

"CARING ENOUGH TO HELP"

INTRODUCTION

Several months ago I attended a very interesting meeting. The people there talked about their hopes and dreams for a peaceful settlement to the problems of our world. They talked about peace in Rhodesia, about what's happening in the Middle East, about the tensions in Ireland, about the real threat of world hunger.

It was stimulating to be with a group of people who haven't given up on human beings, despite the current and widespread cynicism abroad in our land and throughout the world. They still believe they can help bring harmony and wholeness to our world.

On the Monday after Easter, I read what Bishop Moore had said in his Easter sermon at the Cathedral of St. John. The Episcopal Bishop of New York in a rather unique Easter message on death and resurrection appealed to the business community of our city not to forsake what appears to be a dying city, but to stay, to help, to care in bringing about a resurrection of the city. to be involved..

Over the years, our Church has devoted much time, thought, and money to outreach in the city. Various programs and projects reflecting our concerns have been adopted by persons caring enough to help. From adopting buildings on East 100th Street to adopting friends from Vietnam, our people have cared enough to help. Caring enough to help - the list is long.

DEVELOPMENT

From these illustrations - and there are many more - we get the impression that most people want to be helpful. They want to do something that will be helpful and useful to others. Human beings are so constituted. We're made for caring. The depth and range of caring on the part of many in this congregation continue to amaze me. If we're given a chance to develop naturally and normally, we want to make a worthwhile contribution to the world before we move off the scene.

What we can do, therefore, is very important. What we do "out there" in the world can make a great deal of difference in the neighborhood where we live and in the nation and in the world. Let us not forget that. If we care enough to help, we will find a way to help.

However, what Christians do "out there" is greatly determined by what they do "in here" - in local churches and centers of faith like this one. The quality and the value of our service for peace, freedom and brotherhood in the world are shaped and influenced greatly by the services we perform for each other within the congregation. The degree of mutuality which we achieve here in our Church helps us care enough to help people "out there". (PAUSE)

PAUL'S EXAMPLE

Centuries ago the Apostle Paul undertook one of the most difficult, yet most magnificent tasks which any being can undertake: to open the human mind, to lift people out of the mind-set of prejudice and bigotry. If you don't think that's a big job, give it a try sometime. He sought to turn a young and struggling Christian Church outward, beyond the Jewish setting in which it began. He opened up the Church to the Gentile world, or else we might not be here today. This, when you stop to think about it, is one of the truly remarkable achievements in the struggle for religious freedom and human development in the history of the world.

What is the secret of that power for so great a service to the world? I believe that it is to be found in the small centers of faith which he helped to establish around the eastern Mediterranean world. These small groups in Corinth, Thessolonia, Philippi and Ephesus became "power-houses" of enrichment, encouragement, excitement and stimulation. Because of the power generated in these small societies, Paul and others could reach out in service to the world as effective missionary evangelists. In so doing, they brought healing and hope to a sick and weary world. Something of the same sort of thing - England - 18th C. Wealey.

About the middle of the first Century, a small band of Christians came together in Rome. They didn't have a great charismatic leader like Peter or Paul. They were ordinary people. Paul had received news about their vitality and he was eager to visit them. However, because of pressing problems, he was unable to get there. Instead, he wrote a letter. From a rather peaceful setting in Corinth, which was a bit unusual for this great Apostle, he composed the longest and most significant writing of his entire career. It is his Letter to the Church at Rome, the book in our Bible that we call Romans.

The opening verses of this book are very interesting. He first introduces himself. He then tells about his concern for them, his desire to visit them and he offers them grace and peace from God, the Father and our Lord, Jesus.

"First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is proclaimed in all the world. For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I mention you always in my prayers, asking that somehow by God's will I may now at last succeed in coming to you.

For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you, that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine".

Now does that sound like a strong man who could change the course of human history? Those two verses contain as fine a descriptive statement as we can find about the power that a local congregation of Christians can generate. Let's look at them carefully and relate them to our life together in this fellowship.

LONG TO SEE YOU First, what if every member of a congregation like this - after a frustrating week in the office, on the job, at school, or at work in the community - what if every church member had that same kind of eager longing expressed by the Apostle, "I long to see you...." ~~We~~ could revitalize the Church and turn the world around if Christians would assemble today with such eagerness as that. If we had such a feeling, "I long to see you.....". How many of us greet Sunday morning with a groan? Or a yawn? Oh, it's Sunday....I suppose I ought to get up and go to Church.....

What if we came bouncing into Church on Sunday mornings exuding an eager anticipation: "I long to see you members and friends of Park Avenue United Methodist Church. What a refreshing sight you are. How was your week?" If we could believe that every time we come together, we will be renewed, repaired and prepared for another week, another round with the world, the nation, the city, the subway, crowded buses and striking unions. What a difference it would make.

And why was Paul so eager? Just to shake some hands, or to hear some cheerful words of greeting, or to rush to the fellowship room for some food? No, much more than that. Listen to what he says, "That I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you".

In other words, he has something to give. "That's why I'm so eager to be with you. I have a gift for you!" How eagerly we walk when we have something to give to someone we love. We walk with a bounce. It was a "spiritual gift" said Paul. Something that will make you a stronger person. Something more than words, more than a handshake, more than a warm smile and a warm word. A "spiritual gift" for you. Perhaps a prayer, perhaps a concern, but always my love, he seems to be saying.

Do you remember Owen Wister's novel, The Virginian? Said the cowboy,

"It was neither preaching nor praying that made a better man of me, but one or two people in the congregation who believed in me better than I deserved, and I hated to disappoint them",

That's a spiritual gift that gives you driving power and strength for another week.

MUTUALLY ENCOURAGED Paul goes on to explain what the spirit gift is. "That is, that we may be mutually encouraged". I run eagerly to you - not just to give, but also to receive something in return, Paul intimates. He was looking forward to receiving something from the Romans, from these people he had never met.

Think, for a moment, just what those words would mean to a small, struggling community of Christians a thousand miles away. First of all, to receive a letter from this great Apostle was a form of flattery - of the first order - to the little flock of Christians at Rome. But to be told that the Apostle was expecting to receive something from them. It would be like Pope Paul writing to the members of a Catholic Church here in Yorkville and saying, "I want to visit you....for I need your encouragement....your prayers....your spiritual gifts". Wow - can you imagine what that would mean!

The feeling in any congregation is mutual, the apostle is declaring. Charles Newhall, in a beautiful poem, has written these words,

"O Jesus, Master, when today I meet along the crowded
way,
My burdened brothers - mine and thine -
May then through me thy Spirit shine.

To cheer them on their onward way, 'till evening ends
the varied day;
To kindle so a growing light,
Where else might be but gloom and night.

He wants to care enough to help. Listen to the third verse,

"Grant, too, that they my need may know, as side
by side we onward go,

An equal need of kindly thought and love like
that which Thou hast taught".

That's mutuality.

There's an amazing quality about a local congregation - the many ways in which we minister to one another. Orien Johnson has written a book entitled Recovery of Ministry. He is a layman who is a minister and in his book he challenges congregations to launch an exciting and venturesome Christian experiment. Undertake a task which has been neglected for a period of time, he says. He wants to help people find the secret which would help transform discouraged, frustrated and insecure church-goers into joyous, radiant, and growing people of faith and work. His hypothesis is simple: any group of Christian people who will bind themselves together in bonds of real friendship and concern for one another will sooner or later experience the sense of worth which comes with the practice of ministry. Everyone becomes a minister. It is a mutual ministry. ~~This is the direction we are moving in this Church and it a good direction, the right direction.~~

FROM WHENCE IT COMES

From whence does this mutuality, this mutual encouragement come? Paul says we are mutually encouraged by each other's faith. Each other's faith.

Do you know my faith - my struggles, my doubts, my convictions? Am I acquainted with yours? Are we aware of each other's faith? Some people keep their faith the most well-guarded secret in the world. They leave a lot to the imagination. We don't know how they pray. We don't know what they believe. We don't know what makes them sing, or for what they are thankful. But we're seeing more and more of each other's faith. As we walk through the valleys of sorrow, we share these beliefs that can lift us out of the depths. We've shared the joy of holy baptism, as we bring our precious little ones to be recognized and loved by the entire congregation. We've watched each other sing "hallelujah" and praise the Lord. We've prayed with each other hundreds of times, maybe thousands of times the Lord's Prayer. We've confessed our sins in public.

The Apostle Paul knew what he was talking about. He was a person of towering faith. And he only got to where he was because of the faith that other people had shared with his. Said he, "We are mutually encouraged by each other's faith - yours and mine". That's what it can do, when we care enough to help...to share faith through words and deeds.

We return to the world "out there" tomorrow morning - the marketplace of competition and cynicism, the everyday chores of work and home and school, but they look different after we've shared our faith together "in here" today. Somehow compassion, equality and justice and sanity - in Africa, in Asia, in America - even in New York City - seem more possible because we've shared our faith today.

PRAYER

And now, O God, as we depart from this place of worship, help us to carry into the everydayness of our lives our faith that we might bring light and love into lives where fear and uncertainty now exist. Let our faith be expressed through words and deeds in the spirit of Jesus. Amen

ANTHEM: "Benedicite gentes"
(O Praise God, All Ye Peoples)

"O praise God, all ye peoples, praise the Lord, all ye nations, and sing unto Him with a voice of gladness: for it is He that holdeth all my soul in life, and 'tis He who will not suffer my feet to slip: blessed be the Lord, our God, blessed be the Lord, our God, for He hath not cast out my humble prayer unto Him, and He hath not tak'n away, and He hath not tak'n away mercy from me, from me".

ORGAN POSTLUDE

The organ postlude - a final offering of our praise to God - comes after the Benediction. If time permits, we invite you to remain to share in the beauty of it. If not, a quiet departure will be appreciated by those who do remain.

SAVE THIS DATE

The choir is preparing another special music program for our enjoyment. On Monday evening, May 24th, our choir will present Durufle's Requiem. Circle the evening on your calendar and plan to come. Share word of this program with your friends. Invite them to come with you. The time: 7:30 pm.

A SPECIAL OFFERING

On Mother's Day, we receive a special offering for the support of our New York Conference Homes for older persons. An offering envelope for your gift is found in the pew.

TODAY'S SECOND HYMN

Today's second hymn, "The Lord's My Shepherd" is being sung to a tune other than the one in the hymnal. Called "Crimond", it's a well-known, singable Scots melody - one that the minister came to love as a student in Edinburgh, Scotland.

A SUNDAY BRUNCH

Members of the Adult Fellowship are invited to have brunch together today in the apartment home of Sara Filep, 1060 Fifth Avenue, Apartment 7 A. Those attending will meet at the end of the coffee hour.

MEETINGS THIS WEEK

The Council on Ministries will meet Tuesday evening, May 11th, at 7:30 pm in the Community Room. The Education Committee will meet Wednesday evening at 7:30 pm, also in the Community Room.

Rev. Bob Hammon

PARK AVENUE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

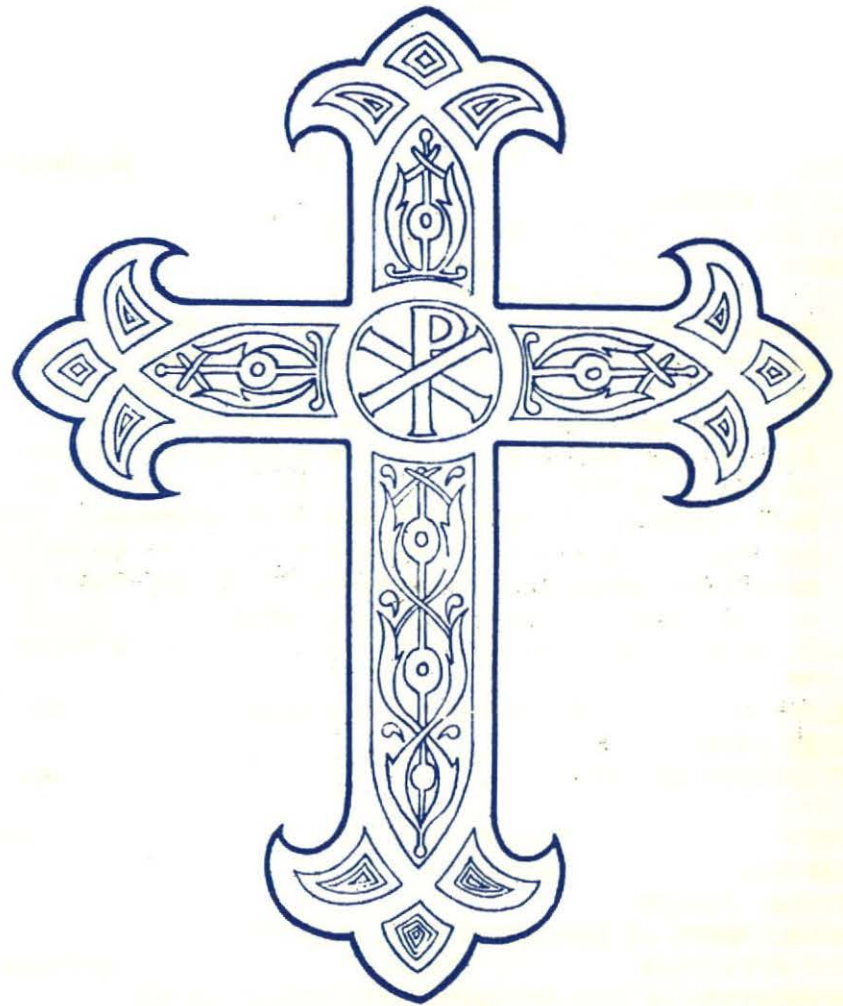
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PARK AVENUE
UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

May 9, 1976

ORDER OF WORSHIP

11 A. M.

ORGAN "Prelude in G" Mendelssohn

CALL TO WORSHIP

HYMN NO. 35 "For the Beauty of the Earth"

PRAYER OF CONFESSION (seated)

Most merciful Father, we have done little to forward thy kingdom in this world, to foster the brotherhood of man, and to establish love as the law of life. We have allowed self to blind us, pains to embitter us. Pardon our shortcomings; forgive our neglect; give us a pure heart intent on pleasing Thee. Help us in all our seeking to seek first thy kingdom and thy righteousness.

And make us to come, as came Thy Son, not to be ministered unto, but to minister. We ask this in the spirit of Jesus Christ. Amen

SILENT MEDITATION - WORDS OF ASSURANCE - LORD'S PRAYER

PSALTER "The Glory of the Lord" No. 599

GLORIA PATRI

AFFIRMATION OF FAITH No. 740

ANTHEM "Benedicite gentes" Lasso

SCRIPTURE Romans 1: 8 - 17

PASTORAL PRAYER

ANNOUNCEMENTS OF CONGREGATIONAL CONCERN

ORGAN OFFERTORY "Largo" Mendelssohn

PRESENTATION OF THE OFFERING WITH THE DOXOLOGY

HYMN NO. 68 "The Lord's My Shepherd"

SERMON "Caring Enough To Help" Mr. Clarke

HYMN NO. 498 "At Thy Feet, Our God and Father"

BENEDICTION

ORGAN "Fugue in G" Mendelssohn

*** Interval for Ushering

LAY READER

We welcome Mr. Glenn Weeks as our Lay Reader today. A native of San Francisco, Glenn has been in New York for three years handling marketing for University Computing Corporation - the scientific and engineering division. He joined the Church a year ago and serves on the Membership Committee and Adult Fellowship.

AN INVITATION

Coffee and tea will be served in the Community Room following the service. Members and friends are invited to share in these moments of fellowship made possible for us today by Mrs. Carey, Mrs. Davis, Dr. Garcia, Mrs. Goldson, Mrs. Maltby and Mrs. Raeburn.

ALTAR FLOWERS

The flowers on the altar are given by Miss Ruth Stadler in loving memory of her parents and sister.

USHERS

The ushers today are Mr. Barclay, Mr. Bevan, Mr. Brown, Mr. Heckart, Miss Langley, Mr. Pew and Mr. Smith.

CHURCH SCHOOL

Sessions of Church School for children are offered every Sunday morning from eleven to twelve. Classes meet on the third and fourth floor. Nursery care for infants and toddlers is provided on the third floor.

AN ADULT CLASS

An adult class meets every Sunday morning from nine-thirty to ten-thirty in the third floor Fellowship Hall. Luke's Gospel is being studied. Coffee is available and new members are always welcome.