

Luke 2 verse 30 "...I HAVE SEEN YOUR SALVATION..."

Pauline Webb in a book entitled "Salvation To-day" tells of an occasion during a meeting of the World Council of Churches Conference when a young Japanese artist ran through the luncheon room as the Conference members enjoyed lunch. He shouted "Salvation! Where Can I Find Salvation?". It was an attempt to dramatise the theme of the Conference: "Salvation To-day". But as those present smiled with appreciation at this attempt to dramatise the Conference theme, there was a cry as the young man threw himself into a lake outside the building. No longer was this a role-play, for the man was drowning.

Here we have a Parable: A parable for us. Everyone needs help of some kind, however satisfied and comfortable, we may be, we need help. When we analyse all the problems which face us as a nation, as a community, as individuals, the one thing people need is SALVATION; or to use a modern term WHOLENESS: a life set free - that is what Christianity is all about. It is what people are looking for. Looking for Salvation - WHY? and WHERE AND HOW DO WE FIND SALVATION? To those three questions, I hope to offer answers.

WHY IS THERE A SEARCH FOR SALVATION. Simon in that story in Luke's Gospel was looking for Salvation. He represented Jewish piety at its best. He was a good and God fearing Man. He was waiting for Israel to be saved. But while we cry out for Salvation, we get drowned.

There are those who search for Salvation of their cause by resorting to violence: the bombs in Northern Ireland, the growing concern over the widespread use of threatening words and behaviour in the streets of London, all show that violence as a means of achieving salvation ends with men drowning in the waves caused by violence and a NEED FOR SALVATION.

Or there are those who search to rescue victims of malnutrition, starvation or the victims of being homeless, to mention a few examples, they believe that it is by kindness and charity that salvation will come; they create organisations and organise events from demonstrations to sponsored events for money, to further their cause. But for economic reasons beyond their control there are still the hungry to feed, the homeless to be housed, and so the need continues - a need for Salvation.

Or a Business Organisation closes a factory; the number of jobs is reduced. There are those without a job looking for work, a local press reported that it was obvious from many calls to the local Samaritans over the Christmas period had unemployment as the source of problems for people looking for SALVATION. They want Salvation.

The Archbishop of Canterbury was the speaker at one of the monthly meetings of the Methodist Men's Luncheon Club. He spoke of the dilemmas of many in the world, people who seem to have surrendered to fatalism about so-called inevitabilities of life, cruelty, injustice, poverty, bigotry and war. Then he went on to speak of the many letters he receives: people write to their Member of Parliament or Prime Minister, and having received no satisfaction write to the Archbishop of Canterbury. Perhaps they are not misguided, for their need is SALVATION.

That old man who met Joseph and Mary in the Temple had no doubt listened to what other men said. There were those about, who were revolutionaries who said that the only way to bring Israel back to its former glory was to use violence. He must have been aware of the other good kind people who would never do anybody any harm, and whose idea was to go away and live in a closed community and so bring about peace. Or he would have known about politicians who aspired to greatness, but with power corrupted themselves

in the process. We hear the same voices to-day. Those same interests are all featured in modern Society. They show the Needs of Many for Salvation: BUT WHERE IS THIS SALVATION TO BE FOUND?

WHERE? Having seen all the ways in which men said Salvation would come, Simeon watched and waited. He knew these claims could not be fulfilled. He knew these men with their various ideas were on the wrong paths. He knew the way to lead to peace would be revealed to Him. And then it happened. In the Temple. He saw the child Jesus. He would have seen babies before. But this day the Spirit of the Lord was with him. He saw what he had never seen before. Here was the Way of Salvation. Here was the opposite to violence.

Into the dark and brutal world of that day, Jesus came in humility. We are living in a world where Jesus Christ can be and should be a living reality for us. There are those whose FAITH testifies to his presence. There are those who have recognised Jesus in the Needs of the Community. There are those whose have given opportunities to OBEY Him. He comes in different ways to different people; but He may come in such humility that we scarcely recognise Him.

You remember the story of those two disciples as they walked to Emmaus, and they did not know Jesus. Why? Why did they not know the figure that drew near to them was the Lord. Probably because they did not expect Him to come in the way in which He did come: in that homely, friendly, and human way; BUT THAT IS THE WAY.

A Chaplain at Dartmoor Prison presented the story of the Good Samaritan to the inmates in a contemporary setting. He told of a coach of American tourists robbed at gun point on the modern equivalent of the road from Jerusalem to Jericho, taking watches, jewellery and money; and added "What is more they got away with it". At this the audience cheered. He turned on them and said "Why you rotten lot" whereupon with immediate audience participation one said "Of course we are a rotten lot, what do you think we are doing in Dartmoor". Those words had a salutary effect on the Chaplain. He realised that those men needed Salvation. To help them he had to do more than just preach. He had to understand them as individuals if they were to find Salvation. He formed a fellowship class which week by week looked at the stories of Jesus in the Gospels, His Life, His Words, the Cross and the Message of this NEW Life. One who was imprisoned for manslaughter, who had shown no remorse and was a hard callous person became a changed person. He became a new person through what he had heard. He had found a new freedom. He had found Salvation. At a most unlikely place; a most unlikely person given the opportunity through hearing about Jesus. He had found Salvation there.

HOW THEN IS SALVATION TO BE FOUND? The words from the hymn "O Come to my heart Lord Jesus, There is room in my heart for Thee" They prompt the question "Do we really want Jesus in our Lives". Jesus and his ways dictate our standards of right behaviour. Our standards of respectability. His ways run the risk of embarrassing Us. If Jesus physically appeared in our midst to-day, have you thought what he might ask us to do. Surely, it would be to go to the broken people in the disaster zones of the world. To help the plight of the underprivileged in the Third World. To help the homeless and rejected in our own land. The sad, the lonely, the friendless. When we hear these needs spelt out, is it not Jesus inviting us to bring those in need to Salvation? That is How Salvation is Found by those in Need.

There are countless individuals, who like that Japanese artist are crying out for salvation, and perhaps unconsciously, struggling to find liberation

from human suffering, from man's violence, from starvation, and so we can go on. But if we remain silent we are failing. Mission Alongside the Poor has made us realise that 'POVERTY' must not be interpreted too narrowly, for loneliness, alcoholism, redundancy, youngster on drugs, nervous breakdowns are sorts of poverty which are none the less real and need salvation.

We have to recognise the opportunities as they present themselves to each one of us. It means letting Jesus into our lives. It means taking every opportunity to show in the society in which we live the Lordship of Jesus. To show that Jesus is Lord of all Life. That Jesus is the way to Salvation

There are two more points about Salvation. One: it is always costly. There is no cheap Salvation, and invariably when a person or event saves the situation the price is paid, not by the one who is being saved; but by someone on his or her behalf. The examples of this in every day life are many. The triumphant affirmation of Christians is that Jesus has done just that, the Jesus who was born at Bethlehem, who was taken into the Temple, was the same Jesus who became part of the system of His Day. He was the same Jesus who prayed that prayer "Father, Forgive them, for they know not what they do". The same Jesus who was crucified, as we sing "There is room in my heart for Thee", it means living His Way, sharing His Life, and His Death at Calvary.

The other point about Salvation is that it relates to the whole of life, and to the needs of the individual. It relates to: the personal identity of each individual; a person's private sins; a teenager's search for the meaning of life...

SALVATION - WHY? We must be aware of many varied cries for Salvation which are all very real round about us if we are to help one another to find this Salvation, this Wholeness of Life. There is a Need

SALVATION - WHERE? The opportunities are with us. As the Chaplain became aware, we have the answer. The members of the Christian Church are the custodians of that Gospel message, for everyone to receive, The Gospel of Salvation.

SALVATION - HOW? We have to show that self-sacrifice changes more lives and more situations than the sacrifice of others. The Way of Salvation is Jesus. Greatness does not come out of power, but in humility. Our Church systems must show it. Our own lives must real it. Hopefully, national policies will then reflect it.

WITH MY OWN EYES "I HAVE SEEN YOUR SALVATION" WHICH YOU HAVE MADE READY IN THE PRESENCE OF ALL PEOPLES.

This sermon was written by John Player a Methodist lay-preacher