

"WHY BOTHER ABOUT GOD?"

INTRODUCTION

The sermon today begins with a story about a young couple. I think that all of you know this couple, the only thing is that the couple that you know is not the same couple that I know! The couple that I know are both well-born; both are from fine families; both are, relatively speaking, well off. That is to say, they have no financial worries or pressures, none, at least for the present. Both of them are very attractive, and both of them are well educated, having been educated in the finest schools their parents could find. Both of them were reared in the Church, not in the same denomination of the Church, but both of them were raised in the Church of their parents, and now both of them belong the same Church, a Church that they rarely, if ever, attend. They're happily married, and as far as any two people can be, they're perfectly mated.

On one occasion they tried to tell me why it was that they seldom, if ever, go to church. And they began with the fact that Sunday is the one day - I won't even finish the sentence because you've heard it so many times, and you know what the rest is likely to be. Sunday, INDEED, is the one day - and I was tempted to finish the sentence, but I like them so much I wouldn't want to embarrass them for the world, Sunday, indeed, is the one day that the Church asks you to give to God. But I could partly, if not completely, understand their predicament, and at least I respect them for their honesty and sincerity. And so they went on to tell me that Sunday is the one day that they can sleep late, the one day that the husband can putter around the house. And besides, they added, Saturday night is likely to be a late night. Some Sundays they go out to the country visiting relatives, or pursuing recreation. And on the Sundays that they're in the city, they're relaxing at home with the newspapers. And so it is that the Church has been virtually eliminated from their lives.

DEVELOPMENT

Now I'm now suggesting this situation to you with any intention of scolding the couple involved. I think I know enough about life to sympathize with them, and besides I know enough about myself to know that I like to have one morning each week to sleep late, read the papers, and relax. I'm far more concerned in trying to see what lies behind all of this. And I think if we put our imaginations to work for a few minutes on this situation, we'll discover behind all of this an attitude that can be summed up in this fashion:

"Why bother about the Church? Life's complicated enough as it is with our short, busy weeks, and our long weekends, without taking on some church responsibilities. And why bother with Christianity anyway? We've got enough to think about without getting caught up in something that's difficult to understand let alone practice. And besides we got enough religion when we were youngsters to last us a lifetime. You see, our parents made us go to Church. Mind you....that's the last thing that we're going to make our children do!"

And if we press this situation a little further, I think that we'll discover an even greater question involved, the question that I've chosen as the subject of this sermon, "Why bother about God!"

"Yes....why bother about God? Nobody has ever seen him? And no two people ever seem to agree either as to what he's like! Why bother about God. It's all so vague, and besides he's been wrapped up in so much mystery. Why bother about Him....especially when we seem to be getting along so well without Him. We're happy. We have a good life, plenty to eat, and plenty of good friends, and none of them seem to be too concerned with Him. Why take on something else that's just going to raise questions, give us additional responsibilities, and perhaps call on us to do some unpleasant things?"

And so this couple is saying practically the same thing that the French scientist, Laplace, said to Napoleon the First when he asked him what room he had left for God in the cosmology of his celestial mechanics. He replied, "Why Sire.....I have no need for that hypothesis."

WHY BOTHER ABOUT ANYTHING IN
LIFE EXCEPT THOSE THINGS THAT
MAKE LIFE POSSIBLE AND PLEASANT?

"Why bother about God?" I
suppose my question to that
couple and to the thousands
of people who share their

point of view would be something like this: Why bother about anything in life except those things that make life possible and pleasant? You never stop to ask yourself, "Why bother with food?" You have to. It's necessary. A person can't live without it. And those of us who are baseball fans, never stop to ask ourselves, "Why bother about baseball?" We bother about it simply because it brings us a great deal of pleasure. A friend of mine raises fish. He spends a great deal of time, and money on those fish. And although I can't share his enthusiasm for his fish, I suppose he bothers about the fish because they bring him a great deal of pleasure. But God....that's an entirely different matter. We can live without God. We can live without paying any attention to the things of God. Thousands of people are existing without God, and some of them seem to be doing allright too! Sometimes we can live a great deal more comfortably without God. You know how it is - no one to nag you from Above, no one to needle you from within. No one to make you feel like a worm when you've done something that you shouldn't have done. You see the assumption behind this point of view is this, that the only things worth bothering about in life are those things that are necessary and pleasant!

But on the other hand, isn't it true and isn't it interesting that some of the things that some people have bothered the most about and cared the most about were things that were neither necessary nor pleasant. Let me give you an illustration to bring this out. Take Gandhi, for instance. Certainly he's one of the conspicuous figures of the 20th century. He spent most of his life bothering about the freedom of his people. He didn't have to. It wasn't necessary. Certainly he could have made a better living as a lawyer. And it wasn't pleasant. All it brought him was contempt, at home and abroad. In the end it brought him assassination. And certainly what's true of Gandhi is true of Albert Schweitzer. He's spent fifty years of his life bothering about the health of a few negroes in Africa. It wasn't necessary for him to do this. He could have been a great musician, or a great writer. And certainly it's been far from pleasant. Of course these two men are famous. It's always easy to use famous people for illustrations. But one doesn't always have to do this.

I think there are people in our congregation today who have bothered about some things that are of no earthly benefit to them. For instance, some of them have bothered about children and young people in this community. It hasn't been necessary for them to do this, and mind you, it hasn't always been pleasant either. I've often wondered why they do these things, and the only answer I can come up with is this, that they do some of these things, and bother about them because something in them is responding to something high above them.

And so I'd like to say this, and if you remember nothing more from this sermon than this one thought, then I'll be satisfied. In my mind, a man is not a man until he has begun to bother about some things that are of no earthly benefit to him whatsoever! And so if I could say to my couple, and to the thousands of people who share this point of view, what I would like to say, it would be something like this. If you've settled down to bother only about those things that make life possible and pleasant, and to do only those things that bring you immediate pleasure and physical satisfaction, then you need to be shaken before you get settled into a rut that could become deeper than any grave that's ever been dug. For when a person is willing to settle for little more than an animal's existence, that you can be sure that he's on the way to becoming little more than an animal himself!

WHY DO PEOPLE BOTHER ABOUT GOD, ANYWAY???

Now, so far this morning, we've been asking this question, "Why bother about God?" as though it were paraphrased, "Why should a person bother about God?". Perhaps we need to turn it around and put it in a different form. Let's put it this way, "Why do people bother about God". I think that there are three reasons why a person bothers about God. I'll try to make them as brief and as explicit as possible.

FIRST: People bother about God because they have to. What I mean by this is that there's something in all of us that responds to that which is over and above us all. All of us, at one time or another, crave God and need God. To be sure, we aren't always aware of this, and I think this too, and I may be wrong, but sometimes we need God a great deal more than we think we do. We often express this desire in different ways. For instance, when a person comes to that point when he begins to wonder what it's all about, life, with its moments of confusion and contradiction; when he stops to wonder if there's any meaning or any purpose, whether life's worth living or not, THEN he's beginning to reach out for God. When a person looks for meaning and purpose in life, then he's looking for God, for whatever else God may mean, he does mean purpose and meaning and order. Do you see what I'm driving at. I'm not sure whether you do. Let me give you another example. Take, for instance, a person who's been thrown around by the storms of life. He's in trouble. He's really having a rough time of it. He begins to reach out for something to hang on to, to hold on to in the storm. When he reaches out for something to hang on to, he's reaching out for God, for the security of the most High!

And so one of the reasons why we bother about God, is because we have to. The very nature of life is such that we're driven to him. Even when things are going well, we want purpose and order and meaning. And when things aren't going so well, then we want God even all the more. That night as I sat there talking to this couple, I began to wonder what would happen if someday this couple were to have a child,

and that child were suddenly to become sick and not recover. I wondered what they would do, whether they'd have a reason then for bothering about God. Whether they'd be able to come through the storm. It's something to think about.

SECOND: The second reason why people bother about God is once again because they have to, although in a slightly different sense and different way from the reason which I just gave. There's something outside all of us that we can't get away from no matter how fast we try to go or how far we try to run. This is hard to explain. You know it's something like the Law of Gravity. All of us know something about the Law of Gravity, but I doubt if there's any one person today who can really describe it and completely understand it. But we need this Law of Gravity in order to explain what happens in the world, and in addition, we can never seem to get away from the very fact of it. So it is with God!

All of you are familiar with the story of Adam and Eve and how they tried to get away from God, and how they met him in the cool of the day. Well God never confronts us in such a dramatic fashion. He seems to get through to us in a much more subtle fashion. We can never completely get away from Him, no matter how far we go, and how fast we try to run. In the long run, this God that we think we needn't bother about suddenly looms up in front of us. I wish I could make it more explicit to you, but perhaps it isn't necessary. Some of you know what I'm driving at. You've been through it. Perhaps in some unexpected crisis, moral or otherwise, this reality, this presence that you had tried to avoid stood squarely in your path.

THIRD: In a deeper sense, the Christian bothers about God because God has bothered about him. This past week as I was trying to work out the answers to this question in my own mind, the thought kept coming back into my mind that perhaps we ought to be asking ourselves this question: Why does God bother about us. Some of us can be pretty indifferent, unappreciate and dull when it comes to God and the things of God. Why does God bother about us? And mind you, he does to! He shares his life with us. He's given us a portion of his own divine freedom so that we can be ourselves, live our own lives, make our own decisions, and yes, even defy Him if we want to. And furthermore he has shared his mind with us through the inspired and illumined minds of the prophets and the poets. And he's shared his own divine creative gift with us enabling us to do some things that are almost beyond comprehension. And yes, he's even shared his love with us. At one time in history he came and lived among us and showed us what life can be like when it's lived under Him. If somebody has bothered that much about you, then it's a little difficult not to bother about him. And so, even though it's beyond our complete understanding and our complete comprehension, we should bother about God and the things of God, because in a deeper and very real sense, he has bothered about us. For as the psalmist reminds us: We love God, (or should love God) because He first loved us.

I fled Him, down the nights and dawn the days,
I fled Him, down the arches of the years,
I fled Him, down the ways of my own mind,
And in the mist of tears, I hid from Him,
And under running laughter.....
UP vistaed hppes I sped;
And shot, precipitated,

A down Titanic glooms of chasmed fears
From those strong feet that followed, followed after.

But with unhurrying chase, and unperturbed pace.
Deliberate speed, majestic instancy...

They beat.....and a voice beat
More instant than the feet...

'All things betray Thee, who betrayest me.'

LET US PRAY:

O God, in this moment of quiet, after we have given ourselves once again to Thee, listened to Thy word.....HELP us to realize in our own lives some of the things to which we now aspire, and accept our intentions for achievement, and help us to grow more and more in our appreciation of Thee. Amen