

"THE MAN FOR OTHERS"

INTRODUCTION

Some time ago I got into a taxi here in the city and had hardly seated myself and indicated my destination when the driver turned around and said, "Now friend...you can talk to me about anything, - anything, that is, but your troubles". I was somewhat taken back by this because I'm not in the habit of unburdening myself to cab drivers. I soon learned, however, from the driver that the previous occupant of the cab had unburdened himself of a tale of woe. And apparently it had been a long and depressing tale of woe at that. The driver had had enough. He lost no time in telling me that if I had problems, I was to keep them to myself.

His attitude I can understand, and it made me think of New York City and what it can do to all of us and why...the pace of life, the noise, the crowds, the competition, the mechanization, the de-humanization. A great city can be impersonal and the people in that city can soon take on its impersonal character of not caring. I'm reminded of that unforgettable line in Thornton Wilder's Our Town, the line where Emily cries, "Oh Mama, just look at me one minute as though you really saw me".

A line in Matthew's gospel comes to mind, "On entering the house of Peter, Jesus noticed his mother-in-law was down with fever". The word that we need to emphasize is the word -noticed. Jesus noticed. Living and working in New York we are often slow to notice. We lose sensitive awareness of people as persons. We become engrossed and pre-occupied. We grow a hard shell about ourselves to protect ourselves. As it has been put, we may be lovers of humanity with a big "H", but fail to love the particular specimens of humanity with a little "h" with whom we rub shoulders every day. When some one comes to us in need we are inclined to throw up our hands and say, we all have our troubles. Don't tell me about yours. I don't want to hear about them.

DEVELOPMENT

In his younger years George Clemenceau, known during the First World War as "The Tiger" paid a visit to England. When he returned to his native France he remarked that he had met one great man in England. It turned out that the great man he referred to was Samuel Barnett, a clergyman, Warden of Toynbee Hall, the first settlement house in the East End of London. After Barnett's death, his wife wrote his biography. She told how all kinds of persons use to go down to the East End of London from the West End with large blue prints for the redemption of the slum areas, but they never accomplished much. She said that her husband had for his conviction that the only permanent good ever done in East London was done by those who were "willing to take time and trouble with individuals", and that this was the ruling conviction of his life.

"Taking time and trouble with individuals" - the ruling conviction of his life. What about your life. Taking time and trouble with individuals is a costly business. It calls for patience, imagination, self-identification, fellow-feeling. ~~It is a large part of the vocation of the Christian Church.~~ Do you remember what the Good Samaritan said to the innkeeper when he brought to him a man in sore trouble. Take care of him. This is one of Christ's clearest words to ^His church. The Church is never more the church of Christ than when it exhibits and expresses in practical ways its care for others. The church is the place - and it's up to us to make it the place and it is something all of us can do - it is the place where the person and the personal values are paramount.

Harry Emerson Fosdick use to say this to the members of his staff and also to the members of his congregation at the Riverside Church:

"A really Christian Church must be 'personality centered'. It's criterion of value the saving experiences which come to-

individuals. Keep your eyes on individuals. Nothing in the long run matters in this church save what happens to them".

"Keep your eyes on individuals". Good advice, but it's tough to do in this city. We find that people can get lost so easily in this city. People move; telephone numbers change. Before you know it, you've lost them. Life in a modern city can be a very lonely thing, but wherever a fellowship of the concerned exists, which is what a Christian Church is, no one need ever be lonely. And this is something that all of us in the church ought to work at, something that ought not to be left to just a small number. Do you, for instance, ever take the time or the trouble to follow up on some other church member, some one who sits near you on a Sunday morning, who may be absent from the church for a Sunday or two. Very few of you bother to do this.

EXAMPLE OF CHRIST Taking time and trouble with individuals is a large part of the vocation of the church. Christ made it His vocation. In a sense, He made it His sole vocation. Nothing was more characteristic of His life than the time and the trouble He took with individuals - a handful of disciples, a woman by the well, a blind man begging by the wayside, a learned doctor of the law coming to Him late at night. Jesus called himself the "son of man". Some of us are so familiar with that title that when we hear it or read it we may not grasp the full meaning. It means that He shared from the cradle to the grave our human condition. He made common cause with our humanity. He did not come to be served, but to serve. He eliminated considerations of self and of self-interest. He put himself at the complete disposal of people. His time, His strength, His powers were all devoted to the welfare of others.

Bishop Robinson, writing about Him in his little book that has had such a profound influence these past two years on Christian thought, "Honest To God" speaks of Him as "The Man for Others". It's a title that compresses into four words what we see in Christ throughout the Gospels - concern for individuals, time spent on them, compassion shown them, love given to them freely and fully.

PERSONAL APPLICATION All of which brings me to the point of personal application. As with Christ, so with His church. As with Christ, so with all who bear His name and call themselves "Christian". His way of life, towering in moral grandeur above our own, is the standard to which our lives are to conform.

A Christian, like His Master, is a "man for others". He ought to not allow a protective shell to grow about his heart and mind. He does not allow life to harden him, to narrow his interests, to rob him of sensitivity to human needs. He must check the impulse to say, "Talk to me about anything, but your troubles". He gives himself to people; he spends himself on people. He makes the person to whom he is talking feel that he is the one person in the world at that moment who really matters. He is the man for whom the word, "lovingkindness" might have been coined. If he is fortunate to be familiar with the words of Baron Von Hugel, perhaps he repeats them in his own heart from time to time:

"Christianity taught us to care. Caring is the greatest thing.
Caring matters most".

Taking time and trouble with individuals. I wonder.....do you recognize yourself in the person I have been describing. What kind of a person are you: for self or for others?

LET US PRAY:

O God, who hast put into our hearts the desire to help and to heal those who are in trouble, grant that we may never pass by those serious situations of need that confront us in our daily lives. Help us to pattern our lives after the life of Him who we regard as The Man for Others.

As we come to thy table this hour, here to receive the symbols that remind us of the life that was broken and given to others, help us to re-dedicate our lives completely to his way. In the spirit of Jesus, we pray. the only meaningful way of life.

Adlai Stevenson eulogized Eleanor Roosevelt in these words:

"She walked in the slums and ghettoes of the world - not on a tour of inspection nor as a condescending patron, but as one who could not feel complacent while others were hungry, and who could not find contentment while others were in distress. This was not sacrifice; this, for Mrs. Roosevelt, was the only meaningful way of life.."