

How a Woman Led Millions to Christ

A church's success can be measured only by the emphasis it places on offering men and women the chance to choose Christ.

God forever fixed the value of a human soul when He "so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16, KJV). Souls are priceless. They are of more value than all the treasure of earth and sky.

The church where the gospel is preached without an evangelistic appeal, that is, a call for men and women to accept the Lord Jesus Christ as their personal Savior and declare themselves on the Lord's side, is a failure. I realize that the public decision for Christ is a rare teaching in the world today, but in our meetings, everything is subservient to the decision to follow in the footsteps of Christ.

Frequently, we are asked why we do not embrace the more prevalent custom of having people go to a rear room, sign cards and shake hands with the minister, instead of having a public altar call. We are asked to explain why we insist on asking people to stand, come down those long aisles and kneel before the world at the altar rail.

The reason this public stand is advocated is because Christ took a public stand for us. He did not go off into some private bedroom and die by Himself, where no one could see Him.

Instead, Christ took the cross upon His bleeding shoulders, carried it through the gate and mounted Calvary's rugged hill. There, hanging high before the eyes of all men, He took His stand.

Would we not take a public stand for Him? And wouldn't we be proud through all eternity that we rose from our seats and walked forward before the assembled multitudes, bowed our knees before the Lamb of God and confessed Him before them all?

The Moment of Courage Often, I think our professed modesty in not wanting to make a public display of our religion is in reality akin to cowardice and moral weakness.

Many souls miss salvation simply because they lack the one moment of courage to make the break. The decision is made in their hearts, but they cannot bring themselves to the physical confession of it. Here is the "No man's land" of the evangelistic battle-the mental barbed-wire entanglement to which the convert has come but which he has not the courage to cross.

Yet the Lord has said, "Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 10:32).

When a public altar call is given, seldom is there an erect head or an open eye in the building. The presence of Him who said, "I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me" (John 12:32) permeates the entire place.

Often during my big tent meetings, hundreds have stood and surged forward with faces that shone as though they were sweeping toward the gates of heaven. I have seen them rise simultaneously all over the large auditoriums in Denver, Chicago and New York City, from the main floor to balconies, until it looked as though the entire congregation was moving to the altar.

Is There One More? – Always we will ask, "Is there another-just one more?" This call usually brings at least a dozen. But the last one to come, the most reluctant and fearful, means more to me than the hundreds already on their knees-because it

was the very last one.

Sometimes there is no time for this appeal because something unexpected happens and, from out of nowhere, something turns the usual order of the service upside down. At such a time, there is just one thing to do-quickly step aside and let the Lord have the unobstructed right-of-way.

Just such an occasion as this remains very vividly in my mind and in the minds of the Angelus Temple congregation. It was during a Sunday night service, and the Temple was packed.

Two weeks before, special services were held for the sailors of the Pacific Fleet, and the Temple had been packed then, too. Hundreds of regular attendees gave up their seats that night to make room for the men.

The main floor of the vast auditorium was a veritable sea of blue uniforms. When the altar call was given, the altars and the platform overflowed.

On this second Sunday night, many of the boys returned. The Temple was packed with its usual Sunday night crowd.

Hundreds were standing along the sides of the main floor. Still hundreds more were on the streets, unable to gain admission.

Everything went along as usual until the announcements were made. Among the notices was the news of the dreadful disaster that took place on one of the Navy tugboats in the San Diego Harbor the week before.

The accident occurred when a careless or thoughtless boy tossed a lighted match too near a gasoline tank. Several members of the crew were killed in the catastrophe.

I said to the crowd: "Who knows, but that some of those brave boys were here last Sunday night? And, who knows, perhaps in God's divine mercy, some of them were saved?"

Just then a sailor who was sitting on the steps leading to the platform arose and made his way toward me. When he reached the pulpit, he asked permission to deliver a message for his buddy who had met death in the explosion.

The young sailor was not accustomed to speaking in public, and the thousands of eyes fixed on him must have embarrassed him mightily. Still, he had a duty to perform and a promise to fulfill.

He was twisting his white sailor cap, until it became a wilted piece of cloth, and in a trembling voice he said: "Friends, you all remember what happened in this Temple a week ago last Sunday night. You all know how Sister McPherson wore a little white sailor's cap in honor of us boys, and how she preached the illustrated sermon with the ships, the lighthouse and the rock with the cross up here on the platform.

"You know how hundreds of us boys listened to her and how some of us cried when she had finished, how we came down these aisles and how we knelt here at the rail. You remember all that."

He paused for a moment, looking down at his own fingers, still twirling his little cap. And then he went on, seemingly gaining confidence as he spoke:

"My buddy was in that explosion Mrs. McPherson just referred to. I was there, and I know that one of those boys killed in that explosion was saved.

"I know he was saved, because he died with his head in my arms. He was here that Sunday night.

"He said he hadn't been to church for years. But when Sister McPherson invited the whole fleet to her service, he came. He told me that his mother was a Christian and always prayed for him, but that she had been called home to glory before she had

seen her boy saved.

“He spoke of the sermon Sister McPherson had she pictured us all adrift on the sea of life without compass or guide, and he answered the altar call and took Jesus Christ on board the ship of his was two weeks ago.

“After that tank exploded, when we carried him into the [sickbay], he looked up into my face-though he was in mortal agony, burned so badly that the flesh was dropping from his bones-and he said to me: ‘You go to Angelus Temple and tell Sister for me that now I know I will be there, sure. And I’ll meet my mother.’”

A Holy Interruption As he continued with the details of that awful tragedy and told of those few precious moments of life when the other boy, stricken unto death, lay in his arms, the sailor on the platform these were not tears of weakness; they were tears of strength that coursed down his cheeks.

“Those were the last words he ever spoke,” he said simply as he finished. “Go back and tell Sister I’ll be there.”

He turned to me, with the tears still streaming down his face, and his hands half outstretched, as much as to say: “And now I’ve told you!”

He had. And he told the audience, too.

It is doubtful that there was a dry eye in the Temple or a throat without a catch in it. Without knowing it, the sailor stirred every heart in that huge assembly.

As I looked around the building, unable for the moment to control my own voice, it was evident that his simple recounting of that incident from real life moved the people more than a sermon could do. Anything that might be added to what he said would only take from it.

White handkerchiefs were aflutter all over the Temple, wiping away tears, as the sailor returned to his seat on the steps leading to the platform. It was difficult to go on in that moment.

How could one at such a time make the announcements or ask for the offering? Once more the sailor stepped up to the platform and asked if he could sing a chorus.

His clear, unaffected baritone voice rang out over the audience almost as though it were the voice of the boy who had perished:

“Tell Mother I’ll be there/ heaven’s joy with her to share/
Oh, tell my darling mother I’ll be there.”

Then he asked the congregation to join him in that chorus. They tried, but never have I heard singing like that.

The song was not sung, it was sobbed out of hearts melted by that simple story. It was sobbed out by mother hearts, still burdened for a boy who was out in the world, or by the softened heart of many a boy who remembered how his mother prayed for him before she was called home.

While they repeated the song once more, softly, to the accompaniment of the muffled organ, I gave the altar call. There was no raising of hands or bowed heads and closed eyes. That sincere, straightforward tale took the entire distance at a bound.

“Come on,” I said. “Let’s all be there-come on!” Ah, how they came! In an instant, the aisles were overflowing, and the altar space was jammed.

In that one evening, at that one service, that young sailor did the work of a lifetime. And the one who died, by his coming, brought hundreds more.

Seldom have I seen an entire audience moved as those thousands

of people were moved that evening. Throughout a lifetime loaded with big moments, I never saw or heard of a night into which more drama was crowded than that night when the sailor boy turned evangelist.

Read a companion devotional.

Aimee Semple McPherson

Aimee Semple McPherson (1890-1944) ranks as one of the most influential church leaders and evangelists in history. She is best-known as the founder of the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel (ICFG) and senior pastor of Angelus Temple in Los Angeles.

Born Aimee Elizabeth Kennedy, she grew up near Ingersoll, Ontario, and was converted at 17 under the preaching of evangelist Robert Semple, who became her husband. The Semples served as missionaries in Hong Kong, until Robert's death in 1910.

Aimee left China for the United States with her infant daughter, Roberta Star. A second marriage to businessman Harold McPherson produced a son, Rolf. Although she attempted to settle into the role of homemaker, her calling to ministry would not abate. Even before her marriage ended in divorce, Aimee began an itinerant evangelistic ministry that would first take her up and down the Atlantic coast of the United States, then nationwide.

She established her base in Los Angeles in 1918. Then in 1922, she received a vision, based on Ezekiel 1, that became the foundation for the Foursquare Gospel movement. Angelus Temple, with its 5,300 seats, was officially dedicated in 1923.

Aimee Semple McPherson, "Sister Aimee," as she was known, was

a defender of a woman's right to preach. She was also considered a forerunner in religious broadcasting because of her effective use of radio. Today, the movement she started has grown to include millions of members worldwide. The Foursquare Church continues to carry out the vision on which it was founded.