19th Sunday after Trinity
Bessemer - 1958

Rev. Carl F. Thrun

IN NOMINE JESU

St. Matthew 9: 2 Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee.

BE OF GOOD CHEER

The glorious words of our Redeemer-King come streaming down at us this morning like the first rays of the morning sun: Be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee. There are those who would describe God as a huge man sitting on a great oak throne, with a white beard reaching to His knees, and a solemn scowl on His face - ready to smash down with His rod on anyone who dares ~~to dares~~ to smile or have a good time. There are those who would describe our Beautiful Savior as being nothing more than a Kill-joy. But we Christians who have tasted that the Lord is gracious, we know otherwise. We know that real joy and happiness can only be found in Him who loved us and gave Himself for us. We know that any joy or pleasure without Christ is nothing but the deceptive camouflage of a world which would lead us to the eternal misery of hell. We know that real cheer can only be found in the heart that has Christ and His wondrous declaration of grace: Thy sins be forgiven thee.

I only wish I could put into words just what happens when Jesus moves into the heart. Paul makes an attempt at it in his Letter to the Ephesians, that New Teatament Song of Songs to the Beloved. In speaking of the intimate union of the believer with Christ, the Apostle uses a deeply significant phrase. Our Authorized Version translates it in heavenly places. In the heavenlies is the exact wording. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings IN THE HEAVENLIES in Christ. God, who is rich is mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ (by grace ye are saved), and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together IN THE HEAVENLIES IN CHRIST JESUS.

Notice the tenses. God HATH blessed us with all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies in Christ. He HATH made us sit together in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus. Paul made it very plain that he was speaking, not of a heaven way up in the sky, but of a heaven which is as close as breathing; not of a heaven to which we shall go someday, but of a heaven in which all who are in Christ live now.

Heaven here and now - what does that mean? Just what Martin Luther meant when, after finding Christ, he wrote: Then the whole Scripture was opened to me and also heaven itself. Immediately I felt as if born anew, as if I had found the open gate of Paradise. There is a Haven far away -

> . . . that blissful abode
> Where the rivers of pleasure flow o'er the bright plains,
> And the noontide of glory eternally reigns;
> Where the saints of all ages in harmony meet,
> Their Savior and brethren transported to greet,
> While the songs of salvation exultingly roll,
> And the smile of the Lord is the feast of the soul.

But there is also a heaven to which I am just as close as I am to Christ. Yet there are not two heavens - only one. God, as Paul assures us, gathers together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth.

How shall we explain it? Perhaps we had better go back to Paul, for Paul once said, I knew a man in Christ. That man in Christ whom Paul knew very well, was Paul. Paul was in Christ, and he lived in the heavenlies. Well, Paul, what does it mean? It means, says Paul, that God hath made us accepted in the Beloved. In Whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace.

That is the Christian's basic blessing. Like a new-born child, he has no former history. His past is past, completely done with. Of that fact he is assured by Golgotha's eternal It is finished! - by the Voice that leaves no doubt: Thou hast made Me to serve with thy sins and hast wearied Me with thine iniquities. I, even I, am He that blotteth out thy transgressions for Mine own sake and will not remember thy sins.

Did you hear that? It is God speaking, the Omniscient One who knows all, who remembers everything. But there is one thing which God will not remember about me - my sins. They are paid in full by my Proxy. They are as if they had never been. They are blotted out, banished forever from the memory of God.

That amazing truth is repeated again and again in the Scriptures. The Psalmist writes: He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward

them that fear Him. As far as the east is from the west, so far hath He removed our transgressions from us. - As far as the east is from the west; and with God never the twain shall meet. Then, in Isaiah, we have this lovely picture: I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins. Like a black cloud, our sins were hanging between Heaven and us. There was no sun - only the shadow of death. We could not pierce the gloom, nor could we get a glimpse of God, much less come to God - when a gentle gale stirred from Calvary, and, in a moment, cleared all the mist away. Micah declares: Thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea. God has buried our sins deep - deep beyond all possible finding or discovery.

That is what Paul meant when he wrote that in Christ we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace. The person who is in Christ has no more sin. He is a sinless saint in the sight of God. He is clothed in white.

Jesus' blood and righteousness
My jewels are, my glorious dress.

So clothed, I can not only look to the future and say,

In these before my God I'll stand
When I shall reach the heav'nly land.

But so clothed I am standing before God - I am sitting with Christ in the heavenlies NOW. There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus. There is only the smile of the Lord, His radiant approval, and this word of wonder: Be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee! Thou art all fair, My love; there is no spot in thee. Come with Me from Lebanon, My spouse, with Me from Lebanon. I have a new status. For I am accepted in the Beloved. I have God.

Who, then, is this God whom the Christian has found in Christ? Do you recall the request which Philip once made of Jesus: Lord, show us the Father, and it sufficeth us ? And the answer of Jesus: Have I been so long with you, and yet hast thou not known Me, Philip? He that hath seen Me, hath seen the Father. God, to the Christian, is not just a vague Architect of the Universe; and assuredly not an impersonal and heartless World Force. What is God like? A wounded soldier once asked that question;

and a friend pointed to a crucifix over the soldier's bed and said, simply: I think God is like that. I know God is like that. I know it because Jesus told me so. I know it from the fact that God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son. I know it from the still small voice of the Spirit, who, as often as I look at the Cross, whispers in my heart: God!

Where is this God? Not far away, but very near. He is where Jesus is - right in my heart. Didn't Jesus say, I and My Father are one? And didn't Jesus also say, If a man love Me, he will keep My words; and My Father will love him, and We will come unto him, and make Our abode - Our home - with him? By faith in Jesus, God is at home in me, and I am at home in God.

And who am I? Perhaps that can best be explained by means of two stories. The stories are about two men. The first is about that well-known philosopher of pessimism, Schopenhauer. One day Schopenhauer sat slumped on a park bench, lost in thought. A passing policeman, mistaking him for a tramp, demanded of him, Who are you? And what are you here for? Schopenhauer slowly replied, I wish I knew! - The Christian is not like that. He does not wish he knew. He knows.

The other story is also one of mistaken identity. It is about the humanist scholar Muretus, who, while a fugitive from France, became ill in Lombardy. The doctors took the sick man for an ordinary vagabond and discussed his case in Latin, having no idea that that bedraggled patient could understand that language. Let us try an experiment with this worthless creature. And to their amazement the worthless creature spoke up in Latin: Will you call worthless one for whom Christ did not disdain to die?

So speaks the Christian. He knows that he is not worthless - not just ninety-eight cents' worth of chemicals. He is not a low form of cellular life on his way to the manure heap. He is not a soul left to struggle alone against the whole weight of a universe that cares nothing for its hopes and fears. I was bought with a price. I am accepted in the Beloved. I am the child of God. I am the bride of the King. I am wanted. I am loved!

Let me repeat that - let me shout it, without end, for the mountaintop: I am

loved! I am loved with a love that is as great and tender and mighty as God - and as everlasting. John Donne put it this way: One of the most convenient heiroglyphics of God is a circle; and a circle is endless; whom God love, He loves to the end; and not only to their own end, to their death, but to His end; and His end is that He might love them still. I am loved! I am Christ's; and He is mine! Thus I can go singing along life's rough way with a joyful heart. I can be of good cheer - my sins have been forgiven me.

Amen.