SECOND WEDNESDAY IN LENT
February 23, 1972
Rolling Meadows, Illinois 60008

Rev. Carl F. Thrun

IN NOMINE JESU

St. Mark 14: 32 - 36: AND THEY WENT TO A PLACE WHICH WAS CALLED GETHSEMANE; AND HE SAID TO HIS DISCIPLES, "SIT HERE, WHILE I PRAY." AND HE TOOK WITH HIM PETER AND JAMES AND JOHN, AND BEGAN TO BE GREATLY DISTRESSED AND TROUBLE AND HE SAID TO THEM, "MY SOUL IS VERY SORROWFUL, EVEN TO DEATH; REMAIN HERE, AND WATCH." AND GOING A LITTLE FARTHER, HE FELL ON THE GROUND AND PRAYED THAT, IF IT WERE POSSIBLE, THE HOUR MIGHT PASS FROM HIM. AND HE SAID, "ABBA, FATHER, ALL THINGS ARE POSSIBLE TO THEE; REMOVE THIS CUP FROM ME; YET NOT WHAT I WILL, BUT WHAT THOU WILT."

Last week we saw that the ABUNDANT LIFE ABOUNDS in SERVICE. This week we want to EMPHASIZE that the ABUNDANT LIFE ABOUNDS in PRAYER. As one of our HYMNS puts it, "PRAYER IS THE CHRISTIAN'S VITAL BREATH." The Abundant Life ALWAYS EXPRESSES itself in PRAYER.

and by the same token,

PRAYER always results from ASKING what the ABUNDANT LIFE IS. It is LIVING as a CHILD of GOD - - - letting God have HIS WAY with US - - DOING His GRACIOUS WILL! All our PRAYERS must relate to THIS. Prayer is NOT to let God know what WE WANT. It is rather to LEARN what GOD WANTS! All our PETITIONS may be SUMMED UP in the SINGLE PETITION: "THY WILL BE DONE."

Our Lord Jesus Christ lived the ABUNDANT LIFE. And that means He was a MAN of PRAYER. It means that the ONE single, great CONCERN in His life was the WILL of GOD. "MY FOOD, He said, "IS TO DO THE WILL OF MY FATHER." And if you see that NO WHERE ELSE, you must surely see it in the GETHSEMANE STORY.

You cannot hear this story without taking SERIOUSLY the REALITY and the FACT that our LORD was a REAL MAN. As the writer to the HERBREWS has it: "HE WAS TEMPTED IN ALL POINTS AS

WE ARE." Like every other MAN He desired - with ALL of His HEART - BODILY HEALTH and LENGTH of DAYS. Like every other man He dreaded SUFFERING and DEATH. He PRAYED, "FATHER, IF IT BE THY WILL, LET THIS CUP PASS FROM ME." And that means, "GOD, I DON'T WANT TO DIE." It means that the CROSS was ABHORRENT to HIM -- SO ABHORRENT that for a moment HE THINKS that HE CANNOT CONSENT to it. He wants His FATHER to find some OTHER WAY to REDEEM MANKIND.

And isn't that just where WE ARE? Don't we ALWAYS want to FIND the EASY way out? We LOVE VITALITY - HEALTH - and LIFE. We DREAD SUFFERING - PAIN - and DEATH. It is the subject of our MOST FERVENT PRAYERS. And we cannot even PRETEND that this is NOT TRUE. There is NO PRETENSE in our Lord's PRAYER in the Garden of Gethsemane - - - - He "Tells it like IT IS."

It is NOT DIFFICULT to UNDERSTAND that our Lord DREADED DEATH like ANY of US - that He was in an AGONY - that His SWEAT became like GREAT DROPS of BLOOD falling down upon the GROUND. It is not difficult to understand that our Lord PRAYED EARNESTLY that this CUP might PASS FROM HIM. But the AMAZING THING IS that through it all He wanted ONLY what His Father WANTED - - "YET NOT WHAT I WILL, BUT WHAT THOU WILT!" It is THAT KIND of SUBMISSION and SURRENDER that we find so VERY DIFFICULT.

For us, too, there is often the BITTER CUP. "WE MUST THROUGH MUCH TRIBULATION ENTER THE KINGDOM OF GOD." We HATE TRIBULATION. We want the ABUNDANT LIFE in terms of what is PLEASING to US. And often we say, "I don't care what YOU want, God - - I want what I WANT." We want a CROSS that we can wear as JEWELRY and NOT one that BOWS our NECK and CUTS into our FLESH. It is TOUGH to PRAY, "YET NOT WHAT I WILL, BUT WHAT THOU WILT!"

Jesus SUBMITTED to the WILL of His FATHER because of His GREAT LOVE for US. He SUFFERED and DIED that we might LIVE the ABUNDANT LIFE. That kind of LOVE - that kind of SUFFERING - that kind of CARRYING the SINS of the WORLD in DEATH - is HARD to UNDERSTAND or COMPREHEND.

It has been said that the HARDEST thing about LIVING as a CHRISTIAN is to be able to say daily, "I AM A REDEEMED, FORGIVEN, AND BELOVED CHILD OF GOD." Our REASON tells us it ISN'T TRUE. The WORLD tells us it is a DELUSION. Our FLESH - our SENSE of SIN and GUILT - tell us it is a LIE. It all seems just TOO GOOD to be TRUE - - - - that I should be FORGIVEN and ACCEPTED.

Sometimes when I am FEELING SORRY for MYSELF - when I am LOW and DEPRESSED - and think, "God certainly could NOT LOVE the likes of ME or ACCEPT ME" - - - - then I think of the story of JUDAS. He has been called "THE MAN OF WASTED OPPORTUNITIES." He spent his WHOLE LIFE putting God's LOVE for him to the TEST. Always he went just a little bit farther - a little bit DEEPER. "If I CHEAT and take a little of our FUNDS for MYSELF - - - Lord, will you STILL LOVE ME?" "If I SNEAR at this WOMAN who is POURING her costly ointment on You - - - Lord, will you STILL LOVE ME?" "If I SELL You out and BETRAY you for 30 pieces of SILVER - - Lord, can you STILL LOVE ME?" ..... And finally he went all the way, and went out an HANGED HIMSELF. And somehow I imagine Judas standing before the throne of God and wanting to KNOW ONCE MORE: Lord, can you STILL LOVE ME? And I imagine the Lord turning to HIM and saying, "Yes, Judas, I STILL DO LOVE YOU - - - but what a WASTE! WHAT A WASTE!"

Sure of our Lord's LOVE for US - it is NOW for us to LIVE the ABUNDANT LIFE of PRAYER. And that means that we will WANT what HE WANTS for us. It means that we will PRAY - EARNESTLY - as our Lord PRAYED: "NOT WHAT I WILL, BUT WHAT THOU WILT!" Sure of

HIS LOVE, we will LIVE FOR HIM. And living for Him means LIVING for OTHERS. His DEATH MEANS to us the death of SELF-CENTEREDNESS. It means PRAYING for the WILLINGNESS to LAY DOWN OUR LIVES, as He LAID DOWN HIS LIVE FOR US. That is the ABUNDAN T LIFE! And that kind of LIVING is NO WASTE. Amen.