

"THE LOOSE ENDS OF LIFE"

A Sermon By

Rev. Philip A. C. Clarke

Park Avenue United Methodist Church
106 East 86th Street
New York, New York 10028
October 11, 1987

"THE LOOSE ENDS OF LIFE"

TEXT: "Your tackle hangs loose; it cannot hold
the mast firm in its place, or keep the
sail spread out".

(Isaiah 33: 23)

INTRODUCTION

I feel more at ease talking about baseball and football than I do about sailing. But since the baseball season is over for New Yorkers for another year and the football season is in trouble and basketball hasn't gotten started, and since tomorrow is Columbus Day, I thought I'd check my Bible to see if there was anything about sailing.

I turned to my Concordance on Friday morning and much to my surprise I came across some words in the Book of Isaiah that you and I might hear on a sail boat. Isaiah, looking at his own nation, said:

"Your tackle hangs loose; it cannot hold
the mast firm in its place, or keep the
sail spread out."

DEVELOPMENT

Now when applied to a nation or to a person, his observation simply means that life needs tightening up if we are to be made "ship-shape" and make any forward movement on the broader seas of life. In recent days, we've launched the work of another season and it behooves us to tighten our tackle and examine our sails for a good voyage before we venture too far out.

I remember some lines that use to hang on the wall in my dad's study in a Methodist parsonage upstate:

"One ship sails East; another West;
With the self-same winds that blow.
'Tis the set of the sails - and not the gales -
That determines the way a ship shall go".

You and I may not have much to say about the gust of the gales that we come up against in life, but we do have something to say about the set of the sails. And with this in mind, let me suggest three loose ends of life which may need some inspection on our part, if we're going to have good sailing ahead.

IMPULSES NOT ORGANIZED

First, consider those impulses in your life that may need attention - perhaps organizing, or tightening, if you will.

All of us are born little bundles of desire. The infant reaches out for anything that catches its fancy and its fancy is apt to change with almost every moment. And if the child does not outgrow that impulsiveness, it remains childish. Some of our impulses need to be curbed, others checked, still others cured. And still others, cultivated. So, take stock of your impulses here this morning for a few moments and take what is now a weakness and make it into a strength.

They say that impulsive buying leaves the pocketbook empty. Impulsive living may leave the heart empty. What about the impulses of your life? A funny thing

about life is that when we just let ourselves "go" and do what we like when we like it, we cease before long to like what we do. And for this reason, William James, the great American philosopher, use to say that a person should do one unpleasant duty every day just to keep himself in good moral trim! To which Somerset Maughan replied, "Yes, I do - I get up every morning". Perhaps there are times when you feel the same way.

What a waste of time and energy if we debated with ourselves every morning whether we should get up and go to work, whether we should have breakfast or take the time to read the paper. Such things we reduce to fixed habits and thus free our minds and lives for bigger choices. Likewise, there are some social and moral and religious duties which we should assume and take for granted without stopping to debate them.

Let me take this a step further and bring it home to our life here in the Church. When a person becomes a solid, active member of any group, we say that he or she is "tied in" to it. What our churches and civic organizations need in this city are more people who are willing to be "tied in". So often our association with such organizations is so loose that we really can't be counted on. Our impulses may be good, but they need to be strengthened and tightened.

In the first place then, we need to tighten up the loose ends of our living, to bring more of our good impulses under the control of good, old-fashioned habit. In speaking of this type of inner discipline, Harry Emerson Fosdick once wrote that,

"No horse gets anywhere till he is harnessed. No steam or gas ever drives anything until it is confined. No Niagara is ever turned into light and power until it is tunneled. And no life ever grows great until it is focused, dedicated and disciplined."

QUESTIONS NOT CLOSED

not closed.

Consider now a second set of loose ends that need some tightening. I call it the matter of questions

A ministerial colleague in a nearby Methodist Church said to me recently that some of the problems he was now bumping in to in his parish were caused by people who disliked being disturbed by a new idea.

All of us on occasion have to contend with people whose minds are closed tight to change, who refuse to open their minds to new points of view and new ways of seeing things. On the other hand, there are some people who are better at opening their minds than at closing them. I think we tend to overlook the perils of the mind that is too open, that never comes to a decision on anything.

Some people are like houses in the winter time with their doors and windows wide open. They hold no warming convictions. It reminds me of the person whose daily prayer was something like this: "O Lord, give me my daily opinion and forgive me for the one I had yesterday". Contrast that one with this great prayer that means so much to so many:

"O God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can - and the wisdom to know the difference."

Yes, we need the "wisdom" to know what questions should be closed, and what ones should be left open. And here the words of the Apostle Paul provide us with a hint of the direction to follow:

"Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise - think on these things."

Someone once offered this negative observation of Columbus in which there is some truth:

"He didn't know where he was going when he set sail. He didn't know where he was once he got there. He didn't know where he had been when he returned home."

We know of people like that. We need to have our minds pretty well made up on those questions regarding life's direction and its ultimate goal and its ultimate values. There's a lot in that line which I occasionally put out on the bulletin board of our Church, "Open Not Your Sail To Every Wind".

"Chose ye this day whom ye will serve". Chose Christ and His way. This, I believe, is one of the most fundamental and basic decisions one ever makes. Make it now. Let us not be like the people of Athens who in response to Paul's preaching of Christ, said: "We will hear you again about this"...thus postponing that important confrontation.

TASKS BEGUN AND NOT FINISHED

Let's move on then to a third set of "loose ends" that needs to be tightened up in order to make things a bit more "ship-shape" in our lives. I'm calling it: tasks begun and not finished.

How often in life we make a decision. We settle a question in our minds. We are moved to action and start to do something about it and then after our initial burst of enthusiasm, we begin to let up and slowly lose interest and eventually leave it as a loose end. I've always been fond of those words of Longfellow from the Village Blacksmith:

"Each morning sees some task begun;
Each evening sees it close.
Something attempted, something done,
Has earned a night's repose."

Now some of us are apt to have so many irons in the fire and we change them so often that only the handles ever really get hot. We do not go after them hammer and tong like the village blacksmith and weld them into a finished object. It happens in the Church. A person says "yes" as "Onward Christian Soldiers" is played in the background, and in the first burst of enthusiasm something gets done and movement is made. But then within a short period of time he or she begins to slacken off and eventually nothing gets accomplished.

Some of us are given to procrastination. Maybe we ought to do as the late Dr. Richard Cabot of Boston use to. He said that when he was tempted to put things off he would ask himself to name another time which would be a better time to do

it, and then he would mark it down and let someone else know about it in order to remind him. In that way he usually ended up convincing himself that there was no time like the present.

Then, some among us may lack the plodding perseverance and the unflagging fortitude which sees some project or some responsibility through to the end. Yes, remember that it was "by perseverance that the snail reached the ark!"

I've always appreciated these words written in a letter to Andrew Jackson by his mother. He was about 14 years of age at the time and his mother was going aboard a warship at Charleston to nurse some men ill from a fever. And fearing that she might not return, his mother penned these lines in a note to him which is at the "Hermitage" near Nashville.

"Andrew, if I should not see you again, I wish you to treasure up and remember certain things. In this world, you will have to make your own way. To do this, you must have friends. You can make friends by being honest. You can keep them by being steadfast."

Steadfastness. Honesty. Integrity and perseverance. Some old fashioned virtues that all of us would do well to have and hold on to in tightening up the loose ends of tasks we may have begun, but not yet finished.

CLOSING Just as Isaiah said to the people of his nation centuries ago, in so many words the pulpits of our land need to be saying:

"Ours is too important an enterprise...too important a voyage to run with loose tackle".

We need to tighten things up. We begin with our own personal lives - habits, impulses, responsibilities, obligations. And then we move out into the life of the city...into our churches, our civic organizations, remembering the importance of "old fashioned" steadfastness and honesty. And perhaps somewhere in our thoughts are the sentiments of a former patriot who wrote of his native land:

"Thou, too, sail on, O ship of state,
Sail on, O Union strong and great.
Humanity with all its fears,
With all its hope of future years,
Is hanging breathless on thy fate".

PRAYER Lead us, Lord, out of our little lives into the greater world of service and understanding. May we never be satisfied with ourselves and always reach for those things beyond our grasp. We ask this in the name and spirit of Christ, our Lord. Amen.

"THE LOOSE ENDS OF LIFE"

A Sermon By

Rev. Philip A. C. Clarke

Park Avenue United Methodist Church
106 East 86th Street
New York, New York 10028
October 11, 1987

"THE LOOSE ENDS OF LIFE"

TEXT: "Your tackle hangs loose; it cannot hold the mast firm in its place, or keep the sail spread out".

(Isaiah 33: 23)

INTRODUCTION

I feel more at ease talking about baseball and football than I do about sailing. But since the baseball season is over for New Yorkers for another year and the football season is in trouble and basketball hasn't gotten started, and since tomorrow is Columbus Day, I thought I'd check my Bible to see if there was anything about sailing.

I turned to my Concordance on Friday morning and much to my surprise I came across some words in the Book of Isaiah that you and I might hear on a sail boat. Isaiah, looking at his own nation, said:

"Your tackle hangs loose; it cannot hold the mast firm in its place, or keep the sail spread out."

DEVELOPMENT

Now when applied to a nation or to a person, his observation simply means that life needs tightening up if we are to be made "ship-shape" and make any forward movement on the broader seas of life. In recent days, we've launched the work of another season and it behooves us to tighten our tackle and examine our sails for a good voyage before we venture too far out.

I remember some lines that use to hang on the wall in my dad's study in a Methodist parsonage upstate:

"One ship sails East; another West;
With the self-same winds that blow.
'Tis the set of the sails - and not the gales -
That determines the way a ship shall go".

You and I may not have much to say about the gust of the gales that we come up against in life, but we do have something to say about the set of the sails. And with this in mind, let me suggest three loose ends of life which may need some inspection on our part, if we're going to have good sailing ahead.

IMPULSES NOT ORGANIZED

First, consider those impulses in your life that may need attention - perhaps organizing, or tightening, if you will.

All of us are born little bundles of desire. The infant reaches out for anything that catches its fancy and its fancy is apt to change with almost every moment. And if the child does not outgrow that impulsiveness, it remains childish. Some of our impulses need to be curbed, others checked, still others cured. And still others, cultivated. So, take stock of your impulses here this morning for a few moments and take what is now a weakness and make it into a strength.

They say that impulsive buying leaves the pocketbook empty. Impulsive living may leave the heart empty. What about the impulses of your life? A funny thing

about life is that when we just let ourselves "go" and do what we like when we like it, we cease before long to like what we do. And for this reason, William James, the great American philosopher, use to say that a person should do one unpleasant duty every day just to keep himself in good moral trim! To which Somerset Maughan replied, "Yes, I do - I get up every morning". Perhaps there are times when you feel the same way.

What a waste of time and energy if we debated with ourselves every morning whether we should get up and go to work, whether we should have breakfast or take the time to read the paper. Such things we reduce to fixed habits and thus free our minds and lives for bigger choices. Likewise, there are some social and moral and religious duties which we should assume and take for granted without stopping to debate them.

Let me take this a step further and bring it home to our life here in the Church. When a person becomes a solid, active member of any group, we say that he or she is "tied in" to it. What our churches and civic organizations need in this city are more people who are willing to be "tied in". So often our association with such organizations is so loose that we really can't be counted on. Our impulses may be good, but they need to be strengthened and tightened.

In the first place then, we need to tighten up the loose ends of our living, to bring more of our good impulses under the control of good, old-fashioned habit. In speaking of this type of inner discipline, Harry Emerson Fosdick once wrote that,

"No horse gets anywhere till he is harnessed. No steam or gas ever drives anything until it is confined. No Niagara is ever turned into light and power until it is tunneled. And no life ever grows great until it is focused, dedicated and disciplined."

QUESTIONS NOT CLOSED

not closed.

Consider now a second set of loose ends that need some tightening. I call it the matter of questions

A ministerial colleague in a nearby Methodist Church said to me recently that some of the problems he was now bumping in to in his parish were caused by people who disliked being disturbed by a new idea.

All of us on occasion have to contend with people whose minds are closed tight to change, who refuse to open their minds to new points of view and new ways of seeing things. On the other hand, there are some people who are better at opening their minds than at closing them. I think we tend to overlook the perils of the mind that is too open, that never comes to a decision on anything.

Some people are like houses in the winter time with their doors and windows wide open. They hold no warming convictions. It reminds me of the person whose daily prayer was something like this: "O Lord, give me my daily opinion and forgive me for the one I had yesterday". Contrast that one with this great prayer that means so much to so many:

"O God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can - and the wisdom to know the difference."

it, and then he would mark it down and let someone else know about it in order to remind him. In that way he usually ended up convincing himself that there was no time like the present.

Then, some among us may lack the plodding perseverance and the unflagging fortitude which sees some project or some responsibility through to the end. Yes, remember that it was "by perseverance that the snail reached the ark!"

I've always appreciated these words written in a letter to Andrew Jackson by his mother. He was about 14 years of age at the time and his mother was going aboard a warship at Charleston to nurse some men ill from a fever. And fearing that she might not return, his mother penned these lines in a note to him which is at the "Hermitage" near Nashville.

"Andrew, if I should not see you again, I wish you to treasure up and remember certain things. In this world, you will have to make your own way. To do this, you must have friends. You can make friends by being honest. You can keep them by being steadfast."

Steadfastness. Honesty. Integrity and perseverance. Some old fashioned virtues that all of us would do well to have and hold on to in tightening up the loose ends of tasks we may have begun, but not yet finished.

CLOSING Just as Isaiah said to the people of his nation centuries ago, in so many words the pulpits of our land need to be saying:

"Ours is too important an enterprise...too important a voyage to run with loose tackle".

We need to tighten things up. We begin with our own personal lives - habits, impulses, responsibilities, obligations. And then we move out into the life of the city...into our churches, our civic organizations, remembering the importance of "old fashioned" steadfastness and honesty. And perhaps somewhere in our thoughts are the sentiments of a former patriot who wrote of his native land:

"Thou, too, sail on, O ship of state,
Sail on, O Union strong and great.
Humanity with all its fears,
With all its hope of future years,
Is hanging breathless on thy fate".

PRAYER Lead us, Lord, out of our little lives into the greater world of service and understanding. May we never be satisfied with ourselves and always reach for those things beyond our grasp. We ask this in the name and spirit of Christ, our Lord. Amen.

ANTHEM: "Prayer To the Holy Spirit"

"Come, Holy Spirit, heav'nly guest,
descend with gifts divinely blest; make Thee
a temple in my heart, grant me Thy grace,
and ne'er depart. O hallow Thou each passing
hour, renewing faith, increasing power. In
sorrow, need, Thy comfort send, and blessed
peace when life shall end."

ANTHEM" "Like As the Hart"

"Like as the hart desireth the water
brooks, so longeth my soul after Thee, O
God. My soul is athirst for God, yea, even
for the living God. When shall I come to
appear before the presence of God? My tears
have been my meat day and night, while they
daily say unto me, where, where is now Thy
God?"

ORGAN POSTLUDE

The organ postlude - a final offering
of our praise to God - is played after the
Benediction. Time permitting, we invite you
to share in the beauty of it.

FOR THOSE WHO SING

New members are always welcome to audi-
tion to sing in the Choir. Rehearsals are
held on Wednesday evenings at 6:15 pm in
the downstairs Choir Room. Now's a good time
to join as the choir begins to prepare music
for the coming weeks of Fall and Winter.

ADULT BIBLE CLASS

An Adult Bible Class meets on Sunday
morning at 9:15 in Fellowship Hall. Anna
Delson is serving as teacher for a study of
the Book of Genesis. All are most welcome
and coffee is always available.

"HOUNDS OF HEAVEN"

The "Hounds of Heaven" study group
meets Tuesday evening at 6:30 in Fellowship
Hall. George Leopold serves as leader. All
are most welcome.

OCTOBER DATES

The Charge Conference of the parish is
scheduled for Tuesday evening, October 20th.

A Fall Rummage Sale will be held on
Saturday, October 24th, 10 am to 3 pm. Be
in touch with Dianne Keller if you can lend
a hand with the many preparations involved.

The Church Fair Committee will meet on
Monday evening, October 26th, at 7 pm. Note
the change in date from the 19th to the 26th.

NEW MEMBERS TO JOIN

New members will be received into the
Church in early December. Persons interested
in strengthening a tie with the Church this
Fall are invited to be in touch with Mr.
Clarke as soon as possible, or with either
Linda Burtch or John Lombardo, Co-chairpersons
of the Membership Committee.

PARK AVENUE
UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

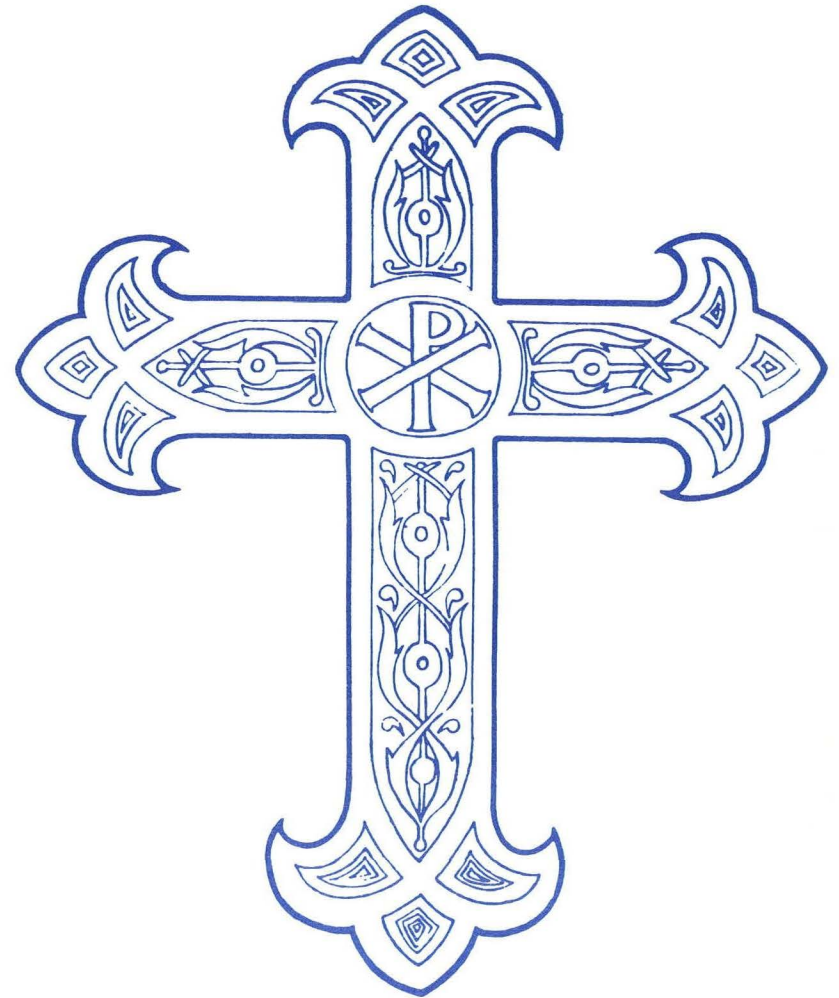
106 East 86th Street
New York, N.Y. 10028
AT 9-6997

CHURCH DIRECTORY

Rev. Philip A. C. ClarkeMinister
Mr. Lyndon WoodsideOrganist-Choir Director
Mr. Jack SchmidtBusiness Manager
Mrs. Judy FerlandSecretary
Mrs. Judith KeismanDay School Director
Mr. Oscar GarciaCustodian

GENERAL OFFICERS

Lay Members, Annual ConferenceMr. Edward J. Brown
Mrs. Joyce Gartrell
President, Board of TrusteesMiss Lynn Bruhn
Chairman, Administrative Council Mrs. Bobbie Heron
Chairman, Education CommitteeMr. William Bell
Chairman, Fellowship CommitteeMiss Helen Wilkinson
Chairman, Finance CommitteeMr. Edward J. Brown
Chairman, Church Property Committee..Mr. Doug Heimbigner
Co-Chairmen, Membership Committee Miss Linda Burtch
Dr. John Lombardo
Chairman, Outreach CommitteeMiss Elizabeth Berg
Chairman, Worship Committee Miss Pam Hubby
Co-Chairmen, Day School Dr. and Mrs. John Lombardo
Chairman, UshersMr. Larry Morales
Superintendent, Sunday SchoolMiss Anne Davenport



PARK AVENUE
UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

October 11, 1987

ORDER OF WORSHIP

11 A. M.

ORGAN "Adagio in F Minor" Mozart

ALL TO WORSHIP

YMN NO. 35 "For the Beauty of the Earth"

RAYER OF CONFESSION (seated)

Most merciful Father, we have done little to forward Thy Kingdom in this world, to foster the brotherhood of man, and to establish love as the law of life. We have allowed self to blind us, pains to embitter us. Pardon our shortcomings; forgive our neglect; give us a pure heart intent on pleasing Thee. Help us in all our seeking to seek first Thy Kingdom and Thy righteousness. And make us come, as came Thy Son, not to be ministered unto, but to minister. We ask this in the spirit of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

ILENT MEDITATION - WORDS OF ASSURANCE - LORD'S PRAYER

SALTER "My Soul Thirsts for God" No. 569

LORIA PATRI No. 792

FFIRMATION OF FAITH No. 740

NTHM "Prayer to the Holy Spirit" Lundquist

RIPTURE Ephesians 6: 10 - 20 Page 1020

ASTORAL PRAYER

ARISH CONCERNS

NTHM "Like As a Hart" Howells

RESENTATION OF THE OFFERING WITH THE DOXOLOGY

YMN NO. 107 "Jesus Calls Us O'er the Tumult"

ERMON "The Loose Ends of Life" Mr. Clarke

YMN NO. 478 "Lead On, O King Eternal"

ENEDICTION

RGAN "Allegro in C" Mendelssohn

*** Interval for Ushering

LAY READER

We welcome Vidya Foley to the lectern this morning.

ALTAR FLOWERS

The flowers on the altar today are given in celebration of the life of John J. Risley.

GREETERS AND USHERS

The greeters today are Robert Gardner and Doug Heimbigner. The ushers are Kenneth Barclay, Ann and Gordon Bryant, Doug Heimbigner, Susan Langley, Cary Danford and Ned Vail.

AN INVITATION

Coffee and tea will be served in the Russell Room following the service. Members and friends are invited to share in these moments of warmth made possible for us today by Marie Birillo, Josefina Garcia, Liz Benton, Susan Langley, Anette Lewis and Katherine Robinson.

CHURCH SCHOOL AND NURSERY CARE

Sessions of Church School for children are offered Sunday mornings from eleven to twelve. Nursery care for infants and toddlers is available on the fourth floor.

A SPECIAL OFFERING

During the month of October we receive a special offering for the Fellowship of Suffering and Service. Envelopes for a special "love gift" are in the insert that is in your bulletin this morning. We invite you to respond with a gift if you have not yet already done so.

"THE LOOSE ENDS OF LIFE"

TEXT: "Your tackle hangs loose; it cannot hold the mast firm in its place, or keep the sail spread out".

(Isaiah 33: 23)

INTRODUCTION

I feel more at ease talking about baseball than I do sailing. I turned to my Concordance earlier this week to see if there was any reference at all to Abner Doubleday and his wonderful invention which I might have overlooked these many years, thinking that if I came across anything having to do with a ball or a bat that this would be the Sunday to put it before you in the way of a text. But I didn't do any better in my search than the Yankees did in their search for a pennant in Kansas City on Wednesday and Thursday and in the Bronx on Friday night. It's all over. We'll have to wait 'till next year.

That was on Wed. AM.

Feeling disappointed and frustrated, I thought the next best thing would be to focus on Columbus and sailing as our departure point. In checking the Concordance a second time, I found - much to my surprise - that centuries ago the great prophet of Israel, Isaiah, looking at his own nation used some words that you and I might very well hear on a sail boat. We read in the thirty-third chapter of Isaiah, the 23rd verse:

"Your tackle hangs loose; it cannot hold the mast firm in its place, or keep the sail spread out."

DEVELOPMENT

Now when applied to a nation or a person, his observation simply means that life needs tightening up if we are to be made "ship-shape" and make any forward movement on the broader seas of life. In recent days, we've launched the work of another season and it behooves us to tighten our tackle and examine our sails for a good voyage before we venture too far out.

I remember some lines that use to hang on the wall in my dad's study in a parsonage upstate:

"One ship sails East; another West;
With the self-same winds that blow.
'Tis the set of the sails - and not the gales -
That determine the way the ship shall go"

We may not have much to say about the gust of the gales we come up against in life, but we do have something to say about the set of the sails. With this in mind, let me suggest three LOOSE ENDS of life which may need some inspection on our part, if we're going to have good sailing ahead. (repeat text)

IMPULSES NOT ORGANIZED

First, consider those impulses in your life that may need attention - organizing, tightening, if you will.

All of us are born little bundles of desire. The infant reaches out for anything that catches its fancy and its fancy is apt to change with almost every moment. If the child does not outgrow that impulsiveness, it remains childish. Some of our impulses need to be curbed, others checked, still others cured; and still others, cultivated. They say that impulsive buying leaves the pocketbook empty. Impulsive living can leave the heart empty. What about the impulses of your life? A funny thing about life is what when we just let ourselves go and do what we like when we like it, we cease before long to like what we do! And for this reason,

William James, the great American philosopher, use to say that a person should do one unpleasant duty every day just to keep himself in good moral trim! (To which Somerset Maughan replied, "Yes, I do...I get up every morning". Perhaps there are times when you feel the same way!

I saw a sign in a resort hotel this Summer in Kennebunkport that said: "For the convenience of our guests". Such signs are appreciated in hotels and motels, but I wonder...can a home be run as a convenience. To be sure, we want as many household conveniences as we can afford, but only when the members of a family share some uncongenial tasks and some mutual sacrifices do they come to enjoy the solid satisfactions and the spiritual blessings of the home.

Likewise, in our relationship with God we are a part of His family. We cannot fully enter into the rich fellowship of God's family if we treat Him merely as a convenience. I think that if we turn to God only when we feel the need of His help in a time of trouble, we shall never really experience the joy of His friendship. If we drop by a Church only when we feel like it, or when we wish to use it for some private purpose, we shall not receive that measure of peace and the sustaining power that are a part of our spiritual heritage.

When a person becomes a solid, active member of any group, we say that he or she is "tied in" to it. What our churches and civic organizations need in this city are more people who are willing to be "tied in". So often our association with such organizations is so loose that we really can't be counted on. Our impulses may be good, but they need to be strengthened and tightened. ~~We believe in them and support them when it's easy and convenient for us to do so.~~

What a waste of time and energy if we debated with ourselves every morning whether we should get up and go to work, whether we should have breakfast or take time to read the paper. Such things we reduce to fixed habits and thus free our minds and lives for bigger choices. Likewise, there are some social and moral and religious duties and obligations which we should assume and take for granted without stopping to debate them.

In the first place, then, we need to tighten up the loose ends of our living, to bring more of our good impulses under the control of good, old-fashioned, fixed habit. In speaking of this type of inner discipline, Fosdick reminds us:

"No horse gets anywhere till he is harnessed. No steam or gas ever drives anything until it is confined. No Niagara is ever turned into light and power until it is tunneled. No life ever grows great until it is focused, dedicated and disciplined".

QUESTIONS NOT CLOSED

Consider now a second set of loose ends that need some tightening. I call it the matter of questions not closed.

A ministerial colleague said to me recently that some of the problems he was bumping in to in his parish were caused by people who disliked being disturbed by a new idea. All of us on occasion have to contend with people whose minds are closed tight to change, who refuse to open their minds to new points of view and new ways of seeing things. On the other hand, there are some people who are better at opening their minds than at closing them. We tend to overlook the perils of the mind that is too open, that never comes to a decision on anything.

Some people are like houses in the winter time with their doors and windows

wide open. They hold no warming convictions. I'm reminded of the person whose daily prayer ~~was~~ something like this: "O Lord, give me my daily opinion and forgive me for the one I had yesterday". Contrast it with this great prayer that means so much to so many:

"O God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference."

Yes, we need the wisdom to know what questions should be closed, and what one should be left open. And here the words of the Apostle Paul from today's Scripture reading provide us with a hint of the direction to follow:

"Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise - think on these things."

Tomorrow those marching in the Columbus Day parade will know what directions they are to go. They'll follow the purple line up Fifth Avenue and down 86th Street. Soeone once made this observation of Columbus: "He didn't know where he was going when he set sail. He didn't know where he was when he got there. He didn't know where he had been when he returned home." We know of people like that. We need to have our minds pretty well made up on those questions regarding our life's direction, its ultimate goal. There's a lot ~~of~~ that line which we occasionally put on the bulletin board out front, "Open Not Your Sail To Every Wind".

"Chose he this day whom we ye will serve". Chose Christ and His way. Here is one question we can settle right now. Let's not be like the people of Athens who in response to Paul's preaching of Christ said, "We will hear you again about this"...thus postponing that important decision and confrontation.

TASKS BEGUN AND NOT FINISHED

Let's move on to a third set of loose ends that need tightening in order to make things a bit more "ship-shape" in our lives. I'm calling it: tasks begun and not finished.

How often in life we make a decision. We settle a question in our minds. We are moved to action and start to do something about it and then after our initial burst of enthusiasm, we let up, loose interest and eventually leave it as a loose end. Remember the words of Longfellow in the Village Blacksmith:

"Each morning sees some task begun, each evening sees it close;
Something attempted, something done, has earned a night's repose".

Some of us are apt to have so many irons in the fire and we change them so often that only the handles ever really get hot. We do not go after them hammer and tong like the village blacksmith and weld them into a finished object. I see it occasionally in the Church. A person accepts a responsibility and in the first burst of enthusiasm gets something accomplished. But then within a short period of time slackens off. Eventually nothing gets done.

Some of us are given to procrastination. Maybe we ought to do as the late Dr. Richard Cabot of Boston. He said that when he was tempted to put things off he would ask himself to name another time which would be a better time to do it,

and then he would mark it down and let someone else know about it in order to remind him. In that way he usually convinced himself that there was no time like the present.

Then, some among us may lack the plodding perseverance and the unflagging fortitude which sees some project or some responsibility through to the end.

I've always been fond of these words written by a mother to her son. Down at the "Hermitage" where Andrew Jackson lived (near Nashville) is a letter from Andrew's mother to her 14 year old son. His mother was going aboard a warship at Charleston to nurse some men ill from a fever. Fearing that she might not return, his mother wrote these words,

"Andrew, if I should not see you again, I wish you to treasure up and remember certain things. In this world, you will have to make your own way. To do this, you must have friends. You can make friends by being honest. You can keep them by being steadfast."

Honesty. Steadfastness. Integrity. Perseverance. Old fashioned virtues that we would do well to recapture in order to tighten up the loose ends of tasks we may have begun, but not yet finished.

CLOSING As Isaiah said to the people of his nation centuries ago, in so many words the pulpits of our land need to be saying, "Ours is too important an enterprise...too important a voyage to run with loose tackle". We need to tighten things up. We begin with our own lives - our habits, our impulses, our responsibilities, our obligations. We move out into the life of the city - into our churches - our civic organizations, remembering the values of steadfastness and perseverance. And perhaps somewhere in our thoughts are the sentiments of a former patriot who wrote of his native land:

"Thou, too, sail on, O ship of state,
Sail on, O Union strong and great;
Humanity with all its fears,
With all its hope of future years,
Is hanging breathless on thy fate."

PRAYER Lead us, Lord, out of our little lives into the greater world of service and understanding. May we never be satisfied with ourselves and always reach for those things beyond our grasp. We ask this in the name and the spirit of Jesus Christ. Amen

"THE LOOSE ENDS OF LIFE"

INTRODUCTION

As all sailing enthusiasts know, Courageous has earned the privilege to defend America's Cup against the Australian challenger, Southern Cross. On Tuesday of this week, America's Cup event gets under way, and with the kind of close competition we've read about in recent weeks, the races should be the hottest yacht competition in the 123 year history of this international sailing event. We wish Courageous good sailing, some happy wind shifts, and may the best yacht win.

Centuries ago, the great prophet, Isaiah, looking at his own nation used some words that one might very well hear on a sail boat. Found in the 33rd chapter of his prophecy, Isaiah said: "Your tackle hangs loose; it cannot hold the mast firm in its place, or keep the sail spread out". His words provide us with a text.

Now when applied to a nation or to a person, his observation simply means that life needs tightening up if we are to be made "ship-shape" and make any progress on the broader seas of life. And here today on this Sunday of late Summer, as we prepare individually to launch into the work of another season, it behooves us to tighten our tackle and examine our sails for a good voyage. I'm reminded of some lines that hung on the wall of my father's study:

"One ship sails East; another West;
With the self-same winds that blow;
'Tis the set of the sails - and not the gales -
That determine the way a ship shall go".

Mind you, we may not have much to say about the gust of the gales, but we do have something to say about the set of the sails. Let me suggest then three loose ends of life which are in need of inspection, if we are to have good sailing ahead.

IMPULSES NOT ORGANIZED

First, consider quietly as you sit here the impulses in your own life that may be in need of a bit of organization or a bit of tightening.

All of us are born little bundles of desire. The infant reaches out for anything that catches its fancy and its fancy is apt to change with almost every fleeting moment. If the child does not outgrow that impulsiveness, it remains childish. Some of our impulses need to be curbed; others need to be cultivated. As you know, impulsive buying leaves the pocketbook empty. Impulsive living can often leave the heart empty. What about the impulses of your life? Are they in need of tightening?

A curious thing about life is that when we just let ourselves go and do what we like when we like it, we cease before long to like what we do! And for this reason, William James, the philosopher, use to say that a person should do one unpleasant duty every day just to keep himself in good moral trim!

I saw a sign in a motel recently that said: "For the convenience of our guests". Such signs are appreciated in motels and hotels, but I wonder....can a home be run as a convenience. To be sure, we want as many household conveniences as we can afford, but only when the members of a family share some uncongenial tasks and some mutual sacrifices do they come to enjoy the solid satisfactions and the spiritual blessings of the home.

Likewise, in our relationship with God we are a part of His family. We cannot

fully enter into the fellowship of God's family if we treat Him merely as a convenience. I think that if we turn to God only when we feel the need of His help in time of trouble, we shall never really experience the richness of His friendship. If we drop by a church only when we feel like it, or when we wish to use it for some purpose (a baptism, a wedding), we shall not receive that joy, that peace, that sustaining power that are a part of our spiritual heritage.

When a person becomes a solid, active member of any group, we say that he or she is "tied into it". What our churches and civic organizations of this city desperately need are more people who are willing to be "tied into them". So often our association with such organizations is so loose that we really can't be counted on. Our impulses may be good, but they need to be cultivated, strengthened and tightened. We believe in them and support them when it's easy and convenient for us to do so. We do not really "tie" ourselves into them.

What a waste of time and energy if we men debated with ourselves every morning whether or not we would shave, or whether we should get up and go to work. Such things we reduce to fixed habits and thus free our minds and lives for bigger choices. Likewise, there are some social and moral and religious duties and obligations which we should assume and take for granted without stopping to debate them.

We need, in the first place then, to tighten up the loose ends of our living, to bring more of our good impulses under the control of good, old-fashioned, fixed habit. In speaking of this type of inner discipline, Fosdick reminds us:

"No horse gets anywhere till he is harnessed. No steam or gas ever drives anything until it is confined. No Niagara is ever turned into light and power until it is tunneled. No life ever grows great until it is focused, dedicated and disciplined".

QUESTIONS NOT CLOSED Consider now a second set of loose ends that need some tightening. I call it the matter of questions not closed.

A colleague mentioned to me at Conference in June that some of the problems he was having in his new parish were caused by people who disliked being disturbed by a new idea. All of us, of course, on occasion have to contend with people whose minds are closed tight to change, who refuse to open their minds to new points of view. On the other hand, there are some people who are better at opening their minds than at closing them. We tend to overlook the perils of the mind that is too open, that never comes to a decision on anything.

Some people are like houses in the winter time with their doors and windows wide open. They hold no warming convictions. We're reminded of the person whose daily prayer went something like this: "O Lord, give me my daily opinion and forgive me for the one I had yesterday!"

We smile at that. Contrast it with this great prayer that means so much to so many:

"O God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference".

Yes - we need the wisdom to know what questions should be closed, and what

should be left open. I think the words of the Apostle Paul from today's scripture reading provide us with direction. They set the tone. Hear them again:

"Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise - think on these things!"

We need to have our minds pretty well closed on those questions regarding our life's direction, its ultimate goal. Next month we shall celebrate Columbus Day and those who celebrate by marching in the parade of that day will know their direction. However, someone once made this observation of Columbus: "He didn't know where he was going when he set sail. He didn't know where he was when he got there. He didn't know where he had been when he returned home". We know of people like that. In recent weeks, we have been reminded of Lindbergh's heroic flight across the Atlantic. When he sat alone in that little plane heading east across the Atlantic, his mind was open to many uncertainties for he was doing something that had never been done before. But he was well settled on the question of his direction and his destination.

We returned to the city this week from a lovely Maine vacation. The first thing that greeted me as I came over to the church was a splendid sentence sermon on the bulletin board that our secretary had arranged to be put out earlier in the week. Perhaps you saw it, too. "Open not your sail to every wind".

"Chose ye this day whom ye will serve". Chose Christ and his way. Here is one question we can settle right now. This will tighten up another set of loose ends. To follow His way in this city is not always easy.

TASKS BEGUN AND NOT FINISHED Let's move on to a third set of loose ends that need tightening in order to make things a bit more "ship-shape" in our lives. I've called it: tasks begun and not finished.

How often in life we make a decision. We settle a question in our minds. We are moved to action and start to do something about it and then after our initial burst of enthusiasm, we let up, loose interest, and eventually leave it as a loose end.

Remember the words of Longfellow in the Village Blacksmith:

"Each morning sees some task begun, each evening sees it close;
Something attempted, something done, has earned a night's repose".

Some of us are apt to have so many irons in the fire and we change them so often that only the handles ever really get hot. We do not go after them hammer and tong like the village blacksmith and weld them into some finished object. I see it occasionally in the church. A person accepts a responsibility and in the first burst of enthusiasm and blush of newness gets something going, but then within a short period of time slackens off. Eventually nothing gets done. We won't bring in the Kingdom that way. We need more "staying" power!

Some of us are given to procrastination. Maybe we ought to do as the late Dr. Richard Cabot of Boston. He said that when he was tempted to put things off he would ask himself to name another time, which would be a better time to do it, and then he would mark it down and let someone else know about it in order to remind him. In that way he usually convinced himself that there was no time like

the present for doing what needed to be done.

Some of us lack the plodding perseverance and the unflagging fortitude which sees some project or some responsibility through to the end.

Down at the "Hermitage" where Andrew Jackson lived near Nashville is a letter written by Andrew's mother when he was 14 years of age. That was in 1781 and his mother was going aboard a warship at Charleston to nurse some men ill of a fever. Fearing that she might not return, his mother wrote these words to her son:

"Andrew, if I should not see you again, I wish you to treasure up and remember somethings. In this world, you will have to make your own way. To do this, you must have friends. You can make friends by being honest. You can keep them by being steadfast."

Honesty. Steadfastness. Integrity. Perseverance. Old fashioned virtues that we in America need to recapture in order to tighten up the loose ends of tasks begun, but not yet finished.

CLOSING As Isaiah said to the people of his nation centuries ago, in so many words the pulpits of this land need to be saying. "Ours is too important an enterprise...too important a voyage to run with loose tackle". We desperately need to tighten things up. We begin with our own lives - our habits, impulses, obligations, responsibilities. We move out into the life of the city, the nation. Integrity. Perseverance.

It has been a Summer filled with great folly, great tragedy, great sadness. The social and the political system developed and hammered out by the Founding Fathers of this land 200 years ago prevailed. Thank God for it. The tragedy and sadness of our time has been disastrous for Richard Nixon and his family, but it must be a heartening one for James Madison. And on this Sunday in late Summer, as people across our land now begin to return to their homes, their jobs, their responsibilities, do we not feel as did a former patriot who wrote of his native land:

"Thou, too, sail on, O ship of state,
Sail on, O Union strong and great;
Humanity with all its fears,
With all its hope of future years,
Is hanging breathless on thy fate".

We pray that God's grace, wisdom and courage may be ours and our leaders - as we prepare to voyage into new seas of service for all people.

PRAYER Lead us, Lord, out of our little lives into the greater world of service and understanding. May we never be satisfied with ourselves, and always reach for those things beyond our grasp. We ask this in the name and spirit of Jesus Christ. Amen

"THE LOOSE ENDS OF LIFE"

INTRODUCTION Suppose for a moment that I was the owner of a sail boat. I do not possess one, but it is a pleasant thought to contemplate. I go down to the shore in order to take it out for a sail. A sailor at the little harbor where it is docked comes up to me and says: "Your tackle hangs loose; it cannot hold the mast firm in its place, or keep the sail spread out". I would at once look to the loose ends of my sailing equipment.

Centuries ago, the great prophet Isaiah looking at his own nation used those same words. They are found in the thirty-third chapter of his prophecy. I repeat them: "Your tackle hangs loose; it cannot hold the mast firm in its place, or keep the sail spread out".

What does that statement mean when applied to a nation or to an individual. Well, I think it means that life needs tightening up if we are to be made ship-shape, if we are to make any progress or headway on the broader seas of life. And here in this early Fall season as we are launching forth into the church work of another year, it behooves us to examine our tackle. Let me suggest to you several loose ends of life which, I feel, are in need of inspection.

IMPULSES NOT ORGANIZED First, consider the impulses in your own life that may be in need of organization. All of us are born little bundles of desire. The infant reaches out for anything that catches its fancy and its fancy changes with almost every fleeting moment. If the child does not outgrow that impulsiveness, it remains childish. Some impulses must be curbed, others must be cultivated. If a person does not learn to organize his impulsiveness, he is apt to be branded childish, immature. And nothing is more difficult to contend with than an adult who is emotionally still a child. Impulsive buying leaves the purse empty. And impulsive living leaves the heart empty.

A curious fact about life is that when we just let ourselves go and do what we like when we like it, we cease before long to like what we do. For this reason William James use to say that a person should do one unpleasant duty every day just to keep himself in good moral trim. Good advice for all of us.

In a hotel recently I saw signs at various points reading: "For the convenience of our guests". Such suggestions are appreciated in a hotel. But a home can hardly be run as a convenience. To be sure, we want as many household conveniences as we can afford, but only when the members of the family share some uncongenial tasks and some mutual sacrifices do they come to enjoy the solid satisfactions and spiritual blessings of the home.

Likewise in our relationship with God we are part of His family. We cannot enter fully into the fellowship of God's family if we treat Him merely as a convenience. If we turn to God only when we feel the need of His help in trouble, we shall never really experience the richness of his friendship. Or if we go to church only when we feel like it, or when we wish to use it for a marriage ceremony, we

shall not receive the joy, the peace, and the power of our religious faith. There are times when we must sacrifice our personal convenience and put ourselves out and do some uncongenial tasks in the service of God and His Church. This is one reason why men join the church and assume certain obligation. Some of you do very well on this score. Others of you could do better and are in need of a little prodding. I've often thought if we could get every member of this church to say "yes" to one or two responsibilities, we would have a much smoother operation, less headaches and more time to concentrate our energies on the vital issues of the hour.

When a person becomes a solid, active member of any group, we say that he or she is "tied into it". And what our churches, our civic organizations, our YMCA's, our YWCA's need are more people who are willing to be tied into them. So often our association with good organizations is so loose that we really can be counted on. We may believe in them, we may attend them or support them when we find it convenient for us to do so, but we do not tie ourselves into them.

We may say, "I don't want to be tied down to any definite duty, or any definite date, or commitments. I want to be free to choose what I wish to do when I feel up to doing it". I sympathize with that feeling to a degree. I don't like for things to become so methodical that they become dull. But I raise the question with you as to whether anything worthwhile will ever be accomplished when you approach things that way. I raise the question with you this morning whether in our desire to live the free life we may not be forgetting that one way to achieve freedom and fulfillment in life is to bring some actions under such automatic control that we do not have to spend time discussing them. What a waste of time and energy if we men debated every morning with ourselves whether or not we would shave, or whether or not we should get up and go to work. Such things we reduce to fixed habits and thus free our mind for bigger choices. Likewise there are some moral and social and religious duties and obligations which we should take for granted without stopping to debate them.

I think we need to tighten up the loose ends of our living bringing more of our good impulses under the control of some good, old fashioned, fixed habits. We need to subject ourselves to inner disciplines. Remember the words of Harry Emerson Fosdick:

"No horse gets anywhere till he is harnessed.
No steam or gas ever drives anything until it
is confined. No Niagara is ever tunred into light
and power until it is tunneled. No life ever
grows great until it is focused, dedicated, and
disciplined."

QUESTIONS NOT CLOSED

Consider now a second set of loose ends: the matter of questions not closed. A ministerial friend of mine confided to me this past week that some of the difficulties he was encountering in his new parish were due to the fact that so many of his people hated to be disturbed by a new idea. All of us on occasion have to contend with persons whose minds are closed to change. But while there are stubborn and prejudiced persons who refuse to open their minds to new points of view, there

"OPEN
NOT YOUR
SAIL TO
EVERY
WIND"

are on the other hand those who are better at opening their minds than at closing them. So apparent are the evils of the closed mind that we tend to overlook the perils of the mind that is too open.

Some persons are like houses in the winter time with their doors and windows open. They hold no warming convictions. Their thinking and their living lacks definiteness and decisiveness. Some time ago a small group was discussing the difficulties of thinking our way through these times of disturbing and changing times. One person said rather humorously that she had adopted as her morning prayer: "O Lord give me my daily opinion and forgive me for the one I had yesterday". Whereupon another person in the group said that this was his favorite prayer:

"O Lord, give me the courage to change the things that should be changed, and the patience to endure the things that cannot be changed, and the wisdom to know the difference".

Yes, and I think we need the wisdom to know also what questions should be closed and what should be left open. Take, for instance, this present issue of racial integration. For Christian people this should be a closed question, not open to debate or discussion. Our Lord has taught us the right thing. He has taught us that discrimination in any form is wrong. The question is closed.

And then too we should have our minds closed on some of the questions concerning our own life's goal and direction. Yesterday was Columbus Day and the Columbus Day parade knew in which direction to travel for the purple line at the last moment was painted up Fifth Avenue. However, someone once said this of Columbus: He didn't know where he was going when he set sail; he didn't know where he was when he got there; he didn't know where he had been after he arrived back home. We know of people like that. On the other hand, I remember seeing the movie, "The Spirit of St. Louis" on the last show last spring. When Lindbergh sat alone in that plane heading out over the Atlantic, his mind was open to many uncertainties for he was doing something that had never been done before. But he was settled on the question of his direction and his destination.

We are reminded of our Lord's remark: "He that is not with me is against me; he that gathereth not with me scattereth". In this situation, as I understand it, Jesus was rebuking those whose motive and direction ran counter to his. He was saying that every one must choose whether he will be a gatherer with Christ or a scatterer away from him. And right now within the next hour by what we think or say or do we shall be adding to the gathering forces of life which make for love, sympathy, peace and harmony or to the scattering forces which make for enmity, division and destruction. Chose ye then this day whom ye will serve: the Gathering forces or the scattering forces. Here is one question we can settle and settle right now. And this will tighten up another set of loose ends.

friends by being honest, and keep them by being steadfast."

STEADFASTNESS.....another good, old fashioned virtue we need in order to tighten up the loose ends of those tasks we may have begun but not yet finished. As Isaiah said to the people of his nation, we say to you:

Ours is too important an enterprise...too important a voyage to run with a loose tackle.

We need to tighten things up - first in our own lives.....and on out into the life of the community and nation. And on this day following the anniversary of America's discovery, do we not feel as did a former patriot who said:

"Thou, too, sail on O ship of state,
Sail on, O Union strong and great;
Humanity with all its fears,
With all its hopes of future years,
Is hanging breathless on thy fate"

May's God's grace, his wisdom and his courage be ours as we voyage to new seas of service for all mankind.

LET US PRAY: Lead us, O Lord, out of our little lives into the greater world of service and understanding. May we never be satisfied with ourselves, and always reach for the things that are beyond our grasp. We ask this in the spirit and the name and the power of Jesus Christ our Lord.

TASKS BEGUN AND NOT FINISHED

There is a third set of loose ends that we need to look after in order to make things ship-shape in our lives. Tasks begun and not finished. We may settle a question in our minds, be moved to action, start to do something about and then after our initial burst of enthusiasm wears off, leave it as a loose end.

We call to mind the words of Longfellow in the Village Blacksmith:

"Each morning sees some task begun,
Each evening sees it close;
Something attempted, something done,
Has earned a night's repose".

~~You may be troubled about the things you have not finished. You may have them on your mind right now.~~ Some of us have so many irons in the fire and we change them so often that only the handles ever get hot. We do not go after them hammer and tong like the village blacksmith and weld them into some finished object. We see this within the church - people who accept responsibility and in the first blush of newness and enthusiasm move along, but then within a short period of time slacken off and eventually nothing gets done. You can't build the Kingdom with that sort of person.

Some of us are given to procrastination. Maybe we ought to do as the late Dr. Richard Cabot of Boston. He said that when he was tempted to put things off, he asked himself to name another time which would really be better and then he would make it down in black and white and let someone else know about it in order to remind him. In that way he usually convinced himself that there was no time like the present for doing what needed to be done.

We lack the plodding perseverance and unflagging fortitude which sees life through. I remember when Dr. Bosley came to New York City a little over a year and a half ago, successor to Dr. Sockman at Christ Church, I sent him a word of greeting on behalf of this congregation, welcoming him to the city and a ministry in this area. A few days later a lovely note came back in which he said: "I am looking forward to the work here in the church. Though it will be surrounded with many problems, I have not seen one that cannot be resolved with patience and persistence." Not only was I reassured by the fact that other churches have problems, but also by the fact that patience and persistence can solve them. This is what you and I need to hear - in our work together in this church, in our efforts to lift the moral life of this community, in our own individual lives, and on out into the world.

Down at the "Hermitage" where Andrew Jackson lived near Nashville is a letter written by Andrew's mother when he was fourteen. That was in 1781 and his mother was going aboard a British warship at Charleston to nurse some men ill of a fever. Fearing that she might not return, his mother wrote these words to her son:

"Andrew....if I should not see you again, I wish you to treasure up and remember some thing. In this world you will have to make your own way. To do this, you must have friends. You can make