

Very near the end of his life, the Apostle Paul was an exceedingly exhausted old man. His missionary travels had taken him the length and the breadth of the mighty Roman Empire. He had endured the hardships inflicted upon him by the elements of nature and the evils of men. At the end of a long and perilous life journey he limped now as a true soldier who had "fought the good fight" with all of his heart and mind and strength. Everything he had had been spent in the struggle; his achievement to this day is incredible. But as a tired and worn old man he looked into the future and perceived its forebodings. He knew that his work was not finished - that it would never be finished. With deep anxiety he longed for it to go on. As a wise leader he had seen to it that his work would be carried on. There was a young lad named Timothy whom he loved as though he were his own son. Timothy was frightfully young and inexperienced but he was fired in heart and mind by the same great vision of Christ which had caused Paul to blaze the pioneer trail for thousands of miles and many years. He had left Timothy in charge of the church at Ephesus. It was not an easy assignment. Timothy was by nature timid and afraid. He was unsure of himself. He had great hopes and dreams and he believed so deeply in what he was doing. But he faced the hostile attitudes of men who were so much older and wiser than himself. Far away in Macedonia old Paul knew of the trembling fears of this callow youth. But believing in Timothy with all of his heart, Paul sat down and wrote him a letter of loving counsel and encouragement.. Out of the great treasures of his own experience, Paul imparted wise counsel as to how Timothy as so young a man could deal with the immense problems of his struggling church. Paul knew how uncertain and critical was the future., and he endeavored to steady the heart of his protege as he looked ahead. But of all the words he wrote to Timothy I think that there are six that mean the most to me. To the young, inexperienced, trembling, but radiant

young Timothy he wrote,

"Let no man despise thy youth"

And what Paul was really trying to say to Timothy was, I think, "Let no man look down upon thy youth; let no man reject thee because thou art young; endeavor to make all men take thy youth seriously."

I do not apologize this morning in speaking to this congregation about youth. This morning I am deeply concerned about the youth of the generation to which I belong, just as many years ago Paul was concerned and interested in the youth of Timothy.

I suppose that it could be said that I have been born in that generation which was regarded as "flaming youth". That is to say that our generation about five years ago was thought to be flaming with irresponsibility, waywardness, and general worthlessness. It is more than likely that I was myself a jet ~~through~~ through which part of this flame poured. To use an extremely vulgar phrase, it was thought by many people ten years ago that the young people of this generation were going to the dogs!

I think that I know something about this generation of which I am a part. I know something about young people, their foibles, their faults, and their fancies. In one sense it is to be admitted readily that young people have been shameful in their actions and misspent in their energies and capacities. Far too often they have been wild and disorganized and fruitless.

But if one is really interested in making a fair appraisal of this generation, there are two poignant facts with which I feel he must reckon. These facts are highly significant ~~in the~~ amidst the tumult of these days. For one thing it must be remembered that the flame of this so-called "flaming youth" was lighted from the still wilder torch of the roaring twenties and the despairing, faithless thirties. Don't blame youth for being wild until you consider well the hectic display of human folly that

of youth which has been ~~used~~ used so quickly and effectively for the glorification of war, is equally capable of being used for the good of mankind and the peace of the world. Therefore I say unto you, "Despise not these youths". Their flame, though imperfect and misused, is bright in its wonder and glorious in its strength. ~~Therefore~~ Some of you are the people who command great influence, are capable of making far reaching decision, and are in a position to chart the future. All of you have a stake in this world, and all of you can rise up together to help secure the fortunes of men. Therefore, I say unto you again, Let not the flame of the youth die.

Let me draw out three great attributes of young people which comprise my faith and which, I feel, will enhance your own.

-I-

Young people believe thoroughly in the goodness and worth of life. You know, I think that it is only when people grow old and bitter that they despair of life. It is only when people allow circumstances to pile one on another in the accumulation of years of despair that their faith in life itself sags and weakens. At a time like that, then, life hangs heavily, encumbering a spirit

But there is something wonderful and radiant about youth that causes them to love life; they want to live. They are not afraid to face life. There is something about their spirit which causes them to have a natural belief in life itself. Their faith is naive and simple, but it is also unaffected and pure. They are always ready to believe the best about life even when they see it at its worst.

The other day I read what was to me a most sad commentary from one of our newspaper correspondents who is covering the war actions on the field of Normandy. Ernie Pyle has a great understanding of human life, and in this particular dispatch he was describing the attack by an American infantry as it advanced through the streets of a French town.

He~~w~~ was particularly interested in the reactions of these simple American boys to the heats and pressures of dangerous warfare. This is what he says of them:

They weren't heroic figures as they moved forward one at a time a few seconds apart. You think of attackers as being savage and bold. These men were hesitant and cautious. They were really the hunters, but they looked like the hunted. There was a confused excitement and a grim anxiety in their faces.

They seemed terribly pathetic to me. They weren't warriors. They were American boys who by mere chance of fate had wound up with guns in their hands sneaking up a death-laden street in a strange and shattered city in a faraway country in a driving rain. They were afraid, but it was beyond their power to quit. They had no choice.

They were good boys. I talked with them all afternoon as we sneaked slowly forward along the mysterious and ~~br~~ubbled street, and I know they were good boys.

These boys are good as Ernie Pyle says they are, for just a few months, ^{ago} maybe years for some, they believed wholeheartedly in the goodness of life. What an irony it is that their faith in life has had to be transformed into ~~the~~ energy of war. I have seen my friends leave for the armed services. They leave uncomplaining about the upset to their lives in which they so believed. But deep down within every young heart this day is a reluctance at what he must go to, because believing as he does in life and its goodness he knows that the tasks to which his hand and mind will be set are not exemplary of this good life.

Despite all of the criticism which, justified on the past, can be leveled against the youth of this generation, I firmly believe that they uphold best the high idealism that is yet to be effective in our world. You take any group of young people of this day and if they have been exposed to any kind of righteous feelings and higher thinking they are not the ones who believe in war; in racial discrimination; or any other of the evils that are plaguing the world.

It is my deepest conviction that no great world can be built without that fundamental loving trust in the goodness of life which belongs to youth. I have seen young people dare to believe in the inherent goodness

of the world even as they are entrapped by its very darkness. Some three months ago I was attending a conference of young people in Concord, New Hampshire. It was in the evening and just before the sun had completely faded in the West, and as the young people were gathering for their program in a large church, ~~a~~ there suddenly arose a darkening and fearsome storm. Great, huge waves of ~~black~~ pitch black clouds rolled over the heavens above, and for a moment it seemed almost like an eclipse. The lightning crashed like daggers across the sky and the ~~thunder~~ heavens bellowed with thunder. In the church, waiting for the program sat nearly three hundred enthusiastic young people when all of a sudden the storm caused the lights to be extinguished. Was there a panic? Were there cries of fright? Was there confusion and terror? No, I'll tell you what that magnificent group of young people did. Stunned only for a moment they began to sing, softly and low at first, but as that spirit caught the heart of every youth/~~s~~/ their voices swelled and filled the room. And for the moment the intense darkness made no difference; it was lifted by the faith of their song. And the song they sang was a hymn beloved by youth:

To the knights in the days of old
Keeping watch o'er the mountain side
Came a vision of holy grail
And a voice through the waiting night:
Follow, follow the gleam.

That's what has happened to youth today. The darkness of the world has been weighted upon them. But they fear not, for by the flame of their youth they believe in life and love its goodness. I say to you, Let not this flame die!

-II-

And in the second place, young people love and trust each other.

Who is there here who would not grant that this is one of the most crying needs of our world. In a world where hatred is eating its way ~~into~~ like an acid into so many human hearts, the greatest things we lack for the building of a better world is the ability of human beings to believe in and trust in each other. Well, youth do! They do not fear each other. They perpetuate no theories of racial hatred. Given a fair chance they will get along together with any other young people of any other race, color, or religion. If you want to be truly inspired by this fact, as I am constantly, just get yourself into a group of young people such as come to our student center. They can be a cosmopolitan group and they know how to get along with each other!

I think that the tragedy of this whole world upheaval is that the youths from so many different parts of the world have been thrown together in the fight to death against each other, when all of the time it is not they who asked for it. Had they been given a decent chance to show their real greatness, they could have displayed to the world just what the brotherhood of man means.

There was a scene from that now almost forgotten play "Alls Quiet on the Western Front" which I shall never forget. On a brutal battlefield an English soldier and a German soldier who were thrown together into a shell pit. The German soldier had mortally wounded the English lad, and they were trapped there together through a long a terrible night. Through that night deep remorse came to the German boy because he realized that he had killed a fellow man whom he did not really hate. In fact personally he had no reason to kill him.

I remember that when I was in high school I engaged in an oratorical contest. I gave an impassioned peace oration. It was a hectic contest and I came out in third place. (there were only four entered). But several weeks ago when I was visiting in my home after being away for several years I went up to our old attic and in rummaging through a great many

old things I came upon a copy of that great speech. I read it through and as I did the significant thought occurred to me that seven years ago the youth of my generation had no hatred for any other youth, or any~~o~~ other people for that matter, in any place in the world. And I don't believe that they do today.

If there is going to be the chance that the world will be able to bind up its wounds after this war, it will be terribly important that people believe in and trust each other. I know that through the hearts of young people there ~~xxx~~ burns this flame, so I say to you, Let not this flame die!

-III-

And in the last place, with faith in life and love for each other, the lives young people are ripe for faith in God. To me the most important ~~xxx~~/single endeavor I have in life is to acquire an ever greater awareness of God. If we are mortal beings and God is the most important fact of the universe, than that is the most important human pursuit.

I know full well that there are a good man young people who have never become sure of God. Many come to college and announce themselves as ~~xx~~ atheistic. There are a good many young people who have never been wholly convinced that there is a God who directs the destiny of the universe. Some young people simply do not see the necessity for God.

Not long ago I sat in on a philosophic discussion with a group of college students. They were contemplating the idea of God and were thinking about what difference, if any, God ~~makes~~ to moral living with one's fellow men. There was one girl who posed this question: "Why can't people treat their fellow men right without feeling that God is in them?" It had been said by the leader that God was in every human being. There I think, is an important point. Young people want to know how on earth God could be in the lives of a good many people. And because it doesn't appear that God is in a great many people, they simply reason that you can

treat your fellow men right without assuming the existence of God.

Now this is an important focal point where I think that people can be led to faith in God. Young people believe in each other despite the fact they cannot always have a clear notion of God. But it is just possible that they are kept from a fuller faith in God because they have never come to the place where they cannot believe in those who are older than they. The actions of their elders sometime short circuit their complete faith in God.

In one respect this regard of young people for each other is really a group consciousness for they have long since seen that their lives are victimized by cold reasoning, enterprising, selfish men for the purposes of war and exploitation. They have seen their lives used and manipulated by evil men for evil purposes. Hence, perhaps, that feeling which causes them to regard each other so dearly.

But supposing this opportunity for their growing faith in God were seized upon by the members of the older generation. One of my closest friends in college was a man several years older than myself. He had come back to college after being "kicked around by the world" as he saw it. He had a wonderful personality and a fine mind, and he used it. We could never quite agree in matters of religion, but we were good friends. One day he graduated I felt that he faced his world with a somewhat distorted point of view. He did not exactly trust the future. Now, on this very day I rather imagine that he as an army airforce officer he is engaged in the deadly tasks of bombing Germany. He is a high ranking officer, a major. He has never had in chance at the world. Quite unexpectedly the other day I got a V-mail letter from him and these were the last words:

"Will you say a small prayer for a guy who isn't afraid to admit that he's scared stiff."

Now you see what I mean. I fear for that boy if he gets back alive. He has so much to offer. I know he believes in his fellow youth. HE COULD

BE LED TO A BELIEF IN GOD. What a difference that would make to the contribution he is able to make to this world!

I say to you that there is in that youth as well as many more a bright and good flame, that were if fanned and fostered by love for him from his fellow, ~~for~~ it could blaze a pathway of peace and righteousness for this world. That flame is flickering; but let us not permit it to die.

There are your youth, then. They do love and believe in life. They love each other. And these taken together and fostered could be built into the mightiest faith in God the world has ever known. But look to the plight of youth in this very hour. Today, ~~in~~ the prisoner of war camps on all sides of the war, there are nearly seven million young men. Their lives are frustrated behind barbed wire until the war ends. Their average age is from 24 to 25 years. The world lies in wait for their return. But what is their plan. I have listened intently to the political campaigns of the last three weeks. I have listened eagerly for some realistic note about the future of youth. I am afraid, though that much of what we hear is like the absent-minded professor who went down to the hospital to wait while a child was being born to his wife. Deploring boredom he took along a book and soon became deeply absorbed in it. Eventually a nurse came bouncing through the door and with great gusto announced, "It's a boy!" Without looking up from the book, the professor dryly replied, "Ask him what he wants".

My friends, I don't trust the politicians to keep this flame alive. But I would like to trust the church. In a survey the Chief of U.S. Army chaplains found out that the boys overseas want as much as anything else that their churches be made worth returning to. That's our job. That's how we can keep this flame burning brightly. The other day I realized what a wonderful opportunity this church has when I received a letter from a boy who had just entered the service. He loved our Student Center

and he asked that we "keep the place going until he could get back". That Student Center has kindled the flame in his life that is wonderful and magnificent. It is yet the hope of this world. The world will be forever poorer and darker if that flame dies.

The scroll of youth is not yet written to the full; it is scortched and it is charred, but a portion yet remains. The words of Paul ring ever clearer to this world: "Let no man despise thy youth". Let not that flame die!