4th WEDNESDAY IN LENT
HOLY CROSS -- 1993

REV. CARL F. THRUN

IN NOMINE JESU

ST. JOHN 19: 19-22

THE TITLED CROSS

There is SOMETHING in EVERY MAN, I think, that wants HIS GOD, if he has a god, to be UTTERLY TRANSCENDENT AND HOLY -- UNSTAINED by human history and BEYOND THE REACH of of all suffering. If GOD is to SAVE US from the RAGING TORRENT of our TRAGIC and SIN-FILLED EXISTENCE, He must Himself STAND ALOOF and APART and NOT BE CAUGHT UP and SWEPT AWAY like the rest of us.

That is why the WISDOM of the TITLED CROSS seems so FOOLISH and CONTRADICTORY. Pilate writes it in three languages --- HEBREW and LATIN and GREEK: "JESUS OF NAZARETH, KING OF THE JEWS!" Already ISAIAH had said of this SUFFERING SERVANT, "KINGS SHALL SHUT THEIR MOUTHS AT HIM" -- that is, they shall THROW THEIR HANDS over their MOUTHS to try to stop GAGGING and THROWING UP with CRIES OF REVULSION at the SIGHT OF HIM hanging there -- looking SO UNKINGLY in His Passion -- so SHRUNKEN and UGLY and FOOLISH for a KING.

From the very beginning SUFFERING is the KEYNOTE of His Life. Even when He enters the world, there is "NO ROOM FOR HIM." The first night of His earthly life He SLEEPS AMONG ANIMALS. The MANGER in which He lies is of the SAME WOOD on which He dies. Even as a BABY, KING JESUS is robbed of PEACE AND SECURITY. Not only does He have HOUSING PROBLEMS IN BETHLEHEM -- but He also becomes a POLITICAL SCANDAL! KING HEROD senses that there is a POWER IN THIS CHILD which is rooted in the WORLD'S FOUNDATIONS -- a POWER which will UNLEASH DISCORD and SET THE WORLD ON FIRE!

The KING OF ALL THE UNIVERSE walks as AN ALIEN UPON THE EARTH -- without HOUSE OR HOME! He has "NOWHERE TO LAY HIS HEAD!" And if they shout "HOSANNA!" to Him -- IT IS CERTAINLY A MISTAKE! As soon as they discover WHO CONFRONTS THEM, they cry, "CRUCIFY HIM! CRUCIFY HIM!"

Toward the end of His life, this KING breaks into tears, when He LOOKS UPON JERUSALEM-- the CITY which has CLOSED ITS HEART to Him and which FAILS TO NOTICE the BIRDS OF PREY

already CIRCLING OVERHEAD! "HOW OFTEN WOULD I HAVE GATHERED YOUR CHILDREN TOGETHER AS A HEN GATHERS HER BROOD UNDER HER WINGS, AND YOU WOULD NOT!" ..... That is HIS GREAT TORMENT and SUFFERING -- WATCHING those whom HE LOVES running headlong TOWARD THEIR RUIN -- disregarding ALL WARNINGS and failing to RECOGNIZE HIM AS THEIR KING!..... Nietzsche's ZARATHUSTRA makes the apt comment: "LOVE FOR MANKIND IS GOD'S HELL!" Here He is -- THE KING OF HEAVEN -- walking through HELL!

On Calvary ABANDONMENT AND LONELINESS close over Him! Even His CLOSEST DISCIPLES desert Him. He hangs there ALONE, while above His head is the superscription, "JESUS OF NAZARETH, KING OF THE JEWS!" What a JOKE! ..... When SOCRATES drank the HEMLOCK, he was surrounded by his FAITHFUL FOLLOWERS. Their RESPECT and VENERATION supported him..... But HERE -- KING JESUS hangs between TWO CRIMINALS -- the SOLDIERS mock and redicule Him: "IF YOU ARE THE KING OF THE JEWS, SAVE YOURSELF!" Others jeered and scoffed, "HAIL, KING OF THE JEWS!"

The KING does not avoid the DEPTHS and DARK VALLEYS -- LONELINESS and ANXIETY -- which are the LOT of ALL OF US! He does not STAY UNSTAINED by human history or BEYOND THE REACH of our suffering. He does not STAY BACK in the SAFETY OF HEAVEN. Rather he leaves the SECURITY of His FATHER'S HOUSE to WALK BY OUR SIDE and ENDURE OUR SUFFERING and OUR DEATH! He is INVOLVED WITH US and He will NOT LET THE DARKNESS SEPARATE US from Him! SO MUCH does He LOVE US!

In TOUGH TIMES when it seems we are in some BLACK HOLE and we LOOK UP LONGINGLY to see if there is perhpas SOME CRACK SOMEWHERE to ADMIT just a TINY GLIMMER OF LIGHT and FRESH AIR -- well, THAT'S the WRONG DIRECTION! We need to LOOK DOWN -- DOWN INTO THE DEPTHS! THERE IS CHRIST! THERE IS OUR KING! He is THERE FOR US in our MISERY! HE IS OUR BROTHER! And He BECKONS TO US with His Arms outstretched: "COME UNTO ME, ALL YOU WHO LABOR AND ARE HEAVEN LADEN! I WILL GIVE YOU REST!" And suddenly we understand what the PROPHET meant: "SURELY HE HAS BORNE OUR GRIEFS AND CARRIED OUR SORROWS!"

That's the SECRET of HIS LOVE -- LOVE SO GREAT that He wants ONLY THE BURDEN -- such SELF-FORGETTING LOVE that He embraces and holds the LIKES OF ME -- of YOU --a WORLD

filled with NAKED, POOR, MISERABLE WRETCHES -- whoever they may be! "THESE ARE THEY," cries St. John the Seer, "WHO COME OUT OF THE GREAT TRIBULATION, AND HAVE WASHED THEIR ROBES, AND MADE THEM WHITE IN THE BLOOD OF THE LAMB!" And suddenly we are CONFRONTED with the MAJESTY OF THE SON OF GOD -- OUR KING -- and OUR CHAINS ARE BROKEN! And we join those from "EVERY NATION, AND KINDRED, AND TONGUE, AND PEOPLE" who are SHOUTING their LUNGS OUT with ANGELS and ARCHANGELS and ALL THE REST OF THE COMPANY OF HEAVEN: "THE CRUCIFIED ONE -- THE CRUCIFIED ONE -- JESUS OF NAZARETH -- HE IS KING FOREVER!!! SALVATION BELONGS TO OUR GOD AND TO THE LAMB WHO WAS SLAIN! -- AND HE SHALL REIGN FOREVER AND EVER -- KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS -- ALLELUIA! ALLELUIA! AMEN! SO BE IT! AMEN!"