Ash Wednesday
Rolling Meadows - 1976

Rev. Carl F. Thrun

IN NOMINE JESU

ST. LUKE 22: 61-62 "AND THE LORD TURNED AND LOOKED AT PETER. AND PETER REMEMBERED THE WORD OF THE LORD, HOW HE HAD SAID TO HIM, 'BEFORE THE COCK CROWS TODAY, YOU WILL DENY ME THREE TIMES.' AND HE WENT OUT AND WEPT BITTERLY."

Someone has said that man can ENDURE and TOLERATE anything -- even the greatest of SUFFERING and MISFORTUNE within & without -- as long as he still has HOPE! Take away HOPE -- and the very BOTTOM FALLS OUT. There is no more MEANING or PURPOSE to life. Everything is VAIN and FUTILE. Without HOPE, there is NOTHING TO LIVE FOR.

The words of our text talk about HOPE. If there was HOPE for a man like PETER, there is HOPE for EVERYONE OF US. NO ONE is excluded. "AND THE LORD TURNED AND LOOKED AT PETER..... AND HE WENT OUT AND WEPT BITTERLY." ..... This is one of the FEW SILENT MOMENTS in a night that was filled with SHOUTING and LYING and NOISE. This is the MOMENT when TWO MEN suddenly LOOK at each other. The HOUR was probably CLOSE TO DAWN. It was the END of a LONG and BITTER NIGHT. MEN were trying to GET RID OF THEIR GOD.

But here there were TWO MEN. One was only TEN HOURS AWAY from DEATH. The other had just told a group of people around the fire that HE DID NOT KNOW THE MAN who was going to His death. "No, No! I do not know Him. I have never been with Him. I swear I haven't."

And just then the COCK CROWED to greet the dawn. JESUS -- apparently being led from one room of the palace to another -- passed through the YARD where the FIRE WAS. "HE LOOKED " at the man who stood there. JUST A LOOK! ..... Suddenly the GATE SLAMMED -- and OUT INTO THE COLD DAWN fled the man who had been SO LOUD and BRAVE a moment earlie He RAN AWAY and DOWN THE SILENT STREETS to HIDE HIMSELF in a corner of the great city. He felt EMPTY inside -- and WITHOUT HOPE. And as he ran, TEARS coursed down his face. They were HOT and BITTER TEARS -- washing away something that was like DIRT ON HIS FACE and BLOOD ON HIS SOUL.

Here at DAWN, in ONE MAN LOOKING AT ANOTHER, we catch a GLIMPSE -- FAR and DEEP and HOLY -- of the true meaning of the CHRISTIAN FAITH. Here is a SCENE that shows, as FEW OTHERS in the SACRED RECORD, that CHRISTIANITY is BASICALLY and ESSENTIALLY a LIVING RELATIONSHIP to a LIVING PERSON. It is FILLED WITH HOPE -- because it is ALWAYS and FOREVER the RELATIONSHIP of a REDEEMED HUMAN SOUL to the REDEEMING PERSON OF JESUS CHRIST -- in FAITH, in LOVE, in TRUST, in OBEDIENCE -- in ALL THE WAYS in which one person is BOUND TO ANOTHER. This is REALLY CHRISTIANITY -- nothing more and nothing less.

PETER had turned against his FRIEND, his SAVIOR, his KING. He had BROKEN THAT RELATION

SHIP to his LORD. He had THROWN IT AWAY..... But when his SAVIOR "TURNED AND LOOKED AT PETER," he suddenly realized WHAT HE HAD DONE. He saw what he had THROWN AWAY and WHAT HE HAD FORGOTTEN. There was nothing to do but to STUMBLE OUT INTO THE DARK -- BLINDED BY BURNING TEARS -- AFRAID AND ALONE -- until ANOTHER DAWN a few weeks later when he would hear the VOICE OF HIS SAVIOR again ---- COMPELLING, HEALING, and WARM, by the lake: "SIMON, SON OF JOHN, DO YOU LOVE ME?"

Certainly all of us -- if we are honest with ourselves and with God -- will have to say: "I have done the same sort of thing. Perhaps I have not done it quite so obviously or so publicly, but there have been hours when I have forgotten. I have broken the bond between Jesus Christ and my soul. I,too, have stood by the sputtering little fires of my lusts, my greed, my hate, my tongue, my envy, my malice. I have acted as if I had never heard of Jesus Christ."

But then comes HOPE! For JESUS TURNS and LOOKS AT US as He "TURNED AND LOOKED AT PETER" The GREAT, CRUSHING POWER in that LOOK which drove PETER into the night with HEAVEN crying in his heart -- the ONE, GREAT POWER that would LIFT him, KEEP him, HOLD him -- was the UNDERSTANDING LOVE and DEEP COMPASSION of his SAVIOR..... It was ONLY A GLANCE -- but in that GLANCE were all the GOLDEN MEMORIES of BLESSED COMPANIONSHIP and all

the INFINITE and GENTLE TENDERNESS of the IMMORTAL SHEPHERD for ONE SHEEP that had LOST THE WAY HOME. "AND (PETER) WENT OUT AND WEPT BITTERLY!"..... In heaven the RECORDING ANGEL wrote his NAME -- INDELIBLY and FOREVER -- among those whom LOVE had brought HOME again.

THIS IS THE CHRISTIAN GOSPEL! This is OUR SURE HOPE! This is the SIGN OF UNDERSTANDING and FORGIVENESS. This is ALL OF IT! It is the GREATNESS OF OUR FAITH and the POWER OF IT! This is the GOSPEL OF ANOTHER CHANCE. This is the HAUNTING, ETERNAL VOICE of our SAVIOR: "I HAVE LOVED YOU WITH AN EVERLASTING LOVE."

Legend says that during the reign of BLOODY NERO, PETER -- by his own request -- was CRUCIFIED HEAD DOWNWARD because he did not consider himself worthy of dying in the same manner as his LORD had died. It was July 19 in the year of our Lord 64. On that hot July morning this OLD MAN was hanging upside down in a Roman arena. If he opened his eyes, he saw the BLOODY RED SAND from which the CHURCH would grow in the years to come. But if he closed them, as I am sure he did -- if he closed them in the moment of AWARENESS and REMEMBERING of all the years that always comes to DYING MEN -- he SAW SOMETHING ELSE. He saw THOSE EYES of HIS SAVIOR that UNDERSTOOD him and LOVED him forever. And he KNEW THERE WAS HOPE! He knew that soon there would be NO MORE NIGHT

No More suffering

and NO MORE TEARS. There would be ONLY JOY! -- JOY and HOPE and LIFE in the CROSS

everlasting

OF CHRIST!

O Lord Jesus, TURN YOUR EYES and LOOK AT US as you did at PETER. Help us to know that YOUR CROSS means HOPE for us. Amen.