the chief motive which leads people to seek God is the desire for eternal security. The late Billy Sunday, the great evangelist, in his revival meetings, was often accustomed to refer to the ministers who were sitting on the platform with him as "The fire escapes". And though his remark was made in humor, it does reflect the feeling of many that the basic reason for religious interest is to escape some sort of future punishment.

However, religion, I feel, rises out of something more than fear. Henry Pitt Van Dusen of Union Seminary asserts that religious concern stems from two basic desires: (1) a desire for light on the meaning of life. (2) a desire for power for the mastery of life. Nevertheless, the longing for security is a very real element in religion. The Psalmist in the 46th psalm sings "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble" The New Testament contains glowing promises of deliverance from sin and death. A few moments ago we sang one of the best loved and judging from the way you sang it one of the most familiar hymns in our hymn book, "Rock of Ages, cleft for me. Let me hide myself in Thee".

But the question that often comes back in to my mind in connection with all of this, a question which I should like to consider with you this morning is this: when does security cease to be a stimulant and become a sedative. In other words, how much security would God have us feel? For a Biblical text, let me suggest to you this line taken from the 29th chapter of the Book of Proverbs, the 25th verse:

"The fear of man lays a snare, but he who trusts in the Lord is safe".....

What then is the safety which trust in the Lord gives to a person? My answer takes the form of three suggestions.

### IT HELPS TO KEEP OUR HEADS CLEAR

First of all, I would suggest that trust in the Lord gives the safety which comes from keeping our heads clear. When you and I confront danger, the first requisite is to keep control of ourselves. I read recently somewhere about a person living in California who carefully observed and recorded the reactions of a lemur whenever a dog came into the room. A lemur, as you know, is a small monkey like creature with a long tail. The first reaction of this little animal was one of such terrific fright that its long tail started wagging and quivering with the result that soon its entire little body was shaking. This little animal would then reach around and take hold of its long tail and would hold it until the first wave of terror passed over and its little body stopped quivering. All of you, I'm sure, can see

the point of this action even though we cannot exactly copy the example of this animal. So often when trouble comes, our tongues start wagging, our knees begin to shake, our minds become agitated and upset with the result that we use up that precious energy which could be used for clear thinking. You know as well as I do that a person who loses his head is in danger of losing his life. This is a truth which can be seen in the traffic of a crowded highway or in the daling of nation with nation.

Bringing the thought of God into a situation always helps us to keep from losing our heads. This is what the Psalmist was trying to tell us in the Psalm I read to you this morning: "The nations rage, the kingdoms totter....come behold the works of the Lord. Be still and know that I am God. I am exalted among the nations. I am exalted in the earth. You see when we still the noisy beatings of our own fears and take the time to bring God into our thoughts, we get the confidence which came to Whittier when he wrote:

"In the maddening maze of things,  
When tossed by storm and flood,  
To one fixed point my spirit clings,  
I know that God is good"

I don't know whether you've heard the story about the man who planned to sell frog legs. Anyway he was venturing forth into a new business proposition and he was sure he knew of a pond where he could find at least a hundred pairs of frog legs. He went ahead and drained the pond and instead of finding one hundred frogs, he found only four old bullfrogs. They had made enough noise for a hundred. It's often this way with the troubles and dangers that loom up in front of us. We tend to magnify them out of all proportion to their size. We lose our heads and lose control of ourselves.

Let me just bring this first section of the sermon together by reminding you that he who "trusts in the Lord" gets the safety which comes from clear-headedness. He sees the things that are "invisible and eternal". He gets hold of himself by getting hold of God!

#### IT HELPS TO KEEP OUR HEARTS COURAGEOUS

In the second place, I would suggest to you that trust in the Lord gives the safety which helps us to keep our hearts courageous. A certain amount of security, I think, is necessary. It's needed in order to give us proper courage. Let a person feel insecure, and he may display the daring of desperation, but this is something different from the stable and steady courage of those who trust in the Lord. One of our favorite television programs last season was "The Untouchables". In it we saw how hunted gangsters may have the reckless daring of desperadoes, but time and again we saw too how they lacked the steady courage of Eliot Ness and the other FBI officers who felt the backing of the law. And so you see the man who trusts in ways of the Lord is braver and more stable and steady in his courage because he knows the Kingdom of God is behind him.

This kind of courage which security gives can be seen in a child. For instance consider the little fellow who grows up in a broken home. He lacks the security of a stable family life. He may be timid, lacking in self-confidence, withdrawing from people, or, on the other hand, he may be too aggressive or over-assertive. The family

where the ties of love are firm is the trellis on which the tendrils of childhood grow up into sturdy characters. Our homes ought to be the place to which we return from the competitive world in order to restore our spirits and renew our courage.

Yet, our Lord would have us watch lest the protecting love of family and friends should prove softening. His own family more than once tried to call Jesus back from the risks and demands of his own public ministry. On one occasion, while he was speaking, word was brought to Jesus that his mother and brothers were outside waiting for him. They apparently had come to urge his return to the safety and security of the carpenter's shop in Nazareth. Remind his reply to the messenger who told him of his family's presence: "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" And stretching out his hand toward his disciples and those who stood around him he said "Here is my mother, here are my brothers. For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother." Those puzzling words did not imply any lack of love on the part of Jesus for his own family. They were his way of saying that the protecting love of home must not be allowed to keep him from his service to God.

Family love, on the one hand, can be weakening, or on the other hand, it can be fortifying. A modern novelist has pictured a wife who thought her husband was being imposed upon by others in his office. And every morning, as regularly as she dropped the sugar into his coffee, she would say, "Now dear....don't let them impose upon you. Don't let them push you around". The result was that her husband soon began to develop a martyr complex. Contrast this woman's attitude with that of Wendell Phillips' wife. Every evening as the courageous old reformer went out to speak in his anti-slavery meetings, he would stop beside the bed of his invalid wife. She would lay her frail hand in his and say, "Now don't shilly-shally Wendell." Such a wife gives the kind of security which sustains courage.

A little girl visiting her grandmother was put to bed in the dark. A few moments later some sobs were heard coming from the little girl's room. The grandmother went in to see what the trouble was. The little girl said, "I'm afraid in the dark". The grandmother replied, "Why your mother puts you to bed in the dark at home and you're not afraid" "Yes" answered the little girl, "But that's my dark". I'm sure you see the point. The little girl had come to feel at home in her dark. The familiar things were there. So he who "trusts" in the Lord comes to feel unafraid in the dark because he is familiar with the trustworthy things that are around him. He can say with the Psalmist "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil for Thou art with me. Thy rod and thy staff they comfort me".

Trust in the Lord not only helps to keep our heads clear in moments of stress and strain, but it also helps to keep our hearts courageous. It gives the fortitude which keeps us steady when the bottom seems to be dropping out of everything. And we discover "That underneath are the everlasting arms"

IT HELPS TO MAKE US MORE CREATIVE

In the third place, we would do well to remember that he who "trusts in the Lord" gets the type of security which serves to make him more creative. Our creative powers do not always find fulfillment in an atmosphere of fear and insecurity.

I know of a little boy who is somewhat shy in front of strangers with the result that he hardly says a word. But this same little boy, who perhaps will hide behind his mother's skirt when visitors come, blossoms out in the family circle and becomes as talkative at the dinner table as his father is in the pulpit on a Sunday morning. It takes a secure sense of at homeness to release his powers of conversation and communication. Or consider the woman who is now approaching the age of retirement. If all that she can look forward to is an uncertain, insecure and poverty-stricken old age, her powers begin to shrink. I think there is a very creative value in old age security programs when properly administered. They help to keep the productive powers of people alert and continuing. A sense of security helps to release our creative powers.

Just after World War II one of our leading chemists was sent to Germany to see what advances the German scientists had made in the field of chemistry. We heard reports of the great things German scientists had accomplished during the war. Our representative discovered that under the Nazi whip German science had not been as creative as we had been led to think. The scientists there were so fearful and so concerned for the welfare of their families that they could not release their full powers in their work. There is some truth in the statement that "necessity is the mother of invention". But then too I think there is a point where fear and poverty and uncertainty tend to stifle the inventive and creative powers of people. A sense of security helps to release creative powers.

But on the other hand, we know that too much security can prove to be a sedative. It can stifle effort. I think that parents do a disservice to their children when they try to make them so financially secure that they will not need to exert themselves. I know of a young lady who is married and who was left quite a bit of money by her father when he passed away. She's one of the unhappiest young ladies I know. Because of all of her money, she doesn't have to work. I can't help but feel she has too much time on her hands to sit around and think about herself. Wise and godly parents do desire to give their children homes and schooling adequate to provide a foundation for their future. And how grateful we are to our parents who said something like this: "We can't leave you much money, but we will give you something nobody can take away from you - an education and a faith by which to live". Two things for which we are thankful.

Let me bring everything together then by saying this to you. The future, I think, cannot always be fulfilled by playing safe. Worthwhile living involves some risk - there are risks in marriage, risks in bringing a child into the world, risks as one goes into a new job. He who plays safe will never accomplish great things in life. He may never have real faith, and hope and experience real love. But he who trusts in the Lord will have the safety which comes from a clear head, a courageous heart and a creative spirit. And it is my hope that as we venture forth into the work of another

church year together, that as part of the ministry of this church, we shall provide you with a faith that will enable you to stand firm in all of your comings and goings in life.

LET US BOW OUR HEADS AND TOGETHER ASK GOD FOR THIS....

Help us, Our Father, as we move forth  
into the weeks ahead to fix our eyes  
on the footsteps of thy son that we  
may not be afraid of anyone or anything.

Give to us a faith that will enable us  
to stand firm

with clear thoughts....  
courageous hearts.....  
creative spirits.....

We ask this in the name of Jesus, Our  
Lord and our Master. Amen