Good Friday
Rolling Meadows - 1967

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IN NOMINE JESU

St. Luke 23: 35-38 And the people stood by, watching; but the rulers scoffed at Him, saying, "He saved others; let Him save Himself, if He is the Christ of God, His Chosen One!" The soldiers also mocked Him, coming up and offering Him vinegar, and saying, "If You are the King of the Jews, save Yourself! There was also an inscription over Him, "This is the King of the Jews."

THE CROSS POINTS TO YOUR KING

You, perhaps, have read or are acquainted with John Rann Kennedy's noted play entitled "THE TERRIBLE MEEK." One of its scenes takes us into the last few moments on Calvary. The Sun has gone down - the crowds have gone home - the Savior is dead. Only two human beings are still standing in the gathering darkness — Mary, the mother of Jesus, and the Roman captain who has just made the great confession: Verily, this was a just Man and the Son of God."

Mary questions him: What did you say? I don't understand you. Only a little while ago I heard His blood dripping down here in the darkness. The stones are wet with it. He's dead.

The captain answers: He's alive.

Mary lashes back at him: Why do you mock me? Are you God that you can kill and make alive - all in one breath?

But the captain insists with quiet determination: Listen! He's alive. I can't kill Him. All the empires can't kill Him. How shall hate destroy the power the rules the earth? Listen! I am a soldier. I have been helping to build kingdoms for over twenty years. I have never known any other trade. Soldiery, bloodshed, murder: That's my business. My hands are crimson with it. That's what empire means.... We stretch out our hands - greedy, grasping, tyrannical - to possess the earth. It can't last! It never has lasted — this building in blood and fear. Already our kingdoms begin to totter. POSSESS THE EARTH! WE HAVE LOST IT! We never did possess it. I tell you, woman, this dead son of yours, disfigured and shamed and spit upon, has built a kingdom this day that can never die. The living glory of Him rules it. The earth is His and He made it. He and His own have been moulding and making it through the long ages. They are the only ones who ever really did possess it: Not the proud, not the wise, not the wealthy, not the vaunting empires of the world. Something has happened up here on this hill

today which will shake all our kingdoms of blood and fear into dust and ashes. The earth is His, the earth is theirs, and no longer ours. The meek, the terribl meek, the fierce, agonizing meek are about to enter into their inheritance. Thei is the power and the glory forever and ever.

Why am I quoting all this? Perhaps because we all feel that we are a generation that has lost much. This strange and terrible world which man has built during our lifetimes has taken something away from us. The sin-blasted mind of man has been at work and has succeeded in robbing us of the one thing we need mos desperately today — a deep and abiding sense of the vision which Kennedy has placed into the eyes of the Roman captain - a vision of the continuing majesty an power of the Cross. For its loss we have received only the usual 30 pieces of silver. We have our man-made machines - standing row on row - cold, efficient, and clean - making tremendous contributions to the material comforts of humanity. We have our rockets, and missiles, and ventures into space. But if you turn away from the machines and the rockets and LOOK AT THE PEOPLE, you will see the fundamental problems of humanity. You will see the faces of men and women pinched and torn by poverty - twisted and distorted by sin - beaten down and crushed by a civilization whose god is the machine and whose prophet is gold. PROGRESS! - The progress of a world that must dump the gifts of the Creator into the ocean while men and women starve. The Progress of a society that makes artificial lakes of milk - while millions around the world are dying of malnutrition! The Progress of a world that is engaged in a seemingly endless war. The Progress of a world that stands today helpless and confused in the fearful results of its long forgetfulnes of Christ and the Cross!

A great number of tragedies have come over the Church during the past 2000 years - but none more terrible than the fact that our own generation has come to consider the Christian religion as something soft. Voices are be raised from all corners of the earth which say that Christianity has no place in the modern world. Instead of the world-conquering, world-dominating Christ who 2000 years ago walked from the Cross to the Throne, He is too often portrayed as a dream-haunted wandere

far from the ways of men who walked about Judea 2000 years ago - pathetically trying to do good to a few people - and who then finally died on the Cross - a Failure - beaten by His enemies - beaten by life - beatan and crushed by a Cros

This is nothing new. It was already the opinion of those who had gathered around the Cross on that First Good Friday. And the people tood by, watching; but the rulers scoffed at Him saying, "He saved others; let Him save Himself, if He is the Christ of God, His Chosen One! The soldiers also mocked Him, coming up and offering Him vinegar, and saying, "If You are the King of the Jews, save Yourself!" There was also an inscription over Him, "THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS

Yet, straight into the teeth of all this - the contempt of yesterday as well as today - we dare to say: THE CROSS POINTS TO YOUR KING! There is a majesty about this Cross. Look at Him for a few moments as He went down into death. Whe the darkness came a midday, the scene became more quiet. The crowd was awed into silence by the darkness and by the Words of the dying Man on the Cross. Then suddenly He raised His head once more and cried out in absolute, supreme triumph, IT IS FINISHED. To the Pharisees at the foot of the Cross - the scribes and elde and the Roman soldiers these words must have sounded like the CRACK OF DOOM. They did not understand them, but there was something wrong. Had they after all failed? They were killing Him. But He seemed to feel that He had won a victory. Had they lost?.... You can sense this perplexity a doubt as they go once more to Pontius Pilate and demand that he set a watch before the sealed grave.

They had lost. Their last defeat was written in the Face of the thorn-crowne Sufferer into Whose Eyes had now come the glow of another world and the light of eternal victory. If those men and women standing at the foot of the Cross had but eyes to see, they would have seen every thorn in His crown become a shining gem in His diadem of glory. If they had but ears to hear, they would have heard the voices of the witnesses - 10,000 times 10,000 - triumphant with God-given power - hurling into the world the message of the conquering and dominating Christ who has the keys of hell and of death. God the Father reaches down from heaven and touches the Cross. The arms of the glorified reach out and embrace humanity.

Under them stands the royal Apostle Paul crying: Because He was obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross, therefore God has also highly exalted Him and given Him a Name which is above every Name, that at the Name of Jesus every knee should bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is the Lord to the glory of God the Father. Under the arms of the Cross stands St. John saying, He is the First-begotten of the Father and the Prince of the kings of the earth. The Cross grows until it becomes the vision of the Lamb enthroned in the midst of heaven, brighter than the sun and more glorious than an army with banners. The hands tha were pierced wield the sceptre of the universe. On the brow that was thronn-crowned and bleeding are the many crowns of universal kinghood. Here is the world-conquering Christ who even today carries a heart-demanding and heart-searching power to which only the best and noblest in Christian manhood and womanhood can respond.

It is time for the world to become afraid of Him. He has a strange and a terrible way of coming back into a hostile, sin-loving world - and a cold, indifferent Church and throwing down the candlesticks as He did 2000 years ago. On the evening of that First Good Friday thousands went down the Hill of Calvary and promptly forgot all about Him. It was so easy to forget. 34 years later, almost to the day, our Lord Christ came back again in the noise and confusion of war - and before His crowned Head and uplifted Arm JERUSALEM crumbled into dust and ashes. Where one Cross had stood there now were thousands. They had shouted, WE HAVE NO KING BUT CAESAR, and they had no king but Caesar. The King of heaven and earth had become their JUDGE and AVENGER. He'll do that again. Men and women cannot mock forever the majesty of the Cross.

What about us? Will we have Him for our King? He will give us for the weakness and sorrow of our way the majesty and power of His own way. There is no room for defeatism and weariness in the Kingdom of Christ! But we shall never know it until we hear His voice saying quietly and assuringly: Fear not, I have overcome the world. Amen.