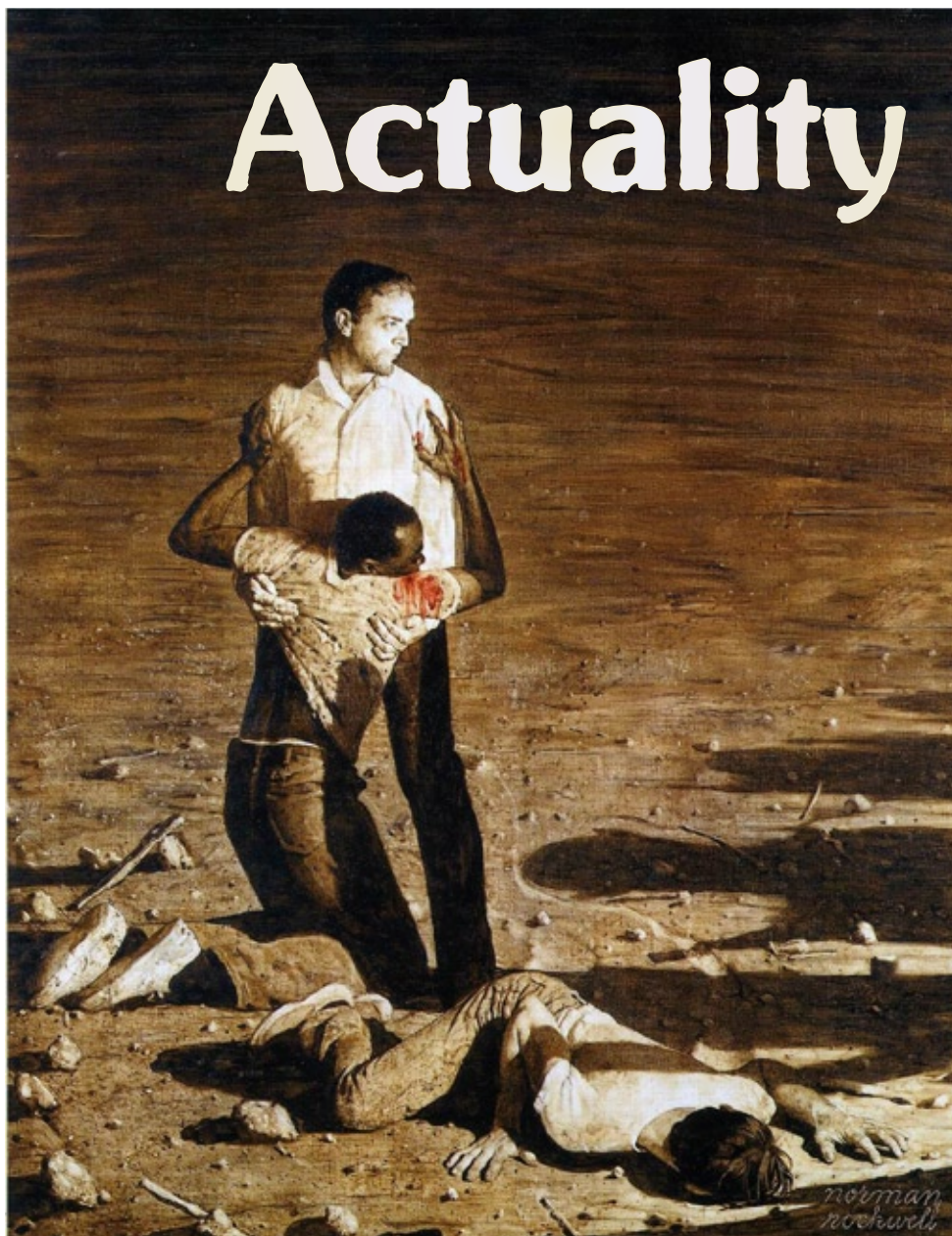


Actuality



**Out in the highways and
byways of life,
Many are weary and sad;
Carry the sunshine where
darkness is rife,
Making the sorrowing glad.**

THE PERILS OF WINTER ARE MANY and, occasionally, surprising. No matter the care and precautions, no matter the weathered experience in things climatic, the unexpected can occur in the blink of an eye.

The menacing weather had been intermittent all day: relative calm interspersed with white-out, blizzard conditions. It was not terribly cold, but the wind was fierce, creating high drifts and a treacherous environment for travel. We knew there was some risk involved in driving into town, but, for the moment, the odds seemed to be in our

favor. So, with the back of the Jeep loaded with blanket, boots and shovel, we set out on the brief journey.

With cautious driving, we were fine on the gravel road. Though snow-packed and slick, the gravel and earthen surface offered a measure of built-in traction. We passed around several curves, then I accelerated across the bridge and up the rise that approached the paved portion of the road that led past the golf course and into town.

The moment our wheels hit the “treated” pavement we went into an uncontrollable skid. The small jolt, where the beginning

of the cement was slightly higher than the graded surface, was sufficient to dislocate our traction—and send us careening into the ditch.

Let us politely avert our gaze from my earnest yet inadequate efforts to extricate the Jeep from the deep, wet clutches of the roadside. We will not linger there. But it was not long before a Good Samaritan drove up. We had gone off the road directly across from our town’s Water Works, and he had seen it all. Not only did he drive out to help, but had searched around the shop—sadly, in vain—for a chain with which to pull us

out. He went back to look again for a chain, but came back, instead, with a phone book. He called a tow company for us on his cell phone, but in the white-out conditions, they were recalling their trucks.

So this kind gentleman drove into town, in a blizzard, to the Water Work's other shop, where he thought he might be able to find a chain long enough for the task. Returning with the object of his quest, he pulled us out in only a few minutes. After modestly accepting our profuse gratitude, he went back to work, and we continued on our way.

The Actuality of Christ

Part of "believing" is believing that Jesus is not just real, but *actual*. It is not enough to believe that there was an historical person named Jesus of Nazareth who was born, lived thirty-odd years, then died. That is the sincere but sterile belief of the historian, of a Will Durant struggling to be respectful of faith, while restricting his analysis to established, documented facts. It is polite, but spiritually barren.

But what does it say? "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart"—that is, the word of faith which we are preaching, that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved;

Romans 10:8-9

It is sufficient, albeit infantile, to believe only that Jesus was the Son of God who died for one's sin and rose from the grave. That is a belief initiated by the Spirit, but left withering and malnourished in the cradle. It shows up on Christmas and Easter and nods its head in solemn agreement with the proceedings, but is otherwise a faithful disciple only of this temporal time and place.

Substantive belief begins with the historical Jesus, moves from there to faith in His redeeming, substitutionary sacrifice upon the cross, but then progresses on to daily living with the *actual* Jesus.

No Less Real

Therefore as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him,

having been firmly rooted and now being built up in Him and established in your faith, just as you were instructed, and overflowing with gratitude.

Colossians 2:6-7

True, Jesus is, for all intents and purposes, invisible to us. Though He may dwell in tangible, resurrected form next to God the Father, to us still dwelling upon the soil of earth He may as well be spirit, for we experience Him much in the same manner as we experience the third member of the Godhead: the Holy Spirit.

Still, this makes Him no less real to us—no less actual. Just as the ministry of the invisible Spirit is tangibly real to the believer, so is the presence and work of the invisible Christ. There are moments in the life of the attentive believer when the consolation of Jesus is as "physically" real as the embrace of a loved one, enjoying coffee with a friend, sharing tears with a husband or wife. We may "feel" the Spirit working within us, but it is the face of Jesus we "see" when the hand of God is upon our life. On a spiritual level, that is the actuality of Christ.

His Tactile Love

His actuality does not stop there, however.

Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma.

Ephesians 5:1-2

Every believer is the actuality of Jesus both to brothers and sisters in Christ, and to everyone else in a fallen world. More than that, when God sets a helper in the path of someone in need, His storehouse of personnel is not limited to the ranks of Christians. As He did repeatedly throughout the Old Testament, God is pleased today to use humans of every stripe to accomplish His will. So the face and hands of Jesus may be realized even in the encouragement or consolation of someone who does not yet know Him personally.

So was our Good Samaritan who helped us out of the ditch a Christian? I don't know. He certainly *behaved* as one, and in his kindness, and willingness to inconvenience himself for two strangers in need, he

became, for a moment, the actuality of Jesus for two of His children.

This kind stranger became, as well, an object lesson—a goad—for us to do likewise. Every day God sets in our path individuals in need of the face and hands of a loving Jesus. He says to us, "I care about this person. I love him. And he needs Me right now. Take the time, and make the effort, to be Me in this person's life."

Every believer is the actuality of Jesus. Every believer is called to model in flesh the compassion, kindness, longsuffering, and forgiveness of the Savior.

For a world that will not acknowledge the invisible truth about God, we must be, for them, the first Jesus they experience. We must, for the moment, be Him in flesh—His face, His hands, His tactile love.



**Tell the sweet story of Christ
and His love,
Tell of His power to forgive;
Others will trust Him if only
you prove
True, every moment you live.**

**Give as 'twas given to you in
your need,
Love as the Master loved you;
Be to the helpless a helper
indeed,
Unto your mission be true.**

**Make me a blessing, make me
a blessing,
Out of my life may Jesus shine;
Make me a blessing, O Savior,
I pray,
Make me a blessing to
someone today.**

Ira B. Wilson