

General Revelation

Romans 10:18b

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

One of the great advantages we have together here, when we talk about the meaning of life and what is beyond our universe, is that we are all the same. All of us face the same kinds of tasks during the week, the same kinds of happiness, the same kinds of problems, and we all meet the same kinds of reactions from other people. We find that we often react in the same way to certain human situations. It is really very natural for me to understand the same things as you. The old human family-resemblance binds a good comedian and his audience together. It binds a pastor and his dear friends together.

And yet, we know that at times our experience together has gone beyond that. There have been those moments when I have described some human situation and it is exactly what you have experienced. We then feel a closeness to each other that comes from our empathy and our love for each other.

We all know that there come other holy moments, when a stillness has come upon all of us, and thoughts have come that are deeper than the words that I am giving out. You are being touched in a deeper place in your personality than I could ever reach. In those moments the telephone operator (and that is all that I am), the human instrument, fades into the background. You begin to know that this is your Maker speaking to you. At times he is making totally different emphases from the ones the human speaker is making.

It is in those moments that we realize we are experiencing that which is in this verse: "Faith comes from hearing and hearing by the preaching of Christ (by Christ himself preaching to us)." {This is a paraphrase of Romans 10:17.}

We all know that those moments have occurred when we have not just been a speaker and an audience. We have not just been dear friends discussing some subject together. There have come moments when God has broken in upon us, and you know that you have been hearing him explaining something to your conscience -- that part of you that is deeper than your mind and your emotions. This is what he is explaining to your conscience: "If you had been the only person in the whole world, I would still have died for you."

It is then that you sense Jesus explaining to you: "Look, these holes that the wrath of God has made in your grasping hands, and by which he destroyed that tremendous addiction that your personality has to things -- that is what these holes in my hands are about. And the feeling of nakedness that I felt on the cross, hanging there in public view for everyone to look at -- that did not bring simply the pain and agony of them seeing my body. The real pain and agony came from my bearing your paranoid personality with all its fearfulness and self-defensiveness. It came from allowing the wrath of my Father to burn it out and destroy it in me. That was the agony I felt."

It is then that we realize that this is Jesus, the eternal Son of God, speaking from the first century to us now in the twentieth century. He is pointing out: "You see, God made me to be sin who knew no sin. You see, I died for all; therefore all died -- including you." You realize that someone other than a human speaker is talking to your conscience, and is explaining to you what happened to Jesus and why it happened.

You remember God's word explaining why Jesus bore you to death with him, and why he bore all that pain: "God made him to be sin who knew no sin." Why? "That in him we might become the righteousness of God." (2 Corinthians 5:21) And, "He died for all, therefore all died." Why? "That those of us who live might live no longer for ourselves, but for him who died for us." {Paraphrase of 2 Corinthians 5:14-15}

It is at those times that you realize that it is God speaking to your conscience, under your mind and your emotions. He is saying, "Have I borne that pain in vain? Will you respond not only with your mind and your emotions, but also with your conscience and your will? Will you die to self with Jesus, and will you rise to God with Jesus? Will you die to that life of yours that is so selfish and is so dependent upon things and circumstances and people? Will you rise into a life that is dependent upon God himself?"

You begin to realize that it is Jesus saying, "Will you allow the holes that have been made in my hands to be made in your grasping hands? Will you stop grasping? I have destroyed the addiction of your personality to things and people that makes you grasp. Now, will you submit your will to what your conscience says has happened in me? Will you stop grasping? Will you, in fact, accept holes in your hands? Will you become like me, a person who was not always trying to hold things to himself? Will you become like me, a person who had hands that simply passed things on to others?"

It is then that you sense Jesus speaking to your conscience: "Will you allow my death to take away the sin in your life and not just use it as a cover-up for your sins? Will you live in the reality of what has been wrought for you in me?" Those are the moments when we sense it is Christ himself preaching to us. All of us have had something of that experience as we come together Sunday after Sunday.

Now, you may say, "I kind of know what you mean, but I haven't had that experience. I know that Jesus' death does show us that God alone can be trusted and that we cannot be trusted at all. I know that, but I actually haven't had moments like that when I sensed some deep life speaking to me. I just haven't felt it."

Loved ones, I do think that those of us who have sensed this thing should look closely at the verse we are studying in Romans. I will share what God has shown me on this verse: "But I ask, have they not heard? Indeed they have; for, 'Their voice has gone out to all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world.'" (Romans 10:18)

Dying with Jesus to self and rising with Jesus to God is a truth that has been set forth so that you could see it in numberless events of your life. The verse is saying that there is a voice that goes out throughout the whole earth. It has gone out to you countless times -- that God alone is the one who can be trusted and that your self cannot be trusted.

Loved ones, what voice are they talking about? What voice has gone out to all the earth? There is a reference in our Revised Standard Version of the Bible in Psalm 19:4: "Yet their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world." Whose voice? "The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard; yet their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world." (Psalm 19:1-4)

Loved ones, every one of us in this room has received through the general revelation of God clear indication that he can be trusted, and that we are to live our lives depending on him and not on self. The very heavens and the very beauty of the earth declare that.

How many of us have lain on our backs on a beautiful summer afternoon and stared at the big sky? We see that tissue of white clouds against the blue backdrop of the heavens. You turn your head to the side, and there is still more of it. You look at it and see that God has put not only clouds in the sky, but it is all moving. Everything is moving.

For a moment you think of the bedroom ceiling you painted, and of the paint dripping down your arm and into your eyes. When you finished, you could see all the marks that shouldn't be there. And suddenly you realize -- it doesn't even move! There is a voice just shouting at you: "Obviously the one who painted that sky is far bigger and more capable than you are, or any of your friends. You can live your life in dependence on me!"

The voice of nature is constantly telling us that we can depend on the Father just as Jesus depended on his Father. Also, the voice of our own nature and personality continually tells us that we cannot and are not to depend on ourselves.

Who of us has not determined this? "I will not let her walk over me again." Or, "I will not let him walk over me again." Whether it is a roommate or a relative, we have determined to stand up for our own rights this time. "I am going to get my own way. I will insist on it. I will maintain my dignity."

And then, after the battle is over, as we sit trembling with strain and weariness and frustration and guilt in the ruins of a relationship, isn't there often a voice that says, "How different this mess is that you have created -- from the peace of that dear person hanging on the cross, with those people around him saying, 'He saved others; himself he cannot save.'"

Haven't you heard God's voice saying, "Don't you see that the cross is the norm for your personality? Don't you see that your old personality, as it used to be, was crucified with Christ? It can only exist in that death of what people can do to it, in that death of what people think of it. Don't you see that the cross is the norm for a healthy personality? It is the only way your new personality will work."

God's voice is saying to us again and again in personal situations that the norm is patience -- the abnormal is impatience. The norm is love -- the abnormal is hatred. The norm for you in your position in Jesus is keeping your temper. The abnormal is losing your temper. The norm for you is being unselfish. The abnormal is being selfish. In a thousand ways this voice within us says, "Life is balanced and filled with peace and rest as I live the same way Jesus lived -- dead to what I want, dead to what I desire, and alive only to what God wants."

Psychiatrists tell us that the feelings and attitudes that cause tightening of the stomach muscles, tightening of the outlet of the stomach, and a constraining of the circulation of the blood -- all cause disease, headaches, and pain. These attitudes and feelings that spoil the free operation of the physical body are envy, jealousy, anger, fear, pride -- all the things that are listed in Chapter 5 in Galatians as the works of the flesh.

Don't you see? It is God's dear voice calling to us again and saying, "Look, if you would live to me and die to yourself with my Son -- as has already happened on the cross -- you will find your body operating the way it was meant to."

Loved ones, that is what the verse means: "Their voice has gone out to all the earth." You have heard the voice of nature. You have heard the voice of your human nature a thousand times saying that the norm is to be dead to your self and alive to God. That is why you cannot get away from the truth of the miracle that happened to us in Jesus. It is written into the very fabric of our beings. It is written into the very fabric of the environment around us.

And loved ones, God's dear voice will speak to you again right after this service, either through your own personality's response or through the beauty you see outside. That voice will continue speaking to you again and again: "Will you accept that the holes in my dear Son's hands are eternal holes that destroyed the miserable addiction of your personality to things? Those holes can be made real in your hands and you can have the freedom my Son had."

I pray that some of you will respond to that voice this very day.

Let us pray. Dear God, we're just bewildered that we can so often kick against the pricks and the goads. We've seen these things a thousand times. We've wrought havoc with our own lives and the lives of our loved ones, through refusing to live that cross life that Jesus lived.

Dear God, we see that the reason that it wreaks such havoc is that it is unreality. It is unreal to treat ourselves as God. It is unreal to treat ourselves as being able to do just what we want when we want. You are God, and you alone can do those things.

Lord, we thank you that we need not be burdened with this recalcitrant personality with its moral perversity. We thank you that we were remade in your Son Jesus, and that the whole purpose of his dear death was so that we would respond not with our minds and not with our emotions, but we would respond with our conscience and our wills -- and we would begin to submit our wills to what our conscience reveals to us happened to us on the cross.

Lord, we thank you that we will hear your voice clearly telling us those things again today. Lord, we would from this moment on begin to touch reality, and begin to live in resurrection life, for your glory. Amen.