2nd Sunday after Trinity
1st in a Series on the OUR FATHER
Rolling Meadows - 1965

Rev. Carl F. Thrun

IN NOMINE JESU

St. Matthew 6: 7-9 And in praying do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles d for they think that they will be heard for their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him. Pra then like this: Our Father who art in heaven.

OUR FATHER WHO ART IN HEAVEN

Doesn't the world seem like a dreadfully unfatherly place? How can we pray Our Father in a world of pitilessness, of persecution, of loneliness, of anxiety, of war and violence and bloodshed? How, O Father, if you do exist, how can you allow these things to happen? How can you allow cancer and sickness and suffering and an endless row of graves? Why should we believe that you are Our Father? Asking these questions, a lot of people think of God - if they think abou Him at all - as a feeble Father, weak and worn out, tired and tame, soft and sweet Maybe He acted with authority once upon a time long ago, but now His muscles have become soft and flabby. His beard grows whiter and whiter, His throne dustier and dustier, and His eyes dimmer and dimmer. This old Santa Claus doesn't care much about people, either. All He can do is to take care of His crotchety, creaky, old self, alone and aloof from the everyday struggle of our complicated world. He is the sour, spoil-sport, old man in the sky whose bark is worse than His bite. He is the old man upstairs, a chummy old fellow whose word and will don't fit too wel into modern life. He is the kind of God about whom someone wrote: They tell me Go is very great, immeasurably deep and high; I want a simple, friendly God, above a near and tender sky. I want Him to be wise, yet not too much more wise than I. I want a God who takes away my sins as soon as done or said; a God who gives me what I ask, of cake as well as bread, and lets me take Him out at night and pat Him on the head. This is the kind of God a lot of people like to have around the house, a family pet, simple and friendly, like grandpa upstairs whose shaky legs will not permit him to come down too often. If God doesn't care too much and is pretty much washed up anyway, you can do just about what you please as long as you don't distur Him too much with too many shenanigans or make too much noise in carrying them out

The God of Scripture is no feeble Father. The Old Testament portrays Hi as young and virile, a warrior-god. He is not like a crotchety old man, nor is He

a kill-joy crab. He is a Father, whose great heart feels all the agony a human father feels when his best is not good enough for his children and they turn against him. He is a Father, who wants nothing more than to be close to His sons and daughters. He is a Father, interested in giving only good and useful gifts to His children. He dares to give even Himself. He gives for the world what is nearest and dearest to His Father-heart, His own unique and eternal Son, the apple of His eye, always obedient and never once disobedient, always understanding and always loving, always thinking of others and never of Himself - Him the Father gives.

By what right ~~do we~~ does anyone call Him Father? Not by birth, but by rebirth. A lot of fuzzy ideas are going around about the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man. A good deal of this is just talk. The Fatherhood of God, like the brotherhood of man, is just talk until a man really comes to know God as his Father. That is why it is so tremendously important that it is Jesus Christ Himself who teaches us to pray the Lord's Prayer. Apart ~~of~~ from Christ no one can call God Father. St Paul was not just talking through his hat when he said, You are all the children of God by faith in Jesus Christ. Born in a drafty cattle barn, living out His life with no pillow upon which to lay His head, and pouring forth His lifeblood on a lonely Cross outside a city wall, the Son of God gave Himself for the life of the world. Take Bethlehem and Golgotha and the open grave out of the world, and God remains silent and praying becomes meaningless. We should all be orphans were it not for X.P. There would be no one to hear us if He had not opened the gates of heaven.

In Christ the Father hears us when we pray. In Christ the Father shares with us the struggles and storms of life. Our sorrows become His sorrows, and our suffering His suffering. That is what Jesus would teach us: Every wound I lay My healing hand upon has ached a thousand times in Me; every demon I cast out has leered at Me; I died the death that I Myself defeated; I let My own body be torn and buried in the earth. Who among you suffers and I do not suffer with you? Who among you dies and I do not die with you? I am your Friend and Helper in every need. Do you understand that? Then understand this too: He who sees Me sees the Father, and he who sees Me suffering with you sees the Father suffering. The Father suffers pain with you and for you, bringing good out of evil.

But you ask: Why then does the Father permit such things when He Himsel suffers from them? Why doesn't He utter His divine NO and put a stop to them? Why doesn't He stop this suffering, this dreadful crying in all the world? One thing is for sure: God is not the author of sin, and sickness, and suffering, and dying. These are hostile powers and radically contrary to God's plan of salvatio God allows them, and He undoubtedly is thinking His own higher thoughts when He does so. ~~What is more~~ But more than that, God uses them to serve His own good purposes. Everything God permits the dark powers to do must first pass in review before Him. Everythi is examined and censored by His fatherly eye to see whether it will really work for good with those who love Him. The result is that instead of going our own way without Him - in our pride and self-sufficiency - we are brought closer the Father care ~~and our faith is strengthened.~~ Sufferings become trials which are meant to be endured in order that I may be purged and refined like precious gold. Great times of terror, in which the furies of man's brutality are unleashed, become time of visitation. Death, the last enemy, becomes the desire...to depart and be with Christ. The dreadful valleys of the shadow become the places where I learn to know the Good Shepherd and test His rod and staff. The anxieties that torment me as I face the insecurity of my existence and the dark curtain of the future become the raw material from which I let God build my trust and my faith. It is as if God intercepts these originally evil and disastrous missiles of life, catches them in His fatherly arms, and sends them in the direction He wants them to go for the benefit of His children.

That is why Jesus' words are so comforting: Your Father knows what you need before you ask Him. And we may add: The Father knows what you need even contrary to what you ask. You can talk as you please in your prayers, you can chatter like the heathen and argue like a lawyer, but not for one second will God be diverted from the one theme of your life - the one thing you really need. Jesus shows us that the Father knows our deepest needs and secrets. And that means that He looks upon us men as a mother looks upon her child who is sick or in pain. The little child cannot tell what is wrong with him, and simply looks upon his mother

with great, appealing eyes. But the mother knows what is wrong with him even though he cannot speak about it, and therefore she takes hold at the right spot. As a father, as a mother pities her children, so the Lord pities those who fear Him and cry out to Him in trouble.

Thank God that our prayer does not depend on our expressing the correct desires - on our making a correct diagnosis of our needs and troubles. The Father knows us before we pray, and He is always there with His goodness before we come. I think, for example, of the paralytic, whose friends finally got him past the crowd into the presence of Jesus by opening up the roof and letting him down. I can imagine that then all of them, including the paralytic, gazed at Jesus with a beseeching look, an unspoken prayer: Save him, save me from my terrible paralysis; make me well again! But Jesus heard this unspoken prayer quite differently from the way they intended. He said to the sick man, Your sins are forgiven, and there by made the point that the real trouble in his life lay in the fact that he was separated from God. Here was the ultimate need of this crippled life. And that i why Jesus first set him straight here, Then, when this had happened, He could also take away the sickness. The point is that Jesus knew what the sick man neede before he prayed for it - even though it was contrary to what he prayed for. The main thing in prayer is really not that we present particular petitions but that we enter into communion, into a personal relationship with the Father. If I do nothing more than say from the bottom of my heart, Abba Father, the main thing has already happened.

How does this relationship with God work out in practical life? One of the most moving stories to come out of World War II was the sinking of the troop ship, Dorchester, off the coast of Greenland. Four chaplains - 2 Protestants, a Roman Catholic, and a Jew - gave their life belts to others. Holding hands on the deck, they wen down with the ship. One of these was Clark Poling, son of the editor of the Christian Herald. Dr. Poling has described the turning point in his sons's life. While attending prep school, the boy called his father long distance and told him that he had to meet him. It was very important. I've got to see you.

The father was not to tell the boy's mother that he was coming. The father was worried, wondering what sort of trouble his son had gotten into. The meeting at the train station was strained. In silence they drove to the father's office. They walked in and Dr. Poling locked the door. Clark slumped in a chair near the desk. The father waited anxiously for the boy to begin. Suddenly Clark lifted his eyes and asked, Dad, what do you know about God? His father was caught off guard. He had not expected this question. Then he began to speak. Son, I don't know much about God. I don't know much about God; but what I know, I really know. I have tested Him in joy and in sorrow, in victory and in defeat....I don't know much about God; but what I know, I really know. That was the day Clark Poling set out on the path which led him into the ministry and eventually to the deck of the sinking Dorchester..... With this kind of confidence, pray then like this: Our Father who art in heaven. Amen.