Quinquagesima Sunday
Rolling Meadows - 1967

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IN NOMINE JESU

St. Matthew 20: 17-28 (RSV) And as Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, He took the twelve disciples aside, and on the way He said to them, "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem; and the Son of Man will be delivered to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn Him to death, and deliver Him to the Gentiles to be mocked and scourged and crucified, and He will be raised on the third day." Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came up to Him, with her sons, and kneeling before Him she asked Him for something. And He said to her, "What do you want?" She said to Him, "Command that these two sons of mine may sit, one at Your right hand and one at Your left, in Your kingdom." But Jesus answered, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am to drink?" They said to Him, "We are able." He said to them, "You will drink My cup , but to sit at My right hand and at My left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by My Father." And when the ten heard it, they were indignant at the two brothers. But Jesus called them to Him and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great mem exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you; but whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave; even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many."

CROSS - JUST AHEAD

Jesus Christ upsets people. The only ones not upset by Him are those who are no longer surprised to find out that what they always thought was right side up is really upside down. Jesus Christ upsets just about everyone else — church member and non-church member, rich and poor, educated and uneducated, young and old. It is a disturbing thing to hear a man say: A man's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses. Now who is honestly going to believe that - especially in our day when so much of our life is bound up with salary, and wages, and medicare, and pensions, and the abundance of things. It is equally distressing to hear Jesus say: If any man would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me. Common sense will tell you that this is no way to make disciples or get a following - by offering crosses. The life Jesus Christ calls blessed or happy is not the one most people are seeking today: Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven... Blessed are the meek, for they shall inheirit the earth... Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy... Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God... Blessed are you, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for My sake. That's upsetting — even people who call themselves Christians don't like to hear too much about that.

Jesus Christ Himself is upsetting. No wonder people turned Him down when He came proclaiming Himself as the promised Messiah. He was not what people

expected or wanted. The little company of men who were always with Him were upset too. Later on, proclaiming Him the Lord of glory, they admitted how disturbed they had been because of Him. Deep down in their hearts they kept hoping He would disclose Himself in power, the conquering Messiah. Right down to the end they kept asking, Lord, when are You going to bring in the kingdom? Right down to the end they were arguing with themselves about which one would be the greatest in that glorious kingdom when it finally came. But right down to the end Jesus kept insisting: The Son of Man will be delivered to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn Him to death, and deliver Him to the Gentiles to be mocked and scourged and crucified. Right down to the end Jesus kept on telling them what He has always preached: You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you; but whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave; even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.

When Jesus calls us to discipleship, He does not discuss rewards. He tells us what the price will be. He doesn't offer us a comfortable religion, an easy Christianity, a respected membership in a sururban church. He offers us a cross! This is the cost of our discipleship - a price that through the years has never changed - the denial of ourselves - a cross to bear - a Christ to follow — this is the pattern for the life of the disciple. Are we prepared for that? Are we ready for the cross - the cross of Jesus and our own?

As I said, this is always upsetting, and it always comes as something of a major shock. I dare say that most of us do not think of discipleship as leading by the way of Calvary which also means a cross for us. No one told us when we joined the church that we were heading for a crucifixion. No one warned us what the cost of our confession might involve — at least, very few take it seriously. Today we have rid the faith of crosses, reduced discipleship to minimum requirements, made alliances with Satan. If Jesus wants to say ~~to~~ that His disciples now must be like His disciples then, He isn't being realistic. After all, we have other

obligations - a home to run, a family to support, a job to hold. We can't forsake it all and go following around the country like a company of happy wanderers. We can't afford to leave our pension benefits, our assemby-line seniority, our group insurance plan. Deny yourself - take up your cross - follow Me? Forget it!

Think about that! Why are you a member of this congregation? Why are you here in this church this morning? What is your motive? What is your interest in the Cross of Christ? Certainly, most of us can give the stock Catechism answers We are here to sing the praise of Him who died for us. We belong because we own Him as our Savior, and when the saints go marching in, we want to be included. We want His blessing and benediction - the peace of Holy Communion - the assurance of sins forgiven - His guidance, His comfort, His help in times of trouble - His victory and His glory at the end of our days! But what about the Cross - have we forgotten that? Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem; and the Son of Man will be delivered to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn Him to death, and deliver Him to the Gentiles to be mocked and courged and crucified, and He will be raised on the third day.

The preacher has no task more difficult, no work more challenging than this -- to get this message of the Cross of Christ across to people. Jesus had His trouble too. When He told His disciples of His coming Passion, the most response He could muster was something like a long, blank stare. They simply did not understand. And the same blank stare still greets the Gospel of the Cross today. How easily its purpose is misread, its love misunderstood, its judgment avoided! Try to say it as simply as you can. Say that the wages of sin is death but that on the Cross Christ died for us. Say that our sins were laid on Jesus and that He endured the penalty for all of them. Say that in Jesus we have peace with God and that our debt has been erased. Say it as directly and as pointedly as you can - but then look out for the long, blank stares. The simpler you can say it, the more difficult it gets. We can't believe it - as we look at the Crucifixion, that this should be the penalty our sins deserved. Are we that bad? We can't believe that God should pay a price like this. Is He that Good? And is

there that much difference? Those great and wondrous words, He died for us, mean little more to us than that in gratitude we ought to try a little harder and live a little better and love a little stronger.

By nature all of us want discipleship without the Cross - without either His Cross or our own. And for that reason alone, if for no other, we must be careful that we do not pass judgment too quickly on James and John, the sons of Zebedee. As Jesus prophecied of His coming death, there was much they didn't understand and much that puzzled them. But they seemed to sense, at least to some extent, that soon the Kingdom would be founded and the victory of Christ acclaimed And they had ambitions. They wanted to be part of it. Their mother put it into words for them: Lord, I'd like to have You do my boys a favor if You would. Make something out of them. Give them a place of honor in Your kingdom. Her request was honorable! If only every mother would express the same high goals for her sons and daughters! If only every Christian mother would express the same concern for her ~~sons'~~ children's relationship to Jesus and His kingdom. Parents are concerned, but too often they are concerned about the wrong things. How often have you prayed that God would keep your children close to Him? Or have you ever thought to ask Him whether He might have a place for them as leaders in His kingdom? That's what this mother asked for. Have you ever asked as much?

One thing Jesus wanted to be sure of: When He calls us to discipleship, He does not discuss rewards. He tells us what the price will be. Do you know what you are asking? He asked James and John. Are you able to drink the cup that I must drink? Are you prepared to suffer? Are you ready for the Cross? If anything was wrong with the ambitions of James and John, it was only this - that they were reaching for the glory without the Cross. But Jesus stopped them in their tracks. And He stops us in our tracks as well. What is it that we are looking for in our Christianity - peace of mind, a way to have our way, security in this life and glory in the next?

God will not be exploited by those who bargain for rewards. He will not be pushed by those who want their own way. He is not a butler who responds to

every wish or a divine vending machine that yields a steak for every two-bit prayer. He will not be used. He didn't call us to adorn the pews. He called us to a cross. He gave His life for us. There is no reason why we must protect our own. Are we ready for the cross? Are we prepared to bear the scorn, the mockery, the long, blank stares in our confession of Christ crucified? Are we prepared to bear the burdens of our fellow men as we suffer with them and seek to serve them?

We need not back away from Jesus because He offers us a cross. We need not fear that it will prove too heavy, too demanding, too restricting for our strength to bear. Before He offers us our cross, He offers us His own. He offers us Himself. And that makes ours worthwhile - worth more than all the loses we sustain in the denial of ourselves. This makes it possible to carry ours, for we are supported by the Mercy that is our refuge and strength. Certainly we have a flesh - an Old Adam - that finds it hard to bear the cross, to suffer loss for Christ, to see our hands go empty as their grip on things begins to loosen. But as we see the Christ of Calvary more clearly and as we feed on Him in the blessed sacrament and grow in Him -- more and more He will be our priceless Treasure, our All in all, and that is enough. Like a magnet He draws us to Himself: Follow Me!

Amen.