Sunday School Rally Day
Rolling Meadows - 1966

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IN NOMINE JESU

2 Timothy 3: 14,15 But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings which are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

ZOO KEEPERS

I suppose we could begin this sermon by taking a good, hard look at what is happening to so many young people today. They are like rebels without a cause. Their lives are empty, hollow, and without a solid foundation. They can see no real purpose, or meaning, or destiny for their existence. The result is that they break the law, hold drunken parties ~~experiment with alcoholic drinks~~, get hopped up with goof balls and narcotics, exploit sex - just to get a few kicks out of life, a few laughs, something of what they call excitement. There is nothing else. In our own city of Rolling Meadows the number of young people booked by our police department has nearly doubled during the last year and a half. What is even more frightening is that an ever increasing number of those who have run afoul of the law are still in Grade School.

When I say this, I'm not just talking about morals and ethics. I'm talk about something which is far more basic and fundamental. I'm talking about what has gone wrong at the ground of our being - at the heart and core of our existence Just this last week a mother cornered me on the church steps. She was concerned about her son - concerned probably more than she wanted to intimate. Pastor, she said, I'm worried about my son. (He is a boy who is still in Grade School.) Rather nonchalantly he told me one day, 'I wish I were dead.' At first, she said, I shrugged it off as just a passing mood. But when he said it a second, and third, and fourth time, I became quite concerned; because my son is not one to just 'kid around.' He is ~~a serious boy, and~~ usually very serious about what he says. Pastor what should I do? I mention this, with permission of the mother, because it illustrates so personally and graphically what we are trying to get across.

When this kind of depressive withdrawal goes the other way and becomes overt, you have what was described in last Friday's newspaper. Five boys (the oldest was 15 and the youngest 12) poured gasoline on a derelict alcoholic who was lying in a drunken stuper in New York City and then struck a match to set him

on fire as a flaming torch. Or consider what happened in a Midwester City, when 37 college students were arrested in a leading hotel. If there had been sufficient manpower, police explained, at least 50 more could have been arrested while racing lightly clad through the nine floors of the hotel in what one of the policemen descrived as a full-blown Roman orgy. The father of one of the girls, when informed that his daughter was under arrest, is said to have heaved a great sigh of relief and to have remarked, Oh, is that all? I thought she had been in an accident or somethin

If we were to characterize this father, we might describe him more as a zoo keeper than as a parent. The truth is that too many parents deserve to be categorized as zoo keepers, raising only educated animals who are suitable for public display only behind iron bars and glass - to keep the public from getting hurt. Where do young people get the idea that they are responsible to no one but to themselves - subject to no authority other than the dictates of their own wants and desires - without the necessity of conforming to any standard, and answerable to no one for what they are and how they conduct themselves? More often than we adul care to admit, the problem must be laid squarely at the door of fathers and mother who have washed out on their responsibilities and have become zoo keepers instead of parents. I know men who spend a great deal more time and are much more interested in training a good hunting dog than in raising the boys and girls God has given them. There are women who are more careful about their cat than they are about their children. Animals in the zoo receive elaborate, expensive, highly scientific treatment. The right temperature and humidity are always maintained in their enclosures. They are provided with the right kind of food; they are given vitamins, shots, antibiotics, and the best care science can provide. Competent veterinarians are on call at all times. No expense is spared to keep them ~~in a~~ healthy ~~conditions~~. But dogs and cats don't go to Sunday School, and chimpanzees don't listen to Bible stories. Parents are little more than zoo keepers when they are concerned with little more than dressing their children up in the latest cloth for public display, when mothers are more interested in dancing lessons than they are in the kind of woman their little girl is going to be; when fathers are more

about the college their boys are going to attend than the kind of men they will turn out to be.

It is nothing less than criminal to neglect the spiritual life of a child. When parents no longer recognize children for what they are, gifts of God made by Him and made for Him - to serve Him with all the magnificent capacities they have as human beings - they often get what they ask for: little animals with all the instincts of the jungle. Yet many parents feel that when they have given their children food, shelter, medicine, and education, they have given them everything. They are not parents; they are zoo keepers. They could do just as well with a dog or a cat whe it comes to fulfilling their God-given destiny as parents.

To a young man who was almost like a son to him, St. Paul wrote: Continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writing which are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. This young man, Timothy, was a young man of mature promise. He got this way not suddenly or spectacularly, but through continued instruction of the right kind ever since he had been an infant. His parents, or at least his mother and grandmother, did not regard him as an animal. They took him for what he was, a gift of God endowed with all the qualities God has bestowed upon the crown of His creation. They brought him up and educated him to serve the God who made him, the God who redeemed him in Jesus Christ, the God who would one day bring him into the kingdom prepared from the foundation of the world for those that love Him.

While I certainly do not despise the religious training given to children in church and Sunday School, I would have you note that St. Paul is talking here about the training of a boy at home. If there is no respect for the Bible at home, parents need not be surprised when their children get out of hand away from home. Children are well off who learn at home what their parents expect of them. Especially fortunate are those children whose parents make it clear that what they expect has been drawn from the Word of God, the Holy Scriptures. Here is the authority of God Himself speaking to men - to parents that they may be worthy of their high calling, and to boys and girls that they may become dutiful sons and daughters,

not only of their parents but of the living God.

I'm not talking about a mere formality. It is not a question of just reading a chapter or so from the Bible every day. Timothy learned the Holy Scriptures, what they have to say to everyone of us in the ordinary affairs of life. From the Scriptures he received not just a formal training but an education of the mind, heart, and soul, leading to a great end: faith in Christ Jesus. The Sacred Writings have to be taught, not just read. Faith in Christ is not just a dead, drab, dry intellectual thing - it is a life, a living relationship with Him who is Lord and Savior, and our Friend forever. Maybe this is why I see red & my dander get up when parents offe as an excuse for not coming to church the fact that they had all this crammed down their throats when they were children and are not about to let that happen now; — when they send their children only very spasmodically to Sunday School and church as though this were something that has very little importance; when they complain abo the amount of homework the pastor gives to their children for confirmation, what with church attendance, and Sunday School attendance, and sermon notes, and memory work, and assignments from the Bible and catechism (what's the matter with kids these days - I was confirmed with only one year's instruction) - are they that dumb? - and now they have even added two years of weekday school that they call pre-confirmation instruction!

Since when has God's love in Christ who lived, & suffered & died, & rose again for us, ever been crammed down anyone's throat?

Christianity is caught, not just taught. Children catch it from their parents who do not teach them one thing and act out the opposite; who do not just send their children to Sunday School and church but bring them in the fear of the Lord; who do not just go through the formalities of religious training but impart the whole spirit of the Gospel to their children with complete understanding of the fact that the Scriptures have a purpose: to instruct their children for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. Extensive survey has demonstrated that when parents merely send their children to church, rather than bringing them, only 20% remain faithful throughout their lives. When parents bring their children to church, over 80% remain faithful.

One final word: To instruct children for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus means more than just imparting the facts. Parents, teachers (and I

certainly include myself here) - we cannot teach the Scriptures as if we were teaching a course in history. It is not enough that our children are able to recite all the pat answers and cliches - Jesus died for my sins so that I can go to heaven, with no other effect or influence on their lives. The Word of God is always a big Word, a powerful Word, a dynamic Word - able to re-create, reconstruct, ~~and~~ transform, and reform - giving new life and salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. Our job is to bring the Gospel message to bear on the lives and hearts of the children who have been put under our charge. It is not enough just to tell a Bible story and be done with it. The Scriptures must be taught so that they relate to the lives of children here and now. They must be able to identify themselves with the real people of the Bible & God's whole rescuing, redeeming activity and know that Christ is also for them too and wants to ~~with them and~~ give Himself to them here and now. They need to be instructed! And that is why we must sometimes read a text or a ~~Bible story~~ lesson over and over again - 7,8,10,20 times - searching the commentaries - until as the Englishman says, The penny drops; and we are able, with the Holy Spirit's help, to make the message real, and relevant, and meaningful to those whom we are teaching. Our task is to make God real in Jesus Christ. Our job is to present Him so vitally, so vividly, as Lord and Savior of all mankind, that men will know whom they are rejecting if ultimately they come to that - that they will be haunted forever by the picture of loveliness that we were able to give them - the picture of Him who suffered and died for the sake of us all. Then we will be able to tell our children what St. Paul told Timothy: Continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the Sacred Writings which are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. Then we will really be fulfilling our destiny as parents and teachers - not zoo keepers. Amen.