



Care Before Cure

In humility we cast all our care on Christ because He cares for us. We must be willing to be servants who care for others even in the midst of rejection, brokenness and "incurable" situations.

In a world full of brokenness it is not possible to remain unbroken. We sin, and we are sinned against. In a very real sense, the sins of the fathers (and mothers) are visited upon succeeding generations, and each generation of sinners sins against its parents, its children, itself. But if brokenness has any virtue, it is that it can be the path through which God softens our hearts toward the brokenness of others. Such tender-heartedness becomes the upturned soil within which the compassion of God can flourish. Suddenly-though still broken ourselves-we care for others at the point of their brokenness.

Some-a precious few-are moved to act. Hungry people need food, homeless folk need shelter, and latch key kids need a safe place to study and play waiting for mom or dad to get home. Churches and the people who run them find themselves swept up in a flurry of "curing" the brokenness they see around them. Suddenly, the church has a food bank, a Habitat for Humanity chapter and an after school program set up, and we become doers of cure.

After a short while, thoughtful and caring folk will begin to observe a curious trend. Providing food for hungry people doesn't end hunger, every new homeless shelter built is filled to capacity the day it opens, and the number of children in single-parent families continues to grow. Suddenly, the thoughtful person realizes that many of the causes for hunger, homelessness and out-of-wedlock births have larger, structural causes. Reasonable, caring people can and do come to radically differing conclusions of the "causes" of our social ills. No matter. For both sides, the temptation is to leave the hungry woman in the food line or the lonely man at the back of the church and venture off to do battle in the public square. You know the argument-"feed a man a fish and you feed him for a day, teach him to fish and you feed him for a life time." Fighting for structural change is a noble human endeavor.

But as any soldier will tell you, wars are won or lost not on good intentions, but when one side or the other is defeated. In the name of care, and for the sake of cure, the vigilant citizen must focus on those who oppose the changes now seen as vital to cure. Money, sweat, time-even blood, if necessary-must be expended on behalf of the cause we so desperately support. The cost of failure is seen as too high, after all, for the lives of hungry/homeless/children are at stake.

But one day, the bruised and battered political veteran wakes up and realizes that the war was lost before the first shot was ever fired. In the name of Jesus, we have sallied forth to bring about social justice, but we find that both our shield bearers and our generals serve another master. In short, we are used to advance the agenda of every one else but God. Those for whom we fought-the ones for whom we first cared even before we attempted cure-are now far, far away, and their condition is no better for all our efforts.

But others have remained home, tending to the needs of particular persons. Day after day, week after week, month after month, we keep ladling out soup to the same empty bowls, keep smiling at the same grim faces, and tend the next baby born to the mother who can't provide for the four she already has. Then in one, dark moment, we come to realize that the daily "cure" is really no cure at all, that many of the men and women we've sacrificed so much for are fully intent on making choices that keep them running in place. They don't want to change, or they can't. In either case, it doesn't really matter if we show up because these folk will be just as broken whether or not we turn down the bed or heat up the soup. Perhaps despair, or worse, apathy, is after all the most reasonable response.

But consider Jesus.

He never tried to change "the system." Never once did he condemn Roman hegemony, Roman economics, Roman law, Roman slavery. Why? Because he knew the real "structure" behind the brokenness of humanity was the human heart. Is this an argument against political action? May it never be! There is a place for political action, and there are those called to these arenas. But the Christian who is genuinely called to this field-like the missionary who plays the piano in a whore house-had better guard the heart. Christ died for hearts-yours and mine-and not for "systems" and structures. If you battle the nasty "Republicans" or those hateful "Democrats," you'd better be sure that you love those who hate you, and care for those who spitefully use you. In other words, we cannot claim to care for the homeless while hating those who have homes or even those we perceive are the cause of homelessness. Care is a condition of our heart, not theirs. And genuine, Christ-like care is not dependent upon the actions of others. Far from it. "For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life (Rom 5:10)." Christ-like actions can only flow out of a Christ-like heart.

And for those who despair at the lack of response or the lack of change in those we try to cure, again, consider Jesus. He was crucified by the very people he came to save. And yet his response

while hanging on the cross is profound. "Father, forgive those who are murdering me, they are blinded by their brokenness; indeed, it is their brokenness that led them to do this to me. And it is for their brokenness that my body is now broken, so please, use my brokenness to heal theirs." Christ didn't attempt "cure" for the sake of cure. He lived and died knowing that most would not repent, would not change, would not even appreciate what he had done. So why did he do it? Because Jesus cared for people long before he attempted to cure them, and he did not let their response to his cure affect his care.

For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. (Rom 5:6-8)