

"THE SIN OF ANXIETY"

INTRODUCTION

The intention of today's sermon is to extend the healing ministry of Jesus to one of the spiritual disorders of life. We begin with two hypothetical persons. The first is the person who avoids responsibility. His greatest talent is for getting out of things. He cultivates an attitude of indifference toward the things that ought to concern him. Somehow he manages to harden himself so that he cares little about what happens to anybody else. You can never really count on him.

The second person is the person who assumes too much responsibility, the person who tries to carry not only his own burden, but also the burdens of the world on his shoulders, the person who looks something like the mainspring of a watch - wound up tight, ready to spring, or snap at any moment.

Most of the sermons preached from this pulpit, as you probably realize, are addressed to the first person with the intention of arousing his sense of responsibility and disturbing his complacent attitude. However, the sermon today is addressed to the second person, to the person who by nature and temperament is likely to assume too much responsibility, to care too much. By over-extending his concerns and responsibilities beyond the realm of his reasonable obligations, he becomes ineffective in doing the things for which he might well be considered responsible. His sin is the sin of anxiety.

The text for the sermon is not taken from the Bible, but rather it is a line taken from a poem by T. S. Eliot, and it reads: "Teach us to care, and not to care - teach us to sit still". I think before we go any further, we need to define more carefully the people for whom this lesson is intended, for it is full of potential danger; the danger lies in the fact that some irresponsible people will take it and use it as an escape for escaping from their legitimate responsibilities.

THE PEOPLE FOR WHOM THIS LESSON IS INTENDED

The people we are thinking about are the persons who assume too much responsibility - the anxious, the ones who care too much. For example, the parents who cares too much about his child - who chooses his child's friends, who plans his life and thinks his thoughts, who even tries to choose his vocation, and who extends the normal care that a parent legitimately has for a young child into the years of that child's adult and mature life. I think the parent who assumes too much responsibility for the child weakens the child in the long run by relieving him of responsibility which he ought to assume himself.

Then, there is the man in the business world who assumes too much responsibility for his business - who is not able to delegate authority because he does not trust the abilities of others, who tries to do everything himself, who is afraid to leave the business even for a day lest something happen to it in his absence. He believes himself to be the indispensable man. As you know, there is no such person.

Another person who falls into this category is the person who cares too much about his own life - who stretches the realm of responsibility far beyond where it legitimately lies. He assumes re-responsibility for the future when there is nothing he can do about the future. He tries to make plans that will cover every conceivable emergency and takes every precaution to prevent disaster to himself.

Then too there is the civic minded person who cares so much about the affairs of the world and broods over them with such constant concern that he becomes virtually paralyzed as he watches the failures and breakdowns here, there and everywhere - and so exhausts his own reserves of power and tranquility that he contributes neither wisdom nor stability in a time of great crisis.

The vice, shall we say, of all of these people is the by-product of their virtue. They care, and there is nothing in life that is more wonderful than that deep concern that one person has for another. The vice of these people is not that they care, but that they care too much. We want them to care less without becoming too careless. We want them to pray: "Teach us to care and not to care. Teach us to sit still".

WHAT DOES THIS PRAYER MEAN? Suppose we move now to a consideration of what this means. How can we care less without becoming careless? My suggestion would be that we can begin by caring less about those things that really are not worth caring about.

I was reading recently that when Madame Curie, together with her husband, discovered radium, she refused to accept the royalties on radium. And when people asked them why they did not accept the legitimate revenues of their discovery, they said that radium was for the enrichment of the entire world, the enrichment of all peoples, that it was a gift of God to the world and that it belonged to no one person. In other words, they did not care about the personal profits of radium. When Madame Curie visited this country and was questioned by some of our money loving people who could not fathom the wisdom of a woman who gave up those fabulous royalty rights, she said this:

"Humanity certainly needs practical men, who get the most out of their work and, without forgetting the general good, safeguard their own interest. But humanity also needs dreamers....for whom the disinterested development of an enterprise is so captivating that it becomes impossible for them to devote their care to their own material profit."

She knew the meaning of these lines - at least to this degree; she knew that there were some things that were not worth worrying about. She cared so much about radium and its value to mankind that the material profits of it were hardly worth her concern and the expenditure of her own emotional energy. How we admire her.

Perhaps you and I need to get down on our knees and say something like this: Teach us, Lord, not to care so much about our material gains in life. Teach us, Lord, not to care so much about the impression

we make on others, about what happens to us personally when we undertake some daring, difficult task, about the headlines that we make or may not make in the papers, about the prominent people we know, about the luxuries we have or wish we had, about the social circles we aspire to, about the position in the firm we should like to hold. Certainly some of these things are not worthy of the worry and care that we tend to give them.

Then also, these lines mean this. We can care less about those things that we should care about. There are times when we shoulder responsibilities when we don't need to care about them. We do that failing to realize and recognize that there are some things that God cares about and takes care of, and that we do not need to worry ourselves sick about them.

The farmer, at his best, illustrates this kind of sublime indifference. He cares intensely about his plowing and the preparation of the soil. He cares about the quality of the seed he plants; he cares about the cultivation of that seed as it grows, protecting it and doing everything he can to secure its full bloom and fruitage. After he has done that, he adopts a kind of careless attitude about the things over which he has no control - the wind and the rain and all the mysteries of the unpredictable weather. Those things which God takes care of he puts in God's hands; he sheds that much responsibility by leaving to God the things that are God's and he devotes his time and energy to the things over which he has control.

Now you may be the type of person who is all tightend up because you feel a kind of responsibility for bringing up the sun in the morning and putting it down at night, for keeping the stars lighted, for governing the winds and the tides and the weather - for the complete future of your children over which you do not have complete control, the destiny of the nations which you cannot influence. If you lean in the direction of being that kind of person, then remember those lines from the poem. Realize that there are some things over which you have little control, and that there is power in the celestial hierarchy to tend to those things.

We need to say something like this: Teach us, Lord, not to care about the daily needs of life which God will supply provided we make the ordinary, reasonable effort and response. Teach us not to care about the ultimate outcome of the world beyond the realm of our ability to contribute to its welfare. Teach us not to care about our children's safety, knowing that they are in thy hands. Teach us to care less about the things we do ~~not~~ need to care about

THINGS TO DO

When you feel like the mainspring of a watch, about ready to snap because of over-extending yourself and assuming more responsibilities than you need to, the thing to do first is to sit down and sit still. Cease all action, all firing. Fold your wings and let them rest and in your mind say to yourself: "Now this world was going long before I came on the scene, and the chances are that it will go on long after I depart. It will run now without my anxiety and effort".

Next remember Jesus. Recall the things he cared deeply about. Remember this that he cared a great deal about "goodness" and not very much about "greatness". ~~Try to feel the depth of his care about trust and sincerity.~~ Recall to yourself the fact that he set his heart and mind on man's relationship to God, and that he did not care a great deal about what happened to himself in the process. Remember too that he was not completely absorbed by the evils that surrounded him; remember too that there were a great number of sick people he did not make well, a great many sinners he did not convert. He didn't seem to be too much disturbed by that, at least not so discouraged that he gave up in despair.

Remember that he talked one time about his observation of the flowers of the field. To him they were more regal in their simple beauty than Solomon in his glory. He said that as he watched them that there was in the very growth a kind of quiet development, no sign of that fretful anxiety that we associate with toiling and spinning. They reached toward the sun with a kind of quiet tranquility. And then remember his words: "Do not trouble about tomorrow - about what you will wear, or what you will eat, or where you will be. Your heavenly Father knoweth that you have need of all these things. Leave these to him. Seek ye first the kingdom of God". The big thing - care about that, and care tremendously. That is the thing to care about....don't trouble about tomorrow.

After you have done that, I would be almost certain that you will begin to feel new life welling up within you. There will be a great difference. Instead of going out grimly to wrench something out of life, something will flow from you because it is coming from beyond you. It will come with all the freedom and flexibility and wonder of things that are given to human beings. You will become once more the open channel by which the responsible action of God will take place in the world of men and women.

"Teach us to care and not to care.
Teach us to sit still
Even among these rocks
Our peace in His will"

LET US PRAY: Help us, O Lord, in the midst of the urgencies of life to sit still in thy presence, leaving to thee the things which are rightfully thine and assuming responsibility for no more than we are intended to bear. Quiet our minds, control our thoughts. Give us new strength that we may be enabled to go forward on our way - confidently and serenely - to do thy will.

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