

For there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; neither hid, that shall not be known. Luke 12:2

The other day I got up, staggered to the kitchen to prepare breakfast for myself. I've done that for years . . . not because I have a lazy wife . . . but because I want to protect her from myself during that first hour or so after I get up. I kind of feel that I've saved a marriage that way . . . mine . . . because I doubt if anyone could put up with me during that time.

At any rate I decided that bacon and eggs ought to be the fare for that day. But I was faced with one of those plastic wrapped hermetically sealed packages of bacon. The stuff was there all right, I could see it, but how could I get to it? The genius who had wrapped and sealed that bacon had not only invented an impenetrable plastic but also a sealing operation designed for eternity. I felt, however, that "there is nothing covered that shall not be revealed". I found that if you bring a fork down with some force from a high distance that you can pierce the cellophane. That initial penetration can then be enlarged with the application of good deal of skill and patience.

Packaging . . . this may go down in history as the age of packaging. no people have ever had their food, their literature their cosmetics, their philosophy, their politics nor their religion served up to them so attractively wrapped.

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There must be millions who are employed, not in producing goods and ideas but in wrapping them up. That goes from everything from bacon to theology. Don't imagine that I am against all packaging. Hygiene and convenience demand it. The question is: Have we reached the point of confusing the package with the contents, or of preferring to live with the wrappings to the reality inside.

Wrappings are important. For example, we owe a lot to the unknown men who skillfully sealed the dead seal scrolls in the jars. The invention of printing was a triumph of wrapping because it meant that the huge store of human wisdom could be sealed and delivered to millions. The great institutions - congress, courts, universities, museums, unions, charitable groups - serve as wrappings for the enduring principles by which civilization lives.

That is true of the Church. In a sense the church is only the wrapping for the gospel. But without that wrapping which of us would have ever received the gospel? Those who would tear up the church need to ask themselves who will preserve the gospel and who will keep it relatively clean. Without the worship, the witness, the instruments and the officers of the Church there can be no continuing Christianity, nor would any of us here today have heard the gospel.

Granted the necessity of wrappings, let me suggest to you some of the reasons I worry a little about it, particularly as

it applies to the Christian faith, both personal and corporate.

1. Think about the impenetrable wrappings with which I whimsically began this morning: what kind of impression are our churches making on people who have a religious hunger today. Perhaps the message of Christ has been sealed off from many by the wrappings of the organization. There is something impenetrable to the person who was not raised within the machinery of a church like ours. It is difficult to penetrate the jungle of organizationsm officials, programs to find what we are trying to say and do. It can be hard to penetrate our forms of worship to find the living center of our faith.

That is why a living church must constantly look at itself and be ready to change. But we need to remember that merely changing the wrappings will not guarantee that the gospel will shine thru. Christ can be obscured just as surely by the contemporary swinging liturgy of some churches as he can by the trappings of conventional worship.

What matters is a breakthrough of the real - the real gospel, the real Christ, the real you and me. When the Spirit is really present and when church members are their real selves-- and not wearing the masks of religious convention - then it is not hard for anyone to penetrate the wrappings and know what it is all about.

A friend of mine asked his confirmation class members to write prayers. The next week he asked the members to read them. One began: "We beseech thee, Almighty God . . ." The leader interrupted and said: "Is that how you really talk? tell me in your own words what your biggest worry is?" The boy thought a moment: "I suppose it my parents being on my back all the time. That's my hang-up". "Then" said the leader "why not tell God about that?" "But you can't say that in church".

There you have it. You can't say that in church. So long as we feel there are certain normal things that are unmentionable in church and that God can be addressed only in formal and vague generalities we're not being real.

The trouble is, you see, with the wrappings within which we enclosed our selves and our beliefs and problems, sometimes a person will settle for a conventional belief at an early age, wrap it up and seal it against eternity. He doesn't want to examine it again.

But there is nothing ~~hid~~ covered that shall not be revealed . . . and the sooner we are honest with ourselves, with our neighbors, and with God the better. New life comes when we learn to remove the wrappings and be ourselves so that God can be himself with us.

2. But there is another kind of wrapping . . . that is the unnecessary wrappings and packaging.

I can't help but think of the fate of a man who buys ⁵
a new shirt. All I want is simple cover to keep it clean.
But what I am faced with is a monstrous contraption with the
scales of an armadillo and the quills of a porcupine in a forest
of tissue paper and cardboard.

The church has been guilty of hiding the gospel by the elaboration of the unnecessary. One part of it will insist on correct ritual, the importance of vestments. Others will offer the gospel only if you are prepared to accept a whole catalog of beliefs. Another part will frown on anyone who dares to follow Christ without accepting the taboos on smoking, dancing, etc. Another wraps the gospel in a blanket of social activity and administration and says that you must be involved.

I think our Lord spend much of his time liberating people from the unnecessary wrappings. He said "Come to me all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest". The context indicates that the the heavy laden were those who were bowed down with unnecessary religious and moral baggage. There is probably no one here who has not carried, at one time or another, that kind of baggage. To know Christ as Lord and Savior, to seek to obey him and serve him, is the center. All else we can, if need be, do without.

3. Now we come to the type of wrappings which are specifically referred to in the text. For Christ is here speaking about deceptive wrappings.

We all know that bright, colorful, fancy wrappings can conceal an average or shoddy product. We are wise to at times discount the deceptive wrappings. What Jesus was saying here was "Beware of the wrappings of the hypocrites. Hypocrisy is the wrappings we wear in order to appear better than we are. Those who are attacking society today focus on the besetting sin of the establishment, they call it hypocrisy. They there they say hypocrisy in the church. There surely is . . . time and time again we profess things we do not really practice. But we try to tell this to God every Sunday morning. There is hypocrisy in government, business, family life. And there is hypocrisy among those who hurl the charges. For to accuse a man of hypocrisy is to set oneself on a pedestal where we know very well we do not belong. Hypocrisy is one word we should be very unwilling to use of another. Unless I have the purity, the insight, the perfection of Jesus Christ, how can I look at my brother and call him a hypocrite. How do I know what his inmost desires are, what struggles are going on inside?

It is word which each of us must take for ourselves alone. And we shall soon see how adept we all are a deceptive packaging. What masks we wear. What one of us would contend that we are consistently what we appear to be? That we are the same person by ourselves, in a crowded room, at work, in church, Some masks are harmless, but some we assume because we want to be

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thought of as a certain kind of person. How difficult to be real, to be honest, to be consistent. We wrap ourselves one way for our cronies, another way for strangers, another way for people we want to impress, we an even wrap ourselves for ourselves refusing to be honest with ourselves.. Real and vital faith begins when we take the wrappings off and "come to ourselves".

The prodigal heard the voice of God, and he said: I will arise and go to my Father". That is what the gospel is all about . . . the presence of God and the awakening of the real you to respond. It comes alive without the wrappings.

This is what Christ is saying: Ultimately the wrappings will disappear. "For there is nothing covered that shall not be revealed; neither hid that shall not be known" Nothing is hidden from God and the real you will be known. To live with pretense is hell, for hell is unreality. But ^{to} be always seeking to discard the wrappings -- the impentable, the unnecessary, and the deceptive - is to open our lives to the grace of God. For he is not looking for those who claim to be aints, but for sinners who ask for nothing but his mercy. And they need have no fear.