

April 27, 1945

INI

Ps. 36, 11

In Christ Jesus Beloved Christian Friends, mourning the death of the first of our men killed in action!

My thoughts go back this afternoon to the first day of this year of 1945. A large number of our boys in service had been home on furlough, among them was Hubert, though his stay was shorter than most of the others. All these men were happy and healthy, looking better than ever before in physical stature and strength.

On New Year's Day they were gone again. Their parents and other relatives came to church that day with heavy hearts. All of us realized the difficulties and dangers these men would face in battle overseas. Our Old Testament text for New Year's day was Psalm 121. After explaining and applying this precious psalm, we said at the close of our sermon: "For many of you there will be severe trials this year. Some of you may have serious losses in your property, your barn or your crops or your home may be burned to the ground. For you who farm there may be a total crop failure. For others there may be a lingering illness of weeks and months duration. To others there may be the terrible shock of a loved one suddenly dead from disease or killed in action. To others there may be the tricky temptations of the devil successful in leading you into terrible sin. For all these emergencies remember these words with which you began the year: "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the Lord, the almighty Creator, the watchful Keeper and the eternal Preserver."

Not four months of 1945 have passed and already many of these trials and emergencies have come, even in ways we hadn't thought of them. One of them is vividly before us this afternoon as we meet for this memorial service. Now then is the time to lift up our eyes to the hills from whence cometh our help. We do that by looking in God's Word, and specifically in that Word of God which Pastor Bernthal gave Hubert as his personal text on the day of confirmation.

TEACH ME THY WAY, O LORD, I WILL WALK IN THY TRUTH, UNITE MY HEART TO FEAR THY NAME

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This word is, first of all, a prayer: "Teach me Thy way, O Lord." God has a definitely planned way for each of His children through this world. He did for Hubert also. That way began already back in eternity, before ever the heavens were formed or the earth was made. God then already foresaw the birth of our departed brother and laid out the complete plan of his life then already even before this world or time had been brought into existence.

And since God knew that Hubert would be born a sinner and ~~would be born a sinner and~~ would need a Savior, He sent His own Son into the battlefield of this world to prepare the way into heaven. That war waged for thirty-three years between God's Son and the devil. The last three years were one continuous bitter battle and then on Good Friday on Golgatha, a little hill outside of Jerusalem, the devil took his final stand. And God's Son was killed. Thus God has the right to put a gold star in the window of heaven, just as you parents will in the window of your home and as we have done on our service flag. But the death of God's Son was also His triumphant victory. Through death He destroyed Him who had the power of death, namely, the devil. Now because God has a gold star in His window, because Jesus, God's Son, has given His life on the battlefield of Golgatha, and because by His glorious resurrection on Easter morning, Jesus has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light, the way for every child of God is clear. Jesus Himself is the Way. He leads through this world, through death itself, into the happy life of heaven that lasts forever. Such is the way as God planned it for this valiant soldier from all eternity.

Such is the way upon which God placed him in this world. He ordained that Hubert should be born of Christian parents who shortly after his birth brought him on God's way through Holy Baptism. There Hubert became the child of God the Father who was to guard and keep him, the brother of Jesus who gave His life for him, and the temple of the Holy Spirit who by baptism worked and preserved saving faith in his heart.

From his parents this baptized child of God learned more and more about the wonderful way of God through this life to the home of God above. They sent him to our Christian school where this way of God was made still clearer and more impressive. He learned better and better what it meant to pray: "Teach me Thy way, O Lord." Then came confirmation instruction and finally the day when on his knees he pledged undying loyalty to his Lord. It was at that impressive moment when the words of our text were given him as a companion-text through life and impressed themselves upon his memory: "Teach me Thy way, O Lord. I will walk in Thy truth. Unite my heart to fear thy name." Through it Hubert asked his Loving Father in heaven: "O Lord, show me Thy way through the world that lies ahead. I know there will be problems and trials and dangers on the way but unite my heart to fear Thy name. Unify all the ambitions and desires of my heart and direct them all to Thee. Let me walk in Thy way and Thine alone. "Thy way, not mine, O Lord, However dark it be. Lead me by Thine own hand; Choose out the path for me. I dare not choose my lot; I would not if I might. Choose Thou for me, my God; So shall I walk aright."

For a number of years after confirmation this way of God was quite smooth for Hubert. He could live in a fine Christian home and community. He worked hard on his father's farm. He found Christian companionship in his church and in the Walther League, and it wasn't hard to see God's way and to walk in His truth.

But then came war. Our country needed men to fight for it, strong, clean, courageous, young men like Hubert. What should he do? He waited to let the Lord show him His way. First, it seemed that the Lord wanted to use him on the farm. The government needed farmers to raise the food and because our departed brother was very busy doing that, he was deferred. That was God's way then. But the war went on and more and more men were needed. Hubert, too, was drafted, together with many other beloved sons of this congregation. We shall never forget the time they left. We prayed and sang that God might be with them till we would meet again.

God's way would be rougher and harder now. It would take more faith to pray: "Teach me Thy way, O Lord, and to promise, "I will walk in Thy truth." Already in his first letter to me from Camp Hood he wrote that some buddies had asked him to gamble and for three Sundays he had not been able to attend a Lutheran service, in another letter he mentioned, that some men in his barracks went to bed with a curse word on their lips at night and got up in the same way in the morning. But in every letter one could read his firm faith in His Savior. He continued steadfastly to walk in His truth.

Then came his very short furlough. The path of God was getting still rougher he knew. He was on his way to the battle-front. At the beginning of February he had already seen action. The way of God was leading through the valley of the shadow of death. But Hubert feared no evil. He knew the Lord was walking with him on the way. His heart was united to fear God's name. Then came a time of joy. God provided a chaplain of his faith, one he knew and respected highly, Chaplain Grapat. From him he received Holy Communion. Thus strengthened in his faith, he was ready to walk courageously forward with God. What had he to fear? He was walking with Jesus, the Way, the Truth and the Life, and he could face anything, even death with Paul's triumphant words: "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law, but thanks to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." And on March 15 death came. Just how it struck him we haven't learned as yet.

But we know there was no slip-up in the plans of God. That was the end of His way with Hubert here in this world but the happy beginning of His way with him in glory. Now the way has no more problems, no more trials, no more dangers or disappointments. It's all joy and glory now. The prayer of our text: "Teach me Thy way, O Lord, unite my heart to fear Thy name" is answered forever for Hubert. He needs to pray it no more.

But we, who remain behind, need it all the more. First of all, you, the father and mother and brothers and sisters need to pray: "Teach us Thy way, O Lord, unite our hearts to fear Thy name." There are many questions you would like to ask which no one but God could answer. Let them rest. Be content with this.

This was God's way and thank God, that Hubert was on this way of God, for with the choir we can say to you: "Beloved, "It is well." God's ways are always right, and perfect love is o'er them all though far above our sight." "Beloved, "It is well." The path that Jesus trod, though rough and strait and dark it be, Leads home to heaven and God." Have no worry or concern about your beloved son and brother. He is home forever with Jesus. Don't feel that you have lost him. Even though he is the first in your family to reach that home, all the rest of you shall follow, as you continue to walk in Jesus' way. Christian families are not broken by death. A little girl in England was once asked, "How many are there in your family?" "Five," was her prompt reply. "Mother and I live here, one brother is in London and the other brother and daddy are in heaven." "Then there are really only three of you now," said the friend. "O no, there are still five," answered the girl. So there are still twelve in your family. You live in Christ here while Hubert lives with Christ there. "O but we needed him so badly to carry on on the farm after the war." We know that, friends, and God knew that, too. But He has planned His way for you differently. God knows how it hurts you to give up your son. He went through it Himself when He gave up His son in death for all of us. As Christians, I know, you will submit to His will and humbly say, "Teach us Thy way also for the future, O Lord, and whatever our course may be, do this one thing for us, unite our hearts to fear Thy name."

That counts, secondly, for the rest of you fathers and mothers and brothers and sisters and wives of our other men in service. We earnestly pray that this may be the only memorial service we will have to conduct, but we know that rests completely in the hands of God. If it should strike in your home, then may you remember, as this bereaved family did, "We are God's children. We are walking in His Truth and in His Way, therefore, also this shock and sorrow is for our good."

But if there be any present this afternoon, who are not on God's way, who are not His children and cannot or will not pray, "Teach me Thy way, O Lord, I will walk in Thy truth, unite my heart to fear Thy name." Whose heart is divided between world and God or united in service only to self, to such may Hubert's death be an earnest call to repentance. You may not be in battle but your hour is set on the clock of God. Jesus has also prepared a way for you to heaven. He died for all. But this way will do you no good if you spurn or neglect or avoid it. Your way will end in hell and that is worse than any war, come then while the way to heaven is still open. Break down the pride of your heart, admit your sin and accept your Savior. Then even though you will not see Hubert's body now, you'll see it in perfect glory. Those bright clear open eyes will be even brighter there, that happy Christian smile will be even more radiant. He lived and died as a real soldier for Christ and his country here, He lives as a real hero through Christ forever there. Amen!