Ash Wednesday
February 12, 1975
Rolling Meadows, Illinois

Rev. Carl F. Thrun

IN NOMINE JESU

II Corinthians 5: 17 - 6: 1:

THEREFORE, IF ANY ONE IS IN CHRIST, HE IS A NEW CREATION THE OLD HAS PASSED AWAY, BEHOLD, THE NEW HAS COME. ALL THIS IS FROM GOD, WHO THROUGH CHRIST RECONCILED US TO HIMSELF AND GAVE US THE MINISTRY OF RECONCILIATI THAT IS, GOD WAS IN CHRIST RECONCILING THE WORLD TO HIMSELF, NOT COUNTING THEIR TRESPASSES AGAINST THEM, AND ENTRUSTING TO US THE MESSAGE OF RECONCILIATION. SO WE ARE AMBASSADORS FOR CHRIST, GOD MAKING HIS APPEAL THROUGH US. WE BESEECH YOU ON BEHALF OF CHRIS BE RECONCILED TO GOD. FOR OUR SAKE HE MADE HIM TO BE SIN WHO KNEW NO SIN, SO THAT IN HIM WE MIGHT BECOME THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD. WORKING TOGETHER WITH HIM, THEN, WE ENTREAT YOU NOT TO ACCEPT THE GRACE OF GOD IN VAIN.

Will you OPEN your BULLETIN and look again at the COLLECT for this ASH WEDNESDAY:

"ALMIGHTY AND EVERLASTING GOD, ~~WHO~~ YOU HATE NOTHING THAT YOU HAVE MADE AND FORGIVE THE SINS OF ALL THOSE WHO ARE PENITENT, CREATE AND MAKE IN US NEW AND CONTRITE HEARTS, THAT WE, WORTHILY LAMENTING OUR SINS AND ACKNOWLEDGING OUR WRETCHEDNESS, MAY OBTAIN OF YOU, THE GOD OF ALL MERCY, PERFECT REMISSION AND FORGIVENESS; THROUGH JESUS CHRIST, THY SON, OUR LORD."

This is the MESSAGE that I have to PROCLAIM to you on this ASH WEDNESDAY - - that God does NOT HATE YOU. Indeed, "HE HATES NOTHING THAT HE HAS MADE." On the CONTRARY, "HE FORGIVES THE SINS OF ALL THOSE WHO ARE PENITENT."

HE FORGIVES - - because in His ESSENCE He is a GOD of LOVE and NOT of WRATH. Our Lutheran Confessions keep UNDERSCOREING this REALITY. ARTICLE 12 of the APOLOGY of the AUGSBURG CONFESSION observes that it is "A STRANGE AND OUTLANDISH WORK WHEN GOD TERRIFIES HUMAN BEINGS, AND THAT GOD DOES SO ONLY TO BE ABLE TO DO THE WORK THAT HE REALLY WANTS TO DO, THE WORK THAT REALLY CORRESPONDS TO HIS PURPOSE AND HIS INTENTIONS FOR US HUMAN CREATURES. THAT REAL WORK OF GOD IS TO GIVE THEM LIFE AND CONSOLATION." ..... FORTY-SIX YEARS LATER, the 5th ARTICLE of the FORMULA of CONCORD [Solid Declaration, paragraph 11] harks back to the SAME THEME "TO PUNISH IS NOT GOD'S THING, REALLY; GOD'S REAL THING IS TO COMFORT AND TO PROCLAIM HIS FORGIVING GRACE."

The PRIMARY AFFIRMATION that we must make about God is that HE IS LOVE! The 6 weeks that lie AHEAD of us are the CHURCH'S CALL to DISCOVER this fundamental fact once more for OURSELVES - - as we SEE the SUFFERING, the PASSION, and the DEATH of CHRIST UNFOLD BEFORE US. It is the CHURCH'S CALL to remember that Christ CAME and that Christ LIVED, and that Christ DIED, and that Christ ROSE AGAIN at His FATHER'S COMMAND - - in OBEDIENCE to His FATHER'S WILL - - - - - - - - in order to accompli

the FATHER'S PURPOSE of RECONCILING ALL OF US HUMAN CREATURES to HIMSELF.

This He did in CHRIST! As our TEXT says, He did it by the MAGNIFICENTLY SIMPLE DEVICE of "NOT COUNTING OUR TRESSPASSES AGAINST US." In other words, He SIMPLY FORGAVE THEM - - without condition - WITHOUT ANY "IF" - - WITHOUT ANY RESTRICTIONS. He simply FORGAVE THEM - - and COMMITTED to His HOLY COMMUNITY on EARTH - - HIS CHURCH - - the MESSAGE of that ONCE-FOR-ALL universal and TOTAL ACT of RECONCILING FORGIVENESS.

It is THIS UNIVERSAL, UNLIMITED, UNQUALIFIED, and UNCONDITIONAL FORGIVENESS that is the MESSAGE of the GOSPEL - - and that must be OUR MESSAGE TOO - - OUR CONFESSION and PROCLAMATION - - if we are to CONTINUE to CALL PEOPLE to CHRIST. God's FORGIVENESS has HAPPENED to YOU - - IRREVERSIBLY and FINALLY. God has DONE His THING! God has DONE His THING in the RECONCILIATION that HE WORKED OUT in CHRIST'S OBEDIENCE - - even to the POINT where HE DIED on a CROSS. God has RECONCILED YOU and EVERY OTHER HUMAN BEING to HIMSELF. THAT'S THE MESSAGE! "GOD WAS IN CHRIST RECONCILING THE WORLD TO HIMSELF, NOT COUNTING THEIR TRESPASSES AGAINST THEM, AND

TRUSTING TO US THE MESSAGE OF RECONCILIATION. .....

FOR OUR SAKE HE MADE HIM TO BE SIN WHO KNEW NO SIN, SO THAT IN HIM WE MIGHT BECOME THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD."

GOD COMMUNICATES, that FORGIVENESS across the CHASM of over 19 centuries through a SINGLE INSTITUTION - - "HIS ONE HOLY CATHOLIC AND APOSTOLIC CHURCH." He does it through th[redacted] the WORD of RECONCILIATION that His CHURCH'S MINISTERS PROCLAIM - - and that CHRISTIAN BROTHERS and SISTERS SHARE in their MUTUAL CONVERSATION and CONSOLATION. God does it THROUGH the WASHING of BAPTISM - - by which HE COMMUNICATES HIS FAVOR AND HIS FORGIVENESS and His SPIRIT of NEW POWER to those who UNDERGO that WASHING. God does it by the SENTENCE of ABSOLUTION that His MINISTERS DECLARE in HIS NAME to those who have SEPARATED THEMSELVES from the BODY of CHRIST and by which they RESTORE PENITENT CHRISTIANS to it again. God does it THROUGH the SACRAMENT of the ALTAR - - in which the MYSTERIOUSLY PRESENT BODY AND BLOOD of CHRIST impart to the PENITENT COMMUNICANT the DIVINE RECONCILIATION and the LIFE of GOD HIMSELF. For it is HERE that He is DELIVERED from the CONSEQUENCES of HIS SIN.

This is what MAKES the CHURCH so VITALLY IMPORTANT - - for it is only IN and THROUGH the CHURCH that this COMMUNICATION of GRACE and of GOD'S SPIRIT ASSURE DLY and DEPENDEBLY TAKE PLACE. THAT is WHY we say in the CREED: "I BELIEVE IN ONE HOLY CATHOLIC AND APOSTOLIC CHURCH." We are USED to saying: "I BELIEVE IN ONE GOD, THE FATHER ALMIGHTY, AND IN ONE LORD JESUS CHRIST, AND IN THE HOLY SPIRIT." But we NEED to say: "I BELIEVE IN THE ONE HOLY CATHOLIC AND APOSTOLIC CHURCH" - - because it is THROUGH the CHURCH that God REALIZES His REDEMPTIVE PURPOSES in the LIVES of HUMAN BEINGS.

"HE FORGIVES," says our COLLECT for today, "THE SINS OF ALL THOSE WHO ARE PENITENT." And HERE, we REMEMBER that PENITENCE is NOT to be UNDERSTOOD merely as being SORRY that we are SINNERS and SORRY that we COMMIT SINS. WE KNOW that PENITENCE INCLUDES ALSO the JOYOUS AWARENESS and CONVICTION and CONFIDENCE that God has FORGIVEN US "BY GRACE FOR CHRIST'S SAKE" when we BELIEVE that He is FORGIVING US TODAY.

"HE FORGIVES THE SINS OF ALL THOSE WHO ARE PENITENT." That is the NOTE on which we GET READY for LENT and for the REST of our LIFE. Amen!!!