

WHAT'S HIS NAME?

By
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I met a small boy one Sunday morning, just a brief encounter. I saw him crying in a corner, a little lad wrapped in sorrow. I was being hurried toward the handshaking reserved for guest preachers, but common decency demanded we pause to console the boy.

As I suspected, he recently had been spanked; the victim of a misadventure in which he assured me he had been neither innovator nor prime mover. There was time only for brief conversation and a hasty repair on a leaky nose. As we left I asked, "What's your name?" I scarcely heard his reply.

The congregation filed past, shaking my hand and murmuring remarks appropriate to a Sunday morning in spring. A happy, typical Christian company. Last in line was my little friend and a lady I took to be his mother.

She gripped my hand with extra warmth and asked, "Do you know what my son said about you?"

I assured her I didn't, though I had some slight fears.

"He said, 'He's the only man in this church who ever asked my name.'"

I shook the lad's hand gravely, and extracted a promise he would never again wiggle in church unless it was necessary. He grinned up at me, as though we shared a secret. I cherish that grin. A boy's friendship is no small thing, no matter how brief.

The mother's words still haunt me. How many men shook my hand that morning? Scores at least. Most of them were members of the church, many of them leaders. Several must have known the little lad. But then he was only six, maybe seven.

I remember a small boy's grin that Sunday morning in spring. I feel the warm clasp of his mother's hand. I am haunted by the thought that some day someone might say of that lad, "I wonder what ever happened to What's-his-name?"