May 30, 1976

"SELL YOURSELF TO THE HIGHEST BIDDER!"

Usually when we think of someone bidding for something, we think of it in terms of money, dollars. Or when we think of selling something, we think of getting money--dollars, in return. Thus people sometimes do sell themselves to the highest bidder in terms of dollars. If a person is offered two different kinds of jobs, he or she might take the one that paid the most salary.

If this happened, the person would at the same time be selling himself or herself to an idea--in this case the idea that the salary a job pays is more important than the job itself.

The point is that as we begin each new stage in life, there are always ideas, as well as people and money which are bidding for us. All through life there are ideas and people saying to us--"Come, follow me. Sell yourself to me and I will give you what you want."

Generation after generation, people come and go. They pass on. But ideas which people sell themselves to, do not always pass away. They remain. And at each stage in life, ideas knock at our door and bid for our allegiance.

So tonight as you prepare to graduate this coming week, I ask you to consider which ideas you are going to sell yourselves to. Are they the ones which are the highest bidders? For you see, the ideas we sell ourselves to, determine to a large extent what kind of person we become.

Take selfishness for example. Persons who let this idea be the highest bidder, become small, unhappy people and their lives are ultimately filled with ruined homes, broken friendships and every other kind of hideous thing.

Or take racism as another example. That idea has been around for a long time and many people still sell themselves to it. It becomes the highest bidder for some. Almost from the beginning of time there has been abroad the idea that one race, or color of skin, or people from one locality are somehow superior to all others. It's a deep sickness within the human race. And the people who let this idea be the highest bidder in their lives can cause more evil than almost anything.

Another very popular idea in our time to which people sell themselves is the belief that the sum total of life is the accumulation of more and more creature comforts and that the more things we have, the happier we'll be.

The reasoning goes something like this--"If I can find a job that will make me lots of money so that I can buy lots of things, a big house, at least two cars, several television sets, a boat and of course a citizen's band radio, then I will be happy. This idea becomes the highest bidder in their lives and they become slaves to it.

Another version of this idea is that "bigger is better." So a person believes that if an automobile runs well with 100 horsepower, it will run twice as good with 200 horsepower. We've lately had an emphasis on small cars, but even then the auto manufacturers often advertised their small car as the "biggest small car."

There were two brothers who owned a truck and they each had $150 dollars in cash. So they decided to go into business. They bought 300 watermelons at a dollar a piece, which they sold at a dollar a piece. Then they bought 300 more watermelons, which they sold at a dollar a piece. They repeated the same operation, buying and selling at the same price. At the end of a long hard day, they settled down to count their money. They had the same $150 dollars each.

The one brother said to the other, "After all that work, you'd think we'd have a little more than we started with." The other brother agreed, saying, "I know where we went wrong. What we need is a bigger truck."

But bigger is not always better. Quantity or size tells us nothing about quality. Simply having a bigger education does not automatically make you a better person. Theodore Roosevelt once said, "Give a person an eighth grade education and he may steal from a freight car. Get that same person a college education and he may steal the whole railroad."

Another idea which many people let be the highest bidder in their lives when it should not, is the belief that the end justifies the means. Or to put it in other words--"We've got to win, no matter what it costs or how we do it."

So people come to believe that "winning isn't everything--it's the only thing."

That's the story of Watergate--the need to win at any cost. Anyone who sells himself or herself to this idea will eventually become corrupt. Winning is nice, but it isn't everything.

These then are some ideas which too many people let be the highest bidders in their lives -- ideas to which they mistakenly sell themselves.

On the other hand, there are some ideas which are the true high bidders because they contain the truth; because they are God's will for all human beings no matter what our religion. And because they are God's will, no person can be used by such ideas without becoming greater himself.

1. First, sell yourself to the idea of the dignity and worth of every human being--the idea of seeing and treating all people everywhere as brothers and sisters of one large family whose home is the space-ship earth. There's no more important idea in all the world. It is the highest bidder.

The way you treat people is the way you treat God. Whether you be Jewish or Christian, this is basic. The Bible says--"If a person says he loves God and hates another human being, that person is a liar."

"If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or clanging cymbal." When you sell yourself to this idea-- you are selling yourself to God and you can't go any higher than that.

As you give yourself to this idea and live it, all sorts of wonderful things happen. One day a minister friend of mine was seeking out a newcomer in town who worked as an auto mechanic. He found the man repairing an engine. "Sorry I can't shake hands with you, preacher," the Auto mechanic said, holding up his hands black with dirt and engine grease. Impulsively, the preacher stooped over and rubbed his hands in the dirt that lay on the floor. "Now there's no difference between us," he said, "You see, sir, I want to shake your hand!" That's putting the idea of the dignity and worth of every human being into action.

If you do not let this idea be the highest bidder in your life, all sorts of other problems emerge.

To learn what errors young people starting on their first jobs should be warned about, a group of vocational teachers wrote to several thousand employers asking them to look up the last three persons dismissed and tell why they had been let go. The teachers expected to find a long list of reasons. They were amazed to find that more than two-thirds of the persons losing jobs had been fired for one reason. It was the same in every sort of business and for workers of all ages and both sexes. It amounted to this: THEY COULDN'T GET ALONG WITH OTHER PEOPLE!"

On the other hand, when we truly sell ourselves to the highest bidder, to the dignity and worth of every human being, we can be of immeasurable help to others.

Not long ago a person was telling me that when he was a child in a small town, the mother of a family not far from him died, and the father often drunk was unable to care for his children. So a woman in the community had taken one of the boys to live with her. Widowed, poor and uneducated, she nevertheless had love and energy to spare for the shivering, curly child. Almost overnight, the boy began to change, to grow and blossom. But one thing held him back; because he was so strange to other children in the neighborhood, none of them would play with him.

One day, his foster mother caught the other children in the neighborhood playing together while her foster child stood to one side, crying and rejected. She sent him into the house and then turned to the other children and said, "I won't have it. That child matters. It's being decided right now whether he's going to be somebody and every time I get him ahead an inch, you children push him back. Don't you want him to live?

The person telling me this story said that through the years he had not forgotten the incident. It was his first brush with the profound and painful truth that people heal and people hurt and destroy. We help or hinder one another, summoning one another to grow and be, or to surrender and retreat, influencing one another as sun and frost influence a green field.

So sell yourself to the highest bidder. Be a lover and respecter of human beings and you will be a lover and respecter of God. } be a friend. (Both kinds)

Then also on a very practical level, choose a job or vocation that you love and enjoy, not just the one that promises to make you the money.

Choose a vocation through which you are certain you are contributing something to society and through which you are convinced that your own talents and potential are constantly being developed and renewed.

There are lots of vocations which are exciting, but you have to love your work just as you love people and the more you enjoy it the better you will be at it.

Recently, I heard about a mother who was trying to get her son up to go to school, but he kept lying in bed. "Wake up," she said. "It's time to go to school."

The son pulled the cover over his head and said, "I'm not going to school ever again." The mother was appalled. "Are you sick?" "No, but I'm sick of school," he said. "They hate me. I hate them. They throw things at me. They call me names. They make fun of me. They laugh at me. Why should I get up and go to school?" The mother replied, "There are two very good reasons why you should go to school. First, you're 42 years old, and second, you're the principal."

Graduates of 1976, sell yourselves to the highest bidder! The idea of the dignity, respect and love for every human being and at the same time find a job or vocation you love. That will take commitment on your part and commitment is not always easy. Many times we have doubts and questions.

There was a skier who wandered over onto the professional ski slope and found himself hurtling down the mountain at a frightening speed. He crashed into a tree and found himself dangling in space over a thousand-foot precipice, hanging on a single limb. After a while, he called up the mountain: "Is anybody up there?" A voice came back: "Yes, I am here." "Who are you?" asked the skier. To his amazement the voice replied, "I am the Lord!" After sustaining the shock of this the skier said, "Well, Lord you see the shape I'm in, please get me out of this predicament!" The voice replied: "I will. Now listen carefully. Turn loose

of the tree, put on your skis and I will take care of you!" The skier replied, "I can't turn loose of this tree, I will be killed by falling down the cliff." The voice persisted: "Turn loose of the tree, put on your skis, and I will take care of you." There was a silence, and then the cry: "Is anybody else up there?"

There is nobody else--God is the highest bidder for your life and mine and we serve God by serving our brothers and sisters in the human race. Congratulations and best wishes to all of you and you sell yourselves to the highest bidder.

by being friends with one another.

Alternate Ending for church service June 6, 1976

As our scripture readings for the morning put it: You are not your own; you were bought with a price. . . God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. There is no higher bid ~~than~~ then when someone gives his or her life -for you. No one can bid any higher than that! But you then have to commit yourself to God.