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[GENTLE MUSIC]

It is so very good, our Father, that we are privileged to be gathered into the silence during this waiting moment. It is very hard for us to be still in Thy presence. Our lives are so fragmented. And there are so many minor absolutes to which we give our strength and our energies that we are embarrassed before Thee.

Will Thou give out of the great stretches our strength and detachment and calm that gives birth to the dreams that Thou has plowed so lavishly upon us?

Some insights that Thou tutor us in quiet and in silence, and in weeping. We seek forgiveness. But again and again, as we wait in the silence, we do not know for what, and perhaps, what we really seek is for an awareness of sin. And failure, shortcomings. Thus we spread this out before Thee. That noise.

We would be better than we are. But as we wait in Thy presence, we are not sure that we want to be better than we are. There is so much reassurance in the comfort of the life which is ours. So much confidence has been built up in us and the familiar role, and the familiar style of our life.

If, under the aegis of Thy Spirit, our lives were changed, we are afraid, our Father, of what may become of us. Work over us, and need us, do all the things that our spirits need. Not that we may be better than we are, our Father, but that we may more deeply desire to be better than we are.

We would not spend all of our time in this waiting silence with the preoccupation, with our own needs and our own little lies. We would be mindful of those others to whom we are related by recollection and by devotion. We would remember those whose lives move in areas in which we are not aware and with which we are not familiar, whose names and whose language we do not speak or understand.

The great vast desolation of Thy children. We would remember this even as we savor the essence of our own comfort and security. We would remember those men who stand at the strategic spots of power in the world, making decisions as if they were gods, and on whose decisions so much of the destiny of all Thy children rides with abandon.

Oh, God of the human spirits, lead them not to the strength of their weaknesses, or the weaknesses of their strength. Bur brood over them, nudging them, tutoring them, urging them, threatening them with Thy love and Thy patience until, at last, they may find a way to seek Thy wisdom. [INAUDIBLE] require this. Till all our striving cease.

Take from our souls the strain and stress. And let our ordered lives confess the beauty of Thy peace, oh, God, our Father, our Father.

[ORGAN MUSIC PLAYING]

It is a strange freedom to be adrift in the world of man without a sense of anchor anywhere. Always, there is the need of mooring, the need for the firm grip on something that is rooted and will not give, the urge to be accountable to someone, to know that beyond the individual himself, there is an answer that must be given, cannot be denied. The deed a man performs must be weighed on a balance held by another's hand.

The very spirit of a man tends to panic from the desolation of going nameless up and down the streets of other minds, where no salutation greets and no friendly recognition makes secure. It is a strange freedom to be adrift in the world of man.

Always, a way must be found for bringing into one's solitary place the settled look from another's face, for getting the quiet sanction of another's grace to undergird the meaning of the self. To be ignored, to be passed over, as of no account and of no meaning, is to be made into a faceless thing, not a man.

It is better to be the complete victim of an anger unrestrained and a wrath which knows no bounds, to be torn asunder without mercy, or battered to a pulp by angry violence than to be passed over as if one were not. Here, at least, one is dealt with and countered, vanquished, or overwhelmed, but not ignored. It is a strange freedom to go nameless up and down the streets of other minds, where no salutation greets and no sign is given to mark the place one calls one's own.

The name marks the claim a man stakes against the world. It is the private banner under which he moves, which is his right, whatever else betide. The name is a man's watermark above which the tides can never rise.

It is the thing he holds that keeps him in the wave when every light has failed and every marker has been destroyed. It is the rallying point around which a man gathers all that he means by himself. It is his announcement to life that he's present and accounted for and all his parts. To be made anonymous and to give to it the acquiescence of the heart is to live without life. And for such a one, even death is no dying.

To be known, to be called by one's name is to find one's place and hold it against all the hordes of hell. This is to know one's value for oneself alone. It is to honor and act as one's very own.

It is to live a life that is one's very own. It is the bow before an altar that is one's very own. It is to worship a God who is one's very own. It is a strange freedom to be adrift in the world of man and to act with no accounting, to go nameless up and down the streets of other minds, where no salutation greets and no sign is given to mark the place one calls one's own.

We are continuing our discussion together on the quest of the human spirit. And this morning, we are thinking together about the quest for identity. It is a commonplace observation that the quest of the human spirit co-mingle and flow together, and separate and come together so that whenever any one of these fundamental quests is discussed, there is always present an overtone from some other dimension of reality with which the individual has to do.

Now the quest for identity really is a quest for the sense of self. It is the quest for the magic circle within which one stands in a kind of splendid and austere isolation and yet, at the same time, from within which he is able to relate to the world around him.

There are many reasons for what seems to be the breakdown of this sense of identity in modern life. You are familiar with these. And I need not to check them out for you, except to say that the struggle for selfhood, the struggle for persona, is perhaps one of the most critical struggles of the individual human spirit.

You may be familiar with the story that Dr. Loomis relates in his little study on the self. The mother and her boy and her daughter came into a restaurant for a meal. And the waitress asked the mother for her order, and she gave it.

She asked the daughter for her order, and she gave it. And then the waitress said to the boy, now young man, what will you have? And the mother said, oh, I always order for him.

And the waitress said, but young man, what will you have? And the daughter said, well, if Mother is not with us, I always order for him, and so I'd be very glad to order for him. And the waitress said, but young man, what will you have?

And then the little boy now began to gather his outlying regions and bring them into a point of focus. And he said, a hamburger. And she said, onions, relish, mustard, the works? And he said, onions, relish, mustard, the works.

So she went back. And in a grave voice, she gave the mother's order and gave the daughter's order. And then with a little extra something, she said, one hamburger-- the works. And the little boy, in utter amazement, turned to his mother and said, Mother, she thinks I'm real.

Now the quest for identity is a quest for a sense of self. And this is rooted initially in what seems to me to be a sense of one's own physical existence, one's own body. I remember babysitting with one of my friends. And we heard his little boy making a cry of some sort in the room.

And we went in to see. And this little boy was-- oh, I don't know-- about that long. And he put his-- he had his big toe in his mouth. And he was just gumming his big toe and crying, because it hurt.

He didn't know it was his toe. He had no sense of, well, of toe-ness-- no toe awareness, is what I'm trying to say. Now he had to become aware of the fact that his body was his body and that once this awareness becomes his private sense, he will never again let his body become the instrument of persons, of forces, that control without his assent.

Now the sense of self is not only rooted in this sense of one's own body, one's own physical persona. But it is also rooted in what may be called the sense of one's own idiom-- one's own idiom, one's own flavor. This is the underside or the inside of every outside that you manifest.

It is the unique tang which belongs to you. It is-- well, it is your idiom. I can't say it in a better way.

Now it is this idiom-- this sense of private flavor, this feeling, this awareness of the grain in your woods-- it is with this that you relate to the style of your society. And it is the degree to which this relatedness is worked out that your sense of self and sense of identity is enlarged and grows.

The social style of the family, of the group, of the community, of the nation, of the world-- and then, now and then, an individual is of sufficient vitality and vigor as a person that he is able to reject the social style of this group, of that group, of the other group as he identifies with the social style of an age that lived at some time in the past, or as he identifies with what seems to him to be an age that is yet to come.

Now very often, one finds the most meaningful aspect of one's identity. And the degree to which this idiom-- this central thing that marks you, the you-ness of you-- the degree to which it seems to be a part of a lifestyle that in itself undertakes to give ultimate answers about the meaning of life and the meaning of existence.

And this is why men find that ultimately they are able to relate to some dimension of religion with some measure of fulfillment and satisfaction, because when they are able to identify with a lifestyle that in itself interprets the meaning of things in terms that are absolute, then one is insulated against the frustrations that come from the shifting of lifestyles that deal with things that are less than the absolute.

Now very often, as far as identifying with the religious lifestyle is concerned, there are radical changes and shifts that take place that cause one to feel that when the style has been altered, the insight disintegrates. Just tarry with that just a little. When this lifestyle has been altered, has been changed-- in other words, when one discovers, to put it crudely, that there is no Santa Claus, sometimes all that is fundamental to the impulse that is honored in the myth of Santa Claus is also destroyed. And the individual becomes desolate and naked against a form of reality which has disappeared.

Now this happens again and again with people who are in universities and who come into a university or to a college with a certain fixed identification with a particular religious lifestyle. And they begin taking certain courses, thinking certain thoughts, being exposed to certain ideas. And when this happens, then they begin to feel as if the sense of identification breaks down. And they become, well, what they become.

I was talking with one such girl. It happened that she was a student at another place, not here. She was a Seventh-day Adventist.

And when she entered this particular college, she was very true to her faith. She did not use rouge or lipstick or any of the decorations of the body in that way. She did not eat pork and so forth.

And then after about three months-- and she prayed every morning and every night. And after about three months, because of what was happening to her mind, the courses she was taking, the whole thing began to-- the whole religious lifestyle with which she identified began to break down. And she started decorating herself and started eating pork. And she stopped praying in the morning and at night.

And then she was caught up in the non-violent movement in the south. And she found herself one day in a very difficult situation in which she was the victim of a certain kind of violence. And now I continue this in her words.

She said, as the man's hands or knees bit into my wrists and I saw my own blood, a great and deep quiet came into my spirit-- the kind of thing that now and then I had experienced when I used to pray. And the strange thing was that the inequality of the religious experience could be mine, even though I had abandoned all of the formalities.

Now, this is what I am talking about. That when the lifestyle of family, of nation, of particular religious faith-- when the lifestyle shifts or breaks down or disintegrates or changes, what happens to the idiom, which is the key to identification? Now if the idiom has been identified with the meaning of the lifestyle-- if it has become a part of the experience of which the lifestyle is merely a transitory or passing manifestation, then the idiom holds its essence of identification until, at last, there begins to be externalized now another lifestyle that grows out of the new experience of the idiom with the essence.

Sometimes identification finally is only possible when it is called for by a strong, dominant personality or a strong, positive cause to which the individual makes a yielding. Now to express this in terms that are somewhat negative, but will reveal the quality of what I'm talking about, you may remember, in [INAUDIBLE] dark hours after Judas had betrayed the Master, he went to one of the priests to collect his money.

And the priest counted out the silver. And according to the play, when Judas placed the silver in his purse and was putting it away, the priest said, there's just one question I would like to ask you. How did it happen that you came under the influence of this man?

And he said, I don't quite know. But one day, I was walking down the street, and I met Him. And he looked at me, and I looked at Him.

My eyes descended into His depth, and His eyes descended into my depth. And I knew that He was a man to whom I would be tied forever. And then I followed Him.

And every time He began talking about the end and what would happen, He would be looking at me. And one day, as He said, "He who dips in the bowl with me will betray me," and it happened that His hand and my hand met at the bowl.

And then one day, He said, "One of you will betray me." And when I looked up, He was looking at me. And he said, if I am an evil man, it is because He has shown me to myself as being evil. He has shown me the devils and how they riot in my streets. If I had never met Him, I would not have seen this.

And you remember how the Master, when He met the man who had lost his mind and he was wandering in the woods, in the silent places, and he'd been chained occasionally, but always, under the great super-human strength of what was going on deep within his spirit, he would break the chains and wander up and down the hills making strange shrieking noises in the night time. And then he met the Master.

And the Master said to him, what is your name? Where do you locate your identity? And you remember what the man said? That's my trouble-- if I only had a sense of self. There are so many of me that their name is Legion.

Always we are seeking identification. Always we are seeking how first to become aware of the distinctive character of our own idiom and how to let this idiom probe into the lifestyle of our family, of our group, of our nation, country, world, seeking always that which will be of such character that the idiom will become more and more articulate and more and more integrated so that, at last, I will be able to say, delight, here I am in my own right.

Forgive us, our Father, for the halting, dim insight. And accept our thanks for the vision which we see, even as Thou dost forgive us for our failure to be the clear, translucent manifestation.

Our heart is raised. The mind breaks down. The words fail. Oh, God, Thou wilt not despise.

[CHOIR SINGING]