The Second Wednesday in Lent
Rolling Meadows -- 1979

Rev. Carl F. Thrun

IN NOMINE JESU

GENESIS 32: 3-12

As I was trying to prepare for this sermon, "The Step Up to Courage," a man came into the Church -- completely distraught and beside himself. "Pastor," he said, "the doctor just told me that my wife has cancer..... If she dies, I don't know what I'm going to do. I need her so much ....." We went into the Sanctuary -- and ON OUR KNEES we prayed for "COURAGE" -- not so much that "our will" would be done (though we did ask that "this cup might be removed from her, if it were His Will" -- but most of all that His GOOD AND GRACIOUS WILL, in the power of HIS LOVE and FORGIVENESS, might be done for HER and for US. "Lord, you know what it is to suffer and have pain. You know what it is to die. Give her and us YOUR STRENGTH, YOUR PEACE, YOUR COURAGE."

6 months to 2 yrs.

There is with all of us a DANGEROUS TENDENCY to confuse OUR WILL with GOD'S WILL. But more than that, often we know very well what GOD WANTS US TO DO, but we find it a HARD WAY TO FOLLOW. God has a way of ASKING US TO TAKE A RISK or PAY A PRICE we would just as soon AVOID. He confronts us with DIFFICULT DECISIONS which demand a LEVEL OF COURAGE we are not sure we have.

It takes COURAGE to place OUR FUTURE or the FUTURE OF OUR LOVED ONES totally into the HANDS OF GOD. It takes COURAGE to AGREE TO SURGERY. It takes COURAGE to WITHSTAND THE PRESSURE OF PUBLIC OPINION. It takes COURAGE to "buck the tide" --- when everyone else

seems to "care less." It takes COURAGE to accept the EVIDENCE that NOW MAY BE THE TIME TO DIE.

COURAGE is necessaryywhen we DO NOT KNOW WHAT WILL HAPPEN and are FRIGHTENED BY THIS KNOWLEDGE. COURAGE is "doing what you are afraid to do." ~~The Writer to the Hebrews says about Moses that "BY FAITH HE LEFT EGYPT, NOT BEING AFRAID OF THE ANGER OF THE KING; FOR HE ENDURED AS SEEING HIM WHO IS INVISIBLE." (Heb. 11: 27)~~ ..... But how shall we find such COURAGE? ..... And it precisely here that we have to WRESTLE WITH GOD. COURAGE is not just one of MANY VIRTUES. It is the quality which marks every other virtue.

COURAGE did not come easily to Jacob. He was ONCE AGAIN TERRIBLY AFRAID! He had run as a FUGITIVE to Haran and his Uncle Laban -- but now he was COMING HOME. He entered the LAND OF EDOM and he knew that soon he would MEET HIS BROTHER. He had known the FEAR once before --- when he had bedded down at BETHEL as he fled from the WRATH OF ESAU. But now -- 20 years later -- he was COMING HOME. And NOTHING SEEMED TO HAVE CHANGED. ..... He was STILL AFRAID OF ESAU. ..... He had sent messengers ahead with GIFTS to demonstrate his FRIENDSHIP and GOODWILL ---- but they returned with BAD NEWS. ..... ESAU was MARCHING toward JACOB -- accompanied by 400 ARMED MEN..... More than JACOB'S WEALTH was at stake..... ESAU and HIS ARMY might kill the entire family.

The conflict between JACOB AND ESAU seemed unchanged --- but JACOB had begun to change. He was able now to offer up the KIND OF PRAYER through which COURAGE is born. It was not an ornate prayer. He began by speaking simply and directly to God: "GOD OF MY FATHER ABRAHAM AND GOD OF MY FATHER ISAAC." ..... At one time JACOB'S WILL had been all that mattered. Now the WILL OF GOD mattered more. He was obeying God, Who told him: "RETURN TO YOUR COUNTRY AND TO YOUR KINDRED, AND I WILL DO YOU GOOD." ..... At one time JACOB thought he "deserved the world with a ribbon around it." Now he thought about what LITTLE CLAIM he had on GOD'S FAVOR, saying: "I AM NOT WORTHY OF THE LEAST OF ALL THE STEADFAST LOVE AND ALL THE FAITHFULNESS WHICH THOU HAST SHOWN TO THY SERVANT, FOR WITH ONLY MY STAFF I CROSSED THIS JORDAN; AND NOW I HAVE BECOME TWO COMPANIES.".... He knew that all this was "up for grabs." He honestly confessed his feelings -- saying of his brother ESAU: "I FEAR HIM, LEST HE COME AND SLAY US ALL, THE MOTHERS WITH THE CHILDREN."

The situation was desperate. JACOB did not know just how things would turn out. His FEARS were real. But now he began to trust the PROMISES OF GOD. He said: "BUT THOU DIDST SAY, 'I WILL DO YOU GOOD, AND MAKE YOUR DESCENDANTS AS THE SAND OF THE SEA, WHICH CANNOT BE NUMBERED FOR MULTITUDE.'"

JACOB had to STRUGGLE WITH GOD IN PRAYER in order to tap the COURAGE he needed.... And

so did JESUS. Of all the pictures of a MAN WRESTLING WITH GOD IN PRAYER, none is more vivid than that of our Lord in the GARDEN OF GETHSEMANE. He, too, spoke DIRECTLY and PASSIONATELY. He cried, "ABBA, FATHER!" which means, "O FATHER, DEAR FATHER!" ..... That phrase reflected a confidence in God which would sustain Him until He said from the Cross: "FATHER, INTO THY HANDS I COMMIT MY SPIRIT!" ..... For Him, too, the TERRORS AHEAD were AWESOME. He "PRAYED THAT, IF IT WERE POSSIBLE, THE HOUR MIGHT PASS FROM HIM." ..... But His FATHER'S WILL was most important of all. "YET NOT WHAT I WILL, BUT WHAT THOU WILT."

So it is that the Writer to the Hebrews says of Jesus: "IN THE DAYS OF HIS FLESH, JESUS OFFERED UP PRAYERS AND SUPPLICATIONS, WITH LOUD CRIES AND TEARS, TO HIM WHO WAS ABLE TO SAVE HIM FROM DEATH, AND HE WAS HEARD FOR HIS GODLY FEAR. ALTHOUGH HE WAS A SON, HE LEARNED OBEDIENCE THROUGH WHAT HE SUFFERED; AND BEING MADE PERFECT, HE BECAME THE SOURCE OF ETERNAL SALVATION TO ALL WHO OBEY HIM....." ..... The REMOVAL OF THE CUP was not to be [redacted] GOD'S ANSWER to JESUS' FEAR. ..... The FATHER'S ANSWER was in giving JESUS the STRENGTH AND COURAGE to see it through! And because JESUS RECEIVED THAT COURAGE, He became the PERFECT SACRIFICE and SOURCE OF SALVATION for all who commit themselves to Him. ..... And that SALVATION includes giving YOU and ME COURAGE to hold on to the PROMISES OF GOD in the face of all terror.

One final thing. When we STRUGGLE IN PRAYER -- that PRAYER is always the GIFT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. This too is GOD'S PROMISE: "LIKEWISE THE SPIRIT HELPS US IN OUR WEAKNESS; FOR WE DO NOT KNOW HOW TO PRAY AS WE OUGHT, BUT THE SPIRIT HIMSELF INTERCEDES FOR US WITH SIGHS TOO DEEP FOR WORDS." ..... Hey, Stick out your chest and Be of good Courage We have the promise that the SPIRIT will help us come into contact with the SOURCE OF LIFE AND POWER. The SPIRIT will give us the SAME KIND OF COURAGE Jesus found in the moment of His testing. We are not "whistling in the dark" when we say this. JESUS HIMSELF has promised this help. He told His disciples: "DO NOT BE ANXIOUS HOW OR WHAT YOU ARE TO ANSWER OR WHAT YOU ARE TO SAY; FOR THE HOLY SPIRIT WILL TEACH YOU IN THAT VERY HOUR WHAT YOU OUGHT TO SAY."

As the STORY OF JACOB shows, all kinds of things can happen when "we let go -- and let God." Criminals can change -- sinners can become sanctified -- and the irreligious can learn how to pray. But above all, we know that JACOB'S PRAYER and JESUS'PRAYER are previews to GOD'S ANSWER to us WHEN WE PRAY. Looking at HIS CROSS OF CRUCIFIXION for us -- we get COURAGE to be CRUCIFIED FOR HIM. Amen.