

Column

God can and does use all sorts. Gipsy Smith is a case in point.

Rodney 'Gipsy' Smith was born March 31, 1861 -- according to some accounts in a ditch -- six miles northeast of London at Epping Forest. His parents were travelers and lived in a wagon, making their living selling baskets, tinware and clothes pegs.

During his childhood, Smith received no formal education. Yet, he went on to become the best-known and most loved evangelist of his day, conducting missions on both sides of the Atlantic. Many were converted under his preaching. One might be so bold as to say that before there was Billy Graham, there was Gipsy Smith.

He would go on to say about himself: "I didn't go through your colleges and seminaries. They wouldn't have me...but I have been to the feet of Jesus where the only true scholarship is learned."

His first visit to the United States came in Jan. 1899. When he arrived in New York, he knew no one, yet using credentials from England, he secured an invitation to preach at the Nostrand Avenue Methodist Episcopal Church of Brooklyn. During a three-week preaching mission, the 1,500-seat building was packed and over 300 people came to Christian faith.

He would make over 40 more trips to America. On Aug. 4, 1947, on what would be his final voyage, he was stricken with a heart attack and died three hours outside New York City on the Queen Mary.

Smith was credited as being as good a singer as a preacher. Often, he would do both during his meetings. One hymn of his own composition is entitled "Jesus revealed in me." Its theme is drawn from Galatians 1:16: "To reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen." The hymn concludes with the words: "Oh, to reflect His grace, / Causing the world to see, / Love that will glow / Till others shall know / Jesus revealed in me."

Perhaps these words, better than any other, sum up the life and mission of Gipsy Smith. More than that, this was the challenge he gave to those who came to hear him preach . . . to reflect Christ's grace.

The story is told of a woman who after attending one of his meetings wrote him a letter reading: "Dear Gipsy Smith, I was very moved by your message and now think God is calling me to preach. There is only one problem. I have nine children."

In response, he wrote: "Dear madam, how thankful you must be that God has not only called you to preach but has given you a congregation in which to minister."

Not everyone can be a Billy Graham or a Gipsy Smith, but God can use all sorts to get out His message and reflect His grace. Why not say with Smith's hymn, "Here, Lord, I bring my heart, my love, my strength, my will" and let Him do the rest?

O GOD, who hast made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on the face of the whole earth, and didst send thy blessed Son to preach peace to

*them that are far off and to them that are nigh;
Grant that all men everywhere may seek after thee
and find thee. Bring the nations into thy fold, pour
out thy Spirit upon all flesh, and hasten thy
kingdom; through the same thy Son Jesus Christ our
Lord. Amen. (Book of Common Prayer)*

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