

To the Members of East Liberty Presbyterian Church:

The ministers of East Liberty Presbyterian Church preach many great sermons through which the voice of God speaks to the hearts of His people. It is our deep and sincere belief that the message brought to us by the Reverend Tim B. Nelson on Sunday, September 29, 1968 was of a special pertinence to each of us in this time and in this place.

We recognize the many physical difficulties that temporarily make church attendance inconvenient so that many members of our congregation were unable to hear this message, one of which every member of East Liberty Presbyterian Church should be aware.

Mr. and Mrs. Bradford C. White
Dr. and Mrs. Everard M. Williams

Sermon by The Rev. Tim B. Nelson
East Liberty Presbyterian Church
Pittsburgh, Pa.
September 29, 1968

THE "HOW" OF IT

During the last week some of us were talking about the coming 150th Anniversary celebration of East Liberty Presbyterian Church. It is a good time to begin planning this because it comes next spring. It is almost as if everything is conspiring with us to help us to understand what 150 years of history means. In fact, we've restored Penn Avenue to its original condition. It is even good this morning, and this was not planned by Dr. Kettring or myself, that one of the anthems was sung in Latin - the language of the Church for almost 2000 years. It gives us a sense of our continuity of that which has gone before us and that which is coming. So, as we consider our past, we must realize that we have come a long, long way. We are the descendants of many generations of people who have sought to serve The Lord in their time according to the needs of their time.

We remember that East Liberty Presbyterian Church was established in that era when the missionary movement was just beginning - people were going out from our country to the "heathen lands", going out to carry the Gospel of the good news of Jesus to the people of the world. This happened at about the same time that we started. East Liberty Presbyterian Church started at about the same time as the industrial revolution in America. We have seen many things happen. We have held many ideas about people and we have seen these ideas come and go. We have seen our nation go from a group of handcraftsmen and farmers to the most prosperous, well-fed, well-educated, well-serviced population in the world, with an industrial complex that is now so interesting, so strong, that it needs fewer and fewer people to make it go. We have come through several theological revivals since 1819. We have seen many things happen in the religious world. Queen Victoria held her sway and influenced even those here in Pittsburgh with a more and a morality that is quickly disappearing now. We have seen a theological revival take place following the First World War - which led to another theological revival that is taking place even now in our midst. And as our Church has grown and prospered, it has done so in that it has responded to the Word of God, the Word made flesh in Jesus, according to the needs of a particular time and a particular people.

The name of greatness has been associated with this congregation. People round about the world know this congregation. We have sent people overseas, we have sent men into the pastorate, we have sent women and children into homes making strong Christian people and families. This is what we have been; this is what we have done, and there is more than I can ever account or remember. When we begin to talk about the past, when we begin to talk about our relatives and our friends and realize how great they were and are, when we even begin to realize the things that we have done and begin to count them as part of our greatness I'm always reminded of something that happened to me when I was a Junior High.

Now, my mother is the seventeenth child of seventeen children and the people of that family have been spread abroad, and many of them have been quite successful. I have an uncle who was the governor of Wyoming for a while and an uncle who was the Speaker of the House of Representatives in California for a while, and growing up in California, we would go up to see Uncle Monte and get the royal treatment. One day I was telling some of my friends about my great relatives and what a wonderful family I had come from and what a grand background I have and mother drew me aside and said, "So, what does that make you? What have you done? Who are you to be claiming the glory of someone else? You don't ride the coat tails of your uncle into the State House of California". So, when we begin to look at ourselves and begin to take stock of 150 years of history we must realize that the perspective of 150 years is grand and even greater is the perspective of 2000 years of history - Christian history - and we are a part of this. But, The Lord, Jesus, Himself, must be looking down and saying, "But, what does that make you? Who are you?" And immediately we have many things that we can claim today.

Our Church is becoming more and more active, more and more concerned, more and more appreciative of the world which is around us. We have established the organization known as ELGAR, REHAB, INC. This group is designed to help rehabilitate homes, to give poverty-stricken people places to live. We have a Tutorial Program in our area which seeks to help the ninth and tenth graders so that they can compete, so that they do not become "drop-outs". We've established boys' clubs and girls' clubs -- many boys and girls are now coming to us whose parents have been involved in these programs. We've done workshops and day camps. We've done all sorts of things -- we've painted houses -- we sew for children in India who cannot go to school because they have no clothes -- we sew for children in Ecumenical Mission and the National Mission. All of these things are great and to our credit, but as we retail them the question must always be in the back of our minds, "What does that make you? What does that make me? How involved am I, or am I willing to ride the coat tails of others who do the work?"

There's an interesting thing going on in the whole of Christianity and this is not just Presbyterianism. There is an understanding and a revival that we must, all of us, find our ministries in the world. The United Presbyterian women have called a program of theirs DARE, standing for the letters D A R E -- "D" standing for "discover the needs" not the suppositions, the needs of your community; "A" "ask for resources"; "R" "respond in action", real concrete, dirty hands kind of action; and "E" "endure" the difficulties,-- DARE. Endure the difficulties--this is what Peter was talking about in his letter. The Christian Church was beginning to come under fire. It was beginning to make itself felt. And, of course, I'm sure you realize one of the primary things that was held against the Church in Rome was that it was a group of anarchists, people who were out to do away with the government and basically, it was over a pinch of incense or a little piece of meat. Christians in conscience could not offer incense to Caesar. Christians in conscience could not eat meat given to idols. And, because they could not do this small thing which was required by their society, they became anarchists--people out to upset the traditional

way of doing things. And, Peter tells them, "Be prepared for trial. Take joy if your suffering is that which is called upon by Jesus. If you can join with Him, then your suffering shall be your joy."

We are asked to dare something, to dare to suffer with Jesus, to dare to be known as Christians in our world, to dare not to give ourselves to something else, to Gods which we have not known. Jeremiah had something to say about that, "How can you go about giving yourselves to gods that you have not known and then come back and claim me, saying 'The Temple of the Lord, the Temple of the Lord'?"

Where are we? Have we set ourselves the task of understanding our past 150 years and those people who lived in Pittsburgh in the early days? It was a tough place and they made their Church and their faith fit those days. Are we willing to bring our Church and our faith to bear in our day and in our time to our generation? For, you see, there is no such thing as the "generation gap". "The generation gap" is something which my age group has devised in order to legalize separating ourselves from the younger generation -- and the younger generation has hopped to it; they are just as glad to be separate. For, you see, the younger generation took us seriously at our word when we taught them about the Declaration of Independence, "When in the course of human events,"-- when we taught them "The Preamble to the Constitution." They thought we lived it; they thought we really meant brotherhood; they thought we really meant fraternity and equality. And, they found out that we are cynics, that we talk a good game. They are willing to comment. Are we willing to listen or are we so busy seeking to find words of rebuttal that we never really listen to one another? Have we made the generation gap really a moat filled with cynicism which comes between us and those who follow us? Younger people are trying to show us the way. They're asking us questions, and we answer with irrelevancies if we answer at all.

We have carried on a form of education within our country that has been very successful in one way. It has created a generation which can live in change. I'm again reminded of my mother who says that she has been asked to change too many times and it's not fair. She was born in a land without airplanes; she was born in a family without automobiles, television, or electricity. Think what each one of those has done for us. Each one has required a change, a change so dynamic and turnabout. And, we're tired -- we don't want a change.

The hardness of Christianity is the fact that we must change. The only thing that is stable in our era is the fact of change. There was a day, a comfortable day, when I was a child, when we knew what was good and we knew what was bad; we knew right from wrong; we knew the flag and country and patriotism. And, all of these things were settled. The depression killed that. World War II and Adolph Hitler, the rule of law and order in Germany changed that. The world is turning and it is changing. There was a day when Christianity was a matter of refraining from certain things. We didn't go to the show on Sunday, we didn't smoke, or drink, or chew, we didn't read certain books. Christianity had become a matter of abstinence. Today the hardness of Christianity is not what we refrain from, but what we are called to be and to do. The hardness of Christianity is that we are being called to take part in our world, to become involved in our world in a real relationship with our world. And the reality of the relationship in the Christian sense and term is one of brotherhood--not fatherhood--brotherhood. We can no longer tolerate within our midst or in ourselves any sense whereby we play the role of father and help other people out. We must become their brothers and join with them in finding their solution.

When we begin this task, we must realize that the gap and the alienation is deep and hard, but it can be crossed--it can be crossed. We can begin to listen to our

brothers round about us; we can begin to listen to the younger generation; we can begin to listen to ourselves; we can begin to take stock of our country. And, it is a great land. When we begin to think of America, let us realize that America was settled by the dissenters. The people who were content, waved goodbye to Columbus and the pilgrims. Let us realize that many of us who have Danish, and Swedish, and German names, came here because our parents and grandparents were "draft card burners" and they left a Europe which was being dominated by a Kaiser. Let us remember that we are always here making a new society in a new land. There is no "status quo" for Americans. That is our brilliance and our beauty. We can never stop -- we must always go forward. So, when we become involved with one another, let us realize that "one another" includes all age groups. That when we begin talking about the Church, we must be considering what some of the age groups are saying about the Church. And, I read to you from a piece which was written by a son of one of the families of our congregation. It appears in a magazine called, THE WORD:

"The old church is dying and a new one is taking its place. Going is the ministry focused solely on the divine aspirations of men, the Sunday Service and the weekday tedium, and non-involved ministers, and the unprovocative message; In its place is coming a Church that seeks out its congregation, functions seven days a week, and is concerning itself, less with the hereafter and more with the NOW. Call it the New Church.

"The Old Church (meaning not just one group of denomination or age group, but the religious organization and the community as a whole) is basically too self-centered; It refuses to believe that humanity for humanity's sake should be of any concern to religious leaders. Religion, to them, for the Old Church, means bring man up to God; Man and God live apart.

"The New Church, therefore, is going through a process of secularization, of bringing God down to man, of bringing them together. Thus, one finds ministers delving into politics and psychology, science and sociology. The emphasis is on man and his world. Religion need no longer be associated with a dry, high-toned sermon about divinity and immortality, for now it finds meaning and expression in the more worldly areas such as poverty and youth.

"The various meanings and expressions of the New Church are not all spelled out and they should never be. The New Church differs from the Old chiefly by being responsive, changing, dynamic; It moves where the Old stood still. The New Church has no definite direction as yet, for it is young and it is experimenting with the ways in which to serve man and God at the same time, better. Perhaps it will settle on the directions out and in: out into the world to get in deeper to the soul of man."

It's a sad thing when our youth point out to us that we feel that somehow God and man live apart, that God is out there somewhere. It's a sad thing when we look at our world and see it as an evil place, as a place of fear and anguish. There has been some question lately as to why we don't have new hymns and new hymnology. They're being written outside the Church. I would read you one called, WHAT A WONDERFUL WORLD! 1.

"I see trees of green, red roses, too
I see them bloom for me and you
And I think to myself, 'What a wonderful world'.

"I see skies of blue and clouds of white
The bright blessed day, the dark sacred night
And I think to myself 'What a wonderful world'.

"The colors of the rainbow, so pretty in the sky
Are also on the faces of people passing by
I see friends shaking hands and saying, 'How do you do'
Really, they're saying, 'I love you'.

"I hear babies cry, I watch them grow
They'll learn more than I'll ever know
And I think to myself, 'What a wonderful world'."

We take baptismal vows pledging ourselves to the nurture and admonishing of the young. We take membership vows in the Church pledging ourselves to the study of the unity and the peace and the forward movement of the Church.

Now it is time for us to begin to act in faith, because you see what we are called to do has nothing to do with something that we do by ourselves. We must begin to act in faith. We are asked to do impossible things, to dream impossible dreams. In the eyes of many strong, wise people we are asked to do foolish things. We are asked to be fools for God, to lose our fears of the future or the present and become involved in the "Now" of God. Jesus said over and over again to His followers, "The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand." Heaven is not a sweet by and by--the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand. This is the good news of our God who is in Jesus Christ, a young man who died painfully and at a very young age. If we join with Him, in His name, seeking to serve the lost and the lonely, the sick and the dying, the poverty-stricken and the prisoner, the mentally ill and deprived, we will have taken one step. But, we cannot lift one foot without faith. We are called to act in faith, the same faith which called East Liberty Presbyterian Church into being in 1819. Let us close the gap between us. Let us strike out in faith, renewing the action and service that we have for one another and for our world.

Let us pray:

O, God, Thy spirit comes upon us as a blowing wind and we are afraid. We turn our backs out of fear of the unknown. Help us to know in our hearts and in our minds and in our bodies that we are not alone, that Thou art with us and will guide us. Reconcile us one with another. Help us to change for Thee and toward Thee. Give us love, and grace, and understanding that Thy Church might be good news to the world around us. This we ask in the name of our Lord, Jesus. Amen.

1. What A Wonderful World, Words and Music by George David Weiss and George Douglass; Valando Music Corp., 22 W. 48th St., N. Y., N.Y., 1967