

Be...

THE PRESIDENT SLEEPS!
GOD STILL LIVES!

Thompson



A SERMON

DELIVERED SUNDAY MORNING APRIL 15, 1945

TRINITY LUTHERAN CHURCH, HAGERSTOWN, MARYLAND

by

THE REV. WILSON P. ARD, D.D.

Pastor

**IN MEMORIAM
FRANKLIN DELANO ROOSEVELT**

The Thirty-Second President of the
United States of America

DIED APRIL 12, 1945

—Published by the Council of
Trinity Lutheran Church

“The President Sleeps! God Still Lives!”

I am not a member of the Democratic political party.

This is not a political sermon.

I have not always agreed with the political theories and the governmental program of the great American President who has fallen into that dreamless sleep that knows no waking. The right to disagree is one of the glories of American democracy.

Nevertheless, I have always recognized and greatly admired the zeal, the courage, the vision, the humanity, the dynamic leadership of Franklin D. Roosevelt.

He battled against terrific physical odds and handicaps,—handicaps that would defeat and consign to a life of invalidism men who lacked his determination and his oaken fibre.

But supported on iron braces and by a gallant spirit he carried the overwhelming burdens of one hundred and thirty million people in years of tumult and struggle, and guided with strong hand the Ship of State through rough and heavy seas,—seas forever crimsoned with the blood of American men swept beneath the ebbing and flooding tides of a global war.

The President has fallen in the most fateful hour of American history! The leader of the nation and the man to whom the oppressed and submerged millions of other lands looked with the gleaming light of hope shining in their eyes and burning in their hearts, this modern Moses, has fallen upon his shield on the field of battle. Fallen just at the moment when rumbling tanks are on the edge of Berlin, just at the moment of the great world conference to be held on the shores of the Pacific in the golden state of California. Indeed, the most fateful hour in our nation's history!

Franklin Roosevelt had a more complete understanding and a wider knowledge of international affairs than any other man in America. His conferences with Churchill, Stalin and Generalissimo Chiang Kai-Shek,—Cairo, Teheran, Yalta and the others, gave him that larger picture and that more intimate familiarity with world problems and with the vast, comprehensive plans for victory and for the future peace and destiny of all the nations of the world.

Yes, he was a shrewd, clever, astute politician, but, forget it not, that he also possessed the mighty stature of Christian statesmanship.

Franklin Roosevelt was a unique and interesting man. He “walked with kings nor lost the common touch”. He was equally “at home” and

at ease with purple royalty and with humblest citizen, and I am convinced that he carried the sincere interest of all mankind in a heart that was great with brotherhood and love.

The spirit of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, breaking from the racked body that tried in vain to make it slave, has entered the long Tomorrow, and death enrolls a new name upon the tablets of immortality.

This man lived in an atmosphere of struggle and turbulence but died in a setting of profound peace. The end came on a beautiful afternoon with the sweet-scented and gentle breezes of springtime stealing across the Georgia hills where he loved to retire to the still and peaceful atmosphere of the little White House near Warm Springs.

A tired and weary man closed his eyes, murmured "I have a terrific headache", and then quietly slipped out into the open spaces of God like one "who wraps the drapery of his couch about him and lies down to pleasant dreams".

The golden day of peace had come at last for the weary warrior broken in the battle for Victory and for Freedom.

What Edwin Markham wrote in tribute to the martyred Abraham Lincoln might well be said of the President:—

"And when he fell in whirlwind, he went down
As when a lordly cedar, green with boughs,
Goes down with a great shout upon the hills,
And leaves a lonesome place against the sky."

On the eve of the San Francisco Conference, he who had planned it and was designated to lead it, he who had envisioned a world at peace, died upon that mountain top of vision and of dream, and we, in the valley, where guns rumble and bombs burst with deafening roar, see but dimly, yet with a hope that glimmers like the light of a silver star, the dawning of that glad day when men shall learn war no more forever.

To the nation his legacy is the memory of a gallant and worthy son, and his legacy to the world, the issue of peace which, please God, shall never die.

He died upon that mountain top of vision looking hopefully, wistfully toward the Promised Land.

Thus he, who had dreamed a high dream of peace for the world, has found peace at last for himself, and has left behind a world still tossed in strife and turmoil.

Thus on Friday afternoon, with the service of the Church conducted in the East Room of the White House and the dusk of eventide stealing across the city of Washington, gently enfolding the nation's capital in the

sable robes of the beauty, of the night, a stunned and staggered world bowed in sorrow and whispered a last tearful farewell to a great and a good man.

And this Sunday morning, not Franklin D. Roosevelt, the Democrat, but Franklin D. Roosevelt, the American, was laid to rest in a green-hedged garden overlooking the majestic Hudson river flowing blue to the sea, and the soft notes of a bugle, calling like a silver-throated nightingale, floated out across a peaceful valley and died in lovely echo among distant wooded hills.

His body has been returned to the earth from whence it came, but left without the grave are visions and dreams of peace and world brotherhood which shall never die—

"Till human time shall fold its eyelids, and the human sky
Be gathered, like a scroll, within the tomb
Unread forever."

And so it's

"Sunset and evening star,
And one clear call for me,
And may there be no moaning of the bar,
When I put out to sea.

Twilight and evening bell,
And after that the dark!
And may there be no sadness of farewell,
When I embark;

For tho' from out our bourne of time and place
The flood may bear me far,
I hope to see my Pilot face to face
When I have crossed the bar."

The President sleeps! God still lives!

When Abraham Lincoln was assassinated the nation was thrown into panic. On April 15, 1865, James A. Garfield stood on the steps of the sub-treasury building in New York and to the great crowd assembled there, spoke these memorable words: "God reigns, and the Government at Washington still lives!" Let us hear again these words!

For this fateful hour, when the pilot has fallen and the helm of the Ship of State has been thrust into the hands of a man who has asked for, and who desperately needs, our prayers, I have selected a striking and appropriate verse of scripture for our consideration. It is Joshua 1:2—"Moses my servant is dead. Now therefore arise and go over this Jordan."

These are the words of God to Joshua who was to take the place of Moses as leader of the children of Israel.

No, I am not saying that Franklin D. Roosevelt was Moses and that Harry S. Truman is Joshua. But certainly there is a dramatic similarity between the situation of Israel when Moses was taken from them, and the situation of our nation in this day when the President has fallen.

The text tells of the calamity that came to Israel. Their statesman and leader was gone. They could have spared anyone better than Moses. He was the man who engineered the great movement of emancipation. He heard God's call to deliver His people. He had led Israel from bondage. Through the Red Sea he had led them, and now they stood on the very edge of the Promised Land. His death at that particular moment was a keen and staggering loss.

What are those people to do? Moses was the one man expected to bring them into the land of Canaan. But the last chapter of the saga of freedom had not been written and the last touches to the picture had not been painted in. What are they to do? They might have given up all hope and assumed an attitude of defeatism. They might have said "Well, since Moses is dead we may as well quit. Let us turn back to the shackles and the slavery of Egypt."

They might have become bitter and rebellious. They might have blamed God for taking Moses just at the very moment when they needed him most.

But God's way is always best and His way is indicated in the text,—"Moses my servant is dead. Now therefore arise and go. . . ."

Since Moses is gone you and I are more sorely needed. God says that Joshua, the new leader, must take on new burdens and assume greater responsibilities than he has ever known before.

That was God's plan then! It is God's plan now! Arise and go, go, go!

There are many things that God can do alone. But there is one thing God cannot do without our help,—He cannot save the world and bring in the Kingdom without our complete consecration and cooperation.

While it is true that God works through men, let us remember that no one man is essential to the success of the work. God takes a workman away, but He always finds someone to fill the gap. The clock of God strikes and the man of the hour strides across the stage of world action!

It is a good thing for us to face this fact. It should make us humble and remove us from our pedestals of foolish pride. Sometimes we are prone to think that the progress of the church depends upon one or two or three people. But when you and I are gone others will fill our places, and ac-

ceptably, too. No man is absolutely essential. No man is indispensable. And please do not think that I am making any indirect, facetious reference to the slogan that was bandied about a few years ago to the effect that Franklin Roosevelt was the indispensable man. I am simply saying that God's plans do not rise and they do not fall because of the efforts of one man.

A man may be a member of the church. Maybe his feelings are hurt and so he decides to wreck the church by withdrawing his support. Does the church die? No, the church does not die, but that man dies! He dies in heart and soul and spirit! God must have men, consecrated and surrendered, but no one man is essential. Five hundred members of churches in Hagerstown could "quit" this morning, but the Church of the living God would march on, without a break in the lines and without faltering.

God spoke unto Joshua. Yes, He spoke to Joshua even after the peerless leader Moses was dead. God did not lose interest in His people after Moses had died. And God still lives and God still speaks words of encouragement as He bends low to whisper into every ear that is attuned to His voice.

God not only spoke to the mighty Moses, but He spoke to the commonplace Joshua. Joshua did not have the heroic proportions of Moses. He was not cast in the same mold. And God had no intention of making him over into a second Moses, but He was willing to lead Joshua into high and glorious places.

"Arise and go." So Joshua arose and went, and he conquered and he succeeded. So, God does not quit when one servant dies. He raises another to take the place of generalship.

In the middle of the nineteenth century there was a quaint and charming civilization in the south. But it died in the smoke and fury of a civil war. As the men of the Confederate armies, broken and spiritless, turned from Appomattox to go back to desolated farm lands and to the smoldering ashes of ruined homes, God said: "Moses is dead. The social pattern of yesterday is swept away. Now therefore rise and go." And rise they did and a New South was born, springing up "Phoenix-like" from the tumbled rubble and gray ashes of the past.

About nineteen hundred years ago there came One into the world who announced that He was going to build a new Kingdom. He gathered about Him a very few selected followers. But the world enterprise was still in the fledgling state when the Leader was crucified on a lonely hill amid the shouts and curses of the mob. Everything seemed to be lost. The disciples of Jesus were in hopeless despair. But God said "My Son is dead. Now you arise and go on." And from that barren hill of seem-

ing defeat those gallant and intrepid followers of the Galilean went forth, with dauntless zeal and unwavering courage, to the conquest of the world!

The church at times faces discouraging situations. Only about 50 per cent of the people of America are members of the church. And of this number many are members in name only. They do not attend services: they do not work: they do not pray: they do not receive the Sacrament of the Altar: they give little or no financial support to the church. What are we going to do? Give up and quit just because of these discouragements and this indifference? Or will we say "Here am I, Lord, send me. I will arise and go on."

Some day Death will whisper to you the one gentle, beckoning word "Come". Those who stand by your grave, as grief stricken friends and relatives this morning stood by the freshly turned earth in a Hyde Park garden, will say "He is dead." But God will say "Your body is dead. But thou art an immortal soul, created in My own image. THEREFORE ARISE AND GO!"

And out into that land of eternal hope and progress where "night is lost in endless day" you will go to climb one great summit after another, shouldering out the stars, in the blessed and beautiful fellowship of God.

Moses may die, but God lives on! And while we hold His hand we hold Life and we hold Victory.

Therefore arise, you who are broken, you who are lonely, you who have lost loved ones, arise and go over your Jordan where your best hopes are waiting to be realized, and where all the golden dreams of a weary, wistful world will, at last in God's good time, come true!

THE PRAYERS

O HEAVENLY FATHER, Whose blessed Son, Jesus Christ, didst weep at the grave of Lazarus: Look we beseech Thee, with compassion upon those who are now in sorrow and affliction: comfort them, O Lord, with Thy gracious consolations; make them to know that all things work together for good to them that love Thee; and grant them overmore sure trust and confidence in Thy fatherly care; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

O GOD, Who hast brought our citizenry together from many nations and climes: Unite us as one people, loyal and strong, that our beloved country may grow in righteous purposes, and may rejoice in the achievement of the national will. And grant that the mind of this people may always be controlled by obedience to Thy holy laws; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

MERCIFUL FATHER, look in compassion on all who must endure the miseries of this cruel war; upon those who by day and night face peril in far places; upon those who live in constant anxiety for endangered loved ones. O Protector of the helpless, hear the cry of the distressed, through Jesus Christ, our Savior. Amen.

BLESS we beseech Thee, merciful Lord, our country and all our people. Give Thine especial aid and grace to the President of the United States. Be his Counsellor and his Defense. Give him faith, wisdom, courage, health and patience to bear the burden of his office. Keep him in safety and grant that, relying upon Thee and seeking to do Thy will, he and his associates in government may enact wise laws and administer them justly, so that the welfare of our people may be assured; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

O ALMIGHTY GOD, the Refuge of all that put their trust in Thee: Direct the course of this world, we humbly beseech Thee, in accordance with Thy holy will; take away whatsoever hinders the nations from attaining unity and concord; prosper all counsels which make for rightful peace; this we ask for Thy mercy's sake, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Ere we leave Thy house, O Father,
For our nation we would plead,
Guard our soldiers and our airmen
In their need.

Spare our sailors in their perils,
Monarch of the mighty deep.
Safely guide them, Holy Pilot—
Safely keep.

Grant to victor and to vanquished,
When their earthly conflicts cease,
Gift of mercy, loving Father—
Heaven's own peace.

Amen.

The Lord's Prayer.