

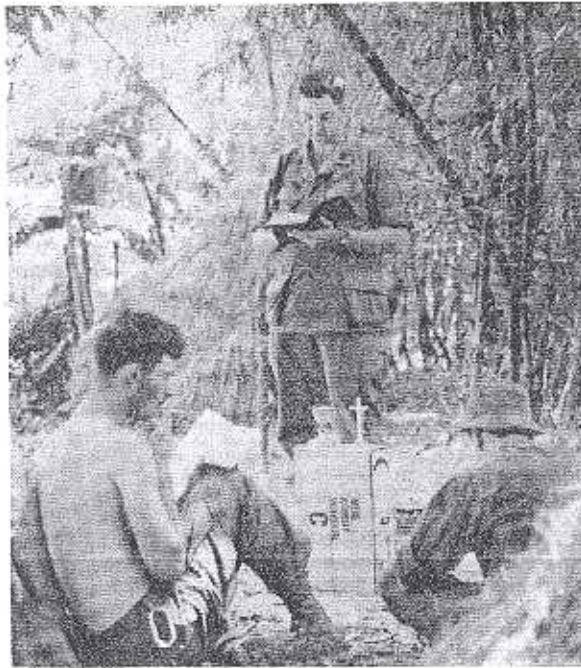
JOURNEY OF LOVE

a sermon preached by
Chaplain Merle D. Brown

at

St. Mark's Lutheran Church
Butler, Pennsylvania

March 14, 1971



IN MEMORIAM



In loving memory of
Chaplain Merle D. Brown
who was killed in Viet-
nam eight years ago, on
April 11, 1971.

Pondly remembered by
Mom, Dad, Brother,
Sister and Family

On Sunday, March 14, 1971, Chaplain Merle Brown, a son of St. Mark's congregation, preached at his home church while on leave from the battle area of Viet Nam. Twenty-eight days later on Easter Sunday, April 11, he was killed in action in Viet Nam while once again fulfilling his responsibilities as a chaplain in the battle area. At the time of his death he was conducting a worship service which was interrupted by enemy fire. He was ultimately killed in a crashing and burning helicopter. He was buried from St. Mark's Luthern Church on Saturday, April 24. In view of these events, we are reproducing his sermon preached on March 14, in written form. We believe that it comes to us now with new impact and with new meaning. We ask you to read and to reverently meditate upon the Word of the Living God as it was proclaimed by one of His servants, Chaplain Merle D. Brown.

JOURNEY OF LOVE

Grace, mercy and peace be unto you from
God our Father and from our Lord and
Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen

I want to express a word of appreciation for the opportunity to speak to you this morning. I am reminded somewhat in my own experience of my first class sermon at the seminary as I stand before some of my teachers and fellow classmates, speaking together and serving the Lord. It isn't every day that we have the opportunity to share in a current event such as Viet Nam, but I don't want to direct your attention entirely to Viet Nam this morning. I want to direct your attention to the Gospel which is our purpose for being there. I want to direct your attention to a portion of a verse of St. John, the 13th chapter, which simply says "Love One Another."

Now may the words of my mouth and the meditation of each heart, O Lord, be acceptable in Thy sight as we share together now this Gospel News of Thy redeeming grace.
Amen

Many times today we are concerned about what is happening to our younger generation and maybe what is happening to our older generation. Sometimes we become uncomfortable in the circumstances in which we find ourselves, but when I become discouraged, as can happen to all of us, my first and only concern is the love of Christ because why else are we here this morning? Why do you have pastors who serve you faithfully? Why do you serve your Lord faithfully? And it's only by considering that love of Christ that is shed and shown so dearly on the cross that I can carry out my work as a chaplain in the Armed Services. With all the discomforting and all the disquietness in our lives brought about by war, by misunderstandings, by turmoil here at home, we sometimes ask "Is God really alive?" Are we really going to fall apart at the seams? Is our nation going to die as have so many other civilizations and governments in the past? But each time this happens something comes along to give me renewed faith and assurance that the love of Christ is there and that in spite of all the things that happen to us today we will love and we will have faith and eternal life.

I suppose one of the most important things right now is that we sometimes call a fad or craze of the younger generation falling in love again with Jesus Christ. That seems odd. It may not seem apparent to you. I am sure that some of you read in a recent article in a popular magazine that told about a movement that is coming out of California that is bringing Christ back into the lives of troubled youth. That it is coming back to help those who have fallen by the way of drugs, who have been lost to the world because of their very concerned attitude. I am sure all of you have heard in popular songs in recent weeks an old familiar Gospel hymn sung by a current popular singer, Judy Collins, called "Amazing Grace" and I think you sang it last Wednesday night. I noted in one of the bulletins several weeks ago that it was an anthem sung in this church.

We note several songs that come up today with the name of Jesus in them. To some of us the songs may

seem anything but religious, but I am convinced as I work with young people in the Armed Services that those words are sweet words of praise to our Lord. We don't find in Scripture places where He tells us how and when and in what form we should worship Him, only that "thou wilt worship Him in all His glory and honor." Some of the favorite songs of our Bible camp and our youth today are songs like "They Will Know We Are Christians By Our Love, By Our Love."

Today I want to take you along a Journey of Love, that took me to Viet Nam, that brought you to church this morning, that brings men and women all over the world to worship together under the fellowship of Jesus Christ.

One of the real challenges of ministering to young people today is to let them minister to us. Youth need an opportunity to love and the freedom to serve. They want to be known by their love, not by the clothes they wear, the length of skirts they wear, the length of their hair, but they want to be known by their service, by the size of their hearts, that they are concerned. They have been unable many of them to accept things as they are, and as they have been in the past for they have realized that they're sinners and that they have fallen short, and that they are less than perfect, but they know that Christ accepts them. Do we know that? Do we accept that fact no matter how imperfect we are or where we serve - Christ accepts us.

In my work I find myself a combination of missionary, counselor, pastor. Being in Viet Nam I suppose is one of the joys of the ministry from the standpoint of being able to serve in these capacities. I'm a counselor to many troubled young souls who are searching in the depths of their lives and hearts for answers to why things are the way they are, as I am sure many of you are. But as we go down this Journey of Love, they too find that sometimes the only answer they come up with is that of Christ.

In the picture on the bulletin that you have, taken a couple months ago of a service in the field, you see two

young men that represent a group that was there in the field who came together, relaxing for a few moments to worship God. They look nothing like a congregation that you may picture yourself here this morning. One without a shirt on, one with a hat on, one with a cigarette in his mouth, in a moment of repose. But there is something about that that should speak to you and me this morning. The quiet repose of Christ in their midst that they could relax, that they could have assurance that He cares and that there was someone there who shows care by serving them, and so they can relax, that they can be relieved from anxiety and can find assurance that there is more to life than death. So we worship together, we find hope.

In that little hamlet that we were sitting in that day, that afternoon, I not only brought with me their week's supply of C rations of food, their mail, their good news from home, but you will notice in the picture sitting on the case of C rations is the Bread and the Cup of the Communion, the Good News of the Bread of Life, of the Gospel.

We find ourselves serving in many unusual ways, many unusual circumstances, but when it comes back to the worshiping of Christ, there are still people who are encouraged. War is war. It is a sign of our weakness that our world is estranged from Christ. War is a result of man's exercise of the free-will which God endowed Him with. God uses war as a punishment upon sinful and rebellious men and nations that deny his Lordship and defy His demands for justice and mercy. God turns war's waste of life and energy, and resources into a reminder of the folly of trusting in material things. Out of war's turmoil the righteous suffer and die along with the wicked, but they are comforted, they are comforted by the assurance that in everything God works for the good for those who love Him. And so we come down the road of the Journey of Love and as we return to the 21st chapter of Revelation, the opening verses, the look and the hope that we find in this Lenten-pre-Easter season that says "Then I saw a new heaven and a new

earth for the first heaven and the first earth had vanished and there was no longer any seas, and I saw the Holy City, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God made ready like a bride adorned for her husband and I heard a loud voice proclaiming from the throne, Now at last God has His dwelling among men and He will dwell among them and they shall be His people and God Himself will be with them and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. There shall be an end to death and the mourning, and crying, and pain, for the old order was passed away. And He who sat upon the throne said, Behold I am making all things new."

To me that portion of Scripture is the assurance of the Journey of Life that comes to the ultimate Journey of the Love of Christ on the cross. It is important that we learn to minister to each other where we are. The importance of the missionary and the chaplain is the fact that they go and they live in the same environment with the people that they are trying to serve. Sometimes here as we sit in our own comfortable churches we are a long way from the war, from the primitive society of some of our mission fields, from the societies where Christ is not yet fully known and we become somewhat complacent about what we are doing.

Five and a half years ago in this same pulpit I was directed by Dr. Huffman as I began my ordained ministry to be urgent in season and out of season for the Word of God. I am sure that that had to spill over on each one of us because it is not just the clergymen who must be urgent in season and out of season for the Word of God but it is each one of us. Every day as we come closer and closer to that final event of Christ the urgency should become more tangible and we should become more aware of it.

One of the concerns of the church today is the fact that membership is dropping, that there seems to be less and less people for the missions. I read in one of the papers sent by our church president saying that there are more seminarians graduating than there are going to be places for them. That there are more seminarians that are interested in going into missions but there isn't

money enough to send them and I have to stop and think back to where I'm at in the world. That I have to think of the many people in Viet Nam who do not know Christ and that is just one corner of the world whose society in life has not been effected yet by this love which we want to share on the cross, and I have to ask myself "Are we really concerned?" What have we done to prevent the misunderstandings, the lack of love, the prevention of war in our own lives, by our own failure to encourage people in Christ?

I know from serving in a civilian parish, there it is very easy to sit back and say "Well, here we are, we struggle along with our own problems, our own little financial hardships in the congregation; we struggle along with a clergyman or pastor that we aren't really always sure that he is right; we put up with his idiosyncrasies, and he with our idiosyncrasies, and we go along from day to day, and from Sunday to Sunday, and year in and year out, never really stirring up the waters of concern, just being satisfied with what we have. And yet, we have so much that we can share with the world that we are wasting.

The love of Christ cannot come into the world unless it comes through you, and through me and as individual Christians we must make the first move. No amount of talk within these walls will bring others to Christ. No amount of offering put into these offering plates this morning will bring others to Christ, but it is only when our own concerns and our own self-interest and our own self-pity and our own lack of self-sacrifice are reversed that we come back again to our own work of bringing the Gospel to people and people to the Gospel. Only then can that Journey of Love be realized in eternal life for God's people.

Where do we start and where do we stand now as we look to each other and as we follow each other along the road of this temporal life? Remember we're only pilgrims. This is not our permanent home. It will not be our home. If all that we had to look for, if all the young men who have died or who put their lives at

stake every day in Viet Nam or any war zone (some of you may have been there or in other wars) if all you had to look forward was to dying, where would you be?

As I visit the aid station, the clearing station of young people or young men who have come in, who are laying hopelessly on the stretchers with maybe portions of their bodies blown away or their bodies full of fragments and they look up at me they can smile, and they can say sometimes, "But there is more to this than what I have just now experienced." Some can say this and others have not yet found it. And that is the urgency of today of our Gospel preaching is that men find a faith and a love in Christ or life is nothing more than dying. That is it, that's the end, there is no more hope. It is no wonder that young people begin to rebel at having to sacrifice their lives because they haven't learned what sacrifice means. They haven't learned about Jesus Christ and it is important that we continue to put that Word out, that we witness it by our lives.

As your sons and daughter, if they have not already been in the Service of their country, or as they come into that age bracket, or maybe have already been there, or maybe have been given up to the Lord in sacrifice to their country, let it be known to you now the only way that they are going to have any hope in life is to know what sacrifice means. That Someone loved them enough to give up His life that they could have life. If they don't know that, if they haven't been able to grasp that in their early church life or in their homes, it is going to be very hard for them on the battlefield of life because without the hope of salvation, without the hope of His love that I have been talking about, they cannot show love. They will not know what it is, and they will not know what comfort comes from it.

I know that you, and I know that I am concerned about the world, about peace. We are all tired of war, but as I said earlier war is a consequence of man's weaknesses and sin. When you read the Old Testament you find that it is full of war for God used war to punish,

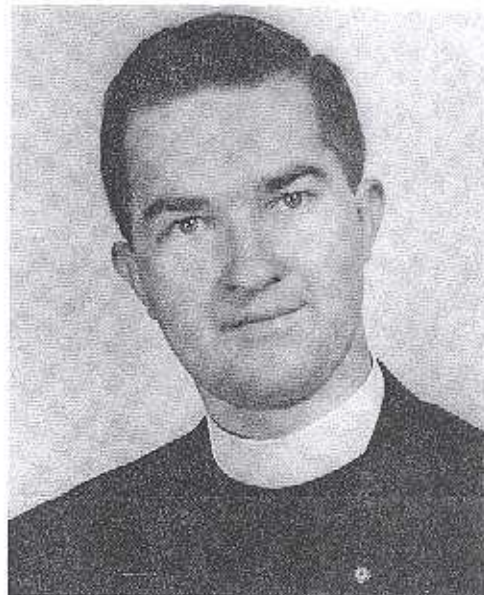
not only His people, but the enemies, the idolator. And so today you and I are faced with an immense problem of a world torn from end to end by conflict and we have within our lives and within our conscience the responsibility of showing it the path of peace as we bring to a close the Journey of Life.

I would like to have you open with me to hymn No. 352 in your hymnal and to close out this portion of the service reading with me the four stanzas of the hymn "O God of Love" - No. 352. Read out because this is a prayer of peace and it is confirmation of your concern.

*O God of love, O King of peace,
Make war throughout the world to cease;
The wrath of sinful man restrain;
Give peace, O God, give peace again.
Remember, Lord, thy works of old,
The wonders that our fathers told;
Remember not our sin's dark stain;
Give peace, O God, give peace again.
Whom shall we trust but thee, O Lord?
Where rest but on thy faithful word?
None ever called on thee in vain;
Give peace, O God, give peace again.
Where saints and angels dwell above,
All hearts are knit in holy love;
O bind us in that heavenly chain;
Give peace, O God, give peace again. Amen*

And now may that peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and your minds and your lives full of action in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen

Chaplain Merle D. Brown



Chaplain Brown was killed in military action in Viet Nam on Easter Sunday, April 11, 1971, as he was faithfully rendering service to God and to his country.

This booklet is provided to the glory of God and to honor the memory of Chaplain Brown by the members and friends of St. Mark's Lutheran Church.