10th Sunday after Trinity
SERIES ON DISCIPLESHIP - THE EIGHTH BEATITUDE
West Henrietta - 1961
Rolling Meadows - 1963

Rev. Carl F. Thrun

IN NOMINE JESU

St. Matthew 5: 10-12 Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for My sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.

Many people would like to believe that once they throw their hat in the ring with the cause of Christ and espouse Christianity, their life will immediately become one unending round of happiness and pleasure forever after. Troubles will cease, and they will float along on cloud #9. But that is not what Christ says. Listen: Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. God's ideal man will not be universally popular. His life will not be one of unending pleasure and delight. Rather, he will feel the sting of persecution.

Evidently Christ realized that we would find it hard to believe the Eighth Beatitude. That is why He repeats it with emphasis. It is the only Beatitude to which He adds an explanation: Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for My sake. More than that: Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is you reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you. Christ actually expects those who live His way to get into trouble. It is the hallmark of their loyalty.

At second thought, however, we ought not be surprised at this. Christ's own life loudly and clearly proclaims the truth of this Beatitude. If ever there was a man in whose life mercy and purity and an active desire for peace were continually and everywhere in evidence, that man was Christ. If ever a man deserved to be loved and respected by everyone, that man was Christ. If ever a man should have been treated with the utmost of kindness and consideration, that man was Christ Yet, look what happened to Him. The leaders of the Church, His own people, and the leaders of the State, combined their forces to torture Him and nail Him to a cross like a hardened criminal. And the mob howled its approval. Christ saw it coming. He warned those who would walk in His way, You can expect the same kind of treatment.

In some ways the New Testament is a handbook for the persecuted. Its page:

are filled with the dynamic power of God's own Spirit to give courage and strength to the disciple of Christ. That is why reading the Bible is such an unreal experience for so many today. Our trouble is not with the King James Version, or with any other version. Our trouble is with us: we are too accommodating about our faith. We are tolerated rather than persecuted, and our Christianity is tame and stifled. We are all too often ready to compromise our faith, and we settle for a "jellyfish" type of discipleship that has no backbone. We don't really listen to the spine tingling call of Jesus to adventure - and risk - and glorious persecution, when He says, Follow Me! The way that He leads is the hard road to the Cross, and we would rather live out our lives in non-committal comfort and ease - without conflict. Therefore, we close our ears to the Voice of Scripture: Stand firm in the faith! Act like men! Be meek, be merciful - but be tough! St. Paul wrote to young Timothy: Take your share of hardship, like a good soldier of Christ Jesus! But how many of our young people are not willing to sacrifice their faith for the sake of a husband or wife? I'm changing my faith, pastor. You see, I don't want any disharmony or conflict in our home. So I'm joining my spouce's church. Just like that! - as though the love of a mate were more important than the love of Christ and faithfulness to His Word! Don't misunderstand me: I would be the last to deny the value of a home that is united in its worship - that families that pray together, stay together; but the solution to the problem is not taking the line of least resistance, but finding a mate who is as true and loyal to the Savior as you are!

Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake! - for living God's way. Many who call themselves Christian are careful not to let the light of their Christian faith shine brightly at all times, so that it is not even visible and they can contentedly say, I've never been persecuted for my faith. Christ says that if we are Christian in all our doings and dealings, we can expect opposition. It may be nothing more serious than a word of ridicule or a sneer of superiority or it may be physical violence. But if nobody dislikes you, you probably have no firm convictions or at least you do not show them. A professor at the Seminary once gave

this bit of advice: Try to be friends with everyone in your congregation, but try even harder always to be a friend of Christ. As Christ's friend, you cannot always be friends with everybody. If you have been pastor of a congregation for five years and have no enemies, you probably have no backbone either!

The world will always hate Christ and His disciples. It always has and it always will. This is so because Christ stands in contrast to unrighteous living and reproves it. Christ's enemies put Him out of the way because they could no longer stand the glaring contrast between His holiness and love and their hypocrisy and selfishness. The forces of light and the forces of darkness cannot live together in harmony. The forees of darkness will seek to destroy the forces of light. Those who in faith follow Christ will find they are not welcome everywhere. They are not always good mixers. They can therefore expect some opposition in the form of ridicule and persecution. - examples

Each of us must see ourself personally involved in Calvary and all that happened there. Christ is suffering, dying there in our behalf, for our sin. Our own lives are nailed with His to the Cross. St. Paul put it this way: We are buried with Christ by baptism into death, that like as He was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. We are the ones who stand before Pilate and witness to the truth. We are the scorned, the slapped, the flogged, the persecuted. We lift a cross to our bleeding shoulders; we wear the crown of thorns, we feel the blows of the hammer as the spikes are driven through our hands and feet. As He was in this life, so are we: dead to this world and its sin, that we might be alive to God through Christ our Lor

Lovers of Jesus Christ have always counted it a privilege to be allowed to suffer on His account. The early Christians faced the lions with a song of praise on their lips. In our day a new persecution of the Church has arisen, so subtle that it does not appear to be persecution at all. Those behind the Iron Curtain who are assigned the task of indoctrinating the masses away from their faith were not born yesterday. They know that the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the

Church. Wherever possible they have sought to avoid the stigma of direct persecution. Christians who have spent time in Communist labor camps and prisons tell how the discussion method is used to bring about acceptable points of view. Endless conversations are carried on, day after day, until the mind is worn to a stupor, and almost any proposition seems credible enough to elicit a convincing response. No lions, no gladiators, no libations on the altar of Diana are as terrifying to face as this kind of diobolical brainwashing. The wheel has come all the way around, as Marxism is made the opium of the people. So rapid is their progress that some who know the situation feel that they will conquer our country within 4 or 5 years. This they intend to do without firing a shot. But even if Communism should capture the wavering population of the globe, and set up its Pilate and its Caiaphas who, in the name of freedom of religion, would condemn the Church of Jesus Christ to the Cross, it does not matter. The Church belongs at the Cross. That is the only place where it will ever find Victory. That is the only place where the world has ever discovered the true significance of the Gospel.

NP says that To be persecuted for ~~Christ's~~ His sake is a tremendous blessing. Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Christ congratulates those who suffer for His sake. The Kingdom of heaven belongs to them. Their persecution is even here and now a badge of honor and privilege. It is a reassurance of their membership in His Kingdom. It is a reassurance that they are truly disciples of the Lord. It is a mark that they have joined the great company of the faithful prophets & martyrs. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for My sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad; for great is your reward in heaven; for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you. Though the disciple finds himself with Job, stripped of everything but God, he still has great cause for rejoicing. God has noticed, and God will remember - and what we have lost for Jesus' sake, we will be given back ~~in double measure~~ a hundredfold - in an eternity of glory and bliss in heaven.

Amen.