

Sunday Morning, September 10, 1967

Sermon Subject: "WHEN YOUR BOAT LANDS IN CRETE"

Now there was this dropout who thought he was real hip. One day he came to his father and he said, "Daddy-o, this pad's getting too cramped for me. I want you to cross my palm with that lettuce you've got growing in your bank vault, and I'm going out there where the action is." And so he packed up his pot and his LSD, and his back issues of Playboy, and he started out for the inner city. While he was walking there in that great cavern of buildings, he saw a flower leaning against a telephone post, and he walked up to him and said, "Man, can you tell me where the action is?" Sleepily, his friend looked up and he said, "Yeah, man. The place that's in ~~the~~ is this coffee house just around the corner called The Fatted Boar. Man, you can't miss it." So with that our young friend walked into the coffee house. He found the room filled with psychedelic colors and music. He found him a corner to sit in and he lit up his pot and he moved into nervana. When he awoke, the sun was high up in the sky, and he looked all about him and discovered that instead of a great happening here in The Fatted Boar, he was out in a pig sty. Now that might be too far out for you. You might not be able to identify with this kooky dropout.

But then let's ~~transpose~~ the idea over to someone with whom you might identify... a young man by the name of Titus. One day Titus sat down and wrote a letter to his good friend Paul, and he said: "Paul, why did you ever let me get tied up in a place like this?" Surely there's no place on the face of the earth that's a worse place to live than here in Crete. Now why don't you send for me and let me come back over there where things are happening?" So Paul wrote a letter to his young friend, Titus, and he said: "Titus, there's a lesson I want you to learn, and it's a very important lesson. It's not where you live... But how."

There's one thing that is a part of each of our lives... common to all of us that we must recognize at the very outset, and that is that we are ~~divided~~ into two components... the means by which we live, and the ends for which we live. Some of the greatest periods of history have been lived at times when the means were very bare, very primitive. Has there ever really been an age that can compare in grandeur with that age of Greece, the Periclean Age, when great minds like Plato and Aristotle searched the mysteries of the universe, spoke with insight that even this day inspires? The great art objects that were created in those days by people who loved and sought to express that love. And yet, the conditions that accompanied that great cultural age were very primitive by the standards of today. We could hardly live under the primitive conditions by which they lived. Or move up in time to a time when a young carpenter walked the dusty pathways of Nazareth. As he walked into the villages, he found people living in mud houses. Many times they lived on the second floor, while underneath them were the animals that they owned. The conditions were so primitive that it's almost beyond our comprehension, and yet it was at this time that a young man brought into the world the mightiest understandings of life and man... the revelations that are ageless. And those who accompanied him found such a power, such an impetus for living, that they ~~literally~~ changed the course of the world.

It was Thoreau who expressed it so eloquently... that we are constantly finding improved means for unimproved ends.

Let's talk a little bit about the means by which we live. Certainly there are means by which we lived today that no man dared dream would ever come into being. The realm of science has opened up vast new stratas. We can accomplish almost anything that we set out to do. Even now there hurtles through space a ship that's being controlled by radios back here on earth whose purpose is to softly place its feet upon the surface of the moon and there discover the secrets of the soil way out in space. If we have come this far along in these short years, can we imagine in the next decades where our minds will carry us? In developing better means for living? Men

live longer because we're able to discover the mysteries of life and death within the human body and have conquered so many of those agents of death itself. And yet, living at a time so blessed by means, can it be true that we have lost sight of the ends for which we live?

Think about happiness...improved means, but short on happiness. We are an anxiety-filled people today. We're insecure in our lives. We're lost in our wanderings. We don't have a clear analysis of what our lives are really all about. It's reflected politically as a great nation that ought to be leading the rest of the world toward peace, and we're fighting among ourselves as to what the proper channel is to follow. And it's out of our ignorance and lack of understanding that we are unable to find a common cause and purpose for which to give our energies. It's reflected in our social behavior. But perhaps most of all it's reflected in the unhappiness of the times. It distresses me to meet so many people who don't have a smile upon their face...nothing to be happy about...no joy in living. I have a little book in my study that I dig out from time to time, and it not only gives me a laugh, but it gives me a lift. The title of it is, "Happiness is a Warm Puppy". You ought to get that book and look at it from time to time. Happiness is in such little pleasures when we can find them. But so often happiness eludes us, because we find ourselves in Crete when we want to be in Rome, and we're unable to acclimate ourselves to this foreign environment which is we never chose but somehow found ourselves planted there.

Quite often we find ourselves in Crete through our vocations. I feel that I'm one of the most fortunate men on the face of the earth because I'm doing what I want to do. There's sheer joy in fulfilling the demands in my calling, but I can imagine the person who's doing the thing that he loathes simply in order to eke out a living for his livelihood. How can one find happiness in a vocation that he never chose but that was forced upon him by the needs of his life. I have a friend who trained all the way through college for one profession. He followed it for a few years and then he discovered that this wasn't what he really wanted to do. There was another vocation that he would like to follow, but by now he had a wife and children. There were such needs for his job in order to provide the necessities of life that he couldn't just shuck it all and go back to school and train for another profession. And so he was shackled there. Each day it is drudgery for him to get up and go to work because it's not the thing that he really wants to do. There's oftentimes a shadow of Crete in the pursuance of our vocation.

And then we're often in Crete in our environment. We can't choose where we're to be born. How fortunate we are to have been born in America where a man's dreams can be realized, but even here many times there are limitations. It might be by the color of our skin, or it might be the economic strata where we're born. Sometimes we find ourselves living in a spot where we don't really like to live. There's one section of our annual conference that many of our ministers want to shun. They always try to avoid going to that part of our conference. At seminary we used to tease one another about our first appointment, and it was always the naming of this particular area. And one day when my appointment was read out, it was right in the middle of it, and I went, and I look back on it as one of the richest experiences of my ministry. It added so much. I wouldn't take anything for it. And yet, on my arrival there, I was told about one minister who was appointed to that same church years before whose first words to his congregation were this, "All my life I've prayed that God wouldn't send me to this part of the conference, and now he's done it." Who's going to be happy in a situation like that. Many times we find ourselves in an environment that has become our Crete.

And in our relationships, quite often we find ourselves in Crete...unable to get along with the people that we love. How distressing it is to see parents unable to get along with their children and children not finding a kinship with their parents. A man and his wife starting out on that great journey of marriage with such hopes only to find disillusionment along the way that they

do not find the fulfillment that they sought for in the beginning. Our relationships within the community, our relationships within the home, our relationships with the small groups of which we're a part. Here are the places where we can really grow...where we can really fulfill our most intimate purposes...only to find that we have become shackled and unhappy. Finding ourselves in Crete when we really want to be in Rome.

We're long on means, but we're short on spiritual energy. One noted news analyst, discussing the plight of the world and the conditions that brought it about made this observation. The tensions that lie in the outer world are simply a reflection of the tensions and the insecurities of the inner world. How we need to discover this about life...that we need a spiritual energy to undergird us in our lives...to help us to find what is valid and what ought to be shunned...to illumine the directions that we're following so that we can really see what the evolvement of life is all about. But we're looking after a spiritual energy that somehow eludes us. We haven't been able to define a God that fills our needs. At a time when religion ought to be the most powerful in the world today because of the many needs that we can rise up in full stature against. Here's the time to discover the spiritual energies of living. Yet, we're not looking in that direction. We're looking in other directions, and we're ignoring this one valid concept of life.

Charles Stienmetz was a brilliant electrical engineer. Some of his discoveries and inventions have enabled us to move into the scientific era where we live today. One person asked Charles Stienmetz, "As you envision the world in the next 50 years, where do you think the greatest strides of power will be found?" And Charles Steinmetz, a person whose perception of life was more than the average person because of the deformity of his body and the way in which he had to restrict his activities that the normal person might participate in, he became more sensitive to the real values and the real virtues of life, and out of this insight and out of his experience he gave this answer? "In the next 50 years, the greatest source of power will be spiritual power!"

We know that to be true because it's told many times over in all the Scriptures, and yet we have yet to take it at its word. We need to develop spiritual power that will get us through these times. We can't find happiness, we can't find spiritual power, until we've improved the ends for which we're living and not live simply upon the means. Suppose that had been true in the lives of so many people whose biographies constantly acclaim the fact that when man lives upon means, his life is empty and void, but when he's living for ends, he's already a great success. Helen Keller is a prime example of this sort of thing. The means for a living that were given to her were so few...cut off from the world by sight and by sound. And yet, those who have been in her presence say that she is one of the most radiant persons alive...not found through means but because she had something to live for. George Washington Carver, and man who rose up in his own race when there was ~~no~~ opportunity for no one. Born of a slave mother...sold as a little boy...grew up in an impoverished home...exploded the myth of the peanut and opened up a vast new understanding in the realm of science. His name is revered by all...black and white alike. Not content to live upon the means...but something to live for. And Charles Steinmetz himself. A man who was deformed at birth...who was so ashamed of his appearance that as a young man, he pledged that he would never take a wife because he would not thrust himself upon a person that they would have to live with such a person as he. He ought to have been embittered. That's what psychologists tell us should have happened, but instead there was a radiant beauty in this man's life that attracted children to him wherever he went. Children didn't notice that he was a dwarfed man...that he had a large hump upon his back. But when they saw him coming they rushed out and called him by name, and they waited for him that he could play with them, and he charted games that they could play together. And when he taught in the university, it was said that the students loved him above all the others because there was such a sensitivity in his life. He discovered that he didn't have the means to live, and so he found an end for which to live.

Let's talk about these ends. What are you living for? Certainly there is more to life than survival. Certainly there's not a dream planted in the hearts of each of us only to gnaw as a great hunger never to be fulfilled. Well, here's what Paul said: "For me to live is Christ." Here is the epitome of life. Here is the fulfillment of ends and purposes, for ingrained in the teaching and the witnessing of our Lord is what life can really be for each one of us. We can live for the material pleasures that can be ours now and God has blessed us with such a time in which to live that we can forget that we are lonely and hungry on the inside because there is so much to do on the outside. But then those words keep leaping out of the Scriptures to remind us that everything that is built upon the earth will ultimately fall away, and what about tomorrow. So many of us are presently in our Cretes when we want to be in Rome. All of us at one time or another will come into Crete, but when we're searching for Rome, but let us remember the words of Paul in his letter to Titus: "It's not where, but how."

And now this...the successes or the failures that are on the inside are eternal, and the successes and failures on the outside are but for a moment, and if we are to overcome our Crete, it's discovering a building foundation on the inside while we enjoy the pleasures of living on the outside. Our Crete can swallow us up and consume us, or they can become springboards by which we discover the true meaning of life.

Harry Emerson Fosdick told a story about a little boy who every night had nightmares and he dreamed each night that a tiger came into his room and he woke up screaming. He was terrified of the tiger that stalked his room each night. His mother took him to a child psychologist and he explored the boy's personality, and finally he said to the little lad, "Now son, that tiger just wants to make friends with you. So the next time he comes into your room, instead of being afraid, reach out and pet him on the head, and say, "Hello there, old buddy.'" So that night when the little boy slept, surely enough he had the dream the tiger stalked his room. And a little hand reached out from under the coverlet and swept the empty air and framed on the little boy's lips with a smile, "Hello there old buddy." And then a miracle...His hand dropped limply. He dropped back into calm repose and he slept the whole night through. The tigers that we encounter in our Cretes can destroy us, or we can make them our friends, in spite of them move to the end for which we were born.