

"THE RESOURCES OF THE INNER LIFE"

II. Someone To Turn To

INTRODUCTION

In the last two sermons, we have been thinking especially about the resources of our inner life with the intention of replenishing them, if possible. We know from past experience that the seas will not always be smooth, that there will be dark days as well as bright ones. We want to be the kind of people who will take the rough seas as well as the smooth seas, and go through the dark days as well as the bright ones without despair.

We are something like a ship; not much like a ship, but something like a ship - at least in this respect: how well a ship rides the storm depends not only on how well it is built (this is basic, to be sure) - not only on how well it has been constructed, but also upon the kind of captain it has, upon the kind of man who is on the bridge. I know very little about navigation, but I would venture to say this: that a poorly built ship with a good captain may do better in rough weather than a fine ship with a careless captain.

In other words: it is the inner life of a person which ultimately determines his destiny. His outer life is comparable to the ship - its keel, hull, propeller, engine room, bridge, deck and all the rest. His inner life is comparable to the captain - the mind, the purpose, the intelligence, the will - who directs the course of the ship. His destiny is determined not so much by his body or by his bank account or by the weather he meets, as it is by his beliefs and by his bravery in clinging to those beliefs in time of difficulty.

LAST SUNDAY

Last Sunday we went into the wilderness with Jesus to see what resources he had as he had his first encounter with the Tempter. We found that when he was under heavy fire, making decisions which would determine the whole course of his life that he had a Book to go by. He was not entirely dependent upon his own resources, his own intelligence, his own strength. He had a Book to go by, a book in which was accumulated the wisdom of past generations and through that wisdom spoke the voice of God. One of the great resources in that period of trial and testing was the fact that he could say: "It is written". He had guidelines; he didn't have to play it alone.

TODAY: GETHSEMANE

Today we follow him into another place:

"And they went to a place which was called Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples, 'Sit here while I pray'. And he took with him Peter and James and John, and began to be greatly distressed and troubled".

Gethsemane - that word you can never say without stopping to listen to the beauty of its sound. Gethsemane was a garden just outside Jerusalem - on the slope of the Mount of Olives. Jesus knew it well. He had been there many times. It was the spring of the year. It was the time of the great Jewish holy day - the Passover - the great Independence Day of his people, celebrated by loyal Jews everywhere.

Jesus had just had supper with his closest friends in preparation for the Passover Meal the next night. He knew it would be his last Passover, not because time was running out - he was only a little over thirty - but because he had run into opposition all along the line, the opposition of those who wanted to keep the status quo, the fierce opposition of those who had little or no imagination and who were not willing to make the radical changes that had to be made if they were to really accept him and this Kingdom of God. The opposition, he knew, was more than he could match - one man against a united hierarchy.

However, I think he knew exactly what he was doing. He did not drift into this situation carelessly or casually; he walked into it deliberately. He was ready for it - but not quite. Something in him still held on to life and held with an almost unbelievable tenacity, so that with the imminence of death staring him in the face, he still wanted to live; he still wondered whether there was any possible way by which he might escape the apparently inevitable death that was facing him. He still longed for life - for life was saying to him - do not let me go! Jesus was tempted more than once. The first time he was in the wilderness; the last time he was a garden.

THREE FRIENDS WITH HIM

When he went into Gethsemane on that fateful night, he took with him Peter and James and John. They had been very close to him throughout his public ministry. We gather that they were closer to him than the others. We wonder why - why were they closer to him. It isn't always easy to see why some people are attracted to others, drawn to others in a sympathetic union, one supplementing, complementing the other? Have you ever found yourself saying, "I wonder what it was that brought those two together?" You can't always fathom the mystery of persons attracted to each other. Sometimes two people may be absolute opposites, often in conflict with each other and yet you know, if you know them well, that there is something about each of them that draws the other in a completely sympathetic union.

It's hard to see in this case. Why were Peter and James and John so close to Jesus? He was a carpenter. They were fishermen. Their professions did not bring them together. And in no sense were they his equals. They were often slow of heart and slow to understand. But there was this about them - this important fact: they responded to him. When he called, they followed. Their response may have been lacking in some ways, they may not have understood what he said and not altogether bargained for what they were in for - but they responded to him. When he called, they followed. They recognized, though dimly, something in him which they knew to be of the mystery of God himself.

And because they responded, he was able to reveal himself to them - to be himself with them. On this occasion, he could let them see how troubled and deeply upset he was. He could say to these three what he really felt, "My heart is ready to break with grief". Being a man (more than a man, to be sure - but being a man), he needed someone who responded to him, who let him be himself, who would understand him, upon whom he could place the burden of his darkness, as well as the brightness of his glory.

When he went into the wilderness to be tempted the first time, he took a book with him. When he went into the garden to be tempted the last time, he took three friends with him. Not only did he have a book to go by in times of stress and times of testing and temptation, but he also had three close friends to whom he could turn.

DO YOU HAVE FRIENDS TO WHOM YOU CAN TURN

Do we have people in our lives to whom we can turn at these critical and pivotal points of life? The answer, of course, would vary if it came from you individually. Some of you I know intimately, and I know that you do have people in your lives to whom you can turn in exactly this way - people who respond to you and your needs, people with whom you can be yourself, with whom you can let down the front.

But I feel that too many people have too few persons to whom they can turn in this way. I have a feeling and I have it more as I know more people and grow older, that there are too many walls between us - too many fences, Robert Frost would say. Sometimes we build them ourselves - sometimes they are there - we have inherited from

past generations the fences that our forefathers built. Sometimes it is more than a fence, more than a wall - it is like a dam that holds the water back that should be streaming into the valleys of life. The result is that our resources, our inner resources, are greatly restricted. We have no one to turn to at the time when we need the help that only another human being can give.

VARIOUS REASONS FOR THIS

There are various reasons for this and I can mention briefly only a few of them.

For one thing, in the last twenty-five or fifty years, we have cut ourselves off pretty much from the generation before us and the generation after us. So often it seems that when people are through raising their families, that they are looking toward retirement. There are housing projects now which are limited to people over fifty and in which no children are allowed. The retired couple may live near the children that they have brought up, but it is unthinkable that they should live with them. And so often the children, when they get to be eighteen or nineteen, assume that if they are not married, they must have a place of their own - an apartment in the city. Freedom to live their own lives is what they want. They have the freedom, but often there is a barrenness and a loneliness about it.

Of course, we cannot change the pattern of our society. But I think we have lost something. I know it's not easy to live with people of different generations, and sometimes it is impossible. I also know that it is not easy for any two people to live together, no matter what generation they belong to. And I know that children who seldom if ever see their grandparents at close hand have been deprived of one of the great resources of their inner lives.

A second reason is that we are - by and large - impatient with long-term human relationships. This is partly due, I suppose, to our excessive mobility. We live in different places and we are there only for a short time; we make a group of friends and then we move to another place and make friends there. Under the present conditions, this is the best we can do. Nevertheless, it is true that the great relationships of life are the long-term ones - and these have to be worked on; they have to be worked out, and this - sometimes - under very difficult and trying circumstances.

The great relationship may be the one between two people who are mated for life - joined together in holy wedlock. It was not so with Jesus, but it is for many. The great relationships may be within the family circle. It was not so for Jesus, his family didn't understand him. Or - it may be with a person completely outside the family circle, with someone who is closer than kith or kin. It was so with Jesus. But note this: it was for him the long-term relationship - the relationships that had been cultivated with patience and forbearance, understanding and intimate association. Note this: when Jesus went into Gethsemane and wanted to take someone with him, he did not take Zaccheus whom he had just met and who had responded to him with almost an excessive enthusiasm. He took three persons who had been with him from the beginning. And by the same token, we would do well not to cut ourselves off from those who have known us, loved us, accepted us for what we are, even though someone more exciting and available and glamorous happens to appear on the horizon.

And finally - we live in a world in which more and more people are becoming less and less personal. Again, I suppose it is the inevitable side-product of the great increase in population, and the concentration of that population in great urban centers. And it may be more noticeable here in the city and in the northeast where people are perhaps more reticent than people living in other parts of the country. A week ago last night I had a funeral service over here at Campbells. It was the first time in my ministry that I have ever had a funeral service where no one

not one soul - appeared for the funeral service. I did not know the person I was conducting the service for. I do not know who made the arrangements, but it was something very sad. No relative - no friend - no one came. The undertaker came in and sat on one of the twenty or more chairs that had been set up for the service. Life is becoming less and less personal. You and I are not entirely apart from this. I think we tend to catch the infection of this impersonal mode of living which the city seems to foster and nurture, of wanting to move about anonymously. If only we could lose some of that inherited reticence which makes us think that nobody wants to speak to us because nobody needs us and approach another human being as though he or she were of interest to us, as though we might need him or her, if we could do something like this in our daily rounds, I feel certain that life would begin to look different for a number of people.

CONCLUSION And so as we go on from here - remember this scene in the Garden of Gethsemane. Even our Lord felt the need for some close friends to whom he could turn in trust in a moment of need and crisis. Oh, to be sure, we read that they fell asleep on him in the garden, but to their credit it must be said - they were there. Their spirits were willing, even though their flesh may have been weak. In that dark and lonely hour of his life, they were there. He had someone to turn to - someone with whom he could be himself - someone with whom he could let down the front - someone he could talk to on the deeper levels of life.

This is another of the great resources of the inner life. Don't overlook it. You'll discover that people are more than willing to reach out to help you - to be of help - and perhaps you, yourself - having received help - can turn around and be one to give it.

LET US PRAY We thank Thee, Our Father, for the few people we know and know well enough to trust - to be ourselves with. Help us to preserve that necessary reticence which will protect us from the casual curiosity of the passer by, and then give to each of us the grace to take the walls down, so that between ourselves and a few others there may be such a community of spirit and mind that we may be members one of another.

In the name and spirit of Christ, we pray. Amen

not one soul - appeared for the funeral service. I did not know the person I was conducting the service for; I do not know who made the arrangements, but it made me feel very sad to think that there was no relative, no friend, no one who cared enough to come. The undertaker came in and sat down in one of the twenty chairs that had been set up for the service.

At times I feel that life is becoming less and less personal. There is little feeling of community among people. You and I are not entirely apart from this for I think we tend to catch the infection of this impersonal mode of living which the city seems to foster and nurture at so many points. We seem to enjoy moving about anonymously. If only we could shake off some of that reticence which makes us think that nobody wants to speak to us because nobody needs us and approach another human being as though he or she were of interest to us, as though we might need him or her, if we could do something like this in our daily rounds I feel certain that life would begin to look different for a number of people.

CONCLUSION And so as we go on from here - remember this scene in the Garden of Gethsemane. Remember that even our Lord felt the need for some close friends to whom he could trustfully turn in a moment of crisis. Oh - to be sure, we read that they fell asleep on him in the garden, but to their credit it must be said - they were there. Their spirits were willing, even though their flesh may have been weak. In that dark and lonely hour of his life - they were there. He had someone to turn to - someone with whom he could be himself - someone with whom he could talk on the deeper levels of life.

This is another of the great resources of the inner life. Don't overlook it. People are willing to reach out to help you - to be of help - and perhaps you, yourself - having receiving help - can then turn around and be one to give it.

Several days ago one of our elder members, Mr. William Logan, passed away. He was in his 87th year. He use to sit right down here near the front, just in front of this pillar. Seldom did he miss church. We had missed him these past four months, ever since mid-October when I preached on the War in Vietnam. He disagreed strongly with the position your ministers took on the War. Mr. Logan joined our church in 1958. I treasured our friendship. His warm support of our efforts meant much to me. His openness and his honesty I appreciated. One day back in 1959, he sent me this card entitled "My Cherished Friend" which I have had scotched taped to my desk for eight years. Let me read it to you. Blessed are such person who have friends like this, for they truly have one of the greatest resources of the inner life!

LET US PRAY We thank Thee, Our Father, for the people we know and know well enough to trust - to be completely ourselves with. Help us to preserve that necessary reticence which will protect us from the casual curiosity of the passer by, and then give to each of us the grace to take the walls down, so that between ourselves and others there may be such a community of spirit and mind that we may be members one of another.

In the name and spirit of Christ, we pray. Amen