

"THE QUEST FOR THE BEST"

TEXT: "The Kingdom of Heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it." Matthew 13:45 - 46

It's evident that Jesus thought highly of this pearl merchant. He admired his sense of purpose, and his determination of character. I think that Jesus must have been impressed with the man's good common sense, and with the courage and the conviction that were behind it. Jesus seems to be saying that "Here is a man who is possessed of a knowledge that is most worthy of possession. He knows what life is all about. He knows how to use life!" I think that we would have to agree that knowledge of this type is very important.

I once read about a man who owned a beautiful, old violin. The man didn't know how to play the violin. He didn't know the secret of how to bring forth the beautiful tones that were hidden and tied up inside the instrument. When asked why he had the violin around if he didn't know how to play it, he replied that it served as a prop to keep open his front door in hot weather. I'm afraid there are times when we mishandle life in much the same fashion that this man mishandled the violin. In order to avoid this tragedy of misuse, it is well for us to study this pearl merchant that Jesus is referring to in this parable. There are several facts about this man that are worthy of our consideration and imitation.

I. PURPOSE

The first fact that is apparent about this pearl merchant is that he had a definite purpose in life. He was a "merchant in search of fine pearls." He knew just what he was after. He had come to terms with himself. He had a definite goal - a PURPOSE that ruled all of his other decisions.

This is the first fact that captures our attention. The man had a sense of purpose. And it's so important that we have some purpose in our living. It adds greater joy and meaning to life. Much of the unhappiness, the restlessness, and the frustration in lives today is the result of not having some definite goal in mind. When people become indifferent to direction and destination then life begins to turn sour.

Several years ago in the Rose Bowl, a football player fumbled the ball, and another player grabbed the ball and made a spectacular seventy yard run. A great roar went up from the spectators, and the player thought he was being cheered for his thrilling performance. When he was a few yards from his opponents' goal posts, he suddenly discovered his mistake. He was running in the wrong direction. And his efforts were worth nothing. The point behind the story is obvious, but very important. Are we running in the right direction? Is there any purpose, is there any meaning behind all of our feverish activity? We often see people running madly through life....making lots of money....living on a day to day basis....and all too often they awaken too late to the fact that they've wasted the precious gift of life.

As we come to terms with ourselves, and define our own purposes, I think that we shall find new power and greater happiness. Purpose brings power. It's been said that there's enough energy in one acre of sunshine to blast the rocks of the earth into tiny stones, if only the rays of the sun were focussed. And by the same token, I would say this - that there's enough energy in the weakest and the shyest person to accomplish great and worthwhile things if only the energy is focussed! Purpose makes for power.

II. HIGH POSSIBLE PURPOSE

As we get better acquainted with this pearl merchant, we come to realize that not only did he have a purpose, but he had the highest possible purpose. This is the second fact about him that captures our attention and deepens our appreciation for him. He had the highest possible purpose!

The pearl merchant was not simply seeking after the good, but he was seeking the very best. He was searching for fine pearls...the finest of all pearls! He's something more than just an ordinary merchant making money. He's a connoisseur of pearls. We know that the pearl in the time of Jesus was the most valuable, and priceless of all jewels. In searching for fine pearls, we can in a sense interpret this to mean that he was seeking the highest and finest values in life!

It's important for us to step aside from the feverish activity of life and consider our own purposes in the light of the real and lasting values of life. Are we seeking the best, or are we willing to settle for second best? And if we win the prize for which we are now spending all of our energies, what will we have? If we gain the goal for which we are now driving, where will we park when the sunset comes? Important things to think about.

Some years ago, a group of boys were playing on the banks of the Tennessee River when it was at flood level. About one hundred yards from where they were playing, there was a stack of lumber whose top was just above the water. One of the boys suddenly noticed a rabbit that had taken refuge on the stack of lumber. It was easy to see that the rabbit was just worn out, and couldn't go any further. One of the boys decided to go out and catch the rabbit. He got into a canoe, and made his way to the lumber stack, caught the rabbit, killed it, and put it into his pocket. As he was returning to the shore, he got caught in a treacherous current. The boat turned over and the boy was drowned. Three days later they found his body. They brought it to land and laid it on the fresh green grass. One of his companions came forward, knelt down beside him and took the dead rabbit from his pocket. Holding it up, he said, "This is what he died for!"

There are times when a man should risk his life in order to insure the quality of his environment. Jesus did this very thing. And there are times when a man should refused to risk his health when certain demands are made by his environment. Sometimes a man should be willing to die for his occupation, and sometimes he is foolish if he gives it more than forty hours a week! The judgment rests on whether his loss is likely to be a gain for others in terms of their own health of mind, body, personality, character or whatever you wish to call it.

A person has a high purpose in life when he is seeking to improve and insure the quality of his environment whether it be in the hospital, the home, the shop, the shipyard, the theater, the court-room, the church, and the office.

The pearl merchant was seeking the very best. We, as Christians, should be seeking to make our environment the very best!

III. RECOGNIZING THE BEST. The third fact about the pearl merchant is that we recognized the best when he found it. He was a keen judge of value. He wasn't fooled by any imitation. He knew the best when he saw it!

And by the same token, it's important for us to be keen judges of value. We need sharpen our eyesight so that we can recognize the things that are important and the things that are not important. We need to be able to tell the true from the false, the genuine from the superficial. We allow ourselves to be so easily bewitched by glamor. We're bothered by the external appearance of things. And we're bewildered when we discover that all that glitters is not gold!

It's easy to be confused by the crowd. We often see our friends scrambling after certain things, and we decided that the things that they're seeking must be the important and necessary things, or why would so many be chasing after them. Clovis Chappell, one of the outstanding preachers in our country tells a story that helps to emphasize what I'm trying to bring out here. As a boy, Clovis Chappell used to feed the pigs on the farm where he lived. Everyday he would empty a basket on the ground, filled with ears of corn - enough corn for all of the pigs. He tells us that there was usually one little pig in the group that would greedily grab an ear of corn and start running as if he had cornered the corn crop of the entire world. Some of the other pigs, instead of ignoring this one pig, would start chasing him leaving scores of other ears just as good lying on the ground. What was the trouble? THEY SIMPLY could not throw away the conviction that this companion of theirs had something bigger and better than anything to be had elsewhere in the world. And believe it or not, we're guilty of being taken in by this bit of pig-philosophy. We're guilty of chasing after things the value of which we have no better proof of than the fact that they're being sought after by the crowds.

It's dangerous to judge the value of things in terms of the number of people who chase after it! It's not only dangerous, but it's wrong. There are much better ways to judge the value of things. For instance: does it satisfy our deepest needs? Is it having a positive effect on our own lives? Is it improving the quality of our environment? Is it helping others?

Centuries ago, the Apostle Paul said: "Now abide faith, hope and love....." Things of the spirit.... things of this type bring lasting happiness and satisfaction. As we build our lives on such wonderful values, we're building on stones that will last a lifetime.

The pearl merchant wasn't fooled. He wasn't confused by what he saw. He knew the real thing when he saw it. And we should be careful not to fool ourselves in the things that we are seeking.

IV. HE BOUGHT IT. All of this leads into the final fact concerning the merchant of pearls.

"On finding the pearl....the one pearl of great price, he went and sold all that he had and bought it....."

This marked the climax of his wisdom. He bought the pearl. All of his searching, all of his seeking, and all of his keen appreciation would have meant nothing if he hadn't gone and purchased the pearl. He was willing to sacrifice in order to have it. And this is where man of us often fall short. We aren't willing to pay the price in order to have the priceless pearl.

There are some people who, instead of buying the pearl, talk about it and wish it was theirs. There are some people who, finding the price too high, try to persuade themselves that it isn't so wonderful after all. And there are still others who, finding the price too high, hang around waiting for it to be marked down. They admire the pearl. They feel that someday they'll buy it, but they're going to wait until it doesn't cost quite so much.

Henry Hitt Crane once told about a young college girl, very attractive, that he met while conducting a preaching mission on the college campus. Following one of the services, the young lady came up to him and said, "Oh Dr. Crane....your sermon was just wonderful. I'm going to be a Christian!" And Dr. Crane began to congratulate her, and then she said, "Oh I don't mean right now....you see there are some things I feel a Christian should not do that I'm not ready to give up at this time." That young lady, like so many others, was looking for a spiritual "dollar day" when she might get into the kingdom of God. She was looking around for the pearl of great price at the bargain counter.

But the pearl merchant that Jesus was referring to wasn't quite so foolish. When he saw the pearl, his eyes just sparkled. Only one thought seized hold of him, "How much does it cost?" And learning of the high price he decides that he'll purchase it! He hurries off to exchange all of his other pearls for gold in order that he might buy this one precious pearl. What does it matter if these pearls have been his pride? What does it matter if these other pearls represent the work of a life time. He must have that priceless pearl. There's not a moment to lose. Suppose someone else should claim it before he does. If that happened, life wouldn't be worth living. He hurries back....and buys the pearl. His pockets are empty now, but he has the priceless pearl in his hand. And there's not a backward look of regret as he walks away.....

Is this story of the wise merchant your story. Have you bought the pearl? I know that you're fine, decent and respectable people. I know that many of you are working hard for this church. I know that you're trying hard to be good Christians. But the question that I must press on your hearts this morning is this: HAVE YOU REALLY....HONESTLY COMPLETELY BOUGHT THIS PEARL? As you sang the words of the second hymn were you singing out of your own experiences, "Blessed Assurance - Jesus Is Mine!" Have you ever stood at the foot of the cross with Thomas, the doubting disciple and said, "MY LORD AND MY GOD". God is not asking just for our time, our money, our work, our prayers. More than all these he is asking for us....all of us. He's asking for unconditional surrender. For only when we give ourselves completely to him, and to the Christian way of life, only then does he give his all to us - and only then - do we find the pearl of great price!

"Take my will and make it thine:
It shall be no longer mine.
Take my heart, it is Thine own.
It shall be thy royal throne.

Take my love, my Lord, I pour
At thy feet, its treasure store.
Take myself and I will be
Ever only all for Thee.

LET US PRAY:

"Grant O Lord that what we have said with our lips
and heard with our ears this hour, we may believe
in our hearts. And what we believe in our hearts,
we may practice in our lives. All this we ask in
thy name. Amen."

"The kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant seeking goodly pearls, who when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it."

Matthew 13:45, 46

"THE PEARL OF GREAT PRICE"

The authorities and experts on the art of preaching all agree that the beginning of a sermon should be as startling and dramatic as a brick hurled thru a jeweler's window by a thief. The idea is that if the speaker can secure the attention of the audience or congregation at the onset of the sermon, he may then be able to maintain their attention throughout the entire talk. The only trouble is that the preacher may run out of bricks to hurl thru the window.... no startling or dramatic phrases with which to capture...

Consider for a moment the teachings of Jesus. What was the essence of his message? His teachings revolve around the phrase, "Kingdom of God". It may be paraphrased in different ways: "Reign of God" or "Realm of God". The core of his message was that God is the Father of all men. God is humane...worthy of love and trust. If a sparrow falls dead to the ground, God is not indifferent. His whole ministry was devoted to showing men what the kingdom of God was like, and what character and conduct made one ready for it. Men should strive to enter that kingdom and begin to live as sons of God.

His method of teaching was largely by what we call the parable. His thoughts were made vivid by parables. They were picturesque stories that were carried home and discussed behind closed doors or in the bazaars of the city. Jesus used these parables as an artist uses music or paint. His was an artistry of words. People heard and listened to them gladly.

The content of the parables was simple and familiar. He did not become entangled in theological profundities. His message was not one of complexity; there was nothing sensational about

his method. Somehow his teaching compelled attention. Men knew that he spoke out of insight, "as having authority, and not as the scribes." He painted pictures.....a man falling among thieves; the son who leaves home and almost breaks his father's heart; a woman searching for a lost coin. So Jesus goes from one picture to another. He almost becomes desperate that men should see that new world in which they should be living. It was the pearl of great price, the treasure hidden in a field, for which the wise man would part with everything else. "the Realm of heaven is like a trader in search of fine pearls; when he finds a single pearl of high price, he is off to sell all he possesses and buy it."

In great beauty the parable of the Pearl of Great Price is given to

SYMBOLISM OF THE PEARL

The pearl has great symbolism. Incidentally this is the only time Jesus made reference to precious stones. There is no mention of diamonds, emeralds, rubies or sapphires. The reason is very simple....poverty precluded any mention. No jewels in his home. At any rate, Jesus did know something about pearls.

It is part of the wonder of the words of Jesus that the more we look at them, the more they begin to glow with deeper meaning and beauty. His words reflect great insight. There is symbolism in his words.

Jesus is saying that the man who has the kingdom of God within him has the pearl of great price. That is, the man has something that cannot be successfully imitated. You've all read advertisements offering you artificial pearls for a ridiculously low price...pearls guaranteed to be indistinguishable from the real. The man who has spent his life among precious stones can quickly detect the false from the real, the paste from the pearl.

And in like manner, a true Christian can always be distinguished

from the counterfeit and false. His speech will betray him as it did the Galilean Peter. His actions will betray him sooner or later. One cannot keep up false pretense. The Christian who is the embodiment of the Kingdom, will glow with an inner beauty. People sense an absence of anything artificial..

There is also a sense of unity about a pearl. It has to be accepted whole. We may cut a diamond or emerald and sell it in parts. But not so with a pearl. To break it in pieces is to destroy its loveliness. There is no joy in a broken pearl. So it is with a true Christian - there is an inner unity and wholeness. The trouble with many of us is that we are trying to live in two worlds at the same time. Joy and peace of mind can only come through an undivided love and allegiance. Many of us are just "so good" - but we're not "too good". We suspect that the worlding is having a better time of it than we are. No doubt he is - at least his heart is divided. He is integrated though perhaps on a low level. We need to become integrated....to become as the pearl...the pearl which symbolizes wholeness and unity.

Pearls do not need artificial environment to set off their beauty. Diamonds do...they sparkle best in artificial light. In ordinary light they look dull and lifeless. However this is not so of pearls. Their beauty is best seen in light of open day. Likewise with the Christian. He shines by virtue of the light within. And, like the pearl, he shines most beautifully against a background of dark velvet. That's where your Christian shows up - he shines most attractively against the backdrop of sorrow, disappointment, loss and pain.

STORY OF PEARL

How does a pearl come to be? How is it formed?

There's a fascinating story behind the formation of a pearl. A speck of sand or small parasite enters the shell of an oyster. An irritation results. But the creature within the shell seeks to conquer and overcome the irritation by weaving around that

irritating intruder within it, a garment of lustrous beauty. And the result is a pearl. A pearl of exquisite beauty and of perfect symmetry.

Thus a pearl represents victory over an irritating intrusion. A pearl is the product of suffering - there is a giving of the self where that irritating element is transformed into a thing of elegant loveliness.

There is a principle of transformation at work. Can we take the things that irritate and pain, and weave about them a garment of exquisite loveliness? How do we respond to our intrusions of pain. How do we deal with our humiliations and defeats? How do we meet irritation and pain and unfairness? Do we have the power to change life's ugly irritations and intrusions into pearls of breathtaking beauty. Or are we allowing these things to conquer and sour and pain us?

The PRICELESS PEARL Well, there he was - the Pearl Merchant.

Sitting in that eastern bazaar with all his pearls before him. For years he has traded until he now knows that there is no one with finer pearls. Then one day word is received of a man who has travelled over land and sea and who possesses a pearl that makes all others fade into insignificance. So through the hot, smelly bazaar our merchant forces his way until he stands before the incomparable pearl. He is speechless at the sight of it. After gazing upon it for several moments, he then inquires as to what the price is. It is high, very high! But he wants that pearl of great price. And so he runs back to his own bazaar and despite all the jeers and laughter of his friends, he sells his pearls until he has enough money whereby to buy this peerless pearl.

"He sold all that he had". Yes, it meant sacrifice. Yet it was a joyful transaction. He was satisfied. He possessed what he had searched for all his life. It was a joyful decision. He went home

elated and happy. He had been willing to give up the good for the best. He had purchased the pearl of great price at the cost of other things good in themselves - but not good enough. The merchant was willing to pay the price....a great price!

There is a challenge in all of this for us? The kingdom of God is open to us. The Christian way of life offers us serenity and security. Peace of mind can be obtained.

The parables and the Sermon on the Mount are the experience of Jesus, set out in story form. He was no Sophist, playing with ideas. In his teachings there is found a philosophy of life, in pursuit of which one finds unity and an unshakable moral strength. The

We find ourselves in the valley of decision; if we are willing to pay the price, there awaits us all the exceeding riches and joys of Jesus Christ.

To every man there openeth a way, and ways, and a way.
And the high soul climbs the high way
and the low soul gropes the low...
And in between on the misty flats the rest drift to and fro.
But to every man there openeth a high way and a low -
And every man decideth - the way his soul shall go.

Almighty God, we invoke thee, the fountain of everlasting light and truth. Help us to perform what thou dost require. Direct us in all things. May we always endeavor to do good and hinder evil. Strengthen us to meet all the experiences of life with a steadfast and undaunted heart. Make us ready for adventure. Amen.

"THE QUEST FOR THE BEST"

INTRODUCTION

A well-known historian once said, "The history of civilization is the record of man in quest of his daily bread." I don't question the statement, but I would add that progress and civilization is also the record of man's insatiable hunger for knowledge of himself and his relationship to the universe. Remember that delightful slogan,

"Good, better, best! I'll never let it rest, until my good is better and my better is best."

There's something of that in all of us, something that keeps us learning and seeking and driving for things. Why? I suppose it's because we think they will give us greater opportunity for happiness. The journey for so many is to far away places. "Ah" we say to ourselves, "That's where it is...over there lies the bluebird of happiness".

DEVELOPMENT

I have the feeling that we're somewhat like the seven year old boy who decided one day to leave home. When he informed his mother of his intentions, she helped him pack a bag and even fixed a little lunch for him. And so he started out bravely, but when evening came, he returned home. He helped set the table for the supper. He hurried to do the usual chores that were required of him. At long last, when no remark had been made regarding his departure and his return home, he looked over toward the cat asleep on the floor by the fire and said, "Well, I see you still have the same old cat!"

The point is this. Often we venture forth in our search for the best and then return to find the same old cat "of wishing and wanting". Why? Because, while conscious of the goal, we have not correctly learned how to attain it, and the same "old cat" is always there until we learn that man's innate desire which leads him on this "quest for the best" is not to have the most or the best, but rather to be the best. The Master of Life put it to us long ago, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and all these things...all these things... shall be added to you". In other words, when rightly understood, man's true quest is an inner journey of self-discovery or self-realization. (to the beyond that is within)

OLD HYMN

There's an old hymn that I love that we use to sing back in Sunday School. Perhaps you remember it and sang it, too. It's called, "I Would Be True". Remember how it closes, "I would look up and laugh and love and lift". "I would look up and laugh and love and lift".

In a modern drama one character asks this question, "Have you reached the heights?" "No" is the answer, "But I saw them once....and they're there all right". We need to remember that. The heights are there. The great tragedy of life is not that the heights are not there, but there are so many of us that are not striving to reach them, or who may never have lifted up their eyes to glimpse them.

Dr. Cachia who read our scripture today is from the city of Edinburgh, Scotland. "Auld Reekie" as they call it - a city dear to our hearts for that's where my wife and I first met, back in Summer of 1954. I was fortunate to be studying at the University of Edinburgh, the recipient of a Rotary International Fellowship, and Rotary Fellows were often "wined and dined" by local Rotary Clubs.

Whenever the invitation was extended, I would respond and they always made a fuss over the students. On one occasion I found myself sitting at the head table next to Sir Edmund Hillary who earlier that year had climbed to the top of Mt. Everest. We engaged in conversation and I asked him at one point (not being a mountain climber), "Why would one want to climb Mt. Everest?" I remember his answer. Quietly and thoughtfully he replied, "Because it's there...that's why". The quest for the best. The lure of the heights...there in all of us.

LOOK UP "I would look up". This is the first step in our quest. Perhaps some of the men in the congregation can remember when they were a recruit in the Army marching on the drill field with many other recruits who literally stumbled over their feet in trying to master the close-order drill. The sergeant would yell,

"Awwll right, quit looking at your feet. Eyes to the front. Your feet will follow your eyes".

How true. Our feet do follow our eyes. If we keep our eyes stayed on the good, on the transcendent, on God as we see Him revealed in the person of Jesus, then we are relentlessly impelled toward our good. So, in our quest for the best, the first step is to "look up" - to look to God habitually, constantly, each day, as the Source of all our good.

LAUGH "I would look up and laugh". In the Second Psalm, David sings, "He that sitteth in the Heavens will laugh". How true this is. When we look up to God and maintain this "uplooking" consciousness in our approach to life, we find that somehow we can keep things in a better perspective and yes, on occasion even laugh at all the seeming foibles and failures of life.

The old idea was that to be a good religious person meant that you had to have a long, sad face. Parsons were often portrayed as sour-looking, long-faced persons dressed in black coats. Remember what Oliver Wendell Holmes once said,

"I might have entered the ministry if so many clergyman I know hadn't look like undertakers".

Today, we know better to the extent that one of the earmarks of a follower of Jesus is a smiling face and a sense of joy. And to have something of this in the face of all circumstances. Someone said that "what this country needs is not a new national anthem, or a Wall Street boom, but the ability to laugh spontaneously".

Dr. James Walsh of Fordham University made a very significant comment recently when he said, "People who laugh actually live longer than people who don't laugh". If laughter could be ordered at the corner drugstore, any doctor would prescribe many laughs a day. I'm reminded of an incident that happened some time ago; I shared this with some of you previously. Anyway, one Saturday morning a friend here in the city accidentally vacuumed up her canary. The canary survived this ordeal, but in describing the incident to me, she said of her canary, "He doesn't sing much any more....mostly sits and stares". Like so many of us..."sitting and staring" and not really feeling the joy and mirth of life.

So, in our quest for the best, the second step is to laugh. To recapture that wonderful feeling of joy that is inherent in all life.

LOVE "I will look up, and laugh and love..." There's a story about John the Evangelist's last days. He lived to a great old age and he became so feeble that the younger Christians had to carry him to the various meetings of the faithful. He didn't have the strength to preach even a fifteen minute sermon, so all he said was "Little children, love one another". The words became somewhat monotonous to the followers of Jesus, and so one day they asked him why he never said anything else. John replied it was the commandment of Jesus, "Do this alone, and it is enough." So, in our quest for the best, in ourselves, we never reach our peak or even approach it, until we learn to express love for all persons in all situations. Love is the great solver and dissolver of life's knots and tangles and problems.

I have always enjoyed the story of Michaelangelo, who while walking through the yard of a builder saw a block of mis-shapen, rough marble that some student had spoiled. When the great sculptor asked the owner what he was going to do with it, the man said, "It's useless...no good". Michaelangelo made the famous reply, "It certainly is not useless. Send it over to my studio. There is an angel imprisoned within it and I must set it free".

And he did set it free. That block of marble became the great, immortal, classic figure of the boy, David. When, through love, you look for the best in others, you see something of the divine possibility within them and help them to unfold and set it free. When Jesus repeatedly urged his followers to love, he was giving voice to the principle that man cannot be his best, or achieve his best without the power of love.

LIFT The hymnwriter added one more word and one more line. Said he,

"You have not lived a perfect day, even though you have earned your money, unless you have done something for someone, who will never be able to repay you".

I like that. Man is in the "express service" business, and he can never really find happiness, or be his best, unless he is giving himself selflessly in helping to "lift" the world. "Look up, laugh, love and lift".

In our quest for the best, in our search for inner happiness, for success and contentment, let us not forget that without service to others, without giving something of ourselves to the world and to those around us, it is absolutely unattainable.

"Man" it has been said in many a sermon "is at his best....when he is bending over and helping to lift his brother in need". Remember that Sunday morning in October three years ago when our friend, Ambassador Sikivou of Fiji, was reading the Scripture. He came to a verse in the 6th chapter of Galatians, paused and after a moment's hesitation, said, "This is my favorite verse..meaningful...let me read it in my own Fiji tongue!" It was that line, "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ".

Florence Nightingale, Albert Schweitzer, Martin Luther King and many others in all stations of society have learned the meaning of that prayer of St. Francis of Assisi,

"Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace. Where

there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled, as to console; to be understood as to understand; to be loved, as to love. For it is in giving that we receive. It is in pardoning that we are pardoned; it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

CLOSING "I would look up, and laugh and love and lift". Let us consecrate ourselves today as we "look up" to God and the good in every experience, every situation....

To "laugh" as we meet life with non-resistance, accepting the joy of the Lord, His strength, knowing that at all times "all things do work together for good".

To "love" as we see the innate possibilities, the inherent good in all persons, in all experiences, and

To "lift"....expressing our best efforts, "bearing the burdens of others", helping others to express the best in themselves.

Let us seek not only to be good, but to be good for something and thus make our lives an expression so that the words of Jesus are fulfilled in us, ~~xxx~~

"I...if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me".

PRAYER: Grant us, Lord, that what we have heard with our ears, we may believe in our hearts, and what we believe in our hearts, we may practice each day of this week in our lives. In the name and spirit of Jesus. Amen