

S E R M O N

WHY LYNCHING?

Sermon Delivered by Rev. C. J. Trigg, Following Salisbury Lynching

Genesis 4:9—"Am I my brother's keeper?"

Exodus 20:13—"Thou shalt not kill."

Matthew 5:22—"But whosoever shall say, Thou fool shall be in danger of hell fire."

Phil. 2:5—"Have this mind in you which was also in Christ Jesus."

We are under a cloud of gloom today, and under indictment unless we openly repudiate the orgy of human torture practised in Salisbury, Maryland, Friday night last. A white man is murdered. A Negro man is lynched. Our State is disgraced. Our government is undermined. Our humanity is sick. Our God is denied.

I have quoted four passages of Scripture that seem clearly to touch our case and condition. I shudder when I think of any murder. I am particularly affected when any Negro commits murder. I can think of no excuse, in the light of Christ's life and teaching, for murder. When one does commit a murder, we have the judicial and executive machinery of government to deal with such according to law, and against this procedure we can not say a word. But when hatred takes the place of respect for law, government and God, when a savage mob of men and women repudiate a jury of peers for the accused, and when keepers of public peace climb into the judiciary seat, by shamefully submitting and in all probability acceding to mob rule, I as a prophet of God and a preacher of the Gospel of the Prince of Peace, cry loud in protest and warn Washington and Annapolis, and City Hall, that there is a hand writing on the wall, whether they see it or not. These executives and law-makers appear to be either in a moral stupor or too busy in personal and party politics to understand, but there is a Daniel in this modern Babylon to warn Belshazzar and his feasting lords. Not that the Negro shall lift a finger against his native land, but that this Nordic hatred and pretense are subversive of all worthwhile government. We are facing a conflict of ideals and principles and allegiances between the church and the State, and the church has to a great extent yielded to the State. One writer has recently said, "The most significant aspect of our civilization is pretense. Pretense is the key to modern civilization. Men pretend to believe in God and sacrifice their lives to Mammon; they love liberty and persecute the champions of freedom, honor Christ and are obedient to Mussolini. They bow down to virtue as holy and stain the earth with prostitution and syphilis. They defend marriage as the ultimate honorable basis of civilization, of life itself, and practice on the sly—the Freedman censor being bribed to keep mum—freedoms and liberties that range from guilty-innocent nibbling, and flirting and tampering to licentious experimenting, poly morphus perversions and free love. They praise truth and allow cheats to occupy the seats of the mighty, making a religion of education and a mockery of enlightenment. They pretend to love the high-brow and in their secret hearts most enjoy the low-brow. They speak of the mind as evolution's most wonderful achievement, and do everything in human power to defy the illumination of consciousness. They shout for brotherhood and shoot, imprison or out-cast those who will not join their drunken debauch in celebration of patriotism, nationalism and war."

It is bad enough to hate, but to pretend at the same time that we love is all but unpardonable. Let the Eastern Shore confess her sins; yes, let America confess her sins, and a new day will dawn, and not before.

The International Labor Defense League is accused of causing the trouble. Well, this organization only said that Yuel Lee could not get justice on the Eastern Shore, and asked a change of venue. But the accusation of the International League is proved by the action of a mob, Friday night. The charge against the League breaks down of itself. All that was asked is entirely within the law.

Then it is charged that outsiders from Delaware and Virginia came in and turned beautiful and peaceful Salisbury into a lethal chamber. I ask, where were the 15,000 law-abiding, God-fearing citizens when 150 to 2,000 strangers usurped the rule of Wicomico county and

committed this crime against all good government, against humanity, and against God? Were they asleep at the early hour of 8 p.m.? The whole Eastern Shore denies her guilt, and there is the tragedy of the whole affair. There is no confession, and hence there can be no shame. The people can not be lifted out of their darkness and sin.

"Why the lynching?" Let me tell you what I know of this section. I lived down there for more than three years. My father was sent to Princess Anne, fifteen miles from Salisbury, to take charge of the State school thirty years ago. The first visit he made into the town on business (of course), two white boys stoned him and yelled "nigger!". They did not know him, never saw him. Why, then, did they stone and curse this man whom the best citizens of Maryland had trusted to help make a better Eastern Shore? This was simply an upsurge of race hatred and the assault of a potential mob on an innocent and helpless citizen.

In 1907, I was appointed to be pastor of a church on the Shore. A short time after arriving I was picked to be mobbed and lynched. One day my church officers sent one of their number to the parsonage at dusk and invited me to take a ride. He drove about three miles into the woods, where about ten of my officers had gathered to confer with me and warn me to leave at once. I said, "My wife

is at the parsonage, what shall become of her?" One man said, "The white folks will look after her." I said, "Then you take me back there, and if I die I die loyal to the end to the little woman of God who gave herself to me."

I did not have a pocket knife, but I had honor, and I had faith. I sat up all night, and every moment I thought was the last. About midnight I heard a voice, with which I was familiar. It was a colored man, a neighbor. He stood under my window and said, "The mob that was to get you tonight is broken up, because the leader dropped dead." I breathed with much relief. This leader was a leading merchant in the town, and the man who pledged his friendship to colored people, in my presence, and to me on the day of my arrival in that community. What had I done? The only charge was that I was a young educated "nigger," and that my wife was too good-looking. The real trouble was a fear that I would lift the economic and moral standards of the community. The old tenant farmer system was in vogue with all its attendant evils, and the herding of men, women and children to pick strawberries and potatoes, and to shuck oysters was a practise that made it impossible for a Negro girl to be moral. For weeks scores of young and old persons lived under most unsanitary conditions.

(The be Continued)