

Be Magnified O Lord!

I was walking past one of our adult Sunday School classes in session last Sunday and heard an interesting question. If I heard it right and remember it right, it went something like this: "How much does God expect us to give?" I didn't stay around long enough to hear the answer; still, it was a compelling question.

Several weeks before that I picked a song from our hymnal that was new to me and to the choir members at Choir Rehearsal; we sang it for our exit hymn the following Sunday. Some were a little concerned about the words: which say this: "What will it cost me to follow the Lord? What is the price of a life that's restored? If I am willing to walk in His way, what is the price I must pay? Everything! Everything! All that I own, Everything! Everything! All that I am, Everything! Everything! All that I love, That is the price I must pay, That is the price I will pay."

Meister Eckhart, 14th century German scholar, theologian, and Christian mystic wrote: "There are plenty to follow our Lord halfway, but not the other half. They will give up possessions, friends, and honors, but it touches them too closely to disown themselves."

Thomas R. Kelly, an American Quaker and author of the devotional classic, "A Testament of Devotion," responds to Eckhart's observation with these words, "It is just this astonishing life which is willing to follow Him the other half, sincerely to disown itself, this life which intends complete obedience, without any reservations, that I would propose to you in all humility, in all boldness, in all seriousness. I mean this literally, utterly, completely, and I mean it for you and

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for me--commit your lives in unreserved obedience to Him.

If you don't realize the revolutionary explosiveness of this proposal you don't understand what I mean. Only now and then comes a man or a woman who . . . is willing to be utterly obedient, to go the other half, to follow God's faintest whisper. But when such a commitment comes in a human life, God breaks through, miracles are wrought, world-renewing divine forces are released, history changes. There is nothing more important now than to have the human race endowed with just such committed lives."*

I believe these words from Eckhart and Kelly are as true and even more needed today than at any other time in history. One more quote: William James wrote: "In some, religion exists as a dull habit, in others as an acute fever. Religion as a dull habit is not that for which Christ lived and died."

Something that impressed me especially about this year's Annual Conference, which in some year's past could be a rather tedious and boring affair, was the high level of spiritual passion. Most of the speakers I heard, including those giving Commission reports, were passionate about what they were saying and passionate about honoring the Lord. This year's Conference theme was "Be Magnified O Lord!" And, it was obvious that those who spoke did so with a desire to honor that theme. This is a good theme and one I would urge all of us to embrace as we go forward throughout the rest of this year and beyond. Let us magnify the Lord, holding nothing back. In many cases I think some of us have given the Lord only half of our available time, talent, worship, commitment, service, and resources--half of our hearts. What would happen if we gave Him the other

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half as well? What would happen if we would truly obey I Corinthians 10:31 that says, "So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God." What if we continually sought to magnify the Lord?

I don't know what all would happen but I'll bet we wouldn't have some of the problems that our facing us as a church today. If we gave God the other half and committed ourselves to God fully, I'll bet we wouldn't have any trouble finding teachers to teach our Children in Sunday School. I'll bet we wouldn't have to worry from month to month about whether or not there will be enough money to pay the bills. I'll bet we wouldn't need to worry about empty seats in the sanctuary or wonder why we don't see more conversions and baptisms. I'll bet we wouldn't need to worry about squabbles in the family of God. If we would commit everything to God, give Him the other half, our life together in the church would be anything but boring; it would not be a dull habit; it would be an acute and highly contagious fever that would magnify the Lord by transforming many lives into the image of Jesus Christ. I don't know about you but that's the kind of faith I want and the sort of church I want to be a part of.

The question is always, of course, how do we get there? Seeing the possibilities and yearning for their fulfillment is a good thing and a good first step but this alone won't get us to where we need to go, need to be. The desire to give God the other half, the whole of our hearts, if we possess this at all, is a gift of God; it is a work of the Holy Spirit. And the only way for our spiritual yearning to be fulfilled is by further workings of the Holy Spirit within us. What we need is a God thing not a man thing. I'm not asking anyone to crank up her own spiritual energy. I'm not asking anyone to

crank up his commitment. Any good that might bring would soon be nullified by spiritual pride or drained off by a lack of perseverance. We don't need a little bleep on the monitor of spiritual growth, we need a steady upward transformation, all of us becoming more and more like Christ. That is the work of the Holy Spirit, it is not of ourselves.

But this doesn't mean that we are totally passive in this process, for while we can't do it ourselves we can choose to cooperate with the moving of the Holy Spirit within us. We can choose to be led, we can risk being obedient, we can allow the Spirit to change our normal way of thinking and acting and speaking so that these magnify the Lord rather than ourselves.

We can resource ourselves with the Word of God by reading and reflecting on Scripture and other spiritual writings. We can position ourselves to hear from God by participating in Worship, Sunday School, and in small group Bible Studies, and by taking advantage of opportunities to participate in special seminars and conferences. We can maintain a regular devotional life at home.

But there is something else we need to attend to. Do we take seriously the knowledge that when we receive Jesus Christ as our personal Lord and Savior, He--in the person of the Holy Spirit--comes to live in our hearts? Well, if we know that, we need to pay attention to it, pay attention to Him. The Quakers speak of this as the Inner Light or the Inward Christ; we say Jesus is in our hearts. But do we understand that Jesus is not in our hearts just to camp out there? Do we understand that Jesus is not in our hearts just to make us feel good and to assure us of our salvation? No Jesus is in our hearts to make us brand new people, changed people, people so

transformed that those around us drop their jaws in wonder because when they look at us and hear what we say and see what we do they see Jesus. They see the reflection of God. They see God magnified. This will only come to pass in us to the degree that we quiet ourselves and get in touch with the Christ within us and surrender more and more of ourselves to love and obey Him.

And, yes it will mean going the other half--giving God everything, committing all that we are, all that we have, and all that we love to Him. And, yes, this sounds scary, but the thing we need to recognize is this: To the degree we are filled with ourselves and with the things and concerns of this world the less we will have of God, but to the degree that we empty ourselves for the love of God, the more we will know and have of Him, which is a far better thing. There is a hymn that says, "Take the world, but give me Jesus." There is no greater thing than for our hearts to be surrendered to His control. Let us quiet ourselves before Him until we recognize His presence and hear His voice. Let us say "yes" to all He asks of us. Let us be surrendered to His will.

To be sure, coming to this threshold of surrender is scary and the devil will whisper and shout a million reasons why we shouldn't go this far. He'll tell us that the cost is too great and that we will be impoverished if we make the Lord our all in all. But just remember that the devil is a liar; Jesus said quite the opposite. In fact, Jesus says in Luke 6:38, "Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you." If we give our all to God, He will give His all to us. In this He will be magnified and we will be blessed.

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Sermon for
The Sunday After Pentecost
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Be Magnified O Lord

Psalm 34:1-8

Jon R. Neely, Pastor

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