

"JOSEPH OF ARIMATHEA"

Still in afterglow of wonderful Easter. A Festival of Joy. Overtones of beauty and meaning come down to us from first Easter Morn. Spring, dawn, songs of birds, fragrant flowers, lovely garden, dew-drenched grass. Then Mary Magdalene at the Tomb. Mary weeping. The Gardener. Then the Voice - "Mary" and her joyful response, "Rabboni" - "Master". All so out of this world.

But there was one follower of Jesus who was not altogether happy among all the joy. Joseph, in whose lovely garden the greatest event in all history took place - Joseph of Arimathea.

Let us be kind to him. He was generous. He wrought a great service to every lover of Jesus. What would have happened to the broken body? It almost certainly would have been flung on refuse heaps of Gehenna! Sought and probably bought the body of Jesus from Pilate. And remember, that in eyes of Jewish law Joseph defiled his own tomb by placing body of Jesus there.

In spite of all these things there was no joy in Joseph's heart on Easter morning. Perhaps I am overdrawing the picture; perhaps making unwarranted assumptions - let us see.

A SECRET FOLLOWER What do we know about Joseph?

Account tells some things -

A righteous man. A wealthy man. Member of Sanhedrin - Jewish high court - held in high esteem. Man of prestige. Account also says he was a follower of Jesus - but secretly for fear. Fear of what? Consequences!

Was not easy for Joseph to come out in open. Member of Sanhedrin, remember. Turned out and ostracised. Probably been denied ministry of synagogue. Family would have suffered. Prestige impaired. Perhaps persecution. More difficult for him than for fishermen like Peter. They had little to lose. He had everything to lose.

Joseph was "waiting" for the kingdom. Not a spiritual kingdom primarily; but driving out of Roman power. He had to be careful. Must not

He had arranged his life so nicely. Rather successful. Appointed to Sanhedrin. Prestige and respect. Had even made provision for burial. The tomb already made. But one day the shadow of a cross falls over that garden and that lovely place forever will remind him of his own mental anguish and failure. He had failed himself and his Lord. And he could never forget that.

And what of us? How much of our discipleship has been under cover? Have we always witnessed and shown our colors? Are we ashamed of our relationship to Christ? Do we speak out when truth and Jesus are upon trial; or are we absent and mute?

In school, in the shop, wherever we are, are we openly on His side; or are we neutral and full of fear? What do we say when the church is under criticism and the minister under fire? Rotarians and other service club members proudly wear their badges; are we ashamed to wear the badge of Christ.

Joseph had the opportunity to do a fine and splendid thing - but he was afraid - afraid of censure, afraid of identifying himself with a doubtful cause, afraid of a crucifixion. He had a chance to shed his blood - a chance to do something big - but he missed his chance - and ever after life had a big regret.

That has happened many times since; when Christ and truth and the church are on trial, then men absent themselves. They take upon themselves a pale pastel of neutrality. They would not be on hand to be counted. They would evade the issue. They have friends on both sides. They would wait until things blow over. Too bad someone will be crucified. Joseph was missing from that meeting.

Joseph was a "good" man - but not good enough. Not good enough to come out in the open with his Lord; not good enough to stand for the truth as indeed he saw it. Not good enough to cast a vote and his influence on the side of Jesus. Perhaps his vote might not have affected total vote; but it would have given Jesus some encouragement. He would not have felt so alone.

But fear and neutrality in Joseph's heart won out that dark night. And when the Resurrection Morning dawned, there was little joy in it for him. He remembered he had refused to stand by Jesus and share the shame, the criticism, the Cross. True, he had not voted against Jesus; true he had not consented to His death. But he had refused to be identified with Jesus in His suffering and therefore could not be identified with the Resurrection Joy.

A FORGOTTEN JOSEPH

We remember Joseph's lovely garden but have forgotten its owner. What happened Joseph?

Probably thrown out of the Sanhedrin anyhow. His association with Jesus would almost guarantee it. Yet as far as we know he never became associated with the Early Church. He never identified himself with the church or Christ. Never mentioned either in Sanhedrin or in the church. He simply drops out of the scene. Steals away into darkness. No mention of him in the Acts of the Apostles.

This man with all his social position, with all his prestige, with all his learning, with all his gifts and graces, amounted to nothing as far as the kingdom went. The forgotten Joseph of Arimathea. Disappointed through the years.

make a mistake here. Cost him his life if Jesus fails at this point. Not sure of Jesus or of His intentions or ability to succeed. Must be very careful and not rushed. Attracted by teaching; fascinated by His personality; charmed by Jesus in every way. But because of his fear he could not come out openly - must follow Him in secrecy and fear.

Then came Good Friday and Crucifixion. Joseph dreadfully sorry about the whole business. Also, rather glad in the circumstances that he had not made a fool of himself. Jesus a sorry failure - this was end of whole episode. Too bad. At least he would see He got a decent burial. We must give him credit for his generosity, of course.

But then came the dawn - Easter dawn. And to Joseph must have come the sobering thought - "What a mistake I made; what a coward I was. Why did I not give Jesus the support He needed in the day of His greatest calamity?" These were thoughts that robbed Joseph of joy on Easter morning.

A PALE NEUTRALITY

Let's continue the analysis.

Joseph was a secret disciple - but there is another touch in gospel portrait that indicates weakness of character. Remember, Joseph belonged to the Sanhedrin. Let me read - Mark 14:53-65. "They all condemned Him to death". Luke says that Joseph did not consent to their counsel and deed". Statements need harmonizing. Answer is obvious - Joseph was not there - he was absent from that meeting.

Messenger came in the night to summon all the members of the Sanhedrin to a meeting. Joseph did not go. He suspected there would be trouble. He was afraid he might be embarrassed. On the spot. He stayed home in bed. Perhaps his wife advised him to stay away. "Don't go Joseph; there's going to be trouble. Besides, you'll only make your cold worse". And after all, it's illegal to have a meeting of the Sanhedrin in the dead of night. He turned over and tried to sleep. He would make a few discreet enquiries in the morning.

Meanwhile, Jesus was on trial for his life.

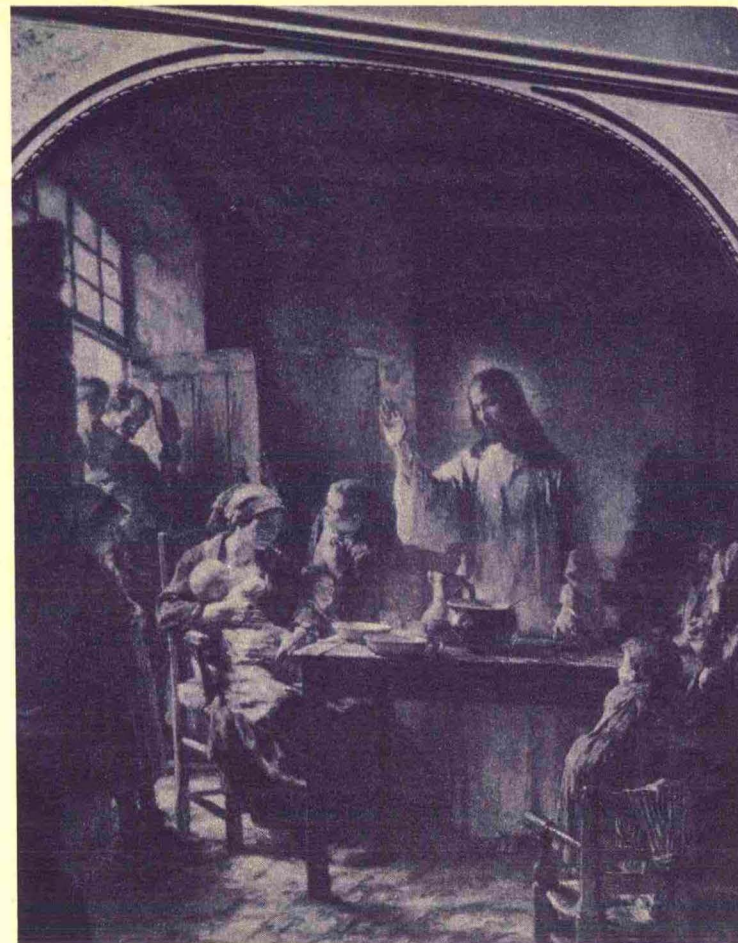
The Presence

THE CONSTANT presence of our Lord in the daily life of His follower is a fact of the utmost importance. In due time it becomes the dominant factor in all that he says and does.

The presence of the Lord is an encouragement and a deterrent, an inspiration and a controlling influence. It encourages one to shun everything that is sordid and impure, all that proceeds from the sinful flesh. It is a warning to guard one's tongue, to avoid profanity, levity and all unseemly conversation.

His presence is a source of strength and power. It makes it easier to say *no* to that which is wrong; less difficult to say *yes* to that which the love of God requires. It supports a person in every sincere effort to put aside the unlovely: unkindness, impatience, selfishness, and envy. It sustains in trials, comforts in sorrows, helps to untangle the perplexities of life, gives confidence and calm in the hour of crisis.

His presence is not something remotely possible, something rarely attained. A trusting heart and a willing spirit insure His presence. Allowed to speak through His Word, He does not long delay His reassuring "Lo, I am with you always." The soul that humbly entreats Him, "Abide with us," quickly discovers that He responds by entering in. In such a life the Presence is a reality.



The Presence

FREMONT STREET METHODIST CHURCH

Gloversville, New York

Fred Clarke, Minister

Janet Price Davis

Minister of Music

Grace L. Gifford

Church Secretary

Lewis Cuning, Sexton

ORDER OF MORNING WORSHIP

ORGAN PRELUDE - "Unto Thee I Cry"

Dupre

"Jesus Christ, Our Saviour"

Dupre

CALL TO WORSHIP - By the minister

HYMN 165 - "Look, ye saints, the sight is glorious" Cwm

SURSUM CORDA:

Rhondda

Minister: The Lord be with you.

People: And with thy spirit.

Minister: Lift up your hearts.

People: We lift them up unto the Lord.

Minister: Let us give thanks unto the Lord.

People: It is meet and right so to do.

DOXOLOGY - To be sung by all

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RESPONSIVE READING - 14th Sunday - page 578

GLORIA PATRI :: APOSTLES' CREED

SCRIPTURE LESSON - Matthew 14:58-64; Luke 23:50-56

ANTHEM - "If With All Your Hearts"

Mendelssohn

PASTORAL PRAYER :: LORD'S PRAYER

ORGAN OFFERTORY - "By the Waters of Babylon"

Dupre

PRESENTATION OF TITHES AND OFFERINGS

HYMN 228 - "O for a closer walk with God"

Naomi

SERMON - "JOSEPH OF ARIMATHEA"

HYMN 225 - "Take my life and let it be"

Messiah

BENEDICTION :: CHORAL BENEDICTION

Dresden

ORGAN POSTLUDE - "Prelude and Fugue"

Buxtehude

The Boy Scouts of this church will collect your newspapers. "Sign up" with them this morning after service.

APRIL 4, 1948 - CALENDAR FOR TODAY

10:30 Morning Worship and sermon - "Joseph of Arimathea"
Church-time Cherub Hour for small children.

11:00 Junior Church with Mrs. Gifford.

11:45 Church School; Mr. S. W. Fear, superintendent.

6:00 Youth Fellowship. Leader, Mr. Clarke. Topic of discussion, "The Resurrection".

7:30 Union Evening Service at Kingsboro Presbyterian Church with the Rev. Kenneth Slorpe, East Side Memorial Presbyterian Church, Rochester as the preacher.

The altar flowers are given by the E.F.W.
Class in memory of deceased members.

THROUGH THE WEEK AT FREMONT

MON. 11:00 Weekday School; grade 10.

7:30 Boy Scouts meet at the church.

TUES. 8:00 April meeting Woman's Society Christian Service. Mrs. Arthur Wilsey will present "A NIGHT WITH ALBERT SCHWEITZER"

WED. 2:30 Weekday School; grades 4, 5 and 6.

7:30 Mid-week Service; Mr. Clarke leading.

THURS. 7:30 Fremont Choir rehearsal.

7:45 Epworth Workers meet at the church.

8:00 Berean Class meets at the Y.W.C.A.

8:00 Venner Class meets with Arch Rogers.

FRI. 11:00 Weekday School; grade 9.

1:00 Weekday School; grades 7 and 8.

3:30 Chapel Choir rehearsal.

6:30 Harmony Class covered dish at the church.

SAT. 9:30 Carol Choir rehearsal.

7:30 Couples Club movie party at the church.

THE EASTER OFFERING at present amounts to \$1150.. While we have not as yet reached our goal of \$2000., yet this offering was very generous. Will those who have not returned their Easter envelope please do so as soon as possible. The Board of Trustees need the full \$2000. for the Renovating and Re-decorating of the church hallways.