Good Friday
Rolling Meadows, Illinois April 9, 1971

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IN NOMINE JESU

St. Luke 23: 52, 53: THIS MAN WENT TO PILATE AND ASKED FOR THE BODY OF JESUS. THEN HE TOOK IT DOWN AND WRAPPED IT IN A LINEN SHROUD, AND LAID HIM IN A ROCK-HEWN TOMB, WHERE NO ONE HAD EVER YET BEEN LAID.

The TITLE to TONIGHT'S SERMON is: "WHY CAN'T WE PRIZE THE DEATH OF JESUS?"

I can just HEAR some of YOU SAYING, "What do you mean, "WHY CAN'T WE PRIZE THE DEATH OF JESUS? Don't we CALL this GOOD FRIDAY? Isn't THIS the ANNIVERSARY of the DAY on which JESUS DIED? Don't we EXALT and GLORY in the CROSS - the INSTRUMENT of HIS DEATH? "

PERHAPS, but we do show LINGERING TRACES of UNEASINESS about the DEATH of JESUS. We SHROUD the CRUCIFIX in BLACK and make GOOD FRIDAY a DAY of MOURNING. We are NOT SURE that our MUSIC ought to be so GAY and our PRACTICE so CHEERFUL on GOOD FIRDAY. But even MORE than this - OUT where LIFE is LIVED - where the VALUES of our FAITH are REALLY TESTED - the ~~BREATH~~ DEATH of JESUS is apt to be a DEAD LETTER, or BLIND SPOT in our THINKING.

In the PRACTICES of our PIETY we EASILY ALLOW GOOD FRIDAY to be a time of DISMAL MOURNING. WHAT is GOOD about THAT? Our BEHAVIOR and our DEMEANOR and our THOUGHTS are DISPLINED to be the OPPOSITE of CHEERFUL. We CONCENTRATE our MINDS on the DYING of JESUS - its UNPLEASENT DETAILS - the AVERSION of the MULTITUDES - the WORLD-WIDE DARKNESS - the FLIGHT of the DISCIPLES.

As we PRACTICE this GLOOM, we somehow IMAGINE that this IS ALL very SATISFACTORY to GOD. We IMAGINE God PUNISHING His SON - and therefore as we SHARE in the SORROW, we FEEL that our OWN FAULTS are somehow being CHASTISED. After

all, we TELL ourselves: "THE SACRIFICES OF GOD ARE A BROKEN SPIRIT; A BROKEN AND A CONTRITE HEART, O GOD, THOU WILT NOT DESPISE!" And so we OFFER our gloom up to GOD as OUR SACRIFICE. But all the while we KNOW that it will NOT last too long - it is ONLY for ONE DAY - ONLY ONE HOUR in CHURCH - and then BLACK FRIDAY is OVER for ANOTHER YEAR.

We might imagine that JOSEPH of ARIMATHAEA in our TEXT would have had SIMILAR THOUGHTS on that FIRST GOOD FRIDAY. He had STOOD UP FOR JESUS in the COUNCIL of the JEWS - and He MUST have SENSED the DISAPPOINTMENT at the CRUEL OUTCOME of the TRIAL. You would THINK he would SAY to HIMSELF: "Well, I did what I COULD. But NOW He is DEAD. I'll FORGET about this thing as FAST as I can. Certainly, He LIVED OUT His LIFE LOVING and HELPING PEOPLE - He did MANY REMARKABLE THINGS - but then His LUCK CHANGED. But that's LIFE!"

But JOSEPH did NOT REACT THAT WAY. He used his influence with the ROMAN GOVERNOR and had the BODY of the CRUCIFIED JESUS given into his CUSTODY. He WRAPPED the BODY in a LINEN SHROUD - as if JESUS had been an ARISTOCRAT - and LAID HIM in a NEW TOMB - obviously the one that he had SET ASIDE for HIMSELF. This was HONOR and RESPECT! Before JEW and GENTILE Joseph suddenly STOOD OUT as a MAN who RESPECTED JESUS CHRIST right in the ACT of HIS DYING.

So can WE! For the DEATH of JESUS was ALL according to GOD'S OWN PLAN. What LOOKED like a MISCARRIAGE of JUSTICE - but it was all the FULFILLING of GOD'S OWN PURPOSE. In JESUS God KEPT His WORD FAITHFULLY! That is what JESUS MEANT when He said "I AM THE WAY AND THE TRUTH AND THE LIFE; NO MAN COMETH TO THE FATHER BUT BY ME." The DISCIPLES were SAD and wanted to FORGET that JESUS

HAD TO DIE - but He TOLD them that it was NECESSARY that HE SHOULD - only so ~~with~~ would the HOLY SPIRIT COME to THEM.

"LET THE EARTH NOW PRAISE THE LORD, WHO HAS TRULY KEPT HIS WORD," we SING at CHRISTMAS time. But GOOD FRIDAY is EQUALLY a GOOD TIME to SING it!

In TWO DAYS it will be EASTER! Many CHRISTIANS BEHAVE as if GOOD FRIDAY were a MISTAKE of God ~~but~~ that He MADE UP for by RAISING JESUS FROM THE DEAD. On GOOD FRIDAY the DEVIL TRIUMPHED with ALL HIS HOSTS - this was the HOLIDAY of EVIL. But SATAN LOST OUT ON EASTER. On GOOD FRIDAY God turned away from His SON. On EASTER He took Him to HIMSELF AGAIN. And so many CHRISTIANS on GOOD FRIDAY SIT NUMBLY - waiting out the GLOOM until the BRIGHTNESS RETURNS.

Well, we shall CELEBRATE EASTER all right - and we shall SAY that "if CHRIST were NOT RAISED, then our FAITH would be in VAIN." But we can ALSO SAY that "if CHRIST had NOT DIED, then our FAITH would ALSO be IN VAIN."

With LOVING HANDS Joseph of Arimathaea TOOK the BODY of JESUS DOWN from the CROSS. He did NOT try to RUN AWAY from the FACT that JESUS WAS DEAD. But this was the DEATH of GOD'S SON! The CENTURION under the CROSS had CALLED HIM "A GOOD AND RIGHTEOUS MAN." The PENITENT THIEF called Him "LORD!" This was all in ACCORD with the PLAN of GOD. Remember how JESUS put into the PRACTICE of His Disciples the rite of EATING and DRINKING the BODY and BLOOD He GAVE UP in the act of DYING? St. Paul says: "AS OFTEN AS WE EAT THIS BREAD and DRINK THIS CUP OF THE LORD, WE SHOW [LITERALLY: WE PROCLAIM AND PREACH] THE DEATH OF THE LORD UNTIL HE RETURNS." And St. Paul calls this PROCLAMATION of JESUS CHRIST CRUCIFIED "GOOD NEWS" - a MESSAGE that SAVES and RESCUES FROM DEATH.

God knows how we RUN AWAY from the REALITY of DEATH. God knows how we TRY to SWEEP DEATH under the RUG. Our TIME knows MUCH about VIOLENCE and DEATH. MEDICAL SCIENCE does MUCH to POSTPONE it. SAVINGS and INSURANCE PLANS make the passing of the BREAD-WINNER as PAINLESS as possible for those who REMAIN. The ARTS of the FUNERAL DIRECTOR COVER OVER some of the HORROR and the REALITY ~~of our DEPARTED LOVED ONES~~. of dying.

Still, when we HESITATE to THINK about ~~that~~ death, it is usually LIFE ITSELF that we SHRINK from FACING - LIFE has the GIFT of GOD - the TRUST that we HOLD from GOD - the CAPITAL on which HE WANTS US to PRODUCE GOD FRUIT! - and death ~~That~~ becomes simply the SUMMONS to TURN OVER the BOOKS.

This is the WONDERFUL FACT about the DEATH of JESUS CHRIST! It has LIFE in its WAKE - not simply HIS LIFE and RESURRECTION, but OURS! For HIS DEATH is the END of DEATH! Jesus DIES on the CROSS - He DIES because of MAN'S REBELLION - HE is FORSAKEN by GOD! But in HIS DYING, HE puts DEATH to DEATH! He DIES that we may SHARE in the GLORY of HIS VICTORY - and that means the BEGINNING of LIFE with GOD instead of LIFE WITHOUT GOD.

No wonder St. Paul exclaims: "FAR BE IT FROM ME TO GLORY EXCEPT IN THE CROSS OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, BY WHICH THE WORLD HAS BEEN CRUCIFIED TO ME AND I TO THE WORLD." ..... Joseph put a LINEN SHROUD around the DEAD BODY of JESUS - a TOKEN of RESPECT and LOVE. But our LORD does MUCH BETTER than THAT FOR US - - - - He puts HIMSELF AROUND US - He WRAPS HIMSELF AROUND US as we go about our LIFE of PRAYER to GOD and LOVE to PEOPLE. He makes our PRAYERS to be in HIS NAME and our LOVE to SPRING from GOD'S LOVE to us in HIM. "I BARE ON MY BODY THE MARKS OF JESUS," said St. Paul -

He was BRANDED

and other PEOPLE could SEE that HE LIVED as JESUS LIVED & loved - what he was really to LIVE and DIE for PEOPLE. Jesus had IMPRINTED HIMSELF upon ~~him~~ Paul. "I HAVE BEEN CRUCIFIED ~~IN~~ WITH CHRIST; IT IS NO LONGER I WHO LIVE, BUT CHRIST WHO LIVES IN ME; AND THE LIFE I NOW LIVE IN THE FLESH, I LIVE BY THE FAITH ~~IN~~ OF THE SON OF GOD, WHO LOVED ME AND GAVE HIMSELF FOR ME."

Only in THAT FAITH can be PRIZE the DEATH of JESUS. Only so can we CALL THIS GOOD FRIDAY. Only so can we exclaim: "I AM BAPTIZED, LORD JESUS, INTO YOUR DEATH - I AM ALL YOURS - I GLORY IN YOUR CROSS!" Amen.