

CONSTRUCTION AND REPAIR
Jeremiah 5:3, Amos 5:10, Ephesians 4:12

Like most others--there is a line item in our budget called "Repairs and Replacement". Some years ago, one of our younger women said it reminded her of her husband. "How so?" I asked. "Well", she said, "I've been trying for years to repair him. He is bad tempered and jealous and trying. I've gotten exactly nowhere. So I'll give up on repairs. I've decided to replace him!" And she did. And she's lived happily ever after (more or less!)

Well- - it made me think about my job. I guess you can say--"I'm in the repair and replacement business"--and let me tell you--after almost 40 years of it, the repair part is harder.

I guess it's the same with a building contractor. Sometimes repairing an old building is worse than replacing the whole thing. It can be difficult and discouraging. What can you do with a cranky, complaining old building--outdated and dilapidated and foolishly put together in the first place? Just try re-making it, not into something admirable or elegant, just secure and efficient and decent--and you know what you've got? You've got trouble. You hardly know how to begin repair. Especially if the foundations weren't good in the first place, If the supports have weakened over the years, and especially if the original plan design was a bad one--then --repair? --possible--but you get the feeling it would be far easier and far, far better to replace the whole "shootin' match" (as my dad used to say). So, like Jeremiah, the old testament prophet, who despaired over those who "refused to take correction" (Jeremiah 5:3) I often despair over the repair of adults. Oh my! You take an old cranky lady of, say, 30, or a complaining old man of about my age--their mentality already out-dated (for they haven't learned a thing since they left college) --their physical framework dilapidated (from overeating and under exercising) --and foolishly put together anyway (by the permissive psychology of their childhood and youth when their parents were afraid to discipline them for fear of disfiguring their little psyches) --so what do you do about repairing these adults? Just try re-modeling grown-ups, not into anything admirable or elegant of course, just a little more secure and efficient and decent--and you know what you've got? You've got trouble. Said the old testament prophet, Amos, with the sigh of experience: "They do hate him who repairs them" (Amos 5:10),

After all if their foundations weren't good, were in sand, in the first place, (looks like they would have known better than to try to build a life on things like status and highs and "sluggish neighbor" and get-ahead-ism) and if their supports have weakened over the years, that is to say (when the money's all spent, and the honeymoon is decidedly over, and the music has all but stopped, alcohol and pills make such inadequate supports, do they not?)--and especially if the whole original design of their life was a bad one (nothing about an over-(...) providence and plan for a good life, just pushing the old self and "the devil take me for all I care")--then repair of these people? Seems hopeless, doesn't it? It isn't, but it just about is.

When for years and years, adults stubbornly refuse to grow up and just run around growing old instead--when not only their muscles and minds grow slack from lack of use, but when they also "get down in" their morals--it is, quite literally, one heaven of a job to repair them. You wish you could start all over from scratch, but you can't replace them--tear the building down and begin again. You simply have to take what's there and use whatever common sense and science is at hand--in our churches, clinics, et cetera, and do the best you can. In the final psychoanalysis and the word means "soul analysis", when it comes to repairing adults, it's a job for God, a "God job". When it comes to reconstructing a self-absorbed, self-pitying, spiteful old man or woman of 24 or 42 or whatever age and stage, it's basically a conversion project and the only adequate engineer for the job is the Almighty, Himself. The Christians say Christ has to come to a man to teach him how to care again--for himself, his fellows, because God cares for him. Certainly I cannot do it. The good Christ has to --the church only mediates this ancient faith--it can't force feed it. So you can see why one would easily despair, like Jeremiah, over the repair of adults. Too many of us will die quite as cantankerous and miserly and miserable, as we've lived, for we won't allow help from heaven or anywhere else to reach us, once we're past 13. Now, now--I know repair of adults isn't impossible. I've seen it happen.

Nonetheless, replacement--or a better word--construction, building from the ground up, is the happier side of the church work. It's where the chief joy is--working with the youngsters--in the church's school and youth groups, choir and scouts, etc.--building not only strong bodies and healthy minds, but also sturdy morals and a religion that goes beyond Sunday piety to daily honesty and fair play, a house built on the rock as Jesus would say.

Christian parents, if they'll stay home long enough, Christian teachers and leaders, if they will stick with it long enough; are in the most exciting and rewarding building business in

the world-- "building up the body of Christ" as Paul puts it (Ephesians 4:12), helping to build creative, Christian adults who will not be in constant need of personality repair as problem people in years to come, whose minds and morals won't come unglued at 40 or 60. We can't do a perfect job of it naturally, but if we give youngsters a sound foundation in faith, the right supports, and a sensible design for the good life under God--then we shall at least have begun a good work which we trust them and providence to finish.

Some families, some churches, some schools, some communities know they are in this most important sort of building business and are giving enough of their time and their money and their ability and their deep concern to do a top flight job of it. I hope we are. God help us.

Let us stand for prayer:

O Christ, teach us it is better to delight in the coming generation than to despair over them. Teach us how to teach discipline in love, and to have ourselves a faith that is so healthy and so happy, it can't help but be contagious. In the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *(Choral Amen)*