

D.B., Fla.
Sept. 22, 1963

INTRODUCTION

All week long I have been haunted by a question; namely, "If that church in Birmingham which was bombed last Sunday had been my church, and if one of those little girls had been my daughter, how would I have reacted to that experience?" Of course, as a matter of fact, that was not my church nor was one of those little girls my daughter, nor do I in truthfulness know how I might have reacted.

However, not until last night was I hit by the full force of a realization which was far more disturbing to me than this haunting question; namely, that that church was God's church and all four of those little girls were His daughters. What then has been God's reaction to this experience? How has He, our heavenly Father and theirs, been feeling all week?

Strangely enough, though I do not truthfully know about myself or what my reaction might have been, I do know what God's reaction has been - for nineteen centuries ago when His Son was crucified, God suffered -- and went on loving. Similarly this week our heavenly Father has been suffering -- and yet, all the while, He has continued to go on loving. The good news of the gospel is this: in response to men's worst, God continues to reveal his best. And the incredible fact that we must never forget is this: of God's best, His grace and love, all of us are benefactors.

It is the clear implication of this good news that I want us to think about this morning; namely, that in the face of the worst of times, I, too, must go on loving. "Only so can (I) be (a child) of (my) heavenly Father, who makes his sun rise on good and bad alike, and sends the rain on the honest and the dishonest...(I) must therefore be all goodness, just as (my) heavenly Father is all good." Matt. 5:45,48

But in such times as ours, how can men give expression to love; how can men be all good as God is all good?

*Chas Sheldon - "What would Jesus do?"
Sermon on Mt - just be reconciled (said for)*

I. First of all, permit me to point out with deep gratitude several of the ways in which our church has sought to go on loving during the almost seven years since we have known its life and witness.

- * We have played host to several Union Services (Good Friday, Thanksgiving (2), U.C.W., Youth Service for World Day of Prayer) which have been open to all Christians of our Halifax Area.
- * We have served several banquets (Florida Chain of Missions, Halifax Area Ministerial Association) attended by Christians from churches throughout our area.
- * Our basement has been used for 8-10 years by the only ~~xxx~~ Red Cross Sewing Group in the Halifax Area, a group which has welcomed the participation of Negroes for some six years.
- * Five times on Sunday mornings we have had Negro worshippers (once a guest minister) in our morning worship services.
- * Three and a half years ago our board approved a motion to the effect that any and all who come here to worship are to be welcomed regardless of race, color or creed.
- * All of these gestures have been attempts to translate our ideals into practice, and to give meaning and expression to our love.

II. SECONDLY, however, permit me to challenge each one of you, ~~in~~ in the words of Paul, to let your love abound more and more, particularly in these tense and critical days in which we live.

A. In a sermon preached here in 1961 I urged each one present to take several first steps away from prejudice toward love. Let me re-iterate those steps today and encourage you to take them if you have not already done so.

1. Use the correct names in speaking about people
2. Watch your jokes
3. Watch your generalizations
4. Know the facts about race
5. Form a personal friendship with someone who is a peer.

B. Today I would like to expand upon that fifth suggestion by raising for your consideration several second steps away from prejudice toward Christian love.

1. Dallas' experience - making this an adult experience
 2. Nashville's experience - Project Friendship
 3. Bible Study Group
 4. Small groups, Sunday School classes - exchanges, visits
- (If anyone is interested, please speak to me right away. Surely there are many of you who would rejoice to have an opportunity to sow seeds of love and understanding in our critical time.)

*5. inviting
a Negro family
to worship
with us
on Sunday.*

CONCLUSION

Don't underestimate the power of love, even the smallest act of love, to change and transform - for "God is love".

Paul's chapter on Christian love (I Cor. 13) - written for a practical purpose ("I will show you a more excellent way") and with a specific challenge ("Follow, then, the way of love" JBP) - call attention to JBP's translation: "Love knows no limit to its endurance; no end to its trust, no fading of its hope; it can outlast anything. It is, in fact, the one thing which still stands when all else has fallen."

FOLLOW, THEN, THE WAY OF LOVE!