Ash Wednesday
Rolling Meadows - 1968

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IN NOMINE JESU

St. John 18: 33-34 Pilate entered the praetorium again and called Jesus, and said to Him, "Are You the King of the Jews?" Jesus answered "Do you say this of your own accord, or did others say it to you about Me?"

IS THIS YOUR OWN IDEA?

Lent calls into question the very veracity & honesty of our Christian faith and life - it pries beneath the surface of our whole relationship with God, and Christ, and the Church, and wants to know how really serious we are and how committed we are to the hard road of discipleship. Lent stands in severe judgment over all the superficialities of a second-hand and uninvolved religiosity. The meek King goes to the Cross. As He goes, He summons His people to repentance - He summons them to DENY THEMSELVES AND TAKE OF THEIR CROSS AND FOLLOW HIM. And He calls to us too! How do we salute Him? How do we acclaim Him? - [redacted] How do we serve Him? Our text speaks to all who think they can complacently dodge or evade the question - it strikes out at what has been called Second-hand Religion. If you say that you are a Christian, the text wants to know: IS THIS YOUR OWN IDEA?

Second-hand religion is just about as good as no religion at all. It is the religion of the curious but uncommitted, waiting to be convinced but without any real, personal religious convictions of their own. It is like the religion of Pilate, who probably did not think of himself as an irreligious man at all. He had heard all about the ministry of Jesus - what He had done & said - how He went up and down the land healing and helping and calling men to discipleship. Indeed, he had even heard that Jesus claimed to be the King of the Jews. But Pilate didn't want to get involved. He was curious - he was willing to speculate, and theorize, and philosophize - but that is all. Still Remaining remote, and aloof, and non-committed, he called Jesus to him and said, ARE YOU THE KING OF THE JEWS? In an attempt to outwit, trap, or test JESUS ANSWERED, DO YOU SAY THIS OF YOUR OWN ACCORD, OR DID OTHERS SAY IT TO YOU ABOUT ME?

Second-hand religion is like an empty bag filled only with air. Jesus punched right through Pilate's empty bag to let in some good fresh air. That's the only thing you can do with second-hand religion.

Most of us, I suppose, have bought something or other second-hand - a car, a house, a boat, a lawn mower, or a washing machine. If they are in good conditic

and don't need too many repairs, second-hand articles can come in mighty handy - especially if you need the money for something else..... Our second son, Tom, has become quite resolved to the fact that he is the one to inherit the clothes which his older brother has outgrown. Some of these items he wears proudly, just as if they had been bought for him personally. There is certainly nothing wrong with hand-me-downs, or things that can be used second-hand.

But there are other things in our household that we buy new for every member of the family - like shoes or eye-glasses which have to be fitted personally in order to do the job properly. Everybody in our house has his own toothbrush. That is too personal an item to be used second-hand.

The Christian faith is too personal ever to be second-hand. Faith, real faith, can and must be handed down from one generation to another, but it can never be a hand-me-down. It can never come second-hand. Otherwise, it is not faith. Faith in Christ - your Lord, and King, Redeemer - has to be first-hand - a thing you know and choose and claim for yourself. Second-hand religion is only a hand-me-down - something people say they believe without being really convinced, something they repeat without thinking, something they receive without genuine acceptance. It is not enough to sing the old hymn, FAITH OF OUR FATHERS, LIVING STILL, and let it go at that. When you claim to be a Christian, Christ wants to know: IS THIS YOUR OWN IDEA? DO YOU SAY THIS OF YOUR OWN ACCORD, OR DID OTHERS SAY IT ~~XX~~ TO YOU ABOUT ME?

X P is King

It is not enough that your mother was a good Christian, or that your father made great contributions to the church. That kind of Christianity will leave you flat - it is a hand-me-down that is no Christianity at all! Recently I had occasion to talk to an individual who hasn't seen the inside of a church for more than 20 years. Apparently his conscience bothered him, because he was quick to tell me that as a young man he went to church every Sunday, attending Sunday School, Bible Class, and every worship service. When I asked him why he stopped going, he explained: When my mother was alive, every Sunday morning everyone had to be out of bed - everyone had to get ready - everybody had to go to church and Sunday School. Mother expected it, and you went. Then mother died, and I just

stopped going. As far as this man was concerned, when his mother died her faith died with her. It wasn't his faith that brought him to church, but her faith. He was just going through the motions. That is second-hand religion at work.

Why do you call yourself a "Christian?"

Why did you come here tonight? WAS IT YOUR OWN IDEA? With all of the yearning and all of the divine longing that can only come from the heart of the Savior Himself, He asks for an answer to that question. Nothing is so sure - so wholly sure - so surely sure as God in the giving of His Grace - His Love - His Gifts of forgiveness, peace, joy, salvation, and life eternal. The King goes to His Cross to suffer, and die, and shed His blood as the guarantee that God's Grace is there for every single one of us! Nothing is so unsure, so fearfully precarious as our hold upon that Grace. Therefore the whole New Testament is filled with faith and fear, with jubilance and trembling - lest we end up with a kind of second-hand religion and despise the King's invitation - and God's Grace becomes a Treasury of Wrath against the Day of Wrath and the righteous judgment of God.

You must know that God's Grace - His Redeeming Love - is not something like a bucket of paint in a corner that you can use from time to time to make your black fences white. You must know that the King's Grace is a personal grace - one that has both enriched you AND claimed you. You must know that the high majesty of God is in the Jesus who stands before Pilate and goes His way to the Cross - in fact, He is that Grace of God, He is King of your life! And you must not only have that grace but you must also live by it - you must live by it if you are to live at all! There is no use trying to live as if (that diabolical as if) - as if that grace were separable from God - as if ~~we~~ you could hear the Word that proceeds from the mouth of God and not live by it - as if we could pray half of the Fifth Petition: FORGIVE US OUR TRESPASSES period - as if a second-hand, non-committal, uninvolved - aloof, distant, remote - discipleship were good enough. The King has no room for those who want to observe the outward form of religion but are themselves a standing denial of its reality.

The King awaits your answer. He is waiting now (at the Communion Table) to speak to you of His love and life, of His grace and the promise of His glory. He is waiting for your response of faith that is not a fake - but faith that is ready to get up and follow Him. What will your answer be? Amen.

Do you say this - that you are a Xian, a follower of the King - of your own accord? Or did others say it to you about Me?