

Chosen to Clap and Cheer  
Colossians 1:3-14; II Timothy 1:16

*Guideposts* magazine once told the story of little Jamie Scott who was trying out for a part in the school play. His mother said that he'd set his heart on being in it, though she feared he would not be chosen. On the day the parts were being awarded, the mother made a point of being at the door when school was out in order to lessen what she felt would be a terrific blow to her son's ego when he didn't get the part.

The school doors opened and what looked like hundreds of children poured out, and along with them, Jamie. He rushed up to his mother, eyes shining with pride and excitement and shouted: *I made it. I've been chosen to clap and cheer.* Life is a stage upon which are played a million dramas daily and some people are center stage doing most of the important things and speaking most of the lines, and some have minor roles, and some are in the supporting cast or the chorus. Some are in the make-up crew or the stage crew, people who make and paint sets and who dress the main characters. Some are in the orchestra. But, in any play, look around you. Where are the majority of the people? What are they doing? They are the ones clapping and cheering. I would even venture a guess that those who often find themselves on center stage, will just as often find themselves on other occasions clapping and cheering, for life has a way of reversing roles.

The essence of my message this morning is that there is a real ministry

consisting of clapping and cheering. On a number of occasions we are all chosen to bring words of appreciation and gratitude, words of cheer and comfort, words of praise and thanksgiving to others. On other occasions it isn't our words that are so helpful as it is our presence, or something that we can do for a person, like bring them a meal, or take them shopping, or even just give them a big hug.

The Bible is full of people who were clappers and cheerers. Our text tells us about Onesiphorus. He was a Christian from Ephesus who is praised for his loyalty and service to Paul and the church. Paul writes, *May the Lord grant mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, for he often refreshed me; he was not ashamed of my chains, but when he arrived in Rome he searched for me eagerly and found me ...*

It is interesting to note what other Bible translators have done with this text in relation to the help that Onesiphorus rendered to Paul. Here are some of the various English translations: *He gave me fresh vigor. He put a fresh heart in me. He relieved me in my troubles. He often showed me kindness and ministered to my needs - comforting and reviving and bracing me like fresh air! His visits revived me like a breath of fresh air.*

Scholars have surmised that the slave Onesimus mentioned in Paul's letter to Philemon, might very well be the same person as Onesiphorus. There certainly would be a remarkable coincidence that two persons of such similar names would

be ministering to Paul in prison and also be serving so well in the church community in Ephesus. In any event, the kingdom of God is not going to rise or fall on this issue, but I simply mention it in order to give a little more flesh and blood to this fellow Onesiphorus, who, depending on the translation of the Bible that you read, did one or all of the following things for the Apostle Paul while he was in prison - refreshed him, revived him, gave him fresh heart, showed kindness, comfort and braced him like a breath of fresh air. He was a good clapper and cheerer. There are other individuals mentioned in the Bible who also supported Paul. Writing to the Corinthian Church (I Cor. 16:17) he wrote that *I rejoice at the coming of Stephanas and Fortunatus and Achaicus, because they have made up for your absence for they refreshed my spirit as well as yours.* Here again we have reference to individuals who gave Paul a boost in time of need. They refreshed his spirit.

This is no small tribute. One of the principal founders of the Christian Church has singled out some members of that church for high honors. Paul is singling out some people of faith who have helped him, and ministered to him in his need.

This ministry is often a quiet and an unobtrusive one where the person doing the ministering and the one receiving it are the only ones who are aware of what is going on. In the New Testament letters, such ministries hardly receive a line of

mention. Today they hardly receive any mention at all. Often this ministry is simply a word of praise, *thanks for a job well done*. Sometimes it takes the form of support, *I'm with you on this project*. Other times it is a word like, *I'm keeping you in my prayers every day*.

Refreshment can come in so many ways. It might come with a small thoughtful gift, or even a smile, or a twinkle in an eye. Sometimes a letter is enough to refresh a person or in this day of a greeting card for every occasion, just a cheery card will do. Each one of us, then, on occasion, is called to a ministry of clapping and cheering.

In closing, let me share with you what I feel is the logical conclusion of all that I have said so far. If, as individuals we are often called to a quiet ministry of support, so are we as a church, as the body of Christ called into such a ministry. Paul felt this way also. He recognized the ministry of the body as a whole. Writing to the congregation in Rome (15:32), he said, *I may come to you with joy and be refreshed in your company*. Beloved, when we gather together, it ought to be a refreshing experience. It should revive us. We should go out of here with just a little more vigor and enthusiasm than we came with, and, I might add, it ought not be just because you've just had a good nap.

To be in the presence of those people who know their God on a personal level, should be an inspiring experience. To sit next to those people who have

committed their lives and all that they have to the work of Christ, should be a strengthening factor. To rub shoulders with those who know that we all shall die, but nevertheless, face that fact fearlessly, should do something to revive us. To be in the company of a group of people for whom the only fearsome thing is to be disobedient to their God, is like, well, a breath of fresh air.

Are we fresh air? Have we this reviving quality about us? Have we this ministry of comfort for those who come here in need? Are we the support group to which many people come in time of anxiety and conflict? The Bible would suggest quite unequivocally that this fellowship, we, you and I, is meant to be a reviving fellowship. Oh, I know all the bad connotations associated with the word revival, but it's a perfectly good word, even for the church of today.

We are the fresh air the Holy Spirit of God has blown into a stale world that needs reviving.

Edward Arnold has written that

*Somewhere there waiteth in this world of ours*

*For one lone soul, another lonely soul -*

*Each chasing each through all the weary hours,*

*And meeting strangely at one sudden goal;*

*Then blend they - like green leaves with golden flowers,*

*Into one beautiful and perfect whole -*

*And life's long night is ended, and the way*

*lies open onward to eternal day.*

This fellowship of believers can be, should be, that place where people find people who will take away their loneliness, their sorrow, their fears and their grief.

Onesiphorus, your name is legion. Actually, your name means profitable and you proved very profitable to Paul in his time of great need. But the real issue is not what our name means, but the meaning that we are giving our name.

Are you, as an individual, welcomed by others like a breath of fresh air? Are we as a church viewed by others as a refreshing, comforting, interesting fellowship?

Let's accept the obvious ... for most of us, our most significant ministry is going to be clapping and cheering, and there's not a thing wrong with that!