

"Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Thy sight, O Lord, my strength and my Redeemer."

Before I begin our journey I do want to take just a moment to give utterance to the joy and happiness and all the other wonderful ways to say it--to express it--that are mine because I am privileged to be here today. Mrs. Thurman asked me to express to you this day her very great and searching disappointment because it was not possible for her to come even at the last minute. She had her tickets and her reservation but life is not always subject to the desires of the heart or the will or the mind. So she is not here today but --in physical presence, but she wanted you to know that in spirit and in heart and in earnest she is here.

It is a temptation on an occasion such as this to spend the time in remembering and in reminiscing and I suppose this is one of the functions of any anniversary. But I will restrain myself and not do that but as soon as possible move into what it is in my mind and spirit to think aloud with you concerning. Twenty years; two decades. And perhaps standing where we stand at this moment in human history it is difficult to remember where we stood at another moment in human history twenty years ago. There is something so persistent and overwhelming about the tyranny of the present that again and again it takes some effort of will and strenuous discipline of the mind to move back into the past and to project oneself into the future. But the climate of America and the climate of the world twenty years ago was far different from the climate of America and the climate of the world today.

Many things come to mind. We had not exploded the atom bomb twenty years ago, and in that act taken upon ourselves a burden of guilt and responsibility that limitless generations that have not yet seen their moment in time will be remembering in the quality of their minds and the experience perhaps of their bodies. Two decades ago anyone who thought about religion and who sought to define religion in terms of the context of fellowship thought about it on the basis of life that was very limited and very narrow and very contained. The magnetic field of awareness of the boundless and endless responsibility of implementing one's experience with God was just beginning to dawn in the mind. And what in every conventional church and every so-called marginal church today takes for granted as a part of the presuppositions upon which it functions, two decades ago, this was not true. And you could go on.

So I am very grateful to God to see this day. And I hope that he who stands in this place two decades from today will have every good cause for thanking God that we are here today.

Now just one more word. I want to express in this public way my appreciation for the kind of experience that I have had since I have been here, in thinking aloud and talking and experiencing the quality of the life of your and my<sup>ne</sup> interim minister. And it has been a great satisfaction to think aloud with him even though what seems to be a thousand chronological years separate us. Either he feels that young or I feel that old. I don't know.

"To him that waits all things reveal themselves provided that he has the courage not to deny in the darkness what he has seen in the light."

Waiting is a window opening on many landscapes. For some, waiting means the cessation of all activity when energy is gone and exhaustion is all that the heart can manage. It is the long slow panting of the spirit. There is no will to will--"----"---There is no hope, not hopelessness--there is no sense of anticipation or even awareness of a loss of hope. Perhaps even the memory of function itself has faded.-----

"For some, waiting is a time of intense preparation for the next leg of the journey. Here at last comes a moment when forces can be realigned and a new attack upon an old problem can be set in order. Or it may be a time of reassessment of all plans and of checking past failures against present insight. It may be the moment of the long look ahead when the landscape stretches far in many directions and the chance to select one's way among many choices cannot be denied.

"For some, waiting is a sense of disaster of the soul. It is what Francis Thompson suggests in the line: "Naked I wait Thy love's uplifted stroke!" The last hiding place has been abandoned because even the idea of escape is without meaning. Here is no fear, no panic, only the sheer excruciation of utter disaster. It is a kind of emotional blackout in the final moment before the crash-----

"For many, waiting is something more than all of this. It is the experience of recovering balance when catapulted from one's place. It is the quiet forming of a pattern of recollection in which there is called into focus the fragmentary values from myriad encounters of many kinds in a lifetime of living. It is to watch a gathering darkness until all light is swallowed up completely without the power to interfere or bring a halt. Then to continue one's journey in the darkness with one's footsteps guided by the illumination of remembered radiance is to know courage of a peculiar kind--the courage to demand that light continue to be light even in the surrounding darkness. To walk in the light while darkness invades, envelops, and surrounds is to wait on the Lord. This is to know the renewal of strength. This is to walk and not faint."

The quest for the eternal has to be always involved in the quest for the temporary and the limited and the bounded. It is easy to think in terms of the quest for the Eternal, or of the Eternal as some far off invisible something that never quite emerges in the context of one's experience of living. There is a sense of course in which this is true. There is a sense in which the thing that I seek I do not ever quite find. There is a sense in which seeking and finding are one and the same. There is a sense in which as I seek I find and it is what I find that keeps me seeking. This may be it.

But what I am thinking about this morning is something else. I am thinking about God. And it is very difficult to burden the mind and the emotions with words. Man's experience of God is literal fact. His interpretation of God is an invention of the mind. This is my first observation that man--man's experience of God is literal fact: his interpretation is invention of the mind, because the mind has to take the raw materials of experience and work them over and get them set in terms of ideas and concepts. And while the mind is doing all of this experience keeps on experiencing. So the invention is always out of date, as important as the invention is. Do not misunderstand me. The invention of the mind is very important because the invention, the crystallizing, the reducing of experience to manageable concepts, this is important because we are rational creatures. But the terror for the spirit is not to recognize in what sense the importance is crucial and in what sense it has no bearing.

The experience of God is a part of the living stuff and substance of man's life. The interpretation of it is the invention of his mind. And the interpretation becomes formal and structured in dogma and theologies, and these are important because they provide handles for interpretation. They do not reveal meaning, however. They reveal descriptions of menaing but not meaning.

And I think this is why children are so close to reality all the time--even--and sometimes they maintain it despite all the things that being mature and adult would indicate. They are so close to reality because they are so fresh from it. They don't know what life and birth are. Well---I've watched little children as they become more and more earth bound and earth acquainted and then they become more and more like me and like you. And you wonder what would happen in the world if they could continue. But that isn't possible. But they have this sense of reality. And so when you listen to them from their lips very often come the things that tell us by their phrases and their words more than all the things that we know

and understand.

There is a radio program in Boston. They give you an album of some sort. It's the creative word that you one year old said gets the prize. And they read all of these in the mornings early. And I listen to them. The things that the little boy said to his father that astounds his father and embarrasses him at the same time. This is why the Master says that children are so close until they have been ----- . And then after we are older then we try to recapture something that we lost somewhere along the way.

A friend sent me a clipping about this, about her little boy who -- her little daughter who was giving her mother a great deal of trouble and the mother told her that if you don't stop when you die you won't go to heaven. And she said "Oh yes I will. Oh yes, I'll go I'll go right up there where God is and I'll go in and out of the room. In and out of the room. And finally God will say, 'Either come in or go out.' And I will come in." This before the invention starts.

So I ask you now: How wide is the gap for adults between your interpretation of your experience of God and your experience of God. I use the words experience of God. I'm not thinking in terms that may be limited and restricted to what you may recognize as being religious. But you see, in my thought God is the Creator of life--not merely of life but he is the Creator of the living substance, that out of which every manifestation of life emerges. He is not only the Creator of life and the living substance but I feel, and this is more searching than if I said I think, for thinking is so new, so new the ink isn't dry on it. I feel that God is the Creator of existence. That means that the creative mind of God bottoms all that is. So that wherever a man is involved in any moment of awareness that seems to push back even temporarily the walls that shut him in, God is busy. Do you believe this? Do you believe it? That whatever you are doing, however ordinary and commonplace and insignificant it may be, but whatever you are doing, wherever you are doing it; whatever may be the nature of the deed or the context in which you are functioning; whatever may be the state of mind or heart or body: it all takes place within the sweep of the divine context and awareness.

Now when I with deliberate self consciousness recognizes that this is the fact, then the ground on which I am standing, whatever else may be its label, becomes holy ground. This is what I mean. And the mind you see, is always trying to say, to give a formula, a statement that will clear this up.

Experience of God is literal fact, the interpretation of that experience is

the invention of the mind. And this is why whenever, in my own life, I seem to do or to be or to say--that truth stands in isolation as something separate from the context, the meaning, the movement of my own life, I am being false. God is one, and a man's life is one thing. And the seeking of the eternal in time is the Eternal seeking the limited in time. Now this is the first.

The second, and I won't tarry long, the second is that in the quest for the Eternal there is a demand made upon the human heart, the human spirit. And I don't know how to say this it is more like a reflection in a meditation than sermonizing, but there comes a time when you have to say yes or no to God; when you must take your stand for God or against God; when you must, at the most fontal and central core of you give the nerve center of your consent to His will or deny the nerve center of your consent to His will. Soon or late<sup>r</sup> every human being, it doesn't matter what may be his context, his frame of reference, what altar he recognizes or does not recognize, every human being at last soon or late<sup>r</sup> comes to a place where he has to face what for him is the ultimate demand of existence. And what do you say? What did you say? What have you said?

In Bernard Shaw's "Back to Methuselah" he has Eve make a very interesting statement. Eve is talking about Noah and she says Noah spends all of his time in the hills wandering, listening to the voice of the Eternal. And he has listened to the voice of the Eternal over a time interval of such tremendous significance that his will has become one with the will of the Voice--his will has become one with the will of the Voice. And then she adds this terrifying insight--"But it will take Noah two hundred years before he can totally experience the Voice!" His will has already become one with the will of the Voice. He has already given the nerve center of his consent to the will, to the movement, to the awareness, to the sense of, to the feeling of, to the presence of, to the mind of the Eternal as expressed in his intimate and primary experience. He has done the formal thing: he has turned and faced the ultimate demand and he has recognized the authority of that demand on his life, and he has yielded at his center. And then he discovered over and over again that all kinds of areas, of pockets in his experience, in his character, in his life that have never heard about this--never heard about it.

It's like the dachshund dog that you know about who was barking furiously at a man, his hair rising on the back of his neck and his ears and all of the things that a mad dog--a biting dog wants to do to give him courage--while his tail is just wagging in a very friendly way because his tail is just remembering a good feeling that he just had two weeks before.

Now this is what I am getting at, that when I have given the nerve center of my consent to the will of the Eternal; and that I am able to say at the center of me that I have no reservations, really; that for better or for worse I am your man and you are my God, then there comes moving up from some obscure corner of life something that begins to operate as if there was no God, no mind, no spirit. And over and over again a man has to go through the life long discipline of bringing under the judgment and control and domination of the centrality of his cored assets the fragmentary regions of his life.

Now this is true for the individual. Now when a man moves out into society and he may try to bring under the judgment of his commitment the stubborn and unyielding aspects of the society around him and then he has all the new dimensions of trouble and difficulty. For, you see, as the Master discovered long ago in that solitary place in the hills far removed from the Jordan river, the kingdoms of this world do not belong to God. The network of relationships by which men are bound to each other do not belong to God. And he who undertakes to accent his commitment in terms of the common life is challenged at every step of the way because in the first place he may be wrong, he may be wrong.

Sometimes I think a man may live his entire life feeling that he has heard the voice and that he has acted on the voice only to discover a minute before he dies that he was mistaken. There is no guarantee against the arch devastation of self deception. No guarantee. So always a man is trying to discover some other than self reference by which he can true the centrality of his commitment. And I think this is why the Master had disciples, because there had to be some little world, some primary unit of human beings in which all of the fundamental assumptions upon which he lived could have dry runs, could test out. And standing within that kind of security he could project himself into the disordered and inharmonious dimensions of the life about him and not feel uprooted and threatened because there was a point of referral in which these things held as binding and true. And this is why the individual alone trying to fulfill some sort of destiny finds that it is increasingly essential for him to find some kind of primary unit, some kind of structure of relatedness with which he can become so identified that the things upon which he lives can be a part of that environment, and standing within that environment he might move in this direction or that direction without feeling that he is always being unhinged and always being threatened. For if over and over again out here it is not true--over and over out here there are the contradictions,

over and over out here everything breaks down and falls apart. Yet, if he knows that somewhere in the context of his experience he is rooted in a relationship or in a context of relationships in which these things hold, then he comes back here to get himself renewed and then he projects himself over and over again. This is what I mean: The long journey. And I wonder where in all the institutions in society; in all the various kinds of groups all over the world, I wonder where in them does God go when he wants to remind himself that his dream for man is a worthy dream. Would he come here? would he go to a pool? Would he go to a bar? Would he go to your house? Where on earth would God go for a reminder that he is not mistaken in his dream for his children? Would I, if he came, if he came to my house what could I say to him? If he came to my church, what could I say?

His will has become one with the will of the voice but it will take Noah two hundred years before he can experience the Voice. And I hope God will be willing to wait--to wait.

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