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SUBJECT: THINGS THAT MAKE FOR PEACE

'when the forest devoured more than the sword'

Our of the old testament there springs a warning that we cannot ignore. It is a time when father and son are eager to go into battle against one another. David and Absolon each has his own army, the victor of this fray will sit upon the throne of Israel. And it has become a strategic moment. Then dawn breaks, the battle is imminent. When dusk falls, the battle is thought of no more. And the writer adds this appendage, "and that day the forest devoured more than the sword."

We must apply that to the day in which we live, when we speak of the threat of the sword when all the time the greatest threat is from the forest in which we live. Devouring more than the sword which kills our minds. When that day is over, David weeps, and Absolon hangs dead from a tree and no problem is really resolved. Only more turmoil, more problems, more death.

One of the tunes at our house that we like it "The Colonel Boogie March." It became one of our favorites after seeing the "Bridge on the River Quoy" a few years ago that won an academy award, a tremendous portrayal of one of the events of World War II. If you saw that movie, I'm sure that you pat your feet to that beat and you whistle it from time to time. It's the sort of thing that you can't get out of your blood and your constantly coming back to it. I loved the motion picture it was an intense drama. Then years after I had seen the picture, it was fated that I pick up a book titled "The Valley of the Quoy." The title caught my attention because I remembered the movie based upon that incident. But I wasn't quite prepared for what the book had to say.

It was written by Earnest Gordon who presently is Chapel preacher at Princeton University. Earnest Gordon was there. In the book he says for four years we were subjected to some of the worst conditions and tortures that the mind can imagine. Out of his own life, he told of lying in a room that was called the death house. He had already survived the rigors of bare barracks, malaria, dyptheria and now he had a blood poisoning, the origin of which they did not know and therefore they had no way to treat it. He had already written a letter home saying 'farewell' to his parents; and now he was lying there in the filth of that room waiting for the release of death. He overheard the doctor that came in periodically to look at him say, "There's no hope for him, it's only a matter of hours."

He said he had a lot to think about while he was waiting. He began to think about the conditions of the camp in which they were having to live. He remembered when they first were imprisoned how out of fear and trying to

gain some strength to sustain them under the conditions in which they were forced to live, each one turned to prayer and Bible reading and church services. And then he threw in a very disturbing statement, he said, "It didn't do any good at all." So we quit praying, and reading the Bible and we reverted to the laws of the jungle. He said each prisoner stole from the other, lied against the other, moved with his fears as though he was a beast in a jungle. But then he said that we discovered that we were little more than beasts. That the strongest did not prevail, that he was going to die, that he would succumb just like the weakest of them and he said almost as one common decision we came to the realization that living by the law of the jungle was not the redemptive force that would release us from the terrible conditions in which we had been imprisoned. And then he said, something mysterious happened. A change came over the whole camp.

Two of the prisoners crept into the room where he lay dying, mindful of the fact that they could contract that terrible disease and themselves die and they bathed his festering ulcers, they smelled the stench of his rotting flesh and they nursed him back to health. One prisoner took his faint ration of food and gave it to another who was ill, so that he himself died of starvation. One day one of the officers came and lined up the prisoners and announced 'one of you stole a shovel' and he demanded to know which one stole that shovel. No one responded and he became angrier and angrier and finally he said, "If you don't confess, I'm going to beat everyone of you until one of you confesses." And then finally one man stood out and straightening himself to his full height and announced it was I who took the shovel. The officer turned to him and he beat him to death and in front of all the others until he crumbled to the earth. And that night when they counted the shovels, none were missing. One of the prisoners crept out of the compound to try to get some medicine for one of his fellow prisoners and they discovered him and they decapitated him. These were the stories of sacrifice and devotion that began to emerge in the group.

Then he said a delegation came to him, knowing that he was a university professor and said, we want you to start teaching us the meaning of Christianity. Then they said, we don't want any of this Sunday school stuff. We want to come down to the real grip of it and find out what Christianity is all about. And so he began to teach. And as they learned more and more about Christianity and the impact upon their individual lives, they began to see that it couldn't be contained simply within the realm of that which is called religion and they began to yearn to know more about economics, history, and political science and so they established a university there within the compound and they taught three foreign languages as well as the humanities. It kept them alive. They built a church, they called it the Church of the Captivity.

When they were free, the conditions were so terrible that their fellow countrymen coming into the compound discovered how they had been treated and were ready to kill every guard on the grounds. And it was the men themselves, that stood up and said, "No, there's no place for an eye for an eye." And their captors were saved because of their intercession,

though they had been treated so terribly. It was out of this experience that Earnest Gordon was forced into the ministry. He came back to his native Scotland and he went to church and he said I was never so dissappointed in my life. The sermons were keyed to generation that no longer existed. There was an apathy and a complacency there that wouldn't grab any man to his knees. He said it was death itself when within that compound under the open sky we had looked upon the city of God. He illustrated something here, something that we can't shake from our conscience and that is the fact when we move along in our Christian experience, when we are saying our prayers and reading our Bible receiving everything unto ourselves without any concern for our fellow man and the state of the world, its just not enough; it didn't work for them and it won't work for us. But it's when one takes those great concepts of love and gives muscle to them, begins to see ways in which we can be prevayers of the spiritual truth, then Christianity comes alive.

That's why we as Christians must stand up and take a new look at the world in which we are living. The time has come to quit separating ourselves individually from the problems of society. The time has come for us to stop talking about inner serenity when there's so much turmoil on the outside that we pay no attention to.

Edwin Gibbon wrote the "Rise and Fall of the Roman Empire." As he traced this great empire to its height and then watched it go into decline, he made five observations. He said just before it crumbled, five conditions became apparent. One was the great number of break-ups within the home, the increased rate of divorce. The second thing was increased taxes that were used to provide free bread and surpluses to the populus. The third was an intense drive for pleasures. The forth was the building of the building of armaments to protect the people within from the people without, when its greatest enemy was already within and that enemy was the moral decadence of the people within. And five, the decay of the church when it substituted form for faith. Somehow, it becomes uncomfortable because this is more like reading the daily newspaper than the history of a dead empire. The marks are so clear. But then sometimes we get so engrossed in the forest itself that we are unable to see the trees. We pretend that these conditions do not exist and therefore are no threat to us.

Bishop Gerald Kennedy told about a little lad who was rushing headlong down the street one day. He ran into an old woman almost knocking her down. And she said, "Sonny, where are you going in such a hurry?" And he replied, "My grandpa is sick and I'm going after the doctor." The old woman brushing herself off said "well sonny, now I know your grandpa and there's nothing wrong with him, you just run back home and tell them that there's nothing wrong with him. He don't need a doctor." So the little boy went home. About a week later they were walking along the street and they met once again and the old woman said to the little boy. "Well sonny, how's your grandpa?" And he said, "Well he's alright. He thinks he's dead and we're going to bury him tomorrow."

Conditions are far from what they ought to be. We need to recognize that. It's easy to look in another direction, to turn a deaf ear, hoping that the problems will be resolved by someone else or will go away. But that's not the Christian way.

During Lent we're talking about peace, the things that make for peace. Remember the final charge that Jesus gave to Jerasaulem as he looked upon them, knowing that they had had their chance and now it was done, and he said, "Oh, if you knew the things that make for peace." Last week we talked about inner peace, inner security. But you can't linger there. You remember a moment ago when I read about Jesus taking his disciples to the top of the mountain and there in that glorious moment of experience they wanted to stay there, drown themselves in the auora of that moment, to let the spiritual affect of the infinite surround them and imprison them. And Jesus said 'no.' And he took them and let them down off the mountain top into the valley where a young lad sick was waiting. We can't escape that, the call of the Christian is to find inner serenity, but not to dwell there but to go out and help establish the kingdom of God among men. The big trouble is we can't be aroused. We sleep and we like to be mesmerized into deeper sleep.

_____ said he preached a sermon once on the forgiveness of God. He was proud of that sermon because he got so many replies at the close of that service as to what a meaningful sermon it was. One man in particular who was one of the wealthiest men of the community came up to him and said, "That was such a powerful sermon and its so full of the thing that I want to be reminded over and over again of how God loves us and how he is willing to forgive. I want a copy of that sermon to keep in my desk." Dr. Trousnik said he was flattered by that request and he immediately had his secretary type up a copy and send it to the man. Six months later the man who requested the sermon ~~was~~ on forgiveness was arrested for embezzlement and was imprisoned. And he said that taught me a lesson; I had offered comfort to a man who was caught up in wrong doing instead of demanding that he change his ways. And he said I made a vow that day, that I would never permit the same mistake again.

We like to be told how good eventually will out over evil. We like to be told how things will not come to the depths where destruction of our civilization is immenint. We like to be told that in spite of sore-festering society, that it is only a matter of time and they will all disappear. We like to be told those things but we don't like to be told to get out and bring it about. That's the hard cover. It doesn't appeal to us quite as much as the other.

When the first dynasty of the Egyptian Empire was falling into ruins, coming to a close, someone inscribed these words on a tomb. "And no one was angry enough to speak out." It alwys happens when men remain silent, because evil it not silent. That which is condusive to corruption is not silent, it's alive and its active. So we must arrest out Christian ~~experience~~ ~~in that~~ at one point

and that is when we broaden the base of our experience in that it touches the lives of everyone with which we come in contact, becoming a leaven in the world to bring about the will of God. And it begins with anger when men are aroused. We picked up an expression recently about the silent majority, I like the majority, but I loath the concept of silence. There's nothing to be gained by a majority when the majority is silent. It's time to become angry. Now this may seem strange to advocate anger. Anger usually is thought of as that which is alien to Christian love but we have permitted one aspect one aspect of anger to overshadow the clean, sharp edge of spiritual anger. We think of anger primarily as that which is unrestrained, that which is unchanneled, that which is done simply on the spur of the moment without any thought of the consequences of that anger and that kind of anger is to be avoided because so much is destroyed. Such alienation comes into being when we speak out of anger and not speaking with a cool mind and with a calm voice.

But then when we think about Jesus we think of one with a cool mind and a calm voice, but we ought not. I don't know anyone who better fits that description of the angry young man than did Jesus. Oh, you remember the one incident where he walked into the temple and saw the money changers. He became insensed because they were preverting the use of the house of God and he drove them out. And we talk about this one incident as showing the righteous indignation of Christ, but he was an angry young man. He looked at the scribes and the pharacies, those who represented the spiritual nature of man and saw the corruption that was so deep within them, he called them "tombs that were white-washed," he called them "vipers." He talked to ~~for~~ them as being lesser than harlots and those are words of anger.

And you remember that day when a young woman was brought and thrown down at his feet and said, "Lord what must we do?" Because she was caught in adultery and Moses told us that anyone caught in adultery must be stoned to death. "Now tell us shall we keep the law of Moses?" I can imagine that Jesus face became flushed, they were using the poor circumstances of a young woman, embarrassed beyond measure, in order to embarrass him. The Bible said that he knelt and wrote in the sand. And there have been many conjectures as to what he wrote. One being that he wrote the sins of each one who witnessed it. But do you know what I think he wrote? I think he took his forefinger and he wrote, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10. And then with a controlled voice he said, "He that is without sin, let him cast the first stone." Yes, Jesus was an angry young man. He reacted to the violence of man's nature and the inhumanity imposed by man upon his life.

We as Christians must learn how to be angry and until we do our voice will remain silent and our hands will remain useless. Because love is expressed best of all with clean anger. We can say that we love our fellow man and let him eat like dogs, live in poverty, be denied his rights and we talk about love. But when we really love we go and we tear down those shambles that make them less than man, we can't be silent. Anger gives a keen edge to our mind and gives courage to our words.