

The Essential Christ

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Morning Service

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Isaiah 53

Jesus' idea of God was that God is life, like unto a father, a living reality, forever working in and about us stimulating us to growth and development. We see the manifestations of this in the constant stimulations of our lives to search for truth, to grow in goodness and express ourselves in honesty.

The outside world is ordered in intelligence, that speaks to us in truth, goodness and beauty. As the parent to his child, so the living spirit of Truth, Goodness and Beauty to us, forever urges us along the pathways of growth into the fullness of the knowledge of life, its truth, its goodness, its beauty.

But we ask ourselves, what preparation has been made in us that we on our part may respond to these alluring sentiments that bid us to know the truth of life, to do its bidding, and to enter into its deepest satisfactions?

Here we stand upon the threshold of the most marvelous field of knowledge and wisdom that the mind has ever dreamed of. "We are fearfully and wonderfully made,"¹ said the psalmist of old. "My substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth."² What is back of us, human beings, full grown, capable of work and play, love and hate, memory and life, full of dreams, purposes, aspirations and ideals?

¹ Psalms 139:14.

² Psalms 139:15.

To go back only to the time when each one began his physical existence in the form of an egg cell, just large enough to be seen by a very keen human eye. It has a diameter of about $\frac{1}{5}$ of a millimeter. A millimeter is 0.0394 of an inch. $\frac{1}{5}$ of that is about .008 of an inch in diameter. This minute egg is a mass of protoplasm, containing some fine yolk granules, and a spherical nucleus, whose diameter is about $\frac{1}{7}$ or $\frac{1}{8}$ of the entire cell.

When this cell is fertilized by the sperm cell, $\frac{1}{35000}$ the size of the egg cell, we have the second step in the growth of the human being, the individual has begun to develop. Now each female cell contains 48 tiny particles and each male cell contains 47 tiny particles, called chromosomes. In the process of fertilization, 24 of these chromosomes from each parent, are contributed to the new cell, now forming, that is to grow into a human being.

Now these 47 or 48 tiny particles contained in this minute human cell make up what we call our inherited characteristics, color of hair, physical appearance, temperamental characteristics. These tiny units, chromosomes, determine the inherited characteristics of a body that grows to be 16,250,000,000 times the size of the determining particle.

How is this accomplished? This fertilized egg cell, with its freight of protoplasm and chromosomes begins to multiply, developed two main lines of cells. First, germ cells, whose function is that of reproduction, and secondly, the so-called somatic cells which make up the structure of the body. The body of man is composed of an aggregation of an infinite number of cells, such as skin cells, bone cells, muscle cells, gland cells, arranged so as to constitute the organs of the body.

Our interest this morning centers in the nerve cells which constitute the nervous system, for it is in and about the nervous system that personality develops. The nervous system is composed [of] an infinite number of nerve cells. Each nerve cell consists of a nucleated cell body and a nerve fiber extending from the cell body to various parts of the body. It is like a system of telephones in the city,

with the cell body corresponding to the telephone instrument, and the wires corresponding to the wires.

In this nervous system there are to be found three kinds of connections. One, the swiftest or reflex nerve system, which may be called a sort of automatic telephone system. There is an exciter at the end of the wire, which sends in a message to the cell body. The cell body reacts to this message automatically and sends out the message that causes the muscles to react. 2nd there are many little internal telephone systems, corresponding to private telephone systems, which work quite independent of these automatic systems. Just how they are related to the automatic system is not known, but there they are.

3rd there is that part of the nervous system which is related to consciousness. It is the central telephone exchange of the body, where the connections are made between the incoming wires and the outgoing wires by the mystery of all mysteries of life, human consciousness.

Let me describe this marvelous central exchange in which is centered that mysterious consciousness that is the essence of us. This exchange is located in the thin covering of the brain, a wrinkled [sheet] that if spread out smooth and flat would cover about 1 foot and one half square. If compressed into a solid it would be a little less than on cubic inch. It contains about 9,200,000,000,000 cells, and in a normal man, it is about 1/5000 part of his total weight.

Into this central exchange, where sits consciousness, working connections make all the message of life, from infancy to death, that go into our training, and education. Here are centered the exchange connections that constitute the habits established by education and training. Here are recorded all the experiences of our own life! Here are recorded all that we have learned by reading, study, and investigation.

Here is this cerebral Cortex, as it is called by the scientists, where consciousness makes the selection of incoming messages, and establishes the connections for outgoing messages to the world, takes place all those

marvelous developments of ideas, reasoned judgements, moral purposes that determine our conduct.

Thus far science. But our mind does not rest satisfied. We contemplate this marvelous mechanism of cells, the product of millions of years of an evolutionary process. We see the product as it shows itself in human persons. We watch a human character develop, with its habits, its standards, its purposes, battles for right, its devotion to ideals, its loyalties, its crucifixion. And with our whole being stirred to its depths in wonder and mystery, we ask what is there in this central exchange where consciousness selects, and combines, and directs thought and conduct. What is there in personality that so orders and classifies and commands?

The answer is one of faith, not a blind credulous faith, but a faith that carries us forward in the direction to which all known facts point, a faith so confirmed by all that we know and experience, that it becomes a great compelling conviction. The faith is this: that somehow in that wonderful mystery of conscious personality, that operates in the central exchange of our cerebral cortex, there is a central urge that reaches out towards the truth, goodness, and beauty of the world. To every stimulating call that bids us inquire into the truth of life, there goes forth from us a responsive answer. To every alluring well of beauty and harmony from the outside world, there wells up some sense of appreciation, some effort to respond. To every act of heroic conduct there within us the impulse to goodness.

Though love repine, and reason chafe,
There came a voice without reply,
" 'Tis man's perdition to be safe,
When for the truth he ought to die."³

Within us is the urge that responds to the temptations, to truth, goodness, and beauty without. "I and my father are one," said Jesus. The God without and the God within are of like life. Purpose registers in us because it is

³ Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Sacrifice," a Quatrain in *The Poems of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, Boston: Houghton, Mifflin Co., 1867, p. 296.

grounded in the world without. We bear witness to the nature of the world because we have had insight into every fiber and cell of our being some of the essence of truth, goodness and beauty that is within and without.

The ancient Greek said "The logos became flesh and dwelt among us." The eternal truth is within us. We are very God of very God, of the same essence as the father. At the heart of the human being is the image and the purpose that is God. The Essential Christ.

"A picket frozen on duty,
A mother starved for her brood,
Socrates drinking the hemlock,
And Jesus on the road;
And millions who, humble and nameless,
The straight, hard pathway plod,--
Some call it Consecration,
And others call it God."⁴

What then is it in us that urges us to seek to do justly, to love mercy, to walk humbly with our God?

What compelled von Baer, who first discovered much that I have told you about the human cell, to shut himself out from the world, and to sacrifice his health for that knowledge? In his autobiography he writes, "And so it happened that in the course of a year I shut myself up in my shell while the snow was still on the ground, and when I again ventured out to cross the garden wall only a hundred steps from me, I was astounded to find that the fields of rye were in the ear."

Many of you one Friday evening heard that interesting man, Russell Conwell⁵ tell of some of the interesting persons he had met. John Burris, urged through life, and into death, by a moral conviction. Conwell's own father, sacrificing every personal interest for a moral ideal. Abraham Lincoln pouring out his heart and soul in Cooper

⁴ Final stanza of "Each in His Own Tongue" by William Herbert Carruth (1859-1924).

⁵ Russell Conwell (1843-1925). American Baptist minister, orator, philanthropist, lawyer and writer. See Wikipedia.

Union quite regardless of political expediency. What has determined the conduct of Russell Conwell himself? Education for young men and women.

Pick your way all down along the line of human history. Who stands out as the leaders in thought, in action in influence? Those whose lives have been determined by a great purpose in the world. Those in whom the Essential Christ, the image of God in the life of man has sat in control in the central exchange where man's conscious conduct is determined.

So this is my faith, my conviction.

N.B.: The biological data in this sermon are taken from *Biology and the Social Problem* by George Howard Parker, Houghton + Mifflin⁶

⁶ Parker, George Howard (1864-1955). *Biology and Social Problems*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1914.