

A Personal Word for You

Mack McCarter

Have you been to a party lately, or some other formal gathering, or just a get-together with friends? If you have, I'll bet you that at least once someone began to talk about the situation here in our city. The conversation begins with the recitation of the latest mind-numbing crime. Everyone, almost in vacant eyed disbelief, just slowly shakes his or her head. Then the litany begins. More tales are told, each larger than the last, and each underscoring the depth of a society in the twilight of decline. Has that happened in your presence? I've seen it untold times, and I know that you have, too. It is a positively paralyzing experience! The problems are so massive that when we all finish adding in our stories, our Hope is being filed away by the rasp of a reality that threatens to consume us. We go home sad, mad, frustrated, but mostly defeated.

I want to tell you something. Our greatest need in Shreveport, our greatest need in America, is not the need to solve the crime problem. It is not the need to solve the drug problem. It is not the need to solve the problem of racism. It is not jobs. And it is not education. Those needs are huge. They are massive. But they are not our greatest need!

The greatest need in Shreveport-Bossier, Louisiana, our greatest need in America, is the need for changed people! We need people who have been changed from being fundamentally self-centered and self-serving, into people who are fundamentally other-centered and other-serving. While this is a simple truth, it is no easy undertaking. Let me tell you why.

Into the life of self-centeredness we are all born. It is the way we are wired. We all have a terminal illness which cripples us and affects everyone around us. That illness is an absolute addiction to "self." We do not have to go far to find the heart of true evil. Evil is nothing more than saying at one time or another, "I want to do what I want to do when I want to do it." Evil is "live" spelled backwards. Adam's story is Everyman's story. We reject the life of community to dance our own frenetic dance—awkward and alone.

Now, there are two amazing truths that follow the big truth of our terminal trap of self. First, we go to great lengths to prove that we are not self-centered. Others, of course, are, but not me. To this generic denial, the great James Martineau replied, "Man is the only creature in the Universe capable of self-deception. That is, man and only man, can create from nothing: a lie. Then, tell that lie to himself. And finally, believe that lie as if it were the gospel truth!" It is our slippery self at the very center of ourselves telling our "self" that we are not self-centered!

The second amazing truth about our self-addiction is that we cannot cure ourselves. It would be just as easy to give ourselves a heart transplant as to cure ourselves of the problem of our "self." We cannot by sheer force of will make our self-centered self into an other-centered, other-serving person. So here is the challenge: in order to change our community, the people must be changed, yet we are incapable of changing ourselves. But don't despair! There is another Truth!

People are not what they should be. But they do not have to stay the way they are. The Great Truth is this: People can change! Even the most hard headed, data crunching scientist must acknowledge both the capacity and the reality that a person can fundamentally change. A person can radically change-change from the inside out-change from top to bottom. Millions of human beings have had the direction of their focus, their attitude, and their behavior absolutely changed.

In the light of this Truth, let me share with you my deepest convictions. None of us can create the power to change ourselves, but that Power is present. It is the real Power of God's Love. When you can trust that you are loved as you are right now from the One who has made you and knows you-it will change you. I cannot explain the mystery of this Love. I cannot even explain the mystery of life, or how life entered a seed of corn, but my ignorance does not stop me from growing corn!! I know how to meet the conditions necessary to grow corn.

Our task at Shreveport Community Renewal is not to try to create the power to change Shreveport, but to appropriate the Power already present by constructing the conditions necessary to grow new character. We are following the practical and workable steps of a basic strategy to grow great crops of changed people. IN the issues of this newsletter that follow, I will lay those steps out in clear and simple ways so that you can see the sense of this mission. I absolutely know that we will win!! Want an adventure? Come and join us!!