

"THE LOST MOOD OF ADVENTURE"

TEXT: "He who watches the wind will never sow,
and he who keeps an eye on the clouds
will never reap".

(Ecclesiastes 11: 4)

INTRODUCTION

More than once across the past fifteen years, you and I have been upset by the demands of the overly zealous. The late Saul Alinski was fond of giving credit to the radicals of our society for getting history off dead center. He was once quoted as saying,

"Radicals precipitate the social crisis by action -- by using power. Liberals may then timidly follow along or else, as in most cases, be swept forward along the course set by radicals, but all because of forces unloosed by radical action".

We may say "yes...." to that statement with our minds, but let's face it - it's hard for most of us to warm up to the radical, the fanatic, the overly zealous of our time. This is true whether that zealot in your life (and mine) is pushing Women's Liberation, Aid for Israel, Prison Reform, National Health Insurance, Dr. Moon's Unification Church, or the Gay Liberation Front....or whatever.

However, it is becoming clearer to many by the day that the overly prudent pose a more formidable threat to our society than the overly zealous. I think our nation has become very cautious, very wary. The mood is one of retrenchment; fear has overtaken us at many levels. We find ourselves waiting to see what life will do to us next. The old saying, "nothing ventured, nothing gained" has given way to "nothing risked, nothing lost".

I think it would be hard to find a better antidote in Scripture for what ails us than these words from the book of Ecclesiastes (3rd century B. C.), the 4th verse of that 11th chapter which was read earlier:

"He who watches the wind will never sow, and he
who keeps an eye on the clouds will never reap".

DEVELOPMENT

To begin with, we don't know for sure who wrote those words, but that really isn't important. We do know that the writer was somewhat familiar with an agrarian economy, for the reference here is obviously to farming. I think our friends living out in Iowa or Kansas would have little trouble in picking up the meaning of this observation. But come along now, we who get our vegetables not from the ground, but from the local super-market - we know what this voice is saying. It's never a completely opportune time, ideal time, to do anything. The farmer who worries too much about the wind and the rain will never plant. Thus, he will never reap. Likewise, people who wait for the perfect time to do what is in their hearts and their bones to do - will end up doing nothing!

This mood has crept up upon us gradually. We seem to have become a nation of wind watchers and cloud examiners. And there are a lot of people who make a pretty good living out of telling us what's up - which way the wind's blowing - on Wall Street or other streets of our nation. Pollsters are forever canvassing the great and the near-great as to how they read the wind and the clouds.

We're living defensively, passively. Our dreams have been intimidated by the computer. We're becoming a generation of on-lookers, rather than a daring set of actors. All of us enjoy the humor of Flip Wilson. A character in a recent Flip Wilson sketch was asked about his religion. After a moment or two of thought, he said, "I guess you could call me a Jehovah's By-stander". "They asked me to become a Witness....but I didn't want to get involved."

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LESSONS OF HISTORY To help us recover in our lives this lost mood of adventure, I would cite briefly two things: first, the lessons of history and second, the teachings of our faith.

If history teaches us anything, it tells us that the "man-spirit" can triumph in the face of high winds and some pretty dark clouds. Not only are we fearfully and wonderfully made, but we are heroically made as well.

Now the times have never been totally fortuitous for any human achievement. Robert Fulton persisted with his steam engine when everyone thought it folly. The Wright Brothers were regarded as eccentrics when they fiddled with the Kitty Hawk. The colonists were taken for midless visionaries when they anticipated the break with England and saw the possibility of a new nation. Ghandi, twenty-five years ago, was written off as a sufferable idealist when he set out to free his land from foreign domination by the tactic of non-violence. And so it goes.

It's never a good time, an ideal time, to do anything, is it? Never a good time to raise money. Never a good time to go on with an education. Never a good time to develop your talent. Never a good time to raise a family, to quit your job for another, to fall in love, to re-build a city, to invest your energies in some crusade for justice. The point is that the human spirit has a way of transcending the times that would hem it in and smother it in frustration. That which lies behind us or before is of small matter in terms of that which lies within us.

I liked what Norman Cousins had to say in an editorial last Winter in the Saturday Review. I clipped it and share it with you.

"The computer can't be programmed to comprehend the mysteries of human response. The computer has no way of anticipating the advent of a Thomas Jefferson or a Winston Churchill or anyone capable of generating ideas that can lead to great change"

He then concluded,

"Men in a condition of despair cannot be commanded to generate glorious dreams. But they can be encouraged to re-discover themselves and to be reminded of past achievements under circumstances of enormous difficulty. They can be given confidence in the naturalness of their visions and the reach of the man mind".

And so they can! Remember that "He who watches the wind will never sow, and he who keeps an eye on the clouds will never reap".

The lessons of history.

TEACHINGS OF OUR FAITH

As Christians, we have something more to build on than the mere insights of secular history. We have also the teachings of our Faith. One of those teachings has conditioned us to be sober in our estimate of history.

Karl Rahner, a distinguished contemporary Roman Catholic theologian, has pointed out that,

"History and society (for the Christian) will always remain both created and fallen, and the objects of both judgement and blessing".

That is to say - we should never be overly caught up in secular optimism, because the world is "fallen". On the other hand, we should never become overly bogged down in secular despair, because the world is "created".

We have a steady, calm and sober view of history because we sense that it bears the stamp of God. Always - in any event or circumstances - there is more than meets the eye. This is what the person of faith builds on and believes.

Our faith also encourages us to understand that while we live our life in the world, we draw our life from God. We live our life in the world, but we draw our life from God. Faith enables us to carry about with us - in any age or circumstance - a portable atmosphere of trust and hope and love. We bring our own climate to a particular situation. We are influenced by the world, but not controlled by the world. The controlling factor is the spirit of God within us.

One senses that this is what Emily Dickinson was saying in a beautiful and touching way when she wrote these lines,

"To make a prairie, it takes a clover
and one bee.
One clover and a bee - and revery!
The revery alone will do,
If bees are few."

Given these lessons of history and teachings of our faith, there are two adventures that beckon as we stand on the threshold of a new season and I heartily invite you to participate.

SOCIAL RIGHTEOUSNESS

One is an adventure into social need and righteousness. Here and now. Often when we are invited to enlist our energies on behalf of the disadvantaged and oppressed, we seem to say in reply, "Well, if things were better, I'd say 'yes'". . . . "I'd do some tutoring and help out". . . . "or volunteer in a home or hospital". "But. . . ." Some call this The Garden of Eden Hang-up. It's got to be perfect before we'll lend a hand. There's no right time, right place to begin. We jump in. . . . take the plunge and start to help.

Russell Baker, who does the Observer Column in the Times let it be known recently that he was moving from Washington to NYC. Somebody asked him why he would leave the relative peace and quiet of our nation's capitol to come to New York City. And Mr. Baker replied,

"I missed combat in World War II, and I didn't get to see

action in Korea or Vietnam, and I wanted to have something to tell my grandchildren". (We welcome Mr. Baker to NYC)

There never has been a good time to begin or a good place to start. But surely, sitting behind barred windows and triple-locked doors - despairing - is not the only nor the final solution to the problems of this city.

Larry O'Brien was reminiscing recently about the late President Kennedy. It was Kennedy's habit to read several papers early in the morning before getting started on the day's work. Frequently when O'Brien arrived to help chart the day, the President would still be reading and expressing anger at some of the things that had been written about him and his administration. "Then" said O'Brien, "he would say the word, 'Hoever'." And With that word his private indignation would be swept aside. "It was the signal that the President was ready to move ahead into the business at hand".

In the Judaeo-Christian interpretation of life, history is not a series of problems that cry for an answer. It is a series of opportunities that cry for action!

PERSONAL GROWTH The other frontier that I would suggest has all kinds of possibilities for adventure. It is the frontier of your own personal growth. Never put off living to another day. Most of us - when we examine our experience of God see it as a series of spurts and jags. A little advancement here and a time of retrenchment and consolidation there. We give up on ourselves so easily....so early. We assume that where we are is just about where we have to stay. "Shifting Gears" is one of the books I read last month in Maine. This is it's theme. Personal growth within....shifting gears.

It was George Bernard Shaw who once said,

"The only man who behaves sensibly is my tailor; he takes my measure anew each time he sees me, while all the rest go on with their old measurements and expect me to fit them".

And it was John Milton who offered this comment on Oliver Cromwell:

"He first acquired the government of himself, and over himself acquired the most signal victories, so that on the first day he took the field against the external enemy, he was a veteran in arms, consummately practiced in the toils and exigencies of war".

The aim is our own growth. Making ourselves, in part, a singular contribution to the world, to this city. Some of us present may be erring on the side of excessive zeal, but I think I'm closer to the truth when I say that more of us are erring on the side of excessive caution. The overly prudent will not reap because they will never find a good time in which to sow. Winds there are, to be sure, and some dark and threatening clouds. But there is also the human spirit and the power of the living God. Yes, how true - that which lies before us or behind us is of small matter in terms of that which lies within us.

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PRAYER Now forgive us, Lord, that we have allowed experience to triumph over expectation, and that we so easily succumb to the down-beat cries of despair of an age that has every fear, save the fear of God.

Help us more nearly to resemble our brothers and sisters of another day, who - in the power of the Spirit - turned themselves and the world upside down, or should we say right-side up.

Remind us always that the power behind us is far greater than the tasks and problems that are before us. In the spirit of Christ, we pray.

Amen