

WHAT IF THE LORD REALLY DID COME TODAY? Amos 5:18-24 (9)

There is a bit of church humor around recently that has a cardinal rushing in to the Pope. "Your holiness" he says, I have some good news and some bad news". "Give me the good news first". The cardinal says: "I have just received word that Christ has returned to earth". "That's is wonderful" says the Pope, "Now, what's the bad news". The cardinal dejectedly says: "The call came from Salt Lake City"

Behind that whimsical bit is a profound question; "What if Christ should return today?" Would that be good news for the Baptists, or the United Methodists, or the Mormons, or the Catholics. Would it be good news for the Americans, the chinese, the Russians; for the whites, the blacks Would it be good news for the rich or the poor, the smart or the simple.

If Christ should return today who would be rejoicing. An obvious answer, we may think...but not so obvious as it seems. The people of Israel in the time of Amos were looking forward to the day of the Lord. But Amos warns them "Woe to you who desire the day of the Lord" That day has surprises. It is as if a man escaped from a lion, only to meet a bear, says Amos. "The day of the Lord is darkness, not light" he warns. And you and I will be in for some surprises.

What if Christ returned today? For whom would it be good news?

There is an old story about a man who came to the gates of

of heaven and asked admission. The gatekeeper asked his name ⁽²⁾ and then asked: "What have you done to deserve admission?" The man thought for a moment: He said: "Well, I went to church at Christmas and Easter". Said the gatekeeper: "We don't keep church records up here". "Well" said the man, "I gave some of my money for religious purpose". But said the gatekeeper: "we do not keep financial records here". Rather despairingly the man then said: "Well, I took good care of my family". But the gatekeeper said: "That doesn't matter much here, there are sinners in hell who did the same thing".

So the poor man gave up, he realized he hadn't done much for God and others. He was about to turn away when the gatekeeper called out to him: "Just a minute. Aren't you the guy that used to feed the sparrows in that little city park". The man said "yes, but what's that got to do with it". "Come in" said the keeper, "come in, the Lord of the sparrows is waiting to thank you".

When Jesus illustrated the content of right living, it was a cup of cold water given in his name or help offered to a man lying beaten in a ditch. It was feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting the sick. Humble deeds of compassion matter far more in his kingdom than bank accounts and polished personalities.

How often we miss that critical fact even in the life of the Church. What makes a great Church. Is it the size of its membership, *the beauty of its building. For some, perhaps,*

that is what makes a church great. But that has nothing to do with greatness in the eyes of our Lord. A great church is one in which people

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1. care - about one another and the world for which Christ died.

Hazen Werner tells of being in the home of a woman whose husband had just died, she told of his long nights of suffering and how she cared for him, not having money to employ a nurse. ^{Werner} He wondered how she could keep going, and she told him that the neighbors had kept their lights burning thru the last few nights, She said: "I knew that they were thinking of us, feeling for us. I can't tell you how, but I got strength from it. It kept me going"

The fact that somebody cares, ~~is~~ interested, that somebody believes in us is often our strongest support.

That is what the body of Christ is about. That's what makes a church great.

Have you noticed the migratory birds, particularly the geese, flying in V formation? Ever wonder how they reach their destination without fail? It is like this! there is not one lead bird. The birds can fly so far and so long because each one helps the flock by taking his turn as a leader. Scientists have determined that each bird flapping its own wings creates an updraft and and upward lift for the one behind him. This gives the flock 71% more flying range than if each bird flew alone. Leadership is rotated because no bird can lead

for an extended period of flight. If an individual bird falls back, and thinks that he is not going to be missed, he immediately feels the heavier load of flying alone...and speeds up to get back into formation. Bird fanciers seem to feel that those who fall behind are encouraged by the chatter of their peers.

We need not belabor the application for the church and its membership. We can't stay out in front very long...even though the majority of our members seem to think that that is what some can do. Together, if you all are willing to rotate leadership, we can help one another and we can extend the scope and range of our spiritual venture.

What if the Lord should come today. It would be good news to those who have learned to share, to care, to love and to look beyond themselves.

2. It would also be good news to those with whom life has dealt unfairly. "Blessed are those who mourn" said Jesus. What strange and difficult words these are. Mourning can be the key to emotional and spiritual maturity.

A number of years ago the personnel director of a large department store called an employee into the office. She was a woman greatly loved and respected; and a lifter of morale of other workers. The personnel director wanted to know how she did it. She told her story briefly.

"When I was a bride of 6 mos, my husband was killed

in a hunting accident. # months later I was crossing the street with my father and mother and they were both struck down and killed by an automobile. I blamed myself for not watching them more closely. I was in a sanitorium for months trying to fight my way back to reality. One evening, in deapair, a emptied a bottle of sleeping pills inthe palm of my hand. I had taken them from a nurses cart.

"A voice spoke to me, but when I looked around I was alone. The voice kept repeating 'people need you. People need you". No one needed me, I had no children, no brother or sisters, no husband, no parents. Then I realized that it was the voice of God speaking to me. O, i know it soun crazy, but my hand opEned and the pills rolled out on my bed. A great peace came over me, and I slept and slept. God spoke to me in the days that followed. If I were to live gain I must lose my life for the sakes of others. I had to take up my dross and follow him".

Do you suppose that lady was prepared for the coming of the Lord? Many of us lead self-cented lives and self-satisfied lives because they have not be refined by the fires of mourning and pain and heartbreak; "Blessed are they that mourn for they shall be comforted.

A young girl was orphaned at 12, along with four younger brothers and sisters. She did not know here to turn, no other relatives around. So she went to work doing all kinds of hard and toilsome labor, mostly

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floors. For years she labored and struggled and took care of her brothers and sisters. when she reached about 30, she looked about 70 for the hardwork and long hours have taken a severe toll. Her shoulders were hunched, her hair stringy, her hands knarled and calloused and carcked.

It was thend that she was encountered by an unfeeling religious zealot: "have you been saved?" "i don't know but I think so". So began a session of badgering by the frantic, and at last she said to the beaten woman.... "Waht will you do when the Lord comes". In near tears the woman merely said: "I'll show him my hands, and he will surely see my spirit".

What if the Lord should come today? The powerful and the proud may not really look forward to that day. But the humble folk, the teacheable, the giving folk, the loving folk . . . those who have lit a small candle in this world of great darkness . . . these will find a joy in the Lord that they never knew before.