22nd Sunday after Trinity
Bessemer - 1958

Rev. Carl F. Thrun

In Nomine Jesu

I Corinthians 3: 1-3 (Moffat) But I could not discuss things with you, my brothers, as spiritual persons; I had to adress you as worldings, as mere babes in Christ. I fed you with milk, not with solid food. You were not able for solid food, and you are not able even now; you are still worldly. For with jealousy and quarrels in your midst, are you not worldly are you not behaving like ordinary men?

LIKE ORDINARY MEN or LIKE CHRIST ?

There is no limit to what the man in Christ can do and accomplish, because there is no limit in Christ. The Christian has all the might and main of the Almighty God at his disposal, because he has Christ living in him. Christ is the God of all power, the Son of the Highest; and all that Christ brings with Him when He enters a heart - forgiveness, peace, joy, hope, love, strength - is, or makes for, power.

Yet, somehow, there is often a noticeable lack of what that power should produce in the Christian's life. It was so with some members of the church at Corinth. They bickered and quarreled. They were not above drunkenness and sexual sins. They conducted themselves so much like the rest of their ill-reputed townsmen that Paul was moved to write to them with evident disgust: You are behaving like ordinary men. Instead of behaving like Christ, they were behaving like the rest of the world.

Need I say that this sharp rebuke has lost none of its sting in our day? Let's take a look at ourselves and see whether we have not just as much reason as did the Corinthians to blush when we read that sentence: You are behaving like ordinary men. We can come Sunday after Sunday into God's House and hear His Word and still be very little effected by it. We nod our heads and give our assent as the pastor delivers God's message, and yet it all bears very little fruit within us. We may even say to ourselves, That was certainly a fine message we heard this morning, but after hearing it - that is the end. We become hearers only - and not doers. I imagine that as everyone of us heard today's Gospel, he said to himself that the servant really should have forgiven his fellow servant that small debt, especially after having been forgiven such an enormous debt himself. But then we will go right away still carrying our old gripes and grievances against our fellow

men, and we say to ourselves, This is different! Look waht he has done to me! But is it? We pray repeatedly, Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us, but we still carry our secret grudges and we have no real concern for the spiritual well-being of the one who has wronged us, just to get even!

We say that we believe in Jesus. We say that we love Jesus. And we sa that we want to be like Jesus. But how much are we like Jesus? We look at Jesus - not only at the tender Jesus, meek and mild, but at the other features of His that are often overlooked: His majestic calmness; His deep joyousness; His absolute fearlessness; His whole-hearted devotion to the Father and the things of the Father; His love that could fondle a child and beam forgiveness on a penitent adulteress, but that could also hate every false way and flame hot indignation into the whited face of those whose religion was merely an orthodox sham. We look at this Jesus, and then we look at ourselves - at our lovelessness and selfishness our envies and jealousies; our grudge-bearing and meanness; our coldness and indifference toward things spiritual; our decreasing discernment of what is right and what is wrong; our edging over, in our business and in our pleasure, up to the borderline and beyond, as if we were trying to find out just how much we can be like ordinary men, and still be called Christ's. We look at ourselves, and we must say that we are about as much like Jesus as a scribbled drawing of a child is like its mother.

Have I overstated? There is, thank God, another side. When King Arthur approached the Round Table where his knights were seated, one beheld, as Tennyson writes,

> From eye to eye thro' all their Order flash
> A momentary likeness of the King.

Who has not seen something similar in the eyes and in the lives of those who by faith have been mustered into the ranks of the King of Kings - sudden flashes which reflect Him, a beautiful deed, perhaps a bracing word, maybe a smile of kindness? Then there are those on whom the image of their Lord is seen, not so much in momentary bursts as in a steady, silent glow: men who live the word of David Livingstone, I put no values on anything I possess save in terms of the kingdom

of God; women like Emerson's wife - My wife Lidian is an incarnation of Christianity; old folk like Charles Lamb's grandmother, of whom he said: For she had studied patience in the school of Christ; Much comfort she had thence derived, An was a follower of the Nazarene.

There is another side. Christians are different, some more, some less. But no Christian is what he once was. The Christ-life has begun for him; and unlimited resources for the development of that life are available to him in Christ. But the surprising thing is that with such unlimited resources to draw from we have not more, much more, to show for in the line of genuine Christian living.

The question which confronts each of us is: Why does Christianity do so little for me? Why am I not more like Christ than I am? My first reaction to that question is to blame the old triple alliance: devil, world, and flesh. These - I am sure - are the reason for my miserable performance in Christian living. It is their fault that I am the spiritual pigmy that I am. But then I come to think of some other people - Christian men (and I mean men) like Paul. Paul had no less of the devil, world, and flesh in him and about him than I have. He was fighting them every inch of his upward way. But he did not let the difficulty of the struggle discourage him. And Paul won through to a degree of Christlikeness that I have never even approached.

Was Paul stronger than I am? Evidently not. According to his own repeated admission Paul had as much strength as I have - NONE. But in himself - in himself Paul had Christ and the power of Christ. I can do all things, he said, in Christ which strengtheneth me. Yet - so I humbly believe - dear Christ, You and Your power are also in me. Then why doesn't Your power work through me as it worked through Paul? Why doesn't it permeate, mold, energize me more than it does? Why am I not more like You?

The answer is found in another word of Paul. This word is not in our Catechism. It does not belong to the memory verses which we learned as children. I am sure that it is not among the wall mottoes that hang in our homes. I doubt that most of us ever gave it more than passing notice. Yet this word is deserv-

ing of all the attention we can give it. It contains the solution to our every problem in Christian living. It is the switch which closes the circuit, which permits the power of the Christ in us to course through us and daily to make us more like Christ. This word of Paul reads: We all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.

Paul wrote that to the same Corinthians to whom he had once said, You are behaving like ordinary men. Now he tells them how to become extraordinary men, how to be changed more and more, from glory to glory, into the image of the Lord. How is this transformation to be brought about? - By beholding the glory of the Lord.

That is the answer. We shall never achieve real Christlike living in any other way. We shall not achieve it, for instance, by just trying. Boys, said Dr. Keats, the old rodmaster of Eton College, it's your duty to be good! If you are not pure in heart, I'll flog you. Pure foolishness! Such psychology may produce a certain forced and outward goodness; but a spontaneous inward and outward goodness - never. That kind of goodness comes to us only by keeping our eyes fixed on His who is Goodness itself. It is through daily, intimate companionship with Jesus that we become more like Jesus, that we get to share, in an ever-increasing measure, the peace, joy, hope, love, power, and all that goes to make up the matchless image of Jesus.

Who of us has never met a husband and wife who bore a striking resemblance to each other? Why, we said to ourselves, you could take them for brother and sister! Their habits, their way of thinking, their tone of voice, their features were so much alike that we could not ignore the similarity. Yet there was no blood relationwhip between them. How had this likeness come about? By living and loving together, day and night, through many a changing year. And it is in the same manner that the Christian becomes like his Christ. The old master painters always represent John, the disciple who was closest to Jesus, as looking like

Jesus. We, too, will acquire an unmistakable resemblance to Jesus, will unconsciously absorb His beauty of character and of life, if we will live our life leaning on His bosom.

It cannot be otherwise. For by a loving association with Him who is altogether beautiful, we shall lose our taste for everything that is mean and low and shoddy. We will have working within us what Thomas Chalmers called the expulsive power of a new affection. Beholding the glory of the Lord develops in us as sense, an appreciation, a love of the beautiful. And having that, there will be no need of everlastingly saying to us, Now don't do this, and don't do that! Love God, Said Augustine, and do what you like. Naturally! For if we love God we will want to do what He like. Everything else will disgust us. And all that pleases Him will be our delight.

What we need to do, then, is to live in a constant companionship with Jesus, to constantly behold the glory of the Lord. As I thus go through life with Jesus at my side, I hear Jesus speaking to me - and presently I find myself speaking to Jesus. I am pouring out my soul to Jesus. I am telling Jesus how much He means to me, how much I love Him, how much I long to be like Him. And as I do that, I become more like Him. I am, without realizing it, absorbing His features. I am like Moses, who, after talking with God, wist not that the skin of his face shone.

Amen.