

THE TRUST FOR YOU TO HOLD

by Lester J. Start

Undated

Text: I Timothy 6:20 O Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust.

We are going to think this morning about our responsibility and duty with regard to the peace after the war. It is very easy to think that our soldiers and statesmen are the ones to whom the responsibility comes for making a better world, but without the help of all of us their efforts are doomed to failure. It is unfortunately true often that in fighting to preserve something we lose by the very struggle those things we are striving to preserve.

We are fighting a war to preserve justice and equality for all men, and yet we can see that we must be unjust to win ultimate justice. In order to win a military victory it seems necessary to bomb innocent civilians, kill women and children, to set aside for a while our ideal of mercy and love in order to do that which is necessary to clear the ground for the construction of a better world. We are in the position of the Jewish soldier who was worried because there was often nothing but ham to eat for dinner in the army. When he asked the rabbi's advice he was told that he would have to eat the ham if there was no alternative offered but he was warned not to eat the bones. And so we have no alternative but to harm innocents in the process of gaining a military victory, but we must not lick the bones, exult in the destruction and carnage being inflicted. There is danger of being pleased at destruction. We must keep a light burning in our hearts that shows us the true way of Christ, that will indicate our duty in helping to create and preserve a better world after this storm of war.

A few weeks ago the young people of this church were privileged to hear an account of life in a Marine training camp by one of our number. Many of us were particularly impressed by his statement that they are being taught things that are contrary to their Christian teaching, especially that they are being taught to hate, because such an attitude makes the best soldier. He then pointed out that our duty was to help retrain the soldiers after the war in the common Christian teachings that must be the basis for normal peaceful living.

When Paul was writing to Timothy encouraging and exhorting him in the performance of his duty as a missionary and minister of the teachings of Jesus, he concluded his first letter with this plea: "O Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust". This is a call that all of us might well keep in mind these days, not only the minister but also every man who professes to be a Christian. We must retain and preserve that which has been committed to our trust, the Christian heritage and teachings which can survive only if we are willing to keep them ourselves.

We owe the very survival of Christianity to individuals who accepted this trust of preserving spiritual truth at all costs. Especially in the early days of Christianity only the apostles and a few like-minded men preserved and spread the teachings of Jesus in the face of the opposition of an indifferent and hostile world. We must remember that countless loyal Christians gave their lives in their efforts to preserve that which they loved more than life, knowing that those who lose their lives for His sake shall find eternal life. Paul tells us in his letter to the Corinthians the

persecutions that his Christian work has brought him, stonings, beatings, hardships of all kinds in his efforts to preserve the faith that was entrusted to him. Our history is full of accounts of great Christians such as Savanorola who would rather die than betray the trust of the spirit of Christ in their souls. The Bible that we use is very cheap in a sense; you can buy a New Testament for a nickel. But we must remember that in another sense the Bible is the most priceless heritage that we have; we must remember that it contains the teachings of a faith bought and handed down to us at a great price. We must not value this heritage too lightly, then; it is in truth our most priceless possession for it can show us the way to our salvation. The Christian teaching available to us all involves an obligation on our part to treasure in our own hearts for others that truth which alone can redeem us. And especially today when our spiritual Christian heritage is being threatened and we are forced to defend it, we must keep alive the spirit of Jesus in our hearts and not fail the trust that centuries of devotion have handed on to us.

Keep that which is committed to thy trust. To keep that which has been entrusted to us, we must first of all make it a part of ourselves. We cannot keep that which we do not have ourselves first. T. S. Elliot, the English poet and thinker, once said that when we call ourselves Christian people all we mean is that we can profess belief in Christianity without being persecuted. Too many so-called Christians are like the Christians Elliot is thinking of. They have never made the teachings of Jesus a part of their lives; they have never taken on the trust that is implied in being a Christian. Jesus does not tell us to witness and admire his teachings. He says instead, "Go thou and do likewise." We should do more than admire Christ in our churches; we must take on the spirit of Christ, put on the new man, as Paul says, and by the strength of our faith in him, do that which we should do, lead our lives as Christ would have us. It is the living water of the spirit of Christ which gives us the power to be Christians. Most of us know what we should do, but we don't have the strength to do what we should do. Here is where the spirit of Christ gives us aid by giving us the power to do what we know is good. But we cannot partake of this power, we cannot be true Christians and take on the trust of preserving our Christian heritage, if we do not have the spirit of Christ in our hearts. If we are to keep something we must first have it. Our first duty then is to make Christ a part of us to such an extent that it is his will and not ours that rules our actions. By taking the spirit of Christ into our hearts we can best fulfill the trust of preserving that for which we are fighting.

Keep that which is committed to thy trust. To preserve something from danger one must make it so strong that it can withstand any threat. Our best guarantee that we will fulfill the trust committed to us is the strength of our faith. "Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven," Jesus tells us. Let us be so full of the spirit of Christ that our influence may be felt by those about us. This is the strength that is not destroyed, that holds its own in the face of a world in which external forces rule.

When Napoleon was in exile after his final defeat at Waterloo and was living his last days, he had ample opportunity to review his life and conquests and figure why he failed. We would expect him to think how he might have altered his military campaigns to achieve victory, but according to one biographer, he concluded that his ambition was doomed to failure, that no man could conquer the world by force of arms. He said, "Alexander the Great, Cyrus of Persia and I built and lost great empires. But one man, Jesus of Nazareth, through love has conquered the

whole world.” The strength of the spirit conquers where armed might fails; it is the most potent force there is. But this force cannot exist by itself; it comes into being and acquires its power only when it enters our lives and rules them.

The strength of our faith by which we attain our happiness is attained through prayer through the constant realization of the spirit of God that lights each man if he will but look within to find it there. Pray without ceasing, Paul tells us. He does not mean that we should spend all of our time in prayer; rather we should so act that we are always conscious of the still small voice within, that we remain always aware of the power and source from which our strength and guidance comes. We must develop a single-mindedness of purpose so that our vision may remain clear and focused upon the true values in life. We must not become confused and distracted by a world whose activities have lost sight of the deeper, more satisfying things in life. It is so easy to become confused by the confusion about us, to become discouraged and seek our happiness in forgetfulness that the diversions of the crowd may provide. But the stability and comfort that we require can come only by a deep sense of our relationship and dependence upon God, who will come to us in prayer if we but seek him earnestly enough. A farmer was once asked why it is that the country people seem to have a deeper faith in God than their city neighbors. This man replied that when the farmer is alone in his fields all day he can't very well miss seeing God. And so it is: the distractions of a busy crowded life sometimes prevent us from seeking and finding the spirit of God that comforts; instead the people seek in amusements forgetfulness of their cares. And yet this is a sort of desperate and unsatisfying way, for at some time we must be alone with our thoughts, deprived of the means of forgetfulness and may truly say of God, “Whither shall I flee from thy presence?” The inner spirit can not be denied even if we try. And the inner spirit becomes the source of happiness when we put our faith in it and thereby make it strong. With singleness of heart let us follow Jesus' first commandment, to love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy mind. We can fulfill the trust committed to us by taking into our hearts the teachings of Jesus and the spirit of Christ, and then making this strong by wholehearted devotion to this spirit of God within. Then will our light shine afar, and spread the glory of God.

Today our statesmen and thinkers are concerning themselves with the problems of the peace, and many remembering the last war are frankly skeptical about the possibility of making a peace instead of another armistice. We are planning to guide the forming of new governments in which minorities will be protected, but here at home our Negro minority creates a problem we haven't been able to cope with. We are beginning to see the difficulties involved in gearing our lives back to a life of peace. The government is working through legislation to lay the foundations for a better world, but the efforts are to no avail unless they have the spiritual basis with which to work. Aristotle once said that if the people be good a nation or society could not be bad. The early writers on political theory all stressed the importance of proper education for a better world. This is where the true and loyal Christian should make his influence felt, by living those principles taught us by Jesus and handed down to our keeping. Our duty is to guard the sacred things, keep the spirit that has guided our civilization through the centuries.

Teach man that states of native strength possess,

Tho very poor may still be very blest;

That trade's proud empire hastes to swift decay,

As ocean sweeps the laboured mole away;

While self-dependent power can time defy,

As rocks resist the billows and the sky.

The kingdom of God is within; the source unfailing for strength and comfort. Illustration of the well

Keep love so that the spirit of destruction may be curbed and hate destroyed.