

"THE GIVING HEART"

INTRODUCTION

The sermon this morning begins with this observation that all of us get our hearts fixed upon something. Some ambition, some dream, some interest, some way of looking at life settles down in our imagination and takes possession of our wills. Out in a dusty wasteland of our country, neighboring close to a desert town, a note was written with a stub of a pencil on an old piece of wrapping paper. This note was put into a baking powder can, and the can was wired to an old broken down pump that stood near a well. This is what the note said:

"Under the white rock I buried a bottle of water out of the sun, cork end up. There's enough water in it to prime this pump, but not if you drink some first. Pour about one-fourth and let her soak to wet the leather. Then pour the rest medium fast and pump. You'll get water. The well never has run dry. Have faith. When you get watered up, fill the bottle and put it back like you found it for the next feller.

Signed, Desert Pete

PS: Don't go drinking up the water first. Prime the pump with it....I've given my last dime away a dozen times to prime the pump of my prayers and I've fed my last beans to a stranger while saying 'Amen'. It never failed yet to get me an answer. You've got to get "Your Heart Fixed To Give" before you can be given to."

The message of Desert Pete is a message of profound fact. It identifies itself, homely as it is, with that important word of Jesus: "He that findeth his life shall lose it; and he that loseth his life for my sake, shall find it".

It's as simple as that. It's how you get your heart fixed that counts. Someone has said that "character is the constant habit not of simply doing right deeds, but of desiring right ends". It's how your heart is fixed....whether you are going to prime the pump and share the blessing, or whether you are going to drink the water and forget the others. It's a question of the slant of your life. Your life becomes a matter of your desire. John Dewey, who early advocated the idea of do as you please, one day was out walking with his small son. The boy stepped into a puddle of water and stood there. A friend who happened to pass by exclaimed to Dewey: "You've got to get him out of there or he will catch cold and get pneumonia" To which Dewey replied, "I know. I've been trying to think of some way to get him to want to get out". Some desire sets up a wanting at the center of your life, and you begin mildly, ever so mildly, but finally to live for it. Whatever you want most, becomes your master. In reality, it becomes you.

Suppose we consider four things that people are so apt to get their hearts fixed upon.

I. NOTHING AT ALL

To begin with, there are some people whose hearts are set on nothing at all. I suppose that that is something. It reminds one of that line in Gilbert and Sullivan, "He did nothing in particular, but he did it very well". People whose hearts are set on nothing at all are as colorless as the oatmeal some

people eat for breakfast.

II. FIXED ON TRIVIA And then too, there are people who have their hearts fixed on trivia...on trifles...on unimportant matters. I've been fascinated with the story of a convention that met in Cincinnati some ago, a gathering of people who call themselves TOPS. The initials stand for "Take Off Pounds Sensibly". There must have been two or three thousand people at that gathering. These women felt that they had a cause as important as Alcoholics Anonymous. Think of it. They got together not for the purpose of studying means and methods for reducing - not at all. They gathered mainly to acknowledge their common plight, to share their feelings, and to germinate morale in order to meet the challenge of taking off pounds sensibly. And there's a men's group connected with it.

Eugene Bartlee passes on to us the story of a man by the name of Wahlstrom - "a thinking kind of man". It seems that Wahlstrom purchased an old bombsight. He took it apart to see what it was like. And when he started to put it back together, he added some other miscellaneous parts. He became fascinated with his new pastime. His friends and neighbors began to bring in parts of machinery for his use. He went on expanding his mechanism. For ten years, he kept putting together wheels, cogs, belts and bolts. As a result he had a machine that people called "Wahlstrom's Wonder". When he threw a switch, three thousand parts began to move, bells rang, lights flashed, belts from big wheels ran small wheels. There's only one difficulty", Bartlee+ remarked....."It doesn't do anything...it doesn't go anywhere" "It just runs".

That's exactly it. There are too many people who fall into the same category as this machine. They're not doing anything significant with their lives. There is no purpose. They just run. People whose hearts are set on trivia...on trifles.

III. FIXED ON AN INDULGENCE In the third place, there are people whose hearts are fixed on an indulgence. We have the emotional power to give ourselves to something uplifting or something degrading, to something good or something evil.

A recent article in the World Telegram and Sun caught my attention and imagination. The article had to do with a man down in the Bowery. You may have read about him. Ray Salyer, a Bowery alcoholic, turned down a forty thousand dollar movie contract. "I don't want the forty thousand dollars" he was quoted as saying to the reporter. "I don't ever want to come back. I just want the Bowery and to be left alone". The forty-two year old Salyer was one of three alcoholics who were asked to serve in a motion picture documentary on the Bowery. "He said, "I lock myself in with my half gallon of wine and I go on a week's bender. Now and then I eat a can of beef soup. Now and then I bum a day's work to get money for the booze." And then Salyer said this revealing thing: "There came a day in my life when I knew what I was doing. But I was no longer capable of doing what was right. Maybe you don't know what I mean. Or what it does to a man who starts to drink...they've tried to straighten me out. I like to drink because there is nothing else in life for me but booze". Salyer's heart was fixed on drink. Remember - it's what you get your heart fixed on that determines your destiny. So easily you can become insensitive to other things but that which is your consuming desire.

FIXED TO GET

Then there are people whose hearts are fixed to get.

Not that they get very much. They don't get enough.

I read an interesting story while on vacation. This is a story that is a little difficult to follow mathematically, but here it is anyhow. Uncle Jim was out to get some wild turkeys. He set a box right in their path with a trap door attached to a string. He put some corn in the box and then sat down at the edge of the clearing to manipulate the string. He watched and sure enough eleven wild turkeys eventually were lured to the trap. Ten of them went into the box. One of them was outside. Uncle Jim waited. He thought he should have all eleven, but in a moment three of them walked out. One of the three came back in. He thought to himself, "I don't want to lose the other two", so he waited for them. Then five went out and that alarmed him, for there were only three left. If he could get two of them back in, he would let down the door. But instead two more went out and there was only one left. Well, he couldn't possibly face that at home, so he waited a while but finally the one walked out. When all you want is to get, you do not get enough. There is no genuine joy in just getting.

There are people who come to church simple in order to receive, in order to get. They are the victims of a culture that is based upon getting, which is out of harmony with God's will. They are really on no one's side but their own. How like Zebedee's sons. When they heard that the Master might be crowned king, they got into a huddle. "This may come off" they said. "If it does, what will there be in it for us?" And so they appealed to Jesus, "Lord, grant us to sit - one at your right hand and one at your left in your glory." Jesus saw what was going on in their minds. He saw that perhaps their good motives were being mixed with motives not so good. Prestige, power, an opportunity to shine by a little reflected glory. You will recall how he turned around to them and said, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink?"

There are persons all around us who take the drinking water while they have it. "Who knows" they say, "If the pump will work....you can't be sure". "There's enough for my thirst.....what else matters". Their hearts are fixed on getting.....getting for themselves.

A LARGER MEANING

Now the Christian ought always to fix his heart on something larger than self. He ought to give himself to something so big and so significant that it will free his life to enter into a larger meaning. This is what Christ does for a man. It sets him free for a meaningful life. T. R. Glover once said about Marcus Aurelius that he never found anything in life big enough to believe in to make him great. It's that liberation that comes when one joins Christ's cause with one's whole soul that gives a person a sense of larger meaning and makes for spiritual health and growth of personality.

When you get your heart fixed on serving Christ you have a new attitude toward others. Need I remind you that it is in the very structure of the Christian life to leave enough water to prime the pump for someone else. And when you do, you confirm for the other person the feeling that goodness is fundamental to human life. Without giving there can be no love, and without love there can be no Christian life.

Today we began a new church season together. This church, although small in numbers and limited perhaps at this time in terms of the service which it can provide, has great potential. It has been my dream and the dream of the laymen of this church who have been intimately associated with it over the years, that this church under the leadership of the Holy Spirit, would one day rise to great levels of Christian service. If we are to realize our dreams of Christian service in this place, we must then have a new sense of devotion and commitment. We need with all our will to say, "Here is my life. Take it, Lord. Use it in whatever way you will". I am talking about a baptism of the spirit, of holding your life out in your hands for the Lord to take and to use. We need so desperately people who will leave enough water for the priming of the pump for the sake of those others for whom Christ gave his life. We need people who ~~are~~ are willing to give of themselves - unconditionally.

Let each one, in these moments, look into his own life. Let each one, fix his heart to give.

A year or two ago there appeared an amazing book entitled, "Through the Gates of Splendor". I can still recall the way in which my own heart was caught up in the venture described in that book. Five young Americans - their wives and children - moved out of an environment of comfort and security in America and put their lives down for the cause of Christ in the jungle of Ecuador in South America. They felt called to do it; they were possessed of something greater than their power to resist, something that drew them to this undertaking. As time went on their call seemed to center upon a wild, warlike people of South America. These five young men worked day and night in order to prepare the way for an actual approach to these primitive people. They flew their tiny piper plane over the villages, dropped gifts, and would then shout in words of the language they had learned, "We are your friends" For a while it looked as though there was a response, these strangely isolated jungle people seemed to be affected by their approach. But more deeply embedded in the emotions of these native people was the hatred that had its beginning in the days when white men exploited them in the interest of securing rubber from that land. They never forgot the mistreatment and the brutality. These five men as you know lost their lives in a venture that to them had more value than life itself. It was Jim Elliot who in his diary wrote these unforgettable words, "Find out the will of God for your life and then live it to the hilt".

Your heart - get it fixed to give for the words of our Lord are still true: "He that findeth his life shall lose it, and he that loseth his life for my sake, shall find it."

LET US PRAY: God, Our Father, we are mindful of the richness of the blessings that have come to each one of us....And as we meet in this Holy Place on this Homecoming Sunday, help us to dedicate our lives anew to thy great purposes. To be willing to give of ourselves without stopping to count the cost....save that of knowing we are serving Thee.