HIS FULLNESS

John 1:16 "Of his fullness have all we received."

Here is a man who feels it necessary that he explain himself. There is nothing unique about that. It is altogether human. It is all but universal. If we have made a mess of life, if we are passing our particular bit of the Jericho road and leaving the wounded unhelped, we have to explain our neglect and our failure to ourselves. It is a human instinct, and none of us altogether avoid it. There is not a man belonging to the church, there is not a man standing aloof from the church in your city, but what has to explain to himself and explain to some of his fellows at times the reason for his conduct.

If we explain what is worst in us, we explain even more eagerly what is best in us. I used to have a dear little friend, a close neighbor, a lad of some four years of age. One day when he came to see me, he was dressed in a more masculine fashion than was his custom. I paid him a great compliment. It is about the greatest compliment we can pay a child. I said, "Mercy, you certainly are growing." It pleased him no end. He squared his shoulders and almost rose upon his tiptoes as he said, "Yes, I am, Dr. Chappell. I certainly am growing. I used to be a girl." Well, that was a great transformation that he felt needed to be explained.

Even so this author feels that he must explain himself and his fellow saints. He declared that he himself has become different from what he was in former years. He also declares that he with his fellow Christians are different from those about them. Of course if they were not in any sense different, no explanation would have been necessary. And if they were not different, their Christianity would have proved a sheer futility. But they were different. And that difference he felt it necessary to explain.

How did he explain it?

He did not explain it in terms of any achievement on his own part. The high privilege that was his was the result not so much of his achieving as of his receiv-
ing. On the farm where I spent my boyhood, among the loveliest of our springs was one we called the basin spring. Here a stream of water flowed out from under a majestic hill over the face of a great flat rock. One day hands that had perhaps been dust for centuries chiseled out a basin in the face of that rock. Left to itself that basin would have been an empty and useless scar on the face of the rock. But instead it is a thing of poetry and of beauty. Always it is leaping and laughing with life. Always it is offering a cup of refreshment to any passerby whether he comes in the bleakest days of winter or in the noontide heat of summer. It always has something to give. Naturally I asked for its secret. Instead of swaggering, I pointed away to the spring that gushed from under the hills, and said, "Of its fullness have I received."

II

Now what is the content of this fullness? First, John affirms that he has received of the fullness of Jesus-life. Of course all the life of Jesus has not been centered in him, but all the life he has has come from Jesus. When our Lord was here, one of the secrets of the spell that he cast over men was the spell of a tremendous vitality. Everybody, when they came into his presence, realized that he was in the presence of one who was living abundantly. "In him," said John, "was life." Jesus was a man who was tremendously alive.

Now we realize that life is a supreme commodity. This is the case because, if one has life, everything in a measure is possible. But without life nothing is possible. Death is a supreme ugliness. I know that there are some morbid souls that seem to want to magnify the beauty of death. But apart from our fate it is the supreme and ghastly ugliness. I remember a song that I heard as a boy. I have not heard it since and never care to hear it again. It was a ghastly song—it was exceedingly untrue. It went something like this:

"Ah, lovely appearance of death!
What sight upon earth is so fair?
Not all the gay pageants that breathe
Can with a dead body compare."
"With solemn delight I survey the corpse
When the spirit has fled,
In love with the beautiful clay
And longing to lie in its stead."

How tremendously horrible! I always long for just the opposite.

Personally I have never been able to enthuse over that favorite,

"Hark from the tomb a doleful sound
Mine ears attend the dry
Ye living men come view the ground
Where you must shortly lie.
Princes, this clay must be your bed
In spite of all your towers.
You tall, you reverent head
Must lie as low as ours."

The psalmists used to say "Sela" after a certain verse. I think the word they would use after this one would be "Goodie". There is a certain morbid delight in the fact that the other fellow has to die. We have received of the fullness of the life of our Lord.

2. We have received of the fullness of his joy. I do not know how it has come to pass that Christianity is so often regarded as something good to die by but a terrible bore if we have to live with it. Many people have looked upon Jesus as the saddest of all sad men. Even the pictures painted by some of our greatest artists are the pictures of a man who could suffer greatly but who could not greatly rejoice. There is nothing further from the truth. Jesus was not only not the saddest man that ever lived though "He was a man of sorrow and acquainted with grief", but he was far and ahead the gladdest man that ever lived. That, to my mind, is not only the teaching of the Bible, the teaching of his life, but it is the teaching of plain common sense.
The writer to the Hebrews dares to make this quotation applicable to our Lord, "God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows." If Jesus was not the gladdest of men, then it strikes me he was far less than sincere because so much of his talk was in terms of joy. So often he was telling people how they might find it. "Oh, the gladness of the meek," he said. "Oh, the happiness of the merciful."

"Oh, the gladness of the pure in heart." Another word that was on his lips over and over was "Be of good cheer." Now can anything be more irritating than such a word on the lips of a man whose life and personality were as gloomy as a thundercloud? If Jesus was not joyous, I say that he was less than sincere. But the joy that he offered to others and that he recommended to others and for which he prayed for others was the rich and deep possession of his own heart. He rejoiced in spirit. He was such a glad man that the rock-ribbed religionists of his day hardly thought he was a good man at all. John the Baptist who never went out to dinner and who wore a hair shirt was a good man, but Jesus, who never refused an invitation during all his ministry so far as the record goes, was not so good. He was a mere glutton, and a drunkard, a friend of publicans and sinners.

"These things," said Jesus, "have I spoken unto you that my joy might remain in you and that your joy might be made full." And the last night of his life, the last time he kneeled in prayer with that little group of friends that he termed his mother, brothers and sisters, he prayed for them this prayer, "That the joy that is mine may be theirs." Notice that he is speaking here of a present possession, not the joy that was mine in the morning tide of my ministry when it looked as if I were going to be victorious, not the joy that I expect when I have passed through this black tunnel of crucifixion out under the clear skies of God's eternal morning, but the joy that is mine now as I kneel under the shadow of the cross. Jesus was a joyous man, and the joy of John and his fellow Christians was in answer to the prayer of Jesus, "That the joy that is mine may be theirs." They went out to show to the world the sunniest of sunny faces, faces such as Christians have shown throughout...
the centuries. And I can say this: that I have met Christians in all sorts of circumstances, but I have never met one fully committed Christian who did not have a song in his heart.

John claims that he has received the fullness of Jesus' concern, the fullness of his interest in others. If Jesus cast a spell over the men of his day because of his tremendous vitality, he cast an even greater spell because of his tremendous care for others. Every man who came into his presence felt that here is one who is interested in me personally, not simply interested in my soul but in my whole self; here is a man who cares; here is a man whose heart goes out to me.

Now of all ways to win friends and influence people there is nothing equal to that. Henry Drummond said years ago to a company of missionaries who were?

"It will take you years to learn to speak in the different dialects of India and of China, but from the moment you land, love will be pouring forth its unconscious eloquence. Of all the ways to help tired and worn human hearts, there is none equal to that of really caring for them.

4. Now because these people had shared in the life and in the joy and in the deep concern of Jesus for others, they had also come to share in his power. These early saints were respectable and decent and upright people, but they were more. They were powerful people. They had a form of religion. They had more. They knew that religion as a force, a religion that had in it the very might of God. It made these people so dynamic that they went out into a world far more torn and disintegrated even than our world and utterly remade it. This is not a theory. This is not a bit of wistful thinking. It is a fact of history. They had received of the fullness of Christ. Of course this does not account for all that is in our Lord. We could give the content of his fullness in its completeness in all eternity. But we can get glimpses of it in the lives of the saints of the long ago and in the lives of the saints of today.

III

Now it strikes me that what these early saints had is what every one of us longs for for ourselves. It is what we need for our church, for our community, for our torn and tortured world. There is no excuse for the empty life. It has no contri-
bution of worth to make. We can only give as we are filled by the spirit of our living Lord.

How then can this fullness become ours? It is not, I repeat, a thing to be achieved, but it is a blessing to be received. Always that fact is emphasized in the New Testament. When Jesus met with his depressed and discouraged disciples immediately after the Resurrection, we read these words: "He breathed on them and said 'Receive ye the Holy Spirit.'" He had given them this promise before, "Ye shall receive power after the Holy Spirit has come upon you." This priceless fullness is not something to be bought with our effort. It is something in faith and humility and deep surrender to be received.

Here is a story. It is true though its application is not altogether original. Years ago when I was a student, I walked one day from Cambridge over to Boston. Naturally I stopped on the bridge that spans the Charles River to look with some romance in my heart upon this historic stream. I was thinking especially of the fact that it was upon another bridge that the poet Longfellow had stood when he received his inspiration for that beautiful song, "The Bridge at Midnight." But as I looked on the same scene, there was nothing of poetry, nothing of beauty in it to me. The stream itself looked like some ghastly monster that was dying of starvation. I could see through its thinness to the wreckage and filth that lay at the bottom of the stream. Down below were some fishing vessels that were heeled upon their sides in the mud, the very embodiment of discouraged uselessness and ugliness. I turned away from the scene in disappointment that bordered on disgust.

But hours later, when I crossed over the bridge again, I decided without any enthusiasm or great expectancy to take a second look. But when I leaned over to view the stream this time, everything was changed. There had been a veritable miracle that had transformed all connected with that river. I could no longer see the mud and filth and wreckage at the bottom. Down below, those vessels that had been heeled in the mud, the embodiment of ugliness and uselessness, now floated in buoyant beauty upon their keels. They now stood ready to do business in great waters.

Of course I could not pass up a miracle like that without asking for the reason, and when I asked the river, "How come?" The answer was not in terms of its own struggle
and conquest. It rather pointed out to the far-flung expanses of the Atlantic Ocean and said, "Of its fullness have I received."

Even so, John says, "I was once that famished stream. I was once suffering in my own inner life from an ebh-tide. But all is different now because I have received from that infinite sea which is none other than Jesus Christ himself."

Now how shall this rich experience become ours?

The first step it seems to me is to realize that we need it. Surely our past failures have taught us that much. Surely we have learned by the futility of our "It efforts that is not by might nor by power but by My spirit, saith the Lord." We need a power that we do not possess, a power that can only be explained in terms of Jesus Christ.

We need to realize in the second place that if this power is ever ours, it must come to us as a gift. It is not something to be bought but something to be received as a free gift at the hand of our Lord. But how can this gift become ours? Jesus can only give his all as we give our all. He literally puts himself on the palm of his hand and holds himself out to you and me at this moment saying, "This is my body. This is my personality. This is my all. This is my everything. And it is given for you and to you." How then are we to receive it? We only receive his all by the giving of our all. The hand that is too close to give is too tightly closed to receive. This then I can say with confidence: If you give yourself to Jesus Christ, he will accept you. If you give yourself to him, he will fill you with his spirit. If you give yourself to him, you can share in some measure in his power. If you give yourself to him, he will use you to his glory. I know that there are those who are afraid to adventure. The Rich Young Ruler was afraid he would have to give up more than he received. Therefore he would not dare to throw himself away on this youthful carpenter though his heart went out to him with yearning desire. But if he had only dared, he would have grandly received.

You remember that old story of the death of King Arthur. His last surviving knight stood by, and the dying king took his sword with which he had fought his battles in other days and gave it into the hand of this knight and said, "Go, throw it back into the lake. It was from the lake that I received it before I began my warfare."
Now in good faith the knight went to obey, but before he threw it away he decided to take one last look at it. And when he drew it from its scabbard, its scintillating and sparkling beauty so gripped him that he said, "I can't throw it away." And he hid it among the rushes and went back to his king. And the king asked him, "Did you do my bidding?" "Aye," he said. "What did you see?" questioned the king. And he told him a fictitious story. And the king said, "You didn't do my bidding. Go again." And a second time he went and a second time the lure of the sword held him so fast that he could not fling it away. And when he went a second time back to the king and told him a fictitious story, the king was angry and he raised himself on his elbow and pointed with a ghastly finger and said, "Go and do my bidding or I will rise from my deathbed to slay you."

This time the knight hurried away down by the lakeside, and he took the sword with both hands and, without daring to look at it, he flung it as far as he could out into the lake, watched to see it splash to rust and rot amidst the mud and filth at the bottom of the lake. But ere it touched the surface of the water, a mighty hand reached out and gripped the hilt and wielded it three times. And the knight rubbed his eyes and realized that he had not thrown the sword away to rust in uselessness at the bottom of the lake, but had simply passed it on to a mightier hand than his where it could receive of the fullness of a mightier power.

Even so, as we offer our empty and weak lives to our Lord, he takes us and fills us with his presence and his spirit so that there is a beauty, a light, a joy, a power about us that can only be explained in terms of his own gift. Blessed is the man, blessed is the group that can say with John, "Of his fullness have all we received."
HIS FULLNESS

"Of his fullness have all we received and grace for grace." John 1:16

This is a word of explanation. Something has taken place in the lives of John and his fellow saints that has made them different. They are different from their former selves. They are not the kind of men and women that they used to be. They are different from those about them. The difference is so pronounced, so unmistakeable that it calls for an explanation. Had they as Christians not been different there would not have been nothing to explain. That is the case with ourselves, our religion has made us different.

I.

What explanation does John give? He accounts for himself, he accounts for his fellow saints in terms of Jesus Christ. "We are what we are," he declares, "not because of any achievement on our part, but but because of our receiving." Of his fullness have all we received.

Under the shadow of a hill on the farm where I spent my boyhood there is a great flat rock. One day, no telling how many years ago, somebody carved a basin upon the hard face of that rock. That left to itslef. basis naturally would have been little more than a scar upon the face of that rock. But instead of being just a bit of dead ugliness it is always laughing and singing with liquid-life. I have gone to it on bleak winter days, when other water was frozen. I have gone to it amidst the drought of summer when some fountains
gone dry. But always I found this basin full, full to overflowing. "How is it?" I asked, "are you constantly filled, while at the same time you are constantly giving?" In answer that basin pointed to the spring that gushed out from the great hills and said, "From its fullness I have received." Even so John points away to Jesus saying "Of his fullness, all we have received".

II.

What is the content of this fullness? Of course, we cannot give the full answer. All eternity will not suffice to give it, but we can get glimpses of it. 

1. Life. We have received of the fullness of his life. Life is the supreme treasure. If we have life everything in a measure is possible, without life nothing is possible. Life is beautiful. Death is the supreme ugliness. Certain our fathers had a miserable way of looking at death that is as horrid as it is false.

Here is a song that I heard as a boy. I am glad to say that I have not heard it since. yet I have not been able to forget it. It runs like this "Ah lovely appearance of death

What sight upon earth is so fair?
Not all the gay pagents that breath
Can with the dead body compare"

"With solemn delight I survey
The corpse when the spirit has fled
In love with the beautiful clay
And longing to lie in its stead."
How utterly horrid! I do not see how anybody could sing that unless they were very ill either physically, mentally, or both.

Even this familiar hymn does not thrill me overmuch.

"Hark from the tomb a doleful sound
Mine ears attend the cry
Ye living men come view the ground
where you must shortly lie!

"Princes, this bed must be your bed
In spite of all your towers
The tall, the wise, the reverend head
Must lie as low as ours."

After that the author does not add "Selah" as do certain songs, but I think "Goodie" is implied.

But if death is ugly, life is beautiful. It was the fact that Jesus was so tremendously alive that accounts in part for the spell that he cast over men. "In him was life" says this author. All sorts of people came to him to ask him about life. One day a young aristocrat possessed of great wealth both material and spiritual ran down the road to kneel at the feet of this man who was a carpenter. It took courage and great eager earnestness to do that. Why did he come? He wanted to know how he could get hold of life "What must I do to inherit eternal life?"

On another day when Jesus lost his congregation, when the multitude walked out on him as if what he said had no value at all, there was a little handful of friends that stood by him. Even they were looking over their shoulders with frightened eyes wondering if they had not
join the vast majority. Then Jesus startled them with this question "Will ye also go away?" Simon answered, "To whom shall we go but unto thee, thou hast the word of eternal life". By which Simon is simply saying "We would have gone long ago had we not been caught under the spell of life. We know that every step away from you is a step toward death." John and his fellow saints had received of the fullness of the life of their Lord.

2. Joy. They had received of the fullness of Christ joy. It is rather amazing how much was given of the sorrow of Jesus than of his joy. That he was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief is certainly true, but I think to affirm that Jesus was the most sorrowful man that ever lived would be infinite leads from the truth. On the contrary he was the most joyful man that ever lived. "Thee anointed with the oil of gladness above thy fellows" Jesus could laugh and sing. He even went out to deliver with a song on his lips.

Some time ago a gentleman came forward and said to me. "I appreciate that sermon, but watch that humor" Remember, the Bible says that Jesus wept. So it does, why does it say it? One reason I am sure, is because that his weeping was unusual. It was so amazing that this sunniest of all men should have his face wet with tears. Had he gone sobbing through his ministry, it might have been written of him that once he smiled.

To picture Jesus as a gloomy man is to picture him as far less than sincere. He had a way of telling folks of the joy of the poor in spirit, of the happiness of the mourners, of the gladness of the merciful and of the meek. How did he know that he was telling the
truth. He knew it because he lived these beattitudes before he spoke them. "Be of good cheer" was another word that was upon his lips again and again. How could he in honesty offer to cheer others to which his own heart was a stranger. Jesus was the most joyful of men.

That joy he shares with his followers. The last prayer that he prayed with the little group of friends that he designated as his family, this was one of his petitions of the joy that is mine may be theirs. Jesus longs for joy because he loves. He longs for us to be near and that it is only by this thread that men can become joy because it is the roadway to our highest usefulness. "The joy of the Lord is your strength". It is our strength for resisting temptation. In Jesus Christ we have a better joy than the world can give. It is our strength for winning others. I wonder of any desperate soul was ever won by one whose own countenance did beam and mantle like a standing pond. John with his fellow saints had received of the fullness of Christ's joy.

3. Concern for others. They had received of the fullness of Jesus interest in other people. They had received of the fullness of his love, so use a word that is so often cheapened. Perhaps this supreme appeal of Jesus was just this—the appeal of a man who cared. As he passed through the little villages of his day, all sorts of people thronged about him. They didn't understand him. Sometimes they resisted and resented him. But what held them was the conviction that here is a man who cares not simply for my soul, but for me as a person.

John affirms rightly that he has come to share something of
the interest of Jesus in others. Such concern had not always been
a good quality of the love of his heart. There was only one blood in
his. Once he had longed for first place, at least he was willing to
share it with only one other, that of his brother James. Once he had
been eager to call down fire from heaven to burn up certain ignorant
villagers who had refused his master hospitality. But now his message
had become a synonym of love, and the message of his life has in
fact become: "My little children, love one another".

That amazing miracle may happen to us. Of all the ways to win
friends and influence people, there is none other equal to this,
really caring for them. You may remain entirely indifferent to one
who was once beautiful and clever, but it is hard to resist even the
homely person who convinces you that he really cares. Caring will
get what we give. No light that has once burned shines again.
Love has a way of changing even the ugliness into beauty.

A friend told me some time ago that he was in a large ward of a
prison hospital. There had been an explosion, and many were suffering
from serious wounds. He said that he looked up from the face of a
patient to see a little hunched back woman enter the ward with her arms
full of field flowers. She was so homely, he said, that my first
impulse was to resent her, but she said, I watch her as she passed
from one to another, speaking a word here and there, always leaving a
flower. Sometimes laying her hand upon a fevered forehead. Watching
her my whole attitude was changed. /pet/ Watching her I felt that
Helen of Troy was not half so fair. /by/

Of all the gifts that our Lord can give none is equal to this,
The gift of love. It is so priceless that nothing really arrives
without it. It is so priceless that the least conquers in its power.
"It will take years" said Drummond to certain missionaries who were leaving for their distant and difficult fields. "It will take years for you to learn to speak in the different dialects of India and of China, but from the moment of your land, love will be pouring forth its unconscious eloquence." Thus John explains himself and his fellow saints. We have received of the fullness of his life, his joy, and his love.

III.

How had this come about? It was not an achievement, I repeat, but a receiving. We do not have to wrench these treasures from God's grudging hands, he gives them. A few weeks ago this springtime world was a dead thing. There wasn't a leaf or a flower. But now "Every clod feels the stir of might An instinct, in it that reaches and towers and groping blindly above it for light Climbs to a soul in the grass and flowers" Here is a true story, though the application is not altogether original. One day as a student I stood on the bridge that connects Boston with Cambridge and looked down into the Charles river. I was thinking of how Longfellow had stood on another bridge overlooking this river and had burst into song. But as I looked, there was nothing about the scene to make me sing. It was as prosaic as the drabest of prose. The river itself was so thin and wasted as to suggest some straying monster.
I could see the mud under the shallow water with its filth and bits of wreckage. Further down the stream I could see some vessels made for grace and usefulness, but now they lay on their sides in the mud as if all hope and purpose had gone out of them. With a sense of disappointment that verged on disgust, I turned away.

But some hours later as I recrossed that bridge, I decided to take another look. At once I realized that a miracle had taken place. The stream was no longer a sickly thing, but was abounding in life. The filth and wreckage so far as I could see, had entirely disappeared. Those discouraged and empty vessels were not longer lolling upon their sides in the mud. Instead they were floating in brilliant beauty ready to sail the high seas in useful service. How had this transformation been wrought? "What has happened to you?" I asked this now lovely stream. In answer the river did not swagger, but rather pointed to the generous sea saying "Of its fullness have I received".

It was certainly an ebb tide in the life of those ten friends of Jesus when they met long ago behind closed doors. Their Lord had been damned to death and they were without purpose, power, or hope. But suddenly Jesus stood in their midst and we read this word "He breathed on them, saying receive ye the holy spirit". It was this receiving that transformed them into heroic souls that enabled them to do the impossible. From this experience they went into a world more dead and disentrenched than ours and literally remade it.

Now it strikes me that this word is just the one that speaks home in a peculiar sense to your need and mine. God never intended that we should live victoriously in a world like ours without his help.
But, all the help we need is available. He offers no lesser gift than himself. In order to receive him, we do not have to coax or persuade, we rather have to be persuaded by him. Listen to this wooing word "Behold I stand at the door and knock, if any man will open the door I will come in." Receiving him we receive of the fullness of his life, joy and love. Thus receiving him we become powerful persons. Powerful through what we are and powerful because we have become channels through which his love and power may flow out to others. Therefore, for the sake of our own needs and for the sake of the needs of others may we be able to explain ourselves in this high fashion. "Of his fullness we all have received".
CHRIST'S FULLNESS

John 1:16 - Of His fullness have all we received.

I.

The text is an explanation. The author is undertaking to account for the vast changes that have taken place in his own life as well as in the lives of his fellow Christians. Some explanation was necessary. Friends were looking at them with faces gaunt with wistfulness and full of heart hunger. "How do you manage?" they say. "How have you become what you are?" Such a transformation, they feel, demands an explanation. And the author is eager to explain. He declares that, "We are different from you not by nature but by the good grace of God." Then he points the way to his Master, saying, "Of His fullness have we received."

We can easily understand such language. At the backside of our old farm in Tennessee, there is a lovely spring.

"The trees fold their green arms round it,

The trees a century old.

The winds go whistling through them,

And the sunbeams drop their gold."

Here is a basin that hands that have probably been dust for centuries, carved in the face of a solid rock. But this lifeless basin prattles and gurgles to itself like a healthful baby all the year round. I have been to it in the noontide hush of midsummer, when dry weather fountains had become choked with dust. I have also been to it in
the bleak days of winter when ice was everywhere, but it still laughed and sang regardless of weather. What is its secret? In answer, it points to the majestic hills in the background, saying, "Of his fullness have I received."

Here is a bit of canvas stretched on an easel. There is nothing conspicuous about it. Nothing to thrill. It is thoroughly commonplace. But I look at this canvas again and its commonplace has completely gone. Where there was once colorless monotony, there is now the sheen of God's rivers. There is the flash of God's clouds. There is the golden glory of a sunset. What has happened? The canvas points to the great artist, Turner, saying, "Of his fullness have I received."

Some years ago, I went to hear Fritz Kreisler. He came upon the stage with a commonplace looking instrument under his arm and a bow in his hand. The whole thing was as voiceless as the dead, but by and by, he drew his bow across that little instrument. In so doing, that bow seemed to become a magic wand. It had power to summon a whole angel choir to sing within the narrow compass of that violin. What was the secret? It was not the violin alone. That violin could only point to the great artist, saying, "Of his fullness have I received."

Here is a sheet of blank paper. Few things are more uninteresting than a blank paper unless it is a blank face. But by and by this voiceless paper finds its voice. It even breaks into song. Listen to it.

"Sunset and evening star, and one clear call for me
And may there be no moaning of the bar, when I put out to sea.
But such a tide as moving seems asleep, too full for sound and foam,
When that which drew from out the boundless deep turns again home."
Twilight and evening bell, and after that the dark,
And may there be no sadness of farewell when I embark.
For though from out our bourne of time and place the flood may bear me far,
I hope to see my Pilot face to face when I have crossed the bar."

How did a blank sheet of paper learn to sing like that. It can only point to the poet, Tennyson and say, "Of his fullness have I received."

Thus the apostle John accounts for the change in himself and in his fellow saints. But, of course, he does not mean to tell us that they have received absolutely all that God can give. The cities and villages in every direction about Niagara Falls are lighted by the power from these rapids. Every single light tells you as the secret of its brightness, "Of the fullness of that great cataract have I received. Not that all the power of those tremendous falls is centered in me, but whatever power I have comes from Niagara." So John says, "Whatever of beauty, of loveliness, of power and life and joy are in me comes from Christ."

II.

What is the content of this fullness? We have hinted at it already. But, of course, we can give only a hint. There is no putting the fullness of it into words. But when John says, "Of His fullness have all we received," he meant at least this and much more.

We have received of the fullness of His life. Did you ever notice the spell that Jesus cast over men? All sorts of men thronged Him. "The common people heard Him gladly." That means the mass of people. Why did they hear Him? For one reason, He was so tremendously alive. Life is always fascinating. It is death that is ugly. I remem-
ber a hymn that I heard as a boy. I am happy to say that we do not sing it any more. It began like this:

"Ah, lovely appearance of death,
What sight upon earth is so fair;
Not all the gay pageants that breathe,
Can with a dead body compare."

What gruesome nonsesense.

It is life that is fascinating. Men gathered about Jesus because he was so tremendously alive. One day a young nobleman dared the scorn and laughter of the crowd to run down the road and kneel at the feet of this carpenter. Jesus was a peasant, the man at his feet was a blueblood. How did this aristocrat come to humble himself in this way? The answer: he wanted to live. He was under the spell of life. Listen to his question: "What good thing shall I do to inherit eternal life?"

Here is another picture. Jesus is preaching to a vast multitude. Thousands are present. As He begins his message, the crowd is all eagerness, but as He gets into His sermon, He begins to lose His crowd. Two men on the far outskirts nudge each other and one remarks softly, "Nothing to that, is there?" So they stroll away. Then others follow in groups of ten, in groups of fifty, in groups of a hundred. By and by, only twelve of the great crowd are left. Even these are looking over their shoulders wistfully, wondering if they had not better go.
Then Jesus pulled them up sharply. With quiet and steady voice, He asked them a question, "Will ye also go away?" Honest Simon starts, blushes, I imagine, a deep red, faces his Master, and confesses, "Lord," he said, "to be honest, we have been wanting to run. We would have gone long ago but for one fact. We realize that every step away from you is a step towards death. To stay with you, to follow you, is to have life. To whom," he says, "shall we go but unto Thee?" That has the sayings of life. To follow Jesus is to receive of the fullness of His Life.

Second, to follow Jesus is to receive of the fullness of His joy. I am not forgetting that the Master was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. I am not forgetting that He trod the wine press alone. I am not forgetting that He went to the Cross after He was wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities. But in spite of this - yes, and because of this - His was the gladdest heart that ever beat in a human bosom. His was the sunniest face that ever looked out upon this world.

Whose irrepressible joy sings out from passage after passage in the New Testament? Who is it that tells us of the blessedness of the Christian life? Who is it that sings of the gladness, of the meek and the pure in spirit? Who is it that was constantly saying to fear filled and worry burdened men and women, "Be of good cheer!" Who was it, on the last night before the Crucifixion, prayed for His disciples that the joy that was His might be theirs? That was our Joyous Christ. To receive of His fullness is to share in the fullness of His joy.
Third, to receive of His fullness is to share in his abiding interest in others. Here is perhaps the supreme secret of the spell that Christ cast over men. His was the spell of the man who cared. Whoever came into His presence felt themselves in the presence of one who was interested in themselves personally. He was not interested in their rank or in their race or in their social position. He was not primarily interested in their souls. He was interested in themselves. Men could not resist Him because they felt that He cared.

Here is a battle-scarred man who tells us frankly that he has suffered the loss of all things. He had been so scarred in the battle that had he gone to Heaven with no other marks of identification, he would have been recognized for his scars. "Who is weak and I am not weak? Who is offended and I do not burn with indignation? I am willing to spend and be spent for you, though the more I love, the less I be loved." His heart has become a veritable house of many mansions into which he gives welcome to all sorts and conditions of men. He has not always been like that. There was a time when he punished to the death those that dared differ from him. What has wrought the change? He has received of the fullness of the love of Christ.

III.

What is the purpose of our receiving of His fullness? It is manifold. I am going, however, to mention only two results. First, to receive of His fullness is to find satisfaction for our deepest needs. And, mark you, there is satisfaction nowhere else. Today as in the long ago, this all sufficient Christ appeals to us with these great words:
"If any man thirsts, let him come to me and drink." We are all thirsty. We all have thirsts that the world cannot satisfy, but He can. "He came to Jesus and drank of that life-giving stream." There is satisfaction for every longing heart.

Second, but not only does He meet our needs, but He gives us power to meet the needs of others. Here is the great invitation again: "If any man thirsts, let him come to me and drink." "He that believeth on me," as the Scripture has said, "out of his \( \text{water} \) life shall flow rivers of living water." In Him, then, we find not only our own needs met but we find power to meet the needs of others. Out of such Christ-filled lives, streams of living water do flow. Thirsty, parched lives are refreshed and drought deadened souls rejoice and blossom as a rose.

IV.

Then one last word: How does this fullness become ours? We do not have to earn it. We do not have to buy it. We do not have to win it through merit. It comes to us as a gift. Notice the word, "Of His fullness have all we received." It does not take great strength or great power or great ability to receive. Anybody can do that who is really willing.

Sometimes, I fear, in our preaching we have made Christianity too hard. Of course, it is a religion of the Cross, but we have sometimes thought and talked as if we had to wrench God's gifts out of His hands by sheer force. We do not have to win them, we only have to receive them. Look up the word "receive". See how often it is used in regard to
God's gifts. "And He breathed on them, saying, 'Receive ye the Holy Spirit!' As many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God." "Repent and be baptized and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." This fullness is a gift.

How then shall we receive it? We shall receive it by the giving of ourselves. The measure of fullness of our receiving is the measure of the fullness of our giving. When we give all, He gives all. As we come to this Holy Communion, just as we receive the bread and wine that are given to us, so we in holy dedication of self are to receive the Living Christ that these symbols represent. Receiving Him, we shall find satisfaction for our own deep needs. Receiving Him, we shall have something to share with the needy world.
"One of the two which heard John speak, and followed him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother."

---John 1:40

I

This is a brief story of the conversion of one of the most lovable men among all those whom Jesus made. But the story is told in such a fashion as to indicate the modest place that Andrew occupied among the friends of Jesus. He was not one of the leaders. He really did not make the first team. From the beginning to the end he occupied a subordinate place. That is indicated by the fact that he constantly has to be explained. "One of the two which heard John speak......was Andrew." Then what? We should have thought it would follow like this: "This Andrew, one of the first disciples to be won to Jesus, is that great soul that walks at the very vanguard of the Christian movement. Here is the man that heads that immortal company that since then has crossed all oceans, penetrated all forests, consecrated all continents. Andrew, one of the first to call Jesus Lord and Master!"

But that is not the way his story reads. The author thinks it necessary to explain Andrew. Therefore, he tells us that he was Simon Peter's brother. I imagine that Andrew was introduced that way so many times that he half-way reached the conviction that that was a part of his name. I can imagine myself introducing Andrew to a friend. "Mr. Brown," I say, "Let me introduce to you Brother Andrew." Mr. Brown shakes hands in a perfunctory sort of fashion, looking right over Andrew's head. "Glad to meet you," he says in an off-hand fashion. I can see well enough that Andrew has not registered. Mr. Brown has no idea who the individual is that he is meeting. Therefore, I add this explanatory word, "This is Andrew, Simon Peter's brother." At once all this changed. Mr. Brown's face at once lights up, his eyes
take on a new sparkle. He grips Andrew's hand firmly and shakes it with enthusiasm. "Oh!" he exclaims, "Simon Peter's brother, of course, of course! I thought I had heard that he had a brother, but I was not sure. So you are Simon Peter's brother! Who would have thought it! Any brother of Simon is worth knowing. A great man, Simon!" That had been the experience of Andrew so many times that had he not been the kind of man he was, he would have written out his resignation and gone back to fishing at least a score of times.

Andrew, therefore, is of especial interest to us because he is so like ourselves. Most of us are just average. We are neither millionaires or paupers. We are neither geniuses nor morons. We are neither great saints nor scoundrels. Phillips Brooks used to say that those who were conspicuously good or conspicuously bad were the promontories jutting out into the sea. The real continent was made up of ordinary folks such as ourselves and such as Andrew.

Naturally, it was not always easy for Andrew to take second place. He had some claim to be among the first. Simon soon forged ahead, but it was not Simon who had led Andrew to Jesus; Andrew had led Simon. He had the claim of seniority. Then there was another reason that made Andrew's place perhaps the most difficult of any among the apostles. He was a member of a quartette made up of two pairs of brothers. These two pairs of brothers had been associated for a long time. They had perhaps played together as boys, had gone to the Synagogue together. They had certainly been together in the fishing business. They had worked together, faced dangers together, battled tempests together, and now they were together as disciples of Jesus.

But there came a time when this intimacy was in a measure broken off. The three with whom Andrew had lived in such close fellowship for years forged ahead while he remained behind. When Jesus went to the big house on the hill and into the death chamber where the little daughter of the ruler of the Synagogue lay, He took with Him Peter and James and John. Andrew had to remain outside. Again when
Jesus went up into the Mount of Transfiguration where the splendor of His deity shone through the garment of His flesh. He took with Him Peter and James and John. Andrew was left behind. In the final night of tragedy when Jesus went into the garden to pray, He took with Him into the inner glooms, Peter and James and John. As usual, Andrew was left behind.

II

How did Andrew react to this? How do we react? Sometimes it is harder to see friends outstrip us than it is to see strangers. Sometimes we resent the promotion of an old school fellow who has been at our side for years more than we do one whose face we have never seen. How do we react when we have to take a subordinate or a second place? It is an experience through which all of us have to pass. "Blessed is the man that learns how to handle the situation as gracefully and graciously as did Andrew. How, I repeat, did he react?

To begin he did not grow bitter and resentful. It was just this inability to take second place that wrecked Saul's life and all-but drove him insane. You remember the familiar story of his return from battle. He was coming home victorious, thanks to his own leadership and to the skill and leadership of David. Some girls went out to greet the returning hero with a song, "Saul has slain his thousands." Saul was delighted until he heard the second stanza: "But David has slain his tens of thousands." That put Saul in second place. He could not stand it. He began to have mad spells and to throw spears at the most useful man he had in his army. He became utterly wretched to the point of insanity.

2. When our second baby came, our first-born was just a few weeks past three years of age. He welcomed this young brother with open arms. He was downright enthusiastic about him. This brother was as interesting as a new toy. But before long he began to recognize that the new-comer was getting a considerable bit of attention. It dawned upon him that he was no longer the only pebble on the beach. It smote him right in the face that he was no longer the center of the stage.
Another had come to share with him the attentions of his parents and grandparents. He began to grow restless under it. One day he came forward boldly with the demand that he had enough. He said, "I am ready now to send that little old baby back to God."

We were patient with him because he had not grown up, but some of us never grow up. We are always wishing to send our rivals back to God or to some other place where the climate is not so good. It is this failure to take second place willingly that has given the mother-in-law her bad reputation. That she has a bad reputation no one will deny. That it is often not deserved is equally beyond dispute. But that it is sometimes richly deserved we have to confess.

3. How is it that the mother-in-law who is not a bad woman for she is a mother before she can be a mother-in-law—how is it, I repeat, that she so often becomes the T.N.T. that wrecks the home? The chief reason is this—that many times she cannot take second place. When a few years ago we went to Texas to marry our son to a charming girl, his mother and I knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that, if that marriage went well, we were thence-forward to accept a second place. "For this cause," says Jesus, "shall a man leave father and mother and shall be joined unto his wife." The father and mother who are not willing to take second place when their children marry are only making trouble both for themselves and for their children.

The honest writers of these Gospels tell us of repeated quarrels among the disciples as to who shall be first. I have an idea that Andrew seldom if ever joined in these heated arguments. If he did, he perhaps was urging the candidacy of his brother Simon. There is every evidence that he himself was not a contender. He would never have said, "I would rather be first in a little Siberian village than second in Rome." He did not have to be out in front of the procession to be happy. He did not have to have folks tell him he was the best preacher in town to keep him from dying of heartache. How many millions have tortured themselves and others trying to be first, but not so Andrew! He learned by the grace of God to accept a subordinate place graciously and gracefully.
"You are Simon—you shall be called Cephas". John 1:42

Thus Jesus greeted blustering Simon when he was introduced by his brother, Andrew. He is affirming that this Galilean fisherman is destined to become a man of rock-like character. That must have sounded a bit incredible even to Simon. Had his friends heard it they would doubtless have looked at each other with tolerant and knowing smiles. Had his acquaintances heard it they would have chuckled behind their hands. Had his enemies heard it they would have laughed with cynical laughter. "Whoever of the followers of Jesus is destined to become a rock?" all would have agreed "that man is surely not Simon."

Yet Simon did arrive to an amazing degree in the life that now is. He became one of the leaders of the early church. The Catholics even claim him, though I think without a shred of evidence, as the first pope. But he was surely the acknowledged leader among the Twelve. If a popularity contest were conducted even now, he would be selected as the best loved among the apostles. Not only so, but I have an idea that of all the radiant characters that walk across the pages both of the Old and the New Testaments Simon is about the best loved.

Of course this is not the case because of his superior ability. I am not sure that he was the most brilliant even among the Twelve. But we never love anybody just because that individual chances to be clever. No more do we love Simon because he was faultless. We love him in spite of his faults. Not only so, but we love him also because of his faults. More than once I have laughed and wept under the ministry of that unique genius Bud Robinson. He was totally lacking in formal education. He broke every law of grammar. But he broke our hearts while he broke the laws of grammar. I am sure that his
faults added to rather than detracted from his appeal. It was even so with Simon.

Part I

Let us look first at some of Simon's virtues.

1. He was genuinely human. That is good. Whenever a minister becomes more minister than man, three strikes have been called on him. Simon was always himself. He never struck a pose. He never pretended. He never tried to hide his ignorance. He constantly said what he thought instead of saying what he thought others desired him to think. Even in Jerusalem, the Boston of that day, instead of trying to speak with a Harvard accent, he continued to use his own Gallilean brogue. We appreciate that. It is the naturalness of Bing Crosby, I think, as much as his ability that has made him about the most popular actor of his day.

2. Simon had gifts of leadership. He had that something that we call personality. We may not agree in our definition of personality, but we count it of real worth whatever it is. It is that something that if one has none of it, he is largely ineffective. If on the other hand he has enough of it, he can get on with little else. It is that something that when Simon said, "I go a-fishing", caused his friends to say, "we will go with you", instead of merely yawning and going off to their own.

3. A third quality we like about Simon is his whole-heartedness. Sometimes he was on the wrong side of the fence, sometimes on the right side. But he never straddled the fence. There were times when he was enthusiastic to the boiling point. There were others when he was below zero. But he was never lukewarm. He might swear like a trooper while he denied His Lord, but he would never "damn with faint praise, assent with civil leer, and without sneering teach the rest to sneer". "I hate men who are half and half", a certain psalmist has God saying. We are close enough akin to God to share that
hate. We applaud Simon for being whole-hearted. I think he loved His Lord even while he lied about him.

Part II

But along with much that was good in Simon there was much that was not good. Look at a few of his faults.

2. He was an exceedingly impulsive man. He reasoned with his feelings rather than with his mind. He was guided by his emotions rather than by his reason. He first spoke, then considered. He took his position, then looked about for a reason to prop it up. I have marveled at the care with which a good golfer strokes his ball. My tendency is just the opposite. I usually become careful immediately after I have made the stroke. Hence I am not a champion.

3. Living thus within the realm of his emotions, Simon was unpredictable and unreliable. Neither he nor anyone else knew what he would do under a given set of circumstances. Sometimes he spoke with wisdom. At other times he did the very opposite. At one moment he was so heroic that we feel moved to stand up and cheer. But the very next he was so cowardly as to bring a blush of shame. At times he was on the crest of the wave, at other times in the very trough of the sea. He was therefore as changeable as a weather vane. He was entirely too impulsive, emotional to be reliable.

In thus criticizing Simon I do not mean that the feelings are to be repressed altogether. I listened to a certain ministerial Doctor of Philosophy recently as he warned of the danger of too much emotionalism in religion. It was hard to restrain a smile. I was quite convinced that the pews in his church exercise little more self-control than the folks who are accustomed to sit upon them. We may shun the man with too much gush, but even he is more winsome than a mummy. As for myself, I should choose impulsive Simon any day in preference to some Herbert...
Spencer, flipping a coin to decide whether he will marry the woman who loves him or break her heart.

1. Simon was a man of too great self-confidence. He seems so sure of himself that some think that he might have had a sense of inferiority. Personally I do not agree. His conceit is "of purest ray surene". In fact it is so pronounced that it often has a kind boyish charm about it that tends to change our frowns into smiles. Had Peter had a sense of humor he must have even laughed at himself. But there is no indication that this self-confident man ever saw a joke, even when he shaved. Therefore, constantly taking himself too seriously, he impresses us as being about as humble as a majorette leading her high school band.

Though doubtless willing for his fellow apostles to take second or third place, he must always be first. He had to be the official spokesman. For instance, when Jesus sought by a word of warning to pierce the armor of Simon's self-assurance, that warning had about as much effect as a bee-bee gun would have upon a battleship. "It might be possible", Simon seems to agree, "for the two sons of thunder to fail. It might even be possible that my brother, Andrew, may collapse. But failure on my part under any circumstances is simply unthinkable".

This conceit did not color Simon's attitude only toward his fellows but toward His Master as well. He was deeply devoted to Jesus. He believed him possessed of a wisdom beyond the human. But even at that he still needed a bit of wise guidance on the part of Simon. For instance, one day a certain woman who had been ill for twelve years came in the crowd and touched the tassel of the robe of Jesus and found healing. Then having gained her purpose she sought to slip away with only half a blessing. But the Master eager to bring her to fullness of life could not allow it. Therefore he asked, "Who touched me?"
At that amazing question Simon was almost embarrassed. Therefore to save his Lord from making himself ridiculous he rushed into the breach. "Don't be absurd", he seems to say. "You asked who touched you. Scores have touched you". How fortunate that Simon was by!

Then a little later When Jesus proposed to wash the feet of this disciple, Simon made a flat refusal. That his Lord should even offer to perform such a slavish task was unthinkable. Therefore with a sense of bewilderment and yet of proud self-assurance, he declares, "You shall never wash my feet. I am not going to allow you to humiliate yourself in any such fashion". He spoke even more emphatically when at Caesarea Philippi Jesus disclosed the cross. "God forbid", he cried indignantly. "It is ridiculous for you even to suggest such a mad waste. You have no right thus to throw yourself away". Simon was once impulsive and full of pride and self-assurance.

Now it was of this bewildering mixture of weakness and strength, stardust and mud that Jesus proposed to make a man of rock-like character. How did he go about it?

1. He gave Simon a glimpse of his possibilities. Our Lord, seeing Simon for what he was, saw also what he might become. Out ahead of the Simon what was, Jesus pointed out a new man whose weakness had become power, whose pride had become humility, whose ugliness had become beauty. "There", he declared, "is the realization of the dream I have dreamed for you. That is the kind of man you can become, the kind you must become if you fulfill my purpose for you."

If this word to Simon is unique it is also unusual. At this moment Our Lord looks upon us not simply as a congregation but as individuals. He never loses the one among the many. To each he is saying, "You are, you shall be". What you are is of vast importance, but what you are becoming is far more important. Some are braver and better than others.
Some have climbed far higher up the hill than others. But this is true of all. Not one of us has yet become our best. There walks ahead of you, there walks ahead of me, a far more Christlike person than either of us has yet become. That is not our despair, but our inspiration and hope.

I read somewhere of a youth who stood one day before a canvas upon which Titian had splashed one of his marvelous dreams. That youth had not yet found himself. But as with glowing cheeks and sparkling eyes he looked upon this thrilling picture, he murmured softly to himself, "I too, Titian, I too, am an artist". Then from this moment of inspiration he went to action to realize his possibilities. So it was with Simon. So it may be with us.

2. Our Lord is here not only giving Simon a glimpse of his possibilities, but is pledging him his help in the realization of these possibilities. If this is not the case then his word is no more than a maddening mockery. None knew better than Jesus how impossible it was for Simon to reach the promised goal under his own strength. Jesus' words were therefore not only a prophecy but a promise of divine help.

One day our Lord made a personal call upon a human parasite who had lain flat of his back for thirty-eight years. To this bit of wreckage he put what at first seems a queer question. "Do you want to be healed?" By this question Our Lord is facing with the man the fact that he is not healed. He had to do that to gain his confidence. But along with this he is assuring him that healing is possible. If this is not the case then this question was not divine, but devilish. "In spite of the fact that you have been worse than worthless for half a lifetime you may still stand upon your feet a creature of worth. This is the case because I am at once willing and able to help you". Even so our Lord pledges himself to help us to become our best.
3. Finally, if Simon is to become Cephas, it must be by his own choice. The best name of Jesus is Savior. He and he alone can save. But even he cannot save without our cooperation. He cannot save physically. I know a man who convinced himself that he could live without eating. He was going to be clothed in Godhead bodily. But all that prevented his being clothed in his shroud was that when he fell in a coma, friends hurried him to the hospital and gave him forced feeding. But there is no forced feeding of the bread of life.

Did you ever undergo surgery? If so, you know what it is to exercise faith. "You are ill," said your physician. To that you had to agree. "I think I can cure you," he continued hopefully, "but in order to do that you must put yourself absolutely in my hands." This you did. You dared to go into a sleep as deep as death, in spite of the fact that you knew that your physician was not infallable. You did it knowing that one single mistake on his part might cost you your life. Such a faith directed toward our Lord is the one sure road to spiritual health.

This road Simon took and the Lord began at once to bring him to his best. His decision to follow was the work of a moment. But for the full winning of the goal he needed all time and eternity. His progress was often pitifully disappointing. The graph of Simon's life no more climbs upward in a straight and unbroken line than does yours and mine. Today the proper noun Peter is also a verb. As to the reason for this even Webster is not sure. But I have an idea that Simon's new name is now forced to do double duty because its wearer made so many failures. He petered out so many times.

But in spite of all these falls we read in the Book of Acts a little later that they brought forth the sick into the streets that even the shadow of Peter might fall upon them and thus enable them to stand once more upon their feet. That is his very presence came to have healing and shelter in it. The picture suggests that fine passage
in Isaiah, "A man shall be—as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land". Already Simon has become so rock-like that weak and weary souls could find shelter under his shadow.

How did this come about? There was no magic in it. Simon, having dared to begin to follow Jesus, kept bravely on in spite of the fact that he fell again and again. But he never allowed any fall to become final. The decisive difference between those suffering ultimate defeat and those gaining ultimate victory is not in the fact that one sometimes failed and the other never did. It is rather in this, one dared to start anew, while the other groveled in remorse and self-pity. Judas might have become as saintly as Simon if he had returned to His Lord instead of trusting to a hangman's noose. Simon won because he held with Browning that we fall to rise, are baffled to fight better. If we thus refuse to quit, nothing can defeat us. "In due season we shall reap if we faint not".
"Pulling Down the Blinds."

John, 1: 46.

"Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" This man Nathaniel has just been the hearer of a marvelous gospel. There has come to him the story of the most wonderful event that ever transpired in this world or any other world. That wonderful event for which the long centuries have waited has at last taken place. He who had been the theme of the prophets' prophecy and the inspiration of the poet's song has come. And Phili, Nathaniel's friend, has been good enough to bring him the news.

I can see even now the radiant faced man as he comes with his gladsome message to his friend. Abruptly he bursts in upon him with this shout: "We have found Him of whom Moses in the law and the prophets did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." "Jesus of where?" Nathaniel asks. "Jesus of Nazareth? Did I understand you to say that he hailed from Nazareth? Now you know I don't like Nazareth. Therefore I do not believe a word of it, for I am perfectly confident that nothing good can come from Nazareth."

It is a familiar picture, is it not? The sun has risen. The light is bursting in upon Nathaniel. He looks out to find from what direction this marvelous light is coming. "Ah", he says, and there is a real sadness in his voice, "I thought the light was going to come from Bethlehem. I never expected a prophet from Galilee, and least of all did I expect one from Nazareth. If Nazareth is the horizon, is Nazareth the east from which this dawn comes, - I'll have none of it." And he reaches up and pulls down the blinds, saying only: "I don't believe it."

And his word is one familiar enough in our day and in all human history for that matter. "I don't believe it. I doubt it" - that is the attitude that many of us have taken towards some of the supreme faiths that have come to bless and enrich our lives. We coolly declare our scepticism, pull down the blinds and sit in the dark.

Now Nathaniel's trouble lies right on the surface. It is easy to see what is the matter with him. He is a doubter. "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth" - what he meant by that question is that personally he did not believe that such a thing was possible. At least he says, "I am exceedingly sceptical on the question." And with Nathaniel, the doubter, as my text I would like to speak straight home to the heart and consciences of you that are here this evening.

Doubt is a very common thing. There are many of us here this evening that are chronic doubters. Some of us are in doubt about trivialities. We are perplexed over non-essentials. We worry ourselves about trifles. We work ourselves into a fever of wretchedness over the story of Johan and the whale, feeling sometimes as if our salvation depended upon the size of a whale's throat. Then there are those of us who are in doubt about things that are fundamental and whose importance is supreme.

Now all doubters are not in the same class. First, there is the conceited doubter. He will believe nothing that he can not understand. Doubt to him is not a burden of grief. It is rather a thing to be paraded and to be rejoiced in. Frankly, he speaks of "my doubts" as
Pulling down the blinds

if it were a treasure of the nature of a large bank account or some rich mining stock.

There are times when he tells you that the reason he is not a Christian is because he chooses to think for himself, and he speaks of the intellectual difficulties that occur to a thinking man. And you want to both laugh and sob as you listen to him. For when he tells you his difficulties he begins to peddle out stale second hand intellectual junk that the cliff dwellers must have smiled over very wearily ten thousand years ago.

Now, the first fact I would like to bring to the attention of the conceited doubter is just this, that doubt in itself is not necessarily a badge of intellectual superiority. I know that there have been brilliant men who were also doubting men. But they were not doubtful simply because they were brilliant. There have been doubters also who were very stupid and very dull and very ignorant. A whole world of folks doubted a man named Delaleo one time but their doubts did not prove them wise. It only proved their ignorance.

So while there are brilliant men here and there who have hard fight with doubt, yet doubt, I repeat, is not in itself a badge of a genius. To smile at the faith of a man like St. Paul as a thing impossible to one of your intelligence does not argue well for your own meehness. William E. Gladstone, one of the greatest men the modern world has known, said that he knew sixty of the master minds of the last century, and of those sixty, fifty-five of them were devout Christians.

A second fact that the conceited doubter ought to realize is this, that doubt is not only not a badge of superior intellectuality, it is not in itself an asset at all. I know doubt may be an open door to a larger truth if it is rightly used. I know it is necessary at times to come to doubt the old before we are ready to pass onward to the new and the larger. But that doubt that is merely a negation, that doubt that merely stands aside and asks questions is never an asset - it is always a liability.

Doubt never gets anywhere in the world of science and invention. What said the world to Columbus when he preached his strange doctrine of a sea route to India? They simply said, "I do not believe it." But out of the faith of a man who did believe a new world was born.

What has the world said in the face of every invention? Just this, "I doubt it." And while doubt did nothing but doubt the man who believed invented the telegraph and the telephone and the wireless and the steam engine and the airship and all the conveniences of modern life.

Doubt is not an asset in the social circle. Have you come to the place where you no longer believe in men and women. Do you believe that every man has his price and every woman has her price? Are you a cynic? Is there nobody that you would trust? Then I won't congratulate you. From my heart I pity you. Whatever may be your wealth, whatever may be the delightful physical circumstances in which you find yourself - you are a poor and miserable wretch. I would not be in your place for ten thousand worlds.

Neither would I congratulate the doubter in the domestic circle.
Yonder is a man with despair in his heart and hopelessness in his face; and he is saying, "To be or not to be - that is the question." And all that keeps him from throwing his life away is not that he treasures it or loves it or prizes it - he has kept from throwing it away by the dread fear of what may come after he has "shuffled off this mortal coil.

What is the matter with Hamlet? Hamlet is a doubter. He doubts his uncle. He doubts his mother. He has a suspicion that amounts to a damning certainty that she is an unclean woman. And doubting her, he doubts everywhere. He is even afraid to love Ophelia. There is something rotten in Denmark. But the thing that makes the situation utterly hopeless is the rotten faith of Hamlet.

Believe me, my friend, no man is the richer for his doubts of those that he loves. It is a bit of a paradise in which Othello and Desdemona live. What changed that paradise into a hell? Doubt. Iago made Othell doubt. And that wild man yonder cries:

"Whip me ye fiends, wash me in deep down gulfs of liquid fire, Oh, Oh, Oh!"

And then he falls upon his sword. What cause lay back of it all? Just doubt. That is all.

But doubt reaches its supreme tragedy when we doubt God. A man with an unfaithful wife is to be pitied. A woman who can not trust her husband is to be pitied, but the most pitiable object in the world is a man with an unfaithful god. He may be intellectual, he may be brilliant and gifted, he may even be a genius, but if he has no faith he is a poor indeed.

We are accustomed to quote with some zest that familiar poem:

"Out of the night that covers me, 
Black as the pit from pole to pole, 
I thank whatever gods may be 
For my unconquerable soul.

"In the fell clutch of circumstance, 
I have not winced nor cried aloud. 
Under the bludgeonings of chance, 
My head is bloody, but unbowed.

"It matters not how strait the gate, 
How charged with punishment the scroll, 
I am the master of my fate! 
I am the captain of my soul!"

But frankly heart, I want a better captain for my soul than this man has been to his own. He boasts of his captaincy and yet he declares in the same breath that he has wrecked the ship. He is the captain but under his guidance he has won nothing but a bloody head and a broken heart and a night black as the pit from pole to pole.

And unbelief makes for darkness and bitterness and wretchedness now and ever more. Ingersol used to say that the pulpit case a shadow over the cradle and a gloom over the grave. But the fact is that the gloom
was already over the grave when Christianity came, and it has been the one force through the centuries that has sought to dispel that gloom. Unbelief only blackened its shadows. Even the poor wife and daughter of Ingersol himself keep his dead body in the home till positive decay sets in. It is all they have and they cannot give it up.

Did you ever know a really happy doubter? One of the best friends I had in Harvard University was a confirmed doubter. He talked his doubts. He argued for them brilliantly. He refused utterly to take any steps to have they dispelled. When I asked him one day to read John's Gospel he refused. He clung to his doubts as if they were treasures more precious than gold.

But were they? I take the confession from his own lips. One day when we were not arguing, one day when the fever of discussion was no longer present we talked heart to heart. Then it was he told me something of his real inner life. And this is what he said. He said, "For ten long years I have never gone to bed a single night without the hope that I might not wake again. And all that has kept me from suicide is the grief that I would bring to my mother."

No, no, young man, when you are flippantly parading your doubts do not take any undue pride in them. They are not assets - they are liabilities. All your flowers grow amidst skulls. All your music is discord. Doubt robs life of its inspiration and its hope. A keen student of the suicide problem points to the decay of religious belief as one of its supreme causes.

Then there is the fool doubter. "The fool hath said in his heart, there is no god." You notice where the fool said this. He did not say it in his head. He said it in his heart. His difficulties were not intellectual. They were moral. The thought of God worried him, therefore he refused to think of Him. The truth of the Bible made him uncomfortable, therefore he closed up the Bible, refused to read it and simply said, "I do not believe it."

There is a vast multitude like that today, men who do not believe because they do not want to believe. They know that if the Bible is true then they are condemned, therefore they prefer to believe that the Bible is not true. A home was robbed in New York a few years ago. In one room where considerable jewelry was taken there was a splendid statue of Jesus, but this statue the next morning was found with its face to the wall. The face bothered the burglar, therefore he turned it away from him. Christ bothered him, therefore he said, "There shall be no Christ." Yes, men do that. They doubt that they might be comfortable in their sins.

And then sin deepens doubt. There is nothing that so puts out our eyes and stops our ears as deliberate wrong doing. You can refuse to obey the truth that you believe till you cease to believe it. You can refuse to respond to the call of Jesus Christ till that call loses all its appeal for you. Many a man has gone utterly blind so far as God is concerned, just as the mole went blind, not because he could not see, but because he refused to see.

And last of all, there is the prejudiced doubter. He is the man of the text. Nathanial had a prejudice. It was not a prejudice against Jesus. It was not a prejudice against the church of his day.
It was not a prejudice against the Bible. It was a prejudice against Nazareth. He absolutely had no use for Nazareth. He thought it a hard and wicked place, therefore he had no confidence in any man that came from Nazareth.

The man with a prejudice - he is a very common individual. I suppose there is hardly one of us without our pet prejudice. With some it is the President. With another it is the League of Nations. With another it is the other man's church. I taught school one time in a community that was strongly Democratic in politics and where the non-progressive branch of the Christian Church had everything there was in religious lines. There was only one Republican in the community so far as I knew. And there was one Methodist. And this old gentleman was both. And he declared very frankly that he was Republican and a Methodist, and that he would be both of them if he knew he was wrong. He was a man with a prejudice.

That is the trouble with some of you. You have an attitude against some doctrine that you have taken for granted to be a Christian doctrine and perhaps it is not Christian at all. Or you are prejudiced against Jesus because of His followers when maybe those who claim to be His followers are not followers at all.

I heard a traveler in South America say that of the 5,000 students in a certain school in Buenos Aires, only five of them claimed any faith at all. They had given up all belief in Christ because of the ignorance and sensuality that the only church that they knew had fostered upon the people. They had allowed the so-called followers of Christ to prejudice them against Christ Himself.

I knew a woman once who got prejudiced against the mourners' bench, and who said that if she had to go to the mourners' bench in order to be saved she would not be saved at all, and she wasn't. And she allowed a form, a mere method to prejudice her against the Christ of God and keep her from becoming a vital believer in Him.

So this man Nathaniel drew down the blinds at first, not, I say, because he had stood face to face with Jesus and found Him wanting, but because he did not like the village from which He came. This prejudice blinded him. This prejudice made him a doubter. This prejudice would have wrecked him and put him forever in the rank of Christ's enemies if he had not been willing to be led out of it. But Nathaniel came from the black shadow of doubt into absolute certainty. I wonder if you would not like to do the same.

How did he do it? How may you do it? First, accept it as a fact that Jesus Christ is not your enemy simply because you have doubts. We read of three doubters in the New Testament. One of them is the man of the text. Another is Thomas. They were both apostles. The third was John. John got into prison, you know, and lost faith. And yet Jesus said, "A greater had never been born of woman than John the Baptist." Jesus Christ then does not hold you as an enemy merely because you are a doubter.

There is a road that leads to certainty. There is not a man listening to me but what may come to an absolute assurance of Jesus Christ as the Christ of God and as his own Lord and Savior. These three doubters of whom I have just spoken came to such assurance. Millions of other
doubters have found this same absolute certainty. You may find it. There is only one requirement and that is that you be willing. "If any man wills to do his will he shall know." Put yourself in an attitude of the hungry and of the thirsty and God will not disappoint you.

Your willingness to do this is the test of the sincerity of your doubt. If you are an honest doubter you will be willing to put aside your prejudice and give yourself a chance to learn the facts. If you are honest you will refuse to be a mere intellectual top water, One night after Alexander Hamilton, according to his custom as a young man, had made a number of flippant flings at Christianity, brought himself up short with this realization, "I would give more attention," he said, "to the case of the very meanest and poorest of my clients than I have given to the claims of Jesus." And he then resolved to give attention to those claims with the result that he became a devout Christian.

How did John find the light? He appealed to Jesus Himself. How did Thomas find it? He did not go to align himself with those Jews who had crucified Him. He did not seek information at the hands of Christ's enemies. He went to His friends. He went to the assembly of the saints. He went where Christ was wont to reveal Himself and in that presence he cried, "My Lord and my God!"

And how was Nathaniel, the prejudiced doubter, convinced? "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" he honestly believed the thing was impossible. He was a prejudiced doubter, but he was honest in his prejudice and in his doubt. Now Philip did not convince him by arguing that Nazareth was after all not as bad as he thought. He said to him, "Come and see." And Nathaniel came, and in the presence of Jesus his doubts utterly melted and he was the first of all the apostles to exclaim, "Thou art the Son of God."

Now I am asking you to be honest with the claims of Christ tonight. You may have many questions. There may be many uncertainties. But will you come and see? Will you give yourself a chance to know? Will you turn your face toward the light? Will you prayerfully examine the record? Will you live up to all the truth that is true to you and refuse to let what you do not know interfere with what you do know?

The great preacher, Horace B, began by being a sceptic. He was one of the most brilliant students of Yale University. A great revival was going on and he felt himself in the way. He did not want to hinder. He did not want to help because he did not believe.

"What do you believe," he said to himself one night as he restless-ly paced his room. "I believe there is an absolute difference between right and wrong," he answered. "Will you take your stand on that and follow it, will you take your stand on that side and stand there even if it costs you your life?" And bowing upon his knees he said, "I will." What was the result? After a pastorate of 47 years in Hartford he said, "Better than I know any man in Hartford I know Jesus Christ."

So for your uncertainty there is certainty. So for your doubt there is positive conviction. And if you continue in the dark, if you continue in your unbelief face this fact; it is because you are not
downright and genuinely fair. If you are an honest doubter you will seek to know. And if you really seek you will find, for God's word is sure: "He that seeketh findeth, and to him that knocketh it shall be opened."

Will you start the search now? Do not expect a sunrise at first. Follow the little faith you have. Be true to the little light that comes to you. When I was a little boy I got lost in a dense forest. It was a terrible night of blackness and storm. A great fear seized me. I hardly knew where I was going, but I kept going and I was afraid to stop. At last I saw the faintest needle point of light in the distance. It was almost infinitely small, but I followed it and it brought me home. Follow your gleam and it will bring you home, home to the shelter of a Father's arms, home to your eternal abiding place in the Father's House.
MAKING THE NEW YEAR NEW

"Thou hast kept the good wine until now."
--John 2:10

Today we stand upon the threshold of a new year. Naturally, there are many who will pass through January 1 without experiencing anything new. To some 1944 will be a new year. To some 1944 will not be a new year—it will be just another year. They will carry into it their old grudges, their old sorrows, their old sins. They will greet it with yawns. They will cry with a cynic of long ago, "There is no new thing under the sun." But there are others for whom the year will be really new. This will be the case in spite of the fact that they live in the same commonplace world in which they lived through 1943. It will be new because God has given an inward newness. Given a new heart, we have a new world. "We see the world with our own eyes, each of us, and make within us the world we see." It is possible for all of us to exclaim as we live the coming year, "Thou hast kept the good wine until now."

The author of the Fourth Gospel is interested in the homely story of which our text is a part chiefly because of the light that it throws upon the face of our Lord. "This beginning of signs," says the author, "did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory." In other words, as we would say in everyday language, "This beginning of signs did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his character." This story gives us an insight into the character of our Lord. It shows us what kind of Christ He is to be. It illuminates the face of Him whom we call Lord and Master. What does it tell us about Jesus?
This story is a revelation of the interest of our Lord in ordinary folks and in their ordinary joys and sorrows.

There was a marriage going to take place in a little backwoods village. It was not a great social event that drew the attention of the world. Who was the bride? We do not know. She is left nameless. Since she is without a name, we naturally do not know whether she was beautiful or homely. We know nothing of her bridal costume nor the kind of flowers she carried. Who was the bridegroom? Here again we do not know. He is also nameless. Neither of these had a place in the social register. Yet when Jesus was invited to this marriage, though He had come for no less a purpose than to save the world, He took time to go.

Why did He go? He went because He was interested in folks as folks. He was not interested in the wedding of these two nameless nobodies because they were a certain kind of people, but simply because they were people. Being interested in them, He was interested in their ordinary joys and sorrows. While the wedding feast was in progress, the wine gave out. It was the business of the bridegroom to furnish wine for the guests. The fact that there was not wine enough indicates the poverty of the bridegroom. When the mother of Jesus indicated to the Master what the situation was, He threw Himself into the breach.

Why was this the case? It was not because wine was a matter of life and death. Wine was an ordinary article of the daily diet. It was about as necessary as coffee would be to a modern feast. Therefore, when our Lord took it upon Himself to supply wine, He did not do so because wine was an absolute necessity. He was simply seeking to save a nameless man from an embarrassment. He was interested in ordinary people and in their ordinary problems.

As He showed Himself here, so He was throughout His entire ministry. He was always interested in people because of their individual worth. It was His conviction that any human personality was more priceless than the world. Every man felt when He confronted Him that He was face to face with One who cared. He cast a
spell over the men of His generation. As we read His story, the ground fairly trembles with the tread of the eager multitudes that sought Him. Why did they come to Him? There were varied reasons, but one of the greatest was this—His was the spell of a Man who cared. He was not interested in certain classes or certain races or men in certain positions. He was interested in every man as an end in himself.

As He was in the days of His flesh, so we find Him after the experience of the Cross. One of the beautiful stories of John's Gospel is recorded in the last chapter. Simon Peter says to a group of his fellow disciples, "I go fishing." It may be that Simon was just trying to fill up a bit of space until he should receive further orders. It is more likely that he was mistrustful of receiving any further orders. He was possibly saying, "I have been following a rather wild dream. I have been climbing one Jacob's ladder after another. Now I am going to come down out of the sky, brush the star dust off my wings, and do a little thinking and working for the life that now is. Therefore, I am going fishing." Simon, being a born leader, carried his fellows with him. They said, "We also go with thee."

But they had no luck at all. They had nothing but a long night of labor for their pains. Now wet and weary and discouraged, they are coming home in the gloaming. As they draw near the shore, they see a vague figure waiting for them. Then a voice calls, "Lads, have you caught anything?" When they answer in the negative, that same voice of authority says, "Cast your net on the right side and you shall find." He is interested in their fishing. They made the cast and the net fairly broke with the abundance of the catch. But what is more impressive still, when these fishermen reach shore they find breakfast waiting for them. Their amazing Master who has just conquered death and hell and the grave is not above preparing a meal for a bunch of tired friends who have come in from a night of fruitless toil. This Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. So He is interested as we venture into the new year in ourselves. He is interested in our ordinary joys and sorrows. There is no legitimate interest of your life not of profound concern to Him.
II

Then this story of changing water into wine gives us an insight into the purpose of our Lord. What is He here to do? He is here to lift the lower into the higher. He is able to transfigure all that He touches. He makes the colorless water of the worthless blush into the fine red wine of the worthful. He has skill to change human desert into garden and to transmute the world's moral waste into the world's moral wealth. Paul, in writing of one of his converts, expressed it in a single sentence, "I commend to you my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my bonds: Which in time past was to thee unprofitable, but now profitable to thee and to me." Whatever our Lord touches He glorifies.

It seems rather amazing that it would be necessary to insist on this after all the centuries during which our Lord has demonstrated its truth. Yet there are still multitudes, even among those who profess to follow Him, who are a bit afraid of Him. We are willing to go with Him within certain limits, but we are afraid of a complete surrender. We are afraid that He will ask of us more than we can afford to give. If we surrender absolutely, we have a fear that life might become a rather tame affair. "Pale Galilean, Thou hast conquered, and the world has grown gray at Thy birth."—So sobbed one who was afraid even to give Him a try. Of course a greater lie was never told. Of course, all the radiance that has come to the world has come through Him.

A man died in the west sometime ago named Luther Burbank. He was a great naturalist. He said, "Every weed is a possible flower." What an amazing confidence he had in his vegetable kingdom! He believed that the only reason this burr-weed did not have its hands full of beauty instead of full of berries was because it had never reached its possibilities. One day this man met the cactus, believed in it. Then one day in a moment of confidence, the cactus put down all its swords and its spears and its bayonets, and filled its hands up full of flowers. Today when we see it, we no longer gather our garments round us lest if should touch us. But we like to wear its colorful beauty over our hearts or rub our cheeks against
the soft velvet of its petals. The cactus has become transformed.

So Jesus touched all human life. He found fluctuating Simon and made him into a rock. He found Paul, the greatest menace of the Early Church, and made him into its greatest missionary. He found demon-possessed Mary of Magdala and made her into a heroic soul who was the last to leave the Cross of crucifixion and the first to be a herald of the Resurrection. He found a tinker named John Bunyan and made him an interpreter to House Beautiful. He made him into a Greatheart who will guide pilgrims to the Celestial City as long as our world remains a world. And what He did, He does. He has not come to kill nor to destroy. He has come that we might have life and have it in abundance.

III

Finally, in this story we find a revelation of our Lord's method of working.

1. How did He change the water into wine? I have an idea that had it been necessary He might have dispensed with any human help at all, but He did not see fit to do so. When He set out to work this wonder, He called for the help of human hands. There was something that the servants could do though they could not work the transformation alone. Jesus did not work it alone. He worked it in cooperation with others.

This is ever the case. One day when He had gone for a bit of rest on the shores of Galilee He was followed by great crowds. These crowds were so caught under His spell that they remained with Him until the day was almost over. They were hungry. He found that they must have food. How did He go about it? He called in the help of human hands. He leaned especially hard on the shoulders of a nameless lad who had come for a day's fishing, bringing with him a bit of lunch consisting of some bread and fish.

When the night had settled over Europe and God wanted a reformation, He brought it about in cooperation with one Martin Luther. When vital Christianity had fallen into decay in England, when the rottenness of a corrupt court had seeped down
through the lower strata of society, God brought faith to a resurrection. How did He do it? He made a beginning through a young man named John Wesley. This man drew to him other loyal hearts. We know today that by far the greatest event in that eventful century was the rebirth of Christianity that took place, not through God alone, but through God and man working together.

This is a word that we need today. There is no getting on without God. This our individual and social and national failures have surely taught us. The branch without the vine can do nothing but wither and die. But if we are absolutely dependent upon God, God is also dependent upon us. If He is to bring you to your possibilities, He must have your cooperation. If He is to build a better church on this corner, He must do it through us. If He is to build the brave new world of which we dream beyond this red hell of war, we must cooperate with Him.

2. This is a revelation of God's abundant response to our cooperation. How much wine was made on this occasion? It would seem far more than was needed. Our God always does things in a grand way. When He wants a universe, He pushes back its confines to the point of infinitude. When He wants suns, He kindles millions of them. When He wants stars, He sows them heaven-wide. Even in our speck of a world, He is the God of abundance. When He wants mountains, He piles up the Alps and the Andes and the Himalayas and the Rockies. When He wants rivers, He makes the Mississippi, the Nile, the Ganges, and the Amazon. When He wants oceans, He scoops out the seven seas.

As He is lavish in the realm of the material, so He is in the realm of the spiritual. When He pardons, He does not forgive without forgetting as we claim to do. He pardons abundantly. "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." When He answers our prayers, He is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think. When He satisfies our longings, He does it on a grand scale. He provides for an overflow. "If any man thirst, let him come to me and drink. He that believeth on me, as the
scripture hath said, out of his inner life shall flow rivers of living water."
When He admits us into His presence, He does not compel us to slip through a slit in the door. He administers an abundant entrance.

3. Finally, this is a revelation of God's method. It is different from that of the world. The governor of the feast said to the bridegroom, "Every man at the beginning doth set forth good wine; and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse: but thou hast kept the good wine until now." That is, life in the fellowship of Jesus Christ does not move on to an anti-climax, but to an ever growing climax. For the Christian always the best is yet to be. The new year is ever to be better than the year that preceded it.

In view of this, it is rather strange how persistently we expect life to begin glowingly and become increasingly drab as we get deeper into the years. We expect it to be a bit like that stream that rushes out all liquid silver out of a mountainside in India to lose itself almost immediately in the desert sands. Here our poets are greatly at fault. They are constantly talking as if only the morning-tide of life is worth living.

"Backward, turning backward, O Time, in thy flight,
Make me a child again just for tonight."

That is the theme song that seems almost unanimous.

"'Tis not on Youth's smooth cheek the blush alone,
which fades so fast,
But the tender bloom of heart is gone, ere youth itself be past."

"Talk not to me of a name great in story,
The days of our youth are the days of our glory,
The flowers that blossom at sweet two and twenty
Are worth all your laurels though ever so plenty."

We might not expect anything better than that from dissipated Byron, but from Christian Wordsworth we hear a song to the same purpose.
"Heaven lies about us in our infancy!
Shades of the prison-house begin to close
Upon the growing boy,
But he beholds the light, and whence it flows,
He sees it in his joy;
The youth, who daily farther from the east
Must travel, still is nature's priest,
And by the vision splendid
Is on his way attended;
At length the man perceives it die away,
And fade into the light of common day."

No wonder that, haunted by this view, a certain pessimist declared that if he had it in his power he could make a great improvement. Instead of being born an innocent baby and trekking down a hill to old age, he would reverse the order. He would be born a doddering old man, leaning on the top of his staff. Then by and by he would grow back to middle life, back to youth, back to the innocence of babyhood, back to nothing. But our Lord tells us that the best is yet to be.

"Thou hast kept the good wine until now." This we say for the first time when we meet Him and come to realize Him as our Saviour and Friend. "Thou hast kept the good wine until now," as we get deeper into the intimacies of His friendship and come to know more fully His amazing adequacy for all our needs. "Thou hast kept the good wine until now"—this we shall say as we walk in His fellowship toward the horizon where the clouds are homing for the night. "Thou hast kept the good wine until now," will be our exclamation when we wake in His likeness on the other side. Life may begin in a song and end in a sob. It may also be as the shining of a light that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.

IV

How shall we realize this bright dream? Mary summed it up in one sentence to those servants of the long ago. "Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it." Every word is emphatic. "Whatsoever"—how seemingly difficult! "Whatsoever he"—the Christ of infinite love and understanding. "Whatsoever he saith unto you"—He has singled you out from all that live, from all that have lived, to make known to you His will. Finally, "Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it." As we thus dedicate our lives to
Him we change the lower into the higher. We also make it possible for life to approach an ever increasing climax both in time and through eternity.
"This beginning of signs did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory."

John 2:11

This is the first recorded miracle of Jesus. In dealing with this simple story it is not my purpose to discuss the authenticity of miracles recorded in the Gospels. I will say however in passing, that the attitude of the modern man toward what we are accustomed to call the miraculous is far different than it was three quarters of a century ago. About that time men of scientific mind ruled out all miracles. They did so on the ground that nature was a static something, that it was fixed. The whole universe ran according to certain fixed laws, a miracle that concluded was a violation of those laws. They were sure God did not make laws simply to break them. They were sure further that the spiritual could not control the physical.

But of course this has all been thrown into discard. A miracle is simply a happening that we cannot explain on the basis of what we know. Why did not Columbus phone over to America instead of taking the trouble of paying America a personal visit? It is not because such phoning was impossible, it was because he was ignorant. When he decided to come in person, why did he not fly instead of sail? Again we answer, simply because he was ignorant. Thus the miracle of one generation becomes the ordinary happening of another. But a miracle is not a violation of law, it is something whose law we cannot explain. I am quite sure
that Jesus never broke any law. He performed his miracles according to laws that the men of his day did not understand. Today we can get a glimpse of his method, but even now we do not understand. But personally I am willing for Jesus to know more than I know.

Why then this story? We are interested in this simple story because of the insight it gives us into the character of our Lord. "This beginning of signs did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory." That is, by this simple service Jesus holds the mirror in some measure up to his own face. By this he indicates his own character. He shows what kind of man, what kind of messiah he is to be. What does this simple story tell us about him?

I.

II. It is a revelation of the interest of our Lord in commonplace folks and in their commonplace needs, their commonplace joys and sorrows. Who was this bridegroom who was getting married in the little village of Cana? Frankly we do not know. He is left nameless. Who was the bride? Here again we must say that we do not know. She too is nameless. They were not conspicuous because of their wealth, or their political prestige or their social position. But when this ordinary couple, living in a little backwoods village, invited Jesus to their wedding he was interested enough to come. He was interested in them not because that they were a certain type of folks. He was interested in them simply because they were folks.

The interest of Jesus in folks as folks that characterized him here is a mark of his entire life. Never once did Jesus manifest any interest in any man because of his wealth or his social standing. He left all that for you and me. The home into which he was born was an ordinary one. The task in which he worked was an ordinary task. The hands that he lifted were toil-worn hands of a day labor.
er. The men that he gathered about him were in the main ordinary men. When he was invited to dinner he always accepted. Even his enemies discovered his interest in folks as such that they learned that he was no respecter of persons.

In being interested in ordinary folks he was interested in their ordinary needs, their every day joys and sorrows. While this marriage banquet was in progress the wine gave out. The wine here mentioned was an ordinary part of the daily diet of the Jewish people. When it ran short, it was not a matter of life, the feast might have gone on without the wine. But the bridegroom whose business it was to furnish it would have been embarrassed. He would have been embarrassed as any host or hostess would be embarrassed today if the coffee ran short, or if a guest asked for another biscuit, and they had to tell him that there were no more. Jesus threw himself into the breach then, not because this was a great crisis, but because he was willing to meet an every-day need of every-day people.

Thus he acted throughout his entire ministry. He was interested in the daily tasks of people. He was interested in their physical hungers. He was interested in their physical health. He was interested in their spiritual health. Every interest of the people with whom he came in contact day by day was of interest to him. This was one of the greatest secrets of the spell that he cast over men. It is said that the common people heard him gladly. That is, the mass of people. They heard him gladly because they were sure of his interest in all that concerned them. He was so intense in his interest that he went to the cross.

But what he was before the crucifixion, that he was when he had risen from the dead. Here is a beautiful scene. One day Simon who felt that he had come to the end of all his fine dreams said to his fellows, "I go a fishing." It was as if he had said, "I have been following Jesus spurred on by the wildest hopes. For three years I climbed one Jacob's latter after another, but now I am going to come down to earth, brush the star dust off my wings and go to doing a little thinking for the life that now is. I am going to get back to something that is real. I
am going fishing." His friends answered, "We go with thee." So they took to the boat, toiled all night and caught nothing.

The next morning as they were coming in over the dawn-lit sea they saw the dim outlines of a figure standing on the shore. Then came a question. "Lads, have you caught anything?" "Children, have you any meat?" is the way John puts it. It is an arresting question. I put it to my own heart and yours. "Have you caught anything? Have you found something to satisfy, give strength and purpose and meaning for life? Have you any bread to sustain the hungers of the heart?"

John with his fine intuition whispered to Peter, "It is the Lord," Simon, true to himself, quick to act, no sooner heard that than he dived into the sea and swam ashore. When a little later his companions came also, they found the fire burning and fish cooking and bread. Who had prepared this meal? Jesus. He turned to these friends of his and said, "Come and dine." That is certainly one of the choicest stories of the New Testament. This amazing Christ who had just triumphed over death is not above preparing a meal for a hand-full of friends who have come in tired and hungry from a night of toil.

What Christ did, he does. "He is the same yesterday, today, and forever." As he was interested in the ordinary people of his day and in their ordinary needs so he is interested in you and me. So is he interested in all that interests us. We can understand this in some measure in our relationship with our own children. There is nothing that concerns your boy or girl that does not concern you. That does not mean that you have to play the games that they like to play, it only means that you are interested even in their small interests because you are interested in them. There are some of us that never think of Christ except in some great hour of crisis. But he is the Christ among the common things of life. There is no legitimate interest of yours that is not of deep interest to him.

II.

Then this is a revelation of what our Christ who is interested in ordinary
folks is here to do for them. What did he do on this occasion? He took ordinary water and made it into wine. That is, he lifted the lower into the higher. That is what he is always doing. He takes the useless and makes it into the useful. He takes the useful and makes it into the greater usefulness. He changes the worthless into the worthwhile. He changes desert into garden. He transmutes the world's moral waste into the world's moral wealth. Whatever he touches he touches only to transform. If he has not made life richer and deeper and more meaningful for you and me, it is simply because we have not given him a chance.

"Of course," we are ready to answer with easy complacency. But it is not of course at all. I am afraid the vast majority of professing Christians do not really believe this. It is so hard for us to get away from a feeling that religion is a rather starved affair. Christianity is good in case of desperate illness or death, but for the life that now is we are not so sure. As a matter of fact most of us are afraid to give our Lord his way in our lives for fear he will cheat us out of something that we are very eager to possess. This conviction was voiced in this brilliant fashion. "Pale Galilee, thou hast conquered, and the world has grown gray at thy birth." —Spurgeon

But in spite of the intellectuality of the man who said this, no falser statement was ever uttered. Jesus came into a world that had lost its zest. Life had grown stale and hard and bitter. Under his touch a few men and women were remade and they went out to remake the world. But even while he lived Jesus had to correct the conviction that he had not come to rob life of its bloom and beauty. "The thief cometh not but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. But I am come that they might have life and that they might have it more abundantly." "Whatsoever I touch," he is saying, "I touch to transfigure, to remake, to give life." 

Is not this just what he did for the ordinary men that followed him in the long ago? The fluctuating Simon, the Son of Jonah, became through his touch a rock of Christ-like character. Fanatical and bitter John, eager to call down fire to
destroy a few ignorant villagers that had refused him and his Master a night's lodging. He made into the Apostle of Love. Paul, the best mind of his century, and the bitterest menace of the early Church, he changed into the greatest missionary. Luther Burbank said a while before he died, "Every weed was a possible flower." Jesus believed that every human weed was a possible Christ-like character. He not only believed it but he demonstrated it by what he made out of the men who followed him. This simple story is the revelation of the purpose of Jesus to lift the lower into the higher.

III.

Finally, this is a revelation of the method of Jesus.

1. It tells us how he lifts the lower into the higher. How did he work this simple miracle? Answer, he worked it in cooperation with men. The water became wine not through his power alone. I am not saying that he could not have said, "Let it be wine," just as he said in the long ago, "Let there be light." But his method of working here was through human instrumentality. That has been his method through the ages. In order to change this water into wine, these servants had to cooperate with him and cooperate with each other.

More and more we are saying that cooperation is a fundamental law of life. Fellowship is not a luxury; it is a necessity. God himself is a fellowship. That I take it is the deepest meaning of the Trinity, the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit. Nothing comes to its best alone, not even God. When God wants a garden, when he wants the wilderness transformed into fruitful fields, when he wants a man reborn, he brings about this transformation in part through human instrumentality.

This, I repeat, is his method always. One day when he desired to feed a hungry crowd he called in the assistance of his disciples. More important still he leaned heavily upon a nameless lad who was present with his lunch in his pocket.
When the early glow of Christianity had faded and the buoyant life of the Church had degenerated into a hard ecclesiasticism, He brought about a reformation. A new day was born. But this new day was made possible not by Christ alone, but by a rugged personality named Martin Luther. And when a bleak spiritual winter had settled over England it needed a John Wesley to change that winter into spring. God longs to make this church increasingly a power of enrichment for this city, but he can only do it through you and through your pastor. God works through human instrumentality.

2. Then this is a revelation of God's method of working results when we cooperate with him. It gives us some glimpse of his bounteouness. Sometimes we are niggardly stingy. Sometimes we ask how little can I give? But Jesus always asks how much? "All things were made by him," says John. How amazingly bountiful he is in creation. When he wants space he push the it back to the bounds of the infinite. When he wants light he does not light one single candle, he lights millions of suns. When he wants stars he sows them heavenwide. Even in our little world he is a bountiful Christ. When he wants flowers he colors the hills and the fields with them. When he wants mountains he piled up the Alps, the Himalayas, and the Rockies. When he wants water he scoops out the seven seas, ribbons the world with rivers, and hangs a million water falls like white veils over the rugged faces of a million cliffs.

As he is the bounteous Christ in the realm of the physical, so is he in the realm of the spiritual. When he forgives us, it is not a niggardly forgiveness as ours so often is. "Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord and he will abundantly pardon." When he meets our needs he meets them abundantly. "He is able to make all grace abound unto you always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work." When he answers our prayers he does that on a grand scale. "He is able to do exceeding, abundantly above all that we ask or think." Then when at last we meet
him at the end of the journey he does not open heaven's door to a slit to let us in, he administers an abundant entrance. How much wine did he give here? Far more than enough. Always he is the boundless Christ.

3. This is a revelation of our Lord's method of giving bountifully. When the toastmaster at this banquet tasted the wine that Jesus had made he was amazed. He said to the bridegroom. "It is customary to give the good wine first, but you have kept the good wine till now. Your feast is moving not toward an anti-climax, as feasts are accustomed to do, yours is different in that it is moving toward a climax. So life is expected to be. So ought it to be for our world, our church, ourselves as individuals.

This is the case only as we cooperate with our Lord. Our generation has been one of vast dissolution. The starved, dissolute, and cynical lives of millions give in some measure the explanation of the tragic plight of our world today. The zest has gone out of life of whole nations. The zest has gone out of lives for most of us individually. One tired man said not long ago that it was a pity that instead of being born sweet and innocent babies we could not be born old and dissolute men such as we become and gradually grow back to middle age, then to youth, then to innocent infancy. In expressing such a yearning he spoke in harmony with the conviction that belongs to multitudes.

How many begin the voyage of life with colors flying, flags waving, full sails spread to the breeze. But by and by the breeze dies, the anchor drags, and we find ourselves strangled in bitter dissolution upon a mud flat. "Youth is folly," said one such, "Manhood struggle, old age regret." Here is another:

"'Tis not all youth's smooth cheek alone

The blush that fades so fast;

But the tender bloom of heart is gone

Ere youth itself has passed.
O could I feel as once I felt
And be what I have been;
And weep as once I have wept
Over many a vanished sin.

As springs in desert found seem sweet
All brackish though they be;
So midst the withered waste of life
Those tears would flow to me."

Yes, the feast of life does lose its tang for vast numbers of us. But such need not be the case. Jesus never expected such to be the case. Of course there is no inevitable progress. I believe that out of the trouble and hell through which the world is passing, there is to come much that is good. But if such is the case it will be because some cooperate with God. But whatever life does to us as individuals we can always believe in a better tomorrow. We can always sing not in vain.

"The distance becomes forward, forward let us range,
Let the great world spend forever down the ringing grooves of change,
Through the shadow of the globe we see good to a younger day."

Yes, my faith is that it will be a brighter and better tomorrow. So I invite you again in the language of this same poet. "Come my friends 'tis not too late to seek a newer world." "Thou hast kept the good wine until now." That we can say when we first come face to face with our Lord. That we can say as we get deeper into life and come more and more to share in his nature. That we can say when we see the King in his beauty at the beginning of our heavenly journey. This is his own promise, "Beloved now are we the sons of God, and it is not yet made manifest what we shall be. But we know that when He shall appear we shall be like Him
for we shall see him as he is."

Finally, let me remind you once how this infinitely, worthwhile result is to be attained. Mary summed it all up in her word to the servants, "Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it." Every word here is an emphatic word. "Whatsoever," he said. However difficult, however seemingly hard, do what he says. It brings us back to the simplicities of our faith. What is it to be a Christian? It is to put ourselves unreservedly in his hands. That transfigures life in the here and now. It will go on bringing an increasing transfiguration through all time and eternity. I can close with no better word than this, If you want today to be bright, if you want tomorrow to be brighter still, whatsoever he saith unto you do it.

Ancient Mariner
The ship was then AE the Earth chains
Down deep into the deep
Day after day, day after day
We knew not where nor when.
"There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, the same came to Jesus by night. John 3:1

Here is a story for which we should all be devoutly thankful. The fact that Mr. Nicodemus should visit Jesus takes us a bit by surprise. Nicodemus is an aristocrat. Jesus is a man of the people. Nicodemus is a man of the schools. He is a scholar and a master in Israel. Jesus has no diploma. He is the teacher of no degree. Then, Nicodemus is an old man; old in years, and old in honors. Jesus is a young man. He is possibly young enough to be the son of Nicodemus. It is at once, therefore, amazing and refreshing to see this learned and honored gray-beard take his way down the street to knock at the door of some lowly cottage, and ask for an interview with Jesus, the Carpenter. "The same came to Jesus by night."

I

The fact that Nicodemus sought this interview throws a wonderful flood of light on his character. It tells us certain facts about him that challenge our admiration.

Why did Nicodemus seek this interview?

1. He was curious. He had heard much of this strange young man. Possibly he had had a fleeting glimpse of Him on the street. Possibly he had even heard Him speak. At least from some cause, his curiosity was aroused. He was eager to know Him better. He was eager to question Him.

For this curiosity of Nicodemus shows that he was a man of an open and hungry mind. I am sure that curiosity wasn't
all that brought him to Jesus, but I am equally sure that it played its part.

Now, I have heard curiosity criticised as if it were a vice. Of course it is possible to be too curious about wrong things. But curiosity in itself is not a liability; it is an asset. All children are curious. That is the reason they learn. Curiosity is the gateway to knowledge.

"Twinkle, twinkle little star, How I wonder what you are."

And because man wondered, he made a telescope and mapped the heavens, and thought God's thoughts after Him. It is curiosity that has made the microscope through which the scientist looked in his laboratory. It was on the good ship "Curiosity" that Columbus, and Drake, and Magellan, and Admiral Byrd made their voyages. When we lose our curiosity we become intellectually dead. When we cease to be curious, we are likely to be mere pillows of salt, looking back to some by-gone Sodom. There are larger motives for coming to church than curiosity, but it is far better to come because one is curious than not to come at all. Nicodemus was a man of an inquiring mind. Therefore, he came to Jesus.

2. Nicodemus came to Jesus because he was so intellectually honest. Here was a man about whom he was constantly hearingstreeting rumors. Some said that He was a prophet, even the greatest of the prophets. Some claimed that he had power beyond the human, that he was able to restore vision to blinded eyes, that He could make the lame walk, that He could even set a heart of glass to beating under the frozen ribs of death. Some even were beginning to dream that He was the promised Messiah, the Christ, and God.
Then, there were others who could find nothing
too sharp and bitter to say about Him. They looked upon Him
as an imposter. He was not to be trusted at all. He was
a foe of true religion. He was a mere glutton, a wine-bibber,
a friend of publicans and sinners.

Now, in the face of these conflicting reports,
Nicodemus felt that as an honest man, as a man who is respon-
sible for his own influence, it was up to him to learn the
facts and act accordingly. If this man were not what He
claimed to be, if He were an imposter, then He ought to fight
Him. If He was really what His friends claimed Him, then he
ought to give Him His love and loyalty and support. The least
he could do was to face the facts and act accordingly. That
much he owed to society. That much he owed to God. And that,
mark you, is every man's business. No man has a right to
dismiss the claims of Jesus Christ without investigation. No
man has the right to a position of colorless neutrality. If
Jesus is the Christ of God, you ought to follow Him. If He
is not, you ought to oppose Him. That is every man's solemn
duty.

3. Then, Nicodemus came to Jesus because He was
possessed of a hungry heart. As we read between the lines, we
cannot but realize that this splendid man with all his learning
had not found a religion that really satisfied. He was sincere
and honest, but somehow he was not sure that he had found the
Bread of Life. He did not feel that he had yet drunk of the
Water of Life. Therefore, he slipped out into the shadows
to make his way to Jesus because "As the heart beateth after
the water brook, so his soul was panting after God."

4. Then, this visit of Nicodemus indicates that
he was a man of a fine and beautiful courage. I know he is
usually credited with exactly the opposite. The first thing we think of in connection with him is his timidity. We constantly remind ourselves that he was the man who came to Jesus by night. He did not quite have the courage to come in the open. He must needs wait till the sun was set, and the streets were black with shadows before he dared make his way to the door of the lowly house where the Master was stopping.

Now, that Nicodemus was a cautious and timid man seems absolutely certain. But that is not the whole truth about him. We sometimes get our eyes so fixed on the fact that he came to Jesus by night, that we forget something that is infinitely bigger, and that is that he came. The plain truth is that the great essential is not how we came to Jesus, but the fact that we came at all. Happy is the man that makes his way to Him, however blundering and timidly. That Nicodemus came with shaking knees, I am quite sure. But in spite of his fears, he did come.

Now, that is courage at its best. We hear one say of a friend now and then, that he does not know what fear is. And we mean that for a compliment. But, in reality that is not a compliment. Fear in itself, our best psychologists tell us, is not a liability, but an asset. To be without fear would be almost as bad as being without our eyesight. Get out on the streets of the city without fear, and see how long you will last. I certainly do not care to drive in a car with a chauffeur who has no fear. It is our fear of disease that has led to our improving sanitary conditions so much that we have added almost a score of years recently to human life.

Of course fear is not always an asset. We may make
it into a terrible liability. Such it is, when it is unreasonable. It is not our legitimate fears that work our ruin, but our morbid and unreasonable fears. Such fears, I am sure, came very near working the ruin of this teacher in Israel. He was afraid of what his fellow-Pharisees would say. He was afraid of the crowd. He was tempted to dread the scorn of man more than the disapproval of God, and his own conscience. Those fears, I am sure, were actually his, but he showed his courage when he conquered them. His fears were real, but he took them in his two shaking hands and strangled them. His was the finest type of courage, a courage that dared to do what he felt that he ought, even when he was horribly afraid. It is this daring that brought him to his memorable interview with Jesus.

II

It is easy to imagine this quite scholarly gentleman as he takes his timid way down the darkened streets of the city to find Jesus. He is dreadfully afraid that he will be recognized. Every noise that he hears makes him turn hot and cold. As he passes another on the street, his breath comes in gasps. His hands grow clammy, and goose bumps break out all over him. He is afraid, horribly afraid. But, in spite of it all, he keeps right on till by and by he knocks at a certain door, and that door opens, and he slips out of the darkness into the light.

Now, suppose you and I have the courage to slip in through this open door with him, take our places beside him, and listen to this transforming interview.

"Master," this timid scholar begins, "we know that Thou art a Teacher sent from God, that no man can do the
miracles that Thou dost except God be with Him.* Nicodemus has not come with this belief in the deity of Jesus, but he does believe that He is face to face with a good man, a God-sent man. But Jesus takes him by surprise by replying not to the question of his lips, but to the question of his heart. He knows what Nicodemus is really seeking. Therefore, He speaks home to that need."Except a man be born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God."*

What does Jesus mean? He does not say to Nicodemus, "You must quit your meanness. You must give up your dishonesty, your drunkenness, your unfaithfulness to your marriage vows. You must give up your critical spirit, your sharp tongue, your sour temper." No, Jesus does not mention any of these things. It is possible that Nicodemus was guilty of none of them. But even if he had been, the message of Jesus would have been the same. He does not preach symptoms, he treats the disease. He always goes to the heart of things. He knows that what Nicodemus needs is to be set right in his inner-life.

If you have a watch that will not run, what are you going to do about it? Something more is necessary than merely polishing the hands. If your car goes dead, something more is necessary than dusting the wheels. I remember that when I was a boy we had a lovely spring at which we watered the horses. An opossum crawled up into that spring and died. Its waters became stenchful and impure. For it to be cleansed, something more was necessary than planting flowers and ferns about the spring. The corrupt thing had to be removed. It is thus Jesus treats human matters. He sets man right at the heart. That is the glory of the New Birth.

Nicodemus expresses astonishment at this plain and commonsense doctrine. Jesus, in turn, expresses astonishment
at his astonishment. "Art thou master in Israel, and knowest not these things?" How does one become aware of the sights and sounds and silences of this visible world about us? How would you become conscious of the loving care of a father and mother, of the blooming of flowers, of the softness of beds, of the blue of the sky? How would the visible world become a reality to you? By being born into it. There is no other way. And it is only plain common sense to say that the spiritual world becomes a reality only as we are born into it.

What is the difference between a vital Christian and one who is not? The difference is far more than one of conduct. The non-Christian may be just as scrupulous, just as ethical as the other. The difference is not in the quantity of their morality, it is in the quality of their life. One is born of God, and the other is not. One has the Light of God in his soul, and the other has not.

But to Nicodemus, the whole thing seems hopelessly impossible. "Can a man be born again when he is old?" he asks desperately. "Yes, there is a possibility, but it is a rare miracle. If you have waited till you are old, the chances are overwhelmingly against your ever being born anew." Yet, with God all things are possible, and even now you may pass through that vital experience that is so transforming that the writers of the New Testament can find no language strong enough to express it. It is a rich passing out of death into life.

"But how can it be possible?" the bewildered scholar persists. Jesus answers, "It is not theory but it is fact. "We speak that which we do know, and testify that which we have seen." So, said Jesus, and no countless thousands have been
able to say since then. For, if there is one fact that seems sure, it is this: that man may be reborn. That is not theory, that is experience. It can be testified to by unaccounted millions on life's other side, and by vast multitudes who are still on this side of the river.

III

But, accepting the fact of the New Birth, how may we experience it? That is the big question. The answer is very simple.

Jesus in his conversation with Nicodemus did not undertake to explain God's part in the procedure. As they were talking you could hear the wind as it blew outside the house, and swept up the street. "Do you hear the wind?" said Jesus. "You do not know whence the wind comes, nor whither it goes."

So is everyone that is born of the Spirit. You can feel the wind. You can see its effect, but you cannot see it. So it is with the Spirit of God.

But if God's side is veiled in mystery, ours is very simple. And Jesus took this master in Israel back to an old story in the life of his people. He reminded him of those days when the camp of Israel was infested by snakes. So many were bitten that at last Moses made it an object of prayer, and God told him to make a brazen serpent and to put it on a pole and that every one who looked at that brazen serpent should be cured. "Now," said Jesus, as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, "so shall the son of man be lifted up, that whosoever might believe on Him should not perish but have everlasting life."

What does this mean?

It means that as we turn in trust and confidence to Jesus, that He makes us anew. Sometimes the consciousness of
this New Birth comes to us instantly, in the twinkling of an eye. Sometimes it comes like the dawning of the day, or like the blooming of a flower. But the source is not the essential thing. The essential thing is the fact. Men who put themselves in the hands of their Lord are remade. They are transformed in the same image from glory to glory. That is the experience of all sorts and conditions of men.

1. It has been the experience of some of the worst men. Some years ago a hopeless, drunken bum staggered in to old Water Street Mission in New York, with a hundred and thirty-six cases of forgery against him. He seemed an utter bankrupt in body, mind, and soul. But, Jerry McCauley, himself a redeemed crook, got him down to the altar and he turned that bankrupt life over to Jesus, and Sam Hadley went out from that service to save literally thousands out of the sewers of New York. And his influence came to be felt around the world.

John Bunyan, the swearing tinker, was made into a preacher of righteousness, who is still getting souls from the city of destruction to Mt. Zion. And the record of crooks, and thugs, drunkards, and rakes, and libertines that have been reborn after this fashion makes a radiant record that is full of highest romance and courage.

2. It has also been the experience of some of the best of men. Years ago, a man held a service in a private home. After the service was over, he came upon a little boy, face down upon a sofa, sobbing as if his heart would break. "Henry," he said, "what is the matter?" And as the little lad of seven choked back his sobs, he said, "I'm crying because I don't love Jesus after all He has done for me." And the man told Henry to look, as Jesus told Nicodemus to look. And he arose into newness of life. And Henry Drummond came to be known by his college chums
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as the "Prince." And D.L. Moody, that deeply spiritual and unlettered evangelist, said of him that he was the most Christ-like man that he ever knew. And George Allan Smith, the great Scottish scholar, paid the same high tribute that he was the most Christ-like man he ever knew.

Here is another man who has left England to bury himself in the wilds of North America. He has come as a Missionary to the Indians. But he meets with meager success. By and by, he returns to America to labor with the same earnestness and still to meet with small results. Then, one night this sincere, honest man felt his heart strangely warmed, and from that experience of the New Birth, he comes forth to be the greatest power for righteousness of his century.

Here, then, is an experience that is an absolute necessity. George Whitfield preached on the New Birth 300 times. One day a friend asked, "Why do you preach from the text, 'You must be born again'?" "Because you must be. This is an absolute essential. No amount of morality, no amount of decency, no amount of good works, nothing, absolutely nothing can take the place of this.

But, when we say that this is a necessity, we tend to obscure the supreme fact about it, and that is that it is our highest privilege. Of all the bright hopes held out to these hungry hearts of ours, of all their big and unbelievable possibilities, this is surely the greatest: that we may be born again. So, when Jesus offered us this privilege and we say, "Must I?" he says, "You may." When he comes to break down our prison door and invite us out into the light and we say, "Must I come out where the air is fresh and sweet with the perfume of flowers?" he says, "You may." He will not compel us, He will not drag us into the light. But, if we are willing, He will make it
possible for us to walk into it. Here is the roadway into the heights. As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the son of man be lifted up. "Whosoever believeth in Him might not perish, but have everlasting life." "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him might not perish, but have everlasting life." This is the gospel, the part of it, and the whole of it. Will you accept it?
AN HONORED CHURCHMAN

John 3:2 The same came to Jesus by night

The same came to Jesus by night.” This is a classic chapter, this third of St. John. It tells a story of one of the best known men in Jerusalem of that day. He was not only well known, but he was favorably known. There is a tradition that he was the most popular man in the city. He was in a sense possessed of everything that the best of that day could desire. He was a teacher in Israel. A man of the schools. Not only so, but he was a member of the highest court of his day; the Court of the Sanhedrin. He was also a Pharisee of very high standing. One has fitly described him as a Professor, a Judge of the Supreme Court, and a Bishop. Now it was this man, so well and favorably known, so honored in his church and in his city, who one day made his way down the narrow street of Jerusalem to knock at the door of a little cottage where Jesus, a carpenter from Nazareth, was spending the night. The same came unto Jesus by night.” That was indeed front page news for that day. It is front page news for any day, if we rightly understood it.

Why did this honored churchman make his way to Jesus? He did not go out of curiosity. There were many in that day who were curious about our Lord. Wherever He went He was thronged by multitudes. Of course many came to Him from hunger of heart, but there were other multitudes who came because He was an exciting personality, and they were eager to see Him, and eager to mix with the throngs that so constantly dogged His steps. But this was not the motive of this great teacher. Why did he come? He came because he had become gripped by certain convictions about this strange Jewish Rabbi. He had
become convinced that He was unique; that He was a teacher come from God; that He was possessed of powers beyond the human. He was convinced that He was a personality who could only be adequately explained in terms of Almighty God. And so he opened up this interview in this private residence with an assertion "We know that you are a teacher come from God.

Just how he had come by this knowledge, we are not told. I am sure it was not a matter of hearsay. I am sure it was not simply because of the rumors that were blowing here and there throughout the land. I think it came through a personal contact. That while he had not met Jesus in person, he had been a part of the crowd. He stood out on the fringe and had heard this amazing man speak. Perhaps he had been near enough to see Him touch blind eyes into morning. Perhaps he had been nearby when some lothesome leper had his health restored to him so that his flesh came back like the flesh of a little child. Anyway, he had seen enough to be convinced. He had certain convictions about this man as a teacher come from God; as one who could speak with authority; as one who could help people; as one, he said, in the deeps of his soul, as one who can even help me.

Now as he came to conclusions about Jesus, he reached certain conclusions about himself. In the presence of this strange young carpenter, he had caught a vision of his own soul such as he had never caught before. I have an idea he had never been fully satisfied. I have an idea there had always been a hidden hunger of the heart that all his religious teaching and all his religious doings could not satisfy. But in the presence of Jesus he said to himself "I am not like that. He has something that I do not have. He is different from me. There is
about Him a serenity; there is about Him a poise, an authority; there is about Him a compassion of which I know nothing. To come into His presence is to be rebuked.

There is a sense in which Jesus is one of the most discouraging of all personalities. When His disciples came upon Him one time at prayer, they humbly came a little later saying "Lord teach us to pray". Hadn't they been praying all their lives? They had. Hadn't they been accustomed to seeing men on the street corner praying? They had. But here, they said, is something different. Here is reality. Here is a man who has made His way into the divine presence. Here is a man who is talking with God, face to face, over whose head the heavens have been opened and into whose heart has come the spirit of Almighty God. This is different. And so Nicodemus said to himself as he listened to Jesus, "I am not like that. But if I'm not like that, I long to be like that. He has something that I want. He has something for which my heart has hungered across the years. I would like to be different. Therefore I am going to Him and let Him tell me how I can find what He has found."

So he came to Jesus with a conviction about Jesus that He was a teacher come from God. He came with convictions about himself, that I haven't found what you have found. I believe you are willing to tell me how to find it. I believe you are able to tell me how to find it. You can speak with authority. Now a man who can speak with authority, even on a secondary matter, is interesting. But a man who can speak with authority on the supreme matter is supremely interesting. "Tell me how have I
missed the way?" And he is saying what the rich young ruler said, a man of his own class, "What lack I yet?" It was this sense of lack, this sense of a great need, that brought this distinguished churchman to see Jesus face to face. Now the author emphasizes the fact that he came by night. Every time he mentions his name, he mentions also that fact, that he came to Jesus by night. There must be some significance about that. Otherwise it wouldn't be emphasized so often.

PART II

Why did Nicodemus come by night? Here opinions differ. There are those who claim he came under a compelling urgency; that he was so eager to find what he believed Jesus was able to give simply him, that he could not wait through the black hours of the night. The night of his soul was too black, and so, in spite of the fact that it was late, he made his way down the narrow street in Jerusalem to find the man who could give him right at once the satisfaction for his soul. He hurried through the night because he could not wait till morning, for that other morning to dawn upon his soul with the rising of the sun of righteousness.

Now it would be good to believe this, but such conviction for me is impossible. Nicodemus does not impress me as a bold and enthusiastic soul. He is not one of those that Jesus described as "the violent who take the kingdom of heaven by force." He is no picture of that pilgrim in Bunyan's immortal story who put his fingers in his ears and started on a run shouting "Life! Life! Eternal Life!" He did not even have the enthusiasm of his fellow aristocrat, the young ruler who one day ran to kneel at the feet of Jesus.
He never impresses me as a bold adventurer who is ready to dash for life or for death into any cause. He always gives the impression of being a rather cautious man. For instance, the next time we meet him is when he is dealing with his fellow members of the Supreme Court. They are condemning Jesus unlawfully and unjustly. What would Paul have said had he been in his place? He wouldn't have spoken, I am sure, after the manner of cautious Nicodemus. He would have said "I called on Him one night. I gave Him a hearing, which was more than any of you dared to do. In the process of this hearing I became convinced that He is a teacher come from God, and I cannot stand here and see Him unjustly condemned. I am His friend. I am His follower. For life or for death, I expect to stand by Him." So Paul would have spoken. So many another Christian would have spoken.

But such was not the case with Nicodemus. He didn't let out the roar of a courageous lion. His was rather a timid speech of a Mickey Mouse as he said "does our law condemn a man before it gives him a hearing?" There was no outstanding self-committal in that. No man turned on him to say "I know you, that you are a Christian. You have met Him. You have become one of His followers." He was by nature a cautious man, and what brought him to Jesus was not a holy urgency that could not wait for the morning light.

Not only was Nicodemus cautious, but he had some reason for his caution. He could have explained it so as to appeal to any thoughtful person. He could have said in the first place "I am not a private citizen. I am a public citizen. I have
a standing in the community to maintain. If I go wrong in my public capacity, I am likely to lead others wrong. If I was found following this new prophet who is false, I might induce others to follow Him. And because of my position, because of the things for which I stand, I have to be more cautious than would otherwise be the case. And the reason I am the public who going by night is because I do not want/to look to me for leadership and for guidance to know that I am visiting this exciting Rabbi, whom all my fellow members of the Court oppose so strenuously."

A second reason he had for caution was because of the vast difference between the standing of these two men. Nicodemus had everything in the way of social position, scholarship, and standing in the community. The man to whom he was going was a carpenter. He was not a man of the school. The hands that He lifted in blessings had still the callouses upon them that He had gathered in the carpenter shop. They were at the furtherest extremes. This great giant of a man going to sit at the feet of one who in the eyes of that day was a mere pigmy. This man who had everything was going to consult a man who didn't have anything.

It was about as exciting and about as fearful as it would be for the Archbishop of Canterbury to go to consult some unlettered leader of a despised sect. Or for some Bishop of our own land to go to sit at the feet of one who was a member of a speckled bird group who counted for nothing, or worse than nothing in the community. It was a rather mad adventure and required caution. Then a third reason for his caution was that
while Nicodemus himself was convinced, the fellow members of his Court and the people who he knew and with whom he associated, were not convinced. He had to take his position alone. He had no backing. Joseph of Arimathea, a fellow member of the Court, became a disciple, but he was a secret disciple, and I have an idea that Nicodemus and he had not yet exchanged confidences. Nicodemus then went through the night because he had to go alone, and he was afraid to be alone in this adventure that might be and that might be mad.

But we must not let the fact that he was cautious shut out the supreme fact that he did go to Jesus. He dared the high adventure, not because he had no fear, but because he defied fear. And that, I think, is courage at its best. The courage of a bulldog is not very commendable. A bulldog has courage by nature. He doesn't know the use of fear. But to be deadly afraid and then go, that takes courage. Courage is then not the absence of fear, but the defiance of fear. And though the goose bumps broke out on Nicodemus every time he heard a step on the cobblestones, and though he reached this humble home with his brow beaded with and though he was tense with fear, he did come. That was the saving fact.

PART III

Now what was the reward of his coming? When he went in and stated his case to Jesus, Jesus didn't answer the words of his lips, but He answered the longings of his heart. What did He tell this man who by his coming acknowledged "I've missed
something. There is something lacking that I haven't found."
He didn't put His finger on a single running sore in His life. He didn't accuse Him of being dishonest. He didn't accuse him of being a drunkard. He didn't accuse him of adultery. He didn't accuse him of any decency or any indecency. There was absolutely no charge made against him. In truth it was not what Nicodemus had done that was the matter. It was what he had failed to become and, therefore, had failed to do. He said
"the trouble with you is, Nicodemus, you've been trying to live a Godly life in the energy of the flesh. You have been trying to do a new work with an old heart. What you need is to be born anew, for except a man be born anew, he can not see the kingdom of heaven."

Now Nicodemus here seems to be a little more dumb than he really is. He knew what new birth meant, and yet he choose to take Jesus in the most crassly literal fashion. He took Him as referring to physical birth. So he said "How can a man be born anew when he is old?" by asking such a question he did not mean to ask how it could be done, but to affirm the impossibility of it. And in affirming the impossibility of it, he was exactly right. Not only is it impossible for a man to be born anew physically, but it is equally futile for one to be born anew physically. Now and then I find people who say "Oh, if I could only live my life over again". But such does not make good sense. If you were to live life over again, there is not the slightest guarantee that you would do any better than you have done the first time. What you need in fact is not a new body, you need a new tenant inside that body.
Being born again physically is certainly not the answer.

What then is the answer? It is to be born anew spiritually. This body that you see is not my real self. It is only the house in which I live. I have thrown away ten bodies in my day and am on my way to throwing away others. And yet I am the same personality I have been through the years. This body is only the house in which I live, and these eyes are the windows through which I look out, and these hands are the hands through which I must minister. My real self, no man has ever seen.

Now it's not a new body, but a new self, and that Jesus proposes to do. He said that we must be born again. Our real selves must be born. Since we are spirit, we must be born of the Holy Spirit. Otherwise we can not enter into the Kingdom of God.

Then Nicodemus came with another how. This was not a denial as the first one was. It was rather an inquiry as to how the new birth was possible. And Jesus began by saying—

acknowledging on God's side it is a mystery. We do not understand how God can make us anew. That is, I take it, the supreme miracle. The creating of the universe, the creating of the atoms, and atomic bombs, and all that—these are mere child's play in comparison with that supremem miracle of making a bad man into a good man, in making a selfish man into a Christ-centered man, of making a filthy man into a clean man, of making a coward into a hero, that is the supreme miracle and that is the miracle that Jesus has come to work.

Now how can he work it? He seems to say to Nicodemus, "Let God's part alone. Keep your hand off of God's business and
mind your own business. What is your business? Your business is to trust in Him. And it takes this great scholar back to a dark day in the history of his people, when the firey serpents were stinging so many of them to death and God provided a remedy. He told Moses to make a bronze serpent and put it on a pole and whoever should look at it after he was bitten would be cured. This was true whether he looked immediately or whenever he looked. All his business was to look, and God would do the rest. "Now," He said, "the son of man is going to be lifted up as that bronze serpent was lifted up." "That whosoever should believe in Him might not perish, but have everlasting life." He is saying here what is the heart of the Gospel. He loves us and has loosed us from our sins, and there is salvation, there is a new life, even for a look. That put salvation within the reach of babes. It also puts it within the reach of the wise and prudent.

A distinguished Scotch minister who was Pastor of a cultivated congregation said, one night there came a knock at his door and a slatternly girl said "I want you to come and help get my Mother in." Thinking that her Mother was drunk, he said "Call the police." She said "I don't mean that, I want you to come help get her into heaven". And so he said "Very reluctantly I went one mean street after another, and then I climbed some rickety stairs up to a third floor where I stood by a dying woman who was lying upon a palet of straw. I sat down beside her and told her of the gentleness of Jesus, and what an example he set for us." And then she turned and stared at
me almost fiercely. She said "that's not for the likes of me. What I need is not an example, what I need is a saviour." And then I told her how He was wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our inequities and that the of our peace was upon Him and that with His stripes we were healed. And I am sure, by the Grace of God, I got her in. Incidentally, I went in too. "And so may we go in if we take this subtle way that Nicodemus took. As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the son of man be lifted up "that whosoever believeth in Him might not perish, but have ever-lasting life".