13th Sunday after Trinity
Bessemer - 1958

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IN NOMINE JESU

2 Corinthians 5: 13-15: For whether we be beside ourselves, it is of God: or whether we be sober, it is for your cause. For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them, and rose again.

CONSUMING LOVE FOR GOD AND MAN

~~It~~ What strikes me as I read the parable of the Good Samaritan is that here is a graphic portrait of our blessed Savior. The traveler, lying by the roadside, robbed, stripped and wounded, is a picture of ourselves. Turning his back upon his original dwelling place in the beautiful realms of Paradise, man went down, traveling the dangerous road toward Jericho, the city of doom and destruction. As he passes along, he is set upon by thieves - the overwhelming powers of the devil, the world, and our own flesh. And they stripped him, tore off from him the clothes of that original righteousness and perfection which he had received from his Maker. And they beat him, beat his soul with the buffetings of evil passions and lusts, and beat his body with afflictions and disease. Thus they left him mercilessly to his fate. Thus lying, groaning, bleeding, dying, hopeless, helpless, there come the priest and the Levite, the Law of Moses and the sacrifices and ceremonies of Aaron, but they pass by on the other side, for they have no relief to offer. But when the fullness of time was come, there came The Good Samaritan, traveling down the same road that man traveled, the dangerous Jericho road, not heeding the hardships and privations of the way. And as He passed along, He heard the groans of the lonely sufferer, had compassion on him, drew forth from the supply which He himself had provided the wine of His passion, His agony, His bloody sweat, His crucifixion, His Cross, and the oil of His heavenly comfort, His pardoning love and grace. Then raising the victim up, He conducts him to the inn of His Church, laying down the two pence of His Word and His Sacraments for his present want. And He promises to return again, to bring whatever is necessary for the complete restoration, to accompany Him into the blessedness and glory hereafter! And so comes the commission to all who have ears to hear: Go and do thou likewise!

With this in mind I would speak to you about THE CONSUMING LOVE OF THE CHRISTIAN. Love is the master-motive of all Christian living. When some of the

Corinthians accused the Apostle Paul of being beside himself - a bit crazy - because of his burning zeal for Christ, Paul replied: The love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge that, if One died for all, then were all dead; and that He died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them, and rose again.

The love of Christ constrained Paul to do what he did, suffer what he suffered, become what he became. He answers the Corinthians: If, as you put it, I am beside myself, it is for God! How can I help being the way I am, considering what Christ has done for you and for me? And with that Paul turns to the Cross. He points to the One who died in the stead of all. That, he says, is what constrains me - the love of Christ. Christ's love for Paul channeled all that was Paul in one direction - Christ-ward. Christ died for Paul; now Paul must live for Christ. So Christ loves us into loving Him. It grips us - that Love so amazing, so divine. It energizes us. It controls us. It makes us slaves of love.

Needless to say, such language is not understood by those who do not know the love of Jesus, what it is. There are to this day Corinthians who consider the all-out Christian queer, eccentric. And they are right: the Christian is eccentric. Eccentric, the dictionary says, means not having the same center; and that is a good description of the Christian. The Christian does not have the same center that others have, that he himself once had.

Man's natural center is self. He is self-centered, self-interested, self-loving, utterly selfish. His whole world revolves around his puny self - that is the basic source of all the troubles of mankind. - It is not so with the Christian. He has experienced a shift of centers. When Christ moved into his heart, Christ became his Center - his Sun around which his thinking, speaking, doing, his whole world revolves. Christ died for all that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them, and rose again.

So when a person becomes a Christian, self dies, Christ reigns. Or rather: self begins to die, Christ begins to reign. The Christian career is a

daily dying to self, an ever-increasing ascendancy of Christ as the Ruler of heart and life. It is an experience like this:

Oh, the bitter pain and sorrow,
  That a time should ever be
When I let the Savior's pity
Plead in vain, and proudly answered,
  "All of self, and none of Thee!"

Yet He found me; I beheld Him
  Bleeding on the accursed Tree,
Heard Him pray, "Forgive them, Father!"
And my wistful heart said faintly,
  "Some of self, and some of Thee!"

Day by day His tender mercy,
  Healing, helping, full, and free,
Sweet and strong, and, ah! so patient,
Brought me lower, while I whispered,
  "Less of self, and more of Thee!"

Higher than the highest heaven,
  Deeper than the deepest sea,
Lord, Thy love at last hath conquered;
Grant me now my supplication,
  "None of self, and all of Thee!"

It was so with Paul. I verily thought with myself that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. That was Saul B.C. - Before Christ. Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do? That was Paul A.D. - After Damascus. Paul soon learned the will of the Lord. To his question, Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do? the Lord repled, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do. And in the city he received his instructions through Ananias, to whom the Lord had said: Paul is a chosen vessel unto Me, to bear My name before the Gentiles, the kings, and the Children of Israel. What that all meant - what travels, labors, trials, persecutions, imprisonments, and, in the end, what a death is now a chapter of history, written in sweat, blood, and tears. Speaking of the Apostles and their successors in the missionary tradition, Samuel Zwemer, himself once a missionary to the Moslems, writes: Who is worthy to loose the latchet of their shoes or follow in their footsteps? Ten thousand times ten thousand miles they traveled, preaching, teaching, healing, until at last exhausted, not by going the second mile but the second thousandth mile, they fell in their tracks. Well,

Paul was the first and Paul was the noblest of that noble lot. Paul set the pace for all that followed, and Paul was never overtaken, not in his time, not in twenty centuries since. And what made Paul run so? - The love of Christ. Christ was Paul's magneficent obsession! Christ's love for us kindles in us a love like that for Christ: a love that is more than a sweet sentiment; a love that gives itself, with abandon, to the service of Christ and the brethren; a love that seeks no reward except that of pleasing Christ; a love whose one ambition it is to become like Christ.

In that chapter which has been called the noblest assemblage of beautiful thoughts in beautiful language extant in this our world, Paul does not once mention the name of Christ. He sings of love.

> Though I speak with the tongues of men
> and of angels and have not love,
> I am become as sounding brass, or a
> tinkling cymbal....

Love, says Paul, is indispensable. Love is not a way to live; it is the way to live. Not to love is not to live.

Then follows the second stanza of the immortal hymn:

> Love suffereth long, and is kind;
> love envieth not;
> love vaunteth not itself,
> is not puffed up,
> doth not behave itself unseemly,
> seeketh not her own,
> is not easily provoked,
> thinketh no evil;
> rejoiceth not in iniquity,
> but rejoiceth in the truth;
> beareth all things,
> believeth all things,
> hopeth all things,
> endureth all things.

As we read these words, whom do you see? - Whom but the Beautiful Savior? Jesus suffered long, and was kind. Jesus vaunted not Himself, was not puffed up, did not behave Himself unseemly, sought not His own.... Paul's whole sublime description of love is not nine but a portrait of Jesus. That is what you and I must be like, Paul wants to say - like Jesus.

In another passage the great Apostle declares: I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost, that I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren. We rub our eyes! We adjust our glasses We make sure that we have read correctly. For who are the brethren of whom Paul is speaking? They are his fellow Jews - men who had hounded Paul, stoned Paul, who would have killed Paul if only they could have had their way. And for these brethren Paul could wish to be accursed, forever separated from his Christ, DAMNED! Where else in this loveless world do we find love like that? Only on Golgotha! Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? - My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me? The connection is unmistakable. Christ was forsaken by God for Paul - Paul could wish to be forsaken by Christ for his brethren. It was the Christ in Paul who set Paul afire with a spark of His own great love. - Christ not only loves us: Christ loves in us, Christ loves through us.

In a rural section of southern California a Mexican mother died, leaving a family of eight children. The oldest girl, not yet seventeen, was a tiny thing, and upon her frail shoulders fell the burden of caring for the family. The neighbors watched her as, taking up the task with courage, she kept the children clean, well fed, and in school. One day, a friend complimented her on her achievement and she replied, I can't take any credit for something I have to do. But dear, said the friend, you don't have to. You could get out of it. The girl paused for a moment, and said, Yes, that's true. But what about the 'have to' that's inside of me?

The Christian has a have to inside of him. I am referring to a more compelling force than ties of blood, human sympathy, voice of conscience, sense of decency or duty. The have to that is inside of me is the Christ in me. He who is Love, and who lives in us, moves us to be loving - compels us to go after Christ-likeness in our concern for the saving of our fellow men, in our every phase of being and of doing.

And Christlikeness is God's goal for us. For this, God made us. God created man in His own image, in the image of God created He him. For this, Christ redeemed us. He gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works. He became what we are, says Irenaeus, that He might make us what He is. For this, the Holy Ghost brought us to faith. We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them. For this, God predestinated us before we were born - before the world began. Whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son. Note those words: to be conformed to the image of His Son. We are to become like Jesus. That is God's eternal purpose for us; and all that God ever did, and still does, for us has this end in view: we are to become like Jesus. We are to be pure as Jesus was pure, to love as Jesus loved, to go about doing good as Jesus went about doing good, to play the part of the good Samaritan, to be Christlike. God help us to this end.

Amen.