

Feb. 16, 2003

“LIVING IN THE GRAY LANE”

Luke 7: 1-10

Dr. John A. Wells

The headline question on the cover of a national news magazine was “KIDS, Without A Conscience?” The article addressed not just the rise in murders committed by teenagers (from 1000 to 4000 annually) but the callousness of the crimes. The article stated, “The young people involved in some of these violent acts are without the capacity to make the connection with another life.” And, “They have no more reason for hurting another human being than they have for peeling an orange.” The article quoted New York psychologist Michael Schulman, author of *Bringing Up A Moral Child*. His solution is straightforward: “You need to teach the child that the family stands for goodness...not simply for comfort and intellectual achievement, but that moral excellence is honored.”

There is a great story in the Gospel of Luke about a soldier who deeply cared for his servant who was near death. The soldier trusted that Jesus’ word was enough to heal. He said the reason for his trust was “*I am a man set under authority...*” Jesus healed the servant and said of the soldier, “*I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith.*” The story highlights three major ingredients in making moral choices in life:

1. Accountability; **2. Faith;** **3. Compassion.** Accountability to those around us, and to God over us fosters respect for others and ourselves. Faith is the ability to walk through the dark with God, seeing not the obstacles, but our hand in God’s hand. Compassion is having a tender heart toward others as God has for us.

Someone said, “*conscience is a three-cornered thing in my heart that stands still when I am good, but when I am bad, it turns around and the corners hurt a lot. If I keep on doing wrong the corners wear off and it does not hurt anymore.*” We are, again, struggling for our moral life as individuals, as a military, and as a society. We have to remember that we are a people “set under authority.” Living in the gray lane is living in a world of complex problems with complex solutions. Our consciences are a God-given guide through that haze of gray. Maybe the corners of the “three-cornered thing” are accountability, faith, and compassion. Maybe the corners are not all worn off, but need some rebuilding. Maybe we can help give the gift of a refurbished conscience back to our youth and our nation. Have a great week.