

Sermon for Sunday, June 8, 1980, by Andrew A. Jumper, D.D., Pastor Central Presbyterian Church, St. Louis, MO 63105

CURE FOR THE HALF DEAD

James 2:14-26

Text: "For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so faith apart from works is dead." James 2:26

This past week I have spent a good deal of time at the General Assembly of our denomination. I am sorry to tell you, but our church is under the control of people whom I consider to be the radical left. They have a strange agenda for the church. They are more interested in boycotts against the Stevens Company and the Nestle people than they are in sending missionaries to Africa. They are more interested in supporting radical revolutionary programs than they are in proclaiming Jesus who changes men's lives. They are more interested in fighting for a new international economic order than they are in establishing the Kingdom of God. They are more interested in gay rights than they are in the rights of the lost to hear about Jesus. They are more interested in whether a man believes in the right socio-political philosophy than they are if he believes that Jesus is divine--as was so clearly demonstrated when a minister was received recently into a union Presbytery who denied the deity of Christ. I tell you, they are busy with many so-called works but they have no New Testament faith. And the Bible says that works won't save you. They are half dead spiritually. And because of their leadership the church is also half dead. Our sister denomination, the United Presbyterian Church, has lost over 800,000 members in the past ten years and if that isn't half dead I don't know what is. Our own denomination has shown a growing loss of members as well and that in a time when the southland is exploding with population growth. If that isn't being half dead, I don't know what is.

But there is another side to the story. I am sorry to report to you that the so-called conservatives and evangelicals in our denomination aren't doing any better. Yes, they believe the right things. Yes, they understand that the mission of the church is to evangelize. Yes, they understand that apart from Jesus men are lost. Yes, they understand that if we love Jesus we will love our fellow man, we will want to meet his needs, to reach out to him to help him. Yes, they understand all of that. But the sad fact is they are not doing anything about it. They have faith--they have faith that believes the right things, that dots the right "i's" and crosses the right "t's", but the fact is they are not doing anything with their faith. The conservative and evangelical churches in our denomination have no more life and no more vitality and no more signs of growth than do the liberal churches. Yes, they have faith but they are not doing anything with it. They have no works. And if that isn't half dead, I don't know what is.

You know, it is a curious thing. My liberal friends claim to believe in social justice, in meeting the needs of the poor, in fighting for a better distribution of the goods of the world, and a lot of other things. But the fact is, when it comes right down to actually doing something specific and concrete, they are doing precious little. They talk a good game but they certainly aren't scoring. And do you know, it is just curious about my conservative friends. They talk about evangelism a lot, they talk about reaching the lost for Jesus, they talk about having a personal relationship to Jesus, but the

fact is, when it comes right down to actually doing something specific and concrete, they are doing precious little, too.

Both groups are half dead. One has works, but no faith and the other has faith but no works. Well, what about Central? Are we half dead, too? I suppose how one answered that question would depend on to whom we compared ourselves. If we compared ourselves to many Presbyterian churches in St. Louis I suppose we would look pretty good. But let's not do that. Instead, let's compare ourselves to the standards Jesus has for us. Let's compare ourselves to our potential. Unfortunately, when we do that, we don't look so good. When we compare our giving to other churches, we look pretty good. But when we compare what we give to what a tenth of our aggregate income would be, we look pretty bad. Or take evangelism. If we compare our growth in new members to other congregations, we are doing very well indeed. But if we compare what we are doing to the number of friends and relatives who aren't Christian and who we are not winning to Christ, we are not doing very well at all.

But let's get even more personal. You see, you can't carry your own, personal religion in the name of Central. Billy Graham says that just because a person is born into a Christian home doesn't make him a Christian any more than being born in a garage apartment makes him an automobile. By the same token, the fact you are a member of Central doesn't make you an alive Christian. No, somehow each of us must appropriate individually his spiritual life. The real question is not whether Central is doing a good job in evangelism or a good job in stewardship, or a good job of praying, or a good job of living a Christ-like life. No, the real question is are you doing those things... am I doing those things.

Well, I'd like to put that question to you this morning. Do you have both faith and works? Are you personally alive spiritually or are you a half dead Christian? That's a question I have been asking myself lately. Is Central in terms of its potential, in terms of its capabilities measuring up to what Jesus wants or are we half dead? Am I (and you'll have to ask yourself the same question) in terms of my gifts and potential and capabilities coming anywhere close to being what I can be and ought to be as a child of God? As I have thought about that, I have been reading in the book of Acts. And do you know what I find there? I find men and women on fire for Jesus. I find men and women turning the world upside down for Jesus. I find men and women who are vitally and dynamically alive for Jesus. And as I have studied, I find some clues to their spiritual vitality. I'd like to share them with you this morning.

The first thing that happened to them was that they got changed. St. Paul says that if any man is in Christ he is a new creation; he is something radically new. Jesus says that for a man to enter the kingdom of God, he has got to be born again, he has got to get himself changed. The Christians in the book of Acts were people who were radically changed. Something happened to their lives that made them amazingly different.

Has anything happened in your life to make you different? Is your life any different than your uncommitted neighbor or friends? Is there any qualities about you that make people ask what has happened to you. Yes, have you gotten yourself changed by an encounter with Jesus? Well, that's what happened to

those people in the New Testament. They believed in Jesus as their saviour and they got themselves filled with the Holy Spirit. And everybody knew they were different--everybody knew something had happened to those Christians. Do you remember what it says? The Bible says, "they took notice of them that they had been with Jesus." That's amazing, isn't it. Well, can anybody take notice of you and me that we have been with Jesus?

Well, that's the first thing. We have got to get changed. The second thing about those early Christians is that they got together. Jesus promised that where two or three are gathered in his name, he is there. And when people who love Jesus get together, things begin to happen! The Bible tells us 120 people got together in Jerusalem and began to pray. And do you know what happened? Why Pentecost happened! Again and again in the Book of Acts when the people of God got together things happened. For example, in a little town called Antioch God's people got together to pray and fast. When they did the Holy Spirit acted and told them to set aside Paul and Barnabas as missionaries. And that event changed the history of the world.

Central needs to get together. We need to get together in prayer, in worship, in fellowship, in study. Out of that sort of spiritual togetherness comes spiritual power; there comes unity of purpose; there comes the will to work and to put our faith into operation. Do you know what the Bible says about the early church? It says, "And they devoted themselves to the Apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers." Yes, they got together. When they did, spiritual power erupted into the world and the Bible adds, "and fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles." (Acts 2:42-43). God is going to use us when we get together spiritually.

You know, we just can't have the spiritual power we need by ourselves. I always think of John on the Isle of Patmos--in prison, suffering all along--yet he writes, "I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day." That is, spiritually, in his heart and mind, he was participating with fellow Christians on the Lord's Day. He needed others and when prison walls kept him away, he says he participated in the Spirit. It was the source of his spiritual power and led him to write the Book of Revelation. There are many of you here this morning who have no church home where you belong and which belongs to you. Life isn't going to work very well for you that way. No, we all need a spiritual power that comes when people get changed and people get together.

The third thing that I see in the Book of Acts about those first Christians is this. First, they got changed; second, they got together; then third, they got going. After all, wasn't that the last thing Jesus said to them? Didn't he say to them, "go...?"

Do you believe a person is lost apart from Jesus, that he will be eternally lost and cut off from God without Jesus? If you do, then for God's sake let's all get going on evangelism. Do you believe this city needs Jesus? Then let's get going with new and more visionary ways to reach this city for him. Do you believe little children need to learn about Jesus when they are young? Then let's get going on a bigger and better Sunday School--and how about let's get going on you being a teacher this fall! Do you think we have about as many members as we need at Central or do you think we ought to be at work bringing more and more people to Jesus? If you think we need to keep reaching people



let's get going--let's get going on more parking space, let's get going on more space to put people on Sunday morning.

I'm praying that as we get changed and get together that God is going to pour out his Spirit on this congregation in a powerful and mighty way! I'm praying God is going to give visions to our officers, that he is going to put a flame in our hearts and that we get going for God.

Let me tell you the story of Sir Wilfred Grenfell, one of the greatest missionaries of the last century. He was a medical student and one evening he was making a house call in London. He saw a big tent and turned in out of curiosity. It so happened that a meeting was being conducted by the great American evangelist, Dwight L. Moody. When Grenfell entered, a local minister was praying and he prayed on and on and on. Grenfell got up to leave, but about that time Moody stood up and said to the congregation, "Friends, let's sing a hymn while our brother is finishing his prayer." Well, that intrigued Grenfell and he stayed to listen to Moody. When he left the tent meeting that night he left with the determination to live his life as he thought Jesus would want him to live. Yes, he got going for God and he became one of the greatest missionaries in the history of Christianity.

Is Central half dead, faith with no works or works with no faith, or maybe just a little of each? Well, it depends on who we are compared to. If we are compared to our ability, our potential maybe we are half dead after all. And what about you? Are you vitally alive for Christ? I don't know about you, but I want to be alive in Jesus. Let's get changed--let's get together--and let's get going.