The Third Sunday after the Epiphany
Rolling Meadows -- 1979

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IN NOMINE JESU

I CORINTHIANS 7: 29-31

To those outside the Church and the Kingdom of God the invitation is, "Come!" To those inside the Church and the Kingdom the command is, "Go!" "GO INTO ALL THE WORLD AND PREACH THE GOSPEL TO EVERY CREATURE." "MAKE DISCIPLES OF ALL NATIONS." "YOU SHALL BE MY WITNESSES.....TO THE END OF THE EARTH." Notice that there are no ifs, ands, or buts here. Let no Christian say, "I don't have the time. I am too busy with other things. I have other priorities." "NONSENSE,"says our text: "THE APPOINTED TIME HAS GROWN VERY SHORT; FROM NOW ON, LET THOSE WHO HAVE WIVES LIVE AS THOUGH THEY HAD NONE, AND THOSE WHO MOURN AS THOUGH THEY WERE NOT MOURNING, AND THOSE WHO REJOICE AS THOUGH THEY WERE NOT REJOICING, AND THOSE WHO BUY AS THOUGH THEY HAD NO GOODS, AND THOSE WHO DEAL WITH THE WORLD AS THOUGH THEY HAD NO DEALINGS WITH IT. FOR THE FORM OF THIS WORLD IS PASSING AWAY."

There is a SENSE OF URGENCY here that cannot be argued or disputed. And there is a PURPOSE that cannot be denied. All the things which are so very common to our life -- MARRIAGE, MOURNING, REJOICING, BUYING AND SELLING -- these things are ONLY TEMPORARY. They are NOT PERMANENT. They do not have ETERNAL VALUE. "THE FORM OF THIS WORLD IS PASSING AWAY." There is something FAR MORE IMPORTANT AT STAKE. It is "THE GOSPEL OF GOD!" Jesus Himself proclaims it in Today's Gospel: "THE TIME IS FULFILLED, AND THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS AT HAND; REPENT, AND BELIEVE IN THE GOSPEL."

There is no escaping our responsibility for "REPENTING" (turning around from anything and everything that might get in the way of the COMING KINGDOM OF GOD -- HIS TOTAL RULE in our hearts and lives) and "BELIEVING THE GOSPEL" (trusting always that no matter how dark and bleak things may appear -- no matter what crosses may happen for good or ill -- GOD WILL HAVE THE LAST WORD). And our FAITH is that that LAST WORD will be a WORD OF GRACE AND MERCY.

This is the GOOD NEWS that has to get out! And don't say that you do not have the talent or the ability. Don't say that if you call yourself a Christian. Look at the UNLIKELY PEOPLE whom Jesus called to be His disciples. I can tell you that if I were on the NOMINATING COMMITTEE I would never have picked them -- these "dummies from Galilee." We don't have time to pick apart all twelve who finally ended up as His most personal and intimate disciples. But let's look at a man like SIMON PETER -- ROBUST FISHERMAN, FOUL MOUTHED, FULL OF BRAGGADOCIO, COCK-SURE (even though the "cock crowed three times" while Peter denied that he ever knew Jesus). And there were JAMES AND JOHN who became known as the "Sons of Thunder" because of the HOT TEMPERS, SHORT FUSES, and JUST PLAIN LOUSY ATTITUDES. They were the ones who wanted to "CALL DOWN FIRE FROM HEAVEN" upon the Samaritan Village who would not accept Jesus because He refused to be their PERSONAL SAVIOR rather than the SAVIOR OF THE WHOLE WORLD.

Can you imagine God calling a man like JONAH in Today's Old Testament Lesson? If ever there was a man with BIAS and PREJUDICE, Jonah is the epitome. Not even THREE DAYS AND NIGHTS in the BELLY OF THE GREAT FISH were able to straighten him out. When the WORD OF THE LORD came to him a SECOND TIME -- and he finally went to that damnable, heathen city of Nineveh -- and he gave them God's timetable: "YET FORTY DAYS, AND NINEVEH SHALL BE OVERTHROWN" ------ he couldn't believe it when the people REPENTED and "BELIEVED GOD..... AND PROCLAIMED A FAST, AND PUT ON SACKCLOTH, FROM THE GREATEST OF THEM TO THE LEAST OF THEM." That's not what Jonah wanted at all. He wanted to see them all "go to hell." He sat under the ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ "PLANT" God grew ~~for~~ to give him shade -- a bitter man -- angry about God's love and mercy -- angrier still when God let the "plant die as a curse for his lovelessness.

Still there is a POSITIVE SIDE. The people of Nineveh DID REPENT. In spite of himself JONAH PREACHED, and the PEOPLE LISTENED, and GOD CARED! There has to be a lesson for all of us there. GOD DOES GET HIS WORK DONE, sometimes even IN SPITE OF US!

Or if you look at the "Unlikely Eleven" at the moment of Jesus' Ascension (remember that JUSAS was not there -- the only one lost) --- but think of Jesus' words to them: "MAKE DISCIPLES OF ALL NATIONS." I ask you, "Who would have thunk it? These dummies?" Yet they were MEN ON A MISSION -- and that MISSION COULD NOT BE DENIED! They knew and

had experienced the GOOD NEWS of the FORGIVENESS OF SIN, LIFE, AND SALVATION -- the SURETY OF EVERLASTING LIFE -- TRIUMPH OVER DEATH AND THE GRAVE. They literally "TURNED THE WORLD UPSIDE DOWN" with that GOOD NEWS.

How did they do it? They stuck to their business of the "WORD OF GOD AND PRAYER." And while they did this, they INSTRUCTED the people. And THEY DID IT. When the PERSECUTIO came, they (the people) were "SCATTERED ABROAD" --- and "EVERYWHERE THEY WENT" the GOSPEL WAS PROCLAIMED and the CHURCH GREW. In in year 150 A.D. Tertullian is able to write that the CHRISTIAN GOSPEL has reached the confines of the EMPEROR'S PALACE IN ROME.

These were PEOPLE ON THE MOVE! ..... What about us? ..... Let me be very frank. Don't complain to me about POOR CHURCH ATTENDANCE, POOR GROWTH IN MEMBERSHIP, POOR COMMUNION ATTENDANCE, POOR BIBLE CLASSES! Let me ask you, "To whom have you talked this past week about YOUR FAITH, YOUR CONCERN that so-and-so has not been at Wroship, YOUR WITNESSING to the Mercy and Love of God as it is found in Christ Jesus?" ..... You really don't have any choice in the matter -- that is, if you are a Christian. NOTHING CAN GET BEFORE THE KING OF THE KINGDOM! "LET THOSE WHO HAVE WIVE LIVE AS THOUGH THEY HAD NONE, AND THOSE WHO MOURN AS THOUGH THEY WERE NOT MOURNING, AND THOSE WHO REJOICE AS THOUGH THEY WERE NOT REJOICING, AND THOSE WHO BUY AS THOUGH THEY HAD NO GOODS, AND

THOSE WHO DEAL WITH THE WORLD AS THOUGH THEY HAD NO DEALINGS WITH IT." In other words, we are called to PUT OUR PRIORITIES WHERE THEY BELONG. Amen.