Ash Wednesday
Rolling Meadows - 1969

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IN NOMINE JESU

St. Matthew 26: 56 THEN ALL THE DISCIPLES FORSOOK HIM AND FLED.

THEY ALL FORSOOK HIM

The story of the Passion of our Lord has been recorded for us by His disciples. And the truly remarkable feature about this record, Unblinking and unvarnished, is that it is an account of the disciples' own failure. That failure is sharply defined by the record, written & asserted to by the disciples themselves. The disciples were not overtaken unawares by the Cross - they were not surprised by the Cross - they were simply overwhelmed by it!

The disciples failed in spite of the fact that Jesus predicted His death and crucifixion at least three times before it took place. The last time Jesus announced His impending death - the time of the last Passover in Jerusalem - He referred to it as something already familiar to them: YOU KNOW THAT AFTER TWO DAYS THE PASSOVER IS COMING, AND THE SON OF MAN WILL BE DELIVERED UP TO BE CRUCIFIED! The disciples' failure was not failure in the face of a completely unexpected event. They knew what to expect - they knew what was coming. Still THEY ALL FORSOOK HIM AND FLED!

That is a cutting description of the whole life and ministry of our Lord! Right from the beginning He was marked as an Outcast! Right from the beginning He was DESPISED ARE REJECTED OF MEN, A MAN OF SORROWS AND ACQUAINTED WITH GRIEF! Right from the beginning He suffered the hell of loneliness and forsakenness! At first THERE WAS NO ROOM FOR HIM IN THE INN - He was relegated to a drafty stable and a donkey's feeding trough! Then, when Herod the Great got wind of of this "other King Jesus" there was no room for Him in all Israel. His parents had to take the young child and flee as exiles from Herod's slaughter of the innocent to the foreign country of Egypt. After Herod's death, they returned - but still there was no room for Him. The people of His own hometown, Nazareth, picked up stones to run Him out of town. On several occasions His own countrymen tried to push Him over a cliff. There is, perhaps, no more pathetic lament in all of Scripture then the Voice of this Lord and Prince of Heaven crying out: THE FOXES HAVE HOLES, AND THE BIRDS OF THE AIR HAVE NESTS, BUT THE SON OF MAN HAS NOWHERE TO LAY HIS HEAD!

Of course, there were a few bright spots along the way - when, for example, Jesus asked His disciples, WHO DO MEN SAY THAT I AM? And Simon Peter, in the warmth and vigor of a passionate faith, burst out: YOU ARE THE CHRIST, THE SON OF THE LIVING GOD! Or when the multitudes of people began to leave Him, and Jesus turned to the Twelve and said: WILL YOU ALSO GO AWAY! And once again, Peter as spokesman for all the disciples, stood up to say: LORD, TO WHOM SHALL WE GO? YOU HAVE THE WORDS OF ETERNAL LIFE. WE KNOW AND ARE SURE THAT YOU ARE THE HOLY ONE OF GOD! Or that last night, in the Upper Room, when Peter once more made his courageous confession: THOUGH THEY ALL FALL AWAY BECUASE OF YOU, I WILL NEVER FALL AWAY....EVEN IF I MUST DIE WITH YOU, I WILL NOT DENY YOU....AND SO SAID ALL THE DISCIPLES.

That was in the sunshine of faith and devotion! But then, when the chips were down - when they came with swords and clubs to arrest Him and crucify Him - then ALL THE DISCIPLES FORSOOK HIM AND FLED! Brave Peter - big fisherman battler of storms and bold confessor - brave Peter followed at a distance and his fiery bravado flickered and died in the company of a housemaid - and he ~~turned traitor~~ cheap and cursing denier!

How often has that not happened to you? How often has that not happened to Me? This is the one thing that all of us have yet to learn - that the Cross of Christ, the Cross of Suffering, is one that all of us somehow, someday, MUST BEAR God Knows how often I have run away and forsaken Him and left Him in the lurch — I, Carl Frederick Thrun, who at my Baptism was marked with the Sign of the Cross, Crucified with Christ, born to new life in Him — turned coward, and traitor, and deserter! GOD HAVE MERCY! How often I have sat on my duff when I should have been on my feet STANDING UP FOR JESUS and CONFESSING HIM. GOD HAVE MERCY! God knows how often I have kept my big mouth shut when I should have opened it wide in bold confession for His glorious Name — or how often I have opened my big mouth and the wrong things came out in base denial, and I would have done much better to keep my big mouth shut. GOD HAVE MERCY!

Because I know myself I know you too - and I can dare to say that the exact same thing has happened in your life - that you have turned traitor and run away. It does happen, doesn't it, every day - at home with your spouse, with your children, with your parents - at the shop, at the office, in your meeting with other people. GOD HAVE MERCY UPON US - WE HAVE ALL FORSAKEN HIM AND FLED!

It is the joy and wonder of the Gospel that He does NOT FORSAKE US! He waits patiently for our repentance and our return. He waits for the disciples to come back! He waits for Peter's tears! He waits for James and John, the greedy sons of Thunder who wanted special seats at His right Hand and at His left He waits for Thomas, the doubter, and all the rest of them. He waits from His bloody Cross of bitter suffering and death to embrace thw whole world with His love.

Let me assure you that that is the glory and joy of the holy ministry! There are times when some person who is completely crushed by guilt and the despair of having run off to the far country comes and says that he or she is beyond forgiveness. How grateful I am that I can say to such a one: You are not the first. ALL THE DISCIPLES FORSOOK HIM AND FLED! But He restored them to their discipleship....He wants you too! Let's forget about you for a moment and TALK ABOUT JESUS. He WENT TO HIS CROSS just for you. He LIVED FOR YOU, He DIED FOR YOU, He was RAISED FROM THE DEAD FOR YOU, and He wants you to be sure of HIS LOVE. He wants to raise you from the SACKCLOTH AND ASHES of your misery to the JOY and PEACE OF FORGIVENESS and FELLOWSHIP.

Sometimes, at the close of such a session like this, there is a celebration - a celebration of the Holy Eucharist, And it IS a celebration - a giving of thanks and a new beginning. It happened to one woman after a Good Friday Service - when finally she was moved to seek out the pastor's sacristy when all the other had left. After receiving the sacrament of the blessed Communion with Him whose atoning death had become so very real for her that night, she said, "I am leaving a burden here which I have been carrying for 20 years. Nameless, a complete

stranger, she went out into the night and the beginning of a new life. Some 10 years later the pastor was approached by the same woman in a downtown store. "You won't remember me," she said. "I came to your study after Good Friday services many years ago. I just want you to know that it changed everything. Life has held new meaning for me ever since. I've never been happier."

GOD HAVE MERCY ON US and give us ALL SUCH A NEW BEGINNING - In Christ!

Amen.