

DATE: APRIL 12, 1970

SUBJECT: "MY BOAT IS SO SMALL"

I must go down to the seas again,
To the lonely seas and the sky.
And all I ask is for a ship to sail
And a star to steer it by.

Somehow there is an attraction in each one of us for the open sea. The vikings sailed through the narrow fiords of their country in the ninth century out into the open sea. And made discoveries of foreign lands that nobody dreamed were there. Five hundred years before Columbus came to America, Life the son of Eric the Red had already ~~discovered and~~ established a colony in North America. They had looked upon the whole world as it was crumbling and deteriorating about them and they imposed their imprint upon it. They so completely overwhelmed Russia that it was completely under their power. It was they who gave it the name of Russia. When we see a Viking ship riding upon the crest of the waves, we see the prevaillity of life. We realize that here is man conquering the unknown, sailing into mysterious places. And its because of this that we must look at the sea and feel that somehow here is a parable of life itself. We think of man having left some port, setting sail. And over the course of the years he moves from calm waters to troublee waters, seeking one harbor and then another, momentarily to escape the storms at sea. Eventually reaching some unknown and foreign port whose distance is never known until we reach it. So life is like a journey upon the sea. But it's the storm that troubles us. Birth itself, as though leaving a port, is not of our doing; we already have life before we can contemplate it. It is not of our doing that we have set sail. Much of that which buffets us in life is not of our doing, we are set upon by the forces that are already at sea in life about us. As to the affect that they have upon our lives is determined by our own attitudes, our own philosophies and the way in which we meet instances and situations. But most of them are not of our own making, they come many times unannounced and they subside many times in the same way. We have found physiochological and mental harbors in which we can retreat momentarily, but we can't stay there. We hear the open call of the sea and we're sailing again. And just over the horizon is the port.

But what of the storm? It is to this problem that most of our inquiry is assigned. It is the way in which we overwhelm them that determines whether we are successful or whether we are failures. Though there are many variations upon the theme - there are only two ways in which we can sail and meet the storm.

The Bible talks about them. It tells two incidents: one in the old testament and one in the new testament about men who are in boats upon a stormy sea. They have these characteristics which make them akin. Each is asleep in a portion of the boat apart from the others members on board. When they went to sleep everything was calm and now storm is raging, but they sleep through the storm and then each is awakened in order to preserve his life.

The first of these is Jonah. God called Jonah and announced to him his intent to send him on a particular mission, Ninava is to be destroyed. But God is compassionate and loving and if there was any way at all in that this wicked city can be spared, God wants an excuse to do it. And so he came to Jonah and he said to him, "Jonah I want you to go to Ninava, I want you to preach to the people there. Tell them that I'm concerned, disappointed and disallusioned with them. They have become so wicked there that they do not repent. I have no alternative but to destroy them." You can imagine that assignment particularly when you realize that Jonah hated the Ninavites as much as one man could hate another. So this was quite an assignment, a man who hates deeply within his heart, given an assignment to go out and save those he hates. And so Jonah rather than to take that assignment decides that his best recourse is just to escape God altogether and that's what he does. Rather than taking the journey to Ninava, he gets aboard ship and sails to a distant port. While they were at sea, a storm rages and Jonah was asleep.

I think we might pause there for a moment and recognize that sinners do sleep. Somehow we got it in our minds that only Christians sleep and sinners are out here tangling with unseen monsters all the while and the only way that can be spared is to somehow make Christians out of them. But the truth remains, that on the surface it looks like the sinners are having a pretty good time of it. They got a good thing going. But it's on the surface. You see Jonah was asleep, but it was the sleep of tranquility. He was tranquil in spite of the danger. He had overconfidence. That's why it's so hard to envision the Christian life to those who are not Christian. Oftentimes they say, how can you improve upon my life if I were to become a Christian, I'm doing everything now that I want to do. I'm getting out of life pretty much everything that I want out of life. And I'm not having to pay the price of morality, that Christians pay.

Dwight Runyon wrote some very beautiful and heartwarming stories about the underworld characters of New York. He endeared them to us in spite of the fact that they were the personalities they were. So deaf was his pen and it was made into a Broadway Production that the underworld characters emerged as the heroes and heroines. And one scene with the salvation so portrayed them without the words as being so limited and blue nosed, that we were embarrassed to be identified with them. On the surface it looks like a pretty good thing. Jonah had a good thing going.

Mark Twain said I'd much prefer the company of hell, if I could just have the climate of heaven. What we identify as a good life apart from God is only on the surface. Tranquility not peace. Tranquility not serenity. We have found ways to achieve that living in an age of storms and surely the storms are all about us. If we were to think constantly about the foreboding news that every's days newspapers carries, we would loose our sanity we are not able to cope with all of the problems that are multiplying all over the world. And when they multiply they grow stronger, not abating but multiplying in intensity. These are terror-filled days if we are willing to take an objective view of the world in which we are living and become mired only in the possibilities of our thinking of the possibilities and many times the probabilities. So we find ways of escape and one of the classic ways that we have found to achieve tranquility is tranquilizers. Medical science broke through with tranquilizers announcing that here was a drug that would ease mental illness and that it has done.

But if ever it has eased one problem it has multiplied itself many times over in related problems.

We're rather well isolated from the drug problem here in Gatlinburg. We're not too much aware of it. I don't know if any of us have ever seen an addict. But when newsweek magazine makes the statement that in the year 1969 that the users of heroin in New York City multiplied by 50% in one year, we know we have a growing problem. By enlarge every problem that has reared itself at some distance point has worked its way into such regions as these, where we have thought it can't happen to us, it can't happen here. But how tearful it is to read the accounts of young people particularly who haven't even yet had a chance to live, having destroyed their thought processes, their very health by the abuse of tranquilizers, pot, acid and eventually heroin. Enslavement to that which completely destroys us.

On a lesser plain it comes about in simply drinking alcoholic beverages, when we escape problems by their use. Whenever any drug or any other use of drug that is to serve as a crutch to obscure, working against our nature only postponing the facing of a problem that grown worse by having been submerged.

It's very serious that we relate ourselves to these problems and discover a stance. Much talk is said of legislating against the harmful importation of drugs into America, but let's not fool ourselves, if anyone wants one he can get it. We can pass all the laws we can to restrict what we need to maralize and open up such patterns of understanding that it will be avoided as some of the deadliest plagues that man has had to face. The hope for many of the people of the world today to find peace is within the realm of narcotics and that is their hope.

But perhaps this isn't a problem that addresses itself primarily to us, let look at it from another angle. We achieve tranquility through withdrawal. Simply to accept the attitude that these are not my problems so why should I be bothered with them. Bernard Shaw in the "Devil's Disciple" said the greatest sin of man is not his hatred but his not caring. We talk about the hostility between groups and between races, open hostility, clashes in battle, but what of the simply withdrawal into that ether region of simply not caring. If it doesn't touch me then I don't care about the rest of the world or anybody else. Last night the movie was shown on television for the fifth time probably, Shenandoah. Irregreted that I had seen it so recently, but I didn't watch it because it was too recent. The story and the scenery in it is so all inspiring. But there is one point at the beginning of the story when this Virginia land owner is asked why aren't you and your sons interested in preserving - Virginia is calling her sons and you are not answering. His answer was, "I don't have slaves, I've never had slaves, so why should I fight?" And those about me who have slaves, let them fight their own battle, I'm not involved in it. It didn't take him long to discover that he was involved because every man is involved. You ask for whom the bell tolls, it tolls for thee. For when anything dies in a man just a little bit, it dies in each one of us. We need to understand the meaning of community - no one can stand alone. We are created with an embracing reach and we need to understand how to live and share together. We've discovered it within the simple confines of the home. We could not exist without that relations ship that exists within that small group within the home and the family. If only we could enlarge that to encompass the whole world itself and learn how to share one another's burdens, what a wonderful world this would be.

Though we have projected ourselves into the atomic age, we still settle our battles in the back alley, with a common dagger and a forked tongue. So we simply withdraw to silence, tranquility.

And then some of us find tranquility in ignorance. It distresses me to talk to people who are not aware of a living God. Who impose upon themselves the authority of simply destroying God because if I don't believe he exists then he doesn't exist. And it becomes that simple for them. But, my word, how can any man have an orderly mind and bring any orderliness such as we know into being without a suprememind. Who can account for the great miracles of every age that have beecured through common ordinary people if it is not the implanted personality of God that has wrought it and brought it about. Indifferance to religion and God these days is a reflection upon the limitation and not upon the broadening mind. So if we have no God to whom we have to account our lives, if we have no supreme force that overwhelm man's own physical power; then we can withdraw with the confidence that comes from believing that we stand at the hieght of all creation. We have to answer to nobody else.

So we sleep and the storms rage and the boat is tossed widely about upon the surface of the sea and we sleep. Tranquility.

But the Bible tells another story. This one is in the new testament. This time it's Jesus sleeping in a boat. The waves are ragging all about and the desciples become fearful and they come and shake him awake. "Wake up master, becasue the sea is ready to swallow us up." And he stand erect and he looks out and he says, "Why do you be fearful?" And with that the storm subsides and calm is all about. Those words reflect into our lives when we face other storms about, why be fearful because God gives a serenity to the soul that will enable us to ride them out. And if we are spiritually destroyed, spiritually we have been victorious. This sleep that was the sleep of Christ was not the sleep of tranquility, it was the sleep of serenity.

A farmer was interviewing a farm hand to work on his farm and he asked him his qualifications. And he enumerated a number of things and the young lad said well I can sleep when it is storming outside. And the farmer could hardly grasp what he meant, it didn't seem at all appropriate. And yet the boy kept repeating it, this was his greatest qualification that he could sleep when the storm blows. The farmer needed a farm hand badly so in spite of his obvious mental limitation he hired him anyway. Time passed and then one night the farmer awoke and it was storming outside, the storm was raging. And he got up out of bed and he looked on in the room where the farm hand was sleeping, no light was on in the room and he thought now well I know what he had meant that he could sleep through a storm. So angrily he dressed and went out into the driving rain. He went to the barn the tighten the windown and close the doors and see that the livestock were cared for and it was already done. He went to the hay stack and he saw that a tarpolian had already been stretched over it and secured. Then he went back to his room and he remembered the boys words and now he knew whathhe meant. He didn't wait fill the storm came to take the precautions, he made the precautions and when the storm came he was not troubled. Many of us wait until the storm hits and we are

in the eye of a hurricane before we turn to God, but for many of us its too late then. Its when we have built our fortress over the time preceding that when the storm rages we find that we've got the metal and the character that enables us to stand. So Jesus had found a serenity that comes from hope. He believes in something so overwhelming that physical life mattered very little in the silent. Somehow we have to enlarge the vision of ourselves, our personality that we loose sight of our physical bodies to say that in the end it doesn't really matter because there's something far greater than this. If the Bible teaches us anything it teaches us that. Hope a reaching out, so that we are not constricted to the narrow confines of the moment. Alfred Luffick said that a lot of people are either like ants or the honey bee or grasshoppers. He said that grasshoppers are always hopping about going in everydirection but never really going anywhere. But that a bee will home in on nectar three miles away, always broadening its circle and coming straight home on the treasure. We need to broaden our lives and not be so restrictive with concepts and habits and attitudes so that we are not able to expand to take in something new and something bigger. Many of us go around in circles and the reason is that life becomes so serene is that life becomes so familiar, we've already been there many times before. Never with enough courage to launch out with new beginnings and new experiences. Serenity comes through hope. Serenity comes through deep resources, fountains that fill our lives with what we need to fortify us to meet it.

Remember the legion of the woman who came to her door one day when someone rapped upon it. Here stood a stranger without and when she opened the door she said could I please have something to drink, I'm so thirsty. She invited him in and he sat at the table and she took a pitcher of milk and poured him a glass of milk. He sat and drank it and was refreshed. As he started to leave he turned to her and told her that he was one of the Gods that had descended from Mt. Olympus and had come as a mortal begging a drink of water. And he said because you have cared for me the pitcher will never sun dry. Whenever you pour out a glass of milk it will be filled up again. Jesus said pretty much the same thing. He said you come to the fountain to drink and you go away to be thirsty again. I have come to bring you a fountain, once having drunk of it you will never be thirsty again. The deep resources of power that God gives to us. That brings serenity.

Serenity comes through faith. How terrible not to believe in anything. So many people questioned about their beliefs have no strict creed by which they can build and mold their lives. It is simply a matter of leaving one's life to the whims of fate. But Christ offers us a faith in something. A something that permeates our lives and gives us faith in ourselves and the world in which we live. The broadening of ourselves from the physical into the spiritual, the material into the realm of eternal. So as we look upon the surface of ones about us, it's hard to tell a Christian from a non-Christian. They both wear smiles upon their faces, they go in the same circles, doing pretty much the same things. But when the storm rages the deep sleep falls and there's the difference. One is simply tranquil, the other serene.

The late president John F. Kennedy had a prayer that he kept upon his desk, an old _____ and fisherman's prayer. "Oh, Lord, be good to me. The sea is so wide, my boat is so small." How many times he must have envisioned that when he faced such crisis as the 'Bay of Pigs' fiasco and the missile crisis in Cuba. On his death millions of people were riveted to the television watching the great drama of the burying of a great man. One remembers that prayer when they brought his body to lie in state in the capitol of the rotunda. As they lifted his body to carry it up the steps the navy band struck up his favorite hymn. "Oh, Christ, whose voice the waters heard and hushed they singing at thy word. Who walked on the foaming deep and amidst the storm did sleep. Oh, hear us when we cry to thee for those in peril on the sea. Oh, holy spirit who did brood upon the waters dark and _____ and bid their angry tumult cease and give for wild confusion, peace. Oh, hear us when we cry to thee for those in peril on the sea."

Your boat is out there and the storm is ready to break. Will yours be the sleep of tranquility of serenity. The one from having escaped God, the other because God is here.

Let us pray.