

BIOGRAPHY - *Walter Vreeland Gray* was born in Waterford, Connecticut on December 12, 1862 (3?) and died of pneumonia in the same town May 13, 1920. He married Louise Abbie Sperry on February 9, 1891, and they subsequently had three children. (info from Mayflower application by his daughter Lura Sperry Gray Hindmarsh, and from on-line Amherst College Alumni Records), the latter records show a different year of birth. These also indicate that he was the author of a pamphlet, "The Holy Spirit the Need of the Church", that he was "fitted for college at Suffield, Conn. Newton Theological Seminary., '89-'90; ordained June 1890; pastored at Bridport, Conn.; Morgan Hill, California; and Cromwell, Conn., '90--".

The original hand written sermon has been passed down in my wife's family, along with a typewritten transcription, possibly the work of his widow, who died in 1958; This was word-processed in 2-19, and is presented here with minor edits by S. E. Briggs (staywiththeboat.com).

Rev. Walter Vreeland Gray
1863 - 1920
His Last Sermon

WHAT IS YOUR MEASURE?

Lesson John 21:15

There is a little question in the 21st Chapter of John's Gospel and the 15th verse that is very searching – "Lovest thou me more than these?"

The quality of our Christianity is being tested today in a manner as never before. And to my mind the test is as severe, if not more so, than any that has ever been before. The early martyrs sought the martyr's crown. It was a sort of a popular thing with many in the early days to die for the faith. The brief bodily pain was not to be compared to the glory to be revealed. But today the test is living for the faith. The young Christian finds it hard to stand out against the customs of the day. Customs that are destroying high ideals of life. But this is not alone the peril of young Christian life. We observe also that older Christians do not hesitate often to "put their light under a bushel". One of the saddest things which has come into my experience recently is the realization of how many nominally Christians have lost interest in things of the Kingdom of Jesus.

This interest has been driven out by lesser and more worldly interest. They would resent being told that they were not Christians. They are much further away than that rich young ruler who was told by the Master that only one thing stood between him and the Kingdom. I fear that a great surprise awaits many, unless they repent. When He shall say "I don't recognize your spirit, depart from me. I never knew you". Then they shall begin to say, "Lord have we not done many wonderful things in Thy name." But it is too late, the final word has been spoken.

We need to hear again this question of the Master, in all its pathos, its deep yearning. With all of its thorough searching. "Lovest thou me?"

Peter had set himself in contrast with the other disciples when he said after the warning of betrayal, "Though all forsake Thee yet will not I". And now the Master looks at him, after the base and cowardly denial, after turning back to his worldly course of living the Master asks, "How is it now, Peter, do you love me more than these?" What is your measure? Contrast is one of our easy ways of taking measure. This is true of things spiritual as well as material. We see what others do and say

and then compare notes. I confess that when I see the earnestness and sacrifice of some for Christ's sake, I am not worthy to be compared.

But I do not like these comparisons. Especially when I am on a lower scale and I don't believe you do. The best way it seems to me is to have it out with Him. Let Jesus take our measure. "Lovest thou me?" How much? Not in word or confession, whether prayer or song; but in deed; in very truth, in the whole life.

I am coming to realize more and more the need of a new consciousness on the part of the Church (and that means you and me) of her relation to her Lord. Christianity is not a creed, not even a Church organization, these are but by-products. Christianity is life, life in Christ and Christ in us. A life lived in the power of the Holy Spirit. Didn't Jesus say once, "And ye shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you?" And that was another great question which Paul asked once. And did ye receive the Holy Spirit "when ye believed": I wonder if we have! Surely power is wanting and that would indicate that He had not been received with all the plenitude of grace. Perhaps there are disciples today like those at Ephesus who have not heard in their souls though they may have heard by the ear that there is a Holy Ghost. We need to hear with our souls.

Only as the Church comes to realize this can she answer the call of the hour: her coffers may be full of the gold and silver but unless she has this better spirit to give, all her gold and silver will not heal the world's sore, which is black and deadly sin. The power to make a new creature in Christ must be in the fore-front. A gospel of dollars and cents will never save the souls of men.

You doubtless have noticed how the Old Scriptures are full of incidents which have a sort of parabolic application to times and events far beyond the pen of the writer. And there comes to my mind one that seems very fitting to these times.

Jonah received a command from God to go to Nineveh and preach a warning to that wicked and doomed city. And the prophet seeks to run away, goes down to Joppa instead and takes a ship for Tarshish. But the Lord is not going to be defeated when it comes to a contest of wills and He sends a mighty wind which threatens to engulf that ship. The captain and crew do all they can to avert the disaster, cast overboard the cargo and call upon their gods. In the midst of their toil and terror they find a Hebrew passenger, taken on at Tarshish, who, instead of taking any part in the toil, is calmly sleeping through the storm, down in the cabin. We can rightly imagine that it was no gentle shake that the captain gave this man when he took him by the shoulder and said, not in soft tones, "What meanest thou, O Sleeper? arise call upon thy God, it so be that God will think upon us, that we perish not."

What a parable of these times! I do not need to tell you how our civilization is tossed today upon a tempestuous sea; the institutions which have made us what we are politically, industrially, socially and religiously being threatened with a disaster that will strew the sea of world's life with wreckage. Look at the desecration of the Christian Sabbath. Look at the fashions that stir the evil passions of men. Our forebears would blush to walk down the streets of our cities, and even sit in some of our sanctuaries. And I do not know that they were over modest.

We thought we were going to have a better world after the fires of European battle-fields had burned out: it was going to be unselfish. A great brotherly spirit was to be. But look at it. A greed that is born of hell, a selfishness that is going to exact the very last ounce of flesh. A certain capital class and labor class have the consumer in the corner and are pounding the very daylight out of him, they have got beyond the dollar, they demand the last cent.

Certainly a new spirit is demanded to save the ship. And shall we, the Church of Jesus, like the

prophet, slumber on in the hole of the ship and think to escape? Certainly these times demand of the churches of Jesus Christ a mental, moral and spiritual alertness, a capacity and a willingness to serve and suffer and an all consuming purpose to "carry on" in the hope of the coming of the King who will make a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness.

Surely the world has a right to look to the Church of Jesus for a different spirit, for a leadership in a high life, for it has professed to possess it. We ought to see more clearly than others that it is no strange thing that has befallen the world in the tragic years of war, but an inevitable reaping of the harvest of more than fifty years of selfish sowing. We ought to be able to interpret the meaning of the present social and industrial crisis and warn the world that industrial selfishness and an autocracy of wealth lead as inevitably to war as did imperialistic selfishness and autocratic power. And we ought to utter a voice that would be heard around the world like that which Jesus sounded amid the hills of Judah: "The time is fulfilled, the Kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe the Gospel." Like the mariners on Jonah's storm-tossed ship, men everywhere are calling for deliverance in this hour of peril. And the Church, as a prophet of God, should have a clear, comforting and strong gospel.

But Alas! Where is that voice? Much of the time it is down in the hole of the ship, silent, slumbering. Today we look upon a spiritual tragedy, a dearth of spiritual growth. All but empty churches, and crowded play houses: a pleasure-seeking more than lovers of God. A selfishness that is much like the grunt of the hog over the swill. For such a time the Church ought to have a positive message on the great fundamentals of the Christian faith, and an utterance that admits of no quibbling. Since modern theology, in some quarters at least, have ruled hell out of court - man are going there as fast as they can.

If the Church lacks moral insight to interpret the tragedies of the times in terms of the requirements of righteousness, to interpret the truths of the Gospel in times of life; if it fails to meet the inarticulate longings and desires of men in their quest for God in the terms of the Gospel of Jesus, then is fulfilled that judicial word of Christ, "The Kingdom of Heaven is taken away from you and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof. If the light which is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness." If the Church of the living God lacks spiritual power, spiritual insight, it is not fit for leadership.

"Lovest thou Me?" In the face of these words there is one thing that the Christian dare not be and that is – indifferent. Oh, this sin of indifference, lack of interest. There can be no feeding of the sheep and caring for the lambs. The church may blunder, make mistakes and be forgiven: but this don't care spirit. Do you know what the living Christ thinks of it? Read the letter to Laodicean Church. Evidently correct in all its doctrines and ritual, but lacking in passion. It did not care. Neither cold nor hot, but lukewarm, utterly nauseating. "Icely regular, faultily faultless, and splendidly null and void."

When Jesus paints for us a picture of hell he does not set before us an outcast libertine, a drunkard, a bomb throwing anarchist, but a rich man who did not care if his brother man starved at his very door. Again when He pictures the judgement scene, it is those who did these things feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting the sick, going to those in prison in His name. These heard the well done, enter into the joys of thy Lord. To those who did not these things He said, depart, I never knew you. Love to Christ then must manifest itself. Christianity is not merely going to church service on Sunday, it is not making long prayers. The Pharisees did that and Jesus called them hypocrites. It is not merely giving money. It is not even an organized church. Christianity is getting back of your creed, your church. You giving with your whole life. It is being what you profess to be.

If you really love Jesus then get back of your church, your pastor, every Christian worker, whether

at home or abroad, with your life. We have loved Jesus with our finger tips. He is asking for the whole hand and the whole heart. Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy (heart), mind, soul and strength and thy neighbor as thyself. And the whole world is our neighborhood.

Brethren! Let us all ask ourselves Christ's question to the denier. Let us look our past evils in the face, that we may learn to hate them. Let Jesus stand before us and ask "Lovest thou me?" that we may learn more of the width, power and mercy of His love. And God grant that we all may be able to say: "Thou knowest that I love Thee." Then the Church will feed the lambs and the sheep.

(What is your measure?)

Edited by S. E. Briggs 2-28-2019
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