"THE LOVE THAT NEVER QUILTS"

A Sermon By

Philip A. C. Clarke

Park Avenue United Methodist Church
106 East 86th Street
New York, New York 10028
February 18, 1990
"THE LOVE THAT NEVER QUILTS"

INTRODUCTION There's supposedly a true story making the rounds about a lady from another part of our country who came to our city on a recent visit. She came here with all of the normal fears and prejudices that we might expect from someone from a rural area visiting the Big Apple for the first time. She had heard about all the crime and the violence of New York City. And as luck would have it, she discovered herself staying in a large midtown hotel which has a parking garage.

There she was, late one evening, parking her car in a lonely, deserted garage. Now if you're a fan of crime shows on television, you know how many scary events happen in parking garages. Here she was, getting out of her car in this deserted garage in midtown and feeling somewhat unsure of herself. Fearfully she starts to get on an elevator and out of the shadows steps a large man, about six feet six, with a Doberman pinscher on a leash, who starts to board the elevator with her. All of a sudden, there are two forces here at work - her fear and her prejudice.

Picture the scene. Here she is with this large man and this black Doberman Pinscher alone in the basement of that hotel. The elevator door opens and she gets in. The man and his dog get in, too, and her heart is pounding. Suddenly the man says, sternly, "Lie down on the floor". Without thinking, this lady, already trembling frightfully, starts to get down on the floor. And all of a sudden the man, realizing what is happening, breaks out in a hearty laugh and says, "Lady...I was talking to my dog". It turned out that the gentleman in the elevator with her was one of our city's best baseball players and a fine human being. David Winfield could easily have been offended by her fearful response, but instead he thought it was so amusing that he gave her two tickets to a Yankee baseball game.

With the Dog Show now over and the baseball season beginning, I thought this was a good Sunday to share this story for it serves as a bit of a launching pad for today's message. The lady must have felt very foolish. Sometimes our fears, particularly those kindled by foolish prejudice, become exaggerated. Perhaps that's the way that some of us have come into this sanctuary. We may be approaching God with feelings of fearfulness and guilt. And some of that inner anxiety may derive from who we are and from what we have done. God seems so remote, so holy, so righteous that we tend to feel a bit uncomfortable in His sanctuary.

DEVELOPMENT What a tragedy that we do not know and fully understand the Gospel, the "Good News" of Jesus. When we come into this room, we are coming into the presence of One who loves us so much that we need not be apprehensive or anxious. Saint Paul writes in Romans,

"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril or sword? Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor thing to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor
anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus, our Lord."

Did you get that? We do not need to be afraid. For nothing can ever separate us from the love of God.

We can take God's own Son and nail Him to a tree. We can hurl all matter of taunts at Him. We can thrust a sword into His side, but we cannot destroy His love for us. We can strip Him of His garments and even gamble for them at His feet. We can deny His very existence, but still He loves us. Even while all of this is going on, what does He do? He looks toward the heavens and prays, "Father, forgive them...for they know not what they do".

Dear friends in Christ, that is greater love than you or I are ever, ever capable of.

There is nothing that you or I have ever done or have ever said or have ever thought that can destroy the love that God has for us. If that is true, and I deeply believe it is, then evidently God sees more in us than we see in ourselves. Put that down as today's first point.

Robert Schuller recently told a story about a homeless person who was sitting across the street from the studio of an artist. From his window, the artist sketched the face of that defeated, despairing soul, except that he made one important change. In to the dull eyes he put the flashing glint of an inspired dreamer. He sketched the skin on the man's face to give him a look of iron will and fierce determination. When the painting was finished, he called this unfortunate homeless person over to see it.

The homeless man did not recognize himself and asked, "Who is it"? Then suspecting that he saw something of himself in this portrait, the man rather hesitantly asked, "Is that me?"

"That's how I see you" replied the artist. And straightening his shoulders the homeless man said, "If that's the man you see...well, that's the man I'm going to be!"

God sees something beautiful within each of us that causes Him to keep on loving us even though we may betray and may doubt and may neglect our responsibilities to Him. Remember this that nothing can ever separate us from the love of God revealed to us in Christ Jesus. That's the first thing we need to see this morning. And God sees more in us than we see in ourselves!

And here's the second. He is eager to restore us to a right relationship with Himself, with others and with ourselves. He is eager to forgive, eager to redeem. He is eager to wash us up and help us to be healthy and whole once more.

The director of a mental institution said in a seminar recently that 50% of his patients could go home if they knew they were forgiven. God is offering that kind of forgiveness to us.
There's a moving story that illustrates this understanding. It's about a little boy and a little girl who every Summer would get in a visit with their grandparents on their farm some distance away from the city. It was a great treat for them to do this and they looked forward to it every year as did their grandparents.

One Summer day the little boy was out playing with a sling shot that his grandfather had made for him... having a good time with it, flipping rocks at trees and anything else he could see to shoot. But as luck would have it, his grandmother's pet duck happened by about this time and without thinking he flipped a rock at the pet duck. His aim was better than he thought and hit the duck and the duck fell over - dead.

He had killed his grandmother's pet duck and immediately he looked around to see if anybody was watching. Not seeing anybody in sight, he figured the best thing to do was to say nothing. The boy, of course, felt terrible. In fact he was miserable. And that night at supper, knowing what he had done, his heart was about to break within him. He didn't say anything at the supper table and excused himself early to go up to bed, hardly eating a bite. The next morning he came down slowly to breakfast. His grandparents and his sister were already there at the table. Still the knowledge of what he had done was burning within his little heart.

"Tommy, how would you like to go fishing with me today" asked his grandfather. But Tommy's little sister spoke up first and said, "Oh, granddaddy, I'd love to go fishing with you." Grandmother spoke up and said, "But, Susie, dear... I had hoped you would stay home and break some beans with me".

Little Susie spoke up again and said, "Oh, grandmother, Tommy would be happy to stay home and help you break beans while I go fishing". Then little Susie whispered behind her hand to Tommy, "I saw you kill grandmother's duck yesterday and I'll tell."

Grandmother turned to Tommy and said, "Tommy... is that right... would you rather stay home and break beans with me while Susie goes fishing with granddaddy?" Tommy lowered his head and mumbled very softly, "Yes, ma'am... I'd be happy to help you break beans".

There Tommy sat alone in the kitchen with his grandmother breaking beans. He had not said a word. His little heart was just about to burst with shame and guilt. Finally, he couldn't take it any longer and he blurted out, "Oh, grandmother... I killed your pet duck... I didn't mean to do it". And the tears started streaming down his face and he began to sob.

Well, his grandmother stopped what she was doing and came over to where Tommy was weeping. She softly placed her arms around Tommy and said,

"Oh, Tommy, I was looking out my kitchen window and saw you kill my duck. I've just been waiting for you to tell me. It's all right. I understand..."

Can you imagine the feeling of relief that Tommy must have felt? And this is my understanding of God's attitude toward our sin and wrong doing. We have
nothing that's hidden from Him. He knows just as we know when we've done wrong. He is eager and willing to restore us to a right relationship, to release us from the burden of guilt. "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow". Nothing you or I have ever done can separate us from His love. He is eager to forgive, eager to help us make a new start.

**REPENTANCE**  
A week from Wednesday we shall enter Lent, the season of repentance. The Latin root of the word "repentance" means "to change one's behavior". Simply saying "I'm sorry; I've done wrong" isn't going to help us with our guilt. Saying, "Father, forgive me. I've been bad. I repent" may help for a little while but in the long run it just won't work. Repentance is making a new start. Eric Fromm once said something that has stayed with me. He said, "You have to stop in order to change direction".

And changing direction is what repentance is all about. God is eager to restore us to a right relationship with Himself. He is also eager to help us make that new start in our lives. And we can make that new start. We need not give up on ourselves. We need not say, "I've blown it. There's no hope now". We can make a new start. That popular cliche rings true, "Today is the first day of the rest of your life". We don't have to look back with regret, but we can look forward to the future.

Roger Bannister, an Englishman, was the first man in history to officially run the four minute mile. A lot of people have done it since, but Bannister was the first. The very next month after Roger Bannister ran his mile in less than four minutes, an Australian by the name of John Landy topped his record by 1.4 seconds. Back in the Summer of 1954, both athletes met in British Columbia to compete against each other. As they moved into the last lap that Saturday night of August 5th, the other contestants were trailing far behind. Landy was ahead. It looked as though he would win. As he neared the finish line, however, he was haunted by the question, "Where is Bannister? How far behind me is he?" Finally, he could not stand the strain any longer. He looked over his shoulder and when he did that, his step faltered and Roger Bannister surged by him to break the tape. As Landy said to a reporter, "If I hadn't looked back, I would have won the race."

**CLOSING**  
There are some of us who are spending far too much time and energy looking back at things we regret. The past is past. That's a healthy thing, a good thing, for us to know. The past is past. That is the promise of the Scriptures. God does not remember our past if we ask for forgiveness. He will remember our sins no more. We can make a fresh start. His love guarantees it! Nothing can ever destroy that love no matter how low, how shameful. He is eager to forgive us and to restore a right relationship. That's the blessedness of coming to His sanctuary. We need not be afraid. We need not be anxious. He is the best friend we have and He wants to help us make a new start this day.

**PRAYER**  
Make us sensitive to Your nearness and Your presence in these moments, dear God. Move in our hearts. Make us ready for an adventure in growth with you in these coming days of our Season of Lent. Let it be a time of repentance, a time when we feel your forgiveness and love. Amen.
PASTORAL PRAYER: February 18, 1990

O GOD, OUR FATHER - from a world filled with noise and strife, with tension and turmoil, we have come to this quiet place this day - HERE to be quieted, to be guided and strengthened, as we again ready ourselves for the tasks of another week.

FAR FROM US, Thou never art - but by the busyness of our lives, and the insensitiveness of our hearts, we shut Thee out. We keep Thee distant.

HELP US, O GOD, to open our hearts to the gentle invasion of Your love, to open our minds to Your Word and to Your Will, and to speak to each of us this hour that word that we desperately need to hear.

OFTEN WE HAVE BROUGHT TO YOU our weaknesses - sins to be forgiven, fears to be allayed, anxieties to be overcome, and discouragements to be driven out.

AGAIN, this hour we come into YOUR PRESENCE with our many needs -

Steady us in our sickness.
Comfort us in our bereavement.
Befriend us in our loneliness.
Be near as we struggle to overcome temptation.
Let not the concerns and the worries of this week destroy us or overwhelm us.

OUR PRAYERS in these moments reach out to include friends and loved ones - from whom, in this time of worship, we are separated by distance, but from whom we are not separated by our love, our thought, our concern.

WE COME, LORD, not only with our varied needs, but also with our individual strengths, with our desire to put our convictions on the line and into action. Therefore,

LAY HOLD, we pray upon our courage and good will. Forgive us that we use brotherly love so poorly and cautiously.

LAY HOLD, we pray upon our faith. Make us aware of what we can do when we do it with You. Remind us that more things are wrought by prayer than this world has ever dreamed, that "with you, all things are possible!"

SEND US FORTH into the ways of this city with courage, with conviction and with compassion in our hearts and on our lips. We ask this in the name of Jesus - for it is in His love that we find our hope - for ourselves and for our world.
"And all things... whatsoever you shall ask in prayer, believing... you shall receive. And as many as touched Him were made whole!"

"Wait on the Lord. Be of good course and He shall strengthen thine heart. For we dwell in the shelter of the Almighty. He is our refuge and our strength."

"We know that in everything, God works together for good with those who love Him!"

"But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength. They shall mount up with wings as eagles. They shall run and not be weary. They shall walk and not faint".

"God so love the world that He gave His only Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life".

"Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits: who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases".

"Thou wilt keep Him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on Thee: because he trusteth in thee".

"In the name of Jesus Christ, I share with you the Good News: We are forgiven".

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PRAYERS / LORD'S PRAYER

0 Thou, who hearest prayer, hear our prayers... for others, as well as for ourselves. Touch with healing, O God... Father of us all, those whom we mention in our prayers this hour:

1. ____________ 2. ____________ 3. ____________
4. ____________ 5. ____________ 6. ____________

...beloved members and friends of this congregation. Comfort the bereaved and the broken hearted among us... and especially be close to Linda who in recent days has lost a loved one. Abide among us as a healing benediction. Heal each of us at the point of our deepest need.

Answer the upspoken prayers now offered to thee on the altars of our hearts, spoken in the name and spirit of Jesus, who taught us to say when we pray.... For we ask all of this in the powerful name and lifting spirit of Jesus who taught us to say when we pray...

"Our Father, who art in heaven. Hallowed be Thy name. Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for Thine is the Kingdom, and the Power and the glory, forever. Amen"
FIRST INTRODUCTION  The week of toil has ended. Our day of rest is at hand. May the rest and the quiet of this hour of worship refresh our inner life. And may it renew in all of us a sense of God's holy and abiding Presence.

In silence, let each now pray as the heart may prompt.

SECOND INTRODUCTION  Remaining in a prayerful spirit, let us enter now into a time of silent meditation...a time in which we prepare ourselves expectantly...that the Spirit of the living God may be made real to us in this hour of worship.

In quietness, let each now pray as the heart may prompt.

THIRD INTRODUCTION  Remaining in a prayerful spirit, let us enter into a time of silent meditation as we come into the Presence of Him whom our faith declares to be the Source of all life and love, all peace and power, the Source of all hope and healing.

In silence, let each now pray as the heart may prompt.

FOURTH INTRODUCTION  Remaining in a prayerful spirit, let us enter now into a time of silent meditation. In these moments, let us ponder the pattern our lives have been weaving as we come into the Presence of Him whom our Faith declares to be the Source of all life and love, all peace and power, the Source of all hope and healing.

In silence, let each now pray as the heart may prompt.

MEDITATION  We rest our hearts in the Promise of Jesus who said:

"Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of Me, for My yoke is easy and My burden is light."

"Ask, and it will be given you. Seek and you will find. Knock, and it will be open unto you."

"I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father, but by Me. If you love Me, you will keep my commandments"

"For I tell you...do not be anxious about your life, what you shall eat...or drink...nor about your body, what you shall put on. Is not life more than food? And the body more than raiment."

"But seek ye first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well."

"For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature - shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus, Our Lord."
SING UNTO THE LORD!

AT OUR

FELLOWSHIP SUPPER

AND

OLD-FASHIONED HYMN-SING

WITH

Rev. David Giles as our Leader

on

February 25th - 6:00 pm - 9:00 pm

in

Fellowship Hall - 3rd floor

Bring your favorite dish to share!
ANTHEM: "Almighty Father"

"Almighty Father, incline Thine ear; bless us and all those who have gathered here. Thine angel send us who shall defend us all. And fill with grace all who dwell in this place. Amen."

ANTHEM: "All Creatures of our God and King"

The words of today's second anthem are quite similar to the words of hymn 62.

ORGAN POSTLUDE

The organ postlude - a final offering of our praise to God - is played after the Benediction. Time permitting, we invite you to share in the beauty of it.

FOR THOSE WHO SING

New members are always welcome to audition to sing in the Choir. Rehearsals are held on Wednesday evening at 6:15 pm in the downstairs Choir Room. Now's a good time to join as the choir begins to prepare for the coming Lent and Easter season.

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

Volunteers are needed for the Saturday Food Program for the Homeless. Be in touch with Janet Ernst (evenings at 288-6936) if you can lend a hand. It's from 1:30 to 3:30 on a Saturday afternoon at the Park Avenue Christian Church, 1010 Park Avenue. March and April Saturdays are being arranged.

"HOUNDS OF HEAVEN"

The "Hounds of Heaven" meet on Tuesday evening at 6:30 pm in Fellowship Hall. Mary Lou Risley is leading the class in a study of D. J. Shelbey's, The Unsettling Season. New friends are always welcome. A study of the Lenten book, We Are An Easter People, begins on March the 6th.

ALLERSGATE CLASS

The Aldersgate Class meets on Wednesday evening at 7:30 in Fellowship Hall. Duane Thompson is leading the class in a study of Ernest Palmer's, The Enormous Exception: Meeting Christ in the Sermon of the Mount. Old friends are always welcome; new ones, too.

PICK UP YOUR COPY

Be sure to pick up your copy of the February issue of our monthly news sheet, "A Word In Edgeways". Copies are by the door in the narthex as well as on the table in the Russell Room.

LOOKING AHEAD

The Oratorio Society of New York under the direction of Lyndon Woodside will present Beethoven's Missa Solemnis on Wednesday, the 21st of March, 8 pm, at Carnegie Hall.

LAST CALL

Don't forget to pick up your box of 1990 offering envelopes in the Russell Room.
NEXT SUNDAY EVENING

Next Sunday evening we shall enjoy another of our delightful Fellowship Suppers. It will be held in Fellowship Hall and gets under way around six o'clock. Dr. Giles will be present to lead us in an ol'fashioned hymn sing using our new hymnal. Sponsored by the Worship Committee, sign up downstairs with Jane Chaney for your contribution to the evening supper table. This the "big" Fellowship Supper of the season and we want everyone to come.

EACH ONE BRING ONE SUNDAY

The Membership Committee is sponsoring a Spring "Each One Bring One" Sunday on the 11th of March. It's not too early to be thinking about inviting someone in your circle of friends to come with you to church that Sunday.

BAKE SALE II

The second of three Bake Sales for the benefit of the All Church Picnic of June will be held today as part of the coffee hour. Support this good cause with a helpful purchase. Thank you.

A SINGING SUNDAY

Next Sunday, the Reverend Dr. David Giles, Executive Director of Evangel Ministries of Albany, New York will be with us to help us become better acquainted with the new United Methodist hymnal and to explore music in worship. Dr. Giles will be preaching on the subject, "Singing the Story". We shall also be dedicating the new candlesticks during the worship service.

ADULT FELLOWSHIP RETREAT

The Adult Fellowship Winter Retreat at Camp Kingswood, Hancock, New York, will be next weekend, February 23 - 25. The cost is $45.00. See Mark Corpron, Melissa Shaw or Lisa Ingram for further details.
# PARK AVENUE
## UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
106 East 86th Street  
New York, N.Y. 10028  
AT 9-6997

## CHURCH DIRECTORY

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<td>Minister</td>
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<td>Organist-Choir Director</td>
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## GENERAL OFFICERS

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<td>Lay Members, Annual Conference</td>
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<td>Mrs. Dee Schafffield</td>
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<td>Chairman, Worship Committee</td>
<td>Mr. Michael Schafffield</td>
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<td>Chairman, Day School</td>
<td>Mrs. Anette Lewis</td>
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<td>Chairman, Ushers</td>
<td>Ms. Effie French</td>
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<td>Mr. Len Williams</td>
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<td>Superintendent, Sunday School</td>
<td>Mrs. Brenda Thompson</td>
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SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY
February 18, 1990

ORDER OF WORSHIP
11 A. M.

ORGAN
"Song of Peace" Langlais

CALL TO WORSHIP

HYMN NO. 111 "How Can We Name a Love"

PRAYER OF CONFESSION (seated)

God of our life, we confess in company with
one another and before Thee, that we are wayward
and less than faithful servants. We have loved
things and used people; remembered slights and
forgotten kindnesses; called on Thee in trouble
and ignored Thee at other times; praised Thee in
word and failed Thee in deed; allowed the pres­
ten age to mould us and left untapped the power
of the age to come. Deal with us after Thy mercy
for we are sorry for our sins and earnestly seek
Thy pardon through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

SILENT MEDITATION - WORDS OF ASSURANCE - LORD'S PRAYER

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PSALTER Psalm 36 No. 771
GLORIA PATRI No. 71
AFFIRMATION OF FAITH No. 885

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ANTHEM "Almighty Father" Bernstein

SCRIPTURE Romans 8: 31 - 39 Page 983

PASTORAL PRAYER

PARISH CONCerns

ANTHEM "All Creatures of Our God and King" by Shaw

PRESENTATION OF THE OFFERING WITH THE DOXOLOGY

HYMN NO. 369 "Blessed Assurance"

SERMON "The Love That Never Quits" Mr. Clarke

HYMN NO. 670 "Go Forth for God"

BENEDICTION

ORGAN "Pasticcio" Langlais

*** Interval for Ushering

LAY READER

We welcome Grace Thomas to the lectern today. A
native of Houston, Texas, a graduate of Texas A & M
with a BS in Economics, Grace is an Underwriting Officer
in Marine Division of Chubb & Son Insurance Co. Here
in the church she serves as President of the UMW.

ALTAR FLOWERS

The flowers on the altar today are in loving memory
of Dr. Otto Broones, given by Carolyn Broones and
daughter, Jane Radnay.

GREETERS AND USHERS

The greeters today are Ann Bryant and Eric de Freitas.
The ushers are Richmond Bates, Lillian Bates, Michelle
Barton, Robin Chauncey, Larry Morales and Philip Yu.

AN INVITATION

Coffee and tea will be served in the Russell Room
following the service. Members and friends are invited
to share in these moments of warmth made possible for us
today by Jacque Notestine, Lynn Clarke, Vicki Jandro,
Sharon Johnson, Linda Quinn, Dee and Michael Schaffield.

CHURCH SCHOOL AND NURSERY SCHOOL

Sessions of Church School for children are offered
Sunday mornings from ten-thirty to twelve. Nursery care
for infants and toddlers is available on the fourth floor.

ADULT BIBLE CLASS

The Adult Bible Class meets on Sunday morning at
9:30 in Fellowship Hall. Gordon Bryant is leading the
class in a study of the Book of Acts. New friends are
always welcome. Coffee and doughnuts are available.