26th Sunday after Pentecost
Holy Cross Lutheran Church
Sarasota, FL 34239

Rev. Carl F. Thrun

IN NOMINE JESU

ST. MARK 13: 1-13

NO EARTHLY PARADISE

A woman came into LIFE SOURCE COUNSELING CENTER where I have my Office. Her voice rang through the hallway. "WHERE IS CARL? I WANT TO TALK TO CARL ABOUT CARL'S GOD! I HATE CARL'S GOD!" There was a long silence as she just stood there looking at me. Then there were TEARS. There were HUGS. She had just witnessed the UNTIMELY DEATH of a DEAR FRIEND in his early 40's. He had died of CANCER..... WORDS are very WEAK and FEEBLE at such a time. "GOD DOESN'T GIVE ANSWERS," I whispered. "HE GIVES HIMSELF." His own DEARLY BELOVED SON was crucified at age 32.

Not many days later the telephone rang. The voice on the other end was SOBBING. "I JUST BAILED MY SON OUT OF JAIL," she said. "HIS WHOLE CAREER WILL BE RUINED." Without going into detail, it appears as if there was a conspiracy and that he was arrested on contrived and trumped up charges and that now his GOOD NAME and REPUTATION are lost. I thought of Shakespear's dictum: "HE WHO STEALS MY PURSE STEALS TRASH, BUT HE WHO ROBS ME OF MY GOOD NAME ROBS ME OF THAT WHICH NOT ENRICHES HIM, AND MAKES ME POOR INDEED." I found myself saying it for the second time in less than a week. "GOD DOES NOT GIVE US ANSWERS. HE GIVES HIMSELF." His own dear Son was the VICTIM of false and trumped up charges.

In Iowa a student does not receive a COVETED AWARD. He writes letters of anger and premeditation beforehand. Then he goes out and MURDERS THREE PROFESSORS and a FELLOW STUDENT before COMMITTING SUICIDE himself..... In the Philippines a TERRIBE TYPHOON suddenly snuffs out the lives of SEVERAL THOUSAND PEOPLE..... The list goes on.

The POINT I am trying to make and the POINT which our text makes is that we are NOT TO LOOK for any EARTHLY SHANGRILA -- any EARTHLY PARADISE where there are NO TRAGEDIES or where there will be a CHRISTIANIZING OF THE WHOLE WORLD which will ultimately make all men brothers. Instead, JESUS WARNS His disciples that there will be NO END OF WARS AND RUMORS OF WAR -- that, indeed, the BATTLE BETWEEN GOD AND SATAN will grow INCREASINGLY

INTENSE and the BATTLELINES will become even MORE ENTRENCHED. The BOOK OF REVELATION speaks of the "BEAST FROM THE BOTTOMLESS PIT" who will ascend in the later stages of history and call forth DEMONIC HORRORS. There is ABSOLUTELY NO TALK about things getting BETTER AND BETTER or becoming MORE AND MORE like PARADISE ON EARTH.

In fact, the OPPOSITE is true. "NATION WILL RISE AGAIST NATION, AND KINGDOM AGAINST KINGDOM; THERE WILL BE EARTHQUAKES IN VARIOUS PLACES; THERE WILL BE FAMINES." Our text goes on to say that the CLOSEST FRIENDSHIPS and HUMAN BONDS will be BROKEN and BETRAYED. Jesus' disciples will be BEATEN and HATED. Man's inhumanity to man will run RAMPANT! "BROTHER WILL BETRAY BROTHER TO DEATH, AND A FATHER HIS CHILD, AND CHILDREN WILL RISE AGAINST PARENTS ~~HAVE~~ and HAVE THEM PUT TO DEATH."

FAITH struggles to MAKE SENSE out of all this. When UNRIGHTEOUSNESS gets the upper hand and LOVE GROWS COLD, we try to GET BY by saying to ourselves that GOD DIRECTS THE WOES OF HISTORY toward His own GREAT FULFILLMENT. When the GOING GETS TOUGH and the BURDENS HANG HEAVY upon us, we try to COMFORT OURSELVES by saying that GOD IS PURIFYING US IN THE FIRE and PREPARING US for better things. But when TROUBLE AND ADVERSITY keep right on PILING UP and there seems to be NO END OF IT, then we are apt to cry out to high heaven: "ALL RIGHT ALREADY; ENOUGH ALREADY; GOOD GOD, I'VE HAD ALL I CAN TAKE!" And then FAITH has to face the fact that WE or OUR FRIENDS or OUR LOVED ONES are not only "RUN THROUGH THE WRINGER," as we say, "BUT STUCK BETWEEN THE ROLLERS." We enounter the ABYSS OF MEANINGLESSNESS. And FAITH has to hang onto ~~the~~ a tiny THIN THREAD that at such times "GOD DOES NOT GIVE ANSWERS. HE ONLY GIVES HIMSELF." And out of the STORM there comes that STILL, SMALL VOICE that says, "FEAR NOT! I AM HERE! I WILL NEVER LEAVE YOU OR FORSAKE YOU! YOU ARE MINE!"

Remember JOB of old? At first Job imagined himself to be in the SCHOOL OF SUFFERING. He thought he could FIND MEANING in the SUDDEN TRAGEDIES that afflicted him. He was the richest man of his time. "HE HAD SEVEN THOUSAND SHEEP, THREE THOUSAND CAMELS, FIVE HUNDRED YOKE OF OXEN, ~~HAVE~~ FIVE HUNDRED DONKEYS, AND VERY MANY SERVANTS." He also had SEVEN

SONS and THREE DAUGHTERS. In a SINGLE DAY due to a SURPRISE ATTACK by foreign invaders and a TERRIBLE FIRE caused by lightning and a TORNADO which flattened the house and killed all of his children who were having a party --- in a SINGLE DAY he LOST IT ALL. Job thought he could FIND MEANING out of these SUDDEN TRAGEDIES. So he says with PIOUS RESIGNATION, "THE LORD GAVE, AND THE LORD HAS TAKEN AWAY; BLESSED BE THE NAME OF THE LORD. But then, when he thought he had GRADUATED from the SCHOOL OF SUFFERING and there was NOTHING MORE TO LEARN, Job gets MAD AT GOD. Weren't the DISASTROUS FIRES and STORMS and BLOODSHED of his servants and LOSS OF HIS CHILDREN -- wasn't that ENOUGH? Now come these PUTRIFYING SORES which BEFOUL HIS BODY and he ends up on a GARBAGE DUMP. Wasn't that a MONSTROUS CONTRADICTION of everything he HELD ON TO and BELIEVED IN? Who can MAKE SENSE out of this COMPLETELY NONSENSICAL PUNISHMENT of a RIGHTEOUS MAN? Was there any point in LIVING any longer? Everything that had MATTERED FOR HIM was ~~go ne~~ gone -- snuffed out! ..... Do you know what it is to CRY INTO THE STORM and receive NO ANSWER -- to be SICK AT HEART and FIND NO HEALING?

The name of our church is HOLY CROSS -- and it is truly a GORGEOUS CROSS which adorns our chancel. But the Cross is a SYMBOL OF DEFEAT before it is a SYMBOL OF VICTORY. "GOD DOES NOT GIVE US ANSWERS! HE GIVES US HIMSELF!" Jesus shares with us the DARKNESS of what it is like to be WITHOUT GOD! "MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAVE YOUR FORSAKEN ME -- WHY HAVE YOU LEFT ME HOLDING THE BAG -- HOLDING THE WORLD -- WHEN I CAN HARDLY ANY LONGER HOLD UP MY OWN HEAD?" He joins the NAKED and the HELPLESS ONES, the VICTIMS and all the others who have JUST HAD IT.

But there is more! THE LORD IS COMING AGAIN! All the FLOODS and FIRES which CLEANSE the world will SUBSIDE before HIS THRONE. Our PAINS and ANXIETIES are but BIRTHPANGS. Like a PREGNANT MOTHER we are filled with JOY and ANTICIPATION of the GREAT EVENT ahead -- where PAIN and SORROW are MYSTERIOUSLY TRANSFORMED by the BRIGHTNESS OF ADVENT. "JESUS CHRIST WILL COME AGAIN IN GLORY TO JUDGE THE LIVING AND THE DEAD, AND HIS KINGDOM WILL HAVE NO END

This is the SURETY which Daniel holds out to the people of his day. SYRIAN OPPRESSORS had done their worst. God's people were HANGED for keeping the SABBATH and their KOSHER DIET. Some were FORCEFED PORK and others were EXECITED at the TIME OF PRAYER. Daniel lifts up his eyes and sees the ARCHANGEL MICHAEL coming to the rescue. Daniel sees beyond the BLOODY PAGES of OBSERVABLE EVENTS. He sees GOD'S FULFILLMENT of His promises BEYOND HIST(-- and if HISTORY is TOO SMALL AN AREA for God to complete His work, then the FINAL CHAPTEI will be written at ANOTHER TIME, ANOTHER PLACE. "MANY OF THOSE WHO SLEEP IN THE DUST OF THE EARTH SHALL AWAKE, SOME TO EVERLASTING LIFE, AND SOME TO SHAME AND EVERLASTING CONTEMI THOSE WHO ARE WISE SHALL SHINE LIKE THE BRIGHTNESS OF THE SKY, AND THOSE WHO LEAD MANY TO RIGHTEOUSNESS, LIKE THE STARS FOREVER AND EVER."

THAT'S THE PROMISE! GOD DOESN'T GIVE US ANSWERS, but we already possess a SAVIOUR whom we know will "BE WITH US ALWAYS, EVEN TO THE END OF THE WORLD." Jesus says that we are to WATCH and WAIT for Him -- that He will come to us OVER THE WAVES and OVER THE TUMULTS to meet us from the OTHER SIDE. As the world perishes by FLOOD AND FIRE, a RAINBOW will agai shine over it! WE MUST NOT BE FOOLED BY THE DARKNESS BEFORE THE DAWN. "HE WHO EDURES TO THE END WILL BE SAVED.

Joseph Wittig once said that the BIOGRAPHY OF A MAN ought to begin with his DEATH rather than his BIRTH -- that it can be written only FROM THE END BACK TOWARDS THE BEGINNING -- because only at the END can the TOTALITY OF A PERSON'S LIFE become visible in its fulfillment..... THE SAME IS TRUE OF HISTORY!

When the FINAL HOUR OF THE WORLD has STRUCK -- when the HOUR OF THE SECOND ADVENT arrives -- when FAITH SEES WHAT IT HAS BELIEVED and when UNFAITH MUST FACE WHAT IT HAS NOT BELIEVED, then the TRUE HISTORY and BIOGRAPHY OF THE WORLD will be revealed. And those who still "ENDURE TO THE END" will be found raising their voices out of the depths: "THOUGH TH EARTH BE REMOVED AND THOUGH THE MOUNTAINS BE CARRIED INTO THE MIDST OF THE SEA, WE WILL NO FEAR. YOU, LORD, ARE OUR REFUGE AND STRENGTH, A VERY PRESENT HELP IN TIME OF TROUBLE. AMEN! COME, LORD JESUS! COME QUICKLY! AMEN!