

AND PREACH THE GOSPEL TO ALL NATIONS." INTO ALL YOUR WORLD THE WORLD OF 1991.

WE PREACH THE GOSPEL" WHEN WE LET THE SPIRIT OF CHRIST POSSESS OUR HEARTS AND MIND? IT'S NOT SO MUCH A MATTER OF PUTTING THE GOSPEL INTO WORDS AS INTO ACTS. THE BOOK THAT TELLS US ABOUT THE SPREAD OF CHRISTIANITY IN THE FIRST YEARS IS NOT CALLED "THE WORDS OF THE APOSTLES" BUT "THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES." AND IT IS THE ACTS OF THE MEMBERS OF THE HOUSEHOLD OF GOD THAT COMMUNICATE THE GOOD NEWS. WHAT WE DO IN THE NAME OF CHRIST TO SERVE OTHERS IN DISTRESS, TO PROMOTE PEACE AND UNDERSTANDING, TO "DO JUSTLY, AND TO LOVE MERCY, AND TO WALK HUMBLY WITHOUT GOD" IS WHAT COUNTS.

AT THE BEGINNING OF THIS CENTURY THERE WAS MUCH TALK IN THE CHURCHES ABOUT THE BUILDING OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD ON EARTH. SOME EVEN BELIEVED THAT BY THIS TIME THE EFFORTS OF CHRISTIAN MEN AND WOMEN WOULD HAVE LED TO A WORLD WITHOUT WAR, WITHOUT SLUMS AND STARVATION, AND WITHOUT PLAGUES.

YOUNG MEN AND WOMEN

PLUNGED INTO MOVEMENTS OF REFORM AND COMPASSION AND LITERALLY WENT TO THE ENDS OF THE EARTH. WE SHOULD HONOR THEM FOR THEIR ENTHUSIASM AND FOR WHAT THEY ACCOMPLISHED. WITHOUT THEIR WORK THE WORLD TODAY WOULD BE A WORSE PLACE IF IT EXISTED AT ALL. BUT WE KNOW OF THE HORRORS THAT HAVE CONVULSED THE WORLD SINCE THEN. WHAT WENT WRONG? WHY HAS THE KINGDOM OF GOD NOT ARRIVED IN ALL ITS PANOPLY OF PEACE, LIBERTY, AND JUSTICE FOR ALL?

I THINK THE ANSWER LIES IN THE CLOSING WORDS OF THAT VERSE FROM MICAH "TO WALK HUMBLY WITH THY GOD." IT IS GOD'S KINGDOM. IT IS GOD'S HOUSEHOLD. HUMAN EFFORT, HUMAN AMBITION HUMAN MANIPULATION CANNOT CREATE THE PERFECT WORLD OF OUR DREAMS. JESUS KEPT REMINDING HIS DISCIPLES THAT "IT IS THE FATHER'S GOOD PLEASURE TO GIVE YOU THE KINGDOM." TO LIVE IN THE HOUSEHOLD OF GOD, TO BE LOYAL MEMBERS OF CHRIST'S CHURCH MEANS WALKING HUMBLY WITH GOD—NOT RELYING ON OUR OWN SKILLS OR OUR OWN MORAL STRENGTH: NOT CLAIMING TO KNOW JUST HOW AND WHEN THE KINGDOM WILL TRIUMPH, BUT BEING CONTENT TO RELY ON THE WISDOM AND THE GOODNESS OF OUR HEAVENLY PARENT.

THERE ARE MANY ROOMS IN MY FATHER'S HOUSE," SAID JESUS. YES: IT IS A WONDERFULLY VARIED HOUSEHOLD TO WHICH WE BELONG, AND TO WHICH WE INVITE OUR NEIGHBORS, NEAR AND FAR. AND WHEN WE LEARN TRULY TO WALK HUMBLY IN IT WE ARE FORTIFIED BY THE THOUGHT WITH WHICH WE BEGAN THIS MORNING. FOR THE WORK WE ARE CALLED TO DO IN THE KINGDOM DOES NOT DIE WITH US. IT HAS AN

ETERNAL DIMENSION, AND IT IS THOSE WHO WALK HUMBLY IN THE HOUSEHOLD HERE WHO WILL AWAKE TO REJOICE IN ITS FULFILLMENT.

Aug. 9, '87

TEXT: THERE ARE MANY ROOMS IN MY FATHER'S HOUSE...." JOHN 14:2

THE TEXT THIS MORNING ARE WORDS THAT WE HEAR AT ALMOST EVERY FUNERAL. OLDER PEOPLE ARE VERY FAMILIAR WITH THE BEAUTIFUL WORDS OF THE KING JAMES VERSION: "LET NOT YOUR HEART BE TROUBLED: YE BELIEVE IN GOD, BELIEVE ALSO IN ME. IN MY FATHER'S HOUSE ARE MANY MANSIONS: IF IT WERE NOT SO I WOULD HAVE TOLD YOU. I GO TO PREPARE A PLACE FOR YOU." SO JESUS IS SPEAKING ABOUT HEAVEN, AND IT IS ASSUMED THAT YOUNG PEOPLE ARE NOT VERY INTERESTED IN THAT TOPIC. A MINISTER FRIEND OF MINE WAS VISITING THE LOCAL SCHOOL AND BEGAN BY ASKING THE BOYS AND GIRLS TO HOLD UP THEIR HANDS IF THEY WANTED TO GO TO HEAVEN. THEY ALL DID EXCEPT ONE. "DO YOU NOT WANT TO GO TO HEAVEN?" AND THE ANSWER WAS: "YES BUT NOT YET."

I'M NOT CONVINCED THAT YOU HAVE TO BE TOTTERING TOWARD THE GRAVE BEFORE YOU BEGIN TO WONDER WHAT MAY LIE BEYOND. AND I FIND THESE WORDS OF JESUS ILLUMINATING AT ANY TIME WITH THEIR PICTURE OF A NEW KIND OF LIFE IN THE ETERNAL HOUSEHOLD OF GOD WHERE THERE ARE AN INFINITE NUMBER OF ROOMS—ROOM FOR EVERYBODY AND PLENTY TO DO. THAT'S SO MUCH MORE APPEALING THAN A HOMOGENIZED HEAVEN OF VERY RELIGIOUS PEOPLE WITH CHURCH SERVICES GOING ON FOR EVER AND EVER.

BUT WHEN JESUS TALKED ABOUT HEAVEN, OR ABOUT THE HOUSEHOLD OF GOD, OR ABOUT THE KINGDOM OF GOD, HE ALWAYS SPOKE OF IT BEGINNING NOW. FOR HIM ETERNAL LIFE IS NOT SOMETHING THAT STARTS WHEN WE DIE. "ETERNAL LIFE IS THIS," HE SAID IN PRAYING TO KNOW YOU THE ONLY TRUE GOD." THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS AMONG YOU." "HEAL THE SICK, AND SAY TO THE PEOPLE "THE KINGDOM OF GOD HAS COME NEAR YOU." WHEN THE FIRST CHRISTIANS WERE WELDED BY THE SPIRIT INTO A CHURCH, THEY DIDN'T JUST THINK OF IT AS A PLACE WHERE THEY WENT ON SUNDAYS TO DREAM ABOUT A PERFECT HOUSEHOLD OF GOD, A KINGDOM WHERE THERE WOULD BE PERFECT PEACE AND JUSTICE IN HEAVENLY BLISS. THEY KNEW THAT THEY WERE CALLED TO LIVE AND WORK DAY BY DAY IN THE POWER OF THE KINGDOM. THEY KNEW THAT THE HOUSEHOLD OF GOD WAS A COMMUNITY—BOUNDED TOGETHER BY A LOYALTY TO CHRIST AND COMMITTED TO REFLECT HIS LOVE IN EVERY AREA OF LIFE. THEY DISCOVERED THAT THERE ARE MANY ROOMS IN THE FATHER'S HOUSE, ROOM FOR PEOPLE OF RACE AND COLOR, ROOM FOR THE POOR AS WELL AS THE PROSPEROUS, ROOM FOR THE DUMB AS WELL AS THE BRAINY, ROOM FOR THE WEAK AS WELL AS THE STRONG, ROOM FOR THE DREAMER AS WELL AS THE DOWN TO EARTH. AND THEY DISCOVERED THAT IN THIS HOUSEHOLD OF GOD

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EVERYONE HAD SOMETHING SPECIAL TO DO—AND THAT SOMETHING SPECIAL WAS NOT JUST WHAT WE CALL "RELIGIOUS". LIVING IN THE HOUSEHOLD OF GOD DIDN'T MEAN SPENDING ALL THEIR TIME IN WORSHIP AND CHURCH ACTIVITIES.

I HEARD ONCE ABOUT A VERY FIRED UP EVANGELIST WHO MET A YOUNG MAN ON A BUS SOMEWHERE IN THE COUNTRYSIDE. HE OPENED THE CONVERSATION AT ONCE BY SAYING TO HIM: "AND WHAT DO YOU DO FOR THE KINGDOM OF GOD?" "I BAKE BREAD," WAS THE REPLY. "NO: I DON'T MEAN WHAT YOU DO FOR A LIVING. I ASK WHAT YOU DO FOR THE KINGDOM." "I BAKE BREAD" SAID THE YOUNG MAN AND HE WAS PERFECTLY RIGHT. THERE'S A WORKROOM IN GOD'S HOUSE. WE ARE LIVING IN THE KINGDOM WHERE WE DO THE EVERYDAY WORK TO WHICH WE ARE CALLED TO THE VERY BEST OF OUR ABILITY.

AND THERE'S A NURSERY IN GOD'S HOUSE WHERE THE PARENTS OF CHILDREN BRING THEM FOR BAPTISM AND WHERE ALL MEMBERS OF THE HOUSEHOLD WELCOME THEM, PRAY FOR THEM, AND REMEMBER THAT IT IS ONLY WITH THE TRUST AND HELPLESSNESS OF AN INFANT THAT WE ENTER THE KINGDOM. BEYOND THE NURSERY THERE IS THE SCHOOL ROOM—WHERE WE LEARN THE SECRETS OF THE KINGDOM—THOSE THINGS THAT ARE NOT TAUGHT IN THE WORLD BEYOND THE HOUSEHOLD OF GOD. AND IT IS THERE YOU WILL FIND MEN AND WOMEN WHO ADD TO THEIR DAILY WORK THE JOY OF INTRODUCING THE CHILDREN TO THE CHRIST WHO KEEPS SAYING: "COME TO ME...LEARN FROM ME."

SO, NATURALLY THERE IS A STUDY IN GOD'S HOUSE. HERE WE LEARN FROM THE WISDOM OF GREAT WRITERS AND REJOICE IN THE BEAUTY AND TRUTH THAT IS OUR HUMAN HERITAGE. AND, SINCE IT IS IN GOD'S HOUSE, WE LEARN TO THANK HIM FOR THE MEN AND WOMEN TO WHOM WE OWE THIS HERITAGE, AND IT IS HERE THAT WE LOVE GOD WITH OUR MINDS, AND THINK THROUGH THE TRUTHS CONTAINED IN THE BIBLE AND NOURISH OUR MINDS WITH THE WORKS OF SAINTS AND SCHOLARS. IT IS IN THIS SECTION OF GOD'S HOUSE THAT WE FORTIFY OURSELVES TO WITHSTAND THE ASSAULT OF A WORLD WHERE MANY THINK WE ARE CRAZY TO ATTEMPT TO LIVE IN THE HOUSEHOLD OF GOD BECAUSE THEY DON'T BELIEVE THERE IS SUCH A PLACE, OR SUCH A GOD.

THERE ARE MANY ROOMS: ROOMS FOR MUSIC AND PAINTING AND ARCHITECTURE, ROOMS FOR DREAMING AND ROOM FOR DANCING. THAT REMINDS ME OF THE ROOM THAT MANY DON'T EXPECT TO FIND IN THE HOUSEHOLD OF GOD—THE PLAY ROOM. I SOMETIMES THINK THAT WILL BE THE GREATEST SURPRISE WHEN WE REACH THE PERFECT HOUSEHOLD OF GOD, WHERE JESUS HAS PREPARED A PLACE FOR ALL WHO

FOLLOW HIM. THERE WILL BE WONDER, YES, AND A THRILLING SENSE OF ADORATION. BUT THERE WILL BE PEALS OF LAUGHTER, AND WE WILL LEARN WHAT GAMES THE ANGELS PLAY. THE BIBLE HAS ITS LIGHTER SIDE, YOU KNOW—ITS FEASTS AND FESTIVALS, ITS HILARIOUS STORIES, THE QUIPS OF THE BOOK OF PROVERBS, THE OFTEN UPROARIOUS PARABLES OF JESUS, THE SENSUOUS CELEBRATION OF THE SONG OF SONGS.

WHEN THE WRITER OF THE BOOK OF REVELATION PAINTED HIS VISION OF HEAVEN, HE MADE A SURPRISING REMARK: "I COULD NOT SEE ANY TEMPLE." HE FOUND THE ANSWER: "SINCE THE LORD GOD ALMIGHT AND THE LAMB WERE THEMSELVES THE TEMPLE, AND THE CITY DID NOT NEED THE SUN OR THE MOON FOR LIGHT, SINCE IT WAS LIT BY THE RADIANT GLORY OF GOD." BUT WHILE WE ARE IN THIS PRESENT WORLD WE NEED A TEMPLE. THERE MUST BE IN THE HOUSEHOLD OF GOD THE SHRINE, THE SANCTUARY WHERE WE CAN BE STILL AND KNOW THAT HE IS GOD, BOTH ALONE AND IN THE COMPANY OF THE WHOLE HOUSEHOLD IN JOYFUL WORSHIP.

IF WE STAY WITH THIS PICTURE OF THE HOUSEHOLD OF GOD AND ITS MANY ROOMS, WE MAY CONVEY THE IMPRESSION THAT IT IS, WITH ALL ITS VARIETY, STILL A COZY PLACE CUT OFF FROM A WORLD WHERE TERRIBLE THINGS ARE HAPPENING—WARS, TERRORISM, OPPRESSION, TORTURE, STARVATION, HOMELESSNESS, SUICIDES, DEVASTATING DISEASES. IS THE FATHER'S HOUSE JUST A PLACE WHERE WE CAN SHUT OUR EYES TO THESE THINGS EVEN AS WE MENTION THEM IN OUR PRAYERS? JESUS AND EVERY BOOK OF THE BIBLE SHOUT NO! FOR EVERY ROOM IN THE FATHER'S HOUSE IS A ROOM WITH A VIEW, AND THAT VIEW OF THE WORLD AROUND US DRAWS US OUT TO BRING THE HEALING POWERS OF THE KINGDOM TO THE POINTS OF GREATEST NEED.

THE TITLE OF THIS SERMON IS NOT "HIDING IN THE HOUSEHOLD OF GOD BUT LIVING IN IT. AND LIVING IN IT MEANS CARRYING OUR CHRISTIAN CONVICTIONS OUT INTO THE WORLD AROUND US, INTO EVERY AREA IN WHICH WE MOVE—OUR HOMES, OUR FRIENDS, OUR LOVE LIFE, OUR DAILY WORK, OUR RECREATIONS, OUR OPINIONS, OUR SPECIAL INTERESTS, OUR PARTICIPATION IN SOCIAL AND POLITICAL ACTIVITIES. WE ARE LIVING IN THE HOUSEHOLD OF GOD, EMPOWERED BY THE SPIRIT OF CHRIST, JUST AS MUCH WHEN WE START WORK TOMORROW MORNING AS WHEN WE HAVE SUNG THE LAST HYMN THIS MORNING. A CHURCH IS A PLACE WHERE ABOVE THE ENTRANCE SHOULD HANG THE WORD "COME" WELCOMING EVERYONE TO THE JOYFUL RECEPTION OF THE GRACE OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, THE CELEBRATION OF THE LOVE OF GOD, AND THE EXPERIENCE OF THE COMMUNION OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, AND INSIDE, AS WE LEAVE, SHOULD HANG THE WORD "GO!" "GO INTO ALL THE WORLD