

THE  
SPIRIT OF LENT

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THE SPIRIT OF LENT



# The SPIRIT OF LENT

By  
THEODORE HEIMARCK



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Gratefully dedicated  
to  
The Reverend and Mrs. Thor T. Heimarck  
my parents  
and  
Dr. and Mrs. O. H. Hegge  
my wife's parents



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THEODORE HEIMARCK





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## Chapter One

# The Judgment in the Lord's Supper

*For he that eateth and drinketh, eateth and drinketh judgment unto himself, if he discern not the body.*

I Corinthians 11:29

**T**ODAY is Ash Wednesday! All Christendom is again observing in solemn mood and grave rite the return of the Lenten season. We are part of an innumerable throng of worshippers intent on calling to remembrance the prodigious cost of the salvation offered in Christ Jesus. That price is plainly marked in Holy Communion, and it seems fitting that we should here begin our Lenten pilgrimage. An invitation, therefore, has been issued to you to eat and drink at the Lord's Table in the cordial fellowship of God's family, remembering and obeying Christ's command, "This do ye in remembrance of me."

But let it be plainly understood that the invitation is not lightly issued, and must not be lightly accepted. For no one can approach the Lord's Table without entering into judgment. The obvious reason for this is that He, even our Lord, claims without reservation that He is *the* "meat" and *the* "drink" which alone can sustain life—to refuse it, He insists, can only mean utter destruction and death. Words like that mean judgment abroad, and so St. John understood the situation, for he put it down as certainty that the Christ bluntly claimed that "the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son" (John 5:22). Even a casual reader of Scripture ought quickly to conclude that Jesus is actually a divider of mankind, one who cleaveth asunder, like a wedge, in action of approval and condemnation.

Nor would we have it understood that this action is limited to communion. It is not limited at all, but it is somehow intensified and brought into focus here as nowhere else. Here as nowhere else, we stand with fear and trembling before the revelation of the frightful penalty of sin, exposed so shockingly in the suffering and dying Lamb of God.

Woe to that individual who dares to stand jaunty and self-satisfied before this judgment on sin, the thing that crucifies God's best gift, for the superficial are always resisted and met with

uncompromising wrath. Blessed alone is that one who, in the judgment upon sin, finds the freedom from sin urged upon him by an overwhelming desire to flee from the company of those who crucify, and to stand in the presence of the Crucified, restored and forgiven. There are actually two judgments, you see, not one. There is the judgment of condemnation, and the judgment of approval and acquittal.

The Apostle Paul understood this double aspect of judgment in the Lord's Supper and urged that every care be exercised to receive forgiveness and peace and to escape wrath. This concern is the reason, of course, for his alarm at the situation existing in the church at Corinth. Impatient with their carelessness, he cries, "Whosoever shall eat the bread or drink the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord." This sober warning came as a climax to a series of charges reviewing their guilt of misconduct. To read this summary of the affairs in the Church is to know that the Apostle is in dead earnest. His tone is indignant, his words furious with undisguised dismay and vibrant with something akin to a consuming fire. You are wrong, he explodes, dreadfully wrong, and sin against Christ and do crucify Him anew with your hateful class rivalry, love of display, pampering of the flesh, and silly divisions. In plain language he lays bare their guilt of abusing sacred

rights and privileges; he insists that a judgment of mercy is impossible, that a judgment of wrath is inevitable. For, says he, you do not “discern the Lord’s body.”

Well, that seems to be plain enough, not to “discern the Lord’s body.” It was a body that allowed us to have the incarnate Christ and to behold His glory. It was a body, also, that brought Him into vital touch with temptation and allowed us to see Him, yet without sin. It was a body, too, that permitted Him to carry in His own person the sins of the world and suffer and die. It is trite but true that the body is and was identified with His actual life in history, and to fail to “discern the Lord’s body” must mean a failure to see *Him*.

That failure is ever with us—yes, even until today. To live “just as though He had never lived, as though He had never died” is the recurring temptation of every age. It is the temptation, too, as we confront the right use of this Lenten season. Rites, seasons, symbols, ceremonies, and sacraments have always carried within themselves the bacteria of disease and putridity. True evangelicals have known this and been afraid of their use. Even the Lenten season was subjected to long disfavor. Its observance, it was rightly said, was a frightfully dangerous solution to the problem of deepening spiritual life.

Dr. Martin Luther shared this suspicion and

was not easily reconciled to its perpetuation in the life of the Church. Small wonder, too, when it is understood how intimately Lent was associated in his mind with absurd medieval rites, passion plays, and inadequate preaching replete with farcical and fantastic anecdote and interpretation. "This is a grand gospel," said the Reformer of Matthew 15:21-28 (text for the second Sunday in Lent), "but they have appointed it for this Sunday because in it we read of driving out a devil. They want to indicate thereby that one ought to become pious and go to confession. But it is a bad and popish piety which can be stored up for the entire year and which consists in miserable fasting and unwilling confession, of which there is no commandment." It is surprising, in view of this and other harsh statements, that there was a survival of any observance of Lent in his ministry.

The fact remains, however, that Luther did not abolish Lent. This would have been an easy solution—too easy. It has always been the solution of the simple-minded, who, like Simple Simon of nursery-rime fame, still hope to get something for nothing. The Doctor of Wittenberg was right in despising this kind of answer and turning his mind towards a worthier one, one that involved the ceaseless struggle of putting meaning and significance into such aspects of the Lenten observance as could be maintained in the light of Scrip-

ture. This potentially useful period of meditation and reflection, the Passion season, was thus retained; but the danger was not erased. It thus becomes your task and mine to fill Lenten observances with significance and to carry that responsibility into any sphere where hands handle sacred things.

It is understandable that many, remembering the sins of the Church in Corinth and the subsequent rebuke, should seek to escape the risks involved in the use of the Lord's Supper by refusing to use it. It remains the easy solution to a vexing problem, but the answer of all such timid souls must be refused. Luther, be it remembered, did not insist that the observance of Lent be forsaken; and Paul did not call upon the people to give up the use of the Lord's Supper. The Professor of Wittenberg was an apt pupil of Paul and understood the profundity of the principle set forth: a *right* use means individual responsibility to "discern the body." It is fair, I believe, to say that rites, ceremonies, days, and seasons can all be used, and ought to be used—to assure and to slay. It is an individual and recurring assignment of the worshipper to see the living Jesus. Peace is found in Him, not in rite or ceremony. To miss Him is to be unworthy, for true faith fastens on Him and His work. It is this "Him" we are to be after, and our very self that He is seeking. The Holy Communion, therefore, can be said to be



constantly searching us. Probing into the secret places of the heart, it asks about motives and desires and insists that we seek a living Christ to trust with the work of justification.

We must not expect or attempt to live the Lenten season in the identical manner of the first Passion season. It is futile to desire that same mood of heavy despair. Christ is risen, the "first-fruits," and our Lent must ever be lived in that knowledge of victory and triumph. His death was important; all Gospel writers give it so much space as to make one believe it was the most important thing Jesus did. It even seems that God in heaven took care to see to it that the death of His Son could never be disputed—high and lifted up on a Cross for all to see, it was no secret that He was being put to death; and a spear thrust in the side gave terrible witness to His dying. The Christ of Galilee died publicly, and in a way it was a seal of assurance that He had lived. But of that dying, Christ Himself said that He gave up His life freely to death. He must die, He knew, and He became a willing victim. By far the easiest solution is that Christ understood that His kingdom was not and could not be of this world, and that He must give up the physical body to rule and reign in His true kingdom which is forever spiritual. It remains for man to be so stupid as to believe that kingdoms can be built of concrete and steel, be accomplished by fear, force, and

conquest. It is the wisdom of God that refuses this limited and decadent kingdom for a universal and eternal reign in the hearts of mankind. And has not that been the real strength and power of His rule? "The gates of hell shall not prevail against this Kingdom," is wonderful assurance of its permanence, but it is also quite reasonable as a conclusion; for what, indeed, can you think of or name that might even conceivably triumph over this sort of thing? Would men destroy it? Well, where will they begin? It has no boundaries, no army, no navy, and yet it is the only permanent kingdom, and the best defended. Yes, He must of necessity die. But death could not hold Him! As Lord of life He rules forever and ever, and Lent must be lived in that light.

It was necessary, as He Himself said, to go away in order that the Holy Spirit might come and lead us into all truth. To this day it is the Spirit that calls men into the Kingdom and nurtures them in the true faith. But just here we have fallen into many foolish and dangerous ideas because we have failed to understand the Spirit's work and program.

Some deludable folks keep looking for the Holy Spirit as though they expected to be overpowered by unmistakable evidence of His presence. I am increasingly suspicious of all prayers for another Pentecost because I am positive we have no reason to expect or desire one. Pentecost, let it be said

emphatically, is an event in history like the Passion and Resurrection and Incarnation—and who would have the effrontery to pray for another crucifixion? The Comforter is here according to promise, doing His work according to promise. It is only our blindness that prevents us from seeing and understanding this. We insist on looking for evidences of the Spirit, but the Spirit is here not to make Himself known but to make Christ known. “He [the Holy Spirit] shall take of mine [Christ’s] and declare it unto you.”

You see, surely, that the very work of the Spirit denies Him recognition as a special agent. It is His business to make Christ known, and to that task He ever remains faithful. The life He gives is the life of Christ. Therefore it is written (Romans 8:9b), “Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.” Scripture makes it crystal-clear that the very fruits of the Spirit are marks of Christ-likeness. Is it not time that we forsake all ambitious searching for mysterious manifestations of the Spirit, and be quite content to see Jesus only? Let that be our concern as we approach a right celebration of Lent at the Lord’s Table. We must come expecting to find a living Jesus, and seeing Him we know the Comforter will be free to work His saving, healing work.

If we are rightly to see Jesus, we must remind ourselves again and again that He is alive. Nothing seems quite so important today as to remem-

ber His words, "I will come in . . . and abide." That presence is available because He chose freely the way of death. He who might have called hosts of angels to His rescue, refused escape. Truly it is written, "Himself He could not save." Whatever else it may mean, and it does mean more, it is a plain statement of the nature of His universal reign: His reign must be spiritual. As a living spirit He is with us to this day. And spirit always seeks a body. This is true whether the spirit be good or evil. When Jesus cast out evil spirits they entered into swine or returned to the same man to make his fate the worse for not giving immediate occupancy to a good spirit. Spirit desires garb and body, and even eternity takes cognizance of that fact: there is the promise of a glorified body. "Take, eat! . . . Drink ye," surely signifies that Christ's desire is to come within to be our strength and sustenance. "This is meat indeed. . . . This is drink indeed!" Fed by His indwelling, sin loses its power and attraction, death its sting, for He has verily known and defeated all life's enemies and His victory becomes ours. Away, then, with mere trite mouthings of truths about Jesus, and let Jesus dwell in our hearts richly. "Give me Jesus, or I die!" must be the cry of desire from within, and, with Paul, it must be, "It is no longer I that live, but Christ liveth in me."

It was grim tragedy for the Corinthians not to recognize this living Christ and His complete mas-

tery of all life. This stupidity brought into jeopardy the entire structure of the Kingdom. Small wonder that the Apostle's words strike out like a lash. The cause of Christ was made too limp because of blind discipleship. It seems important to ask ourselves today whether or no we have not stood long in need of the same kind of lash. Is not our failure apparent? Is it not evident that we have been far too unwilling to know and receive this living Christ? And is not the very lack of Christ-likeness the thing that makes Christianity ridiculous in the eyes of the world? To regain this life is our hope. This hope includes a new life, and the new life is as always the very life of Christ.

I fear that many will say that this life is too high for them. We have accustomed ourselves to saying something like this, "I can not, of course, be expected to be perfect," and we think that this is the final answer and an effective stop to further urgings. But it is not! The Law is, indeed, too high for us. Just because it is, we are too content to accept failure. But the real terror of the Law is its fulfillment in the Son. Look again at His life! See! He made it! And His life is offered to us. This is His gift—our ransom.

Think of it! Free from the tyranny of sin and its power; free from death and its terror—who is there that does not want that, that does not need just that? You, with sin filling up the cup of your

life with grim unhappiness and who stand helplessly watching it spill over to drip gloom and shame on those you love. You, trying to rise again from the slavish depths of wretched personal habits that have all but destroyed you. You, sitting lonely and afraid because dim vision and shortness of breath have come to remind you of the approach of death. You, I say, need not live forever on the brink of the abyss of defeat and shame. You can have a new life, a victorious life, and you can have it today, now! Jesus is here, and calleth for you, and His voice is like running waters. Clear and clean and running and tumbling and singing and laughing, the waters tell of refreshment and hope and cleansing and life. One of God's prophets saw and understood it; cried out a glad invitation: "Ho! Every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy . . . without money and without price."

It is a fact, is it not, that the greatest stumbling-block to service for Christ and the extension of His Kingdom has been the poor showing of His friends. God help us! We have been a weak and sickly lot. It was never His plan that we should be like this, so decrepit and weak and ugly. It is His presence in our lives that can change all that, now! His presence will effectively silence the worst critics of His Church. His presence will give new visions of service and speed the day of the coming

of His Kingdom. And it is His presence that will rebuke the world and convict it of sin. "Without me ye can do nothing," but lo, "all things are possible to them that believe."

Well, here we are, you and I, just a tiny part of the great Lenten procession—and yet—and yet each one of us so important to the Christ whose Passion we all strive now to commemorate. Before us is the Lord's Table. Christ invites *us*, individually, to *come*. Woe be unto him who fails to discern the body of the Lord, but blessed is he who sees beyond the range of ordinary vision and humbly gives over his body as a dwelling-place for Christ. Ah, Christ has need of you in His work, but more important still, you have need of Christ. Then ~~come~~, come to the Lord's Table with its judgment, unafraid. Let the judgment fall on sin and unbelief, for it has no terror to such as are hid in Christ Jesus. To such, indeed, judgment means acquittal and freedom and peace and gladness and life evermore.

Come into my life, Lord Jesus.  
Come in today! Come in to stay!





## Chapter Two

# On Hindering God

First Sunday in Lent

*But He turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan; you are a hindrance to me, because your thoughts are not God's thoughts, but men's."*

Matthew 16:23 (Weymouth)

IT IS, to be sure, a horrible thought, one to bring terror charging in to claim the soul. Probably only Kierkegaard would dare to utter it, to put it down bluntly, realistically, and without apology, saying: "Let us collect all the New Testaments there are in existence, and let us carry them out to an open place or up upon a mountain, and then while we kneel down let some one address God in this fashion: "Take this book back again; we men, being such as we now are, are no good at all for dealing with a thing like this which only makes us unhappy.' Such is my proposal," he continued, "that like the inhabitants of Gadara we beseech Christ to 'depart out of our coasts.'"

Here certainly is an extraordinarily radical solution to that vexing problem of what to do about the obvious bungling which has always characterized our handling of God's truth. Most of us don't take to the idea either. As a matter of fact, it strikes us as being fearfully indecent and loathsomely impious. Impulsively and indignantly we want to hit back with quick questions and exclamations like this: "What! Shall we destroy the only hope we have? Would you have us smash the dream of ultimate destiny that has alone been able to inspire glad songs of victory? What mad folly is this? What senseless chatter!"

This shuddering and protesting is exactly what this seemingly irreverent philosopher of the North wants of us. Exasperation at his words of goading would please him no end. Only, of course, he would want it plainly understood that our reaction must go beyond hot words of rebuttal. Words, as we all know, are poor substitutes for the kind of noble living one rightly expects to follow in the train of a genuine profession of Christianity. The more one thinks about it, the more one finds difficulty in excusing so much craven behavior. For here we are, after these hundreds and hundreds of years of preaching and teaching, still lovingly fingering the garments of greatness, admiring the hue and the cut, but forever stepping back and aside when the suggestion is pressed that we pay the price and make them our possession. This

cowardly slinking away is the very thing that nettled Kierkegaard and brought his ire to bear upon the awkward and disappointing manners of Christians, and made him sternly thunder that mighty little had yet been done with the New Testament light, save sin against it—each generation carelessly trampling under foot most of its high hopes and unspeakable love.

Let us admit frankly that we need to be startled into some kind of drastic action in regard to Christ. The dull listlessness of those of us who call Him "Lord" has already given too sound a basis for the worst of all criticisms, namely, that He really does not matter. We have no business toying with divine plans and purposes. We can not and must not continually dilly-dally with God's great promises and stay indolent in the face of His prodigious assignments. It is "high time" that we do something with the stupendous and revolutionary New Testament revelations—either approve them with reckless risk of life or confess that they are much too high for us and fling them far to one side with shattering violence. It does seem braver and more nearly honest to deal thus decisively with this bold claim of Christ to be all in all.

That God in Christ should still give us opportunity to make a decision is one of the mysteries of His grace. How wonderful, indeed, does not the patience of God become when we rightly behold our spluttering blundering and our many

black pages of recorded failures, especially when we note that His patience is not yet exhausted! He still hopes to restore our souls. We can make up our minds, also, that He will never retreat from this world in confused defeat. The Cross and the resurrection tell us He is in this conflict of life to stay until His purposes are accomplished. That may take time, but what is that to Him who is eternal? His Kingdom will come and His righteousness prevail—this much we know or ought to know. In the knowledge of such patient and prevailing love we ought to gird ourselves to play the valiant part, not stand puttering with little nothings that keep us constantly in the company of those who hinder God.

We can and do hinder God. Jesus said so to His disciple Peter. "It is because you think the thoughts of men," said the Master, "that you now oppose me and become a hindrance to me."

Many of you are well acquainted with Edmund Spenser's book, *The Faerie Queen*, and know something about that tale called "The Quest of Sir Guyon." Quite readily you will recall the events that brought this brave knight to a final victory over a wicked witch, who had managed to subject an entire land. Let me remind you, though, of the scene where the company prepared to leave by boat. They are attacked again by the fierce beasts that blocked their earlier arrival; the palmer touches each one with his staff; they be-

come men again—I say “again” because the crafty witch had turned them into beasts with black magic—and there is great joy, we suppose, in the hearts of those who now find manhood’s estate restored. That is, most of them evidently found delight in such a restoration, but one, we are told, one who had been a pig, complained bitterly about it, urging his preference for the recent past, and so the palmer obligingly said, “Let Gryll be Gryll, and have his hoggish mind,” and the man was speedily granted his desire to grunt his way back to the filthy mire and slough.

There are, it seems, always those who balk at the change in status God has in mind for them—folks who prefer the contentment of an animal-like life. They live by instinct and feeling, resent the intrusions of thought, and fretfully complain of boredom when presented with opportunities to dream big dreams and see great visions. Such individuals can never be useful in building the “Eternal City” that John found so impossible to describe because its wonders exceeded the power and scope of language. All such persons insolently block out—actually hinder God. Our churches have many members who in the last analysis do not really want what God has to offer, are hopelessly earthly-minded, and who look with disdain at the life as “joint-heirs with Christ” that God shoves toward them with eager hands. Of course they are hindering God, that is plain. To all such

comes the plea to look again at God's intentions and plans for mankind. It is for you, too, "though your sins be as scarlet," and though your past be a long list of nothing but defeats and a history of absorption in worldliness. Come, press forward to the new life so graciously proffered again in Jesus' name, and begin to think God's thoughts after Him of redemption and glory and sonship.

The text for today, however, deals more especially with those who do call Christ their friend, and who do delight in His company. They, too, often hinder God. God's cause can not stand still in some pleasant retreat but must be thrust into the center of all life for decision and action. To tug at God's sleeve and to voice our impossible plans for a salvation that is cost-free and cozy is to betray Him and His cause, and means that we are actually on the side of the enemy of truth. Peter should have known better.

It happened in Caesarea Philippi. This, as you probably know, is the most picturesque spot in all Palestine. Here stands proud Mount Hermon, snow-capped and haughty in its successful challenge of the clouds. Everywhere one sees flourishing vegetation, inviting glens, and laughing waters. Surrounded by autumn's prodigal splurge of color, with the hush of nearby woods, Jesus and the disciples were snatching needed rest from overcrowded days of arduous tasks and finding some relief from the curious gaze of an increasingly

hostile people who, more and more, coarsely accosted Him and them with flippant questions and ill-disguised contempt. It was good to rest. It was a beautiful place to tarry in intimate and good comradeship. Against that peaceful background the thoughts Jesus expressed, of coming conflicts, pain, death, and a little-understood resurrection, came with horrific force by contrast. Gloomy disciples listened, looked despondently at Peter, their spokesman, who in turn managed to get the Master aside where he felt free to give Him some friendly counsel about not going knowingly into such traps and sorrows and sufferings as evidently awaited Him in the city. "This," he said with confidential urging, "this shall not be unto Thee." He was not allowed to complete the hastily arranged arguments, because he was quickly interrupted by the voice of Christ that unusually sharply said, "Get behind me, Satan, . . . you are a hindrance to me, because your thoughts are not God's thoughts, but men's."

Not many days later, disciples, left at a nonplus by such determination, followed the sure step of their Lord as He "set His face" towards Jerusalem. The city waited impatiently for His arrival—that very city that H. V. Morton, in his book *In the Steps of the Master*, describes as being the color of a lion-skin. "There are," he writes, "tawny yellows and dark browns and pale golds . . . a city like a lion crouched in the sun, watchful, vindic-

tive, and ready to kill." Here Jesus meant to go to challenge evil, to reveal God's truth, and to die. We can not wonder too much that the disciples followed a bit bewildered and somewhat dismayed.

There is a Caesarea Philippi in religious experience. It must not be belittled or made to appear unreal. The "struggle and strife we find in this life" needs a healing and quiet place where stability and wholeness may surge back into sick and feverish lives. Thank God, we are invited to a place of rest and to a place of peace where burdens are laid down and the weary welcomed. There is nothing surer than the tender arms of the Good Shepherd who carries the lost to green pastures and living waters. And yet we are not to think that this is it—that Christianity has its beginning and ending in a sweet fellowship with Jesus beside a shady brook far from the hustling throngs in the market-places of life.

It is dreadfully wrong to keep talking about the Kingdom as though it had only a door, as though beyond this entrance there was not a road—a "Way." Conversion is a beautiful experience of turning eyes and steps homeward and being gathered into warm arms of welcome and forgiveness. The temptation is to stay in this experience—to re-do it, to re-live it, to tarry. "Lord, it is good to be here!" said one, and we can believe it is true also of this beginning of the Christian life.



Yet it does become highly dangerous to keep talking about conversion as though this indeed were the chief end of Christianity. It is not. It is factually the first step, the beginning. I do not want to be misunderstood here, and yet I am anxious to have you thoroughly instructed in this vital matter and can not let you go before you see that that new Christ-life born within is meant for sturdy uses and not only quiet and comfort.

Paul, it is said, spent some three years in a wilderness after his dramatic meeting with Jesus on the Damascus road. It would be interesting to know if there was a struggle within, fierce and long, before he consented to the open road again. It would have been natural, I think, for him to have said to his Savior something about liking the isolation of their place of retreat, about enjoying the bliss of long hours with Him who loved him and rescued him from that dreadful blindness of only yesterday, and something, too, about staying there forever. But Paul could not stay. He was made to shoulder his way back into the crowds of Jerusalem, to walk "the Way," and to suffer the indecencies of prisons, the indignities of hatreds, the piercing pain of whip and stone. Out of this kind of conflict and hardship he wrote to the Colossians (1:24), "Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church."

Whatever else this word means, it means at least that Christ's life, in the hearts of believers, is not wholly comfort and nice ease. He is as little wanted today as on that day we call "Good Friday." Sooner or later we all discover that He does not fit into the world as we know it, and never will. Whenever He puts in an appearance, there is the far-off rumble of conflict and the noise of battle. Into that furious fray He will go. We would stop Him if we could, because we know that we will be dragged along with Him to our chagrin and disgrace.

What one man has called "the cruel promises of Christ"—promises of hatred that rages and spends itself in every trick of cruelty, oppression, and destruction—is a fact that we must reckon seriously with. It is our refusal to suffer that has made Christianity a thing of no importance—a thing of which it is said, "It may do you some good and certainly can not hurt you." Just where is the Cross in that sort of thing? The Cross is gone! We have managed somehow to make Christianity a Caesarea Philippi—a quiet corner for ourselves and Christ in some beautiful church building where we can fellowship an hour or two without fear of interruption. The unkind and unfriendly world out there—well, let it go its way without challenge from Him or us, or Him in us. But the feet of Christ are growing restless. One can sense it in the uneasy conscience of the Church,

His body. His penetrating eyes are upon us again in rebuke for hindering the march of the Kingdom. We must move, or be left behind—His face is set “toward Jerusalem” where He will go to judge and be judged, reviled, mocked, scourged, crucified, and, glory be, rise again the third day.

We can not protect Jesus or keep Him safe from defilement. He always did intend to be on the offensive in the struggle of life. The believer in the Cross must go bravely into the streets of any and every Jerusalem with condemnation for false beliefs, uncovering with keen analysis the shallowness of materialism, prodding spiritual indifference with the voice of a prophet, overturning proud self-sufficiency with evidences of limitations of mortality, challenging drunkenness, revellings, licentiousness, and all sensual living. It is the world that is on the defensive, not the Church, His body. When the world is attacked she will strike back, remember that. She will lash out livid facedly at any who become “evil to their trade” and who threaten her deeds of darkness with the light of God.

The life of Christ constitutes judgment upon the world, and the world resents Him with every whit of strength. The world talks insistently in terms of self-seeking, sees always through the eyes of self-interest. Christ talks insistently in terms of self-sacrifice and sees always through the eyes of God’s interests. These are as incompatible as

night and day, and as surely as the darkness of the night gives way to the light of the morning and the light of the day gives way to the darkness of night, so the one must displace the other and will seek desperately to destroy the other. The resurrection tells us that Christ can not be destroyed. We need not be afraid, and we must not coax Him to tarry longer, to spare us, even yet, from the rough and tumble of boisterous ridicule, and judgment, and blood, and sweat, and tears.

Henry Sienkiewicz has graphically portrayed the days of early Christian persecution in his book, *Quo Vadis*. He imagines that Peter is leaving Rome at the urgent request of all believers who fear that his death may jeopardize the cause of Christ. With safety just ahead, Peter sees what no one else could see—a vision of the Lord. “He fell with his face to the earth, as if kissing someone’s feet,” says the author. There was a long silence broken by the sobbed words of the Apostle: “*Quo vadis, Domine?*” . . . “To Peter’s ears came a sad and sweet voice, which said, ‘If thou desert my people, I am going to Rome to be crucified a second time.’ The Apostle lay on the ground, his face in the dust, without motion or speech. It seemed to Nazarius that he had fainted or was dead; but he rose at last, seized the staff with trembling hands, and turned without a word toward the seven hills of the city. The boy, seeing this, repeated as an echo, ‘*Quo vadis, Domine?*’

'To Rome,' said the Apostle, in a low voice. And he returned."

The novelist has caught a bright glimpse of the truth that we are after just now, the truth that His saving work is hindered when we try to save our lives and His. Let us not stand in His way any longer, but gladly and confidently keep step with Him as He leads the way toward our Jerusalem and our Cross, sustained and assured in the knowledge that what looks like death is life and what looks like defeat is victory. So difficult and mysterious are the ways of God, and yet so plain, too, now that we have Christ's help and triumph. There is joy in this way of obedience, the experience of every disciple is a witness to it. "They departed from the presence of the council," we read in Acts 5:41, "rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name." Up, up, then, to such living as will bring the well-earned citation, "Men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ."



## Chapter Three

# The Song in Lent

*And when they had sung an hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives.* Mark 14:26

*And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; and hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth.* Revelation 5:9-10

THE prelude to the stirring scenes commonly associated with the Passion-tide was a song, a hymn. Bible scholars seem to think that the text was Psalms 115 to 118 or else 134. In any event, it appears certain that one of the mighty truths emphasized was the power and strength of the God of all creation, and another, God's gracious mercy and wisdom and ever-present hand extended to help and steady His servants. I am sure you would have enjoyed hearing that song. Think of it! Judas, you know, had gone out into

the night. The Lord's Supper had been instituted. A tremendously moving discourse had been heard. And now a song. Moving below the windows of that upper room more than nineteen hundred years later, we can almost hear in imagination the song of these sturdy men. And is there not one voice sweeter, fuller, and probably more intense? Is it not the voice of the Man of Galilee? Is there not a semblance of a catch in that voice? Yes, just there! At the words, "I will take the cup of salvation and call upon the name of the Lord."

One thing is certain, though, and that is that there is a song in the Passion of Christ. We labor at times to muffle it and strive to remember with the help of strong emphasis the sighs, and tears, and sweat, and blood—we can not and will not ever forget that—but always there is that song with its note of confidence and resignation to eternal plans and purposes, sounding a note of sure hope in final and eternal victory. I, for one, am glad that it is there and that it has not been erased or overlooked in foolish haste to pass over to bigger things.

It somehow seems especially fitting that a song should be included. I have read somewhere, and I think it was written by a famous theological professor, that the Lutheran position does not permit us to stand over-long before a gruesome blood-spattered crucifix. Our proper station is rather before an empty Cross betokening



His final victory—and from what little I know about it, that does seem to make good sense. If you will read some of the first sermons preached by the Apostles, you will agree that there is a melody in the Passion because of the glad news of the resurrection, and that very fact made the Gospel worth preaching. We dare not, of course, forget the untold agony of Christ's suffering and death, but there is no help for it, the song comes back again in view of our full knowledge of the "sweetest story ever told."

We ought to be singing that song today. But here it needs to be said that there are songs, and then there are songs! Some of them are not worth singing and some of them contribute not so little to the program of Satan. Is it not strange and ghastly how evil cleverly manages to use and control the gifts of God? Take our eyes, for instance, or our ears, or our taste, or our feelings, or our hands and feet—indeed all such things as are the normal equipment of man—and just review in your mind the use our Savior put these things to. But do not forget that He saw "the lilies of the field," approached the lepers, placed hands in blessing on little children. Next, please, take the worst criminal you have ever heard of, and see what made his crimes possible. But do not forget eyes, ears, hands, and feet.

Is it not a fact that evil somehow exists only by virtue of God's gifts? Evil, it seems, is always

a distortion of these marvelous creations of His to uses that are anti-God!

Then there is song. That, too, is His gift. But we all know that music and song are generously employed in the service of all that is unclean and immoral. Modern jazz has been defined as follows: "Raucous ribaldry on the surface, with a deep undercurrent of the blues, syncopated to conceal the heart-break, and blaring loud dissonant defiance at all who would presume to question the genuineness of its hilarity." Most of us know enough about this world of ours to see the insolence of the swagger in this kind of song; know, too, that it is cheap silver-plate to cover up tired, jaded, and worried spirits. That frivolous tempo and intoxicated mood of "popular" music is evidence enough to convict its lovers of unfaithfulness to life's reality, baring, as it does, its sickening intention to ignobly hide behind frippery.

It has been said that "there is no accounting for tastes," but it would have to be an extremely hasty person who would willingly apply this to all of life. The poet is much nearer to the truth when he sings: "You tell on yourself by the clothes you wear," and then continues on to describe how our choices in all such everyday affairs are a valuable clue and index to the kind of person doing the choosing. This is substantiated by the sharp analysis of the author of Proverbs (27:21, Goodspeed), when he says: "As the smelter is for silver, and

the furnace for gold, so a man is tested by his praise." *Taste* and *praise* are here understood to be identical. Both words represent a decisive selection resulting from what we are, and what we therefore approve. Into our *praise* or *approval* go all our prejudices, all our learning, all our best judgment, and all our loves. To judge a man's character and personality by the music and songs he selects seems sensible and fair. The songs a generation favors become a convenient yardstick for measuring its breadth and length and height and depth.

Listen with care to the "popular" songs of to-day if you would understand this generation. Tell me, what are your conclusions as to the kind of people who swing through life on their scales? You must agree it is almost certain that it is a very clever generation, for the intricate tonal combinations are nothing less than evidences of highly developed skills. And it is quite certain, too, that it is a superficial generation bent on having fun, for the broken rhythm and careless text tell a story of people intent on entertainment. And the great company devoted to its interests indicates that it is "big business." But despite all the activity of its organization, it is becoming more and more difficult to stir the crowd out of boredom. Futility is openly confessed in the entire extravaganza. The brazen nakedness of its appeal to the vulgar, the crude, and the animal instinct is evi-

dence enough that it is rotten at the core, and many people are sickening of the stench and seeking something more satisfying. Gradually there is developing a consciousness that something important has been left out of life. They want to find that something. The appeal of the life of play is growing dim in the light of an uneasy revelation that "life is more than food and raiment."

I do not think this is too much to say about it, not in the light of the fact that the smartest leaders of bands and orchestras are beginning to include at least one solid, substantial, and age-proved song or hymn. People like it, and more and more insist upon it. Maybe Dr. Kirk is right (*A Design for Living*, Harris Elliott Kirk, Fleming H. Revell Co., 1943): "The whole world is suffering from an exhausted and overstrained emotionalism, and the backslider is filled with his own ways. Self-indulgence has lost its appeal and man is bitterly conscious of the fact that the way of the transgressor is hard." The songs of just yesterday and the trend of today seem at least to bear this out.

Several years ago Will Durant said, "We move into an age of spiritual exhaustion and despondency like that which hungered for the birth of Christ. . . . The greatest question of our time . . . is whether man can bear to live without God." Dr. Kirk quotes Katherine Mansfield as saying: "I do think that one must have some big thing to live by, and one reason for the great

poverty of art is that artists have got no religion, and they are, in the words of the Bible, sheep without a shepherd. One can't drift, and everybody is drifting nowadays." The confusion and the growing despair are the challenge that confronts the Christian Church today. But there must be no complacency, no smugness, no "I told you so," for it will not be easy to win with promises these discouraged folks who have listened to promise after promise and chased and chased in faith that the promises of the "best" and "biggest" and most "sensational" meant life and gladness and even peace. The Christian promises must be backed by radiant lives, and with a song that can be sung when life is most real and most strained.

We have songs and hymns available that fit the hour, but we do not know them—at least, not well. This is partly due to the fact that we have too many melodies that feebly attempt to match the "popular" with jingle and jangle, and too many texts that justify John Haynes Holmes in writing (*Christian Century*, June 10, 1942): "The average Protestant hymnbook of the last century was an almost hopeless collection of literary and spiritual trash, illustrating how easy is the descent from the simple and natural to the obviously cheap and sentimental."

I can believe a famous choir director was wiser than he thought when he said to a group of us: "If the selection of a new pastor was left to me,

I'd invite every man recommended to submit the titles of his ten favorite hymns, and I'd know quickly the man to suggest and call without further inquiry into qualifications."

Before you throw the idea overboard in disdain, try it out on yourself. You will be amazed at what such a list will reveal of your theology, or lack of it; of your spiritual experience, or lack of it; as well as the degree of appreciation which is yours of culture, history, and philosophy. I can think of worse ways to investigate a man, including the popular one-sermon-test by a committee of five—five can comfortably travel in one car, you know. But let that pass, and remember that right selection and appreciation seem to presuppose competent judgment.

What is obviously needed is a standard. I should like to propose the "new song" of Revelation as an appropriate guide. "Thou art worthy," the song of heaven begins. Ah, how our hearts pant for something worthy of our best efforts, our time, and our love. The vision of John affirms what men approved of God have been saying generation after generation: there is something in life that is worthy of the most precious thing we possess, namely, God made known in Christ.

"The four and twenty elders fall down before him . . . and worship him that liveth forever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying, Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory

and honor and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created." There must be eternity in our song, you may be sure of that. There must be a God who reigns forever; a God before whom we can throw down our crowns in complete resignation. We want that and need it, and it is in the "new song."

Breathless, bewildered, and anxious men and women will gladly throw down the symbol and reality of self-rule if they know where to surrender their crowns with safety and wisdom. Here before the throne of the author of life is the perfect answer.

Truly we are "fearfully and wonderfully" made, for life flowing from Him must return to its source before life is fulfilled and eternity is won. We belong to each other, and "what God has joined together, let not man put asunder." That you recognize as being part of the marriage service of the Church. It is appropriate. Have you never stood astounded at that mysterious power that draws man and woman together in matrimony? Have you never sensed that life is best and richest and fullest and most natural in real homes?

I recall walking through the woods, far removed from civilization, with a member of my parish. We happened upon a little shack where a man lived by choice in a solitary mode. It aroused my curiosity. I asked questions. My com-

panion said something like this: "Yes, I know something about this man. I know that he has lived in this way for many years. He very seldom leaves the woods, and then only for very brief visits to town for necessities. It is very difficult to visit with him. He is gruff, blunt, and curt in whatever conversation can be managed. We generally make it a point to leave him alone. And you know, pastor, knowing him has persuaded me of the truth that 'it is not *good* for man to be alone.' "

It is such an obvious thing in life, this Adam and Eve, as to hardly need restatement. Because of it, one has a right to expect that the intimate relationship of marriage might possibly become a way of expressing the relationship between man and God—and Scripture is full of it. There is a "marriage feast," and there is a "bride," and there is a "husband," and all tell the story of God and man belonging naturally and creatively together.

Well could Saint Augustine confess a "restless heart until it found its rest in Thee," a Creator God. Augustine, mind you, knew something about life and had tested its gayety and vulgarity. He had fondled its sham and caressed its thrills until, satiated to the point of nausea, he stumbled one day into the presence of God, where all things were compelled to tell their true worth, and, seeing the nothingness of all that life had meant before, he stooped low to have God give him a



new hope and purpose. What could he do but throw his crown before the throne of Him who is and ever shall be, world without end? And Augustine did that. With the crown went all his talents and all his energy to a new life of service. You can not read his story without knowing that he is trying to say over and over again, "Thou art worthy!"

But no one knows those words unless he has first learned the reality of what the "new song" confesses next: "For thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood . . . and hast made us unto our God kings and priests and we shall reign." Here is the reason for the glad exclamation, "Thou art worthy." We can safely trust Him with our crowns because He loves us. God cares! And that is no guess, no idle conjecture, but something demonstrated in this life and from out of this life. "God so loved the world, that he gave his son," says Scripture. All world history bears it out.

He did live, and He did die—there is no question about it. His life and work mean that the obstacles have been cleared away, and we, who were at odds with God, have a road opened to friendship.

Micah has a striking word for this work of the Messiah. He calls Him the "breaker." This word is evidently intended to convey the thought of one who goes before to break up and break down all

forces, powers, and obstacles that prevent His people from marching to freedom. He is a liberator. The new song John heard calls Him a *Redeemer*. The idea and the experience are the same.

I know there are many of you who have experienced this. You have been wooed to God by the Lenten cross. You have come to the side of the Savior, ashamed of your sins that crucified Him, and been persuaded there that the cross guarantees forgiveness, that the burden and guilt of sin can here be safely laid down, and that at the cross your God meets you, not with cruel censorious words, but with an offer of friendship—a friendship that a soul craves and finds natural and so satisfying that no word will do but *home*.

But why do we not say so? If we know the “new song” why do we not let it ring out with a full voice? So many are waiting for the hope and gladness of it and trying to hum little snatches of it, little phrases that hint at God or eternity or universality (remember, it says distinctly, “out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation”). We in the Christian Church know, or ought to know, the whole story and should be teaching eager souls the words—but too often, we are not. Is it, perhaps, because we are not sure ourselves?

Then let us come again this Lenten season to the cross of Christ and see the Son of Man bravely and gallantly breaking down the fences of sin,

death, and the power of the evil one, and hear Him graciously promise to make us "kings and priests." Let Him, I beseech you, teach you the song of heaven.

"When they had sung a hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives," and there Jesus prayed, being in agony. It was the beginning of a way of suffering and torture that we can only hint at, but always there was that song of "Thy will be done" and "Into Thy hands." He knew His Father, you see, so intimately! The disciples did not do so well that day or the next or the next, but when they understood that Jesus, their companion of the wayside, was a "breaker-through" of even the gates of man's last enemy, death, and that He was present though unseen, then they got hold of the Lenten Song and understood something about the confidence of their Master. Prisons rang with the "new song," and it carried the faith that nothing could daunt.

"And they sang a new song," those that came out of the great tribulation and had washed their garments in the blood of the Lamb. I do not say that life will always be easy. Just for that reason it needs a song that is big and sturdy, and yet tender and sympathetic. Nothing less than that "new song" will do—a song breathing the joy of fellowship and communion with our Maker, a song promising victory over life and death, a song assuring us that God cares and has a plan

for life because of a Son given and a cross raised out there at the "place of the skull."

In the strength of that love and presence we can and must go on! In the strength of that love and presence we can and must come home victors.

We have a song. Learn it. Sing it!

## Chapter Four

# Jesus and Our Scheme of Things

Second Sunday in Lent

*Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee.* Luke 7:40

*And he said unto her, Thy sins are forgiven.* Luke 7:48

**T**HIS incident in the life of Christ is a story about a good man that was no good, and a no-good woman that was good. This topsy-turvey state of affairs came about partly because of the past, partly because of the present, and partly because of the future. These tenses are ever with us, of course, but their value and significance get jumbled when Jesus takes them in hand. The New Testament, you will note, is replete with illustrations of this sort of thing. All usual and ordinary laws and procedures of life, that appear so formidable and impregnable to mortal eye, are crushed by Christ with such ease as to make them

appear fragile and wholly unworthy opponents of His powers.

For instance, ordinarily we are quite ready to agree that a person is the sum total of yesterday, and that on the basis of past history some kind of future can safely be predicted. "I know of no way of judging the future, but by the past," said Patrick Henry in a great oration that every high school graduate is acquainted with, and wise, experienced, white-headed men nodded full agreement with such an obvious fact. And it is true enough—true enough, indeed, to tempt very fine scholars to make a system out of it—only do not stand, megaphone in hand, shouting such rules with assurance in the direction of Jesus! I tell you nothing so simple as that remains long unbroken before the strength of His Word. Vincius, a character in *Quo Vadis*, says truly: "I do not know how the Christians arrange their affairs, but I do know that where their teachings commence, there our dominion ends; there ends Rome, there ends the world, the difference between conqueror and conquered, between rich and poor, between master and slave—there ends government, there ends Caesar, law, and the order of the world."

There is Peter. Who of us, had we known him, would have risked predicting a glorious future for such a fellow? He came, we suspect, from the most ordinary circumstances and environment, lacked the polish of a formal education, and was

raised in that school of hard knocks where back-breaking toil is relieved now and then by idle hours of rough and brutal sport punctuated with coarse oath and vulgar jest. Life is not usually sweet and genteel on the water-front. Peter, with his hot temper and ready tongue, was hardly one not to be a lively participant in life as he knew it. Had you known him, and known his record, would you have predicted for him a future so super-glorious that following generations would reverently call him *Saint Peter*? Would you have dared to suggest that forever after his death Rome would engage in arduous and labored and expensive scholarship to prove that he had once visited that city—fearful that such a signal honor might be stolen from her? Yet Jesus, knowing all the facts as none of us can know them, placed His hand confidently on those rugged shoulders one day, pointed to the future, and sketched that sort of prophecy.

One never knows what will happen next when one has dealings with Jesus. Simon becomes Peter. James and John become Boanerges. Saul becomes Paul. And you? Well, who knows what amazing person He will make of you? Ordinary things get all mixed up when Jesus touches them, and whole systems disintegrate like weathered fabric when the Nazarene puts His hand to them. Things like the past seem not to count at all, the present takes on wildly exaggerated meaning, and the future—

that future is wide, wide open to such flights of the imagination as to stagger and frighten credulity.

Christ sets us dreaming, dreaming impossible dreams of what we ought to be, hinting at great enterprises we could be engaged in—something that really counts. One searching look into His face and we know there is something of eternal significance even in our poor lives. The urge to set our course by that radiant vision sets our hearts pounding with fierce excitement and thrilling hopes. Down there a man repairing a barn suddenly throws down his tools and sets sail for China to become a missionary. He has caught a vision that will not let him go. Over there a shoe salesman throws overboard a promising career to become an evangelist. He has a vision that will not let him go. Across the water a miner's son defies all known authority and becomes the great Reformer. He has a vision that will not let him go.

When Jesus looks into the eyes of eager people, no impossible anchors of the past can hold them fast. They must put out to sea and, empowered by a smart breeze, be off to new lands and new ports. It is like that. The past is left behind, and its power to hold with tenacious habit and sordid fear is snapped. Unfettered they stand, free for a try at those absurd dreams of immortal life and sonship with God that have haunted them ever, and now have come alive with passionate



hope because in that sudden turn in the road they met the Master face to face.

There must be someone here that has experienced something like this, someone who has gone limping along through dreary days of emptiness with nothing much ahead except perhaps another meaningless tomorrow, someone who quite suddenly has met Christ and been asked, "Come, now, is this the best that you can do with this glorious gift of life?" There must be someone who has stood confused and stammering before possibilities never seen before, who, having seen this, has said in dismay, "But Lord, I can not make it. It is way beyond my strength and powers, held as I am by the relentless grip of past failures. Surely, Lord, you do not know me, else you would understand that I am totally unfit for such great things as you point to." Surely he has then heard, "My grace is sufficient," "thy sins are forgiven," "go in peace." There must be someone here that knows from experience what it means to have the cruel memories of yesterday blotted out from the memory of God so that they are as if they were not at all, and who stands today delivered and freed, dreaming new dreams with God of a life that can be lived as "a workman that needeth not to be ashamed."

Are you that someone? Then you know that not only does Christ set you dreaming, not only does He forgive, but He sets the wild hope alive that

you can and will be and do those impossible things He has in mind—things as good as done because He promises to be along on that great venture. With Him there can never be defeat.

Earl Marlatt, in 1926, sensed the reckless confidence of the Christian as he set his face toward an unbelievably honored tomorrow, and wrote a hymn about it. The chorus is:

Lord, we are able, our spirits are Thine,  
Remold them, make us, like Thee, divine.  
Thy guiding radiance above us shall be,  
A beacon to God, to faith and loyalty.

All of this happened to that no-good woman. Her past was a wretched story of . . . of, who can tell what? She was a woman of the street, and who can tell—indeed, who cares to tell if one can—all the misery and unhappiness and lamentable grief of such a foul-scented business. Enough, surely, to know that she had sought to batten on man's lust, using every trick of face and eye and limb to entice trade from the shadows of the night. It is enough to know that she had sickened of such a poor lot and was seeking release. It was not easy. It never is. Decent folks, who might have given a hand, hurried to the other side of the street at her approach, and tight lips and haughty manners blocked hope of help from them. Old friends, suspecting her longings and betrayal of friendship, goaded her with jeers and taunts calculated to

drive her back into line and crush any uplift movement in their midst.

Then came Jesus with His tender manners and fair speech. His searching eyes looked out over the crowd until they met hers, offering a new life and forgiveness for the past. Then nothing would do for her but to set her feet on that high road that led to God and home. Nothing, nothing would or could stop her. She needed no other help. All opposition crumbled, for in her heart was a refrain that probably went like this:

Lord, I am able, my spirit is Thine,  
Remold me, make me, like Thee, divine.  
Thy guiding radiance above me shall be,  
A beacon to God, to faith and loyalty.

Nor was it only that the words of Christ seemed to say, "I excuse you, just forget it." No, it was far, far and away more than that, and more wonderful. We must understand that. We limited human beings have no way of wisely estimating all that forgiveness from God means, for we cannot even calculate with any exactness the ache and soreness we give His loving heart with our quick jabs of disobedience and disloyalty. Only that shocking cross can suggest the extreme cost of God's burden and love in forgiveness, and we look at that dully and without any great comprehension. Let us, however, not underestimate the price of our redemption. We all know from experience

how difficult human forgiveness can be. We have heard countless men say that they can forgive but not forget, which is to say that they will excuse but not have fellowship again. Some of these sins against our fellowmen are enormous, to be sure, and it strikes us as being exceedingly generous when some kind of little pardon is forthcoming and prosecution and retaliation dropped.

But what shall we say when we know that all such things are sins against God? What shall we say when He promises to erase forever these transgressions and trespasses and regard us in Christ as though we had never sinned? And then, now mark this well, to restore freely and fully His priceless *fellowship*? Forgiveness with God goes all the way to restored friendship. The no-good woman understood Christ so. This forgiven woman, this *good* woman, when she heard that He was nearby, in the home of a certain Pharisee, made some hasty preparations and hurried to do Him homage and enjoy His undoubted welcome and friendship.

Jesus did not disappoint her! He was not embarrassed by what most people would find to be an awkward situation. There at that sumptuous table, with the raised eyebrow and supercilious stare of the host upon Him, Jesus accepted her ministrations. Poor woman! Little did she realize that her very presence would bring nasty suggestions to impure minds that might link His friend-

ship with her awful past. Does that startle you a bit? Let it! We need to glimpse some of the fearful implications of what it means when we are told that Jesus is to be numbered with transgressors and bear our sins.

Poor woman. She had come so bravely and gladly, with no thought but to honor Him, and now, well she may have sensed the injustice she was doing her Savior with such a public display of friendship before such a cold and critical world, and sensed, too, that such friendship was even greater than she had suspected could be true. It was all too much for her, and unplanned tears fell in torrents. Ashamed of such weakness, and wholly unprepared for this emergency, she took refuge in her long tresses, using the hair as a towel to dry the feet she had now all unconsciously washed in preparation for kissing and anointing in lowliest servile fashion.

Jesus remained calm. Not only did He accept these devoted expressions of esteem and love, but solidly protected her and publicly defended her, giving her credit for all those ordinary tokens of friendliness that had been denied by His host. To this *good* woman He gave recognition of love, assurance that her faith was saving, and pointed to the future of peace and life.

Christ will do that for you, too. Has He ever been niggardly? Has anyone ever come timidly into His presence and been rebuffed? Think, can

you name one? Or can you conceive of the Christ holding the most unworthy mortal in suspense even for a moment as to His gracious and good will? History books tell us about that shameful scene when Henry was compelled to stand outside the gates at Canossa, begging and pleading with the self-styled vice-gerent of Jesus for pardon. Hour after hour and day after day he stood in bitter cold and snow. At long last, he was permitted to enter, on his knees, and then given the exquisite pleasure and high honor of kissing the Pope's toe. Have you ever heard of Christ delaying for a minute the release of a sinner who looks longingly into His eyes with expectant hope? To others one may look utterly hopeless, more beast than man, but if in no matter how inarticulate manner one has been wistfully sighing,

And oh, for the man to rise in me,  
That the man that I am may cease to be,

then one can repeat the story in his own life.

Keep sharp watch, then, for Jesus. The no-good becomes good when He seals the past against one with forgiveness, and opens the flood-gates of unspeakable visions for today and tomorrow. Do you say again that this is not for you? Of course it is, exactly for you. Do not look so stubbornly at your tattered garments. Look to His Word, man, look to His Word, and see for yourself. It does say: "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast

out." Read it for yourself in John 6:37 and let it stand, as it was meant to stand, for you.

And that good man that was no good, what about him? I suppose he went along satisfied with what he was and what he was not, listless in his visions of the intentions of life, unable to cope with anything as tremendous as Jesus, because wrong beliefs nurtured by silly pride kept him refusing the faith Jesus demanded.

Wrong beliefs will keep a man from the Kingdom every time. You cannot go through life believing in the ability of man to conquer the problems of evil without losing any need for a Savior. If you start out on the premise that man can master his destiny, Jesus becomes unnecessary. Sometimes this takes the form of an ethical program that demands loyalty to its tenets as the forerunner of gaining the prizes of life. It appeals to great numbers of people because it assures them of their importance to the saving scheme, and rewards their efforts. When such a program fails, as it has time after time, one would think it would have confessed itself a lie. But no, it comes back again and again with this excuse or that. "Try harder" is often suggested to gullible people intent still on saving themselves, or "Try a different arrangement of the rules."

The host, this Pharisee, was not quite satisfied with the rewards of his moral living and religious program. At least so much is plain from his desire

to have Jesus sup with him. And yet he was not ready to own himself a bankrupt debtor. His pride rebelled against that as pride will. Somewhere in our very being is a twist that honors the "self-made" man and disdains the life of grace. Is anything more discouraging than a full realization of the fact that after these hundreds of years of preaching about "grace alone," people still feebly define Christianity as "doing the best one can?"

With the world falling in ruins about us, governments and systems plunging to death, staggering problems of capital and labor, race hatreds, and unemployment, and a long list of ills and fears, one would think every Christian would be shouting, "This way to salvation—this way to Christ!" But we do not hear them. Is it not too true that we sit smugly with the Pharisee, sensing vaguely that something is wrong, but rebelling at the suggestion that *we* are wrong? Circumstances must be changed and policies altered and conditions made different, but *we* are all right. *We* need not change. *We*, God have mercy on us, will not change. Jesus is incomprehensible because we keep asking for some new rule, some new interpretation of an old rule, some "Outline" of Wisdom in ten easy lessons, and Jesus will not speak and cannot speak, for what He offers is a new life.

All of which is to say that it is our unbelief that keeps us from being good people. We call ourselves good and are no good. Jesus can make only



that good which is willing to confess that it is no good. Jesus is the help of the helpless, the physician to the sick, the bringer of life to the dead. "Other refuge have I none," we sing so sentimentally, and yet no one ever really understands it until he has tried every other refuge. Goodness is not something we gain. It is a gift of God in Christ. Our gifts of love wait the day when we will recognize this, the day when we see in Him the only hope left, the day when we understand better the offense and stumbling-block of the Cross.

It must wait, as far as world-wide participation is concerned, but it need not be in that vague future for you. For you it can be today. Throw wrong beliefs aside, trample on pride, and look with new expectancy at this Christ whose eyes are looking out over this crowd anxiously searching out yours. Let nothing prevent you from seeing that His life can be yours, that that sound joy and contentment written in every line of His countenance are also meant for you. Start dreaming of that Christ-life as something freely offered. That past? That cannot hold you with forgiveness in the air. Christ will be in you and for you. Let others look askance at the new stride and straightened shoulders, and the new places you seek out, like prayer. In His company awkwardness will disappear when those blessed new assurances are given, protection experienced, and happy visions given of all it means to "go into peace."

But let one sit glum and unmoved before what Christ has to offer, satisfied to poke around yet longer in the debris of a salvation by merit and good works, and Christ speaks words that sting and bite. "Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee." You know the rest.

That life of lovelessness, little matter how correct in deportment, was judged as no good. The new life of love for Christ as Savior stood approved as good. I tell you again, nothing is safe with God in Jesus walking these streets and lanes of ours. The past can not hold tomorrow in its tenacious grip. No longer can it point its lean, ghost-like finger and write, "On the basis of yesterday's failures I predict failure and misery tomorrow." It can not do that any longer with Jesus around. The present is not only another today with friendlessness to greet those gallant strivings within. No, the present is a moment of release and a moment of help when the eyes of Jesus are upon one.

Hearts full of gratitude for forgiveness will risk even the home of a Pharisee to meet Him, sure that His friendship holds anywhere and anytime and under every sort of condition, for convention is shattered with Jesus around. All our good works and all our prides of life that we had figured on lugging into His presence as the purchase price of eternal approval, all these look tawdry and cheap at the foot of the Cross. Values get twisted

in His presence, and the things we call good are no good. Our whole scheme of things goes awry when the Lord of Life stretches out His loving hands of healing and forgiving.

Tell me, have you seen Him? If you have, you will bring your precious ointment in the form of a whole life and place it at His feet as a tribute far too small.



## Chapter Five

# The Garden in Lent

*And they came to a place which was named Gethsemane: and he saith to his disciples, Sit ye here, while I shall pray.*

Mark 14:32

ALMOST unconsciously the feet of Jesus carried Him over the brook toward Gethsemane. So accustomed was He to seek retirement and privacy in this garden. The hours in the Upper Room had been difficult and trying, and now, leaving that behind, there was an hour or two left Him for some last preparations. Without hesitation He led the way to His favorite trysting-place with God, His beloved garden.

Dr. Gaius Glenn Atkins, in his book *Resources for Living* (Harper and Brothers), has an interesting chapter entitled, "The Use of the Margin." The title, he explains, is borrowed from another book written by Edward Howard Griggs, on the "Art of Life." Griggs, he says, "was almost a pioneer in noting the significance of the margin

in the fruitful conduct of life." By "margin" is meant "the margin of time each is free to spend as he pleases, and its use goes far in determining the ultimate success or failure in the business of life. . . . It is a blank check drawn upon the treasures of life." The philosophers sometimes call this "solitude," and narrow it down to the things we think and do in solitude. The sociologist likes to think of it in terms of "leisure" and "recreation." But the important thing they all emphasize is that it is what persons do during these free periods that is decisive for estimating and molding individuals and society. In such a situation Jesus chose a garden.

It is, to say the least, a revealing angle from which to study life. It prompts us to ask personal questions. What is there in my thoughts and desires that demands my whole-hearted devotion whenever I am free to give myself to it? What cries impatiently for my attention and time whenever I have completed my hours of drudgery at office and shop? And if we will answer such questions honestly, we will learn something about self that we did not know before. Maybe you will discover that you are one of the few ingenious people that always find constructive use for such time. In which case let me be the first to congratulate you on your conscious or unconscious wisdom. Maybe, though, you will learn that there is no such compelling thing in your life. In that case let

me assure you of much company in this generation.

We are a busy people. We all know that. The weekly schedule of most families precludes much standing around waiting for something to happen. Not that all or even a major portion of the elaborate plans are of much significance, nor that we had very much to do with the planning. No, the whole thing somehow was foisted on us, and we simply carry the burden as cheerfully as possible in the hope that we may be counted "good scouts" or "civic leaders" or "socially prominent."

Be that as it may, we must confess that dignity, purpose, and quiet confidence in an eternal destiny have all fled and have given place to fuss, flurry, and fidgeting. All of this is a fruit of our secularized and pagan culture. God is left out. That is sin. Isaiah's description fits us. He might as well be writing of us when he says: "But the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked" (Isaiah 57:20, 21). No wonder power has deserted us.

The world is too much with us; late and soon  
Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers.

See all sights from pole to pole,  
And glance, and nod, and bustle by;  
And never once possess our souls  
Before we die.

“But we are part of this generation and cannot help that,” some will protest. And we dare not deny the potent influence of environment. Indeed, let us quickly agree that there is profundity in the estimate given of that woman of whom it was said, “She averaged well for this community.” But it is wrong, nevertheless, to raise this as a flimsy barrier to something better, in the light of our knowledge of Christ. Remember how provoking and stupid that one appears who said, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” “It is a marvel whence the white pond lily derives its loveliness and perfume,” writes one, “sprouting as it does from the black mud over which the river sleeps, and from which the yellow lily also draws its unclean life and noisome odour.”

You see, the same environment produces often enough the beautiful and the ugly. The talent of some is to gather to themselves what is foul and poisonous, while others harvest the good and become beautiful and fragrant. Scripture says that the sons of Eli made themselves vile. Anything less than personal responsibility is, as always, a half-truth unworthy of God’s best creation.

Undoubtedly we could do better. We could do better if we made wise use of “the margin.” We all have some time like that on our hands, some time that we call our own. If we fail to use it to go into a garden or closet to be alone with God, that failure must be laid to habits that carry us



constantly in another direction. Many of us have been hoping that the world crisis would force big questions into our rattle-brained living. At times there are little indications that make this prayer seem near to realization.

"I don't quite know how it started," writes Margaret Lee Runbeck.\* "Maybe because we listen to the news broadcasts just before dinner. But anyway, about a month ago, something began to happen in our house. Some unseen presence tip-toed in, and after we had listened to the tragedy that is upon the world, it took us each by the hand and led us more quietly into our dining room. The first times we felt it we had no words. Then one night one of us said with embarrassment: 'Funny thing, but just now I felt we were all going to bow our heads and say grace.'" And that started it as a family habit.

There are, we hope, many like that family here in America, people who, seeing their good fortune in the light of relentless starvation abroad, sense that they must give thanks to God for His lavish goodness that goes far beyond any reasonable deserving on their careless part. Our tables can become a garden for us when we make it a rendezvous with the unseen but ever-present Giver of all good gifts. At least it could be a sort of kindergarten for us who have been so childish as to go

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\*Article "Grace" in *Good Housekeeping* as condensed in *Reader's Digest* (Vol. 42, No. 249).

along all unconcerned about the deep and hidden mysteries of life. It would, at least, bring us within hailing distance of those deep places that our very souls cry out impatiently to test. It would bring us closer to the time when we would seek out God in our solitary moments, to quietly "wait upon the Lord."

Of course it may come, this bowing of the head, also in some great disaster. It has come to some of those brave men of ours adrift on endless oceans with breath coming in labored short gasps and the mind poised on the portal of insanity, yet held fast, as they themselves confessed, by the mercy and grace of God.

But whether on the stormy seas or rocking gently at anchor in the quiet waters of the harbor, we can and must learn the necessity of having in our lives a little garden where we meet our Maker.

Our Lenten season is intended to underscore quiet and contemplation and prayer. It is planned to hint at the possibilities of a right and good use of "the margin" in life. Lent has been a healthful social curb on unrestrained shallow living. As early as the third century we discover Wednesday and Friday set aside as days of fasting, and added services were the order of the day. After the Church had gained the recognition of the State, the world-denying spirit of Lent began to exert an influence also upon public life. Games, shows, noise, and frivolity were all taboo. It need hardly

be said that even to this day there is a sharp decline in participation and planning of such gay functions. Lent is still given right-of-way by the general public. The Church, in many places, discourages or prohibits weddings, parties, and dinners. There is an air of earnest soberness and solemnity, and meditation is urged upon all people.

Most of us are agreed that some such restrictions are probably profitable; also, that it would be well to carry its lesson of prayerful quiet into year-round daily living. But not all know how to begin. May I say to you earnestly, the very first thing you must do is to begin. You need not, indeed you *must* not, wait the day when you will be good enough to begin. Start just as you are and where you are. Set a time each day and hold yourself to it with dogged determination. Lack of discipline in this matter will guarantee failure. Use a plan.

Men interested in the "liturgical life" are quite insistent that the best plan is to use the "daily office," by which they mean Matins or Vespers, "because it somehow ties us in with the Church of all ages, gives us a feel of the sweep which is in the idea of the Communion of Saints, provides a discipline of daily lessons, and provides for prayers that include all manner of men." Do not be too quick to ridicule the idea which is theirs. Give them credit for being faithful at prayers.

Others prefer the freedom of the "Oxford"

quiet time which emphasizes a period of quiet and prayer with note-paper and pencil ready to jot down the ideas that may come through contemplation, ideas that plan and control the day. Cruel jesters have labeled such living "hunch existence," but we need to be careful here too. God does work through impulses, desires, and ideas, so give them credit for at least listening.

Still others prefer the reading of a portion of Scripture and prayers of their own making according to the needs and desires which they sense.

It does not make so much difference what plan you adopt, but have a plan: Scripture reading, prayer, and meditation at a fixed time and place. When our Catechism was translated to read that "prayer need not be limited to fixed times and places," it failed to emphasize that the "fixed time and fixed place" was taken for granted as a normal and natural requirement of the Christian life. Grimsby was right when he changed it to read, "but I also need special periods for prayer each day."

Men and women, we must come to that kind of decision today. It is not fair, it is not decent, it is not even good common sense that we, who have received all the blessings of Christ's work in home and school and church, should live in contempt of God's proffered Father-child relationship. It is worse than heathenism. "Shall we pray?" I heard a preacher query. Had he paused just a little long-

er and sought an answer from the upturned faces of the congregation, he would have known that the utter indifference expressed in every line of those faces really meant, "Well, if you must, but please hurry." Never will I ask that question. More and more I shall find ways to say, "Let us," with the compulsion of "we *must*" pray.

There is an interesting legend connected with the Mohammedan custom of praying five times a day. It is said that the Prophet met Moses in heaven, that Moses straightway made inquiry as to how many times a day he had instructed his followers to pray, and was told fifty times. Moses was horrified, insisting that it would never work, that he had tried fifty times a day on the children of Israel, and found it too much for them. This sad experience on the part of Moses excited the Prophet, who at once hurried to the Lord and pleaded that the number be reduced. After some persuasion, the Lord granted a reduction to forty, but the worried Mohammed pressed for a better bargain and at long last managed to whittle the figure down to a mere five. When Moses was told of this compromise he shook his head in doubt, saying that the children of Israel had not liked even that many prayers. But Mohammed, like Abraham, blushed at the thought of pressing the Lord further and the figure was allowed to stand.

One could wish that Christians had Mohammed's sense of shame. We ought to manage to keep

pace with those whom we hope to Christianize. Again I say it, men and women, we must pray. We must set aside a time and place. We must make right, proper, decent, and Christian use of "the margin." If someone will still insist that he has no time, then let him be reminded of the Scriptural injunction to "redeem" the time. That means, plainly put, to "buy back" the time. It may cost you some sleep, or membership in a club, or a committee appointment, or a meal, but whatever the price may be, you pay it.

Sometimes people quite sincerely say, "But Pastor, we tried it and it did not work." Probably they are referring to Scripture reading and meditation. They started out gallantly, too, they plead, with colors flying, but a strange stupor seized the soul. Flatness took stout hold of resolution and choked it to death. After this silent struggle, steps no longer sounded on the pavement leading to the garden. The disciples, right there in Gethsemane, dozed, and drowsily nodded with every yawn. "What," said the gentle voice of the Good Shepherd, "could ye not watch with me one hour?"

It was different, though, when they understood what their failure had cost them in confusion and shame that awful night and Friday, and that, despite their failure, He was willing to come back to companion with them and bless them. We must try again, you and I, alert to His

love and presence, eager for His benediction, and heeding anxiously the admonition, "Watch!"

It may be that it was prayer that had been tried, and that had met with flat failure. One day, one gloomy day, they would have you know, when fearful darkness had fallen like a pall over whatever joy they had managed in life, they had knelt to send with fevered intensity a petition to the throne of grace. The answer was nothing but the echo of their plea come back to mock them in their loneliness. So they had flung the whole thing from them, and only bitterness was left. Surely it must be wrong that we have been guilty of giving the crude impression that prayer is magic. It is not.

God can say "No." Indeed, He does say "No" on many occasions. "Let this cup pass from me," prayed Christ in His Gethsemane. There was no answer, unless it was "No," or unless it was the sending of the angels to strengthen Him. God said "No" to Paul, too, adding only the consolation that His grace was sufficient, and thus instructing him to lean and press more confidently on His friendly shoulder. In neither case was there any bitterness, just resignation to a higher will.

Prayer is more than petition, a furious insistence upon some plan or desire of our own. It is also a brave questing for His will in reckless abandon of self. First, Thy will, Thy name, and Thy kingdom. But we must not think of ourselves as

desolate, only lean harder. His grace is more than enough, and look closer, His angels bring strength to endure. It is still true, "Ask, and it shall be given."

No matter what the excuses, the Garden of Christ manages to brush them aside as unworthy. Desperately we hold them up, only to feel chagrin at their tattered and beggarly appearance when placed squarely inside Gethsemane. When we complain of unanswered prayer, Gethsemane points to the angels. When we urge dullness and heaviness, Gethsemane points to His repeated prayers. When we half-heartedly suggest lack of time, Gethsemane points to this vital hour snatched out of final preparations. When we plead that we have not words, Gethsemane points to the simplicity of, "Let this cup pass from me" and "Not my will, but Thine be done."

Man is a dual creature. Living on this earth-level, he is never content until he lives also on an eternal level. If we fail to have our little garden, we fail our self and our self's greatest meaning.

There is only a confession left. We do not have a garden because, frankly, we do not feel the need or desire of the friendship of the Son of Man. We cringe visibly when we say it. It ought never be said. But if it be true, we ought to begin by simply confessing it. All of us know it should be otherwise—with Jesus "sweating great drops of blood," and our knowledge that all the while it is our sin



He has shouldered and our love He ever seeks. How awful is this coldness of our hearts. We need a trysting-place with God just to tell Him daily about the shame we feel on account of it, and in the Name of Jesus plead without excuse for pardon. Let us not be afraid! Into the garden of our choosing, Jesus will come to meet us. He knows gardens of prayer and is at home in quiet and meditation. He knows, too, about coldness and waywardness, because He lifted and carried all sin to the Cross. He will tell us of forgiveness and point again to the proof of His love in the nail-prints and the jagged wound of the spear. Sooner or later we will find the delight we know we ought to have even now in His company. More and more we will learn to trust Him with all our secrets and all our life. We will spend more and more time in our garden, His and ours, because we will be getting to be old friends that can not live apart.



## Chapter Six

# Free, for What?

*Jesus therefore said to those of the Jews who had now believed in him, As for you, if you hold fast to my teaching, then you are truly my disciples; and you shall know the truth, and the truth will make you free. John 8:36*

**F**REE, for what? This is an important question. Frankly, it is not original with me. It was thrown out from an impressive background in the Home Furnishings Building at the New York World's Fair back in 1939. That year, as you know, saw the entire world sobered by fast moving events pointing toward a blunt denial of freedom. It was a year, too, when everyone sensed that the inevitable outcome of the clash of ideas must one day, one fearful day, be warfare. At that moment the question, "Free, for what?" seemed exceedingly timely. The passing years have seen it grow in importance.

This question, then, we wish to deal with and attempt to answer. Let us first look at the back-

ground for the question. It came as a climax to a series of scenes depicting the gradual development of increased leisure time, increased powers of communication, increased speed and comfort of travel, and increased opportunities for sports and pleasures. It is a familiar story, and yet it is as always a dramatic story of sharp contrasts and whirling speed. After all, it is a thrilling tale of human achievement packed into a period of only one hundred fifty years.

The first scene introduced life as lived in 1789. A typical colonial community was shown where the usual rule of that era held life in a slavery of work. Eight hours of sleep and sixteen of work, with little or no time for leisure. After several decades had passed, life was shown with a few added privileges, and so scene followed scene until the present.

The final action depicted man moving aloft until he reached a bright star where his home was revealed. Small clouds were illuminated, each carrying a significant symbol, for instance, great towering masts for *radio*, and speeding train and plane for *transportation*. The emphasis now was upon man's mastery of today over distance and hardship and labor. The new rule for life had become eight hours for sleep, eight hours for work, and eight hours for leisure.

A narrator was making the emphasis pointed by saying:

“Time for interest in government,  
In community, in the group.  
Time to plan for our community.  
At last Man is freed. . . .  
Freed in time and space.  
For what?”

Here is told a strange tale of glorious progress ending on a note of tragic aimlessness. Here is the man of today freed from much of the back-breaking work of only yesterday, freed from many of the time-killing jobs of yesterday, freed from the isolation of ignorance and restriction of hamlet life.

And . . . and, so what? What shall he do with his increased efficiency, his increased capacity to produce, his new-machine strength? With all the tools that this breath-taking age of invention has provided, what will man make that is better and finer than yesterday?

The implications of such questions seem to be these: First, man has not yet defined his goal. The very struggle for such freedom was so engaging as to forestall a sincere attempt to find out what all the bustling was about. Secondly, the accumulation of all these tools ought to presuppose some tremendous task. Nothing looks quite so ridiculous as what one man called “pounding tacks with a sledge-hammer.” Thirdly, it is possible that man may choose to use his acquired treasures for purposes of destruction. This seems to be the back-

ground, real and implied, for the question, "Free, for what?"

The next step is to inquire whether or not there is anything in the present scene that justifies the anxiety these implications manifest.

Of the desire for freedom we all know something. We were, as a matter of fact, very young when that hunger began to gnaw at our spirits. In loud, impatient youth we passionately yearned for freedom from parental control, from school's discipline, and from social restrictions. Most of us, at one time or another, vowed darkly that we meant one day to do just as we pleased. All of us learned, often the hard way, that even maturity could not provide us with the kind of freedom we had longed for. Restrictions, we discovered, were part of all life. The dream of youth was only a myth. It was not a pleasant discovery. We fled madly from one restriction only to discover another more formidable than the first.

In many respects the story of western civilization is not much different from the school-day dreams. There is always a real or suspected tyranny—political, social, or religious—that makes flight desirable. Freedom is always up there ahead, in the next turn of the road, away from the tyrant. The desperate search for this dream-world has written many brave pages of history. It has meant long and vigorous marches toward the setting sun, impassioned speeches like, "Give me liberty or

give me death," and large risks of life in battle and on dangerous frontiers. It is an epic of valorous souls leaving security, loved ones, and beloved places in search of better conditions and a new civilization. And as long as new country lay ahead, people kept hopeful that their ideal community might yet be founded and their freedom enlarged.

Until only recently, it was easier to flee from tyranny than to confront it and fight it out. Today we are matured and are meeting the first indications of the discomfort that full knowledge of permanent restriction brings. Until only recently the struggle and zest of the search were quite sufficient. Now we are restive and glum. Freedom, say many in a unison minor chord, is only an illusion. The chase was engrossing and exciting. It was responsible for all the things we call progress. It stimulated the imagination and kept folks marching with heads up and roll of drums. But it was an unreality that managed to live only because there was hope that it might be found over the ocean or across that plain. Now that hope is dead. And so Spengler wrote a book about it and candidly called it, *The Decline of the West*.

Facing the Golden Gate, in San Francisco, there is a statue of an American Indian on horseback. Of that statue Flewelling says in his stimulating book, *The Survival of Western Culture* (Ralph Tyler Flewelling, Harper and Brothers, N. Y., 1943): "Both horse and horseman present

the dejected appearance of extreme weariness and hopelessness. They have reached the end of the trails and journeyings. There is a physical sense in which the statue symbolizes the present condition of Western Civilization. For many long years mankind had often forsaken all that was dear in exchange for a life filled with peril, hunger, and hardship, and whose end was hid from all but his own ideal vision. Now that freedom can not be secured by moving into new location. He is through."

This, then, is the story of mankind enthusiastically seeking freedom and meeting up finally with an old, toothless, leering hag, offering the ashes of burnt-up zeal at the end of the trail as her joyless reward to a tired world. "Only one color," blurts out one despondent soul, "only one color is needed on my palet to paint the future civilization—that color, black."

A good deal of this heavy mood might have been avoided had we paused long ago to ask, "What do we want with freedom anyway? What is it?" But no questions were asked. It was more than enough to know that our hearts yearned for some little elbow-room and that it seemed within reach over yonder. Certain things were taken for granted, of course, as being implicit in the very nature of the thing called freedom. Chiefly it was *individual* freedom. We learned to recite glibly a long list of things that were intended to protect



the person: freedom of the press, freedom of the conscience, freedom of speech, freedom of trial by jury, and freedom of religion. Everything was done with an eye toward the individual's rights. Yes, we called them *rights*. In doing this, we made it very difficult for society to find any protection. Even courts found it next to impossible to convict the real criminals. There were far too many loopholes for the individual who wished to take advantage of his own peculiar rights—rights that seemed to stretch out endlessly for the unscrupulous. The same rights that protected the individual, you see, made it possible for him to take advantage of the weaker members of society—the impoverished, the ignorant, the unborn. How easy, for example, was it not to convince even good people that the "Prohibition Amendment" was an infringement on individual rights, despite the fact that most good people did lambaste drinking as a social evil.

"When men no longer are under the restraints of community ideals, patriotism, integrity, morals, and religion; popular sovereignty falls into chaos and anarchy," says Flewelling, and then adds, "There are not armies and navies enough, police power, guillotines or scaffolds enough to maintain for long a civilization which does not possess widely among its individual members the goodwill of self-control in the interests of the wider society."

And the "wider society" has also some rights. We have tried to define it, but never very successfully. Limitless individual freedom can result only in conflict and confusion, and this is exactly what we have on our hands today. Individuals can not live together, work together, play together, and plan together on that kind of basis. There is something about mankind that seeks power over others. There is something present in the heart and soul of mankind that is untrustworthy in dealing with other individuals, seeking advantage for self, using every freedom for self, and every tool in his possession for self and against others. If this is true, then the more potent his tools the greater the possibility of destructiveness.

Lately we have heard a good deal about "freedom from": freedom from want, freedom from fear, and so on. Though we have heard it expressed time and time again, we still rather shudder at the implications. The old freedom we understood, but this thing seems difficult and impossible. It appears to cut rather sharply across the boundaries of what had been staked out with frivolous disrespect for others. Instinctively we sense that this kind of freedom means cooperation and personal restrictions, a surrender of rights that are dear because they grant lavish undisciplined living to the shrewd and the strong. The new conception is bringing political strife, and people are taking sides with grim determination. Capital is against

Labor, and Labor against Capital. Whites are against Colored, and Colored against Whites. Group after group has banded together, surrendering certain individual rights for group rights and now seeking grimly the freedom in strife that can no longer be found on the frontier. But are groups to be trusted? Especially groups that seek their own welfare? Where do their rights end? When granted power, will they use power for the same tyranny they now seek to overpower?

What side are you on? Do you want to continue with the old conception of freedom? And is it because that concept yields you personal advantage? Do you want a new conception of freedom? And is it because you have been with the unfortunate victims of the stronger? In this coming conflict and struggle where will you side? Can freedom survive? Will the majority find freedom an empty thing, good only to "trade in" for food, shelter, meat, and drink? Who is to blame if the clever of today, the rich of today, the strong of today, are tomorrow to be the victims of a compulsory goodness and generosity that is plainly a denial of their freedom?

Free, for what? That is the question that is pressing for an answer today with an insistence born of necessity. Is freedom a personal achievement that hungrily devours all in its path to power? If it is, we need not be shocked when we hear sounds of battle. Is freedom a gift that in-

volves cooperation and restraint? How can it be achieved or received? How can it be effected without a denial of freedom?

These are questions that are difficult and suggest lengthy answers. Let us answer them as succinctly and clearly as possible. There is only one answer, for there is only one Name given amongst men whereby they can be saved. There is no political or social scheme big enough to solve the problem of man. Man is himself the problem. There is no freedom worth having except the freedom from self. The recurring temptation is to seek freedom for power, or at least to use freedoms won for purposes of tyranny. This is the lesson of history that has gone unheeded.

The children of Israel, by the hand of God, were given freedom from the slavery of Egypt. No sooner had they received this gift than they began to seek scope for expressing their new power. Like other nations, they wanted kings as well as the pomp and the glory of this world and opportunity to enslave others by the might of their given freedom. Time and again God gave them this precious gift, and time and again they wasted it. God intended them to have it for service but they managed to use it for self and for things. God has been revealing in history that freedom is a spiritual thing for spiritual ends, and man has been blindly groping at it for the satisfaction of appetites that are carnal. Man can

not be trusted. He is wrong. He is selfish. He is proud.

Pride prevents man from confessing selfishness, and pride is an attribute of the devil. Listen to Christ as He says of those people long ago, "Ye are of your father the devil, and he is the father of lies." True freedom, He would say, begins and ends with the release He alone can give to the human soul held in the bondage of lies. You must be born again, He said, and it is quite evident, no matter how mysterious it may sound. Men must be changed if freedom is to find uses that satisfy the real hunger of the spirit. Jesus offers to change people. Love for me will change you, He says, and He walks with staggering steps up the steep way to Calvary to bear our blindness and conceit, and wring our hearts with a love so undeserved as to bring giants like Paul to his feet in adoration and worship.

Christ is making a bid for your heart today. Not for the past hundreds of years has Christianity stood as such a saving alternative to the path of destruction. The issue is clear-cut and distinct. People must either change or be doomed. Man is not the master of his fate, but the slave of a distorted reason and will that tosses him about gnashing and wailing in the manner of the one possessed. Christ speaks, as He did then, words of release and pardon, words of love that send men out as servants—even as He was a serv-

ant—under the constraint of His love to do the works approved of God.

“Abide,” said Jesus, “hold fast to my teachings,” and ye shall know the truth. And I must confess that it is not always an easy matter, for it means walking along roads that seem many times very dangerous and unreasonably difficult. How many, even of those whom we reverently speak of as “saints,” have not confessed that they started out on some road of obedience reluctantly and shivering with fright, finally risking to go ahead only because they stretched out a nervous hand to find something to hold to, and met His, the ever Good Shepherd. Only hold on, hold out, and you will experience His Presence. As you walk you will learn the truth—the truth about man, the truth about God, the truth about freedom. Then, when the question, “Free, for what,” comes thundering at you from busy lanes where walk the tired, the dejected, the cynical, the fearful, you will know the answer and speak with assurance about freedom as a gift of the Son who, by His wondrous Cross, purchased and won you from all of life’s enemies.

Free, yes free. Free to serve in the spirit of Christ, victor over the thralldom of sin and death. For this is God’s great gift, a love that is liberating and cleansing and healing, a love that purposes to glorify the Creator of life with holy purposes that center in Him who is holy.

## Chapter Seven

# The Tears in Lent

*And the second time the cock crew. And Peter called to mind the word that Jesus said unto him, Before the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny me thrice. And when he thought thereon, he wept.*

Mark 14:72

LENT is traditionally characterized by a spirit of passionate sorrow. There are tears in Lent which bespeak the tragic plight of mankind and confess the depth of his potential sense of self-reproach and remorse. One would think that the Church would use its strength to hush the sobs and quiet the expressions of hopelessness, but not so. Indeed, the Church begins the season by striking a note of futility, preaching in prophetic style with ashes (indicated by the very name *Ash Wednesday*), gravely speaking of mortality and doom: "Remember, O man, that dust thou art and unto dust thou shalt return." From the very first announcement, worshippers stand in the presence of altars, pulpits, lecterns, and clergy,

wearing violet or purple to emphasize that there has been and must be a noise of mourning in the Lenten experience.

It is admittedly a heavy mood, almost morbid. But the Church—the same Church that decks its chancels with gay evergreen and Easter lilies—seriously demands articulate expressions of sorrow during Passiontide and is insistent that this minor chord is an important and integral element in all Christian experience. So important is it, dictates this institution that has gathered the experiences of the ages unto herself, that it must not even be relegated exclusively to any season of the Church Year. It must be present in every Order of Service. Thus it argues that tears belong to the every-day experience of the Christian life.

From early childhood most of us have been poignantly aware of this gloomy, introspective, and fault-finding note in the message of God and have known intuitively that it could have no other end than to usher us into the presence of despair. As children we did not like this interpretation of man's lot. We writhed uneasily in our pews as we listened to something that sounded dangerously like false alarms set ringing chiefly to destroy all laughter, all joy, all fun. It seems fair to say, too, that many young people determined very early to quietly sever relationship with this message as soon as opportunity presented itself. Others drifted easily away from an institu-



tion that had indelibly impressed itself upon them as being opposed to the thing they wanted most: life, glad life and free. This is probably the reason so many people explain absence from participation in the life of local churches by saying, "Church? No, thanks, I had an overdose when I was young." It is undoubtedly a faulty explanation, but it indicates pointedly the vivid impression left on such lives by a church preaching heaviness and despair and tears in sharp contradiction to the listeners' experiences and desires.

Could this have been avoided? Perhaps, in part. At least it can be partially explained. There is little question but what the stern and rocky land of our forefathers, with its massive heights and expansive sea, introduced into their knowledge of life a futility and despair out of proportion with the American scene. As the years passed, the lonely sternness of hymns and literature became increasingly difficult to translate and transfer into a vacuum. This was the experience, too, I believe, of Puritanism. The tendency of men with such severe background was to insist upon a duplication of their experience, obviously impossible. They often as not, in desperation, tried to "stuff it down the throats" of their hearers with physical violence, accompanied by much pounding of the pulpit and expert grimace and shouted invective. Many of the children tried to follow where they were told they must go. But more and more found

themselves admitting that they were not "built" for this kind of business, and its unreality became something to rebel against and resist. It seems that this must be the explanation for part of the cruel criticisms leveled at the Church by a generation that failed to understand its message, and fled.

In Worcester Cathedral there is a tombstone with an inscription which includes these lines:

Here born, here Bishop, buried here,  
.....  
Chief pastor late of Lincoln's flock,  
Whom Oxford trained up in youthe,  
Whom Cambridge doctor did create,  
A *painful* preacher of the truthe.

It probably is a mistake to interpret this as meaning a preacher that is painful by style, method, and theory, and yet most of us know something about that type. Many preachers would like it said of them that they were preachers of the "painful truthe," but I am sure they would resent being called "painful preachers." There is a world of difference, as you can readily see. The latter is likely to give impressions that are not quite in line with the message, and this actually happened. Christianity, it became rumored, is nothing but a gospel of fear. The chief reason for serving God, it was said, is to escape hell and the company of the devil.

Whether we like to admit it or not, churches, in enough places to make it appear general, gave an impression of being against joyous living. Preaching became an exhibition of fury and wrath. It appeared, at least, as though the preacher hoped to drive the devil and his workers from the face of the earth with a "puff and a huff." I can not help sympathizing with people who gained their impressions from such "goings-on." Many a person has sat in a pew and shivered, not so much from fear of the devil, as from fear of the preacher and his frenzied indignation.

This does not mean that fear has no place in the Christian message. The message is life, and fear is a part of living. As a matter of cold fact, it is an extremely useful gift of life. Christianity is not ashamed of including it in its pronouncements. It saves lives daily. We would not care to live long in a world void of it. Imagine that kind of world, if you can, and see the catastrophic consequences of having doctors, nurses, engineers, mothers, children, and a long list that you can compile, all absolutely unacquainted with fear. Fear prevents us from dashing in front of trains and cars and means that extra touch of safety that insures protection to other lives as well as our own. It even serves as a check on dishonorable conduct.

From days at school you will remember Eugene Field's amusing little poem:

Once when I licked a feller 'at had just moved on our street,  
And father sent me up to bed without a bite to eat,  
I woke up in the dark and saw things stand'n in a row,  
A-lookin' at me—so!  
Oh, my! I wuz so skeered 'at time I never slept a mite—  
It's almost alluz when I'm bad I see things at nite.

An' so when other naughty boys would coax me into sin,  
I try to skwush the tempter's voice 'at urges me within;  
And when they's pie for supper, or cakes 'ats big an' nice,  
I want to—but I do not pass my plate f'r them things  
twice!

No, ruther let starvation wipe me slowly out of sight  
Then I sh'd keep a-living on an' seein' things at night!

Fear is a helpful comrade on life's road, no doubt of that, but it can be destructive, too, and terribly so. When the Church is accused of preaching a gospel of fear, I suspect that it is intended to be a jibe at the very motive power of the Gospel. That accusation must be refuted. Fortunately this is not so difficult as one would think. Fear does not create music like Bach's! Fear of mistakes will make Bach a meticulous creator, but it can not be and is not the inspiration and dynamo back of the creation. Christianity is not fear, but love, and "perfect love casteth out fear."

"What did you preach about?" asked an older pastor of a youngster in the ministry.

"About hell," said the youngster with violent thrust of jaw and bold air.

"I hope you preached it tenderly," said the experienced and gentle shepherd of souls.

There is tenderness in the gospel, even in severe judgment. Our Catechism makes a distinction between what it calls "a slavish fear and a child-like fear." The former serves God because of the punishment only. It is churlish and weak and suspicious and destructive. The latter is rightly said to be a constructive power that fears to sin against love.

If preachers forget now and then that this distinction is important, laymen must not be so foolish.

Just as important, no doubt, in contributing to gross misunderstanding, is the fact that the pulpit is often far ahead of the hearers in spiritual understanding and experience. Augustine was able to write: "Thou, O Lord, didst turn me round toward myself, taking me from behind my back, where I had placed me, unwilling to observe myself; and setting me before my face, that I might see how foul I was, how crooked and defiled, bespotted and ulcerous." Many preachers understand these words, as do many devout Christians. But we need to bear in mind that this statement came from a man who had set his foot in mad gladness on the dark lanes of terrible sin, had had much forgiven, and who, by long and intimate association with his Savior in prayer, meditation, and careful study of God's Word had penetrated

into the deep mystery of the real cleavage between God and man.

It is not given to all to know the life of the spirit as well as this, and one ought not be impatient if such a vision be slow in coming or denied despite the use of prayer. Often enough the deep sighs and tears, so important in Christian experience, are only the result of long experience in the company of Jesus. Real depths of remorse are often as not reserved for the saints. Those of us who have been plunged into an understanding of it must be patient with those who long for it and can not seem to find it. Our experiences or remorse must not be foisted upon them. Nor do we have the right to infer that there is something wrong with them unless they conform to our personal (very own) experience.

Salvation does not depend upon tears, but upon the "blood of the Lamb, slain from the foundation of the world." Let us never forget that. Remorse, sorrow, and tears are not something we present to God to make us worthy to claim adoption as sons. It is not a manipulation whereby we wheedle "grace" from the reluctant hands of God. What terrible thoughts!

And yet it does seem true that some people, in the presence of God, behave like a famous woman in history of whom it is written: "An outburst of tears, so she seemed to think, would solve any problem, and make her right." It can happen,

you see, that the deep places, understood by saints, become stumbling-blocks for the untutored, who flee because the whole thing is unintelligible and even reprehensive.

I know there are many today who earnestly desire to be Christians, and who may feel that they have failed because there are no tears. Let me remind you that we are created unlike in many respects, even to our emotions and strength of mind. Life treats us differently, too, but God wants you also in His Kingdom. Just start where you are, without tears and without remorse. Go quietly to the heavenly Father and say each day, "I know there should be sorrow, for I know I am not perfect as Thy Son was perfect, and yet, merciful God, I feel none of this. But cast me not aside for this reason, but teach me to love Thee and Thy paths of righteousness." Begin where you are.

Another thing is certain, though. The Church can not silence or erase its message of Lenten tears. Frequently that message has been misinterpreted by zealots whose harshness has sometimes been said to have driven people from the Church. It may well be that we need to ask forgiveness for trying to drive when we should have led, and for storming when we should have sympathized, and for impatience when we should have been understanding.

There have undoubtedly been numerous signal failures, but not on God's part. It is His good

pleasure that we still have time to serve more effectively as pulpit and lay witnesses.

That more effective way does not lead toward a renunciation of remorse and tears and confession. That can be underscored, too, for it is not a theoretical assertion; it is experience. Those who have followed the trends in religious life know something about the effort put forth by perspiring men to erase all gloom and sadness from Christianity. There was a time—only a few years ago—when, in order to overcome criticisms and guarantee church attendance, preachers vied with each other to make Christ popular. The lowly Carpenter became in turn an unwilling world's greatest salesman, business executive, and sportsman, and His Gospel became a success story of evolution that would, we were assured, by the efforts of civilized and educated man, soon culminate in the "kingdom of God" here on earth.

The complete collapse of such shallow historical study and optimistic opulence came with a terror and shudder of "black-outs." It had to fail. It was confronted with a phenomenon it did not understand and could not interpret. Who could explain as easy jogging progress an enlightened modern civilization lying awake nights plotting diabolical horrors with which to frighten the world into submission? Especially when it became evident that plots of the night were to be realized in day activity? "When the morning is light," wrote



Micah, "they practice it, because it is in the power of their hand. And they covet fields, and take them by violence; and houses, and take them away . . ."

Paul S. Minear has an article in *Religion in Life* (A Christian Quarterly, Spring Number, 1943. Abingdon-Cokesbury) entitled "Satan Returns from Holiday" which sums up the situation realistically. He writes: "We have been so confident of advances in psychology, sociology, history and metaphysics as assuring mastery of destiny that we have termed biblical attitudes primitive and credulous and have prided ourselves on progress as *distance from* rather than *nearness to* their insights. But it is we who have been naive and superstitious—and unsatisfied. Jesus, Peter, Paul testify to actual victories over the tyrant Satan, victories for which our souls are starved. But we have stifled our hunger by denying its existence and are thus doubly under the power of the kingdom of this world. No less slaves than they, we ignore the existence and power of our masters." If the Church has made mistakes and been impatient in presenting its message, its mistakes were quickly seized upon and used as excuses by a generation eager to seize upon a hostile world philosophy built on flimsy wishful thinking.

Current events conclusively demonstrate that though God is in His heaven, not all is right with the world. The trouble with the world is man, of course. The trouble with man is not that he

does not know what to do, but that he is unable to do what he knows he ought to do. Man's job is bigger than man's strength. Knowledge is at odds with desire and craving, and the latter are the proven victors. "But," you protest, "they can not and will not win in this conflict," and you will say it emphatically.

The answer seems to be that they have already won. They have managed to bring the entire world to the abyss of destruction, and have demonstrated that evil is bigger and stronger than knowledge of decency and that evil delights in distorting knowledge to its own fiendish ends. Because it has happened today, it can happen tomorrow. We are opposed by a force too strong for us. We are fools unless we now look earnestly for a salvation that is strong enough to match this menace. There is only one power strong enough, and that power, too, has been demonstrated in history. Thank God for that! Need I tell you the name again? You know, do you not, the name above every name? When pronounced it shall make every knee bow, both in heaven and on earth.

We are a strange people, are we not? So quick to forget that time is on God's side. "Ye shall be like gods," promised the prince of liars to our first parents. The glib smoothness of the words prodded humanity into a faith in self that has never been justified but which has never been completely destroyed, a faith which keeps us in

a slavery that we even fail to recognize. Now and then, of course, there come little stirrings within to question whether or no it be really true. So many little things are amiss. We ask questions, for instance, when we should be answering them, if gods we are. We should be controlling forces, if gods we are. Oddly enough, too, there come promptings to worship—to worship that which we know, in our better moments, is above us. “Better to forget these weak moments of acknowledged incompetence,” we gruffly say, “for we *are* masters of our destiny and *do* hold all fate in the palm of our hand.”

That fierce contest has gone on through the centuries in varying intensity. Looking down from His Creator throne, seeing man bustling around surly, rebellious, proud, all dressed up in god’s clothes, He might have laughed—the Psalmist was certain he heard a note like that—but God, who is perfect love and mercy and goodness and wisdom, threw down a challenge to that lie in life and sent His Son carrying a crude Cross to tear man from his love of self, and turn his clumsy feet homeward.

We have been such crude failures at playing god, have we not? There is something contemptible, as well, about the modern Nebuchadnezzar strutting vainly to the proud boast, “Is not this great Babylon, which I have built for the honor of my name, and the might of my majesty, and

the power of my kingdom?" It looks silly today, and the prophet is heard with new understanding as he repeats the words of Daniel: "And thy dwelling (therefore) shall be with the beasts of the field." "Fool," said a greater prophet than Daniel, even God's Son, to that rich man striving to make himself secure against tomorrow with new barns and great harvests, "this night thy soul shall be required of thee!"

We all know, deep in our hearts, that we must be better than "fools," and better than "beasts," for the sake of this stunned and battered world, for the sake of bewildered lost selves, and for the sake of the love in the face of God's Son. We also know that it is beyond our power. "Ye must be born again," said Jesus; and we must confess, in the light of colossal failure, that something radical like that must happen to our whole being. But to be born either a first or second time is something with which we have precious little to do. It is the work of God! That is what He is doing out there on Calvary. He is winning victories we can not win over powers before which we stand helpless, and offering that power to us. "I will not leave you desolate," He promised, "I will come and abide with you." It does seem simple enough, an offer of friendship that passes human understanding.

In the cold court-yard stood Peter, brought there by his impetuous, unthinking self-confidence.

Out he went, to weep! He had failed so miserably to live up to the love of his best friend. The remorse would have killed him, too, as it did Judas, except for the remembrance of love's tender assurance and forgiveness in the eyes of Him who knew the denials and who, even then, was carrying the agonizing burden of such sin. That love held Peter steady. He had caught a glimpse of the hope of forgiveness and restored friendship. He kept hoping—and it was true! Jesus came and called him friend again. Never again would Peter trust in himself alone and follow Jesus "afar off," but he would cling close to Him who saved him by grace, and trust utterly in the Savior's strength.

Many years later, after much experience, Peter was able to confess honestly that he had never changed his mind about the worth of that power found in Christ. "His divine power," he wrote, "has given us all things that are needful for life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and perfection."

How long must we stand impotent and impudent in the cold court-yard before we look up and see that "Jesus Christ is passing by"? How long before we see that it is not our tears He is after, but our very innermost being?

The Church will speak again this year of tears and remorse and doom. It is real! But even as she speaks in word and symbol of man's tragic plight of blindness and weakness, and the stormy

path of rebellion, lo, a rainbow, a promise of God's forgiveness and peace and joy in Christ.

Sometimes in the church you will hear messages that are frankly beyond your experience. Sometimes there may even be an emphasis that is frightening (it is so difficult to manage a right balance in every sermon). But the experience of Christ's friendship is available, that is sure. Only start out today in His company, and journey with Him by prayer and reading of God's Word, but start out—and just as you are. As you keep stride with Him, you will enter into the mysteries of the depths and the heights and be satisfied. Following like that, the day will come when you, too, will look up and be startled into a realization that you have denied the Holy One of God, and join Peter on "the mourner's bench." In that day remember the compassion of the Savior, and know His hand is extended to you in glad forgiveness and salvation. As you walk, you will understand more and more the grief of the pain you have caused Him, as well as the joy that is found in the words, "saved by grace." Only start out today—just as you are!

## Chapter Eight

# Self-Sacrifice in Lent

*And the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.*

Galatians 2:20b

ON July 12, 1944, *The Christian Century* printed a poem written by Franklin D. Elmer, Jr., entitled, "American Cathedral." He writes:

Main Street is an empty-ended nave  
Thronged with worshippers.  
The windows are brilliant showcases  
Stuffed with the trivia of little life.  
Soul-hungry, harried multitudes,  
Seeking, seeking, seeking,  
Dash from the Chapel of the Dollar,  
Checkbook still in hand,  
To share vicarious confession  
Slumped in a deep-cushioned seat  
Before a silver screen.  
A touch of laughter, a sniff of tears,  
Then out again.  
And now the station of the hat

Or shoes, or candy, or a bright necktie—  
 Then a visit to the Fountain of the Rich Milk Shake,  
 And home!  
 Day after day they come,  
 For this is a seven-day faith!  
 See how devoutly they genuflect at crossings  
 To the Red and Green,  
 Rushing, stopping, rushing!  
 Day after day they leave,  
 Wearier, more harried than when they came.  
 Main Street is an empty-ended nave.  
 Look east! Look west! There is no altar!

That strikes us as being a succinct and pungent story of man's noisy and pointless existence. There is no theme-song, unless you dare to call its chatter and boom, its din of clattering and noisome traffic a theme-song. Of course that is what Carl Sandburg probably would call it, for he writes in his poem entitled "Chicago":

And having answered so I turn once more to those who  
 sneer at this my city, and give them back the sneer and  
 say to them:  
 Come and show me another city with lifted head singing  
 so proud to be alive and coarse and strong and cunning.  
 Flinging magnetic curses amid the toil of piling job on  
 job, here is a tall bold slugger set vivid against the  
 little soft cities;  
 Fierce as a dog with tongue lapping for action, cunning  
 as a savage pitted against the wilderness,  
     Bareheaded,  
     Shoveling,



Wrecking,  
Planning,  
Building, breaking, rebuilding.

Under the smoke, dust all over his mouth, laughing with  
white teeth,  
Under the terrible burden of destiny laughing as a young  
man laughs. . . .

But there is no melody—only that frightful wail. It reminds us of an old frame house that stood on the campus of the school we once attended. Most people called it “The Music Hall.” Every afternoon, as one passed by, there could be heard the shrill screech of a violin, the squeak of a clarinet, the thunder of many pianos, and the crazy competition of many soloists, all working on different compositions. Do you know what we called that building? We called it “Agony Hall.” And it seemed like a very appropriate name to most of us. There was, though, one redeeming feature. Out of it came trained musicians who gathered voluntarily before the discipline of a baton, and then, hallelujah, we had music with melodies that stirred the depths of our souls.

It was an incisive insight that led Mr. Elmer to write, “Main Street is an empty-ended nave. . . . There is no altar!” It explains why the world has become a heaving “Agony Hall,” and why a business-man friend said, “All of my associates have made a lot of money this past year, but there is present in their conversation a certain hopeless-

ness, a 'what in the world is the use' attitude." In such lives there is apparently no altar.

There is only one thing wrong with this idea. It is not true. Man is by nature a worshipper. He always builds an altar. The Old Testament introduces us very early to a picture of man gathering stones for the purpose of building one. When Paul came to Athens he found many and ancient altars. Search antiquity, search history, and you will find yourself stumbling against them in every civilization: Roman, Greek, Egyptian, Babylonian, Druidic. No matter what civilization you study, make up your mind to have a look at the altars. Your knowledge of any given generation's culture is incomplete until you have stood there and asked questions. It is a simple factual statement to say, as one did, that "man is incurably religious," and it is just as factual to say that if you want to know what a man is like you must visit his altar.

If this is true, and I believe it is, then it does not help to say, "Look east! Look west! There is no altar!" One must keep looking—in! What is it, one must ask, that man bows down to, reverences, sacrifices to? What is it he lavishly spends his time, money, and interest upon? I think you know the answer.

Once upon a time there lived an old couple in almost complete isolation. By one means or another it came to their attention that, far re-

moved from their backwoods home, a man had invented what was called a "looking glass" that was guaranteed without reservation to duplicate exactly what the looker looked like. The idea captivated their imagination and they determined to scratch and save in order to purchase this wonderful gift of civilization.

After much effort the price was ready to be met. The last few pennies had been scraped together by the man, who now determined to secure the "glass" as a surprise. It was done. But lo, the "glass" was such a wonderful thing that he decided to hide it in a distant shed where he might enjoy it alone for awhile. So it came to pass that he spent much time away from home, contrary to habit.

The suspicious wife followed him one day and saw him enter the shed. She peered in and watched him preen himself, smile, and laugh before a small flat object that looked much like a picture. But examination could wait. Later she stole over and searched the shed until she found the exact object. She looked, saw the face of a woman, hurried to her husband, confronted him with the thing and said: "So this is the picture of the old hag you have been spending your time with lately!"

The story does not say so, but we are sure that the husband explained, and that a now delighted wife found excitement and pleasure in its use. At

least we do know that the present generation understands its use and delights in it. "What do you do," asked a modern girl of another, "when you see a pretty face?" "Oh," said the other, "I just lay the mirror down, rest awhile, then look again." And it is not funny!

The point is that man has seen himself in a mirror, a mirror of his own making, and keeps coming back and back again to admire himself. There is an altar in that mirror. Do you not believe me? Look at America's cosmetic bill.

Of course it is more than cosmetics. A man pointed to a window and said to a friend, "Look into the glass and tell me what you see." The other looked out upon a crowded city scene and said, "I see people." "Look again—but into this glass," said the first, pointing to a mirror. "I see myself," said his companion. "Isn't it strange," mused the instructor half to himself, "how by simply adding a little silver, man's vision becomes limited to self?" It is the silver, then, that does it—symbolical of man's wealth. It is the ever increasing purchasing power that builds the altar in life.

Purchasing power has always limited vision. It was when Sennacherib had gathered the spoils of victories that he dared mock the God of Israel in stupid confidence in his own strength. But we have not learned well the facts of history, have we? There is a reason for that, too. Much of the

tragic behavior of contemporary humanity would have been impossible if history were well known. But people do not read history; they only hear commentators. But read history, especially the history of Israel, and learn its sober lessons. We shall have need of them tomorrow.

There we stood, only yesterday, with all the wealth of science at our disposal, and with all the wealth of an industrial world, and with all the wealth of learning. And we built an altar in a mirror. I know there are many indications that repentance for this bitter fruit of humanism and rationalism is on the way. I have heard and read many great leaders of world thought, and understand that all such leaders are beginning to define the limitations of man with sharp emphasis. It has been said that the man in the study is twenty years ahead of the man on the street, and it frightens me because in my impatience I want them to see the limitations now before a new substitute for God's altar is found.

We stand, God willing, on the doorstep of such victories on the far-flung battlefronts as to insure an end of the hostilities that have given us all "war-nerves." We must understand that victory has graver responsibilities than conflict. Remember, it was when Belshazzar was feasting that ruin fell with the deafening commotion of a horrific explosion. And there are plenty of indications that we are waiting for the hour of feasting with

an insatiable maw. God have mercy upon us if with the spoils of victory we turn to frivolity, nudity, vulgarity, and drunkenness as fit sacrifices to lay on the altar of life! One need hardly be a prophet to see the handwriting on the wall in that case. No, there must be no detour. We in the Christian Church must see to that with enthusiasm.

Possibly the greatest danger lies with the Church itself. The question will not down: Are we in the Church ready for this hour? Are we not guilty, too, of worshipping at strange altars? Could not Micah say of us truly that despite our sins of selfishness, greed, avarice, and lust we content ourselves with a superficial knowledge of God's ways and presence—"Yet will they lean upon the Lord and say, Is not the Lord among us? none evil can come upon us."

Of all the evils that could come to pass, this must surely be the worst: God's people delighting in the sins of worldliness and still insisting that they have Him among them and feel secure. "Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write: . . . 'I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love' . . . repent!" "Unto the angel of the church in Thyatira write: . . . 'I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols' . . .

repent." "Unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write: . . . 'Because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew thee out of my mouth. Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need for nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked' . . . repent!"

Repent. Turn around! That is where we must begin. Let self-consciousness cease, that fearful consciousness that weighs everything in the light of self's needs and powers, that shameful practice of protecting, shielding, comforting *me*.

We must come to a speedy realization that all half-way sacrifices to God are of no avail. "Where your heart is, there will your treasure be." There could be no half-way for our Savior. The way of sacrifice must begin with a "not my will, but Thine be done." Calvary was an altar, God's altar. Here the "lamb without blemish and without spot" was slain. "Ye know," wrote Peter, "ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, but with the precious blood of Christ." And then He came with those gruesome holes in hands and feet and side, saying, "Peace be unto you," and Thomas knew there was nothing for it but to throw himself at His feet and confess Him "Lord and God."

There is no use shying from the full implications of that confession, for so have said all His

disciples. They understood that the lordship of Jesus meant that they were no longer their own. They had been purchased and bought from sin on the altar of Calvary. It meant that their life in all its wholeness must be brought and placed on that altar of God. Without it there could be no discipleship. It meant that all of life's purposes must now be to glorify His name. Without it there could be no discipleship. Faith, for them, meant not only trusting Him with death, but with life. The altar once reared to *self* must therefore be crushed and hauled away for junk. It was not worthy of their prodigious efforts of sacrifice, for it was the altar of a god of destruction. But Christ and Calvary, that was different: "He is worthy," they joyously cried and brought their poor lives to lay upon His altar for healing and dedication for service.

Now Lent comes to remind us that self-sacrifice is part of life lived in the light of the Cross. No one argues it, everyone admits that "Thou gavest Thyself for me, what have I given for Thee?" is a fair question. Most of the people in the Church are willing to do something special during Lententide "to show Jesus that they really care." Sometimes this takes the form, in our Church at least, of "Penny-a-Meal" offerings and special devotions. In some instances there is fasting, and abstinence of various kinds. All of these things, these little extras, are without question a fine and splendid



thing. Many people, indeed, take a great deal of pride in their Lenten routine.

And that is where they are wrong! "Why don't you ever sing the second stanza of No. 121?" a young girl asked. "Because," was the answer, "I do not believe it—I do not believe that 'the least you do for Jesus will be precious in His sight.' " But many do! They take a little from the overflow of life's goods and lay it on His altar and feel very pious about it.

"I can not understand it," said a venerable old pastor to his flock before an offering was to be received, "I watch you men in the fields tossing big bundles about with apparent ease, and yet as soon as an offering is announced you all look pale and sickly. I have noticed that many times it takes as many as ten of you to carry a dollar to the altar."

Kierkegaard is not so gentle as the old pastor when he attacks the discrepancy between what we say we believe and the way we express our faith in deeds: "In an author of old time I read the following observation or something like it," he writes. "When one sees a man holding the axe wrong and chopping in such a way that is likely to chop everything but the log, one does not say how wrongly the woodsman handles the axe; but one will say, the man is not a woodsman. Make the application. When one sees thousands and thousands and millions of Christians whose lives

have not in the remotest way even the least likeness to what—and that is the decisive thing—to what the New Testament calls Christians—is it not strange and confusing, is it not to speak as one would not do in any other situation, when one says how poorly the Christians express what it is to be a Christian, how far they are from expressing it? In every other situation one would say, these men are not Christians.”

It is confusing to look at the things we bring in the name of “sacrifice”—something that is intended to confess the measure of our love for a Christ who gave His life freely for us, and find that the spirit of Cain is still with us. We have this amazing gift of God in Christ with forgiveness, reconciliation, and eternal life, and—and—God help us!—some unfeeling, impertinent person pipes up with the staggering problem, “Do you think it is a sin to dance? to go to shows? to visit taverns?”

What is it, I beseech you, that we have made of Christ’s agonizing death and priceless atonement? What is it, I beg you, that we have made of His “Take up your cross and follow me”? By what and whose authority have we translated it to mean a “stop this!” or a touch of lumbago or a financial reverse?

Can this be the meaning of Paul’s plea to the Christians at Rome: “I beseech you . . . present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto

God, which is your reasonable service" and his injunction, "Be not conformed to this world"?

Is this the most that we can make of these words of Christ, "Truly, I tell you, except a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains a single grain; but if it die it bears rich fruit"? Then truly is our plight desperate, for we have the "letter that killeth" without the spirit "that giveth life."

"I'd give my life to have those little ones crowd so joyously about me," said a fastidious irreligious club-woman to a Christian friend with whom she had insisted upon going on a regular visit to the slums. "I had never thought of it that way," said the Christian, "but I guess that is what one has to give." And it is! "I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus," said Paul. Do we have the marks of Jesus? Look at our hands! Are they there? Look at our feet! Are they there? And do we, as Paul admonishes the Corinthians, "do all to the glory of God"? Even our eating and drinking and daily chores? Do we work for the purpose, as the Apostle puts it, that we "may have to give to him that needeth"?

When Jesus came to Galilee, a few men gave their all—  
Their souls and minds, their strength and wealth—in  
answer to his call;

Eleven men did not withhold from him a thing they  
owned—

'Twas worthy of a Christ who died to see a world atoned.

When Jesus came to my home town, they sold him  
novelties;  
They gave him suppers, pies and plays—just anything to  
please.  
For men had lost the vision of a world from sin redeemed;  
They bought and sold for profit even in his church, it  
seemed.

Still Jesus cried: "Forgive them, they are children yet and  
blind;  
They think they do my will when they give money of  
this kind."  
The men just laughed and said in scorn: "Why, no man  
gives his all.  
Tell him to come to our bazaar; we'll rent him out a  
stall!"

But Jesus wept such bitter tears to see the sons of men  
Live just as if he'd never come and died and risen again;  
As if he'd never taught them they must consecrate their  
all—  
Their souls and minds, their strength and wealth—in  
answer to his call.

(Ernest Emurian in *Church Management*, Feb., 1939)

Let us not speak of self-sacrifice and self-denial,  
unless we are willing to look into the gentle eyes  
of Him who hangs on a rough-hewn Cross, and  
cry—not sing—

The dearest idol I have known,  
Whate'er that idol be,  
Help me to tear it from Thy throne,  
And worship only Thee.

W. Cowper

Let us not speak of self-sacrifice and self-denial, unless we are willing to die to self—how our nature rebels at that!—and to raze the altar to self.

You cannot do it? Tell Jesus so. He will draw you up Calvary's slope with the power of His divine love, and lo, it is done! See, He is smiling as you exclaim in astonishment, "But this is not death, it is life!"

Hush! There is the sound of angelic choirs, and they are singing "Amen." There is bound to be celestial music when men gather from every tribe and nation around an altar like the Cross.



## Chapter Nine

# Lent and Self-Examination

*Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith.*

II Corinthians 13:5

**S**ELF-EXAMINATION is one of the avowed purposes of Lententide. What is it? What are its prized benefits?

Most of us have had the experience of a medical examination. We know that ordinarily the first step is to answer numerous questions—about father, mother, grandparents, habits, past illnesses, and a host of kindred things. All of these we answer, personal though they be, because we expect that honest replies will be helpful in determining the status of our health. Next we are subjected to various tests to ascertain whether blood, heart, lungs, and what-have-you measure up to fixed standards acceptable as normal be-

havior; and finally comes a verdict upon the degree of our physical well-being.

Self-examination is comparable to this kind of procedure in that there are questions, tests, standards, and verdict. It is radically different in that it proposes to examine, instead of body, thoughts and words and desires and deeds—indeed, man's spirit, things which can not be submitted, except in a limited sense, to any other examiner save oneself. Therefore, it is literally examination *of self, by self*.

This calls for a truly extraordinary ability, a strange and mysterious power to stand outside of oneself looking at oneself as objectively as though self were another, as though self were actually a stranger, and yet a stranger about whom we know every dark secret. This power inherent in man makes it possible for Gillilan to urge:

Just stand aside and Watch Yourself Go By,  
Think of yourself as "he" instead of "I";  
Pick flaws; find fault; forget the man is you,  
And strive to make each estimate ring true.

Without this knack of being able to say, "Think of yourself as *he* instead of *I*," there could not be the kind of consciousness of self that we all have experienced. Then most certainly there would not exist as a fundamental hunger this appetite for approval of both self and others. Whether we would then be human is another



matter, but let us try to make it clear that we have this peculiar power, and almost unthinkingly use it in our restless search for approval. This knowledge results in some interesting and vital facts concerning human behavior.

A few years ago I read the sensational account of the death of a Chicago physician. He was dead by his own choice, a suicide. A note left behind read: "Surely there can be no good reason for my going on and maiming honest people just to eke out a living." Here a recent patient was named, followed by a brief summary of a last bedside call that led to these thoughts, "His very last dying words called me back to his side, bringing the terrible realization that I had utterly and completely missed the diagnosis, a fearful monument to my horrible ineptness as a practitioner."

There is profound meaning for us in this record of human tragedy, for here, mind you, is a history of self-examination. Here certainly can be seen questions, tests, standards, and verdict. It was an examination of self and by self done almost as unconsciously as we breathe. He did not say, "I shall now go into a room apart and examine myself." This man looked at himself, as we all look at our selves in anxious quest of approval. But approval was not forthcoming. He saw nothing but things which met with his deepest disapproval. The chagrin of failure compelled a frenzied search for some avenue of escape, and when

all avenues appeared blocked, death beckoned with lies of security. This man in despair was desperate, and any promise of deliverance was snatched at with ferocious hunger.

The insistent verdict of failure may frequently end in suicide. Sometimes it results in insanity. In all such cases it is obvious that the standards are too high. If the standards could be lowered for them, complete despair might be avoided. It is a matter of record that parents and teachers have often sinned against lives entrusted to their care by pointing such persons at goals far beyond native talents and endowments. Wisdom in this matter would save many lives and many heartaches.

But of course not all self-confessed failures turn to self-destruction. There are many individuals who manage to shoulder the burden this knowledge thrusts upon them. Some even manage to be quite brave and gay in spite of the pronounced judgment of doom. Margaret Goldsmith writes of Christina of Sweden, "She knew that she had accomplished nothing, that she was leaving no mark on time . . . she had lived, and that was all, for sixty-three years." And yet she was able to order as her epitaph with a flippant show of courage, "Vixit Christina."

To manage by sheer will-power to live under this horrible judgment is not easy. It involves one, as it did Christina, in the need for a forced gaiety that restlessly paces the streets of the world in

search of new thrills and new crowds. It brings a nervous behavior that needs shrieking excitement and giddy movement. Often as not, it brings in its train a long list of physical ills that destroy happiness, all happiness save such as can be wrested from self-pity, and the poor comfort that responsibility for usefulness and success can no longer be expected.

Another group, probably the great majority, feels only twinges of remorse, and hears only the rumble of defeat. Such warnings may come with frequency and some insistence, or like some faint echo, sounding from the depths of unsuspected caverns deep within, muffled and all but inarticulate. They manage to live with such sounds because of another mysterious power, the ability to justify and harden self with deception.

We all know the subtle tricks used to justify this self. At least we have a gift for recognizing the tricks when we suspect others are employing them. "I have just been talking to so-and-so, and she says she knows the reason why so-and-so said what she did." But how did she know the why and the wherefore? Was it not because of her ability to stand in the place of the other person and select motives and reasons, knowing the worst as well as the best, and giving her credit for the worst? We can guess at other persons' reasons only because we know all the temptations and treachery within our own spirit. But the feeble, invalid,

and sordid motives we find in others are never found in us, on the other hand, because we give self substantial and noble reasons which we refuse to test, and therefore accept as true. And where there is some feeble testing, there are also prejudice and self-satisfying reasons.

What an elaborate and intricate game it turns out to be! "I heard that vulgar person tell a friend that I am a selfish wretch," we confide to a friend, "but I have done this good thing, contributed to that good cause, donated of my precious time on behalf of this project and that—you don't think I am a selfish wretch, do you?" we implore. And few would, in that spot. But though we know enough to know even this, we go triumphantly home, elated and vindicated. At once we manage to force the little voice into an inglorious retreat, properly cowed. If we have too much pride to go to a friend, we argue it out in the inner courts and chambers, marshal such prodigious arguments for our side as to rout any thought of guilt. We are adept, not only at finding excuses, but at fixing upon reasons that are noble and unselfish, thus ushering self into a make-believe "hall of fame."

This game of justifying and excusing self makes repetition of some repulsive action possible. When such repetition is indulged in, and excuses are directed long enough and often enough at one target, such actions become accepted as right with-

out the need for expending any effort on its defense. Thus it becomes possible to harden self against the demands of a former ideal, and to lower standards.

Approval, remember, must be had by every human soul, and must be had short of despair if there is to be any peace and happiness. Other than by the way of self-deception, there is no way to this peace except through the absence of ideals. This presupposes such ignorance and darkness as to make civilization almost unthinkable.

It is actually, then, deception of self by self that makes it possible for great numbers of people to live in some degree of peace. The degree of that peace depends upon the kind of standards that have been presented and accepted as the test and pattern of normal behavior, together with the strength inherent in that pattern to insist upon conformity. People may spurn an ideal as unattainable and undesirable, may give self such faulty ideals as to make attainment easy, or may successfully excuse themselves by giving themselves credit for things they are not, overlooking the things they are. The way to peace, it seems, is a way of low ideals and successful lies.

On the other hand, if and when the standard becomes insistent and determined in its judgment of failure, man enters into the dark region of despair.

Here suicide and insanity beckon with wild ges-

ticulations that appear friendly, or nervous fatigue offers panting and perspiring companionship.

William Allen White writes (*Masks in a Pageant*) out of long experience with men high in public life: "They were men half beast and half god, with the two elements continually battling within them. They were typical of their times, incarnations of various phases of the democratic spirit. Each had his delusions about truth upon which his career was founded, and from which delusions, curiously, came much of his strength. For instance, Harrison and Wilson cherished Calvinistic gods, created in their own image. With these gods they defied the world. . . . But Cleveland seems to have heard the voice in the clink of a gold reserve, and Bryan was fooled by the ballot box. . . . So Bryan was always listening at the little hole in the top of the box, sedulously convinced that what he heard there was the voice of God." Now, regardless of what you may think about the conclusions which he draws from his knowledge of these men, here can be seen the results of different standards. We, in turn, judge them by our standards.

But who can understand completely the mysteries of this inner court? The dim light and the labyrinthine corridors yield their secrets to no man. The presence, though, of this ability of self to criticize self—to question, test, measure, and bring judgment—is something we need to reckon

with seriously, for it is as plain as an elephant's nose that civilization can flounder into despair with standards beyond it, or sink into shabby indifference and reckless destruction by a shameful deceit and a refusal of any standard save that within easy reach. Self-approval, and the approval of others, both eagerly sought, are the roads to peace all right, but without Christ they are to be had in this world only by cheapening life's meaning and destiny.

Thus far I have refused to use the name "conscience." That has been done deliberately. "Conscience" is the name Christians use to label this area in life, but the area is not Christian. It does not belong to the Christians as a peculiar possession, but is a universal endowment. The Christian Church gives, besides its own name, its own questions, its own tests, its own standards, and its own verdict.

In the Christian life the standard is ever our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. "Behold the man!" said one who sat in judgment upon Him during the shameful mockery of His trial, and all Christians agree that the ejaculation of this pagan ruler is true—*the Man*. He is our standard of perfection, and we sing, "I long to be like Jesus." We confess, too, that besides revealing what man ought to be, He reveals what God is. Therefore He has, we say, not only our approval, but God's, sealed with the resurrection, the ascension, and the com-

ing of the Spirit. Our conscience, this uncanny ability to stand outside and pass judgment on self, has a new light in the life of Christ. It is not for nothing that He is called the "Light of the World," and personal witness is made that He is "my light." The Christian ideal is fixed in Him.

Jesus makes it very difficult. Make no mistake about that. He comes with such lowliness as to make recognition difficult, no grandeur that we should desire Him. He comes bluntly pointing out that the approval we hunger for and seek with lies, self-deception, and lowered ideals, is not the thing we want at all. If we seek the clue to happiness in this manner, happiness will be transient and temporary in view of the judgment of God. He comes with pounding footsteps to confront us with a love as tremendous as the Cross on Calvary, drawing life up to that for its testing and verdict.

We stand before Him, recognizing dimly the beauty of His lowliness, astounded at His sinlessness, confounded by His life of sacrifice, asking questions, testing, measuring by His standards, and . . .

Who dares bring in the verdict? It is a standard too high for us! Its road leads straight to despair. Here surely is mystery. For the very thing man must avoid if he is to live with peace and happiness is now proposed as the very thing to embrace.



Despair, for the Christian, is also a desperate plight, but lo, the alternatives have been increased by one. There is an open door that this dark region has not yielded before, and it is the door to the very thing his spirit craves, approval of God. This approval is the key to the approval of self, for self is excused and forgiven in Christ. The approval of others, so important in the past, is discarded as unworthy in the light of the knowledge that the real "other" is God alone.

Thus despair becomes the goal of Christ for every human being. We could not insist upon this way of destruction except for Him—except for those explicit promises to the helpless to be their helper—to stand with them in the courts of their own lives and in the courts of God, accepting their sin and failure as His very own, and pleading His sinlessness for them. We find that despair at standards too high is an open road to the status of children of God.

Christian Lenten self-examination is meant to confront self with Christ. Ask questions like these: What did His eyes see? What do mine see? Where did His feet go? Where do mine go? What were His thoughts? What are mine? What did His lips speak? What do mine? This is conscious, determined self-examination, and the call now during Lent is for you to make the effort. Ask questions, test, measure, and walk into the regions of despair. He will not forsake you in your sick despair.

but will tenderly bind up the wounds and lift you in His power to a new life hid in Him.

Such examination has another use. His life in mine ought to dominate and shine forth radiantly. It is our task to let Christ dwell in us richly to the showing forth of His praise. Conscious self-examination is a road that leads to Christ-likeness. It is a daily assignment, though it means time and toil. Do not forget that pardon is given freely, but Christ-likeness is won only in conflict. It looks like a dreary assignment, but there is unsuspected joy and zest in the given task. "Count it all joy, brethren," shouts Paul back over his shoulder to us, "count it all joy when you fall into temptation." Sweat and bleed and pray—there is victory ahead, for Christ is with you and in you.

"I buffet my body to bring it into subjection," shouts the Apostle with gladness in the fight, and points us to other battlefields, saying, "We battle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers and rulers in dark places."

And even as he speaks one catches a picture of a man battling his way into the dark regions of soul-life, coming to grips with lies and deceit and sham, and valiantly struggling to defeat and slay such treacherous foes. Come along, he seems to say to you and me, come along, clutch the sword which is the Word of God just so, and if you are worsted for a minute or two, up, up, again and again. Christ is with you because He was with me.

We know he speaks the truth. We are inspired at the assurance of his experience and step back into the fray with new confidence and hope. So the battle rages, today, tomorrow, every day, until that final great victory when we, because of Him, conquer that last grim tyrant called "death."

But we are often listless and tired soldiers.

One day I happened to be in the company of a pastor friend in his office. He was ministering at that time to delinquent boys. "Come over here," he said, "I want to show you a picture one of the boys painted for me." I stepped around the desk and looked at a copy of a famous picture of Christ. "Not bad," said I. "No, not bad," he said, "but notice how there are betrayals of the criminal tendency in the painter—see here, around the eyes, look here, around the mouth." There was no doubt about it, the hand could not behave except in obedience to the inner spirit of the painter.

As I looked at my life, I asked soberly, "I wonder, what kind of Christ do people see in me?" The question hurt, deeply! For I knew that the Christ who saved me was looking to me to paint a picture that would glorify Him and be a good presentation of what His Gospel can do for a man and all that.

Look at yourself! Could not you, too, do better with a daily self-examination? Of course, it means toil, but the Lord of Life is looking to you and to me to express that life:

Not merely in the words you say,  
Not only in your deeds confessed,  
But in the most unconscious way,  
Is Christ expressed.

And from your eyes He beckons me,  
And from your heart His love is shed,  
Till I lose sight of you—and see  
The Christ instead.

Self-examination will help us in that it will spur us on toward Christ-likeness, but it will also keep us earnestly single-minded in all our efforts. One finds it impossible to forget the main business of a Christian life if it is lived with daily examination before the face of Christ. And it is easy to forget! So much of life seems organized against us. Just that deadly daily routine—social contacts, business worries, political problems, and the lure of worldly pursuits—is enough to blunt the edge of what ought to be a sharp consciousness of our relationship to God in Christ.

“Watch! Watch! Watch!” shouts Scripture, understanding better than we our perils. Forgetfulness of our role as “sons of God and joint heirs with Christ” threatens always to sink us into mediocrity and uselessness for the gigantic task and place of honor that has been accorded to us by the mercy of God.

History is full of examples: For instance, King Saul was chosen of God for the highest position

in the land, yet he went his heedless way until finally it was written of him, "After whom is the king of Israel come out? after whom dost thou pursue? after a dead dog, after a flea?" "But even a king," Ivan H. Hagedorn reminds us, "can sink to the level of a beggar, and have the beggar's outlook, and spend his life 'looking for a dime,' or as David said, 'pursue after a flea.'" Then there was Nero who ran giddy-headed about his kingdom flinging challenges at the fiddlers. And do not forget Lydian scraping away at his hobby of filing needles.

Great tasks were before them all, but they became preoccupied and engrossed in trivial matters. Little wonder that men of long experience in the "Way" cry, "Watch." Let him that thinketh he stands take care lest he fall. For when I am strong, then am I weak.

Self-examination will keep us humble, too, and dependent upon our Savior for strength, for as we learn dependence we learn the peace and joy and hope of His constant presence.

I am sure as sure can be that somewhere there is a frightened, lonely self who is trying to carry the burden of failure all alone. "Come," Jesus tenderly says, "come unto me, ye weary and heavy laden," and it must mean you. There must be someone "sick and tired" of making excuses and building elaborate fortifications in the joyless task of protecting self from self and others. Confess the

flimsy walls and be done with it, for He will abundantly pardon. There must be, too, many who sense the need to walk boldly into His presence daily for renewal, that one may walk "worthy of the high calling in Christ Jesus."

One morning many years ago I went with a mother, at her urgent request, to a jail where her young son had been incarcerated late the night before. Anxiously we looked through the heavily barred door. We saw a large group of youngsters—rebellious, tired, shabby, disheveled, and ragged—Jew, Greek, Italian, Indian, Negro, and just plain Yankee. Finally my eyes caught sight of her boy. He was sitting apart from the others, immaculate in appearance, and plainly ill at ease.

"There he is," said the mother as she, too, caught sight of him. Then she called, and he came walking toward her, this fine appearing boy that anyone would be glad to call son, and at last they stood face to face, with only bars between. She reached eager hands and arms through the openings and drew him close as she sobbed through tears, "Oh, son, son, don't you see, can't you see that you don't belong here!" And he did not belong there, not with his splendid home background and adequate financial resources, not with his Church and Confirmation instruction. No, he did not belong there.

Now some of you may be away from home, imprisoned with careless habits, wrong occupations,

and shabby, unworthy companions. Can you not see? You do not belong there—not you—not with your training and resources and available love, and I want to urge you to come home where the love of Christ will forgive, and His skill bind up the wounds, and His inspiring presence lift you to a sonship that is eternal.

Self-examination is one of the avowed purposes of Lententide. Use it, though it lead through the frightening darkness of despair, for it leads the way to life, to Christ-likeness, to single-minded purposeful living, to humility and a consciousness of our high destiny in Christ Jesus, whom we confess to be Lord.





## Chapter Ten

# Lenten Memories

*In remembrance of me.*

Luke 22:19

YOU have no idea," said a victim of amnesia, "how lonely life can be without any memories."

Well, try to imagine what it would mean to lose this ability to recall the "scenes of my childhood"—to lose all vital contact with the past. I shudder at the thought of having yesterday a great void, and can understand that "lonely" was probably a feeble attempt to describe an aching spirit that longed to have "memory play an old tune on the heart."

It would be a frightful thing to have a society without a trace of remembrance. It would mean a solitariness that would speedily destroy order and coherence. Thank God for this great gift of memory, which when combined with imagination makes possible a history and tradition that is animated and generous in its rich gifts for life.

Without such a faculty there could be no roots to existence, in lieu of which there could be nothing but shallowness and emptiness.

Who can properly estimate the place of memory in the habits of men who carry the indelible mental etching of a praying mother? Who can escape the urge that prompted Joseph's brave answer when there is a past to sin against? No, we dare not discount the importance of memory as a force and power in the behavior of mankind.

William Allen White once said, "Life is organized memories. And the kind of organization one gives to his memories makes his personal equation—his personal character." In the light of this, it becomes imperative for us to select the material for memory with utmost skill and care. It is extreme folly to crowd a personal life with material that will later cause fear and cringing. Many of us would like another chance, I am sure, for in our stupidity we thought we were strong enough to tolerate tainted memories, or at least supposed we should be able to subdue them with some kind of forgetfulness. We never thought that conscience would insist upon thrusting them constantly to the fore to menace all health and happiness.

"Why did you return this money, son?" said a man to a small boy who came running with a lost purse. "You might have kept it. No one would have known, and it could have been used to purchase many things you desire."

“Oh, but I would have known, sir,” said the boy, “and I don’t want to live with a thief.”

But that was wisdom beyond the knowledge of experience. The lad was selecting his memories in faith. Would to God that we all had had that kind of faith—a faith that walks by the knowledge of revelation and the experience of others.

Choose the material for your memories with all the help and training and experience that you can get, for here lies much of the precious stuff that life is composed of, and here is the secret of much of what we call character. Little wonder, then, that nations and churches should set aside days for calling to mind important past events. It is society proposing such memories as it supposes will be a leaven for good in the behavior of its people, and confessing that much of the past is a precious thing that needs cultivation and selection in the best interests of all humanity.

It should occasion no surprise, therefore, when Jesus boldly makes a bid for a place in this department of life. “This do,” He said, broke and gave bread, passed the cup, “in remembrance of me.”

It was as though He proposed to make His place in memory secure by eating and drinking. That was ever the way of Jesus, to take the ordinary and make it extraordinary. Of water He made Baptism. Of bread and wine He made the Holy Communion. Of a body He made a fit sacri-

fice for the sins of the world. Of a cross He made a throne. Of death He made life.

And so it came to pass that He was known "in the breaking of bread," and the disciples of all ages have met with Him around a Table to find refreshment in remembering Him. There have been times, to be sure, when a heavy lethargy has prevented the frequent opportunities for communing that would seem to be desirable, but even during such days there has been a profound respect for its significance, and participation has meant hush and quiet and His presence. Today we notice that more frequent communions have become the rule in many congregations, and all of us are hoping that this means the beginning of a firmer hold on the knowledge of Christ's nearness.

Let us come to the Lord's Table intent on remembering, persuaded that Jesus asks urgently for a place in this determinative sphere of character and behavior.

According to Thy gracious word,  
In meek humility,  
This will I do, my dying Lord,  
I will remember Thee.

The Lord's Table has often been called a Eucharist, that is, a thanksgiving. And the first thing we ought to do this Maundy Thursday is to resolve to listen with unusual care to the glad

invitation, "Lift up your hearts," and respond with fervor, "We lift them up unto the Lord." We are such ungrateful creatures, forever heaping up the prodigious gifts of a loving Father without taking thought of His mercy and goodness, and accepting them all more or less as our rightful possessions.

"If I could paint," said one man, "I'd paint a panel of three pictures. First, I'd show Jesus taking the cup and giving thanks. Secondly, I'd show Jesus with the seven loaves and few small fishes giving thanks. Thirdly, I'd show the Apostle Paul on that pitching ship in a gale of such proportions as to make hardened sailors quake, taking bread and giving thanks in the presence of them all. Then," said the man, "I'd hang that picture in every home to remind all people of God's gracious care, and as an exhortation, too, to give thanks to almighty God."

We need that reminder. Our dour and glum countenances are constantly revealing our ingratitude and lack of understanding of that revelation which declares, "God is love." The wonder of it no longer startles us, and our listlessness is proof enough that too frequent hearing has taken the mystery out of it for us.

I heard the other day of a minister who had the courage to do what I have often thought I should like to try. He entered the pulpit, offered prayer, read the text, "God is love," said that

there was nothing he could add to such a glorious message, said, "Amen," and left the pulpit. The friend that reported this incident expressed deep regret. "Because," said she, "I had looked forward to hearing this man preach, and had traveled many miles to be present at the service."

The preacher was right, of course, for there is little that can be added to such revelation, and all attempts to stimulate enthusiasm are quite futile in unregenerate hearts, though helpful for the regenerate. But the preacher was wrong, too, for though power of description fails and tongues reach dryly for words to speak the unutterable things of God, yet we can and must point to the Cross as the evidence.

Without that story of Calvary, the statement, "God is love," is open to serious objections. For someone will surely say, "Prove that to me, please, for my experience is at odds with that kind of knowledge. Search history as I will, I can not find traces of it there; and if I search the heavens and the earth the knowledge is not there." And they have reason to question the unruly elements and human strife, woe, pain, disaster, and death, as expressions of love.

No, we could not defend such a doctrine unless God had revealed it in some way that would forever still questionings, had spoken some word as articulate as a Cross. Someone has said: "Reason cries: 'If God were good, He could not look

upon the sin and misery of man and live, His heart would break.' And the Church points to the crucifix and says, 'God's heart did break.' Reason cries, 'Born and reared in sin and as we are, how can we keep from sin? It is the Creator who is responsible, it is God who deserves to be punished.' And the Church kneels by the Cross and whispers, 'God takes the responsibility and bears the punishment.' Reason cries again, 'Who is God, what is God? The name stands for the unknown. It is blasphemous to say we know Him.' And the Church kisses the feet of the dying Christ and says, 'We must worship the majesty which we see.' "

The Cross is stronger than our doubts and fears. And though all of life and its experiences bring that love into question, yet within the shadow of the "Place of the Skull" questions are exchanged for a knowledge that is beyond all human knowing. "Nerve me," said one man, "nerve me with constant affirmations." It must be our business as a Church to point to the Cross though all language and explanation fail us.

Give thanks, then, as you kneel at the altar. Give thanks for the memory of God's unspeakable love in Christ Jesus, our Savior.

That love is best known in the forgiveness of sins, the assurance that Christ's sacrifice is sufficient atonement for sin. God has always called forth sacrifice. It was true of the children of Israel

with their regular lamb, dove, and bullock offerings for trespass and sin and thanks, but it is also true of all who call upon the name of a god—man has always sensed that something must be brought as an offering for peace. More and more it becomes plain that the only sacrifice acceptable is a perfect life—something beyond man's power to give. It is as this understanding comes to the fore that God's sacrifice of His only Son begins to assume its true magnitude, and the true riches of His gift is laid bare. God's love is best known by what He does for us, carrying in His own person the sin of the world.

And at the Lord's Table Jesus is present to touch you with this material sign that you may know of pardon and reconciliation and peace, and understand that God forgives rebellion and betrayal and accepts trust with a friendship that astounds and confounds. Here is adequate sacrifice, and here is healing for the wounded mind and spirit that desperately cries for love, sympathy, and tender assurances. "If only I knew," sighs one. But here in Communion we know God's favor, for here is pledged His good-will toward you. It is *for you* and requires a believing heart. Take it, accept it, believe it and sing:

O Jesus, blessed Lord, to Thee  
My heartfelt thanks for ever be,  
Who hast so lovingly bestowed  
On me Thy body and Thy blood.



Truly it is a wonderful relationship—"once afar off, strangers, aliens, and now made nigh in the blood of the Lamb"—a relationship of pure grace. But it does mean that this same relationship must exist as a basis for all of life. Having accepted His life, we must remember to live out in word and deed the forgiveness received. The love of Christ must constrain us to love and to forgive, and that often becomes exceedingly difficult. The only thing that makes it possible is the Christ living within. Ever to forget it is to fail sadly in our pledged word to Him.

"Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us," is not a limitation that has been put there to restrict us. It is a simple revelation of fact as to how life is organized. There can be no forgiveness for him who refuses to forgive, and no love for him who refuses to love. There are many times when we find ourselves stubbornly refusing, and justifying our reluctance by a recital of the unworthiness of the person in question, adding up, too, the number of trespasses. But we are not to measure the forgiveness we give, in view of the fact that it has not been measured unto us. Our human relationships fall apart without forgiveness. There is nothing that can hold us together except the limitless willingness to forgive in the spirit of Christ's mission and message.

There should be no place where cooperation

and brotherly good-will are more in evidence than in the Christian Church. The Church is a society or a community by and of itself. It is the body of Christ, a body of which He is the head and we the several members. This society ought by its communal living to constitute a rebuke to a world that seeks every other way of life except that of love and forgiveness. To be sure, many of the world's laws and codes are formulated under the influence of Christian love and mercy, but it can not be understood in any sense to be Christian. No, it is humanitarian. It has as its interest the best welfare of people, but Christianity has as its first and chief interest the glory and honor of God. We who kneel at the altar to receive forgiveness must arise to live in a community that gives forgiveness without motivation other than that of Christ's love. In this sense it should be a perfect society here on earth, not perfect always in words and deeds, but perfect in the sense that it is governed by a Cross. More and more the Church must assume responsibility for a community or family life that is filled with the warmth of a relationship that is forgiving, loving, sympathetic, and cheering.

"I should like to join your church," said one individual, "but I simply can not as long as Mr. Blank is a member. Confidentially, he cheated me out of a considerable sum of money, and I can not sit in church and see him there without

having old hates surge through my mind. It is better, of course, that I stay away—don't you think so?"

"The trouble with you," answered the pastor, "is that you don't comprehend the significance of the Christian Church. In the Church we forgive once and for all for the sake of Christ, and because He Himself forgives in this fulness. But you find it hard to forgive, don't you?"

"Hard," said the man, "it is practically impossible after what he did to me."

Said the pastor, "You ought to be in a good position to understand the cost of forgiveness—it cost God a Cross, you know."

And that is the point. In just these ordinary human relationships we can find the cost of forgiveness and therefore look with new wonder at the Cross, and with new understanding build our congregational life with this as its basis. That is why congregational organizations are effective in the Kingdom's work. People have an opportunity to "rub shoulders," to cook together, to work on the same committees, and to cooperate on various projects—all this, mind you, with people that are often not easily loved and with quirks that make them difficult, yet always held steady on the foundation of Christ's Kingdom of forgiveness and love.

The congregation is in some respects a "testing ground" for the family as Christ planned it.

Others build their organizations on the basis of mutual likes and dislikes with a careful eye toward economic and social levels, but the Church of Christ defies all such limitations. It accepts rich and poor, lettered and unlettered, black and white, and asks them to work together under Him in whose eyes there is "neither Jew nor Greek." Let us not forget at the Table of the Lord that we are one in needs, hopes, and faith.

The Church is not only a rebuke but a promise to a bewildered world that in the Cross is found the solution to all those relationships between man and man as well as between man and God. We are not to eat His body and drink His blood unless we, committed to Him by love, accept His life as our own.

There is a dramatic moment in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* that you probably all remember. Tom had been threatened with a flogging by Legree, who says, "I'll conquer ye or I'll kill ye! I'll count every drop of blood in your body till ye give up."

"Marse," says Tom, "if you was sick, or in trouble, or dyin,' and it would save ye, I'd give ye my heart's blood, and if takin' every drop of blood in this poor old body of mine would save your precious soul, I'd give 'em freely as the Lord gave His for me. Do the worst ye can."

Then follows a moment of hesitation when love almost swayed cruel Legree, but only for a moment, and then followed the flogging that was to

mean the death of Uncle Tom. A friend comes to his side in death and mutters his hatred for Legree, and Tom says, "Hush, Marse George! Don't feel so. He ain't done me no real harm—only opened the gates of heaven for me—that's all."

"Only opened the gates of heaven!" Think of that! How many there are, as a matter of fact, who, like Tom, have discovered that in giving full and free forgiveness to fellow-men, no matter how vicious and brutal, have released for themselves a vibrant sense of heaven's nearness and Christ's approval. And at the same time, how many there are who, in stubborn unwillingness to forgive, have found Christ slipping from them, leaving them the worst of all fates—forsaken of God.

A community of Christ-loving, Christ-confessing, Christ-living men and women—a company of forgiven and forgiving, loved and loving—this is the Church. That Church gathers today to give thanks for One who, "in the night in which He was betrayed," thought more of us than of Himself, and who instituted, in that grave hour, the Lord's Supper and who now invites all mankind to share in His life, accept its benefits, and shoulder its responsibilities to the finding of life and to the glory and honor of the Lamb enthroned to reign forever and ever.

How different it all could be if we remembered Him, and if we carefully and deliberately chose

as memories the things He has asked us to remember.

Remember Thee, and all Thy pains,  
And all Thy love to me;  
Yes, while a breath, a pulse remains,  
Will I remember Thee.

## Chapter Eleven

# The Lenten Cross in Our Today

*They crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame.* Hebrews 6:6b

ON April 27, 1944, more than five hundred witnesses professed to have seen a vision of Christ on the Cross in the skies over Ipswich, England, during an air-raid alert. We call your attention to this phenomenon, not to argue the plausibility of it, but to suggest that such a spectacle is in accord with a vague intuition which dictates that Christ is forever being put to death, that the Calvary Cross is a contemporary thing in every generation, and that Jesus of Nazareth is still bleeding and dying, still gathering unto Himself and absorbing the sin of the world. There is present with us the uneasy feeling that "The Stranger of Galilee" is even now being nailed to a rude Cross, still the object of vehement

mockery, agitated hatred, and foul spittle. Factually it is impossible, since He died once, but the vision in the skies over Ipswich will not respond to a fretful command to be gone. It comes back again and again to stir the conscience and preach hope and forgiveness.

Crucified One, so plainly visible in our world today, too, speak to me this Good Friday and tell me why You still haunt the conscience of humanity. Why must there be a great gathering of men and women in churches today to recall the horrors of a "black day" in history when men and women met on that little hill outside Jerusalem to slay You?

Plead as we will for plain explanations and definitions, the answer seems always to be, "Look yet again, and again," and we know that somehow its mystery will never be resolved from this side of the grave. It is as broad and deep and high as all life and will not submit to man's puny attempts at analysis and control. Yet we must exert our every faculty to reach some conclusions. We must know something of the meaning of this amazing, never-dying yet always-dying, ever-present crucified Jesus. For though it be so complex and difficult as to defy a full explanation, yet there must be a simplicity about it all, too, or how could ordinary folks like you and me ever hope to secure an answer?

Some plain facts we all know about that man



on "the old rugged cross." We know that He came forth from God and that He is God's well-beloved Son born of the Virgin Mary, and that in Him dwelt true righteousness and holiness. Soderblom calls attention in his writings to a medieval chasuble in Uppsala Cathedral, and says that this most beautiful of all chasubles of this period has embroidery which places the Christmas idyll directly in the middle of the Cross. The unknown artist thus declares the vital connection that exists between the Bethlehem manger and "the hill far away." "Ye have seen me, therefore ye have seen also the Father," Jesus says constantly, and we in the Christian Church bow low in adoration and say, "Even so! Amen!" And it ought to gather us together today in a common up-reach of spirit in wonder and awe. It is not beyond us, not out of reach. This knowledge is yours and mine by faith in His Word.

It was at a midnight Christmas eve service that I first sensed this awful mystery. A splendid choir was singing the *Credo*. They came to the words I had heard a thousand times and more, "and was made man," but I heard them now with new understanding as they were sung slowly and quietly with stirring reverence. Those words belong to song and poetry and the deep places of the spirit. They will not be cramped into cold scientific analysis. They refuse to yield significance when said with speedy flourish and thoughtless

haste. The writer of the following lines has caught the mood:

Let all mortal flesh keep silence,  
And with fear and trembling stand;  
Ponder nothing earthly minded,  
For with blessing in His hand,  
Christ our God to earth descendeth,  
Our full homage to demand.

If it is not true that the Cross carried the "true Son of the Father" who "comes from the skies," then Good Friday is hardly worth remembering. But this is exactly who He is, this Crucified One with a crown of thorns. The Church will never tire of proclaiming Him as "the Word" who "was made flesh and dwelt among us." That is reason enough to meet here today around His Cross. For here we see God and know His unspeakable love.

The life of Christ is well known to you, and there is no reason why we should review it today. Yet, it seems fitting that we should let our minds hastily survey that perfect life of holiness and love, remember His quick compassion for everyone in need, remember His perfect goodness as He walked the crowded streets and narrow country lanes or preached to the multitudes by the side of the sea, remember the love that eagerly stretched out healing, forgiving hands to all who besought Him in faith. Hunger and thirst and friendlessness—was there any need too small for His sympathetic attention? Sinners without hope, men despised and

hated—was there any limit to the kind of people He joyously defended and received in forgiveness?

This Christ will never cease to evoke our exclamations of "Well done!" for we know that here is the very stuff that life ought to have for us also, and our hearts cry out for a God like this who knows the difficulties of life—a God that does not hesitate to share our fate and shoulder our burdens.

The Cross declares that God has entered into our struggles and walked even the lonely, fearful, agonizing path of death. We have a God that cheers us with hearty participation in our battle, and keeps assuring us that life is not futile; that victory is a victory of faith with eternal life and peace and joy as prizes worthy of striving after with heart and soul and mind; that He Himself is in it, with us and for us.

Another thing we know about the Cross is that the One hanging in pain there was the victim of the perfidious sinfulness of humanity. Jesus the judged has turned the Cross into a judgment. Crafty Caiaphas, gay Herod, and proud Pilate have lost though they won. We have learned to study them from the viewpoint of the Crucified, and in the light of later happenings their sins are nothing short of monstrous. And yet I am sure that if we could have been present to remonstrate with them, they would have denied

that they were motivated by ambition, fear, and selfishness. No one will admit that decisive things like these are empowered by such ugly things in life. I am sure that they themselves utterly failed to comprehend the injustice and the wrong connected with the decision to put Jesus to death. No, to them the whole thing was on a supposedly higher level. It was important, they reasoned, for the future welfare of religion, and vital for national security, and essential for peace and harmony. It was from this level that they made it appear reasonable, even to themselves, that it was *right* that He should die. The whole action was an action determined by convictions that the only sensible thing that could be done was to crucify Him. One simply can not account for the Cross unless one sees sincere men desiring His death for what they thought good and sufficient reasons.

We are, indeed, "fearfully and wonderfully made"—especially "fearfully," when we remember that it is possible to bring Scripture, experience, and reason to our support to such an extent and degree as to make us wonderfully sincere in wrong actions. It is possible for a person to do good, suppose he does it for the sake of doing good, and discover upon careful examination that it was all done for the purpose of gaining approval of others in the hope of glorifying self. It is possible for a person to do evil, not for the purpose of doing evil, but because it

appears to be right. How else can one account for the difference in viewpoint during the Civil War? Read some of the sermons of that period, and see the sharp division of opinion even in the Church. The men that supported slavery were not wicked and evil people. They were sincere in believing that they were doing right. And the frightening thing about all this is that we may be both earnest and sincere and still be foolishly the victims of deceit and lies.

Deceived men crucified the Lord. They were not the kind of people we would ordinarily call "wicked" people. No, they were ordinary people with ordinary sinfulness. They were intensely interested in protecting personal security and institutions vital to their life. They argued it out with themselves and the people around them on the basis of community welfare and national safety.

Somehow that sounds very familiar to us all, for at one time or another we have been guilty of the same practice. Tell me, honestly, have you not, too, argued against some venture, some cause, or some plan because it meant interference with your personal plans and personal budget, and then pitched your reasoning on the level of group or community welfare? "This," you said, "is not good for the Church or the community, can never be paid for, can not be justified in the light of conditions, will work a hardship on many of our

people, etc." Though at first you knew this thing had to be fought because it might cost you something, in the end you were perfectly sincere in thinking that the real reason was bigger than you or your selfishness.

You see, it is our very nature that is involved in sinfulness, not deeds on the surface of life, but deeds that flow out of depths of wrong thinking, wrong reasoning, and wrong conclusions. Satan is called a deceiver because he has managed to twist the source of our being into a "wrongness" that is defended by self as right. The lie in life is not on life's surface but intimately associated with the very thing we call the "I" or the "self."

None of us can disassociate himself from this common fate of mankind. We are all caught in this vast and sturdy net. The devil is a liar, not because he comes often with tinsel and sham that is easily brushed aside by the vigilant, but because he comes with a distorted reason and will that leave us helpless to know whether we are right or not.

Probably one reason for such blindness on our part is that we are by nature led to ask the wrong questions when confronted by truth, justice, mercy, goodness, and honesty. We are always prompted to ask questions like these: Does truth pay here? Does goodness pay here? Does honesty pay here? And if it does not "pay," we are easily

persuaded that a compromise is not only in order but essential.

Truth, of course, does not always "pay" in the sense that there are immediate rewards in tangible things. Rewards like these often go to the boldly dishonest people. Pilate was sure that it would not pay to be on the side of Christ. It might, yes, it looked very probable that it would cost him his position. No matter where you look in the Passion story you find people weighing the cost of discipleship and answering that it does not pay.

No, justice does not always receive as its reward a return of justice—not in this life. Mercy is not always rewarded by mercy—not in this life. Love is not always an investment that returns dividends of love—not in this life.

Jesus understood all this, and still insisted that justice was worthy of itself, and that it was a great and noble thing in and of itself. He called upon mankind to forgive beyond any law or restriction or contemplated reward, to love when loving seemed intolerable, and to do justly when justice appeared to be a hardship rather than a blessing. All these virtues, He said, can stand on their own feet. They need no incentive from dividends. "I do always the will of my Father," was His sufficient reason for any course of action, and He did not change His mind when confronted with Calvary.

And if it is not asking wrong questions that keeps blindness with us, it is the tendency to "whittle down" goodness and love and justice and mercy to our own size. Bunyan tells about a day in his life when he was resting in bed and a voice came into his consciousness saying, "What can you do with Jesus?" Another voice, he says, insistently answered, "Sell Him—sell Him!" Bunyan cried out desperately, "No! No! that I will never do!" But the voice persisted, "Yes, yes, sell Him! Turn Him into money. Sell Him!" At last, so he says, he could not stand that inner conflict any longer, but hurled himself from the bed and fled.

Well, right here is bared the conflict that we are all tortured by. Here are alternatives that must be accepted for debate and decision. Deep in our spirits, too, some jumbled voices arguing that selflessness, mercy, honesty, and truth are costly things that lead to death and destruction. They fail to gain appreciation and applause. They are often received with cruelty, derision, and crucifixion. Again and again comes the voice insisting that there is an escape from all this for one who will compromise, and that no one need hardly know that a compromise has been effected. "Turn Him into money!" does seem like a shameful and cowardly thing to do, but the temptation will not leave us.

"Enough is enough," we say, and argue it out



with self on the basis of all our good works. We are wise enough to understand, at least part of the time, that life will go to pieces without a certain minimum of the virtues of Christ, and we do homage to them as long as they do not cut across our lives too drastically. But Christ looks intently at us and whispers words that sound like "blindness"—words that remind us of the stern accusation He voiced once, saying, "Ye are of your father, the devil."

The Cross can not tolerate that kind of thing. It actually shouts at our folly in daring to participate even half-heartedly in sins that crucified Him. He Himself is perfect goodness, perfect love, perfect truth. To do violence with any detail of it is to take part in that atrocious act of Good Friday, to become partners in a perfidious scheme to destroy life with curses and hisses.

Jesus bears the sin of the world. In doing so He uncovers the nature of sin and reveals the pain sin costs God. Here is demonstrated for us the bent of all evil—to destroy. Here we see sin poised with dagger ready to slay. God looks with pity on the lost and accepts the agony. Who is there that can fail to see that this is what sin is ever determined to do? To destroy the Prince of Life! It is against His Person we do wrong, and into His hands and feet and side that we, in sin and by sin, thrust instruments of torture and pain. No one can sin against goodness, jus-

tice, and truth any longer and feel that it is a slight thing. It is not a difficult deduction that leads us to the knowledge that there is no evil thing which is not part and parcel of His crucifixion.

To every generation comes the realization, though it may not come with such vividness as that April day in England, that Jesus is still being put to death. Every generation has a share in the bloody Good Friday's business. Every person has a hand in the cruel work of destroying the Lord and Giver of Life.

It is the *God-Christ*, His perfect sinlessness and perfect accord with the Father, that discloses the inherent wrong in mankind. He it is that reveals to mankind that the Kingdom is within, in the hearts of people. Our helplessness is so utterly complete because we can not even know the depth of our evil. When we think we are right, we are often wrong. Helplessness is complete.

The Cross must mean this much to us: It must mean that sin is aimed at the heart of God in Christ. It must mean that sin is a deep lie in our very heart that deceives us. It must mean that goodness can never be "whittled down" without in some way doing injury to His life. It must mean that we are guilty of the sin of all humanity and stand without excuse.

Yet one plain truth: the Cross tells of pardon and reconciliation. What would we do without it in our complete despair? What could we do

without God bringing us out of blindness and making us children of the light? "Forgive them," the Lamb of God said so gently from the Cross, and excused them with, "they know not what they do." It was not a feeble excuse as much as a plain statement of the lost condition of humanity, a people that were confused about life's meaning and life's values, who did not understand that their whole bent of life was misdirected and their whole life misspent. "Forgive them," He said. And that divine love must warm our hearts today, and must make us kneel in helplessness before Him who carries in His body our sins, too.

Sin is terrible. It puts to death goodness and life, even Christ our Lord. Sin is terrible. It makes even wrong things look expedient and sensible. Only the Cross can reveal the true meaning of our deception, and He did not shrink from that costly revelation. Only the Cross brings us to a knowledge of a God that makes satisfaction for our sin and frees us from the curse and punishment of sin and invites us lovingly to a new life of sonship. On what grounds shall we refuse it? Because we are too full of sin? That we are beyond redemption? That will never do as a reason for refusing Him. Remember the woman taken in adultery, remember the thief on the Cross next to that of Christ! He will receive you, forgive you, heal you, and sup with you.

On what grounds shall we then refuse Him?

Because we do not want Him? Because we prefer to live life as a lie, frantically protecting ourselves and saving ourselves? Must we go on forever denying that we are wrong? Must we in our blind folly continue to crucify life, and pursue and woo death? Again that voice from the Cross, saying, "Forgive." Broken-heartedly we must fall before Him and confess our need of help and pardon and peace and cleansing.

Come, let us join that band that speaks excitedly of the wonder of redeeming love and life in His name.

















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