

is your basic message still: still as dynamic, as "mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds," as moving and heart-piercing, as when men heard it preached in Jerusalem long ago.

There is, however, another side to the matter. Just as we noted how profoundly the modern mind is dominated by the tension between disillusionment and hope, so now we have to observe that over against the escapist attitude, countering it and setting up a further tension, there exists a strange passion for reality. Illogical? Undoubtedly. But there is the fact governing the relationship of multitudes at this moment to the religion of Christ—what repels, attracts; what disturbs and disconcerts, haunts and convinces. In the very moment of the headlong flight from reality, the drive towards reality makes itself felt; and "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man" becomes "Nearer, my God, to Thee!"

It is one of the mightiest safeguards of a man's ministry—to be aware of that hungry demand for reality breaking inarticulately from the hearts of those to whom he ministers. For that cry puts everything shoddy, second-hand or artificial utterly to shame.

You do not need to be eloquent, or clever, or sensational, or skilled in dialectic: you *must* be real. To fail there is to fail abysmally and tragically. It is to damage incalculably the cause you represent.

Anything savouring of unreality in the pulpit is a double offence. Let me urge upon you two considerations.

On the one hand, you will be preaching to people who have been grappling all the week with stern realities. Behind a congregation assembling for worship there are stories of heavy anxiety and fierce temptation, of loneli-

ness and heroism, of overwork and lack of work, of physical strain and mental wear and tear. We wrong them and we mock their struggles if we preach our Gospel in abstraction from the hard facts of their experience. It is not only that they can detect at once the hollowness of such a performance, though that is true; there is also this—that to offer pedantic theorizings and academic irrelevances to souls wrestling in the dark is to sin against the Lord who died for them and yearns for their redeeming.

But there is a further indictment of unreality in preaching. This is rooted not so much in the hard problems men and women are facing—what Whittier called this "maddening maze of things"—as in the very nature of the Christian faith itself. The Gospel is quite shattering in its realism. It shirks nothing. It never seeks to gloss over the dark perplexities of fate, frustration, sin and death, or to gild unpalatable facts with a coating of pious verbiage or facile consolation. It never side-tracks uncomfortable questions with some naïve and cheerful cliché about providence or progress. It gazes open-eyed at the most menacing and savage circumstance that life can show. It is utterly courageous. Its strength is the complete absence of utopian illusions. It thrusts Golgotha upon men's vision and bids them look at that. The very last charge which can be brought against the Gospel is that of sentimentality, of blinking the facts. It is devastating in its veracity, and its realism is a consuming fire.

This is the message with which we are charged. How grievous the fault if in our hands it becomes tainted with unreality!

Of course, this is an issue which concerns the whole