

***The 16<sup>th</sup> Annual Columbus Day Weekend of Evangelicals Concerned***  
***Ocean Grove, New Jersey, October 5 – 7, 2018***  
***Three Centennials on Christian Liberty, 1918 – 2018***  
***Gardner C. Taylor, Billy Graham & Aleksandre Solzhenitsyn***  
**Dr. Ralph Blair's Centennials Lecture and his Three Sermons for the Occasion**

**It's 1918.** Since 1914, The Great War has wreaked death, devastation and despair all across Europe and fear and grieving here at home. Sixteen million die. Ten million were soldiers. Says a poet, "For the Fallen": "They went with songs to the battle, they were young, / Straight of limb, true of eye, steady and aglow. / They were staunch to the end against odds uncounted, / They fell with their faces to the foe. / They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old: / Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn. / At the going down of the sun and in the morning / We will remember them." (Robert Laurence Binyon) Alas, many *don't* remember them, *won't* remember *them* – or *why* they gave their lives.

At "the 11<sup>th</sup> hour of the 11<sup>th</sup> day of the 11<sup>th</sup> month" of 1918, a defeated Germany signs the appointed armistice. But, right through the 59<sup>th</sup> minute of the 10<sup>th</sup> hour of that 11<sup>th</sup> day in that 11<sup>th</sup> month, 10,000 *more* soldiers die or are wounded – some 3,000 of whom are Americans – because General Pershing is obsessed with "teach[ing] the Germans a lesson".

So, a war that the foolish called, the "War to End All Wars", will resume in 1939, when Hitler invades Poland on the heels of his own evil hoax, a year after Britain's Prime Minister limply waved a meaningless piece of paper that announced: "Peace in Our Time". France and Britain – later joined by America – will respond to Hitler's aggression by declaring war on Germany. And then, history's *deadliest* war will rage on until 1945.

In March of 1918, an outbreak of flu at Fort Riley in Kansas sends 500 soldiers to the hospital. They recover and are sent to the Front. The virus mutates. A pandemic spreads around the world, mislabeled as "The Spanish Flu". Worldwide, it kills many millions. Here at home, it kills over 600,000 – *twice* as many Americans as are killed and wounded during all of The Great War.

Besides our honorees – Gardner C. Taylor, Billy Graham and Aleksandre Solzhenitsyn – other noted Christians, born in 1918, include Oral Roberts, Bob Thieme, Avery Dulles, Madeleine L'Engle, and Paul Harvey. Other newborns are Leonard Bernstein, Ray Charles, Jerome Robbins, Abigail Van Buren and her twin sister Ann Landers, Pearl Baily, Rita Hayworth, Sam Walton, Mary Kay Ash, William Holden, Alan Jay Lerner, Nipsey Russell, Art Carney, Bob Feller, Ted Williams, Birgit Nilsson, Ingmar Bergman, Nelson Mandela, Anwar Sadat, Gamal Nasser, Kurt Waldheim and Helmut Schmidt. Among the four-legged offspring of 1918, there's Rin Tin Tin.

1918's bestselling authors are Mary Roberts Rinehart and Zane Grey.

Top songs of the day include, "I'm Always Chasing Rainbows". The lyrics are littered with irrationality. "At the end of the rainbow there's happiness / And to find it, often I've tried / But my life is a race, just a wild goose chase, / And my dreams have all been denied. / Why have I always been a failure? / What can the reason be? / I wonder if the world's to blame? / I wonder if it could be me? / I'm always chasing rainbows, / Watching clouds drifting by, / My schemes are just like all my dreams, / Ending in the

sky. / Some fellows look and find the sunshine, / I always look and find the rain, / Some fellows make a winning sometime, / but I never even make a gain, believe me, / I'm always chasing rainbows, / Waiting to find a little bluebird in vain."

Other pop songs of 1918: "Oh, How I Hate to Get Up in the Morning" – maybe a diagnostic clue for the rainbow griper – and, "How 'Ya Gonna Keep 'Em Down on the Farm (After They've Seen Pree?)". My *home* state's song – "Beautiful Ohio" – is written in 1918. It'll be revised years later.

Hit films are "Tarzan of the Apes", *first* of all the Tarzan films, the *fifth film* adaptation of "Uncle Tom's Cabin", Charlie Chaplin's "A Dog's Life" and "The Bell Boy" with Fatty Arbuckle and Buster Keaton.

Broadway's 1918 hits are "The Mikado", "H. M. S. Pinafore", "Hamlet", "Macbeth", "King Lear", "Othello", "Romeo and Juliet", "Her Honor, the Mayor", "An Ideal Husband", "The Gentile Wife", The Ziegfeld's Follies, "Tiger! Tiger!" and "Toot-Toot!"

Out on Long Island at a military camp, there's a grateful young immigrant, who, at 5 years old, escaped with his family, from Russian oppression. He's writing a "soldier show" for Independence Day at camp. His closing number will become a classic. But, he's not yet satisfied with it and shelves it. Twenty years later, Irving Berlin will ask Kate Smith to introduce that song: "God Bless America!"

1918's comic pages add two *new* strips: "Gasoline Alley" and "Ripley's Believe it or Not".

The Eiffel Tower has been the world's tallest structure for 30 years. In 1930, the Chrysler Building will top it. GM acquires Chevrolet, a chemist invents shaving cream and calls it, Barbasol, and another man, whose wife is prone to kitchen crises, devises bandages for her. They'll be called, Band-Aids. And ads for Wrigley's chewing gum urge us to: "Send it to your friend at the Front. It's the favorite 'sweet ration' of the Allied armies."

Airmail service begins with its *first* flight to New York City from DC. But the pilot gets lost 25 miles north of DC. Out of gas, he crash-lands. Next day, he gets lost again and crash lands. He's fired.

And Daylight Savings Time is adopted all across the country, while, all across the country, a total solar eclipse protests.

*Christians* of note in 1918 are Billy Sunday, Bob Jones, Paul Rader, Homer Rodeheaver, R. A. Torrey, Mordecai Ham, C. I. Scofield, Lewis Sperry Chafer, J. Gresham Machen, and G. Campbell Morgan.

### **A Few Wise Words on Historical Perspective**

Martin Luther King, Jr. spoke wisdom that now fails to penetrate the minds of postmodernists, bent on ephemeral, egocentric *fantasies* of "progress". Said King: "If we are to *go forward*, we must *first look back*". That's necessary. As Malcolm Muggeridge observed, "Life is a *drama*; not a *progress*." Even scientific and technological progress always proves to be a *mixed* blessing. We, who occupy this Earth, are a *fallen* race. Every so-called "right side of history" is fatally flawed by our *self-righteousness* and our *shortsightedness*. *True progress* through *this* world is a *pilgrim's* pathway, *looking back* to *Calvary* and *pressing on* in *faith*, to *Lands Beyond* all *fantasies*.

EC regularly recalls the lives and the witness of faithful forebears who gathered around the Christ of the cross. We've had literary teas, field trips, and their biographical reviews

at our retreats and we've looked at their hand-written letters and the books that they've held in their hands. We've heard their recorded voices – not always so crystal clear. And until EC quarterlies went green, a commemorative bookmark was sent out with every mailing and a commemorative calendar was sent out each year.

At the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, EC folks spent a weekend in the mountains reviewing 20 centuries of Christianity. In a turn-of-the-century sermon at City Church, I summarized that history, condensing each century to a New York minute.

Our EC website offers an overview of over four decades of EC's history. It's called, "Looking Back". Look it up

### **Gardner Calvin Taylor**

As we now look back *this* weekend, the first of our centennial honorees is Gardner Calvin Taylor. He was born in those dreadful days of the Jim Crow South, on the 18<sup>th</sup> of June 1918, in Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

A grandson of slaves, he was the only child of Selena Gesell Taylor, a schoolteacher for black children, and the Rev. Washington Monroe Taylor, pastor of the Mount Zion Baptist Church, founded three years *before* The Civil War by two preachers, one was white, the other was black.

Gardner, himself, would pastor that congregation from 1943 to 1947, just prior to his half-century of service as pastor of the great Concord Baptist Church of Christ in Brooklyn.

His parents instilled in him an appetite for learning. He said, with such obvious evidence, that they had, "a natural feel for the essential music of the English language wedded to an intimate and emotional affection for the great transactions of the scriptures".

As a child, he listened to his mother read to him from, *Great Stories of the Bible Illustrated for Children*. He recalled that these Bible stories were bound in an attractive purple cover. He'd eventually turn this learned love of language and the Bible into a lifetime of well-crafted sermons, communicated with high eloquence.

*Time* magazine called him the "Dean of the Nation's Black Preachers". *The New York Times* said that he was, "The Greatest Black Churchman in America". And, when introducing him at Harlem's Canaan Baptist Church, Rev. Wyatt Tee Walker would always say: He's "the greatest preacher living, dead or unborn".

He was given 15 honorary degrees and President Clinton gave him the Presidential Medal of Freedom, one of the United States' two highest civilian honors.

But back there in Louisiana, in 1937, at 19, he was driving a car for his black school's principal when a Model-T Ford suddenly cut across the road and crashed into him. Both of the white men in that Ford were killed. Given the Jim Crow South's racism back then, Gardner thought that, at best, he'd get a long prison sentence, at worst, a quick lynching.

The *only witnesses* were two *white* men – a poor farmer and an oil refinery worker. Both testified *truly* that this young *black* man was *not* at fault. Gardner was shocked. "Surprised by God's grace" in the *true testimonies* of these two white men, he was immediately moved to take serious stock of what he was meant to make of *this*, his now *liberated*, life.

So, he enrolled at Oberlin College up in Ohio. A century earlier, it was the first white college to admit blacks and women. He earned a divinity degree and entered the ministry.

Taylor often remarked that, “One of the great contributions of the black church was giving to our people a sense of significance and importance at a time when society, by design, did almost everything it could to strip us of our humanity. But come Sunday morning, we could put on our dress clothes and become deacons, deaconesses and ushers, and hear the preacher say, ‘You are a child of God’ — at a time when white society, by statute, custom and conversation, just called us ‘niggers’.”

1948 was the centennial year of Brooklyn’s big Concord Baptist Church of Christ. But this black congregation was in mourning over the passing of their pastor of 26 years.

This was when they called the 29-year-old Gardner C. Taylor to be their *new* pastor – a decade after God, as Taylor knew, freed him from doom, to live his life in faithful Christian service.

Four years into his ministry at Concord, its great edifice was destroyed by fire. Their first Sunday worship service after the fire was 66 years ago today. They’d moved into their previous building, a few blocks away. And in 1965, their grand new church building was finally ready, with seating for 2,250.

As Taylor stood alone inside that huge new sanctuary, he gazed all around at it all, and he felt tempted by pride. So, to remind himself of *who* it is that the people come to see, he put a little sign *inside* his pulpit, that only he could see. It was from John 12:21 – “Sir, we would see Jesus”.

Taylor mentored Martin Luther King, Jr., with whom he’d formed the new *Progressive* National Baptist Convention for blacks in 1961. The aim in doing this was to get *traditional* black Baptists *into* the Civil Rights Movement. Far too many black Christians were *lukewarm* on civil rights, thinking of that Movement as a *political* effort rather than as a *Christian calling*.

Still, Taylor always warned against what he called “a ‘cross-less’ Christianity, a happiness cult. That’s heresy”, he declared. He advised young pastors: “We ought to preach the cross not only in the Passion season. The devil has driven us from our central place. Calvary ought to be in all of our sermons, explicit or implicit. At the tree we find our deliverance. At the place of the riven feet, and at the place of the torn side, and at the place of the thorn-crowned brow, and at the place of the pierced hand we find our oneness, our oneness in Christ, our Sovereign Lord, our Gracious King. ... Calvary represents the central event in our Christian gospel, the focus of all divine history as far as the sons of men can see. There, the Lord Christ lured the powers of hell into a fatal misstep and an overreaching of their evil designs and ways. Calvary is the supreme public event in the divine purpose.”

Disgusted with the “prosperity” sermons that so tempted so many black preachers, he often recited the words of Rhea Miller, written when Gardner was just a 4-year old. George Beverly Shea set her words to music and sang them at Billy Graham Crusades: “I’d rather have *Jesus* than silver or gold. I’d rather have *Jesus* than riches untold, ... I’d rather have *Jesus* than men’s applause, I’d rather be faithful to *his* dear cause, I’d rather have *Jesus* than worldwide fame, I’d rather be led by *his holy name*.”

Well, in 1990, at age 72, Taylor retired from the Concord Church on what, by then, had been *renamed* Gardner C. Taylor Boulevard. And he said, with a very wise smile, that he knew better than to hang around getting in the way of a *new* pastor's work.

Thus, on many a Sunday morning, he'd be sitting, unobtrusively, at the rear of the Fifth Avenue Presbyterian's sanctuary, listening with much appreciation, to the preaching of R. Maurice Boyd.

Maurice quit Fifth Avenue in January 1992, and soon joined the City Church venture as our preacher. From time to time, Taylor was our *guest* preacher. And, never expecting to hear any shouted "Amen" from the folks in City Church, he toned down his *style* a bit, but he never changed his *substance*.

One Saturday night, he was stuck in Chicago, but scheduled to preach for us in the morning. He called on me to preach. Honored, even at a last minute, I reminded myself of that little sign in his old pulpit.

In 2004 I asked him to preach at one of our EC retreats. He kindly thanked me, but he was already booked for that very date.

That very same year, he and his wife relocated to Raleigh and seven years later, he moved into a convalescent center.

The last time I heard from him was on Maundy Thursday, 2009. He wrote to say: "I am most deeply grateful for the touching eulogy for our friend, Maurice Boyd. I have blessed memories of Sunday mornings in City Church, when you and Maurice made an enviable team. Every blessing on you." Then, he added, in Maurice's familiar phrasing: "I look now confidently to 'the land of promise and the country of the Great King'."

In 2015, just after Easter Sunday service, Gardner Taylor found himself in Christ's nearer presence. Now, he awaits *his own* resurrection on that *new* Earth, in God's land of promise – the country of the Great King.

### **Billy Graham**

Twenty weeks after Taylor's birth, and 700 miles to the east, Billy Graham was born on his family's dairy farm in North Carolina. Both men grew up in the segregated South, but in very different worlds.

Billy Frank (as he was known then) was 10 years old when his family moved into their new house on the farm. Given his later fame, it's been dismantled and rebuilt twice. It stands today beside the Billy Graham Library, near the graves of Billy and Ruth Bell Graham, just off of the Billy Graham Parkway outside of Charlotte, North Carolina.

At 16, he committed his life to Christ at revivals led by evangelist Mordecai Ham. After high school, he sold Fuller brushes door-to-door and then, in the fall, he enrolled at Bob Jones College.

He soon found the school's rules too restrictive and decided to transfer to a Bible school in Florida. Dr. Bob got himself offended, and so he berated him for, "throw[ing] your life away at a little country Bible school. Chances are you'll never be heard of, [and you'll wind up] somewhere out in the sticks." But, it was at that little Bible school, in anguished prayer on a golf course at midnight in May 1938, that he heard the call of God to preach the Gospel.

Southern Baptists ordained him in 1939. He moved up to Wheaton College to get an *accredited* degree in anthropology and graduated in 1943. Then he married Ruth Bell, a Wheaton classmate and daughter of medical missionaries to China.

He became the pastor of a small Baptist church in nearby Western Springs, Illinois and preached on a Chicago radio program, *Songs in the Night*, with soloist, George Beverly Shea. Bev Shea would be Billy's soloist in their worldwide evangelistic ministry, on through the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

In the mid-1940s, he joined up with Torrey Johnson, founder of Youth for Christ, and Chuck Templeton. Back then, I heard Templeton preach in Youngstown, but he had serious doubts about the Bible and Christianity. So, with only a high school diploma, he enrolled at Princeton Seminary. He tried to talk Billy into joining him there. Sadly, under his less than orthodox professors, Templeton *lost* his Christian faith. His son would later say that his father "came out [of seminary] an agnostic".

Graham, though, kept *true* to the Gospel. In '47 and '48 he preached in Grand Rapids, Charlotte, Augusta and Modesto. At Modesto, he and his associates each pledged *never* to be *alone* with a woman who wasn't his wife – wisdom that was far ahead of *The Playboy Philosophy's* poppycock that led to #MeToo, but is mocked by postmodern elites.

In 1949, Graham made the big headlines with his Crusade in Los Angeles. For eight solid weeks, thousands came and heard the Gospel in a big Canvas Cathedral at Washington and Hill Street. Two of the converts were Olympian POW hero Louis Zamperini and organized crime's double agent, Jim Vaus. Well, Dr. Bob's old prediction that Billy would wind up, "unknown, out in the sticks", vanished as completely as the smog that lay over Los Angeles in those days, obliterated whatever fell under its spell.

In 1950, the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association was formed to coordinate citywide Crusades across America and around the world. And, each week, ABC carried his live radio broadcast, *The Hour of Decision*. The program's title was Ruth's idea.

In 1952, Bob Jones' advice to Billy was this: "Do campaigns in small towns and pull your budget way down. It will do your soul good to get away from the cities where there is not so much glamour."

However, Graham was already deep in plans for the 1954 Greater London Crusade. Britain's clerical and media naysayers would later be totally *shocked* when the packed meetings in London continued on for three solid months.

In 1956, with his father-in-law, L. Nelson Bell, theologian Carl F. H. Henry and other evangelical leaders, Graham founded *Christianity Today* to steer a more responsible journalistic path than Modernists and Fundamentalists. Fundamentalists claimed he'd *sold out* to Modernists and Modernists hired snoops to dig up dirt on this "Fundamentalist" – whatever they could find, financial, personal, whatever. They found nothing.

*Christianity Today's* first editorial in 1956 stated: "We need a new vision of the sovereign God, of a sovereignty which is universal, unlimited and immutable. Neither chance, the follies of man nor the malice of Satan can determine the sequence of events and their issues. God has not abdicated; He is on His throne and He still causes the wrath of man to praise Him."

In fall, 1956 – as 1957's New York City Crusade was being planned – a 1<sup>st</sup>-year student at Bob Jones University ran afoul of the school's hostility to Billy Graham. Within an hour of his being overheard "griping" about that morning's anti-Graham speaker in Chapel, he was summoned and seated in front of Dr. Bob and surrounded by several deans. Dr. Bob shouted him down, as he'd done to another freshman, 20 years before.

But, now, rather than transfer out in 1956, as the other student did in 1936, I stayed for two years and *then* I transferred, per my *prior* plan with my uncle Dave, who'd *heard* of BJU *from me*. He liked what he heard and convinced my dad to let me attend BJU for two years. In exchange, *he'd* pay for my *seminary* costs. He'd later serve on the BJU board for 30 years as their major financial benefactor.

But in 1956, Dr. Bob knew *nothing* of D. D. Davis, as he ranted that I knew *nothing* about evangelism. My uncle never knew about Dr. Bob's berating me.

But, in another 20 years, in 1976, after Graham's preaching at IVCF's Urbana conference, I handed out EC stuff to students as they left that final assembly.

By the way, BJU's anti-Graham rhetoric backfired and caused a dramatic drop in enrollment. Of course, Dr. Bob and other separatist Fundamentalists saw this consequence as *persecution* that follows faithfulness.

Well, that 1957 New York City Crusade, set for six weeks, went on for 16 weeks, becoming the *longest* Crusade of Billy Graham's long ministry. He now was recognized as the greatest evangelist since George Whitefield, two centuries earlier.

During that New York City Crusade, Graham invited Martin Luther King, Jr. to lead in prayer. King would say later: "If it had not been for the ministry of Billy Graham, my civil rights work would have been much harder."

Back in 1952, in a heat wave in Houston, Graham insisted that the *shaded* portion of the segregated stadium's seating be reserved for *blacks only, not whites*. Then, at 1953's Charlotte Crusade, racists got angry when *blacks* were counseling *white* inquirers coming forward at the altar calls. At the Columbia, South Carolina Crusade, a racist governor rescinded use of the state capitol's grounds, sneering: "Graham's a well-known integrationist." So, the Fort Jackson's commanding general offered the use of the Army base, and 60,000 South Carolinians joined together in that state's *first integrated mass meeting*. For the 1953 Chattanooga Crusade, Graham *insisted* that *all* the seating be *integrated*. When racist ushers refused to remove the ropes that separated the races, Graham, himself, began to remove the ropes, saying: "Either these ropes stay down or you can go on and have the revival without me."

In 1973, Graham preached to South Africa's *very first racially integrated* mass meeting. He preached to over a million Koreans in another great outdoor assembly – world history's *largest Gospel gathering*. In 1974, he convened the International Conference on World Evangelization in Lausanne, Switzerland.

This worldwide ministry so often took him far away from home, even for months on end. So, ever resourceful, Ruth did great double-duty rearing their five children. Once she was asked if she'd ever considered divorce. This spunky and quick-witted woman, replied: "Divorce? No. Murder? Yes."

In 1983, Patricia Cornwell wrote Ruth's life story. Cornwell would become a bestselling crime novelist and openly lesbian. But she grew up in a troubled family down the road from the Grahams' mountain home and the Grahams were her strong anchors during those years. Ruth encouraged her to write.

Cornwell told London's *Telegraph* that, when she was going to be publicly outed: "I flew to see [Ruth], saying there would be things in the news. She just said, 'So, honey, what else have you been doing?'" Interviewed by *The Advocate*, she said: "Ruth knew about me and didn't care. Everybody who I had a semiserious relationship with, I took

up to the Grahams' house." Of her wife, Cornwell says, Ruth "loved Stasi". She affirms: Billy was "a nice man".

In Ruth's last months, son Ned was caring for his parents and called Cornwell for help in the family's dispute. Ruth wished to be buried up at their mountain home, not at the tourist attraction of the Billy Graham Library. But Franklin opposed her. It's recalled that, during the intervention: Billy's "eyes never leave Cornwell's face as she talks. Ruth Graham sighs. A lot." But, Franklin wins.

Billy Graham was admired, even by liberal clergy like Leslie Weatherhead of London's City Temple, major theologians such as Helmut Thielicke, church leaders such as Geoffrey, Lord Fisher, Archbishop of Canterbury. Said Weatherhead: "I want to pray for Billy Graham and the converts he is reaching. I want to thank God he is succeeding where so many of us have failed." Thielicke asked, rhetorically: "What is lacking in me and my theological colleagues in the pulpit and at the university lectern, that makes Billy Graham so necessary?" The Archbishop observed: "Dr. Graham has taught us all to begin again at the beginning in our evangelism, and speak by the power of the Spirit – of sin and righteousness and judgment."

In over 60 polls, Gallup found that Graham was always one of the world's 10 most admired people. The American Jewish Committee gave him its National Interreligious Award. He prayed with every President from Truman to Obama. He was awarded 20 honorary doctoral degrees (even one from Bob Jones, six years *before* that New York Crusade). And he declined at least as many honorary degrees. He was given a star on Hollywood's Walk of Fame. He and Ruth received the Congressional Medal of Honor for "outstanding and lasting contributions to morality, racial equality, family philanthropy and religion". And Queen Elizabeth granted him knighthood.

On December 25<sup>th</sup>, 1991, the Soviet's hammer and sickle was lowered for the last time and Russia's new tricolor flew over the Kremlin. Just months later, the former Red Army Chorus and Band – now, renamed the Russian Army Chorus and Band – led in the singing, *in English*, of "The Battle Hymn of the Republic" at Billy Graham's Crusade in Moscow.

In 1993, he spent the last night of the first President Bush's term in The White House, with the family. The next morning, he offered the inaugural prayer for President Clinton. In 1994 he preached at Richard Nixon's funeral. In 1995, he preached at the memorial for the Oklahoma City bombing victims. And, in 2001 he spoke at the post-9/11 memorial service at the National Cathedral in Washington.

But he well knew that his *highest* honor was to preach the true and simple Gospel. And he preached it to more people, *in person*, than anyone in history. He saw all of this as a sacred privilege, so remained a man of "holy simplicity", as London's liberal *Guardian* phrased it. He knew that he had *nothing* going for him *except God's call* and *his response*.

His final Crusade was in 2005, over in Flushing Meadows. "God Hates Fags" picketers protested. EC, too, was there, as we were there at his 1991 Crusade in Central Park.

In frail health for years, but mentally alert, on the 21<sup>st</sup> of February last, just before breakfast at his log cabin home in the mountains, he passed on to Higher Ground. "The dream had ended, it was morning".

Millions gave thanks for his life. But a woman who writes for *Teen Vogue*, *The New Yorker*, *New York* magazine and *The Nation*, trolled: "Have fun in hell, bitch."



*Newsweek* reported that, “conservatives are really ticked off at her.” So, she pushed back at them, calling Graham, “a piece of shit”. Of course, this fallen world’s *contempt* for the Gospel knows no bounds. It goes on and on – but *not* without end.

Billy Graham’s body would lie in honor in the U.S. Capitol Rotunda – just the fourth civilian to be so honored. But he, himself, was beyond all the *honors* – *and* all the *disdain* – of *this* world. He was now at peace in the nearer presence of his Lord, and awaiting resurrection.

### **Aleksandre Solzhenitsyn**

Solzhenitsyn was born a month after the armistice of 1918. He was born at Kislovodsk, between the Black and Caspian Seas, 6,000 miles east of the Grahams’ farm. Bolsheviks had brutally murdered the czar, his wife and their five children – in “celebration” of the centennial of the birth of Karl Marx.

Aleksandre was still in his mother’s womb when his father was killed. At 10 years old, he devoured Tolstoy’s *War and Peace* from cover to cover. He dreamed of becoming a writer, himself, one day.

The next year, the Soviet Secret Police hounded his grandfather. Then, his grandfather disappeared without a trace. No one dared ask, “What happened?”

At 13, Aleksandre was in a fight with another boy at school. When he saw his blood, he fainted and his head slammed against a doorpost. That gash, so very familiar in all his portraits, was on his forehead for the rest of his life.

Graduating from high school in 1936, he went on to college to study math and physics. Still, pursuing his writer’s dream, he also enrolled in correspondence courses in literature.

At 22, he married Natalia Reshetovskaya, one of his classmates, and he became a schoolteacher.

Drafted into the Red Army for World War II, he was twice decorated for his bravery. But, in 1945, Soviet Secret Police found an unflattering comment about Stalin in one of his personal letters to a friend. It was determined that his comment was “counter-revolutionary”. So, he was sentenced to 8 years in Moscow’s most notorious prison, Lubyanka. The word, itself, was synonymous with the very harshest of punishments for *ideological dissent*. He was subjected to many months of torturous interrogation. His ordeals in the Lubyanka and, later, in the Siberian slave-labor camps, would compel him to write his three-volumes of *The Gulag Archipelago* and the rest of his autobiographical works against totalitarianism and the Soviet Socialist oligarchy.

To spare his young wife from the dictatorship’s vicious harassing on his account, he had to sign a document of divorce.

Eventually, he was transferred to a prison where his skills in math and physics would be more useful to the dictatorship than was the manual labor he’d been forced into. But he found that the aims of the technical work were so reprehensible that he refused. So, he was thrown into an even more brutal Gulag.

In 1953, he was exiled to still another forced labor camp – this one in the farthest reaches of northern Kazakhstan. It was there that he first battled cancer. And, it was there, too, on his first day without a guard, that he learned of the death of Stalin.

On whatever scraps of paper he could scrounge and keep hidden, he’d write down his thoughts, memorize what he’d written, and destroy the scraps of paper before they were discovered. This is how he wrote his poetry and plays and how he planned his first

novel, *In the First Circle*. It was his hard life in that remote Kazakhstan slave labor camp that inspired his work, *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*.

Through all of his years of imprisonment in Soviet slave-labor camps, only his personal *Christian faith* brought him patience and protection from utter despair, when even the Russian Orthodox leaders were agents of Marxist ideology and treachery.

Thus, he became a *most credible* Christian witness against all of the *evils* of Marxism's very *necessary totalitarianism*, of which Western media and elite are so ignorant or in denial. Today, utter naiveté as well as *willed* ignorance fail to grasp the tight connections between our *fallen human nature* and the *evil temptations of any and all totalitarian power*. Having never had to cope under the *utter deprivation* of personal liberty, many foolishly hold themselves hostage to their own utopian fantasies of Marxism and not to the grim historical realities of Marxism.

But, as Solzhenitsyn assessed: "Within the philosophical system of Marx and Lenin and at the heart of their psychology, *hatred of God is the principal driving force*, more fundamental than all their political and economic pretensions. Militant atheism is not a side effect but the central pivot of Communism."

And, it's been right there on display in the huge *Soviet Encyclopedia's* one and only sentence about Jesus: "Jesus is the name of the mythological founder of Christianity." Period! End of discussion!

Solzhenitsyn observed: "The main cause for the ruinous revolution that swallowed up some sixty million of our people – and I could not put it more accurately [than the peasants did and do], 'Men have forgotten God'."

He noted, that, "Among [allegedly] enlightened people it is considered rather awkward to use, seriously, such words as 'good' and 'evil'. Communism instilled in all of us that the concepts are old-fashioned and laughable. But if we are deprived of the concepts of good and evil, what will be left? Nothing but the manipulation of one another."

And that is the very definition of any totalitarian state, where all must bend to the *will* and *definitions* set by the political dictators of everyone's thought and speech.

In 1898, Tolstoy foresaw that, if Marxism takes over from imperialism, "the only thing that will happen is that despotism will change hands."

So, yet again, in 1956, when Khrushchev came to power, he, himself, denounced the dead Stalin and he released Stalin's prisoners. But he, now in his turn, launched the Cuban Missile Crisis against America.

During the Cold War era, Solzhenitsyn completed his tomes, *In the First Circle*, *The Tanks Know the Truth*, *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* and assorted writings.

But, then, with Khrushchev's ousting from power in 1964, all of Solzhenitsyn's works were yet again banned. So, it was, again, in hiding, that he wrote, *The Cancer Ward* and *The Gulag Archipelago*.

In the later '60s and early '70s, he was under increasing censorship. When he was awarded the 1970 Nobel Prize, the commissars in Moscow banned him from receiving it. And, the KGB tried even to *assassinate* him with ricin.

He managed to smuggle his *Gulag* manuscript to a typist. But the KGB found the typist, tortured him, and seized the manuscript. The remorseful typist then killed himself.

In 1974, *The Gulag Archipelago* was published in Paris. So, of course, Solzhenitsyn was, again, arrested for *treason*. He was stripped of his Russian citizenship and expelled to West Germany. There, he was reunited with his wife and their sons.

In 1976, the family lived in Vermont. From there, he'd travel to speak around the U.S. and abroad. His signed Vermont driver's registration card is here for you to see.

In 1978, Solzhenitsyn gave that most memorable Harvard Commencement Address titled, "A World Split Apart". He spoke the hard truth about Communism's failures – to the obvious displeasure of most in his naïve and self-styled "progressive" audience. He also decried what he detected as the *meaningless materialism* in so much of American society.

Accurately foreseeing America's near future, he warned: "I call on America to be more careful with its *noble trust*. Prevent *false use of social justice* to lead you down a *false* road." Equally prophetic was his warning: "It's time in the West to *defend* not so much human *rights* as human *obligations*."

Voicing conclusions of a lifetime of faith in God during a lifetime of dictatorial atheism, he affirmed: "We can reach with determined confidence only for the warm hand of God, that we have so rashly and so self-confidently pushed away."

After the fall of the Soviet Union, Solzhenitsyn was allowed to return to Russia, where he spent his last years in further writing and in tutoring other writers.

On Sunday, August 3, 2008, at age 89, he had a fatal heart attack. Thousands came to pay their respect. The funeral was held in Moscow's 16<sup>th</sup>-century Donskoi monastery. His widow and sons and friends were there. Even Putin, who had given him Russia's State Prize, was there. Observers said the funeral had the hallmarks of a *state* funeral – goose-stepping honor guards, military band, a gun salute.

But Solzhenitsyn, himself, was now beyond all worldly acclaim and totalitarian disdain. Safe at last, he rested in the nearer presence of Jesus, waiting for what "no eye has yet seen, no ear has yet heard, no mind has ever conceived, of what God has prepared for those who love Him." (I Cor 2:9)

### ***"Liberty – therefore, Gratitude"***

One Sabbath, in the Nazareth synagogue, Jesus stood up to read the Scripture. Isaiah's scroll was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found where it is written: "The Lord's Spirit is upon me. He has anointed me to proclaim *good news* to the poor, liberation to the oppressed, recovery of sight for the blind, and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

Rolling up the scroll, he handed it back to the attendant, and sat down. Every eye in the synagogue was fixed on Jesus, as they awaited *his* words. Here's what he said: "*Today, in your hearing, this scripture is fulfilled.*" (Lk 4:16ff; Isa 61:1f)

Paul shared this tremendous good news, writing to Galatians: "Christ has set us *free!* We're *really free!* Hold on to that freedom. Don't ever again be slaves to the Law." (Gal 5:1)

In Christ, we're *really freed* from all of the legalist demands and rituals. Therefore, our only *reasonable response* is *genuine gratitude*, lived out daily, fully and affordably, in our freedom, as we follow Jesus, in the continuing proclamation and active demonstration of this Good News to all of the poor and oppressed.

Well, all have always known *half* of the Bible's message. All sense their poverty and oppression, however poorly they diagnose it, however poorly they prescribe their remedies. Paul summed it up in these words: "All have sinned, and all fall short of God's glorious goal for us all". (Rom 3:23)

That, “all have sinned” and “all fall short”, was *not at all, news* to anyone in the ancient world. It’s *not at all, news* to anyone today. Nobody, anywhere, at any time in all of human history, has been without an *anxious awareness of not measuring up*. Nobody has been without a gnawing sense of *guilt*. And, nobody has been without a *fear of being caught*.

No people group, from the most primitive to the most progressive, from the poorest to the most prosperous, has ever been found without pseudo-solutions for trying to deal with this unavoidable awareness of guilt and anxiety over not measuring up, of falling far short. They’ve tried to cope by way of what’s recognized as “religion” – shifting blame from themselves to animal sacrifices or a scapegoat, trying to appease deities, trying to put them in their debt. Coping later evolved into psychotherapeutic terminology in which fault was shifted to a parent or to society-at-large. Today, sociopolitical identities of race and gender try to *shift* the blame from “us” to “them”, a pluralizing of individualized blame games and a duplication of ages old nationalist rivalries. Such blaming has more lately metastasized on steroids of intersectionality whereby an accumulation of “approved” identities over against *disdained* identities attempts to assuage the unwanted sense of not measuring up.

But such blaming only gets everyone more mired in a mess, for blaming can’t remove our own sense of not measuring up. Finding fault with others can’t remove the sense of guilt that *prompts* the blaming that, then, only *amplifies* our sense of inferiority, and, predictably, brings on a *retaliating* backlash of blame from those who, likewise, sense they don’t measure up.

So, all *fail* to solve the problem of guilt when they try to cope with guilt on their own. Their own guilty consciences constantly accuse them, of what they can’t, on their own, escape, for they do buy into their own sense of not measuring up. They, themselves, experience their falling far short.

So they try to cope by using drugs, by getting dead drunk or by dropping dead, whether by intent or by accident.

They try to get affirmation, but cannot buy into it, even if those from whom they seek such affirmation can somehow afford to mumble some semblance of such, out of their own distracted sense of inferiority.

No such efforts ever do anyone any good. Neither does any effort at any *unbelievable* posturing of one’s so-called “self-esteem”. No *seeking* for affirmation, no *self*-affirmation, no popularity, no monetary gain, can do it. Nothing works to work *one’s way* out of a pervading sense of sin and guilt and its final payoff.

There’s no comfort in one’s own cover-ups that can’t cover up one’s own sense of self that doesn’t measure up. There’s no easing of ever-experienced anxiety that dreads exposure of one’s sin and guilt. There can be no real gratitude in a life governed by unrelieved guilt.

Nothing but *that other half of the Bible’s basic message* will do it. And here’s that *Good News* that Paul shared with Romans, when he put this way: “By the *free gift of God’s grace all are put right with God through Christ Jesus, who sets them free.*” (Rom 3:24)

Paul repeats this *Good News* in all his letters. He proclaims it to Corinthians like this: “God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself, not counting *their sins* against *them.*” (II Cor 5:19)

Postmodernists may be *unaware* of Paul's texts, but *their own prefabricated pretexts* for all their *paranoid* blaming and *perfumed* boasting are attempts to cover up the stinking seepage of their own sense of sin that they do, indeed, smell down deep inside of their own *secret privies*.

But, on their own, they can't come up with that other half of Paul's great summary of biblical truth: the *Good News of Christ Jesus*. They know there's something wrong with them, but they can't, on their own, come up with the Good News that, says Paul, God committed to us, in Christ, to share with all, *reconciliation* with God through Christ's sacrifice of himself on behalf of sinners. (II Cor 5:19). Without this *Good News*, we're all left clutching to our own contaminated chaos of quick fixes that fix nothing.

Quick fixes fix nothing at all, for what's broken is far more broken than even the most guilt-ridden have even the foggiest of clues. They may think they fall short of their own fantasies for themselves. That's a falling short of *merely* what they can *imagine* on their own – a fantasy stuffed with the stuff of *triviality*.

But Paul says that we all fall short of the *glory of God's goal* for us all, what we were *created* to be as *God's own Image-bearers*. So, by that high standard, whatever we may have in mind in terms of our not measuring up falls pathetically far short. They – and we – are not only dead wrong about how wrong we all are. In their sin and ours, they and we, are *dead*. Period.

Today, we get ourselves so easily distracted, we hurt our feelings, we outrage our egos, we get ourselves hooked on cell phones and selfies, obsess over what we anxiously project into others' brains. We frantically de-friend others at the drop of a "diss" with which we obviously *agree*, but can't afford to *admit*. Our very vengeance reeks with rationalization – a clue to our problem if we could but admit we do see it. We so strive to *belong*, to be *affirmed*, to *disprove* our guilt, to try to *counter* our sense that we don't measure up. And, on our own, we have no identity that is deeply *meaningful* for our true identity is our *creation* in the Image of God and *redemption* in Christ. Folks wander around on their never-ending quests in never-never land that can never be found.

Folks talk about "affirmation" and "belonging" on such trivial levels, while neglecting, even resisting, even rejecting, even renouncing, the very deepest affirmation and eternal belonging that's offered in the great truth, that, "In Christ, God was reconciling the world to Himself, not counting our sins against us, and entrusting to us, this good news of reconciliation." (II Cor 5:19)

Apart from the glorious *second half* of the truth of Paul's pivotal preaching, there's no good news. But in that second half of the truth there is the very best news there could be. In this second half of Paul's statement to the Romans, he adds these words: "... and all are justified freely by His grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus". (Rom 3:24)

This is the glory of God from which we fall so far short – His own intrinsic glory, and our glory by His grace in Christ Jesus at the cross.

And it's God's *gracious gift of guilt* that gets our attention, our clue that we do, indeed, fall far short.

No wonder Gardner Taylor so often urged pastors: "We ought to preach the cross not only in the Passion season. The devil has driven us from our central place. Calvary ought to be in all of our sermons, explicit or implicit." Taylor surely was right, for,

without Good Friday, we're without Good News. We're left with only this: "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God."

Yet, under allegedly "progressive" Protestantism, dressed up in fashionable clerical robes of rainbow colors and a canon of political correctness, anything *but* the *cross* and the *blood* of Christ is preached. No "bloody" Gospel for them! The *substitutionary atonement* of Christ on the cross is labeled, in their virtue-signaling lingo, as "Divine Child Abuse", even when those who speak this way are otherwise loathe to speak of Jesus as any more than an ancient sage.

But Jesus' laying down his life for us on the cross was *the only way out of our sin and death and into our liberation from sin and death*. To deny biblical revelation is to deny the *crux* of Christianity. The Good News for us is found in Christ's body bloodied on the cross and in his resurrection body on that first Easter morning.

But the so-called "liberation" that's so often preached today, isn't liberation *from* sin and death, but a liberation *for* more sin and death, i.e., a "liberated" *self-indulgence* in *self-seeking self-centeredness* and a "liberated" *self-obsession* in intolerance of all who aren't as "advanced" as *we* are in *self-righteousness*.

It's never been wise to assume that the spot at which one's lately *arrived*, is the *apogee* of advancement rather than merely another dumb detour, another dumping ground that will be shown to have been a big mistake even a bit later on.

For those who refuse to tolerate the biblical theology of Christ's cross, there can be *no liberation from sin and death* for postured *self-righteousness* can't redeem *itself*. Pretended *self-righteousness* refuses *God's gift of a sense of guilt* as well as *God's gift of Christ's righteousness*, taking the place of our putrid pretensions.

There can be no joyous *gratitude* for sins *forgiven*, for life *restored*, if what we're *owed* is what we've tried to *earn* by being self-centered, self-righteous selves.

Under such unscriptural, even counter-intuitive premises, we create a "god" in *our* selfish image, a "god" in our self-centered debt. We refuse to admit that God, in a body like ours, paid our debt in full and at unimaginable cost at the cross. He came to us in *our* image, as it were, and bore our sins, to restore us to Himself in *His* Image, for life eternal with Him.

The New Testament Greek word for *freedom* or *liberty* is *eleutheria*. In that ancient world, it was used of liberation from chattel slavery. I noted at our Luther weekend that the Reformer was so moved by the *liberation* of the Good News that he changed his family name, *Luder*, to *Luther*, a play on that Greek, *eleutheria*, pointing to the *freedom* from sin and from death that was won for us at Christ's cross.

Paul expounded on *eleutheria*: "To the one you give control of yourselves, you are slaves". He points out that we're all *slaves, servants*, to *whatever* or *whomever* we give *ourselves* – whether foolishly, selfishly, to sin and death, or wisely, gratefully, to Christ and life in him and life for the welfare of others. It's to that, that Paul alludes in noting that *sin's* final payoff is *death*, but "the *gift* of God's grace is *eternal life* in Christ Jesus, our Lord." (Rom 6:23)

Writing to Corinthian Christians, Paul says: "*Don't you realize you're not your own, you're a temple of God's Holy Spirit in you?*" (I Cor 6:19) *Don't we realize, we're not our own!* Thank God! That's *good news!* But today, folks think it's *bad news!* I'm not my own?! *I am my own!* Okay. If you're "your own", you're *on your own* – from now on, forever.

They don't "get it". Who would be better to serve than the ever-loving God who, in Christ, gave Himself for our liberation from sin and death? Does that everlasting fact of liberation from sin and death call for gratitude? If you "get it", there's no other response *but gratitude – now and forevermore*.

To be *truly freed*, like that, *from deadly bondage*, like that, is to experience the *deepest gratitude*. Gardner Taylor knew it. Even though that fatal car crash was no more *his fault* than his grandparents' enslavement was *their fault*. Yet the *liberty* in either case was *real*. His grandparents were among the millions who were sold into slavery around the world, though through no fault of their own. And yet, though sinned against, they were, as *we all are*, sinners *otherwise*. Taylor's own close call reminded him that, nonetheless, his life was *not without* sin and guilt. And for God's liberating him from *his own sin and consequent death*, there at Christ's cross, he was *profoundly grateful* throughout his life.

At the Graham Crusades, those who came forward under conviction of sin, found *freedom* at Christ's cross for which they felt *gratitude to live for Christ's sake*. As Paul put it: "Whatever you do in word or deed, do it all for the sake of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father, through him". (Col 3:17)

A truly *grateful* heart isn't experienced or expressed in *self-righteousness*, or in greed, or hostility in response to not getting one's way, not getting one's fantasies. A truly *grateful* heart is freed from all of the "self" that's been left, with relief, at the foot of Christ's cross.

The Greek for "gratitude" is *eucharistia*, as in, the Lord's Supper or Eucharist. For such *freedom in Christ*, Paul exclaims: "Thank God for His *indefinable gift*." (II Cor 9:15) *Thank God!*

Hopefully, we've all had reasons throughout our lives to be so frankly grateful – at least from time to time, if not as a *daily* habit of our being in this world *with* Christ Jesus. But in view of God's great gift of our liberation from sin and death in Christ's sacrifice, alone, have we been, are we now, grateful? Think about it. Pray about it. We're privileged to rejoice in him, for his grace, now and through all eternity. Amen.

### ***"Liberty – therefore, Humility***

Among the ancient pagans, *humility* was *belittled*, even *loathed*, as a despicable defect. They did this, of course, to prop up *self-importance* that they really couldn't believe. So, their ruse made them nervous. They couldn't *really* believe that they *really* were so important *to others*. And, by the way, they weren't. The others were too obsessed with *their own* ideas that they, *themselves*, weren't important enough to be affirmed by others. They couldn't afford to distract themselves *from themselves*, even for *their own* good.

While, irrationally reading *their own unwanted experience* of *their own unimportance* into what they irrationally assumed *others* were thinking of *them*, they needed to *rationalize* their showing off that, of course, they, themselves, couldn't buy into.

But, hey, under the aegis of a socially subsidized discrediting of *humility*, they hoped they *might* get away with strutting for social approval. Yet, neither they nor the others ever did, or ever could, arrive at their desired destination by such a doomed route.

And, at any rate, if and when anyone else, tripping over his own sense of self, did buy into the braggart's boasts, he'd get jealous and try to escape this by ridiculing the

braggart. So, nobody escaped his or her own enslavement through such a counterproductive, self-incarcerating self-centeredness.

They were selfishly captive to their own sense of self and their own desire for things to be otherwise as they defined otherwise. They were bound up in the bonds of their own making.

But, on their own, they could not get unbound, for their own solution was their folderol that they feared no one would fall for, for they, themselves, couldn't fall for it. And, if ever a second fool might foolishly impress himself with that first fool's fooling him, that first fool would have to be publicly put down.

What these pagans tried to use to cope with all of this, were but the two sides of a counterfeit coin of pretended pride and stigmatized humility. Thus, they were trapped in their never-ending cycles of spin.

But, with the revelation of the One True God's sovereign glory and amazing grace, proclaimed through the Hebrew scriptures and in the coming of Christ, as over against the competing and capricious gods and goddesses of paganism – *humanity* was finally freed to savor *humility* as a daily reminder of the genuine freedom so fully available in the only *loving* God, come in flesh and blood in Christ Jesus. *Humility* could then be understood as the absolutely appropriate and realistic response to the loving reality of the One and Only God, the universal Creator and the sovereign Redeemer, who *humbled* himself for all humanity, even in disgrace and death on a cross.

We can identify with the pagans, for we are their descendants. We carry their DNA – genetically, of course – but also morally, for we, too, are members of a *fallen* and *ever-rebellious* race. And yet, we are in some ways far worse than pagans, for we have heard the Good News of God's unmerited favor in the Christ of the cross. Yet, even in this light of the Gospel we've heard, we can still so easily resemble the pagans who never heard the Good News, and we can so easily resemble the ancient Israelites in their disobedience, though they had heard much more than the pagans heard. Jesus warned that much is required from those to whom much is given. (Luke 12:48) That certainly does make sense, but it so seldom is paid any serious attention.

With further revelation in the lifetimes of the first Christians, Peter was moved to conclude one of his letters in these words: "Finally, all of you, be at peace with each other, having a loving concern for each other, being kind and *humble*." (I Peter 3:8)

So *loved* and so *liberated*, they could afford to be kind and humble with each other. So *loved*, so *liberated to love*, in *honest humility*! By God's amazing grace in Christ, what could be *more affordable* for us than to be humble and humbly to love one another as we are already loved to the uttermost at the greatest of all costs?

But, sadly, the insecure, the fearful, try to deny their experienced weakness and wrongs and can ill afford to let their self-doubts and anxieties show.

Jesus, with fullest confidence in his Father's loving presence, could *fully afford to be meek and humble*. (Matt 11:29) Therefore, followers of Jesus, given the evidence of his sacrificial love and the evidence of the power of his vindicating resurrection, can fully afford to be meek and humble.

A Hebrew proverb explains that, "Pride ends in humiliation, while humility brings honor." (Prov 29:23) That's the *reality*. It's the reality back there and then in all of those ancient worlds, and here and now, in our own corner of our world today. And it's reality forevermore.



In the Hebrew Bible and in the New Testament, what always leads to pride is a sense of falling short. What follows in pride's wake is predictable, but, of course, unintended shame and even utter ruin. As all such pride is deliberately *posed*, over against the poser's actual sense of *insufficiency*, the pose, itself, is a *sufficient clue* to the poser, that his effort is a lie. And right there, the resulting humiliation has begun.

Postured pride may, of course, fool *others*, at least for a while, but it *never* fools the poser. Yet, the fact that it doesn't fool the poser is really a *gift* of God's grace. Still, God's good gift is so often ignored and suppressed. Aware of God's grace by which we're forgiven, can we not *afford* to humbly admit our sins to ourselves, for in admitting them to God, the reply is *forgiveness*.

People commonly pass the buck to others when there's something *they, themselves*, should do but don't *want* to do. It's a *selfish* copout. But there's one *self-assigned* assignment about which we seldom pass the buck. Indeed, it's one of our most tempting *self-assignments*. Of so many things we *should* do, we *selfishly* say, "Let somebody else do it." And we boast, "I do enough." But there is something *else* we do often do on our own, and never leave it to others to do, for we think if we leave it to others it would never get done. We *boast about ourselves* for we can't afford to wait around for *others* to get around to boasting about us. Yet, the biblical Proverb suggests: "Let somebody else do it." (Prov 27:2)

Paul, in Christ, could, indeed, so fully afford, as he said, "never to boast, except in the [religiously despised embarrassment] of the *cross of our Lord Jesus Christ*, through which", as he put it, "the world was crucified to me, and I to the world". (Gal 6:14)

Solzhenitsyn, in a peasant's parlance, remarked: "Pride grows in the human heart like lard on a pig." And G. K. Chesterton keenly observed: "It is always the secure who are humble." Quite! Indeed, in this sinful world, it's *only* the *truly secure* in Christ who can readily afford to be humble.

Christians who appreciate what God has done for us in Christ, are humbly grateful for that solidly reliable security of spiritual liberation through the most radical grace of God. We can experience a confidence in God that allows us to really rest in humility, rooted in this liberation by God's grace.

Only the *truly secure* can truly *afford* to be humble. The *insecure* sense a gnawing awareness of not being who they *should* be or who they're *pretending* to be. So, they *boast against* their *insecurity* and *against* their *sense* of self, and they angrily fault any and all *but* themselves. And, of course, this can't work. They can't help but see right through all of their busted bluster and all of the blundering blaming. And, thank God, for this grace that allows us to see right through all of this nonsense of ours.

Humility is not a *virtue* – as it's so often assumed to be. It's not an *assignment*. It's a *straightforward consequence* of a stable, realistic awareness of *true reality* and *reliable safety*. There's nothing *more real* and *more reliable* than God's amazing grace to fallen humanity. Grateful for our liberation in Christ, we can now easily afford to be truly humble. Sturdiest security allows us to humbly, honestly thrive in our standing *in Christ*, *not in ourselves*. Freed from self-centered distractions and anxiety we're afforded the *ability* to get on with *living lives* of service to *others*. No more "poor me" for folks so divinely privileged.

We're under the precious *gift* of the shed *blood* of the "Lamb, slain from the creation of the world", the "Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world". (Rev 13:8; John 1:29)

And recall that, even all of those innocent lambs of the sacrifices in the Old Covenant were also *God's own lambs*. Those lambs, too, were the *gifts* of God.

Neither the ancient Hebrews nor Christians today *earn* forgiveness. Forgiveness was and is God's *gift*. Back in Leviticus, the Lord God made it quite clear: "*I myself* have given the blood of the lambs to you to make atonement for yourselves." (Lev 17:11)

The words of an old hymn that was synonymous with the altar calls at Billy Graham Crusades were these: "Just as I am without one plea, but that, Thy blood was shed for me, and that, *Thou* bid'st me come to *Thee*, O Lamb of God, I come." No postured pride here! No unbelievable boasts!

Two centuries before the Graham Crusades, folks were singing that same faith through Toplady's words, sung to the Lord: "Rock of Ages, cleft for me, let me hide myself in Thee. . . . Not the labors of my hands, can fulfill Thy law's demands; could my zeal no respite know, could my tears forever flow, all for sin could not atone; Thou must save, and Thou alone. Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to Thy cross I cling; naked, I come to Thee for dress, helpless, look to Thee for grace; foul, I to the Fountain fly; wash me, Savior, or I die."

The sophisticated, "the woke" as they boast of self these days, defensively disdain all of this: "What a downer!", they say. Realists realize: "*What a truth!*"

The terms of these honest old hymns, rooted in the Scripture, are not the boasts of the clueless, the self-pitying, the self-excusing, the self-righteous who, in blaming others, are so foolishly heralded today. The lines of these old hymns are the humble prayers of all who know, so honestly, so humbly, that they are, in and of themselves, utterly lost in selfishness and in need of the Savior. Here, there's no delusional effort to try to put God in our debt. There's simply a sober and humble acknowledgement of self-awareness – seeking mercy.

So, Paul, calling himself, "a prisoner of the Lord", wrote to his sisters and brothers in the Lord, fellow captives of the Lord, at Ephesus. He began yet again, with his typical, and so familiar, "therefore", *that adverb of consequence*, and here, again, it was *in consequence of our Lord's liberation of us*. "Therefore . . . in meekness and in lowliness and in humility, bear with one another." (Eph 4:1ff) How could they *afford* to behave so contrary to the ways of this world? They could do so by following the Way marked out by the Way, Himself, their meek Lord, on his road to Calvary. It led, through grief and pain and unimaginable death, to the glory of the resurrection and eternal life for a fallen, yet now redeemed, race.

This *life of humility*, of *living* and *vibrant* humility to which we're privileged to be called in Christ, is *ours in relationship* to our life and death *to ourselves* in that one, "who, being in his very nature, God, did not consider equality with God something to be used for *himself alone*; rather, he made himself to be as nothing by taking on the very nature of a slave, being made in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by being obedient to death, even to that horrible death on a cross." (Phil 2:6ff)

The more we grasp of the utterly unmerited favor of God – unmerited in terms of our own *self-centeredness*, but *not* unmerited in terms of Christ's *self-sacrifice* – the more it

makes sense to respond to the Good News of God's grace with spontaneous humility. This humility equips us to let go of selfish distractions and get on with our *life in Christ* for the welfare of others. This humility enables us to escape our unendurable *isolation* in self-centeredness and defensive intolerance of others and to enjoy the *fellowship* of communion with Christ and our sisters and brothers in Christ. This humility enables us to get on with the privilege of living the life we're called to live each day as witnesses to all our world of the *inexpressibly* Good News of the written and the living Word of God. Amen.

### ***“Liberty – therefore, Patience”***

Have you ever noticed that there's one very short sentence that's almost *never* spoken *patiently*? Here it is: “Be patient!” Now, of course, such obvious *impatience* may get tweaked with a bit of baby talk and a forced smile, but frustrated condescension can't really conceal the angry *impatience* that underlies it.

Impatience *can* be *contagious*, too. Yet the *initially* impatient person and the impatient *responder*, each adds to the stew of hostility by thinking that things really do “need” to be otherwise *right now*. So, both parties hold *themselves*, and *each other*, hostage to booby-trapped investments in irrationality.

Of course, patience cannot be ordered up on command – either by oneself, or by one's impatient opponent. Patience can't be *compelled*, whether in self or in others, since *impatience* is *involuntary*, though its *expression* can be quite deliberate, even orchestrated. The effort to command patience, in each case, is stuck, in scenarios that are saturated with a sense of insurmountable urgency. But, of course, a merely *experienced sense* of urgency does not, in and of itself, *verify* any need for urgency.

*Impatience* is the *emotional response* to one's *thinking* that something really does *need* to be otherwise – and the sooner, the better, like: *right now!*

To the degree that one fantasizes that something needs to be *different right now*, one cannot help but *feel fear* and *frustration* if it seems that it's *not* going that way right now – or, maybe, *never will* go that way. Trying to get on top of such troubling fear and frustration, one will, of course, *impatiently* resort to *anger*, whether by a foul *attitude* or a fatal *attack*.

An ancient term for “impatience” resonated by sounding a staccato of short snorts. All these short snorts gave vent to exaggeration that spurred on more spurts of snorts that then bred a big batch of reactions that fueled further fears, further frustration, further fighting and more counterproductive *impatience*.

Consequently, a supposedly “necessary” *outcome*, is made even *less likely*, and may, in effect, be rendered *impossible*. And, of course, all of the experienced helplessness inevitably continues. Way to go, stupid people! But there's another way to go.

Paul knew that Timothy's *youth*, *inexperience* and *immaturity*, understandably made him susceptible to *impatience* in dealing with others. And Paul well understood that a loss of temper could very easily be counterproductive in ministry. So, he cautioned his young cohort: “Flee youthful lusts”. (II Tim 2:22)

This text's English rendering confuses us today. It leads us to misunderstand *what* Timothy needed to flee. Paul *wasn't* telling Timothy to flee *sexual* temptations. He was warning Timothy to be on his guard against youthful *passions of impatience* and

*impulsiveness* – very common traits of youthful *inexperience* throughout the ages. Even back then, the young so easily assumed that they were “woke”, to use the term of our day’s “know-it-alls”. As we’re warned in the Proverbs: “Patience is smart, but impatience is stupid.” (Prov 14:29) Paul knew that *patience* is crucial in dealing with others who’re just beginning to grapple with the *unexpected* and the officially *censored* revelations of the Gospel of God’s Grace and Peace in the crucified and risen Christ.

This weekend we’ve been reminded that, our *freedom* from sin and death is in the Christ of the cross that leads us to *living* this life in *gratitude* and in *humility*. And that freedom in Christ is the basis for *patience*, as well. There’s a “therefore” there, too, *leading* to patience, for it looks back to our *liberation* in Christ and looks forward to the inevitable fulfillment, in the fullness of time, of all that Christ accomplished.

On this day in 1957, Billy Graham replied to a Fundamentalist who objected to the New York City Crusade’s sponsorship. Graham told him: “It is my prayer that this difference of judgment as to sponsorship shall be swallowed up in a glorious realization that God has over-ruled and blessed despite the frailties of all of us, His servants”. In other words: Let’s “wait patiently for the Lord” to do His good and wise and sovereign will. (Ps 27:14)

Our patience is the fruit of our freedom in Christ, just as gratitude and humility are fruit of that freedom. As Paul told Galatian Christians, such patience for tolerance, restraint, endurance and forbearance, is just as much the “fruit of God’s Spirit”, as is love, joy, peace, kindness, and gentleness”. All of this *fruit* is produced – not by ourselves, or on our own – but by God’s Spirit, *alive* in us who realize that we are so deeply loved and liberated by God Himself. (Gal 5:22) Paul adds, even with a smile and maybe a wink of rhetorical flourish: “There’s no law against any of these!”

Whenever one looks forward to having things go his or her way, say, *culturally*, as in wishing for some particular political or social change, there’s some usefulness to a good sense of stoicism in anticipation of any outcome. It can *seem* that, very much is at stake in things going “*my way*”. The fuel, though, for desiring a particular outcome is, of course, a *fantasy*. And, no matter what the fantasy, as it’s but *fantasy*, it inevitably leads to disappointment – not only for those whose *fantasy* doesn’t materialize *at all*, but also for those whose *fantasy* fails to materialize as *fully* as the fantasy foretold. And, of course, fantasy has an abominable track record. Each of these mixed outcomes in the wake of a fantasy is inevitable, but those who hold themselves hostage to fantasies are *too naive* to question beforehand, and *too resentful* to do so later.

Those, whose fantasies are dashed by not getting what they fantasized, now hold themselves hostage to fantasy scenarios of “if only” they had gotten their way. Those, whose fantasies are dashed by getting their way by some fairly objective definition, now hold themselves hostage to fantasy scenarios of “if only” that outcome would not come with all of the unintended baggage. But, of course, life is always a mixed bag, so it always comes with some baggage we, at least at first, don’t want.

Still, as the poet William Cowper penned, even through all of his lifetime of depression: “God moves in *mysterious* ways, His *wonders* to perform”. He moves, He acts, but not by the whims of our pet fantasies. That’s why George MacDonald wisely wrote: “The *principal* part of faith is *patience*.”

And, no doubt, it will be only in the ever-opening wonder of eternity in the New Earth and New Heavens that we’ll be able even to begin to become aware of the multiplied

manifestations of mercy we've received all along, through God's being in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself.

But, for now, we're still too *unimaginatively shortsighted* and too *uncharitably self-centered* to readily contemplate, let alone, comprehend, *anything*, really. Is it not enough, then, to know that, *God is patient?* As Paul rhetorically reminds us, "Don't you see how patient God is *with you?*" (Rom 2:4; I Pet 3:9) Woops! This was clear to the Psalmist, too: "The Lord is compassionate and gracious, *slow to anger*, and abounding in love." (Ps 103:8) Thus we get to live in faith-filled and confident hope for what is coming, sooner or later, but in God's own time.

And of that hope of things to come, we read throughout the Scriptures. From Isaiah: "Look, I will create *new* heavens and a *new* earth. Former things will not be remembered, they'll not even come to mind." (Isaiah 65:17) From James: "Blessed is anyone who *perseveres* under trial, because when he's *stood* the test, he'll receive the crown of life that God has already promised to those who love Him." (James 1:12) Paul, too, takes note: "As it is written, 'Since the beginning of the world, no eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has imagined the things that God already has prepared for those who love him'." (I Cor 2:9; Isa 64:4) With such a promise, can we not be patient?

But in 1918, a modernist minister in Manhattan, Norman Thomas, imagined *he* could imagine the world, as it *should* be. So, he launched a socialist periodical, *The World Tomorrow: A Journal Looking Toward a Christian World*. The Fellowship of Reconciliation funded it as the, "militant [and] pacifist" voice of "Christian socialism". It lasted until 1934.

It was also in 1918 that another devotee of Marxism, Max Eastman, founded *The Liberator*, a socialist monthly. But after Eastman's own eye-opening, eye-witness experience of what, for Solzhenitsyn was far more brutally and personally experienced in the terror of the Soviet state, Eastman would finally write: "It was in 1933 that my resolute faith in the Soviet system began really to break down ... just when my popular pro-Soviet lecture was becoming most popular and remunerative" – a bit of a closeted Capitalist, hmm? He nonetheless still tried to convince himself against his eyewitness evidence that world socialism would yet mean *world liberation*. He wrote: "I asserted, or my typewriter did, that [my socialist dream] was being realized in the Soviet Union". Finally, he couldn't fool himself further. He couldn't deny all of the deadly atrocities that he himself witnessed and he gave up that hope.

Still, a modernist Protestant comrade of his, in spite of all of the evidence to the contrary, that he, too, witnessed, refused to believe that his Soviet dream was not – and these were his actual words – not "Christ's Second Coming!"

A century later, others naively expected "Second Coming" benefits from a series of U. S. presidential elections. Again, the expectations were based in fantasies and, again, disappointment inevitably abounded, not only as some still held to fantasies of candidates who lost elections but as others still held to fantasies of candidates who won elections.

But as great as America has been and is, rooted in a Judeo-Christian heritage prompting historic liberty and justice, we're all still fallen and we're all still struggling in a fallen world that politics can't redeem.

Our weekend's teachings have focused on our *Christian liberation's* prompting of gratitude, humility and patience. Each of our honorees lived in these *gifts of the fruit of the Spirit*, yet in each of their lifetime's settings, there seems to be a clear picture of one

of these fruits, in particular. Taylor's *gratitude* was particularly clear, as was Graham's *humility* and Solzhenitsyn's *patience*.

In 1948, C. S. Lewis wrote yet another of his letters to a fairly new pen pal, Don Giovanni Calabria, an Italian priest who'd sent Lewis a fan letter the year before. They corresponded in Latin, for one couldn't read English and the other couldn't read Italian. What they both knew and experienced deeply was their shared faith in Christ Jesus.

In this particular letter of August 10<sup>th</sup>, 1948, Lewis brought these themes of *gratitude*, *humility* and *patience* into sovereignly providential focus. As he stated: "We ought to *give thanks* for all fortune: if it is 'good', because it is good, if 'bad' because it works in us, *patience*, *humility* and the contempt of this world and hope of our eternal country."

In another letter Lewis wrote to Giovanni – this one on St. Patrick's Day, 1953, he agreed with Giovanni about the sad state of *this* world and again took note, quite patiently, of the glory to come at last: "No day do I let pass without my praying for that longed-for consummation."

Lewis noted the difference between living in a post-Christian world and living in a world Before Christ. Said Lewis: " 'Post-Christian man' is not the same as 'pre-Christian man'. He is as far removed as virgin is from widow; there is nothing in common except lack of a spouse; but there is a great difference between a spouse-to-come and a spouse lost."

The next year, at 81 years of age, this padre died. Thirty-four years later, he'd be beatified and, in 1999, canonized. But long before these honors were finally bestowed in this world's meager ways, either on the padre or on the apologist and poet, Giovanni, since 1954, and Jack Lewis, since 1963, had already been in the nearer presence of their Bridegroom for whom they'd long looked forward with hope, in *gratitude*, *humility* and *patience*. Amen.