

United Methodist Church

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May 19, 1982

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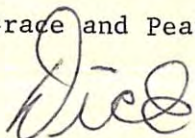
Mrs. Johnny Wilson

Bladen, NE 68928

Dear Mrs. Wilson:

In response to a request from Mrs. Wayne Brooks, I am enclosing a copy of the sermon that was delivered in New Virginia on May 2. It was a great pleasure to be with you on that momentous occasion and I look forward to times spent with you folks in the future.

Grace and Peace,



Richard D. Turner

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OPPORTUNITY KNOCKS TWICE

Sermon By
Richard D. Turner

100TH ANNIVERSARY NEW VIRGINIA UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

May 2, 1982

Scriptures: Ephesians 5:15-20

I greet you all in the name of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit and on behalf of the churches and pastors of the South Central District of the United Methodist Church. I also want to bring you greetings this morning from Bishop Bryan who is the third link in this chain of local church, of district and of annual conference connections in our United Methodist Church.

It is a real pleasure for me to be here with you today on the occasion of your 100th Anniversary. As you perhaps know, in this season of the year the Bishop and the District Superintendents are about what Bishop Bryan calls "appointment labors" so it is good to get away from them and to be able to participate with you in this delightful day and, particularly in this worship experience this morning.

A few Sundays ago I was invited to preach in one of the others churches in the district and I was sitting up front by a 7-8- 9 year old girl who was the candlelighter for the morning. During the course of the service I became acquainted with her and we visited off and on. I don't know whether it is good Christian Education or good liturgy but at least we did talk together. I asked her name, how old she was, what grade she was in and then asked if her family was sitting in the audience. She pointed out her family; her mother was there and she said her Daddy was a Doctor and was on call so he wasn't there this morning. I said that was a large family and were all of them her brothers and sisters she said, "No, some of them are my cousins visiting for the weekend". I said, "My goodness, that's terrible, you're sitting up here with me an old, stodgy, grown-up and you could be down there with your cousins and brothers and sisters". Then, she said to me, "Well, it's kind of nice to get away from them for awhile". And, that's how I feel this morning. Nothing personal, but it is kind of nice to get away from the Bishop and the Cabinet and to be out among the people of the District; especially with you folks this morning.

One of the benefits of televised sports is the instant replay. It has become a very important adjunct to the whole football industry, for example, wherever and whenever games are televised. It will expose mistakes; enable viewers to see plays from several directions; proves accuracy; but, most of all, it provides a second opportunity to see what happened. Today, on your 100th Anniversary we are gathered to back up to that piece of time, run a short instant replay to see what happened and ask, "Does opportunity really only knock once?" Aside from honoring the mission of those who inspired this church on the prairie and remembering the sacrifices that preserved it over these 100 years, there are some theological reasons we need this "instant replay".

I. We need this instant replay to stand partly outside-of time with God. All of us complain that we haven't enough time. We run after time. We try to catch up with time. We try to gain time. One of Michael Quoist's prayers talks about the tension between time as we experience and complain about it one hand and time as viewed from God's perspective on the other. He says in a prayer entitled PRAYERS:

Lord, you must have made a mistake
in your calculations.
There is a big mistake somewhere.
The hours are too short,
The days are too short,
Our lives are too short.

You who are beyond time, Lord, you
smile to see us fighting it.
And you know what you are doing.
You make no mistakes in your
distribution of time to men.
You give each one time to do what you
want him to do..
But we must not lose time, waste time,
kill time,
For time is a gift that you give us,
But a perishable gift,
A gift that does not keep.

Lord, I have time,
I have plenty of time,
All the time that you give me,
The years of my life,
The days of my years,
The hours of my days,
They are all mine.
Mine to fill, quietly, calmly,
But fill completely, up to the brim,
To offer them to you, that of their
insipid water You may make a rich
wine such as you made once in Cana of Galilee.

I am not asking you tonight, Lord,
for time to do this and then that,
But your grace to do conscientiously,
in the time that you give me, what
you want me to do. Amen.

This beautiful prayer reminds us that there is always time to do what God wants us to do, but we must put ourselves completely into each moment that God offers us. This requires a certain kind of wisdom and almost a different word for this meaning of time.

The Bible helps on both of these counts. First we learn that walking with God involves using time wisely. Second, the Greek word for time is Kairos instead of chronos. Chronos represents the calendar and the hours of the day, while Kairos is the time of God-given opportunity. And, according to Paul in Ephesians, the wise person uses his or her opportunities to the fullest, and maintains the ability to stand outside of present time reflect on his or her relationship to God's time - past, present and future. When we complain that we haven't enough time we could be looking at our lives from too human a point of view!

As a boy, in the days before television, I used to read western novels. I'd pretty well stopped that completely until I happened to catch an interview with western author, Louis L'Amour on SIXTY MINUTES one Sunday night. I happened to mention the interview with one of the laymen of our church and since then he keeps me supplied with Louis L'Amour westerns. One, in particular, he pointed out has a lot of philosophy in it so, logically, he knew I would enjoy it especially. In the novel BENDIGO SHAFTER 18 year old Ben is assigned the task of building a cabin for the widow Macken, out in the mountains of Wyoming: "It was Ruth Macken, but lately become a widow, who led the move to stop while supplies remained to us, and we who stood beside her were those who favored her decision and joined with her in stopping.

My father was a Bible-reading man and named his sons from the Book. Four of our brothers had gone the way of flesh, and of the boys only we two remained. Cain, a

wedded man with two children, and I, Bendigo Shafter, eighteen and a man with hands to work.

Our sister was with us. Lorna was a pretty sixteen, named for a cousin in Wales.

'You will build for the Widow Macken,' Cain said to me. 'Her Bud is a man for his twelve years, but young for the lifting of logs and the notching.'

So I went up the hill through the frost of the morning, pausing when I reached the bench where their cabin would stand. A fair place it was, with a cold spring spilling its water down to the meadow where our oxen and horses grazed upon the brown grass of autumn. Tall pines, sentinel straight, made a park of the bench, and upon the steep slope behind there was a good stand of timber.

The view from the bench was a fine one, and I stood to look upon it, filling myself with the quiet morning and the beauty of the long valley below the Beaver Rim.

'You have an eye for beauty, Mr. Shafter,' Ruth Macken said to me. 'It's a good thing in a man.'

'It works a magic,' I said, 'to look upon distance.'

II. This brings me to another reason we need this instant replay. We need it to "look upon distance" with an attitude of joy and thanksgiving.

The instant replay will expose any mistake, but depending on our attitude, our mistakes may just provide us a second chance; another opportunity. To complain, even on the replay, that it was the referee's fault or a teammate when it actually was you, only reveals a poor attitude.

In the church there are lots of different attitudes that we run into and experience. One is the attitude of never being satisfied. A cartoon in the newspaper pictures a duffer driving his golf ball into a tree. The ball then careens off to hit a large stone, ricochets against a post, and finally bounces to the edge of the green. "Can you beat that?", the duffer exclaims. "Left myself a long putt."

Then there is the attitude that doesn't want to hear any bad news. A man came home from the office, kissed his wife on the cheek and then stood back, looked at her and said, "Oh, boy, you've got that disaster look on your face. Something terrible has happened hasn't it?" She said, "Yes". He said, "Well don't give me any bad news, I've had nothing but bad news all day long. Can't you tell me any good news?" She replied, "Yes, I can. We have six beautiful children, right?" He agreed. "Well, she said, five of them didn't break a leg today."

Then there is the attitude of a cheerful disposition. How much easier to live with ourselves if we have a cheerful disposition and a sense of humor. One of the books you might want to turn to today to read and enjoy is Norman Cousins's book entitled ANATOMY OF AN ILLNESS. One probably never would think of the philosopher Socrates in regard to a sense of humor but one day his wife scolded him with scornful words and then dumped a bucket of water over his head. Did Socrates react as most people would have done. No, being a true philosopher, he remarked that after so much thunder and lightning, he expected a shower.

As in any area of life, it is a cheerful disposition that best checks our complaints. Like the early church described in the letter to the Ephesians, we would like our church to be characterized by singing and happiness. Filled with the spirit of God, making joyful our little corner, and giving thanks in the name of Jesus Christ.

III. But there is one more reason we need this replay. We need this instant replay to hear opportunity knocking again.

No matter how many times you run the film on the replay of a sporting event, you can't have the play itself over again. But there are opportunities to learn from our weaknesses and strengths and there is always next week's game.

The same may be said for us here today in the New Virginia church. No matter how many times we re-run the 100th year celebration of this church, we can't have that day over; we can't build it. But new opportunities are given to us each and every day when we let ourselves be inspired by that which forged the will of a people called Methodist in New Virginia. Then there's always tomorrow and tomorrow and another 100 years.

In the book I referred to a few moments ago, Louis L'Amour captures the sense of being inspired by a building when he writes about the building of a Wyoming town in 1869:

"Where the wagons stopped we built our homes, making the cabins tight against the winter's coming. Here in this place we would build our town, here we would create something new.

We would space our buildings, lay out our streets and dig wells to provide water for our people. The idea of it filled me with a heartwarming excitement such as I had not known before.

Was it this feeling of creating something new that held my brother Cain to his forge throughout the long hours? He knew the steel he turned in his hands, knew the weight of the hammer and where to strike, knew by the glow of the iron what its temperature would be; even the leap of the sparks had a message for his experience.

He knew when to heat and when to strike and when to dip the iron into water; yet when is the point at which a group of strangers becomes a community? What is it that forges the will of a people?

This I did not know, nor had I books to advise me, nor any experience to judge a matter of this kind. We who now were alien, strangers drawn together by wagons moving westward, must learn to work together, to fuse our interests, and to become as one. This we must do if we were to survive and become a town."

There you have it: to work together, to fuse our interests, and to become one. This, the congregation of 100 years ago, had to do in order to build this church.

We look back and we think about how this church has been saved and we say, "Those were the days, my friend, we thought they'd never end, we sing and dance forever and a day."