

"THE BOLDNESS OF PETER AND JOHN"

A Sermon By

Rev. Philip A. C. Clarke

Park Avenue United Methodist Church
106 East 86th Street
New York, New York 10028
February 2, 1986

"THE BOLDNESS OF PETER AND JOHN"

TEXT: "Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John...they wondered. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus".

(Acts 4: 13)

INTRODUCTION

That's a beautiful line...a powerful text for a sermon. I've been carrying it around with me now for several months since bumping into it last Fall in a Bible study group. The "boldness of Peter and John". Let's think about it together for a few moments this morning and see if there's a message in it for us.

As I read this fourth chapter of the Book of Acts, I'm aware that Peter and John had done a good deed. They had helped to heal a crippled man and now they were having to explain what had taken place to the authorities. (Acts 4, verses 5 - 12). They were quite open in offering an explanation and saying this was done in the name of Jesus.

There were two things that the authorities could not get away from as they confronted the boldness of these two men.

INFLUENCE OF CHRIST IN THEIR LIVES

First, there was the undeniable influence of Jesus Christ at work in their lives. They were men of no extraordinary power and had little in the way of education and prestige going for them. Yet, they were bold to speak and as they spoke it became clear that their power came from Jesus. Yes, they had been with Him and had caught something of His own faith. They shared in His courage and through them His love and power was now spreading into the circles of wretched humanity.

The authorities and the observers that day could not get away from the fact that those men were carrying on the work of Him who they thought was dead and buried.

PLUS THE UNDENIABLE EVIDENCE

And second, neither could they get away from the undeniable evidence. There was the lame man standing in front of them...now healed. His life had been changed. They were not dealing with a theory which could be abstractly denied, nor with a proposition or claim that could be conquered by a battle of wits or verbal exchange.

They were dealing with a deed, with something that had been done! They could not get around it. They could not even suggest that it was bad. The undeniable evidence of religion is always like that. It is a life that has been changed, a fearful person who has been given confidence, a lost soul that has been found...rescued from destruction. It is something done in the community, a school built, a hospital endowed, a home for children established, a refugee family helped to new life.

Those are the things that no one can deny. As they say, "they're the proof of the pudding". Undeniable evidence. There it was in front of them.

Now it's interesting to note that in the face of such facts that the

authorities were driven to a last resort.

A LAST RESORT When they recognized that "they had been with Jesus", they then forbade the men to talk about Jesus. They forbade the men to even mention His name. Verse 18 of the Fourth Chapter puts it this way,

"So they called them and charged them not to speak or to teach in the name of Jesus."

They might as well have commanded the tides of the sea to stand still. They refused to not speak for in verse twenty we read,

"For we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard."

The compulsion to preach is the first prerequisite of good preaching. A man talks about the weather because he has nothing else to talk about. He talks about Jesus because nothing else is worth talking about. And that kind of compulsion comes only to those who have felt the power of Christ at first hand. Like men released from prison after all hope had disappeared, they cannot refrain from telling others about it...especially others who themselves are imprisoned by life's experiences.

Follow it along another step or two. When the men went back to their friends they burst out in a hymn of praise and thanksgiving, ending with the petition that they be given the power, not to keep still, but rather to speak out with even greater boldness than before. And their prayers were answered. The whole building seemed to shake, as if a power too great to be contained had been unleashed...and was shaking itself loose. And the men went out and spoke the word of God with boldness.

In verse 29 and again in verse 31 we find the word "boldness". A powerful word...a word that carries with it the suggestion of fearlessness and daring. And something that we need to have more of in our time and in our lives.

BRINGING IT HOME All right then...in taking this word out of the First Century and bringing it down to the 20th century, to our time and our lives, let me quickly touch on several areas where we need to "dare to be bold".

Remembering that the boldness of Peter and John was due to "having been with Jesus", and they were filled up with the Holy Spirit, we need to get over some of our timidity when it comes to letting others know how we feel about our faith in Christ to accomplish things. You know how it is apt to be. We tend to feel uncomfortable when it comes to talking about Jesus to others, letting them know what His word and way really means to us. We're doing better in telling each other how we feel, but how are we away from the Church..."on the road" so to speak, when we play an "away game". That's always tougher. In Christianity these days, you've got to be able to win both at home and away... just as in sports. If you can't do both, you're in trouble.

Six weeks from today we'll be celebrating another of our "Each One Bring One" Sundays. This, I feel, is a step in the right direction...a simple exercise when we ask you to "dare to be bold"...to speak the Word to a friend...the Word

about Christ and His Church...to invite them to come along with you. It's an opportunity to go "one on one" with a friend. Have some fun with it and see how you do. Choose one person (or more) in the next six weeks...concentrate on them...talk to them...invite them to come along with you. Think about some one in your circle of friends. That's the first step. Remember the boldness of Peter and John in speaking out. They did it. Why can't we?

I have the feeling that if each of us were to respond with eagerness, with faith, with enthusiasm to this simple spiritual exercise or challenge, that this building might seem to shake, "as if a power too great to be contained was shaking itself loose".

It's been said by someone that you "can't steer a parked car". And that "even God can't steer a parked Christian". Some of us have been parked too long. Time's running out. The meter has been showing red for some time. I'd like to encourage you to move out on your best hunch. Dare to be bold. Once a person is in motion God has something to work on. There's no point to sitting in front of the wheel, keys in hand, debating the course of the journey. Yes, even God can't steer a parked Christian. Remember that line in Luke's Gospel, chapter 17, regarding the lepers. It says that "as they went they were healed".

BOLDNESS IS INDIVIDUAL

The last thought I share with you is this: through our boldness we really can help each other. Boldness is individual. Peter and John through their boldness helped to enlarge the sense of the possible for others. So often we feel the limits of the possible and then someone speaks with boldness - the lifting and helping word and we believe it can be done. We move out in faith and it is done. Boldness enlarges the sense of the possible. It helps us to move out and tackle the impossible.

Representative Jack Kemp recently sent President Reagan a memo noting the following. Before General Douglas MacArthur's masterstroke, the landing at Inchon, Mac Arthur's advisers and emissaries sent from Washington, said it could not be done. The harbor, the weather, the ships, the tides - everything was wrong. Recalling Mac Arthur's peroration that carried the crucial meeting, a witness said:

"If Mac Arthur had gone on the stage, you would never have heard of John Barrymore."

After all the skeptics spoke saying why it could not be done, Mac Arthur rose. In his memoirs he wrote,

"I could almost hear my father's voice telling me as he had so many years before, 'Doug, councils of war breed timidity and defeatism.'"

All councils do. There never was a bold committee. Boldness is individual.

And for us it comes from our "being with Jesus"...from our relationship with Him, one that is undergirded by prayer and Bible Study, and yes from the "taking of the cup and the breaking of the bread". "Dare to be bold". This week try enlarging the sense of the possible for some one else by being bold enough to speak His Word of life and love, so that others may be lifted, helped and healed.

PRAYER Lord, we believe. Help thou our unbelief. Thou hast made us
 for thyself and our hearts are restless until they find their
rest in Thee. Empower us with Your Spirit, O God, that we may be empowered
to speak your lifting Word to others with greater boldness.

Like Peter and John, help us to heal and help others in our daily rounds.
Strengthen us. Steady us. Sustain us. Support us. And as we grow in our
faith and trust in Him in whom we see life's highest hope and deepest
meaning, may we feel not only this room shaking, but the world which is our
home.

In the spirit of Christ, who came to shake up our world and to
shake us up, we pray.

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INTRODUCTION

To me, that's a beautiful line...a powerful text for a sermon. I've been carrying that one around with me for some time ever since bumping into it while looking for another Biblical word. The "boldness of Peter and John". Let's think about it here this morning for a little while and see if there's a message in it for us.

In looking over this fourth chapter in the Book of Acts, I'm aware, first of all, that Peter and John had done a good deed. They had helped to heal a crippled man and now had to explain to the authorities what had taken place. They were quite open in offering an explanation and saying that this had been done "in the name of Jesus".

DEVELOPMENT

Peter and John were bold, when it was dangerous for them to be bold. They were not educated men. They had been disciples of Jesus. The healed man stood there before them. The people and the court knew the cure was genuine, but the influence of the Sanhedrin...the authorities...itself was in danger if this movement went on. The question coming before them was, what is the best policy?

There were two things that the authorities could not get away from as they confronted the boldness of these two men.

First, there was the undeniable influence of Jesus Christ at work in their lives. They were men of extraordinary power and had little in the way of education and prestige going for them. Yet, they were bold to speak and as they spoke it became clear that their power came from God through Jesus. Yes, they had been with Him and had caught something of His very own faith. They shared in His courage and through them His love and power was spreading into the circles of wretched humanity.

The authorities that day could not get away from the fact that those two men - Peter and John - were carrying on the work of Him who they thought was dead and buried. That's the first thing.

And second, they could neither get away from the undeniable evidence. There was the lame man standing in front of them....now healed. His life had been changed. They were not dealing with a theory which could be denied, nor with a proposition or a claim that could be conquered by a battle of wits and some verbal exchange.

They were dealing with a deed...with something that had been done. They could not get around it. They could not suggest that it was bad. The undeniable evidence of religion is always like that. It is a life that has been changed, a fearful person who has been given fresh hope, a lost soul that has been found...rescued from destruction. Those are the things that no one can deny!

You know how it is apt to be...not only with friends, but even within our own families. What about the children entrusted to our care. We're less than bold when it comes to "lifting up" the name of Jesus to our own family members. And all we need to do is to lose out with one generation and it's pretty much over and we'll have some church buildings to close down and lock up.

We're doing better in telling each other how we feel, here within the cozy confines of the sanctuary...but let me ask you this: how do we do when we're out there....away from home, "on the road"....when we play the "away game". That's always tougher. In Christianity these days, you've got to be able to win both at home and away from home and if you can't do both, you're in trouble.

From time to time, we have an "each one, bring one" Sunday or emphasis. It's an opportunity to go "one on one" with a friend. Be thinking about some person that might benefit from an invitation to come to church and learn more about Jesus. Remember the "boldness" of Peter and John in speaking out and letting others know to whom they belong. They did it. We've gotten away from that personal word of witness.

I've often had the feeling that if each of us were to respond with eagerness, with faith, with enthusiasm to this simple spiritual challenge, this this building might seem to shake, "As if a power too great to be contained was shaking itself loose".

Someone has offered this observation that "you can't steer a parked car", and that even God can't do much to steer a parked Christian. I know some who have been "parked" too long and time's running out. The meter has been showing red for some time. I'd like to encourage you to move out on your own best hunch. Put a bit of boldness in to what you do. Once a person is in motion, than God has something to work on. There's little point in sitting in front of the wheel, keys in hand, debating the course of the journey.

There's a line in Luke's Gospel, chapter 17, that comes to mind...regarding the lepers. It says that "As they 'went', they were healed!"

BOLDNESS IS AN INDIVIDUAL THING

Now there's one more thought to take away from this Biblical scene and that is this that through our boldness, we can help each other. Boldness is individual.

Peter and John through their boldness helped to enlarge the sense of the possible for others. So often we feel the limits of the possible and then someone speaks out with BOLDNESS and that lifting and helping word touches us and we feel "YES....YES...it is possible". We move out on the promises of faith and it gets done. Boldness has a way of enlarging the possible. It helps us to move out and helps us to tackle the impossible. Put a bit of boldness in what you do.

Some time back...about fifteen years ago...when Ronald Reagan was president, Jack Kemp sent him a memo noting the following. Before General MacArthur's masterstroke in the Korean War...the landing at Inchon, Mac Arthur's advisers and emissaries sent from Washington, said it could not be done. The harbor, the weather, the ships, the tides....everything was wrong. Recalling MacArthur's peroration that carried the crucial meeting, a witness said:

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Sustain us. Support us all the day long. And as we grow in our faith and our
trust in Him.....may we feel not only this room "shaking"....but the world which
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In the spirit of Christ, who came to "shake up" our world and to "shake
us up", too...at times, we now pray. Amen.

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As they say, "they're the proof of the pudding". Undeniable evidence. There it was...there he was standing in front of them. And it's interesting to note that in the face of the "facts" and the evidence that the authorities, the Sanhedrin, were driven to a last resort.

THE LAST RESORT

When they recognized that "they had been with Jesus", they then forbade the men to talk about Jesus. They forbade the two apostles to speak openly "in the name of Jesus". And the stubbornness of the facts proved even less than the determination of the two men. Their words spoken to the court were scripturally sound:

"A man must obey God first of all! We shall witness to those things which we know from our experience." This, in effect, is what they said....

And what thousands have said since that day. They might as well have commanded the tides of the sea to stand still. They refused to not speak for in verse twenty, we read:

"For we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard."
(Acts 4: 20)

The "compulsion" to preach is the first prerequisite of good preaching. A man talks about the weather because he has nothing else to talk about. He talks about Jesus because nothing else is worth talking about. And that kind of compulsion comes only to those who have felt the power of Christ - first hand! Like the man or the woman released from prison after all hope has disappeared, they cannot refrain from telling others about it...especially when those "others" are themselves imprisoned by life's rough experiences.

And follow this along another step or two. When the men went back to their friends, they burst out in a hymn of praise and thanksgiving...ending with the petition that they be given the power...not to keep still...but rather to speak out with even greater boldness than before. And their prayers were answered. The whole building just seemed to "shake", as if a power too great to be contained had been unleashed...and was shaking itself loose. And the men went out and spoke "the word of God" with boldness.

If you take out the Bible and turn to page 950...to Acts, chapter four, verses 29 and 31, you will find the word "boldness" creeping back into the account. It is a powerful word....a word that carries with it the suggestion of fearlessness and daring, a word that we need to have more of in our lives and in our time.

BRINGING IT HOME

All right then...in taking this word out of the First Century...lifting it out of the Book of Acts and setting it down in the 20th century....letting it spill over into our time and lives, let me quickly touch on several areas where we need to "dare to be bold".

Remembering that the "boldness" of Peter and John was due to "having been with Jesus", and they were filled with the Holy Spirit, we need to get over some of our timidity when it comes to letting others know how we feel about our faith "in Christ" to accomplish things.

You know how it is apt to be...not only with friends, but even within our own families. What about the children entrusted to our care. We're less than bold when it comes to "lifting up" the name of Jesus to our own family members. And all we need to do is to lose out with one generation and it's pretty much over and we'll have some church buildings to close down and lock up.

We're doing better in telling each other how we feel, here within the cozy confines of the sanctuary...but let me ask you this: how do we do when we're out there....away from home, "on the road"....when we play the "away game". That's always tougher. In Christianity these days, you've got to be able to win both at home and away from home and if you can't do both, you're in trouble.

From time to time, we have an "each one, bring one" Sunday or emphasis. It's an opportunity to go "one on one" with a friend. Be thinking about some person that might benefit from an invitation to come to church and learn more about Jesus. Remember the "boldness" of Peter and John in speaking out and letting others know to whom they belong. They did it. We've gotten away from that personal word of witness.

I've often had the feeling that if each of us were to respond with eagerness, with faith, with enthusiasm to this simple spiritual challenge, this this building might seem to shake, "As if a power too great to be contained was shaking itself loose".

Someone has offered this observation that "you can't steer a parked car", and that even God can't do much to steer a parked Christian. I know some who have been "parked" too long and time's running out. The meter has been showing red for some time. I'd like to encourage you to move out on your own best hunch. Put a bit of boldness in to what you do. Once a person is in motion, than God has something to work on. There's little point in sitting in front of the wheel, keys in hand, debating the course of the journey.

There's a line in Luke's Gospel, chapter 17, that comes to mind...regarding the lepers. It says that "As they 'went', they were healed!"

BOLDNESS IS AN INDIVIDUAL THING

Now there's one more thought to take away from this Biblical scene and that is this that through our boldness, we can help each other. Boldness is individual.

Peter and John through their boldness helped to enlarge the sense of the possible for others. So often we feel the limits of the possible and then someone speaks out with BOLDNESS and that lifting and helping word touches us and we feel "YES....YES...it is possible". We move out on the promises of faith and it gets done. Boldness has a way of enlarging the possible. It helps us to move out and helps us to tackle the impossible. Put a bit of boldness in what you do.

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"LIVING ON BORROWED FAITH"

TEXT: "And there were also with Him other little ships"
(Mark 4: 36)

INTRODUCTION

By the fourth of July, the boating season is in full swing in the New York area. In our rivers, bays and sounds, and on the waters of the nearby ocean, motors are droning their power and the freshly laundered sails are blowing in the wind. Oh...to be "out there", cooler, I'm sure.

Water is prominent in the Bible. Much, indeed, would be lost were the Scriptures to be "dehydrated". Hallowed memories cluster around the Dead Sea, the Red Sea, the Jordan River and the Brook Kedron, and - lest we forget it - the Sea of Galilee, only seven miles by thirteen...and yet so important in the ministry of Jesus.

DEVELOPMENT

What an unforgettable event it must have been for all concerned that day when Jesus stilled the waters of the Sea of Galilee. Remember the scene...the account? Throughout the day, Jesus had taught the people at water's edge, using a boat for a pulpit. As evening neared, He was exhausted. The disciples proceeded to dismiss the eager, but demanding crowd and set sail across the sea, the lake...to give their Master a rest, a breather. And soon He was asleep on a pillow toward the stern.

But Jesus did not sleep for long. Soon He was roused from His slumber by the anxious disciples, frightened by high winds and some choppy waves. They shook Him and shouted, "Carest Thou not that we perish?" A foolish question...really... to put to Him of all people. Jesus responded in a way described by Mark with restraint and majesty:

"He arose and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, 'Peace. Be still.' And the wind ceased and there was a great calm."

THOSE WITH HIM BENEFITED

And then this line...almost as an "aside", we are told that "there were with Him also other little ships".

Let's reflect on this well-known incident on the Sea of Galilee for a few moments this morning from the point of view of those other "little ships". As soon as the ship that Jesus was in made for the opposite shore, some of the crowd jumped into their own boats to follow. Perhaps they were curious, or perhaps they craved adventure, perhaps they wanted to hear more. Anyway, the same storm that buffeted the ship that Jesus was in also buffeted the ships in which they traveled. Chances are they were frightened by the storm, but there was no Christ on board to quiet their hearts.

These other little ships were also the beneficiaries of the faith that resided in that one flagship. When the waters calmed, they calmed for all. When the winds quieted, they quieted for all. These "other little ships" made it to the opposite side on some one else's faith. Granted...the faith of the disciples was not great faith. It was not strong enough to allow Him to sleep, but it was confident enough to rouse Him. They believed that Jesus could do something about this storm.

TYPICAL OF LIFE

"And there were with Him also other little ships". Now there's something about this scene that suggests to me something that's typical of life. Let me put it this way: a few believe and many are the beneficiaries of that believing, of that faith. It works in this way in the sciences and the arts. Edison believed and all we do is snap a button to turn on a light. Louis Pasteur believed and subsequent generations drink safe milk. Emerson summed it up well for us when he wrote:

"We are multiplied by our proxies. How easily we adopt their labors. Every ship that comes to America got its chart from Columbus. Every novel is a debtor to Homer. Every carpenter who saves us with a foreplane borrows the genius of a forgotten inventor. Life is girt all around with a zodiac of sciences, the contributions of men who have given to add their point of light to the sky".

This holds true for the entire field of public service. A few have faith or vision or dedication or determination and the lives of many are lifted. I am continually impressed by the fact that in our society virtually every human need is attempting to be met by someone. Whatever the need might be, the chances are that here in our city there is already some board, some agency, some institution set up to meet that need.

For example, I remember once reading that out on Staten Island there's an organization called CLUB 52, the purpose of which is to see that veterans' hospitals are visited, not just on Memorial Day or on July 4th, but 52 weeks of the year. There are people who take hospital patients to a Sunday Chapel service. There are groups that read to the blind. There are institutions that help to retrain people whose skills have been rendered obsolete by our mechanized society. A few have the vision. A few feel the need, but the lives of many are blessed because those "few" have cared and have helped to light the path for others. I'm sure you can add to my little list.

RELIGIOUS REALM

But this borrowing from others is most visible of all in the realm of religious faith. Only God knows how many within walking distance of this Church are living today on the faith of a mother and / or father. Only God knows how many are members of this or any other congregation are leaning heavily on the robust faith of a few. It has been said of faith,

"That the first generation believes, the second generation believes in believing, and the third generation does not believe at all...."

How did we come to such a situation? I think that part of our problem stems from the fact that most of us inherited the faith we have. Back in the forties, a group of young English doctors reported that they had discovered a young girl who could repeat anything she was told...no matter what the language - French, German and yes...even Welsh. Long rambling sentences would be spoken in her presence and she would repeat them back "letter perfect!" This phenomenon dumb-founded the medical scientists. The doctors involved chose to call this strange affliction "echo-lalia"...the habit of repeating parrot-fashion all that is spoken in one's presence. My point is that perhaps we're suffering from a form of advanced "echo-lalia" in the church today. Think of it this way.

We say the words. We sing the hymns. We push through the creeds. We listen to the sermons. But precious are the individuals for whom the living God is real...a real and vibrant presence in the heart.

Often our connection with Christ is not live and direct. We touch Him indirectly by way of some secondary contact...through a group, an organization, a board, an action, a person. In other words, we go on from year to year and from decade to decade once removed from the power that would make our own faith come alive, real and exciting. Only a few see. Only a few feel. Only a few believe.

IS THERE ANYTHING WRONG WITH THIS

You may wonder...if there anything wrong with this? After all, all the ships on the Sea of Galilee made it over to the other side. Those with faith "on board" and those without faith "on board"...all made it, and some might suggest that no person believes by himself or herself. True. I think it was Martin Buber who once put it this way:

"If someone would sing and cannot lift up his voice, and another comes and begins to sing, then the first is enabled to join in song. This is the secret of union."

But the point I raise with you and the concern I would lift up is this: how durable and lasting any part of the Christian enterprise can be when those who believe and act become too few for the many who do not. One can easily project a point where the account will be marked "over-drawn". In other words, there is a limit to the load that the few can carry "on behalf" of the many. A form of spiritual "battle fatigue" can set in. Burn out can occur. Through how many generations, one may ask with Renan, the French scholar of the 19th century, can we continue to live "on the perfume of an empty vase"?

SECOND HAND FAITH

Second hand faith tends to be full and arduous. Have you ever noticed that there seem to be two kinds of people in the church: the "nuclear" people who make things happen...good things, and the "peripheral" folks who hang around the edges offering delayed reactions to what others do. The folk who enjoy their faith and radiate its vitality are the "nuclear" people whose contact with God is direct, fresh, primary. The joy of the Christian life comes not with being carried, but in helping to carry others.

From time to time we need to ask ourselves: are we living on borrowed faith? Is ours a second-hand faith? Or, do we have a faith of our own.

There's a baseball story that Ernest Campbell, former minister of the Riverside Church, has shared with us in one of his books. He tells us that as a boy, he grew up in that area of the city where Riverside Church now stands. As a growing boy, he use to go out and play baseball on a sloping hill between the Church and the Hudson River. One day he met a boy from Wisconsin who had come to the city for the summer weeks while his mother took graduate courses at nearby Teachers' College. This kid from Wisconsin was sporting a new baseball glove and stood there watchin the other boys play. They reached out to him and included him in their game and in the days that followed Ernest Campbell and the boy became good friends because of their bonding interest in baseball. The year was 1941. Said this out of town boy to Campbell,

"This Joe DiMaggio who plays centerfield for the Yankees really must be something." "He sure is", replied Campbell.

"Joe's quite a player"...."He's really something!" "You talk as if you know him". "Yes" said Campbell,

"I do....I know Joe....he's from San Francisco. Father runs a restaurant out there....he has a brother, Vince, who plays for the Pirates and a brother, Dom, who plays for the Red Sox and Joe's hitting .341 and has 18 homers and 51 RBI's...and he's already hit in 36 straight games...."

"Gosh", said the out-of-town boy, his eyes just widening..."wouldn't it be something if I could go home and tell my friends there...here, shake the hand that shook the hand of the 'Mighty Joe DiMaggio'....but I don't know how to get to Yankee Stadium". Well, young Ernst Campbell replied that it wasn't that easy, but that if the other boy got some tickets, he'd be happy to take him up to Yankee Stadium. And so the day finally came and the boys set out to 161st Street and River Avenue in the Bronx, and they got there early, the way good fans in this city always do!

As this boy from Wisconsin looked down on the field, he spotted NUMBER FIVE. Joe DiMaggio, the Yankee Clipper. He was standing with his back to the seats. The boy was beside himself. The conversation that followed went like this.

"There he is. Take me down. Introduce me to him."
Campbell replied, "Well....this really isn't the best time to do it. You you, this is the big leagues and Joe has to take his warm-up cuts at the plate....." And he hesitated. The other boy said, "Come on...let's go down...if he knows you, it will be OK...you do know him, don't you?" And Campbell replied, "Sure...yes, sure I know him. He's from San Francisco. His father runs a restaurant. His brothers are big leaguers....Vince with the Pirates. Dom with the Red Sox. Joe is hitting .356 and has 22 homers and 61 runs batted in.....yes - sure I KNOW HIM!"

And before Campbell knew it, his friend from Wisconsin was pulling him down to the field to where Joe stood. He tells us that he remembers quite well how he felt as the color rose in his cheeks as he stopped dead in his tracks and said,

"I really don't know Joe DiMaggio...I only know about him!"

"Yes" said his friend from Wisconsin...."I thought so all along"...somewhat disgusted...which leads me to say this in closing out today's sermon.

CHRIST AND OURSELVES

The question I place on your heart today is this: how is it with us and Christ? We know all about Him.... where He was born, where He grew up, what His father did. Who His mother was. We know something about the things He did on the playing field of His life - His statistics...miracles performed, people helped, parables spoken. Most of this we've "inherited"...picked up along the way. But do we really know Christ, or do we only know about Him? Are we living on "borrowed faith?" Or, do we have a faith of our own? Are we counting on the faith of others to get us across the waters of life? Or, are we putting forth the personal effort through prayer and Bible study, through worship and service to get us there?

"And there were with him also other little ships". I invite you to set the direction of the sails of your life so that you may find a strong and vibrant faith that will take you across life's troubled waters...to the peace and serenity of the other side. That is my hope and my prayer for each of you.

PRAYER

Make us sensitive to Your nearness in these moments, O God....to Your peace and power. You have revealed Yourself to us fully and completely in human terms....in the life and love of Jesus, whom we call Lord. Help us always to be willing to turn to Him - in openness, truth and sincerity - that we may always be conscious of the highest possibilities of life as we find them in him.

In the name and spirit of Jesus, we now pray. Amen.