



UNCOMMON DECENCY

“Let your light shine before
men in such a way that they
may see your good works,
and glorify your Father who
is in heaven.”

Matthew 5:16

IN A COMMON WORLD, the follower of Christ is to be uncommon. The Christian's path is challenging, for we are to thread our way through a minefield of temptations, distractions, and proffered compromises. We are not to permanently detach ourselves from this world, since it is, in Jesus' terms, a "field... white for harvest." We are always to be serving, reaching, "harvesting" those that do not yet know our Savior.

"Do you not say, 'There are yet four months, and then comes the harvest'? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look on the fields, that they are white for harvest. Already he who reaps is receiving wages and is gathering fruit for life eternal; so that he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together. For in this case the saying is true, 'One sows and another reaps.' I sent you to reap that for which you have not labored; others have labored and you have entered into their labor."

John 4:35-38

Yet, as any farmer can tell you, tramping through a field that has been sown will result in dirty feet. Seeds are not planted in clean, level pavement, but in deeply plowed, soft fertile soil. If there has been welcome rain, the soil will have turned to a wet, sucking muck that tries valiantly to remove the boots from our feet. Gnats, mosquitoes and flies buzz irritatingly around our face and bare arms, driving us mad with their mindless persistence. No, tramping through a field ripe for harvest is not the same as a pleasant walk in the park.

Though we are to remain in the world, through it all we are not to be *of* the world.

"I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world."

John 17:14-16

Our lives are to be different from the rest, distinctive, sanctified. We are not to blend in, but to stand out as something out of the ordinary.

Years ago we hired someone to paint the exterior of our house. Stupidly basing my selection of painter solely on his low bid, I was disappointed to discover later that I had chosen someone for the job who was a thuggish lout. His personality was coarse and abrasive, his language profane. It took constant effort on my part to get him to follow through on his promises. The man's behavior was churlish and abusive, full of empty boasts and small-minded excuses. Throughout, he was argumentative with me. He would be inexplicably absent for days, then work for only a few hours when he finally did show up. He promised a crew of 4-5 men, but had trouble keeping two on the job. He said the job would take four days; it took more than four weeks. The painter constantly cut corners and reneged on promises made. He yelled at his men and called them derogatory names. He promised to pay them, but didn't, causing them at one point to walk off the job. On what he saw as his last day, he collected up his ladders and came to the door to collect the balance of his money when there were still many parts of the house which had not yet been painted. On the last day he was here, his work and behavior became so bad that he was ultimately paid off and ordered off the property at once, even though the painting had not been completed.

At the beginning of the job I had given the painter four tubes of my own caulk to use around the windows on the west porch. Because he never did that part of the job, before he left the property for good I asked one of his workers to retrieve the tubes from the back of his truck. The boss wasn't around, and the hired man could only find two of my tubes of caulk. He did, however, find a couple more that belonged to the hated boss man. "Here, just take these," he said, offering me the caulk that belonged to the painter.

"No," I replied, "I'll just take the two that belong to me."

The man shook his head disbelievingly. Finally he said, "You're a better Christian than I am."

“No,” I answered quickly, “not better. But if I took those, I would be just as dishonest as your boss.”

I wasn't being a “better Christian.” I was just doing the right thing—which, sadly, today is rather uncommon. In a fallen world in which common decency has become uncommon, we are called to be different. We are called to reflect the image of Christ to those who may never have met Him.