"TWO ARE BETTER THAN ONE"

INTRODUCTION Two are better than one. So declared the writer of the Book of Ecclesiastes. We might be tempted to ask - somewhat cynically, which two? Which one? And...better for what?

Now Ecclesiastes is not a book that the faithful rush to read. I suspect it's one of the three or four most expendable books in the Bible. It has some passages of commanding brilliance. At the same time it's a slippery book. One can prove most anything from Ecclesiastes.

The meaning of the passage read earlier is clear enough. Two are better than one because cooperation is better than aloofness. Where two are joined to one another they're able to cheer each other up - keep each other warm and present a stronger defense against attack.

To give the author his due, let it be noted that he did not say that two are more than one, but that two are better than one. A team is not merely quantitatively superior to an individual. It's qualitatively superior as well.

JESUS BELIEVED THIS, TOO What prompted me to preach on these ancient words today is the fact that Jesus also believed that two are better than one. Indeed, He incorporated this belief into His strategy for spreading the Good News. We read in Mark chapter six and verse seven:

"And Jesus called to Him the twelve and began to send them out two by two" (Mark 6: 7)

Up to this point, Jesus had been the lone spokesman for the cause. It was He who preached the Word and performed the mighty works. Now the time had come for the Mission to be shared. Aware of the importance of their assignment, and aware, no doubt, of their feelings of inadequacy, Jesus sent them out two by two. And He prayed with them before He sent them out. We may be sure that the pairing of the Disciples was included in that prayer. Anyone who has ever been responsible for room assignments in camp or college, or a touring group will know the wisdom that's required. A good idea to pray with them!

Where the Disciples are listed in Mark and Matthew, interestingly enough, they are listed in pairs. It's not necessarily the case that this was the pairing that prevailed when Jesus sent them out, but it might have been. Check that list sometime and let your imagination play with the various combinations:

"Simon, and Andrew, his brother; James, the son of Zebedee and his brother, John; Philip and Bartholemew; Thomas and Matthew; James, the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; Simon the Cananaean and Judas Iscariot". (Matthew 10: 2 - 4)

Always in the Bible God seems to "link" His workers together. Thus Moses is joined to Aaron, Joshua to Caleb, David to Jonathan, Bartholemew to John Mark, Paul to Silas, Peter to John. In many places in the Scriptures this bit of wisdom of Ecclesiastes is born out, exemplified. Two are better than one. Even to this day our Mormon and Jehovah's Witnesses friends send out their missionaries two by two. Sisters in the teaching and healing orders of the Catholic Church are usually found traveling together two by two.
SPIRITUAL GROWTH STRATEGY

But the two by two strategy is more than a tactic for advancing a cause. I would suggest that spiritual growth - if not spiritual survival - is much more likely to occur when two are related to each other as spiritual kinsmen or partners.

Many Christians flounder as Christians because they jump from the one of self to the many of the congregation and fail to develop along the way a soul-deep relationship with one other Christian. True enough, the Christian religion has its precincts where the individual must stand alone. Kipling had such in mind when he penned the line:

"The race is run by one and one...and never by two and two".

In other words, there are those occasions when we must go a space beyond the dearest of earth we know...there to wrestle and pray and decide.

Moreover, the Christian religion has its moments and its scenes when we enjoy each other in lavish numbers. Much is being written affirmatively these days about the corporate celebrations of the Church. It is vital to a man's spirit to know that he is part of an ongoing, vigorous entity that is larger than himself. The phone rang in the office of the Priest in charge of one of the great Cathedrals in England. "What time is your Sunday service?" asked the caller. The Priest replied, "What time can you be here?" It's hard to operate in that kind of setting. We draw strength from others and our spirits are lifted by celebrations that number many. And John's heart must have found fresh courage there on the Isle of Patmos when he was granted a vision of that multitude-which-no-man-can-number-out-of-every-kindred,-tongue and tribe.

But the Christian religion also rests on teams of two in which each member learns to priest the other. Such pairings do happen. They cannot always be structured or programmed. They often form and function unconsciously. They can appear either within or beyond the tied of blood and family. And no Church can afford to be without them. They're not restricted to one parish, or one denomination.

What the "Buddy System" means at a summer camp suggests in a very faint way what happens when two Christians enter into a "prayer partnership" and assume responsibility for each other. Friendships can form around many different interests - a hobby, a job, a political affiliation, a shared grievance, a common neighborhood, an athletic loyalty or pursuit. But that deepest level of friendship that is possible to us is a friendship that is formed around a common commitment to the things of God.

WHAT CAN THEY DO FOR US

What can these two by two arrangements do for us? Well, they can give us a better line on ourselves, for one thing. We're all pretty good at rationalizing our behavior and our decisions. We all have our blind spots and are given to self-distortion.

Most of the time we're not looking for correction. Oliver Wendell Holmes once remarked (and I think he's on target):

"You may set it down as a truth which admits of few exceptions, that those who ask your opinion really want your praise, and will be contented with nothing less."
Echoes become boring, however, once the novelty wears off. If we surround ourselves only with people who are related to us in such a way that they cannot level with us, then all we can hope for is the barren echo of our own desires.

On those occasions when we really want the truth about ourselves we don't always know where to go. The "ministry of rebuke" is seldom practiced nowadays. In counseling the emphasis has been on the non-judgmental, non-directive, non-evaluative approach. The counselor tries to hide his own convictions and reactions against the hope that the client will rise to some form of inner illumination insight and see reality for himself. Incidentally, a number of articles have come across my desk recently in which the concern is raised that there is room for judgment in Christian counseling. Not condemnation, mark you, but judgement.

Those who are interested in getting a line on themselves in our society often will make their way to a T-Group experience or share in an Encounter Group. It's been my impression that the casualty rate in both ventures is apt to be high and both are a kind of crash course. They're not the kind of thing that one can turn to on a daily or weekly basis.

What I am urging today is that we try in the coming weeks of the Fall (as a goal) to develop a single friendship in "Jesus Christ"...in which we can tell the other how he looks to us and find out how we look to him. A friendship in which there is no possibility of exploitation. A friendship that is cemented in a strong bond of total confidentiality. A friendship with another who does not want your job, your apartment, your influence, your wife, your husband. A friendship with someone who is equally with you in his dependence upon the grace of God. A friendship with one who will not drop you if you fall, or be envious if you succeed. Openness. Candor. But always in a spirit of love. It's a good way to get a better understanding of who we are and what we are... and how we look.

One has the feeling that the Senator who went to the rostrum at a political convention in Miami a number of years ago to second his own nomination for the office of Vice President would not have done so had he had a friend who could put it to him straight.

BETTER GRASP OF THE FAITH

What else can such a tandem give us? A better grasp of the faith. Our grasp is only partial and needs to be rounded out.

Remember that Jesus has mastered a variety of people. Thank God they are not all exactly alike. We're drawn into two by two relationships by both similarities and differences. It would be dull to be joined to someone who was exactly like us, and painful - on the other hand - to be joined to someone who was totally different. Two by two spiritual friendships involve points of likeness and areas of contrast.

I've been thinking about that rather strange union that prevailed between Peter and John in the early church. When Peter heard the Gospel and saw Jesus it made him feel he should embark on a Crusade. He was a man who was intense, aggressive and practical. But John - when he heard the same Jesus - in the same context tended to respond more passively and contemplatively. I can imagine that Peter at times enlarged John's vision of Jesus, while John, on many occasions, had his effect on the Big Fisherman.
God sets us up in these relationships, I believe, lest we assume that our temperament, our attitude, our perception of the faith are normative.

The man or woman who tries to be a Christian alone is bound to have a difficult time of it. Have you ever noticed that? There's a lot more in what Jesus said that ministerial comfort or a spiritual pick-up for a low spirit on a rainy, dreary day. "Where two or three are gathered together in my name"... but listen to the whole passage:

"Again, I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matthew 18: 19, 20)

In other words, one person's prayers can be lopsided... but if a person can bring a soul-brother or a soul-sister to pray about a given matter with him, then, said our Lord Jesus, it will be done for them by our Father in heaven.

STEADY FAITH, TOO

Finally, may I suggest that by being joined to another Christian in this "yoke-manner", we stand a better chance of keeping our faith steady and strong. It's easy to make a noisy beginning. But to stay with it and at it day after day - that's the big test - isn't it? "To walk and not faint... to run and not be weary" to quote Isaiah. "Don't tell me how high you jumped the day you came to the Lord" said that Nashville evangelist. "But tell me how straight you've walked since that day!"

You see when two people accept responsibility for each other they tend to negate each other's highs and lows. Chances are that both will not be down in the dumps at the same time, that both will not be weak in the same area. The likelihood is that the one who is down will be brought up by the other. The positions might well be reversed one month later.

At times we're called upon to serve as "stand-ins" for God to other people. There is a man whose name is familiar to most ministers and teachers of Theology. I refer to Arthur Samuel Peaks, who, though a layman, has given us some very searching commentaries in both the Old and the New Testament fields. Dr. Peake one time received a letter from a young man who had been his student. It contained a compliment that comes close to being the highest compliment that a Christian can ever know.

"I marked - especially at the prayer meetings at Western Street - your magnificent faith in a loving Father, and if you don't mind my saying what is on my heart,...I held on to you, Sir, while you held on to Jesus".

Sometimes that's all we have...the faith of another who believes. And it makes a difference, as you know. It helps to bring us through.

CLOSING

"And He called to Him the twelve and began to send them out two by two". We tend to protect ourselves against this kind of intimacy. In fact, I am inclined to believe that the scheduled activities of the average Church often work against such intimacy with another person. We push. We promote. In the process, we may experience a burn-out.

Some of you have read or saw the movie, I Never Promised You a Rose Garden
by Hannah Green. Remember in that story how a young, disturbed teen-age girl finally got out of a mental institution and sought to win a place for herself in the work-a-day world. The novelist had this to say:

"Although Deborah had gone to the choir practice at the Church and sewing classes at the High School and even a teen-age outing club, she went and returned...sharing her sewing machine, her hymn book, a map and a "good evening" and a "good night" and - no more. Everyone was most polite and so was she, but their lives had been walled against her."

It does happen. It's the responsibility of those who take Christ seriously and believe in the Church to see that it doesn't happen. Let the other happen. God joins His people to each other not only in congregations like this, but also "two by two". Let the coupling take place. Let it happen....and ask God now to grant you the openness and the courage to let it take place - in the coming weeks here in this fellowship.

PRAYER

We thank You, Our Father, that we are never far from help or from those who may need us. Forgive us if pride or lack of faith has kept us locked up tight.

Unite us to one another in such a way that truth may prevail in our estimate of self, that our perception of Christ may be broadened and deepened, that we may walk with steadier step the road of Faith with Him. So shall our Christian life be a joy to ourselves, to others, to Thee. In the spirit of our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ. Amen
ANTHEM: "Gloria"

"Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace, good will to men".

DUET: "I Will Sing of Thy Great Mercy"

"I will sing of Thy great mercy, for I was in deep affliction, and Thou didst deliver me. I will call unto the people, and the nations all shall hear me, and shall praise Thy holy name."

ORGAN POSTLUDE

The organ postlude - a final offering of our praise to God - comes after the Benediction. Time permitting, we invite you to remain to share in the beauty of it.

FOR THOSE WHO SING

New members are always welcome in the choir. Rehearsals are held Wednesdays at 6:15 pm in the downstairs Choir Room.

NOW'S THE TIME

Altar flowers for the coming months are now being arranged. Call the Church office if you'd like to reserve a Sunday to place flowers on the altar in memory of a loved one or in celebration of a special event in your life.

THE ADULT BIBLE CLASS

The Adult Bible Class meets on a Sunday morning at nine-thirty in Fellowship Hall. William Proctor serves as leader. Coffee is available and new members are always most welcome.

MEMBERSHIP COMMITTEE TO MEET

The Membership Committee meets today at 12:45 in the choir room. All committee members are urged to be present as plans for the coming weeks are reviewed. Please be in touch with either Frank High or Bev Limestall if you cannot be present.

PICK UP YOUR COPY

Be sure to pick up your copy of the September issue of "A Word In Edgeways". Copies are available in the narthex by the door as well as in the Russell Room.

This issue provides information about Fall activities. Several volunteer service opportunities are provided. Perhaps you can help.

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A new Church Directory with an up-to-date listing of names, addresses and telephone numbers is available in the church office. Call if you'd like to have one.
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He is treated for his blood disease and serious condition.

Anyone who is willing to help the family, please let

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ORGAN
"Adagio" Mozart

CALL TO WORSHIP
Mozart

HYMN NO. 66 "Praise, My Soul, the King of Heaven"

PRAYER OF CONFESSION (seated)
God, our Father, who hast set forth the way of life for us in Thy beloved Son; we confess with shame our slowness to learn of Him, our reluctance to follow Him. Thou hast spoken and called and we have not given heed; Thy beauty hath shone forth, and we have been blind; Thou hast stretched out Thy hands to us through our fellows, and we have passed by. Forgive us our transgressions; help us to amend our ways and in Thine eternal goodness direct what we shall be, in the name and power of Thy Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

SILENT MEDITATION - WORDS OF ASSURANCE - LORD'S PRAYER

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PSALTER "O Lord, How Majestic Is Thy Name" No. 555
GLORIA PATRI No. 792
AFFIRMATION OF FAITH No. 740
***

ANTHEM "Gloria" Haydn

SCRIPTURE Ecclesiastes 4: 9 - 12 Page 576
Mark 6: 7 - 14 Page 872

PASTORAL PRAYER

PARISH CONCERNS

DUET "I Will Sing of Thy Great Mercy" Dvorak

PRESENTATION OF THE OFFERING WITH THE DOXOLOGY No. 809

HYMN NO. 224 "Blessed Assurance, Jesus Is Mine"

SERMON "Two Are Better Than One" Mr. Clarke

HYMN NO. 170 "O Master, Let Me Walk With Thee"

BENEDICTION

ORGAN "Fantasia" Pachelbel

*** Interval for Ushering

LAY READER

We welcome Beth McKay - a member of our Church - to the Lectern this morning.

ALTAR FLOWERS

The flowers on the altar today are given by Janet Frisbee in loving memory of Pearl Weston.

USHERS

The ushers today are Mr. Morales, Mr. Bates, Mr. Padilla, Mr. King, Mr. Kunishima, Dr. Nieratka and Mrs. Williams.

CHURCH SCHOOL

Sessions of Church School for children are offered Sunday mornings from eleven to twelve. Nursery care for infants and toddlers is available on the fourth floor.

AN INVITATION

Coffee and tea will be served in the Russell Room following the service. Members and friends are invited to share in these moments of warmth made possible for us today by Miss Frisbee, Miss Hoelscher, Mrs. Yoder, Miss Limestall, Miss Langley and Miss Berg.

HOMECOMING SUNDAY

We shall celebrate Homecoming Sunday next Sunday. A long-standing tradition in the life of our parish, it marks the beginning of the Fall Season. Plan to be here for it.

Following Church next Sunday we shall enjoy a rooftop brunch for which tickets are on sale at today’s coffee hour. The Adult Fellowship and the United Methodist Women are co-sponsors of this Homecoming Sunday Event. Places for 100 will be set up.
PARK AVENUE
UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
106 East 86th Street
New York, N.Y. 10028
AT 9-6997

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Co-Chairmen, Day School Committee ........... .Mr. and Mrs. Hughes
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Coordinators, Adult Fellowship ............. .Miss Mary Pat Englehart
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