

The Church as Fellowship for Common Purpose.

This does not sound very much like an Easter subject, and yet I selected have ~~suggested~~ it for the very purpose of suggesting the deeper meaning ^{by} with which all the associations of this spring festival are ~~shot through and through~~ ^{mythologized}. The roots of its tradition, its forms its symbolism run far back into the rich and fertile soil of human history. The institution of a spring festival was already a part of man's organized life when he first arrived at that point in his history of making records of his thoughts and institutions.

Easter is essentially the festival of life, of faith in the conquering power, the imperishable quality of life. There is a tingle to life in these days that no one can escape. Even to the most blind and sordid there comes some kind of consciousness that all about ^{him} the great mystery of life is operating with unwonted zeal and power; that we are absorbing the dead past up into the living

living present, the vital pulsating glorious present in whose womb ^{the} unborn to-morrow leaps with joy. Among all people this faith in the unconquerable life, in the power that overcomes all things has centered about somekind of a spring festival.

Out that that deep rich past of human history, with all its glory and its tragedy we have come to this day. Many forms, many leaves of the past, many great trees in the forest of human achievement that once pulsated with the life of ^{the} a living ~~present~~ God are now but the rich soil out of which we draw our sustenance and nourishment. But on this day as we meet together the same spirit, the same faith that once gave hope to a more primitive man, the same living power stirs is us, and almost in spite of ourselves our souls expand and grow with the expectancy of to-morrow's glory. If you could clear away all the dross so as to leave the living power that has operated in the mind of man all through these years and ages,

as itx has faced year after year the mystory of the expanding life,
, and if your could reduce it to a single form of expression, you
would find that its nature is suggested by a deep and unconquerable
faith in the worth of the human personality, the human soul, ~~xxxx~~
~~greatness and its~~

Age after age has added new vistas to our outlook, as we have
climbed up the steep and rugged pathway of human acheivment. New occa-
sions have tought new duties, life has made ancient forms seem uncouth,
listen
but if we ~~xxxx~~ with an under -standing ~~xxxx~~ ear we shall detect the
same motif running though all the strains , of joy and sadness that
maße the symphony of the festival of the new life. That is the back-
ground out of which we have come. Bear that in mind.

But I turn now that the thing in the large, to the process in
the concrete. You will pardon me if for the purposes of what I wish
to say this mroning, I lay before with an abandonment that is not

above some of the intimate experiences of my own life, for it is only through those after all that I can tell you the tale of the world that I live in.

I was born in the country. Our house sat upon a high hill. To the east I could look for miles, in the fore ground of which view I could see the church steeples and high buildings of the near by city. To the south was a wide range of country ~~where~~ on whose hills-tops I could see the small dots that told me the tale of human life, perhaps like unto the life in the houses that I saw near by. Away to the west beyond the nearest hills, some ten miles distant I have watched many a night the sun go down behind Mount Washington seventy five miles beyond. To the North still more expanse of country. It was a free glorious country. I roamed the fields, fished the brooks, had my adventures in the woods. I worked, played, went to school.

It was just growing human life, discovering the facts, the powers the beauty of the world that it lived in. I remember so clearly the day when I first awakened to the beauty of the woods. It was a day in spring such as we shall soon see here.

In winter eveings I read my tales of the pioneers, and the heroism of Natty Bumppo and the Last of the Mohicans. Into this country that I lived in I brought men heroes and heroines from abroad. I remember also the time when one day in school it first dawned on me that there was some kind of meaning to life. I could not see just what it was, or why it was, but I knew that it was there. I began then to work over the question of what my plan might be. I was getting hold of lines that we may wind on forever but we shall never find the end thereof. But the winding of this line carried me away to school and college. I lived in a maze, so strange and confusing were the

new relations ~~into~~ which I came in contact. One of the most clearly defined incidents was an experience that I had one fall evening as I was returning home from college for the week end. As I left the train I found the streets filled with excited people, running and shouting. I learned that there was a strike in the shoe factories, and that there had been a riot, and pistols had been fired. I was learning something more about my world. Rights and privileges were the words that I heard and learned the meaning of then.

Years went by. I was reading, studying, playing, ~~living~~ living, coming upon an illuminating experience here and there, or hearing and illuminating remark here and there, until one day, as I sat under the lecture of a great teacher, it suddenly dawned upon me that all those faint ideas of a meaning to life, and a plan of life were a part of the very nature of things, that life is shot through and through with meaning and purpose.

In due time I came here to Pittsfield where after all I have learned the richest things of life, for here in reality, not in books and in theories I have seen life, --its joys and sorrows, its achievements and failures, its silent heroisms and its unheralded consecrations and courage. I wish that each one of you could know all the others in this fellowship as you have told me your lives, day by day. The world would glow with a new light as it glows for me this day. Work as I may

I never can repay ~~you~~ the men and women that I have come to know here for the deep insight that they have given me in the richness, and the power of human life in its concrete illustrations, its definite ^{expressions} ~~illustrations~~ of the worth of the human soul, of the passing ~~moments~~ tale of the infinite process registered in human life.

So by another route we come to this easter morning.

But the suggestion as to why I am here is but a slight variation of the story that each one might tell. I am not here because I was born on a hill, or went to a country school, but because, according to my ability I have followed the lead of purpose. So also have you. In a large measure I have told your story also. The setting is different, the experience is differently colored, and differently emphasized, but it is essentially the same. The purpose, the search after the values of life, the seeking of the holy grail, that is the story of each. On the one hand there is the big broad generalization that we call humanity. On the other the concrete individual. In between are the groups, the centers, the fellowships that for one sort of purpose or another come together to assist and to receive assistance in carrying out their purpose, in fulfilling their destiny, in achieving the heights of human life, in measuring and selecting lives

greatest values. Why are we here ? Because life has a meaning to each one of us. We come freighted with a purpose. We have a message to ~~xxx~~ transmit, a task to ~~xxx~~ perform ? Each one says to himself that it is his task, his message, his life. While the tale of one is essentially the tale of all, yet in another sense, each tale is the tale of an individual, with its own peculiar setting, coloring, character and quality. From the others he may receive raw material which he may work over into his own story, but the telling of his own story is his task, his life. We are not machines all cut in the same mould. We are living organisms, living personalities, each with his own peculiar mark, and character.

We are here, in this particular fellowship, if you please because we recognize that as a fundamental principle of life. You may help me, but you cant live my life. ~~xxxx~~^W may try to imitate

one another, but we cant ~~xxxxxx~~ chnage places. It is because we know that this is a fundamental principle of life, that our purposes have lead us here where self asserion, self respect, responsibility , obligation to tell our tale is recognized in the principle of freedom. But further we are here because we recognize that a second great principle is that of mutual aid. I do not want to make you think, or feel or act like me. God forbid. You are to feel and think and act like yourselves. But we are here because we can help one another. You tell me in the experiences of your lives things that I never could know otherwise. Perhaps I may tell you some little thing that helps you in your great task of living, that you might not otherwise have known. Give and take is the gospel, -mutual aid is a great factor in the struggle for esistance, Fellowship. We are here because of these two principles of freedom and fellowship.

But they are only conditions of life¹

But they are only conditions of life. They are not life itself.

Under these conditions of freedom and fellowship, individual responsibility, and mutual aid, and mutual aid we seek a common purpose.

What is that purpose ? ~~What is that purpose ?~~ There is a statement of ~~Paul~~ the apostle Paul which, if you can give it its real meaning, contains in a negative way what I want to say? "If Christ be not raised from the dead, then is our preaching vain". To put it in modern language we would say, "If there be no imperishable character to a personality that achieved the greatness of giving his life that other might live, and if there be no place in the purpose of God that recognizes such qualities in life, then is the whole conception of life a mockery. I believe that there is in man that character, or rather that man is incorruptability, that in his life as it registers itself in human effort, there is operating a quality that is indestructable and immortal. I see in man that

imperishable quality that rides in heroic conquest through the stroms of life.

But my thoughts are not on the life after death this day. They are on that other concern which has to do with the recognition of the fact that if human life is immortal anywhere, it is immortal here and now. The purpose is not to insure the insignificant irresponsible life as we know it here for a future glory, but to let the elements of immortality display themselves in the life that now is, in the integrity, and the quality of the life that we live, its unconquerable buoyancy, its illimitable faith, its transcendent hope. This is where the elements of immortality must show themselves, here on this earth, in the lives that you and I live, here in Pittsfield, in this fellowship, in this year, but by and by but now, in our personal life, in our political, social, business relations. When we get up in the morning, fill ourselves with the consciousness that we are not ani-

mals even though we have bodies, - that we are not playing a game but living the life of an immortal being, through whose soul shoots the shaft of life of a living God. That is the big thought, the big transcendent faith that through the ages man has gleaned by the travail of his soul in the midst of the mystery of life. Whatever language he uses, whatever symbol he speaks with, that is the song that he sings this day, the triumphant song of an unconquerable faith ~~that~~ ~~life~~ in the imperishable worth of his own soul.

But you say that all sounds very well, but I seem to hear the cry of anguish going up from a blood stained world, writhing in the struggle of horrible war. Yes so do I. I recall that on this very Good Friday the President of our nation has sent forth the declaration of war against a nation already shaken to its foundations. But still I believe, not entirely inspite of, but partly because of that very

situation, however much I loath and detest war.

What we are, and what we have has not been handed out to us as a charity. The path is strewn with conflict, and hardship. Not one single idea has been given. We are earned it by the sweat of our brow, the anguish of hardship, The world is not a soft comfortable bed of ease and luxury. Even if war is not here, new truth finds but a cool reception in this world, but it does come, and it does conquer, and we do learn some things as the ages pass by, and, down at the bottom it is the search for the holy grail, for the secrets of life, the acceptance of the challenge that the universe throws out to us, the daring to discover the awful sweetness of life in life and life in death, ~~and~~ that is the thing that counts. In spite of the fact that I hate war, that I believe that it is foolish, absurd, and barbaric, I have to recognize that in the background of each of the

contending forces, there is that heroic spirit, that says,-

"Though love repine, and reason chaafe,
 There comes a voice without reply,
 Tis man's perdition to be safe,
 When for the truth he ought to die."

It is this heroic spirit, even though it rouses itself to champion a dying institution, that lifts even a battle-field above the filth of ~~the~~ its mud. It bespeaks the greatness of a man that can give all that he is for what he believes is important; and true.

Yet it has been with heavy heart that I have watched the developments of the past week. I know that there are forces at work that are damnable, but still I believe in man, and the imperishible worth of his life, and his ability to achieve freedom and fellowship as the conditions of his life.

I come now to the point towards which I have been striving, and I could not come to you with a song in my heart this day unless I could include in its melody the deep undertone of tragedy that is

fact and factor in life. It is not use trying to live in this world by the silly process of shutting our eyes to what we call the dark side of life. We are at the end of an era. The superstructure of the past has fallen and is falling. But the end of one era is the doorway to another.

This immortal life we live here. Before us lies the future. Into the stream of the life current in this nation have come ~~from~~ men and women from many nations. Each brings his won story with him. The puritan the huegonot, the irishman the german, and men fro many nations to live together here. It is the melting pot of the world. Out of it in freedom and fellowship we are going to bring this people though, and acheive the ~~and that~~ purpose that made glorious the early days of this republic. We have wondered far from that purpose, we have worshipped false gods, we have dragged our heritage in the mire, and we still are

doing so, but the debauchery of mammonism is having its last fling. Out of the stress and travail of its downfall we are going through to a greater day, where freedom shall be more of a reality than to-day. and fellowship based upon responsibility and mutual aid ~~shall give~~ ~~place to~~ in the great common purpose of life shall give place to scramble for wealth and property.

You have often asked me why I have loved so much this fellowship. I will tell you. I have seen here not only the symbol, but the beginnings of that common purpose. I have seen here men and women from many different national hilltops of birth, associated in a common end, recognizing, respecting differences. I have seen in this the beginnings of a glorious to-morrow. I have remembered that it was in just such obscure beginnings of freedom and fellowship that the little groups that founded this republic had their origin. I have remembered that it was in just such fellowships that the early christian movement

brought a new civilization out of the crumbling remnants of a decaying roman Empire. I have remembered that such has always been the process of stepping forward in the worlds history. As I have linked all this up with my idea of a meaning in life, and have seen here in miniture the republic of to-morrow, and perhaps the federation of the world. To be part of that, to feel that one is taking part in the ~~buildingx~~ ~~of that~~ life of that new era, that is something that commands the alligience of an immortal soul.

The task is not easy. The pathway is not clear. but the light is shining through the clouds . One this Easter Morn I bid you take all earth's sadness up into your hearts, and sing, sing for joy, for I have seen in the eyes of men mystery of life that shall carry us through. ~~xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~

Easter.

Beauty for ashes forever the planet puts on !
Blossoms and birdlings and brooks when the winter is gone !
Rise , O my soul , to the Easter without and within ;
Flee from life's bareness and weakness and selfhood and sin .
Live with the lavish forthspending of Nature at play ;
Fling on the path of thy fellows some luminous ray.
Sleep not while war and Oppression hold nations in ~~wary~~ woe ;
Wide in the furrows of Man seed regenerate ~~thine~~ sow.
Listen ! The song of Humanity's springtime is near !
Join in the chorus sublime which the race shall yet hear.
Laugh like the sun, sound the bobolink's jubilant cry ;
This shall be Easter full-bloom, fit for earth or for sky.

By James H. West.