4th Wednesday in Lent
Rolling Meadows - 1976

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IN NOMINE JESU

ST. MARK 15: 6-15 " NOW AT THE FEAST HE USED TO RELEASE FOR THEM ONE PRISONER FOR WHOM THEY ASKED. AND AMONG THE REBELS IN PRISON, WHO HAD COMMITTED MURDER IN THE INSURRECTION, THERE WAS A MAN CALLED BARABBAS. AND THE CROWD CAME UP AND BEGAN TO ASK PILATE TO DO AS HE WAS WONT TO DO FOR THEM. AND HE ANSWERED THEM, 'DO YOU WANT ME TO RELEASE FOR YOU THE KING OF THE JEWS?' FOR HE PRECEIVED THAT IT WAS OUT OF ENVY THAT THE CHIEF PRIESTS HAD DELIVERED HIM UP. BUT THE CHIEF PRIESTS STIRRED UP THE CROWD TO HAVE HIM RELEASE FOR THE BARABBAS INSTEAD. AND PILATE AGAIN SAID TO THEM 'THEY WHAT SHALL I DO WITH THE MAN WHOM YOU CALL THE KING OF THE JEWS?' AND THEY CRIED OUT AGAIN, 'CRUCIFY HIM.' AND PILATE SAID TO THEM, 'WHY, WHAT EVIL HAS HE DONE?' BUT THEY SHOUTED ALL THE MORE, 'CRUCIFY HIM.' SO PILATE, WISHING TO SATISFY THE CROWD, RELEASED FOR THE BARABBAS; AND HAVING SCOURGED JESUS, HE DELIVERED HIM TO BE CRUCIFIED."

Have you ever noticed that God does not always work at the same speed? Sometimes for years in our OWN LIFE and for centuries in the LIVES OF NATIONS nothing much happens. TIME is a SLOW RIVER moving imperceptibly to the sea. There is a DECEPTIVE STILLNESS about LIFE and TIME which can easily LULL US into a FALSE SENSE OF SECURITY..... And then SUDDENLY things begin to MOVE -- the CLOCKS OF THE WORLD and OF LIFE STRIKE TOGETHER -- and the CHARIOTS OF THE LIVING GOD sweep through LIFE and the UNIVERSE. The GOD of LIFE and HISTORY and REDEMPTION swings into VISIBLE and EVIDENT ACTION.

This is exactly what happened on GOOD FRIDAY. Here was GOD really MOVING FAST -- and WHEN HE MOVES, LIFE and HISTORY and MEN move with Him to new, strange, but divinely appointed ends. HE NEVER MOVES ALONE. He calls for DECISION, DEVOTION, DEDICATION. When HE MOVES, He will never let you remain on MIDDLE GROUND. You cannot REMAIN NEUTRAL For BETTER or for WORSE you must MAKE UP YOUR MIND.

And so -- with WEIRD CONSISTENCY -- those involved in the DRAMA of CHRIST'S CRUCIFIXION make up their minds about what they are GOING TO DO with THEIR GOD. JUDAS decides -- and COMMITS SUICIDE. PETER decides -- and STUMBLES OFF with BLINDING TEARS in his eyes. ANNAS and CAIAPHAS and the CHIEF PRIESTS decide -- and get a FEW MORE YEARS of SHODDY, UNEASY POWER. The DISCIPLES decide -- and FLEE INTO A NIGHT WITHOUT STARS..... The STAGE empties FASTER and FASTER until there are only FOUR CHARACTERS left -- a ROMAN GOVERNOR - a CRIMINAL - a FACELESS MOB - and the STRANGE, SILENT FIGURE OF JESUS.

Curiously enough, the ONE MAN who has the HARDEST TIME making up his mind about CHRIST is NOT ONE OF THE DISCIPLES but PONTIUS PILATE. There are things INSIDE HIM which seem to hold him back. He has a SENSE OF FAIRNESS and JUSTICE..... On the other hand, he is a TWENTIETH-CENTURY MAN. He has POWER -- and he means to keep it..... And so he TWISTS and TURNS. He TALKS and TEMPORIZES in the VAIN HOPE that he may find SOME WAY to GET OFF THE HOOK -- to AVOID A DECISION -- to DISCOVER SOME WAY OUT OF THE DILEMMA. He would like to find SOME WAY of GETTING RID OF GOD without DECISION, or DEVOTION, or DEDICATION.

Finally in his desperation he hits upon a seemingly BRILLIAN IDEA. He DOES NOT WANT TO DECIDE -- so, even as YOU and I, he will try to LET SOMEONE ELSE DO IT. <u>LET THE PEOPLE DECIDE</u>! He resolves to be DEMOCRATIC about the situation and give them the choice

between GOOD AND EVIL, between GOD AND MAN, between JESUS AND BARABBAS. He appeals to GROUP MORALITY. Surely they will DECIDE THE RIGHT WAY! Surely they will recognize the THORN-CROWNED SUFFERS as ONE OF THEIR OWN -- their FRIEND -- their TEACHER -- the CARPENTER's SON FROM NAZARETH. Surely they will PREFER HIM to a MURDERER -- a WILD-EYED REVOLUTIONARY -- one of the ANONYMOUS CRIMINALS who were forever cluttering up the Roman jails all over the world. Surely this was an EASY CHOICE for the people!

We all know what happened. PILATE asked his question -- there was a ROAR FROM THE CROWD -- and the NOISE OF IT was like the CRACK OF DOOM to Pilate's ears: "BARABBAS! GIVE US BARABBAS!" The people had spoken. The ELECTION was over. The VOTES were in. The VOTES were counted -- in EARTH and HEAVEN and HELL -- FINALLY and FOREVER.

This is all FEARFULLY MODERN and CONTEMPORARY. We may call it what we will -- SPIRITUAL BLINDNESS, MOB SPIRIT, MORAL INSANITY. We may refer to our texts on PSYCHOLOGY and SOCIOLOGY in order to explain it..... But we must NEVER FORGET that this was a CROSS SECTION of our COMMON HUMANITY. These were people even as YOU and I. They were MEN and WOMEN from the HOMES - the SHOPS - and the MARKETS of Jerusalem. Here were STUDENTS from the SCHOOL OF GAMALIEL -- GOOD PEOPLE -- RELIGIOUS PEOPLE --- people who would not think of KILLING AN ANIMAL ON SATURDAY, but who are ready to KILL THEIR GOD on FRIDAY.

WHY? Why did the mob yell: "BARABBAS! GIVE US BARABBAS?" After all, here was One who had come to BRING THE GOSPEL TO THE POOR -- to BIND UP THE BROKENHEARTED -- to TELL THE CAPTIVE SOULS THAT THEY WERE FREE -- to OPEN THE EYES OF THE BLIND -- to HEAL THOSE WHO HAD BEEN HURT AND BROKEN BY LIFE. Why did they make their decision and cry: "BARABBAS?"

There was something HOPELESS here -- something DEEP and DARK and DEMONIC. They cried "BARABBAS" -- the world today cries "BARABBAS" -- we cry "BARABBAS" because we are under the DEEP, DARK, DEMONIC COMPULSION OF SIN..... HERE IT IS -- ALL OF IT! What was BEHIND THAT CRY is STILL WITH US TODAY -- SIN! - CRUELTY! - BLASPHEMY! - BLIND HATE! Here is EVERY WRONG APPETITE -- EVERY EVIL DESIRE -- EVERY UNNAMED VICE to the very LAST and LOWEST of them all. — selfishness, desire for power, status, success, reputation, & money — everything & anything to which we dedicate ourselves.

Do you see what our text is telling us? There can be no real DEVOTION or DEDICATION to GOD by our own STRENGTH or WORTHINESS. By our own nature we will always cry for "BARABBAS." That's why LUTHER says: "I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to Him." We must in REALISM and PENITENCE identify ourselves with those people UNDER THE CROSS. And GOD - in HIS PITY - indentifies us with BARABBAS -- for whom our LORD became the SUBSTITUE -- who went FREE because GOD WAS CAPTIVE ON A CROSS -- who LIVED because CHRIST DIED.... THIS IS THE MYSTERY AND MIRACLE OF GRACE!..... Only so can we leave this Church with our HEADS

UP -- FREE AND FORGIVEN -- DEVOUT AND DEDICATED ------ because ONE DAY there was a CROSS and our SIN entered into the LIFE and HEART of the ETERNAL SON OF GOD MADE MAN. Our SIN was SHARED BY GOD! It was BURIED IN GOD! At the FOOT OF THE CROSS -- in GOD's OWN MERCY -- we can DEDICATE and DEVOUT OURSELVES to "HIM WHO LOVED US AND GAVE HIMSELF FOR US." Amen.