

"THE MIGHTY TIDE OF GOD ROLLED IN"

A Sermon By

Philip A. C. Clarke

Park Avenue United Methodist Church
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INTRODUCTION

They say that a ship strayed off course near San Diego a number of years ago. Stuck in a reef at low tide, twelve tugboats tried unsuccessfully to move it.

Finally, the ship's captain sent the tugboats back home. He sighed and said, "I'll just be patient and wait". And so he waited until high tide. What human power could not do, the rising tide of the ocean did. It lifted that ship and put it back into the channel and forward it went.

DEVELOPMENT

I'd like to think that something like that happened to the early church on the Day of Pentecost. They were all together in one place - confused, fearful, stuck...when suddenly the tide of God rolled in.

It says in the Book of Acts that there was a sound like the rush of a mighty wind. And above every head there appeared a tongue of fire. And these largely uneducated followers of the Galilean began speaking in many tongues.

News of what was happening quickly spread. Jews from all over that part of the world had crowded into the Holy City to celebrate the sacred feast. Curious crowds gathered outside the house where the disciples were staying. Each listened with amazement to the disciples testifying in their own language. There was such turmoil that some took the disciples to be drunk. It fell upon Simon Peter to interpret to the crowd what was happening. We're not drunk, he said. The prophecy of Joel was being fulfilled. God was pouring out His spirit on His people. And Peter began telling the Good News of Jesus. When he had finished, about three thousand souls were added to the Church. A good day's work, I'd say.

WE LONG FOR THAT EXCITEMENT

How we long to have such excitement in the church again! How we long for "the mighty tide of God" to roll in once more! Imagine the police called to our church here because the people on either side - our neighbors - complained that we appear to be drunk and a bit disorderly. I don't think that will ever happen. I could be wrong.

Most of us in our Christian faith are as sedate as former President Calvin Coolidge. Coolidge, say often said, kept himself under such control that when his death was made public, someone quipped, "How can they tell? Are they sure?" That may be said when the death notice of some churches is one day posted.

The church was born in excitement. And I've always felt that the church ought to be one of the most exciting places "in town". By that I do not mean that we should be rowdy just for the sake of being rowdy. There should be joy and enthusiasm...love and laughter.

A reporter once covered a campaign rally back in the mountains of Kentucky. He watched as the politicians made their speeches...to the loud yells of the mountain people. When one finished, the reporter asked a fellow who had taken a leading role in the cheering, "What did you think about the speech you just heard?" And back came the reply, "I didn't come here to think...I came to holler!"

There are churches where people don't come to think. They come to simply "holler". We do not call for that here, but still...the church ought to be one of the most exciting places in town. Why? Let me suggest three reasons.

A PEOPLE FUELED BY PRAYER

There ought to be the excitement, first of all, of a people "fueled" by prayer.

Harry Emerson Fosdick, for many years the great voice and pastor of the Riverside Church, once stood by the rail admiring Niagara Falls. The man standing next to him commented,

"You know...right there is the greatest unused power in all the world."

Fosdick, in his warm, kindly manner, quickly responded,

"No, I'm afraid I'll have to disagree with you. The greatest unused power in all the world is prayer!"

Fosdick, I'd like to think, was right...on target. Prayer is a dimension in our world still to be explored. "More things are wrought by prayer than this world has ever known" said the poet.

Here's a story you'll like. It's about two members of the United States Diving Team, which was completing in the Summer Olympics in Seoul, Korea. They decided one Sunday morning to attend Church in Seoul. They hailed a taxi, but unfortunately they could not speak Korean and the driver could not speak English. Trying to communicate the concept of church, they put their hands together as if to pray.

The driver quickly smiled, nodded his head and took off through the streets of Seoul...and finally ten minutes later brought these would-be-church-goers to the large city swimming pool. A problem in communication is what we have here.

It's ironic to me that that should have happened in South Korea for if you know anything about the growth of churches in South Korea, you know that they put enormous emphasis on the power of prayer - far more emphasis than we do in our Western churches.

Every great revival that has swept through the Christian community has begun with a commitment to prayer. The lay revival of 1858 affected the western world for half a century. It began with a handful of people in a small room of the Old North Dutch Reformed Church here in our own city. As the group grew, daily meetings were added. Within a few months they say that 10,000 people daily gathered at noon for open prayer meetings in the streets of this city. It probably helped to "fuel" the building of our second church here in 1858. And within two years, two million converts entered American churches.

Charles Colson has described it in this fashion,

"Like flood waters, the revival spread through the Hudson River Valley and on to Chicago, where Dwight L. Moody was just beginning his work with young people. Then it jumped the Atlantic to Ireland, Scotland, England, Wales and danced like fire across much of Europe, then to South Africa and India. There was no elaborate evangelistic organization. Communication was slow. Word had to spread from one prayer

cell to the next, from church to church, from city to city. It was a movement inspired by the fervor of thousands of Christian lay people."

What, you ask, were these lay people doing? They were praying. They were making contact with Divine energy. An exciting church is always a praying church.

AND TRULY CARING FOR ONE ANOTHER

another.

In the second place, excitement also grows out of church people truly caring for one

There was a Peanuts cartoon some time back that ties in here. It was a baseball game. Charlie Brown, Lucy and Schroeder are all sitting on the bench waiting their turn at bat.

Charlie Brown yells, "We need a run. We need a run!" Lucy asks impishly, "Hey, manager...what'll you give me if I hit a home run?" Schroeder replies, "A home run? You've never hit the ball out of the infield in your entire life!" But Lucy persists, "If I hit a home run, will you give me a kiss?"

Schroeder again replies,

"If you hit a home run, I'll meet you at home plate and give you the biggest kiss you've ever had!"

In the last scene, Charlie Brown and Linus are "bounced off" the bench, when Lucy jumps to her feet, her bat raised skyward in victory, yelling "INCENTIVE!"

Love builds excitement. I know that some of you probably are addicted to the daytime soaps operas on television - either daytime or nighttime. You know, to me...television is dull compared to the things that really happen in the lives of real people. If the life of our church gets humdrum at times, it's apt to be because there is no real sharing of what's going on in the individual lives of our people...our concerns, heartaches, joys and sorrows. I've often said that in all my years here I've never had a dull day.

The Prime Minister of New Zealand attended the coronation of Edward VII as King of the British Empire. Someone asked him on his return home what was most memorable about the trip. He replied that on the way back to his hotel he passed a slum section in London and there in a dark alley he saw a boy about 12 years old sitting with his arm around a girl of about 6 years of age. It was late and cold and the boy had draped his coat around the girl's shoulders and put his cap over her bare feet. That was the most memorable part of the Prime Minister's trip.

When people truly care about other people there is excitement. Exciting churches are praying churches. They are also caring churches. And truly those early disciples cared about each other. The Book of acts tells us how they ate together, prayed together, sang together and had all things in common. No wonder there was such electricity in the air.

AND HAVING A GREAT PURPOSE

purpose being realized - bit by bit and step by step.

One thing more. Excitement comes from having a great and a driving purpose and seeing that

Perhaps you know what I mean. Perhaps you have it in terms of your work... a clear cut purpose and you can see it being realized a bit each day. Or, it may be in terms of a hobby. A sense of excitement about it and a feeling of exhilaration that provides solid fulfillment. So it is with the Church. Churches that have a clear-cut understanding of who they are and what they are called to do in His name are exciting places to be.

What is our purpose? Can we not say that it is to claim our community and our world for the values we see embodied in the Christ-event? Can we not say that it is to bring this Kingdom of Christ - of right relationships - into individual lives by showing them Christ's love. Is it not to find those who are unable to find and help themselves and to flood them with God's grace that requires nothing in return. This is a mighty purpose that brings us together and calls us to march with Him.

How do we achieve all of this? We achieve it by committing ourselves without reservation to His service. Let me try to open this up by sharing what I think is an exciting analogy. It's from Jack London's masterpiece, The Call of the Wild.

It's the story of a magnificent dog named Buck. Buck was half Saint Bernard and half Shepard. 150 pounds of pure muscle. Because he was such an impressive animal, he was stolen...kidnapped off the streets of San Francisco and taken to Alaska where there was a tremendous need for powerful dogs to pull sleds through the wilderness snow. So cruelly was Buck treated by his kidnappers and then by his first owners that he was nearly broken in spirit by the time he fell into the kindly hands of John Thornton. Thornton was so humane in his treatment of Buck that Buck developed an undying liyalty to Thornton.

Thornton, however, wasn't perfect and the story continues. One evening during a conversation in the Eldorado saloon, Thornton was lured into making a thousand dollar wager that Buck could break a thousand pound load from a frozen standstill and move it 100 yards. Some dogs had been known to break 500 pounds, maybe even 600 pounds, but a thousand pounds seemed impossible. It was a foolish wager, but Thornton believed that if any dog could do it, that Buck could. Thornton didn't even have a thousand dollars. He had to borrow it from a friend.

Men spilled out of the saloon to see if Buck could possibly perform this feat. A sled holding twenty 50 pound bags of flour was standing frozen in the snow. The ten dog team that had been pulling it was released and Buck was harnessed in their place. A large crowd gathered.

John Thornton put his face against the face of his great dog. This time he did not playfully shake him as was his normal custom. Instead he knelt down by Buck's side and whispered in his ear these unforgettable words, "AS YOU LOVE ME, BUCK...AS YOU LOVE ME..." Then he stepped back and allowed Buck to do the rest. And, of course, Buck did. "AS YOU LOVE ME, BUCK...AS YOU LOVE ME."

CLOSING You and I face a task that the world says is impossible, the claiming of the world for Christ. Can it be done? All we have to go on is a voice in our ear that whispers, "AS YOU LOVE ME..AS YOU LOVE ME." Is there any task in this world more exciting than that. I think not. So let the mighty tide of God rusk in again and move this world that's frozen in its own ways...generating an excitment fueled by prayer, by caring for one another and by having a clear-cut purpose which we can see being fulfilled from day to day. The Day of Pentecost is here. And may it lift our church tonew heights of service, devotion and love.

This is our hope. This is our prayer. And quietly, let us pray for it now.

PRAYER

PASTORAL PRAYER: May 19, 1991

ETERNAL SPIRIT - WHO...whether we walk through green pastures,
beside still waters,
or through the valley of the shadow of death,
canst be our guide and our helper -

BEHOLD US NOW - here in this sacred place of worship, seeking in
a common prayer, light upon our separate ways,
and strength and illumination within our individual
lives...

SEEK US OUT - one by one - in those special circumstances of personal
need that have drawn us here to this sanctuary on this
Sunday morning. Help us now to "center down", to
look up and to see life from higher ground. Remind us..

HERE - lift up the unhappy souls into joy and the discouraged souls into
encouragement...the defeated souls into victory - and thus enable us:

"To fight the good fight, to keep the faith,
to finish the course..."

BREATHE into our hearts, O God, goodwill and generosity.

BREAKDOWN our stubborn prejudices.

SAVE US from letting un-Christlike attitudes and actions take hold.

FORGIVE US that at times we can be such a part of the problems of
the world, and such a small fraction of its solutions.

COMFORT US, LORD, where we are hurting.

REMIND US - as we worship YOU - that we cannot fellowship with You
if in our hearts we reject or neglect our brother who
is in need. And so we pray for the hungry, the homeless,
the hurt and helpless of our society. Sensitize our
heart-sight that we may see those in need of help.

HELP THOSE OF US who take Jesus seriously and who try to follow in His
Way always to be -

Agents of His love. Pure in thought,
gracious in speech, courageous in our
actions.

Grant us the serenity to accept the things
we cannot change - the courage to change
the things we can, and the wisdom to know
the difference.

ALL THIS we ask in the name and spirit of Christ, our Lord, in whom we
see hope for ourselves and hope for our world.