The Second Wednesday in Lent
Rolling Meadows - 1976

Rev. Carl F. Thrun

IN NOMINE JESU

ST. LUKE 23: 34 "AND JESUS SAID, 'FATHER, FORGIVE THEM; FOR THEY KNOW NOT WHAT THEY DO."

Seven times Jesus spoke from the Cross -- three times to men, three times to God, and once to Himself..... This FIRST WORD -- "FATHER, FORGIVE THEM; FOR THEY KNOW NOT WHAT THEY DO" -- is TOTALLY UNEXPECTED. He says NOTHING about Himself. Like LIGHTNING our Lord's first words STRIKE STRAIGHT INTO THE HEART of ALL THE TRAGEDY of MANKIND. The FACE under the CROWN OF THORNS goes up -- and the CROWD around the CROSS is TRANSFORMED into the HUMAN RACE. The WORLD hears a DYING MAN point to the REASON FOR DEATH: FATHER, FORGIVEN THEM; FOR THEY KNOW NOT WHAT THEY DO."

Surely this is NO SUDDEN THOUGHT without a LONG BACKGROUND and without a PROFOUND CAUSE. THIS WORD reaches far back beyond the centuries into the QUIET UNBROKEN CALM OF ETERNITY -- where there was ONLY GOD. It reaches back into the COUNSELS OF THE HOLY TRINITY -- where there was the VISION OF THE CROSS AGAINST THE DARKENED SKY and the FAR SILHOUETTE OF THOSE TORN AND LIFELESS ARMS. It reaches back into the GARDEN "IN THE COOL OF THE DAY" when ADAM AND EVE were hiding from the VOICE OF GOD after the FALL INTO SIN. It reaches back into ALL THE VOICES of the PROPHETS and KINGS who had SAID SOMETHING about this DYING MAN ON THE CROSS. It reflects the QUIET NIGHT when there was a CHILD BORN in a STABLE at BETHLEHEM. It reminds us of the words of the APOSTLES' CREED: "BORN OF THE VIRGIN MARY, SUFFERED UNDER PONTIUS PILATE, WAS CRUCIFIED,

DEAD, AND BURIED."

This now was the FULFILLMENT of all these events. This was the CLIMAX of the DRAMA OF REDEMPTION! Now GOD COULD DO NO MORE. His INFINITE LOVE FOR MANKIND was now reflected most clearly in the PERSON, the WORK, and the WORDS of HIS ONLY-BEGOTTEN SON dying on the CROSS..... The FIRST WORD, therefore, is for all our YESTERDAYS and all our TOMORROWS. It is for ALL MEN who HAVE LIVED and WILL LIVE. It picks up ALL THE YEARS and ROLLS THEM UP TO HEAVEN for the FORGIVENESS OF OUR HEAVENLY FATHER.

There are few words in SCRIPTURE which point more clearly to the TREMENDOUS, DARK, and TRAGIC FACT OF SIN..... There are SOME THINGS we CAN DO about sin. We can be SORRY for it. We can REGRET it. We can WEEP over it. We can offer to MAKE AMENDS & separations when our sin has struck someone else..... There is, however, ONE THING we CANNOT DO about sin. WE CANNOT FORGIVE IT! SOMEONE has to go the LONG REST OF THE WAY. There MUST BE a VOICE FROM THE CROSS against the LONG SILENCE OF ETERNITY -- over the NOISE of the centuries & our MIS-SPENT LIVES: "FATHER, FORGIVE THEM; FOR THEY KNOW NOT WHAT THEY DO."

"FOR THEY KNOW NOT WHAT THEY DO!" We have all heard the AGONIZED QUESTION: WHAT IS REALLY WRONG WITH THE WORLD AND THE HUMAN RACE? Here is the ANSWER: MORAL STUPIDITY! There is a STUPIDITY OF THE MIND and a STUPIDITY OF THE SOUL. After all, WHO CRUCIFIED

JESUS CHRIST?----Men TOO BLIND to see who He was -- TOO DULL to hear the truth -- TOO STUPID to care about GOODNESS and HOLINESS and TRUTH. How often we have said -- sometimes in bitter tears: "If only I had known! If only I had known what would happen with that CARELESS WORD -- with my TURNING AWAY FROM MY FRIEND -- with my MOMENTARY ANGER or PASSION!.... If only I had known."

This is the basis for our LORD'S PLEA for FORGIVENESS: "THEY KNOW NOT WHAT THEY DO." They THINK that they are WISE, INTELLIGENT, AND SHREWD -- but THEY DO NOT KNOW to what end their DEEDS finally lead..... Let it be said again -- as it has been said these many hundreds of years -- that SIN is always UNINTELLIGENT, STUPID, and FOOLISH. It always ends in the ASHES OF BURNED-OUT FIRES and the GRAY DUST OF SHAME.

THE CROSS MEANS FORGIVENESS! And certainly all of us NEED THIS as we NEED NOTHING ELSE. We have brought MEMORIES into this Church of our own SINS over the years. These MEMORIES BURN. These are THINGS we should LIKE TO FORGET..... But the GREAT, HOLY, and BLESSED THING is that the CROSS can give you this FORGIVENESS and this FORGETFULNESS. There can be a DRYING OF OUR TEARS over our SINS. There can be RELIEF from the TEARING PAIN in our HEARTS. There can be a RETURN to HEAVEN and HOPE. "FATHER, FORGIVE THEM; FOR THEY KNOW NOT WHAT THEY DO."..... We can come to HIS CROSS in

PENITENCE and FAITH. We can come to TASTE of HIS LOVE -- HIS BODY GIVEN FOR US and HIS BLOOD SHED FOR US FOR THE REMISSION OF OUR SINS. And if we do that, SUDDENLY He is HIGH and LIFTED UP --- and the BEAUTIFUL STORY of the PRODIGAL SON is RE-ENACTED again and again in THIS CHURCH and ALL OVER THE WORLD.

And what happens after that is that we GO OUT to PUT INTO PRACTICE the FIFTH PETITION of our LORD'S PRAYER: "FORGIVE US OUR TRESPASSES AS WE FORGIVE THOSE WHO TRESPASS AGAINST US." No amount of TWISTING and TURNING can get away from this fact: WE ARE ASKING FOR FORGIVENESS IN THE MEASURE IN WHICH WE ARE READY TO FORGIVE -- NO MORE AND NO LESS! We are TYING OUR LIFE to the LIFE OF GOD in JESUS CHRIST! It is therefore completely wrong to say, "I can forgive, but I cannot forget."

By the GRACE OF GOD we can do what God has done for us. WE CAN ALSO FORGET. He has FORGOTTEN our sins as high as ..... He remembers ..... He has BURIED them in the BOTTOMLESS SEA of His ETERNAL PITY and LOVE..... So we are to ACT in OUR LITTLE LIFE as God acts in ALL LIFE and HISTORY. We must FIND TIME to FORGIVE and FORGET the TRESPASSES and SINS of others -- HUSBAND to WIFE, WIFE TO HUSBAND, PARENT TO CHILD, CHILD TO PARENT, NEIGHBOR TO NEIGHBOR. Will you do that in the handshake of peace?

There is no sense in STAGGERING TOWARD ETERNITY with a HEAVY BURDEN of GRUDGES and

HURTS and JEALOUSIES and HATE and MALICE and BITTERNESS. "FORGIVE US -- AS WE FORGIVE." THE CROSS MEANS FORGIVENESS! This is GOD'S WAY of doing things. It is the WAY OF INCREDIBLE POWER. It reflects a LOVE that will NOT LET GO. It shows us again a LOVE which "BEARS ALL THINGS" for us. "FATHER, FORGIVE THEM; FOR THEY KNOW NOT WHAT THEY DO." Amen.