4th Wednesday in Lent
Rolling Meadows - 1967

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IN NOMINE JESU

St. Matthew 26: 59-63 Now the chief priests and the whole council sought false testimony against Jesus that they might put Him to death, but they found none, though many false witnesses came forward and said, "This fellow said, "I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to build it in three days." And the high priest stood up and said, "Have you no answer to make? What is it that these men testify against you?" But Jesus was silent.

St. Luke 23: 8-9 When Herod saw Jesus, he was very glad, for he had long desired to see Him, because he had heard about Him, and he was hoping to see some sign done by Him. So he questioned Him at some length; but He made no answer.

St. Matthew 27: 13-14 Then Pilate said to Him, "Do you not hear how many things they testify against you?" But He gave him no answer, not even to a single charge; so that the governor wondered greatly.

THE CROSS POINTS TO VICTORY

The Cross points to victory! But it is a strange kind of victory. We have here the kind of ~~biblical~~ theological double-talk that appears utterly absurd and completely contradictory to all our human perception and understanding. Just put these two words side-by-side and see for yourself: Think about it Cross and Victory. What is there that can possibly be victorious ~~and~~ about a cross and a crucifixion? Where is the victory when a blood-~~soaked~~ dripping figure of a Man hangs suspended between heaven and earth on a gallows and dies in silent lonliness - is either rejected or forsaken by both God and men?

Nevertheless, we have said it and we are going to be bold enough & brazen enough to stick by this seemingly rediculous & foolish assertion: The Cross points to Victory! ~~Yet~~ at same time, make it about it is a victory which is discernible, and visible, and audible only to the eyes and ears of faith. Nobody else will ever find it, or see it, or hear it. It is victory surrounded by the strange, and dreadful, and deafening silence of God. This side of the Final Judgment you can either read God in or read Him out as you like. And for that very reason any one of us is capable at any moment of breaking ~~our~~ his spiritual neck on Him.

absurd

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God will be God only on His own terms. You cannot remold, or re-fashion, or re-make Him into Something of your own liking. You cannot badger, or bully, or push Him into a mold of your own making. You cannot order Him around, as it pleases your own fancy! Men have always found this to be a hard lesson to learn. The prophets ~~used to~~ called on God to vindicate His honor against the enemies of His people - and He still allowed His people to be driven away captive into Babylon. The psalmists called on Him, and the Greeks armies came anyway. It was no way for God to act! And after them the Romans. Tide after tide, wave after wave!

Then that strange Man from Nazareth, who seemed bent on doing nothing that mattered - just giving Himself over into the hands of the crowd that hated Him. What a plan of campaign that was - marching out (single-handedly) against all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them! When He told His disciples how He must go up to Jerusalem, and suffer many things, and be put to death, Peter rebuked Him - and Jesus flashed back, Get thee behind Me, Satan! It was the old offer, (all over) again - of easier terms than God's! The only way to win was by losing - by the wisdom of this folly, the strength of this weakness - the Cross, the nails, the crown of thorns - and the gibe written over it all: JESUS OF NAZARETH - HIS MAJESTY FROM NOWHERE - KING OF THE JEWS! * (But, you see,) God can't be God except on His own terms. Sometimes I wonder why we try to keep Him from it! It is the only way to victory!

x way around the Cross -

No way for God to alt!

There is a penetrating, (pathetic) pitiful little sentence, after all the turbulent years in the Book of Judges, when the glory was about to depart from Israel, and Samuel was only a child in the house of Eli: And the Word of the Lord - so it runs - was precious in those days. But the meaning is not as it sounds. I wish it were. The Word of the Lord was rare in those days — that's the sad fact of it - rare, like a Jewel - and men longed for it, because they had heard nothing from Him - they had seen nothing to remind them of Him. Again it happened, in the time of Amos: Behold...saith the Lord...I will send a famine - not of bread or water, but of hearing. And they shall wander from sea to sea...they shall run to and fro to seek the Word of the Lord, and shall not find it. Once more, on a day while it was yet dark, before the dawn - Caiaphas, the high priest, stood up and said, Have You no answer to make?...But Jesus was silent. Herod too questioned Him in many words; but the silence was unbroken. And Pilate, at the last: Do You not hear how many things they testify against You? But He gave him no answer! It's the hour that may come to anyone of us - like a man who told me not long ago: Pastor, I prayed, and cried, and sobbed into my pillow all night long - but there was no answer from God! When do you get up the courage to say that God's answer was there all along - but it was not the answer he wanted to hear - and therefore he did not hear it?

At the crucial moment, God is silent. Immediately there are people who arise to tell us that God must be dead. Because God does not rise to the bait of the stupid and the nonsensical. not to speak about the unfriendly and the hostile, it must be assumed, so we are told, that He is dead. AND GOD WILL LET YOU COME TO THIS VERDICT! HE FORCES NO ONE TO BELIEVE! Even theologians chime in today, adding their voices to the general clamor, insisting with all of the vehemence at their command: God is dead! Those who believe in God are looked upon as misguided people trying to live their lives in the unrealistic past.

conclusion

Let's, once and for all, meet the question head on: Is God really dead, or is He just silent - silent to modern men who have forgotten to hear when God speaks - silent when the loud-mouthed prefer to listen to themselves rather than to the living God? Could it be true that God refuses to submit Himself to the little expectations of little people - that He insists upon being God on His own terms, while bold and brash men demand that He come out and show Himself to be God on their terms - telling Him that He must jump down from the pinnacle of the temple if He wants to be God - or His voice must be heard from some loudspeaker in the sky - or He must come down from the cross to show His divine power - or He must furnish His accusers with sensible answers to their rediculous questions — otherwise, they will not recognize Him as God? It is the same arogant demand all over again - Satan whispered and the crowd shouted: If you are the Son of God, don't just stand there, do something! say something!

My wife says more to me in silence than with a whole host of words!

In the silence of God, there is a word for our world. It is a silent word, breaking through the defenses people try to build up around themselves. They want to be big - big enough to demand an answer from God. His silence is their answer - the most devastating and disconcerting answer God can give to a world that fails or refuses to listen when He speaks. In His silence, God speaks. In His silence, God shows Himself to be God. In His silence, God passes judgment upon unbelief, and, at the same time, He brings about victory to those who are ready to listen to Him and put their trust in Him!

Disappointment, defeat, frustration, loneliness - a Cross - this is the way

Take up your Cross & follow

God intends to go on being God - and this is the way He holds out against us. Pick up your New Testament and you will find that Jesus Christ deliberately concealed His deity more often than He proclaimed it. Twelve legions were waiting in the wings, but He was silent - He made no reply. This is God's way. Our way would probably be the twelve-legion-way, but this is God's way. Hiding His glory, the Son of God dies for the sins of the world. Hiding His face from the wickedness of men, the living God breaks forth with all the good news of life and forgiveness in the name of Jesus. At Calvary, the silence is broken by the muffled cry, It is finished. So it is - this is God's Word — His way of bringing salvation to a world lost without Him, unable to find its way if He remains silent. Willing Himself to fail on a Cross — the great God holds that Cross there with tense muscles against the changing years - so that everybody can see it and nobody can budge it! It is the only hope of our forlorn world.

Do you get the feel of it? It isn't soft! It's love - that's what it is - outrageous, violent love - that knows what it has to do to rescue and redeem us. The Cross means pain in God. + means Blood dripping down the off branches of His heart. Here God is broken upon us men. Here alone you can grasp how great is God's sorrow for you - when you realize how much you are loved and to what extent God is thinking about you. The triumph and victory of God was fashioned out of suffering and defeat. In the silence of the Cross He brings about final and ultimate victory. It is here that He has won His victory over us that becomes His victory for us. You can accept it in faith or reject it in unfaith. - as the case may be Nevertheless, it is the way of God. It is God's way of bringing the issue as near the level of His love as His power can lift it! Satan whispered and the crowd shouted: If you are the Son of God, don't just stand there, do something! Perhaps we should turn it wrong side out! If You are the Son of God, don't just do something! STAND Here Stand there - in my sorrow and loneliness - in all my frustration and defeat - where the shadows are - where death & despair raise their ugly head - until the day breaks and the Resurrection comes - and I see at last that all has worked together for my good - and Thy ~~grace makes my weakness strength!~~ Amen.

Strength is made perfect in Weakness!