2nd Sunday after Trinity
Rolling Meadows - 1964

Rev. Carl F. Thrun

IN NOMINE JESU

Psalm 84: 1-5 (RSV) How lovely is Thy dwelling place, O Lord of Hosts! My soul longs, yea, faints for the courts of the Lord; my heart and flesh sing for joy to the living God. Even the sparrow finds a home, and the swallow a nest for herself where she may lay her young at Thy altars, O Lord of Hosts, my King and my God. Blessed are those who dwell in Thy House, ever singing Thy praise! Blessed are the men whose strength is in Thee, in whose heart are the highways to Zion.

WHY DON'T PEOPLE GO TO CHURCH?

Why don't people go to church? The question needs to be asked. 70 to 75% of Americans regard themselves as church members. A clear majority of these professing Christians will not be in church today, and some of them have not attended worship services for weeks on end. A good many of them did not even pay their respects to God with a single prayer, not even when they sat down to eat the food provided by His generosity. In our own congregation scarcely 1/3 of our membership can be found in church on any given Sunday - about 150 of our more than 400 communicants, and about 300 of our more than 850 souls.

Why don't people go to church? For some the answer is altogether clear: They don't want to go. Others see no need for going to church. Still others claim they get nothing out of going to church. ~~There are those who insist they can be just as good if they stay at home. People who don't go to church are offended by the suggestion that they are not as good as their friends and neighbors who do go to church.~~ Robert Brown in his book, The Bible Speaks to You lists some of the excuses people give for staying home on Sunday morning: ~~I don't like the church because....~~ the people in it are so hypocritical...it's full of old maids of both sexes...it doesn't do anything...I don't believe God has 'office hours' on Sunday morning... the churches are always fighting among themselves...I'm more interested in the world than in heaven...it's doing things that counts, not pulling a long face on Sunday ...religion is an individual matter. Of course, the list might be ~~continued~~ carried all the way back to the day of our Lord: I have bought a piece of ground, and I must needs go and see it...I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them...I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come. People are inclined to look upon going to church as if they were attending a civic club or a neighborhood social

something they can take at leave, as the case may be!

event. It is like going to a party or to a lecture on ethical behavior. To a great many people the moral and ethical values of their church-going neighbors appear to be pretty much the same as their own, and they can see no reason for changing their non-church-going habits.

Why don't people go to church? Let's be honest. The church itself is often partially responsible. When a pastor does not take the time, or else has his days so taken up with trivia that he does not have the time for earnest prayer & meditation & genuine study ~~cannot adequately~~ prepare for ~~to give~~ his people a message from God - but is forced Sunday after Sunday to try to shake a sermon out of his shirt sleeve when he proclaims his own ideas instead of the Word of the living God. when church members go to church for the wrong reasons, with no intention of listening to the Word of God or of letting it transform their lives, then you can expect people to stay away from church. The church must be the church. Unless the church is an angel of the most high God, the bearer of His message of salvation to a lost and stricken world, what right has it to be taken seriously? People must know that they will meet their Lord there. They must come expecting to hear what He has to say, and they must ~~be~~ come prepared to respond to His voice with their own worship of prayer and praise. In his book entitled How Christ Came to Church, A. J. Gordon tells how he had a dream one night. In that dream he saw himself in the pulpit ready to begin his sermon. A stranger entered, walked slowly up the aisle, and found a seat. The stranger's face impressed the preacher, as did his humble bearing and attentive attitude. Throughout his sermon the preacher found his gaze wandering to this stranger. When the service was over, the stranger slipped out before the minister could greet him. Questioning one of the ushers, he was given the matter-of-fact reply: Why, that was Jesus of Nazareth... Don't be troubled, He has been here before and, no doubt, He will come again. Thereupon the preacher began to ask himself some serious questions: What was I saying in the pulpit? Was I preaching on some popular theme in order to catch the ear of the public? What did He think of our church and the way we are worshiping? Thereupon the minister awoke, but he did not stop asking questions: If Christ came to church and sat in one of the pews, what then? Would I ask Him to preach to the people? Would He decline and say, 'I am among you as One who heareth'? Would I

beg Him at least to give the congregation some message of His own through the lips of the preacher? If strife existed in the flock, wouldn't I appeal to Him, the Good Shepherd, to give guidance so that there might be peace among His own? The writer went on to say that now he understood for the first time what John the Baptist meant when he said about Jesus, There standeth one among you whom ye know not! What's the good of going to church if Christ is unknown there - or if He is not known for what He really is, the Son of God and the Savior of the world? If there is no chance of meeting Him at church, and the people who go to church don't expect to meet Him there, what's the good of going?

One of the reasons people don't go to church is FEAR - fear of being called a Holy Joe by friends and associates who would prefer to spend the usual hours set aside for worship digging up divots on a golf course or sitting at the butt end of a fishpole - fear of being looked upon as a hypocrite because none of us, including the best Christians, is perfect - fear of being known as a person of conviction in a day when it is popular to be a skeptic - fear of committing oneself to a cause that makes a hard demand on time, talent, and treasure. The way of the Christian faith is not easy. I don't believe in begging people to come to church, or thanking them for coming on a rainy day. I have made calls on people, asking them to come to church, and they came - once! It ~~is~~ was as if they were saying, You visited me once, so I will come to church and visit you - once! Christ did not beg His disciples to follow Him. He said simply, Follow Me. Either they did or they didn't. Some followed, and some did not. It was as simple as that.

It is as simple as that today. Some seek the church only when, as someone has observed, they are hatched, matched, and dispatched - when a baby is to be baptized, a marriage to be solemnized, or a funeral to be conducted. There is little rhyme or reason in that kind of attachment to the church. The fact is that it only deceives people into believing that they belong when they do not belong at all. This is not what Christ meant when He said, Follow Me! God's judgment is altogether clear: I tell you, none of those men who were invited shall taste my

banquet. Richard Halvorson has described a Sunday morning when he was leaving his hotel room to go to church: I passed door after door along the corridor on which a familiar little card had been hung over the doorknob bearing the simple request, 'Please do not disturb.' America was sleeping in on Sunday morning! It reminded me of a prayer I had read in a magazine, 'Almighty God, as I lie here on the sofa this lovely Sunday morning, surrounded by the Sunday paper and half listening to one of the big preachers over the radio, it has just come to me that I have lied to Thee and to myself. I said that I did not feel well enough to go to church. That was not true! I was not ambitious enough! I would have gone to my office had it been Monday morning, I would have played golf had it been Wednesday afternoon. I would have attended my luncheon club had it been this noon. I would have been able to go to a picture show had it been Friday night. But it is Sunday morning, and Sunday illness covers a multitude of sins. God, have mercy on me! I have lied to Thee and to myself. I was not ill... I am lazy and indifferent! — PLEASE DO NOT DISTURB, GOD! How often have we hung this sign over the door of our hearts?

Going to church does not make a man a Christian, but a Christian goes to church. He participates in the fellowship of those who come to receive from a loving God the assurance of the pardon of forgiveness in Jesus Christ, His Son. Going to church was never meant to be a burdensome duty but a joyful opportunity. The psalmist approached the House of the Lord in a spirit of joyful expectation: How lovely is Thy dwelling place, O Lord of Hosts! My soul longs, yea, faints for the courts of the Lord! Here was a man who loved the Lord and the place of His habitation. He was a realist. He had been through the school of hard knocks, and he knew what real life in the world was all about. He knew that man is homeless without his God. On another occasion he said, I would rather stand tense and uncertain at the threshhold of the House of my God than to dwell at ease in the tents of wickedness... Blessed are the men, he concluded, whose strength is in Thee, in whose heart are the highways to Zion.

The Christian Church has always come together to hear the Word of God,

to worship the living God. It would not exist if it had not come together. It cannot exist in the modern world unless it comes together. The church exists not because people come together, but because they go forth strengthened by the good Word of God, finding in Christ release from their guilt and the power and courage to go on and to turn the world upside down for His Name's sake. ~~Redeemed, restored forgiven, they come to meet their Lord; and they are not disappointed.~~ Looking ahead & beyond, In joyful anticipation of what is to come in the glories of eternity, they call out: How lovely is Thy dwelling place, O Lord of Hosts! My soul longs, yea, faints for the courts of the Lord! Amen.