The Fourth Wednesday in Lent
Rolling Meadows -- 1978

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IN NOMINE JESU

ST. JOHN 18: 15-27

Peter stands outside in the courtyard by the charcoal fire warming himself. Inside, the high priest begins the questioning process. He already knows what he wants to do -- to move Jesus as quickly through the legal process as possible and send Him out to the HILL.

The night air grows colder -- and PETER moves a little closer to the fire. Inside, "THE HIGH PRIEST QUESTIONS JESUS ABOUT HIS DISCIPLES." He wants to know just how INTENSE their LOYALTY is. He wants to know about their ALLEGIANCE, their DEVOTION, their FAITHFULNESS. He wants to makes sure that THESE DISCIPLES will not STIR UP ANY TROUBLE -- that they are NOT READY to lay their LIVES ON THE LINE -- that they are not WILLING to go all the way to CRUCIFIXION HILL with Him. That would make TOO MANY MARTYRS -- and that could cause SOME REAL PROBLEMS.

Apparently JESUS did not answer the question. If He did, the ANSWER is not recorded.

PETER still stands in the UNCERTAIN LIGHT of the "CHARCOAL FIRE."

The HIGH PRIEST then questions JESUS about His "TEACHING." "How well are You staying in the traditions of the fathers? How are you interpreting the prophets? - Scripture?"

For the first time JESUS SPEAKS. You can sense the DRAMA of it all. JESUS is really going to DEFEND Himself. You can feel the TENSION! You probably could have "cut the air with a knife." ..... "I HAVE SPOKEN OPENLY TO THE WORLD; I HAVE ALWAYS TAUGHT IN THE SYNAGOGUES AND IN THE TEMPLE, WHERE ALL JEWS COME TOGETHER; I HAVE SAID NOTHING SECRETLY." In other words, Jesus wants it to be known that WHAT HE HAS SPOKEN and WHAT HE HAS TAUGHT, He has spoken for ALL TO HEAR. There were never any SECRET MEETINGS -- nothing done BEHIND CLOSED DOORS. Everything He said was ALWAYS OUT IN THE OPEN.

PETER leans a little TOO CLOSE to the fire. The FLAMES light up his face. A servant girl looks at him and asks, "ARE NOT YOU ALSO ONE OF THIS MAN'S DISCIPLES?"

JESUS continues His defense before the high priest and before the world. And He does a very FRIGHTENING THING. He stakes His WHOLE DEFENSE -- His WHOLE KINGDOM -- EVERYTHING ----- on the "man on the street." Can you imagine that. JESUS lays HIS LIFE ON THE LINE -- sure of the TESTIMONY of "JOHN DOE CITIZEN" to acquit Him.

Incredible! Incredible! "WHY DO YOU ASK ME? ASK THOSE WHO HAVE HEARD ME, WHAT I SAID TO THEM; THEY KNOW WHAT I SAID." Incredible! -- As if to say: "Go and get anybody who has heard Me speak and put him on the witness stand. I stake My whole life on what he or she will say." Just imagine that! Every HEWER OF WOOD -- every DRAWER OF WATER --

every TAX COLLECTOR -- every SELLER AND BUYER IN THE MARKETPLACE ---- "If they have heard Me speak, they will come to My defense."

PETER -- man of faith, man of action -- answers the servant girl, "I AM NOT ONE OF HIS DISCIPLES." ..... Is this really the man who said with such BRAGGADOCIO, "Lord, IF THEY SHOULD ALL FORASKE YOU, I WILL NEVER FORSAKE YOU. EVEN IF I MUST DIE WITH YOU, I WILL NOT FORSAKE YOU?" ..... Now, when the "heat is on" and the "pressure is there" he says, "I AM NOT ONE OF HIS DISCIPLES."

Translate JESUS' CALL FOR WITNESSES into TODAY. Every BUS DRIVER -- every HOUSEWIFE -- every STUDENT -- every EMPLOYER -- every EMPLOYEE -- every SUNDAY SCHOOL CHILD -- every CHURCH MEMBER ------ "Bring them all in and put them all on the witness stand. I stake My Kingdom, My Life, on what they will say."

Incredible! Just imagine that! JESUS reached right out of the trial -- right at the beginning of it -- and He TAPPED YOU ON THE SHOULDER: "Come, John Doe -- Come, Jane Doe -- Take the witness stand in My defense."

At the fire PETER'S FACE is caught in the light again. Others recognize him and say to him, "ARE NOT YOU ALSO ONE OF HIS DISCIPLES?" ..... Come on Peter -- TAKE THE STAND

IN DEFENSE OF YOUR LORD! JESUS' LIFE IS ON THE LINE! THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS AT STAKE! ..... Come on JOHN -- SUSAN -- BILL -- MARY -- whoever you are! TAKE THE WITNESS CHAIR FOR JESUS. Tell about His "TEACHING" -- His "DOCTRINE"! Tell what you KNOW AND BELIEVE ABOUT HIM.

Out in the COURTYARD Peter gives his answer. ..... WHAT ABOUT YOU? You have been a member since your BAPTISM. You have been in SUNDAY SCHOOL and BIBLE CLASS. You have to remember something of what you learned in CONFIRMATION INSTRUCTION. GIVE AN ANSWER! ..... I can almost predict what you are going to say -- I have heard it so many times before: "Me? I'm not a theologian. I'm not trained. I make it a practice never to talk about religion or politics. Me? -- To take the witness stand for Jesus?" ..... We move a little closer to the COMFORTABLE FIRE. "Me? A witness for Christ?" ///... "Not me. I don't even know the Man."

And JESUS LAID HIS LIFE ON THE LINE ---- sure of the WITNESSES He could call from the street -- you and me!

The first rays of SUN pierce the darkness. The ROOSTER raises his head -- stretches first one leg and then the other. And PETER says it again: "I DO NOT KNOW THE MAN!" ..... The ROOSTER fills his lungs with the morning air, and the SOUND OF HIS CROWING

fills the courtyard.

And what about Jesus? He moves from judge to judge -- from "pillar to post" -- from SCOURGING AND CROWN to CROSS AND NAILS. ..... Listen as He prays from the depths of His UNCONQUERABLE LOVE: "FATHER, FORGIVE THEM," His PRAYER is not just for the MAN WITH THE HAMMER -- or for the JUDGES. His PRAYER is for the WITNESSES WHO DID NOT APPEAR ---- for people like PETER and people like YOU AND ME. XXX "FATHER, FORGIVE THEM, FOR THEY DO NOT KNOW WHAT THEY ARE DOING."