

Wall,
8:14-1

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Some time ago, I was out walking and I saw a truck pull up sharply and pull into the side of the road. The driver climbed out of his cabin and made for a small boy who was struggling with a tricycle at the curb. "You can't get it up, Sonny," he said, and with one movement of his arm and the pleasantest of smiles he put the machine on the sidewalk. On the way back to the truck, happening to glance in my direction, he good-humoredly shrugged his shoulders and yanked his thumb in the direction of the boy who was already on the tricycle and riding away. Though I was close to the lad I hadn't noticed him or his plight. I had been busy with my thoughts and, until I heard brakes being applied, oblivious to what was going on. My heart warmed to that truck driver. What he did was a little thing, and a simple thing, but it showed that he hadn't lost the human touch.

With the rush of life so fast and feverish we are apt to lose the human touch, to forget that, next to bread, kindness is the food all mortals hunger for. It is easy to develop an impersonal, unfeeling attitude to people. We grow so that we don't notice need or misery or injustice. Opportunities of showing little courtesies or performing simple kindnesses pass us by. We keep people at arm's length. We become so self-engrossed that we almost shrink from human contact.

What we need to cultivate is the quality of sympathetic imagination and understanding that enables us to put ourselves in the place of other people, to visualize their life, to see with their eyes, to think as they think and feel as they feel.

I heard recently of a president of an industrial concern who was reproving one of his junior executives. "Why didn't you use your imagination, man?" he demanded. The reply he received was, "Sir, I have no imagination, only technical knowledge." In all walks of life there are too many persons of whom that sort of thing is true. The human factor doesn't weigh with them as it ought. They think in figures, see every problem in terms of a mathematical equation, produce all sorts of elaborate statistics about it. They work by rule and routine, interpret regulations soullessly, carry official formality to excessive lengths, strangle humanity with red tape.

I wonder whether we appreciate how essential the human touch is to real religion. A church is a poor affair, no matter how

beautiful its sanctuary, no matter how stately its service of worship, if its members lack the quality of sympathetic insight and understanding that carries them out from pre-occupation with themselves and their own interests and needs until the pains and pleasures of others become theirs also.

Religion is a poor affair if it has to do only with the individual and God, if it is never translated into social action, if it does not make us kinder, more patient, more helpful, more generous in our relations with our fellows. On the 1st Easter Monday of his life Dr. Samuel Johnson ~~wrote~~ wrote to his friend Taylor: "In the meantime, let us be kind to one another." Kindness may not be "all the creed this old world needs," but it does need it desperately. It is the absence of simple kindness that is responsible for a great deal of our unhappiness and our stupidity. There is not as much sin in the world^{as} many of us think; there is a woeful, widespread dearth of sympathy and understanding.

Jesus had the human touch. He had an intensive feeling for people, not for humanity in the ^{mass} but for individuals.

Ellery Sedgwick offers a shrewd comment regarding Phillips Brooks.

I remember his vast, benevolent bulk filling my study like Gulliver in Lilliput. In the pulpit (his) torrential eloquence was all that tradition says, but after talking with him I remember wondering whether he did not love everybody too dearly to care especially for anybody.

Nobody can have felt about Jesus that he loved everybody too dearly to care especially for anybody. His interest in people was personal. It was his quickness in understanding, his instinctive care for their necessities that commanded their affection. Dr. Moffatt's translation of the Gospel According to Matthew, there is an arresting sentence. "On entering the house Jesus noticed that Peter's mother-in-law was down with fever." That's the human touch. He had a quick eye, an outgoing nature, an alert and sensitive sympathy. Facts did not have to be brought to his attention. He could take a situation in at a glance. He was concerned with the concerns of others. Nothing human was alien to him. He noticed the patched garments of children, the long lines of men out of work, a poor widow in the temple putting into the offertory box a contribution far beyond her means.

It is from Jesus we learn that the human touch is the hall-

mark of real religion. Think of the parable of the good Samaritan. What is religion worth, it says, if it can see need and pass it by; if it is insensitive to suffering; if it is so taken up with rank and ritual, with organizations and committees, that it has no time to turn aside for an act of mercy; if it fails to note what it does not want to think of? This is to play at religion. It is to tithe mint and anise and cummin and neglect what is vastly more important-interest in people, a feeling for them, the instinctive humanity that reaches out a helping hand to them, if it be only by the offer of a cup of cold water.

✓ According to Jesus the last judgment itself turns on whether a man has the human touch or not. On the right hand of the Judge are men and women who realize where they are with a gasp of surprise. How has it come about? The Judge tells them: "I was a hungered, and ye gave me meat." The reply mystified them. "Lord" asks one of them, "when saw we thee a hungered and fed thee?" They do not remember. Their little acts of kindness and of love had long since been forgotten, but Jesus insists that they are decisive. "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me." With the men and women on the left hand it was the other way. They could remember their good record and were ready to point to it, but they had forgotten the decisive fact about themselves - they were instinctively hard. "Lord" they complain, "when saw we thee hungered, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee?" And the Judge replies, "Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of these least, ye did it not to me."

✓ With the example of Christ so clear and his teaching so explicit it is strange that more attention has not been given to this matter. It is the human touch that counts. It is the little, unremembered acts of kindness and love that are the best portion of a good man's life. You can't be self-engrossed and be much of a Christian. I received a good many letters asking me to state categorically what I believe. Do I subscribe to this? Do I preach that? Am I liberal or conservative or neoorthodox in my theology? One correspondent recently impressed me as so label-conscious, so positive that a man's theology was the first and last and only determining thing about him, that I had an almost uncontrollable impulse not only to write him and ask whether there weren't deeper questions but to send him a questionnaire with such inquiries

as these: "Have you a quick eye, an outgoing nature, a heart tender and sympathetic? Do you care when others are hurt? Are you swift to sense their hurt and to do what you can to relieve it? Is anything human alien to you?" WE should have a quick eye, an outgoing nature, a heart tender and sympathetic. We should care when others are hurt- should be swift to sense and see their hurt and to do what we can, to relieve it. Nothing human should be alien to us. This is the central and supreme simplicity of the religion of Jesus - to get alongside of people, to visualize their situation, to be understanding and sympathetic, to want to help and serve them. Yet that it is central and supreme can be tragically overlooked.

I have read of a minister doing his work in a hard unimaginative fashion, neglecting none of his duties, sparing no pains in preparing his sermons. His visitation was ruled by a timetable which allowed only so many minutes to each household. If, through any accident, time was lost early in his round the later visits had to be curtailed in order that his full task for the day might be completed and he get home in time for dinner. One evening, entering the home of a very poor and very solitary woman, he looked at his watch and said, "I can only give you 7 minutes." "Well," was the answer, "if that is all, you needn't sit down." He was thinking more of his carefully ordered plans and his punctual meals than of the woman in her chilling loneliness or of any trouble she might be in. He left her wounded and insulted, and she never forgot. It was lack of imagination, lack of the human touch, that poisoned everything.

Let me match that incident with another. for 38 years W. H. Lax was a minister in another city. He learned that an old man was gravely ill and called on him. It was at once made plain that he was an unwelcome visitor, for as soon as the sick man caught sight of Lax's clerical collar he turned his head and refused to utter a word. While trying to sustain a conversation Lax noted the dreariness of the room, the pitifully small fire, and suspected that provisions had run low. When he left he went to a butcher shop and had two lamb chops sent to the house. He called again a few days later and though the old man was still far from talkative he was disposed to be friendly. On the way home another order was left with the butcher. By the third visit there was a pronounced change in the patient. He was congenial and even

expansive, and before taking leave of him Lax read from the scripture and prayed. A preaching engagement took him out of town for some days. When he got back he was informed that the old man had died and had left a message for him. Just at the last when he could barely speak he made a sign that he wanted to say something. "Tell Mr. Lax," he gasped, "it's all right...I'm going to God...but be sure to...tell him...that it wasn't his preaching that changed me...it was...those lamb chops." How the human touch can break down barriers of misunderstanding and estrangement!

Mark how it does so. It is full of understanding- it knows how easy it is to sin, how difficult to live nobly. That is why it never makes quick, harsh judgments, never descends to personal abuse, is never sarcastic but seeks to win without wounding. It gets to the heart of a situation as nothing else can. It has an almost superhuman instinct for what ought to be done and how to do it. It is always rendering service that others never think of rendering or fail to recognize as requiring to be rendered. It prefers action to speech, and would rather visit someone in want than make orations about brotherhood. It believes in people and gives itself to them without reserve. It knows no barrier of rank or class, or creed or color. It never patronizes. It enters a slum with as much respect as a mansion. It thinks in terms of individuals - of men, women and children - and not in terms of "hands" of statistics.

We need that spirit today. For the want of it our civilization is already in decline. In an age when space has been annihilated and the continents bridged, the world, shrunk as it now is, was never so full of strangers, nor the strangers so full of antagonisms. People seem to be without the quality of imagination and understanding, unable somehow to put themselves in the place of others, to visualize their life, to think as they think and feel as they feel. It's the human touch that is lacking.

We need it in the church. These are days when Christians have to demonstrate that belief in the love of God is more than a beautiful and sentimental idea. It cannot exist side by side with indifference to human need. It has to be translated into concern for people. It must find outward expression in action and in loving, self-denying service, otherwise, turned in and made subjective, it is a subtle

form of selfishness, an indulgence,^a soporific, what Karl Marx complained all religion is- the opiate of the people, a ticket to heavenly happiness at a reduced price.

"Sentimentalism," George Meredith once said, "is enjoyment without obligation." Look at your religion in the light of th definition. At the end it will be what you have done for othe whether you had the human touch, that will count. Jesus picture of the final judgment is breathtaking in its simple realism. It is not by our beliefs or our standing or our succe but by our service and our love that we shall be judged.

"inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these m breathren, ye have done it unto me."

