

ON BEING FOLLOWERS OF CHRIST

Christ Church
Pledge Sunday
Feb. 22, 1948

In Acts 26 is the most interesting of the three:
"The disciples were called Christians first in Antioch."

This morning we come to the second Sunday in Lent...

The Lenten season is one which traditionally has stressed THE IDEA OF SELF-EXAMINATION

the measuring of our lives -- against the standards of ~~the Bible~~ our religion..

to the new way

In keeping with the spirit of the Lenten season, let us turn our thoughts this morning to certain ASPECTS OF THE THEMES:

BEING FOLLOWERS OF CHRIST.

AND SO FROM THIS VERY EARLY DATE --- CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP MEANT FOLLOWING A WAY OF LIFE

with Christ as leader, friend, and guide.

The word train

INTRODUCTION

The word Christian appears in the N.T. only three times.

In Acts 26, Agrippa says to Paul:

"Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian."

In I Peter, the writer says:

"....if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed."

In Acts 26 is the most interesting of the three:

"The disciples were called Christian first in Antioch."

In each of these instances the word CHRISTIAN was not used by Christians speaking of themselves

... but by others who were looking at them..

X The early disciples were recognized as

FOLLOWRES OF JESUS -- called THE CHRIST.

It appears that the earliest Christians were not too much concerned with what name should be applied to them

Rather -- they seem to have thought and spoken of themselves as FOLLOWRES OF A DISTINCTIVE WAY of life....

The reference to this way occurs in Acts -- before the Antioch reference is found....

AND SO FROM THIS VERY EARLY DATE --- CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP ~~IS~~ MEANT FOLLOWING A WAY OF LIFE ----

with Christ as leader, friend, and guide.

Many centuries later

The thing which brings us together -- in a Xian Church
is our common desire TO BE FOLLOWERS OF CHRIST

That is our supreme purpose ---
✓ all other things are secondary.....

The one true test of ^{The} ~~any~~ Christian Church is this: ^{must always be}

ARE WE GROWING IN ~~THE QUALITY OF OUR~~ OUR UNDERSTANDING
OF WHAT THE CHRISTIAN WAY OF LIFE IS ^{it means to}
and ^{follow Christ}
IN OUR APPLICATION OF IT?

***** + are we translating that ^{Personal His} ^{into deed} ^{human relation}

For 1900th centuries Christian people have believed
that CHRIST IS RELEVANT TO THEIR NEEDS AND TO
THEIR DAY.. ^{deeper personal}

To follow him with understanding -- IS TO FIND
THE BEST WAY OF LIFE...

In that spirit Paul said: / in writing to the Corinthians:

" It is no weak Christ you have to do with, but
a Christ of power."

In that spirit the author of John's Gospel wrote:

"The light is still shining in the darkness,
for the darkness has never put it out." ^{(so Christ} ^{light} ^{never dying}

And a more recent writer -- George Matheson, the blind
hymn writer -composer of "O Love That Wilt Not Let Me
Go" and other hymns ---

expressed the feelings of all CHRISTIANS --
THAT THERE IS A CONTEMPORARY SIGNIFICANCE TO THE
THE LIFE OF CHRIST:

Son of Man, whenever I doubt of life, I think
of thee.....I feel no limit in thee

~~They never grow old to me..~~

Last century is old, last year is obsolete
fashion, but Thou art not obsolete....

Thou art abreast of all the centuries. I have
never come up with Thee, modern as I am."

Thus, the Church is built on the conviction of
THE RELEVANCE OF CHRIST TO LIFE IN EVERY GENERATION.

He is relevant at the point of our personal need

at the point of OUR COMMUNITY AND WORLD NEEDS.

The thing which ^{now} brings us together --- IS OUR DESIRE
TO FIND AND FOLLOW THE CHRISTIAN WAY --- in the
life of the 20th century...

We believe that on that basis, we shall find
life at its highest and best.

I. - Historical Background

Now, as we turn the pages of Christian history --- we find that people have had various ideas as to what it means to follow Christ...

Every generation MUST RE-STUDY and RE-STATE what it means to follow Christ --- under given circumstances.....

Jesus never left a long list of detailed instructions as to what to do under all conceivable situations

He did something far better: HE LEFT US THE MATCHLESS EXAMPLE OF HIS PERSONAL LIFE HE LEFT US SOME BASIC PRINCIPLES

with spirit of love - produces of faith - permeating it

And then he left us --- the privilege and responsibility --- OF TRANSLATING HIS LIFE AND SPIRIT INTO THE VARIED SITUATIONS OF LIFE -- as they emerge.

And so, every generation must re-study and re-state what it means to follow Christ --- under specific situations as they come along...

And that is our responsibility today.

✓ it is a word when our lives overlap with the lives of so many

✓ a word

As we turn the pages of Christian history we find that there have been various theories held as to the ideal Christian.....

What is the highest ideal of the Christian life?

Let us look briefly at just a few of the ideas held at some time or other:

A. Very early in the history of Christianity there arose the MARTYR IDEAL

the ideal Xian was he who gave his life for his faith

It is easy to understand how this thought rose

Many of the early Christians were persecuted -- they refused to engage in emperor worship

X They had the choice of - renouncing their faith, or suffering death.....

The early church was BUILT ON COURAGE OF MANY OF THESE MARTYRS...

X It has been said: "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church."

Interestingly enough -- some CHRISTIANS CAME TO THE PLACE THEY ACTUALLY SOUGHT martyrdom.....

About the year 100 - a man named Ignatius was condemned as a Xian in his home city of Antioch -- sent to Rome to be thrown to the wild beasts...

In Rome he wrote some letters to friends -- asking them not to interceded for him -- HE WISHED TO BE A MARTYR..!

The Martyr ideal....

Obviously, some people are called on to be martyrs - but not all

B. As time passed in the early church ----

various statements of belief or doctrine were drawn up ----

we have the period of creed-making in the church...

... Sometimes, ^{people} believed in the creeds, as stated, and sometimes they didn't...

~~SOON THERE EMERGED ANOTHER THEORY OF THE IDEAL CHRISTIAN--~~

HE IS THE PERSON WHO ACCEPTS WITHOUT QUESTION OR RESERVATION ----

the official creed, as stated...

Thus there was introduced into the Christian movement ---- the ideas of orthodoxy

Even today -- we may find those -- WHO THINK THAT THE SUREST MARK OF BEING A FOLLOWER OF CHRIST

IS TO GIVE INTELLECTUAL ASSENT TO A SERIES OF STATEMENTS OF BELIEF...

We might call this the DOCTRINAL IDEAL.

THE CRUISING IDEAL

C. And then, from the 4th to the 16th centuries
there prevailed still another approach.

WE MIGHT CALL IT THE MONASTIC IDEAL.

The ascetic life -- and life in monasteries..
During this time we see the rise and development
of many monastic orders...

Behind this approach was the thought that
the world ~~was~~ essentially evil
is and the best way to follow Christ -- IS TO GET
OUT OF THE WORLD -----

to withdraw apart -----
to go to some secluded place for
contemplation

There is no doubt that we are indebted to
the monastic orders ---
for the preservation of given documents..
and for various writings....

BUT IN THE MAIN -- IT IS AN APPROACH TO
CHRISTIANITY WHICH TAKES ONE OUT OF THE MAIN CURRENT
OF LIFE....

still another
D. During the Middle Ages a ~~somehat different~~ idea
emerged in a part of the world ---

THE CRUSADING IDEAL

Stress was placed on relics and pilgrimages

The purpose of the Crusades -- or at least that which was most widely enunciated --

WAS TO WIN THE HOLY-LAND FROM THE MOHAMEDANS...

so we have thousands of men, women, and children -
travelling hundreds of miles --
enduring untold hardships

many inducements were held out to those who would make the Crusades....

~~X~~ -- THUS, THERE ROSE THE IDEA -- THAT THE LOFTIEST
WAS OF FOLLOWING CHRIST -- was to go on a Crusade..

E. There have been many other ideas held as to the ideal Christian ----

~~Let~~ Let us think of just one more --

~~X~~ THERE EMERGED THE BELIEF THAT A VITAL CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE must always follow a fixed pattern ----

a this pattern was climaxed with a given experience of a highly emotional character often attended by certain outward manifestations

Thus it was believed (and still is by many) -- THAT THE TRUE FOLLOWER OF CHRIST

IS ONE WHO HAS HAD A PARTICULAR KIND OF EXPERIENCE -- FOLLOWING A GIVEN SET PATTERN OF PROCEDURE

---- If a person had had that experience -- he was a true followers of Christ --

If he had not -- he could not be called a Christian regardless of the quality of his life....

Thus we could go on enumerating ATTEMPTS TO IDENTIFY CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP ---

with rather unusual experiences

martyrdom ---

going on a crusade ---

retreating from the world -- etc.

***** *That's what it means + falls short*

Doubtless -- there have been many persons of real devotion

who have expressed their devotion --in these ways ..

→ But you see, all of these approaches tend to limit to a few ---

→ BUT IN THESE DAYS -- WHEN THE FORCES OF SECULARISM

ARE MAKING THEIR WAY -- INTO ALMOST EVERY ASPECT OF LIFE -----

WE NEED TO PLACE OUR EMPHASIS UPON STILL ANOTHER APPROACH -----

NAMELY DAY BY DAY CHRISTIAN LIVING ---

IN THE SITUATIONS AND EXPERIENCES WHICH COME TO

EVERY PERSON....

To be a follower of Christ is to be a Christian in thought + motives in spirit toward others - facts in God

Jesus said: "Whosoever will come after me ---

let him deny himself --

take up his cross --

and follow me...."

HE PUT IT ON THE BASIS OF DAY BY DAY LIVING.

Paul said: "There is a diversity of gifts --- but the same spirit...."

HE PUT IT ON THE BASIS OF DAY BY DAY LIVING

And again, in writing to the members of the Church at
Corinth -----
who were so concerned about what are the marks of
a real Christian, he said:

... "And now abideth faith and hope and love -- these
three - and the greatest of these is love."

To be a follower of Christ makes special demands of
us under special conditions --

BUT IN THE LONG RUN --- THE POWER OF CHRISTIANITY
LIES IN THOSE PEOPLE

WHO TRANSLATE CHRISTIAN PRINCIPLES INTO THEIR
DAY BY DAY LIVING....

Someone once said of Christianity:

"One real example of it -- is worth a thousand
arguments..."

How true that is ---
THE WORLD IS LIFTED AND INSPIRED by those people
of whom he say

He or she is a Christian person...

THE IMPORTANCE OF ONE'S OWN LIFE -- IN
REPRESENTING THE CHRISTIAN WAY

As the N.T. puts it:
"You are our epistle -- read of all men."

All of us here -- are quite familiar with what the basic principles of the Christian religion are ----

We ~~clearly~~ recognize a person who embodies the real Christian spirit -- and outlook.....

WE HAVE THE THEORETICAL UNDERSTANDING*****

What we all need TO SEE MORE CLEARLY ----

IS THE IMPORTANCE OF THE ~~INFLUENCE~~ THE INDIVIDUAL PERSON --- EXERCISING A CHRISTIAN INFLUENCE.....

The individual follows Christ

Somehow the best work of Christ in this world is done rather quietly and inconspicuously BY INDIVIDUALS --- WHO HAVE CAUGHT THE

SPIRIT OF CHRIST ---- and reflect it in their living.

And this year, I wish we might keep Lent by meditating on that thought ---

That
THE IMPORTANCE OF ONE'S OWN LIFE -- IN REPRESENTING THE CHRISTIAN WAY...

As the N.T. puts it:

"You are our epistle -- read of all men."

And now in closing --- let us turn our thought
for just a moment --- TO ONE OF THE TRULY
MOVING SCENES IN THE NEW TESTAMENT...

In The Gospel of Luke -- ~~Jesus is portrayed in~~
we read of Jesus being in the Upper Room
with his disciples -----

And in this hour of difficulty --- with still greater
demands and sacrifices ahead --- he says:

"It is you who have stood by me
through my trials."

Not only were they grateful for him;

But he was grateful for them...

Sometimes they had not done so well ---

Peter was there -- soon to deny him thrice...

There had been contention among them -- AS TO WHOM
SHOULD BE GREATEST IN THE KINGDOM -----

So often they had misunderstood the
spiritual depth of his message ---

And yet, they were his disciples --- his followers,
sometimes in a faltering kind of way....

And to them, he said ~~great~~ gratefully:

"It is you who have stood by....."

It must have touched them --- and made them humble...

If only we could lift that scene out of its ancient setting ----

... and reproduce it in our modern world.....

X We all recognize

--- MANY OF THE BASIC THINGS FOR WHICH CHRIST STOOD ARE HAVING A HARD TIME OF IT IN OUR WORLD..... ^{in what people put}

^{eat} ^{so deep into} ^{so my} ^{TRUST}
The acids of secularism are eating

--- THERE IS NEED FOR INDIVIDUALS WHO MORE COMPLETELY EMBODY THE CHRISTIAN SPIRIT

in their personal lives
in their outlook on problems & human relations

X

How fine it is, when ~~the spirit of Christ can~~ ^{we can} ~~have~~ ^{think of Christ saying,} ~~speaking~~ ^{speaking to some in} ~~to some in~~ ^{this generation}
"IT IS YOU WHO HAVE STOOD BY ME."

~~to seek inner motives of purity and righteousness~~

as just we can face ourselves - fellowman - God (without shame)

✓ To ^{seek high} ~~accept~~ standards of ~~high~~ moral living; & conduct

✓ To respect the sacredness of personality in all human relationships...

TO ~~TRY~~ TO PRACTICE THE PRINCIPLE OF SINCERE GOODWILL ---

TO SEEK FIRST THE KINGDOM OF GOD -- ^{& His wish} ~~and~~ ~~peace~~ ~~our trust in God.....~~ ^{God}

To TRUST in ~~His~~ ~~word~~ ~~and~~ ~~promises~~ ^{Take time for Him}

^{This is} TO FOLLOW CHRIST, in spirit and in truth... ^{--- think like}

this is our privilege -- and our heritage...

As we progress in this Lenten season ----

a season which reminds us that WE ARE CALLED TO BE
THE CHRISTIAN DISCIPLES OF THE 20th century

let us pray that we shall be worthy of those words
spoken in an Upper Room:

"It is you who have stood by me."