

"TAKING THE HIGH ROAD"

INTRODUCTION

The sermon today begins with a story about a young couple who are facing a rather serious problem.

None of you know the young couple that's involved so I feel free to share their problem with you. They're very much in love with each other. They have two small children, and they love them very much. They have a fine home, and they have many fine friends. Up to this point, there has hardly been a ripple on the surface of their married life. But now as things have developed, the wife's mother is no longer able to take care of herself or provide for herself. And in this case she happens to be a rather difficult person to get along with. Temperamentally she is not congenial to either the wife or the husband. And so their problem is this: what to do about her. Should they open the doors of their home running the possible risk of having her disturb their happiness, of unsettling the peace and the contentment which now prevails in the home, or should they make other arrangements, and if so, what should they do?

I think that sooner or later most people have serious problems to handle, and this one I think is typical enough of some of the problems that we encounter in life to be used as a starting point for this sermon. But before we go any further in working out a solution to this problem let me just say two things.

MORE NORMAL TO HAVE PROBLEMS THAN IT IS NOT TO HAVE THEM.

In the first place, I think it's more normal for human beings to have problems than it is for them not to have them. We're all familiar with the old saying that the course of true love is never smooth, and so it is with life. The course of life is never completely smooth. There are rough spots along the way. There are situations and problems that are difficult and unpleasant for us to handle. And as we grow into maturity, I think we come to realize more and more than problems are part of the pattern of life. And so first of all we need to adjust our minds to this thought that problems are a normal and natural part of our human condition. We do not have them all the time, and for this we need to be thankful, but there are times when we have some very serious problems facing us.

EVERY PROBLEM HAS A SOLUTION

And then in the second place, I would simply say this that every problem has a solution. Now I realize that that's a large statement, and that perhaps you won't agree with me. But to my way of thinking, there is no problem that is insoluble. Every problem has a solution. To be sure, you and I may not see the solution. There may be blindnesses or dead spots in our lives that are preventing us from discerning the solution, but nevertheless the solution is there waiting to be discovered. And this too, perhaps the solution that we want is not the solution that we're going to get. The solution may be staring us in the face, and yet we do not see it because it's not the solution that we want, and we disregard it entirely as being a solution.

And so just remember these two things as we move into the main area of our thought: that it's normal for human beings to have problems, and that every problem has a solution. Once we get these two thoughts entrenched in our minds, then we're in a position to move forward.

TWO SOLUTIONS: A LOW GRADE SOLUTION AND A HIGH GRADE SOLUTION

Every problem has a solution. In fact, our experience tells us that every problem has two

solutions: a good one and a poor one. A high grade solution and a low grade solution. Let's look at some examples of both beginning with the case of the young couple that I referred to a few minutes ago.

I suppose that in this particular case the low grade solution would be to apply for an old age pension, and to look for a room in a rooming house for the mother so that she might live out the days of her years by herself. But on the other hand, I suppose that the high grade solution would be something like this. Take her into the family circle, run the risk of her disturbing the family happiness, but to try to make her last years happy years by including her within the family circle.

I think every problem can be analyzed in this fashion. Let's look at some other examples. Let's consider the case of the middle aged woman who has plenty to live on, but very little to life for. She's a widow. Her husband has passed away, and her children have grown up and are independent of her. Life has little meaning for her, and she lives a rather useless, listless existence. That's her problem. I suppose a low grade solution would be something like this. Let her crawl into a little shell, taking care of her own needs and necessities, and let her cut herself off from the main stream of life. But then I think that the high grade solution would be something like this. Admitting in her own mind the emptiness of her present life, then let her strike out for a new life. Let her replace some of her old interests with newer interests. Let her find a place of usefulness in society in order to fill up the emptiness of her life. It's hard to do, but in the long run it will bring her greater happiness.

Or if you will, take another example. Consider, if you will, the person who is on the verge of being an alcoholic. He's not an alcoholic yet, but his tendencies are moving him in that direction. His drinking is destroying the effectiveness of his work, it's interfering with his family happiness, and it's destroying friendship for him. What should he do. I suppose the low grade solution would be for him to fight a war of containment, that is to try to keep it within bounds, to do his best in keeping it from interfering with his job and his home life. But on the other hand, I think that the high grade solution would be to fight a war of unconditional surrender that is to get rid of it altogether, to cut it out, to make a clean start. It may sound drastic and impractical, but certainly no more drastic or impractical than the advice of Jesus who said: "If thy hand offend thee, but it off"

Or take the case of the man who has been in a position of responsibility for a long time with the result that he's grown stale, cautious and conservative. His enthusiasm has gone. His interest is flagging, and he simply is not doing the job. What do you do? The low grade solution would be simply to get rid of him to remove him from the position or replace him. No need to keep someone on who is simply not doing the job. The high grade solution would be to sit down with the man and to point out to him what's happening. It would be the job of his employer to encourage him to dig in, to find new

depths in the job, and to encourage the man to put all of himself into the job and not simply half of himself.

This same principle carries over into the realm of our national affairs. One of the great problems facing America today is this: what can America do and what should America do so as to contribute most to the welfare and peace of the world. The low grade solution is this: keep America happy. Keep up the level of prosperity at home, and not worry too much about the needs of other peoples. Aim at the level of the average person's stomach. But then on the other hand, the high grade solution would be this: Forget America as an end in itself. Do all that we can spiritually and physically to care for the undernourished peoples and the undeveloped lands of the earth. Take risks in the interest of all peoples.

And so perhaps in all of this you're beginning to see that running through every problem is a high road and a low road. In most cases, we can tell one from the other. The high roads changes to be sure with the changing circumstances, but nevertheless it is always clearly distinguishable from the low road which passes through the swampy regions of self interest and self indulgence.

THE VOICES AROUND URGE US
TO TAKE THE LOW ROAD.....

Now I don't know what your experiences tell you, but mine tell me this that the voices around us are constantly urging us to take the low road. Not in so many words, but in suggestion and implication. For instance, take the case of the young couple. I'd venture to say that most of us would have advised the couple in this fashion, "Well....your mother has lived her life. I think you're justified in putting her into a rooming house or a nursing home. You have your lives to live. Why burden yourself with a personality that's not congenial." Of course, each case is different, but for the most part, we'd most likely encourage the couple to take the low road.

Or consider the man on the verge of becoming an alcoholic. Once again most of the well meaning voices offering advice would suggest the war of containment in preference to the war of unconditional surrender. We'd probably say something like this "Well....it's not good, but try to keep it down. Keep it within bounds. You can still do it without losing your job, or letting it interfere with your home life. Just keep it down. It's easier, safer, and will take less out of you"

And what of the man who has gone stale in his job. We'd have little patience, I'm sure with the person who is not producing. We'd simply get rid of him, no ifs, ands, or buts about it.

Isn't it true too, that the voice of popular psychiatry, that is psychiatry, as it's popularly understood, and not as it's practiced by the great doctors of the profession, but as it's understood and comprehended by the rank and file of people is usually saying something like this: "Take the easy way. Be comfortable. Be happy. After all you have certain instincts and impulses which shouldn't be denied, and you can't deny them, so go ahead and enjoy them. If this marriage doesn't work perhaps the next one will." And this too, and you know this as well as I do, that our kind hearted and well meaning friends are usually giving us advice which doesn't take us up to the high levels of life, but usually tends to lead us downward. And then on top of this, our own easy going selves usually tell us to take the low road, the easy way, the way which offers the least resistance.

These voices mean well, and perhaps contain a great deal of common sense. But there are times when all of us want to hear and need to hear someone say to us something like this, "Don't be afraid to take high road. It's not easy. It's not going to be pleasant. It's not always rewarding. But take it. It's right and it's good. You can take it. You're capable of taking it. You were made not to adjust to circumstances, but to rise above them, to handle them, to master them. Take the high road. You may not be able to take it all the way, but at least give it a real try"

THREE THINGS TO DO IF YOU DECIDE TO TAKE IT Now if you decide to take this high road, then there are three things you're going to have to do. I'll simply mention them in passing.

FIRST: If you take the high road, you're going to have to do it gladly. That is you'll have to approach it with a spirit like this: "I'm going to seize this thing and see what I can make out of it. It's a challenge to me. It's a threat to my manhood and my womanhood. I'm going to do it, and I'm going to do it gladly. It's the right things to do."

SECOND: If you're going to take the high road, you'll have to take it with someone else. You can't do it entirely alone. If you're married, then your wife or your husband will have to go along gladly with you. If the problem includes both of you, both of you will have to be willing to take the high road together. If you're not married, or if your problem is such that you cannot share it with your wife or husband, then you'll have to find a friend or an advisor with whom you can talk freely. You'll need someone with whom you can discuss your problems openly, someone to whom you can reveal your weakness and your shortcomings. You can't do it alone. You may need the fellowship of faithful people who follow Christ, who may not know in detail what you're going through, but who nevertheless instinctively are supporting you with interest, prayer and loyalty.

THIRD: If you're planning to take the high road, then you will have to aim at something very high. If you're aiming at simply your own personal welfare, you may never make it because the incentive will not be enough to carry you to the top. Aim at something very good, something so high that you'll be willing to make some sacrifices in order to get there.

CONCLUSION And so we come to the end of the sermon. It's not like some of the sermons that we're preaching during Lent. Nothing has been said about God, Jesus, or even salvation. I seldom attempt to give advice in sermons, but on occasion I suppose it doesn't hurt. I know that some of you have come here looking for encouragement, for additional strength for the problems you may be carrying around inside you. I hope some thing has been said that will be helpful. And so the conclusion is very simple. Will you now, in the quietness of this place, and at the end of this service, ask yourself what your problem is. If you have none, then be thankful. But if you have, remember this, both now and later on as you think of your problem, that there are two solutions to a problem, two ways through it. What I would say to you is simply this: Take the high road. For in the long run, you'll discover as so many other have discovered, it will make all the difference.

LET US PRAY: Help us, O God, in the midst of our perplexities, to find the solution that is high and good, and give us the will and the power to pursue that solution to its end. Amen