

"JESUS - THE LIFE BRINGER"

TEXT: "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly". (John 10:10.)

We would see Jesus! For the past two Sundays, we have been watching Jesus, first, as he called the disciples to come and follow him, and then, last Sunday, we saw Jesus as he went about healing the sick. ~~I have been attempting to relate these events in the life of our Lord, to our own measure of Christian discipleship.~~ This morning we would see Jesus as the great teacher, bringing to us a new way of life.

Mahatma Gandhi said, a few years before he died:

"For many years I have regarded Jesus of Nazareth as one among the mighty teachers that the world has had."

This testimony of a Hindu serves to remind us of the universal regard for Jesus as a great teacher. But for many people in our world, Jesus is not just one among the great teachers. He is the greatest of all teachers!

Jesus took the most profound truths of life and made them come alive with a clear and compelling appeal. His interpretation of religion and of life brings authority to the heart as well as understanding to the mind.

A 19th century German philosopher defined religion in these terms: RELIGION IS MAN'S FEELING OF ABSOLUTE DEPENDENCE UPON GOD. Jesus said the same thing when he prayed: "Father into Thy hands I commend my spirit."

Eustace Hayden defined religion in these words: RELIGION IS THE COOPERATIVE QUEST FOR A COMPLETELY SATISFYING LIFE. Jesus said the same thing when taught: "Love thy neighbor as thyself."

William Hocking of Harvard defined religion as: THE HABITUAL REFERENCE OF LIFE TO DIVINE POWERS. Jesus said: Thou shalt love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind."

In other words, Jesus rescues religion from dull, intellectual abstractions and he makes it come alive for us....

Jesus didn't argue about the existence of God. He prayed to God. Jesus didn't argue about the worth of personality. He loved and served all people. Jesus didn't stop to teach humility as an abstraction. He washed the feet of his disciples. What a great teacher he must have been.

Unlike the scholars and philosophers, he didn't have a well ordered system of thought. His CLASSROOM was the out-of-doors - the green hills of Galilee, the crowded city streets. His PUPILS were all those who would stop to listen to him - the women of the street, the fishermen, the soldiers. His TEXTBOOKS were the ordinary things of life - coins, sheep, flowers, birds. He TAUGHT with stories, conversations, and with his own life. He spent his life teaching. And we would do well to spend our lives sitting at his feet and learning from him.

THE LOVE THAT FORGIVES AND
THE LOVE THAT SERVES IS THE
ONLY SUCCESSFUL BASIS OF
HUMAN RELATIONS.

Another idea that Jesus taught is
that the love that forgives and
the love that serves is the only
successful basis of human relations.

Here again is a new idea. The older morality in Jewish teaching was no more than a system of checks to curb bad behavior. Such teachings as "An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth" reflect this older morality of the Old Testament. Jesus brought new meaning into this whole area of human relations. He gave goodness a positive note. Goodness is directed by an outreaching love for all people - friend and enemy alike. The trouble with many people today is that they have never gone from the Old Testament teaching of "An eye for an eye" to the more progressive teaching of Jesus that "Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them". We all know of people, who if someone hurts them, or bruises them or perhaps makes them feel a little inferior, they immediately want to get back at the person and even up the score. Or if they can't even the score, they take it out on someone else. It was this poisonous attitude that Jesus wanted to tear out of the minds of men, and replace with the more positive attitude of a love that knows how to forgive and serve. It was a new idea, and can't you imagine how the people must have just stared at him. They must have thought he was foolish and naive. But when they saw he was in dead earnest, I would imagine they didn't like it. Because they found it just as difficult to practice as we do today.

This active love requires forgiveness, said Jesus. During the First World War, an Armenian nurse saw her brother brutally murdered by a young Turkish soldier. A short while afterwards, this same girl was forced by the Turkish government to care for the wounded in a hospital. A rather strange incident took place....strange, I say, because one just doesn't find this type of thing happening every day. The soldier who had killed the girl's brother was brought in one day - wounded, unconscious and dying. Unless given special care, he would within a day or two. It was within the power of this girl to let him die, and the desire for revenge was quite strong. But a stronger desire took hold of this girl. She felt it was her duty to care for him. Gradually the soldier recovered, and one day he recognized the girl as the sister of the man whom he had killed. He was puzzled why this girl had helped him to live. She told him she was a Christian, and that she had been taught by Jesus to love her enemies. And he said to her: **IF YOUR JESUS CAN MAKE YOU ACT LIKE THAT, THEN HE IS STRONGER THAN MY MOHAMMED. YOUR JESUS WILL BE MY JESUS!** A rather dramatic example of forgiveness. We do not always have the opportunity to forgive in such a dramatic fashion, but nevertheless each day brings with it opportunities for us to practice this spirit of forgiveness.

This active love requires forgiveness. It also requires service. Several years ago I had the opportunity to visit Palestine. In this land where Jesus lived there are two lakes each of which is formed by the widening of the Jordan River. One is the Sea of Galilee. It is beautiful. Flower blossom on its shores. Vineyards flourish on its hillsides. Fish swim in its sparkling waters. The lake is always clean and wholesome. It gets its water only to give it away and let it flow onward through the country to the south. The other lake is the Dead Sea. The water is salty. No fish can survive in it. The land around it is dusty, dry and barren. No flowers, no trees are to be seen. The Dead Sea has no outlet, but keeps all the water to itself. And for this reason - it is dead and stagnant. These two lakes in the land where Jesus taught help to illustrate his teaching that **ACTIVE LOVE.....in the form of**

unselfish, outgoing service is the door to a rich and abundant life. It is the golden key that unlocks the door. It is the only successful basis of human relations.

EVERY INDIVIDUAL IS OF PRECIOUS VALUE IN THE SIGHT OF GOD, AND AS WE ACKNOWLEDGE THIS TEACHING, LIFE BECOMES VICTORIOUS FOR US.

Jesus also taught that every individual is of precious value and worth. As we grow in our realization of this truth, life becomes victorious for us.

Once again, we see an advance over the Hebrew teaching of the time. In Jewish thought, it was the nation that was the special concern of God. Even when the Old Testament prophets gave attention to the individual, it was still the Israelites they were interested in.

Jesus believed in people. He believed that every person was of precious value. For him this meant Greeks, and Romans, as well as Jews. For him it meant those who were opposed to him...yes even those who crucified him. ~~He believed that every person has his own personal relationship with God. That human beings have status as individuals, and not as members of a nation or a race.~~ This was a new idea that Jesus taught. There was the time that the disciples tried to push away some of the poor, nameless, individuals that gathered around Jesus, so that Jesus might have contact with the more influential people of the town: He told his disciples:

"It is not the will of my Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish."

And so for the first time in history, the poor, downtrodden, people of the masses, were regarded as individuals and persons! We must admit that this teaching of Jesus is basic to all our progress in democracy, in education, in the rights of individuals, in institutions and programs of mercy. It is an idea that is fundamentally opposed to the teachings of communism and the totalitarian state.

Because of this sacredness of personality, Jesus urged men to live life to its fullest measure. And as we grow in our realization of this truth, life does become victorious and meaningful.

"I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly"

Jesus loved life. It was not dull or empty for him. He wants us to enjoy life too and to get the most out of it. He taught us how we may do it. Live as children of God, and life will be rich and victorious. His way leads to greatness....

A story is told about a small boy who was taken by his father to visit a great cathedral. As they walked down the central aisle, the little boy pointed to the cross and said: "Daddy - what's that big plus sign stand for?" I don't know how he answered that question, but the boy's question is significant. For the cross is God's plus sign. If we think of the Christian way of life as something that subtracts from life, then we haven't penetrated to the real meaning of the teachings of Jesus. The way of Jesus brings so many new and enriching elements to life. It adds to life. It doesn't subtract from life.

These then are just three ^{LESSONS} ideas that the greatest teacher of all times would have us learn:

FIRST: He brought God closer to men, and showed us how we may trust in him at all times.

SECOND: He taught us that active love - the love that expresses itself in forgiveness, and in service, is the only successful basis of human relations.

THIRD; He would have us learn that all men are of precious value in the sight of God.

As we grow in our realization of these great truths, life will become rich and abundant for us.

We would see Jesus on the mountain teaching.
With all the listening people gathered round.
While birds and flowers and sky above are preaching
The blessedness which simple trust has found.

LET US PRAY:

Our Heavenly Father, we are beginning to see that the rich, wealthy and abundant life does not come by heaping up material goods, but rather by storing away spiritual treasures. Help us to grow in our understanding of the teachings of Thy Son. And now as we go back into the thick of life, may a quiet heart and mind attend us....to make straight out path, to open all doors ahead of us....and to smooth the way in every human relationship. In Thy name we pray. Amen

GOD IS A LOVING, HEAVENLY FATHER,
WHO IS JUST AND GOOD. WHO IS ALWAYS
NEAR AND WHO CAN ALWAYS BE TRUSTED.

Jesus taught that God is a
loving, Heavenly Father, who
is just and good....who is
always near, and who can

always be trusted. This was a new insight into the nature of God. The Old Testament prophets had taught that God was a mighty creator, a king far off and remote from life. A God to be feared. But Jesus revealed to us another side of God's nature. That God loved people and loved everyday things. This idea was refreshing to the people of his time. To them God had been far away, and had to be appeased by careful and routine attention to religious laws and duties. Jesus helped them to see the closeness of God.

This reminds me of a story about a small boy who was taken on a camping trip by his father. They hired a guide, left the beaten trails and spent a week in the heart of the woods. The boy was greatly impressed with the ability of the guide to see all sorts of things invisible to the ordinary eye. One day, after the guide had been pointing out some of the hidden secrets of nature, the lad asked the guide, "MASTER - CAN YOU SEE GOD?" And the old man replied, "MY BOY....IT'S GETTING SO THAT I CAN HARDLY SEE ANYTHING ELSE WHEN I'M OUT IN THE WOODS."

In a sense, that was the experience of Jesus. He saw evidences of God at work everywhere. God was not far off and remote, but near at hand... The flowers of the field reminded him of God's love. The birds of the air spoke to him of God's personal interest in every creature. God is like a shepherd who cares for his sheep. One wanders away, and the shepherd goes in search of it. That's what God is like, said Jesus. Or God may be likened to the woman who loses one coin and she sweeps the house in search of it, and when she finds the lost coin she rejoices. Even the hairs of our head are numbered by God. I don't think we should take these statements literally. Jesus often made exaggerated statements to kindle the imagination. We should look to the deeper truth that he is trying to teach us, namely that the love of God for men knows no limit.

...IF WE BELIEVE THIS TO BE TRUE...

If all of this is true, and ~~I don't think we would have come here today if it wasn't~~, then why should we worry and be fearful about so many details of living - food, shelter, clothing, and health. God is a God to be trusted. Worry is not necessary. Worry comes from unbelief. It comes from not trusting God. Jesus would have us free ourselves from all the anxieties of life by LINKING OUR LIVES TO GOD.

Many years ago a bridge was to be built over the East River, not far from where it flows into the ocean. The first step in the project was to remove an old hulk, or barge that was stuck in the mud at the bottom of the river. Divers went down and fastened chains about the barge at the bottom of the river and then tugs tried to pull it away. But this didn't work. They couldn't budge it. It presented quite a problem. Then one engineer hit up another plan for removing it. He fastened the chains to some barges on the surface when the tide was low. Soon the ocean came flowing in in all of its great power. And as the tide came in, the barges on the surface were lifted up, and as a result the old hulk at the bottom of the river also was lifted up, and towed away. Success came easily and quickly when universal power was harnessed to the task.

Maybe some of us need to harness our lives to universal power. When the spirit of God comes into a person's life, it brings peace and stability. We need to link our lives to God. Jesus tells us of the closeness and nearness of God....that we can trust him. Only as we learn this first lesson of a complete trust in God do we become candidates for the abundant life.