

DATE: March 23, 1969

SUBJECT: A RIVER OF THREE TEARS

In these later days of lent, we tend to weep for Christ. We conjure in our thoughts the image of Christ struggling through these last days. We picture his as experiencing the agony of the garden. Then it comes to a climax at his awful execution on the cross. Yet when we do this, we stumble over the last commandment that Jesus gave prior to his conviction. This is the very thing that was feared, this was the very thing that he did not want. And so his last words before going to the cross were these, "Weep not for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children."

This is how it came about. He was struggling outside the city walls with the crossbeam lashed across his shoulders. Forced to carry the cross to the place where it would be erected. By now he was weakened and frail. And the blood streamed from the open flesh of his forehead and mixed with the salty sweat of his laden, blinding, running into his mouth with a sweet salty taste. He struggled under the physical burden of the cross. From time to time he dropped to one knee to get one moment's relief before they prodded him on. Flanked on both sides of this narrow pathway, by those who taunted, by those who grinned phendiously because of the victory now that they had gained over him. But there was one group who stood out from the rest of the crowd. A group of women. Why they were there, we have no way of knowing. Perhaps, they were there simply from a sadistic point of view. Experiencing bycariously what he was going through and they were wailing, going along. But among them certainly there were those who were sincere in their wailing and in their tears. Many who wept because of what he was suffering. Keeping abreast of Christ, struggling through the crowd so that constantly the hint of their crying was in his ears. Finally he came to the point where carrying the burden of the cross was too great and he stumbled under the weight of it. He could not lift it again. It was while he was there, prostrate on the hard ground, waiting for someone to lift the cross off his back, that he looked up into the eyes of these women who were wailing and weeping, and it was then he said, "Do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves."

Now on the surface this sounds as though he were chasen and_____. As though he was saying to them, you are doing a thing which is embarrassing to me. Or perhaps it was simply from a feeling of discouragement, that somehow they were unable to see what was going on, that they were still caught up in the context of a human life. They were unable to see what this human life was doing in this moment of history. We can't look into the mind of Christ and see what motivated this outburst, but we know it came. And it was significant enough for the gospel writer to record it in his minutes. Weep for Christ. We have a tendency to do it all these weeks leading up to the observance of Easter. Why weep for Christ, for this was his moment of victory. Shall we weep because he was arrested. One of his disciples

while they were still in the garden and Jesus had fought this spiritual battle all the night long. One of his disciples said, "Do not arrest him, my sword stands between him and you." But Jesus would not be denied the cross. He rebuked his disciple, he said, "For this cause came I to this hour." It was the greatest moment in his life. Weep for him because he was to be crucified. He needs no tears who has the powers of evading the consequences of what's about to happen. And he instructed those who looked as though his life were being taken reluctantly from him, he said to them, "No one is taking my life, I'm willing, giving it, in this moment. For if I be lifted up, then I will draw all men unto me."

Weep for him because his life was a life of failure. Trace his personality through all of history. You'll find no more dynamic force than his life. No failure here. The great works of Aristotle were giving meaning by St. Agusta, Simply by straining it through the personality of Christ. Plato who stands head and shoulders above most of the philosophers of the world was discovered in true reality when Thomas Aquinas was able to confront his ideas with the mind of Christ. Go into a great art museum of the world and look upon the great paintings of Michaelangelo, and Lafille and Devince. And there captured in oil is the personality of Christ. What more moving music to be discovered by the pin of any man than that of Handel and Bach as they interpret the meaning of the life of Christ, in the movement of music. Or thread your way through the western civilization and see what it was that gave birth to the great changes in society, that made this world a world worth living in. And you find that it emerges from the ethical principals that were set forth by Jesus Christ. Must we weep for one whose life is so victorious. Not for me, but weep for yourself.

How shall we weep for ourselves without becoming selfcentered, sentimental about our state. Essentially in the way that he wept for us. In that sense, we are to weep for ourselves. Jesus wept on one occasion when he came in to the company of dear friends of his. They were sad and disallusioned. They were lost and a lack of comprehension of what had happened about them. Lazarus, the dear friend of Christ, had died and had been buried. And now Jesus was there and he wept. It would be foolish for ~~him~~ us to say that he wept in the same context that we weep when one dear to us had said. For his disciples even said, "If you had been here, it would have been avoided." He knew that Lazarus was at the point of death and yet he had failed to go and do whatever he could in those last hours of life. With a knowledge of what he was about to do, there was no place for him to weep for death. The tears of Christ was shed because he looked into the eyes of his friends and he found there a lack of faith and a lack of comprehension. He wept again when he wept for a nation. His was a great moment of victory when he came into Jerasalem. It was short-lived, but there for one moment those who looked upon him, they saw that he was the one to lead them out into greater experiences of living. But it died down just as suddenly as it had come into being. And Jesus paused on a brow of a hill just outside the city of Jerasalem, there in solitude of darkness ~~he~~ he looked over the lights of the city and he imagined what the people were doing, the thoughts of their minds. He drove his imagination into the very depths of their

being. Seeing what was there, he wept. Not because of what they were about to do to him. But because of what they had failed to discover in his life. And so in the context of his weeping then he comes to the moment in which he said, "I shall no longer be able to shed tears for you, henceforth, you must weep for yourselves in the context of my weeping for you."

One of the most difficult things that any one of us is called upon to do is to look at ourselves, honestly, without prejudice and see the depth of plight in our lives. In a superficial way, Robert Burns asked us to do that when he said, "All with the power of gift to give, simply to see ourselves as others see us." But life is far deeper than simply our opinions and the observations of other people, our contemporaries, what do we feel. George Perber was far more profound when he said, "Dress and undress they soul and mark the decay and the growth of it." Coming to that moment of truth when we rip ~~it~~ away all of the ribbons that bedeck our lives. To remove the rings from our fingers and the furs from our bodies. To take away the flowers, the perfumes and the aspirin bottles. Look at ourselves, stripped, with our souls undressed. We make too many evaluations upon the primice and not what really is.

I used this illustration on last Wednesday evening. I had come upon it recently in my reading and somehow it planted itself in my mind. It was about two trees. At Christmas time we take a fir tree in our houses and we hang beautiful, expensive ornaments upon it and we light it with beautiful lights. It becomes a thing of beauty. But let it be for just a while. And the lights will flicker, and the ornaments will shine vividly but the tree itself will be brown. What appears ~~is~~ to be thing of beauty is simply the ornaments that hang upon its branches. But this arthor said at the same time, "Look out at the apple tree in your back yard. What a thing of ugliness it is." The limbs are bare and dark and brown, baren knarled, but underneath there's life." There's something flowing in that keeps it alive until that day when spring arrives and then small green leaves begin to come upon its branches, blossoms make it thing of beauty. A great flower blossoming in the back yard. The blossoms then will turn into a piece of fruit itself to bring the light to the _____. Nothing superficial on the outside, but what is on the outside has been born from within. To undress our souls and see ourselves.

Undress your soul and weep. If you discover that your attitude of society, your dissalusionament with the things that way they are, are not matched by an attempt to make them better. How many of us are critical of the society in which we live. Thats the limit to which we go, simply to look upon it and to criticize it. To find fault with those who are trying to do something about it and make it a better society. We find it much easier simply to cirtize and not change. Our disallusionment with society is contingent upon two things, people and the world itself. We are disallusioned by the way some people live and their attitudes in which they project their thoughts and being. And at the same time we are disallusioned with the world because it has not yet been able to embrace the real quality that God put into it. Discovering all the while the things that destroy and overlooking the things that build and create.

double standard. That which is alright for those of the affluent portion of our society is not alright for the poverty stricken. That which is alright for these in their mature years is not alright for those that are emerging into their youth. What we say in church is not necessarily the guidelines by which we live when we step out onto the lawn. Let us weep, when our disillusionment with society is not matched by an effort to change it.

Un cloth your soul and weep. If it is not the framework of your life upon which the word has become flesh. One of the greatest interpretations of the nature of Christ is that the word became flesh. And so we try to manifest the full meaning of that simply that the word became embodied in a man living in Palestine, who lived 2,000 years ago. That isn't it at all. The word became flesh and dwelt among us. And it was Paul who said, "It is not I who live, but Christ lives in me." That is the embodiment of the word, the word became flesh. And Christianity is simply academic. Then we have disoriented the word from the flesh.

Norman Cousins was writing recently in the Saturday Review. Perhaps with tongue and cheek, but with a very grave lesson, he said, "We ought to bring the Fijian Islanders to America and let them become missionaries to us." He said of all the places around the world that he had gone, there's no place where I have found a warmer reception. Some of them still living in grass huts. Don't know the meaning of luxury and things, material things. And yet they'll give you the very dearest possession that they have, if you enter their door because you're their friend. He said murder is unknown in their society. They have found a peaceful life. Living together in community action. Not vying against one another, not battling among themselves. But he said, you can feel the peacefulness of their lives descend upon you, when you come into their midst. Eighty years ago they were cannibals. They didn't eat the flesh of one another because they didn't have anything else to eat, it was simply because this was the greatest delicacy. And they discovered that the white missionaries were the best meat of all. One missionary got through before he got eaten and more missionaries came. And not since 1880 has a white man been eaten on the Fiji Island. While we were a mature civilization over here, talking about the principles and the ethical principles of Christianity, they learned them, they embodied them in their flesh. Weep for ourselves, when we can go no further than Galgotha with Christ and see him die there, because he has not been resurrected in our personal life.

And now this. There is the river of three tears that courses through all of Christianity. The first two were tears wept by Christ for a person, you and me, for a nation, our nation and many other nations of the world. But the third tear is the tear that we must weep, when we are willing to uncloth our souls and mark the decay, the growth. But there is one last word. It is seeing one's faith for what it is that brings tears, it is an understanding of the problem that causes weakness. One of the greatest promises of the Bible is this - God shall wipe away all tears and there is the solution.

Let us pray.