

THE DISTINCTIVE LIFE

Preached: August 18, 1957
Park Avenue Methodist
Text: Matthew 5: 47.

"THE DISTINCTIVE LIFE"

TEXT: "If ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others?"
Matthew 5: 47

At one end of the City Post Office Building in Washington, D. C. there are the following words:

Messenger of Sympathy and Love
Servant of Parted Friends
Consoler of the Lonely
Bond of the Scattered Family
Enlarger of the Common Life

And at the corresponding spot on the other end of the same building there are these words:

Carrier of News and Knowledge
Instrument of Trade and Industry
Promoter of Mutual Acquaintance
Of peace and goodwill
Among Men and Nations

I'm sure that we all agree that these are rather unusual inscriptions to be found on a Post Office Building. They glorify the everyday matter of mailing a letter. They put a halo around such hardworking people as postmen. In fact, they make of the postage stamp a thing of beauty and power. Far more important however, these inscriptions point up the importance of good human relations that disregard all boundaries and deal with all men alike.

Jesus, too, was a specialist in human relations. He, too, was interested in the communications that took place among people. He was very concerned with bringing people together, and breaking down some of old barriers that kept them apart. His method was the way of love. For him, love is the great "Enlarger of the common life". Love is the "Consoler of the Lonely", and the "Bond of the Scattered family". But above all, love is the great divine "Promoter of Mutual Acquaintance - or Peace and Goodwill Among Men and Nations".

This kind of love, said our Lord in the Sermon on the Mount, makes for a distinctive kind of human relations. It not only ties friends together, but it extends across all boundaries. It reaches out to the unloved and the unlovely. It includes the hated and the despised. This was a new idea that Jesus was emphasizing. To be sure, there had always been lots of love between friends and family, but here Jesus was calling for love between enemies. He's really laying it on the line for us. There can be no misinterpretation of his words at this point. Our attitudes and our sympathies are to be broad and generous. Snobbishness and exclusiveness have no part in mature Christian thinking. The Christian is marked by a loving consideration for all those beyond his own crowd.

(REVIEW THE SCRIPTURE)

In other words, the distinctive life is a life that loves and cares regardless.....

In this passage, Jesus is telling us of the marks of the distinctive life.....

**STRANGE POWER TO WIN FRIENDS
AND INFLUENCE PEOPLE WHO ARE
HOSTILE AND ANTAGONISTIC**

The distinctive life is marked by a strange power to win friends and influence people who are hostile and antagonistic.

Jesse Owens, the great negro athlete, was chosen a few years ago by the sports writers of this country as the outstanding negro athlete of the first half of the 20th Century. There choice was a good one because Jesse Owens is not only a fine athlete, but also a distinctive type of person.

After his days of competition were over, Jesse Owens decided to go into Boys' Club work. His idea was to help underprivileged negro boys take advantage of some of the great opportunities offered by this country. His new career took him to Chicago, to the south side of the city where he was to lead a large Boys' Club. But this is only part of the story...

Coming into Chicago, Jesse Owens purchased a house in a white residential section. The house had six small apartments, and when one of the apartments became vacant, the Owens family moved in to it. They were the only white family in that area, and words of objection were voiced by many of the white people. They didn't care for a negro family living in the neighborhood. They claimed that property values would go down. They showed their great displeasure in many ways by making it as uncomfortable as possible for the Owens family. On one occasion a white neighbor was outraged when he discovered that the little Owens girl who had been going to Sunday school with his daughter was a Negro. The man ordered the little girl off his porch, and sent her home crying.

But Jesse Owens proved in all of this to be a distinctive type of Christian. Instead of becoming embittered by the situation, he decided to win over this hateful neighbors by loving them. He made friends with the children, and played games with the boys. He got to know the father of the little girl who had once ordered his little girl to get off his porch. The two little girls became good friends and grew up together. Jesse Owens improved his property, and made a beauty spot of his back yard. He painted his building, and put on storm windows. Soon it was the most attractive place in the area, and the white owners had to get busy and fix up their places to keep up with his home. Because of this, whenever property was sold, it was sold at a profit. Real estate values increased, and a spirit of good will took hold of that neighborhood because a distinctive life had led the way.

It always seems to work out that way. Patient understanding, sympathetic concern, and a friendly spirit of love always help to tear down the barriers that separate people. It's a love that believes in walking the second mile.....in turning the other cheek.... We have here in this kind of love a weapon of great power in solving tensions and problems.

"If ye salute your brethren only,
what do ye more than others...?"

In the first place then, the distinctive life is marked by a strange power to win friends and influence people who are hostile and antagonistic.

A WILLINGNESS TO COOPERATE FOR THE
COMMON GOOD WITH THOSE OF CONFLICTING
BACKGROUNDS AND INTERESTS.

The distinctive life is
marked by a willingness to
cooperate for the common
good with those of

conflicting backgrounds and interests.

A group of bricklayers watched while one of their own number laid the last of 200,000 buff bricks used in refacing the main offices of the Kraft Foods Company in Chicago. William Olson, the construction engineer of the company, asked for the brick. He scraped off the mortar and asked every bricklayer to sign his name on the brick. And then, on the scaffolding high above the street, twenty members of Local 201, A. F. of L. Bricklayers Union, scraped their names on it. These were some of the names that were recorded: William Keele, English; John Harris, Scots; Michale Heneghan, Irish; Tim Larsen, Swedish; Alfred Rheinhardt, German; John Mazersyk, Polish; Emil Kroschel, Finnish; Tony Lomanto, Italian; Tony Tatosian, Armenian; and Jack Toussaint, French.

As the men were signing the brick, Olson pulled out a piece of paper and wrote down the following words:

"Many men from many homelands. Men with different backgrounds, different religions, and different customs have all contributed their skill toward a common goal. But as the diplomats of the world haggle over conference tables, some swear the peoples of the different nations never can solve their mutual problems. Here....all these men worked, planned and cooperated until they built something lasting.....an expression of their pride in this America. Perhaps in this last brick there will always be a warm flame kindled by the men who love America....."

The brick and the paper are now in the executive office of the company. In a sense they're symbols of the possibilities of the distinctive life for men....for a nation....and for the entire world.

"If ye value your brethren only, what do ye more than others....."

The causes of human brotherhood will not be won in the ivory towers. But rather they will come to pass on the rough scaffolding of life's common ways. The victory will be led by people who are leading distinctive Christian lives. Lives that believe in cooperation rather than conflict.

And here in New York City, the cross roads of the world, we have a unique opportunity to put this teaching of Jesus into practice....in apartment house living...in the schools....and in the churches. It's not always easy, but whoever said that following Jesus was an easy matter. I'm convinced that Christianity offers the answer, but I'm also convinced that somewhere along the line, some so called Christians are going to have to start living Christianity.

A DESIRE TO MAKE A PERSONAL CONTRIBUTION TO THE BETTERMENT OF SOCIETY WITHOUT EXPECTATION OF GAIN OR RETURN.

The distinctive life is marked by a desire to make a personal contribution to the betterment of society without expectation of gain or return. This is

the third mark of the distinctive life.

Most of our efforts to get along with others are tinged with motives of selfishness. He sometimes use people in order to get ahead. Most of the organized programs of human relations or public relations have some thought of personal return or gain in mind. It shouldn't be this way. But the distinctive kind of human relations that our Lord was speaking about has a different quality. It's the natural outgrowth of a loving interest and concern in people. In spite of our harsh exteriors, we have soft hearts. We want to help. We want to be of use to someone. And Jesus is urging us to follow this impulse. But in all of this we are to do more than others. We are to give something of ourselves without hope of return.

Any life can have this distinctive quality. In order to have it one must really care. The Apostle Paul, centuries ago, in writing to the people of Corinth, seemed to know what Jesus was talking about. His great chapter on love is familiar to many of us. Remember it closes with these words:

"Now abideth faith, hope and love, but the greatest of these is love....."

This chapter has been phrased for us by Nellie Morton in an article entitled, "Brotherhood Our Unfinished Task". It goes this way -

"Thought we speak on brotherhood as well as
the best minister or politician,
And have not love, we are like blown up paper
bags....
Though we can teach a Sunday School lesson on
"Love Thy Neighbor"
Though we can understand the mysteries of the world,
Though we have enough faith to stop war...
Though we have enough knowledge to answer all the
questions...
And have not love, we are nothing.
And though we give money to our church for home missions,
And though we talk about living together, and fair
wages, and lack of discrimination,
If we have not love enough in our hearts to do something,
then the talking and the giving are nothing.

Love never dies; talking will someday cease.
Giving will someday stop; protesting will someday fail;
But when one loves enough to really care, and does
something to bring friendliness and understanding
between people, nothing can ever take that away.

For love never dies.....

Let Us Pray: Our Father, we are beginning to realize that the things that are wrong with our world are the sum total of all the things that are wrong with us as individuals. Make us want to do right..ability to