

Hendricks Chapel Sermon

THE TWENTY-FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST
11:00 A.M., HENDRICKS CHAPEL, SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY
A SERVICE OF THE WORD FOR KINGDOMTIDE

NOVEMBER 9, 1975

TODAY'S MUSIC

Prelude: Sonata II (1st movement) Paul Hindemith
Processional Hymn: Pg. 27 "Immortal Invisible,
God Only Wise" St. Denio
Hymn of the Week: Pg. 58 "We Come Unto Our Father's
God" Nun Fruet Euch
Recessional Hymn: Pg. 478 "Lead On, O King Eternal" Lancashire
Anthem: Cantate Domino Heinrich Schutz

TODAY'S READINGS

First Reading: Hosea 11:1-4, 8-9: "How can I give you up,
O Ephraim!"
Second Reading: I Thessalonians 5:1-11: "You are not in darkness,
brethren."
Gospel: Matthew 25:14-30: "I have made five talents
move."

TODAY'S LEADERS

Leader: Dean McCombe
Preacher: Dr. Capps
Readers: Ashok Kalai, Class of '76
Paul Waldner, Class of '75

Vice Chancellor Michael O. Sawyer will be the guest at Monday Munchies tomorrow at 11:45 a.m. in Dean McCombe's office. His topic will be "Administration at Syracuse University". All are welcome.

Chapel Board will meet in Dean McCombe's office following the Wednesday Communion Service, which is held in the North Wing of the Chapel at 5:15 p.m.

Dean McCombe will preach at next Sunday's service. In preparation, please read the following: Malachi 2:1-10; I Thessalonians 2:8-13; Matthew 23:1-12.

Any students interested in working in local churches weekends are asked to call Darrell Fasching, Ext. 3-2901, for further information.

Chapel Board is collecting food and clothing for needy families for the Thanksgiving holiday. Please bring non-perishable food items and clothing to the Dean's office in the basement of Hendricks Chapel weekdays from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Hendricks Chapel will present the first in a series of Performers' Concerts next Sunday evening at 8:00 p.m. Timothy Albrecht, Organist, is a doctoral candidate at the Eastman School of Music. These concerts are open to the public.

Faculty and students are invited to the wine and cheese party at Community House every Friday from 4:00 to 6:00 p.m. All are welcome.

The meditation this morning is based on the Epistle Lesson for the day, the text from the Second Letter of St. Paul to the Thessalonians, the first eleven verses of chapter 5:

[read the passage again]

Can there be typed in?

On first reading I couldn't help but reflect on an experience I had a few years when I met Norman O. Brown for the first time.

Brown, as you know is the author of Love's Body, Life Against Death, Clay Time, etc.

It was at a faculty ^{gathering} meeting in California, at Santa Cruz, and during the course of the introductions prior to the meeting, upon meeting me, Norman O. Brown said, "I've been wanting to meet you for some time."

which flattered me, of course...

and then he added: "I understand you are a Christian..."

I hesitated a little, ^{suspicious} not quite knowing what to make of this, or how to respond immediately in a faculty group.....

So, he went on, "You are a Christian, aren't you?"

And I said, "Yes, I am a Christian, but I'm not sure you and I would understand that ^{designation} term in the same way."

He responded, "oh, we could agree quickly on what it is to be a Christian..."

I waited.

He said, "A Christian is one who is praying the last words of the New Testament fervently."

I looked at him.

He went on, "you do remember the last words of the New Testament, don't you?"

I acknowledged that I did. And then together we spoke them,

"Come quickly, Lord Jesus." And I went away realizing how

I cite this encounter this morning because the Epistle lesson ~~is in~~ ^{skewed his} ~~the same mode.~~ ^{expresses the same truth.}

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through
etc.

In our lesson, we are given a ^{brief} very interesting glimpse into the life of the Christians in Thessalonica, ~~in~~ ⁱⁿ the 1st century, ~~and thus,~~ ^{and thus,} ~~of that is,~~ among first-generation Christians. —

We can learn a lot about ~~them~~ ^{their background} simply by reading Paul's letters to them....

We understand, as I said, that they are first-generation Christians...

Their enthusiasms are still large and vital....

We can also gather that much of their education into matters religious has been supplied by St. Paul.

He had been with them on several earlier occasions...

and he is using this letter as a means of reminding them of things he has already taught them...

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It is also apparent that their initiation into the ways of the Christian faith was accompanied by a large dose of spirit-filled action..

There were ~~xx~~ ecstatic persons among them....

Some had experienced what it is to be filled with the Spirit...

If they were around today, we'd probably call them charismatics, ~~or~~ or we'd probably suspect that they had had some exposure to pentecostalism...

For them, being a Christian was a very inward thing.

Intellectual understanding wouldn't have been enough.

They really felt moved by the spirit.

4

Also, the letters of Paul make clear that ~~that~~ many of the Thessalonians really felt compelled

to change their ways ~~radically~~ radically

when they became Christians. ~~It was~~ personal transformations

This involved personal transformations.

There ~~is~~ evidence that they were idol worshippers before,

and that they have given up the idols now that they have become filled with the Spirit.

It is also apparent that a lot of them liked to party a lot....

There are references to previous wild orgies.

A lot of them liked to drink a lot ...

in fact, drink too much.

There are heavy references to "Bible" - Be of whom. The text to need to be solved.

And some of them had even returned to former drinking practices....

It also seems as if their parties provided for male-female exchanges of a rather free and even sordid nature....

The reason we can infer this is that some of them, after becoming Christians, thought it appropriate to avoid relations with members of the opposite sex altogether... even marriage relationships....

Like with parties, orgies, ~~drink~~ and drink, they felt this an area ~~how~~ better left completely alone...

Then there is the ~~element~~ dimension of hostility in the letters. ~~too~~ relationships ~~that is,~~ that is, persons in the same area were hostile to the Christians...

the Christians They had suffered a lot because of their profession of ~~Christian~~ faith.

not just mental suffering, but afflictions and even persecution..

In other words, it wasn't easy to be the way they had become...

The environment didn't support their religious preferences...

They were a minority in the land....

a rather obvious minority...

So, it was understandable that they had many questions....

Not simply questions of clarification about things they had been taught...

but deep, x searching questions about what would happen next...

~~Because~~

Because some didn't know what would happen next, they had drifted into idleness....

About these St. Paul said, "if a person doesn't work, he shouldn't be allowed to eat..."

And yet it was somewhat understandable that some among them would fall idle...

For the expectation was that Jesus would come again....

They thought rather soon.

If someone had happened on to the scene and had asked the Thessalonian Christians what they were doing, ~~they would~~ he would have heard them say, "well, we are waiting for Jesus to return..."

~~They would~~ And, of course, if you are waiting for Jesus to return, to change everything, there isn't much point in storing up treasures on earth, or in making long-range earthly plans, or in making sure your projects and investments are in order...

Should they take on life - insurance policies?

The problem is that they had been waiting for some time, and they had begun to wonder if they had understood the situation properly...

Why hadn't Jesus come...?

How long could they maintain their enthusiasms...?

~~They would~~ How could they keep the expectation alive...?

In other words, they wanted a better sense of the sequence of things to come....

So ~~they~~ they turned to their teacher for advice...

And to make matters worse, he was unable to come see them, although he said that he really wanted to...

So they had to depend upon their mails for answers to these fundamental questions... This is background to St. Paul's letter.

In the words we have read, St. Paul

He tells them first that they really don't need to know anything more about the times and seasons... when this will happen... when that will happen....

To get all of that schemed out in advance, to be able to predict days and times and hours, is to miss the point....

The event is to be a surprise...

It will sneak up on them when they least expect it...

It will shock them....

The day will come, Paul says, like a thief in the night...

But he does add that they can know something about the conditions which might prompt the coming of ~~that~~ that Day...

That is, when ~~people~~ members of their

own company begin to announce that they have peace and security ... nothing to worry about any longer....

are ~~say~~ then they should get worried, and remember that the ~~are~~ day will come like a thief in the night...

They should ~~as~~ also know that the day will be accompanied by a lot of terror... ~~tention to the commanding voice...~~

It will scare them... the end is imminent...

It will strongly affect them....so much so that they will be involved totally in the event... like a woman giving birth to a child....

But then ^{after mentioning this.} he suddenly switches it from terror to comfort...

And he tells them to think of the coming of that day ~~as~~

according to another image than that of the thief sneaking up on them, or breaking in on them, in the middle of the night... ~~data~~

He says, in effect, but this is to use night imagery...

You Thessalonians don't belong to the night -- you belong to the day...

childbirth = like day break -

Let's consider all of this as something that occurs in daylight....

Then, comes the lesson: the distortion that we can rely on

Thessalonians -- don't be like people of the night....

stumbling around there... without clear sense of direction...

When they are starting to feel good about things!

Thomson lectures talking about "parat vierse"

sees the new day - footprint in new - Keller shown.

If a great text for morning persons!

But be sober ...

You'll Be watchful...

this Be aware

Many of Be perceptive

Live in the light *below the light & expand*

become higher

Paul writes: "For you are all sons of light and sons of the day; we are not of the night or of darkness. So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep aware and be sober."

And then he goes on to reaffirm the message he told them from the beginning:

There are several lessons in it, I think, for us; or, perhaps, these are only some observations:

The first is simply to call attention to the commanding vision....
the expectation that the end is immanent...
... that they are living, as William Thompson might say, at the edge of history....
in the closing moments of time...

Though the vision is never enunciated in full, we can perceive its influences:

It implies that there be no over-investment in the things of the world.....

-- no ^{scheming} ~~scheme~~ and calculating about where we want to be at a certain stage of life....

-- a very sober critique of the attempt to get our kicks from day to day successes.....

Satan's only option for worldly success

Because the end is immanent, there is liberation from many of the world's ~~max~~ enticements ...

// in which impulse is stimulated by the

There is freedom from the distortion that we can rely upon our abilities to perpetuate our own future...

// extremes

(7)

You'll forgive me, I know, for thinking of President Ford in this regard....

Many of us wanted to love him when he came to office....

For it was to be an interim affair....

following a very difficult time....

The country was in the mood to give him support even on a bi-partisan basis....

But the entire atmosphere changed when it became clear that President Ford became interested in his own future as President...

that he wanted also to perpetuate that future....

and that many of the decisions he is making at the moment are calculated to extend the time of his presidency —

This, in a way, is the situation addressed by the text for the day ; ;

~~The~~ ~~vision~~ ~~points~~ ~~to~~ ~~the~~ ~~futility~~ ~~of~~ ~~basing~~ ~~one's~~ ~~confidence~~ ~~upon~~ ~~strategy~~ ~~to~~ ~~perpetuate~~ ~~the~~ ~~moment~~...

On one side, the vision points to the futility of basing one's confidence upon ~~strategy~~ ^{for} perpetuation the moment...

From another side, it illustrates ~~how~~ ~~one's~~ ~~entire~~ ~~orientation~~ ~~to~~ ~~life~~ ~~is~~ ~~changed~~ ~~when~~ ~~it~~ ~~is~~ ~~recognized~~ ~~that~~ ~~the~~ ~~end~~ ~~is~~ ~~near~~....

And it is at we will not be passing this way again... that God is very near....

and that, very soon, God will be present ~~in~~

~~in~~ ~~a~~ ~~fuller~~ ~~way~~ ~~that~~ ~~he~~ ~~is~~ ~~present~~ ~~now~~...

and the third observation is a teaser -- I would be remiss in not mentioning it... I ask only that you think about it...

The teaser is that the Master is away.... We have the same thought in the Gospel lesson of today... The imagery has it that the master was here .. for a brief time .. then he went away... but he'll be coming back, perhaps, very, very soon...

the master is away - but he'll be coming back

8

The second observation concerns the encouragement Paul gave the Thessalonians....

He calls them "children of the day" ... " sons of light...."

And he does this to comfort them...

to free them from worry...

to ease their minds....

He writes: "For God has not destined us for wrath, but to ~~that~~ obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ."

He goes on, "He died for us -- that is, Christ died for us -- so that whether we wake or sleep we might live with him."

In other words, we are living with him now

His presence is with us even now....

The future need not be feared, for the way it will be is not that different from the way it is ...

For children of the light, to face the future is to witness the light shining brighter...

And it is the same light as that in which we are living now...

The Thessalonians have already been initiated into the mode of the future....

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The imagery has it that the master

was here .. for a brief time .. then he went away...

but he'll be coming back, perhaps, very, very soon...

the master is away -
had with
he find his servants --

What do you make of it ... ?

What kind of religion is ~~that~~ it that understands ~~it's~~ it's master to be away ?

It's not just that we are away ...

that is, away from home

like being on a pilgrimage

that we are in the process of journeying beyond and

that we will one day return ...

No, it is the master who is away ...

Absent ... that is, not fully present

But present in a way in memory - in recollection .

Absent, but expected ... and, for the Thessalonians, and perhaps for some of us....

expected immanently....

As I said, I just ask you to consider this ...

I fully believe that Christianity wouldn't be what it is without this very important conviction.....

And I suggest that it is testimony to our present incompleteness....

To me it says that even the most highly sensitized human perspective

even the most accurately corrected perception of things ...

even our best intentions cannot put the pieces together.....

that we sense a presence, but that the presence is absent

that is, if the Master is away ...

or if we really do feel, from time to time,

like motherless children ...

as the spiritual puts it...

It's as if the Master has to do something before he can return.....

He's doing something too

perhaps, as the theological visionaries put it ...

establishing "preparing the conditions to make his return possible...."

or, as I would like to put it....

working preparing for an even creatively to facilitate his ~~greater~~ eventual greater manifestation ...

when God will be all in all ...

when the invisible will be visible hidden things revealed

(10)

Well, all of this is prompted by a little glimpse into the
life of the Christian community in Thessalonica ...

Since we have deigned to identify with them this morning,
I believe it appropriate that we receive St. Paul's
~~salutation to them as our own~~ benediction *as our own*.

May the God of peace himself sanctify you wholly.
And may your spirit and soul and body be kept
sound and blameless at the coming of our
Lord Jesus Christ.....
He who calls you is faithful, and he will do it.

Amen