20th Sunday after Trinity
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Rev. Carl F. Thrun

IN NOMINE JESU

Ephesians 5: 18-21 Be filled with the Spirit; speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ; submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God.

THE CHURCH AND ITS WORSHIP

The worship of Almighty God is the primary goal and ~~responsibility~~ objective of the Christian Church. All of the various activities and functions of the congregation are in the final analysis to lead us to greater depth and devotion in our worship - giving God supreme worth, giving God the honor due His name, rejoicing in all He has done for us, glorying in His abiding presence among us! Worship is the response of the creature-heart that is tuned to the greatness and goodness and love of the Creator-God. I am going to ask you to look around the congregation that has gathered here for worship today - not to see who is here, but to take note of ~~who isn't~~ those who are not here ~~that~~ and should be here. I dare say that many of us can come to God's House Sunday after Sunday and never give a thought to the fellow members of our congregation who have gone astray and consistently are missing from their place in worship. They are your responsibility! Together with you they are members of the Body of Christ. If you should suddenly lose one of your arms or legs, would you not miss it? Certainly you would! All the members of our body are very precious to us. If one or the other of them is injured or is sick or is bruised, all the other members favor the one that ~~aches~~ is hurt. So it is with the body of Christ. You simply cannot be indifferent or complacent to a fellow church member who is injured or sick or bruised spiritually. You must strive to bring ~~them~~ those back to health. To this end St. Paul admonishes us in our text: Be filled with the Spirit, speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God.

Oh, I know ~~many~~ some of you will immediately respond: That is what we hire you for, pastor! And it is your pastor's concern! But it ought to be your concern also. All the members of this congregation are intimately tied together with you in Christ. Let me give you just a little idea of what the work of the ministry

involves in this parish. Since the beginning of September, in just 40 days, your pastor has made 53 calls, spent 44½ hours teaching various classes, sat for 35½ hours in meetings and conferences, and spent 14 hours in private counselling sessions. I have travelled more than 2000 miles in the work of Christ and have preached 17 times with this service. This does not include the hours of prayer, the hours spent in preparation and study, the hours spent keeping records, writing letters, preparing materials. I mention this in a spirit of humility with but one regret: I could and should have done more. There is so much to be done for Jesus! Right in our own midst there are many who have fallen by the way, who need a word of encouragement and direction, who need the comfort and consolation of Christ. They are part and parcel with you in the body of Christ. They ought to lie heavy upon your heart also. They ought to be your concern. The call of Christ is not for spectator Christians who do nothing more than sit in the balcony, but for cross-bearing, working Christians who will take their place down in the arena.

It is true that you will not always be welcomed or loved, when you thus set out to work for Jesus. You will find some people who will rise up indignantly and ask what business you have coming to them. It is a hard and trying thing that some who want to be known as Christians will not submit themselves one to another in the fear of God. They will offer all kinds of excuses. They will tell you perhaps that only the pastor has the right to call on them. Believe me, they give the same weak excuses to the pastor too. But this is no reason for neglecting them In today's Gospel the messengers of the king went nevertheless to invite the guests to the marriage feast. We are told that they made light of it, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise; and the remnant took his servants, and entreated them spitefully, and slew them.

But what if.... what if because of your concern and admonition a lax brother is brought back to the fold? Think of what this means! - A soul that may have been lost forever now saved, saved forever because you went to him in Jesus' name and encouraged him to remain steadfast in the faith! Think of the both of you

in the Mansions of Eternity, both robed in the spotless wedding garment of Christ's blood and righteousness! Think of him thanking you throughout the long ages of eternity, forever grateful that you spoke to him a word of exhortation! Of course, whenever we would set out on a mission of love for Jesus, we must be overcome with the feeling of humility and unworthiness. We must be filled with the Spirit. Our care and concern must be genuine. We cannot say one thing and do another. We cannot say we are Christian and act like a heathen. Christ must shine through in our whole bearing and behavior, as we stand behind His Cross and what is right and good and true. In other words, we must practice what we preach.

Now we are right back where we started. Is there anything more important to us - really - than the worship of our God, speaking to ourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in our heart to the Lord, giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ? This is what we want to do throughout all eternity - worship before the throne of the King of Kings, Jesus, our Savior. Our excuses for not coming to church are often so flimsy, so weak, so worldly. How many of them would really hold up before God? For instance, what if the pastor would decide that he is too tired to go to church, or too busy with the cares of the world, or that he wanted to go on an outing, or fishing, or hunting. But, you say, it is the pastor's duty to be in church. Christ expects you to be there too. This is where He has promised to meet you and guide you and strengthen you - in the company of like-minded Christians - where you build one another up in the grace of God. Amen

It is like this. Boy meets girl. He likes her and is attracted to her. He wants to know more about her. So he takes her out. The more he sees of her the closer they become. Constantly she is on his mind. He dreams about her. The girl too is not unaffected. At the sound of his voice and the touch of his hand a melody wells up in her heart. It is the melody of love. And before long they are married and are united together in one flesh. God came a'courting in Jesus Christ. He loved the unlovely - you and me! He came to woo and win us, in spite of the

ugliness of our sin-cursed condition. In order that we might be eternally His, He sacrificed His life on the cruel Cross, taking all of our guilt and sin and shame to Himself - and there drowning the iniquity of our lives in the flood of His own holy and precious blood. He did this that we might become His bride - forever. This is the love that passeth knowledge. This is the amazing love that causes our whole being to vibrate with joy, lifting our souls in the glorious music of heaven-y song, making our hearts thump, thump, thump with melody to the Lord. This is the love that causes the response of worship.

Worship - like most things - begins at home. It begins with the heart-altar that comes daily and reverently to the Cross to kneel and adore. From there it moves to the home-altar where husband and wife help and encourage each other along the way, becoming heirs together of the grace of life. And then it moves to the church-altar, where father, mother, and children join other Christians in singing the eternal gloria to the Christ we can never forget, the Christ who is our God and Savior, the Christ who is constantly in our dreams! I said father, mother, and children. Let us not forget the children - these lambs who are so precious to Jesus, for whom He died. Children are a vital part of our worship. They are a part of the Church - Christ's body. It was the twelve-year-old Jesus who said, I must be about My Father's business. Parents are to set the example here. There is a poem that brings this out in striking manner. I wish I knew who wrote it. It goes like this:

A little girl with shining eyes -
Her little face aglow -
Said, "Daddy, it is almost time
For church to start. Let's go!
And sing the love of Him who died
To bring us to His Father's side."

"Oh, no!" said Daddy, "not today.
I've worked hard all the week,
I'm going to the creek,
For there I can relax the best,
And I must have one day of rest,
And fishing's fine, they say.
So run along; don't bother me,
We'll go to church some other day."

Months and years have passed away;
But Daddy hears that plea no more -

Those childish days are o'er.
And now that Daddy's growing old
And life is almost through,
There's plenty time to go to church;
But what does daughter do?
She says: "O Daddy, not today -
I stayed up most all night,
And I've just got to get some sleep;
Besides, I look a fright."

Then Daddy lifts a trembling hand
To brush away the tears,
As again he hears the pleading voice
Distinctly through the years.
He sees a small girl's shining face
Upturned, with eyes aglow,
Who says, "It's almost time for church.
Please, Daddy, won't you go?"

God help you to leave this church today taking this message from God with you; not leaving it on the church-step, but carrying it in your heart and preaching it in your life. Be filled with the Spirit: speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God.

Amen.