APRIL 30, 1*»78
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I have chosen two texts for this morning, one from the 19th chapter *of* Acts, the ^othgr^^rjm the 20th chapter. My announced theme^ re fates" *zo* the first text4 ~~ULliU^^MiiG ss~~ ~~i^ fl iadalatLLxL~~ thought of the "idolatry of business," but that's somewhat beside the point.)

Here's the first text: "And there is danger Hnot only that this trade of ours may come into disrepute but also that the gLxxL temple of the great goddess Artemis may count for nothing, and that she may even be deposed from her magnificence, she whom all Asia and the world worship."

The story in which this text appears is humorous enough. About that time, we're told, "there arose no little stir concerning the Way." It appears that the early Christian movement was upsetting some of the idol-makers.

So a certain^emef^rius, cal 1 s a "special meeting of 'Acad ic Council. ~~xkxxxxmeexkxg.~~ "Men," he says to the-s* silversmith),/ 'appealing right off to their pocket books, "you know that WKxkxxaxaiixxKx our business depends of people believing in the goddess Artemis. How are we going to be able to give students scholarships and pay faculty salaries, if our investments in our trade don't keep paying off?

"But you seej* Demetrius goes on, 'that Paul and these other rabble rousers are suggesting that the people should divest of their interest in Artemis. Why, before too, long no one will even know the name of Artemis any longer. Clearly our whole way of doing things is being attacked.*'

When the people at the xLxLL meeting heard Demetrius's impassioned words, they immediately began to shout: ''Great is our way! Great is academic excellence! Great are high salaries and security../[1] And they kept on shouting: ""Great is the classroom experience! Great is the seven college exchange! Great Ls hoop-rolling and graduation and coffers full of equity!'*

Then one of the older members of the communi ty./who h.ad risises to undoubtedly witnessed siwh disturbances before, address the meeting, Os the voice of reason: "People of Ephesus," he says/'we surely all know that we, are the temple keepers of the great Artemis, and of her sacred stone that fell from the sky right here, in these lovely^00 acres. We really don't have to worry about tefefeee faminority of trouble-makers, do we?/[f]

So the tUW» clerk calms the meeting, somebody moves to adjourn, and they all go home,without having taken any action.

A fun kind of story.

But its a funU story that's pointing out some deeper truths about the lives many of us are accustomed to livti^g, and indeed about the lives of most people, at any time or place in human history.

The business of idolatry six isn't just a fun story, is a story full of anguish and pathos. It takes two forms, ~~generally~~ ~~!pl'~~ fill hiiQ, which are frequently intertwined, but distinguishable nevertheless.

I.

about the turmoil at Ephesus

What we see surfacing in this story/are two different kinds of Security^Systems. For, that's what the business of idolotry is — security. XML Both of the^we know from our own experience, but each one has a long and L venerable history. I will refer to them as Security System A, and Security System B.

The first one is by far the more archaic. I remember visiting the city of KKX Ephesus some years ago and seeing a large statue of Artemis that had been unearthed by archeologists. Carved from alabaster, she presented a very striking countenance, dominated by rows and rows of breasts from her shoulders to her toes. Clearly, Artemis would not have gone over too well in places such as Puritan New England. But there she was in all her sensuous glory.

She was the archaic earth godbss, of course. Her realm was the world of nature, with all its vitalities, its sensuality, and it ever-repeating rhythms of birth, nurturing, times of passage, and death.

That is one security system that people have chosen throughout the ages — basically trying to lose themselves in the rhythms of nature^ We see this tendency time and time again, from Ephesus to Walden Pond, from Ancient Egypt to the contemporary counterculture and its fascination with organic famaaing, simple living, back to the earth, dnd the spirits of the eternal woods.

and so to find stability

And it's surely an alluring security syatern^^Ask a busy college chaplain, for example, how good it was',.-for 'niitf"t6 plan some weeks of escape in the White Mountains this summer. What a relief he felt to think about getting away from it all and returning to the bosom of mother nature. Ask him, if you wish, about Security System A. It's very real and very powerful.

II.

Then there's Security System B. If Security System A is archaic and natural, Security System B is historical and urban. This is the workaday security system that **sotiietr~~me-s driven •people to flee to the embrace of the eternal hil l s--L^>S~~**

up have been raised with, from our parents' knee.

As the silversmiths appear in our text they seem to be understandable in all manner of ways. Here comes this fellow Paul blowing through town saying that gods made with hands are not gods. The silversmiths may not have grasped the theological significance of it all, but they surely gained a quick appreciation for the economic di®®KKiHHSxafxftksxApastiRx implications of the Apostefc preaching.

All they were doing, it seems, was making aliving. And everyone — right? — has a right to make a living. So who is this fellow Paul to take away their rightful livelihood? Their feelings are understandable enough.

(3)

But more seems toK be at stake than that. Security System B, as adumbrated here, is something else than the right to make a living.

Note that Demetrius's appeal to the silversmiths is twoffiid. First, he addresses them with regard to their livelihood, and thert with regard to their sense of importance in the world: "And there is danger," he says, "not only that this-K- trade of ours may come into disrepute but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis may count for nothing, and that she may even be deposed from her magnificence, she whom all Asia and the world worship."

I cannot help but think that there is an alusion here to the venerable tower of Babel story, where the people came together to build a great tower, in order to make a name for themselves. Clearly, the sense of importance of the silversmiths, with regard to their goddess and their city, as the center of the world, is very much at stake.

It reminds me a little of a story on the news the other night. It seems that the CAE is abrogating Bee ton's role as one of the ^gateway cities"to kEtRgdx London. No longer will Pan-^m flights leave here or head here for or from London. A whole controversy is beginning to brew, because Boston's sense of importance is being impinged upon. Also, naturally, a number of jobs are at stake.

But I think there's a better image for Security System B, to be seen actually, from the windows of one of those Pan Am jets while they still are flying from here to London and back.

I don't know what you see when you fly into the LL8MMX London area, but I can imagine seeing, perchance, a cathegraiX or two.

But I do know what you see xkyxysHX when you fly into Boston. Of course, not cathedrals, but insurance buildings. And that's the story of contemporary American civilization, in large measure, is it not. In one way or another most people are out to garner in as much financial security as they can possibly garner. Show me an American sitizen today, and I'll show you someone who in all likelihood wants a piece of the rock.

Our Career Services office reports, for example, that a sizeable number of our pre-med xfcafcaxKRfcax^t^j^nts will say, in so many words, that they are going into medicine.forreasons <fif financial security. That's Security System B.

III.

Here we are with these two Security Systems, then, familiar throughout the course of human history. Security System A is arahaic and focusers on nature. You find security^- in one way or another, by "jasi-ng< the^wo?!*d* of 'nature, which is the original domain of Artemis.

Security System B is less archaic and more historical. It focuses on the economics of civilization, above all urban life. Ariemis is its goddess, too, although probably — if the truth were told -- Artemis would only be a front, as it were, for the high god Mammon.

Now the Christian movement enters this scene, not as a Security System, but as a Subversive Force. That's the first thing we have to learn about the Christian Faith, I think and maybe the last thing . The Christian Faith is subversive!

WWWWL Most of you do not rememberJ,Sie days of the McCarthy era in this country, but I do remember a little of it. In those days the word subversive was a highly charged word? much more than it is now. People were looking under their beds at night for fear of subversives. People were calling whole academic departments on the carpet, impoobable as that sounds today, for being subsersive. Well, that's how the early Christian movement was perceived by many in the first century Mediteraanean world and hsSWvL on into the second century. A bunch of subversives! That's what the Church was.

And it still is, when it's true to itself. For all manner of reasons, but L»r one main reason, as far as our text is concerned this morning: because the Christian faith calls you away from the business of idolatry, the busy-ness of orienting your whole life on the quest for security.

If Security System A, that of Artemis, prompts you **IqMe** yourself in the eternal rhythms of nature^- **pvomMNSL^.** and to that degree find a kind of peace and stability in a world of turdmil, — if Security System B, that of Mammon^, (or Artemis fronting for Mammon^ prompts to you to seek security by gaining the world for yourself^ the Christian faith prompts you to find yourself by giving yourself in love to others.

In fefeSEt-^8®se Christian faith and security, the life with Christ and the quest for KKKnxxfcy: peace and stability, simply don't mix at all, as frameworks for authentic living. In this sense, Christianity is not only subversive, it's also divisive and harsh.

As I was saying the other night to some of you, you don't say ^fes to the Gespel of Jesus Christ, without saying the claims of the world. You don't take up your cross and follow Jesus, while still holding on to your security system. That's implicit I think in this marvelous term "the Way," that's used to refer to the Christian movement.

As a Christian you're underway. You travel light. You don't build some retreat in the eternal hills where you can ^injj security forever. You don't build some babelous towers -nf/u/makes a name for yourself before all others, where you can find security in great wealth and adulation. You take up your Cross. You reach out to take the hand of the One who goes before you on the road of life, the Crucified, who has promised to carry you through to life, no matter what the tribulations.

IV

This^is the end of the business of idolatry, and the birth of the glorious insecurity of the Christian pilgrimage. This is the way of the Way, and I commend it to you and to me once again this morning.

I commend it teosffs not because we don't know what it is, but because we sometimes want to have it bofih ways. We sometimes want to follow Jesus Christ, to take up his Cross, and yet to hold on to our security systems, whether A or B, or some combination of them both, at the same time.

But I remind you and me this morning, in the name of Jesus, that we can't have it both ways, both Christ and security, As Loren Kierkegaard and Martin Luther and Augustine any many others of the theological giants of our tradition knew so well, the Christian life is always either/or never both/and.

Could it be, for example, that the end result of your 24,000 dollar Wellesley education will be a subsistence iob in a ~~onunLinJiIlJ, aggaeg~~ i ~~n Spanish llarlam?~~ Could it be, likewise, that your lifelong dreams for living like Marcis Welby in Grosse Point will be foiled because Jesus is calling you to work as a midwifle in Columbia?

Could it be that your stature as a leading member of the local community will be endangered because you state publicly and so act that as a Christian you are opposed to marketing infant formula products in Third World countries. If ~~you~~ perchance you work for Abott Laboratories or Bristol Myers or American Home and you say that, you might find yourself on the street. Could that happen? It might.

Z^What if people are making jokes, as they sometimes do in this secular world, about people who believe, in God and Jesus, and you suddenly speak up and tell them to esft'it all, because you are one of those strange believers, and you find lifers meaning centered in Jesus Christ? What if? It could happen. And you cpuld^lose some friends* ini.jigtEfc.ji £(«E- You might find yourself insecure, quite lonely, very soon.

~~IV.~~ V

This brings me at the very end to my second text from the 20th chapter of Acts. Paul is in Miletus, and he sends to Ephesus and calls to him the elders of the Church. It is a sad time for all. For he tells them that he is leaving, to go to Jerusalem.

Paul isn't even given the security of staying with a familiar circle of friends who clearly love him very deeply. 5c,He readies ^•ffhself to get up and go, to continue on the way,with the Way.

'He tells issim poignantly: "And, now, behold, I am going to Jerusalem, bound in the Spirit, not knowing what shall befall me there; except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflactions wax awâit me. But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may accomplish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God. "(Acts 20:22-24)

This is my prayer for all of us this morning, for you and for me; that we, likewise, may continue to follow this ***dfrUAte*** ~~apostolic way,~~ knowing how to forsake those security systems that are so alluring to us so much of the time, and to reach out ahead for the hand of Jesus who goes before us on the r^qji, leading us into the glorious insecurities of apoato lic ~~existence. Amen.~~ way. Amen.