

The Pioneers

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When I was a little boy – I thought the wild, wild west was just across the Chatahoochee River – in Alabama. I had heard tell of the shootouts in Phenix City, the saloon brawls. I figured the pioneers in their wagon trains must be over there too – probably heading toward Birmingham. I was – in short – living on the frontier – or so I thought.

In American history, however the "frontier" was a shifting line between the settled and the unsettled territory – land lying on the boundary of the unexplored, the unknown. It offered opportunity, excitement, adventure to those who wanted it. Those who accepted the challenge were called frontiersman – or pioneers – for they were willing to push that line forward, to venture across mountains, streams, prairies – into new lands. By 1860 – jolting along on foot, on horseback, in wagon trains – these pioneers – spilling a good bit of gold, cornmeal, and blood along the way – had pushed the American frontier as far as the present western boundaries of Minnesota and Iowa – exploring the unexplored, settling the unsettled. And, by 1940, with the help of Henry Ford this geographical frontier was over and done with. Practically speaking, this frontier disappeared and the spirited pioneers along with it.

And, today? Well...about all you need to cross the continent today is a plane ticket and a charge card. So where is the frontier today? So is it in space? Could be – for future generations – but no space-dates for most of us. Where is the frontier for us? In business? Umm – possibly for some few of us – but most of us will never know the exciting life of the money moguls moving into the uncharted ways of high flying finance. So where is the frontier today? So what about the arts? Maybe for one or possibly two of you – but most of us must take the arts strictly secondhand, being so busy keeping a job and making our own little ends meet, and feeding the dog and the family, that we have neither the time nor talent to venture into the rarified atmosphere of the lively arts. And even if we are transported occasionally by the arts to strange new lands of perceptual beauty – only a limited number of us can stay in that foreign country long enough to live and create in it ourselves. The vast majority only make little sallies into arts _____. 99.9% of us can only be sightseers in the new lands being opened up by the arts. We cannot really pioneer there.

So where are the frontiers today? For us? If not in space or business? Not in art? Ah, I have it! In science – pushing back the frontiers of knowledge into the unknown – microcosm and macrocosm. But – once again – there won't be more than a half dozen of us here this morning who can actually get into this hinterland at all – the rest of us – one too old or too dumb – besides we don't have a passport – a Ph. D. – credentials – the ticket. We couldn't ride in on a microscope or macroscope if you gave us one. We must just wait outside – out here in the familiar, settled old world while others go on in to pioneer the unknown jungle of scientific inquiry – we just wait here for others to go into the new "Holy of Holies" and to bring us out new microchip toys, new wonders – some to save us from our pains and other wonders to blow us all to smithereens. At any rate – the adventure, the excitement, the challenge will be the scientist's. Those priests of tomorrow – not ours – we only profit or lose by it.

So – where's the frontier today – for us to pioneer? In athletics? – no, you don't look the type – though some healthy exercise would do you good. In high society - I doubt it. So where 's the frontier today – for us to pioneer? Well, I won't mention sex and drugs – that's explored territory if ever there was any. Freud was our great pioneer there and we've all come trooping after – no happier for it. *I think.*

So – where's the frontier today? For us? "O Pioneers!" Let me tell you – there is a frontier left beyond even the farthest frontiers of geography, economics, art, space, science and what have you – beckoning to all men and women alike at whatever age or stage – it is the old, forgotten frontier – not in space but of the soul. What I'm trying – very *lamely* to say is that to be a Christian – is to be a pioneer – in the truest sense – for the life of faith and hope and love – is unexplored territory for most of us. Here is open land most of us have never really set foot in – much less settled in – so here is the great frontier – for all of us.

Why not leave behind our old fears, our old doubts, our old hates – where we have lived too long. *Let's* Move out into a new life of faith – not someone' else's faith but our own.

Faith that we *are* ~~all~~ live in a god-made, god controlled universe: that "the earth is the Lord's and the fullness there of; the world, and they that dwell there in." (Ps. 24)

Faith, therefore, that we do not walk alone in search of identity – but were made by God and for God: saying "I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvelous are thy works" (Ps. 139:14) and hearing God *only* – "I have called thee by name; thou art *(mine)*." *reply*

Wherefore we have faith in the divine companionship - "Be strong of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed; for the Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest." (Joshua 1:9) "My help cometh from the Lord, which made heaven and earth...he that keepeth thee will not slumber...(Ps 121) the Lord is my Shepard...I will not fear (Ps. 23) I am persuaded that neither death, nor life...shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Ro. 8:29)

How many of us have ever really lived - hour by hour and day by day and night by night - pioneered ⁱⁿ this frontier of faith? Aware of God's presence, trusting ourselves into God's keeping - so - going about our work with holy calm - free from our insecurities and fears - no longer tense, taunt - but relaxed in a quiet confidence that God's grace is all sufficient. How secure, how stable, sturdy sensible this life of faith would be.

For most of us moderns - this is a frontier that needs exploring. Christ has pioneered the way says the book of Hebrews. Enter in. To peace.

Hope is another quality of pioneer Christian living. What an adventure it would be to move out into new hope - leaving behind all our disillusionments, all our constant bemoanings, all our whining despair, ~~to~~ to be a hopeful people and live among people of hope. "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope in God: for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God." (Psalm 43:5)

Why continue to live always conscious of the flaws in nature - all the evils in men - all the hypocrisies of churches - all the ugly, mean, twisted things in everybody and everything? No wonder "thou art cast down O my soul." - no wonder "disquieted." Why not move out to new terrain and praise God for the healthy things in life - and so find hope in him? "Whatsoever things are true...pure...lovely...of good report...think on these things" (Ep. 4:8) "For God's sake" we want to say to some folk - "radiate a little hope. Your pessimism is killing you and besides that - it's killing me too!"

To live in hope - is to live in the kingdom of God, as we said - and let me tell you for a great many of us dour, surly folk, here is unexplored territory - a frontier we ought to move out into and settle in. The Christ who saw the possibilities for good in the worst of us has made it open country. Let's move in.

And finally - there is not only faith and hope - love is the supreme quality of Christian life. Ah - if only we dared to leave our old hates behind and strike out into a

new life of "loving kindness and tender mercy" – not asking "who loves me?" – but "whom do I love?" If you want to be miserable in life – keep asking "who loves me?" If you want to be happy, ask "whom do I love?" Ask yourself how many of my family – friends do I live warmly and affectionately with - ? giving of myself unstintingly, without fear of losing – showing kindly sentiment openly when it is felt – a smile, a handclasp, a hug, an encouraging word – not holding back all feeling in frightened aloofness – not psychoanalyzing to its death every human affection.

And what is you're given affection and friendship before and been rejected or rebuffed? Is that any reason to retreat from other human beings and withdraw into your self and never love again? Do you give up food for the body because you sometimes get a bad apple? Then why give up this food of the soul when every now and ^{then} ~~then~~ your gestures of friendly good will are rebuffed? "This is my command, " said Jesus, "that you love one another." Including those outside your family and friends who need you – for Christian love goes beyond affection which you can't feel for everybody without an artificial emotional glut – to deep concern for the welfare of all our fellows which we can feel for everybody – even our enemies, said Jesus. Ask yourself how approachable am I to people who do not know me but need my help? Can they count on me being gentle in the face of their faults? Generous in face of their needs? Do I share my kinship with men and women around the world? For "God so loved the world that he gave..." it is the only basis for giving. Without love – all we give is but a calculated investment.

The words "live" and "love" have only one letter to differentiate them – they are almost synonymous – for without love – we don't really live – we just exist.

And yet – how many of us have never yet dared to let down [our] defenses enough to trust other people – never allowed [ourselves] to establish bonds of affection and never really been concerned for the right, the wellbeing, the happiness, of another living creature – Ah yes, - love is a frontier of the soul ~~of~~ many frightened persons' love never ventured into. Satisfied with their own salvation – they have lost that too – by not keeping the great commandment – "Thou shall love – thy God, thy neighbor, as thyself."

Yes – there are still frontiers of the soul – waiting to be occupied – by pioneering spirits who want to live life to the full – at its very best – Christ has opened the way – enter in! O Pioneers!