

- For any given Sunday, especially in this pulpit, where we stand only very occasionally and have the whole unsearchable riches of the biblical message from which to choose. I recall how Austin Fodder, the learned chaplain of Trinity college, Oxford once began thus. On Thursday of last week, my sermon was driven to my front door in a delivery truck, carrying flowers for the college ball and there in large letters, on the side of the truck was my topic ready-made, reads and crosses made to order and young men and women life is just not like that. Now, it's a rare occurrence for a sermon, of course, to drive up to our front door. My former teacher, Dr. Arthur John Gossip, used to tell us, that we should never preach on any text, unless it leaked out at us from the printed page of holy writ and clutched us by the throat, and implored, preach me, preach me. But once again, it is given to few of us to be so dramatically enlisted, by any theme. All of which, leads me to submit that I have selected these words from Hebrews this morning, here we have no continuing city. We seek one to come, or rather these words have selected me probably because of my own mood and circumstances of the moment. In a few days, I shall be leaving for a sojourn at home. It would be quite dishonest to deny, that one hasn't experienced, an eradicable yearning for the old home places, for the native highland hills and glen. Yet over there, shooter's life. There will invade the heart, a hunting nostalgia for here, for the green symmetry of this campus, for the limpid yellow of the Carolina moon, for the air swirled breeze whispering in the tall pine. Or again, for lasting friendships made here and ties of affinity knit together. Are we ever men and women completely at home anywhere on earth, whether it be Edinburgh or Dharam, Paris or New York, are we not pilgrims and exiles, strangers and sojourners? This start all our days by a deep restlessness of spirit and an endless craving for another and a lovelier home. There is a basic incongruity between man and his universe declared FH Amman that makes us all feel ailments. We often feel in fact like cock os in a nest of swallows. Implicit in our text of this morning, is that very mood. Now I imagine that the word about how having here, no continuing city conjures up different ideas and different pictures for different sets of people. There is more than just a chance, for example, that it may speak, to the ineradicable optimism of youth, even here and even now, many of you may be dreaming of a university city in which wisdom is given wings from on high to fly unerringly from your teacher's mind to yours. A university city in which you would examine us perhaps by a new and gentle clairvoyance are able, properly to measure the estimable qualities you, yourself are sure your possess. Or better still a university city in which examinations are forever consigned to the limbo of forgotten thing. By contrast, the promise of a city to come beyond all earthly cities, may bring its own comfort to those of my listeners who are in the twilight years. And not even young people who are as yet but lightly touched by thoughts of our mortality. Not even young people must laugh off the question mark that is raised by death. For inevitably death comes to all of us, that the most certain day, when life and the splendor of this world are seen to be, but transient. And when the last enemy comes talking near to us. The question as to whether death is cruelly final and catastrophic or only the gateway to a larger and a lovelier city. That question will almost assuredly not leave any of us unconcerned or indifferent. I think of principal Rainy of Edinburgh affirming after his wife's death, that he knew her still to be at home, only home was now a little bit higher up on the everlasting hills of God. My soul, there is a country beyond the burden of death, do not despise this faith and this hope that we have in and through Jesus Christ, crucified and risen, such faith and hope of a city to come. But the triumphant confirmation and consummation of that propensity, which all men seem to be given with their existence, for

turning from a world of inanity and meaninglessness to receive strength from the world of meaning, where love triumphs over hatred, union over division and eternal life over death. On the one hand then, the idealism of youth, on the other hand, the light and hope of the life everlasting in God. If this takes speaks to either or both of these, so be it. Only a childish old age would deny the inextinguishable ideas of youth, and only tallow and immature youth would begrudge older age, it's sustaining expectation of a city not made with hands that outlast death. However, we have not even begun to take the measure of what the writer to the Hebrews is seeking to convey. Until we try to understand the delicate balance he strikes between waddled denial and waddled affirmation. Waddle denial you say, the vision of the key vistas day, the coming heavenly city. What does our day and generation know about that? I wonder. Defying our technological genius, are we not rather fascinated and entranced by what lies immediately before us. The tangible, the visible, the provable. Much of our current literature is so desperately one sided. For instance, as to miss the central tragedy and grandeur of human existence, the inseparable duality inherent in human experience. We are at once temporal and determinable. At once under law and under grace. At one under necessity and at the same time free. And yet on every hand today, aren't we attempting to gauge man's worth and destiny by purely sociological, biological, or even sexual standards. In his presidential address last year to the society for New Testament Studies, Father Benoit opened with what he called a matter-time metaphor. He told us of a little French boy who was hustled together with his mother into the line of queen Elizabeth. Together they were given a grand conducted tour of the inside of the huge ship. Together they saw the shops, they saw the beauty salon, the ball rooms, the tennis court, the swimming pools. They saw the radio and radar equipment and way deep down, they saw the mighty engine themselves. After two hours had come and gone the youngsters suddenly broke out into sobs and he talked that his mother scout, and he said,(foreign language). Mother, I want only to see the sea. He is a parable for our time. Perpetual thinkers in the engine rooms of life and the world. There is urgent need for us to get on deck and touch a glimpse of the broader vistas. Dr. FR Budde was surely right When he affirmed, if we persist in thinking of man, holy in terms of biology and history, holy within space-time horizons. Our philosophies end in contradiction and our nostrums of salvation cannot save us. We must go back once again to the frontier and ask, what is man? And in the face of the ultimate question of human existence, I believe it should be clear to us today, that in this our time, we must recover our lost sense of distance. We must experience afresh the homesickness for eternity, unless our hearts are fixed on the higher order of things in which redemptive concern rules over bitterness, beauty over ugliness and truth over falsehood, our Christianity has lost its lifestyle. We have neither inspiration nor stimulus to improve the lot of this our world. And we might as well resign ourselves to the condition of things as we find them, and that would be a pretty miserable outcome in a world like this. Well then, not for us, are content and quiet and peace of mind, for we go seeking a city that we shall never find. Only for us, the dawn and the sun and the road and the wind and the rain and the watch fire under the stars, then sleep on the road again, we travel the dusty road till the light of the day grows dim. And the sunset, shows us fire away on the waddles rim. The sight of this beyond, of this coming city of God as Anna Strauss put it, is the only dynamic for the present. Precisely at this point, do we come upon the decisive and the burning question. Where is the vision of the city of God to be entertained. Where is it relevant? Where does it apply? Now, if you and I should answer, that the Christian dream of heaven, properly falls within the circle of the religious or properly belongs only to the speed of the sacred or the holy we delude ourselves. Is it not just here that the contemporary church is adulterating the very essence of Christianity and betraying her lot. The vision of the eternal city has degenerated into a spurious, other world

winners. A retirement from the secular into the department of the religious. An escape from this world of ours, into the shelter of the church, with its head in the clouds. We see the church today, far too often. As simply a religion for the practice of an esoteric cult of the piety of individual souls, as an opportunity for withdraw for all common and vulgar things. How else could you describe our chattiness today? Our passionate concern over the statistics of sanctuary attendance, our interminable retreats to dinner meetings and committees, our endless talk and discussion groups, our constant equation of the Christian religion with Sunday worship. Men and women, it's fatally easy for us to cherish our visions blended of the city of God in snugness and security behind stained glass windows. While all the time the world out there is perishing of its own worldliness and is starving for the love of God in Jesus Christ and in Christ's disciples. And if ever, we have caught a glimpse of the heavenly city of God, and yet resign ourselves to the social and political injustice and divisiveness that are rampant in our earthly cities. If we have refused to let our holy church and religion be contaminated by the realm of the worldly and the profane, then we are out of all men, the most miserable. Sensitive, prophetic spirits in our time like Dietrich Bonhoeffer have pled with us to recognize that either the heroism of Christian discipleship must manifest itself in the secular spear, in the dust and heat of a common day, where people feed and hope and hate and love and live and die. Either Christianity must be Christianity there or else another little worldly church should simply close its doors as no more than a grievous anachronism. And in this same sense, the voice of the writer to the Hebrews is decidedly a voice for our generation. For captivated though, this man is by a dream of the heavenly city. He is no mere or unrealistic visionary. He resolutely refuses to divorce the ideal from the real, the sacred from the secular or the holy from the profane. Listen to what he says. Let us go to Jesus he says, outside the camp, outside the camp, bearing his reproach. Outside the camp, means away from the shelter of the sacred place, away from the sanctity and beauty of the church, outside the domain of the religious all together at the place of the skald, at the gallows hill, where Christ is crucified and love and justice are murdered, where pious people don't want to linger very long. Out there, where there is no security and no sanity and no warmth, out there is the place of through encounter with the Christ. Out there the church supported by its faith in an old blood divine order of things to come must live, and must die. It is out there that we have to bear Christ reproach to exhibit the marks of Christ passion for men. It is out there that we have to find the grace and the power to be the reconciled and reconciling community. I find myself once in 1945, in the video, Grind of Allied Service Men at El Alamein in the north African desert, at a time, ironically enough, when it was tended by Germans prisoners of war. Under the glare of the relentless desert sun, row after endless row of crosses, marking the last resting places of the named and unnamed dead, were casting their long shadows on the sand. It seemed to me, that all these crosses, became fused into one cross, the cross of Jesus Christ and that cross stood then as it has always stood, not in the temple, not on holy ground, but away from the protection of the camp. It stood at the heart of life's grimaced realities, where the egotistic and imperialistic pretensions of men produce anguish and tragedy on a lavish scale. The cross of Christ stood then as it has always stood as a condemnation of the foully and wickedness of men. And yet at the same time, as God in his capable summons to us, to venture forth from our beautiful sanctuaries, like this, to meet the holy and the sacrificial love of Christ in the depth of the common out there, in the worldly, the secular relationships of light. How can we dare, to shut up our religion within the confines of our churches? How can we dare shut up our religion within the church doors? seeing that by the cross of his beloved son, God has once for all shattered the division of the sacred and the secular, and has rent the veil of the temple from top to bottom. It is out there, amid the clamor and the confusion and the loveless ness of

our worldly cities that we must be motivated by our vision of the eternal city of God, even so, shall we be able to cut the navel cord that binds us to the world and at the same time to give ourselves joyously as Christ's men and women for the world's redemption. Let us therefore, go forward on to Jesus, outside the camp, bearing his reproach, for here we have no continuing city. We seek one, to come. Let us pray. Almighty and ever blessed God. Before the brightness of whose presence, the angels fell their faces and whose glory the heavens do declare, dwell in our hearts this day, in our son, Jesus Christ. That even through him we might behold, the vision splendid of the eternal city of God, not made with hands and sustained by that vision in the secular order of things in our time, may we live out diligently as disciples of Jesus Christ for the improvement of the conditions in which man and women live. Enable us by his grace, then to make the world a lovelier and a better and a happier place for his love sake. And now may grace, mercy and peace from God, the father, the son, and the holy ghost rest upon you and abide with you this day and forevermore. (hymn music)