

THE PRODIGAL /Sun. July 4, 2010

Sermon: "Freedom in Recovery"

Sermon by: **Fr. Bill Wigmore**

Big Book: Practical experience shows that nothing will so much to insure immunity from drinking and drugging as intensive work with another alcoholic or addict. It works when other activities fail. This is our 12th suggestion: Carry this message to (the others who still suffer.) You can help when no one else can. You can secure their confidence when others fail.

Don't start out as an evangelist or reformer. To be helpful is our only aim. When you discover a prospect for our fellowship, find out all you can about him. If he does not want to stop drinking, don't waste your time trying to persuade him. You may spoil a later opportunity.

Call on him while he is still jittery. He may be more receptive when depressed. See your man alone, if possible. If you are satisfied that he is a real alcoholic or addict, begin to dwell on the hopeless feature of the malady. Tell him exactly what happened to you. Stress the spiritual feature freely. You had better use everyday language to describe spiritual principles. Never talk down to an alcoholic from any moral or spiritual hilltop; simply lay out the kit of spiritual tools for his inspection.

He may be broke and homeless. If he is, you might try to help him get a job, or give him a little financial assistance. Burn the idea into the consciousness of every man that he can get well regardless of anyone. The only condition is that he trust God and clean house.

Your job now is to be at the place where you may be of maximum helpfulness to others, so never hesitate to go anywhere if you can be helpful. You should not hesitate to visit the most sordid spot on earth if you can be helpful. Keep on the firing line of life with these motives and God will keep you unharmed.

Psalm 24:

*The earth belongs to the Lord
For he founded it in empty space
He has filled it with manifold creatures*

***and everything on it is his.
*and breathed his own life breath into it.
*each one precious in his sight**

*Who is fit to hold power?
Those with a passion for truth;
 who act with mercy to the poor,
 who have let go of selfish concerns
Their strength is in their compassion;
Their children's children will bless them*

***Who is worthy to act in God's place?
*who are horrified by injustice
*and take up the cause of the helpless
*and see the whole earth as sacred.
*God's light shines through their hearts.
*and the work of their hands will endure.**

Gospel of Luke:

After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them ahead of him in pairs to every town and place that he himself intended to visit.

He would say to them, "Although the crop is good, there are few harvesters to go and gather it. So implore the harvest boss to dispatch workers into the fields. Get going; look, I'm

sending you out like lambs into a pack of wolves. Carry no purse, no knapsack, no sandals. Don't greet anyone on the road. Whenever you enter a house, first say, 'Peace to this house.' If peaceful persons live there, your peace will rest on them. But if not, it will return to you. Stay at that one house, eating and drinking whatever they provide, for workers deserve their wages. Do not move from house to house. Whenever you enter a town and they welcome you, eat whatever is set before you. Cure the sick and tell them, 'God's kingdom is close at hand.'

"But whenever you enter a town and they do not receive you, go out into the streets and say, 'Even the dust of your town that sticks to our feet, we wipe off...'

"Whoever hears you hears me, and whoever rejects you rejects me, and whoever rejects me, rejects the one who sent me."

The seventy-two returned with joy, saying, "Lord, even the demons submit to us when we invoke your name!"

And he said to them, "I was watching Satan fall like lightning from heaven. Look, I have given you authority over snakes and scorpions, and over all the powers of the enemy; and nothing will ever harm you. However, don't rejoice that the spirits submit to you; rejoice instead that your names have been written in heaven."

Sermon in a sentence: Jesus brought God's kingdom to those who thought they didn't deserve it and thought they'd never live to see it – so must we.

Sermon and Notes:

Well welcome again and a Happy Fourth of July! How's everyone doing tonight?

- I can't remember where I first heard this
But somebody once pointed out
That you can't understand LIGHT
if you haven't also known DARKNESS
- Explain
- And as alcoholics and addicts, I'm guessin' that most of us have known our share of DARKNESS!
- At the end of my drinking, whenever I'd get drunk, I'd always turn off the lights and close the blinds –
If you're going to do darkness – go all the way!

And what's true about LIGHT & DARKNESS
is also true about knowing FREEDOM.

The more your addiction has made you feel like a slave
The more grateful you'll be today for your FREEDOM!

(A little aside here: On our vacation, my wife and I took a cruise out of Brooklyn, New York – and I'd always wanted to see the house where Ebby first brought the message to Bill Wilson

- It's a brownstone on Clinton Street
- I couldn't find it
- Then we're in a cab going to the ship – and my wife spots it
- Bill had maybe his darkest hours there in that house
- 3x in detox

- His doctor finally gave him and his wife the word: "He's hopeless"
- He's deep in depression
- Then he gets a call from his old friend Ebby – I'm coming over to see you.
- Bill's at that brownstone – he's in his boxer shorts – he's half-drunk at his kitchen table – he has a bottle of gin and some pineapple juice – wanted to be sure he got his vitamin C!
- And Bill gave us a description of that darkness – and he even used the analogy of being in chains
- Here's what Bill said:

In our readings tonight, we heard from two different men.

They lived 2,000 years apart – but what they're describing here seems pretty similar:

- **How do you bring LIGHT to people living in darkness?**
- **How do you tell people in chains that you've found a way out of the cave?**

Let's start w/ Jesus – I think Bill would want us to do that!

In Luke's gospel, we hit a real turning point in his story last week.

Just before the reading we heard tonight, Luke says that, "*Jesus set his face toward Jerusalem*"
Up till now.....

But now he's going to confront the political and religious powers in the capital

So tonight, we hear what Luke imagines are the instructions Jesus might have given to his disciples for making a 12th Step call in Israel.

These instructions are known as *the Rules of the Road*.

They try to answer the question: **How does a follower of Jesus act when he brings the Good News into some new village or town?**

Jesus starts off by saying that he's sending his messengers out "**like lambs traveling among wolves. hey're gonna be playing to a tough crowd** – crowds with very **hardened hearts** –

And so he says:

"Go carry the message to the lost ones first."

- And here Jesus sounds very much like Dr. Silkworth, Bill Wilson's physician when he says: **"But don't go preaching to 'em, boys! And don't go telling them all sorts of holy stuff about God or about me. That's not what they need to hear. Not yet. Not now.**

But instead go into their towns and go into the homes that welcome you

and first heal their diseases and ease some of their pains.

These sheep have wounds that first need to be tended to.

- **Heal them** – Comfort them - Cast out their demons. **Do that first.**
- Then whisper this gently in their ears: **Say: "The kingdom of God is close at hand... Today it's come very close to your house."**

And they're gonna know that's true because the kingdom of God will have touched them where they live.

You know, they say *Texas sits* in the very heart of *the Bible belt* – **and if that's true** – then you'd think *the kingdom of God* ought to be close at hand

here too. **But is it? Take a quick look around!** Among all our 50 states:

- Texas is **dead last** in helping its alcoholics & addicts.

- Texas is **at rock bottom** when it comes to *caring for its poor*.
- **We're last** in just about every measure you can take of **social action or social justice**.
- We've filled our prisons with *the poor and the powerless* while our leaders talk about **"leaving nobody behind."**
- **The kingdom** that Jesus spoke about wasn't some fairyland located up there in the clouds.
- **The kingdom** Jesus knew, & experienced, & spoke about – ***he said it begins right here and now.***
- He said *we enter that kingdom* whenever we make God the ruler of our lives and whenever we begin to act toward his other children the way we would want them to act towards us.

So Jesus says: *Be humble* yourselves – **Model the kingdom**, cause you might be the only kingdom these people ever get to see.

- Let them see that you're different from the priests and the scribes and the Pharisees –
- ***"Carry no purse – no knapsack –no sandals –***
- ***Especially you, Peter.***
- ***And for God's sake, get rid of those Birkenstocks!***
- **Then he instructs 'em to "stay at the first house you enter** and don't go moving all around, looking for a softer mattress or someone who's got a big screen TV."
- ***"Eat what's set before you* and don't go shopping around for the best cook in town. **Heal the sick – and do it all for free! –****
- That's how they'll know God's kingdom has come into their village –
- See, nobody's ever given these people anything for free – ***not in their whole life –***
- All people had ever done is come into their towns and take from them ***what little*** they had left.
- **And then Jesus says, after you've fed them, and clothed them, and after you've detoxed 'em if they're drunk or stoned –**
- **Then tell 'em the Good News that'll set them free forever: *Tell 'em God loves them – and he loves 'em just as they are.***

That was a powerful message that *transformed* people back then – and it's the message that still has the power to transform people today!

Luke says *Jesus sent seven-two of these messengers* into the little villages he was *traveling to* on his way to Jerusalem –

And when they went into those villages, they did as they were told.

They healed the sick – They cast out demons – They told people that God loved them and he wanted them *to love themselves* and to love one another too.

- **And just like it says in the Big Book: *"They were amazed before they were halfway through."***
- For the first time in years, the people in those towns began *"to know a new freedom and a new happiness."*
- **The *"Love program"* worked for them!**
- The kingdom really *was there* all along –
It was *in them* - and it was *all around them*.
- The people in those towns could see it in the 72 -

- *And before very long they started to see it growing in themselves too.*

Now I don't know if Bill Wilson had this reading from Luke in front of him when he wrote Chapter Seven in the Big Book – but it sure sounds to me like he did.

- **How do you tell an alcoholic or an addict that he or she doesn't have to *live like they've been livin'* any more?**
- Bill says, **"Tell 'em the Good News - but be *very careful in how you lay it out to them* –**

So the first thing he suggests is that we never forget that *we're being sent on this mission because we need the people we're being sent to every bit as much as they need us.*

Bill says: Don't start out by feeling even the least bit superior to them – **cause if you do your mission will over before it even starts. "To be helpful is our only aim."**

- We're not there to cure 'em, or to fix 'em, or to dazzle 'em with our brilliance or our Bull Shit.
- We're not there to quote the Big Book or to evangelize to them either.

None of that ego stuff'll work.

- ***We're there to tell them the Good News of our own recovery. That's the only story we've got to tell.***
- *Tell them what it was like for us when we were down, and when we felt so damned lost*
- *Tell 'em what it felt like to feel **absolutely hopeless inside.***
- *They need to hear that from us, **and we need to be reminded of the place where we came from not so very long ago ourselves.***
- Bill says **that's the stuff** that'll reach inside and touch the heart of an addict.
- ***That's the stuff that'll gain their confidence –***
- ***To know that someone else was exactly where they are now – and that – somehow - they've found a way out. How'd you do it?***

Whenever Bill Wilson told his AA story he always told about the day his sponsor Ebby first carried the message of recovery to him there in Brooklyn.

There was no preaching –

No pressure to accept **his version** of the Good News –

Only the need to tell a fellow sufferer

what God had done for him when he was down –

Bill listened to his old friend – Outwardly he didn't change very much that day –

But inwardly there was now a crack in Bill's armor

and the kingdom of God began to slip into his heart –

Bill was never the same man after that.

Within a month he was sober – never to drink again.

There's an old reading that we turn to pretty often here at this service.

To be totally honest, sometimes I do it because it's an easier softer way *to end a sermon* -

And that particular character defect of "sloth" hasn't yet been removed!

But it's also something that's important to me – Something that my old sponsor Floyd handed me many years ago.

- He gave it to me when I was probably feeling like one of those villagers who had "a kingdom-visit" from one of the 72 back in Jesus' day.

- I was suspicious and I wanted to know *why was Floyd **doing all those nice things for me?***
- Why was he spending so much time with me – helping me get a job and sort out the mess I'd made of my life?
- Why was he buying my lunch and inviting me home to dinner with his wife and family?
- **What was in it for him?**
- ***I didn't get it!***
- ***Nobody I ever knew acted like that unless they wanted something from me in return.***

So one day I got up the courage and I asked him.

And Floyd lowered his head and said very humbly, that:

"Years ago some guy had done *all of that **and more*** for him and now it was his turn - *so he was just passing it on to me.*

- He said **Maybe if *this thing took in me* - then someday I'd go and do the same for someone else.**

Here's the reading he handed me – but I'll only read a part -
We'll have some copies of it at the door when you leave the service.
But as I read it, I'm gonna ask you to do what those 72 did when
they carried this message years ago,
and do what Bill Wilson did when the same message
was carried to him – **Hear it not just with your ears – but with your heart.**

The message is called ***Why We Were Chosen*** and it goes like this:

God in his wisdom chose this group of men and women to carry the message of his goodness.
In choosing them he did not go to the proud, the mighty, the famous or the brilliant.
He went instead to the humble, to the sick, to the unfortunate.
He chose the drunks and the addicts, the so-called weaklings of the world.

Well might he have said to us: "Into your weak and feeble hands I have entrusted a power beyond estimate.
To you has been given that which has been denied to the most learned of your fellows.
Not to scientists, not to statesmen, not even to my priests or ministers have I given this gift of healing that I entrust to you.

"You are not chosen because of exceptional talents.
And be careful always, if success should come your way,
not to ascribe to personal talent that which is really only my gift.
If I had wanted learned men to accomplish this mission,
the power would have been given to the physician and scientist.
If I had wanted great speakers, there would have been many
anxious for the assignment, for talk is the easiest used of all the talents with which I have
endowed mankind.
If I had wanted scholars, the world is filled with better-qualified men and women who would be
available.

"You were chosen because you have been the outcasts of the world and your long experience as
alcoholics and addicts has made you - or should make you - humble and alert to the cries of
distress that come from the lonely hearts of the addicted everywhere.

"So go and carry this message to all who still suffer and keep ever in mind the admission you made of your own powerlessness and your own unmanageability. Remember, I am with you always."

Even till the end of time. Now pass it on to the next guy! Go bring him God's freedom!

Amen.

Why We Were Chosen

God in his wisdom chose this group of men and women to carry the message of his goodness. In choosing them he did not go to the proud, the mighty, the famous or the brilliant. He went instead to the humble, to the sick, to the unfortunate. He chose the drunks and the addicts, the so-called weaklings of the world. Well might he have said to us: "Into your weak and feeble hands I have entrusted a power beyond estimate. To you has been given that which has been denied to the most learned of your fellows. Not to scientists, not to statesmen, not even to my priests or ministers have I given this gift of healing that I entrust to you.

"It must be used unselfishly; it carries with it grave responsibility. No day can be too long; no demands upon your time can be too urgent; no case can be too hopeless; no task too hard; no effort too great. It must be used with tolerance for I have restricted its application to no race, no creed and no denomination. Personal criticism you must expect; lack of appreciation will be common; ridicule will be your lot; your motives will be misjudged. You must be prepared for adversity, for what men call adversity is the ladder you must use to climb toward spiritual perfection. And remember, in the exercise of this power, I will not ask of you beyond your capability.

"You are not chosen because of exceptional talents. And be careful always, if success should come your way, not to ascribe to personal talent that which is really only my gift. If I had wanted learned men to accomplish this mission, the power would have been given to the physician and scientist. If I had wanted great speakers, there would have been many anxious for the assignment, for talk is the easiest used of all the talents with which I have endowed mankind. If I had wanted scholars, the world is filled with better-qualified men and women who would be available. You were chosen because you have been the outcasts of the world and your long experience as alcoholics and addicts has made you - or should make you - humble and alert to the cries of distress that come from the lonely hearts of the addicted everywhere.

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Anonymous