

CATCHING THE SPIRIT OF THE MASTER

INTRODUCTION

The meditation this morning begins with this observation that there is in most human beings a strong impulse to copy the very best things that they know. Master pieces have a way of casting a spell over people. Remember Beethoven under the spell of Mozart; young Keats under the spell of the Fairy Queene; Henry Adams under the spell of Chartres. The spell bound person is more than likely tempted to copy of the work that he admires so extravagantly. Beethoven, for instance, copied Mozart and John Keats copied Spenser. In so doing, they lost neither their independence or their integrity. They were practicing the art of imitation. Few people, however, are content to remain imitators. As they mature, they catch the spirit of the master and recreate it in some new form of their own. So Beethoven caught the spirit of Mozart and recreated it in symphonies and string quartets of his own never before dreamed of. And so Keats caught the beauty of the Fairy Queene and recreated it in new forms of his own - in the Ode to a Grecian Urn, and in the Ode to a Nightingale.

DEVELOPMENT

In something of the same fashion, there have been people who have had an irresistible desire to imitate Jesus of Nazareth. Limited as their own human proportions are, high above them as he is in holiness, they instinctively reach out to Him with their powers of imitation. Quite literally he casts a spell upon them. His words have a strange music which they find difficult to forget. His movement has a grace that they cannot cease to admire. His spirit has a comprehensions and a breadth that they cannot escape. No matter how often they may fail him, his spell never quite loses its power over them.

We need not be surprised to find ourselves consciously, deliberately and clumsily, to be sure, trying to copy Jesus. Indeed we might be surprised that we do not copy him more continually. He prays, so we pray. He cared for the common man, so we try to care for the common man. He was calm and confident in a storm, so we try to be calm and confident in a storm. He made a foreigner the model man of good will, so we let down the barriers to foreigners and men of other faces. He forgave his enemies, we try to follow him more and more in that forgiveness. We're never proud because we always fall that short but neither are we discouraged because the more sincerely we copy the more our habits of thought and action are controlled by him. Like all imitators there are times when we can get only his mannerisms, but there are other times when it seems perhaps only for the moment, Christ was living within us.

TO COPY IS NOT ENOUGH

To simply copy is not quite enough. It doesn't allow the creative spirit of a person enough room. It doesn't provide for the time when the circumstances are so different that no exact copying is possible. Jesus for instance did not work in a coal mine, but Vincent Van-Gogh did. VanGogh could not copy Jesus, but he could catch his spirit and recreate it in the hopeless and begrimed lives of the miners. Jesus never lived in a slum, but Kagawa did. Kagawa could not copy Jesus line for line; he could only catch the spirit

of His love and recreate it in terms of tenement houses and families of faith. Jesus never lived in a jungle but Albert Schweitzer does. He cannot copy Jesus line for line, but he can catch his spirit and recreate it in remedies for tropical diseases. Jesus never faced a German firing squad. He was never a nurse. He never sheltered escaping soldiers, but Edith Cavell was and did. She couldn't copy Jesus for the situation was unlike any that he ever knew. But she caught something of His spirit and died in such a way as to move the whole world and by moving it, took away some of its sin.

THE CLIMAX Now to bring this meditation to a sharp edge and at the same time to make it as intensely personal and meaningful for you as possible, let me say this. Jesus, as you know, lived in a world that was somewhat different from our own contemporary society. For instance, he never had to contend with the different personalities involved in office routine. He knew nothing of the cut-throat competitive ways of the business world. He never had to deal with trade unions; he never dreamed of global war nor ever contemplated the complexities of an international peace. He never had to deal with the responsibilities of raising a child. He didn't know of the great temptations that we often encounter. We cannot copy him as we move through these deep waters. All we can do is to catch his spirit of love and recreate it in the new forms that our age and our own personal situations demand. It was a love so strong that it made men good. It's my conviction that that spirit of love is reproduceable. First self-consciously, deliberately by imitators, and then spontaneously and creatively and to the degree that it is reproduced in us, to that same degree are we really Christians.

LET US PRAY

Our Heavenly Father, as we come to thy table this morning, help each one of us to look deep within our own lives and to ask ourselves whether we are doing all that we can do to reproduce and recreate the spirit of thy son in our world....whether we are doing all that we can do to recreate that spirit in our homes, in our offices, in our daily walks of life.

Where there is strife and tension, help us
to bring peace.
Where there is doubt, help us to bring hope.
Where there is hatred, help us to bring love.
Where there is disappointment, help us to bring
reassurance.

Help us to truly catch the feel of His spirit, the spirit of Him who came and dwelt among us, who came that we might have greater life. We ask this in his name. Amen.