

Sunday, November 24, 1968

Sermon Title: "The Smog of Taking Things for Granted"

There's an unwritten law by which the mountain man lives. "Be beholden to no man." Now, on the surface, this seems highly desirable for it ~~is~~ implies that a man be independent, to be proud to call his deeds his own. To be in debt to no man. For when one does a favor for you, as readily as you can you return the favor. You pay him back. You carry your own load. You find it embarrassing for someone to lift your load and carry it for you. This is a traditional character trait of the independent mountain man. And how refreshing it is for this code of the hills in a day like the day in which we're living. And yet even though it may be commendable, at the same time it becomes a highly dangerous philosophy for this reason. No man can live without being beholden to another for each one of us is deeply in debt. Now I'm not speaking about financial indebtedness perhaps that doesn't apply to you. It applies to most of us, we all know the problem of stretching a dollar to keep everybody content for a while. Trying to broaden our experiences with limited resources. I suppose the way in which you tell that a person has arrived is to see how deeply he is in debt. That's a part of the phenomena of life but I'm not talking of any spiritual overtones of financial indebtedness. There is a far deeper region of indebtedness to which I want to ~~and~~ carry our thoughts this morning. These are debts that cannot be repaid. We are indebted to friends ~~for~~ professional persons who out of their skill and daring have lifted us out of temporary straits. Those who ~~and~~ give their life to serving mankind the benefits that we reap each day that we live. These are debts that we cannot possibly repay. In fact, if we were to ~~set~~ out on the course of living with this one objective in mind pay off everybody and be in debt to no man, life would hold no meaning at all for us. For each breath that we take we have incurred a debt to someone, somewhere. So it isn't our place to try to repay all debts. But we can do the thing that is better even than that, that is to accept all of the blessings and the goodnesses that come to us with a sense of gratitude. But here is where the accusing finger points at us. Far too often we take these things for granted. Not ~~only~~ are we unable to repay the debts, but we do not even go to the length of returning gratitude for what has been done for us. And ~~there~~ is one of the greatest sins that we can commit. ^{scripture from the} The sin of ingratitude. Just a moment ago I read in your hearing a portion of the book of Deuteronomy in which it is written, "Take heed when you have eaten and you are full, ~~and~~ and when you have built goodly houses and live in them and your silver and gold be multiplied, take heed, lest your heart be lifted up and you forget the Lord, your God." How strange it is that we remember God at times of adversity, but at times of plenty and great reward, we forget God, there we put our confidence and trust in self, take pride in announcing to the world that we are self-made men and nobody has made of us what we are. When it is the combined efforts and interests and good will of multitudes that have brought us to ~~the~~ this place and most of all it is by the gifts that God has implanted in us. The wondrous skill of his creation that we are able to excel. And in our excelling we tend to forget there's a very tender example of this in the life of Jesus. When on one occasion, he was proceeding toward Jerusalem. He came upon 10 lepers ~~who~~ who were off by the way-side who saw him approaching. We can't imagine what plight it must have been to have been a leper in those days. They were the living dead, not only were they physically dying carrying portions of dead flesh upon their bones by the nature of the disease but they were spiritually dead because no man would have anything to do with them, they were outcasts whenever anyone approached them perhaps with an extended hand in friendship they had to shirk back by law and cry out unclean, unclean, lest anyone come to them and be _____. Ten dead men sat by the road and saw Christ approach, they must have heard about him for immediately they had expectations. ~~Perhaps~~ Perhaps they murmured to one another and said, "He can heal us, he can bring us to life."

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And when he came in hearing of ~~x~~ where they were, they cried out, not daring to approach him, but from a distance, "Have mercy upon us." And Jesus looked with compassion upon these 10 dead men and he said, "Go show yourselves to the priest." Now by law, if one were considered to be unclean, he could not be considered clean until the priest had declared him clean, having been a leper, each was unclean. He could not enter back into society until he went to the priest and the priest said, you are henceforth clean and with that purpose they went to the priest. So the ten scurried off, Jesus must have lingered there for a while, because one of the lepers came back to where he was. He must have thrown himself down upon the ground, tears must have drained upon his face from the depth of gratitude for giving him a new life. And Jesus must have reached down and lifted him up and looking him in the eye he said, "Because you have come, go forth and behold." But what about the nine others, where are they? Now Jesus was not one who wanted someone to say thank you when he did anything for them. But by the simple fact that this has been recorded it takes upon a deep sense of importance. The purpose for the telling of this story ~~x~~ was to point out the fact that of the ten who were cleansed, nine apparently were ungrateful. I don't believe they really were. How could one be ungrateful for being given a new life. But here is the fine line upon which we must live the difference between ingratitude and taking things for granted. They took the healing for granted and went on their way, truly they were grateful, but they didn't stop to give thanks. And the attitude of taking our blessings for granted is the next thing ~~xxx~~ to being ungrateful, itself. The stoic philosopher, _____, who was a contemporary of Christ, had this to say, "The crime of ingratitude is the worst personal crime that can be committed." Perhaps today we are to be found guilty of this defined worst crime against humanity. That is draining upon the goodwill of others without showing even an appearance of gratitude in return. Perhaps the majority of us do have a sense of gratitude if someone forces us to the point of expressing ourselves, but by and large we are guilty of that grosser ~~or~~ crime of simply taking without giving thought from which it came, taking things for granted. It's good that one time in the course of the year we can arrest ourselves with this ~~one~~ thought that stands out clearly from all others a day for giving thanks, we say over and over again that Thanks ~~xxx~~ giving ought not to be; an incident arising once a year, but something we experience all days of the year and surely the attitude of living has to be in those terms. But it's good to give it precedence just once in a while. To remind us how dependent we are upon others. How much we have to be grateful for. For instance we take our liberties for granted. It's quite disturbing that our generation must be recorded as that generation that saw the blood of countless ~~battles~~ thousands of having been wasted in gaining liberty for our land. The flag which is symbolic of the suffering and the travail of thousands over the years is something that ~~x~~ can be trampled in the dust and ~~x~~ desecrated in our day without any sense of the symbolism of this great indication of America's growing to maturity. Our minds do not pierce through time to those revolutionary days when men put their lives on the line ^{for an} expression and liberty ^{hope of} ~~out their lives on the line for an~~ ~~expression of hope~~ that they had not attained. And how in every generation since that time we have been able to take our finest young men and equip them with uniforms of our country and send them out into battle to preserve that dream and that hope. Today we are finding a discontent with the values upon which America was built. We see a senate hearing and a hippie walking into the senate hearing with the flag of the American people cut up into a uniform to be worn. We take our liberties for granted. We take our material possessions for granted. We are the most affluent people that have ever lived and yet the signs of discontent in our affluence is greater than ~~x~~ we've ever known before. It is in looking into the lives of ~~x~~ others and coveting what they have, counting our blessings, naming them one by one to see how much we have, how well it might be if we could

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villages

look into some of the backward nations of the world looking into those ~~rustic~~ who on this day are counted by those lying in the streets dying of hunger. To know how blessed we are of all people on the face of the earth. Remember that beautiful story that Fulton Ousler told about his old governess. He grew up in a home with this old negro woman who found something to be grateful for even in the work that she was doing; and when she went through the house dusting and cleaning and whistling, he said to her, "How can you be so happy, when you're having to work all the time?" She said, "Whenever I pick up that little figurine that's been your mother's since she was a little baby, ~~then~~ I think, how fortunate I am to be able to enjoy ~~a~~ something like this. And when I got caught out in the rain the other day and came in drenched I thought isn't it nice to be able to take a shower bath like this like other folks do," and it was her way of living and one day Fulton Ousler happened in the kitchen when she was sitting down to eat and he over heard her as she bowed her head and said, "Thank you Lord, for my vittels." So little to be thankful for, but so full of gratitude. He grew up and left home and ~~didn't~~ hear anything about this old negro governess until in the later years, he got word that she was dying. He had already made his place in the world and he came back to his old home town and he searched out this old negro woman and he found her living down in the poorest ~~section~~ section of town and in a hovel so full of stench and dirty one could hardly stand the wreck in the building itself. And when his eyes got accustomed to the darkness, he looked over to the bed and there upon this bed was the weak frame of an old woman now reduced to bone and stretched skin. And the thought raced through his mind, "Oh, what is there for her to be thankful for now?" The times that she was so grateful and he thought, "What does she have to be thankful for now?" He stumbled over to the bed and awkwardly reached over and took hold of her hand and she looked up into his face and instantly a light of recognition came upon her face and as ~~her~~ tears filled her eyes she gripped his hand and spoke a prayer, "Much obliged Lord, for my friends." We take our material possessions for granted. How many of us saw that sunset last night ~~when~~ when God etched the sky with a pale rose color and darkened it on the other side to give a deep perspective to the heavens. And when that bright evening star first broke through into our consciousness and hung so brilliantly there. And at six o'clock this morning as I walked out into the quietness of the dawn, my eyes were drawn up into the heavens because of the bright stars shining there. But how many of us saw them. We take so much for granted. It is living in a sense of ingratitude that reduce us from the children of God, ~~and~~ to simple children of men. But I don't want to keep it on such a negative plane as this, my attempt to alert to the issues of the day and ~~and~~ keeping before you the great problems of our day in the perspective of Christ ~~prompts~~ prompts me at times to think that I'm looked upon as a prophet of doom, I never want to be thought of as a prophet of doom, for there's hope everywhere, beauty fills our life. On this approach to Thanksgiving, surely we don't want ~~to~~ look on the negative aspect of what we've become and what we are, but let us see how we can be grateful. Grateful, to be grateful is not something that can be cultivated. The little child is visiting with you in someone's ~~home~~ home and they give him a piece of candy and then there's an awkward silence and then, in a whisper that's audible to everyone around the parent says, "Now what do you say?" And the child pipes up "Thank You." We can learn to do this but that's not gratitude, there's something that disturbed me a long time and that's the Lord's Prayer. This is supposed to be the model prayer and yet there's no evidence of Thanksgiving there. There's not any expression of gratitude. And that troubled me for a long time until I realized that there's a deeper meaning here in all of the great recorded prayers of Jesus, he ~~be-~~ begins by saying, "I thank thee, my Father." Why did he not teach us to say, "I Thank thee my Father.?" For he feared that they become learned words like we teach our children to ~~say~~ say

"Thank you" for a piece of candy. But gratitude is the fruit and it is not something that can be learned. It is something that develops naturally when we have assumed the kind of life in which it can grow. God knows gratitude, only as it is spoken from the heart and not in words. We become grateful when we live in a sense of awareness, when we are sensitive to what people do for us. ~~W~~ For what our nation constantly holds before us. For the blessings of God. Not taking it for granted, but being constantly aware of what we have. And the second thing is to have a sense of reverence. To revere the things that need to be revered. It disturbs me when we can talk about God and Christ with such glibness. It disturbs me when we can look at the church and see it only as an institution and not as the hand-maiden of God. It disturbs me when we can speak foul words without any sense of having desecrated the holiness of our minds and our motives. But it is a sense of reverence to know that life is reverent, that everyone that lives is a man of dignity, a child of God. To know that we hold no claim ~~that~~ upon all of the many blessings that come ~~upon us~~ into our lives everyday, that we are unworthy to receive them but in spite of our unworthiness, we know them to such extreme as they are. It is in the sense of awareness, humility, before God that gratitude springs from the human breath.

And now this: We're all deeply in debt. ~~A~~ A debt that cannot be repaid in ~~the~~ kind. We can return a favor to one who has done a favor for us to balance the scales but the debt has not been erased. The only way that a debt can be erased is in gratitude for gratitude reaps the sacrifice. ^{of the giver} When Abraham Lincoln was assassinated, the slow train was winding through the mid-western country-side. Each village through which it passed it slowed down so that the people could get a glimpse of that flag-draped coffin. And as it went through one village an old negro woman was seen holding her little child in her arms and as it came close she was over-heard to say, "Look closely child, he died for you." And in that moment ~~is~~ his death had been repaid.