3rd Sunday After the Epiphany
Rolling Meadows, 1971

Rev. Carl F. Thrun

IN NOMINE JESU

St. Matthew 8: 11, 12: I TELL YOU, MANY WILL COME FROM EAST AND WEST AND SIT AT TABLE WITH ABRAHAM, ISAAC, AND JACOB IN THE KING DOM OF HEAVEN, WHILE THE SONS OF THE KINGDOM WILL BE THROWN INTO THE OUTER DARKNESS; THERE MEN WILL WEEP AND GNASH THEIR TEETH.

The MINISTRY of JESUS CHRIST was a COLORFUL ministry, to say the LEAST. He was ALWAYS SAYING and DOING the UNEXPECTED - thereby throwing and keeping PEOPLE OFF-BALANCE. He was certainly NO CONFORMIST! No one could ever CONVENIENTLY categorize Him or put Him into a MOLD of their OWN MAKING. He was FAR from being a MR. MIKQUETOAST - afraid to TELL PEOPLE the HARD FACTS of GOD'S WORD. His ministry was CONSTANTLY calling people to be ALIVE in a world that had become MOST INSENSITIVE to HUMAN PROBLEMS and HUMAN NEEDS.

Today's Gospel LESSON is a CASE in POINT. It TELLS of 2 incidents which must have SHOOK the STAID, COMFORTABLE, CONFORMIST PEOPLE down to the SOLES of their sandals.

The FIRST tells about a LEPER who came to Him and KNELT BEFORE HIM, saying, "LORD, IF YOU WILL, YOU CAN MAKE ME CLEAN." The LEPER knew Jesus COULD DO IT! All he asked was: IF HE WOULD! The leper's FAITH TOUCHED the HEART of our LORD. ~~By his~~ Because of his confidence and DARING, the LORD REACHED OUT His HAND.....and TOUCHED him. We are NOT TOLD what the CROWD said or did when they SAW this - but they MUST have GASPED to see that TOUCH. Jesus DID what no one else at that TIME would have EVER DONE. Indeed, He BROKE the CEREMONIAL LAW which said that PEOPLE had to STAND 6 feet AWAY from a LEPER - more than an ARMS LENGTH. But when it came to HELPING PEOPLE, that ARMS LENGTH LAW had to GIVE WAY to the HIGHER LAW OF LOVE!

The leper DARED to ASK, and JESUS DARED to TOUCH. There was NO arms length HERE

the LEPER said, "LORD, IF YOU WILL....." and CHRIST TOUCHED HIM, saying, "I WILL."

It is a MIGHTY WILL - this will of Christ! It is a MIGHTY WORD - this WORD of Christ! Christ's WORD is GOD'S WORD. As the Psalmist said of God: "HE SENT FORTH HIS WORD AND HEALED THEM, AND DELIVERED THEM FROM DESTRUCTION. LOOK AND THANK THE LORD FOR HIS STEADFAST LOVE, FOR HIS WONDERFUL WORKS TO THE SONS OF MEN!"

Christ was NOT afraid to REACH OUT and TOUCH! Nor should WE. We should NOT be AFRAID to TOUCH the DISAPPOINTED and the DEPRESSED, the SAD and the SUFFERING, the SICK and the DYING. We should NOT be AFRAID to TOUCH PEOPLE with the HEALING touch of CHRIST. We should NOT be AFRAID to TOUCH our NEIGHBORS DOORBELL or even to TOUCH his HEART with the HELP and HEALING OFFERED in the NAME of CHRIST. We MUST DARE to TOUCH - and Christ WILL work THRU us!

Whenever I go to VISIT SICK PEOPLE, I TAKE their HANDS in MINE to PRAY with them. There is something about the HUMAN TOUCH offered in LOVE. I BELIEVE it is the TOUCH of CHRIST HIMSELF.

Some may say that OUR LORD was a FOOL for TROUBLE - but that is PRECISELY the WAY that LOVE WORKS. LOVE does not COUNT the COST. LOVE PLUNGES in where others will NOT GO. LOVE finally got Jesus NAILED to the CROSS.

The 2nd incident, described by St. Matthew, is just as DARING and UNPRECEDENTED as the first. A Roman CENTURION comes to HIM, beseeching Him and saying, "LORD, MY SERVANT IS LYING PARALYZED AT HOME, IN TERRIBLE DISTRESS." These Roman soldiers

were FEARED and HATED by the JEWISH PEOPLE. But that DID NOT STOP our LORD'S MINISTRY! Jesus KNEW that LOCAL BIGOTS considered it UNCLEAN to go into the HOUSE of a GENTILE. Yet He who REACHED out His HAND to TOUCH the untouchable leper, could ALSO SAY to a BELIEVING GENTILE, "I WILL COME AND HEAL HIM." Jesus was NOT CONCERNED about what OTHER PEOPLE might THINK or SAY. He had a MINISTRY to PERFORM.

The answer of the CENTURION to Jesus' WILLINGNESS to COME ALONG with him to his HOUSE is ~~absolutely~~ positively startling: " LORD," he said, "I AM NOT WORTHY TO HAVE YOU COME UNDER MY ROOF; BUT ONLY SAY THE WORD, AND MY SERVANT WILL BE HEALED." Someone has paraphrased the centurion's ANSWER to sound like this: "Lord, after all, it really ISN'T NECESSARY for you to COME UNDER MY ROOF. Although I am a MAN of some RANK, I am STILL ONLY a MAN. Yet when I SPEAK, men JUMP. If the WORD of a MERE MAN can achieve such RESULTS, at Your WORD Nature itself has to JUMP, and PAINFUL SICKNESS MUST take its FLIGHT. Lord, standing RIGHT where you ARE, SPEAK the WORD ONLY, and my SERVANT shall be HEALED."

The point is that JESUS did NOT DODGE people who were IN NEED - PEOPLE who CAME CRYING to Him for HELP! What He SAW was JEWISH PEOPLE - DECENT, RESPECTABLE, LAW-ABIDING JEWISH PEOPLE giving their GREETING of "SHALOM" or "PEACE" to JEWISH PEOPLE, but to NO ONE ELSE. What He saw was GENTILE people saying " GRACE AND PEACE" to OTHER GENTILES, but NOT to JEWS! The SAME attitude IS ever so PREVALENT TODAY: WHITE men saying "Hello" to white men, but NOT to BLACK men - BLACK MEN saying "GOOD MORNING" to black men, but not to WHITE men. No where in the MODERN WORLD is the FATAL FLAW in HUMAN NATURE and the HOSTILITY toward GOD and MAN MORE EVIDENT than in the RELATIONSHIP between PEOPLE of DIFFERENT RACES. Our world's BIGGEST HURT - it's WORST PAIN - is in this little comment,

so easily made and so HARD to make GOOD AGAIN: "THESE are NOT OUR kind of PEOPLE."

HOSTILITY does NOT STOP with RACE. It goes RIGHT ON into NATIONALITY, ECONOMIC SITUATIONS, SOCIAL STATUS, and even RELIGION. So it happens that ENGLISHMEN say of GERMANS "THESE are NOT our KIND of PEOPLE." Germans say it of POLISH people. Polish people say it of ITALIAN people. In one of the HOTTEST trouble spots in the WORLD TODAY, Palestine, there are TWO PEOPLES of the SAME RACE - but of DIFFERENT NATIONALITY, saying about one another, "THESE are NOT our KIND of PEOPLE." JEWS say it of ARABS, and ARABS say it of JEWS. The rich people say it of the POOR and the POOR say it of the RICH: "THESE are NOT our KIND of PEOPLE." ROMAN CATHOLICS say it of PROTESTANTS, and PROTESTANTS say it of ROMAN CATHOLICS: "THESE are NOT our KIND of PEOPLE." PROTESTANTS say it about OTHER Protestants. LUTHERANS say it of OTHER Lutherans: "THESE are NOT our KIND of PEOPLE."

Our Lord's WHOLE ministry defys this kind of DIFFERENTIATION. PEOPLE may be DIFFERENT - but what DIFFERENCE should that REALLY MAKE in OUR ATTITUDE toward THEM, in our TREATMENT toward them? What difference, in the LOVE OF GOD, does it REALLY MAKE that they are DIFFERENT? We ALL want to be SONS of our HEAVENLY FATHER. But LOOK at what our HEAVENLY FATHER DOES - He makes the SUN to RISE upon the EVIL as well as the GOOD - and HE sends His RAIN upon the HONEST and DISHONEST ALIKE.* If you LOVE ONLY THOSE who LOVE YOU, what CREDIT is that to YOU?" asked JESUS. Even the WORST PEOPLE can think of doing the SAME THING. If you EXCHANGE GREETINGS ONLY with your OWN CIRCLE, are you REALLY DOING anything EXCEPTIONAL? Even the PAGANS can do THAT MUCH.

*He gives His Son into death for all!

We can sit in our SECLUDED SUBURBS, and somehow let the REST of the WORLD GO BY.

or DO anything about

We DON'T EVEN BOTHER to THINK about - let alone PRAY about - the PLIGHT of the people in the GHETTOS - or of those THOUSANDS upon THOUSANDS of people in EAST PAKISTAN who are STARVING from HUNGER & dying of disease - or the COUNTLESS OTHERS who are IN NEED all over the world. Though we are BLESSED RICHLY, we will not even give our FINANCIAL SUPPORT to HELP them. I hope you will LOOK at the RECORDING SECRETARY'S REPORT in the next TIDINGS. It is ASTONDING! The number of people who are giving ONLY 1 dollar or LESS or 2 dollars to the CAUSE of CHRIST in our CHURCH AREA seems to me to be UNBELIEVABLE! And I am TALKING about ADULTS! That MUST BE LESS than 1 percent of their ENTIRE INCOME - a mere TIP thrown to GOD!

And that brings us to the WORD of JUDGMENT found in our TEXT: "I TELL YOU, MANY WIL COME FROM EAST AND WEST AND SIT AT TABLE WITH ABRAHAM, ISAAC, AND JACOB IN THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN, WHILE THE SONS OF THE KINGDOM WILL BE THROWN INTO THE OUTER DARKNESS; THERE MEN WILL WEEP AND GNASH THEIR TEETH."

What Jesus is saying is SIMPLY THIS: When you GET TO HEAVEN, you are GOING to be SURPRISED at the NUMBER of former CHURCH MEMBERS you LOOK FOR WITHOUT being ABLE to FIND them. Or maybe they WON'T be ABLE to FIND YOU. And they WON'T unless in COMPLETE SINCERITY YOU CAN COME saying, "LORD, IF YOU WILL, YOU CAN MAKE ME CLEAN," for ONLY THEN will you HEAR His GRACIOUS REPLY: "I WILL; BE CLEAN!" Amen.