

DATE: MARCH 22, 1970

SUBJECT: Series- "THINGS THAT MAKE FOR PEACE"

'If only you knew, . . . Forgive Them, They Know Not'

No lament is sadder than this, 'if only I had known.' Consider the number of times in your life that hurts have evolved, deeds been done, anomalies been created by misunderstandings, by foolishness, by ignorance. The real problem that encounters us at every turn of life is truth and how to know it. Ignorance and how to avoid it. Unroll the scroll of history and trace your finger back to the year 399 B.C. Here in the city of Athens, Socrates sits at the feet of his accusers. They thrust a cup of hemlock into his hand and then stand back and wait for him to drink. With courage and dignity he lifted the poison to his lips. If only they had known. Move forward to the year 1431 France. A little lass of 19 stands lashed to a post. Fire is heaped to her feet and as the flames leap up to consume her body, one English nobleman standing nearby caught a glimpse of her face as she lifted it to heaven and he cried out, "We have burned a saint." If only they had known. And 1692 in Salem, Massachusetts, a West Indian servant girl belonging to a minister of that city sat down one day and some little girls of the neighborhood gathered about her and she told them tales of voodoo from her homeland. They were so startled by it, so overcome that many of them swooned into ecstasy. Disturbed parents took them to the village physician to see what was the matter and they said, "They have been bewitched." And the good people of that town rushed to the home of the minister, dragged out the young servant girl and they hanged her for a witch. For the next 12 months a witch hunt went on until 19 persons were hanged and one person was pressed as being a witch. If only they had known.

When we commit Jesus to the court of Pilate. It is not the sin of man that has brought him there, it is the misguided judgement of good people. For the tormentors that railed out against him were not the evil people of the country, they were those who respected goodness, who respected truth, who were religious in all of their forms. Yet it was they who perpetrated this most heinous of crimes upon an innocent man. He thought ignorance all of his life and ultimately the thing that he was to fight would destroy him in the end. Remember that day when he was teaching men how to live and he had told them a number of ways in which a man's life ought to be structured. When he had finished he said, "Now if you take seriously what I have said, you are a wise man." One as thought he had build his house upon a rock. But if you ignore what I have said, then you are a foolish man. Like one who built his house upon the sand. He remembered one day about a man who had gained wealth and prestige, who at the end of his life had everything material to show for his success but nothing spiritual. And he accessed the life of this man at the moment of his death and he said, this was a foolish man. He warned his peers to be prepared. He said its like a wedding that's being held and 10 maidens are invited to come, five are prepared and five are unprepared. And the unprepared are left out when the wedding takes place and he termed them foolish maidens. He warned of the blind leading the blind. And giving instructions to his followers he said go out into the world and be as harmless as doves but be as wise as serpents. You see Jesus recognized in all his ministry that it is the misguided mind that

corrupts and destroys, it's not the evil. We recognize evil and put it in its place and by our own rejection we overwhelm evil, but it's the good man whose misguided, who perpetrates most of the problems and difficulties in all of life.

Remember Sario _____, the French soldier and poet, who at the end of his life he fell in love with the beautiful girl that he had loved all of his years under the guise of another. And then when the one loved falsely had been killed in battle how Sarino kept paying calls on his beloved Roxanne to cheer her loneliness, while all the time it was he who loved her. After years had passed, Serino was on his way to the monastery where she had gone after she lost her lover. On his way there he was fell upon by _____ with a load of wood and he was mortally injured. But desperately he wanted to see his Roxanne before he expired. He struggled to get to the gate of the monastery, wandered into the garden where she sat. And there delirious he began to babble. And he did babble with all the vices of his life that now rose up to destroy him. And he sought to cut them down, but his sword was useless against them. The time was too late to destroy the true image of his life. So it was with Jesus. It was ultimately the enemies that he had fought against that succumbed him in the court of Pilot.

How easy it is for us to stand at this distance of history and look back at that momentous day and charge a race of men with his blood. Individuals there who were known by him and were plotting against him and destroying a good man. No, we continue to crucify Christ unless we realized that the very thing that crucified him if let loose in our own day. How many crosses have we erected in our lifetime? Of ignorance, stupidity, foolishness. Someone said a good person imprisoned in a closed mind is the most terrible force in the world.

Studdard Kenedy thought about this and he wrote a beautiful poem.

When Jesus came to Galgotha and they hanged him on a tree
They drove great nails through his hands and feet and made a calvery
They crowned him with a crown of thorns and red were his wounds
and deep
For those were crude and cruel days, even flesh was cheap
When Jesus came to Birmingham they simply passed him by
They never hurt a hair of him, they only let him die.
For men have grown more tender, they did not give him pain
They only just passed down the street and left him standing in the rain
Still Jesus cried, "Father forgive them for they know not what they do."
And still it rained a winter rain that drenched him through and through.
The crowds went home and left the streets without a soul to see
And Jesus crept against the wall and wept for Calvery.

No we have heaped greater pain upon our Lord as the centuries have past.
For we have preserved those elements of life that drove him to the cross.
Misguided minds, good people, who don't think; foolish people who do the wrong thing.

If it is true that we preserve within our lives the very forces that found him guilty that enlited his life then let's expose them before they make of us his final tormentors and slayers. The nails driven by the bold hammer into his hands - the first nail was simply this - biggertry, a closed mind.

We identify the pharacies as they stood about the cross of Jesus, they were good men, don't forget that for a moment. They were not the common men of the streets out for a good time, out to destroy a good man. The very word pharacy means, puritan, one who keeps the letter of the spiritual law, who will not see it broken at any point in their lives. They were the best people of the land who had come here to rail upon him. The pharacies were not evil, they were good men who were misguided. That same problem crops out in our experiences day by day. We don't have to relevelate it to a spiritual realm so that we can identify Christ. But we can see it evident in our experiences every day that we live, at those points where our character emerges to the surface and we are known for what we really are.

In this generation we have lamented the cism that occurs within families, misunderstandings between parents and children, a lack of communication. Many children have been ruined by parents, parents who were not evil, but parents who were misguided, who were fookish.

I read a book not too long ago about a minister who was fundamental in all of his teachings, rooted in the most conservative religious form. Who tried to impese that same thing upon everyone in his own family. His nephew and his great nephew carried one the story as in their lives there werethe stains and the tortures of a mind that was spiritually demented, denying the progress of spiritual growth by dogmatic opinions, by conceptinns that were not consistant with the Christian faith. How many times we have discovered that in life. Children who turn their back upon the church because it was proposed to them in a manner that did not reflect its true self. I praise the day when we outgrew the negativeism of Christianity. I grew up in it. I grew up in a time when it was frouded upon to go to a movie theatre or play cards in your house and to have a drink at the dinner table. I grew up at a time when it was what you didn't do that made you stature of man, not what he did do. And when one listened to the sermons that were preached he was only reminded of the terrible sins that he was to avoid, given no direction upon the positive things that blossomed and nourished his life. We've come to a time now where we realize that when a man's right inside that what happens on the outside can take care of itself. And many lives have been blighted and many young people have grown into adulthoood thinking that the church is one thing, when it's not that at all, but they never come back to see what has happened. Good men who have perpetrated evil, and wrong.

And we've found it so strongly in our political life as a nation. So many things have weakened it, so many ~~knix~~ blights upon our national heritage done by good men. My great grandfather was a slave owner and he went to church every sunday. And there was a time in the history of our nation when we took the lowly Indian out of his culture, off of his land and drove him westward leaving a trail of tears. And we've dramatized it to enjoy, forgetting the plight of that Indian today, out on the western plains, steeped in ignorance, undeveloped. So many sores brought about by good people. Good people who are accepted by the community, by all of us. That's the first nail that was driven into our L^Urd - biggertry.

The second hammer drove in the nail of capitulation, wrong choice. When Jesus came into Jerasulem they recognized him as the person he was. They had an alternative, a choice, between letting Jesus go free or a murder named Barabus. It was the good people of Jerasulem who shouted give us Barabus and they loosed him upon the community to perpetuate his crimes. They imprisoned the gentle Lord. They chose the wrong one. But we a man of wrong choice. For through the passage of history we have come to the crossroads and we have had a unique gift of making the wrong choice, so many times. What do we choose today as the alternatives are laid out in front of us. We choose war, not peace. We choose sexularism, not a rejuveniation of Christianity. We choose to die, not to live. We choose to become a nation of adicts, one whose personality is determined by the chemical content of his body and not the natural processes of a clean uncluttered mind. When we are forced to make a decision we have a unique gift of calling for Barabus and to imprison the Christ.

Then the hammer blow fell upon the third nail - expediency. The glamour of the moment, banishing the long look. Somehow we are enamoured by what's happening now. We term the rising generation as the 'now generation.' It's what we can see in the moment, what we can touch now, that we put a premium upon and we dash away the hopes and dreams and the aspirations that need to be worked toward. How easy it is just to live for the moment. To sacrifice the good of years in order to calm the passion of a desire for _____. We've never been willing to look very far ahead, they weren't when they crucified Christ. They were unwilling to look at a kingdom that he saw on the horizon. They only saw in this moment that he's not the one that we want. They didn't try to understand. They didn't try to see. History has let it grow and mature and materialize. We have seen the effects upon civilization and it has grown strong and it has created a new world. But its nothing like it would have been if they had listened to the teacher and given his word prominence over their lives. We have come to a stopping place here. How easy it is to say we have gone far enough, now let's linger and rest for awhile when there are social diseases all about us crying out to be rectified, achievements yet to be discovered, new worlds yet to be unturned. If only we can take the long view and get out of a moment.

In 1840 an imigrant from Australia from the Mediterrian and he carried with him a beautiful potted plant from his homeland. A prickly pear. A plant that was not native to Australia and so when it was planted it began to reproduce, it had not enemies. And over the years it began to spread and grow until eventually it became a national problem until one of the great items in the national budget was how to destroy the prickly pear. Beginning at such a humble beginning, it spread into such magnitude of destruction and waste. And the seeds that we plant at this moment have that same potential and that same possibility. What happens tomorrow depends upon what you and I do today.

They crucified him. Stupidly in ignorance, but they crucified him. But God has a way of turning defeats into victory. And so what foolish men did becomes the wise way of life to those who are opening their eyes in future years and willing to look back that one who came manifest in love and truth as no other man has come. Focused in him is all the hope and dreams that every man has nourished in his breast. Here is the fulfillment of it all.

When Abraham Lincoln was assassinated his body was moved from Washington to his beloved Illinois. As it passed through one small town an old negro woman lifted her small child up so that he might look upon his coffin as it passed by and she whispered in his ear. "Take a good, long look because he died for you."

So we must on this palm Sunday as we anticipate Good Friday. We must force ourselves to look upon that day of infamy which we have perpetuated by our own foolishness.

And now this. As Jesus died he look magnamiously over the crowd and made a plea to the courts of heaven. "Father, forgive,them, they just don't know what they are doing." Father forgive us, we do.

Let us pray.