3rd Sunday after Epiphany
Rolling Meadows -- 1976

Rev. Carl F. Thrun

IN NOMINE JESU

ST. MARK 1: 14-20

I read and re-read this GOSPEL LESSON many times. I THOUGHT about it -- MEDITATED about it -- PRAYED about it. But always I ended up simply SHAKING MY HEAD in UTTER AMAZEMENT -- and I kept saying to myself: "It can't be -- Incredible -- Impossible -- Unbelievable!" I mean, "What kind of POWER did this Jesus have -- what kind of AUTHORITY -- what kind of MAGNETISM?" First He calls out to SIMON PETER and his brother ANDREW: "FOLLOW ME." And without a moment's hesitation "THEY LEFT THEIR NETS AND FOLLOWED HIM." Next He comes upon JAMES and his brother JOHN. He calls to them -- "AND THEY LEFT THEIR FATHER ZEBEDEE IN THE BOAT WITH THE HIRED SERVANTS, AND FOLLOWED HIM."

Maybe I am just too REALISTIC -- maybe I am just too PRACTICAL ---- but I find it difficult to COMPREHEND how FOUR GROWN MEN -- with FAMILY, and FRIENDS, and obvious RESPONSIBILITIES (SIMON PETER we know was a married man -- JESUS later healed his MOTHER-IN-LAW) ---- I find it difficult to UNDERSTAND how at a MOMENT'S NOTICE and at the "drop of a hat" they would leave everything behind and just GO OFF and FOLLOW this JESUS.

Can you PICTURE YOURSELF doing that? Can you PICTURE YOURSELF suddenly LEAVING EVERYTHING -- EVERYTHING you hold NEAR AND DEAR -- in the words of LUTHER, "goods, fame,

child, and wife" -- letting these ALL BE GONE -- in order to FOLLOW JESUS?

Perhaps that is what is the matter with the CHURCH today. Perhaps that is what is the matter with our brand of DISCIPLESHIP..... There is so little REAL COMMITMENT. There is so little REAL SACRIFICE. In a sense it is very true: "We want our cake and eat it too."..... Most of us have grown up from little on hearing about GOD'S GRACE, and LOVE, and FORGIVENESS, and MERCY. The GOOD NEWS of LIFE and SALVATION in JESUS' NAME is AUTOMATIC. To be a CHRISTIAN -- a DISCIPLE OF JESUS CHRIST --does not CUST US ANYTHING. By GOD'S GRACE it is FREE for the TAKING. So "we CAN have our cake and eat it too."..... In the TIME OF TROUBLE -- in the "HOUR OF TRIAL -- GOD, like a DIVINE BELL HOP, will always be there to BAIL US OUT.

In the meantime we can go right on worshiping the others gods of POWER, PRESTIGE, PLEASURE, LUXURY, THINGS. We can go right on SELFISHLY SUCKING IN everything we can possibly get out of life. We don't have to LEAVE anything! We don't have to GIVE UP anything! We don't have to OFFER anything! We don't have to SACRIFICE anything! We can KEEP IT ALL FOR OURSELVES -- and THE REST OF THE WORLD BE DAMNED -- just so long as GOD IS ON OUR SIDE.

Now I know that NONE OF US would ever come right out and say such a thing so directly

and pointedly. But the TRUTH is that "our actions speak louder than words."..... So again I ask you to try to PUT YOURSELF into the SHOES of PETER, and ANDREW, and JAMES, and JOHN. Would either YOU or I do such a thing? Are we willing -- even now, at this moment -- to just DROP EVERYTHING in order to FOLLOW JESUS?..... Ask people to SERVE and the answer is: "I'd like to -- but I just don't have the time. I'm too busy. I need a sabbatical." Ask people to GIVE and the answer is: "I can't afford it. I over extended myself -- bought a cottage on a lake, bought a new car, bought some things we NEEDED for our house, etc., etc., etc.....I can't afford it."

Someone suggested that since I am so good at selling ROTARY TICKETS for the annual Rotary Dance, I should personally receive the OFFERING on Sunday Morning -- look at what has been given -- and then HAND THE BASKET BACK until we at least meet our BUDGET REQUIREMENTS..... I don't say this to be FUNNY..... Are you really aware that the REAL RECEIVER of your OFFERINGS -- your SACRIFICES OF TIME, AND TALENT, AND TREASURE -- your WHOLE SELF -- is JESUS CHRIST???

We are able to see things in a MUCH DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE than PETER, ANDREW, JAMES, or JOHN. He comes to us with NAIL-PIERCED HANDS -- with HIS TRIUMPH over SIN, DEATH, AND THE DEVIL -- with HIS PRESENCE and the GIFT OF HIMSELF in the SACRAMENT OF HOLY COMMUNION -- with the PROMISE OF EVERLASTING LIFE ----- and He says: "COME, FOLLOW ME."

"all this I have given for you - what will you give for Me?"

Those people out there in this DARK and FEAR FILLED WORLD -- the SICK and the SUFFERING -- the LONELY and AFRAID ------- they will only SEE JESUS PASSING BY because of US! Their ONLY HOPE is YOU and ME -- that in WORD AND DEED we PREACH THE GOSPEL OF GOD and say: "THE TIME IS FULFILLED, AND THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS AT HAND, REPENT, AND BELIEVE IN THE GOSPEL."

Don't COUNT THE COST for that! Just DO IT! Leave everything else go! FOLLOW JESUS!

AMEN.