4th Wednesday in Lent
Rolling Meadows - 1964

Rev. Carl F. Thrun

IN NOMINE JESU

St. Matthew 26: 47-50 (RSV) While He was still speaking, Judas came, one of the twelve, and with him a great crown with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and the elders of the people. Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, The One I shall kiss is the man; seize Him. And he came up to Jesus at once and said, Hail, Master! And he kissed Him. Jesus said to him, Friend, why are you here? Then they came up and laid hands on Jesus and seized Him.

FRIEND, WHY ARE YOU HERE?

Boys and girls, why are you here tonight? - Because your mother and daddy said you had to come - Because you could not stay at home by yourself? Would you rather be doing something else - watching T.V. or playing a game? Why are you here? Jesus wants to know. Why are any of us here? - Have we come out of habit, because it just seems like the thing to do, because going to church gives us a good feeling, because we want to appear like good Christians? Would we honestly rather be doing something else? Jesus wants to know. Friend, why are you here?

Take a good look at Judas and see if you can't see yourself. Bringing along a crowd armed with swords and clubs, Judas said to them: The one I shall kiss is the man. Seize Him. Then he walkedup to Jesus saying: Hail, Master, and kissed Him. Jesus said to him, Friend, why are you here?.... It looked as if Judas was doing the right thing. He came to Jesus. He sought Him out. He brought others along. Obviously, he wanted to give the impression that these armed friends had come along with him to protect Christ against His enemies. Judas greeted his Master with a friendly kiss - the common greeting of that day, similar to our handshake. Our Lord cut through all of the pretensions and appearances with one question: Frien why are you here?

Meet Christ, and sham is dispelled. Tell me how good a person you are, and I shall have to believe you, for I have to judge by appearances. Tell Christ how good a person you are, and He will not have to judge by appearances. He sees through the thin veneer of so many of our actions, and His question confronts us with shocking pointedness and force: Friend, why are you here? Christ is always interested in the WHY of our actions, not just in WHAT we do. He condemned the Pharisees who loved to stand on the street corner and pray where they could be seen by people. In these days He would tell us of those who send out press agents to

proclaim the alms they give to the poor, the contributions they make for the church, and the favorable picture they would draw of themselves in comparison with others. Praying and worshiping and giving and doing are no longer good, when they become the products of pride and self-righteousness.

It is possible to do the right thing, Christ said, for the wrong reason. Judas is an outstanding example of a man who always seemed to be doing the right thing for the wrong reason. He came to Jesus for the wrong reason, kissed Him for the wrong reason, and brought along his friends for the wrong reason. His actions looked good, but they were essentially evil. Usually we call this hypocrisy - when people do the right things for the wrong reason.

Lent is a time for deep and earnest self-examination. As Christians we need to re-examine not only our actions but the reasons behind our actions. We must be ready to admit to ourselves that it is possible to go to church for the wrong reason; to be seen praying for reasons of business or social prestige in the community. We need to recognize that fact that it is possible for the leaders of the church to do the right things for the wrong reasons. It is possible for men to be active in positions of leadership for their own glory and for their own ends, putting roadblocks in the way of the faith instead of furthering it, hindering the Gospel rather than spreading it. These things not only are possible - they actually happen. We should not be surprised that there are hypocrites in the church. There was one among the twelve whom Jesus Himself chose.

Christ does not permit us to deceive ourselves. We must face the fact that our actions, and the reasons behind them, are not always and altogether noble. We must constantly be cleansed of the selfishness which eats away at our hearts. Only after thorough self-examination can we invite other people to examine their own actions and the reasons behind them - to see whether for the wrong reasons they are doing the things usually called right. If you help your neighbor just to benefit yourself, if you work in the church just to glorify yourself, you are doing the righ thing but for the wrong reason.

Of course, it is possible to do the wrong things for the right reason. People have done horrible things in the Name of God and true religion. An outstanding example is Saul, before he became the great Apostle Paul. This man persecuted his fellowmen because they believed in Christ. He put them in jail, and even participated in a murder, thinking he was doing God a service. As a young man, he stood by while Stephen, the first martyr of the Christian Church, was stoned to death. Saul was sincere all right - but his sincerity was misguided. Then came tha historic event on the Damascus road. Suddenly there came a blinding light from heaven, and Christ confronted him with His penetrating WHY? - Saul, Saul, WHY persecutest thou Me? A mere desire to please God, or the fact that a man acts with good intentions, does not make his evil acts less evil. St. Paul spent his life repenting of what he had done, regretting his blindness and misguided zeal.

Every age has produced its own people who have done the wrong things for the right reason.. They include the inquisitors of the late middle ages, who sought out heretics for torture and burned them at the stake in the Name of the King of Love. Like them were the people who hanged the Salem witches in the early history of the American colonies. Like them have been all those governed by the principle that the end justifies the means. There are always people who would stamp out evil by following the slogan, It's time to fight fire with fire. Here is a man who is ready to compromise honesty and integrity because, he says, he is thinking of his family which he loves dearly. In this catalog of wrongdoers for the right reason are the people who spread corruption and greed by hallowing the practice of gambling under the sweet name of charity. Doing the wrong thing for the right reason does not make it right. It is still wrong.

Christ asks the question: Friend, why are you here? He wants us to ask ourselves whether we are doing the right thing for the right reason. What is the right thing? Christ insisted that this question cannot be answered without taking God into consideration. God has established universal standards of right and wrong. What is eternally right has a right reason behind it, summed up by Christ in two

great statements: Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, and with all thy mind; and thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. No one can meet these standards by his own initiative. We are all inclined to be lovers of self - deeply & hopelessly in love with ourselves. If anyone thinks he is meeting God's standard, he is only demonstrating that he has watered down God's demands to meet his own level of achievement. To put God first in everything - in everything - is impossible for any of us to achieve by our own efforts. Putting a neighbor's interest above our own is not the natural thing to do. The natural thing is to be hostile and competitive toward anyone who threatens our security and independence. The truth is that the natural man does not know the things of the Spirit of God; his mind is carnal and is at enmity with God. He does not want to do the right thing for the right reason, though he is willing to do the right thing for the wrong reason, and the wrong thing for the right reason.

That is the reason for the Cross of Christ. While we cannot depend upon ourselves and our own efforts, we can depend upon God. God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself. God made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him. God promises life to those who put their trust in His Son, Jesus Christ - life filled with satisfaction, joy, and hope. Life in Christ is inspired by the desire to do the right thing for the right reason. Christ gave His life for us - He suffered and died for us. The great drama of His suffering and death is reenacted in the life of everyone who turns to Him in faith. This is to go through Gethsemane, Calvary, and Easter personally - where the old self-loving self is crucified and killed and replaced by a new man - by Christ Himself, who enters in and lives in us. He gives us the power to love what once we hated, to give ourselves away as He gave Himself away, to do the right thing for the right reason.

Friend, why are you here? - The question comes straight for the heart of Christ to our hearts. In so asking He offers us the new life in Him - the life that is itself prompted by the Spirit of God - the life of self-sacrificing love that gives as He gave, loves as He loved - the life that will finally overcome and obtain the victory. Amen.