

(A sermon on the transporting of school children preached by Dr. Joseph B. Mullin, First Presbyterian Church, Greensboro, N. C., June 6, 1971.)

"ONE NATION UNDER GOD"

James 1:19 (TEV) *"Remember this, my dear brothers! Everyone must be quick to listen, but slow to speak and slow to become angry."*

Do you believe that God is guiding the destiny of our nation and the nations of the world? God is invisible and intangible but evil can be seen and heard. We see and hear man's failures and foibles. We see and hear war and the results of man's hatred. Sometimes these can cause us to believe that evil must ultimately rule, for we cannot see God.

God gave us free will and because of free will men can choose to thwart God's progress and to delay His victory. But the great God of the universe will have the final say and the final act.

Historians have pointed out that nineteen civilizations have disappeared from the face of the earth. Have you ever wondered why this happened? Could it be that the civilizations no longer fulfilled the purposes that God had in mind so He removed them?

This great nation was founded by men and women who believed that God was guiding their destiny. Those early settlers who clung tenaciously to the shore lines of our land believed that their destiny was in the hands of God. As we participate in Guilford County's Bicentennial year we are very conscious of our nation's rich history. Benjamin Franklin, when he was eighty-one years old, spoke these words at the framing of our Constitution, words that speak for the people of his day who were creatively forming the future:

"I have lived a long time, and the longer I live the more convincing proofs I see of this truth: that God governs in the affairs of men. If a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without His notice, is it probable that an empire can rise without His aid? We have been assured in the Sacred Writings that 'except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it.' I firmly believe this, and I also believe that without His concurring aid we shall succeed in this political building no better than the builders of Babel."

WE BELIEVE GOD IS GUIDING US NOW

We gather in this sanctuary week by week to worship God and to seek His guidance because we believe that He participates in the affairs of men and that He guides the destinies of men and nations. Jesus Christ came to show us God's love and to demonstrate the depths to which God would go for us by letting His Son die upon the Cross.

When we say that our nation is being guided by God we know that we are human beings who are sinful and that we err, but we continuously seek His forgiveness individually and corporately and pray for our nation that we will do His will. We do

not believe that our nation has a corner on God, but we believe that our nation and all nations are responsible to Him and stand before Him in His love and in His judgment.

DEMOCRACY: A NEW EXPERIMENT

The United States of America is unique in history in that over the past 200 years we have tried a fantastic experiment. In forming our Constitution we created a democracy and began to proclaim that all men are created equal. "We hold these truths to be self-evident," the framers of the Declaration of Independence recorded, "that all Men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."

Throughout our 200 year history the visionary conviction that all men are created equal has been put to the test. The profound words of Abraham Lincoln more than 100 years ago describe the crisis of this belief then. He had come to the battleground at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania to dedicate the military cemetery there. His words on that occasion are taking on new meaning for us now. Hear again a few sentences from that brief address:

"Fourscore and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent a new nation, conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal. Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation or any nation so conceived and so dedicated can long endure.....that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom and that government of the people, by the people and for the people shall not perish from the earth."

DEMOCRACY IS BEING TESTED TODAY

In this last half of the 20th Century in America we are being put to the test to see if democracy can continue to work. We are overwhelmed with technological and economic change. Our population is crowding into cities. We have untold problems. But the real test of democracy in these remaining years of the 20th Century is not population, pollution or poverty. The real test of our democracy is whether the Black Man and the White Man believe that all men are created equal, whether they believe that each of us can have pride in his own race and still live together in mutual respect and love for one another. Democracy will rise or fall in this generation on whether or not we are able to see ourselves all as children of God, a God who created us equal and loves us all the same, a God who has endowed us with inalienable rights and that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

Greensboro is a part of this great venture in democracy. In these years ahead we will be tested continually to see if we in our community can make democracy work. We can fail miserably or we can be an example to the nation and the world. The whole world is watching our nation in these years. To succeed now in this exciting experiment of democracy we will need everyone committed to this cause. We must have courage, openness, trust, integrity. We must be willing to change our minds. We must be willing to wrestle with new ideas. We must be willing to be forgiving. We must love.

We must take some risk.

THE IMMEDIATE ISSUE: TRANSPORTING OUR CHILDREN

Right now the immediate issue before the citizens of Greensboro is the transporting of our children and youth to public schools to attain racial balance. There is deep, emotional feeling about this with many Black and White people. I would like to make some comments about this issue. I realize that you are at a disadvantage, for in this setting I talk and you listen, however, our Session has provided an opportunity for you to express your views tonight in our Social Hall.

I, too, have feelings about this issue for I have three children in our public schools who will be affected by it. Some of you may disagree with what I have to say. You know that I do not assume to have all the right answers. But if we disagree let us not do it in a spirit of downing each other as being evil or bad-intentioned or even stupid. This issue will pass, and we are going to need one another in the future perhaps for greater issues. Let us not alienate one another now and thus jeopardize our relationships for the future.

STANCES WE CAN TAKE ON THE ISSUE

There are at least four different stances that we can assume about the transporting of our children from one school to another in Greensboro this fall:

1. We can comply with the law of the land and the plan recommended by the Board of Education, whatever that plan ultimately may be. But in so doing we can view with alarm, express our anxieties and fears wherever we go, or participate in the rumors of the upheaval and violence that are predicted to take place.

2. We can organize to fight the Board of Education. We can begin to have meetings to plan strategy to obstruct the transporting of children.

3. We can decide not to participate and arrange to have our children attend private schools.

4. We can comply with the law of the land and the plan recommended by the Board of Education to carry out the intent of the law, but rather than be anxious and afraid about the possibility of the plan's working, we can commit ourselves to making the plan work. Rather than to live on rumors or threats or fears of the unknown, we can actively seek to gather the right information that will make the plan succeed, and we can actively seek ways of influencing others to help in the endeavor. Each person who is committed to seeing that the plan works and is dedicated to making it work is as contagious in spreading that attitude as are those who are spreading the fears and threats.

There are two questions that I would like to speak to:

WHY SHOULD WE WANT THE PLAN TO WORK?

I. Why should we want the plan to work? Because the public school system is jeopardized if it doesn't work. Many of us could afford to send our children to

private schools, but we do not because we believe in the concept of public education and what it has to offer our children. This is not to condemn private schools for there are certain kinds of private schools that meet special needs for some children.

But the public school system is like the way the world is which our children will enter. There are, or should be, children and youth from all strata of society, rich and poor, bright and slow, Black and White. The ideal of having a distribution of White and Black students in our public schools that matches the population balance of a community is fair and sound in a democratic society that sincerely believes in the equality of all people under our Constitution.

All of us should be exposed in school to the kind of community and the kind of world that is outside the school walls. We need to be together, to learn, to grow, to work, to play. Most fears seem to vanish when we are exposed to each other. Because of some of this exposure among today's youth, their attitudes are different from many of us who are in our middle and later years. Our youth have taught us much in this area of mythical fears between the races.

The proposed plan recommended by the Board of Education attempts to accomplish the racial balance in most of our public schools in the area. I feel that the transporting of children is an artificial means to accomplish the end result. The question we must answer is: "Is the end result worth it?" I personally believe that it is.

HOW CAN WE ACCOMPLISH THE PROPOSED PLAN?

II. The second question is how can we accomplish the transition taking place in our school system this fall?

(1) By deciding that we will be part of the solution rather than part of the problem. We must continually ask ourselves in our conversations each day: "Am I helping to solve or am I adding to the problem of the community by what I am saying?"

(2) We will think through what our attitudes will be that will best support our community and our schools in their transition, and we will promote these attitudes, knowing that we will not have a crisis in our community unless we make it a crisis.

(3) It is important that we know what each other is thinking and that all of us are having opportunities to express ourselves, especially between the Blacks and Whites. We will help to get these two groups together wherever and whenever possible and decide the ways we can meet the transition together.

(4) We will determine ourselves not to let a small group of rabble-rousers, whether teenagers or adults, whether Whites or Blacks, incite us and our community into distrust of each other or let us succumb to fears of the unknown.

(5) We will work out techniques of city-wide communication to dispel rumors. If trouble arises we will isolate it and not panic. We will continuously commit ourselves anew to carrying out the proposed plan.

LET US BE SLOW TO BECOME ANGRY!

Consider my text. It is *James 1:19 (TEV)*, "*Remember this, my dear brothers! Everyone must be quick to listen, but slow to speak, and slow to become angry.*" When I read that this week I just knew that it was speaking to me and to you. It is the attitude we must have for these months ahead, as we live with our public school transition.

We are one nation under God. We were one nation under God before we added "under God" to our Pledge of Allegiance some years ago. We are a nation under God: under His Divine love and protection and under His Divine Judgment. The Psalmist proclaimed: "*Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord, the people whom he has chosen as his heritage.*" (Psalm 33:12) Democracy is a great experiment. Our attempt in forming our nation under the belief that all men are free and equal is relatively new compared to the history of man, only 200 years old. We believe that to work toward the goal of letting men be free and equal in our land is according to the desire of God. It is so vital to our very structure that the future of our existence as a nation hinges on it.

Democracy will not rise or fall in America because of the transporting of our children to public schools in Greensboro this fall. But it is one step toward showing ourselves, our community, our nation and the world that we trust and believe in each other in our community and that Black and White people can pull together in a common cause--that of the best possible education for all our children.

THE WHITE MAN AND THE BLACK MAN MUST LIVE TOGETHER

The future of democracy's success in America still depends on whether the White Man and the Black Man can live together in appreciation of each other, and in respect of what each other has to offer to our nation and the world.

Today let us commit ourselves anew to becoming the kind of a nation that God can use, where the kind of love that He offered us in Jesus Christ can be shared with all our fellowmen.

And whatever may be your position on the current issue, that of transporting our children to public schools, let us be "quick to listen, but slow to speak, and slow to become angry."