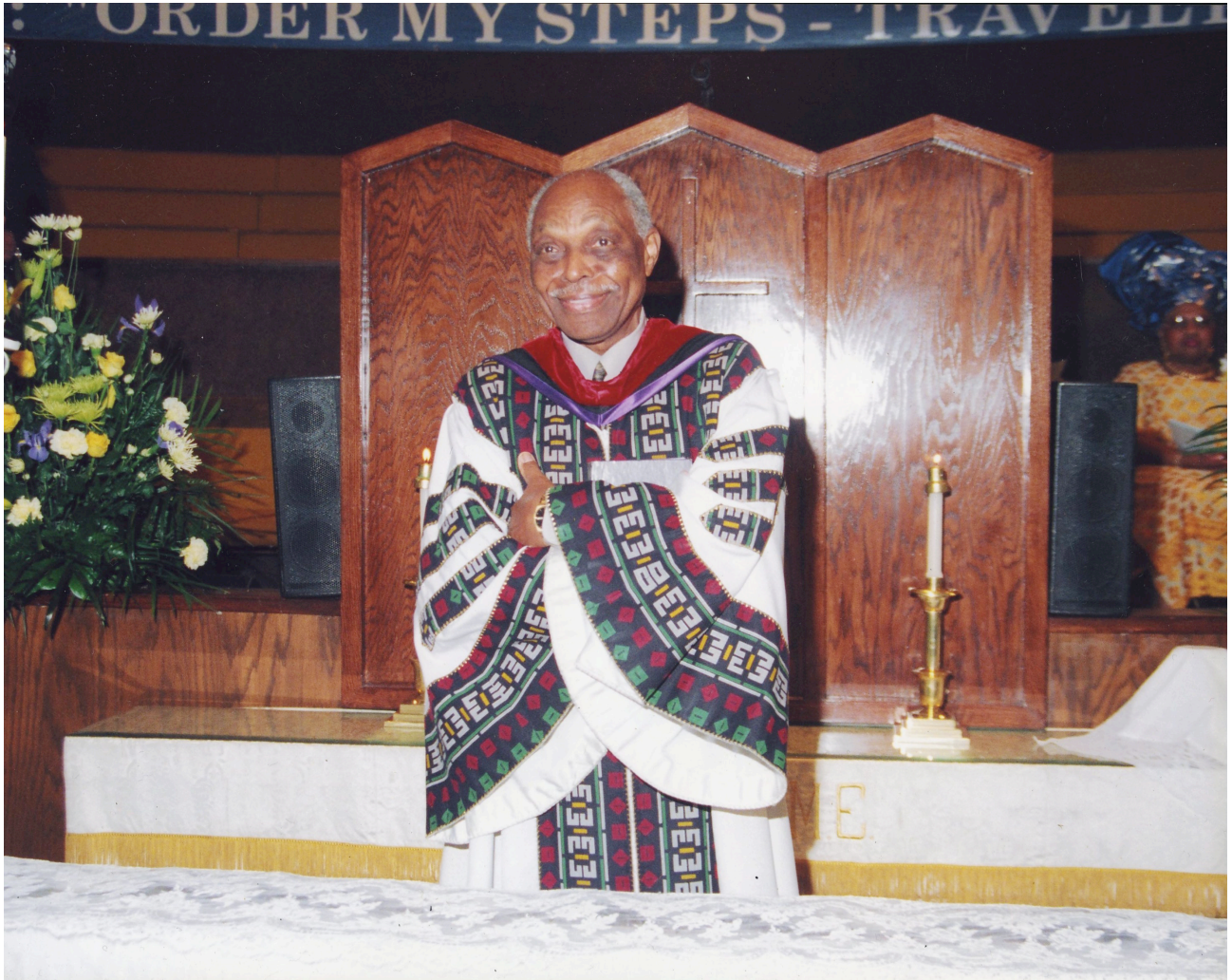


Joy Comes in the Morning

The Prophetic Social Witness of Rev. Cecil L. Murray



June 2019

USCDornsife

Dana and David Dornsife
College of Letters, Arts and Sciences
Center for Religion and Civic Culture

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Introduction

On the Sunday following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, Rev. Cecil L. Murray stood before his agitated congregants at First African Methodist Episcopal (FAME) Church in Los Angeles and urged them to let their minds settle—to become aware of the “purifying presence” of the Holy Spirit in their midst.

“Balcony, can you feel it?” he asked. “Can you feel it in the nave? Can you feel it in the alcove? Can you feel it in the plaza? Can you feel it in the choir?”

Rather than decrying terrorism from abroad or the thump of war drums at home, Pastor Murray’s focus was on bringing spiritual clarity to the lived experience of his flock. As always, the first order of business in his pastoral theology was orienting the inner world of believers toward a connection with the divine. Directing his audience to critique the systemic injustices that often shaped the outer world beyond the walls of his church invariably came next.

“You’re caught up in madness,” Pastor Murray said during his sermon on September 16, 2001. “Only don’t let the madness be caught up in you. You’re caught up in poison, only don’t let the poison be caught up in you.”

Pastor Murray served at FAME for 27 years, from 1977 to 2004, transforming a small congregation into a megachurch that brought jobs, housing and corporate investment into South Los Angeles neighborhoods. As Los Angeles’ oldest African American church, FAME has always had a significant role in the civic landscape of Southern California. The height of Pastor Murray’s fame came in 1992, during the civil unrest that followed the acquittal of police officers involved in the videotaped beating of Rodney King. Even while the fires still burned, Pastor Murray emerged as a leader of a movement among faith communities, civic institutions and corporate stakeholders to rebuild ravaged neighborhoods and address the underlying social inequities that had provided tinder for the flames.

The Murray Archive—a project of the USC Center for Religion and Civic Culture, in partnership with FAME—makes Pastor Murray’s prophetic social witness available to a new generation of activists, pastors and scholars. Drawing on careful exegesis of biblical texts, Pastor Murray also rooted his ministry in a deep analysis of human history and a practical concern for the lived reality of his congregation. “It starts with the Word, the Bible, the scriptural text,” Pastor Murray said in a recent interview. “That in turn relates to the context of human nature, because in a thousand years, we human beings have not changed radically. The system we are caught up in may deviate from time to time, but it is basically that same reality: How do you cope with the challenges before you?”

The 14 sermons that we’ve chosen to highlight in this small sampling of Pastor Murray’s homiletics touch on several key moments in the recent history of Los Angeles: the civil unrest of

1992, the death of Mayor Tom Bradley, the racial and religious fault lines revealed during the O.J. Simpson trial and, of course, the tumult of 9/11. Sermons on more mundane topics—Mother’s Day and child-rearing, for example—also capture the distinctive combination of moral remonstrance, social critique and comfort for the afflicted that characterized Pastor Murray’s ministry at FAME.

“You got to go through Jordan in order to get to the Promised Land,” Pastor Murray told his congregation in a sermon he delivered in May 1999. “Wade in the waters, children! Old Jordan River is chilly and cold. It chills the body, but not the soul. Don’t be afraid of what’s out there waiting for you. You got to go through some changes. You got to go through some hard times. You got to go through some dark nights. You got to go through some bad relationships. You got to go through being talked about, rebuked and scorned. I agree with the Psalmist: Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning.”

Today, the social legacy of the Black Church is often dismissed by a new generation of progressive activists. At the same time, nostalgia for a mythical era of American greatness drives a racially tinged form of nationalism. In this context, listening to the prophetic voice of one of our country’s greatest preachers is especially urgent. We hope Pastor Murray’s sermons will continue to inspire, comfort and motivate everyone who encounters them.

In addition to the sampling of sermons available in these pages, you can watch videos of a larger collection of sermons and read their transcripts at <http://crcc.usc.edu/murray-archive>. Additional sermons will also be available through the USC Digital Library.



Overview of Sermons

“Does Anyone Here Know My Jesus?”

April 5, 1992

Pastor Murray encourages his congregation to challenge the stereotype of the "gentle Jesus," asserting that Jesus was not gentle and passive, but assertive for the cause of justice. He says, "When you meet Jesus, Jesus disturbs the peace," meaning that Jesus challenges the status quo and pushes for progress. Pastor Murray notes that this phrase -- "disturbing the peace" -- was used to describe the transgressions that Peter and Gabriel, Martin Luther King Jr. and Nelson Mandela were all similarly accused of committing.

“Making You an Offer You Can’t Refuse”

May 3, 1992

Over six days in late April and early May 1992, hundreds of fires burned in the heart of Los Angeles. The acquittal of police officers charged with using excessive force against Rodney King had sparked the L.A. Riots or L.A. Uprising, one of the most destructive episodes of urban violence in U.S. history. The unrest left 55 people dead and more than 2,000 injured. As the fires burned, First AME Church had opened its doors to the community, news media and civil authorities, providing services and mediating between various stakeholders. Rev. Murray's sermon in the midst of the civil unrest combines a brilliant critique of the structural inequalities that spawned the violence with a humor-inflected balm for those in need of comfort and reassurance.

“Sent for You Yesterday, Here You Come Today”

May 31, 1992

Pastor Murray talks about the negative effects of waiting for justice to be done: waiting on other people to acknowledge injustice, waiting on fairness for Rodney King or waiting for the full realization of Black civil rights. He argues that for change to happen, you must stand up and initiate it.

“It Only Takes a Few”

August 14, 1994

Those who walk the path of Jesus become God’s prisoners—that is, prisoners of love. Being a prisoner of love means that you are often called to “disturb the peace” of the status quo for the sake of the Lord. You cannot love without disturbing the peace and working for the greater good of all humanity.

“Healing First, Hugging Second”

October 1, 1995

In a sermon delivered as the O.J. Simpson murder trial was ending, Pastor Murray preaches on inequality, and how blame is placed on communities of color for the consequences of crimes committed against them. He says these communities must be healed before they can be expected to "coexist" peacefully with the majority culture.

“Fighting Without and Fears Within”

October 1, 1995

Addressing a number of societal issues related to racial inequality, Pastor Murray affirms, "Until there is justice for everybody, there is justice for nobody." He encourages his congregation to stand up tall by voting, writing letters to political leaders and advocating for positive change.

“Never Too Wise for God to Teach You”

June 16, 1996

"You never outgrow your need for God," Pastor Murray tells his congregants. He encourages them to continually re-evaluate themselves, learn delayed gratification and handle problems with the intellect, not instinct.

“Hating Me Until You Need Me”

October 14, 1998

Pastor Murray talks about anger as a natural product of struggle and human relationships. He reminds his congregation that even when you are broken or empty, God is always there. And when you do succeed, stay humble and do not take advantage of fleeting good fortune.

“Old Jordan River is Chilly and Cold”

May 16, 1999

Pastor Murray speaks to his congregation about the coldness that we can encounter in the world: loneliness and rejection, for example. However, he assures us that nothing is wrong with being alone, and it is okay if some people don't like you, as long as you are devoted to God. "The soul warmer (God) will heat you up when the world is cold to you," he says.

“Boomerangs Come Home Again”

May 30, 2000

Preaching to the young people in his audience, Pastor Murray talks about the boomerang effect in terms of actions having consequences that come back to us: "What goes around comes around." He also reflects on the balance of good times and bad times, saying that bad times may seem long and impossible to navigate, but we should always trust God through bad times, and have faith that good times will return.

“Man, That’s Your Mama!”

May 12, 2001

Speaking directly to the men in his congregation, Pastor Murray highlights the importance of honoring your mother by being a good son and appreciating what your mother taught you. Women should look for quality men raised right by their mothers. Love the man who can say "I love you" to his mother, men who love their mother like Jesus loved his mother. Something is wrong with men who cannot speak respectfully about their mothers. You must take care of the one who brought you into this world. We all have dignity, and it takes a complete man and a complete woman to have a strong relationship, to raise a strong son. Raise a son who respects God and women, and be a son who your mother can be proud of.

“Above the Madness”

September 16, 2001

Pastor Murray admonishes his congregation not to partake of the toxic stew of hatred and rage that has bubbled up in some communities after the terrorist attacks of 9/11. As the choir hums the hymn "Healing for the Soul," Pastor Murray says, "You're caught up in madness--don't let the madness be caught up in you. You're caught up in poison--don't let the poison be caught up in you."

“It Ain’t About You, Brother or Sister”

September 1, 2002

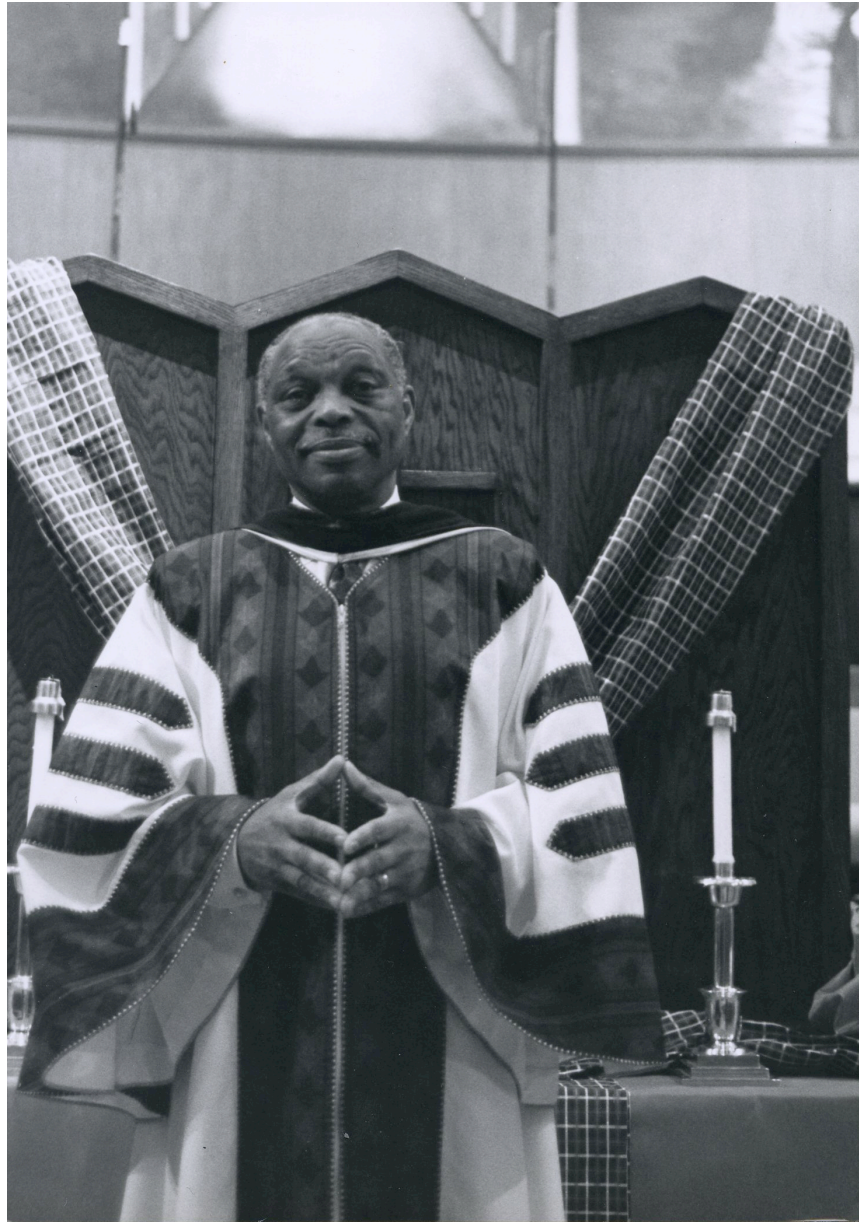
“Put God first, put your neighbor second and yourself third," Rev. Cecil Murray says in this sermon about resisting the natural temptation to always put yourself first. Self-surrender leads to self-discovery. Self-surrender does not mean putting yourself down, but putting yourself in perspective. When Jesus leads you somewhere, follow Him all the way, and don’t let your sense of self become an obstacle.

“I'm Going to Trust in the Lord”

May 23, 2004

Pastor Murray emphasizes the importance of always trusting in God, through thick and thin. He reminds his congregation that you always praise the Lord, not only when times are good. Instead of talking, listen and trust in God.

Selected Sermons



“Does Anyone Here Know My Jesus?”

April 5, 1992

The high court recognized that these men, Peter and John, had been with Jesus. Our subject: Does anybody here know my Jesus? It's an important question because sometimes Jesus's own crowd doesn't know Jesus. Martin Luther King stands before some temples, white temples in the deep South, all with memberships of two and three thousand people. Tall steeples, stained glass windows, and yet the foundations of those edifices are discrimination, racism and segregation. Martin asks himself, "Where are the Lord's prophets? What kind of people worship there? Who is their God?"

Does anybody here know my Jesus? Because if you know Jesus, you ought to show some signs. I can't think of anything more important than where we were in Leimert Park yesterday. I can't stand here and say I know Jesus, but I wasn't there to save Jesus's Black folks.

Jesus's substance, Jesus's children killing children, Jesus's children being killed by children. What kind of God do they serve?

Peter and John stand before the Sanhedrin--the Sanhedrin is the Jewish high court, the supreme court of the land. They stand there as nobodies, uneducated, un-credentialed, unknown, unrecognized. The Sanhedrin is composed of the best-educated minds in the country, the wealthiest people in the country, the most powerful people in the country, and they stand there. They could have been trembling, but when you know Jesus--darlings, when you know Jesus--nothing makes you tremble. When you know Jesus, Satan can throw his fiery darts at you, but God wraps you in God's asbestos. When you know Jesus, things may be wrong for you in this world, but still in the face of adversity you can sing Jesus is still all right.

The high court brings them up on the same charge that they brought Martin Luther King up on. The same charge that South Africa brought Nelson Mandela up on: disturbing the peace. That's the thing that happens to you when you meet Jesus. You begin to become a rabble-rouser. You get on fire, and the status quo can't hold you any longer. That old crowd you've been running with isn't cute to you anymore. Those old habits that you've had are no longer important to you. All when you meet Jesus.

Jesus disturbs your peace. You had it down to a science, you weren't due much in life except eating and drinking and procreating and having a good time for yourself. But then, when you meet Jesus, Jesus gives you an agenda. Jesus always disturbs the peace. As long as you want to go along with the status quo, Jesus says I stand at the door and knock. But then, when you open the door and let Jesus come in, you would have thought a bomb when off in the house. People start getting mad at you. Your friends say something's happening to you and I don't know you anymore.

You end that old bad relationship when you were hooked up with the taker and there you are being a giver, and Jesus comes into your house. Jesus says, "There ain't no dignity in being a

slave, stand up and assert your rights." You say to that person abusing you, "I ain't going to take this no more. I don't need nobody mistreating me, I can do bad all by myself." When Jesus comes into your life.

I want to tell many of you something because maybe you're suffering a little elevated blood pressure. Maybe you're finding your chest pounding sometimes. Maybe you find you can't sleep at night or your appetite is no good.

Maybe you need to discover Jesus as somebody who tells you the reason you are out of sorts is because you don't stand for anything, you let other folks control your life, you're so interested in what other folks are thinking about you, you don't worry about what God is thinking about you. You go through life, excuse me for living. Excuse me please, is it all right if I breathe? Is it all right if I think what you're thinking? How do I look? If you dress yourself, you ought to know how you look. Do care what nobody thinks about you?

Jesus says, "I didn't come in peace." We like to picture Jesus as gentle Jesus, meek and mild. That was not gentle Jesus that went into that temple and cleansed it by making a whip for himself. That wasn't no gentle Jesus who stood up against the scribes and Pharisees and the Sadducees and said, "I'll stand on the rock of God. You may destroy this body but you can never destroy this soul. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. The sword of justice, the sword of righteousness."

Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

How have they disturbed the peace? How have Peter and John disturbed the peace? They had healed a man. You remember the man who sat by the gate called Beautiful, one of the twelve gates to Jerusalem? This beggar was born crippled, and his friends bring him to the gate called Beautiful, one of the twelve gates outside of the city, outside of the temple. There he begs for money. One day Peter and John come along and they tell him something that Jesus and God are willing to tell you and me this morning. "I don't have a lot of money. Silver and gold have I none. But such as I have, I give to you. In the name of Jesus of Nazareth, walk. In the name of Jesus of Nazareth, be healed."

You would have thought the Sanhedrin would have been shouting with joy. You would have thought the religious leaders would have said, "This is a miracle from God." But instead, they asked Peter and John, "By whose authority do you do this? Who in the world do you think you are? Healing folks, that's our function. We're the ones who have been to Harvard and Yale and Princeton and Claremont. We're the ones who are in charge of religious duties. By what authority do you do this?"

People are used to authority. Average person you see is looking for somebody, tell me what to do. Tell me what to eat. Tell me what to wear. Tell me where to stand. Tell me when to raise my arms. Now we've even got experts telling you when you can have a baby, as if the economy won't tell you. You can't have a baby until you can afford a baby.

Some people just love a dictatorial preacher: Do this, do that. But then, they say, "Come on, let's do what it is God wants us to do. Let's do what the fruit wants us to do." But they don't know how to take that. We want an authoritarian life. We say at Bible study, we want to tell you what to do, we want you to think for yourself and then decide what you want to do. By what authority, in whose name do you do this?

I lived in West Palm Beach, and the rich folks lived in Palm Beach, across the water. DuPonts, the McCormicks, and the Astors and the Huntingtons and all. From time to time, when we were over there working, we worked after school, and verily a white policeman would stop and say, "Boy, who you work for?" I'd say, "R.D. Huntington, majority stockholder in Douglas Aircraft Company. Multi zillionaire, R.D. Huntington." "All right, boy. Go on." If I hadn't worked for Mr. Charlie, I'd been in trouble. But the name of R.D. Huntington saved me from a brutalizing. Well, I want to tell you about another name that will save you from brutalizing. I want to tell about the name of Jesus, that in that name every knee shall bow, even R.D. Huntington, even John J. Rockefeller, even Mr. Bush.

Every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. In whose name? In the name of Jesus.

They began to squirm on the Supreme Court. Began to squirm a little bit. And then, the Scripture says, they recognized these men had been with Jesus.

I want to tell you, early birds, Jesus makes a difference in your life. Yes, he does. If you just give Jesus 15 seconds in the morning when you awaken. Just fall by the side of your bed. "Thank you, Lord, for the little resurrection. Thank you, Lord, that I survived the night."

And then, before you go to bed at night, 15 seconds on your knees. You don't have to have fancy Princeton University words, all you have to say is come into my heart, Lord Jesus. I hear you knocking, Lord, and you can come in. When you know Jesus, in the name of Jesus, Jesus will take care of you.

They wanted to put Peter and John in jail and throw the keys away, but they were scared to do it. You know, Rome rules the world and Rome had just one rule: You must have peace in your prophets. And, if we put these two people in jail, then thousands of folks out there who are proud of the way they healed that man, who are claiming them, they going to riot and we going to have a problem.

The Lord also had Peter and John's defense attorney standing in the back of the room. The best defense attorney in the world. The best defense attorney in town. His business card says, "If you are right, I'll fight your battles." That defense attorney was the same one who gave Peter the courage to stand up before the world, the Supreme Court, and speak. For he spoke in the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit of God is your defender, so that one man can say never have I seen the righteous forsaken, or his seed go begging for bread. The Holy Spirit will lift you up when people put you down. The Holy Spirit will stand with you at the midnight hour.

The Holy Spirit stood at the back of the courtroom and said, "Now, y'all so bad, you don't mess with them. You don't mess with them. I'll call as my first witness that man they healed. The eye learns much quicker than the ear. I don't need a whole lot of pleading. All I have to do is stand that man before you. You used to give him quarters at the city gates. You used call him, Oh, poor child, I feel so sorry for you. Forty years, forty years you used to give him a nickel, but now look at him. He's here ready to go to work. Ready to witness to the Lord. You can't beat God giving. You can't say what God can do."

Our works speak for us. Even when we can't speak for ourselves, our works speak for us. That's why you look at the Rodney King trials going on all day, every day, costing the tax payers millions of dollars. Now, here's some defense attorneys trying to convince the whole world that we didn't see what we saw. I saw a bunch of people who saw Black and they saw red and they just started beating Black and beating Black because I hate you, I hate myself. I've been given the power to beat you, and they hit him and they hit him and then they say he fell down. The eye knows the truth.

Here is the man who was healed, and if he tells his story, he'll say, "I once was lost but now I'm found. Was blind but now I see. I don't know who these [two men] are, but the name I remember they said to me, in the name of Jesus, and at that name I stood up. For the first time in my life, I stood up. I feel so good this morning. I feel so good this morning. We better leave them alone, we don't want no riot."

"Peter?" "Yes." "John?" "Yes." "We going to let you go this time, but no more of this propaganda. Don't you talk about this Jesus no more."

"Your Honor, with all due respect, sir, I have my choice between serving you and serving God. If you let me walk out of this courtroom, I'm going to preach from the time I hit the first step, 'til the time my head is cold. If you are a witness, won't you let God abide?"

Peter goes out to the thousands of people standing there and in other words he asks, "Does anybody here know my Jesus? Does anybody here know my Lord? I want to know if you know my Jesus. I want to know if you know my Lord. Then, if you know him, you ought to praise him. Praise God from whom all blessings flow. Praise him, oh creatures there below. Praise him above ye heavenly hosts. Praise him. Praise him. Praise him. Praise him. Praise him."

While you are on your feet, our Lord has opened the doors of the church. If you have no church home, we invite you to come. Give us your hand in membership and we'll take it from there. As we sing, won't you come?

“Making You an Offer You Can’t Refuse”

May 3, 1992

Delivered in the midst of the Los Angeles’ Civil Unrest in 1992, which began on April 29.

Jesus, why did you come to Los Angeles? "I have come that you might have life." John 10:10. But, Jesus, we already have life. Jesus, we got day life, night life, morning life, afternoon life. We already have life. "Yes, I see. You people are very lively! As a matter of fact, you might say you are incendiary."

I spent a few hours in the Simi Valley. Oh, you have life, and I was down the Parker Center. You have life alright, but I have come that you might have a different kind of life.

Our subject is going to be making you an offer you can't refuse. The good shepherd always sentences you to life. The bad shepherd always sentences you to death. The good sheep always know the difference. The good shepherd is the one with integrity. The good shepherd is the one who is genuine. What's our street language? Straight up! Jesus says to each and every one of you this morning, "Baby, I'm for real! If I tell you, I love you. If I tell you the truth, the truth will set you free. If I tell you that you are equal in the sight of God, red or yellow, black or white, all are precious in His sight--I want you to believe that. Baby, I'm for real."

Some here think that Coke is the real thing, both kinds of Coke. That's because you haven't met Jesus yet. "Everyone who thirsts, come under me and drink." Everyone. You don't need money; Jesus paid it all. If you're thirsty for righteousness, come unto me and drink. You're thirsty for dignity, come unto me and drink. Jesus is the real thing.

The bad sheep... shepherd comes always to take life. The bad shepherd comes always dressed as the good shepherd, filled with words of love. The sheriff who sentenced us, and really that person's not a judge... Down home, we used to call him the high sheriff. The high sheriff was a symbol of terror. The high sheriff gave us a change of venue. The judge gave us a change of venue that took us away from a valley of possibility out into the Simi Valley of death. I know if I get him out there, they'll do the right thing. I love you. The bad shepherd loves all of the sheep, except for Black sheep.

The four great heroes of the West who have been through training that said everyone is to be treated with dignity. You are to love everyone within the environs of greater Los Angeles, and you have a club on your side and a gun on your side and the National Guard at your back and the Army, Navy and Marines waiting to come to your rescue. You don't have to be a bully force, and yet they crucified little Rodney.

I feared for my life, surrounded by 20 armed police persons. Poor little Rodney, prostrate, couldn't even help himself if they wanted to, but they love all the citizens. They love all the sheep, except for Black sheep. The jury charged to lift up, to lift up the dignity of the law, the

law of our land, given to us by the law of God, the law that's so sacred when it has taken our vilified. We cannot live in peace with each other. We cannot live in fairness and equity with each other. Those 12 good people and true going to chamber and they sit day after day after day after day. They come out and they say, "We good 12 people and true love all of the sheep. We find these four sheep not guilty. We love all of the sheep, except the Black sheep."

The bad shepherd who wears the badge, the bad shepherd who says it's an operation, the bad shepherd who gives a blanket of approval, "I want you to go out to the streets, and I want you to love all of the sheep." Then, he winks in his gateway cell and says, "Except the Black sheep."

Then the sheep get together, the white sheep get together. She's just hearing the truth. The white sheep get together over here, because the bad sheep doesn't like a color mix. Then, the bad shepherd puts the Black sheep over here. The Black sheep look at the white sheep and say, "Lord, what's going on? They outnumber us 12 to 1. I sure hope they've got fair minds!" The white sheep put their heads together. "What we gonna do about them Black sheep?" Fifty percent of the them say, "Treat them fairly," and 50 percent of them say, "Treat them poorly."

Are we some aberration? No, here's a poll conducted by a radio station represented here today. They polled 3,300 people about the outcome of the Rodney King verdict. They just split almost down the middle. Fifty percent said, "We think it's a bad verdict. We think they brought in an inequity of justice. It was a bad verdict," and 50 percent almost said, "We think it's a good verdict. They have done nothing wrong." What we have is a good verdict from a good judge sending it out in a change of venue, a good verdict coming down from a good jury. This good verdict that's good for nothing except creating chaos, leading us against each other, causing us to hate one another! Good for nothing. Good for nothing.

Jesus, let me show what goodness is. Jesus, I hope you can count way up into the thousands, because I'm gonna count every spire or smoke plume that's going up into the sky. Jesus, I hope you can look at the alienation of Black against white against Korean. Every man's hand is set against every other man. Every woman's hand is set against every other woman's hand, because of this good verdict. Some shepherds create chaos, and some sheep capitalize on chaos.

It's bad enough when the bad shepherd mistreats the Black sheep. It's even worse when the Black sheep mistreat each other.

Now, Black sheep, you didn't start all of those fires. Every four minutes a fire? My goodness, fires don't move on CPT. Our precious non-Black brothers and sisters: CPT stands for "colored people time."

Little Black sheep didn't start all of those fires, but the first news reports the northern boundary was Florence Avenue. Then, we come up to Slauson Avenue. Then, we're at Vernon Avenue. Then, we're at Wilshire Avenue. Then, we're at Melrose Avenue. Then, we're at Sunset Boulevard.

We don't live up there. We work up there. We didn't set all of those fires.

When the record is clear, maybe it will show we didn't set most of those fires. But, we do have to confess, we set some of those fires, to our shame. Because now mother's crying in the ghetto because Boys Market had built stores in the ghetto. Boys Market came in along with a few other markets when nobody would return after the 1965 riots.

Fifteen of the stores burned down, can never open up again, because they'll have to build new. Yesterday, three representatives of Boys Market came. We sat together in the office, and we talked together in the office, and we had prayer together in the office. I felt their pain. How could you treat us in the same category with your enemies? How could you treat your friends and your enemies alike? I had to say, "We understand." Ted Watkins of Watts Labor Action Committee in South Central has served Black folks for a generation, they burned his office down. Golden Bird Chicken is Black Bird Chicken. They burned his office down.

The truth of the matter, we have no excuse for going around setting fires, for now we have no place where mothers can buy milk for their children. It is in our communities that we have no means. Somebody's gonna have to get a transfer and another transfer and go way up to another section of down, leaving our wealth in that section of town and coming back with nothing but a bag full of nothingness. We are not proud that we set those fires, but we'd like to make a distinction to America this morning. The difference between setting a fire and starting a fire.

We set some of those fire, but we didn't start any of those fires. Those fires were started when some men of influence decided that this nation can indeed exist half slave and half free. Those fires were started when some men poured gasoline on the Constitution of the United States of America. Those fires were started when somebody decided that the very pioneers who started this city should not have freedom and justice under the law. Those fires were started when somebody poured gasoline on the criminal code and the civil court, when somebody took word and truth and poured gasoline on them and burned the whole structure down.

But, it is not to our credit that in the flicker of those fires, we were found looting and robbing and pillaging and stealing. For that is not us, dear hearts. We are noble people. I know a mother can say, "I was stealing mil for my baby." I understand, baby. I understand, but why didn't you come to the church?

Another... I understand what you were doing, but I cannot condone it. Baa, baa, Black sheep, have you any wool? Yes, sir. Yes, sir. Three bags full. Ham for my belly, booze for my brains, television for my entertainment just in case it rains. Oh, Black sheep!

Black sheep, you must have wool on your head, and you are learning that that wool is good wool because God made it. But, God put the wool on your head, not in your head. You have to

use your head. You want to be able to say, "I'll go hungry before I'll go humiliated." Your folks said, "Before I be a slave, I'll be buried in my grave and go home to my God and be free."

Choose hunger over humiliation. You ask why the little Black sheep jumping on each other. Why? Oh, when I was a younger man, they made a home brew called Sneaky Pete. A lot of things go down smooth. Sneaky Pete went down as smooth as Dionne Warwick and Al Green.

But once Sneaky Pete went into action, Sneaky Pete would blow the top of your head off. Sneaky Pete, 150 of the men of the church standing on Western and Adams at 3:00 in the morning, having been there for three hours. Standing between 50 police persons who want to do that staccato step, to do that Kent State thing all over again. You could look in some of their eyes. You see, "I ain't whipped... I ain't whipped a Black sheep in a long, long time." Not all of them, but it only takes one idiot to make an idiocracy. On the other end, 150 young Black men throwing rocks and stones and bottles from the alcohol they had consumed, provoking these people to move forward. The men of the church said, "No, no, no, no, don't throw that," and formed a line presenting their bodies as a living sacrifice.

What was egging those rock throwers on? Sneaky Pete, a little Black sheep with a wooly mind hollering out, "Throw the stone! Throw the stone! Throw the stone!" What does he have in his hand? Absolutely nothing. Where was he located? Way in the back, so that when the head-whipping starts, he'll start. Sneaky Pete. Why would anybody follow Sneaky Pete? Whether he's Western-Adams Sneaky Pete or Parker Center Sneaky Pete, why would anybody follow Sneaky Pete? Why would anybody endure an embarrassment to the City of the Angels? One of the most sophisticated cities in the world having a little white sheep with a wooly mind talking for everybody. Why would we endure Sneaky Pete?

Go to Israel and watch. The shepherd has the sheep drinking and eating. Then, the shepherd calls out, "Ahh, wee," and the sheep get up, and they follow their shepherd. He knows their name. "Come on, Bill. Come on, Bloods. Come on, Crips. Come on, preachers. Come on, everybody." Knows their name. They follow him. Someone asked the guy, "Sir, will the sheep always follow the shepherd?" "Oh, yes, except the sick sheep. They'll follow anybody."

Well, I'm coming home now. I just want to tell you about our friend who says, "I'm for real." He says, "I know my sheep, and my sheep know me. My good sheep follow me. My sick sheep with follow anybody. My good sheep ..."

Let me tell you this morning, because we gotta clean up the town. We gotta clean up the air. We gotta clean up the air. As you clean up, smoke gets in your eyes. Don't you worry about that. Weep a little bit and keep on walking. Smoke gets in your eyes. Blink a little bit, because you cannot see through teardrops. You cannot see through the occlusion of hatred and anger and violence, and you lump all white folks together. You lump all Korean folks together. You lump all Black folks together. Weep a little bit, but keep on walking.

When the smoke gets too thick for you, sit down by the side of the road and have a little talk with Jesus. Tell Him all about your troubles. Then remember, "Jesus, You brought me all the way. You're such a wonderful Savior. I've never known you to fail me. Jesus, You brought me all the way." Then, you get up and you keep on walking, walking up the King's Highway. When you know anything, there's a warm hand in your hand.

There is your friend who brought you out of the Valley of the Shadow of Death. There is a friend who fed you when you couldn't feed yourself. There is your friend who educated you when you couldn't educate yourself. There is your friend who defended you when you couldn't afford an attorney. There is your friend who helped you build a house when the bank reclaimed your house. There is your friend. There is your friend. Walk on with Him. Walk on by faith. The smoke is passing over. Walk on by faith, and you'll never walk alone, in the name of Jesus!



“Sent for You Yesterday, Here You Come Today”

May 31, 1992

Thank you, Jesus. Joppa is in mourning...because Dorcas is dying. Dorcas is a good woman. Dorcas has fed the hungry and clothed the naked and housed the homeless. Dorcas doesn't look too good. Late that night, Dorcas dies. In Acts 9, verse 38: "But when the people learn that Peter is nearby at Lydda, they sent two men to beg him to return with them to Joppa." We're talking about timeliness, doing the right thing at the right time. So, we're going to borrow from the blues world to suggest our subject: Sent for you yesterday, here you come today. Some people are always a little bit out of sync. If you're not careful, they'll get you out of sync too. Their constant refrain is "Wait a minute, what's the rush? Wait a minute."

Do you know how much a minute is worth? If you only earn \$5,000 a year, a minute is worth five cents. If you earn a modest \$10,000 a year, a minute is worth ten cents. If you are blessed and you earn \$100,000 a year, a minute is worth a dollar. The next somebody tells you, "Wait a minute," send them a bill. The bill of rights. What do people owe you when they've been keeping you waiting for 200 years? Many of them will say, "We don't owe you nothing. We don't even owe you the time of day. We don't owe you an explanation, let alone a reparation. We owe you nothing for keeping you on hold."

People don't wait too well, do they? Some of you are tied in marriage to a partner who's compulsively late. There you were with your cheekbones burning, your ears burning!

You're smoking, tapping your toe like Los Angeles smoking, burning, and in the time peril, you look to chief of justice and you look for some justice in the world, and what do they send you, here comes the Quayle. You didn't expect a miracle healer. You didn't expect an angel from paradise, but you would think that with most of the people smoldering in resentment and other people on fire to build and to rebuild it, you think they would send you something other than the Quayle. My daddy used to say, "Boy, if they put your brain in a jaybird's head, he'd fly backwards." That jaybird and the Quayle must've cut a deal. The Quayle flies 3,000 miles in reverse to tell us that our problem is Murphy Brown.

I said we've got to find this Murphy Brown. This Murphy Brown must have an army at the back of Murphy Brown. This Murphy Brown must have a strong political reality. This Murphy Brown must be somebody. We've got to approach this Murphy Brown. If our problem is Murphy Brown, we got to have a little talk with Murphy Brown. Lo and behold, I find out that Murphy Brown doesn't even exist. Murphy Brown is a fictional character. Mama Brown has had little Baby Brown to Papa Brown who plays the town, and that's not good for little Baby Brown. That's not good. That'll make little Baby Brown, that'll turn Baby Brown's blue eyes blue. I looked around, and then is that the bad thing, because the baby Quayle had mama Quayle and papa Quayle, all of them at home, and the baby still didn't turn out right.

A poll shows that most Americans would prefer Murphy Brown for President to Dan Quayle. Dan Quayle flies to the West Coast to tell us that our problem is children born out of wedlock. It is a problem, but Mr. Quayle, aren't you rearranging the deck chairs on the deck of the Titanic? The ship is sinking!

Dorcas is dying. Dorcas has just died, so they send to Peter come quickly, come now. When people need you, they don't need you tomorrow. Do they? When people need you, they don't need you giving them a lick and a promise. Come now! People don't wait too well. People get incendiary. People don't wait too long.

An innkeeper in Germany goes down into his wine cellar and he unwraps a bottle of wine and he finds attached to it a picture and a note. The picture is that of a magnificently apportioned young woman, and the note says, "If you see this, write me a letter. I'm 19-years-old and I'm looking for the husband." The innkeeper hurries back to his desk and he writes a note of proposal. Soon he receives a response that says "Alas, you are 10 years too late. Your champagne was bottled in 1956, and that was 10 years ago." The note concludes "Wine can age and get better, but not women."

Some of you sisters know what we're talking about. Been going with that brother for five, six, seven years wanting to hear a proposal and all you hear are promises, promises, promises. Last week, the student ministers laughed as we related the case of this young lady who had gone with this brother for eight years, treated him like a king.

Finally, she discovered that he was running around, so she addressed him in public at gunpoint. I should say she undressed him in public at gunpoint. "Take off that suit I bought you. Take off those shoes and those socks I bought you. Take off that shirt and that tie that I bought you."

The grace of God is shown in that this man still had retained enough decency to buy his own underwear. It works both ways. People don't wait too well.

Brothers, remember that blues song that says, "Take off that wig I bought you, I'm going to let your head go bald." You want to get people incendiary, you want to get people explosive, just keep them waiting. That's a desecration of their dignity. What makes you think you are so great that you can keep me waiting all the time?

Why you are so great that I have to be your servant, subject to your whim? That's why we sing wait on one person, that wait upon the Lord, will renew the strength, they shall mount up on wings like an eagle. They shall run and not get weary. They shall walk and not faint. Waiting on each other just disappoints us all the time. Waiting on people to come into your own. Air Force One wasn't even going to take off. Air Force One just thought that it was Watts on fire. Then, Air Force One learned that it wasn't just South Central on fire, it was Mid Central on fire and Sunset Boulevard on fire and Melrose on fire and the white folks were burning and the Korean folks were burning and the Latino folks were burning and the Black folks were burning and Atlanta was getting ready to burn.

If I ain't careful, I won't be around the next four years to fly Air Force One. Then, Air Force One took off, off we go into the wild blue yonder, law and order into the moon. I don't know why they call beautiful Jerry Brown Moonbeam. Air Force One doesn't even know where the Milky Way is, doesn't even belong to the galaxy. Air Force One comes out talking about law and order. The Quayle comes out talking about mama who have a baby out of wedlock, and Air Force One says, Didn't I do something? I had the guard there. I have the National Guard in reserve and I was prepared to send in some more troops. We going to have law and order around here. Thank you, Air Force One. But, can we have a little law and order in those four policemen who beat Rodney King?

Can we have a little law and order in the S&L saving bonds? Can we have a little law and order there? Have a little law and order in Congress, writing checks and know you ain't got no money in the bank.

Peter comes quickly and when Peter comes in, the first thing Peter does is put all the naysayers out. Peter puts all of the mourners out. Peter says, "Excuse me, sir, excuse me, ma'am, but you all ain't doing nothing but adding to the confusion." Pat Buchanan, get out. Mourning, he goes to Koreatown, as he should, mourning. I feel so badly about the persons killed and your businesses burned. On the Michael Jackson talk show, I ask him "Mr. Buchanan, aren't you coming to South Central, too?"

"No, I'm not going to South Central. Those burners and those looters and those who set all the fires." Mr. Buchanan, are you sure you've got your facts straight? We didn't set all of those fires. We set some of those fires, but other fires were set by others, and the same way Koreans died, we died. The same way Korean businesses were burned, our businesses were burned." Mr. Buchanan said, "You people are better off than Black people anywhere else in the world." I hadn't heard that one since Hector was a pup.

Mr. Buchanan, mourner, you're going to tell me I'm lucky that I can wait on your benign generosity that you are doing something for me by helping me to do better in America than they're doing anywhere else? Mr. Buchanan, do you realize I was here 107 years before the pilgrims walked the shore? Mr. Buchanan, do you realize I was the first to die in the American Revolution? Mr. Buchanan, do you understand that I brought the process of wheat farming to North America? Mr. Buchanan, do you understand I've been on Earth longer than any other person, 200 million years? Mr. Buchanan, do you understand I helped to found Los Angeles? Forty-six people founded Los Angeles, 42 of them were Native Americans, African Americans. Mr. Buchanan, do you understand I am here, I have a right to be here, I will be here, I brought it here? You are not giving me anything. I don't know, Mr. Buchanan, if we are better off than other Blacks, but I pray to God we are better off than you.

Because we know inexorably under the skin, all people are kin. It has to be true because all people came Black people. We know inexorably, Mr. Buchanan, that each of us has a dying soul to save and a God to glorify. There's no way we can stand before the throne of God without

standing hand-in-hand. That's what Peter did. Then, I'm coming home. Peter kneels by the bedside of Dorcas and he prays [with her], don't you forget Lord because you can climb as high as a sycamore tree, God will climb the next highest sycamore and pull you down, don't you forget the Lord. Don't worry that the Lord may be a little delayed in coming. Delay does not mean non-caring. Delay just means that God is waiting on the right opportunity.

Don't forget the admonition of our fathers and our mothers who knelt and prayed and found that there was a delay, but then they came to theologize. He may not come when you want Him, but he's always on time. After Peter prays, Peter reaches out and he touches this dead situation. He touches this situation infused with structures of non-being. He touches this unreality masquerading as reality. He touches this yesterday promising to be tomorrow. He touches this dead and life-defying hopelessness, this ridiculous sarcasm, this negativism, this nihilism that tells us that if you are dead, you cannot rise again. He touches Dorcas the same way last week we touched George Holliday, the young man who took the video of vicious beating and showed the whole world how we human beings can be at our very worst.

He felt badly because he said, "I'm guilty. I caused all this pain. I caused 58 people to die. I caused a billion dollars in damage and another billion in future damage. I caused different people to have their hands set against each other." You and I said, "Come on, George, we want to heal you because you didn't cause suffering any more than the Cross caused suffering. You revealed the suffering and you challenged us to rise above it."

When he stood before you, he was so carried away, he couldn't speak. When he stood before the camera, he was so carried away, he couldn't speak and his attorney calls and he says, "I was carried away. This was the greatest moment in my life because people reached out and they touched me."

I watched the film, and as he returned to his seat, us Black folks will just reach out, and they touched him. The reason I'm here. You and I hug, we don't just shake hands. We reach out and touch and we can just touch somebody. When we stood and said thank you, Jesus, thank you Lord, people came all the way from the back and they embraced George Holliday and they touched him. What's the salient note for you and me as we build upon the new foundations? Touch somebody's life as you pass along. You will never pass this way again. It's not hard just reach out and touch somebody. You'll be surprised how soon that same touch, that same touch, that same touch comes back to you in the name of Jesus. Amen!

“It Only Takes a Few”

August 14, 1994

Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord! Let everything that hath breath say, "Praise the Lord!"

Congregation: Praise the Lord!

Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord! Today we continue step two in our series, "A Prisoner of Love." Turn to your neighbor on your right and say, "Neighbor I love you."

Congregation: Neighbor I love you!

Neighbor, turn right back to them and ask, "Are you sure?"

Congregation: Are you sure?

Whenever you are God's prisoner, whenever you are love's prisoner, you always find yourself sentenced to the same thing as Paul and his friends. You find yourself arrested for disturbing the peace. You can't love somebody without disturbing their peace.

Congregation: Yeah!

Parents are trying to rear a "Yes" generation, everything they ask you, you just say, "Yes, yes, yes," you don't want to disturb their peace. If you don't disturb their peace now, they'll go to pieces later. They save Paul, and Silas, and Timothy, and Luke, here in Athens, those men who have turned the world upside down have come here also. You ain't going to do no good for God, you ain't going to do no good for yourself, you ain't go do no good for love unless you make somebody unhappy.

If you want to come in number one in the contest, "I want to be loved, somebody love me, somebody tell me it's all right for me to be here, somebody dignify me," you ain't going to do nothing but eat, sleep and die and go to hell. Disturbing the peace, disturbing the peace, I've not come to bring peace, I've come to bring a sword. I've come to love somebody, if you're going to feed somebody, you're going to make somebody mad who don't want to feed nobody.

If you're going to heal somebody, you're going to make somebody mad who likes to see everybody sick. "But pastor, pastor, I'm just a little bit of person, ain't nothing to me. I'm just a little shot, I'm not a big shot." Well, neither was Paul when he turned to be a Christian, neither was Timothy, neither was Silas, neither was Barnabas, you know what a big shot is? A big shot is a little shot that keeps on shooting.

Acts 17 near the end there—Acts 17, verse 32, when they heard Paul speak of the resurrection, of a person who had been dead—this itinerant Jewish carpenter, preacher, Jesus—dead, back to life. Some

laughed, but others said, "We want to hear more about this later." That ended Paul's discussion with them, listen to this, "But a few joined him and became believers."

Our subject: "It only takes a few." For good, it only takes a few, for evil, it only takes a few, for good or for evil, it only takes a few, it's your call. That's all God ever says to you and me, "It's your call." Sisters don't come to pastor, brother don't come to pastor in the council chamber, talking about you did wrong because of so forth and so forth who made you do it. You did wrong because you wanted to do wrong!

It's your call, it's your call. If you want to do good like Paul and the company, you go about lifting, you go about telling them, you got a dying soul to save and a God to glorify. You go about telling them, "I was sinking deep in sin, but God lifted me up." You go about telling people, "This Jesus who was crucified is come again from the dead." And if you believe that you will live, you go about telling people, "You can do wrong a long time but sooner or later, you're going to hit a red brick wall, you got to live a good life," you can do that.

Or you can do wrong. And it's a funny thing, who opposed Paul and his band?

The church folks, the religious folks. Why do we church folks, religious folks always fight each other? Why can't Baptist and Methodist get along? Why can't Episcopalians and Catholics get along? Why can't we get along in the house of the Lord? If we're all going to the top of the mountain, ain't but one top, a lot of ways to the top.

The Baptist go by water, the Methodist go by land, you want to see Jesus in the morning, you got to go there, hand-in-hand. The religious leaders take offense: "These men, these outsiders have come now to Europe, they were in Asia Minor talking about this crucified carpenter who's come back to life. And we believe in the Roman gods, we believe in the Greek gods, don't listen to them, we are here for our people."

They're religious people, but they have refrigerator religion. Refrigerator religion. A refrigerator generates a whole lot of power, refrigerator religion. Refrigerator holds a whole lot of goodies, refrigerator even has a light on the inside. Refrigerator is working all the time, but a refrigerator is ice-cold, frigid, cold, it needs to loosen up sometimes. It needs to warm up sometimes.

You know people who are perfectly good, but they are just as cold as ice. Some people today are 100 degrees, everybody fanning, and they run here with a fur coat on that's so cold. It's one thing to have thin blood, it's another thing to have a thin religion. When somebody says to you, "I love you," what do you say back?

Congregation: I love you!

Somebody hugs you, what do you do?

Congregation: Hug them!

Do you hug them with one arm or two arms?

Congregation: Two arms!

Somebody say, "I love you," at least you can do is say, "Well I'm working on it."

Some people have refrigerator religion. How do you let somebody, a stranger, sit in the pew next to you at church, and you don't even reach over and say, "Hello, my name is... welcome to worship. Welcome to worship, welcome to worship."

Refrigerator religion. The only way to heat it up and to loosen it up is to break it up or to break it down, and this God has to do by pulling the plug.

I tell you, when you are aloof, when you don't feel for people, Abraham Lincoln said, "I feel sorry for the person who can't feel the whip when it's on another person's back." Can't you feel the pain of the people in Bosnia? Can't you? Can't you feel the pain of the people in Rwanda? Can't you? Those children by the side of the road, can't you feel their pain?

Can't you feel the pain of the people in Haiti? Can't you? Can't you feel the pain of the people in Cuba? Can't you? Can't you feel the pain of the people in the projects in South Central? Can't you? Can't you feel the pain? It only takes a negative few to cause everything to freeze up.

The mob is never led by the mob, the mob is always led by a few negative people. And I don't know what choice you've made this morning about choosing to do good works or to bad works, I don't know what choice you've made. But a long time ago, I decided to follow Jesus. A long time ago, I decided to put it on the line for Jesus. A long time ago I decided, and I didn't have the biggest car in town, the biggest house in town, the biggest ego in town, I've decided to follow Jesus.

I'll take the way with the Lord's despised few. I've started with Jesus and I'm going through. You have your choice of being in the despised few, or being in that negative few. Young people you know, every time you get into trouble, it isn't because you yourself have led yourself into trouble. You've led yourself into trouble following some jackass with his pants hanging halfway down his behind, with his shoes two sizes too big.

The grace of God is such, God can take the negative few, denigrating and putting down the despised few, and God can take of that negative and make it a holy negative, by making that despised few a holy few. "Pastor what do you mean?" I mean, God can use the negative to accomplish the positive.

I mean, sometimes God has to kick us out of town for us to get out of town. Paul and his friends are kicked out of Iconium, kicked out of Lystra, kicked out of Philippi, kicked out of Berea, and today they find themselves in Athens. A whole lot of us are here because God had to kick us out of Texas, God had to kick us out of Arkansas, God had to kick us out of New York, God had to kick us out of Boston.

If God hadn't said, "I shut that door in order that another door can be opened," we wouldn't be here today. George Smith, missionary, goes to Africa. George Smith, one convert. And she was a woman who was poor, begging on the streets--one convert. Six months later they threw him out the country and he died, almost of a broken heart.

Kneeling there with his Bible, praying for this province in Africa, calling himself a failure. But 100 years later, there were 13,000 converts in that spot. They were there because of that woman of the streets, and because a few men who stumbled by and saw his body, and saw the Word of God, were moved by the Word of God.

I want to tell you meddlers, it only takes a few this morning, it only takes one person on fire this morning, it only takes one in your family, it only takes one in your household, it only takes one in your neighborhood. I don't know about you, but I'll take the way with the Lord's despised few. I've started with Jesus, and I'm going through.

As you struggle to do the good in your life, to love, don't worry about sophisticated people here. Don't you let no smart-aleck put you down. Don't you let any Ivy League graduate put you down. Don't you let any top of the Beverley Hills person put you down. It ain't where you're living, it's what you're living with.

It's necessary to go to school, and nobody pushes school more than we. Three hundred-fifty kids every week getting ready for college, but the old folks knew what they were talking about. And you repeat it to the next generation, and the next generation: You can go to college, you can go to school, but if you ain't got Jesus, you're just an educated fool. And that's all, that's all, that's all, that's all.

The most uncommon thing in the world is common sense. Americans have very little common sense. Our children are killing children, and we doing business as usual. We paying baseball players \$1.3 million a year, and we are paying teachers \$30,000 a year, and the baseball players are on strike, we don't have any common sense at all.

Athens, Athens is a smart town, Athens is just filled with philosophical debates. The Epicureans are there and the Epicureans say the highest joy in life is pleasure. A pleasure that doesn't have any pain connected with it. The Stoics are there, the Stoics say everything is in the cards, everything is in the stars, everything that is, was meant to be, and there's nothing you can do except get in step with the flow of time.

These Athenians love to debate, they even have a forum, up there on Mars Hill, where the philosophers stand up and everybody debates. Paul did less work in Athens than he did in any other city he went. Less work than in Philippi, less work than in Thessalonica, less work than in Rome, less work than in Ephesus, because people who are busy talking all the time, ain't going do a doggone thing!

We reach a point of city sophistication where we are like a two-year-old, got us a new toy. When a child, before a child learns how to walk, you have to protect him from everything. And after the two-

year-old learns how to walk, you have to protect everything from him. The terrible twos, got us a brand-new toy, the whole house.

They've got them a toy: religion. They've got an altar to every god, the Roman gods, and the Greek gods, and the Phoenecian gods, and just in case, they have altars to unknown gods. "We don't want to take any chance, just in case there's one of y'all out there that we don't know about--here's an altar to you!" Paul starts with people where they are, all learning starts with people where they are.

My friends, my Athenians, he says on Mars Hill, I know that you have an altar to an unknown god. Well, that God is not unknown anymore, because I'm here today to proclaim that God to you. That God made a one, all the people of the earth. That God made us in the image of that God. That God when making us knew that He'd need to remake us because we'd fall into sin.

That God sent a savior, Messiah, to make us all over again. And the course of the Messiah's work, he was crucified, dead and buried, but God raised Him up. Believe that, and you will live. You remember the scripture when they heard Paul speak of the resurrection of the dead, the person who had been dead, some laughed. Children, Christians always keep you three pairs of shoes, three pairs of shoes.

The Ward Singers sang about traveling shoes. Put on your traveling shoes that's so you can meet your God. Don't you get permanent down here, don't you get caught up in L.A. la-la land. There's something beyond this foolishness. There's something beyond your weekends, there's something beyond your club, there's something beyond your alligator shoes, there's something beyond your designer jeans. Put on your traveling shoes.

The second pair of shoes you need are some walking shoes so you can walk in the midst of people who are positive. Get you somebody who believes in possibilities, get you somebody who believes you can still rear children right. Get you somebody who believes you can tell the truth and the truth will set you free. Get you somebody who when they say, "I love you," don't mean "I love what you going give to me."

Get you somebody you going to wake up in the morning, put that word in the bank.

Traveling shoes, walking shoes, then keep you some running shoes, so you can run away from people who are negative, people who laugh at everything. People who put everything down, people who think, they always got to have an angle.

People who wake up in the morning plotting how to do something evil, put on your running shoes, run away from them. I ain't got no time to mess with you, you want to game somebody. Some laughed, some hesitated, "We want to hear about this tomorrow. Some more convenient day." If you're going to make a decision, make it today. If you're going to decide to follow God, decide today. If you're going to love that person, decide today.

Because you look around, today will be gone and tomorrow will have you weeping. Whatever you're going to do, make a decision today.

And there was that third crowd, just a few believed. A few believed, they happen to include one of the most brilliant minds in Athens, Democritus. Everybody respected him, God will send you some significant others, and they included a beautiful woman named, Demetrias.

But she wasn't always that way. She was the only woman in the crowd when Paul spoke that day. Women weren't allowed to mix with men in public. You remember Jesus talking to the Samaritan woman, it was a hard time and the Bible is written by men and men can be so chauvinistic. Women have been the backbone of everything we've done in history, but if you read the Bible, if you read the Bible, you get to see that women historically have been treated like Jews and like Blacks, and like poor people, and like down-and-out people.

They've been treated not as second-class citizens, but as third-class citizens. This woman was not a sophisticated woman, this woman was not acceptable in polite company, this woman was a woman of the streets. This woman earned her living on her back literally. This woman had the gospel of God and this woman believed. This woman and that rich man brought Christianity to Athens.

Athens brought it to Greece, Greece brought it to the Roman Greco world, they brought it to you and me this morning. I want to tell you, children: It only takes one or two. "I've decided to follow Jesus. Sign my name for the Christian jubilee, write my name on the roll. I have been changed since Jesus called my name. I want to be right, I want to be saved, I want to be free."

"IT ONLY TAKES A FEW" Sunday 27 January 2011 AMB

I. It only takes a few to disturb the church

- + Call each other brothers and sisters, and display sibling rivalry
Don't disturb your brother. "Daddy, he's already disturbed."
- Fight about anything, and when there's nothing fight about, fight about that
- + Last 4,000 years, less than 300 years of peace; most of these holy wars. Church fight, fuckass
- + Holy insane—either preacher disturbing the church or the church disturbing preacher
Who called the preacher jack ass? Who called that jack ass a preacher?
- + At every meeting, two meetings—meeting hall and parking lot—then phones
It only takes a few for show time, show off time
- + But then when it's show up time, show nuff time, act like take Mustang Sally, Bulldog Drummon, Spider Man, and Scooby Doo
- + Use energy to build, not to tear down: Admiral Nelson—Yonder the enemy
Go yonder to the hungry, helpless, homeless, suicidal, homicidal
Go down, Moses, tell old Pharaoh, no—tell my people, to let my people go
- + Abraham had only few begin with; so Moses; so Jesus; so you and I if going do anything Jes had 2
I've started with Jesus and I'm going through
- Even though I walk through valley of shadow of death
Shadows can't hurt you, only make you hurt yourself
Jumping at shadows is not jumping for God

II. It only takes a few to disturb the peace

- + We need our peace disturbed
- Get so used to our peace we going to pieces
- + Jesus, great peace disturber: I have not come to bring peace, but a sword -- sword of truth
- + Jesus turned out the Temple: when God shows up God shows out with sword of truth -- people want truth
- + Way truth pierces your conscience when you hear it, look good or act good -- want good truth
- + Way our people want truth in church, not feel good
- + Cab driver and preacher go heaven; driver golden robe, preacher cotton
- We go on merit system: while you preached people slept; he drove people prayed -- hard, don't let for kill me
- Cab driver broke every law except 1st Commandment: thou shalt not bore people
- + Paul/Silas/Timothy/Luke driven Iconium, Lystra, Borea, Phillipi for disturbing the peace
- But if you are driven, a few will believe in you
- Few big shots among Greeks believed in them, including Dionysius

“Healing First, Hugging Second”

October 1, 1995 (8 am service)

Delivered as the O.J. Simpson murder trial was ending.

My dear family in God, it is good to celebrate when you come to worship. This is a house of healing, not of hurt. The world deals you enough hurt already, doesn't it? This month we're going to be talking on the theme: fightings without and fears within. That's all you know, isn't it? Something wrong on the outside, and fighting and struggling and safety laws and security systems. Fightings on the inside and fears within.

You've got to find something within you that's stronger than your fears. We have a lot of merchants of fear, running around the nation now, peddling hatred. You and I, the people who have been healed, owe it to our nation, owe it to our God, owe it to ourselves, to try to find the way to ease the fightings on the inside and the fears on the inside. Now it will be no easy way. Some of us want to be carried to the skies on flowery beds of ease. Some of us want to pick up and run to suburbia. Some of us want to go into denial. We want to pretend we don't have any problems. You may not have any problems with your two-car garage and your wall-to-wall carpets, but there are millions of people in America who have problems. There are millions of Black people who have problems.

If you're responsible at all, we are not allowed denial. Denial. Everybody, say, “Denial.” I want you to remember that de-Nile is a river in Egypt. It is not a reality. When we have problems, the problems are not going away. The trial--and you know which one we're speaking of--it will soon be ended. There will be a decision, one way or another, but the real trial will still be going on. Everybody that stands before the bar of justice will not be a millionaire or have a dream team to defend them.

We can't pretend we don't have problems, and we can't pretend we'll just hug each other and everything's going to be all right. Healing first. Hugging second. That's our subject. Healing first. Hugging secondly. James 4 asks us a question. What is causing the quarrels and fights among you? Isn't it because there is a whole army of evil desires within you? You want what you don't have, so you kill to get it. You long for what others have and can't afford it, so you start a fight to take it away from them. And yet the reason you don't have what you want is that you don't ask God for it.

Don't want anything you can't ask God for. That's a good rule of thumb right there. Don't want anything you can't take before the throne of God. We're in trouble today, and the media are running around, much of the media, and many of the people in the community. Are you going to riot? Are you going to riot? As if we are some type of people who are just looking for a way to burn down our neighborhoods. If justice is done, no we are not going to riot. If the jury is fair, no we are not going to riot.

We are normal, intelligent people, just like any other people. We built our communities. We don't want to burn them down. Why can't we make the point, over and over again? All we want is justice! All we want is economic parity. All we want is political sanction. All we want is fairness. The wrong people are asking the wrong question. Here James is asking the right one. What is causing the quarrels and fights among you? We are fighting today because 300 years ago somebody figured out, we want free labor in America.

You can't have free labor. If you're going to work a person, you pay that person, and if you pay that person, you respect that person. You don't take everything from that person. You don't go to Africa and rape a continent and kill 100 million people. Kill 18 million people in the Atlantic crossing, and then say they are savages. The savages are the ones who took their country!

Then to say, why can't we all just hug and get along? We can't hug and get along because you've wounded. You've killed. You raped. You maimed. You made lame, and now you want to act as if that has no repercussions on the day. The schools are secondary, because you maim. The jails are filled because you maim. The schools are empty because you maim. You can't have healing. We want healing. That's all. Healing.

Certain tribes in Africa, when a man kills another man, they don't put him in jail. What they make him do is take the position of the man he has killed. He must take that man's children and rear them. He must marry that man's wife, now widow. He must take that man's debts. He must take that man's position, and as he carries that man around with him, perhaps something will happen within him. It won't happen that way in America. It probably is not happening too often in Africa, but you can be one thing that's sure. Be sure your sins will find you out. Be sure that if you hurt somebody, you got to live with that somebody. Be sure that you can't go around blaming the victim.

You can't blame those children. You done took their father away! What is causing these quarrels among you? James gives us the word of the Stoics. The Stoics of his day said, "Desire is causing our problem." Turn to your neighbor on your right and ask, what do you want? Neighbor, you heard the question. Are you a Christian? Turn back on the left and say, I don't want nothing that doesn't belong to me.

Why can't we understand that? Why do we keep wanting something at the expense of someone else? We have some men running for President, and they got the nerve to talk about Affirmative Action, and there ain't one woman running for President in the United States. A few of them have integrity. The others of us ask what is causing these quarrels. They want something. They want to become President. So, they throw us at each other. They throw meat to the big white tiger. They throw Affirmative Action to America at large. They know better. They know better.

They know that the angry white male, as they call them, and praise be to God for those beautiful white males who are a part of our congregation, but they know truth when they hear

it. We're talking about the angry white male, and they're appealing to the angry white male, and there's nothing but rhetoric.

They know that the angry white male is only 33 percent of the American population, but 90 percent of the Congress of the United States. Ninety percent of the Fortune 500 companies. Ninety-three percent of tenured college professors. One hundred percent of the Presidents of the United States. They know better.

But they have desires. They want to use our backs as a bridge to the White House. Much as in the Senate, many Southern Senators used to get elected just by hollering the N-word, and now they're going to jump up and say we are playing the race card because Furman used the N-word. The N-word, we've been hearing the N-word for three centuries. Furman ain't nothing new to us. We've been hearing the N-word for three centuries.

The only way we made it around the N-word, neighbor turn to your neighbor on your left and tell them that old African proverb, "It ain't the name you call me. It's the name I answer to." Tell them neighbors. Tell them neighbors. I can handle Furman. I can handle Mark Furman. What I can't handle is you looking shocked that somebody in power could use the power in the wrong place. Anybody with any sense knows that you sow the wind, you reap the whirlwind. Anybody with any sense knows, when you put a gun on a person's side and a badge of authority on their chest, you have to monitor them very well. Anybody with any sense knows, if you have an upper class and you have an underclass, you have to be careful to protect the rights of the underclass, or the rights of the upper class will get carried away.

Anybody with any sense knows, when you go into a courtroom and you have an all-white jury, sentencing an all-Black person, you're going to have an inequity of justice. Anybody with any sense knows. It's desire, and they ask, what do you people want? Are you deaf? Can't you hear? Three hundred years! All we want is liberty and justice for all. Not all white people. For all. Not all brown people. For all. Not all yellow people. For all.

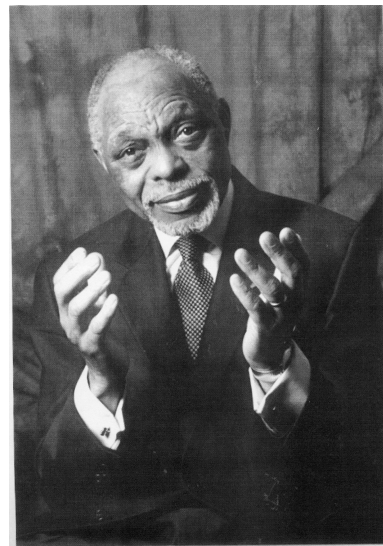
What's our solution? What's our solution? We can't pass this on to our children. We can't pass hatred on to our children. What we must pass on to our children, of all generations, and of all ethnicities. We have a problem in this country. We have a problem in this state. We have a problem in this city. God calls upon each of us to be problem-solvers. God doesn't call upon us to be problem-creators. The problem created itself. The problem was created when the Statue of Liberty pointed every way but towards Africa.

The problem was created when a tobacco-spitting Southern Senator stood up on the floor of Congress and said that all Negro soldiers were cowardly. The problem was created when, in 1965--after the dogs had started barking, after we'd buried Martin Luther King--things are not much better off today than they were then.

James tells us we're going to need a lot of humility. I agree with him. We're going to have to come to these problems as problem-solvers. He says you're trying to take by evil what God

would give you by prayer. James got enough sense to know, our problems are not going away by you and me coming to the altar call. He's saying that when you come to the altar call this morning, have a little talk with Jesus. Tell him all about your problem. Open your ears and hear Jesus say, "Hey children, I set you free, but only 33 percent of you are voting. You got to keep on voting. Children, I taught you how to write, and you got to write letters to your Congress people. I taught you how to move. You got to get up and get on your feet. You got to protest when things are wrong!"

When it comes to hurting each other, children, you've got to stop hurting each other. You got enough out there hurting you already. You got to love one another. You got to lift one another. You got to shout with one another. You got to support one another. You got to preach freedom to each other. You got to realize you ain't free yet. You got to preach up! You got to teach up! You got to lift up! You got to pray up! You got to move up! You got to know up! And when all that is given, God will make a way somehow. In the name of Jesus.



“Fighting Without and Fears Within”

October 1, 1995 (noon service)

My dear family in God, it's good to be alive, isn't it?

Turn to your neighbor on your right and say, "It's good to be alive!" Tell your neighbor it's good to be alive! It's good to be alive!

But as long as you're alive, you will probably experience what we're going to be talking about in this series of sermons: fightings without and fears within.

It's not going away. It's not going away. If it isn't one thing, it's another. Some fightings are necessary, aren't they? Some fightings are necessary. You and I must fight the good fight. And we must always remember we can handle this fear on the inside if we've got something within. Something within. Our problem is not the outside--we can handle Mark Fuhrman! We can handle Mark Fuhrman.

Turn to your left and call your neighbor by the N word. Neighbor, turn right back and to 'em, tell them in the words of the African proverb: "It ain't the name you call me, it's the name I answer to!"

The real fights are on the inside. And that's where our problem comes, and that's where our solution comes--on the inside. Mr. Dole, Senator Dole, is running around the country siccing everybody on Black folks. He's making us the enemy. The conservatives are running here, running there, siccing everybody on us. But you remember Pogo the Possum when he said, "We have met the enemy, and they is us!"

The system has to change. The system has to be purged. Every time you look, someone is asking you, "Are you Black folks goin' tear up Los Angeles if the decision comes in contrary to what you want?"

What is the only answer except, "Has the process been observed?" Now, you have a jury: Are we represented on the jury? Yes. Are we represented on the prosecution? Yes. Are we represented on the defense? Yes. Has justice been done in the courtroom we pray? Yes. Then if process has been observed, why do you think we are going around burning and looting? You think we got less sense than anybody else? We are talking about justice!

We want to heal this country. We want to heal our communities. And we want to make very certain you can't put a band-aid on a cancer. We can't wrap up until we make up. We got some understandings to go about. Husband and a wife split, they come back together. They split, they come back together. That can go on ad infinitum. The same two people having the same problems are going to have the same outcome. We've got to sit down and have an

understanding. We've got to understand that until there's justice for everybody, there is justice for nobody! We've got to understand that.

Our subject: healing first, hugging second. Second Corinthians, chapter 7, verse 5 or thereabouts tells us, "When we arrived in Macedonia, there was no rest for us. Outside, trouble was on every hand, all around us. Within us, our hearts were full of dread and fear."

Paul is nervous in Macedonia. Anytime things are wrong, and you have any sensitivity at all, you get a little bit nervous. Paul was nervous in Los Angeles. Paul is just come from Corinth, and in Corinth was a church that Paul helped to get started. But something began to develop in that Corinthian church: a power struggle. Darlings, that's the fact of life. Everywhere you go, there is gonna be a power struggle.

You got to understand, Jesus was caught up in a power struggle. And once we realize that unless we are on the side of right, we gonna lose that power struggle, we gonna keep on being victimized. But when we take the high ground, when we take the moral ground, when we know where the source of our power is, we can't lose with the stuff we use. We can't lose when we're on the side of God.

They've had a church fight in Corinth. Oh, if you have a choice between being caught up in a bull fight or a dog fight or a cat fight and being caught up in a church fight, please my children, go for the bull fight every time! Go for the dog fight every time! Go for the cat fight. At least when the fight is ended, they'll be something of you left to bury.

But in a church fight—oh, Lord!--ain't nothing left but a bitter taste in your mouth. America's cranking up with the right-wing churches on one hand and the left-wing churches on another. You think the Ku Klux Klan is terrible, burning the cross? You think the Third Reich skinheads are terrible? You haven't seen anything 'til the people of God go to war.

It would seem to me that on the body politic, you need a right-wing and you need a left-wing. But it seems to me that when one side is overbalanced, when the right-wing is overbalanced, when the right-wing wants to force religion down people's throats, when the right-wing that blessed slavery wants to jump up now and condemn the inner-city, when the right-wing wants to act as if we are the only people on welfare, when they are 38 percent of the people on welfare.

We pay the farmer for what he doesn't grow, we pay the miner for what he doesn't bring up. They talk about affirmative action: The white male in America is 33 percent of the population, but 90 percent of Congress, 90 percent of the Fortune 500 executives, 100 percent of the presidents.

If you're gonna call yourselves right-wing, you at least ought to be right! If you're gonna call yourselves the right-wing Christian conservatives, you ought to at least be in the right! Otherwise, when only one wing on the chicken, the chicken just goes round in circles.

So, Paul is in Macedonia, and over in Corinth, the church is just going 'round in circles. So, Paul sends his friend Titus with a letter. Theologians call it the "stern letter." Paul really takes them to task. Paul tells them, "You call yourselves the body of Christ, and here you are fighting! If you are the body of Christ, then you ought to have the agenda of Christ."

The agenda of Christ is that all people are equal. You are no better than everybody else. Red or yellow, black or white, all are precious in God's sight! If you are of the body of Christ, you don't go around figuring out ways you can hurt people! You go around figuring out ways you can help people! You don't worry about those 15 percent of Black people who are with substance abuse; you wonder at those 85 percent who are not on substance abuse. And you wonder why we are 15 percent of the drug traffic and 37 percent of the drug arrests.

He writes 'em a stern letter admonishing them to believe in the Jesus Christ that they profess. Then Paul has second thoughts: "Maybe I should've made it a little sweeter. Maybe I should've used a different language. Maybe I should just've told them that we are all washed in the blood of the lamb, and that one day, Jesus is coming again. And when He comes again we will be caught up in the air. Maybe I should've talked about them being into the Word, into the Word rather than talking about the Word getting into them. Maybe I should've been conciliatory. Maybe I should've done like one of the justices of the Supreme Court who got there on affirmative action and now that he's there, he doesn't want affirmative action. Maybe I should've gone into denial. Maybe I shouldn't have called a struggle a struggle, a fight a fight. Maybe I should've been soft and sweet."

A lot of our peoples are just crying: peace, peace, peace! I don't see no colors! Well, you're the only one in America who don't see any color. The trick is not to be color blind; the trick is to be color rich. We see colors, but we also see possibilities in every color. We see red and yellow and black and white and brown, and we don't want anybody to be blue, so we lift everybody up. And this color that we're trying to put down, we remember that they were here, oh they were here! The Pilgrims came in 1620, and they were here in 1517. So that when the Pilgrims walked ashore, the Black man and the Red man walked out to greet them: "Welcome to our home! Welcome to our home!"

You have to find a way to heal before you can be respected. Nobody's going to respect you if you just take everything sitting down, and standing up doesn't mean standing up throwing a rock! Standing up means standing up voting. Standing up protesting. Standing up writing letters. Stand up tall, and nobody can ride your back! Stand tall, and nobody can ride your back. Stand tall with dignity and nobody can ride your back. Stand tall on the Word of God and nobody can ride your back. Nobody!

People can be so cruel when you a little bit outta step. And God calls us all to be out of step. One young girl in 10th grade is rather tall. And sometimes our society punishes tall people. It's bad enough for the males; it's even worse for the females. But daughters, if you are of stature, don't you bend your back and try to make yourself shorter. Stand tall! Stand tall!

One little girl comes to her father crying; she towers over him. "Daddy, they're always asking me, how's the weather up there? How's the weather up there? I get so tired of them asking me, how's the weather up there? What am I going to do?"

Daddy said, "Daughter, next time somebody asks you, how's the weather up there? Say to them, why don't you grow up and find out?"

The Macedonians are fighting all around Paul, they're fightings with our people. Just jumping just to be jumping, and then there's the fear of the letter, and so that it is written here, our bodies got no rest.

Anybody tell you there's rest for the weary, I don't know what planet they livin' on. There is no rest for us, not as long as our children are killing children. There is no rest for us as long as we have adults killing adults and acting like children. There is no rest for us as long as our children are being born out of wedlock and there's a parent that's missing somewhere in the equation. There is no rest for us when in our elections, only 33 percent of us are voting. There is no rest for us when our divorce statistics are rising higher and higher. There is no rest for us when our children are getting addicted to drugs and addicted to alcohol and addicted to firearms. There is no rest for us until we arrest that problem, until we learn how to handle our fightings, and our fears. Until we learn to turn to God, there is no rest for us!

If you want peace, you will go to pieces unless you go to God. Look at what God does for Paul and Titus. They don't even know that while the letter is on its way to Corinth, the Corinthians have begun to rethink and repent of their insurrection against the laws of God, their rebellion against the laws of God. The Corinthians have already begun to repent. They are sorry for the way they treated Paul, and by the time Titus comes in with the letter, they read the letter and then they hug Titus and tell Paul, "It's all right."

I don't think they could possibly have been prepared for that letter unless Paul in the first place had acted with integrity. You and I don't need to sell out in order to have a home in suburbia. You and I don't need to sell out in order to have a \$30,000 car. You and I don't need to sell out in order to have soft clothing and silk accessories. You and I need to have integrity! We need to stand up and tell the truth. We need to wait for America to repent! We need to say, "You are wrong, repent! Stand, you are wrong!"

Just give me one more minute, one more minute, because we gotta end on God's note. The Corinthians repent and Paul opens his arms. Daughters, sons, don't go around fronting. Mad at everything! This ain't no time to get mad. This is a time to get smart! This is no time to get even; this is a time to get ahead! This is no time to go back to the 60s and the 70s, trying to dig up heroes. We need heroes and heroines for the 21st century! This is no time to sit back and wait for the Lone Ranger to come riding in out of the West. The Lone Ranger has already arrived! They call him Jesus! They call him Jesus! They call him Jesus! And Jesus has said, "I will not give up, I will not let up, until I've stayed up!" Lifted up, in the name of Jesus!

“Never Too Wise for God to Teach You”

June 16, 1996

That's all we've got: the love of God. It was just mediated through the creative artistry of Joe Westmoreland, Charles May, Carol Dennis. Give them a hand.

Thank you, Lord. You look so very good. You look so good. Some of us men are upstairs, the vast majority are downstairs. We're talking on the theme, brothers: Aren't you getting a little old for this?

Sisters, much will pertain to you. Take what is relevant. Brothers need to talk to each other, and if you'll just tune in on the party line you can help us a little bit by helping us help ourselves. Aren't you getting a little bit old for this? This what? Blaming, gaming, shaming, maiming. Sisters, it pertains here, too. Teach your sons don't go around blaming the woman in their life. Your woman is not responsible for you. Your woman can't take away your manhood. If you had any manhood to begin with, she can't take it away.

Don't go through life looking for somebody to blame. You and God are captain of the ship—don't blame the crew; it's your ship, cut out the blaming. Aren't you getting a little old for this blaming, gaming? Daughters, daughters, you got good intelligence. Daughter, when somebody comes up to you, "Hey, Mama," he's telling you something right now. What's he looking for? You looking for a son?

You don't find a son on the sidewalk, you find a son in the maternity ward. You got to make up your mind. Turn to your neighbor on your right and say, "Don't you know when you being gamed?" Now, turn right back to the same person and ask them, "Then why do you play games?" Aren't you getting a little old for this?

Shaming. Teach your sons you got my name. You got your daddy's name. You got your clan's name. Don't shame your family. Teach your children a sense of shame. Shaming, blaming, gaming, maiming. Every 70 minutes a Black man kills a Black man. Sisters, they are saying that downstairs. They are talking plain.

They're telling them, "We got to stop this," and got to stop this maiming stuff, too, sisters. Ain't nobody as hard on a sister as a sister is on a sister. Ain't no need of you fighting her over him. If you get him, in six months he's going back to her. You're a woman, you're not a ping-pong ball! Raise your right hand. You gonna make a promise in God's house for one week. We ain't asking two weeks. This word y'all call y'all, that female dog. You know what I'm talking... Don't go getting holy on me now. That one has a long skinny tail. Y'all are known for having another kind of tail. "I will not..." repeat "I will not..."

Congregation: ...I will not...

Cecil Murray: ...during this week...

Congregation: ...during this week...

Cecil Murray: ...call any woman...

Congregation: ...call any woman...

Cecil Murray: ...by the B word.

Congregation: ...by the B word.

Cecil Murray: Thank you. Thank you. Aren't you getting a little bit old for this foolishness? Not

blaming but aiming, that's our goal, aiming at wisdom. We get our wisdom teeth at an older age. They call them wisdom teeth because by that age we old enough to know better. But, we got word for you, it ain't the teeth, it ain't the tongue how old you are, it's the trust. It's whether you trust in God to give you some wisdom. Wisdom don't come with your teeth. Wisdom don't come at age 40. You got some 50-year-old fools and some 5-year-old geniuses.

First Kings, chapter 12, verse 6. Rehoboam, the king, talked it over with the old men who had counseled his father, Solomon. "What do you think I should do?" he asked them, and they replied, "If you give them, the people, a pleasant reply and then agree to be good to them and serve them well, you can be their king forever."

Listen to foolishness. But, Rehoboam refused the old men's counsel and called in the young men with whom he had grown up. Our subject: never too wise for God to teach you. In a few minutes, before the men come up, we gonna talk about two things, rehabilitate and rehabilitate your attitude. Rehabilitate just means take what you have and work with it. You are not what is given you, you are not what is given, you are what you are. Don't go around here crying about this man in your life. That came to you from the outside; you are what's on the inside. Now, don't go around talking about how bad your job is or how bad your economics are. You are not what happens to you, you are what happens within you.

That's why they sing that song, "Have You That Something Within?" Have you that something, then you have to play the cards that are dealt you. You thought you had the best family in the world, but a year later, 10 years later you found you didn't have a good family at all. You can't go back and live with your dreams, you got to take what you got and make some decisions from there. You can't go through life crying all the time. You got to take the hand that's dealt you. One out of three of you here have been sexually abused. Downstairs one out of six have been sexually abused. Well, you can't go through life rubbing your scars; you got to go on from there. You can't say that all men are no good because your uncle took you, or your daddy took you, or your brother took you, or your cousin took you, or somebody broke in the house and took you. It leaves scars, but bring them to the altar of God and get up from the altar.

You got to play the hands that are dealt. You got to play the cards that are dealt you, and every hand isn't a dead man's hand. You got to stop acting as if life is bad. Come on and put some joy in life. Every hand is not a dead man's hand, and every card, every deck, has a joker in it, but don't you be the joker.

When God tells you that ain't good for you, walk away from it. When God tells you to go right don't go to the left.

Rehabilitate means take what you have and work with it. This thing of jealousy is not becoming you at all. If some other woman has eyes, what do you care, you got fingers? If somebody else has hips, what do you care, you got ankles? Somebody else got legs, what do you care, you got brains? Somebody else got a husband, what do you care, there are a lot of single ones out there? Somebody else got children, what do you care, go adopt some? Stop wanting what you ain't got! You have to take the hand that's been dealt you.

Jesus took what He had to work with. Jesus took out on the water in a borrowed boat. Jesus fed 5,000 with a borrowed schoolboy's lunch. Jesus ate the Last Supper in a borrowed chamber. Jesus was buried in a borrowed tomb. Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a borrowed ass. But, Jesus didn't have to borrow his light. He says, "God is light." John says, "The true light that's God has come into the world." Jesus was in darkness on Friday. Jesus was in darkness on Saturday. Jesus was in darkness on Saturday night, but early Sunday morning, I saw the light. I saw the light. Thank God Almighty, I saw the light!

Rehabilitate. Rehabilitate. Take the darkness you working with. Your son is not doing too well, bring him to the church and put him in the 27 programs. The darkness is only temporary. The darkness of self-hatred is only temporary. The darkness of self-destruction is only temporary. The darkness of our men acting ignorant is only temporary. The darkness of our men getting physical with our women is only temporary. In the morning, God sends the light, but first you must say: "I saw the light!" I saw the light. Thank God Almighty, I saw the light. This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine, let it shine, let it shine, let it shine.

Secondly, [let it be] said: Not only rehabilitate, but rehabilitate your attitude. Downstairs the men are agreeing, we gonna check out our attitude. We gonna check out these filthy names we call our women. We gonna check out this getting physical with our women. When our women frustrate us, or we frustrate ourselves, we gonna check out this saying that our women are all the same, when people are different. We gonna check out this being a weebee, and don't you go around here supporting a weebee. You know what a weebee is. Mama, we be living in your house. We be eating out your refrigerator. We be driving your car. We be spending your money.

Solomon needed to check out his attitude. Solomon is the third king of Israel. There's Saul, there's David, now there's Solomon. The kingdom spread to its greatest under Solomon. The people were living like Americans are living, every bit of luxury in the world the people had. Solomon is listed as the wisest man who ever lived. But, no matter how wise you are, you never outgrow your need for God. You never get so wise that God can't teach you another lesson. Solomon needed to understand, you can't let power go to your head. You can't let power corrupt you. Lord Acton says, "Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely." Solomon had absolute power. Solomon put a tax on the people that was more than a third of everything they earned. The people were groaning. Solomon needed to learn you can't go too far with power.

Brothers got to learn you can't go too far with the power struggle. No woman is your servant. You don't know anything more than another woman knows, a woman knows, you got to sit down and talk it out. You can't rule by [brute] body strength. You can't rule by the power of economics. You ain't paying the cost to be the boss, because she working just as hard as you working. Solomon's foolishness split the kingdom, just as chauvinistic foolishness can split the family. Ain't nobody putting up with no boss no more. You get up and hit that freeway. You come home and you hit the wash tub, or you hit the kitchen refrigerator. You got the right to be yourself. You ain't taking abuse off nobody.

Solomon needed to get ahold of himself. Israel needed to get ahold of itself. Israel wanted the fringe benefits of taxes without paying the dues of taxes. Like some people want to belong to the church and don't pay no dues. You don't even understand it takes us \$60,000 dollars a week just to keep the ship going, and you come and you giving us hamburger money. The people of Israel wanted the fringe benefits of being taxed without the taxes themselves, just like you want to go off with who you want even when your mama told you that "You know what ain't no you know what." Your daddy told you that "You know what ain't no you know what." I told you that "You know what ain't no you know what." You told yourself, "You know what ain't no what," but then you go, "I love him." Turn to your neighbor on your left and ask, "What's love got to do with it?" Loving the wrong thing, you gonna be waiting to exhale till your butt explode.

Look at Solomon with two loves, Yahweh, God, the God who made him everything he is, and Moloch the god he found, that this Pagan god to whom they'd offer child sacrifices, like taking little Chris and sacrificing him to Moloch. Instead of Solomon staying with God, Solomon strayed over with Moloch. Some here are making that same mistake. Instead of staying with the God who brought you where you are, the God you knew about in Mississippi and Alabama, you've already gone to the god of Hollywood. Instead of you taking the one that's square, the one that's a nerd, you got to have the "Hey Mama" one. You don't choose between the two.

You ought to understand you can't have both things at the same time. You can't have both things. You got to tell him. You can't have the living room and the bar room at the same time. You can't have the golf club and the night club at the same time. You can't have monogamy and polygamy at the same time. You can't have a single status and married status at the same time. You got to choose. You can't have God and Moloch at the same time.

My senior year, Florida A&M, '51. They brought all the football stars on stage and they gave each a bundle of flowers. They brought their girlfriends on stage. Now, you walk from here to give your girlfriend a bunch of flowers. What a beautiful moment it was. Wilbur Gary was All-American center. Wilbur Gary was so sexy when he walked by, the roses melted. Wilbur Gary had three girlfriends, and the committee was gonna get Wilbur. They brought all three girlfriends up on the stage!

There's the dilemma: one bunch of flowers, three girlfriends. Wilbur Gary walked the stage, and the brothers were dying, and they, "Ah!" Wilbur Gary pulled out his handkerchief and wiped his brow. Wilbur Gary got on his knees and lifted up his hands, then he got up and he took his bunch of flowers and he almost closed his eyes. He walked over to the one he loved the best and he put the flowers in her hand, and the other two had to walk away. That's the way it is with God. You got to put the flowers

in God's hands. You got to put your life in God's hands. You got to put your future in God's hands. You got to put your tomorrow in God's hands. You cannot serve both God and Moloch.

Give me two more minutes, because I want to tell you about Rehoboam, Solomon's son, the fourth king under whom the kingdom was split. He wasn't too smart, and he knows not, and he knows that he knows not, so he goes to the wise men of the village. They tell him, "Cut the taxes, Son! Cut them now. Deny yourself now, and the people will affirm you forever."

That's what we're teaching right now. Son, learn how to deny yourself. Learn delayed gratification. Learn that you can't have everything you want, but you can have everything you need. Learn to look down the road. Learn not to handle everything with your instincts, but with your intellect. He heard the old men, then he leaves them and goes over to his guys, the elders who are in his category, his classmates, the 40-year-olds. They played games together. They knew each other growing up. They were his gang, and his gang says to him when he asked, "What should I do? Should I cut the taxes?" His gang says, "No, don't cut the taxes. Double the taxes! Anybody disagree with you, whip them."

Well, Sister, you gonna find fools like that. But, Israel rose up and said, "Look it here, Rehoboam, you whip slaves, you don't whip free people," so the empire split. The ten tribes up North. Rehoboam and his two tribes down South. Israel in the North, Judah in the South. Daughters, if you got any sense; Sons, if you got any sense, you don't take abuse anymore. Slaves take whips, free people don't take whips. You got some dignity under God. God says, "Clean your plate. Hold it up in front of me. Tell me what you want. I'll give it to you." Don't take the first thing that comes along. I got some fire this morning. I want you to use your wisdom. I want you to say, "I saw the light. I saw the light. This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine, let it shine, let it shine, let it shine!"



Rev. Murray with Donald E. Miller, co-founder of the USC Center for Religion and Civic Culture

“Hating Me Until You Need Me”

October 14, 1998

Delivered the day before a memorial service for deceased Los Angeles Mayor Tom Bradley.

Everybody, come on and say, “Catch the fire! Catch the fire, catch the fire.”

Don't let the fire of hatred burn you up. Hatred destroys the one hating. Come on and complete this sentence, “What goes around...”

Hate is going around. Everywhere you go, you run into hate. I hope none is here in your seat, in your lobby here, in the pulpit, in the choir stand. What goes around? The person who hates you will end up coming back to you. Judges 11, verse seven: But Jephthah said to them, “Why do you come to me when you hate me, and have driven me out of my father's house?”

Why come now, when you in trouble? Let's talk on the subject: hating me until you need me.

In this world, in this world, there are users. There are people who will use you. If you ever been used, raise your hand. In this world, oh my Lord, there are the users, and there are the used. Now, if you're gonna be used, don't feel too badly. Don't feel too badly. Just make sure you're being used by God. But don't you become a user just because you are used. Jephthah is used. Jephthah is the son of a prostitute, and his half-brothers despise him because of that. They call him a son-of-a-whore. They blame him for his mother, and this seems so unfair, and so ridiculous. I thought the mother was responsible for the son, not the son for the mother. I didn't think you had anything to do with how you got here. I didn't know anybody who had anything to do with who their mother was, or who their father was. That's why I heard God say, “When your mother and your father forsake you, then the Lord will take you in.”

They called him an outside child. Somebody here has been called an outside child. Somebody here's mother wasn't all that you would've wanted your mother to be. But you ought to hear the point, saying for God, “Though his beginnings be but poor and low, thank God almighty, a man can grow!

When you look at the Book of Judges, and the judges were the ones who ruled Israel before they started having kings. The judges were the chief people in the nation. Jephthah goes on to become preeminent among the judges, but for right now, Jephthah is a nobody. The community elders, the wise people of the village, the wise people of the nation, call him “a nobody.” They ostracize him, they put him out of the communities. They say, “You are a nobody.” But let you learn something this morning from the Holy Spirit of almighty God. With God, nobody is a nobody!

Tomorrow we will eulogize the son of a sharecropper, who became the first Black mayor of a major city in the United States of America. Somebody here knows what it is to be the grandson or granddaughter of a sharecropper. Somebody here knows what it is to be the great grandson, the great granddaughter of a slave people. Somebody here knows what they are talking about when they say, "With God, nobody is nobody." Everybody is somebody. Everybody is somebody.

I love you whether you wearing chains or not. I love you whether you are hungry or not. I love you whether you sin or not. Nobody is a nobody. I'm a child of the King! With Jesus, my Savior, I'm a child of the King! Call me anything you want to. Call me an outside child, but I'm inside the love of God. It's not where you're coming from that counts. It's where you're going to that counts.

Don't cry because of where you're coming from. Rejoice in where you're going! Jephthah was almost going crazy. You know people can run you out your mind picking on you. Why do you think God's people are so angry all the time? 'Cause we get tired of being called outsiders! We get tired of being picked on all the time. In the counseling chambers I stay on the sisters. Sisters, don't become a sapphire. Sisters, don't let that anger eat you up. Sister, don't go around with a frown on your face all the time. I can look at it, though, and understand why. If you've been mistreated ever since you were 15 years old, that's bound to make you angry. If you can't get a job 'cause you a woman, and a Black woman, that's bound to make you angry.

I want to tell you you've been rebuked and scorned, but I know somebody who loves you this morning. God is on your side.

Jephthah praised Him! He goes into the streets, and because he has such natural strengths, he becomes preeminent in the streets. We are wasting a lot of material by labeling them and putting them on the outside. If you can make it on the streets, you can make it anywhere.

They called his people he was running with, in Hebrew, they called them "the empty people." They called them "the broken people." Jephthah becomes the leader of "the empty people," of "the broken people." But Jephthah in this place, this morning, will tell you and me, don't ever call anybody empty, because no matter how empty you are, God can fill you! No matter how broken you are, God can mend the pieces! God just says, "Bring me the pieces. Bring me the pieces. I'll fix them up. Bring me your load. I'll bear it. I'll share it. If you only bring it to me. And when you're empty, there is a fountain filled with blood, drawn from Emmanuel's vein."

Is anybody here empty this morning? Is anybody here broken this morning? Don't give up! God can fix you up. Nurse complains to the chaplain, "Patients at times take advantage of me. Chaplain, they talk to me as if I'm a dog. I don't know if I can stand it much longer, the way these patients treat me!"

Chaplain said, "They treat you poorly? Yes, praise be to God! Praise be to God! Glory be to God!"

Nurse says, "Chaplain, I tell you the people treat me badly, and you said glory be to God. Why?"

"Well, it's like you were carrying a vessel, and this vessel was filled with liquid. And somebody bumped into you, brushed into you. You can only spill out what's on the inside in the first place. When people bump into you, you can only spill out what's on the inside in the first place! When your importunity comes, your importunity is God's opportunity."

So that you carry this vessel through life. You ought to pray somebody bumps into you! You can't spill out moonshine if on the inside you've got sunshine. Sunshine on my shoulders makes me happy! You dare to hurt me on the outside if God is on the inside? God is on the inside!

Your importunity is God's opportunity. God don't always provide you an opportunity when somebody treats you poorly. The Ammonites attacked the Israelites, and the Ammonites are a powerful force. The Ammonites take no prisoners, and Israel is trembling. Those same elders, the council of elders that put Jephthah out, come to Jephthah: "We want you to be our captain. We want you to lead us. We want you to take charge of every blade of grass."

And Jephthah asked them, in the words of our Scripture, "Why do you come to me now? You put me out. You ostracized me. You called me the son-of-a-whore. You said I was a nobody. Why do you come to me now, when you in trouble?"

And they're honest enough to say, "We come to you now because we are in trouble! We have nobody with the strength of Jephthah. We have nobody with the charisma of Jephthah. We want you to be our captain!"

And Jephthah says, "You want me only for a season and a reason. And then when we shall have won the war, you're going to abandon me."

And they said, "Oh, no! Even after the war, you're going to be the chief of our judges. God will make a way somehow."

Jephthah accepts the commendation. Jephthah wins the victory. I want to tell you that if you're right, He'll be fighting your battles. I want to tell you this morning, God is your strength and your shield. God will make your enemies your footstool. God will wake you up when it's time for battle. God will pin a medal in your chest!

Well, Jephthah told me to tell you some things this morning. Jephthah told me to tell you when your enemies hurt you, don't you hurt them. Don't you give an eye for an eye or a tooth for a tooth, an insult for an insult. Jephthah told me to tell you, when somebody's mean to you, don't you be mean back to them. God says, "Be still, and I'll make your enemies your footstool."

Jephthah told me to tell you something else: When you have advantage, don't take advantage! When you get a little power, don't let power get you! When they put a crown on your head,

don't let your head get too high. When you have advantage, don't take advantage. Remember when you were out there with the empty and the broken. Jephthah told me another thing: Oh, be very careful! Don't make an enemy, when you may after have to go to that enemy and make a friend. Then Jephthah told me, "Tell them, don't waste their time hating!"

Life is too short to hate! Somebody here is 50 years old, carrying a grudge. You look around, you gonna be 70 years old. And your teeth gonna fall out. Everything's gonna be wrong with you, and you gonna ask yourself, "Why did I waste my time hating that crazy-in-the-head clown? They didn't have no sense! Why am I going crazy?"

Dave Thomas. For 42 years, Dave leaves a note under the door of Rachel Jones, who stays next door. Every day for 42 years, Dave leaves a love note to Rachel. They split up when both of them were 32 years of age. They had a lover's quarrel, and they were so immature. They didn't understand that you can't have a relationship without getting mad sometimes. You can't stay together without fighting a little bit. And she took the note every day and tore it up and threw it out the window.

One day he got enough courage to go and knock on the door: "Rachel, I love you and I want you to marry me!" She said yes, and both of them were married on the day they were 74 years old. How you can waste your time? How you can waste your time? How you can waste your love, hating somebody? What goes around, comes around! Hatred is going around, but get out of my way, hatred! Love is going around! Come on, love! Come around, love! Come around, love. Come around, love. Come around!



Mayor Tom Bradley at FAME, January 1994

“Old Jordan River is Chilly and Cold”

May 16, 1999

Glory be to God! Catch the fire. Everybody, say, "Catch the fire!"

When you are coldly afraid. Everybody, say, "When you are coldly afraid." With your kind cooperation, we would like to say thank you to some care packages. Early this morning before the eight o'clock service, the devil got in the mix, and the sound system went out.

And our sound crew has been working with might and mane up to this very moment. They never gave up, they gave out. Thank you! Sound crew, thank you, thank you, thank you.

While ago, the shadow stood here, the young man who told us of his experience, the shadow knows. The shadow said, "Never give up." Never give up. We want to talk in our remaining time, only difference between the body chillers—everybody, say, "body chillers"—and the soul warmers. Sometimes you find yourself in cold water, around cold people, with cold circumstances.

Some of you here never in your life heard your father say, "I love you," if he was there. Never heard mama say, "I love you," or put arms around you. Just cold water. When I say wade in the water, God's gonna trouble the water. Sometimes you don't find yourself in cold water, but you find yourself in hot water. Wade! Wade in the waters. God's gonna trouble the water. 'Cause Jesus tells us there is another river. There is a river whose streams make live the hearts of men and women. Don't worry about those who can kill the body.

Matthew 10:28, "Fear not those who can kill the body, but fear those who can kill the body and the soul." So, our subject is: "Old Jordan River is Chilly and Cold."

You may know the lyrics, it comes from another generation, old Jordan River is chilly and cold. It chills the body, but not the soul. Jesus, Jesus, why doesn't it chill the soul? Because the soul belongs to God. Don't forget that. The soul belongs to God, and the soul-warmer will meet you down by the River of Jordan. Whatever you're going through right now, the soul-saver, the soul-warmer, will heat you up when the world is cold to you. Wade in the waters, children! Don't be afraid of the troubled waters. Don't be afraid of what you're gonna meet this week. Don't be afraid to do without, because as long as you're with God, you are never without. God will make a way somehow. God will part the sea. God will calm the storm. Wade in the waters, children! Soul-saver. The soul-warmer will meet you at the waters.

Of course, you're gonna be met there by the body-chillers too. The body-chillers are people who just keep raining on your parade. The body-chillers are people who just turn down the thermostat. You were up a while ago shouting in praise to God and you could look down the row at one of the body-chillers, and their whole expression says, "What in the hell are you

shouting about?" And all you can say is, "I sing because I'm happy! I sing because I'm free! [God] is on the spiral, and I know He watches me!" Never give up!

You gotta go through Jordan in order to get to the Promised Land. Oh, I know Jesus would say, "I wish I could carry you across Jordan. I wish you didn't have to get wet. I wish everything were alright for you." But if everything is all wrong, God is still all right. Wade in the waters, children! Old Jordan River is chilly and cold. It chills the body, but not the soul. Don't be afraid of what's out there waiting for you. You gotta go through some changes. You gotta go through some hard times. You gotta go through some dark nights. You gotta go through some bad relationships. You gotta go through being talked about, rebuked and scorned. You gotta go through being lied on. You gotta go through being put out at the midnight hour. I agree with the Psalmist: We may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning. Wade in the waters, children!

Matthew 10, read that chapter when you get home or when you get down. Three times, Jesus says to you and me, "Fear not." Verse 26: "Fear not." Verse 28: "Fear not those who can only kill the body. God can kill the body and the soul." Verse 31: "Fear not. You are more valuable to God than the sparrow that falls from the skies." We are a trembling generation. We are a frightened generation. Some of us are frightened of being alone, and nothing is wrong with being alone. You oughta hear of that man who talks to himself all the time, and somebody asked him, "Why do you talk to yourself all the time?" And he responded, "Because I like to talk to somebody intelligent."

The greatest fear we all have is the fear of rejection. You're gonna be rejected sometimes. There is trouble all over this world. Why should you expect everybody to like you when everybody doesn't even like God? Everybody doesn't even like Jesus? Some people will stand out and shake their fists at God. God understands, then you and I can understand. Why should, just because you love somebody, that person have to love you to where you love them? You aren't loving them for them to love you back. You're loving them just because you love them. I love you, my sister. I love you, my brother. It doesn't matter whether you love me or not. I love you. I'm not afraid of rejection as long as God takes me.

I want you to look at three brief ways, three brief ways, to keep the fear out, to keep the body-killers from killing you, to keep the soul-squashers from squashing you. Three simple ways are given to us in Matthew 10, as Jesus talks to us, 'cause you gotta cross that Jordan River. You gotta go through it, and you need some water wings. You need a fire burning for you so that you can warm up when you come out of the cold. The first thing: Everybody, say, "Isolate."

Find a quiet spot, where the Holy Spirit, where Jesus, can whisper to you. It won't be with people, 'cause some people will say, "Oh, they think they so holy." It won't be around a lot of people, because some people don't believe in prayer. It's amazing how some of us don't believe in prayer until the bullet is three inches away from us, or here comes death, and then we go, "Our Father, who art in Heaven..." You must think the Angel of Death is crazy! You done told me to go jump in a lake all your life, now here you come, it's time for you to cross Jordan, you gonna tell me carry me over Jordan River. You better get yourself together.

Isolate. Find a quiet place, close the door, cut off the television. Get you some soft music on the radio, sit back and let the Lord love you. Prayer. Isolate. We get all caught up in this hip culture. We get all caught up in this downbeat and deadbeat language. We forget the simplest thing in the world is to have a little talk with Jesus. We don't want anybody to call us a nerd. We don't want anybody to call us square. I got news for you: If you gonna be round, you better let God round off your corners, or else you ain't never gonna be round. You ain't never gonna be hip until you let God tell you what's how.

Isolate. One of the greatest scientists of all times, Issac Newton. Issac Newton says I can take my telescope and I can look out into the universe, millions and millions of miles away. With my telescope I can see infinity, but then I set my telescope aside. I go into my room and close the door. I get down on my knees and have a talk with the Lord, and I can see further than my telescope could ever see. I can see the Lord clearer than I could ever see with my telescope. Have a little talk with Jesus. Pray on, children! Pray on into the dying lamp. Isolate. Brothers, raise your hands, brothers. All the males. I want you promise something while you got your hand in the air. Every morning you get out of bed, whether it's 5:00, 6 or 7:00, go down on your knees for 30 seconds, one minute, a minute and a half. Whatever! Go down, have a little talk with Jesus. If you'll do it, say "Yes!"

Thank you, brothers. Isolate.

Second, cogitate. Think. Meditate. Cogitate. Look here, God has put something in you, says Jesus. God has put something unusual in you. The world can't kill that. The world may kill the body, but that soul, nothing can destroy it. Again and again, you remember the African proverb: "It's not the name you called me, it's the name I answer to." God has given you something extra. That's why nobody can hurt you, because you know who you are. I'm a child of the King, that makes me a prince! Sisters, that makes you a princess! God don't make no junk.

I don't care what's happened to you yesterday, you and God can recover from it and go on a little bit. There's something special in you. One bad relationship doesn't mean two bad relationships. One bad day doesn't mean two bad days. You are not junk. You are not junk. You're not junk. Stir up the git that is in you. Just stir it up and God will be there to mix with you. Cogitate.

A storm off the Samoan islands we read about. And this boat was anchored off shore, and the storm was about to dash it against the rocks. In his time of crisis, the captain reached within, the same way you and I do when the storm of life is raging. Instead of saying, "Oh woe, oh woe, this is the end of me!" It ain't never the end of you! Don't ever give up. Listen to God whispering to him, "Pull up the anchor." Pull up the anchor. "Head out to sea in the midst of the storm. Go out!" And when the storm had passed over, the boat was still standing, still floating. God has put something in you that the storm of life can't quench. You are not what is in your pocketbook or in your bank account; you are what's in your heart. God has put something in your heart. God has put something in your soul. Stir it up!

Third: We've said isolate. We've said cogitate. Now we say, "Concentrate." Focus, focus. Jesus says, "Even if you fall, you will rise again." Focus on the rising and not on the falling. You got an option between a good thought and a bad thought, focus on the good part. If a sparrow falls... What's a sparrow worth? A penny? Remember your Scripture. Half a penny. If a sparrow falls, and God is aware of it, then if a Black bird falls God will be aware of it too. If a ghetto pigeon falls, God will be aware of it too. If a buzzard falls, God will be aware of it too. If a turkey falls, God is aware of it too. If a chicken falls, God is aware of it too.

When you fall, you rise again. Our trouble, too often, is falling for the wrong things. Sisters, raise your hand. Long as my head is hot... Repeat after pastor. Say it again, "Long as my head is hot, I'm through crying over somebody who I want but doesn't want me. I ain't falling for no fool no more."

And if you make your resolve, God will take care of you. See, when you're scared, people feed it. You go in to apply for a job and you're trembling, you can't even say your name you're so nervous. Why didn't you have your prayer outside of the door? When did you isolate? Why didn't you meditate? Cogitate? Why didn't you think about it, then why didn't you concentrate my name, and so and so? "I believe I can help this company, and here's what I offer. Here is my resume, but if you find that I'm not worthy, I'll work for you free. You owe me nothing." And you get the job, and you work hard on the job, and the job works on you, but you work on the job. God is there. Even if you fall, you do not fail because you cannot fail in God. The only time you fail is when you are scared to fall. Ain't nothing wrong with falling. It's getting up again!

Lemme tell you about Reverend [Henson], and then we'll open the doors for those who will help us help God. Reverend Henson stands before his congregation. It's his last time. He tells them, "I'm fatally sick. I won't recover. I just want you to know I love the Lord. He heard my cry. He pitied every woe as long as I lived." [Loved ones] hasten to his side. Then, as the people wept, he walked out of the aisle and got in his car, went home, he stays five miles outside of the city in a country home. He looked at the mountain. It's night, and he looks at the stars, looks at the trees, he looks at the running brook. Then he says, "Mountain, I may not see you many times again, but I want you to know that I shall still be standing when you have fallen. Trees, I want you to know I may not see you many times again, but I shall still be left standing when you are uprooted from the earth. Stars, I shall still be left standing when you have fallen out of your sockets. Birds, I shall still be standing when your songs shall have ended." I thank you, Lord, that I can look up.

Old Jordan River is chilly and cold, it chills my body, but not my soul. My soul is anchored in Jesus, and the world can't do me no harm, in the name of Jesus.

Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Please wait for the meditation. Please stand to your feet. Please stand to your feet. Please stand to your feet.

“Boomerangs Come Home Again”

May 30, 2000

So, help me God! So, help me God to see that collusion brings collision. The Psalm that says everybody here has an enemy. Some may say, "I don't have a single enemy in the world." No, you don't have a single enemy, you got a whole lotta enemies! Some people don't like you just because you're breathing! What do you do when your enemies attack you? That's the question. Who defends you against your enemies? Everybody say, "The Lord is my defendant!" He will not suffer your foot to be moved. Behold, he who tries to remove you will he himself be removed! And moved.

In Ontario, Canada a man by the name of John Bassick. John Bassick goes into this entertainment place. Children, he asked the waitress, pay attention. Hey! Pay attention. Sit up girl, hush! Thank you, thank you. Say amen, children! Turn around son, turn around. You can look at her after worship. Alright. Mamas, that's what y'all up there for, alright!

John Bassick goes into this eating place and he asks the waitress, "Will you dance with me?" She says, "No, thank you." He takes out his gun and he shoots her. Five times. She falls to the floor. And then, as he's trying to escape, he stumbles over her body, falls down, breaks his neck and dies. She recovers, makes a full recovery. Do you see God? Then look a little closer. Psalms 94. Psalms 94. Here in the church it's page 42 and the radio audience pick up Psalms 94 and let's begin looking at verse 19, 19.

Lord, when doubts fill my mind, when my heart is in turmoil, quiet me and give me renewed hope and cheer. Will you permit a corrupt government to rule under your protection? A government permitting wrong to defeat right? Do you approve of those who condemn the innocent to death? No! The Lord my God is my fortress, the mighty rock where I can hide. Listen to this, God has made the sins of evil people to boomerang upon them. God will destroy them by them their own plans, Jehovah our God will cut them off. God has made the sins of evil people to boomerang upon them. Our subject: Boomerangs come home again.

Hey, boomerangs! Boomerangs come home again, we gonna look at three things. Three things. Number one: sticks and stones may break my bones, sticks and stones. A boomerang is a throwing stick, curved, designed so that it returns to the one throwing it out. People who always hurting people think they are throwing a stick at you. They need to be aware it's more than a stick; it's a boomerang. And what goes around, comes around.

Remember Malcolm X saying, "Chickens come home to roost?" Some of us need to remember that. We think the chicken can't find its way home at sunset. If you hurt that chicken, that chicken is coming back to you. If you do good, it's coming home to you. If you do evil, it's coming home to you. What goes around, comes around. Chickens come home to roost. Sticks and stones may break my bone. The Psalm that says, "Israel is in trouble. Israel feels all alone

against its enemies." You know what they're talking about. Sometimes you feel like a motherless child, as the old spiritual says, "I couldn't hear nobody pray. I looked for my friends and I couldn't find my friends anywhere. And my enemies were on my right hand and on my left hand. I couldn't hear nobody pray. Way down yonder by myself, I couldn't hear nobody prayin'. I couldn't hear nobody prayin'."

They're in a learning mode. Somebody here is in a learning mode. 'Cause you have been hurt. You have been rebuked. You have been scorned, and you look up at God and you say, "God, have you got me on hold? God, are you mad at me? God, I do my best, and these people are hurting me unto death. Oh Lord, they're in a learning mode. Somebody's going to the school of hard knocks right now. Things don't always work good for you just because you do good. Sometimes you do good, and that's when the devil gets busy.

Going to the school of hard knocks, you have been as nice as you can be to that family and here they come jumping on you. You've given everything in that relationship and here they come jumping on you. You work harder on that job than anybody else and here they come jumping on you. You're in a learning mode. Going to the school of hard knocks. It's alright, go ahead. Fuss at God when you're in third grade. You don't know much. Fuss at God while you're in fifth grade, Lord why are you letting this happen to me? Fuss at God while you're in eighth grade, but by the time you finish school, you'll know that things are not always what they seem.

Be not deceived, God is not mocked for whatever person sows against you, if you in the right. A whole lot of us want God to defend us when we in the wrong. When you in the wrong, ain't but one thing to say. Everybody, say, "I'm wrong!" It's hard to say, see that I'm wrong. You good and wrong! Everybody, say, "I'm wrong!" And don't make an excuse for yourself, don't say, "I'm wrong, but..." Ain't no but; when you wrong, you wrong. Practice it! Tell your neighbor on your right, "I'm sorry." I'm sorry. Neighbor, what do you do? Turn back and say, "It's alright." It's alright, it's alright. Get over it. Get over it. God is not mocked. Vengeance is mine, sayeth the Lord. You don't want God to shoot your enemy; you just want God to hit him out your face. And what God does to 'em, that's between them and God.

You remember this Greek story, the small Greek town. They erect a statue, a monument, to one of the men of the town who has done greatly in the Greek games. They erect a statue to him. And his friend, friend, is jealous of him. We gonna rehearse the mantra again about jealousy: God never gave anybody anything he wanted me to have. Say, "Yeah!" Say, "I ain't jealous of nobody, I got some stuff of my own." He's so jealous, he goes out after dark every night. He pushes on that statue. Tryin' to remove it from its pedestal. He pushes on that statue. One night, he achieves success! It falls off of the pedestal. It falls on him. It falls on him. Sticks and stones may break my bones, but God's word will always heal me.

That's the second thing. Tell your neighbor on the left, "God's word will always heal me." But what is God's word? What is God's word? What is, God's word is this: When your friends fail you, and there ain't nobody here that hadn't been failed by a friend, when your friend. See your enemies can't fail you 'cause you don't expect nothing of them. Your enemies can't hurt you

'cause you on guard against them. It's that person who walks with you, and turns the corner with you, and eats your bread, and wears your clothes, and spends your money, and goes out and talks about you behind your back. It's that grinning friend. Grinning like a Cheshire cat and then cutting you down as soon as you get outta sight.

Children, pay attention, you're gonna need this. Don't you take everybody to be your friend. I tell you about something, when your friends fail, God never fails! God never fails. He abides with me, He gives me victory, God never fails. Remember the Psalm that sing, "I been a young man, now I'm an old man, in all my years, never have I seen the righteous forsaken. Nor his seed go begging for bread."

God never fails, so don't you fail God. Don't fail yourself. Be the best that you can be.

How do you fail God? Well, you fail God by letting God feed you Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, and then when the bread is scarce on Saturday you start tripping. How do you fail God? You let your children get through junior high, and then in 10th grade, the boy does something stupid and the police knock on your door at midnight and you ask God, "Why are you doing this to me?" How do you fail God when everything is right? Your health is good, your money is good, your house rent is good, you're getting ready to buy a home, and then things go bad, and you drop outta church 'cause you mad with God. That's how you fail God.

How do you fail God when you've had 12 years in a marriage, a good marriage, then you have 12 bad months, and you gonna act like God is picking on you? Don't you know that the negative go with the positive in life? Don't you know that you can't have good without bad? You gonna have some good days and you gonna have some bad days, but through it all I've learned to trust in Jesus. I've learned to trust in God. God never fails.

Word of God will heal me. God never fails, don't you fail God. And don't you fail yourself. Psalmist, how do you fail yourself? Listen to his right answer: by flying into a rage. Any of y'all ever flew off the handle? Lady, wake him up. Anybody here ever flew off the handle? What're you mad about? What're you so mad about you go to 20,000 feet flying into a rage? Some people fly first class. Now you did something that I can't meaningfully relate to.

Speaker 2: Alright now!

I have no kindred feelings with you at this particular moment. Some fly first class, some fly coach. Bring it on! You give me some change, I'ma give you pay back. You hitchhike your way over here, I'll pay your way back. Bring it on!

But whether you fly first class or coach, whenever you fly into a rage, you always make a bad landing. Nothin' good comes out of it. A little therapy. But, you could have gone out in the alley and hollered. You coulda gotten in your car and closed the windows and hollered. You coulda gone into the bathroom and hollered. And you may have done a little good there, but this way, and when you land, you don't kill yourself. You kill your religion.

You heard people say, "I almost lost my religion"? The religion you can lose is the religion you've never found. You can't lose what you ain't found, and you can't find what you ain't lost. Sticks and stones may break my bones, but the word of God will always heal me. And this is the word of God. Listen to what the Psalmist is saying, "I screamed, I'm slipping Lord, and He was kind and saved me." When you're slipping into darkness, God'll reach out to you with God's right hand. The right hand of God will save you when you find yourself slipping into darkness, when you find yourself slipping into sin, when you find yourself slipping into a rage, the right hand of God will save you. When you look on your right hand and you got no friends, you look on your left hand, you got no friends, you look on your right hand, you got enemies, you look on your left hand, you got enemies--look up, children! Look and live! Look to Jesus Christ.

Sticks and stones will break my bones, the word of God always heals me. Third, third, third. What goes around, what? Comes around. Everybody, say out loud, "Actions have consequences." I dunno why we don't learn that lesson. If you don't study, what you gonna do on that exam? And when you fail, who you gonna blame? Don't be looking for people to blame. You get in that relationship with that clown, your momma told ya that joker wasn't no good and he hurts you, who you gonna blame? You gonna go after miss momma, miss hot mamma is so hot that she gotta have five people to cool her off, and then you get your heart broken. Who you gonna blame?

Actions have consequences. You eat them calories and then you gonna resent the movie star. Uh huh, you sitting up there and I done stepped on your fat. Actions have consequences. Do the crime, what? Do the crime, do the time. Now the judgment of God has shown that God makes you serve the time. The judgment of God has shown when your enemies throw at you, God lets you stand there and suffer the consequences of your very own actions. I knew I was developing a drinking habit, and everybody told me you better do something 'bout it while you can do something about it, but I say, "I can handle it, I'm just a weekend drinker. I can handle it." And then I ended up with a problem I couldn't handle. Now judgment says God lets me suffer the consequences of my own actions. But grace, God stands between me and the consequences. Here's the act over here, here the consequences over here, and somehow God places Jesus in the middle to protect me from my own foolishness.

What goes around, doesn't come around. God stops it from coming home to roost. And if I don't like Jesus, if I don't acknowledge Him, how can He protect me? If I say, "Jesus, get out of my way," then the stones got to hit me. Reciprocity has to hit me. The consequences of my action have to hit me. You raised them spoiled little children, they gonna end up in the gangs and streets and drugs, you got nobody to blame but yourself. But God bleeds with you. Give your children a work ethic! Teach your children to come to church! Teach your children to watch their mouth! Teach your children not to steal! Teach your children to do their homework!

God, God saves us from the boomerang effect. Well I'm coming home now, just wanna tell you. You've heard about the touch of Midas? Midas. Bacchus says, "Midas, ask for anything you

want, and I'll give it to you." Midas says, "Hey, grant that everything I touch will turn to gold." Bacchus says, "Oh, my goodness, uh oh. Alright, my word is out. You now have the touch of gold. Everything you touch will turn to gold."

Midas goes out and he touches a twig of a tree. It turns to gold. He touches a rock and it wakes up, turns to gold. Turns to gold. Touches an apple and it turns to gold. He goes home shouting, "I've got it made now!" He tells his servants, "Prepare a lavish feast!" Then at the feast, he reaches for bread. It turns to gold. He takes a cup of wine and drinks it. And it turns to gold on its way down. He says, "Oh my God! I'm gonna starve to death. I'm gonna starve!" He runs back to Bacchus. Bacchus, take away this gift you've given. Put it back like it was before. Bacchus tells him, "Go down to the river. Follow the river till you come to its fountain. There, plunge in your head and your body and you will come out whole. You will come out cleansed of your foolishness."

Don't you see? It's the same with you and me. I'm going down to the river of Jordan. I'm gonna be baptized by John the Baptist. I'm gonna wash my sins away. What can wash away my sin? Nothing but the blood of Jesus. What can make me whole again? Nothing but the blood of Jesus. I wanna be a boomerang for Jesus. I'm coming back to my senses. Take me back! Take me back, Dear Lord, to the place where I first believed you! Take me back! Take me back, Dear Lord. Take me back! Boomerangs come around in the name of Jesus.

C'mon and stand on your feet. Lift up both of your hands. Thank you, Lord, thank you, that we can, like your boomerangs, come back to our senses. Even as we've come to our feet, help us come to our senses. To see that when the darkness appears, God doesn't disappear. We don't need to disappear. God, the suicide rate is mounting. Help us come back to our senses. Lord the homicide rate, help us come back to our senses. Anything we can do to hurt ourselves, we are doing it. Lord, help us come back to our senses. Lower your hands children, but don't lower your hopes. Don't lower your expectations. God has sent you to us this morning. If you have no church home, come down one of the aisles and meet us here at the cross. God has sent you to help us help others of God's children. If you need a prayer, you're trying to get a prayer through for someone who's in crisis, probably not you, come down the aisle. Meet the prayer warriors here as we sing.

For prayers come to your right, to join come to your left. As we sing, won't you come. Come on children. Thank you.

“Man, That’s Your Mama!” Mother’s Day, May 12, 2001

If you've got a reason, one more time, raise your hand and say, "Praise the Lord!"

Congregation: Praise the Lord!

At the top of your voice, say, “Praise the Lord!”

Congregation: Praise the Lord!

Healing. Healing for the soul. Gaining the whole world and losing your soul.

Going from soup to steak. Even getting in your mama's face. Some of you here had an old-fashioned mama... tell you, “I brought you into this world... I brought you into this world and I'll take you out!” And you didn't call 911. Not just because they didn't have it then, you didn't call 911 because if you did, you would be calling the fire department to put out this fire in your soul. Thank you, mama!

Nobody has to love you. And your mama loves you enough to chastise you. Honor your mother. God says honor your father and your mother that your days may be long, full and meaningful on this earth. I need your permission to talk straight from the belly this morning, may I have it?

Brothers, I need your permission to talk about us males as it relates to females. May we have your permission, brothers? Alright, and don't worry--Father's Day is coming soon.

In your pew Bibles, turn to page 511. Keep your seats, 'cause we're only gonna take it a verse at a time. Page 511, and I'll read the ordinance. Proverbs 15, Proverbs 15, looking for his twin in there. A sensible son gladdens his father, a rebellious son saddens his mother. In the original Greek, instead of “saddens his mother,” “despises his mother.” A rebellious son despises his mother. That's just our subject we want you to pray with us on. Man, that's your mama!

It starts with the mind. Something is happening in the mentality of these sons you're raising, mothers. Something is going wrong with this matter of esteem. The brothers don't esteem themselves so that they have a balance. Now we just need a small example... an exemplar of what it is for some mother to raise a good son, one who's been exposed to fame and fortune, but who still remembers his Lord, who takes care of his children, who loves his wife, who doesn't have to go around proving anything.

Stand up, Dave Winfield! Stand up, Dave. Where is Dave? Stand up, Dave. Give him a hand!

Give your mama a hug today. Mama! Mama, you did a good job. You taught him the truth about yourself. I don't care if you hit 300 or 0, you still a fine man. I don't care if you tall and

buffed out or not, you still a fine man. You're the oldest man on Earth, I don't want you to think you any Uncle Tom fool, I want you to know you are God's child! I want you to know you are somebody! I want you to get you head together!

Something's wrong with our head. Every time you see us, we got something on the head: wrapped it, or curl it, or curlicued it, or dreadlocked it, always custom-made fools. Two-hundred dollars on your head! And ain't nothing in your head! Won't go to the library, but you go to the beauty salon! You gotta have your fingernails done and putting a dollar in the offering tray; something's wrong with your head! You gotta pose all the time! You out at the bus bench, catching the bus posing! If you ain't got a car, you ain't got no business to be acting big-shot! Get you a job and stop posing so much!

You can't even say to a woman, "I love you." I mean, mama, you know--I'm too wrong for you, mama. Mama, you know. That ain't your mama! Your mama probably made a mistake. Messing up your head. Mothers! You are raising future men, not future fools. Mama! You better pet your husband and raise your son, and start raising your husband and petting your son. Mama, how come your son ain't at church with you this morning? Mama, why is your son sleeping in, or sleeping out? Mama, where is your son? Mama! What's wrong with you messing up your son's mind?

Verse 14, a wise man is hungry for truth, while the mocker feeds on trash. We are the trash-talkingest generation in the history of the world. Don't do nothing but talk trash. Now, here you are, one of the world's best basketball players in the NBA, all you got to do is make the baskets and set up the plays, and you talking trash to the referee, talking trash to the crowd, talking trash to your coach, choking your coach. You got to be so bad, so everybody call you a bad nigga. Mama, you messed up his head!

Talking trash. And sisters, you got to stop loving trash. May I have your permission to talk this morning?

You say it's alright to talk from the gut? Is it alright?

Sister, can't you tell sugar from salt? How many women has he messed up? Seven! But you gonna be different, "I'm eight!" Can't you tell a fine strong man, he ain't got much, he ain't much to look at, he ain't hip, he's just as square as a city block! But he's going on to college! He's starting his career! He looks out after his money! He says "I love you!" He sends you flowers!

And you want something driving fast. His mama's car. Racing to the red light. Talking trash. You off in the right seat and he on the cellphone, whispering to his other woman out there, "Hey, mama. I be there tonight, yeah. I mean like, you know, you know, like you know," can't even talk! "Like, like, like, I mean, I mean, you know? You know? I mean, I mean." Ain't talking trash--just trash!

Mama! You can't even say his name! What's your name son? Well, nice to meet you, do you have a last name? Needs to learn the truth, 'cause that's when it comes down to truth or trash. Your granddaddy was for truth. Your grandmama was for truth. But you and I living in a trashy generation. Even trash the mama. You've heard all these CDs, and every time I hear it, I just wanna throttle 'em. I wanna throttle the group! I wanna throttle the ones who are paying it! I wanna throttle the ones who are buying it! I wanna throttle the ones who believe it! Calling our women bitches and whores! I just wanna throttle 'em! You ain't got no mama, who's a bitch or whore! What's wrong with your mind?! What's wrong with your mind?!

Truth or trash. That's trash. And that ain't us. Truth, the truth is your mama brought you into this world, and your mama is keeping you in this world, sometimes by herself. Alright? This ain't got nothing to do with the brothers, we'll talk to the brothers later. We've said before, brothers, anything you bring into this world, you ought to take care of. If you and the mama ain't getting along right, what's that got to do with the children? If you have to eat oatmeal, no meal, and miss meal, you ought to send the child support, and mama you ought not turn that boy against his daddy, let his daddy have him! Mama! Mama!

You have to raise your son by yourself. You have to raise your son by yourself. And don't blame nobody. Your mama tried to tell you that that fool you were messing with was a fool. But you a control freak. Your love so great, you can change him, even him don't wanna change him. You can't, won't offer somebody that they won't for themselves! You can't raise a grown man! You gotta start with his son. That woman you just talked trash to. Your mama brought you in this world, and is keeping you in this world, sometimes by herself. Divorce rate is 50 percent. And premarital counseling, we go at it good and hard. If you don't want truth, don't bring it here.

'Cause you got to learn in life, everything is a matter of giving and giving. You can't have a giver and a taker, you gotta have what?

Congregation: A giver and a giver!

A giver, a giver, and a giver! You can't say "I love you," and the brother says, "And I love you... and you, and you, and you." Don't worry. Jesus loved his mother. And when Joseph, his father, dies, Jesus takes care of his mother. He's a carpenter, he makes money, and he takes care of his mother. He has all the younger brothers and sisters, but he accepts the responsibility of an adult man! The one who took care of you, you take care of that person.

And on the cross, he remembered his mother. Looked down at his best friend and said, "Son, behold thy mother, standing next to him. Woman, behold thy son."

Took care of his mother, somebody didn't send their mama a flower today. But when they bring it down that aisle, then you gonna come with \$300-worth of flowers. And falling into the casket filled with guilt. 'cause all that hollering, screaming and showing your short shoot, when you come to that casket, you just bearing guilt. You ought to take care of your take-care, while your take-care is still living. Take care of the one who takes care of you. Take care of the one who

brought you into this world! Take care of the one who feeds you! Take care of the one who shelters you! Take care of your take-care.

There was a time when dad was there, and dad reinforced mama. Mama say, "Wash them dishes and make up that bed," and you "oh, mama," and daddy would say, "Do what your mama says!" Raise your hand if you had a daddy like that. Yeah. Brothers raise your hand if you're gonna be a daddy like that. Raise, reinforce, reinforce. Reinforce. You gotta take some responsibility right now.

We slip back a century. We were getting to the place where we knew that men and women were equal. Women and men, we equal. Now the brothers, done going into this stuff a mean man, and you my property--you chattel property. And some sisters are so silly, you're believing that stuff, you need a man to tell you what to do. You need a man to complete your life. You don't need a man to complete your life! You are complete within yourself. And if there is a complete man that comes along, then a complete man and a complete woman, make a complete marriage. But you don't need a man so bad, that you have to go around denigrating yourself! You have dignity! Sisters, touch somebody on your right and tell 'em, "I have dignity! I have worth!"

This woman crossing the street, this busy thoroughfare in this large city, and another man crossing, passes out. She rushes to him and the traffic stops, and she unbuttons his collar, seeing what she can do to help him. Brother walks up and pushes the woman aside, you know these important people. "I, I, I. Me, me, me." King-of-the-jungle type. Pushes her aside, he takes a pulse, and then he gets ready to do artificial respiration. She taps him on the shoulder and says, "When you get to that part where you call a doctor, I'm already here."

It starts with the mind. Tell your neighbor on the left, "It starts to the mind. Starts with the mind." Secondly, equally as important of two things. Neighbor turn back and ask 'em: "What's on your mind?" Sisters, we pray it's a song, you ain't gonna make it through life without a song. It's going to be another 50 years before we get the family problems straightened out, and we gonna take a month to set it aside for this thing where Jesus is gonna talk to us about family. And the brothers gonna make some commitments, and the bachelors are gonna start being bachelors, and the women are gonna know how to treat a man, instead of "Nya, nya, nya," so she got a real man, she gonna just talk to 'em gently. She's going to be his princess, not his mama. But you need a song.

Some of you had a mama or grandmamma, "Jesus keep me near the cross... to keep me from killing these kids... there, a precious fountain, free to all, a healing stream, flows from Calv'ry's..." remember your mama, "...mountain." Everybody, sing it!

Congregation: (singing)

"Be my glory 'til ever. 'til in my rapturous soul, shall find them. Rest beyond the rift."

And she was a different person. Went to that refrigerator to sip that Jesus! You fill it up before you, you'll fill it up again. Husband got a drinking problem, hard to bottle and sing "Jesus, keeping that old cross." Make it to church on Sunday! Somebody else sang "Nearer, My God, to Thee," somebody else sang "If it Had not Been for the Lord on my Side."

Tell me, what! What would I do? Where would I be? I guess it's a choice, of cheer, or gloom. You got another half a century, sisters. You better get ready for your cheer, 'cause life gonna send you enough gloom. It's gonna take us a half a century to unmess the brother's mind. Half of them don't know who they are, and the other half don't care. It's gonna take us a half a century sister, you got to cheer!

Look what verse 15 says, Proverbs 15: "When a man is gloomy, everything seems to go wrong. When he's cheerful, everything seems right." So, you make your choice, and you teach your sons to make their choice. The racist system is not going away in America, anytime soon. You got to teach your son, you got to be twice as good in order to get the same thing that the white man gets. You better teach your son, you gotta stand tall, when everything is trying to push you down. You gotta teach your son to respect the women, and it ain't having sex that makes a man. You don't have to have sex when you 15, 16, 17, 18, don't you let sex have you; you gotta make a decision. Don't go with the street gang, go with God's gang. You gotta learn how to put some cheer in your life.

Better are little, better are little with reverence for God than great [with no faith]. It is better to eat soup with someone you love, than steak with someone you hate. That's the concept of stewardship. That's why, when you're offering trade passes, you put God first! That's someone you love! If you want soup, ain't nothing wrong with soup! Soup kept your mommy here! Soup kept your grandmamma here! Soup kept you alive! Ain't nothing wrong with soup. You got a soup salary. Trying to do Beverly Hills food. You gotta learn to do without. If you can't afford a BMW, get you a car that you can afford. And when I say afford, I do mean a Ford. You can't afford a five-hundred-dollar suit, a hundred-dollar suit will do!

Thank you, mama. A lazy fella has trouble all through life, the good man's path is easiest. Sensible son gladdens his father, a rebellious saddens his mother. If he turns out good, daddy takes credit for him. If he turns out bad, his mama's fault. Everybody say, "Thank you, mama!"

Congregation: Thank you, mama!

When I'm coming home, I just wanna tell you about this captain of nurses in the war zone. Well, she's a sensitive person, and when soldiers are dying, she never fools them that they're gonna live. She tries a way to tell 'em the truth. As an 18-year-old, he's dying, he's dying. He asks her, "Am I dying?" "What do you think?" He said, "I think I am." "Do you know how to pray, son?" "All I know, 'Now I Lay Me Down to Sleep'." "That's good for a start. Go ahead and pray it." "My mama taught it to me, will you hold my hand while I pray?"

Normally she said I wouldn't ever do this, because I'm a supervisor and I told my staff don't get too emotionally involved, when I couldn't just stand there and hold his hand. I got in bed with him, I put my arms around him, and I held him, and I rocked him, and I told him "Son, it's gonna be alright." I kissed him on his cheek, and then he said, "I love you, mommy." And he died. I got up, expecting the staff to mock me, to laugh at me. But instead, they were weeping with me. I know his mother will be wondering how he died. She's gonna sit down and write her a letter, and not only tell the mother he loved you, but he didn't die alone.

Everybody, say, "I learned to pray in my mother's heart."

Congregation: I learned to pray in my mother's heart!

I learned to walk in my mother's heart.

Congregation: I learned to walk in my mother's heart.

I learned to talk in my mother's heart. I learned table manners in my mother's heart. I learned courage in my mother's heart. And brother, my mother's alive with God. Oh, woman! Behold thy son! Behold thy son! Behold thy son! Thank you!



Left to right: Janie Williams Murray, mother (1909-1932); Minnie Saunders Murray, stepmother (1913-1988); Bernadine Murray, wife (1930-2013)

“Above the Madness”

September 16, 2001

Delivered following the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks

Holy Spirit, you're welcome in this place! Thank you for walking with us down the aisle. Thank you for calling us right now. Thank you for telling us of the good news that comes in the morning. Thank you for waking us up in our souls, healing for the soul. Thank you for Jesus. Everyone, say, "Jesus."

Congregation: Jesus!

Thank you for Jesus. Everyone, say, "Jesus."

Congregation: Jesus!

Thank you for Jesus. Thank you for life, healing for the soul. Thank you, Lord!

Thank you. My unconquerable soul, unconquerable because of purifying presence. Everyone, say, "Purifying presence."

Congregation: Purifying presence!

Purifying presence. That presence is in the midst of us. Balcony, can you feel it?

Can you feel it in the nave? Can you feel it in the alcove? Can you feel it in the plaza? Can you feel it in the choir? Purifying presence. That purifying presence says, "You're caught up in madness. Only don't let the madness be caught up in you."

You're caught up in poison, only don't let the poison be caught up in you. So many have said before Tuesday, September 11, "I had an eerie feeling. I had an eerie feeling that something was about to happen." And then when it happened, so many said, "I had an eerie feeling." And now, here in the days after, we have an eerie feeling. It could have been me! It could have been me.

And the Holy Spirit says, "It was you!"

Remember John Donne, the poet, said, "Ask not to know for whom the bell tolls. It tolls for thee!" No man is an island. No woman is an island. We are part of a peninsula! We all stand together. No one stands alone. Come Holy Spirit, healing presence. Purifying presence. We do not stand alone. We stand now in a moment. If you turn to page 311 in your pew Bibles, and our radio audience. And thank you for your healing messages. Two Kings, chapter four. We're going to begin reading in verse 38. Please rise. Page 11, Two Kings, chapter 4, verse 38.

Elijah, Elisha now returned to Gilgal. There was a famine in the land. One day as he was teaching the young prophets, he said to Gehazi, "Make some stew for supper for these men." One of the young men went out into the field to gather vegetables, came back with some wild gourds. He shredded them and put them into a kettle without realizing that they were poisonous. But after the men had eaten a bite or two, they cried out, "Oh sir. There's poison in this stew!" "Bring me some meal," Elisha said. He threw it into the kettle and said, "Now it's all right. Go ahead and eat!" And then it didn't harm them.

There's madness. Take your seats, and tell your neighbor the subject of our sermon: above the madness. Tell your neighbor. Tell your neighbor. Come on.

Above, above the madness. We're going to talk about two things. In a real stew, and delivered by God. We're in a real stew. Some of your reserves are going to be called up. Some of us here may have to sacrifice everything we have. We're in a real stew. Elisha returns home to Gilgal, and there is a famine in the land.

You and I are from the same hometown as Elisha. There's a famine in the land. People are hungry for the Word of God. People are hungry for the Gospel of God. People are hungry on the inside. People have food on the outside, but people are hungry on the inside. You got up and came to church this morning. Some got up as early as five o'clock, six o'clock. You come from 14 different cities, hungry for the Word of God. There's a famine.

There's a famine in Gilgal. Elisha remembers what you and I remember about Gilgal. Choir, are any of you old enough to remember, when the neighbor from next door would come and knock at the back door and ask you for a cup of flour? A week later, you'd go and borrow a cup of sugar, some salt. Anybody remember what cornmeal is? Anybody here know where hot water cornbread comes from? Oh, and when you cook some, you cook twice as much, and you took the other portion next door to Miss Suzie.

Didn't have any money. What'd Peter tell the man begging? "Silver or gold have I none. But such as I have, I give to you." In the name, not of Peter, in the name of Jesus--rise up! This is nine centuries before Jesus. Elisha is the son in the ministry of Elijah, ninth-century prophet. Elijah, so close to God that he's one of the three men, along with Enoch and Jesus, who was translated to God. They've just went to heaven.

Elisha says there's a famine in the land. People don't love beyond themselves. Everybody, I love me! I love me. I love myself from me. People don't love beyond themselves. People don't reach beyond themselves. People don't look out beyond themselves. They only look out for themselves. There's a famine in the land.

But don't you give up. Don't you dare even think about giving up. You remember that in the midst of bad times, you have a good God. Good God, don't let bad times make you bad! Good God! Don't let mean times make you mean. Good God, don't let messy times make you messy.

Good God, don't let negative times make you negative. Good God, don't let cynical times make you cynical. In bad times, we have a good God!

Elisha calls one of them Gehazi. Gehazi's Elisha's right arm. His right-hand man. Elisha is there with the students of Elisha. He says, "Gehazi, go make some stew. Go make some stew." Well, wait a minute. Now you said student. There's a famine in the land. Things are falling apart, and you're talking about student and school? Yes. Elisha has some ministerial students. They called them the sons of the prophet. A prophet always has sons, and he teaches them the Word of God. Don't you see the point? Even though you're starving for the bread, you're also starving for the bread of life. Don't ever set aside the Word of God for the word of man or woman when you're starving. Stay under the Word!

Gehazi doesn't argue with Elisha because Gehazi understands you cannot live by the word alone. Nine hundred years later, Jesus would teach you cannot live by bread alone. Caught up in a materialistic society, but here we learn you cannot live by the Word alone. These so-called Word churches that don't feed anybody, don't clothe anybody, don't house anybody, don't transport anybody, don't lift anybody--just stay in church for three hours, hollering about the Word, and then close the church door when homeless people sleeping on the church steps. You've got to have more than the Word. The Word must become flesh!

Gehazi, Gehazi make a stew. Not make a mess. Some of us are real mess-merchants. We are caught up in the madness of mess! Some of us don't do anything but create mess everywhere we go. We come to the choir, we create mess. We come into the ministry, we create mess. We on the stewardess board, we create mess. We on the usher board, we create mess. We get up with a bad attitude and give everybody else our mess. We're on the parking lot, we create mess. We on the job, we create mess. We in the relationship, we create mess. Everywhere we go, we just create mess! Mess. Tell your neighbor, "Don't be so messy!"

Gehazi, Gehazi sends out one of the disciples to get some herbs, some vegetables. Goes out in the field, and he gets some wild gourds. Everybody, say, "Gourds."

Congregation: Gourds!

He brings them back and puts them in the kettle of hot water. Any of y'all remember what a kettle is? Anybody remember them big boiling-pots in the backyard that you wash clothes in, and then you have a big kettle with fire running and wood that you bought from the wood man, and then the ice that you bought from the ice man, and then the mail man? And there was also a saving man—Jesus--when nothing was in the pot. You had the bread man. Puts it in the kettle. Ain't no meat! This is meatless stew. When you ain't got nothing but wild gourds, what do you eat? When you ain't got nothing but oatmeal, what do you eat?

Congregation: Oatmeal!

When you can only afford a Ford, what do you buy?

Congregation: Ford!

And when I say a Ford, I mean a Ford! When you can't afford to buy a home, what do you do?

Congregation: Rent!

Rent. And then you come on and see our home folks that's in the bulletin. Why are you paying rent when you can own your own home? But the point is, take what you have, and work with it. Take what you have. We are caught up in insanity! That's what you have right now. You've got insanity, in the world. Take what you have. Don't let it take you!

Grandmother takes a little grandson to the children's fair. He has freckles galore. Any of you all have freckles? Oh, God! You went through some things, didn't you? There's one booth where one of the local artists is painting pictures on children's faces, a tiger claw. And the line is long. He gets in the line. The little girl in front of him looks at him and says, "With all those freckles on your face, there's no room for a picture."

Yes, you caught it! Touch your tongue. Touch your tongue, everybody. Now say, "Behave!"

Congregation: Behave!

Grandmother sees grandson just sort of drop his head. She stoops down and says, "Ah, I just love freckles! All of my life, I have wanted freckles. There is nothing more beautiful than freckles."

"Really Grandma? Really?"

"Tell me one thing in the world that's more beautiful than freckles?"

Thinks for a while. Then he looks her in the eyes with love and says, "Wrinkles!"

Take the thing you have! If you're in a stew, don't make it a bigger stew. We're in a real stew! Secondly, delivered by God. Tell your neighbor on your left, "God is in the delivery business."

Congregation: God is in the delivery business!

Oh. yes, yes, yes, yes, yes, yes, yes! God is in the delivery business. God delivers us from other people's foolishness. God delivers us from our own foolishness! God saves us from ourselves. God helps us. God saves us. God saves us from ourselves! If it had not been for the Lord on my side, tell me, what would I do if it hadn't been for the Lord?

God saves us from our own poison! That one who went out and brought in those vegetables didn't know that they were poison. He put them in the pot. He knows the Word of God better

than he knows herbs. That's like some of us. We know the Word of God better than we know God's people. We come to church, expecting the church to be filled with saints. We into the Word, into the Word, but we can't tolerate somebody who ain't into the Word. We are holy! We are so heaven-bound, we're no earthly good. We enter the Word, but we don't know the herbs.

A lot of times you can mean well and do poorly by not understanding. When you make a soup, you got to know what you're putting into it, don't you? You have to be careful what you're putting into it. The disciples take a bit or two. The sons of the prophets take a bite or two and you know, they spit it out and say, "There's poison in the stew! There's poison in the bowl! There's poison in the pot!"

How did they know? God has given you taste buds. So, you have spiritual taste buds. Sons of the prophets, you cannot eat what everybody's cooking up. Some of you know, "I don't eat that 'cause I don't know who cooked it." How many times have you said, "I don't eat everybody's cooking"?

They don't like you! They're back in the kitchen spitting in the stew. I don't eat, I don't eat everybody's cooking. You can't accept everything that's brought to you. When you're hungry, you got to be careful what you eat. When you're hungry, you got to be [wondering] who brings you what. When you're hungry, the devil will come along and offer you some poison.

You can't eat everybody's cooking. Elisha calls Gehazi again. Gehazi, bring me some meal! Hey, look at that. He takes the meal, and he pours it in the mix. In the mix. In the mix. Then he says, "It's all right now! Come and eat." And they stuffed themselves. You remember when Elisha met the bitter waters? And he cured the bitter waters with salt. Now he meets the poisoned stew, and he cures the poisoned stew with meal. But are we talking meal? No!

We're talking about, be sure God is in the mix! If God is in the mix, you can't fail. We're standing here surrounded by insanity. There's a purifying presence. God is in the mix! If your life has a war going on in it right now, there's a purifying presence. God is in the mix! God will take care of the poison. God--if only you put God in the mix!

Man goes to his sun deck, his favorite sunflower. "Oh, Lord!" You know us. "I don't know what I'm going to do!" Us.

"Times are so hard." Us. "He left me. She left me. I caught him in bed. And he wasn't singing a solo. Times are so hard! My son has had to call himself into action. My daughter's on drugs. I don't have a friend. Times are so hard." He knew that this sunflower was dying. Only good now for seeds. Its carcass would make seed for others to grow. He was despondent.

I want to tell you something, children of God. Whenever you hang your head, that's one dimension. The other dimension is to look up. There's a purifying presence. There is One who

can lift you above the madness. That one won't take the madness away, but that one will lift you above the madness.

He comes out the next morning, at sunrise, to have a funeral service for his sunflower. Great God from glory, that sunflower is looking up, facing the rising sun! That flower was just looking down because the sun had gone down.

Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning! In the morning, that sunflower looked up. In the morning, that sunflower was alive! By and by, when the morning comes, I'll rise again. Come on and stand to your feet. Ain't no power on Earth... (singing)... Take it up a chord or two.



Left to right: James Lawson, civil rights leader; Rev. Murray; John Hope Bryant, founder of Operation HOPE; and President George W. Bush

“It Ain’t About You, Brother or Sister”

September 1, 2002

Now if you glad you woke up above ground this morning, if you saw the ceiling when you woke up, let everything that saw the ceiling say, "Praise the Lord!"

Now point up and say, "Order my steps!"

Order my steps. Traveling in order. Traveling in order. And what is the order? Put your God first! Everybody, say, "Put your God first. Put your neighbor second. And put yourself third."

Point to yourself and say, "I'm third."

Put your God first, put your neighbor second, put yourself third. Last.

How do you get to that place? Because it's human nature to put yourself first. And even to put your God second. And to put your neighbor third, or at best, to put your God first and put yourself second and to put your neighbor third. But here's how you get self-discovery. Self-discovery through self-surrender. Everybody, say, "I surrender, Lord!"

Self-discovery through self-surrender.

About the best advice, missionaries, you can give some people is to say, be yourself.

Tell your neighbor on your right, "Don't be yourself." No, no, tell them, "Be your best self." Don't be yourself. You got to learn self-surrender.

These two little children riding this wooden horse. And the little boy says to the little girl, if one of us would get off, that would leave more room for me. For me!

Here we are, Matthew 16, verse seven, page 762. Mathew 16, verse 24. Then Jesus said to the disciples, if anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let that person deny self. Take up your cross and follow me. Deny yourself. Take up your cross. Follow me. That suggests our subject: It's not about you brother, or sister.

It's not about you. The battle's not yours. Who does it belong to? It's the Lord's! The battle's not yours. It's the Lord's. We began reading now at verse 21. From then on, Jesus began to speak plainly to his disciples about going to Jerusalem. And what would happen to him there. That he would suffer at the hands of the religious leaders. That he would be killed. And that three days later, he would be raised to life again. But Peter took him aside to [get things] straight with him.

Heaven forbid, sir, he said. This is not going to happen to you. Jesus turned on Peter and said, "Get away from me, you Satan! You are dangerous trap to me. You are thinking merely from a human point of view and not from God's."

The battle's not yours. It's the Lord's.

This is my Father's world. Sometimes, we forget that this is not your world, or my world. This is my Father's world. And the only question is, which one do you put first? The world of your Father or the Father of your world? Some of us put my Father's word ahead of my Father. Some of us put the anxiety and the neurosis of my Father's world ahead of the Father, who is the Creator of the world. Some of us put the created thing ahead of the One who created the thing. Everything on Earth, God created, and God wants you and me to enjoy it. But God explicitly says, don't get confused around here. Put God first and put the created things second.

Some of us are getting drunk on this world. Some of us are drunk on what we wear, what we eat, what we drink, what we ride, what we have in the bank. We are drunk on what instead of the cause of what. Don't get drunk on the thing. The battle's not yours. It's whose? It's the Lord's!

One drunken old man, stumbles by the river where the preacher's out there baptizing. By mistake he stumbles on into the water to be baptized. The preacher says, "Are you ready to meet Jesus?"

"Yeah preacher, I'm ready to find Jesus!"

The preacher takes him under the water and when he comes up, "Did you see Jesus? Did you meet Jesus?"

"No, I didn't see Jesus."

Takes the drunk down under the water again, brings him up, says, "Did you meet Jesus that time?"

"No, I didn't meet Jesus!"

Exasperated, the preacher takes him under and holds him under for 30 seconds brings him up:

"My God, man, did you meet Jesus that time?"

He says, "Preacher, are you sure this is where He fell in?"

In this old drunk man, we see the conflict of our two natures that Jesus is talking about. Our human nature and our divine nature. Our human nature can lead us into some strange paths.

Can it? Our human nature can make us do some things we wouldn't dream about doing while we are sober. Our human nature often leads us into the paths of error.

To err is human. Tell your neighbor on your left, "To err is human!"

Yes. Those are the words that we have repeated many, many times. To err is human. Sophocles says those words. To err is human. Robert Burns says those words. To err is human. Dryden says those words. To err is human. Pope says those words. But none of those four can make it as plain as Pope does. Because Pope captures the spirit of Jesus Christ. Pope captures the spirit of the conflict between our human nature and our divine nature. Pope adds a line: To err is human, to forgive is divine.

That's where we get our great strides in favor of God. Whenever someone makes a mistake, we can forgive them. They make the mistake because they are human. We forgive them because they are divine. We forgive ourselves because we are divine. The greatest challenge you have is not to forgive your neighbor, not to forgive your enemy, not to forgive the one who mistreats you. The greatest challenge you have is to forgive yourself.

Everybody, point to your chest and say, "I forgive you."

I forgive you! Put it behind you. Bring it here to the altar this morning and leave it. And then you'll walk up the aisle a totally different person. Burden down, Lord! Burden down. When I laid my burden down. Remember the Bible is not yours; it's the Lord's. 'Cause you can't fight Satan. Satan got more tools than you'll ever have. The only instrument you have to fight the tempter is the scale of almighty God, our Lord. And God will say to you, no matter what you've done, I can forgive it for you this morning. The battle is not yours. I want you to know I'm in your corner. Forgive yourself. Then forgive your neighbor as you forgive yourself.

One sister stands in her younger sister's room. Her younger sister is 13 and out. And the older sister is bringing the laundry to various rooms of the house. And as she comes in--oh, my goodness!--she sees her younger sister's diary. You know, sibling rivalry. She's so jealous of her younger sister. Her younger sister has a winning smile, a winning personality, a very sharp mind, only makes A's in school. The teachers all respect her.

She is so jealous of her sister and she says, "Ah, here in her diary. Now I can find a weapon. Because I know my name is in here and I know she's gonna be talking about me and castigating me, and putting me down. Now I've got the ultimate weapon." And she starts scanning through the diary. And sure enough, there is her name and what is written about it: "My hero is my sister. I want to be like her when I grow up. She's the finest human being on the face of this Earth."

Oh, my Lord, the sister collapses to the floor. Her legs seem to fail her. And on the floor, she makes a commitment to the Lord. When I rise from here I'm going to find my sister and I'm going to hug my sister and I'm going to tell my sister I thank her. I'm going to apologize to my

sister. And then, she adds, and then, I'm going to forgive myself. You can't love somebody until you love yourself. You can't love yourself until you get the right order for yourself. Put God first. Put your neighbor second. Put yourself third.

Peter doesn't understand that yet. Peter pulls Jesus over to the side. Man, don't be telling them brothers that you gonna be killed in Jerusalem. You're the Messiah! Nothing like that is gonna happen to you. Don't say that Jesus. Jesus calls Peter the tempter, the Satan. 'Cause Jesus is scared. Jesus is human. Jesus says, "Peter, cut me some slack. Peter, don't tempt me when I want to be tempted anyway. Peter, I got to go into Jerusalem. I got to die Peter. And I want you to know, Peter, you got to carry on. Didn't I tell you a few minutes ago, Peter--I gave you the keys to the Kingdom! And the keys to the Kingdom also open up the doors to understanding. Peter, you've got to learn to put yourself in proper perspective. You've got to put yourself last. And if you put yourself last, God will take care of it this morning."

If you believe him, come on and say, "Yeah!" It ain't about you, brother or sister. The battle's not yours; it's the Lord's!

Secondly, we all fight the same battle. Now here we go. Mathew 16:24. Then Jesus said to all the disciples. Imagine yourself one of the disciples now: "If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, then you must deny yourself. Take up your cross and follow me. For anyone who keeps his life for self, himself, herself, shall lose it. Anyone who loses his life for me shall find it again. What profit is there if you gain the whole world, good bank account, and lose eternal life. What can be compared with the value of eternal life? For I, the Son of Mankind, shall come with my angels and the glory of my Father and judge each person according to his or her deeds. Some of you standing right here now will certainly see me coming in my Kingdom."

We all fight the same battle. Jesus must not bear the cross alone. There's a cross for what?

Congregation: Everyone!

And there's a cross for everyone! That's what Jesus is telling Peter. You're telling me, "No I'm not gonna bear the cross, Peter!"

I'm telling you, you won't bear a cross. All of the disciples died a violent death except John on the Island of Patmos, died of old age. Jesus says, "I want you to follow me and I want you to follow me all the way." Some of us follow Jesus through green pastures. Some of us follow Jesus beside still waters. Some of us follow Jesus to the dining room table, when your cup runneth over. But when we get to the Valley of the Shadow of Death. When the valley appears, we disappear. Some of us follow Jesus when we got a good job. But when the job is threatened, we stop coming to church. We stop coming to the altar. We stop believing in God. Some of us follow Jesus when the summertime is here. But when winter comes in our lives, we fall away. You gotta follow Jesus all the way! Where He leads me, I will follow. I'll go with Him. Go with Him! How far? All the way! All the way. All the way.

Some of us are living in halfway houses, in halfway houses. Last night there was some 250 people in our substance abuse program. There's a three-day marathon. They're across the street now. Many of them live in halfway houses. Some of us in faith live in halfway houses. We are half in faith and half out of faith. We're half in belief and half out of belief. We are half in doubt and half in assurance. We are half in the church, and half out the church. We are half following Jesus and half falling away from Jesus. We need to stop living in halfway houses and follow the formula that Jesus gives to you and me to go all the way!

First of all, deny yourself. Everybody, say, "Deny yourself." That doesn't mean to put yourself down. We done had enough of that haven't we? And don't put yourself down. Don't put yourself down. That's when we act so angry, 'cause we have been put down too much. Is your color alright? Say, "Praise the Lord!"

Some of you didn't say it 'cause you're still mad, 'cause God made you Black. Is your color alright? Is your hair alright? Are your feet alright? Are your legs alright? Is your history alright? Is your God alright?

To deny yourself don't mean to put yourself down. Just mean to put yourself in perspective. It ain't about you, brother. It ain't about you, sister. This whole world is spinning on its axis right now. And if this world stopped for a microsecond and let you off, in another microsecond it would go right on spinning. It ain't about you brother or sister. When they say put yourself in perspective, deny yourself. They mean, don't let yourself escape all that you see around you. It's a wonderful world! It's a wonderful day! I'm having a good time in worship! It's good to be alive! I'd rather be alive than its opposite. I don't have a lot in my pocketbook, but I got a lot in my heart. I don't have a lot of people I can pick up the phone and borrow \$100 from. But I can get to Jesus on his royal telephone.

To deny yourself means to make the best of every moment. Every moment. Every moment. 'Cause if you're obsessed with yourself, you just think of all the bad things that can happen to you. And there are so many there. But tell your neighbor on your left, "This is beautiful!"

Deny yourself. Neighbor, don't turn back and say, "What's so beautiful 'bout it?"

See, you still affirming yourself. Deny yourself! And then God will open up a whole new world.

This little girl riding on the train, sitting in her mother's arms. "Oh, mommy look--the horses!"

"Yes, darling! Yes."

"Mama look--the houses!"

"Yes, darling. I know."

"Oh, mommy the trees, the birds, the..."

She's embarrassed. She turns to the man in the next seat and says, "Please excuse her. She's still at that age where you get excited about everything."

That's where we come in. Would you rather be a child who can get excited about everything, or a cynical old adult who doesn't get excited about anything?

Let me again remind you of that man who spent his whole life complaining, then when he died, he calls to be put on his tombstone: I told y'all I was sick!

Tell your neighbor on your right, "Just dying to prove it."

Deny yourself! Take up your cross. Look, here's what Matthew is telling us for Jesus. When you deny yourself, it creates space. It creates space. There's room in your life when you deny yourself. It creates space. Now, nature abhors a vacuum. God abhors a vacuum. The Holy Spirit abhors a vacuum. So, the minute that vacuum is created, your cross comes in. Your cross is your mission in life. For the children that's going to school right now. For dad and mamas raising their children. Going to work. Tithing in the church. Working in the community. Establishing a home. Getting a fund ready to take. Taking care of their grandparents. Working in the community. The cross comes in. It focuses you.

A lot of us are unhappy in life 'cause we ain't about nothing. We are on the ant syndrome. When the ant is hungry, I eat. When I'm thirsty, I drink. When I'm lonely, I go find me an anthill. Yes. That ant is just reflex action. But that human being, you can be about something beyond your appetite. You can be about something beyond your visceral mode. You can be about something beyond what you can see. You can see the invisible. You can hear the inaudible. You can touch the untouchable. You can reach the unreachable star. But you gotta dream big!

So, then, denying yourself creates space. Taking up your cross fills space. And following Me gives you focus. It takes you somewhere in life. If you just heading for retirement, you ain't going nowhere. Sister, nobody prays for your husband more than Pastor. But if you holding your breath 'til your husband comes, you ain't about nothing. Brothers, you been through hell, and going through hell. But if you fixated on nothing but getting out of hell instead of getting to heaven, you ain't about nothing.

When Jesus comes and says follow me, it's like in the military when you're in that second rank or that third rank. Your eyes are fixed on the head of the person in front of you. And you can almost count the hairs [on his head], and you following him. Where he leads me, I will follow. And when Jesus say right turn. Follow me. Catch the rhythm. Catch the rhythm of life. Catch the rhythm of the life. For what does it profit you to have a million dollars in the bank. God bless you if you have, but if you think you gonna get off this planet alive, I got news for you.

Remember that man who asked, that rich man? How much did he leave? He left all of it. He left all of it. Maybe following Jesus should go down by the seashore. And you'll see some children, a

boy and a little girl building a sandcastle. Oh, God! If we could build sandcastles again! And they have it there, the turrets, and they have the towers and the gate. It's a magnificent work of creative art by children. But then a great big wave washes it away. I expected to see them start crying and to go into the despair. You know how it happens when life washes your castle away? But instead, they run up on the beach, laughing and holding hands. Laughing and holding hands! And they start to build another castle. The battle's not yours, it's the Lord's.

We all fight the same battles. All of us are building on shifting sand. No matter what you have, you are building on shifting sand. And the tidal wave may come along and wash it away, but somebody's holding your hand, laughing with you this morning. For all you can say is on Christ the solid rock I stand! All of the ground is sinking sand. Thank you, Lord, for putting me first. Therefore Lord, I put you first! In the name of Jesus. Rise to your feet! Rise to the occasion. Give God a hand! Give God some glory! Give God the battle!



Rev. Murray with Edward and Louise, his brother and sister.



Rev. Murray with Bernadine and their son Drew.

“I'm Going to Trust in the Lord”

May 23, 2004

Everybody, come on and say, "Taking the high ground."

Congregation: Taking the high ground!

Tell your neighbor, "I'm anchored in the Lord."

Congregation: I'm anchored in the Lord!

I'm anchored in the Lord. Anchored in the Lord! Yeah, you and I on board the old ship of Zion. To the old ship of Zion. On board the old ship of Zion, you don't put your trust in the anchor of the ship. You put your trust in the Master of the ship. The Lord of the ship, my soul is anchored in the Lord.

On board the old ship of Zion, you know that anchors can go up and anchors can go down. But the Master of the vessel is always up. The Lord of your life and mine is always up. If you are up for the Lord, put your fist in the air, and say, "Praise the Lord!" Praise the Lord. Sometimes you get caught up in a storm.

As both choirs have been singing of our theme this morning, somebody here right now may be caught up in a storm. A woman calls her pastor by phone. She's utterly distressed, has a bad case of nerves. The pastor hears a child in the background--he thinks the sound of a child. He says, "Is that your child I hear?" "Yes, pastor."

"My goodness, is he as nervous and as distraught as you are?" "Of course not, pastor." "Then why are you? Why don't you learn something from that child?"

She says, "Well, that child trusts in me, and lets me do the worrying." He says, "Can't you transplant that experience? Why don't you trust in God, and let God do the worrying?"

I trust in God. I know he cares for me. Upon the land, on the rolling sea, for whom what may, from day to day, tell your neighbor on your left, "My heavenly Father watches over me!" Then, in your pew Bibles, turn to page 894, in your green Bibles, and then page 634 in your red Bibles. We're going to be looking at Acts 27.

Keep your seats, because there are going to be [a lot of Bible readings] this morning. Acts 27, our key verse is verse 40. They finally decided to try, cutting off from the anchors, cutting from the anchors, and leaving them in the sea. They lowered the rudders, raised the foresail and headed ashore. They just cut off the anchors. Everybody, say, "I'm going to trust in the Lord!"

Do you believe that some people really come to church and don't trust in God?

Congregation: Yeah!

Do you all believe that? Ask your neighbor, "Are you one of them people?" Do you trust in the Lord? I trust in God, I know He cares for me. Upon the land, on the rolling sea. How do you worship God and not trust in God? If you say really, I trust in God, tell God in a good loud voice, "I trust in God!"

Congregation: I trust in God!

I'm going to trust in the Lord. Then you're going to find three times. One, there's a time to listen. There's a time to listen. Let's begin reading here at verse 21. Acts 27, verse 21: "No one had eaten for a long time. Paul and the crew were caught up in a storm. But, finally, Paul called the crew together and said, "Men, you should have listened to me in the first place, and not left Fair Havens."

[Paul continued], "You would have avoided all this injury and loss. But cheer up, not one of us will lose our lives, even though the ship will go down. For last night an angel of the Lord, angel of God--to whom I belong and whom I serve--stood beside me and said, "Don't be afraid, Paul, for you will surely stand trial before Caesar. What's more, God has granted your request and will save the lives of all those sailing with you. So, take courage, for I believe God! It will be just as God said. But we will be shipwrecked on an island."

A time to listen. It's no accident that God gave you and me two ears and one tongue. Is it your experience that most of us listen too little and talk too much? Two ears and one tongue. That indicates we are to listen twice as much as we talk.

Now, you remember the wise men of the testament saying that man, woman has trained every creature on earth? We've trained the rhinoceros, we've trained the lion, we've trained the elephant, we have trained the dog, we have trained the cat, we have trained every animal on earth, except the tongue. It's hard to train the tongue, 'cause the tongue is too busy talking, instead of listening.

God says there's a time to listen and there's a time to talk. You should learn to listen twice as much as you talk. If you had been listening when your mama told you, you wouldn't have gotten into trouble. If you would have been listening when your daddy told you, you wouldn't have gotten into trouble. If you had been listening when the Holy Spirit told you, you wouldn't have gotten into trouble.

How many times have you said, "My mind told me so and so." The next time your mind tells you something, listen to it, and you may not get all caught up in a storm. Every time you talking when you should be listening, you're going to end up in a storm. Paul is on board being taken to Rome as a prisoner. Luke is with him, and Luke writes this portion in the book of Acts.

Paul says, "Look here, captain, look here owner of the ship, I think we should stay here in Fair Havens. It's October; winter is coming. I have sailed the Mediterranean more than most people, and I know you don't want to go out on that ocean at this time of year. We should stay here in Fair Havens."

But the owner of the ship is interested in profit. You know how we get when we get money. We get a little bit crazy. How when we want money, we forget to want the Word of God that will take care of everything we need. The owner of the ship says, "No, let's go on to Phoenix." The captain of the ship says, "Yes, let's go on to Phoenix. Don't stay here in Fair Haven, go on to Phoenix."

That's where somebody may be here right now, 'caught between Fair Haven and Phoenix. Caught between trusting and obeying and going on and doing what you want to do. Caught between safety and security. Most of us think more of safety than we think about security. When you think about safety, you're taking care of yourself. When you think about security, you're thinking God will take care of you. If you go on you said to Phoenix, you will find safety and security in Phoenix.

But if you stay here in Fair Haven, Paul is saying, "God is here with you, and wherever you are, you have security. Wherever God is, you have security." If you in prison, you have security. If you in church, you have security. If you caught the bus here this morning, you have security. If you in the choir, you have security. Wherever God is, there is security. If you believe it, say it!

They go on to Phoenix on their way to Rome, they don't stay in Fair Haven. They just go on, and then they get caught up in a storm. Paul is so human. Paul says, "I told you so." You know how we human beings like to say, I told you so. You all won't listen to me when I told you. I told you so. If you'd done what I told you to do, we wouldn't be in this storm right now. I told you so!

Paul chastises, 'cause that's our human nature. We like to chew each other out. We like to say, "I told you so." Every time you get a divorce, your friends say, "I told you so." But then what, if you were so sure that it weren't going to work, why were you my bridesmaid? Why were you my best man? Why didn't you tell me early about it?

Yeah, my chance to wear my Tuxedo. I know it weren't going nowhere. I told you so. Paul chastises them. Then Paul empathizes with them. He sympathizes with them. Whenever you and I put somebody down, the next step is to put them up. We put them down because we are human. We put them up, is because we are superhuman.

We put them down because we are natural. We put them up because we're supernatural. The worst in Paul says, "I told you so." The best in Paul says, "Cheer up, I've talked to an angel of the Lord. Everything's going to be all right."

When you trust in the Lord, the Lord sends you an angel. When you trust in the Lord, the Lord doesn't make you an angel, but the Lord sends you an angel.

When you trust in the Lord, the Lord will give you a message and a messenger. When you trust in the Lord, even though you walk through the Valley of the Shadow of Death, you need fear no evil, for God is with me. When you trust in the Lord, let not your heart be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. Everybody say, "I trust in the Lord!"

Congregation: I trust in the Lord!

I tell you, you're going to be all right. Three reasons Paul gives, and the angel told me one: Paul, you're going to stand before the Emperor in Rome. So, I know we going to make it through. Two, the angel told me that all of you I've been praying for, 276 on board, everyone will be safe. Three, the ship itself will be lost on an island.

If you mess with God, you're going to have a shipwreck sometime. If you obey God, you're going to have a shipwreck sometime. If you disobey God, you sure enough going to have a shipwreck sometime. But the Lord has given you a free pass that will get you into the Lord's bosom. I don't care what you're going through, don't let it go through you.

I don't care what folks are saying about you, know that I'm saying I love you, I'll take care of you. Be not dismayed with every time, God will take care of you. But you have to learn to listen, there's a time to listen.

This immigrant, first time to America. This immigrant is walking the railroad track in New Jersey. What a heavy load he has on his back, like a homeless man, carrying everything he has. But this time, it's on his back, and not in that shopping cart. He passes a station, and the official comes out and says, "Sir, you get off that railroad track there. You could be arrested for trespassing."

Man reaches into his pocket and pulls out a ticket. Lord, it is a railroad ticket.

He says, "I have the right to walk these tracks." The agent says, "Sir, don't you understand, that ticket is for you to ride on the train." He explains it, and the man gets on board the train. It's going from Jersey City to Springtown, Pennsylvania. He lays down his heavy load, and he lifts his eyes and says, "Thank you, Lord, for the ride."

Somebody here ought to say, Thank you, Lord, for the ride! God has given every single one of us here a ticket. God has arranged a ride for every single one of us here, and some of us don't listen to God. We're busy walking to Scranton, instead of riding to Scranton. We're carrying our load instead of letting God carry our load for us. If you trust in God, come on say, "There's a time to listen!"

Congregation: There's a time to listen!

There's a time to listen. Secondly, there's a time to drop anchor. There's a time to drop anchor. Let's look at verse 27: Acts 27, verse 27. About midnight, on the 14th night of the storm, Lord, two weeks, as we were being driven to and fro on the Adriatic Sea, the sailors suspected land was near. They sounded and found 120 feet of water below them. A little later they sounded again, found only 90 feet.

At this rate, they knew they would soon be driven ashore, and fearing rocks along the coast, they threw out four anchors from the stern, and prayed for daylight. Some of the sailors planned to abandon the ship, and lowered the emergency boat as though they were going to put out anchors from the prow. But Paul said to the soldiers and commanding officer, "You will all die unless everyone stays aboard."

The soldiers cut the ropes and let the boat fall off. A time to drop anchor. Two weeks in a storm. And you who are in a storm or have been in a storm, and as everyone of us here, you know that two weeks seem like two months. When a storm of life is raging, all you can do is say, "Stand by me!" When the world is tossing me like a ship out on the sea, Thou who rule this wind and water, stand by me.

Anybody here ever pray that prayer, when you've been caught up in the storm: Stand by me, Lord! You all are [caught up] right now, tied up, tossed up, twisted up, tangled up. Don't forget to look up! Look up, don't forget your prayers! Some of us are so weird, we have church prayers, and then we have crisis prayers. We don't understand that the two are one and the same.

When you're doing all right, you ought to say, praise the Lord! And when you're doing all wrong, you ought to say, praise the Lord! 'Cause you know weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning.

Cutting off the anchors, there's a time to drop anchor. All right, when he looks up, he gets the message, "Now son, you got two choices, you can take to the sea, the storm, you can take to the storm, or you can go to the rocks. If you go to those rocks, you're going to be destroyed. There are sand bars out there, and as sure as you live, that storm may send you on the rocks, or you may go out and park at the sea."

What does Paul do? He follows the wording of God. He throws out the four anchors on the back. Remember now, Paul is not the owner of the ship. Paul is not the captain of the ship. Paul is a prisoner on the ship, being taken to Rome to stand before Caesar. But in the time of trouble, people will call upon whoever they feel can get them out of trouble.

Paul says, "I've been up and down the Mediterranean. I've been on this ship before, I've been rebuked, I've been scorned, I've been talked about, [by everyone]." Somebody here is no novice to a storm. You've been on a storm before. Sometimes when the storm of life is raging, you got to choose between the storm itself and the rocky shore. Wish there was a third choice. But you need to do like Paul.

Paul says, "I know what's going to happen if I go to the rocks."

I know what's going to happen in this relationship. I know what's going to happen if I keep on drinking. I know what's going to happen if I keep on smoking. I know what's going to happen if I keep on lying and cheating. I know what's going to happen there, I think I'll take the thing I'm not so sure about. I think I'll just go out to the storm.

So, they drop anchor. The anchor serves like a brake. It holds the ship from moving on near the rocks. Jesus helps you and me put the brakes on. If you've got a self-destructive habit, Jesus says, "Drop anchor." If you got things going wrong for you, drop anchor. If the whole year has been bad, drop anchor. My anchor holds and grips the solid rock. Come on and say, praise the Lord!

Congregation: Praise the Lord!

It's a matter of trusting in God, when you're going to drop anchor. This little boy, so anxious to climb that apple tree. As he climbs, the rotten limbs break off beneath his feet and he grabs higher, and pulls, and that breaks. His father sees the plight and the peril, and he goes under and lifts out his arms to catch his son.

He says, "Let go, son!" His boy cries out, "Are you telling me to turn loose of everything, daddy, and trust you?" He does just that, and he falls safely into the arms of his father. Sometimes you got to let go of everything. You just got to trust God. You just got to let go of everything, especially yourself.

You got to learn how to let go of some people who are not good for you. They're just as rotten as those limbs. I don't care how much they hang around you, you got to learn to let go of that which is rotten. If you don't let go of what is rotten, you're going to fall to the ground, and your daddy may not be there to catch you.

When your daddy tells you, "I love you. I love you so much, I'll catch you when you fall. I love you so much, I'll catch you even in the midst of your rotten environment. I'll catch you even though I told you not to climb that tree in the first place."

But you got to learn when to let down your anchor. Got to learn when to drop anchor.

I'm going to trust in the Lord. Well, we've said there's a time to listen, there's a time to drop anchor. Let's conclude, there's a time to up anchor. Look at verse 39: Acts 27, verse 39. When it was day, they didn't recognize the coastline, but noticed a bay with a beach, wondered whether they could get between the rocks and be driven up onto the beach.

They finally decided to try, cutting off the anchors, letting go. Leaving them in the sea, they lowered the rudders, raised the foresail and headed ashore. But the ship hit a sandbar, ran aground. The bow of the ship stuck first, while the stern was exposed to the violence of the waves and began to break apart.

The soldiers advised their commanding officer to let them kill the prisoners, lest any of them swim ashore and escape. But Julius, heading the prisoners, wanted to spare Paul, so he told them, "No." Then he ordered all who could swim to jump overboard and make for land. And the rest to try for it on planks and debris from the broken ship.

Everyone escaped safely ashore. There's a time to up anchor. Ask your neighbor on the right, Ain't you sick of you? Here you are with your anchors down, a storm just tossing you and turning you and tossing you and turning you, and you sit there crying, "Oh Lord, oh Lord!" It's time to up anchor!

It's time to try something else. All say, Can you see by the dawn's early light? You see you were there all night long in that storm, for two weeks in that storm. But every day brings a new dawn, brings a new light. By that dawn's early light, you see an opening there. God will always give you a way out. God will always give you an open bay.

God will always give you a way out. God says, "If I give you a way in, I'll give you a way out. It isn't whether or not I give you a way, it's whether you take the way." That way Jesus says, "I am the way and the truth and the light, why don't you take the way I've given to you? Why don't you up anchor?"

But we may not make it, you heard them. We may not make it. You right balcony, God doesn't give you risk-free insurance. No way, God doesn't give you risk-free insurance. Children, God doesn't give you risk-free insurance. Babies, God doesn't give you risk-free insurance. Jesus did not have risk-free insurance. Paul does not have risk-free insurance.

Luke does not have risk-free insurance. You and I will not have risk-free insurance. God does not give us risk-free insurance, God gives us blessed assurance, blessed assurance. Blessed assurance. They start moving towards the bay. But just as Paul said, the ship will be wrecked, they hit a sandbar. Now, here's the bow, the front part of the ship stuck on a sandbar.

Here's the stern, the back part of the ship, being tossed and driven by the wind, so the tension causes the ship to break in two. Here, you've got some who can swim! Paul cries, Swim! Somebody here can swim when trouble comes. Somebody here is a veteran of the Merchant Marines, of the Navy. Somebody here knows how to swim. Some here can swim 100 yards, some 200 yards, some half a mile.

Somebody here knows how to swim. But look at God, God is so good. Even when you don't know how to swim, I trust in God, the Lord will make a way somehow. Paul says, "Cling to the pieces." You find yourself going through this week, clinging to the pieces of your dream, clinging to the dream, clinging to the life, clinging to the relationship. Soon, everybody makes it ashore.

I trust in God. I know He cares for me. Upon the land, on the rolling sea, for come-what-may from day to day, my heavenly Father watches over me. Let pastor tell you about that man who told us about his favorite preacher. My preacher is the best preacher on Earth. My preacher is a little free Robin that comes to my window every day.

I put bread crumbs on the window sill, especially every night, I put bread crumbs for my little preacher. My little preacher will come and eat until it's full. I never saw my preacher with a duffle bag, looking out for tomorrow. I never saw my preacher with a wagon, even a Volkswagen.

All my preacher does is say give us this day our daily bread, trusting that somehow or another, I'll put that bread there every day, every night. Then after my preacher was filled, my preacher would hop over to a tree, climb up the branches, lift its eyes to heaven, and begin to sing a hymn of thanksgiving.

How many times have you heard us say, a bird is beautiful creature. Every time it takes a drink of water, it lifts its eyes toward heaven in gratitude. That bird sings its song, and then that bird lifts its wing, put its head under its wing, and goes to sleep.

I trust in God. I know He cares for me. Upon the land, on the rolling sea. Though come-what-may from day to day, my heavenly Father watches over me. If you believe it, put your hands together. Stand to your feet!

Acknowledgments

The Murray Archive is a project of the USC Center for Religion and Civic Culture (CRCC). After he retired from active ministry in the AME Church, Rev. Cecil L. Murray joined the faculty of USC as the John R. Tansey Chair of Christian Ethics in the School of Religion. He is a senior fellow with CRCC and chairs the USC Cecil Murray Center for Community Engagement, which is part of CRCC. The Murray Center has trained and consulted with hundreds of faith leaders in low-to-moderate income communities in Los Angeles on community development and civic engagement work. We thank Pastor Murray for his leadership. Rev. Mark Whitlock and Rev. Najuma Smith-Pollard, respectively the executive director and program manager for the Murray Center, were essential in helping CRCC develop the archive. Nick Street shepherded the project.

The Murray Archive is also a partnership with First African Methodist Episcopal (FAME) Church in Los Angeles, which has preserved tapes of Pastor Murray's sermons. CRCC thanks Rev. Edgar Boyd and his team at FAME for allowing CRCC to have access to these tapes and digitize them so that they can be freely accessible online.

CRCC received funding from the John Randolph Haynes Foundation to digitize and publish these sermons and transcripts. This project also led to a partnership with the USC Digital Libraries to digitize more sermons, with funding from the National Endowment for the Humanities.

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