

"THE CAN'T DO EVERYTHING, WON'T DO ANYTHING SYNDROME"

TEXT: "There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two fish; but...what are they among so many?"

(John 6: 9)

INTRODUCTION Somewhere along the way I heard of two men who were living in a houseboat that stayed tied up at a waterfront dock. One night while they slept a storm came up. The boat broke loose from its mooring and drifted out to sea. Next morning one of them got up early and with coffee in hand went out on deck. He could hardly believe what he saw. Rushing to rouse his friend, he cried, "Wake up. Wake up. We're not here anymore".

Nobody's 'here' anymore is around. The cozy and the familiar are disappearing for most of us. As someone recently put it, "She's in the water...but the bath tub is gone". The scenery around is different - and, for the most part, different bad, not different good. We find ourselves whelmed by people and by problems that come at us thicker and faster than we can sometimes handle.

Felix Rohaytn, in discussing the new proposals this week to reorder the city's finances, put it this way: "This is like throwing an 82 yard pass with four seconds to go. With four seconds to go, there's no point in throwing a 10 yard pass." Rather descriptive, but that's the way it is. "Wake up. We're not 'here' anymore". Our circuits are over-loaded. No wonder TV shows are resorting to tracks of canned laughter. For the real thing's hard to come by.

WRITE IT OFF Let me risk making too tidy an analysis by suggesting that there are three ways in which we can respond to history. To put it in the vernacular, we can write it off. We can seal it off. Or, we can bring it off. Let's consider those options for a few moments this morning.

Some simply write history off. In the words of the old gospel tune,

"This world is not my home.  
I'm just a-passing through;  
If heaven's not my home,  
O Lord, what will I do"

You know how it goes. The only purpose history serves is to allow God to save His favorites out of it. Heaven's near and death is sure, so why worry about the problems of world hunger, equal rights, environmental sanitation, or the city's finances, or anything else for that matter? Say your prayers. Mind your business. Tough it out - it won't be long. nw sources of energy

A surprising number of religious types in East and West hold to such a point of view. How embarrassing for Christians who believe this way to discover one day that Jesus was ever among us in the flesh, and that He openly declared this world to be the object of His love and focus. Let's not write it off.

SEAL IT OFF Others try to get by by sealing it off. They know that out there large questions and problems cry for a solution. But they feel that they lack the intellectual or emotional wherewithal to deal with them. "Don't both me, I can't cope" is their motto. Send them away. We do not have the resources with which to make a response!

Now, that expression "send them away" should trigger in our minds a remembrance of Jesus feeding the multitude. This was the reaction of the disciples as they assessed the crowd that gathered around Jesus as meal time approached.

Whether they used the old math or the new math, it was apparent to them that there were more than they could handle. Three thousand people, four thousand, five thousand - and the count was always changing. People kept coming and going. Philip, who had a quick way of making a count as well as a knack for keeping the disciples in touch with reality, said, "Lord, two hundred denarii - or two hundred dollars - worth of bread wouldn't be enough to give each of them a little". Andrew was a bit more helpful and hopeful. He took inventory and said, "Lord, there's a lad over here who have five barley loaves, but what are they among so many". It was Andrew's conclusion that because they couldn't do everything, they shouldn't do anything. I call this the "I can't do everything, won't do anything syndrome".

Friends, life comes to a screeching halt when we begin to think like this. Between the little things that we will not do and the large things that we cannot do lies the danger that we will end up doing nothing! So...many try to seal history off. They deliberately put distance between themselves and the dark, demanding, brutal side of life, and guard against the intake of the unpleasant. Where to - then? To escapist television, to escapist theater, to escapist literature, to escapist religion.

Some sealing off is necessary to our sanity, but more about this later on. My question is: who would wish to live in a world in which people did not stir themselves to care? Send them away. "Lord, we have a lad with five barley loaves and two fish, but what are they among so many?" Surely, there is a better response.

BRING IT OFF Some there are, thank God, who seek to bring it off. "Bring what off?" you ask. The vision of a world that increasingly resembles the kingdom of God. These are the "salt of the earth" as Jesus described them two thousand years ago. "Salt of the earth" "Light of the world". They dare to know what's going on; they plug in where they can; they take hold and become involved. And obviously, this is the only posture that can be made to square with Biblical religion.

I assume that all of us who are here this morning would like to bring it off. What does it take?

ROOTS For one thing, it requires roots. Most people who are deeply discouraged and cynical today about the human story lack perspective. One reason why fire-fighters do not panic when they see a burning building is because they've seen others before.

One of our troubles today is that we have a tremendous amount of foreground and very little background. We tend to be pretty well informed about current events, but somehow we do not see them in a perspective that is wide enough.

Listen to these four sentences that came from the lips of one of America's great preachers:

"The Puritans in England and America found in the Christ of the Catholic Church and in the dogmas inherited from Rome scope for their austere piety and their longings for civil

freedom. But their creed is passing away, and none arises in its room. I think no man can go with his thoughts about him into one of our churches without feeling that what hold public worship had on people is going. It has lost its grasp on the affections of the good and the fear of the bad".

That's stark enough to have been preached somewhere in the city last weekend. But actually it was preached on July 15th, 1838 (a year after this church was founded), by no less a figure than Ralph Waldo Emerson in a sermon at Harvard Divinity School. We need roots to understand where we are in terms of history that has gone before.

Every Friday evening, along around 5:30, I find myself back here in my study at the church following a workout at the 92nd Street Y. In order to get my own soul prepared for the coming weekend, I find it helpful to tune in on WQXR and listen to the weekly Sabbath evening service that comes from Temple Emmanuel where my friend Ronald Sobel is the Senior Rabbi. Something good happens inside of me when I hear God invoked as "The God of Abraham, Issac and Jacob". We get so excited about the Pharoahs of our time that we forget that the future was with Moses and his people. God cannot love and desert. To bring it off, we must have roots - which provide us with perspective.

INSTITUTIONS For another thing, to bring it off in history requires institutions. This is a hard saying in our time because we live in a time of anti-institutionalism. Most people whom I know who say they just can't cope are apt to be "loners". That is, they're out there by themselves. None of their vision is coordinated with that of other people. Thus, they lack camaraderie and they lack connections.

When William Pitt was replaced as Britain's Secretary of State by an irate King George III, he would sit moodily in Parliament. "I was there" he said, "unconnected and unconsulted". I know of people today who feel that way about themselves. History's happening at a rapid pace all around us, and there they sit - "unconnected and unconsulted".

*Good!* The President said something recently in a speech about inflation that I appreciated. Most of what he's been saying recently I haven't appreciated, but this made my ears pick up. He said, "We need more capital. We can't eat up our seed corn". As a city boy for the most part, I feel a bit shaky trying to interpret this to you, but I think I know what our President means. Seed corn is what the farmer keeps for planting in order that there might be some more corn next year. Translate that out of the field of capital and finance and ask yourself: who is responsible for safe guarding the moral and spiritual seed corn in our society? We can't allow it to be eaten up.

This is where the institutions come in. Among other things, they are responsible for seeing that the seed corn is retained. I'm aware of the dangers inherent in bureaucracy and yes - in organized religion, too - but I can't help asking myself and you today, where would the future of our seminaries, our universities, our homes and hospitals, our missionary out-reach be if all who claim to love Jesus were content to strum guitars in sandled feet under the arch in Washington Square. We need institutions. There is no human continuity except through institutions.

STRATEGY We also need a strategy if we are to bring it off in history. I mentioned earlier that a certain "sealing off" is necessary. I'm

grateful to Ernest Becker for some helpful insights in his book, The Denial of Death. He makes a point of suggesting that the only way for us to maintain a semblance of sanity in today's world is to "partialize" our experience of life. The word is "partialize". That is, we must be willing not to take on every cause or take in every need that comes down the pike.

One cannot take in all of the cares, the inequities, the good causes generated by the present or flowing out of the past. One must seek to "partialize" his response or lose his sanity. One must in some way come to terms with what one can do, and where one can respond and then do so to the best of his ability. Partialization. I'm reminded of this insight around this time of year when I have the feeling that I'm on the mailing list of every cause in this city.

One of its masters in our time was Pope John, a man whom I continue to enjoy and respect. "He is the only man in Paris in whose company one feels the physical sensation of peace" said Robert Schuman of him in 1947. And one of Pope John's favorite sayings was, "To see everything - to turn a blind eye to much of it - to correct a little".

PARTIALIZE TOGETHER Here in this Church we attempt to partialize together. It's impossible for a small church like this in the big city "to be all things to all people". We can't be. We receive many suggestions of things to do, causes to respond to, areas in which to be involved. Some prove to be beyond us, too far, and some thank God are manageable, possible and to those we commit ourselves. We do well, I feel, in responding the way we do. Setting our priorities, we then proceed. Remember that helpful word from Sister Carita, "Accept an assignment, then you won't feel responsible for everything".

"Partialization" is good strategy for individuals and churches if we wish to bring it off in history. Send them away? "No," said Jesus "give ye them to eat". And so we take our individual loaves and fishes, such as they are, and we leave the rest to God! Each shared what he had and through this miracle of sharing, all were fed. It happened then. I believe it can happen now.

This church offers you a way to help bring it off, to say "yes" to life at a time when many are frozen in fear or apathy. We can connect you with your roots. We can provide you with an institution. And you can join us in the implementation of our strategy.

CANVASS This is a critical Sunday in the life of our Church. Our financial canvass has been launched. Our goal is a manageable goal, if all help. I believe we can do it and I sense a will among us that this shall be done.

Remember that great scene in Mrs. Miniver. Remember how the British had been defeated at Dunkirk, but the people didn't know it yet; they seemed never to know when they were defeated. All anybody knew was that the telephones were ringing in the dark of the night, and every man who had a boat was getting up and pulling on his clothes. They were wanted somewhere - launches, tugs, out-board motors, everything that could float, that could move. From the little inlets and bays and harbors, they put-putted down the rivers, down to the sea. And there they were told how things stood...of the thousands of soldiers stranded...

It wasn't a happy picture. Things were dangerous. They could go on or they could go back. But the huge fleet moved into the channel - the craziest looking armada that ever crossed the channel with the Spitfires flying overhead. It wasn't a miracle - or was it? What do you think?

to rescue those thousands of men faced with Nazi closing in, the sea in front.

Every man with his little boat pulling his share of the load. The miracle wasn't God doing something for them that they could do for themselves, but God doing something - in them, through them, with them - and with every person doing his very best, pulling his own share of the load. It made a difference!

007/2  
Do you suppose we could have that kind of miracle in this Church? I'd like to believe that we can. IF....~~WE~~ could succeed now.....if we could do the best thing in this tough, difficult time...nobody begging off, but everybody doing his very best, everybody practicing a bit of faith and sacrifice....what a victory it would be!

"Whoever has a heart full of love always has something to give" said Pope John.

Now is the time for us to get moving....to cross the channel of hard work, tough effort, sacrifice and see if we can't TOGETHER meet this challenge. We can't do everything, but we can do something. Let's do our something together, and see what happens.

PRAYER      Keep us believing in miracles, O God. Keep us loyal to thee and faith-  
to our trust. In the name and spirit of Christ, we pray. Amen

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INTRODUCTION Somewhere along the way I heard of two men who lived in a house-boat that stayed tied up at a waterfront dock. One night while they slept, a storm came up. The boat broke from its moorings and drifted out to sea. Next morning one of them got up early and went out on the deck. He could hardly believe what he saw. Rushing to rouse his friend, he cried, "Wake up! Wake up! We're not here anymore."

Nobody's "here" is around anymore. The familiar has gone for most of us. The scenery around us these days is different - and, for the most part, different bad not different good. We find ourselves whelmed by people and problems that come at us thicker and faster than we can handle. Our circuits are over-loaded. No wonder a lot of TV shows resort to tracks of canned laughter. The real thing is hard to come by. Not tent evangelists, mind you, or street-corner preachers, but scholars and scientists are the ones these days who are telling us that the world may be on its way to hell.

DEVELOPMENT Let me risk making too tidy an analysis by suggesting that there are three ways in which we can respond to history. We can write it off. We can seal it off. Or, we can bring it off. Begging your pardon for their colloquial character, I ask you to consider those options in some detail.

Some simply write history off.

"This world is not my home, I'm just a-passing through;  
If heaven's not my home, O Lord, what will I do?"

You know how it goes. The only purpose history serves is to allow God to save His favorites out of it. Heaven is near and death is sure, so why worry about world hunger, abortion, pollution, over-population or anything else for that matter? Say your prayers, mind your business, tough it out. It won't be long.

A surprising number of religious types in east and west hold such a point of view. How embarrassing for Christians who think this way that Jesus was ever among us in the flesh and that He openly declared this world to be the object of His love.

Others try to seal it off. They know that out there large questions cry for an answer. But they feel that they lack the intellectual or emotional wherewithal to deal with them. "Don't bother me, I can't cope". This is apt to be their motto. Send them away. We do not have the resources with which to make a response.

That expression, "send them away" should trigger in our minds a remembrance of Jesus' feeding of the multitude. That was the disciple's reaction as they assessed the crowd that gathered around Jesus as mealtime drew near. Whether they used the old math or the new math, it was apparent to them that there were more people there than they could handle. Three thousand, four thousand, five thousand -- and the count was always changing. People kept coming and going. Philip who had a lightening way of calculating and a knack for keeping the

disciples in touch with reality, said, "Lord, two hundred denarii (or two hundred dollars) worth of bread would not be enough to give each of them a little". Andrew was a bit more hopeful. He took inventory and said, "There's a lad here who has five barley loaves and two fish; but what are they among so many?" It was Andrew's conclusion that because they couldn't do everything, they shouldn't do anything. I call this the "Can't Do Everything, Won't Do Anything Syndrome".

Life comes to a halt when we begin to think like this. Between the little things that we will not do and the large things that we cannot do lies the danger that we will do nothing! So, many try to seal history off. They deliberately put distance between themselves and the dark and brutal side of life, and guard against the intake of the unpleasant. Where to, then? Well, to escapist television, to escapist theatre, to escapist literature, yes, and to escapist religion.

Some sealing off is necessary to our sanity, but more about this later on. My question is, who would wish to live in a world in which people did not stir themselves to care? Send them away. "We have a lad with five barley loaves and two fish; but what are these among so many?" Surely there is a better response than this.

Some souls, praise the Lord, seek to bring it off! "Bring what off?" you ask. The vision of a world that increasingly resembles the kingdom of God. These are the salt of the earth as Jesus described them. They dare to know what's going on and they plug in where they can. Obviously, this is the only posture that can be made to square with Biblical religion.

ROOTS ARE REQUIRED We'd all like to help bring it off, wouldn't we? What does it take? For one thing it requires roots. Most folks who are deeply discouraged and cynical about the human story lack perspective. One reason why fire-fighters do not panic when they see a burning building is because they've seen others before. We must beware of excessive topicality. One of our troubles today is that we have a tremendous amount of foreground and very little background. We tend to be informed about current events but somehow we do not see them in a perspective that is wide enough.

I want you to listen to four sentences that came from the lips of one of America's great preachers:

"The Puritans in England and America found in the Christ of the Catholic Church and in the dogmas inherited from Rome scope for their austere piety and their longings for civil freedom. But their creed is passing away and none arises in its room. I think no man can go with his thoughts about him into one of our churches without feeling that what hold the public worship had on men is gone or going. It has lost its grasp on the affection of the good and the fear of the bad".

Why, that's stark enough to have been preached somewhere in New York last week. It was preached on the 15th of July in 1838 by no less a person than Ralph Waldo Emerson in an address to the students and faculty of the Harvard Divinity School. We need roots to understand where we are in terms of the history that has gone before.

Every Friday evening along about 5:30, I make a point of being in my study

here at the church with the radio on. In order to get my own soul prepared for the demands of the coming weekend, I find it stimulating and helpful to tune in on WQXR and listen to the weekly Sabbath evening service that comes from Temple Emmanuel where my friend Ronald Sobel is the Senior Rabbi. Something good happens inside me when I heard God invoked as "the God of Abraham, Issac and Jacob". We get so excited about the Pharoahs of our time that we forget that the future was with Moses and his people. God cannot love and desert! To bring it off we must have roots - which means perspective.

#### INSTITUTIONS NEEDED

For another thing, to bring it off in history requires institutions. I know that this is a hard saying in our time because we live in the age of the anti-institutional. Most people whom I know who say they cannot cope are loners. They're out there by themselves. They coordinate none of their vision with that of other people. Thus, they lack camaraderie and they lack connects.

When William Pitt was replaced as Britain's Secretary of State by an irate King George III, he would sit moodily in Parliament. "I was there" he said, "unconnected and unconsulted". I have many friends who feel that way about themselves. History is happening at a rapid rate and there they sit - unconnected and unconsulted.

I think it's time for somebody to say a good word for organized religion. I don't particularly like either of the words in that term, but I do feel an allegiance to what is represented by organized religion. When someone says to me, "I don't go for organized religion", I'm tempted to ask, "Well, do you prefer disorganized religion? Or unorganized religion?" Can it be seriously believed that the disordered serve God better than the ordered, the impromptu better than the planned, the scattered better than the focused?

President Ford said something in his mild speech last month on inflation that made my ears perk up. He said, "We need more capital. We cannot eat up our seed corn". As a city boy for the most part, I feel a little shaky trying to interpret this for you. But I think I know what our President means. Seed corn is what the farmer keeps for planting in order that there might be some more corn next year. Translate that out of the field of capital and finance and ask yourself: who is responsible for safe-guarding the moral and spiritual seed corn in our society? We can't allow it to be eaten up!

And this is where the institutions come in. Among other things they are responsible for seeing that the seed corn is retained. I'm aware of the dangers inherent in bureaucracy. But I can't help asking myself and you today, where would the future of our seminaries, our universities, our hospitals, our homes for the elderly, our missionary out-reach be if all who claim to love the Lord were content to strum guitars in Sandled feet under the arch in Washington Square? We need institutions. There is no human continuity except through institutions.

#### ALSO A STRATEGY

We also need a strategy if we are to bring it off in history. I mentioned earlier that a certain "sealing off" is necessary. I'm grateful to Ernest Becker for his helpful book, The Denial of Death. In that work the author makes the point that the only way for us to maintain a semblance of sanity is to "partialize" our experience of life. That is, we must be willing not to take on every cause or take in every need. It seems to me that we must learn to partialize historically. A lot of things were out of shape on this earth before we got into it. The game was already "on the table" when we arrived. The balls were long since racked and broken.



In law we have what is called a "statute of limitations". You can't continue to bring up a grievance year after year after year. A cut-off point has been decreed. You and I came into a world in which the Turks and the Armenians hated each other, in many places the blacks and the whites, the English and the French, the Swedes and the Finns, the Japanese and the Chinese, the Indians and the Americans, the Cuban right and the Cuban left. If I do not partialize my response to some of this I will not be sane.

I must also partialize horizontally. I cannot take in even the cares and inequities that are generated in the present. This means that I must in some way come to terms with what I can do. Partialization. One of the masters of partialization in our time was Pope John XXIII, a man whom I continue to enjoy and respect. Robert Schuman who became the French Premier said of Pope John back in 1947, "He is the only man in Paris in whose company one feels the physical sensation of peace". Pope John had a favorite maxim, "To see everything, to turn a blind eye to much of it, to correct a little".

Here in this church we attempt to partialize together. We receive many suggestions from our people for objectives to be pursued. We look at those objectives carefully. Some prove too subjective. Some too idealistic. Some are too far away and some, thank God, are manageable and possible and practical. To these we commit ourselves. As Sister Carita said so wisely, "Accept an assignment, then you won't feel responsible for everything".

Send them away. Jesus said, "No, give ye them to eat". And so we take our loaves and fishes, such as they are, and leave the rest to God!

CLOSING I make the presumption that all who are within reach of this message want to bring it off. We are not prepared, I hope, theologically to write history off, nor are we willing to attempt to seal it off. We would like to bring it off. We would like to say "yes" to life at a time when so many of our countrymen are frozen in fear or apathy. This church offers you a way to help bring it off. We can connect you with your roots. We can provide you with an institution. You can join us in helping to devise a strategy.

This is a critical Sunday in the life of our church. This is a critical month in the on-going life of this fellowship. Our 1975 Every Member Canvass is underway. We need \$42,000 in pledges. This goal is a manageable goal, and will only permit us to hold our own against inflation. I believe we can do this and I sense a will among us that this shall be done.

For one reason or another, many of our members made no pledge last year. Some doubtless give without pledging. Some come from churches that have a history of not pledging. Pledging is not a gimmick designed by ministers and Finance Committee members. Pledging is the only way that an institution of this size can anticipate its income and do its business decently and in order. From my heart I appeal to those of you who are non-pledging members, to move out and join those who do .

I've been advised that if all of us who gave last year would give again plus more to account for inflation we could easily reach our goal. I'm aware that some cannot go up. Indeed, some of us must come down. Some will not be able to give at all. Fosdick in the very dark of the depression said to the impoverished member of Riverside Church: "If you can't give anything, come on Sunday anyway and put your empty envelopes in the plate. This will tell us that you're with us and that you'll give when you can!"