

WHAT WILL HE DO WITH ME?

Christ in the Judgement Hall

When Jesus had finished the agony of the garden out of which came His prayer, "Thy will be done", which I submit is the greatest prayer that can come from the lips of a human being, is that God's will should be done through Him.

He stood up, as it were, to meet the people who came to get Him. For there came into the garden that night, into its silence and its sanctity, soldiers with staves and lanterns and racket. And He, it seems, almost voluntarily said, "Here I am. You can take me now. The battle has been fought and I am ready for the last chapter of my life."

And so it was that we come into the ~~the~~ scriptures to the amazing account give in all four of the Gospels of the trials of Jesus. I must confess that there is a certain fascination for me about reading about trials. I have read many of the stories of Clarence Darrow who was probably one of the greatest criminal lawyers of this country and who knew the drama of the courtroom. And so it was that Jesus moved out of this background of quietness and prayer into the jostling between the political and the religious arena.

In one sense these were not trials at all. This is a miscarriage of justice. The jury had already made up his mind what would happen if He were brought. As a matter of fact there were Biblical authorities who said that the members of the Sanhedrin had been working for the day to get everything ready so that in the event that they could get Him, Pilate would know it and everything would be ready for the execution. Other scholars say no. Be that as it may, the fact of the matter is however you may look at the trials, on one side you have the religious and political. There is power; there is prejudice; there is money. There is all that in a sense is represented by the combine when it strikes hard at the heart of love and justice. Over against this, what do you have? A Man. As a matter of fact, in this Scripture that I read is the statement, "Behold, the Man"--"Ecce Homo" is one of the most famous cries of all the scripture. What was this Man? Morally He had power. His life was one that had been lived in love and mercy. He had given Himself without stint or question to the common people of His day. But what chance would you give this Man in the face of this crowd who wanted Him? Probably none. They didn't in that

day either. But the fact of the matter is that one of questions you have to raise is 'Where is Pilate? now? Where is Herod now? Where is Caiaphas now? And then I ask you, where is Jeuss now?

You see, friends, in a sense the terrible drama of the trials is that we are involved. We are implicated. And we do not catch the tragedy of the cross nor the meaning of the cruxifixion if we do not understand that in some deep, meaningful, mysterious way, there is blood on my hands. My heart is not clean and my ambitions are unholy. So that as I thought of this whole Easter Lenten season the words of the old gospel hymn came home to me, "Jesus is standing in Pilate's hall
Friendless, forsaken, betrayed by all.
Hearken, what meaneth the sudden call?
What will you do with Jesus?
What will you do with Jesus?
Neutral you cannot be,
Someday your heart will be asking,
What will He do with me?"

This is the issue. And as one moves through the trials one gets the uncomfortable feeling that it isn't Jesus that is being tried at all! It is Pilate that is being tried. It is Caiaphas that's tried and Herod and the crowd with them. So take, if you will, just three of the personalities and situations involved.

Here is Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin. Now I realize that we make of Caiaphas, the high priest, a whipping boy. Yet there are some good things on his side. Surely he must have loved religion or he never could have become the high priest. He must have loved his family, been thought of well by many people. Yet, you see in a sense Caiaphas represents entrenched religion, hardened, compulsive. Caiaphas represents in a deep sense religion when it becomes incrustated when it identifies human institutions always with the will of God. This is why it is always dangerous to say about ~~the~~ a church that it has arrived. So that we can say our church equals the will of God.

So Caiaphas when he spoke in a situation with the Sanhedrin believed that he was doing the will of God, he thought he was doing the right thing. Because all that Jesus had ever done was to upset the law, things he honored and revered and held hight. Se said, "It was said of old". Jesus had said, "But I say to you". They said "The Sabbath is sacred". Jesus said, "A man is more sacred than the Sabbath", and even allowed His disciples to

come through the fields eating. So that everything in a sense that Caiaphas held dear was challenged by this Galilean carpenter who was nondescript in a sense and had no seminary training. Now he found Him standing over against him. The charge that he laid against Him was blasphemy. He said that He had spoken of tearing down the temple building it again in three days. He said that He called Himself the Messiah. And in a sense both these claims made by Jesus were true but they were twisted the way Caiaphas and his crowd handled them.

My friends, before I leave this, let me remind you that all of us are tempted to become religious this way. Look at the priest and the Levite who when they came by the stinking, sick, bloody man in the ditch moved by him. Why? Because their religion said that if you get down in the ditch with this man and get your hands dirty, then you will become unclean and if you become unclean you cannot perform the rites in the temple. Is it not true that this is the temptation for all of us? To somehow set up a pattern, to harden it and say, this is religion.

So Caiaphas to somehow protect himself and build his case he found witnesses to witness against Jesus and they could not even agree amongst themselves. What a tragedy! They did not utter one voice but it was the babble and cries of many. Is it not true that there are false witnesses against religion today? We are told on one hand that we are radical. We are told on the other that we are just a bunch of romantic deluded people. We are told on the other hand that if you become religious then you somehow give up life and you become narrow and restricted. Friends, the day of false witnesses is not past and I should like to challenge any person in this Sanctuary before you leave this day to investigate Jesus impartially on His own record and on the basis of the witnesses who were His own disciples. Any man who will try to live one month with the staggering personality of Jesus, however he thinks of Him will come at least to some kind of basis by which he can make judgment of Jesus. The problem is that we make half-hearted statements against Christ like these men and our testimony does not agree. But before Caiaphas got through with Him, he did a terrible and a dirty thing. He had his men spit on Jesus. Have you ever seen boys on a playground when they get one kid down and spit on his face? This is the bully and the crowd gets the one who is the weakling. It is a

terrible and a damnable thing. Let us never forget somehow that the weakling as we think who walks in our midst may be carrying the word of God and woe betide us if we find ourselves fighting God when in a spirit of a bully we do what they did.

They said Jesus prophesied. You're a prophet, aren't you? They poked Him and said, "Who now has stuck you?"

And then finally this man, Caiaphas, did what I submit was the temptation of the church to do in every hour in every ~~period~~ period of history. They shoved the hot issue of Jesus off their hands over to Pilate. Now Pilate got Him. May I make this point before we leave this judgment to say, friends, one of the great dangers of the church and of Christian people either deliberately or by simply lacking to take a stand is that we evade the great issues. What are the issues of our time? Are they not war and peace? Are they not healing? Are they not human relations? Are they not integrity? Then is it not ^a ~~our business~~ danger that the church will say, "This is not our business. It belongs elsewhere". Once we cared for our aged. We cared for our mentally ill. We took care of the affairs of men. Now we have retreated, retreated, retreated. As one hot potato after another has been dished off by the church on somebody or something else so that we have said - let the state do it. Let someone else do it. It's not our business. So that one of the indictments against Caiaphas was that this was a religious issue and he said it was a political issue in the end.

So now He came before Pilate. Let us not be too hard on Pilate. He didn't know better than some of the things he did. All of his life had been disciplined to think of many gods, not one. He had been taught all his life not to look kindly upon the Jewish people who were looked upon as ^a obstreperous damnable lot out here at the end of the Mediterranean Sea in this little country of Palestine. His relations with these people had been difficult ones so that he had a strong, bitter feeling toward these people. So that whatever else he said to himself, he said, "I am not going to let these fellows get the best of me." And when Jesus came before him, let it never be forgotten, he wondered at that Man. He wondered. This is not an ordinary rebel now. This is not just another revolutionary. And when this man, Pilate, took Jesus into his private closet, his sanctuary in a sense,

he was saying, "What's wrong with you? Don't you know that if you give a little, you can save your skin? I can't find anything wrong with you, Jesus." But may I say to you that this man, Pilate, did not wonder deeply enough. In one way he did what he knew best but when he started to wonder, it did not cut deeply enough in his life. When he asked the question, "What is Truth?" it was a casual flippant thing, I believe. When he wondered about the moral cleanness and purity of Jesus it was a shallow wondering. And with one ear that was somehow cocked to the moral purity of Jesus his other ear was cocked to the crowd. And like we play our polls, he listened to the crowd. This was his undoing for every time the crowd pushed in harder, it shoved Pilate down lower. This was just like one of our great dangers, friends, that we play everything we do according to how the crowd wants it done. The problem was that if every man had lived like Pilate, there would have been no great moments in history. No man called Martin Luther who said, "Here I stand, God helping me, I can do no other." No Abraham Lincoln who would have stood against the crowd who called him a cheap shabby politician, but standing where he thought he ought to stand. You cannot always play the way the crowd wants you to play. For somehow in the integrity of one's soul in the agony of the night a man has to beat out how he will go and what way he will fling his life. But Pilate listened to the crowd and finally he thought, "I can get rid of this thing if I offer to them Barabas." A

And so Barabas was brought in. This was an eternal decision. ~~One~~ You know this is true. Choosing between outer power, racket and all the things that Barabas, the son of revolution, stood for, and choosing between that and the inner moral strength and purity of the One who was called the Son of God.

And finally Pilate asked a pitiful question, yet ^{an} inescapable question: "What then will you do with Jesus who is called the Christ?" I say to you, ladies and gentlemen, this is a question with which history has to deal. Every generation has to face it. The marketplace has to face it. A nation has to face it, Once He moves in on the arena of its life. You cannot dismiss Christ of the peripheral, call yourself a Christian and expect the fruits of Christianity.

This is one of our great dangers. You yank Jesus Christ out of the home and it will end in shambles. You take Him out of our lives and we call ourselves God fearing people

and life, whether it is political, religious or economic, begins to disintegrate and go to pieces. And we start to say that we will live by the law, the tooth and the fang. Do you know what Albert Einstein has been quoted to have said? It has been quoted I am in sure many places: "I do not know with what weapons men will fight the third world war but I do know they will fight the fourth world war with stones and clubs."

You cannot dismiss Christ who calls Himself the Savior of the world from all peace making, from all talk of the future, from all talk of life and reap anything but concentration camps and the agony we have reaped. "What then will you do with Jesus who is called the Christ?" is the question of Pilate.

And finally this man Pilate says, "I will wash my hands". Can you wash your hands really once a moral issue has laid its claim on you? Can you square blood money by giving to the church or with conscience money? Is not the issue the fact that once a moral issue has laid its claim on your soul and life, then you have to settle that issue? This is one of the inescapable prices, folks, of being a human being. So Pilate who thought he could wash his hands did not wash his hands and when those poor Jews yelled out, "Let His blood be upon our children and upon our heads", under God did not know what they were saying.

So then He went to Herod. A man who was cheap licentious, the only man that Jesus ever called a name. He called him a fox behind his back. "You go and tell that fox", he said. Here was Herod who was egotistical, a little puppet who imagined his power was far greater than it was. Rome could have just snapped its fingers and he would have been done. Jesus comes in and in curiosity he thinks somehow I can find out the things I want to know. This is John the Baptist raised from the dead. After all, Herod had killed him. So he was disturbed, I suppose. He said, "Perform some sign" and they laughed. No sign, no nothing.

Young people, I want to say this to you in a way that I hope you will never forget it. The issue is going to be decided on whether or not we can find young people who have got deep inner rules by outer coertions. I think you have to live by inner compulsions. It takes great religion to live by inner compulsions. Something that lays ahold on a man's mind and will and emotions. We will lose ourselves with sexual flippancy, with cheap

drunkenness, with cutting corners until the innerds(sp?-no such word) of life gets eaten out if we do not find great inner discipline to live by. I will say to you in paísing that Ottawa University and this church are committed to finding people who with open minds and warm hearts will commit themselves to deep, great religion. Lots of people want to settle for Herod's brand, where we call somebody and he does a sign and everybody gets tremendously moved by that. The fact of the matter is that it is a long hard pull. You have to go to the cross and you have to stand there and know something of its power before at the bottom of your life there begins to come a kind of integrity that goes beyond Herod.

Well, it was all over finally. All over. Do you think really these men judged Jesus? Or did He judge them?

And in the midst of all this we are a little like Peter, aren't we? He was the one fellow who was supposed to be on the inside, who got in, and yet it says he followed from afar off. And because he was far off he got weak. Because he got weak he forgot Jesus and in the midst of trying to save his own skin he said, "I don't know Him." And in the Gospel of Luke it says, "Jesus looked at him!" looked at him and he wept like a baby. He knew he had sold Him down the river.

The issue is what will He do with me? What will He do with me? Have you ever thought about the places Jesus never said a word. Our little babble, our little systems have their day. He was silent.

I heard Fulton Sheen speak about the Catholic missionaries as well as the Protestant missionaries in China who took beatings and flogging in solitary confinement and he says we have people in our own faith who say, "Why doesn't God smash this thing now?" This is the silence of God. His day comes. It does not come as we expect it but it comes. And I should like to make out of this simply this fact that whatever happens those who repent, He loves. Peter He loved. The dying thief He reached out toward. The people under the cross when finally He came to the end, he said, "Father, forgive them. They know not what they do." You see, give this love a chance and it breaks through. It shatters human lives and remakes them. It changes all men who accept it until they become like children of God.

One of the great evangelists of our time who comes from Australia, Alan Walker, who wrote the book, "The Whole Gospel for the Whole World", a very intelligent and enlightened

man, tells about on his last trip to this country. Amazingly he was taken out to a ranch outside Los Angeles. It was the ranch owned by Roy Rogers and Dale Evans. And in a current religious publication Alan Walker says, "I had a long heart to heart talk with this person, Dale Evans, who just 5, 6, 7 years ago was another actress in Hollywood, but now she is a mature, Christian woman. And in the course of my being there after my visit with her I met a man who wanted to tell me about himself. "I'm off skidrow in Kansas City. My life has changed. I'm going into the ministry. The thing that gave me my hope was when I read the story of Peter who even though he had sunk low, found that Christ in the midst of his trials would handle him with mercy and tenderness." So when I say, what will He do with me?, the answer is to those who are penitent even though weak, for those who even struggling for faith, even though they doubt, for those who seek and not knowing whether they will find their answer--He stands there waiting to give you that life which comes from Himself, His cross.

(there should have been another few words but we were cut off)

DRINKING THE CUP

My friends, in the story of the human race the place of the cup and drinking together has had a remarkable history. Some of the most moving things that you read about are found when at the end of a banquet someone would stand to pledge his allegiance to the king or queen and drink to his or her health followed by the others drinking. Then having drunk out of the glass would break it and cast the glass back over his shoulder. And some of the most moving scenes in history have been where people have taken a glass or a cup and have drunk together and this has meant in most cases a pledge where it has been used in a particular way, a pledge to someone and to each other. We have in the pulpit today this goblet which is very ancient in the life of this church. It goes back a long time. We do not use it now except to display it here in the church parlor. But on many occasions one can come on places in the history of this church where it says they celebrated the Lord's Supper together and they had a cup in common. I submit that these are moving moments in the history of this church where men have drunk together from this cup. And I should like to say this morning that we are a part of the fellowship of people who at one time or another have drunk from this cup. I ca

I can recall in my own experiences in the churches that my father had because in very few of those churches did they have the individual glasses as we use them here in this church, that as a boy before I was allowed to take the Lord's Supper they used a cup like this. And after the minister had drunk from it and wiped it with a napkin, it was passed slowly through the whole church and even on occasion the cup had to be filled again so that all who were there could drink together. Today we speak of this as somewhat unsanitary or unhealthy. Yet there was something moving about the fact that men in allegiance to the Lord and to each other have drunk from a common cup.

So on that night that Jesus was betrayed He took one cup, raised it. It was filled with wine. This meant many things and He stood against the background of centuries in which men had drunk together and He said, "This/^{is} the blood of the everlasting covenant. When you drink this it speaks of forgiveness and this cup shows forth the Lord's death until He comes

again." So that every time we come together as we are doing today to drink together, we are pledging our allegiance once again to Him and to each other.

May I say the first time they did this, it was not done flippantly or casually. I do not know what you have brought in your heart as you came to this Sanctuary today, but I hope that none of you have come casually or flippantly or with a shallow sense of curiosity. I would hope that you have come with a sense that you need forgiveness, that somehow caught up in this that we do together, there is the very mystery of the fact that God offers Himself to us in Jesus Christ; and this is never to be taken lightly, never flippantly for of all the fows, of all the promises, of all the pledges you will ever make, none goes deeper, none cuts more deeply into your life than that thing which we do together today.

I have thought of the fact that this is the cup that Christ invites us to drink from. And I have thought of the fact that God loves us to drink from this cup. I know this sounds trite. We have said this so many times. But how often we need to be reminded that in the midst of our ups and downs of our vicissitudes of our churches for we all blow hot and cold. There is a love that does not change. It stubbornly persists. That in the face of rejection and of rebellion and disobedience this love chimes on unfailingly. So many of us who are caught in this modern age where we feel that "no one cares, no one loves me. If I dropped out what difference would it make." We need to be reminded that in this cup God has literally pledged Himself to redeem me. There is nothing more stupendous that I could say to this congregation today that in God there is deliverance out of a land of captivity into a promised land. And the whole gospel over and over affirms this that rooted in the past of Israel who had been delivered as no-people, just a group of wondering nomads out of captivity, the captivity of Egypt. They were tied together by the love of God and bound by His justice until finally they found His redemption in the land of Canaan. And when we come to drink this cup we are reminded that like as He delivered the children of Israel through the deep waters of the wilderness, so in Jesus Christ, He has delivered us from a land of captivity into a land of freedom. This we know.

Then may I say to you that this drinking of the cup together means that He invites us to share in His life. D. T. Niles, the Christian from Ceylon says that it isn't half so important that Christ lives in my heart as it does to say He dwells in His life."

For we have been ~~buried~~, says the book of Romans, into His death and we have been raised into His life. So that this cup is an invitation literally to drink of His life and to live in His grace and in His mercy. So as we come spiritually to this upper room to take this cup, ~~and we~~ do it together, we are bound to each other. Once we were no-people but now we have become a royal priesthood, a nation under Almighty God.

Before I conclude this brief meditation may I recall to you the words of the Scripture of the morning which tell of how a mother came to Jesus and said, "I wonder if one of my sons could not sit on your right hand and the other on your left hand" and Jesus answered to this, in ~~sense~~, this unholy ambition, said, "It is not give to me to say who will sit where but I ask you, is it possible for you to drink my cup with me?" Then He went on to say, "The Son of Man came not to be ministered unto but to minister and to give His life a ransom for many."

I would like to conclude by saying there is a depth in the Christ life in which one discovers the greatest joy and this is the depth of drinking the cup of suffering. As Dr. Gezork said to the students at the college on Friday, "It is not easy to talk about discipline nor is it easy to talk about suffering to a culture who has wanted so badly to get the best seats in the house and to cut the corners and to live easily. Yet there is a note ~~in~~ the gospel which says that you will never find the deepest joy until you get around the corner of suffering. Look at Jesus. He hated sin. He bled inside when He faced it.

A boy after class in New Testament this week asked me about Jesus driving the money changers out of the temple and about that righteous indignation. He did this because in a sense something holy rose up in Him against this thing that men should take what was holy and desecrate it, pull it down to their level. So with sorrow and anger He drove them out. Any man who has a sensitive soul cannot live with sin without suffering. I say to you that this age has winked at many things. It has cut many corners. It has reduced things to less than they were before a Holy God. We know this. And so we use fancy theology for things that once upon a time were disobedience and a denial of the holiness of God.

When I drink the cup, if I do lightly, I suffer because I live in the midst of sin. Look at the way HE entered into the suffering of other people in this cup of His. Have you heard about Charles Lamb, the essayist of whom it is said that when he found that his sister whom he loved dearly had a mind that was just barely flickering out. And knowing somehow her mind was giving out, he would lead her by the hand and go by the hospital to which she was to be taken shortly and he would weep as he held her hand because it was said he entered into the suffering of his sister.

I need not tell you, do I, that this is an age that longs for people to help carry their burdens? Do I need to say this to you? People who are waiting for someone to come and help carry their load. And we say, "I've got enough troubles of my own". But do you know that a miracle happens when you start to move outside yourself and carry someone else's load, your load starts to get easier? "Come unto me, all you who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest." And this Christ entered into the suffering of people. This is why we gather at this table today. Had He not gone into our suffering and borne it, we would not be here today.

And then He gave Himself in service. There is a kind of suffering about this—to develop the sensitive of the soul in such a way that one gives himself for the life of others. What a high and holy thing! At the Evangelism Conference, and I told the folks coming home in the car that they would probably hear about one or two things that we got out there in Concordia) we had the privilege of listening and worshiping with the wonderful Dr. Cranford, "Cranny" as practically everybody calls him. Dr. Cranford says that he gets letters from Dr. Halford Luccock, the great teacher of preaching, and he always says, "My dear Dr. Cranford, or "Cranny" as the Lord calls you". Well, Cranny at the end of his last address at the Evangelism Conference said he knew a girl once down South in a church, a lovely girl and this girl had not come to a point in life where she could give herself to Christ, but somebody said, "Why don't we ask this girl who has got the radiance of a queen to take a Sunday school class" and the pastor or supt. said, "I just don't think we ought to do that. This girl hasn't come to a commitment of her life." Well, the other person said, "Why don't we try her." So that gave a

group of young boys to this girl to teach. The boys loved her. After two or three weeks she came and said, "I just can't go on." They said "why not?" She said, "Because I don't really know the things I am trying to talk about." So Cranny said the pastor took this lovely girl into his study and talked to her about commitment, about giving her life, about serving and out of it came a transformation and there came a Sunday in that church when they asked if there was anyone there ~~that~~ who wanted to accept Christ that most of the young people in that class on a particular Sunday professed Christ as their Lord and Saviour and somebody when it was all over, someone who had been in the church a long time said to this girl, "I would give my life to have an experience like that." And the girl smiled and said, "That's exactly what it will take. It will take your life." Some of you might be unhappy because you have never give your life really. Some of you might have taken Communion a hundred times and yet never known what it means to drink out of this cup with Him. It would be my hope and prayer that on this day as we drink together that we might know what it means.

Shall we pray: "We are grateful, O Lord, that Thou doest invite us to drink from Thy cup. Help us to understand that this is no ~~little~~, flippant affair into which we pass very casually and leave very superficially. But here if we will we ~~can~~ know that Thou art standing against our lives and that Thou art calling us. So bless us, our Father, in the experience of our drinking and eating together that we might know the presence of the Holy Spirit, we pray. Amen.

COMMUNITY UNDER THE CROSS

This is the day which will be celebrated throughout all Christendom as a day of triumph and of joy. I know that you are well aware of this. For it was on this day more than 1900 years ago that Jesus, a simple Galilean, a man of Nazareth, a carpenter entered a city and literally took that city by storm. The city was the capital of its own country. It was the center of religion and commerce. And in its own way it was a great city which was filled with folks who had come for the great celebration. The folks who went out to meet Him were common folks, I assume, much like we are. Many of them were poor and humble and they did a very amazing and a very spontaneous thing that day for they took their garments off and cast them on the road. They seized branches off the trees. This is why we call this Palm Sunday. They cast them down and waved them and shouted in a great and loud enthusiasm. But before this Holy Week had ended Jesus had been crucified in misery and in blood and in darkness. And this you must understand or you will not appreciate this day. For this became a week of intrigue and lawlessness, a week of despair and darkness and as one progresses into this Holy Week with all of its meaning one senses that here is one man who stands alone in a sense in dignity and honor against a crowd who would have his blood. And finally in the Gospel of Mark one comes on some great and moving words. They are very simple and yet they carry a world of meaning. They are four words and they read, "And they crucified Him". One cannot put into those stark, naked words all that they mean. Books have been written about what these words mean. Yet somehow in the mystery and the meaning of what the Cross is all about, men have written whole theologies. Men have tried to define this from every facet and every side, yet somehow the Christian religion with all of its words, its songs, its liturgies and its plays have said in the end this is a great mystery that God should so love the world that He would give His only begotten Son. But the Christian church has added that this crucifixion which comes after Palm Sunday is assuredly the revelation of God. So one of the great and early writers said, "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself." And one of the great paintings has God standing behind the Cross where Jesus is dying in His agony. The Christian Church has said that at the Cross we see the judgment of sin, Not just sins in plural but sin. That the things that put Jesus to death reveal there in starkness (is this the word?)

for all that they were are really the sin of all people--our greed, our self-centeredness, our cowardice, all of ~~this~~ and more is surely there.

But the Christian Church has also said that if a man would walk in God's Way ~~He~~ must go the way of the Cross. So that every Christian in this Sanctu~~ary~~ who understands and who is trying to live by this way says he has come to understand in ~~in~~ his own life that there must be a cross. "If any man would come after me," says Jesus, "let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow me." So that when one thinks of this cross, this Christ, he thinks of all that God is, all that sin is and all that ~~his~~ life can become.

Now, friends, we have talked the last few Sundays about some of the enemies, some of the folks that stood over against Jesus. When you come to the Cross you find the same thing is true. I think, for example, in reading the Passion story again that there were those under the cross, it says, who reviled Him, who spit upon Him. Not only had they done this before the crucifixion, they did it afterwards. Golgotha, the place of the skull, was not too far from a common road and people would come off that and they would say as they looked up, "Another poor devil is being crucified. The Romans have got another one." Or some of them, it was said, came by and they said, "If you are the Son of God, come on down off the cross." Or they said in cutting words, "He saved others but ~~He~~ cannot save Himself." And the shame of this, the utter shame of it is that there were church people who stood and yelled the same things. ~~It~~ It is also said there were soldiers who sat under the cross. These were hard men. All of their lives/^{maybe they were old,} they had been soldiers They knew that human flesh and blood was cheap. And so after they had finished the job of hanging this One with the two thieves up, this revolutionary as they assumed Him to be, it says that they sat down under the cross and gambled for His gown, His seamless robe. Much has been said about this. Lloyd Douglas wrote a whole story about it. The fact of the matter is that one has to remember that men always, always before stupendous events, before great mysteries have gambled and played for little things. They thought that the robe was of more value, in a sense, than the ~~Man~~ who died. And so they took the one thing perhaps that Jesus possessed, the robe that was seamless, and gambled for it. This is not the first or last time that men have done this, for one of our great temptations, friends, is

to play with secondary matters.

There was also a crowd there. They drifted in and out. The curious had come. And in one place we read that they smote their breasts and rent. All crowds are like that-- moved in a sense by waves of emotion, beating themselves saying, "Isn't this a terrible thing that is going on?" And then goes home and then the next day or the next or the next forgetting all about it. This is the way of the crowd. I hope and pray that we will not ultimately folks that are conforming to a crowd.

But may I say that one of the great wonders about this scene is that you find under and around it there were some friends there. ~~They may not say anything.~~ This is what I want to emphasize this morning if I can. Is it not true in the moments and hours of human need, you have to have friends? I have found as your Pastor that when people face death they want friends there. They may not say anything. There may be nothing they can say, but they want someone there standing beside them. And so in Jesus' death agony let us not forget that there were friends there.

W. E. Sangster, the great British preacher tells a remarkable story about a friend of his who was a pastor in the north of England. Sangster is a great preacher in London. He says that these friends of his had a boy in the service. He was a flier with the R.A.F. His plane crashed. He was taken by the Japanese. And because they had ~~not~~ received a letter from the boy after his being taken captive by the Japanese they hoped and prayed that he might be living. So every day they waited and waited and waited. Finally the war ended and still the mother believed that he would come back. One day there was a knock at the door. A man in the uniform of the British Air Force stood there and assuming that the parents had had the news that the boy had died, he blurted out and he said, "It is too bad that your son was killed, or died in the camp." The mother staggered. She cried out like a wounded beast and then she said, "Tell me, how was it at the end?" And this friend of their boy's said there was one of their fellow comrades, a hardened veteran, who stole food so that he could live. And there was another friend who read the letters that came when he could no longer see, his eyes had failed. And he would have this friend read the letters over and over again. Then said this hardened soldier, "I believe that

in his last hours his mind drifted back and forth between this home and the home beyond." And then Sangster said, in all the agony of sorrow that mother comforted herself with the thoughts that in his last hours he had friends that stood by him. So it was with Jesus. He did have friends.

And it is to this business of inviting you to become friends that I speak this message today. I think for example of Simon of Cyrene. We do not know whether he was black or Jewish. We know he came from Africa. He could have been a negro. He could have been a Jew. But the fact of the matter is, why he went to Jerusalem we know not. Maybe he had gone for the passover. Maybe he had gone to conduct business. And because there was a crowd on the road leading up to Calvary, he like many of us would do, joined himself to the crowd. And as this One stumbled under His cross, having faced His trials, having been through agony of Gethsemane, having felt the whip on His back, having known rejection, He stumbled and fell. And so the soldier undoubtedly in the crowd stuck the man with a spear and said, "You carry it." And so a man who was going about his own business was forced to get under a burden he did not expect to have to carry. Is this not true of life, friends? There are some of you here who carry loads you never intended to carry. Some sorrow, some gripping agony has fallen on you. You did not expect it but it came your way. The world is filled with millions who have done this. And every great nation of the earth in this 20th century young men have been drafted. They did not even know in some cases why they fought or under what circumstances they were to fight, but a government reached out and said we need you. And the men went.

I recall and will to my dying day standing on a French battle field out of Lantz (sp) the great coal mining town, and hearing an old French Baptist minister and cry as he said, "Do you know that there are 35,000 crosses on this battle field?" And every cross marked a grave and as we moved through the graves I must confess that I too wept. For here are the names of American and Canadian and French and British boys who had fallen. They did not intend to bare a cross, but they were forced by our times to bare this.

So Simon standing by found a cross jammed down on him. I can imagine that man talking to his boys. He had two of them, you know. One was named Alexander and the other was called Rufus. I don't know whether he saw them when it was all over in Jerusalem or back

home. But he said to them, "Do you know this thing happened to me. They forced this cross on me. I resented it. I hated the men who did it and I began to stumble up with that burden and then all of a sudden I looked at this man" (I can imagine him saying this) "whose burden I was carrying. I saw there love. I saw there mercy. And I saw there gentleness and my life will never be the same again." Could he not have said this? Do you know that these two boys, Alexander and Rufus, became leaders in the early Christian Church? How did they become leaders? Maybe because in that glance in his carrying that load, a spark was ignited and life was shared. So he was there.

I think, for example, of the fact that in the throes when Jesus did get on the cross-- as He was facing death in the last three hours He cried out a cry that was heard. It was a human cry in the darkness and in the suffering of His parched life up there. He cried out and He said, "I thirst". Is there any more human cry than this? Who of us have really known thirst? And through these parched, puffed lips with the noise and the dust under Him and the hot sun overhead, this is what He cried, "I thirst." And somebody, it may have been a soldier (I believe it may have been a soldier) took a reed and stuck it in a sponge and jammed it up to His lips.

I want to say that you find kindness and mercy in the most unusual places. He heard the cry and responded to it.

Is this not what the Christian religion is all about? That with some semblance of mercy we hear the cries of men and lift our little gifts to them. This church tries to say when ever anybody comes to it coming through the city needing help, "in the name of Christ and in behalf of hundreds of people who give in our Communion service to a Deacons' Fellowship Fund we give you this in the Name of Christ. You may have lied to us in telling us the story but we give you this in the name of Christ". This is done in your behalf by this church. But I am always reminded that Jesus Himself said, "Inasmuch as you have done it unto the least of these, my brethern, you have done it unto Me." *(Roger - just as I was typing this, a man came for a coat and \$2.00. He got the - in the name of Christ.)*

A story that a man tells, out of the war again, is the story of a rough, tough Irish sergeant who could cuss longer and harder than anybody else. They came upon a village that had been bombed and here was a girl who was a refugee. Her parents gon, a whimpering little girl. And this tough, rough sergeant threw his gun to a buddy and said, "You carry the gun,

I'll carry the girl." And so for miles he carried the girl. He didn't have to but he did it as an act of kindness.

Then I am reminded of the fact that some women stood there. Let us not look despisingly at women in the church (insert: no, let's don't!) For here when all is said and done, where is Peter now? Where is James? Where is Thomas? These men had walked with Him. In the midst of that crowd with all the racket stood some women weeping. It is to be admitted that they were not near the cross, they were at the outskirts afar off. But there they were. And somehow one has to pay tribute to people who will stick by through to the end.

How easy it is to shut off when the going gets rough. And I want to say that the Christian religion by an large moves by creative minorities. People who stand, at least they were saying this thing is not right! We can't say much but it's not right. At least they kept saying we believe in Jesus. And out of that kind of stuff the Christian Church was born. For they at least, some of these women, were in the upper room the day that the Church was born on Pentecost. And so they stood there and this is what it seems to me that we need in our age, friends who will stand by when it is not the thing to do because here He hangs in naked shame and the whole crowd ridicules Him--to stand by and say, "Now I am willing to be counted." We need, as I have said to this church, creative independent thinking that is Christ-like where we say we will have the mind of Christ and not of the crowd.

Finally there was the thief. There were two of them. Where these men had come from, what kind of mothers they had, what kind of homes they had come from, no one knows. You can conjecture and guess but on one side there hanged one who died taunt and scared, in fear and cursing. On the other there was one on whom light shone that day. And the one who made the difference was the One who hanged in the middle. If I can say it to you quite bluntly the difference between Heaven and Hell is Jesus Christ. And while they were ~~opposite~~ ~~opposite~~ close together, these two men, spiritually they were oceans apart. For somehow both of them started to curse and yell, "Why don't you get us out of this mess? You are the guy who got us involved in this. If you hadn't been crucified today maybe we would have be." And finally one of them in his agony saw the dignity, the mercy, maybe it was he who

reported later, somehow cried out in some way that he heard those words, "Forgive them, they know not what they do." Finally he turned to Him and said to Him, "Will you remember me?" May I say the only kind words you find recorded in the gospel recorded in that hour were spoken by a thief who died with Him. So I should like to say he was the first recruit for Glory.

There are other things that could be said but may I simply say that out of this little scraggily group, this little nondescript crowd, this bunch of no-accounts in a way compared with Rome and the religious crowd. This man, Simon of Cyrene who bore the cross; this soldier who stuck up some moisture for the lips of Jesus; this thief who cried out in his need; this group of women--out of that kind of stuff the Christian Church is made. And the invitation of this church and of this service and of this week and of Christ Himself is for men and women to join themselves to His friends. For to be a Christian I have been trying to say this to Deacons, boys and girls in these first pews and elsewhere in the Sanctuary to be a Christian when all is said and done, folks, is to be a friend of Jesus. And so in a way as we pass through this week and this day, this is the time of decisiveness when I must ask myself, it seems to me, to what crowd do I belong? Am I friend or foe? And in cross bearing, in kind deeds, in discovering the power of the Cross as the thief did and in standing with Him in His shame, I become a part of a community which stands under the Cross.

Our God, it is difficult to say what we feel and think like this. How can spiritual reality be conveyed in words? We pray that all of us this day might rejoice though that Jesus came, that He entered the city and He became, really its King without the city knowing it. So let us, O God, let Him to be King of our lives and may we whether young or old, whether we are unknown or known, may we be willing to be counted among His friends, a community under the Cross. So hear our prayer; for Jesus' sake. Amen.