Ash Wednesday
Rolling Meadows - 1967

Rev. Carl F. Thrun

IN NOMINE JESU

St. Matthew 27: 45,46 Darkness fell over the whole land from midday until three in the afternoon; and about three Jesus cried aloud, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani, which means, My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?

THE CROSS POINTS TO SUFFERING

The Cross points to Suffering. You can hardly mistake it. It is there all along the way - from the bloody sweat of Gethsemane to his arrest and arraignment, the senseless interrogation in the parlors of the church, the cruel mistreatment as He is flogged, and mocked, and spit upon, the tomfoolery in the palaces of Pilate and Herod where He became the butt of the soldier's jokes, the casual condemnation to death without even a passing nod to justice, the dragging of a Cross through the city streets, and the raising of that Cross - with Christ nailed to it - against the Spring sky amid the screams and the shouts of a blood-thirsty mob. Suffering is there - wherever you dare to look. But ~~now~~ Then - at noon - something else - there comes a darkness - this darkness steals across the whole land, lasting until about three o'clock in the afternoon. In that darkness, as it deepens, a Man suffers - really suffers - ~~and this is the Holy One of God!~~ Does anyone need to have a picture drawn for him to understand what it means for a healthy man, in the prime of life, to be put to death through six hours of torture? ~~And now~~ But at three O'Clock, in the anguish of His body and the agony of His soul, there comes a ~~long~~, loud agonizing cry that is loaded with something more than physical pain: Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? - My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?

We cannot help but ask the question: Is this the Son of God? Could the Son of God possibly suffer like this? And the answer of the Christian faith is: Yes - this is God of God, Light of light, Very God of Very God... who for us men and our salvation....was crucified, dead and buried. This is the part of the story which would have been omitted if the ~~sacred writers~~ historian had just been trying to portray Him as another conquering hero - another noble character - or even the noblest man of all time. This would have been omitted, but the story is told just as it happened. This is the way it occurred. This is what He said. Even avanaic was All of it tells us something about Him - the Son of God, forsaken by God, abandoned by His Father. The Son did not abandon His Father. He was dutiful and obedient right up

to the end. The Father abandoned Him, turning Him over to His enemies, gave Him up at the very moment when He would prove once and for all that He was loyal to the core. This is what happened, and it cannot be explained away.

Is there something real here, haunting each one of us as He cries out in a loud, clear voice through the gathering darkness, My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me? The terrifying thing about it is that we hear it every day. It is the cry of humanity in its own darkness. I hear it from the people who stream through my office - from wives abandoned by their husbands or husbands abandoned by their wives - from parents abandoned by their children or children abandoned by their parents - from people who have known nothing but health all their lives and now are suddenly confronted by the limitations of an incurable illness - from men and women who have made a mess of their lives and don't know where to turn - from the heart of humanity bleeding deep down inside -- My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken me?

You see it and hear it everywhere today - in the picture of human desolation from Vietnam or on the faces of the people down the street - in the quiet agony of the family where son or daughter has gone wrong or in the struggle of a young man with himself when education has led him not to the high ground of certainty but to almost complete loss of his bearings. You see it in the works of modern artists caught up in the uncertainty and anxieties of our time - bringing forth shocking, weird productions which have no form, no cohesion, no stability, and no meaning. You hear it from a noted biologist who says honestly: The crumbling of the foundation - that is, the foundation of God - leaves a terrible void in the human soul. There is a void in the human soul when God is gone - an emptiness, a cry, a whimper: My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me? It is there today, even when people put on a brave face as if nothing could possibly be wrong.

My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me? The words have a strangely familiar ring! His words are our words. Jesus Christ was not play-acting on the Cross. He was a real man, with real flesh and blood. Scripture tells us that though He did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, yet He emptied

Himself, taking upon Himself the form of a servant and being made in the likeness of men! Jesus, a real man, really suffered and really died. Nails bit through real flesh and real bone. The mental anguish and the spiritual struggle were as real to Him as they have ever been to any man. The cry from the cross was real, terribly real: My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?

At the end every man stands alone. He is cast upon the unknown shore alone. A psychiatrist ~~once~~ has said: Death is like parachuting. You're hanging in midair all by yourself. You cannot bring your wife and children along. You job, your money, your pride at this one moment mean nothing at all. Death is the great separator: it is the great divide. Who can take it calmly, pretending to be casual? Who does not writhe under the sting of it. Who does not feel its pain, even if there is no other pain? The pain of death - its sting, as the Scriptures describe it, is the deep-seated feeling, all too real, that here a man slips away from the One who has made him a man - God. This is judgment - a painful judgment - from the God whom man has failed - from the Father he should have obeyed and did not - from the Father whom he should have loved but instead deserted. The sting of death is sin. This failure, this disobedience, this desertion, makes death so painful, so terrifying, giving a man the feeling he has deserved exactly what he is getting.

That pain Jesus Christ knew. He was completely loyal to God, and yet He knew the pain. Though He knew no sin at all, He was made to be sin for us. He stood in for us. He took our place. He drew the wrath and the flame of the fire - of God's judgment against human sin. He bore our sins - the sins of the whole world. He died as the guiltiest sinner of them all. He did; He really did. He paid the price. At our dim-witted worst, we try to understand what life with all its suffering is about, and only dimly do we sense the agony of the Son of God at this greatest moment for Himself and for the world - when He cried into the darkness of Calvary: My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?

Here we are in deep waters. This is not just a dying man. This is God's Son - God's Self - God giving Himself for the life of the world. God so loved the

world that He gave His only Son. He gave His Son and gave Himself. I and My Father are One, said Jesus. The Father gave the Son and was Himself in the Son. What can this possibly mean? I wish I could explain it all to you. It is beyond me - as it is beyond every man. We can only look and listen - we can only behold and believe. We have been given one breath-taking glimpse into the heart of God. We have one solid fact to hold onto: God is for us. He is for us, willing to go to any length for us. In spite of what we are and what we have done, He is ready to sacrifice His Son, sacrificing Himself for a loveless humanity that would just as soon not have anything at all to do with Him.

The Son of God was killed - actually killed - by human selfishness, human fear, human greed, human anxiety, human cruelty, and human pride. It is the kind of stuff of which all of us are made. If we abandon ourselves to that stuff, life will be bleak indeed. If there is nothing to life except what we can give it, as far as we are concerned God is dead and we are dead, too. Death is all around us. The road to death is the most crowded highway in the whole world. Yet people try to put it out of their minds. They would just as soon not speak about it, or think about it, or plan for it. Yet it is, in the words of T.S. Eliot, The stranger we cannot deny. yet Gospel messages have to reach On that road to death, and through death, another Stranger has joined us. He knows what death is - He endured it for us. He knows what life is - He won it for us. He is the Son of God, and He is our brother - even in that moment of our great extremity and suffering. He knows what it is to be forsaken - forsaken of God - and He goes along with us to bring us back to the Father.

To suffer - to

Listen carefully to His words as you kneel at the Communion Table: This is My body given into death FOR YOU....This is My blood poured out in death FOR YOU! Get this: FOR YOU! For you He went into death and for you He came through on the other side. The Son of the living God went through hell for you. He has made good for you. He forgives you - He stands by you - He will see you through. You suffer, and He suffers. Whatever lonely outpost you may occupy on this weary planet of ours, HE IS THERE, reaching out to you the hand of hope and life in the midst of death. Amen.

When