

The Significance of Quaker Service

All over the world today there are people who are spiritually hungry. They have become disillusioned with the world about them and dissatisfied with their own inner lives. They crave spiritual bread, but when they have turned to the organized Christian groups for help, they have not found that which satisfied their hunger. When they have asked for bread, they have received a stone.

These people crave a religion that is alive, vital, radiant, deep, helpful in their everyday living. So far they have not found such a religion exemplified in those groups which call themselves Christian.

These people have not given up hope; they are still searching. Their search is an indictment of organized Christianity today and a challenge to us to re-examine Christ's life to see what parts of His message we have failed to grasp.

Emphasis of Jesus on Service

One of the most important parts of His message that we have failed to understand and apply was His emphasis on service to others in the spirit of love. Over and over again Christ emphasized the basic theme of service to mankind. To the lawyer who asked the Master what he should do to inherit eternal life, Christ replied:

"Thou shalt love the Lord, thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself." (Luke 10:27-28)

I do not mean to minimize the first of the two great commandments, but in this instance I am concerned chiefly with the second part—the love of one's neighbors—which He included in this terse statement of the essence of Christianity.

When speaking of those who would inherit Christ's kingdom He included those who had lived in the spirit of these verses:

"For I was hungry, and ye gave me to eat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink; I was a stranger, and ye took me in; naked, and ye clothed me; I was sick, and ye visited me; I was in prison, and ye came unto me." (Matthew 25:35, 36)

How can we as Christians read such statements without realizing the importance of service in the Christian message? How can we fail to see the importance attached to this phase of Christ's life here on earth? Yet

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we have so often turned from such challenging parts of the Gospels to sections which demand less of us as Christians.

Is it not significant that upon Christ's first public appearance after His days on the Mount of Temptation, He entered into the synagogue and read from the book of Isaiah that earlier prophet's word on service:

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he anointed me to preach good tidings to the poor. He hath sent me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised." (Luke 4:18)

From that time on Jesus not only preached but *lived* in the spirit of those words. His life was a life not only of words but of deeds. Tersely phrased, we can describe His three years of public ministry in the statement: "And Jesus went about doing good." He ate with the hated publicans, He talked with the despised Samaritans, He visited the ostracized members of society chained in the mountains because they were "filled with demons," as the people explained. He had as His friend a former harlot, Mary Magdalene, and a ruler of the Jews, Nicodemus. He served *all*, not those from a selected group.

He not only talked about service, He demonstrated it. Perhaps no picture is more characteristic of Him than the incident at the Lord's Supper, when He rose from the table, laid aside His garments and took a towel and girded Himself and then poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith He was girded.

In His service to mankind Christ demonstrated the difference between the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea. The water for both of these seas comes from the same source, the heights of Hermon and the roots of the cedars of Lebanon, but what happens to the water in these two seas is absolutely different. As Harry Emerson Fosdick pointed out in his book on *The Meaning of Service*, "The Sea of Galilee makes beauty of it, for the Sea of Galilee has an outlet, *it gets to give*. It gathers in its riches that it may pour them out again to fertilize the Jordan plain. But the Dead Sea with the same water makes horror; for the Dead Sea has no outlet. It gets to keep."

As followers of the Christ we expect to *receive* continually, but we have not learned to *give* continually. Hence our Christianity more nearly resembles the Dead Sea. We have not learned that the heart of the Chris-

tian message is, as E. Stanley Jones phrased it in his book *Service As An Outgrowth of Spiritual Life*: "Be Christlike, give thyself."

Such service, however, must be the outgrowth of a deep inner spiritual life. It is important to remember that when Christ laid down the two great commandments, He first declared:

"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind."

Only after He had laid down this first basic principle, did He add—

"And thy neighbor as thyself."

The love of neighbor is the direct outgrowth of the love of God, a continuation of the same line and not a parallel one; the new offshoot from the same tree, and not a new tree planted alongside the old. Only when the trunk of the tree and its root systems is alive and vigorous, will new life spring forth.

One of the main reasons why we as Christians have not expressed our love of God more effectively in service to our fellow men has been the fact that our inner spiritual life has not been vital enough, vigorous enough, deep enough to produce such service.

In the chronicles of Christ's life we have comparatively little insight into the sources of power from which His service sprang, but we know they were there. He wandered off into the mountains and spent the night in prayer. He passed through the fields and absorbed the beauty of the lilies. He escaped from the crowds by pushing out from the shore in a boat with only His disciples for companions. In these periods He refilled His reservoirs of spiritual power, but only in order that He might call upon them later in His days of service to men and women. His life was a continual inflow and outgo.

One of our temptations as Christians has been to linger on the mountain, to continue walking in the fields, or to stay in the boat on the lake and not to return to the everyday world to serve. We are like Christ's disciples who wanted to build their tabernacles on the Mount of Transfiguration and live there forever. But Christ came back into the valley and we must come with Him.

Motives for Service

The motive for this service is equally important. Christ might possibly have performed more and greater miracles. He could have accepted the dramatic way to power which came to Him on the Mount of Tempta-

tion, but He spurned this method. It is quite possible that if He had accepted this way He would have eventually lost His power to perform miracles because He would have been cut off from the true source of His power. Certainly His ability to do good would have greatly diminished, for the people would have come more and more to see the miracles and less and less to hear the message.

Likewise it is important to remember that Jesus Himself did these deeds of service. He did not tell others to do them and then go His way. His service was first-hand, personal.

In real Christian service one must himself do the serving and from the motive of interest rather than self-satisfaction. Jesus illustrated these two points in His description of the scribes and pharisees, when He spoke to His disciples and the multitude in these words:

“All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works; for they say, and do not. For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men’s shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers. But all their works they do for to be seen of men.”
.... (Matthew 23:3-5.)

As Quakers we are interested in service; we are active in service. But we have much to learn and many pitfalls to avoid. We must ever remember that our service must spring from our individual inner faith and our group worship. That is the center of Quaker service and if it is not motivated by worship, it is likely to be worldly service. We must feel in our service the same Presence in the Midst that we feel in our Meetings for Worship. Our service must be personal and intimate and not a great organization directed by us without this element of personal giving in it. And particularly in these times we must avoid the danger of publicity and acclaim.

The same characteristics hold true of the little acts of service that we do as individuals. Our service must spring out of our inner spiritual life. It must be motivated unselfishly. It must be personal. Perhaps one example will suffice to illustrate what I mean.

After five days of spiritual refreshment and inspiration at the Yearly Meeting sessions at Bad Pyrmont in 1940, I rode back to Berlin with one of the finest of our German Friends. During part of the trip we talked together, but most of the time I read and she wrote. She was writing to those whom she knew were in distress. She had not contributed to a fund

to let someone else do the job for her (important as that sometimes is). She was doing the job herself,—writing each one a personal note. She had gotten a great deal of inspiration at the Yearly Meeting, but she was using that inspiration in an act of service to others in the spirit of love. She had already come down from the Mount of Transfiguration.

True Quaker service must spring from a deep, inner spiritual life. It must be motivated by unselfishness. It must have the personal touch to be most effective to the giver and the receiver.

Replenishing the Sources of Service

The demands that such service makes upon one's physical and spiritual resources are tremendous and as one reads the account of Christ's journeys here and there, one wonders how He could meet these demands even with the brief periods of spiritual renewal which He had in His busy life. Then, as one reads further, one realizes that in an unexplainable way Christ found His strength in the work itself. The greater the demands, the greater the resources. His service to others seems to have quickened His own inner life and to have brought Him closer to the inexhaustible source of spiritual power.

Finally there came the great test of His service to humanity—the sacrifice of His life. Faced with this supreme test, He faltered, then went apart to pray. There, alone with God, He struggled to find the strength which would make the supreme sacrifice possible. And there His spiritual life was so quickened that He was able to climb the hill to Calvary and pray: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

In the history of groups and individuals, service calls upon all our spiritual resources, yet as we pour out our supply, our reservoirs are re-filled,—if we are in contact with the eternal springs.

The Christian Church has found its soul countless times when called upon to serve. The periods of vitality have been periods when the great ideal of service has been uppermost in the hearts and lives of its followers. Non-Christians and nominal Christians have been called upon to give all that they could give and in the giving they have found the spirit of Christianity.

Our own Quaker history illustrates this point vividly. Our periods of testing have been the periods of growth and vitality. A deep spiritual life has found its expression in service and the service has so challenged the resources of the Society that it has driven it back to the true sources of

spiritual refreshment before it could go on serving the Negro or the Indian, the prisoner or the insane, the refugee or the unemployed coal-miner. All over the world today the Society of Friends is serving and in this service the Society is finding new life and new sources of strength.

Individuals, too, are spiritually deepened and brought nearer to God as a result of the out-pouring of themselves in service. There come times in the lives of all those who serve when they cannot proceed with their own power. When they find the power of God, they can proceed.

Yes, Christian service quickens the spiritual life of groups and of individuals and brings us nearer to God.

Joy in Service

There is a popular belief that service requires sacrifice and therefore excludes personal happiness and joy. How far from the truth that really is.

In Christ's life there was perhaps little of the outward expression of that which we generally call joy, but who can read the story of His life and not catch His inner joy? Who can believe that Christ would have attracted men and women to Him if He had lacked this essential quality of victorious living?

If we examine the lives of the great servants of mankind, we will find that they all have had this inner joy that comes from unselfish service to mankind.

Paul was one who possessed this great trait. Throughout the years of his life as a Christian his life was beset with difficulties. He was looked upon as a traitor by his former Jewish friends. He was distrusted by some of the Jewish Christians who had known him in the days of his persecution of Christians. He was hated by those who did not want to see Christianity spread among the Gentiles. He was stoned by mobs, imprisoned many times. He was plagued with a disease which he called a "stake in his flesh." He lived a life full of service and what is generally called sacrifice. He sacrificed what the world calls important for what he considered more important. He may not have found what the world generally calls joy, but he found a joy in service that was deeper than the superficial joy most of us know.

Triumphant in the face of obstacles, he proclaimed:

"I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us

from the love of God, which is Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 8:38, 39.)

In his last days he wrote his young friend Timothy with the joy of accomplishment reflected in his words:

"I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith." (Timothy 4:6-7.)

That is the joy of Christian service—real joy.

David Livingstone lived for thirty-three years among the Africans. He crossed and recrossed the desert, battled his way through the jungles, his footsteps dogged by the Boers who tried to cut off his way to the sea, and by the slave traders whose traffic in human lives he combatted. For six years he was lost to the civilized world and lived without any white companions. In the jungles his wife and many of his trusted faithful helpers died. His was a life of sacrifice seldom equalled. Could there possibly be room in such a life for joy? Oh yes. Listen to him as he answers those who say service means sacrifice and therefore denial of happiness and joy: "People talk of the sacrifice I have made in spending so much of my life in Africa. . . . It is emphatically no sacrifice. Say rather it is a privilege." That, too, is the joy of service.

Let us hear the testimony of someone nearer our own day,—the testimony of Mathilde Wrede, the angel of the Finnish prisons. The daughter of a provincial governor, she could have enjoyed a life of ease and luxury, but the call came to her early in life to work in the prisons of her native land. Despite poor health, family position, and the fact that such work had not been done by woman, she devoted her life to working with these prisoners. After a life with the criminals and outcasts of Finland in which she completely lost her health, she could ask at the end of her life: "Do you believe that anyone on earth is so fortunate as I?"

The same is true of many of our contemporaries, many of those we know, and love.

Yes, Christian service means sacrifice, but it brings an unparalleled deep, inner joy.

Small Opportunities for Service

There is always the danger that we will consider large-scale activities as important and overlook the scores of smaller opportunities for service which we have in our everyday lives. There is a glamor connected with

service in some foreign country, with service performed by a well-known individual or group, particularly if large numbers of people, adventure, or danger are involved. Real service, however, is a continual process from morning until night.

Jesus lived in a remote province of a vast empire, far from the capital of the then known world. He never travelled as far away from home as the average worker of today travels. He associated with the common folk around Him as He met them in their homes, in the market-place, in the synagogue, by the city gates, and along the seaside. But in that small area and with those simple people He made himself felt. And it was a continual process, manifested in day to day living.

There were many times in the life of Paul, the great missionary, when he was confined to the walls of one house or to the narrower area of a prison cell. But Paul was undaunted. He knew that the Christian message can be preached and lived anywhere. Since the guard was changed daily, he could meet a large number of men during the period of confinement and they in turn would meet many others. Paul never let an opportunity for Christian service pass by. As he testifies, "My chains have helped me to spread the Gospel."

The opportunities for service are many, if we have the eyes to see them. The trouble with most of us is that we are blind. We are not among the righteous who said to Jesus when He enumerated those who inherit the Kingdom of Heaven:

"Lord, when saw we thee hungry, and fed thee? or thirsty and gave thee drink? when saw we thee a stranger and took thee in? or naked and clothed thee? or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me." (Matthew 25:37-40.)

We have too seldom served these people.

Each of us knows better than anyone else just where these opportunities for service on a small scale lie, if we only take the time and trouble to think. Yes, Christian service is essentially service on a *small scale*.

Conclusion

Individually and as groups we have failed too often to realize the significance of service as an essential part of a vital, dynamic Christianity.

As a result there are Seekers in our midst who have received stones when they have asked for spiritual bread. But they are still searching and we can help them in their search by demonstrating a religion that is vital, radiant, deep, helpful in one's everyday living. An important part of such a religion is the ideal of service, the true type of Christian service that arises from a deep inner spiritual life, a service that requires sacrifice, but that brings a quickening of the spiritual life of individuals and groups and an unparalleled inner joy, a service that is an individual, everyday continuous experience for the followers of Jesus.