The Feast of the Resurrection of our Lord
Rolling Meadows -- 1980

Rev. Carl F. Thrun

IN NOMINE JESU

I CORINTHIANS 15: 1-11

Bread smells so good when it comes newly baked out of the oven. You just want to eat i then and there..... If it sits a day or two, however, it goes stale and loses its original excitement. ..... Therefore bakers of bread engage in a battle against staleness. They bake only what will be eaten quickly. They freeze some. Commercial bakers add chemicals.

In our text St. Paul is doing battle against a staleness that invades the Christian message -- drying out its vision, excitement, and power. ..... You can sense how the staleness happens, for example, in our worship and hymnody. The Old Testament Lesson preserves a hymn as glorious as any we sing at Easter: "I WILL SING TO THE LORD, FOR HE HAS TRIUMPHED GLORIOUSLY! .... THE LORD IS MY STRENGTH AND MY SONG, AND HE HAS BECOME MY SALVATION!" But try singing that week after week -- year after year! As it becomes routine, it goes stale. ..... And so also with the preaching and teaching of the Church -- even the familiar stories. YOU KNOW ALL THAT! YOU HAVE HEARD IT ALL BEFORE! The EXCITEMENT is long gone. Even the RESURRECTION STORY comes through like dry and tasteless bread.

What shall we do? How shall we fight the staleness? .... Maybe we can lay down a little law -- command each other to get excited -- to sing and shout as though we were truly

fresh and awake and alive! Maybe we can cut away some of the mold -- shake up the liturgy a bit -- pull in more people participation -- beat the drums and blow the trumpets. Maybe we can engineer more meaningful activity in the congregation -- get some dynamic programs going!

St. Paul offers another way. He confronts the staleness by taking the saints at Corinth -- and us -- back to that FIRST EASTER. "NOW I WOULD REMIND YOU, BRETHREN, IN WHAT TERMS I PREACHED TO YOU THE GOSPEL, WHICH YOU RECEIVED, IN WHICH YOU STAND, BY WHICH YOU ARE SAVED, IF YOU HOLD IT FAST." ..... Will you let all that go now, as though it were nothing? "Think back to when I first came to you," Paul says, -- this odd Jew with so odd a message! "Do you remember what the Word of God did to you -- how excited you were? Here I was -- a Jew -- breaking all the walls that had excluded you Gentiles --- proclaiming how my God loved you, honored you, gathered, and embraced you as His own people! He gave you a name -- and a place to stand -- and a share in the inheritance of the saints! He promised you life against death -- and a glory and a kingdom which no one can ever take from you. He filled your heart with thanksgiving at the wonder of His love and gifts. He invited you to let Him lead you -- to give you vision and courage in the face of every threat and fear. Do you remember what that Word and Spirit did to you -- how it lifted you up and freed you and transformed you and made everything new? Will you forget it now -- and let it all go to waste?"

"CHRIST DIED FOR OUR SINS IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE SCRIPTURES." This "Christ" of ours died! He did not slaughter others! He did the dying Himself! And for what? ..... Stand in the courtroom of Caiaphas -- and the verdict is that He died for blasphemy, for claiming to be the Son and Servant of God. Stand in the court of Pontius Pilate -- and the virdict is that He died for insurrection, for making Himself king and starting a war against Caesar. ..... BUT WHAT DID HE REALLY DIE FOR? "FOR OUR SINS!" Stand in the court of God -- then you will see it! It was JUDGMENT DAY -- the Day of the Lord's Wrath against a rotten and rebellious world of sinners. Death and eternal fire should have fallen upon Caiaphas and those with him! Death and eternal fire should have consumed Pilate and Caesar and the whold Gentile world of sinners in their proud idolatries of power! Death and eternal fire should have fallen on Judas and Peter and the rest of them who could not hear or follow their Lord and Master..... It should have been the world that perished in its sins. ..... But here is the great wonder -- that this Christ stood in between -- willingly and in love for us in our pride and blindness Innocent and uncomplaining -- in obedience to His Father's mercy on us -- He died to swallow up the judgment that stood against us all!

All this He did "IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE SCRIPTURES." We thought we knew the Scriptures -- what kind of Christ He should be -- how He should obey the Law -- and how He should exalt Jew over Gentile. .... But we did not understand what the Scriptures meant by

love and forgiveness. We did not dream that the Scriptures were speaking of the MERCY OF GOD to sinners -- and of OUR CHRIST AND KING -- when they described how the "LAMB" was "LED TO THE SLAUGHTER," and how "THE LORD LAID ON HIM THE INIQUITY OF US ALL." But now we know! "CHRIST DIED FOR OUR SINS IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE SCRIPTURES."

"AND HE WAS BURIED." Nobody understood the judgment that had happened -- that the world lived only by His dying. Among the Gentiles it was business as usual. To the priests and the people in Jerusalem it was the religious routine of the Passover. Religion had triumphed! The troublemaker was out of the way -- and everything was under control. As for the disciples, they could see only disaster. The impossible had happened. The living God had not rescued His own Son! All their plans, and dreams, and hopes had ended in ruin.

But then comes the EASTER CLIMAX! "HE WAS RAISED ON THE THIRD DAY IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE SCRIPTURES." We thought we knew the Scriptures -- but we did not know them -- how they were filled with promises! "IT SHALL GO WELL WITH YOU," God had said. Do My Will -- Walk My Way! Turn neither to the right nor to the left! Love Me and your neighbor! Do not cringe in the face of sufferings and death! Lose your life for My sake -- and you will not lose! "I WILL NOT GIVE YOU UP TO DEATH, OR SURRENDER YOU TO THE GRAVE. I WILL SHOW YOU THE PATH OF LIFE!" Trust Me! If I strke you down, I will also raise you

up! "AFTER TWO DAYS I WILL REVIVE YOU; ON THE THIRD DAY I WILL RAISE YOU UP, THAT YOU MAY LIVE BEFORE ME. THEREFORE PRESS ON TO KNOW ME, FOR MY GOING FORTH IS AS SURE AS THE DAWN!"

Jesus heard that Word of God. He trusted the Father and walked in His Way. That is why He went to Jersualem and to death. No one took His life from Him. He laid it down Himself -- FOR US! And the promises of God did not fail. ON THE THIRD DAY HE ROSE! ..... That is how we know Him -- and God in Him. HE LIVES -- and by His death and resurrection WE LIVE. THIS IS LIFE ETERNAL! ..... This is the life that can never grow stale -- never become old and dried out -- never die!

Do you hear -- you saints of God in this time and in this place? Is your heart open -- so that you too can rejoice at the GRACE that broke the bonds of death to gather you? Are your eyes open so that you too can see JESUS CHRIST risen and alive this Easter Day? -- Mercies new every morning -- Fresh Grace every day -- the Spirit of Christ in you breathing joy and life!

"I WILL SING TO THE LORD, FOR HE HAS TRIUMPHED GLORIOUSLY! THE LORD IS MY STRENGTH AND MY SONG, AND HE HAS BECOME MY SALVATION!" Live it! Sing it! Shout it! There is nothing stale about it! Amen.