

Scraps

CHECK POINT 13

Sunday Sermon May 24, 1970 at Claremont United
Church of Christ Congregational

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Last April Clarence Faust invited me to give this sermon, and it seemed harmless enough at the time. I began to get some thoughts on paper on May 3, which was quite a Sunday! You may remember that some 1200 people started out at seven o'clock that morning on a 28 mile hike and about 600 of them finished the 28 miles. The idea of the hike was to raise money to help improve our environment - some of the funds went to Zero Population Growth, some went to the Sierra Club, some to buy books about our environment for the local libraries. All told, the hikers raised about \$15,000, which is somewhere between 50¢ and \$1 per mile actually hiked.

I'll admit I was impressed. There were 14 check points along the route and each hiker had his card stamped as he reached each point. There were also oranges and cups of fruit juice at these points. Check Point #13 was at Mills and Twelfth Streets on the Harvey Mudd College campus, just outside my study window, so as I began to think about this sermon, there were people streaming by the window who had walked the first 27 miles - mostly youngsters, the youngest of them age 8, but most of them about 14, and an occasional old-timer. They were all hot - the temperature was 88 degrees and many of them were limping. Some of them were carrying their shoes in an obvious attempt to change blisters, but they were all proud they had managed to hike 27 miles and were being of some help about the environment.

May 3 was also three days after the President's decision to invade Cambodia and I was worried about what the reaction would be on the college campuses, in general, and The Claremont Colleges, in particular. I knew many students would be outraged about this decision. I knew, too, that we had had very little violence on any of The Claremont Colleges' campuses, but that our luck might not hold forever. And, of course, I have had a busy three weeks since then. I have talked to student groups who are trying to understand what they should do and have argued with those threatening to sit-in; I have worked with student officers and have worked with concerned faculty.

Many of you will know that the students and faculty of The Claremont Colleges sent a group of 15 of us to Washington two weeks ago - ten students, three faculty, one trustee, and me. We had interviews of about an hour's length

with the President's Director of Communications, Mr. Herbert Klein; with Deputy Undersecretary of State, Mr. Macomber; with Special Assistant to the President, Mr. Moynihan; with Secretary of HEW, Mr. Finch; and U. S. Commissioner of Education, Dr. Allen; and with Secretary of Interior, Mr. Hickel. The students also made several dozen other contacts. Since returning to Claremont we have been attempting to sort out what we learned there and what we learned here.

Now, this is a sermon and not a news bulletin. From the events of this month, I think I begin to understand a little more clearly some of the things which divide us and it is to this I want to speak. I do not plan to generalize because I know better than most people that no two students agree on everything. Many students support the President's actions and many of them oppose them. Many feel this is a time of crisis and some think it is not.

However, one statement is true of all our young people under thirty - they were born after 1940 - they have essentially no memory of the Second World War - they do remember the draft because they have grown up under it. We have had a peace-time Selective Service since 1948 - the longest in the nation's history in peace or war. We have had some United States troops in Vietnam since 1950, so we have also been in Vietnam for as long as most of them can remember. The number of United States battle deaths in Vietnam now exceeds those in the Revolutionary War, or the War of 1812, or the Mexican War, or the Spanish-American War, or the Korean War, and is closing in on the number of battle deaths the United States suffered in the First World War. These, then, are memories which are common to all our citizens under 30: universal military conscription and a lifelong war.

Those of us over forty have a different set of memories from our growing up. We remember the Depression, and we want the security of food, clothing, and housing. We remember the Second World War and its very strong sense of national unity.

It is not my purpose today to claim that the viewpoint of those under thirty is right, or that the viewpoint of those over forty is right. I am simply trying to point out that the points of view are different. One can read history and listen to the stories around the dinner table, but he still won't know what it feels like to be out of a job with other people depending on him - unless he has been out of a job with other people depending on him! One can read the underground press until his vocabulary would shame a stevedore and still he will not know what it is to decide between Canada, conscientious objecting and military service, unless he has had the six years of experience with that choice which some of our young people have had.

This difference in understanding makes it difficult to communicate. It is true for every generation that young people want to find their own ways of doing things, and that they resent the authority of their parents. This is part of growing up. You may remember Mark Twain's story about arguing with his father, when Mark was 16 and again when he was 26. His story was that he was amazed how much his father had learned in those 10 years. Now Mark Twain and his father also grew up in different times and had different experiences. But our children and we, who are parents, have a much greater psychological difference because we have been brought up with much greater differences in the kinds of advantages and disadvantages which have shaped our lives. In my own case, I now consider it an advantage to have grown up in the Depression without much money. But it is not an advantage I can provide for my children. Time will tell whether or not it will have been an advantage for our young men to have grown up under the expectation of a peace-time draft. What we cannot deny is that these are different experiences.

Part of my job is to talk to students and I have talked to hundreds of them on these questions. I find they have hundreds of different views - about military service, about United States foreign policy, about what they want to do with their own lives. They think even more independently than those of us who are in our fifties. Some students believe that, by and large, Daddy knows best - others are sure he doesn't. I do not plan to give you a student's viewpoint; there is no student's viewpoint. But there is a growing sense of frustration. Most students are quite willing to try to understand my point of view, quaint though it may be. Many of them are convinced that it is much more difficult to get me to understand their point of view. And, believe me, they have tried for hours on end!

The result can be frustration - and there is plenty of cause for frustration on either side of the generation gap. One way of dealing with frustration is to give up and do it the other fellow's way - which is precisely what most of the college students are now doing; and what we did when we were kids. Another response to frustration is to quit and do something else, which is why a number of our forebears came West, and why some of our children drift off to hippie colonies. Another response to frustration is to do what is expected of you, but to insist on doing it your own way, which is what I do when my wife makes me move the furniture; or what college students do when they wear long hair and sandals, but get good grades. Frustration reactions from here on become progressively more destructive. The man who finds his opinion is ignored may swear to see if he gets attention that way, and we have been well cursed recently. Or, he may threaten to change his adversary's point of view by force or violence. The whole history of the Civil Rights movement is of non-violent coercion and now we have more violence. We have seen each of these reactions between students and their elders in our national life. We have also seen a tremendous search on the part of our young people

for new ways to open communication, to talk with the rest of us, to find ways of working with their parents, their elected representatives, and their college presidents, which do not leave them completely frustrated. That is why we have peace marches or invasions of Washington. Jackson State and Kent State said to some of our young people - "Do it our way, or we will kill you," but said to others, "There must be a better way to talk things over and let's try again while there is yet time."

I'm with those who believe we should try again while there is yet time. I know all of the arguments about those under thirty, who have known little suffering, have had to take little responsibility, have had all sorts of benefits showered upon them and who have moral standards that we just can't recognize. There is some truth in each of these statements for some of our young people. I know all of the arguments about those of us over forty who have long since compromised all our standards, who preach a moral code we do not follow, who are scared to death of change, and are interested in hanging onto what we've got. There's some truth in each of these statements for many of us.

But there are larger truths. We are, all of us, part of a religious tradition which includes the Old and the New Testament. We believe that the Lord has work for his people. We hold that the Lord works his way through people, in each generation - that to each of us in our time He reveals some of His truth - He speaks to old Moses and to young David. Part of our duty is to listen, to seek the Will of the Lord for ourselves and to find the Will of the Lord in the actions of others. For what does the Lord require of us but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly in His sight?

It is a time for reconciliation - not for frustration. Please listen to your own kids and hear those, too, who are so passionately eager to build a better world. They are frustrated, and we can, if we will, help many of them to build that better world from which they feel cast off. We can begin by watching and listening - which is why I began with the view from Check Point #13.