

Nobody Like Me

Romans 11:19

by Ernest O'Neill

Will you turn to Romans 11:19: "You will say, 'Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in.' You remember we said that Paul was trying to discourage the Gentile Christians in the church from looking down on the Jewish Christians in the church; he was trying to discourage them from boasting over the Jewish Christians. He was trying to say that in Christ there is neither Jew nor Gentile, but everybody depends on the same root of the Christ Spirit that lived in the patriarchs. That is why he says, "But some of you, when I say that to you, will say 'Branches were broken off that I might be grafted in.'" That's the temporal meaning of that word; that is what God was trying to do through Paul for the loved ones Rome in 57 A.D.

Now, what is the eternal meaning of that word to you and me here in the twentieth century? That we have our own version of "branches were broken off so that I might in some way be grafted in, so in some way I am better than those branches." And our version of it is "there is nobody quite like me in this world -- there is nobody quite like me!" The interesting thing is that all of us, deep down, feel that there isn't, is there? We have talked about this before; that all of us in this room feel that we are unique; that we are very much individuals. We feel, "There is nobody like me!" You think of the person beside you and you may think, "They may be friendlier than me, they may be richer than me, they may be more talented than me, but I'm in some way very different from them and I can see things that they cannot see." In other words, there is a great difference between the pronoun "I" and the pronoun "you." There is a greater difference between the pronoun "I" and the pronoun "them". Every one of us in this room feels "I am me and they are them." We feel that in some way we are unique, and even with all our inferiority complexes we still feel this -- each person feels exactly like you---really! You think you are the only one who feels that way but no -- I feel that way -- we all feel that way; we are all feeling as unique as you are feeling. We all do feel we are different; we do feel we are one of a kind.

And yet in our external behavior and in our internal experience that sense of individuality is continually affronted by the hard facts of life. The hard facts of life are that we all have a tendency to look very like Andy Warhol's Campbell's Condensed Soup tins. We have a tendency, if you look at us in the mass, to look like three-and-a-half billion Campbell's Condensed Soup tins. Some of us may be clam chowder and some of us mushroom and some of us tomato, but we look very much, boringly, the same. If you went to London this morning and you listened to two people greeting one another and you taped the conversation, I can tell you exactly the way it would run -- doesn't matter which two people you would tape, it would run the same way: "Good morning, isn't this a beautiful morning?" "Oh, it is beautiful -- so much better than Wednesday, isn't it?" "Oh, Wednesday was so cold." "Yes, but it warmed up in the afternoon." "I do hope it is going to be good at the weekend, especially Saturday." "Yes, it is so good to have a good Saturday...."—ad infinitum, ad nauseum, forever amen! If there is no weather in heaven we Britishers will be lost, because that is the way we talk!

So very different from you original Minnesotans! I felt you were so interested in me personally when I heard your greeting -- it's the greeting that you all use six times a day, twenty-five times a day; "Hi, how ARE you?" or "Hi, how are YOU?" At the beginning a newcomer feels that's nice of you to ask, and sets out on a detailed explanation of their health, with little details on the health of

their children, their dog, the state of their car, the state of their finances and investments. That is -- they do it once -- and then they learn that even if they at that moment are dying of a heart attack, even if they are filing bankruptcy the next day, you only require one answer -- one word: "Fine."

We really are desperately the same. The clichés in conversation are funny, but in a way they are only the tip of an iceberg that gets deader and more lifeless and bigger and colder the more you follow it underneath the surface of our lives. Because that's what really gets to most of us; it's not the conversational clichés -- but the clichés in our behavior that have a kind of deadening effect on us. We feel we are individuals and yet we admit that from the day we first started school, through college to our job life, we are very much boringly the same in our responses to life. We admit that we are like puppets on strings; strings that are pulled by the circumstances that surround us, by the people that we meet, by the events that take place.

Most of us are like little robots that are programmed by our desires for happiness, or our desires for security, or our desires for friendship, so that we just respond the same way continually. We started off in school wanting and appreciating the praise of our teachers, and wanting and appreciating the admiration of our peers, but then as life went on we ended up such slavish men-pleasers that we just could not abide anybody not liking us. And so our lives tend to be dominated by that desire for other people to like us. It is the same with the "rolling with the punches" that we learned at the beginning. In the early days in our teenage years, we thought, "Oh, well, you roll with the punches -- you just go as the circumstances drive you." But we've been doing that for years now, until we've become poor, empty, opportunists that are driven through all the twists and turnings of our lives by the apparently meaningless plans of the companies or businesses that employ us, until many of us have reached the point where we wonder, "Is there anything inside me that is different or makes me different from everybody else in this room? I react the same way as them -- the boss smiles, I'm elated; the wife glowers disapprovingly, I'm depressed. The sky is bright and sunny, I'm happy; the sky is cloudy and dark and rain falls, I'm miserable. My friends criticize me, I get paranoid and depressed and I criticize them back. Things go well at the office, I come home with flowers; things go badly at the office, I come home and hide behind the newspaper all evening. The children are good, I'm happy; the children are bad, I'm irritable and resentful."

We all know that the boring thing about it is that we are all reacting the same way -- and we wonder if there is anything inside that is original about us at all. Many of us wonder, "Am I just a machine that responds continually to the punches or the pins that people stick in me?" Of course that is what makes so many of us uncertain of who we are -- do you see that? That is why so many of us are uncertain of who we are and why we really have doubts about our own value. It is not just the mass society -- it is not that there are three-and-a-half billion other people; it's the feeling that we are actually no different from them -- we're all bumping up against each other; colliding and responding and reacting exactly the same way. None of us breaks the pattern at all; none of us is a surprise to one another -- we all know exactly how we deal with each other. In fact, the commercials on TV know it so well that they plan their whole success on the basis of our machine-like habits -- that's what makes us wonder are we worth anything? Are we of any value? Are we not just one of a million other cogs that not only could do the same thing, but actually do the same thing as we do?

Loved ones that's why we get into our superiority thing; we have this feeling deep down that we are different -- we are unique -- and yet we have all the evidence of our own lives and behavior to

suggest that we are not unique; that we're the same as everybody else, and that we're no different from anyone in the world. Yet this feeling inside keeps saying — because it is planted there by someone very powerful — "You are unique, you are unique." So we decide, "Yes, I am unique; I am different. They may be brighter, they may be more intelligent, they may look better, they may be more sociable, they may be richer, but there is something — I can see something different from the way they see it." Yet all the evidence is against it, so the next step is, "Well, branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in; I am better than they are in some way. I don't know how -- I can't express it -- but I am. Somehow I am! In the eyes of the whole world they may be better than me, but really, I think I'm better than them."

So we join affinity groups and we misuse the affinity groups. The Lions Club wasn't for that purpose, the Rotary Club wasn't for that purpose, and the church wasn't for that purpose, the Spirit filled groups weren't for that purpose. But we join a group that makes us feel in some way different from everybody else -- gives us the security of the group so that we are with other people -- but still makes us feel that we are at least a little above the mass of the proletariat. So we have this superiority complex working continuously. It is very wearing because all the evidence is against the truth of it, so you have to keep plugging it hard to make yourself believe it. Did you know that that is why we criticize? Every time you criticize, you suggest to yourself that you can see something that the other person can't see; therefore, in some way you are superior to them. That's why we have such trouble praising other people; we dare not do it because our own value, our own self-esteem depends on proving to ourselves beyond all doubt that we are better than them.

Now loved ones, the truth is you are unique, you are. There is nobody like you and that is the truth. That is even a physiological truth; even if you were identical twins, there is some way in which you differ from your twin -- you are different from everybody else in this world. There is nobody exactly like you and there will never again be anybody exactly like you -- you are unique. And if you could only find your real self deep, deep down inside you, you'd find that you were put here to do something that none of the rest of us can do. That may amaze you, but you were put here to do something that none of us in this room can do and you were put here to be somebody that none of the rest of us can be. Our dear Maker designed you exactly with that in mind; you may not know what that is, but he knows. That dear Christ Spirit, by whom God says all things were made and without whom nothing was made that was made, that dear Christ made you and he knows why he made you. He knows what he put you here on this earth to do and to be, and he can tell you. He can begin to explain to you who you really are, deep down in that place where you feel so empty; in the center of your heart where you feel, "There is nothing there -- I look inside and there is nothing. I don't know what to do with my life; I don't know what to think; I don't know who I am. I feel I am the plaything of everybody else, I feel I'm like everybody else -- I'm nothing."

Jesus, that eternal Spirit of Christ, who lives across the centuries and who made you, is alive today and you are able to begin to believe in him and communicate with him. That is it, loved ones -- he can explain to you what he wants you to do in this world. If you miss that; if you keep on living that silly life that you are living with no direction but what everybody superimposes -- you make the dollar -- you want to go out after the dollar so you are controlled by the dollar; you want everybody to like you, so you are controlled by everybody liking you; you want to enjoy yourself, so you are controlled by your desire for enjoyment. If want to continue living that silly life you'll die! These are hard words, but you will be buried like a dog. You're life will be as dominated by your environment as an ordinary animal's life; a life as controlled by the events and the people and the things around you as a "Punch and Judy" show.

But loved ones, if you'll begin to realize that there is some reason why you are different from all the rest of us; your Maker knows that reason, and his son Jesus is able to explain that to you. Now do you see that's what the new birth is? You feel so like the rest of us because the "I" is actually dead -- there is plenty of "self" alive -- but the "I", the unique you, is pretty well dead, or shrunk almost to nothing. And that's your spirit -- it's shrunk almost to nothing; that's why you find almost no initiative coming from inside you. That is why you say, "What should I do -- I don't know what to do. What do you think I should do?" We live our whole lives by what we happen to see on television commercials or in store windows, or by what our friends happen to be doing, or what seems we all should do at this stage of life. There is no sense of personal direction in so many of us because our spirits are shrunk almost to nothingness. The only one who can make them begin to live, and to make you come alive yourself so that you begin to sense "There is a "me" in there -- and I do have separate, individual direction from my Maker" -- the only one who can do that is this Jesus -- this Son of God that is alive in every century and is alive here.

And actually, would you believe it, the wee bit of you that is responding to this and thinking it may be true -- that's his Spirit inside you. That's the hope that you are even able to understand this. That's what proves that you are not dead, that you are not hopeless -- that you can even sense this. Loved ones, it is possible to develop a relationship with that Spirit within you. It is possible to develop a relationship with that Jesus, so that you can begin to sense that you have an individual path to walk, and an individual life to live. You can begin to understand from your Maker why he put you here; he begins to explain it to you. Then it doesn't matter whether you live in poverty, it doesn't matter whether you live with no friends, it doesn't matter whether in the eyes of society you are an abject failure -- there comes within you a sense of rest at last, a sense of knowing where you're going and who you are and why you are here. And loved ones, that's everything -- that is worth all the success in the world, just to know "I know why I'm here, this little speck of dust. I know why my Maker put me here, and I know what he wants me to be, day by day." Then as you walk with him day by day, you begin to sense a direction in your life.

Loved ones, the start is to believe that that Spirit of Jesus is already in you. Begin to listen to him and begin to say, "Lord, will you begin to show me who I am, and why on earth you put me here, and what you want me to do? I want to know that; I'm tired of this meaningless drifting from one thing to another. I want to know why you put me here. Will you tell me?" Then as you ask him that day by day, he will begin to bring answers to you. You will begin to sense the direction. But loved ones the first thing is to break off the other way of life -- you have to carry on with your jobs -- we all have to carry on with our responsibilities -- but start getting a real line on what your life is meant to be. That is the start. If you do that, you will begin to realize you are not a "Campbell's Condensed Soup" tin; you'll no longer have to prove that you are different from everybody else, because you will know that you are different. Then heaven begins to come on earth wherever you walk. I pray that wherever you are coming from, you will begin to do that and find out why God put you here.

Let us pray.

Dear Father we are tired, ourselves, of this superiority stuff, "branches are broken off so that I might be grafted in so I'm better than them." Lord, it is wearing, and we get tired of it ourselves, as well as fed up with our hypocrisy and our selfishness. And yet Lord, you know how scared we feel; we feel as if we're just one of a number; we feel that we're no different from all the rest. Yet there's something inside us that makes us feel we ARE different. Dear Father, Dear God, Dear

Jesus; will you begin to show us why you put us here and what you want us to do during our few years here on this earth and what you want us to be?

Jesus, we need to know from you – not from preachers or from other Christian people or from the best people we know, but we need to know from you, yourself. We know that we can know you in a way that is different from everybody else. And we know that you're going to be defeated and disappointed if we waste our lives, and there's going to be a piece missing in your plan if we miss what you have for us to do here.

So Lord, all we can say is thank you for making us different from everybody else. And thank you for the evidence in our own hearts that we are different. And now Lord, we want you to show us in what way we are different so that you'll be satisfied with our lives and so we'll fulfill the purpose you had in mind in making us. We ask this in Jesus name.

And now the Grace of our Lord Jesus, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with each one of us now and evermore. Amen.