Septuagesima Sunday
Bessemer - 1960
W. Hemmitter - 1961
Rolling Meadows - 1963

Rev. Carl F. Thrun

IN NOMINE JESU

I Corinthians 9: 27 But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.

DON'T TOY WITH HOLY THINGS

When I Survey the Wondrous Cross - everything that is worth anything begins there - at the Cross. Real love, wisdom, understanding, strength, courage, peace, hope, joy - life itself has fullness and meaning only at the Cross. The Cross is the expression of our deepest Christian feeling no matter what the time or place. It belongs everywhere, and not least does it belong in the Christian's living heart. Survey the Cross, and all the mercy and redeeming love of God will come tumbling into your weary soul, bringing the Bread, the inexhaustible Manna of joy and salvation. Look and live!

The Cross - that is what made Paul the man he was. God forbid that I should glory save in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Cross - Paul lived and breathed it! He knew nothing else! Paul could never survey the Cross in a detached, objective manner. Paul always looked at the Cross as an intensely personal thing. Paul saw in the Cross of Christ primarily the Cross of Paul - the concentrated essence of the whole hell which Paul had deserved to suffer and which the Prince of Glory, once for all, suffered in Paul's place. This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief. I was before a blasphemer and a persecutor and injurious; but I obtained mercy. He loved me and gave Himself for me. That, to Paul, was the everlasting amazement. That made for him the gallows of Golgotha into the only thing that ever really happened. That moved him to pour contempt on all his pride. That captured him, soul and body, for Christ. That made him the slave of Love. That infected him with the most insatiable ambition the world has ever witnessed. That obsessed him from the sands of Damascus to the executioner's block in Rome, driving him from city to city, and from country to country, forever crying, I am a debtor - I am a debtor, until he could cry no more.

All of this boils down to one thing: Love so amazing, so divine, Demands my soul, my life, my all. Christianity is not an abstraction. It is a concrete, vital, compelling, moving force. It demands everything you are and have. The

Cross made Paul a selfless tool - to be used by Christ. It turned him into a beautiful fool, and then it let him die for his madness. The lesson? If you don't want such a thing to happen to you, then keep your eyes off the Cross, or give it no more than an occasional glance. And always be careful not to become overly emotional about it. Don't lose your head or your heart to Christ. And then people will not think you queer. Then they will not want to murder you for your magnificient madness.

Real Christianity always involves a fight. Paul knew this only too well. That is why he ever and again looked back at the Cross. For Paul the devil was a very real enemy. He was an enemy to be fought. He was an enemy who sought control of his body - his passions, desire, and ambitions. There could be no peace-treaty with this enemy, no concession, no compromise. So fight I, not as one that beateth the air. Paul was no shadowboxer, fighting he knew not what. Paul was fighting a real devil, who with all cunning and guile wanted to lead him away from the Cross. In the strength of the Spirit Paul fought with all his might, lest the devil persuade him to toy with the holy things of God - His mercy and love and forgiveness - and give in to the weakness of his carnal flesh so that finally this great Apostle would find himself not in heaven but hell. So, giving himself completely the ~~the~~ Cross, Paul cried: I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.

The devil is a real enemy for every preacher. How satan would love us to become so accustomed ~~with~~ to dealing with the holy things of God that they lose their appeal and amazing wonder. How the devil would like to lead us away from the Cross! He would urge us to preach our own pious platitudes and human wisdom rather than Jesus and His love. The devil would scratch our pride, whisper how grand and glorious our preaching is, until we are so wrapped up in self that we forget the Cross. Self - how that fellow can puff up and strut and refuse to shrink to size. Self- how I love to listen to myself. The devil, of course, is right there urging me to believe that I really am something because I am a preacher; because I have a ~~Reverend~~ Pastor in front of my name; because people tell me at

times what a wonderful sermon I preached; and because I then smugly forget that if it was indeed wonderful, then I did not preach it; and that if I did preach it, then it was surely so wonderful that it stank. At such a time, I must by the Spirit's power fight my way back to the Cross, kneel there, and pray: Lord, Forgive me and make me humble! Help me so to preach that people see not me, but Thee

It is said that when Francis of Assisi was once applauded by his people at the conclusion of a sermon, he went home in tears to repent because men had applauded him rather than bowing in reverence at the feet of his Lord. I am nothing; my Jesus and His Cross must be everything! Therefore, with Paul, I must fight; I must keep under my body, and bring it into subjection; lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.

The devil is also a real enemy for you. He would turn you away from the Cross too. He would bring you to church to listen to the preacher and not to Jesus. He would persuade you to apply the truths of God's Word to everyone but yourself. He would teach you that Christ and the Cross are really nothing to get excited about. You've heard it all before. Nobody really expects you to be a madman for this strange Man on Calvary. We expect our pastor to be a Jesus-man; that's what we pay him for. But me? I have to live in the world, and the world expects me to be a regular guy. Don't sell the devil short! The drift which characterizes a world that is all too ready to listen to the Prince of Darkness is and will always be a real problem for you as a Christian. At the most unexpected times you will discover that the devil has been hard at work in your life, seeking to pull you from the cross. Right under your nose, jealousy and quarreling will arise as you sit down with fellow Christians to do the work of the Kingdom. The nastiness that underlies a pietism based upon self-righteousness, making you feel exalted and superior to the man next door; the capabilities of the tongue when it is released from its obligations to Christ; the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life - all point to the fact that the devil goeth about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour; whom resist steadfast in the faith.

Resist him steadfast in the faith! Back, back to the Cross - you must fight your way in the Spirit's power - and there sacrifice your life to His love! It takes real men, Spirit-filled men, to be Christian men. It takes real men, who are willing to be known as the world's rubbish, to keep on trying to win people for God in the kind of world in which we live. It takes fighting men, men who are aware of the devil's deceptive power and by God's grace are conscious of the danger of toying with holy things and falling from the faith, to cry out with Paul: I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others (told others the story of life and salvation in Christ), I myself should be a castaway.

The point is this - do you need Christ? Do you feel your need for Christ? Do you feel your need for Christ as the man in the death cell feels the need for pardon, as the starving beggar feels the need for bread, as the body feels the need for breath, as the bride feels the need for the bridegroom? Then Christ will move into your life. He will own you. And each day you will find Him more necessary, more desirable, more indispensable. You cannot be without Him, His satisfying presence, for even an hour. You hear Him speaking to you, wherever you are, in familiar words that warm your heart and that ever and again cause your heart to speak to Him. And all the while something is happening to you. You are being filled. Your emptiness is drinking in of His fullness. His knowledge, wisdom, love, sympathy, strength - all that Christ is and has, is becoming increasingly yours. And because you know you are worthy of none of these things and that you could have none of these things but for that amazing Cross - the wood on which God died for you to make you the everlasting heir of all things - because you know this, you will pour contempt on all your pride, keep under your body, and bring it into subjection. You are nothing; Christ is everything! Christ Crucified is your ALL. He is - in Luther's words - the beginning, middle, and end of all the spiritual and divine thoughts which you may have at any time day or night. Then you, too, will be a slave of His love. Amen.