

10-13-54

Introduction: I am very happy to be with you this morning and assure you that I feel quite at home with you. From my very early life until now my principal inspiration has been the Christian Religion. My father himself was a minister. He was a slave and I am the child of a slave. My father was a man who preached on Sunday and worked for a living all the rest of the week. He preached because he enjoyed it. As I look back on my childhood, my vivid memories of the past center around the Mt. Zion Baptist Church. I am grateful that in my childhood when school facilities were exhausted--and they were exhausted when I reached the sixth grade; that was all the education our town gave colored people--my mother had the vision to send me away to Nashville to a Christian institution called the Roger Williams University. There I continued my education. The school shuddered when I came there, and after enduring me for about six months it burned down. I went back hopefully the second time, and it burned down again. Then I went to Atlanta, Georgia where I registered in a Christian institution, and I shall never cease to be grateful until the day I die for the men and women, both white and colored, who were my teachers in that institution. So you may know that Christianity is precious to me.

Now I have been through many educational institutions and have traveled in many parts of the world, but I would say that the deepest things that I have learned about life are the things I have learned in trying to pastor the Christian Church. There are no insights in the world at all comparable to what a man learns as he goes about thoughtfully loving people. God speaks to the mind, but He cannot speak to the mind effectively except through the heart. When the heart is alive to the needs of human life and the mind is engaged with all of its powers trying to serve those needs, a man learns things that can never be taken away from him.

I feel especially near to you in this church too because one of the finest teachers I have ever known came from your church. Her name is Dr. Eva Dykes. When I first came to Howard University, her name came to my attention in a peculiar way. She had just gotten her Doctor's degree from Radcliffe, and we were about to engage her as a teacher. Before she would take the job, she wrote a letter to the Dean, saying, "Before you conclude this contract there is one thing you should know about me, I do not know whether you will wish to employ me or not, but I feel I must tell you I am a member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, and beginning at six o'clock on Friday--I think it was--until six o'clock Saturday evening I will be able to do no work for the university, for in that period my church is foremost in my allegiance, and I shall feel under obligation to do whatever they wish me to do and will be able to give no service to the university." The Dean brought her letter to me (he was the first Negro in the United States to get his degree in Germany) and said, "Mr. President, this is a very sad letter. I suppose this finishes it. We cannot employ this young woman. What a tragedy!" But I said to the Dean, "This settles it. This makes certain we are going to employ this young woman."

"What do you mean, Mr. President? We cannot hire someone who has reservations about service."

I replied, "This is not a reservation but an affirmation. And I would further suggest that any human being who has the center of her life so dedicated is worth keeping, and we should not run the risk of losing a young woman of that type. She will be just as loyal to the university the other six days as she is to the church on the Sabbath."

He said to me, "Mr. President, I had not thought about it that way, but I think that way now." Strange how we change our minds sometimes.

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So we employed her, and have been happy to have her. Before she left for the South, she was unanimously voted by the faculty of the Liberal Arts Department to be the best, all-round member of that faculty of 100 teachers. Ever since that experience I have felt very close to you, and have thought that in your way you are doing something great in this institution and in your church.

I want to talk to you briefly this morning--perhaps I should state that I am not distinguished for being brief. I sometimes think the Lord is going to send me back to Mississippi to practice making twenty-minute speeches before He will give me permission to enter heaven permanently. But I want to discuss the world significance of the Supreme Court decision on segregation. Great anxiety is being felt especially in the Southern States about the Supreme Court decision. And it is not surprising. People who have been going one way of life for over 250 years do not find it easy to be confronted suddenly with the demand that has been made on them. And there are many sincere persons who are genuinely doubtful that the change in the pattern can succeed. Normally, I think those persons are for the most part thinking domestically. They are thinking of this decision in the light of national history and past experience.