Merry Christmas to You
Church Speaks To World

By DR. WALLACE FRIDY
Pastor, St. John's Methodist Church

Does the church make any difference in the world in which we live? Is the church and its message relevant to our age? These are questions many people are asking today. If the church is irrelevant to our day, it is a denial of the incarnation, for "Jesus Christ came into the world that the world might be saved."

The main reason for its existence is that it has a message for the age in which it lives — a message from God. The church must live in history as a witness to the Lordship of Christ. Jesus Christ is Lord, and the church must speak His word of reconciliation to the world. It must speak it with power and directness.

Religion for many people is a convenience. Dr. William Mallard tells of a student at a fraternity house who once confessed to him that at the university he was having nothing to do with the church. He explained that back home he had been active in the affairs of the church for it was the expected thing to do to fit in with the life of his home town. But here at the university he didn't need to do this to belong, so he just left this out of his life. Then he said, "When I graduate and take up my life again in some community, marry and settle down, then I guess I'll need to get back to church, for it will be necessary to get along. It will help my business to be seen in church."

How much of an accessory can one make of religion!

GEORGE W. WEBBER reminds us that for most of us religion has become one of the twenty-five departments in "Time Magazine," an area, an interest in life, "but not the focus through which the problems of our existence are understood and our direction determined. We have nothing to say to the world, and the world knows it. Often the church is silent. Often when we do have some word to speak, we are afraid to say it."

If the Church is to be "God's Colony in Man's World," it must have a word to say to man's world. It must be revealed to the affairs of men. It must go out where men are, where life is lived, and have a saving and healing word to say. The church must, out of compassion, be concerned with whatever hurts men; it must throw the searchlight of truth upon evil and encompass men with God's love. To be sure religion deals...
"For unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord."

Luke 2:11
By DR. WALLACE FRIDY
Pastor, St. John's Methodist Church

In Matthew 2:11 we read, "And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts: Gold, and Frankincense, and Myrrh." These gifts represented their best.

In the hymn, "The Three Kings of Orient Are," we have the details with adorned this well-loved story. Let us look at the gifts the three men brought and see what they represented.

IN THE first place the gold, brought by Caspar, can represent our gifts of substance. This was mentioned first perhaps because of our gifts or substance are so hard to give freely and gladly. Yet, much of the strife of life comes with our clutching of things, holding on to the material.

Unless we can bring our substance and lay it at the Master's feet, then our substance takes the place of life itself. Bringing our gold to the Christ child is to recognize that God has given us all that we have, and that we are merely stewards for a little while. It is to acknowledge that God is the owner and that we merely possess.

When Caspar brought this gold, he fell down and worshipped the Christ child. Could it be that unless we bring our substance to the Master, we cannot really worship? His coming and paying homage to the King recognized a basic principle in life, and that is, we need to give more that the Lord needs what we have to give. And unless we give, we become like old Scrooge before Christmas. But how little we give. Most of us offer only the fragments of our substance, the left-overs, the remnants, the scraps from our tables. Few of us give until it hurts. Pierce Harris says that some say they give until it hurts, but he comments many can't stand much pain. Most of us give so little that we miss the joy which comes to the generous giver.

To be able to give is a privilege. Some years ago a man sat in my study and I was telling him about our new church and of how I hoped he would have a part in it. We talked of the many needs and opportunities and when he left he said, "Thank you for giving me this opportunity to give." It was a privilege. I wasn't begging in the name of the church; I was doing him a favor.

"you give but little when you give I and yourself. It is when you give yourself that you truly give."

From the Prophet
By Kahlil Gibran
Let's never think of the invitation to give to Christ's Church as begging. It is not begging. It is inviting another to bring gold and to lay it at the Christ Child's feet. It is giving another an opportunity to pay his just obligations to God. It is helping him square his account with the Lord. It is offering him a chance to flood his heart with joy.

No wonder Paul said, "For God loveth a cheerful giver."

**IN THE SECOND** place, Melchoir brought frankincense, which can represent wisdom and influence. Here is wisdom as well as substance bowing down before the babe. These men represent the learning of the ages, the wisdom of the world. They were the scientists of their time.

This is a symbol for us today of the need for knowledge to gain direction and purpose in its use. Real wisdom is more than knowledge. Knowledge is the accumulation of facts; wisdom is the interpretation of facts. Knowledge is culled from textbooks; wisdom comes out of life.

What an amazing scene this around the manger—men of great learning and rare insight bowing down before the manger, worshipping a Babe! Yet it is not so incredible nor extraordinary when we see wisdom's helplessness alone to make a better world.

There have been those who have said science is the hope of mankind, that knowledge offers the way out, that culture can change our pagan ways. Society has thought that the achievements of men could bring in a better world, that scientific inventions and progress could bring world peace, that taking care merely of the mental and physical states of man was enough to insure his well-being. But now disillusionment has followed in the wake of such belief as was and its aftermath has wrecked this theory's fondest dream.

Of course we would not decry material progress and achievement which may be benefactors of mankind. We would not say let us go back to primitive life. But we must recognize that man in all his progress needs a spiritual interpretation of life. He needs that which will give him the right motive in the use of that which he has made.

And then here is represented influence. Dramatically this need of influence to bow before the babe was manifested in the request of our President—Lyndon Baynes Johnson—for prayer in facing the tremendous tasks before him. In his address to the Nation, November 28, 1963, he said:

"Let all who speak and all who teach and all who preach and all who publish and all who broadcast and all who read or listen—let them reflect upon their responsibilities to bind our wounds, to heal our sores, to make our society well and whole for the tasks ahead of us.

"What we need today is a mixture of brute, but that will strengthen our weak, good points, and weaken our strong, bad points."

Courtney C. Weeks
"Let us pray for His divine wisdom in banishing from our land any injustice or intolerance or oppression to any of our fellow Americans whatever their opinion, whatever the color of their skins—for God made all of us, not some of us, in His image. All of us, not just some of us, are His children.

"I ask that you remember your country and remember me each day in your prayers."

Here is influence feeling the need of bowing down.

And at this Christmas time when the world is wondering what the future holds, men if they are really wise will return to the Master teacher who gives us something to live for and something to live by. Indeed, as another has said, we live in an 'age that is in a more dangerous and precarious position than any previous age in all history, because new and colossal weapons are in the hands of people who are unsure about the purpose of life.

FINALLY, BALTHAZAR brought Myrrh. Myrrh was used as an embalming fluid, and thus can stand in this instance of sorrow and suffering.

This, the bitterest, is the hardest to give to Christ. It is easier to harbor our suffering and sorrow in bitter protest.

Dr. Butterick says, "The reason why sorrow hardens one man and melts another is just that the one man keeps his sorrow selfishly and the other offers it in oblation."

Some years ago I was visiting a mother who had lost her daughter. Her sorrow was great, and the years did not heal it. It made her bitter. "Why did God do this to me?" she cried. "There is no justice and love in a God who would do that."

Contrast her response to sorrow with that of another mother who faced great loss, but gradually the sorrow which came seemed to serve and make her better. She found truth in Jesus' words, "Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted." They gave her strength to stand and withstand what life had in store.

Sorrow can add sympathy and season to life. There is a mellowness that comes with sorrow that is brought in no other way. Tenderness comes with tears and a capacity for friendship with morning.

Some years ago following a performance of the Passion Play at Oberammergau a visitor spoke to Anton Lang, who played the part of Christus. "When I watched you in the play, it appeared as if the cross were really heavy," "It is," replied Anton. "I can scarcely lift it."

"Why do you have it so heavy when it is only a play?"

The man playing the part of Christus replied, "If I do not feel the weight, I cannot act the part."

Sorrow helps us feel the weight of other men's troubles. Deep sympathy and mellowness can come with the trail of tears.

"Each is given a bag of tools. A shepherd's staff, a tool for a rule. And each must make his life is flown, a stumbling block, or a stepping stone."
A Jewish psychiatrist said to Stanley Jones, “I have a case where a woman would be well if she could get an inner security, so that no matter what may happen to her on the outside she would still be secure within. As a psychiatrist I can’t give it to her, but maybe you as a religious man can.

Dr. Jones confessed that he, too, was helpless to do it, but that he could introduce her to Someone who could—the Christ.

Who of us today is not carrying some burden, some load, some grief which is too heavy for our shoulders? Who of us do not need those words of strength and comfort found at Christmas time in the angel’s promise. “Fear not; for behold I bring you good tidings of great joy... for unto you is born a Saviour...”

So at this Season let us come to the Christ child and offer him our gold, the substance which really belongs to God; offer him our frankincense, the inner treasure of our thought; and or myrrh, the suffering and sorrow of our hearts. Then we will indeed give The Utmost for the Highest.

A Blessed Christmas
Church In Today's World

By DR. WALLACE FRIDY
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Our thoughts in recent days have been turned to many events of significance in today's world. Certainly, we have been made grateful for the elevation of Rt. Rev. John Elbridge Hines as Presiding Bishop of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States. He is a native South Carolinian, born in Seneca, S. C. Most of his ministry has been spent in Texas, where in 1955 he became Bishop of Texas, and increased the number of priests in his diocese from 80 to 185. He also founded the Episcopal Theological Seminary of the Southwest in Austin.

In his inaugural sermon he cited this aphorism from the late Dag Hammarskjöld: “In our era, the road to holiness necessarily passes through the world of action.” Bishop Hines said that the time has passed when Christians can retreat within their ecclesiastical fortress to recite prayers and polish brass. “The church,” he emphasized, “is caught up today in the throes of a worldwide convulsion, the basic ferment of which is the thrust for freedom and dignity and hope on the part of the little people of the world. The church as an agent of God's reconciling love cannot survive this revolution as an observer.”

In these stirring words the Presiding Bishop speaks of the church’s task in the world where suffering is, where wrongs are to be righted, where freedom is threatened and denied, where sin abounds. He speaks of the church in mission.

WHAT HE HAD to say reminds me of what Dr. H. Richard Niebuhr wrote shortly before his death in THE CHRISTIAN CENTURY concerning his religious pilgrimage during the last ten years. Among other concerns he writes on the church, and of her continual need to reform itself to meet the demands of the age in which it lives.

He writes, “The immediate reformation of the church that I pray for, look for and want to work for in the time that may remain to me is its reformation not now by separation from the world but by a new entrance into it without conformity to it. I believe our separation has gone far enough and that now we must find new ways of doing what we were created to do.”

This is the great thrust of the church to—
day: “the road to holiness necessarily passes through the world of action.” This is what Paul van Buren had in mind when he answers his question: “Where is your Church?” by answering: “Well let’s see, about this time of the morning most of it is at work, except for the night shift, or those who are sick. Some are at work in this factory and that, and others are working in this office or that store, some are in school, some in their kitchen, the Church is infiltrated through the whole town right now. . . . It’s spread all through the town involved in all sorts of work, doing that work in such a way and talking in such a way as to let others know what is already true: that Jesus Christ is the boss of this city and all that goes on in it. This is the Church work. And then, one day a week, we rest from our Church work and gather to hear again our Lord speaking to us, that we may go back renewed to the task he has set before us.”

TO BE SURE there is a vital place for the expression of our fellowship within the church building, and a place for teaching and worship. We should give it our best and have the finest and loveliest building and house of worship that we can build to the Glory of God. All this is vital, but the matter does not end there. This is only part of the Church’s life, limited within the confines of a building it uses as headquarters, but out where we live is our field of operations.

We come to church to set our sights, to find strength in our fellowship together, to gain inspiration through worship, to feel anew the presence of Christ in our corporate worship, but out there is where we witness day by day for Him.

CARLISLE MARNEY states it like this: “The gospel has to be lived at the bank, the stores, the schools, the houses, the prisons, the rental offices, the government offices, the factories and mills, the slums, the streets. “This means that the new creation calls for more ministers to serve it as vehicles of transfer—it means the world needs a priest at every elbow, every desk, every sick, every bedroom, every turning lathe, every knitting machine, every steering wheel, every golf course.”

When Jesus gave us our marching orders sending us into all the world, he meant for us to carry his Gospel and its deeper meaning into business, industry, politics, the professions, in our homes, in our play, in our solitude—into the arena of everyday life. But the Church is in all these areas in the persons of its members. The impact upon our world and in all areas of it “is determined far less by what the clergy proclaim on Sunday than by what the laity represent from Monday to Saturday.”

Thus, indeed “in our areas, the road to holiness necessarily passes through the world of action.”

“God is the home, the goal of the soul; we are no good away from home except in retirement.”

“Perfect love casteth out fear.” 1 John 4:18
Candles To Be Lighted

By DR. WALLACE FRIDY
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Now and then someone tells me that they want a job in the church—that they want to become active. Of course, the church does need leaders—teachers, stewards, singers, class officers, greeters, scout leaders, youth workers, visitors, committee chairman, and committee members, ushers, collectors, typists, and many others to fill places that have to be manned. Indeed, the church could not run without a host of faithful workers.

But in a real sense every member has a job as a follower of Christ and that job is defined in the 16th verse of the 5th chapter of Matthew: “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.”

This is our commission—to be a light that shines, a candle that burns, a life which adds glory to God’s name. The fact is there are not enough titled jobs to go around in the organization of the church, and just to create jobs and to formulate titles can be a hollow sort of thing. But there is something for everyone to do—to be a light that shines, a witness for God. Everyone can be active—an active disciple of Christ in seeking to spread His good news to men everywhere. We come to church and Sunday School to learn of God as we know Him in Christ and to be inspired to love and serve Him.

We find Jesus expressing it like this: “Come unto me all ye who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” Then go out and “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in Heaven.”

Let us look at this verse today.

IN THE FIRST place, it suggests to us that each one of us is a candle to be lighted. “Let your light so shine before men.” These lives of ours remain dark in outlook and in purpose until God is let in and lights us. We are indeed unlighted candles, people with unimaginable possibilities, that God is waiting to light.

In the first chapter of the 4th Gospel we find Jesus facing a man not unlike many of us. Here we see him looking into the face of Simon and discovering an unlighted candle. He looked beneath the surface and says,

"The spirit of man is the candle of the Lord."

Proverbs 20:27

"For then wilt light my candle: the Lord my God will enlighten my darkness."

Psalm 18:28
"Thou art Simon," an unlettered fisherman. Thou art impulsive, and an untrue friend. Thy life means little now. But he doesn't stop here but says to this man, "But thou shalt be Peter—a rock, upon whom I shall build my church." Thou shalt be a lighted candle whose rays shall heal those upon whom they fall. Thou shalt be a tower of strength upon whom men shall lean.

Here we see Jesus looking beyond the mere exterior of Simon and seeing beneath his crudeness vast undeveloped possibilities. He sees here a light which is dark but which can be made to shine. That is what He sees in each of us—a candle which can give light. We find Him spending the greater part of his ministry lighting candles, calling out of men their best, recognizing their faults and failures, but challenging them to something better.

History is replete with men whose lives have turned from darkness to light, whose latent possibilities have been released.

IN THE SECOND place, Jesus is here telling us that God judges our little candles not only by the light they are now giving but what they can give. "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good work and glorify your Father which is in Heaven." Of course, Jesus looks at these lives of ours and recognizes their limits, their present condition, recognizing that tomorrow is determined by today. But he goes beyond to what we may become. "Thou art Simon," He says, "But thou can't become Peter."

Each of us is made up of two parts. What we are and what we may become. Regardless of our age and station in life, these divisions remain with us. Our concern should be not so much with what we now are, but what under God we may become. It is not so much the actuality today but the potentiality of tomorrow that we are concerned.

It is tragic to see so many lives today which are dark, which are not fulfilling the purpose for which they were made. But God can take a life and transform it.

Again here is the life of William Grenfell whose brilliance in the medical world had already gained recognition. To be sure he was doing useful tasks, but there were vast undeveloped potentialities in his life. One night in London God spoke to William Grenfell through the voice of Dwight L. Moody and said, "William, I want you to be a lighted candle for me in a far off land which is cold and very dark." And God made his life immortal in Labrador.

IN THE THIRD place, unless we give God our possibilities, we miss the purpose for living. Unless we let Him light our candle, we remain in darkness. It is reasonable to believe that He who made us, wants to possess us, wants us to be that for which we were

"What we are is God's gift to us;
What we make of ourselves
is our gift to God."

Dr. White
intended. What is God's will for my life? That is the question and the most important one in life. The discovery of it is the beginning of all wisdom. Unless we let God take hold of our lives and become their master we are lost. God has a place for these lives of ours and unless we give Him full sway the purpose of their existence does not become realized.

FINALLY, TO "Let your light so shine, that men may see your good works," not only helps us to find life's purpose, but also "glorifies your Father which is in Heaven." To shine as a ray of light in a darkened world glorifies God because the purpose for which we were made is being fulfilled. How then can we serve God? Let our lights shine. Be a lighted candle. And such a light may be the difference between life and death for another.

Robertson, the great English preacher, used to say that you could judge a life by the first sentence people spoke about it after one was dead. The editor of a western newspaper said this about a departed: "In his going there is not any cause of worthy institution that will suffer loss."

Remember, "Ye are the light of the world. You do not put a candle under a bushel but on a candlestick." Unless we let God take hold of our unlighted candles, one corner of the world will remain dark. In a quaint Swiss village a church has been erected which is lighted by lamps of each member. There is a place for each lamp and if someone fails to come a dark corner is unlighted in that sanctuary. So it is in God's Kingdom, unless our candles are lighted a dark spot remains.

Roy Pearson in the foreword of his book THE MINISTRY OF PREACHING puts it like this: "The author adds his little candle to the lights burning around him, and he hopes he has not increased the shadows on the wall." So may it be with us!
Living Under Direction

By DR. WALLACE FRIDY
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Some years ago Dr. George W. Carver in one of his letters quoted this verse from Proverbs 3:6, "Acknowledge Him in all thy ways, and He shall direct thy paths." "This promise," continued the noted scientist, "is one that never fails."

Certainly, as we look at his life now through the eyes of his biographer, Rickham Holt, we see just how much Dr. Carver's life accepted this promise. His laboratory he called God's work shop. His astounding creations and inventions came according to him from God.

How many of us here today believe that if God is completely acknowledged He will direct our paths? I am afraid that for most of us our trust and faith does not go that far. To be sure we all believe that God does guide but few of us are willing for Him to take complete control. We too often make our own plans, and then tell God what we are going to do and that we hope it meets His approval. We too often take the verse "ask and it shall be given you; seek and ye shall find" as meaning that if we ask God for what we want, He will provide whether it be His will or not. But contrast Jesus' complete faith and trust when he prayed, "Nevertheless not my will, but Thine be done."

Let us then take this verse, "Acknowledge Him in all thy ways and He shall direct thy paths," and see what it means.

In the first place it tells us that there is a personal being at the heart of the universe.

What would we do today in our moments of extremity and anxiety if we did not believe that at the center of life was a personal God willing and waiting to help us? This verse tells us that God is not only the Creator of life but the Sustainer as well. He is not an absentee owner with little concern for what He has made. But rather One who is now and always active in the lives of men.

Sometimes we feel so alone in the world, and that God is far away. But all the while He is hovering near seeking for our companionship. Yes, He is not one who made His world and then abdicated or who went away.
to let His Creation work out its own salvation.

He is not a God who is so great that He has little time for our little petty problems. No! He is a God vitally concerned and ever near, and One who wants to guide and direct in our complex life.

IN THE SECOND place, this verse suggests to us that God's leading and paths on which we are directed always follow according to established laws. Yes, God works within the framework of His world. Ours is a dependable world and we would have it no other way. There are laws which if we defy we pay the price whether it be through ignorance or willful disobedience.

Now we see how His leading works through them. God uses people for His purposes of leading others. To be a great scientist or preacher, God has established the condition when if met will produce the expected results. If we pray for patience, He will give us situations where patience is tried. He uses History to point the way — the experience of the race.

BUT EVEN beyond our conscious conception of working within God's laws, there seems to be something that works through us if we can tune ourselves to Him. To be sure His working within us, I am sure, does not go counter to His laws but it may supersede our knowledge of His law.

Here we are dealing with the principle of released power. Somehow when people can so attune themselves to the infinite, undreamed of power comes. A person becomes so cleansed that the spiritual forces of the universe can surge through.

An individual who lives so close to the center of life really is at times unaware of what is actually being done through him. A poet says that his best poems write themselves. An author confesses that prayers write themselves, just overflow. Emerson once said, "I like my poems best, because I did not write them." Dr. Walter Judd says that he tires when he is not completely sold on what he is doing, but gains extra energy when all the forces of his life are directed toward what he is doing.

But before we close, let us remember that before our lives can be directed, they must first acknowledge Him who is Ruler and Lord. Electricity does not give light unless there is connection. Water works need connection with the Reservoir.

So, "Acknowledge Him in all thy ways and He shall direct thy paths."

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"The trend of life is to know the life that never ends."

William Penn

"We have committed the Golden Rule to memory. Now let us commit it to life."

Edwin Markham
Ancient Church Scene Of Sermon

By DR. WALLACE FRIDY
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LONDON AIRPORT — The last time I was in an airport with my typewriter was just before I left the United States in the Dulles Airport, Washington. Now I am here in the London Airport waiting to board a plane for Edinburgh. The flight has not been called, and this gives me a few minutes to record for you some of the full and eventful days just passed since last I wrote.

Today we visited the Lamboth Palace, the home of the Archbishop of Canterbury, with part of our visiting preaching team from the U. S. We met earlier at No. 10, Eaton Gate, headquarters of the British Council of Churches, and there we were introduced to Miss Jean Owens who planned our preaching assignments. (Sorry, they just called our flight, and I will have to finish this after we land in Edinburgh.)

ALMOST forty-eight hours have elapsed since I started writing this, but every minute has been packed full including two sermons today which I preached in St. Cuthbert's Parish Church in Edinburgh. It is a Presbyterian Church and being one of the oldest religious foundations in Scotland. On the site on which the church now stands there was a church here in Celtic times. Tradition says that on this site Christian worship has been carried on for some thirteen hundred years.

The minister of this church is Dr. R. Leonard Small, who some years ago was an exchange minister in the First Presbyterian Church, Spartanburg, S. C., at the time when we were living there and serving at Bethel Methodist Church. Dr. Small and his family are on vacation, or holiday as they call it, and we were sorry not to get to see them again. However, we were well cared for by Rev. David S. M. Hamilton, associate minister, who conducted the services and briefed me on their order. This church will seat 1800 and has 3400 members. It is one of the most beautiful churches in which I have preached and behind the Communion table is one of the most conspicuous ornaments of the church. It is an adapted reproduction in alabaster of Leonardo da Vinci's famous painting, the Last Supper.

WHAT A small world it is, for yesterday in one of the stores we unexpectedly ran into a friend from Columbia, and a former parishoner, Mrs. W. D. Robertson, known to her friends as "Happy." How good it was to see her! She promised to come to church today, and did, and then invited us to have dinner with her at the Calendonian Hotel. Also in the congregation this morning and this evening was another friend from S. C., who just happened to be in Edinburgh for a few days en route home from Hong Kong, where she has been serving for the last three years as a missionary—Miss Anne Herbert of Sumter. She saw in "The Scotsman", the morning paper, that I was to preach today at St. Cuthbert's.

We are guests here of Mr. and Mrs. J. Chalmers Miller who have given us free run of an apartment. They have been most kind, and in fact, people here in all walks of life are kind and friendly—bus drivers, clerks, policemen. This is a great little country of only five million people, half of whom live in the narrow central belt of the country whose centers are Edinburgh and Glasgow. This is the land of Mary
Queen of Scots, Bonnie Prince Charlie, Sir Walter Scott and Robert Burns. It is the birthplace of Alexander Graham Bell, Robert Louis Stevenson, and here lived John Knox, whose house we visited yesterday.

YESTERDAY in St. Giles' Cathedral we saw again a monument to Robert Louis Stevenson, portrayed in a reclining position on a couch, symbolic of the poor health which hounded him most of his short life. I copied this inscription which I pass on to you:

"Give us grace and strength
to forbear and to persevere,
Give us courage and gaiety
and the quiet mind,
Spare to us our friends,
Soften to us our enemies.
Bless us if it may in all our innocent endeavors
If it may not give us the strength to encounter
That which is to come, that we may be brave in peril,
constant in tribulation,
Temperate in wrath.
And in all changes of fortune
And down to the gates of death,
Loyal and loving to one another."

—Robert Louis Stevenson

"Be like the bird, that halting in her flight awhile, on boughs too slight
Feels there give way beneath her.
And yet sings, knowing she hath wings."

Victor Hugo
The Near End Of God

By DR. WALLACE FRIDY
Pastor, St. John's Methodist Church

In Lloyd C. Douglas' book "The Robe" there is a conversation between two Roman soldiers who claim to have no religious faith. They do not believe in the many gods of Rome, but confess that it would be good to have a god — one god whom you could worship and to whom you could give yourself completely. Paulus then tells Marcellus what kind of god he would like. Here is what he says:

"The god I am going to invent is good. He doesn't just pretend to be good. He really is good! He takes a few bright men into his confidence — not necessarily Romans or Greeks or Gauls; just so they're honest and intelligent — and entrusts them with some important tasks. He tells one man how to cure leprosy, and others how to restore sight to the blind and hearing to the deaf. He confides the secrets of light and fire; how to store up summer heat for use in winter; how to capture the light of day and save it to illumine the night; how to pour idle lakes into arid lands."

Well, if you did not believe in God and someone asked you what kind of God you would invent as worthy of your allegiance, what would you say? What would be his nature?

THE VERY IDEA of God is a stupendous thought too big for the human mind to comprehend. Think of it — a God who has created this universe and now controls it. As we look upon this marvelous universe, and scientists tell us of distances and island universes million of light years away, we find new meaning in the Psalmist's exclamation "The heavens declare the glory of God." And when we think of these bodies of ours, their minuteness of detail, surely you and I must say with the Psalmist, "I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; marvelous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well."

Yes, the mind of man is too limited to conceive of the greatness of God. When we think of Him we have to use symbols. We lift up the highest in human experience to help us think of God. We call Him a rock, a
fortress, a bulwark and a high tower. We call Him father, companion, and friend. We call Him Ancient of Days and Hound of Heaven. We say God is like this and God is like that. We must conclude that our ideas of God are only partially true.

We must not leave the matter here. Though God is so great we think of Him in symbolic terms, yet He does have a near end which touches us.

EACH SUMMER many of us go to the beach for a vacation. There we look upon the vastness of the sea. We do not know all of it. In fact many of us have never sailed out very far upon it. But no one can say that we do not know the sea, for we do. We know that which touches our beach. We bathe in it; we sail in it and we are lulled to sleep by its music at night.

And God is like the sea. He is so great that we cannot know all about Him, yet He does have a near end which touches us. It is this near end which is of most concern to us. To be sure it is gratifying to think of a powerful-God, a Great God. But what you and I want to know most about is that part of God which washes our shores.

There are many ways in which God touches our lives — through beauty, truth and goodness — and many other ways.

But let us consider the supreme way in which He has revealed Himself. In Luke 7:16 we have these words, “God hath visited His people.” Here this doctor-writer Luke has referred to Jesus who came to live among men. He was saying what Paul said, “God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself.” So, in Jesus of Nazareth we find the face of God and can go to sleep in the dark. We have but to look at Him and we find answer to our question “What is God like?” for in Him do we find revealed the Heart of the universe.

LOOKING AT Jesus men no longer need to say, “Show us the Father and it suffices us,” for Jesus answered their requests by saying, “Have I been so long time with you and hast thou not known me. He that hath seen me hath seen the Father.”

In Him God touches our little shores — the Christ who not only lived historically but who also lives today. It is here that the Divine and Human meet as God revealed Himself in the life of Jesus Christ. Here is the supreme revelation of God for us; it is here that we find the near end of God.
What We Do Counts

By DR. WALLACE FRIDY
Pastor, St. John's Methodist Church

The parable of the talents which Jesus
told as recorded in Matthew 25:14-30 tells us
about the use of God's investment in us. You
remember how the man who was going into
another country gathered his servants, and de-
liberated unto them his goods. To one he gave
five talents, to another two, and to a third one.
The servant who had received the five used
what he had to make five more talents. The
one who had received two, also doubled his. But the ser-
vant given the one talent
went away and digged in the
earth and hid his lord's
money. Let us look at this
story.

In the first place, it
suggests to us that life is lent
to be spent. It is a gift of
God. This gift is lent by God
to be used. We did not choose
to be born; the gift preceded
the choice. We were given
life. It is a trust. God has invested in us. . .
given us life. How shall we use that which is
given?

We get the clue in answer to our quest-
ion from what the man in the story expected
from the talents given his servants. He expected
their use, their spending. Life is not to
be buried, not to be squandered, not to be
preserved, but used, spent.

Victor Frankl has well said, "Everyone
has his own specific vocation or mission in
life; everyone must carry out a concrete as-
ignment that demands fulfillment. Therein he
cannot be replaced, nor can his life be re-
peated—he can only answer to life by an-
wering for his own life; to life he can only re-
spond by being responsible."

IN THE second place, this story repre-
sents every man as having some talent.

"Unto one he gave five talents, to an-
er two, to another one; to each according to his
several ability." This is a statement of
the inequality of human endowment. The
older we get the more real this truth be-
comes when we realize that certain graces and
gifts have been planted within us and certain
withheld or denied us.

Dr. George Buttrick reminds us of this
difference: "Shakespeare has five talents in
literature, Michelangelo five in art, Savonar-
ola five in preaching, and Edison five in in-
vention. These are the bright particular stars
in the human firmament. . .But the vast ma-
jority have two talents. They are the useful
hosts of mediocrity. Then there are those who seem limited and handicapped—the one-talent people."

But over against this apparent inequality in human endowment, we see two balancing truths, namely, that each of us is endowed with some gift, some talent, and secondly, that we are expected to produce only in accordance with the measure it has been meted out to us. The two-talent man has fulfilled his task if he explores to the fullest his two; and the same with the one-talent man, he is not expected to produce what the five-talent man does. "Perhaps we should not envy greater capacity; it spells greater responsibility."

The question is not what faithfulness. God is not expecting us to become famous, but to take what has been given and explore it to the fullest so that He may be able to say, "Well done, good and faithful servant, What I lent you have used. And the kingdom of heaven is richer because you came this way."

IN THE THIRD place, the one-talent man failed to see that his talent was needed. This is the tragedy of the story. He despised his gift. What a tragedy to see or to feel that God has no need for the one talent!

Now this man wasn't bad. He didn't steal his master's money. He just hid it. Surely he felt responsible, but he only buried it for safe keeping.

How many of us are like that! When we are asked to do a job, we often say, "Let someone else do it; they can do it better than I." To be sure, to feel inadequate may be a healthy virtue, but we must never forget that what we have to offer God needs too, and never forget what amazing achievements God has wrought through unlikely instruments, instruments which are placed in his hands. Many have so little to offer and yet give so much. Not what treasure but what faithfulness.

Jesus gave repeated and surprising emphasis to what many called "obscure" service. He spoke of the importance of "the cup of cold water" give in love. He insisted that to feed the hungry and to visit the sick was of infinite value. Here was the widow's mite, the unknown Simeon carrying the Cross, the little boy feeding the five thousand.

FINALLY, THE one-talent man lacked the courage to accept the risk of adventure. This is the crux of the story—"I was afraid." He was afraid so he buried that which had been given and thereby lost it. He was afraid that he couldn't do as others. He couldn't measure up. He was afraid of work. He was lazy. He was afraid of his master. He was afraid that he wouldn't be given a fair deal.

The result was that when the master returned he said, "Take the talent from him and give it to him that hath ten.” This was not a cruel threat, but a sober fact of life... a true statement of the living law.
Dr. Buttrick has so well said: "Feed a capacity for music or for sympathy, and it will grow with an ever-deeper root. Neglect it, and it will disappear... Take away the talent from him. Empty the instinct for prayer... and soon the skies will be filled with spiritual hosts. Bury the instinct and soon those selfsame skies will be as inert as slag."

God has a job for you. If your job goes undone, no one else will do it. If your place goes unfilled, it will not be filled. Your life has been fashioned by God. Remember if you don't fill your place, God's plans for your life will not be fulfilled, nor will His completed plans for the world be fully realized. What you have God needs. If His investment goes unproductive, He has lost on you.

There is a little child waiting to be taught. There is a lonely boy yearning for friendship. There are sin-scarred men and women needing a new start in life. There is a broken-hearted wife seeking help for her alcoholic husband. There is a bereaved father listening for some word of cheer. There is a self-centered man needing something to shake him from his complacency. There is a depressed woman longing for that which will give peace and hope.

Maybe you are the person God would use to answer one of the cries of human need. It may be that "somebody is on your wavelength."

The Kingdom of Heaven is built like this:
Little by little,
Light by light
Bit by bit.
Life by life.

Remember the words of the poet Edwin Markham when he said: "There is waiting a work where only your hands can avail; And if you falter, a chord in the music will fail."

Now how much but how faithful. Then you will hear: "Well done thou good and faithful servant."
What Is The Good News?

By DR. WALLACE FRIDY
Pastor, St. John’s Methodist Church

We live in a world that bombards us with bad news. Every day through the various news media we are confronted with what happened yesterday, almost too frightful to contemplate, and also of what may happen tomorrow, that would add to our fears. Do you feel at times that it is more than you want to hear? If you do, you are not by yourself, for all of us now and then want to get away from it all.

Into this kind of world, the Christian is to go with “Good News.” What is this “Good News” we are to embrace and to proclaim? What is it that should give us abiding joy and peace of heart? Why is it that a Christian should be radiant and joyful? What is it that we should have that would commend it to those outside the faith? These questions are at the very heart of our religion. They search us and send us on a quest for the fundamentals of our faith. Dr. John Marsh of England has stimulated my thought and let us look at this Gospel.

We speak of the Gospel as being the “Good News.” What is it that is Good News? What is the Gospel?

IN THE FIRST place, the Gospel can be seen as history. The account of the Gospel is given to us in what we know as the Four Gospels — Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. It is the account of what took place when Jesus, the Christ, came to earth. It is God’s action in history when at a point of time, in a certain place, He, in the form of man, came to earth. The accounts of this event are given by these four writers.

At times, Matthew, Mark and Luke are looked upon as more historical than John, and John as being theological, but in a real sense all of them are theological in nature — that is they are telling the story and what it means in the life of man. It is a story that the Messiah is to be with people, a group of people, and that in this event of His coming to live with men we get a clue to the meaning of history. These four Gospels are telling us what took place.

So, we can be assured that our faith is rooted in history, at a point of time.

IN THE SECOND place, when we read in the Gospel what actually took place, some-
thing else is taking place. It is not just a story but what God is doing through events. The Gospel is a story which points to events, but also points to the meaning behind the event. It tells us what people are saying about this event, that “God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself.” And that through this act, He has given us a word of reconciliation, a means whereby we might be brought to God.

The Bible throughout is concerned with society, a people, always life in the people, the people of God. The Word is not just in isolation, but in company. The New Testament speaks to a community. And when the Evangelist tells the story about Jesus, it is what God has done for the people. It is something which has taken place; it is the news about what has taken place. God has now remade human life, wholly with the purpose of God. This was the Good News that God had made Jesus to be perfect man, and that God intended men to be like Him in a perfect society.

The “Good News” speaks to them about their own situation, about the life of the people. It speaks to us as persons immersed in a society, about our own situation, and this is why every new generation must have a re-interpretation of the Gospel for its age, a theology for the given situation. To be sure the Gospel does not change, but the age to which it speaks does, and this Word must be slanted to contemporary life in each generation.

**NOW IN THE THIRD place, what does this Good News consist of?**

For one thing, it tells us that there is no possibility of man being able to establish this Divine Community on his own. This Kingdom of God cannot be brought in by man himself. If there is to be a Community of God and man, the dominant factor must be God — the Creator and Ruler of life. Man must come to Him in total self-commitment.

A demonstration of this was given to us in the account of the Gospel story by the Lord coming and giving Himself completely to God. Now the religious man saw in this act a threat. But God is telling us through the Gospel story that this is the only way new life can begin — man giving himself completely to God. So when we read from the four Gospels, it is not just a story, but also to be seen is how God has established earth and men to have fellowship with Him.

“We now see through a glass darkly,” but there is hope. Here is something that happened to Jesus and that happens to man. Here is a story with a meaning beyond itself. It is in parable. The Reign of God finally began in Christ, but this is a parable for everyone else. It is what is to take place over and over again.

"In order to improve the mind, we ought less to read than tochi.

—Rene Descartes

“Patient is as like virtue that she seems either the sister or her daughter.

—Aristotle