

From The Pulpit

by Rev. Donald M. Clark

WHEN PEOPLE MET JESUS

What happened when people met Jesus? I think that they came to Him in the first instance because they were drawn.

To begin with, people were drawn to Jesus by what He said. When we think of the teaching of Jesus our thoughts turn first of all to the parables. In them you meet living men and women.

Jesus understood human nature and I very strongly suspect that that was one of the first things that drew people to Him. They heard Him speak about people and they said to themselves: That Man knows me, He knows my strengths and my weaknesses, He knows my successes and my failures, He knows my hopes and my fears.



REV. D. M. CLARK

It is still true. Two thousand years have given us a good many new tools for the understanding of human nature and I would not for a moment underrate the value of such disciplines as modern sciences. He knows me. He knows you. He knows what it is to be a human being. And people were attracted to Him in His own day because they recognized that He knew them as they really were.

What we have noticed about the parables applies equally to Jesus' moral teaching. Read any book on any subject that was written two thousand years ago and you will come away from it with the overwhelming impression that practically all of it is hopelessly out of date. But when you come away from the teaching of Jesus about human nature and about the nature and character of God, you do not have that impression. On the contrary, you have the feeling that it says the last word. There is something permanent about the truth that Jesus revealed when He taught. That was the first thing that drew people to Him. When they heard Him teach they had a strange sense that they were hearing a revelation of the mind of God.

The second thing that drew people to Jesus was His power to change lives--not just to change minds or answer questions, but to change lives, which is quite a different thing. When we talk about the miracles of healing we sometimes limit ourselves to a discussion of the miracles of curing. That is to say, we think of healing as the curing of physical disease.

Physical cures did result, of course, from Jesus' healing power. But the physical cures are not the whole story. Jesus also had the power to re-make whole lives. Take the case of the tax collector named Levi. Take the case of Zacchaeus.

The third thing that people saw in Jesus was the least easily definable of all. It is what we call personality. We all recognize, of course, that personalities differ. Some people are so lacking in warmth and vitality and interest as to make almost no impression on people around them. Others are so full of life and strength and sympathy that when they walk into a room the room seems to be a brighter place. When they share your trouble, the trouble seems easier to bear. When they stand beside you in the place of danger, the danger seems to lose its worst terrors. Jesus possessed this sort of personality to an exceptional degree.

One could cite many other examples. But they all tell us the same thing. When people were with Jesus they had a strange sense that they were close to God. He reached out His hand to men and women who had given in to their failures and they had a strange sense that God had forgiven them. He went among the poor and the outcast, the despised and the rejected, and they had a strange sense that God cared. St. Mark tells us that one of the soldiers who stood guard at the cross watched the way Jesus died, with a prayer of forgiveness for those who were putting him to death and a word of hope for a



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thief who was dying beside Him. When it was over, the soldier, who had never seen Him before, was moved to say, "Truly this man was the Son of God." He saw it, too.

What drew people to Jesus? Three things--what He said, what He did, what He was. In His teaching is the truth about God and man. In his touch is the power not merely to cure physical disease but to make people whole. And in His presence is that which turns the fear of defeat into the confidence of victory over the storms of life, within and without.

When you feel Jesus drawing you to Him, go gladly. For in and with His strength, all things are possible.

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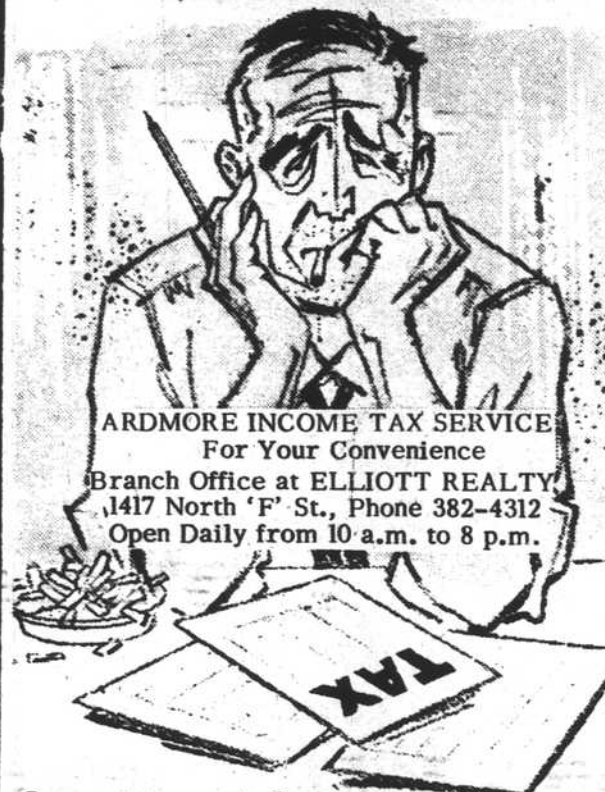
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