2nd Sunday after Trinity
Rolling Meadows, 1966

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IN NOMINE JESU

I John 3: 14-16 He who does not love remains in death. Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. By this we know love, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.

HOW TO LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR

The Christian Church does a great deal of talking about love. Repeatedly the Scriptures emphasize that husbands are to love their wives, wives their husbands, parents their children, children their parents. Christians are to live in harmonious love with one another. They are to stand out and stand apart from the rest of the world by the visibility of their love for their fellowmen, even for those people who are virtually unlovable. Jesus makes a great point of this: Love your enemies, He says, and pray for those who persecute you. Our text puts it this way: He who does not love remains in death. Anyone who hates his brother(and here the word brother means all other human beings) is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.

The problem is: How can this happen? How can any one of us ever have that kind of love? Recently an unhappy young couple came to me for advice. They seemed to have every advantage young people could be expected to have. They were intelligent, good looking, and personable. The husband had a good job, and the wife was attractive. But they could not stand each other. Neither was able to express genuine love for the other. I spoke to them about how love alone could overcome the difficulties in their marital relationship. I told them how love come from God, expressed in the humanly almost impossible but absolutely necessary divine language of Christ's Cross, who gave Himself and laid down His life for us. To all of this they said, Yes, we know all of that, but we can't seem to do that - to give ourselves to each other.

We may not have particular marital problems, but we are all confronted with the problem of how to love everybody. How does one love his neighbor? How is it possible to love your enemy? Does this mean that I am supposed to pump up some feelings of love in a situation my natural inclincations and instincts demand the opposite reaction? Would this not put me in the very realm of hypocrisy and forced love? When I try to impose upon myself the duty of loving someone because my Christian

or pastoral profession demands it of me, this is an intolerable situation not only for myself, but also for the victim of this kind of forced love. People quite naturally sense that this is something which is merely being put on. But if this is so, if I cannot command love, how can I get to the place where I love a person in the genuine sense?

The story is told of a row going on in an apartment house becuase one of the tenants always had his radio on at top volume. In the apartment there live a wise, old man who talked to one of the more exasperated tenants in an attempt to calm him down. After a long discussion the old man said, Yes, you really have to love people in order to put up with them. You mean to say, said the other, that I should love a fellow who turns on jazz music at full folume every night at 12:00 o'clock? Whereupon the old man replied, Well, it's no trick at all to love someone who has no radio. Is this so? Is love a kind of trick that one must learn and practice upon an enemy, a radio-neighbor? Is this really a matter of methods and exercises? In Remarque's book about World War I, All Quiet on the Western Front the author describes how he once leaped into a shell hole and found himself face to face with an Englishman. He was about to bayonet the English soldier when he saw that he was severely wounded. Humanly touched by his condition, Remarque gave him a drink from his canteen. The Englishman then indicated that he wanted him to open his shirt pocket He did so and an envelope containing pictures of the man's family fell out. He obviously wanted to look at them once more. In that moment before the English soldier died, the German held up before him the pictures of his wife, his children, and his mother. For Remarque the Enlishman was no longer only the wearer of a uniform, an enemy. But he saw him now in a completely different dimension - that he was loved by his wife, his children, his parents, and that he himself loved. He would be missed and mourned by his wife and children and parents.

When Jesus prayed on the Cross for His tormentors and executioners, Father forgive them, for they know not what they do, this was not just an extreme effort of the will in which He fought down all the feelings of hatred within Him, but rather this was a transformed way of seeing. In other words, Christ saw in His tormentors not merely the representatives of hostile forces arrayed against Him,

but He saw them rather as the lost children of His Father who were intended to be something totally different, who had fallen away from what God really meant their lives to be and had become lost on the wrong road. He saw in these people the original design of His Father in heaven; He saw through the layer of dirt that covered their lives; and thus He saw them as His brothers.

Only as we realize how Christ looked upon men, will we begin to understand many things about Him which we would not otherwise understand. He is the One to whom all power has been given in heaven and earth; He is the One before whom angels bow; He is the Ruler of the world. But strangely enough, this King who encompasses the whole world in His realm has time to stop and talk to the individual. For us men, who are always thinking in terms of status and class, this is quite astonishing. That Jesus Christ does not go directly to the upper ten thousand, to the big cities, that He does not occupy the strategic key positions, that He stops and talks to a poor woman, a blind man, a leper - in any case, to those who are outside the pale of society and have no productive sociological value whatsoever - this is incomprehensible. We can understand this only if we see that this other, individual person is infinitely valuable. It is a grave sign that everywhere in life today we hear terms used which make a thing of man - the physicians speak of cases, the military speaks of manpower, the schools speaks of teaching-force, the church speaks of membership. Without attaching too much significance to these terms, I ask whether our weariness of people, the fact that we feel our neighborly love to be a drudgery, does not stem from the fact that we no longer see this other dimension in people, that for us they have actually become cases, depersonalized objects whom we feel we can manipulate.

The important point is that we must change our way of looking at our neighbor. We must change our eyes, not our will. But this brings us back to the same problem that has been dogging us all along. Ultimately I can no more put on new eyes upon command than I can love upon command. They must be given to me. St. John compares it to being born: We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love remains in death. The point is that when we are summoned to love the people around us, people who may owe us

something or who get on our nerves, this is not a matter of our making an effort of will or self-control. We are simply to stop and remember what has been forgiven us. God does not interest Himself in us, He does not accept us because we have such beautiful blue eyes, because we are men, because it would pay Him to establish a kingdom of God for our sake. When the Psalmist asks, What is man that Thou art mindful of him? there is only one answer: Nothing! Here it is emphatically pointed out that we men are something only because God has bestowed His heart upon us. God loves us, not because we are so valuable; rather we are valuable because God loves us. This is the miracle by which we live - Jesus Christ has dearly purchased us. And this Gospel says to us: You cannot give anything whatsoever to your neighbor except that which you have received. No man can give more than he has; first something is given to you - God's own redemptive, forgiving love - and only when you have received this from Him can you pass it along to your neighbor.

When in normal life we love other people we always interpret this as a kind of recompense for the other person's lovableness. He deserves to be loved because he is so charming, because he has a decent character; so I recompense him with my love. I have exaggerated this a bit, but generally this is the way we feel. But if we go back and look at how Jesus Christ treated people, and see Him loving the publicans and the harlots, for example, then we see something happening which is totally different. His love was a creative act which penetrated the layer of dirt to the original man. So it was that people whom Christ had looked upon and loved went away different from what they were before. His love made them loveworthy. By this we know love, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. Many a person with whom we come in contact, who grates on our nerves and is so emphatically unlovable, is probably that way because we have not love him enough. And only as we ourselves stand beneath the shadow of the Cross and behold the outstretched arms of the inviting Savior and know what His love has given us - only then will we be able to see the infinite worth of our fellow men and what God in His infinite love and grace can still make of them. Then quite spontaneously we will reflect the light and love of Calvary. It will not be just love in word or speech but in deed and in truth. Amen.