13th Sunday after Trinity - Bessemer, 1957 Carl F. Thrun

IN NOMINE JESU

Luke 10:25-28 And behold, a certain lawyer stood up, and tempted him, saying, Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? He said unto him, What is written in the law? how readest thou? And he answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself. And He said unto him, Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live.

LOVE FOR GOD AND MAN!

Some eleven or twelve years ago Isabella da Noronha, probably the richest woman in Portugal of her day, died. She was popularly known as "The Vigil Lady," or "The Watchful Woman," who during more than half of her life-time waited daily at a street corner for a lover who never came, It all started one evening some thirty-seven years before her death, when Isabella was introduced to a handsome young man at an elite social gathering. For both love came at first sight; and before the evening had ended, they agreed to meet the next day at a prominent corner overlooking the plaza. For reasons never explained, the young man failed to appear at the appointed time; so Isabella waited six hours, finally called her carriage and rode home. Hopefully she returned to the same spot the next day, and the next, and the next, for thirty-seven years; but the record remained the same: the man who said that he loved her and would meet her did not keep his promise. When her family and friends protested against this ceaseless watching and waiting, she would reply: "I am sure that he will come some day. He told me that he loved me, and I will wait for him forever." As the years wore on, she purchased the building on the corner where they were to have met, and after she died, her WILL revealed the instruction to bury her there and always to keep a light burning above her grave so that even at night this tombstone inscription could be read: "John, I'm still waiting."

What astonishing devotion -- this woman's thirty-seven-year vigil for her beloved! Yet all that time is less than a second of the eternity in which the Almighty has longed for you. Even Isabella da Noronha's unwavering attachment to her absent lover does not deserve comparison with the Heavenly Father's unfailing affection and love for you, for me, for all; because with an ardent and intense devotion that literally shatters the barrier of understanding and description "God

so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." We wonder whether that young man in Portugal truly loved the girl whom he promised to meet but never did. Even more pointedly, however, I ask you, "Do you really cherish the Lord, the Savior, who has purchased and won you from the death-dealing anguish of sin and hell, not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood? Do you really love Jesus?

When the lawyer came to Jesus with the ageless and ever-repeated question: What shall I do to inherit eternal life? the Lord directed him to the Holy Scriptures, to the law in which he was an authority, and asked, "How readest thou?" The lawyer's answer indeed showed profound insight: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself." He had hit upon the heart and core of the commandments! Jesus accepted his answer: "Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live!"

Far from ascribing to work-righteousness as a means of inheriting eternal life, Jesus emphasizes to this self-righteous lawyer his complete inability to keep the Law. Pointing to and underscoring the Divine Truth of the Law, Jesus declares: "This do, and thou shalt live." Since the lawyer in his self-esteem had no real sense of guilt or sin, Jesus uses the Law to awaken in him the realization of his own unworthiness for eternal life.

The man who loves the Lord God with all his heart, with all his soul, with all his strength, with all his mind, and his neighbor as himself -- that man is a live man. He has eternal, blessed life flowing through him. But the source of this life and this love does not come from within a person, by his own initiative or will. Scripture declares that man is born dead in trespasses and sins. As far as God is concerned he has absolutely no life in him. "The carnal mind is enmity against God." The Almighty's Will and His Law appear as a drudgery, as shackles to enslave man. ~~No one of his own accord loves either God or his neighbor~~

It is only when the creating Spirit of the Almighty God reaches down into our dead hearts and souls with the Finger of Life that we can even begin to love

God above all things and our neighbor as we love ourselves. But even then we frequently we fall far short of the mark ~~But Oh, how often we must confess that we have fallen far short of the mark~~! Which one of you can stand up and confess that you have given God your whole heart, soul, strength, mind without any division or reservation. Who will dare to assert that he loves God above all else? Who can truthfully say that there is no division in his love, but that it is so exclusive that no other person, nor any other thing in all the world detracts the least little bit from it?

Who of you can honestly say that you love and are as interested in your neighbor as you are yourself? From the story of the Good Samaritan we learn that our neighbor is not only the person who lives next door, and who has been kind to us. Our neighbor is not merely one who belongs to our church, our social circle, our club. Our neighbor is anyone in need, even though he be our enemy. The Samaritan and the Jews were bitter rivals, arch enemies. Yet the Samaritan aided and befriended the wounded Jew. He went to extreme lengths to help an enemy back to life.

Would you be as willing to go "all out" for a negro in need, for a communistic Russian, for a drunk in the gutter? We sometimes even find it hard to be sincerely concerned about some members in our own church who are in need either spiritually or otherwise. Jesus declares: "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you."

Certainly, everyone of us -- if he is truly honest with himself -- must declare that he has not had this kind of selfless love either for God or his neighbor. "But how then," you ask, "can I obtain this ardent devotion for God and heart-deep concern for my neighbor? How can God's Will ever become a privilege and a joy to follow instead of a grievous burden? How can I ever show as much concern for an enemy as I do for myself? "It seems to go so much against my nature!" Exactly! It does go against your nature. God would have you recognize your own insufficiency for love and fling yourself upon His mercy and all-compassionate pardon. He would teach you how to love and give you the necessary strength and ability to cast off all selfishness , all hatred, all malice.

You see, God loves us despite our unworthiness, despite our repeated rebellion against His Holy Law, despite our unbelief and unholiness. He cherishes us with a devotion higher than any mother's for her child, deeper than the truest affection of husband and wife. Now, what happens when two people are truly in love? They want to be together. When time and distance separate them, they long to be at each other's side. When ~~your~~ their husbands are away on business, what grips ~~your~~ the hearts, ~~you~~ of loving, faithful wives? Is it not the yearning for reunion and the hours of happy companionship? In a far higher way, too marvelous and merciful for our meager minds, the Savior yearns for the sinner and pleads that he come to Him, receive Him as the Redeemer, be born again by His Spirit, live with Him here on earth and forever after in heaven.

In the most magnificent mercy men can ever proclaim or believe, Jesus, the holy Son of God, has broken down every barrier which would keep you from coming to Him, removed every bar which would lock the door to heaven. He took our transgressions from us, assumed their guilt, suffered their curse in His own holy body, His own stainless soul. He bled on Calvary as your Substitute; therefore you need not face hell's tortures. He died in your stead that you might escape endless anguish. So completely did His cross cancel the charges against you that you can confidently declare in Scripture's truth: "There is, therefore, now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus."

When you have this faith, not in your head, but in your heart; not as a family treasure, but as your personal possession; not as a church creed, but as your own inner conviction, then you are saved, you shall inherit eternal life. Struck by the brilliance of God's boundless love for you, you now can have the same love flood your heart. As St. John puts it: "We love Him because He first loved us. If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar; for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? And this commandment have we from Him, that he who loveth God love his brother also." May such love be found in your heart. Amen.