5th Wednesday in Lent
Rolling Meadows - 1966

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IN NOMINE JESU

St. Luke 23: 26-31 And as they led Him away, they seized one Simon of Cyrene, wh was coming in from the country, and laid on him the cross, to carry it behind Jesus. And there followed Him a great multitude of the people, a of women who bewailed and lamented Him. But Jesus turning to them said, Daughter of Jerusalem, do not weep for Me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. For, behold, the days are coming when they will say, 'Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bore, and the breasts that never gave suck!' Then they will begin to say to the mountains, 'Fall on us'; and to the hills, 'Cover us.' For i they do this when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?"

THE CROSS AND MY PEACE

I will put enmity between thee and the woman - thus God had promised wh He cursed the devil for destroying man's peace with God. We cannot even imagine what life was like without sin - when there was perfect harmony between God and man, when there was a perfect response of man to God's love, when there was perfe peace because there wasn't a thing wrong between God and man and God walked with man as a man walks with his friend. Now, suddenly, all this was disrupted - God' intentions were distorted - and man declared himself a rebel. Now man had chosen sides with the devil, and he was therefore galled by the authority of God and jealous of the Godness of God to which he could not attain. Man listened to the devil's way of becoming like God, and with that he destroyed his peace with God. Ever since man has been running away, no less from himself than from God, running away from the destiny he was created for. He has been convinced that you can become like God Himself if you only assert yourself and become independent of God.

What should God do? What would you do? We are always so certain tha we can improve on God's way. If you were God and had the power and authority of God, how would you react to man's disobedience, to his despising of your love, to his insisting so finally and so fully on going his own way and doing what he wants to do? Would you set out, as God did, on the long road of winning man back by putting enmity between him and the devil - or would you denounce the enmity and say in cold judgment: All right, man, you made your bed; now sleep in it! How do we men treat each other? What have you done, or what have you said to the person who has hurt your feelings? How well have you prayed the Fifth Petition: Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us? How much genuine concern and redeeming love have you shown for those who need your praying hand an your supporting hand your your giving hand? But God does not respond in kind.

God does not give out in return what He gets. He is the God who broke the enmity between Himself and man, the enmity which man himself had created. God broke it by putting enmity between man and his real enemies - so that man might no longer at peace with his destroyers but rather at peace again with the God whom he would have destroyed. This is the peace of God because it is peace which only God, the offended One, can create. And this is the peace of God which is His gift to us i the Cross of His Son Jesus Christ.

Pilate refused to make a choice, and with that he made his choice. You just can't let someone else crucify Jesus without being involved yourself. The people may stand by and heap curses upon themselves to the effect that Jesus' blo be upon them and their children; it is also upon us if we do not stand up on the name of Christ and allow the same thing to happen to us! ~~refuse to permit it unless they are willing to do the same to us~~. This is the only interpretation of Christ's own Word: Whosoever shall deny M before me, him will I also deny before My Father which is in heaven. What else i that except His blood be upon us? But Pilate would neither be warned nor won, so that while he was perfectly willing to speculate about Christ and God and truth, he was unwilling to commit himself to Christ or give up everything that was holdi him back: his position, his being a friend of Caesar, his ambition to get ahead. So finally the Cross is always the place where men send Jesus while they get on with their self-seeking, which is enmity against God.

The Cross itself had been ready for some time, ready even from eternity It is not only Pilate's enmity or my enmity against Christ being my Lord and my God, but it is also God's love. If only, for once, we could see this in faith, that God does not want to be God to us by overpowering us in the fury of His wrat or overwhelming us with His judgment - but God wants to be God to us in love, lov beyond our understanding, love beyond our telling, love that must be seen and kno and experienced in Jesus Christ before it can be believed. Man fashions that Cro for God, and God takes the Cross and out of it fashions salvation for men. Men sin and express their defiance of God, and God takes their sin and their defiance and makes His grace abound all the more where these abound. Men mock God in Chri

with the crown of thorns and the dirty purple robe and the reed scepter, and God takes the mockery and with it becomes the true Lord of sinners. Men insult God i His Son by numbering Him among the transgressors and putting Him in the middle as the archtransgressor against all that is holy among men and before God, and God takes it to convince us that His Son is truly numbered among us and is like us an therefore is for us. Man renews the warfare with God daily as he daily gives him self over to his opposition against God in Christ, and God makes peace possible b destroying the opposition. All that is the Cross of Christ for us if we will own our participation there and if we will let that Cross be planted squarely into ou own hearts. Come, then, you Simons of Cyrene, who came only to worship God, to celebrate His great feast of the Passover; come, and let the Cross of Christ be laid upon your shoulders where it belongs, for only so will God be able to answer the real plea of our worship and give us deliverance beyond anything that once to place in Egypt! Come and let the powers of God's holy Law thrust the Cross upon your conscience so that you can never get out from under it, and you will know th it was your burden in His Passion that Christ has borne for you. That's why the Cross of Christ is the only peace with God that there is.

That, of course, is not the only possibility open to us. It never is. You see what can happen if you have a religion of your own making, a religion tha is not relationship with God through Jesus Christ alone. Then not only do you ha to get this Jesus out of your religious way, but the Cross becomes the final hurd over which you will never jump. It is an offense to your own self-goodness and morality, a stumbling block on which you break your religious neck because you r fuse to carry it as your very real and personal guilt before God. Then you stand alongside the way of sorrows and you refuse to become involved with Him; you refu to identity yourself with Him. You mock His stumbling collapsing efforts to carr away what God says is rightfully yours. You won't turn a finger for Him, but are done with Him when the miracles cease for your benefit and the Cross comes into view - done with Him when there is no apparent benefit in it for you but only cos and personal self-denial and total self-sacrifice. Remember that we are not now

talking about the Romans, people outside the church; we are talking about those within the church, those who claimed to be under the covenant of God - people lik you and me, the baptized and the keepers of holy days and the strong regarders of the Bible as a book which we can handle but never as a book which must handle us! Oh, that we would get under that Cross with Christ and let our shoulders take the place of Simon's!

You are involved! You can never be just as spectator or onlooker! You cannot even just stand aside and give Jesus your pity and sympathy. Listen to th judgment of our text. Some women followed after Jesus and bewailed Him. They we into mourning for Him. He presented such a ghastly, helpless sight that their tender woman hearts could not but spill over in tears. And all they got for thei tears was: Weep not for Me, but weep for yourselves and for your children...for i they do this when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry? Weeping fo this poor Jesus will cause Him to speak judgment upon you. If these Lenten Services, if the Cross and Suffering of Christ do not pass over into your daily life - they will one day give you reason to cry out for the mountains to fall upon you Dead orthodoxy, dead religiosity, pious expressions of mere sentimentality about the Passion of Jesus that do not recognize and own Him as Savior - Savior at such a terrible price because of the terribleness of my transgressions, the unutterable horror from which each one of us has to be saved - will bring this same thing upo you that came upon this Green Wood, this Holy One of God, and will utterly consum you if you are dried branches fit only for the fire, dried because you were not grafted into the only Vine, this Jesus Christ.

Weep well will because weep we must, but the weeping will be for ourselve and for our children. We brought that woe on Him. But now the tears have been caused by God Himself, and they become tears of repentance, tears of unspeakable regret that I should have done that to my Lord and my God, tears because, however unimaginable, I did it, and off He goes bearing His Cross, my Cross, my personal hatred of God and my personal enmity against God. That's what I now see my sin t be! And with that the way of Christ's sorrows becomes the way of my return to Go

my forgiveness from God, and my peace with God. Look with that faith, and you wi hear the eternal benediction upon you, the sinner: The Lord bless thee, and keep thee, bless thee by the Cross, and keep thee always under the Cross; the Lord mak His face shine upon thee, the face all spattered with blood and spittle and cover with shame, that you might have in Christ the God who is gracious unto thee; the Lord lift up His countenance upon thee, His whole Being, there in Christ, fully and completely for thee; and give thee peace, God's own peace, which man can neve understand but which alone can keep our hears and minds through Christ Jesus. Am