

## "THE SANITY OF JESUS"

### INTRODUCTION

For a few moments here this morning, I would like to talk to you about the sanity of Jesus. One gets the impression from reading the Gospel account that once the public ministry of Jesus got under way that there were those persons who felt, not that He was sane, but rather that He had taken leave of His senses.

As His friends, including the members of His own family, listened to what He was saying and watched what He was doing, they became greatly alarmed for His safety and also for their own. There came a day when they went out to seize him, to take Him away if need be by force, for they said: "He is beside himself".

His enemies - it was not long before He had enemies - (certainly a good man in a world where evil is entrenched and people have vested interests and rights in it, make money by it, is bound to make a few enemies) - His enemies said: "He has a demon, and He is mad; why listen to him?" In their eyes, He was a ~~megalomaniac~~, a trouble maker, a disturber of the peace, a threat to the Establishment, religious, political and economic. He was a deceived deceiver - demon-possessed, insane.

### DEVELOPMENT

Of course people today do not come right out and charge Jesus with madness. It might be better if they did. Instead he is treated with formal, deferential respect and ignored. In newspapers, books, and plays that are grappling with the life and death issues of our day, He is seldom mentioned. He is not associated in any practical way with our problems and policies, whether at City Hall, Albany or Washington. What has to be said is that He is commonly regarded as a great soul, a peerless teacher, but for the most part an idealist, a dreamer, a visionary, and our hard-headed, hard-hearted world has little use for idealists and dreamers. The world calls them "starry-eyed", says their heads are up in the clouds, thinks of them as touched with madness.

The sanest people always have about them a touch of what the world calls madness. By virtue of their sanity, they see what is at fault in the lives of men and society, and because they see and see clearly, they are bound to speak up and out, to act and act energetically, in a way that makes trouble for wrong-doers, disturbs the peace of the placid, and threatens the status quo. The apostles had barely got going before the critics were complaining, "These men have turned the world upside down".

Jesus, I suppose, had about Him more than a touch of what the world calls madness. Take into account the remark that was made by somebody after World War I: "The only person who came out of it with an enhanced reputation was Jesus Christ". That bears thinking about. It reminds one of the judgment to which George Bernard Shaw kept returning:

"Jesus remains unshaken as the practical man; and we stand exposed as the fools - the blunderers - the impractical visionaries. This man has not been a failure yet; for nobody has ever been sane enough to really try his way. But he has had one quaint triumph. We have always had a curious feeling that though we crucified Christ on a stick, he somehow managed to get hold of the right end of it, and that if we were better men we might try his plan."

THE SANITY OF JESUS

The sanity of Jesus. When we speak of the sanity of Jesus, just what is it that we have in mind.

Sanity suggests wholeness, soundness. And Jesus was a whole man if ever there was one. He saw life steadily and saw it as a whole. No one ever had a clearer eye for facts or saw the world just as it was on all its sides with both idealism and realism, with interest, freedom, kindness and honor. He brought sheer, sound sense to bear on any situation, cleared man's minds of insincerity, had an instinct for what is vital, pierced through all that belongs to the circumference of life and went straight to the center. He was a voice, not an echo; a well of living water, not a cistern; one who saw things with his own eyes and helped others to see them for themselves.

JUDGMENT OF HUMAN NATURE

Consider, for one thing, the sanity characterizing His judgment of human nature. It was a comprehensive, well-balanced, factual judgment - not a Pollyanna, rose water one. He had faith in men, but He was never fooled by them. A good man is sometimes gullible and a bad man is often cynical; Jesus was neither.

He knew that human nature was capable of taking itself off into a far country and wasting its substance there with riotous living, and for a time being satisfied with riotous living, but he also knew that when it so acted it would be untrue to itself, beside itself, and He believed that sooner or later it would come to itself, long for home, make for home and God.

This too - he saw the weakness in human nature, but never, not even in what we would call the worst specimen of humanity, lost sight of the strength, the promise, the potential and He focussed on them. For him it was true that every son of Adam could become a son of God. All of his energies were concentrated on bringing out of people the best that was in them, on making men and women who were petty and small loyal to the best in themselves. In that sense He was a visionary, a dreamer, an idealist. Would we have him otherwise? If there were more people - parents, teachers, social workers, employers, politicians, judges, prison wardens - sharing His mind, animated by His spirit, the whole level of character and life among us would be lifted to a higher level.

ATTITUDE TO HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS

Consider, in the second place, the sanity characterizing the attitude of Jesus to human relationships. He was born a Jew. His people were a proudly nationalistic people and they were also - they thought it necessary to their survival - exclusive and isolationist. He, by comparison, had a wide, embracing, universalistic view of humanity. He believed in the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of man. He taught that all men are members of the one family of God and there should be no barriers of class, race, color.

People have professed and called themselves Christian, but they have been so slow to practice what they profess in this regard. Racial prejudice and the exploitation of man by his brother man have gone on from century to century. I never did have opportunity to see the Broadway version of South Pacific, but I did see the movie. And etched in my memory is that moment when the chorus sang:

"You've got to be taught to be afraid  
of people whose skin is a different shade...  
You've got to be taught before it's too late,  
Before you are six or seven or eight,  
To hate all the people your relatives hate,  
You've got to be taught barefully."

This is, of course, in part the story behind so much of the racial tension and difficulty in our own nation. It's the same story in South Africa, in Rhodesia, in Vietnam. Who is mad? Ah.....Christ. With all our vaunted progress, how far behind you we are in simple sanity. You are the way - the truth - and the life. You have the secret of a just and durable order of society. We are the fools....the blunderers.....the impractical visionaries..... Why can't we see that all men are brothers and treat one another as brothers..... Out in California, I understand, they are putting on car bumpers: "Kill a Commie for Christ" This is not Christ's way. His way transcends political and national lines, and he would remind us that in the long run everything that is combative and cruel breaks down.

The sanest convictions about God and man and life and human destiny are His. If He should be disavowed, if His voice should be drowned out, there will be a darkness where we sorely need light, and a silence where we desperately need to hear a voice.

LET US PRAY

O God, who hast revealed thyself to us in the life and the teachings of Jesus - our Lord and Master - help us to turn to him in simplicity, sincerity and truth that we may always be conscious of the highest possibilities of life as we find them in him, and let us never rest until we have come near him who is the Truth and the Way and the Life.