Prayer
Scripture: 1 Corinthians 5:1-5
Hymn: 538 "Work for the Night Is Coming"

Only after some fourteen years of fierce challenges and struggles was Calvin able to make Geneva the center of international reform. He often despaired of success and expected to be dismissed and expelled.

A CONTINUING DIFFERENCE BETWEEN CALVIN AND THE MAGISTRATES:

In spite of their desperate pleas to Calvin for his return to the city, the magistrates had no intention of making him the final authority of the city. Calvin would preach and teach but the magistrates would rule the city. Excommunication would be in their hands. Calvin believed that the Consistory composed of the ministers should have the final word in excommunication. Calvin believed that it was the responsibility of the state to enforce the teachings of the church. The Word of God was supreme and he was the preacher of the Word.

PROBLEMS IN THE MINISTRY:

From the first Calvin was plagued by the lack of full sympathy and support from his ministerial associates. Henri de la Mare, Jacques Bernard and Aime Champereaux had been called to the ministry by the magistrates before Calvin's arrival. He longed for the help of Farel and Viret, but except for brief periods, they had to devote themselves to the work in Neuchatel and Lausanne. Calvin's situation was somewhat relieved when Bernard moved to a country pastorate in 1542 and when Henri de la Mare was transferred in 1543. In July, 1542, four new Frenchmen of varying merits and degrees of satisfactoriness were added to the Geneva ministry: Philippe de Ecclesia, Pierre Blanchet, Mathieu de Geneston, and Louis Treppereau. Calvin had to train spiritual disciples on whose loyalty he could depend. Pierre Blanchet proved loyal and courageous but died in the plague. Geneston proved helpful; de Ecclesia and Treppereau moved out in 1544. Two more Frenchmen sympathetic to Calvin were added: Abel Poupin in 1543 and Jean Ferron in 1544. There was considerable grumbling about domination by foreign clergy.

When the plague broke out anew in April, 1543, the Little Council ordered the ministers to appoint one of their number to minister to the victims of the plague in the hospital. Most of them declared they would rather "be with the devil." The rector of the school, Sebastian Castellio, volunteered but the Council was unwilling for the school to be left without a head. Calvin himself offered to serve in the hospital but the Council declared he was "necessary to the Church." A French lay refugee, Simon Moreau, offered to serve in the dangerous post.

THE PLAGUE OF WITCHCRAFT:

The plague was followed in 1545 by popular rumors that the plague was due to witchcraft. Calvin shared the views of his age. A series of cruel tortures and executions followed. Calvin did plead for more merciful executions.

THE FALL OF SEBASTIEN CASTELLO:

On the recommendation of Farel, Castellio had become a teacher in the Geneva School in June, 1541, three months before Calvin's return. Calvin wanted his old friend, Mathurin Cordier, to be rector but Cordier would not leave Neuchatel. In April, 1542, Castellio was made rector of the school.

Castellio, who was six years younger than Calvin, was a Savoyard by birth who had risen to distinction in humanistic learning at Lyons. Because of his Protestant sympathies he had been forced to flee to
Strasbourg where for a time he was a part of Calvin's household. He was brilliant, impetuous, kind hearted. He proved his courage by volunteering to serve in the hospital in the plague when others were cowardly.

Castellio was ambitious, disputatious and quarrelsome. He injured the prestige of the school when he got involved with his wife's brothers in a quarrel over her dowry. He became involved in a quarrel with another relative who was also a teacher in the school. 

Castellio attempted to make a popular translation of the New Testament. He submitted his work to Calvin but became bitter when Calvin made criticisms and suggested improvements. Calvin suggested that he use "the Holy Spirit dwells in us" rather than "the Holy Spirit visits us." Calvin suggested that he had distorted the meaning in some passages. Castellio's resentment grew when Calvin could not spend as much time arguing with him as he wished.

Castellio thought his salary as rector of the school was too low and applied for a pastorate. His application was refused because of his position on doctrinal questions. He had suggested that the Song of Songs was love poetry rather than an allegory of Christ and the church. He had asserted that when the Apostles' Creed said Christ "descended into hell" it meant that on the cross Christ suffered the torments of hell. Castellio blamed Calvin for his failure to receive the appointment he had requested.

Calvin recommended Castellio warmly in letters to several friends, including Viret, suggesting that they help him. In May, 1544, Calvin spoke in a Bible class for preachers about being a true minister. Castellio broke out in an angry denunciation against the ministers. Calvin did not reply. Castellio left Geneva for Basel where he lived in poverty collecting driftwood and doing odd jobs. He spent the rest of his days an embittered soul and a bitter critic of Calvin.

THE LIBERTINES:

By the autumn of 1545 Calvin had transformed the ministry of Geneva into a homogenous, loyal group. Champereaux, the last of the ministers in office at Calvin's return, moved to the country in July, 1545. Nicolas des Gallars and Michel Cop, brother of Calvin's Paris friend, were added to the pastorate in 1544 and 1545. When Genevan died his place was filled in 1545 by Raimond Chauvet. With these loyal followers Calvin was able to insist on a more strenuous administration of discipline. Those guilty of breaches of chastity, after being punished by the magistrates, were required to appear before the Conistory (the ministers) for ecclesiastical admonition. Calvin considered it proper church discipline but his enemies resented it as unnecessary disgrace.

Calvin's opponents came to be known as "Libertines." At first the Libertines were a motley crew from various sources: those who called themselves "Spirituals" who emphasized freedom of the spirit as opposed to law; remnants of Anabaptists; those who opposed the discipline; those who resented Calvin's political influence. By 1545 and 1546 this uncordinated opposition began to coalesce into a party whose rallying point was opposition to Calvin's discipline.

The nucleus of the party came from inter-related families: the Favres, the Bertheliers, the Vandelas, the Septs--old Geneva families who were wealthy, worldly, and who resented interference with their way of life from a foreign preacher. Members of these families had long dominated the Little Council and had furnished many syndics.

Calvin's first conspicuous conflict with the Libertines came when Pierre Ameaux at a supper party in his home in January, 1545, freely and bitterly attacked Calvin. His ancestral business of manufacturing playing cards had been ruined by the ban on cards. His wife became an advocate of free love and he sought a divorce. He was further embittered when Calvin opposed the divorce. His attack on
Calvin was reported to the Little Council and Ameaux was imprisoned. The Council ordered him to pay a fine of sixty crowns and to make a public acknowledgement. The Council of Two Hundred reduced his punishment to an apology to Calvin. Calvin refused to let the matter be passed over in this light fashion. He would not enter the pulpit again until Ameaux received adequate punishment. A riot almost followed. Ameaux was sentenced to parade through the city, carrying a torch, kneeling at designated places to beg God's pardon.

More trouble came from the Favres, a well-to-do family of easy morals. Francois Favre was accused of adultery and was excluded from communion. A little later his son, Gaspard, was also accused of adultery and excluded. A daughter, Francoise, wife of Ami Perrin who had been the leader in bringing Calvin back to Geneva, was most defiant. Information leaked out that Perrin, his wife, and a syndic, Amblard Corne, had danced at the betrothal of Antoine Lect's daughter to Claude Philippe on March 21, 1546. The dancers were imprisoned.

Gaspar Favre showed his contempt for Calvin by playing a noisy game in his garden just outside the church where Calvin was preaching. The Libertines felt that people of their class were above the law. Calvin insisted the laws must be enforced without partiality. Jean Favre was imprisoned for frivolous behavior at his own wedding. Phillibert Berthelier interrupted Calvin's sermons with fits of exaggerated coughing. The Sept brothers, Balthasar and Michel, were related to the Favres by marriage and were prominent Libertines. These family connections drew Perrin away from Calvin and put him at the head of the opposition.

The Libertines succeeded in defeating the attempt to replace the taverns with the abbayes, religious eating and meeting clubs where grace was said before meals, swearing, slandering, card playing, and dancin were forbidden. The French Bible was to be displayed and psalms were to be sung and religious conversations encouraged.

The Council submitted a religious drama prepared for Easter to Calvin. He recommended that the drama not be performed but the Council allowed it any way under the direction of the minister Abel Poupin. A drama on Acts of the Apostles was fiercely denounced from the pulpit by Michel Cop and a riot followed. The Council forbade dramas until a more favorable time.

Calvin and the ministers attempted to regulate the naming of children. Children were to be given Christian names rather than foolish, blasphemous and meaningless names. The Council ordered Calvin to draw up a list of forbidden names.

More troubles came in 1547. Perrin was sent to France to pay respects to the new king, Henry II. Upon his return, Laurent Maigret charged that Perrin had carried on unauthorized discussions with the French that involved French intervention in Geneva. Perrin brought counter charges against Maigret. Maigret was finally imprisoned. The February elections went against Calvin. His position was insecure. He was openly insulted on the streets. Perrin, who was Captain-General of Geneva's militia, petitioned the Council to allow the troops to wear gay patches on their uniforms at a spring festival. Calvin strongly opposed the vain show. The Council voted against the patches and Perrin's ill will increased. Calvin described him as "a comic Caesar."

The office of Captain was abolished. Later it was restored.

A threatening letter was found on the pulpit of Calvin's church. Jacques Cuet, a Libertine who had had breakfast that morning with Favre, was suspected and arrested. His home was searched and papers blaspheming religion were found. Treasonable correspondence, licentious works, and threats to the ministers were found in the same handwriting. He was tortured and then beheaded on July 26, 1547, with Calvin consenting to his death as one who would corrupt the youth.

In 1548 the Councils admonished Calvin to do a better job. Farel
was provoked to a stinging reply. About the middle of the year Pierre Vandel and Phillibert Berthelieu organized a party to actively oppose Calvin. They chose a white cross as their badge. They attacked the idea that the ministers had any right to excommunicate. Calvin protested that their organization was illegal.

In the elections of 1549 Perrin and his supporters gained full power. They did not want to get rid of Calvin. They felt it was safer to reduce his influence and power. He was openly insulted and ridiculed and dogs were named for him.

THE DEATH OF CALVIN'S WIFE:
In was in these troubled times that Calvin's wife died. He bore the loss with great fortitude and immersed himself in his work, fearing that at any time he would be dismissed from his post.

CALVIN'S WRITINGS:

During these troubled years Calvin turned out some of his most important writings. He worked at revising the *Institutes*. For six years after the Commentary on Romans he published no commentaries. Then he brought out the commentary on I Corinthians in 1546. In four years he finished the commentaries on Paul's epistles. The first edition of the collected commentaries appeared in 1549 and a revised edition in 1550. He began work on the Catholic epistles and the completed edition was published in 1556. A commentary on Acts was published in 1552 and one on John in 1553. By 1555 he had completed the New Testament commentaries. He began his Old Testament series.

CONTINUING BATTLE OVER DISCIPLINE:

The Libertines found new ways to trouble and insult the ministers. They received a set back in the scandal of Roux Monet, a secretary in the justice department and a friend of Perrin. He was charged with possessing obscene pictures. Vandel defended him. When Monet boasted that he had had affairs with the wives of four of the councillors, including those of Perrin and Vandel, he was condemned and executed.

The minister, Philippe de Ecclesia, was accused by the ministers of slander and false doctrine. The Council ordered the ministers to forgive him and to restore him to his post. The ministers tried to send him to a country church but when he appealed to the Council it upheld him. In December 1552 he was accused of heresy and ill-treating his wife. Finally in 1553 he was deposed.

THE AFFAIR OF BOLSEC:

From the beginning of his ministry in Geneva Calvin had welcomed refugees who had fled homelands for their faith. Publicly and in letters he proclaimed Geneva a sanctuary for faithful members of Christ. Protestant refugees streamed into Geneva from France, Italy, the Netherlands, Scotland, and England. Calvin was dedicated to making Geneva a training place for reformation throughout Europe. The presence of the refugees greatly strengthened his position in Geneva for most of them were loyal backers of Calvin. The refugees loyalty to Calvin provoked great jealousy and anger in the older citizens who backed the Libertines. Hostility to the refugees fed the fires of opposition to Calvin more than any other issue. King Henry II's renewal of severe persecution of Protestants in France greatly increased the stream of refugees. In 1549 Geneva granted citizenship to seventy-two of these. One hundred and twenty-two were granted citizenship in 1550. By 1554 citizenship had been granted to 1376. Among the refugees were many of distinction: Laurent de Normandie, a royal officer of Noyon; Guillaume Trie, a wealthy merchant from Lyons; the Colladon family from Berry; Theodore Beza, the scholar who would be Calvin's successor; and Robert Estienne, the famous Parisian printer who in Geneva became Calvin's printer. In January, 1551, the Libertines proposed to the Little Council that it make residence for twenty-five years prerequisite for citizenship. The Council rejected the motion.

One of the refugees who became a bitter foe of Calvin was Jerome
Hermes Bolsec, a former Carmelite monk of Paris and a physician. He had been a refugee at the court of Renée in Ferrara and then had served as physician to a refugee Protestant nobleman, Jacques de Bourgogne, at Veigy in Bernese territory. In Geneva he won great respect as a physician. He took a keen interest in theology but soon found himself in sharp disagreement with Calvin, particularly over his doctrine of predestination. Bolsec insisted that Calvin's doctrine made a tyrant of God. He charged Calvin with faulty exegesis of Scripture. Calvin believed that Bolsec was attacking the very foundation of his position. Calvin held no post but that of interpreter, preacher and teacher of the Word. He considered predestination a doctrine of comfort to the Christian. Human nature being wholly bad, man's only assurance of salvation was predestination. Calvin insisted that Bolsec's doctrine came from Satan himself.

Calvin answered Bolsec publicly and then laid the matter before the civil authorities insisting on a legal trial. Bolsec was arrested. He defended himself with great skill but as a foreigner he received little support even from Calvin's enemies. He insisted that the matter be submitted to neighboring cities for their judgment. Calvin was opposed to going to the other cities but was defeated in the matter. He sent letters strongly denouncing Bolsec. Bolsec wrote a poem picturing the severity of his treatment in prison that was upsetting to the magistrates. The answers from the cities were not what Calvin wanted. Basel thought Bolsec was a heretic. Zurch thought both sides too bitter. Bern declared Bolsec was not a bad man and called for reconciliation. Neuchâtel led by Farel denounced Bolsec as an instrument of Satan. Calvin and the ministers of Geneva resolved to win the battle unaided by the other cities. They powerfully set forth their views on predestination. On December 23, 1551, Bolsec was banished forever for false opinions that were contrary to Holy Scripture and pure Evangelical religion. Calvin had maintained his position as exegete of Scripture.

Bolsec found refuge for a time in Bernese territory but was driven out in 1555. He returned to France where he recanted his errors at the National Synod at Orleans in 1562. In 1563 he was deposed from the French Protestant ministry as a apostate. He returned to the Roman communion. In 1577, thirteen years after Calvin's death, he took his revenge in a scandalous biography of Calvin filled with the grossest calumnies.

The debate over predestination was continued by Calvin's opponents. Jean Troillet, a former monk, who sought to become a pastor in Geneva, blamed Calvin for his rejection. He became a popular lawyer. He affirmed that Calvin's Institutes were heretical. Calvin had him brought before the Little Council. Troillet had many friends. He defended himself ably, appealing to the teachings of Melanchthon. The Council ruled that the Institutes presented the holy doctrine of God against which no one was to speak, but also ruled that Troillet was a good man and a good citizen. Both sides were displeased.

THE PERRINIST VICTORY:

In the February elections of 1553, the Libertines gained a majority in the Little Council and Perrin again became a syndic. In March the ministers were denied the right to vote in the General Assembly as long as they held office. The Little Council asserted its right to examine ministerial candidates. The Council denied the right of the Consistory to excommunicate. Fearing rumors of French plots, the Council ruled that only citizens could have arms. Only a sword was allowed to the refugees and it was not to be carried in public. Only citizens could serve in the guard. Ill-feelings ran high between the old citizens and the refugees.

Though the collapse of his work seemed imminent, Calvin immersed himself in his writing. Revisions of the Institutes appeared in 1543
and 1550. He published a tract against relics in 1543. His Antidote in 1547 was a vigorous attack on the Council of Trent. He protested the attempt of Charles V to control the Protestant churches. In a strong tract he pled for Protestants to end their quarrels. Elaborate works on predestination appeared in 1543, 1550 and 1552. He continued to turn out a stream of commentaries on Scripture.

THE TRAGEDY OF SERVETUS:

Calvin's position as the leader of French Protestantism seemed to be crumbling in 1553 when unexpected relief came from the clash with the arch heretic, Michael Servetus. Servetus was born in Villanueva in Aragon, 1509-1511. He studied law at Toulouse. Protestant leanings led him to visit Oecolampadius in Basel in 1530 and he was kindly received by Capito in Strassburg. His favorable reception ended when he published his On the Errors of the Trinity at Hagenau in 1531. To Catholics and Protestants alike he was the extreme heretic.

Servetus concealed his identity as a medical and science student in Paris under the name of Villeneuve. He failed to keep an appointment with Calvin. He became a corrector of proofs for Melchoir and Gaspard Trechsel at Lyons, where he edited Ptolemy's Geography. Back in Paris he touched off a storm of controversy when he suggested the pulmonary circulation of the blood, three quarters of a century before William Harvey. After brief stays in Avignon, Lyons, and Charlieu, he settled down as a physician in Vienne under the name of Villeneuve. He developed a very successful medical practice and won the good will of the educated.

In 1553 Servetus published his Restitution of Christianity which he may have finished in 1546. He believed he was bringing Christianity back to pristine simplicity. He set forth a pantheistic view of God, taught that Christ was truly the Son of God and that the Godhead was corporeally manifested in him; he denied the pre-existence of Christ except in the mind of God; he began with his earthly conception and birth. He attacked the Nicene doctrine of the Trinity as a three-headed Cerberus and denied Chalcedonian Christology and infant baptism as corruptions of truth. He emphasized a progress in revelation from the Old to the New Testament. He rejected predestination and asserted the merit of good works. He declared that the millennial reign of Christ was near and believed his Restitution was a preparation for it.

Servetus began a correspondence with Calvin about 1546. Calvin sent him a copy of his Institutes. Servetus returned it with critical notes and sent Calvin a portion of a copy of the manuscript of his Restitution (Restitutae). Calvin took it to be a sort of pun on his Institutes and as an attack on his teaching. The exchange grew into a bitter controversy. Calvin wrote Farel in 1546 that if Servetus ever came to Geneva he would not go forth alive.

The Restitution was secretly printed by Balthasar Arnoulet and his head manager, Guillaume Cereol, at Vienne in 1553, and circulated in Geneva. Calvin's friend, Guillaume Trie, wrote a cousin in Lyons, Antoine Armess, an Ardent Catholic, that it was in Catholic France, and not in Geneva that Blasphemies were tolerated. He cited passages from the Restitution as proof and charged that the author should be burned. Armess carried the correspondence to the ecclesiastical authorities at Lyons. The authorities began action against Servetus, who denied that he was the author and asserted that he was simply the physician, Villeneuve. The authorities pressed Trie for more proof. He persuaded Calvin to let him have the copy of the Institutes that had been annotated by Servetus along with several letters from Servetus to Calvin. The case against Servetus in Vienne moved slowly. On April 7, 1553, friends helped him escape from prison. His trial was held without him on June 17 and he was sentenced to death by slow fire. He was burned in effigy.

After wandering for weeks in Southern France, Servetus came to Geneva where for a month he was unrecognized. On August 13, while
listening to a sermon by Calvin, Calvin recognized him and had him arrested. Thirty-eight charges were brought against Servetus in court. It was more than a heresy trial; it was a struggle between Calvin and his enemies. The prosecutor was a friend of Calvin, Germain Colladon, but the Little Council was dominated by the Libertines who wanted to thwart and weaken Calvin. Their lieutenant of justice was the excommunicated Philibert Berthelier. On August 17, Calvin appeared before the Council attacking Servetus for his denial of the Trinity; he accused him of blaspheming Moses and the Holy Spirit in denying Palestine was a land flowing with milk and honey; he charged that his pantheism made the floor and bench the substance of God and even made the devil part of the substance of God. The Little Council decided to ask the advice of Bern, Basel, Zurich and Schaffhausen, and to ask for a record of the proceedings from Vienne. Vienne demanded that Servetus be extradited to them for execution, but on August 31 the Little Council refused the demand. The Council called for a debate between Calvin and Servetus. Calvin presented accusations of heresy drawn from the writings of Servetus. Servetus accused Calvin of being a disciple of Simon Magus, of barking like a dog to frighten the judges, of being a liar and cheat, a false accuser and heretic. He called on the judges to put Calvin to death as a false teacher and proposed that Calvin's property be awarded to him as a reward for his exposing Calvin's false teachings.

During the trial the Libertines seized the opportunity to assert the superiority of the Little Council over the Consistory, to deny that the Consistory had the power of excommunication, and ordered that Berthelier be admitted to communion. Calvin declared he would die before he would administer communion to Berthelier. The Council declared Berthelier restored but advised him not to present himself for communion.

Servetus took hope from this struggle. The Libertines however had no sympathy for his heresies. The substance of the reply from the Swiss churches on October 18 was that the pest should be removed from the churches. Perrin saw that Calvin had won; to try to delay the conclusion he absented himself from the Little Council and then proposed an appeal to the Two Hundred. On October 26th, the Council ordered Servetus to be burned the next day. Calvin sought a milder form of death by beheading but the court would not change.

Servetus begged pardon from Calvin and asked for an easier death but would not recant. Farel delivered the final exhortation to repentance. Calvin did not attend the execution. Servetus cried out in honor at the sight of the torch and as the flames seared his lips he prayed, "Jesus, thou Son of the Eternal God, have pity on me!" His enemies wanted him to pray, "Eternal Son of God."

Across the years the burning of Servetus has been considered by many the great blot on Calvin's record. In 1903 (the three hundred and fiftieth anniversary) Geneva erected an expiatory monument to Servetus. Castellio published a stinging attack on Calvin, charging that Calvin's Christ was Moloch. Calvin replied with his Refutation of the Errors of Servetus. Castellio admitted heretics should be burned but questioned Calvin's definition of heresy. Gentle Melanchthon expressed the opinion of Calvin's contemporaries when he said of the burning that it was "justly done." We should remember, first, that Calvin did not have authority to burn anyone. Second, that Calvin's one must be compared to the numbers martyred by the Lutherans and Zwingli, and the thousands by the Catholics.

CALVIN'S VICTORY:

In the elections of 1554 and 1555 Calvin's supporters were victorious. The Little Council voted to continue to receive the refugees. The defeated Libertines, on the evening of May 16, 1555, held meetings in two taverns with Perrin and Vandel present. Perrin and Vandel went home at nine but the others staged a disorderly
demonstration, denouncing and insulting the refugees. A French
refugee, Claude Dumont, servant of one of the syndics, Jean Pernet,
was hit by a stone thrown by the younger Comparad. His cry brought
the watchman and the syndic, Henri Aubert, from his drug store near
by. Aubert attempted to arrest Comparad. A crowd gathered in which
angry words were exchanged. Libertines cried for the French to be
killed. Perrin returned and tried to wrestle the baton of authority
from Aubert. A little later he attempted to seize the baton of
another syndic, Pierre Bonne.

The Comparad brothers were arrested and the crowd finally dispersed.
Calvin and his friends declared that the riot was a revolutionary
conspiracy aimed at the slaughter of the French refugees. The Little
Council began an investigation. More arrests were ordered on May 23.
Perrin and five of his friends fled from Geneva. On June 3 Perrin and
four associates were condemned to be quartered and burned. The
Libertines were rounded up and burned and their wives banished. The
fugitives were forbidden to ever return to the city under pain of death.
The Libertine party of Perrin was totally destroyed and Calvin at last
had full control of the city.