13th Sunday after Trinity
Rolling Meadows - 1963

Rev. Carl F. Thrun

IN NOMINE JESU

There are times, I am sure, in every pastor's ministry when he is filled with a deep-seated, inner compulsion to depart from the planned preaching program. Giving way to this urge today, I have elected to speak to you about our Lord's Parable of the Prodigal Son. We shall continue with our summer series of sermons on the Cost of Discipleship next Sunday.

St. Luke 15: 11-24 And He said, A certain man had two sons; And the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living. And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living. And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want. And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him. And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants. And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him. And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son. But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry: For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found."

THE PRODIGAL SON

The 15th chapter of St. Luke is, I am sure, a great favorite with many of you. The Parable of the Lost Son is preceded by two other great parables - the Gospel of the Lost Sheep and the Lost Coin. They are three parables in a row to show us what the Fatherhood of God means - what His love means and what He would do through this love in our life. The whole thing hinges on the fact that there was a man gradually coming around to see himself the way he really looked in the sight of God - that a prodigal, a man who had wasted his whole life, finally began to turn toward home, and toward the waiting Father. I ask you to listen carefully. It may well be that I may never have the chance to tell you this again about God and His great love in Christ Jesus, our Lord.

The conclusion, the words which he repeats so carefully, Father, I have sinned before heaven and in Thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called Thy son, are great words. In our own Service it would be, Oh, Almighty God, merciful Father I, a poor miserable sinner, confess unto Thee all my sins and iniquities with which I have ever offended Thee, and justly deserved Thy temporal and eternal

punishment. But I am heartily sorry for them and sincerely repent of them, and I pray Thee of Thy boundless mercy, and for the sake of Jesus Christ, to be gracious and merciful to me, a poor sinful being. I hope you have been saying the words in your heart along with me, because we say them so often and without very much thought. We have a comfortable church and these a comfortable words that we speak to a Father Who has fortunately not seemed so near to us that He could touch us with His hands.

Rarely when we pray these words, do we see Him as the waiting Father, with His arms outstretched to receive us, to hold us to His heart again. It is because of that that our prodigal sons and daughters are lost in Rolling Meadows. When finally, by God's grace, they do come back, it is always so very late that we tremble for them. The Prodigal may be, for today, Martin Knight, age 39, address - the suburb of Rolling Meadows. He had a fine, Christian wife and was the father of a fine, Christian son. Marty - as everyone called him - was born and baptized in another Christian church, where he went to parochial school and even sang in the church choir. He is a likable fellow - with a nice home with a growing business of his own -- yet he have taken the journey into the far country. He has no time for God, for Scripture, for worship. Prayer is a lot of nonsense. Christ and church are foolishness. He is going to live his own kind of life. For altogether too long he has lived in the far country - it seemed as though nothing could reach him.

God has a peculiar way of keeping track of His people. Scattered around the city of Chicago there are a vast number of great monuments of misery and mercy which we call hospitals. Into these great buildings of concrete and brick almost everything that is pain and illness flows at one time or another. There is the great Veterans Administration Hospital, the great TB Hospital, a Children's Hospital, a Psychiatric Hospital - all of the misery in one heap, if you want to find it there. When it gets to be night in one of these great hospitals, there is a tremendous, almost suffocating, sense of frustration and woe that lays itself over you.

One day the telephone rings. Pastor, my husband has been admitted into the Hein's Veterans Hospital. Will you go to see him? -- A long, busy day lies ahead. But we never say No. Of course we will go to see him. And so the familiar ritual begins which most of you never see. It's out to the car and then down the crowded toll-ways. You begin to wonder whether there are any drivers left in the city of Chicago who still have their sanity. You pass through the guarded gate to the hospital and park your car. Then comes the long walk through the hospital corridors to Ward F.-3. On the way you see men on stretchers and in wheel chairs. They give you a courteous smile as you pass by. You can feel that the breath of death is close by. Finally you reach F-3 and stop at the nurses' station to get further directions. A friendly nurse takes you to the room. You enter with a final prayer in your heart that God would somehow use you as His instrument and speak through your faltering lips. You reach the bed and begin: Hello, Marty. You can feel the tension. There is an exaggerated friendliness and politeness. It is always that way when you stand face to face with a man and his soul. Hello, Pastor. My wife just left a few minutes ago. There was really no need for you to come all this way to see me. I expect to be out of here in a couple of days. There is something wrong with my back. They're going to give me some tests to find out what it is. The conversation ambles along, and before you go you ask, Marty, would you like me to pray with you. There is the usual politeness. All right. You pray, and you hope that your prayer is as much a witness as it is a petition.

The days become weeks, and the weeks months. You learn that Marty has a swift, growing cancer and is not expected to recover. You continue to visit, and to pray, and to speak the Word of God. You keep it simple and direct: God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have eternal life. The atmosphere is less strained now, and you know that your visits are welcomed. Then comes a word of real encouragement. It comes from his wife. Marty said that you came to visit him and left without

reading the Bible and without offering a prayer. Inside, your heart rejoices and gives thanks. You know that God has been at work. Then comes the question: Pastor, I have not been baptized in the Lutheran Church. Can I be? You explain that is not a church or a person that makes a valid baptism, but the Word of God which is in and with the water - that God established His covenant with him at the time of his baptism - that all he needs to do is cling to God's great promise of love ~~and forgiveness~~. What about Holy Communion? - Would you like that? - Yes, I would. - I'll want to go over with you what Scripture teaches about this sacrament? God Himself sees to it. You go back with the Communion vessels. It is only a few hours before he sinks into a final coma - but his mind is clear and sharp. Again you speak the Word of God and the assurances of Christ. And then you ask the question, Is this your faith? Is this what you believe? - Yes. - Would you like Holy Communion? - Yes.

Communion with his Lord - Communion for a prodigal son come home! And there lies that small white wafer which is the assurance of Him Who once was sick unto death - Who once spoke about a shepherd leaving ninety-nine sheep in order to find one lost one out there somewhere in the wilderness. Alongside of it stands the chalice, the surety that He shed His blood. Then the age-old mercy comes through for a man who had forgotten the mercy of God - Oh Almighty God, merciful Father, I, a poor miserable sinner - and the whole thing, all the way through - and it becomes an echo again of the words of our Lord - how He told the story, I will arise and go to my Father , and will say to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son. And then for a moment (because it is always very brief) there comes a ministry that can never be duplicated - but for just one moment you can become heaven's voice - I, by virtue of my office as a called and ordained servant of the Word, announce the Grace of God unto you, and in the stead and by the command of my Lord Jesus Christ (because He is right here) I forgive you all your sins. It is a great moment. Surely there are those who want to scoff about it. I can only hope that some day

they come to realize what the Word of Christ meant when He said, And when he was yet a great way off his Father saw him and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him. And he said, This my son was dead and is alive. What do you do with the great words - May the body and the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ strengthen and preserve you in the true faith unto life everlasting. - Bring forth - isn't this the echo - bring forth the best robe and put it on him and a ring for his hand and shoes for his feet - This, my son, was dead and is alive. It doesn't take much after that. There is the handclasp. It's a strange gesture of trust that you take a man's hand. Inside, your heart breathes the marvelous old parting prayer of the Church - Oh Christ, Who alone art the Door to everlasting life, open the door for him. May God the Father who has created thee, God the Son Who has redeemed thee, God the Holy Spirit, Who by baptism has sanctified your body to be His temple, bring you home safe to Paradise. Angels carry thee home and grant thee, with Lazarus, eternal rest in the bosom of Abraham.

We don't know very much about the prodigals in your family, and the sons who haven't come home, but we do know a little bit about the mercy of God. On and up goes the soul of one Martin Knight to be in Paradise where once walked the Savior with the penitent thief from the Cross - and Marty discovers something about himself - He discovers Marty the penitent, Marty coming home and the waiting Father putting his arms around him; Marty, clean, pure, holy - that's a ministry. As I say, it can only be momentary and there will always be men who will downgrade us till the end of days. Martin Knight <u>for</u> the Father. Yes, and that's the point of the whole parable and the point of our whole ministry - <u>my son</u>, for the sake of Jesus Christ... The Pastor doesn't know anything about this. He can only trust the promises of Christ and that is enough to build a whole ministry on.

Amen.