

"THE WAY LIFE OUGHT TO BE"

A Sermon By

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### INTRODUCTION

We all love happy endings. We all like to see life "work out".

There's a story about Hollywood producer Sam Goldwyn. Sam Goldwyn, they say upstate, grew up in Gloversville, New York...my "home town"...and so this story caught my attention. He once listened to director Billy Wilder describe in detail the true life story of a famous artist. Wilder thought it would make a great movie.

"But does it have a happy ending?" Goldwyn wanted to know.

"Well" said Wilder, "it winds up with the guy in an insane asylum thinking he's a horse".

Goldwyn threw Wilder out the door. But Wilder wasn't discouraged. He poked his head back in and said,

"Okay...how about if at the end the guy who thinks he's a horse...goes on to win the Kentucky Derby".

We like happy endings. We like to believe that in the end people do live happily ever after. We like to imagine a world of love and peace and harmony and compassion for one another. The way life ought to be. But unfortunately, reality isn't quite like that.

### DEVELOPMENT

No, life isn't always fair and people frequently are not reasonable. Take the true story of an Illinois census counter. One day last Spring she approached a house, saw no dogs, and thought she was safe. When she rang the bell, a woman came out of the house and attacked her and bit her. The bite broke the skin, too, and required medical treatment. It's a crazy world that you and I live in. Still we dream. We share with St. Paul that idyllic hope of a world patterned after the life of Jesus Himself. Listen to St. Paul's words from the second chapter of his letter to the Philippians:

"So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any incentive of love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfishness or conceit, but in humility count others better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which you have in Christ Jesus..."

### PAUL BEGINS WITH CHRIST

Notice, first of all, that St. Paul begins with Christ.

"So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any incentive of love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy"

In other words, he's saying,

"If you have ever found Christ's support in an hour of need, if He has ever refreshed your spirit and given you the ability to hold on, then complete my joy by being of the same mind..."

These words Paul uses in the original text picture Christ coming and standing by our side to comfort, console and to encourage as only Christ can.

In one game this past season that matchless superstar of the Chicago Bulls, Michael Jordan, scored 69 points. One of his teammates was interviewed on television not too long after that night. The teammate was asked about his most memorable experiences. He said, "I'll never forget the night Michael and I score 70 points..."

We lean on Christ. Because we have found encouragement in Christ, we ought to be encouragers. However, many of us are not. Many of us prefer to find fault rather than try to build up.

Jonas Salk discovered the Salk Polio Vaccine. In spite of this grand accomplishment he had many critics. He once made an interesting observation about the nature of criticism. He said,

"First, people will tell you that you are wrong. Then they will tell you that you are right, but what you're doing really isn't important. Finally, they will admit that you are right and that what you are doing is very important; but after all, they knew it all the time."

That's human nature. Even when we are trying to do good, if we are working from our own resources alone, our efforts can be counter-productive.

A French novelist tells a story about a very wealthy woman he called The Woman of the Pharisees. In a way this wealthy woman was committed to the poor people in her village. She visited them all regularly. She always left behind a gift - along with a suggestion that with a little more ambition and a little more thrift they could improve their situation. She never left a poor family's house without making them feel worse for her having been there.

St. Paul is not counselling the church at Philippi simply to be nice to one another - even though their many little squabbles were profoundly disturbing him. He knew that "being nice" is a surface phenomenon that soon withers and dies and can even cause resentment and illwill. He longed for them to be transformed to a new creation - to have the mind of Christ as their mind. Thus he begins with Christ. As E. Stanley Jones use to say, "Get the center right and the circumference will take care of itself". A good thought for all of us to carry along with us in our relationships with others here in our Church.

THEN HE PAINTS A POSITIVE PICTURE

they will become. Let's take a look at the picture he paints for us there in his letter to the Philippians:

Then he goes on to paint a positive picture of the kind of Church he hopes

the picture he paints for us there in

"So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any incentive of love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfishness or conceit, but in humility count others better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to his own interests, but also to the interests of others..."

Wow! Wouldn't it be great if all churches could be like that? If Christ has brought you any encouragement, St. Paul is saying...any love, affection, sympathy...then pass that encouragement on to those around you. We need people who are committed to a ministry of encouragement. Let it be here with us!

George and Mary Lou were celebrating their golden wedding anniversary. A reporter asked George, "What is your recipe for a long, happy marriage?"

George replied that after their wedding his new father-in-law father took him aside and handed him a little package. Inside the package was a large gold watch which he still carried. And there, across the face of the watch, where he could see it a dozen times a day, were written the words, "Say something nice to Mary Lou".

We all need somebody to say something nice to us from time to time. I read about a study that was conducted at Springfield College in Massachusetts. A group of children were told to draw a detailed picture of a man. When they had finished, they were asked to draw another picture of a man. This one, they were told should be better than their first. When they had finished, they were then told again, "Now draw another man, this time better than the last".

No matter how poor their drawings might have been, no one was criticized for his or her drawing. However, neither were they praised or given any word of encouragement. They were merely told to draw another picture.

You can probably guess the results. Some of the children got angry and displayed their resentment openly. One refused to draw any more. Most, however, just looked angry, said nothing and continued their joyless, unrewarding toil. Each of the drawings, however, got worse and worse.

We all need to be encouraged from time to time. True, we have found encouragement in Christ, but we also need encouragement from one another. It can make a difference.

Recently I read about a man who was going to commit suicide. He was depressed, lonely and afraid. He decided to walk down the street where he lived. He said,

"If I pass just one person who smiles at me and is friendly, I won't commit suicide."

What if he had passed you? What would have been the outcome? The world needs encouragers. Make a point today or reaching out to some person and speaking an "encouraging word".

WE CANNOT BECOME A TRUE ENCOURAGER ON OUR OWN

Finally, remember this  
that we cannot become a

true encourager on our own. Paul writes,

"Have this mind among yourselves which you have in Christ  
Jesus". (Philippians 2: 5)

Maxie Dunnam tells a beautiful story about Thomas Moore, the 19th century Irish poet. Moore was married to a beautiful young woman to whom he was totally devoted. Shortly after they were married Moore was called away on business that lasted some time. When he returned home, he found the doctor waiting on the doorstep with terrible news. His beautiful wife had contracted smallpox and the disease had left her scarred and ugly. She had commanded that the shutters be drawn and that her husband never be allowed to see her again.

Thankful that his bride was still alive, Moore rushed upstairs, heedless of his wife's request. He burst into her room and started to light the lamps. His wife cried out in surprise and begged him not to. "Please go" she pleaded. "Please go!" "This is the greatest gift I can give you now."

Moore reluctantly left the room and went down to his study where he sat down to write. From his mind and pen came the lyrics and melody of a song that is still heard today. The next morning he mounted the stairs and entered his wife's room. "Are you awake?" he asked. "I am" she replied softly. "But you must not ask to see me. You must not press me, Thomas."

"I will sing to you, then", he said, and began his song.

"Believe me, if all those ending young charms,  
which I gaze on so fondly today,  
Were to change by tomorrow and flee from my arms,  
like fairly gifts fading away,  
Thou wouldst still be adored, as this moment thou art,  
Let the loveliness fade as it will,  
And round the drear ruin each wish of my heart  
Would entwine itself verdantly still."

As he finished the song there was a brief pause, and then Moore heard his wife get out of bed. Slowly he crossed the room to the window and opened the shutters.

Two questions: don't you imagine his wife had more love in her heart than she had ever had before? I do. And then, don't you imagine that love could easily overflow to others? Yes, again I do. That is the kind of love God is calling us to. A Christ-like love that can encourage, because he encourages us.

PRAYER Lord, in the quiet of this hour before You on this Labor Day weekend, we would pause to ask for a surer knowledge of who we are and what we as Your followers should be about. Show us the relevance of Christ for the life we live within and the world we make for others, that we may no longer live to ourselves but unto Him whom we call Saviour, Lord and Friend. Amen.