

DATE: September 20, 1970

SUBJECT: "BRIDGE OVER TROUBLED WATER!"

In a lonely new England church yard there leans a weather-beaten head stone over a forgotten grave. In letters hardly readable because of the age there is recorded the name of a man, the date of his birth, the date of his death and the simple epitaph, "He builds bridges." Oh, the drama of those words. To be a builder of bridges, to span from two points that are separated and bring them together. Hardly any phrase can enter into our imagination and construe more possibilities and potentialities than to build bridges. A few years ago I lived in sight of a TVA dam that was being built. And coarsing along the road in the valley you could look up to the peak of a sprawling hillside and see a bridge reaching out into space and on the opposite hillside was a bridge reaching out from it. It seemed so incongruous to see a bridge suspended so high over such a wide valley and yet the bridge was being built and then one day it was finished. The dam was closed, the water rose and now passing over that bridge one is not even aware that he is passing over a former valley its all one together, a bridge brought together two mountain top and made them one. We've had a lot of full moons these past few nights. I don't know if you other lovers have noticed them or not, but they have been beautiful. It's hard to imagine that on that barren star there are footprints of a man left there be astronauts from this earth. Unbelievable, yet we have spend the systems that once separated, that man never dreamed would be closed and yet man reached out and span that emptiness of space until we have discovered the mysteries of the moon we know that is no longer green cheese. Bridges everywhere, engulfed to be breached.

Simon and Garfunkle's latest song is "Bridge over Troubled Waters." We know those troubled waters, we know those gaps. How desperately we need to discover the bridges that will breach the gap across the troubled waters, for we live in an anxiety of an age that is rumbling and trembling all about us. Troubled waters such as we have never know before. Society rumbling and trembling with the threat of drugs and violence. Of course, whenever you mention the threat of drugs and violence today there is always someone ready to put you down by saying it's always been this way, we've just getting disturbed over it now. And in a sense that is quite true. You can pick up a periodical of years ago and read of the same threats and the same forebodings that we are talking about now. It's true man has always been plagued by drugs and violence. Shortly after we entered into the atomic age it was a common thing to be warned of possible atomic annihilation and there was always someone who could stand up with pride and say, "Yes, they talked about annihilation when dynamite was discovered too." But there's a difference, you see. Dynamite can't, the atomic bomb can. And the distressing things about violence and drugs is not the fact that it is being done as it has always been done, but that society is accepting it and that makes the difference.

When I was a small lad, in our neighborhood theatre on Saturday there was usually an advertisement on Saturday ~~afternoon~~ night there was an advertisement of a midnight show for adults only. Invariable impinted on those posters would be the secret sin of marijuana. It's no longer there, we are talking openly about making it legal because it's no more harmful than a social drink, so why keep it in a darkened corner.

And yet those of the medical profession who are not looking at it from a moral standpoint, continue to warn of the devastation that twists the mind and changes the chemical posture of our minds. We pretend not to listen.

I saw a movie last week, "The People Next Door." I wish they had left out some of the nude scenes so that it could have been for a general audience to bring in the young people. Nothing could have been a greater lesson of life than to be measured up as to what can happen to a person under the influence of drugs. It wasn't preaching a sermon either, it was simply telling it like it was. And we cringed as we stood outside waiting for those who had seen the earlier show to file out, we commented upon the look on their faces. They had experienced something that was real. A young girl whose life was completely destroyed through drugs. But underlying that was a constant awareness of why she was taking drugs. And it was because of a family relationship that she could not accept. The cry that so many young people are leveling against the false cry of hypocrisy, ~~xxxxxxx~~ false standards, the alienation of affections, the pretensions and she couldn't live under that burden and she turned to drugs for escape. There's a difference between the person who turns to drugs for a kick and the person who turns to drugs for escape. For those who are looking for kicks are going to find it somewhere, there's sympathy for them when they fall but yet at the same time it does not reflect an alien environment in which they are trying to live but for those who turn to drugs out of an escape out of a relationship that they cannot accept - then how desperately we need to right that environment, that relationship.

There's the troubled water of the deteriorating environment, a destruction of the world that God created in all of its majesty and beauty and put into our care and look how we have perverted that responsibility. Look how we are destroying the most wonderful things that have ever been put into our care, denying generations that follow the very basics of life. I read an article not too long ago warning us that as we spread more asphalt over the face of the land we are cutting out ~~oxygensxxxxxxx~~ vegetation that puts oxygen back into the air. And if this rate continues with the growth of population the time will come when people will gasp for oxygen and there will not be any there to breathe.

I saw Tennessee play SMU yesterday. It is strange that my mind could even have wondered to any other thought there as I walked to the stadium with anticipation for that game because you know what an avid sports fan I am. But this was my alma matre and I hadn't been there in some time and walking through the campus I remembered every trail and I looked down the hillside at the stream that ran down through the campus. Beautiful trees, the grass was green and the stream was just like it was when I was there, littered with cans, styrofoam cups, bubbled refuge. Hundred and thousands of dollars spent upon beautifying an environment when the natural aspects of beauty was being destroyed by the carelessness of other people. I bought a piece of land here near the great Smokies and I've said more than anything else I want a place in years to come where my children can get away from the smog and pollution and go into an environment that has been preserved for posterity where nature can express itself as God created it. There was a nearby stream coming out of the mountains that a road followed and up on that stream at a distance is a paper mill that throws its refuse into what could be a beautiful mountain stream filled with trout and now it's a boiling caldron of industrial waste. And that's one of our troubled waters.

And the troubled water is the fermentation of ideals and morals in life. Time once was when we set high standards for our thoughts, when we respected those who reached for the stars who dreamed of better ways and better things. Now we have acclimated ourself to a society that takes the baser elements of life, the commonplace of life and accepts it as the normal, no longer to be moved away from but to be waltzed in and accepted. Ethical relationships today are on a low level and we can't pretend it to be otherwise. Statistics constantly bring us to our feet in an understanding of the fact that we no longer honor individual life, in the way that we ought in the way that once we did. Intimate relationships before marriage to destroy the sanctity of the institution when it occurs. The use of vile and obscene language in public by groups that profess to be working for a better race of men. In the committee set up by the president to investigate phonographic materials, it reports 'let's let them flood through like it's the new bomb of Gilliad.' Well, beautiful thoughts are too treasured to be replaced by vile and obscene things. To think that we have to take the basest emotions of man and let it replace the purest emotions that we could possibly have. When I'm talking to young people about the use of drugs and obscenities and poor ethical relationships, I know that they are not going to listen to a moralizing voice and so I take the next best thing and that is to shame them. To say, do you have no higher regard for yourself that to be so low in the level of your thinking and your aspirations, because anybody can be obscene, anybody can be vulgar, anybody can be sexually promiscuous. And the fact is that the greatest concentration of that is still in the gutter. You've got your choice between a mountain top and a gutter, if you want to choose the gutter you can and that is one of the troubled waters.

And one of our troubled waters is war. For a while we were riding high on the coattails of the Vietnam war but now it doesn't look quite so overwhelming with the plight of the middle east, highjacking. I noticed in yesterday's paper where Billy Graham predicted that there would be more and more kidnapping of high officials by extremeists groups. And one wonders how we will respond to these threats to our way of life in light of the way that we have responded all ready in trying to understand, and pat them on the back and say go to it buddy, you're wanting a better way of life for us all. There has always been that element of life in society but now we are accepting it and giving them strength and adding fuel. War is not international war but social wars that are constantly burning up with greater intensity and we can loose it all. There are more troubled waters, and individual problems.

As many individuals that exist there is that accumulation of problems that are uniquely our own and these are the problems that we face every day. We have a tendency to pour oil on troubled waters and it worked. It came as quite a surprise to me to learn that this was not just an empty expression. You can pour water on troubled waters and they will subside and be calm as long as the oil lies on the surface. Many of the ways in which we are trying to react to the problems of today, spiritually especially but socially as well, the way in which we try to react is to pour oil on the waters and for a moment it works. Then the waters become troubled again as the oil subsides and we discover in life that the more oil you pour the more it takes the next time and there's a pollution of oil upon the troubled waters of trying to solve the social and political ills of our time.

What we need are bridges to span the troubled waters to rise to a level above them, where they do not threaten where we can move apart from the troubled waters until they are no longer a threat to everything that is holy and dear. We need to span that gulf that is between our real selves and our potentials. But what ever else might be said, the problem ultimately rests upon everyone of us that we individually respond in the way that we ought and when we do then the accumulation of all our responses then make for a great movement. It troubles me that those that have the greatest evangelistic zeal today for change are these militant groups who take the problem by the horns and they make a mark upon society ~~and they make a mark upon society~~ in spite of their small numbers. While many of us rest complacently back and say it is not a threat at all, it will pass it is just a paper dragon. Don't get upset about it. They say that when Pompey was covered with lava from the eruption of Vesuvius, that the older Plimi and they begged him to leave the city and flee for his safety but he thought it was just a threat and nothing was going to happen and he was buried alive. It's a matter of truth but those who have the greatest weapons at their disposal today for bringing a better and more orderly society out of the coldrin of unrest, distrust and disrest that we have in our world today, are those who sleep soundly while it is happening. We need to discover the potential that God put into our lives and let it become an expression of our lives to reach toward the potential that we can be.

I always think when I look at a child that is just born. Think of the potential with which this child has been created. Knowing full well that over the years there will be those who rise up to disect one potential from another, to dwarf to disturb, to change- to twist - to modify. Until that child born with full potential will come to the end of his life and look back and say why did I fail, if only I had the chance all over again and we are all going to be saying that. Because we have not reached our full potential.

Leo Tolilsoil came to the middle years of his life, he had made a great impact upon the world. And yet he wrote, "I've come to a place in my life in which I am forced to write, ' what good is it all; where am I leading and what did my life count for.'" And he entered into an arid phase of his life when he was unable to produce, when he could only ask the question over and over again that refused to have an answer. Then five years later writing about it he said, "It led me to my conversion. We need to breach the gulf of what we are and what we can potentially be. And we need to build a bridge to breach the gulf between our real world and our potential world. Robert Kennedy said, "Some look at things the way they are and ask, 'why?'. I look at things they way that could be and ask, 'Why not.'" We have a potential for a world that so far surpasses the imagination, that we cannot begin to comprehend the fullness of what we could do if our world reached the potential that it is capable of. Yet we are content to remain far back, to be at a level very easy to stop and to cease our progress.

Paul said, "I press forward." How desperately that needs to become the credo of our lives, to press forward rather than to arrest our progress. We become complacent with the way things are and accept them as the commonplace and lose the vision of a world that can be changed, transformed by progress. This is what he talked about. He stood at Jerasaulem at the brink of that great city, the greatest in that whole province in his day, here was the culmination of everything that was good, everything that was vital, everything that was rich. He stood looking over the city and he saw what it really was and the Bible said that tears coursed down his cheeks as he wept, "Oh, Jerasaulem, Jerasaulem, if only you knew the things that could be yours." I wonder if the great rain storms of this

day are not the shed tears of Christ over a world of such potential, but a potential that is never being advanced. We need to build a bridge from the visible world to the invisible world. Jesus said that the things that are really important are the things that are really unseen. Yet our energies are put toward the gaining of those things that are seen. Those things that are readily handable, that which is an emotional response to our physical deeds. How far we have progressed in gaining for ourselves a material way of life that far surpasses that of our fathers. Yet how we have dragged our feet in spiritual gain of pursuit. That world that is essentially real as opposed to the world of reality which is essentially artificial. Our minds need to explore within the realm of the spirit. There are the real forces that can transform this world into what it ought to be.

A builder of bridges, what an exciting thought in the light of a world that is gaining more gulf, experiencing greater and more intense breaches. It means that we discover ourselves first of all and project that self at the point of the real needs of the world.

Roy Nell Smith told about coming out of an impoverished childhood. It was a hard thing for his family to save money to send him away to school. But what pride there was in his fathers face what the day came that he went away to school for the first time. A privilege that had not been afforded either of them and now bicariously they were going to experience it through their son. And he said he came home for the first holiday and said he went walking with his father and said that while he was at school he had joined the track team and that he had set a new record with the broad jump. And all that he could talk about was the broad jump that he had jumped while he was at college. His father didn't say a word for a long time as they walked out over the prairie and suddenly a jack rabbit jumped up and the father said, "Son, that jack rabbit jumped a lot further than your broad jump and he never went to college." And Roy Smith said, "I began to think about things that were really important and they changed my life and perspective. Little bridges that make the way for big bridges.

And now this. Here are the troubled waters, we desperately need builders of bridges. Are you one?

Let us pray.