

Our Father's Arms

Romans 11:31

Sermon Transcript by Reverend Ernest O'Neill

Have you ever watched a father trying to show his little five-year-old son how to hit a baseball? He stands behind the little guy and puts his arms around him and places his hands over the little guy's hands, and then he tries to show him how to swing the bat. And you know what the little guy is doing. He is saying, "I can do it! I know how to do it! I can do it! Let me do it! I can do it!" You almost feel his small body filled with strain. "I know how to hit it!"

That's what sin is. It is. Our dear Creator is standing behind you, putting his arms around you and putting his hands over your hands. He is trying to impart to you all the understanding that he has of your function in this world, because he alone knows exactly what you are here for. He is trying to give you a feel of it. He is trying to give you a feel of how to swing the bat. The same kind of uppity independence is in you and me that is in that little baseball player.

Really! It is the same uppity independence. We are saying, "I can do it! I know how to do it myself!" We feel we are absolutely capable of reproducing the flawless action of the Master on our own, by our own independent effort. It is just like that little guy thinking that somehow he is able to reproduce the flawless action of the master, Babe Ruth [1895-1948, American professional baseball player], just by imitating it or knowing how to do it. It is just as impossible for him to do that as for us to do what we're trying to do. Unless Babe Ruth is somehow able to transmit to that little guy his sense of touch and feel, his judgment of distance and his quickness of eye. Unless Babe Ruth is somehow able to transmit that to the little guy, that little guy can't reproduce the flawless action of the master.

That's really our own situation. The riches of this world can only be released by the One who placed them in the world. The geothermal energy underneath the earth, the beautiful forms of metal and shape that are locked into this universe, the shale oil, the power of the wind, the beauty of color and form, the colors under the ocean bed can only be released in beautiful harmony, rather than in destruction the way we do, by the One who locked them away. You and I are here to take part in that release.

Every one of us is put here to, in some way, release the beauties and the magnificence of this world so that the whole universe is filled with the glory of the Creator who originally put them there. We can only do it if we have the touch of life, the feel and the exact sense of striking the ball that comes from the Creator's hands being on our hands.

Loved ones, sin isn't always immorality. The heart of sin is not actually crime or what we call the "big sins". Those are just bluffs. It's not the drinking or all the other things that are the problem. It's this inner straining that we have whereby we want to do it in our own way. It's that that makes us miss the ball so often. It's that that makes us wave the bat all around in all directions. "We will hit it somehow! We will hit it. Somewhere it is there." We keep blasting and blasting, trying with all our strength to do what we are supposed to do here on earth, and we don't have a feel for it.

Of course, that's what happened in the early days. God did pick out for himself a little nation and

he chose to impart his own wisdom and insights to them. But they responded much the same way as the little guy with the baseball bat. They just wanted to do it on their own. He said to them, "Look, I will provide all that you need. I will give you my wisdom and my insights into the universe. I'll show you how to unlock the treasures of this world."

Their reaction was the same as the little guy's. You can see it if you look at Exodus 14:10. This little nation was just about to be rescued by God: "When Pharaoh drew near, the people of Israel lifted up their eyes, and behold, the Egyptians were marching after them; and they were in great fear. And the people of Israel cried out to the Lord; and they said to Moses, 'Is it because there are no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? What have you done to us, in bringing us out of Egypt? Is not this what we said to you in Egypt, "Let us alone and let us serve the Egyptians?" For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness.' That's it. "Let me alone, let me alone. I can do it myself!" That's why our lives are so often messed up. Have you ever thought about it?

Your life doesn't mess up by massive crises. Your life messes up by little errors, little wrong directions, little wrong turnings, and little wrong tendencies. Your life messes up gradually.

God gave to this group of people special abilities to develop the resources in the world. But about a thousand years after he had given them those abilities, they had again done it in their own way and perverted them completely. Amos 8:4: "Hear this, you who trample upon the needy, and bring the poor of the land to an end, saying, 'When will the new moon be over, that we may sell grain? And the Sabbath, that we may offer wheat for sale, that we may make the ephah small and the shekel great, and deal deceitfully with false balances, that we may buy the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals, and sell the refuse of the wheat?'"

That was them--"I can do it. All right, you have given me this; now let me use it the way I want to use it." Our Creator was so anxious for them to see the intimate trusting contact of a son to his father that he had in mind for them, that he even described the kind of life that they would live if they were allowing him to have his hands on their hands. He said, "Listen, if you will just let my hands rest on your hands and show you how to do what I want you to do, then you won't have to steal; I'll provide everything you need. You won't have to tell lies about your friends. You won't have to bear false witness because you will know that I'm right with you and you won't care what anybody thinks of you because I obviously love you. You won't keep wanting other things that you see in shop windows; you won't keep coveting, because you will know that what you have at this present time is exactly what I want you to have."

Of course, they took those things and they made them into laws. These things that were to be signs to them that they were in fact trusting their Father's hands, they turned into laws to prove to God that they were yielding even when they weren't yielding. It was like the little guy straining against his father's hands, resisting the guidance of his father's touch and managing to hit every third ball, and then saying, "Look, I'm doing it the way you showed me." That was what the dear Israelites did. "took, I'm doing it, even though I'm doing it on my own and without you and I'm not nearly doing it the way you want me to."

Loved ones, that was the situation all down through those years when what they most needed was to yield to the loving contact of their Father's hands and to allow him to put his hands on their lives and make their lives what he wanted them to be. But they would not yield to that. It's so often the same with our selves. What we most need is that touch of God that changes us and molds our lives.

At the crucial time in history when God's arms appeared in obvious visible form, they utterly rejected them. Here's the moment when God's arms appeared here on earth so that everybody would see what he wanted to do. John 8:31: "Jesus then said to the Jews who had believed in him, 'If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.' They answered him, 'We are descendants of Abraham, and have never been in bondage to anyone. How is it that you say, "You will be made free?"' Jesus answered them, 'Truly, truly I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin. The slave does not continue in the house forever; the son continues forever. So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed. I know that you are descendants of Abraham; yet you seek to kill me, because my word finds no place in you.'"

Loved ones, Jesus was God's arms. Jesus' death and resurrection was God's arms around us as a human race, trying to at last give us the sense of touch and feel that he had for our lives, trying to mold our hands and the movement of our bodies and our minds into the same form and feeling that he himself has for us. That's what he was doing at Calvary. Calvary was actually the expression in time and space of God cosmically destroying the whole human race, including and renewing us completely. It was his remaking of the human race. It was the great moment when he got his arms around us, his hands upon our hands and changed us, changed us into people that can trust and yield to him. That's what Calvary is all about; that is our greatest need. Your greatest need and my greatest need is to be changed by God's own molding action so that he gives us his feel for our lives and we can begin to live as the little guy would live.

I remember my dad teaching me soccer that way at the beginning. And you know one funny thing--when you are close to your dad like that you can certainly tell whether he has cleaned his teeth or not, can't you? Or you can certainly tell whether he wears deodorant or not, you are so close to him. It is interesting, most of us can still tell the smell of our dads as they helped and showed us things. We are so close to them that that's what we felt about them. That's what it's like, loved ones.

That's the kind of closeness that each of us needs to experienced with our dear Father. That's what he wants for us in Jesus. He wants that kind of closeness for us. He wants us to yield to his dear arms on Calvary as he tries to draw us into the center of his Son's death and resurrection. If we will yield to that and accept that, we will find our lives being changed by His Spirit.

Now the verse we are studying today states that the dear Israelites didn't do that. Maybe you would just like to glance at it as we conclude. Romans 11:31: "So they have now been disobedient"--and you see for years they have; they have failed to be what even in their own laws or their perversion of God's laws they think they should be--"in order that by the mercy shown to you they also may receive mercy." The only mercy they thought God extended to them was a readiness to forget the times they missed the ball. That's it. That's the only mercy they knew in Old Testament times--that God was ready to forget the times they missed the ball. They didn't realize that there was a greater mercy, there was a mighty work done in Jesus on Calvary in eternity whereby God actually stood behind them, put his arms around them, placed his hands over theirs and changed them and made them able to live the way he meant them to live. They didn't know that.

That's why Paul says they were disobedient, so that by the mercy that has been shown to us, they themselves may receive the same mercy. In other words, they may see that mercy is not simply forgiving failures in the past, but the greatest glory of mercy is God changing you now, this very day, by the work he has done upon you in Jesus to make you able to hit the ball.

Loved ones, that's the same with our own lives. That's why we are disobedient, do you know that? God uses even our disobedience. When you have trouble with anger, when you have trouble with jealousy, when you have trouble with pride, when you have trouble with a critical spirit towards other people, that's God saying to you, "Do you see it's not knowing how to be good that will enable you to be like me? It doesn't matter how much you know how to be good. It's not that that counts. It's yielding to me, yielding to my hands, yielding to his Spirit as I begin to mold your life. That's what will enable you to be free of these things. While these things remain in your life it's an indication that you are not yielding. Don't get all uppity and determined that 'I'm going to hit the ball with my own strength and effort.' Don't! Instead yield to me. Yield to my cross. Come into my Son's death. I destroyed you there and I remade you there. Believe that and now yield to my hands as you feel their touch on your life."

That's what it is, loved ones. That's what trusting God is about. The truth is we can't do anything on our own. We really can't. After a while the little guy begins to be natural. The father's nature begins to be his nature and the father's touch begins to be his touch, but it's so good to feel the father's hands are right there whenever you are not quite sure.

That's what faith is. That's the attitude that the Father is asking from all of us here. Uppitiness is what prevents him governing our lives. I suppose there isn't one of us that doesn't know exactly the moment when we say, "I can do it myself." So zero in on that, whatever that moment is for you, and in these few minutes of quietness when we pray give that to your Father and say, "Lord, I want your hands on my life, I want to be changed the way you want to change me."