

WE HAVE TO WANT HIM

Pilgrim Congregational Church, Duluth

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Psalms 42:1-2

Everyone knows that we live in a world of change. And the change is not always superficial. It is often radical, penetrating right down to the roots, into human nature itself. So the result is that the deepest things change. The deepest things about us change. Our very desires change, our tastes change, our hungers and our thirsts change.

Who looks forward any more at the end of a long hard day to a tall glass of sarsaparilla?

Our wants are multiplied. We have created wants, manufactured wants. Our whole style of life is based on the bringing of new wants ceaselessly into being. No longer do we blame Madison Avenue for this. We demand this of them. We want to be kept wanting. No people ever thirsted so abundantly and so variously as we.

Yet what can we make of this, this cry of the psalmist?

"As a hart longs
for flowing streams,
So longs my soul
for thee, O God,
My soul thirsts for God,
for the living God."

What can we make of that?

It is not true that religion is dead. People still look for much in religion: for a position in the social fabric, for companionship, for a favorable moral judgment on themselves, for good works to do, for inspiration in improving the world, for peace of mind, for forgiveness of sin, for consolation in trouble, for immortality.

But for God, the living God, do they look for him?

"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." Is that a promise worth repeating? "For they shall see God."

Who cares?

The problem about God today is not so much unbelief as indifference. Unbelief, that was the 19th century problem. It is still an issue, but it has been worked over so much, that there is nothing much left to say about it. The 20th century problem is that people don't much care whether there is a God around or not? They are indifferent because they feel God doesn't make much difference, one way or another. Which reveals their self-serving outlook.

Of course, people have always been self-serving. Rarely have people ever sought God for his own sake. Time was when they did feel he made a difference one way or another. There was the way to heaven and there was that other way. If you took these options seriously, then, pardon the expression, it did make

one hell of a difference. But that could be self-serving too.

Still, there was a time when people thirsted for God, when they gave up everything and went into the deserts just for the vision of God, when they sailed seas and built cathedrals just for the glory of God. There were those who really experienced a dryness in the throat, a twinge in the innards, an ache in the bones for the living God. There were those for whom to be united with the source of their being, to be bound to that one in the communion of a pure love, to behold that splendor which cannot be expressed, to unite their will to that will which guided all things to their appointed end, to behold, to adore, to serve the living God, that was the one and only thing that mattered.

But tastes do change. God becomes like one of those untouched delicacies we keep in the refrigerator week after week. We know that it is supposed to be good, that we should like it. We hate to throw it out. So we keep it there, hoping that someday we shall develop a taste for it. But we never do, and finally the thing begins to spoil. Then guiltily, sneakily, we throw the thing away.

And who knows, when they find it missing, others may conclude that we actually ate it!

Can it be thus with God?

Can this be the real truth of the saying that God is dead?

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It is strange, isn't it, that we can grow smaller in the process of growing larger. For we do grow larger. Every time we climb into an automobile, our bodies expand. They expand in size and speed and power, and that is why we like to go roaring around the world in automobiles and snowmobiles and other such things. j We become so big!

And our eyes see so much farther today, to the moon and even to Jupiter. And our ears take in so much more, the very footsteps on the streets of China echo within us. And our minds, they stretch too, moving continually into new realms of discovery. And our hearts, for all their hardness, even they expand, we can feel so many different kinds of ways today. Do you wish a little righteous wrath, or the thrill of danger, or the sweet sorrow of vicarious grief? It is all there in TV Guide any night of the week. We can pick the mood we wish.

We do grow larger.

But perhaps smaller. There used to be another dimension to us. It tied us in not just to things, but to the source from which all things come. It was not something added on to life, another sensation, another theory, another experience. It was something that pervaded every bit of life. It was not just another department of our nature, like those departments we still speak of rather unscientifically, body-soul, reason, emotion and the like. This dimension, this spiritual dimension gave shape to all departments.

It was the orientation of our life as a whole to the whole of life. It was the rooting and grounding of ourselves in a love that reached beyond ourselves.

It was carrying on everything out of obedience to a demand from above that challenged us moment by moment to be faithful.

It was knowing ourselves claimed.

Oh, we were giants then, then when the meaning of our humanity lay in being united to the immensity of God!

Great were they who knew that bottomless thirst for the living waters!

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But now, "Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow
creeps in this petty pace from day to day."

Life is restricted by the short steps of our shrunken souls. We are busy wanting many things, but we have forgotten to want the one thing needful.

We wouldn't know God if we tripped over him.

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I think if God is to come into the world today, he will want to be wanted.

I think if God is to come to us today, he will expect to be desired.

Now, indeed, is the time to take Madison Avenue seriously, and to insist on creating a need, on fashioning a thirst. If God is to come to us we must long for him "as a hart longs for flowing streams."

We must long to see the whole world in the splendor of his glory,
to see all humanity in the reach of his righteousness
to find the meaning of our own pilgrimage beginning and ending in him.

If God is to come to us in these times, we must try to seek him not for what we can get out of him, but for himself, for his own sake.

If we are to rise up out of our shrunken condition and acquire the stature of Adam and Eve we must acquire a taste for the living God.

If we are to hail the advent of the Word become flesh, then we must sing, "Come, Emmanuel, come, God who is with us," and mean it with all our heart and soul and mind and strength.

Any way we say it, we shall have to change.