Ash Wednesday
Rolling Meadows - 1966

Rev. Carl F. Thrun

IN NOMINE JESU

St. Luke 22: 41-46 And He withdrew from them about a stone's throw, and knelt down and prayed, "Father, if Thou art willing, remove this cup from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Thine, be done." And there appeared to Him an angel from heaven, strengthening Him. And being in an agony He prayed more earnestly; and His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down upon the ground. And when He rose from prayer, He came to the disciples and found them sleeping for sorrow, and He said to them, "Why do you sleep? Rise and pray that you may not enter into temptation."

THE CROSS AND MY OBEDIENCE

I wonder how many of us still recognize what a great offense the Cross of Christ really is! To bow before the Cross of Christ - to glory in that Cross - is really a great affront to human ingenuity and human pride! It is completely contrary to all of man's natural thoughts about himself and his thoughts about God. To glory in the Cross of Christ means that we have to come to bow under the verdict of God which smashes all our own verdicts. We have to come to worship the God who is not God at all in man's sense of the word, because He is not a God in whom you can glory as man understands glory, impressive display and overwhelming might. We kneel here before that God of whom on human terms we must be ashamed, the God whom we think we have to defend, the God whom we more often ~~then not~~ stick in the corner of our lives than display as the glory of our lives. ~~And this shows what kind of God He is. We get away with it.~~ We sing our songs of allegiance here, and we declare our oaths of loyalty in these friendly surroundings - but outside who ever hears from our lips about the Crucified? And who sees in our lives anything ~~resembling an expression~~ that shows that the Cross of Christ has become our Cross? ~~And we get away with it! We get away with it, because the Cross is still the Cross of Christ - His burden and His shame - because this is the kind of world that it is and because we are the kind of people we are, still very much in need of His Cross!~~

You remember Judas Iscariot! Here was a man who followed Jesus because of a grand dream and a high expectation. But when he saw how it really was, he knew that his dream was only a dream and his expectations couldn't possibly be fulfilled in following this Jesus. Jesus just wasn't the kind of Messiah and Savior he had hoped for, and it was the certainty of the Cross that brought that home to him. So Judas not only quit Christ's cause but also betrayed Christ and

His cause. Let him that has ears really hear! The Cross is not only integral to the life of Christ, but it is also the heart of man's disappointment in Christ; and when men become disappointed with Christ, they not only quit His cause but betray His cause. They always hope to get something out of it that fits their expectation of what it means to have a god. What is the sense of being involved in a cause if it does not pay off? They are always their disobedient selves - and far from letting God be God simply and only because He truly is God, they would dictate the terms on which they will let Him be God, and they prescribe for Him what He must do if He is to be their God. And the Cross has no place in any of it, so that as soon as the Cross becomes real with its implications for them and their God, they not only beg off for themselves but also betray. Friend, wherefore art thou come? Judas, betrayest thou the Son of Man with a kiss? To this day Christ is betrayed into the hands of the enemy more by kisses than by curses, more by shows of friendship than by open enmity, more by tokens of what should be love than outright manifestations of hate. I have yet to hear a church member shout out in the world that he hates Christ; but how many by their church membership are betraying Jesus, putting Him right into the hands of the enemies, because their church membership is nothing more than a Judas kiss!

The temptation is always that we close our eyes and our ears to our personal involvement in Christ's Cross. In the Garden of Gethsemane the disciples fell asleep in spite of the strongest possible warnings from Jesus Himself that they watch and pray, or they would fall into temptation. Well, they didn't watch and pray, and so they fell into temptation, the very common temptation of falling asleep, of being where Jesus was but not being awake to what He was doing, of being only a stone's throw from His agony in prayer but really being in another world because they had no part in that prayer. Again and again Jesus tries to awaken them, to show they that they are involved. Watch therefore and pray...the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak. That our spirit is willing is amply demonstrated by our being here at all. This is the last thing that our flesh would bring us to do on these Wednesday nights. But when we come here even under

the prompting of our spirit, we bring our flesh with us, and unless we watch we are going to fall asleep to all that Christ is here doing for us, and unless we pray we are going to lose our part in it.

But what is it that we are to see as we watch and pray? First this - that the theme of Jesus' whole life was to do the Will of His Father. I am come to do the will of Him that sent Me! And now we see Him wrestling with that will of God until His sweat falls to the ground in great drops of blood. Again and again He throws Himself on the ground tp pray the same thing: O My Father, if Thou art willing, remove this cup from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Thine be done. And there was no word from God, no word whatsoever. An angel comes and strengthens Him, but this only increases the agony of His praying. Obviously the angel could only help Him to face the cup, sustain His strength at least this much that He would not die before He drank it. The all-important question for us is: What was the cup about which He prayed, pleading even from the very depths of His Being so that it even involved His blood, pleading as no one has ever pleaded with God before? Surely it was not merely the prospect of suffering; He had been the closes Friend of suffering all His life. Nor was it merely the prospect of death, cruel anc horrible as it surely was; far lesser men than He had faced the same kind of death without all but dying at the prospect. Remember how calmly He had spoken of His Cross, even the bitterness, the mockery and the spitting and the rejection? His disciples were greatly disturbed by His words, but He only set His face like flint to go to Jersualem and the Cross. What entered the picture now so that He could no longer remain calm about it? What was it that so laid hold of Him that it all but killed Him on the spot?

There is only one answer. The new element that He could not calculate in advance, was our sin. This is what was meant by drinking the cup. This is what was so horrible and repulsive to Him. It meant that separation from God which sin always creates. It meant that He would cry to God and there would be no hearing by God because God has no ear for sinners. It meant that God's Hand would be turned against Him and He would deserve it. God would look with utter

revulsion at Him. It meant fully taking our place, being before God and men what we really are, and so taking everything that we had deserved. Look at me! Am I so bad? And Jesus seat blood praying not to be completely identified with me before God! But He drank the cup. He established the identity. It was the Father's will. So when He rose up from praying He saw Himself as I am. He knew that God saw Him as God sees me, and that was the great hurt that He could hardly stand, the great hurt that almost killed Him before they hung Him on the Cross. Yet He drank the cup willingly because it was the Father's will. Or as St. Paul says it: He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross.

I never was obedient to God, neither in the little nor in the great things of life. I really never even bothered to ask what God wanted, or if I did, I never really lived it that way. Or if it looked as if I did, my heart wasn't in it, and I resented the will of God because it was opposed to my will. I have no obedience of my own to offer God. If I had, it wouldn't have been quite so bad for Jesus to identify Himself with me. But He did drink the cup; He did become obedient unto death, even the death on the Cross. And now I no longer see myself by myself. Now I look and see Jesus for me - every step my step, every hurt my hurt, every drop of blood my blood flowing from me, very moment in hell my eternity of hell. His obedience was for me! So now I go to Sinai with its demands upon me which I do not fulfill and with its sore threats upon me - but I do not go on my own, or I would die if I ever touched the Holy Mount. I now offer perfect obedience to every demand made there by the holy God. The great Thou shalts and the Thou shalt nots thunder at me as loud as ever, but I can insist that they cannot possibly frighten me any longer. I point them to Jesus Christ who humbled Himself and became obedient for me, obedient for me even unto death, yes, the death of the Cross. Sinai, hear! God of the Law, listen to what is prayed in the blood sweat of Gethsemane: Father, not My will but Thine be done. That, heavenly Father, is the only obedience which I even attempt to offer, because I believe it is full obedience for me. Amen.