

SHARE YOUR GIFTS AND POSSESSIONS
WITH OTHER PEOPLE

Edmund (Readhead) has a canny ability to find strange friends. By strange I take the meaning of the word to be extraordinary, surprising, wonderful. As the poet Byron stated, "Tis strange, but true; for truth is always strange."

Edmund introduced me to a friend on Vancouver Island who showed me the strange truth that human opportunity to be generous of spirit are always present. The stranger was a deaf mute, and lived alone in a shabby shop along the highway by the sea. We'd have driven by without noticing the little store, but the folk of the community beat a path to his door.

The man was a baker, and when we entered the shop he had just finished baking some apple pies. With a smile the man set out a pad and pencil. Edmund pointed to one of the apple pies. The man wrote, "Make me an offer." With a grin, Edmund wrote a better than fair price. The man smiled and boxed the pie. While there we negotiated further and increased our larder with cookies and cakes as well.

Up the road we met with friends of Edmund's of the Qualicum native band. They insisted we stay and eat with them. They shared their food with us and we topped the meal with apple pie and cookies. There was a great deal of shared enjoyment.

In the sphere of material things, giving means being rich. It is not those who have much that are rich but those who give much. When we hold our possessions loosely and with respect so they can be used well and shared we find ourselves growing spiritually. When we are

generous of spirit we find we often receive far more than we would by being cautious.

I observed my new-found silent friend was not wealthy in material things but was a rich man in friends. He created opportunities for everyone who came his way to share of themselves with him and he with them.

The next time you have an opportunity to share your skills with others ask them to make you an offer.

Many Hear the Call, Fewer Make Choice

One day I sat on a committee where the members were instructed to introduce themselves. The exercise started with the man next to me. He began his introduction by stating he had been "called to the bar." We knew immediately he was a lawyer.

When it came my turn I stated that I had been "called to the church." That identified me as a clergyperson.

Afterwards I got thinking about the meaning and implications of the term to be "called", a phrase I hear less used today than in my youth.

I observe about me many dedicated and beneficent volunteers contributing hours of valuable and saving work to help others and to make our community better. They must feel "called" to do the work they do.

But in the vocational field I wonder if there is as much a sense of calling? It is true that there are those who take upon themselves work

("Call", contin'd)

that is of social, medical, serviceable, and educational assistance to others. Sometimes these jobs have the added benefit of being well paid vocations. Then the emphasis may become placed more on salaries than service.

From the standpoint of the Christian life the meaning of being "called" has a very spiritual significance. Jesus spent his ministry inviting people to become citizens of the realm of God. But it was not a token membership. It involved taking on the responsibilities of active and meaningful citizenship.

The writer of the Gospel of St. Matthew attributes Jesus quoting an old proverb in this respect and stating, "Many are called, but few are chosen."

The Christian life calls for fitness, dedication, and persistent faithfulness. Many hear the call; fewer make the right choice to follow the way of love and service Jesus affirmed. Christian service is greatly curtailed by the chilling indifference of those whom it has a right to be its loyal friends.

House of Four Rooms

When Helen and I attended a native Pow-wow at Serpent's Mound Provincial Park we enjoyed native fellowship, aboriginal foods, drumming and dancing. The following is part of their religious belief they shared with us.

"There is an Indian belief that everyone is a house of four rooms: a physical, a mental, an emotional and a spiritual. Most of us tend to live in one room most of

the time, but unless we go into every room every day, even if only to keep it aired, we are not complete."

What Is Life?

It is the flash of a firefly in the night.
It is the breath of a buffalo in the winter time.
It is the little shadow that runs across the grass and loses itself in the sunset.

- Poem of the Crowfeet

Comes the Dawn

After a while you learn the subtle difference
Between holding a hand and chaining a soul.
And you learn that love doesn't mean security,
And you begin to learn that kisses aren't contracts,
And presents aren't promises.
And you begin to accept your defeats
With your head up and your eyes open,
With the grace of a mate, not the grief of a child.
And you learn to build all your roads
On today because tomorrow's ground
Is too uncertain. And futures have
A way of falling down in mid-flight.
After a while you learn that

(Comes the Dawn, cont'd)
even sunshine burns if you get too much.

So you plant your own garden and decorate your own soul, instead of waiting

For someone to bring you flowers.

And you learn that you really can endure . . .

That you really are strong.

And you really do have worth.

And you learn and learn.

With every goodbye you learn.

Help With Your Bible Study

The Bible is more than an ancient book - it is a library, made up of 66 different writings, written by different persons, at different times, under different circumstances, and for different reasons. These writings were written with limited writing materials and in different languages than ours. Our Bible is the result of a series of translations from the original tongues to ours. The oldest writings were written more than 3000 years ago, and the most recent from somewhere between 100 and 150 A.D..

The name, "Bible", comes from the Greek word, "biblia", meaning, "books". The Bible is a library of books. If you separate them you have a shelf of 66 books.

The term, "Testament", is somewhat misleading. It arose from an accidental mistranslation into Latin of a Greek word meaning, "covenant", which in turn goes back to a Hebrew word having the same meaning. Hence it would be more accurate to speak of the Old Covenant and the New Covenant.

Perhaps a first question should be why read and study such an ancient book today?

We live in a tense and chaotic time. New issues press upon us and

call for contemporary decisions. But it is important to remember the present can only be understood and lived effectively with a perspective from the past. We must have a curiosity about the influences that have given our civilization its most characteristic marks.

It is certainly not to our benefit to live ignorant of the inspiration that runs through the great art and great literature of the past.

The Bible is great literature. It deals with life in all its aspects, from birth to death. It has a lot to say about the destiny of humankind.

The doctrine of biblical inspiration caused the Bible to be separated from other books, making it impossible to be read impartially. In exactly the same way belief in the truth of Christianity led scholars to view the Christian faith in isolation - as a separate religion revealed by God in its perfection, and therefore only slightly if at all related to other ideas and other traditions.

Today's global village has brought us into closer contact with people of many traditions and faiths. We can share our insights into truth. The Bible is useful to help us to see how the creative spirit we call God is active in history. Here we find a record of spiritual reality rising out of the remote past and continuing through succeeding generations.

The Bible is useful also to show us there is a divine meaning and power in life that can help us steer through the shifting choices we continually make. God is the source of moral qualities and the Bible can assist us to see how persons before

(Bible Study, cont'd)

us found truths and morality that worked for them in their day and circumstances. We face new and dangerous issues today and need all the help we can get to deal with them.

The message of the Bible to our own day is a reaffirmation of the value of the individual. In our overcrowded society the individual may become lost to sight. We can become part of a lonely crowd. In our laws and dealings with one another we can lose sight of the value of the individual. Each of us is more than a pawn in history.

Again, the Bible is of permanent religious value because of its keen insights into human nature. It has been called the "family album of God". We are given a number of character sketches that enable us to see how others faced and met the trials and temptations of their day, and we are shown and inspired to live well and faithfully in our day.

Interpretation

The beginning of biblical interpretation is bound up with the formation of the Bible itself. The O.T. books of the law were a result of the efforts of the Hebrews to interpret the world around them and their relationships with one another in terms of the meaning of the divine working amongst them.

In the prophetic writings a penetrating analysis of the presence of the holy in history is produced.

Jesus broke sharply with the prevailing method of scribal interpretation as he pierced through the letter of the Old Testament law to its vital centre and meaning. He instructed his hearers to live by the spirit of the law, rather than

the letter of the law.

During the next 1500 years the church perpetuated the literal and allegorical approaches to Bible study, adding a new approach - the anagogical or mystical. The Protestant reformers challenged the distortion of meaning of Scripture that often resulted from these approaches, emphasizing instead the need for grasping the basic intent of the biblical authors.

With the age of Enlightenment, the tenability of literalism began to be challenged, first by rationalism, which concentrated on the ideational content of the Bible, then by historicism, which explored the process by which the Bible came to be.

To understand the Bible we need to study about the times and people of the times it was written. We need to determine as accurately as possible the intent of the biblical writer - what he or she was trying to communicate, to whom they were directing their message, what the situation was that prompted their concern.

We must identify also the basic human need or problem to which the particular biblical material is speaking, thus indicating the valid point of contact for the radically different perspective of our present era.

We must recognize the specific implications of the biblical material for our own personal situation. Insights can be gained concerning the truth about ourselves and our fellow creatures.

"Religion NOW" is published in limited edition by the Rev. Ross E. Readhead, B.A., B.D., Cert of Corrections, McMaster University, in the interest of furthering knowledge and participation in religion.

Dialogue is invited and welcomed.