

Displaying Manners

When I meet children – in the elementary or high school age group, in particular – today, I am always deeply impressed by those who display manners in their behavior and greetings. Maybe it's just me, but I'm concerned that not enough attention is given in the home and the classroom – and, yes, even in churches – to teaching civil courtesies. That's why it is remarkable when I encounter children who show their understanding of the rules of conduct. Employment of manners, however, is not confined to children.

Perhaps one good definition of manners would be doing and saying what makes others feel comfortable, or respected. In fact, being respectful of another person is an appropriate description of acting in mannerly fashion.

I read recently an excellent example of manners demonstrated by an entire church congregation. Some years ago, the members of a church in Scotland were able to produce one of the most remarkable preachers of the time just by showing him manners. Here's what happened:

Ian Maclaren, author of *Beside the Bonnie Brier Bush*, was learning to preach without notes at his first church assignment in the Highlands. At times, he would stop in the middle of a sermon and say to the congregation, "Friends, that is not very clear. It was clear in my study on Saturday, but now I will begin again."

After one particular service when his memory had failed him, Maclaren was approached by a gaunt elder who took him by the hand and said, "When you are not remembering your sermon, just call out a psalm, and we will be singing that while you are taking a rest; for we are all loving you and praying for you."

What a demonstration of manners! With such parishioners, how could Ian Maclaren have done anything other than grow in his preaching abilities and pulpit composure? That first Highlands church made Ian Maclaren. Years later, he said, "I am in the ministry today because of those country folk, those perfect gentlemen and Christians."

As Julia A. Fletcher Carney wrote: "Little drops of water, little grains of sand, make the mighty ocean and the pleasant land. Little deeds of kindness, little words of love, help to make Earth happy like the Heaven above."

--Beecher Hunter