THE FIFTH WEEK IN LENT
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Rolling Meadows, Illinois

Rev. Carl F. Thrun

IN NOMINE JESU

St. Luke 23: 33 - 34: AND WHEN THEY CAME TO THE PLACE WHICH IS CALLED THE SKULL, THERE THEY CRUCIFIED HIM, AND THE CRIMINALS, ONE ON THE RIGHT AND ONE ON THE LEFT. AND JESUS SAID, "FATHER, FORGIVE THEM; FOR THEY KNOW NOT WHAT THEY DO."

Our CHURCH FATHERS called the FORGIVENESS of SINS "THE SUMMUM BONORUM" - THE SUM OF ALL GOOD THINGS. Without it you have NOTHING. With it you have EVERYTHING! Martin Luther says it so very well in his SMALL CATECHISM: "Where there is FORGIVENESS of SINS, there is LIFE and SALVATION."

The PRAYER of JESUS from the CROSS, "FATHER, FORGIVE THEM," was an OFFER of LIFE -- and OFFER of the ABUNDANT LIFE! Normally, the FIRST CRY of a CRUCIFIED PERSON was that his life might be SPARED. Our Lord prayed that the LIVES of His CRUCIFIERS might be SPARED. And since we are PART of THAT COMPANY - since it was for OUR OFFENSES and OUR SINS that HE DIED - - - He prayed for OUR LIVES TOO.

To understand the CLOSE CONNECTION between the FORGIVENESS os SIN and the ABUNDANT LIFE we must KNOW what LIFE MEANS in its TRUE BIBLICAL SENSE. Life to our Lord was NOT mere existance - a PULSE - BLOOD coursing thru the VEINS - COLOR in the CHEEK. To Him LIFE meant nothing less than a RIGHT RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD - - LIVING UNDER, and WITH, and FOR GOD - - - - being HIS CHILDREN - - - ENJOYING and PRACTICING HIS FORGIVENESS and LOVE.....And DEATH, in the language of our LORD, was something far more DREADFUL than the LACK of a HEART BEAT. It meant having NO HEART FOR GOD AT ALL - - SHUTTING God OUT of one's LIFE.

God LOOKS DOWN from HEAVEN on the MASSES of PEOPLE who are HIS CREATION and should be HIS CHILDREN. Among them are many who SHOW NO AWARENESS of HIS FATHERHOOD. He gives them many GIFTS - but they NEVER THANK HIM. He COMMANDS -

and they DO NOT OBEY. He CALLS - and they DO NOT ANSWER. He INVITES - and they DO NOT COME. Never getting any RESPONSE from them, He says, "THESE MY CHILDREN ARE DEAD!"

This is precisely what the FATHER of the PRODIGAL SON said, when his SON LEFT HOME and SHUT HIM OUT of HIS LIFE: "MY SON IS DEAD!" And then there was the GREAT JOY and CELEBRATION when his SON "CAME TO HIMSELF" and DECIDED to COME HOME. The father SAW him AFAR OFF and RAN to MEET him and EMBRACE him. And there was only 1 thing he could say: "MY SON WAS DEAD AND IS ALIVE AGAIN."

But God did not JUST SAY, "MY CHILDREN ARE DEAD." He went on to say, "I MUST BRING THEM BACK TO LIFE AGAIN." And for this HE sent His ONLY SON into the WORLD. Our Lord described His MISSION on EARTH by saying, "I AM COME THAT THEY MAY HAVE LIFE, AND HAVE IT MORE ABUNDANTLY." He came to put MEN BACK into a RIGHT RELATIONSHIP with GOD. To do this He HAD TO DIE. He had to DIE on a CROSS. He had to REMOVE and BLOT OUT our SINS - our TRANSGRESSIONS - EVERYTHING which SEPARATED US from God. The word for that is "FORGIVENESS" - - - and this is the CONNECTION between the FORGIVENESS OF SINS and the ABUNDANT LIFE. In His letter to the COLOSSIANS, St. Paul CONNECTS the 2: "YOU, WHO WERE DEAD IN TRESPASSES, GOD MADE ALIVE TOGETHER WITH CHRIST, HAVING FORGIVEN US ALL OUR TRESPASSES."

"FATHER FORGIVE THEM!" This is God saying thru HIS SON: "You may NOT LOVE ME - but I LOVE YOU. You may FORGET that I am YOUR FATHER - but I can NEVER FORGET that YOU are MY CHILDREN. I know HOW to FORGIVE. My FORGIVENESS is WAITING for YOU."

Let us NEVER FORGET that while JESUS prayed these words, MEN were POURING OUT upon Him their HATRED and their CURSES. Still, what Jesus PRAYED FOR - He DIED FOR - - - OUR

FORGIVENESS, our LIFE, our SALVATION.

My CONSOLATION is that Jesus was praying NOT just for PONTIUS PILATE - NOT just for KING HEROD - NOT just for the ROMAN SOLDIERS - NOT just for the JEWS - - - - BUT ALSO FOR ME! And NO SINS can ever trouble me so much as MY OWN! Still He prays in the MIDST of HIS CRUCIFIXION: "FATHER, FORGIVE THEM." And that also MEANS ME!

WITHOUT FORGIVENESS life with God is IMPOSSIBLE. WITHOUT FORGIVENESS life with OUR FELLOW MEN is EQUALLY IMPOSSIBLE. Sin is NOT only the BARRIER that stands between God and man - - - it is also the BARRIER that SEPARATES MAN from his NEIGHBOR - - - a HUSBAND from his WIFE - - CHILDREN from their PARENTS - - WHITE PEOPLE from BLACK PEOPLE - - the "HAVES" and the "HAVE-NOTS" - - CHURCH MEMBERS from CHURCH MEMBERS. Sin ALWAYS SEPARATES!

What a GREAT thing FORGIVENESS IS. How everything comes ALIVE, and is FILLED with JOY, and everything seems to take on a WHOLE NEW DIMENSION - - - where there is FORGIVENESS and RECONCILIATION. How GREAT it is to know in the HOME. You all know the TENSIONS and FRUSTRATIONS that occur. But how WONDERFUL and how MARVELOUS it is when HUSBAND and WIFE can LIFE TOGETHER - when PARENTS and CHILDREN can LIVE TOGETHER - - when ALL the bariers are BROKEN DOWN and there is PEACE ONCE MORE. What a JOY and SIGH of RELIEF there comes - when FORGIVENESS OCCURS - when it HAPPENS.

Our Lord's prayer on the CROSS meets us where we ARE. It FINDS us where we are. I need a WIFE who will NOT say, "Get RID of your SINS and then I will LOVE YOU" - - but one who ACCEPTS me as I AM and KNOWS how to FORGIVE. I NEED CHILDREN, FRIENDS, and

PARISHIONERS who will NOT say to me "BE DIFFERENT AND THEN WE WILL LOVE AND RESPECT YOU" - - but who will LIVE with me on terms of GOD'S FORGIVENESS. Luther God knows that I have LIED to HIM a thousand times that I would do BETTER - - but somehow I always come out WANTING. And ALWAYS the GREAT THING IS the PROCLAMATION of the GOSPEL: THAT HE STILL WANTS ME - THAT HE FORGIVES ME - - that He WANTS ME to be HIS OWN !

The 1st WORD from the CROSS is for me the GREATEST WORD from the CROSS: "FATHER, FORGIVE THEM, FOR THEY KNOW NOT WHAT THEY DO." So often I know not what I do. But this is the MESSAGE from MY LORD. It is the MESSAGE from HEAVEN! "WHERE THERE IS FORGIVENESS FOR SINS, THERE IS ALSO LIFE AND SALVATION." And that means an ABUNDANT LIFE! Amen.