

Maturing Through Trials - Testimony

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

I think loved ones, we'll just take it where it goes this evening if that's okay. I suppose I'd like to say to you how much you mean to me. And maybe all of us feel that after we've been on vacation or been away, but I think this time it's especially true. I suppose when I heard some of the things that were happening, it's you I thought about you know.

We've already talked enough about being on the cross to be happy that it doesn't matter what people say about us but I suppose I thought of you a lot. Of course, I being the shepherd, keep thinking of you, "Well, they're just young, they're just young." And of course, to come back and find a rock, you know just a rock, and the love of – oh you know, I hate to really mention names but I feel the love of Jim, and Clyde, and Colleen, and Mike, and all of you out there.

And it was like coming back to a rock, it really was. I came back on Friday and just came by on Saturday because I was looking for the notes of those old sermons which I never did find, I've lost them somewhere. But I met some of you, and then coming this morning and sensing that it was just a ship that hadn't even wobbled and it was just so good. And I'd like to thank God for each of you and for your trust in Him, and your love, and your faithfulness, and for putting in your lives a lot of the things we've shared. And it just has meant more than I could express tonight and what I have to watch is that I just keep it under control and keep expressing what I really think deep down.

And I think there are some things that Jesus gave me there, that's why I think it will be a bit rough tonight, because I just got it there, a moment or two ago, what I should say. But, I think some of the things are under the heading of "God and trouble". And I think that one of the good things, when we run up against trouble as a body, or when you run up against it individually, is it throws you out of any sense that you can control it all, doesn't it? Part of what baffles you about this stuff is that it's way out, you just don't expect it, it's so dumb that you can hardly conceive that anybody would think of it. And it's so totally unexpected that you feel, "What can you do? They're insane. They're mad." And it does tend to throw you absolutely out of any sense that you can control this thing.

And I think it's the same in our own personal lives, isn't it? When you hit trouble that just bewilders you and that is beyond what you expect, it is good, it throws you into the right relationship with God again. And I think that's good, you know. That when you find the job may just be going down the drain, or you find something at home falling completely apart, or you find some friends taking an attitude to you that you cannot understand at all, in a way that throws us into reality. Because really, that is truth, isn't it? That we are not the Gods in control of things; that actually any semblance of order in our lives is only because of God's dear grace and we can't control a fly let alone the whole direction of our lives. And so it's good when trouble hits us, you know.

And I think it's maybe good for us to see that: that trouble is a good thing. That it is right what our dear Father said, "Greet it as pure joy when you enter into various trials." We all like to think, "No, no trouble is a bad thing. Trouble throws us into chaos." No, it throws us out of the bluff sense of order that we have tried to create by our own power and it throws us back into the

hands of God realizing that if he does not save us, nobody will save us.

And that's the first thing that the Father showed me just a few minutes ago, that I should share with you about God and trouble; trouble is usually a good thing because it throws us out of controlling our own lives and into the hands of God. And I think Jack, I think of you and I think of your loved one and others of us that have just gone through hard things. And it's probably a blessing, it's a blessing to us. And that's I think the first thing that came to me when I was down there, you know, sailing in that old boat, I thought, "Oh Lord, I ought to be back with my loved ones helping and sorting it out." And he showed me, "This is a good thing."

I don't know what they meant fully by "the greening of America" but I thought it was the maturing, and in a way this is the greening of the body, it's the maturing of the body. It's you coming into your own fullness and certainly I for one feel that I'm not any longer with little undergraduates that I met at the University of Minnesota 10 years ago but that this is a strong body that will take all the beating that we will have to face, loved ones, in the coming years. We will. There will be a lot worse than these things to come in our own personal lives and as a group.

The second thing that the Father showed me was that the trouble that you face personally in your own life and that we face together as a body is not actually due to our own stupidity. It isn't. I suppose that's the thing that always comes to me. In Ireland we were brought up, "You're responsible for your actions. You're responsible to make sure you don't say things that can be misunderstood." And so I always, as any kind of person who is interested in the old intellect does, I think, "Could you have said it differently? Could you have done it differently?" Then the Father came straight through me and showed me, "Look, when any of you say that in times of trouble you're seeing the thing completely wrongly. You're blaming yourself for something that has happened. Do you know who has brought this or who has allowed it to come? I have allowed it to come."

It suddenly hit me that if you think of it, think of all the mistakes you have made in your life, think of all the mistakes I have made in my life, think of all the mistakes we have made together and how many times God has saved us from the consequences that should have followed those things. And so any time he allows trouble to come to our door, it's because he is allowing it to come. And I saw again the meaning of that verse, you know, that you should in all circumstances give thanks to God for all things.

And then the next clause I saw in a new way because it goes, "For this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus." And I thought, up to really recently, in fact, this past week and particularly this evening, I thought, "Oh yeah that's the will of God for you to give thanks to him in all circumstances for all things. That's what that means." And then suddenly I saw, "No, that's not what it means." You've to give thanks to God for all things in all circumstances because that very thing, the very circumstances that you're in, the very things that you're experiencing, those are the will of God for you in Christ Jesus.

And so when trouble hits you or hits us, we need to see that that is God's permissive will for us in Christ Jesus. It's not something that is due to our own mistakes, or our own foolishness, it's not something we could have avoided by doing things better. It's something that God has allowed to come to us at this present time. And then suddenly I saw that the Father knows exactly what we need as a body. He does, he knows exactly what we need and he knows that this is the next step for us. And he is allowing us to touch a little of the opposition and the little of the unpopularity, and a little of the hard things that all of us loved ones, are going to have to live with for the rest of

our lives if we're going to be in that dear Savior who walked that Calvary road.

And so I don't know about you, I don't know what you're experiencing, I know what some of you are experiencing and some of you have experienced. But I think it's really vital for us when trouble comes to our door to give thanks to God for all things, and all circumstances because that very trouble is not God's ideal will but it's his permissive will for us. It's his best for us at this time. It's the next thing that we need to make us more like Jesus.

And it was just interesting because I thought, "Give thanks for those happy souls that have been tearing us apart." And then God said, "Yes, because I am going to use those dear ones to do something in you individually and as a body." And suddenly it's in a whole new light. Suddenly you're not gritting your teeth and trying to say, "Oh I thank you Lord for that relative that has just torn me apart." Or, "I thank you for that employer that has just thrown me out of my job."

It's no longer that gritting your teeth and trying to work yourself up to it but it's seeing that the Father who loves you is working something beautiful through this; that he has everything under control. And these wee souls don't know it, they may mean evil as Joseph's brothers meant evil to him when they sold him into slavery, but the Lord meant it for good to them. And that's the situation with us.

And every situation loved ones, whether it's the flat tire on the freeway at a wind chill of minus 60 or whether it's the finances falling apart, or whether it's some friend stabbing you in the back, the same situation pertains for all of us: give thanks to God with joy for it because this that looks like a messenger of Satan is actually an angel in disguise and God is doing something in you through this. It just cleared things for me. I don't know any of the dear clergymen that have taken action against us, but it was so good to be able to thank God for them with joy and delight in my heart because, he was using this for something in us as a group.

And then that's the last thing I saw: that all things do work together for good to them that love God. You remember the verse runs, "God is working together for good in them that love him." And I suddenly saw that things such as we've experienced as a body, the trouble that we experience as individuals, they are God's beautiful plan for us. He is working good out of those things. There is nothing that can happen to us, however bad or terrible, that God is not using to make us more like his son Jesus. And you remember, that's what that verse goes on to say, "That they may be conformed to the image of his son."

And then I'd just share with you one more verse that God made real to me years ago but he brought it back to me at this time. I don't know the reference, "And I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not and I will lead them in paths that they have not known. I will make the darkness light before them and crooked things straight. These things will I do unto them and not forsake them." And when God made that real to me, oh years ago, what hit me was, WHO will he bring? "I will bring THE BLIND by a way that they knew not."

And suddenly I saw, it was only if I was blind and could not see the way forward for myself. It was only if I was like that, that the Lord would bring me along a path that they had not known. And it was only then that he would make the darkness light before me and crooked things straight. And that he would do these things and not leave me or forsake me. And loved ones, it's the same with us individually and as a body.

I used to think, "Oh sure I know what Pat Anderson or Ron Rusnak needs. I know what Martha needs." Or, "I know what Ted needs to become Jesus' man." Well, the truth is we don't. We don't know what each other needs. We don't even know what we ourselves need. But, the Lord knows and he is going to bring the blind by a way that they knew not and the path ahead, even the path that I've mapped out as God has guided me, that may not be the path. God may lead us in paths that we have not known but he will be with us all the way.

And we need to see the delight and the joy of that. This isn't some stereotype organization that has set its path internationally and set up its school, and set up its businesses, and is going to mow right down that road. It's a dynamic, living, changing, developing body of Jesus that is looking forward to what he has around the next corner. And I would ask you who are beginning to move together as a body, will you look at it that way? Especially, maybe you who are sitting here tonight and who have come maybe often and thought, "Well, I do like the body, and I do like the teaching. But, I don't know that I'm going to go abroad. I don't know that I'm going to give up my job and live somewhere else."

Loved ones, maybe you shouldn't say that too fast. I had a friend who was an ex-marine, just a tough guy who became a pastor and he belonged to the Methodist church. And he said, "I will never leave the Methodist church." And of course, he left and joined the Evangelical United Brethren Church. And then he said, "I will never leave the Evangelical." And then he left. He used to say, "As soon as you say, 'I will never do that', repent brother, because you'll do that."

So be careful yourselves, be open in your hearts. Don't say, "Well, yes I'm part of this body but I probably will never go abroad." Don't say that -- because God's promise to us is, "And I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not. I will lead them on paths that they have not known. I will make the darkness light before them and crooked things straight. These things will I do unto them and not forsake them."

And loved ones, one other thing that is good about going on vacation and being away from all you dear, dear people is that you see how bored the world is and how miserable and empty most of the loved ones are. And it's so good to realize that whatever else happens we won't be bored. We'll have exciting things around every corner. And I know that's short but I really have to say what Jesus gave me to say and then shut my mouth.

And I'd just encourage you to see that the Father has put us through our first little test together and we have a glorious future ahead, just glorious. And we are in his hands. And what God is working among us, thank God is not a man's work. That was a good thing for me to come back and sense, "This is not something that Ernest O'Neill has produced and that he alone can take care of." Suddenly I saw you are your own men and women, you are Jesus and he will take care of each of us. And this is a strong body, a creation of God and not of man.

And I think we just need to see the glory of it, need to thank him for it, and need to walk humbly with our God and he will take us all the way. Will we get 10,000 of us abroad by the year 2000? Who cares if we get 10,000? If we get around that number that's okay. But, let's go, let's go for as near to that 10,000 abroad as we can for Jesus. And we've got the next 20 years or so and if it takes a little of what we've gone through, well if the blessing is as great as it's been this time, boy we'll be blessed right out of our socks.

So loved ones, I thank God for you and next Sunday I will preach about the laws of the spirit. Let

us pray. Dear Father we thank you for the family that you've brought us into. Thank you for peace. Thank you for loved ones who love each other and accept each other. Lord we pray for even greater closeness. Lord I'd pray for Ted at this minute, and think of other loved ones who love you. Father I'd pray that you'd draw us all into a close knowledge of each other, a dear acceptance of each other, a warmth of love for each other.

Lord I'd pray that every loved one here this evening, and the dear souls that come on Sunday morning, would all begin to feel a real closeness to each other and to you. A real acceptance, a real feeling that we're known and yet we're loved even though we are known. Father we would pray that you would draw us nearer together and that you would enable us to understand each other even better and to be used to bring each other into the glory of that position you have given us at your right hand in Christ Jesus.

Lord, we'd thank you for that. That we who are dead and are trespassers in sin, you have raised us up and made us sit with you in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. And Father we would pray that you by your Holy Spirit, would so enable us to minister to each other in these coming days, that we will all be lifted in reality into that position and we'll experience the victory, and the triumph of that position in all the troubles that come our way.

And Father we would just thank you for trouble, and thank you for difficulties, and thank you Lord that you know exactly what we need to keep us low before you and to keep us in the hollow of your hand. Father we now pray for all the loved ones who are still trying to sort things out in the Twin Cities. We pray Holy Spirit that you would lay your hand on the dear ones who will write about things and who will talk about things and that you will bring a great peace and a great sense of understanding and love so that your work may prosper.

And Lord Jesus we would pray that many young men and woman would be stirred even by these things and that many would be drawn to some body of yours that will be moving forward for your glory. So we pray our Father, that you will do what you have said, you will work all things together for good to us because we love you. And we thank you Lord Jesus for your love and for your dear example of triumph, and victory, and joy in the midst of the cross. Thank you Lord.

We look forward to the day when we will sit around your throne and talk about the way the Lord our God has led us. Thank you Lord. The grace of our Lord Jesus and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with each one of us now and ever more. Amen.