

**Richard C.H. Lenski**

**The Gospel Selections of  
the Ancient Church**



**An Exegetical-Homiletical Treatment**

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# The Gospel Selections of the Ancient Church

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# The Gospel Selections of the Ancient Church: An Exegetical- Homiletical Treatment.

*A Series of Gospel Texts for the Entire  
Church Year*

By Richard C. H. Lenski

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Dr. Lenski's explanations of the following passages are found in these books:

- **Anc. Gospel.** Lenski. *Gospel Selections of the Ancient Church*
- **Anc. Epistle.** Lenski. *Epistle Selections of the Ancient Church*
- **Eis. Gospel.** Lenski. *The Eisenach Gospel Selections*
- **Eis. Epistle.** Lenski. *The Eisenach Epistle Selections*
- **Eis. O.T.** Lenski. *The Eisenach Old Testament Selections*
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How Can You Find Peace With God?

# Preface by Lutheran Librarian

In republishing this book, we seek to introduce this author to a new generation of those seeking authentic spirituality.

**Richard C. H. Lenski** (1864-1936) is best known for his insightful and still invaluable series of New Testament Commentaries. He served as Professor of Theology at Capital University and President of the Western District of Joint Synod of Ohio and Editor *Die Lutherische Kirchenzeitung*.

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## **A Note about Typos** [Typographical Errors]:

Over time we are revising the books to make them better and better. If you would like to send the errors you come across to us, we'll make sure they are corrected.

# General Introduction: The Christian Church Year And Christian Preaching

A TRULY MAGNIFICENT CONCEPTION is presented to us in the so-called Christian Church Year. Adopted in the earliest centuries, the Church Year comes to us as a most valuable inheritance.

The early Church began to celebrate the great historical events on which our salvation rests. The start was made with the resurrection of the Savior, the supreme event celebrated already every Lord's Day (Κυριαχὴ ἡμέρα, Rev. 1:10). At first, and before the development had gone far, Easter Sunday was counted as the beginning of the Church Year, much as the Jews regarded their annual Passover Festival. In due time the other great historical events in the life of our Lord were made prominent by festive celebrations: the death of the Savior on the Friday before Easter; the Ascension forty days after Easter; the Sending of the Holy Spirit fifty days after Easter; the Manifestation of the Savior on Epiphany, the sixth day of January, — celebrated at first and quite early in the Eastern churches, and later also in the Western; finally the Birth of the Savior on the twenty-fifth day of December. These high festivals termed the basis of the Christian Church Year.

On the first half of the Christian Church Year rests the second, which deals with the members of the Church. As far as I am able to discover, the development of the second half occurred at a later time. No great festivals were placed into this second half. Nebe is right in observing that festivals cannot be celebrated before the great work which they commemorate is done. The Savior's redemptive work is completely done, hence the great celebrations which deal with him, hence also no celebrations which deal

with us in the Church on earth. We of the Church *are not done* with repentance, justification, and sanctification, — all these must ever go on. One historical celebration was introduced, that of the Reformation, commemorating the nailing of Luther's Ninety-Five Theses to the door of the Castle Church of Wittenberg, Oct. 31:1517. The Harvest Home Festival and the American Thanksgiving Day bear no relation to the Church Year.

The Sundays following Pentecost were not left in an unbroken, monotonous line. Three dates divide them into four groups. The Sunday before June 29 was used as a preparation for the commemoration of the martyrdom of the apostles Peter and Paul. According to the varying date of Pentecost there could be as many as five Sundays after Pentecost. The very first gospel lection presents Nicodemus and baptismal regeneration, John 3:1-15. The epistle lection for the fifth Sunday after Pentecost (the Fourth after Trinity), Rom. 8:18-23, our groaning for the redemption of our body, fits the thought of the two apostolic martyrs.

The idea of the Trinity Festival, occurring on the Sunday after Pentecost, was introduced in the Middle Ages, and not until then was the count of twenty-seven Sundays "after Trinity" made. This innovation obscures the original conception, yet it in no way justifies the mistaken conclusion that the texts for the twenty-seven Sundays are without cohesion. Despite the late introduction of the Holy Trinity Festival, the original text for the day, John 3:1-15, has never been discarded.

August 10 commemorated the martyrdom of Saint Laurentius.<sup>1</sup> The Sundays between June 29 and August 10 were reckoned as "after Peter and Paul," and formed the second group. The third group extends to Michaelmas, September 29, the day of the angel Michael (often called Saint Michael), and dedicated to the angels in general. The final group was not fully fitted out with fixed lections, so that Luther determined what some of them should be.

The progress of thought in these after-Trinity lections is not difficult to perceive, for they lead us from the inception through the development to the consummation of the Christian faith and life in the Church. One may be in doubt now and then as between one lection and its successor. The original line of texts had appointed an epistle text for the Wednesday and a gospel text for the Friday service, both of which have been lost. These lost texts

might have made the connection of thought clearer. The conclusion is not warranted that the twenty-seven after-Trinity lections were chosen without regard to proper sequence. Jerome, who seems to have made the selections, followed a *causa rationabilis*, if we may attribute to him the letter in which this statement appears. Nor is it credible that the first half of the Church Year should be supplied with carefully chosen texts, while the second half was left with a loose and disconnected set of selections.

Beginning with the high festivals, appropriate liturgical material gradually became established and helped to bring out and to grace the significance of every celebration and finally also of almost every main Sunday service. In the first half of the Church Year the festivals each dominated certain preceding or following Sundays, so that fixed cycles were formed. Each Sunday arrived at a definite significance and many of the Sundays were actually named.

Israel of old had its high festival celebrations in the old covenant. When local synagogues were established after the Babylonian exile, fixed Old Testament Scripture lections for each Sabbath service in the synagogue were appointed to be read, namely a *parasha* from the Pentateuch and a *haphthara* from the Prophetical Books. In the Christian churches the lections were taken from the apostolic writings after these had been copied and spread and then finally authored into a fixed canon. The ancient Israelite tradition was thus continued in a new form and was lifted to the highest plane by the development of the Christian Church Year.

During the reign of the papacy in the Middle Ages the early pure development was not lost, but was badly spoiled by the introduction of Romish saint worship and by the rank growth of saint days and festivals, with their legends, their adoration of relics, and other extravagances, perpetuated to this day especially in papal lands. The celebration of the Mass usurped the place of the preaching of the Word.

The Reformation finally cleaned house. Luther's conservative work preserved, restored, and augmented the ancient Christian inheritance. The Zwinglian and Calvinistic reformation did the opposite. Proceeding on radical lines, the whole idea of the Christian Church Year, with all that made it so valuable, was cast aside by Calvinism. Instead of the mountain heights of glorious Christian festivals, with their ascending and descending

Sunday services, a monotonous, unbroken plain of fifty-two common Sundays was introduced. All the special lections and their rich liturgical settings were abolished, and in their place the *lectio continua* was introduced, i.e. the reading of biblical books chapter following chapter, among them also and even preferably Old Testament books. The choice of the books was left to the individual preacher, who also composed the prayers at each service, in fact, arranged the entire service as he pleased. For his sermon he took whatever text suited him.

This radical change was made on the plea that the Church Year and the lections for the festivals and the Sundays, together with the liturgical prayers and other features, were Romish and supported Romanism, — whereas the entire conception and system are anciently Christian. A second plea was that the series of selected texts — we call them pericopes — withheld from the churches the bulk of Scripture, in Romish fashion, and purposely impoverished the Christian faith, life, and knowledge. The answer to this second plea is that no *lectio continua*, especially when including many Old Testament books — Calvinism has always manifested a preference for the Old Testament books, — can possibly supply more Christian truth and knowledge than the carefully selected and exceedingly rich lections and texts from the New Testament.

Although the Anglican Church became strongly Calvinistic after the Lutheran movement in England, it preserved the old lections and liturgies. The denominations that split away from the Calvinistic reformation kept to the radical idea.

About 400 years have passed, ample time for a comparison of results. We are able to register the fact that the innovations begun under the influence of Zwingli and Calvin have run a deplorable downward course.

Where is now the *lectio continua* in all the denominations descended from Calvin's radical reformation? All their preachers choose their own texts Sunday after Sunday, each one as he deems best. The extreme opposite of reading continuously through entire books, with pulpit exposition according, is in vogue, namely extremely short texts, which often appear only as scrap texts or as pretexts. All these preachers are continuously obliged to hunt after this type of text. They live from hand to mouth; they hardly ever know what their next text will be. Each is swayed

in his choice by his subjective personal limitations, likings, chance experiences, and the like.

The case is worse. Many no longer know what a text really is, namely a *textus*, a web, a section of Scripture woven through the sermon, or, to use another figure, the Scripture section on which the entire sermon is built. Many of these preachers expect the text to furnish only a *subject* for the sermon, one on which the preacher may dilate *ad libitum*. They call this “topical preaching.” The usual result is an *essay* on the subject which some Bible verse may mention. No homiletical training in a theological seminary is necessary for essay writing. Luther’s idea is that every sermon is a battle. Reciting what amounts to an essay is one of the lower types of sermonizing. The preacher soon runs out of subjects. The churches are not filled by reciting essays, especially when the essays are merely read from manuscript. To obtain additional subjects topics are selected that often have no place whatever in the pulpit of a Christian congregation.

Some preachers attempt to rise higher and seek texts containing a striking phrase or sentence, on which the preacher may ring the changes in his sermon. Such texts, of course, are not numerous. To obtain more of them the preacher resorts to allegory, — a capital crime in preaching. A preacher of national prominence used John 11:44: “Loose him and let him go!” as a text for a high school baccalaureate sermon, telling the audience for over thirty minutes that there comes a time when parents must let their children go out into the world and stand on their own feet. Another used the clause from the account of Christ’s Transfiguration: “as they came down from the mountain,” and told a class of seminary graduates that they must *come down* from their mountain heights to reach the people with their preaching. This man forgot Matt. v. 1: “He (Christ) *went up* into a mountain,” which would supply him with the very opposite allegory. Holding up the hands of Moses for the slaughtering of the heathen Amalekites (Ex. 17:12) has been allegorized for the conversion of the heathen in a missionary sermon.

To such pitiful levels has the Calvinistic *lectio continua* of Zwingli and Calvin degenerated in the pulpit of the present time.

Yet, in spite of all efforts, the great Christian Church Festivals have defied the Calvinistic nivellization<sup>2</sup> They stand today as a defiant Gibraltar,

and are celebrated everywhere in the Christian world. The radical attempts have deprived the churches in which they were made only of the minor festivals like Epiphany and Ascension Day. Lent is forcing its way back among the descendants of Calvin, although many of them as yet have no conception of Lent as the Passion Season (*Passionszeit*) of the Christian Church Year. Even Unitarianism and modernism are helpless allies when it comes to wiping out the great festivals of Christendom, which form the very backbone of the Christian Church Year.

No Calvinistic preacher has ever produced a Postil, — the term derived from *post illa* (sc. *verba*), meaning “after those words,” i.e. the sermon spoken after reading the words of the text. Among the sermon books of all time Luther’s Postil stands in the front rank. Great is the number of other Postils. All of them expound the anciently chosen texts. Often they were called Sermons for the Church Year; many of them bore specific and beautiful titles. All these preachers knew only one form of preaching, namely the expository, which sticks to the text and unfolds to the hearers the saving contents of the text.

Calvinists, like the Baptist Spurgeon, preached only once on an individual text selected only by the preacher himself for this or for that Sunday. Enterprising publishers printed collections of such sermons and sold them in quantities by means of heavy advertising and by proclaiming that particular preacher’s fame. The preachers who preached on pericopes did not proceed in this fashion. They preached on the established texts perhaps as many as twenty times, and then at last published only the ripest fruit of all their repeated efforts. The Church has been greatly enriched by this most valuable and noble sermonic literature. It appears in Germany, in Norway, in Sweden, etc., in hundreds of volumes, and in the Christian homes each “sermon book,” as it is commonly called, is treasured, read, and reread many times. In America and in the English language we have too few of such “sermon books.” Let our best preachers produce more.

In more recent times new selections have been made and authorized by the different church authorities in Germany and by the Synodical Conference in America, not as Scripture lections to be read at the altar or at the lectern, but as texts for the pulpit. All these selections are pericopes, fitted closely to the ancient idea of the Christian Church Year. Often there are three lines of texts, an Old Testament line besides a gospel and an

epistle line. There are more than twenty-five of these. Naturally many individual pericopes appear in a number of these series of texts. Take for instance the Christmas festival, — the four gospels offer only three or four outstanding texts suitable for this occasion, certainly not twenty-five or more. The same is true regarding the other great festivals.

These new series of texts for the pulpit aim to answer the desire of the churches to hear sermons on those portions of Scripture not contained in the ancient series of gospels and epistles. In these new pericope selections the correlation of the texts is close, much like chapters in a continuous narrative, which makes them attractive for both preacher and hearer. Outstanding are the two selections named after their authors, those proposed by Thomasius, and those offered by Nitzsch. The selections made by the Eisenach Conference in Germany have met with great favor, especially also in America. Exegetical and homiletical helps for the Eisenach text selections were published in Germany. For our American preachers *The Eisenach Gospel Selections* (now in the third edition), *The Eisenach Epistle Selections*, and *The Eisenach Old Testament Selections* soon followed; also another entirely new series of gospel texts, *The New Gospel Selections*, an exegetical-homiletical volume in which a complete sermon on each text is added to the other material. In these four volumes no text is repeated, and no text from the ancient pericopes is introduced.

For the ancient gospel and epistle selections the main helps consisted of the many sermon books on these texts, nearly all of which are rich in material, illustrations, etc., and suggestive for our present sermonizing. In 1886-7 the Reformed preacher and professor A. Nebe published *Die Evangelischen Perikopen des Kirchenjahres* in three volumes, and also three volumes on the epistles, which became well known and were extensively used. A condensation of the volumes on the gospels was prepared by E. J. Wolff, *An Exposition of the Gospels of the Church Year Based on Nebe*. A smaller but useful work is that by J. L. Sommer, *Die Evangelischen Perikopen des Kirchenjahres*, the fourth edition of which appeared in 1898. Sommer also has a volume on the epistles. The need of a more adequate exegetical-homiletical treatment of the ancient gospel and epistle selections has long been felt. The manager of the Lutheran Book Concern has commissioned the writer of these lines to meet this need.

1. He suffered martyrdom in the Valerian per in 258. The Roman prefect, having heard that the Christian Church was in possession of great treasures, demanded that Laurentius surrender them. He seemed willing to comply, was released, then returned with a host of old, poor, and sick people, paupers and cripples, and said: “These are our jewels!” The prefect was enraged, and sentenced Laurentius to death over a slow fire. The Christians of Rome actually saw and heard how “his living limbs hissed over the coals.” The legend reports that when his scourged and lacerated body, stretched on the gridiron over the slow fire, was roasted on the under side, the martyr asked that his body be turned over to roast on the other side.↵
2. “leveling” —Ed.↵

# **The Festival Half Of The Church Year**

From The First Sunday in Advent to The Festival of The Trinity

**The Savior**

In the Supreme Divine Events on Which our Salvation Rests

# **The Christmas Cycle: The Savior's Coming**

## **The First Sunday in Advent**

*The Savior's Gracious Coming*

## **The Second Sunday in Advent**

*The Savior's Coming in Judgment*

## **The Third Sunday in Advent**

*The Herald of the Savior's Double Coming,  
John the Baptist*

## **The Fourth Sunday in Advent**

*The Infinite Greatness of the Savior Himself*

## **Christmas**

*The Son of God Born in Bethlehem*

## **Second Christmas Day**

*The First Martyr's Heavenly Birthday*

## **The Sunday After Christmas**

*The Savior, the Sign Which Shall Be Spoken Against New Year's Day  
The Savior's Circumcision*

## **The Sunday After New Year**

*The Savior's Flight into Egypt*

# **The Christmas Cycle**

## **The First Sunday in Advent to the Sunday After New Year**

The first or festival half of the Church Year is usually divided into three grand sections or cycles, called respectively the Christmas, the Easter, and the Pentecost cycle. Within these cycles, however, there are two sections, distinct and important enough to stand by themselves, namely the Epiphany texts and the texts for Lent. Instead, therefore, of dividing the first half of the Church Year into only three parts, one of them, that of Pentecost, quite unequal in size as compared With the other two, we much prefer to make five more nearly equal cycles: Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Easter, and Pentecost. Each has its great dominating festival, and with that also its appropriate circle of thought, to which each text contributes its distinct and valuable share. The five cycles together present in this festival half of the Church Year:

### **The Savior**

#### **The Supreme Divine Events on which Our Salvation Rests**

Homiletically speaking, in this half of the Church Year we deal in a most direct manner with *the Gospel histories of the first rank*, do so even in festive celebration. The birth, manifestation, death, resurrection, ascension of Christ, and the Sending of the Spirit, are absolutely essential to the Gospel. No substitution is even possible. It is easy to distinguish the Gospel histories of the second rank. One and even more of these could be omitted from the Scriptures altogether, with only minor loss. Suppose there had been no wedding at Cana? no walking on the sea? no expulsion of the demon legion? Or suppose that the creation of wine had occurred, not in Cana, but in Bethany? the walking on the sea, not in Galilee, but on the Dead Sea? the demon expulsion of the legion, not at Gadara, but near Jericho? The birth of Christ *had* to occur in Bethlehem of Judea, his death at Jerusalem. Beside the events of the first rank themselves, essential to our salvation as such, many of the adjuncts of these supreme events *had* to be as they actually were, because of our salvation.

The supreme divine events stand apart from all the minor Gospel events because of their direct relation to our faith. This is an essential matter as far as our preaching is concerned. Homiletically the supreme historical Gospel

events demand *appropriation* in preaching and hearing. In the most direct way all that occurred in each of these events is *for me*. The Savior was born *for me*; manifested himself *for me*; suffered and died *for me*; arose on the third day *for me*; ascended to God's right hand *for me*; sent the Holy Spirit *for me*. And I *by faith* am to appropriate and make my own all the saving power and grace in each of these events. Here are no "lessons" and the preacher offers no applications, or anything of the kind. Each of the supreme events stands as a simple, divine *fact* full of the power of grace to save. The preacher's one task is so to present the fact and to call on me: "Believe it! Amen." This he must do at any time, no matter when a text contains mention of any of these supreme facts, and most certainly at the time of the great festivals which commemorate them with high solemnity.

Everything is different in regard to what are called the *histories of the second rank*. These do not admit of such direct appropriation. Take Peter's confession of Christ, or his denial of Christ. Neither of these was made for me. In all these historical examples a third feature or *tertium* lies between the history and me. We have 1) a minor event and its history; 2) then the *tertium* or characteristic involved in the history; and thus 3) the application that pertains to you and to me. The formula runs positively: *As then — so now*. Or negatively: *As then — so not now*, or: *As not then — so now*.

Take Peter's confession: As Peter confessed so must I confess, and negatively, I must not deny. Again: As Peter denied, so many deny today, but, negatively, not you and I. There is in both instances the abstraction, called the *tertium*; in the first history the confession, in the second the denial. Thus, in brief, the preacher may understand the difference between the histories of the first rank, in which he must use homiletical *appropriation*, and the histories of the second rank, in which he must use homiletical *application*.

Many preachers become hazy regarding the distinction. The Bible contains so much material suitable for application that the preacher forgets how to use appropriation and thinks that all he has to do is to apply. Let him learn the difference and then follow the rule: Use appropriation wherever the text permits, for application will abundantly take care of itself. It is a capital crime to use application on any of the great festivals, instead of the most effective appropriation.

There is more to say. In many histories of the second rank the Savior himself appears in act or in word or in both. Other persons also appear, as for instance Judas, Peter, Caiaphas, Pilate, Herod, etc., in the Passion history, or as in the miracles the persons healed and others who may be present and may also speak and act. While all these histories are indeed of the second rank, an element appears in them which the preacher should recognize and by which he should lift his sermon above ordinary application. He should use what I call application approaching appropriation. The great mistake in treating the texts in which Judas appears would be to let Judas occupy the whole foreground of the picture, and to crowd Jesus into the dim background, to send the hearers home filled only with the thought of the traitor and with scarcely a thought of the Savior, save that he was shamefully wronged. In all such texts make the Savior stand forth, his power, his grace, his mercy, his help, etc., — no fear that the other personages will fail in getting their due.

See the discussion in my homiletics, *The Sermon* 225 etc. All the homiletical principles, as well as the methods, presented in *The Sermon* are utilized in this volume.

Each of the five cycles in the festival half of the Church Year is governed by one central or chief text, namely the one for the great festival day occurring in the cycle. Yet there is variety in the arrangement of the cycles. In the Christmas cycle the chief text is found near the middle, it is the fifth of nine or of ten texts, — ten if we count the one for the Day after Christmas. In this respect the Pentecost cycle is similar, save that it has fewer texts. In the Epiphany and in the Easter cycles the chief text is the very first text, opening the cycle with a burst of glory, which sends its radiance through the texts that follow. The Lenten cycle is the very reverse, — the dominating text is the last of the twelve, the one for Good Friday.

In this arrangement something fine and appropriate appears. The birth of the Savior was heralded in advance, and when at last it was accomplished a period of waiting ensued until the child reached manhood. Epiphany as the manifestation of the Savior, and likewise Easter, break forth with the unexpected, and then let us absorb this in the Sundays following. During Lent we slowly go forward until we reach Calvary and see the Savior die on Good Friday. Pentecost comes as Jesus had promised, and is followed by

the continued work of the Holy Spirit, which is traced for us in the remainder of the Church Year.

I am compelled to disagree with those who regard the Holy Trinity as the basis of the festival half of the Church Year, and who therefore also divide it into three parts: 1) *the Father* sent his Son into the world to die for its sins (the First Sunday in Advent till Good Friday); 2) *the Son* arose on Easter morning and ascended to God's right hand forty days after, revealed as indeed the Son of God; 3) *the Holy Spirit* descended at Pentecost. The entire festival half of the Church Year deals with **the Savior** — it is *he* who is born, *he* who is made manifest, *he* who dies, *he* who rises and ascends, *he* who sends the Spirit. There is no need to argue the patent facts. In all that he did for our salvation, our Savior is none other than the Son, the Second Person of the Godhead, and this is the only reference to the Trinity in the composition of this half of the Church Year.

I furthermore reject the idea that the threefold office of Christ is the groundwork for the three cycles in the festival half of the Church Year, — the prophetic office for the Christmas cycle, the high priestly office for the Easter cycle, and the kingly office for the Pentecost cycle. It is even supposed that both the three divine Persons and the three offices of Christ constitute the basis of the three cycles as originally arranged for the ancient Church. Such mixing would constitute a muddle. As for the Savior's offices, who thinks of the Prophet when we kneel at the manger in Bethlehem? As for the High Priest, he appears with his atoning blood on Good Friday, and certainly not on Easter morning. As for the Pentecost cycle, while Ascension Day and Christ's kingship might be connected with this festival, the subject of the cycle as such is not Christ's kingly office as subsequent to two other cycles dealing with his prophetic and his high priestly offices.

Let the texts speak for themselves. They present *the Savior in the Supreme Divine Events on which our Salvation Rests*. The number of these events is five, and not merely three.

The four Sundays in Advent stand out, each beautifully distinct. They intend to prepare us for the proper celebration of the Incarnation and Nativity of the Savior.

The First Sunday in Advent deals with *the Savior's Gracious Coming*.

The Second Sunday in Advent deals with *the Savior's Coming in Judgment*.

The Third Sunday in Advent deals with *the Herald of the Savior's Double Coming, John the Baptist*.

Because the Baptist appears again in the text for the Fourth Sunday in Advent, some imagine that this Sunday means to deal with the Baptist a second time. But the climax of the text is reached in the final verses, John 1:25-27: *the Infinite Greatness of the Savior Himself*, whose way the Baptist prepares.

Now comes Christmas, with Luke's account of *the Savior's Birth at Bethlehem*.

Second Christmas Day was celebrated as commemorating Stephen's martyrdom. Hence the text Acts 6:8-15; 7:54-60, the record of his martyrdom, and the gospel for this day Matt. 23:34-39. The ancients regarded a martyr's death as his *natalis* or birth into the heavenly life. So this day celebrates *the First Martyr's heavenly Birthday* — One of the ancient Gallic texts for Christmas was John 1:1-15, which is shortened by one verse in the Catholic and the Anglican lections (Nebe I, 92-93). For some reason this is made an alternate gospel text for the Day after Christmas in our hymnals. As such it presents *the Deity of the Savior Born on Christmas Day*. — Luther himself used Luke 2:15-20, which Nebe lists as one of the two Lutheran gospel texts for Christmas Day. It would present *the Newborn Savior Received by Faith*. "This gospel contains what the effects and fruits of the Word of God are, and which are the evidences by which one may know whether the Word of God is lodged and has wrought in us."

The Sunday after Christmas, by means of Luke 2:33-40, presents *the Savior as Set for the Fall and Rising of Many in Israel*, and as *the Sign which Shall Be Spoken against*, and is thus in line with Stephen's martyrdom.

New Year's is *the Festival of the Savior's Circumcision*.

The Lutheran Church provided a text for the Sunday after New Year. Seldom does a Sunday occur between New Year's Day and the Epiphany Festival. Matt. 2:13-23 is an appropriate text: *the Savior's Flight into Egypt*.

This closes the Christmas cycle. The Epiphany idea presents an entirely new cycle of thought, which certainly deserves to be treated as independent and not merely as an adjunct to or an appendix of the Christmas cycle.

# The First Sunday In Advent.

## Matt. 21 :1 -9

### The Savior's Gracious Coming

The Christian Church Year begins, not on Jan. 1, but with the First Sunday in Advent. It is the Savior's Year, not a mere secular year. Advent means "coming," — he who has come with love, grace, and mercy will come again in final judgment. The Savior's gracious coming assures us believers that his coming in judgment at the last day will be for us an event of boundless joy. The texts that consider eschatological matters are placed in the closing part of the Church Year, and only so much of eschatology is introduced into this opening section as emphasizes the Advent idea in connection with Christmas.

The Savior's entry into Jerusalem in fulfillment of Zechariah's prophecy fits this first Sunday in Advent perfectly. The central fact is that of the Savior's *coming*, even as one of his Messianic titles is "the One Coming." In Rev. 1:8 he still bears this name: Ὁ Ἐρχόμενος, "the One Coming," in view of his second coming, a fact which it is well to note. The gracious Savior comes to us to bring us salvation, and he does not wait until men perhaps go to him, which in his sinful bondage no man can possibly do. So also he ordered his Church and his apostles to go to all nations and to every creature to bring them the Gospel and salvation. We are living in the era of grace, — the dawning of every one of these years is a new Advent, a new *coming* of the King of Grace.

The idea of coming includes someone who comes and those to whom he comes, and also some purpose for which he comes to them. All three of these thoughts are prominent in this narrative.

It is Jesus, here called “the Lord,” and “the King of the daughter of Zion,” who comes, and in this act of coming is characterized as “meek,” for he comes riding upon an humble ass, not upon a panoplied charger surrounded by an army with weapons of war. Grace and salvation mark his coming. Rev. 19:11-21 shows that he will indeed come otherwise, sitting upon a white horse, and then too bearing the title “King.” However, the purpose of his first coming is entirely pure grace and mercy. He is “the Son of David,” God’s Son born man of David’s seed, come to rule on the throne of David for ever; and the proper acclaim for him is the one in our text: “Hosanna (grant salvation) in the highest!”

The Savior came to Jerusalem, the city of the Temple and its Sanctuary, at the great Passover Festival, when all the nation was gathered at its capital and Sanctuary before the Lord God. To Israel, to the people covenanted to be God’s own people, even in this holiest season, the Savior came as their King of salvation, with the purpose that they might so receive him in their hearts. What is recorded in this text is much narrower than what is stated in John 3:16, God sending his Son into the world. It will not do, by means of application or otherwise, to treat the two texts as identical. The Savior came *unto his own*, and *his own* received him not, John 1:11. Deep tragedy underlies this text. The enthusiastic “Hosanna” soon turned into the murderous “Crucify, crucify him!” Repeatedly the Savior had told his disciples that he was going to Jerusalem to die, to be crucified. Bear in mind that he had come to Jerusalem before, and had taught everywhere in the whole land for the past three years. The Savior now comes for the last time. This is Sunday, — on Tuesday afternoon Jesus left the Temple, never to enter it again. “Behold, your house is left unto you desolate!” Matt. 23:38.

The application to ourselves is obvious. We now, in our churches, are the daughter of Zion. With this text the Savior-King comes to us. The great question which this text should make each of us ask is that of Paul Gerhardt:

**“O how shall I receive thee, >How welcome thee aright?”**

This is the text for Palm Sunday, the last Sunday in the Passion Season. For Advent we should make the Savior’s coming the great subject of the

sermon; during the Passion Season his coming to suffer and to die, using as the keyword “meek,” Hebrew *'ani*, “one who cannot resist” with force. The tragedy suggested in the text should be brought out fully in the sermon for Palm Sunday, and only with restraint on the First Sunday in Advent.

It will probably be best throughout this volume to use the close translation I have employed in my *Interpretation*. The preacher will use the Authorized Version in the pulpit, and will compare the Revised Version in his study.

On Friday morning, the 8th of Nisan, after a night spent in the home of Zacchaeus, Jesus left Jericho, and in the afternoon of that day arrived at Bethany. There he rested Friday night and also spent Saturday, the Sabbath, quietly. When the Sabbath ended on Saturday at eventide, his friends made a special supper in his honor (John 12:2). Jesus spent a second night in Bethany. On Sunday he made his royal entry into Jerusalem.

Jesus had come up from Jericho with a great caravan of pilgrims, proceeding to Jerusalem for the Passover festival. While he and the Twelve halted at Bethany, the pilgrims went on to the city, and, of course, told the crowds of pilgrims already there, that Jesus had been with them and had stopped at Bethany. Thus all day Saturday many came out to Bethany from the city to see both Jesus and Lazarus, the report of whose astounding resurrection from the tomb some time before was filling the multitudes with great wonder (John 12:9-10).

This streaming out of the festival pilgrims continued on Sunday. When now Jesus made ready to leave Bethany for the short journey to the city, word was swiftly carried to the pilgrim visitors in the city: “He is starting! He is coming!” The result was the formation of two great crowds: the one formed at and near Bethany was composed of the pilgrims already there and of those approaching, all of these going along with Jesus; the other formed at the city by all those who had gotten the news, all of these going out to meet and to welcome Jesus as he approached.

This is the situation into the midst of which Matthew places us without preliminary remarks. We obtain the complete picture only by correlating the records of all the evangelists, that of John being most important.

**[1] And when they drew near to Jerusalem, and came to Bethphage to the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, [2] saying to them: “Go into the village over against you, and immediately you shall find an ass tied, and a colt with her. Having loosed them, bring them to me. [3] And if any one shall say anything to you, you shall say: ‘The Lord has need of them’; and immediately he will send them.”**

In chapter 20 Matthew has concluded his account with the story of Jesus restoring to sight the two blind men on the road out from Jericho. It is with reference to the remote Jericho that Matthew now writes: “And when they drew near to Jerusalem,” and then adds just how near: “and came to Bethphage to the Mount of Olives.” It was then that this notable incident occurred, “then Jesus sent two disciples,” etc. All that intervenes between Jesus’ stay in Jericho and his approach to Bethphage is omitted. Yet Mat — they too records the story of the supper made in honor of Jesus in Bethany, but he does not follow the chronological sequence and records this event in 26:6 etc., in order to throw into contrast the honor accorded to Jesus in Bethany and the plot of the Sanhedrin to kill Jesus, 26:1-5.

So we are now with Jesus shortly before he approaches the height of the ridge called “the Mount of Olives,” over which the road from Jericho to Jerusalem leads, and from the top of which one sees the Holy City spread out below with its fortified massive walls and towers, the Temple on Mount Moriah, the palaces on the higher Mount Zion, and all the buildings encircled by the walls. Bethany, which Jesus has just left, lies on the slope toward Jericho, and may still be visited. Bethphage evidently lay a little farther ahead, still beneath the ridge of Olivet, and a little to the side of the main road, probably being only a small cluster of insignificant houses, all trace of the little village having now disappeared.

[2] The twelve disciples are with Jesus, and so are all the pilgrims who had gone out of Bethany to see Lazarus and Jesus, others at the moment just arriving from the city. Jesus made a halt on the road. This time he intends not to walk but to ride into Jerusalem, — a highly unusual proceeding. So also is the proceeding about securing a mount. For the mere asking Jesus could have secured a mount at the very start from Bethany, where he had all those friends who made the supper in his honor the evening before. Instead, he walked out of Bethany, and now obtained a mount from little Bethphage, and this in in most remarkable manner.

Jesus reveals his omniscience, as at Bethany some time before he had revealed his omnipotence in calling Lazarus from the grave, and at Jericho on the preceding Thursday had restored two blind men to sight. Mark it well, *this* is the Savior-King who today is coming to Jerusalem. Most simple and almost unobtrusive is the present use of his omniscience. Yet exceedingly significant, especially for his disciples. A similar use of omniscience is soon to follow, Matt. 26:17 etc. Note also Matt. 26:1-5, where Jesus declares that in two days he will be crucified, while the Sanhedrin resolves *not* to kill him at the time of the feast. Add to all these incidents all the exact and detailed predictions Jesus had made in the past to his disciples in regard to his suffering, his death by crucifixion, and his resurrection on the third day.

During the days of his humiliation the Lord employed the divine attributes bestowed upon his human nature only as their employment aided the great mission and work for which he had come into the world. This explains all the miracles of Jesus which are recorded for us in the gospels. Thus at Tana he manifested forth his glory, and his disciples believed in him (John 2:11). And John writes (1:14): “We beheld his glory, the glory as of the Only begotten of the Father.” This glory consists of the manifestation of any one or more of the divine attributes bestowed upon Jesus’ human nature. That his human nature was made possessor of the divine attributes is denied by Nestorius of old, and by the Calvinists since Calvin, but it is attested throughout Scripture, even in the most lucid manner.

Jesus does not order the two disciples — no one knows just who they were — to go and find him a mount, hoping that they may succeed. Jesus orders: “Go into the village over against you, and immediately (without any search whatever) you shall find an ass tied, and a colt with her.” There is no if about it. Jesus speaks as though these animals are waiting, tied up in the Village, so he needs but to send and to claim them. Mark and Luke add the information that the colt had never been ridden before. This is not a discovery made later, when the colt was brought, but a fact known to Jesus, who intended to use only an unriden colt. “You shall find,” he says, just such a colt. Mark tells us that the two disciples “found the colt tied by the door without, in a place where two ways met.” The two disciples are not to ask permission to take the animals, they are simply as a matter of course to untie them and to bring them to Jesus.

[3] The directions of Jesus include one more point. namely that if any one shall say anything to the two disciples, they shall say in reply only: “The Lord has need of them.” At once the owner will not only permit, he will send the animals. Ἐὰν denotes expectancy, — the two disciples are to expect the owners’ question: “Why are you loosing the colt?” as Luke records the actual question asked, see also Mark. The question does not indicate an objection; it only asks for information. Readily the owners send the animals. The obvious implication is that the owners know Jesus, know that he is “the Lord,” ὁ Κύριος, and are such devoted friends of Jesus that they are happy to lend him the use of their beasts. It is worth while to note that Matthew alone tells us that there were two asses, the dam and the colt. Here again he shows his independence from Mark and Luke. Both animals were taken to Jesus, for neither would be content if only the colt had been taken. Jesus rode the colt, the dam walking by its side.

So simple is the account, yet so significant, lucidly revealing the use the Lord made of his omniscience during his advent to Jerusalem. This, however, is only the half of the great fact.

**[4] Now this has occurred, in order that it might be fulfilled which was spoken through the prophet, saying:**

**[5] “Say you to the daughter of Zion: ‘Lo, thy King comes to thee, Meek, and riding upon an ass And upon a colt, a son of a burdenbeast!’”**

Here is more than momentary omniscience, wonderful as this is in itself; here is conscious and purposeful fulfillment of divine prophecy on the part of our Savior. Centuries before Zech. 9:9 foretold this act of the Messiah, that he would come to Jerusalem riding upon the colt of an ass. The entire act, with its most important details, was recorded by the prophet ages before it occurred, and now, when the great day had arrived, the act took place in literal fulfillment. Matthew does not wait till he has reached v. 7 before he states that Jesus mounted the colt and rode forward, in order to record the prophecy. He records it already in connection with the order Jesus gave to the two disciples. This can have only one meaning, namely that Jesus himself knows and by his order proceeds to fulfill the prophecy. He did not fulfill it unconsciously as the Jews fulfilled so many prophecies concerning him, as the disciples themselves aided in the fulfillment on this very

occasiOn: “These things understood not his disciples at the first: but when Jesus was glorified, then remembered they that these things were written of him, and that they had done these things unto him,” John 12:16.

Note the formula: ἵνα πληρωθῆ τὸ ῥηθὲν διὰ τοῦ προφήτου λέγοντος, “in order that there be fulfilled the thing uttered through the prophet, saying.” Matthew takes this wording from the lips of the angel as recorded in 1:22, and employs it almost constantly in his gospel (2:15:17:23; 8:17; 12:17), with only occasional variation. Read my *Interpretation of Matthew’s Gospel* 51 etc. As long as the prophecy stands by itself it is like an empty vessel waiting to be filled. When the event occurs, the vessel is filled to the brim. The significant words are τὸ ῥηθὲν, “the thing spoken or uttered,” a passive participle substantivized, this passive always implying an agent, the one who speaks or utters. In 1:22 and 2:15 the agent is named: ὑπὸ τοῦ Κυρίου, this being the preposition specifically employed for the agent with the passive: the thing spoken “by the Lord,” Κύριος meaning *Yahveh*. Διὰ, “through,” expresses the medium used by *Yahveh*, here the prophet, his mouthpiece. These διὰ phrases occur many times.

We have here the biblical definition of Verbal Inspiration: God does the speaking — the prophet is his mouthpiece, with tongue and pen — the thing spoken is preserved word for word as desired by God. This is the definition taken from the Scriptures by our sound dogmatists: God the *causa efficiens* (ὑπὸ), God’s agents or instruments the *causae instrumentales* (διὰ). The aorist participle expresses *a fact*: “spoken.” There is no “theory” about the entire matter. We believe the divinely attested fact, and reject every theory.

[5] Zechariah begins with the jubilant call: “Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem!” for which Matthew substitutes the more sober line: “Say you to the daughter of Zion,” which he takes from Is. 62:11. The idea in the substitution seems to be that when the daughter of Zion is told who is coming, she will of herself greatly rejoice. She certainly ought to rejoice. It is necessary for her to be told in advance who is coming, so that she may not fail to rejoice. The substitution, then, is interpretative. The biblical writers ever ref use to quote mechanically, in slavish fashion. We shall see this a second time in the following.

“Zion” (= sunny) is the name for the highest elevation in Jerusalem; Moriah is a lower hill and was the Temple site. “The daughter of Zion” names the people of Israel from the highest hill of their capital city. By a legitimate transfer this poetic title is now transferred to the New Testament Israel, the Christian Church. The word “Zion” alone is often personified and by itself used as a poetical name for the Church.

The prophet is ordered by God to tell Israel: “Lo, thy King comes to thee!” and also to describe his coming so that it may at once be recognized. The interjection “lo” is dramatic and means to stir and arouse Israel out of indifference and unbelief. It is no less than Israel’s “King” who is coming to his people. “Thy King” not merely as destined for thee, but thine by his very descent and birth as Son of David and eternal heir of David’s throne. “He comes,” *ερχεται*, recalls one of his Messianic titles: ὁ ἐρχόμενος, “the One Coming.” This title is equal to a mighty promise. Jesus fulfills this promise on Palm Sunday.

Fail not to see that this King’s coming is no mere arrival, but an arrival which brings all the grace and the gifts of grace which this King possesses and comes to bestow. There never was a king like unto this King. His Kingdom is not of this world, and is an everlasting Kingdom. It is his blessed rule of grace on earth and his glorious rule in heaven. Other kings are made by their kingdom, and often also are unmade; this King makes his Kingdom, — where he is, where he comes, there is bound to be also his Kingdom. Other kings draw all that they have, even their crowns, from their people, this King bestows all that he has and brings upon his people. Yea, he shares his Kingdom and his Throne with his people, they are all to be kings and are to sit on his Throne and rule (lit. to king it) with him, Rev. 3:21. “He is a peculiar King: thou dost not seek him, he seeks thee; thou dost not find him, he finds thee; for the preachers come from him, not from thee; their preaching comes from him, not from thee; thy faith comes from him, not from thee, and all that thy faith works in thee comes from him, not from thee.” Luther. Add to this the truth that he comes to bestow no less than eternal royalty upon us.

Matthew omits the next line of Zechariah’s prophecy, which, however, is not: “He is just and having salvation” (A.

V., and margin “saving himself”); but: “He is righteous (i.e. has God’s verdict in his favor) and experiences God’s rescue.” Matthew omits this line because it describes the resurrection and exaltation of Jesus, and Matthew wants only the description of his coming to Zion. The evangelists quote intelligently, as we have already noted, not mechanically.

The weightiest part of the prophecy lies in the two lines: “Meek and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt, a son of a beast-burden.” Zion shall have no difficulty whatever in recognizing her King when he comes to her. God himself describes him and says how he will come. Absolutely different from all mere kings of earth, this difference itself will identify him to Zion when he comes. Not for a moment will he be mistaken for a common earthly king, one like David was, or Solomon. God told Israel in advance so as to remove all false, superficial, mere earthly notions about the King and his coming, notions which foolishly cause disappointment. God fully informed Israel long in advance, so that all should see the heavenly grace of this King and be filled with heavenly joy at his coming. We know how and why Israel failed in both respects, save for a remnant. Beware, lest we too fail today!

The great distinguishing feature of this King is that in his coming he is “meek,”  $\pi\rho\alpha\upsilon\delta$ , Hebrew ‘ani, “one who cannot resist.” This word describes the King perfectly in his gracious coming. Absolutely different will be his second coming, read Matt. 3:12; 24:30; 2 Thess. 4:16; Rev. 20:11. Jesus comes to Jerusalem there to complete his redemptive mission by non-resisting suffering and dying in our stead. How could he have come for this otherwise than as “meek,” “unable to resist”? even as he himself told Pilate, John 19:36-37. “Meek” is inward as well as outward. “I am meek and lowly in heart,” Matt. 11, 29.

In a most simple and also obvious way the King’s meekness is made to appear, — he comes “riding upon an ass,” namely “upon a colt of asses” (Hebrew, meaning such as asses have), which Matthew renders interpretatively by “son of a burden-beast,” bringing out the lowliness of the ass as the oriental burden-bearer. I rode on such an ass around the great walls of Jerusalem and also from the desert camp in Sahara to the great pyramids and the Sphinx. Kings come riding on powerful steeds, not to display meekness and inability to resist, but to display the very opposite.

Never do we hear of an earthly king entering his capital in a great procession, or even otherwise, on an ass.

Vain is the assumption that Jesus rode an ass of superior breeding. The last place to look for highly bred stock was a cluster of poor houses like Bethphage. Nor is the ass more peaceful than the horse, — not at all, only far more inferior, common and cheap in the Orient, and thus much used as a ὑποζύγιον, a burden-bearer, the Orient having three, the ass, the camel, and the woman. Because Luke 19:30 reports that the colt had never been ridden, some have called it “untamed” and imagine something like a miracle in that Jesus rode it without difficulty; the colt was entirely gentle. Jesus rode the colt, not the dam, nor did he ride the one a while, then the other. It was fitting that the Savior should ride, not on an animal that had already carried others, but on one new and used by him for the first time. Embroidering any text with fancies is idle.

Even the ancient Jews understood Zechariah’s prophecy as referring to the Messiah. All the evangelists report its literal fulfillment and thus impress its importance. Yet none of the disciples remembered the prophecy on the day Jesus brought about the fulfillment, and this despite the fact that in all his many travels hitherto Jesus had always proceeded on foot and now suddenly and in a most striking way secures an animal to ride.

**[6] And the disciples, having gone and done just as Jesus appointed them, [7] brought the ass and the colt, and put on them their robes, and he sat thereon. The two disciples carried out their orders.**

[7] Matthew’s brevity is to be taken *ad sensum*. The two asses were brought to Jesus at the place where he halted on the road surrounded by the accompanying crowd of pilgrims. Spontaneously all the disciples slip off their long, loose outer robes (ἱμάτια) and throw them over the backs of both animals, as if to caparison them, leaving Jesus to choose which animal he wishes to ride. Because of the crowd it was not convenient to ask Jesus; moreover, they meant to caparison also the animal that would not be ridden. The antecedent of the pronoun in the second ἐπ’ αὐτῷ phrase: he sat “thereon,” is ἱμάτια, the robes.

Humble beasts that were borrowed — old worn robes were lent — meek indeed-comes Zion’s King!

**[8] And most of the multitude spread their own robes on the road, and others were cutting branches from the trees and were spreading them on the road. [9] And the multitudes, those going before him and those following, kept shouting, saying: “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed the One Coming in the Lord’s name! Hosanna in the highest!”**

A most wonderful enthusiasm manifested itself in the crowd of pilgrims. From Luke we gather that the spreading of the garments and the palm branches on the road began almost at once, and then a little while later, as Jesus reached the top of Olivet and “was drawing near to the descent,” the jubilant shouting began. The pilgrims were turning Jesus’ coming to Jerusalem into a triumphal entry, Jesus accepting it all. On every First Sunday in Advent and on every Palm Sunday, when this text is used in our churches, the hearts of the hearers are stirred with something of the same emotion, and in the hymns the Hosannas echo and reecho.

When Matthew writes “most of the multitude” he does not imply that some were unwilling to aid in the demonstration, — he is merely exact, for some were behind Jesus and could not get to the front. The multitude exhausts its resources for honoring Jesus as its Messiah-King. They make a carpet of their own robes for him to ride over. These ἱμάτια were large rectangular pieces of cloth, draped about the body and reaching to the feet, and thus could easily be spread flat on the road-way. This still left the wearers with their tunics over which the robes were worn.

When Matthew comes to the branches and to the shouting, he uses imperfect tenses, which portray the actions as in a moving picture, and we may translate: “kept cutting — kept spreading — kept shouting.”

It is from John that we learn that the branches were cut from palm trees. These trees have long since disappeared from Olivet; in fact, the country has long been denuded of forests and trees generally, with no hope of being restocked. Nimble climbers ascended the tall palm trees and cut off some of the broad, flat fronds which were then placed flat on the road-way, perhaps over the robes. Artists usually picture the people waving the palm branches; but these were too large for that, nor does any evangelist say anything about waving. We usually connect the idea of victory and triumph with palms, but the oriental regarded them as symbols of life and salvation (*Interpretation of St. John’s Gospel* 829).

[9] Matthew at first mentions “the multitude,” but when he comes to speak about the shouting he speaks about two: “the multitudes, those going before him and those following.” John tells us how there came to be two. The crowd that started with Jesus from Bethany, where they had come to see both Jesus and Lazarus, was for the most part in the rear; while the crowd that had come from the city on hearing that Jesus had started from Bethany, was practically in its entirety out in front. Thus the procession slowly moved forward. Then the shouting began.

This shouting was not in unison. Snatches were taken from Ps. 118:25-26, and improvisations were made. “Hosanna!” kept ringing back and forth, and was expanded by some to “Hosanna in the highest!” Three of the evangelists report this expression. The other shouts varied. “To the Son of David” (Matt.) was added; “the coming Kingdom of our father David” (Mark); “the King coming” etc. (Luke); “the King of Israel” (John). From the various shouts each evangelist makes a selection, yet all four evangelists taken together scarcely record all the variations that were used. It is well to remember that both Matthew and John were themselves in the procession and write as eyewitnesses.

Ps. 118 is part of the *Hallel* (Ps. 113-118) sung at the Passover when the festive procession was received by the priests, sung also a part before and a part after the Passover meal (Mark 14:26). The cry “Hosanna” was most distinctive (Hebrew *Hoshi’ah-nna’* meaning *schaffe Heil*, grant salvation, rendered “save now” in our A.V. in Ps. 118:25). It is a mistake to imagine that the people did not really understand the expression when they made it so prominent in their shouting, especially also when they added so many other clear statements, all of which greet and welcome Jesus as the Messiah and as King.

“The Son of David” was used already by the blind men at Jericho (20:30-31). This designation is clearly both royal and Messianic, even “the coming Kingdom of our father David” (Mark) was added. It is worth knowing that hitherto Jesus had steadily avoided the title “Messiah,” using it only once, and then when speaking to a Samaritan woman (John 4:26). This Jesus felt constrained to do because of the earthly, political conceptions the Jews held regarding the Messiah, as the great conqueror who would not only free the Jewish nation from the Roman domination, but would elevate the Jewish nation to dominate all other nations. The Jews

today cling to the same dream, only discarding the idea of a personal Messiah, substituting their nation, which eventually is to be the world's Messiah after long suffering and persecution, by its rule over the whole world blessing all the world's nations. From this old Jewish dream sprang its Christian form, namely chiliasm. Instead of "the Messiah," a title so filled with gross earthly expectations, Jesus steadily called himself "the Son of man," — see the elucidation in *The Interpretation of St. John's Gospel* 173 etc.

Now when Jesus comes to Jerusalem for his great Passion the danger lying in the political conceptions regarding him is passed. In 20:10 and here in the acclaim of the multitudes Jesus freely accepts the Messianic title "the Son of David." He is the divinely prophesied Messiah-King, he must now enter Jerusalem as this King, and thus he accepts the jubilant applause of the nation as represented in these crowds of pilgrims from the entire Jewish world. But in the meek form of his entry Jesus even visibly excludes all secular and political features of his royalty.

"Blessed the One Coming in the Lord's (Yahveh's) name!" constitutes a welcome and is quoted from 1's. 118:26. "Blessed" is the perfect participle: "having been blessed and thus now still blessed." Ὁ Ἐρχόμενος is a clear Messianic title: "the One Coming," the promised Messiah, which also is reinforced by the phrase "in the Lord's name." Jehovah has blessed this Coming One, not merely with verbal benediction, but as Jehovah always blesses, with the gifts and treasures implied in the benedictory words. Loaded with these gifts the Coming One brings them all to his capital and nation to dispense them to his people. John sheds light on this acclaim, when he shows how the enthusiasm was fired by the latest miracle of Jesus, that wrought upon Lazarus, a climax to all his other deeds. The Coming One comes to us today in his Word and his Sacraments with the same royal gifts for our salvation.

The very frequent phrase "in the name" plus a genitive is commonly misinterpreted; thus here it is taken to mean: the One Coming "by the Lord's authority." Yet *onoma* never means "authority." Other interpretations are just as wrong. The Lord's "name" is all by which he reveals himself to us, by which he makes himself known, and by which we know and apprehend him. His Name is thus his Revelation. "In the Lord's Name" = the One Coming "in connection with the Lord's Revelation." So Jesus came

to Jerusalem in connection with the whole Old Testament revelation, in connection with all the revelation the Lord had made through Jesus himself, and in particular in connection with the Lord's prophecy through Zechariah. Study the word ὄνομα in both Testaments, likewise the great recurrent phrase.

Ἐν τοῖς ὑψίστοις, "in the highest," is added to "Hosanna," and signifies the abode of God, and is either locative: the hosanna is to sound in heaven itself, or means "in connection with the highest (places)," in connection with heaven, ἔν being used in its original sense, as in the preceding phrase, and thus analogous to the phrase used in the Psalm itself: "out of the Lord's house."

How much did all these pilgrims understand of what their words really contained? Many are ready to say, almost nothing. This would be wrong, for it is certain that a holy enthusiasm caught the hearts of these pilgrims on this Sunday, a wave of real spiritual feeling and joy, the direct product of "all the mighty works they had seen" (Luke), which moved them when thus welcoming Jesus to "praise God" (Luke). Jesus accepted this sincere and true welcome and lent himself by his every act to this enthusiasm, riding into the city as "the King of Israel" (John) that he was.

## Homiletical Aid

The homiletical principles and methods presented in my little work *The Sermon* are used in this volume, because I know of none that are better and more effective for the preacher's work. Students of *The Sermon* will at once understand what is here offered as homiletical aid. Further references to *The Sermon* are abbreviated to *S*.

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A new Church Year opens. Under the scepter of our Lord Jesus Christ, the King of Grace. The ancient prophet Zechariah saw how this King of Grace would come in a triumphal procession to the capital city of Jerusalem. He still comes to us with all his grace in his Word and his Sacrament. Invisibly, but no less effectively. For us too the prophet's cry is intended:

## **“Behold Thy King Cometh Unto Thee!”**

His greatness and his blessedness are beyond compare and should insure his joyful reception by us.

- I. The King long promised.
  1. The promise reached back to Eden. Zechariah made it over 500 years before its fulfillment.
  2. The hope of the world hung upon this promised King. His was not a Kingdom like those of men. Describe. But a Rule to set men’s souls free from the tyranny of sin. A Rule of grace, to bless and to make happy forever.
- II. The King’s deity.
  1. Despite his lowliness his deity shines forth in his omniscience. Thus in all his miracles. The raising of Lazarus.
  2. A King less than the Son of God could not have brought salvation and heavenly grace to the world.
- III. The King’s meekness.
  1. No army, no outward power, a borrowed ass, a band of twelve disciples: “meek,” one who cannot resist.
  2. He came not to force men, but to bless them, not to demand of them, but to bestow upon them. So defenseless, because he came to die and to shed his blood in expiation.
- IV. The King who works out and bestows salvation.
  1. The Savior-King. Infinite grace. The price he paid. Thorn-crowned.
  2. Universal redemption. Blood and death of the Son of God. Infinite value. Dispensed to all who believe.
- V. The King on whose proper reception everything depends for us.
  1. The jubilant reception at Jerusalem. Ephemeral. What is left for the Jews since they rejected their King?

2. Our jubilant reception renewed today, more wholeheartedly than ever. We know the King's grace and salvation. There is no other name.
- 

On through the ages the shouts of Hosanna continue. An apparently endless procession, constantly renewed, marching through the centuries till it disappears before the Throne in heaven. Anew we shout:

### **“Hosanna to the Son of David!”**

- I. Receive him anew with faith and joy as your King of Salvation!
  1. “The Son of David” — the Kingdom of sinners pardoned — saved, made God's sons and heirs of all his blessings.
  2. We receive him anew by faith and love, vowing to be his own for ever. No world or flesh or temptation of the devil shall lure Us away from him.
- II. Understand anew his blessed meekness!
  1. When did a king ever ride into his capital on a beast so humble as an ass? Explain the commonness of the beast. A borrowed animal at that. Robes of the disciples his saddle and saddle-cloth. Robes of the crowd and palm branches decorating the road-way.
  2. The secret is plain. So meek, so defenseless, because a royal sacrifice to expiate all the world's guilt. The King of the Jews on the Cross. He rules with pierced hands, a crown of thorns, his diadem. We as repentant sinners at the feet of his throne.
- III. Worship him anew in his glorious deity!
  1. His deity beyond all the royalty of earth. He came in the name of Jehovah, God's own Son. So all-sufficient the price of our expiation. Deity revealed in the omniscience here displayed.
  2. We are worms of the dust. To us in Word and Sacrament David's divine, royal Son comes anew. Worship him! and hope

for the day when you shall be able to kneel before his eternal throne there to worship him with angels and archangels in glory.

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Sihler has a simple and an obvious division:

### **The Gracious and Comforting Coming of Our Lord Jesus Christ.**

- I. The manner in which he first came and still comes to us. With grace and comfort; our one hope against sin, death, and hell.
  - II. The manner in which we should receive him. To appropriate this grace and comfort. Faith, adoration, joy.
- 

The text contains a tremendous paradox: the most exalted King, “the King of kings and Lord of lords” (Rev. 19:16) — yet so “meek,” i.e. unable to resist, and riding on a borrowed lowly beast. Present the contrast and then the solution of the paradox.

### **Our Astounding Advent King.**

- I. Can a King so high — describe his deity, the divine attributes bestowed also on his human nature, — a King utterly incomparable:
  - II. Come in a manner so meek? With only twelve disciples, all humble men, no outward power of any kind, riding on a young ass, in Jerusalem having nowhere to lodge, etc.
  - III. Yes; this King came to same you and me. This lowliness the preamble to his cross and bloody death. Phil. 2:8. Thus he is our Advent King. Now infinitely exalted. We send our praises up to his eternal throne.
- 

### **Thy King Cometh.**

- I. Meekly.
  - II. Yet triumphantly. — J. A. Dell.
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The story of the great Advent gospel text:

**“Blessed is He that Cometh in the Name of the Lord!”**

- I. From the Lord God.  
On his wondrous mission.
  - II. To his people Israel.  
Zechariah’s prophecy (9:9). In fulfillment of all the covenant promises.
  - III. In meekness to save.  
By his defenselessness to save us.
  - IV. In omniscience to rule.  
In his deity and exalted humanity, over an eternal Kingdom, of grace, of glory.
  - V. For us today to receive and adore.  
Partaking of all his royal gifts, worshipping his grace and majesty in blessed joy.
- 

**“Thy King.”**

- I. Hear God say through the prophet:  
“Thy King!”
  - II. Let him hear you say in faith and confession:  
“My King!”
-

The Christian Church year begins with the First Sunday in Advent. Some have allowed this idea to dominate outline and sermon. I regard this as a mistake. It does violence to the text in all the outlines I have seen. The idea offers not even a workable auxiliary concept (*S.* 184-7). Only a brief reference, either in the introduction or in the conclusion is permissible.

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The ancient world knew the triumphal entry of resistless bloody conquerors in Rome, carrying booty and chained captives with them to be garroted at the end of the procession. This our King enters himself to die at Jerusalem in order to save us from eternal death.

# The Second Sunday In Advent.

## Luke 21 :25-36

### The Savior's Coming in Judgment

The distinction is incorrect which states that the First Sunday in Advent presents the *adventus Christi in carnem*, the Second the *adventus ad judicium*. “Into flesh” and “for judgment” do not correspond. In both advents we have the Godman, but in the first we notice his human nature in humiliation, and in the second his human nature in glory. Yet even this is not the point of distinction in the connection of these two advent texts. We have first the advent in grace, and next the advent in judgment. Each text presents a coming, grace and judgment make them a pair that belongs together.

Grace is to prepare us for judgment. But for the Savior's grace we must despair on the great day of judgment. How we receive the Savior when he comes with grace determines how he will receive us when he comes with judgment. It is quite true that the beginning, presented in the text for the First Sunday in Advent, would be incomplete without the end, presented in the text for the Second Sunday in Advent, and vice versa, the end would hang in the air without the beginning. Yet beginning and end are not the real keys for unlocking these two texts and the import of these two Sundays of the Church Year. Time is not the pivotal point, nor beginning and completion. Only a part of the present text is objective, all the rest is subjective, and its climax is a warning, v. 34- 36: “Take heed to yourselves, lest at any time” etc.; and: “Watch ye therefore, and pray always,” etc. This text aims to tell us how to use the Savior's grace in view of the impending judgment, how to do this today. Let us study the text from this point of view.

It is the Tuesday after Palm Sunday, late afternoon. Jesus had spent the day in the Temple courts. He spent the nights outside of the city, to thwart the plans of the Sanhedrin for his arrest and murder before the hour fixed in the divine plan. Jesus leaves the Temple for the last time on this Tuesday. He never entered it again. Some suppose that he returned to the Temple on Wednesday, but this is done only because none of the evangelists say a word about Jesus' whereabouts or his activity on Wednesday. There is something tragic in this final abandonment of the Jewish Temple by the Savior.

Read Matt. 23:34-39, and note the fateful words: "Behold, your house is left unto you desolate!" It is this word that induced the disciples to direct the Lord's attention to some of the beautiful buildings which he and they were passing as they were leaving the Temple courts. Let us remember that fifty years devoted to the rebuilding of the Temple had passed, and much grandeur was before the eyes. The words of the disciples mean: "Look at these grand structures — are they all to be completely deserted?" To Jews such a thing was unthinkable. Then Jesus said something that was much worse: "Verily I say unto you: There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down!" Matt. 24:1-2.

The little company gradually disengages itself from the multitude of pilgrims in the courts, proceeds out of the city, halts on the slopes of Olivet, where Jesus sits down to rest a bit before proceeding on to Bethany beyond the ridge. We take it that they traveled the same road over which Jesus had ridden on Palm Sunday. It is Mark (13:3) who tells us that Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked Jesus the double question, in answer to which he spoke the great Discourse on the Destruction of Jerusalem and on his Parousia at the End of the World, Matt. 24 and 25; Mark 13; Luke 21:5-38. I can imagine the scene most vividly, for I too have stood on this slope of Olivet towards evening and looked across the valley to the Temple hill, where now stands the Mohammedan Dome of the Rock (sometimes called the Mosque of Omar), its great dome of dull gold magnificently lit up by the rays of the sinking sun, the city on Zion hill behind it rising to a higher elevation. So Jesus sits now as he speaks, with Herod's great Temple and the brilliant Sanctuary (Holy and Holy of Holies) with its golden roof sparkling in the dying sun.

Much that is utterly wrong and also much that is inadequate is found in the commentaries regarding this Discourse on Olivet. Suffice it to say that Jesus answers the double question of the four disciples most completely. We see this best in Matthew's record. The first sketch (24:4-14) presents a world view, which takes us to the 1,-9.0; or end. The second sketch (24:15-28) presents the overthrow of the Jewish nation, closing with a reference to the Lord's Παρουσία, which shall come like a mighty flash of lightning, and shall not occur in connection with the Jewish calamity. Thirdly, in 24:29-25:46, the first part of which forms our text according to Luke's narration, Jesus tells just what the end and his Parousia will be, the two occurring together. This section includes the great eschatological parables and finally the detailed description of the Last Judgment (25:31-46). We now examine our text.

**[25] And there shall be signs in sun and moon and stars, and on earth distress of nations in perplexity at sound of sea and billow, [26] men expiring from fear and expectation of the things coming upon the inhabited earth; for the powers of the heavens shall be shaken. [27] And then they shall see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.**

This is prophecy, spoken by the lips of him who is the Son of man and who shall bring it to pass.

The whole siderial world shall collapse. This is plain from the statement: "for the powers of the heavens shall be shaken," i.e. dislocated. All that holds the heavenly bodies in their orbits and enables sun, moon, and stars to light the earth shall give way. Luke writes summarily: "signs in sun and moon and stars"; Matt. 24:29 more specifically: "the sun shall be made dark, and the moon shall not give her brightness, and the stars shall fall from the heaven." Let no man try to imagine the cataclysm! It is utterly beyond human conception.

Kaì does not mean "after this collapse," or "in consequence." "And" simply adds a word about the condition of men on earth: "on earth distress of nations in perplexity at sound of sea and billow." The very mention of "sound of sea and billow" which occur here on earth, and are so much less than the siderial collapse, indicates that this distress precedes the final collapse.

[26] “Men expiring from fear” etc., implies the same thing. We thus conclude that the final and main thing is placed first, irrespective of the sequence of time, and that the minor phenomena are added in the second place. It may well be that the entire disintegration shall not come in an instant, but shall run a course with “signs in sun, moon, and stars” before they collapse in the final cataclysm. This gradual disintegration, like that of a house beginning to totter towards its fall, shall affect the earth, and first of all its fluid part, the sea. The waters shall rise with terrific sound in a tremendous billow, hurled out of their bed, where hitherto only tempest and hurricane made them roar. This statement is only a humble effort which strives to understand the words.

Hence also “on earth distress of nations,” entire nations thrown into “distress,” the word meaning that their hearts are held as in a vice, the phrase “in perplexity at sound of sea and billow” helping to expound, i.e. in utter loss what to do when the fearful dislocation of the earth and the universe begins.

The genitive absolute adds further explanation. Yet “men fainting” is too weak a translation; ἀποφυγόντων means “expiring,” falling lifeless “from fear and expectation (apprehension) of the things coming upon the inhabited earth.” These are the extreme cases, men actually expiring from apprehension. “The things coming upon the earth” have been recorded long in advance, in the Scriptures, — we believers know right now what they shall be. What men shall apprehend in deadly fear at last will be the product of their own imagination, made more terrible by the dread voice of conscience.

We regard as impossible every allegorical interpretation: that by the sun the light of the Word is meant, and that this light is removed and thus darkened; that the moon = the state, justice and science, and that these are lost; that the stars = the notable teachers in the visible Church, and that these are taken away. Other still more far-fetched allegories have been offered. As arbitrary as these allegories themselves are, so arbitrary is the supposed extent of the allegorical words used by the Savior. Is the distress of nations also allegorical, the shaking of the powers of the heaven, etc.?

Even when the words are acknowledged to be literal, their interpretation has been dubious. Take the stars as an instance, they are supposed “to sink

below the horizon,” — a meaningless supposition, since the earth is a globe, with people living on all parts of the globe. “And” is supposed to be chronological: after all that happens to the heavenly bodies, the nations are stricken by distress. Just about the reverse is true.

As far as the preliminary signs of the end are concerned, the centuries have been full of them, listed as they are, not in Matthew 24:29, but already in Matt. 24:6-8, to which add v. 9-12. Skeptics and scoffers have disregarded them, often with mockery, and they do so to this day, 2 Pet. 3:4. The self-styled scientists among them speak of “the natural causes.” That the wicked world is rushing to its doom is a fact alien to their minds. This blindness is due to one of the fearful delusions which God sends with increasing intensity in his preliminary judgments upon the world of unbelief. These punitive delusions are pictured in Rev. 8 and 9, in the six trumpets.

Our text speaks of the actual end. We of the present day have not yet arrived at the end (τὸ τέλος, Matt. 24:14), yet even we are experiencing something that may well be called “distress of nations.” Men hope to cure it, but uneasiness fills many regarding what may yet come and not a few talk about “the destruction of civilization.” Delusions, fearful dislocations, impending disasters and fear of them mark the present times. These are “the beginning of sorrows,” Matt. 24:8. Let us in no way be deceived, Matt. 24:4; Luke 21:8, we are indeed approaching the end and the Parousia of the Lord literally foretold in our text and in many other places of the Scripture.

[27] “Then they shall see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.” The cataclysm describes the end and ushers in the Son of man at his Parousia. “The Son of man,” in brief, is he who is man and yet more than man. He is the Godman. Jesus is the author of this title and constantly makes use of it, because to the Jewish ear it was wholly devoid of the political connotation which the Jews had injected into the title “Messiah.” See the full exposition in my Interpretation of Matt. 8:20; Mark 2:10; Luke v. 24; John 1:51. “They shall see” means all men then living on the earth. “This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven,” i.e. visibly, Acts 1:11; Rev. 1:7.

If the curious question is asked, how men on all sides of the globe shall simultaneously see the Son of man at his second coming, take as the answer that the whole universe and the present earth shall be utterly changed beyond anything that we with our present notions of either time or space are able to conceive. Where will all the countless millions stand at the judgment, and how long will it take till each one is called and judged? The skeptic may stand assured that his place will be duly reserved for him, and that his name will be reached in what we now might call the first minute. “Time shall be no more,” Rev. 10:6, which certainly also applies to space. “Coming” is the significant participle used so often with reference to Christ’s first coming that it became one of his Messianic designations: “The One Coming.” This is still his name in view of his second coming.

He shall come “in a cloud with power and great glory,” — he who once was spit upon, scourged bloody, mocked blasphemously, and crucified as accursed. Clouds are God’s chariot, Ps. 104:3; Is. 19:1, symbols of his heavenly majesty when coming. The power is Christ’s omnipotence, manifested already in the cosmic upheaval; his “great glory” is the sum of all his divine attributes shining forth in infinite splendor from his human form and nature.

“He shall so come,” Acts 1:11. God help us to believe and to realize the fact! How it would change our entire lives, 1 John 3:3; 2 Pet. 3:14.

[28] First, the prophetic fact of the end and the Parousia. Next the admonition for the disciples and for us in view of the prophetic fact. This admonition, spoken by Jesus on Olivet on Tuesday after his great coming to Jerusalem, pertains to the entire interval between his two comings, the entire time between the coming in grace and the coming in judgment.

**But when these things are beginning to occur, lift yourselves up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.** Jesus illustrates the admonition by means of a beautiful parable, and then fortifies it by a remarkable prediction and a strong assurance. Verses 28-33 belong together.

Note well: “when these things are beginning to occur,” ἀρχομένων τούτων γίνεσθαι. This genitive absolute, with its durative tenses, cannot refer to what has just been said in v. 25-27 concerning the end. “These things” begin with all the signs mentioned in v. 9-24, compare Matt. 24:5-

26: the coming of deceivers, wars and rumors of wars, including the Jewish war which destroyed the Temple and the Jewish nation, famines, pestilences, earthquakes (all these the beginning of sorrows), persecutions, false prophets, iniquity abounding, etc. Eleven of the disciples will get to see their share, according to the length of the life of each one. We today are able to look back into history over the long procession of these things.

How are “these things” to affect the Savior’s followers? Though they may be hurt and damaged by them, perhaps even killed, Jesus calls to all of them: “Lift yourselves up and raise your heads!” like people who are in happy expectation. How so? “Because your redemption is drawing near.” Though some of them are very painful to us, all these signs are blessed harbingers of the Savior’s second coming and of our final redemption. All these signs, and each by itself, shout: He is coming! Your ἀπολύτρωσις, your release, is drawing near! The word means “release by payment of a ransom,” and is often used to mean our ransoming by the ransom of Jesus’ blood (Matt. 20:28), then also a few times for our final deliverance, due to this ransom, at the last day, when our soul and our body shall together enter into the glorious liberty of the children of God (Rom. 8:21). It is as when the languishing captive hears his keepers coming to unlock his prison cell, ushering him into eternal freedom.

Away then, with discouragement and complaint! The sufferings of this time are not worthy to be compared with the glory coming to us, Rom. 8:18. The Savior here opens to us a deep fountain of comfort. Drink from its sparkling waters, and let your hearts be filled with blessed anticipation. Let the blind, deluded world complain, rave against God, and go on in its desperate course, in vicious disregard of the signs.

[29] The Savior wants his word to have the fullest possible effect. **And he spake a parable to them. See the fig tree and all the trees. [30] When now they shoot forth, seeing it, you realize of yourselves that now summer is near. [31] Thus also you, when you see these things occurring, realize that the Kingdom of God is near.** This “parable” is a beautiful illustration. All the advance signs of the end of the Parousia are like the heralds of spring, promising the arrival of summer. The illustration employing the signs of spring is so apt because these fill us with happy anticipation: “Lift yourselves up and raise your heads!”

Why should any one spoil it all and allegorize, — allegorize a parable at that? “See the fig tree and all the trees” mentions the fig tree only in order to individualize; moreover, the fig tree starts its leaves late, after setting its fruit, so that its leaves come out shortly before the summer. What is the sense in making the fig tree mean the Jews, and all the other trees the Gentiles? Then this is made the fig tree that Jesus blasted (Matt. 21:19 etc.), and we are told that Jesus means that now the Jews are cursed, but that they shall be restored in a final national conversion. This is a sample of what chiliasts do with simple Scripture words.

[30] What Jesus says is that the budding trees proclaim the nearness of the happy summer time. All people realize it of themselves, nobody needs to tell them. The cold and discomfort of winter are disappearing, lovely days are coming fast.

[31] Jesus himself interprets the parable: when we see all these things (“these things” of v. 28) occurring, we should realize that the Kingdom of God is near. Γινώσκω == to realize, namely to know with affect and effect upon ourselves, hence it is more than οἶδα, to know only intellectually. Our great hope is the eternal Kingdom of glory, for which also we constantly pray. To the children of this world, who scorn the Kingdom and its King, every sign that this world, in which alone they have and seek their happiness and their treasures, is breaking up, must bring dismay. But our treasure is in the Kingdom, and every sign that proclaims its heavenly consummation must fill us with the greatest joy. Here is the winter of our discontent, there is the summer of our hopes and longings.

“The Kingdom of God” is here to be understood in the narrow sense, even as we see the King coming at last “in great glory.” It signifies Christ’s rule of glory, which follows and crowns his present rule of grace. See further *The Interpretation of St. Matthew’s Gospel* 91 etc.; or of *St. Luke’s Gospel* 174 etc.

[32] In support of the admonition of v. 28: “Lift yourselves up and raise you heads!” Jesus adds a further, and we must say, most remarkable, prophecy plus an incontrovertible assurance: **“Amen, I say to you that this generation shall in no wise pass away, until all things occur. The heaven and the earth shall pass away, but my words shall in no wise pass away.”**

“Amen” is the transliterated Hebrew word for “truth” or “verity.” We often append it like a seal at the end, as is done in the New Testament epistles. Jesus used it to usher in his most important statements, placing this seal at their head. He adds to the seal of verity the seal of authority: “I say to you.” He vouches for the verity. Both seals demand faith, and both bestow assurance. A grave solemnity is always present. Who is meant by “this generation” that shall not pass away until all things occur? — “all things,” including those of v. 25-27, and thus not merely “these things” (v. 28 and 31), the preliminary signs. Some answer: the human race; some, the Christians, some, the Jews; some, obdurate unbelievers in general; and some come with the dictum that γενεά, especially ἡ γενεὰ αὕτη, “this generation,” must mean the contemporary generation, the people living at the time when Jesus spoke this sentence. Let no such dictum frighten you.

Take a look at the meaning which this word has in both Testaments. The LXX constantly translates the Hebrew *dor* with γενεά when the sense is an evil one, hence we see at once that a kind of men is meant, the evil kind that keeps reproducing itself on through the years as a marked class. Ps. 12:7: “Thou shalt preserve them from this generation for ever.” Ps. 78:8: “their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation, a generation” etc., i.e. a long succession of this evil kind. On the other hand, Ps. 14:5: “the generation of the righteous,” the long succession of this kind; 24:6; 73:15; 112:2; Deut. 32:5 and 20; Prov. 30:11-14; Isaiah often; Jer. 7:29; etc. The same use is found in the Gospels of the New Testament; then glance at Acts 2:4; Phil. 2:15; Heb. 3:10. At times the evil character is indicated by modifiers, as in Matt. 16:4; 17:17; Mark 8:38; etc., but often the more context indicates this. We have such a case in our passage: “this generation,” this type of obdurate Jews, with which Jesus had to contend in vain throughout this Tuesday (19:45-20, 47), it shall continue and not pass away until everything (πάντα) occurs of Which Jesus here speaks, down to the end and his Parousia.

We offer all this evidence regarding the meaning of the word because of the dictum mentioned above. Why does Jesus make this statement about this type of Jews? Because he has just foretold the destruction of their capital, their Temple, and their nation (v. 20-24). One might hastily conclude that this destruction would surely end the whole generation of obdurate Pharisees and Sadducees. Not a bit of it! “This generation shall in no wise pass away.” Two thousand years have already passed, and still we

have the Sadducees in the guise of the modern reform Jews, and the Pharisees in the present-day orthodox Jews, all voicing their vicious opposition to our Lord as strongly as ever: He is not the Messiah, not the Son of God!

In this prophecy Jesus himself gives an answer to all the chiliasts and to others who expect a final national conversion of the Jews, with or without the fiction of a millennium. It is an empty, unbiblical claim that God is preserving the Jews because he has great intentions regarding them, namely their wholesale conversion and their exaltation in the Church before the end of the world. The contrary is true, the divine intention is a standing miracle of judgment placed clearly before the eyes of all the nations of the world, a miracle they cannot help seeing day by day, year by year, century after century. These hardened haters of the Savior, regarding whom Paul uses the terrible word “petrified” (Rom. 11:7 and 25), have neither country, capital, nor center of worship, but are scattered among all other nations, and yet never amalgamate, are never absorbed, always, always remain the kind of Jews they are, ever also producing a more or less irritating problem for the nation in which they grow numerous, — where is there anything like “this generation” in all the course of history? The ten tribes, whom the Assyrians carried away, were soon absorbed, leaving not a trace. Why not likewise the two tribes? Two million perished in the Roman war of four years, 90,000 were carried off and sold as slaves. All human prediction would foretell nothing but extinction. Jesus foretells the direct opposite. Here under our own eyes is this miracle of judgment, set before us as one ever to be seen because of the immanent final judgment. No wonder Jesus uses the solemn formula of assurance: “Amen, I say to you!”

There is considerably more to say. See *The Interpretation of Romans* on 11:25 etc., and the pertinent passages in *The Interpretation of Revelation*.

[33] The Savior utters a solemn assurance, like the one found in Matt. v. 18. The statement is general, and must not be restricted to the words of this discourse, for such a restriction would imply that perhaps there are other words of Jesus that shall pass away, i.e. as having no reality back of them, thus not worth preserving. The assurance is made graphic by saying first that the heaven and the earth shall indeed pass away, — in fact, Jesus has just spoken of this cataclysm. So enduring is the solid earth on which we stand, so unchanging the great sky and firmament which ever span the

earth, — no more permanent objects can be named. Yet they shall pass away, they are not enduring.

In the strongest possible contrast Jesus declares: “But my words shall in no wise pass away,” not one of them. The litotes means: they shall stand for ever. Jesus’ words speak of the future, one of them about the continuance of the hardened kind of Jews till the very end of the world. The words stand, because they speak reality. They are not nullified by a different or by an opposite reality. Men may deny or pervert the words of Jesus and themselves utter words speaking of a different reality. These men are liars. Their words shall pass away as all lies do. Jesus’ words shall stand firmer than the heaven and the earth, both before and after the reality comes, absolutely substantiated by the reality.

Those who insist that “this generation” means the people then living, and that before all of them are dead Jerusalem shall be destroyed, can never explain why Jesus utters such an assurance regarding an event so near; in comparison with the heaven and the earth and their passing away at the end of the world. Far worse is the claim that Jesus supposed that the end of the world would follow hard upon the destruction of Jerusalem and that “this generation,” the cotemporaries of Jesus and his disciples, would live to see both events. Then Jesus is a false prophet, — all that he here says about the end of the world has been proven false for many a century, for the end is not yet.

Jesus says positively that the physical heaven and the earth “shall pass away.” Yet this has been converted into the opposite: that as little as heaven and earth shall pass away, so little shall Jesus’ words pass away. This perversion needs no refutation. Another twist of the thought is that heaven and earth shall indeed pass away, but not before the words of Jesus are fulfilled. What Jesus says is that his words shall never pass away, shall stand eternally. This means that every word of his shall be fulfilled to the utmost, and by this fulfillment be made to stand for ever. The fulfillment, once accomplished, cannot be wiped out again or even altered. Thus Jesus’ words stand for ever.

Does the passing away of the heaven and of the earth mean their annihilation, followed by the creation of a new earth *ex nihilo*? Or does it mean a transformation into a different mode and a different form of

existence? We cannot obtain the answer from the verb *παρελεύσονται* found in this and in other passages. We must consider together all the passages which deal with the subject; we dare not stop with one or two. The most decisive is Rom. 8:19-23, together with 1 Cor. 7:31 (only the *σχῆμα*, fashion of the world shall pass away), and Rev. 21:1-5 (the divine heaven and the earth shall be united in one). So the present physical heaven and earth, suffering from the effects of sin in time and in space, shall be purified, transmuted, befitting timelessness and spacelessness, and made one with the heaven of God. But the words of Jesus never undergo the slightest change, either in meaning or in form; every word of his is sealed with its absolute fulfillment. This answers the juggling modernists, who call the Savior's words "outworn categories of thought" or "obsolete thought patterns," thus brushing his divine words aside, substituting their own human words as up-to-date.

[34] The third part of the text consists of warning, comp. 1 Thess. v. 2 etc.; 1 Pet. 4:7. **"But take heed to yourselves, lest perhaps your hearts be weighted down in drunken nausea and drunkenness and anxieties of life, and that day come upon you suddenly as a snare. [35] For it shall come upon you suddenly on the face of all the earth. But be watching in every season, begging that you prevail to escape out of all 'these things about to occur, and to stand before the Son of man."**

Spoken first to the disciples just before the Savior's death, these words apply and are meant to imply to any and to all believers living between the two advents. The first part of the warning is negative (v. 34-35), the second part positive (v. 36).

The world moves on to its doom. Grave signs keep occurring, often bringing dire distress. These are the preliminary signs of Matt. 24:6-12. They often affect the Christians with great severity. The danger is that "your hearts be weighted down" as with a heavy load. The weights Jesus mentions are of two kinds. First, drunken nausea and drunkenness, secondly, anxieties of life. The first two are only samples of the means to which men resort to escape from the third. In all the turmoils and convulsions of the world, as already in all common distress ("anxieties of life") one way in which men seek to drown their troubles is by drink, thereby only loading themselves with new weights. Not that drink is the only means resorted to,

this is only a common sample; its mention is to make us think of many others.

Κραιπάλη = crapulence (crapulent, the adjective), nothing but the common term for which the Germans have *Katzenjammer*, the nausea and headache caused by heavy drinking. It is not at all a specifically medical term (*contra* Zahn, Harnack, and Moffatt). To this day medics use many common words in their common meanings, just as they did in Luke's day. The nausea is mentioned first, and then its cause, "drunkenness," just as these two are placed before the "anxieties of life" which may induce resort to drink. Μέριμναι recalls the verb μεριμνῶ, which Jesus used with reference to Martha's distraction (Luke 10:41), both words derived from μέρις and μέρος or part, the verb "to be divided," to toss between one alternative and another, and the noun in the plural having the same sense: "worries," when one knows not which way to turn, what course to take. The Greek has the handy adjective Βιωτικός, derived from Βίος, the ordinary course of life, for which we can use only the genitive: "worries of life."

The warning is graphic. Jesus, and following him the apostles, speak very plainly when they warn. Let this not offend our delicate ears. Observe that they also follow the principle of naming the worst, and thereby mean to cover all that is less bad, without making a complete list. "Thou shalt not kill!" forbids murder, yet Jesus himself tells us how much more this commandment covers (Matt. v. 21-26).

"And that day come upon you suddenly as a snare," when it will be too late to repent and escape. So the flood caught those of Noah's day, and fire and brimstone the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah (Matt. 24:36-39). Both of these judgments are types of the final judgment. The Christian is to live as if the end may come tomorrow. We know it will come as a thief in the night. Though we may not be alive at the last day, that day will find us in the condition in which we die, and death may strike us at any moment.

The Greek uses the adjective αἰφνίδιος, "sudden" and makes it predicative to ἡμέρα, whereas we employ the adverb "suddenly." The verb "come upon you" is often used with reference to sudden confrontation. The A.V. connects "as a snare" with the next verse, but this throws γάρ too far back. Moreover "suddenly" is not strong enough for the coming of that day upon those weighted down as described. The suddenness will be with

deadly effect, as when a bird or an animal is caught in a noose or a net. When we note the preliminary signs from day to day, we are not to be weighted down, but are to lift ourselves up and raise our heads (v. 28), casting off any weights that may seek to hold us down.

[35] Translate exactly: “For it shall come upon all those sitting on the face of all the earth,” — not: “all them that dwell.” Our versions have the latter, although the Greek has an entirely different verb for “dwell,” and thus the versions make this “for” clause quite meaningless. To lend it point, the A.V. draws in “as a snare”; but “that day” does not come as a snare upon all earth-dwellers, not at all as a snare upon the Lord’s people who watch and pray. The A.V. leaves the snare where it belongs, yet inserts “so,” and thus commits the same mistake.

The word that lends meaning to the statement is τοὺς καθημένους “upon those sitting on the face of all the earth.” These are not the Lord’s people, for his people “lift themselves up and raise their heads,” v. 28. They know all about “that day,” it is the day of their final redemption, v.28, they meet it with joyful expectation. “Those sitting” are all those who are content to be on the face of the earth, who care nothing for the Savior, for anything higher than the earth. Γάρ explains the previous statement, that that day shall come as a sudden one like a snare: for it shall come upon all these sitting ones, — their sitting thus, and not standing in earnest expectation, shall make that day so fatal for them.

[36] The positive part of the warning is according: constant wakefulness in the sense of alert watching. The present imperative is durative, hence also “in every season,” no matter how some season may look to us, namely as if that day is still far, far away, and as if we may relax our vigilance and start sitting carelessly, no longer standing alert.

This constant watching is to be coupled with prayer. Δεόμενοι means “begging,” and ἵνα states for what we are to keep begging: “that you prevail to escape out of all these things about to occur, and to stand before the Son of man.” The A.V. adopts the reading καταξιωθῆτε, “that ye may be accounted worthy,” and makes ἵνα denote purpose. The attested reading is κατισχύσητε, “that you prevail,” and ἵνα denotes the object asked of the Lord. We are to be strong enough to down (κατά) every temptation to grow slack in our watching, to sit content with this earth. “Prevail to escape out

of all these things about to occur” is the negative part. This does not mean that these things about to occur are not at all to touch the Christians; we have already seen that they will suffer much, at times even be killed. “To escape” means to come through spiritually unharmed.

Hence the positive addition: “and to stand before the Son of man” (this title in v. 27). He who is man and more than man shall come on that day, and to stand before him means to be acquitted before his judgment-seat. The infinitive is passive: “to be made to stand,” by his grace. Both infinitives are aorist: actually to escape any spiritual harm, and thus actually to stand on judgment day. Do you truly want this? Then ever watch and pray! All others will be caught as in a deadly snare. Those who watch and pray shall have their prayers heard, shall escape, shall stand with joy before the divine Judge, the glorious Son of man.

## **Homiletical Aid**

Last Sunday called on us to embrace the grace. This Sunday adds: “Having done so, face the judgment!”

### **Face the End!**

#### **The Coming of the Son of Man with Great Glory.**

I. Face the tremendous fact, v:25 and 27!

Our Lord Jesus Christ shall indeed return from heaven in great power and glory to judge the world. The great White Throne, Rev. 20:11.

Many fail to face the final judgment; they dare not face it.

II. Hold to the eternal words, v. 33!

To enlighten you.

To drive out foolish errors.

To direct you, so that you can face the end.

III. Mark well the special sign, v. 32!

The persistence of the obdurate Jews in all the lands of the world. The dream of the millennialists that all the Jews shall be converted etc. But they are a standing miracle and sign of the Lord's judgment, warning the world.

IV. Expel all fear, v. 26!

Men's hearts failing them for fear, but not our hearts.

We know what is impending, and we are ready for all of it, — Why should we fear?

V. Scorn all dissipation, v. 34-35!

The world's way of facing serious days, only increasing guilt and multiplying folly.

The end shall not find me in a night club, dance hall, etc., but on my knees, over my Bible, in my church.

VI. Lift up joyful heads, v. 28-30!

Our final redemption draws nigh. Like the spring and summer.

VII. Pray to stand before the Son of Man, v. 36!

Pray now ever to remain in his blessed grace, So that you may be acquitted on judgment day.

Note: The difference between a sermon with two or three and with six or seven parts is that the more main parts we have the fewer subdivisions we need to make.

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**“Your Redemption Draweth Nigh.”**

I. Understand!

Jesus paid not merely for our peace here on earth, but for the glory of our soul and our body in the new heaven and the new earth.

The sinful world must end, and the new heaven and the new earth come forth.

II. Believe!

How do we know? Because of the infallible words of Jesus, v. 33.

We even have the Jews as a standing sign.

III. Lift up your heads!

The signs of the approaching end are the harbingers of spring.

No fears, only joyful hope and expectation.

IV. Watch and pray!

Flee sin, vice, worldliness!

Keep in close union with the Lord!

Then shall you stand before his judgment throne.

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The all-decisive day, the day of the final judgment. Our life a preparation for that day. Many so live as to make sure of their damnation on that day.

### **Pray to Stand Before the Son of Man!**

I. When the words of the Son of man are fulfilled.

Disregarded now,

But certain to come to pass down to the very letter.

II. When the universe disintegrates.

All the effects of sin to be removed from it.

Heaven and earth joined in a new world, Rev. 21:1-5.

All the wicked removed.

III. When the Son of man arrives in glory.

According to his promise.

For the consummation.

IV. When the wicked are caught as in a snare.

Blind to all warnings.

Perverse, obdurate.

Overtaken by their doom.

V. When the godly enter the Kingdom with heads erect and hearts elate.

All their sorrows over.

All their hopes more than fulfilled. Eternal joy their lot.

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This text invites a *Homily*, — review *S.* 112-117. A homily requires a skillful hand, lest the result be only a Sunday school lesson.

Sitting on the Mount of Olives on the Tuesday when he had left the Temple for the last time, Jesus,

### **The Son of Man, Foretells His Final Coming.**

1. The final cataclysm.
2. The preliminary events coming on the earth.
3. The arrival with power and great glory.
4. The parable of the budding trees.
5. The miracle of the obdurate Jews.
6. The words that shall never pass away.
7. The day that comes as a snare.
8. The people who shall stand before the Son of man.

Frederick the Great, the Voltarian skeptic, considered religion good for the people, since it kept them so obedient to their ruler. So he maintained a court church and a court preacher. Yet on occasion he loved to prod his court preacher. Thus at a state banquet, before an array of noble guests, the king demanded a plain, convincing proof for the genuineness of the Christian religion. The preacher paused, then looked the king in the eye, and replied: “Your Majesty, the Jews!” The preacher scored.

One word more. Any sermon on this text, no matter how constructed homiletically, should grip preacher and hearers. Every part of the text

demands intense attention and intends to stir the deepest emotions of the soul. Carry no fire of your own kindling into any text, but the coals the Lord has laid on the altar of his Word quench not with water in your sermon.

# **The Third Sunday In Advent.**

## **Matt. 11:2-10**

### **The Baptist, Commissioned to Prepare the Way**

The significance of this Sunday is clearly indicated by its ancient gospel text, which deals with John the Baptist, the prophesied prophet, commissioned to prepare the way for the One Coming. Correspondingly, the ancient epistle for the day (1 Cor. 4:1-5) deals with the apostleship and the ministry, with the men who still prepare the Lord's way. The two preceding Sundays present the Savior's Coming, in grace, in judgment. That is not all. God also sent one "far beyond a prophet," in addition to all those whom he had sent long before as ordinary prophets, namely, John the Baptist, to usher in the Savior's coming, to prepare the way for the Savior, i.e. to prepare the Savior's Reception.

This is our cue for the sermon on this text. The Baptist's task is practically completed at the date into which our text places us as readers and hearers. For this text is a piece of history. But while this little chapter of history lies in the distant past, and the Baptist has been dead and buried these many centuries, the effect of what he did and was commissioned to do is just as alive and fruitful today as it was on the day that Jesus spoke of the Baptist as recorded in this our text. "He being dead yet speaketh."

It would be a mistake to place the Baptist in the foreground of the sermon, to let him fill the picture, by using ordinary homiletical application in drawing "lessons" from the actions and the character of the Baptist. That would violate the Baptist's own character, who ever shrank from putting himself forward and ever called himself nothing but "a voice crying in the wilderness," an impersonal voice, the words of the cry it uttered alone to be regarded. In our text the Baptist speaks, not about himself as suffering imprisonment, but about "the One Coming." Jesus does likewise in the

word he sends back to the Baptist: “Report to John” about my work! When in the following Jesus does speak about the Baptist, it is in order to magnify his office: “a prophet far beyond a prophet,” — “my messenger, who shall make ready thy way before thee.” It is the prophecy, the message of the Baptist, that is magnified, that all who hear those words of Jesus may believe the Baptist and thus receive their Savior Jesus. This text calls for appropriation. The entire commission of the Baptist was and is so great because it brings Jesus to us and enables us to receive him as the Coming One.

Jesus had appointed twelve of his disciples as apostles and has sent them, two by two, on their preaching tour. Thus at this time Jesus is alone, is preaching and teaching in one place after another all by himself. It was during this interval, on a day when the Twelve were absent, that a commission sent by the Baptist reaches Jesus. **[2] Now when John heard in his prison the works of the Christ, having sent by his disciples [3] he said to him: “Thou, art thou the One Coming? or shall we be expecting someone else?”**

Matthew (4:12) has already reported that John was thrown into prison, and will tell us the details in connection with the account of his martyrdom, in 14:3 etc. John is languishing in a prison cell in the fortress Machaerus near the Dead Sea (Josephus, *Ant.* 18:5, 2), yet such friends and disciples of his as were devoted to him had free access to his prison, which explains the fact that he could send two of them to Jesus. The fact that the Baptist should still have disciples means that even as a prisoner he continued his work as best he could, the simplest way being to have close attendants to whom he could convey all that God had revealed to him.

The correct text has the preposition *διὰ*, not the numeral *δύο*. It is not Matthew but Luke (7:19) who inform us that the commission consisted of two disciples. In his prison John listened with eagerness to all the reports he could secure regarding the activity of Jesus. Matthew writes: “when John heard in prison the works of the Christ,” yet thereby does not mean that “the Christ” is to be understood as a personal name — read a few chapters of Matthew and see how this evangelist names the Savior. By writing “the Christ” Matthew means to state at once that “the works” Jesus was doing fully and truly revealed him as what he indeed was, “the Christ,” “the Messiah.”

[3] Since Matthew emphasizes the fact that what John heard in his prison was that Jesus was doing “the works of the Christ,” it has always seemed strange to Christian readers that John should raise such a question, and should even refer it to Jesus for answer. To shield John from what this question seems to imply, not a few offer the explanation that the question never occurred to John himself but that John’s disciples raised it, and that they and not John doubted the Messiahship of Jesus, and that John sent a commission to Jesus only on account of these his doubting disciples. In this way it is proposed to clear John. The opposite explanation assures us that beyond all question John did doubt, namely in the way in which our moderns doubt, with disbelief, that John had indeed lost confidence in the Messiahship of Jesus. Both explanations are wrong, both should never have been offered.

The true explanation is quite different. God himself had pointed out to John that Jesus was the Messiah, John 1:33-34, and John never doubted this direct revelation from God. Jesus, then, was to do all the great Messianic works, first those of grace, as John himself had declared in Matt. 3:11; and secondly, also those of judgment, as again John himself had declared in Matt. 3:12. Thus John believed and expected, and thus he had preached and taught. But now as Jesus went on with his works, all of them appeared to be only works of uninterrupted grace, and not even a single one a work of judgment. This apparently strange fact perplexed John “when,” as Matthew says, “he heard in his prison the works of the Christ.” Where were the works of judgment, where was anything resembling the swinging of the fun, the crashing blows of the ax? They were absent. Despite all his faith in Jesus and in God’s revelation regarding him, John was perplexed. He failed to understand. He did the right, the sensible thing, he promptly sent a delegation to Jesus himself and asked him to remove the perplexity.

Here we ourselves need an explanation in regard In all the Old Testament prophecies concerning the Messiah, including the proclamation which John was In make and did make concerning Jesus in Matt. 3, 1 I-12. Always the time intervening between the first mining of Jesus with his works of grace and mercy, and the second coming with the works of judgment In not stated. The prophetic picture is without perspective as to time. Grace and judgment are simply placed side by side, and the element of time is, as Jesus himself says in Acts 1:7, left entirely in the authority of

God. It is easy to see what caused John's perplexity when he contemplated "the works of the Christ" and saw only works of grace.

When the absence of the works of judgment dawned on him, when in his own mind he could not find the proper answer, he neither doubted, lost confidence, nor disbelieved, he hastened to send a committee to Jesus, in full confidence that Jesus would remove his perplexity. This is also exactly what Jesus did.

We must read the two statements of the question without making a division between them, for the second statement is only the complement of the first, and to stress unduly either statement would lead to a wrong implication. John really asks in what sense Jesus is the One Coming, in the complete sense (despite the absence of the works of judgment, which puzzled John), or in the sense that still another is to be expected (to perform the works of judgment). Σὺ εἶ with the pronoun expressed = "Art thou" etc. Ὁ Ἐρχόμενος, "the One Coming," means "the Messiah," as we see from the other words of the Baptist, Matt. 3:11; Mark 1:7; Luke 3:16 etc.; John 1:27. The present participle, here substantivized, is purely qualitative and characterizing, and contains no reference to time. "The One Coming" is a descriptive title. The form προσδοχῶμεν may be either indicative or subjunctive. If it is read as the former, the question would ask for information: "Are we expecting someone else?" If it is read as the latter, the question would be deliberative: "Shall we be expecting someone else?" Since the Baptist first asked himself this question, the subjunctive may be the form intended. For ἕτερον Luke 7:19 has ἄλλον. The former may imply one different, the latter one like thee, although the two words are often used without this distinction. The point in the entire question is whether the entire Messianic fulfillment is to be found in Jesus alone, or whether someone else will be included.

**[4] And Jesus answered and said to them: "When you are gone report to John what you are hearing and seeing: [5] blind are seeing, and lame are walking; lepers are cleansed, and deaf are hearing; and dead are being raised, and poor receiving the Gospel preaching. [6] And blessed is whoever is not trapped in connection with me!"**

The sense of this answer is that John is not to let the absence of the works of judgment blind him to the glorious presence of the works of grace

now in full progress. John is to be satisfied with seeing those works of grace which testify so completely. The implication is that these very works of grace, being done at the moment in such profusion and with such effect, exactly as foretold by the prophets, attest that in due time the works of judgment will follow in the Hume completeness. This answer which Jesus sends John is typical of Jesus. It does not match in form the form of John's question; it does far more, it goes to the heart of the entire matter for John. The answer stresses the fact that all the works of grace are basic for "the Christ," and implies that John and all other believers must leave the works of judgment to "the Christ" to be set in motion at the time fixed by God in his ἔξουσία, even as Jesus tells his own disciples just before his ascension (Acts 1:7).

The participle πορευθέντες, "having gone," means: "after you have gone and have gotten back to John in his prison." "Report to John," says Jesus. This settles the question, which the commentators raise unnecessarily, as to whether John asks the question for his own sake, or for the sake of his disciples. To think the latter is to assail the integrity of John, as though he asked a question for his own sake, when he really intended to ask it only for the sake of his disciples. Still worse. This supposition also assails the integrity of Jesus, who says: "Report to John!" as if John wanted to know, when only John's disciples wanted to know. In trying to save the honor of John, the honor of both John and Jesus is sacrificed. As far as John is concerned, 1 Pet. 1:10-11 states plainly that in the times of the Old Testament even the prophets diligently searched their own prophecies in regard to the time both of the suffering and of the glory of the Christ. John is the last great prophet (v. 9), and he is doing this very thing now, and John is going to the one right source.

The aorist participle ἀποκριθεὶς is circumstantial, indicating an action simultaneous with εἶπεν, and it helps to mark the weight of the answer. The masterful nature of the answer is so great because Jesus takes John back into the Old Testament prophecies concerning the works of the Messiah, the One Coming, from which John's perplexity arose. The reference to the blind, deaf, and lame goes back to Is. 35:5-6. Jesus adds the lepers and the dead, works of grace even greater than the ones promised by the prophet. The climax of these works of grace Jesus takes from Is. 61:1, the preaching of the Gospel to the poor (Hebrew, meek), who have come to realize that

spiritually they are wholly destitute. To be sure, the Gospel is preached to all men, even as all men are “poor” (literally “beggarly”); this reference is to all those who by the law have been brought to the realization of their poverty, no matter whether like Nicodemus, Joseph of Arimathea, and others they are financially rich, or like many others financially poor or in moderate circumstances.

Εὐαγγελίζεσθαι, usually active, is here and in Heb. 4:2 and 6 passive: the poor “are being gospelized.” This is the main work of “the Christ.” Not only do all his other works, all the miracles, receive their value from the gospelizing, the work of judgment cannot come until this work of gospelizing is completely done. Not till then shall the end come, Matt. 24:14. In a marked way Jesus omits what Is. 35:4 says about God’s coming with “vengeance” and judgment. John could not but note this significant omission, seeing that John is to leave the time of the vengeance in the hands of him who is so gloriously fulfilling the prophecies regarding the Messiah’s works of grace.

We have no reason whatever for allegorizing the blind, lame, lepers, deaf, and dead, and referring them to the spiritually blind, etc. Jesus tells John’s disciples to report to John “what they are hearing and seeing,” which cannot refer to states of the heart. The terms are to be understood literally. Jesus is speaking of his miracles of grace, and Luke 7:21 adds the circumstance that just at the time when John’s disciples arrived with their question Jesus was especially busy working miracles, also that he had just raised the son of the widow at Nain.

[6] Jesus concludes his answer to John with a beatitude: “And blessed is whoever is not trapped in connection with me!” In all of the beatitudes (see for instance Ps. 1:1) *παχάριος* expresses a divine verdict, and in form is almost exclamatory: “O the blessedness of him who” etc. In a most happy state is the man Jesus describes; joy and songs should fill his heart and his mouth. The opposite verdict is οὐαί, “woe!” terrible indeed when pronounced upon a man by Jesus.

It is the negative description that lends to this beatitude a gentle touch of warning. Yet no direct reference to John is intended, for Ὅς ἐάν is general, and ἐάν implies expectancy: here and there a man may indeed be trapped. “Is not trapped” may be a litotes, a negative wording for a positive thought,

yet the idea of being trapped points alarmingly at a deadly danger. The passive hides the agent; the ultimate agent in trapping any soul is Satan. The aorist means: “is actually trapped,” i.e. is caught and killed in the trap. We must get the true meaning of this verb *σχανδαλίζω*, which refers to a trap set with a crooked stick to which the bait is affixed, and which springs the trap the moment the bait is touched. The point of the verb is that the Victim is killed. Mark well that the verb has nothing to do with stumbling, the verb for this idea is an altogether different one. One may stumble over something, and even fall, and yet not be killed. The translation “to offend,” passive “to be offended,” is metaphorical, and must be understood in the sense of fatal offense, by which a person is spiritually killed, no less. Ἐν ἔμοί = “in connection with me,” the preposition used in its original sense.

Jesus pronounces any one blessed in time and in eternity who escapes being caught in a fatal trap set by Satan with untrue thoughts regarding his Messianic person and works. The implication is that everyone must ever beware of such dangerous thoughts. The entire answer of Jesus is spoken in public, before “multitudes” (v. 7), and thus the whole answer, including this negative beatitude, is intended both for John and for all these multitudes, and also for us of today. How many have lost their souls because of untrue thoughts, arguments, and conclusions regarding Jesus and his works? Some are like the skeptics and scoffers mentioned in 2 Pet. 3:4, but many others have been fatally trapped by even more shallow falsities.

**[7] Now when these were going, Jesus began to say to the multitudes concerning John: “What did you go out into the wilderness to behold? A reed swayed by wind? [8] Well, what did you go out to see? A man enrobed in soft clothing? Lo, those wearing the soft clothing are in the houses of the kings. [9] Well, what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yea, I say to you, and far beyond a prophet!”**

The genitive absolute with its present tense says that immediately, while John’s two messengers are in the act of leaving, perhaps are not yet out of earshot, Jesus begins to address the multitudes concerning John. These multitudes have just heard the question addressed to Jesus and the great answer he gave. “Began to say” indicates the weightiness of what Jesus now says. Jesus pronounces his high estimate of John, and the fact that now in his prison John was perplexed about the works of Jesus in no way reduces this estimate, a fact which comforts us when we now meet

perplexity in the Scriptures. Jesus is not saving the honor of John, but is aiming at the hearts of the multitudes (note v. 15), for what he says “concerning John” becomes an indictment of his hearers who were satisfied with neither John nor Jesus (v. 16-19). There are three pairs of questions, all of them alike. The R.

V. mistranslates the third pair.

When John was active “in the wilderness,” the uninhabited western banks of the Jordan, thousands flocked out to hear John, also from Galilee, where Jesus now is. Many of these Galileans were now present. Jesus asks them: “What did you go out to see?” They are to answer that question themselves. Three times Jesus repeats his question, thereby making it the more impressive. He probes for the answer. Each of his three questions is followed by another, these coming to a climax, the last stating what the crowds really went out to see, namely “a prophet,” a fact which Jesus most emphatically confirms: “Yea, I say to you, and far beyond a prophet!”

“A reed swayed by wind” is figurative for a man who yields to popular opinion, veers with it, and has no solid convictions of his own. The usual interpretation of this statement is palpably wrong, namely that John’s question to Jesus proves John to be such a reed, and that Jesus now is trying to save John’s reputation. In the first place, the question as to what these people went out to behold refers entirely to the past, this is also true with regard to the next two questions, — ἐξήλθετε three times. In the second place, if John now were a swaying reed, what about the second question, — is John now in soft clothing in the king’s house? He is languishing in the king’s prison! John is a prophet, yes, far beyond a prophet. The three questions form a whole, a climax, and are not at all asked in John’s interest, as if his reputation were at stake and needed shielding, but in the interest of the people whom Jesus confronts with these searching questions, in order to stir up and to rebuke their callous hearts, which, having had John, and now having Jesus himself, find fault with both and are gaining nothing from either (v. 18-19).

That is why Jesus uses θεάσασθαι in the first question and only ἰδεῖν in the other two. A touch of irony lies in the idea of going out many miles into the wilderness “to behold,” as if it were a great phenomenon, a reed swaying to and fro in the wind. The shores of the Lake of Galilee here in

Galilee had plenty of reeds like this, — Why hurry all the way to the reaches of the lower Jordan to obtain a View of such a reed? Certainly Jesus is speaking of John. What induced the people to go out to him was the fact that he was the very opposite of such a reed. The whole Jewish land was filled with men who were unstable like reeds, swaying with the wind of the popular opinion of the day. Our own land has hosts of such preachers today. They bend to every new notion that comes along, literally falling over each other to do so. Down there in the wilderness was a man of a different type. At this very moment he is lying in prison because he would not compromise one of God’s commandments. All the Jewish authorities, in fact, the entire Jewish nation passed Herod’s sin by in silence, but John did not for one moment do so. He opposed it like a rock. Well, such action deserved it that men should go out into the distant wilderness to see him. But was this really the reason why you went out to see him? Jesus asks these people. He leaves the answer with their consciences in the hope that they will be inwardly smitten in shame and repentance.

[8] The German commentators are mistaken when they make they make ἄλλά mean *sondern*, much like “but” in our versions. Here ἄλλά is not a conjunction, but a particle, which, being derived from ἄλλος, turns to another point. Its force is: “Well now; if this is not what you went out to see, why then did you go out?” The question, whether perhaps they went out to see “a man enrobed in soft clothing,” carries the thought of the swaying reed a step farther. A man who yields to popular opinion, who bends to the will and the word of the influential and mighty, is rewarded by them, is given a high place. With μαλαχοῖς supply ματίοις. The adjective “soft” (i.e. to the touch) conveys the idea of the finest and the most expensive material. The word is exactly the right one, bringing out, the strong contrast with the coarse, harsh, cheapest kind of material used in the burnoose of camel’s hair worn by John. The point of this reference to clothing in this, that if John had stooped to court Herod’s favor, he could have worn a courtier’s rich robes and basked in Herod’s royal grace.

The exclamation “lo” with the statement that people who wear such soft clothing are “in the houses of the kings” (generic articles), marks this as far more than a general observation. Soft and rich garments are also worn outside of royal courts. As for finely robed courtiers, the people of Galilee had these right close at hand, in Herod’s palace in Tiberias, and certainly

did not expect to find such courtiers in the wilderness of the lower Jordan. This specification that softly robed gentlemen are “in the houses of the kings,” intends to convey the idea that John is now indeed in the royal house of Herod, in the fortress of Machaerus facing the Dead Sea, but not as a handsomely dressed courtier, but as a wretched prisoner, still clothed in his rough burnoose of camel’s hair.

So this second question implies: “When you went out, did you hope to see a man who knew how to secure the royal favor and rewards? To do that you certainly would not have needed to go that far.” But no; you went out to see a man who dared to rebuke even a king, who could be bought by no royal favors, who showed absolute fidelity to God and to his Word. Yet Jesus asks: “Did you really go out to see such a man?” Once more the question strikes the conscience, aiming at conviction and contrition. We often use “to see” as it is used here, meaning not merely to look at a person, but to come into direct personal contact with him. This word is also used with reference to other objects, the Kingdom in John 3:3, corruption in Acts 2:27; examine the word in Young’s Concordance. The common conception that here ἰδεῖν is less than the preceding Θεάσασθαι must be corrected.

[9] “Well (ἀλλά), what did you go out to see?” Jesus asks a third time, hammering in the question with its probing effect. And now the secondary question is: “A prophet?” i.e.: “Did you really consider John a prophet of God and go out to see him as such a prophet?” Here the intensive force of “to see” is plain, for to go out and to see a prophet means not merely to go and look at him, but to get into personal touch with him, i.e. to hear his proclamation from God with one’s own ears, to let him move the heart to repentance and to the Baptism for the remission of sins. Jesus asks: “Did you really go out to John for this purpose?” The three infinitives denote purpose and all of them are construed alike.

This question reaches the climax. The two previous ones only hint at what John was; not a swaying reed, but a solid rock; not a venal courtier, but an incorruptible man of God. This question states outright what John was, “a prophet.” Thus this question strikes the conscience of these people straighter and harder than ever; for they had called John “a prophet,” in fact, still did so (Matt. 14:5; Luke 20:6), but, as Jesus states it, they “were willing for a season to rejoice in his light” (John v. 35), proud once more to have an actual prophet in Israel. John’s message as a prophet had for the

most part produced only a transient effect. This truth Jesus is driving home. In the same superficial manner in which these people and the Jews generally treated all the mighty Old Testament prophets, they were now treating this final prophet, John. The terrible truth is that today the same is done even on a greater scale with the ,whole Bible, with the prophets, the evangelists, the apostles, and Jesus himself, — praised with pride, but not obeyed in true repentance and faith.

The more to reach the consciences, Jesus states his own estimate of John: “Yea, I say to you, and far beyond a prophet!” We may read the comparative *περισσότερον* as a neuter: “something beyond a prophet,” or as a masculine: “one beyond a prophet.” “I say to you” is authoritative, and *καί* is ascensive: “even beyond” etc. Since John was such a prophet, disregarding his prophetic message from God regarding true repentance and grateful acceptance of the Messiah was the more fateful.

[10] How can John be something beyond a prophet: **“This is he of whom it has been written: Lo, I myself commission my messenger before thy face, who shall make ready thy way in front of thee.”** It is not the personal character of John, as compared with the character of all the previous prophets, that places John so high; in this respect all of them were alike. John is the one prophet who himself was prophesied. This made him more than any previous prophet. Why were John and his work prophesied? Because John was the *ἄγγελος* or messenger, who, not only like all the other prophets foretold the coming of the Christ, but who actually prepared the way for him and personally ushered in his coming.

This prophecy concerning John is uttered by Malachi (3:1). *Γέγραπται* introduces a direct quotation, and the perfect tense: “it has been written,” has present durative force: “and stands thus now and ever as written.” Jesus quotes the original Hebrew, not the LXX. The wording of Jesus is often called “free,” but it is in no sense “free,” it does vastly more than to state the general meaning of the original. The wording of Jesus is interpretative, and the interpretative touches are most exact, and are preserved identically in Mark 1:2, and Luke 7:27.

Jehovah addresses the Israelites, who are expecting “the Lord” (*Ha’adon*), “the Messenger of the Covenant” (*Maleach Habbe’rith*), i.e. the Messiah. Malachi distinguishes between Jehovah and this Lord and

Messenger, just as the other prophets do. Because Jesus quotes only one sentence from Mal. 3:1, the one about John, the only one that he needs, he clarifies by means of pronouns, in perfect accord with the remainder of Mal. 3:1: "I myself commission my messenger before thy face, who shall make ready thy way in front of thee." Jehovah himself will come to Israel, but in the Messiah. Jehovah's "messenger" shall prepare the way for the Messiah as the Messiah's actual forerunner (ὄς with the future denotes purpose). Jesus states the true sense of Mal. 3:1. In the first place, this prophet prophesied John; in the second place, he foretold that John was to be the immediate forerunner of Jesus. These two facts lift John above all other prophets, as Jesus authoritatively declares.

[11] On the basis of this prophecy by Malachi, Jesus restates his high estimate of John: \_\_ "Amen, I say to you \_\_ (verity, plus authority, see Luke 21:32 in the previous text), **there has not arisen among women-born a greater than John the Baptist!**" Although, like all men, John is "woman-born," and thus sinful and mortal like all other men, as we see from Job 14:1; 15:14; 25:4; Ps. 51:5, none greater has ever arisen. None has had a greater office, none has in his office been with the Messiah, — not even Abraham who is called the father of believers, not Moses who is called the mediator of the old covenant, not David or Solomon, great as all these and others were. Note well, that Jesus is not placing John so high because of his personal faith and character, but because of his great office. "Has arisen" refers to John's office and official career, wherefore also Jesus names him not merely "John," but with his official title "John the Baptist," his official baptizing furnishing this distinctive title, which at once also connects his whole office so immediately with Jesus. Even Jesus was baptized by him.

Harder than before does Jesus strike the hearts and consciences of his hearers. Did they call him "u, prophet," similar to those of old? Had they never realized that John was the greatest prophet of all, himself prophesied, and directing all men to Jesus as the Messiah at this moment standing before them and speaking to them concerning John and John's most blessed and immediate relation to himself? Indeed, it was not merely "a prophet" these Galileans had gone out to see and after that more and more to disregard, it was the greatest prophet of all, come to make ready the way for Jesus, the Messiah himself, by disregarding whose message they were disregarding their own Messiah and the eternal salvation he was now

preparing and seeking to bestow on them. Would they still remain indifferent and blind?

And what about us, .who have so long had this John, even as a martyr, with his call to repent and to prepare, and the Messiah, Jesus himself, with far more even than his miracles, with the whole consummation of his redemptive work, his suffering, his death, his resurrection, his outpouring of his Holy Spirit? Read Heb. 2:3-4.

## **Homiletical Aid**

The remarks introductory to the exegesis are vital for the contents of the sermon. I have not read a single sermon that consists of application made from John's character or his actions that I would approve. If I were to sit in the pew, as I have now done for many years, and were to hear the preacher preach that we must not doubt like John doubted, and must not grow weak in faith as John grew weak, or if he blamed John's disciples for such doubt and weakness, I would be tempted to throw my hymn-book at the preacher and to leave the church. The sermon books and the collections of sermon outlines that I have seen contain too many of these misguided attempts.

In your introduction to the sermon you may tell the true story as to how John came to direct his question to Jesus. Do it in a clean-cut, interesting, yet brief manner. It leads straight to the theme:

### **The Important Question which John from his Prison Directed to Jesus.**

Simple analysis supplies the parts:

- I. The answer, which this question elicited from Jesus in regard to Jesus' Work.
- II. The declaration which this question educed from Jesus in regard to John's Work.

Part two, like part one, glorifies Jesus, for he is the Messiah so great that a prophesied prophet ushered in his Coming in Grace. This type of sermon,

so simple and to the point, will strike the hearers: Here is all this work of Jesus' grace before our hearts today, and here is the prophesied prophet who prepared the way for Jesus, — what is our response? Only a passing interest, ending in indifference?

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The outlines offered in this volume are not offered as models, but as aids or suggestions. The formulation may be varied in every case, depending on the preacher's skill in bringing the text to the hearts of his hearers. I might make the didactic formulation dramatic:

### **“Art Thou the One Coming?”**

- I. Speak, Ye Works of the Savior!
- II. Testify, Thou Ancient Prophecy!

The outlines that come under my observation during my preparation of a sermon stimulate me to sharp criticism and to the effort to excel them. Do exactly that with all that challenges you in this book!

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A strongly subjective formulation, theme and parts in one extended sentence (see *S* 206-7, §4):

### **Placing Ourselves Among the Multitudes Surrounding Jesus when the Baptist's Messengers Came and Departed.**

- I. How are our hearts affected by the works of grace which Jesus is doing?
  - II. And by the great prophecy which Jesus quotes from Malachi concerning the Baptist's commission?
- 

The subjective element may be shifted to the elaboration:

## **When the Baptist Sent his Messengers to Jesus,**

### I. Jesus satisfied the heart of the Baptist —

Jesus' works of grace stand for all time — and mean to bring his Gospel grace to our hearts today — to prepare us for the last judgment;

### II. And then struck the consciences of the multitudes —

as Jesus must today strike our consciences — lest we too remain indifferent to both the Baptist's commission and to Jesus' grace — and remain unprepared for the judgment.

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We come to the synthetic treatment of the text. This is the Sunday of our preparation for the One Coming. The text is chosen chiefly because of v. 10: the Baptist God's messenger sent to prepare the way for Jesus, the Messiah. All is in vain, if this preparation is not made.

## **God Wants to Prepare the Way for the Savior into our Hearts (v. 10).**

### I. That is why he sent more than a prophet (v. 9).

1. John is the only prophet whose appearance was prophesied (v. 10).
2. John is the immediate forerunner of the Savior (v. 10).
3. God has ever continued and still continues to use John to open the way for the Savior into men's hearts, — your hearts anew this day.

### II. That is why this super-prophet was thrown into prison (v. 2).

1. John preached repentance, the only way to prepare the way for the Savior into a sinner's heart.
2. John preached repentance even to the wicked king, for which the king threw him into prison; but John's imprisonment only intensifies his preaching of repentance, lest in spite of the Savior we be damned like the obdurate king.

3. Listen to no swaying reed in the pulpit, to no seeker of soft clothing; heed this prisoner, who truly turns our hearts to the Savior.

III. That is why this prophet was so concerned about the works of the Savior (v. 2-3).

1. God had forbidden John to prophesy both the grace and the judgment of the Savior, like all the preceding prophets.
2. Imagine John's concern when he saw all the mighty work of judgment continuously absent.
3. John's concern was so great because the Savior's judgment must strike all who will not let repentance open the way for the Savior into their hearts.

IV. That is why the Savior significantly reported his many works of grace to this prophet (v. 4-6).

1. It was not given to John or to any one to know how long the Savior would work in grace before he would come in judgment.
2. The completeness of the Savior's works of grace was to certify to John that also the works of judgment could not fail to come in their proper time.
3. Because the judgment has not yet come, shall we, like the Savior's Galilean hearers, close our hearts to the Savior and refuse to let God's great prophet John prepare the way into our hearts?

# **The Fourth Sunday In Advent.**

## **John 1:19-28**

### **An Attestation of the Savior's Deity**

Both the previous text and the present text were chosen because of their concluding verses. The climax of the present text is undoubtedly v. 26-27: "There standeth One among you, whom ye know not... whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose." The Fourth Sunday in Advent is regarded as belonging to the Christmas festival, as being a pre-celebration of the festival, even also as Christmas Day often follows close upon this Fourth Sunday in Advent. Thus the subject for this Sunday is the infinite greatness of him whose birth we are about to celebrate. On this Sunday the preacher is to testify to the Deity of Jesus. This ought to be a joy to him and to his hearers, since the Christmas light is now so near.

John the Baptist is not the subject of the text, despite his prominence in it. The testimony to the Savior's deity requires someone who does the testifying. We never have testimony without a testifier. Here this testifier is the Baptist. Some other testimony to the deity of Jesus, uttered by some other witness, might be used, but surely that of the immediate herald of Jesus is preferable for a Sunday in Advent, especially for this Fourth Sunday, that follows the Third which reveals the Baptist as more than any prophet. Incidentally, we should not make the mistake which Nebe and others make who rank the Baptist as the final Old Testament prophet, "the ripest fruit of the old covenant, the most faithful bearer of the spirit of the Old Testament theocracy." Malachi, living four centuries earlier, is the last Old Testament prophet. After four centuries of complete silence comes the Baptist who in his great testimony is able to say what no preceding prophet could say: "In your midst stands One whom you yourselves do not know." The Baptist has Jesus at his side and with Jesus belongs wholly in the New

Testament, all his testimony consisting of new revelation given to him directly by God. Like the three synoptists the evangelist John introduces him as the direct witness of Jesus in 1:6-7, in our text, and in the next two paragraphs, v. 29-34 and v. 35-37. All this is so plain that Nebe should never have made such a mistake.

We have the Baptist's testimony to the deity of Jesus. Moreover, we have it in its full historical form. Here is the entire account, relating how John testified in detail to the official representatives of the Sanhedrin, the supreme religious rulers of the Jewish nation, and to the representatives of the Pharisees, the real religious leaders of the Jewish nation, whom the bulk of the Jewish nation revered and followed. On official demand God's great prophet testifies to all Israel that Jesus, who is in their very midst, is the Son of God. The testimony delivered in this account carries supreme weight.

All the evangelists begin their accounts of the Messianic ministry of Jesus with reports of the appearance and the activity of John the Baptist as the promised herald commissioned to prepare the Messiah's way. The readers of the evangelist John possess the other three gospels, hence all that the fourth evangelist needs for introducing the Baptist to his readers is the statement of v. 6-7. The great theme of the Fourth Gospel is: The Attestation of Jesus as the Son of God. From the history of the Baptist the fourth evangelist thus selects the most notable testimony made by the Baptist. This most weighty testimony was made on three consecutive days: 1) before the commissions sent to him from Jerusalem, — our text; 2) before his own disciples, v. 29-34; 3) before two of his disciples, v. 35 etc.

We are now ready to examine our text.

**[19] And this is the witness of John, when the Jews from Jerusalem sent to him priests and Levites, in order to inquire of him: "Who art thou?" [20] And he confessed and denied not; and he confessed: "I am not the Christ."**

"And," repeated in v. 20, is not to be regarded as a connective, for it connects with nothing. "And" is merely the Hebrew *vav*, which may introduce a whole book or any major section of a book. The evangelist writes "and" in Hebrew style. The repetition of this "and" in v. 20 shows that the words: "And this is the witness of John," are not a title for what follows.

Without the least ceremony we are introduced to the Baptist at the height of his ministry and influence. We are supposed to know all that the synoptists report about the Baptist in the wilderness, his message and his Baptism, the sensation he caused, the opinions of the people, etc. We are placed at the point at which the central authorities of the nation at Jerusalem felt constrained to make a first-hand investigation. The Sanhedrin has sent an official committee, and we are at the dramatic moment when before all the gathered multitudes out in the wilderness this official committee faces the Baptist and receives his telling answers to their questions. The evangelist at once indicates the fact that for him the Baptist's μαρτυρία is the essential thing: "This is the witness of John, when" etc. We have this same "witness" in the synoptists, yet the fourth evangelist wants all its weight in this fourth record which especially presents the attestation of the deity of Jesus. So we have the entire event narrated to us.

The Jews from Jerusalem sent a commission composed of priests and Levites to the Baptist to make formal inquiry of him and to get a full and an adequate answer to the direct question: "Who art thou?" It is evident that these are not some of the ordinary Jewish citizens of Jerusalem. "The Jews from Jerusalem" are the men of authority, who have the right to control all "the priests and Levites," even as they send a commission of them in this instance. These Jews constitute the Sanhedrin, the supreme court of the Jewish nation, located in the capital, Jerusalem. It is furthermore evident that the movement produced by the Baptist far away in the wilderness at the Jordan has stirred the Sanhedrin to make a formal investigation, especially to discover what was behind all the surmise and the reports that this man at the Jordan might be the long expected Messiah.

To make such an official first-hand investigation was not only the province of the Sanhedrin, it was really obligatory for this responsible body to examine any religious movement in the nation, and, if necessary, to take such action as might be required. The matter of a possible false Messiah was a serious and even a dangerous thing. In the fourth gospel οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι comes to be strongly tinged with hostility in Jesus, and often is equivalent to "the enemies of Jesus." The character of the leaders of the Sanhedrin was base and vicious. Yet in the action here taken in sending a commission to the Baptist, no fault is apparent.

The commission that came to the Baptist consisted of “priests and Levites.” The Levites performed the menial and the police duties in the Temple, and for the latter duty were marshalled under “the commander of the Temple” and his lieutenants. A detachment of Levites accompanied the committee of priests on account of the dangers of the road from Jerusalem into the wilderness of the Jordan and for the purpose of lending a more official character to the priestly committee when it appeared among the multitudes about the Baptist. The committee consisted of ordinary priests; no higher dignitaries were necessary, for only a report was to be brought back, any further official action being reserved for the Sanhedrin itself. The verb ἐρωτάω refers to a formal and a dignified inquiry; “inquire” is a better translation than “ask” (our versions). In the purpose clause there is stated what the priests were to inquire and then did inquire: “Who art thou?”

The question is not hostile, not inquisitorial, but coming from this commission it is legally formal, and betrays no personal interest either on the part of the Sanhedrin or on the part of its committee. The Baptist is proclaiming the coming of the Messianic Kingdom and is baptizing great multitudes as a preparation for this Kingdom. Deut. 18:21 etc., implies that Israel should examine and test any prophet who might appear thus. Naturally, the Sanhedrin would act as the executive of the nation in such a matter. When now it did so, the Baptist is not surprised, expresses neither objection nor resentment, but answers promptly and to the point.

[20] Although the question is merely: “Who art thou?” its object is to find out whether the Baptist in any way claims to be the Messiah, even as many of the people thought and said that he was. The Baptist had given no occasion for such a rumor, he had thus far said nothing about himself, he had constantly pointed only to Another, to One far greater than himself. He therefore answers the question as it is intended, not by stating his name, his parentage, and his divine commission, but by the prompt declaration: “I am not the Christ.” The ὅτι *recitativum* is the equivalent of our quotation marks and is therefore not to be translated. As the pronoun in the question is emphatic, so is the pronoun in the answer: “Thou, who art thou?” “I, I am not the Christ.”

The evangelist, however, does not write, as we should expect: “And he *replied*: ‘I am not the Christ’,” which would match “they *requested*”; he writes: “And he confessed, and denied not; and he confessed.” It is as

though the evangelist would say: I myself heard the Baptist confess and not for an instant deny, and this is what he confessed. In other words, the evangelist conveys to us, his readers, the impression made upon him by the answer of the Baptist. That answer was testimony, full, clear-cut confession, that denied nothing. “*I am not the Christ*” confesses that *Another* is the Christ, turns attention away from the Baptist to this Other One, and thus does not in the least deny what the truth here demanded.

An ugly implication has been read into the words, namely that the Baptist was tempted to imagine himself to be the Christ, that he at least played with the thought, when so many in the multitudes at least wondered whether he was not the Christ come at last. The very opposite is true. We here refer to this foul slander only because the preacher may meet with it in his books, not because he should in any way refer to it in the sermon. The whole character of the Baptist is revealed to us in the Scriptures; this character and every word the Baptist uttered cry shame upon the evil suggestion which no true man could ever entertain.

[21] In a way the Baptist’s succinct answer to this official committee is enough; it settles the main point which the Sanhedrin has in mind in sending its committee to the Baptist. Yet the committee, like the Sanhedrin and like many in the multitudes, had also other thoughts in regard to the Baptist, as to who he might really be. How about these other suppositions? **And they inquired (further) of him: “What then? Art thou Elijah?” And he says: “I am not.” “Art thou the prophet?” And he replied: “No.”** From these two additional questions, which name outright the one or the other person many supposed the Baptist to be, we see that the original question was answered to the point: “I am not the Christ.” The insertion of οὐ bases the further questions on the Baptist’s answer: “What then, if thou art not the Christ, art thou Elijah — art thou the prophet?” The rabbis understood Mal. 4:5 to mean that Elijah would return from heaven in person to prepare the Messianic Kingdom. Perhaps something in the stern preaching of repentance by the Baptist, aided by his austere dress and mode of life, prompted the surmise that the rabbinic expectation was fulfilled, and that the Baptist actually was Elijah returned to earth. This the Baptist denies, not what is promised regarding him in Luke 1:17, and what Jesus afterwards says of him in Matt. 11:14; 17:11, three statements which correctly interpret Mal. 4:5.

The next question: “Art thou the prophet?” ὁ προφήτης (not “a prophet,” Luther) refers to Deut. 18:15 and 18-19. There were two views: the right one, that Christ is the prophet like unto Moses (Acts 3:22; 7:37), voiced also by the Galileans in John 6:14 etc.; the wrong one, that a special prophet would precede the Messiah, voiced in John 7:40 and in the question now put to the Baptist. He answers the question in the sense in which it was intended, this time with a curt, categorical “No.” Note the progressive bluntness of the Baptist’s denials, ending with this flat “No.” In Matt. 16:14 we meet the assumption based however only on 2 Macc. 2:4 etc., and on legend, that Jeremiah was to be this prophet. Perhaps this is the idea entertained here.

[22] The evangelist reports the exact manner in which the committee questioned the Baptist. He was there, himself saw and heard all. This committee put on a superior, highly official air, heavily to impress the Baptist and the multitudes around him. Their curt questions sound like those of a judge in court conducting a juridical examination of a prisoner. The Baptist rightly answers as he does, his words clipped to the exact point. By assuming this haughty air the committee obtained only negations, valuable as far as they went, but negations did not meet the full purpose for which they were sent. So the committee is constrained to begin again and condescends to ask a more elaborate question. **They said therefore to him: “Who art thou? that we may give an answer to them that sent us. What dost thou say of thyself?”**

We see that some of the committee’s haughtiness has disappeared. They condescend to ask for simple information regarding what the Baptist has to say about himself, in positive form, apart from the wrong opinions of others which the Baptist has had to repudiate. The committee even becomes solicitous. The M clause is elliptical: “in order that” etc., meaning: “Please tell us, in order that we may give answer to them that sent us.” If the committee returned to the Sanhedrin with nothing but negative items, this would secure for them severe censure. The Sanhedrin demands more from its committee. As far as personal spiritual interest on the part of the committee is concerned, this continues to be absent.

[23] Thus approached, the Baptist again gives them What they ask. **He said: “I am a voice shouting in the wilderness: ‘Make straight the way of the Lord!’ as said Isaiah the prophet.”** This is what the Baptist has to

'say concerning himself; it is not an estimate made by himself regarding himself, but a divinely inspired estimate, recorded by one of Israel's greatest prophets. Report this, the Baptist would say, to the high authorities who sent you. What the Baptist says regarding himself obligates the Sanhedrin and the whole Jewish nation to deal with One vastly higher than the Baptist, with God himself who gave to Isaiah the prophecy which is now literally fulfilled in the Baptist's person and mission.

Critics claim that Is. 40 to 66 was not written by Isaiah. I believe the Baptist in preference to 10,000 such critics. They say that Is. 40:3 is not at all a prophecy regarding the Baptist, but that the Baptist uses the words of Is. 40:3 only after a fashion, only as fitting his own thought. This again is untrue. All four gospels (Matt. 3:3; Mark 1:3; Luke 3:4, and this verse of our text) state that Is. 40:3 is literally and completely fulfilled in the Baptist and in his work. Objection is raised to the effect that the Baptist's quotation is not exact. The Baptist condenses and abbreviates two of Isaiah's lines and fuses them into one. Any writer, including all these critics, does this very thing, when it serves his purpose — shall only the Baptist be condemned?

Isaiah wrote:

**“Voice of a crier in the wilderness:  
‘Prepare ye the way of the Lord!  
Make straight in the desert  
A highway for our God!’”**

The Baptist does not declare that he is such a voice, that this figure of a voice in some way fits also him, as it fits or may fit others similarly; but that he, he alone, is this voice. The Greek even matches the Hebrew, two words being used in each language: *Qol qore'* — “Crier's voice!” ρωνή βοῶντος, meaning the same thing. With ἐγώ the Baptist asserts: “I myself, I, a crier's voice.” Isaiah places this voice “in the wilderness.” That is exactly where the Baptist's voice rang out. This is what identifies his voice as the voice foretold by Isaiah. For here is an astounding phenomenon, — a man with a great message to shout out to an entire nation, doing this away out in the wilds where there are no inhabitants at all. Everybody would expect such a crier to appear in the capital city, in its most populous square or avenue. God does the most astounding things; this one he did so that all

men should at once connect the prophecy and its literal fulfillment. Did this crier's voice "in the wilderness" ring out to the empty air? Thousands and thousands went out to hear him.

They left their homes and their occupations, the round of their lives, all their ordinary thoughts. The wilderness received them, wilds where they had never been before. A totally new experience struck them. That is why God appointed the wilderness, and not Jerusalem. In the wilderness they faced the Baptist and heard the mighty call: "Make straight the way of the Lord!" The figure behind these words is that of an oriental king with his retinue, for whom a way or a road is shaped when he makes a passage in state. Out in the roadless wilderness this figure is enhanced. That is the divine intention. The road meant by Isaiah and the Baptist is even more difficult to construct than one made to run straight, smooth, and true right through the Jordan wilderness, where no man in all the centuries had ever even tried to make as much as a temporary, twisting, rough road. The hearts of Israel were like this wilderness. The Messianic King is coming. The road into these hearts must be prepared, made straight for his reception. Fear not that it cannot be done. Dream not that anybody can construct this spiritual road with his unspiritual power.

The very words by which the Lord in his Gospel bids us do something contain the divine power we need. Right here is the Lord's prophet and the Savior's herald sent with the Gospel and all its power to make this road, to create repentance and faith, the reception of our Savior-King.

Note two things. By employing Isaiah's prophecy the Baptist lays all the stress on his work and office, none whatever on his person. He is "a voice shouting," — the two words like an exclamation in the Hebrew. "A voice," nothing more, its owner as good as out of sight. It is the herald-message that is everything. Just so it is effective. Secondly, by incorporating this message in his reply to the committee, the Baptist is actually doing his work also upon these men who have been sent to him. He is here and now calling upon these men to make straight the Lord's way, ὁδὸν, Jehovah's way, who is coming in the Messiah. This committee is to report to the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem. When they do so they will be obliged to repeat these words of Isaiah, and will thus carry the Lord's call right into the ears of all the Sanhedrists, every one of them thus brought to hear the same Gospel call

heard here by the multitudes of the people they ruled. The Lord knows how to effect his great purposes.

[24] The correct reading is: καὶ ἀπεσταλμένοι ἦσαν ἔχ τῶν φαρισαίων, and the correct translation: **And some Pharisees had been commissioned.** Ἐχ τῶν Φαρισαίων is partitive and = “some Pharisees,” and thus may be used either as the subject of the sentence or as the object. Both of our versions, Luther, and the A.V. margin are wrong. The faulty reading with οἱ before the participle, and the misconception of ἔχ are due to the idea that the evangelist is still speaking of the committee sent by the Sanhedrin, which is not the case. He has fully characterized this committee in v. 19; we cannot assume that at this late point in the narrative a further characterization is introduced. Moreover, the leaders of the Sanhedrin were Sadducees. It would be astounding, if on this mission relative to the Messiah, these Sadducees had sent a committee composed of Pharisees, the more astounding since the Sadducees and the Pharisees had different opinions about the Messiah. The committee was composed of priests who were members of the Sadducaic party.

This committee has ended its inquiry and has stepped back. In addition to this committee sent by the Sanhedrin, the Pharisaic party in Jerusalem had sent a representation of its own, not trusting the Sadducaic priestly committee. We have two commissions dealing with the Baptist. Note well that the evangelist does not say that “some of those commissioned were Pharisees,” i.e. that a few members of the Sanhedrin’s commission were Pharisees, the rest Sadducees. While the evangelist does not say who commissioned “some Pharisees,” it is obvious that only Pharisees can have done so. The evangelist is concerned to have us note two points: first, that the Pharisees who now speak were not some who accidentally happened to be present on this occasion, no, they “had been commissioned,” they represented others, yet not the Sanhedrin as did the “priests and Levites.” Secondly, it is necessary for us to know that the question now asked of the Baptist is one that would occur only to Pharisees, and can be fully understood by us only when this fact is noted.

The Sadducees were freethinkers, skeptics, their leaders men of wealth and prominence, the high priest and his relatives being among their number. The far more numerous Pharisees also had some men in the Sanhedrin (Acts 23:6-9; Gamaliel in Acts v. 34). The Pharisees were sticklers for the

law and its outward observance, having built a formidable hedge of human commandments and traditions about the divine law; they were utterly self-righteous, ostentatious formalists, severe as regards ceremonial forms, fastings, almsgiving, long prayers, tithing, etc. The people revered the Pharisees for their supposed holiness and for their zeal regarding the law. Even the Sadducees often had to yield to them, as in Acts v. 34 etc.

[25] The committee of Pharisees yielded precedence to the priestly committee of Sadducees, because this latter was the committee of the Sanhedrin. They stood silent until the priestly committee had completed its questioning. Then this committee of Pharisees spoke. Keen for legal rights, they note what to them seems an unauthorized and thus illegal function on the part of the Baptist. **And they inquired of him and said to him** (the two verbs mean: in a most impressive manner): **“Why then baptizest thou, if thou art not the Christ, neither Elijah, neither the prophet?”** This committee uses what the other committee had elicited, but only the negative part of it, that the Baptist was not the Christ, etc. They pretend to have keener minds than the priests, who failed to see the illegality of the Baptist’s baptizing; but they only pretend, for they ignore the positive part of the Baptist’s answer (v. 23), which should have made every question about illegality and lack of authorization impossible.

On the basis of Ezek. 36:25; 37:23 and similar statements the Jews in general expected the Messiah, or his forerunners Elijah or “the prophet” to use lustrations or cleansing washings, meaning baptisms. They were right. Yet when the true forerunner of the Messiah stood before them, right in the Wilderness where Isaiah had said his voice would cry out to them, they were both deaf and blind, and these Pharisees, whom their party at headquarters had especially commissioned to examine the Baptist at first hand, even asked him why he dared to baptize.

[26] The Baptist’s answer is really a condescension to these Pharisees. He might have told them that their question was already fully answered by Is. 40:3, to which he had referred the priests (v. 23). The possessor of the voice in the wilderness sent by the Lord to prepare the Messiah’s way certainly had the authority from the Lord to prepare the people by means of Baptism. The Baptist implies as much. He names no authority entitling him to baptize. **John answered them, saying: “I baptize with water: in your midst stands One whom you yourselves do not know, [27] even he that**

**comes after me, the latchet of whose shoe I am not worthy to unloose.”** Instead of naming an authority for his baptizing, the Baptist states the reason for what he is doing: he is the immediate forerunner of the Messiah, who actually has already arrived to begin his work; for him the people are being baptized and cleansed.

Ἐγὼ is emphatic: “I on my part am engaged in baptizing with water,” and contrasts the Baptist and his work with the infinitely greater One, the Messiah, the Godman, who is already present to begin his infinitely greater work. What is the Baptist doing? Just as by his voice he is making the people prepare to receive the Messiah, as he has already said, so he is also doing by the Sacrament of Baptism. “Baptizing with water” means using a means of grace. The Messiah’s divine work of redemption is the basis of this means of grace. By thus in a simple way placing himself with his work in contrast to the Godman, the Baptist once more conveys the thought that he is nothing but a man, yet that he is indeed the Godman’s forerunner and as such uses Baptism to make Israel clean and ready for the Godman, the Messiah.

In the Baptist’s reply ἐν ὕδατι, “in connection with water,” or simply “with water,” is not in contrast to “with the Spirit.” Where this contrast appears (Matt. 3:11; Mark 1:7; Luke 3:16), the Baptism “with the Spirit” is also “with fire,” and it refers to the completion of the Messiah’s work on Pentecost, when in connection with the Spirit’s descent the tongues of fire appeared. That the Holy Spirit was present in John’s Baptism is clearly evident in John 3:6, for Jesus speaks to Nicodemus about the regenerating power of John’s Baptism. Both Mark 1:4 and Luke 3:3 call this “the Baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.” A Baptism that conveys this remission by repentance is impossible without the Spirit. Yet the Spirit’s outpouring to work amid all nations and tongues had to await the completion of the Savior’s work, the day of Pentecost, after his ascension to heaven. All the preparatory work was restricted to Israel. The derogation of John’s Baptism as a mere “water baptism,” only a water ceremony, an empty sign, thus stands condemned. The people who obtained no more at the Jordan, no grace for repentance and remission, were not prepared for Jesus. The Baptist should have stopped with his preaching.

Did John immerse? Was this the original mode? The answer is a categorical no. See *The Interpretation of St. John’s Gospel* 115 etc., for the

proof. When preaching on this text this question need not be treated. Likewise the question regarding the Baptism of John and of Jesus, answered in the work named, p. 116 etc.

When the Baptist says: “I baptize with water,” namely: “My work is to apply this means of grace,” this must not be separated from the following: “in your midst stands One whom you yourselves do not know,” etc. Not as a distant forerunner does the Baptist baptize. While his preaching and his baptizing go together, he here speaks only of the latter, because this is being challenged. The Christ is already here, I know it, although you on your part do not. “The One Coming after me” means: right after me to do his Messianic work. Some scribe added: “preferred before me,” from v. 30, because he thought both verses should read alike. For the Greek adjective μέσος we are compelled to use a phrase. The force of “Him should not be missed;”stands” does not mean merely: stands to be seen, but: stands to begin his work, his mission.

[27] “Whom you do not know” is the subject of “stands,” and to this subject is added the apposition: “the one coming behind or after me,” and then another apposition, the relative clause: “the latchet of whose shoe” etc. So close is the Messiah, so near his mighty work. This follows on the very heels of the Baptist, and will be as great as the person of the Messiah is great. The thought of unfastening the strap of his sandal is more than illustrative, for it goes with the Baptist’s knowing the Messiah, with the Messiah’s standing right in the midst of the people, so that the Baptist may indeed stoop to unfasten the Messiah’s sandals. All this means that there is no time to spare. All the people need the cleansing of remission in the Baptism if the Lord’s way is to be made ready into their hearts. What is the object of these Pharisees’ questioning the Baptist’s right to baptize? This close connection between the Baptist and the Messiah settles the right of the Baptist and his divine authority for his work.

In this testimony of the Baptist to Jesus throbs the note of satisfaction and joy. To usher in Jesus, what more blessed task could fall to any man! And does any one question the Baptist’s work, — Jesus is its justification and its seal! Purposely the Baptist does not name Jesus as the Messiah to this committee of Pharisees. With the assertion: “You do not know him,” meaning: “I do,” he suggests to these men that they should ask to have him pointed out, to have themselves made ready and fit to receive him. Do they

respond, do they ask? Alas, no! Not even when the Baptist tells them how great this Messiah is. To men like that the Baptist rightly declines to name Jesus.

Note that here too ὁ Ἐρχόμενος is a title of the Messiah. The illustration is oriental. When the master of the house or an honored guest enters, it is the task of the humblest slave to kneel, to unfasten the sandal straps, to bathe the feet, and to cleanse the sandals of dust. Picture Jesus, the Coming One, either as one come to his own (v. 11) as the Master of his own home, or as the most exalted Guest at the home of his nearest kin and friends, the Baptist is not worthy to perform for him this most menial service. The Koine construes ἄξιος with non-final ἵνα. Did many surmise that the Baptist might be the Messiah? He is as nothing compared with the real Messiah! Did so many imagine that a mere human being might be the Messiah? He who is the Messiah is and must be more than man, namely the Godman. Did they suppose the work of the Messiah to be so small that one like the Baptist could perform it? Another mistake. No man on earth could be the Lamb that takes away the sins of the world. All that even the greatest man could do was to prepare his way. In v. 34 the Baptist himself says of Jesus: “And I have seen, and have witnessed, that this is the **Son Of God.**”

[28] The fourth evangelist repeatedly mentions the place of an event at the end of his narrative. So here. **These things took place in Bethany beyond the Jordan, where John was, engaged in baptizing.** “In Bethany” is the correct reading, only this is “Bethany beyond the Jordan,” and not the Bethany on the slope of the Mount of Olives. The place has disappeared, it must have been only a small village, not on the banks of the Jordan, in the hot Ghor or gorge of the river, but close by on the upland. The Baptist did not camp in the open, he had some house in the village for shelter; v. 38 says the same regarding Jesus. Whenever a sufficient number of converts were ready, the Baptist took them to the river for their Baptism. The fact that the evangelist thus mentions the place means that in his old age, when he wrote this account, the whole scene and the whole action are as vividly before his eyes as ever. The reading “in Bethabara” was passed on by Origen and entered various texts, also the A.V.

## Homiletical Aid

The man who knows only homiletical analysis finds this text difficult. He cannot cut it into two or three sections, preaching on each section, in two or three parts of the sermon. The man who knows only homiletical application likewise has difficulty. He will use the pattern: as the Baptist was humble, honest, true, etc., so must we be today. He may also compare us with the priests and with the Pharisees in the text, and teach us not to be like them. Perhaps also he may fasten on v. 23, and preach our preparing the way into our own hearts and then also into the hearts of others, i.e. that all of us ought to be people like the Baptist. Yet, I think, even this kind of a preacher senses that such an applicatory sermon, with such “lessons” from this great text, is weak and fails to do justice to its main feature. For the previous text has already presented the Baptist as a prophet, yes, as “something beyond a prophet,” and the obvious fact is that no one among us is anything of the kind. Likewise, in this text the Baptist is a voice in the wilderness, “as said the prophet Isaiah,” and Isaiah never said anything of the kind about us. It is altogether incongruous to compare our hearers to the Baptist. The preacher may ignore the incongruity, but that does not remove it. More may be said to the same effect.

The better type of preacher rises higher. One presents: **The Preacher in the Wilderness**: 1) Who he is, and 2) What he preaches. Another offers: **John’s Testimony at Bethabara** (which should be: at Bethany beyond the Jordan): 1) Concerning himself; 2) Concerning Christ. Both themes have color. Yet the parts under the first theme are mere categories. The main fault is that in both of these sermons John occupies half of the sermon, and this half becomes either merely historical in telling about John, or when it seeks for more descends again to “lessons” drawn from John. Moreover, it is the Third Sunday in Advent which is intended to deal with the Baptist as the Great Herald of Christ, not the Fourth. It would be strange indeed to have two Sundays for the same subject.

We are on the eve of the Festival of the Savior’s Birth. The object of this text for the last Sunday before Christmas is to impress upon us the *Deity of Him who is Born in Bethlehem*, — this is why we celebrate his birth as we do. So great is the Savior sent by God into the world, because none less than he could possibly “stand” to perform the work needed for our redemption. In other words, *the Messiah had to be the very Son of God*, and he was the Son. This is the true burden of the whole text. This is the

μαρτυρία, “the testimony” of John (v. 19) which John bore when this double committee came to him in the wilderness. It is this “testimony” that the evangelist records, for this testimony stands for all time, for you and for me to this day.

*Testimony*, true testimony, calls for belief on our part, aims to produce this belief and all its fruits. This is the aim of the entire text. Where faith already exists, this testimony aims to increase, intensify, fortify such faith, lest it decline or grow ineffective. To meet *true testimony* with *unbelief* constitutes the most fatal guilt. Such unbelief is unnatural, abnormal, hence damnable (John 3:18). It ought to be impossible.

This text demands homiletical *appropriation*, and that not only in one part of the sermon, but in the entire sermon. The sum of the sermon must be: “This is the Testimony” (v. 19) — believe it! Amen. Keep this high level. God knows how necessary this is for our day. The Virgin Birth is ignored, even boldly denied. Divinity is substituted for deity, a noble, divine, godlike man for the Son of God incarnate. Christmas is celebrated in high style without the Son of the Highest. Matthew’s and Luke’s account of the Nativity are rejected as legendary, as imitations of pagan stories about heathen gods appearing on earth. Who is this whose birth we are about to celebrate on Christmas day? Our very souls depend on the true answer.

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### **The Baptist’s Immortal Testimony to the Deity of Christ at Bethany beyond the Jordan.**

- I. This Testimony faces as today, because it is immortal.
  1. Given to the official committees of the Jews by the Baptist.
  2. Transmitted to us by God through his evangelist.
  3. Declaring the Deity of Jesus, whose sandals even the great Baptist is not worthy to untie.
  4. Declaring that Jesus, the Godman, “stands” to begin the work of our redemption.

5. Justifying the Baptist's work, as the Voice in the wilderness, bringing Israel to Baptism.
  6. Destroying all false notions about Jesus and his forerunner the Baptist.
- II. We face this Testimony today, because it is immortal.
1. As true today as the day it was uttered.
  2. Demanding faith in the Deity of Jesus and in his redemption which only he could begin and finish.
  3. Producing faith by its power of truth.
  4. Destroying all false notions we and others may still have about Jesus and his redemption.
  5. Warning us away from the guilt of disbelieving.
  6. By all this preparing us for rightly celebrating the Godman's Nativity.

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The appropriation may be cast into various homiletical forms. For instance:

**The Voice that Testifies to Us from the Jordan Wilderness.**

- I. Mark the authority of this Voice!
  1. This Voice spoke long, long ago, and many disregard its testimony.
  2. God put his authority into this Voice, already through the prophet Isaiah 800 years before this Voice testified in the wilderness, and because of this authority the testimony endures for all time.
  3. The testimony of this authoritative Voice is absolutely true, let deny its truth who Will.
- II. Hear the Testimony of this Voice!
  1. This Voice testifies to the Deity of Christ (v. 27).

2. To the Deity of Christ as he then stood ready to begin the work of our redemption.
3. To his Deity as assuring our redemption and eternal salvation.

III. Make response in your hearts to this Voice!

1. The response of faith by which the authoritative and true testimony of this Voice makes the Godman and his redemption our own. I John v. 13.
2. Never the response of unbelief, which challenges God's authority, calls this true testimony a lie (1 John 2:22; 2 John 7), and loads itself with fatal guilt.

Conclusion: With this testimony drawing us to the manger, all the eternal blessings of Christmas will be ours.

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Before we gather at Bethlehem to kneel with the shepherds at the manger of the Christ Child, our text takes us to the Jordan wilderness to make our preparation.

**Come to Bethany beyond the Jordan!**

- I. Witness the dramatic scene!
- II. Mark the supreme issue!
- III. Carry away the fulness of faith!

It is worth while, if you are able, to reproduce the drama: the Baptist at the height of his career — hosts and hosts of Jews flocking out to him — the exciting rumors far and near — the Sanhedrin stirred up in Jerusalem, its imposing committee, its duplication by the authorities of the Pharisees in the capital — this day the Israelite nation demands answer from John — and he gives the answer that rings down through the ages. This would be my first part, gripping description. — Now the supreme issue: not John or anybody like him — John sharply settles this false issue — but “the One Coming after me,” infinitely above John — for whom John has been sent

— whose Coming means redemption, salvation. To him John directs all hearts. — We come away with the Advent vision of our Savior's deity, with fulness of faith and trust, and thus with the joy that truly sings Glory to God in the Highest when Christmas dawns. I believe such a sermon would leave a lasting impression on my heart.

# Christmas. Luke 2:1-14

## The Son of God Born Man in Bethlehem

This is the Christmas text par excellence. Its beauty is beyond all question. But the preacher must not forget that he here has history, the inspired account of events that took place in the past, actual facts which no man can possibly wipe out or change, and, as far as our salvation is concerned, a history of the first rank, which means that if this text is not history, then we have no Savior, and no salvation. The same holds good for all the other histories of the first rank, on which the high festivals of the Church Year rest. If they do not report facts, our faith is in vain.

The preacher's task is homiletical *appropriation* in its most direct form: God's Son is born man for you! for you! — glory to God in the highest! (Review S. 227 etc.) Purposely the text stops with v. 14. In some pericope systems the text is extended so as to include v. 15-20, the account of what the shepherds did, on the supposition that this lengthening is an improvement. The idea back of this procedure is to get homiletical application: as the shepherds did — so do you! Inferior homiletical training or total lack of training causes preachers to operate with nothing but application, even on the high festivals. The ancients who concluded the text with v. 14 were superior preachers. This text demands, that the whole impact of the sermon be to drive home the tremendous fact as a fact: He is born! He is born! Glory, hallelujah! Believe it or not, he is born. This day we want the fact, the fact alone, with nothing else to divert even the least attention from the fact. It is too great, too wondrous, too blessed, to place anything beside it during the half hour you are in the pulpit.

If the preacher does not realize this and preach accordingly, his place is not in the pulpit on Christmas morning, he ought to remain in the pew. The same fact obtains at every high Christian festival. When will we learn that simply preaching the historical facts of the first rank affects the hearts as

nothing else can? The facts as facts, driven home, produce faith by themselves, without any urging of application. Trust the facts 100% for this effect. To do so is the only sound psychology. Unbelief always, yea always, finds itself driven to deny the supreme historical facts, for these would smash all unbelief. See this right here: modernism denies the fact of the Virgin Birth, denounces Luke's and Matthew's accounts as fictitious legends and not history. But enough. The Son of God was born man! Give us the fact, the whole fact, and nothing but the fact. It is this that floods our souls with faith, with heavenly joy and unending praise.

The preacher must know much more about this text than he uses in his sermon, for only when he has full knowledge can he preach with safety. We thus discuss also the critical points, with which the congregation need not to be troubled, certainly not on Christmas day.

**[1] Now it came to pass in those days, there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus that all the inhabited world be enrolled for taxing. [2] This, a first enrollment for taxing, occurred while Quirinius (this the proper spelling) was governing in Syria.**

These statements do not intend to fix the date of the birth of Jesus; they intend to account for the strange fact, that while Mary and Joseph lived in Nazareth in Galilee, the birth occurred in Bethlehem in Judea. How Luke fixes a date we see in 3:1-2. Somehow Luke is not concerned about dating the Savior's birth, he is only concerned about dating the beginning of the Baptist's work, for it is his work which ushers in the great new era. The astounding thing is that an imperial decree, affecting the whole Roman empire, was issued, and was put into effect in Palestine just at this time, so that Joseph and Mary had to go from Nazareth to Bethlehem. The vast machinery of the world-empire moved to effect this apparently tiny result. And this machinery moved not only the entire civilized world of that period, but that part of the movement which involved Syria and Palestine got under way precisely during the weeks preceding the Savior's birth, forcing his mother to travel to Bethlehem. It is this fact that Luke notes in v. 2.

The hand of God in his world-encircling providence is here clearly revealed. Yet, in reality, moving the mountains of world-empires is as easy for God as shifting the little trail of an individual's life. Since we are

Christians world-empires do not impress us as they do worldlings. On the other hand, it is the Son of God himself who is to be born. No world event is comparable to this event. To place this birth where God wanted it to be, to have David's eternal Heir born in David's city, really was far greater than setting the emperor's taxing machinery into motion in all his kingdoms and provinces the world over. The Son of God is infinitely greater than this empire and its secular rulers.

Now the details and the critical historical questions regarding which you have probably read the explanations of various writers, some of them uninformed, some also hostile.

With transitional δέ, and the circumstantial Hebraistic ἐγένετο placed in LXX fashion before another finite verb, Luke begins his great narrative, and here too shows that he is not recasting the history of Jesus' birth into language of his own; but even in the language employed he keeps to the original account which was composed in Aramaic, all the intimate details of which Mary herself, and then too Joseph, supplied. Luke afterwards had ample opportunity to question Mary herself and not merely those who had been closest to her, a man like the apostle John for instance. A δόγμα is a decree, here one issued by the emperor, of course, with the approving vote of the Roman Senate. Luke is the only evangelist who names Roman emperors, and he always designates them correctly, thus Caesar Augustus, but Tiberius Caesar (3:1), — why should he not, living as he did in the imperial age?

The decree was issued in Rome on one certain day. Luke is not concerned about that day, but about "those days" in which this decree was put into execution, especially in Syria and Palestine, and thus came to determine the birth-place of Jesus. If no such decree had been issued in Rome, or if, though issued, its execution in Palestine had been hastened or had been delayed a few weeks, humanly speaking, Mary and Joseph would not have moved to Bethlehem. Not indeed as though God could not have employed other means to bring about this move; we are here told the means he did employ, means of which no man would have thought.

That ἡ οἰκουμένη (sc. γῆ) here means the Roman Empire is substantiated by Acts 17:6, and 19:27. The noun (ἀπογραφή (v. 2) appears again in Acts v. 37, and must have the same meaning as the verb

ἀπογράφεσθαι in v. 1. In Acts v. 37 the word includes both the census and the actual levy of the tax, which determines its actual meaning here. Luke does not draw a line between ἀπογραφή as a mere enrollment and census and ἀποτίμησις, the valuation of the property and the levying of the tax. We thus translate: “to be enrolled for taxing.” The present tense ἀπογράφεσθαι is worth noting. If only one world-taxing were referred to, we should have the aorist; the present tense suggests a continuous series of enrollments for the purpose of taxation. This harmonizes with the recent discoveries made in Egypt of a periodical fourteen-year taxing, which as far as Egypt is concerned the papyri carry back to A. D. 20.

[2] Luke calls this “a first enrollment” (whether we retain the article or omit it makes no difference in the meaning), but “first” has no reference to a second, a third, etc., enrollment; “first” means that nothing of the kind, no enrollment for the purpose of taxing which involved the whole world had ever before been made. We have the same sense of “first” in “firstborn,” in v. 7. The fact that this universal enrollment for taxing was the “first,” an entirely new thing, is thus marked as phenomenal.

Until a recent date the critics challenged Luke’s statement by claiming that if Caesar Augustus had issued such a decree at the time Luke indicates, the old Greek and Roman historians would certainly have reported such a grand and phenomenal decree, yet they do nothing of the kind, hence Luke most certainly is wrong. A second grave error is charged against Luke, namely that Quirinius was governor of Syria and made an enrollment for taxing in the year A. D. 6 — the enrollment which Luke himself mentions in Acts v. 37 (Josephus Ant. 18:1, 1), — but Luke here places the governorship of Quirinius and this enrollment for taxation in 8 B. C. when Varus was governor of Syria. Until a recent date these charges seemed to subvert Luke’s reliability as a historian. All that one could do was to believe Luke, despite the critics.

The entire situation with regard to these critics has been reversed. A mass of papyri and several inscriptions verify that Augustus did issue this decree, that it was indeed a new, epoch-making measure, and that this decree inaugurated a periodic enrollment for the empire, at intervals of about fourteen years, which was continued more than two centuries. If the ancient historians fail to tell about this great act of Augustus, this omission

merely casts reflections on them, certainly not on Luke who duly records this imperial act.

Now the confusion concerning Quirinius. The critics were sure that Luke is wrong, wholly wrong. They especially depended on Josephus, and, of course, were only too ready to take the word of this renegade Jewish priest, born as late as 37 or 38 A. D., in preference to the word of an inspired New Testament writer. Josephus was set up as the canon of historical verity, whatever disagreed with Josephus could not be true. It is now plain that in various instances Josephus made serious errors, and he did so here (those interested may consult Zahn's commentary on Luke). *Publius Sulpicius Quirinius* was indeed the regular governor in Syria in A. D. 6, and after the death of Archelaus he made a census for taxation; but by treating Palestine as an ordinary Roman province he caused the formation of the militant Jewish party of the Zealots, which persisted till Jerusalem fell, the fate of whose founder is noted in Acts v. 37, to which one of the apostles, Simon "the Zealot," once belonged (Luke 6:15; Acts 1:13). But back in B. C. 7 and after, Quirinius functioned during the first taxing of Syria and Palestine under the imperial decree for the world. Luke's genitive absolute with ἡφεμονεύοντος is mistranslated by our versions and by the skeptic critics; the participle does not mean "was governor," but was "governing," i.e. acting in a governing capacity. At the time of Jesus' birth, somewhere about B. C. 6, Varus, the general whom the Germanic tribes afterwards defeated so thoroughly in the Teutoburger forest, was the governor of Syria. Herod the Great died B. C. 4; Jesus was born two or perhaps three years before his death (Matt. 2). Consult Kretzmann, *The New Testament in the Light of a Believer's Research*, p. 54: "When was Jesus Born?" While Varus was governor of Syria, Quirinius controlled the armies and directed the foreign affairs of Syria under Varus. It was in this capacity that Quirinius supervised the matters of taxation in Palestine.

At this point another objection is raised, namely that Quirinius might have managed the taxation in Syria, but certainly did not do so in Palestine, the domain of Herod the Great. This is another conclusion arrived at in the study only. Herod's standing with the emperor was not that of a *rex socius*. He was not king in his own right, but was dependent on the φιλία Καίσαρος; he was one of the *amici Caesaris*, dependent on Caesar's *amicitia*. How easily Herod might forfeit this imperial "friendship" is seen

when the emperor reprimanded Herod for his war with the Arabians, and told him that hitherto he had been treated as “a friend (φίλος)? but that he will now be treated as a mere”subject (ὕπηχος).” The standing of Herod never was such that a personal representative of the emperor could not supervise the taxing in Herod’s domain. Some suppose a reluctance on Herod’s part as regards this function of Quirinius; others suppose an alacrity, an eagerness to please the emperor. It is not safe to guess. The taxing did not in Palestine get under way as soon as in other parts of the empire. This delay need not surprise us, even if we lack the precise information regarding the cause. The surprise to us is that the orders to report for the taxing in every one’s home town came so as to affect Jesus’ birth.

**[3] And they were all proceeding to go to be enrolled for taxing, each to his own city.** Ἐπορεύοντο is descriptive: “proceeding to go,” and ἕχαστος is an individualizing apposition. Everybody was affected when the administrative order of Quirinius was issued, which executed the imperial decree in Palestine. The Jewish system was followed: each person’s name, standing, property, etc., had to be entered anew at the place which was considered the family seat. The Roman authorities accommodated themselves to the customs of the people they ruled; their own Roman system recorded each man’s data and took his tax wherever he happened to live at the time. Judging from statements in the papyri, the Egyptian system resembled that of the Jews: ἀπογραφὴ κατ’ οἰκίαν, “enrollment for taxation family by family.”

**[4] Now there went up also Joseph from Galilee out of the city of Nazareth unto Judea to David’s city, which is called Bethlehem, for the reason that he was of David’s house and parentage, to get himself enrolled for taxation together with Miriam, who had been betrothed to him, she being pregnant.** Luke has introduced us to Joseph and Miriam (= Mary) and informed us of their betrothal in 1:27. As in 1:27 Nazareth is mentioned in relation to Mary, so now it is mentioned in relation to Joseph, and Galilee is named in connection with Nazareth because Bethlehem lies in Judea. Bethlehem is made important by calling it “David’s city,” because both Joseph and Mary were descendants of David’s royal line. Zahn denies Mary’s Davidic descent, but he is compelled to do violence to all the texts which contradict him. Physically, through Mary, Jesus was of David’s

blood, and legally, through his foster-father Joseph, Jesus belonged to David's family. In both respects he was "the son of David." He had to be in order to be the Messiah. If in either respect he had not been David's descendant and heir, it would have been extremely easy to disprove his Messiahship. No enemy of his even ventured to attack him on this score.

[5] Matthew supplies the genealogical table of Joseph, Luke that of Mary (despite Zahn). So Joseph had to go to Bethlehem, the family home of king David, for his enrollment. Ἀπογράφασθαι is causative: "to have himself enrolled," an aorist because one act is referred to. The phrase "together with Mary" modifies the infinitive with which it is construed. The enrollment undoubtedly included the datum as to whether Joseph was single or married. Joseph had himself enrolled "with Mary" as his wife. Whether Mary had to be present in Bethlehem for this act, or whether she could have been left behind in Nazareth, we are unable to determine, because the details of the law regarding the taxing are nowhere reported.

We have the same participle "having been betrothed" which occurred in 1:27, the perfect tense with its present connotation. But we must understand this expression in the Jewish, not in the American sense. The marriage vows were exchanged at the time of the betrothal, which always was public, and which made the two persons man and wife. After a shorter or a longer period of time this marriage was consummated when the husband came in state to take his betrothed wife to his own home (see this imagery in Matt. 25:1 etc.), celebrating this event with a marriage feast. There was no "engagement" in our sense of this term, no promise to take the marriage vows at some later day before a legal official of the Church or of the state. In 1:27 the betrothal had taken place, but Joseph had not yet taken Mary to his home, — note Matt. 1:18. Here in Luke 2:5 this latter had been done (comp. Matt. 1:20: "to take unto thee," and 1:24: "and took unto him his wife").

The participial phrase οὖσα ἐγγύφ "she being pregnant," reverts to 1:31-35, Mary's divinely wrought pregnancy. Let it be understood that we have no quarrel with the skeptics in regard to the induction of natural reason that no woman can become pregnant without male seed, — who does not believe that? The issue is only obscured by making it turn on the way in which human beings are conceived, a matter that no one even remotely questions. The skeptic denies the existence of the Second Person of the

Godhead. Since the eternal Son of God is non-existent, how could he become incarnate? This is the real issue underlying all the modern denials of the Virgin Birth. It is not that such an occurrence as a virgin birth has never been known on earth, but that no Son of God exists from all eternity who could have become man, whether by a miraculous conception, or in any other manner as far as this is concerned. The moment God's revelation of himself as Triune is accepted, the skeptic is through, all his contentions are empty talk, and what he is pleased to do with the Scripture records is a vain farce.

God's eternal Son became man. That he did this in a miraculous way, absolutely above and beyond the manner in which mere human beings come into existence, is so self-evident that nothing more needs to be said. Besides the denial of the eternal existence of the Son of God, the skeptic operates with a second denial, namely that no miracle ever occurred. Thus when the skeptic meets the revelation of the stupendous miracle that a virgin conceived by the direct operation of God, without copulation in any sense, he simply shouts his rash denial. But this is only the skeptic's secondary objection, — for him God's Son never existed, to say nothing of having been born man.

The skeptic wants no Son of God as his Savior from sin, death, and damnation. He wants Jesus as a noble, godly man, a model to copy, — although no skeptic ever achieved even the first lines of a real copy. So he turns Jesus into a man, the physical son of Joseph, and boasts about what he has done, 1 John 2:22-23.

Mary's pregnancy was advanced. While the participle states only the fact that she was pregnant, the connection in which this is stated may well imply that Joseph took Mary along because of her advanced pregnancy. He scarcely did so because she had to be enrolled for the sake of her expected child, or because Joseph was anxious to have the child born in David's city. Joseph took Mary away from Nazareth to shield her against slanderous tongues. He did not go alone to Bethlehem and leave her alone in her condition in distant Nazareth; he took her with him to give her all the protection and the care she needed. Mary herself must have greatly desired to leave Nazareth with Joseph. It seems that henceforth they intended to make Bethlehem their home; we find this implied in Matt. 2:22-23.

**[6] Now it came to pass, while they were there, the days were fulfilled for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her son, the firstborn, and wrapped him in swathing clothes, and laid him down in a manger, because there was no room for them in the stopping-place.**

These two verses are infinitely precious to all believers, for they are the only historical account we possess of the Savior's birth.

In reality v. 6 is a circumstantial introduction to v. 7. Luke might have written: "Now while they were there, Mary gave birth" etc. But no, — the event is too great for such brevity even on the part of a sacred writer. Ἐν τῷ with an infinitive is common in Luke as a designation of time: "while they were there." Place beside this clause the other: "there were fulfilled the days for her to give birth," the infinitive with τοῦ modifying "the days." This important clause shows that it is a mistake to think that Joseph and Mary arrived in Bethlehem just in time for the birth. A famous picture presents Joseph at the door of a house in Bethlehem begging to have his wife taken in, while she is huddled in the street as if her pains are about to begin. The picture is not true. Joseph and Mary arrived in Bethlehem in ample time. A number of days passed before Mary's time came. Joseph had plenty of time to find a place for himself and Mary. To be sure, it was a very poor place, but that was as God wanted it to be. Even a greater number of days would not have changed this circumstance.

[7] The birth itself is recorded without an unnecessary word: Καὶ ἔτεξε τὸν υἱὸν αὐτῆς τὸν πρωτότοχον: "And she gave birth to her son, the firstborn." Jesus was born in the natural way. The birth pains set in, and the child passed through the mouth of the womb, just as a normal child is born in the normal manner. The old supposition is not true, that Jesus was born *clauso utero*, "with the womb closed," the child miraculously passing through the walls of the womb in the manner in which the body of Jesus afterwards passed miraculously through the rock-walls of, the sealed tomb. This opinion crept into the Latin version of the Formula of Concord, happily not into the German. John Theodore Mueller (*Christian Dogmatics* p. 293) treats the *clauso utero* as "an open question," but without the least justification. Luke writes: "her son," not "their son." This was not Joseph's physical son, it was only Mary's.

The addition of a second article: τὸν πρωτότοχον, makes this adjective emphatic, almost like an apposition: “her son, the firstborn.” This apposition is badly misunderstood by all who make it mean that Mary afterwards gave birth also to other sons plus daughters. Thus Robertson: “The expression naturally means that she afterwards had other children and we read of brothers and sisters of Jesus.” The exact opposite is true. The word “firstborn” looks backward, not forward (C.-K. 1075). If Mary had died in giving birth to Jesus, he would still have been her “firstborn.” Moreover, “firstborn,” applies to such a child the moment it is born, just as Luke calls Mary’s babe “the firstborn” here at the moment of its birth. There is no waiting when applying this term, to see whether later the mother will give birth to other children. To have a “firstborn” no mother needs to have several children, as if, failing to have a second child the one she has could not be her “firstborn.” Never do we read: “her sons,” or “her children,” but only “his brothers”; most notably also in Acts 1:14, the very place where it would be odd indeed, if Mary had had other sons, to read: “his brothers,” and not: “Mary, the mother of Jesus, and her other sons.” See my *Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles*, 41 etc.

The term “firstborn” refers to the sanctity of a firstborn son and to the necessity of redeeming him with a sacrifice; the law concerned is quoted in v. 23. The “firstborn,” furthermore, refers to most important rights, which in the case of Jesus were great indeed (1:32).

Joseph had been a carpenter in Nazareth, a skilled artisan. Not that he built houses, — in Palestine everything in the way of a building is made of stone, the land is full of rock. Joseph made the fittings and the furniture. He was no pauper. When he betrothed himself to Mary, he had saved enough from his earnings to set up a household in Nazareth. Then the decree regarding the taxing compelled him to go to Bethlehem. He did not plan, as we have already noted, to return to Nazareth; he meant to take his wife, miraculously pregnant (Matt. 1:18-25), and establish his home in his native home town of Bethlehem, away from Nazareth. He had money more than sufficient to provide an ass for his wife so that in her condition she might ride on the long journey to Bethlehem.

They arrived a number of days before the child was born. They found a “stopping-place,” a κατάλυμα, with some relative in the town. The house proper was small, consisting probably of a single room, in which Joseph

and Mary could stay as guests during the day time, but where there was no accommodation for their sleeping at night. The house had a lean-to, of course, also built of stone, where various utensils were kept. We learn that this room had a manger; thus it was a place to tie up and to feed an ass or two, the one Joseph brought and very likely the one belonging to the owner of the house. Here, most likely on the floor, a sort of bed was made for the two guests. It was a poor enough place in which to sleep, yet Joseph and Mary accepted it under the circumstances. Here they slept every night of their stay. I myself saw just such a house. It belonged to one of our Palestinian guides; when we came to it, he invited us in to see where he lived. The' lean-to was roomy; our guide had stored in it a small heap of alfalfa and some wheat, both recently harvested. It was a place where one could sleep very well.

Then came the night when the baby was born. It was not born, as Luke says, in the κατάλυμα. It was born in this side-room. Hence there was no good place to lay the baby, save in the manger, which most likely had its bottom on the floor. The ass or two were moved and tied outside. When the birth pains set in Joseph called his host's wife, probably also another neighbor woman or two. We have no reason whatever to think that Mary was left only with Joseph during the hours of this night. When Luke writes that Mary wrapped the baby in swathing clothes and laid him down in a manger, it is wrong to press this, as if Mary did it with her own hands. Even if Joseph alone had been with her, he would have washed the child, wrapped it in the strips of soft cloth, and gently laid it in the manger. Mary had the "swathing clothes" ready, told the woman or the women where they were, and thus these things were done. The "swathing clothes" were not rags picked up at the moment; they were nice soft pieces, bought by Joseph days in advance, the kind used for little babies anywhere among the common people.

We have been at pains in these paragraphs to picture the birth of Jesus as truly as we can from the data which Luke himself provides. All sorts of fancies have perverted the simple statement of Luke; painters and poets have been especially guilty.

An early apocryphal legend, probably patterned after Gen. 35:16-20, said that Jesus was born just before Mary and Joseph reached Bethlehem. This led to the idea of a cave, used as a stable, as the place of the birth.

Some of the ancient fathers then interpreted Luke as saying that Joseph could find no room in the village that night, after running from door to door, and had to take Mary into this cave. Already during Origen's time († 253) the cave and the manger were exhibited. Under Constantine, at the urging of his mother Helena, a basilica was erected over the cave. I saw the present church in 1925, the town having grown out to the place and now surrounding it in quite a city. Five sects own the church. In the cave is shown the place of the manger, the place where the wise men knelt (Joseph and Mary are supposed to have lived in this cave during all this time!), and a silver star is inlaid at the place of the birth. Here is shown also the underground cell where Jerome is said to have lived, and there is shown also his tomb in an adjacent chamber, opposite that of the French sisters who supported him during his life. In the passage way that leads outward I was shown what purports to be the tomb of Josephus! In the adjacent Catholic church I was shown where Joseph had his dream, also where the bodies of the children that Herod slew were thrown, — as if they had not been buried. As at Jerusalem, so again here at Bethlehem everything is fixed up conveniently for the piety of the ignorant and credulous. By the way, in Nazareth the workshop of Joseph is shown; and it is located down in a cave similar to the one found in Bethlehem.

Most of the confusion has been caused by misunderstanding Luke's διότι clause: "because there was no room for them in the stopping-place," and by misconceiving the meaning of the word κατάλυμα. The clause explains only how there came to be a manger in the room where the child was born and how thus he could be laid down in a manger. The clause is not independent and does not explain the general situation. We have the word κατάλυμα in Luke 22:11 and Mark 14:14: "Where is the κατάλυμα, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?" In this case the κατάλυμα was a spacious, beautiful upper room, where the Passover was eaten on that eventful night. Here in Bethlehem the κατάλυμα was the room of the house proper, where Joseph and Mary had been during the daytime, sleeping at night in the lean-to. In the κατάλυμα there was, of course, no manger, and if the birth had occurred there the babe naturally would not have been laid down in a manger. Κατάλυμα simply means *Ausspänn* and thus *Absteigequartier*, i.e. stopping-place, quarters.

It has been confounded with πανδοχεῖον (Luke 10:34), a *khân*, caravansery, and mistranslated accordingly “an inn.” Commentators, poets, and others have thus built up the picture that when Joseph and Mary arrived at Bethlehem, they went to the khan, but found it full of arrivals, all having come because of the taxing. So the poets have the sad refrain: “No room for them in the inn!” The child was born several days after Joseph and Mary arrived in Bethlehem. R., *Word Pictures*, offers what he conceives to be a picture of such a *khân*, and, strange to say, has Jesus born in such a place. Dismiss all such notions; we do not know whether Bethlehem, tiny village that it was at the time, even had a *khân* for transient travelers. Joseph too intended to settle down in Bethlehem, and not to return to Nazareth shortly.

[8] Attached in Hebrew fashion by a simple καί Luke records the story of the shepherds. **And there were shepherds in the same region, camping in the open and keeping guard at night over their flock.** The two participles are not to be construed with ἦσαν as forming periphrastic imperfect tenses. “There were shepherds in the same regions,” is a statement complete in itself, and this statement has the participial modifiers belonging to “shepherds”: “camping in the open and keeping guard” etc. Nothing strange or unusual is thus reported. This the shepherds of the locality about Bethlehem did as a regular thing at this season of the year: they grazed their sheep in the open country, camped in the open with them, and guarded them at night. The land was an open range, free to anybody. The shepherds did not live in Bethlehem; where their homes were is immaterial.

The question why these shepherds were selected for the announcement of the angel rather answers itself, — God found them the kind of people to Whom he could communicate such news. They were in a class with Simeon and Anna and those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem (Luke 2:38). The date of the birth, December 25, is only traditional, the tradition extending back to the celebration of the nativity in Rome in the fourth century. We retain this date, because it is traditional, and are satisfied, since certainty cannot be attained. Jesus was born at night, otherwise the angel would not have appeared to the shepherds “at night.” Luke’s sources are Jewish, hence night sets in with the sinking of the sun and night is one unit, not made up of two sections as With us: from evening till midnight of December 24, and from midnight till morning of December 25.

[9] Up to this point the whole story is most humble and lowly, with nothing grand and wondrous to overwhelm us. In an instant this is completely changed. **And an angel of the Lord came upon them, and glory of the Lord shone around them, and they feared with great fear.** Wrapped in their heavy robes, the shepherds slept and drowsed, as they had done on many previous nights. Then suddenly came the angel and the glory. Κύριος = *Yahveh*, and with the anarthrous nouns forms one concept: “Jehovah-angel,” “Jehovah-glory.” All in a flash there stood the mighty angel, and the Lord’s glory of heavenly radiance shone all around the frightened shepherds. Ἐπέστη is used with regard to sudden, unexpected appearances, and so is the right word here. Since it was Gabriel who appeared to Zacharias and to Mary in Bethlehem, it is proper for us to conclude that Gabriel is this angel sent to the shepherds.

[10] **And the angel said to them: “Stop being afraid! For lo, I am announcing as good tidings to you great joy, which shall be to all the people: that there was born to you today a Savior, who is Christ, the Lord, in David’s city.”** The present imperative is used to stop an action already begun; so here: “Stop fearing!” The great fear that fell upon the shepherds who were poor mortal men, When suddenly in the dead of night they saw the Lord’s glory and his holy angel, is justified indeed because of their sin, and yet this fear is to cease, for it is blessing, yea, the absolute, supreme blessing for sinful, mortal man that the angel brings to these shepherds. The Gospel always begins with: “Fear not!” for it removes sin, the cause of fear.

With γάρ the angel justifies his command to stop fearing, and With ἰδοὺ he exclaims because of the greatness of this justification. Note that he first states the effect, and then the cause, first the great joy, then the wondrous birth that produced the joy. Εὐαγγελίζομαι is here used as in 1:19, in the general sense of announcing good news, although in this case the news constitutes the Gospel; it was at a later time that this verb came to mean for Christians the preaching of Gospel salvation through Christ. The present tense describes the act of telling good news in its progress. The “great joy” is the antidote for the “great fear.” When the angel says that this great joy “shall be to all the people,” we must know that λαός is regularly used for the covenant people, the Jews, and is so intended here. God is fulfilling his great promise made to Abraham and to his descendants in Isaac, a promise

made to Israel alone, yet one that through Israel would extend salvation to all nations. The future tense is prophetic, to indicate the coming spread of the Gospel as the bearer of this great joy to all the people.

[11] We regard ὅτι as declarative, as stating the contents of the angel's message: "that there was born to you" etc.; not as stating a reason for the great joy: "for unto you is born" (our versions).- The Greek aorist states the simple past fact as such, ἔτέχθη, "was born"; we prefer a reference to the present time, "has been born" (i.e. just recently; or even "is born" in our versions). Since the Jews begin the day with sunset, "today" means this very night, only a little while ago.

Great titles are used to name the child just born, titles which indicate why an angel announces the glad tidings of his birth and of the joy that shall flow from it to all Israel. The first is Σωτήρ, "Savior." While we may translate "a Savior," we should know that the absence of the Greek article does not make the term indefinite, since the attached relative clause supplies the definiteness. There is only One Person, only One Savior, "who is Christ, the Lord." In 1:77 we have "salvation in connection with remission of their sins." "Savior," like "to save" and "salvation," refers to the mighty act of rescue and to its abiding result, the condition of safety following. Mary gave this name to God in 1:47; it is used with regard to him in both Testaments. Here where it is applied to the babe, and quite often when it is applied to Jesus in the New Testament, the deity of this babe is implied. He is "Savior" in the same sense as God is Savior (Is. 45:15 and 20; Luke 1:47; Hab. 3:18; Ps. 79:9). The salvation referred to is always spiritual, not secular, political, temporal. The Roman world accorded the title "Savior," to the emperors and added the idea of divinity. The conclusion has been drawn that the early Christians applied the title "Savior" to Jesus in constant opposition to this pagan use of the title. But "Savior" from an angel's lips recalls all that is said in the Old Testament about salvation as attributed to God and the Messiah he would send, and thus leaves far behind the pagan use of the title as applied to the emperors. Even in later years and among Gentile Christians, "Savior" as used in the apostolic writings differed so immensely from any imperial "Savior" title that the two were hardly ever compared in the Christian's consciousness. See C.-K. 1035, correcting Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East*, and

others. We note that “Savior” is the meaning of “Jesus,” the name the babe afterwards received.

While the relative clause makes “Savior” definite, its purpose is more than grammatical; it is descriptive. Like the term “Savior,” the clause “who is Christ, the Lord” takes us back into the full light of the Old Testament. Χριστός, the verbal noun from the ceremonial verb χρίω, is the Greek for the Hebrew *Maschiach* or “Messiah,” “the Anointed One,” and was understood (the angel spoke Aramaic) by every Jew as a reference to the great Deliverer promised to Israel by God. The angel could not have used a clearer term. The babe was indeed not yet anointed; the act of anointing would follow in due time, but he is the one who would in this manner be placed into his great office. “Messiah” means only “the One Anointed,” and by the grand act of anointing only hints at the high office of the Anointed One, without defining it more closely. That is why “Savior” precedes, stating what the work of this child actually is.

We cannot read this as a compound title: “Christ- Lord,” i.e. “Anointed Lord,” for such a compound is not found in the Scriptures, and our cue is Acts 2:36: “God hath made that same Jesus whom you have crucified both Lord and Christ.” The two terms are therefore separate titles, appellatives, not personal names. Luke has repeatedly used Κύριος; as the Greek equivalent for *Yahveh*, the covenant name of God, and one might be inclined to think that when naming the babe in Bethlehem Κύριος the word again signifies Yahweh. Yet this Greek translation Κύριος, in the sense of *Yahveh*, does not seem to be applied to Jesus in the Scriptures. Here Κύριος is the translation for *'Adon*, in the sense of “divine Lord.” Compare Ps. 110:1: “Yahveh said unto my *'Adon*,” which is translated in Matt. 22:44 “unto my Κύριος,” namely Christ. In Matt. 22 Jesus uses this designation *'Adon* as Scripture proof for his deity.

“In David’s city” is far more significant for the shepherds than “in Bethlehem” would have been. Here recall v. 4: “to David’s city... for the reason that he was of David’s house and parentage.” The king’s name and the mention of his house recall all the Messianic promises made to David, which this babe as “the son of David” is born to fulfill. The phrase modifies the verb at the head of the sentence, but is placed at the end for strong emphasis: “Born is the Savior, who is Christ (and) Lord, in David’s city.” The angel’s announcement was meant to be clear and informative. When

Robertson now enumerates six different translations and confesses that it is not clear what Χριστὸς Κύριος means, we turn him a deaf ear. The statement that Luke loves to write Κύριος where others say Jesus is misleading for here Luke quotes the words of the angel, who did not and could not as yet say “Jesus” to the shepherds as he did say “Jesus” to Joseph in Matt. 1:21.

[12] **“And this to you the sign: You shall find a babe having been wrapped in swathing clothes and lying in a manger.”** Not “a Sign,” but “the sign,” the sign sure and certain. The future tense: “you shall find” takes for granted that the shepherds will see this most wonderful babe in David’s city and assures them of finding it. The high, divine titles which the angel gives to this babe seem not at all to comport with this lowly sign identifying the babe; but that is exactly what makes this the infallible sign that it is. Where in the entire city of David could a second babe be found, that had just been born, and was enswathed and lying in a manger, hence in a room used as a stable, not in the house proper, and even in the stable not on anything like a bed, but on hay or straw in a manger? So great the babe, so lowly its condition! Even David’s city had only a manger for David’s eternal Heir.

The cave now shown was located outside of the city at the time of Jesus’ birth. If this cave were the place of the birth, the angel should have said: “in a manger in a cave beyond David’s city.”

[13] **And suddenly there was with the angel a heavenly army host praising God and saying,**

[14] **"Glory in highest places to God,  
And on earth peace,  
On men good pleasure!"**

Astounding as are the appearance and the announcement of the one angel, still more astounding is the appearance of this vast angel army and their proclamation. All the earth lies still and silent, but heaven is moved and vocal. Do all these angels appear only to this handful of shepherds? This is God’s way, 1 Cor. 1:26-29. Πλήθος is a vast number, and the genitive στρατιᾶς οὐρανόυ, “of the heavenly army,” implies that this army is able to send out such hosts. Many thousands of angels appeared, filling the sky. Swarm, “army,” is the proper word, because the angels are mighty

spirits, *giborim* (Hebrew), “that excel in strength,” Ps. 103:20. Here an army announces peace (Bengel). We here see what Jesus meant when in Gethsemane he spoke of twelve legions of angels coming to his aid, about 120,000. The two plural genitive participles “praising and saying” are construed *ad sensum* with the genitive “of the army” which is a collective. The words uttered are poetical in form; whether they were spoken or sung is not directly stated.

[14] We divide into three poetical lines. This is due to the sense, and is opposed to those who divide into two lines. The stress is on the three nouns “glory” — “peace” — “good pleasure.” The second line is in contrast to the first, and the third line is explanatory and coordinate to the second. For this reason no *mi* introduces the third line. Since “and” connects the contrasting line, a second “and” connecting the appositional third line would be confusing. Note the plain contrast: “in the highest places” — “on earth”; also the appositional coordination: “on earth” — “on men,” the two belonging together. This angelic praise of God, based on the birth of the Messiah, is a most positive assertion; so also the results on earth, “peace” and “good pleasure.”

Δόξα, “glory,” is the radiant shining forth of any or of all the divine attributes — here of the truth (in keeping his promise), power (1:35), and grace of God in sending the Messiah. In the mouth of the angels this “glory” is ascribed to God as recognized, worshipped, and praised by the angels. “In the highest places” (neuter plural, as in 19:38) is the same substantivized adjective that is used in the masculine singular as a designation for God: “the Highest,” in 1:32:35:76; 6:35. The highest places are heaven, and the phrase modifies “glory,” not “God,” as our versions construe. All heaven declares the glory of God as shining forth in the Incarnation of his Son.

Beside heaven the angels place “earth.” The Incarnation fills heaven with glory to God, because it pours out “peace” “on earth.” Εἰρήνη is “peace” objectively, as “made through the blood of the cross,” Col. 1:20, and as in the Word “preaching peace by Jesus Christ,” Acts 10:36. It is the condition in which God’s wrath is turned away and his grace extends to men. This “peace” men are to accept and to enjoy, entering thereby into a new relation to God; but whether they do so or not, the babe in Bethlehem means “on earth peace.” “On earth” means on the whole earth, and not only

in some places on earth. The peace brought by the Savior is universal. So also “in the highest” does not mean here and there in heaven, but in all of heaven.

Textually the reading εὐδοχία, nominative, is as well attested as εὐδοχίας, the genitive. Those who insist on the latter cannot do so on textual authority. Textually ἐν must remain, although interpretatively it makes no difference. Εὐδοχία is constantly used in the Scriptures as a designation for the “good pleasure” of God, his free determination to save men and for any part of that blessed determination; for instance in Matt. 11:26; Eph. 1:5, 9 with βουλή as the parallel in v. 11. The word never denotes a moral quality (C.-K. 354) either in God or in men. This rules out the Vulgate: *homines bonae voluntatis*, “men of good will,” i.e. whose will is good. Zahn goes back to this Latin translation without saying so. The worst feature about this idea is the thought that men by nature are supposed to fall into two classes, those of good will who seek God, and those of evil will who reject God — all this before the Gospel ever reaches them. So the angels sing of peace only for the former: “on earth peace among men of good will.” To bolster up this view it is in vain to say that after all peace is the possession of only a few men. The angels are speaking objectively of the peace won for the whole earth, intended for all men, and not subjectively only of those who finally attain this peace. Moreover, as a matter of observation the plural ἄνθρωποι is never connected with a qualitative genitive in either Testament.

The R.

V. clings to the genitive εὐδοχίας, and since it is hopeless to think of the “good will” of men, returns to the “good will” of God: “men in whom God is well pleased,” i.e. men of (God’s) good pleasure. But this is self-contradictory. Men in whom God has good pleasure need no peace, they already have it — how could God otherwise be pleased with them? But dividing the human race in this way: men of God’s good pleasure and men not of his good pleasure, is Calvin’s doctrine, which he himself admits to be “horrible.”

We must read the nominative εὐδοχία, not the genitive εὐδοχίας. This nominative is parallel to the other two nominatives: δόξα and εἰρήνη. The *eudokia* expresses the *voluntas Dei antecedens*, his original will to save

(“God so loved the world,” John 3:16), as distinguished from the *voluntas consequens*, the will that sets in when men either believe or disbelieve (Mark 16:16), according to which he both saves and damns. The ἔν, which some are ready to omit from the text, is due linguistically to εὐδοκία (C.-K. 354), and is construed with the nominative: God’s saving *eudokia* (good will) rests in or on men, all of them. His Son’s birth is the supreme evidence for this *eudokia*. Peace is for the earth, because God’s good will is now so completely evidenced for all men. This Divine Babe is the whole world’s Savior.

## Homiletical Aid

Historical narration in the text invites us to use analysis for the sermon outline. Our text records 1) the imperial decree which compelled Joseph and Mary to go to Bethlehem; 2) the birth itself in a room containing a manger; 3) the announcement of the angel; 4) the praise of the angel host. Loy illustrates this simple analytical type of outline.

### **The Savior is Born.**

Let us dwell

- I. On the marvelous fact;
- II. On the glorious announcement.
- III. On the angelic praise.

The decree and the birth are placed into one part, so that the ’ sermon appears with only the customary three parts. The formulation of the outline is entirely didactic and commonplace. It would be a pity if the sermon rose to no higher level. I should like to see the preacher on this higher level already in his outline.

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Sommer presents

## **The Birth of the Savior of the World.**

- I. Its world-historical preparation.
- II. Its lowly appearance.
- III. Its heavenly announcement.

To restrict the outline to three parts instead of four, Sommer combines the one angel's announcement and the many angels' praise into one part. The form is again didactic.

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Why not formulate something like this:

### **Sing Forth Your Joy at the Christchild's Birth!**

St. Luke shows us how this blessed Child was born, served by

- I. The imperial decree of Caesar Augustus.
- II. The lowly manger of a beast.
- III. The herald angel's proclamation.
- IV. The angel host's praise.

The text itself calls for homiletical appropriation because of the pronouns: "I bring you good tidings of great joy — unto you is born this day" etc. While "you" refers to the shepherds, "peace on earth, on men good pleasure" includes all of us.

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Other efforts at analytical outlines use auxiliary concepts. Von Staehlin the concept of a journey:

### **Our Christmas Journey.**

- I. To the palace of Caesar Augustus in Rome.

- II. To the poor manger in Bethlehem.
  - III. To heaven and the glory of God.
  - IV. To the fields and the poor shepherds.
- 

Ahlfeld dares to form as many as six parts, using the concept of a Christmas celebration:

### **The First Christmas Celebration.**

- I. God's festive preparations.
- II. The place of the celebration.
- III. The festive congregation.
- IV. The preacher.
- V. The sermon.
- VI. The song of the choir.

As the parts reveal, the idea of a celebration is really not adaptable.

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Although the text is so easily analyzed, somehow quite a number of preachers think they must try superimposed analysis (*S.* 99). Appuhn

### **The Manger at Bethlehem.**

- I. A throne.
  - II. An altar.
- 

### **Behold, I Bring you Good Tidings of Great Joy!**

For in the newborn Savior you have:

- I. Riches.
  - II. Honor.
  - III. Health.
  - IV. Peace. — Sommer.
- 

### **Christ is Born, Rejoice, O Christendom!**

In Christ's birth

- I. The lowly find exaltation.
  - II. The fearful consolation.
  - III. The sick healing.
  - IV. The restless peace. — Sommer.
- 

### **The Manger in Bethlehem.**

- I. The turning point of all time.
- II. The high point of all love.
- III. The starting point of all salvation.
- IV. The central point of all worship. — Uhlhorn.

These preachers are impelled to use more than two or three parts by the nature of analytical superimposition, which in most cases prefers a number of items in the development, although Appuhn finds it possible to employ only two parts.

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In the literature available to me there is a dearth of synthetical outlines. Most men will do no transposing. Yet we may even reverse the order of the items in the text and thus use synthesis:

## **“Joy to the World, the Lord has Come!”**

- I. Bringing God’s peace and good will.
  - II. The Savior, who is Christ the Lord.
  - III. Born as the Virgin’s Firstborn Son.
  - IV. As promised in David’s own city.
- 

## **There is Saving Joy Wherever we Look in the Christmas Story.**

How can any of us remain joyless and unsaved? Look

- I. “Into the highest” [1]. 14).
- II. Into the lowly manger.
- III. At the angel and at the angel army.
- IV. At David’s city and at the emperor’s decree.

Any rearrangement of the items of the text that suits a central idea formulated as a theme will constitute a synthetic outline.

# Second Christmas Day. Matt. 23:34-39

## Stephen's Martyrdom

Second Christmas Day is seldom celebrated in our American churches, although the American Lutheran Hymnal makes full provision for it liturgically. Second Christmas Day was anciently intended to commemorate Stephen's martyrdom. Hence the Hymnal offers the ancient epistle text Acts 6:8-15; 7:54-60, which deals with Stephen himself, and the ancient gospel text Matt. 23:34-39, which is broader and deals with all the martyrs killed by the Jews. The Catholic, the Lutheran, and the Anglican text selections are identical.

Luther wanted to substitute as the gospel for this day Luke 2:15-20, dropping the idea of martyrdom entirely, and making the shepherds illustrate how we now should receive the Savior into our hearts. Both Nebe and Sommer follow Luther's lead in their works on the old gospel texts. In my opinion the old text selections should be left unchanged whenever we know with certainty what the text was. To change even the significance of a festival day is doubly wrong. It may seem strange that the Church appointed the commemoration of Stephen's martyrdom for the day after Christ's birth; we must remember that the day of a martyr's death was considered his birthday ushering him into the heavenly life. The Church called these days the *natalicia martyrum sanctorum*.

See *The Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel* 893 etc., and *The Eisenach Gospel Selections*, 720 etc. When this text is used for the Tenth Sunday after Trinity, as is done in the Eisenach Selections, the obdurate Jews are the subject and the burden of the sermon is the warning that we may not follow their example. When used for the commemoration of Stephen's martyrdom, the subject are the martyrs and the burden of the

sermon is the stimulation of our faith by the example of the men and the women who died for their Savior and their faith.

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The celebration of Stephen's martyrdom (the epistle). The martyrs abused and killed by the Jews (the gospel), afterwards also by the Gentiles. It is not strange that

### **The Christchild has Martyrs;**

Considering

I. Those who suffer martyrdom.

1. Commissioned by the Lord with his Word.
2. Believers and confessors of the Lord and his Word.
3. Absolutely loyal to the Lord.
4. Also filled with his spirit (v. 37). Considering also

II. Those who inflict martyrdom.

1. Who, like Jerusalem, reject Christ and his Word.
  2. Who scorn all Christ's warnings (v. 35-36:38).
  3. Who assume all the blood guilt from Abel onward.
- 

Stephen. The great galaxy of Christian martyrs. Matt. v. 11-12; Rev. 6:9-11; 20:4.

### **"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem!"**

I. The martyrs thou hast made!

1. Beginning with Stephen and Saul's bloody persecutions.
2. The martyrs the seed of the Church, not the sign of its destruction.
3. The ten pagan persecutions, and those in modern times.
4. Can the Lord call upon us to join this host of martyrs?

## II. The doom thou hast brought upon thyself!

1. All the righteous blood from righteous Abel onward.
2. Jerusalem now a Mohammedan city (v. 38).
3. The Jews scattered over all the world, without a homeland, capital, government, a standing miracle and sign of judgment for all nations.
4. The only hope is those Jews who repent and come to believe, greeting Christ with the Palm Sunday confession: "Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord."

# The Sunday After Christmas.

## Luke 2:33-40

**“Behold, this Child is Set for the Fall and Rising Again of Many in Israel!”**

The question has been raised whether this pericope should not begin with v. 25. This extension has been advocated. But it would alter the burden and the significance of the text and make it less appropriate for the last Sunday of the secular year. Some may not think so because they regard Simeon as having been a very old man and they take his word about departing in peace to mean departure. from this earthly life. But Simeon says: “Now art thou releasing thy slave (manumitting him), Supreme Master, according to thy utterance, in peace.” Simeon is speaking of something higher than the time of his death, see my *Interpretation of St. Luke’s Gospel*. Since Simeon’s departure from life is not in the text, a correspondence between such departure and the passing of another secular year is excluded.

The ancient text begins with v. 33 and its great burden is found in v. 34, in Simeon’s prophetic words regarding what the Child in his arms is set to be. All that is said about Anna, in particular that “she went on speaking concerning him to all those expecting Jerusalem’s ransoming,” is subsidiary to Simeon’s prophecy. In the light of this great prophecy we also read v. 40, that the Child kept growing up with God’s grace resting upon him.

This text has no reference to the end of the secular year. The last evening of the year, December 31, called Sylvester Eve, is the time for dealing with the solemn passing of another earthly year. In all my experience I have found that our people love this final Sylvester Eve service. The Sunday after Christmas continues what Christmas and Second Christmas Day began, save that the continuation is prophetic. Place v. 34 and Anna’s word “Jerusalem’s ransoming” beside v. 10, the angel’s designations for the

Child, and the progress in thought is apparent. In the gospel records we lose sight of Jesus, save for the one incident occurring in his twelfth year, until he begins his great Messianic work with his Baptism. Simeon tells us God's great intent and purpose concerning Jesus.

The scene is the court of the women in the Temple in Jerusalem forty days after the birth of the Child. Joseph and Mary were still living in Bethlehem where they now intended to make their permanent home. Joseph had found a house for his family and had begun to work at his carpenter trade. Two matters had to be attended to in the Temple, the requirements regarding Mary's purification according to Lev. 12:1 etc., and those regarding the presentation of Jesus to the Lord as a firstborn son according to Ex. 13:2 (Luke 2:22), had to be met. The Holy Spirit himself directed Simeon to be present in the Temple court at this hour when Joseph and Mary came in with the Child. Other parents were present in the Temple court for the same purpose. Simeon, it seems, was already present in the court when Joseph and Mary arrived. How he singled out the Child we are not told, save for the intimation that the Holy Spirit gave him the necessary indication (v. 27). Simeon then accosted the parents, was permitted to take the Child into his own arms, and then by the Inspiration of the Spirit spoke the great words of prophecy.

[33] After Simeon's first statement Luke writes: **And his father and his mother were wondering at the things spoken concerning him.** It astonished them to learn that this man Simeon knew all about their Child. Simeon's first words went even beyond Matt. 1:21 and Luke 1:32-33 and 2:10, which refer only to what the Child should be for Israel; Simeon includes all the Gentile nations in the salvation this Child was bringing. While ἡν is singular in agreement with the subject Joseph, the participle is plural and also includes Mary, and is masculine because in 'all such constructions where two genders are mentioned the masculine form has the preference. Luke freely writes "the parents" in v. 27, and now "his father and his mother." It is a hopeless endeavor to satisfy the skeptic who is determined to get rid of the Virgin Birth and the deity of Jesus by reading "his father" without reference to what Luke has written 1:34-35.

[34] Simeon's prophecy continues, but it is separated from the preceding words by an act of blessing. **And Simeon blessed them, and said to Mary his mother: "Lo, this one is set for a falling and a rising up of many in**

**Israel, and for a sign spoken against. Moreover, also through thine own soul shall a great-sword go. In order that there may be revealed out of many hearts (their) thoughts."** Simeon's blessing, pronounced on both parents, is not recorded; it probably referred to God's placing this Child into their care. The fact that Simeon turns to Mary and passes by Joseph is due to his prophetic insight that Joseph will no longer be alive when the things now foretold shall come to pass. Joseph died a long time before Jesus began his ministry.

"Lo" exclaims because of the wonder of what is now said; κείται serves as the passive of τίθημι: "this one is set," i.e. by God himself for the double purpose indicated by the εἰς phrase: "for a falling and a rising up of many in Israel," to which a second εἰς phrase adds the elucidation: "and for a sign spoken against." It is worth noting that the entire revelation vouchsafed to Joseph and Mary until this time deals only with the *voluntas antecedens*, the antecedent will of God, which takes account only of man's fallen estate and sends grace and a Savior for all men alike (John 3:16; Rom. 9:33b; Acts 4:12). Thus Matt. 1:21: "He shall save his people from their sins"; Luke 1:33: "He shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his Kingdom there shall be no end"; Luke 2:11: "a Savior, who is Christ the Lord," v. 14: "on earth peace, good will to men." Even Simeon's first prophecy is universal: "Thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all people, a light to lighten the Gentiles and the glory of thy people Israel." All these revelations say nothing about the coming unbelief and the opposition, and of their terrible consequences, nothing about the *voluntas consequens*, which, resting on the infallible foreknowledge, takes into account the effect of grace in men's hearts. When men reject grace in unbelief they fall, and it is God's will that they perish (Mark 16:16; Is. 8:14; Matt. 21:42:44; Rom. 9:33). On the other hand, when God's grace wins men and makes them rise up from sin and damnation to spiritual life, this is again the effect of the consequent will, and at the same time the execution of the antecedent will.

It is from Simeon that Joseph and Mary first learn the dreadful facts concerning the Child. Not only is the πῶσις of many placed first by Simeon, but "a sign spoken against" repeats the idea of opposition to Jesus. This "falling" is to be understood in the intensive sense of perishing. How so many in Israel could reject their own salvation and perish in unbelief is

for us inexplicable. All that we are able to say is that unbelief is the height of irrationality. To seek a rational explanation for attitudes and acts that are irrational is itself to make an irrational demand. Here lies the damnable guilt of unbelief. The man in Matt. 22:12 is speechless, — there is no rational answer. The man in Luke 19:20-21 did state a reason, but one which only condemned him out of his own mouth by its irrationality. When the Child is called “a sign,” his person and his future work are referred to as signifying in a divine way salvation for Israel and also for all men. Instead of believing the sign and accepting the salvation by faith, many right in Israel shall speak against him in unbelief, violently rejecting this heavenly Savior. Simeon’s words are true to this day, and not only as regards Jewish unbelief.

Yet, thank God, this Child is set also “for a rising up” of many in Israel. Ἀνάστασις is used as the opposite of πτώσις, a rising up from the prone condition of sin, death, and eternal guilt. One may think of spiritual “resurrection,” yet the context does not justify our elaborating this imagery. Both πτώσις; and ἀνάστασις are words indicating an action, because they are formed with the suffix -σις, and thus refer to what men will do, not to what will be done to them. Yet those who rise up do so only through this Child and the grace and salvation he brings, by which saving faith is wrought in them. Though Simeon has referred to the Gentiles (v. 32), he now speaks only of “many in Israel.” This restriction is proper when we note what follows, the reference to the crucifixion of Jesus. Mary herself shall witness what is here said of “many in Israel.”

Καὶ adds, and δέ states that what is added is different. Simeon foretells the terrible experience of Mary at the climax of the rejection of her son by Israel. So happy was Mary’s heart now with the sweet little Babe in Simeon’s arms, but he is the sign spoken against, and when this speaking against him shall be heard, Mary’s grief and pain shall be extreme, like the passing of a great-sword through her soul. Ῥομφαία is a great broad-sword used by the Thracians, Rev. 1:16; 2:12:16; 6:8; 19:15:21; Goliath’s sword, 1 Sam. 17:51 LXX; μάχαιρα is the Roman short-sword. In the figurative language here employed the greatsword is more expressive than the short-sword would be. It cannot well be said that this great-sword shall go through Mary’s heart, for it would entirely split an organ the size of the heart. This sword shall go through Mary’s soul, piercing it with the worst

pain: *Stabat Mater Dolorosa*. Mary, the mother of Jesus, shall be crushed with pain. The Romish opinion that Mary's suffering aided our salvation is just as baseless as the rationalistic perversion of Simeon's figure that Mary would seriously doubt the deity of her son.

Simeon spoke by direct Revelation and equally by Inspiration. Even the words in which he couched the prophecy were given to him. The words are plain and yet are marked by a certain reticence. They bear these characteristics of divine prophecy.

The purpose clause with ὅπως ἄν is to be construed with all that precedes, and is thus best written as an independent sentence: "In order that there may be revealed out of many hearts (their) thoughts." The aorist means "actually revealed." "Many" are those already mentioned, "many in Israel." By διαλόγιοι are meant the decisive thoughts, reasonings, or conclusions at which the heart arrives. It is remarkable indeed, but contact with the grace and salvation of Jesus invariably reveals the inside of men's hearts, whether they love darkness more than light (John 3:19) and thus turn against Jesus in unbelief, or whether they are brought to love the truth and by faith in the saving truth come to the light with their deeds wrought in God (John 3:21). When a man is brought face to face with Jesus, neutrality is impossible.

**[36] And there was Anna, 8. prophetess, daughter of Phanuel, of Asher's tribe. This one had gone far forward in many days, having lived with a husband seven years from her maidenhood, [37] and herself as a widow up to eighty-four years, who was not withdrawing from the Temple, with fastings and petitions worshipping night and day.**

Simeon utters the great prophecy concerning Jesus; Anna, the prophetess, promulgates it in Jerusalem. This witness for Jesus is remarkable because of her great age. Anna was honored as "a prophetess." This does not mean that she is comparable to men like Isaiah or Jeremiah. She may not even have been in a class with Agabus, who received some minor and incidental direct revelation from God. Most likely we must class her with Philip's daughters (Acts 21:9); she was one of those women who knew and interpreted to others the Word and the will of God for their edification. She had the valuable charisma of which Paul speaks at length in

1 Cor. 14, and like Philip's daughters used this gift in an unostentatious, quiet way. Right here we may note that the Spirit puts the prophecy into the mouth of Simeon, not into that of Anna; but it is Anna who receives, understands Simeon's prophecy and tells about it to many others (v. 38). In this way she acted as a prophetess.

It is her age that is remarkable, and probably on this account Luke, who is so fully informed, mentions her ancestry: "daughter of Phanuel, of Asher's tribe." This is one of the ten tribes that was lost in the Assyrian captivity. Some individuals among these tribes had survived and were now dwelling in Judea or in Galilee. Anna "had gone far forward in many days" (comp. 1:7 and 18), i.e. she was very old. Luke did not know her exact age, so he gives us the data which he has: she had been married for seven years after her maidenhood, and had now been a widow for no less than eighty-four years. If she had been married at the age of fifteen, she was now about one hundred and six years old. The opinion that eighty-four represents her entire age contradicts the text, which says that she had lived as a widow ἕως, "up to," eighty-four years, i.e. was adding still more years. So young the Babe, so ancient his first prophetess!

[37] Concerning Simeon's character we are told that he was righteous and devout, expecting Israel's Consolation, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. Concerning Anna Luke writes the litotes that "she was not withdrawing (imperfect) from the Temple," that she spent practically all of her time there. "With fastings and petitions worshipping night and day" is a separate modifier; Anna did not spend the night in the Temple. Δατρεύειν is the service which we all owe to God, not the official priestly service. Anna had no official position; her fastings and her petitions were entirely voluntary. Luke writes δεήσεις, "petitions," not προσευχαῖς, "prayers" in general. We take it that as Simeon waited for the Consolation of Israel, so Anna prayed for the fulfillment of the Messianic promises.

Here is something worth noting. The nation of the Jews was on a deplorably low spiritual level and nearly all the ruling classes were morally corrupt; yet God had here and there preserved for himself true Israelites who looked for Israel's Consolation, the coming spiritual Messiah. It is always thus. The true Church on earth never comes to an end. The Lord knoweth them that are his.

**[38] And having come up at this very hour she went on returning thanks to God, and went on speaking concerning him to all those expecting Jerusalem's ransoming.** Anna was in the women's court, but it was God's providence that at this very hour she came upon the little group. The participle ἐπιστᾶσα conveys the idea that all at once Anna was present, at the very moment when Simeon took the child and prophesied. Anna saw, heard, believed.

Two imperfect tenses describe what Anna now began and continued to do. Ἀνθομολογέμαι, "to make acknowledgment," is to be taken in the sense of gratefully acknowledging or "returning thanks." Anna's words are not preserved, for they varied from time to time. Her many petitions had been heard. As fervent as her requests had been, so fervent were now her thanks. Secondly, "she went on speaking concerning him to all those expecting Jerusalem's ransoming." In this way she continued as a prophetess: she took Simeon's prophecies, passed them on and explained their true meaning to these other people. Yes, despite the Pharisees and the Sadducees who perverted the Messianic prophecies, there were true Israelites in and about Jerusalem who hoped and prayed like Simeon and Anna. How many they were, we can only guess. Luke writes "all those expecting" etc. Let us not make their number too small, nor let us think that all of them were old people.

"Jerusalem's ransoming" recalls the word of Zacharias recorded in 1:68: Jehovah "wrought ransoming for his people." "Jerusalem" names the capital and means the nation. The promises were indeed made to the Jews, yet from them salvation was to spread afar to all nations (John 4:22). The genitive is objective: God is to ransom Jerusalem. Αὐτρώσις is "ransoming," the act of delivering by means of paying a λύτρον or ransom to set a slave or a captive free. The Chinese bandits and our own American kidnapers keep teaching us what a ransom and what ransoming are. Great effort is made to reduce the word as used here and in 1:68 to the mere idea of deliverance, to eliminate anything resembling the payment of a ransom. The deliverance, too, is supposed to be only political, freedom from the power of Rome, national independence and liberty. That *lutrosis* is to be understood spiritually is denied. Simeon and Anna, as well as Zacharias, are reduced to ardent patriots. How so? Simply because the skeptical commentators say so and are unable to see anything higher. Some, like the

grammarians Robertson, straddle the issue and mix the patriotic and political with the spiritual.

The facts are these: even in the varied connections in which λυτροῦσθαι is used in the Old Testament, the idea of a ransom is never absent, and in many instances is decidedly prominent. Always a cost and a price is paid. Westcott states the fact: "The idea that redemption costs much is everywhere present." We prefer the English word "ransoming" to "redemption," because the latter word has grown pale through constant use. Simeon and Anna saw in the Babe Jesus the great Ransomer who would pay the ransom to release Jerusalem from her spiritual bondage. The Jewish sacrifices had long taught the ransom of sacrifice and of blood. The question is raised as to how clear the word "ransoming" was to Anna. This is a favorite question with rationalists. Who can look into Anna's mind? She has been dead for a long time. To rob the dead woman of the idea of a divinely paid ransom through this Child is a despicable act. To do it in order to destroy the idea of Christ's ransom for Christians today only makes the deserved damnation the greater.

**[39] And when they had finished all the things according to the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee to their city Nazareth.** The Greek needs only the aorist "when they did finish"; the English prefers to mark the time relation with regard to the main clause: "when they had finished." Though Jesus was the Son of God, no requirement of the law was omitted or set aside in his case. The deity and the sinlessness of his human nature required perfect compliance; so also his redemptive mission. Luke draws the attention of the Gentile Theophilus to the great fact. "All the things according to the law of the Lord" embraces also the purification of Mary, for it was impossible for Jesus to have a mother who transgressed the plain provisions of the law of the Lord and remained ceremonially unclean. By this entire submission to the law of God the Lord Jesus, the Son of God, was placed beside us sinners to bear our burden and to free us from the condemnation of the law.

When Luke writes: "they returned to Galilee to their city Nazareth," he summarizes. Luke means: they did so eventually. He omits all that Matt. 2 records regarding the enforced stay in Egypt. That Nazareth lies in Galilee is noted already in 1:26 and a repetition of the geographical fact is thus unnecessary. Hence also Luke does not write: they returned "to Nazareth in

Galilee”; he writes: “they returned to Galilee” etc., meaning to this half-heathen country. Here the Child grew to manhood, not in Judea, not in the neighborhood of the Temple. The reason why Joseph took his family from Egypt to Nazareth and not to Bethlehem is recorded by Matthew.

**[40] Now the child kept on growing, and kept on gaining strength by being filled with wisdom; and God’s grace was on it.** Concerning the Baptist 1:80 states: “Now the child kept growing and gaining strength in spirit, and was in the desert regions” etc. The difference lies in what is added regarding Jesus’ “being filled with wisdom, and God’s grace was on it” (ἐπ’ αὐτό, neuter because of τὸ παιδίον). “Kept on growing” means physically, and “kept on gaining strength” means mentally and spiritually, even as the participle indicates: “by being filled with wisdom.” The young lad attained more and more σοφία. “wisdom,” which means knowledge in its proper use and application in life. We see what is meant from v. 47 and v. 49. namely that it was not mere secular wisdom but a wisdom that included the relation of Jesus to his heavenly Father and to the great purpose of his life in this world.

Something always baffles us when we try to penetrate the human development of Jesus. About all that can be said is what Luke here says. That Jesus grew physically from a babe to manhood presents no problem. Also that he gained mental strength gradually until we see the power of his mind in dealing with friend and with foe in his ministry. What will always baffle us is the deity of his person or ἔγω in this process of unfolding and the sinlessness of his human nature. In his growth Jesus is utterly beyond us and all that we see in our own children. We will ever have to leave him in a class by himself. He was indeed utterly unique in the fact that in all the universe he is the only being with two natures.

When Luke states “grace of God was on it” (the Child) he means that this was apparent from the perfection of the Child’s development. “Grace of God” as here applied to Jesus means indeed God’s blessed favor, but not with the connotation involved in the case of sinners who are full of guilt and deserve only punishment from God. That the Father should grant all favor to his beloved Son when incarnate as man is only to be expected. Luke notes the fact as one plainly apparent. Moreover, as a man Jesus was ever under God and wholly dependent upon God even as we are. Yet in his

case no trace of sin ever appeared to modify or to disturb this blessed relation to God.

## Homiletical Aid

Gabriel (1:31-33): “Son of the Highest” — “the throne of his father David” — “of his Kingdom there shall be no end.” The angel on Bethlehem’s plain: “A Savior who is Christ the Lord.” Now the prophecy of Simeon adds the reference to the Child’s suffering and death and to his bitter rejection by unbelief: “We will not have this man to reign over us!” Luke 19:14.

### The Child, a Sign Spoken Against.

#### I. The bitter experience of his mother.

So happy now standing in the Temple court of the women to redeem her firstborn according to the law (v. 23), but soon Joseph and she would flee to Egypt from the bloody hand of king Herod. This only the prelude. Joseph would be dead, but Mary would live to stand under her son’s cross and witness his fearful suffering and his death on Calvary. Jesus utterly rejected and accursed by the Jewish nation. The sword piercing through her soul.

#### II. The utter rejection of unbelief.

The denial of his virgin birth and of his deity. By the Jews who condemned him for calling himself the Son of God. They could and would not see in Jesus, the humble man from Galilee, the promised Messiah, mighty to deliver the Jews from their political oppressors and glorious to make them the rulers of the whole world. So they crucified him.

His virgin birth and his deity denied now in the same unbelief. Many reasons alleged why Jesus cannot be the Son of God miraculously born.

The rejection of his mission as the Lamb slain for our expiation. His blood and his righteousness despised by all unbelievers. The Jesus they would leave us is no Savior from sin and death.

### III. The hostility that faith must ever meet.

The faith of Mary and Joseph, of Simeon and Anna. How Anna spoke to all those who looked for Israel's redemption. The Child spoken against always has his true believers.

Your faith and mine must expect nothing else than this opposition to the divine Child. We are forewarned already forty days. after his birth. This opposition must intensify our faith. It would leave us only a sham Savior, no Christ able to save to the uttermost.

The Holy Child grew up as Luke describes in preparation for his great mission.

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Negative formulation is proper, because just as all positives involve the corresponding negatives, so all negatives point to their positives. The sermon dare not consist only of negatives. Where theme and parts are more or less negative the elaboration brings the positive statements in all their fulness.

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### **Jesus is Set for the Fall and Rising of Many.**

- I. The Holy Child Jesus is set for the fall of many in Israel.
- II. The Holy Child Jesus is set for the rising of many.

This is Loy's outline, — an illustration of a split theme. The parts are joined together and are then called a theme. Our preachers should be beyond this plain fault. Yet notable men besides Loy are guilty. Loy's theme is a good one. We may outline as follows:

Simeon is given to see the significance of the child Jesus. The Holy Spirit enables him to prophesy and state just why this Holy Child has been born.

### **Jesus is Set for the Fall and Rising of Many.**

I. Because of the person he is.

God's Son who existed in all eternity.

Virgin-born as man and in a state of humiliation, only in a small measure using the attributes of his deity.

Hence the blind and wicked unbelief that rejects him and brings men to fall in eternal damnation. Hence the enlightened faith that accepts him and rises from sin, death, and damnation to salvation and heaven. The obdurate Jews — Joseph, Mary, Simeon, Anna, those looking for redemption in Jerusalem. This cleavage runs through the world of men. Where do you stand?

II. Because of the mission that is his.

Gabriel foretold it when he spoke of the throne of David and of this Child's Kingdom that is without end (1:32-33), calling him the Son of the Highest. The angel on Bethlehem's plain foretold it when he called this Child the Savior, Christ the Lord (2:11).

Simeon speaks of his mission when he tells Mary about the sword piercing her soul; Anna when she tells about Jesus to those looking for Jerusalem's "ransoming." This Child's death and blood was to save the world. Thus he grew up sinless in his deity, and his wisdom was perfect for his mission.

Yet this his mission, which we now see fully accomplished, divides the world of men into the damned and the saved. Wicked unbelief wants no Savior from sin, it wants sin. Blind moralists want no ransoming blood, they want their little reforms of moralism. Thus these fall and perish. But our faith rejoices like that of Simeon and of Anna. We embrace this saving mission of Jesus and are among those who rise and enter heaven.

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Jesus himself said (Matt. 10:34): "I came not to send peace, but a sword." Simeon held this child Jesus in his arms and already at that time spoke of this Child causing many in Israel to fall and to rise. It has ever been so: this is

## The Child that Divides the World.

### I. He became the great Ransomer (v. 38).

Mary was to see him die on the cross and have the greatsword of extreme anguish pierce her soul. The death and the blood on Calvary ransomed all of us from sin, death, and hell. But it was this redemptive, saving act of Christ which divided the world of men. For now

### II. All unbelief rejects this Child.

This unbelief is inexplicable because it is utterly irrational and thus the climax of guilt, condemned and damned by itself. It prefers hell to heaven, darkness to light (John 3:19), guilt to pardon, God's wrath to God's grace. Thus the thoughts of many hearts are revealed by coming in contact with this Child.

### III. Faith alone accepts this Child.

His deity, his ransoming, the salvation he has brought. We see a few believers in our text, but the Jewish authorities and the nation turned against this divine Ransomer. So the division has ever continued.

The great question is where you and I stand.

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C. F. W. Walther, *Predigtentwuerfe*, presents the following. From the introduction we take a few sentences. After mention of Herod's murderous attempt we read:

But when finally Christ stepped out from his thirty years of silence and seclusion and appeared among his people with his message of grace and of joy, then too at once opposition against him arose from all sides. Pharisees, Sadducees, scribes, priests, high priest, elders of the people, king Herod, and the governor Pilate, they all like one man appeared against Christ, and even the people who at first clung to him with great love and heard him with great desire, nevertheless finally cried out regarding him: "Away with this man!" Rejected by his own people, Christ therefore finally bled on Golgotha and died amid the blasphemies and mockeries of many thousands

and oh! even amid the silence of his own. This opposition has now continued throughout the world for all the centuries until the present day.

Walther then brings out the thought that now it includes many so-called Christian churches. He says that all else may now be preached without arousing any special strife or contention, but as soon as Christ is again proclaimed, high and low, rich and poor, learned and unlearned become angry. Etc. So the question is asked: Are we perhaps mistaken in receiving Christ and the Gospel with joy? And this brings us to the theme:

### **Why the Universal Opposition to Christ and the Gospel is Not to Disturb Us in our Joy.**

#### I. Because this opposition is foretold in God's Word.

A selection of the prophetic passages similar to Simeon's prophecy. Whence this advance knowledge? Would it not have been possible that the world might simply have ignored Christ? God alone could know about this opposition. Hence its occurrence in no way disturbs but only confirms our joy.

#### II. Because this opposition has a ground as untenable as wicked.

In the case of the Pharisees pride and self-righteousness; in the case of unbelievers generally the claim that it is incredible that God should become man to ransom sinful man. How unworthy of God to become a babe, lie in a manger in swathing clothes, etc. The mystery and the incomprehensibility of the Incarnation are the very reason for our faith. The only way in which we could be saved was that God come and bleed and die in our stead. This is the abyss of divine love.

But who are they who voice such objection to Christ? Are they humble and men who seek the truth in fear? They are proud, arrogant spirits, who boast of the lantern-light of their own wisdom, who think they owe God nothing, but that he owes them everything.

Hence we are in no way disturbed by this opposition. Men self-righteous to the point of ridiculousness shall never take our joy from us.

III. Because this opposition has up to this hour not been able to prevent the dissemination and preservation of the Gospel.

The Gospel grew just as Luke says the Child Jesus grew. Yet the Gospel is not like Mohammedanism, suited to the flesh, but the very opposite, — still the Gospel grows. What have the opponents of the Gospel accomplished? They have fallen, etc.

Their opposition thus does not at all disturb our joy. Whatever the number of the Savior's opponents, we remain true to him.

# The Circumcision Of Christ (New Year). Luke 2:21

## The Savior's Circumcision

It is due only to accidental circumstances that the Festival of the Savior's Circumcision coincides with the secular New Year's Day. For when the Festival of the Nativity was placed on December 25 the Festival of the Circumcision was dated eight days later on January 1, because Jesus was circumcised eight days after his birth. The text is chosen accordingly. The entire Festival has nothing whatever to do with the beginning of the secular year. The ancient Church ignored the New Year's Day of the world entirely, it intended to do so. Not only did the Church have its own new year's day on the First Sunday in Advent and considered that enough; the Church also refused to celebrate the world's New Year's Day because the Roman pagan world celebrated this day with wild excess in typical pagan and worldly fashion. Hence the early Church was inclined to treat this day as one of repentance. Thus Caesarius of Arelate admonishes: *jejunemus ergo et stultitiam miserorum lugeamus* (quoted by Nebe).

The fact that the text for the preceding Sunday reports what happened on the fortieth day after the Child's birth whereas the present text takes us back to the eighth day, is disregarded; for the text for the last Sunday did not at all stress the point of the chronology, but was altogether centered only in the prophecy of Simeon which speaks of the Savior's rejection. The redemption of Jesus as the firstborn is not at all considered (v. 23-24). At a later period the Festival of the Circumcision began to be observed as a religious celebration of the secular New Year. This occurred after the population had generally become Christian and when the old excesses were no more in vogue. Yet the Reformation retained the ancient purpose of the Festival. In his Church Postil Luther says: "On this day they used to deal

out the New Year in the pulpits as though they did not have enough useful and salutary things to preach.” He speaks similarly in the House Postil. Note that in our liturgies the day itself is named “The Circumcision of Christ” and New Year is added only in parenthesis. The liturgical material has only an added collect for New Year.

When Nebe writes that now all evangelical preachers observe the day as one celebrating the New Year, this is not correct. Then we should now have different gospel and epistle texts; also the Introit and the Gradual should be changed, as well as the Collects. These alterations would break the ancient sequence of thought as expressed in the Church Year. Introducing the secular New Year’s Day would introduce an element entirely foreign to the sacred Church Year. To the churches of the Calvinistic type, such as have services on this day, this abandonment of the Circumcision would, of course, mean nothing, since these churches from their very beginning abandoned the Church Year and even now have recovered only fragments like Christmas, Easter, and an inadequate conception of Lent. We do well in “sticking to the text” and retaining the ancient significance of this festival.

**And when the eight days for circumcising him were fulfilled, his name was called Jesus, the one called by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.**

Luke’s account only implies that the Child was circumcised, for his main clause tells us that the Child was named Jesus in accord with the directions received from the angel. Yet Luke’s language by no means reduces the circumcision of the Child to a secondary or minor position. If the circumcision had been only a subsidiary act, Luke would have used a participle. No; the circumcision is taken for granted in Luke’s statement. “When the eight days for circumcising him were fulfilled” means that then, of course, the Child was circumcised. What is peculiar in this Child’s case is the act stated in the main clause, namely that he was duly called “Jesus” as God had ordered.

Regarding the two acts, circumcision and the giving of the name, it is the former that is of chief importance, because circumcision was given to Abraham as a sign of the covenant which God had bestowed on him (Gen. 17:12). Thus this sign had to be applied even when the eighth day was a Sabbath (John 7:22). The general custom of giving the child a name

arose later; it seems to have attached itself naturally to the rite of circumcision. Of course, no divine command regulated the giving of a name. In the case of this Child God selected the name for him and had his angel direct both Mary (1:31) and Joseph (Matt. 1:21) in regard to this matter. As regards this naming compare 1:59, the child of Zacharias.

As regards the circumcision of Abraham and thus of Jesus it is a grave mistake to trace the significance of this rite back to heathen sources. The fact that other ancients circumcised and the purpose for which they circumcised we must disregard altogether, for the pagan custom sheds no light on this covenant sign that God selected for Abraham and for his descendants. Circumcision as practiced in the phallic religions, of which religions Masonry is a modern exponent (hence the little white apron worn over the phallus, — see Wagner, *Freemasonry*), is wholly foreign to the soteriological significance which it had in Abraham's case. Nor can the biblical rite be associated with the idea of sacrifice, as though cutting away a part of the foreskin was a substitute for self-sacrifice to a god. These are the main pagan notions.

The soteriological idea is just about the opposite. Instead of glorifying the phallus (no woman can ever become a Mason!) or making the foreskin a substitute sacrifice to a god, the foreskin was treated as the symbol and the embodiment of uncleanness and impurity, so that its removal by the divinely appointed rite of circumcision was the act of cleansing and of purification. Israel was to be holy even as God was holy. The Philistines and other heathen people were significantly called “the uncircumcised,” i.e. the unclean.

To be sure, this outward rite considered by itself did not cleanse and sanctify. This is not the case even now with regard to Christian Baptism. Hence we have statements like Rom. 2:29: “He is a Jew which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.” Cf. also Col. 2:11. Whoever despised circumcision was therefore cut off from the covenant people of God, for he who rejected the outward sign could not possibly possess its inward, spiritual significance. To be uncircumcised was to be pagan. To bear the covenant sign was to be in the covenant, enjoying its blessings and keeping pure as this covenant required.

Sometimes the question is asked why God chose a rite applicable only to males. This question springs from the modern individualistic idea that a woman is the equal of the man in all respects. Correct that idea by consulting 1 Tim. 2:13; 1 Cor. 11:8-9. The biblical conception is that man and wife are one. The solidarity of the family involves the female members, and the man, not the woman, founds the family and establishes this solidarity. Thus, too, and thus alone could circumcision serve as a soteriological mark of the covenant made with Abraham.

On the basis of the facts thus sketched we may consider the significance and the importance of the circumcision of the Child Jesus. He was the Son of God and absolutely sinless. As far as his person was concerned he needed no circumcision. Just tell yourself that as far as his person was concerned he also needed not to be born man of the Virgin Mary. He came to save us from our sins and was thus born a member of the covenant people and was thus marked with the covenant seal of this people. All the promises God made to Abraham centered in this Child, and his circumcision was unlike the circumcision of any member of his people, even unlike that of Abraham himself. All of these were by their circumcision marked as intended recipients of the covenant blessings and salvation, but the circumcision of Jesus, God's Son, the Savior, marked him as the bestower of these blessings and of this salvation. The bestowal was not to be made, in fact could not be made, by one standing aloof and far off. As also the Baptism of Jesus plainly shows, the Savior had to join himself to those whom he purposed to save. Heb. 2:14. He placed himself under the load that was crushing them, to bear that load away in his own person and free them from it for ever. There was no uncleanness in Jesus which required circumcision, but we were full of uncleanness, as the Abrahamitic sign indicated, and needed this Clean One to cleanse us for ever.

Circumcision as the sign and the seal of the Abrahamitic covenant was pure Gospel. This Gospel character of the rite was not altered when 430 years after Abraham (Gal. 3:17) the law was given to Israel by the hand of Moses (John 7:22-23), only the eighth day was made legally obligatory (Lev. 12:3). Because of this legal provision Luke writes in v. 39: "When they fulfilled all the things according to the law of the Lord, they returned." Nothing required by the law was omitted in Jerusalem and certainly also nothing was disregarded in Bethlehem.

The circumcision is at times considered to be a part of the active obedience of Jesus and especially also the act by which he was placed under the law to fulfill its requirements in our stead and thus to redeem those under the law, that they may receive the adoption of sons. Some have even gone so far as to say that Jesus needed the active obedience for himself that he might be acceptable to God for his own person, and that this "obedience of his was not rendered for us and in our stead, — which is decidedly wrong. Jesus suffered the circumcision. Being a babe eight days old, the circumcision was not like his Baptism at the age of thirty years, a voluntary act on his part. Joseph just took the Child and performed the circumcision. This act brought pain to the Child and a little effusion of blood. The circumcision belongs to the passive obedience of Jesus.

We must not think that only a legal rite obligated one to fulfill the law. A Gospel rite like circumcision conveys a strong obligation in this respect. Born as a member of the covenant people and now marked with the covenant seal, Jesus certainly was under the law. But as the sinless Son of God his fulfillment of the law would not only be perfect, of divine value far beyond any mere man's fulfillment, but also Vicarious, in our stead, substitutionary, redemptive. Thus the importance of the Savior's circumcision appears.

Kaì before ἐχλήθη merely marks the apodosis in Hebrew fashion and is thus not translated. The Child's name was "Jesus," *Yehoshu'a* or *Yeshu'a*,

"*Yahveh* is help or salvation," meaning "the One through whom Jehovah brings salvation": "for it is he that shall save his people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21). The name "Jesus," Savior, is descriptive and appropriate in the highest sense. Others like Joshua (2 Jesus) had borne this name, it is used in Spanish countries to this day, but none was ever a "Savior" in a sense comparable to this blessed Child.

## Homiletical Aid

One minister tells me that he never liked to preach on this text, namely on circumcision, before a mixed audience. Another tells me that when he used this text he preached on the name "Jesus." Any reluctance regarding the circumcision is needless, because the sermon will describe the significance

of the rite and not emphasize the cutting away of the foreskin as a physical operation. To dwell only on the name and not on the circumcision is not to deal fairly with the text and with the ancient import of the day, which is “the Circumcision of Christ” and not his naming.

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The old promise to Abraham that in Isaac all the nations of the world were to be blessed. The fulfillment in the birth of the Virgin’s son in Bethlehem. Here is the Child who would bring salvation to us all. As he is born of Abraham’s blood according to the promise, so now St. Luke tells us that he received Abraham’s covenant sign, and also that he received the name chosen for him by God, the name “Jesus.”

### **When the Child was Eight Days Old.**

#### **I. He received the seal of the covenant.**

The covenant with Abraham, i.e., the promise of God, that a descendant of Abraham through Isaac would win salvation for the world. This son was now born even more miraculously than Isaac.

Hence he is given the seal of the covenant with Abraham, circumcision as instituted by God for his chosen people. It designated this divine Child not as needing cleansing and purification for his own person, but as the sinless One who is made wholly one with God’s people because he will bring them the cleansing and purification. He steps into the covenant in order to fulfill God’s covenanted pledge and promise.

We possess what that covenant and its seal promised. Without the fulfillment in Jesus we would all be hopelessly lost. Hence this day of joy calls forth our praises and our adoration of the Child.

#### **II. He was given the name “Jesus.”**

The Jewish custom of naming utilized by God. Both to Mary and to Joseph God gave the order thus to name the Child. Describe.

“Jesus” = Savior. Unfold all that lies in this name, using passages like Acts 4:12.

Jesus has saved us. The name infinitely precious to us.

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Loy has the following:

### **The Sacrament of Circumcision.**

I desire to speak of the circumcision of the old and of the new dispensation; in other words I. Of Circumcision in the strict sense, as the rite ordained for the Jews, and II. Of Baptism, which St. Paul calls the circumcision not made with hands (Col. 2:11).

Loy subdivides part one: 1) Circumcision was a. divine ordinance. — 2) Circumcision was a trial of the people's faith. What good can such a thing do? So Satan deceived Eve. — 3) By circumcision Jesus was made under the law as our representative. — 4) The name which our Lord received at his circumcision.

Part two is divided similarly: 1) Baptism has come in the place of circumcision. — 2) Baptism also proves our faith. What good can a handful of water do? — 3) Baptism works regeneration. — 4) Finally, the baptized are pledged to live in the name of Jesus.

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Jesus was born man, was circumcised, was redeemed in the Temple, was finally baptized by John the Baptist, in order that he might indeed be the Savior to free us for ever from our sins. All these acts regarding Jesus naturally have this special significance because he is the Son of God who needed nothing for himself but came to earth for our eternal advantage. So in our text we see

### **Jesus Placed in the Saving Covenant.**

I. He was placed in this covenant by means of the covenant seal.

The Gospel promise made to Adam and Eve, Gen. 3:15. Sealed by God's oath to Abraham (Heb. 6:17). From Isaac's descendants the Savior of Israel and of all the nations on the earth should come.

That covenant promise was now fulfilled: God had sent his own Son into the world as the world's Savior.

Thus Jesus was circumcised on the eighth day. He received the covenant seal ordained of God for the covenant people. Jesus was joined to Israel in this blessed covenant. Yet II. He was placed there as "Jesus," the promised Savior.

This is the meaning of his name, which God especially ordered Mary and Joseph to give him. He was not just another Israelite. He was not one of the nation who needed saving like all the rest and like the pagan peoples. He was the One who would do the saving in this covenant, and thus God had him named "Jesus," which means "Savior." Matt. 1:21.

His saving power and his blessed salvation extend to us. We are in Abraham's great covenant by Baptism, the saving Sacrament instituted by Jesus for us all, and by faith in Jesus. By looking at Jesus and seeing how he was placed in this covenant to be our "Jesus" and Savior we see the blessedness of our own position and are moved to remain true to it by faith and obedience.

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Before his conception Jesus was named as the Savior by the angel Gabriel. At his birth the same was done. So now when he is only eight days old the first step is taken in his position as the Savior: he enters the covenant as the Savior.

### **Jesus Enters the Covenant as the Savior by Receiving the Covenant Seal.**

#### **I. Abraham's covenant seal.**

Circumcision meant the cleansing and purification of the heart by faith in the promised Savior. Baptism has now taken its place, for the Savior has come. Husband and wife are one and his circumcision counted for all the female members of the family.

#### **II. The bearers of the circumcision seal.**

They all needed the cleansing and purification and were pledged to faith in the promised Savior as well as to obedience to the Savior's will. While other nations might have circumcision, none had it as such a divine seal, conveying so much and promising still more.

III. The One who needed no such covenant and seal.

He was God's own Son, born of a Virgin in an incomprehensible, miraculous way. He was pure and absolutely holy and could not be cleansed and purified like sinful men.

IV. This One came to bring what the covenant and its seal assured.

The others needed saving, Jesus was the Savior. He enters the covenant, not to receive, but to give what the covenant promised. He brought the cleansing that saves from sin and death.

V. Therefore at his circumcision he is named "Jesus."

"Jesus" = Savior, God is salvation. This little Child, only eight days old, shall save his people from their sins (Matt. 1:21). We are included. Our cleansing in Baptism and in faith. Our holy life as made partakers of the covenant through Jesus and his atonement. The covenant now is new because Jesus has fulfilled its old promise. Our joy in the Child "Jesus."

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Some may be disappointed because I offer no New Year's outlines. But I remain true to the text, which says nothing about a new year. Those who "dish out the new year" (Luther) preach almost entirely on the name "Jesus." They would sanctify the secular new year. What real sanctifying the year needs has already been attended to on the First Sunday in Advent. That should be enough. Some of the newer pericope selections present the New Year's idea, but not the ancient gospel and epistle selections. So I would not preach, as once I did, following Nebe's idea: Over the New Year's Portal write

**Jesus.**

The grace of Jesus; 2) the Church of Jesus; 3) The path of Jesus; 4) the help of Jesus; 5) the glory of Jesus. I attached a group of pious thoughts to the name "Jesus." I could have used almost any text which contained his name. I only "dished out the new year," than which Luther says we ought to do what is far better and more salutary. I certainly would not do it again.

# The Sunday After New Year.

## Matt. 2:13-23

### The Savior's Flight into Egypt

This Sunday occurs so seldom that it really has no individual name. It also had no text, for the text in our hymn books was chosen in the time of the Reformation. Now we hardly need to provide for this Sunday, for when it does occur in our church calendar we almost invariably use the text and liturgical parts of Epiphany which have a fixed date and thus so often fall on a week-day. Hence we offer no exegesis and content ourselves with a couple of outlines. For the exegesis see my *Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel*.

### Homiletical Aid

Luther covers the text very well when he speaks of the consolation and the instruction in this text. "The instruction is that we see how the devil and the world are hostile to the Child Jesus and his Kingdom, and are violently concerned about how they may crush, down, and even abolish them. The consolation is that this intention of the world does not succeed, the world must let Christ, his Word and his Church remain, and although some must suffer loss for Christ, yet it shall not be to their damage, but to their highest advantage; but the tyrants shall go to destruction in the matter, — nothing shall help them against that."

Introduction. — The hand of God so often invisible. We see only natural causes as they are called. In the present text the hand of God is visible and we are given needed instruction and strong consolation.

## **The Wonders of Divine Providence in the Preservation of the Child Jesus.**

### **I. The Child escapes.**

God used even miraculous means, v. 13-15 and 19-23. Often he uses what we call natural means in his designs.

The Child was not to be slain untimely, but was to accomplish his saving mission and was to die on the cross in executing this mission. God brings his blessed purposes to pass, now also in the Church and in our individual lives. But God lets some die.

### **II. The innocents are slain.**

The bloody tyrant Herod in this utterly futile massacre. Describe.

Why did God let such a crime occur? We have no complete answer. This only may we say: God wants some martyrs. These babes were unconscious martyrs and as members of the covenant were saved. Though Jesus was rescued on this occasion, he too died when God's hour came, died the death of the accursed on the cross, and no divine providence saved him. Much of what occurs in our lives is like the underside of a piece of fine embroidery, all a tangle of thread and ends of threads. Now we see only the underside of God's providences. Soon we shall see the upper side, a glorious, perfect pattern.

### **III. Herod perishes.**

His fearful death. The wicked have their wicked way in some things, but God brings them to book. Fret not thy soul because of evil doers, — they never triumph in the end. Herod's bloody plans helped to fulfill the prophecies (v. 15 and 23). The reign of Archelaus caused Jesus to be reared to manhood in Nazareth, to which Joseph had originally not intended to return. So Jesus was called "a Nazarene."

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The world did not seem to know or care that the Savior was born in Bethlehem. Heaven cared, for the angels sang in honor of his birth. And hell cared. It inspired king Herod to murder the Holy Child.

## **Hell Rages Against the Holy Child.**

### **I. Hell's attempts are in vain.**

Herod's cunning plan all known to God and frustrated by him in the simplest way; the Child safe in distant Egypt. Even prophecy thus fulfilled. No plan or attempt of Satan could spoil the plan and purpose of God. Ps. 2:2-6.

So hell rages in vain against the Church. Always God has those who have not bowed the knee to Baal. Martyrs, like the slaughtered innocents at Bethlehem, show hell's rage, yet glorify God and Christ for whom they die. God also takes care of you as one of his children. Yet remember that when the time came he let his own Son die helpless on the cross. Thus whether we live or die we are the Lord's.

### **II. God's purpose triumphs.**

It seemed as if Herod would surely succeed, the Child and Joseph and Mary seemed so helpless. The Magi were even made Herod's tools. But it was God who triumphed.

Herod's fearful end; he died as a monster of iniquity. So the enemies of Christ, though they are as strong and powerful as kings, are brought to their doom and punishment. The babes were slain, but their souls entered heaven; Herod perished, and his soul entered hell.

It is not for us with our poor finite eyes and minds to demand to know the mysteries 'of the counsels and judgments of God or of his wondrous plans. We are like children who ask foolish questions about what is beyond them. It is for us to trust God and our Savior and to hold to the consolation that God's great and blessed purpose ever triumphs, let hell rage as it may.

# The Epiphany Cycle

The Savior's Manifestation

## **Epiphany**

*The Magi Make Manifest the Deity and the Kingship of the Infant Jesus*

## **The First Sunday After Epiphany**

*The Boy Jesus Makes Manifest his Connection with his Father's Business*

## **The Second Sunday After Epiphany**

*Jesus Makes Manifest his Savior-Glory at the Wedding in Cana*

## **The Third Sunday After Epiphany**

*Jesus Makes Manifest his Saviorhood in Miracles of Healing*

## **The Fourth Sunday After Epiphany**

*Jesus Makes Manifest his Omnipotent Power over the Forces of Nature*

## **The Fifth Sunday After Epiphany**

*Jesus Makes Manifest his Divine Wisdom in Teaching*

## **The Sixth Sunday After Epiphany**

*God Makes Jesus Manifest as his Son in the Transfiguration*

# Epiphany. Matt. 2:1 -12

## **The Magi Make Manifest the Deity and the Kingship of the Infant Jesus**

The Epiphany Festival originated in the eastern church and was probably the earliest of all the Christian festivals. When it came into vogue in the western church about the fourth century it experienced a change in texts. For the original text Matt. 3:13- 17, the account of the Baptism and the Anointing of Jesus, Matt. 2:1-12 was substituted, the account concerning the Magi, so that the festival was also called the Festival of the Three Kings.

Augustine and some of the preachers of the Middle Ages supposed that the change in the gospel text indicated a change also in the significance of the Festival. No longer did these preachers consider Epiphany to be *the Festival of the Manifestation of Jesus*, but found in the text the call of the Gentiles to the Kingdom. The preachers of the time of the Reformation and many preachers of today follow the same thought. Thus Loy preaches on the theme: "The Heathen Come to Worship Christ"; and C. F. W. Walther, "That Christ Came into the World to Save also the Heathen." The festival is made a missionary festival, and some of the preachers have gathered their collections for missions on this festival. This attempt, however, is a total failure. Since Epiphany is fixed for the sixth of January, it generally occurs on a week-day. Anciently and in Reformation times and later this day was a holiday; but it has ceased to be treated so. The preachers thus shift the Epiphany service to the Sunday nearest to the day and so at least save the festival for the Church. But for the gathering of funds for missions a far better time is found in the late summer or the early fall, at the time of the celebration of a regular mission festival.

The change of significance from the Manifestation of Jesus to the idea of Gentiles coming into the Church was due to superficial thinking and was

passed on in the same superficial way. This change is not the result of a study of the Church Year, nor even of the Epiphany idea. “Epiphany” means “appearance” or “manifestation” and neither the festival nor the cycle has lost this name. The festival and the six texts following deal with one grand subject, and that subject is *the Manifestation of the Savior*. The festival itself strikes this grand note and the Sundays of the cycle carry forward the echo. It is a piece of thoughtlessness to retain the name Epiphany and to change the -meaning of the festival without changing also the meaning (and the texts) of the six Sundays following.

The epistle texts for this cycle would then likewise call for a change, for the ancient epistle texts which we still have in our hymnals treat of the *Christian’s Manifestation*. More must be said. Matt. 2:1-12 is not a true missionary text. The Magi come. Jesus, however, told his messengers to go. The Magi need no conversion to Christ; as converted men they come to Christ. They indeed come to honor the Babe with gifts and with worship, but in doing this *the Magi Make Manifest the Deity and the Kingship of the Savior*. The great Epiphany idea fills the text. The Magi make manifest this Child as Israel’s King in all Jerusalem, the capital of the Jews, and even in Herod’s court, though he was an Idumean. Instead of suggesting an ill-advised mission sermon about the Gentiles being brought to Christ, the text itself describes how the Gentile Magi brought the news of Christ to the Jews and to their Idumean king.

Behold the contrast: Gentiles adore the Infant Savior — the King of the Jews, Herod, seeks to kill him! Both incidents are prophetic for the Messianic King and for his Kingdom.

**[1] Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, 10, magi from eastern parts arrived at Jerusalem, [2] saying: “Where is he that was born King of the Jews? For we saw his star in the east, and came to worship him.”**

Matthew mentions the birth and the naming of Jesus in 1:25. In the genitive absolute “Jesus having been born in Bethlehem of Judea” the mention of the place is important because of what follows, likewise the general time of the birth, which was still “in the days of Herod the king,” toward the end of his life. Joseph had determined to remain in Bethlehem and not to return to Nazareth. He had secured a house for his little family

and for his workshop as a carpenter. The Child had been duly presented in the Temple at Jerusalem (Luke 2:22 etc.). The Romans had granted Herod the title “king,” and Matthew so names him here; his territory was divided after his death.

The main statement is introduced by the interjection “10,” because it is bound to cause great surprise. No person imagined that anything like this could happen: “magi from eastern parts arrived at Jerusalem,” seeking the newborn Child. Indeed, the surprise is altogether too much for the critics. They refuse to believe the account, they pronounce it spurious, a late myth invented to glorify Jesus, for which reason also they translate μάγοι with “magicians” the more easily to make the story false, for magicians would indicate charlatans. These visitors from eastern parts were “magi,” and a fair translation renders the word as “wise men.” The eastern parts from which they hailed cannot have been either Arabia or Medo-Persia, because these men are presented as astronomers versed in the science of the stars. These “magi” came from Babylon, where since the most ancient times and far down into the Christian era astronomy and astrology were sedulously studied.

From the three kinds of gifts that they brought to Jesus the hasty conclusion was drawn that these magi were three in number, but Matthew says nothing whatever to this effect. The three kinds of gifts came from the magi jointly, and not even from them alone, for they were really only a committee or a commission sent out from the whole guild of magi in Babylon and thus were fitted out by the guild with these significant gifts. In Christian legend the magi were elevated to the position of kings, “the three kings of the Orient,” because it was considered to be more proper that kings should bow down and worship “the King of the Jews,” Jesus. It is well for the preacher to correct and to remove these fancies from the sober account of the evangelist.

The magi of Babylon were wealthy. Hence those mentioned in our text could travel the distance they had come and could present such gifts of great value to Jesus. Their knowledge of the King of the Jews who at some time was to be born in the Jewish land goes back to the prophet Daniel, 600 years earlier, who lived at the court of the Babylonian king and held such a high position that he was “chief of the governors over all the wise men (magi) of Babylon” (Dan. 2:48). Some have thought of later Jewish contacts

with the magi of Babylon, which we need not deny, but the close contact with one of God's great prophets during the Babylonian captivity carries more weight and would leave a far more lasting impression than any later Jewish contact could.

So we imagine a number of these learned and dignified men from the Babylonian royal court riding into the Jewish capital on fine riding camels with a stately retinue, causing no small sensation among the Jewish populace. Jerusalem indeed had many foreign visitors and some of these were prominent men, but never had magi from distant Babylon ridden into her portals.

[2] Part of the great surprise was the question the magi asked: "Where is he that was born King of the Jews?" This King whom the magi seek is no ordinary royal child to rule a nation in the ordinary way of kings, "for," the magi say, "we saw his star" in the east and came to worship him," προσκυνῆσαι, to bow in the dust before him, to do obeisance to him. The aorist participle τεκθείς merely marks the fact that the King "was born," likewise the aorist indicative ἦλθομεν, "we came," for which the English prefers the relative tenses, a past and a present perfect. An implication lies on the surface of this astonishing question, namely that the birth of this King of the Jews is of such importance that it concerns also the people of Babylon. This King is far too great for the one people of the Jews. Babylon has its own king, yet it is no disloyalty to their own king for these magi to seek out this newborn King of the Jews and to do obeisance to him. To be able to do this and to make report on their return to the other magi of Babylon and to their chiefs was the object of the long journey of these men. They expected this King to do great things also for Babylon, yea, for the world.

For which king's birth had ever been signaled by a star in the heavens? "We saw his star in the east" involves two questions, one about the star itself, and the other about the way in which the magi connected it with the newborn King. We may as well say at once that no one is able to answer the second question. The Babylonian magi were entirely correct as regards the star, — it was indeed "his star," the divine sign that the promised Savior was now born. There is no recorded Old Testament prophecy stating that such a star would appear at the time of the birth of the Messiah. All that the

prophet Daniel had communicated to the magi in his time we, of course, do not know.

Regarding the star itself a few important things may be said. It could not have been a star in the distant firmament like the many stars which we see on a clear night, for one more star twinkling in the distant empyrean could not have moved before the traveling magi to direct their journey, nor could it have indicated the house in the village where Jesus Was. All the research by noted astronomers like Kepler, including even the examination of Chinese astronomical tables, has been barren. To speak of a comet, of a constellation, of a meteor, etc., is not even good guessing. This star must be regarded as being wholly exceptional, its movements not at all in a fixed orbit, moving, in fact, so low in the sky as to serve its purpose, also appearing only for that purpose and then disappearing. This star was a phenomenon the like of which these magi had never seen in all their astronomical experience. No wonder they were deeply affected. This was a, miraculous star, used by God to bring the Babylonian magi into connection with his Son Jesus.

Naturally the magi came first to Jerusalem. The people of the capital of the Jews surely would know where their King had been born and thus where he could be found. It must have puzzled the magi greatly when their inquiries were met by blank ignorance and surprise at such a question. The people in Jerusalem knew nothing about a King of theirs recently born. Their king was Herod, and he was old and had sons, but had no recently born son.

**[3] Now when Herod the king heard it, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.** The magi did not go to Herod. The news of their presence and of their search reached the king through persons of his court. That he should be shaken by hearing of the birth of the King of the Jews does not seem strange when we consider that he thought only of an earthly political king, not of a spiritual King. Herod was an Idumean and had no Jewish blood in his veins. He was a usurper. He was greatly upset by the news of this recently born “King of the Jews” because this would be a legitimate king with rightful claim to the Jewish throne. Though Herod was old and this newborn King still a babe, yet Herod wanted the rule of the country retained in his own family.

All Jerusalem, the capital, was troubled with Herod because the populace of the city guessed the true reason for the king's agitation and dreaded the measures the bloody old tyrant would most likely take to put down any movement among the people in favor of the newborn King. The contrast is highly dramatic and significant: the Gentile magi came from distant lands to worship the newborn King — Herod and the Jewish capital are upset by the news of this King's birth.

[4] Herod's plan is quickly made, — the infant King must be killed. **And having gathered all the high priests and scribes of the people he inquired of them where the Christ is born.** Herod calls a plenary session of the Sanhedrin. These religious authorities of the Jews should know the answer to his question. Herod must know where to find this infant King in order to kill him. "The Christ" is appellative, i.e. the Messiah promised to the Jews. Here indeed is a strange thing, — Herod is ready to believe what the Scriptures say about the place of the birth, but he is not ready to believe all the rest that the Scriptures say about the reign of this Christ; in fact, he imagines that he is able to nullify all this by killing the Christ. The inconsistencies and the self-contradictions of unbelief have ever been astonishing.

The Sanhedrin consisted of three sets of members; but often only two are named when designating the body. There was, of course, only one reigning high priest, but this office was no longer held for life. Those who had held it still bore the title, and the title, it seems, was given also to the reigning high priest's relatives who sat in the Sanhedrin. The present tense in the question is timeless.

**[5] But they said to him: "In Bethlehem of Judea;" for thus it has been written through the prophet:**

**[6] 'And thou, Bethlehem, land of Judah,  
By no means art least among the leaders of Judah;  
For out of thee shall come forth one that leads,  
Who shall shepherd my people Israel.'**"

These learned Sanhedrists knew Micah v. 2. The scribes among them were ardent students of the Old Testament. Note well, here the highest Jewish authority quotes Micah v. 2 to prove that "the Christ" was to be born in Bethlehem of Judea. Every one of us can examine the passage for

himself. When now the Jews claim that “the Christ,” “the Servant of Jehovah” as Isaiah calls him, is not at all an individual but the entire Jewish nation, they must face not only Micah v. 2 but also the authoritative interpretation of their own Sanhedrin in Herod’s time. The perfect tense “has been written”= and stands thus written now. Διά, “through” the prophet denotes verbal inspiration, as in 1:22: God the speaker, the prophet his instrument. Moreover, both in 1:22 and here it is not Matthew who uses the phrase, but an angel and the Sanhedrin.

[6] The Sanhedrin quotes relative to the point at issue, just as we do today, and not with useless mechanical literalness, such as so many critics are pleased to demand of Scripture. Hence “Ephratah” (fruitful) is omitted as being unnecessary; and “land of Judah” is inserted from 1 Sam. 17:12, locating the small village as the one quite near to Jerusalem.

Micah makes a comparison in regard to population. An *'eleph* is a thousand, counting families and family heads, and *'alluph* is head or chief of a section having at least a thousand families. Micah names the thousands, the Sanhedrin names “the leaders or chiefs” (ἐν τοῖς ἡγεμόσιν). Bethlehem, too little to have a place when the thousands in Judah were counted, is nevertheless not the least among them, but really the very greatest, for this little village without a ἡγεμών shall furnish the great “Leader” (ἡγούμενος) for all Israel. Micah’s last clause is omitted as not being pertinent to Herod’s question, and in place of it a clause from 2 Sam. v. 2 is added: “who shall shepherd my people Israel.” The figure of shepherding a people, ruling them with the wise and tender care of a shepherd, recalls the rule of David. Indeed, Jesus was to be the Shepherd of Israel.

The strange fact is that Herod accepts this prophecy as far as Bethlehem is concerned, but is blind to the last clause that the King born in Bethlehem should shepherd God’s people Israel. So men see what they want to see in Scripture and are blind to what contradicts their desires.

[7] The wily king now knew the place, he wants to learn also the time of the birth. **Then Herod, after secretly calling the magi, ascertained from them the time of the shining star.** The inquiry directed to the Sanhedrin was public and bore a natural air. The inquiry addressed to the magi is secret, for Herod wants to hide his interest in the infant King, lest the people of Jerusalem become still more suspicious and disturbed: Herod says

nothing whatever about the King or his birth, he pretends an interest only in “the time of the shining star,” as if the astronomy regarding the star were the main thing for him. What Herod really wished to know was the time of the infant King’s birth, the Child’s approximate age. The attributive participle φαينوμένου means no more than “shining.” The star was not now visible while the magi were in Jerusalem.

[8] ’How Herod deceived the magi we are now told. **And he sent them to Bethlehem and said: “When you have gone, carefully search out about the young child. And when you find, report to me, in order that I too may come and worship him.”** Only because it was offered in a secret conference could a lie like this be perpetrated on the magi without arousing suspicion, for they were men who knew neither Herod nor the people of Jerusalem. By telling them the place Herod poses as one doing them a favor. The king spreads his net cunningly, — the magi, the great admirers of the newborn King, are to aid in this King’s undoing. The plan seemed to be perfect.

[9] **And they after hearing the king, went.** The secret conference must have occurred under cover of darkness, at night. One wonders whether the magi harbored any suspicion at all regarding Herod. They, the magi, set out at once for Bethlehem, although it was night, — but Herod lets them set out alone. No retinue from the court accompanies them. Did the magi note the omission? Apparently, Herod is in no great hurry about seeing the infant King. To be sure, Bethlehem was only two hours’ walk from Jerusalem and on a straight road, so no guide for the magi was required.

**And, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, was going before them, until, having come, it stood above where the young child was.** The magi met a great surprise when they rode out of the city. Here again was this strange star which they had last seen in the far east. The imperfect tense “was going before them” is descriptive, picturing the star’s movement. The star led the way. Then, when Bethlehem was reached, the star stood still above the very house where Jesus was. God directed the magi to his Son, not Herod.

Is this a child’s fanciful narrative, which we adults must discard as not being true? The critics think so. Various untenable explanations are offered by believing commentators, but these explanations only encourage the

critics who cry: "Impossible!" I agree with the critics — if this was a star like the stars we see in the heavens at night, then the story is impossible. Such a star could not lead men from Jerusalem to Bethlehem and could not indicate a certain house in the little Village. I have already indicated the miraculous nature of this star and need add no more.

[10] **Now when they saw the star they rejoiced with joy exceedingly great.** And no wonder! For the magi now knew that God was leading them and that in a little while they would be in the presence of the divine King.

[11] **And having come into the house, they saw the young child, together with Mary his mother; and having fallen down, they worshipped him; and having opened their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold, and frankincense, and myrrh.** It was night. Joseph admitted the magi. The house was the one which Joseph had secured for permanent residence in Bethlehem. Mary is mentioned because the Child was in her arms when she brought him out to the magi. The fact that Joseph is not mentioned is without significance.

The magi fell down and worshipped the Child, — not also Mary. They had not worshipped Herod. Only Joseph and Mary saw them' do this; the Child was too young to know. The house was quite humble, the little village quite unknown, the Babe perhaps quite sleepy. We know of only one explanation for this act of the magi, — they knew that this Child was divine, sent by God to bless the world. With this accords the next act, they opened "their treasures" (receptacles) and presented the Child with gold, frankincense, and myrrh. We are not told of gifts to Herod. Let us understand" that these gifts to Jesus were sent by all the magi of Babylon, the few magi here in Bethlehem serving as a committee. It is unwarranted to conclude that three types of gifts means three magi. Names for the three are also only legendary inventions.

That gold is a royal gift is apparent. But why are frankincense and myrrh added? It is superficial to say that all three gifts are such as are given to royalty alone. To call them the products of the country is untrue, for gold was never found in Babylon, and frankincense comes from India. The gifts indicate what the magi see in Jesus. The old fathers thought that gold is intended for the Child as King, frankincense for the Child as God (for frankincense was burnt on the altar in the Temple), and myrrh for the Child

as destined to suffer and to die. It is no improvement on this view to allegorize the gifts and to substitute for what the Child is (King, God, Sacrifice) something that we are, we with our gold of faith, with our incense of prayers, and with our bitter myrrh of suffering. The ancients were nearer the truth than these subjective present-day interpreters.

[12] **And having been divinely warned in a dream not to turn back to Herod, they withdrew by another road to their country.** The magi composed themselves for sleep. On their long journey they carried camping outfits. Soon the warning dream came. When God uses dreams for communicating something, he enables the dreamer to realize that he is having no ordinary dream, but is indeed receiving a message from God. Before the morning dawned the magi slipped away from Bethlehem and by another way reached Babylon. God had upset Herod's cunning scheme. He sat in Jerusalem only a few miles away, and the magi never returned.

## Homiletical Aid

I retain the original idea regarding the Epiphany Festival as indicated in this beautiful text: the magi make Jesus manifest as what he is, the King of the Jews who is to bless also Babylon and the whole world. In five of the texts in this cycle Jesus manifests himself, but in two, namely in the present text and in the one for the Sixth Sunday after Epiphany, others make Jesus manifest.

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Introduction — Epiphany = manifestation. The little Child Jesus made manifest by the magi as “the King of the Jews,” as the divine King with a world-wide mission and rule.

### **The Epiphany Sun in Bethlehem.**

- I. Its light shines with brilliance and loveliness.
  1. The star sent by God, and all that connects with this star (describe).

2. The prophecy (v. 6) now begun to be fulfilled.
  3. The publicity about the Child as “the King of the Jews” in Jerusalem.
- II. Its light must illumine our hearts.
1. Herod, the Sanhedrists, and the people in Jerusalem remained in the darkness. So many today.
  2. The magi were drawn to the Child, found him, worshipped and honored him; so must we receive the light of Epiphany to illumine and to bless our entire lives.

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The “wise men” were not kings, as we might think from the song, “There came three kings from the Orient.” How many they were we do not know; their three types of gifts do not prove their number to be three. Their names, too, are not known; when names are given to them, these names are invention. The wise men who came from the East belonged to an ancient guild in the great eastern country and in the city of Babylon, which had high standing at the court of the king and busied itself among other things with astronomy. These wise men were rich, learned, influential, of high standing. These were the men whom God used to produce an epiphany for the Babe Jesus, that is to make manifest who this Babe really is.

### **The Wise Men in the East Make Known the New-Born King of the Jews.**

- I. Their faith.
- They got it six hundred years before from Daniel, — note Dan. 6:26 — 28; 7:13-14. These wise men had looked for centuries for some sign that the promised King would appear. God finally sent them
- II. The star.
- A miraculous star, unlike the stars we see in the distant sky. It hung so low; it came and went; it served only them and then disappeared. They recognized the sign. To this manifestation in Babylon came the manifestation in

### III. Jerusalem.

The inquiry for the newborn King of the Jews. Herod and the city are stirred. The Gentile wise men love and seek to worship the King, but Herod and the people do nothing of the kind. John 1:11. The wise men are sent to

### IV. Bethlehem.

The star leads them. They find the Child. They worship him as the divine Savior. They honor him with significant gifts. God frustrates Herod's murderous plans.

Note: This framework sketches the objective story and lets the preacher weave in his appropriative and applicatory elaboration.

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It was night. Joseph, Mary, the Child asleep. Joseph had secured a house and intended to continue to live in Bethlehem. A knock at the door. Strange visitors from far away Babylon with their retinue. Magi, wise men, astronomers, from the court of Babylon. They explain their mission, etc.

## **The Night the Wise Men Came to Bethlehem.**

### I. The mission of the star was ended.

Daniel — the prophecy — six centuries — the star, the sign from heaven — recognized — the newborn King.

### II. The faith of the wise men rewarded.

Only a tiny Babe — in a lowly artisan's house — asleep in his mother's arms.

The wise men see far more — the promised King of the Jews who with his divine reign was to bless the whole world. We know that he did — blessed also us.

### III. The Child was worshipped and honored with gifts.

A divine King. The great men bow in the dust before him and adore him as God's Son. The astonishment of Mary and Joseph.

The significant gifts from all the wise men of Babylon — for the Child whom Herod planned to murder.

IV. God frustrates Herod's murderous plan.

The wise men camp and sleep, receive God's directions in a dream, slip away before dawn, and Herod waits in vain.

Jesus would accomplish his blessed mission. He would die as our sacrifice on Golgotha and not before. He is for ever our thorn-crowned King.

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When Jesus was born in Bethlehem nobody in Jerusalem paid attention to the event. Even when Jesus was presented in the Temple only Simeon and Anna realized who the Child was, and Anna told of him to the godly souls who were waiting for Israel's redemption. Then, all at once Jesus was made widely manifest in Jerusalem, so that even wicked king Herod heard of him and the whole city was agitated because of what Herod might do if people were drawn to this newly-born King. The magi made him manifest by their great question:

**“Where is he that is Born King of the Jews?”**

- I. The answer then was given by the high court of the Jews, the Sanhedrin, composed of the high chief priests and the scribes, who gave the correct answer to Herod, from Micah v. 2, which Herod then in secret passed on to the magi. The answer was: in Bethlehem of Judea. There the Child was, sleeping that very night in his mother's loving arms, but also in his heavenly Father's care. The magi went that night, found and worshipped the Child, and gave him their valuable gifts. Nor did Herod succeed in his murderous plan.
- II. If we ask the question today the answer must be different. Jesus left Bethlehem that very night, never to return to the village. He finished his work on earth, he died on Calvary. Pilate wrote the placard for the cross: “This is the King of the Jews.” Today we must say that he who is born King of the Jews is in Heaven at the Right Hand of God. From

his heavenly throne he rules his Kingdom. He rules us in his heavenly grace. Etc.

- III. We must add to this answer. The physical sight. of Jesus is no longer possible. We cannot kneel and adore as did the magi, and we are not yet in heaven where we can see him as he now is. But he himself comes to us in his saving Word and Gospel. There we can meet and can see him at any time by reading and hearing and can receive all the blessing he came to bestow upon us. His Gospel affords a constant epiphany of Jesus for us.
- IV. We must complete our answer. He that is born King of the Jews, justifying his statement that salvation is of the Jews, wants to make that salvation our own, by dwelling in our hearts through faith in him as made manifest in his Gospel. This is the great personal Epiphany question for each one of us: Is Jesus truly in our hearts? The magi did not bear the Babe away with them to Babylon, but in their hearts by faith they bore him away. Blessed are all they who do so.

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You may name the parts of your sermon in the introduction before the statement of the theme. Secondly, you may state your parts together after the announcement of your theme. Thirdly, you may state each part as you come to it. Yet fourthly, you may state each part at the end of the development of that part, or shortly before the end, or about the middle of the development. Of course, you must do this so that your hearers will understand what you are doing, namely stating the formal sermon part. Do not follow only one of these ways regarding the statement of parts. Variety lends interest. Use all of these methods.

# The First Sunday After Epiphany. Luke 2:41-52

## The Boy Jesus Makes Manifest his Connection with his Father's Business

In the text for the preceding Sunday the magi, or God through the magi, make Jesus manifest as the divine King of the Jews. In the text for the present Sunday Jesus makes himself manifest as the Son of God Who must be about his Father's affairs. So early in the life of Jesus this first manifestation took place. This pericope from Luke is the only account regarding the youth of Jesus left to us and is thus infinitely precious to us.

[41] **And his parents kept going year by year to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover.** The imperfect tense is iterative; the ward phrase also emphasizes the idea of iteration: they kept going year by year. The dative τῆ ἑορτῆ is a dative of time. During the entire childhood of Jesus Joseph and Mary regularly attended the Passover in Jerusalem. According to Ex. 23:14-17; 34:23; Deut. 16:16 every Jewish male was expected to attend three festivals each year, the Passover, Pentecost, Tabernacles, but the more diffused the diaspora became the more this became impossible. Since the Passover was the most important festival, many Jews from distant parts attended at least this festival. Women were not obliged to attend, yet many women did so nevertheless, and Mary belonged to this devout class. As regards the details of the Passover consult the Bible dictionaries. Mary and Joseph were godly Jews indeed.

[42] **And when he became twelve years old, they going up according to the custom of the festival, [43] and having completed the days, while they were returning, there remained behind Jesus the boy in Jerusalem, and his parents did not realize it, [44] but having supposed him to be in the caravan went a day's journey, and began making**

**thorough search for him among their relatives and their acquaintances, [45] and not having found him returned to Jerusalem, making thorough search for him.**

The age “of twelve years” (an ordinary predicative genitive) is mentioned because at that age a Jewish boy became “a son of the law” who was obliged to learn and to observe the law and its requirements. To imagine that now Jesus began to wear the phylacteries isto make him a Pharisee. Jesus was not reared as a member of a Jewish sect. We need not be puzzled by the present tense in the genitive absolute: ἀναβαινόντων, without the addition “to Jerusalem,” for the participle “going up” refers to the entire journey in both directions during which time everything that is here told transpired. No matter from what elevation a Jew started, if he traveled to Jerusalem he “went up.” So once more Joseph and Mary attended the Passover and took Jesus along.

[43] The aorist genitive absolute places us at the end of the seven days of the festival (Ex. 12:15; Lev. 23:6; Deut. 16:3). While some of the pilgrims left at the end of the important first two days, the holy family remained for the entire seven days. Luke loves ἐν With the infinitive: “while they were returning.” The boy (παῖς) Jesus remained behind in Jerusalem, and his parents did not realize it. Some scribes did not like the word “his parents” and thus altered the reading. One of these alterations is adopted by the A.V. There is no danger of misunderstanding the word “parents” after all that Luke has written on the relation of Joseph to Jesus. We are furnished no details and thus can say only that Jesus became separated from his parents in an entirely natural way. The caravan for the journey homeward was made up, but it left without this one “boy,” as Luke now calls him.

[44] Joseph and Mary felt no uneasiness whatever, for they supposed that he was somewhere in the caravan in company with other boys. The caravan was strung out along the road going northward, hundreds of pilgrims traveling together. Only at nightfall, when camp was made, and when Jesus did not appear, the parents became disturbed and instituted a thorough search. Naturally they searched by making inquiry among their relatives and their acquaintances. All of these camped together. But none of these persons and none of the boys among them had seen Jesus during that entire day. This caused real worry to Joseph and Mary.

[45] There was nothing left to be done but to return the next morning, and in doing so the parents made search along the entire way, asking the pilgrims and their boys whether they had seen their boy Jesus.

**[46] And it came to pass after three days, they found him in the Temple sitting in the midst of the teachers, both hearing them and inquiring of them. [47] Now all hearing him were in amazement at his understanding and answers.** Καὶ ἔγένετο is followed by the finite verb εὔρον and marks the importance of what is said. It was on the afternoon of the third day since the parents had left Jerusalem with the caravan that they found Jesus. The second day was consumed in getting back to Jerusalem, and the third day was spent in searching in the city itself, until either Mary or Joseph, probably recalling the boy's great interest in the Temple, thought to look for him there. Here they at last found him, not at play with other boys, but among the teachers, the venerable rabbis.

Distinguish the ἱερόν from the ναός. The former signifies the entire sacred complex with all its different buildings and areas, the latter signifies only the Sanctuary, the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies. The larger complex afforded both halls and colonades where any rabbi who so desired might teach the people. Teachers and listeners sat on the floor cross-legged. Jesus was found in a group of several rabbis. When this scene is called "Jesus teaching in the Temple" We have a grave perversion. Luke says not one word about his teaching. The teaching of the rabbis was not just a lecture by the *didaskalos*, but was interspersed with questions by the hearers and at times the teacher too asked a hearer some pertinent question. Luke draws no unnatural picture of Jesus. The lad knew his place and showed no forwardness or presumptuousness. He asked questions as any one present might ask them and also made answer when a question was asked of him.

[47] Yet his questions and such answers as were given by him amazed all those who heard them. Luke mentions the double cause: his σύνεσις, his grasp and understanding of the high religious matters as revealed by his answers, and then also by his own astounding questions. The learned rabbis had never seen such a boy. We would go far astray, if we thought of what is called precocity, a mind advanced beyond its young years; the mind of Jesus was filled with heavenly wisdom (v. 40). Jesus put on no airs, he did not wish to impress and astonish. He simply understood many things in the

Old Testament, that he had heard when read and had learned in Nazareth, with such clarity and penetration that the Jerusalem rabbis and other persons present were dumbfounded. We should like to know much more, in fact, should like to know all about the youth of Jesus, but we must be content with the little we have.

**[48] And having seen him they were struck with a shock, and to him his mother said: “Child, why didst thou treat us thus? Lo, thy father and I being distressed were seeking thee!”** The verb by which Luke records the effect of the sight of Jesus on his parents is even stronger than the verb which records the effect of the questions and answers of Jesus upon those who heard him. So quietly had Jesus been growing up in Nazareth, where he had never given an exceptional indication of his insight, that now to find him here, absorbed in converse with a number of learned Jerusalem rabbis amid a circle of absorbed hearers, struck his parents with a shock. I do not think that the parents interrupted the scene. They stood still and looked on and listened, until Jesus noted their presence and then at once arose and came to them. What Mary said to him, and what Jesus replied was not heard by the rabbis and the people.

It is Mary who speaks excitedly to him. The address “child” is an expression of a mother’s tender love. The reproach contained in Mary’s words is the natural expression of her anxieties. It is not a matter of indifference to have a young son lost in a great city lull of departing pilgrims and be seeking him for three days ὀδυνώμενοι (passive), continuing to be greatly distressed. Who could blame Mary for her expression of maternal concern?

**[49] And yet this Child was not to blame. We have no account as to how Jesus spent the seven days of the festival while his parents remained in Jerusalem, but judging from what Jesus did on the three days following, his observant mother should have known at once where her “child” was when she missed him on that first day of the homeward journey. But Luke is compelled to record that she too did not understand even when Jesus gave her an answer. And he said to them: “What is this that you were seeking me? Were you not aware, it is necessary that I be in connection with the things of my Father?”**

Τί should not be translated “why” as though asking for a reason, for it refers only to the fact and is followed by ὅτι, “this that.” Jesus expresses surprise because of the fact that his parents thus sought him and did not know at once with what he would be engaged. This surprise is fully justified, for both Joseph and Mary knew that Jesus was the Son of God, — God himself had given them this revelation by the mouth of his angel (1:32; Matt. 1:20). But the fact that God thus had his own Son born man of the Virgin Mary could have only one meaning, namely that God was sending him on his great mission as the Messiah of Israel ( 1:32-33; 2:11; 2:29-35). Although this had been plainly told them, the parents failed to apply what they knew, and Jesus himself must tell them that “it is necessary that I be in connection with the things of my Father.” Τά with a genitive of the person means the affairs of that person; the A.V. is correct: “my Father’s business.” Some wish to render “my Father’s house,” but here the thought does not turn on the idea of place; moreover, the τά of this idiom is constantly used in the sense of “affairs,” and only once in a papyrus in the sense of “house.” Understand ἐν in its original sense: “in connection with.”

This entire incident is recorded by Inspiration because of the genitive which Jesus used in his reply: “the things of my Father.” This is the first manifestation of himself which we possess. Jesus manifests who he is and thus also that he is engaged in a mission entrusted to him by his Father. We have a true Epiphany text.

At the age of twelve Jesus reveals the knowledge which he has, namely that the Father in heaven is his Father, that he is not the son of Joseph but only of Mary, in other words, that he is God’s Son. Here is the first significant “my Father,” an expression which is found throughout the four gospels and which differentiates Jesus from all other men who may say “our Father,” but not one of whom dare arrogate to himself the pronoun that belongs naturally only to Jesus. See John 20:17 the pointed opposition between “my Father” and “your Father.” Never does Jesus say “our Father” and thus include himself as a member of a larger group.

Whence did Jesus so early in his life obtain the realization of his deity and of his mission? We do not think that Mary had told him about the mystery of his birth. The realization came to Jesus from a study of the Old Testament and from his own developing consciousness, for the ego in him was that of the eternal Son of God. This statement leaves us with many

unanswered questions. They will remain unanswered, for they deal with the one person who in all the world is absolutely unique in this regard that he possesses two natures, the divine from all eternity and the human since his physical conception.

Connected with the deity of his person is his mission. Δεῖ declares the necessity. For his mission Jesus was born man. Jesus must be “in connection with the things of his Father,” he must be about his Father’s business (A.V.). He had reached the age of maturity and thus speaks of the great purpose of his life. Did not his parents know all about this? They should have known at once where he was to be found.

[50] **And they did not understand the utterance which he spoke to them.** Note that τὸ ῥῆμα agrees with ἐλάλησεν, and that both words refer to utterance in opposition to silence. Luke does not mean that the parents did not know the sense of what Jesus had spoken; the revelations they had had from God were entirely clear regarding the sense. But never had Jesus made an utterance indicating in any way that he too knew. The fact that he should now make this astounding utterance, and make it as something perfectly self-evident, passed the understanding of his parents.

[51] **And he went down in company with them (μετά), and came to Nazareth, and continued being in subjection to them; and his mother went on carefully keeping all the things in her heart.** Jesus made no attempt to remain in Jerusalem or in the Temple, or to become independent of Joseph and Mary. At once he joined them and went down to Nazareth. One always “went down” when leaving Jerusalem, namely in an ethical sense. Luke uses a periphrastic imperfect tense when stating that Jesus “continued being in subjection” to his parents. This tense stresses the idea of continuance. Let us understand it well: the Son of God who was fully conscious of his deity obeyed Mary and Joseph as being his human parents. Often the application is made that as Jesus obeyed, so should our children obey. This application is impossible. It would degrade the obedience of Jesus. His obedience in Nazareth lies on a far higher plane than the obedience of any human child. For he obeyed as part of his great Messianic mission. He obeyed in our stead, for our sakes, to work out our salvation. Let us hold fast the inner purpose of his obedience and we shall not reduce this text to the common and cheap level of mere application.

The strong periphrastic tense justifies the conclusion that Joseph lived for a number of years after this incident, — for how many we do not know. In the opening section of his gospel Luke is concerned to tell the story of Mary, from whose lips he may well have heard all the main facts. So Luke tells us how Mary “carefully (Mi in the verb) continued to keep” all the blame: (the plural= things, matters) in her heart. Here were mysteries indeed, yet Mary did not seek to penetrate them and to remove all the veils, she kept and guarded them as blessed and sought to appropriate all the blessedness. No, she did not talk of these things, tell her neighbor woman about them or spread them abroad in the town. She made a holy shrine for them in the silence of her heart. Learn from Mary.

[52] **And Jesus kept progressing in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man.** Comp. v. 40 (Sunday after Christmas). The verb means literally: “he kept cutting forward,” and is followed by three datives of relation. Wisdom is placed first (see v. 40) because Jesus had shown it in so remarkable a degree in Jerusalem. By ἡλικία we must understand stature, for that he grew in age is self-evident. Jesus grew into a strong, impressive, commanding figure. All the paintings on canvass or on glass which make Jesus appear weak, anemic, pale, and soft should be abolished. Χάρις is “favor” as explained in v. 40.

## Homiletical Aid

The heart of our text is the word of Jesus to his parents: “Wist ye not” etc. This explains why he was busy in the Temple. This states what Mary and Joseph should have known. At the age of twelve years a boy was considered “a son of the law” and was obliged to learn and to obey all the requirements of the ceremonial law of the Jews. Jesus had reached that age and now for the first time manifests who he is and What his mission in life is. Remember that “Epiphany” means manifestation, and our text presents to us the first self-manifestation of Jesus.

### **The First Self-Manifestation of Jesus.**

It was both by word and by deed.

I. Tell the story, interestingly, to v. 49.

Bring out all that lies in “my Father,” showing that Jesus never says “our Father” as including himself in a larger group, and how he sharply distinguishes between “my Father” and “your Father.” Thus early in life Jesus understood the Old Testament prophecies concerning himself, understood his miraculous birth, knew that Joseph was only his foster-father. We can be quite certain that Mary had told him nothing about his birth, nor had Joseph. The sinless, perfect mind and lucid self-consciousness of Jesus must also be considered.

This self-manifestation of Jesus comes from his own lips. He declares that he is none other than the Son of God. Hundreds of other manifestations are to the same effect. Our faith rests on them as on a sure foundation, than which none can be surer. If Jesus could not have said “my Father,” then etc. Develop the negative as may be needed;

II. The act goes with the word.

Jesus is shown us as he is engaged in his Father’s business. He is in his Father’s house asking questions, listening carefully, answering when asked. He puts on no high airs, he is humble and meek, but he is eager to learn all about his Father’s Word. We see that he had already learned very much, his answer to Mary betrays that, but he was determined to learn all of that divine Word. The manifestation of his wisdom and understanding astonished all who saw and heard him. Yes, he was attending here in the, Temple to his Father’s business.

Also in Nazareth. God’s Son obeyed Joseph and Mary according to the Fourth Commandment. God’s Son humbled himself in this manner. Not that he needed this obedience for himself; he rendered it for our sakes, in our stead, that the merit might be ours for our salvation. This obedience was part of his Father’s business to which Jesus had to attend. There was much more until he could cry on the cross: “It is finished!”

The manifestation in deed is as blessed for our faith as the manifestation in word. Close the sermon on this line — homiletical appropriation, not application.

The so-called apocryphal gospels are fictional accounts, invented by men who wanted to fill in the gaps which the inspired gospel accounts have left as regards this early period of the Savior's life. Childish, trivial, silly things are ascribed to Jesus in these false gospels, all in glaring contrast to the one incident which the inspired pen of St. Luke has preserved for us. Here is Jesus at the age of twelve, required now to attend the high festivals of the Jews and to observe the ceremonial law. Here is a true record taken from the days of his youth. What appears in this brief record certainly applies to all the rest of his years, until we see him assume his Messianic office at the age of thirty years. For us Christians St. Luke's account is priceless. It depicts for us

### **Our Savior at the Age of Twelve.**

I. His parents at last find him in the Temple.

But there is where he naturally would be, as he who had to be about his Father's business.

II. His questions and answers cause astonishment.

Naturally they would, since Jesus was no ordinary lad but the Father's Son come to attend to the Father's business. Hence his wisdom and understanding and the questions thus produced.

III. His obedience in Nazareth is perfect.

This was part of Jesus' mission and was rendered by him as the Son of God whose mission was to save us.

Conclusion: Thus our Savior revealed his person and his mission already at the age of twelve and fills our hearts with faith, even as he fulfilled that mission and finished our eternal redemption.

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C. F. W. Walther, *Gnadenjahr*, treats the text in a broad way.

### **A Look at Christ's Holy Youth and the Recollection of Our Own Youth.**

- I. A look that calls for repentance when we properly compare Christ's holy youth with our own.
  - II. A look full of comfort when we consider with contrition and faith the gracious purpose of Christ's youthful life.
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Walther has another outline in *Predigtentwuerfe*.

### **What Purpose is our Consideration of the Twelve Year Old Boy Jesus to Serve?**

- I. Wonder at his lowliness and at his highness.
  - II. Comfort in the sorrow for the sins of our youth.
  - III. Encouragement to walk in the footsteps of the Holy Child.
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Loy's sermon outline serves only as a warning, for he has the theme:

### **Lessons from the Youth of Jesus,**

and he does not even formulate the four "lessons" he wants to teach us: 1) Parents should instruct their children; 2) Jesus was very wise; 3) We should faithfully discharge the duties of our vocation; 4) Children should obey their parents.

We ask: Why only four lessons? We note that this theme "lessons" can be used for almost any narrative text. Such a theme calling for a number of lessons is really no theme. Even the old saw is better: I. We shall explain our text. II. We shall apply our text. But this business of hunting for "lessons" has become one of the great faults of modern preaching. It means that the preacher sees only homiletical application and is blind to homiletical appropriation. He hammers at works, works, works, although he may deceive himself by using the word "life" and by imagining that he is preaching "practical" sermons. In this text Jesus is the center, his deity, his mission, and far less his example. *S.* p. 118 etc., on "lessons" and p. 225 etc., on appropriation, etc.

I regret to say that I too once followed the wrong track, although I dressed up my outline. In 1904 I preached on

### **A Visit in the Home of the Holy Family after the Return from the Passover.**

We see

- I. A family that loves its church and its religion.
- II. A family in which parents and child dwell harmoniously.
- III. A family in which true happiness is richly attained.

All mere applications whereas the text demands much more! Many preachers have imagined that this text and the following text are complementary, this text dealing with children, the next text dealing with marriage. But both texts are Epiphany texts, — self-manifestations of Jesus that our faith should receive. All else is incidental. Is it so difficult to rise to the proper homiletical height?

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Jesus — twelve years old — conscious of his deity — aware that he must be about his Father's business — telling his mother so — going back home with his parents and there obeying them as his parents — increasing in wisdom, stature, and in favor with God and man: involuntarily we exclaim:

#### **“Beautiful Savior!”**

- I. Amid the doctors —

Not acting the teacher as some suppose, but the intelligent hearer — filled with holy wisdom — penetrating the Word he loved — his questions reaching out for more wisdom and more truth: who that knows him will not exclaim: “Beautiful Savior!” So painters have portrayed him, and in this Epiphany season we are to impress his message with all the significance of his actions upon our hearts.

Such a Savior God sent us!

What fascinated him so that he remained after the Passover Festival? His Father's house, the Temple. Not the boys he had met in the city, not the sights of the city, etc.

Why was he amid the doctors in some shady colonnade of the Temple? There he heard them discuss his Father's Word.

How was it that he could ask the questions that astonished everyone? He was his Father's only Son. He is our "Beautiful Savior."

## II. Speaking to his mother —

She rebukes him for staying behind, she now lets her natural feeling carry her away when after long fruitless search she finally has found him — she should have understood from the beginning — Jesus is no ordinary son, and she of all persons knew that best. — See how gently, only by means of a mild question, Jesus reminds his mother: "How is it that ye sought me?"

Then another question full of radiant, beautiful Epiphany light: "Wist ye not" etc.? Jesus speaks of his deity. There is no uncertainty, no false idea in his mind regarding himself. His mind, undimmed by sin, knows that he is God's Son born man for the Father's work of salvation. As the words come from his lips we must acknowledge again that he is our "Beautiful Savior."

His Father's business, — that is your salvation and mine. Only One could attend to that business, — God's own Son. No wonder he wanted to know all that his Father had said about this business, for he was here to attend to it all, — so ready, so eager, so devoted, already as a boy of twelve, — "Beautiful Savior" indeed!

## III. Obedient to his parents in Nazareth —

A higher obedience than our children are able to render, for Jesus was God's own Son. So high was he, and yet he stooped so low. His mother never needed to speak twice. His father taught him the carpenter trade and had a perfect pupil. Never did Jesus presume upon his deity. He grew up to a noble manhood, his heart full of wisdom. People all thought most highly of him, and God's own favor rested upon him in blessing.

All this, beautiful in itself, means so much to us personally. He fulfilled the Fourth Commandment for us who have broken it, as have our own children, many times. Because of his deity his obedience is of divine, of infinite value, to cover up our sin and guilt. The humble and holy obedience of Jesus was part of his Father's business which he had to do. The other part was his suffering and death to atone for our guilt. When all this is clear to you, more than ever with deepest love, devotion, and gratitude will you exclaim: "Beautiful Savior!"

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I certainly agree with Nebe when he prefaces his sermon outlines with the statement that we must above all things set forth the glory of the Lord in preaching on this text, and only as a minor matter make applications to children and the like.

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In the likeness of men, yet far more than men. At the age of twelve, but no lad of that age could be placed beside him. The immortal question:

**"Wist Ye Not that I must Be About My Father's Business?"**

Here is an Epiphany, a self — revelation indeed.

- I. We behold his deity ("my Father").
- II. We hear of his mission ("my Father's business" — to work out our salvation).
- III. We observe his presence in the Temple (learning his Father's will).
- IV. We understand his obedience in Nazareth (part of his saving mission).
- V. We yield our hearts to him in faith and then also learn from his example.

# The Second Sunday After Epiphany. John 2:1 -11

## Jesus Makes Manifest his Savior-Glory

The Epiphany character of this text is stated in so many words: “He manifested forth his glory, and his disciples believed on him.” One may use this double statement as the two parts of the sermon. All the miracles are epiphanies of Jesus, for in all of them he manifests himself. Therefore, too, we have three Sundays in this cycle which have gospel texts dealing with miracles. There is, however, no monotony, for the miracles themselves are very different, and each of them shows us something distinctive regarding Jesus.

I cannot agree that the previous text presents the epiphany in word, while the present text presents the epiphany in deed. I find plenty of deed in the preceding text, and in the present one the miracle is wrought entirely by means of a spoken word. Moreover, a mere formal sequence like word and deed is by no means the reason for the choice of texts. I also ask, why do we then have texts that record miracles allotted to the two following Sundays? We need no formal sequence. Jesus manifested himself in many ways and on many occasions, and out of the abundance which we thus possess a few choice instances are selected as texts for this season of the Church Year. In the previous text and in the present one we have first manifestations. After the texts dealing with the childhood of Jesus these texts containing the first self-manifestations are eminently in order.

Jesus created wine at Cana. I do not think that this fact is intended to place Jesus in contrast to the Baptist who used no wine. The Baptist indeed also performed no miracles, — which constitutes a far more notable difference, although nothing need be made of it when preaching on this text. The point of difference regarding wine is expanded by some. The Baptist is

wrongfully placed into the Old Testament and is made a representative of the significance of the Old Testament. Thus the miracle of Cana is decorated with the strange meaning that by this miracle the great difference between the economy of the Old Testament and the economy of the New is made manifest by Jesus. Yet the fact is that John the Baptist belongs in the New Testament; he is the great herald who ushers in the Messiah himself. Jesus manifests himself in the miracle at Cana, likewise in his many other miracles. He fulfills the Old Testament promises. Promise and fulfillment represent the relation of the two Testaments. But why introduce these matters into our text and into the sermon on this text? They have no business here. My task is to show my people the Glory of Jesus in the Miracle at Cana. I avoid extraneous matters and see to it that I do my proper task well.

The text calls for homiletical appropriation. When preaching on the previous text some descend to shallow application: our children should be taught to go to church regularly, to learn the Scriptures, to mind their parents, etc. In a similar manner the present text is “applied”: we are told about marriage, about inviting Jesus, about needs in the family and requests that Jesus may help, etc. As practical and as needful as such thoughts may be, the text is far grander in its import. Here is the epiphany of the divine glory of our Savior. It is this that we should preach. The only application to which the text invites is the example of the disciples: we should believe on him as they believed.

John records the first “sign” by which Jesus attested himself.

**[1] And on the third day a wedding took place in Cana of Galilee; and the mother of Jesus was there. [2] Now there was invited also Jesus and his disciples to the wedding.** The third day after the day mentioned in 1:43, two nights having intervened. The time was ample to permit Jesus to proceed from the Jordan to Cana. How the invitation reached him and how it included also the disciples who had just attached themselves to him is not indicated. The circumstances are merely sketched, and the entire emphasis is placed on the great sign.

We must think of this γάμος or wedding in the Jewish manner. The betrothal preceded in which the bride and the groom were publicly, i.e. before their parents, pledged to each other in a way that made them man

and wife, yet a shorter or a longer interval intervened before the two lived together. At the end of this period of waiting came the γάμος or γάμοι, the “wedding.” The groom, with his chosen companions, proceeded in state to the bride’s home, where she, with her chosen friends, awaited him. In festal procession the groom brought his bride to his own home; there was a feast of seven days or more, and so the marriage was consummated. No rabbi or priest functioned either at the betrothal or at the wedding feast. No vows of any kind were exchanged at the wedding feast. Our wedding customs are different, but neither the ancient Jewish custom nor our own today are prescribed in the Word of God.

We are unable to say whether this particular wedding lasted seven days; and if it did, we have nothing to indicate on which day Jesus arrived. The fact that the wine gave out may indicate that Jesus came on one of the later days. The miracle was wrought the day Jesus’ arrived. Note that the mother of Jesus was not invited, she simply “was there,” which is rightly taken to mean that most likely she was related to either groom or bride and was present to help in the work occasioned by the presence of many guests. This also accounts for her activity when the wine gave out and for her order to the διάκονοι. John never mentions either his own name or that of any of his relatives. The fact that he never mentions Mary’s name is support for the conclusion that she was one of John’s relatives, very likely a sister of his mother Salome.

[2] Jesus was formally invited, probably because he too, like his mother, had some special connection with the groom or the bride. The aorist implies that he accepted the invitation. It may have been extended when Jesus returned. His disciples were included in the invitation, but this was done only because they were attached to Jesus. Μαθητής, as the correlative of διδάσκαλος, means more than pupil, it rather designates a follower and an adherent who accepts the teacher’s instruction and aims to absorb his teacher’s spirit. Thus “disciple” came to mean a true believer. Jesus had only six disciples at the present time, and these had just recently attached themselves to him and thus had only begun their training, nevertheless “disciples” is the right word to designate them. John, the writer of this gospel, was one of the six.

[3] Take the Greek reading that has the superior textual evidence. And when the wine began to fail, the mother of Jesus says to him: “They have

no wine.” The aorist participle is ingressive: the wine began to fail. The fact that the wine was running low was discovered before it ran out entirely. What caused the shortage is not stated. It is too easy an explanation to say that Jesus and his disciples, the unexpected coming of seven additional guests, caused the shortage. In a country where wine was the universal beverage, even a poor bridegroom would provide an abundance. It is best to assume that someone had blundered by not obtaining enough wine. This blunder provided the opportunity for Jesus.

Mary has charge of affairs at this wedding, and — strange to say! — turns to Jesus. Another explanation, altogether too simple, is offered for this action, namely that Mary did here in Cana what she usually did in Nazareth before Jesus left, simply appealed to her son in any difficulty. But this is not Nazareth. This is Cana, to which Jesus has just come from beyond the Jordan. How could Jesus, an honored guest at this wedding, provide wine in a city strange to him? Others whom Mary could at once reach might easily do this, not Jesus.

We must reckon with the following decisive facts. Jesus had left his home to begin his Messianic mission. He had accepted John’s Baptism and had returned with six disciples. The Holy Spirit had descended upon Jesus right after his Baptism, and God’s voice from heaven had attested his Sonship. When Mary heard these things she thought of all the earlier prophecies regarding her child. It is thus that she now comes to Jesus and tells him: “They have no wine.” What did she expect Jesus to do? She most certainly expected him to provide wine! How? There is only one adequate answer: in an extraordinary, wondrous way, as befits the Messiah. The act of Mary was one of faith’s intuition. We may compare it with the act of Mary of Bethany recorded in 12:1-8, — she alone realized that Jesus would soon die by violence and that his body could then not be anointed for burial, — so she anointed him in advance at the feast his friends made for him in Bethany.

Mary merely states the fact that the house is short of wine. She asks nothing, not even: “Can, or will, you help?” To say that Mary meant, that Jesus and his disciples had better leave, thereby also inducing other guests to leave, is to introduce a low motive. The intent and the motive of Mary’s brief statement are entirely worthy and proper. She merely states the need, otherwise she leaves everything to her son.

**[4] And Jesus says to her: “What is that to me and thee, woman? Mine hour has not yet come.”** We must understand the Greek idiom of the question: “What is that to me and thee?” the meaning of which is not: “What have we to do with that?” or as Robertson puts it colloquially: “Never mind!” The thought is: “There is nothing here that concerns thee as it does me!” Or, in other words: “This is my affair, not thine.” Here already lies a promise, for if Jesus considers this entirely his affair, he certainly will attend to it.

Thus we also understand the address “woman.” Jesus has entered upon his Messianic mission; he is present at this wedding in the capacity of the promised Messiah. The old relation of mother and son that had continued so long in Nazareth is now at an end. Jesus now cannot say “mother,” for he is not acting as a dutiful son who relieves his mother and heeds a mother’s request. He is acting as the Messiah in his great, divine office, in which he knows no family relation or family claims. The address “woman” is correct and decidedly significant. Mary is to be blessed and to be saved by the Messiah just as is any other woman. Jesus in no way supports the Catholic view regarding Mary. Compare Matt. 12:46-50 for the thought, and John 19:26 for a repetition of the address “woman.”

When Jesus adds: “Mine hour has not yet come,” he deliberately promises to relieve the need. The words, however, say much more than that Mary must not hurry Jesus and that Jesus intends to choose his own time. Compare the other passages in which this expression about the hour of Jesus is used. The Messiah is speaking to Mary, he who is carrying out the great Mission assigned to him by God, in which nothing is left to mere human desire or direction, in which everything is arranged by God. Hence throughout his entire life Jesus never hurries and never lets others hurry him. When the hour comes, Jesus acts, not before. When the hour comes, he enters his Passion and dies; when the hour comes, he rises from the dead. Note the majesty of the word.

Mary is learning something. She learns very quickly. Her intuition was correct, that here was an opportunity for Jesus to exercise his Messianic office. But God makes this opportunity, everything is in higher hands. Jesus bids her to let everything rest there and to drop all effort toward managing and directing Jesus who is also her divine Lord.

**[5] His mother says to the servants: “Whatever he shall tell you, do!”** Just as the intuition of Mary’s faith made her come to Jesus with her implied request, so her quick sense grasped the significance of the reply she received. She is fully satisfied, she understands. She drops into her proper place, she makes no attempt to presume because of her motherhood.

There is no reason to assume that the text abbreviates the dialog, that really much more was said, — allowing the commentator to bring in his own opinions. Highly objectionable are the comments which speak of sex, of Mary’s “feminine quickness,” and, as regards Jesus, of a man’s rebuffing a woman’s suggestion. So also is the shallow notion that Mary expects Jesus to order the servants to go out and to obtain wine in Cana. Do guests at a wedding do such things? Could not Mary herself give such an order?

Delighted at the implied promise of Jesus and understanding that at the chosen time he will act in his Messianic capacity, the mind of Mary leaps farther, — she, as manager of the work at the wedding, orders the *diakonoi* to do anything that Jesus may say. Note that these are *diakonoi*, persons who help for the sake of helping. They were friends and neighbors who had come in to aid the young couple at the wedding feast. Such voluntary, friendly helpers generally have their own opinions about what is to be done. What Mary anticipates is exactly what happens, — Jesus gives a very strange order. Mary forestalls any disobedience due to the thoughts of these *diakonoi* who may feel that they know that what they are told to do is useless, even foolish. Here are their strict orders: “Whatever he shall tell you, do!” No “ifs” or “buts” about it. Think what you please, but obey!

This is only Mary’s word, a human, not a divine word. I have used it as a text for installation of ministers. Jesus accepted Mary’s word and acted on it by giving an order to the *diakonoi*. His acceptance makes the word fit as a text. Yes, everyone of us, pastor or people, should ever without hesitation, question, or misgiving do what Jesus says to us. So Peter did when he let down his net at what he considered the wrong place and the wrong time of day, with a crowd of people looking on, all of whom might jeer at him: “At thy word I will let down the net.” When will we learn implicit trust in the Savior’s Word? When will we drop our own wisdom?

**[6] A parenthetical statement is necessary. Now there were six waterpots of stone set there after the Jews’ manner of purifying,**

**containing two or three firkins apiece.** These waterpots were stoneware. From what follows we gather that they were placed where the assembled guests did not see them. *Κεῖμαι* is used as the passive of *τίθημι*; the participle: “set” there, merely describes the purpose of the great jars. “In accord with (*κατά*) the purification of the Jews” briefly states the purpose of these jars for John’s Gentile readers. It is well to remember that in post-Babylonian times the original Levitical regulations about ritual cleansings were greatly multiplied in ways not authorized by God. See Mark 7:4 regarding all that was ceremonially washed, — some texts mention even the *triclinia*, the couches on which persons reclined while dining.

The Attic *μετρητής* was 8½ gallons, and in general it corresponds to the Hebrew *bath*. The Rabbiists make the *bath* a little less than 4½ gallons. According to the higher and more probable estimate the six waterpots held at least 110 gallons, according to the lower and less probable about 60 gallons. The main point that the preacher should note is not the exact capacity of the jars, but the great capacity. That is why the evangelist reports how much each jar held.

[7] We are not told how long Jesus waited before his hour came, i.e. before he acted. It may well have been until all of the wine was consumed, until the announcement would have to be made that no more wine could be served. *Jesus says to them*, i.e. to the *diakonoι*: **“Fill the waterpots with water!” And they filled them to the brim.** Verbs of filling take the genitive, here ὕδατος, “with water.” The little details are not included in John’s record. Did Mary call Jesus from the dining room to tell him about the lack of wine? Did Jesus, when the hour came, leave the table and go to the place where the waterpots were? Did he stand there while the *diakonoι* filled them? I do not think that they were empty. I take it that they were emptied and then refilled with clean, fresh water. The aorist imperative *γεμίσατε* is peremptory, — Jesus speaks with authority.

He is promptly obeyed. These servants obey Mary’s orders to the very letter. I wonder what remarks passed between these *diakonoι* as they carried in so much water. Was this young Rabbi Jesus going to have water served in place of wine? Very well, they would bring in plenty, — each jar was filled to the very brim.

[8] Sure enough! **And he says to them: “Dip out now, and go on bringing to the steward of the feast!” And they brought.** Let us understand just what is here said. Among the aorists found in v. 5-8 the iterative present imperative φέρετε stands out. The order of Jesus is to the effect that the *diakonoι* now use the liquid they had poured into the great jars whenever more wine was needed. As soon as the steward of the feast would call out: “Bring more wine!” some of the *diakonoι* would bring him what had been dipped out of one of these jars. Thus the order of Jesus was obeyed: “They brought it.”

The miracle had taken place, just at what instant it occurred is not said and is immaterial. It was wrought solely by the will of Jesus. Chrashaw has the beautiful line: *Lympha pudica Deum vidit et erubuit*, which is rendered into English: “The conscious water saw its God and blushed.” The ἄρχιτρίκλινος is the man placed over the *triklinia* of the dining room, the managing head-waiter, the superintendent or steward of the feast, one of whose duties it was to taste the food and to make sure that everything brought in by the waiters was as it should be.

[9] The miracle is promptly discovered. **Now when the steward of the feast tasted the water that had become wine, and knew not whence it was (but the servants knew, who had dipped the water), the steward of the feast calls the bridegroom, [10] and says to him: “Every man sets on first the good wine, and when they have drunk freely, the worst; thou hast kept the good wine until now.”**

The first δέ continues the narrative, the second δέ indicates a parenthesis. The steward called for more wine; one or two of the *diakonoι* who had filled the great jars with water responded and brought him What at the order of Jesus they had poured into the jars. They observed the change in color. Had this water turned into Wine? It seemed an absolute impossibility, for they had poured nothing but clean, fresh water into the jars. Their eyes hung upon the action of the steward of the feast. In due order he tasted what they brought, of course, without the least knowledge about the water that Jesus had ordered used to fill the jars.

[10] The steward is greatly disturbed. He calls the bridegroom and takes him aside and then tells him rather pointedly what an egregious mistake he has made. Everybody has the best wine served first, and when the taste of

his guests has been dulled the inferior wine is brought, — and here this bridegroom has for some unaccountable reason done the reverse!

John stops at this dramatic point. His readers are able to picture all the rest, — the astonishment on the bridegroom's face who knew that he had provided only common wine for his wedding, — the tasting of this strange, most excellent wine, — the inquiry, whence it came, — the voluble explanations of the servants, etc. Presently all the guests too knew that Jesus had wrought a miracle. What did Mary think?

We need not worry about the steward's word: *καὶ ὅταν μεθυσθῶσιν*, as though this means: "when people have been made drunk." The passive is used in the sense of the middle. The steward is stating a general rule. When one has two qualities of wine, he serves the better quality first, not last. When the guests have partaken freely, their taste is dulled and does not appreciate quality as it did at first. Then the inferior wine may be used. That is all the steward says. It would be utterly false to assume his meaning to be that at every feast the guests actually get drunk, and that when they are thus drunk good wine is lost upon them. It would be monstrous to assume that Jesus would attend a feast where drunken men appeared as guests. Trench is right, such thoughts are entertained by persons who are "eager to mar, if by any means they could, the image of a perfect Holiness, which offends and rebukes them."

Note both the quantity and the quality of the wine that Jesus made. In neither respect is he niggardly, but he is gloriously generous. He might have had one waterjar filled half full, supplying, let us say, only enough wine for this occasion. All six are filled to the brim, — a grand present to the young couple which they can enjoy for many days to come. For his gift Jesus employed the largest vessels that were at hand. Do not let the thought enter your head that all this wine was to be consumed at this little wedding!

The preacher is never to allegorize in his sermon. The wine that is worse is not to be interpreted as the best that the world offers us, or that the false Judaism of Christ's day offered; the excellent wine is not to be interpreted to mean the Gospel that Jesus offers us. The word on which these allegories are based is not even a word of God or of Christ, but the ordinary observation of a Jew. To allegorize is to substitute one's own fancy for the facts of the Word. To allegorize is to forsake the words of the text and to

preach pious notions of our own. As regards the world and Christ, what they offer is not two qualities of wine, but utter opposites, sin that leads to hell, salvation that leads to heaven.

When the complaint is raised that John's narrative is incomplete, this complaint betrays ignorance of John's purpose in writing. John is not attempting to tell us all that is interesting, but all that constitutes the attestation that Jesus is the God-Man. This he does, and for this purpose his narrative is perfect.

**[11] This did Jesus as a beginning of the signs in Cana of Galilee, and manifested his glory; and his disciples believed in him.** Ταύτην is the object, feminine because its apposition is feminine: "This did Jesus." Ἀρχὴν is predicative: "as a beginning of the signs," And this he did not in Judea, not in Jerusalem, but in despised Galilee, "in Cana of Galilee." Correct both of our versions.

The A.V. demands correction also as regards σημεῖα, which is not "miracles," works that cause wonder, but "signs," an ethical term, works that signify something. Signs always require faith in what is signified, coupled with the obedience required by this faith. The Jews refused to believe what "the signs" so powerfully attested and disobeyed all that Jesus declared. With us the word "miracles" has become common, yet we should never substitute it where the Scriptures use "signs" and should carefully explain what "signs" mean.

Turning water into wine manifested "the glory" of Jesus. For this purpose the sign was wrought. It signified that the divine δόξα dwelt in Jesus, namely the sum of the attributes of deity. Through the veil of the humility of Jesus there broke for a moment this sign which signified that Jesus was the Godman. "And we beheld his glory, the glory as of the Only Begotten from the Father" (1:14).

John states nothing regarding Mary, the groom and the bride, or the guests and the servants, and records only that "his disciples believed on him." They are the persons that count, for they were to evangelize the world as the Lord's eyewitnesses. In this text we read the testimony they have left us through one of their number. Let us too believe.

The purpose of this text is not to show that Jesus honors marriage and the family relation by his presence and by his generous gift. The purpose of this text is not to oppose prohibition and the fanaticism that makes prohibition a law. Mere incidental features should never be allowed to monopolize the sermon. The theme ever must display the mighty fact that Jesus manifested his glory in Cana of Galilee with this beginning of the signs.

## **Homiletical Aid**

The Epiphany at the Jordan after the Baptism when the Holy Spirit descended visibly upon Jesus and when God declared him to be his Son. By his own deed here in Cana Jesus manifested that he was in truth the Son of God and our Savior.

### **The Epiphany of Jesus in Cana of Galilee.**

#### **I. He manifested the glory of his deity.**

The transubstantiation of water into wine, by the mere act of the will of Jesus, — describe.

This sign signifies omnipotence, and any divine attribute when displayed in visible action constitutes the glory of God. So here Jesus manifested forth his glory, i.e. the glory of his deity.

This sign, plain and most convincing in itself, becomes vastly more so when we note that this first sign was followed by a host of others, all to the same effect.

At once when Jesus begins his ministry we see that we have a Savior indeed.

#### **II. He revealed his condescension and grace.**

Besides the great sign itself, when, as the poet declares, “the conscious water saw its God and blushed,” we note the circumstances. The omnipotent Son of God attends a human wedding, helps in a need that arises and at the same time bestows a most generous gift.

Yes, he whom all the angels serve, came to serve us poor sinners. This sign wrought as described characterizes the Savior's entire ministry. So do all his miracles. He came in grace to bestow the gifts of grace, the greatest of which is salvation through his sacrifice on the cross.

Even all the circumstances of this Epiphany in Cana proclaim that we have a Savior indeed.

III. He impels us to believe in him as our Savior.

So his six disciples believed. They are mentioned because as eyewitnesses they were to testify in all the world. All the others at that wedding surely also believed.

We too are to believe through the apostolic testimony, i.e. to let this Savior win our trust that he is mighty and gracious to save us for ever.

When thus we believe we indeed have a Savior.

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The word "miracle" refers only to human astonishment, but the word "sign" refers to divine significance, a significance that we must read, see, understand, and thus believe.

### **The Great Sign in Cana of Galilee: The Water Turned into Wine.**

I. The water turned into wine signifies that he who caused it to turn is omnipotent.

There is no escape from this conclusion. The way in which modernists try, though vainly, to escape this conclusion is by denying the fact that water was made wine. Then all the other signs must be denied. Then our Savior is a mere man, — and no mere man can possibly save us. Then sin and our need of being saved is denied. And thus we are left to a sad and terrible fate.

But the fact cannot be overthrown by blind denial. John 1:14; 1 John 1:1-2. It is one of a multitude of facts, sign upon sign. All manifest the deity of Jesus. Read the Bible, — as on a great highway you see one grand sign after another all declaring the same thing, in

the words of the centurion under the cross: “Truly this was the Son of God.” Matt. 27:54.

- II. The water turned into wine at a wedding signifies that he who caused it to turn is full of grace.

Omnipotence alone could not help us poor sinners. Here is more than omnipotent power, — with the power there is grace, condescending love that bestows a free gift. To deny the divine omnipotence is to be forced to deny also the divine grace. If this sign was never wrought, its grace too disappears. And grace is our only hope in life and in death.

The gracious Savior accepts the wedding invitation. Not to receive, but to give. The opportunity, the lack of wine. Mary’s request. Jesus has more in mind than Mary could imagine. The sign is wrought. The gracious wedding gift. Grace on a small scale, but a sign of grace on the supreme scale, when Jesus stoops to the cross and saves us by his blood and death.

- III. The water turned into wine long ago still signifies that he who caused it to turn deserves our faith.

Do not suppose that this sign was wrought only for the few people present at the wedding. What they thought, even what Mary thought, is not mentioned; but that the disciples believed, this fact is mentioned, because they gave to us the inspired record of this sign through the apostle John. The sign was wrought so that all men in the world might read, understand, and believe.

Do you feel how the record draws you to believe? To have such a Savior what joy, assurance, salvation! To disbelieve, what a loss, what a lonely, lost life, what a hope destroyed!

Behold his glory! Believe!

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Suppose you and I had received an invitation to attend the wedding at Cana in Galilee. All dressed up, bringing our little wedding present, we arrive. All is delightful. Describe in your ablest manner.

Jesus, the most notable guest. Describe how he has just come from the Baptist and tell what the guests hear about him. This promises to be no ordinary wedding.

### **You and I as Guests at the Wedding in Cana of Galilee.**

- I. Everything proceeds in the usual manner, until in the midst of the dining the steward gets excited. Describe the scene, the excited steward, the nonplussed bridegroom, — whence all this most excellent and precious wine?! You and I too look at each other.
- II. It is not long until the friendly helpers confess. Incredible, but they carried in water, just plain water, and then they dipped out what all see is the finest of wine. All this they confess they did at Mary's command and on the orders of Jesus.
- III. With all the rest we go out and the six waterjars are inspected. Everybody wants to see, also to taste from each great jar. We too. Incredible! Here are about 110 gallons of the costliest wine! Describe further in your best manner.
- IV. From the wine everybody turns to regard Jesus. You and I look at Jesus with new eyes. An omnipotent, gracious helper. You and I have an advantage, we know the whole life and the work of Jesus. We believe in him with all our heart. He died for us on Golgotha. He now sits at God's right hand. Through him we have life, pardon, peace. Yet for you and for me today to be guests in spirit at that wedding long, long ago, how it strengthens our faith and what feelings of happiness it arouses!

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Stoecker did it, but I would not do it:

### **Jesus, the Best Friend of the Home.**

- I. He comes as a friend.
- II. He helps in need.
- III. He reveals his glory.

The main thought is ranged alongside of two inferior points, making an unbalanced sermon in which the main thought (the glory) is obscured. The next outline is another which I would not use.

### **Do You Wish to Be Blest in Your Marriage?**

- I. Invite the Lord as guest.
- II. Let him do all the managing.
- III. Acknowledge his goodness with thanksgiving.

There are many more like this one, — how at Cana Jesus honors marriage, how he upsets the prohibitionists, etc., and then also, as if this were an item of the same order, how he manifests his glory.

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Mary's word to the servants. It was only a human word. But when Jesus acted on her word he lent it his divine authority. This justifies our using it as the basis for a sermon.

### **“Whatsoever He Said: Unto You, Do It!”**

- I. Raise no objections!

The strange command to fill the waterpots with water when wine was needed. So many words of Jesus, and of Scriptures in general may sound strange to our ears. Take examples.

We may think we know better. For instance, that Jesus should have sent for wine to some friend of the groom. Our wisdom may appear superior.

Others may contradict Jesus. What others think, say and do makes a great impression on us. But do whatever He says.

- II. Remember his glory!

The attributes of his deity, here his omnipotence. Nor is his arm shortened today. How foolish to doubt him who has infinite power. See its revelation at Cana.

Secondly, the attribute of grace and beneficence. He came to give, not to take; to serve, not to be served, etc. Thus is all his life, thus the supreme sacrifice and gift on Calvary.

III. Believe and obey.

Absolute trust in our hearts in him and in every word of his.

Wholehearted obedience to everything he bids us do.

The joy and the happiness that result.

# The Third Sunday After Epiphany. Matt. 8:1 -13

## Jesus Makes Manifest his Saviorhood in Miracles of Healing

John states that the miracle at Cana was the first sign Jesus wrought. He refers to the many others that followed. Our present text presents two of this great number. A text that relates two miracles is in place for this Sunday, for it indicates that Jesus wrought many miracles. In the next place, we observe that the first sign was wrought in regard to inanimate water. We thus need an additional text which will reveal the power and the grace of Jesus in signs that are wrought on human beings themselves. We have such a text before us. It continues and amplifies what the text for the preceding Sunday began.

I cannot agree with the View that these two texts were chosen by Jerome because they present the beginnings of the Lord's miracles. When Jesus preached the Sermon on the Mount he was at the very height of his ministry, and the miracles recorded in Matthew eight and nine followed immediately after the delivery of this sermon and form a significant point in the Lord's life. The Sermon was preached on a Sabbath morning. The first group of miracles (8:1-17) occupied the remainder of the Sabbath, — see my *Interpretation* 323 bottom, where more is said. The program announced in Matt. 4:23 is duly carried out: in the Sermon on the Mount we are shown how Jesus preached, and then, how he went about “healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people” (4:23). Note Matt. 8:16-17, which follows our text, stating that on into the night of the day on which the Sermon was preached Jesus healed many.

**[1] And there followed him, after he came down from the mountain, great multitudes.** The Sermon is ended. Its effect is stated in 7:28-29. From the mountain Jesus walked to Capernaum (Luke 7:1). On the way he

passed through a certain city (Luke v. 12) and there he healed the leper. Naturally, when Jesus left the mount the crowd that heard him also departed. Yet Matthew is exact when he does not write “the multitudes” followed him, i.e. the multitudes that had been on the mount, but “great multitudes.” Some who had heard the Sermon accompanied Jesus to Capernaum, yet not all did so, and those who went with him were joined by others en route.

**[2] And lo, a leper having come forward was prostrating himself before him, saying: “Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst cleanse me.”** Jesus was passing through a small town when suddenly this leper appeared and fell upon his face before Jesus (Luke v. 12) . The man’s action and the manner of his request elicit the evangelist’s “lo,” expressive of surprise. As regards leprosy see the Bible Dictionaries and note that leprosy was considered a living death. This leper did not rush up to Jesus, but kept the required distance when he fell on his face.

The request he makes is astonishing indeed: “Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst cleanse me!” The man has not the least doubt regarding the power and ability of Jesus to heal leprosy, this frightful disease that was humanly utterly incurable. The verb “cleanse” is used because leprosy was termed unclean, and whenever a leper approached he was compelled to signal his condition by crying: “Unclean, unclean!” This leper, however, confesses not only his faith in the power of Jesus, but in addition his confidence in the will of Jesus, and thus also his submission to his will. “If thou shalt will” (ἔάν with the subjunctive) is the condition of expectancy. The leper is not full of doubt, but full of hope that Jesus will so will (θέλω to indicate a volition that produces an act; an aorist because a single act is meant).

This “if” places the entire matter into the hands of Jesus, into his will alone. True, that is where it belongs, yet to have it so decisively admitted is remarkable. This “if” submits to Jesus’ will without reservation. True, this too is as it should be, but overlook not the fact that this “if” means that the leper is ready Without murmur and complaint to remain in his living death if Jesus shall will not to cleanse him. Somehow this leper had learned what we all must learn, namely to pray: “Thy will, not mine, be done I”

When did this leper obtain such faith? The evangelists never answer such questions. They state the facts as they occurred, they do not trace

psychological processes and origins, for these were hidden from View. How much is contained in the leper's address "Lord" and in the remarkable form of his request? This too is a frequent question, asking: Just how much did this and that person imply? The point of importance is here, whether the leper realized that Jesus was the Son of God. The prostration and the title "lord" must not be rated too highly, for orientals were naturally highly demonstrative when prostrating themselves, and with them "lord" often meant no more than our polite "sir." It is chiefly the form of this man's request, his placing himself entirely under the will of Jesus that makes me say that this man realized that Jesus was divine, the very Son of God. That is enough. How fully, how completely he understood is not for me to say — God knew.

**[3] And having stretched out the hand, he touched him, saying: "I will; be thou clean!"** Mark 1:41 states that Jesus "was filled with compassion," which makes me think that this leper was in an advanced stage of the disease, a most pitiable figure, "full of leprosy" (Luke v. 12). Jesus stepped forward to the place where the leper lay and touched him with his hand (Luke v. 13). No person would touch a leper, for that would make him too unclean and perhaps infect him with the disease. Jesus touched many whom he healed (Luke 4:40), but the healing was wrought by the volition of his will. Some think that the touch was to help the sick person's faith, and they go so far as to assert that faith was necessary for being healed. But whenever it was used, the touch conveyed the idea that the power came from Jesus. The miracle itself intended to kindle faith both in the recipient and in the witnesses. That faith on the part of the beneficiary had to precede is not true. Did the centurion's servant believe (v. 5)? Did the possessed believe (v. 28 etc.)? Did Jairus' daughter and the widow's son at Nain believe? Most pernicious is the opinion that Jesus was dependent on God for working his miracles, i.e. in each case had the permission and the power to work the miracle conferred upon him. This idea is positively contradicted here when Jesus says: "I will, — be thou clean!" He is himself the Son of God and speaks in that capacity here. To be sure, his will and the will of his Father never diverge.

**And immediately the leprosy left him.** Full of leprosy he prostrated himself, free of leprosy he arose. The flesh that was eaten away, the fingers and the toes that had dropped off, the raw sores that were spreading over the

body, were instantly restored and the entire body was again whole and sound. There were no missing fingers or toes and only the skin healed over where they had been; there were no scars where the sores were healed. No; so healed was the man that in looking at him no person would ever have thought that at one time he had been “full of leprosy.” The modern faith healers and the Catholic healings reported to have been wrought at Catholic shrines of Mary or of some saint cannot even faintly compare with the true miracles of Jesus and of his apostles. Cheap imitations, misleading deceptions, that is what these healers and these shrines produce.

Note the brevity of the statement. So great a miracle, so few the words! How different from all uninspired writers who would use many words. Inspiration guided Matthew’s pen.

**[4] And Jesus says to him: “See to it, tell no one! but go, show thyself to the priest, and offer the gift, which Moses ordered, for a testimony unto them.”** The command to keep silent is peremptory, and Mark adds that it was sternly given. Jesus “immediately rushed him off” (Mark 1:43). Why this command and this hurry? Had not multitudes witnessed the miracle, yet they are not told to keep silent? The matter is perfectly clear. This healed leper is to hurry to the priests in Jerusalem, is to have the quarantine lifted, is to be formally and officially certified as clean of leprosy by the Temple authorities, — before these authorities learn that it was Jesus who healed the man. After the man is pronounced sound and healthy by them these authorities are to learn the facts. This is the testimony they are to receive, testimony to the omnipotent power and to the deity of Jesus. The point is that the Temple authorities are thus to endorse officially the miracle of Jesus.

The ritual for the reinstatement is found in Lev. 14. First a physical examination and the offering of two birds and the prescribed ceremonies (v. 2-8); secondly, on the Seventh and eighth day the offering of two lambs (v. 9-20 and 21-32). The first act restored the healed leper to the people, the second act to his Temple privileges. The whole proceeding was like lifting the quarantine by our health authorities of the present time. It was not a method of healing the leper. These regulations do not imply that many lepers were cleansed; they applied mostly to cases that at first seemed to be leprosy, but eventually turned out not to be this dreaded scourge. Some have supposed that the leper healed by Jesus could go to a priest’s home, thus to

some priest living in Nazareth, and have himself pronounced clean, but this is not true, — the offerings and the pronouncements had to be made in the Temple in Jerusalem.

Note that Jesus supports the regulations of Moses (5:17). “For a testimony unto them (m’noigY’ is meant *ad sensum*; the antecedent of “unto them” is suggested by “the priest.” It is Mark who tells us that instead of obeying Jesus this leper went about everywhere and told his story and even interfered with the work of Jesus. He probably finally went to the Temple, but the evangelists do not say anything further. This leper brought a perfect request to Jesus, for which we give him credit; but his thanks to Jesus was wholly a mistaken form of thanks, for which he deserves only blame. You are to thank the Lord in the way he prescribes, not in the way you may choose.

**[5] And having entered into Capernaum, a centurion came to him, beseeching him [6] and saying: “Lord, my servant is lying in the house, a paralytic, terribly tormented.”** The Romans had no garrison in Capernaum; the centurion was in the pay of Herod Antipas whose troops were foreigners of various nationalities (Josephus). Matthew abbreviates the narrative by omitting the fact that the centurion acted through Jewish elders; he himself was a Gentile (Luke 7:2 etc.) . All of the centurions whom we meet in the New Testament are admirable men, not so all of the chiliarchs. This centurion was a proselyte of the gate and the narrative shows that he had a high degree of faith, even as Jesus acknowledges. The verb παρακαλῶ has various shades of meaning according to the context, lit. “to call to one’s side,” here “to beseech.”

[6] On the address “Lord” see the notes under v. 2. The spokesmen of the centurion are ordered by him simply to state the distressing facts to Jesus; these facts contain their own appeal for help. Note that here we have another hopeless case, a severe stroke of paralysis, already advanced to the stage of great suffering. Παῖς is to be understood in the sense of *Bursche* and does not refer to age; nor does δοῦλος in Luke’s account, which brings out the fact that he was a slave. Did this slave have faith? It does not matter, his master had. Luke adds the remark that this slave was dear to his master. Yet we note the master’s compassion which goes well with his faith in Jesus. Ἐν τῇ οἰκίᾳ “at home,” “in the house,” — there the sufferer lies in great pain and thus cannot be carried out to be placed before Jesus. But this

phrase also hints at a difficulty, — as a strict Jew Jesus will not enter an unclean Gentile's house. We shall see how this centurion overcomes this difficulty. Army officers are often exceedingly proud and unbending, but this centurion drops all presumption due to his rank. From Luke we learn that he was wealthy and generous, for he built the synagogue for the Jews in Capernaum, yet even on this score he presumes nothing, but only asks the Jewish elders to take his petition to Jesus. Both his compassion and his humility go well with his faith.

**[7] And he says unto him: "I, having gone myself, will cure him."** Too many fail to see the significance of ἔγω. Its meaning is not merely: Since the slave is in such a condition and cannot be brought to me, I myself will go to him. The offer of Jesus meets the centurion's chief difficulty: the centurion thinks that as a Jew Jesus cannot enter his house. Jesus says that he will come nevertheless. We need not bother with the perversions of this word of Jesus.

Note well: 1) an unclean leper; 2) an unclean Gentile's house. Next, incurable and far advanced leprosy, and incurable and very severe paralysis. Yet Jesus says: "I will cure him."

[8] Jesus is already near the house. The news that he is actually coming is reported to the centurion. He hastily sends further word to Jesus. **And the centurion responding said: "Lord, I am not sufficient that thou shouldest enter under my roof; but only say a word, and my servant shall be healed."** Was Jesus under some misapprehension about the nature of the centurion's house? Had the centurion's messengers urged Jesus by not telling him that the petitioner was a Gentile? However this may be, the centurion feels that he cannot be silent and let this holy man of the Jews enter under the roof of a Levitically unclean Gentile's house to heal this servant who probably also was a Gentile.

What he shrank from telling Jesus in the first place, lest it seem like dictating to Jesus, the centurion feels compelled to say now, namely that Jesus needs to say only one word and thus the servant will be healed. In this way the centurion met the difficulty, — Jesus did not need to enter his house, go to the bed of the servant, and lay his hands upon the sufferer. To such height and such clarity this man's faith had risen. His faith far exceeded that of the court official mentioned in John 4:46-54. ἰκανός is

“sufficient,” and does not mean “worthy” (our versions). The ἵνα clause takes the place of an infinitive: “sufficient for you to enter.”

[9] Lest the suggestion that Jesus needs only to say a word to have his will obeyed seem like presuming too much, the centurion adds how he comes to this idea regarding Jesus. **“For I myself too am a man under authority, having soldiers under me. And I say to this one: ‘Go!’ and he goes; and to another: ‘Come!’ and he comes; and to my slave: ‘Do this!’ and he does it.”** In the king’s service the centurion is only a subaltern, yet as a centurion he has soldiers under him. The soldiers obey him on the instant at his mere word and command, and so does his servant. The centurion does not need to take a single step, all he needs to do is to make his will known: “Go!” — “Come!” — “Do this!” and he is obeyed.

The meaning lies on the surface. If this centurion, a mere subaltern, commands such prompt obedience, much more does Jesus. The argument is *a minori ad majus*, from the less to the greater. This is indicated by καί: “I myself too” etc. The implication is that Jesus is far, far greater than the centurion, in fact, that he is omnipotent. The illustration is not double, i.e. that the centurion obeys as well as his soldiers and his servant, for this doubling would be pointless.

[10] **Now when Jesus heard this, he was astonished, and said to those following: “Amen, I say to you, Not even in Israel so great faith did I find!”** We note that Jesus does not address the centurion, for, as Luke states, he was not present, but had sent word as I have already described. While Matthew abbreviates his narrative, he nevertheless agrees perfectly with Luke’s additional details.

“Amen” is the Hebrew word for “verity,” “truth,” and has been adopted in many languages without alteration. It is generally placed at the end of a statement to express strong assurance. Jesus places it at the head of important statements and combines it with the expression of authority. “Amen” — verity; “I say to you” — authority; both for assurance.

Jesus implies that he has indeed found great faith in Israel, but he says none as great as this Gentile’s faith. Why was this man’s faith so great? 1) Because of his trust in the word of Jesus. Note how difficult it was for the court officer mentioned in John 4:50 to arrive at such trust. This centurion sends to Jesus because of such trust. 2) Because he has the proper

conception of the exalted person of Jesus. His word, spoken at a distance, has omnipotent power. The centurion sees in Jesus the Son of God. 3) Because of the humility of this man's faith. Although this man is a military officer, and although he has built the synagogue for the Jews of Capernaum, he considers himself utterly unworthy.

Here are marks by which we may measure the greatness of our own faith. When we do, let us not overlook the advantages we have had and the disadvantages which hindered this Gentile. He was born and reared as a heathen; he was in a profession that fostered pride and arrogance; when he did find God it was among the corrupted Jews of Galilee. Nevertheless, his faith quickly rose to great heights. Shall he shame us at the last day of judgment?

[11] This man's wonderful faith leads Jesus to utter a great prophecy concerning the hosts of future Gentile believers who will enter his Kingdom. **“Moreover, I say to you, many shall come from the eastern and the western parts, and shall recline in company with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the Kingdom of the heavens; [12] but the children of the Kingdom shall be thrown out into the outer darkness. There shall be the weeping and the gnashing of the teeth.”**

“I say unto you” is the voice of authority. The eastern and the western parts do not omit the northern and the southern, but divide the inhabited earth into two halves, and thus mean: “from over the entire world.” It is true, the Jews were scattered far and wide over the whole world, and are thus scattered now more than ever; here, however, the reference of the “many from the eastern and the western parts” is to the Gentiles, for “many” is placed in opposition to “the children of the Kingdom” (Jews) in v. 12. Jesus sees this Gentile centurion as the forerunner of hosts of Gentiles in the future years coming into God's Kingdom from over the entire earth. What a glorious sight!

The blessedness of the Kingdom is frequently pictured as an oriental feast, the guests reclining at table in the old oriental manner. The mention of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob does not intend to restrict the idea of the Kingdom to heaven. The Kingdom of grace and of glory is viewed as one, so that whoever enters it here on earth is at once united with the ancient patriarchs. They are made so prominent because God made the Messianic

covenant with them, beginning with Abraham who believed the covenant promise and is thus called “the father of believers.” That covenant was to bless all the nations, even as Jesus here prophesies anew regarding the “many” Gentiles. Thus every believer in Jesus, the Messiah, the fulfiller of the covenant promise, becomes “a son of Abraham” (Luke 19:9; comp. 13:16), and in the figure here employed, reclines with the patriarchs at the divine feast.

[12] Concerning the Jews Jesus prophesies that “the sons of the Kingdom shall be thrown out into the outer darkness.” Because the Jews are here called “the sons of the Kingdom” we cannot argue that they were in the Kingdom. Often they who are in a place are afterwards thrown out, but they too who never were in may be thrown out when they presume that they have the right to enter. Why should we cause ourselves unnecessary difficulties? The Jews imagined themselves to be Abraham’s sons, because they were Abraham’s physical descendants; they still cling to this imagination. Jesus did some of the throwing out in John 8:37-41 where he reveals to the Jews that Abraham is not at all their spiritual father, that their father is the devil whose works they do, while they fail utterly to do what Abraham did, — he saw the day of Jesus in the great promise of God and was glad.

The comparative ἑξώτερος, “the outer darkness,” is used in the superlative sense, the darkness utterly outside, beyond which there is no greater. This comparative form implies another darkness that is only ἔξω, “outside” of the Kingdom. This is the spiritual darkness of blindness and unbelief which we see all about us in the unbelieving world. They who are lost in it often shout aloud that they and they alone possess the true light. One may escape from this outside darkness (2 Cor. 4:6) by means of the light of the Gospel and the enlightenment of faith, thus becoming a son of Abraham and thus entering the Kingdom. But when one has been thrown into the outer darkness, which signifies the darkness of hell, he is lost for ever.

To retain a proper understanding of what the Kingdom means see Matt. 21:5, the First Sunday in Advent. The A.V. should not translate υἱοί as “children” (connotation: birth, immaturity, dearness); the word means “sons” (connotation: maturity, legal standing, the opposite of slaves, etc.). Τὸ σκότος with the article often has the significance of a monstrous power.

Here the adjective “the outer” is added with a second article and is thus like an apposition and is made as emphatic as its noun. “Thrown” (passive) is the verb so constantly used, — glance at Rev. 19:20; 20:10 and 14-15. The supposition that Jesus here speaks eschatologically is not correct, for each obdurate Jew’s soul is thrown out into the outer darkness already at the instant of death and does not need to wait until the day of final judgment.

The Bible speaks of heaven as a place, also of hell as a place. This, however, is condescension to our finite minds which cannot conceive of anything that has no space and is wholly above time (eternal). Therefore it is always foolish to press the spacial idea (or the time idea) when speaking about the other world and from such ideas to draw conclusions by means of our logic. The outer darkness is one of the various scriptural names for hell, and this is everywhere described as a place of torment. “There shall be the weeping (definite, none more terrible) and the gnashing of the teeth” (again definite, none more excruciating). Only the souls of the obdurate are at first thrown into hell, their bodies decay in the earthly graves. Yet Jesus speaks as though these souls have eyes with which to weep and teeth which they gnash. None of us knows how to speak of souls in any other way. “The weeping” is due to the absolute loss of happiness and hope, and the gnashing of the teeth is due, not to rage or helpless despair, but to the excruciating torment in hell. Compare 13:42 and 50: “the furnace of fire: there shall be the wailing and the gnashing of the teeth.” The description is standard: 22:13; 24:51; 25:30; Luke 13:28.

Zahn believes in the annihilation of the damned, but he and all who think as he does have the Scripture revelation solidly against them. Unbelievers rage against the idea of hell, but their rage changes nothing. Why do they rage so? Is it because of secret misgiving that the words of Scripture may be true? The Russellites manipulate the words sheol and hades, but who cares about the names, — the descriptions of the place recorded in the Scriptures inspire all the terror.

**[13] And Jesus said to the centurion: “Go thy way. As thou didst believe, be it unto thee!” And the servant was healed in that very hour.** From Luke we learn that the centurion had sent a second delegation to Jesus, but Matthew speaks only of the centurion, for he wants us to understand that Jesus meant to deal with this man. So Jesus sends him word to go his way (ὑπάγε) and assures him that it shall be to him as he has

believed. The reference is to v. 8-9 and to the true faith concerning the person and the power of Jesus there expressed. Without going to the sick man, by his mere volition Jesus healed him in that very hour, i.e. at that very moment. Thus he justified the centurion's faith.

Nothing is said about the faith of the sick man. This proves that faith is not always a requisite for being healed. "As thou didst believe" is at times generalized to mean that whatever we request of Jesus he will grant. And again, that if we believe hard enough Jesus will give us whatever we ask. Let us note that the faith that has a wrong conception of Jesus or that expects wrong things from Jesus cannot expect to be heard. The wrong ideas and the wrong faith, however strong, must first be corrected. Then also we must learn to say What the leper had learned: "If thou wilt." True faith ever bows in humble submission to the Lord's will.

## **Homiletical Aid**

The great number of miracles of healing. The blessed light they shed on Christ's person and on his mission. He who came to save us', soul and body, from sin, death, and hell manifested his ability to save by working so many wondrous miracles of healing while he walked here on earth among men. Our text selects two that are notable to a high degree, two that reveal to us what all of these miracles really convey.

### **Christ's Saving Power and Grace Manifested in the Blessed Miracles of Healing.**

- I. We must have a proper conception of the greatness of these miracles.

The leprosy — even in an advanced stage, "full of leprosy" (Luke) — a living death — describe — incurable — we still read of leper colonies — segregated. Jesus cured such a man with the simple word: "I will! Be thou clean!"

Paralysis (not palsy, our versions) we have often seen. Here a severe case. Complications had set in causing great distress. Wholly

incurable. Healed on the instant, healed and made perfectly healthy and strong, by just one word.

The true religion the only one attested by such miracles. Legendary and fanciful tales of miracles. Faith healers, Christian Scientists, Catholic shrines offer nothing even comparable. Bring out the fact.

II. We must see the great import of these miracles.

They are miracles of healing. One of the fearful consequences of sin is disease of the body, even also of the mind. The world is full of doctors. The achievements of medicine in our day, yet ailments of all kinds persist and multiply. Behold in Jesus the power and the grace which by removing in such a wondrous way these consequences of sin proclaimed to men that he was the One who also removes the cause, the sin itself. The worst physical consequences (leprosy, paralysis here) do not exceed his ability, because his mission is to save us eternally, soul as well as body.

The deity, the omnipotence, and then the blessed grace, compassion, condescension.

III. We must understand the permanent significance of these miracles.

They stand before us in the inspired record for all time. When originally wrought, though many saw these miracles, yet the number was small, and these miracles are meant to manifest Jesus to all men in the world. Hence there is no continuous repetition in our day. Once wrought, they stand in Holy Writ as a wondrous Epiphany for all time. To demand repetition at the present time is to say that the recorded miracles are not enough.

Therefore we constantly go back to these miracles, read them, preach on them, teach them to our children. The Lord's arm is not shortened, he still works miracles. But we lack an inspired record of them and thus we cannot use them as we use the miracles set before us in the Scriptures.

We reject all the pretended miracles of so-called healers, etc.

IV. Thus we too will ever come to Jesus in the fulness of faith.

In full submissiveness of faith, ever submitting to our Lord's will alone.

With absolute confidence in the Lord's Word.

We will lay our troubles at his feet and accept whatever his grace allots.

We know that in the end he will deliver us from all evil.

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Unbelief is blind. I would not ask a blind man about the color of a beautiful flower. What unbelief presumes to say about Jesus is blind judgment, pure presumption. Faith alone sees the Epiphany of Jesus and the manifestation of his glory. Learn from our text

### **How Faith Sees the Lord, the Great Helper.**

Here are several expressions of pure and true faith addressed to Jesus himself, each expression revealing what faith sees in him.

I. "Lord, if thou wilt."

The leper came to Jesus as the almighty Helper who could heal even him in the advanced stages of his deadly disease. Faith sees the deity of Jesus with all the attributes of deity. Nothing is too hard for this Helper.

Yet faith never dreams of dictating, never presumes. Just because this Helper is God's own Son faith bows in the dust and says: "Lord, if thou wilt!" Faith is ready to die of disease if it be the Lord's will.

II. "Lord, I am not worthy."

The Jewish elders said of the centurion: "He is worthy" (Luke 7:4). Was he not a centurion? And, more than all, had he not built the synagogue for the Jews of Capernaum? That a Gentile, a mere proselyte of the Jews, should do such a thing certainly made him worthy.

But true faith ever knows and confesses its total unworthiness. It sees in Jesus pure grace, extended only to the unworthy who confess their unworthiness. So this centurion sent his petition to Jesus. Many of us count on our worthiness, especially when we have done something for the church. Look at Jesus with the eyes of this centurion!

III. “Lord, speak the word only.”

So Peter: “Lord, at thy word.” Luke v. 5. The word makes known the will, and this word and this will of the Lord faith trusts with completest confidence.

All the words of Jesus that we have, all the blessedness that they express, — requiring only that we hear and believe them. To see the glory of Jesus, to see him as he really is, is to rely utterly on his Word.

IV. “Lord, my servant lieth sick.”

The centurion prays for his servant, who was even his slave. This is the intercession of love, and love is a fruit of faith. Jesus is love and ever responds to true love.

The centurion states only the fact: “My servant lieth sick,” he leaves all else to Jesus. This is faith and trust indeed. He is the One to whom we can submit everything, even our life and our death.

Does your faith see the Lord, your Helper for time and for eternity, in this way?

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The danger is that instead of preaching on the manifestation (Epiphany) of Christ we preach on the leper and the centurion. When we do preach on their faith the emphasis of the sermon must be on what they believed, on the contents of their faith, on Christ. Our homiletical application must be akin to homiletical appropriation, — see *S.* 230, etc., by the author.

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This text reaches far beyond the Jew who was a leper and the Gentile centurion who had a paralyzed servant. Both men had faith, the Gentile

centurion even had great faith, greater than that of any Jew who had as yet believed in Jesus. This centurion made Jesus speak of you and of me when he said:

**“Many Shall Come from the East and the West.”**

I. All attracted by the Epiphany of Jesus.

The manifestation of power, grace, and love in the two wondrous healings of our text. Many more such miracles. All of them point to the healing and the help contained in Christ’s death and resurrection, to the Kingdom of salvation. This Epiphany light now shines in many lands, by means of the Gospel, and attracted by it many come from over the entire earth.

II. All moved to saving faith in Jesus.

He cured the leper and the centurion’s slave, because he is the almighty and all-merciful Son of God, our Savior. These miracles of healing are the foretaste of his power to heal and to save both body and soul by an everlasting salvation. The leper and the centurion came to Jesus in faith before the miracles were wrought, — how strong must their faith have been after the miracles were performed. Thus all the many from the east and the west are drawn to faith, and your faith and mine in Jesus cannot be too strong.

III. All dining with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the Kingdom.

All partaking of the complete salvation Jesus has wrought. The picture of the feast. The patriarchs received and believed the promise, and we together with all these from the east and the west have received the very fulfillment itself. So they dine at the head of the table, and we dine with them and enjoy the pardon, sanctification, peace, joy, consolation, etc., Jesus has prepared for us, finally also the glory in heaven.

IV. But alas, the sons of the Kingdom are cast out!

The obdurate Jews who were called first but despised and crucified Jesus. Their hardened unbelief, Matt. 23:37-38. The outer darkness (explain), the weeping and the gnashing of the teeth.

Christ's Epiphany of grace divides men into two classes, those dining with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and those cast out into the outer darkness with the obdurate Jews. In which group are you?

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Jesus had just finished preaching the great Sermon on the Mount. The impression of this testimony by word in 7:28-29. On the same day, after leaving the mount, Jesus added the testimony of his deeds; comp. 4:23. Concerning the healing of the leper Jesus himself says that he wanted it to act as a testimony to the authorities of the Jews in Jerusalem. Indeed, all his miracles are mighty witnesses, which offer the strongest testimony concerning him, even down to the present day.

### **The Glorious Testimony of the Miracles.**

I. They stand there in Holy Writ and testify to the whole world today.

To the omnipotence of Jesus, to his compassion and grace, to his condescension and pity. And thus to his Sonship, to his Saviorhood. He certainly did not come to relieve a few sufferers from their physical ills and no more. The miracles cry out to us that he came to deliver our souls from the greatest disease, from the sin and the death in us.

II. They stand there in Holy Writ and demand that their testimony be believed.

Jesus said: "Though ye believe not me, believe the works!" John 10:38; see also John v. 36; 14:10. What does the testimony of the healing of the leper say? The testimony of the healing of the centurion's servant? This testimony multiplied in all the healings. What the miracles gloriously testify is altogether plain.

Men reject this testimony. They want no Savior such as this. Many deny his miracles, explain them away, ignore them. Thus they rid themselves of their testimony. They refuse faith.

But we will join the many from the east and the west. We accept this blessed testimony. Our faith shall ever rest upon it, and thus our consolation, joy, and hope.

III. They stand there in Holy Writ to the confounding of all who reject their testimony.

Jesus sees the many believers dining in the Kingdom with the patriarchs, who first received the promise in the covenant grace. Blessed are these indeed! Here is where we belong.

But he sees also the sons of the Kingdom, the obdurate Jews, who refuse all this glorious and blessed testimony, thrown out into the outer darkness. Many who are not Jews belong with them. But not you and I.

# The Fourth Sunday After Epiphany. Matt. 8:23-27

## Jesus Manifests his Omnipotent Power over the Forces of Nature

Surely Jesus manifests himself in this miracle, the companion to which is John 6:16-21. This manifestation makes the text highly appropriate for a Sunday after Epiphany. Nebe's idea that the texts of this cycle present Jesus as the prophet is not at all borne out by the texts themselves. Where is the prophet here on the storm-tossed sea? Here is the Lord of storm and of sea, here is omnipotent power over the forces of nature. Here is the effect of this mighty manifestation on the witnesses: "What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him?" We see that in many, many ways Jesus manifested his deity, so that no man could fail to see in him the Son of God come to be our Savior.

The account of the day on which the Sermon on the Mount was preached and the many miracles that distinguished this day were performed is concluded with v. 17. Matthew now tells us about more miracles that occurred on another notable day of the same period. The first of these miracles is the Stilling of the Tempest.

It is toward evening, for presently the Lord sleeps (v. 25). A great multitude had gathered at the shore of the lake (v. 18). Jesus was tired and spent and sent them away (Mark 4:36). Jesus gave orders to go to the other side of the lake (v. 18), and after a short delay (v. 19-22) he is able to embark. **And when he had entered a boat there followed him his disciples.** These were not only the Twelve, but also other followers of Jesus who went along in other boats, Mark 4:36. The storm on the lake caused all of the boats serious distress.

**[24] And lo, a great tempest arose in the sea, so that the boat was covered by the waves; he, however, was sleeping.** Matthew's exclamation "lo" pertains to all three facts, the sudden coming of the tempest, the boat covered with waves, the Lord calmly sleeping. The fact that such a storm should suddenly arise toward evening of a hot day is in itself nothing surprising, since the lake lies between high hills in a sort of trough and is subject to sudden and violent tempests which sweep through the declivity. The astounding thing is the fact that while this tempest brought the boat into great jeopardy Jesus should be wholly unconcerned, quietly asleep.

The severity of the storm is indicated by the result (ὥστε): the boat was covered by the waves. The very words σεισμὸς μέγας point to the same effect, for the word σεισμὸς is also used with reference to earthquakes and in this connection refers to the tossing waters, hence we have the reference to the waves dashing over the boat. The other evangelists speak of the severity of the wind. Jesus had fallen asleep before the tempest arose. Mark states that he lay "in the stern" and "on the cushion" provided for such a purpose. We do not know how the boat was constructed, but we presume that in the stern a sort of cabin had been built which afforded shelter from sun and from rain. In this cabin Jesus slept. The imperfect tense ἐκάθευδε is pictorial and at the same time intimates that something else followed.

Fanciful notions have been inserted. Already the ancients were not satisfied with natural causes, but had the devil bring on this violent storm. It was also attributed to the presence of Judas in the boat, although at other times wind and water did not disturb him. Then come the allegorizers with the remark that wherever Jesus is present upheavals must occur. Yet, Jesus sailed across the lake on many occasions and nothing whatever exceptional occurred. Then there are tricky and dangerous questions: did the deity of Jesus sleep? did his omniscience foreknow the coming of the storm? did he go to sleep because of such knowledge? The simple fact is that the storm came as an act of the providence of God, in whose hands are all the forces of nature. The peaceful sleep of Jesus was due to the day's fatigue. If this explanation is too simple for your mind, then make the most of it as it is.

**[25] And having come to him they aroused him, saying: "Lord, save! We are perishing!"** Being at their wit's end, these disciples come to Jesus for help. A number of them were expert sailors, had handled boats on this lake for years, knew all about what to do in a storm, — and yet here they

run to Jesus! He was a carpenter, no sailor, wholly inexperienced as regards boats, now even asleep, so that one might expect him to be thoroughly frightened on waking and seeing the tempest and the great danger, — and yet these men turn to Jesus! Astounding! A strange confession! They are not thinking of human aid, for the best of that they have in their own skill. When they arouse Jesus they cry for divine help. The act of divine providence brought out their faith in Jesus and this strange confession of it.

Yet they did not have faith that was robust, strong, assured, smiling. Their faith was mingled with panic, with fear of death in the waves; they manifested a littleness of faith. They regard Jesus as their last resort. The evangelists report their cries differently, but some cried one thing, some another, and each evangelist makes his selection. Remember, Matthew himself was in that boat, was one who perhaps cried as he here reports. Note the strong aorist “save,” σωσον, i.e. save by a decisive act; but also note the durative present “we are perishing,” απολλύμεθα, describing the danger.

**[26] And he says to them: “How frightened you are, men of little faith!” Then, having arisen, he rebuked the winds and the sea, and there came a great calm.** Not a trace of fear in Jesus. His serenity is undisturbed. Why? Because he was ever in his Father’s hands.

Jesus rebukes the storm in the hearts of his disciples and also the physical tempest on the lake. It would seem that Mark and Luke have the correct order, first the stilling of the tempest, then the word to the disciples. Τί is the adverbial “how” as used in an exclamation: “How frightened you are!” It is the fact because of which Jesus exclaims. He cannot well ask: “Why are ye fearful?” because Jesus himself answers this question, — the reason is their littleness of faith. In the address: ὀλιγόμιστοι, “men of little faith,” lies a rebuke. Jesus had a right to expect a greater faith from them.

Yet, a little faith is better than no faith. Critical moments expose the size of our faith. Divine providence lets such moments arrive.

But it is a mistake to think that because Jesus was physically present in the boat, therefore the disciples had no right to be so frightened. Preachers then at times make the application to us by telling us that Jesus is ever present with us, and therefore we should not fear. The latter is true, and as far as the disciples are concerned, they too should not have feared, even if

during that storm Jesus had been far away from them, in Capernaum or in Jerusalem. As children of God we are ever in God's care and protection.

However, this does not mean that we shall never be killed when in danger. God has left us no promise to that effect. In mortal danger we do cry to him, but we submit to his will. If in his counsel we are to die, we resign ourselves to his will and die in full trust in his wisdom and his grace.

The Lord ἐπετίμησε, "rebuked," the winds and the sea, and told them to be still. Mark writes: "Be silent! Put the muzzle on and keep it on!" perfect tense. And immediately there came a great calm. The commotion did not die down gradually, it ceased as at a blow. All the synoptists report this sudden calm. Now dashing waves almost swamping the boat, and in the next instant a calm and a lovely sea with scarce a ripple. This was a miracle, and thus all opportunity for assigning natural causes for the cessation of wind and waves had to be cut off and was cut off. The miracle was visibly overwhelming. The objection of rationalists that Jesus saw that the storm had just about spent its fury is childish. Did Jesus, the carpenter, see that, and did the sailors among the disciples not observe it?

**[27] Now the men marveled, saying: "What kind of person is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him?"** When Matthew writes οἱ ἄνθρωποι, "the human beings," he does not refer to people who afterwards heard about the sudden cessation of the tempest; but the evangelist has in mind all the men in all of the boats. Matthew here indicates that he knows about the "other boats" of which Mark 4:36 tells us. All these persons marveled at what they witnessed. Their astonished minds focused upon Jesus: "What kind of person is this" etc.? The omnipotence of Jesus had manifested itself in so great a manner that really the only answer to the question is: "This person is none other than the Son of God."

Note that ὅτι is consecutive and should be translated: "seeing that," or simply "that," and not "because." Winds and sea obey Jesus on the instant. What mere man could ever thus control these mighty forces of nature? John 1:14b. When now men come with their rationalizings, we decline to waste our time on them. Jesus once more displays his deity here. He is Master of all the forces of nature.

This historical account has been allegorized by the preachers, and not a few pride themselves on their skill in so interpreting this text. The sea is the

wicked world, the boat with Jesus and the disciples aboard is the Church. The wicked world rages against the Church and would destroy it, but it cannot, for Jesus is in the boat with his Church, his almighty command stills the raging and keeps his Church from perishing. The thing is done after this order.

## Homiletical Aid

Here are outlines to which I object. M. Herold offers:

### **The Tossing Ship, the Church of the Lord.**

I. Her distress; II. Her being alone; III. Her cry for help; IV. Her victory.

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Sommer approves this one:

### **The Course of the Christian Church is like the Voyage of a Vessel.**

- I. The little vessel has to battle with wind and waves.
- II. The men on board are of little faith and afraid.
- III. The Lord, however, guides it with a strong hand to a safe haven.

Besides the allegory we here notice weak generalizations and abstractions.

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Stoecker, though a court-preacher, illustrates another fault. His theme is:

**“Call Upon Me in the Day of Trouble and I Will Deliver thee and thou Shalt Glorify Me!”**

The division is:

- I. The trouble — the storm.
- II. The calling — the prayer.
- III. The Deliverer — the Lord.

I should not use a passage that is remote from my text as a theme, for it then appears as though the sermon is based on this passage. A confused and blurred impression is made. Let your text supply theme and division and do not import them from other parts of the Bible.

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When Jesus turned water into wine, when he healed the worst cases of disease, he let men see who he really was and on what mission he had come. He multiplied the miracles and made the evidence overwhelming. There were so many miracles that a large number of them were not recorded; the evangelists refer to them only in a summary way. Among the outstanding and most notable miracles is the one which records that he stilled the tempest on the Sea of Galilee. Here we behold

### **Jesus as Master of All the Powers of Nature.**

- I. It was toward evening. Jesus was tired and spent as a result of the arduous work of the day. He is at the sea-shore and the crowds are still about him. He dismisses them and enters into a fisherman's large and roomy boat and bids the disciples, so many of whom were fishermen by trade and expert sailors, to sail to the far side of the Sea. Other boats follow. Jesus lies down to rest on the cushions in the cabin in the stern of the boat. The Sea is calm — gentle ripples are stirred by the breeze as the boat leaves the shore. The powers of nature seem so calm, so pleasant, so tame. Etc.

This is the Sea of Galilee. Describe how it lies in a trough, how sudden, fierce storms sweep over it. The scene changes. The gentle powers of nature suddenly become fierce and terrifying — howling wind, crashing waves — sails long sheeted home, but waves almost swamping the vessel. Behold here:

*Tremendous are the powers of nature.*

The storms you have seen. Uncontrollable. This storm extreme.

- II. What happened in the boat? Jesus slept peacefully on in the sheltered cabin.

The sailors among the disciples handled the boat with expert skill. They had weathered many a storm on this Sea. For a time they succeeded, probably glad that Jesus did not awaken and come out of the cabin into the flying spray. He might only have been in the way. But this tempest grew worse than any in which they had ever been. The boat was threatening to sink. All sailors' skill was at an end, panic ensued. Behold here:

*Men quail before the threatening powers of nature.*

The disciples had reason to quail. Describe how they finally cried to Jesus, whose trade had been only that of a carpenter, to save them from perishing.

- III. Divine providence sent the tempest in order to reveal the power and the glory of the Son. Describe how Jesus arose, how he rebuked the disciples' littleness of faith and then spoke to the turbulent elements. Behold:

*The powers of nature obey Jesus on the instant.*

The sudden, amazing calm. And then the great question: "What manner of man is this?" How happy we are to give the answer:

**The Almighty Lord and Savior of the World, Who Came to Deliver us for ever.**

Note: This sketch consists chiefly of description. The hearers love it, generally hear too little of it. See S. 233-240 on elaborative analysis and note the last paragraph. No false notes dare appear in the description or the effect is ruined. The climax of the sermon centers in Jesus who is mentioned at the end.

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The climax of the text lies in the question asked by the men in the accompanying boats: "What manner" etc. They had just witnessed the

tremendous fact that

### **The Winds and the Sea Obey Him.**

I. The winds and the sea obey him: Yet he died on the cross.

Combine these great facts and thus see the Lord's Saviorglory.

II. The winds and the sea obey him: Yet his apostles died.

He, the almighty Savior, directs our lives. No danger so great but that he can save us. Yet he wants some martyrs. He wants us to be tried and refined as gold in the fire. He wants us to die when his wisdom so decides.

III. The winds and the sea obey him: Yet men refuse to believe that he is our almighty Savior.

The men in the boats ask the question, their answer is not recorded. The Jews nailed him to the cross, reject him to this very day. Modernists, the press, the man on the street. The winds and the sea obey him, but so many men will not obey him.

Let us obey in faith.

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Back of the commotions of nature is the hand of providence. We see this especially in our text.

### **What did the Great Storm on the Sea of Galilee Reveal?**

I. Littleness of faith on the part of the disciples.

The disciples considered themselves devoted believers, — just as many of us do.

In the hour of danger they resorted only to their own ability, — just as we so generally do; try every possible human means.

Only as a last resort, in panic and despair, they run to Jesus, — just as this happens in the case of many Christians.

In the case of the disciples the storm brought out this littleness of faith and enabled Jesus to rebuke it.

When faith is little, it is soon upset and lost. Ever and always trust Jesus a hundred percent, even if in his wisdom he permits you to die.

II. Omnipotent deity on the part of Jesus.

The terrific forces of winds and sea that no human power is even faintly able to control. These forces reveal our utter weakness.

A calm command from Jesus, and winds and sea obediently turn into a great calm. They hear their Creator's voice and drop at his feet.

Did the disciples know and believe that Jesus was the Son of God? Now they had new and most mighty support for that faith. We also have this support.

The omnipotence delivered them from mortal danger. Our faith is to be triumphant and firm even when Christ's omnipotent power allows us to suffer, even to die.

Such a Savior have we, and such faith should he find.

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We must know our Lord more fully. Then we must put absolute faith and confidence in him. For this we have

**The Epiphany of our Lord in the Storm at Sea.**

I. We see him indeed as true man.

He was tired and spent after a day of arduous work. He sent the crowds away. He reclined in the boat's cabin on the cushions and slept. True man indeed.

Our Savior had to be one of us, partake of our flesh and blood (Heb. 2:14). Expand.

II. Yet behold his deity!

The storm, the danger, the panic.

The calmness of Jesus, the rebuke to the disciples of little faith, the word of omnipotent power and its instantaneous effect: wind and sea in a great calm.

What a glorious epiphany!

III. Shall we offer Jesus only littleness of faith?

Shall we run and cry to him only as a last resort?

Shall we put our greatest trust in our own ability and in that of men?

Shall we believe in him only tentatively, half-heartedly?

Such littleness of faith is wholly unworthy of him. A shame to offer him no more.

IV. Let us believe in him with heart and soul!

With a faith resting on the fullest understanding of his person and of his saving mission and work.

With a faith that never wavers in any danger or ill that betide us. His power, wisdom, and grace are ever over us. Remember St. Paul's thorn in the flesh.

With faith in him as our Redeemer who saves our souls for evermore.

# The Fifth Sunday After Epiphany. Matt. 13:24-30

## Jesus Makes Manifest his Divine Wisdom in Teaching

The miracles manifest the Lord's glory; hence during this Epiphany season of the Church Year we have had a selection of miracles. The teaching of Jesus also manifests his glory, especially his divine knowledge and wisdom. Thus one of his wonderful parables is chosen as a text for the present Sunday. The range of choice for making a selection of material illustrative of Jesus' power as a teacher is naturally wide, for any portion of his teaching manifests a great deal concerning this all-wise teacher. A parable is chosen, I think, because the parables are a unique feature of Jesus' teaching. He has employed so many of them; all are so perfect in substance and in form that they become distinctive of Jesus. The best human teachers have never been able to construct parables of equal perfection. Whether the parable of the tares was chosen for a special reason I am unable to say. The import of this parable is certainly most valuable. We may accept it as a striking sample of *the Teaching of Jesus Manifesting his Divine Wisdom*.

**[24] Another parable he placed before them, saying: "The Kingdom of heaven has become like a man that sowed excellent seed in his field; [25] but while men were sleeping, his enemy came and resowed tares among the grain, and went away."**

On the present occasion Jesus spoke several parables. The way in which Matthew introduces the second, the third, and the fourth seems to indicate that Jesus made quite a pause between them and thus allowed the hearers to absorb each parable and its great significance. We must note the historical aorist ὁμοιώθη, which is the effective aorist because it points to the end of What happened. The Kingdom of the heavens "did become like" (the passive used in the middle sense, since no agent is implied). We are to be

told what happened to bring about this likeness to a man who sowed excellent seed in his field and then found tares growing in it. The parable describes past facts which all of us should know well. These facts present a problem, the right solution of which we should also know. As regards the Kingdom see the notes on Matt. 21:5 (the First Sunday in Advent). The Kingdom is the Lord's rule of grace here on earth, and his rule of glory in heaven. It is the Kingdom of the heavens because this rule is exercised from heaven in its grace and mercy and is thus altogether heavenly in its character.

The story of the parable is entirely simple and plain. The sermon must add the interpretation which the Lord himself fortunately supplies in v. 37 etc. The man who sowed the excellent seed in his field is the Son of man, Jesus himself. To sow this seed was his great mission. Jesus gave himself the title "the Son of man" and constantly used it, because the title "Messiah" had too strong a worldly and political connotation in the minds of the Jews who looked for a grand earthly deliverer to raise their nation above all the nations of the world. This extravagant opinion of the Jews concerning the earthly elevation of their people formed the source from which millennialism grew when Christianity spread. The Son of man = he who is man and yet far more than man, the Godman. In *The Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel* 330 etc., I offer a full exposition.

The interpretation that the field is "the world," and therefore not "the church," is most valuable. For this fact that the seed was sown into the world cuts off two dangerous errors. One is that the sons of the wickedness may remain undisturbed in the congregation (no church discipline, no expulsion). The other is that the sons of the wickedness ought to be removed from the world (the use of the sword against heretics either by the church herself or by her use of the secular arm). When Jesus forbids his douloi to go out into the field to pull up the tares, he forbids no proper church discipline; what he forbids is that these douloi should do what is reserved for the angels at the final judgment. Heretics, errorists, and unbelievers in general are to have no place in the church, but in the world they may run their course.

This is true religious tolerance. False tolerance allows heretics, errorists, and unbelievers to remain in the church and there to undermine the true doctrine and its confession. This parable shows what religious liberty really

is. This liberty pertains to the world. As for the church, she is bound to preach, teach, and confess nothing but what the Word teaches. When she fails in this she herself becomes full of tares.

The surprising feature is the fact that Jesus calls the excellent seed “the sons of the Kingdom,” i.e. the sons who belong to the Lord’s rule of grace while here on earth. When the Word of God is sown into our hearts by faith we become “the sons of the Kingdom.” Not subjects. We are partakers and heirs of the Kingdom. Royalty is ours. We are kings and rule with Christ. The word is “sons,” not “children” (A.V.), for the connotation of the word “sons” is that of maturity, of conscious rights, the opposite of slaves. “Sons” refers to our high standing. The excellent seed is sown into the field. The sons of the Kingdom, and these form the church, are placed into the world although they are not of the world. We must live our earthly lives in this wicked world among heretics, errorists, and unbelievers of all kinds, yet we are kept and supported by the Lord’s grace as his own.

[25] The enemy of the Son of man is the devil (v. 39). “While men were sleeping,” at night, the devil who works in the dark and shuns the light came stealthily and resowed the field with tares, ζιζάνια, most likely a kind of “darnel,” which has foliage like wheat or barley and during the first stages of growth cannot be distinguished from the grain. The tares are “the sons of the wickedness,” the opposite of “the sons of the Kingdom.” We might translate οἱ υἱοὶ τοῦ πονηροῦ as “the sons of the wicked one,” namely of the devil, but in the very next sentence (v. 39) he is called “the devil” and not “the wicked one.” The opposite expression, “sons of the Kingdom,” has an abstract noun in the genitive, and in the corresponding expression the genitive likewise should be an abstract noun. “The sons” has the same connotation of legal right and of conscious standing as it has in the designation sons of the kingdom. “The wickedness” means active, vicious wickedness and is definite as indicating the wickedness which the devil brought into the world.

“The sons of the wickedness” are not any and all unregenerate sinners in the world. Then the parable would not fit the facts. No, these “sons” are sown by the devil, and not everywhere, but only where the Lord has sown his sons. The devil’s sowing follows the Lord’s sowing. Where Jesus by the gracious sowing of the Gospel produces sons of the Kingdom, right there, if possible in order to ruin the blessed sowing of Jesus, the devil resows and

produces “the sons of the wickedness,” men who have spurned the Gospel and the Kingdom and who prefer the wickedness (John 3:17-21). These are the unbelievers, and we must remember that the most damnable sin is that of unbelief. We do not call men unbelievers who have never come in contact with the Gospel.

Fortunately we do not hear much about the crime here described, yet ancient Roman law provided a penalty for a spiteful resowing of a man’s field with noxious weeds. “And went away” adds a touch that emphasizes the criminal character of the devil’s work. Ever and ever he leaves his wicked seed behind; ever and ever he seeks to work ruin and to spite Christ.

**[26] “Now when the blade sprouted and made fruit, then appeared also the tares.”** Not until the grain was well advanced and began to form heads did it appear that there were many tares here.

[27] Now follows the second part of the action. **“And the slaves of the house-lord, having come forward, said to him: ‘Lord, didst thou not sow excellent seed in thy field? Whence then has it tares?’ And he said to them: ‘An enemy did this.’”** The picture is that of a man who owns a large estate, who therefore, too, has many slaves on his place. Their question and the answer they receive intend only to make evident the greatness of the devil’s crime: where the grace and the Gospel of Jesus sow many believers and where all the hearers should also be true believers, there the devil by his wicked lies and deceptions draws many hearts into unbelief. When the seed begins to form this is all too apparent.

**[28] “And the slaves say to him: ‘Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up?’ [29] But he said: ‘No; lest by gathering up the tares you root up together with it the grain. [30] Let both grow together until the harvest, and at the season of the harvest I will say to the harvesters: ‘Gather up first the tares, and bind them in bundles for burning them up. But the grain gather into my storeroom.’”**

Θέλεις is to be construed with the subjunctive , and no connective is needed. The first thought that would occur to us is the one here expressed by the *douloi*, — we think the field should be cleaned of the tares. Despite this parable and what the Lord here states as his will, this very thought has been carried into action. The Church of Rome has burned and banned those

whom it adjudged to be, heretics and unbelievers. Others have been influenced by her example.

[29] When οὐ=“no” it has an accent. Why shall the tares be allowed to stand beside the grain? Note that only where the good grain (believers) is found there also are the tares (unbelievers) found. While we are here on earth we are not always competent to say who is a true believer, who is an unbeliever. If we attempted to root out the tares we should also destroy some of the good grain. The parable states this in simple fashion, but we may add that even a single believer is priceless in the Lord’s eyes.

[30] As for the tares, the Lord will attend to them in due time. They shall be gathered and burned at the harvest. Ἄφετε with the aorist infinitive means: “do you let both finish growing.” The harvest, Jesus says, is “the consummation of the world-age” (συντέλεια αἰῶνος), v. 39, i.e. the time when the present world-era has reached its conclusion, which is the end of the world. The harvesters are the angels. The idea is not that the angels are more competent to distinguish the tares from the wheat, for the douloi already clearly saw the difference. The angels are the Lord’s ministers at the final judgment.

Because of our method of reaping by cutting the grain with a machine, we may fail to get the idea expressed in the parable. In ancient times the grain was harvested with sickles, or the grain was pulled up by the roots by hand. Thus the harvesters could easily cull out the tares, so that no tares reached the threshing-floor. The tares were then tied in bundles, ready to be heaped up and burned, lest their seed be scattered and grow again. The grain gathered into the store-room or granary means that the sons of the Kingdom shall be taken into the new heaven and the new earth on judgment day.

## Homiletical Aid

Too many sermons drop the idea of Epiphany, of Christ’s manifesting himself, and deal only with the wheat and the tares as such. We should treat the parable as shedding light on *Jesus, the Supreme Teacher*. Nebe has eleven outlines, but not one that incorporates this feature.

Another fault against which we must guard is that committed by German preachers. Theirs was a state-church to which according to state law everyone living in a certain locality belonged and by the same law paid church-taxes. A man might be a scoffer, yet he was reckoned as a church member. With this type of church in mind Nebe offers the theme: "Good and Bad are Mixed Together in the Church." Sommer is governed by the same idea when he offers the themes: "The Mixed Form of the Church of Jesus on Earth," and: "The Glory of Jesus as it appears in the Mixed Form of the Church on Earth." According to these men the field is the church, not the world. They also are loud in praising Jesus for his tolerance, but their idea of tolerance is not that of Jesus, for they tolerate all sorts of unbelievers and ungodly people *in the church*.

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Yet the outline under Sommer's second theme conserves the Epiphany idea in, a rather unexpected manner. We therefore eliminate his wrong idea about "the mixed form of the church" and reconstruct his outline:

### **The Glory of Jesus Manifested in the Parable of the Wheat and the Tares.**

I. We see his love, — he sows the good grain in the world.

What would this world be if Jesus had not sown in it "the sons of the Kingdom"? A frightful pagan wilderness.

By Word and Sacrament these "sons" are produced, and they are true believers, the Christian Church, the Communion of saints.

Jesus would fill the whole world with the sons of the Kingdom, but so many men refuse to accept him and his Word.

II. We see his tolerance, — he suffers the tares in the world.

Wherever Jesus sows the devil resows to spite Jesus and, if possible, to ruin the sowing of Jesus. "The sons of the wickedness," unbelievers, heretics, errorists, in a word people who spurn the truth of Jesus' Word. Wherever by his Word Jesus creates true believers Satan produces as many unbelievers as possible.

What shall be done about these sons of the wickedness? They are not to be allowed in the church, in our congregations (discipline), but they may remain in the world. This is Christian tolerance: no persecution, prison, rack, fire and sword. No carnal weapons against unbelievers, only the mighty sword of the Spirit.

III. We see his justice, — the tares are burned with fire.

We may be impatient regarding the sons of the wickedness, but Jesus gives them their full time of grace for repentance. He keeps his church despite the devil and his devilish machinations. The tares do not worry Jesus.

The harvest is coming, etc.

Note: I have taken only the ideas of love, tolerance, and justice from Sommer's outline. They convey the Epiphany idea.

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Jesus the Master Teacher. His incomparable parables. The greatest difficulties are cleared up and the truth made plain in ways that are exceedingly simple and at the same time unforgettable. Thus the divine wisdom of Jesus shines forth to win our faith. As great as are his miracles (the three previous texts), so great is the teaching of our Lord. Consider

### **The Wisdom of Jesus in the Parable of the Wheat and the Tares.**

Jesus takes a simple incident, such as at times occurred in Palestine, and he tells this incident in a way that is not only full of meaning but at the same time makes entirely clear a few of the difficult matters that often perplex us and which many people have solved in the wrong way. Here retell the parable.

*Consider what the wisdom of Jesus indicates by*

I. The tares.

1. Jesus sows the excellent seed, the sons of the Kingdom. A concentrated expression. His Gospel works faith in our hearts and makes us believers, partakers of his blessed Kingdom (rule of

grace and of glory). By means of the Gospel all men should be such sons. But what has happened?

2. The devil by a criminal act resows the field with the sons of the wickedness, with those who do not believe, many of whom pervert the Gospel Word. Again a concentrated expression. By his lies and deceptions the devil works this unbelief, and he does it just where Jesus sows the sons of the Kingdom. Ever it is so. Where there is a congregation of true believers right there expect that there will be unbelievers of all kinds, heretics, errorists who oppose the truth of the Word.

## II. The field.

1. It is divine wisdom that says the field is the world,— note well, not the church. The church is to be composed only of true believers and true confessors. A few hypocrites may steal into it, but the parable disregards them. Unbelievers etc., have no place in the church.
2. The state-churches which count all the inhabitants; community and other creedless churches; pretended churches, like Unitarians, Russellites, Christian Science bodies, etc. The field is the world, not the true church of Christ.

## III. Letting the tares grow.

1. Human wisdom, like the servants in the parable, would pull up all the tares, kill all unbelievers, heretics, etc. This very thing has been done, recite the historical facts.
2. The wisdom of Jesus says no. This is Christian tolerance, religious liberty. The sword is not a means of grace to convert. The very reason which Jesus assigns, “lest ye root up also the wheat,” is exemplified by Catholic persecutions, for many noble believers and confessors were made martyrs.

## IV. The harvest.

Develop this part yourself.

Jesus is glorified in the tragedy of the tares. Dark is their origin and terrible their end, but heavenly is the grace of our Savior who would save all men so that none should be counted as tares. Keep in mind that the good seed sowed by Jesus are persons, “the sons of the Kingdom,” and that the tares sown by the devil are “the sons of the wickedness.” Consider thus

### **The Tragedy of the Tares.**

#### **I. The Lord’s grace makes this tragedy so great.**

“The Kingdom of heaven is like unto a man which sowed good seed in his field.” “The good seed are the — sons of the Kingdom.” We know he sowed by means of the Gospel, which he sent out into all the world to fill men’s hearts with faith. Matt. 28:19: “Go!” Behold the host of them that do believe. The field is the world, believers abound.

This is the greatness of the tragedy that whereas all could and should believe and be sons of the Kingdom, so many refuse in willful unbelief. Matt. 23:37-38. If there had never been a Gospel it would have been tragic, but since the Gospel was sent into all the world and thousands made the sons of the Kingdom, the tragedy is infinitely worse when men reject and believe not, pervert the Gospel, etc.

#### **II. The devil’s crime makes this tragedy so black.**

“His enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way.” A rare kind of crime. “The tares are the sons of the wickedness. The enemy that sowed them is the devil.” Only where the good seed is sown are the tares sown. Only where the Lord has believers does the devil place unbelievers. All the rest of the world is just heathen.

These unbelievers might have been believers, but they heeded the devil’s lies and deceits. When Jesus came to them, they chose the devil. When the light came, they loved the darkness rather than the light. John 3:19. This makes the tragedy of the tares so black. Black is blacker when set against strong light.

#### **III. The delayed judgment intensifies the tragedy.**

Unbelievers ought to receive their due at once. “Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up?” He said: “Nay, lest while ye gather up the

tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest.” The tares are the unbelievers and the heretics who are obdurate and cannot be changed. So we do not speak here of unbelievers who after all become believers. Yet they are allowed to continue.

Not for their sakes, but for our sakes. When men have attempted to weed out (Romanists) they mostly destroyed the good seed. The Lord rules in this tragedy. This delay in judgment only intensifies the tragedy. Unbelievers, with the doom absolutely certain for them.

IV. The day of doom brings the tragedy to its climax.

The time of the harvest. The angels; the bundles of tares. The fire. But the wheat in the granary. Here in the world we walk side by side, believer, unbeliever, confessor, heretic and errorist. Many disregard all difference. They would fraternize even with the Jews (Matt. 23:37-38). But the gulf is as wide as that between heaven and hell.

The climax of the tragedy at the last day: “Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire!” Matt. 25:41. And yet they might have gotten to hear: “Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the Kingdom!” Matt. 25:34.

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It is Jesus who proclaims complete religious liberty. They who scoff at him have him to thank for the freedom that permits them to scoff. Let us see how indeed

### **Jesus Proclaims Religious Liberty.**

I. Yes, you may believe what you please.

1. Jesus sowed the good seed, “the sons of the Kingdom,” true believers, in the world. Promptly the devil resowed the field with “the sons of the wickedness,” all sorts of unbelievers. But to the question whether these are to be pulled up Jesus answers: “Nay,” and wants us to let these tares continue to grow.

2. So you may reject the Gospel, you may be a blasphemer, scoffer, infidel, heretic of any of the many kinds, in or out of a so — called “church,” a wretched worldling who believes nothing, etc., etc. Jesus gives you this liberty.
3. Of course, you ought to be a son of his Kingdom, a believer in him and in his entire Gospel. You ought not to be seed which the devil sowed, a son of the wickedness. And to be sure, the true church of the Gospel cannot possibly admit you.

II. No; you are not to be coerced.

1. Men have tried that, at times with fire and sword, even in religious wars. Where Jesus builds a church, the devil erects a chapel alongside, and men thought they must pull that chapel doivn or set fire to it. They destroyed more true believers than unbelievers.
2. Not because of any right that you have are you to be left in your unbelief, if you will not believe your heavenly Master and the truth of his Word. Really you deserve no consideration whatever except that you be torn up root and branch. Our blessed Lord forbids religious coercion because of the sons of his Kingdom, — let no unbeliever claim too much.
3. The principle of non-coercion is violated by a large number of unbelievers when they force true believers to act counter to their faith in order to retain a position, obtain an office, etc.

III. Of course, you must take the eventual consequences.

1. These come inevitably. You cannot follow the devil and expect Jesus to accept you at the last day. You cannot ignore or despise him or maltreat his Word and have his angels at last conduct you to glory.
2. These come at the final judgment. Describe. The true believers are then to hear their Lord say: “Come” etc., Matt. 25:34.

The wheat and the tares do not end in the same way and in the same place.

# The Sixth Sunday After Epiphany. Matt. 17:1-9

## God Makes Jesus Manifest as his Son in the Transfiguration

Most of the old lectionaries present only five Sundays after Epiphany. Because of the manner in which the Church Year is constituted a sixth Sunday occurs all too seldom. This text was selected for the sixth Sunday in the days of the Reformation; the person who first proposed and used this text is no longer known. This is an Epiphany text indeed! Preach on it, even if the cycle has fewer than six Sundays.

Two texts of this cycle show that Jesus was made manifest by others than himself. The magi manifest him, and in our present text God makes the manifestation. “This is my beloved Son,” the Father himself declares. The entire text is full of the Epiphany thought.

**[1] And after six days Jesus takes with himself Peter and James and John his brother, and brings them up into a high mountain in private.** The time is noted in order to connect the Transfiguration with the account that precedes in 16:13-28, with Peter’s great confession in 16:16 etc., with the announcement of the Passion in 16:21, and with the prophecy concerning the judgment. When the Spirit descended upon Jesus at the time of the Baptism the Father declared his Sonship from heaven. Now more is to be done, — the actual divine glory of Jesus is to become visible to the three chosen witnesses. They are not only to hear that Jesus is God’s Son, they are to see him in his divine glory as the Son.

Jesus takes three witnesses with him, because two or three witnesses were always required. Even God abides by this principle (Heb. 6:17-18) and, of course, Jesus also does. Peter, James, and John, we may say, formed an inner circle among the Twelve, for Jesus distinguished them on three

special occasions. If it be asked why Jesus did not take the entire group of the Twelve, we may think of Judas. Remember that Jesus sealed the lips of these three witnesses for the time being (v. 9); to multiply the number of witnesses was thus not desirable. The traditional site of the Transfiguration is Mt. Tabor. This, however, does not merit the description “a high mountain,” — I have seen Mt. Tabor; and this so-called “mount” lies too far south. The slopes of Mt. Hermon are high enough, but they lie too far north. Jesus was not far from Caesarea Philippi, and it is best to think of one of the high ridges of the mountain region near this city.

**[2] And he was transformed before them. And his countenance shone like the sun; moreover, his garments became white like the light.** This occurred while Jesus was praying (Luke); prayer marks the important moments in the Lord’s life. The passive verb μετεμορφώθη has the Father as the agent: “he was transformed.” We should note that the verb is derived from μορφή, which always denotes the essential form, not a mere fashion like σκῆμα. The very nature of Jesus was made to take on a form that corresponded to this nature. This was done by an act of God, just as was the anointing with the Spirit after the Baptism. Yet Jesus must have known the Father’s intent, for he took the witnesses with him and climbed to the mountain height where they would be κατ’ ἰδίαν, “in private,” by themselves.

Matthew describes the astounding metamorphosis. The face of Jesus shone like the sun; the radiance was blinding. This brilliance extended to the entire body, for the garments of Jesus became white like the light. There is no comparison with the radiance on the face of Moses; we should think rather of the glorious appearance of Jesus in the vision of Rev. 1:13-15. Peter, one of the three eyewitnesses, writes: “We were eyewitnesses of his majesty,” 2 Pet. 2:16. John, also an eyewitness, writes: “We beheld his glory, glory as of the Only Begotten, from the Father,” John 1:14.

It was the same body and the same human nature that the Virgin bore, but joined to the person and the nature of the eternal Son of God. By virtue of this union the human nature was made partaker of all the divine attributes and of all their glory and majesty. During the days of the humiliation the human nature of Jesus used these imparted attributes only on exceptional occasions when the ministry for which he had come so required and then only to the extent of that requirement. Thus Jesus wrought his many

miracles, and thus God now transfigured the body of Jesus. These witnesses were to see their Lord in the actual glory which by virtue of the Incarnation belonged to his human nature. Soon he would bleed and die on the ignominious cross, but he was even then the same Jesus whose face now shone as the sun. In the state of glory which the witnesses saw on the mount Jesus now appears in heaven, and we shall see him as he is, we shall even be like him, 1 John 3:2. Yet I think we should say that the glory seen on the mount was subdued, so as not to blind the witnesses; in heaven it shines in all its fulness.

Rationalists persuade themselves that the rays of the sun were reflected from the figure of Jesus. Some have imagined a process operative in the spirit of Jesus and through it upon his body, a process now so far advanced as to shine out from his body. Once childish shallowness, then hollow profundity.

**[3] And lo, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah in company with him, speaking together.** This appearance of the two Old Testament representatives certainly deserves the interjection “lo.” Ὅπτομαι is frequently used with reference to the appearance of angels and to other manifestations; the aorist passive with the dative = “there were seen by them,” i.e. “there appeared to them.” Moses and Elijah were sent from heaven by God and appeared “in glory” (Luke) like Jesus. Elijah had been transferred bodily to heaven, and thus he must have appeared in his glorified human body. After the death of Moses God himself buried his body in an unknown place. God had no difficulty in regard to the appearance of the soul of Moses. The speculations that the souls of the blessed are fitted out with some kind of a body on their arrival in heaven, based on a misinterpretation of 2 Cor. v. 1 etc., should not disturb us even for a moment. Like the bodiless angels, these souls are able to appear where God wants them to be seen; only skeptics ask in regard to Rev. 6:9 and 20:4 how John could see “souls.”

The question is inevitable as to why God sent Moses and Elijah to appear to Jesus. The question pertains less to Moses than to Elijah, for beyond question Moses is the great representative of the law. Yet a most worthy companion of Moses is the great figure of Elijah, whom God took into heaven bodily, who preached the law when Israel had reached its great decline, when only 7,000 were left who had not bowed the knee to Baal. Yet

both men also represented the Old Testament prophecy. Luke informs us that they spoke with Jesus about the ἔξοδος the final outcome, which he should fulfill at Jerusalem. This refers not only to the “decease” of Jesus, but includes his resurrection, even as the two always go together. So the three spoke together concerning the great consummation of the mission of Jesus. The three disciples heard what was said; there is no reason for supposing that they had this information only because Jesus told them afterwards.

**[4] Now Peter responding said to Jesus: “Lord, it is excellent that we are here. If thou art willing, I will make three booths here, for thee one, for Moses one, for Elijah one.”** Ἀποκριθεὶς is used not only when one answers a question, but also when one simply responds to a situation. That is all that Peter does here, he offers the reaction of his own thoughts. When he declares that it is good to be there, he expresses what certainly was the case. He felt very near to heaven. He was in the presence of heavenly glory, two dwellers in heaven were present in their wondrous appearance. Peter’s one desire was to prolong this experience, and that is why he speaks of constructing booths. Mark indicates the foolishness of Peter’s idea by saying that Peter did not know what he was talking about. The idea of erecting booths out of limbs and foliage for beings in heavenly glory is certainly foolish. But Peter ever was a character who put himself forward and spoke where silence would have been better.

Thus also Peter receives no answer whatever. More important things are transpiring.

**[5] He still speaking, lo, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and lo, a voice out of the cloud, saying: “This is my Son, the Beloved, in whom I was well pleased! Be hearing him!”** Peter’s words were still in his mouth when, as Matthew exclaims (“lo”), a bright cloud overshadowed them. So suddenly this cloud appeared above them. It was miraculous, not a mere matter of natural cloud movements in the sky. Matthew is the evangelist who notes that the cloud was “bright,” which feature is correctly taken to symbolize the beneficence of the Father’s special presence; a dark, lowering cloud would be appropriate for threatening judgment. From this cloud the Father spoke. He is identified by what he speaks.

He declares the deity of Jesus: “This is my Son.” How any interpreter is able to deny the deity in the face of this declaration, which is the repetition of the same declaration of the Father recorded in 3:17, passes my understanding. I shall not argue, I shall point only to those words and shall let all deniers settle their accounts with the Father himself.

Ὁ ἀγαπητός (the verbal with passive sense), “the Beloved,” is an apposition: the Father’s love embraces Jesus, his incarnate Son. Because of this love he has in the midst of his humiliation granted him this glorious transformation. The love expressed by the verbal (ἀγάπη) is full of the completest comprehension and corresponding purpose. For the Father sent his Son, the Beloved, on his great redemptive mission, and his love thus enfolds his Son.

The relative clause: ἐν ᾧ εὐδόκησα, has the verb in the historical aorist tense. We are compelled to translate: “in whom I was well pleased,” and dare not translate: “am well pleased” (our versions). This aorist is not gnomic, despite Robertson, who apparently tries to justify the latter rendering. The historical sense of the tense becomes entirely certain, both here and in 3:17, when we discover that εὐδοκέω is at times used in an intensive sense; thus here: “I was well pleased when choosing him.” While this reaches back to the Father’s eternal mission of the Son, the fact that the Father now so declares reveals his good pleasure right at the moment of his speaking. The tense, however, remains historical and nothing more.

“Him do you hear!” with its present imperative means: hear him ever and ever. Here compare Deut. 18:15 and especially v. 18-19 with its threat against every soul that refuses to hear and thus refuses to believe, for faith cometh by hearing, Rom. 10:17. Peter’s confession of Christ’s deity as recorded in 16:16 is here confirmed by the Father. Peter, James, and John had been disciples of the Baptist, and they may well have heard the Father’s first testimony as recorded in 3:17 .

**[6] And when the disciples heard they fell on their countenance, and were exceedingly afraid. And Jesus having come touched them, and said: “Arise, and stop being afraid!” [8] And having lifted up their eyes, they saw no one, except Jesus alone.** Why did no one fall on his face in 3:17, where the Father spoke the same words, while here fear prostrates the witnesses? The situations are different. Here Jesus appears in super-

earthly glory, Moses and Elijah are present in glory, Peter already spoke foolishly, then when the cloud suddenly cut off his vision and when the majestic voice of the Father spoke, poor mortal, sinful nature could no longer endure it, the disciples feared exceedingly and fell on their faces. Credit Matthew with recording this fact. .

[7] He likewise records that Jesus came to them and touched them, and bade them to rise and stop fearing. The aorist passive is used in the active sense: ἐγέρθητε, “arise.” But μὴ φοβεῖσθε is the present tense which, when negatived, often means to stop an action already begun, thus here: “stop being afraid.”

[8] When now the three disciples raised their eyes they saw only Jesus, and he was in his natural state. Moses and Elijah had been removed in the same way in which they had been brought to Jesus. The cloud had likewise been lifted. The supposition that the cloud enveloped Moses and Elijah and caused them to disappear is without warrant. The cloud overshadowed also the disciples and Jesus. The cloud indicated the Father’s special presence. The disciples saw Jesus alone, and that meant that the wondrous Transfiguration was ended.

**[9] And while they were coming down out of the mountain Jesus ordered them, saying: “Tell no one the vision, until the Son of man is risen from the dead.”** On their way down Jesus seals the lips of the three witnesses until the time for testifying shall come. It is not true, as some suppose, that the rest of the Twelve were told. “Tell no one,” includes the nine disciples. Matthew writes “the vision,” τὸ ὄραμα. The opinion which makes this word mean a mere subjective, mental occurrence in the minds of the apostles is shattered by Matthew’s narrative which records objective facts and no mental phantasmagoria; also by Mark who writes ὃ ἑίδον, “what they saw,” and Luke who writes τὰ ἑώρακα, “the things they have seen.” “The vision” means that the three witnesses saw heavenly, supernatural sights with open eyes and with all their senses alert. Their silence regarding the vision was not to be for long, the death and the resurrection of Jesus were rapidly approaching.

Jesus had a strong reason for postponing the testimony of the witnesses. The disciples were by no means free from the general Jewish expectation that the Messiah would erect an earthly kingdom in which the Jewish nation

would be supreme over all other nations and would rule them as long as the earth stood. This Jewish opinion is perpetuated by the present day millennialism (chiliasm); the only revision that has been made is the introduction of the 1,000 years on the basis of Rev. 20 and the addition of certain Christian trimmings and various fancies. Jesus took great pains not to encourage this false, merely earthly Jewish hope. He even avoided the use of the title “Messiah” when he labored among the people, for in their minds this title was saturated with their political ideas and expectations. Only to the Samaritan woman he declared that he was the Messiah, and only shortly before his death did he speak to the Jews regarding the Messiah. The term that he applied to himself was “the Son of man,” he who is man and yet far more than man, — see Luke 21:27, The Second Sunday in Advent, and Matt. 8:20 in my *Interpretation*.

To hear about the transfiguration of Jesus was dangerous for men who were full of the Jewish ideas concerning the Messiah. Their carnal hopes would be greatly increased, their imagination would become inflamed. Jesus had to suffer and to die. After his resurrection the disciples would understand the meaning and the purpose of the Transfiguration. For the Transfiguration is more than a verbal assurance, even though this was given by a voice from heaven, that Jesus was the Son of God; the disciples were permitted actually to see Jesus in the glory of his deity and the heavenly prophets also in glory speaking with him. The Transfiguration is one of the major acts pertaining to our salvation. We are permitted to see in advance who he is whose blood flowed on Calvary.

The frequently occurring ἐκ νεκρῶν never has the article and in this respect is idiomatic like other Greek phrases. In English we are compelled to say “from the dead.” In recent years millennialists abuse the phrase in the interest of a double physical resurrection and force it to mean “out from among the dead.” No scholar who knows his Greek will do that. The anarthrous noun is qualitative and the phrase means only “from death,” i.e. from the condition of such as are dead. No wonder that the phrase is never used with reference to the ungodly; it is used no less than thirty-five times in regard to Christ, always in the sense of “from death” and never as referring to a large number of dead people whom he left behind.

# Homiletical Aid

The form of a servant. Yet Jesus was true God, and the fact that he appeared as God was no arrogation on his part. Phil. 2:6 etc. Once he did appear in the glory that belonged to him as the Son of God and that was bestowed upon him as man. Three witnesses. State why three. State why not the Twelve. Soon Jesus would die the death of the accursed on the cross. Therefore these witnesses were actually to see him in his divine glory.

## The Three Witnesses on the Mount.

- I. They behold Jesus transfigured.
  1. Face, raiment. The divine glory bestowed on the human nature at the Incarnation shone forth from his human body in heavenly glory and splendor. In this glory Jesus might have walked on earth at all times. But how, then, could he have died for our sins?
  2. The witnesses behold the fact that Christ's human nature truly possesses this glory. They see why he does not make use of it and display it. We are also to see and understand.
- II. They see Moses and Elijah, beings from the other world.
  1. Moses who died 1500 years before this event, Elijah who was taken bodily to heaven in a fiery chariot. Great representatives of the Old Testament and of all its teaching.
  2. God sent them from heaven in their heavenly glory to enhance the glory of Jesus, — Moses without his body, Elijah in his glorified body. They spake with Jesus regarding his death on Calvary and regarding his resurrection from Joseph's tomb.
  3. Nothing spiritualistic, the very denial of anything of that kind. The saints in heaven dependent on what Jesus was to accomplish, even as we today who are on our way to heaven.
- III. They heard the Father's voice from the bright cloud.
  1. "This is my Son" etc. This attestation spoken a second time. God's Son died for us and rose again; he did this through his

human nature. The infinite value of his death and his resurrection.

2. "Hear ye him!" as your Savior, your Lord, all of whose words are salvation for you.
3. The impression so powerful that the witnesses lay in the dust. Jesus bids them arise and seals their lips until he should arise from the dead. No false earthly hopes to be strengthened. Our faith in the Son, in his deity, in his expiation. We too shall be glorified and shall see him in ' his glory in heaven.

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All that during the earthly life of Jesus reveals him as the eternal Son of God, including his many miracles, comes to a climax. in his Transfiguration on the Mount. All men could not be present, even as none of us could be there, to see any part of Jesus' life. We see also the Transfiguration through the eyes of the Lord's chosen witnesses. St. Peter writes: "We were eyewitnesses of his majesty," 2 Pet. 1:16.

### **Behold the Savior's Transfiguration!**

#### I. The heavenly light.

Face, raiment shining with the glory-light, even as Jesus now appears in heaven.

The glory received by his body from his deity, but because of his mission to suffer and die not used while he fulfilled that mission.

Behold it in faith, that you may truly know who your Savior is and that his salvation is genuine.

#### II. The heavenly visitors.

The one had died 1,500 years before this event, the other had been taken to heaven bodily less than 900 years before. Through both God had given his Word. They represent all the saints in heaven.

They speak with Jesus concerning the final accomplishment of his mission, that Jesus shall die and shall rise again.

God sent these heavenly visitors to enhance His Son's transfiguration and to increase our faith. Heaven is concerned, — can we be indifferent?

III. The heavenly voice.

The Father speaks, he who was well pleased chose his Son for the great saving mission. His testimony enhances the Transfiguration and crowns it. Jesus transfigured, — truly he is God's Son.

Therefore we must hear him, believe his every word. There is no other Savior.

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C. H. Rohe, *Die frohe Botschaft*, describes the Transfiguration as having occurred after sunset when darkness began. He centers on

### **The Voice out of the Cloud.**

I. What it tells us.

It tells us that Jesus is the Father's Son chosen to be the Messiah, our blessed Savior. God's acknowledgment to strengthen our faith in his Son.

II. What it asks of us.

In all the world there is none other whom we might hear, believe, and obey. "Hear ye him!"

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Jesus said: "I am the light of the world" (John 8,12). Regarding the New Jerusalem, the Eternal City, St. John writes: "And the Lamb is the light thereof" (Rev. 21:23). Indeed, he is the light! We see this in his great Epiphany. Behold

### **The Epiphany Light on the Mount of Transfiguration!**

I. Jesus is the focus.

His appearance in humiliation. The appearance when suddenly it became visibly manifest that he was the Son of God. His face like the sun, etc.

This is the Lord with whom we have to deal. You too shall see him thus (1 John 3:2). What if you have loved darkness rather than light (John 3:19)?

II. Moses and Elijah are in its radiance.

The great Old Testament lightbearers, come from heaven, the home of light and bliss. The one a soul, the other body and soul.

They bring us a glimpse of heaven, to which our souls shall go at death.

They spoke with Jesus regarding the consummation of his redemptive mission, for on this rested their salvation and their glorification, even as also ours rests.

They appeared for our sakes, that we too may be like them in glory.

III. Peter is entranced by its blissfulness.

He cannot refrain, — it is good to be here. He wants to arrange for as long a stay as possible. In that light he had a taste of heaven.

But Peter has the task of carrying the light of Christ to all the world.

Let the Epiphany light of this text fill us with joy, — in due time we shall be with the Lord for ever.

IV. Yet at last the disciples are struck with fear.

The sudden overshadowing of the bright cloud and the mighty voice of the Father out of the cloud. Their mortal insignificance in the divine visible and audible presence struck fear into their hearts. Fear should fill our hearts, for we are dealing with the Father and with his Son in the whole matter of the Gospel.

Jesus dispels the fear by his kindness and his grace.

# The Lenten Cycle: The Savior's Redemption

## **Septuagesima**

Not by our works

## **Sexagesima**

Faith in the Word

## **Quinquagesima**

The Atonement

## **Invocavit**

Jesus vanquishes Satan in the Temptation

## **Reminiscere**

Jesus drives out the devil from the Canaanitish woman's daughter

## **Oculi**

Jesus is the Stronger One

## **Laetare**

Jesus is not an earthly king

## **Judica**

Jesus Is before Abraham Was

## **Palm Sunday**

Jesus is the Son of David, Israel's Messiah-King

## **Maundy Thursday**

"I, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet"

## **Good Friday**

The redemptive death on Golgotha

# Septuagesima. Matt. 20:1 -16

## Not by Our Works

Septuagesima, Sexagesima, and Quinquagesima belong to the Lenten Cycle and form the introduction to this holy season. These three Sundays thus constitute a group of their own. The subjects offered by the texts should be understood and formulated accordingly. In this manner I arrive at the following: 1) Not by our works; 2) By faith in the Word alone; 3) By the atonement of Jesus alone. When we enter Lent proper we have another trio, for Invocavit, Reminiscere, and Oculi treat of the satanic power.

A bright light falls upon the parable which constitutes our text when the situation which produced it is noted. The rich young ruler is told to sell everything and to give all the proceeds to the poor, and then he is hidden to follow Christ (19:16-26). Peter states that the disciples have in effect done what Jesus told the rich young ruler to do, and then Peter asks: “What shall we have therefore?” In our common way of speaking: “What do we get out of it?” Promptly Jesus answers Peter by telling him that the disciples shall be most richly reimbursed (19:27-30).

But more must be said, considerably more. For Peter’s question is dangerous. It may be asked from a work-righteous motive. The legalist may raise such a question. This species of blindness develops everywhere in unregenerate hearts. When Jesus shows Peter the greatness of the reward that is coming, it ought to be apparent at once that no man in the world is able to earn such a reward by means of the works that he may do (19:28-29). Moreover, Jesus significantly adds that many first shall be last, and last ones shall be first. Then Jesus proceeds with the parable and aims to drive out everything in the nature of a mercenary spirit. He uses a parable because a parable is both easy to be remembered and easily makes clear what otherwise might still remain a puzzle. The burden of the parable may be stated literally: *Heaven is not earned by our works*. Or we may take the

striking summary given by Jesus himself: “The last shall be first, and the first last.”

[1] **“For, like is the Kingdom of the heavens to a house-lord, who went out at once at early morn to hire laborers for his vineyard.”** The sense of γάρ, “for,” is: in order that you may understand. This is the explanatory “for.” On the “Kingdom” see the notes for Matt. 21:5 (the First Sunday in Advent): God’s heavenly rule of grace here on earth. Jesus says that in one very important respect there is a resemblance between this divine rule and the action which this parable presents. The story of the parable is quite commonplace, except for the owner’s generosity in paying off the laborers hired at the later and at the latest hours. The house-lord (οἰκοδεσπότης) — the addition of ἄνθρωπος is pleonastic and requires no translation — is God ruling in his grace in the visible church on earth. He owns an estate that includes a great vineyard in which much work needs to be done. We see this man’s concern for his vineyard. “At once at early morn” he goes out to procure laborers, and he does this latter five times in succession. So much is to be done, so many “hands,” as we should call them, are needed. We may say that the imagery of the vineyard is used by Jesus because it affords an opportunity to discuss the laborers. The entire action turns on them, not on the vines and not on the harvest of grapes.

[2] **“And having agreed with the laborers on a denarius for the day, he sent them into his vineyard.”** The denarius = 17 cents in our money. It constituted the regular day’s wage for a laborer, and the day’s pay of a Roman soldier. Ἐκ is employed for the idea of price, and τὴν ἡμέραν is the accusative of length of time: “for the day.” The wage must not be gauged according to its equivalent in our money, but according to its purchasing power in ancient times. See the A.V. margin. “A penny a day” in our versions is not a proper translation. When preaching on this feature the impression dare not be made that this house-lord hired the laborers at as low a price as possible; he paid the standard price.

The parable deals only with the labor of one day. This is enough for the Lord’s purpose. The laborers who were the first to be hired in the early morning made an agreement regarding the wages, while those hired at later hours are satisfied with the owner’s promise of fair pay. Somehow, the laborers first hired display at once their mercenary spirit.

The penny is not Christ himself and his sacrifice, nor the restored image of God, nor life eternal. Such a view is not tenable for the simple reason that these are not earned by labor of ours. Then, too, Jesus should not have said: “So the last shall be first,” etc., but: “So all shall be alike in the end.” I am surprised that Luther confessed that he had no interpretation for the denarius, for Melancthon, his associate, has the correct solution. The denarius pictures *all the temporal benefits* which the members of the church receive. You never work for the Lord, but that you are paid in full.

The laborers are all of the κλητοί. They enter the outward visible church. They are termed “laborers” because all Christians are to serve their Lord with works meet for repentance, with works as evidence of their faith. This is the viewpoint presented here in answer to Peter’s question: “What do we get therefore?” Now any one who enters the Lord’s vineyard and spends even a short time in working there should very soon learn all about the grace of God and how it bestows salvation on us sinners, then also in what spirit and manner we are to do our work in his vineyard. Even outward connection with the visible church affords these grand opportunities for filling the heart with Gospel faith in God’s pure grace through Christ Jesus.

**[3] “And having gone out around the third hour, he saw others standing in the marketplace idle, [4] and to those he said: ‘Do you too go into the vineyard, and whatever is right I will give you.’ And they went on. [5] And having gone out around the sixth and the ninth hour, he did likewise. [6] Now around the eleventh, having gone out, he found others standing, and he says to them: ‘Why are you standing the whole day idle?’ And they say to him: ‘Because no one did hire us.’ He says to them: ‘Go you too into the vineyard.’”**

See the great desire of God to bring men into the church, — the house-lord goes out again and again. Reckon the hours in the Jewish way, twelve hours of daylight, so that those called at the eleventh hour labored only one hour. Yet the end of the parable presents only two classes, those who murmur and those who are satisfied. The parable covers only one day. The hours are considered in relation to the end of the day when the laborers receive payment. All the workers in all the ages of the church are pictured in this parable with its one day. Moreover, the apostles are certainly the laborers first called.

These observations help us in understanding what is meant by the hours. They have been viewed as the different eras of the church, beginning with Adam and extending either to Christ's time or, as some think, to the conversion of the Jews. This interpretation made Luther so indignant that he called it *Geschwaetz* serving only to kill time. Others interpret the hours as picturing the stages of the individual life, childhood representing the early morn, etc. More complicated interpretations have been offered by combining strange interpretations of the denarius with strange ideas concerning the hours.

The hours do not denote length of time; they measure accomplishment. An ordinary day-laborer accomplishes more in two hours than in one, and certainly much more in twelve hours than in one. Thus by means of the hours Jesus pictures the amount of work accomplished in the visible church. There are certainly great variations in the amount. Some do but little even during a long life; some do a great deal during a short life. For a large part of his life Paul was a Jew, but, behold, what he accomplished during the rest of his life (1 Cor. 15:10).

[4] The second group of laborers is sent to the vineyard as was the first. God's call is ever the same. Yet these laborers make no contract with the houselord regarding their pay. This point is not accidental, for Jesus means to answer Peter's question: "What do we get for what we do?" All that is here said about these laborers is that they shall receive what is right, δίκαιος, — the term is forensic as always.

We must not assume that all who accomplish much in the church are mercenary and make a contract for so much pay, or that only those who accomplish less or the least of all are non-mercenary and appreciate the Lord's grace. Even when related by Jesus' parables have their limitations and cannot picture everything regarding the subject which they treat. Besides, in this case Jesus is answering Peter who, as we have already indicated, belonged to those who would indeed accomplish much. Questions like the one he was asking should never have occurred to him. Finally, the object Jesus had in view when speaking this parable has been abundantly attained: his noblest and most successful workers, both when quality and quantity are considered, have never raised Peter's question.

[5] More laborers are called at the sixth and at the ninth hour. Note here that the house-lord does not spend his entire time at the market-place. God has his hours of grace for you and for me. Then he calls, and then his call brings you in.

[6] No man would go out so late in the day and hire laborers for only one hour, a part of that hour being consumed in getting to the vineyard. These anomalies in parables should be well noted. The illustration is made to fit the reality. Never does the illustration govern. God does many things that go far beyond the usual things men do. Note it well when a parable brings out this fact.

Those hired last receive a rebuke. All these hours they have wasted. Their accomplishment is bound to be small, and the fault is entirely theirs. Even at this late hour the house-lord “found” them. It was due wholly to him that they were “found” at last. While the rebuke is pronounced only in regard to these last idlers, it pertains in varying degrees also to the other laborers, excepting only the first group. Many are afraid they will do too much for the Lord, and so they idle and diminish, often severely, their accomplishment.

[7] The Question: “Why stand ye here all the day idle?” really has no answer. Yet these idlers have a reply: “No one hired us,” meaning neither you nor any of your agents. The house-lord makes no reply, because the answer is already given in the parable, — the house-lord went out to hire laborers at all the different hours. Where then were these lazy and late ones? It would be wrong to say that the house-lord had passed these men by at the former hours, or that these men had declined the call to labor and agreed only at the eleventh hour. The fault belongs wholly to these men themselves. Where they had spent all the other hours of the day is really immaterial.

Note that even these are hired, although the day is already far spent. So the first group was hired despite the fact that they contracted for their pay. Though we have many a fault God takes us to work in his visible church. Not that we may go on in our faulty ideas and ways, but that by actual contact with him and with his blessed church and with the work we may remove such initial faults. The best texts omit the clause: “and whatever is right you shall receive” (A.V.). Thus we have three groups of laborers:

those with at fixed contract; those with a general promise of what is right; those with only the order to go to work.

**[8] “Now evening having come, the lord of the vineyard says to his steward: ‘Call the laborers and duly give to them the pay, beginning from the last to the first.’”** We approach the climax of the parable. The “evening” is to be considered together with the hours, and together with the hours refers to the accomplishment of the laborers. Hence evening does not refer to the end of life or to the final judgment, for the pay duly earned by the laborers is *the benefit enjoyed in this life*, nevermore the blessedness of heaven. The οἰκοδεσπότης. “house-lord,” is now called κύριος, “lord,” as the one who decides everything. The lord has an ἐπίτροπος, one to whom affairs are turned over, i.e. a steward. All interpreters agree that Christ is this steward. The laborers are summoned to receive the pay due them, because of its preposition ἀπόδος = “duly give.” This verb seems to fit only the first group, since this group alone had a full day’s wages coming to them. Yet the word “duly give” refers to this lord’s giving, who pays not as other employers, who never haggles, but employs his great beneficence and generosity.

Moreover, the order is to pay the last group first and so to proceed in retrogression until the first group is reached. This is a device in the parable which intends to make it possible for the first group to see how much the other groups receive. If the first group had been paid first, this group would have left and would have made no comparison between their own pay and the pay of the other groups. In actual life such comparison is constantly made, and the heavenly Lord is often considered to be treating us unjustly; therefore the parable is constructed as we have it. The story is arranged so that the laborers hired first have the opportunity of comparing their wage with that of the rest.

**[9] “And when those about the eleventh hour came, they received a denarius each. [10] And when the first came, they supposed that they would receive more; and they too received a denarius each.”** Those who had labored only one hour received a full day’s pay. Here we see clearly the generous nature of this lord. The three intermediate groups were, of course, treated similarly, but there is no need to mention them because the action reaches its climax in the amount paid to the last group.

[10] After a fashion the expectation seems justified, that the lord who paid so much for one hour's work would pay more than the stipulated day's wage for a full day's work. The Greek retains the future tense of the original thought: "We shall receive more." In English we accommodate the tenses: "that they would receive more." Yet every man received no more than a denarius. These laborers had no right to expect more. Because they were afraid that they might be defrauded of their just wages, they had made a verbal contract with this lord at the time when he hired them. This same grasping spirit now raised false expectations in them. Such a spirit fails utterly to appreciate our heavenly Lord's goodness and generosity, — it means only to exploit the Lord.

**[11] "Now when they received it, they started to murmur against the house-lord, [12] saying: 'These last worked only one hour, and thou didst make them equal to us who bore the burden of the day and its heat.'" These laborers took their pay and started a loud complaint. That the denarius cannot possibly signify eternal life should certainly be plain. No one enters heaven with complaint. The denarius cannot signify the degrees of glory in heaven, for these certainly differ and are not equal.**

[12] So important is this complaint that the words in which it is expressed are made a part of the parable. The lord is charged with having done wrong. He is acting with gross injustice. Here are these last who worked only one hour, whose deserts amount to almost nothing, and these men are made equal to us who bore the burden of a full day, right through the great heat of noon and of the afternoon. This indictment against God is fully stated in the parable and is made as strong as possible. Peter and the disciples are to see what is wrong with Peter's question (19:27), to what it must eventually lead. Moreover, in the parable the Lord means to refute the charge in its strongest form.

**[13] "But he answered and said to one of them: 'Fellow, I am not treating thee unjustly. Didst thou not agree with me on a denarius? Take up thine own and be gone! But it is my will to give to this last, even as unto thee. Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? or is thy eye wicked, because I on my part am good?'"**

In the parable the reply is made to merely one of the laborers who murmured, so that each one of us may ask himself the searching question:

“Lord, is it I?” This “one” is individualizing. To call this answer mild and only “a friendly correction” is to misread it entirely. The words are like the crushing blows of a hammer. They are fired like a volley. Each brief sentence snaps like a whip-lash. The address ἑταῖρε is by no means synonymous with (φίλε, “friend” (our versions); here and in 22:12 and 26:50 the word is of evil omen (Trench), and amounts to our “fellow.”

First, the indignant denial: “Fellow, I am not treating thee unjustly!” Robertson says that the present ἄδικῶν has almost the force of the perfect: “I have not done thee an injustice that still continues.” Note the terseness of the denial; it is sharp. It is no light thing to charge God with dealing unjustly.

Without a γάρ or any other connective the proof for the denial is hurled at this complainant: “Didst thou not agree with me on a denarius?” The asyndeton makes the question come with a sharp snap. Διναρίου is the genitive of price. To pay in full according to verbal contract is exact justice. To pay more would be unmerited grace. This lord does exercise such grace; but this laborer knows nothing about grace, all he thinks of is justice. He thus places himself outside of the reach of grace. When a person works in the church and does ever so much, yet fails to see that everything in the church is filled with grace, it is too bad; he shall obtain the justice which he calls his due.

[14] The command is sharp: “Take thine own and be gone!” Luther: “trot along.” “Take it, and get out!” He wanted justice, he has justice, — for what is he stopping? Even now it is not grace that he wants, but justice, — a strange kind of justice, namely one that reasons that if grace bestows undeserved rewards upon one man, *justice* demands that the same thing be done with others.

So much for the alleged injustice. These laborers, however, are also filled with envy. They cannot stand by and see men receive a full day’s pay for one hour’s work. Such good fortune dare not come to others. This lord vindicates his pure justice, and in even stronger terms he defends his grace. We may say that in God there is nothing more wonderful than his grace, and never will he allow it to be besmirched. But remember that grace, unearned, unmerited favor is wholly as he who bestows this grace wills it to be. Grace is ever sovereign. No man can dictate to grace and say that it must do this,

dare not do that. Herein lies the sovereignty: “But it is my will (θέλω) to give to this last even as unto thee!” Since when can any laborer set up his will and dictate how the lord is to proceed?

[15] “Is it not lawful (οὐκ ἔξεστι, idiom) for me to do what I will with mine own?” Again no connective, again the sharp decisiveness. The question can be answered in but one way. No law or principle forbids the fullest exercise of grace. See this generous grace manifested in every member that is received into the visible church. At once he has a full share in the church building and in all the property of the church, although he has paid nothing toward their purchase. All the rights and the privileges are his, despite the fact that he has not done anything toward establishing and preserving them. He does not receive less because he has just come into the church.

Yes, God can do and does what he wills with his own. There is only one alternative: “or is thy eye wicked (πονηρός, worse than”evil,” κακός) because I on my part am good (ἀγαθός),” for freely granting gifts unearned? This question, too, implies its own answer. While this is a question, it really contains a verdict. “The wicked eye” is the verdict. This eye cannot tolerate the sight of a freely dispensed gift. To this eye grace is a crime. To see one who is good and generous in free grace is a heinous offense. In other words, God must cease dispensing his grace altogether or must bestow his grace indiscriminately, throwing it even before the swine who have wicked eyes, — else these men will not be satisfied.

[16] The parable is finished. The Lord sums up its teaching: “**Thus shall the last be first, and the first last.**” Comp. 19:30. “Last” means outside of the kingdom; “first” inside of the Kingdom. God wants all men in his Kingdom and he calls them hour after hour. Many enter the visible church and take their places there, — thus in our congregation. Why are not all of them “first”? It is not God’s fault, it is their own. Because of their wicked eye they exclude themselves from God’s wondrous grace. All who cannot tolerate grace and who fail to be won by grace are lost.

## Homiletical Aid

The rich young ruler would not forsake all. Peter etc., did forsake all, but Peter asked: “What shall we have therefore?” Because of the danger lying in this question Jesus answered with

### **The Parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard.**

#### **I. The laborers and their work.**

1. Christians are to receive, to enjoy, to feast in the visible church. Then, however, they are also to work. First the parable of the Prodigal, of the Marriage Supper. Then, however, the parables of the Pounds, the Talents, and now of the Laborers.
2. The work as in a vineyard. Eradicate sin, vice, faults, plant virtues, build up ourselves in faith, love, good works. Work on the vine of our own soul, on the souls of our brethren, etc.
3. Not always easy or pleasant, yet God gives us ability. Always blessed. Perhaps trying, criticized, hindered, yet God calls to this work. Always more of this work to do, — but that is what we are here for.
4. The difference in the motives of the laborers. Some have only the motive: “What shall we get out of it?” These never learn the secret of God’s grace, though they work hard and accomplish much. Others make no contract and no demand. Glad that God lets them work; may accomplish little enough. They begin to understand grace.

#### **II. The laborers and their pay.**

1. Most certainly there is pay! No man shall do anything for God and say that God did not pay him. Even a cup of cold water shall be rewarded, and he who shows mercy shall receive mercy. Other passages.
2. The penny (day’s wage). All those in the visible church have the same earthly benefits. The same church, the same preacher, the same social benefits, the same temporal blessings, whether we do much or do little in the church. Eternal life is not referred to.

3. But there are two kinds of laborers in the visible church: those who understand and appreciate grace, and those who do not; those who are glad to take what is given them and those who murmur and call God unjust.
4. The dissatisfied are condemned out of their own mouth and are sent away thus condemned. Be warned by their example! The grateful, happy laborers who are surprised at what the Lord pays. These shall be first, i.e. shall be given heaven.

What kind of a laborer are you?

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“So the last shall be first, and the first last.” The Lord would make all of us first, but some make themselves last. How this comes about.

### **In the Master’s Vineyard.**

- I. There is no unemployment, — only considerable laziness. No lack of work, but a lack of understanding.
  - II. There is no injustice, — only a wealth of grace, which looks like injustice to those who have no use for grace.
  - III. There is no strife of precedence, — only some who complain are ordered to get out. Let us, with St. Paul (1 Cor. 4:3-5), be content to leave our reward to the Master. “Then shall every man have praise of God.” — J. A. Dell.
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The great theme of the Lenten season to which we now turn is *Redemption*. The first great truth which we are to learn anew is that *Grace Alone Counts*. The negative side of this truth may be expressed in accord with our text, the Laborers in the Vineyard, in the summary *Not by our Works*.

**The Laborers in the Vineyard teach us that Not our Works but  
Grace Alone Counts.**

Let us review the parable.

I. Look at the vineyard.

Do you really suppose that God must have a place like a vineyard, and thus must have laborers to do a lot of work for him? You see, I hope, that his grace prepared this vineyard for us, that we might leave the world of sin and for our own spiritual good enter into his Kingdom.

II. Look at the hours.

At six, at nine, at twelve, at three, and again at five o'clock, as we designate the hours. Do you suppose that God needs you and me so badly that otherwise his work would not be done? What makes God, as it were, run after us and select some of us only for as much as one hour's accomplishment? Is it not plain that this is pure grace, astounding heavenly grace? Shall we who are called by this grace fail to see that it is grace? What if we were still out in the world?

III. Look at the penny.

Not a cent, but a full day's pay for ordinary labor. Do you suppose God is just, fair and square, like the boss who gives you your time? Then why a full day's pay even for one hour's work? God is not like the world, his dealings are full of astonishing grace.

IV. Look at the complaining laborers.

So long a time were they in the church, so long a time they worked, and yet they have no conception of grace. Their charge of injustice recoils upon them; their envy is exposed. Do you suppose such men can dictate what God's grace is to do or not to do? You get your pay for your works, — it is temporal pay. Then you can go, you are through. Works do not count in the supreme issue. He who will not see the grace of God in all that calls and permits him to work, cannot expect grace when eternal salvation is dispensed.

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C. F. W. Walther speaks a word of warning against the spirit manifested in Peter's question (19:27).

## **Mercenary Piety.**

### I. Of what it com' ts and how it reveals itself.

1. The Jews who kept the ceremonial laws could not see the Gentiles come into the church without submission to all these laws.
2. Men in general are so minded that they do the good and avoid the evil in order to have God pay them. By nature no one would do good or shun evil, if he thought this would be of no avail for him in this life or in the next. It is not the love of God and of Christ that prompts them, but the natural dread of a hell and the natural hope of a heaven.
3. The doctrine of work-righteousness is publicly preached, extensively believed.
4. The conversion of gross sinners and the refusal to have such persons placed beside us who have not fallen so deeply. "This man receiveth sinners and eateth with them." A friend of publicans and harlots.
5. Lip-Christians, who are very churchly, etc., but in their hearts have not the love of Christ. Some highly pietistic, look down on others in their pietism, and imagine they alone are genuine.

### II. Of what value it is and how it is rewarded.

1. This piety does not produce genuine good works. Good works cannot be produced by mercenary piety. — Pay a dealer so much money and receive the equivalent in goods, — is this a noble, meritorious deed? To work for stipulated pay is no merit. To make a little present in order to obtain a big one in return is base. [The Germans say: To throw the sausage after the ham.]
2. But the men of mercenary piety are rewarded. They get what they bargain for, and then are told to get out. So the Jews had their reward, and that was all. [The earthly advantages they may get, but they exclude themselves from the heavenly gifts of grace.]

3. God wants no works of such mercenary piety. They who bring them cannot be accepted. Turn not your piety and good works into a business transaction.

**Der Grund, worauf ich gruende,  
Ist Christus and seiu Blut;  
Das machet, dass ich finde  
Das ew'ge wahre Gut.  
An mir and meiuem Leben  
Ist uiehts auf dieser Erd',  
Was Christus mir gegeben,  
Das ist der Liebe wert.**

Let this mind be in you, and then sing:

**Im Himmel ist gut wohnen,  
Hiuauf steht meiu Begier,  
Da wird Gott ewig lohnen  
Dem, der ihm dient allhier.**

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We are saved by grace alone, by means of faith in the Word alone, by means of Christ's redemption alone. As the introduction to Lent three texts, each concerning one of these three vital subjects. So today, learn anew that our dependence must be on grace alone. I am

### **A Laborer in God's Vineyard by Grace Alone.**

- I. I see that it was grace that prepared the vineyard and called me to labor in it.

I did not produce the visible church. If it had depended on me, the church would never have come into existence. It was grace.

I did not call myself etc., if I should have done it I should never have been called. It was grace.

- II. I see that it is grace that enables me to labor and that pays me so generously.

Grace must give me strength to do what I should in the visible church (details). If left to my own devices I should spoil the vines.

Grace pays me beyond all deserts. Even if I do much, bear the burden of the day and its heat, I really have no claim on God (Luke 17:10). If left to myself I should still be working hard for the devil. Grace pays me so richly by means of all the temporal benefits of the church.

III. Finally I see that all the laborers who scorn grace shall obtain justice alone.

They have worked and they receive what they worked for, — all the blessings of belonging to the visible church. They themselves exclude themselves from further grace, because they are blind to Grace.

I do not want to be such a laborer in God's vineyard. I want his grace to bestow its greatest gift upon me, life eternal, which Christ alone could earn for me and did earn, and which the unfathomable grace of God alone bestows on me for Christ's sake.

As I labor my song shall ever be: “*By Grace Alone!*” ’

# Sexagesima. Luke 8:4-15

## Faith in the Word

The text for last Sunday impressed upon us the great fact, that we are saved by grace alone. The text for this Sunday adds the thought that we are saved by the Word alone and by true faith in the Word alone. But just because salvation is by grace alone and by the Word and faith alone, many exclude themselves from salvation, they want no grace, they have no faith in the Word, and so they are lost. This is sad indeed, since the way of grace and of faith is so easy that nothing whatever is required of us. The subject and its text are eminently fitting at the beginning of the Lenten cycle, especially because of the way in which they connect with grace as presented by the previous Sunday, and with Christ's redemption as presented by the succeeding Sunday.

[4] **Now a great crowd coming together, and they from every city resorting to him, he spoke by parable.** Δέ merely proceeds with the narration. Lest we think that the great crowd was composed only of local people, a second genitive absolute adds the statement that people from every city were resorting to Jesus. Κατά is distributive: "city by city," and the phrase is made a noun by the article: τῶν κατὰ πόλιν, "they of city by city." This substantivized phrase is the subject of the genitive absolute construction.

Luke indicates no place. Matt. 13:1 informs us that this parable, together with others, was spoken to the crowd at Capernaum from a boat on the shore. This explains Luke's phrase "by means of parable," using this form of teaching. As far as we know, the parable of the Sower is the first one that Jesus uttered.

[5] **"There went out the sower to sow his seed."** Ὁ σπείρων is the substantivized present participle: "the man whose business is sowing." The

article is generic. The two aorists, ἐξῆλθεν and σπεῖραι imply that the task of sowing was begun and finished. The picture of this sower is simplicity itself. A few brief words and no more.

**“And in the sowing part fell along the path, and was trodden down, and the birds of the heaven ate it up. [6] And another part fell down on a rock, and after springing up it was dried up on account of not having moisture. [7] And other fell in the midst of the thorns, and springing up with it the thorns choked it off.”** How true to life the picture! It is typically Palestinian. The sowing is done by hand. The patch to be sown is not large and is unfenced. A path (not “road”) runs along the side, perhaps dividing this patch from another patch belonging to some other man. While sowing some of the grains of wheat or of barley naturally fell on this path and thus was trodden down and crushed by the feet of the persons who used the path, and was eaten up by the wild birds (birds of the heaven). The seed was perfect, but there was no fit soil on the path to receive it.

[6] Much of Palestine is rocky elevation, and the patches of soil fit for cultivation have rocky projections, covered at times with only a thin layer of soil. A part of the seed fell upon such places in the patch of ground. It sprouted quickly, due to the warmth generated by the underlying rock; but it soon dried up because of the lack of moisture in the thin layer of soil. So this part of the seed made a start, but ended in failure.

[7] A third part of the seed proved a failure in another way. In places of the field the roots of thorns were embedded too deeply to be reached by the plow. The surface looked entirely fair, but when the grain sprouted the thorns also grew thick and luxuriantly, and so the young growth of grain was rapidly smothered and could bring no return.

[8] **“And another part fell into good earth, and after springing up made fruit, a hundredfold.”** Saying these things he went on to cry: **“He that hath ears, let him be hearing!”** Luke tells only about the maximum yield, “a hundredfold,” a perfect yield, yet some brought thirty and some sixtyfold. I do not regard the imperfect ἐφώνει as an iterative, but as a descriptive imperfect: “he went on to cry.” The man with ears is to use them for hearing. None was there who had no ears, but how many heard more than the outward story, how many heard the real meaning which it conveyed? Note how this call to use the ears aright interprets the parable.

Some ears are like the trodden path, some like the shallow soil on rock, some like the soil with roots of thorns beneath. All their hearing is in vain. Preach them the purest Word of God, no fruit results.

[9] Now his disciples proceeded to inquire of him, what this parable was. The optative εἴη merely replaces the indicative and marks the indirect discourse, hence should not be translated: “might be” (potential: εἴη ᾗν), as is done in our versions. Luke might have retained the verb of the direct discourse, ἐστί, “is,” for which our English in an indirect clause after a past tense substitutes “was.” From Mark we learn that this inquiry was made after Jesus finished teaching the multitude, that others joined in the inquiry, and that it included the question why Jesus used parables in his teaching.

[10] Jesus states why he used parables. **But he said: “To you it has been given to know the mysteries of the Kingdom of God; but to the rest in parables, in order that seeing they may not see, and hearing may not understand.”** “The mysteries of the Kingdom of God” are the wondrous divine realities connected with the Kingdom, i.e. with God’s rule of grace here on earth. By nature and by his own abilities man is not able to penetrate these blessed mysteries, they appear as foolishness to ordinary reason. The word “mysteries” (or comprehensively “mystery”) is used with regard to hidden things which are not to remain hidden but are to be made known by revelation. Thus to the disciples it was given to know these mysteries. But this was not accomplished by some means withheld from other men. The giving is not arbitrary. The preaching and the teaching of the Gospel reveal and make known these saving mysteries. The disciples had received this preaching and this teaching and were thus competent to understand the parables.

“The rest” are by no means all other men. “The rest” are the Galileans to whom Jesus had preached for a long while, who, however, refused him faith and became unbelievers. Therefore Jesus clothed the mysteries of the Kingdom in parables. One purpose was to withhold the blessed truth from those who scorned it. This was the first step of judgment upon them. What they would not have, they should not have. Seeing, they were not to see, and hearing, they were not to understand, comp. Is. 6:9-10, which words Matthew quotes from Isaiah as now being once more fulfilled. God’s grace and his Word of salvation are not extended indefinitely. There comes a time when men who spurn the Word shall find that it is taken from them. Yet the

judgment was not final. The Word was still offered, although it was in parables, in caskets that required a key. Some might yet be brought to faith. Comp. Prov. 1:24-33; Amos 8:11-12.

**[11] “Now this is the parable: the seed is the Word of God. [12] They along the path are those that heard; then comes the devil and takes away the Word from their hearts, in order that they may not by having believed he saved.”** As simple as is the parable, so simple is its interpretation. The key to the Whole parable is found in the seed, namely in the fact that this seed is the Word of God. No need to say that the sowing is the preaching and the teaching of this Word. The parable turns on the different kinds of soil which the seed finds and thus on the fate of the seed; hence the sower is not especially interpreted, yet he must be Christ and all who represent Christ in preaching and in teaching the saving Word of God.

[12] The terse designation, “they along the path,” characterizes the persons in accord with the seed that fell along the path. These are people who indeed heard, — the aorist participle means to state the fact. The Gospel truly and adequately reached them, but it did not get beyond their ears, it did not find sufficient soil to enter their hearts. The path was trodden hard, no seed could sprout upon it. There lay the precious seed, entirely exposed, no soil to cover it. Even growth was impossible, to say nothing about fruit.

Men’s hearts become like a path on which the earth is solidly packed when nothing but worldly thoughts and desires keep passing through their minds, when deed after deed is prompted by these desires. Let the good seed of the Gospel fall through the ears upon such a heart, and these worldly, sinful, at times viciously wicked thoughts will trample upon the seed and crush it. The wild birds are called the birds of the heaven and represent the devil. He does not come in person to each of these hearers, for he is only an angel and is not omnipresent. Hence Jesus has the plural “birds,” which, however, are not a flock of demons. Satan’s intention is that these hearers may not be saved, that God’s intention to save them may not be carried out.

The Gospel is mighty to save. Thus the devil sees to it that what these hearers have heard shall be wholly taken from their hearts. The wild birds are the many means he has for accomplishing his purpose. These means are

the uncontrolled thoughts that enter into the minds of these hearers after they have heard. Once he tells a man that the Word he has heard is nothing but an exaggeration; that sin is not at all so deadly as he was told, — why, everyone sins! that God has no wrath and that this wrath is a boggy that frightens only the ignorant; that our age is enlightened and has discarded such outworn categories; the preachers themselves do not believe what they preach, they talk because they want to make an easy living. You may designate the many other birds. So the seed disappears.

**[13] “And they on the rock, — who, whenever they get to hear, with joy receive the Word; and these do not have root, who for a season go on believing, and in a season of temptation stand away.”**

At first glance these hearers seem to be the opposite of the first group, for they not only believe the Word, they actually receive it with joy: “Oh, this is just what they have been waiting for!” The picture of these temporary believers is perfect: the stone under the layer of soil creates warmth so that the seed sprouts rapidly and starts growth ahead of the seed that is sown elsewhere. But this hidden stone is fatal. The sun gets hotter day by day, but the stone cuts off moisture and prevents the roots from reaching down deeply. So the grain withers away and nothing is produced. These are temporary believers. “The season of temptation” are the days when the sun shines with great heat. Such days must come. They try out the hearer. If his roots go deeply, he grows on and even flourishes in the strong sunshine.

**[14] “And the part fallen into the thorns, these are they who heard, and in going on were choked by cares and wealth, and pleasures of life, and bring nothing to maturity.”** These hearers are like the second group, — there is a fatal fault in the soil, not stone that keeps the life-moisture away, but deep strong roots of thorny growths that shoot up and smother the growing grain. Jesus tells us what he means: 1) cares, worries about earthly things of a person’s life; 2) wealth, which puffs up, leads into anti-Christian society, makes it difficult or impossible to be a good Christian; 3) pleasures of life which captivate and draw men away from the sober needs of the soul. When the heart is full of such roots what chance has the good Gospel seed? It loses in the competition, because the thorny growths already have strong roots in the soil, and “in going on” this counts heavily.

[15] **“And the part in the excellent earth, these are such as in an excellent and good heart, having heard the Word, hold it fast, and bring fruit in perseverance.”** Note well that each group hears. Here are hearers with an excellent and good heart, — morally excellent for the reception of what is heard, — and good and beneficial for this purpose. “Honest” in our versions is like the Latin *honestus*, “fair, noble,” but in our time this translation is rather misleading. These people retain their hold on the seed of the Word, and they bring fruit ἐν ὑπομονῇ, “in perseverance.” The word is used to designate remaining under trials, bravely holding out. “With patience” in our versions is inexact.

The parable reveals that the Word fares so differently because the hearts of the hearers are so different. But this leaves us with the grave question as to the cause of this difference. Why are not all hearers like the fourth group? How did the fourth group get excellent and good hearts? The usual answer is that neither the parable nor its interpretation by Jesus intend to answer this question. That, of course, makes things easy also for the preacher, the more so since there is no dispute as regards the fact that he has such hearers before him. But are you satisfied with this answer?

Many suppose that the parable intends to picture *the hearer's first contact with the Word*. Then even a man like Trench who intends to hold most firmly to the unquestioned doctrine that all hearts are by nature wholly depraved, and none are made better save by the Word alone, drifts into plain contradictions of this doctrine, by calling some hearts “fitter” for receiving the seed of everlasting life, “latent sons of peace,” containing tinder which the Word may set afire, — while other souls have no such tinder; or that some contain “particles of true metal,” — while other hearts have no such particles. Trench voices the opinion of many, and this opinion is rankly synergistic, even boldly Pelagian.

The parable presents *the final fate of the Word in the hearts of men*. It states the last word in regard to the hearers of the Gospel. It sets forth why only some bring a harvest. Some never let the Word enter their hearts, some never let it root deeply, some never let it grow up freely. This final fate of the Word is shown us now, that we may examine ourselves as, to how we are treating the Word *now*, before life is over and change is impossible. Not that we are able of our ourselves to transform our hearts into excellent and good soil. God has means so to transform them. See what lies in the parable

itself. That hard trodden path needs the sharp plow of the law; that rocky ground needs the blows of the sledge hammer of the law to loosen and to remove the rock; that soil infested with roots of thorny growths needs the deeper cut of the plow of the law to cut away those roots. All Gospel is in vain unless the law be first applied. But many hearts resist the condemnations of the law which bring out the sin that lies in our hearts. Where this willful resistance remains, all the sower's work is in vain. Are you truly contrite for your sins? Then true faith will not be difficult.

## **Homiletical Aid**

The natural division for this parable is the analytical one when the parable itself and its interpretation by Jesus are at once combined. The only question will be in regard to the formulation which always reveals the degree of skill possessed by the preacher. J. A. Dell has this attractive form, in which the parts are alliterated:

The seed is good. It is that Word of God which, in another metaphor, is said to be quick and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword (Heb. 4:12). It is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth (Rom. 1:16). It is that Word by the hearing of which faith cometh (Rom. 10:17). But it does not work magically. It does not invariably produce the same results.

### **The Soil Conditions the Growth of the Seed.**

#### **I. Beaten path.**

I select from the elaboration the thought that habit makes callous, hard hearts, such as cursing, swearing, lying, coveting, failing to sanctify the Lord's day, yielding to the appetites of the flesh. Even good habits, hearing the Word so habitually that what goes in one ear goes out of the other.

#### **II. Barren place.**

Again I select. These are the ones who are converted at every revival. They are the ones who compliment the preacher on the sermon and go home to live just as they did before.

III. Briar patch.

Capable of doing worthwhile things in the Kingdom, if only their energies, talents, gifts were not wasted on so many worthless activities.

IV. Best part.

Like Mary at Jesus' feet. "She hath chosen that good part" etc. Let me add that such good soil is prepared by the law.

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The devil would like to prevent all hearing of the Word; when he cannot do so, he seeks to prevent the saving effects of the hearing. Hence these different hearers.

### **The Different Hearers of God's Word.**

I. The hardened.

Sin hardens, vice. Indifferent hearers, blind and self-deceived. Self-righteous (Pharisees), skeptic (Sadducees). Hardened by continuous resistance.

Word does not enter into the heart, no repentance, no faith, no amendment. The devil's birds: empty evasions, objections, scoffing. Heart grows harder. Sometimes a bearer has certain hard spots in his heart.

II. The superficial.

Touched somewhat by the Word, by the desire to be godly, by the thought of pardon and salvation. But the old life and the world still under the surface. They are Christians as long as things go well, especially according to their own ideas, but without depth, firmness, real strength.

Surface hearing. The Word merely pleases. They speak of the beautiful, touching sermon, they wipe a tear. Outward Christianity. In the test they wither away.

III. The worldly.

What really occupies the heart is of this world, of the temporal, transient life, its worries, its pleasures.

The seed is smothered, the world wins.

In some hearers hardness, superficiality, worldliness are combined.

IV. The truly receptive.

These are crushed in contrition and are raised up in faith. The effect of the Word is decisive. They hear, and what they hear remains. They search the Scriptures, they meditate, absorb.

Harvest: contrition, faith, good works, finally salvation. How are you hearing?

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Here is a subjective, personal formulation:

### **What Kind of a Hearer of the Word Are You?**

- I. Are you like a hard trodden path?
- II. Are you like stony soil?
- III. Are you like thorn-infested ground?
- IV. Are you like good soil?

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In the following example the four parts form a chain, — see my homiletics, *S.* 209 etc.

### **What Happens to God's Word in Men's Hearts.**

- I. Some hear it, but do not receive it.
- II. Some receive it, but do not allow it to penetrate.
- III. Some let it penetrate, but do not let it flourish.
- IV. Some do let it flourish and bring a harvest.

Adapted from Nebe.

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Here is an outline with three parts.

### **The Seed of the Divine Word.**

I. It is sown in men's hearts.

Christ makes us hear his Word through his true ministers. You hear the Word and are not the same as before. The Word is ever the same, full of saving effect.

II. It is received in four different ways.

Sketch these ways, as already indicated.

III. It always has its effect.

Where men will not hear and heed it, it is gradually hidden and withdrawn. Where it is heard amiss its saving effect is withheld. Where it is received in faith and obedience the result is life eternal.

Adapted from Sommer.

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God means to take you to heaven by means of your ears. It is so easy to be saved by means of your ears, yet you can prevent it. Ears mean hearing, and hearing ought to mean abiding faith, and such faith means salvation. "He that hath ears to hear, let him be hearing!"

### **Ears: By Faith Alone.**

I. Ears should mean hearing.

When Christ said: "Preach, teach the Word!" he aimed at your ears. To be sure, the Word is also written by Inspiration and the writing is aimed at the eyes; also we are told to search the Scriptures. Yet to read requires an effort, while to hear requires nothing, the divine Word falls

right into our ears and ought thus through this ever open channel fall in blessing into our hearts.

The recent monopolization of our ears by means of the radio. The dangers besetting our ears.

## II. Hearing should mean believing.

The Word is the saving truth of Christ. Sketch its main doctrines. Truth ought to be believed. It is a crime not to believe the Word of truth. It is self-condemnation. The devil is the great liar.

The ways in which true and lasting faith is made impossible. The ears hear, but the heart is obdurate. The ears hear, but the heart is shallow or is filled with the world.

Yet the grace of God comes by way of the ears. It is received by faith alone and means “ears.”

## III. Real believing invariably means salvation.

Through the ears the Word kindles faith and keeps making it stronger, and thus by faith salvation drops as a free gift into our poor hearts.

Bless God for your ears! But use them as God intends. For you are saved by faith alone.

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Paul prophesied that some would have “itching ears” (2 Tim. 4:3), itching to be tickled by flattering teachers, — ears that ought to be cuffed to drive the itch out of them. Then there are empty hearers, hearers only and not doers (James 1:22 etc., Rom. 2:13), with ears like a sieve, — everything just runs through. But thank God, there are also noble hearers who receive the engrafted Word in persevering faith. Their ears are no better than those of any one else, but see what they obtain just through their ears!

I am preaching to a whole church full of ears. I am pouring the same Word into every pair. Will the result be the same for every pair?

## **What Are Your Ears Carrying Away?**

- I. Nothing at all? The packed roadway. Such ears will receive judgment.
- II. Only a transient impression? Something that makes you feel happy for a while (the stony soil)? something that you soon forget (the soil with roots of thorns)? These ears will also meet judgment.
- III. God's grace in Jesus Christ by true faith? That is what God offers to your ears that you may carry it away and keep it for life eternal.

# Quinquagesima. Luke 18:31-43

## The Atonement

Grace is the efficient cause of our salvation (Septuagesima).

The Word and true faith are the instrumental causes, the one objective, the other subjective (Sexagesima).

Christ's death and resurrection are the mediatorial cause of our salvation, to him belongs the Messianic title "the Son of David" (Quinquagesima).

The sequence of these three texts is perfect. Why is the miracle performed upon Bartimeus included in our text? Nebe allegorizes: men are blind to the mystery of the passion and of the resurrection. But if allegory is ever out of place, it is so when we are told about Christ's passion and his resurrection. The preacher must learn never to allegorize a miracle, in fact, to avoid all allegory, save the use of incidental allegorical expressions in the elaboration of his sermon. The miracle is included not because blind men were healed of their blindness, but because of Jesus who here accepts the high Messianic title "the son of David." This he does because the end is so near.

Throughout his public ministry Jesus did not use the title "Messiah," because the Jews connected with it their political, earthly ideas of the grand elevation of Judaism above all the nations of the world, and because to them the Messiah meant the earthly king who would bring about this glorious elevation. This Jewish dream was afterwards dressed in Christian garments and became Millennialism (Augsburg Confession, Art. 17: "Jewish opinion"). Because Jesus was the utter opposite of such a Messianic king the Jews nailed him to the cross. During his ministry Jesus used the title which he adopted from Daniel: "the Son of man," with which no false earthly dreams were connected. Yet Jesus could not go into his death without the full assertion of his Messiahship. Here, before the gates of

Jericho Bartimeus makes it in public, and thus it then continues to be made in the most public and open way until Pilate himself writes the superscription for the cross: “The King of the Jews.”

[31] Jesus is on his way to die at Jerusalem. **Now having taken the Twelve aside he said to them: “Lo, we are going up to Jerusalem, and there shall be accomplished all the things that have been written through the prophets for the Son of man. For he shall be given over to the Gentiles, and shall be mocked, and shall be outraged, and shall be spit upon, [33] and having scourged him they will kill him. And on the third day he shall rise again.”**

The leisurely journey down through Perea is finished. Jericho is at hand and the comparatively short stretch of road to Jerusalem. At some point before reaching Jericho Jesus called the Twelve aside (παρά in the participle), away from all the other disciples who traveled together with them, and once more in the plainest possible manner told them what was to occur in a few days. Jesus had made similar announcements in 9:22 and 40, and in Matt. 16:21 and 17:22-23. Now, however, the details are complete. The entire horrible tragedy is unrolled, crowned once more with the announcement of his resurrection.

“Lo, we are going up to Jerusalem.” The exclamation “lo” is justified. Astounding, indeed, that Jesus who knew all that was awaiting him at Jerusalem should now deliberately go there. “We” in the verb includes the disciples. They were to witness all these events. Jesus would die on the cross at Jerusalem. Here so many of the prophets had died (13:33), and Jesus was the greatest of them. Jerusalem was the heart of the Jewish nation, the seat of its highest national and religious authority, the Sanhedrin. Not in some corner of the land, at the hands of some mob, by people aroused to sudden fury, was Jesus to die, but at the capital itself, at the hands of the highest representatives of the nation, after they had deliberately gone through the legal forms. Thus the nation would repudiate him, as not being the Messiah, as a man accursed of God.

All that the prophets have written for the Son of man (dative of personal interest) Shall now be accomplished, τελεσθήσεται, the verb used by Jesus when he cried on the cross: “It has been accomplished, or finished!” The word πάντα, “all,” is not absolute, but is limited to the things which Jesus

was to accomplish at Jerusalem. Jesus himself lists them in the following words. Note *διά* “through the prophets” (they the medium), not *ὑπό*, “by the prophets” (agents). God is the agent (*ὑπό*). Note Matt. 1:22 and Luke 1:70; follow these prepositions through the Scriptures. In them we have a neat biblical definition of Verbal Inspiration: God is the speaker, the prophets his mouthpiece.

Yet Jesus does not quote the words of the prophets, he uses words that state in coldest literalness and in terms that cannot be misunderstood exactly what shall happen in a few days in Jerusalem. The language is really appalling, all save the last clause, and this is astounding (the resurrection). The commentary on them is the full history of the passion itself, and for the last clause the history of the resurrection. “The Son of man” = he who is man and yet more than man (see Luke 21:27, the Second Sunday in Advent).

[32] The incredible deed will be the fact that the Jews will deliver their own Messiah into the hands of the Gentiles. The prophets did not specify this feature of the passion. We must regard the following acts as those performed by these Gentiles. The mockery of the Sanhedrin is recorded in 9:22. Jesus now tells the Twelve that when the Jewish authorities turn him over to the Gentile authorities, to Pilate and to his legionaries, these shall mock, outrage, spit upon him, and then shall scourge and kill him. Calmly Jesus recites all this, calmly he tells the disciples that for this he is taking them to Jerusalem.

[33] First we go down, down to the most brutal death, and then at one bound up to the most glorious and exalted height: “And on the third day he shall rise again,” *ἀναστήσεται*, the future middle in the active sense. The evangelists say both: he shall rise, and he shall be raised up. Both are true. The *opera ad externa, sunt indivisa aut communa*. The prophets did not mention the third day; all that we have in the Old Testament regarding the time is the analogy and type of Jonah’s stay in the maw of the great fish. It was left for Jesus to foretell the exact day of his resurrection, — not a day in the distant future, but the very third day after his death. He died late on Friday afternoon, he arose early on Sunday morning.

**[34] And they grasped none of these things, and this utterance had been hidden from them, and they were not realizing the things being**

**said.** It is the same blindness as that recorded in 9:45. Despite the clarity of the words of Jesus, the Twelve did not think that Jesus could possibly mean what he actually said. Luke uses three statements to express the one thought. First, the fact: they did not grasp a single one of these things (the verb an aorist). Secondly, the thing uttered (τὸ ῥῆμα) had been hidden from them, — periphrastic past perfect tense, hidden by something in the past that still continued to be operative. This was their utterly false conception of what the Messiah would eventually be and do. That he would die such a dreadful death was the utter opposite of their preconception. Finally, they were not realizing the things being said (the durative and descriptive imperfect tense).

The conclusion would be hasty that since the Twelve did not understand at all, it was useless for Jesus to waste his breath on them. Jesus is preparing for the future. When all is fulfilled, then the fact that Jesus now foretells it so exactly will mean exceedingly much for his disciples. The same is true with regard to us to this day, — many a Scripture word means very little to us for a time, but when life's experience comes upon us in some crisis, the power, the light, and the comfort of that word mean everything to us.

**[35] And it came to pass, while he was drawing near to Jericho, a blind man was sitting by the side of the road begging. [36] Now when he heard a crowd passing through, he began inquiring what this was. [37] And they reported to him that Jesus the Nazarene was passing by. [38] And he shouted, saying: "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" [39] And those leading began rebuking him, that he be silent. He, however, kept yelling much more: "Son of David, have mercy on me!"**

Luke uses ἐγένετο with a finite verb, also ἐν τῷ with an infinitive. No trace of a discrepancy between the accounts of the evangelists appears when we secure the actual facts. After crossing the Jordan Jesus passed through Jericho. No one in the city invited him to remain. On the other side of the city, along the roadside, Zaccheus was sitting on a limb of a sycamore fig tree, waiting to get a good look at Jesus as he passed by. Jesus advanced to that spot on the road, invited himself to the house of Zaccheus, and proceeded back to the city. It was on this return journey, while he was approaching the city for a second time that the miracle was wrought. There were two blind men, as Matthew, who was present, reports; one of them

cried so loud and put on such a demonstration that Mark has preserved his name, Bartimeus. These blind men were begging.

[36] When the crowd that was following Jesus back into the city came surging past, Bartimeus inquired “what this was,” — the optative εἶη is the indirect discourse and replaces ἔστί of the direct. He asked: “What is this?” He heard the noise and the many voices and could not understand what was going on.

[37] The answer he received electrified this blind man. He heard that Jesus the Nazarene was passing by, was retracing his steps to reenter Jericho. “Jesus” is his ordinary earthly name, and “Nazarene” is for the purpose of identification, the Jesus who hails from the town of Nazareth in Galilee. This appellation is not intended to be derogatory, yet, of course, it is not intended as a distinction.

[38] Bartimeus was electrified: at once he sends out the shout: “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” lit. “mercy me,” the verb having a direct object in the Greek. He does not ask why Jesus is coming back, how far off he may be at the moment, he just shouts and shouts with all his might. Perhaps the other blind beggar also lifted up his voice, but it is Bartimeus who carries off the palm in this shouting.

[39] The people in the van of the crowd wanted to silence this shouting at Jesus, — just why we are unable to say. But they reckoned with the wrong man. The more they tried to hush this beggar, the more vociferously he shouted: “Son of David, have mercy on me!” Here was his one opportunity; if he let it slip by, it would likely never come again. It meant either to attract the attention of Jesus and to obtain seeing eyes, or to let the opportunity escape and retain blind eyes. Nothing could cow Bartimeus,

It should be plain why this miracle is placed into the sacred record by all three of the synoptists. It is not for the sake of the miracle itself, for Jesus had healed many blind men, so the addition of the healing of two more means very little. This miracle is so important, because these two beggars call Jesus by his royal Messianic name, “Son of David,” right here in public before all the multitude, and Jesus publicly accepts the great and significant title. Note that each of the synoptists repeats the title and thus emphasizes its import. Here note Ps. 110:1; also Matt. 22:41 etc. Note what I have said in the introductory remarks. The time is past for hesitation regarding the use

of the full Messianic titles and for the danger of having them misunderstood. Soon Jesus will be dead. But he must die as what he truly was: David's Son, the heir of the royal throne, the Messianic King whose rule shall continue for ever (1:33).

**[40] Now having halted Jesus ordered him to be brought to him; and drawing near, he inquired of him: [41] "What dost thou want that I shall do?" And he said: "Lord, that I receive sight!" And Jesus said to him: "Receive sight! Thy faith has saved thee." [43] And immediately he received sight, and he began following him, glorifying God. And all the people on seeing it gave praise to God.** Mark tells the story more vividly. When he hears the beggar's anxious cries Jesus halts the entire crowd, and now willing hands conduct the two blind men to Jesus.

[41] Jesus asks what Bartimeus wants. We note that θέλεις is followed by ποιήσω, the deliberative subjunctive, without ἵνα. The question affords an opportunity for further confession. Luke writes Κύριε, but Mark preserves the original "Rabboni," which the Latins render by *magister et domine* or by *domine* alone. Zahn states that "Rabbun" was used in Jewish literature for the Hebrew 'Adon in expressions like "Lord of the world or of the worlds." This would add to the Messianic title "Son of David" a further title expressing deity. We have an imperatival ἵνα and may translate: "let me receive sight." Jesus elicits this answer, for the man is blind and cannot see Jesus.

[42] The earnest request is granted. Matthew states that Jesus compassionately placed his hands on the beggar's eyes. Jesus adds: "Thy faith hath saved thee." It had indeed. Without that faith Bartimeus would not have cried out; or if he had uttered a cry or two, he would have let the people silence him. Some draw the hasty conclusion that in order to receive miraculous healing the recipient must always have faith. The facts are that quite a few were restored who at the moment did not believe. Jesus often responded to faith, again he expected faith to follow his miraculous help.

[43] The restoration of sight followed immediately. Now blind, — now eyes clear and strong. No wonder that Bartimeus glorified God for this miraculous gift. All people joined him and gave praise to God.

Luke intends to narrate the story of Zaccheus in an uninterrupted account, and therefore he tells the story of the blind beggars in a paragraph

by itself, apart from the narrative about Zaccheus.

## Homiletical Aid

Far more than sympathy for Jesus during Lent. He bore our sin and guilt. All our devotion to Jesus during Lent is the expression of our faith and our love toward him as our Redeemer. Thus we accompany him in spirit when he said to his disciples: “Behold, we go up to Jerusalem!”

### **The Last Journey of Jesus to Jerusalem.**

- I. Its motive — infinite mercy.
  1. A hard journey, the most cruel suffering and the death of one accursed the goal. Our future largely hidden from us. All that awaited Jesus in Jerusalem perfectly clear to him. The power, of the motive.
  2. The motive seen in the healing of the blind beggar. Still greater gifts to bring us. Jesus slain for our redemption.
  3. Let us adore this motive and accept all that his grace bestows on us.
- II. Its object — plenteous redemption.
  1. Redemption as planned and as prophesied by God.
  2. Redemption the only possible help for sinners. By “the Son of David,” the King of our salvation. His resurrection the proof and the seal of the reality of our redemption.
  3. Redemption the glory of our religion. Its acceptance by faith.
- III. Our understanding of this journey — vital for ourselves.
  1. The failure of the disciples to understand even what Jesus meant. The failure of so many to this day to perceive the expiation, the reconciliation, the atonement of the self-sacrifice of Jesus. As little as those two blind men could themselves remove

their blindness, so little can a sinner remove his sins and save himself.

2. To understand this last journey aright opens up heaven for our hearts. The mystery into which the angels delight to peer. The most blessed object to fill our mind and heart. If Jesus had not entered upon this last journey to Jerusalem, — .

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The following is from J. A. Dell. The theme is a quotation from John 9:30, which recalls too much the story of another blind man. The treatment should not be allowed to run into allegory. —

“Jesus of Nazareth passeth by.” This sentence might be taken as the general theme of the Lenten season which is just at hand. He passeth by in his humility and majesty, shame and glory, death and resurrection. Do we grasp the meaning of these things, or are they hid from our eyes? Happy are we if we can say:

### **“He Hath Opened My Eyes.”**

#### I. The blind man could say it.

1. He had never seen Jesus, yet what he had heard about him had opened his spiritual eyes in faith. His soul’s eyes saw Jesus as “the Son of David,” God’s Messiah and Savior. Hence his loud shouting and his refusal to stop. Jesus himself points to his faith.
2. Jesus granted him the miracle of sight. The man followed Jesus and glorified God, and thus saw more in Jesus with the eyes of his faith.

#### II. The disciples might have said it.

1. Jesus had taught and prepared them, and now told them about his suffering, death, and resurrection. But in spite of the plainness of the words they remained blind to their meaning. They would not let Jesus open their eyes.
2. The disciples still clung to the earthly conception of the Kingdom of Jesus. Thus they could not say What they might and

should have said.

III. Can we say it?

Behold, we go up to Jerusalem in the Lenten season before us, and what we shall see there depends upon whether our eyes have been opened or not.

1. We shall see tragedy. But this dare not be all. 2) We shall see victory. The disciples saw it at last, — the full meaning of what “the Son of David” meant. He was bruised for our iniquities, etc. He was raised for our justification.

**"O blessed Light from heaven,  
Shine forth into my soul!  
Dispel the innate darkness  
That would my soul control!**

**Without thee I am groping  
And should forever stray,  
For thou alone canst save me  
And safely lead the way."**

— American Lutheran Hymnal 205.

The elaboration of the parts is my wording.

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Here is the theme that Dell finds so attractive: —

Jesus of Nazareth passed by physically on the road to Jericho. In fact, he had already passed through the city and out beyond it, and no one had taken the least advantage of his blessed physical nearness. So far he had passed by entirely in vain. But in our text he is going back into the city, and now at last his nearness is noticed by a blind man who saw Jesus with the eyes of faith. — All of us could not be there that day so many centuries ago on the physical road to Jericho. The essential thing for us is what we note in the blind man, namely, to believe in Jesus and to see him with eyes of faith and depend on his grace of mercy. Thank God for his nearness in his Word and his Sacrament! Here he is ever passing by so our souls can see him. Yes,

## **“Jesus of Nazareth Passeth By.”**

- I. The blind beggar saw him.
  1. With the eyes of faith.
  2. As “the Son of David.”
  3. As the giver of divine mercy.
  4. He lived to see far more, namely the Lord’s full salvation.
- II. The blind disciples did not see him.
  1. Jesus tried to make them see the main thing about himself (v. 31-32), the great culmination of his life and his work.
  2. Their old Jewish and earthly opinions of the Kingdom of the Son of David still kept their eyes blind.
  3. Jesus bore with them till finally at his resurrection their eyes were opened and they saw their redemption.
- III. Are our hearts still blind?
  1. See him passing by your soul every time you hear or read his Word and come to his Sacrament?
  2. But do you truly see him? — his grace that helped and healed so many in order to show us that he means above all to heal our souls? — his grace that blotted out our guilt on the cross and released us from death by the power of his resurrection?
  3. So many never see him in faith. Earthly-minded, unbelieving, indifferent.
  4. Let Jesus touch your hearts and open your soul’s eyes. The tragedy of tragedies to have him pass by, and to let him pass you by.

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**Why so Many Still Fail to Realize the Glorious and Blessed Power of Christ’s Passion.**

- I. So many regard the Passion of Christ only with the eyes of reason.
- II. So many do not want to realize how much they need Christ's Passion.
- III. So many are afraid of comforting themselves with his Passion.

The voices that hold us back: What do you want? — Grace? — You deserve no grace! First become a better man! Do better repentance! Show more zeal for your salvation! First cleanse your heart! First follow Christ's example! — But the more your conscience cries: "Be silent, you miserable sinner!" the more do you reply: "Just because I am a miserable sinner will I cry to my Savior who died for my sins!" — C. F. W. Walther.

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Septuagesima, grace. Sexagesima, the Word and faith. And now Quinquagesima, the merits of Christ. These three are the pillars of our salvation. If one of the three were absent, no one could be saved.

A little more than a week before his death Jesus announced once more, and in fullest detail, what would occur in Jerusalem. He spoke with more plainness even than the prophets of old. His passion, death, and resurrection accomplished our atonement.

### **The Savior Goes to Make Atonement for our Sins.**

- I. He is the Son of man and the Son of David.

He who is man and yet more than man, God's own Son, whose atonement has infinite value and is all-sufficient for all men.

He who by his death and his resurrection accomplished an everlasting Kingdom of grace and of glory.

His compassion and his omnipotence in the miracle.

- II. He goes to suffer, to die, but also to rise again.

The suffering in detail as foretold by the prophets and now by Jesus himself.

The death on the cross.

The wondrous resurrection.

III. The atonement thus to be made.

Jesus goes to suffer and to die for our sins. He bore the penalty. All the worst sins strike him unchecked and unrestrained until he hangs helpless on the cross. The cross as the symbol of the curse (Gal. 3:13). His blood the sacrifice. In all the universe no other means to remove the guilt of a single sin.

He goes to rise again, to show that he did atone for our sins, that the penalty is indeed paid.

All this we must know and believe as the absolute basis of our salvation. The disciples could not at first understand that such things could occur; but they did occur, then the disciples understood, and ever since that time the Gospel resounds and men come in faith to our eternal Redeemer and King.

# Invocavit. Matt. 4:1 -11

## Jesus Vanquishes Satan in the Great Temptation

The Savior's work of redemption includes the vanquishment of Satan. The first three Sundays in Lent properly deal with this great subject and thus form a minor group. Our text shows us the Victor. Reminiscere shows us the Spoils of Victory. Then Oculi presents the Rejection of the Victor and his Victory. This sequence and this connection are both obvious and highly satisfactory for Lent.

Adam and Eve fell when tempted and thereby plunged all of us into sin and death. The Second Adam met the tempter and the tempter's utmost power of delusion and worsted him utterly; thus began our rescue from the tempter's power, from sin and from death. Thus Jesus began to destroy the works of the devil. Heb. 2:14-15.

The account of the temptation of Jesus dare not be regarded as a parable, a myth, or a legend. It is history, just as real as is the account of his death and his resurrection. The temptation was not a dream or a vision that Jesus had. It is nowhere recorded that Jesus ever had dreams or saw visions for the obvious reason that no revelations were communicated to him in this manner, — he himself made revelations to others. A victory over Satan in a dream or a vision would be no victory in fact and would help to save no one.

Some late commentators regard the temptation as a mental occurrence. Instead of dreaming all of it or having it come to him in a vision, Jesus just thought all of it. The extreme view regards even the wilderness, and, of course, also the wing of the Temple, the high mountains, the angels, etc., as merely mental. The less extreme views regard some things as real, while the rest are mental. This mixture weakens such a view. But the worst feature about these views is the ethical monstrosity which has Satanic temptations arise in the holy and sinless mind of God. To assert such a possibility is to

set aside the deity of the Son. Even the devil is unable to inject evil into the mind of Jesus.

The worst and the most dangerous confusion results when it is assumed that the temptation of Jesus must have been like our temptations in all respects, including the possibility that Jesus might have fallen. The matter is usually presented in this form: if Jesus could not have fallen, his temptation was not a real temptation (meaning: like ours); it is presented in the Scriptures as real, hence Jesus might have fallen. These conclusions would be sound, if Jesus could be placed on a level with us believers in our present state, or with Adam and Eve in Eden, or with the angels in heaven prior to Satan's fall. But all Scripture attests that Jesus was the Second Person of the Godhead. God cannot fall. Only the Kenoticists who empty the Logos at the time of the Incarnation, who have a Jesus with only one nature (*Einnaturenlehre*), are able to speak of a Jesus who might have fallen when tempted.

Neither the Father nor the Spirit could possibly be tempted by Satan. Nor could the Son, save for his human nature. He alone could be asked to appease his hunger in a sinful way, for he alone could suffer hunger by way of his human nature. He alone, by means of his human nature, was made dependent on his Father, and could thus be asked to abuse his dependence by a false trust in his Father. He alone, in his human nature, faced the cross, and could thus be asked to evade it and follow an easier road. Temptation was possible to Jesus only on the side of his humanity. The verb *πειρῶ* means to try or to test. The greatness of the strength to resist in no way changes the reality of the test to which it may be subjected. The strain applied to it is just as real when the strength endures it, as when the strength is too weak to endure it. Jesus, the Stronger, remained unmoved under all the force that Satan, the strong one, brought and could bring against him; in fact, there was no attempt so great that he as the Son could not have resisted. Thus the test or temptation was real in every way and no illusion, and yet the Savior could not have fallen. We see this more readily, perhaps, when we think of the test applied, not by immoral solicitation, but by suffering. Jesus alone could endure the penalty of suffering and death for the sin and guilt of the world. When the test was applied the outcome was not for a single moment in doubt. The agony and the death were absolutely real, and yet Jesus bore them triumphantly.

**1) Then Jesus was led up into the wilderness by the Spirit, to be tried by the devil.** There is a close connection with the preceding narrative concerning the Baptism and the Anointing of Jesus. The temptation comes as the result of the inauguration of Jesus into his ministry. At once Satan was ready for the great battle, and God himself who through his Spirit descended upon the human nature of Jesus wanted him to enter the battle.

The site of the ordeal is not known. The observation may be correct that in the LXX ἡ ἔρημος is used as a designation for the wilderness on the eastern side of the Jordan, and ἡ ἔρημος τῆς Ἰουδαίας for the wild regions on the western side. So the place must have been in Perea, but no one is able to say anything more definite.

Jesus was led up by the Holy Spirit to be tempted by the devil. Jesus did not rashly throw himself into the temptation right at the beginning of his ministry. He obeyed the Father's will as always. The Father sent Jesus against Satan immediately after his inauguration, and no one can say that Jesus had first of all to train and to prepare himself.

This temptation occurred in the wilderness, because the devil was to have full play. Jesus was utterly alone in the wilds high above the deep Ghor of the Jordan. No one could aid him even by merely being present. He was to meet the enemy alone. We may at once add that also the enemy was to be enabled' to use his fullest power, nothing putting him at a disadvantage. The Greek word for "wilderness" means an uninhabited, wild, lonely place.

The devil was not compelled to tempt Jesus. He was only too eager to do so. He knew all about this man who had lived absolutely sinless in Nazareth. The devil had been an invisible spectator at the Jordan when Jesus was baptized and when the Spirit descended upon him. So this was God's Messiah come to crush Satan, destroy his works, and erect the Kingdom of God among men! The devil at once resolved to break this divine champion. He had conquered the first Adam with little difficulty, he certainly would overthrow this second Adam without undue effort. Before this Jesus even got under way on his mission, the devil would ruin him and that mission completely. God willed that the devil should have the fullest opportunity. The A.V. is certainly wrong when it translates "spirit" and not as the R.V. "Spirit." The Holy Spirit who has descended upon Jesus led him

into the wilderness. Πειράζω is really a *vox media*, “to try,” but it gets a sinister connotation from its context and thus means “to tempt to sin,” and ὁ πειράζων means “the tempter.”

Skeptics scoff at the idea of “the devil,” ὁ διάβολος, “the slanderer,” “the adversary.” Skeptics may well wish him out of existence. We have no need to say more at this point. Yet the devil is only the mightiest of the fallen angels and is neither omniscient nor omnipotent or in any way equal to God. Without God’s will the devil could not have come near Jesus. But Jesus came to destroy the kingdom (i.e. the rule and domain) of evil and to prepare our rescue from its doom. Hence Jesus was sent to meet the arch-foe of God and of man.

**2) And after fasting for forty days and for forty nights, he finally was hungry.** The idea of a partial fasting is excluded by Luke 4:2: “he did eat nothing in those days.” Both evangelists state that hunger did not set in until after the forty days had passed.

During the entire forty days Jesus underwent temptation by the devil. Mark writes: πειραζόμενος ὑπὸ τοῦ Σατανᾶ, “being tempted by Satan”; and Luke writes: πειραζόμενος ὑπὸ τοῦ διαβόλου, “being tempted by the devil.” The participle is durative or iterative; the attempt to make it indicate purpose: “in order to be tempted,” so that only the three temptations that occurred at the end of the forty days are referred to, is a violation of the tense and a violation of the context Which mentions the forty days: “for forty days being tempted by the devil” (Luke), Mark says the same.

We thus dismiss the idea that the forty days were a period of preparation for Jesus; nowhere is it said that he fasted and prayed. Also the opposite notion that Jesus only weakened himself by not eating for forty days is untenable. Another opposite opinion, that he enjoyed the contemplation of the Father’s testimony regarding his deity (3:17) is also improbable. Jesus battled with Satanic attacks for forty days, and thus of necessity fasted. We possess no details concerning this great period of temptation. I consider it unsafe to supply details. We have an account of the three final assaults; the Spirit thereby intends to indicate that this is enough for us.

Comparisons are made between this fast of Jesus and the long fasts of other men: Moses on Mount Sinai (Ex. 34:28), Elijah traveling to Mount Horeb (1 Kgs. 19:8), and long fasts of ordinary men today. I consider these

comparisons useless, even when all of these fasts continued for forty days. For the body of Jesus was Without sin and the damaging effects of sin, and was thus, even in his humiliation, ever in a class by itself. Why the hunger held off for precisely forty days and Why we meet the number forty repeatedly in the Scriptures, in particular also forty days, I cannot explain satisfactorily to myself.

**[3] And when the tempter had come, he said to him: “If thou art a son of God, say that these stones shall become bread.”** It may be that the devil gave Jesus a breathing spell, so that he should feel the pangs of hunger, for the devil launches his attack against this condition of Jesus. The text takes for granted that the devil appeared to Jesus in visible form. Ordinary Christians never have difficulty in believing this. These πνεύματα or spirit beings, angels, the good angels and also Satan, are able to appear visibly when necessary, although they have no body and except for such appearances need none. Only theosophists and certain speculative minds imagine that these beings possess an ethereal body and frequently extend this notion so as to include even God. Jesus dealt with Satan personally, and the arch-foe brought all the power of his deception to bear upon the Savior.

In this first specific temptation the devil employs no new method, — with his “if” he casts a cloud of doubt upon the very word uttered by God himself: “This is my beloved Son.” Compare Gen. 3:1: “Yea, hath God said” etc., did he really say etc.? Job 1:9: “Doth Job fear God for nought?” or only for what Job gets out of it?

There is no question that υἱὸς τοῦ Θεοῦ may be read as a title: “*the* Son of God.” It is not the absence of the Greek article, but the context which makes me think that the devil said only: “a son of God,” one of God’s many sons, the one whom God selected to be the Messiah. Even the fact that Jesus is only such a son, the devil implies, requires proof. Not that the devil would accept the proof if it were furnished to him and would believe in Jesus, but that Jesus ought to test the matter out for himself. A miracle wrought by Jesus would supply the proof, and the devil suggests the proper miracle as required by the circumstances, turning stones into bread to relieve the hunger of Jesus. Was not the Messiah to perform miracles? Did not all the Jews entertain this expectation? Yes, later on the Jews themselves demanded that Jesus perform certain miracles to prove his Messiahship. Those that he wrought did not satisfy them, they wanted something far

grander from *their* Messiah. Ordinary Christians have the right idea when they say: “If Jesus had done What Satan said, he would have obeyed Satan, not God.” So also, he would have done the wrong and perverted will of the unbelieving Jews, not his Father’s holy will, if he had yielded to their demands.

There is another side to the devil’s tempting proposal. Jesus trusts his Father’s assurance. Jesus does not need proof of his Sonship to assure himself. If Jesus supplies the suggested proof this is not an innocent matter, but is clear evidence that Jesus does not truly and unquestioningly believe the Father’s word: “This is my beloved Son.”

The further point is that by following the devil’s suggestion Jesus would not prove himself to be either “a son of God” or “the Son of God,” but a sorry son of God, one who does not trust his Father. Jesus was here in the wilderness by the direction of his Father’s Spirit. Here his Father had preserved him from hunger for forty days. Now that hunger has set in, is this not according to his Father’s will, is Jesus not to suffer this hunger patiently and wait for the Father who brought him into this situation also to bring him out of it? Is Jesus no longer to look up to his Father with a son’s trust? Is it so strange that he who is even the eternal Son of God should come to this hunger because of his battle with the devil, when his Father sent him to suffer far greater. hurt than mere hunger? The opinion that this temptation does not deal with the Messianic mission of Jesus because it concerned itself with hunger and bread to appease physical hunger, remains on the surface and overlooks the real issue, namely that Jesus is “a son of God,” yea “the Son” from eternity and as such our Messiah.

[4] Jesus conquers the tempter by acting as a true “son” should, to say nothing about “the Son.” Instead of showing the slightest distrust or doubt Jesus forthwith displays *the most perfect trust and reliance upon his Father* and thus conquers the tempter. **But he answering said: “It has been written: ‘Not on bread alone shall a man live, but on every utterance going forth through God’s mouth.’”**

Jesus smites the devil with “the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God” (Eph. 6:17). He who was God’s own Son, whose own words were the Word of God, uses no new word of his own to crush the tempter, but hurls at him the ancient, recorded Word. Jesus employs Deut. 8:3 and thereby

stamps the Pentateuch as the Word of God. The formula: “it has been written” (perfect tense, implying that what was written still stands as written), is never employed save for quoting the divine Word. The importance of the reply Jesus made is indicated by the addition of the participle ἀποκριθείς, “answering.”

God wanted Israel to learn during the forty years in the desert that its whole dependence was to be on him alone. That is why Israel was fed with manna and drank water miraculously supplied. As man Jesus did not need to have this great truth impressed upon him, he knew it perfectly and no hunger could darken that knowledge. Thus the word which Moses spoke for God rings out from the lips of Jesus to the confounding of the tempter.

In all three temptations Jesus smites the devil with the written Word. In this he has left us an example. Our defense against all the tempting lies and deceptions of the devil is this same Word of God. With it we conquer, without it we fall. This means that we must know the Word. Ignorance cannot wield the sword of the Spirit and gain victories. Great theological erudition is not the essential, but a simple understanding of the sense of the statements of the Word.

In 3:17 the Father says: “*my Son*”; the devil says: “a son”; and now Jesus says: ὁ ἄνθρωπος (the article is generic), “a man,” “a human being.” When the devil says “a son,” one of a class, Jesus does not reply “I am the Son.” He neither debates with the devil, nor does he enlighten him. He is here to conquer the devil. Therefore Jesus meets the insult which questions even his sonship by a reply which pertains to every man merely as a human being. Does the devil really imagine that a human being is kept alive by bread? does he think that Jesus can be persuaded to act on such a false notion? This is a fool’s idea, ridiculous and silly the moment it is stated. So is every lie of the devil. Let the light of truth shine on it and its falsity appears also in its silliness. Let the devil think, that a human being, to say nothing of a son of God, lives on bread alone (i.e. “bread” in the sense of earthly food), Moses knew better, Israel learned better, every son of God knows better. Only unbelievers, skeptics and skeptic so-called scientists fail to know better.

What does a human being live on? “On every utterance going forth through God’s mouth.” The Hebrew term *motsa*’, when used with reference

to lips or mouth, means *Ausgehendes* and could thus be expressed by the neuter participle ἔκπορευόμενον Without the addition of ῥῆμα, thus: “what goes forth through God’s mouth.” Thus in the Greek no stress rests on the word ῥῆμα. What goes forth out of God’s mouth is the expression of his will, is what his will orders. On (ἐπί) this every human being’s life rests. You may have at hand all the bread in the world, a million bakeries, you will not remain alive save for the will and the word of God. And if there is no bread, as when Israel journeyed through the desert, when Moses and Elijah were so long without food of any kind, even as Jesus had no food here in the desert for forty days, God’s will and his orders are the one real force that continues our life.

The first temptation resembles the one that occurred in Eden. It deals with food and seeks to instill distrust in God and in God’s Word. What succeeded in Eden, the land of plenty, failed in the destitute wilderness. What succeeded with Adam and Eve who were well fed, failed with Jesus when in great hunger. Whereas the first Adam went down in defeat, the second Adam retrieved the loss in glorious victory. Not with his deity did Jesus smite the tempter, but as man with the Scripture-Word, leaving us an example that by his help we should do the same.

[5] The second attack is the reverse of the first. Whereas the first tempts to *distrust* of God, the second tempts to a *false and an unjustified trust in God*. The devil thus contradicts himself, for not to trust contradicts the solicitation to trust beyond limits, and to trust thus contradicts the solicitation to distrust. Only in this do these contradictory temptations agree, both equally solicit to the gravest sin against the heavenly Father of Jesus.

**Then the devil takes him with himself into the holy city, and placed him on the wing of the Temple, and says to him: "If thou art a son of God, throw thyself down. For it has been written:**

**'To his angels he will give injunction concerning thee;  
And on their hands will they bear thee up,  
Lest ever thou strike thy foot against a stone.'**"

Distinguish τὸ ἱερόν, “the Temple,” the whole area with its buildings and walls, from ὁ ναός, “the Sanctuary,” the one structure containing the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies. “The wing of the Temple,” τὸ πτερύγιον

τοῦ ἱεροῦ, is the point of the outer wall of the Temple area where the drop into the ravine below measures several hundred feet. There were two such places, — which one is here referred to is hard to decide. From the one James the Just was thrown, Eusebius 2:23; the other showed a drop of 600 feet.

Matthew's language is very plain. So also is Luke's: the devil took Jesus bodily and set him on the wall above this precipitous depth. Certain commentators raise strong objection, — they cannot conceive of such a thing, hence it could not have occurred. The devil must have produced the mental illusion that Jesus stood on the wing of the Temple. This supposition forces a consistent mind to the conclusion that all the temptations of Jesus were not real, but were mere mental ideas. It compels to the assumption that the devil was able to invade the mind of Jesus with sinful thoughts. Then also Matthew and Luke reported falsely. These critical commentators, however, ask us to believe the impossible, which we decline even to attempt. The Holy Spirit led Jesus out into the wilderness for the very purpose that he should meet and vanquish the strongest efforts of the tempter, and it is thus that the devil was permitted to place Jesus where he desired to have him for his purpose. It is utterly ungodly to imagine that the devil could make a sinful thought arise in the mind of Jesus. Even the psychology implied in such an idea is impossible.

[6] To prove that he is “a son of God” and the chosen Messiah Jesus is to throw himself down from this beetling height. And since Jesus relies so strongly on God's written Word, the devil quotes the great promise of Ps. 91:11-12, that God will order his angels to bear up Jesus, so that when he alights he will not even stub his toes against a stone, — if Jesus hesitates, he shows that he does not trust his Father and his Father's Word; if he makes the test, if he leaps down and is dashed to pieces, then the Father's Word is nothing and Jesus might as well be dead as live and rely on such empty promises.

The passage which the devil quotes seems to fit perfectly the act by which the devil proposes that Jesus should display his complete and perfect trust in God's promise. In fact, the entire Psalm contains the same thought. Certainly, this is God's own promise, and it is not changed because the devil quotes it to Jesus. The devil indeed omits the line: “to keep thee in all thy ways.” Yet this is no falsification, as some have supposed, for then Jesus

would at once have exposed the falsification. Nor can we make God's promise conditional, that he will preserve us when we walk in his ways, for then "in all his ways" would be the reading, yet it is "in all thy ways." No, this omission is mere abbreviation, the deception is not so superficial.

Here the devil himself quotes Scripture and does it most expertly. Jesus has struck him with the sword of the Spirit; the devil would now seek to wrest that sword out of the hand of Jesus. The written Scripture is very patient, — even the devil may quote from its pages. To him nothing is holy, neither Jerusalem, the Holy City, nor the holy Temple, nor the holy body of Jesus, nor God's holy Word. The devil abuses God's own Word to destroy God's own Son. He has had many, many pupils. The Scriptures are quoted in support of the grossest religious falsehoods. Men think they trust God's Word when they really trust nobody but the devil. The art of employing Scripture for deadly purposes is fully developed. Here the devil stresses one passage and makes it mean what it does not mean, and omits the other passages which reveal the true meaning. We here see how ancient is the trick of making the Bible say what a hundred places in the Bible tell us it does not say and never could say. This deception easily catches the unwary, especially the devout who feel bound by the Scriptures. The perverters of Scripture also delight in harassing devout believers, while they imagine they are safe behind impregnable walls.

[7] More than ever must we know the Scriptures to protect our own faith and to defeat such attacks. **Jesus said to him: "Again it has been written: I 'Thou shalt not test out the Lord thy God!'"** Does Jesus abandon Scripture because the devil uses Scripture? Not for one moment! As a true son of God he knows what his Father says in the Word, and no devil can mislead him. Does the promise of Ps. 91 mean that by some foolhardy act we may challenge God to keep his promise? It is a devilish thought thus to tempt God.

But we are not left to our own conclusions in this matter. God's own Word crushes the abuse to which the devil subjects God's promise as mentioned in Ps. 91. Deut. 6:16 states: "Thou shalt not test out the Lord thy God." Here Jesus uses the great principle of Scripture interpretation: *Scripture ex Scripture, explicanda est*, Scripture is explained and must be explained by Scripture. Any false conclusions or deductions drawn from one passage are eliminated by comparing with other pertinent passages. No

man dare press into one passage a meaning clashing with another passage. Here stands condemned all exegesis which operates with contradictions in the Scriptures, also all exegesis which rests only on fractional Scripture evidence and which ignores pertinent portions of Scripture.

The devil is asking Jesus for evidence of *false trust in God*. What the devil asks for is really a presumptuous, uncalled for test of God. Jesus is to challenge God to fulfill his promise in a way which the devil dictates. To leap off the wing of the Temple is to commit deliberate and even silly suicide. To expect God to intervene with his angels is to ask God to condone such a sinful act, yea to call it a noble act of trust.

Ex. 17:7 crashes through all these devilish ideas: “Thou shalt not test out the Lord thy God!” Israel’s challenge was: “Is the Lord among us or not?” Israel meant: “If God does not do what we demand as a help, then there is no God among us, then his promises amount to nothing.” What Israel committed in this negative way, the devil wants Jesus to commit in a positive way, which is the worse of the two. Without danger Jesus is to hurl himself into mortal danger and thus test out God and his promise. The insult to God by thus daring him not to withhold his protection is plain. The moment Jesus points it out.

**[8] Again the devil takes him with himself to a very high mountain, and shows him all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them; [9] and he said to him: “These all will I give to thee, if thou, by falling down, wilt worship me.”** Luther well says that in the first temptation Satan shows himself as the black devil, in the second temptation as the white devil who uses even God’s own word, and now in the third temptation as the divine, majestic devil who acts as if he were the very God himself. He drops the mask, he speaks as the prince and ruler of the world. No more does he say to Jesus: “if thou art a son of God.” The devil accepts the truth that Jesus is such a son, yea, the Messiah himself, and builds his temptation on these facts.

The high mountain is not merely mental. Likewise “all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them.” It is true enough that no mountain affords a view of all the kingdoms on earth, and that we are unable to say how the devil did what the evangelists record. We shall have to be satisfied with that. Luke adds ἐν στιγμή κρόνου, “in a prick of time,” and thus excludes

the idea that Jesus gazed all around and drank in the vision of these kingdoms and their glory. It was all done in the wink of an eye by the devil's legerdemain.

[9] Satan offers to turn all these kingdoms and all their glory over to Jesus right here and now. Had not Jesus come to be the King? Well, there is no need for him to labor and to suffer in order to obtain the crown. The devil is ready right here to turn the crown over to him.

Note well, the devil speaks as if he were the rightful ruler of these kingdoms and as if he had the right to dispose of them according to his will. But the devil is a usurper who shall be thrown into the lake that burns with unquenchable fire.

So also the condition of his offer, that Jesus bow down and worship him, rests on utter falsehood. There is not one word of truth in the pretense that God made the devil the grand ruler, and that as the devil rules under God so the devil can make Jesus rule under him, and that this will be in perfect order. Does the devil kneel and worship God? No. Is the devil God that any one should kneel and worship him? Nay, the hook protrudes from the bait. If Jesus bowed and worshipped the devil this act would make Jesus the dupe and slave of the devil, would make Jesus lose the rule of the world for ever.

The devil would like to be God. He fell because of his ungodly pride. "Ye shall be as gods" was the bait with which he caught Eve. But when Eve had taken the bait she found herself in the toils of the devil. The devil grandly offers a prize, — to Jesus all the kingdoms and their glory. He bought Judas Iscariot rather cheaply, — for thirty pieces of silver. But whatever prize he offers you, be it high or be it low, you never keep it. Judas threw the silver into the Sanctuary, the blood-money burned in his fingers.

[10] Then Jesus said to him: **"Begone, Satan! For it has been written: 'The Lord thy God shalt thou worship, and him alone shalt thou serve!'"** As with a mighty stroke of a sword all the pretenses of the devil are cut away. The holy indignation of Jesus flashes out: "Begone, Satan!" (i.e. adversary). The devil has shot his last fiery dart. Jesus knows it and orders him out of his presence. But the victory is won for the third time with the sword of the Word, Deut. 6:13. The Hebrew "thou shalt fear" is

according to the LXX rendering “thou shall worship,” yet *yare*’ ever expresses itself in true worship. The Hebrew adds: “and serve him,” in the LXX: “him alone.” Jesus retains the latter. This λατρεία or “worship” belongs to God alone, and to accord it to any one else is the abomination of open idolatry. This fact, too, makes the temptation the final one, even as the First Commandment is the greatest of all.

Not with the powers of his deity did Jesus meet and overthrow the devil. Throughout Jesus speaks as “a son,” a true Israelite. As man, Jesus too was under God, and hence honored and worshiped God and kept all his commandments, as all men ought to keep them. Jesus vanquished Satan as a man. Thus “we have not an High Priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin,” Heb. 4:15.

**[11] Then the devil leaves him,** utterly routed. Yes, he attacked again (note 16:22-23; John 6:15; 14:30). Comp. Luke 4:13 “for a season.”

**And lo! angels came to him, and engaged in serving him.** Note the descriptive imperfect δηκόνουον, and the fact that the verb means service freely rendered to the benefit of someone. Did the angels bear Jesus back from the high mountain to the wilderness Where Jesus had spent the forty days? Did they bring him the food he needed? See the painting of Tissot. Did they help him celebrate this first great Victory? You may answer these questions yourself.

## Homiletical Aid

Homiletical application (*S.* 227 etc.) cannot possibly do justice to this text. It would be a calamity to leave the impression that Jesus entered this great temptation merely to supply us with an example of how to act when tempted. This is a great soteriological text, therefore demanding homiletical appropriation (*S.* 230 etc.). In the great temptation Jesus conquered the tempter for you and for me, and by faith in Jesus we are to make that victory ours. The battle that Jesus won we are not to fight over again.

At his Baptism in the Jordan the Father inaugurates his Son into his great office as the Messiah, our Savior, our Redeemer. In his Baptism Jesus takes our sins upon himself to bear them away. The Holy Spirit descends upon him to aid in his great mission. The Father set his approval upon Jesus and upon his mission. Then follows

### **The Savior's First Battle with the Arch-foe.**

#### I. We were the stake.

Why did the Spirit lead Jesus out to be tempted? Jesus had to meet and to vanquish our foe. By temptation our first parents fell, by conquering all the tempter's power the loss was to be retrieved.

Jesus was your Champion and mine. As far as he himself is concerned he could have crushed Satan with his almighty power, but to deliver us he had to undo what Adam and Eve once did to our eternal hurt.

This was the first battle and the first victory. The final victory was on Calvary: "It is finished!"

#### II. Temptation is the weapon of assault.

Just as Satan used temptation in Eden. He brings on his very worst and his most deadly temptations. The siege of forty days, then the three final efforts.

Cunning, like the deadly hook covered by alluring bait: to make Jesus sin. One sin would have destroyed Jesus and us for ever.

The sin of distrust — of false, presumptuous trust — of yielding to Satan for a price. Satan used every advantage.

#### III. God's Word is the weapon of victory.

Three times Jesus used the written Word, "One little word ov'rthrows him." Luther.

Jesus could not fall, for he was God's own Son, and the weapon could not be conquered, for it was God's own Word.

The three victorious strokes of the Word. Satan is through.

IV. The spoils of victory are ours.

Our foe was conquered and remains so. We are delivered from his power. We belong to Jesus. When Satan now tempts us he is a vanquished foe.

“He yet can harm us none, for he is judged, undone.” Luther. Jesus is at our side, his Word is our weapon. If we should fall, the door of repentance is open.

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J. A. Dell has the theme:

### **Why Are We Interested in the Temptation of Jesus?**

I transpose the second and the third parts:

- I. He is our Champion.
  - II. He is our Victor (better than the abstract “victory”).
  - III. He is our Example.
- 

The best in the way of an applicatory sermon is offered by C. F. W. Walther. Note his introduction:

“The gospel just read to you, my beloved, may be considered from two angles. For one thing, we here see how Christ as our Redeemer, Savior and substitute battled with the tempter for us and overcame him. Then also we here see Christ as our model, whom we, if we want to be his disciples, should follow. Let us now consider our gospel from the latter angle.”

### **The Three Main Temptations of a Believing Christian, because of which he is Compelled to live in Constant Conflict.**

- I. The temptation through want and all kinds of tribulation.
- II. The temptation through false faith and false spirituality.

### III. The temptation through riches and all kinds of temporal advantages.

Observation. Sermons like this seek for the likeness between Christ's temptation and our temptation. They overlook the vast differences. Jesus fought an unconquered foe, we now fight a completely conquered foe. Jesus met the devil face to face, we do not, for he is not omnipresent, — as an angel he is present only at one place at one time. By means of men etc., the devil appeals to our old Adam, the flesh; Jesus was sinless. We Christians may fall when tempted, the Son of God could not possibly be drawn into sin. He was the Stronger, the devil only the strong one. The object of the temptation of Jesus differs vastly from the object of our temptations: Jesus did not conquer to save himself, but we are to conquer to save ourselves; he conquered to save us, we do not conquer to save him. Quite an array of differences! enough for a valuable sermon.

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Eden, the victory lost; in our gospel, the victory regained.

### **Our Savior Overthrew the Tempter.**

#### I. “The old bitter foe.”

Satan, his fall, his kingdom, his conquest of the world, the prince of darkness and of this world.

Men deny his existence and thus play into his hands. The devilishness in the world. Sin holds us in his power.

#### II. “The Valiant One whom God Himself elected.”

God's Son as such could not have been tempted, but the Son incarnate could.

Satan could attack him with suggestions to commit sin, but Jesus could not fall into sin. He was invincible, the Stronger One before whom the strong one had to go down (Luke 11:21).

When God made the Son to be our Savior, the outcome was never in question.

#### III. “Deep guile and cruel might are his diread arms in fight.”

Satan was permitted to bring his strongest temptation against Jesus.  
The deep guile or deception in the three temptations recorded.

Satan's entire power of temptation was to go down in defeat.

IV. "One little Word o'erthrows him."

How one little Word did it in each case.

The power of truth against deception and the deceiver.

V. "The Kingdom ours remaineth."

With its blessed King.

With all the blessings of his rule.

In time (grace) and for all eternity (glory).

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The simplest treatment is analytical, — the three temptations form the three parts of the sermon. More or less skill may be employed in the formulation.

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The first Sunday in Lent, the battle with Satan in the great temptation.

### **How Satan Tempted Jesus.**

- I. The temptation to mistrust God.
- II. The temptation to rash trust in God.
- III. The temptation to trust Satan.

Or

- I. To sever him from God by mistrust.
- II. To sever him from God by rash trust.
- III. To bind him to Satan by pain trust.

# Reminiscere. Matt. 15:21-28

## Jesus Drives out the Demon from the Canaanitish Woman's Daughter

Invocavit: Jesus conquers our arch-foe. Reminiscere: Jesus divides the spoils. This is the sequence of the texts. The idea is not that first Jesus conquered the devil on his own account and for his own person (Invocavit), and now he drives out the devil from others (Reminiscere). The entire defeat of the tempter was effected for our sakes.

Faith receives the spoils, faith alone. Certainly unbelief does not receive the spoils, for unbelief rejects the Victor himself. The value of great faith is at once apparent, and the text portrays an example of great and persevering faith. The saving power of Jesus is magnified: he delivers the daughter who is at a distance, he does not need to go to her. These additional features of the text harmonize with its main import: *the Conqueror of Satan divides the spoils*.

The text is inadequately treated when the woman and her faith are made the main features and when the miracle of Jesus and all that this miracle reveals concerning him is omitted or thrust into the background. Much as we admire the persevering faith of the Canaanitish woman, our contemplation of her is only to direct our eyes to Jesus. We do not now see cases of demoniacal possession, although some still occur, — see William A. Matson, *The Adversary; a Study in Satanology*. As regards the actuality of demoniacal possession see *The Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel* 169 etc., also Matson's book. It would be a mistake to allegorize the daughter's demoniacal possession into evil spiritual conditions caused by the devil. Such conditions are not removed by the Lord's miraculous intervention. The miracle wrought upon this girl stands for all time as an aid and a seal of faith without allegorical repetitions.

**[21] And having gone out from thence,** from the place in Galilee where Jesus clashed with the Pharisees who had come from Jerusalem to oppose him (v. 1), **Jesus withdrew to the parts of Tyre and Sidon.** The opposition had grown to such an extent even in Galilee that Jesus retired from the populous centers and took refuge in the distant outskirts. This was not cowardice on his part, but sensible prudence. Thus we now see him in the northwest, close to the borders of Galilee and thus in the parts of Tyre and Sidon. The point is that Jesus was in Gentile territory.

**[22] And lo, a Canaanite woman, having come out from those borders, cried out saying: “Show me mercy, Lord, son of David! My daughter is badly demon-possessed.”** Remarkable indeed that in this remote section a pagan woman had heard about Jesus and hastens across the border calling him by his Messianic name and begging for a miraculous act of mercy! We have no evidence that she was a proselyte to Judaism. All that we dare say is that she had heard the reports regarding Jesus, and while these reports varied she centered on the truth that Jesus was the “son of David.” Note that this is a clearly Messianic title and that “Lord” is coupled with it in this exalted sense. Ἐλέησόν με! is the aorist, here used as it is used in prayers because it expresses great urgency, and in addition because one act of mercy is desired; in Greek the verb is transitive: “Mercy me!”

Matthew calls her “a Canaanite woman,” a descendant of the ancient Canaanites whom the Israelites were ordered to exterminate, but failed to exterminate completely. Mark calls her a Greek, meaning a Gentile, which indicates her religion, a Syrophenician by race, which is the current term for her nationality. The point is that this pagan woman had no claims upon Jesus comparable to the claims of the chosen people. No doubt this woman had tried all the remedies which her neighborhood suggested for her daughter. None had helped her poor child. Now the great news had just reached her that Jesus, whom some called the Messiah and David’s son, was in the neighborhood. Posthaste she hurries out to him. We may reconstruct the scene: Jesus and his disciples have just finished dining in the house where they had stopped for food or where they lodged for a day or two. The woman does not rush in upon Jesus, she waits outside until Jesus comes out, and then most fervently begs for his mercy.

**[23] But he did not answer her a word.** Jesus completely ignored the woman; he walked on as if she were not there crying to him. Strange action

indeed!

**And his disciples having come forward kept requesting him, saying: “Dismiss her, for she is yelling from behind us.”** Several of the twelve disciples advanced nearer, one after another, and respectfully requested Jesus to dismiss the woman. The imperfect tense ἠρώτων is descriptive and iterative. Their motive is not high. Picture thirteen men on the street and behind them a woman wringing her hands and with all her might crying for mercy from their leader. That would cause a sensation. “Dismiss her” does not reveal whether the disciples meant: “Get rid of her in some way!” or: “Give her what she wants and thus hush her cries!” When had Jesus ever acted in this way in answer to a cry for help?

**[24] He, however, answering said: “I am not commissioned save to the sheep that have been lost of Israel’s house.”** Apparently Jesus halted and turned around to face the Twelve. Jesus was now in Gentile territory and presently, as Mark 7:31 states, he would go “through Sidon,” a Gentile strip of land. Jesus intended to help this woman, but no one was for a moment to suppose that he was transferring his ministry to Gentiles instead of restricting it to Jews, or that his mission was to work among Gentiles as he had worked among Jews. By no means! In due time Jesus himself would send out the Gospel to the Gentiles. But the Messiah and his mission were promised only to the Jews. Not that every Gentile was excluded from his grace and mercy, — note 4:24 “all Syria,” 8:28, etc. So Jesus would help this woman, but all wrong deductions from his act were to be avoided.

Note the affectionate word “sheep.” On their lost and distressed condition compare 9:36-38. By saying “sheep” he makes himself their Shepherd. Indeed, they have been lost (perfect tense) and are now in this sad condition; the more need have they of their Shepherd. “House of Israel” is a stereotyped title, and thus we have no mixed figure in “the sheep of the House of Israel.”

The interpretation that Jesus pretended to be hard and that he tortured the woman with uncertainty for the purpose of testing and then praising her faith, outrages all moral feeling. Jesus never pretends or plays the actor. Of a similar character is the idea that Jesus persevered in his attitude in order that this woman’s faith might overcome him. It has even been suggested that Jesus changed his mind in regard to her case. When Jesus passed

through Sidon we hear not a word that he preached there or that a miracle was wrought there. What motivates Jesus' action is his own commission from God. No misconception regarding this commission dared to fill the minds of the disciples nor this woman's mind.

[25] **But she, having come, was worshiping him, saying: "Lord, be helping me!"** While Jesus halted and turned to speak to the Twelve, the woman came closer to him, bowed her head to the ground in humble worship and reverence, and repeated her appeal. Now she uses the present imperative: Βοήθει, "be helping me," which is more pleading than the urgent aorist and pictures the act of helping.

[26] **But he answering said: "It is not an excellent thing to take the bread of the children, and to throw it to the little pet dogs."** When this is properly translated the harshness which appears in our versions disappears. Jesus did not say "dogs," he said κυνάρια, the diminutive of endearment: "little dogs" that were kept as pets in the house. We must know that in the orient dogs were ownerless, roamed the streets, acted as scavengers, and especially among the Jews, were considered as utterly unclean. Jesus is not comparing this pagan woman to such dogs. But people kept small pet dogs in the house, where no street dog ever dared to enter; these served as pets for the children. When the children dined, such a dog might be lying beside the dining couch, and any crumb that the children dropped the pet dog could eat. This is the picture Jesus uses.

Note that Jesus does not address the woman. His statement is general, and all are to hear it, for it repeats in figurative language what Jesus has just said in literal language. This repetition makes the thought clearer. It does more by adding an implication which is really an invitation to the woman, we might even say a promise. Jesus does not say: "It is not *right*." The question is not one of direct right or wrong. Jesus says: "It is not καλόν, not a *nice* thing, a *fine* thing," to take the bread of the children and to throw it on the floor for a pet dog. This is certainly true. Yet a pet dog is allowed to pick up crumbs. Right here in this word lies the invitation to the woman's faith and the covert promise.

[27] Quickly she seizes them. **But she said: "Yea, Lord! for the little pet dogs too eat some of the little crumbs that keep falling from the table of their lords."** It is wrong to interpret the word of Jesus as making it

very “hard” for this woman’s faith to continue, then praising her for having stood the “hard test.” The facts are almost the reverse. This, however, is true: the word of Jesus asked her to humble herself, and this the woman did with all sincerity. Being a Gentile she did not presume to possess the rights of the chosen people. The personal ministry of Jesus was indeed to the Jews and not also to the Gentiles. John 4:22 is true: “Salvation is of the Jews.” The time of the Gentiles (Luke 21:24) had not yet come. It was not far off (Matt. 28:19); then there would be no difference (Rom. 3:24- 25), “neither Jew nor Greek” (Gal. 3:28). But that day had not yet come.

We see that by the little pet dogs Jesus did not refer to all the Gentiles in the world; he referred to only such Gentiles as were among or close to the Jews at this time. This woman is glad to be one of them, to get a few crumbs of grace that fall from the table of the Jews. She asks no more, and, in fact, Jesus has already granted this humble desire when he said “the little pet dogs.” True faith and true prayers of faith never presume; even they bow in humility to the Lord.

**[28] Then answering Jesus said to her: “O woman, great is thy faith! Let it be to thee as thou wilt!” And he healed her daughter from that very hour.** The greatness of this woman’s faith is misconceived. When it is supposed that Jesus kept her on tenterhooks for the purpose of making her faith stretch itself to the utmost, like holding a morsel higher and higher to make a dog jump to the limit of his ability before rewarding him. The greatness is not in overcoming obstacles set up by Jesus, the obstacles being made progressively difficult. Nor is the greatness in the woman’s overcoming any reluctance on the part of Jesus.

The greatness of this woman’s faith is like the greatness of the Gentile centurion’s faith (8:10). In both instances the faith truly understands and Wholly accepts the Lord’s Word. Note the necessity of this understanding and perceiving as expressed in 11:25; 13:13-15 and 51; 16:9; Eph. 1:17-18, and in other passages. Every misconception on which one relies is false faith, and the stronger such faith is, the worse it is for him who has such faith. All right knowledge of the actual facts revealed by Jesus forms the eternal basis of faith, and faith is great in the measure of the confidence it places on this basis, neither questioning nor rationalizing about the facts involved nor about the divine will revealed in them. Great faith in the

meaning of Jesus is not merely strong confidence; it is strong, humble, unquestioning confidence in the true objects of faith.

So many lay the entire stress on this woman and her great faith. But the main thing is the miracle of Jesus. Why dim the astounding fact that by a word, spoken here to this mother on the street, Jesus drove out the demon that had harassed her daughter while that daughter was in her home far away? Jesus, the Victor over Satan, divides the spoils of conquest (Luke 11:22, a part of the text for the next Sunday), and even this woman and her daughter, Gentiles and before the time of the Gentiles, receive not a mere crumb but a glorious portion. So Jesus has ever dispensed the spoils. We have our share. If now demoniacal possessions do not occur in our land, is this not due to Jesus? What we are to appropriate from this miracle is not that Jesus still frees from physical possessions of demons or from other physical results of sin, but that he does far more: by faith he makes us completely his own, keeps us from all power of the devil, enriches us with his grace and knowledge, and thus saves us for ever.

## Homiletical Aid

Although the first three Sundays in Lent proper deal with the devil and his power, this text about the Canaanitish woman induces most preachers to preach on her faith. The greatest fact in the text, the blessed miracle, the expulsion of the demon, is generally mentioned only as the help the woman obtained. Take as an example Sommer's first outline, which he also elaborates: The Canaanitish Woman a Model of Faith; 1) In her search for the Lord; 2) In her wrestling with the Lord; 3) In her receiving from the Lord. Take Stoecker: From Need to Blessing: 1) Need teaches fervent prayer; 2) Prayer teaches humble faith; 3) Faith brings blessed help. We note incidentally that prayer does not teach faith; the reverse is true, for faith leads us to pray. I could present many outlines of this nature.

Now faith must be preached on the basis of this text, also great faith. But only in this way: by faith we share the Savior's victory over the powers of hell; by faith the wondrous blessings of the Savior's victory are ours. By faith the Canaanitish woman obtained one such blessing. There are many more, but they are obtained by the hand of faith alone. Such treatment of

faith leaves the emphasis where it belongs, on the son of David, on his power and his grace, on his ability to rescue us from Satan's power.

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From an introduction by J. A. Dell: A woman who was helpless in fighting the powers of hell. Her daughter grievously vexed of a devil. Jesus overcame the prince of darkness and took captivity captive that such blessings as this woman obtained are made possible. Jesus conquered that we might be free from the bonds of the devil. Our text presents a result of the victory recorded in the text of last Sunday. The woman's faith secured her the blessing. Dell's theme is good:

### **How to Get Help from Jesus.**

We may unfold it as follows:

- I. He is the Divine Helper sent us by God.  
Bring out all that lies in his title "Lord, Son of David."
  - II. He has help that exceeds all the help of men.  
Power and grace to deliver from the devil. To free the woman's daughter from the demon that tormented her body and her mind; to free us from sin, death, and hell.
  - III. He follows God's plan when extending help.  
Not at once all the Gentiles. First redemption completed among the Jews. Only in advance such as this woman. Now the difference has disappeared. Yet God still has his plans, — St. Paul bore the thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan who buffeted him.
  - IV. Faith in this Helper obtains his help and his blessing.  
Your faith cannot be too great. It is measured by the clearness of your knowledge and by the corresponding strength of your reliance.
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Look at the woman in our text, but look into her heart, and then your eyes will see nothing but Jesus. Unnamed, but her name written in heaven.

### **“O Woman, Great is Thy Faith!”**

I. Great, because it embraces Jesus as David’s son.

Why is Jesus far off in this distant corner? Despite all his miracles and all his teaching, the Jews refused to accept him as David’s son, the Messiah. Danger to Jesus.

But here a pagan Canaanite woman, who had never seen him, who had only heard of him at second hand, does come to him as being David’s son. See the Savior filling her whole heart.

Is he in your heart after all your instruction?

II. Great, because it recognizes Jesus’ power and grace.

No human help for the woman’s daughter. A supernatural foe working havoc.

The image of Jesus shining in this woman’s heart: One who can command even the demons of hell, One who has infinite grace to help even a Gentile woman.

What image of Jesus do you carry in your heart?

III. Great, because it keeps its humble place.

This woman’s place is not that of a child, but only that of a pet dog. Explain.

This woman’s heart humbly bows to all that Jesus says.

Do you wish to dictate to Jesus? Is this the kind of a Lord and Savior that you make of him?

IV. Great, because it lets Jesus change her whole life.

Jesus, whose great gift she received, changed this woman’s entire life. Describe.

So carry him in your heart that all his blessings may be yours.

Jesus in the midst of his mission. He overcame the devil in the temptation (text for last Sunday), he kept destroying the works of the devil. Finally, he completed the wondrous victory on the cross. He began to extend its blessings throughout his saving ministry. The case in our text points us to all these blessings shared now by us since the victory is complete.

### **Poor Sinners Sharing Christ's Victory over Satan.**

#### I. The Canaanitish woman's share.

Her daughter delivered from a possessing demon (describe).

The change made in the life of this pagan woman and in her daughter's life (describe).

Behold the wondrous gifts of Christ's victory!

#### II. Your share and mine.

The miracle of the expulsion of the demon reveals all the grace and the power of Jesus, and these reach out to help us.

The least help is that from bodily ills.

The greatest is the deliverance of our souls from Satan, sin, death, and damnation.

#### III. The woman as well as you and I receive our share by faith alone.

The faith that embraces Jesus as God's Savior sent to us.

The faith that submits to God's plan and his will.

The faith that throws itself completely on Christ's mercy.

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Dogs in the orient, ownerless, foul and filthy, scavengers. Not of such dogs does Jesus speak. The little pet dogs of the children kept in the house, allowed under the table, eating the crumbs dropped by the children. Here is a beautiful picture:

### **The Precious Gospel in the Word about the Little Pet Dogs.**

- I. It contained a great promise to a woman who had been a pagan.
  1. The promise to grant her prayer though she was not an Israelite.
  2. The woman embraces the promise by faith, whereas the Israelites refused faith and made Jesus withdraw himself.
  3. The fulfillment of the promises and what this fulfillment revealed about Jesus and his power and his grace. That woman never forgot Jesus' word about the little pet dogs.
- II. It still contains a world of promise to all who will believe today.
  1. No division now between Jews and Gentiles, the Gospel to all alike. No more little pet dogs, all of us asked to be children in the house. The blessing bestowed upon the Gentile woman a sample of all the Gospel blessings now extended to us in their fulness.
  2. This word should kindle and make great our faith. But does it do so? The children with their rich food often indifferent and unappreciative, while the little pet dogs would be happy to receive the crumbs. Let the little pet dogs shame us into fuller faith.

# Oculi. Luke 11:14-28

## Jesus, the Stronger One

We are informed that the catechumens of the ancient church were given a thorough examination on this Sunday; this was followed by an exorcism and a renunciation of the devil and all his works, — hence the choice of this text for this Sunday. Apart from this historical reason, the text completes the thought presented in the trio of texts, of which this is the third. The great thought is that we are delivered from the power of the devil. *Invocavit* presents our Deliverer who conquers the devil. *Reminiscere* presents a great gift of his deliverance from the devil, the gift obtained by faith. Now comes *Oculi* and once more presents the great Victor and his deliverance, both the deliverance from bodily possession and from the devil's possession of the soul; but now we are shown how men reject this wondrous deliverance and remain the abject slaves of the devil despite his complete defeat. In brief: 1) the Victor; 2) Faith sharing in his victory; 3) Unbelief despising and forfeiting the deliverance wrought by his victory. The sequence of thought is simple and excellent.

**[14] And he was casting out a dumb demon, and it came to pass, the demon having gone out, the dumb spoke. And the multitudes wondered.** Time, place, and circumstances of this miracle are immaterial to Luke. Only the great fact of the miracle is briefly noted. Once more the Victor over the devil delivers one of the devil's poor victims. Demoniacal possession violated the body in various ways. In the present instance the man was robbed of the power of speech, so that when Jesus drove out the demon the man spoke. This miracle occasioned what follows and is related only on this account. The result of it was that the multitudes who witnessed the great miracle wondered and began to ask: "Can this be the Son of David?" i.e.: "Can this after all be the great Messiah of God come to save

us?” Matt. 12:23. Unbelief was giving way in these multitudes, faith was beginning in their hearts.

**[15] But some of them said: “In conjunction with Beelzebul, the ruler of the demons, does he. expel the demons.”** These “some” were Pharisees who were not present when the miracle took place, but promptly heard of it. Matt. 12:24. These Pharisees were determined above all to keep people from believing in Jesus and so they resorted to this blasphemous explanation of the expulsion of demons: Jesus and the devil are in a secret partnership; the devil calls off his demon from the victim when Jesus so desires. So little is Jesus the Son of David, that in reality he is in secret and cunning league with the devil himself. The Pharisees were the revered religious leaders of the people, and this explanation must have made a deep impression upon the people. After we have read of the victory over the devil in the great temptation, this blasphemy is shocking indeed.

Modernism: you must not believe that Jesus drove out devils, — there is no devil, there are no demons, — these were only mental cases, and “to the modern mind can easily be explained on psychological principles, which are gradually being understood” (the latest modernistic commentary), — the evangelists wrote as blind children of their day, and you must not imagine that their words are verbally inspired by God. It is thus that the modernists have improved upon the old explanation of the Jews. But the aim of both is identical: Do not for a minute believe in the power of Jesus to free you from the devil!

As regards the difference between “Beelzebub” and “Beelzebul” the preacher needs to say nothing, especially since the linguists themselves are not in the clear. See the dictionaries. The Jews gave this name to Satan, “the ruler of the demons,” the head of the kingdom of darkness. Jesus drove out so many demons from their poor human victims and thereby manifested his divine power over the whole hellish kingdom to such an extent, that the Pharisees were driven to the blasphemous explanation here recorded.

**[16] Moreover, others, trying to tempt, were seeking from him a sign out of heaven.** These too were scribes and Pharisees, but they had another basis for their hostile unbelief. They made light even of such great miracles as the expulsion of demons, they wanted grander signs, something “out of heaven.” Πειράζοντες is the conative present: “trying to tempt,” — not that

they expected Jesus to comply, but they hoped to impress the people. The answer Jesus gave them is recorded in v. 29 etc.

[17] Jesus summoned his slanderers and answered them face to face (Mark 3:23). **But he, when he knew their thoughts, said to them: “Every kingdom divided against itself, becomes waste, and house falls against house. [18] And if also Satan did come to be divided against himself, how will his kingdom stand, — seeing that you are saying that in conjunction with Beelzebul I am casting out the demons?”**

Jesus had not heard the slander and, it seems, none of the people who did hear it cared to inform him. “When he knew their thoughts” refers to the supernatural knowledge of Jesus. Jesus used his divine attributes during the days of his humiliation only when such use was necessary for his Messianic mission. Here it was necessary for him to know what the Pharisees were saying, also what some were desiring (v. 16), plus all the secret motives and purposes in their hearts. It is thus that he has them called into his presence and answers them. He begins with the slander about Beelzebul.

Some things are utterly plain, and only fools think of denying them. “Every kingdom divided against itself, becomes waste, and house falls against house.” Our versions have a double illustration: a divided kingdom and a divided house. But the illustration deals only with a divided kingdom which becomes waste when one house falls against another when the civil war wrecks the kingdom.

[18] The major premise, which is a universal proposition, is followed by the minor which embodies the assertion of the Pharisees: “If also Satan did come to be divided against himself, how will his kingdom stand, — seeing that you are saying that in conjunction with Beelzebul I am casting out the demons?” To say that “also Satan did come to be divided against himself” is to use a highly concentrated expression, yet it is squarely to the point. To say that a kingdom is divided is easily conceivable, but that a person is divided and that even “against himself” seems inconceivable. But this is the very point of the syllogism; the argument is a *reductio ad absurdum*. The very idea that Satan should have his demons possess people and that Satan should destroy his own work by driving out these demons at the wish of Jesus, is absurd. If this is a sample of Satan’s actions, “how will his

kingdom stand?” Jesus says: “Answer this yourselves.” Of course, there is only one answer.

We have the ὅτι *consecutivum* in the clause ὅτι λέγοντες, “seeing that you are saying.” The syllogism rests on this statement of the Pharisees: “that in connection with (ἐν in its original meaning) Beelzebul Jesus is casting out the demons.” The connection referred to is the implied fact that Jesus has an understanding and a compact with Satan, is in secret league with him, is himself an agent of Satan.

Opposition to Jesus regularly upsets men’s logic, and often they put forth as utterly convincing reasons that are not merely unsound but are actually absurd. We have an instance of the latter here. Yet many of Christ’s opponents call themselves “scientists” and boast of their “reason” and rationality (rationalists). Foolish Christians are impressed and disturbed. But a little logic explodes their absurdities. Nay, Satan is never divided against himself; in no way does he tear down his own kingdom. When Jesus frees men from demoniacal possession he is doing a divine work, not a devil’s work. It indeed takes a devilish eye to see the devil’s hand in a work that saves from the devil.

**[19] “But if I in conjunction with Beelzebul expel the demons, your sons — in conjunction with whom do they drive them out? For this they shall be your judges.”** This second argument rests on the first. It is also in the form of a question that the Pharisees themselves may answer. The argument is this: according to the Pharisees a man must be “in connection with Beelzebul” in order to drive out demons. Well, what about the sons of the Pharisees themselves, some of whom are exorcists? Do the Pharisees mean to say that only Jesus is in league with Satan and not these their own sons? Logic must be consistent, otherwise it is false and silly. Jesus says, these your own sons shall — pronounce a verdict upon you.

“Sons” is not to be understood in the physical sense; these Jewish exorcists were pupils of the Pharisees. I wish we knew more about them, especially about their method of procedure and about their results. Our ignorance prevents us from saying very much. The words of Jesus imply that at least some of these exorcists were successful, and they also imply that no one imagined that these exorcists were in league with Satan. That is enough. Already that would be enough for the argument of Jesus.

But certain commentators have turned this argument upside down. They use the story of Josephus, *Wars* 7:6, 3; *Antt.* 8:2, 5, which tells how an exorcist drew out a demon through the Victim's nose by means of a mythical root called Baaras that was secured in a mythical fashion. The conclusion is drawn that all these exorcists used witchcraft and charms plus the names of demons in their exorcisms, and the words of Jesus are made to mean: How can you Pharisees condemn me because I use Satan's aid, when your own pupils do the same thing, use Satan's aid by means of witchcraft, etc.? Thus Jesus would be using *the ordinary argumentum ad hominem*:<sup>1</sup> if your sons do wrong and you do not object to them you cannot object to me when I do the same thing. This would indeed silence the Pharisees, but it would also recoil upon Jesus, — even in argument and for the sake of argument Jesus cannot admit that he uses the power of Beelzebul.

[20] “But if I in conjunction with God's finger drive out the demons, then the Kingdom of God did already reach to you.” Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil. These two: the connection with the devil, and the connection with God form a dilemma, an absolute either — or, for *tertium non datur*. Disproving the one proves the other. Jesus has disproved the connection with Beelzebul, hence only the connection with God is left as the explanation for his expulsions of demons. Instead of “God” Jesus says “God's finger,” for which Matthew writes interpretatively “Spirit of God.” In all the works of Jesus all three Persons of the Godhead are concerned. The Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus after his Baptism. “Hand or arm of God” would denote the great power of irresistible omnipotence; with the finger one merely points, or the finger is raised and shaken in rebuke. So little is needed to drive out demon after demon. So much for the true View of the facts.

The facts involve a conclusion: “then the Kingdom of God did already reach you.” Then the Kingdom is not merely at hand, about to come, it is already right here, — these miracles are the wonderful blessings which constitute the evidence of the presence of the Kingdom. Only men willfully blind refuse to see this evidence. The Kingdom means the rule of God's grace through the Savior Jesus Christ, as explained in Matt. 21:5, for the First Sunday in Advent. What man who sees the ravages which the devil and his rule in the world have wrought would not welcome God's blessed

rule which delivers us from the kingdom of the darkness and translates us into the Kingdom of his dear Son (Col. 1:13)? But no, — read John 3:19.

[21] **“Whenever the strong man completely armed guards his own court, in peace are his possessions; [22] but whenever one stronger than he, having come upon him, conquers him, he takes away his panoply, on which he had relied, and distributes his spoils.”** Ὁ ἰσχυρός has the generic article, for the illustration which Jesus here offers is general: any strong man — any stronger man. As regards the two the matter is always as Jesus here states. The application to Satan as the strong one and to Jesus as the stronger one lies on the surface. In every illustration we must clearly see the *tertium comparationis*, the point of the comparison, beyond which our thought dare not go. Here the *tertium* is the fact that complete defeat must precede the act of plundering at will. God’s Kingdom must first have come, before Jesus could expel demons at will. So far removed are these expulsions from any willing cooperation on the part of the devil they are a violent despoliation of the devil.

He is pictured as a powerful brigand or bandit. Kurd in the participles pictures him as completely armed, these arms picturing his power. His 013% is the great court of his palace from which he issues and to which he returns bringing his booty with him. Here he guards his possessions and all is in peace here, quite undisturbed as long as no foe appears.

[22] A change comes over the scene when “one stronger than he” comes upon him and conquers him (aorists of actuality). What happens then? The stronger one strips the strong one of his panoply, all the weapons with which he is armed to the teeth, and then the stronger one divides the spoils. Jesus is the Stronger One. We see him dividing the spoils, and that means that he has conquered the devil, rendered him utterly helpless. The matter involves a syllogism. Major premise: Only complete victory allows plundering at will. Minor premise: Jesus plunders Satan at will. Ergo: Jesus achieved complete victory over Satan. The logic is inexorable.

[23] **“He that is not with me is against me, and he that gathers not with me scatters.”** The statement comes to a point, and while it is still general, it becomes highly personal, since it demands of each of us an answer to the question as to where we stand. There are only two sides: for or against, — neutrality is impossible. Either Jesus or Satan; either the

Victor or the vanquished. First, the personal position: *nevi*, in company with Jesus, or *κατά*, against Jesus. One might try to hide his personal attitude. Often we say of a man that we do not know where he stands. Such an attitude is difficult in the case of Jesus, because not to be with him is already clear proof of being against him.

The inner attitude reveals itself in outward acts, and these acts speak an unmistakable language: he who does not gather with me scatters. As regards the attitude and also the actions, already the omission counts as decisive. No objects are mentioned with the two verbs “gather, scatter,” and it is best to leave them unmodified. The verbs are opposites like to build up and to tear down. To gather is to help Jesus who gathers the lost; to scatter is to help the wolf Satan who scatters, rends, and kills.

[24] Luke at once adds further statements regarding demons. **“When the unclean spirit goes out from the man, he goes through waterless places, seeking rest; and not finding it, he says: ‘I will return to my house whence I came out!’ [25] And having come, he finds it swept and set in order. Then he goes and takes with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself; and having gone in they dwell there. And the last conditions of that man are worse than the first.”**

In Matt. 12:45 we have the addition: “Thus will it be also with this wicked generation,” i.e. whereas at first one demon plagued it, soon eight would plague it. Where at first John the Baptist and then also Jesus who continued John’s work drove out impenitence and produced repentance, the old impenitence entered in in intensified form, rejecting Jesus with violence. We thus regard this paragraph as referring mainly to spiritual possession.

Why an expelled demon goes through waterless places seeking rest (*ἀνάπαυσις*, “pause”), some place where he may remain and be satisfied, we have no means of saying, because we know too little about demons and their ways. Yet note that when Jesus was to be tempted the Holy Spirit took him into the wilderness. Of course, the expelled demon finds no rest in waterless places, and thus proceeds to return to the man from whom he was expelled. In other words: once rid of the devil either physically or spiritually is not yet to be free for ever. We need Jesus not only to free us,

but also to keep us free. Since among us physical possession has ceased, the warning applies to spiritual possession.

[25] Matthew adds that this demon of whom Jesus speaks finds the house “empty” (lit. “at leisure”) when he returns to it. Luke says only that it is thoroughly swept and set in order. The figurative terms “house,” “swept,” etc., are transparent. The person and his soul are meant. The condition pictured is that of a house for rent. Everything is in proper order in the house, but there is no tenant. The devil was expelled, but that was all. The renovation was only a half-way action. Christ was not received to fill heart and soul. The outward conduct is proper in form, but the inner power is lacking. No; the demon does not need to break into this house, its emptiness is an invitation to him to enter. Its swept and orderly condition is an added invitation, for the devil and his demons are constantly called “unclean spirits”; their delight is to befoul everything, to upset and to knock everything to pieces.

Learn that outward reformation is not nearly enough. When devoid of Christ’s presence and power in the soul such reformation is an invitation to the devil to come back and to take stronger possession than ever. You cannot keep out both Jesus and the devil and remain neutral and sweetly empty.

[26] What does this demon do? He does not rush back into the house by himself, he goes and gets seven other demons more wicked even than he is and together they enter and play havoc. It is not that the additional demons are needed in order to break in, for the door is unlocked and the place is empty. But there is opportunity to do more damage than one demon can do. In the hellish kingdom there is close and strong cooperation. The demons pull together. Why this demon secured just seven others remains another unanswered question, as also why there should thus be eight altogether. Mary Magdalene was freed from seven demons (8:2; Mark 16:9), and -the demoniac in the country of the Gadarenes was physically possessed by a legion of demons (8:30). We know only a few superficial facts like these and no more. Moreover, it is well to note that the revelation of Scripture is rather reticent in regard to many things we should like to know about the demons and hell. The great interest of Scripture is that we keep away from everything hellish.

Here is a case in which the last conditions came to be worse than the first, which already were frightful. Consider Matt. 12:45; the wicked generation of the Sadducees and the Pharisees has become worse than ever as the centuries rolled on, — the Jews are harder than ever in their unbelief and hostility to Christ. They constitute a miraculous phenomenon of rejection and of judgment, placed during all these centuries before the eyes of the entire world as a terrible warning of God. But the same thing is repeated in individuals, whose last conditions may likewise be worse than the first, — eight demons in place of one.

**[27] And it came to pass that, while he was saying these things, a woman out of the crowd raising her voice said to him: “Blessed the womb that bore thee, and breasts thou didst suck!” [28] He, however, said: “Yea rather, blessed they that are hearing the Word of God and are keeping it.”**

The courage of Jesus in answering the blasphemous slander by calling the slanderers to him and replying in public and the power of this reply so impressed the people standing by that a woman involuntarily cried out and blessed the mother of Jesus for the son she bore and nursed. In those days there was less reticence about mentioning the womb and the breasts, etc. A holy envy fills this unnamed woman’s heart. What would she not give to be in Mary’s place! Unwittingly she fulfilled 1:48.

[28] Μενοῦν confirms and yet corrects: “Indeed, yet rather.” It is not adversative, — Jesus in no way calls this woman’s benediction wrong. Mary was highly blessed to be the mother of Jesus, more highly than this woman imagined who did not know the mystery of Jesus’ conception and his birth. But to stop with this woman’s beatitude would be misleading. It is not the physical connection with Jesus, but the spiritual connection with him that is truly blessed. If Mary had had only the former she would deserve pity and not beatification.

Therefore Jesus states who indeed are blessed people. He uses the plural, for this blessedness is open to all of us; the other could be had by only one person and that a woman. Those who keep hearing and guarding God’s Word, they are blessed indeed. The two descriptive present participles always go together in obtaining the blessedness. Many hear in vain. The Word is meant to be heard, and this includes its preaching and its teaching.

Φυλάσσω means more than “to keep,” i.e. to retain; it means “to guard,” namely to stand sentry over, to let no one take away, tamper with, or injure. This includes both faith and confession, faithfully defending the Word and every part (doctrine) of it against attack and perversion. By mentioning the Word of God Jesus is not turning the woman away from himself, but is drawing her to himself, for Jesus does not only bring the Word, he is its very sum and substance.

## Homiletical Aid

A text full of blessing (v. 14; v. 17-22; and v. 27-28) and of warning (v. 15-16 and v. 23-26). Its central point lies in what Jesus says about himself as

### **The Stronger One.**

#### I. His victory over the strong one.

Satan, the kingdom of darkness, his power undisturbed, in the world, and indeed he seemed to be supreme. Sin and wickedness, superstition and idolatry, misery and hopeless death everywhere, — even Israel almost entirely in Satan’s power.

Christ overthrew Satan in the temptation, the prelude to the final victory when all sin was expiated and death itself shattered. Let nothing deceive you; although the world still lies in wickedness, Satan and his kingdom are conquered and doomed. Our great joy.

#### II. The spoils that he divides.

In the text a demoniac is freed and restored to speech (v. 14). Another victim of Satan is spiritually freed (v. 24).

Today the world is ’full of poor sinners who are blessed with the spoils of Christ’s victory, and we are among them. Ours is forgiveness and peace for conscience, new life and glorious hope, etc., etc. What joy and happiness!

#### III. The hostility that dooms itself.

Open. The blasphemers in the text, plus the sign-seekers. The world is today full of those who refuse to see the finger of God (his Word and his power of grace). They love the darkness rather than the lights

Secret. Freed from Satan's kingdom, but soon cold, indifferent, inwardly empty. The result, eight times worse than at first. We must hear and must guard and keep the saving Word.

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The bodily demoniacal possession does not occur now, save very seldom in foreign mission fields; this is the blessed fruit of Christ's victory over Satan and his hellish kingdom. What occurs now only too often is described by Jesus in what he says about

### **The Seven Additional Devils.**

To understand about them we must know in the first place about

I. The strong one.

How he reigned supreme. What happened to him when the Stronger one came. He and all his hellish kingdom were overthrown. — We must also know about

II. The Finger of God.

God's Word of power and grace. By it Jesus freed from bodily possession, and by it he releases from the devil's delusion and fills the heart with faith. All the devils of hell and all this terrible kingdom cannot stand for one moment against the finger of God. That finger merely needs to point and the demon runs. — We now come to

III. The Word of God that is not guarded and kept.

Some even blaspheme Christ and his Word; new ways of doing this today. Not merely victims, but even seek to make others victims of Satan.

Some, once delivered by Christ, fall away again. They may cease to hear the great Word, or they simply do not guard and keep it. Thus faith dies, the heart grows empty. — But this does not mean that such a

person simply falls back into his former condition; no, we come now to

#### IV. The worst that can happen.

It is bad never to come to faith, to be in the devil's possession and just remain so. It is many times worse to have been saved and to fall back into the devil's power. Then seven additional devils are liable to enslave such a man. Will it be possible ever to save him again?

Conclusion: Whom do you want to carry around with you in your heart? Not even one devil, to say nothing about eight. Christ shall own me completely. With the Word of Christ filling my heart completely, no devil with even a single deadly lie or delusion dare ever even try to enter.

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C. F. W. Walther restricts himself to the last part of the text, its warning against backsliding: **Concerning Falling Away from Grace**, the manner, the consequences. In sketching the manner he writes:

“There is only one way to come to faith, but a thousand ways and manners in which to get away from faith. Some lose God's grace by a gradual, slow falling away, as this appears to have been the case with the traitor Judas. On the other hand, others fall suddenly like David by means of adultery and like Peter in his denial. Some do not know that they have fallen away, like the bishop of Laodicea, to whom Christ had to say: ‘Thou sayest: “I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked.”’ Others well know that they have fallen away, like Cain; hence these at times fall into despair. Some fall away outwardly, so that everyone is able to see it; they lose living faith not only out of the heart, but also desert to those of false faith, or like Demas to the world. They turn from being rightly believing Christians into fanatics, from confessors of the pure doctrine into tools of the antichrist or into blasphemers, scoffers, persecutors. On the other hand, others fall away only inwardly. They remain in the outward fellowship of the Christians; they still go to church and to the Lord's Supper; they still keep speaking like the best of Christians about divine things; they keep, in a word, as the apostle says, the form of

godliness while they deny its power, like the bishop of Sardis, to whom the Lord had to say: ‘Thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead.’ Some fall away in such a way that they come to be entirely trifling again, yea, full of vice and like the unclean animal that was washed turn again to wallowing in the mire. On the other hand, others fall away in such a manner that they lose only the willing, joyful heart for doing good, the real evangelical life, and drift into legalistic, anxious activity.”

The searching question is asked: “If you have not fallen away just like this one or that one, perhaps you have fallen away nevertheless, only in a different way? If not suddenly, then perhaps gradually? if not consciously, then perhaps unconsciously? if not outwardly, then perhaps inwardly? if not in a gross manner, then in a refined manner?”

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J. A. Dell presents

### **Christ’s Kingdom and Satan’s.**

- I. They are unalterably opposed.
- II. We must be in the one or in the other.
- III. True happiness for us is in Christ’s Kingdom alone.

From the elaboration of the second part: “A soul cannot remain empty. Either God fills it or the devil does. The same thing is true of our civilization. Christ has cast many devils out of it, so to speak. He has raised the status of womanhood, driven slavery into the dark corners of the world, banished superstition, brought in universal education, etc. But if our civilization merely accepts these benefits, but will not allow Christ to fill it and rule it, its last state will be worse than its first. Seven additional devils will move in. If I were to name some of them (to carry out the figure), I would include war, unemployment, disrespect for law, pseudo-scientific theories, organized atheism.”

“Yea, rather blessed are they that hear the Word of God and keep it.”

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When Moses made all the dust in the entire dusty land of Egypt, where it does not rain, become crawling lice, Pharaoh's magicians and sorcerers tried to imitate the miracle but could not and confessed to Pharaoh: "This is the finger of God." Ex. 8:19. The heavens are "the work of thy fingers" (Ps. 8:3), also the moon and the stars. The Scriptures speak also of the arm and the hand of God (Jer. 32:21; etc.), his almighty power in action. Jesus says that he drives out demons "in connection with God's Finger," and this means, as St. Matthew states, "in connection with God's Spirit." We must know more about

### **The Finger of God which is God's Spirit.**

#### I. Jesus frees a demoniac, whom the demon had rendered dumb.

The miracle is mentioned here only as one of very many of this most notable kind (note the one in the text for last Sunday). Describe briefly demoniacal possession. One word and the vicious demons abandon their victims. It is as though Jesus raised only his finger and is instantly obeyed. He did not need the strong hand and the outstretched arm of his omnipotence, the Finger is enough.

We see why this Finger of God is called God's Spirit. Jesus was anointed with the Holy Spirit. The Spirit wrought in Jesus. Now the Spirit's great work is sanctification, freeing us from sin and its fearful consequences. Recognize thus

*The Finger of God in the Blessed Work of God.*

Wherever the devil's power is broken, wherever a person is freed from the devil, there is the blessed Finger of God. Ever mighty, but all the might filled with grace.

The devilishness of calling this divine Finger "Beelzebul." Jesus answered this blasphemy. The blindness today which refuses to recognize the Finger of God and makes Jesus a mere man. Worse than the Egyptian sorcerers who in Ex. 8:19 recognized that Finger.

#### II. The work of the Finger of God through Jesus is unmistakably clear and gloriously apparent when it drives out devils in a miraculous way.

But this part of the work aims only to attract full attention to the Finger of God. The whole work of Jesus for which the Holy Spirit was bestowed upon him was to destroy completely all the works of the devil, not merely to do some miracles and free some demoniacs. Therefore Jesus tells the Pharisees that they should recognize

*The Finger of God in the Kingdom of God.*

This Kingdom is the entire rule of Christ's grace among men by his Spirit. The miracles heralded this Kingdom's coming, they still herald it. The Kingdom is ever where the King is, he makes the Kingdom. He destroys the devil's work, he draws us by his grace, sin and death are overcome, our faith conquers the world, we are Christ's own.

O the blessedness of the Finger of God in this Kingdom! What greater sign can we desire? No wonder that he who is not with Jesus, the King, is against him.

- III. We ought now to see why Jesus combines the Finger of God, the Kingdom of God, and the Word of God. A man may be freed from the devil's power.

So Judas was freed, so Ananias and Sapphira were freed, so also Demas. But that alone is never enough. The Finger of God must remain in our hearts; we dare not stray from its grace. Recognize

*The Finger of God in the Word of God.*

By this Word the Finger works. When this Word fills and controls our hearts no devil can reenter. Where in some way we lose this Word from our hearts, there the door is open to any number of demons. Hence blessed are they who not only hear but also keep the Word of God.

Where Jesus is there is the Finger of God, the Kingdom of God, and the Word of God. It is the Word by which we have the other two and are free forever from the devil's power.

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1. This type of argument is not correctly defined in some of the recent manuals of logic. The wrong definition is: an attack upon the

opponent's person and character, instead of an attack on his claims. But this would be no argument of any kind, it would be nothing but slander and vilification. The true definition is: "An argument proving a conclusion from the principles or practices of an opponent himself: often by showing them to be contrary to his argument." Standard Dictionary under "argumentum."↩

# Laetare. John 6:1 -15

## The Attempt to Make Jesus a King

The first three Sundays in Lent deal with “the old bitter foe” whom Jesus conquered, with his demons and his kingdom and with our deliverance from them through Jesus. The three remaining Sundays also present a unit idea and form a corresponding group. They present our Redeemer and his Redemption. He is not an earthly king such as many would like to have made him (Laetare). He it is who is before Abraham was (Judica). Indeed, he is Israel’s King, the promised Son of David, the eternal Messiah (Palm Sunday). Such is the apparent sequence of thought in these gospel texts.

The feeding of the five thousand should never be sundered from the great discourse on the Bread of Life recorded in John 6. The miracle prepares for this discourse. Therefore we should never accept a theme like that of Loy: “The Believer Trusts Jesus also in Temporal Things”; or like that of C. F. W. Walther: “How Happy they are in regard to Temporal Things who Hold not to the World but to Christ!” Themes like these are proper for the text that records the feeding of the four thousand, the miracle that was performed purely for the relief of hunger, a temporal need, never for the text that presents the feeding of the five thousand, the miracle that by means of the wondrous earthly bread meant to direct men’s thoughts to Jesus, the still more wondrous Bread of Life. Moreover, a text and a sermon on the relief of bodily hunger and on supplying mere earthly bread surely would be out of place in the middle of Lent. This much we could know of our own accord, but we must add also the words of Jesus himself as recorded in 6:26-27. Compare my *Interpretation of St. Matthew’s Gospel*, 584.

[1] Chapter five relates the rise of opposition to Jesus in Jerusalem, and chapter six adds an account of the rise of opposition in Galilee. **After these things Jesus went away beyond the Sea of Galilee, the Tiberian.** John

proceeds from the festival at which Jesus healed the impotent man (5:1 etc.) to the time close to the Passover, the third Passover in Jesus' ministry. After working in the populous neighborhoods he crossed the Lake to the northeastern shore. "The Tiberian" is added so that the general reader way not think of the Mediterranean. The city of Tiberias was rather widely known. It is the only city on the shores of the Lake which Jesus did not enter, being quite pagan in character, yet it is the only city on the Lake still existing today.

**[2] And there followed him a great multitude, because they were beholding the signs he was doing upon those who were sick.** Jesus is in the full activity of his ministry, hardly able to avoid the great crowds that persisted in surrounding him. What attracted them were "the signs he was doing upon those who were sick," not his preaching. We see that the same attitude was manifested here in Galilee which had been in evidence in Jerusalem (2:23), the attraction of the miracles and not what their signature indicated and what the preaching of Jesus stated. This attraction was not genuine, nor was it permanent. The time was at hand when all the signs failed to prevent open hostility. Note v. 66, — many withdrew from Jesus.

**[3] And Jesus went up into the mountain and was sitting there with his disciples.** John does not intend to tell us the entire story, for he assumes that his readers have and know the accounts of the three synoptists. The feeding of the five thousand is recorded by each of the four evangelists. John thus records only what is necessary for his general purpose.

Jesus had crossed the Lake to find respite from the crowds and to speak in quietness with the disciples. That their number now is twelve John does not deem it necessary to say. The grave news had reached Jesus that Herod had killed the Baptist (Matt. 14:13). This foreshadowed Jesus' own death. Reason enough to retire from the turmoil which even made it difficult for Jesus and the disciples so much as to eat (Mark 6:31-32). Some superficial readers imagine that Jesus failed to attain his purpose because the great crowd followed him after all. But it took that crowd some time to reach Jesus. The crowd went on foot and had to walk around the upper end of the Lake. This gave Jesus the time he wanted, and John describes him sitting quietly with his disciples in a spot on the mountain side not far from the Lake.

[4] With parenthetical δέ John notes the time. **Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was near.** The apposition: “the feast of the Jews,” is intended for the general reader. Remember that John wrote in Asia Minor long after the destruction of Jerusalem chiefly for readers of Gentile origin. The Passover is mentioned because so many of the multitude were intending to attend the Passover in Jerusalem and, as the sequel shows (v. 15), made an attempt to take Jesus with them and to proclaim him king. At the Passover the whole Jewish nation would be represented at the capital and the plan was to have Jesus acclaimed king — an earthly king — by the whole nation.

Other explanations, supposedly more profound and spiritual, have been offered. One is that in place of the Passover lamb Jesus was offering his own body and blood in the Lord’s Supper as the true Bread of Life. This attracts those who understand the discourse on the Bread of Life as a reference to the Lord’s Supper. This was not the last Passover for Jesus, and not yet was the Passover abrogated. The Bread of Life contains no reference to the Sacrament.

[5] **According, having lifted up his eyes, and having seen that a great multitude was coming to him, he says to Philip: “Whence shall we buy bread, in order that these may eat?”** Οὐδὲν merely resumes the narrative after the parenthesis of v. 4. From the elevated place along the mountain-side Jesus could see the shores of the Lake and thus beheld the crowds of people strung out for some miles coming to find him.

The great point of John’s narrative is the fact that Jesus put his probing question to Philip *before the multitude arrived*, and not, as we might conclude from the synoptists, when finally evening was approaching. Jesus thought of the problem of food. He had already determined what to do. For him there was no problem of food, could be none. Food was altogether a minor matter.

Why Philip is selected as the one to whom the question is put we are unable to say. I take it that there is no special reason. The result would have been the same no matter to whom of the Twelve the question would have been put. But this we must note, that by raising the question so far in advance Jesus gave Philip and all of the Twelve abundance of time before evening to find the right answer. Yet they did not find it. The question is

about buying bread, for Jesus and the Twelve had none, and the natural way would be to get bread from elsewhere, yet this was excluded, for there was no place near enough to supply bread enough for such crowds of people. Even with great wealth bread could not be bought where there was no place to buy. This is why Jesus asks: “whence?” In other words: “What source is available for the bread that shall presently be needed?”

[6] Again δέ introduces a parenthetical remark. **Now this he was saying as testing him; for he himself knew what he was about to do.** The test really included all of the Twelve. Like Philip, all of them failed; Mark 6:37 states that even at the last, after having had hours to consider, none thought of a source for bread beyond some place where bread might be bought. Πειράζων is here used in the good sense: “testing him,” not “tempting him.” Neither Philip nor the others remembered Cana and the water turned into wine. Jesus, of course, knew (ἤδαι always in the sense of the imperfect) what he was about to do (ἔνελλε, the imperfect, indirect discourse).

[7] Philip answered him: \_\_ “Two hundred denarii worth\_\_ (genitive of price) **of bread is not sufficient for them, for each to take a little something.**” In this way Philip stood the test, and the the others with him. If buying was the solution, there was no place to buy, and equally there was not sufficient money to buy. The sense of Philip’s reply is: “Even if we had two hundred denarii (at 17c = \$34.00, but with greater purchasing power than so many dollars today) that would not be enough to buy even the minimum for each person.”

All avenues are closed, completely closed, — only one avenue is open, the miraculous power of Jesus. Although the disciples are almost forced to see this blessed avenue, they do not see it. Yet do not grow too indignant at them, rap a little at your own door!

[8] John counts on our knowing what now happened. The crowds came. Jesus healed and taught (Luke 9:11). It was getting toward evening, no food in sight. The disciples grow worried and tell Jesus to send the multitude away, that they may buy what bread they can. Jesus replies, that they need not depart, that the disciples should give them to eat. Even this pointed order does not wake up the sleeping faith of the disciples and make them see what Jesus has in mind. All the disciples are able to see is an effort of the multitude itself to scatter and to buy bread. Weary of seeking to do

anything more with these dense men, Jesus orders them to go and to see what food there is at hand. The report is quickly made. Remember, all this occurs toward evening.

**One of his disciples, Andrew, 'Simon Peter's brother, says to him: [9] "There is a lad here, who has five barley loaves and two fishes."** Then Andrew adds the sage, if not ironic remark: **"But what are these for so many?"** Do not think that Andrew alone made the search for food; all the disciples got busy, and Andrew is only their spokesman. I heard the sermon of Dr. Dell in which he compared our church leaders to Philip and Andrew. The one is like our leaders who believe that making a budget is the thing; but the lowest figure of Philip's budget left the case hopeless. The other figured with available resources actually on hand, like our leaders with their plan to pay out no more than comes in; but look at Andrew and the next to nothing that came in, leaving the case equally hopeless. Brethren, there is still Jesus, — if we only knew how to use him!

Behold the full hopelessness of the situation exposed: five flat barley cakes and two cooked fish! And over 5,000 to feed! Barley was used extensively for bread. These were no loaves like ours, but flat cakes baked on a hot stone; hence pieces were broken off when eating. By ὄφάρια we must understand *Zukost*, something to eat along with bread, which in the Lake country was mostly roasted fish.

[10] Andrew's hopeless tone is ignored. He is told to get the cakes of bread and the fish, i.e. to buy them from the lad, who evidently had them left from a quantity he had brought along to sell. Did it look as if Jesus intended to secure this small amount of food at least for himself and his disciples? Indeed no! **Jesus said: "Make the people sit down!" Now there was much grass in the place. Accordingly the men sat down as to number about five thousand.**

Imagine the scene. Five thousand men, not counting women and children, ordered to sit down to eat, and five cakes of bread and two fishes to divide among them. Was this perhaps a joke? How the faces of the Twelve must have looked when receiving such an order from Jesus! The ground was covered with thick grass during April, the time before the Passover. This sitting down does not mean that the people had been standing; no, it means that they were to sit down in squares of fifty and a

hundred with straight lanes between, ready to be served with food in an orderly fashion. Thus also the count was made.

[11] The miracle itself is described in the simplest manner by indicating only the actions of Jesus. In points like this the control of Inspiration is actually tangible, for an ordinary writer would certainly elaborate this great climax of the account, whether he be a journalist and news reporter or a literary writer of books. **Accordingly Jesus took the loaves, and having given thanks distributed to those sitting down; likewise of the fishes, as much as they would.** Not even a single exclamation! Not one word beyond the bare facts that John saw and heard! We are not even told that a miracle was taking place; not even that the food kept multiplying as it was being handed out, or how far each loaf and each fish lasted. Do not let your familiarity with the narrative hide these astounding facts from your mind.

Despite all this reticent brevity the scene is vivid enough and the preacher should describe it effectively. True and excellent description is a strong asset in a sermon. Jesus took the basket with its cakes of bread and its fishes and pronounced a table prayer; he said grace before meal. Whatever the form of the “thanks,” we may say that it contained nothing exceptional, otherwise one or the other evangelist would have reported the fact or the words which Jesus used. Then Jesus took one flat cake after another and broke off good-sized pieces, and the more he broke off the more bread there was for him to break off, — each loaf furnishing enough for more than a thousand people. So also the two fishes, — there was enough so that each person could have just as much as he wished, no stinting, no stretching. The twelve disciples acted as waiters, probably each of them carrying two baskets full.

**[12] And when they were filled, he says to his disciples: “Collect the superfluous broken pieces, in order that nothing may be lost.” [13] Accordingly they made the collection, and filled twelve baskets with broken pieces from the five barley loaves which were left over to those having eaten.**

Yes, every one in that great multitude “was filled,” ate all he could; and remember that all were good and hungry. But although Jesus had furnished such a prodigal abundance, no one was to waste any of it. Nothing was to be thrown under foot. Some people’s eyes are bigger than their stomachs;

they take more than they are able to consume. Jesus sent out the apostles, each with an empty basket to collect all that was left over.

[13] A κόφινος is a small basket used by travelers for carrying provisions etc. Twelve of such baskets were filled with pieces of bread. Nothing is said about fragments of fish, yet I suppose fish too was left over and collected. Think of it, more bread was left over than Jesus had to begin with. How this helps to magnify the miracle!

Just twelve baskets full, apparently one basket full for each disciple and none for Jesus, — and all of them were hungry as the multitude had been, not having eaten all day long. Thus Jesus provided richly for the Twelve. If you ask, why not also for himself, why not thirteen baskets full? I believe the answer should be that the Twelve were to share their food with him. He still pours out his abundance to us, and expects us to remember him in the poor and needy and in the support of his church.

[14] John amplifies the account of the synoptists (Matt. 14:22 etc.; Mark 6:45 etc.). They report that Jesus sent his disciples away in the boat while Jesus dismissed the multitude and retired into the mountain to pray. Why did Jesus not leave with his disciples? John tells us the inside of the story. **The people, therefore, having seen the signs which he did, were saying: “This one is truly the prophet that is coming into the world!” [15] Jesus therefore having realized that they were about to come and kidnap him, in order to make him king, withdrew again into the mountain himself alone.**

This is the effect and the outcome of the signs, especially of the last one, the miraculous feeding. The word went around through the multitude that undoubtedly Jesus was the promised prophet (Deut. 18:15) . Elsewhere (1:21) the Jews imagined this prophet to be only the forerunner of the Messiah, but here the people mean that the promised prophet is the Messiah himself. The apposition places this beyond doubt: “who is coming into the world,” ὁ ἔρχόμενος “the One Coming,” a standard Messianic title. All these people recognize him by this last great sign.

[15] Then the great object of Jesus was attained? For is this not what Jesus desired, that the people of their own accord recognize his Messiahship? Sad to say, the object of Jesus was badly defeated. For these people, like the Jews in general, had a totally false conception of the

Messiah. They thought he would be a grand earthly king, who would institute a most glorious earthly reign and would raise up the Jewish nation to be supreme over all nations in the world. Of course, he could do this only by means of miracles, and had these people not seen a most magnificent miracle right here beside the Lake?

Note well, that this Jewish conception is the root of millennialism, “Jewish opinions” (Augsburg Confession, article 17). These Jewish opinions about the earthly reign of the Messiah in wondrous glory were afterwards Christianized, — in the millennium the Christians would be supreme instead of the Jews, or rather the Jews would then be converted to Christianity. Chiliasts embroider their dream in various ways, often in the most fanciful manner. They also love to figure out the time when the millennium is to begin. Note furthermore that because of these “Jewish opinions” Jesus could hardly ever use the title “Messiah,” but used as a substitute “the Son of man.” To call himself the Messiah would have made the Jews think of the supreme political kingdom they constantly had in mind.

We see why Jesus hurried his disciples away in the boat. They too had these wrong opinions about the Messianic Kingdom, — even as late as Acts 1:6. Jesus removed them from contact with the multitude. For these people were quietly planning to kidnap (ἄρπάξειν, snatch away) Jesus and take him along with them to Jerusalem to the Passover and there, where all Judaism would be assembled, proclaim him their Messianic King. These people imagined that Jesus was only holding back in his lowly appearance, was only waiting for the people to get ready and show that they were ready. Well, they would show that readiness now. No doubt Jesus would fall in line with their plans, once he saw the people were in earnest, and with his miracles would brush away all opposition and all difficulties. Could he not feed armies as he had fed the thousands an hour ago? What else could he not do when the need would arise?

Jesus drew a line through these pitiful earthly opinions and plans. He slips away “into the mountain himself alone,” before the plans for kidnapping materialize. Soon darkness falls. Nobody could find Jesus. The whole ambitious plan came to naught.

No; Jesus is not such a king. Look at the cross on Golgotha, see him crowned with thorns, read Pilate's superscription in three languages. There is your King! Of his reign there shall be no end, Luke 1:33.

## **Homiletical Aid**

Narrate how Jesus had just received the news of the Baptist's murder by king Herod, how the crowds kept Jesus from privacy, how finally he sailed across the Lake to its northeastern shore and there had a few quiet hours with the Twelve. How the multitude came to him even there. Left without food, Jesus fed them toward evening, in number over 5,000.

How glorious for the people thus to flock to Jesus! It would have been glorious if they had not been utterly blind to the true glory of Jesus.

### **The Jews Tried to Make Jesus a King.**

- I. They wanted to give him a poor earthly kingdom,
  1. After Jesus fed the 5,000 they thought he must be the promised Messiah-King.
  2. "The Jewish opinions" thought of an earthly king and kingdom, — describe.
  3. Hence they wanted to bestow a throne and a crown upon him. What a pitiful idea.
  4. These old "Jewish opinions" persist today. Many dream of an earthly kingdom for Jesus: no wars, no physical wants, bread in abundance, education and social blessings everywhere, a world of righteousness and peace. They are busy building this kingdom and offer it to Jesus. Many call it the millennium and act as if it were foretold in the Bible.
- II. Who ever creates his own divine Kingdom,
  1. Jesus is the King by divine right; his is a spiritual heavenly Kingdom, full of his divine grace and glory.

2. All the people in the world could not produce this Kingdom or give it to Jesus. He creates it himself; it is wherever he is, wherever he rules. See Matt. 21:5, The First Sunday in Advent.
3. The signs and miracles evidence his deity and his Kingship. Thus the healings here at the Lake before Jesus taught, thus too the miraculous multiplication of bread and fish.
4. A Kingdom of souls reborn, freed from sin, fed with the Bread of Life, walking in the footsteps of Jesus.

III. And by whom alone we were made partakers of this Kingdom.

1. Jesus alone makes us partakers of this blessed Kingdom, not to be subjects, but ourselves to be kings and priests unto God.
2. The means, his Word and the faith it creates.
3. Alas, so many want only a bread-kingdom! What about you?

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The Scriptures say so much about the Kingdom of heaven and the Kingdom of God. And always they mean Jesus, of whom we sing:

**“He is the King! He is the King!”**

Consider:

- I. The king he refused to be.
  1. The earthly Messianic king of the Jews who would make the Jews supreme over all nations. His feeding the 5,000 never meant such earthly kingship.
  2. The millennial king of whom so many dream now, who is to make the Christians and the converted Jews supreme over all unbelievers for a thousand years.
  3. The king of this world who helps his church abolish war, poverty, etc., etc. The modernistic kingdom, with no thorn-crowned expiating divine King.

## II. The King he came to be.

1. The King of power and of grace whose help Philip and Andrew and all of the Twelve forgot at the critical moment.
2. The King of souls, whose Kingdom is spiritual and eternal and not of this world.
3. The King who fed the bodies of the five thousand because he was and is the Bread of Life who never would stop at feeding the bodies alone. He preached for hours to the five thousand.
4. The King who came to bear the crown of thorns on the cross, for whom Pilate would put up the superscription in three languages, whose blood frees us from our sins, whose glory reigns over us for ever in heaven. "He is the King! He is the King!"

## III. The King you need.

1. Who feeds your body from year to year? This King to whom all power in heaven and in earth has been given. Make no mistake about that, although he now uses no miracle.
2. Is that all you need? Do you know no spiritual need and hunger? What of the time when you will want no bread, when your soul leaves your body?
3. Have you a place at the King's heavenly banquet (Ps. 23:5; Matt. 22:11; 8:11)?

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Jesus a lonely man.

Perhaps this, above other things, made him "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief." Desiring so fervently to have men enter into fellowship with his heavenly thoughts, and finding them falling short. His brethren, his disciples, his people. Like a cultured man cast away among savages. His only recourse for fellowship and sympathy his Father and the holy angels.

The last two words of the text:

## **“Himself Alone.”**

- I. Himself. alone perceiving the real need.
  1. Not isolated cases of suffering,
  2. But the underlying cause of all sorrow. To this day the mistake is made. Typhus well: paint the top and leave the water corrupted. Program of the church weakened to one of social service. Emergency remedies rather than thorough-going cure. Boils: salve, not medicine. “They have healed the hurt of the daughter of my people slightly, saying: ‘Peace, peace!’ where there is no peace,” Jer. 8:11.
- II. Himself alone knowing his own power.
  1. The unbelief of men. They think of money to buy, of provisions on hand, when they had the Lord of creation in their midst.
  2. His own consciousness of divine sonship.
- III. Himself alone seeing the proper course.
  1. The false course urged by others. Here the multitudes would make him king.
  2. The course planned by God.

Conclusion: Nevermore alone! We have caught the vision, thinking his thoughts and doing his will.

From a sketch by J. A. Dell.

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Why a text about hunger and bread in Lent? Because Jesus is the Bread of Life.

We see it when we regard

### **The Spiritual Significance of the Feeding of the Five Thousand.**

- I. The hungry multitude.

1. Five thousand men, plus women and children, grown exceedingly hungry and no way to feed them: no place to buy — no money to buy — no supplies at hand save five cakes of bread, etc. The blank faces of the disciples.
2. The main trouble was unbelief. The bodily hunger was the least of the need.

II. The divine host.

1. He fed the bodies completely. Was there no more to feed? Then why the miracle?
2. The miracle full of divine significance. It pointed to Jesus as the Bread of Life. The next day Jesus spoke of this at length.
3. But all that the multitude did was to try to make Jesus a grand earthly king, ever to give them earthly bread, earthly power, earthly glory.

III. The miraculous meal.

1. Five loaves for five thousand and over. And yet they did not see his deity, his greatness as the Son of God, who certainly came for more than feeding men's bodies.
2. If Jesus would dispense earthly gifts and treasures, how men would acclaim and crown him! But for his eternal gifts, who cares? Let us seek Jesus himself, the Bread of Life for our souls.

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**“Whence Bread?”**

- I. A burning question.
- II. A divine solution.
- III. A deeper significance.

Jesus offers himself as the living Bread in Word and Sacrament. Stoecker.

# Judica. John 8:46-59

## “Before Abraham Was I Am”

In the text for the preceding Sunday we see *friendly people* who want Jesus; to throw off his incognito, who want to declare him king of the nation. Their friendliness is tragically misdirected. In the present text we see *utterly hostile people*, the Pharisees, in the most open and violent conflict with Jesus, who conclude with an attempt to stone him to death. The tragedy of both texts is at bottom the same: Jesus is not the Messiah the Jews really want. Neither their friendliness nor their hostility sees him as he truly is.

The contrast between these two texts is only incidental. The sequence of texts is the thought that Jesus is not an earthly king, showering mere earthly benefactions upon his followers (Laetare), he is before Abraham, his ancestor, was, and thus delivers from death. The great Lenten theme is fully unfolded. Here is Jesus, our Redeemer, and his Redemption. He feeds the 5,000 because he is the Bread of Life and no mere earthly king, and he frees from death by means of his Word because he is the Eternal One who is before Abraham ever was.

[46] The text places us in the very midst of this most violent clash with the Pharisees in the Temple court. Jesus declares the truth to these Pharisees, but that is the very reason why they refuse to believe him. Thus they furnish the clearest evidence that God cannot possibly be their father, that only the devil is their father, Whose nature is not the truth but lies. But by thus telling these Pharisees the truth about themselves and their father Jesus furnishes the fullest evidence that he is of the truth. What are the Pharisees doing in reply? Are they clearing themselves by pointing to some true evidence that there is ἁμαρτία in Jesus? They are doing nothing of the kind. It is thus that Jesus challenges them: **“Who of you convicts me of sin?”** Let him stand forth and speak!

Note well that Jesus does not say: “Who of you convicts me of a lie?” Jesus in no way restricts. Of course, a lie would be “sin” and is thus included, but the whole field of sin is thrown open to these vicious and virulent enemies. Note *περὶ ἁμαρτίας* (no article): “sin” of any kind whatever. Of course, the challenge is *ἐλέγχειν* “to convict,” to furnish actual evidence of guilt, not merely to assert a lot of vilification and bring accusations without basis of fact.

The challenge of Jesus stands unanswered to this day. He is the absolutely Sinless One. No man has ever convicted him or can ever convict him of sin. He is the eternal Son of God and could not sin. The very idea of his sinning is unthinkable, impossible. Hence, as far as the fact is concerned, no one has ever convicted him of sin.

The assertion that this defiant challenge of Jesus means only that Jesus felt safe because of the inability of these Jews to convict him of sin, hence does not signify that Jesus was sinless, would convict Jesus of inner, moral falseness, namely that while he knew of sin in himself he traded on the inability and the ignorance of the Jews to point out anything sinful in him. Some would reduce the impeccability of Jesus by saying that he had “no consciousness of sin.” The apostle Paul had no consciousness of sin and yet confesses: “I am not hereby justified,” 1 Cor. 4:4.

The constant use which the church has made of this word of Jesus as an assertion of absolute sinlessness from his own lips, is fully justified.

Since there is no sin in Jesus, he must be and is utter truth. In v. 45 Jesus charges the Pharisees with the fault that just because he tells them the truth therefore they do not believe him. To strike their consciences the more certainly Jesus turns this accusation into a question. **“If I say truth, why do you not believe me?”** He uses the condition of reality because he does speak truth. Just as broad as the anarthrous “sin” is, so broad is the anarthrous “truth.” For all that Jesus speaks is “truth,” and not merely what he has just said about the infernal fatherhood of the Pharisees.

The idea that the Pharisees did not understand Jesus and thus did not see the truth is the reverse of the fact, — the Pharisees understood the truth as indeed the truth only too well. This is the very reason why they utterly refused to believe it and determined to silence Jesus. He cannot be charged with presenting the truth in a faulty way so that the Pharisees did not see

the truth as truth. The utter opposite is the fact. Why should not he who is the Truth (14:6) speak truth with perfect clearness?

There is no answer to the question of Jesus. Does this stagger us? It is axiomatic: truth must be believed, lies must be disbelieved. It is unreasonable, it is morally monstrous to disbelieve the truth and to believe the lie, its opposite. The lie is compelled to dress itself up to look like the truth, in order to gain credence. But we constantly meet the phenomenon that truth meets with violent rejection the more it is recognized as truth. No psychologist can possibly explain this phenomenon, for no man can possibly offer a reasonable explanation for unreasonable, irrational acts. Here appears the self-conviction and the self-condemnation of all unbelief.

[47] The Jews dare not answer, hence Jesus answers for them. **“He that is of God hears the utterances of God. For this reason you do not hear, because you are not of God.”** Throughout Jesus is using sound and thus inexorable logic, and practically all his statements may be expanded into syllogisms. Here a deadly negative syllogism appears; major premise: He who is of God hears God’s words (it is impossible to maintain the opposite or to maintain something different); minor premise: You do not hear God’s words: ergo: You are *not* of God. Of whom these Pharisees are Jesus tells them in v. 44. “Hears” = receives through the ear into the heart; and *éfiuaw* speaks of the divine “utterances” as holy vessels of thought, ever to be received with fullest faith.

Like all their unbelieving successors, the Pharisees thus furnish their own deadly self-conviction, which Jesus merely needs to state. They are of the devil, not of God, — *ék* to indicate source or spiritual origin. The judgment here pronounced on this undeniable evidence will be repeated at the last day.

[48] His opponents cannot possibly give answer to Jesus. The violent rage of the Pharisees breaks out in insult and vicious vituperation, — thus once more striking at the truth because it is truth and revealing their moral parentage. **The Jews answered and said to him: “Say we not well, that thou art a Samaritan, and hast a demon?”** With the sneer: “Say we not well?” they hurl at Jesus the ugliest epithets of which they can think. They call Jesus “a Samaritan,” namely morally, because he told the Pharisees who their father was. Being a demoniac charges him with speaking as a

devil would speak. Here is blind, ridiculous rage shrieking out What is devoid of all sense. When God's voice is called the devil's, the limit is reached.

This is at times done in a more polite manner. Oppose unbelief today, and it may turn upon you with bloody violence and rabid denunciation, but it may also answer with a smile in a calm tone. Be not deceived: there is none the less a dagger under the cloak.

[49] With the calmness of complete mastery Jesus makes reply. **Jesus answered: "I, I have not a demon; on the contrary, I am honoring my Father, and you, you are dishonoring me."** The emphasis is on the pronouns ἐγώ — ὑμεῖς; I imitate the emphasis by repeating each pronoun in my translation. Jesus makes no reply regarding his being called a Samaritan. The Jews utterly despised the Samaritans; Jesus, however, did not. The folly of charging him with being a demoniac Jesus brushes aside by stating the two simple facts: "I have not a demon, on the contrary, I am honoring my Father." The very opposite of the charge is true. When a demon speaks out of a man he does not honor the Father. That Jesus is honoring the Father is not a general statement; he here specifically honors the Father by protecting the Father against the lying claims of the Pharisees that they are the Father's children.

Another emphasis rests on the verbs: τιμῶ — ὀτιμάζετε While Jesus is in the very act of honoring the Father as indicated, "you, you Pharisees, (by your vilification) are dishonoring me." Compare v. 23. Thus the Pharisees show once more that God is not their Father.

[50] Jesus suffers the insult, he does not retaliate, 1 Pet. 2:23. **"But I seek not my glory. There is one who seeks and judges."** Jesus commits himself to God. The matter of maintaining and vindicating the honor of Jesus is in the right hands. But Jesus now advances from τιμή, "honor," to δόξα "glory," the highest form of honor. "There is One who seeks and judges," and Jesus does not need to name him. The almighty Vindicator stands behind Jesus. He will see to it that Jesus receives due glory, he will pronounce judgment, and his judgment will be just. The words are spoken in solemn warning. God will not disregard the vilification of his own Son incarnate; God, the great Sender of Jesus, will not let men abuse with impunity the great Representative whom he has sent.

[51] Jesus has uttered the stern words of the law; he now follows with the sweetest Gospel. Law and Gospel always belong together; it makes no difference which of the two is preached first, but both must be preached. **“Amen, amen, I say to you: If any one shall guard my word, death he shall not see for ever!”** The double “amen” is the seal of verity, and the words, “I say to you,” are the seal of divine authority, — both constitute the “strongest assurance for us.” If any one” is both universal, excluding none, and yet personal, for each must guard the Word himself. Ἐάν denotes expectancy, — there will be such; and the aorist denotes actuality, — there actually will be such. Jesus sees them. “To guard” the Word of Jesus (τηρεῖν often used by Jesus) means to keep it and to allow no one to tamper with it, — do not overlook this second thought. Thus to guard Jesus’ Word means to believe it and to defend it, in substance the same as v. 31-32.

In v. 31-32 Jesus mentions the proximate effects, now he states the ultimate effect: “death he shall not at all see for ever.” The emphasis is on “death.” Why the promise is couched in these terms is not at once apparent, and commentators imagine a break in the discourse, and offer other explanations regarding the sequence of thought. But observe that the Pharisees had murder in their hearts (v. 40), were the children of the arch-murderer (v. 44), and the devil and death are certainly connected with each other. The Scriptures use the bodily senses to describe the experiences of the soul. “To see” is especially used as the unit *Gemeinsinn* for “to experience.” Note that therefore the Scriptures speak in the singular of both the ear and the eye: “He that hath an ear”; “If thine eye is single.” Delitzsch, *Bibl. Psychologie* 234. Thus never in any way to see death is perfectly lucid and does not refer to physical death, but to eternal death. Ἔς τὸν αἰῶνα, “unto the eon,” = for eternity. Only a vicious mind would pretend to misunderstand.

Not ever to see death is a litotes and = shall have life eternal. See the same negative statement in 6:50, and the negative and positive side by side in 3:16 and v. 24. Note also the implication that he who spurns Jesus’ Word is bound to see death for all eternity. Eternal life and eternal death are bound up in the Word of Jesus, because this Word is the means or the channel by which alone eternal life is obtained.

[52] The vicious unbelief of the Pharisees strikes back at Jesus. **The Jews therefore said to him: “Now we know that thou hast a demon.**

**Abraham died, and the prophets. And thou sayest: ‘If any one shall guard my word, he shall not at all taste of death for ever.’ [53] Certainly thou art not greater than our father Abraham, seeing that he died? and the prophets died. Whom art thou making thyself?”** The perfect tense ἐγνώκαμεν is most likely intensive: “we know beyond a doubt.” No man in his right senses could say such a thing as Jesus says; a devil must rule his mind and his tongue.

Either deliberately or because of the densest ignorance of unbelief the Pharisees pervert the word of Jesus; they apply to physical death what he said regarding eternal death. Their counter claim is that it is utterly preposterous to say that a man can escape dying, for the most holy men of the Old Testament died, Father Abraham and the prophets, to mention only these. The change of wording “shall not taste of death” instead of “shall not see death” is not important. The sense of taste is used with reference to physical death to hint at death’s bitterness, and to suggest the idea of drinking a bitter cup. These Pharisees use “taste of” because they speak only of physical death.

[53] In addition to the negative deduction, that, since Abraham and the prophets are dead, a devil must wag a man’s tongue if he talks of preventing physical death by means of his word, there lies in their words also a positive deduction, that a man who talks thus must imagine himself to be greater than even Abraham and the prophets. And that opens the question: “Whom art thou making thyself?” This brings them to the deity of Christ, which these children of the devil (v. 44) would not for an instant admit to be possible; but they considered such an implication a blasphemous idea.

[54] By thus emphasizing “my Word,” and stating what believing it will do, Jesus arrogates nothing to himself; he in no way makes of himself what he is not. **Jesus answered: “If I glorify myself, ’my glory is nothing. It is my Father that glorifies me, of whom you claim that he is your God, [55] and you do not know him; but I do know him, and if I shall say that I do not know him, I shall be like you, a liar; but I know him, and I am guarding his Word.”** It is true regarding every boaster: if he glorifies himself, his glory is nothing. So it is also true regarding Jesus. If he is the only one who sees something great and glorious in himself, this amounts to nothing. Again Jesus uses the word “glory,” the highest kind of honor (v. 50). The One glorifying Jesus is the Father; ὁ δοξάζων = engaged in

glorifying him. By saying “my Father” Jesus declares himself to be the Son of God.

Jesus puts himself and his Father on the one side, and the Pharisees far off on the other: “of whom you claim (ὄν λέγετε) that he is your God, and you do not (even) know him,” proving your claim to be false. Who, then, is making a hollow boast? The Pharisees. They are making themselves children of God and do not even know God, — ἐγνώκατε again the intensive perfect as in v. 52. Jesus has already furnished the evidence that the Pharisees are total strangers to God (v. 47), hence he only repeats the proven fact. The worst of it was, that they could and should have known him from his blessed Old Testament revelation.

[55] Emphasizing the mighty contrast between himself and them, Jesus not only declares: “I do know him,” but adds that he would be a liar like the Pharisees if he said that he does not know him, — a liar like them only in the opposite direction: they saying they do know him when they do not — Jesus saying he does not know him when he does. Thus the gulf between Jesus and the Pharisees could be bridged only in one way: they and Jesus would be alike, if Jesus too became a liar such as they are. But this is utterly impossible: “I know him, and I am guarding his Word.” As Jesus bids us guard his Word, so he guards the Father’s Word, for the two are one and the same Word (7:16; 8:28; 14:24), committed by the Father to the Son in his human nature to be transmitted to us.

Here Jesus three times in a marked way uses οἶδα when referring to himself, and when referring to the Pharisees he says γινώσκω. Unfortunately the English does not have two words for “to know” with a similar difference. Οἶδα indicates a relation of the known object to the knowing subject; γινώσκω denotes a relation of the subject to the object. Thus in Matt. 25:12: οὐκ οἶδα ὑμᾶς: *you* have no relation to me of which I know; but in Matt. 7:23: οὐδέποτε ἔγνων ὑμᾶς: I have no relation to you of which I know. Thus also here: “You do not know (γινώσκω) God,” because *you* have no relation to him, are not his children. But: “I know him” (οἶδα), because *he* bears a relation to me as being my Father. Another connotation deserves note. “I know” is like “I am acquainted with,” and fits the Son who was in the bosom of the Father (1:18) and thus knows God; while γινώσκω fits the idea of revelation, — God reveals himself, and we know

him by our believing experience with that revelation. Compare the work by Cremer-Koegel.

[56] As far as Abraham is concerned, whom the Jews mention as having died physically, Jesus, omitting the reference to the prophets, states that Abraham obtained life eternal through himself, Jesus. **“Abraham, your father, exulted to see my day; and he saw it and was glad.”** “Your father,” of course, means “your physical father, whom you claim as also your spiritual father.” Never would or could Jesus combine himself with the Jews and speak of Abraham as “our father.” Even physically Abraham is not the father of Jesus in the same sense as he is the father of the Jews, and spiritually, as Jesus here states, Abraham’s faith rested on Jesus, not anything in Jesus upon Abraham.

“Abraham exulted to see my own day.” *ἵνα* denotes purport, not purpose: that he was to see; and “to see” is to be understood in the same ethical sense as in v. 51. The possessive adjective τὴν ἑμὴν is strong: “my own day.” Already the prospect of seeing the day of Jesus made Abraham exult. “And he saw it (aorist: actually saw it) and rejoiced” (another aorist). These are simple historical tenses, and all are dated during the earthly life of Abraham, — not in sheol or hades (to mention this speculation) nor in heaven after Abraham’s death, i.e. at the present date when Jesus spoke. This statement in regard to Abraham is a *maschal*; it is like a riddle with a hidden meaning, and requires a key; compare another *maschal* in 2:19. In the present case Jesus supplies the key (v. 58). But the wording of the *maschal* is itself helpful, for the pointed repetition of the idea of joy in “exulted” and “was glad” refers to the central *ocCur* — *rence* in the patriarch’s life, Gen. 17:17; 18:12-15; 21:6-8, marked by “laughter,” the name Isaac itself meaning “laughter.” Likewise “to see the day” means “to live to see it.”

Take the key of Jesus. It deals with no type or antitype as some suppose. Abraham exulted when God promised him the birth of Isaac in whom all the nations of the earth were to be blessed. Abraham saw that son born and was glad. But in that event Abraham saw with his own eyes, i.e. personally experienced, the day of Jesus Christ; for then and there that day of Jesus began. Abraham, a hundred years old, had lived to see it. Hitherto all had been only promise, nothing but promise; now at last came actual fulfillment. It did not matter how long the time would be until Jesus was

born — about two thousand years, — the day of Jesus did not begin with his birth in Bethlehem, it began with Isaac.

[57] Viciously the Pharisees pounce upon this maschal. **The Jews therefore said to him: “Thou hast not yet fifty years and hast thou seen Abraham?”** Of course, Jesus is not nearly fifty years old. Fifty is used only to make the interval of two thousand years stand out. Note that the Jews draw a conclusion: if Abraham saw the day of Jesus (i.e. lived to see that day), then Jesus himself must have seen Abraham (i.e. lived two thousand years ago). Their logic is perfectly correct. The only fault is that it does not go back far enough, hence Jesus corrects it.

**[58] Jesus said to them: “Amen, amen, I say to you (see v. 51), before Abraham came to be, I am.”** Here is the key to the maschal. The correction is to the effect that we dare not halt at the date of Abraham, — there is no date in time at which we may halt.

Πρὶν γενέσθαι (πρὲν with an infinitive after a positive verb) with its aorist marks the point of time when Abraham came into existence. Jesus means: when Abraham himself was born, then “I am.” Εἰμί is stronger than ἦμην, “I was.” For the thought is not merely that Jesus is far older than Abraham; for this might imply a birthday for Jesus at some time prior to that of Abraham. The thought in ἐγώ εἰμι, “I am,” “I exist” is in contrast to the aorist γενέσθαι, “came to be,” and states that Jesus never came to be, that for him no such point of coming into existence can be predicated, — i.e. Jesus is eternal.

Usually this is understood only regarding the divine nature of Jesus; but look at Rev. 13:8: “the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.” Do not speak of an “ideal” slaying. This slaying and this “I am” are not mere thoughts, they are realities. Accept them as such. Do not try to fathom them. If you do, you will land Where these rationalizing Pharisees did: How can a man less than fifty years old have seen another man who lived two thousand years earlier? The very idea of eternity (timelessness) is incomprehensible to us; so is every divine attribute and the sum of divine attributes, the Doxa. This is most especially true when these attributes are spoken of as communicated to Christ’s human nature.

[59] Do the Pharisees understand Jesus? They certainly do. **They took up stones therefore in order to throw at him; but Jesus was hidden, and**

**went out of the Temple.** Lev. 24:13-16 demands stoning for a blasphemer. Of course, he should be tried, convicted, and then stoned. But these Pharisees, bursting with murderous hate, having caught Jesus in *flagrante delicto*, propose an act of popular justice and attempt to stone Jesus on the spot. Parts of the Temple were in process of being rebuilt, hence there were pieces of rock that could be thrown. But a slight delay ensued, for the Pharisees had to go to the spot where the stones lay about an unfinished wall and take them up. Thus Jesus escaped. “He was hidden” need not mean miraculously; he was surrounded by his friends and thus walked away. The A.V. interpolates from Luke 4:30 and John 9:1: “going through the midst of them and so passed by.” The regular course is: unbelief — contradiction — perversion — vilification — violence. The most powerful argument of the foes of Jesus are “stones.”

## Homiletical Aid

During Passiontide Jesus appears in his deepest humiliation and finally ascends the cross. Yet ever his true glory appears: he is God’s Son Incarnate. Thus he appears in the gospel text for Judica Sunday.

### **Our Savior’s Incomparable Greatness.**

- I. Recognize it!
  1. His eternity (“Before Abraham came to be, I am”).
  2. His sinlessness (v. 46).
  3. His deity (“Whom makest thou thyself?”).
  4. His saving power (“If a man keep my saying,” etc.).
- II. Worship it!
  1. Honor Jesus as his Father does and wants us to do.
  2. Rejoice in the day of Jesus like Abraham did, yea, even more.
  3. Hear the Word of Jesus and guard it.

4. Embrace the deliverance from sin and death and praise your Savior's name.
- 

Judica. The Introit: "Judge me, O God, and plead my cause against an unholy nation," Ps. 43:1. Jesus judged in our text by the hostile and even murderous Pharisees. He states how his Father judges (i.e. glorifies) him. We too must judge Jesus. The world still judges him like the "ungodly nation" of the Jews.

### **Judge: Who Is this Whom the Pharisees Would Stone?**

- I. Is it your judgment that he is the Sinless One?
  1. The challenge the Pharisees could not meet (v. 46), save by ugly slander (v. 48).
  2. Only the death of the Sinless One could atone for us sinners.
  3. The horror when sinners reject the Sinless One and thus doubly plunge into perdition.
  4. Judge the Sinless One this day as God judges him, despite all the false judgments of his foes.
- II. Is it your judgment that his Word is life?
  1. His great Gospel offers you escape from eternal death, i.e. the gift of eternal life (v. 51).
  2. Behold the tragedy, — the dying ones spurn the Deliverer from eternal death and his Word of life!
  3. In the face of those who judge him falsely, what is your judgment regarding him who is the Fountain of Life?
- III. Is it your judgment that he is before Abraham came to be?
  1. All the divine attributes, thus also eternity, belong to Jesus. The incarnate Son above all limitations of time. How Abraham saw his day, how Jesus saw Abraham. Incomprehensible wonders of Jesus' human person.

2. The tragic folly of the finite ones stoning the Infinite One.
  3. Only an eternal, infinite Savior could rescue us from our infinite guilt.
  4. Let miserable sinners spurn the deity of the eternal Son; your judgment must draw you to his blessed feet in adoration.
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Once the Jews wanted to make Jesus king (the text for last Sunday); next the Jews wanted to stone him as a criminal (our text). That manner of king Jesus could not and would not be, even if all the world wanted it; the Savior that he is, even if his whole nation rejects him and other great masses join that wicked nation.

### **“Before Abraham Was I Am.”**

- I. The eternal Son of God.
  1. Long before Abraham, with no beginning such as Abraham had. Eternal, timeless. Incomprehensible, especially when we think of Jesus’ human nature (Rev. 13:8).
  2. The day of Jesus in the fulfillment of prophecy when Isaac was born, named “Laughter,” Abraham exulted and was glad.
  3. Only the Eternal One could be our Savior, whose saving power reached back to Abraham, yea back to “before Abraham,” and embraces all men. Let the lowliness of Jesus deceive none of us.
- II. Whom none convicts of sin.
  1. The whole world full of nothing but sinners, and here One who is sinless and separate from sinners.
  2. Only a sinless Savior could save us sinners, take our sin upon himself and expiate this sin.
- III. Who delivers from death.
  1. The terrible dying in the world, terrible enough the physical, infinitely more terrible the eternal. Sin produces this death.

2. The One whose Word cures this death and opens the gates of eternal life. All that our Savior is and has done for us is made ours by his Word through faith.

IV. Who speaks the truth.

1. The world filled with liars, — liars about God, sin, salvation. Only one source of saving truth, Jesus sent of God.

2. The supreme truth. He told the Pharisees what they were (law), and how to escape from sin (Gospel). This truth still resounds.

V. Whose glory the Father seeks.

1. That men should believe, obey, worship and adore him, even as the Father honors him.

2. The Pharisees rejected him, sought even to stone him, finally crucified him. No, they were not of God. The terrible and tragic rejection continues.

3. God help us ever to rejoice to see Jesus' day and to glorify him in heart and in life who is before Abraham came to be.

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### **Your Conviction regarding Christ.**

I. You must know his own testimony.

II. You must face the either or which this testimony presents.

In his elaboration J. A. Dell brings out that you cannot go half way. "This is the great mistake so many make. They imagine that they can accept Jesus' words in part and reject them in part. But this is impossible. If you deny anything that Jesus says, you make him a liar. And if he is a liar, you cannot believe him in anything, and nothing that he has said is worth believing." Examples are added. Jesus is God's Son and it is impossible that any word of his should be untrue.

The scene in the Temple court. The vicious enemies of Jesus. The climax began

### **When Jesus was Called a Samaritan.**

*This was when Jesus revealed himself so fully, when his revelation should have filled all hearts with faith, glorifying him as the Father's Son and our own Savior. With all our hearts we believe him and in him today.*

*This was when stones foreshadowed the cross, when unbelief revealed its true inwardness (lying, murder, v. 44). But Jesus had come in humbleness to suffer and to die and thus to save us from sin and death. With all our hearts we give him honor and glory today.*

# Palm Sunday. Matt. 21 :1 -9

## Jesus, the Son of David, Israel's Messiah-King

I raise no objection to the fact that the ancient gospel selections present the same text for the First Sunday in Advent and for Palm Sunday. No Advent sermon has ever exhausted this text so that it would detract from it when used on Palm Sunday; nor can any one assert the opposite. The simple fact is that the text fits both Sundays in the most admirable way, and this is why this one text appears twice in these selections. The First Sunday in Advent shows us the Gracious Coming of our King; Palm Sunday intends to show us the Passion-King himself. He is the King indeed, but his crown which he wears in the royal capital is plaited of thorns and his throne is the cross. The royal entry of Jesus took place on Palm Sunday, that is to say six days before Good Friday, the day of his crucifixion. This chronology determined the ancient church when accepting this text for the opening of holy week.

This Sunday ushers in Holy Week, the climax of the Lenten season, the week in which the Lamb of God was slain as sacrifice for our sins. The Germans call it *die stille Woche*. This Sunday rises far above all the previous Sundays in Lent. The sermon for this Sunday should rise to an equal height.

More can be done, much more.

A grand climax can be arranged, one which will stimulate the entire congregation spiritually in the richest manner. Nothing like this can be arranged for any other season of the Church Year. 1) On Judica Sunday morning have the public examination of the catechumens. Have a procession. For the examination seat the children on the platform so that they face the audience, and the preacher stands below in the aisle. Ask the whole class to answer in unison a number of questions the answer to which have been memorized from the Catechism; again, all the boys, all the girls, or three or four together. Ask individuals questions that require individual

formulation. 2) Confirmation of the class on Palm Sunday morning. 3) A reunion of as many previously confirmed classes as possible on Palm Sunday evening, with a report on these classes. 4) Then the Maundy Thursday and the Good Friday services. 5) The grand climax of all on Easter Morning, communion on both Thursday and on Easter. I hereby testify personally to the uplift which this program, properly executed, will bring to the entire congregation. To confirm the class at any later time, secures very much less. The objection that one cannot have the class ready so early receives this answer: start your catechetical work so that you can end it in ample time. If you have not done so, try it.

The exegesis of the text given for the First Sunday in Advent suffices for Palm Sunday.

## Homiletical Aid

“Hosanna to the Son of David!” This class of catechumens joins all of us in vowing allegiance to our King.

### Palms for the King!

- I. There never was one more worthy of them.
  1. Because he is the King without compare. Consider his Person, his relation to his Kingdom, the blessedness of this Kingdom, your reception into it.
  2. He is the Victor above all victors. The victories of his grace already so great, securing him the people’s welcome. The final victory for which our King now enters Jerusalem.
- II. There can be for us no greater blessedness than to bestow them.
  1. By the bestowal we accept and honor him as our King (faith, confession, — confirmation).
  2. By the bestowal we enter his Kingdom and are made recipients of his gifts and his blessings (forgiveness, life, salvation).

3. By the bestowal we pledge ourselves anew to live in his Kingdom and to serve him in innocence, righteousness, and blessedness.
4. By the bestowal we become candidates for the glory of his Kingdom above.

Palms for the King! Palms for the King!

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The immortal Palm Sunday scene. The incomparable King rides on in majesty.

**“Ride on, Ride on in Majesty!”**

(American Lutheran Hymnal 429.)

- I. In the majesty that towers so high.
  1. Great David’s greater Son. The attributes of his deity.
  2. Without this majesty the ride would have been in vain. No hosannas. No eternal Savior-King.
  3. We acclaim, worship, and adore his majesty.
- II. In the majesty that stoops so low.
  1. Riding on a borrowed ass, when he might have ridden as in Rev. 19:11-16. His wondrous humility and lowliness.
  2. This King to wear the crown of thorns, his throne the cross. His Kingdom for blood-bought souls. “Hosanna” = Lord, help, and here indeed is eternal help, the King who saves to the uttermost.
- III. In the majesty that makes him our King.
  1. Sinners all, not worthy to touch his sandals. “Thy King” who cleanses, frees, lifts up in his Kingdom.
  2. Do you acclaim him? Is your hosanna true and sincere?

- IV. In the majesty that is now crowned with glory for ever.
1. Jesus, our King, ascended to the right hand of the Father. He rides on in the majesty of omnipotent power and rules the world, even his foes; in the majesty of his grace over the Church on earth; in the majesty of glory over the saints in heaven.
  2. When he shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is, 1 John 3:2. Lowly now under his grace, as once he was, we shall be glorified and shall rule with him. With all our hearts we acclaim him now and for ever.
- 

A holy enthusiasm in the royal reception of Jesus: the multitudes, the garments and the branches, the royal acclaim and hosanna. The disciples joined in, but failed to understand what it all meant (John 12:16). We wonder about the hearts of the people and of the disciples on that Palm Sunday, and then we think of our own hearts on this Palm Sunday.

### **The Palm Sunday Heart.**

- I. Fall of the great Palm Sunday faith.
  1. This faith knows who it was that rode thus into Jerusalem and why he rode as he did into Jerusalem: God's Son, our Savior-King, in the humility of infinite grace, to die on the cross for our sins, to admit us into his eternal Kingdom.
  2. This faith trusts him completely, in good and in evil days, in life and in death, etc.
- II. Full of Palm Sunday song.
  1. This heart voices its faith aloud. It calls Jesus by his true names and expresses its complete dependence upon him in hosannas ("Lord, help!").
  2. This heart loves to confess Jesus with the multitude of the church, as the multitudes in the text, as in our festive service today. But it confesses equally before the hostile world and when alone in any situation.

III. Full of Palm Sunday joy.

1. The joy that such a King is ours, ever keeps and blesses us in his rule of grace, to whose cross and throne we ever have access.
2. The joy that the glory of this King awaits us when we close our eyes in death.

Oh, for a true Palm Sunday heart!

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Describe how the great procession formed and marched with Jesus into Jerusalem. It was the advance guard of a far greater procession. Let us see

**The Great Palm Sunday Procession.**

I. Marching through the ages.

1. The Church Universal: apostles, ministers, martyrs, believers, confessors, laying their lives at the King's feet, with lips and with acts praising and glorifying his name. Ever and ever this procession marches on. Hell may rage, and the devil may seek to interfere, but it marches on this very day.
2. But some only march along. On the road to Jerusalem there was Judas Iscariot, and most of the crowd were enthused only for the moment. Mere church members, lip Christians, etc. They swell the procession only outwardly, but the King knows their hearts.
3. Among which class do you find your place today?

II. Marching by way of the cross to the throne of glory.

1. The way that Jesus went. The goal he reached. The road goes by way of Calvary and the cross of Jesus. The hearts must be washed with the atoning, cleansing blood. For this reason Jesus went to Jerusalem. And then the road goes on through the world, ever confessing, ever glorifying Jesus before men, until it follows Jesus to his eternal throne of glory in heaven itself.

2. Many seek to avoid the cross and Jesus' blood and yet wish to march to the glory-throne with those cleansed by his blood. The heavenly gates close against them. To shout "Lord, Lord" is not enough. Many would abuse Jesus' blood, be washed by it but deny its power in a worldly life, not serving the King. Again the gates are closed.
3. The host that gathers at the throne, the 144,000 from every tribe, nation, people, and tongue. The acclaim that then will resound, the songs that then will swell. I am going to be there, are you?

Note: "Heart" and "procession" in the two themes are auxiliary concepts. Such themes should be fully understood, for they are a great homiletical asset. I treat them in *S.* 184-188.

# Maundy Thursday. John 13:1-15

## **“I, your Lord and Master, have Washed your Feet”**

Maundy (mournful) Thursday commemorates the Lord’s institution of the Holy Supper. One might wonder why the gospel for this day does not follow the thought of the epistle and present the accounts of the institution of the Sacrament as recorded by one of the evangelists, as the epistle presents Paul’s account as found in First Corinthians. Of course, this might have been done, although gospel and epistle would then have been quite identical in substance. The early church celebrated the Supper in the evening, and the ancient gospel and epistle were intended for the service of the morning when no celebration of the Supper took place. So both the gospel and the epistle were intended as a preparation for the Sacrament to be celebrated in the evening. The gospel text is thus eminently appropriate. When now we have only the evening service and the celebration of the Lord’s Supper at this service, the old gospel text with its old significance of helping to prepare us for the Communion remains quite unchanged. Text and Sacrament are only brought more closely together, both of them being combined in the same service.

It is Thursday, the evening of the 14th of Nisan, according to Jewish reckoning the beginning of Friday, the 15th. The Passover lamb had been killed during the afternoon, and the Passover feast was ready. It is after sunset, and the streets are dark when Jesus arrives in the upper room. His enemies do not know that he is here.

**[1] Now before the Feast of the Passover, Jesus knowing that his hour was come to pass out of this world to the Father, having loved his own in the world, he loved them to the end.** Construe “before the Feast of the Passover” as a modifier of Jesus “knowing,” and read both participles: “knowing” and “having loved” concessive, and ἀγαπήσας constative. Although at this moment before the Passover begins Jesus knows that his

great mission is almost completed, and although he certainly has all along showered his love in highest measure upon his disciples, he does not think that in these last hours of his earthly life he should think only of himself; no, he loved his disciples to the very end. “Love divine, all love excelling!” From the moment of this Passover to the moment of the death of Jesus his love to his own was active. Even these last hours Jesus did not reserve for himself. So great was his own suffering, yet his heart went out to others.

Often we read that “his hour” had not yet come; but now it had come. The expression “to pass out of this world to the Father” means more than “to die”; Jesus came into this world as one sent by his Father on his redemptive mission, and this mission is now to be completed, and so Jesus returns to the Father. His own, the disciples, are left “in the world.” Read 17:11 and 15. They have a mission to execute in the world, Matt. 28:19. “Love” here as always = the love of comprehension and of corresponding purpose, as I have so often defined it.

**[2] And at supper, the devil having already cast into the heart that he should betray him — Judas, Simon’s son, Iscariot, [3] although knowing that the Father did give all things into his hands, and that he did come out from God and is about to go back to God, [4] he rises from the supper and lays down his garments, and having taken up a linen cloth he girdeth himself.**

Δείπνου γινομένου or γενομένου (present or aorist) simply means “at supper,” and not: “supper being ended” (A.V.), or “during supper” (R.V.); compare Mark 6:2, where the genitive absolute also means: “on a Sabbath.” Peter and John had prepared the supper, which was now to begin. But this is only the outward moment, — great inward things are to be noted as regards this moment: first, what Satan had done to the heart of Judas, and secondly, what the Father had done to Jesus, etc. All this must be present to our minds when we see Jesus proceed to wash the disciples’ feet.

Dipping the tips of the fingers in water before eating was the Pharisaical requirement called “washing the hands.” Washing the feet was neither a requirement of the Jewish ceremonial law nor of the traditions of the Pharisees; it was merely an oriental custom of propriety, due to the wearing of sandals which permitted the feet to become dusty. Thus on entering a

house the sandals were unfastened to be cleaned and the feet were washed and dried. A slave did this, or, to honor a guest, the host himself did it.

Jesus had arranged that this last Passover should be wholly private. Hence the upper room, hence the water and the apron for washing the feet, duly placed in the room. Hence no servant is present, no host. They who think that Mark and perhaps others were present are mistaken. But who was to wash the feet of the ten and of Jesus who had walked into the city from Bethany? Peter and John were already here. They felt that they had done enough by getting everything ready. No one volunteered. Although their feet were unwashed, they were ready to begin to eat. Then it was that Jesus laid aside his outer robe, tied on the linen apron, and did this menial service for the Twelve. The essential matter was not the cleansing of the feet in conformity with oriental cleanliness, but a severe and effective rebuke to the haughty spirit of the disciples, not one of whom was ready to stoop to this lowly and menial service.

This spirit was bad enough. But what shall we say of Judas, here identified as “Simon’s son,” the man of Kerioth, “Iscariot,” and thus distinguished from the other Judas among the Twelve? The devil had cast the thought into his heart to betray Jesus, — ἵνα παραδοῖ, object clause, the verb subjunctive. There sat this traitor with the treachery lodged in his heart. Should Jesus wash this man’s feet? In many ways, because we are still sinful, the devil can inject damnable thoughts and projects into our heart, but it is one thing for him to do this, and quite another for us to accept, entertain, and act on such thoughts. Recognize every wicked thought as one cast into your heart by the devil and cast it out with all its devilishness.

[3] At the same time Jesus knows that the Father did give all things into his hands and that he came out from God and is now about to return to him, the mission for which he had come now being almost completed. In no wise is Jesus compelled to act. According to his human nature, man that he is, all things are in his hands as a gift from his Father, — Jesus may do with all things, with this miserable Judas and with the rest of these foolish men, as his will may decide. In his deity Jesus came from God, voluntarily to execute his saving mission, and now voluntarily he completes it. It is thus that Jesus proceeds to wash the feet of these men.

On the one side the devil — on the other the Father and God.

On the one side a devilish traitor and eleven men so jealous of each other that they would not wash even their own heavenly Master's feet — on the other side the almighty Son of man, the eternal Son of God.

[4] All this is present to the mind of Jesus as he proceeds to do a slave's task for his disciples. Vividly John paints the scene in its details, interspersing aorists with historical present tenses. Jesus waits until the last moment, When the supper is to begin. He waits in vain. So "he rises from the supper," takes off his girdle and long flowing outer robe, takes the apron the host had provided and ties it around himself by means of the attached bands. Behold this δοῦλος or slave! Yet not one of the Twelve leaps up to stop him and to tie the apron about himself!

[5] **Thereupon he pours water into the basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the apron with which he was bound around.** A vessel filled with sufficient water, a basin, and a large apron had been provided by the owner of the house, and Jesus uses them for their intended purpose. Not a word is spoken. One pair of feet after another is washed by Jesus. It seems almost incredible that the disciples should have allowed this to happen. Alas, they did!

[6] **According he comes to Simon Peter. He says to him: "Lord, thou art going to wash my feet?"** Intolerable idea! Moreover, Peter had not walked into the city from Bethany, he had been here for some time with John to have the Passover ready when Jesus and the others came. The more intolerable the thought that *the Lord* should wash *his* feet.

[7] **Jesus answered and said to him** (doubling the verb marks the importance of the reply): **"What I on my part am doing, than on thine dost not know now, yet thou shalt realize hereafter."** This reply does not mean: "Just wait a little while, until I am through, then I will explain." The entire act of Jesus is lightly esteemed when the reply of Jesus is made to say no more than that.

What Peter does not now know but shall eventually realize is all that the humiliation of Jesus signifies for his salvation. That Jesus now stoops to wash his disciples' feet is only a part of this humiliation; in a few hours he would stoop to die the death of the accursed, hanging on wood. Μετὰ

ταῦτα, “hereafter,” refers to the days after the resurrection and the giving of the Holy Spirit. Ἐγώ and σύ are in strong contrast; οἶδα and γινώσκω are explained in John 8:54-55, Judica: what Jesus does does not now bear a relation to Peter as far as he knows, but in a few days Peter shall come to bear a mighty personal relation to it as far as realization goes. The aorist γνώση is ingressive. Here is the answer of Peter’s “Lord.” Here, too, is the reason why Peter’s feet should be washed, although they were not dusty from travel.

**[8] Peter says to him: “By no means shalt thou wash my feet for ever!”** Εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα, literally “for the eon,” is one of the Greek equivalents for our phrase “for ever.” Peter called Jesus “Lord,” but he now speaks as if he himself were the lord. The gentleness of Jesus serves only to make him rashly bold and presumptuous, and the promise of Jesus that he shall come to realize in due time Peter ignores entirely. He thinks that he knows what he is doing by this refusal ever to be washed by his Lord.

**Jesus answered him: “If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me.”** Too often this is misread as meaning: “If I do not wash thy feet, thou hast no part in me.” Yet “thy feet” is not in the reply. “If I wash thee not” is not the same as: “If thou wilt not now let me wash thy feet.” Jesus does not stress what Peter may or may not do, but what he, Jesus, does: he must wash us.

Some think of the feet-washing as “symbolical,” yet all they achieve is allegory: physical elements and actions are made illustrations of spiritual counterparts. Those who treat Baptism and the Lord’s Supper as “symbols” may thus make the feet-washing a third sacrament, — if symbolical rites deserve the name “sacrament.” Yet the simple fact is that here Jesus speaks figuratively: to wash Peter is to cleanse him. In 4:10 the figure is drinking; in 6:50 it is eating — the Water of Life and the Bread of Life are gifts of Jesus; so also other figures are used. The figure of washing is in place here where Jesus is actually washing the feet of the disciples.

Jesus, our high and holy Lord, must indeed stoop down, yea down, to us unclean sinners to wash us from all our sins. Otherwise we can have no part with him. To have part with someone (ἔχειν μέρος μετ’ ἐμοῦ) means to have a share in his great possession or in the great benefit he has achieved. The atonement for our sins, achieved by Jesus, must be applied to us to

wash and cleanse us from these our sins. This is done by justification. Some stress sanctification of life, but the aorist  $\nu\acute{\iota}\phi\omega$  points to one act, not to a process, and all Scripture makes justification the key to heaven.

What a tiny service that Jesus should wash the feet of his disciples! It cost only a little lowly labor. What a tremendous task to provide and to apply the washing away of our sins by the blood of Jesus! See what this costs. Can Peter reject the tiny cleansing as something he cannot possibly accept from the lowly Jesus, and yet accept the stupendous cleansing of his soul that required the vastly greater humiliation of his Lord?

[9] Now Peter goes to the opposite extreme, and we see that he still fails to understand. **Simon Peter says to him: “Lord, not only my feet, but also my hands and my head!”** All the exposed parts of his body. Poor Peter! Like a pendulum, once one extreme, then another. He still does not distinguish the washing of which Jesus speaks (spiritual) from the washing in which Jesus is now engaged (physical), the one of the heart, the other of the feet.

[10] He is set right. **Jesus says to him: “He who has been bathed has no need except to have his feet washed, but is clean altogether. And you are clean, but not all.”** The figure employed in v. 8: “unless I wash thee,” is now expanded and literal language is added. The difference between  $\nu\acute{\iota}\pi\tau\omega$ , “to wash,” and  $\lambda\omicron\upsilon\omega$ , “to bathe,” is only formal; but the passives are important:  $\acute{\omicron}$   $\lambda\epsilon\lambda\omicron\upsilon\mu\acute{\epsilon}\nu\omicron\varsigma$ , “the one having been bathed” (perfect tense: being in this condition now);  $\nu\acute{\iota}\phi\alpha\sigma\theta\alpha\iota$ , “to be washed” as to his feet, or “the feet to be washed.” The point in the voice of the verb forms is that no one bathes, washes, cleanses himself, but is cleansed by Jesus. The figurative language is oriental and applies to a person who wears sandals. The figure contemplates only a single day in this person’s life. He bathes his entire body in the early morning, hence needs no repetition of such a bath; all that he needs to keep clean is to have his feet laved after walking on dusty roads or streets.

The language is very transparent, the more so since Jesus is now busy with the customary literal washing of the feet. The complete spiritual cleansing is the justification received at the moment of faith. This needs no repetition. But one who is thus justified is compelled to live and to walk in this sinful world and thus daily sins more or less and needs the daily

pardon, — Luther: “daily and richly forgives all sins to me and all believers.” For this forgiveness we pray in the Lord’s prayer. This washing does not denote sanctification. It is a washing which removes sin and guilt; it has properly been called “continued justification.” Sanctification is the divine work of setting us apart unto God so that we avoid sin, keep free from sin.

In literal language and in direct personal application of what has just been stated in general terms, Jesus declares: “And you are clean, but not all.” Figuratively: “you have all been bathed and are clean,” which includes Peter; you need only to have your dusty feet washed, and Peter should understand this. Literally: the disciples have all been justified and need only daily forgiveness. Such is their blessed cleanness. Such should be ours. But Jesus is compelled to add: “not all.”

[11] This might mean several things hence the evangelist explains (γράφ): **“For he knew the one betraying him; on this account he said: ‘Not all are you clean.’”** The verb is used in the sense of the imperfect: Jesus knew all along. The present participle means “the one engaged in betraying him,” for Judas had concluded his bargain with the high priests, had received his money, and was now only waiting for the best opportunity to deliver Jesus into the hands of his enemies. This one man is not clean. He has lost his faith in Jesus and his justification. His sin is mortal. He does not repent, but is even now seeking to carry out his betrayal. This lack of repentance makes his sin mortal, deadly to his soul. Peter wept bitterly, and though his sin was terrible it was not mortal because of his repentance. Any sin is dangerous because it may become mortal, which it will if you fail to repent.

Jesus says all this for the benefit of the eleven. Note well that the whole act of washing their feet is herewith explained. Actions so often speak more impressively than words, here action and word speak together. Keep clean, keep clean! Do not lose your justification.

Tragically the evangelist repeats the word of Jesus, yet not only οὐχὶ πάντες, but sensibly adding καθαροί ἔστε. A sensible writer quotes so that his readers may quickly understand. As far as Judas is concerned, Jesus here strikes hard at his conscience. “You are not all clean” informs him that all his treachery is known to Jesus, and that Jesus is able to frustrate it with slight effort. Until Judas leaves the room (v. 30) Jesus repeats these blows at

the conscience of Judas. It was all in vain. Judas obeyed the devil (v. 2). You might say: What was the use of Jesus' making all these efforts when he knew they were all in vain? But Judas is no exception: Jesus still seeks to save those of whom he knows that they are determined to go to hell. On the last day no man shall be able to say that he is lost because Jesus did not strike his conscience and seek to rescue his soul.

[12] The ominous word: "Clean, but *not all*" (οὐχί, the strengthened form of οὐ) rings in the ears of Judas and of the eleven, and nothing more is said until the feet of all are washed. **When therefore he had washed their feet, and taken his garments, and reclined again, he said to them: "Do you realize what I have done to you? [13] You call me 'The Teacher,' and 'The Lord,' and you say well, for I am. [14] If I therefore washed your feet, I the Lord and the Teacher, you too ought to be washing each others' feet. [15] For an example have I given you, that even as I did do to you, you too keep doing."** The act is done, Jesus again dons his robe and his girdle and once more reclines on the couch, ready to eat the Passover. The Greek is satisfied with simple aorists. Ἀναπίπτω is used much like ἀνακλίνομαι: "he fell (dropped) back on the couch."

"Do you realize" etc., is no rhetorical question that intends to draw attention to what follows. That Jesus meant to rebuke their jealous pride is very plain and needs no statement on Jesus' part. There is far more to be realized here. The negative side, the rebuke, is minor; the positive side, the example is the thing to see. It is this that Jesus makes them realize (γινώσκω as already explained).

Many preachers imagine that the example of humble serving love is the real import of this entire text. They regard the replies of Jesus to Peter as merely incidental and make much of the way in which Peter acted. Thus they lose the heart of this text. The heart of it is the washing of justification which clears us of all our sins, needing only continuation in daily forgiveness. The justified believer is then also to show proper fruits, humble, serving love. But this always comes in the second place, and could not come at all save for the justifying faith.

[13] First, our Redeemer; next, our example. First, washed in his blood; next, walking in his steps. First clean, next active. Woe to him who is not clean! See how utterly impossible it is for him to be active in love! Yes, the

disciples gave Jesus the titles: “The Teacher — the Lord,” and this in the superlative sense, the Teacher and Lord who is God’s own Son. For doing this Jesus commends the disciples, — he is truly what they thus call him.

[14] Now see what follows: a powerful *argumentum a majori ad minus*. If he, their acknowledged Lord and Teacher, stooped humbly to a slave’s task and washed their feet, they certainly ought to wash each others’ feet. None of them stands as high as Jesus, none of them needs to stoop quite as far down; for all of them are on the same level with each other. The figurative language continues, but with clear transparency: to wash each other’s feet is to render the humblest service in true love. The force of the argument is greatly enhanced when we observe that the act of Jesus was wholly voluntary and without obligation on his part. The idea is not: as I ought, so ought you; as I met my obligation, so should you meet yours. Ours alone is the obligation toward each other.

[15] All that Jesus has done is to give us an example, a *fméfiewua*. As a good teacher he uses more than words, he illustrates in his own person that his disciples may see and never forget.

Here, then, is an example, and not a sacrament. Here is not even a symbolical rite. Again, what we do for each other is not a washing that cleanses our brethren. This washing Jesus alone does. “Example” is all that Jesus says; they who seek for more find it only by their own invention.

## Homiletical Aid

On Tuesday Jesus left the Temple, never to enter its courts again. On Wednesday Jesus remained secluded in Bethany. On Thursday he sent Peter and John to prepare the Pascal lamb and Supper, so designating the house that Judas, the traitor, could not know the place in advance. Peter and John bought the lamb, had it killed in the Temple in the afternoon by one of the priests, took it away, dressed and roasted it, and made all else ready for the Passover celebration. The room was a fine large one with a beautiful tiled floor, situated on the flat roof of the building, insuring perfect privacy for Jesus and the disciples. No one else was present. After sunset Jesus brought the other ten disciples.

On arriving someone should have untied the sandals and should have washed the dusty feet of the travelers, as was the custom in those days and those lands. This was the task usually assigned to the lowest slave or servant. Sometimes it was performed by the host, when a guest was to be honored in the highest manner. Here no servant or slave was present. All of the disciples were afraid of lowering themselves beneath one another, thus none stepped forward, although water, basin, and towel had been placed in readiness.

### **Behold, Jesus Washes His Disciples' Feet!**

#### I. A rebuke to their jealous pride.

1. Each wanted to be greater than the others. Each feared to lower himself and to exalt another.
2. Our sins of pride. Satan fell because of pride. Eve wanted to be too high and so fell. The pride of life in the world and among us. Yes, to preside and rule, to dictate to others, but not to do the dirty work, etc.
3. God's Son, our Teacher and Lord, be the highest of all, stoops to this lowest task. What a rebuke to the Twelve, to us! Confess as you come to his Holy Table to eat and to drink the body and the blood given for you in humility even far greater.

#### II. An illustration of the cleansing they still need.

1. Far more than rebuke. Only the feet, Jesus tells Peter. For the oriental bathed his whole body in the morning, and on entering a house from the street had only his feet washed. Thus by grace through faith Jesus had cleansed the disciples (justification), but in this sinful world sin still soiled them and they needed daily forgiveness. Like washing dusty feet.
2. The washing we still need points to the great washing we already have. Do not, like Judas, lose the cleansing of your soul. The Sacrament not for some Judas, not for Caiaphas, etc., or for unbelievers, but for repentant sinners who ever desire the Lord's cleansing.

### III. An example of humble service.

1. There is still more in this act of Jesus. All should have rushed to wash his dusty feet and the feet of the others, and none did. Behold the example Jesus gave them!
2. The lowest, humblest, hardest service should have the most volunteers. To help another in body or in soul should be our delight. With hearts ready to follow the lowly example of Jesus let us come to his Sacrament. In this humility lies blessedness and the Lord's commendation for us.

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Actions speak louder than words. This is true of the actions of Jesus when he washed his disciples' feet. Yet his words aid the strong language of his actions. It is almost incredible that God's own Son should lay aside his robe and his girdle, tie an apron-like towel around himself, pour water into a basin and wash the feet of the disciples, including a Judas Iscariot. But look at our text, — here is

### **Jesus Girded with a Towel.**

#### I. A sight to shame us.

Must the Godman thus rebuke our sinful and our silly pride — teach us the nobility of being truly humble — show us how to serve each other?

#### II. A sight to frighten us.

The hypocrisy of Judas who sat there and let Jesus wash his feet, so that Jesus had to say: "Not all are you clean." Woe to him who sees and hears all that Jesus does and hardens his conscience against the Savior's warnings. Who does not dread the wrath that shall reach him in due time.

#### III. A sight to bless us for ever.

True disciples are clean indeed, and all they need is the daily pardon for sins of weakness, ignorance, and thoughtlessness, and this Jesus bestows

upon them daily and richly. Read 1 Cor. 6:11. May nothing ever make us lose our state of grace!

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### **Jesus Washed the Disciples' Feet.**

When he did it

I. See what was in his heart.

He knew that his hour was come.

From God to God, his mission nearly finished.

He loved the disciples to the end.

He saw the heart of Judas.

He knew that all things were in his hands.

And yet he washed his disciples' feet!

After he did it

II. Look at the washed feet.

Only the feet needed washing, you are all clean.

The one exception. Yet Jesus washed Judas' feet; he did all that he could to clean and to save him.

What did the eleven think of themselves when they looked at their feet? Ashamed.

Their feet a sermon, — so wash each other's feet.

Aid in our preparing for Communion.

For this he washed the disciples' feet.

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**Jesus prepares His Disciples to receive Holy Communion.**

- I. He shows them all the Need of His Forgiveness. (“If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me.”)
  1. He wants them to stop comparing themselves with the others in the group, which always leads to the exaltation of self and excludes real repentance.
  2. He wants them to look at themselves as He sees them, in their sins of omission, the result of their pride and conceit.
- II. He bestows His Forgiveness only on those who can appropriate it. (“Ye are clean, but not all.”)
  1. He corrects the one who misunderstands and arouses in him the desire and request for forgiveness.
  2. He withholds from the impenitent and unbelieving one the promise and blessing of forgiveness.
- III. He exhorts the forgiven disciples to future conduct that will be pleasing to Him. (“I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you.”)
  1. He exemplifies Christian humility by becoming their servant and washing their feet.
  2. He gives them the principle of Christian love, that puts serving God and the brethren before self, in the practice of which there is avoidance of sin.

E. C. Fendt.

# **Good Friday. No Text**

## **The Redemptive Death on Golgotha**

Neither the ancient church nor the church of the Reformation selected a fixed text for Good Friday. In our hymnal two entire chapters, John 18 and 19, are listed, or the entire account of the so-called Passion History, but these are not texts to be preached on, they are lections for the lectern. For the sermon the preacher is left to choose his own text. It should be a selection from one of the four gospels and should present the Savior's Death in its Redemptive Power. I really have no right to say anything more.

# The Easter Cycle: The Savior's Triumph

## **Easter**

“He is risen!”

## **Easter Monday**

“Their eyes were opened and they knew him”

## **Quasimodogeniti**

“We have seen the Lord”

## **Misericordias Domini**

The Good Shepherd who laid down his life for the sheep

## **Jubilate**

The little while and the unending joy

# Easter. Mark 16:1-8

## “He Is Risen!”

The Easter cycle is like the Epiphany cycle, each begins with a burst of glory and the radiance of each shines through all of the following Sundays. The Easter cycle is the opposite of the Lenten cycle; the latter climbs slowly until it reaches its climax, the former begins at the very top. These variations make the Church Year highly attractive.

The Easter Festival is the greatest of all our Christian festivals. On Easter morn our Savior brought his great work to its triumphant consummation. Because of its greatness Easter extends beyond the Sunday and Monday set aside for its celebration; Quasimodogeniti is the octave of Easter and belongs to its celebration.

Easter Sunday must have a text which presents the great fact of the resurrection of Jesus. We must have a text containing a *history of the first rank*. This means an objective account of the resurrection. It means a sermon full of homiletical appropriation, and not one full of homiletical application. What is here briefly stated is vital for the preacher. To disregard it is the greatest homiletical failing. I treat the matter in *S.* 225 etc. To present the objective, incontrovertible, unchangeable historical fact of the Savior's resurrection is not only the supreme obligation of the preacher on this highest festival, but should be also his supreme joy.

The substance of every true Easter sermon based on a gospel text is simply this: “Our Lord is risen from the dead! Hallelujah! Believe it with all your heart! Amen!” Yet the Easter sermon is not the place to answer the denials of the Lord's resurrection, least of all to try *to prove* his resurrection in answer to skeptics. Our joy is too high to bother about skeptics. This much we may do: sketch what our life would be if Jesus had *not* risen from the tomb, as a foil for the glorious fact that he did rise.

**[1] And the Sabbath having passed, Mary the Magdalene, and Mary of James, and Salome bought spices, in order that having gone they might anoint him.**

This statement tells about the purchase of the spices. At the time of the burial on Friday toward evening all that the friends of Jesus desired to do to honor his body in death could not be done for lack of sufficient time. Save for Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea there would have been no linen wrappings for the body and no powdered aloes. Yet no ἄρώματα, liquid essences, were at hand with which to anoint the body and envelop it in the sweetest odors. But the women among the disciples were determined to make good this omission.

They had to wait until the Sabbath was passed, for all the bazaars were closed until sunset on Saturday and opened only for a few hours after the sun had set. Then the women made their purchase, and we may note that the *aromata* were quite expensive and that a quantity sufficient to anoint the entire body was purchased. Compare what Mary of Bethany had done (14:8). She anticipated that Jesus would die a violent death and therefore anointed the feet and the head of Jesus with costly essences previous to his death and his burial.

The evangelists mention only the important women. Matthew contents himself with naming only two, Mark names three, Luke mentions four and speaks of others. How many women there were we are not told. We hear only of women. Even when the women went out to the tomb, not a single man among the disciples went along. The men were still stunned, moreover they had scattered. When presently Mary Magdalene sought them she could find only two. It is the love in the hearts of the women that kept them together and moved them to render this last service and honor to the Lord's body. Let it ever be noted to their credit.

**[2] And very early on the first with reference to the Sabbath they come to the tomb, the sun having risen.** The Greek word for "Sabbath" may be used in the plural; it is like the Greek terms for some of the festivals. The Jews had no special names for the days of the week and thus designated them with reference to the Sabbath, thus ἡ μία (supply ἡμέρα) τῶν σαββάτων (genitive of relation): "the first of the Sabbath," i.e. the first

day with reference to the Sabbath, i.e. our Sunday, which, however, the Jews began at sunset of Saturday.

All the evangelists agree that it was early. Sometimes a contradiction between them is asserted. There is no disagreement of any kind, for one evangelist notes the moment when the women started from the city, while it was yet dark, and another, like Mark, the moment when they arrived at Joseph's garden, just as the sun had risen above the horizon. More important is the reason for this hurrying on the part of the women. Jesus had lain dead since Friday. Because of the climate of Palestine bodies start to decompose quickly, Wherefore also they are, if possible, buried on the day of death or promptly on the day after. The women knew that there was not even an hour to lose. If decomposition should have progressed a little too far, they knew that they could not anoint the body as they desired. So this great hurry at dawn of day. As regards the fact in the case of Jesus, no decomposition even began in his holy body (Acts 2:27; Ps. 16:10).

**[3] And they were saying to each other: "Who will roll for us the stone from the door of the tomb?" [4] And having looked up they behold that the stone has been rolled away; for it was very great.** Not until the women are on the way do they think about the stone that closes the doorway of the tomb. Would they have sufficient strength to roll it in its groove so far as to expose the entrance? If not, whom could they get to help them?

Do not think of a grave in the earth filled with earth. Jesus lay in a tomb or sepulchral chamber hewn out of a perpendicular rock cliff. Read the description of the "Garden Tomb," also called the "Gordon Tomb," Gordon having discovered it, in *The Interpretation of St. Mark's Gospel*, 460. The evidence is rather complete that this is the actual tomb in which the holy body rested. The entrance is of good height and requires a stone of corresponding size to close it. This ample entrance leads into a vestibule, and to the right of the vestibule is the 'chamber for the bodies, a chamber of ample size, with only three places for bodies, one beside each of the three walls, the middle space unutilized. This certainly was a rich man's tomb. Only one place is ready to receive a body, the other two places are not completely hewn out. The places for the bodies are cut down to the floor level, but a rock wall at the foot and at the outer side of each place is left intact, thus forming three coffin-like receptacles. The place for the body in

the finished receptacle along the inner cliff-wall is hewn out a little deeper than the floor so that the position of the head is clearly indicated.

More may be added by way of description, but this is enough to explain the stone. A channel or groove was cut out at the base of the cliff, extending from the entrance to the left of the cliff, at a slightly upward incline. Into this channel a great flat, circular stone was placed, flat against the cliff. This closed the entrance completely. Pilate told the Jews to attach a seal to the stone and the cliff wall when they posted a guard at the tomb. The upright flat stone was rolled in its groove to the left far enough to expose the entrance, and was blocked in this position until it was allowed to roll in place again and close the entrance. The women are worried about rolling the great stone from its entrance. They, of course, knew nothing about the action of the Jews who had secured a Roman guard from Pilate to post at the tomb and had also affixed a seal.

I am at pains to explain all this, for many entirely mistaken conceptions are current. Take as an example the translation by Moffatt, including his commentary based on his translation. These men offer “boulder” as a translation for λίθος and apparently have a misconception of the way in which the fine tomb of Joseph was really closed and opened. Αίθος never means “boulder,” πέτρος would be the word for that. Αίθος is the word for a cut or dressed stone. Our versions are correct in using the word “stone.” A round and rough boulder might block the entrance, it could not properly close it, nor could it be properly sealed. A man rich enough to have such a tomb cut into a solid rock cliff certainly had an appropriate arrangement for closing its entrance.

[4] The worry about the stone arose before the women came Within sight of the tomb. The Garden Tomb is situated in a kind of ravine or depression, the floor of which is parked with trees and shrubs. A path along the cliff above makes a sharp turn and leads down into this garden. Having come down this path the women could see the face of the perpendicular cliff and the place of the tomb. To their amazement “the stone was rolled away,” the tomb stood wide open.

Mark is very brief. The women saw more. The stone was not rolled in its groove or channel along the side of the cliff; the sight they beheld was much worse, the stone was rolled clear out of its channel and lay flat on the

ground, as if violently hurled away from the entrance to the tomb. An angel had done this and had seated himself upon the stone (Matt. 28:2), apparently waiting for the arrival of the women, and just before they came he entered and seated himself in the tomb. Note John 20:1: “the stone taken away from the sepulchre.” At that moment also the earthquake had occurred. The guard of soldiers was stunned and fled and was not seen by the women. There lay the stone as if it were never to be used again to close the tomb. There gaped the entrance to the tomb, proclaiming in its mute way the resurrection of Jesus.

Our artists gravely mislead us, and the preacher should correct the impression they make. They depict the glorified and triumphant Savior leaving the tomb by way of its entrance, as if the stone was rolled away to permit him to come forth. Jesus had left the tomb before the stone was rolled away. He had passed out of it through the rock walls in a supernatural way. Then, when the tomb was empty, and to show to all the world that it was empty, the angel came and opened it by hurling the great stone away. Behold, behold the empty tomb!

Seeing the tomb open and the stone on the ground, a feeling of dismay seized the women, — the tomb must have been rifled. This terrible indignity the wicked Jews had inflicted on Jesus. With this thought lending her speed, Mary Magdalene fled back to the city to secure the help of some of the men and started Peter and John on their way to the tomb.

None of the evangelists describes the resurrection itself; 1 Pet. 3:18, however, says this much: *θανατωθεὶς μὲν σαρχί, ζωοποιηθεὶς δὲ πνεύματι*, which is correctly translated: put to death by means of flesh (the body of Jesus), and made alive by means of spirit (his spirit returned from heaven and Paradise to his body). This we call the *vivificatio*, the resurrection in the strictest sense. Yet when we speak of his resurrection we commonly include both his leaving the tomb and his appearance in a glorified state to his disciples, the chosen witnesses.

Here note *Concordia Triglotta*, 1004, 100: “The incomprehensible, spiritual mode, according to which he neither occupies nor vacates space, but penetrates all creatures wherever he pleases; as, to make an imperfect comparison, my sight penetrates and is in air, light, or water, and does not occupy or vacate space; as a sound or tone penetrates and is in air or water

or board or wall, and also does not occupy or vacate space; likewise, as light and heat penetrate and are in air, water, glass, crystal, and the like; and much more of the like. This mode he used when he rose from the closed sepulcher, and passed through the closed door, and in the bread and wine in the Holy Supper.”

This is now a different tomb, and requires a different watchman, not keepers of the dead, but an inhabitant of the realms of life and light. The servant (angel) appears first, presently the Master will be seen. The new era has begun, heaven and earth are now joined, for Christ, our Savior, has risen. Man is reconciled to God. The Father has accepted the sacrifice of the Son. This is the supreme Easter truth.

**[5] And having gone into the tomb they saw a young man sitting at the right, having had thrown around him a white robe. And they were dumbfounded.** Mary Magdalene has departed for the city. The rest of the women go to the tomb to see what has happened and they feared the worst. They entered the tomb. From Luke 24:3-4 we gather that when they entered no angels were Visible. The women were given time to examine the place and to see that the body indeed was gone.

Here again beware of a misconception. The coffin-like place where on Friday the body had been laid was not empty. Jesus had left mute and eloquent witnesses of his resurrection: the linen wrappings were left in their place just as they had been wound around the body and the limbs, not one fold disturbed, only now the folds were collapsed, flat, the body having gone out of them. Also the linen cloth that had been placed over the face was neatly folded up and placed on the side. John 20:6-7. It was impossible for any one to rob the body of Jesus and to leave the linen wrappings perfectly undisturbed. Robbers would have carried body and linen away. It was humanly impossible to remove the body and to leave those wrappings undisturbed. Mutely and yet loudly these linen wrappings declared the resurrection.

When this fact had impressed the women the two angels became visible in the tomb. Mark mentions only the one because he was the spokesman. Their white garments are brilliant, — white the symbol of holiness, of light, and life; *στολή* is *Talar*, *Prachtgewand*, state-robe. In the place intended for death and decay these messengers of heaven appear.

The angels are without sex, bodiless spirits. When God has them appear to human beings, they always appear as men and as young men, this form indicating strength and virile power. No lady or baby angels are known to Scripture, let our artists say what they please. The fact that the angel who spoke sat on the right (ἐν τοῖς δεξιούσις, an idiomatic plural) has no symbolical significance whatever. The vestibule of the tomb was at the left of the chamber that held the bodies. The angels ἐπέστησαν αὐταῖς, were suddenly present for them (Luke), yet not standing (our versions), but “sitting” (Mark; see also John 20:12). In the Gordon Tomb the rock wall at the foot end of the place finished for a body is thick and one may conveniently sit on it; this is also true with regard to the rock wall between the head of this place, dividing it from the foot end of the second (unfinished) place for a body. So an angel could literally sit at the feet and another at the head. I believe no similar rock-hewn tomb has ever been found.

Two angels mean two witnesses to attest the fact of the resurrection. The linen wrappings and the sweat-cloth form a third. The women were dumbfounded, ἐξεθαμβήθησαν, filled with amazement. What became of the *aromata*, the precious ointments? We read not a word about them, they are utterly forgotten.

**[6] But he says to them: “Stop being dumbfounded! You are seeking Jesus, the Nazarene, the one that has been crucified. He arose. He is not here. See the place where they did lay him! But be going, say to his disciples and to Peter: ‘He is going before you into Galilee.’ There you shall see him, as he said to you.”**

The present imperative in a negative command often means to stop an action that has begun. Thus it is here: “Stop being dumbfounded!” This order from the angel’s lips is full of God’s infinite grace. The women have a living, not a dead Savior and Lord. Instead of amazement and fear the blessedness of the great fact should come home to their hearts. The angel states that the women have come to seek the dead body of Jesus, dead because he is ὁ ἐσταυρωμένος, the one who has been crucified (an apposition). The perfect tense contains a present connotation: once crucified Jesus now and ever remains the crucified one. “The Nazarene” is added as an apposition in order to leave no doubt as to Jesus’ identity; he was commonly named from his place of long residence.

“He arose.” In Greek the one word to express this thought is ἠγέρθη, an aorist to indicate the historical fact. The Greek is content to use the aorist to designate an act that has just transpired; the English would generally employ the perfect. Here is the whole Easter miracle in one word: “He arose.” This is the way with the holy writers, — their astounding brevity in stating the greatest divine facts is striking. Only inspired pens write thus. The Greek verb is passive in form, yet especially in the Koine many passive forms are active in sense. A strange uncertainty attaches to these passive forms in Greek. Here we are quite safe in translating: “he arose” instead of “he was raised.” Yet the Scriptures freely say both, for both are true. The same is true with regard to the ascension: Jesus ascended and Jesus was taken up. The principle prevails with regard to all the divine *opera ad extra*, they are all *indivisa aut communa*, i.e. predicated equally of the different persons.

At once the angel supplies the evidence: “He is not here; see, the place where they did lay him!” Yes, the tomb is empty, and you may call this negative evidence. Skeptics never say any more, — you know why. But even this negative fact, the empty tomb, confounds all skepticism, for no skeptic has been able to account even for that emptiness, i.e. to explain even to his own satisfaction what became of the dead body of Jesus. Ridiculous, utterly incredible explanations are offered, — a confession that the angel’s words are true.

But the main fact is the *positive evidence*, which all skeptics, as far as I know, ever ignore. The angel points the women to the place where on Friday the friends of Jesus had laid his body. That place was not empty. There lay the linen wrappings as I have already described. No human skill or ingenuity could have extracted the dead body of Jesus from those perfectly undisturbed folds, or could have unwound the linen wrappings from the body and then rewound them as they were before without the body. Forget not the hundred weight of powdered aloes sprinkled in all the folds of the linen. To these wrappings the angel pointed the women. He made all of them look with care. Here was the tremendous and incontrovertible positive evidence of the Lord’s resurrection. The vivified body, glorified in the instant of its vivification, had in a divine way passed through the linen and through the rock walls of the tomb. He had risen indeed!

[7] With Jesus dead, — nothing is to be done but to finish the burial. With Jesus risen and alive, — everything is to be done. The women are to bear a message to the disciples: “He is going before you into Galilee.” Note this appointment for Galilee; it is repeatedly made: Matt. 26:32; 28:7 and 10. To be sure, right here in Jerusalem Jesus appeared to the women as well as to the disciples. The appointment for Galilee is special in every respect. There Jesus met all his followers, the entire Church of that time, over five hundred believers (1 Cor. 15:6), and there he gave them the Great Commission (Matt. 28:16-20).

Mark has received the information from Peter personally when he records that the angel said: “to his disciples *and to Peter.*” It is not a distinction for Peter that his name is thus added; it is quite the opposite. Peter had denied his Lord, he had forfeited his apostleship, he had deserved to be disowned and cast out. But the Lord pardons him, and the fact that his name is thus added conveys the pardon to him. “And Peter” forms a good text for a confessional address. There is nothing here to elevate Peter as being the first pope. Peter’s absolution was followed by his formal reinstatement into the apostolic office, which also occurred in Galilee (John 21:15- 17).

**[8] And having gone out they fled from the tomb, for trembling and amazement held them, and they said nothing to any one, for they were afraid.** Emotions overwhelmed the hearts of the women: trembling, amazement (ἔκστασις), fear. Matthew adds “great joy,” which is included in Mark’s *ekstasis*. It is easier to imagine the state of the women than to describe it in cold ink.

The facts have been misconceived, especially Mark’s statement, that the women said nothing to any one, conceiving it as a flat contradiction to Matt. 28:8 -and to Luke 24:9 and 22. Dismiss the idea that the eleven were gathered together somewhere in the city. Soon after the women fled from the tomb they met Jesus himself, and he repeated the commission given them by the angel. When Mary Magdalene had hurried back she found only Peter and John together. When the women returned to the city even Peter and John were gone, and the nine others had to be hunted. There was considerable delay in bringing the eleven together, and during this delay the lips of the women were sealed for fear both of the angel and of Jesus, whose orders they felt they dared not violate. So they told no one even a

word until they could tell the eleven disciples as they had been ordered to do.

## Homiletical Aid

**“Hallelujah! lo, he wakes!  
Lives o’er death and hell victorious.  
Earth in awe and trembling quakes,  
As the hero rises glorious, —  
He who died on Golgotha,  
Jesus lives, hallelujah!”**

This Easter day the great fact of our Lord and Savior’s resurrection from the dead must make its deepest impression upon our hearts; for this inexpressibly glorious fact is the eternal foundation of our salvation. The Savior’s resurrection crowns his death on Golgotha, seals our deliverance from sin, death, and hell. We live because he lives, — with a deathless, imperishable life we live.

The Easter fact is for our Easter faith. The angel puts it into one word: “He arose!” We add ’our jubilant hallelujah:

**“He Arose!” Hallelujah, Hallelujah!**

The resurrection fact exhibits itself in

- I. The spices, needed no longer.
  1. How the women bought and prepared the costly ointment, to complete what could not be done on Friday; how anxious they were lest decay had advanced in the dead body. What if the spices had been needed? A dead Jesus, honor for a dead body, tears and quivering lips beside a corpse, nothing but fond memories left: “We trusted” — but it was in vain, Luke 24:21.
  2. “He arose,” — what became of those spices? They are not even mentioned again. Abandoned, forgotten, utterly useless. The spices are not needed. That dead body lives. It is glorified. Jesus

lives to give us life and immortality. He brings us the spoils of victory. No sad, heart-broken memories, but the joy of embracing in our hearts 3 risen, living Savior and all the gifts he has obtained for us.

The resurrection fact exhibits itself in

II. The stone, rolled from the door.

1. Explain the tomb. What if the stone had been in place? Then death, the result of sin, the victor; then life for ever vanquished. Then write over every tomb and grave: "All hope abandoned here!"
2. "He arose" — look where the stone is. See who hurled it from the entrance. The stone is rolled away. Because the tomb was empty, because Jesus had passed out of it, because all the world is to see its emptiness. "Behold the place where they laid him," all the linen undisturbed, etc. The risen Savior removes sin and death and gives us imperishable life.

The resurrection fact is exhibited in

III. The angels, sitting in the tomb.

1. What is a tomb for? Dead bodies, mold, decomposition, decay. Closed tight, dark, dreadful. What if Jesus' tomb had been like all the tombs and graves in the world? Develop this negative side of the contrast.
2. "He arose," — and thus he sent his angels into his empty tomb. Think of it: angels sitting in this tomb! The inhabitants of heaven, the beings of life and light. These deathless ones in brilliant white festive robes — sitting here in the place meant for darkness and death. From heaven their path led down to this tomb and leads back again. By the power of the risen Savior angels shall bear our souls into Abraham's bosom and our bodies shall arise and be glorified.

The resurrection fact is exhibited and made personal by

- IV. The angelic message, to be delivered to the disciples and to Peter.
1. Again the contrast. What if there had been no message? A silent tomb. Then to this day our hearts too like silent tombs. No word for our hearts. Develop the negative side.
  2. “He arose,” — and all is vocal now. The hallelujahs ring out. Peter who denied him is pardoned. Our joy knows no bounds. The whole Church now is busy with the greatest of tasks assigned by the risen Lord “in Galilee” (Matt. 28:19-20).

“He lives!” This is our Easter benediction.

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The sketch by J. A. Dell is along the same line of strong contrast:

**“The Stone Was Rolled Away.”**

I. What if it had not been?

Then use for the spices, for then a dead body.

Then no vision of shining angels.

Then no trembling amazement, but as from Abel’s death onward slow steps and heavy hearts moving away.

Then no wondrous message, only silent sorrow. If it had not been rolled away, then no New Testament, no tide of victory from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth, no Christian Church, Christian ideals, Christian civilization, no martyrs, no saints, no missionaries, no Christian faith and life, no Christian homes, no Christian death-beds. The whole world would be a sepulcher, sealed by the stone in impenetrable gloom.

II. What if it has been?

A new relation of man to God.

A new relation of man to the universe.

A new relation of man to man.

The second part may be developed in a different way. The fact that the stone has been rolled away means that death is conquered since sin, the power of death, is atoned for — a living Savior who gives us life — the Gospel for our faith — angels and heaven.

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The tomb intended for the dead — the shining angels of heaven. Easter — the Savior's resurrection.

### **The Voice of the Easter-Angel.**

I. "He arose."

Not like others who were raised up. Never did one arise like this: He laid down his life, and he took it up again (John 10:18). He gave himself to be crucified, bore the sin and the curse in our stead, and then arose to attest that the sin and the curse were borne away. Death, the curse of sin, was crushed and conquered.

This is what the resurrection of Jesus means, the voice of the Easter-angel.

II. "Behold the place where they laid him."

Behold it well! The place is not only empty. Here is a miracle: the linen wrappings all in place, and the body gone from them. The tomb tightly closed and sealed, and Jesus passed out of it. Not only did his human spirit return from heaven and vivify his body, his human spirit and his body were glorified. Not as once we shall be glorified, but far more, — his human nature now uses all the divine attributes.

This is the resurrection of Jesus, of this the voice of the Easter-angel speaks.

III. "Tell his disciples and Peter."

Jesus crucified and risen,— this is the Gospel, this is for our faith, this brings salvation, even for Peter who denied his Lord, yea for any and all sinners.

The resurrection of Jesus means no less. Blessed voice of the Easter-angel!

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The angel: “Ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified — he is not here.” No death like this death, no resurrection like this resurrection. All this is reflected in

### **The Incomparable Tomb in Joseph’s Garden.**

In all the world

I. None with a body like this one.

Incorruptible, not decomposing. The body of God’s own Son. The body crucified for our redemption.

II. None with grave clothes left as they were in this one.

Undisturbed, flat, the body gone, passed miraculously out of the clothes and out of the locked tomb. Glorified, possessed of divine attributes, opening the way to heaven for us all.

III. None forced open like this one.

Its tenant gone, its chamber empty. To reveal that emptiness the angel rolled the rock from the entrance. Death’s power broken, shattered by its victim Jesus, and deliverance from death ours.

IV. None with visitors like this one.

Angels, messengers of life, light, peace, heaven. Women, needing the angel’s message, the message that brings these gifts to us all.

V. None that has sent hallelujahs into all the world like this one.

Organs peal, bells chime, choirs intone, flowers decorate, churches are filled, congregations sing, preachers proclaim, sorrow ceases, comfort supports, faith grows strong, hope shines radiant, and hearts thrill with joy — all because of this one incomparable, eternally blessed tomb.

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## **Christ Is Risen from the Dead**

### **I. Hear the astonishing information!**

1. Go in spirit with the women, who are sorrowing over the death of their beloved Master, now taking the first opportunity after the Sabbath rest to lay His corpse away permanently in the tomb, wondering how they might be able to get into the sealed tomb.
2. Experience with those women their surprise when they find the stone door rolled aside, no person about who can explain the unexpected devastation of the tomb.
3. Listen to the voice of a messenger from heaven who claims the corpse of Jesus is not in the tomb any longer, that Jesus is again alive and waiting to greet His friends.

### **II. Believe the glorious testimony!**

1. Look at the empty tomb, with Pilate's soldier guard missing, watched over by an angel to insure examination of the tomb just as Jesus left it.
2. Calm your fears of death and destruction because Jesus is announced as the Conqueror of the grave. There is life after death.
3. Rejoice in God's manifestation of His glory and power in bringing back to life the One who was despised and rejected of men. His enemies have not stolen the body — Jesus lives to confound them.
4. Look forward to the faithful fulfillment of all His promises because He lives to execute them.

E. C. Fendt.

# Easter Monday. Luke 24:13-35

## “Their Eyes were Opened and they knew Him”

This beautiful text for Easter Monday may also be used for the evening of Easter Sunday. The exegesis by the author is found in *The Interpretation of St. Luke's Gospel*.

The great Easter fact is here presented anew. Jesus himself appears to two of his followers, expounds to them the Scriptures regarding his resurrection, is recognized by them, and all this is reported by them to the eleven in Jerusalem. Jesus thus sends them two more witnesses. Their testimony stands to this day. The distinctive features of this narrative are, besides the fact of the resurrection, the disbelief of the two travelers, the Scripture exposition concerning his resurrection made by Jesus himself, the holding of the eyes of the travelers until Jesus blessed the food. Mark 16:12-13 was written before Luke composed his gospel and briefly summarizes what Luke reports in full.

## Homiletical Aid

The great truth that Christ is risen must enter our hearts and change our lives. The experience of the two disciples who went to Emmaus on the evening of Easter Sunday must become ours in its essential features. We too must have

### Easter-Hearts.

#### I. Mournful hearts.

The news of the resurrection of Jesus seemed incredible. These two men not scoffers, not hostile, but it seemed so impossible that he who

was crucified should be alive and glorified.

Even for the best of hearts, even for the lovers of Jesus there is nothing but sadness, mournfulness, and no Easter-heart, if Jesus remained dead.

II. Hearts that burn within.

Jesus turns the light of the Old Testament Scriptures on his suffering, death, and resurrection. There could be no true Savior without these. All the plans of God from Gen. 3:15 onward (see especially Is. 53) climax in a dying and a glorified Savior, dying for our iniquities, risen and glorified for our justification.

How the Scriptures made the hearts of the two burn within! There can be no Easter-heart without this Gospel fire. It must burn also within you.

III. Hearts that swell with undying joy.

Our physical eyes do not see the risen, all-glorious Lord. Our eyes are holden. But we believe the witnesses, the divine testimony, and this faith is the life-beat in the Easter-heart.

To have such a heart is to have a new life, full of ceaseless joy, strength, light, a hope that never makes ashamed.

May Christ give you the true Easter-heart!

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Hard-headed men, not a bit credulous. The strong testimony of the women did not convince them.

Do not scold them for their reluctance to believe. The resurrection of Jesus with all that pertains to it seems so incredible to the narrow and puerile reasonings of the ordinary human mind. Their reluctance is a good thing for us, because great as it was it was perfectly overcome when they actually saw Jesus alive and glorified.

With all the Church we believe, confess, and teach (Apostles' Creed):

**“The Third Day He Rose Again from the Dead.”**

I. So all the Scripture foretold.

Only a Savior suffering and then glorified could save us.

II. So Jesus himself declared.

Before he died, here after his resurrection, again in v. 44-48.

III. So it occurred in fact.

It had to occur. All the witnesses are unanimous in their testimony that it did occur. Hear the two in our text, hear also the eleven in our text, especially Peter (v. 34), in fact, the whole array of chosen, select witnesses (1 Cor. 15:3-8).

Live and die in the power of this faith and this confession!

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### **When Jesus Blessed and Broke the Bread in Emmaus.**

I. Then they knew him, the two disciples.

II. Then they saw the Scriptures fulfilled.

III. Then their hearts throbbed with joy.

IV. Then they testified.

V. And ever since the whole Church believes and lives in the power of Jesus' resurrection.

# Quasimodogeniti. John 20:19-31

## **“We Have Seen the Lord”**

Quasimodogeniti forms the octave of Easter and continues the celebration as a part of the great festival. The Easter lilies are still in place.

It is the evening of Easter Sunday. Jesus had appeared to Mary Magdalene, to the women on the way back from the tomb, to Peter, and to the two disciples at Emmaus. While these latter two are still speaking (Luke 24:36) Jesus appeared to the apostles, but Thomas was absent. Our text has two focal points: Thomas and his doubt — the Church and the remission of sins. Either point may be made supreme in the sermon, leaving the other subordinate; or both may be treated with equal consideration.

**[19] It therefore being evening, on that day, the first one of the week, and the doors having been locked, where the disciples were, on account of the fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in their midst and said to them: “Peace to you!”**

It was late in the evening (Luke), “on that day” so notable, “the first with regard to the Sabbath” (see Mark 16:2, Easter), thus the day of the resurrection (v. 1), as Jesus also had foretold. John writes for Gentile readers living near the end of the century and thus does not begin the new day at sunset in the Jewish fashion.

The disciples had locked the doors, being afraid that after having killed Jesus the Jewish authorities might seek to arrest also his immediate followers. I take it that both the door leading from the street into the courtyard and the door admitting into the room of the house were locked. This statement, however, has special reference to Jesus, — the locked doors were no hindrance to him. Suddenly Jesus “came and stood in their midst.”

Really it is not proper to imagine any motion or to say that he passed through the locked doors or through the walls. He took no steps from the door or the wall to get to the midst of the disciples. We indeed speak of his passing through the rock of his tomb and here through the doors or the wall, but that is our human way of speech. In his glorified and exalted state Jesus is above time and space. His human nature uses the divine attribute of omnipresence. Imagine no motion at all. Where Jesus willed to be there he was. To the finite mind this is altogether incomprehensible; it is wisdom not to think that we can comprehend.

The disciples believed that Jesus had risen (Luke 24:33), Peter had already seen him, yet when Jesus thus suddenly appeared they were afraid (Luke 24:36 etc.) and Jesus had to remove those fears. Therefore he greets them: "Peace to you!" There is no reason to fear and to shrink away. This is far more than the greeting current among orientals. As the person, so the greeting. Compare 14:27. This is peace in the objective sense, the condition of peace between the disciples and God. This condition is the risen Savior's gift to the disciples. He who has this condition and this gift should derive from it the feeling and the enjoyment of peace, all being well between God and him. The condition abides, the feeling may fluctuate, but if the feeling ebbs it will return again. It is the continuance of the condition that is essential.

**[20] And having said this he showed his hands and his side to them. The disciples therefore were glad, because they saw the Lord.** Luke adds that he also showed the feet, but omits mention of the side. Jesus showed the disciples his five wounds, for one thing to identify himself as being indeed the crucified Jesus (Luke), and at the same time to exhibit the seals of the peace he was bestowing upon the disciples. By his five holy wounds, i.e. by his sacrificial death on the cross he bought our peace. When conscience accuses us, when we face God's just judgment, let us take refuge in these wounds; in them is peace for us. Remember all the disciples had forsaken Jesus and had fled. Jesus here pronounces their absolution and shows its seal.

Because the disciples thus saw the Lord their fear disappeared and they were glad. They had and we have the highest cause for joy. They were glad because they saw him alive again. Only gradually, as Jesus appeared to them again and again, the full significance of his resurrection was

understood by them. They then went forth and preached the power of the crucified Lord's resurrection to all the world. So their gladness has descended to us.

**[21] Jesus therefore said to them again: "Peace to you! As the Father has commissioned me, I too am sending you."** Once more Jesus bestows peace, but, as the following words show, not merely to fortify the hearts of the disciples and their own consciences, but because they are to be the bearers of "the Gospel of peace" (Eph. 6:15), "preaching peace by Jesus Christ" (Acts 10:36) to all the world. They who are commissioned to bring peace must themselves have peace.

From Luke's account we see that more persons than the ten apostles were present. This fact is important. The commission bestowed by Jesus is bestowed for the entire Church and not only for the apostles and the ministers. In order that the Church may properly carry out this commission the Lord gave to the Church the holy offices and the men to fill them (Eph. 4:11). The apostles the Lord himself appointed, the ministers the Church is to appoint. How the believers as such preached the Gospel far and wide we are shown in Acts 8:4. The commission to the Church is the continuation of the Father's commission to Jesus. The commission of Jesus was to redeem the world, that of the Church is to evangelize the world. The one naturally leads to the other.

As the Father, so Jesus. They are on an equality. Jesus uses different verbs: "As the Father has commissioned me, I too am sending you." The difference is due to exactness. In the verb "send" the idea is. to travel into all the world (Acts 1:8); the personal mission of Jesus confined him to the Jewish land. Yet Jesus uses *πέμπω*, "send," also with reference to himself and often speaks of the Father as "my Sender," thus marking no essential difference in meaning between the verbs.

**[22] And having said this he breathed on them and says to them: "Receive the Holy Spirit! If of any you dismiss the sins, they are dismissed; if of any you hold the sins, they have been held."** He who sends enables those whom he sends, and the enabling is by means of the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Both the Hebrew term *ruach* and the Greek *pneuma* signify "breath," as does also the Latin word "spirit." Thus we see why Jesus breathed on the

disciples when bestowing the Holy Spirit. The act is more than symbolical, for from Jesus himself the Spirit came to the disciples as a heavenly gift. With the breath goes the word: “Receive” etc. Let us understand that this was not the first bestowal of the Spirit upon all these disciples. At the moment of faith and in their Baptism they received the Holy Spirit. In a wonderful way the disciples would receive him at Pentecost. We must not misinterpret John 3:34 and refer “measures” to the Holy Spirit, — the Third Person of the Godhead cannot be divided. Ever the same Spirit is received, but his gifts to us are manifold, and when receiving them we receive anew the Holy Spirit, whom we already have received. Thus here all these disciples now receive the Spirit for the great mission on which the Lord sends them.

[23] “I send you” is the mission of the Church. “Receive the Holy Spirit” is the gift of the power for the mission. “Dismiss — hold” the sins is the supreme exercise of the power in carrying out this mission. Bringing peace and preaching the Gospel come to a climax in the act of dismissing men’s sins or of holding men’s sins. The entire Gospel is an absolution for all sinners whom this Gospel brings to faith, and a condemnation for those who refuse faith, Mark 16:16. Dismissing and retaining sins is the office of the keys, Matt. 16:19; 18:17-20. It is true, God alone forgives sins (Mark 2:7). But Jesus makes the Church his authorized agent. This delegated authority and power is real in every way, so that the Church truly dismisses and holds sins, and does not merely tell people that Jesus does this.

The verbs are expressive: ἀφίημι, “to send away,” “to dismiss,” and κρατέω, “to hold.” The removal extends as far as the east is from the west, Ps. 103:12. Where does the east begin and the west end? As far as the depth of the sea, Mic. 7:19. Entirely out of God’s memory, Is. 43:25. Happy is the man whose sins are thus removed. That a minister, a church, and a church member can remit the sins only of the penitent sinner is not brought out here; but it is the teaching of all Scripture. Jesus puts his own stamp on this dismissal of sins: “they are dismissed,” there is no question about it.

Also the other fact: “they have been held,” the perfect tense meaning: held by Jesus even from the time of their commission, the disciples joining Jesus in this holding for all time to come. The verb means “to hold” with their guilt against the impenitent sinner. Luther well says (Catechism): “This is as valid and certain, also in heaven, as if Christ, our dear Lord, had

dealt with us himself.” It is Luther who has freed the Church from the papal and priestly arrogance which usurped this power for pope, bishop, and priest alone and denied it to the laity. Not that the ministry and its call are abolished, — they remain and have the public functions allotted to them, leaving to the laity the private functions.

**[24] But Thomas, one of the Twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came.** The magnet that had brought the scattered disciples together again on Easter Sunday evening, faith in the resurrection of Jesus, did not grip Thomas who refused to believe. As “one of the Twelve” he should have been in his place. He remained away to his own grief and hurt. Writing toward the end of the first century John adds also his Greek name: “called Didymus” among those who spoke Greek.

**[25] The other disciples therefore were saying to him: “We have seen the Lord.” But he said to them: “Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and thrust my finger into the place of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I shall in no wise believe.”** All the disciples, not merely the ten, one after another testified to Thomas that they had seen the Lord. John abbreviates, for this seeing includes Luke 24:30-31 and 35, the locked doors, his hands and his side, “handle me and see,” Luke 24:39; eating fish and honeycomb. Some had held his feet in worship, Matt. 28:9; Mary Magdalene had clung to him, John 20:17. Here was unanimous, overwhelming testimony by people all of Whom Thomas knew personally as reliable and altogether truthful.

Thomas rejects their unanimous testimony.

How could he do so? This question cannot be answered, for it demands a reasonable explanation for an utterly unreasonable act. The unbelief, or call it doubt, of Thomas is a sample of all unbelief: 1) wholly unreasonable; 2) willfully stubborn (“I shall in no wise believe”); 3) utterly haughty in its demands; 4) wholly arbitrary, — nothing and nobody counts except what unbelief is pleased to accept; and in addition shockingly coarse, — Thomas must place his fingers into the holes made by the nails, and his hand into the gash made by the spear. Unbelief condemns all believers, yea, all the chosen Witnesses of the Lord. All these features make unbelief so damnable, and this should be preached in the strongest manner. Where the evidence is so strong, it is no effort to believe, for the evidence produces

faith; not to believe requires a deliberate, willful, unreasonable effort that condemns itself.

While all the other disciples were filled with the joy of faith, Thomas remained in the unhappy, gloomy night of his unbelief.

[26] Then came the next Sunday. **And after eight days his disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Comes Jesus, the doors having been locked, and stood in their midst, and said: "Peace to you!"** The scene and the situation form an exact duplicate to those of the preceding Sunday: inside the same house, at evening, doors locked in the same way, Jesus comes again as he came, his greeting too is the same.

But now Thomas is present. Why he is present this time is not stated. The way in which Jesus treats him shows that his unbelief had not abated, as some

believe. Why Jesus waited eight days is his concern, not ours. More important is the question as to why Jesus came to remove the unbelief of Thomas. Let no unbeliever suppose that Jesus is under obligation to make special efforts to overcome his unbelief, — to draw such a conclusion from the case of Thomas is a grave mistake. Jesus saved Thomas, but all his efforts — and they were strong — did not save Judas. Thomas was not compelled to believe; there is no *gratia irresistibilis*. It is the Lord's pure, unmerited grace that seeks the lost again and again until seeking is all in vain, that here sought Thomas. This grace was concerned also with us: Thomas, like the rest, should personally see the risen, glorified, and exalted Lord. In addition to the testimony of the others he should have also this evidence directly from Jesus before Jesus was through with his unbelief. This evidence Jesus gave to Thomas for our sakes, so that no one is now able to point to "one of the Twelve" and to say that one at least did not believe the full evidence of Jesus' resurrection.

[27] The appearance on this Sunday evening is chiefly on account of Thomas, although it mightily strengthened the faith also of all the rest. **Thereupon he says to Thomas: "Bring thy finger here, and see my hands; and bring thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not unbelieving, but believing!"** The three statements correspond to the three made by Thomas (v. 25). Jesus speaks as if he had heard Thomas speak.

He orders Thomas to do exactly what Thomas had demanded, place his finger into the holes made by the nails in the hands of Jesus, and insert his hand into the gash made by the spear in Jesus' side. The two present imperatives φέρε denote the preliminary actions, the main actions are expressed by two aorist imperatives. These peremptory aorists fit the entire situation. Not for one moment can we agree that Thomas did not do as ordered, but "just sank down at Jesus' feet. He had to do as ordered. He had demanded this evidence, and now he had to receive it as demanded. So long he had held out in his blind unbelief; in the days to come the unbelieving thought should never be able to arise in his mind that after all he had not put his finger and his hand into those wounds. Moreover, Jesus and Thomas were in the presence of all the other disciples, and Jesus was piling up for them all the "many infallible proofs" (really "demonstrative evidence") of his resurrection, Acts 1:3.

The deduction would again be wrong that Jesus must furnish such proofs as unbelief may demand, and that if he does not, unbelief is justified. When the Jews demanded a sign from heaven, Jesus did not supply the sign demanded. When the Sanhedrists demanded that he come down from the cross and agreed that then they would believe, Jesus did not come down. That Jesus here meets the demands of Thomas in a way so direct is due to his great condescension. It is due also to all the disciples present and finally due to all of us. Even the last and least ground for unbelief on the part of any one is here removed.

Γίνου is a present imperative. If the negative command stood by itself, we might translate: "StOp being unbelieving!" but the positive addition prevents this rendering. Also we cannot translate: "become not unbelieving," etc., for Thomas had already "become unbelieving," and what is now demanded of him is not a process or gradual development, but a course of action: ever and ever Thomas is to be not unbelieving, but believing. Adding the positive to the negative makes the demand strong.

**[28] Thomas answered and said to him: "My Lord and my God!"** The deity of Jesus overwhelms Thomas. Both titles express the same thought; the use of two adds an emphasis. It is true indeed that ἡ Κριση often is no more than a title of respect, but the disciples had long come to address Jesus as their divine Lord, and here Thomas can mean no less, in fact, he brings this meaning out by adding "my God." The two pronouns

“my” make the confession personal. Thomas believes, believes fully. The two nominatives are such in form, yet are vocatives in force, — supply nothing. Nominatives are often used in an exclamatory manner. Skeptics and subordinationists cannot tolerate the fact that Jesus is here called “God” in the most direct manner. In various ways they seek to make Jesus something less than God. It is not necessary to refute their vain efforts in the sermon.

**[29] Jesus says to him: “Because thou hast seen me thou hast believed. Blessed they who did not see and did believe!”** We note that Jesus acknowledges the faith of Thomas: “thou hast believed.” Yet his faith was due to sight. Let us not condemn this fact in Thomas. All the chosen witnesses could be witnesses and were made witnesses only by means of sight. Note 1 John 1:1 as well as John 1:14. Without having themselves seen the risen Lord they could not have testified. What was wrong with Thomas was the fact that he refused to believe the testimony of the others. Joyfully he should have believed that testimony, — the Lord meant to give him all that he possibly could desire in the way of sight, for he was to go forth as one of the Lord’s apostles to bear witness to all the world.

Yet only these chosen witnesses were to be thus equipped. All the rest of us are dependent on testimony, on the Word alone. Thus 1 Pet. 1:8: “Whom having not see, ye love; in whom, though now you see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.” Hence the beatitude: “Blessed they who did not see and did believe!” If Thomas had so believed he would have seen most fully in a few days. So it is with us, only the days are more numerous, though what difference does that make? Very soon we too shall see him as he is, 1 John 3:2. Faith is for a little while, sight shall be for ever.

**[30] Many and other signs therefore Jesus did in the presence of his disciples, which have not been written in this book; [31] these, however, have been written, in order that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.**

These two verses conclude not only the section dealing with Christ’s resurrection but the entire gospel of John. The term “signs” is broader than our word “miracles,” for a sign need not be a miracle, it may be any act that

is full of divine significance. All manner of such signs in great numbers Jesus did “in the presence of his disciples,” thereby making them direct witnesses who can testify to us. Others too saw these signs, but not all of them; only two men besides the Twelve (Acts 1:20-23) saw them. John made a selection from all these signs and placed them in this record of his as attesting the deity and the saviorhood of Jesus.

[31] Of course, the signs go with the words that Jesus spoke; the two cannot be dissociated. Without the signs the words would be empty. That is why Jesus told the Jews that they should believe at least his works (John 10:38). Thus the great purpose for which John wrote his entire gospel, and thus also the portions about the resurrection of Jesus, is that we may believe that he is the Christ, the Son of God, (proximate purpose) and that believing we may have life in his Name (ultimate purpose). The aorist *ἠκούσατε* cannot be ingressive: “come to believe,” because John wrote his gospel for Christians, for readers who already believed. The aorist is effective: “may once for all believe,” “may decisively believe.”

“The Christ, the Son of God,” forms one great concept and the two terms belong together. The Anointed One, our Prophet, High Priest, and King, our Savior, could be none other than the Son of God. To believe that Jesus is this Person is not only the heart of the Christian faith, but its concentrated summary, the essence of all the articles of faith. To have such faith (confidence, trust) is to have “life in his Name.” This ζωή is the life principle itself; itself invisible, but affording unnumbered evidences of its presence. This life is the opposite of spiritual death. It passes unharmed through physical death into the glory of heaven. Translate ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι αὐτοῦ to have life “in connection with his Name,” and “his Name” is the revelation by which he made himself known to us, by which we know him so as to believe and trust in him (see also Matt. 21:9, First Sunday in Advent).

## Homiletical Aid

The radiance of Easter reflected in this Sunday. The resurrection too great and too glorious an event to confine its celebration to only one festival Sunday; the church uses two Sundays.

The Lord with his great Easter-Gift: "Peace be to you!"

### **The Great Easter-Peace.**

- I. The Easter-Peace is here.
  1. The five holy wounds, the seal of peace. The price, this price paid. The sin expiated, the guilt atoned for, the sacrificial Lamb slain.
  2. The Easter-peace is established. Our Savior's sacrifice all-sufficient, accepted by God. Hence the resurrection of Jesus. Jesus is our Peace. All is well between us and God through Jesus, our risen Savior.
- II. The Easter-Peace is to be brought to all.
  1. "So send I you," — the mission.
  2. "Whose soever sins" etc. — the authorization.
  3. "They are remitted" — the absolution, the impartation of the Easter-peace to the individual soul.
- III. The Easter-peace is received by faith.
  1. Unbelieving Thomas had no peace, although the peace was there; the others blessed and happy in possession of peace.
  2. The change in Thomas, faith and peace.
  3. Believe!

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One might divide the text and preach two sermons.

Christ's resurrection is generally considered in its relation to the individual. But see also

### **The Significance of Christ's Resurrection for the Church.**

- I. In the establishment of a Kingdom of peace.
- II. In the commission for offering peace.

III. In the authority to confer peace (the absolution).

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Thus Thomas may be treated separately:

### **Thomas and Doubt.**

- I. How doubt arises.
  - II. How doubt acts.
  - III. How doubt damages.
  - IV. How doubt dies.
- 

J. A. Dell preaches:

### **“Peace Be Unto You!”**

- I. The risen Lord brings peace.
- II. His followers are to spread peace.
- III. Peace comes through faith in Christ.

Also:

### **The Risen Lord and His Church.**

- I. He gives his Church a vision.
    1. The vision of himself as the Risen Lord, to the chosen witnesses.
    2. The vision seen now by faith in their testimony (the Word).
  - II. He gives his Church a mission.
-

C. F. W. Walther:

**“Blessed are They That Have Not Seen, and Yet Have Believed!”**

- I. It is our obligation not to see and yet to believe.
- II. It is our blessedness to exhibit such faith.

This is no blind faith, no baseless credulity. It rests on testimony. The first disciples had all the Old Testament testimony (Luke 24:25 etc.; verses 45-48) and had all the testimony of Jesus himself that he would arise on the third day. Though he had not seen, Thomas should have believed.

The appearances of Jesus to the disciples and also to Thomas were made for our sakes, that they may testify to the actual fulfillment of the Old Testament and of Jesus’ own promises. The disciples were given the privilege to see for us; we see through their eyes.

One may also add the illustrative thought that it is impossible for us to see any number of events, etc., in the world, with our own eyes, and yet we who do not see them believe them and act on them as being true. The utter folly of refusing to believe unless one also sees.

The blessedness of this faith is great indeed. The wretchedness of unbelieving Thomas. The mistake of those who first want to feel, to experience, and thus to see, before they believe.

The faith that simply trusts the Word and is content not to see until the Lord calls us to see, has peace, pardon, joy, a sure and certain hope, all resting on God’s own Word.

Lord, give me such a faith!

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What is Easter without the Easter-faith? It is a flood of blessedness with not a drop of it for you and for me. But

####The Great Easter-Faith

wells up in our hearts as we contemplate in our text:

I. The locked doors.

Risen, yes, but much more: glorified, exalted, “the Christ, the Son of God.”

II. The hands and the side.

The wounds that shed the blood, the price of our redemption and our peace.

III. The finger and the hand of Thomas.

The certainty beyond all question, for ever removing all doubt. Thomas unreasonable; they who now doubt even more so.

IV. The confession of Thomas.

Jesus is our Lord and God, who has redeemed, purchased and won us etc. (Catechism).

V. The peace of Jesus.

The condition established by Jesus. The gift to the believers. The enjoyment.

VI. The power of the keys.

Your absolution and mine, as if spoken by Jesus in heaven. The sins sent away for every penitent believer.

Every impenitent sinner’s sins held. The exalted Savior’s authority bestowed on his Church. —

Nothing shall ever rob us of our Easter-faith!

# Misericordias Domini. John 10:11-16

## The Good Shepherd who Laid Down his Life for the Sheep

When this text is considered in its setting it is readily seen that it has been properly selected for the Easter cycle. The ordinary imagery of the shepherd is transcended. Here is the Shepherd who does for his sheep what no other shepherd is able to do. Such an ordinary shepherd might risk his life for his sheep, might die for them; but if he died, the sheep would simply be shepherdless, completely a prey for the wolf. One might admire the heroism of such a shepherd, but could only deplore the fate of the sheep.

But this divine Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep and takes up his life again. He does not use one or more of his sheep for a sacrifice, he himself sacrifices himself to save his sheep. And this sacrifice of himself does save the sheep, for on the third day he takes up his life again and is resurrected, a victorious Shepherd, who shall lead his sheep through all the ages and shall unite with his flock also the many other sheep that are not of Israel's fold, so that there shall be one Shepherd and one fold.

The old figure of the shepherd and the sheep Jesus here elevates to a new plane. Who except Jesus would have thought of using this imagery in so exalted a manner? This is not ordinary comparison: as the earthly shepherd — so the heavenly Shepherd, namely in this point, in that point, and so forth. Here is the incomparable Shepherd upon whom all who are sheep depend in an absolute way. Here is the one Shepherd who is unlike every other shepherd, — “who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed... the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls,”. 1 Pet. 2:24-25 (the epistle for the day).

In v. 1-10 Jesus describes himself as the Door to the Fold and shows that every religious teacher must be judged according to his relation to the Door. The image of the Good Shepherd makes clear why Jesus alone is the Door, — there is none other whose relation to the sheep is even faintly comparable to the relation of Jesus as our Good Shepherd. It is thus that Jesus now proceeds to say: **“I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.”**

Here is one of the great **I AM** statements. Ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ ποιμὴν ὁ καλός. When the predicate has the article it is identical and interchangeable with the subject. In the present instance this means that as “the Good Shepherd” Jesus is absolutely in a class by himself. Understand this linguistic point! The thought is not that there exists a class of good shepherds and that Jesus is one of this class, say the most notable and prominent one; the thought is the opposite: Jesus is the one and only shepherd who is “the Good Shepherd,” in a class utterly by himself. The two Greek articles lift Jesus into this supreme position.

The English loses the full force of ὁ ποιμὴν ὁ καλός. This is not ὁ καλός ποιμὴν, the good Shepherd who differs from a bad one or from all bad disciples. Here is no comparison at all. Nor is the adjective added predicatively: καλός ὁ ποιμὴν, “good (is) the Shepherd,” to be thus classified with all good shepherds. Ὁ καλός is added by a second article, which makes the adjective equal in weight with the noun, really a kind of apposition: “the Shepherd, the Good One,” *der gute, der trefliche Hirte, schlechthin gedacht*, as such incomparable, in a class by himself, as also all that follows reveals.

So at once the fact that this Shepherd, the Good One, “lays down his life in behalf of the sheep.” Look at this fact by itself. What good would the voluntary and heroic death of an ordinary shepherd do? It would simply leave the flock shepherdless, to wander astray, to be destroyed by wolves, to be captured by those who do not own it. It would be folly for any other shepherd to sacrifice his life voluntarily for the sheep. Not so this Shepherd. For this is the very act that makes him ὁ καλός, “the Good One,” for his self-sacrifice brings infinite benefit to his sheep, something that no human shepherd’s death could do.

The expression “to lay down the life” (φουχή) is found only in John. The phrase with *iméo* = in place of, instead of, in substitution for, no matter how we translate it, whether thus or as “in behalf of,” “for.” This matter has been settled so fully that whoever now dares to dispute it reveals his ignorance of the Koine or his determination to falsify the meaning of the word. Consult Robertson’s Grammar and his chapter in *The Minister and his Greek New Testament*, where he furnishes the evidence from the papyri and concludes: “It is futile to try to get rid of substitution on grammatical arguments about ὑπέρ.” Other linguists agree. The day is past when the enemies of Christ’s blood-atonement are able to abuse this preposition in the interest of their error. “The papyri forbid our emptying ὑπέρ of its wealth of meaning in the interest of any theological theory.”

Jesus does not take some sheep of his flock and slay it in sacrifice; he lays down his own life in sacrifice for the sheep.

When all other sacrifices are slain they remain dead, but not Jesus who lays down his life and who takes it up again.

All other blood sacrifices die without or against their will; Jesus himself lays down his life, no one takes it from him.

No other sacrifice that is killed bestows life; the death and blood of Jesus bestows eternal life.

**[12-13] “The hireling, not also being a shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, beholds the wolf coming, and leaves the sheep, and flees; and the wolf snatches them, and scatters, — [13] because he is only a hireling, and is not concerned about the sheep.”**

The article with ὁ μισθωτός is generic since it refers to any one who is a hireling and not merely to some one person with the hireling’s character. “The hireling” is not an imaginary person who is introduced merely to throw into bolder relief “the Good Shepherd.” The hireling is another photograph of “the thief and the robber” mentioned in v. 1 etc. Jesus refers to every false prophet, to the Pharisees and the Sadducees, to any of their present day followers. In his parabolical language the hireling is such a character one hundred percent. Thus we have murder and adultery mentioned in the Fifth and the Sixth Commandments, the extreme form of these sins, but all the lesser forms are included (Matt. v. 21 etc. and 27 etc.).

This is also true with regard to “the hireling,” — many are hirelings to a certain degree.

The word might refer to one who is regularly employed and hired for wages. He would have a right to shepherd the sheep, and his flight at sight of the wolf would stamp him only as an unfaithful shepherd, of whom, of course, there are also many, and these too are the opposite of the Good Shepherd. But this is not the kind of a hireling Jesus has in mind, for he adds both a participial and a relative clause to exclude this idea altogether. Ὁ μισθωτός is the subject: “The hireling,” and should not be translated predicatively: “He that is an hireling” (our versions), nor is there a “but” (A.V.). The article excludes the predicative idea of “an hireling.” The first modifier: “not also being a shepherd,” denies that “the hireling” is in any sense “a shepherd,” that hireling here does not mean one hired to take care of the sheep. The relative clause intensifies this thought: “whose own the sheep are not.” They do not belong to him in any sense. Neither God nor Jesus entrusted them to his care. How then did he get them into his hands? Are not the words “thief and robber” plain enough (v. 1.)? We thus see in what sense Jesus wants us to understand the word “the hireling,” — a teacher who usurps authority over the sheep, whose object is not the welfare of the sheep but his own enrichment. Note how throughout both sections (v. 1-16) the sheep occupy a most important and decisive position. “The wolf” may be either generic like “the hireling” or specific. For in Matt. 17:15 we have rending wolves, and in Acts 20:29 grievous wolves (plurals), yet in 1 .Pet. v. 8, the lion, and in Eph. 4:27; 6:11; James 4:7; etc., “the devil,” singular, — once the devil and his agents, then just the devil himself. “The wolf” and all that he does to the sheep are not imaginary and mere embellishment, but only too real. One might suppose that the devil would be satisfied to see sheep in the power of his hireling, who certainly will keep them only in order to enrich himself by means of their wool, their hide, and their flesh. It is certainly also the devil who sends the hirelings. Here remember the ultimate purpose of the devil which extends far beyond hirelings and false prophets. For even in the days of Elijah seven thousand remained true, and in the days of Jesus’ infancy there were persons like Simeon and Anna and others waiting for the redemption of Israel.

The devil means to destroy the Church utterly, “to snatch and to scatter,” so that no flock whatever shall remain. It is significant that Jesus does not

say: the hireling flees from the wolf. No, “he leaves the sheep and flees.” Here everything turns on the sheep. This man is only a hireling in the sense indicated by Jesus, — the sheep cannot expect a bit of help from him when the wolf appears, for the hireling “is not concerned about the sheep.” Readily, as if cooperating with the wolf, he abandons the sheep and turns them over to the wolf. The latter “snatches them” with his teeth, ripping the throat of one after another, and “scatters,” one lone sheep being left here eventually to perish, another there; no flock remains. Such was the condition of the sheep in the days of Jesus, — read, for instance, Matt. 9:36 and my Interpretation.

**[14-15] The pure, white image of the Good Shepherd is thrown on the screen still more clearly: “I am the Good Shepherd, and I know mine own, and mine own know me, [15] even as the Father knows me, and I know the Father; and my life I lay down for the sheep.”** “And” coordinates, yet it furnishes the proof for the fact that Jesus is the Good Shepherd.

It is the relation of Jesus both to the Father and to the sheep which is now advanced as proof. In v. 11-13 it is the contrast to the hireling. Once the background is a fearful black against which the white image of the Good Shepherd is seen; next, the background is entirely white and most beautiful. Yet in both instances we hear that this Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep, and we must know that this is the act that makes Jesus the incomparable Shepherd that he is. What shepherd could save his flock by dying? What shepherd could lay down his life and then take it up again for the benefit of his flock? While the taking up of his life appears in the two verses following our text, we must add this fact to our exposition and in our preaching, for without it we cannot properly understand the laying down of his life.

Τὰ ἑμέα, “mine own,” is neuter because of the gender of πρόβατα, “sheep.” Everything still turns on the sheep, even as the title “Shepherd” connotes sheep, — without sheep no shepherd. We must know the force of γινώσκω which is often used in a pregnant sense: *noscere cum affectu et effectu*, to know with affect and effect. In οἶδα there is a relation of the object known to the subject knowing; but in γινώσκω there is also a relation of the subject who knows to the object which he knows, and this is a relation of loving affection and blessing. Οἶδα = mere intellectual knowing;

γινώσκω, when used distinctively, a knowing that involves appropriation. Yet it would be incorrect to make the latter an act of the will; in the intensest use the act remains one of knowing. See 2 Tim. 2:19 and the negation in Matt. 8:23. In the Koine the classic rule that a neuter plural subject must have a singular verb no longer obtains, hence we here have: γινώσκουσί με τὰ ἑμέα.

With loving and appropriative knowledge Jesus knows his own, and in the same way they know him. This intimate bond unites them. Yet he is the Good Shepherd, so high, so great, and his knowing is on the same lofty plane, and his own are only his sheep, far beneath him, wholly dependent on him, yet theirs too is a knowing like his. A large number of comforting thoughts clamor for attention at this point.

[15] Jesus compares this relation to that existing between the Father and himself: “even as the Father knows me, and I know the Father.” Καθώς, however, must not be pressed to denote identity of knowing, for the Father and the Son are two equals, two Persons of the Godhead, and their knowing is identical in perfection, while we are mere creatures, still sinful, with a knowing only in part and imperfect. Yet there is this intimate, personal knowing in our hearts, albeit not as perfect and as high as that of the Father and the Son; and it is this that is blessedness for us.

What Jesus says impersonally in v. 11 he now repeats personally: “and my life (no less) I lay down for the sheep.” This he did about six months after this utterance. The repetition, now with the personal pronoun “my life,” is arresting and impresses this supreme evidence which reveals him to be the Good Shepherd upon the mind of his auditors. Whenever we think of him as the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls we must think of the sacrifice he made to become this for us.

[16] Jesus is thinking not only of his sheep then existing, but of all his sheep in all ages of the world. “**And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold; them also I must lead, and they will hear my voice. And there shall be one flock, one Shepherd.**” When Jesus says that his other sheep “are not of this fold,” he refers to the future Gentile believers who were not of the fold of Israel. He does not say that he will bring these other sheep into this fold. During the period of the old covenant Gentiles who came to faith had to become Jews or nearly Jews to be counted as members of the

fold. Jesus says: “them also must I lead” as I am now leading you of “this fold.”

The oriental shepherd does not drive his flock, he leads it, and the sheep follow him closely and always listen for his voice. Hence Jesus says: “them also must I lead, and they will hear my voice, ‘-’ — the future” will hear,” volutative, not merely futuristic: “shall hear.” He says: “I must lead,” for this is his great office. We hear his voice today in his Word, and by it he leads us as the Good Shepherd; the voice of a stranger only makes us flee from him (v.

5.. Thus "there shall be one flock, one Shepherd."

Not one grand outward church, which is the ideal of Rome and of many Protestants, but one spiritual body, the Communion of Saints, all brethren by faith under one Lord and Master, the *Una Sancta*. “There shall be one flock,” — this is future fact and prophecy. Jesus does not pray that there shall be, he does not need to. Many are confused regarding this question of unity. All believers are one, their faith makes them one. Outward organization neither adds to nor subtracts from this inner spiritual oneness. Jesus prays for the oneness in his Word, that all believers may be one in understanding, apprehending, confessing, teaching his Word. He wants no denominations with divergent ideas about his Word. Join Jesus in praying for this holy oneness in his Word. The sweat that is shed in labor to increase this oneness is most noble sweat.

Jesus speaks of all these “other sheep” as if his eyes saw them. 2 Tim. 2:19 is true. The infallible foreknowledge sees all those as his sheep Whom his grace and his Gospel bring to faith. In this way we are elect and predestinated. When Jesus spoke this word he omitted not one of us who lives and dies in the faith. In his infallible foreknowledge he embraced all of us as his own.

There were not to be two churches, one Jewish, one Gentile; there was to be only one with everything divisive, whether Jewish or Gentile, completely removed, — only one olive tree (Rom. 11:7), only one household (Eph. 2:12), only one fold. Synergism is introduced when the “other sheep” are supposed to be the “God-seekers” among the pagan nations, and when these are supposed to accept the Gospel when it is brought to them. Most of these so-called “Godseekers” resist every effort of

Gospel-grace, while many flagrant sinners are converted. The *gratia sufficiens* dare never be discounted in its efficiency to save any and every sinner; this sufficient grace receives no help in its work from any “God-seeking” or anything else in paganism.

## Homiletical Aid

When Jesus calls himself “the Good Shepherd” he means that he alone is the Good Shepherd, not that there is a class of good shepherds and that he is one of this class. Jesus is absolutely in a class by himself. That is why we follow him alone as our Good Shepherd and will not hear the voice of a stranger.

### The Incomparable Good Shepherd.

- I. Incomparable — because he laid down his life for the sheep.
  1. A shepherd might lay down his life in defense of his sheep. But what good would that do his sheep? Then the sheep would be shepherdless, a prey of the wolf. Jesus did a far greater thing.
  2. By laying down his life for the sheep he enabled you and me to become his sheep, he obtained his flock. John 3:16. We who believe in him do not perish. Without our Good Shepherd’s death there could be no sheep, no fold, no flock.
  3. For he did not only lay down, he also took up again his life (resurrection). Where do you see a shepherd even faintly comparable to this our Good Shepherd? He arose to be our Good Shepherd for ever.
- II. Incomparable, — because of his incomparable flock.
  1. Purchased and won with his holy, precious blood and with his innocent suffering and death. A shepherd must have a flock. Where is there a flock like this!
  2. Incomparable connection: our Shepherd knows us and we know him with the knowledge of affect and effect, as the Father

knows the Son and the Son the Father. Higher and deeper than any other relation possible to men.

3. Incomparable extent, for the sheep are drawn from all nations, tribes, and tongues, and many as yet unborn are embraced in his appropriative knowledge.

You and I must be members of this fold.

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Describe the oriental shepherd and his sheep. Often used in Scripture: Ps. 100:3; 23:1; Is. 53:6. “Fear not little flock!” Parable of the lost sheep. “The lost sheep of the house of Israel.” Matt. 9:36. “Feed my lambs — my sheep!” Sheep and goats on judgment day. But in our present text Jesus uses the familiar imagery of the shepherd and the sheep in new and most impressive ways; for he makes this imagery express all the power and the blessings of his death and his resurrection. That is why the text dealing with the Good Shepherd is appointed for this Sunday after Easter.

### **Our Blessed Good Shepherd.**

We know him fully when we carefully regard not only his great title *The Good Shepherd*, but also...

1. The Good Shepherd

There is and can be no other shepherd who in any way deserves to be called “The Good Shepherd.” All others sacrifice one sheep or more; Jesus sacrifices himself for all his sheep and by his sacrifice enables us to be his sheep and makes himself for us “the Good Shepherd.” What shepherd is like unto this Shepherd?

2. The sheep,

To know this blessed Shepherd we must know his sheep: they who are redeemed by the life he laid down, who are washed in the blood he shed for them, who are born anew by the life he brought from the tomb, who are known as his own by his knowledge, who know him as their own in faith, love, reverence, obedience. They are docile sheep,

not unclean, snarling dogs. They form a flock and fold, hear his voice, follow him alone and no other.

3. The hireling,

To know our blessed Shepherd and all the blessedness that is ours through him, we must know the hireling, of whom there are many. These are not hired men and unfaithful shepherds, but thieves who steal the flock, who have no right to the flock (“not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not,” v. 12). But for our Good Shepherd we would be in the hands of such hirelings. They care nothing for the sheep (v. 13), save to get their wool, hide, flesh. Antichrists, false prophets. These abandon the sheep to the wolf, and invariably the sheep are lost.

4. The wolf,

Blessed is our Shepherd, for under his care the wolf cannot destroy us. The devil would like to snatch at and to scatter the sheep, so that there may be no sheep, no flock, i.e. no believers, no Church of our Lord Jesus Christ. But our Good Shepherd knows us and is known by us, and no one shall pluck us out of his hand. To be safe from the hellish wolf is our blessedness.

5. The one fold.

You and I are also not alone, we have the joy of belonging to one great flock and fold. It began with Jewish believers, but now embraces believers from all the nations, the great Communion of Saints here on earth, in succession entering the glory of heaven. Blessed indeed is our Good Shepherd!

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Twice with great emphasis Jesus calls himself “The Good Shepherd.” What then must you call yourself? You must say:

**I am the Good Shepherd’s Sheep.**

I. Me he knows, and I know him.

He knows me as his own, my faith and faithfulness; also all my needs, prayers, hopes, etc. And I know him as my Shepherd on whom my soul can depend in life and in death.

II. Safe only with the Good Shepherd.

In my stead, in expiation, in ransom.

To save me from sin, death, and the devil, that I may be his own and live under him etc. (Luther, Second Article).

III. Me he has delivered from the hireling and the wolf.

From the antichrists who would exploit me. From those who would abandon me to the devil when they can no longer exploit me.

IV. Me he has made a member of his one great fold.

Leading me upon green pastures, where I with all his sheep hear his voice (in the Word), and lie down in peace beside still waters.

With this flock he leads me to enter heaven at last.

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### **Jesus Laid Down His Life For Me.**

I. Was my danger so great?

II. Am I worth that much?

III. Can I ever repay him?

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I do not think it proper to make application from “The Good Shepherd” to us pastors or shepherds. Every attempt at such application that I have seen only impairs the image of him who laid down his life in expiation for us. No brother can ransom another. The entire image here drawn is entirely too high for any human shepherd to be made comparable. — The correct exegesis does not postpone the one fold and one Shepherd till the end of time.

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Men's foolish pride. Each dreams that he is "master of his own fate."  
Independence. All this a deception. The truth is in our text. Man is

### **Only a Sheep.**

- I. Defenseless against his enemies.
  1. The exploiting hireling.
  2. The ravening wolf.
- II. Safe only with the Good Shepherd.
  1. Bought by his life.
  2. Known (appropriated) by him, and in turn knowing (appropriating) him.
- III. Happy in the one great flock.
  1. There the sheep hears the Good Shepherd's voice.
  2. This flock the Good Shepherd leads. His one interest is the true welfare of his sheep which he acquired at so great a price.

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### **"His Life for the Sheep."**

- I. What a price to pay!

Not our value but the Good Shepherd's infinite love and grace explain this price.
- II. What an obligation to meet!

It is beyond us to meet, but we must know him, hear his voice, follow his leading, and remain in his flock.

# Jubilate. John 16:16-23

## The Little While and the Unending Joy

The text is taken from the comforting discourses of Jesus spoken in the upper room before he went out to Gethsemane. At the moment the disciples did not grasp what Jesus meant. The little while and the unending joy became clear to them after Jesus arose from the dead. This unending joy is ours today. The text fits the after-Easter season. If we ask whether all grief and sorrow was ended for the disciples by the resurrection of Jesus, we shall have to say no. They were as we are, still in the world, still subject to much sorrow. But as they so we too can know “our joy no man taketh from us.” It remains undimmed and undiminished amid the sorrows which we must still undergo. This is due to the fact that the joy produced by the resurrection of Jesus once for all removed the despairing sorrow of the eleven produced by Jesus’ death. We now have no dead Savior, over whom to grieve eternally, but a risen and living Savior, over whom to rejoice forever with a joy that keeps us jubilant amid any sorrow that may come to us. This our joy shall emerge in due time into the joy of heaven.

The point we had in mind in thus sketching the proper trend of the sermon on this text is the avoidance of allegory. The little while means the three days after Jesus’ death and not the time of our earthly lives. The reference to our earthly lives and the sorrows in them is not to be secured by an allegory of this sort. The eleven had sorrows to meet until the last sorrow, death, arrived. Yet no man could rob them of their unending joy. Thus we are to be like them. The imperishable nature of this joy is revealed in its source, namely in the resurrection of Jesus which ended the little while of the grief of the eleven.

**[16] “A little while, and you no longer behold me; and again a little while, and you shall see me.”** In a little while, in only a few hours on this very day (Friday), Jesus is to be taken from the disciples. In a second little

while (μικρόν), in three days (on Easter Sunday), he shall be restored to the disciples. The separation shall be short. Exceedingly painful though it may be, a measure of comfort is contained in this brevity.

Note well how Jesus speaks so clearly of what now impends. All that the next few hours, all that the following days shall bring is as clear to the vision of Jesus as if it all were already past.

[17] This double word about “a little while” stirred the disciples. **Some of his disciples therefore said to each other: “What is this that he says to us: ‘A little while and you do not behold me; and again a little while and you shall see me: and, that I am going to the Father?’”** [18] **They were saying therefore: “What is this that he says: ‘The little while’? We do not know what he is saying.”** Ἐκ is partitive and with its genitive means “some of the disciples.” They spoke in low tones, not venturing to ask Jesus. What puzzled them was this double “little while” and especially also the relation of these two statements about the little while to the other and repeated statement, that he is going to the Father (14:12 and 28; 16:10). They confess to each other that they do not know what Jesus is saying. The aorist εἶπον simply states the past fact as a fact; the imperfect ἔλεγον pictures the past speaking as it progressed. Λέγω refers to what one says, λαλέω only to the act of speaking and not being silent. The present λαλεῖ = “is saying.”

**[19] Jesus knew that they were desiring to inquire of him, and said to them: “Concerning this are you searching with each other, that I said: ‘A little while, and you do not behold me; and again a little while, and you shall see me?’ Amen, amen, I say to you, that you shall sob and wail, but the world shall rejoice. You shall be filled with sorrow, but your sorrow shall become joy.”**

Of course, Jesus knew what the disciples desired (3:24-25; 6:64; 16:30). In his state of humiliation he used the divine attributes bestowed upon his human nature to the extent that their use served his great mission, — thus also the omniscience with which as needed he saw men’s thoughts. While the disciples hesitate to inquire of him, he himself answers them. In indirect discourse the Greek commonly uses the tense of the corresponding direct discourse: “are desiring”; but occasionally the tense is changed after the fashion of the English: “were desiring” (imperfect). Jesus restates the

thoughts of the disciples, but he omits what they say about his going to the Father. At present this word may wait, for in due time the disciples shall understand, and that far more perfectly than they could now be told. But this “little while” is rich in comfort for them, and they need all this comfort right at the present moment. So Jesus opens it for them.

[20] Compare the single “amen” in Luke 21:32 (the Second Sunday in Advent) and Matt. 8:10 (the Third Sunday after Epiphany). The double “amen” appears only in John’s gospel (twenty-five times), and strange to say, is not found in the ancient Jewish literature. “Amen” is the Hebrew word for truth or verity, and Jesus doubled the word and prefixed it to many of his weighty statements, — there is no reason for supposing anything else. “Amen, amen” = the double seal of verity; and: “I say to you” = the seal of authority.

The first “little while” means that the disciples “shall sob and wail.” The verbs are expressive: the first describes loud, unrestrained weeping, the second denotes wailing moans and cries for the dead (our English “threnody”). Into this condition the first “little while” shall plunge the disciples. For as Jesus has repeatedly told them, he would be abused, scourged, crucified, be killed as one accursed of God. At the same time, as if in mockery of their fearful grief, and as intensifying it to the utmost, “the world shall rejoice” that it has thus made away with Jesus. “The world” is surely a wide and comprehensive term to denote the Jews of Jerusalem and their Sanhedrin, or the Jews hostile to Jesus. Jesus makes it so wide because the immediate murderers of Jesus are representative of all who hate him and whose joy it is to be for ever rid of Jesus.

The aorist passive verb may be taken in the sense of the middle: *ihr werdet euch betruenen*, “you shall grieve yourselves,” although the passive too is good: “you shall be grieved.” But now comes the second “little while.” Their grief shall not merely disappear and joy take its place, — their very grief shall become their joy. The greater their grief, breaking their very hearts, the greater the joy which this grief shall become, almost bursting their hearts. Strange indeed! Yet it is true, the passion and the death of Jesus, which to this day drive pangs through our hearts, are the fount of our highest joy. At the great world’s fair in Chicago I walked down some steps and came unexpectedly upon the sacred group about the Savior’s dead body, all so realistic and overwhelming that I had all I could do to keep

back the tears. O the deep grief of the disciples! And all at once this very grief shall be all joy, heavenly, eternal joy.

The two mikrón are explained.

[21] But can one and the same thing produce such entirely opposite effects with only a brief interval, “a little while,” between? Yes, here is an illustration. **“The woman, when she gives birth, has sorrow, because her hour has come; but when she has given birth to the child, she no longer remembers the anguish, because of the joy that a human being has been born into the world.”**

The articles: ἡ γυνή — τὸν παιδίον are generic, “the woman,” “the child” concerned, and the present subjunctive = in the act of giving birth. ἔκει = “has” in any such case, present tense (not an aoristic), because general; so also “she no longer remembers.” The aorists ἦλθεν, γεννήση, and ἔγεννήθη are idiomatic; for actions in the immediate past we use the perfect in English: “has come,” “has given birth,” “has been born.”

The illustration is excellent: one and the same act produces first acute anguish, next abiding and great joy, and the interval is brief. The joy does not merely follow the pain, but the pain produces the joy. Jesus himself states the *tertium comparationis*: grief made joy. Yet some are not satisfied, they must allegorize, must introduce ideas of their own. But the death of Jesus is not the birth of a new humanity, — “the child” cannot be allegorized. ’Nor dare we allegorize the woman and make her the Jewish theocracy, and the glorified Christ or the Christian Church the child. Also, this illustration does not picture the Parousia, the birth-pains of this world ending in the state of glory at the last day. An illustration is an illustration and all we need is the *tertium*; it is *schwaermemlsch* to find allegories where none exist.

[22] Jesus himself states in simple words what his illustration illustrates: **“You too now have sorrow; but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no one takes away from you.”** The words are so clear that interpretation is scarcely needed. The disciples “now have sorrow,” now already in prospect of what Jesus tells them is impending. This sorrow will be greatly intensified in a few hours when Jesus is brought to his death. Combine: “you shall see me” (v. 16), with what Jesus now adds: “I will see you again,” — he promises mutual seeing “in a little

while.” Add John 20:20: “Then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord.” The promised seeing is physical, with the natural eye, during the forty days, and not a seeing at Pentecost or at the Parousia. “You shall see me” (v. 16) and “I will see you again,” foretell and promise the resurrection.

Note Well that the joy which shall flood the hearts of the disciples on the day they see Jesus risen from the dead “no man takes away from you,” — the present tense is futuristic. This joy in the risen Lord abides in their hearts their life long and merges into the joy of heaven. This joy has entered also our hearts and abides in the same way. Yes, some lose it (Heb. 6:4 etc.); here it is not necessary to introduce this sad, abnormal fact. They who lose the joy themselves give it up. Wicked men, like skeptic teachers in high schools and colleges, try to take it away from their pupils, but succeed only when the heart itself casts aside the joy.

**[23] “And in that day you shall not inquire of me on anything.”** The reference is to v. 17-19: the disciples wanted to inquire and hesitated to do so. Jesus says: when I have died and have risen again and when then you shall see me in my glorified state, in which also I shall rise to heaven before your very eyes, all the questions that you now have in your state of sorrow will be answered better than words are able now to answer them to your sorrowful hearts. Moreover, Jesus has already promised the Holy Spirit to his disciples, he will renew that promise during the forty days, and on Pentecost, ten days later, the Spirit will descend. He will lead them into all truth.

If we read: οὐκ ἐρωτήσετε οὐδέν, “you shall not inquire anything,” in a mechanical way as meaning that the disciples will not ask a single question of Jesus, we may produce a contradiction, for in Acts 1:6 Luke reports: ἐπηρώτων αὐτόν, “they were inquiring of him,” Jesus also answering their inquiry. I take it that during the forty days, in their intercourse with Jesus the disciples asked him one thing and another. What the statement of Jesus about asking him nothing means is that the disciples have the answer to all their questions in the actual resurrection of Jesus and in their actually seeing him in his risen and glorified state. Any question that may arise in their hearts and that they might actually ask is thus already answered in advance.

## Homiletical Aid

Jubilate! “Jubilate!” The Christians are the happiest and most joyful people in the world. They ever walk in the sunshine and in the light. Sorrows? Only like passing clouds. Behind them shines the full splendor of the sun and ever breaks through the clouds. We must know all about this joy.

### **The Joy That No One Takes From Us.**

#### I. Wondrous how it began.

1. The roots of this imperishable joy go deep down into Calvary, into the sacrificial death of Jesus which won for us the pardon and the peace of God. This joy sprang from the deep grief of the disciples during the “little while” of the three days that Jesus lay dead in the tomb.
2. The bloom of this imperishable joy broke forth in Joseph’s Garden in the resurrection of Jesus which brought light, life, and immortality to light for us, which sealed our reconciliation with God and makes certain our place and our joy through faith.

No one can take Calvary and the empty tomb from us; hence no one can rob us of our joy-

#### II. Wondrous how it shines on and on.

1. Did the disciples have no sorrows after Easter? They had many hardships, some of the disciples died as martyrs. No beds of roses. But they were God’s children, all things redounded to their good, their glorified, exalted, triumphant Savior led them through life. The joy of Easter made every hardship and every hurt suffered for Jesus’ sake a triumph and a victory.
2. It is so with our griefs and sorrows — they disappear in the ceaseless stream of joy that flows out to us from the two “little whiles” in our text. Christ crucified and risen for our salvation makes all our hurts and our disappointments in this life disappear. We may weep for a day in our weakness, but ever there is joy in the morning. Most pitiful are they who do not know this surpassing joy.

It is ours by faith. Shall any one ever rob us of our faith?

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This is the text about “the little while,” which puzzled the disciples so much when Jesus was seeking to comfort them, which he explained to them so clearly. We too must understand

### **“The Little While.”**

- I. It places all earthly sorrows into the right light.
  1. “The little while” of which Jesus spoke in the upper room: in a few hours he would die on the cross, and again in only three days he would arise from the dead. First, they would not see him, then they would see him again. The world would rejoice at his death, but the resurrection of Jesus would bring endless joy to his disciples: their very grief would become joy, imperishable Joy.
  2. In the light of the joy born from the two little whiles we must regard all our present sorrows. How small they became, how transient they seem, how the great joy heals and overcomes them, how the inner happiness of our hearts never disappears as do the joys of the world.

We must say more about “the little while”:

- II. It presents us with the certainty of eternal joy.
  1. All the joys of the world contain the germs of eternal sorrow. Yet men chase after these dangerous joys. They seek to build a millennium on earth. The world ever a vale of tears. The Christian ever under the cross. Some Christians have an especially hard lot, there are even martyrs. It is because of all this world of sorrow, all your griefs and sorrows, that Jesus points with this double “little while” to the certainty of eternal joy that no man takes from us.
  2. Nothing can destroy the joy that arises for you and for me out of the death and the resurrection of Jesus. See how the very sorrow of the disciples became unspeakably great joy. That joy flows in its full tide today. Drink of it by faith. Let it be the supreme blessing in your entire life. In this joy close your eyes when you die and at once the eyes of your soul will open to see

the exalted Savior, his shining angels and the saints in heaven, all the heavenly bliss.

For human hearts in this life there is no joy like that born of “the little while.”

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Loy parallels: “1) The little while of our Lord’s crucifixion and resurrection; 2) The little while of our earthly life.” I do not think that the preacher has a right to do this. The little while when the disciples did not see the Lord and then saw him again cannot possibly be repeated, for the very simple reason that Jesus does not die and is not buried again to fill us with grief, and does not rise again to turn that very grief into joy. Our joy arises out of the little while that occurred once.

There was only this one case where the grief itself became joy. When now we suffer, our grief does not become joy, it only ends and joy takes its place. The difference is great indeed. Loy really allegorizes; so do all who preach in the same fashion. I must include Walther who preaches on “the Constant Alternation of Sorrow and Grief in True Christianity,” for here, too, the one alternation in the text is paralleled with our various experiences of grief and joy and which in our case is even multiplied. I believe that neither of these men saw that they were presenting allegory and an allegory utterly unsound at that. Walther should have preached on “The True Christian Joy which no Sorrow Alters.”

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The heart of man is made for joy and in this sinful world finds so little joy, and all that it does find here is perishable. Flowers for a day, then thorns again. When one counts the happy days of the ordinary human life and finds them proportionately so few, some have asked whether the life was really worth living. When, moreover, we Christians note the wretched quality of this worldly joy and happiness, the question whether such a life is worth living at all becomes even more difficult to answer with a joyful yes. Hence the philosophy of pessimism: this world and the life in it is worse than no world at all.

Thank God, we know a joy that is so great, so wonderful, so blessed, that it more than makes our earthly life worth living.

### **Our Imperishable Joy.**

- I. The joys that perish.
  1. Devilish joy. In our text the joy of the world, the enemies of Jesus, at his terrible death. Today the joy of the enemies of the cross in apparent victory: Russia, the secular educational world, etc.
  2. Sinful joy. Quickly it ends, leaves a stained conscience, a soiled life, the woe of guilt and penalty.
  3. Noble earthly joy. The beautiful things of human life that bring joy; the noble and altruistic achievements in life that bring honor and joy. All end, if not sooner, then at death. Transient, perishable, fading.
- II. The sorrows that prevail.
  1. The aches, pains, discomforts, sicknesses, losses, failures, disappointments, of which each of us expects his share in this sinful world and often gets an excessive share. These sorrows prevail.
  2. The sorrows brought on directly by our own sins and by the sins of others. The consequences of our own folly; the inflictions of vicious men who defame, smite, rob us, etc. And of these sorrows there is no end, they pile up ceaselessly.
- III. The one joy that never ends and that reaches into heaven itself.
  1. Jesus died for us and rose again, took away our sins and made us God's children. Imperishable joy. '
  2. All the common sorrows of earth fade into nothingness beside the joy of having this Savior. All the sorrows due to our own sins are swept away by his absolution. All the sorrows suffered for his name's sake so much glory and no sorrow at all.

3. The joy of our redemption and adoption frees us from all sinful, worldly joys, puts into our natural joys a spiritual delight, and at death fills our souls with the unspeakable joys of heaven.

Yes, there is this imperishable joy, and it is ours by faith in the crucified and risen Lord.

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Happiness, so fleeting. Never perfect. Those who are happy carry along from day to day many feelings that are not happy at all. Have you discovered the genuine happiness? They who have it are

### **The Happiest People in the World.**

1. Happy because of the little while.
2. Happy now despite the world's joy.
3. Happy ever amid life's sorrows.
4. Happy at last in the bliss of heaven.

# **The Pentecost Cycle: The Savior's Mission of the Holy Spirit**

## **Cantate**

The Savior promises the Comforter and his great work

## **Rogate**

The Savior promises to answer prayer

## **Ascension Day**

The Savior sends the Gospel to the world and ascends to heaven

## **Exaudi**

The Savior foretells the hostile reception of the Testimony

## **Pentecost**

The great gift of the Holy Spirit

## **Pentecost Monday**

The condemnation of unbelief

# Cantate. John 16:5-15

## The Savior Promises the Comforter and his Great Mission

The Eisenach Selections begin the Pentecost cycle with Rogate, but the ancient selections begin the new cycle with Cantate. I do not know why this difference should be found. In itself the difference is not material, for in either case we pass without a marked break from the one cycle into the other; also it is of no special import whether we say that our Risen Lord sent the Spirit, or that our Ascended Lord did this.

Jubilate appoints v. 16-23 as a text, Cantate the verses that precede, namely 5-15. To the imperishable joy, the inexhaustible comfort is now added. *The Savior Promises the Comforter and his Great Mission*. Jesus speaks of his Ascension: "I go on my way to him that sent me." He promises to send the Paraclete: "I will send him unto you." Jesus tells what the Holy Spirit will do as regards the world (v. 8-11) and as regards the disciples (v. 11-15). All of this was said in the upper room where the last Passover had been celebrated. Its import extends through all the centuries to the end of time. Jesus did ascend; the Holy Spirit did come; his mission is now in full progress. The words of Jesus meant to comfort and to uplift the eleven disciples who were seriously downcast, whose great sorrow was just beginning (v. 20). The words now bring the mightiest comfort to us 'as we struggle on in a hostile world.

[5] The disciples must realize that there is a great advantage in their Lord's going away. The old days could not continue, the great break is impending, Jesus is departing to sit at his Father's right hand, to rule in endless glory. But instead of registering a loss to the disciples, the departure of Jesus and the new era that is now about to begin bring a mighty advance beyond what any continuation of the old days could possibly bring. The blessed affairs of the Kingdom were moving forward, were entering upon their final grand stage.

**“But now I am going away to him that did send me; and none of you is inquiring of me: ‘Where art thou going?’ [6] On the contrary, because I have told you these things, sorrow has filled your heart. Nevertheless I tell you the truth: It is an advantage for you that I depart; for if I do not depart, the Paraclete will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you.”**

Note well that Jesus is going away “to him that did send me.” Ὁ πέμψας με is the substantivized aorist participle and refers to the one act of sending Jesus into the world for his great redemptive mission. In John’s gospel Jesus speaks of “my Sender” in various connections. It is at once evident that the stay of Jesus here on earth would end the moment his great mission would be accomplished. To think of prolonging the former days endlessly would involve the other thought that Jesus had not yet accomplished the task for which the Father had sent him, and that would be discouraging indeed. What Jesus says amounts to this: The redemptive mission for which my Father sent me into the world is just about finished; I am about to leave and to report this to my Father, and that means that a new era is to begin. About this new era Jesus then enlightens his disciples.

Yet the disciples do not even ask whither Jesus is going. The tremendous advance that is on the verge of occurring interests them so little. The Greek is much like the English when using ποῦ, “where,” in the sense of “whither.” One would think that when Jesus says that he is departing the disciples would at least be anxious and concerned to know to what place he intended to go.

[6] No (ἀλλά); all the disciples think about is the fact that Jesus is leaving them, leaving them permanently, and in consequence the only reaction Jesus receives to his words is ἡ λύπη. “the or this sorrow (grief)” into which they are now plunged. They seem to be deaf to everything else. The situation seems most discouraging for Jesus. He, however, is not thinking only of the present moment. This “little while” will not last long. The disciples will presently understand, and then Jesus will obtain the proper response from them.

[7] So in spite of their short-sighted grieving he tells them about the great advantage contained in his going to the Father. The Eva clause is non-

final and forms the predicate of the impersonal verb συμφέρει. With γάρ Jesus at once explains and states what constitutes the great advantage.

Only because of the departure of Jesus to the Father can the Paraclete come to the disciples. Jesus states this fact both negatively and positively, and the positive statement is a promise: “I will send him to you,” send him on his great mission in the world. The mission of the Holy Spirit follows and crowns the mission of Jesus. The Spirit’s great world-mission cannot begin until the redemptive mission of Jesus is completed and fully executed; but when it is so completed, the Spirit must send its blessings out to all the world. The thought is not by any means the pale idea that unless Jesus goes to heaven he will not be there to send the Spirit, — as though it were vital for Jesus to be at the right place. The thought deals with the great sendings or missions, with the accomplishment of two tremendous tasks, the redemption of the whole world, and the evangelization of the whole world, the one the work of the Son, the other, resting up the Son’s work, the work of the Spirit.

The Spirit is called “another Paraclete” (14:16). The verbal παρακλητός is derived from the perfect passive παρακεκλήσθαι, and not from the active παρακαλεῖν, and means “one who has been called to a person’s side.” The word seldom occurs in literature, but was current in speech, even the Aramaic having it in transliteration as we have “amen,” “hallelujah,” etc., from the Hebrew. The term is by no means restricted to court usage, “advocate,” a friend supporting the accused before the judge. By implication (14:16) Jesus is the first Paraclete, and to take his place he sends the Spirit as “another Paraclete.” The disciples are not the ones who call either of these Paracletes to their side; no, the Father sent the Son to them, and the Father and the Son send the Holy Spirit. Luther strove to convey something of the rich meaning of “Paraclete” as here used by Jesus when he chose the German word *Troester*, which our English versions adopted by translating “Comforter.” But the word includes much more than the bestowal of comfort in sorrow. As Jesus led, instructed, shielded, strengthened the disciples in every way as their Paraclete, as the One called to their side for their help, so the Spirit is now to take the place of Jesus as another Paraclete. The thought is that without such a divine Paraclete to help us, the disciples, and now also we, could not survive in this wicked world.

[8] Jesus states just what the Paraclete will do. **“And when he is come, he will convict the world concerning sin, and concerning righteousness, and concerning judgment. [9] Concerning sin, inasmuch as they do not believe in me. [10] Concerning righteousness, inasmuch as I go away to the Father, and you behold me no more. [11] Concerning judgment, inasmuch as the ruler of this world has been judged.”** This is the Paraclete’s mission in the world. This is the work he will do as the Paraclete sent to the disciples to aid and to support them.

Two facts are implied: 1) the Spirit will do this work through the disciples, as their Paraclete. The great mission of the disciples is to evangelize the world, — here we see how this work is done. 2) The Spirit will do this work through the Word, for the convicting instrument is the Word. Hence the Paraclete will do his second work in and for the disciples as stated in v. 13-15, lead them into all truth. The divine agent throughout is the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete.

The three subjects concerning which he will convict the world are: sin — righteousness — judgment. No articles are needed because the three terms are used as titles. Everything pivots on these three subjects. The verb ἐλέγχειν, “to convict,” may imply that the conviction is admitted by the person in question, — thus the 3,000 at Pentecost were convicted and thereby converted. Again, the verb applies when the person concerned refuses to admit the conviction, — thus at the trial of the apostles before the Sanhedrin these judges were indeed convicted, but remained obdurate and unconverted. The great work of convicting the world began on Pentecost (Acts 1:8). The start was made at Jerusalem.

[9] In the three clauses do not translate ὅτι with “that” (mere statement of fact), nor with “because” (our versions, as if reasons are here given), but with “inasmuch,” for each time Jesus lays his finger on the essential point which convicts beyond hope of evasion or escape.

Many commentators think only of sin as sin, or of unbelief as the greatest of sins. The world does not deny its sin; every day it parades the catalog of its crimes anew in its newspapers. Of course, it does not admit that unbelief in Jesus is a sin, in fact, the greatest sin. Yet the aim of the Spirit is not the work of adding another sin to the volume of admitted sins, to cap this pyramid with a supreme sin. They who see nothing but sin in the

clause do not fully understand Jesus. “Inasmuch as they do not believe in me” refers to the one avenue of escape from sin, faith in Jesus Christ. Not to believe in Jesus is to be eternally lost in sin. To believe in him is to be eternally saved from sin. Read Mark 16:16.

Yes, the first subject is “sin,” — sin as all the world admits it without special preaching. But the main point about sin is the question: “How shall we escape from its damning guilt?” The Spirit’s task is to glorify Jesus (v. 14): there is only one way of escape, it is to believe in him. That means to trust in him as the expiation for our sins. Whether the world is actually brought to believe, or obdurately refuses to believe, is a matter by itself; the Paraclete convicts the world concerning sin, convicts it in the essential point: “inasmuch as they do not believe in me.”

[10] From sin Jesus proceeds to its Opposite, “righteousness.” The Paraclete convicts the world concerning righteousness. The essential point that we should note is the fact that all three: sin, righteousness, judgment, are the world’s, for the obvious reason that the world is to be convicted either in a salutary or in a damnatory way. “Sin” in v. 9 is a negative term (ἁμαρτία, missing the mark; ἄνομία, contrary to law; ἄδικία, ἄσέβεια, all negatives). Therefore also the elucidation is negative: “inasmuch as they do not believe in me.” - “Righteousness,” however, is a positive term, and thus the elucidation is positive: “inasmuch as I go away to the Father.” The negative addition: “and you behold me no more” is added only in order to emphasize the positive thought.

Yes, the world has sin, mountains of sin, and admits it. But the world also boasts of “righteousness.” No one is able to get along without “righteousness.” Thus the old Pharisees declared themselves righteous (Luke 16:15), like the criminal who acts as judge in his own case and acquits himself. Jesus speaks of our own righteousnesses which are all as filthy rags, but of which men are exceedingly proud. The world is full of such false, self-made, self-pronounced righteousness.

Here is where the conviction of the Paraclete sets in. He tears away all this fictional righteousness behind which men hide and persuade themselves that they are safe. The Paraclete does this “inasmuch as Jesus goes to the Father.” Thus the disciples see him no more, for his great work is done. Jesus is about to die and to be glorified and thus to ascend to heaven. In him

alone, in his expiating death, in his resurrection as the seal of his expiation, in his exaltation as the crown of his expiation, is righteousness for us all and for the world. His going away to the Father shows that his redemptive, atoning work is done, and that for Jesus' sake God now declares the sinner who repents and believes righteous and acquits him as being free from all guilt. Away with all these verdicts of acquittal which men pronounce upon themselves! In Christ alone is our redemption. For his sake God acquits us, and they alone whom God pronounces righteous are righteous indeed.

Note well that as always, so here, δικαιοσύνη is forensic and denotes the status of one who has been acquitted by a judge. Every sentence of acquittal that you or the world pronounce upon yourself is only a piece of self-delusion and only increases your damnation. Jesus is our righteousness, he who died, arose, ascended for our redemption. We are not acquitted unless God acquits us for his sake. This conviction the Holy Spirit drives home. Men of the world may bow in contrition and faith at the Savior's feet, or may spurn this acquittal of God, the conviction remains, for the truth regarding righteousness has been made to confront the world.

[11] The third conviction is concerning "judgment," κρίσις, the act of judging. The "judging" is exactly like the "righteousness," the world's own judging, yet not in general, but in regard to itself "inasmuch as the ruler of this world has been judged," namely by God and stands thus now and ever as thus judged (perfect tense). The ἄρχων of this world is the devil who is no legitimate ruler of anything, but a usurper of dominion over "the world," "this world" signifying the fallen world in its wicked state. Note the meiosis in the neutral terms χρίσις and κέκριται, both leaving unsaid that adverse judgment is referred to. The devil has already been judged and expelled from his rulership by the death, the resurrection and the exaltation of Jesus (13:2 and 27; 14:30; see also 12:31 and note Rev. 20:1-3). These great events have not as yet actually occurred, but Jesus speaks as if they were already past, for the death is only a few hours away and all of these triumphant events will occur with certainty. The agent in the passive "has been judged" is God.

The great point is the fact that it is the world's own head and ruler who already now stands as judged. What then of "this world," his dominion? You might answer that then this world has also already been judged by God, and this certainly would be entirely true. This, however, is not what Jesus

says, for this would cut off all hope for the world. While the final judgment on the world's ruler has been pronounced by God, he has not also pronounced such a final judgment on this world. No; Jesus is about to send the Paraclete, and the Paraclete will use the -Word and the disciples for proclaiming the Word, and this the Paraclete will do so as to convict the world "concerning judging." He will show this world the judging (χρίσις) it should pronounce on itself in view of the awful fact that its own ruler has already been judged. The right judgment, in view of this terrible judgment on the devil, can be only this, that unless they who belong to this world repent and turn away from the devil, the judgment already pronounced on him by God must inevitably also strike them. Will they who are of this world bow to this conviction of the Spirit and do this "judging" (krisis), or will they resist this conviction, do a lot of false judging regarding themselves and so end under the damnation already pronounced upon the devil?

Remember that the Paraclete's work, as stated in the three progressive phrases, is missionary, — many will be saved by this convicting work. Many, of course, will be lost; they cannot escape being convicted, but they harden themselves in the face of this conviction. They reject what the Spirit tells them about "sin," about "righteousness," about "judging." In rebellion they set up their own notions of sin, find ways to declare themselves righteous, do altogether fatuous judging by denying the judgment already pronounced on the devil. They laugh at the very idea of a devil; the atoning death, the resurrection, and the glorification of Jesus, which pronounced the verdict on the devil, are nothing to them. Thus they go to their doom in guilt.

[12] Jesus now turns to the work which the Paraclete will do for the disciples themselves. **"Yet many things have I to say to you, but you cannot hear them now. [13] But when he is come, the Spirit of the truth, he shall guide you into all the truth; for he shall not speak from himself, but whatever he shall hear shall he speak, and things to come shall he report to you."** Jesus takes the condition of the disciples into account. It would be useless to tell them now in their great sorrow all that Jesus had on his heart and wanted to communicate to them.

[13] He would let the Spirit do this, whom he now calls "the Spirit of the truth." The genitive denotes ethical quality: the Spirit belongs to and is

wholly bound up with “the truth,” the saving reality contained in Jesus. Therefore he shall lead the disciples into all the truth, including also the realities that are yet to come. He shall make true prophets of the eleven.

Here is the answer to the question that is constantly asked. Add the fuller statement found in 14:26. How could the disciples write the four gospels and all the other New Testament books in the way in which they did, with never an error, misstatement, faulty expression? The Holy Spirit led them into all the truth; he taught them, he brought all things to their remembrance (14:26), he also revealed to them future events which it was necessary for them and for us to know. This action of the Spirit is called Revelation and Inspiration. Revelation = the perfect communication of the truth to the disciples; Inspiration = the perfect communication of this same truth by the disciples both when they spoke and when they wrote.

We cannot apply this promise of Jesus directly to ourselves, for we are not to receive direct and immediate Revelation from the Spirit, — *Schwaermer* (fanatics) alone think so; nor are we enabled to speak or to write by the Spirit’s Inspiration. The Revelation accorded to the apostles and recorded by them through Inspiration is the Spirit’s means for “leading us into all the truth.” Accept this means, be led by no other means, and you and the apostles will be one.

What is true of Jesus (12:49; 14:10) is equally true of the Spirit: neither speaks anything “from himself,” as invented by himself. No; Jesus brought us the Word of the Father, as in all things he also did the Father’s saving will; and the Spirit brings us the Word of Jesus, “whatever he shall hear,” — expressing it in a human way. Thus all this Revelation is one. It is eternally sure, for it comes to us from the Three Persons of the Godhead.

**[14] “Me he shall glorify! For he shall take of mine and shall report it unto you.”** Note the double emphasis, both on ἑκεῖνος and on ἐμέ. The Spirit’s mission is to make Jesus glorious among men, for his one task is to bestow upon us the salvation which Jesus obtained for us. When that is made our own, we praise and glorify Jesus. “He shall take of mine” means of the saving realities embodied in Jesus’ person and his work. These the Spirit “shall report unto you,” the disciples, that thus they may now be brought by them to us and may be made our own by saving faith.

[15] “All things, whatever the Father has, are mine. For this reason I said that he takes of mine and will report it to you.” When Jesus stresses “mine,” the things by which the Spirit shall glorify “me,” it would be utterly wrong to think that Jesus is speaking of something that belongs to him apart from the Father. Quite the contrary: everything that the Father has belongs also to Jesus, and thus the Spirit takes what belongs to Jesus and reports it to the disciples. Through them (the New Testament) these precious, blessed treasures are now made ours.

## **Homiletical Aid**

The Holy Spirit’s work prior to the completion of Jesus’ work of redemption was restricted to the task of preparing for the work of Jesus. Upon the completion of Jesus’ work the world-wide mission of the Spirit began. Jesus goes to the Father, a blessed epoch begins with his departure. The eleven disciples think only of his leaving them and are plunged into unnecessary grief. Jesus tells them what his going away really means. Now there may begin

### **The Wondrous Work of the Holy Spirit on Earth.**

- I. The work of convicting the world.
  1. Of sin. The world admits its sin readily enough. What the Spirit impresses upon the world is that believing in Jesus is the only escape from sin.
  2. Of righteousness. The world’s false righteousnesses. The Spirit destroys these false verdicts by pointing to the departure of Jesus, the completion of his atonement, for the sake of which God does indeed pronounce the believing sinner righteous.
  3. Of judging. God has already judged the ruler of this world; according to that fact the world is to do its judging regarding itself.

All this convicting is done by the Spirit, by means of the Word, through the disciples (the Church), to save as many as possible in the

world, to take away all excuse from those who reject this conviction in impenitence and unbelief.

II. The work of guiding the Church.

1. He leads the apostles into all the divine and saving truth.
2. He prepares the New Testament Scriptures through them to guide all future believers into all the truth.
3. He thus keeps and strengthens us in all the truth.

All this guiding of the Church glorifies Jesus in our hearts and our lives; for he takes only the things of Jesus, which are the things of the Father. Thus all three Persons of the Godhead bless us with salvation.

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The promise of Jesus to send the Spirit. The name “Comforter” (14:16).

**The Witness of the Spirit of Truth.**

I. Reproof to the unbelievers.

Develop v. 8-11.

II. Comfort to the believer. How is the presence and the witness of the Spirit comfort to the believer?

1. The comfort that the New Testament was prepared for us by the Holy Spirit. v. 13; I Cor. 2:12-13; 2 Pet. 1:19; not cunningly devised fables, 2 Pet. 1:16, not the wisdom of men, but the power of God, 1 Cor. 2:5.
2. Through the Word the Spirit comforts us in regard to exactly those points in which he reproofs the world. He brings us all that is Christ’s and that he has from the Father: how to escape sin — how to obtain the true righteousness — how to judge ourselves aright. Passages: Rom. 8:1; 10:4; 1 Cor. 1:30; John v. 24.
3. The comfort of the Spirit’s personal assurance that we are God’s children. Rom. 8:16-17.

J. A. Dell.

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**“O sing unto the Lord a new song,  
For he hath done marvelous things.  
The Lord hath made known his salvation,  
His righteousness hath he openly showed in the sight of the  
heathen.”**

These are the words of the Introit. The vision of the eleven disciples in the upper room too limited, hence sorrow filled their hearts. Jesus opens for them and for us the world-wide vision, which calls to us:

**“O Sing Unto the Lord a New Song!”**

Its first stanza must deal with

I. The Holy Spirit.

1. His work preliminary until the redemption of Jesus was complete.
2. Then he was sent on his world-wide mission to glorify Jesus.
3. No greater and more glorious work takes place today. What the world and we would be if the Spirit were not present and active.

The second stanza deals with

II. The New Testament Scripture.

1. Produced by the Spirit: Revelation — Inspiration, v. 13-15.
2. The New Testament full of Jesus and his blessed salvation, all as promised and foretold in the Old Testament.
3. The New Testament the special instrument of the Spirit in his work. What if it had never been written under the Spirit’s agency?

The third stanza follows regarding

III. The Christian Church.

1. The Spirit equipped the apostles for their work, v. 13-15. Thus was the Church spread in the world.
2. Our place today in the Church due to the Spirit. Ours all that Jesus came to earth to provide for us, — enumerate.
3. The use the Spirit makes of the Church and of us who are in it for his continuous work in the world. What if there were no Spirit and no Church?

This leaves one more grand stanza in our new song, one singing about

IV. The world.

1. Which the Spirit now convicts concerning sin,
2. Concerning righteousness,
3. Concerning judging: — develop according to the exegesis. Thus the Spirit brings many to Jesus and salvation, and thus he leaves the rest without excuse. What if no Holy Spirit wrought thus in the sinful and lost world?

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Explain the word “Paraclete,” translated “Comforter” in our Bible, how it means “One called to our side” by the Lord. This is the Holy Spirit, and we must have him

**Ever At Our Side.**

- I. Lest like the blind and deceived world we persist in thinking lightly, falsely, and in a fatal way concerning sin, and thus fail to grasp that the one and only deliverance from sin is through Jesus and faith in him as our Redeemer. The blessedness of having the Holy Spirit at our side ever to keep us truly delivered from sin.
- II. Lest again like the foolish world we cling to false ideas concerning righteousness, and imagine ourselves righteous before God’s judgment seat when we are anything but righteous and have God’s verdict of damnation resting upon us, or lest we set up and strive to attain

mistaken ideals of righteousness, which even if attained amount to nothing before God, the Judge. Instead of attaining God's true verdict of righteousness through Jesus who finished the expiation for our sins and so returned to the Father. The blessedness of having the Holy Spirit at our side ever to keep us in the true righteousness of Christ.

- III. Lest also like the arrogant and haughty world we get dangerous ideas concerning judging and judge ourselves and others falsely, acquitting ourselves, when the Supreme Judge, before whom we must all appear, has already judged the prince of this world and thereby all who remain in his domain in this world. Instead of judging ourselves aright by submitting only to God's true judgment. The blessedness of having the Holy Spirit ever at our side and of having him ever keep us judging in harmony with God's judgment.
- IV. Lest we be misled away from the truth which glorifies Jesus, as the world is misled and as are so many who call themselves Christians. The Holy Spirit has given us the New Testament in addition to the Old, to guide us into all truth, to make our own all that belongs to Jesus and that means all that is the Father's. All this blessed truth is to enlighten, enrich, direct, safeguard, elevate us,— the most glorious treasure a human soul is able to possess. Shall anything ever induce us to turn from the Holy Spirit and the saving, heavenly truth, instead of keeping our Paraclete ever at our side?

# Rogate. John 16:23-30

## The Savior Promises to Answer Prayer

Rogate is regarded as the Prayer Sunday of the Church Year, i.e. as the Sunday appropriate for a special sermon on prayer. Yet it is only the ancient gospel text which treats of prayer, not so the epistle text. How the Sunday itself became a special day for praying and finally ushered in an entire Week of Prayer, I have sketched in the Eisenach Gospel Selections, 3rd ed., 532. As this special feature of the Sunday came into vogue, so it also disappeared. We now let the gospel text supply the name “Rogate” for this Sunday and from this text preach to our people on the subject of prayer. This important text on prayer and an adequate sermon on the great subject of prayer, one full of instruction and strong in stimulating our people in their praying, are eminently in place in the Pentecost cycle, for all true prayer is the work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of the Christians.

We have a third text from John’s sixteenth chapter, — Jubilate v. 16-23; Cantate v. 5-15; and now Rogate v. 23-30. We may note, too, that Cantate presented to us the extensive work of the Holy Spirit as regards the world and as regards the Church; Rogate presents the intimate work of the Spirit, for praying is a most intimate, personal matter and is no less so even when we all join in congregational prayer. The text itself does not mention the Holy Spirit, yet remember the text for Cantate and forget not that our text for Rogate is a portion of the great final discourse of Jesus in the upper room in which Jesus both promises to send the Holy Spirit and so fully describes his blessed mission. It would be a mistake to isolate our text and to treat it as if it were no part of a grander whole.

After telling the eleven disciples what the “little while” signifies and how it shall end by bringing them the joy which no man shall take from them, Jesus instructs these disciples regarding prayer in his name. Jesus refers to the time following his departure to the Father, the time in which we

ourselves now live, the time for which he will send us the Holy Spirit as “another Paraclete” (14:16, the Spirit of the truth, who shall be our great guide 16:7 and 13). It is thus that Jesus says: **“Amen, amen, I say to you, whatever you shall ask the Father, he will give to you in my name. [24] Up till now you did not ask anything in my name. Keep asking, and you shall receive, in order that your joy may be filled full.”**

“Amen, amen, I say to you,” the double seal of verity and of authority, is explained in v. 20, in connection with the text for Cantate. This great seal always stamps statements as being of the utmost importance. Here it is the repetition of the promise that whatever the disciples shall ask the Father he will give to them. This promise runs through the final discourse, note 14:13-14; 15:7 and 16. We have an almost exact duplication of the promise in 15:16. Prayer is to be the constant reliance of the disciples. These repetitions indicate that they will often be in need of gifts and of help that the Father alone can supply. In 14:13-14 Jesus says that he himself will do what we ask; in this section, that the Father will do this. Jesus and the Father are one, and Jesus says: “All things that the Father hath are mine” (v. 15).

He will give to you “in my name.” In v. 14:13 we are told to ask “in my name”; so also in 15:16. Both the asking and the giving is “in my name.” This important phrase is not always understood although both Jesus and the apostles frequently employ it. Ἐν is to be understood in its first meaning, and ὄνομα is the revelation by which Jesus makes himself known and by which we alone can and do know him in faith. “In my Name” = in connection with this revelation of myself as truly apprehended by you. That “in my Name” includes true faith in this revelation is obvious. Because of this meaning of the phrase Jesus does not need to add restrictions to the blanket promise: “whatever (ἄν τι = ἕάν τι, “if anything”) you shall ask” (αἰτέω, active: beg). Faith when using the Name (revelation) of Jesus does not ask anything in conflict with this Name (revelation); thus also the Father’s gifts in answer to such prayers naturally harmonize with this Name (revelation).

All prayer without Jesus’ name is devoid of the divine promise of being heard. As an outward sign and evidence that we do pray only in Jesus’ Name we commonly say so in oral and in public prayers. Of course, not the utterance of such words counts, but the faith which embraces this Name in

our hearts. No true believer is able to join in a Unitarian prayer or in any of the ritual prayers of the secret orders. In such prayers the Name is not merely omitted, it is omitted intentionally. In these prayers the Holy Trinity is denied, the God who is addressed does not exist, and the God and Savior who do exist are insulted by these prayers sent to the non-existing God.

When reference is had to the Lord's Prayer in which the name of Jesus does not occur, the form of this prayer is no justification for Christless prayers, for Jesus himself gave Us this prayer, Jesus cannot bid us pray without his Name in this prayer and then in this solemn discourse before his death bid us pray only "in my Name." Moreover, the very first words: "our Father," mean: "our Father in Christ Jesus" in whose name alone we as children can cry to God: "Abba Father." When a Unitarian or a Mason, etc., use "Father" in their prayers, this is not the Father mentioned by Jesus in the Lord's Prayer, Whose children we are by faith in Jesus and in his Name alone, but a Father that exists only in men's perverted minds, a Father set up in opposition to the Father we confess in the Apostles' Creed, whom together with the Son and the Holy Spirit we worship as the One God beside whom there is no other.

[24] Up to this time the disciples had not prayed in Jesus' name. They had prayed as believing and devout Jews in the old covenant name: the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in connection with the Messianic promises. But now these promises were on the point of being fulfilled through the death and the exaltation of the Messiah, the Savior. Thus naturally the disciples should now pray "in my name." All they who now refuse to do so thereby repudiate the revelation in Jesus, all his atoning work. Scorning God's own Son, their Savior, they presume to come to God and ask gifts of him, by their very asking insulting God in the worst possible manner, — but it is not God to whom they come, it is the fiction of God they have themselves made as a substitute for God.

It is a grave mistake to think that Jesus is faulting the disciples for the manner of their praying until this time. All blame would fall back on himself, for not until this time does he emphasize and teach them the use of his name in prayer. He had to delay "up till now," because not until now was his own redemptive work (which forms the heart of his "Name") completed.

“Keep asking!” means “in my name,” so that the Father may give to you “in my name.” Call this a command, and neglect to obey it, and you manifest disobedience to the command. It is a blessed Gospel command, or rather invitation. It urges us to use our high privilege as children of our Father in Christ Jesus. Here Jesus opens to us the treasure house of all God’s love and of all his gifts for us; we may freely enter and call for anything that we need.

When Jesus adds: “in order that your joy may be filled full,” he reverts to the joy referred to in v. 22: “and your joy no man taketh from you,” the joy that is ours as the result of our Savior’s death and his exaltation. Our joy is to have such a Savior. The gifts which the Father gives us in answer to our prayers in this Savior’s name are the evidence which shows that we indeed have this blessed Savior. Thus we have not only some joy, but the full measure of joy. Robertson speaks of a periphrastic perfect subjunctive; I think we may regard the participle as a predicative modifier: our joy is to be “as having already been filled full” by our Father and now continuing thus.

**[25] “In paroimias have I spoken these things to you. The hour is coming when I no longer shall speak to you in paroimias, but will report to you with openness concerning the Father. [26] In that day you shall ask in my name, and I do not say to you that I myself shall make request of the Father pertaining to you, [27] for the Father himself has affection for you, because you on your part have had affection for me, and have believed that I on my part came forth from the Father.”**

“Paroimias” are neither “proverbs” nor “parables.” Derived from πάροιμος, “by the way,” the word is here used as the opposite of παρρησία, “openness” which speaks without restraint and holds back nothing. The condition of the disciples laid great restraint upon Jesus, note v. 12. Regarding the main things he could not speak out as he desired. When he says that soon the hour (here used in the sense of time) would come when he could speak with full openness “concerning the Father” we must connect this reference with everything else that he says in this great discourse about the Father, namely that he is the Sender of Jesus, that Jesus is completing the great mission on which he has been sent, and that, after the mission is completed, he is ascending to heaven to his great Sender to execute the heavenly part of his mission.

The time to speak without restraint about all these matters was fast approaching. We see how Jesus spoke to the disciples in the light of his actual death and his resurrection in Luke 24:25-27 and 32; 44-49. This is a part of “the hour” to which he refers; the greater part follows at Pentecost and after when Jesus spoke to the disciples by the revelation of his Spirit (v. 13-15); then the last restraint was removed.

[26] Jesus explains what he means when he says in v. 23 that the Father will give in Jesus’ name what the disciples shall ask of him. ‘This does not mean that when Jesus goes to his Father and the disciples pray to the Father in Jesus’ name, Jesus Will secure the gifts asked for by himself making request of the Father concerning the disciples. “In my name” is not to be understood in that way. The mediatorship of Jesus will indeed remain and this includes all the intercession of Jesus in heaven (note for instance 1 John 2:1-2) in behalf of the disciples.

[27] But as regards their own prayers to the Father in Jesus’ name, this name alone avails abundantly. The Father has affection for those who are attached to this Name. Here Jesus uses φιλεῖν, not ἀγαπᾶν. Our versions make no distinction, and yet we do not understand fully what Jesus here says unless we know the distinction. Φιλεῖν here means both more than ἀγαπᾶν and also less. The latter is always the love of comprehension and of corresponding purpose, the former is the love of liking and of personal affection. The former is the higher, the latter the lower type of love. God can have and does have *agape* for the world, he cannot and does not have *philia*. But in addition to his *agape* he does embrace us, the disciples who come to him in Jesus’ name (as the world does not come), with the affection of his *philia*. Jesus states the reason.

The reason is because we on our part have *philia* for Jesus and have believed that he came forth from the Father, i.e. came for the great mission that Jesus was now completing. Thus the *philia* we have for Jesus is over and above the *agape* we have for him, — it is the tender love of affection with which we ever embrace our Savior, — from *philia* is derived the word for “friend” and for “kiss.” So the Father’s *philia* reaches out to us over and above his *agape* for us, — it is his tenderness as our Father for us as his dear children. In his *philia* for us he is able to bestow gifts upon us such as he could not possibly bestow upon the world, upon those who do not believe in the great mission on which he sent his Son, who do not believe in

Jesus, who also scorn to pray in Jesus' name. The Father's own great affection for us answers our prayers offered up in Jesus' name. These assurances were full of enlightenment and comfort for the eleven disciples gathered about Jesus in the upper room; we treasure these assurances as applying also to us.

[28] Jesus has just said that his disciples believe that he came forth from the Father. Everything centered in this fact. Therefore Jesus states it once more, simply yet fully and this time objectively and by itself, whether any one believes it or not. **“I came out from the Father, and have come into the world; again, I am leaving the world, and am going to the Father.”** These are the four cardinal points, and they are stated in language that could not be more lucid.

The aorist “I came” states the historical fact, states it as such. The perfect tense “I have come” present continuance, — having come, Jesus is still present, though about to depart. The two present tenses “I am leaving and am going” speak of the act now impending. Note well that all these verbs speak of these acts as being his own: his coming, his remaining, his departing are acts that he performs. He accepted the Father's mission, he is now completing that mission, and thus returns to his Father. He speaks as the sovereign Son. One in essence with the Father, hence  $\epsilon\kappa$ ; yet two in Person, hence  $\pi\alpha\rho\acute{\alpha}$  (“from the side of”). So simple the words, yet they reach from heaven to earth and back again.

[29] Various individuals among the eleven are moved to express what they all feel. **His disciples say: “Lo, now thou speakest with openness and speakest no paroimia (veiled word). [30] Now we know that thou knowest all things, and dost not have need that one inquire of thee. By this we believe that thou didst come forth from God.”** The apostles are certain in regard to three things: 1) the way in which Jesus speaks; 2) the wonder of his knowledge; 3) the support this knowledge of his furnishes their own faith in the vital fact concerning Jesus.

The disciples feel that in his last statements Jesus is speaking without reservation. It is true, his words are very clear and altogether simple and easy of apprehension. Yet what Jesus says in v. 25 about his speaking in the time to come goes far beyond even the openness of what he now says. This the disciples do not realize, in fact, could not realize at the present time. So

Jesus says no more on the subject. It was best to wait until the “hour” would arrive.

[30] The second thing that impresses the disciples is the fact that Jesus knows all things so that he answers unspoken thoughts, for this he had done regarding their own thoughts (v. 19). He who is able to read men’s hearts and to answer unspoken inquiries must have divine supernatural knowledge: “thou knowest all things.” The disciples were right.

Ἐν τούτῳ = in connection with this fact, the one just stated, in regard to this knowledge of Jesus, the disciples confess that “we believe that thou didst come forth from God.” They formulate their confession to match Jesus’ own words spoken in v. 28, except that they abbreviate. Yet by confessing the one fact they confess also the others expressed in v. 28. The use of *rind* does not mean to deny the fact of v. 28, but means to include it. The disciples here confess, for the last time before the death of Jesus, both his deity and his great mission. As far, then, as our prayers are concerned, they ever rest on this same faith, of which we at this late day should be even more certain than the eleven could be in that last night of Jesus’ life.

## Homiletical Aid

We are weak — our need is great — at times we have dire distress. Jesus bids us pray. The Holy Spirit comes to us in the Word, and he is the Spirit of prayer. But is there any use to pray? Does God hear prayer, does he give what we ask? Most decidedly Jesus answers yes. Consider

### **The Power of Christian Prayer.**

#### I. Its wondrous greatness.

“Whatever you shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you.” “Ask and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full.” There are no restrictions whatever.

There need be none, for this is Christian prayer, and Christian faith does not play with prayer, tempt God with prayer, ask what is contrary to God’s will and to our own hurt, but always only so that our joy may be full.

Examples of Christian prayer. Our own personal experience. Complaints about not being heard; but when we are not heard the fault is our own, we pray amiss (James 4:3).

II. Its divine support.

The command and the promise of Jesus.

The connection with his blessed name (revelation). The Father hears us for Jesus' sake (v. 27).

Many prayers are directed to an imaginary God, as when the priests cried to Baal and Elijah mocked them. Many prayers are not prayed in Jesus' name. All such prayers are devoid of divine support. They insult the true God. They bring down a curse, not a blessing.

III. Its blessed use.

By faith in Jesus' name. The power is there in all its greatness and all its divine support, Whether you believe or not. The door is open. The key is in your hand. Many doubt and fail to pray or just put God to a test.

The prayer-life: Sunday, church, public, congregational, united prayer; the family altar; prayer in our own private room; in need, in danger, in sorrow.

The fruit of prayer: deeper Christianity, better hearers, readers, learners of the Word; better givers, helpers, workers; better sufferers, more patient, ready to bear; better fighters of sin, better victors; better in living and better in dying.

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When Jesus in the night in which he was betrayed told his disciples that he was leaving them, he bade them to pray. When he told them he would send them the Holy Spirit, he again told them to pray. After his visible presence was gone, prayer would still be their constant contact with him. Also the Holy Spirit bestowed upon them would constantly keep them in prayer-connection with Jesus. Let us see how

**The Lord Jesus Moves Us to Pray.**

I. Lovingly he bids us pray.

1. His is not the voice of the law which commands under threats and penalties. The Second Commandment. God created and preserves us, we are utterly dependent on him. This fact already should drive us to pray. Refusal to pray is disobedience, draws penalty, plunges into damnation. But we are sinners, transgressors of the law, hence God sent us the Savior and the Gospel.
2. Jesus lovingly asks us to pray. Jesus has come on his redemptive mission, he has purchased and won us; we are to believe in him (v. 27); thus the Father will embrace us in affection as his children; this should move us to come to him in prayer.
3. The Gospel brings us the Name (revelation) of Jesus, by which we may draw nigh to the Father in believing prayer. Prayer thus our highest privilege, our most precious right. It is the door Jesus opened for us, freely to enter, and to enrich ourselves. Prayer freely takes all the gifts that the Father's hands proffer to us in Jesus' name.
4. Not to pray means to forfeit the Gospel and to fall into the condemnation of the law, to scorn both our Redeemer and our Creator, to forfeit the highest love and our most valuable right. To pray aright in Jesus' name is to show that we are indeed believers, disciples of Jesus, beloved of the Father, and that means to be blessed in time and in eternity.

II. Graciously he promises that we shall be heard.

1. "Whatsoever ye shall ask," etc. Expound.
2. All that the Father's affection is able to bestow: "the Father himself loveth you" (φιλεῖ).
3. "That your joy may be full" (v. 24).
4. Not to pray or to pray amiss means the loss of what is here promised. To pray in the true faith means the enrichment which Jesus promised.

## **We pray to Our Father in Heaven.**

- I. He is revealed to us, by Christ Jesus.
- II. He is related to us through Christ Jesus.
- III. He loves us in Christ Jesus.
- IV. He answers our prayers made in the name of Jesus Christ.

J. A. Dell.

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All true religion is a communion between God and man. God is mindful of his creature; man is mindful of his Creator. God looks down with love and blessing; man looks up with praise and prayer. This is the meaning of: "Pray without ceasing."

We Christians believe in and practice prayer. We teach children to pray. Many prayers in public worship. Family worship, private prayer, etc. We chide and rebuke all who neglect Christian prayer. There is no substitute for prayer in Jesus' name. Why all this? We answer: Look at

### **The Basis of Christian Prayer.**

- I. Christian prayer is based upon the belief that Christ came forth from, and returned to God (v. 28-30).
- II. Christian prayer is based upon the direct command and promise of God (v. 23-28).
  1. God wants to hear.
  2. God wants to help.

J. A. Dell

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### **To Pray in Jesus' Name**

- I. Is to pray to the Father of Jesus,

- II. Is to pray in faith in Jesus,
- III. Is to pray according to the mind of Jesus.

J. L. Sommer.

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Prayer, prayer, — the world resounds with prayer. Pagans pray, Mohammedans pray (five times a day), Jews pray, in our country many functions are opened with prayer, nominal Christians pray, we true Christians pray. The great mass of this volume of prayers is wholly in vain, unheard in the sense of unanswered. We must ever be on our guard lest our prayers also belong to the class of

### **Unheard Prayers.**

These are prayers

- I. That are not directed to the Father.

We pray to the Triune God alone. We may address any of the Three Persons, they are one in essence. This God alone answers prayer. Since the world stands no prayer was heard and obtained the gift for which it asked, save prayer to the true God.

How can prayers addressed to an idol of wood or stone be heard? or addressed to an imaginary God such as the grand Architect of the Universe (a phallic god)? or any Unitarian, deistic god, no such God existing? Rightly did Elijah make mock of the priests of Baal when they cried and cried to their idol and no response came. None could come!

Never pray to any save the true God!

- II. That ignore the mission of Jesus.

We rest all our prayers on Jesus, on what he has done for us sinners when he came from the Father into the world, redeemed us with his blood, and then returned to the glory of his Father. As sinners we know

that we dare not approach the holy throne of God and expect to be heard without our Redeemer, without his expiation.

How can they who come to God, even to the true God, without this one and only cover for their sins, expect to be heard? They who think but lightly of their sins, to whom the blood of Jesus Christ means nothing, who are ready to join in prayer with “Jew, heathen, and Hottentot,” cannot possibly be heard. Their prayers accomplish no more than the Chinese prayer-wheels.

Utter no prayer save through Jesus!

III. That lack the Name of Jesus.

We pray in Jesus’ name. His name is the revelation by which he has made himself known to us, by which we alone can know him, do know him, and thus trust in him with our whole heart. Apart from this name, revelation, and faith, it is hopeless to expect to be heard by God.

This is the very name so widely and so viciously spurned. How can prayers without this name possibly be heard? Do you think your own name avails before God? Do you know of any other name you could use? Believe in whom or in what you will, though your faith be gigantic, all your praying in it is in vain. Empty the name, say that Jesus is not God’s Son, not born of a virgin, did not shed his blood to expiate our sins, did not arise from the dead, as says the Jew, the modernist, the worldling, and all your praying is empty sound.

Pray only in Jesus’ name!

IV. That do not help to fill our joy.

We pray for such gifts from God as serve to increase our spiritual joy. We know that God has affection for us as being his children in Christ Jesus, that therefore he wants every gift of his to be a true blessing and a source of joy for us. Hence we do not dictate to him, we do not set up our presumptuous wisdom. We leave everything to his affection.

How can any one hope to be heard when he comes with presumption and the challenge that if the Father does not do so and so he will not believe and not pray any more? Thus Christians are at times

told by skeptics to pray for a thing to see whether there is a God or not. Christians themselves at times pray for earthly, and temporal things without adding: “Thy will be done, not mine!”

Never pray except for real blessings that bring true spiritual joy!

# Ascension Day. Mark 16:14-20

## Our Savior Sends the Gospel to the World and Ascends to Heaven

The critical question regarding the genuineness of Mark 16:9-20 is answered in my *Interpretation of St. Mark's Gospel*. The fact that the ancients chose Mark 16:14-20 as the text for Ascension Day indicates that in the early days the closing verses of Mark's Gospel were considered to have come from Mark's pen. There should be no doubt on this score, for the external as well as the internal evidence allows no other legitimate conclusion. Our text is a part of the inspired Word.

Ascension Day was made a festival somewhat late in the history of the Church Year. Even then when it was distinguished by a special church service, it was not the act of the ascension alone that was celebrated. In both the gospel and the epistle text more than the act is included. An essential part of the gospel text is the Great Commission, which cannot be executed save through our ascended Lord. Thus the preacher should indeed describe the ascension and the heavenly exaltation of Jesus as one of the great soteriological facts: with the ascension he who came from the Father into the world on his great redemptive mission (John 16:28, Rogate), returns to the Father, with his mission completed, with everything ready so the Holy Spirit can carry the Gospel into all the world (Acts 1:8). Along these lines we preach on the ancient gospel text for Ascension Day.

**[14] And afterward he was manifested to the eleven themselves while reclining at table, and he upbraided their unbelief and heart-stiffness, because they did not believe them that did behold him as having arisen.**

Luke recites this incident at greater length (24:36 etc.); yet Mark's account is entirely independent of Luke's record. It is a sad fact, at first the apostles did not believe in the resurrection of Jesus. It is not true that they were a credulous set who believed a rumor the moment they heard it and

thus started the report that Jesus came back to life. They were the very opposite, a hard-headed set, who resisted the strongest evidence and believed only when they could no longer disbelieve. In this respect the apostles are by no means models; they brought down on themselves the Lord's severe rebuke. In another respect their refusal to believe is valuable, for it excludes every claim of skeptics that the apostles were uncritical and credulous and believed without the full support of the facts.

Jesus blames them for their unbelief. The verb ὠνειδίσει is a strong expression: Jesus confronts the eleven with their guilt, and they have no answer and not even an excuse. Jesus upbraided "their unbelief and heart-stiffness," σκληροκαρδία, the condition of the heart when it is like a dried out branch which refuses to bend. This ugly stiffness caused the unbelief. Change your idea that unbelief has intellectual causes; it is due to the resistance of a stiff or hard heart. Where the heart is wrong — in Greek the heart is the seat of the ego and of the will — the intellect, which is the slave of the will, trumps up all kinds of arguments against believing, but all these fade away the moment the will is changed, the stiffness of the heart is removed.

Although Mark's account is so brief, he states what was wrong with these unbelieving hearts, in what their hardness consisted: they refused to believe the full and circumstantial testimony of those who had beheld Jesus as one having risen. Note that the word is not merely "who had seen," for this might indicate only a brief, fleeting seeing; no, they "had beheld" (so also v. 11) they had time to do this, they had viewed closely, fully, and found Jesus ἔγηγερμένος, "arisen," the perfect participle stating that he arose and is now in that state. The testimony to this effect should have been promptly believed. But the eleven did not, would not believe. They violated the law of their own reason; they acted unnaturally, abnormally; for adequate and complete testimony must be accepted and believed. This matter is of the greatest importance for us of today, for all our faith rests altogether on true and genuine testimony (John 20:29; 1 John 1:1-3). Not to believe the written testimony of Scripture would plunge us into fatal guilt.

[15] I decline to place v. 14 into the same paragraph with v. 15-18, as our R.V. does. Verse 14 was spoken in the locked room; but the Great Commission was spoken in Galilee to the 500 disciples (1 Cor. 15:6). Matthew 28:16-20 reports the same event. Each of the two evangelists

offers an independent report. Jesus said even more than both of them report. From the many words that Jesus spoke on the mountain each evangelist selects what he deemed necessary for his readers to know. Thus Mark records: **And he said to them: “Having gone into all the world herald the Gospel to the whole creation! [16] He that believed and was baptized shall be saved; but he that disbelieved shall be condemned. [17] Moreover, these signs shall follow them that believed; in my name they shall cast out demons; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and if they shall drink anything deadly, it shall in no wise hurt them; on the sick they shall place hands, and they shall be well.”**

The Great Commission includes the Great Promise of Salvation. It was given to the entire Church (the five hundred, 1 Cor. 15:6), whose leaders were the apostles whom Jesus himself called. Throughout the ages the apostles reach the whole creation by means of their inspired writings (the New Testament). Although all of the apostles did not produce literature, those who did, including James, Luke, and Mark, wrote what all of them taught, so that we hear their united voices in every part of our New Testament.

“Having gone into all the world” is the minor action and is thus expressed by a participle. The intention is not that in all places among all nations and all classes some may be saved (Calvin: those elected by an absolute decree), but that all men in the whole world may hear the Gospel, may believe it, and be saved. The Gospel is universal. To send it to the ends of the earth Jesus ascended to heaven and rules in majesty at God’s right hand. The main command is: κηρύξατε τὸ εὐαγγέλιον πάσῃ τῇ κτίσει, which is translated: “Herald the Gospel to the whole creation!” “The whole creation” = “all the nations,” πάντα τὰ ἔθνη in Matthew. Note that the dative used in Mark’s account has the article; hence it cannot be translated “to every creature” (A.V.). Also in English the presence or the absence of the article changes the sense. By “the whole creation” Jesus means all men, and he designates them by a reference to their Creator and his great act of creation on the sixth day.

The command: “Herald the Gospel!” is an aorist and thus has a peremptory, majestic ring. As heralds do, so the apostles are to shout aloud the precious Gospel news so that the whole world may hear. This they have

done. Yet pause a moment and let the majesty of this command impress your mind. To no less a territory than the whole world with all its nations and its uncounted millions, while standing on a mountain in Galilee, with the grand panorama of the world reaching to the far horizon all around him, Jesus sends his heralds. So few in number they were, but there is no question in regard to their success. Their simple task is “to herald,” “to preach” in this sense. This means to take the message their Lord gives them and to sound it forth just as they have received it from him, to change, to add or to subtract nothing. Let every preacher (herald) note it well! Jesus utters a Gospel command. The salvation he has bought at so great a price is to be taken to all men in the world. The command is given to us “to go,” not to them “to come.” So far grace extends. So much grace includes. The Gospel seeks all men’s hearts. What a going there has been! Think of the travels of Paul. Over land and sea, by means of all sorts of conveyances, in the face of all matter of difficulties. And still the heralds go. When their task is finally done, “then shall the end come,” Matt. 24:14. In all the world no more important work is done.

[16] Great as is the Commission, so great also is the Promise: “He that believed and was baptized shall be saved.” Our versions translate the two substantivized aorist participles with English present tenses, so they also translate the aorist participle of the next clause. Do our versions regard these aorists as gnomic aorists? Are these substantivized gnomic participles? In Rom. 8:30 we have gnomic main verbs, but in these two clauses here in Mark the main verbs are in the future tense. The participles are quite ordinary. One article combines the two, and the aorists designate actions that precede the future act of being saved. The baptizing is itself one past act that must precede the action indicated by the future tense; the believing may likewise be one past act: “he that came to faith” (ingressive aorist), or it may be constative. By using only one article the act of believing and being baptized is made a unit. Naturally any adult believer will ask for Baptism; he could not reject Baptism and be a believer. Baptism is an essential part of the Gospel. They who make Baptism a mere sign remove its necessity. The believing baptized person receives salvation, “shall be saved,” passive, by the Savior. Ζώζειν contains both the idea of a rescue from mortal danger (from the ἀπώλεια, perishing) and the placing into a permanent state of security. The verb, its noun, and their cognate

terms form the greatest, most distinctive and most glorious terms in the Scriptures.

Christianity is the one religion which does not demand that the sinner save himself, but that he permit the Son of God to save him and to keep him safe.

So simple the means: *the Gospel*, a part of which is Baptism (objective means); *faith* (subjective means), which includes the acceptance of Baptism and its divine promise, both the faith and the acceptance being wrought by the Gospel itself. Yet so many scorn these means and perish in spite of the great salvation. The Gospel, the divine good news that is heralded abroad, is perfectly fitted to produce faith, divinely intended for this supreme purpose. Κηρύσσειν and πιστεύειν are close correlatives: no heralding except for believing, and no believing except as the response to the heralding. That “believe” is not a mere opinion, not mere assent (*fides informata*, which by the addition of *charitas* and works of love becomes *fides formata*, — the Catholic conception), not a mere subjective conviction, but the *fiducia* or confidence of the heart in the divine, unchanging realities Which naturally involves explicit knowledge and most intelligent assent, is the teaching of all Scripture. The saving power of faith lies not in the action as an action of *fiducia*, for one may have the greatest possible confidence in the world, if that confidence relies upon either a wrong object or upon an imaginary, non-existing object, it will avail as little as disbelieving.

While in the terse formulation of our text no object is mentioned, the entire teaching of Jesus regarding saving faith supplies the object: he that believeth in me, in my sacrificial death and my resurrection.

**" I know whom I believe in,  
I know what firm abides,  
When all around me fading  
Away like vapor glides. Etc.**

**" It is the Light of Glory;  
It is my Jesus, King;  
It is the Rock I stand on,  
It is of this I sing. Etc.**

**“He whom blood-stained they buried  
In the still twilight hour,  
He whom God waked from slumber,  
He who arose in power:  
He for my guilt atoneth,  
To me his Spirit gives,  
Me with his grace he crowneth:  
I live because he lives.” — Ernst Moritz Arndt.**

If he that believed and was baptized shall be saved, then he that disbelieved shall undoubtedly be condemned, κατακριθήσεται, “shall receive a Verdict against him,” “shall be damned” (A.V.). Jesus does not need to add: “and was not baptized,” for a disbeliever spurns Baptism, and even if he was baptized in his infancy his later disbelief scorns and rejects his Baptism and the salvation it brought him. But the omission of a reference to Baptism in the negative statement may also have this implication: a person may believe and be ready and anxious for Baptism, and yet may be overtaken by sudden death before the Sacrament is actually administered to him. Such a person is saved by the Word alone. Naturally cases of this nature will occur rather seldom.

Mark does not record the institution of Baptism, yet here its institution is clearly implied. The alternatives are exclusive: salvation — damnation. He who scorns the means of salvation, by that very act plunges himself into damnation. Fastidious ears do not like the “shall be damned” of the A.V., yet the softest name does not in the least alter the fires of hell. He who makes it impossible for Christ to acquit him from sin and guilt must not complain when Christ does the only other thing that is left for him to do, pronounces the verdict of damnation. Note that in both statements Jesus uses the singular, faith and Baptism as Well as disbelief are altogether personal.

[17] The miraculous signs here promised are not new, for they were bestowed already in 3:15; Matt. 10:1; note also the Seventy, Luke 10:17. This list is only a little longer. “In my name” is explained in John 16:23, Rogate. The record of these signs is found in Acts, where also we see the difference between the signs wrought by Jesus in his own power and the signs wrought by the apostles. and by others in Jesus’ name. The phrase

never means “by the authority of Jesus,” but always “in connection with the revelation of Jesus.”

We must get rid of the idea that any and all believers were able to do these signs. The Holy Spirit chose his instruments. Likewise, those who wrought signs did not and could not do so *ad libitum*, as they themselves might decide and desire, but only as they received intimation from the Holy Spirit. For these were divine “signs” that signified something beyond themselves; they were the Lord’s credentials and seals appended to the preaching of the Gospel, certifying to its divinity and its truth. We have the inspired record of these signs as they were actually wrought, and thus these signs are certifications also for us. Thus also they came to an end when their number was sufficient. We cannot ask that what is already fully sealed and certified be ever sealed and certified anew, for this would mean that no seal and certification really sealed and certified. Not that the arm of the Lord is shortened and that miracles have ceased to occur. Those that still occur do not have the same value as those that are recorded by inspiration, for we can have no such authoritative record of them, which means that they bear no such sign character as the recorded miracles. To the claim of Christian Scientists, believers in faith and prayer cures, etc., that the church must still do what it did in apostolic days, we need but reply by demanding that they perform a few genuine miracles similar to those recorded in Acts. Until then we shall look with pity on their claims and alleged “cures.”

On demoniacal possession see Matt. 15:21-28, Reminiscere. The skeptical denial of its possibility, and the scientific claim that only some kind of mental derangement was the actual fact involved in the biblical accounts, should not disturb us. Regarding the speaking with new tongues see my *Interpretation of Acts* chapters 2 and 10:46; 11:17; and in 1 Corinthians, chapter 12:10; 14:1 etc. Suffice it to say here that the sign consists in speaking actual foreign human languages, which natives are able to understand. Certain fanatics claim to speak in tongues today, but they only babble in gibberish. A craze for speaking in tongues started some years ago in California, made its way into Norway, then at last spread in Germany. It ended with a crash when its leaders in Germany confessed in print that the entire movement was due to demon influences.

[18] “Shall take up serpents” recalls Luke 10:19, treading on serpents and scorpions. The only comparable example we have is Paul’s escape from

death recorded in Acts 28:3 etc. We have no example of escape from the fatal effects of poisonous drinks, save that tradition reports that the apostle John drank poison without harm, likewise Justus Barsabas (Eusebius, 3:39). Examples of healing the sick miraculously are numerous. As regards Καλῶς ἔξουσιν remember that ἔχειν with an adverb means “to be,” hence the future: “they shall be well.”

**[19] So then the Lord Jesus, after he spoke to them was received up into the heaven, and sat down at the right of God. [20] And they, having gone out, heralded everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the Word through the signs that kept following after.**

“After he spoke to them” (λαλήσαι, aorist) means: after all was spoken that Jesus had to say to his disciples, including also his very last words recorded in Acts 1:4-8. The ascension took place from Mount Olivet (Luke 24:50), forty days after the resurrection (Acts 1:3). Mark records only the great fact. Only here at the end of his gospel he calls Jesus Κύριος, Ἰησοῦς and Κύριος (v. 20). When Mark wrote, the title “Lord” was in constant use, and Mark might have employed it throughout his gospel. He reserves it for the very end, to mark the fact that these two verses form the end (not the entire section v. 9-20, as some suppose), and to merge his gospel into the faith, the confession, and the worship of the Church as it existed in Mark’s day, which has value also for our own much later day. Only a critical mind would cast doubt on Mark’s authorship of these verses by calling the title “Lord” and “Lord Jesus” liturgical. As for the liturgical title common in the days of Mark’s writing, this is the confessional one: “our Lord, or our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.”

“Was received up into the heaven” states exactly what took place. The preacher may compare and utilize the epistle text for the day, the detailed exposition of Acts 1:9, in *The Epistle Selections of the Ancient Church* 474, etc. The passive means that God took Jesus up. Visibly his body rose into the sky, until a cloud enveloped it and hid it from sight, and in that instant, altogether timelessly, Jesus was transferred to heaven, the supernatural abode of God and his angels and his saints. The disciples did not see the first part of the resurrection but only its last part, the Lord’s appearances; conversely, they saw only the first part of the ascension and not the last. Jesus in his human nature was taken into heaven, his human nature not only being glorified (like that of Elijah) but also being exalted to participate in an

absolute way in the use of all the divine attributes which were bestowed upon this human nature when it was joined to the divine at the Incarnation but which Jesus used only in a very limited way during the days of his humiliation. During the forty days Jesus appeared to his disciples and left after each appearance by simply vanishing from their sight. He now left in a far different way, in a way that plainly indicated that the appearances they had enjoyed hitherto were ended.

It is Mark alone who adds that the Lord Jesus “sat down at the right of God.” The charge that by writing this Mark ceases to be a historian and becomes a theologian operates with untenable ideas. To be sure, the disciples did not with their physical eyes see this divine *sessio*, but is only that fact historical which someone sees? Both of Mark’s aorists: “he was taken up,” “he sat down,” are equally historical. The latter fact was communicated by revelation and is as little merely “theological” as the other fact. Ἐκ is the Greek idiom, conceiving the right hand to extend “out from” God, and the plural δεξιᾶ conceives the “right” as consisting of parts. God is an infinite spirit, and has neither right nor left side nor hand. Mark’s expression is anthropomorphic. Scripture condescends to our poor finite limitations.

One must combine all the passages which speak of God’s right hand. Then such notions as that of Spurgeon will disappear, namely that Jesus’ sitting down means rest after hard labor. “The right”: the power and the majesty of God, and “to sit at the right of God” = to exercise all the power, the majesty, and the glory in the absolute manner. This sitting can be ascribed only to the human nature of Jesus. So God himself is described as “sitting” (Rev. 4:2-3); and the twenty-four elders “sit,” also the souls of the departed believers “sit” (Rev. 4:3; 20:4), these exercising power and dominion according to their station. In his exaltation in heaven the Lord Jesus, also according to his human nature, rules in majesty for ever. In simpler language: He Whom they nailed to the cross as a man accursed of God and derided with blasphemy, he sits and rules in divine exaltation in heaven.

[20] Mark makes a wide sweep, for “they having gone out” means out “everywhere,” as the Lord had ordered. “They heralded” the Gospel to the whole creation. In this final verse Mark writes a summary of the entire book of Acts. In this heralding the Lord kept cooperating with them, so that

although they were so few and were devoid of all human power, they succeeded in planting the Gospel everywhere. In particular, the Lord confirmed the Word by means of the signs that kept following. Here we see what the signs were to do: confirm, make sure and certain, the Word. The signs had the function of seals. They have this now, and ever will have it, despite all that skeptics may do by denying the actuality of the miracles.

Mark opens a grand vista as he lays down his pen. We today look back into this vista from the vantage point of 1900 years. The Lord still cooperates with the true preaching of the Gospel; he discontinued the confirmatory signs after he had enough of them and affixed them to his Word. And in that Word itself they continue to confirm until the end of time.

## **Homiletical Aid**

### **The Festival of the Crowning of Our Heavenly King Jesus Christ.**

- I. The throne which he ascended.
  1. Hard earned.
  2. Highly built.
  3. Firmly founded.
  4. Gloriously occupied.
- II. The rule which he exercises.
  1. He possesses all power and is the source of all power, all right, all majesty.
  2. A mild, happy, gracious rule. Our Ruler is also our Intercessor, our Brother in heaven, and at the same time our Light, Protection, and Comfort on earth.
  3. By the sending of the Holy Spirit, by Word and Sacrament he causes the blessings of his rule of grace to descend upon us.
- III. The triumph which he celebrates.

1. His ascension into heaven in the sight of his own is itself a triumph.
  2. His being invisibly near us and ever working with us is a continuous triumph.
  3. His promised return in power and glory is the crowning triumph.
- Appuhn.

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We glory today in “our ascended Lord.” But when we think of his heavenly ascension we must put away all the inadequate ideas that bring in the notions of space and of time as we are subject to them on earth. The right hand of God is not a chair placed at his right side which was vacant and which Jesus then occupied. God is a spirit, etc. When the white cloud hid the ascending figure of Jesus he did not go on slowly ascending, but was instantly transferred into the heavenly glory. Etc. Think thus more adequately about

### **“Our Ascended Lord.”**

- I. About his own eternal exaltation.
  1. “He was received up into heaven and sat” etc. Jesus was true God; as such no exaltation possible. But as man, who was in lowliness and had hung on the cross, he could be and he was exalted. The exaltation during the forty days. The final exaltation in the ascension, the full exercise of all the divine glory and majesty also as man from heaven. Think thus of “our ascended Lord.”
  2. Add, then, that he ever rules in judgment over all his foes, all demons and all men, none of whom shall triumph, etc. He rules in love, grace, and mercy over his Church on earth and over every one of its members, including also you. The rule of glory in heaven over his angels and the souls of his saints shall be

consummated at last in the rule over the new heaven and the new earth. Think in this personal way about “our ascended Lord.”

II. About the glorious completion of his work on earth.

1. He left the command to preach and to baptize. This will be done in spite of all opposition, and wherever it is done our ascended Lord will save through these means, until the last sinner is saved and the end comes. Think thus about “our ascended Lord.”
2. He left the most blessed promises of assistance and protection for the apostles and for his Church. The signs that were to follow and that did follow. Recorded by Inspiration they stand as the confirmation seals to this day. Think thus of “our ascended Lord” who is ever with us.
3. He left to us the most glorious hope. We shall be with him and see him. We shall share his glory and exaltation. Thus he crowns all those who believe; but all disbelievers bring their condemnation upon themselves. Look thus in your faith with the eyes of hope upon “your ascended Lord.”

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Christmas: the newborn King; Advent and Palm Sunday: “Behold thy King cometh unto the!” Ascension Day: he sits at God’s right hand, enthroned, exercising eternal dominion.

**The Lord Rules.**

- I. Having ascended into heaven,
- II. He has not forgotten his work,
- III. Or forgotten his workers.

J. A. Dell.

The parts are formulated so as to constitute a sentence (see *S.* 266 etc.). Instead of the negative formulation of parts two and three I much prefer a positive formulation, especially in this case.

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“I go to prepare a place for you” — “I go to the Father” — “my Father’s house.”

We are pilgrims here, we seek a continuing city. Our Savior has gone on before. We confess (Apostles’ Creed): “He ascended into heaven.”

### **“He Ascended Into Heaven.”**

Consider

I. The doctrine itself.

1. Its presence in the Apostles’ Creed.

a. Foretold by Christ:

“What and if ye shall see the Son of man ascend up where he was before,” John 3:13; 6:62.

“I go to him that sent me.” John 7:33.

“I go to prepare a place for you.” John 14:3.

“I go to the Father.” John 14:12.

“I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world; again I leave the world, and go to the father.” John 16:28.

“Now come I to thee.” John 17:13.

“Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father.” John 20:17.

b. Written by evangelists.

Mark in our text.

Luke 24:50-51; Acts 1:9: “He was taken up.”

Paul, Eph. 4:8: “He ascended up on high.” 1 Tim. 3:16: “Received up into glory.”

Heb. 4:14: “Great High Priest that is passed into the heavens.” 9:24: “Christ is entered . . . a. into heaven itself to appear in the presence of God for us.”

2. Not to be misunderstood.

a. Christ is omnipresent, also according to his human nature.

“Lo, I am with you alway.” — “Where two or three” etc. The entire Christ. His body and his blood in the holy Sacrament.

b. He is visibly present in one place.

Stephen saw him.

“Where I am, ye shall be also.”

They see him. Rev. 14:1-5: “The Lamb in the midst.” 1 John 3:3: “We shall see him as he is.”

II. The comfort of this doctrine.

1. Jesus is our representative in heaven.

a. Our brother.

A place for us in heaven.

He, a true man in heaven.

Our Redeemer, approved and exalted by God.

After his humiliation this exaltation, Phil. 2:5-11.

b. Our advocate.

We are sinners.

But Christ’s righteousness and atoning sacrifice are continually pleading in the Godhead.

“Who is he that condemneth?” Rom. 8:34.

2. We are the representatives of Jesus on earth.

a. Our King.

He leaves us here on earth as his own, but is ever with us.

He overrules all evil as regards us (v. 18).

He protects his precious Church (v. 19).

b. Our Lord and Leader.

He gave us a work: “Preach the Gospel!”

He blessed the work of the apostles (v. 20).

He now blesses our work.

Conclusion: “He upbraided them for their hardness of heart and their unbelief.”

We manifest unbelief, if we doubt that there is a heaven, an abode of the saints.

We manifest unbelief, if we doubt that Jesus rules the world, and if we give way to pessimism and despair.

We manifest unbelief, if we go at our Christian work in a halfhearted way, as if we doubted its success. Christ is in heaven!

Let us remember these things when we confess in the Creed: “He ascended into heaven.” J. A. Dell.

Permit the definition of “doctrine,” since Dell uses the term in this sketch. A doctrine is a religious fact or reality presented in adequate words which may be a brief or a long statement as needed. Not to preach doctrine is to be a sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal. Διδαχή (doctrine) and διδασκαλία. (teaching) are the same in substance and both words are found in Scripture. To object to the former and to applaud only the latter is a rather serious mistake.

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Our ascended Lord is crowned indeed, Ps. 2:6, let his enemies rave as they will, Ps. 2:1-4. What about our hearts?

We answer with the refrain of the hymn with which we acclaim him King:

**“And Crown Him Lord of All!”**

By this line we mean:

- I. Down with every form of unbelief! (v. 14).
- II. Up with our eyes to the right of God!
- III. Onward with the Gospel banner!

# Exaudi. John 15:26 To 16:4

## The Savior Foretells the Hostile Reception of the Testimony

Men who bring the Gospel of eternal salvation to the world ought to be received with open arms as being the world's greatest benefactors. In the upper room in the night in which he was betrayed Jesus told the eleven disciples that as he had been hated they too would be hated (v. 18-21); Jesus adds that this hatred against him is totally without cause and that his haters do not even know the Father (v. 22-25). Our text specifies to what length this hatred of the Gospel witnesses will go: excommunication from the synagogue and killing the witnesses (16:2).

The text is well chosen. The ascended Lord who orders the apostles to proclaim the Gospel in all the world sends them the Paraclete for their task as the witnesses of Jesus. Thus the apostles shall succeed in their preaching and in their winning believers for their Lord. They are, however, left under no illusion in regard to the vicious hostility they shall meet. Their reaction must be not to rely on themselves but on this "other Paraclete" (14:16), the Holy Spirit, who will soon come upon them. Exaudi is thus a complement to Ascension Day and a preparation for Pentecost. Somewhere in these services the Church must hear about the hostile reaction of the world to the Gospel, for this will be continuous, and Exaudi is the most appropriate Sunday for this message.

**[15:26-27] "But when the Paraclete shall come, whom I myself will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of the truth, who proceeds from the Father, he shall testify concerning me. [27] And you too testify, because from the beginning you are with me."**

The term "Paraclete" is explained in 16:7, Cantate. That the Paraclete is to come is promised in 14:16, and the fact that he shall teach all things and bring them to the remembrance of the disciples is added in 14:26. This teaching prepares the disciples for their witness-bearing both in their oral

preaching and in their writing the New Testament books. Of this witness-bearing Jesus now speaks. “The Spirit shall testify concerning me, and you too testify,” — 51-5 is not adversative. Jesus does not refer to two testimonies, one of the Spirit and one of the disciples. The Spirit is bestowed upon the disciples, uses them as his instruments for preaching the Word in the world (16:8-11), and works the miracles through their agency. Down to this day the testimony is one, for the Spirit uses the Word which he led the holy writers to record and the Church which he has built and maintained.

Let us say it at once: without the coming and the work of the Paraclete the redemption of Christ could not have been communicated to men. We are wholly dependent, individually and as a Church, upon him who is ever at our side, yea in our very hearts, with his blessed Word.

There is no incongruity in the tenses: “the Spirit shall testify” (future) — “you too testify (present), because from the beginning you are (present) with me.” The Spirit’s great work starts at Pentecost (future), but the qualification of the disciples as witnesses is this continuous presence with Jesus, which thus already makes them witnesses.

The Father gives the Paraclete, Jesus sends him. The Father’s giving is accomplished by the Son’s sending; the Son’s sending is effected by the Father’s giving. The *opera ad extra sunt indivisa, aut communa*. When Jesus says that he himself will send the Paraclete “from the Father,” we see that he refers to the divine connection between the Persons. All the saving acts of God reveal the unity of the Three Persons as well as their equality in carrying out their one work. Where equals are a unit in a purpose and a work, the equality remains undisturbed when one of these equals requests another, sends another, allows himself to be sent by another, to perform one or the other great part of that work. Thus none of the expressions used denotes a subordination of the Son to the Father, or of the Spirit to either the Father or the Son. As for the human nature of the Son, this always was and will be subordinate, for its exaltation is a gift.

Jesus calls the Paraclete “the Spirit of the truth” in the same sense as he did in 16:13: he belongs to the truth, all the saving reality contained in the divine Persons, so that he is the fountain of this truth for us. The relative clause: “who proceeds from the Father” cannot mean what is already said,

namely, that Jesus will send the Spirit “from the Father.” The clause does not signify what many commentators claim, namely the going forth of the Spirit for his mission on earth. What a strange idea to utter this in such a relative clause after saying that Jesus will send the Spirit from the Father, and even after adding the apposition: “the Spirit of the truth.” No; “who proceeds from the Father” refers to the Spirit’s inner- Trinitarian relation to the Father, his proceeding from the Father in eternity. Thus the Son is begotten of the Father. The relations of the Persons to each other are beyond our powers of conception and are not revealed to us that we may penetrate their mysteries and profundities, but that we may realize that each of the three Persons bears his distinct wondrous relation to each of the other two in the unity of the One Essence. In human language the tense had to be the present: ἔκπορεύεται, “proceeds,” yet it would be a mistake to understand this as referring to a continuous process of proceeding or to apply to this tense any idea of time whatever, for the act is timeless, infinite, above and beyond all conceptions of time, and thus again inconceivable to any human mind.

**[16:1] “These things have I spoken to you, in order that you may not be entrapped.”** Fully and completely Jesus informs his disciples. He does not say “foretold,” but “told” (λαλεῖν). They are not to be caught unawares. Jesus hides none of the painful experiences that are coming, so that when they happen they will descend upon the disciples like a fatal trap. Σκανδαλίζω means to catch in a trap; σκάνδαλον is the crooked trigger stick to which the bait is affixed so that when touched the stick springs the trap. The figure in the word always refers to fatal, mortal catching, — the victim is crushed. “To offend” is not strong enough, for no less than mortal offense is meant. “To stumble” is a wrong translation, for we often stumble and only hurt ourselves slightly or not at all.

[2] Jesus adds two of the worst forms of persecution which the Jews would inflict on the disciples. **“They shall make you persons banned from the synagogue; yea, the hour is coming that every one who kills you shall think he is making an offering of service to God.”** Ἀποσυνάγωγος is an adjective, and to make one what this adjective signifies is to expel or excommunicate him from the synagogue. In a country where all were Jews this act caused the victim to be treated as a religious and a social outcast and as a renegade to the nation. No Jew would

have a thing to do with him; life would be almost impossible. Ἀλλά is copulative and adds what is worse; ἵνα after ὥρα is non-final and states the contents of the hour. This worst form of persecution will not consist merely in the fact that the Jews will kill disciples, but that they will think that by such killing they are bearing an offering to God (προσφέρειν), namely a λατρεία a service such as is obligatory on all Jews. Jesus withholds nothing. The full gravity of the hatred that awaits the eleven and also those who shall believe their word is stated to them in this solemn hour before Jesus' own cruel death.

[3] Because these acts are so monstrous, Jesus explains. **“And these things they will do, because they did not recognize my Father, nor me. [4] But these things I have told you, in order that when the hour for them comes, you may remember them, that I myself spoke to you. And these things I did not tell you from the beginning, because I was with you.”**

Jesus in no way excuses the hostile Jews, he here reveals their guilt. Their failure to recognize “my Father and me” is not innocent ignorance, but guilty ignorance. The difference is very great. The truth is not that the revelation of the Father and of his Son Jesus had not been brought to them, or had not been adequately brought. This is exactly what had been done by no less a person than Jesus himself.

Note well that Jesus says: οὐκ ἔγνωσαν, which conveys more than our common verb “know.” The verb refers to knowledge plus its proper affect and effect, defined by Cremer-Koegel as implying a relation of the knower to the object known, and not merely a relation of the object known to the knower such as is indicated by οἶδα. These Jews had never appropriated the Father and Jesus, the Redeemer, as their God and their Savior, although both were so fully revealed to them. They had in their hearts an utterly false conception of God and of the Messiah, as false as that of paganism. Thus this monstrous effect would result: they who considered themselves God's own chosen people murdered God's own children and thought this the highest act of worship, even as Bammidar Rabba (fol. 329:1) writes: *Omnis efiundeus sanguinem improborum, aequalis est illi, qui sacrificium facit*, — almost the very words of Jesus.

[4] All these things about the Paraclete's taking the place of Jesus and about the opposition the disciples would meet when they would testify with the Paraclete's support in this hostile world, Jesus did not tell the disciples from the beginning, "because I was with you." This means that he was visibly present with the disciples, so that the hatred fell upon him and exhausted itself upon him, disregarding the disciples. Jesus is even now awaiting his bloody death, while the Jews ignore the eleven. But the situation would change presently: they would stand in the foreground and Jesus would be gone. Hence what did not need to be so fully revealed to the disciples in the earlier days must now be made fully clear to them, for the hour of the change of their situation is at hand. When then the world's hatred shall presently strike them, the fact that before his leaving Jesus told them all about it in advance will prevent any disconcerting or upsetting surprise on their part. They will then remember that Jesus himself had told them all about what would come upon them, they will take it all without surprise as a mere matter of course and will rely upon the Comforter and upon the strength, courage, boldness, and joy in suffering for Jesus' sake which he would supply. This word of Jesus applies to all the martyrs of the following years, down to the end of time. It applies to all those among us who in some degree are made to suffer for our loyalty to Jesus, for our faith and confession, for our testimony and our refusal to be silent or to deny. You may lose your job or position with its income, you may be harmed in one of many possible ways, your good name may be assailed, your character maligned. These things may even be done to you by churchmen *ad majorem Dei gloriam*. Your comfort and your support are in the words of Jesus as found in this text. Matt. 5:11-12.

## Homiletical Aid

Christ the Witness (Rev. 1:5; 3:14; 1 Tim. 6:13). — The Holy Spirit the witness.

### **"Ye Also Shall Be Witnesses."**

- I. A word spoken directly to the apostles.

1. The Spirit's great work is to bear witness of Christ, thereby bringing all Christ's blessings to men. A world black, blank, hopeless without the presence of the Spirit and this work of his.
2. The apostles his notable instruments. The Spirit's witness carried by them into the world, at the same time recorded in the New Testament for all future ages.
3. This witness of the Spirit and the apostles still resounding in our ears and in the ears of the world. He the Spirit of the truth, and it is ever criminal not to accept and believe the truth.

II. A word applying also to us.

1. The Holy Spirit still uses living human witnesses, — us. It is impossible for us to believe and not to be witnesses and to testify to the world.
2. We all testify unitedly in our congregation, in which we support the public preaching of the Word, this eternal written testimony of the Spirit and of the apostles. This is the chief part.
3. The second part: we testify individually in our faith to the truth which the Spirit has implanted in our hearts, and we testify with our lives. The world has keen ears for the latter. Example: stay away from church on Sunday and you testify that it makes no difference whether one worships and hears the Word or not.
4. The world's opposition still continues. The prospect the apostles faced. Martyrdoms. Damage done to faithful witnesses to this day. But note Matt. v. 11-12.

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Every Christian must be a witness. No witness, no Christian. — Our testimony often silent, often too weak. “He that is not with me” etc., Matt. 12:30. “How long halt ye between two opinions?” 1 Kgs. 18:21. “No man can serve two masters.” “I know thy works that thou art neither hot nor cold.” Rev. 3:15. Away with all hesitation and vacillation.

**Testify!**

When Jesus says that we too shall testify of him he refers first of all to the apostles who were with him from the beginning, but secondly also to us who are to repeat the apostolic testimony to the world today. Thus Jesus calls to us: Testify!

We see that this is

I. Necessary.

Hence Jesus sent his Spirit, — so necessary is it. The Gospel must be carried to all men, otherwise Christ's work of redemption would be in vain. Yet to testify is

II. Dangerous.

Jesus forewarns the disciples. We know what happened to them. The array of Christian martyrs. Testimony sealed with blood. Other inflictions, down to the present day. This dangerousness helps to make the testifying

III. Noble.

It makes us like Jesus, the Supreme Witness. It places us in the company of the prophets (Matt. v. 12) and of the apostles, which should fill us with exceeding joy. No nobler work on earth than to be a true and a courageous witness for Christ. Certainly to testify aright is

IV. Hard.

Most noble actions are hard. Our flesh would deter us. We are inclined to shrink from painful consequences. We feel that it is too difficult for us, that we must let others do the testifying. Jesus knew it would be hard, hence he sent the Holy Spirit, and thus the testifying becomes

V. Easy.

It becomes second nature to us to support the Gospel preaching, to voice our own faith in every part of this Gospel, to defend it against attack, to instruct others, to testify also through all our actions, and to bear with a smile, as if receiving a distinction and an honor, all painful opposition. A true believer cannot keep still.

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## **Ye Shall Bear Witness.**

- I. In the face of powerful opposition,
- II. You shall have powerful assistance.

J. A. Dell.

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## **To Testify or Not to Testify — That is the Question.**

- I. Perhaps you are a plain incompetent.

Like the Jews you may not really know the Father and Jesus. You may never have actually taken them into your heart. You may be perfectly right when you say: “Really, I cannot testify.” You have nothing to testify to. Dead faith. Mere outward Christian.

Let the Spirit and the grace of God testify to you and make you competent. Get the joy, the life, the power of salvation into your soul, and you will never ask whether you shall testify or not testify, — for you that will no longer be a question.

- II. Perhaps you are a miserable coward.

You put up the plea that it was all well and good for the apostles to testify, but you are not called to such a position. You are afraid to open your mouth for Christ, lest someone scoff at you. Also you would hate to lose your job or position. Also you think, what good would it do for you to testify, lots of other Christians are as silent as you are.

It is despicable to be a coward, doubly despicable where Christ is the issue. Let the Spirit make you fearless through the Word. Where will the cowards be when the crowns are bestowed?

- III. Perhaps you are a cunning compromiser.

You would like to stand in with Christ and the church, and at the same time you would not offend the world. You intend to limp on both legs, to carry water on both shoulders. To testify, but not so that the

world notices. To get out of the world all you can and yet to satisfy Christ.

Let the Spirit teach you the simple “either — or.” Your cunning has oft been tried, has never once succeeded. There is. never a place for “To testify or not to testify?” as if that were a question. Every day and every way testify!

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Lies, lies, lies,— the world is full of them. Fallen man has an affinity for them. The ignorant and the blind swallow them. The cunning seek to profit by them. And all these lies and these liars go straight to perdition.

You and I are to be governed wholly by

### **The Spirit of the Truth.**

I. Who frees us from the world’s lies.

So hostile to the truth, so deceptive, so deadly.  
By exposing all that these lies really are.

II. Who fills us with the Lord’s truth.

All the blessed realities of his Person and his work for our salvation and our share in it. The joy of having the truth.

III. Who enables us to testify to the truth.

By maintaining the preaching, by our own confession of lip and of life, unafraid, caring nothing for the cost, thus winning others for the truth.

# Pentecost. John 14:23-31

## ####The Great Gift of the Holy Spirit

Pentecost celebrates the wondrous sending of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles and the believers in Jerusalem. Pentecost can be repeated as little as can Christmas or Easter. Yet some hope and pray for new Pentecosts. Since he has once come upon the Church, the Spirit remains, and his presence is constantly attested by his work in and through the believers. The existence of the Church is itself the grand evidence of the Spirit's presence and his saving work. Every true Christian serves as an example of the miracles of grace wrought by the Spirit through Word and Sacrament.

We possess only one historical account of the outpouring of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost, and this account is made the epistle text for the festival. The four gospels offer no historical record of Pentecost, but John's gospel contains the great discourse of Jesus in the night in which he was betrayed, and in this discourse he speaks in the clearest manner about the Spirit's coming and his work. Thus we come to have our present gospel text for the festival. When preaching on this text the preacher is entitled to use Acts 2 or any other part of Scripture regarding the Spirit. Even Easter was still a matter of the future when Jesus uttered the words of our text. The promised Spirit has come, has done and is still doing all that Jesus promised. We celebrate "the day of Pentecost" (Acts 2:1), but we celebrate the day because of all that it has brought and brings to us since its historical occurrence.

[23] Judas, not Iscariot, but the Judas "of James" (Acts 1:13), which means not "brother" (A.V.), but "father" (R.V.) of Judas, asks Jesus, what has occurred that he will manifest himself only to the disciples and not to the world. Is not Jesus the Savior of the whole world? Does this not require a universal manifestation? The question is by no means out of place. Jesus does not interrupt his discourse, he goes on as though Judas had not spoken,

but this is only done because he is answering the very question raised by Judas. If Judas had not asked he would nevertheless have had his answer.

Hitherto Jesus had himself traveled up and down the country and had preached with his own mouth and with his own word had wrought miracles. Nothing similar to this is to continue in the Jewish land or is to be extended so as to include all lands. Jesus is going away. The Holy Spirit takes charge and uses the disciples themselves. This is the answer Judas receives.

**Jesus answered and said unto him: “If any one loves me, my word will he guard; and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and will make abode with him for ourselves. [24] He that does not love me, my words he does not guard. And the word, which you hear, is not mine, but the Father’s who did send me.”**

Jesus continues and amplifies what he says in v. 21. He describes the manifestation of which he is speaking. It could be made only to the disciples, only to loyal lovers of Jesus and faithful guardians of his Word. These lovers and guardians he leaves in the world under the Paraclete’s direction, and thus all that the world needs will be fully provided. Judas is answered.

“If you love me” (v. 15) is now broadened: “If any one loves me.” Ἐάν expects such lovers, vividly visualizes them; ἀγαπᾶν, as always, signifies the love of understanding and comprehension coupled with corresponding purpose. We know that this intelligent and purposeful love is the fruit of faith. It is proper here to speak of love instead of its source, faith, because the supreme work of the believer is named, namely guarding the Word of Jesus. We entrust a great treasure to him who loves us intelligently and purposely. How could we place the treasure into indifferent or into hostile hands? Loyal lovers are required by Jesus.

His “word” is a great trust. The singular is comprehensive; in the next verse the plural “my words” spreads out all the individual parts. Moreover logos and logoi refer to the substance not merely to the spoken syllables and sounds. The whole of this precious Word the loyal lover of Jesus “will guard,” τηρήσει. “To guard” means more than “to keep” or “to obey” the Word. In v. 15 Jesus uses the term ἐντολαί, “behests,” yet even here “to guard” them means to hold and not to lose the Word (the words, the behests), to let no one change, alter, remove, or in any way violate them.

Like a sentry we are to stand guard. This treasure is not intended for our appropriation only, but has been entrusted to us in order that we may convey it also to others (the world).

“And my Father will love” such a lover of mine, such a loyal guardian of my Word. This is the Father’s subsequent love and is clearly to be distinguished from his antecedent love. When we show ourselves loving, true, and faithful to Jesus, the Father’s love flows out to us his true children, the bond of love between the Father and us is tightened. His love is response to and reward for our love.

More than this: “and we will come to him and will make abode with him for ourselves,” we, the Father and I, “for ourselves,” middle voice. Jesus refers to what we usually call the *unio mystica*, of which the Scriptures say so much in so many figurative and also literal terms. Μοῦνῆ = “abode,” and in v. 2 is translated “mansion” by our versions. Christ’s lovers are to be “mansions” in which the Father and the Savior dwell. That this of necessity includes the Holy Spirit needs scarcely to be said.

God is never separated from his Word; when his Word is in our hearts, God dwells in them. Thus his indwelling is ever mediated by his Word. There is no *unio mystica* apart from this means. Mystics have thought to achieve an immediate unio with God, or with one or the other of the Persons, but all their efforts are morbid and dangerous. India has the most highly developed mysticism. The famous Christian mystics have left an evil legacy, for we must consider the fruits of their teachings and of their practices in those who seek to follow them. All of them appear as pathological cases. The divine indwelling is perfectly sober and normal. The figure of the “abode” explains with clearness, although we must add also what the other figures of Scripture tell us. You live in a house and that means: that you possess it, arrange everything in it to suit yourself alone, make it your home, where your voice is heard, your treasures are stored, your love is manifest. In such a way the Father and the Son make us their “abode,” their “mansion,” but as befits their deity and our own spirit.

[24] This blessed and intimate manifestation cannot take place in one who does not love Jesus. For certainly “my words he does not guard.” Love is a secret state of the heart. Its presence is known only by the evidence it produces. Whoever does not love Jesus certainly will display this lack by

the indifference with which he treats the words of Jesus. The plural is in place, not, however, as a mere variant of the preceding singular, but as revealing the evidence for the absence of love. Every time some individual word of Jesus is considered, lack of love shows no concern to guard, defend, maintain, and rejoice in the integrity of such a word. The heart is cold, the Word is not upheld. Thus the *unio mystica* is absent. Jesus names only the negative: “my words he does not guard.”

But the gravity of thus treating the Word is serious indeed. Let no one think lightly in regard to “the Word which you hear” from Jesus. This Word is not an invention of Jesus, of a man who lived and spoke only like other men here on earth. By no means. This is the Father’s own Word, and it is he who sent Jesus on his mission. This Word which is the Father’s deals altogether with the great, saving mission of Jesus. It is fatal not to love Jesus, not to guard his Word, for not to love and to guard is to be indifferent to the Father and to the saving mission on which the Father sent Jesus.

Ah yes, many loudly boast of love! But they fail in the test. This and that part of the Word they violate, they do not guard; even also the command to guard his words. Such love is hollow. Many pick and choose, guard a part of the Word, do as they please with other parts. What about their love? How mean and poor it is! Can the Father and Jesus reward it with indwelling?

**[25] “These things have I spoken to you while remaining with you. [26] And the Paraclete, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you everything, and will remind you of everything that I myself said to you.”**

See how Jesus repeats: “These things have I spoken to you,” in 15:11 and 17, and in 16:1, 4 and 25. It is the expression of one about to depart, recalling to his loved ones the words he has been uttering, which they must cherish in their hearts. The emphasis is on the participial addition: “while (yet) remaining with you,” i.e. while yet visibly in your presence as during the past three years. This is to change, the other Paraclete Will take the place of Jesus. Precious indeed to them are these words of their departing Lord.

[26] The term “Paraclete” is explained in 16:7, Cantate, and the phrase “in my name” in 16:23, Rogate. “The Holy Spirit” is placed in apposition with, as fully identifying the Person meant by “the Paraclete.” We should

know that all the ancient Jews were Trinitarians, that all of them knew about the Third Person, so that from the days of the Baptist onward no Jew needed an explanation either in regard to God's Son or to God's Holy Spirit. The objection to Jesus never was the fact that God has no Son, but that a humble, lowly man like Jesus should claim to be that Son. It was the opposition to Christianity which made the Jews what they now are, namely unitarians. Thus the addition "the Holy Spirit" identifies "the Paraclete" for the eleven.

The promise that the Paraclete is soon to come to take the place of the visible presence of Jesus is given in v. 16; hence Jesus now merely states the fact that "the Father will send him in my name" and adds to the fact the great and blessed things the Paraclete will do. "In my name" is so generally misunderstood, yet it means: "in connection with me and with my revelation," ὄνομα, revelation by which one makes himself known and is known and apprehended. "Give" in v. 16 is replaced by "send." For all this revelation (*onoma*) requires the sending, the mission of the Paraclete. To understand the whole of his mission we must combine all the passages of this last grand discourse that deal with the Spirit. In the present connection we are told about the fundamental part of the Spirit's mission or work, the part that lies at the bottom of all his activity in the Church and in the world generally.

Like a true Paraclete, who stands at the side of the apostles and helps them, the Spirit "will teach you everything," πάντα, not "everything" in the absolute sense, but everything that they as apostles of Jesus need to know. We have the fulfillment before our eyes in the apostolic writings. Literally they show us how these chosen men knew "everything" that they and all future ages need to know regarding salvation. The range and the profundity of the New Testament exhaust the "most able and the most ardent student. Some things are withheld from us, but this is done only because we either could not know them or because it is not salutary for us to know them; but for all that we need to know to our salvation we never go to the apostolic writings in vain.

Jesus adds: "and will remind you of everything that I myself said to you." For three years the apostles were with Jesus and heard his instruction, which Jesus was even now completing. Let us at once acknowledge that no man's memory can possibly reproduce with exactness what has been heard

during such a length of time; in fact, the very discourse of Jesus uttered by him in the present-hour could not have been reproduced by the apostles without a flaw. Jesus expected nothing impossible from them. The Holy Spirit with his divine power would remind the apostles of everything (again *panta*) that Jesus had said to them. This we call divine Inspiration. We see here that it deals with what Jesus “said” to the apostles, with the *ipsissima verba* which he uttered, with their reproduction. The Church has always called this action of the Spirit Verbal Inspiration. What else could you call it? Many cannot tolerate this word “verbal,” but the reason does not lie in a lack of evidence that all true Inspiration must be verbal, but, it seems to me, in the desire to be free from the authority of Scripture. For, if the Spirit did what Jesus here said he would do, we have, as included in Verbal Inspiration, Infallibility, Inerrancy, and divine Authority.

Why should the apostles be thus gifted with the Spirit, why so taught and so reminded? Certainly also for their own personal spiritual benefit, but most certainly for our sakes, that is for the sake of all believers, of the Church of all ages. The Spirit equipped the apostles to prepare an infallible record for the whole world. Therefore, too, we read that the 3,000 converted at Pentecost remained ever “in the apostles’ doctrine,” Acts 2:42. Pentecost and the Spirit have given us this infallible, inerrant doctrine. Let this be our Pentecost praise. Many men want to alter this doctrine, and thus insist on inferior views of the New Testament and of the Scriptures as a whole. Our hearts shall be guided and controlled by the Spirit alone through the great means he has bestowed upon us, his Verbally Inspired Word.

[27] Jesus leaves the gift of his peace. **“Peace I leave to you, my own peace I give to you. Not as the world do I on my part give.”** I explained this [demo] in John 20:19, Quasimodogeniti. It is the objective condition of peace, from which, of course, the subjective feeling of peace springs. Yet the condition remains when the feeling which fluctuates declines; the feeling will revive again. When Jesus repeats and says “my own peace” he means that this is the peace he is now purchasing for us at the price of his death. The interpretation cannot be defended that he is giving to the disciples the same feeling of serenity that he himself has. “I give” and “not as the world gives” refer to an objective gift, not to a similar feeling. “Peace” is a central concept, the result of grace, and dare never be taken to denote only a feeling of safety.

The world has no peace, yet it often cries: "Peace, peace!" It cannot possibly give the soul peace, the condition when all is well between God and the soul. All it can do is to pretend to give you such peace. Presently, when the critical hour comes, the soul finds that the world gave only words, words, words, no reality of peace whatever. Not in this manner does Jesus on his part give; his peace is the most blessed reality.

Read the following as belonging together. **"Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid! You heard that I myself said to you: 'I am going away, and am coming to you.' If you loved me (present unreality: εἰ with the imperfect), you would have rejoiced (past unreality: the aorist with ᾗ) that I go to the Father; for the Father is greater than I. [29] And now I have told you, before it takes place, in order that when it does take place, you may believe."**

This agitation and this dismay of the heart are not the effects of mortal danger striking the disciples, for the context mentions no such danger to them. Jesus is speaking of the wrong reaction occasioned in the hearts of his disciples by the announcement that he is on the point of leaving them. They are inclined to be shaken and upset at the thought of losing their Lord's visible presence from their midst. Against this reaction Jesus seeks to fortify his faithful disciples.

[28] Once more he repeats what he has told them and What they have heard. It is by no means only the fact that he is leaving them, as a dead man leaves his family behind. No; it includes also the fact that he is coming to them, not indeed in the old limited, earthly, visible way, but in the divine, superior, heavenly way described in v. 18. Yes, he is leaving, but they must never forget that he is also coming to them for all time to come.

The conditional sentence is mixed, the protasis present unreality: "If you loved me," but you do not; the apodosis past unreality: "you would have rejoiced," but you did not, you only grieved. Jesus does not say that the eleven do not at all love him, but that this love is absent, the love which should have understood and rejoiced. Was this too much for their love to achieve? — ἀγαπᾶν, "to love" with proper intelligence and corresponding purpose. The reading is: ὅτι πορεύομαι, not: ὅτι εἶπον πορεύομαι; "that I am going," not: "that I said I am going" (A.V.). This ὅτι states the object of the joy: "that (not"because," our versions) I am going to the Father."

The second ὅτι clause is causal: “because the Father is greater than I.” During his earthly life Jesus is in his state of humiliation, his human nature being gifted indeed with all the divine attributes, but laying aside their full use, using them only in a limited way, in order that he might suffer and die for our redemption. Who can imagine what it now meant for Jesus in his human nature when the humiliation was past and the glorification was complete, when he sat at God’s right hand and exercised all his divine attributes also according to his human nature? Now he could crown his work and bring it to its glorious consummation. Who that loved him would not have rejoiced in this return to the Father? Yes, the Father was greater than Jesus in his human nature. “Than I” refers to the man Jesus who stood before the eleven and spoke to them.

This simple clause has been made a battlefield on which all those disport themselves who are determined to make the Son less than the Father. Here you meet Cerinthus, the Gnostics, Arius and the Semi-arians, Sabellius, the hosts of subordinationists, the different ranks of the kenoticists, and a motley array of rationalists. One contends against the other. We turn away from their bedlam. Jesus is not speaking of the inner-Trinitarian relation of the Persons of the Godhead, but only of his person in its present state.

That it means much indeed for Jesus himself to go to the Father is the point here indicated, but the whole discourse adds how much this also meant for the disciples. So they really had a double reason for rejoicing. But the eyes of their love were clouded.

[29] Jesus, however, told his disciples about his leaving and his returning, not merely for the effect this would have on them at the moment. Jesus is concerned about the long future. He tells these things in advance, so that when they occur the eleven may believe. For then they will see with different eyes; then they will tell themselves, that Jesus. told them everything in advance. That will increase their faith to the highest degree.

[30] The time of parting is almost here. **“No longer will I speak much with you, for the world’s ruler is coming, and in me he has nothing. Nevertheless, in order that the world may realize that I love the Father, and that just as the Father gave me commission that I do, arise, let us be going hence.”**

Jesus knows exactly how much time he has left, time not to say much more. Presently Satan will come, and that ends the short time. Jesus might have said that Judas and the armed men sent by the Sanhedrin are coming. Instead of naming the human agents Jesus names their master, “the prince or ruler (fiowa) of this world.” It was Satan who had entered the heart of Judas (13:2 and 27) and was coming to destroy Jesus. Calmly Jesus speaks of this hellish foe. None of his schemes, agents, movements are hidden from Jesus. He could frustrate them at any time, but he is proceeding most willingly to lay down his life for us.

Satan is coming — “and in me he has nothing” (the Greek doubles the negative and makes it very strong). There is nothing whatever that could justify Satan in coming to strike at Jesus. Jesus is absolutely sinless, different from every other man. A great gulf exists between Jesus and Satan. The sinlessness is due to the deity of Jesus. Why then is Satan moving Judas and the Jews to capture and to slay Jesus? Because the sinless Son of God is executing his commission from the Father and is working out our deliverance from Satan and our salvation.

[31] This explains why Jesus lets Satan proceed as he does, why he does not get rid of him as in Matt. 4:10. Satan is doing no damage. Whatever, although he imagines that by killing Jesus he is doing the worst damage possible. Full of love to his Father Jesus is simply carrying out the ἐντολή, *Auftrag*, behest or commission of his Father to give his life as a sacrifice and a ransom. Thus after a few more minutes he goes to Gethsemane. He intends to give himself up to die. It is his Father’s will.

The great purpose of this act of his is clearly before his mind at this moment when now the great step is to be taken. It is “that the world may realize” this love of Jesus for his Father, and this obedience to the Father’s behest. Jesus’ sacrifice for our sins shall be preached in all the world (Acts 1:8), and by this preaching the Holy Spirit will bring many to realize (γινώσκω) the blessed truth of what Jesus is now on the point of doing. Thus many in all future ages will be saved. All these Jesus has before his eyes in this fatal night.

To carry out this behest of the Father Jesus says: “arise, let us be going.” These words do not form a separate sentence as in our versions; they conclude the foregoing sentence, which otherwise would be left incomplete.

Jesus says, let us be going that the great purpose may be fulfilled. “Arise” means: from the couches on which they had thus far reclined for the Passover meal. “Let us be going” means: \_ on our way to Gethsemane. Yet the company lingered a bit longer in the upper room. Standing in the room, almost ready to leave, Jesus spoke a little while longer and then prayed (chapter 17), and then as 18:1 states: ἐξῆλθεν, “he went forth.”

## Homiletical Aid

Festive day — festive joy — festive gift: the Holy Spirit. The greatness of the gift: all our soul’s gifts comprised in this one gift. The importance: without this gift, nothing spiritual or divine in us. All that we are and have is from the Holy Spirit, and all that we expect and hope for is through him.

### **Our Savior’s Priceless Pentecostal Gift.**

#### I. The Spirit of light, v. 26.

1. All the world dark, night: lies, delusions, religious follies, deceptions, superstitions, hopeless ignorance.
2. Jesus sent his Holy Spirit, who produced the New Testament in addition to the Old. Could not have been written without him. The divine, imperishable light. Our way of life, our road to heaven lit up as by the noonday sun. What a pentecostal gift!
3. Is it truly light? So many “sects and insects,” so many false interpretations. Men mix in their own thoughts. But the Spirit with his Word, the light, is here, our gift, to make us blessed, if only we take the Word as it is given.

#### II. The Spirit of love, v. 23-24.

1. Love sent the Spirit, fills the Spirit, is wrought by the Spirit. His office is effected by means of his own love to’ usher us into all the love of God and of our Savior.
2. The Holy Spirit and love for Jesus are invisible, in our hearts, but show themselves when we obey the Word of Jesus, do what he bids us. This is spirituality, a truly religious life.

3. The false, disappointing, poisonous love of the world. The loveless, selfish, blind way of doing what you please, following whom you please. The joy and the happiness of the love wrought by the Spirit in our hearts.

III. The Spirit of peace, v. 27-28.

1. “Not as the world gives.” Peaceless. Crying for peace. Crying also: “Peace, peace!” All in vain.
2. True peace: all well between God and your soul, through Jesus Christ, his blood and righteousness. He bought our peace. The enduring condition, from which springs the sweet feeling, no matter what happens here on earth. Pictures of this peace in Ps. 23 (see *Old Testament Eisenach Selections*); Ps. 4:8.
3. The gift of Jesus, but only through his Spirit. In this peace I want to live, and not in constant dread that God’s hand is reaching out to punish me. In this peace I want to die, God sending his angels to bear my soul to heaven.

We must have the Savior’s priceless gift for Pentecost.

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J. A. Dell’s sketch selects other points of the text when speaking of

**The Indwelling Spirit, Christ’s Parting Gift.**

- I. The Spirit of sonship. This is based on the words: “If any man love me, my Father will love him” etc. The Spirit makes us sons of God. Without him what would we be?
  - II. The Spirit of enlightenment.
  - III. The Spirit of consolation. Peace is treated in this part. Phil. 4:7.  
“Come, Holy Spirit, come,” etc.
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Christmas, Epiphany, Good Friday, Easter, Ascension, — Pentecost crowns them all. Because it is the Spirit that brings the gifts of all these other high festivals and makes them our own. Jesus gave him a special name, he called him “the Comforter.” We shall see what this precious name really means. We are celebrating

## **The Festival of the Comforter.**

He is

### I. The Third Person of the Godhead.

1. All Three Persons are mentioned together in v. 26: the Father — sends the Comforter, the Holy Spirit — in the name of Jesus. So much is needed for our salvation that all three have their work.
2. The Spirit and the Word. The New Testament added to the Old. The Spirit’s great means in his task as “the Comforter.”

### II. The substitute of Jesus.

1. The eve of Jesus’ departure. The centuries that Jesus has been gone. The disciples who walked familiarly with Jesus and we with them have lost nothing. Here is the great, abiding substitute ever with us. ,
2. See how the Comforter brings Jesus to us in the four gospels and in the entire New Testament. We may still walk with Jesus, hear his voice, see his miracles, behold him suffer, die, rise again, ascend on high, and the Comforter makes it all far plainer to us than it was to the first disciples when all of it occurred.

### III. The source of every spiritual blessing.

1. Jesus speaks of love and of its true evidence, guarding his Word (words, biddings). Jesus bestows peace, the peace be bought. Do you wish you could have been in the upper room? But we fall short in no way.
2. Pentecost guarantees that. There are millions of Christians in all places and in all ages.. The Spirit reaches all of them. The

Word is his means. Peace, love, faithfulness, yea, every spiritual gift he bestows upon us. This is what Pentecost means.

IV. The reliance of all Christendom.

1. Now we can see why he is called “the Comforter,” in Greek the Paraclete: the One whom the Father called ever to be at our side in this world. We may call him “our Reliance.”
2. Our Church and every one of us believers is never alone. The Comforter is ever at our side: to guide, instruct, warn, rebuke, cheer, uphold, strengthen, console, rejoice, make brave, etc. Yea, he is in our very hearts, ever prompting and helping us by means of the Word he implants in us. “All hail the day of Pentecost!” Thank God for the festival of the Comforter!

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The Third Article of the Apostles’ Creed and Luther’s explanation: “What does this mean?” may serve as an introduction to a sermon. — The promises regarding the Paraclete and their wondrous fulfillment according to Acts 2, the epistle text for Pentecost, may likewise form the introduction. — Of course, such introductions must lead straight to the theme and to the body of the sermon.

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Pentecost, 1900 years ago, — the last day of this earth, the last human being saved. Divide the entire course of time: 1) from Creation to Christ; 2) Christ, thirty-three years; 3) the Holy Spirit’s era from Pentecost to the end of time. Such considerations help us to understand the great day of Pentecost. The miracle of Pentecost ushered in

### **The Blessed Era of the Holy Spirit.**

You live in this grand era. Blind and deaf? I hope not. Let Pentecost shed its light upon you and your life-time. Forget the wretched politics, the wars, the turmoil of men who do not know the era in which they live. In this grand era

I. Redemption is complete.

Not until it was complete could this era begin.

The text shows Jesus completing redemption: “even so I do, arise, let us go hence,” v. 31. Jesus about to go to the Father, v. 28.

Thus he promises the Comforter, and we are now in this great era.

II. The Word is prepared.

The Spirit added the New Testament, v. 26. The Old Testament could not possibly remain alone.

This Word the Spirit’s great means and instrument conveying redemption to men, faith, the new life, salvation.

This the era of the world-wide Bible, despite all its opponents. Is it the era of the Word for you?

III. Peace and love reigns.

O no; not in the selfish, warring, vicious world: “not as the world giveth,” v. 27. There we should indeed be troubled and afraid.

In the hearts of the believers, since Jesus is gone it is done by the mediation of his Spirit.

Love coupled with loyalty, and peace coupled with joy at our Lord’s exaltation, v. 28.

IV. The Father and the Son dwell in our hearts.

The profound, inner union with all who love Jesus.

As one in his own home arranges everything to please him, so the Father and the Son in our hearts.

But all this through the Spirit.

Conclusion: Do we recognize this blessed era, open our hearts to the Spirit, and thus obtain all the blessedness intended for us? The grand consummation at the last day.

The day of Pentecost 1900 years ago filled with miraculous manifestations.  
No less miraculous

### **The Pentecost in Your Own Heart.**

I. What a place! “Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts,” etc., Matt. 15:19. There the devil reigned. There “the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, the pride of life,” 1 John 2:16. You would say: Hopeless! But lo:

II. What a power!

God’s own Spirit, with God’s own Word, and the Son’s redemption. All fitted for the hearts of us vile sinners to cleanse and change our hearts. Pentecost sent this Spirit into all the world, and now look:

III. What a change!

The peace that comes from forgiveness bought through Christ’s redemption. The love that comes from faith in him and ever guards his Word (words, behests). The joy that knows Jesus in the glory of heaven. A complete change indeed. And 10, now once more, but in a different sense:

IV. What a place!

Here dwell the Father and the Son as in a pleasant home of love. In this heart they have arranged all things so as to please them. Heavenly riches fill this their human home. What condescension on their part, what ennobling for this heart! And this is only the prelude, for presently this heart will be filled with glory.

Did the Spirit’s Pentecost accomplish this in your heart?

# The Day After Pentecost. John 3:16-21

## The Condemnation of Unbelief

The text may be used for the evening of Pentecost Sunday. *The Interpretation of St. John's Gospel* supplies the exegesis. The text does not mention the Holy Spirit, but all that it says about faith and about unbelief pertains to the Holy Spirit just as completely as if his name were mentioned several times. The selection of this text for the Day after Pentecost reveals a profound understanding of Scripture in the ancient Church.

The text for Pentecost Sunday speaks to the eleven in the upper room, and the preacher applies what Jesus says to them to his hearers by a kind of homiletical application. He cannot do this with 14:26, because we are not to write inspired books, nor are we the first witnesses as were the eleven who were in the Savior's company for so long a time. Our present text is different: in its very wording it is universal: "whosoever believeth — he that believeth — he that believeth not," etc. Jesus is speaking directly to every one of us. The reason why I word the general subject of this text negatively is because it contains so much about unbelief. Of course, positive wording is also in place.

## Homiletical Aid

The work of the Three Persons: the Father sends the Son to save us; the Son redeems us at the price of his blood; the Holy Spirit is sent by the Father and the Son to make this redemption ours by working faith in our hearts: he that believeth shall be saved. In all reason we should expect that all men would promptly be brought to embrace this great salvation, the more so

since in addition to the Father and the Son, no less a person than the Holy Spirit comes to create saving faith in our hearts. God's Holy Spirit,

### **The Creator of Faith.**

#### **I. Creator indeed!**

He brings to us all the love of God for the world and all the atoning sacrifice of God's Son, in all his own love to save us, — in the whole universe nothing so mighty to create and to preserve faith in a sinner's heart.

A person believes only what is more. Here are the Persons of the Godhead to make salvation sure. The sure redemption wrought by Jesus. The sure Word of the Gospel. Nothing surer in the universe.

A person embraces by faith what is blessed. Hurtful things we believe reluctantly. Not to perish, but to be saved eternally is absolutely the most blessed reality that can possibly be brought to a miserable, guilty, doomed sinner.

He who operates with what is so certain and so blessed is indeed a Creator of faith.

#### **II. And hosts of believers.**

It could not be otherwise. This great love of God, do you mean to spurn it? This bloody sacrifice of God's Son, do you mean to scorn it? Hell (to perish) is before you, can you even think of declining to be carried to heaven (to be saved)? Do not these questions answer themselves?

To believe, to have faith is to embrace with the confidence of the heart. Such confidence is wrought in us by the very realities which this confidence relies upon and embraces. It could be produced in no other way, otherwise it would not be faith.

It is so simple, so easy to be saved! The infinite treasure is laid into our hand. No greater happiness for a sinner than to contemplate this treasure made his own by the Creator of faith. With faith in his heart he is saved, a new creature, blessed for ever.

III. Yet men do not believe.

What would seem to be incredible is nevertheless true. We ask how this can be? There is no complete answer, even Jesus has no such answer. This is because the question asks a reasonable explanation, and the refusal to believe is an unreasonable act, irrational, utterly unnatural, and for such unreasonable acts no reasonable explanation can be made to our minds.

This unreasonableness of unbelief Jesus points out: it is to love the darkness and to hate the light when the light comes. It is to love the darkness because this would reveal their wickedness. It is thus to be judged now already, though Jesus came only to save, and to forfeit salvation by this added guilt. This is enough.

Let the heavenly Creator of faith make and keep you a true believer.

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### **The Tragedy of Unbelief.**

“He that believeth not is judged already,” κέκριται — the verdict pronounced on him continues to stand.

I. So guilty!

Because of God’s boundless love, the Son’s wondrous sacrifice, the Spirit’s faith-producing work. The tragedy of men’s own deliberate making.

II. So unreasonable!

Because salvation is so easy to obtain, perdition so easy to escape, the Spirit himself creating faith, so that a huge, utterly perverse effort is required to maintain unbelief. The tragedy so unutterably wretched because of its unreason.

III. So horrible.

Because the darkness is preferred to the light; because the wicked deeds demand the darkness, flee the light and its reproof; because, with salvation (heaven, eternal blessedness) purchased, won, and actually

brought to a man, he deliberately takes hell as his part. The tragedy could not be more fatal.

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Of course, we know that many men do not believe in Jesus Christ and will not come to him. The Bible, like our text, speaks of them, and their voices shout their unbelief all around us in the world. The fact of this fearful unbelief is beyond question, and yet this fact is so utterly unjustified that but for its being a fact we should have to call it unbelievable:

### **Unbelievable Unbelief.**

It is a fact indeed, yet in itself unbelievable in Unbelief:

1. Not to respond to God's love;
2. Not to accept the Son's sacrifice;
3. Not to recoil from perdition;
4. Not to embrace salvation;
5. Not to delight in the light;
6. Not to abhor the darkness; in a word,
7. Not to believe.

# **The Non-Festival Half Of The Church Year**

**The Twenty-Seven Sundays After Trinity**

**The Saved**

From Their Reception of Salvation to the Consummation

# The First After-Trinity Cycle

## The Reception of Salvation

### Trinity Sunday

*The New Birth Trinity Sunday belongs to this cycle.*

### The First Sunday After Trinity

*The Hereafter*

### The Second Sunday After Trinity

*The Rejection of the Gospel Call*

### The Third Sunday After Trinity

*The Lost Found*

### The Fourth Sunday After Trinity

*The Compassionate and Enlightened*

### The Fifth Sunday After Trinity

*An Illustration of the Saving Power of the Word*

# The Festival Of Trinity. John 3:1 -15

## The Holy Spirit and the New Birth

The ancient church observed no Festival of the Trinity and selected no texts for such a festival. I have explained the matter in the General Introduction to this volume and in *The Epistle Selections of the Ancient Church*. Our present Trinity Sunday was called The First Sunday after Pentecost and its text, John 3:1-15, presented the work of the Holy Spirit in regeneration. From Pentecost the ancient Church looked forward to Sundays after Pentecost. No Trinity festival concluded the first half of the Church Year, — no halt was made at this point and no formal second half of the Church Year began with the First Sunday after Trinity. All of the Sundays succeeding Pentecost were not called Sundays after Trinity. The first few were called Sundays after Pentecost, and all the rest bore no special fixed names.

The Trinity Festival was introduced in the Middle Ages; just when and by whom does not seem to be known, — the only information available are remarks of certain writers to the effect that such a festival existed. I dissent from Nebe who thinks that the Festival of the Trinity originated in a dogmatical age and from dogmatical considerations. No; it originated from confessional interests, and these interests sustained the novelty of the introduction of this festival. Although papal approval was at first withheld, such approval was finally granted by Pope John XXII († 1334). The Reformation fully approved the festival and none of us would today cast it aside. More than the believers of the fourteenth century we need a festival when all our churches may unite in confessing the Holy Trinity, for the multitude of the anti-trinitarians has greatly increased, against whose ideas about God our people must be fortified.

Nebe's fear that the preacher may seek to plumb the profundities of the metaphysical Trinity when preaching on this Sunday I consider idle. Our ministers are taught something better, and have better judgment. Nevertheless, we confess these profundities and intend most emphatically to do so, and need instructive sermons to help make our confession what it should be.

When the Festival of the Trinity came into vogue the ancient texts were discarded. In place of John 3:1-15 (gospel) and Rev. 4:1-11 (epistle), Matt. 28:18-20 and Rom. 11:33-36 were appointed. It may be due to the reluctance of the Catholic Church in adopting the Trinity Festival that this change did not maintain itself as far as the gospel is concerned, — this still remains John 3:1-15.

The situation thus produced creates its own difficulty. To be sure, not for all preachers. There are preachers and even homileticians who treat these ancient texts as a loose aggregation; who think that they are not intended to link into each other. Thus it makes little difference what subject is assigned to a specific Sunday. This view of the ancient, and also of the modern text selections, destroys the great idea of the Church Year and certainly does not commend itself. But the moment we give serious attention to the true sequence of our texts we encounter the anomaly that John 3:1-15 was never intended for the Festival of the Trinity, and secondly, that if we do preach on the Holy Trinity, we introduce a subject foreign to the ancient and original sequence and cause a serious break in the line of thought.

Preachers can easily adapt themselves to a situation. They take this gospel text which was not intended for Trinity Sunday and which was chosen long before such a Sunday was known, and preach the Holy Trinity from it. Luther even persuades himself that John 3:1-15 was chosen for the Trinity Festival: "It seems this excellent, beautiful gospel, which shows the one, right, sure way to eternal life, was designated for the Festival of the Holy Trinity for the very reason that in so fine and proper a way the difference between the Persons is indicated in the highest and greatest work which God performs with us poor human beings, when he justifies and saves us." Yet John 3:16 is not a part of this text, but a part of the text for Pentecost Monday. Moreover, if we now preach on the Holy Trinity, how shall we continue with the following Sunday, which has Luke 16:19-31 as its text?

Taking everything into consideration, my decision is not to make the Trinity the subject of my sermon, but *the Spirit, Baptism, and regeneration*. For a consideration of this subject the text was chosen and I want to deal honestly with the text. If I were to choose I should not select this text for a sermon on the Holy Trinity, but I should select it for the subject for which it was originally so obviously selected.

I am rather compelled to divide the Church Year into the festival half and the non-festival half, and to speak of the Festival of the Trinity and of the Sundays after Trinity. But in reality, I make the present Sunday the First Sunday after Pentecost. All the later text selections, such as the Eisenach series, avoid this entire difficulty.

The story of Nicodemus is of minor import, the teaching of Jesus is the burden of John's account. As far as Nicodemus is concerned, the sequel appears in 7:15 and 19:39. Nicodemus was one of those who believed because of the miracles, to whom, therefore, Jesus did not entrust himself (2:23-24). John presents the teaching of Jesus as the counterpart to the miracles (2:23), somewhat as does Matthew, although the latter has the miracles follow the Sermon on the Mount. The conversation with Nicodemus is chosen by John because it offers the summary that John desires to present, dealing as it does with the Kingdom, regeneration, faith, the Son of man, God's love and the plan of salvation, judgment and unbelief. This observation serves to explain why the narrative drops the conversational form after v. 9. I take it that there was more dialog, that Nicodemus remained a much longer time than the few minutes it takes to utter what John has written, and that he departed from Jesus in a grateful spirit. John's object is not to tell this story, but to give a summation of all the main subjects Jesus presented to Nicodemus. While John condenses, his report is exact, a demonstration of what Jesus means in 14:26. The Holy Spirit guided John's pen.

**[1] Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews.** Party connection — personal name — official position. A conversation such as is here reported would have been impossible in the case of a Sadducee or of a Herodian. The name of Nicodemus might have been omitted, but it is almost necessary to mention it in view of 7:15 and 19:39. "A ruler of the Jews" here in Jerusalem signifies a member of the supreme Jewish court, the Sanhedrin. Nicodemus held a lofty position of

power. Jesus penetrated even the ranks of this high court (1 Cor. 1:26: “not many,” but some). We gather also that he was a scribe (7:50), like other Pharisees in the Sanhedrin.

[2] He must have been a dignified, venerable old man, thoroughly versed in Jewish theology. **This man came to him at night, and said to him: “Rabbi, we know that from God thou art come as a teacher; for no one can do these things that thou doest, except God be with him.”**

Do not call him a coward, — he was only cautious, and did not want to compromise his official position, because he was not as yet sure about Jesus. His purpose in coming to Jesus is, if possible, to make sure. The fact that Nicodemus comes to Jesus at all means a great deal. We see his attitude. Because of his miracles and in part because of his teaching Jesus has attracted the man. The credit for this attraction belongs wholly to Jesus, not to Nicodemus. The same miracles and the same teaching had been viciously and wickedly cast aside by Caiaphas and so many other Sanhedrists. Their attitude was one of a different kind. The problem is not how Nicodemus came to Jesus, — this is answered by the *gratia sufficiens* and all that we see in Nicodemus is his normal reaction to the power of this *gratia*. The problem insoluble for our minds is why the same *gratia sufficiens* did not produce the same reactions and the same effects in Caiaphas, etc., but a horribly opposite reaction (conduct, attitude). Here are two poisonous fountains and streams. Comes the Savior with the means all-sufficient to unpoison them. The one is gradually unpoisoned, but horror of horrors, the application of this heavenly means makes the other spring and stream a thousand times more poisonous than it was before, so poisonous in fact that it can never be unpoisoned. The mystery does not lie in the Savior, not in the *gratia sufficiens*, not in the logic of the case for it is utterly illogical and is not even a matter of logic, but in man’s will. Who is able to say more? This is said not to explain either conversion or eternal election, but to place the guilt where it belongs, on the willful, obdurate will.

The address “Rabbi” is entirely respectful and was used also by others. The plural “we” does not = I, nor Nicodemus and the Sanhedrists, but Nicodemus and the “many” mentioned in 2:23. Nicodemus expresses their conviction that Jesus is not a teacher who has assumed his work of teaching on his own accord, but one who has a commission from God similar to that

of the ancient prophets. The words belong together: “hast come from God as teacher,” and thus do not refer to the divine nature of Jesus.

The conviction of Nicodemus rests on the many “signs” Jesus was doing. Nicodemus regards them not merely as τέρατα, “wonders,” or as δυνάμεις, “powerworks,” but as “signs” that point to something higher, as divine credentials and seals. Nicodemus was right, these deeds were “signs,” and he understood correctly what these signs signified: a teacher from God. His vision, however, was still too dim, — he should have found much more than a divinely commissioned teacher. Yet he was on the way of doing this, for his words indicate that he is seeking the answer to the great question as to whether Jesus is the Messiah promised by God. Note that μετ’ αὐτοῦ means: in covenant or in association with him, — σύν would mean only: helping him.

Nicodemus explains his quiet visit to Jesus, and in doing so implies a silent question.

**[3] Jesus answered and said unto him: “Amen, amen, I say to thee: Except one be born anew, he cannot see the Kingdom of God.”** The double wording “answered and said” marks the importance of the statement thus introduced, and ἀποκρίθη is frequently used, not with reference to a reply to a question, but with reference to a pertinent statement, as in the present instance. “Amen, amen (verity), I say to thee” (authority), is explained in 16:20, Jubilate. “The Kingdom of God” is explained in Matt. 21:5, the First Sunday in Advent. “To see” this Kingdom is the biblical psychological expression for being a partaker of this Kingdom. Ἐνωθεν does not in the present connection mean “from above,” but “anew,” because its counterpart in v. 4 is δεύτερον, “a second time.”

There are still many externalizing views of “the Kingdom” besides those of Catholicism. Men speak of “working for the Kingdom,” of “building the Kingdom,” when they can do nothing of the kind. Even preaching the Gospel is not working for or building the Kingdom. For this Kingdom is the Rule of the King; where he is there is his Kingdom. And this Rule that is his Kingdom comes not With observation, is not of this world. Dismiss all analogies that conceive the Kingdom as similar to earthly kingdoms, especially as regards anything like subjects. Here are no subjects. We partake of God’s (Christ’s) Kingdom, we are made kings and priests in it,

we reign in it with the King, and thus we “see” it. Only by a new birth can you share in this Kingdom: “except one be born anew.” All these kings in the Kingdom are sons of God, begotten of God (1 John 3:9-10; v. 4), new creatures, with the C0013, the new life, in them.

It must have taken this old Pharisee’s breath away to be told point blank that all his Jewish birth and physical descent from Abraham was utterly valueless, all his Jewish prerogatives, attainments, honors, and merit were of no avail, and that nothing less would do save a new birth. What a blow! The fact that he was a Jew gave him no part in the Kingdom; the fact that he was a Pharisee, esteemed as far holier than other people, availed him nothing; his membership in the great Sanhedrin and his fame as one of its scribes went for nought. This house of the old man crashed. With one sentence Jesus swept it away. A lifetime of effort gone! The word of Jesus still causes the same devastation. Look at the people in Matt. 7:22-23! But really it is utterly simple. Birth makes sons, heirs, princes, kings in this Kingdom, birth and nothing else. Not what you do, but something that you undergo, that is done to you. It has never been otherwise, never can be.

**[4] Nicodemus says to him: “How can a man be born when he is old? He certainly can not enter a second time into his mother’s womb, and be born?”** These two questions, of which the second elucidates the first, mean: “I know that thou art not speaking of a second physical birth I” “When he is old” shows that Nicodemus is thinking of himself in particular. But of what, then, is Jesus speaking? The interrogative particle μή expects a self-evident negative answer: “He certainly cannot, etc., can he?”

These questions evidence the natural resistance of Nicodemus. They are also evidence of grave ignorance. Although he is stunned by the dictum of Jesus, note well that Nicodemus does not suddenly rise up and leave, does not say, either politely or otherwise, that he did not come to be insulted and thus leave, does not take back the admission that Jesus is a teacher come from God. To cut the connection with Jesus and his Word would have been what we, for lack of a better term, call willful resistance. Note what Felix did in Acts 24:25; he kept his soul from the Word. Formula of Concord, Epitome, XI, § 11 (Concordia Triglotta p. 835): “so that he (the Holy Ghost) cannot perform his work in them,” *sein Werk in ihnen nicht haben kann*. The term “willful” is confessional: *weil sic sich mutwillig von dem heiligen Gebot wieder abwenden*, “they willfully turn away again,” etc. Sol. Decl.

XI, § 42 (*Conc. Tr.* p. 1077). To set aside the difference beclouds the biblical accounts. Calvinism is our warning.

**[5] Jesus answered: “Amen, amen, I say to thee: Except one be born of water and Spirit, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God.”** The answer of Jesus shows that Jesus regards the questions of Nicodemus as being entirely sincere. Nicodemus wants to know “how.” He is told: “by Baptism.”

Jesus simply repeats what he has already stated and adds one phrase: “of water and Spirit.” The substitution of “enter” for “see” is merely formal: one sees when he enters, and must enter to see. Because of the contentions of the Baptists we must discuss: ἔκ ὕδατος καὶ Πνεύματος. The two nouns form one object of the one preposition. They must not be separated into two phrases: “out of water” (Baptism, a mere water ceremony) and “out of Spirit” (bestowed apart from the water, at some other time and place, and in an immediate manner). “Water and Spirit” define Baptism, and the contention that would reduce Baptism to “water alone” (Luther’s expression) is contrary to Scripture. Tit. 3:5; Eph. v. 26 (the Word is the Spirit’s medium).

Nicodemus knew about the Baptist’s Baptism, in particular that it was “the Baptism of repentance for the remission of sins” (Luke 3:3). This Baptism, Jesus tells Nicodemus, is the source (fix) of the new birth. While water is the necessary earthly element of the Sacrament, the divine power regenerating and causing the spiritual birth is the Holy Spirit. John’s Baptism was continued by Jesus (read 3:22 and 4:2) and finally was ordered to be taken to all nations (Matt. 28:19). It is one and the same Sacrament, with the same Holy Spirit in it and producing the same saving effect. When adults are converted by the Word and are baptized, these acts go together. Normal faith at once demands Baptism. Yet it is not the *defectus* that damns, but only the *contemptus* of the Sacrament (see Mark 16:16, Ascension Day).

Recognize the historical fact that Nicodemus, like all the Jews before his time, believed in the Holy Trinity. The Baptist spoke to the Jews about the Spirit and about the Son of God (1:32 and 34), and no Jew objected or demanded an explanation. Gather all the evidence to this effect. Their objection was not to the idea of the Trinity, not to the teaching of the Son as

the Second Person, or to the Spirit as the Third; but the claim that this lowly, humble man Jesus should be the Second Person, — the Sanhedrists called blasphemous. The Jews became unitarian after their opposition to Christianity developed. When some theologians assume that the revelation of the Three Persons is all too faint in the Old Testament, the first pages of the New Testament, in fact, the bulk of the New Testament, should help to revise this assumption to the extent that the Jews found nothing new and incredible in a reference of the Baptist, of Jesus, and of others to the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit, who indeed are more fully revealed through them.

[6] Jesus adds without a connective, yet in explanation of this new birth: **“That born from the flesh is flesh; and that born from the Spirit is spirit. [7] Marvel not that I said to thee: ‘You must be born anew.’ [8] The wind blows where it will, and thou hearest its sound, but knowest not whence it comes, and whither it goes, — thus is every one that is born from the Spirit.”**

The neuter τὸ γεγεννημένον is explained by the masculine ὁ γεγεννημένος in v. 8. The neuter is abstract and thus generalizes. The articulated masculine individualizes. The perfect tense of these participles indicates a birth in the past and its continuous result in the present. The two statements regarding birth are axiomatic and thus need no proof, but serve to be used as final proof. “The flesh” and “the Spirit” are opposites, and thus ἡ σὰρξ here means not merely our human nature, frail, weak, mortal, but in addition this nature as sinful, corrupt, depraved. “The Spirit” cannot be “the spirit” or immaterial part in us, for this produces no birth, for both the ψυχή and the human πνεῦμα are embraced in “the flesh.”

Only two births are possible: the natural physical birth, which is due to human parents, and their sinful nature, and thus produces nothing but “flesh,” beings with the same sinful and corrupt nature. We scarcely need the word of Jesus to establish this fact, — every child born of human parents proves the fact empirically. No stream ever did ascend above its source. No evolution is able to eliminate sin and its concomitant death by selective breeding. Till time ends the fact that Jesus here states stands. Nicodemus, old revered Jew that he was, had only this birth. Suppose that repetitions were possible, — a million repetitions would produce no higher result.

But a second birth is possible: ἐκ τοῦ Πνεύματος (article of previous reference), ἐκ denoting origin, source. No need to mention the water, for the power is not native to the water of Baptism, but is divine, the power of the Third Person of the Godhead. No sin, no corruption in this birth, but the bestowal of “life eternal” (v. 15), spiritual, heavenly life which passes unscathed through physical death. Here belong all the passages regarding this life, regarding the sons, children, heirs, etc. All true religion consists in having and using the life received in the new birth from the Spirit; and where this life is absent all religion is hollow and empty, which applied most directly to the Pharisaism of Nicodemus.

[7] Did Nicodemus look astonished, he who had all his life long trusted in works — works — works, and now hears all this about birth — birth — birth? Jesus tells him not to marvel about this necessity of regeneration. The plural: “You must be born anew,” means all who would see and enter the Kingdom. There is no exception.

[8] In order to illustrate the matter to Nicodemus Jesus takes an example from nature: the wind that blows, whose sound we hear, yet whose source and destination we do not know. Is there any doubt about the wind for any such reason as that none of us knows where it starts, where all this rushing air comes from, and whither it all is going? Never a doubt. Our antarctic explorers have been seeking the source of the weather and the winds at the extremities of the earth, but, I am afraid, we know no more than before.

Note well that Jesus does not compare the wind to the Spirit. He does not say: “Thus is the Spirit,” although the comparison he makes seems to be suggested by the fact that both *ruach* and *pneuma* mean “wind” or “breath.” Here is one of the numerous instances in which an intermediate thought is taken for granted, and in which the speaker leaps forward at once to the ultimate thought, which here is: “thus is every one that is born from the Spirit.” The fact and reality of the wind is beyond question because we hear its sound, the gentle breeze in the trees or the crashing storm, despite the fact that we do not know the wind’s source or its destination. The intervening thought is the fact and reality of the working of the Spirit. This is omitted, because it is involved in the fact and reality of the result of this working, namely every man who is actually reborn by the Spirit. The two features that are alike must be such as we ourselves can verify. If the wind did not affect our senses we should never know its blowing; if the Spirit did

not produce reborn men, we should never know his presence and his activity. We hear the blowing, We observe the regenerated person. This removes all doubt. The mysteries about the Wind and about the Spirit do not change the certainty regarding either the wind or the Spirit.

The usual word for “wind” is ἄνεμος, but here in v. 8 τὸ πνεῦμα is used for “the wind,” while ἐκ τοῦ Πνεύματος means “from the Spirit.” So in v. 6 we have the two meanings “Spirit” and “spirit” side by side. The predications attached to the terms obviate any confusion. We cannot possibly read: “The Spirit (or spirit) blows (breathes) where he Wills,” because this would confuse the entire sentence. The margin in the R.V. is wholly uncalled for. Ὅπου Θέλει attributes no will to the wind, nor does this little clause imply that the Spirit works in an arbitrary, erratic manner, regenerating at random this and that person, passing by others, or that the Spirit regenerates (or sanctifies) without means. The wind blows “whither it wills,” simply means that it blows now north, now south, now east, now west, without any apparent control.

**[9] Nicodemus answered and said to him: “How can these things be?”** This is the last statement uttered by Nicodemus and thus is important, — hence “answered and said” (compare v. 3). Nicodemus reveals some progress. In v. 4 he questions the fact, now he questions only the manner. But this still prevents him from believing (v. 11b). Nicodemus is still unreasonable. Is it not enough that the Spirit knows just how he creates the new birth? Must Nicodemus too know just how the mystery is to be solved? Is not the illustration drawn from the wind sufficient?

[10] The sharpness in the reply of Jesus is justified. **Jesus answered and said to him: “Art thou the teacher of Israel, and understandest not these things? [11] Amen, amen, I say to thee: We are uttering what we know, and are testifying what we have seen; and you receive not our testimony.”** Could “these things” still be hidden from Nicodemus, that the fact and reality of the Spirit’s work in its blessed results is the essential for us, and not the manner in which he brings these results about? The question of surprise involves blame. This is the greater because as a scribe in the great Court of the Jews Nicodemus surely ought to know his Old Testament well enough to know these rather elementary things. “The teacher of Israel” = the well known, acknowledged teacher. Of lesser men people would expect less. Nicodemus has even had more than the Old Testament, he has

had all the preaching of the Baptist and his Baptism, to which Jesus therefore also referred him (v. 3 and 5), and he has had even some of the preaching and the miracles of Jesus himself.

[11] The seal of verity and authority gives Nicodemus assurance in regard to what Jesus is telling him about the Spirit and the new birth, but also plainly adds that he is one who does not believe. “We” means Jesus and the Baptist, the two great witnesses to Israel. Jesus never uses the majestic plural. When he refers only to himself he uses “I,” either the pronoun or the verbal suffix. The Baptism of which Jesus spoke in v. 3 and 5 was that of the Baptist, and thus Nicodemus understood at once that “we” included the Baptist.

The doubling intends to impress: “we tell what we know, we testify what we have seen,” and the second statement says more than the first. One can tell what he knows, but he must have seen in order to testify. Moreover, here are the two witnesses required for any competent testimony. Jesus has just expressed surprise at the ignorance of Nicodemus: “knowest thou not these things?” But now Nicodemus is told and cannot plead ignorance. He is actually given competent testimony, which everybody and especially a Sanhedrist who knows all about what valid testimony requires in the court, ought to believe. Jesus and the Baptist both saw the Spirit and saw also the results of the Spirit’s work, namely men who repented, believed, received a new life.

But what about Nicodemus? There he sits and just says: “How — how?” and does not believe. When Jesus tells him: “You receive not our testimony,” this manner of confronting him with his unbelief is most effective, for this Sanhedrist knows that a judge can be guilty of no greater crime than to reject true and competent testimony. The plural “you do not receive” places Nicodemus in the great class of unbelievers, yet not with the intent of thrusting him away from Jesus, but with the intent of strongly drawing him away from all such unbelievers. What more can Nicodemus demand in order to have faith enkindled in his heart?

[12] Jesus assaults the unbelief of Nicodemus in another way. **“If I told you the earthly things, and you do not believe, how, if I shall tell you the heavenly things, shall you believe?”** Jesus has been telling Nicodemus “the earthly things” pertaining to the Kingdom: Baptism, the Spirit’s work

on earth, regeneration, repentance, faith. “If I told you” is a condition of past reality, — Jesus did tell him. But if Nicodemus does not believe these things, which it should be easy for him to believe because he has his Old Testament and two competent witnesses sent by God to testify, how shall he believe, if now Jesus add “the heavenly things”? For Jesus will have to do this. Behind and above “the earthly things” of the Kingdom are “the heavenly things.” The earthly rest on the heavenly, could not exist save for the heavenly. There could be no Baptism and no regeneration without the counsel of God’s love for our salvation (v. 16), without the sending of the Son and of the Spirit, and all this not merely for the consummation of the Kingdom, but equally for its establishment, progress, and continuance to the end. Jesus is now about to tell Nicodemus about these heavenly things. Will he meet still greater unbelief? The plural “you” continues in the verbs, — does Nicodemus mean to continue to be associated with those who refuse faith?

[13] Can Jesus really testify regarding things in heaven? He comes now to the great heavenly facts which must be told whether Nicodemus and others believe them or not. **“And no one has ascended into the heaven, except he that descended out of the heaven, the Son of man, the One who is in the heaven.”** The sole exception is Jesus. He can and does testify regarding the heavenly things.

If any ordinary man were to become a direct witness of heavenly things he would first have to ascend into heaven. Elijah did so ascend, but only when his commission as a prophet was ended; he was not sent back to testify. Paul too was caught up into heaven, but his lips were sealed in regard to what he saw. So the statement is quite correct: “No one has ascended into heaven,” namely in the sense here meant: to be a witness to us of the exalted heavenly things regarding the Kingdom.

There is only one exception, εἰ μὴ, “except,” then naming the person with three terms. “Except” does not mean, as the English mind might wish to understand, that the person now named did ascend into heaven and came back to testify. The Greek “except” makes him a far greater exception: he did not even need to ascend, his eternal abode was heaven: he is “the One who descended out of the heaven.” No ascent was necessary, only this gracious descent, which signifies the Incarnation.

Note well that ὁ ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ καταβάς (the substantivized aorist participle) is a designation equal to a noun. Note that “the Son of man” is an apposition, ὁ υἱός; a noun. And then do not fail to see that ὁ ὢν ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ is again a substantivized participle, the present tense this time, again equal to a noun, forming another apposition.

“The One who came down out of the heaven” is “the Son of man” and is “the One who is ever in the heaven.” This identification is stated in the third person and is thus strongly objective. Jesus might have come out of heaven without becoming man, but to be “the Son of man” he became incarnate. The designation signifies the One who is man and yet more than man. I discuss it at length in *The Interpretation of St. John’s Gospel* 174 etc., and in the other three gospels. Jesus himself coined this designation and used it constantly in place of “the Messiah” which among Jews had come to have too much of a political connotation. Correct the idea that “the Son of man” speaks of Jesus only as man; quite the contrary, it always speaks of his deity in connection with his being man, for the title is drawn from Dan, 7:13-14: “one like the Son of man” etc.

“The one who is in the heaven” is a second apposition and ascribes the attribute of omnipresence to Jesus. So great is this Person that, although he descended to earth from heaven and is now before Nicodemus as the Son of man, by his thus becoming incarnate on earth he did not leave heaven but is in heaven, is there as much as he ever was before his incarnation, but now according to both his divine and his human nature, in a manner utterly incomprehensible to us. What Nicodemus really came to find out was whether Jesus perhaps was the Messiah (v. 2). Here is the fullest kind of an answer, — yes, the Messiah, but far above all the cheap nationalistic and political Jewish conceptions of the Messiah.

I omit a discussion of the dogmatical and the grammatical misconceptions connected with this simple apposition, the meaning of which Nicodemus could not help but understand. Here was one of “the heavenly things” to which Jesus testifies, so far above the conceptions of our minds, — would Nicodemus believe or again ask doubting and unbelieving questions?

[14] From the great person who came from heaven and can testify regarding the heavenly things Jesus advances to the great salvation coming

through this person. For this person is far more than a mere witness, he is the Savior himself. Thus Jesus seeks to kindle faith in Nicodemus, faith in the divine salvation offered him. **“And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, thus lifted up must be the Son of man, [15] in order that every one believing may in him have life eternal.”**

Jesus takes Nicodemus back into the Old Testament, which he knows so well, to Num. 21:8-9, the brazen serpent, one of the types of the Messiah and of his saving power. All that is necessary for Nicodemus is the brief reference: “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness.” Those bitten by the fiery serpents sent among them in punishment for their wicked murmuring, needed only to look up to this brazen serpent to be instantly healed. Beside the type Jesus places the great antitype: “thus lifted up must be the Son of man,” this great person whom Jesus has just named with three great designations in v. 13, and whom he now names again as “the Son of man,” the One who is man and yet far more than man. It required faith on the part of a bitten Israelite to believe God’s promise and to look up to the brazen serpent. The intention with regard to the Son of man, likewise lifted up, is the same: “in order that every one believing may in him have life eternal.” The words “should not perish” are not a part of the text, but were by some scribe added from v. 16.

The point of likeness in the type and in the antitype is this being lifted up, hence also the infinitive is placed forward for emphasis: “lifted up must be” etc. The crucifixion of Jesus is referred to, not the ascension to heaven and not also the ascension. The serpent was elevated on a tall staff, Jesus was elevated on the cross. Yet this point of likeness, the elevation, is not to be understood in a mechanical and a bare manner, but as the purpose clause in v. 15 shows, this likeness includes the saving power and the saving effect. Those bitten by fiery serpents were healed, those lost in sin obtain life. Of course, the antitype far exceeds the type.

Many of the exegetes seem determined to turn the simple type into an allegory, which then, too, is often developed at length. All allegorical interpretation must be discarded. Jesus is content to say that he, too, must be lifted up. In due time Nicodemus will understand fully. So Jesus foretold his death by crucifixion even in far plainer and most literal terms to his disciples, and yet they understood fully only after the event. Jesus was preparing Nicodemus for the hour on Good Friday, when he together with

that other Sanhedrist, Joseph of Arimathea, helped to bury the body of him who had been lifted up in order that all who believe may in him have life eternal.

[15] Do not construe: πιστεύων ἐν αὐτῷ, “believing in him,” for then the preposition should be εἰς but: ἐν αὐτῷ ἔχη. “in him may have,” i.e. “in connection with him, in union with him may have now and ever.” The present subjunctive “may have” is not to be dated at the last day, but at the moment of faith. The connection referred to by ἐν is that formed in the instant of faith.

“Life eternal” is the life principle itself, always invisible like natural life, yet manifesting itself in countless ways. This life is spiritual. We may identify it with faith, although the concepts differ. This life passes unharmed through physical death, for it passes on into heavenly glory. This life makes us sons, children, heirs of God. One may lose this life by sundering the connection indicated by the phrase “in him,” through impenitence and unbelief. While amissible, this life may be regained. It is created in us by the Spirit’s grace.

## Homiletical Aid

Many people say “God,” “Father,” “Supreme Being,” and the like, but do not mean the true God who really exists, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, Three Persons and One Being. We must know that such people are not Christians in any sense of the word, any more than a Jew or a Mohammedan is a Christian. Aside from the great reality itself regarding the true God, the Holy Three Persons are so connected with our salvation that all unitarianism casts this salvation aside. At the very threshold of the Kingdom of God we meet the Son and the Holy Spirit, without whom no person can possibly enter and become a Christian. In our text Jesus shows Nicodemus

### **The Blessed Portal of the Kingdom.**

- I. The Son of man lifted up upon the cross.

1. He who came down from heaven (Incarnation); became the Son of man, that is man who is far more than man, whose miracles already proclaim his deity; and while on earth is even in heaven (eternal, omnipresent also in his human nature).
2. Like the brazen serpent in the wilderness this Son of God was lifted up on the cross. His sacrifice, all-sufficient because of his person. In his cross alone is salvation. It is the portal of the Kingdom.
3. By believing in him and in his sacrifice we enter. There is no other way, despite all that men imagine.

## II. The water and the Spirit in Baptism.

1. Faith and Baptism ever go together. For to enter through the portal of the Kingdom is to receive a new life, "life eternal by faith," the new birth in Holy Baptism. In all grown persons the faith is first and demands the Baptism and its divine promises as the seal of the new life. In babes the new life is wrought and conscious faith follows.
2. A greater miracle than the miracle that so impressed Nicodemus. Even an old man can be born anew, obtain the spiritual life, become an actual child and heir of God in his Kingdom. But he must be born, he cannot achieve this himself.
3. The Holy Spirit causes this birth and life. The life-giving power is all his. It is applied to each individual in Baptism. The power operates through the water of Baptism. It pleased God to institute this Sacrament with this earthly element. The permanent effect: enduring, new, spiritual life.

Conclusion: He that believeth and is baptized is in the Kingdom. The cross and the Sacrament form the portal. The Son and the Spirit admit us. Blessed are all who enter.

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J. A. Dell has his own skillful way of preaching on the Holy Trinity from this text. Yet it was not the Trinity that caused the difficulty for Nicodemus.

Like all Jews, he knew sufficient about that. It was this strange new birth. Dell outlines as follows:

### **We Believe in the Triune God.**

- I. The wonder-working Father.
- II. The revealing and redeeming Son
- III. The regenerating Spirit.
- IV. And these three are one God.

Conclusion: I do not understand it. I believe it.

**“To thee, great One in Three,  
Eternal praises be,  
Hence evermore!  
Thy sov’ reign majesty  
May we in glory see  
And to eternity  
Love and adore.”**

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Dell has another outline on the same order.

Text a conversation between Nicodemus and Jesus, “a teacher sent from God.” Let us see what we can learn from it concerning

### **The Trinity.**

- I. They speak of God the Father.

“Master, we know that thou art a teacher come from God, for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.”

1. The faith of Nicodemus. Tacitly approved by Jesus. Nicodemus believes in an almighty Maker and Governor. First Article of the Christian Creed.

In the Jewish idea of God the Oneness emphasized for a purpose (pagan polytheism). Yet in the Old Testament a revelation of Three Persons in God, though less full than in the New. Nicodemus understood.

2. Nicodemus believes in a merciful God, who sends prophets to lead men aright. "Teacher come from God." The history of the Jewish people confirms this faith.
3. This faith we also confess: "God the Father is the First Person of the Godhead, who from eternity begat the Son as his image, has created all things, preserves and governs them" (Catechism).

## II. They speak of God the Son.

Nicodemus believed Jesus a prophet. The Lord leads him further, v. 12-15.

1. He speaks of his person. "No man ascendeth up to heaven, save he that came down from heaven, namely the Son of man, the One who is in heaven." No doubt a puzzle to Nicodemus. Something for him to think over and understand better later on.
2. He speaks of his office, "As Moses lifted up the serpent" etc. Jesus lifted up on the cross. For the salvation of men.
3. "God the Son is the Second Person of the Godhead, begotten of the Father from eternity, has assumed human nature, and thus became our Redeemer and Mediator" (Catechism).

## III. They speak of God the Holy Ghost.

"Verily, verily, . . . Except a man be born... everyone that is born of the Spirit."

1. The Holy Spirit applies the redemption that is in Christ to the individual creature. New birth. How can such things be? Things in nature we do not understand. Wind. But we accept them. "Marvel not!"
2. The necessity of the New Birth. Word of the Spirit. The Spirit and water. Baptism. The means used by the Spirit.

3. “God the Holy Spirit is the Third Person of the Godhead, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, and through the Word and Sacrament regenerates and sanctifies us” (Catechism).

This is our Christian Faith.

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Unless you are born twice, you shall die twice. Jesus alone bestows the second, the spiritual birth through the Holy Spirit. With this new birth the Christian life begins.

### **Twice-Born Men.**

- I. To be twice-born means to have life eternal.
  - II. To have life eternal means to believe on the crucified Savior.
  - III. To believe on the Savior means to be born of water and the Spirit.
- 

Life is born. The children of God are all born. The true religion starts with a new birth and life. Verse 6. There is no substitute for the new birth and life.

### **The New Life.**

- I. Brought by Jesus.  
From heaven. He incarnate. Lifted up on the cross, as Moses lifted up the serpent to save from death.
- II. Bestowed by the Spirit.  
By faith (v. 15) and Baptism. Wondrous beyond the mysteries of the wind or other mysteries of nature.
- III. Recognized as life indeed.  
Invisible, like physical life, yet seen and recognized by its powers and activities, even also as we see physical life. All in the spiritual

realm. But when the physical life ceases this new life passes through physical death into eternal glory.

# The First Sunday After Trinity.

## Luke 16:19-31

### The Hereafter

I do not see how this text can possibly introduce the series of twenty-seven Sundays after the Trinity Festival or can introduce even the first sub-cycle, which extends to the Fifth Sunday after Trinity. Therefore I include in my chart for this sub-cycle the text for Trinity Sunday itself, which presents the New Birth and thus fittingly begins this sub-cycle as well as the entire after-Trinity series of texts.

The subject of the first half of the Church Year is

#### **The Savior:**

*In the Supreme Divine Events on which our Salvation Rests.*

The subject of the second half of the Church Year is

#### **The Saved:**

*From their Reception of Salvation to the Consummation.*

The series of twenty-seven Sundays is divided into four sections by three fixed dates: June 29 — August 10 — September 29. These three dates mark three festive days highly esteemed in the ancient church: the commemoration of the martyrdom of Peter and Paul, called “Peter-Paul Day” — the commemoration of the martyrdom of St. Laurentius (see the footnote in the general introduction) — the day that honors the angel Michael, also the angels in general, called Michaelmas. We thus have four subcycles.

The year for which these texts with these four minor cycles are designed is one in which the Easter Festival comes on the earliest possible date which is March 27, and the Pentecost Festival comes on May 15. The first sub-

cycle embraces the Sundays between May 15 and June 29. There are six: May 22 and 29, June 5, 12, 19, 26. Since Easter seldom comes on its earliest possible date, the interval between the variable date of Pentecost and the fixed date of Peter-Paul Day, June 29, is generally shortened, and when Easter comes on its latest possible date it may include as few as two Sundays. The Sundays between the two festivals (Pentecost and Peter-Paul Day) were called “Sundays after Pentecost.” The Sundays following Peter-Paul Day were at times called “Sundays after Peter-Paul Day.” In other words, when a year had fewer than twenty-seven Sundays after Trinity (as we now term these Sundays) the shortening was made in this first sub-cycle, not as our present calendars do by dropping Sundays and texts from the end of the list of twenty-seven. Here let me say that the texts for the last three of the twenty-seven Sundays should never be dropped, for these three are the real eschatological texts.

Between June 29 and August 10 (St. Laurentius Day) we have six Sundays in the year here considered: July 3:10:17:24:31, August 7. In the third sub-cycle the count continues after the fixed date August 10, in the same way and halts before September 29. The last sub-cycle begins after this date and uses all the remaining texts and, of course, needs to omit none.<sup>1</sup>

When Pentecost comes at its latest date and leaves us only two Sundays before Peter-Paul, June 29, the two texts that remain nevertheless form an excellent pair. John 3:1-15 presents the New Birth by which Salvation is first Received (our present Trinity Sunday), and Luke 16:19-31 presents the last step in the Reception of Salvation, namely the reception of eternal salvation in the bliss of heaven.

The parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus completes the series of parables as recorded in Luke: 1) The Lost Sheep and the Lost Coin; 2) The Prodigal’s Return; 3) The Unjust Steward; 4) and now Dives and Lazarus (Luke chapter 15 and 16). Our parable needs no introduction, for its import in this group of parables is apparent.

*The Saved* are finally saved when they pass into the heavenly world. *The Reception of Salvation* is complete when we die in faith. The day a martyr yielded up his life was termed his “natal day” in the ancient church, his heavenly birthday.

[19] Now a rich man there was, and he constantly put on himself' purple and fine linen, making merry day by day splendidly. [20] Moreover, a beggar, by name Lazarus, had been thrown at his portals suffering from ulcers [21] and longing to be filled from the things falling from the table of the rich man; yea, even the dogs coming kept licking his ulcers. Words just enough, not one too much or too little, to throw on the screen the picture of these two men in the most masterly manner.

Is Jesus sketching the history of two actually existing men? They are imaginary persons as are the figures in his other parables, for instance in the parable of the Good Samaritan. But while not taken from actual life, the figures are drawn true to life. This Dives represents a large class of men, and so does this Lazarus. The two are extremes as far as outward conditions are concerned, one so grand and gorgeous, the other so wretched and miserable. There is a purpose in presenting the figures in this manner, for these extremes at times actually do occur side by side, moreover, all such biblical maximal cases intend to include also those of lesser degree.

No name for this rich man. It is as if Jesus looked into the Book of Life and did not find his name entered there. As far as heaven and the Church are concerned he may as well remain nameless. Many people knew his name while he lived here on earth, and many certainly never even inquired after the name of Lazarus (which means: God a help). Jesus attaches this lovely and significant name to the beggar. All God's saints are known by name to Jesus (John 10:10: "calleth his own sheep by name").

Royal personages wear purple and fine linen, purple out of which the outer robe, byssus, the very finest of linen out of which the tunic next to the body are made. The poor rags worn by the beggar need not be described. Dives (= rich man) lived splendidly every day. Εὐφραινόμενος καθ' ἡμέραν (distributive κατά) pictures a daily festivity in the midst of jolly friends, and certainly this man never lacked for friends to help him celebrate λαμπρῶς, "splendidly," "sumptuously" (A.V.).

[20] Now the complete opposite: the beggar Lazarus. Friends, such as he still had, deposited him before the rich man's portal to lie there in order to get some food. He could no longer even walk. There he lay. Through that portal the rich man and his friends had to pass and thus had to see this poor

man's wretchedness and to hear his quavering voice begging for alms. But if any of these lordly gentlemen cast an eye upon him, all they saw was something "disgusting." The participle ἡλκωμένος means "having been afflicted with ulcers," loathsome, festering, painful, untended sores. His diseased condition had reached an advanced stage. He was helpless.

[21] The picture is entirely oriental, and for those who have seen the orient highly graphic. The "off-falls" from the rich man's table were disposed of in the common fashion: a slave-boy carried out the scraps and threw them into the street where the dogs, which acted as scavengers in the town, quickly devoured them. The beggar would ask the boy for some of the scraps, and if the boy was so disposed he held the vessel down and let the beggar help himself.

Ἄλλα is copulative and = "yea." So severe is the abject condition of this beggar: the dogs licked his sores. When these ownerless dogs had disposed of the scraps and the garbage they often came and in kindly dog-fashion licked the sores of the beggar just as dogs would lick their own sores to alleviate them. Jesus understood dogs very well. Some commentators imagine that the beggar was too weak to fend off the dogs and even that the dogs were already treating the beggar as a corpse.

**[22] Now it came to pass that the beggar died, and was borne away by the angels into the bosom' of Abraham; moreover, there died also the rich man, and was buried.** Yes, the disease killed the beggar. Of course, he had no formal funeral, — his body was buried somewhere somehow. But ah, his soul, — angels carried it into Abraham's bosom!

"Abraham's bosom" is a beautiful Jewish expression for heaven. For Abraham is the father of all believers, who are children of Abraham. The figurative expression means that the angels placed Lazarus into the arms of Abraham as his child, and implies that Abraham acknowledged and received him as his child. Nothing more blessed could be said about a Jew.

In the simplest manner Jesus speaks of the souls or spirits of the dead. Abraham has a bosom, the rich man eyes and a tongue. Yet disembodied spirits have neither. Nor is there anything like our earthly time and space in the other world. If Jesus would speak to us in terms of the other world, no one on earth would understand him. We dare not with our poor finite minds make deductions from any of these expressions of Jesus. How many miles

did the angels travel to reach Abraham's bosom? How can Abraham receive all dying believers upon his bosom?

Yes, also the rich man died. The same word is used with reference to both men: each "died," each gave up his soul or spirit and left his body. Jesus tells us that the rich man "was entombed." In Palestine tombs are often cut out of the rocky cliffs, — remember the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea. Grand tombs were sometimes built, as men still build them today. Dives had a grand funeral. I need not describe. Ostentation was his life, ostentation adorned his burial. Alas, that is all! As for me, let God's angels stand around my death-bed and carry my soul, like the beggar's, into Abraham's bosom, and let my poor, dead body be laid humbly away.

**[23] And in hades, having lifted up his eyes, being in torments, he sees Abraham from afar and Lazarus in his bosom. [24] And he calling out says: "Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am anguished in this flame."**

It is a masterly touch to note that Jesus simply takes for granted that the soul of Dives went to hell, no matter who took his soul to this fearful place. Where else did his soul deserve to go? As regards "hades" we need state only the facts. The word appears ten times in the New Testament, yet never when both soul and body are mentioned, for then "the Gehenna" is used by Jesus, or some other term is employed. See *The Interpretation of St. John's Revelation* 614 etc., note 618. In the New Testament hades appears once as a translation of sheet, the place of damned souls, Acts 2:27. The notion that hades signifies a third place in the hereafter, lying between heaven and hell, which some German commentators call the Totenreich, the realm to which all departed souls go, is a Catholicizing fiction. Heaven, the place of the blessed in the hereafter, has a number of synonyms, each with its special connotation; so has hell, the place of the damned, and the connotation with the "hades" of the New Testament is the place where the souls of the damned are before their bodies are also sent to hell.

The conversation between the rich man and Abraham forms the main purport of this parable, revealing as it does the condition of the damned souls in hell. Therefore the picture is drawn in such a manner that this conversation can take place, and Jesus presents this conversation in full.

This does not mean to place Abraham and Dives in the same place (*Totenreich*), where, although separated, they are able to converse with each other, Abraham being in the portion called “Paradise,” and Dives in the place of fire. Nor does this parabolic picture mean to say that in the hereafter the damned and the blessed are able to see each other and to speak with each other. Let us not forget that nothing like our time and space exist in the other world, and that we dare draw no conclusions from such ideas? Where, for instance, was Lazarus to obtain the water the rich man desired? We have a picture drawn in a humanly comprehensible manner, — let us therewith be content.

[24] The rich man needed no introduction to Abraham. Ask not the nature of the fire and the flame that scorched the soul of the rich man, nor why he should speak of his anguished “tongue” when the physical tongue of his body was on earth. How would you speak intelligibly of a disembodied soul and how could water ease such a soul? Yet Jesus is readily understood, if such useless questions are left unasked.

What a son to cry: “Father Abraham”! and to appeal for mercy through Lazarus, when he had never shown mercy to Lazarus? In Greek the verb is transitive: “mercy me.” The genitive ὕδατος is due to the verb βάφῃ. Alas, there is a time (if we may speak of it as “time”) when mercy has reached its end and justice takes its place. The rich man had reached that time. Let men deny the existence of hell, Jesus here warns us against its terrors. How small has this great Dives grown, to ask only for as little water as clings to the tip of a finger! What good would a drop of water do a scorched tongue? Ah, but think how precious even one drop would be in hell!

**[25] But Abraham said: “Child, remember that thou didst get in full thy good things in thy life, and Lazarus likewise the bad things; but now here he is being comforted, while thou art anguished. And in connection with all these things between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those wanting to cross from here to you may not be able, nor that they may pass over from there to us.”**

What a “child” of Abraham to have rightly come to such a place and such a condition! This man had wanted nothing but earthly “good things” during his earthly life. And, surely, he had duly gotten them. Note that ἄπο in the verb ἀπέλαβες means “duly.” All the claims he had made had been

duly, fully honored. As for the other world, he had cared nothing about it; as for the joys of eternal salvation, he had not sought them and the way to obtain them. It is in vain now to claim even a drop more, for it is too late. Many live and die like Dives, only they do not get all they would like to get in this life, but caring not for the road to heaven and the blessed company of heaven, they too are answered by Abraham.

Lazarus had “the bad things” during his earthly life. He bore them as a true son of Abraham. The very name “Lazarus” which Jesus has given him shows that in all his adversity he made God his help, looked ever to heaven and to the way to its blessedness. So now eternal salvation is his. Thus are all true sons of Abraham, like their father; amid the adversities of this life they ever look for “a city which hath foundations, whose builder and Maker is God” (Heb. 11:10) and keep to the road that leads to this Eternal City.

It is not wealth possessed in this life that brings to anguish in the hereafter, although wealth has great dangers. It is not poverty that leads to the comforts of heaven. Abraham and David were rich, and many of the damned were poor enough. The difference lies in how we bear our earthly lot, on what we set our hearts, whether we travel the road to heaven or choose the world’s road to hell. The two pictures which Jesus draws necessarily present the extremes: so many earthly blessings, and yet the heart of Dives would not turn to God and to heaven — no earthly blessings at all, and yet Lazarus did not complain but set his heart on God and on heaven. Between these two cases, which depict the limits, lie all other cases.

[26] In connection with what Abraham has just said the fact is rather decisive that a chasm has been fixed (perfect tense: and remains fixed for ever) between the two places (heaven and hell) which no one on either side can ever cross. Those who find a *Totenreich* in these two places say little or nothing about this impassable chasm. The underlying thought is that death decides for ever, either heaven or hell. Once in either place after death, no transfer is possible. Reckon with that fact now, and do not let it overwhelm you after it is too late. Some have dreamed of a probation after death, and there are writers who think the Gospel is preached in what they call this realm of the dead. Jesus destroys all these fancies by this parable.

**[27] However he said: “I then request thee, father, that thou send him to my father’s house — for I have five brothers, — in order that he may thoroughly testify to them, lest they too come into this place of torment.”** Once more we see what a strange son this man is who keeps asking his “father” Abraham to do what he asks. Note the simplicity of the narrative: Abraham as the father of his children is supposed to be able to grant their requests and is supposed also to be able to send his children whither he desires. These are the notions of the rich man. Unbelief never was satisfied with what the Scriptures state as facts, especially also with what they say about the other world. This parable is most instructive in this regard.

[28] What a wonderful missionary interest this man develops in hell! He does not want his five younger brothers, who are still in his father’s house, to end as he himself did in hell. Laudable indeed! But how does he propose to keep them out of hell? Does he repent of the fearful example he has left his five brothers? Does he repent that he failed utterly to follow Abraham’s faith during his earthly life? No thought of repentance! No thought of his brothers being directed to that faith! Unbelief always invents its own ways of salvation. God’s way of salvation it simply will not have.

The rich man asks for a resurrection of Lazarus. As one returned from the dead Lazarus is to tell those five brothers to what a terrible place their dead brother’s soul has come. This will so frighten them that they will not also come into hell. What a way of salvation! Note the secret accusation against God: if God or if Abraham had sent one from the dead to the rich man, he would not now be in hell! Really he who is in hell is more concerned about his unbelieving brothers than God himself who is in heaven.

**[29] But Abraham says: “They have Moses and the Prophets. Let them hear them!” [30] He, however, said: “No, father Abraham! On the contrary, if one shall go to them from the dead, they will repent.” [31] But he said to him: “If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, not even, if one rose up from the dead, will they be persuaded.”**

Succinctly, almost sharply Abraham answers the insinuation that God is remiss in his provisions for saving men from hell. These five brothers have Moses and the Prophets, i.e. the whole Old Testament Word (Moses = the

Pentateuch; the Prophets = all the other books, their writers being called prophets). Abraham did not have that much. But Abraham had the faith of Moses and of the Prophets, — in that faith he lived and died. This divine Word is the one, only, complete, all-sufficient means of salvation. It saves from hell, nothing else can. We today have the Evangelists and the Apostles in addition to Moses and the Prophets.

“Let them hear them!” The aorist imperative is peremptory. At the same time this aorist is effective: “hear effectively,” not indifferently. We are at the climax of the parable. Two allied great facts are made to stand out: 1) death decides everything; 2) faith in the Word, faith alone saves, all unbelief to the contrary notwithstanding.

Right here is the trouble. Jesus is speaking to the Jews who had Moses and the Prophets and certainly revered both, even decorating the tombs of the prophets whom their fathers had killed. To this day the Jews glory in Moses and the Prophets. Do they hear them? Do they repent and believe in the Savior God sent them? Like this rich man and his brothers they do not. Here men have the entire Bible, both Testaments, Jesus himself. Do they hear, repent and believe? They do not! What then is left? Like this rich man they shall lift up their eyes in hell.

[30] Οὐχί is the sharper Greek “no.” Even in hell resounds the ugly contradiction of unbelief: “N o, no!” Here is the kind of son that calls Abraham “father” and contradicts this “father” at every turn. Even the fires of hell do not cure unbelief. No wonder hell is eternal. Ἀλλά, “on the contrary,” reinforces the contradiction to Abraham’s imperative. The rich man in hell knows that if one rose from the dead and warned his brothers they would repent. A hellish repentance this would be, scaring them into heaven. There is no such repentance. The rich man never discovered what saving repentance is. He uses the word “repent” as he did the word “father” regarding Abraham. Tragic is the ignorance of unbelief. Even hell does not remove it. Since the rich man speaks about the resurrection as he does, we cannot think of him as having been a Sadducee, although many of these Sadducees were rich and ostentatious.

[31] They who do not hear the Word, would not hear the testimony of one risen from the dead. The present tense ἀκούουσιν means that all along during their life they do not hear. Many fail to go near the Word, lest

perchance they hear; others, when they hear, really hear not, for they close their hearts and shake off what they hear. We cannot say that Jesus refers to himself, that although he arose from the dead unbelievers did not hear him. Jesus never appeared to unbelievers.

Suppose for a moment that the rich man's idea would be carried out, — what would be the result? What would all these unbelievers say? They would not be persuaded that this witness had arisen from the dead. They would demand a thousand proofs. A thousand more saints would have to rise from the dead to prove that the first saint had really risen. And then, like good Sadducees, most of these unbelievers would deny the very possibility of such an act as rising from the dead.

The parable ends at this point. Its warning is complete. It is a part of the divine saving Word. Let us hear it well!

## Homiletical Aid

It was on the First Sunday after Trinity that I once unexpectedly attended services in Rev. A. J. Feeger's church in Richmond, Ind., when he preached on this text and began his sermon with the words: *Heute wollen wir den Lazarus begraben*: "Today we shall conduct the funeral service for Lazarus." This opening sentence I have never forgotten. Although the angels bore the soul of Lazarus into Abraham's bosom, his body was not properly buried, and so it was fitting indeed that an appropriate funeral sermon should be preached for him.

Let us bury Lazarus this morning. When his boils finally killed him he had no friends to put his body away decently with proper religious service. It was simply put out of sight like so much carrion. When the rich man died, the proceeding was far different. His palatial home was put into deep mourning, on the set day his body was borne in state to a costly tomb, the most elaborate services were conducted. The contrast could hardly have been greater.

Yet consider the other side, the side that men are not here given to see. Lazarus had angels of God beside him who carried his soul into Abraham's

bosom; the rich man, — he simply woke up in hell, and had no idea how he had so suddenly arrived there.

It is time that the omission in regard to Lazarus be made good. If any man deserves a funeral sermon and a proper burial service, it is this saint, our friend Lazarus.

### **The Man Whose Soul the Angels Carried Into Abraham's Bosom.**

I. A true son of Abraham.

The promises made to Abraham in the covenant.

This man's complete faith in those promises.

Hence the angels.

II. Afflicted with deepest poverty and hard disease.

This he bore like a son of Abraham.

In humility, in hope.

Hence the angels.

III. The angels are assured for you at death.

Not by wealth and health, or by poverty and disease before death.

But by faith like that of Abraham and his sons in the great promises of God in Christ Jesus.

A faith that proves true in whatever life God places us.

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Does it make a difference whether a person is born anew or not? Whether he is a child of God or not? Yes, a great difference already throughout the life in time, and what at least to us appears as the greatest possible difference in the hereafter.

### **The Difference Between Dives and Lazarus.**

I. In life.

1. Rich — poor. The one the best this life affords; the other the worst it affords. The two extremes include all that lies between. But this difference is only the outer frame.
2. The main difference: unbelief — faith. The unbelief knew and cared for nothing higher than earth's good things, leaving the soul empty; the faith that made God its help and hope in the Messianic promises of Moses and the Prophets. A vast difference indeed.
3. Here learn: regarding riches; regarding poverty; regarding the highest treasure in life.

## II. In dying.

1. Both died. Soul separated from body, body left here, soul passed into the other world.
2. Grand funeral — none at all. Negligible difference. Soul in hell — soul carried by angels into Abraham's bosom (explain). Yes, there is a tremendous difference in the way in which persons die. It would be just as tremendous, if both had died equally rich or equally poor.
3. Here learn: regarding dying; regarding funerals; regarding the absolute essential, life eternal.

## III. In all eternity.

1. Hell — heaven. Torment — bliss. The facts. Jesus knows. Tells of them so that we may understand. Do not quibble.
2. The unbelief of earth persists in hell: wants water, not forgiveness. The same contradiction of unbelief persists: No, father Abraham! not God's saving Word, but what unbelief demands. Faith receives the fulfillment of the Gospel promises of Moses and the Prophets, to which we add those of Jesus.
3. Here learn: regarding the means of grace; regarding the time of grace; regarding eternal' salvation.

True Christians are not much concerned about hell and hellfire. They are relieved of all fear of hellfire through the blood of Christ. Heaven is their home, and they are preparing to be carried into it by the angels of God. The unbelievers are the people who get excited about hellfire, scoff at and mock us for our assurance, use the word “hell” in cursing, and in too many ways betray in advance that they shall at last join the rich man of the parable who ended in hell. When then the subject of

## **Hellfire**

comes up we have only this to say: that although hellfire is I. Often denied, it is, II. Only too real, yet as, III. Easy to escape, as, IV. Heaven is easy to attain.

- I. The question one not of your opinion or mine. Not of argument at all. One of fact. — The first people in the world to deny are they whose great interest it would be to have no hellfire, since they would surely be cast into it, if such a fire does exist — All these heated and calculated denials leave us undisturbed.
- II. The person most entitled to speak on hellfire is the Son of God who came from the other world to die for us on the cross, in order that he might save us from hellfire. His coming and his death cannot possibly be in vain. From him, as from all divine revelation, we know that hellfire is as real as heaven’s glory. The fire, flame, torment, anguish as real and as eternal as the joy, bliss, and glory of heaven. Consider Dives; consider Lazarus.
- III. Lazarus had no trouble to escape hellfire. He had all of Moses and the Prophets to help him. He did not only call Abraham “father,” he believed as Abraham did and was a true child of his. His poverty, living on scraps, his boils which the dogs tended, often tried his faith. But he lived through it all with the true faith and hope in his heart. He had no funeral, for nobody cared for him, but the angels carried his soul into Abraham’s bosom.
- IV. Dives could just as easily have escaped hellfire and attained heaven. Amid all his riches and luxury he surely knew that he must die. He could go more easily than Lazarus where Moses and the

Prophets were taught. He lived in the false security of unbelief. Even in hellfire his answer to Abraham is: “No!” Even there he blames not himself in repentance, but blames God. — Let the Savior teach us, cleanse us, keep us, send his angels for us at death.

Hellfire? “No!” says unbelief. Moses and the Prophets? “No!” says unbelief. Well, they who will not have heaven must take hellfire. We do not belong to their number.

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From J. A. Dell I take the following.

The perennial question. Many answers that do not even satisfy: death ends all — our spirit is merged in the universal spirit where the individual consciousness is lost — the future life is like the present one, etc. Text, a ray of the heavenly light which breaks through the dimness and the guessing.

### **After Death — What?**

- I. There is a heaven.  
A place of eternal comfort.  
The way to enter. Using also Heb. 11 on Abraham. Faith.
- II. There is also a hell.  
Only too true, although unpopular to say so. Sinners object.  
The description: fire, etc. Passages like Matt. 13:38-42; Rev. 20:10; 14:10 — 11. The way to keep out of hell.
- III. There is no changing after death.  
Only two places; some dream of more than two.  
The impassable gulf.  
Hear Moses and the Prophets betimes!

Where will you spend eternity? In heaven or in hell? May God grant us grace to accept by the power of the Holy Spirit the promises that are made

to us in Christ Jesus, laying all our sins upon him, so that when the last hour of life shall strike for us we may be carried by the angels of God to that city not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

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### **Rich and Poor.**

I. The rich man a poor man.

All he knows is to eat and to drink and to dress gorgeously.

He has not even a bit of mercy in his heart.

He dies without the pardon and the peace of God.

He loses heaven.

Even his belated remorse and love is hollow and worthless.

II. Poor Lazarus a very rich man.

He is rich in his faith in God's mercy and help.

He is rich in light from Moses and the Prophets.

He is resigned and patient with his beggarly lot and painful ulcers.

He dies in pardon and peace.

He has angels awaiting him.

He gains heaven. Rich man indeed!

Altered from Biarowsky.

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### **Death's Great Refutation.**

I. Death refutes the judgment of the world regarding who is wise and fortunate.

II. Death also refutes the world's judgment regarding who is foolish and unfortunate.

C. F. W. Walther.

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My years have increased. More and more I think of the last summons that awaits me. Soon it will come. But the very day on which I write these words one in the bloom of youth was thrown from a car and died almost instantly because of a crushed skull. "In the midst of life we are in death," no matter what our age. Too many live as if no last summons await them; too many think of that summons in an unreal way. Yet we all must meet

### **The Last Summons.**

We know a great deal about what we shall then experience. For one thing,

I. It will treat us all alike.

The soul will be reft from the body. In an instant the soul will be entirely out of this world and in a thoroughly different world. So it was with Lazarus and the rich man.

Many, many things will then make no more difference whatever: whether life was long or short, it will then be done; so the rich man and Lazarus. Whether rich or poor — a body fat with luxurious food or starved on scraps. This evening's paper speaks of Nizam of Hyderabad, India, richer than the Fords and the Rockefellers. When he dies he will leave it all behind, like the poorest beggar leaves his rags behind. Lazarus left his friendly dogs, the rich man his friends, many of them not as sincere as the dogs. Etc.

Each soul alike will see all its past life in the light of eternity. What a revelation that will be, — all shams gone, all illusions and deceptions dispersed, all true values and all false values exposed. At the same time all the realities of the other world, of which Scripture can speak to us only in parable, figure, symbol, all fully seen as they really are.

Marvelous indeed what the last summons will do for us all alike!

II. Yet it will treat us as absolutely different.

The one by the last summons finds angels about him; the other — ? The one as a true son of the father of believers in Abraham's bosom; the other in fire, flame, torment. The one obtaining the fulfillment of all the promises of Moses and the Prophets, add those of Jesus etc.; the other obtaining all that the divine threats pointed to.

This mighty difference is wholly just. Too long the Word of grace and heaven was neglected, spurned, in unbelief. The day of grace unused. Then the last summons came, and justice had to be done. Lazarus, however, kept ready. Happy the day of the final summons.

Conclusion: Your last summons may be on the way now.

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Parable or not?

A word of the Lord.

Told to explain, not to confuse.

What it explains.

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### **Heaven, Hell, and Purgatory.**

- I. The abode of the blessed.
  1. There is such a place.  
Despairing agnosticism.  
The message from heaven.  
This life is not all.
  2. The state of the saved.  
"The bosom of Abraham."  
"He is comforted."  
Contrast between earth and heaven.

The positive joys not stated here.

3. The conditions of entrance.

Not poverty — Abraham was there.

What Abraham and Lazarus had in common.

Faith cometh by hearing (Moses and the Prophets).

II. The place of the lost.

1. There is a hell.

Foolish security of men.

Plain statements of God.

Why is there a hell?

2. The condition of the lost.

The biblical descriptions, fire, etc.

The place of despair.

Contrast between earth and hell.

3. Entrance requirements.

Not riches — Abraham was not there.

A heart turned from God.

Rejection of God's grace (God's grace in Christ).

III. The half-way station.

1. It does not exist.

Many believe it does.

No trace in the whole Bible.

“A great gulf fixed.”

Purgatory clashes with Bible doctrines.

2. There is no realm of the dead.

Protestant idea.

“Hades” is no such realm.

No probation after death.

Complete grace.

J. A. Dell. I add to part three. Although the theme names the three parts, it is a good theme, for it arrests attention and if advertised in advance will draw hearers.

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1. In *The Epistle Selections of the Ancient Church* “the seventh of September” on page 789 should read “the twenty-ninth of September.” Also the Twelfth Sunday after Trinity should introduce the third sub-cycle instead of closing the second.↩

# The Second Sunday After Trinity. Luke 14:16-24

## The Rejection of the Gospel Call

We have just heard: “They have Moses and the Prophets. Let them hear them!” Preaching and teaching Moses and the Prophets (the whole Word) is the Great *Deipnon* portrayed in our parable. All ought to be eager to accept the invitation to the Great Supper. All are not. Note that among all the excuses for declining the invitation the ones here listed are the best. They are quite transparent, — these people do not want to come. Matt. 23:37: “and ye would not.” Note also that the invitation will be accepted, the Lord’s house will be filled.

Jesus is in the house of a Pharisee, invited to dine there on the Sabbath amid a hostile company (read v. 1-14). One of the guests exclaims: “Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the Kingdom of God!” Jesus responds with the parable: This blessedness already begins here where we are all invited to the Lord’s Gospel table, but, alas, so many reject the invitation with shallow and insincere excuse.

**[16] And he said to him: “A man was making a great dinner, and he invited many. [17] And he commissioned his slave at the hour of the dinner to tell those that had been invited: ‘Be coming, because things are already prepared!’”**

All present at the table heard what Jesus said. The greatness of this person (ἄνθρωπος) who makes “a great dinner” appears in the invitation he had sent out to many long in advance. The imperfect ἐποίει, “was engaged in making,” refers historically to the old covenant preparation for our redemption, and the aorist ἐκάλεσε, “he invited,” states the historical past fact as such. As the parable moves on, the greatness of the giver of the

dinner appears more fully, — he is God himself. The many he invited in advance are the Jews. Δεῖπνον is the main meal of the day, eaten in the evening, hence we may say either “dinner” or “supper.”

[17] We are now placed at the time when the preparation for the great dinner was finished and when “the hour for the dinner,” the hour for its start, could be announced to the invited guests. So the slave is sent out to tell all these guests to be coming, for things are already prepared. This is not a second invitation. The coming dinner is so great that following the formal invitation the hour for dinner is itself also formally announced. Various opinions have been offered regarding the slave commissioned to make the announcement. The best one is that this is none other than Jesus. The word “slave” is a part of the imagery of the parable in the Old Testament. The Messiah is termed the *Ebed Yahveh*, the “Servant of Jehovah,” the Greek term being παῖς and not δοῦλος. By “things already prepared” all that pertains to our redemption is meant. To prepare them is one thing, to partake of them is another.

Jesus is not portraying how the children of God who lived during the time of the old covenant were made partakers of redemption, but how all of us, beginning with the Jews of Jesus’ own day, are brought to this participation. This great dinner is now prepared for us. Through Jesus God calls all of us to come. How we who are not of Jewish blood come to receive this call is shown in a moment.

**[18] “And they began with one voice all to make excuse. The first said to him: ‘I bought a field, and I am compelled after going out to see it. I request thee, consider me excused.’ [19] And another said: ‘I bought five yoke of oxen, and am on my way to test them out. I request thee, consider me excused.’ [20] And another said: ‘I have married a wife, and because of this I cannot come.’”**

Incredible, yet true. True to this day. These are even the best excuses offered, all others must be worse. No real excuse can be offered. With ἄπο μιᾶς a feminine noun must be supplied and I consider φωνῆς best: “with one voice,” — a marvelous unanimity. Since the Jews as a nation rejected the Gospel Jesus can say: “with one voice all began to make excuse,” παραιτεῖσθαι, “to beg off.” The Jews as a body reject the invitation to this day, and a large number of Gentiles follow their example. All of these

excuses are dishonest, for they who make them know that they are merely pretending. The excuses veil the real reason, for it is simply the unreasonable determination: "I will not come!"

The first pleads necessity; he is prevented from coming. And what do you suppose prevents him? You could not possibly guess. Why, he says, he bought a field and simply must go out and inspect it. Could he not hurry the inspection and get back for the great evening-dinner? Could not the field wait, or would it run away? If he had arranged with someone to go out to the field, could that arrangement not be altered, or was this other person so important that to oblige him the Giver of the great dinner might well be insulted? But why try to put reason into the willful act of unbelief? This man and the next one show a veneer of politeness, they beg to be considered as excused. Ἐξε is here a Latinism: "consider me" etc., and the perfect passive participle is predicative: "as having already been excused."

[19] The second claims that he cannot come, for he is already on his way to test the five yoke of oxen he has bought. No; he could not possibly take another day, and could not possibly get back in time on this day. But why ask such questions? These two excuses are typical of many that are polite. Always, always something is in the way, so that they either cannot come or find it too inconvenient to come. Thus by their own fault they are lost.

[20] Politeness ends in the case of the third. He does not ask to be regarded as excused. Think of it, — he has married a wife and therefore he cannot come. This man almost says that he will not come. For what is to hinder him from taking his wife along with him to the great dinner? Could he do anything finer for her? Yet anything will do as an excuse when the Gospel is rejected. It is not wrong to inspect a newly bought field, to test out newly bought oxen, or to marry a wife. But it is wrong, inexcusable, self-condemning, to make these acts an excuse for rejecting the grace of God in Christ Jesus.

[21] **"And having returned the slave reported these things to his lord. Then having become angry the housemaster said to his slave: 'Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the city, and the poor and crippled and blind and lame bring in here.' And the slave said: 'Lord, it has been done what thou didst order, and still there is room.' And the lord said to the slave: 'Go out into the roads and hedges and compel to**

**come in,' in order that my house may be filled. [24] For I say to you, that not one of those men that had been invited shall taste my dinner."**

The slave who in the parable does so much and who does it in such close conjunction with his lord can be none other than Jesus working together with his Father. He is pictured as making due report to his lord. No wonder this lord, now called οἰκοδεσπότης, "the housemaster," became angry at having himself and his dinner scorned in such supercilious fashion. This anger pictures God's wrath which is aroused by the Jewish unbelief. Those have an inadequate conception of God who imagine that just and holy wrath should not be found in him. All Scripture testifies to this wrath and it has fallen heavily upon the unbelieving Jews, as we may see to this day.

Shall the dinner then be made for nothing? The plans of God's grace cannot possibly end in failure. There are many who can be brought to his dinner with joy and gladness. They, too, are in the city, but out in its "streets and alleys" (the city has no "lanes"); they are the outcasts, all of them are here under the one Greek article combined into one large class: "the poor and Crippled and blind and lame." These are the publicans, the harlots, the sinners (Matt. 21:31-32), and many others, despised by the haughty Sadducees, lawyers, scribes, Pharisees. These "poor," etc., represent wretched spiritual conditions. These have no money to buy fields, yokes of oxen or to marry and live in a fine home, — their wealth picturing self-satisfaction, caring for no Gospel and no Savior. Yet these "poor," etc., are still in the city, are still in Israel. The dinner the others despise these "poor," etc., gladly accept.

[22] Once more the slave comes and reports. All these poor people have been brought in, yet room is still left. The story is told in the most natural way. Also, the story is fitted to the reality — it is so in all of the parables, — and we should not change the reality to fit what we think is implied in the story. It would be wrong to think that if all of the guests who had at first been invited would have come, "the poor," etc., would not have been invited nor those from the roads and the hedges. In general, it is out of place to introduce hypothetical conclusions into the imagery, because the parable touches only the facts as facts.

[23] The full greatness of the dinner now comes to View. All the homeless and the destitute of the city do not fill the dining room; all those

in the roads and the lanes bordered with hedges, which are outside of the city likewise find room. This does not sound strange to oriental ears. I have mentioned the Nizam of Hyderabad in India (news item Dec. 24, 1935) who provided a thousand oxen and ten thousand sheep for the silver jubilee of his reign. Great feasts exceeding this one in India are on record.

The city pictures Israel, the country roads picture the Gentile world. It ought to be unnecessary to say that “compel them to come in” in no way refers to physical force: “Compel them at the point of the sword, under threat of death or other harm!” In the first place, all these people found far from the city, in the imagery of the parable itself, cannot but find the invitation to them rather incredible and thus will need compulsion. As far as the reality is concerned, all we need to do is to consider the work of Jesus and of his apostles, the compulsion they used with Gentiles, namely the strong urging of love and of grace.

The purpose is: “in order that my house may be filled.” This clause covers the entire heavenly mystery that underlies the plan of salvation. What is there in all these people, “the poor,” etc., those in the roads etc., to induce this great man to carry out his magnanimous plan for his dinner? Even the hatefulness of the guests honored with the advance invitation does not deter him. He is determined to fill his wondrously great house, and the implication is that he does indeed fill it. The mystery of this wholly unmerited grace is too deep for human analysis or comprehension. Its blessedness for us more than suffices for our contemplation. When our thought has exhausted that we may proceed farther.

[24] A *crux interpretum* meets us in this concluding statement. “I say to you... my dinner” cannot well signify Jesus, for in the parable it is God’s dinner and Jesus is pictured as the slave. Then it must be the lord in the parable who now addresses all the guests at the dinner in the house of the Pharisee where this parable is spoken. This fits the purpose of the parable, for all these guests were Jews who had long ago received God’s advance invitation and were rejecting it without reason. They are now warned: “not one” of such rejecters “shall taste of my dinner” (the genitive after a verb of tasting). They would not, hence they shall not.

Grace is not unlimited. “Too late!” is the cry that sounds at last. The Jews are the standing example. Jesus said that their obdurate generation is

not to pass away till time ends. They stand as a warning for the entire Gentile world: “Not one of those men that had been invited shall taste my dinner.” Heed this warning verdict of the Lord of the Great Supper!

## Homiletical Aid

In a way our text is illustrated by this morning’s church services, — how many are absent this morning without a valid reason; and if you would speak to them would offer you a lame excuse? In a similar manner, with equally cheap and hollow excuses, men turn away from the Gospel invitation and from the Gospel salvation. Jesus spoke this parable to warn us all. Once more hear the great and blessed invitation:

### **“Come, For All Things Are Now Ready!”**

We are shown by Jesus:

- I. This invitation rejected.
  1. The blessedness of the invitation. It comes from the Almighty and All-merciful. It cost the life of God’s Son. It offers forgiveness, life, adoption, every spiritual blessing, and eternal glory.
  2. The enormity of the rejection. The shock that any sinner should even think of rejection. The outrageous fact: not only that many do reject, but many who should be the first to accept. We are shocked the more when we hear the excuses. Here are three of the very best. Wholly unreasonable. All sane reason cries out against them, against rejection. Thin veneer covering the determination: “I will not!”
  3. The tragedy of the rejection. They who might sing with the angels in heaven, choose to howl with the devils in hell, v. 24.

Thank God, we are shown also

- II. The invitation accepted.

1. Many in Israel, v. 21-22; still more among the Gentiles, v. 23. A few Jews still accept, but the Gospel finds believers in all the nations. No danger: the house of the great supper is going to be filled.
2. Are you one of the guests in that house, partaking with faith, joy, and gratitude of the Gospel? Shall your place be taken by someone else?
3. The appealing grace of the invitation, — so wondrous and blessed, — how it should draw and hold us. The tragic warning: the Jewish nation to this day refuses to accept.

All things are now ready for you. You must be ready for them. After this Great Supper of the Gospel on earth comes the Great Supper in heaven.

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Some people speak right out and tell us Why they have no use for the Gospel. Their attitude often ugly. But many trade in excuses. They put up a plea and act as if that excuses them. Have you ever offered an excuse? Are you hiding behind one now? Here is a text that sheds a clear light on

### **Your Excuse,**

if now or ever you think of offering one. Just ask and answer these questions: Your excuse, —

#### I. Any good, is it?

We do not even need to hear your excuse, for we have the three best ones in our text, yours cannot be any better, and these best ones are altogether no good. You couldn't for a minute face God with them. They would fly back into your own faces like a boomerang and would utterly damn you out of your own mouth.

Do you for one minute suppose that the all-gracious and at the same time all-wise God would send you an invitation that you really could not accept? that it actually would be inconvenient for you to accept? or that your wife and even your entire family could not accept with you?

Yet this is what the best excuses ever invented try to have us believe. All the rest are still worse.

You can offer an excuse that is no good with men, but I advise you not to try it with God. God has too much invested in the Gospel of his Son Jesus Christ to permit a sinner like you to disdain it with an excuse regarding his other affairs.

Then ask also this:

II. Any gain in it?

You must think so, if you resort to an excuse. Yet what could you gain by turning down the Gospel? It brings light, peace, joy, forgiveness of all your sins, a new life, a sure and certain hope for your soul. Is there any gain for you in turning down these gifts? The text speaks of God's "house." There God is, our Savior Jesus, all God's blessed children. Is there any gain in it for you to decline the invitation to be one of this blessed company? Yes, they are sinners all, — but what are you? Yes, there are hypocrites in the outward church, but come along, there is room for one more (Dr. Dell's answer), there are worse hypocrites outside, and there is no danger of a hypocrite ever deceiving God.

Sometimes Christians make excuse for not being faithful in church-attendance, in going regularly to communion, in sending their children, etc., etc. Any gain in it? What gain did indifference, carelessness, blindness, unfaithfulness in any affairs of life ever bring you? what, then, in the greatest affair of all?

So we had better ask also:

III. Any loss in it?

The Great Supper is the saving Gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Explain.

Whether you believe it or not, to pass that by with an excuse is to lose God and his grace, Christ and his redemption, sonship and the inheritance in the Kingdom and the crown of glory in heaven. Perhaps you do not want these gifts. There are such people. Do you really intend to be one of them?

When these people are told that not one of them shall taste of God's Supper, this states the loss only in one way. Where are these people going? If not to God, Christ, God's house, God's Gospel, what place and what company are there left to welcome them? Yes, there is just one other place. Jesus speaks of it often enough: the place where there is howling and gnashing of teeth.

Excuse? Would not dream of one! I want my place at the Great Supper of my God. What do you say?

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The structure of a homily is explained in *The Sermon* 112 etc. Forget the logic used in the analytic and in the synthetic structures, employ the descriptive talent. Not many gospel texts invite to a homily. —

The story of Jesus dining on a Sabbath in a Pharisee's house amid a number of other Pharisees, and how Jesus came to speak this parable.

### **The Great Supper of the Gospel.**

1. The great host, under no obligation, makes the greatest sort of a feast, and is determined to have his immense house filled with happy guests.
2. The wondrous supper, providing all that our souls can possibly need or even desire, the great essentials that earth could not supply, viands that cost the highest price, that ought to draw and to delight every human soul. State the realities.
3. The slave whom the host sends out to the invited guests to tell them of the hour. Jesus, who still bids us come since all things have been prepared. The fact is, he himself prepared all things for the supper. We come to it only through him.
4. The invitation, early to the Jews by the mouth of all the prophets. Then Jesus came to say the hour is now. The honor of this advance invitation. The heathen did not even know about this supper. The delight with which the Jews should have come. The heathen people were invited later.

5. The incredible refusal. The whole Jewish nation to this very day refuses to come. Many in other nations follow their example. Vain excuses. Unreasonable will. The Jews a warning to all other men.
6. The happy guests. "Poor," etc., they who were wretched in soul, now in the most satisfying joy; they who did not even know the true God now filling his house and tasting all his grace. \_

Among them you belong, make no excuse, no matter what others do. Let no one, let nothing keep you away!

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### **Excuses to God.**

- I. Excuses for what?
- II. What excuses?

J. A. Dell.

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### **Great Indeed is the Great Supper!**

- I. Great the grace that prepared it.
- II. Great the invitation to partake of it.
- III. Great the multitudes that come to it.
- IV. Great the folly that disdains it.
- V. Great the judgment that concludes it.

Suggested by Nebe.

# The Third Sunday After Trinity.

## Luke 15:1 -10

### The Lost Found

The subject of the entire after-Trinity series is The Saved; and the subject of the first sub-cycle is The Reception of Salvation. Our present text elaborates one side of this reception: we receive salvation when we are found. The theme in brief is: The Lost Found. We are indeed “lost,” and this term expresses our condition under sin. The second great point is that to be found someone must seek and thus find us, and the two parables tell us who does find us.

Both parables constitute the text and are thus to be considered a unity, not a duality. To be sure, I could use either one of the two parables by itself as a text, but there is no real reason for using only half of the text when the task assigned to us by the ancient church is the construction of a sermon on the entire text. What preacher would want to admit to himself that this task is too difficult for him? or that he intends to be arbitrary? It is Luke alone who reports these two parables, in fact, he alone who records also the other parables found in chapters 15 and 16.

**[1] Now there kept drawing near to him all the publicans and the open sinners to hear him. And there were murmuring both the Pharisees and the scribes, saying: “This fellow keeps receiving open sinners, and eating with them.”**

The ministry of Jesus is distinguished by its power of attraction for people who were not only publicly accounted sinners, but who were grave sinners also in God’s judgment. The Romans taxed the Jews. The government sold the taxes to wealthy Romans who paid a fixed sum into the public treasury (*in publicum*) and thus were called *publicani*, whence

we derive our word “publicans.” None of these wealthy Romans is mentioned in the New Testament. They collected the taxes from the people through their agents, chiefs who had the actual collectors under them. These were the men despised and hated by the Jews. They were considered traitors to their nation because they aided the Roman oppressor. Moreover, the system of thus farming out the taxes tended to corruption. From the Roman *publicani* down to the publicans who came to collect the actual tax from the Jews, all wanted to get as much money as possible out of the business. “Collect so much!” came the order from the Roman. “Collect a good bit more!” came the order from the chief publicans stationed in Palestine. “I will collect still more, so as to feather my own nest!” the actual collectors each said to themselves.

The entire Jewish society was dominated by the Pharisees and the scribes, by their fanciful interpretation of the Old Testament, by their traditions (rabbinical principles and commandments) and by their peculiar formalistic type of piety. These men controlled public opinion. When they murmured and severely criticized Jesus it was no light matter. The second term, the ἄμαρτωλοί, is comprehensive, and is to be understood in the sense of notorious sinners who offend the accepted standards of morality. In v. 2 the term includes also the publicans. Harlots are specifically mentioned elsewhere, still other classes of sinners are included. The frequent mention of harlots in the four gospels casts its own light on the Jewish society of the day and on the character of its Pharisaic control.

What drew the social outcasts among the Jews to Jesus? They were like sick people coming to a noted physician (5:31). The Pharisees did nothing but brand them as outcasts. No promise made to a publican needed to be kept. Neither synagogue nor Temple received their alms. Their money was considered as loot obtained by rapine. Jesus did not cast these sinners off. He had what they all needed so sorely and what all others denied to them: divine pardon for their grievous sins and the spiritual power of a new life. Mark it well, not only did Jesus not condone the sins of these open sinners, they themselves knew that with Jesus any condoning of sins of any kind was utterly impossible. At times preachers have foregathered with sinners who were counted as such by the church of today, sometimes even by the world, when all that these sinners desired and hoped to obtain was silent

endorsement for their lives. They did not follow the example of Jesus, whatever they thought they were doing.

[2] When Jesus is charged with receiving open sinners and being so intimate with such notorious people as even to eat with them, the point is that Jesus is placed on the same low level. 01510; is derogatory: “This fellow, — think of it — open sinners!” Birds of a feather flock together. Touch pitch and defile yourself. Tell me with whom you consort and I will tell you who you are. So speaks the wisdom of ordinary experience, — but not of the physician in the hospital full of the diseased (5:30-31), not of him who seeks to save the lost. Jesus did not avoid even the Pharisees and scribes, — last Sunday’s gospel shows him dining amid Pharisees in a Pharisee’s house. In Israel no greater sinners than these were to be found.

[3] Jesus tells them what he is really doing. **But he spoke to them this parable, saying: [4] “What man of you having a hundred sheep and having lost one of them does not leave behind the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go on after the lost till he finds it? [5] And having found he puts it on his shoulders, rejoicing, [6] and having come to his house he calls together the friends and the neighbors, saying to them: ‘Rejoice with me, because I found my sheep the lost one!’ [7] I tell you that thus joy will be in the heaven over one open sinner repenting, more than over ninety-nine righteous, such as do not have need of repentance.”**

When Luke writes “this parable” he includes everything up to v. 10. The parable is simplicity itself. Its argument is that the Pharisees and scribes themselves do what Jesus does. This closes their mouth. More than this: what they do is right, and just as right is what Jesus does. The argument is also from the less to the greater. If the Pharisees do so much for a mere sheep, shall Jesus be condemned for doing so much for a human being? The climax is the joy. The Pharisees look sour while the angels in heaven rejoice. These Pharisees do not seem to be in accord with heaven. The two parts of the parable present in duplicate: 1) being lost; 2) the great search; 3) the happy finding; 4) the abounding joy. These four points may serve as parts for the sermon outline.

The parable has been buried under a mass of misinterpretation, which even homiletical works seek to recommend to the preacher. Hence this brief warning. It is important to note that our parable is the first in a series that

extends through Luke's two chapters. This first parable pictures what is done for the sinner and stops with this thought. Stop where the parable stops. The sermon which treats in the proper manner what this parable contains will not lack material.

[4] The question: "What man of you" etc., completely disarms the murmurers, for it leaves the answer entirely to them. Moreover Jesus helps his opponents by generalizing the point at issue. By asking about a sheep these men are enabled to put aside their blindness and their self-righteousness, and may answer in all honesty. The mastery with which Jesus handles these mean opponents of his and the simplicity of the manner in which he does this deserve the fullest recognition. There is not a man present before Jesus who would not do just what Jesus says, leave his ninety-nine sheep and go to seek the one lost sheep till he finds it. He would not say, the one is only one and does not matter, seeing ninety-nine are still left. He would not say, seeking the lost sheep is too much trouble, seeing also that it may never be found for all the seeking. Nothing of the kind! He would go and seek.

Although the Pharisees and the scribes are not themselves shepherds, the imagery of the sheep appeals to them because it is so well known. We today must remember that Palestine is not fenced like so much of our country, but in great part is rocky, hilly and rugged, and the shepherd is always with his sheep, leading, not driving, them, and carefully watching when they are at pasture. The parable contains no superfluous word. Hence we are told only that the ninety-nine are left behind in the wilderness, and it is understood that they are left in complete safety; for who would go after one lost sheep and risk the danger of losing many more? So also the possible case is omitted, that after the most complete searching the lost sheep after all is not found.

Never should we overload the interpretation. This is done when the search is made a long one, leading over rocks, through brambles, etc., the owner of the sheep weary and spent. This is done in order to bring in the entire Passion of Jesus. But if Jesus had had this intent, he should have pictured all the sheep as lost, and not merely one. The one sheep pictures the individual soul become separated from Jesus and lost in this sense, with no one to give it the shepherd care it needs, with all kinds of dangers surrounding it. True, we are all lost originally, but Jesus is thinking of the

publicans and of the open sinners in Israel. These persons had been placed in the safety of the old covenant, and had strayed away from its protection and had become lost. To us this parable speaks of those who were baptized in the Christian Church, reared in Christian homes, Who then became lost in sin and in unbelief.

[5] “Till he finds it — Having found” are placed together in order to emphasize this blessed finding. Yes, the grace of Jesus through his Word and Spirit and under God’s blessed providence is most successful in finding lost and straying souls. In Greek the main thought is often expressed by a participle. So here, placing the lost sheep on the finder’s shoulder is the minor thought, for in this way a spent sheep would be carried; that the shepherd does this rejoicing is the main point.

[6] Therefore Jesus elaborates this feature. We now come to the strange part of the parable. Why does this shepherd take the recovered sheep to his house where he lives, not back to the ninety-nine, the flock which he left in the wilderness? What shepherd would make such an ado about the recovery of a single sheep as to call together his friends and his neighbors to help rejoice over the fact that he found his sheep, “the lost one,” ἀπολωλός added by a second article, hence emphatic: “the one having been lost” and for a time in this sad condition (perfect tense)? Here is one of the cases in which the reality is made to control and to shape the imagery, and not vice versa. The reality thus thrusts itself upon us.

Being taken to the shepherd’s house pictures the final state of the soul found by Jesus, and this is heaven. We may thus say that the finding includes not only the discovery of the lost sheep but, as the placement upon the shepherd’s shoulders adds, also all that the shepherd does for his sheep. To be safe in heaven is to be found indeed. While the imagery deals with a sheep, the reality far exceeds a sheep. “How much then is a man better than a sheep?” Matt. 12:12. Hence this demonstration of joy. When we see that the house = heaven, we have no difficulty about “the friends and the neighbors,” which v. 10 interprets as “the angels of God.”

[7] The authoritative “I tell you” leaves the parable and presents the interpretation. Jesus, who came from heaven, tells these Pharisees and scribes who murmured when they saw gross sinners repenting that they were in conflict with heaven itself where there is ever joy over even a single

sinner who repents. “Shall be joy” looks forward to the coming repentance of sinners; “is joy” in v. 10 speaks of the joy already present in heaven.

The parable describes what is done for the lost, he is found; but in the interpretation Jesus touches also upon what occurs in the heart of him who is found, he repents. The present participle: one sinner “repenting” indicates the continuousness of repentance. The first one of the famous Ninety-Five Theses of Luther reads: *Da unser Meister and Herr spricht: Tut Busse usw., will er, dass alas gauze Leben seiner Glaebigen auf Erden eine stete Oder unaafhoerliche Busse sein soll*, — the entire life of the believer is to be an uninterrupted repentance. This repentance insures that God richly and daily forgives all sins to me (Luther).

Μετανοεῖν is one of the cardinal terms of Scripture. Etymologically it means “to change the mind afterward”; the Baptist and Jesus deepened it to mean the decisive spiritual change produced by the law and the Gospel in the sinner’s heart, consisting of contrition and true sorrow of the heart for sin and of faith in Christ for the forgiveness of sin. For the Jew it was the faith in the promised Messiah, for us it is faith in the Messiah who has come and has purchased and won us.

Much misunderstood are the words: “more than over ninety-nine righteous, such as (αἵτινες, causal: because they are such as) do not have need of repentance.” The ninety-nine are not any ninety-nine, but the ninety-nine of the flock of Jesus (v. 4). These are truly righteous, i.e. justified, pronounced righteous by God. They do not need repentance, because they already have it. If they needed it, they too would be lost sheep. These “righteous ones” are most certainly not ninety-nine Pharisees who call themselves righteous and live in self-righteousness, Luke 16:15. “More than,” n is not exclusive: joy over the one, no joy over the ninety-nine, but more joy over the one. There was just as much joy over each one of the ninety-nine when he repented as over the one now repenting, and that joy does not cease. Each time another sinner repents a new burst of joy occurs. A mother is overjoyed to have a child recover, more rejoiced indeed over this one than over the other children who were not sick.

This joy in heaven is intended to strike these Pharisees. Something must be radically wrong with them when they murmur while heaven rejoices. They themselves are not in the flock, they are lost sinners, they need to be

found, they ought to repent. By means of this very parable Jesus is seeking and endeavoring to find also them.

**[8] “Or what woman having ten drachmas, if she shall lose one drachma, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and seek carefully till she finds it? [9] And having found she calls together the women friends and neighbors, saying: ‘Rejoice with me, because I found the drachma which I lost!’ Thus, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one open sinner repenting.”**

The woman is like the man (v. 4). The question regarding her is like the one regarding him, — just as objective, which the Pharisees themselves should answer, and being about an obvious case like such a woman, easy indeed to answer honestly. “Or” at the head of this part of the parable makes the two parts alternative: take either picture, the man or the woman, the answer must be the same. Most assuredly this woman is not going to say: “I have nine drachmas, I will not trouble about the one I lost.” No indeed; she will seek for that lost coin until she finds it.

This woman is the Church, animated by the same spirit as is Jesus, bound to seek and to find the lost sinner. To let the woman signify nothing is an easy way to dispose of her. All Scripture analogy is opposed to identifying the woman with the Holy Spirit. The interpretation that the coin was lost by fault of the Church, while the sheep was lost without the fault of Jesus, is unsound. The sheep is alive and thus strays away of its own accord; the coin is inanimate and thus someone loses it. The exigencies of the imagery require this difference. In the reality the sinner gets lost entirely through his own fault, — there is never any difference. The sinner may blame the Church when he leaves it for the world, but he ought to blame himself. Moreover, Jesus speaks of the true Church, not of the many erring churches or congregations, certainly not of the synagogues of the Pharisees.

Lighting the lamp and sweeping with the broom is generally interpreted as applying to the law and the Gospel. Yet the law is as much a light as is the Gospel. We must say furthermore that Jesus as well as his Church has only the law and the Gospel with which to produce repentance. The coin is lost in the woman’s house, not in the street, hence the lamp to light up the corners of the rooms and the broom to sweep them, — house, lamp, broom form one piece of the imagery. A Greek drachma= a Roman denarius =

about 16c = a day's wages for common labor, thus in purchasing power about \$1.50. Note also, first one out a hundred; next, one out of ten; and then, one out of two (v. 11 etc.). Repentance runs through all three parables and is fully pictured in the Prodigal Son. A good deal has been said about the image on the coin, but really to no point. Jesus says nothing about the image. The drachma bore on one side the crowned head of the Caesar, on the other side his seated figure holding his insignia. But this is pagan imagery. Jesus could have used the Jewish shekel or half-shekel, bearing at least sacred images, but he did not. So I preach nothing about the image on the coin.

[9] Upon finding the coin the woman does exactly what the man did. She summons her woman friends and neighbors for a great joint rejoicing. To be sure, divided joy is multiplied joy, even as divided grief is lessened grief; yet this great rejoicing over the mere finding of a lost piece of money intends to let the reality break through the inadequate and strained imagery.

[10] For Jesus speaks of the joy of the angels in heaven over one sinner who repents. "In heaven" in v. 7 = "the angels of God." They know all about every repentant sinner. Jesus is here with them, and they themselves are sent forth and go out to minister to the heirs of salvation. Heaven cares nothing for all the mighty works of men, but repentance sets it afire with joy.

Did the angels rejoice over the Pharisees and scribes who first heard this parable? Had they repented? Why did they fail to rejoice with the angels when publicans and open sinners repented? And how is it with you?

## Homiletical Aid

You may divide horizontally: the sheep — the coin. You may divide vertically: lost — sought — found. Again you may take the persons: Jesus — the Church — the sinner.

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Pharisees and scribes — publicans and open sinners — both lost. Jesus seeks both. He does so in this parable.

## The Sheep and the Coin.

### I. Lost

1. They ought never to have become lost, even as the ninety-nine and the nine were never lost. No church member should ever be lost.
2. Their own fault. Portrayed in the sheep (prodigal, v. 13); not in the inanimate coin.
3. Sad condition. The sheep may perish, be devoured, etc. The coin utterly useless, in some crack, in some dusty corner. So the person strayed from his Savior.
4. Lost means loss. Love of Jesus counts one out of a hundred an intolerable loss; the Church one out of ten. But what about the loss of the lost soul? Jesus and the church can live without you, but can you live without them?

### II. Found.

1. They contribute nothing to their being found. If permitted to remain lost, they would become only more lost.
2. It takes seeking to find them. A love that does indeed seek. The effort and labor. The means that find the lost.
3. To find is to be joined to Jesus, eventually in heaven. To find is to be joined to the Church.
4. To be found means joy in heaven. Think of it, angels in heaven sing when one lost sinner repents! The devils laugh when a sinner refuses to repent. The joy over the ninety-nine and the nine.

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There may be three parts: I. Lost; II. Sought; III. Found. Or also four. The fourth part would deal with the joy. It is a matter of how you wish to group your material. — The following theme has been treated in various ways:

**“This Man Receiveth Sinners.”**

I. He seeks them; II. He bears them; III. He brings them home. M. Frommel.

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**Jesus Receives Sinners.**

- I. Comfort for all repentant sinners.
- II. Offense to all haughty sinners.
- III. Joy to God's holy angels. von Biarowsky.

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**Jesus Receives Sinners.**

- I. Offense to the world.
- II. Salvation for the lost.
- III. Joy for heaven.
- IV. A question for conscience: How do you concern yourself about the lost?

Let me add that sometimes church members say: "We can get along without this fellow!" when someone has strayed from their church. Let me add an outline of my own with this well-liked theme:

**This Man Jesus Receives Sinners.**

- I. That certainly looked bad.

It was much worse than the Pharisees and scribes tried to make out.

Here were not only publicans and open sinners,

There was even a man like the malefactor, by his own confession rightly condemned to the cross.

Yea, there were the worst of all, the Pharisees and scribes themselves, with whom Jesus also ate (14:1 etc.; 7:36 etc.), —

hardened, even self-righteous sinners.

Jesus even taught his Church to do the same thing that he was ever doing.

Yes sir, for this very thing that looked so bad and was so meanly used against him Jesus came into the world and we see it in all of his official life.

II. Nothing ever can be better.

It opened the door of repentance to all the lost sinners. What a sad, sad thing, if no one came to bring lost sinners to repentance.

It saved even Pharisees like Nicodemus. Pharisees also in Acts 15:5.

Without this reception of sinners no Church, no Kingdom, only a world sold completely to the devil.

The songs of the angels when one sinner is found by Jesus and by his Church.

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Selfishness is bad. We preach unselfishness. But there is a wonderful and most blessed unselfish selfishness. See it in Jesus.

### **The Blessed Selfishness of Jesus.**

- I. He keeps what he has, his Church does the same. The ninety-nine and the nine. They are not regarded as cheap; they are counted most precious. Leads and keeps his sheep; keeps coins safely in purse. Let us not forget the ninety-nine and the nine.
- II. He recovers what becomes lost, his Church does the same. Not always easy, but he is blessedly selfish and cannot dismiss such a loss. The effort of the search. If expended on a member of your own family, yea, upon your own self, — would you not bless his selfless selfishness?
- III. He even celebrates his gain, his Church does the same. Strange how much we mean to him! Who could ever turn from him and become

lost? He wants us to be with him and his angels in heaven for ever.

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**The Festival of Joy,**

- I. Which heaven prepares for earth,
- II. And earth prepares for heaven. von Staehlin.

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**One Lost Sheep.**

Look, there is so much to see!

- I. Miserable publicans and sinners.
- II. Ugly Pharisees and scribes.
- III. An anxious Savior.
- IV. A solicitous Church.
- V. A heaven full of delighted angels.

# The Fourth Sunday After Trinity.

## Luke 6:36-42

### The Compassionate and Enlightened

The Pharisees and the scribes, who claimed to constitute the Church in the days of Jesus, had in their hearts qualities that were just about the opposite of those that Jesus here enjoins. This fact explains their mean and cruel treatment of the publicans and sinners, as we saw it in the text for last Sunday. In that text we are shown the woman who diligently seeks the lost coin, just as the shepherd seeks his lost sheep. The woman is the Church and the Church is composed of disciples who should be minded even as Jesus was minded. Our text, which is a passage from Luke's account of the Sermon on the Mount, teaches us what this mind is.

The Sermon on the Mount was delivered when Jesus was at the height of his great ministry, seeking to save the lost. The disciples had him before their eyes as their living example in this work, which soon would be their own life-work. The place assigned to the text is not as broad as the place the text occupies in the great Sermon of Jesus, for Jesus speaks of our relation to our brethren as well as of our relation to men outside of the Church. The subject of this first sub-cycle of the after-Trinity series of texts presents the Reception of Salvation. Hence our text means to show us the kind of people who are fit to help in bringing salvation to the unsaved and lost; they are the Compassionate and Enlightened.

**[36] “Go on being compassionate, even as your Father is compassionate. [37] And be not judging, and you shall in no way be judged. And do not go on condemning, and you shall in no way be condemned. Go on acquitting, and you shall be acquitted. [38] Go on giving, and it shall be given unto you, — an excellent measure, having been pressed down, having been shaken together, running over, will**

**they give into your bosom. For with what measure you keep measuring, it shall be measured to you in return.”**

These are the precepts for “the sons of the Highest” (v. 35). All of the present imperatives of these precepts demand courses of action and repetitions whenever occasion arises; this applies also to the prohibitions, — none of them are to be translated: “Stop doing so and so!”

Οἰκτιρῶν = “compassionate,” to be filled with tender pity for any who are in distress. Since we have the fine English word “compassionate,” our versions should have used it instead of using “merciful,” which is a different, although synonymous, word in the Greek. Our heavenly Father is compassionate, and all his sons must be the same, — it could not be otherwise. We have a beautiful example of the compassion of Jesus in Matt. 9:36. Jesus is ever compassionate and reveals to us the heart of his Father. For the present Sunday we should note in connection with such passages as Matt. 9:36 that we of the Church should ever be compassionate toward outsiders and should not treat them with disdain, as the Pharisees and the scribes treated the publicans and the sinners of their day.

[37] This compassion must show itself in four ways, the first three of which belong together: not judging — not condemning — acquitting. “Be not judging” is not to be taken in the absolute sense, and does not contradict passages such as John 7:24; 1 Cor. v. 12; 1 John 4:1, or the necessary disciplinary judging in the church, Matt. 18:17-18; John 20:23. Jesus forbids all judging that is devoid of godly compassion. The Pharisees loved to assume the judge’s throne and to hand out verdicts by their haughty authority, and nothing like compassion was a motive in their verdicts. Jesus forbids all self-righteous, self-exalting, hypocritical, unauthorized judging, for this is wicked and false and calls down God’s judgment.

“And you shall in no way be judged,” namely by God. The vice of judging encounters God’s judgment; by not judging we should escape his judgment and not be judged at all. The Father does not judge his true and obedient sons. Since all their sins are forgiven by God, there is nothing left to bring into judgment. The opposite is also true: He that judges shall be judged.

Κρίνειν is a neutral term. Already the act of assuming the judge’s throne and his authority is to incur God’s judgment, no matter what verdicts are

pronounced. But the Pharisees and others who arrogate the throne of judgment to themselves, do this in order to condemn: καταδικάζειν. Themselves they acquit: “Ye are they which justify yourselves before men,” Luke 16:15. By acquitting themselves and by condemning others men feed their pride and their feeling of superiority. But this calls down upon them the condemnation of God. By obeying 1 Cor. 11:31, we should ever keep in humble repentance.

Compassionate sons of God “release,” in the sense of let go, any blame against any one. The moment they are wronged they forgive, ἀπολύειν, “acquit,” dismiss the whole matter, and thus they have no occasion whatever to assume the judge’s chair, — there is nothing that they could take up in court. They show themselves as true sons of their Father who certainly will forgive also them. Not that our little forgiveness earns God’s great forgiveness; there is no such thought either here or in the fifth petition of the Lord’s Prayer. The opposite is the connection as the great parable shows (Matt. 18:23 etc.): the compassion that forgives us our immense debt must produce in us a compassion that forgives another’s small debt.

[38] Jesus reaches still farther than forgiving when he tells us to be giving. No objects are named, hence giving whatever may be needed at any time is referred to, — certainly not thoughtless, foolish, ill considered giving which encourages shiftlessness, improvidence, etc. He who gave us so much wants us to be like him in compassionate giving, letting the needs of others stir us to action. Moreover, seeing that we are his true children he will thus continue his gifts to us. He will do it in the most generous way. He will take an excellent measure, one that is καλόν, large and ample, he will fill it, press it down to get more into it, or if it contains loose provisions he will shake them together to get as much in as possible, and even then he will heap up the packed measure till it runs over when he pours it out to you. Never did you get such a generous measure measured out to you in the store or in the market.

The long loose robe worn by the oriental was held to the body by a belt, and thus could be used as a pocket-bag by leaving the robe above the belt loose. This is what the phrase “into your bosom” means. The indefinite plural: “will they give,” is the German: *man gibt*, and is used here as a matter of style to avoid a repetition of the passive: “will be given.”

The exact size of the measure which God will use in measuring to us is already fixed: he will measure with the same measure with which we measure to others. We ourselves give him the measure which he is to use in measuring to us. He might use a larger measure, but we insist that we want only this measure used which we have selected. Few people think of that. They suppose that when they take a tin-cup, God will use a barrel. He will take that same tin-cup. Do not look disappointed when he does it. In the previous statement Jesus speaks of what we give, and how we shall get the same, only much more of it, packed down, shaken together, running over. Thus will it happen to the generous and truly compassionate soul. When now he speaks of the measure and says it will be the one we use, he is thinking of niggardly givers; no “excellent measure” will be used for them.

**[39] Moreover, he spoke also a parable to them: “You would not say that a blind man can lead a blind man? Will they not both fall into the pit? [40] A disciple is not above the teacher; but after having been perfected everyone shall be as his teacher.”** Luke indicates that he is making a break in his account of the Sermon on the Mount. What he reports was indeed spoken by Jesus in this Sermon, yet some of his sayings he used also on other occasions. Every good teacher repeats.

Two dangers appear: 1) not to see at all, and thus to become a joke and a calamity; 2) to imagine that we know too much.

Who would dream of saying that a blind man is able to lead a blind man? Most certainly, they will both fall into a pit. Yet what is so entirely obvious when put in the simple language of a parable, is not at all treated as obvious in men’s lives. The Pharisees were utterly blind and yet they posed as βλέποντες, men who see (John 10:40-41), and proceeded to lead the Jewish people as though they were blind. These Pharisees even hated the light (John 3:19) and wanted to keep it from the people. So we have our “scientists” today, men who claim to be “knowers,” determined to lead all the rest of us whom they regard as ignoramuses. It is comic to see the blind leading the blind, but only too tragic when both fall into the pit.

Βόθρυος is “pit,” not “ditch.” We should not think of a ditch alongside of the road as we see these ditches in our country. In Palestine the roads are made of stone, and the stone to keep them in repair is quarried alongside of the road, where women sit and crack it into proper size. So rocky is the

country that stone is almost everywhere available. But this handy supply of stone leaves rather dangerous pits beside the road. One could easily break his limbs or kill himself by falling into such a pit. Jesus says “the pit,” almost as if he had the pit of hell in mind. No; we are sons of the Father, and let him lead us as his sons. He opens our eyes and removes our blindness.

[40] What Jesus says about the disciple becomes somewhat clearer when we note that a μαθητής is not merely a pupil or a scholar, but one who follows his διδάσκαλος to absorb the spirit of his teaching. Thus Jesus also bade his disciples to follow him (Matt. 11:29: “Learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart”). It is true, then, that a disciple is never above his teacher. However far he advances, the disciple must ever acknowledge his teacher as his teacher and must acknowledge what he obtained from him. How eminently this is true of us who are disciples of our great Teacher Jesus, needs not to be said. But what shall we say of men who have had the noblest teachers and now disgrace these teachers by doing the opposite of what the noble spirit of their teachers sought to instill in them?

Καταρτιζῶ = to fit out completely (perfective ward), and the perfect participle = to be in the condition of having been fitted out entirely. Since the context deals with disciples and with teachers, we may say: one who has graduated. The highest position a disciple may attain is to be “as his teacher.” As a son always remains a son, no matter how great he becomes, so a disciple always remains a disciple, no matter how far he advances. For the thing that makes him what he is he obtained from his teacher. This relation cannot be changed. Hence also the great ambition to reach the height of being “as his teacher.” If he has fine earthly teachers many a disciple may reach that height. All who do will certainly bless these their noble teachers. But we can become only relatively “as our teacher Jesus,” Christlike and no more, seeking to achieve an *imitatio Christi*. Yet this must be our aim. There are ever new spiritual truths and virtues to acquire, but this should only stimulate us and spur us on.

**[41] “Moreover, why dost thou see the sliver in the eye of thy brother, yet the beam in thine own eye thou dost not perceive? [42] Or how canst thou be saying to thy brother: ‘Brother, hold, I will take the sliver out, the one in thy eye,’ thyself not seeing the beam in thy eye.**

**Hypocrite, take out first the beam out of thy eye, and then shalt thou see clearly the sliver, the one in the eye of thy brother.”**

The imagery here used is frankly impossible in actual life. A piece of timber like a plank or a beam cannot be found in a human eye, neither can a κάρφος, which is not a “mote” (our versions) or a mere speck, but a dried twig or straw. The picture is made ridiculous by Jesus: a man with a plank in his eye claiming that he not only sees the sliver in the other man’s eye, but asking him to hold still until he performs the operation of removing the sliver.

The common interpretation overlooks the eye, — this beam is in the eye, also this sliver. Not in some other part of the body, not for instance in the hand which comes into so many contacts with wood. Therefore this cannot be the interpretation that the sliver = a slight moral fault, and that the plank = a grave moral fault, and that the person with a grave moral fault is unfit to correct the person with a slight moral fault. The parabolic language is of a piece with the injunctions that precede. The eye signifies perception; a man who cannot possibly see certainly can neither see nor correct as a teacher (v. 40) the man whose sight is only imperfect. The beam in the eye is huge religious error; the sliver in the eye is partial religious error. We know at whom this imagery is aimed: the Pharisees who claimed to be βλέποντες, experts at seeing, hence expert eye-specialists for all Israel. Yet the publicans and the open sinners had better perception than these Pharisees, although their eyes were in a bad enough condition. They at least did not set themselves up as eye-doctors.

[42] The indignation of Jesus flashes out in the exclamation: “Hypocrite!” The word is used with reference to an actor who impersonates some other person; ὑπό, “under,” in the word refers to something underhanded, intending to deceive. A man afflicted with huge religious error cannot possibly help another, even if he be afflicted only with slight religious error. But the men with beams in their own eyes still persist in enlightening everybody from pulpits, universities, press, and lecture platforms, guaranteeing the removal of every sliver, no matter how small. It would be laughable, if it were not so fatal. The one man destroys the little sight which the other man may have left.

# Homiletical Aid

The woman seeking the lost coin (last Sunday) is a picture of the true missionary Church, diligently, tirelessly seeking the lost. It is well enough to say this, but we must add that we ourselves are to be this missionary Church, — even you and I. We are to be the Lord's hands in this supreme work of the Church. What kind of people ought we, then, to be? Not like the Pharisees and the scribes, callous, blind. Our text shows us:

## **The Lord's Missionaries.**

They have:

### I. Compassionate hearts.

Like their heavenly Father who even sent his Son into the world to save the wretched and lost, and who has saved us.

Hearts that no longer judge and condemn the sinner, for if God did that to us, we certainly would not be saved. Not blind to the unbelief and the sins of the lost, but full of pity for the lost and anxious to help them.

Hearts ready to forgive and to give in true compassion. The highest and the most precious gift is the Gospel blessing of salvation.

Such compassion reaps the highest reward. It is. easy to condemn those outside. Help to save them with compassionate hearts.

### II. Enlightened eyes.

Zeal that is not of knowledge, Rom. 10:2. The Pharisees great missionaries, but made men twofold more the children of hell, Matt. 23:15, but the sinners at their door they barred out, Matt. 23:13.

What happens when the blind lead the blind, and when the man with the plank in his eye doctors the man with the sliver in his eye? Thus the Pharisees and still so many today.

Jesus must be our teacher. Never imagine yourself above him. Aspire to be as he is.

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Some congregations do not grow. The years pass, the number of members remains the same. What is the matter? Let us diagnose the case of

### **The Stationary Church.**

I. There may be heart-trouble.

Callous instead of compassionate hearts. Forgetting the Father's compassion toward us.

Censorious instead of forgiving. But what if God should judge, condemn, and not forgive us?

Selfish instead of generous. Satisfied to keep the church entirely to ourselves. Do we expect to be given an overflowing measure in this way? Do we forget that we furnish the measure with which God measures us?

II. There may be eye-trouble.

Complete blindness, one church member helping to lead another into the pit.

A case of beam and splinter.

The cure is the enlightenment by our teacher Jesus, — we must be as he is.

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Never use an outline like this one by C. F. W. Walther:

### **“Judge Not! Condemn Not!”**

I. How these words are misunderstood.

II. What their right understanding is.

This division can be applied to a large number of themes. The basic formula is: I. What does this not mean? II. What does it mean? How not to understand and how rightly to understand is only a verbal variation.

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## **Three Things Which the Christian Needs,**

is von Staehlin's theme. We meet such themes quite frequently, which offer us two, three, even four things. All of them indicate that the preacher has not been able to find a unity, so he offers the pieces. There is never a reason why the pieces are only two, three, or four, why they might not be more. Certainly the Christian needs more than just the three things von Staehlin has found, although the three are: I. A wide heart; II. A narrow conscience; III. A sharp eye.

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During his entire life the Christian must be

### **As his Master.**

Especially also in that part of his life which affects others and either helps them to receive salvation or hinders them from receiving it. Jesus pronounced a woe upon the Pharisees who "shut the Kingdom of heaven against men," Matt. 23:13. As much as we want to be in that Kingdom, so much should we aid others in coming into it and in remaining there. Hence each of us must be as nearly as possible

### **"As His Master."**

- I. Full of compassion.  
Matt. 9:36: "He was moved with compassion."
- II. Not judging and condemning.  
John 3:17: "God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved." Luke 9:56; John v. 45.
- III. Freely forgiving.  
Even the malefactor on the cross. Matt. 18:15b and 18; John 20:23.
- IV. Richly giving.

Matt. 10:8: “Freely ye have received” — Jesus keeps giving to you; “freely give” — and the best gifts are those that benefit the soul. ”

V. Knowing the light of truth.

1 John 1:7: “As he is in the light.” Not as the blind leading the blind, or as the man with a beam in his eye trying to pull the sliver out of another man’s eye.

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You will say: How can a person have a beam in his eye? How can he even have a sliver in his eye (for “sliver” is the word)? You are right, such things are impossible in nature. And yet they constantly occur in the soul life. Untold damage is done by these beams and these scantlings in the eyes of church members.

### **The Beam in the Eye.**

I. The beam of ignorance.

Claiming to know better than the Master, not satisfied to be as the Master. All the terrible ignorance that boasts that it is knowledge, in pulpit and in pew.

The untold damage this beam does. It makes blind and in v. 39 see the results. It knocks out both of the eyes of him who suffers only from a sliver.

II. The beam of callousness.

Pitiless judging and condemning. Harsh refusal to forgive. Selfish unwillingness to give.

The untold damage this beam does. Who wants to join a church where these vices are seen? Who wants to stay in such a church? If this is Christianity, it is no better than the world.

Cast out the beam!

# The Fifth Sunday After Trinity.

## Luke V. 1-11

### An Ocular Demonstration of the Power of the Word

It has always been a pleasure for me to preach on this text. From his earliest seminary days onward every preacher should be most deeply impressed by the power of the Word. Yet strange to say, although they are fully taught about the *efficacia* of the Word, comparatively few preachers deep down in their hearts really believe in the power they handle when they employ the Word. Hence many preach their own thoughts, many dilute the Word, many unconsciously betray their littleness of faith in the power of the Word, and their hearers, quick to sense the fact, respond with even less littleness. The preacher who should be a channel to transmit 100% of the power becomes a channel that transmits 10% or less, and then he wonders why his preaching fails to produce adequate results.

Twice Jesus gave his apostles an Ocular Demonstration of the Power of the Word — compare John 21:1-14. These men who were to face Judaism and paganism with the Word and were to plant churches over the entire Roman empire had to possess the strongest conviction regarding the power of the Gospel: δύναμις θεοῦ εἰς σωτηρίαν, “God’s power for salvation.” Our text reveals the secret of their success, a secret as accessible to us today as it once was to them. We need scarcely say a word on the position of our text in this first sub-cycle of the after-Trinity season. Its subject, the Reception of Salvation, requires a text on the means of salvation. Baptism is the one means, but this ever accompanies the preaching of the Word. Baptism we considered on Trinity Sunday, the Word we have to consider on the present Sunday.

**[1] Now it came to pass in that the multitude was pressing upon him and listening to the Word of God, he too was standing beside the lake of**

**Gennesaret. [2] And he saw two boats standing beside the lake; but the fishermen having stepped away from them were engaged in washing the nets. Now having stepped into one of the boats, which was Simon's, he requested him to put out a little from the land. And having sat down he continued teaching the multitudes from the boat.**

The Sea of Galilee is also called the Lake of Gennesaret from a point of land bordering on the lake. The situation was not satisfactory. Jesus was preaching to a packed multitude on the level of the lake. Teachers and preachers generally sat down, but both Jesus and the dense crowd were standing. Παρά with the accusative is used with static verbs in the Koine.

[2] Jesus remedies the situation. Hauled up on the shore and thus “standing beside the lake” were two empty boats. The fishermen, who had been working all night long, were now busy cleaning their nets a little way from the boats.

[3] One of the two boats belonged to Simon. Jesus stepped into it and asked Simon to shove it out a little from the land. This was done. Jesus sat in the boat and went on with his preaching. The boat was his pulpit. Jesus sat as was the custom of preachers. He had his entire audience before him on the shore.

So the sermon, “the Word of God,” as Luke rightly terms it, was duly preached. It is not necessary for us to know the details of the sermon, enough that it was God's Word. Quietly the crowd stood and listened; perhaps they also sat down. No effect of the preaching was visible. Being spiritual, the effect was invisible, in the heart. But was there any effect? Did the Word of God, when preached, have any effect different from any other word that a man might preach? This day Jesus wanted to reveal to the very eyes of the disciples that the power in the Word is no less than God's own power, fully effective for the purpose for which it is sent. Hence the strange order that now follows.

**[4] But when he stopped speaking, he said to Simon: “Put out into the deep, and lower your nets for a catch!” [5] And answering Simon said: “Master, having labored through the whole night we took not a thing; yet on thy utterance I will lower the nets.”**

Note well three points in this command: 1) Jesus was a carpenter, not a fisherman. He might tell a carpenter what to do, but what did he know about fishing with nets to tell an expert and professional fisherman when and where to catch fish? For Jesus to give the order he gave seemed presumptuous. 2) After the preaching the hour was well on toward noon, when the sun is hot and glaring on the water, when no fisherman even tries to make a catch. They fish at night. In addition, “the deep,” the middle of the lake, is not at all the place for fishing; the fish are caught in the shallower places, not so far from the shore. Therefore the order of Jesus looked like a huge piece of double ignorance, which a professional fisherman might excuse in Jesus, but which he certainly would not act on. 3) Jesus and Peter were not alone. A crowd on the shore would see what Peter was doing. Many in this crowd knew all about fishing. For Peter to obey Jesus invited the ridicule of all these people. It takes no small amount of courage to face public ridicule.

Jesus knew these implications in his order to Peter; he wanted his order to Peter to clash with all the human wisdom of fishermen, to contradict all their daily experience. Preaching the Word and expecting grand results ever does look like foolishness, 1 Cor. 1:21. In order to reveal and to illustrate the power of this foolishness, Jesus had to give an order that sounded entirely foolish to human ears, that no man following his own wisdom and experience would act upon, certainly not before a great crowd of witnesses.

[5] Peter is fully alive to all that the order of Jesus implies. He shows it by telling Jesus that he and his men labored the whole night and caught never a fish. In the right places and at the right time, and no success whatever, — and now in the wrong place and at the wrong time, and even under the eyes of a numerous crowd, and yet hope for success? The order certainly tried the faith of Peter.

Peter uses ῥῆμα, “utterance.” Peter obeys, but altogether on Jesus’ utterance: “Thou hast spoken and this commands my will.” Peter acknowledged that he is acting on nothing whatever save the utterance of Jesus. Common-sense, reason, expedience, human opinion, he gives them all up and takes his stand only on his Master’s utterance. Yes, he hereby also throws all the responsibility on Jesus. But that is exactly what Jesus wants Peter and every preacher to do, shut the ears to every human consideration, throw themselves on Jesus alone and let him bear all the

responsibility. We must even say more: the order of Jesus involves a great promise, to lower the nets for a catch means that Peter will make a catch. It appears to have been providential that Peter caught nothing whatever by working With human skill during the entire previous night, and now without such skill is to catch so much so easily. The contrast is certainly made the more impressive by the night's failure.

I fear, most of us are afraid to risk so much on Jesus and on an utterance from his lips. We feel lost unless we have something human to which we may hold. It is a wonder sometimes that we catch anything. Luke does not use the word "Rabbi," he uses the vocative *ἐπιστάτα*, "Master." The plural: "your" nets, indicates that Peter had his men in his fishing business.

**[6] And having done this, they enclosed a great mass of fishes; moreover, their nets began to break. [7] And they beckoned to their partners in the other boat in order that having come they lend a hand. And they came, and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink.** "Having done this," done it "on thy utterance," the amazing result ensued. Does it pay to let go of everything else and to trust the Lord's Word alone?

Here is the ocular demonstration of its power. When we preach we cannot see, except at times by some outward signs, what we are accomplishing in men's souls, so here we are given an exhibition in a domain where the effect of the Word and its promise could be seen: in two boat loads of fishes, which could be counted and weighed and sold for so much cash. Whence came all those fish in the middle of the lake where of their own accord they never go, especially in broad day? Rationalism tells you. Jesus had nothing at all to do with the fish. He happened to glance over the water and noticed that many fish were disporting themselves in the deep and so told Peter that he had better let down his nets in that part of the lake. Luke just made up a miraculous story about it or heard the story from someone else. The power of Jesus brought those fish together both here and in John 21, and his power filled the nets so completely.

[7] I wonder whether Peter ever made such a haul in all his life. His nets began to tear (inchoative imperfect) in the place where the men hauled them over the boat's side. Then they motioned for help, and the men in the other boat came and lent a hand (*συλλαμβάνεσθαι*), and the two boats were filled so that they almost sank. So generous is Jesus, — recall the quantity of

wine at Cana. But the physical part of the great miracle is only the illustration for its ethical import. As the Word brought this visible result, so it brings also its invisible results: it sweeps the mountains of ignorance away — it melts the flinty hearts like butter by contrition, — a new, immortal, spiritual life springs into existence, — the frightful, crushing loads of guilt are blown away as far as the east is from the west. If these effects could be made visible to our eyes, how they would astonish us! Their invisibility does not in the least affect their reality.

**8) But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at the knees of Jesus, saying: “Go out from me, because I am a sinful man, Lord!” [9] For astonishment enveloped him and those with him at the catch of the fishes which they did take together, moreover, likewise also James and John, Zebedee’s sons, who were associates with Simon.**

During the excitement of making and of completing the tremendous catch Peter’s mind was taken up with the hurry and the work. Now that the fish are in the boats and that Peter sees what the Lord has done, a powerful reaction sets in. Peter is overwhelmed by the deity of Jesus. Luke has called him “Simon,” but now adds the great name Jesus had given him and writes “Simon Peter.” Of course, it is puerile to object that Jesus could not leave the boat while it was still out on the lake. Peter is struck by his utter unworthiness: he “a sinful man” having the Son of God with him in his boat. He whose deity shone out so mightily in this miracle would have to withdraw from a sinful man like Peter. Therefore also Peter does not again address Jesus as “Master,” but now uses “Lord.” It is true that “Lord” often expressed no more than respect for a superior person, but in the present connection Peter’s “Lord” means no less than “divine Lord,” in the sense in which a little later the standard designation of the believers for Jesus came to be: “our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Peter had seen many miracles, and at times had been deeply impressed. Jesus had healed even his own mother-in-law (4:38-39). Why was he so overcome by this miracle? In the first place, because it was wrought for Peter directly, in his own boat, in his own profession. In the second place, because Peter had indeed obeyed the Lord’s orders but had had his doubts about the implied promise that there would or could be much of a catch, and thus was struck hard by the realization of his own great sinfulness. In the third place, because the deity of Jesus appeared to him so clearly. In Peter’s

mind came together his own miserable, despicable self and the deity of the Lord whose mere will filled nets full of fish for men such as he. Peter broke.

[9] “For” states what may help us to understand Peter’s action better. Astonishment περιέσχεν, “held him around,” enveloped him, and not him alone, but equally all the other men that had helped to take in the catch.

[10] James and John are especially named and are called “Zebedee’s sons” because Luke mentions them here for the first time. Their father was still alive. They were κοιῳνοί of Peter, partners in the fishing business, the other boat belonging to them. This miracle was also for them.

**And Jesus said to Simon: “Stop being afraid! From now on men shalt thou be catching alive!”** When negated the present imperative often means to stop an action that has already begun. So Peter’s fear was to cease. This bidding is really an absolution. Peter had confessed his great sinfulness and feared Jesus whose deity he saw so clearly. By telling Peter to stop fearing Jesus absolves him from his sins, and thus Peter needs not shrink from him. This absolution Jesus adds to the gift of the miracle. We, of course, should know that Jesus pronounces absolution in many ways.

Note the emphasis: “men shalt thou be catching alive,” human beings. The periphrastic future tense expresses linear action, — this kind of catching shall be Peter’s business. The verb ζωγρέω means “to catch alive,” and not merely to catch as the fish were caught. Catching them killed them, but catching men by the Gospel never kills them. A fisherman’s work is good work at which to make a living, but as much higher as men are above fish, so much higher is the ministry of the Gospel than any mere ordinary trade. Here was another, even a direct, promise for Peter. Having witnessed the miracle, it was easy for him to believe. Here is a promise that implies an order. In v. 4 the order includes the promise.

**[11] And having brought the boats down to the land, having left everything they followed him.** Κατάγω is nautical: to bring down from the high sea. “Having left everything” means just what it says. They left the boat’s, the fish, their work, their families, their homes, — everything. Their new life’s work was to prepare to be fishers of men. Of course, the fish were not to be wasted. Remember how Jesus ordered the broken pieces to be gathered up when he fed the 5,000 and the 4,000. Zebedee and the men

Peter employed would take care of boats and of fish. Jesus left the rich gift of fish for the families of his future apostles. The story has been about Peter, but now Luke has the plural: “they followed him,” Peter, John, and James. The ocular demonstration of the power of the Word was meant for all three. Andrew seems to have been absent.

## Homiletical Aid

Treatment of the Word — despised and scorned — neglected and underestimated — used, but not appreciated at its true value. No empty sound — full of divine power — tremendous effect.

### **The Tremendous Power of the Divine Word.**

- I. An ocular demonstration of this power.
  1. The sermon of Jesus. No power visible.
  2. The catch of fish. The power displayed.
  3. The object: to display this power of the Word to the coming fishers of men and to all of us.
- II. A true appreciation of this power.
  1. The desire to hear this Word.
  2. Complete trust in the power of this Word.
  3. Our sinfulness and the absolution of Jesus.
  4. All the men who have been caught alive.

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The following outline has a little more color (*S.* 192 etc.).

### **Peter’s Draught of Fishes an Ocular Demonstration of the Power of the Word.**

- I. The power invisible in the preaching.

1. Subject of the sermon unknown, but like other sermons of Jesus. Same lips, same boat as when the miracle was wrought.
2. If one could have seen: mountains of ignorance removed; accumulations of guilt swept away, as far as the east is from the west; divine life kindled in the soul; heaven brought down to men.
3. All invisible because spiritual, in the soul. They know who experience this power.

II. The power made visible in the miracle.

1. The same lips, the same boat. A command contrary to all experiences, human wisdom, inviting ridicule of the assembled crowd.
2. The two boats full of fish, — an ocular demonstration indeed.
3. Peter overwhelmed by his own sinfulness and by the deity of the Lord. Just because the demonstration was ocular.

III. The appreciation of the power.

1. The apostles had to be convinced of the power to preach it to bigoted Jew and to superstitious pagan. So all preachers to this day. How many are so convinced?
2. Every hearer must know with what power he is dealing in the Gospel Word. It would be too bad to discover this power too late.

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Walther preaches on “the earthly calling,” *der Christ in seinem irdisehen Beruf*. Loy: “Labor in Obedience to God’s Word,” — not much better. Stoecker: “A Blessed Day’s Work: It begins with God’s Word — It proceeds under Jesus’ care — It is crowned with eternal blessing.” There are quite a number of such outlines. I fail to understand how men of such gifts find no more than they do in this great text. Such sermons also disregard entirely the position of this text in the Church Year. Take Stoecker’s sermon and his first part: Jesus preached until near noon, — how many workmen could listen to a sermon that long and still get in a day’s

work? The people on the shore of the lake had greater things to do that day than to get in a day's common labor. If all the application from the long preaching of Jesus is to be only that a Christian starts the day of labor with family worship, then application, in my estimation, is an unconvincing effort.

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All so quiet while Jesus preached. And now all at once the strange command:

**“Launch Out Into the Deep!”**

I. That did not make sense.

Either on the lake: all that was against doing anything of the kind;  
Or in the apostolic work: the bigotry of the Jews, the ignorance and the vice of the pagan world.

II. Nothing ever made more sense.

Two boatloads of fish testify on the lake, do so to this day. The other miracle in John 21.

Millions of men caught alive by the Gospel testify wherever the Gospel is preached.

We are but sinful men, Jesus is God's own Son. His Word has the power of deity in it, omnipotent power in the domain of nature, and the power of infinite grace in the domain of the spirit.

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The Word in the instruction of Jesus and in Holy Baptism was to save Nicodemus. Jesus and the Church save men through the Word. We have heard this in a number of texts. Too many of us lack a proper conception of

**The Great Means of Salvation, the Word.**

I. Jesus made its invisible success

If you and I had sat among that crowd beside the lake and had listened to Jesus himself, the greatest Preacher the world has ever heard, what could we have seen? Mighty little. Jesus no revivalist to throw his audience into convulsions, and to do that is not Gospel success. The success is spiritual, hence invisible (describe). ’

II. Visible to Peter’s eyes

Jesus makes the invisible visible. He lets his word work in the realm of nature. Just a little command involving a promise and there are two boatloads of fish before Peter’s eyes, and he is overwhelmed by the consciousness of his own sinfulness and unworthiness, and by the deity of Jesus who had spoken that command to launch out into the deep and cast out the nets to make a haul of fish. Peter never could forget this visible success.

III. For the benefit of all true Gospel preachers

The miracle is intended for all preachers. We who are called to preach see so little outward effect and success. I preach to you this morning. Presently you get up and leave. Has anything been done in your souls to save you? If a Jew or a modernists had preached, would the effect perhaps have been the same? So hidden is the effect now. Of course, I shall see it all visibly revealed on judgment day. But all these fish in Peter’s nets are certainly a great comfort to me.

IV. And all believing Gospel hearers.

So they ought to be also to you and to true believers of the Word. If you could see your faith and your love for Jesus, your sins all swept away, the new life unfolding in your heart, etc., what a blessed sight that would be. But now, 1 John 3:1-2 is true. The Word does save you, although you do not see and you only believe. It is mighty to succeed when you teach it in your family and when you speak it to other people as you have opportunity.

It is the Word of God, and it must succeed.

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**Two Boat-Loads of Fish.**

They tell us a great deal about

- I. Jesus. About
- II. His Word. About
- III. The success of the Gospel. And about
- IV. Our own faith and trust in the Gospel.

# The Second After-Trinity Cycle

## The Life of The Saved

**The Sixth Sunday After Trinity.**

*The Better Righteousness*

**The Seventh Sunday After Trinity.**

*Our Daily Bread*

**The Eighth Sunday After Trinity.**

*Good Trees*

**The Ninth Sunday After Trinity.**

*Faithful Stewards*

**The Tenth Sunday After Trinity.**

*Duly Warned*

**the Eleventh Sunday After Trinity.**

*Praying in True Repentance*

# The Sixth Sunday After Trinity.

## Matt. 5:20-26

### The Better Righteousness

Consult the introductory remarks on the text for the First Sunday after Trinity. June 29 is Peter-Paul Day. The Sunday after this date begins a new subcycle which extends to St. Laurentius Day, August 10. The Sundays of this sub-cycle were at times designated “after Peter-Paul Day.”

This group of texts presents

### *The Life of the Saved.*

They who are the saved, who have received the great salvation (this is the subject of the first after- Trinity, or rather after-Pentecost, cycle) live accordingly. Thus the first text of this sub-cycle presents: The Better Righteousness. Unless one possesses this Better Righteousness and shows it in his life, he cannot be one of the saved.

[20] The first verse of our text presents the theme of the entire Sermon on the Mount! Righteousness — the Righteousness which distinguishes Christ’s true disciples — the Children of the Kingdom in the Righteousness that is theirs. The elaboration of this theme begins with v. 21. The great importance of v. 20 is thus at once apparent.

“**For I say to you,**” as the very King of the Kingdom of the heavens, “**that unless your righteousness shall surpass by far that of the scribes and Pharisees, in no wise shall you enter into the Kingdom of the heavens.**” Γάρ is merely elucidative. It lays down the great fact regarding righteousness, on which everything hinges in the Kingdom of the heavens. “I say to you” is divinely authoritative. Who would dare to contradict or to disbelieve when the King himself speaks?

For every man on earth the supreme question is and remains: Is he or is he not in the Kingdom? Is he or is he not one of the saved? Like the scribes and Pharisees in Christ's day, many to this day fatally deceive themselves; They imagine that they have the righteousness which admits them to the Kingdom and to salvation, when in fact their righteousness is unreal and spurious. Δικαιοσύνη is the quality of one on whom a verdict of acquittal has been pronounced. The term is always forensic, it always implies a judge and the pronouncement of a sentence. Here where the Kingdom is concerned the judge is God. When modernists translate the word "goodness," or "uprightness," they simply mistranslate and reveal that they have no adequate conception of the biblical term. "Goodness" and "uprightness" are virtues of ours, "righteousness" is a divine pronouncement. The aim of modernism is to destroy the doctrine of justification by faith at its very source.

The Kingdom is explained in Matt. 21:5, the First Sunday in Advent; John 3:3, the Trinity Festival. It is "the Kingdom of the heavens," because it is not of this world (John 19:36), its origin and its entire character are heavenly. Its other name is "the Kingdom of God" because God is its King; so also it is called "the Kingdom of Christ." One does not become a citizen or subject in this Kingdom, but a partaker of it. One enters it by regeneration, as a child, son, and heir of God, — as a royal prince, as one of the "kings" of "the King of kings." For this Kingdom is not a land or a nation of people, like earthly kingdoms, but the royal reign of God and of Christ, here on earth in heavenly grace, and above in divine glory.

The question: Have I entered this Kingdom, and am I one of the saved? do I live under the rule of the King's grace? resolves itself into the question: Have I the righteousness that avails before God? is the verdict he pronounces upon me a verdict of acquittal? When Jesus delivered this Sermon the scribes, who were great students of the Old Testament and of all its regulations, and the Pharisees, who most scrupulously lived up to all the regulations, both those in the Old Testament and those handed down by tradition, claimed to possess beyond question the righteousness necessary for admission to the Kingdom of heaven. The one Greek article makes one class of "the scribes and Pharisees." The righteousness which they possessed was due to the verdict they pronounced upon themselves, Luke 16:15. They were like so many criminals in the penitentiary: they acquit

themselves. The fact is, every man likes to sit as the judge in his own case, likes to pronounce himself free from guilt. This is the common failing.

In other words, no man is ready to kneel down in the dust and to repent; no man is ready to count all righteousness of his own as nothing but dung (Phil. 3:8), all invent a righteousness of their own. Many church members do the same thing, even when constantly warned against such folly. Jesus here tells us plainly that unless our righteousness “surpasses by far” all such self-pronounced righteousness, entrance to the Kingdom will be barred to us. This does not mean that we must have more of this useless righteousness, and that if we have a sufficient amount of it, we shall enter. Jesus means that we must have an altogether different righteousness, namely one that has back of it a verdict pronounced by God himself, instead of a verdict that we, or some important men, or the world generally pronounce upon us.

This answers the question which is constantly asked in regard to our passage: Does Jesus mean the imputed righteousness or the acquired righteousness? Only the imputed righteousness admits into the Kingdom. No acquired righteousness admits into the Kingdom. The acquired righteousness, which is God’s favorable sentence on works that are truly good in his sight, cannot even begin before we are in the Kingdom; they are impossible before the admission into the Kingdom, possible only after the admission. Paul calls this righteousness the righteousness *διὰ πίστεως* and *ἐκ πίστεως*, “through faith,” “due to faith.” In Old Testament times this was faith in the promised and coming Messiah; now it is faith in the Savior who has come.

**[21] “You heard that it was said to the ancients: ‘Thou shalt not murder! and whoever murders shall be held to the judgment.’ [22] But I say to you, that every one angry at his brother shall be held to the judgment; and whoever says to his brother: ‘Blamed bonehead!’ shall be held to the Sanhedrin; and whoever says: ‘Blamed fool!’ shall be held for the Gehenna of the fire.”**

The elaboration of the Sermon begins with v. 21. The first part of the elaboration (v. 21-4’8) deals with the law of God, using portions of it as illustrations. The scribes and Pharisees treated God’s law as only a code for their courts. They imagined that they were perfectly righteous when they

were not indicted by these “courts, when no verdicts were pronounced against them. This shallow righteousness, they imagined, gave them entrance to the Kingdom of heaven. Jesus shows the emptiness of this sort of righteousness. They who possess the better righteousness, imputed to them by grace through faith, they who are among the “blessed” (v. 3 etc.) who by grace alone and without works have entered the Kingdom, these have the law of God in their hearts, obey it of their own accord, and thus have an acquired righteousness surpassing by far any mere legalism like that of scribes and Pharisees. Not, however, that this acquired righteousness admits into the Kingdom; no, it is only evidence that one is in the Kingdom.

It was, of course, Moses who said to the ancients, the Israelites at Sinai: “Thou shalt not murder!” That was a Commandment of the Decalog. The scribes and Pharisees so accepted it; they also interpreted it correctly: “and whoever murders shall be held to the judgment.” Therefore when a man did commit murder the Jews haled him before their courts, tried him, and pronounced sentence upon him. That was all you heard, Jesus tells his hearers, — nothing but this civil law, to be applied to an actual murderer by a civil court. The scribes and Pharisees allowed you to conclude that if you did not run foul of their courts, as far as this Commandment is concerned, you could enter and remain in the Kingdom of heaven. Did they say anything about what God’s Commandment required of the heart? No. Anything about the passions that lead up to actual murder? No. Anything to the effect that these passions in the heart, whether they produce a deed of murder or not, are equally as wicked as murder? No.

Note that the Commandment has the singular: “thou.” The matter is entirely personal. The future tense is employed in legal commands, and is decidedly peremptory. The common local courts of the Jews had seven judges and two assistant Levites (shoterim). The Talmud reports courts consisting of twenty-three judges as found in larger towns, and of only three in villages. The Jewish supreme court was the Sanhedrin, which, however, did not consider merely local crimes.

[22] “I say to you” (ἔγω) emphatic) is in direct opposition to “you heard.” It is not in opposition to “it was said,” i.e. said by Moses, for Jesus and Moses agree (v. 17). Jesus is contradicting the shallow and superficial interpretation of the scribes and Pharisees and is offering the true interpretation. He speaks with the pronoun of divine authority. The Fifth

Commandment is not intended as a civil law for the courts, nor is it a law against only actual murder. It indeed forbids the extreme, the bloody crime of murder, because the extreme must be included, but it reaches down to the heart; by forbidding murder it forbids all that underlies murder and may lead to the overt crime, whether it succeeds in doing this or not. God ever regards the heart and the hidden motives stirring in the heart. Observation shows that the Scriptures constantly mention the extreme and include with it all that underlies the extreme.

Jesus declares that the Fifth Commandment includes anger, calling a person against whom one is angry a mean name, or an evil name. Jesus stops abruptly with these three, but the next steps would be threatening, raising the hand to strike, actually striking, wounding. Thus 1 John 3:15 states: “Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer; and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him.”

Jesus selects three sins which no court of the Jews could consider as crimes. Where is the court that would pass judgment on a case of anger? So also it is impossible to imagine that the great supreme court, the Sanhedrin, would entertain a case in which one man called another a bonehead or numskull. And to what court could the scribes and Pharisees hale a man who had called another a fool and have this criminal remanded to the Gehenna of the fire? The common exegesis which attempts to find mention of three crimes that courts should penalize, and three court penalties, cannot be maintained.

Jesus is satirizing the casuistic interpretation of the Jews. He is expounding after their fashion: anger for a common court of judgment; the ugly name “bonehead” for the Sanhedrin; and, splitting the hair finely, the name “fool” for a non-existent court that is able to remand to hell. All of this is ridiculous. The sense of all of it’ is that this Commandment is not at all law for court action. The scribes made it such a law only by restricting the Commandment to the actual crime of murder. But this Commandment reaches down to the heart, beyond the province of any court, where it would be ridiculous to introduce courts and court penalties. God wants the righteous whom he has acquitted for the Messiah’s sake to have the law in their hearts, not to keep them only from such gross crimes as murder (although this is included), but to keep anger, hatred, malice and all evil

passions out of the heart, letting love alone rule heart, tongue, and all the members.

The best we are able to say on the epithet ῥακά is that it means “empty one”; hence we translate: “Blamed bonehead!” Μωρέ is probably derived from μωρός, silly, stupid, foolish, thus: “Blamed fool!” The effort to convert this epithet into a curse should be given up. Bonehead and fool are only variants. The satire of Jesus is keen by making a high criminal difference between the two. “The Gehenna of the fire” is one of the Hebrew terms for hell. “Hades” is used in the New Testament when the souls of the damned are said to be cast into hell before the last day, but “the Gehenna,” or “the Gehenna of the fire” when the reference is to both body and soul. The expression itself is derived from “the valley of the sons of Hinnom,” which the people of Jerusalem used as a dump for refuse and offal, where also much of the trash was burned.

[23] How the law must operate in the heart of the righteous Jesus pictures in an example that occurs only too frequently. **“If therefore thou art offering thy gift at the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother has something against thee, [24] leave there thy gift in front of the altar, go first, be reconciled with thy brother, and then, having come, be offering thy gift.”**

Οὕτως, “therefore” or “then,” merely takes up this case as one that expectedly (ἐάν) may occur. The second person singular makes it highly personal. Jesus, of course, uses the Jewish form of worship when describing the case: “thy gift at the altar.” The form has altered, but the example applies nevertheless. If you do not do so before, then in God’s presence, in church, where the altar and the pulpit remind you of God, if then you should remember that your brother has something against you, rightly against you, because you have wronged him by commission or by omission, by word or by deed, and your conscience should rebuke you, then do not proceed with your worship as if everything were in order. There is a bar between you and God, namely this wrong that you have done. Without removing that bar, your worship would be useless, if not worse.

In such cases each person must be his own judge and must judge honestly and truly, and not with partiality to himself. Sometimes a brother raises complaint Without cause, acting offended Where he has no right to

feel hurt. To such a brother we owe nothing save to set him right. But Where we did sin against him, we must make it right, and must do this for our own sakes, irrespective of any wrong which the brother may on his part do to us. Any such wrong we must at once forgive, irrespective of whether the brother comes to us to be reconciled or not. To forgive thus at once, from the heart, is what so many forget, hence the hard feelings that persist and the mean names that are called (v. 22).

[24] First go (ὕπαγε πρῶτον should be construed together), be reconciled with thy brother (passive of διαλλάσσω, be made thoroughly ἄλλος), and then proceed with thy worship. Go to him, confess thy wrong, ask his pardon. If he grants it, well and good, — he certainly should. But if he is ugly, treats you meanly, perhaps even refuses to speak to you, you are clear, — his own guilt he himself must bear. Only hold nothing against him. To be sure, What Jesus here teaches holds good for your brother as well as it holds good for you. But it holds good for you. Carry it out, irrespective of What any brother may do. The old covenant required sacrifices at the worship and these sacrifices pointed to the coming Messiah, whose own sacrifice cleanses from sin. We no more have sacrifices in our worship, and this absence points to the sacrifice which Christ has made and which is all-sufficient to cleanse us from sin. The example here presented by Jesus shows us how the righteousness of faith (imputed) brings forth through grace in our hearts the righteousness of life (acquired).

[25] The specific example of v. 23-24 is now broadened by an admonition couched in figurative or parabolic language. **“Be disposed to come to terms quickly with thy opponent at law, while thou art in his company on the way, lest perhaps the opponent at law hand thee over to the judge, and the judge hand thee over to the officer, and thou be thrown into prison. [26] Amen, I say to thee, in no way shalt thou come out thence until thou hand over the last penny.”**

The periphrastic present imperative ἵσθι εὐνοῶν = “be well-minded,” which I translate interpretatively: “be disposed to come to terms.” Again we see that the matter is one of the mind or heart, which also God ever regards. An ἀντίδικος is an opponent at law; he may be either plaintiff or defendant. In the present case the latter is addressed. The parabolic language deals with a debtor and the old legal method of dealing with debtors, remanding them to the judge, who orders his court-officer (ὑπηρέτης, “underling”) to throw

the culprit into prison until he pays his debt in full. This explains how the two men are found together on the way to the judge, — the creditor is forcing the debtor to go along. The wise thing for the debtor is to be well-minded and before the courtroom is reached to come to terms with the creditor, to effect some mutually possible and satisfactory settlement of the debt. If ill-will persists, the debtor will be handed over to the judge, who will make short work of a refractory debtor by turning him over to his bailiff and having him jailed until the debt is met.

[26] “Amen, I say to you” (see John 16:20, Jubilate), verity and authority combined, introduces the exposition of the parable. The *tertium comparationis* is the identity of the action of the two judges, the earthly and the heavenly. The heavenly Judge will release the prisoner as little as the earthly judge does until the last penny is paid. The debt is the wrong we do a brother, against which he complains to God. How easily we could make that right! Shall we wait until it is too late, until death compels us to face the divine Judge? Once remanded to the prison of hell (v. 22 the Gehenna of the fire), release will be impossible.

The parable is two-edged. Suppose that I acknowledge my wrong to the brother, yet he hardens his heart and keeps holding my wrong against me? Then the roles are reversed. Then the debt of forgiveness, unpaid by him, will land him in prison unless he settles it before it is too late.

The Catholic exegesis seizes upon ἕως ἄν, “until,” and contends that this connective implies that the debt may indeed be paid after the debtor is thrown into prison (purgatory). That “until” may have this implication should not be denied (see also 18:30 and 34). It is true, too, as regards the parable that many a debtor did manage somehow to pay his debt even after he was lodged in prison. Yet these considerations do not decide the sense of the clause as here used. This ἕως ἄν raises the question: How will a man whom God has sent to hell (there is no purgatory) ever pay anything that he owes, to say nothing about the last κοδράντης, *quadrans*, ¼ cent, the Greek word being used by the Jews without translation into Hebrew? The answer is: Even the payment of one *quadrans* is impossible. Over the portal of this prison is inscribed: “Ye that enter here abandon hope!”

## Homiletical Aid

Any sermon on this text which omits the imputed righteousness made ours by faith in the Redeemer omits the main part of the text. We must recognize that v. 20 is the supreme part. This is true by itself and true also because this verse announces the theme of the entire Sermon on the Mount: The Children of the Kingdom in the Righteousness that is Theirs. I offer this remark because I find sermons and outlines, all too many, on themes like the following:

- “A Consideration of the Fifth Commandment.”
- “What does Christ Say Regarding the Law?”
- “Christian Reconciliation.”
- “The Evil Results of Loveless Anger.”
- “The Love that Strives for Peace is a Well-Pleasing Sacrifice.”
- “The Virtue of the Natural Man is Altogether Insufficient.”
- “Thou Shalt Not Kill!”
- “What Belongs to the Right Fulfillment of the Law?” The right knowledge of the law — of our own guilt — of the span of life accorded to us.

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The children of the world often claim to be “just as good” as we are. To one’s surprise, there are Christians who rather believe this boastful claim. If we Christians are not better, far better than these worldly boasters, then we are not at all Christians.

### **The Righteousness that Exceeds.**

- I. The righteousness that admits us into the Kingdom of heaven.
  1. The worldly boasters are like the scribes and Pharisees: not one of them is in the Kingdom of heaven as God’s child and heir, because not one of them has the righteousness pronounced by God, only the false righteousness each one pronounces on himself (Luke 16:15).
  2. Only one righteousness admits into God’s Kingdom, makes us poor sinners children and heirs of God, and that is Christ’s blood and righteousness, the verdict of God himself that for Christ’s

sake your sins and mine are forgiven. None but true believers have this pardon which declares them righteous before God.

3. No man can of his own accord and by his own efforts get into the Kingdom of heaven. Let us drop forever the delusion that this is possible. We get in by no righteousness of our own. Jesus had to fulfill the law, had to suffer and to die, and all that he did must now be bestowed 'upon us and be embraced by us in faith as our own; then and then alone the portals of the Kingdom swing wide and take us in.

## II. The righteousness that develops in the Kingdom of heaven.

1. The worldly boasters are like the scribes and Pharisees: since not one of them is in the Kingdom of heaven as God's child and heir, not one of them knows what happens when one gets into the Kingdom, how the law of God ceases to be only an outward law and enters the heart where it meets the power of a new life.
2. The law and mere court authority: if you do not murder you keep the Fifth Commandment. But the law forbids anger, calling mean and vicious names; and are the courts to punish such crimes? Jesus ridicules the scribes and Pharisees. No mere outward fulfillment is a true fulfillment.
3. God's house, sanctuary, worship, move the heart to go and ask pardon of the person we have wronged. The picture of the debtor in the old courts. The heart is changed. True and acceptable worship is rendered. So throughout in the new life in the Kingdom. This is the righteousness of our own new spiritual life.

The righteousness of Christ, which is made ours, is perfect and admits into and keeps us in the Kingdom.

The righteousness of the new life, which is developed in us, grows ever more perfect and manifests that we are in the Kingdom.

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### **The Righteousness that Exceeds.**

I. Let me describe it.

The imputed righteousness, from which flows the acquired righteousness.

II. Let me illustrate it.

No mere outward fulfillment of law, the imputed righteousness lifts us above that. The heart prompted by God to go and do what pleases him.

III. Let me show you the secret of it.

The love of Christ who gives us his righteousness which he acquired by his fulfillment of the law and by his suffering and his death in our stead. The faith and the love which his love implant in us.

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Everything depends on whether you have entered the Kingdom of heaven or not. On the last day many will say to the King: “Lord, Lord, have we not done great things in thy Kingdom?” Matt. 7:22-23. But the King will say: “I never knew you.” People think they are in the Kingdom and yet are not in it. Here is a supreme subject:

### **Entering Into the Kingdom.**

I. Only thinking that you have entered in.

Supposing the law to be the entrance. Some suppose they can actually fulfill the law of God.

Reducing the law, like the scribes and Pharisees and so many today, to outward compliance: as though not killing is the keeping of the Fifth Commandment.

The warning of Jesus: this is no righteousness at all. These are false human verdicts.

II. Really entering in.

Despairing of all self-declared righteousness. “In my hand no price I bring.”

The Gospel is the only entrance. Christ's blood and righteousness, purchased and won by his holy life, suffering, and death. This righteousness bestowed through Word and Sacrament and imparted to us as our own by faith.

You enter on your knees in repentance. You enter with the bloody cross by faith.

III. The evidence that you are in.

Use the Fifth or any other Commandment. When wronged you do not hate or call ugly names or do even worse. Because God forgave you, you too forgive. Matt. 18:21-35.

When you wrong you first acknowledge and ask pardon before you face God in worship.

The evidence is in the new life wrought by the Gospel. The King meets these at the last day as "the blessed of his Father," Matt. 25:34 etc.

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The text is full of court language. Justification by faith the act of the Eternal Judge. We must all appear before God's judgment seat. It will be more than interesting when you and I appear

### **In God's Court.**

I. The Judge.

Who sees and knows all.

Absolutely righteous and just.

Infallible in every verdict.

Whose verdicts stand for ever.

Vastly different from the courts in which men usurp the judge's place and acquit themselves, Luke 16:15.

II. The hopeless pleas.

Outward fulfillment of the law, like that of scribes and Pharisees.

The judgments of the world and of men who claim they know and who act as high judicial authorities.

All pleas based on our works, merit, etc.

We will never be able to pay even the first, not to say the uttermost farthing.

III. The verdict of righteousness.

Based on Christ's merit when brought by faith into God's court.

Pronounced only on genuine faith, which faith is always attested by the good works of the Gospel of Christ, — examples: when wronged, forgive and do not hate, call vile names, etc.; when having wronged, repent and beg for pardon (v. 21-26).

Removing all sin and guilt; declaring perfectly righteous.

This acquittal already recorded in a hundred places in Scripture.

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Righteousness, — only a judge can pronounce a person righteous.

### **Face the Supreme Judge!**

I. The usurpers.

1. The world likes to judge.
2. You yourself like to be the sole judge in your own case, but many a criminal acquits himself.
3. The Supreme Judge reverses the judgment of all usurpers.

II. The sentence of condemnation.

1. On all who come with the law, no matter how they imagine they have fulfilled it.
2. On all who think the Supreme Judge will shut an eye in their case.

3. The dread sentence of prison till the uttermost farthing is paid.  
No purgatory.-

III. The acquittal.

1. For Christ's sake.
2. Christ embraced by faith.
3. Faith attested as genuine by a changed heart.

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**The Uttermost Farthing.**

- I. Its payment is offered to you now by Christ in the Gospel. The righteousness that exceeds.
- II. Many wait until payment must be demanded of them. Too late!  
They can never pay.
- III. Keep your accounts absolutely clear! By faith in Christ. But remember the new heart.

# The Seventh Sunday After Trinity. Mark 8:1-9

## Our Daily Bread

The connection with the foregoing gospel text is expressed in Matt. 6:33: "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you." The previous text deals with this righteousness and God's Kingdom, which must ever be our supreme care; then all the earthly things that we may need, such as our daily bread, will be thrown in for good measure, as when to a purchase at market a few handfuls are added as extras. What pertains to our earthly subsistence is so small a matter for God that he does not bother to reckon it. God promises to take care of our earthly needs, so that nothing in regard to them may distract our minds from attending to our supreme need.

The Feeding of the Five Thousand, John 6:1-15, Laetare, is the great introduction to the Sermon on the Bread of Life and bears this spiritual application, even as the five thousand wanted to make Jesus their king. The Feeding of the Four Thousand bears no such relation. The import of the miracle does not go beyond the divine care which provides our daily bread. Various minor questions may arise in our minds. Do Christians never hunger and thirst? Paul often did. The saints in Jerusalem suffered from a long, severe famine. The churches in Macedonia went through "a bad depression. These inflictions belong in the domain of divine providence. Jesus so often had not Where to lay his head. Job 13:15a. If in his plans God needs my hunger and thirst, my privation and destitution, even my death in miserable fashion, mine not to demand why, but, if needed, even to die.

**[1] In those days, there being again a great multitude and having not what they may eat, having called the disciples to him he says to them:**

**[2] “I have compassion on the multitude, because three days already they remain with me, and have not what they may eat; [3] and if I release them fasting to their home, they will become exhausted on the road; and some of them are come from afar.”**

“In those days” = when Jesus was in Decapolis, the country east of the upper Jordan. “Again,” as so often, there was a great crowd, and this time they had nothing to eat. So Jesus called his disciples to hear what they would say about the situation.

[2] It is the physical need that calls forth the Lord’s compassion, which also he describes. In John 6:5-7 Jesus questions two of his disciples when he first sees the crowd assembling and then waits until toward evening. Here the crowd has been with Jesus for three days and has consumed all of its supplies, — ἡμέραι τρεῖς is a parenthetical nominative of time. During this time this multitude of people has not wearied in remaining with Jesus to hear his preaching and to see his miracles, and has disregarded the disappearance of its supplies. Jesus will have to dismiss them. Τί φάγωσι is a question of deliberation in indirect discourse.

[3] But if these people are sent away “fasting,” i.e. if they have to start for home on an empty stomach, some at least will become exhausted on the road, — ἐκλυθήσονται = “will be completely (ἐκ) unloosed,” like a bowstring when unstrung, metaphorically: “will be completely exhausted” before getting home; especially those who had come from afar. You may ask, Why Jesus had not thought of this sooner, why he had delayed so long and allowed this awkward situation to develop. The answer is: because Jesus intended to work this miracle, intended to send all these people home with the powerful impression of having been fed full with supernaturally multiplied food. Jesus is never caught unawares.

**[4] And his disciples answered him: “Whence shall one be able to fill these with bread in a desert place?”** This reply is misunderstood when its sense is taken to be nothing but an evidence of perplexity and utter forgetfulness of the other miracle, the feeding of the 5,000; for exactly the opposite is true. The disciples acknowledge that no one is able to obtain bread here in the wilderness, i.e. in this utterly uninhabited section of country, for such a multitude. But their indefinite τῖς does not include Jesus. We see this from Matthew’s account (15:33): “Whence have we in a desert

so much bread” etc.? This time the disciples do not think of a minimum of bread for each person: “that every one may have a little” (John 6:7); they remember that by means of the other miracle Jesus fed the people till each could eat no more, and so they speak of a maximum of bread for each hungry person: “to fill these with bread” (the genitive after a verb of tasting, including also the verb χορτίζειν),

The implication in the reply of the disciples is that Jesus alone has power to feed this multitude as they should be fed before starting on the journey homeward. Therefore the disciples are not worried in the least as they were before the other miracle was wrought (Matt. 14:15). Yet they do not tell Jesus what he ought to do for this multitude. They have learned a great deal, namely to leave in the Lord’s hands what should be done.

**[5] And he inquired of them: “How many bread-cakes have you?” And they said: “Seven.” And he passes an order to the multitude to recline on the ground. And after having taken the seven bread-cakes, having given thanks, he broke them, and kept giving to his disciples, in order to place before them. And they placed them before the multitude. [7] And they had a few small fishes; and having blessed them he said, to be placing them too before them.**

The disciples understand what Jesus is about to do. The other miracle has taught them well. So when Jesus inquires: “How many loaves have you?” they promptly answer: “Seven.” For these seven are all they have left of their own supply of bread. The Greek uses the plural ἄρτοι, “breads.” These are not “loaves” (our versions) in the form of our present bread, but flat cakes or sheets of bread, often baked without yeast. For the purpose of eating they were never cut with a knife, i.e. sliced, but broken into pieces, just as Jesus breaks these seven breads.

The repetition of the miracle of feeding thousands miraculously is to impress upon the disciples the ability of their Lord to provide food for them at any time of need. The intensive training of the Twelve is far advanced. The narrative emphasizes the compassion of Jesus and his dealing with the disciples; the multitude is entirely in the background.

[6] Παραγγέλλει is often used with reference to the passing on of a military command to troops and is used here because of the multitude. The present tense amid aorists is quite in order, lending a touch of vividness

amid the drab aorists. The Jews reclined in order to dine, and so this multitude is ordered to recline as for a meal, only they must use the ground instead of couches. To feed 4,000 people requires a great deal of bread and of fish, and here only seven flat cakes of bread and a few small fish were in sight. Yet in all seriousness this entire multitude lies down, each resting on the left elbow, as if about to be served with a meal.

The minor actions are expressed by participles, thus taking the seven bread-cakes, and giving thanks. Jesus said grace before meal. Nothing unusual was contained in the words, or else one or the other evangelist would have remarked the fact. The word of thanks very likely was one of the usual Jewish table thanksgivings. No difference is intended when Mark writes that Jesus “blessed” the fishes. After the benediction Jesus broke the bread, the aorist merely noting the fact. Each fiat bread made perhaps two, three, or four pieces according to its size. But the next verb is an imperfect, and its tense alone reports the miracle: “he kept giving to his disciples, in order to place before them.” So simply the astounding miracle is reported. This is the Scripture way, — not a word more than is absolutely necessary. I see Verbal Inspiration in this manner of writing; for left to themselves any speaker or writer would use many more words than a mere tense in one word wherewith to recount such an astonishing event.

Jesus “kept giving,” ever more and more pieces of bread, filling the receptacles of the disciples again and again, — perhaps each of the Twelve carried two baskets, one in each hand. When they became empty they returned again and again to Jesus and he just “kept giving — kept giving,” — and just from seven bread-cakes to begin with. The food was not fancy, it was only bread, but ordinary people like these before Jesus were very thankful to get enough to fully satisfy their hunger.

[7] The way in which Mark writes Jesus makes two acts of the miracle. He dealt out the fishes separately. The lake country made fish a staple food to go with bread. A few fish means more than two, as in the other miracle. Mark has the diminutive: “little fishes.” Of course, he got that word from Peter, from whom he derived his entire gospel. But Mark has an ear for such little details and likes to preserve them for his readers.

**[8] And they did eat, and they were filled.** Two aorists, — two great facts. **And they took up what remained over of broken pieces seven**

**baskets. Now they were about four thousand. And be dismissed them.** Some people always take more than they are able to consume. So here again there were quite a few pieces left over. They filled seven baskets. In comparing with the twelve baskets left over after the other miracle we must not overlook the fact that a distinction is made in Matt. 16:9-10 and in Mark 8:19-20 between the seven *spurides* and the twelve *kophinoi*, the former being the larger. For the seven bread-cakes the disciples gave they received seven baskets full of bread in return. They lost nothing by offering their bread for the miracle. A beautiful propriety runs through the two miracles in these features.

[9] The number fed on this occasion was 4,000, but Matthew states that these were the men, to which the women and the children are to be added. So little food, — so many fed! Then Jesus dismissed them; the aorist means that they departed and did not attempt to linger. This means, too, that Jesus himself was departing. He had given three precious days to these people.

It is worth noting that Mark does not say a word in regard to the effect this miracle produced upon the 4,000 or upon any part of them. The object in reporting this miracle lies not in the reaction of the multitude, as this was the case in the other miracle, but in the deed of Jesus himself, in his great compassion and in What that compassion caused him to do for so many hungry stomachs. This is one of the cues Which is helpful for the preacher.

## Homiletical Aid

First the soul's need, — righteousness and the Kingdom. Next the body's need, — daily bread. The world seeks first the bread, and lets the soul take care of itself. But What about us and

### The Great Bread Question?

- I. How it arises.
  1. In the text the people remained with Jesus too long. With Jesus in their midst it was not much of a question at all. It would be well with us, if all that raised the question for us regarding bread were the result of our devotion to Jesus.

2. In the world it arises from selfishness. Economists use many learned terms concerning production and distribution, agriculture, manufacture and business. In a world where sin and selfishness rule, these evil forces may also cause us to hunger.
3. God's providence sends dearth in judgment on men and this may affect also us. Our loyalty to the faith under divine providence may cause us lack of life's necessities.
4. Our one great refuge whenever the bread question arises for us is our compassionate Lord.

## II. How it is regarded.

1. The world regards it as the supreme and the essential question. Men devote their entire lives to multiplying earthly resources and neglect their souls altogether. The Rich Fool.
2. Many Christians place bread first, the needs of the soul second. So also they trust first of all their savings, their bank account, their skill in labor or in business, and secondly somewhat also the Lord.
3. The other miracle had taught the disciples to trust the compassion and the power of the Lord.

And Jesus fed the 4,000 as he had fed the 5,000. Heb. 13:5. "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." Ps. 37:25: "I have been young and now am old," etc. Ps. 145:15: "The eyes of all wait upon thee," etc. Matt. 6:26: "Are ye not much better than they?"

## III. How it is answered.

1. Only one answer for us who by faith are Christ's own: his tender compassion and his infinite power, exhibited in the miracle.
2. He taught us to pray to our Father in heaven for our daily bread, and from him comes every mouthful that we eat. We use our talents and our opportunities, but for our daily bread and for all our temporal needs our faith rests wholly on the Lord.

Luther's explanation of the First Article of the Creed and his explanation of the Fourth Petition of the Lord's Prayer. Our text leads us to consider

### **Our Daily Bread.**

- I. It comes from God.
  1. Consider how much food it takes to feed all the human beings in the world, say only for a day or for a year. Does all this food come from "Mother Nature," as our newspapers like to say?
  2. We need a miracle like the one in our text to open our eyes to the true source of all our bodily food: the compassion, the power of the Lord. Not one morsel of bread but what is his gift.
  3. Yes, men plant and sow, but God sends sunshine and rain and gives the increase. You work and earn, but God supplies health and strength and conditions in state and in society that call for your work.
- II. It should be received only with thanksgiving.
  1. God's own Son said grace before the great meal. So he did in the other miracle. Prayer sanctifies the food. Brute beasts, without rationality, plunge in and devour. We want food, but food as God's blessing, as Christ's disciples and God's children.
  2. To be unthankful is one of the greatest of sins. To receive food without grace is to call on God to withhold food and visit us with dire punishments. The infinite forbearance that feeds the unthankful. I do not want to put one morsel of food into my mouth accompanied by God's curse on my ungratefulness.

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### **The Lord Will Provide.**

- I. He has compassion on his people.
- II. His help is same and will not fail. His mercy endures for ever and there is no limit to his power. His means are inexhaustible.

III. He gives in overflowing measure.

M. Loy.

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After three days of preaching Jesus fed

**4,000**

- I. At one time  
Miraculously,  
With only seven cakes of bread  
And a few small fishes,
- II. In divine compassion,  
Lest any of them grow faint from hunger on the road,  
Showing how far his care extends,
- III. In divine omnipotence,  
The bread and the few fishes multiplying under his hands,  
At his mere will,  
Till all were more than fed, yet not beyond,
- IV. To proclaim his care for us,  
In a sign that once wrought stands as such for ever,  
And needs no repetition, only the infallible, inspired record  
For us in all our life, especially in our vicissitudes,
- V. To call forth our trust,  
In petitions,  
In thanksgiving and gratitude.

Note: The entire outline is one sentence.

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## **The Miraculous Feeding of the Four Thousand.**

I. There were only 4,000.

Not all Jews.

Not all the Gentiles.

The 4,000 enough. Do not act as if you personally had to be present at every miracle.

Through the 4,000 this miracle is for all of us.

II. They were fed only once.

Not every day, not three times a day.

The impression of that one feeding was enough.

How many miracles did it take to reveal the wondrous compassion and the omnipotence of Jesus?

III. They received only bread and fish.

That is all that Jesus and his disciples had.

Jesus has given much more to many of us.

We deserve none of his gifts.

It is a shame to disregard his care and his bounty and to act as if we had a right to demand.

IV. But they should have carried the Savior away with them.

In faith and trust as the Helper in all their needs of body and of soul.

Coupled with gratitude and undying devotion.

This faith and gratitude shall fill also our hearts.

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An introduction and theme by J. A. Dell:

No more miracles?

Miracle — something wonderful, supernatural. The working of a power beyond our understanding. He who denies miracles must deny God. He who believes in God finds miracles commonplace.

The miracle of our wheat fields. Go out and look. Let me place in every field for your imagination to behold the Man of Galilee, hands outstretched in blessing, and saying:

**I Have Compassion on the Multitude.**

# The Eighth Sunday After Trinity.

## Matt. 7:15-23

### Good Trees

The Life of the Saved, which constitutes the theme of this sub-cycle, may be viewed from various angles. The saved possess the true righteousness and are in the Kingdom (the Sixth Sunday after Trinity). The saved receive their daily bread and have no cause for worry (the Seventh Sunday after Trinity). The Eighth Sunday shows us the saved as good trees, the Ninth as faithful stewards, the Tenth as men who heed the warning of Jerusalem, and the Eleventh as people who repent and are not self-righteous. The sequence is all that one could desire. When I give the present text the heading “Good Trees,” I do so for the sake of simplicity. I could also say: The Fruits are Decisive; or: Saying “Lord, Lord!” is not Enough. But these variations already take us into the selection of sermon themes.

Jesus has just said that we should enter the narrow and never the wide portal. There always have been and always will be false teachers who will misdirect us and send us through the wide instead of through the narrow portal. **“Beware of false prophets, such as come to you in garments of sheep, but within they are rapacious wolves.”** With προσέχετε supply τὸν νοῦν; the present tense denotes a course of conduct: “ever hold the mind away from.” The New Testament knows of two kinds of prophets: such as receive direct revelations from God, like the apostles, and on a lower level such men as Agabus; and such as receive the revelation through these major prophets, pass it on to others, elucidate and expound it. The latter class is all that we now have, namely preachers and teachers. The former class of prophets are able to say: “The Lord himself told us,” the latter class: “The Scriptures, Moses and the prophets, Jesus and the apostles tell us.”

Now we see what “pseudo-prophets” are. The Old Testament knew about prophets who boldly asserted that God had spoken to them and had given them a message, when he had done nothing of the kind. Thank God that today we have no prophets of this kind! But, we are sorry to confess that the number of the false prophets who are preachers and teachers is more than legion. Many are utterly false: they claim that none of the fundamental doctrines of the Gospel are found in the Scriptures, they pervert or deny all of them, and yet claim before the whole world that they, they alone, are God’s true prophets. Such were the scribes, the Pharisees, and the Sadducees in the days of Jesus. Claiming to follow the truly scientific and historical method of interpretation, certain writers insist that Jesus referred only to these false Jewish teachers; and these writers demand that when an application of this word of Jesus is made we must refer only to men who in all respects are like these false Jews, i.e. to men who reject the Gospel *in toto*.

As regards the historical fact, Jesus did not speak the words of this Sermon and thus in particular this warning for his immediate hearers alone, but for his people of all future ages. Any contradiction of the Word of God, any deviation from that Word, when preached and taught as the Word of God, rends and tears and helps to destroy the soul. To the extent that any man preaches what is false as if it were God’s word he is a false prophet of whom Jesus bids us beware.

One of the most dangerous notions is the idea that if a man in some way still preaches Christ, he is not a false prophet, although he may preach a hundred falsehoods besides his Christ. He who surrenders the outer forts is near surrendering the central citadel. Doctrines form a living whole, — pervert one doctrine and the perversion will work like a cancer and will eat not only into other doctrines, but even into the center of them all. A little leaven leavens the entire lump. We need not labor the point. We see erring churches all around us. How did they sink to this level of modernism? By fraternizing with men who denied a part or all of Christian truth.

Jesus says: “such as come to you,” — God and Christ never sent them. Much has been written on the phrase “in garments of sheep,” and this much of it is sound: these false prophets, who in reality are fierce wolves, pretend to be gentle, harmless sheep. The notion that in Old Testament days prophets wore sheep pelts cannot be substantiated. The Baptist was a

prophet, but wore a garment of camel's hair. "The garments of sheep" refers to all that sheep have on, and thus to the appearance of sheep in contrast to the reality, "rapacious wolves," in Acts 20:29 called "grievous wolves," akin to the wolf mentioned in John 10:12. Sometimes the question of sincerity is raised: these pseudo-prophets mean to preach the right thing, ergo they are not to be condemned. Yet Jesus does condemn them, denouncing them as "rapacious wolves." Was Jesus wrong? is he to be condemned? When a man in all sincerity gives me poison in place of medicine, shall I take the poison? If I heed false advice, though it be ever so sincere, and place my money into an insolvent bank, the sincerity of the advice will not restore my money. I do not reach my destination when I am most sincerely pointed to the wrong road. But such mistaken sincerity is really inexcusable, for the truth is so readily available. When men today teach and preach the untruth on any matter pertaining to the soul, they stand doubly condemned.

**[16] "From their fruits you shall recognize them. Do people gather ripe grapes from briars, or figs from thistles?"** What is meant by the "fruits" by which we are to recognize the coming pseudo-prophets? Note that Jesus is speaking for all future time, even down to you and to me. Some say, their doctrines; others, their works; still others, both their doctrines and their works. The answer is Is. 8:20; 1 John 4:1; Heb. 13:9; 2 John 9 and 11; Matt. 15:9; Titus 1:10-12. The fruits of the prophets are their teachings, their doctrines. Their personal works cannot be used as a criterion for recognizing them. Consider 24:24; Deut. 13:1-3. True prophets may commit sins, false prophets may present a great display of holiness (garments of sheep). We are pointed to something more certain than works, namely to the doctrine. Why is this so certain? Because we are able to judge every doctrine by means of the written Word.

No; sweet, ripe clusters of grapes are not plucked from briars, nor luscious figs from thistles. These illustrations are humorous. Who would go out into a briar patch to cut grapes, or into a thistle patch to gather figs? Grapes and figs picture true spiritual food, Which grows on the Word of God alone, not on the briars and on the thistle-stalks of man's own wisdom. Every man who presents false doctrine is to that extent a briar and a thistle. Who objects to this interpretation? They who mean to teach some doctrine in conflict with Scripture.

**[17] “Thus every good tree produces excellent fruits, but every worthless tree produces wicked fruits. [18] A good tree cannot produce wicked fruits, nor a worthless tree produce excellent fruits.”**

The statements are axiomatic and are couched in words that place their meaning beyond dispute. The fruits tell the story: the simple fact is that every good tree bears excellent fruits, but every worthless tree wicked fruits. By using *καλός*, “excellent,” and *πονηρός*, “wicked,” Jesus touches the reality and thus at once reveals what he means. Note that he is not speaking of the condition in which a tree may be, the one sound and healthy, the other diseased, decaying. Our versions suggest this idea when they translate: “corrupt tree.” It has rightly been asked: “Do rotten (*faule*) fish enter a net? do rotten trees bear fruit at all?” *Σαπρός* is used with reference to fish in 13:48, and simply means worthless. It is the kind of a tree that determines the nature of its fruit, not the condition the tree may be in.

[18] It is actually impossible for a tree to bear fruit contrary to its nature. Therefore, look at the fruit and you are able to tell the kind of tree from which it came. This applies to all prophets, true and false, in fact, it applies to all men. Since the specific work of prophets is their preaching and teaching, their specific fruit is their doctrine, which is either excellent (in accord with the Word) or wicked (in contradiction to the Word). Applied to men in general the fruits are either excellent works (in accord with the Word) or wicked (in conflict with the Word).

[19] The kind of a tree decides the fate of the tree. **“Every tree not producing excellent fruit is cut down and is thrown into the fire.”** You might say that the wood of a tree like this is used for various purposes, and, of course, you would be quite right in a number of cases. This, however, is figurative language and deals with the cases in which such trees are burned up, for the figure intends to point to the fires of hell. “Not producing excellent fruit” = producing wicked fruit. It is by no means an innocent matter to preach false doctrine, and thus not an innocent matter to follow and heed false preachers. The warning of Jesus is very plain. You will again think of prophets who teach only some falseness, — What about them? Their fate is recorded in 1 Cor. 3:12-15, and I do not want to be counted among them.

[20] **“Therefore from their fruits you shall recognize them,”** both prophets and men, keeping away from false prophets and not being found among the men of their following. Ἀπαγε draws a conclusion, the vs adding emphasis. Jesus repeats the criterion by which we are to be guided, that we may not end among the fire-wood.

[21] The reference to the final judgment is now elaborated. **“Not every one saying to me: ‘Lord, Lord!’ shall go into the Kingdom of the heavens, but the one doing the will of my Father in the heavens.”** Jesus is speaking about the future, about all the coming preachers and church members who are prodigal with their reverent addresses: “Lord, Lord!” and imagine that this fervency is enough to admit them into the Kingdom here on earth and in heaven above. The Kingdom is explained in Matt. 21:5, the First Sunday in Advent; John 3:3, the Trinity Festival. Note the duplication in Scripture: “Lord, Lord!” “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem!” “Martha, Martha!” “O Absalom, my son, my son!” and feel the emotions involved. Here are men who have for a long time been unctuously addressing Jesus as “Lord,” claiming that he is that for them and that they belong to him and are surely acknowledged by him as his own. But lo, when the portals of the Kingdom are thrown wide open on judgment day, they are barred out.

To say “Lord, Lord!” is not wrong; it is not enough. They go into the portals who are doing the will of the heavenly Father. We need not dispute about what this will is: it is contrition, faith, and obedience in a new life. This saving will is not done by our unaided strength, but wholly by the grace of the Father in his Son and through the Holy Spirit. The means is the Word. Because the Word is the means, every falsification of the Word is such a deadly and damnable thing. “Beware of pseudo-prophets!” Jesus says: “my Father.” He never combines himself with his disciples so as to say: “our Father.” The difference is marked in John 20:17. He is the essential Son, we are only, adopted sons and children. See also “my Father” in Luke 2:49, the First Sunday after Epiphany.

The statement of Jesus does not contrast words and deeds, for all doers of the will also call Jesus “Lord.” A grave error conceives doing the will as doing good works. But see John 6:29:39-40; 1 John 3:23. No work-righteousness passes muster on judgment day. Those who love the taste of a dose of heterodoxy in their theology and their church work and practice, love to make the saying of “Lord, Lord!” refer to orthodoxy, generally

branded as “dead orthodoxy.” Jesus is also not contrasting religious hypocrisy and religious sincerity.

[22] We see what Jesus means when he continues: **“Many will say to me in that day: ‘Lord, Lord! did we not prophesy in thy name, and in thy name throw out devils, and in thy name perform many works of power?’ [23] And then will I confess to them: ‘Not at any time did I acknowledge you. Be withdrawing from me, you that work the lawlessness!’”**

They will cry: “Lord, Lord!” even at the final judgment. No, they do not come with words merely, they offer the Lord also wonderful deeds, all of them done “in thy name,” as they claim, in this name “Lord.” On the phrase “in the name” see Matt. 21:9, the First Sunday in Advent; John 16:23, Rogate. The claim, however, is spurious, for all false prophets and their followers use “the Name” only as sheep’s clothing. All false doctrines are put forth “in the name of the Lord.” That is the worst feature of their falseness, — forging the Lord’s name to doctrines.

Jesus tells us that they will do miracles. But you must compare 24:24 with 2 Thess. 2:9-12: “lying wonders.” Pseudo-prophets perform only pseudo-wonders. Therefore the Lord does not dispute with them in regard to what they actually wrought, whether a demon was foolish enough to let them drive him out or not, whether their many δυνάμεις were “power works” in the sense of works wrought by God’s omnipotent power or not. No apparent miracle, only the Word decides who a true prophet is. Deut. 13:1-3. When Jesus himself points to his miracles in John 10:36 etc., he does so only as corroborating his Word.

[23] Ὁμολογεῖν = *unumvunden erklæren*, to make a frank and full statement; ὅτι is the *recitativum*, hence not to be translated, it is like our quotation marks. “Not at any time did I acknowledge you,” ἔγνωσεν in the full intensive sense: *noscere cum affectu et effectu*, the knowing which recognizes with an appropriative affect and effect. Jesus never knew them as his own. Hence in the final judgment he orders them away in words taken from Ps. 6:8: “Be withdrawing from me, you that work the lawlessness!” In the final judgment the works are used as the decisive evidence. One may ask how these persons who so prodigally used the Lord’s name and who did so many great deeds in his name can be called

workers of the lawlessness. The answer is that no greater lawlessness can be wrought than to call Jesus “Lord, Lord” when he is not truly apprehended by faith as Lord, and to pretend that works are done “in his name” when his name is not in the hearts that profess to serve him by such works. Not everything that men please to do “for the church,” “for the Lord,” “to build the Kingdom” is accepted by him.

Note well that Jesus here calls himself the Judge at the last day: “I confess to them: Be withdrawing from me!” He reveals his deity when he speaks of “my Father.” After our text follows the conclusion of the Sermon.

## **Homiletical Aid**

The burden of this text is that we must all be

### **Good Trees,**

preacher as well as members of the congregation, the preacher preaching the pure Word of God as a true prophet, and he and all his members doing the will of the Father by believing and by living in accord with that Word.

### ***Worthless Trees,***

Whether preachers or members of the congregation, are cut down and end as fire-wood. This means that they are cast into hell. It is therefore most important that we should heed the Lord’s warning instruction, and that we should know just what

### **Good Trees**

are and how they are distinguished from worthless trees by

#### **I. Their nature, which is recognized by**

It certainly is a piece of folly to expect excellent fruit from a tree whose nature is worthless or good-for-nothing. An orchardist and even one of us who plants a fruit tree in his lot is careful to obtain a tree whose nature is good. Yet the nature of a tree cannot be seen or

recognized by the eye. It is hidden in the cells of the tree, and thus a person may be badly deceived, planting what he thinks is a good tree when in reality the tree he plants is bad. Yet the double fact stands, and none of us expects it ever to be altered: “A good tree” etc. v. 18.

All this we know, and we reckon with it in life. It is just as true with regard to men, and yet here we often act as if it were not true, as if men, whose nature is inwardly unchanged can please God and be accepted in the final judgment.

## II. Their fruit, a fact which applies to

The fruit tells what the tree is. Expand this to other plants. “Do men gather grapes of thorns?” etc. You would laugh at people who try to do this. You know that trees, shrubs, vines, etc., are known by the fruits they bear. A thistle-bush will invariably bear thistle blooms and seed; only a fig tree bears figs. The axiom is not even questioned: “By their fruits” etc., v. 20.

The fruits decide for you and for me in judging ourselves and likewise for others whom we are to judge. But Jesus has to tell us these self-evident facts, he even has to repeat them, because so many times when it comes to ourselves we badly disregard them.

## III. True Preachers and then also to

Make the right application to prophets. The two kinds, the ones here meant: the preachers and teachers, your own preacher, those in other churches. Jesus warns us about false prophets. They look as innocent as sheep. Their doctrine gives them away: “ravens wolves.” Every bit of false doctrine rends and tears. Nothing is so dangerous for the soul. When will we learn that, and when will we flee from these wolves? Their use of holy, scriptural words, their show of piety, their high claims should never deceive us. Their fruits tell what their true nature is.

We want only true prophets, who will not deviate an inch from the Word of God to please any man. Such a preacher we should prize. He will heal our soul and will lead it aright.

## IV. True church members.

But this test applies to all of us. Our fruit as church members is the doctrine which we believe and confess and according to which we live. Jesus is the infallible Judge. Do we at the last day want to be among those in sheep's clothing who cried so often: "Lord, Lord!" but did not heed this Lord's Word; who perhaps preached, or who helped the preachers do wonderful works, and yet learn at last that he never knew them as his own and orders them away from himself for ever?

Now is the time for you to examine the kind of preaching to which you are listening. Is the Gospel preached truly, fully? Are some parts left out or changed to please men? Etc. Are you confessing this Gospel, all of it, with all your heart, and does your life show it?

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Sham Christians — genuine Christians. Never are the two the same. The Lord knows as his own only the latter.

### **The Christian Must Ever Distinguish. For**

I. Not every preacher is a true preacher.

The Jewish scribes and rabbis were not, they falsified the Word.

Today thousands of preachers do the same and are false prophets.

Even if not totally false, wherein they are false they rend and tear like wolves.

Sheep's clothing must not deceive us, biblical language, pious airs, zeal and energy.

The pietists tried to look into the preacher's heart, but the true criterion which is also easy to apply is doctrine — does the man preach the Gospel, the whole Gospel, and nothing but the Gospel?

II. Not every confessor is a true confessor.

Many say "Lord, Lord," but in their hearts do not embrace and submit to this Lord.

Our fine foliage does not make us good trees. Briars and thistles do not supply the sweet grape clusters and luscious figs the Lord desires.

Only one confession must we make and substantiate with our lives, the confession of the Gospel in all its precious doctrines. Rom. 10:9-10.

III. Not every doer is a true doer.

Many doers even perform astounding works, doing them even in the Lord's name. But the Lord does not as much as look at them or in the least accept them at the final judgment.

What is wrong with so much doing? It is the doing preached by the false prophets, not the fruit of genuine faith.

Not for any doing or saying "Lord, Lord" shall we be accepted, but only for what this Lord has done for us. This we must embrace by faith and show that we have done so by what we do.

Distinguish lest you make a fatal mistake!

Note: The three parts are borrowed from Nebe.

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### **Sheep's Clothing.**

I. A terror in the pulpit.

Hiding the wolf's fangs.

Misleading unsuspecting souls.

Omitting part of the Word.

Perverting other parts.

All error rends, destroys.

True preachers: The whole Word and nothing but the Word.

II. A curse in the pew.

Thorns and thistles, corrupt trees.

Saying: "Lord Lord!" — speaking the language of Canaan but remaining Canaanites.

Even, perhaps, doing great works.

What are the true works?

The final verdict.

Our verdict must be Matt. 25:30.

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The saved must ever be warned, instructed, and pointed to the final judgment. All this Jesus does in our text, in which he speaks to us as God's Son, our eternal Lord, and our final Judge.

### **Keeping the Saved Saved.**

#### I. Warning them.

“Beware of false prophets!”

Ravens wolves — mortal danger.

Sheep's clothing — deadly deception.

Indifferentism regarding doctrine.

Unionism in pulpit and at altar.

The Word, the whole Word and nothing but the Word.

This Word alone keeps the saved safe.

#### II. Instructing them.

“Ye shall know them by their fruits.”

Where do we get grapes and figs?

What trees alone bear good fruit?

What is done with trees that bear bad fruit?

The preacher's fruit, his sermons — no false doctrine of men.

The hearer's fruit, his faith, confession, and life — no mere lip confession (v. 21), no hypocrisy, etc.

By hearing the Word alone, believing, confessing, obeying it alone  
the saved are kept safe.

III. Prophesying to them.

“Many will say — I will profess to them.”

The Judge himself tells of the last judgment.

The vain confession “Lord, Lord” of the lips only.

Grand works disregarded by the Judge.,

The confession we must make.

The works we must bring.

The verdict we want, Matt. 25:31.

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Quite a few sermons have been preached on the theme: **Beware of False Prophets**. These deal With errorists and generally wander away from the line of thought of this subcycle.

# The Ninth Sunday After Trinity.

## Luke 16:1-9

### Faithful Stewards

Good trees bearing good spiritual fruit in the preceding text, now followed by Faithful Stewards of our earthly possessions.

This text is considered difficult, yet without reason. At the end its meaning for us is stated by Jesus himself in literal language. In a worldly way this man was wise; in the true spiritual way we are to be wise. By his shrewd crookedness the unrighteous steward made himself friends who were glad to receive him after he? was" deposed; by faithful stewardship of our earthly possessions we are to assure our reception in heaven. Do not fear the idea of work-righteousness, as though one might buy his way into heaven. Only a believer can be a faithful steward. But he must be a faithful steward in order to evidence his faith. If he cheats his Lord by unfaithfulness he only demonstrates that he has no faith, whether at a previous time he ever had it or not.

The world should teach us that money is not such an innocent matter even for the world. Not a few are behind the bars because of money, and, according to popular consent, a few more should be there. So also money has sent not a few church members to the eternal prison. In the case of Judas the amount was pitifully small. Money should be a blessing to us, not a curse, an aid to heaven, not an aid to speed us on into hell.

**[1] Moreover, he went on to say also to the disciples: "A rich man there was who had a steward. And this fellow was denounced to him as squandering his possessions."**

Note the place which this parable occupies in the series of parables in chapters 15 and 16. A few simple words sketch the situation. A man has a

large oil and grain business, buying up and selling the olive oil of the country and the grain of the farmers. He deals in wholesale quantities. He employs a general manager. Οὗτος is derogatory; διαβάλλω picturesque: to throw something through a man, “to denounce.” The fellow was denounced to the owner as one wasting his possessions. It is a mistake to think that ὡς implies that the denunciation was not true; the word may introduce true as well as doubtful allegations. In the present case the charge was only too true, — this general manager has not even the shadow of a defense. Who made the denunciation, from what motives, and how the possessions were dissipated to the loss of the owner, are questions immaterial to the point of the parable and should thus not be raised or answered.

[2] **“And having called him he said to him: ‘How do I hear this of thee! Give due account of thy stewardship, for thou canst no longer be steward.’”** At once the owner calls in his manager, exclaims in indignation at what he hears, demands an accounting, and discharges the rascal. Ti is adverbial: “how” do I hear, not “what.” The employer is asking no questions. The guilt is beyond question, even as no defense is attempted. In ἄποδος the ἀπό suggests the idea of giving “due” account.

[3] **“But the steward said to himself: ‘What shall I do, seeing that my lord is taking the stewardship away from me? To dig I have not strength, to beg I am ashamed. [4] I got what I will do, in order that when I shall be discharged from the stewardship they may receive me into their own houses.’”**

As crooked as the man is regarding his master, so honest he is regarding himself. Jesus states his thoughts fully. If he is to do anything, he must do it at once. In τί ποιήσω; we have either the future indicative, or we have the deliberative aorist subjunctive, and ὅτι is to be taken in the consecutive sense: “seeing that” etc. “To dig” = to work as a common field hand, — for this the steward has no strength, which cancels that idea. “To beg” he who has held so high a position until this time is frankly ashamed. Are these the only alternatives? No.

[4] It is hard to render the aorist ἔγγων. The aorist says that just this past moment he arrived at the knowledge on which he is determined to act, hence I venture to render: “I got what I will do.” He does not state at what plan he has just arrived; the plan is evident from his action. He means to

have plenty of homes open to him when he is turned out of office. The margin of time is brief indeed, but this steward finds it long enough.

**[5] “And having called to him each one of the debtors of his lord, he went on to say to the first: ‘How much dost thou owe to my lord?’ And he said: ‘A hundred bath of oil.’ And he said to him: ‘Take thy writing, and having sat down quickly write fifty.’ [7] Thereupon he’ said to another: ‘And thou, how much owest thou?’ And he said: ‘A hundred cor of wheat.’ He says to him: ‘Take thy writing and write eighty.’”**

The owner has many debtors. The steward deals with each one privately without a witness being present. Two debtors suffice as illustrations, like two witnesses in court.

[6] The first owes a hundred bath of oil. A “bath” is an old Hebrew measure holding between eight and nine gallons. This man owes the owner between 800 and 900 gallons of olive oil. The debtor has turned in to the manager a receipt for this much oil, certifying that so much has been duly delivered unto him by the manager. Accompanying the receipt the debtor has turned in also his note for the amount of money due for this quantity of oil. The debtor’s signature is on both of these documents. The manager takes them out of his safe, hands them back to this debtor, and tells him to write a new receipt and a new note for only fifty bath. The manager thus makes a deliberate present of 400 or 450 gallons of oil to this debtor. The owner is robbed, but this is no new thing for the manager who has wasted the owner’s goods before. We see what his scheme is: he is turning his lord’s debtors into debtors to himself. He is putting them under heavy obligation to himself, obligations on which he presently hopes to cash in. As the manager now closing the books he still has power to have the receipts and the notes altered.

[7] With the next man he deals in the same way; and so on with the rest. The illegal acts are done in a perfectly legal way, in the way in which books and accounts are still falsified with no one being the wiser. A “cor” of wheat= ten bushels, a 100 cor a 1,000 bushels. The receipt and the note for this amount were destroyed, and a receipt and a note substituted which named eighty cor. It is asked, Why a reduction in the one case from one hundred to fifty and in the other case from one hundred to eighty? The answer is not that the manager knew each man and gauged the reductions

accordingly. We should not judge by the quantities, but by the money value. Donating fifty bath of oil may have been equal to donating twenty cor of wheat. No verification can be made, because the prices of commodities fluctuated as much in ancient as they do in modern times.

[8] So this rascally manager shrewdly bought friends for himself with the owner's property. **“And the lord praised the steward of unrighteousness because he acted shrewdly, — because the sons of this eon are shrewder beyond the sons of light in their own generation.”** It is the lord of this steward who praised the shrewdness of this steward for feathering his nest as he did. He calls him “the steward of the unrighteousness,” the qualitative genitive being stronger than an adjective would be: marked by the unrighteousness of which he was flagrantly guilty. The entire parable is a genuine piece of worldliness. Hence one worldly man (the owner) appreciates the shrewdness of another worldly man (the steward).

Jesus himself tells us this when he adds to the parable the observation that the sons of this eon are shrewder beyond the sons of the light in their generation. Φρόνιμος = smart, *klug*, shrewd. This is not said to fault the sons of the light, as is often thought. There is here no idea that we too ought to be as smart as the worldlings in their generations. We simply could not be and remain “the sons of the light.” Εἰς = “in (static) or for their own generation” and applies to both the sons of this eon and the sons of the light, yet not in a double sense: the sons of this eon in their generation, as worldlings — the sons of the light in their opposite generation as spiritual people. The phrase means: in or for their own generation, while they live here on earth. The fact is decidedly obvious. They who live for this eon only are able to do many things which they who have the true light cannot do. They can set conscience aside and in legal ways can circumvent law. How many shady deals are executed in the world today! You and I recoil from such deeds. Yes, these worldlings are smarter than we are. Jesus tells us so at this point in the parable to make it clear that the entire parable and all of the men pictured in it are drawn from the ungodly world.

“The sons of this eon” are they whose whole standing is centered only in this world. An eon is a long period of time, but always one marked by what transpires in it: “this eon”= this vast world age marked by sin and wickedness. Its opposite is ὁ αἰὼν μέλλων, “the eon about to come,” the

heavenly world-age. “The sons of this eon” and “the sons of the light” do not seem to be opposites, yet they are. “this eon” is one of total spiritual darkness, and the Christians possess the light of the saving Gospel truth. Observe that Jesus does not say “children,” but “sons,” and that sons refers to maturity, to conscious and even legal standing. The genitives are qualitative just as in the expression “the steward of the unrighteousness.”

[9] To avoid the many wrong and faulty interpretations of this parable note three points: 1) the interpretation must be derived from the whole parable, and not from its details; 2) the interpretation is confined to the disciples, even as v. 1 states; not until one by grace becomes a son of the light can this parable apply to him; 3) the interpretation rests on one point, on the picture of the unjust steward considered as a unit.

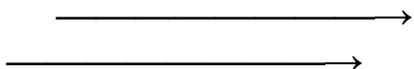
The interpretation is made by means of the direct opposite. Moreover, this opposite is presented in its full development. The picture of “the unrighteousness” of the sons of this eon is complete. Thus we interpret: the fully developed unrighteousness we see in this man as regards the unrighteous mammon is to help us to see, and inspire us to attain, the complete opposite, the fully developed righteousness with which we are to handle this unrighteous mammon here on earth.

Many imagine that φρόνιμος forms the *tertium* or the pivotal term: instead of *die weltliche Klugheit* we are to attain the *geistliche Klugheit*. But in his own elucidation Jesus does not use the word. The keywords are: the steward of “the unrighteousness”; the mammon of “the unrighteousness”; and in the verses that follow our text three times the word ἄδικος, “unrighteous,” and three times its opposite πιστός, “faithful,” “trustworthy,” and also the verb πιστεύειν, “to entrust.” For me these terms decide the question regarding the point of the parable.

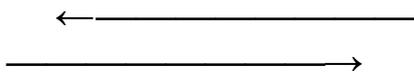
**“And I myself, to you I say: ‘Make for yourselves friends by the mammon of the unrighteousness, in order that when it gives out they may receive you into the eternal tents.’”** At this point, and not before, Jesus begins his interpretation and this he places in the form of an admonition. The preamble says more than the more usual expression of authority: “I say to you”; for both pronouns are emphatic: I as your Lord say to you as my disciples. Jesus could not admonish other men as he did his disciples. They are to regard this unrighteous steward and are to do the

same thing he did to a certain point which makes all that we do the direct opposite of what he did.

The parallel is close, and this makes the one point in opposition stand out the more boldly. He was a steward — we too; he was entrusted with property and values — we too; these were the mammon of unrighteousness — in our case too; he makes friends with it — we too; he comes to an end — we too. Up to this point the two lines run entirely parallel:



But now, in a flash, by means of the final phrase, our line is completely reversed and made to run in the opposite direction: “into the eternal tents.” The sons of this eon are intended only for temporal transient houses; the sons of the light are intended for an eternal home. This reverses everything, so that the lines run thus:



The one line is motivated by unrighteousness, the other line by righteousness.

“The mammon of the unrighteousness” again has a qualitative genitive;  $\mu\alpha\mu\omega\nu\tilde{\alpha}$  is the Doric genitive, and the Greek spells the word with two, not with three, *ms*. The derivation is lost. We know only that no idol is referred to and that the word in a manner personifies earthly possessions, money, etc. It is called “the mammon of the unrighteousness” not merely because it tends in the direction of unrighteousness, but because it is made to serve the unrighteousness as it passes from one owner to another in this sinful world. Look at the money in your own hand, — how many unrighteous and wrong purchases has it already made, and how many will it yet make after leaving your hand? The genitive characterizes mammon correctly.

Who are these friends who are to receive us into the eternal tents? I dismiss the idea of angels and of the poor whom we help. These have not the authority to receive into heaven. As for the poor, they may outlive us, some of them may not even get to heaven.  $\Delta\acute{\epsilon}\chi\omicron\mu\alpha\iota$  means “to receive,” not

merely “to welcome” at the door of heaven. The meaning of the text is made altogether too narrow when our using the unrighteous mammon righteously is restricted to bestowing alms upon the poor. I think of Matt. 25:40: whatever we do for the very least of our brethren we do for Christ, who will receive us. He and his Father have the authority to admit into heaven. They are our friends when we are their faithful stewards.

Why did Jesus use the expression: “the eternal tents”? He, of course, referred to heaven. Perhaps the answer is that “tents” is to remind us of the transitoriness of the worldling’s homes which are all he is able to secure for himself here on earth; for unrighteous as he is, he cares nothing for a place beyond. Hence the paradoxical expression “eternal tents” for the everlasting home of the blessed. All other “tents” remain only for a time, really for only a very short time; but these are tents that remain for ever.

## **Homiletical Aid**

You can tell a Christian by the way in which he handles his money and his property. In the matter of money the sons of this world and the sons of the light differ most markedly. The former look out, shrewdly though it may be, for a home in this world; the latter ever make sure that they may not lose their home in heaven. Whereas worldlings are faithless and unjust stewards, we Christians are and ever must be

### **Faithful Stewards.**

- I. In many respects so like the faithless steward in Christ’s parable.
  1. Like he, we are only stewards, who do not own, but only manage the business.
  2. If we forget it, it will be sharply brought home to us, as it was to the unjust steward.
  3. The mammon of unrighteousness is placed into our trust. Connected with many unrighteous dealings. Revealing that many are miserable, unrighteous stewards. Yet the test for us all is that we be faithful stewards.

4. Like the unjust steward our trust terminates. Sooner or later the accounting must be made. The books closed in regard to our dealings.
- II. In the vital respect totally unlike the faithless steward of Christ's parable.
1. All he did and all he knew how to do in his worldly shrewdness was to make friends for himself to provide him a home in this life. He paid no attention to a heavenly home and to the way to reach that home.
  2. We faithful stewards have our hearts fixed on the eternal tents. We want Christ and our heavenly Father to be our friends to receive us into heaven. We know how to please them also with our money. We have a heart also for the least of Christ's brethren. We spend and invest for spiritual interests. The transient, temporal mammon we exchange for abiding values.

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I find so many outlines and sermons on the wisdom of the unjust steward, bidding us to copy this wisdom. Nebe has nine outlines, every one on this order. Thus: "The Child of this World a Master in Wisdom." — yet the unjust steward was a big fool for losing his position in the way in which he did, and that folly he never made good. It was smart to cheat his lord in the way in which he did just before he closed his books, and his lord acknowledged it; but we are not to copy that final trick, we are to be just stewards from start to finish, keeping Jesus and his Father as our constant friends, and thus entering our eternal home. So I refrain from extolling this rascal's "wisdom," — the word should be "shrewdness" or "sharp dealing," and I decline to hold up the worldling as a model for the Christian.

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Stoecker has this simple outline:

### **The Use of Earthly Wealth.**

- I. The bad use and its curse.

## II. The right use and its blessing.

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The unjust steward is often held up as a model that we should follow when we note the way in which he saved himself from pauperism when he was discharged. But the Lord holds this unjust steward up to us as a warning example that we may do the opposite of what he did in his stewardship. So I preach to you on

### **The Follies of the Unjust Steward.**

1. He wasted his lord's goods.

What a piece of folly for a man who is only a steward and is accountable for the goods entrusted to him.

The true wisdom is to administer the goods according to the will and for the interest of the owner. Remember that, you stewards!

2. He was thrown out of his stewardship.

What a piece of folly to lose a high position of trust like that, and to face the alternative of digging or begging, and then deciding on more rascality!

Nay ours shall be the faithful administration which will not only let us remain in our stewardship, but will induce our Lord to place us in still higher positions of trust.

Remember that, you stewards!

3. He ended with a deal more crooked than ever.

What utter folly to have one's career end in such a wretched, conscienceless way! What folly to crown wastefulness with plain criminality, and to have nothing but that to look back upon! And what did he get out of it at last? Friends that have to be bought with a crooked price are not very stable friends.

Remember that, you stewards!

4. He missed the min thing in life.

What folly to look only for a berth in this life and for earthly friends to provide it, and to forget the two friends in heaven and the eternal tents!

Our heavenly Lord, who calls us as stewards shall ever be before our eyes. Him shall our money serve, not the devil, the world and the flesh. Happy shall be our accounting at last.

Remember this too, you stewards!

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### **The Christian's Relation to his Earthly Goods.**

I. He is not to misuse them.

Not to waste them (v. 1b) for the devil, the world and the flesh.

Nor to misappropriate them so as to secure himself merely for this life.

II. He is to deal honestly with them.

According to the trust of his stewardship, in good works, in serving Christ and the Father.

So as to merit the Lord's commendation and so as to be received into the eternal tents.

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Let not money control you. Do you control your money.

### **The Mammon of Unrighteousness.**

I. Let not the mammon of unrighteousness make us unrighteous stewards.

To waste and to misapply, instead of being true to our Lord.

To take from our Lord in order to make only earthly friends for mere temporal advantages.

II. But as the sons of light let us make ourselves heavenly friends with the mammon of unrighteousness.

Doing the will of Christ and the Father with our money in never neglecting our soul's interests or the bodily and spiritual interests of others.

Thus getting the most out of our money in the light of the Word, and received at last into our eternal home.

# **The Tenth Sunday After Trinity.**

## **Luke 19:41 -48**

### **Duly Warned**

For the saved God has set a warning that is ever to be before their eyes to keep them true and faithful in their life. In fact, the warning is intended for the entire world, if only men would see it and think a bit about its phenomenal nature. This warning does not consist only in the destruction of Jerusalem, but in this fearful destruction and in what has followed it to the present day, — the Jews, for nearly 2,000 years a people without a homeland, scattered over the entire world, with no government, no capital, no central authority, mixed among all the other nations, speaking all their languages, yet never absorbed by these other nations, remaining Jews, and, where numerous enough, often becoming an irritant, drawing hostile attention to themselves, and raising the Semitic question.

All that we thus summarize becomes the more significant when we consider the Ten Tribes. They, too, were deported, they, too, never returned to their homeland, but they were absorbed, completely absorbed by their pagan conquerors. Not even a trace of them is left. We now speak of them as the Lost Ten Tribes. Why did the other two tribes not suffer a similar fate? There is only one answer to the phenomenon which the Jews have become. God's curse is upon this obdurate nation which today rejects Jesus Christ as viciously as ever, although he is great David's greater Son. God's judgment has placed them in the world as a miracle of judgment for all time. Jesus said: "Verily I say unto you: This generation shall not pass away, till all be fulfilled," Luke 21:32, the Second Sunday in Advent. The prophecy is now in process of fulfillment.

Chiliasts of various types offer the argument that God is merely preserving the Jews because he has wonderful plans regarding them. When

the millennium arrives all the Jews will be converted and will become the head of all Christendom during the millennial age. Palestine and Jerusalem will become the great center. The Temple will be rebuilt, even the Jewish Levitical sacrifices will be reestablished. The Jews will become the real spiritual aristocrats of Christendom. The very opposite is true. Despite all of their power and their influence and despite the strongest efforts for almost two millenniums Jerusalem has never returned to Jewish hands. Today it is a Mohammedan city. There is only one hope for the Jews, — repentance and faith in Christ. When this is genuine, but a generation or two will be required before the Jews are absorbed and will lose all trace of former Judaism.

Ever since Jerome chose the gospel for this Tenth Sunday after Trinity (then called the Fifth after Peter-Paul Day), this Sunday has retained its peculiar significance as the Sunday of the Jews. In the newer pericope systems this significance is generally retained.

[41] It is Palm Sunday. Jesus is riding an ass in a great and jubilant procession, which is just reaching the ridge of Mount Olivet. They now reach it, — looking across the valley of the Kidron, there lies the city in a glorious view, the walls, the Golden Gate, Mount Moriah, crowned with the Temple sparkling with its gold-coated roof, farther back and higher up Mount Sion with its palaces, and thus all the city. I write thus because I myself had this view, — of course, I saw only the modern city.

**And when he got near, on seeing the city he sobbed over it, [42] saying: “If thou hadst realized in this day, even thou, the things for peace, —! But now they were hid from thy eyes!”** The present participle in v. 37 shows Jesus drawing near to the ridge; the aorist verb ἤγγισεν used in v. 41 states that now he got near, now he reached the ridge. It was at this place that the deep emotion of Jesus was allowed to break forth.— Jesus sobbed, ἔκλαυσεν, burst out into audible weeping. These were no quiet, silent tears, but sobs that shook him.

[42] The entire tragedy of Jerusalem and of the Jewish nation overwhelmed the tender heart of the Savior. They who should have been the foremost of the saved were making themselves the foremost of the damned. He saw the judgment descending upon the wicked city just as clearly as he

saw and foretold in detail what was awaiting him in the city on the following Friday (18:32-33).

The first sentence he utters is broken; he utters only the protasis which is one of past unreality: “If thou hadst realized” etc. This broken sentence is thus itself a sob. “In this day” means in the time of Jesus when all the fulness of God’s grace was poured out upon Jerusalem. But Jerusalem simply would not realize, she only piled up her guilt more and more until it became mountain high and judgment had to descend. The addition of καὶ σὺ, “even thou,” brings out the full pathos. The things Jerusalem would not “know with effect and affect” (γινώσκω) were “the things for thy peace” which Jesus, as the last divine messenger, he even being God’s own Son, was bringing to her. Here were the pilgrims who had come from afar trying to give Jesus a proper welcome, but not the Sanhedrin of Jerusalem, not the inhabitants of Jerusalem.

Alas! “But now they were hid from thy eyes!” It is Calvinistic to attribute this hiding to the *goettliches Verhaengnis*, for here was God’s own Son still trying to reveal these saving things, the Gospel grace and the light which bring peace with God and eternal salvation. The passive ἐκρύβη, “were hid” is constative and historical, leaving the agent unnamed, but Matt. 23:37 makes Jerusalem itself the agent: “but ye would not.” The guilt of hiding the things that make for peace from the sinner’s eyes is ever and ever his own guilt.

**[43] “For days will come upon thee, and thine enemies will throw a rampart around thee, and will encircle thee, and will hem thee in on every side, [44] and will dash to the ground thee and thy children in thee, and will not leave stone upon stone in thee, in return for that thou didst not realize the season of thy visitation.”**

Rapidly are the days approaching which will bring the terrible siege and the total destruction of Jerusalem and with this destruction the extinction of the nation as a nation.

Because Jesus foretold the siege and the fall of Jerusalem with such exactness on this Sunday When he rode into the city, the critics tell us that Luke wrote these words after the fall of Jerusalem. The critical canon is that prophecy is impossible. We can only smile at this childish critical presumption. All that Jesus said here on the crest of Olivet amid the

acclaiming multitude came true literally to the last syllable. Titus besieged the city and hemmed it in so closely with a χάραξ, a palisaded wall, that a fearful famine set in and decimated the multitudes that had flocked into the city before it was invested. Read the account of Josephus who was with Titus. A large number of Jews were crucified. The palms from which the fronds were taken for the welcome of Jesus along the very road on which Jesus approached, were cut down for the siege, together with all other trees near the city.

[44] The city and her children (inhabitants) the enemies will dash to the ground, i.e. slaughter when the city falls. And the structures in the city they will utterly destroy, leaving not one stone upon another in its original position. The Temple itself, completed only two years before after decades of building, would end likewise: “There shall not be left here (in the Temple) one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down,” Matt. 24:2. Its sacredness did not save it, nor its fanatical admiration by the Jews. Shall any critic tell us that Matthew, too, put into Jesus’ mouth prophecy that he never uttered? We see now why some men are so set on denying the Verbal Inspiration of the Bible. They want to play with its words.

Ἀνθ’ ὧν = “in return for the things which.” We are compelled to translate with the singular: “in return for that thou” etc. Just retribution had to set in at last. The grace has limits. When the vessel is filled with obdurate unbelief it runs over. All the “and” clauses, the one tragically following another, even the first introduced by καί, show us this running over. The city would not recognize the season of its visitation. Ἐπισκοπή may be, as it is here, a gracious visitation, when God “looks in” with his grace on us, or a punitive visitation, when at last he looks in With punishment.

Remember, there comes a time when it is *too late, too late*. Let me refer you to a study of the tragic text in the *Eisenach Old Testament Selections*, Is. 63:7-16, p. 118 etc., the heartrending prayer for Israel, which was too late. Inexorable judgment wiped out the Jewish nation. Humanly speaking, the Jews should have ceased to exist, so many were slain during the war of four years, so many perished, and so many were carried away and sold as slaves. Part of their judgment is the fact that they are to continue in dreadful warning for all nations of the world, and that the nations may not disregard the Jews, their curse is that they make themselves obnoxious and thus literally force attention upon themselves, their tragic history, and their

capital city, now theirs no more. Three catastrophes stand out for all time: the Flood — Sodom and Gomorrah — Jerusalem.

**[45] And having gone into the Temple he began to throw out those selling, [46] saying: “It has been written: ‘And my House shall be a House of Prayer; but you, you made it a robbers’ den!’”** See Matt. 21:12-13; Mark 11,15-18. This is the second cleansing of the Temple (ἱερόν, the entire complex, not ναός, the sanctuary). The first cleansing took place near the beginning of Jesus’ ministry, the second at its end. This is Monday, when after his royal entry Jesus on the day following returned to the Temple courts. The old abuses had crept back in and were as rank as ever. Luke reports summarily, because his main interest lies in the word Jesus uttered. So Luke writes only that Jesus began to throw out the sellers who were in the court of the Gentiles. “Began” is pictorial; Jesus certainly also finished the task. “Those selling” is enough; the fact that the buyers were included the other evangelists state.

[46] With one mighty word from Scripture, Is. 56:7, Jesus brands this desecration of God’s Temple, at which the high priest and the Sanhedrin not only connived, but for which they sold the concessions. “It has been written” = and is thus on permanent record. “And my House shall be (Hebrew: shall be called) a House of Prayer” (προσευχή in the wider sense: Worship). The Temple was to be the place for Israel’s devout, undisturbed worship. But when one entered the first great court and saw all the traffic, heard all the noise resembling a great cattle and also money market, smelled the stench, that holy name was no longer appropriate. The very Temple of the Jews had lost its sacredness. One needs but read Josephus and note what occurred later: the assassinations, the riots and the brawls, etc., when the nation was literally tearing itself to pieces.

Yet fanatically the Jews clung to their Temple. But how: “You, you made it a robbers’ den,” Jer. 7:10. This figurative expression does not mean that the Jews robbed their own temple, — robbers do not rob their den, they make it their refuge. The Jews ran to their Temple and imagined themselves safe there, as robbers run from their crimes to their den, there to escape. Would God let them make such a den out of his Temple? No; he would soon clean out this den, yea, destroy it altogether, even as formerly he had destroyed Shiloh for the same cause. Note Jer. 7:12-15. “Robbers’ den” is the voice of judgment.

**[47] And he was teaching by day in the Temple. But the high priests and the scribes were seeking to destroy him, also the foremost of the people; [48] but they did not find what they should do, for all the people were hanging to him by hearing.**

Beginning on Sunday Jesus kept teaching in the Temple, until he left it for good on Tuesday toward evening. He spent the night outside of the city, so as to prevent a premature arrest. Under the leadership of the high priest and of his relatives in the Sanhedrin the resolution had been passed to make away with Jesus. The intention was to effect a judicial murder. It is Luke who informs us that in this determination to destroy Jesus also the *πρωτοί* of the people, the persons of prominence in Jerusalem, were implicated. The Jewish nation was repudiating the Savior, thus filling up the measure of its ungodliness and calling upon justice to hasten.

[48] Although such powerful and such unscrupulous agencies were at work, the criminal plan was difficult to carry out. This was due to “the people,” namely to the pilgrims who filled the city and its environs and who had come from over all the land and from the diaspora. Luke uses the strong expression: “they kept hanging to him by hearing,” i.e. this *λαός* could hardly tear itself away from Jesus. Since he was always surrounded by enthusiastic hearers, there was not even an opportunity to arrest Jesus and to whisk him away. This is the situation in which our text leaves us.

## **Homiletical Aid**

From Josephus, *Wars*, 6:5, 3: Ananus, a common man, cried in Jerusalem continually for seven years and five months: “A voice from the east, a voice from the west, a voice from the four winds, a voice against Jerusalem and the Holy House, a voice against the bridegrooms and the brides, and a voice against the whole people!” They scourged him most severely, but this did not stop him. He said neither good nor ill to any one, only cried: “Woe, woe to Jerusalem!” His cry was loudest at the festivals. Finally, when the city was closely besieged, he was going round upon the wall and cried again with great force: “Woe, woe to the city again, and to the people, and to the Holy House.” He added: “Woe, woe to myself also!” Then a stone out of one of the engines struck and killed him.

The destruction of Jerusalem and the continued curse on the Jews are the voice that cries out constantly in warning to us.

### **Remember the Things that Belong to Your Peace!**

#### I. Christ's sorrow over Jerusalem.

1. He beheld the city, its outward splendor, its inner corruption and its unbelief. So his eyes be — hold us, our whole church, our congregation. How much true faith does he see? Remember the things that belong to your peace!
2. He wept over the city. The past warnings, the time for repentance, now even the mercy of the Messiah — all in vain. The shadow of judgment and of destruction settling down, with no one to heed it. Oft repeated on various scales. Shall we not be warned? Remember the things etc.!
3. He lamented the city's fate. He prophesied her destruction with a heavy heart, but justice had to be fulfilled. The signs of justice are plain to read. Most striking of all, the curse that rests on the obdurate Jews. Shall we disregard it? Remember the things etc.!

#### II. Christ's zeal in Jerusalem.

1. He cleansed the Temple. The buying and the selling, the sign of the terrible spiritual decay. Yet like robbers in their den they thought themselves safe in their Temple. So the fools today: just so they have churches, no matter what is preached and what goes on in them. Where the Temple stood now stands the Mohammedan Mosque of Omar.

What is the true business of the church, of our church? What cleansing do we and our hearts need? Remember the things etc.!

2. He kept teaching in the Temple. Not the Jerusalemites, but the pilgrims from afar heard him gladly. The High Court and the main men in the city had resolved to kill Jesus, but found no opportunity. Alas, the voice of Jesus was lost!

It is lost in many churches today. Men preach and want to hear anything but the mighty voice of Jesus, the preaching of his deity,

atonement, judgment, faith which alone saves, etc. Do we with all our hearts love the voice of Jesus? Or shall a voice cry out upon us too: “Woe, woe!” Remember the things etc.!

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In the parable of the unjust steward Jesus taught that a day of reckoning is coming. In today’s text with tears in his eyes he pronounces Judgment upon Jerusalem. That city had been an unfaithful steward of the mysteries of God. The result was

## **Judgment.**

### I. The certainty of it.

What Jesus foretold occurred to the letter, v. 43-44; Matt. 24:2. Even during the lifetime of many who were with Jesus on Palm Sunday. St. John was one of these.

Shall the other judgments foreseen and foretold by Jesus, the judgment of the world, be less true? Judgment is as certain as the righteousness of God, as certain as the unbelief and the Wickedness of men.

### II. The reason for it.

“Thou knewest not the time of thy visitation.” The time of the Baptist, of Jesus, of the apostles, — refused to see all the grace.

Pharisees and Sadducees, the latter like the corrupt bishops of the Roman Church before the Reformation, the modernists of Jerusalem, who laughed at the simple faith of the people in angels, in the resurrection, etc.

What form the judgment takes is in God’s hands. The terrible form that descended on the Jews, the effects before our eyes today.

### III. The escape from it.

Wrong way — killing the Judge. Does not work.

Right way — destroy the unbelief and the evil. Get rid of the sin, Ps. 103:12. Repent, Ezek. 33:11. Receive life, John v. 24.

J. A. Dell.

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The warnings for the Saved: the Flood — Sodom — and right before our eyes to this day the Jews.

Sketch their story and what they are today.

### **The Tragedy of Jerusalem.**

I. So pitiful.

Jesus wept — amid the pilgrims' acclaim, in view of the city, seeing all that was coming: vast numbers slain, starved, sold as slaves, the nation ended, Jerusalem and the Temple not one stone on another. The pitiful sight, Jesus sobbed.

II. So unnecessary.

The day of her visitation, the Baptist, Jesus, and the apostles. Jesus riding into Jerusalem now. Why would Jerusalem not realize and know? Her acts unreasonable and no reasonable explanation of unreasonable acts can be given. Men are damned only by their own guilt.

III. So inevitable.

To spurn all God's grace must end in fearful judgment. Always so. Men may laugh at the idea as they please. The judgment on the Jews, once God's chosen people, is before us this day, so that we and all the world may see.

IV. So full of warning.

Do we know the things that belong to our peace?

Does our church, worship, personal religion need cleansing?

Do we make our church a robbers' den, thinking our membership makes us safe, no matter how our hearts and our lives look?

Do we let Jesus, Jesus alone, preach to us and keep us in his grace?

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Note: I find a number of sermons on the tears of Jesus.

Twice the evangelists tell us that Jesus wept and Hebrews tells us that he cried with tears in Gethsemane. The fact that our Savior shed tears means much to us, the saved.

### **The Tears of Jesus, Wept at the Sight of Jerusalem.**

I adopt some of Appuhn's ideas.

I. They shame us.

Jesus wept to see Jerusalem going to destruction and the Jews to perdition.

Does the fate of the unbelievers, Jews included, move us today?

II. They terrify us.

Jesus saw the inevitable judgment and this caused him to weep.

Terrible indeed the hour when grace can do no more, when judgment and doom sets in. Behold the tears and never think lightly of God's judgment.

III. They warn us.

Now is our day of grace. How careless we often are, how worldly, how arrogant at the preaching of Jesus.

Shall Jesus weep over us? Once the Jews had Jesus, whom and what have they now?

IV. They comfort us.

They reveal the depth of our Savior's love, who would not have one of us lost.

When we hear his voice in his Word let his love claim us. Instead of being stiff-necked, uncircumcised, obdurate, ours shall be soft and obedient hearts.

The purpose of this text is to warn us, that we may ever be faithful and true in our lives.

We hear much about the Jews in our days. The very name “Jew” both in the New Testament and in our own times bears its own peculiar meaning. The Jews crucified Jesus. Our text states that their Sanhedrin and their chief men in Jerusalem “sought to destroy him,” and we know that they did.

### **The Jews and their Curse.**

#### I. Their ancient delusion.

That as a nation the Messiah would set them above all nations to rule and dominate all the nations of the world. The spiritual prophecies they interpreted politically. Hence Jesus could not call himself “the Messiah” because of the political notions the Jews connected with this word. Because of this delusion the Jews lost the Gospel.

#### II. Their loss of Christ.

They were obdurate in the face of his grace; he wept over their capital (v. 41-42); they plotted to destroy him (v. 47). They crucified him and now call themselves “the Messiah.” Their obduracy persists, they are Messiahless.

#### III. Their national destruction.

Verses 43-44. Sketch the salient points of the tragedy. Their judgment. All obdurate Judaism under the curse ever since.

#### IV. Their tragic persistence.

Humanly speaking, ever since Titus destroyed their nation there should be no more Jews. Like the lost ten tribes, lost without trace. But there are Jews in every land, and these Jews remain Jews (some cease to be, being converted), never amalgamating, ever distinct, — with no home country (Palestine is three-fourths Mohammedan), no ruler, no government. Always alien wherever they live. This is their curse.

#### V. Their modern delusion.

Like the ancient one, that the Jews shall yet bless the world by dominating it. The Christian delusion: that there shall be a millennium,

and that God preserves the Jews in order then to convert all of them and make them the aristocracy of Christendom in the millennial age.

VI. Their real function.

Their separate persistent existence a miracle, but a miracle of God's awful judgment, so that all Jews and every Jew we see should be a mighty warning to us against all unbelief, disobedience and hardening against Christ's grace. As the Jews are found over all the world, this warning is for the whole world.

All the saved take it to heart.

# The Eleventh Sunday After Trinity. Luke 18:9-14

## Praying in True Repentance

This text closes the second sub-cycle of the after- Trinity series of texts. The life of the saved is filled with true repentance. The first of Luther's Ninety- Five Theses reads: *Da unser Meister and Herr spricht: Tut Busse, usw., will er, dass das ganze Leben seiner Glaebigen auf Erden eine stete oder unaufhoerliche Busse sein soll.* When our Master and Lord says: Repent etc., he wants the entire life of his believers on earth to be a continuous and ceaseless repentance. All our life and all our service must be filled with this repentance to be acceptable to the Lord.

Many a publican had treated the Temple as a robbers' den, as though running to the Temple rendered him safe. As though the Temple was founded for men of his stripe, who could go on sinning all they pleased, just so they did some of the outward works of the law; then they would be safe in the Temple with God and could boast of it. Self-righteousness and humble repentance are here contrasted.

**[9] Moreover, also to some who had been resting their trust on themselves that they were righteous, and were treating the rest with contempt, he spoke this parable.** Δέ adds something of a somewhat different nature from what precedes. "Also" means that besides others some of the kind of men were present who are now described by a perfect and by a present participle. They "have been trusting in themselves that they are righteous." Continually they have been doing this, and they are doing it now. And thus they "go on contemning the rest," ἐξουθενοῦντες, counting altogether (ἐκ) as nothing.

Δίκαιοι is “righteous” in the full forensic sense. These men were sure that they had God’s verdict in their favor. This certainty they based “on themselves,” on what they had done. In the parable the Lord states exactly what the phrase covers. There was nothing hazy or indefinite about their conviction. They could point to the law and to the Jewish tradition for what they had done with no fear of receiving an adverse verdict from God.

Thus they considered themselves highly superior and far above other men who had no such impressive claims on God. Their work-righteousness and self-righteousness filled them with tremendous self-satisfaction and shameless pride. Other people, not in their class, were altogether nothing, — God could and would not consider them for a moment. It is rather difficult to copy this type of people, since Jesus has so thoroughly exposed their sham and their vanity, and yet copies abound. Men will not cease setting up claims before God, even though they be flimsy, for which claims God must accept them and even accord them a high place in heaven, far above others who have manifest sins at which the world is able to point. The parable of Jesus is needed today as much as ever.

[10] **“Two men went up into the Temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican.”** It was one of the regular hours of prayer-worship. The two men entered the court of the men together with many others. To Jewish eyes they were extreme opposites, “the one a Pharisee,” accounted as having achieved the pinnacle of holiness, “the other a publican,” because of his occupation accounted as an outcast. It was a wonder that the publican appeared at all, considering the way in which the populace regarded him. We may duplicate the scene today: into church comes one of the pillars of the church, a person highly respected by all the members and esteemed as most worthy in the entire community, — of course, he takes a most prominent seat; and another man comes, at whom the ushers and the members look askance, because his reputation is not good, and indeed there is much in his life to criticize, — naturally he takes his seat in as retired a place as possible. There were no seats in the Temple of the Jews, all stood.

[11] This is a parable. Therefore Jesus lets us hear fully and precisely what each of these men says down in the secret of his heart. **“The Pharisee took a stand and went on praying these things for himself: ‘God, I thank thee that I am not like the rest of men, robbers, unrighteous,**

**adulterers, or even as this publican! [12] I fast twice during the week; I tithe all whatever I acquire.’”**

The Pharisee “took a stand,” right up in front, next to the stone balustrade dividing the priests’ court from that of the men, where he could be seen by as many as possible. The imperfect tense is descriptive: “he went on praying.” The Pharisees loved long prayers and vain repetitions; so we may say that this Pharisee made many more words than are here recorded, yet the gist of them is given in what Jesus here says. Πρὸς ἑαυτόν = “for himself,” for his own advantage, in his own favor. The Pharisee thought that he placed himself in great favor with God by this prayer.

In a parable everything is trimmed down to the essentials, hence we cannot charge against this man that he said only ὁ Θεός “God.” This form of address is quite sufficient. He made his prayer one of thanksgiving: “God, I thank thee,” etc. We can do nothing better than to thank God, to recognize all his blessings and all our unworthiness, and thus to be drawn to him to love and to obey him. But this Pharisee’s prayer has only the hollow word “I thank thee,” for he mentions not one act of grace. The fact is that he ought to thank himself, for “I — I — I” runs through his prayer: “that I am not etc.; I fast, I tithe.” He should say: “God, see what a wonderful fellow I have made of myself, all by myself, just to please thee!” Surely, God should then pat him on the shoulder and tell him to keep right on.

This blind Pharisee was measuring himself according to a false human standard. No greater mistake can be made than in worldly fashion to compare ourselves with “the rest of men,” selecting the worst kind like “robbers” or gangsters, “unrighteous,” whom everybody condemns, “adulterers,” whom the world counts vile. When he turned around the better to be seen by all those behind him, the eye of this Pharisee happened to light upon the poor publican standing far back in the rear. He caps his criminal list with this fellow: “or even as this publican,” about the worst sinner that can be named. Note that this Pharisee is not thanking God’s grace for keeping him from coarse and open sin. Keeping himself thus is his own great deed. Indeed, he could not thank God or God’s grace for having made him a Pharisee, — God and his grace never make a Pharisee, never fill a man with Pharisaic pride, with self-righteousness and work-righteousness. Which is the worst in God’s sight, a self-righteous person or

a robber, an adulterer, etc.?. Which is the worst sin, pride and despising other sinners, or a publican's trade?

[12] First self-absolution from all sin, with not a single sin left to confess to God; then self-exaltation, even merit of supererogation, beyond what God has commanded. "Behold, God, a paragon who fasts twice during the week!" The word "Sabbath," both singular and plural, is used for "week," and the genitive indicates time within which something is done. God's law prescribed only one day of fasting during the year, the great Day of Atonement. The nation itself had decreed four other fast days. Since the Babylonian exile private fasting had been introduced. The Pharisees carried this to excess, fasting twice a week and making a demonstration of it so that men might see (Matt. 6:16). What real fasting is, a fasting in true repentance, the Pharisees had never learned.

So with regard to the tithing. This Pharisee did not avail himself of the established exemption, he tithed "everything whatsoever," even the garden herbs (11:42), another wonderful work of supererogation, piety to excess. Two items suffice Jesus to show how this man prayed. His prayer was a boast, a grand piece of self-laudation, no real prayer at all; it was utterly devoid of repentance, of faith in a Redeemer, of a poor sinner's dependence solely on the grace of God.

The effort is being made to introduce tithing as a Christian method of giving. It seems the Jewish idea is to be revived and made Christian, and it is then at times also given a new name. Here are the New Testament facts. In the four gospels tithing is mentioned three times, and each time with scathing severity when condemning the Pharisees. In Heb. 7:5-9 occur three merely historical references regarding a single exceptional case of tithing. That is all. Although the apostles who were originally Jews had been reared in the atmosphere of tithing, with not one word did any one of them intimate to the Christians that tithing might be a helpful method of making their contributions to the work of the church. To all of this negative evidence should be added the strongest possible positive evidence: when Paul called upon all his churches to make a great offering for the famine sufferers in Jerusalem (1 Cor. 16:1 etc.; 2 Cor. ch. 8 and 9) such a method as tithing never occurred to him, he used a truly evangelical and far superior method. A poor man with a large family cannot tithe. To ask poor and rich alike to tithe is unjust. The motive prompting tithers is sometimes doubtful,

for so often the appealing idea is the thought that if I tithe God will bless me the more. Exegetically, dogmatically, ethically, and practically tithing has no place in the Christian system. I have fully set forth the secret of true Christian giving in my *Interpretation* of 2 Cor. 8, note v. 4.

[13] **“But the publican standing far off would not even lift up his eyes to the heaven, but was striking his breast, saying: ‘God, let thyself be propitiated in regard to me the open sinner!’”** Far back in the court of the men, where few saw him, since most of the men were in front of him facing away from him, stood the humble publican. “Far off” from the Sanctuary, which he felt unworthy to approach even as near as this. The imperfect οὐκ ᾔθελεν tells us that during the entire period of worship he did not lift up his eyes to heaven, but kept his gaze lowered as one who is ashamed and cannot face his God. What a difference in the attitude of the two men! Yes, one’s outer bearing and attitude in the presence of God, in the house of worship, and during the period of worship reveal a great deal regarding the heart’s inner attitude.

Repeatedly, as the imperfect tense states, the publican struck his breast as the natural expression of deep contrition. In his breast, in his heart was the voice of self-accusation and self-condemnation before God. This man was deeply conscious of his sins before God. The parable does not report the details of the man’s life, whether the sins that grieved his heart were connected with his business as a tax collector or with his life otherwise. Let us remember, sins are sins. Striking his breast as he did is already a confession of his sins, and with this act goes the vocal acknowledgment: “me the open sinner.” He thinks only of himself. The fact that other sinners, perhaps even greater sinners, stand all about him, is no shield for him and his sins and does not lessen his contrition. What if there are worse sinners than yourself? Does this fact lighten your burden or lessen your judgment in the least?

Ὁ Θεός (nominative employed as a vocative) is the appeal also of the publican. You may well ask, how dare a gross, self-confessed sinner approach God and that right in his Holy Temple? The answer is blessed indeed. There is forgiveness with God; his Temple is built to receive sinners; God has provided expiation for the sins; in his Temple he applies this expiation to the sinner. And God’s Word declares all this and seals the forgiveness. The publican was, indeed, in the right place. The publican was

a Jew, and as such he came for the expiation provided for the sinner in the old covenant, the expiation which pointed forward to the coming Messiah. You and I have the expiation accomplished by Jesus and look back in faith to that!

The publican's prayer must be correctly translated. The verb is not ἔλεειν, "to be merciful, to show mercy," it is ἱλάσκομαι, and the aorist passive signifies: "be propitiated in regard to me," or the passive in the sense of the middle: "let thyself be propitiated in regard to me." Let not our versions put the idea into your minds that this man's sins and your sins can be pardoned merely by the mercy of God without expiation and propitiation. Sins are erased, removed, taken away only by blood, by a sufficient sacrifice, by due expiation. God's grace provided the blood for this very reason, otherwise even all God's grace and mercy could not free the sinner from his guilt. The greatness of this publican's prayer lies not only in the fact that he sees and feels his sins and confesses them, and not only in the fact that he asks God to forgive his sins; the greatness lies in the fact that he prays that the expiation God has provided for sinners may be applied by God in his case, that this expiation may propitiate God in regard to him, and that God may thus remove all his sin and his guilt.

See the gulf between the two worshipers. The one stands brazenly before God without sins to confess; the other stands deeply contrite and grieved because of his grave sins. The one offers vain boasts of all that he has done; the other names not a thing of which he can boast. The one sees a thousand sinners beneath him and his supposed holiness; the other sees only one sinner, himself. Note well: ὁ ἁματωλός, not: "me a sinner," but: "me the sinner." Bow before God as though you were the only sinner.

**[14] "I tell you, this one went down to his house as having been justified rather than that one; because every one exalting himself shall be humbled, but he humbling himself shall be exalted."**

"I tell, I declare to you," is the voice of authority. The Temple was not located on the highest hill in Jerusalem, yet every one who left it "went down," — the elevation was moral. What Jesus says is that the Pharisee was not justified, the publican was justified. The perfect participle "as having been justified" is predicative to οὗτος, "this one." Right then and there

when he was contrite, confessed, and believed in the propitiation, God justified him, and that justification remained his.

It is absolutely essential to understand the verb δικαιῶν as well as all its cognate terms. This necessity is the greater in our day because modernistic translators deliberately mistranslate the word. Always and always the sense is forensic, never: “to make righteous,” ever: “to declare or pronounce righteous.” There is the Judge, his court, his judgment-seat, you and I at the bar of judgment, the savior’s expiation, and then the verdict: “Thou art righteous! Thy sins are dismissed! Thou art acquitted!” See the overwhelming evidence in Cremer-Koegel, *Bibl.-theol. Woerterbnch der Neutest. Graezitaet* 317, etc. You need to examine this evidence only once in order to be proof against every falsification.

Why was the publican justified and not the Pharisee? Because every last person who exalts himself shall be humbled, but he who humbles himself shall be exalted. The passives have God as the agent. God cannot do otherwise. He is a just God, he had to puncture the bubble of the Pharisee’s arrogance. God could not let this man’s lie endure. Especially also since God had provided a true righteousness for sinners, and this man spurned it, manufactured a false righteousness of his own, and tried to pass it off on God. The true facts had to come out, and then this man’s self-exaltation turned into its Opposite.

God had to do the opposite with the publican. Contritely he humbled himself under God’s law and confessed his sins to God in his Temple. In humble faith he turned to God and to the expiation God had provided for him. God could not but lift him up on high by justifying him and accepting him as his own. Even God cannot pour anything into a full vessel. But the vessel that his law has emptied, his grace can and does fill.

## Homiletical Aid

The second sub-cycle of the after-Trinity series of texts deals with the life of the saved, and the last text of this series shows us that the saved never base their justification and salvation on their own works, but, like the publican in the Temple, only on the expiation and propitiation provided by God. This is our cue for the sermon on this text.

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Some mistakes are fatal. The loss cannot be retrieved. No mistake is as fatal and as terrible as the mistake regarding your soul and its standing before God. The text: a man who made, and a man who avoided this fatal mistake.

### **The Most Fatal Mistake Regarding the Soul.**

The two men show us wherein the mistake consists and how to avoid making this fearful and fatal mistake.

I. It is fatal to forget contrition.

1. The Pharisee.

Conscience hushed.

God's law misused.

Easy works selected.

Comparison with great sinners.

Brazen self-righteousness.

Empty self-exaltation and pride.

2. The publican.

Accusing conscience, smites his breast.

Sinfulness confessed.

God's law used aright.

No good works, real or supposed, mentioned.

Self alone before God.

Deep humility.

II. It is fatal to disregard grace.

1. The Pharisee.

Blind to his great sins.

Hence needed no grace.

Even exceeded the law's demands.  
Hence grace could do nothing for him.  
False security, but fatal.

2. The publican.

Driven to the Temple by his sins.  
To have God propitiated his sole hope.  
Grace to which his faith clings.  
All illusions swept away.

III. It is fatal to think yourself justified when you are not justified.

1. The Pharisee.

Blind and false security.  
No Word of God justifying him.  
False peace of mind.  
Terrible awakening awaiting him.

2. The publican.

Jesus declares him righteous.  
So does the entire Scripture.  
So will Jesus again as the final Judge at the last day.  
This repentant sinner was acquitted.  
Peace was his, heaven open for him.

There is no excuse for making the most fatal mistake regarding the soul.

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You will grant that there are some big fools in the world. You are asked to meet the biggest fool of all this morning. He is the same man whom you have met at other times, without his being called what he is now called. I earnestly hope, however, that he may not be your own self.

## The Biggest Fool in the World.

He is the person who is I. Self-justified, and therefore II. Unjustified by God.

### I. Self-justified

1. He is a fool regarding the law, thinks he can keep it by selecting a few easy outward things from the law, keeping his conscience away from the law's terrors, living in a fool's paradise (false security).
2. He is a fool regarding the Gospel, blind to its grace, expiation, propitiation.
3. Hence no contrition, confession of sins. No cry of faith for God's propitiation. But haughty eyes toward others, self-exaltation and self-laudation. This fool climbs the judgment-seat himself and justified himself.
4. The shock that awaits him, when he shall be deposed from the throne of judgment and when the real Judge pronounces the verdict of damnation upon him.

### II. Unjustified by God.

1. To be justified by God you must be honest with the law of God and let it condemn you. The *terrores conscientiae*. You must get beyond the shallow judgments of the world, and the casuistries and the shallow excuses of your own heart. Otherwise you will rank with the biggest fool in the world, imagine yourself justified when you are unjustified by God. A man who fools himself into hell and damnation is a fool indeed.
2. To be justified by God your contrite heart must take refuge in the Gospel, in the propitiation it offers, the ἱλασμός who is Jesus Christ (1 John 2:2). This is true faith. The saved are never self-saved by works and efforts of their own, cheap ones as in the parable, or weightier ones; they are saved only by the Savior, who by his sacrifice makes propitiation for us with God. What a fool to do over again what no less a person than God's own Son had to

do for you! What a fool to think one has done with a few cheap works what required the death and the resurrection of God's own Son!

3. It is easy to justify oneself. Luke 16:15. It is flattering to act the judge. But it is a matter of life and of death. Let Jesus, let God and his Word judge you! Get your verdict from them! Then, if you are justified, you are the most blessed of men. Then you, indeed, are justified and do not merely dream that you are when you are after all unjustified and the biggest fool in the world.

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### **False Comfort Drawn from the Parable of the Pharisee and the Publican.**

- I. To live piously or ungodly makes no difference, for all is grace anyway.
- II. To be converted is an easy matter, just sigh: "God, be merciful to me!" C. F. W. Walther.

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### **The Way of Justification illustrated**

- I. By contrast in the Pharisee.  
Self-exalting impenitence.  
Justifying himself;  
More than justifying himself.  
Alas, he stood condemned and perished.
- II. By example in the publican.  
The humility of true contrition.  
The confession of sin.  
The cry for mercy.

The publican justified by God. M. Loy.

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### **The Great Difference Between the Pharisee and the Publican.**

- I. The one thanks so that he forgets to ask; the other asks so that he may thank.
  - II. The one compares himself with other men; the other compares himself with the law.
  - III. The one sings his own praises; the other confesses his sins.
  - IV. The one fails of justification; the other is acquitted by God. von Biarowsky.
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The central doctrine of the Scriptures: Justification by Faith Alone. Deeply impressed by this parable. A man not justified, a man justified. This raises

### **The Most Personal Question in the World: Does God Justify Me?**

Does he forgive all my sins? Does he acquit me of all guilt? Does he pronounce me righteous? Does he open heaven's door for me?

- I. He most certainly does not!  
If I am impenitent;  
Self-righteous in my impenitence;  
Boastful of what I do in my Self-righteousness;  
Exalting myself in my boastfulness.

No, he certainly does not. Look at the Pharisee.

- II. He most certainly does!  
If I let his law make me contrite;

If I confess my sins in my contrition;  
If I believe his Gospel in my confession;  
If I throw myself wholly on his mercy in my faith.

Yes; he certainly does justify me. Look at the publican.

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The man who thought he was justified because he did the justifying himself.  
The man who was justified; because God justified him and Jesus told us so.

### **Are You Justified?**

I. O yes, — I justify myself.

It is very easy to do so.

I do not let the law strike my conscience.

I just forget about my sins.

I find many sinners far worse than I can possibly be.

I see so many good works that I do.

I find they are even more than enough.

I feel good over what I have accomplished.

I even boast a little and exalt myself.

No; it is not at all hard to justify and to acquit myself. The other answer is:

II. Thank God, — HE justifies me!

It was not at all easy for him to do so.

He had to send his Son to die for my sins.

He had to send the law to crush my heart in contrition.

He had to send the Gospel to kindle faith in my heart and trust in his grace and in Christ's expiation.

He had to move me to confess my sins and to kindle my faith in his pardon for sins.

Yes, it was rather hard for God to justify and to acquit me. His Word, and Jesus in this parable, assure me that he has actually done so. My soul thanks him to all eternity.

***Hier kommt ein arme'r Suender her,  
Der ouch durch Gnad' gern' selig waer.'***

# The Third After-Trinity Cycle

## The Character of the Saved

### **The Twelfth Sunday After Trinity.**

*Christlikeness:*

*Like Him Who Doeth All Things Well*

### **The Thirteenth Sunday After Trinity.**

*Love:*

*Like the Good Samaritan*

### **The Fourteenth Sunday After Trinity. Gratitude:**

*Like the One Leper out of the Ten*

### **The Fifteenth Sunday After Trinity.**

*Carefreeness:*

*Like the Lilies of the Field*

### **The Sixteenth Sunday After Trinity.**

*Safety in Death*

### **The Seventeenth Sunday After Trinity.**

*Intolerance of Pretense*

### **The Eighteenth Sunday After Trinity.**

*The Great Confessional Mark*

# The Twelfth Sunday After Trinity. Mark 7:31-37

## **Christlikeness: Like Him Who Doeth All Things Well**

The church year according to which the Sundays and their lections are arranged is one in which Easter comes on the earliest possible date. The present subcycle includes the Sundays that during such a year fall between the fixed dates August 10 and September 29, i.e. between St. Laurentius Day and Michaelmas. I find that this group of texts presents in detail

### *The Character of the Saved.*

The second sub-cycle deals with the Life of the Saved. Embedded in this Life is the Character of the saved.

The very first text of this group is comprehensive. Jesus heals a deaf-mute. But he does it in an exceptional and a rather remarkable way, eliciting from all of the people who witnessed what Jesus did the exclamation: "Excellently has he done all things!" Only Mark reports this miracle, apparently because of the way in which Jesus proceeded and because of this exceptional comment. Therein I find the cue for the choice of this text for the present Sunday: it is not the miracle as such, but it is the excellence of the Lord's procedure. In this he serves as our model. Our subject is to be: Christlikeness. As the Savior did all things well, so the Saved must do all things well. We are to follow in his steps (1 Pet. 2:21). The Lord wrought miracles prompted by his compassion and through his omnipotence. We cannot work miraculously, yet we can copy his spirit. He spoke in sign-language to the poor deaf-mute. He sought to bestow on the man far more than hearing and speech, namely faith, appreciation of divine grace and help, and the gratitude that would secure all the great spiritual blessings of God.

Such is the Christlikeness which all the Saved are to exercise and to develop.

A comprehensive subject such as this fittingly ushers in the new group of texts. Consider the subjects that are next in order. The connection with the last text of the preceding group is also obvious: the justified publican must become Christlike, his entire character must be molded along the lines set forth in our present group of texts.

**[31] And again having gone out from the borders of Tyre he went through Sidon to the Sea of Galilee in the midst of the borders of Decapolis.** From the far north-west, in a wide sweep across the north, Jesus arrives in the far south-east. His object in taking this route is to avoid the populous centers of Galilee, where the opposition against him had become acute. For the most part Jesus devotes himself to his disciples. Mark states that Jesus “went through Sidon.” This is the only time that Jesus passed out of the Jewish land and entered upon pagan soil. He merely went through, he did not exercise his ministry of teaching and of working miracles (see the text for Reminiscere). After crossing to the east Jesus proceeded south, but eastward of the Sea of Galilee, into Decapolis, the territory of the Ten Cities. Here the fame of Jesus had been spread by the demoniac whom Jesus had freed from a legion of devils.

**[32] And they bring to him one deaf and dumb, and beseech him that he lay the hand on him.** Jesus wrought many miracles while he tarried in this locality (Matt. 15:30). The one here recorded by Mark is singular only because of the way in which Jesus proceeded in healing the man. We see that he did not do what he was requested to do, just place his hands upon the afflicted man and thus restore him to hearing and to speech. Jesus wants to do much more for the man.

**[33] And having taken him from the multitude to himself in private he pushes his fingers into his ears, and having spit touched his tongue, [34] and having looked up to the heaven he sighed, and he says to him: “Ephphatha!” which is: “Be completely opened!” [35] And his ears were completely opened, and the bond of his tongue was loosed, and he started to speak rightly.**

“Excellently has he done all things!” applies doubly in the case of this miracle: Jesus gave the man hearing and speech, and he did it in the most

perfect manner.

Imagine the deaf-mute's situation. He is brought into a crowd of people, to a man in the center of the crowd whom he had not seen before. He could not speak and could not hear others speak. He is flustered and excited, badly upset in his mind. Quietly Jesus takes him by the arm and leads him out of the crowd and away to a spot where he and the man are "in private" by themselves. The participle conveys the thought that this is a preliminary and a minor action. It tells the man that Jesus intends to do something for him. The kindly look and the gentle action of Jesus impress and encourage the deaf-mute.

After the man has been entirely reassured, Jesus pushes his fingers into his ears. This is the first main action, hence the verb is finite. Yes, in the ears is found a part of this man's great trouble. Pushing a finger slightly into each ear conveys to the man the suggestion that 'Jesus intends to do something in regard to his deafness, and he is now more attentive than ever. The question begins to shine in his eyes: What does this strange man intend to do, and who may this strange man be?

With the man's eyes upon him. Jesus spits upon the ground and then with his finger touches the deaf-mute's tongue in the way in which he had touched the inside of his ears. Yes, here lay the other part of the man's trouble, — his tongue could not speak, could at best make only inarticulate sounds. Jesus did not spit upon the man's tongue, or upon his own finger which then conveyed the spittle to the man's tongue.

[34] Jesus is using the simplest, the most easily understood sign-language. The man can see and can feel, and Jesus speaks to him through these two senses. Having fastened the deaf-mute's full attention upon his two great disabilities, Jesus indicates to him the nature of the power which is now removing these disabilities. Jesus looks up to heaven (a participle to indicate this subsidiary action) and then he heaves a deep sigh (finite verb), not, of course, so the deaf man may hear, but rather that he may see it. No charm is being applied, no human powers are put into operation. No; the help comes from heaven, from God, and it is help that comes to us poor mortals through prayer. The man could not fail to understand. Note also that Jesus never employs means that are ineffective.

When he sighed thus Jesus did not pray for the Father's aid for healing this man. Such an idea reduces Jesus to the level of the prophets and the apostles, who had no power of their own to work miracles, but for every miracle received both a divine authorization and the needed divine power. Jesus ever wrought miracles by his own will and his own power. To find sympathy for the deaf-mute expressed in this sigh of Jesus is to inject a sentimental idea. Did Jesus sigh only for this man and show no sympathy for other far greater sufferers?

The deaf-mute has been duly prepared by Jesus. Now the miracle is wrought. Jesus says to the man: "Ephphatha!" And at once the man's hearing and his speech return in their perfection. Mark preserves the original Aramaic word which Jesus uttered (imperative ethphael). Mark had learned the use of this word from Peter, from whom he draws all his narratives, and he likes to have his readers hear the actual sound of the word Jesus employed (note also v. 41). Of course, he at once translates it for his Greek readers: Διανοιχθητι (ὅ refers to the Aramaic word): "Be completely opened!" (διά strengthens the idea of the verb). The aorist imperative is strong and authoritative. It is the voice of omnipotence. Its effect is instantaneous. "Be opened!" refers to the tongue as well as to the ears, for the idea is that of a δεσμός (v. 35), a fetter that is unlocked. Yes, the deaf-mute heard that mighty word. It completed what Jesus was conveying to him: the divine power from heaven came to restore his hearing and his speech through Jesus, through the word and the command, through the power and the gracious will of Jesus. This essential part of the miracle the man also understood.

Jesus had done all things well in this man's case. He could not have done them in a more excellent manner.

[35] "Completely opened were his ears, and loosed the fetter of his tongue," the verbs emphatically forward, two aorists to indicate the historical facts. The imperfect is ingressive and picturesque: "he began to speak rightly," ἐλάλει, to utter words of speech in the proper manner. He did not acquire proper expression gradually and by practice. The gifts of Jesus are ever entirely complete.

**[36] And he charged them to tell no one; but as much as he went on to charge them, the more beyond measure they went on heralding him.**

**(37 ) And beyond measure they continued to be amazed, saying: “Excellently has he done all things! Both the deaf he makes to hear, and the speechless to speak.”**

Mark states no reason why Jesus did not want the miracle reported. The most likely reason is that Jesus is approaching the end and does not want false Messianic hopes stirred up in the people. But the more earnestly he charged silence, the more zealously the people advertised him, περισσότερον ἐκήρυσσον (progressive imperfect), “the more beyond measure they went on heralding him,” like heralds they made loud proclamation of what he had done.

[37] The country of the Ten Cities was Jewish territory, ruled by Herod Antipas as being a part of Galilee, although the population was mixed, Jewish and Gentile. The many miracles (Matt. 15:30-31) amazed these people. They were entirely new to them. Hence they could not restrain themselves. Mark reports what they said especially with reference to the miracle which he here reports, — in fact, he selects this miracle for his report just because the people, too, singled it out, saying: “excellently he does all things!” Καλῶς must include the manner in which Jesus proceeded when healing the deaf-mute, which therefore also Mark reports so fully. For the people add in a pointed manner: “Both the deaf he makes to hear, and the speechless to speak.” A double miracle, yea, two miracles, with a single glorious word. But the present tense ποιεῖ generalizes: Jesus “makes” at any time when he wills. They are right: the one miracle is evidence that Jesus can do a thousand. They also saw him do many more.

Jesus in his holy office does all things καλῶς in a morally excellent manner. So he did in bestowing hearing and speech upon this poor deaf-mute. In the miracle we see our divine Savior, whom we, too, acclaim and worship. But we also follow his blessed example and by his help become ever more Christlike, doing well all things which he has appointed to us who are the saved.

## **Homiletical Aid**

“He hath done all things well,” — so well that our entire faith and hope rest on him alone, — so well that in our humble way we follow in his steps.

## **“He Hath Done All Things Well.”**

- I. The deaf-mute exhibits it.
  1. Not only did Jesus give him the precious gift of hearing and of speech with one almighty and all-gracious word;
  2. He also wrought faith in the deaf-mute’s heart, so that he could hear and believe the whole Gospel with his ears and confess his Savior with his tongue.
- II. This exhibition calls for faith on our wt.
  1. It is our Savior who did all things so well not only in this but in every miracle he wrought for poor sufferers.
  2. God sent him to save us from sin and its curse. The miracles are only a part of the evidence.
  3. The supreme need is that we believe in him and that by thus saving us he may do all things well for us. We can hear and speak well enough, but that is not enough. Faith delivers us.
- III. This faith bids us copy the example of Jesus.
  1. How ill the world of men does things even when it employs its best efforts! What would our lives be if we had no Savior and no true faith in him?
  2. Though our calling be ever so lowly, let us use the Savior’s help in order to do all things well. To please him. To aid our fellow men in love and in unselfishness. To help them come to faith and with us grow strong in faith.
  3. In Jesus we have not only the perfect and the most blessed pattern, but also the power to copy it and to become Christlike.

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There is a strong temptation to allegorize the miracles of healing, especially also this miracle wrought on the deaf-mute. *Never allegorize!* If you cannot handle the text as it stands, take another text. “Ephphatha” attracts the allegorizers, because they can ring the changes on this word. Here is a

sample: “Ephphatha!” that is: “Be opened!” — I. Thou eye — to see the Savior. II. Thou ear — to hear his Word. III. Thou mouth — to praise his glory. IV. Thou heart — and become his dwelling. — Here is another: “Ephphatha!” This word the Lord still speaks today and it still has the same power that it had at the Galilean Sea. He directs his ephphatha 1) to the deaf ears; 2) to the fettered souls; 3) to the closed hearts; 4) to the lamed tongues; 5) to the locked heavens. When the physical is turned into the spiritual and then expanded to include eyes and heaven and anything the preacher wants to have opened, the preacher no longer preaches on his text. See S. 13 etc.

The preachers have allegorized our text in quite a variety of ways. One frankly has the theme: Christ’s Healing of Spiritual Deaf-Mutes. We are not much interested in the parts of his sermon. Another preached on: The Holy Joy and Duty of all Christians to Lead Souls to Christ. Probably the number of allegorical outlines exceeds the number of proper outlines.

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In one of his parables the Lord says to the blessed: “Well done, thou good and faithful servant.” Yet even in the case of the faithful it is only a partial and an imperfect well-doing, that leaves much to be desired. There has been only one Servant of Jehovah who perfectly fulfilled the will of God. That was God’s Son, of whom it is said in our text,

### **“He Hath Done All Things Well.”**

The text, of course, does not describe all of the things he has done well. More than one text is necessary to do that. ’As far as it goes, however, this story paints a lovely picture of the Master.

I. He is mindful of requests.

From the elaboration: Especially pleasing to him are the requests that we make for others, where no selfish interest of our own is to be furthered, but the request is made in the same spirit of love to others that moved the Master himself to live and to love and to serve.

II. He is kind to the unfortunate.

III. He is sincere in all his words.

“Beautiful Savior! King of Creation!” etc.

J. A. Dell.

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Every revelation of the Savior intends to produce two effects in us: to draw us to him as our Savior by faith, — to lead us in his steps by love. The second of these effects is based on the first and is possible only as resulting from the first: we must believe in the Savior before we can copy his example and become like him. When thus we Christians speak of

### **Christlikeness,**

I. We begin with faith in Christ,

The entire proceeding of Jesus with regard to the deaf-mute aimed to instill faith in him. Without such faith in Jesus, what good would hearing and speech do the man? Just to have these abilities restored would have meant nothing but their use in sinful activity. Jesus aimed to bestow a better gift on this man.

II. We proceed with his example,

The people were right when they praised Jesus because he had done all things well. So high and holy was his blessed office as the Savior, and so perfectly he did all that pertained to it. How perfect the loving way in which he gave hearing and speech to the deaf-mute and implanted faith in his soul. Our humble calling so much lower, yet by his help we are also to do well all that rests on us, especially in loving helpfulness to our fellow men’s bodies and their souls. The saved ever follow the Savior.

III. And we end with heaven.

Forget not that the final aim of true Christlikeness in faith and in love is heaven.

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Describe the scene as though we were in the crowd when the deaf-mute was brought to Jesus. St. Mark preserved for us the very word Jesus used:

### **“Ephphatha!”**

I. The word of omnipotence.

The deaf-mute — deplorable loss of hearing and of speech. Human skill and help utterly useless.

With the one word Jesus restored both. Here shines forth the omnipotence of his deity.

We must know him fully who spoke that mighty word.

II. What led up to this word.

The sign-language which Jesus employed. Jesus intended to bestow a greater gift than hearing and speech.

Behold the love back of this almighty word, working faith in this soul. The Savior came to save our souls.

III. Our own ears and tongue.

We hear and speak Without effort. We need no omnipotent ephphatha. Do we prize what we have, and do we understand that omnipotence would be required to give us what we have, if we should lose it?

Can it be that we are to use these priceless abilities only in a worldly way? So many do.

These open ears, this voluble tongue are to hear the saving truth, to confess our God and our Savior, to serve them in faithfulness and in gratitude.

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The ears receive; the tongue gives. What and how we receive with the ears, and what and how we give with the tongue, reveals our character, whether ours is the Christian character of the saved or the worldly character of those

who do not want salvation. Because the ears and the tongue tell so much, the Savior's healing of the deaf-mute is important for us.

### **Tell-Tale Ears and Tongue.**

I. Why did the Savior not simply heal the deaf-mute and be done with it? Why this peculiar way of dealing with him? Because every man's ears and tongue tell a tale. They tell about you and the Savior, whether you truly believe in him as your Savior and whether you truly follow his steps. Jesus wanted to give the deaf-mute sanctified ears and a sanctified tongue. He wanted the man to believe.

Are your ears drinking in the Savior's Word this morning; are your tongues singing hymns of praise to his name and voicing confession and prayer to his throne? You know how many people have ears for everything else save for the Savior's Word, and tongues for everything but what pleases the Savior. Are you watching what your ears and your tongue tell about you and the Savior?

II. We see how solicitous and kind Jesus is to the poor deaf-mute. How much trouble he takes with this unknown man! He certainly does not deserve it. And then this priceless gift to him! Jesus teaches him and us how we as believers should treat our fellow men. Note well in regard to your ears and your tongue, they tell about you and your fellow men. They reveal what is in your heart, whether it is Christian kindness, sympathy, helpfulness, etc.

Do you love to hear and to speak good of others, especially also of your brethren? Do you love to sit with your brethren where you can jointly hear the Word and praise the Savior and thus support each other in the faith? Are you ready to help the body and the soul of others? Oh, so many want to hear only what is to their advantage, etc., and speak hurt and harm for others, etc. Are you careful about your ears and your tongue as regards your fellow men?

III. These tell-tale ears and tongue have still more to reveal about ourselves. Jesus knew what he was bestowing on the deaf-mute when he gave him hearing and speech. These ears and these tongues, they tell about what must become of us at the end. What you take into your inner being, and what you give out in confession and in converse from

your inner being, reveals who you are, whether one of the saved or one of the lost, whether a child of God or a worldling. And that decides your final fate.

It was not a simple thing to open a man's ears and liberate his tongue. Tell-tale are these members. You have had hearing and speech all your life. Hear and speak as a true Christian should.

# The Thirteenth Sunday After Trinity. Luke 10:23-37

## Love: Like the Good Samaritan

The story of the Good Samaritan was intended to convince the lawyer of his sinfulness and to move him to repentance. “Do thou keep doing likewise!” implies that the lawyer will soon discover that he is unable to do likewise. This use of the law in the case of the unregenerate is well understood. By nature no man can fulfill the law, especially its inner demand which requires perfect love.

When used as a text for the sermon, this section of Scripture is intended for regenerate Christians, who, unlike the unregenerate lawyer, have in their hearts the powers of the new life and thus are able to fulfill the law, although not perfectly. The place in the Church Year which this text occupies, being found in the group of texts which depict the character of the saved, points to the same conclusion. Faith always produces love. For us, the saved, the order: “Do thou keep doing likewise!” means that we are indeed to obey and to treat our fellow man with the love of the Good Samaritan. For that matter, we have the perfect example of Jesus himself, which we are called upon to follow. The law is to serve all the saved as their *Regel*, their rule, showing them what they should do because of true love. None of the saved are without love. *The Character of Love* distinguishes all of them and should mark them even more strongly than it does. Yet love has reached many glorious heights in the history of the church.

[23] The Seventy had returned and had made report to Jesus (v. 17). Our text begins with the Beatitude which Jesus spoke to them. **And having turned to his disciples, he said in private: “Blessed the eyes that see what you are seeing! [24] For I say to you, that many prophets and**

**kings wanted to see what you are seeing, and did not see, and to hear what you are hearing, and did not hear.”**

Others besides the Seventy were present and, of course, heard what Jesus says, but all present understood that the beatitude applied only to the Seventy as being devoted believers and followers of Jesus. Not in what they do and accomplish for him lies their blessedness, but in what is bestowed upon them, in what they see and hear and receive in their hearts. On another occasion Jesus pronounced a similar beatitude upon the Twelve (Matt. 13:16-17). Μακάριοι (as in Ps. 1:1; Matt. v. 3 etc., Luke 6:20) expresses the Savior’s judgment on the people to whom “blessed” refers. This *ashre* of the Old Testament is more than a wish or a mere description. Like its opposite: “Woe!” the word is exclamatory, a glorious verdict. Always the full reason for the verdict is stated. In the present beatitude the reason lies in the clause: “that see what you are seeing.”

[24] This, however, is expanded, adding the emphatic assurance: “I say to you.” The greatest personages of the Old Testament were the prophets and the kings. The prophets had received the divine revelations at first hand, and the kings had them at second hand. But all that men like David, Solomon, Hezekiah, Josiah, etc., had were promises, types, symbols, with the fulfillment far in the distance. The more earnestly they believed, the more they longed to see and to hear. What was withheld from these great persons was given to the disciples both to see and to hear. In fact, Jesus wanted them as his first-hand witnesses. But apart from the witness they were to bear to others, their own souls were blessed by all that was given them to see and to hear.

[25] At this point an incident occurs which leads Jesus to use the great illustration of the Good Samaritan. **And lo, a lawyer stood up, tempting him by saying: “Teacher, by doing what shall I inherit life eternal?”** This νομικός, “lawyer,” a man learned in the *nomos* or law (Old Testament), belonged to a class of the γραμματεῖς or “scribes,” of whom the νομοδιδάσκαλοι, “law-teachers,” formed another class. Τίς = our indefinite article “a.” The entire company was probably sitting cross-legged in the oriental fashion; so this lawyer rose to his feet so that Jesus might distinguish him as the speaker.

“Tempting him” does not mean that the lawyer had been primed in advance and acted as the agent of others. No; it was the beatitude of Jesus that stirred the man’s opposition. To be blessed, especially eternally blessed, he felt certain required far more than that a person see and hear something. As an expert in the law he was certain that to do something was essential and required. So he asks what he must do to inherit eternal life. In other words: Should not the beatitude of- Jesus make this doing the main point, instead of just seeing and hearing? The lawyer means to say: “Just what must I do?” While he is certain in regard to doing, this lawyer is by no means ready to agree with Jesus on what Jesus may say should be done by him. The lawyer’s question is more like a challenge to Jesus on this matter of doing. He expects an unsatisfactory answer from Jesus in regard to what it is essential to do. In this sense he tempts Jesus. He wants to draw Jesus out in order to bring a charge against him. All of this helps us to understand why Jesus answers the lawyer as he does.

Not a few imagine that there is a self-contradiction between doing and inheriting. To inherit is, indeed, used when the context suggests sons, children, heirs; but here the context is entirely general, so that “inherit” means no more than “obtain.” Therefore Jesus also makes no issue of the words “do” and “inherit.”

This, however, we should note: seeing and hearing simply receive, as a gift is received; doing merits or seeks to merit. This lawyer’s heart was as Pharisaic and as Pelagian as the natural man’s heart is today. The first, and generally the only idea men have about getting to heaven is to get there by doing, so the great question they ever raise is what to do. Now the blessedness of which Jesus speaks a person is able only to receive — it can’t be obtained in no other manner. This is equally true regarding life eternal, in fact, even regarding physical life. All life comes as a gift.

The address “teacher” is quite proper and contains no exceptional significance. The lawyer mentioned a great concept when he said ζωὴ αἰώνιος, “life eternal.” We must give him credit for desiring to obtain this life and therefore asking his question. Ζωή is the spiritual life-principle itself. They who have this “life” reveal it in a thousand ways. For spiritual as well as physical life is itself invisible, its presence being known only from the life-activity. Where this activity is absent, we have death. Αἰώνιος is added to bring out the thought that this “life” passes unharmed through

physical death and joyfully enters eternity. One who obtains this life may lose it again; yet when it is lost, it may be regained. There are only two classes of men, those who are spiritually alive, those who are spiritually dead.

**[26] But he said: “In the law, what has been written? How dost thou read?”** The mastery of this double counter question is incomparable. This double question is so natural and so simple. It asks the questions by which the lawyer is to answer his own question. He is versed in the law, and Jesus credits him with this fact. He even credits him with ability to quote the law exactly, for he asks: “How readest thou?” The answer is so plain in the Torah of Moses. If any one wants to live and to enter heaven, but not by receiving and by way of a pure gift of grace, what a person is to do need not long be asked. Addressed as “Teacher,” Jesus as a good teacher asks his pupil to state what he already knows so well.

Ponder the reply of Jesus and see how with a few simple words he completely disarms this lawyer, making him forget any hostility he entertained and any tempting he intended to do. The lawyer is kindly asked to cooperate with Jesus and really cannot refuse to do so. Whereas he expected to disagree with Jesus when he asked Jesus his question, Jesus by asking his counter questions offers to agree with the lawyer’s answer. I wonder whether the lawyer realized what Jesus was doing for him so as to open his soul for the truth.

**[27] And he answering said: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God out of thy whole heart and in thy whole soul, and in thy whole strength, and in thy whole mind; and thy neighbor as thyself.”** Deut. 6:4-5 and Lev. 19:18.

The answer of the lawyer, especially his combining of the two passages, is excellent, if one considers only the law as recorded in the Torah. The verb must be ἀγαπᾶν, the love of full understanding and of corresponding purpose, and could not be φιλεῖν, the love of mere affection (“to like”), either as applying to God or to the neighbor. The future tense: “thou shalt love,” is used in legal commands. But note well, that while this command is law the name for God: “the Lord thy God,” is pure Gospel and furnishes the Gospel motive for obedience to this and to the following commands of the Decalog. For ὁ Κύριος = *Yahveh*, the God of the covenant made with

Abraham, the great “I am that I am,” who in his covenant grace changes not, whose covenant promises are absolutely trustworthy; and “thy God” = *Eloheka*, the Gospel thought lying in the possessive “thy”: the God Omnipotent, all of whose omnipotence is graciously in thy favor. Both terms form one name. Who would not love this God, when he fully comprehends his covenant promises and his infinite power employed for us in his grace?

The phrases are not gathered together under only one preposition, but are spread out under four, one ἕκ and three ἐν, the adjective “whole” being repeated four times. The *leb* (Hebrew), the καρδία, is the center of our being and our personality; here dwells the ψυχή. the soul, here resides the strength, and here functions the mind. Hence the ἕκ with the whole heart as the source of this love to the Lord thy God. In Matt. 22:37 all the phrases are used with ἐν; in Mark all are used with ἕκ (as in the LXX). The *nephesh*, ψυχή, “soul” or “life,” animates the body, the consciousness of which fills the heart. The ἰσχύς = the strength as possessed, whether put forth in action or quiescent, in rest; it is the vitality amid the personal power. Finally, the διάνοια is the reason or mind with its functions of thoughts, ideas, convictions, judgments, according to which the heart and the personality act. The love commanded is to include the whole of the four sides of the personality, for the simple reason that no one and nothing is comparable to the Lord our God to be placed beside him as bearing a relation to us in any way equal to the relation he bears to us. It would be an intolerable and a criminal lie to reserve a part of our heart, etc., for any other being or object.

The love for our neighbor, which means for our fellow man with whom we come in contact in his various needs, is not made equal to our love to God; for our neighbor each is to love “as thyself.” How much dost thou love thyself? So much love thy neighbor. To love him less is to be guilty of selfishness. It is useless to say that we are to love all men in the world. This could be true only ideally, for each of us knows only a handful of men, the other millions he only hears about. Therefore, too, the word is ὁ πλησίον (the adverb made a noun), the person near thee.

**[28] And he said to him: “Rightly didst thou answer! This keep doing and thou shalt live!”** “You are perfectly right,” Jesus says, “all you need to do is to live up to your answer and you surely will live!” I think the

lawyer was very much surprised because of this instant and this complete agreement of Jesus with his answer. This must have been the intention of Jesus. The lawyer is to stop and to consider what Jesus here tells him. The present imperative ποίει is durative: “keep doing,” i.e. without a break or omission, for one failure is sin, and one sin brings death in place of life. Jesus answers the lawyer on the basis of his own idea regarding the law. Like all the self-righteous, the lawyer overlooked all the grace lying in the covenant name “the Lord thy God” which by being placed at the very head of the Decalog establishes the fact that this God never intended to offer the law to a sinner as the way to obtain eternal life, Gal. 3:21. The work-righteous also alter the law and imagine that their partial fulfillment, rather their mere outward observance, is quite sufficient.

[29] Jesus spoke as though the matter were ended. In fact, there was nothing more to say. The lawyer’s tempting purpose had turned to water. All that can be told the work-righteous is to recite to them the divine law and then tell them to go and do what it says. If that does not bring them to a realization of their sin and their need of grace, nothing else will. The lawyer thus looked rather foolish for having asked something so exceedingly simple, presenting it as though it were a great problem, something that all who heard him were surprised to learn that he, a learned lawyer, could not himself answer without asking Jesus. Thus he does not sit down and subside as he should. **But he wanting to justify himself, said: “And who is my neighbor?”** He wanted to justify himself for having asked his question in the first place. He wanted to save his face. He, of course, had not thought about bringing up the question as to who is his neighbor; he only makes this question, so much debated by the Jews, his refuge now. He means to correct Jesus and to tell him that this matter is not so simple after all, for how is one to know who really is his neighbor and how many are included in this term?

The idea that he is justifying himself as one who himself had kept the entire Decalog is entirely foreign to the context, especially also to the answer which Jesus now gives.

[30] **Taking it up, Jesus said: “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among robbers, who after both stripping him and laying blows on him went away leaving him half dead.”**

Jesus takes up the lawyer's question which asked who his neighbor is. He does it by means of an illustration which ends with a question to the lawyer, again asking him to answer his own question. The road from Jerusalem to Jericho leads through a rugged, uninhabited mountainous country, which at that time and even a long time after was infested by bandits. Some think that Jesus is sketching an actual event; I prefer to say that it is an event that might well occur. We have neither parable nor allegory, although some think that an allegory is intended. We have a graphic illustration. Its first part depicts the opposite of the commandment: "Love thy neighbor as thyself!" The Opposite is even made extreme, in order to cover also all lesser cases. This is often done, as in Matt. 5:21: murder including hatred, calling names, etc.

Here is a man whom the robbers got. They robbed him and in addition stripped him of his clothes and beat him so severely that when they left he lay half dead.

**[31] "Now by coincidence a priest was going down on that road, and on seeing him passed by on the other side. [32] Likewise, moreover, also a Levite, having come down to the place and seeing, passed by on the other side."** Since the road was seldom used, it was "by coincidence" that a priest came along it, most likely on his way to his home in Jericho after his days of priestly service in the Temple were finished. He sees the man lying in the road in his desperate plight, in fact, came alongside (παρά), came over to the other side (ἄντι), when passing by. He never stopped. A priest, mind you! One who knew and taught the law, like a preacher of today. Did he look around to see whether any one saw him hurry on? Well, God saw him. Of course, the robbers might still be near, and it was dangerous to halt. We should imagine that both the priest and the Levite each rode an ass, likewise the Samaritan; and so also the victim, whose animal the robbers had stolen.

[32] The Levite followed the same course of action. He, too, came from the Temple, where he did the menial and the police work, and thus knew the commandment of love. The translation of the A.V.: "he passed by on the other side," has become proverbial for heartlessly abandoning a person.

**[33] "Now a Samaritan, being on a journey, came down to him, and on seeing him was moved with compassion. [34] And having come to**

**him, he bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Moreover, having set him on his own beast, he brought him to an inn and took care of him.”**

It is easy to understand why the priest and the Levite were traveling on this road. When Jesus comes to speak about the Samaritan who lived north of Judea he adds: “being on a journey,” as a man who has business. Jesus makes this man “a Samaritan.” We must recall all the bitter hostility that existed between the Jews and the Samaritans. The latter came from pagan stock, were without Jewish blood; were cursed publicly in the synagogue with the prayer that they might have no part in the resurrection of life; were never accepted as proselytes; to eat their food was equal to eating swine’s flesh; it was far better to suffer than to accept their help; the Jew wished never to see a Cuthite (base name for Samaritan); add still other evidences of violent animosity, which the Samaritans returned with interest.

It was startling on the part of Jesus to make the man in the illustration a Samaritan. As far as Jews or Samaritans were concerned, we should know that it would have been as difficult to find a Jew as it was to find a Samaritan who would show such complete love. When Jesus selected a Samaritan for the illustration and contrasted him with a Jewish priest and a Levite when it came to helping a Jew, he intended to shatter the Jewish self-righteousness of the lawyer, who imagined that Jews alone kept the divine law.

[34] Here is what priest and Levite should have done and did not do. When the Samaritan saw the sufferer in his plight he was moved with compassion. The Greeks locate the tender emotions in the nobler viscera, heart, lungs, liver. The love was stirred in deep pity; the motive was right. It was strong, for it produced a full complement of actions. The wine was used as a handy antiseptic because of its alcoholic content; the oil as an emollient to ease pain. The physician Hippocrates prescribes for ulcers: “Bind with soft wool, and sprinkle with wine and oil.” Every traveler would carry wine and olive oil for the purpose of food, especially when he was riding a beast. He mounted the sufferer on his own ass, held him there and trudged on foot to the inn (πανδοχεῖον, not the word used in the Christmas story), where he stopped and himself took care of this sufferer. Naturally he also secured clothes for him.

[35] **“And on the morrow, having taken out two denarii he gave them to the innkeeper, and said: ‘Take care of him, and whatever thou mayest spend in addition, I myself at my coming back will duly give to thee.’”** Here is complete love for one’s neighbor. On leaving, the Samaritan does not assume that he has done enough, that the innkeeper and others may now do the rest. Quite the contrary, he pays in advance for the victim’s care and promises to repay anything expended on the victim beyond this first sum. Because in our dictionaries a denarius is listed at a value of sixteen cents we should not get the impression that the Samaritan was close and left a minimum amount, for the contrary is true. On the basis of the ancient prices charged for lodging two denarii paid for about two months of care. So long a time would scarcely be required for the recovery of the man, but if more was expended by the innkeeper the Samaritan promised duly to repay it on his return journey.

Yes, the picture here drawn is perfect.

Did such a Samaritan ever exist? The picture is ideal. Where could a Samaritan at that time obtain such love? We must remember the object at which Jesus aims when drawing this illustration: no work-righteous and no self-righteous Jews could possibly attain to the love here shown; the priest and the Levite show what they attained to. But here is the love that ought to be attained to. Can we attain to it? Yes, but only by grace.

Trench is one of those who allegorizes the illustration. Allegorizing is a mistake. Neither this lawyer nor any who heard Jesus dreamed of finding allegorical meaning in what so obviously is an effective illustration.

[36] With the picture completed, Jesus asks: **“Which of these three does it seem to thee has become neighbor of him Who fell among the robbers?”** This question is really inevitable. The answer lies on the surface. Yes, the illustration makes the matter altogether plain. But Jesus reverses the lawyer’s question. It is not: “Who is my neighbor?” reducing the number to as low a figure as possible; but: “To whom may I become neighbor?” increasing the number to as high a figure as possible. Priest and Levite walked past a golden opportunity of love. How many opportunities have you lost by walking by on the other side?

[37] **And he said: “He that did the mercy on him.”** The lawyer did not say: “the Samaritan,” yet he describes his act in a way that is better than just

naming him according to his nationality.

**But Jesus said to him: “Go on and do thou keep doing likewise!”** It is the same ποίει, “keep on doing,” as that used in v. 28, and Jesus might have added: “Rightly didst thou answer.” In this little verb lies the crux of the entire text.

What the law demands is entirely plain and is clearly and beautifully illustrated by Jesus: flawless and unbroken love to every person with whose need we may come into contact. The unregenerate man cannot possibly attain to such love. The very root from which this love springs is lacking in his soul. Thus the direction which Jesus gives the lawyer intends to bring him to a realization of his loveless, sinful state, which, as long as it remains unchanged, cannot possibly obtain life eternal. This realization should bring about contrition. At the same time this realization should open the lawyer’s eyes to the beatitude which Jesus pronounced upon the seventy disciples, to the grace they were receiving by seeing and by hearing. It is not the law but the gift of God’ and his grace in the Gospel which bestows upon a sinner life eternal. This discovery the lawyer should now make. Then, having received the great love and the grace of pardon and of life in our hearts, love will be kindled in these hearts, love to God and to our neighbor, yea, such lovely and perfect love as Jesus depicts in his illustration. What if the new Gospel power does not always attain to the highest degree of love when its golden opportunities arrive? Not failure but low aim is crime.

The truth ever remains: the character of the saved is marked by love.

## **Homiletical Aid**

There are many robbers, not so many good Samaritans in the world. True Christian compassion is not over plentiful. Yet every one of the saved must have and must show forth Christian love. Such love is the evidence of the faith by which we are saved.

### **Read Aright the Story of the Good Samaritan.**

- I. Read in it your own condemnation. Here is perfect love exemplified.

Enhanced by special features: an enemy — at risk of life from robbers — doing all that could be done (inn, etc.).

We so often like the priest and the Levite, loveless.

Here is our condemnation. Our only hope for past lovelessness is true contrition.

II. Read in it your need of a Savior.

You cannot change of your own accord; of your own accord you would remain like priest and Levite.

Blessed are the disciples of Jesus who saw his deeds and heard his Gospel words.

Faith in the Redeemer and Pardoner and the power of the new life.

To the Gospel, to his Savior, Jesus tried to lead the lawyer, that he might cease trying to save himself by the law, that he might obtain life eternal by grace, and show the evidence in true works of Christian love.

The text seeks to produce the same effect in us.

III. Read in it your example.

Genuine love and compassion, inspiring and appealing to us for whom Jesus actually suffered and died.

The flesh may hinder, yet the loving voice of Jesus calls: Go and do likewise!

We who are saved by his infinite love cannot but for his sake respond in love.

There are no true Christians whose character is not marked by love.

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“Blessed are the pure in heart,” say the Scriptures. “Blessed are the meek.” “Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly.” And with many other sayings are the characteristics of the blessed set forth. We can sum them all up in one sentence:

## **Blessed Are the Disciples of Jesus!**

- I. They have a revelation which prophets and kings have desired.

We live in the age of fulfillment, with all the Gospel light for our eyes and all the Gospel truth for our ears.

The responsibility, Luke 12:48.

- II. They have an understanding of law which scribes and lawyers did not attain to.

Still too much work-righteousness in the world.

“This do, and thou shalt live,” means that none of us can do this and earn life.

- III. They have a spirit of service which only their master could teach.

Saved by the Savior, the law becomes for them a shining goal, not a driving master. Not how little, but how much our love can do.

To show love in deeds of love a golden opportunity. The last priest and Levite should disappear from us. J. A. Dell.

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The word “neighbor” has ever played a great role and will continue to do so. This is because the law says: “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.” It is also because Jesus used the illustration of the Good Samaritan. The fact is that in a certain way our salvation depends on this question regarding our neighbor.

### **The Question Concerning my Neighbor.**

- I. The wrong question. Asked by those who try to get eternal life in the wrong way.

1. They ask: “Who is my neighbor?” They reduce the number: Jew is neighbor only to Jew; lodgeman only to fellow lodgeman. In their second degree the Odd Fellows act out the Good Samaritan and after that the Noble Grand lectures on What he calls “a famous drama” (with never a mention that it comes from

Jesus), in order to impress the truth that one Odd Fellow must help another Odd Fellow.

2. They reduce what the divine law demands, holy, perfect, uninterrupted love, to what they call love, a little humanitarianism, some formal acts, even boldly teaching that a Mason is not to violate the wife or the daughter of a fellow Mason, knowing her to be such, — saying nothing about all other women.
3. Thus we get the robbers, the priest, and the Levite in the Lord's illustration. The daily papers tell what else we get.
4. Yet men expect to get eternal life and to be saved by using some scraps of God's law, some of their own shallow notions about his law. The lawyer whom Jesus sought to disillusion.

II. The right question. Asked by those who get salvation in the right way.

1. They ask: "To whom am I neighbor?" They get salvation and blessedness by receiving, not by doing. The eyes and the ears of the disciples in our text mean faith. To see and to hear the blessed fulfillment of the Gospel promises which prophets and kings believed and longed to see fulfilled. Salvation the gift of God's grace is Christ Jesus.
2. The heart changed by faith. The love received kindles answering love. The cruelty of the robbers is gone; the callous selfishness of the priest and the Levite is gone; all the shallow quibbling of the lawyer is gone. True love, extended for Christ's sake, who died for love of us, rejoices in every opportunity to be neighbor to any one who needs our help. That is why Jesus makes this illustration present a Samaritan helping a Jew. Love like this is the death of hate.
3. The example of the Good Samaritan, like the example of Jesus himself, is perfect. Our model must be perfect. Jesus could not set up an imperfect model. Christ's blessed disciples are inspired by the perfection. Though they fall short in attainment, they have daily pardon, increase in grace, and grow in love's perfection.

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## The Christian is Marked by Love.

Our text shows us

I. Robbers.

The opposite of love: criminality, cruelty, thievery. The mark of the world in a thousand varying forms.

II. A priest and a Levite.

The absence of love: callous, unfeeling, selfish. Hollow religion. How many today?

III. A Jewish legal expert.

Talking about love: full of questions and ignorant, misleading opinions, but no true love. Religious talk about love, climbing to heaven by love. Delusions.

IV. The Lord Jesus.

He fulfilled the prophets, all the promises of saving love, all the requirements of the law of love, all the sacrifice for our guilt. All that he gave his disciples to see and to hear, i.e. to receive by faith, so that they were blessed, saved, possessed eternal life.

V. The disciples of Jesus.

Saved by love through faith, the powers of life eternal manifest in them. Jesus' love kindles their love.

VI. The Good Samaritan.

Our model of perfection when eternal life is ours. Our growth in holy love. The constant help of Jesus. Weakness pardoned, but strength ever made greater.

Yes, the Christian is marked by love.

# The Fourteenth Sunday After Trinity. Luke 17:11-19

## Gratitude: Like the One Leper out of the Ten

The character of the saved is marked by gratitude to Jesus, the Savior. This text furnishes an example. Ten lepers had been saved from leprosy, one returns in deepest gratitude and worships Jesus. The deliverance he had received was a sign of the far greater deliverance Jesus had come to bestow. This grateful leper obtained also the greater deliverance. Pitiful are the nine who obtained only the deliverance from leprosy and could also so easily have obtained an eternal deliverance for their souls.

**[11] And it came to pass in going to Jerusalem\_ he was going through between Samaria and Galilee.** Καὶ ἐγένετο καὶ followed by a finite verb is a Hebraism that came into the Koine via the LXX. Luke tells the story as it was originally phrased. Ἐν τῷ with the infinitive is one of Luke's favorite constructions.

Luke, however, disregards the chronology, for he has already told us about incidents that occurred on this journey to Jerusalem which took place later and far down in Perea. In our narrative Jesus has not progressed very far on this journey, he is still going eastward on the border line between Samaria and Galilee (compare the incident related in 9:51 etc.), for this is the force of διὰ μέσον. I assume that he is on Galilean soil, for it is easier to believe that ten Jewish lepers, who had one Samaritan among them, were in Jewish territory, than to think that they were in Samaritan territory, where also Jesus and any travelers who were going to the great Jewish festivals were not welcome. Even then Luke's interest in thus locating the miracle does not go beyond offering a casual explanation for the presence of the one Samaritan leper. A Samaritan was found among the ten because of the proximity of Samaria.

**[12] And as he was entering into a village there met him ten leprous men, who stood far off. And they lifted the voice, saying: “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!” [14] And on seeing them he said: “Having gone, show yourselves to the priests!” And it came to pass while they were going they were cleansed.**

Lepers were accounted as being practically dead, unclean for this reason and not to be touched. They had to keep at a safe distance in order not to infect others, and on approaching any one had to shout: “Unclean, unclean!” As regards the details of this incurable disease see the Bible Dictionaries. I happened upon begging lepers in Jerusalem. In Cairo there were quite a number of them, insistent beggars, boldly coming entirely too close. Mutual misery had brought the ten together and had caused them to welcome even the Samaritan, forgetting the national hostility existing between Jew and Samaritan. Besides, Galilee was inhabited by a mixed population and the hostility to the Samaritans was less pronounced on the part of the Jews.

These lepers were not permitted to live in the little village, which Luke leaves unnamed. They had established themselves outside of the Village, a bit removed from the highway. Thus Jesus came upon them, but they were standing at a distance somewhat removed from the road. The Greek says “from afar,” because he measures from the distant object toward himself, and not as we do, from ourselves toward the distant object.

[13] What a pitiful line of men thus keeping their distance! Among other things leprosy destroys the voice. With combined effort the ten could still make plenty of noise. There they stand and reiterate their pleading cry: “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!” The Greek verb is transitive: “Mercy us!” They know his name “Jesus,” and the fact that he is a rabbi or a teacher. Luke does not retain “Rabbi,” but uses ἐποτάτης (vocative ἐπιστάτα) instead: equivalent to “chief,” the one who stands over others. The mercy these men beg Jesus to extend to them is the healing of their leprosy. They had heard of the miracles and of the power of Jesus, and thus with faith and hope trembling in their hearts they shout their prayer. It is noteworthy that in so many prayers for such help the appeal is just for mercy, with no specification whatever, except when it is asked for by Jesus.

[14] Jesus saw them, and, of course, heard their cries for mercy. He halted and probably motioned to them to be still. Then, standing right where he was in the road, he called out to them: “Having gone, show yourselves to the priests!” That was all. He neither approached them nor had them come to him. The Greek uses a participle to indicate the act: “having gone”; the English does not care to distinguish the minor act from the major.

The sense is plain: leprous as these men are, they are to go and to present themselves to the priests as if they were sound men and altogether healed of their leprosy. The priests were the health officers. They would make the physical examination and the tests and then offer the sacrifices. The lifting of the quarantine is described in Matt. 8:4, the Third Sunday after Epiphany. Did the lepers look at each other when Jesus gave this order and then simply walked on? With all their leprosy upon them were they to go to the priests? Why they would not even be allowed to get near the Temple, much less to approach the court of the priests! Then it flashed into their minds that the command of Jesus included a promise, namely that their leprosy would disappear and that the priests would lift the quarantine and legally attest the fact of their cure.

So they started out for Jerusalem. The Samaritan would go to Mount Gerizim and to his own sanctuary there. Let us remember that Jesus was not building up Judaism, John 4:21. The lepers had cried to Jesus for mercy because of a faith that rested on what they had heard about him and about his miracles. All that Jesus had given them was his word. To believe it meant to act on it. Thus to act on Jesus’ word meant an increase of their faith, and this would teach them ever and in all things to believe the word of Jesus. In fact, in the case of these lepers there was hardly anything to do but to start out for the priests. The only alternative to cast aside the word of Jesus in foolish unbelief.

So they started out with all their leprosy, and before they had gone very far, suddenly their leprosy was gone. Incredible, but true. Imagine how they looked at each other, how each examined his own body and then the bodies of the others. How they must have shouted with joy. The ugly sores had become sound flesh, the dropped joints were restored, not even a blotch remained or any other trace of their former disease. They could hardly believe it. And all ten of them were restored equally. A miracle indeed!

**[15] But one of them, on seeing that he was healed, turned back, with a great voice glorifying God, [16] and fell on his face at his feet thanking him; and he was a Samaritan. [17] Now Jesus answering said: “Were not ten cleansed? But the nine — where are they? [18] Were there not found having turned back to give glory to God save this foreigner?” [19] And he said to him: “Having arisen be going! Thy faith has saved thee.”**

Surely there must have been a second debate among them. The first was, should they go as Jesus had told them. All ten of them had gone. Now the question arose, should they keep on going, or should they not first hurry back and give thanks to Jesus? The vote was nine to one. The nine quote the word of Jesus, that they were to go to the priests and to no one else. That argument seemed to be sound. But the Samaritan did not yield to the majority. It would consume but a little time to go back and to thank Jesus; nothing was lost thereby as regards going to the priests.

The decision was not, however, made by any such outward argument. It was made by the heart. Out of the Samaritan's faith that caused him to cry to Jesus for mercy and out of the word of Jesus that had healed him something was born that was not born in the hearts of the nine Jews, something that drew this Samaritan back to Jesus despite the adverse decision of the others. The Samaritan's faith was advancing with great strides and the evidence of the advance was his profound gratitude. The others went on to the priests, — for them the healing was the chief matter, not the Healer.

Majorities impress us too much. What would you have done if you had stood against nine? Majorities can go wrong as well as an individual. In matters of right and in religion majorities do not count. Luther stood against the world in his day. He stood with and for the truth. God and I still make a majority. So the lone Samaritan turned back. But he became vocal in glorifying God; every step was jubilant. The distance was not great, for in the first place, Jesus would not let the lepers travel far with their leprosy still upon them, and in the second place, if both parties had traveled far the Samaritan would have had difficulty in locating Jesus, but as Luke narrates the story the Samaritan quickly found Jesus. It was quite likely a question of a mile or two.

[16] The Samaritan, now healed, hurries to Jesus and falls on his face in oriental prostration and pours out his ardent thanks to Jesus. We see how the wondrous miracle had impressed the man with the greatness of Jesus, — less than ten words heal ten lepers instantly. Genuine gratitude and thanksgiving are supremely significant; so is their lack. Truly to recognize what one has received is itself a blessing and opens the door wide for receiving further blessings. To omit genuine thanksgiving is the opposite and closes the door. The secret of happiness is bound up with gratitude. The grateful heart is the happy heart. The nine were glad because of what they had, the one was glad because of that and because of much more that he found in Jesus: Many, to be sure, make long prayers, all after the pattern: “I thank thee, Lord — I thank thee — I thank thee,” but long recitations like this seldom impress us as being true expressions of gratitude.

[17] Ἀποκριθεὶς is used in a broad way, as when one responds to a situation as Jesus does here; the addition of this participle also helps to lend importance to what is said. The questions of Jesus are exclamatory because they are surcharged with deep feeling. “But the nine — where?” is full of sad pain and disappointment. The words are like a cry of longing, reaching out though sadly all in vain.

It is not that Jesus wants thanks for himself. The great gift of healing which he gave was not given for its own sake, but in order to win and to open the hearts of the beneficiaries for this other and greater gift. Yet the nine never returned, they prevented the bestowal of any greater gift. They frustrated the mighty love that heard their cry for mercy. This is the reward they gave Jesus. No wonder he was grieved.

[18] The Greek negates the verb Whereas the English negates the subject. The question is one of deepest sadness. Note also that it implies that if any would have returned, the nine Jews Who had been healed should have been the ones, but here it is only this ἄλλογενής, this foreigner (of another race). The Samaritans were of Gentile extraction, not even partly Jewish, as is often supposed.

[19] Jesus tells the Samaritan to arise and to proceed on his journey to the priest. But he adds the weighty and the pregnant word: “Thy faith has saved thee!” It was the faith that cried out for the mercy of Jesus and received the gift of healing. Not that faith was the *causa efficiens*, but that it

was indeed the *causa instrumentalis*. For the power lay in Jesus, and him faith embraced. But is that all that faith is for, — to receive only a physical, temporal blessing? Is that all that Jesus is for, — to bestow only such a blessing? The faith of the Samaritan had grown, for unlike that of the nine, the Samaritan's faith had borne the fruit of deepest gratitude. But it was to grow still more. The Samaritan did not yet have saving faith; he was not yet delivered from his sin. To bring him to this saving faith is the intent of Jesus. The Samaritan had learned to trust the word of Jesus. The Savior's word would soon bring him all the treasures of salvation. Then in the higher sense his faith would save him.

As for the nine, — they took their healing and that was all. What faith they began with Wilted and died like a bud that brings no flower or fruit.

## Homiletical Aid

### The Story of the Ten Lepers.

- I. Great misery.
- II. Great mercy.
- III. Great ingratitude.
  
- v. Bierowsky, theme changed.

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The text offers a temptation to allegorize. But see *S.* 13. Sommer still believes in this.

### The Healing of our Spiritual Leprosy.

- I. The sick.
- II. The healing of the sick.
- III. The gratitude of the healed.

This is not preaching on the text. Moreover, the second part is identical with the theme, a serious fault in outlining. Allegorizing is an evidence of helplessness. Resort to allegory is a confession that the preacher is at a loss as to how to treat his material. It should remain an unbroken rule: Never allegorize a miracle!

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The Germans say: *Undank ist der Welt Lohn*. You have experienced much ingratitude, you have also been guilty of ingratitude. Nothing is so base and mean. The Christian must be grateful to his Savior in the highest degree, — like the healed Samaritan leper, — not like his nine Jewish companions. Their ungratefulness the worse because he went back to thank Jesus and they scorned to follow his noble example. Consider

### **The Ungrateful Nine.**

What was the matter with them? Is there anything similar to that wrong with us? If so, eradicate it. If you are grateful, cultivate that gratitude.

- I. They saw too little.
  1. Saved from a living death.
  2. By an act of omnipotence and of mercy.
  3. They did not see enough of their Benefactor and of what his miracle meant.
  4. They were not drawn back to him.
  5. The grateful Samaritan saw far more — so much that nine men could not restrain him.
  6. Here is one of the sad causes of ingratitude: the wretched ignorance that does not see enough. Here too is its cure.
- II. They remembered too little.
  1. All their wretchedness in their living death, one should think they remembered it most vividly.

2. Once they were healed, the memory began to fade. The great difference before the help is received and after it is received.
3. So they were not drawn back to Jesus.
4. The Samaritan remembered, so strongly that nine men could not stop him from going back.
5. Here is one of the sad causes of ingratitude: we remember too little from what we were delivered. Here too is the cure.

III. They desired too little.

1. They were satisfied with their bodily cure.
2. They did not feel any further need, — so too this is often true with regard to us.
3. They perceived not that they had come upon the eternal fountain of grace for soul and for body, for life and for eternity.
4. The one gift created no desire for more gifts.
5. Not so the Samaritan. His heart drew him to the fountain from which so great a mercy had come to him, and nine men could not stop him.
6. Too easily satisfied makes us ungrateful. Think of all that you need. This is the cure.

IV. They were left with too little.

1. They never received another mercy from Jesus. We pity them.
2. The Samaritan found the key to all of the Savior's mercies — faith.
3. Rise above all this pitiful ingratitude. But be grateful not merely with the lips.

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The Ten Lepers and our Troubles. Let us learn:

- I. To call upon the Savior's mercy.

1. The Savior has abundant mercy, not only miraculous. All help in trouble comes from him.
  2. So few call upon his mercy and recognize his mercy and his powers. The nine lepers recognized only the fact that he had helped others. We must penetrate more deeply when we call.
- II. To obey his gracious directions.
1. The strange order to the lepers, just to show themselves to the priests. The Savior has his own means, ways, and times to help, — do not dictate.
  2. The significant order to the lepers, involving faith. This faith in him and in his directions (Word) is essential and the key to all his help for both body and soul.
- III. To thank him for his help.
1. Nine, no thanks. Their hearts satisfied with the bodily gift. Many rise no higher.
  2. The lone Samaritan, true gratitude. The faith that produced this fruit. The great significance of especially this fruit of faith in our lives. We need much more than healing even from a dead — ly disease. We need a Savior whom we may thank in all eternity.

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### **Nine to One.**

- I. Nine to one makes it easy for the nine.

The big majority for the wrong course. In the crowd the one encourages the other. The more numerous they are, the more certain they feel that they are right.

The followers of Jesus are the little flock that is not to be afraid. The world the great crowd today. Multitudes have no use for Jesus, other multitudes pervert his Word. Our young people: everybody does it, why not I?

It is easy — and dangerous to run with the crowd.

II. Nine to one makes it hard for the one. Does he alone know?

Is he perhaps just a crank? — There are such.

To stand alone, like the healed Samaritan leper, means to have genuine certainty. Jesus confirmed his act.

To stand alone thus requires noble courage. To this day we admire the Samaritan, fault the nine Jews.

To stand alone in true faith in Jesus, in gratitude to him and in any true fruit of faith, exceeds in blessedness.

Can you stand and act alone when you should?

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A" favorite theme is the Savior's sad question:

### **“Where are the Nine?”**

I. Nine ingrates.

They had every call to be most deeply grateful, — the priceless gift of their healing.

They had the Samaritan's example to shame them.

They took what they had gotten and — left.

O the ingrates we see! Children reared in Christian homes. Catechumens at the altar, then all too soon: Where are the nine? Other examples.

Shallow faith that would not allow itself to be deepened even by the greatest gift, and revealed its shallowness by its ingratitude.

II. Nine failures.

They were by pure mercy set on the high-road to life's success, spiritual success. As long as they should live they would carry that grace around with them in their bodies.

They never advanced another step, despite the glorious example of the Samaritan. They never gained another gift from Jesus, who so

mercifully and so promptly had given them health. Failures! Absolute failures! Worse, because what they could have obtained was so evident from what they had obtained.

The flicker of their first faith died. Could not even achieve true gratitude.

To have the most abounding health and not even a grateful heart is deadly failure.

### III. Nine warnings.

So many who want only the bodily, the earthly gift. Who when they get it go on their own way.

Does Jesus mean anything personal to you?

Woe to the ungrateful! Bless the thankful Samaritan whom we will ever join!

# The Fifteenth Sunday After Trinity. Matt. 6:24-34

## Carefreeness: Like the Lilies of the Field

It is scarcely necessary to prove that Christian Carefreeness is one of the great characteristics of the Saved. If we are not as carefree as we should be, this text is our medicine.

[24] We are not to lay up for ourselves perishable but imperishable treasures. **“No man can be a slave to two masters. For either he will hate the one and will love the other, or he will hold to one and will despise the other. You cannot be slaves to God and to mammon.”** The matter is axiomatic. It applies to us in our relation to God, because no human being is his own master. He must be a slave to some one. Δουλεύειν = to be or to serve as a slave. The idea in the concept slave is the thought that the slave has no will of his own, that his will is wholly his master’s will. The axiom, therefore, is not nullified when several persons own a slave, as for instance a family. Though they are several, yet they are a unit, with one will which then is the slave’s will.

The matter is treated entirely from the side of the slave and not from a duality of the masters. Nothing is said about how the masters would react. By hating the one and by loving the other master, or, which amounts to the same thing, only advancing now to the slave’s actions, by holding to the one and despising the other (note the chiasmic arrangement), the slave himself demonstrates that he cannot be a slave and devote his will equally to two masters. To be sure, the thought is that of two contradictory masters. The slave himself decides the question, he makes one or the other master his real master, to whom his real love (ἀγαπᾶν, not merely φιλεῖν) inclines.

The two masters Jesus has in mind are God and mammon (see Luke 16:13, the Ninth Sunday after Trinity). By “mammon” is meant money or its equivalent. The word was left unchanged in Greek and was used because it was such a handy term. Thus also, placed here beside “God,” it is personified as a slave’s master, although the term is not intended to name an idol or a pagan god. Men make money, etc., their god, make themselves slaves of this god, sacrifice to him all their time, mind, thought, effort. The God who made them they ignore, forget, blot from their memories. Can they do both at the same time, love God and love mammon? Some are fools enough to try it, but never has a single one of them succeeded.

[25] On the principle thus laid down and elucidated Jesus rests the admonitions and the illustrations which ought to keep us undivided slaves of God and free us from all attachment to money. **“For this reason I say to you: ‘Stop worrying for your life, what you shall eat, or what you shall drink; nor yet for your body, what you shall put on. Is not the life more than the nourishment, and the body more than the thing put on.’”** When the present imperative is negatived it frequently means to stop an action already begun. A dog that has begun to bark you hush with this imperative. The verb μεριμνάω (see Martha, Luke 10:41) means “to be distracted,” the mind turning now to this now to that, and knowing not what μέρος or part to settle on in order to make sure of food, drink, or clothes. “Drink” is important in a country like Palestine where it is often a grave problem to secure water. The subjunctives of deliberation are retained in the indirect discourse, and are only changed to the second person.

If we are slaves who slave only for God, and give him our undivided will, and have turned our will from mammon, all is well with us. He who gave us life will certainly give us what is far less, namely nourishment; he who gave us the body in which this life breathes will certainly give us things to put on. Φυκή is our immaterial part, which animates the body, hence it signifies “life” in the present connection. Thus the psyche and the body form a pair, and to remain in the body the psyche requires nourishment.

[26] A simple illustration drives this truth home. **“Look at the birds of the heaven, that they do not sow, nor reap, nor gather into storehouses; and your heavenly Father nourishes them. Are you not far superior to them?”** These birds should be a standing wonder to us. They live altogether

from hand to mouth. They have no such advantages as we have, for we can sow and reap and thus store up much food. Still their-next meal is assured, for “your heavenly Father” nourishes them. Not that he is their heavenly Father; he is yours. If he is your heavenly Father he certainly will not set a constant table for wild birds (2 of the heaven) and permit you, his very own children, to starve. For you certainly are far superior to a lot of wild birds. Διαφέρω = “to differ,” i.e. advantageously. We are μᾶλλον, “by far” different, i.e. superior to them.

[27] **“Moreover, who of you, by worrying, is able to add to his lifetime a single half-yard?”** While *fiMxia* is used with reference to stature, it is also used with reference to length of life. It would be ridiculous to make it mean “stature” in the present connection. What person has ever tried to become taller by a Mime or half-arm (about a half-yard) beyond his normal height? The fact that the word means a measure of about eighteen inches does not demand this meaning here, for in Ps. 39:5 “a handbreadth” is used with reference to the length of life, and this same usage has been adopted with regard to other linear measures. “Worrying” never lengthens, but it shortens life. Much more may be said regarding its harmfulness.

[28] The same is true with regard to clothing. **“And concerning something to put on, why are you worrying?”** when it is equally useless, foolish, and hurtful. **“Consider well the lilies of the field, how they grow. They do not toil, nor do they spin. Yet I say to you, that even Solomon in all his glory did not robe himself like one of these.”** These lilies are a marvel indeed. As “the birds of the air” are the wild birds, for whom no one provides, so “the lilies of the field” are the wild lilies which are altogether uncultivated. Consider and weigh well how they grow. We toil, we spin, so as to get some kind of a garment. These lilies do neither, — they just grow.

[29] Yet look at their beauty, the texture of their petals, the exquisite shading and the colors. When on state occasions great king Solomon, the greatest of Israel’s kings, decked himself (lit. “threw around himself”) with all his royal splendor he did not equal one of these lilies. Κρίνον may be the wild iris, yet the popular name “lily” was used with reference to various flowers. Remember, Jesus spoke these words in the open, probably with wild birds and wild lilies near at hand.

[30] Jesus has employed the argument from the less to the greater. He does this again. **“But if the grass of the field, which today exists, and tomorrow is thrown into an oven, God thus enrobes, how much more not you, men of little faith!”** Jesus is still speaking of the lilies which have a grass-like foliage. In a country where fuel was scarce, such foliage was cut for the purpose of making a quick, hot fire, say in an oven, into which, when properly heated, dough was placed to be baked. So one day the lily plants stood in the field, and the next day they were consumed to ashes. So ephemeral, yet so grandly decked out by God! The argument is overwhelming: if God does this for mere transient grass, shall he not do far more for us, the disciples of Jesus, his own children, who are to live for ever?

When addressing the disciples as ὀλιγόποτοι he reproves their little faith. Yes, they have faith, but it is all too small. Every worry decreases that faith. That is all it does or can do, for it in no way aids in taking care of us. If God should leave us to our worries, by them to take care of ourselves, We should indeed be in a plight. The Greek term is an adjective and occurs only in the New Testament.

[31] Now (οὐν) the admonition. **“Do not therefore worry, saying: ‘What shall we eat?’ or: ‘What shall we drink?’ or: ‘With what shall we enrobe ourselves?’ 32) For all these things the Gentiles seek after; for your heavenly Father knows that you have need of these things all.”** Instead of the negative present imperative which is used in v. 25, we now have the negative aorist, a subjunctive, because in negative aorist commands this mode was used. But this aorist is peremptory. The disciples of Jesus are summarily forbidden to worry.

The questions of v. 25 were in indirect discourse; the discourse now is direct, and the subjunctives are deliberative. No questions of this kind are ever to harass a disciple’s mind. Such questions fill the minds of the benighted “Gentiles” (τὰ ἔθνη), these “nations” that do not know the Father in heaven and run after dead idols. The mere mention of “the Gentiles” should be enough in this connection. Do we believers want to descend to the pagan level? Note that both in πάντα ταῦτα, “all these things,” and in τούτων ἅπánτων, “these things all,” the emphasis is on the first word.

We Christians live in a higher world, where we enjoy our heavenly Father's care. Let us give this great, loving Father credit for knowing that we need all these things. What is he a Father for, if he forgets, neglects, and lets his children perish?

[33] Our seeking is for something higher than that of pagan nations. **“But be seeking first the Kingdom and the righteousness that is his, and these things all will be added unto you.”** I fear that seeking the Kingdom is often seriously misunderstood, especially by those who imagine that they can build the Kingdom. I explain “the Kingdom” in Matt. 21:5, the First Sunday in Advent, John 3:3, Trinity Sunday. Here on earth it is the reign of the King in grace, and our desire as disciples should ever be to participate more and more in Christ's rule of grace, enjoying more and more the blessings of this rule of grace, which rule eventually becomes a rule of glory. Only the righteous participate in the Kingdom, hence all seeking of the Kingdom is at the same time a seeking after “his righteousness,” that which the King has prepared for us and which in his juridical judgment, ever is righteousness indeed. This “righteousness” the King bestows upon us; it is the quality which is ours when his verdict has pronounced us righteous. Christians ever hunger and thirst after this righteousness, and ever they are filled. Compare Matt. 5:20, the Sixth Sunday after Trinity.

When Jesus says: seek ye first the Kingdom, he does not mean that we may at least seek the earthly things second. Again, he, cannot mean that Christians are not at all to seek the earthly things, for in the Lord's Prayer he teaches us to pray for our daily bread. The matter is simple: whoever seeks the Kingdom, etc., first has no trouble about anything else. Yes, he will pray for his daily bread and all that this includes, but ever in the right Christian manner, devoid of all worry. Jesus tells him how relatively small all these earthly things are to our heavenly Father, — he throws them in for good measure with the gift of his Kingdom and his righteousness. At market one buys provisions, and the market-man measures out a full bushel for you, and then in his generosity adds three or four handful more.

[34] So the final admonition sums up the matter. **“Do not therefore worry into the marrow; for the marrow will worry for itself. Sufficient for the day is the trouble thereof.”** We must translate “into tomorrow,” for if the meaning were “for the morrow, about the morrow,” we should have the genitive after the verb. Jesus says: Do not carry worry from one day into

another! Do not toss in bed because of worry until another day comes! Yes, the morrow will worry for itself. Do you then live today without any worry whatever, — toss all your worries into the lap of tomorrow. If you do this day by day, how serene, how untroubled, how sweet and sane your whole life will be. We cannot follow the A.V. and change the verb: “the morrow will worry for (not: take thought for) itself.” For this verb runs through the entire text. No; the morrow is never here, it does not exist today. So also all the worries of the fleeting morrow never are reached by us.

In any event every day has its κακία, its load of what is good-for-nothing. Why borrow more from the morrow? Luther well translates: *Plage* (plague). There are always things that should be better. In this sinful world many things cause us trouble. We simply bear them, but worry — never!

## Homiletical Aid

The artist must be able to see things in a true perspective, so that he does not draw men taller than the houses, or objects in the background larger than those in the foreground. In all walks of life it is likewise important to have a true perspective, so that one does not waste his efforts with inconsequential de — tails and miss the main issue. Thus ever

### First Things First.

- I. God before mammon.
- II. The soul before the body.
- III. Righteousness before riches.
- IV. Eternity before time.

**“All depends on our possessing  
God’s abundant grace and blessing;  
Earthly treasures quickly wane.  
He whose hope on God is founded  
Has a wealth of joy unbounded,  
And his heart will firm remain.” — J. A. Dell.**

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What a happy characteristic to have one's character marked by carefreeness! Many advise you not to worry. The only trouble about following that advice is that the worry gets too big or the worries too many. About the only people, outside of true Christians, Who do not worry are reckless men, or happy-go-lucky people, and their freedom from worry is certainly not even a worldly virtue. We know the antidote that is good for the poison of worry, that Will leave us with a happy, joyful, singing heart. It is the Savior's own prescription for the saved. It is exceedingly easy to take.

### **The Carefree Soul:**

#### **I. Considers God.**

If you give your heart and your will to mammon, cares and worries eat you up, like the noxious insects in Ethiopia. You are a wretched slave.

If you try to compromise between God and mammon, you will fail. No one has ever succeeded. You will be a pitiful slave.

If you give your heart and your will only and wholly to God, he will take perfect care of you. You will be a slave that is a king.

#### **II. Considers God's wild creatures.**

The birds and the bread-question.

The lilies and the clothes-question.

You as compared with these creatures, God's children in Christ Jesus, destined for eternity.

#### **III. Considers the Gentiles.**

All they have is dead, dumb idols. Though like the priests of Baal they cry all day long, they deserve only that Elijah make fun of them.

Yet many still turn to a "god" that only their minds have manufactured.

Shall we belong to this great class?

#### **IV. Considers God's Kingdom and his righteousness.**

Your supreme need to be under his rule of grace sharing in all his gifts of grace.

Your supreme need his righteousness, obtained from him for Christ's sake by his pardoning verdict.

V. Then considers its own worries.

They will all have disappeared. If one should still buzz about to sting you, throw him into the morrow and tell him to stay there.

It is like adding an extra to a purchase for God to give you all that you need. Mere play.

That is how the Christian is carefree.

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Two kinds of novel preachers. One kind is vocal, preaches all summer long or even all year long; the other kind is silent, and preaches only a few days during the summer. Theirs is a great sermon, one that we all constantly need.

### **The Sermon of the Wild Birds and of the Wild Lilies.**

I. Exceedingly simple.

1. They are God's creatures.
2. Though they neither sow nor reap, toil nor spin, God feeds and clothes them.
3. Solomon by comparison.
4. The whole world of men cannot help but hear this great sermon.

II. Undeniably true.

1. These little creatures never worry in the least.
2. They are happy to rely wholly on their Creator.
3. So they continue from year to year.

III. Unheard by the mammonites.

1. They give their souls to mammon and what it can buy.
2. Many of them try to serve both God and mammon, — a thing that has never been done.
3. The love and service of mammon produces endless worries. So light the poor man's heart, but give him a million and lo, the worries!

IV. Heeded only by true Christians.

1. Theirs the Kingdom, the righteousness of God, the soul riches for eternity.
2. Theirs the promise that all else shall be thrown in for good measure.
3. Theirs the blessed freedom from all worries.
4. If any worry shows itself they throw it out into the morrow, and so they never see it again.
5. Are you one of these carefree Christians?

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When life is done: — all the things that will make absolutely no difference, — the one supreme thing that will make all the difference. Throughout our lives we should never be deceived regarding the relative value of these things. The wreck would be too great if we allowed ourselves to be deceived. Get a clear view of the supreme thing:

**God's Kingdom and His Righteousness.**

They are like a unit, so closely do they go together.

I. Not only supreme

God's rule of grace, through Word and Sacrament, — nothing greater or more blessed for your soul. This rule makes you share the Kingdom as being God's son and heir. Though you were emperor of a

vast earthly empire, this is as nothing compared to being an heir in God's Kingdom. God's righteousness alone admits to this royal position, i.e. God's verdict for Christ's sake through faith.

Many fail to see what is supreme, run after mammon, plunge themselves into countless worries, remain on the pagan level. But not you and I.

II. But assure everything else.

All these other things that cause men such great worries and for which they eat out their lives, are as nothing to God. He gives them to the millions of wild birds and to the exquisitely robed lilies, — they cost him nothing. And he does so with the heirs and the children of his Kingdom, the righteousness of which cost him his Son. Like an extra handful for good measure. How foolish to be a mammonist, to be like the pagan peoples who know nothing but idols. No; not you and I.

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### **Do Not Worry!**

- I. You, are God's slaves.
- II. You are God's children.
- III. You are God's heirs. Nebe.

# The Sixteenth Sunday After Trinity. Luke 7:11-17

## Safety in Death

The saved have a Savior who is mightier than death. He so proved himself by raising the widow's son at Nain. Thus the saved have no cause whatever to fear temporal death. Ever they are safe in the arms of Jesus. That Safety in Death should characterize the saved and distinguish them from the children of this world is rather self-evident. A Christian may not feel as safe as he should at the prospect of death, but the safety is there and he can embrace it and enjoy it. Most men of the world are afraid of death, in some cases pitifully, abjectly afraid. They have no Savior to go with them through the valley of death. Dread uncertainty harasses them. They have heard about hell after death and are not sure that hell is not waiting for them. Many false philosophies are called upon to dispel the fear of death, they are without real power to do so. Not a few men face death with brazen bravery, as if it were a virtue to plunge recklessly into the dread unknown. The saved alone can say: "I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep; for thou, Lord, only makest me to dwell in safety."

**[11] And it came to pass in the time soon after, he went to a city called Nain, and there were going with him his disciples and a great multitude.** Nain is a little village south of Mt. Tabor and is still pointed out to the traveler. Jesus spoke a few immortal words here and the place has been famous ever since. Ἐξῆς, whether preceded by τῷ or τῆ, is used as an adjective.

**[12] Now as he came near to the portal of the city, lo, there was being carried out one dead, a son only-begotten to his mother, and she was a widow. And a goodly crowd of the city was with her.** Jesus and the multitude with him meet a funeral procession coming out of the city gate,

Nain at that time being a walled town. “Lo” marks the surprise that the two crowds should meet in this manner. It seemed purely accidental, but it was highly providential. Καί before ἰδοῦ introduces the apodosis, but it is not translated because we lack this idiom.

The pathos of the scene is fully conveyed by Luke: a young man, the only son of his mother, in fact, the only child she had ever had, was now being buried, and she herself was a widow. The sympathy of the community was attested by the large attendance at the funeral. Once before this woman had stood beside a sad grave, when her husband had died. Then she had had her only son left as her support and stay, — and now he too was gone. So it is With funerals, — every one of them has its burden of sorrow and sadness. In some cases the grief is more poignant than in others; that, however, is little comfort for the bereaved.

**[13] And when the Lord saw her he was filled with compassion for her, and said to her: “Stop sobbing!” [14] And having come forward he touched the bier; and those bearing it stopped. And he said: “Young man, to thee I say, rise up!” [15] And the dead sat up, and began to speak. And he gave him to his mother.**

Jesus proceeded at the head of the great crowd that was following him. The funeral procession and the crowd that composed it was headed by the dead body borne on a bier, and by the lone mourner who either followed close upon the body or walked directly in front of it. With one glance Jesus took in the entire pathetic situation, and his heart overflowed with compassion for the stricken widow, — no husband by her side, no child or children. We need no explanation as to how Jesus was so fully informed. Whenever he needs to know he knows. The Greeks located the tender feelings in the σπλάγχνα, “viscera,” but in the nobler viscera, heart, lungs, liver, and thus also this verb was formed. At various places the gospels mention the compassion of Jesus. We should not identify his compassion with ours. We pity the sufferers who suffer as we do, for we and they are both on the same level. The compassion of Jesus is that of “the Lord,” as Luke here rightly calls him, of the divine Lord, who stands far above all these sufferers and has power to deliver them. So often our compassion is utterly helpless, offering at most only a few words of sympathy. The compassion of Jesus is mighty, able to deliver to the uttermost.

When the present imperative is negatived it may mean, as in the present case, to stop an action that has begun: “Stop sobbing!” The verb refers to loud, unrestrained, audible weeping, not merely the silent shedding of tears. No interval occurred here, no time during which the widow might wonder about such a command being addressed to her.

[14] Jesus stepped forward to the bier, touched it with his hand, causing the bearers to stop in their tracks. Funeral processions are never interrupted, they have the right of way. Ordinarily Jesus and his crowd of followers should have pressed to one side of the road, and allowed the funeral procession to pass. But Jesus interferes with this procession and stops it. The moment the bearers halt, Jesus addresses the dead man and bids him arise. This is what “stop sobbing” had meant. Note, too, the authoritative addition: “to thee I say.” Jesus raises the dead by his own power. Σορός means only the bier, *Totenbahre*, *sandapila*, such as was used for common people. The Jews used no coffins. The body was wrapped in its cerements and was transported on a bier, carried on the shoulders, or just by the hands. I saw a large Jewish funeral procession at Jerusalem, made up entirely of men, marching in well separated files and filling the street. The bearers had two long poles with bands across them, on which the wrapped body was borne by the suspended hands of the bearers.

The Great Prince of Life, whose mission it was to conquer and to destroy death, here at Nain meets face to face with the dread ruler death, carrying off one of his victims. See what now happened.

[15] The dead man sat up and began to speak. That is all that Luke says. But add: his soul returned to his body and reanimated the lifeless corpse. Not at the point where this dead man’s life had been interrupted by death was it now continued. He probably had died of some virulent disease, the ravages of which finally brought on dissolution. NO disease or trace of those ravages remains. This young man arises in perfect health and strength. Note all that forms an integral part of this miracle. The bier was no longer needed. The Young man steps to the ground, and tenderly Jesus gives him to his mother. Describe this scene, — it is worthy of the best pen and the best writer. A sad funeral procession came out of the city gate, but a jubilant procession of joy went back in. Yet, can you believe it, there are men who do not want such a Savior who performs such miracles and such a Gospel filled with scenes of superabounding joy!

**[16] But fear took all. And they began to glorify God, saying: “A great prophet did rise among us!” and: “God did look upon his people!” And this account concerning him went out in whole Judea and in all the region round about.** If you can in imagination place yourself among these people you will have no difficulty about this “fear” that took them (aorist) with a sudden grip. It certainly was fear; we should not tone the word down to mere awe or reverence. All that is uncanny for us mortals in regard to death, and all that we know about the divine power to snatch death’s prey from its hold, would make us quake and blanch with fear, if we were present and witnessed the clash.

But this grip of holy fear quickly passed into the glorification of God. Luke preserved two of the best expressions that were uttered. It was well indeed to glorify God for the miracle. The great disappointment is that none of these people learned from the miracle who Jesus really was. All they acknowledge is that he is “a great prophet,” one like those who brought about resurrections in Old Testament times, one who might thus be the predecessor of the coming Messiah. Their eyes would not open wider. So great the miracle, so disappointing the effect.

[17] Δόγος is the account of the miracle. Say what one may about the blindness which would not recognize the Messiah in this mighty work of his, the miracle itself was so great and so full of love that wings carried it over all the land. Nain is located in Galilee. But as here used by Luke “Judea” does not mean the southern province, but the entire country of Palestine (so also 1:5). Naturally Galilee heard the report first of all, but it traveled also throughout Samaria and the southern province of Judea, including Jerusalem. The Prince of Life, the Victor over Death, was come. The glorious news had to be spread.

## Homiletical Aid

We should sadly misunderstand the Savior’s miracles of healing and his three miracles of recalling the dead to physical life, if we supposed that the Savior must now continue such miracles, or that his church today must prove itself to be the true church by repeating such miracles. The miracles once wrought by Jesus and his apostles and recorded by Revelation and

Inspiration are signs and seals and certifications that stand for all time. They cannot be repeated, even as during all the centuries none were or could be added by Inspiration. What these divine seals attest is our great concern and not a debate about repetitions. This is the fact that death cannot possibly harm us, because we are in the power of One Infinitely Mightier than Death. Indeed, the characteristic of all the saved is their

### **Safety in Death.**

- I. Not a mere verbal safety.
  1. In poetic words: “Thanatopsis,” used by one of our “literary” preachers for the funeral of a dear saint.
  2. In philosophic words, that nothing follows death, that all go into “the better land”; etc., etc.
  3. In the verbiage of the lodge. Of the self-righteous; etc.
  4. Self-made safety for the hour of death is the supreme delusion.
- II. Our safety is in the Eternal Lord of Death.
  1. One word and at Nain death gives up its prey. The two other similar miracles.
  2. He shattered the power of death by his own glorious resurrection.
  3. Faith binds us to him for ever.
  4. No matter how this Lord may call us to die, absolute safety is ours. Passages.
- III. Our safety destroys all fear of death.
  1. No dark shadow trails us, no secret fear of what may lie in the hereafter.
  2. Sure and certain hope.
  3. A happy anticipation of the day of death.
  4. A life that glorifies both God and the Savior of the saved.

In the midst of life we are in death, etc. Whether we see many about us meeting their last summons or not, there is always

### **Nain:**

- I. An impressive sermon on the power of death.
  1. Come, young men, let us go to the funeral at Nain. Join the mourners. Note the sadness.
  2. Come, you mothers, widows, parents, etc. Here a second grave is to be added to the first.
  3. The old riddle: “Why?” in all its perplexity, with only God’s wisdom, love, and providence able to answer, and the answer often not understood.
  4. The Bible: sin, and death through sin: wages of sin is death — sting of death is sin. But eternal victory is ours in Christ Jesus.
- II. A vastly more impressive sermon on the power of the Savior from death.
  1. Infinite compassion.
  2. Restoration of earthly life (perfect).
  3. The Messiah, and no mere prophet.
  4. Calvary and Joseph’s garden.
  5. Ps. 4:8.

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Death: we distinguish the spiritual — the physical — the eternal death.

### **How can we Escape the Eternal Doom of Death?**

- I. Only through him who has conquered death for us.
  - II. Only through faith in him who has conquered death for us.
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Cheating the undertaker and the sexton by perishing in the sea. Yet every one of us, both when he himself comes to die, or when he is bereaved by another person's death, needs

### **The Comfort That is Stronger Than Death.**

- I. You cannot get it from men who themselves succumb to death.
- II. You can get it alone from Him who conquered death for us. "Stop sobbing!"
- III. His loving compassion bestows this powerful comfort.

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### **The King of Terrors and the Prince of Life.**

- I. Terrible is death.
- II. Glorious is the Savior.
- III. Death is swallowed up in victory.

Adapted from Stoecker.

# The Seventeenth Sunday After Trinity. Luke 14:1-11

## Intolerance of Pretense

The key to this text is: pretense. Dell points out: 1) the pretended friendliness to Jesus; 2) the pretended Sabbath piety; 3) the pretended personal importance. Some despair of finding a true unity in this text, nor do they find an integral position for this text in the sub-cycle into which it is placed. But the matter is plain: Jesus, the Savior, was ever intolerant of pretense. So also Intolerance of Pretense is an abiding characteristic of all the saved.

**[1] And it came to pass, when he went into the house of one of the rulers of the Pharisees on a Sabbath to eat bread, they kept watching him closely.** Jesus had no illusions when he accepted the invitation of this ruler of the Pharisees, i.e. Pharisaic elder of the local synagogue; he knew he would be amid hostile men, who would put on a pretense of friendliness and of politeness, most obnoxious to himself. But he had come to seek and to save even the Pharisees and thus endured their pretenses and accepted the invitation. The dinner was attended by a number of other local Pharisees. When Jesus entered the house and the dining room, all kept watching him closely. He was under sharp, hostile scrutiny from the start. The periphrastic imperfect tense expresses a strong durative idea.

**[2] And lo, a man with dropsy was there before him.** Τίς merely our indefinite article “a.” Luke does not say that the host or that some of the guests had procured this man in order to see whether Jesus would heal him on the Sabbath. We must remember that great dinners and feasts were semi-public affairs. Outsiders strolled in at pleasure, stood, or sat a while and watched the proceedings. In this way the woman mentioned in 7:37 entered. We are not even certain that this dropsical man came in with the secret hope

and prayer that Jesus might heal him, like other curious persons he may have come in just to see what was going on. As far as Luke's interest is concerned the matter is immaterial.

**[3] And answering Jesus said to the lawyers and Pharisees, saying: "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not?" [4] But they were quiet. And having taken hold, he healed him and released him.** "Answering" means "responding to the situation." Yes, Jesus would not ignore this situation, no matter how it had come about. He had come to teach men the true sense of the law and to rid them of their grave misconceptions. It seems that the meal had not yet been served. Jesus does not wait until the question is put to him, he himself asks the lawyers and the Pharisees whether it is lawful (ἔξεστι) or not to heal on the Sabbath (the infinitive is the effective aorist: actually heal). We see that professional lawyers were also present (compare the lawyer in 10:25, the Thirteenth Sunday after Trinity). The meal must have been rather pretentious because so many illustrious guests were present.

[4] The question, please remember, is one about the Jewish Sabbath (Saturday) which is still in force for all Jews by God's command. It is regarding the Sabbath as enjoined by the law with all its added detailed regulations laid down in God's law, not, however, the added traditions of the elders. Is it right and allowed by God to heal on this Sabbath, or not? Once Jesus asked the question in an even more simple manner: Is it lawful to do good on the Sabbath, or not? 6:9; Mark 3:4. To ask the question is to give answer. But here see what a pretense of holiness will do. All the dignitaries present added to their illustriousness by keeping silent. No one was man enough to say what he thought: "No, it is not lawful!" All of them feared the crushing answer that would follow. Insincere to the core and rank cowards. I think Jesus paused for an answer for quite a While, letting his eyes travel around the circle of these notables. The silence must have become actually painful.

Then Jesus reached out, took hold of the man, healed him, and dismissed him. Here was the answer of Jesus. Deeds speak louder than words. It seems that Jesus simply let his touch heal the man, without uttering a word. Then he sent the man away from this ungodly company which certainly was no fit place for him after having received such a benefaction.

**[5] And he said to them: “Of which of you shall a son or an ox fall into a well, and he will not draw him out at once on the day of the Sabbath?” [6] And they had not strength to reply to these things.** The reading varies. It seems that Jesus said: υἱὸς ἢ βοῦς, “a son or an ox,” and not merely as in 13:15: ὄνος ἢ βοῦς, “an ass or an ox.” The argument is much stronger when the word used is “a son.” A φρέαρ is “a shaft” of a well. While watering cattle, an unruly ox might stumble into the well-shaft; in fact, the owner’s son himself might do so while supervising the watering, should the cattle crowd and be unruly.

[6] These were lawyers and Pharisees. Whether any of them had oxen or not and ever delegated a son to attend to watching oxen on the Sabbath or not does not alter the force of the illustration and the argument. One’s own “son,” — yes, that is different. Instantly steps would be taken to lift him out of his dangerous position in the shaft. And one’s own “ox,” — an animal as valuable as that, it would be regarded as no desecration of the Sabbath to hoist him back to safety. Either case would, of course, require genuine labor. But for Jesus to touch a man and to heal him of dropsy, of this dread symptom as well as of its cause, — these lawyers and scribes have not the moral courage to say aloud whether such a healing is lawful or not on the Sabbath. There they recline shrouded in silence. Their pretended piety in Sabbath observance had brought them to this unenviable plight. To the Savior as well as to the saved such pretense is intolerable.

**[7] Moreover, he went on to say a parable to those that had been invited, noting how they were choosing for themselves the chief reclining places, saying to them: [8] “Whenever thou art invited by any one to a wedding, do not recline in the chief reclining place, lest one more honored than thou have been invited by him, [9] and he who invited thee and him having come shall say to thee: ‘Give this man place!’ and then thou wilt begin with shame to hold the last place. [10] But when thou art invited, having gone drop into the last place, in order that, when he that has invited thee comes, he shall say to thee: ‘Friend, go on up higher!’ Then there shall be honor for thee before all those reclining together with thee.”** Γάμοι (singular or plural) means “wedding,” and Jesus means “wedding,” — any application to the present dinner these lawyers and Pharisees, bursting with the pretense of their own personal self-importance, may make for themselves. A wedding would

provide a feast for many guests, and this fact, of course, afforded quite a number of high places at table.

The Jews reclined on couches when dining, and this fact produces the gradation of high and higher places, as well as lower ones, down to the lowest. Each couch provided places for three or for four guests, who reclined on the left elbow. Thus the person farthest to the left had the highest place on the couch, and the person farthest to the right had the lowest place. The former could see all that he desired without turning his head; the latter had to turn his head far back to look toward the head of the table. The couch nearest the one occupied by the bridegroom was the one that had the very highest place of all, i.e. the place at its left end. The gradation in importance ran along all the "other couches, slowly diminishing. The fact is every individual place on the couches had its specific grade of honor. The lowest place of all was on the last couch, at the right end.

[8] This is a parable, although it is couched in the second person singular. So Jesus warns his hearer not to rush in and to drop himself down in the very highest place. That is precisely what each of these lawyers and Pharisees would like to do, counting on the fact that once secure in the highest place no one would risk making the effort to dislodge him. Well, sometimes such presumption might be successful, but at a grand wedding not very often. The great likelihood is that "one more honored than thou have been invited by him."

[9] The result would be that the host would order you to vacate the highest place, and you would be exposed as a presumptuous person, arrogating honor to yourself that does not belong to you. Nor is this all. The host will certainly not give you the highest place on the next couch in order. All these couches will already be occupied by the time you are ousted from your highest place. What is then left for you? With shame to walk past all the other already occupied couches, all the guests curiously eying you, down to the lowest, where the lowest place is still vacant, — for the number of places is always duly counted so as to correspond with the number of guests. Pretense and pride are their own undoing. Would that they might receive their full dues in every case as they did in this parable! We have heard of some of the tense but ludicrous situations that arose at the banquets at our own national capital, where precedence counts for so much.

[10] Because this is a parable it presents the extremes, the very highest and the very lowest place, but this is done in order to cover all that lies between, and because the extremes do at times happen and thus must also be covered.

Observe again that Jesus purposely descends to the low motivation of these lawyers and Pharisees, who would not be able to comprehend the true, really humble motive of the Christian. From the standpoint of these blind Jews it is a piece of folly to rush for the highest place and almost certainly then be assigned to the very lowest, with all the company of guests making ironic remarks. No, Jesus says, if you are so sure of your personal importance and are not suffering from a hyperinflated ego, when you enter that dining room just drop into the very lowest place. No; since men like you are as numerous as they are, there will be no danger of finding this lowest place already occupied, — there will never be a grand rush for it. What then? Almost certainly the host will be at hand with the invitation: “No, no, friend, not down here! Go on up higher!” If you are out for honor, this is the way to get it, and the way is quite simple indeed.

How did all these gentlemen, men of weight and importance, feel when Jesus had thus mercilessly exposed their strife for honor, which was a real vice with them and which, of course, they had exhibited before the eyes of Jesus also here at this Sabbath dinner? Every man found in a high place must have wished himself well out of it.

[11] The illustration and the advice of Jesus would be little more than an exposure of the pretended importance of the lawyers and Pharisees; but Jesus adds the final word, which lifts what he has just said to a far higher plane. \_\_“Because everyone exalting his own self shall be humbled\_\_ (by God), **and the one humbling his own self shall be exalted** (by God).” Although the agent in the passive verbs is not expressed, the fact that this agent is God is beyond question. If we had to deal only with men, we might succeed in imposing our pretended personal pride and importance upon them and be exposed to shame only occasionally. But such exposure on the part of men is only an indication of what God will do. This is true also as regards the exaltation. It is a matter in which God speaks the decisive word, if not in this life, then at its end. Compare 18:14; Matt. 23:12; etc.

It was this worldly pride and self-exaltation of the Jews as a people that brought on their most terrible humiliation in the judgment of God. The Jews imagined themselves to be the cream of all the nations of the earth, and therefore utterly scorned a Messiah as humble as Jesus. That brought on the horrible catastrophe. Did it cure them? Not a bit! To this day the Jews are filled with inordinate pride in their Jewish blood. They alone stand at the head of all the nations of the world. The Jews shall eventually come to rule all other nations. Though they now suffer painful disabilities, their illusion of superiority never leaves them. The chiliasts who believe that all the Jewish people will be converted at the beginning of their millennium, and that God is preserving the Jews throughout all these centuries because he has the very highest plans in regard to them, encourage their overweening and pernicious pride, which keeps them from conversion as it did in Jesus' day, and flatly contradicts the word of Jesus: "Everyone exalting his own self shall be humbled" ("abased," A.V.). The history of the Jews is a tale of unrestrained pride and arrogance, and it can end only in one way.

They have had their brazen followers: others who would not bend the knee in the dust of repentance, — infatuated scientists, to whom the preaching of the Gospel is absurd foolishness; arrant skeptics, who know every matter far better than God can possibly know it; and then the indiscriminate mass of those who are ignorant of truly religious questions, who so often, the less they have come to know, the more self-assertive they are and the more insistent on reclining in "the chief reclining place." Like their Lord, the Savior, the saved, too, are wholly intolerant of all such pride and pretense.

## **Homiletical Aid**

When Jesus stepped into the house of the Pharisaic ruler of the synagogue who had invited him to dinner, yet without including also his disciples, he stepped into the most unpleasant company, lawyers and Pharisees, — not a sincere man among them. You may imagine how comfortable Jesus was in such a gathering of guests. Here was not one man who was friendly to Jesus. All were polite enough, but from the host downward not one cared the least for Jesus in his heart. All were hostile, watched with the eyes of a lynx for something in regard to which they might fault Jesus. Jesus simply

proceeds to expose their dreadful insincerity. Not in the least does he enter upon pretense.

For he as our Savior and we as the saved are filled with

### **The Intolerance of Pretense.**

Three abominable types in the text.

#### I. Pretended friendliness for Jesus.

Since Jesus knew into what a hypocritical company he was being invited, why did he not decline the invitation? He had come to seek and to save even these arrant sinners. Thus he dined also with publicans. As far as you and I are concerned, the case is different. We have no business to go Where we have no plain call of God to go. It is a deplorable pretense on our part to imagine that we are able to handle every situation, and, that if we do not leap in and save, nobody else can and will.

Any pretended friendship is despicable. But what shall we say regarding pretended friendship for Jesus, the Savior? Seeking for some flaw for which to stab him? For some word or some act for which to damn him? Jesus still has these pretended friends. They even preach and praise him, but no, he would not really satisfy them.

You are either for or against him, his or not his. Dissimulation damns. Every pretense explodes. We, the saved, are a full hundred per cent friends of the Savior and glory in the fact anywhere and in any company.

#### II. Pretended piety.

To heal a man of dropsy, — an unlawful act, a terrible breach of the Sabbath! Why? Not one of these important lawyers and Pharisees dared even to risk an answer.

But when a son of these men, while watering cattle on the Sabbath, fell into the well, or an unruly ox fell in, to run for ladder and ropes, to haul and to pull with all power, was no breach of the Sabbath!

But whether, as in the case of these Pharisees, pretended piety gives itself away or not, it is an attempt to fool God. Be not deceived; God is not mocked. Deception is always bad, but deception in piety toward God is the height of abomination.

Is your praying, worship, service to God truly sincere? How can the saved ever sink into pretended piety, when their entire salvation calls on them for absolute sincerity?

III. Pretended personal importance.

Explain seeking the highest places. Overweening self-importance. Pitiful pride. So often even defeats itself.

The Jews and their continued pretense until today.

God's answer to this pretense. The wonder is that God picked us up out of the dust and set us on high among the saved. Only true humbleness of spirit can keep us there.

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### **Beware of the Leaven of the Pharisees!**

See Pharisaism:

- I. In its heartless persecution.
- II. In its hollow ceremonialism.
- III. In its miserable self-exaltation. — M. Loy.

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This is not a text on the proper use of the Christian Sunday, and to preach on this use, may end in our confusing the Jewish Sabbath and the Christian Sunday, or in trying to extract from the Jewish Sabbath what is not at all in it. There is no such thing as "a Christian Sabbath," and we are not to be Sabbatarians in any sense of the word.

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Jesus amid men utterly insincere. Trying to win them from their insincerity. Every one of the saved must be sincere. While this is essential, it is not enough.

### **Consider Sincerity.**

#### I. Sincerity is certainly essential.

1. An insincere friend is worse than no friend. Judas finally even betrayed Jesus.
2. An insincere law observer is worse than one who does not observe the law at all.
3. Insincere claims of importance are worse than childish.
4. We therefore must demand utter sincerity in our religion. God ever sees the heart.

#### II. Sincerity must go with truth.

1. Wasted sincerity. Sincerity is pitifully wasted on error, falsehood, wrong laws and wrong practices. Sincerely to hold to the wrong thought or practice is only the more deadly.

The notion that genuine sincerity is sufficient in the sight of God. He did not make the world in such a way: Take poison in the" sincere conviction that it is your prescribed medicine, and your sincerity does not save you. Many other examples.

2. Devote your sincerity to the truth.

To the real Gospel facts as they actually are.

To the true devotion, love, and obedience to Christ.

How lovely is this sincerity, in faith, in life, in confession, in conduct!

I have seen many men, leaders, like the lawyers and the Pharisees, who swallowed many things they knew were wrong, agreed to many things as insincere politicians do, so that I had to shrink from them and dread their insincerity.

When the truth does not make you fully sincere, God have mercy on your soul!

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We read of the sweet-smelling savor of Christ's sacrifice (Eph. v. 2). On the other hand, Jehovah declared: "I will not smell in your solemn assemblies" (Amos v. 21), — the smell was wrong. Your nostrils may be thick and clogged up, so that you can smell no difference. In fact, the worst spiritual stench may smell to some like the purest attar of roses. The lawyers and Pharisees in the text had no spiritual sense of smell. They lived in such a cloud of self-renewed stench that for Jesus to be near them at all was indeed an infliction for him, which he endured only that he might cleanse them.

The saved must smell sweet and pure like their Savior.

### **Spiritual Stench.**

I. As Jesus met it.

Faked friendliness — pretended friendliness to the law — unholy pride and scramble for honor.

All sin stinks, but the worst odor is caused by religious pretense.

This is not at all strange, for sin is corruption and the consequent odor is inevitable.

II. As we still meet it.

Pretended piety.

Serving the Lord and the Church by not obeying his Word.

Appeals to love in order to shut off any real appeal to the truth.

Leadership that merely wants to dictate and be out in front. Etc.

III. As our noses should ever promptly detect it.

The noses that have lost the power of spiritual smell, or have the power badly impaired.

The noses that possess this power adequately. Created by the Word, kept highly active by the Word.

They smell what is not sweet in themselves (repentance), and what stinks in others (warnings).

All the vile spiritual smell is due to corruption and thus ends in spiritual death and decay.

# The Eighteenth Sunday After Trinity. Matt. 22:34-46

## The Great Confessional Mark

When one considers the most important characteristic marks of the Saved, most of them will appear to be of an ethical nature, even as we have preached on Christlikeness, Love, Gratitude, etc. The ethical marks may be made more or less numerous. Yet some of the marks are of an entirely objective nature. Such is Safety in Death. In the same class belongs The Great Confessional Mark: “What think ye of Christ? whose son is he?” The true answer should rest on the objective fact that Christ is the Son of God. Our confession does no more than to voice this fact as our personal conviction. The utterance of the confession is, of course, subjective, and yet it is not the same as the contrary subjective confession of unbelief, as the latter loves to assume. It is no mere matter of personal opinion or preference whether I confess: “And in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,” etc., or deny: “I believe that Jesus Christ was a mere man, most likely the son of Joseph.” For as Jesus himself indicates in our text: there is the invincible evidence of Scripture.

One of the real reasons why the Verbal Inspiration of the Scriptures is being attacked with renewed vigor at the present time is the necessity for getting rid of the binding force of the evidence of Scripture on this as well as on other subjects. If the wall of Scripture stands without breach, all who refuse to confess as the Scriptures place the confessional words into our mouth, stand utterly condemned. We need not say even a word; the facts themselves speak in thunderous tones. For ever it remains true that the confessors of the Lord’s deity and of all that his deity involves, have the sacred voices of the entire Holy Writ assenting to their confession in grand, unanimous chorus, before the very face of God; while all who make bold to

deny have all of these voices of Holy Writ denying their denial with the same overwhelming unanimity, before the face of God. How can this chorus with its testimony for and against be hushed? Many are sure that it can be done when once Verbal Inspiration has been sufficiently invalidated and has been wholly discredited.

In happy fashion our text combines the heart of the law and the heart of the Gospel. To confess Christ properly the saved must know the law and the men who make the law their life's confession.

[34] It is Tuesday of Holy Week, the last day that Jesus spent in the Temple. Jesus has just exploded the tricky story with which the Sadducees thought they had utterly disproved the resurrection from the dead. **Now the Pharisees, when they heard that he muzzled the Sadducees, were gathered together at one place; [35] and one of them, learned in law, inquired, tempting him: [36] “Teacher, what kind of commandment is great in the law?”** Filled with delight because Jesus had muzzled their old opponents, the Sadducees, so that they would never again dare to use their little story about the seven brothers (this the sense of “muzzled”), with which they had hitherto so successfully silenced all advocates of a resurrection from the dead, the Pharisees either “were brought together” by summons sent out to them, or (assuming that the passive form is to be understood in the sense of the middle) “assembled themselves” of their own accord when the news they liked so well was spread about. *Ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτό* = in one place, in one of the Temple courts. I think it is a mistaken idea to say that these Pharisees were actuated by vicious intent toward Jesus. The very contrary must be true. Jesus had just fought one of their battles for them, one in which they themselves had never been able to vanquish the Sadducees, because they never knew how to reply to the argument of those seven brothers all of whom had had the same woman as a wife. Jesus had blasted that argument so that it could never again be used. The Pharisees are grateful. They are in anything but a hostile mood. Jesus has helped them so greatly on one score, perhaps he will help them on another.

[35] So one of them, a learned νομικός, propounds to him the question: “What kind of commandment is great in the law?” Mark tells the story as it pertained to this lawyer alone, Matthew as it involved the entire gathering of Pharisees, for the question was of great importance to all of them. All were agreed that the one lawyer should do the asking, and none of the rest

would interfere. “Tempting him” is here to be understood in the mild sense: “trying Jesus out,” to see how he would solve this new conundrum, after having solved the other with such eminent success. In a way, to have this question laid before Jesus was to extend him a compliment on the part of these Pharisees.

[36] The question introduced with ποία and containing the positive μεγάλη might mean: “Which commandment is the great commandment” etc., (our versions)? Yet the answer which Jesus gives shows that he understood ποία in its unmodified sense. He does not name one commandment but two, and he points out in each the quality which makes it “great.” We, therefore, translate: “*What kind* of commandment is great in the law?”

We shall understand this question better when we note that the rabbis counted no less than 613 commandments: 248 positive, 365 negative. To obtain so many they used gematria, a cabbalistic method of interpretation, enabling the rabbis to interchange Hebrew words whose letters have the same numerical value when added. Christian commentators have applied gematria to the number 666 (Rev. 13:18), see my elucidation in *The Interpretation of Revelation*. There is no case of gematria in the whole Bible, there could not be. Among so many commandments, the bulk of which were obtained in so odd a manner, some would naturally far outrank others, and when a conflict arose in regard to obeying them, the inferior commandments would have to yield to the superior. See a supposed case in 15:4-6.

Now how shall the greatness of a commandment be determined? Of what kind (ποία) must it be? Some said: Judge by the severity of the penalty attached. Thus some regarded the commandments about the sacrifices as being great, others the Sabbath laws, and still others the commandments about circumcision. The whole question was rather an open one, there being apparently noway for the rabbis to settle it. What helped to aggravate the matter was the fact that the Sadducees rejected all these extra commandments and would accept only those that were written in the law in so many words. We thus see the reason why all these Pharisees now flock to Jesus. He has vanquished the Sadducees as regards the great fact of the resurrection, — perhaps he would support the Pharisees a second time on this matter of greatness in regard to commandments of the law.

**[37] But Jesus said to him: “Thou wilt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole mind! This is the great and first commandment. And a second, like it, this: ‘Thou wilt love thy neighbor as thyself!’ [40] In these two commandments the whole law hangs and the prophets.”**

Most of what is needed in the way of interpretation I have already given in connection with Luke 10:27 etc., the Thirteenth Sunday after Trinity, which see. Here Jesus uses the preposition ἐν four times: “in thy whole heart,” etc. “The Lord thy God” is God’s Gospel name with reference to Israel, and the Gospel faith in him and the love for him is the root of all fulfillment of the law. “Thou wilt love,” ἀγαπήσεις, is the voluntative future in a legal command; in force it is decidedly peremptory.

[38] The question which Jesus is answering is one regarding the quality of a truly great commandment. Jesus thus points out this quality: “This is the great and first commandment.” It extends upward to the great, unchanging covenant God, — no command could possibly reach to a higher altitude. It must necessarily be counted as first, for no one can possibly be placed above “the Lord our God.” Hence also it reaches into the deepest depths of our being: “heart — soul — mind.” This, therefore, is the commandment that controls and must control all other commandments, give them standing or weight, or deny obligatoriness to them.

[39] Yet where supreme quality is the question, a second commandment must be mentioned, namely this one: “Thou wilt love thy neighbor as thyself!” In quality it is “like” the one about God. Once more we have “love” and the complete range of this love among our fellow men. See the exposition in connection with Luke 10:27. Jesus cites these two commandments because the supreme character and the incomparable importance of these two commandments are “alike,” and because they are equaled in no other commandment.

[40] Jesus himself says so: “In these two commandments the whole law hangs and the prophets.” A mistake is often made in that “the law and the prophets” are taken to refer to the legal part of the Old Testament. The expression is really “The Torah and the Prophets,” a common title for the Old Testament, including all of its books. Jesus means that the contents of the entire Old Testament “hangs in these two commandments,” and that

they would fall and be lost without them. These commandments were given to the covenant people by their covenant God, “the Lord thy God,” — without him and his covenant there would be no covenant people, and all that Moses and all the prophets wrote would amount to nothing. To say this much is already sufficient. What the removal of these two commandments would mean in regard to all the other commandments included in the Levitical system does not even need to be added.

In the most friendly and the most accommodating way Jesus has answered the question put to him. The lawyer himself praised and even repeated the answer of Jesus (Mark 12:32-33) and was commended by Jesus. There is no trace of hostility, but indeed an approach to an understanding of the essentials of the law.

[41] After submitting to the various questionings recorded in 21:23 to 22:41, Jesus himself propounds a question, and no question could be more vital. **Now since the Pharisees had gathered together, Jesus inquired of them, [42] saying: “How does it seem to you concerning the Christ? Whose son is he?” They say to him: “David’s.”** Here were all these Pharisees congregated in a gathering of considerable size, and crowded about them were many festival pilgrims from afar, to whom Jesus turns after he has finished with the Pharisees.

[42] Jesus asks in a dignified and a natural way, and the question is so simple that any Jewish lad could have given him the prompt answer which he received. The time for all reticence is now past. Hitherto Jesus had avoided the title “the Messiah,” because to Jewish minds it was filled with all sorts of extravagant political aspirations. But on Sunday morning the time had come when Jesus was to enter Jerusalem; he had entered as “David’s Son,” “the Coming One,” “Sion’s King,” “the Messiah.” All danger of false political conceptions was now passed. On Friday Jesus would ascend the cross as “The King of the Jews,” wearing a crown of thorns.

“How does it seem to you concerning the Christ? Whose son is he?” repeats the question which Jesus had asked the disciples in 16:13-16 and which Peter had answered so well. Luther asserts what some deny, that the question about greatness in a commandment and the true answer and this question of Jesus about the person of the Messiah and its true answer

belong closely together. Why would the covenant God of Israel, *Yahveh Eloheka*, ask his people to love him as he did, if that love could never be realized in their hearts because of their sin and their doom under sin? His very covenant name points to the covenant promise of the Messiah, in and through whose grace Israel would indeed come to love the Lord their God in the whole heart, soul, and mind, Jer. 31:33-34. The first and great commandment (v. 38) and the Messiah, David's son and David's Lord, will ever belong together.

The Pharisees answer with alacrity and unanimity: "David's." We have the lineage of Mary, Jesus' mother, in the genealogical table in Luke 3:23 etc., and the lineage of Joseph; Jesus' legal father, in Matt. 1. Modernists claim that it was merely Jewish opinion that the Messiah should be a descendant of David, but that in fact he might have had another ancestry. Even an unquestioned fact such as this is not safe in the hands of modernists. But the prophecies are altogether too plain, and no one can change the meaning of the genealogical tables and of the other statements concerning Jesus, such as Rom. 1:3.

The answer of the Pharisees was perfectly true as far as it went, but it should have gone much farther. For David had a large number of sons. How was that one son among all these sons of David to be distinguished and recognized who should be the Messiah? If God had revealed no more concerning the Messiah than that he should be a son of David, he would have left his people altogether in the dark. Davidic descent was only one mark, — what was the other, the one that would make one of David's sons stand out above all other sons of David, even sons as great as Solomon, Hezekiah, etc., as being beyond all doubt the promised Messiah? Surely, God gave a clear revelation in Scripture. To help these Jews in understanding their own Scriptures, Jesus continues his question.

**[43] He says to them: "How then does David in Spirit call him Lord, saying: [44] 'The Lord said to my Lord: Be sitting at my right, until I put thine enemies beneath thy feet'? [45] If therefore David calls him Lord, how is he his son?"**

Jesus puts it very mildly, — he lets the Pharisees solve the matter for themselves. David wrote Psalm 110, He wrote it ἐν Πνεύματι (ἐν τῷ Πνεύματι τῷ Ἁγίῳ, Mark 12:36), literally: "in union and connection with

the Holy Spirit,” the Third Person of the Godhead. David wrote the Psalm by Inspiration, and that this means Verbal Inspiration is too obvious to be denied; for Jesus, the Second Person of the Godhead, is drawing critical attention to the exact “words” which David wrote.

Let us settle this question at once. The critics claim to be “scientific” and “historical” and deny that we are either, we who believe in Verbal Inspiration. Who is “scientific”? He who operates with the facts and with the evidence. The critics deny that David wrote Psalm 110. They deny the testimony of Luke and of Peter in Acts 2:34-35; of Paul in 1 Cor. 15:25; of the writer of Hebrews 1:13 and 10:13; of our passage; of Mark 12:36, and that means the testimony of Jesus himself. I consider it as evident that any claim to “scientific” procedure ceases when the decisive evidence is ignored and when subjective opinion is put in its place. How did David write Psalm 110? What does Jesus say in regard to the “historical” fact? David wrote Psalm 110 in connection with the Spirit. This historical fact is assured. To reject this fact and to plead for some other writer who lacked the connection with the Spirit and some set of historical circumstances occurring years beyond David’s time, is to pursue an “unhistorical” method.

In the present case Jesus makes a practical application of the Verbal Inspiration of Psalm 110. They who deny this Inspiration must, of course, accept the results of their denial. These are disastrous. If David never wrote this Psalm, if David never wrote that *Yahveh* called David’s son David’s *’Adon*, if the Pharisees and all Judaism were mistaken on this point, and if Jesus as a child of his supposedly uncritical times was equally mistaken: then we have the ludicrous spectacle of the great Jesus proving to Jews who were guilty of the same mistake what both of their mistakes disprove instead of prove. Here, on this last Tuesday, just before his death, Jesus utters a lot of nonsense about his being David’s *’Adon*. The alternative is no better. If only the Pharisees were mistaken regarding the authorship and the Verbal Inspiration of Psalm 110, if Jesus knew better, then Jesus used the dense ignorance of the Pharisees for his purpose and sinks to the level of a tricky modern lawyer who capitalizes on the ignorance of his opponent at court. Procedures that claim to be “scientific” and “historical,” but fail to prove that they are what they claim to be, and that end by presenting us with an ignorant or with a tricky Jesus, do not commend themselves to us,

but in their own “unscientific” and “unhistorical” way help to prove to us the assured verity of Verbal Inspiration.

[44] “The Lord said” is more impressive in the Hebrew: *ne’um Yahveh*, “communication of Jehovah,” something secretly whispered into the ear, the communication of a mystery, “verbal” beyond all question. *Yahveh* speaks to David’s *’Adon* or “Lord.” This is the Messiah, the Second Person of the Trinity, as the entire description of the Psalm makes clear: the *’Adon* who sits at *Yahveh*’s right hand and rules in glory, all of whose enemies shall be made his footstool, who has the rod of strength out of Zion; etc., throughout the Psalm. Even every designation is marked as the product of no less than Verbal Inspiration.

Note well, here are the three Persons of the Godhead: the Spirit by whom David is verbally inspired — *Yahveh* who speaks to the Son at his right hand — and David’s *’Adon*, this Son, who should become incarnate as David’s descendant. In View of this Psalm and of other Old Testament passages, it is not true to say that the Trinity was not revealed in the Old Testament and was scarcely known to the Jews. The opposite is the fact. Carefully consider the fact that all that Jesus here says concerning himself and concerning this Psalm rests on the adequate knowledge of the Trinity, which the hearers of Jesus had and had to have in order at all to understand him. Jesus (as well as the Baptist) takes such knowledge of his hearers completely for granted, which he could not and would not have done if they had not had it.

There is no type and antitype in this Psalm. To inject this idea violates the sense of the words. The claim that nowhere else does David distinguish between himself and the Messiah is met by 2 Sam 23:1-7; Ps. 2:7 and 12; Ps. 22.

There is indeed a son of David who by *Yahveh*’s own revelation to the Jews is exalted infinitely above all the other sons of David. Note Heb. 1:2-9. *Yahveh* said to him: “Be sitting (present imperative, durative) at my right!” This Hebrew imperative: *sheb limini*, has actually been made a title of the Messiah: *Sheblimini*. Not according to his divine nature could the Messiah sit at God’s right hand of power and of majesty, only according to his human nature derived from David “according to the flesh” (Rom. 1:3). *Yahveh* himself will make of all the Messiah’s enemies a footstool, — a

word to strike terror into these Pharisees who were the enemies of Jesus. But here the aim of Jesus is only to let the full light of one passage of revelation fall on the question: “The Christ — whose son is he?” I hope it will not be necessary to explain the anthropomorphic expressions used in this Psalm, which ever since David’s own day have been well understood.

[45] Jesus asks: “If therefore David calls him Lord (*'Adon*), how is he his son?” The condition is one of reality, and all the Jews admitted that David did call the Messiah his *'Adon*. Note well that Jesus does not ask: “If he is David’s son, how can he be his Lord?” Nor dare we generalize about a son who becomes greater than his father. We must stay with David, Israel’s mightiest king. Since he was the king that he was, he had no one, and could have no one, above him save God alone. Yet this king himself placed his own son above him as his divine Lord! Rationalists may cry out: “He is not David’s son at all!” Yet if they had shouted such words at the time of Jesus, the Pharisees would have proceeded to stone them.

Jesus hurls the Pharisees against the stone wall of the fact that the Messiah is David’s son. In the Psalm his deity is assured by David himself. How can this deity be united with the human sonship? The Pharisees would not give the answer of faith. This answer we Christians give with hearts full of joy.

**[46] And not one was able to answer a word. Nor did any one dare from that day to inquire of him any further.** Eloquent was the dreadful silence. There was an answer that was true enough, but that answer their obdurate unbelief refused to give. Their silence becomes their utter self-condemnation. Although convicted, they will not yield. This was Tuesday. No one dared to ask another question. The time of grace was ended. None of the evangelists reports what Jesus did on Wednesday or during the day of Thursday. After Jesus left the Temple on Tuesday he never returned to it, as far as the records show.

## Homiletical Aid

It is Tuesday afternoon, the last day which Jesus spent in the Temple courts. Toward evening he would leave them never to return. During these last minutes the most essential subjects are presented by him, as if in final

farewell: the heart of the entire divine law and the heart of the entire Gospel of salvation. Jesus draws all Israel's eyes upon himself:

### **David's Son and David's Lord.**

- I. He it is to whom the entire law points.
  1. The great demand of the law. The Jewish folly of inventing 365 prohibitions, and 248 commands, and then disputing about which were great and in consequence took precedence, and which could be superseded.
  2. The law would never have been given except by "the Lord thy God" (i.e. the God of 'the covenant grace).
  3. The entire law referred to the Savior, the Great Fulfiller of the Law who would be our substitute.
  4. There is no salvation through our fulfillment of law, for this is non-existent.
- II. He it is who stands before us in the Gospel.
  1. David's son, true man.
  2. David's Lord. A king has no one above him save God, but David says his own son is above him as divine Lord.
  3. The Godman, the Messiah, he who fulfilled the law with all its requirements for us and who bore all the penalties the law held against us.

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Many are called "Christians," many also deem themselves to be "Christians," when they are nothing of the kind. The mistake may be tragic indeed. Yet Jesus himself supplies to us the decisive question by which we may know what each one of us is, a Christian or a non-Christian. Note how "Christ" and "Christian" go together.

### **The Decisive Question: "What Think Ye of Christ?"**

I. To think of him only as a man cannot possibly make you a Christian.

1. Then you might be a Jew, like the Pharisees to whom Jesus put the question; like the present day Jews, for such is their opinion.
2. Or a Gentile follower of these Jews who also are sure that Jesus was no more than a man.
3. These people look at the law but do not see how full of sin they are and how dreadful are all their sins.
4. They imagine that they can attain heaven by their own effort plus a little teaching by Jesus.
5. These at best are sham Christians.

II. To think that he is the true Son of God, no less than this makes you a Christian.

1. To think = to believe with the whole heart.
2. Only God's Son can be the Christ who redeems us.
3. Only God's Son can be the Christ to raise us to heaven.
4. All the Scripture testimony.
5. It all issues in our salvation, and this makes us Christians indeed, — men whom Christ has saved.

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Conceive the greatness of a real king: all men in his kingdom are far beneath him, and above him is no one who could hold him to account, — save God alone. Such a king was David of old. Yet his own son, the Messiah, Jesus, was above him, was his Lord. How could this be? Know fully

### **“Great David's Greater Son.”**

- I. God's Son became David's Son,
- II. To save us from our sins,

- III. So that in repentance we bow at his feet,
  - IV. And are raised up to rule with him.
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The saved bear many marks and characteristics by which they are known. Acts 4:13 toward the end: “they had been with Jesus,” which always leaves its mark. Some of these marks of the saved we have considered and we now come to the last and the most essential of all:

### **The Great Confessional Mark.**

“I believe in Jesus Christ, his Only Son, our Lord.”

- I. Faith in Christ’s human nature, by which he as the Son of God did all the works of the law and suffered all the penalties of the law in our stead as our substitute. This is Tuesday, — on Friday he paid the last penalty for us. This is why he stood as man before his enemies in the Temple courts, as our text states.
- II. Faith in Christ’s deity, by which his obedience and his death received infinite value to atone for all men in the universe, and thus also for you and for me. God’s Son made satisfaction to his Father for our sins. God’s Son is King for ever enthroned in his human nature, to receive us and to crown us in his Kingdom.
- III. Faith happy to confess the Godman and to appropriate him and all his saving work, grace, and promises. This faith is full of power, courage, comfort, joy. Also it has the fruit of love which the law asks of the saved, so that they may please God.

# The Fourth And Last After-Trinity Cycle

## The Saved Facing the End

**The Nineteenth Sunday After Trinity.**

*Forgiveness*

**The Twentieth Sunday After Trinity.**

*The Robe of Christ's Righteousness*

**The Twenty-First Sunday After Trinity.**

*Faith*

**The Twenty-Second Sunday After Trinity.**

*Forgiveness of the Brethren*

**The Twenty-Third Sunday After Trinity.**

*Godly Citizenship*

**The Twenty-Fourth Sunday After Trinity.**

*Deliverance from All Evil*

**The Twenty-Fifth Sunday After Trinity.**

*The End of the World*

**The Twenty-Sixth Sunday After Trinity.**

*The Last Judgment*

**The Twenty-Seventh Sunday After Trinity.**

*Readiness*

# **The Nineteenth Sunday After Trinity. Matt. 9:1-8**

## **Forgiveness**

The last sub-cycle of the after-Trinity series of texts embraces all the Sundays that follow September 29, Michaelmas Day. When the Church Year was planned, the burden of the last Sundays was to be eschatological, so that we summarize the texts of this final sub-cycle under the caption:

### **The Saved Face the End.**

The nine texts of this cycle divide into two groups. Only the last three are eschatological in the strict sense of the word, in that they actually present the end. The first six texts should be treated in the light of the end. Thus: none of the Saved would for one moment face the end and the last judgment without Christ's forgiveness, without the great wedding garment, without faith, without forgiving a brother, without godly citizenship, etc. It is easy to see the homiletical advantage in placing these texts into this specific perspective, which thereby also makes them the more attractive for preaching.

Jesus demonstrates that he has the power to forgive sins. The demonstration is utterly convincing. Here are two acts, each wrought by a word of Jesus. Both acts require the same authority of God, but when the word for bringing about the one act is spoken the effect is altogether invisible, while when the word is Spoken in connection with the other act, the effect is instantaneously visible. Thus the authority which produces the visible effect establishes the fact that this same authority produces also the invisible effect. The verity that our sins are indeed forgiven is placed beyond all doubt for the saved. Without this unqualified certainty regarding the forgiveness of their sins, they could not think of facing the end. In its

manner of proof, by offering an ocular demonstration to prove the operation of an invisible power, our text resembles Luke v. 1 etc., the Fifth Sunday after Trinity.

**[1] And having entered into a boat he crossed over, and came into his own city.** In the morning Jesus had freed two demoniacs on the lake-shore of Gadaritis (8:28), and then was asked by the inhabitants to leave their region. Certainly Jesus left. He sailed back across the lake to “his own city,” namely to Capernaum, where he had established his mother.

**[2] And lo, they bring to him a paralytic lying on a bed. And having seen their faith, he said to the paralytic: “Cheer up, child, dismissed are thy sins!”** Matthew abbreviates the story of this remarkable case, centering our entire attention on the vital points. Mark and Luke add the details. Matthew’s exclamation: “Lo, they bring to him a paralytic, lying on a bed,” betrays the fact that he knows how this bringing was done. Jesus is in a house so crowded with people that it is impossible to bring this sick man to him through the doorway. Four men are carrying the paralyzed man on a pallet. They are determined to bring the patient into the presence of Jesus without delay. By a stairway leading up the outside of the house they take him to the flat roof, and the part of the flat roof just above the spot where Jesus is preaching they carefully open sufficiently by means of ropes to let the sufferer on his pallet down before the feet of Jesus.

What an astonishing feat! It was possible only in an oriental house of one story constructed with a roof of tile that could be lifted out of place and then also be replaced without damage. But picture the scene! The tiles removed above the head of Jesus, four sets of strong hands let a swaying couch down at his very feet! Matthew states that Jesus saw “their faith,” — it was certainly most evident: persistent, inventive, most resourceful faith. Some restrict “their faith” to the faith of the four friends of the paralytic, but wholly without warrant. The paralytic was not brought against his will; moreover, Jesus does not merely heal him, Jesus forgives his sins, and no sinner is forgiven without faith.

Down through the opened roof comes the swaying pallet with its burden until it reaches the floor. Not a word is spoken by the paralytic or by his four friends. Silently Jesus glances upward into the faces of the four men and then down upon the prostrate sufferer who has reached his presence in

such an odd way. There is no need to say anything to Jesus. Everything is perfectly plain to him. Therefore he acts as he does. We are able to judge the situation only from the manner in which he proceeds. Jesus first forgives the sufferer's sins, then he frees him from his paralytic affliction. Yet it would be hasty and wrong to suppose that this man's sinful career had brought on his paralytic affliction. There are cases of this type; John 5:14 is one. But in John 9:3 the case is the opposite. As regards the paralytic, his apparently is one of the numerous cases in which the arrival of severe sickness or other misfortune stirs up the consciousness of sin to a grave and depressing degree. Many a man has to learn by means of some physical infliction that he is nothing but a wretched and miserable sinner. The uses of affliction are many, and this use is one of the most important.

The chief ailment of the paralytic was not physical, but spiritual. He needed forgiveness more than healing. Many sick persons desire only to be restored to their bodily vigor, to go back to the old life with no spiritual improvement. Let us learn from this paralytic ever to long for forgiveness and to devote the rest of our life to the love and the service of our Lord.

Jesus speaks and he says to the paralytic: "Cheer up, child! Dismissed are thy sins!" Being the great physician that he is, Jesus heals the main ailment first. Φάρσαι, "cheer up" or "be of good cheer," bids the sufferer dismiss all gloom and all depressing thought, and the tenderly affectionate address τέκνον, "child," extends the sympathy of this great Helper to the sad sufferer. Jesus knows how to do both: to bestow the great gift — to do this in the most effective and fruitful way.

The readings vary: the present passive ἀφίενται (or ἀφίονται) and the Doric, yet common, perfect passive ἀφέωνται, a highly expressive tense: "have been and thus continue to be dismissed." This is the great (Meats, "dismissal" or "remission" concerning which the Scriptures say so much. The preacher should by all means understand this verb and its corresponding noun: the sins and all their guilt are "sent away" from the sinner, so far away and in such a manner that they shall never again be found, not even on judgment day. Our versions translate "are forgiven thee," and we speak of Christ's forgiveness; but to my mind "to send away" is far more graphic and realistic. Use this Greek meaning at least when elucidating the English word Then add Ps. 103:12; Is. 43:25; 44:22; Micah 7:19. In the entire universe of men Christ alone is able so to separate a

sinner from his sins. All other alleged separations are mere fictions, which on judgment day, to the terror of the sinner, leave him utterly covered with his sins. This, too, remember: the moment you commit a sin, that sin and its power are beyond you, for they stick to you more closely than your shadow and resist all means for prying them loose from you, save only through the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, 1 John 1:7.

**[3] And lo, certain of the scribes said within themselves: "He is blaspheming."** After Jesus absolved the paralytic the silence continued. Not a word was spoken audibly. Yet violent language filled the hearts of the scribes and Pharisees. These men were not present in Capernaum by accident, but by evil design. They hailed from Jerusalem and Judea, and some were also present from Galilee, and they were intent upon gathering evidence against Jesus in order to lodge charges against him in some Jewish court and, if possible, thus to stop his further work. As if an outright present had been made to them, here, without the least effort on their part, they thought they now had exactly what they wanted: Jesus was guilty of gross blasphemy. He forgave the paralytic's sins, — he a mere man, whereas God alone has power and authority to do such a thing. Yet, cunning foxes that they were, they kept their mouths closed, they did not exult over their success in finding a rather deadly charge against Jesus. Five men full of faith in Jesus, and a crowded room full of scribes and Pharisees bent on destroying him.

[4] Silently the eyes of Jesus rest on these his silent enemies. **And when Jesus saw their thoughts, he said: "Why are you thinking wicked things in your hearts? [5] For which is easier? to say: 'Dismissed are thy sins'? or to say: 'Rise, and be walking'?"** I see no reason for changing ἰδών: "when Jesus saw their thoughts," into εἰδώς, "knowing their thoughts," for the former is far more unusual and graphic. There sat these scribes and imagined that their thoughts were securely hidden within their skulls, and yet all of their damning thoughts were spread out before the eyes of Jesus like so many devilish images. Read John 2:24-25. Ordinarily Jesus did not make use of his omniscience, but whenever he needed that power, and to whatever extent he might need it, it was entirely at his command. This was true also of the other divine attributes communicated to Jesus' human nature by means of the personal union.

Jesus thus breaks the silence a second time. He hurls a question right into the faces of these scribes: “Why are you thinking wicked things in your hearts?” The Greek is even more precise, for it asks ἵωατί, “for what purpose,” with what intent are you thinking wicked things in your hearts, — not merely false, incorrect, mistaken, foolish things, but πονηρά, “wickedly vicious things.” In a flash that question exposes the entire purpose of the presence of these men. The interrogative particle is not διατί, for what reason. Like animals who are startled out of their safe lair the scribes must have looked at Jesus in a frightened manner. The fact that he could look right into their hearts and their thoughts should have satisfied them that he certainly had the power to remit sins.

[5] Γάρ is merely explanatory. What are the sensible, right thoughts that these men should entertain, thoughts the aim and intent of which is not wicked and devilish? Thoughts like this: Which is easier? to say (effectively, aorist): “Dismissed are thy sins!” and thereby actually to dismiss these sins, send them into eternal oblivion; or to say (another equally effective aorist): “Rise and be walking!” (“rise,” an aorist to indicate the one act, “be walking,” a durative present to indicate the continued action) and thereby actually, in an instant, to heal the paralytic of his fearful affliction?

Ah yes, — which is “easier”? Both are so easy as to be utterly impossible for any mere human being. Both require divine power, and for that power are easy indeed. When we say divine power, we mean that in the case of forgiveness it is the power of grace, and in the case of the cure of paralysis it is the power of omnipotence.

[6] In the same breath Jesus continues: **“But in order that you may know that the Son of man has authority to dismiss sins on the earth”** (then says he to the paralytic): **“Having risen, take up thy bed, and leave for thy house!”** [7] **And having risen he went to his house.** Jesus demonstrates that he indeed has the ἐξουσία, right and power, to send sins away from sinners, even as he had exercised this authority upon the paralytic. Jesus had to crush the insinuation that his remission of sins was a mere pretense. Certainly anybody can say to another person: “Dismissed are thy sins!” But are they dismissed? No one can see whether they have disappeared or whether they still lie upon the sinner. For sin and guilt are invisible entities. The scribes were sure that when the remitting word of

Jesus was spoken to the paralytic nothing whatever happened, that Jesus had merely pretended, and that he was committing the mortal crime of blasphemy.

These scribes had to be met with incontrovertible proof of the reality of the remission pronounced by Christ. The sins were gone. In one instant they were still piled mountain high, in the next instant, at the word of Jesus, blown utterly away with not a single sin to be found anywhere in the universe. So great is the miracle of remission. The concern of Jesus is not with these mean and unbelieving scribes; for who cares what such men think or say about our remission? The Savior's concern is for the paralytic, lest the scribes disturb his faith and cause him to doubt the certainty of his remission. His concern is for all whose sins he remits; all of them must be completely certain that "the Son of man has authority to remit sins on the earth." This means that the Son of man is not merely an agent of God in the remission, on the level of an apostle, or as now on the level of a rightly called minister of the Gospel, but that he acts with his own ἐξουσία, even as he is God himself.

"The Son of man" designates Jesus as man indeed, but as the man who is infinitely more than man, namely God. See Luke 21:27, the Second Sunday in Advent. Jesus himself coined this name and employed it in place of the title "Messiah," which the Jews had filled completely with their political Jewish ideas, — their Messiah was to make their nation supreme on earth. The Son of man came to do all the blessed, redemptive, and saving work on earth, and thus certainly also dispensed remission to contrite and believing sinners.

To prove the genuineness of the one power Jesus needs but to exercise the other power. For this power works in the realm of the Visible and tangible, where no man dares to rise up and intimate that the words are sham and that in reality nothing has happened. So without pause Jesus turns to the paralytic stretched helplessly on his pallet on the floor and orders: "Having risen, take up thy bed, and leave for thy house!" The Greek conceives the rising up as the minor act and thus expresses it by means of a participle; so also in v. 7. In English we disregard such points and use finite verbs for all of the acts.

[7] Here was the ocular demonstration and proof. The mouths of the scribes were stopped. His sins were remitted as certainly as his body was instantaneously restored. The paralysis was gone, yet not to give place to a slow and gradual process of convalescence, — no, instantaneously the man was sound, whole, restored in every respect, as if his body had never been paralyzed at all. He did exactly as Jesus bade him: he got up, he rolled the pallet together, perhaps he bound the roll with one of the pieces of rope with which he had been lowered from the ceiling, and, the dense crowd making a way for him, he went to his house, i.e. went home. Luke appends: “glorifying God,” vocal at last, vocal with overflowing gratitude.

**[8] But when the multitudes saw it, they were afraid and glorified God who gave such authority to men.** What did the scribes and the Pharisees say, — these men who had gathered to watch Jesus with a wicked purpose? It seems that Matthew lets them disappear ingloriously from the scene. They had nothing left with which even to vilify Jesus in the ears of unthinking men.

Matthew tells us only about the effect on the multitudes, ἰδόντες, “when they saw it.” Only a few were in the house where Jesus spoke the blessed words and confounded the scribes; but the crowds in the street saw the paralytic, who had been carried to the roof, come out of the house with his bed-roll, singing the praises of God, and soon they all knew the entire story, the remission and the healing that sealed the remission.

It is not difficult to understand the underlying psychology when Matthew writes: “they were afraid.” These people had a truer understanding of what had occurred than their leaders, the scribes. They bear a slight resemblance to Peter in Luke 5:8, for they sense the presence of God in what Jesus has done. I am unwilling to make two groups, one that felt afraid, one that glorified God. The fear was due to the sinfulness of which the people felt conscious when they heard about the paralytic whose sins Jesus had remitted. That fear like this should presently glorify God who had given such blessed authority to men as Jesus exhibited is altogether natural. Τὸν δόντα is an accusative apposition: “the ’One that Gave.” They think that God gave such gifts to men through Jesus. They generalize the case of the paralytic; they see in him a representation of all those to whom such gifts are granted.

Sad to say, Matthew was unable to add more. These people did not recognize the deity of Jesus himself, the ἔξουσία of his personal deity as the Son. Only a great agent of God they make him and no more. Even the scribes seemed close to the great fact when they declared that God alone is able to forgive sins (Mark 2:7; Luke v. 21); but when Jesus demonstrated both that he was God and that he did truly remit sins, we hear no more about them, certainly not that they now believed Jesus to be God. Thus Capernaum again disappointed Jesus, who soon had to upbraid this so highly favored city, Matt. 11:23-24.

## Homiletical Aid

The paralytic in the text had for years lived in a careless and an indifferent way, just as many do today while their health and strength endure. Then he suffered a stroke of paralysis. This stroke forced him to drop all indifference and to face the end, death, and thus also the final judgment. His sinfulness overwhelmed him. Not that he had lived in open, gross sins, but his daily life was sinful because of many sins just like your life and mine. His soul cried out for forgiveness. Jesus saw what his extreme need was and gave him

### **The One Gift We All Must Have: The Forgiveness of Our Sins.**

#### I. Forgiveness, the glorious fact.

Literally, the sins sent away.

As far as the east is from the west.

To the depth of the sea.

Like a dissolved cloud.

At death and in the last judgment not a single sin found.

#### II. Forgiveness, the absolute certainty.

The scribes: Jesus merely says so.

The ocular proof: one and the same power sends the sins away and sends the paralysis away.

Jesus is God's own Son.

He died to blot out our sins.

He now forgives our sins through the mouth of his called servants,  
in Word and Sacrament.

III. Forgiveness, the endless joy.

The paralytic's changed life.

The greatest change caused by the forgiveness.

Every morning bright; light at every eventide.

The light of heaven at death. No judgment at the last day.

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The man who could not get to Jesus, but reached him none the less. Paralyzed, but four men solved that difficulty. A house filled closely with people, but there was a way to overcome also that obstacle.

### **The Faith that Went Down Through the Roof.**

I. Jesus lets us know for what the paralytic longed. Interpret the text. Determined: To obtain the absolution of Jesus. "Thy sins be forgiven thee!"

II. The scoffing scribes. Destroyers of the certainty of the absolution. We have them today. But this man's faith: Obtained also the proof of that absolution. For which we to this day cannot be thankful enough.

III. Imagine how that man went home. He went by the door through the crowd: And his heart sang ever after. Sickness now no more a warning of impending judgment. Conscience free from accusation. Death and judgment to come devoid of fear.

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In nothing is utter certainty so essential to me as in the matter of the forgiveness of my sins. I know that men live from day to day, year to year, pile up more and more sins and care not a fig about anything like the

forgiveness of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Judge of heaven and earth. They laugh at the idea that such a Judge exists. I know that other men have various theories by which they figure out that they are more or less safe as regards their sins; many just risk it, as they say, with the majority, seeing also that there are some mighty good men in this large majority. As for me, — thank you! Nothing one whit less than utter certainty suffices me, a certainty from the Supreme Judge himself.

### **The Certainty of the Forgiveness of My Sins.**

#### I. I could not live without it.

I could not spend a single happy day. For I should be in constant fear that before the happy day ended the Lord's strong hand would reach me to punish me for my sins.

I could not face a day of sickness (like this man's paralysis) or of misfortune, without cringing, knowing that I am about to be brought to a reckoning for my sins.

How could I die and pass on to the judgment day knowing that Justice will then step in? Defense mechanisms may ease the fears of others, they could not ease my fears. I keep thinking of Lazarus and of Dives, the one who was certain, the other who did not care.

I want a life and a death unharassed by any secret terrors arising from my sins.

#### II. It is so easy to obtain.

The paralytic obtained this certainty of forgiveness. The trouble he took. He let nothing stop him.

Jesus gave him the certainty that no scoffing scribes could dispute. The ocular demonstration.

Jesus lived, suffered, and died to buy for me the forgiveness of my sins.

He sends me the certainty through this text and through scores of Scripture statements, even also in the Sacraments.

My forgiveness is sealed and secured to my faith in Jesus.

I am ready to face death and the last Judgment, — Jesus has made me ready, — he has remitted all my sins.

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### **Forgiveness of Sin is More than Healing from Disease.**

- I. Without it no healthy man is sound.
  - II. With it even the sick is happy.
  - III. By it every healing is complete. Stoecker.
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When my old body is now and again stricken with pain, when at times it grows pitifully weak and is threatened by actual dissolution, when then also my mind loses all strength, and at times has become unconscious, I cannot agree with those who in like circumstances see great signs of grace, I must confess that the Lord is bowing me deeply into the dust and is reminding me of all my sins. In every sickness I feel utterly humbled, deeply crushed. I then realize anew and with renewed force that for me there is only one hope and one help, namely the forgiveness of my sins. Like the poor paralytic I want at all costs to get to the feet of Jesus that he may look also into my heart and say to me:

### **"Child, Be of Good Cheer: Thy Sins are Forgiven Thee!"**

(Jesus did not say "son"; he said "child").

- I. Incomparable comfort!  
It dismisses every fear, worry, misgiving.
- II. Unshakable certainty!  
The Judge sends me remission attested and sealed, through his Written Word.
- III. For me only to believe!

That means to receive, to clasp to my heart and thus, when the hour comes, to die in safety.

IV. Joy flooding my whole being.

This is why the Lord permits me to get sick, makes me face all my sins once more, that in his forgiveness I may have this joy, a foretaste of heaven.

# The Twentieth Sunday After Trinity. Matt. 22:1-14

## The Robe of Christ's Righteousness

The text for last Sunday centers on the one happy man whose sins Jesus sent away. That man could face life, death, and the final judgment with assurance and with joy. Our present text is much grander. The parable of the King's Son's Wedding Feast compresses into one picture the great act of God by which he makes his election from the fallen mass of mankind. The act is eternal; the Scriptures condescend to our finite minds and date it before the foundation of the world. But eternity, we must ever remember, is the very opposite of time, namely infinite timelessness, — a concept utterly inconceivable to our small finite minds. Once this is recognized, we must altogether cease making deductions regarding eternity based on our concepts of time. Because this is so constantly done, God's eternal election and predestination are so much misunderstood, to say no more.

God is eternal; he exists and acts in the timelessness which is above all time. How, then, shall this great act of election be presented to our finite minds? Jesus presents a grand parable, but he does not use the concept "before the foundation of the world." He uses, instead, the entire course of time, from the beginning of covenant grace until the conclusion of covenant grace. Jesus unrolls this course of time before us, because we poor mortals are compelled to think in terms of time. Yet, see how the picture is heavily compressed into a Wedding Feast which is first prepared and then consummated. Now, as far as God is concerned the actual succession of time in the history of his covenant and the sequences pictured in the parable are wholly immaterial and in no way limit him. He is not obliged to wait until after you are born before determining anything regarding you. All the days and all the ages and all the human beings in them and all God's grace

with all its gifts and all its work and all its results from beginning to end, lie before God in utter completeness, like a tale that has long been told, to which nothing can be added, from which also nothing can be subtracted. For us tomorrow is another day, bearing in its womb we know not what. For God tomorrow and all tomorrows are like the yesterday of the very first day of creation.

So Jesus shows us the whole picture including also, in the picturesque imagery of the Wedding Feast, the last day, the final day of judgment. What are we shown? *Astounding Grace*, — for all Jews, for all Gentiles, yea, for all men, to be permitted to sit as the elect of God in the magnificence of his Wedding Banquet Hall, enrobed in the priceless Wedding Garment. See the whole Hall filled when the King comes in to view the Wedding Guests. All shine in Grace, pure, unmerited Grace. How could it be any other way?

But why are not all men in this Hall? How is, it possible that there is one in this Hall without the Wedding Garment? In other words, why are not all among the elect? The answer is as luminous as it possibly can be. We see their Rejection of this astounding Grace of God. All is summed up in Hos. 13:9: “O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself; but in me is thine help.” Matt. 23:37: “How often would I, — and ye would not.”

There is no mystery about that Hall full of Wedding Guests Royally Enrobed, — the *gratia sufficiens* is *explanatio sufficiens*, — save that grace itself is a divine mystery. The inexplicable mystery is the accursed rejection of grace on the part of all those who will have none of it.

When the King comes in to see the Wedding Guests, the only thing for which he looks is the Wedding Garment, the Robe of Christ’s Righteousness made yours and mine by faith. In the parable just one man is presented who is without that Garment, — Jesus wants you and me to ask: “Lord, is it I?”

**[1] And Jesus answered and spoke again in parables to them, saying: etc.** The participle ἀποκριθεῖς does not refer to a question that Jesus answered, but to the situation that the parable of Jesus meets, and at the same time it lends weight to εἶπεν... λέγων. The plural “in parables” probably considers the ’extended imagery of the one parable as a variety of parables. In 21:45 the high priests and the Pharisees are stirred to murderous hate when they perceive that the parable related in that chapter is

spoken against them. Well, the proper response to that hate is not that Jesus should run away but that he should speak another parable against them, and the one that now follows uses some very plain language.

**[2] “The Kingdom of the heavens has become like a king, who made a wedding for his son, and sent his slaves to call those that had been called to the wedding. And they were not willing to come.”**

“The Kingdom” is explained in Matt. 21:5, the First Sunday in Advent; also in John 3:3, Trinity Sunday. Note the verb ὠνοιόθη, a historical aorist, not “is like,” or “is likened to,” our versions; but “was made like,” or “got to be made like.” The rule of the heavens in its grace here on earth in the hands of God, its heavenly King, at a certain historical stage of its development, namely at the time of the apostles, arrived at the grand likeness which Jesus now unfolds in detail. The sum of the whole likeness is briefly stated: “a king who made a wedding for his son.” Unspeakably grand is this wedding, as we see from the picture that is now unfolded. That any human being should ever dream of refusing the invitation to such a wedding is next to unthinkable. Thus is revealed the enormous guilt of all those who commit this crime against their king. Let that be deeply impressed upon us.

We must note that the opening statement governs the entire parable, and it should be limited only to the imagery actually used by Jesus and should include no more: the king makes a wedding feast for his son. Hence we are not to speak about the son and his happy bride, about the beautiful wedding procession, or about any detail of a wedding not pertinent to the unity unfolded in this parable. A wedding feast implies many, many wedding guests, for without them there could not be such a feast. The interest of the parable is confined to all of these guests, both to those that refuse to come and to those that do come. The whole story is told in an entirely objective, historical way.

[3] Therefore also it sets in at a definite point of the earthly history of the Kingdom and takes us forward to the definite final historical date when the rule of the heavenly Kingdom shall be completed here on earth, namely to the day of judgment when “the king came in to view those reclining at table.” “Those that had been called to the wedding” are the people of the Jews. Their call and invitation had been sent them long ago, and they had

been told that they should come when the wedding was ready. The “slaves” now sent to them are not the Baptist and Jesus, for the wedding was not ready until the Day of Pentecost had come. Besides, Jesus is the King’s Great Son, in whose eternal honor this Wedding is made by God; he cannot also at the same time be one of the slaves sent out to the Jews to announce the celebration of the Wedding. It is historically true, of course, that the Jews received the preliminary covenant call, which the Gentiles did not receive; but this double call to the Jews makes the entire parable wonderfully grand. So great and glorious was this Wedding that God sent out the first invitations centuries before the great date.

Incredible, and one might say an impossible fact, but Jesus sets it down in so many words: “And they were not willing.” When the great time came, the Jews, so long before invited, refused the final call. “They were not willing” places the fault wholly in their will. Many of us call this “willful resistance,” for lack of a better term. I have already explained the satanic mystery involved, which our poor minds will never penetrate. The imperfect tense ἤθελον implies that something follows which is to be told in a moment, closing the subject.

[4] If you had been this king and had been thus insulted in your own person and in your grace and in the noble person of your royal son, what would have been your reaction? Instantaneous and most summary penalty. But behold this king! Was ever grace so strong and persistent, before its last limit was reached? **“And he sent other slaves, saying: ‘Lo, I have prepared my breakfast; my steers having been slaughtered, and all things prepared. Come to the wedding!’ [5] But those that made light of it went away, the one to his own farm, the other upon his business [6], while the rest, having laid hold on his slaves, maltreated and killed them. But the king grew angry, and having sent his armies destroyed those murderers and set fire to their city.”**

This king actually repeats his final invitation. The “other slaves” are not again the apostles, but their successors, who worked with the Jews. So solicitous is this king that his invitation is now made detailed: the breakfast, eaten about nine o’clock in the morning, is ready, waiting for the guests to appear at table. What a predicament in which to leave the king! So he urges through his slaves: “Hither to the wedding!”

Behold all the loving persistence of grace, all its patient calling of sinners! There is nothing like this grace in all the universe. This grace must be contumaciously rejected by damnable sinners in order that they may be only κλητοί and not ἔκλεκτοί.

[5] Two classes are described, thereby enabling us to see the contumely with which they treated the king, his son, and the great wedding feast. Instead of going to the palace to honor the crown-prince, the one class snaps its fingers at the very idea. Here is one of them, — he has business of his own, far more important, on his own farm. But in the parable he must be pictured not as a common farmer, but as a grand landed proprietor. We are shown a companion, a business man of equally large interests. These two are the best representatives of their respective classes of men. Their counterpart has ever continued and is found extensively also in the Gentile world: people who look at divine things with supercilious disdain. The grossly earthly is their concern, they cannot bother themselves about the heavenly. They live in order to conduct some estate or some business successfully. Because their number is so great Jesus spoke a special parable about them in Luke 14:16-24.

[6] But there is another class: the cruel persecutors. These laid hold of the slaves “maltreated and killed them.” Historically this double statement is literally true. These are the actual Jewish crimes against the King’s blessed messengers. Think of it: a wedding invitation and the bidding to come now, the most delightful and happy occasion that can be imagined, — and these highly honored guests “maltreat and kill” the king’s messengers! Was ever such an unspeakable outrage known before?

[7] The imagery of the parable is historical, for it pictures the destruction of Jerusalem. At the same time, the fate of these murderers and of their abominable city indicates what awaits others who follow the Jewish example. For, while depicting historical Jewish features, the parable includes all time and all men.

See how thus the image of this king, of his son, and of his wedding feast grows before our eyes. He is a king indeed! To imagine that the sending out of his armies on this punitive expedition interferes with the progress of the grand wedding, and thus mars the imagery of the parable, is to cling to conceptions entirely inferior. While the first impression conveyed by the

idea of a wedding is that of limited time, selected guests, etc., we soon perceive how all these limitations fade away. Days, weeks, etc., are far transcended by this wedding. Those first invited have a great capital city, etc. At every step the imagery is forced to expand, until at last all the wondrous reality is lifted into View. For this is God's Wedding, made for his Own Son, our Savior, and it takes in all the people who lived on earth since the Son was glorified.

Great as the grace of God in Christ Jesus is, that idea is false which supposes that this grace and the patience that goes with it are limitless. Grace is utterly unmerited. No one can dictate to God either that he shall at all extend grace, or to what extent he shall extend it. This determination is wholly the prerogative of God. We may say that in this respect grace is sovereign, yet the word "sovereign" has been used by Calvinists to express an arbitrary, absolute, and wrongly limited exercise of the divine power, and all such ideas of sovereignty must be excluded. When the grace of God can do no more to save, it ends, and then judgment sets in. God knows when the limit is reached. There comes a time when it is too late, too late to cry for grace.

The King "grew angry" (ingressive aorist). Rationalists ever criticize the God of the Bible because he becomes angry and vents his wrath upon the obdurate sinners. To speak of this wrath as passion, similar to the passionate outbursts of men is to misrepresent God. His wrath is the reaction of his holiness and his justice against sin. The trouble with so many minds is that they misconceive God's grace because they badly misconceive his holiness, righteousness, and justice. Rationalism is pleased to invent a grandfather god, who shuts an eye to the sins of men, whose soft heart lets all of them slip into heaven. When the Scriptures speak of God's wrath, as in the present connection, this is rejected as making God, who is all love, a horrible, blood-thirsty tyrant. But when the wrath of God does reach the sinner at last, that sinner feels only that he is receiving the just reward of his deeds.

**[8] "Then he says to his slaves: 'The wedding is prepared, but they that have been called were not worthy. [9] Be going therefore to the outlets of the roads, and as many as you shall find call to the wedding.' [10] And those slaves having gone out into the roads, brought together**

**all as many as they found, both wicked and good. And the wedding was filled with those reclining at table.”**

In the parable Jesus makes the king himself utter the verdict regarding the Jews. The king declares: “The Wedding is prepared (the redemption in Christ Jesus is complete), but they that have been called (the Jews, by means of the Old Testament) were not worthy.” They lacked the worthiness of faith. There is no greater unworthiness than unbelief. This the Jews manifest to this day.

[9] The grace of the king remains unaltered. The Jews were only one of his people, he has many more in his kingdom, and now orders his slaves to be going to call (invite) them to the wedding. The expression ἐπὶ τὰς διεξόδους τῶν ὁδῶν does not mean “into the highways” (A.V.), or “unto the partings of the highways” (R.V.), nor does the expression refer to “cross-roads.” Διέξοδος is used to designate the outcome of a court trial, and when it is applied to a road, it means its terminal, the place where all the traffic that passes along the road is bound to arrive. We thus translate: “the outlets of the roads,” the place Where they come in from the outside country and terminate in the center of this or of that city. The nearer to the city the road approaches the heavier becomes the traffic; at the terminals practically the entire population of the land can be reached.

Again we note how the image of the king, of his son, and of the wedding grows. Think of all these people of a Whole populous kingdom being accommodated at a Wedding Feast! Then add ages and ages until the end of the world, and so the grandness of it all will be complete.

[10] The slaves carry out the king’s command. Ἐκεῖνοι, the very same slaves, for the apostles and their helpers who called the Jews still call men over the entire world. They brought together “all as many as they found,” making no distinction of any kind. This “all” still includes Jews, but no longer as a preferred class, as the class that had received a great advance invitation. The Jews now are only among the other sinners found by the slaves. Some Jews are continually won for Christ, although not many.

It is striking to hear that “both wicked and good” were brought in to the Wedding. We dare not tone down πονηρός so as to mean only “bad” (our versions), for the word for this would be κακός. The word means “wicked” in the active and the vicious sense. But “wicked and good” are here the

people whom the' call reaches, and they are characterized according to their condition before the call, hence "wicked and good" in the popular estimate. We know what distinction Jesus has in mind: publicans, harlots, open sinners — men like Nicodemus, the rich young ruler, etc. The many who were brought in by the king's slaves differed in this way, but this difference disappeared entirely once these people were brought in. Worldly wickedness does not exclude from the Wedding, and worldly goodness is no ticket of entrance. Both the wickedness and the goodness must be replaced by the great Wedding Garment.

We are at the climax of the parable. The work of calling is entirely done. "The wedding was filled with those reclining at table." The last guest had been brought in. The king's plan was brought to full fruition. The fact that those bidden in advance refused to come made no difference, save that they excluded themselves. When one looked over all these hosts in oriental fashion reclining at the Royal Wedding, he did not even miss the obdurate Jews whose city had been destroyed.

**[11] "And the king, having gone in to view those reclining at table, saw there a man not having been garmented with a wedding garment. [12] And he said to him: 'Fellow, how didst thou come here not having a wedding garment?' And he was struck speechless. [13] Then the king said to the ministrants: 'Having bound him feet and hands throw him out into the outer darkness! There shall be the weeping and the gnashing of the teeth.'"**

The supreme moment of the entire parable has been reached, — the king himself comes in to the magnificent Wedding, which is now furnished with its complete array of Wedding Guests, "to View (θεάσασθαι) those reclining at table," to feast his eyes upon the sight of all these uncounted Guests in their magnificent Wedding Garments. Dismiss the idea that the king comes in as a judge or as a critic, if possible to find something wrong with some guest or other. No. All his plans have been successfully, most magnificently carried out. The entire grand scene that meets his eyes when he sees all these Guests Enrobed in Wedding Garments and this entire Wedding Feast is the product of the King's Own Boundless Grace. The whole scene displays the Glory of the King's Grace. Let not the preacher lose sight of this great fact just because the king found one guest who was no guest and had to be expelled. This one false guest only emphasizes the Absolute

## Necessity of the Royal Wedding Garment for the King's Son's Wedding Feast.

We must feel the full enormity of the insult offered by this guest without the wedding garment. At grand oriental feasts and celebrations the magnificence of the host does not display itself merely in providing the feast, but in addition in furnishing to each honored guest the grand appropriate garments, even several such garments. No guest is to offer the plea that he has no robes befitting so great an occasion. In fact, no guest is to be put to the expense and to the concern for the proper clothing. The host attends to all of it. This is the imagery of this superlative royal wedding feast. All of these people who were brought in by the slaves from the terminals of the roads, any number of them quite poor, were not to go back to their homes to bring suitable garments. What a pitiful showing would such garments, the very best these people had, have made? With such garments, a motley array indeed, the royal wedding would have afforded a most unroyal sight for the king to go in “to view.” No, the king had hosts of attendants who garmented each guest in royal fashion when he came to recline at the feast. Yet, here is “a man not having been garmented with a wedding garment.”

I am sorry to report that many commentators regard the Wedding Garment as the *justitia acquisita*, our acquired righteousness, our good works. How they can be satisfied with such a View I fail to understand. The imagery of the parable itself contradicts this View, for each garment is like the other, and each is the gift of the king to the guest. The Wedding Garment is the *justitia imputata*, the Robe of Christ's Righteousness made ours by Faith, his holy and perfect merits imputed to us. “He hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness,” and these are bridal garments as Is. 61:10 continues to state.

[12] Ἐταῖρε should not be translated: “Friend!” The word is etymologically equal to our unfriendly “fellow.” No guest, enrobed in a Wedding Garment, would the king address as: Ἐταῖρε! This word of address already foreshadows the man's fate. Note the fine grammatical point: οὐκ ἐνδεδυμένον — using οὐκ with the participle to designate the fact that met the king's eye: the man “not having been garmented” etc. (v. 11); and now: μὴ ἔχων κτλ., “not having” etc. — using the regular negative μή in the

king's question. Οὐ marks the cold fact as the fact, the outrageous sight, the man without the king's royal wedding garment; while the common μή refers only to the king's thought.

The parable presents only one guest without a wedding garment. It is, of course, perfectly correct to say that this one is representative of all the others who are like him, who come with their own righteousness and deem that altogether sufficient, disdaining the perfect righteousness of Christ. Yet in the parables (18:24 and 28) this one intends to make each of us ask the question: "Lord, is it I?" This man was not a true guest Who had accepted the king's invitation of grace. When the question was put to him as to how he came in here without the royal wedding garment, "he was struck speechless," — note the passive voice. The question struck him speechless. There was no answer. In his silence he stood utterly condemned, — self — condemned. When the damning question is asked in such a parable, an answer is indeed sometimes given, but the attempted answer damns him who makes it out of his own mouth, exactly as the dread silence does that dares to make no answer.

[13] "He that believeth not shall be damned," Mark 16:16. The king's order to his ministrants only repeats this verdict. These *diakonoi* are not the human slaves that went out with the call of grace; they are God's angels, the ministrants of his justice and his judgment. Here is a case in which the parabolic language is abandoned and the reality takes its place. Like all the others who spurn the king's grace, this man lands in hell. "Having bound him feet and hands, throw him out into the outer darkness! There shall be the weeping and the gnashing of the teeth." There is a terrible darkness here on earth, not merely σκότος, "darkness in general," ignorance and its falsehoods and lies, but τὸ σκότος, "the darkness," the hellish power of the lie and the delusion that grips men and drags them to hell. From this power of the darkness grace affords escape. All the guests clothed in Christ's righteousness escaped. Then there is "the outer darkness": τὸ σκότος τὸ ἔξωτερον, outside of and beyond this world, the infernal darkness of hell from which there is no escape.

Jesus repeatedly referred to this darkness and added the awful description: "There shall be the weeping and the gnashing of the teeth," — both nouns articulated, for there is no weeping like this weeping in the outer darkness, where all happiness is for ever gone and where all woe and

anguish are for ever present, and there is no gnashing of teeth like this gnashing in the outer darkness, where the pain is unbearable and the damned thus grind their teeth in agony.

[14] The parable is ended. Jesus sums up in one brief sentence what it sets forth: **“For many are called ones, but few elected ones.”** “For” is explanatory: “And thus you will understand that many” etc. The predicates are anarthrous, and this stresses their qualitative force: “called ones” — “elected ones.” The two verbals are passive, equal to descriptive past passive participles: persons that were called by God — persons that were elected by God. Throughout the parable *καλεῖν* is to be taken in the sense of “to invite,” and it refers to the call of grace from God apart from the fact as to whether it wins assent or not. Thus the verbal *κλητοί* means that many are only invited ones and no more. The grace of the call reached them and no more. The effect that should have followed was prevented.

When Jesus says “many” and “few” he refers to all men of all time. After the work of grace has been completely done in the entire world, there will be on the one hand many called ones, on the other hand few elect ones. Why this difference? The wondrous grace of God is so great, so sufficient, so utterly attractive that we should think every last human being would be an *ἐκλεκτός* and not merely a *κλητός*. In a manner as clear as crystal Jesus states the reason for the phenomenon: so many refuse all the grace of God and exclude themselves from God’s eternal election. God would, but they would not.

I think it is a mistake to say that it is a mystery that I should be an elected one. The *gratia sufficiens* is the full and the adequate explanation. The mystery lies in the many, in the fact that they should reject this sufficient grace and damn themselves, refusing the call as the Jews did, some even resorting to violence, or pretending to come outwardly but spurning the Royal Robe of Christ’s Righteousness. This mystery is beyond our human probing. The act of rejecting God’s grace is the most unnatural, unreasonable, outrageous act, violating every norm of sense, of reason, and of right. To ask a reasonable explanation for what is utterly unreasonable is to ask for what does not exist. We have called this “the willful resistance to grace,” but really it deserves a worse appellation: the act is devilish, satanic. The mystery of it is the mystery of hell.

The parable does not merely describe the called and the elect, for in both passive verbals, implying God as their agent, we have the entire act of God in calling and in electing. The parable is a picture of God's entire act of election. It shows us how God came to choose few and not more than these few — all the rest prevented him from choosing them. In fact, this explains how there comes to be an ἐκλογή, an ἐκλέγεσθαι. Thus our parable rightly forms one of the supreme *sedes doctrinae* for the doctrine of election (Concordia Triglotta 1069:14), together with Rom. 8:29 etc., and Eph. 1:4 etc.; to drop our parable as a *sedes* is a serious mistake. In the statement of what constitutes election (F. C. XI, § 15-22) most of the eight points are drawn from our parable, just as Martin Chemnitz, the main author of the article on predestination, also chose this parable as his text when he preached his notable sermon on the subject.

The divine act of election is timeless and occurred in the timelessness of eternity. In the parable Jesus uses the concepts of time to show us with entire clarity what God did in eternity. In no way does time hamper God. All that time would contain was absolutely present to him before time ever was: his whole plan of grace with all its operations and its effects, exactly as sketched in the parable. Election is the entire subject of this parable from beginning to end, from the redemption of the whole human race to the glorification of those who enter heaven. We are like little children, and because of our weak, finite minds Jesus must take it all apart when showing it to us, while with God it is all one act. For God the end is already in the beginning. That is why the whole is truly God's eternal election. It is the whole sum of God's eternal grace which produces and therefore accepts saints clothed in Christ's righteousness as his own for ever in eternal glory.

Again take the essential point of v. 11, the king's viewing the guests in their wedding robes, Christ's righteousness embraced by faith. This is the culmination or climax. Recognizing it, we may define: the divine election is that specific eternal act of God's grace by which he accepts the saints whom he has succeeded in clothing in Christ's righteousness as his own in eternal glory for ever.

Perhaps someone can put these efforts at formulation into more adequate form, — I am only doing the best I can.

Both views present the same fulness of grace. The former looks at God's election from the viewpoint of its cause (the grace), and thus views the effect (the elect, compare point eight in F. C. XI, § 22). The latter looks at God's election from the viewpoint of effect (the elect), as produced by the cause (the grace). Neither cause and effect, nor effect and cause can ever be separated, for the attempt to do so would inevitably pervert both. The effect of all the grace consists in all the elect, chosen in timeless eternity in view of the Royal Wedding Robe, the saving merits of Jesus Christ perseveringly apprehended by faith, which is often abbreviated to the two words: *intuitu fidei*.

## Homiletical Aid

Dr. Martin Chemnitz, Superintendent of the Church of Braunschweig, preached a sermon in the Prince's Chapel at Wolfenbuettel on the Twentieth Sunday after Trinity in the year 1570. I offer the three divisions of his sermon, for which he had no formal theme, in a brief formulation:

- I. What the Election of God comprises and on what it stands (*worauf sie stehe*).

From the elaboration:

The Son assuming human nature for the whole human race.

The Son slain as a sacrifice.

This sacrifice for men.

The servants with the call.

The efficacy to work in men's hearts, enlighten, convert and justify them.

Those justified he would protect, keep, preserve, and make eternally glorious. Rom. 8.

All those, who despise his call, blaspheme, persecute, or refuse to follow the call, and persist in this resistance, he would punish in time and reject and damn eternally, as this parable clearly indicates.

This is the simple understanding of what belongs to God's predestination (Versehzmg), what it comprises and wherein it stands, that we take all these pieces together, when we speak or think of predestination, as does Paul in the whole first chapter of Ephesians.

- II. How this doctrine serves us as a warning, rebuke, admonition and amendment, when we reject God's call.

This doctrine is to produce repentance, etc. Jesus warns the world in so friendly a way.

- III. What comfort this doctrine gives us that in his counsel God ordained us to eternal salvation and considered the means etc., before the foundation of the world.

From the elaboration:

Thus I have two pieces of comfort from this doctrine. First: That from the call I can be assured and made certain that I too am chosen unto salvation. Secondly: That from the call I have a certain consolation that the Holy Spirit by means of the Word will work in me the powers and abilities that I may be able to accept it.

If God is for us, who can be against us?

He is faithful who by the Word has called us to his glory.

The Scriptures point us to a single ornament which avails before this king for salvation, namely Christ Jesus, with the merit of his obedience, passion and death, which we put on by faith in the Word and Sacrament. Gal. 3; Ps. 45: "king's daughters" etc. Is. 61:10.

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The outline of C. F. W. Walther is negative and omits the elect and their election (*Gnadenjahr*).

### **The Conduct (*Verhalten*) of Most Men Toward God's Invitation to his Heavenly Wedding.**

- I. They remain indifferent and will not come.
- II. They are aroused to hate and persecution.

III. They accept outwardly, but not from the heart.

For myself I must say that I could not preach on this text without preaching fully and joyously on all those who are won by the invitation and shine in the royal wedding robes.

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The Christian would not think of dying or of facing God at the final judgment without accepting his infinite grace and the supreme gift of that grace, the righteousness of Jesus Christ. This grace and its gift make us not only safe but for ever blessed.

The parable. The supreme moment,

### **When the King Comes in to View the Wedding Guests.**

I. Will he find you among the number of his guests?

1. The marriage feast.

The picture of God's infinite grace for sinners: forgiveness, life, and salvation prepared in Christ Jesus, and the Gospel call to bring us to this wedding and its blessedness.

2. The supreme moment.

Pictured at the end, but God is timeless, all is ever before him. The plans of infinite grace consummated. See the king as he enters. Are you among the happy guests? Does his eye of grace rest lovingly on you? You are giving the answer now.

3. Many the king did not see.

Those who disdained his grace, those who even persecuted the Gospel messengers. All these bar themselves out of infinite grace and are damned in spite of grace. The example of the Jews.

4. Whom the king saw.

His vast and glorious hall was filled to the very last place. Nothing but poor sinners. The malefactor on the cross is one —

add others. Grace, pure grace, brought them in. Are you among them?

- II. Will he behold you clothed in the Royal Wedding Robe?
  1. Explain the oriental custom. The one man without the wedding garment. Speechless. Cast out.
  2. Why one only in the parable? “Is it I?”
  3. The wedding garment, Christ’s righteousness. All our righteousnesses as filthy rags (Is. 64:6).
  4. Let there never be a doubt about our being garmented in this robe!

Conclusion: Why are all these happy guests at the King’s Son’s Wedding Feast? Grace, grace, grace is the sole answer. Why are so many absent? They rejected this grace. They excluded themselves.

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### **Who Is Elect?**

- I. Not he who despises God’s call.
- II. Not he who rejects God’s robe of righteousness.
- III. But he who accepts God’s grace and its supreme gift. After Stoecker.

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Election, — false views, as though God arbitrarily and mysteriously elected some to salvation, and damned the rest to hell or just abandoned them to their fate. That, therefore, God now calls only the former seriously, but not the latter.

### **The Elect**

- I. Are not they who despise the call of grace or who reject Christ’s righteousness.

- II. Are they who follow the call of grace and embrace the merit of Christ by faith.
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All serious souls will ever concern themselves about the question whether they are among those whom God elected in eternity. Formula of Concord XI, §25 (Concordia Triglotta 1071): “This also belongs to the further explanation and salutary use of the doctrine concerning God’s foreknowledge [predestination] to salvation: Since only the elect, whose names are written in the book of life, are saved, how we can know, when and whereby we can perceive who are the elect that can and should receive this doctrine for comfort.”

We are told not to answer this according to reason, nor by penetrating the secret abyss of divine predestination, but by the revealed will of God. We “should hear Christ, who is the Book of Life and God’s Eternal Election of all God’s children to eternal life” (§70).

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### **A Look into the Book of Life.**

To see what the King saw when he came in to view the Wedding Guests. Here are

#### **the Names of all the Elect.**

All written here are

- I. Lovers of God’s grace.

So many have no use for this grace because grace is for the unworthy and is received on our knees in the dust of repentance. So many even resent this grace.

But in the Book are written only the names of those who bless and worship this grace. You can see whether your name is there. All the Wedding Guests are there.

- II. Followers of the call.

“Come!” and they came. The Gospel offer and gift of salvation. They let nothing interfere. Here are none indifferent or hostile to the call.

The call ushers into the Wedding, bestows all that God has prepared for those who love him. You can easily determine whether your name is there.

### III. Believers in Christ’s righteousness.

One who tried to be counted in on the strength of his own righteousness (Is. 64:6). No such names in the Eternal Book.

The all-perfect, all-glorious righteousness of Christ, — a royal robe indeed, giving us a name worthy to be inscribed on the eternal pages. You can easily know whether your name is there.

Conclusion: All men could have their names in the Book of Life. Grace, the call, the merits of Christ reach out to embrace all of them. But regarding so many it is sadly true: “Ye would not!”

# The Twenty-First Sunday After Trinity. John 4:46-54

## Faith

Our text deals with faith in the Word and in nothing but the Word. It receives its special import from the fact that it is placed into the eschatological sub-cycle of after-Trinity texts. Its place in this group is to show that the Saved are able to face the End only with Faith in the Word. The miracle itself simply substantiates the power and the efficacy of faith. We need forgiveness (the Nineteenth Sunday after Trinity); we need the robe of Christ's righteousness (the Twentieth Sunday after Trinity); and now we need faith in the Word. Faith is indeed also found in the two previous texts, for Jesus saw the faith of the paralytic and of his bearers and the unbelief in the hearts of the blasphemous Pharisees; and certainly the robe of Christ's righteousness is put on and is worn by faith alone. But our text intends to single out and to stress the vital importance and the necessity of faith itself, and its sole object must be the Word and this alone. When then we think of the end, toward which we are hastening, the fact that such faith is altogether essential becomes fully apparent.

**“O for a faith that will not shrink  
Though pressed by every foe,  
That will not tremble on the brink  
Of any earthly woe!”**

**[46] He came therefore again unto Cana of Galilee, where he made the water wine.** The second miracle, which Jesus performed in Galilee was wrought in Cana, the place where he had wrought the first miracle. The one miracle prepared the ground for the other.

**And there was a royal official whose son was sick at Capernaum.** This βασιλικός is not “a nobleman” (our versions), but a man connected with the king, “a royal officer” of the court or of the king’s household. The king referred to is Herod Agrippa, who was only a tetrarch, ruling over a fourth part of the country; yet he was commonly called “king” by the Jews. This royal officer’s son was gravely ill in Capernaum where the family seems to have had its home, and the father had hastened to Cana when the news reached Capernaum that Jesus had returned to Galilee.

**[47] He, having heard that Jesus was come out of Judea into Galilee, went away unto him, and requested him to come down and heal his son; for he was about to die.** Let us note a few facts. The extreme need of the royal official drives him to Jesus. “Sweet are the uses of adversity.” God uses our need to draw us to the blessed Helper. Save for this sickness of his son the official might not have particularly concerned himself about Jesus and his powers of deity. The man is a royal officer and certainly has his servants, yet he makes the journey in person in all urgency to lay his request before Jesus. The life of his son is at stake, and the father trusts nothing to the possibly inefficient hands of a servant, The man had faith in Jesus, for he requests Jesus to hasten and come down to Capernaum to heal his son. We see, too, the grave limitations of his faith, for he thinks that Jesus must hurry to Capernaum, reach the bedside of the son, place his hands upon him, and thus perform the healing. Jesus, as it were, must run a race with death. Any delay may be fatal. Such is the petitioner that comes to Jesus.

We may here think of our modern faith healers. They either leave desperate cases like this entirely alone, or if they try their skill on them they fail shamefully. Their claims that they are following the example of Jesus are utterly spurious. We Christians use prayer and by prayer lay our sick and our dying into Jesus’ hands that he may grant them life or death according to his good and gracious will. The Greek retains the present tense ἦκει, “is come,” in the indirect discourse after the aorist participle ἀκούσας; the English uses “was come” or “had come.” Ἀπῆλθε is the aorist and merely reports the fact that the father went away to Cana, but ἦρώτα is the imperfect, “he was requesting,” which holds us in suspense as to the outcome of the request. We hear the man’s pleading and wonder what Jesus will say to him.

**[48] Jesus accordingly said to him: “Unless you see signs and wonders, you will in no way believe.”** Jesus voices a severe complaint. He speaks to the royal official (πρὸς αὐτόν), yet he uses the plural, placing this official into the same class with many others who based such faith as they had only on the signs and wonders which they saw. The evangelist has written about these people in 2:22-23, and we must add what he says about the people of Galilee in 4:45. It is quite possible that the royal officer was among the pilgrims who had been in Jerusalem at the last Passover and had seen Jesus work one or more miracles there, little thinking then that in a few months he would run to Jesus for miraculous aid for himself.

The point in the complaint of Jesus is not that he is asked to come down to Capernaum and to do the healing where the officer can see it being done, but that the kind of faith represented by this officer can be kept alive only by signs and miracles. As far as healing at a distance is concerned, such an idea had not even occurred to this officer. When Jesus says: “unless you see signs and wonders,” he does not, mean that people of this type must actually see the miracles, for hearing about them answers their purpose just as well; what Jesus means is that the faith of these people demands a constant succession of miracles. If the miracles should cease, their kind of faith would soon likewise cease. Jesus does not deny the reality of the faith they have, but complains that this faith does not advance as it should from resting on the miracles alone to resting on Jesus himself. This faith continued to treat Jesus as nothing but a worker of miracles, and refused to behold in him the promised Messiah of God, God’s own Son, the eternal Savior.

The two words “signs and wonders” are regularly combined, but the evangelists never use the latter alone to designate the miracles of the New Testament, for the pagan nations also had τέρατα, “wonders,” portents, marvels. “Signs” is the ethical term, the wondrous character of these deeds of Jesus signified something. The faith of these inferior believers was blind to what the “sign” signified, namely that Jesus was the Messiah of God, come not merely to free us from bodily ills, but by freeing men from these ills to attest his grace and his power to save their souls for evermore. It seems as though the “signs” could have been read so easily; yet the fact is that multitudes of Jews would not advance beyond the miracles to full and complete faith in Jesus himself.

We meet the same low type of faith today. Jesus today means little or nothing to many people until some calamity like severe sickness strikes them. Then they cry aloud to him and call on the pastor to pray with might and main. They want the wondrous, even miraculous help of Jesus and demand that it be granted in short order. When such strange prayers are answered in the way in which they deserve to be, like a fire of straw the faith dies out. All the signs and wonders recorded in the Scriptures are indeed to be food for our faith, but that faith is to read aright and absorb the full import of the signs, and is thus to embrace Jesus himself and all his saving work for our redemption and our deliverance in time and in eternity.

[49] Jesus makes no move to hurry to Capernaum to outrun the arrival of death. The royal officer is deeply stirred by his fears and literally throws himself upon the mercy of Jesus. This much the complaint uttered by Jesus had achieved. The royal official says to him: “Sir, come down, ere my little child die!” Here we have πρίν with the infinitive after a positive verb. Note the tender paternal appeal in τὸ παιδίον μου, “my little child.” Will Jesus let this little fellow die? The poor father is still so blind that he thinks Jesus must hurry from Cana to Capernaum, — Jesus is little concerned about this point, he will soon lift the man beyond it. That the officer has been brought to cast himself completely on the heart of Jesus and that he sees that everything depends on the Will of Jesus, this is the advance in faith secured by Jesus. Thus also Jesus is now ready to act.

**[50] And Jesus says to him: “Be going on thy way; thy son lives.” The man believed the word which Jesus said to him, and went his way.** The father’s plea is heard. The father is not to realize this after a long suspense as he hurries back to Capernaum, but at once, right now in this instant: “Thy son lives!” When we read this word from the printed page it seems tame and unimpressive. But picture the scene, imagine the face and the eyes of Jesus and the majestic tone of his voice, and you will see the sign and wonder and its power will go home to your heart. Here was far, far more than the father had dared to hope for.

Yet here appeared to be so little. Jesus gave to this officer only his word: “Thy son lives!” and only in this briefest possible form, not one syllable more. There was nothing to see, to touch, to lean upon, no other support. Only this word and the Speaker whose will this word expressed. The word demanded faith. The alternatives were sharp: either believe, or refuse to

believe. 'There was no third possibility. Gone was the officer's notion about hastening to the dying child's bedside. Something higher had entered, namely the challenge to believe Jesus and the simple word of Jesus, to believe him because of the person that he is and because of the power of his word. Thank God, the man "did believe" (aorist, which states the fact). In ὧ εἶπεν the dative is attracted to the case of its antecedent.

There is no peremptory aorist, only the mild present imperative: Πορεύου, "be going." Hence we should not inject a contrasting thought, such as: "No, leave me, I am not going!" and then, after depressing the man's hopes, suddenly raising them: "Thy son is living!" What Jesus tells the man is: "Be assured, thy son lives!" In other words:, "It is not at all necessary for me to go to Capernaum to save thy child's life, not necessary that I should prolong thy suspense for one moment, — right here and now I grant thy prayer and give thee thy little son's life!" The man had only Jesus' word, but oh, think what that word contained! He could receive that word only by faith, but oh, what a gift that faith had received which it could and did embrace! Often we have only the word of men; shall we ever doubt or disbelieve our heavenly Savior's word? Note the present tense of ζῆ, "is living" and continues to live, — all danger of death is gone. The word is chosen because of the man's expression "ere. my little child die," but it means to say that the child is completely free from his disease, and is sound and well.

**[51] Now already while going down his slaves met him saying to him that his boy is living. He accordingly inquired of them the hour in which he became better. They accordingly told him: "Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him." [53] The father accordingly knew that it was at that hour in which Jesus said to him: "Thy son lives." And he believed himself and his whole house.**

Imagine the scene at the officer's home at Capernaum where the mother hovers over the little lad burning up with fever. The one thought is, will the father succeed in reaching Jesus and in bringing him in time. Then, all at once, as in a flash, the fever is gone. Usually when severe fever does subside lassitude and weakness set in and there is a gradual recovery. Our versions have this idea when they wrongly translate the aorist κομφοτέρον ἔσχε as ingressive: "began to amend" (ἔχω with an adverb="to be"). No; suddenly the fever was completely gone and the little boy leaped up from

his bed and played again because he was perfectly well. That is why the slaves were dispatched to inform the father. If the fever had only begun to leave, if only signs of recovery were apparent, it would have been premature to send word to the father, for then at any moment the fever might have become aggravated again and in a few hours the boy might have been dead.

Those hurrying servants prove that the child had indeed fully recovered. They use the same words that Jesus used, only the evangelist employs the indirect discourse: “that his boy is living.” They call the child ὁ παῖς αὐτοῦ, as is natural for servants, but they use the significant verb ζῆν, as if repeating it from the lips of Jesus. Where death was so near and brought such fear, enduring life has returned and brings such great joy.

[52] The father’s inquiry as to the hour when the boy made the change sounded natural to the slaves, but the answer was freighted with the greatest significance for the father. They answer: “Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him.” It is probably best to consider the accusative ὥραν as merely adverbial. “The fever” is only the alarming symptom, and it gives us no clue as to the real disease from which the boy was suffering. But the leaving of the fever means complete restoration, just as the fever left Simon’s wife’s mother and enabled her to arise from her bed and to help prepare a meal for Jesus and the disciples.

[53] The father knew that the hour was the same in which Jesus had pronounced the blessed words of healing. His will and his word exercised in Cana had instantly healed the boy lying sick in Capernaum. The hour was the unquestionable proof. The evangelist takes us to the family in Capernaum and we are told that the royal officer himself believed and likewise his entire household. We know with what a poor faith they started. A higher, better faith took its place, faith in Jesus himself and especially also in his word. But this does not seem to be all. The evangelist does not seem to stop with the day of the father’s return, but seems to refer to the future when this royal officer and his family filled an important place in the Christian congregation at Capernaum. It is for this reason that some writers identify this officer with Chusa.

How are we to understand “the seventh hour”? This question brings up the wider one: Does John designate the hours in the Jewish or in the Roman

manner? No satisfactory answer has as yet been discovered. The matter is of greatest importance when we come to 19:14; see the details in *The Interpretation of St. John's Gospel* 144 etc. In our present passage all is simple if we follow the Roman reckoning, according to which "the seventh hour" would be our seven o'clock in the evening. Then the slaves could say "yesterday," for then the father and the slaves would be able to meet only on the day following the miracle. The only question is: Did John use the Roman reckoning and did he do so throughout when he mentions specific hours? According to the Jewish reckoning "the seventh hour" would be our one o'clock. We should then have entirely too much time of the day left, for the distance to Capernaum is less than six hours. The father could easily have reached home by evening. He and the slaves would have met about three or four o'clock of that afternoon, and the slaves could not have said χθές, "yesterday." Try your acumen on this problem of the hours in John.

**[54] This again as a second sign Jesus wrought, after having come from Judea into Galilee.** "Again" modifies the verb: "wrought again." "As a second sign" is predicative and places this sign beside the miracle of turning water into wine. The interval comprises something like eight or nine months. From John we learn that Jesus spent this time in Judea where he wrought many miracles. Since John records only this second miracle some conclude that Jesus remained in retirement. But he went right on with his public work and multiplied the signs. John is not concerned about recording these signs, for he has his fixed plan of writing and adheres to the great subject which it presents.

## Homiletical Aid

### Thy Child Liveth!

- I. What has Christ to do with the life of thy child?
- II. What hast thou to do with the life of thy child?

From the German of J. A. Dell.

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## **The Unbelief of Believers.**

- I. How there is such unbelief.
- II. That it must be removed.

Believers still love to see signs and wonders in visible bodily help; in answer to prayers the way in which we think they should be answered; in lack of appreciation of the eternal help that Jesus has for us; in not listening to his Word and placing completest reliance on that alone.

Unbelief in our faith is always dangerous and must be removed. The Lord does this when he helps us in his own way; when he leaves us only his Word as faith's support; when he teaches us what his real purpose regarding us is and how this transcends all our own thoughts.

C. F. W. Walther's theme and parts, to which I add elaborative notes.

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“When the Son of man cometh shall he find faith on the earth?” Luke 18:8. How hard it was for Jesus to produce faith when he was on earth. Many, indeed, profess faith today, but when examined by the Savior, so much of this faith is faulty that it is a question whether Jesus can accept it or not.

### **Examine Your Faith!**

At the last day, even as now, everything depends on your faith. The tragedy of imagining ourselves believers who by their faith are safe for time and for eternity when in fact our faith may be so faulty that it may leave its owners in the lurch. The text shows a man with a gravely faulty faith. Many are the faults of faith. Let us see that we suffer from none of these faults. There is

- I. The earthly-minded faith.
  1. The officer in the text. A faith that needed signs and wonders to sustain it, help in earthly and in bodily matters, the man asking for his child's life. This faith is liable to die at any time.

2. Today faith that depends on Jesus for earthly and for bodily aid: success in earthly undertakings; preservation in danger; restoration in sickness; etc. Suppose the Lord withholds such gifts, then what about the faith?

## II. Misguided faith.

1. Jesus gave the royal officer only his word, a word so brief, so seemingly impossible. The man believed that word.
2. The Word which he has given us to believe. How many truly believe it? How easily we are misguided as to its meaning and allow men to guide us wrongly. Entire churches. Most misguided faith proves fatal, like the man who is misled to take the wrong road, the wrong medicine, the wrong guide. Drop your own rationalizing thoughts, believe and follow the Word alone.

## III. Shallow faith.

1. The royal officer's faith was shallow. Only his great need drove him to Jesus. He thought only of physical help. All that the signs of Jesus signified far beyond such help and all that Jesus truly meant to be for him he had never apprehended.
2. So shallow is much faith today. People have so many things to do, to occupy their minds, and their diversions, too, take up so much time and so much strength that they cannot think much about Jesus, read his Word and ponder it, and scarcely have time to hurry to church on Sunday. What a thin, dried-up, shallow faith! Do you expect to stand assured with that on judgment day?

## IV. Ignorant faith.

1. The royal officer even thought that Jesus had to hurry to Capernaum to heal the child. This only a piece of ignorance.
2. Can you stand a simple examination on the elements of What a Christian must believe? on the main things in the Bible? Are you a catechumen who has done only one thing — who has forgotten? Are you safe with an ignorant faith?

## V. Weak faith.

1. The question with regard to the royal official was whether his faith would stand the strain Jesus put upon it when he told him to go home, his son being alive.
2. Faith must stand strains. It must meet temptation, opposition, unbelief, attacks. A weak faith is soon trampled down. All faulty faith is weak. The tragedies of weak faith are pitiful. Invite no such tragedy upon yourself. You must have a strong, even a heroic faith, like the women and the children among the martyrs.

VI. A sound, strong faith.

1. The best part of the story about the royal officer is the fact that he and his Whole house believed and were staunch members in the church that grew up in Capernaum.
2. God build us up in such a faith that with such a faith we may meet him at death and at the final judgment.

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“He that believeth shall be saved.” All the saved are saved by faith alone. Yet faith is often sadly misconceived.

### **Make No Mistake About Faith!**

I. About what faith is.

1. The notion that it is a mere opinion; that one opinion is as good as another; that it makes no difference what one believes, just so he does What is right; etc.
2. Faith is the confidence of the heart. This confidence rests on someone and on something. The nobleman relied on Jesus — the right Helper. Yet the nobleman should have relied on Jesus far more fully. It makes all the difference in the world on whom and on what we rest our trust. The devil wants us to misplace our faith and trust. That means destruction.
3. Do we truly trust Jesus? Does ignorance, deception, our own foolish thinking hinder and spoil our faith? Do we truly know him

and rely on him accordingly, — know his Word and the grace and the power of that Word and is our faith according?

Make no mistake about what faith is!

II. About what faith obtains.

1. They who think that faith in regard to Christ is nothing, rob themselves. For faith in Christ is like a hand that receives, like a lap into which a treasure is laid. Shall we cut off the hand? Keep the lap filled with human junk?
2. The signs and wonders are bestowals of earthly help, yet as signs pointing to the promised Savior who would bestow help equally for the soul and for eternity. The tendency to desire like the nobleman only the earthly help. We cannot be freed from every earthly ill, — many we must simply bear, sinners that we are. Are we concerned for the pardon and the peace of our souls? Does our faith embrace the eternal treasures, forgiveness, life, and salvation?
3. Faith the only means by which these treasures may become our own. God gives them to faith; faith receives and holds them; unbelief rejects and loses them. See how much depends on the strength, the purity, and the genuineness of your faith. The faith to which the nobleman was finally brought.

Make no mistake about the treasures of faith!

# The Twenty-Second Sunday After Trinity. Matt. 18:23-35

## Forgiveness of the Brethren

Jesus repeatedly impresses upon his disciples the truth that God cannot forgive them if they harden their hearts and refuse on their part to forgive others. In view of the end and of the final judgment the saved ever forgive those who wrong them. Our text belongs where the ancients placed it, namely in this eschatological group of texts. Even now none of us can lie down and sleep in peace who has not forgiven his brother.

This matter has not always been properly understood, and preachers have often mismanaged the quarrels they attempted to settle in the Christian manner. When must I forgive a wrong? The moment I realize that I have been wronged. But am I not to wait until the brother who wronged me comes to me, admits his wrong, and asks my pardon? No. He may never come. My conscience must be clear, no matter what he who wronged me does. What he does as regards his conscience is a matter between God and him.

How, then, are quarrels to be settled? Not in the way which is often tried, by bringing the two quarreling parties together and telling them to make up; and not at all by sitting as a judge in the case and by announcing how much each must confess and ask pardon for from the other. This method usually proves to be a complete failure. At best it leaves both parties dissatisfied. Let the pastor speak to one of the two. Ask him whether he has been wronged and let him tell how seriously he has indeed been wronged. Then ask him: "What does Jesus say you should do?" The answer is: "I should at once forgive." "Are you ready to do so, with your whole heart and never to bring up your wrongs again?" As a Christian he must answer yes. Then ask him: "But did you not also wrong your brother?" Make him honestly and

truly confess what wrong he has done, but do not press him beyond what his conscience is ready honestly to admit. “Are you ready to confess this to your brother and to ask his pardon?” He will gladly answer yes.

Take the other party privately and deal with him in the same way. If you succeed as I have indicated, then let the two meet with you. Each has forgiven the other completely. When each goes to confess what wrong he has done, neither will much care to listen, for they have both forgiven. This method obtains true and lasting results.

If one or the other, or if both, refuse to forgive as here described, they automatically become subjects for discipline, they cannot commune, and their church membership is in question. When one member forgives etc., and not the other, that one is clear as to his soul. When one of the two is not a church member, only the church member can be dealt with. For how can we retain God’s forgiveness when we do not forgive?

Peter raised the question: “How often shall my brother sin against me, and I remit it to him? Up to seven times?” The old Jewish teaching was that three times was the limit.. Credit Peter with increasing this to a possible seven times. To his utter astonishment Jesus answer: “Not, I say to thee, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.” Evidently this does not mean that 490 remissions are enough, but that we are ever to forgive; for who can keep count and tell when 490 have been reached?

Instead of attempting to make this answer plain to Peter by expounding and explaining it, Jesus resorts to a parable, one that Peter and the disciples will never forget and in which the whole matter is made so plain that not even a single question remains. While the parables may hide the truth from the unspiritual, to the true disciples the parables reveal with clarity even beyond literal explanations.

**[23] “On this account the Kingdom of the heavens has been made like to a king who resolved to settle up with his retainers.”** “On this account” = on account of the obligation that we are constantly to forgive. Every time Peter has doubts as to the number of times he must forgive, let him think of this parable and what the king in this parable did; then all of Peter’s doubts will indeed disappear. The “Kingdom of the heavens” is explained in Matt. 21:5, the First Sunday in Advent; also in John 3:3, Trinity Sunday. It is the heavenly rule of God’s grace here on earth through

Word and Sacrament, and his heavenly rule of glory above. The parable deals with the rule of grace. All this talk of our building the Kingdom, and all these conceptions which make the Kingdom like earthly political kingdoms will disappear when we understand the reality and such words as John 18:36-37.

The aorist passive ὤμοιόθη is explained in Matt. 22:2, the Twentieth Sunday after Trinity. God's rule of grace here on earth had to be made like the story of this parable because if God is to continue to forgive us, we too must forgive others. The addition of ἄνθρωπος to βασιλεύς is merely pleonastic; we have no such idiom in English and must leave ἄνθρωπος untranslated. The word does not mean "a certain king" (our versions). This king came to the decision (ἠθέλησε) to settle up with his retainers. The verb συνᾶραι means "to take up together" and λόγον refers to accounts. Here δοῦλοι are not "slaves" in the ordinary sense. These are grand satraps, the king's retainers and lords who rule his various provinces. In a sense they are indeed the king's slaves, for this oriental ruler holds absolute sway, and even the highest nobles in the realm are thus his slaves, absolutely subject to his will and his power. That he is dealing with such persons we see from the vast sum which the first *doulos* owed the king. Each satrap had to pay the king the revenues of his province; these sums were not small by any means.

**[24] "Now he having begun to settle up there was brought to him one, a debtor of ten thousand talents."** It is a true touch when it is stated that this debtor "was brought" to the king. He did not come joyfully of his own accord; he would a thousand times rather not have come. But the king sent him peremptory summons and so he came. This pictures the sinner. Sins are often described as debts. The summons does not refer to the last judgment, but to a reckoning in this life, when something occurs that makes the sinner face his sins with a conscience fully aroused and implacably accusing him. In the providence of God such hours of judgment come in our lives and often shake us to our inmost soul. They are meant to bring us to deep repentance that our souls may not be lost by going on in indifference until it is too late.

The debt each of us sinners owes to God is here described as a huge sum of money: "ten thousand talents." Just how much this sum amounts to in

terms of our present money is hard to say. A talent was a weight of silver or of gold coin; and this weight differed with different nations and at different eras. Besides, values were far higher in the ancient days than they are at present, when even our own dollar has its gold value severely reduced. The Attic talent = \$1,200; the great Roman \$500, the small \$375; the Hebrew, the Assyrian, and the Babylonian from \$1,550 to \$2,000. In terms of Attic talents the debt would be \$12,000,000; in Eastern talents \$15,500,000 to \$20,000,000. An Attic talent amounts to 6,000 denarii, and 10,000 of these to 60 million denarii, that is to 600,000 times as much as his fellow *doulos* owes this great debtor. It is well to remember that a denarius was a laborer's day's wage (20:2).

For comparison we may note that Archelaus drew an annual revenue of 600 talents from Judea and Samaria, and Herod Antipas 200 talents from Galilee and Perea. Whether the 10,000 of the parable are meant symbolically or not, in some analogy with the Ten Commandments, the sum is certainly completely beyond the satrap's ability to pay. Does it shock you to have your sins pictured as so, immense a debt? Jesus is picturing the reality only too truly.

**[25] “But he not having in order to pay, his lord ordered him to be sold, and his wife and the children, and all whatever he had, and payment to be made.”** The retainer could not pay this immense debt. The point of the parable is not the folly which had allowed this great debt to accumulate, but the fact of its greatness and of the debtor's inability to pay. Even Jewish law permitted that the debtor be sold into bondage because of his debt, but the imagery of the parable seems to be drawn from the great eastern empires, Assyria or Babylon. We must not get the impression that the king's action is unduly harsh or tyrannical; quite the contrary, the king deals out the common justice of the time. The debtor and his family are sold into slavery, and all of their possessions are also sold. The proceeds are applied on the debt, but, of course, fall far short of covering its amount. The members of the man's family are sold because they are considered to be his property. In the infinitives ἀποδοῦναι and ἀποδοθῆναι the addition of ἀπό conveys the idea of paying what is due.

Here is pictured the sinner's state when God confronts him with his sins. The parable dwells on the number of the sins, “like the sands upon the sea,” because the imagery of the debtor lends itself to this presentation. And,

indeed, who will count the number of a sinner's sins! But it is well to remember that no sinner can pay for even a single sin; once its guilt is incurred, I can bring no price in my hand to cancel its debt.

Like every other reference to God's punitive judgments the picture here drawn of the justice of God does not please men, and many are rash enough to call such a God evil names, saying that they will not believe in such a God. Such an attitude is puerile. It would call for an unjust God, — he would then be no God but only a puppet of the human brain of ill balanced men. The common moral sense of men acknowledges its guilt and the justice of God when the sins finally bring on their punishment. Justice is an elementary part of man's moral nature, and to rebel against God's justice is to reveal serious moral perversion.

**[26] “The retainer therefore, having fallen down, warships him, saying: ‘Lord extend longsuffering to me, and I will pay thee all!’ [27] And moved to compassion, the lord of that retainer released him, and remitted the loan to him.”** Faced by the king's verdict the retainer breaks down completely. With his face at the feet of the king he confesses his guilt and begs for the king's longsuffering, asking that the verdict be delayed, and promises the impossible, namely that he will pay the whole huge debt. The best comment is that of Luther:

“Before the king drew him to account, he had no conscience, does not feel the debt, and would have gone right along, made more debt, and cared nothing about it. But now that the king reckons with him, he begins to feel the debt. So it is with us. The greater part does not concern itself about sin, goes on securely, fears not the wrath of God. Such people cannot come to the forgiveness of sin, for they do not come to realize that they have sins. They say indeed with the mouth that they have sin; but if they were serious about it, they would speak far otherwise. This servant, too, says, before the king reckons with him, so much I owe my lord, namely ten thousand talents; but he goes ahead and laughs. But now that the reckoning is held, and his lord orders him, his wife, his children, and everything to be sold, now he feels it. So, too, we feel in earnest, when our sins are revealed in the heart, when the record of our debts is held before us, then the laughter stops. Then we exclaim: ‘I am the most miserable man, there is none as unfortunate as I on the earth!’ Such knowledge makes a real humble man, works contrition, so that one can come to the forgiveness of sins.”

Do not find fault with the man for begging for time and for promising to pay everything. Rather admire Jesus who paints the picture in true psychological colors. The first thing of which the sinner who is startled by the law thinks is that he will make atonement for his sins, and Luther rightly says, that the sinner cannot imagine that God will simply forgive him all his sins, immense as the number and the weight of them are. The verb μακροθυμεῖν is transitive, and “longsuffering” is ascribed to God but not ὑπομένειν which refers to enduring adverse things.

[27] God is just and must confront us with our sins; but he is equally compassionate and full of grace, and ready to remit our sins. The moment the sinner realizes his sin, confesses it, and turns to God, God pardons his guilt. The Greeks locate the tender emotions in the nobler viscera, heart, lungs, and liver, and hence we have the verb σπλαγχνίζομαι and the noun σπλάγχνα to indicate the pained feeling caused by the contrite sinner’s deep distress and the strong desire to help him. Compassion is the inner motive of God from which his pardon flows. The king released the debtor from the verdict ordering him and all his to be sold, and at the same time the king “remitted” the debt to him. The verb is highly significant: ἀφῆκεν, “he dismissed and sent it away.” This is the verb (ἀφίημι) that we usually translate “forgive,” and its corresponding noun is ἄφεσις; the Greek is far more expressive than its English equivalent. Use it when explaining the English, and do so with the help of Ps. 103:12; Is. 43:25; 44:22; Micah 7:19: The sins are sent so far away that they are never found. The debt is called “the loan” because it was tribute long due to the king, and when it was not paid became a loan allowed to stand for a time by the king.

Here is vast comfort, all the priceless Gospel comfort. God does not wait until the sinner perfects his contrition. He does not keep him on the anxious bench (Luke 15:20). He remits the instant it is possible to remit. He remits the entire debt, not only a part of it, holding the sinner himself still to pay a part. The debtor pays nothing, in full truth can pay nothing. Our Savior Jesus Christ has made full payment, although this phase of the subject is not treated in the parable. The only change that takes place in the man is his contrition and his faith in throwing himself on God’s longsuffering, both imperfect at first but to grow perfect under grace. The king’s word of remission is forensic: God on his throne declares the sinner free from guilt, as free as if he had never at all incurred that guilt. This is the biblical

justification, the central doctrine of the Christian faith: God declares the sinner free from guilt and righteous in his sight for Christ's sake.

Rationalists attempt to use this parable in justification of their rejection of the atonement and the satisfaction rendered by Christ for our sins. Their claim is that God remits just as he pleases. They play one part of Scripture against another, instead of combining one part with the other. This is irrational and unscientific. It would make the parables of Jesus impossible, for all of them would become unwieldy, each one being compelled to narrate the entire plan of salvation. As Jesus formulates it, each parable presents one side of the great plan, and every intelligent reader knows this and adds the other sides.

**[28] “Now that retainer, having gone out, found one of his fellow retainers, who was owing him a hundred denarii, and having laid hold on him, he choked him, saying: ‘Pay, if thou owest anything!’ Having therefore fallen down his fellow retainer entreats him, saying: ‘Extend longsuffering to me, and I will pay thee!’ [30] But he was not willing. On the contrary, having gone away he threw him into prison, until he should pay what was owing.”**

Here is a duplicate of the previous situation, only on a smaller scale. The forgiven retainer is in the position of the king. A poor fellow retainer is in debt to him. Again payment is demanded, and in spite of the trifling amount of the debt it cannot be made, and the poor debtor begs for longsuffering exactly as the high and mighty retainer had done. But at this point the duplication ends. This man, to whom 10,000 talents had been remitted, would not even extend time to his humble debtor who owed only 100 denarii. One involuntarily exclaims: “Can there be men like this?” We must sorrowfully confess: “There are men like this!”

The details that are presented in the parable only heighten the enormity of the action. A lordly retainer, so grand that the king must summon him and institute a grand reckoning before the vast sum of his debt can be determined to be no less than 10,000 talents, lays his hands violently on another but very humble servant of the king because of an unpaid trifling sum of 100 denarii (17c each, \$17.00 altogether) Note the comparison I have already made. The aorist ἀποδός =: “Pay up!” as if the demand were shouted. The reading is εἴ τι and not ὅ τι (“what thou owest”), but the sense

is: “if thou owest as thou dost and darest not deny.” This expression is also violent.

Compared with our sins against God, our sins against each other are only as 100 denarii are compared with 10,000 talents. This, too, Peter was to realize, for any wrong done to us is liable in our own minds to swell in importance beyond all proper proportion. The case narrated in the parable is necessarily made extreme, because, for one thing, the extreme at times occurs and must be covered, and by presenting the extreme naturally all lesser cases will be included. Thus in 5:21 and in 5:27 etc., the extremes of murder and of adultery include all the lesser sins which the Jews failed to note, but which Jesus so plainly indicates.

[29] The repetition of the scene of v. 26 is striking. Only a little while before this retainer of the king lay at the feet of the king and pleaded with the identical words: Μαρκοθύμησον ἔμοι, “extend longsuffering to me” and made the same promise to pay back — only a small debt like \$17 .00 can be paid back, While 10,000 talents could never be paid. How could this retainer fail to be struck by his fellow servant’s action? How could he avoid being compassionate like the king and extend the time of payment? He should have rejoiced to copy the king’s example in full and should have remitted the debt entirely. The ways of wickedness are so dark and so unnatural that it is in vain for us to seek to explain them in a rational way.

When comparing with v. 26 we may note the slight differences. The worship and the address “lord” are omitted because they befit only the king. We have παρακαλέω, for one *doulos* may entreat another. The little word “all” is omitted because the sum is trivial.

[30] Οὐκ ἤθελεν, “he was not willing.” This hardness of the will is the utter opposite of the king’s noble compassion. The wickedness centers in the will. The imperfect “was not willing” points to the following result: “he threw him (aorist) into prison until he should pay what was owing.” This is the imprisonment for debt, which continued even in Christian lands until recent times. It is only because the sum is so small that the retainer resorts to this mode of penalty; we feel that he would like to have sold his fellow servant into slavery and surely would have done so if the debt had been sufficiently large. Yes, this man is a moral monster. Even if he had not had so enormous a debt remitted to him, it was sheer brutality to throw his

fellow *doulos* into prison for debt; but because so vast a debt had just been remitted to him, his action toward the other man becomes monstrous.

“Till he should duly pay” etc., intimates nothing in regard to the outcome, whether payment was or was not made, whether it could be or could not be made. The point of the parable is the fact that this creditor would not remit the debt of the debtor. Do not imagine that this case is Wholly exceptional. There are a large number of Christians who are entirely ready to accept God’s remission of their sins, while they will not remit some wrong a fellow Christian has done to them. One feature in their blindness is the fact that they fail to see the 10,000 talents of their own debt and the paltry 100 denarii of the debt due to them; and the other feature is the fact that, despite the number of times Jesus has told us, they imagine that they can retain God’s remission, while they themselves refuse to remit.

**[31] “Accordingly, his fellow retainers having seen what occurred were grieved exceedingly; and having gone explained to their lord all that occurred.”** God indeed knows all things and does not need that any man explain to him. The effect of the brutal action of this retainer upon his fellow retainers has its own purpose, namely to convey to us the truth that even to us it is a monstrous thing to accept vast forgiveness and then to refuse to give even small forgiveness. What so deeply grieves the fellow retainers must offend God much more. All of these are *σύνδουλοι*, retainers of the king, not common citizens. These are Christians, all of whom know the blessedness of the remission of sins. No wonder they “were grieved exceedingly.” The parable does not say that they rebuked their cruel fellow retainer, for too many details would overload it; but we may well assume such rebuke and remonstrance.

But it was all in vain. We meet many cases like this in the church where our efforts are unavailing, where all that is left to us is to lay the matter before our heavenly King; and we may be sure he will attend to it in due time and in the proper manner.

**[32] “Then having called him to him, his lord says to him: ‘Wicked retainer! All that debt I remitted to thee, when thou didst entreat me. Was there no need for thee also to show mercy to thy fellow retainer, even as I on my part showed thee mercy?’ [34] And angered his lord**

**delivered him over to the torturers, until he should pay all that is owing.”**

Little comment is needed. In the parable the action follows swiftly, in actuality the retribution will follow as surely as it is swift in the parable. “Wicked retainer!” already contains the entire verdict, for the adjective denotes vicious and active wickedness. The address is a deserved denunciation. We hear the outraged tone of the declaration: “All that debt” etc. Yet a remission so great had no effect upon this man.

[33] Now the damning question to which there is no answer, or, if one were attempted, it would only be self-damning. Δεῖ is used for all types of necessity, and the imperfect οὐκ ἔδει refers to the moral necessity resting enduringly on this retainer as over against any companion of his. Note how the verbs match: ἐλεῆσαι, “to show mercy,” and ἠλέησα, “I showed mercy”; and how the pronouns are placed side by side: ἐγώ σε, throwing great emphasis on ἐγώ, “I on my part.” The question brings out the absolute justice of the king and of his verdict. For as great as are his grace, his mercy, and his longsuffering, so great also is his justice.

What the parable pictures is entirely obvious when we apply it to the reality. It would be morally monstrous for one of us to receive and to retain God’s forgiveness for all our sins, while he refuses to forgive a brother who has sinned against him. If any of us is blind to this fact his blindness will become terrified sight when he faces God in his heavenly court. God’s unspeakable grace and compassion always come first; we never earn them by our first forgiving others. But God’s mercy towards us is to melt our heart to mercy and compassion towards others. Where this result fails, the divine mercy and the remission are forfeited, and that with aggravated results.

[34] We have discussed the anger of God in Matt. 22:7, the Twentieth Sunday after Trinity. This wicked retainer brought his fate upon himself. Jesus mentions three grades of punishment: jailing for debt, selling into slavery, delivering to the torturers. The first one man exacts against another (vengeance); the other two God imposes. We need not puzzle about the difference between these two. They are described in Luke 12:48 as the few stripes and the many stripes. The idea of prison is also figurative when applied to the tortures of hell; so also is the imagery of “torturers,” who are

not merely jailors. The ancient tortures that were applied to hopeless debtors consisted in dragging about heavy chains, near-starving, excessive labor, and *carnificia* or bodily tortures proper (Trench). The mysteries of hell are for the greater part hidden from our ken, and we should be content to leave them hidden.

Catholics imagine that the last penny of our debt can be paid, but this means only the *poenas temporales* supposed to be paid off in purgatory, if they have not been taken care of by the merit of masses and by the pope's indulgences. It appears like folly to think that this retainer ever paid off the 10,000 talents plus the mortal guilt of his refusal to forgive.

[35] The parable is ended. Jesus closes with the summary application: **“Thus also will my heavenly Father do to you, if you do not remit each one to his brother from your hearts.”**

So hard are our hearts that in addition to God's great forgiveness they need this impressive warning against refusing to forgive. Never is Peter to refuse a brother forgiveness. And you are to place your name beside Peter's. Thus Jesus also bade us pray: “And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.” Matt. 6:12; add v. 14 — 15. “My heavenly Father” is right, not “your heavenly Father,” for when we fail to forgive God ceases to be our heavenly Father. The future tense ποιήσει is volitive: “he will do,” not merely futuristic: “he shall do.” Absorb this parable and you will never ask Peter's question: “How often shall I forgive my brother?” The parable deals only with a brother, but not in order to restrict our forgiveness. See 6:14-15.

## Homiletical Aid

Who can face God, now or at the last judgment, while an unforgiven brother cries out against him? Who can hope to have and to retain God's forgiveness when he refuses forgiveness to his fellow man? The rabbi's three times; Peter's seven times; Jesus' seventy times seven times. The whole matter becomes clear when the two debts are compared, our debt to God, our brother's debt to you or to me.

**Compare the Debts!**

- I. The debt you ask God to forgive to you.
    1. Its size, 10,000 talents. How to reckon it. Count your sins. Also your omissions. The blessings you have received: life, home, friends, eyes, ears, hands, feet; countless opportunities, etc., etc. How you misused and failed to use them aright. Thus the great debt.
    2. The carelessness. Letting the debt run on and on, as though it were nothing, as though no reckoning would be made.
    3. The reckoning. When God takes us to task in sickness or in danger of death, in grave misfortune, in finally arousing our indifferent conscience.
    4. The forgiveness of God. Contrite and believing sinners. Complete forgiveness due to compassion and grace.
  - II. The debt your brother asks you to forgive him.
    1. The wrongs we commit against each other, 100 denarii (“pence”). Easily paid and made good. God first forgives you and thus expects you without any question at once to forgive others.
    2. The man who refused to forgive. Failed utterly to appreciate the great debt God forgave him. His heartlessness. Many such unforgiving Christians today. Are you holding something against a brother or against a fellow man (6:14-15)?
    3. The true Christian forgiveness. Christ on the cross. Stephen’s prayer. Whether those who sin against us are sorry or not, make amends or not, ask pardon or not, forgive us or keep on in unforgiving hate, — you and I must forgive and clear our souls. God will attend to them.
    4. How alone can God’s forgiveness be retained. It is morally impossible to accept God’s forgiveness and to refuse forgiveness to others. Forgive as you have been and as you expect to be forgiven.
-

Loy has the theme: The Wicked Servant. Let us make this

### **The Unforgiving Servant.**

- I. Was forgiven.
  - II. Would not forgive.
  - III. Was accordingly condemned.
- 

### **How Mightily God's Forgiveness Impels Us to Forgive.**

- I. The sins forgiven to us are incomparably greater than the sins to be forgiven by us.
- II. God's forgiveness is not due us, but our forgiveness to a brother is due from us.
- III. God revokes the forgiveness of those who refuse to forgive.

C. F. W. Walther.

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Sometimes a little arithmetic is good for the soul. Not three, not seven, but

### **Seventy Times Seven Times.**

- I. Ten thousand talents — the unpayable sum you and I owe to God.
- II. One hundred denarii — the very payable sum our brother may owe to us.
- III. You and I cannot take the ten thousand talents and withhold the hundred denarii — it is not morally possible before men and before God.
- IV. If added to the ten thousand talents, the one hundred denarii will make your debt more frightful than ever. He who abuses grace must take justice.

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## **When Wronged, Forgive!**

I. Grace urges you to do so.

Behold what God forgives us, freely, by his grace alone.

This is to be the impelling motive during your entire life in all that you do regarding both God and man.

II. Justice warns you to do so.

Even the imperfect justice of men.

Much more the holy justice of God and of Christ himself.

# The Twenty-Third Sunday After Trinity. Matt. 22:15-22

## Godly Citizenship

The opinion that this text deals with the relation between Church and State encounters the question why a text on such a topic should be placed into this eschatological group of after-Trinity texts. Nebe thinks that this text presents Christ's victory over his enemies and thus foreshadows his final victory at the last day. This view is scarcely tenable; for it is the first half of the Church Year that deals with the Savior; the second half deals with the Saved, and certainly Jesus' great word spoken in this text is addressed to us, the saved: "Render therefore unto Caesar" etc.

The subject of this text is quite simple: the Godly Citizen. Like the previous texts this text also receives its eschatological setting from the fact that it is placed into this final sub-cycle of after-Trinity texts. The text is to answer the question: "How shall the saved live in this world as citizens under secular governments in view of the account they must render at the last day?" The reference to the final accounting is the thought which the position of the text in the Church Year adds to the text. Jesus answers the question in the most perfect way. The applause his answer received on the part of his enemies when he first gave the answer has continued in increasing volume to this very day.

[15] Sanhedrists, high priests and elders, which means Sadducees and Pharisees, had fared badly at the hands of Jesus. Hence the Pharisees now operate without the Sadducees. It is Tuesday after Palm Sunday, the last day, as far as I am able to ascertain, which Jesus spent in the Temple, never again returning to its courts. **Then the Pharisees went and took counsel, how to ensnare him in a statement.** The Pharisees gather in a group by themselves and concoct a cunning scheme by which Jesus is to be caught

like a bird in a hidden noose of thread. He is to be led to make a statement (λόγος) without realizing the fatal consequences it involves until it is too late. These Pharisees, remember, were esteemed as holy men by the Jews, who scrupulously obeyed even the minutia of the law. We here see the hollowness of their holiness.

[16] Here is the deadly trap they set for Jesus. **They send to him their disciples, in company with the Herodians, saying: “Teacher, we know that thou art truthful, and teachest the way of God in truth, and carest for no one, for thou dost not look on men’s countenance. [17] Tell us therefore, how does it seem to thee? Is it lawful to pay poll-tax to Caesar, or not?”**

Luke 20:20 affords some additional information. Luke calls these disciples of the Pharisees “spies” who were to “feign themselves just men,” really concerned to discover the true answer to their question; and their scheme was to capture Jesus right on the spot and to deliver him into the power of the governor Pontius Pilate. For the Pharisees felt rather sure that Jesus would answer: “No it is not lawful to pay tax to Caesar.” These Pharisees do not in person approach Jesus, they send their pupils, young men whose faces would be new to Jesus, whom he would thus not suspect of ulterior motives. They were to take along with them (μετά) several Herodians. I am unable to find evidence for the idea that these disciples of the Pharisees and the Herodians were to stage a dispute, the one party contending for the unlawfulness, the other for the lawfulness of the tax. As far as the Herodians were concerned, they too would be new faces to Jesus, and he would not know to what party they belonged nor what motive prompted them.

Only occasionally do we meet Herodians in the gospels. They appear as a minor political, nonreligious party among the Jews; they were supporters of the alien Herodian dynasty, which ruled under Caesar, and regarded this as far preferable for the Jewish nation than Caesar’s direct rule through Roman procurators like Pilate. The Herodians thus favored the Roman tax because of the dependence of the house of Herod on Rome. To be sure, the Pharisees opposed them. They demanded complete independence from Rome and autonomy for the Jews. They regarded the Roman tax as utterly “unlawful” in the sight of God. Yet we need not wonder at the fact that here Pharisees and Herodians operate together. Matthew has just described how

the strong opponents, the Pharisees and the Sadducees, combined forces when an attack was to be made on Jesus. And presently we shall see that even Pilate and Herod became friends through their efforts in abusing the innocent Jesus. All of these are unprincipled men and act accordingly.

The Pharisees have coached this delegation well. The disciples of the Pharisees furnished the spokesman. The Herodians were to be silent witnesses. Their testimony would count for more with the governor than that of the Pharisees. Moreover, their expectation was that Jesus would declare the tax unlawful. The Herodians regarded it lawful, and they would be the men to step forward, to lay hands on Jesus because of his dangerous declaration, and to see to it that he was brought before the governor Pilate.

It is astonishing to note how these men flatter Jesus. Most astonishing is the fact that what they say in flattery is altogether true. We are compelled to say that the Pharisees know that what they put into the mouth of their pupils is indeed true regarding Jesus, and in spite of that knowledge they mean to destroy him. Can moral baseness sink to a lower level? These Pharisees confess: "We know that thou art truthful," — and these Pharisees meant by their treachery to hush the voice of this true teacher for ever. "And carest for no one, for thou dost not look on men's countenance." How well they knew that Jesus spoke ever without fear or favor, that he was utterly impartial. We know why this statement is added, — it suggests to Jesus that he fears neither Caesar nor Pilate, neither the opponents nor the defenders of the tax.

All of this praise was flattery. While every word was true in fact, known to be true by these Pharisees and therefore condemning them out of their own mouth, they never meant a word of what they said. They were insincere even when telling the truth. They spread their false flattery on too thickly. To hear this fulsome preamble makes us suspicious. Jesus needed no effort to see through their falsity. These are not eager minds and hearts, anxious to hear the decision of Jesus in order ever to abide by its guidance. These are men cunningly setting a trap to catch the innocent. Let us realize it fully. Like the previous situations, this one also involves a matter of no less than life and death for Jesus. One unguarded word and he would be lost.

[17] The question was: “Is it lawful to pay personal tax to Caesar, or not?” Mark adds: “Shall we pay it, or shall we not pay it?” — we who are so greatly concerned about walking on “the way of God.” The answer desired by the questioners is almost laid upon the lips of Jesus. How could Jesus help but say: “In God’s eyes that tax is not lawful.” The κῆνσος is the poll-tax, exacted from every individual for his own person, and thus considered by the Jews as a special badge of servitude to the Roman power. Hence the disputes among the rabbis about paying especially this tax. Τέλη (plural) are levies on goods and wares collected at harbors, at piers, and at city gates (17:25), a tax much less galling to the Jews.

**[18] But having perceived their wickedness Jesus said: “Why are you tempting me, hypocrites? Show me the poll-tax coin.” And they brought him a denarius. [20] And he says to them: “Whose this image and the superscription?” They say to him: “Caesar’s.” Then he says to them: “Duly give therefore the things of Caesar to Caesar, and the things of God to God.” And having heard they marveled, and having left him went away.**

Jesus lives, up to the high praise bestowed on him by his enemies, — he tells them the truth to their faces. Jesus always penetrated through the trickery of the Jews. Their best-laid plans were wholly transparent to him. Read John 2:24-25. For one thing, the mind of Jesus was pellucid and clear, unweakened and undarkened by sin. But for another, Jesus used the divine attributes bestowed upon his human nature, among them his omniscience, to the extent that this usage was needed for executing his office; and thus he knew what was in all men, whom to trust and whom not to trust. The scheming of these Pharisees and these Herodians ’was as open to him as if it had been planned in his hearing. Matthew is right when using the word πονησία, “wickedness,” vicious and active evil. Their lips dropped honey, but their hearts distilled poison. To their faces Jesus calls them “hypocrites.” The word convicts them, and they dare not resent it. Ὑπό in the Greek word lends it the idea of a showactor who wore a mask on the Greek stage.

[19] Unworthy as were his questioners, Jesus freely answers them. The answer is circumstantial, complete and to the point. As for catching Jesus in this answer, never was there less hope for such a purpose. In fact, the answer is such that every Jew must approve it. So did the entire cunning

scheme turn to harmless water. Jesus turns to his questioners and makes them cooperate in the matter of the answer. Since they have asked their question he demands: "Show me the poll-tax coin." They hand him a denarius, 17c in value, but of purchasing power equal to the day's wages of a common laborer. The Roman senate had the right to mint only copper coins; the right to mint gold and silver coins was reserved for the emperor. The denarius was a small silver coin, usually stamped with the emperor's head (occasionally with the head of a member of his household), and invariably with the name and the title of the reigning emperor. The denarius was "the poll-tax coin," the amount each Jew had to pay.

[20] Jesus asks the simple question: "Whose this image and superscription?" Luther writes well: "Jesus begins in a childish and foolish way, as though he did not know the image and the inscription and could not read, so they quickly thought, surely, here we have him, he is afraid and intends to dissimulate about the emperor, and dares not speak against him. 'But he takes the word right out of their mouth, making them surrender with their confession. They dare not be silent, for just as they bade him answer, so now he bids them answer. If they were silent, he would say: 'If you will not give answer to my question, neither will I answer your question (21:27).'"

Jesus continues to make his enemies cooperate in giving the answer to their question. He holds their poll-tax coin in his hand. That simple shining coin helps to make the answer realistic, and this the more because Jesus draws attention to the image on the coin and to the superscription.

[21] The Pharisees regarded the question of Jesus as entirely harmless and understood that Jesus merely wished to have the facts stated. So they readily reply: "Caesar's." Nor did Jesus place a tricky catch into his question or into the necessary answer. The whole matter is too simple for words. So this is Caesar's imprint and his mark of ownership that the Jews carry in their pockets and use daily in all their money transactions? It is Caesar who supplies their nation with his coinage, and as he supplies this stable means of exchange so he supplies a great many other benefits as the ruler of the empire and of their nation.

What have the Pharisees done by answering: "'Caesar's'"? They have cooperated with Jesus to such an extent that they have actually answered

their own question. They have done so unwittingly. All that remains for Jesus is to draw their attention to the fact and to formulate the answer so that it may fit their original question. Εἰκὼν is the German *Abbild* implying a *Vorbild*. It is the emperor's head that is engraved on the coin; so the sun is reflected in the water, the statue presents the man, the child is the image of the parent. Ὁμοίωμα is only "likeness," resemblance without derivation: two persons may merely look alike, one egg resembles another.

All that Jesus needs to say is: "Duly give therefore the things of Caesar to Caesar, and the things of God to God." That is all. No more needs to be said. It is a fact, that is all. Who can add more? Who could say anything that would be better? Let us give the Pharisees and the Herodians credit, they at once recognized the perfection of this answer; in that respect they were better than some quibblers of today who seek to pick some flaw or other in this answer of Jesus.

The answer is so perfect because it is so simple and yet so complete. The Jews made a great mistake by considering the poll-tax by itself. The true way to look at it was to place it among all "the things of Caesar," and then to look at all these things in connection with (καί) "the things of God," because the Jews were not pagans but wanted to be children of God. The moment they would look at the poll-tax in the way indicated the difficulties about the lawfulness of its payment and all other difficulties would disappear. The trouble with so many casual question is the fact that we look at only the one question, and fail to rise to the comprehensive view which takes in the whole domain of which the one question is only a trivial part. Jesus always saw the Whole, and Paul rises to the same height. The wisdom that does this is from above.

All of the Jews carried the emperor's money, and because it was the emperor's it was current in the entire empire, an immense advantage to every traveling Jew, and there were many thousands of Jews in the diaspora. How far would the Jewish Shekel have carried them? This coinage was one of the advantages enjoyed by the Jews, and they had it without special charge. The denarius with the emperor's image in the Jewish pockets and passing from hand to hand was the mark of the divine providence of God which had made the Roman emperor also the ruler of the Jewish land. No more needs to be said. The Jewish obligation was plain: "Duly give therefore the things of Caesar to Caesar!" (ἀπόδοτε, the ἀπό

with the sense of “duly.” This is the entire obligation, for it includes not only this poll-tax, but any other proper tax and the honor, the obedience, and the fear that God’s people owe “the higher powers” “ordained of God” (Rom. 13:1-7) and set over them by God’s providential ruling. Whether our government makes this our obligation hard or easy to fulfill makes no difference. Our part is plain, — let the rulers look well to theirs. For they, too, are answerable to God.

This is only a part of the answer. The question: “Is it lawful or not?” referred to God, “lawful” in his sight. Therefore Jesus answers: “and the things of God to God.” It is of vital importance that we observe the force of this connecting *mi*, “and.” This important “and” means to answer and to cancel the disjunctive *ñ* “or,” in the Pharisees’ question recorded in v. 17. There is no such opposition as “either — or,” either lawful or unlawful as regards this tax. The obligation to Caesar and the obligation to God do not clash, they harmonize. “The things of God” are all that our relation to him as his children involves, contrition, faith, love, worship, obedience, submission to providential guidance, even to his correction and his chiding.

We misunderstand Jesus when we suppose that his “and” merely places the two obligations side by side, as if the two had no connection whatever for the child of God. Even the Pharisees who first heard this answer of Jesus were not that shallow. By giving to God what is God’s we will for God’s sake give the ruler what properly belongs to him. For our obligation to God covers everything in our life, our citizenship as well as our religion. This “and” connects a small field with the whole field. Only by seeing both in their true relation to each other, do we see either aright. From Caesar Jesus advances to God, — no one would suppose that he merely parallels the two.

Jesus’ word about Caesar acknowledges the state and government as a divine institution, willed of God. Rom. 13:1-2. The conduct of Jesus himself before Pilate exemplifies this fact, particularly the Word of Jesus recored in John 19:11. His word about Caesar treats the state and our relation to it as a specific and hus separate domain, and what we commonly call the doctrine of the separation of church and state, an exemplified most perfectly in the world by the American Constitution, is the only legitimate conclusion from what Jesus says. I have already said that his separation does not make these two statements either mere parallels or make them equals. Our obligations to God are the whole life, those to the ruler. the

government, and the state only a part of this whole. Ever Caesar is merely subordinate to God: and if Caesar makes demands in conflict with God. his demands are null and void for the children of God. The question: “Is it lawful?” may thus indeed have its place (Acts 4:19-20; v. 29), and receive its strong negative answer.

But while church and state are distinct and separate as indicated, no gulf exists between them as’ such. They are not like two watertight compartments. Always the church will put conscience, namely as governed by God, into our relation to the state (Rom. 13:5). There is no sensible ruler who will fail to appreciate this grand contribution of the church to the state. What the state normally contributes to the church, Rom. 13:3-4 states. Thus the two support and aid each other, but it is ever the church that, aids the state in a superior degree.

What is here said applies to the true church, not to any church, for many churches would, if they could, and sometimes they did, control the state and government. Then grave trouble ensued. So also we speak of the normal state which is content to attend to its many obligations, for often and down to this day the state would, and did, and still does, control the church. Again the gravest harm results. The abnormalities can be rightly judged only when the normal relation, as implied in the words of Jesus, is understood and accepted. As far as Caesar was concerned, the policy of Rome was ever enlightened and it referred the religion of the subject nations entirely to those nations. In Russia an unprecedented situation has deVeloped: the state determined with ruthless power to destroy all religion and all belief in God in its citizens. What can true believers do under such a government? Only what we see that they have done, suffer — die. Even such a government is in the hands of God.

[22] Well might the questioners marvel at the answer Jesus gave them. The pity is that they did no more. Not only had their plot against Jesus failed utterly, Jesus himself had gained greater credit than ever. So they left and went their way. They should have remained and should have become his disciples instead of the disciples of the Pharisees.

## **Homiletical Aid**

Politics do not belong in the pulpit. This does not mean that our politics have no connection with our Christianity. We are citizens and mean to be guided by Christ and his Word in all our civil and political life. For we are ever answerable to God and certainly mean to run no risk of losing our salvation at death and on the last day of judgment because of our politics in this life and our actions as citizens under our government.

The story of the text, — sketch briefly. All of the saved are citizens under an earthly government. Jesus shows us

### **The Christian Citizen.**

- I. He renders unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's.
  1. Not like the children of this world who imagine that government is only a human arrangement; whose obedience to the government has no motive of conscience or of accountability to God.
  2. The Christian citizen obeys for conscience sake, because he is God's child and government is God's own institution.
  3. Even if the government is evil. Not the evil is from God, but the government as such is. It may fall into the hands of evil rulers as a punishment for the citizens. Then repentance and amendment is the call for us. As citizens We may pray, testify against the evil, and use all lawful means to bring about a remedy. If the evil government attacks the godly citizen, his lot is to suffer.
- II. He renders unto God the things that are God's.
  1. Our citizenship is a part of our life as children of God who obey his will and his Word. The Christian citizen is thus the best citizen in the state. He puts God first in all his life and is conscientious in his citizenship as in all things else.
  2. We should thank God for our kind of government, and make full use of the liberties we enjoy. We are free to exercise our Christian faith. It is sad that our governmental blessings are not always appreciated with due thanks to God. Some would alter or

even overthrow our Constitution. Dangers threaten us. Forget not to pray.

3. The many things we should render to God. Our whole heart should ever be his. We are wholly dependent on his blessings. Let us live all of our life, including the civil part, so that he may receive us at last.

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We Lutherans believe in the separation of State and Church. An American principle. But often violated. Churches interfere with politics. Politicians interfere with churches. Wrong.

This does not mean that we as citizens hold aloof from the State, etc. We — all — are the Government. Yet when we function as citizens we do not cease to be Christians. Our Christian faith tinges all that we do. Makes us better citizens.

This text comes in time for election (Nov. 4, 1923).

### **Our Christian Citizenship.**

- I. The Christian is a fellow citizen with the saints.

To God his children Owe first allegiance. “We must obey God rather than men,” in case of conflict of authority. Martyrs.

1. The Christian considers God above all.
2. Christ is his King.
3. Other Christians are his fellows.
4. True internationalism. Christians on earth in all lands. Let us make more of them. Largest and most powerful international body — if its power were exerted.
5. There are said to be many anarchists, Bolsheviki, reds and pinks of all shades in America. Do not let them deceive you. The true internationalism from the Christian standpoint remains.

- II. The Christian is a good citizen of his land.

The answer of Jesus to the Pharisees: “Render unto Caesar” etc.

1. He obeys the laws.

Whether they please him or not, whether he is compelled to do so or not. No tax-dodgers. No hypocrites. Hates to see the flag displayed prominently by a bootlegger, or by one who wants to take the laws into his own hands, or by one who desires to violate the liberties that flag guarantees. The flag is honorable as long as the principles for which it stands are honorable.

2. He honors the government.

“Let every soul be subject” etc. “Honor the king.” Governor or president may not be the one I voted for, but they are my rulers nevertheless. There may be wrong conditions. If I honor my government, I will try to right things honorably.

3. He loves his country.

“Breathes there a man with soul so dead,” etc. Love of country goes well with love of Christ. Let us be thankful for a strong and a truly beneficent government, lest we be given governors and presidents who may ruin even our beautiful country.

4. He is a salt and a leaven. A benefit to all his fellow citizens. Christ’s purpose with all governments.

**“He shall reign from pole to pole  
With illimitable sway,  
He shall reign when, like a scroll,  
Yonder heavens have passed away —  
See Jehovah’s banner furled,  
Sheathed his sword — He speaks, ’tis done,  
And the kingdoms of this world  
Are the kingdoms of his Son.” [168]**

J. A. Dell.

The Christian is a citizen of two governments. Not coextensive. Not alike in their purpose. Happy is he if allegiance to the one does not interfere with the other. This has happened. It will not, if the purpose of each is correctly understood. Worthy of our study. We must answer to God on judgment day. The Word of Jesus concerning

### **Church and State.**

- I. Entangling alliances are excluded.
  1. Pharisees, Herodians, and Christ. Trying to get Christ into politics. The approach. The dilemma. "My Kingdom is not of this world."
  2. The Roman Catholic Church. The church and imperial Rome. Decay began with their union. Evils of domineering church or of intolerant state. Rome has not learned Christ's Word to this day.
  3. Protestant meddlers. Protests against Rome. For themselves with the same stick. Lobbyism. Pulpit politics. Fail to appreciate one of the greatest blessings of the Reformation.
- II. The separation of church and state.
  1. In Christ's day.
    - The Jewish theocracy dissolved.
    - The Roman government.
    - The Jewish religion.
  2. In the Reformation.
    - Protestants began as rebels.
    - Tolerance their principle.
    - Became dominant in some countries. Dangers.
  3. In America.
    - Separation the basic law of the land.
    - The principle most precious and ever to be saved. Catholics. Ku Klux Klan, etc.

### III. Loyalty to both.

#### 1. Jesus' explanation.

Loyalty to Caesar.

Loyalty to God.

#### 2. Other proof.

"Let every soul be subject" etc.

"Fear God, honor the king."

What this includes: tax-paying, voting, officeholding, war-time service, honoring flag, etc.

#### 3. How it works.

Christian does not cease to be a Christian when he functions as a citizen. The Christian is the best citizen. But he does not manipulate the machinery of the state in the service of the church. "My kingdom is not of this world." If we had the power what would we do? Enlightened conscience must guide us in crucial cases. Conscience enlightened by just such decisions as this of our Savior.

The final accountability of the Christian citizen to God.  
J. A. Dell.

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With the Jews it was a question of paying the poll-tax. They had lost their independence and were ruled by the emperor of the Roman empire as a subject nation. Among the taxes they had to pay, this personal tax galled them especially, because they regarded it as a sign of their position as a conquered nation.

The Pharisees laid a trap for Jesus. If he declared the tax unlawful, they intended to denounce him to the Roman governor; but if he pronounced it lawful, they intended to denounce him to the people as untrue to the nation. While it was a question regarding a tax, much more was involved, as is always the case with such questions. In the light of what Jesus answered to the Jews let us ask:

## Why do we Pay our Taxes?

One answer is:

I. Because we are citizens.

We have to pay.

We enjoy many benefits of government for which we should pay.

Our officials waste much tax money, and this makes it harder for us to pay.

Some seek to evade, but generally the government has means and power to force payment.

To regard only our worldly citizenship is a low moral plane, and because our officials also rise to no higher plane we have all the heavy taxes and the constantly rising state debts.

The better answer is:

II. Because we are children of God.

Our civil life is only a part of our Christian life. As those who are saved through Christ and his blood, we carry conscience into our paying of taxes and into our other obligations as citizens.

In every way we seek not to take advantage of our government, but to purify it, to keep it clean, to elevate it. We pray for all our magistrates (the general church prayer). We may seem to accomplish little, but we never cease.

As God's children we submit to his providences. He may wish to chastise our nation by the poor government he allows it to suffer from. We penitently submit and pray for our nation and for better days. We too have sinned and have been too careless and indifferent.

III. Because we remember our final accounting.

We are approaching the end of the Church Year and are reminded of the last day and its judgment. We want to appear before God as his children who have given to Caesar the things of Caesar, and to God the things of God, as his Son bade us.

# The Twenty-Fourth Sunday After Trinity. Matt. 9:18-26

## Deliverance from All Evil

Perhaps it will interest the readers to know how the ancient worthies like Ambrose, Jerome, Hilary, and others interpreted this text eschatologically. They resorted to extravagant allegory. Jairus represents Moses and the law, his child sick unto death represents the Jewish people; the woman with the issue of blood the Gentile world. Before the daughter of Jairus is delivered from death, the woman with the issue of blood arrives at salvation. For before the fulness of Israel enters the Kingdom of God the fulness of the Gentiles must be saved. Note that nothing in the historical narrative of the evangelist is allowed to mean what it does, everything is made to mean something that you would and could not even guess, — the preacher invents his allegory and then tells you what the text means, — something that it does not mean nor could possibly mean. Yet we still have preachers who imagine that they are doing something superfine when they devise allegories.

It is not difficult to see the fitness of our text for the place which has been assigned it in this subcycle. If we had only the account of the raising of the daughter of Jairus we should merely have a parallel to the text that narrates the raising of the widow's son at Nain, the Sixteenth Sunday after Trinity. Both texts would then deal only with death. But our text adds the account of the afflicted woman and is thus made much broader. We are constrained to think of the fulfillment of the last petition of the Lord's Prayer: "But deliver us from evil." The final and complete deliverance takes place at the last day, when even our dead bodies are raised up and are glorified. Our text shows us the great Deliverer and two instances of his delivering power and grace. To him we flee in all our distress in this life and

receive his deliverance again and again. He carries the soul safely through death and will also restore and glorify the body at last. Comfort and hope are entwined in our text.

[18] Matthew furnishes us the exact sequence of events. In the morning Jesus came back to Capernaum from the country of the Gadarenes, and went to his own house. There a dense crowd gathered and he healed the paralytic. Then Jesus dined at Matthew's house, probably in the late afternoon, and following the meal he answered the Pharisees and the disciples of the Baptist. Matthew's office and house, I assume, was at the landing place on the road beside the Lake, for Matthew was not a common publican, but a collector at the port. Thus "he was now by the sea," Mark v. 21. While Jesus is still speaking to the Baptist's disciples, Jairus arrives.

**While he was saying these things to them, lo, a certain ruler, having come, warships him, saying: "My daughter just died; but, after coming, place thy hand upon her, and she shall live."** The man's name is Jairus. We have the indefinite use of the numeral εἷς as in 12:11; 18:5; 21:19, much like τῆς: "a certain ruler," or simply "a ruler." He was a ruler of the local synagogue and thus a person of considerable importance.

Matthew has a way of compressing accounts and at once laying the essential point before us. He does this in the present case, for he tells the entire story in only one paragraph, while the other evangelists expand their accounts. Thus Matthew writes that Jairus prostrates himself before Jesus in deepest oriental fashion and tells him: "My daughter just died," etc. Mark writes: "She is at the last," i.e. at the point of death; Luke: "She was dying," i.e. when the father left. Matthew does not intend to narrate the details, stating how the servants came to Jairus and told him that there was no use in troubling Jesus, for his daughter had died. That is the main point of the entire account, the girl had died and Jesus raised her from death to life. So the main point is at once introduced.

What Jairus and the family feared, that the child would die before he could bring Jesus, happened. The girl was dead. Jairus had hoped that Jesus could reach her before death set in, could lay his hand upon her, and thus cause her to live. When he expected Jesus to proceed in this manner, Jairus followed only what he had either seen Jesus do or had heard that he did, namely lay his hand on the afflicted person. When the news of the death

reached Jairus, it was Jesus himself who sustained Jairus' faltering faith, telling him that; although the child was dead, Jesus could touch her and bring her back to life.

So Matthew gives us the essentials in agreement with Mark and Luke. Here was need for great deliverance; for here was not merely the dire imminence of death, here death had already done its dreadful work. Those who have had a child or a member of the family die know what this means to their anguished hearts. To Whom shall we go? Jairus leads the way. To Jesus, our great Deliverer. No, he will not today bring the dead back to life as he did in Capernaum. Jairus' daughter finally died a second time and was buried as we now bury our beloved dead. But our Deliverer from evil still has the power to vanquish death, namely to raise the soul to heaven and thus to fill our souls with strong, abiding comfort and hope. For, after all, earth is not our home; we seek the Eternal City (Heb. 11:10), where we shall find our beloved ones in eternal joy.

**[19] And having started, Jesus followed him, also his disciples.** The circumstantial participle ἐγερθείς (like the more frequent ἀναστάς) does not mean that Jesus was sitting or still reclining at table and thus arose, but only that he “up and started.” Matthew knows the complete story, which fact he indicates by stating that the disciples went along; for he does not record that Jesus used three of them as witnesses of the miracle, — yes, the disciples hurried after Jesus and Jairus.

**[20] A serious interruption ensues. And lo, a woman, suffering hemorrhage for twelve years, having come up behind, touched the tassel of his robe; [21] for she was saying within herself: “If only I may touch his robe, I will be restored.” But Jesus, having turned, and seen her, said: “Cheer up, daughter! Thy faith has restored thee.” And the woman was restored from that very hour.**

As I have already indicated, the ancients supposed this unnamed woman to be a Gentile, and they invented names for her, such as Veronica from Paneas, or Bernice. There is no reason for thinking her to be anything but a Jewess. None of the evangelists says enough about her ailment so that we can determine its exact nature. Guesses are gratuitous. Her ailment rendered her Levitically unclean, and naturally she was ashamed to expose her case by an open request to Jesus for healing. Matthew omits the fact that during

the twelve years of her suffering she had vainly sought help from physicians, spending all the money she could spare. Her case was humanly incurable.

This poor sufferer conceived a great faith in her heart, one that would obtain help for her without the embarrassment of telling what ailed her. If only she could touch the garment of Jesus, she was certain in her heart that she would be healed. She carried out her secret plan. Matthew says nothing about the crowd that surrounded and followed Jesus. Mingling with that crowd the woman worked her way forward so as to get close behind Jesus, where she could stretch out her hand and unseen by Jesus touch one of the tassels of his robe. Like all true Jews, Jesus wore the *shimla*, a square cloth, used as an outer robe, with four tassels (*tsitszth*, κράσπεδον) at the four corners, according to the requirement of Deut. 22:12. The tassels were attached to blue cords. The Pharisees loved to make the tassels conspicuous in order to display their compliance with the law. Two of the corners of the *shimla* were thrown back over the shoulders, so that two of the tassels hung down at the back. One of these the woman managed to touch.

[21] The woman had said nothing to any one. Her thought had remained entirely within her own heart. No one noted her act, and if any one had, it would have appeared to them only as an act of devotion. The tassel hung loosely, and Jesus could not have felt a touch upon it. Yet he knew, in the way in which we have described in the foregoing text, just what this woman had done and why she had done it.

[22] Again Matthew condenses and reports only the essentials. Jesus does not let the woman retire unnoticed, as she had planned to do, first because of his concern for her, and secondly because of the others who were present. They, too, are to know what has been done for her. It is necessary that this woman should know that she was not healed without the will and the knowledge of Jesus. She was not to slip away and to entertain her own, perhaps badly mistaken ideas about what had really happened. Mark and Luke state that Jesus made her declare herself, which she did with fear and trepidation, thinking that Jesus might be angry with her for in a manner stealing his help.

But Jesus is all kindness, for at once he dispels all fear and uneasiness: “Cheer up, daughter!” Φάρσει means to continue to be of good courage or

comfort, to be cheered and happy. Jesus states the reason: “Thy faith hath restored thee.” It must strike every Bible reader that Jesus constantly attributes so much to faith. How can he do so, when it is he himself who is the *causa efficiens* of all the help offered in the miracles. Some interpreters fear the thought of synergism by making so much of faith, yet certainly Jesus was no synergist. All is plain regarding what Jesus says about the power of faith as also what Paul likewise says; but we must have their conception of faith. To be sure, it is the confidence of the heart, as we commonly define faith. But faith is a correlative term: this confidence rests on someone. It is never alone. It is like a cup filled to the brim with Christ. It is not the activity of believing that makes faith so powerful to save, but the passivity of having been filled with Christ. When faith is praised so highly, it is because of the contents of faith. Faith is the ὄργανον ληπτικόν, *die Nehmehand*, and it is not empty, but into this hand is laid the Savior himself by the Word, and so faith saved (restored, σώζειν) this woman and saves us for evermore. We have this stated in the words of the woman herself (v. 21).

We meet some rather intolerable notions. One is that this woman was superstitious and supposed that touching the garment would let the power of Jesus flow into her. Others speak of magnetism, as if magnetism ever ran out through the tassel of a person’s garment. But when and where in all the world did superstitious faith or magnetism ever heal a hemorrhage of twelve years’ standing? Yet ridiculous and utterly false ideas are more appealing to some minds than the word of Jesus himself: “Thy faith has restored thee.”

Listen to Luther: “She believes that divine, omnipotent power resides in Jesus; that he can answer the secret unspoken trust of her heart; that, all she needs is the Word and preaching by which he has made himself known, and uses the touch of his garment only as in some way to come in contact with him. Who has seen such wonderful people, this Jairus who trusts that the hand of Jesus touching his dead child can bring her back to life, and this woman who trusts that her touch of his garment will bring her restoration? No wonder that Jesus rewarded such faith.”

**[23] And when Jesus had come to the house of the ruler, and had seen the flute players and the crowd making a din, [24] he was saying: “Be leaving! For the girl did not die, but is sleeping.” And they were**

**laughing him to scorn.** Jairus' home is reached at last, and here the Jewish mourning is already fully under way. We must not be surprised at this speed, for in the orient and in the climate of Capernaum (600 feet below sea level) the interval between death and burial is short. The child died sometime during the early evening and would thus be buried on the following morning. The professional mourners would thus have only a short time for their mourning. They had been summoned at once. Matthew alone mentions "the flute players," who produced their lugubrious sounds on their instrument. In "the crowd" are included the hired wailing women, with hair streaming, beating their breasts, and filling the air with long, loud wails interspersed with bursts of sobs.

One wonders at this artificiality at such a serious time, but let us not say too much, for our own funeral customs are certainly not beyond criticism. The Jewish custom was very ancient and was found also in other nations. Since Jairus was a ruler in the synagogue we may assume that the hired mourners were numerous and did their best in the way of producing noise. Most likely also friends of the family were present. Confusion and noise filled the place.

[24] Jesus orders all these noisemakers out of the house: "Be leaving!" The verb means to make room for some one else. Jesus is taking charge. As for these professional mourners, they were entirely out of place with all their din: "For the girl did not die, but is sleeping." This statement exactly suits the rationalists, — here is no miracle calling the dead to life, here is only the awakening of a sleeping girl. But this idea is a huge mistake. All these people laugh at Jesus, *sie lachten ihn aus*. They took his words literally just as the rationalists do; and these people who had seen the dead girl and knew that she was indeed dead beyond any question could not be put off with the word: "she is sleeping."

Yet the statement of Jesus is true, true regarding this *dead* child. For him who has the power to call -her back to life death is no more than a sleep. Jesus is speaking in terms of the miracle he has come to work. He is about to wake this child from its sleep of death. Let no one think that perhaps after all this was only a case of coma, such as are by no means rare, which resemble death to a marked degree. Coma would only change the miracle. For human power does not abolish coma with a mere grasp and a word.

Finally, on the authority of Jesus the house is cleared, and the silence and the dignity are secured for what now follows.

**[25] Now when the crowd was put out, having gone in, he grasped her hand, and the girl rose up. And this report went out into that entire land.** Some of the crowd seem to have needed a little physical persuasion to put them out of the house. Matthew again abbreviates rather severely. He does not mention the five chosen witnesses, the parents and the three disciples, the words which Jesus spoke, and the other details recorded by Mark and by Luke. He has said that the girl was dead (v. 18), and that is enough. Jesus now grasps the dead girl's hand, drawing her upright as one would a sleeping child. Forthwith "the girl rose up." That she was alive, raised from death to life, need not be said. The fact is self-evident. Note well the reserve of this evangelist, it is typical of so much of the inspired gospel narratives concerning Jesus. Here is no attempt to make much of the story, in fact, here is the very opposite. That one of the greatest of the Lord's miracles is being narrated is hardly apparent. All that Matthew does is to let the main facts speak for themselves. They have ever done this and ever will.

[26] Jesus pledged the parents to silence, which was for their own sakes, lest by talking about the miracle to all the curious listeners, the blessed effect of what Jesus had done for them be dissipated. But with all that crowd around the house, all curious to<sup>o</sup> know what Jesus had done, the miracle itself could not remain hidden; besides there was the little girl, twelve years old, both very much alive and in perfect health, free of disease such as had brought on her death. So the report of the miracle swept through all that land, namely Galilee. For this miracle exceeded many others that Jesus had done, although in sober fact every one of them required no less than omnipotent power.

## Homiletical Aid

The fame that went abroad. Yet how many sick and dying who to this day do not comprehend that fame? They drift by dully until they are lost. Behold Jesus, our Deliverer from all evil! He shall deliver us now and also at the last day.

## What Does Our Sick and Dying Race Need?

### I. A Savior with divine power and grace.

#### 1. The woman.

Spent all her money. No help. We have better doctors now, but incurable cases are many. The touch that healed. This is the Deliverer we need.

#### 2. The child.

Dead. The fearful power of death. The dying now. No human power to stop it. The Deliverer who broke the power of death. This is the One we need.

#### 3. The sinners.

All they want is physical deliverance from sickness and from death. But the cause back of these is sin. No real deliverance except deliverance from this power of sin. See how Jesus stresses faith in him. The physical help Jesus rendered in the two cases is only visible evidence for his entire power of deliverance.

### II. A faith strong enough to trust this Sa/vior completely.

#### 1. The two in the text went to Jesus in faith. He brings out the woman's faith and supports the man's. That faith rewarded.

#### 2. We today. Office of medicine, yet all success in our Deliverer's hands and no help except from him. How can they who ask no help of him expect to receive it?

#### 3. Some remain sick, some die, in spite of faith and prayer. Yet never because Jesus has no power and no grace to deliver or is unwilling to extend it. He deals with us according to his wisdom and his love, sending us what is best for us. Hence our faith does not falter. "Thy will be done."

#### 4. The main deliverance spiritual, to which all other deliverance is secondary and like stepping stones. The final deliverance "from every evil of body and soul, property and honor; and finally when our last hour has come, grant us a blessed end and graciously take

us from this vale of tears to himself in heaven” (Luther). The deliverance at the last day.

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### **Jairus’ Little Daughter and the Afflicted Woman.**

- I. The terrible evil which has come upon us.
  - II. The wondrous help which has appeared to us.
  - III. The one means by which we embrace this help.
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### **Sickness and Death are to Lead Us to Jesus.**

- I. The Lord Jesus lets sickness and death come also upon those whom he loves and whom he means to help.
  1. All things are in Jesus’ hands. Think not that he has forgotten or is neglecting you when he lets sickness and death come to you.
  2. Not that he is the author of sickness and death. Sin brought these into the world. When sickness and death come murmur not against God as if you did not deserve such evils. You do deserve them, — all the lovely and good things in our lives we do not deserve.
  3. Jesus is Lord of all and uses the evil in this world for two purposes, for the glory of God and for the good of men. He would lead us to repentance and to take refuge for help, comfort, and support by faith in him.
- II. In sickness and death we are not to despair but to turn to Jesus as his will is.
  1. The beautiful faith of the two persons in our text. Describe both.
  2. The Lord alone can help us. But he now wants us to use the means he gives us (contra Christian Scientists, healers, etc.); he

blesses these means. Not that the Lord cannot still do wonders, whether with or without means. He healed thousands on earth by miracle, but millions by medicine. Yet without him all the physicians in the world can do nothing. We bow in faith to his will.

3. It is appointed for us to die. The life of Jairus' daughter was only prolonged. Eventually she died and remained dead. The wonderful comfort: "she is sleeping." "Lazarus, our friend, sleepeth," John 11:11. The awakening, John v. 28-29. We will thus prepare ourselves for this blessed sleep, to be ready when the Lord wills. Thus let sickness and the prospect of death draw you to him who shall deliver us at last from all evil.

J. A. Dell.

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### **Jesus Heals One and Raises Another from the Dead.**

These miracles remind us once more

- I. Of the frailty and perishableness of our life.
- II. Of the great Physician and Prince of Life.
- III. Of the only means of our deliverance, faith.

The parts are taken from von Biarowsky.

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The story in brief, which reveals once more that Jesus is

### **The Deliverer from All Evil.**

- I. Not as men would have him.
  1. Not to cure every sickness and rob all undertakers.

2. The woman relieved of one incurable disease; one child was once recalled from death and the grave. Both suffered many other ills and eventually died and turned to dust.
3. A deliverer such as men would desire, to whom they can run, or can pray, and get rid of every physical trouble in an instant, would be a poor deliverer indeed, for he would ever keep us here in this vale of tears.

II. But as Jesus showed himself.

1. Many he healed and some he raised from the dead, in order to show that he was truly able to remove these worst physical consequences of sin.
2. No one can remove them as he did without conquering the sin itself from which not only these terrible physical ills spring, but from which all ills and especially also all spiritual and eternal ills likewise spring.
3. Jesus is indeed our Deliverer and Savior.

III. As we need him now and at the end.

1. Many evils and hurts we must bear. He gives us strength, fortitude, perseverance. Some of God's children are heavily afflicted. They murmur not.
2. From many evils Jesus still frees us, in answer to submissive prayer, nor is his arm shortened or his power and grace lessened because visible miracles are not wrought as when he walked on earth.
3. We especially need our Deliverer in the hour of death, to take us out of this vale of tears to himself in heaven. And that means in the last hour of judgment that he may place us at his right side.

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**“The Maid is Not Dead, but Sleepeth.”**

- I. The crowd laughed at Jesus.

1. The very idea of telling them that the maid was merely sleeping. They knew she was dead. The mourners were in place. Jesus could only be jesting and it was a rather heartless jest at that.
2. Yes, the crowd, these hired wailers and flute players, were right. This little girl was dead indeed, as dead as she would ever be.
3. But forget not what had happened to a woman while Jesus was on the way to this dead maid. She certainly had had a real disease that for twelve years no doctor had cured, and now look at her! she had simply touched a tassel of Jesus' robe.

II. The laugh of the crowd turned to amazement.

1. Jesus simply woke the maid just as if she had been only sleeping. "Talitha cumi!" He took her by the hand.
2. For Jesus death is indeed only a sleep from which he shall wake us at last. But this is true only of the godly, the believers. The wicked are waked to eternal terror in hell.
3. Jesus has come to seek and to save, and calls all the sick and the dying to trust in him, who shall deliver us at last from all evil.

III. The report about the sleeping maid went into all the land.

1. It has come even to us, together with the entire Gospel of our Deliverance.
2. We need this Savior's deliverance to make our life blessed by his support and his care, and our death a pleasant sleep till the last trump sounds the awakening to glory.
3. Do we believe like the woman and like Jairus? Blessed are they who do not see and yet believe, as Jesus told Thomas.

# The Twenty-Fifth Sunday After Trinity. Matt. 24:15-28

## The End of the World

The last three after-Trinity texts are seldom used in the pulpit, because so many preachers simply follow the calendar and stop with the text of the Sunday which is marked as the last for the current Church Year. Thus the last three Sundays after Trinity are seldom reached. The text for the Twenty-Seventh Sunday after Trinity suffers most of all, for this final Sunday is often used for a sermon on Thanksgiving. This should be changed. Make an early survey and drop a text here and there so that these last texts come to be used more frequently.

The present text is taken from the great eschatological discourse of Jesus. We entitle it “the End of the World,” but only because it deals with the destruction of Jerusalem which is one of the standard types of the end of all things. Our text follows v. 4-14, in which Jesus describes the events which form “the sign” of the end of the world. Beginning with v. 15 he adds the warnings which his disciples need regarding the fall and destruction of Jerusalem. The change of subjects is altogether obvious. Some may object that the two subjects are thus combined in one discourse, but they go together well and there is no confusion except in minds that create confusion for themselves, for the destruction of Jerusalem together with the Flood and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah is a type of the end of the world. Without a jar Jesus turns to his Parousia in v. 27, and after that proceeds at length to speak about his Second Coming.

**[15] “When therefore you see the abomination of desolation, that spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (he that reads let him understand!), [16] then those in Judea let them flee upon the mountains. [17] He upon the housetop let him not go down to**

**remove the things out of his house; [18] and he that is in the field let him not return back to remove his robe. But woe to them that are with child and to them suckling in those days. [20] Pray, however, that your flight may not occur during winter, nor on a Sabbath; [21] for then shall be great tribulation, such as has not been from the world's beginning up till now, neither at any time shall be."**

Jerusalem shall be destroyed. Sitting on the slope of the Mount of Olives on Tuesday toward evening, after Jesus had left the Temple never to return to it again, the inquiry of the disciples (v. 3) with which they responded to his prophecy, that not one stone of the Temple should be left upon another that should not be thrown down, is fully answered. That Jerusalem and the Temple should be completely destroyed is stated in v. 2 and certainly needs no repetition. What the disciples need, and what they must tell the believers, is the plain sign when the Roman armies shall arrive to enclose the doomed city. In other words, Jesus informs the disciples in regard to the fatal point of time beyond which escape will be impossible. This date is not set by the Roman invader .or by anything that this invader shall do; it is set by the Jews themselves. For the truth is that not the Romans but the Jews themselves are destroying their own capital and Temple. Read the full account in Josephus, the horrible factions, the bloody dissensions, the assassinations, and the rest of the crimes by which the Jewish nation as it were brought on its own inner and outer disintegration. It became a festering boil and had to be abolished by the Romans.

The final sign for precipitate flight is "the abomination of destruction standing in the holy place," namely in the Temple itself. Jesus speaks of this sign as one easy to be recognized, and as one that believers should not be mistaken about after what he now tells his disciples. This should guide us in our interpretation and warn us away from many ideas which the commentators would introduce. The main term is "abomination," and the genitive is qualitative: "of desolation." This genitive points to the result which the abomination will produce: desolation. Jesus himself uses the word in 23:38: "Your house is left unto you desolate." "Desolation" and "desolate" mean that the Temple shall be bereft of worshippers. It shall no longer be Israel's place of worship. It shall be turned into a desperate ruin because of the desecration that shall culminate in the introduction of the

final “abomination.” The judgment shall be like a slowly filling vessel that at last overflows.

To aid the believers Jesus tells the disciples that this is the same sort of an abomination as was “spoken of through Daniel the prophet.” The reference is to Dan. 11:31 and 12:11. Daniel’s prophecy was fulfilled by Antiochus Epiphanes who erected a pagan altar on top of the great altar of burnt sacrifice in the court of the priests and otherwise desecrated the Sanctuary. Read the details in 1 Maccabees 1:20-68. Note that Jesus does not say that Daniel prophesied. What would occur before the coming of the Romans for the final destruction of the Temple. All that Jesus says is that the same kind of an abomination with the same kind of an effect, only much worse (v. 2), would appear in the Temple.

Commentators have wrestled with this word of Jesus and have essayed many interpretations. We must at once discard all those interpretations that refer “the holy place” to the entire Jewish land; this idea prevents every tenable interpretation of the “abomination of destruction” as of the kind mentioned in Daniel, which occurred in the Temple and not in the broad land of Israel. We eliminate also all interpretations which fix the time as the period of the siege of the city by the Romans. If the abomination is to be sought at so late a date, it would be impossible for any one still to flee the city and the country. Likewise all views are to be eliminated which see in the “abomination” a person, called by some Antiochus *redivivus*, a supposed impersonation of the antichrist. The reference to Daniel is also not to be interpreted as an actual repetition of what Antiochus Epiphanes did. They who scan history for another pagan abominator do so in vain. It was bad when Antiochus, the pagan, desecrated the Sanctuary and the great altar. But the Romans were still far away and had a long siege ahead of them before they reached the Temple when this final desecration occurred which ’was to be the signal for all Christians to flee the city and the land, for this final “abomination of destruction” was the crime of the Jews themselves. This must be firmly believed, if we are not to mislead ourselves. Israel destroyed itself (Hos. 13:9). That is why its destruction is so tragic, so complete and so final.

We have several points to guide us in determining from history what is meant by the abomination of destruction. 1) It is a sign easy to be recognized as the climax of what is abominable to God. 2) It occurs in the

Temple itself, as a final and a fatal pollution of its sacredness. 3) It is a crime perpetrated by the Jews shortly before the Romans close in for the siege and while there is still time to flee. Examine the history of this period yourself. I have come to the conclusion that this abomination refers to the act of the Zealots, who defended the Temple with arms against other Jewish factions. These Zealots admitted the Idumeans to the holy precincts, and the result was that the Temple was deluged with the blood of 8,500 victims.

Read the record of Josephus, *Wars* 4, 5, 1-2; also 4, 6, 3 the last sentences: “These men, therefore, trampled upon all the laws of men, and laughed at the laws of God; and as for the oracles of the prophets, they ridiculed them as the tricks of jugglers... For there was a certain oracle of those men, that the city should then be taken and the Sanctuary be burnt, by right of war, when a sedition should invade the Jews, and their own hands should pollute the Temple of God.” You may think as you please about this “oracle” to which Josephus refers; for we have no way of verifying what he says about it. But the pollution of the Temple by a flood of murderous blood at the hand also of pagan Idumeans and at the instigation of the Jews forms the climax of all other desecrations and with its blood, surely signifies final and utter desolation.

I am fully satisfied with this historical interpretation. The Christians recognized the sign when it occurred and all fled to safety. Jesus sharpened their eyes by the parenthetical injunction: “he that reads, let him understand,” namely he that reads the words in Daniel. It will not do to apply Daniel’s words mechanically or superficially. Note the expression: τὸ ῥηθὲν διὰ Δανιήλ τοῦ προφήτου, “the thing spoken through Daniel the prophet.” Here is another of the many exemplifications of Verbal Inspiration, so plain and so simple and so complete that all the opponents of Verbal Inspiration with their “scientific and historical” claims cannot possibly overthrow it. The aorist passive participle “spoken” refers to God as the speaker; the preposition “through” (διὰ) makes the prophet God’s medium or mouthpiece or instrument for the speaking. The fathers said: God the *causa efficiens*, the prophet the *causa instrumentalis*. That is certainly correct. But that is what all of us mean by Verbal Inspiration, — not some caricature that hostile persons may ascribe to us. The Scriptures have many examples similar to this: 1:22; 21:4 (the First Sunday in Advent), etc.

[16] When this final sign occurs Jesus bids all those in Judea to flee “to the mountains.” The apostles to whom he is speaking are to communicate this order to flee to all the Christians. Note that, of course, Jerusalem is included, but even also all Judea, for the entire country will be unsafe because the invader will be advancing-to crush all of it. Judea itself is mountainous, but the Judean mountains are not referred to, for they would afford little safety. Eusebius, *Church History* 3:5, tells us what the little congregation in Jerusalem did, for he says that, following a revelation received by reliable men before the war, all migrated to Pella, beyond the Jordan, in the province of Perea. As far as one may judge, this occurred at the time when the bloody factions in the city were making a shambles of the Temple courts.

[17] Jesus has told the disciples the last date for flight. Wise Christians, on hearing his warning would not wait for that final sign, but would hurry to safety weeks and months before. But some always wait until the last moment.. By means of concrete examples Jesus impresses upon them the haste that is necessary. Say a man happens to be on the housetop when he hears of the massacre in the Temple. It would be folly to go down into the house to pack up some things to take along on the flight. If he were to carry anything with him in the completely unsettled state of the country he would only invite being stopped, robbed, or turned back and prevented from escaping. Empty-handed let the man flee and hope that in this way he may get away.

[18] Another concrete illustration. A man is working in his field when he hears about the sign. He has left his *himation* at home in the city, the long, loose outer robe, so necessary to the oriental, for at night he uses it as a covering against the cold, especially when traveling as the fugitive would travel, sleeping in the open. But not even for this necessary robe is he to stop, he may not be able to leave the city again. Let him hasten away in his tunic. Life is worth more than many robes. These examples show the state in which the country and especially the city will be at the advanced date of the sign. Actual history proved that the prophecy was only too true.

[19] Some, alas, will be caught in a pitiful plight and the heart of Jesus melts at their distress. These are the pregnant women and those with nursing babes, burdened and unable to move fast or far. When Jesus says: “Woe to them!” he is not as at other times pronouncing a just verdict (like

the dreadful woes upon the Pharisees), he is giving expression to the pity in his heart because of what they must suffer under the severe conditions of their flight. "In those days" refers to all of them with their mounting dangers and dread reports. We here think not only of fleeing Christians, but also of the poor mothers left in the city, unable to escape and of the more than tragic stories left us by Josephus.

[20] The tender heart of Jesus thinks of other distress that may aggravate the flight of the believers when at last they must abandon house and home merely to save their bare lives. The fatal time might come in the winter with its chilling cold, especially at night, and with its frequent rains. The suffering and even the deaths this would cause we may easily imagine. It would be equally unfortunate if the day of the flight, marked by the last fatal sign, should come on a Sabbath. It is useless to contend that the Christians of those years, the sixties, still clung to the Levitical system or celebrated the Sabbath as their day of worship. No; the fanatical Jews, furious because of any supposed Sabbath desecration, would make hasty travel on the Sabbath almost impossible, the more so since the Jews actually followed a course directly opposite to that of the Christians, they crowded into Jerusalem and filled the city with penniless refugees, while the Christians fled from the city.

"Keep praying," says Jesus, that these contingencies may not become actualities. But can prayer mold and control the course of history, for instance the events and dates of an approaching siege? This is exactly what Jesus implies. In fact, his order for continuous and persevering prayer contains the promise that the prayer will indeed be heard. The fact is that the Christians did escape with little difficulty before the city was surrounded and before the horrors of the siege began. Many Jews attempted to escape by penetrating the encircling Roman lines; but generally they were caught and were crucified in sight of the people in the city. Great is the power of true prayer, although fanatics often misuse notable examples of prayers that have been heard in visible ways by God, thus doing severe damage to the Christian's right use of prayer. All human events are in the hands of divine providence. God can speed or can delay the day of judgment, as in the case of the Jewish nation. Things great and weighty as well as things utterly trivial he is able to use for his purposes. He ever

listens for the cry of his people. He governs in providence for their good, Rom. 8:28.

[21] The reason for this injunction to pray is the terrible state of the Jewish nation when the fatal Roman war begins. Before the Romans were near enough to surround their city for the great siege, these Jews themselves began to bring “great tribulation” upon themselves, Mimi, pressure, which finally grew to be so great that its equal has not been found in prior ages or in the ages since. Students of history will know of many fearful horrors beside this one enacted at Jerusalem. But the word of Jesus, spoken in prophecy, is only too true. We have the detailed account of Josephus in his *Wars*, which every preacher should have carefully read. Read also a late book casting all this material of Josephus into vivid story form: *Josephus*, by Feuchtwanger. No nation had ever piled up a guilt like that of the Jews. They were the people chosen of God and infinitely blessed by him, and they were the people who crucified God’s own Son and repudiated him in blasphemous hate for the past forty years. Let us understand it well: no nation and no capital ever called down upon itself a judgment of God so severe. Among all the judgments of God none outranks this judgment that wiped out the Jews as a nation in blood and terror.

[22] **“And unless those days had been shortened, no flesh would have been saved; but because of the elect those days shall be shortened.”** The intensity and the severity of this “great tribulation” will be so great that a prolongation would cost the lives of all the Jews in the land. The conditional sentence is one of past unreality, perfectly regular in construction: εἰ with the aorist (protasis), and the aorist with ἄν (apodosis). The Greek construes the negative with the verb: “all flesh would not be saved”; in our idiom we say: “no flesh would be saved,” meaning no Jew would be left alive. The extent of the war was long enough in any case, lasting about four years and more, from the year 66 to the year 70.

The verbs really mean “docked,” and in that sense “shortened,” cut short like the long hair of a horse or a dog’s tail; hence also “to amputate.” If God merely withheld his hand the Jewish self-annihilation would have been complete. But he interfered, yet not because of any missionary intent respecting the Jews that would remain alive and would continue their race, but διὰ τοὺς ἑκλεκτούς, “for the sake of the elect.” God of his own accord docked those days in the interest of the elect.

This act of God is misunderstood when it is restricted to the elect then living, in particular to the elect among the fleeing Jews, as though abbreviating the days enabled them to live. It was the heeding of Christ's warning to flee betimes that saved their earthly lives. At this late time, in the sixties, the work of the apostles had produced many other elect ones, namely multitudes of Gentile believers and many Jewish believers in the diaspora. We cannot exclude these from the phrase "because of the elect."

The fact is that the shortening of the days preserved the lives of the Jews who would otherwise have perished by their own fanatic folly. Their preservation was in the interest of the elect, and the elect here spoken of are all of them of all present and all future ages and places. For the spiritual interest of all God's elect the obdurate Jews of Palestine were not completely exterminated. They were then and even also ever since kept from extinction by the hand of God as a miraculous phenomenon in the world, as an enduring sign of warning and of judgment for all the elect ever to behold with their own eyes in all future ages. We see the fulfillment of the word of Jesus (v. 34): that this obdurate generation of Jews would not pass away until all would be fulfilled until the time of his Parousia. Not that the Jews as mere Jews would persist, but "this generation" of Christ-hating, Christ-crucifying Jews.

The fulfillment is before us in regard to both types of Jews, the Sadducaic, skeptic, often even agnostic Jews, though ever still Jews, and the orthodox Pharisaic, devout Jews, but ever ready to spit upon the cross. Without a land of their own, without a capital or a government, scattered among all the nations of the world, never amalgamating with any, always Jews, and nothing but Jews, arrogant where numerous enough and so frequently an irritant, fiercely persecuted and maltreated time after time, the hand of God preserves them, a warning to the elect that they may be faithful to the end. Some of these Jews were converted, for it is not God who has excluded them. "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself; but in me is thine help." Hos. 13:9. But a Lenin shows us of what they are capable. The expectation of a final national conversion of these Jews is the opposite of what Jesus foretold and of what Paul prophesies in Rom. 11:25-26, — see *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans* by the author. There will be neither a millennium nor such a conversion. Regarding "the elect" see 22:14, the Twentieth Sunday after Trinity.

[23] Jesus repeats the warning of v. 5 and of v. 11, but he now restricts it to the period marked by the disintegration of the Jewish nation. **“Then, if any one shall say to you: ‘Lo, here the Christ! or there!’ do not believe. [24] For there shall arise false Christs and false prophets, and shall furnish signs and wonders, so as to deceive, if possible, the elect. [25] Lo, I have told you beforehand! If therefore they shall say to you: ‘Lo, he is in the desert!’ do not go out; ‘Lo, in the inner rooms!’ do not believe. [27] For even as the lightning comes out of the eastern parts and shines to the western parts, thus shall be the Parousia of the Son of man. [28] Wherever the carrion is, there the eagles shall be gathered together.”**

In the dire days preceding Jerusalem’s fall the longing of the Jews for the promised Messiah would flare up stronger than ever. And thus the rumors would spread that he had come: “Lo, here the Christ!” or “there!” These cries will have a special appeal to the Jewish believers in Christ, for they will think not of the Messiah’s first coming, but of his second coming, his Parousia. They may easily come to think that this has indeed occurred. Some of the old wrong nationalistic opinions (Acts 1:6) may also survive, namely that the Lord will return to elevate the Jewish nation above all the nations of the world. Against all such deceptions Jesus sets the peremptory (aorist) command: “Do not believe!” subjunctive as in all negative aorist commands.

[24] “For” adds an explanation, namely that false Christs and false prophets shall arise and shall even furnish signs and prodigies (Téoata), if possible to deceive the very elect. It has been denied that these words were fulfilled during the hectic days of the Jewish disintegration. Josephus, however, has collected evidence enough. Read Wars 2:13:4 and then 5 (the Egyptian who “pretended to be a prophet also”); next, 6:5, 2 (“a great number of false prophets suborned by the tyrants”). It is true that Josephus does not speak of false Christs, but he does not pretend to list all the cases that occurred, and it is well to remember that in those days the line between false prophets and false Christs was rather tenuous.

When Jesus speaks about their “signs and wonders” our preachers need the emphatic warning that these were not genuine miracles. This notion has been preached and taught with the explanation that such miracles were actually wrought by diabolic powers. Almighty God alone, and no devil

works true miracles. Satan is not omnipotent. Untold damage has been done by admitting satanic healings through witchcraft. Just study 2 Thess. 2:9 and learn that even the great Antichrist is able to work only: “all power and signs and lying wonders.” Mark it well: lying, false, sham, spurious wonders! When did the devil ever need a genuine miracle to accomplish his deception? It is entirely deception, the very signs and wonders as well as what they pretend to prove.

These pseudo-miracles may look formidable, dangerous enough to deceive even the elect, — “if possible,” Jesus adds, which means that this is not possible. Jesus is speaking objectively. It is not some secret divine decree that protects the elect, but the very grace that made them God’s elect and has kept them faithful as the elect, protects them against these devilish machinations. If they could be deceived they would not be the elect. God cannot be mistaken in the persons whom he elected.

[25] The reason why Jesus adds: “Lo, I have told you beforehand!” is that when the time comes the Christians may constantly tell each other: “He said that he told us in advance,” and may thus both recall and heed his warning.

[26] Jesus specifies more closely: some will raise the cry that the Messiah has come for the deliverance of the Jews and is out “in the desert.” Thus the Egyptian of whom Josephus tells in Wars 2:13:5, started “from the wilderness.” Or the word may pass around secretly that he is “in the inner rooms,” as yet keeping himself from public view. These deceptions will take various forms. No Christian is either to run out into the desert to see for himself, or is to believe the word about the inner rooms. These deceptions about the Parousia of Christ are entirely too gross.

[27] The Parousia of Christ will be absolutely different, — like a blaze of lightning filling the whole heaven from the eastern to the western horizon. The whole world shall see “the Son of man,” him who is man and yet more than man, — see Luke 21:27, the Second Sunday in Advent regarding this title. The return of Christ in glory will be utterly beyond imitation. Sham Christs have always made poor shams.

28. There is no γάρ in the text, not even as a variant reading. The “for” in the A.V. must not mislead us; cancel it. Verse 28 is not at all an

explanation of v. 27. This supposition has produced nauseating interpretations: that Christ is the carrion, believers the vultures; or that the believers are the carrion and Christ the vulture. Another notion is that Luke 17:37 must be identical with our passage. But no informed student of the Bible will compare the angels of judgment with the birds of carrion.

First of all, find the *tertium comparationis*. Who are these eagles attracted by this dead body? The answer lies on the surface, — we must know that eagles too are carrion eaters. This dead and putrefying body are the Jews of the times preceding the Roman war; these eagles are the false Christs and the false prophets come to batten on their putrid nation. Πτῶμα means a fallen dead body, a carcass, and the word describes the state of the Jewish nation as hopeless. It is rotting, stinking carrion. When the Jewish nation has gone so far, it is fit for nothing but false Christs and prophets, who have come to complete the horrible work of removing this carrion. Note that the proposition is general: it is always true that a *ptoma* attracts the eagles. Apply that to our own times. Any eagles (false prophets preaching false Christs) flying about now and gathering thick in conventions? Then there must be carrion about, Christians become apostate to their faith. Be warned!

## Homiletical Aid

The destruction of Jerusalem a miniature picture of the end of the world. The counsel and the warnings Jesus gave the apostles for the Christians of that terrible period in the Jewish land now applies to us upon whom the end of the world is coming fast.

### **The Destruction of Jerusalem — And We who are Approaching the End of the World.**

#### I. Jesus bids us: “Flee!”

Jesus bade the Christians flee out of the doomed Jewish capital and land, lest they be caught in the Jewish doom. Precipitate flight at the critical day.

We cannot flee the world, but we can so separate ourselves as to escape its doom. Flee every antichristian company, — what are you doing in the lodge? Flee every word and every power antagonistic to Christ, to his Word, to his true Church. The new abomination of desolation: pulpits and altars desecrated by false prophets.

II. Jesus bids us: “Pray!”

Christ’s pity and mercy in the words concerning the women. A blessed assurance that prayer would be heard and was indeed heard, — the flight from the Jewish land did not occur in the winter, or on a Sabbath, inflaming the Jewish fanaticism.

Christ’s pity and mercy still call on us to prove them by our earnest, believing prayer. We stand helpless against the rising tide of atheism, hatred of God and of Christ, the invasion of pulpits and altars, etc. The world and whole sections of the so-called church are rotting like carrion, and the eagles, the false prophets are gathering. Our one hope and help is Christ to whom we go in prayer. He can defeat the evil forces, he can protect and strengthen us, he can and will preserve his little flock.

III. Jesus bids us: “Beware!”

False Christs and false prophets when the Jewish nation plunged into decay; like eagles on a putrid body. Danger for the Christians at that time: Do not believe, do not go out!

Similar conditions now. The multitudes of false prophets. Increase as the world’s end draws nearer. Jesus has warned us in advance. We are to remind ourselves of his word, and are to beware. Evil days; heed the Lord’s counsel.

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End of Church Year — end of the world. Prophecy: the near event that was foretold and that came to pass as it had been foretold is proof that the later event which is foretold will also come to pass as foretold. Jerusalem fell as foretold, so will the world reach its doom.

**“Whoso Readeth Let Him Understand.”**

- I. The abomination of desolation — flee into the mountains!
  1. In Jerusalem, the bloody desecration of the Temple. — The desecration of the holy places in the Church today, likewise of the heart, of the home, of the nation.
  2. Pella. — The fortress of faith on the sure Rock of the Word, there alone security for our souls.
- II. The increasing power of falsehood and deception — believe them not!
  1. In Jerusalem before its fall. — Deception and lies today, not the least of them in the erring churches and the pseudo-churches.
  2. The Christians in the days of Jerusalem. — We today, strong against all apparent proofs and the blindness of the multitude.
- III. The great tribulation — pray!
  1. Jerusalem and its fearful fate. — What the end of the world will yet bring, in spite of vain hopes and of the blindness that will not see the signs.
  2. Pray that flight be not in the winter or on a Sabbath; prayer fulfilled — Pray that we may escape, that we may be prepared.

Compare Pank, *Ev. Matt.*

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Jesus wept over the city of Jerusalem, which was to be given over unto the spoilers. How much more should he not have compassion on those of his own followers who would be found in it on the appointed day! Therefore he warns them. But not them only. He is speaking also of the end of the world, and thus to those of his people in the following ages. To us all he says as to those men on the hillside (v. 3) that day:

**“Behold, I Have Told You Before.”**

- I. The terribleness of the judgment.

1. Of Jerusalem. “Abomination of desolation.” Jerusalem shut in. The great siege. Great tribulation, such as never was before or since. Heb. 10:31. They denied the Lord that bought them and brought upon themselves swift destruction.
2. Of the world. The coming of the Son of man prefigured in the destruction of Jerusalem. As surely as the latter came, so surely will the former come. The carcass and the eagles. The signs of decay, the false prophets of our time. His coming like the flash of blinding lightning.

## II. The earnestness of the warning.

1. To Jerusalem. The Christians must flee. Precipitate flights, from house top, from field. Pregnant and nursing women. Flight not in winter or on Sabbath. Pray. Lest some be led astray, by false Christs and false prophets. When Christ does come, all the world will see him.
2. To the world. There is a way of escape, but not for those who delay, for “a more convenient season,” who love their precious goods. Woe! Those who are held fast by the world, pleasures of life, in the mesh of sin. Woe! Those deceived by false preachers, churches, and pretended churches. Woe!

Conclusion: “To whom much is given, of him much shall be required.” The Jews — the Christians — Lutheran Christians “Behold I have told you before!”

J. A. Dell.

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Occasion:

“Thy house... desolate,” 23:37 etc.

“Not one stone upon another,” 24:1-2.

“When shall these things be? What shall be the sign of thy coming and of the end of the world?” 24:3.

We too believe in the second coming of Christ, “to judge the quick and the dead.” Christians do not fear to contemplate that day.

## **Judgment Day.**

### I. The day of God’s wrath.

1. Pictured in history: the Deluge — Sodom and Gomorrah — Canaan — Belshazzar.
2. Also in Jerusalem. “Abomination of desolation.” Dan. 9:26. Luke 21:20, the Roman invasion, 70 A. D.
3. Flouted by men. “Where is the promise of his coming?” 2 Pet. 3. “Millions of years in the past (according to them), millions of years to come.” Even church people: “sermons received and filed.”
4. Sure to come (carcass and eagles). As God is God. As Christ is true. As the apostles are inspired. Woe to the indifferent and unbelieving.

### II. Yet the day of God’s grace.

1. Grace warns his people here. “Weep not for me,” etc. Repeated warnings. The plain language of hell-fire.
2. Grace gives them signs. Jerusalem itself a sign. False Christs and false prophets. Falling away (v. 12). Preaching of the Gospel (v. 14).
3. Grace prolongs the day of grace. Disciples thought the end would perhaps come soon. All these years of grace, another is ending now. “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” by neglecting prolonged grace.
4. Grace offers a way of escape on judgment day. Jesus would gather us (23:37). “This same Jesus” (Acts 2:36), “How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation” (Heb. 2:3)?

Conclusion: “Behold, I have told you before.” Let no one accuse me on judgment day. “Behold, I come quickly.” Even so come, Lord Jesus. J. A.

Dell.

# The Twenty-Sixth Sunday After Trinity. Matt. 25:31-46

## The Last Judgment

This is an exceedingly important text. Other passages speak of the final judgment and tell us this and that about it, but in this text the eternal Judge himself tells us at length just how he will conduct the final judgment. In all Scripture we have no comparable account. Perhaps the one nearest to it is Rev. 20:11-15.

Consider the structure of Christ's grand Eschatological Discourse. In 24:4-14 he sketches the entire course of the world up to the end. In 24:15-28 follows a sketch of the destruction of Jerusalem and of the Jewish nation. In 24:29-31 he adds the account of his actual Parousia, concerning which the disciples had especially inquired. In 24:32 to 25:30 follow the admonitory sections with three important parables. Finally comes our text, the description of the last judgment itself.

**[31] "Now when the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he shall sit on his throne of glory". [32] And there shall be brought before him all the nations, and he shall divide them from each other, just as a shepherd divides the sheep from the goats. [33] And he shall stand the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left."**

Transitional δέ ushers in the new and somewhat different subject matter. Jesus connects with what he has revealed in 24:30-31 concerning his Parousia; he now completes the subject. He still calls himself "the Son of man" (see Luke 21:27, the Second Sunday in Advent), he who is man and yet far more than man, the Incarnate Second Person of the Godhead. What a difference between his two Comings! Once in humiliation, a babe lying in a manger and at last nailed to the cross; now in exaltation, "in his glory," in

the sum of the divine attributes (δόξα) and in their unrestricted exercise, use, and display in his human nature. Enhancing that glory “all the angels are with him.” He shall Sit on his throne, “a great white throne” (Rev. 20:11), the symbol of power, rule, dominion in holiness (white). Thus to sit is to exercise the dominion and the majesty of that throne. And every eye shall see him.

Draw a good picture of him in the sermon; our people need to have the Christ of infinite glory and majesty impressed upon their consciousness and not only the lowly Christ who walked on earth.

[32] Our Lord Jesus Christ has come to judgment. “There shall be brought before him all the nations,” namely by the angels who are represented as the ministrants of the King, our Judge. Πάντα τὰ ἔθνη, “all the nations,” are the same as those mentioned in 24:14; 28:19; and in Acts 17:26 πᾶν ἔθνος ὀνθρώπων, “every nation of men,” and the term expresses universality, — not one member in any nation but shall be brought before the Lord’s judgment-bar. “All the nations” means the whole human race. It staggers the imagination to picture the scene.

Not in a great indiscriminate mass will the human beings be assembled, but through the angels the Judge will at once make a division into two masses, a process which is likened to the act of the shepherd who has a mixed flock and at the end of the day divides the sheep from the goats. This division already constitutes a judgment and a verdict; what follows is only the justification for this division.

[33] The sheep are the elect (24:31; 22:14). Consider the sheep spoken about in John 10:2 etc., especially as mentioned in v. 14-16; also the sheep and the lambs in John 21:15 etc. Since they are contrasted with the sheep the goats must be all the non-elect, all those who rejected the grace of God and prevented their election. Instead of here speaking of the elect and of the non-elect we may describe the two hosts according to the following verdicts: they who have the works which constitute the evidence of faith, and they who have no such works because they are without faith. Here observe that there are two judgments: an individual secret one at death, in which God accepts faith, the faith which embraces Christ (see the description of faith in Matt. 9:22, the Twenty-fourth Sunday after Trinity); a public judgment before all men and all angels, in which not faith itself, but

the evidence of faith is accepted, since evidence alone counts in any public court of justice. Thus, quite consistently, the Scriptures everywhere make works the decisive factor in the final judgment. Our works are visible, tangible evidence.

But are not the believers to be exempt from all judgment (John 3:18; v. 24)? Observe that while the sheep are present before the Judge, not a single sin of any one of them is as much as mentioned, only their good works are named before the universe. so, indeed, they are not brought into judgment and yet are judged. But all the sins of the unbelievers are brought forth before the universe and on them their verdict of damnation is pronounced.

**[34] “Then shall the King say to those on his right: ‘Hither, you that have been blessed by my Father, inherit the Kingdom that has been made ready for you from the world’s foundation. (.35) For I did hunger, and you did give me to eat. I did thirst and you did give me drink. A stranger I was, and you did take me in. [36] Naked, and you clothed me, I was sick, and you did look in upon me. In prison was I, and you did come to me.’”**

When the right and the left are made opposites, the right denotes honor, the left dishonor, and in Greek these expressions are idiomatic plurals. The enthroned Judge is our King, and he disposes of a Kingdom. He addresses those on his right as “you that have been blessed by my Father.” This blessing, here attributed to the Father of our Judge, embraces all his grace to sinners in our Savior Jesus and all the gifts of this grace, forgiveness, life, salvation. The Father desired to bless equally all those on the left of the Judge, but they “would not” (23:37). In 22:1-14 we are shown how they exclude themselves. The perfect participle “have been blessed” covers all the preceding time since the blessing was bestowed upon them.

“Inherit the Kingdom” speaks to them as heirs (God’s sons, children, begotten of him). Hitherto they have been crown princes, now they are to be actual reigning kings. So few understand what the Kingdom is and how we do actually inherit the Kingdom. Get entirely away from the idea that we are to be subjects in the Kingdom, — it has no human subjects. In this statement of Jesus the Kingdom is the rule of glory in the new heaven and the new earth, in the Eternal City of Rev. 21 and 22, distinguished from the rule of grace as still in progress here on earth. When we inherit the

Kingdom at the last day we shall all reign with Christ as kings sitting on his throne (Rev. 3:21). This shall be a Kingdom composed altogether of kings, raising the idea of a kingdom to its nth degree. Christ shall be the King of kings (we, the kings) and the Lord of lords (we, the lords). See at length my *Kings and Priests* on this glorious subject.

The Judge says that this Kingdom “has been made ready for the heirs from the world’s foundation,” i.e. from all eternity. So Jesus speaks in John 10:16 of his other sheep and of uniting all his sheep in one flock and one fold at the end of the world. From eternity all of them were present to the omniscient eye of God, and God prepared his rule of glory for them that they might join the Godman, their King, in it. Consider how the beginning in eternity and the end of the world are joined into one.

[35] The King’s verdict on the heirs is just. With this King it could not be otherwise. Be not afraid to read γάρ as illative. A verdict must have solid grounds on which it rests. There is no fear of work-righteousness, — let those who will misinterpret. Note well that all of the six works here named refer to the King himself: “I did hunger, and you did give me to eat.” Behold the inner motive behind all these works: love to the King, the love that springs from faith in the King. It is in vain to drop the faith and to preach salvation by love and works alone. For faith alone is the root of fruitful love. Note again that all the works here listed are of the humblest and the lowliest nature. Not one grand work appears among the six, in glaring contrast to the boasts mentioned in 7:22. All of these are works which even the smallest faith is able to produce. And forget not that even the smallest faith saves. As regards giving drink compare Mark 9:41. “You did take me in” means: did lodge me.

[36] “Naked” means: having insufficient clothing. “Look in upon me” means: visit me with help. Coming to those in prison bears the special reference to Christians who are persecuted for their faith and thus imprisoned. In most cases to visit such prisoners is to incur danger.

The six works here listed are concrete samples and no more. All the good works listed and described in the Scriptures will be displayed on judgment day; their number and variety is great. The idea that Jesus is speaking only of what we commonly call “charity,” what at present is also called “relief,” works produced from humanitarian impulses, must be

corrected with thoroughness. The unbelieving and even the state do such works.

**[37-39] "Then the righteous shall answer him, saying: 'Lord, when did we see thee hungering and did feed thee (aorist from τρέφειν)? or thirsting, and did give thee drink? [38] And when did we see thee a stranger, and did take thee in? or naked, and did clothe thee? [39] And when did we see thee sick, and in prison, and did come to thee?'"**

By all means grasp the full force of the new term here used to designate "the sheep" and "the blessed of my Father." Οἱ δίκαιοι, "the righteous," are those who were declared righteous by a verdict of God when they first were brought to faith and by faith embraced Christ and his atoning blood and righteousness. In this term lies the entire doctrine of justification by faith alone. This term explains why these people were at once placed at the right of the Judge. All that happens to "the righteous" is that now at the final judgment the verdict of acquittal pronounced upon them by God long ago is repeated publicly and justified publicly by Jesus, the King and Judge.

One of the distressing things we meet in exegesis is what we must call the deliberate falsification of this term οἱ δίκαιοι and of its cognate terms, removing from it the forensic sense. Sometimes modernists translate it "the upright." But no matter how the perversion is made it flies in the face of all linguistic evidence, it stultifies any claim to honest scholarship, and it grossly deceives the common people. Read Cremer-Koegel *Woerterbuch* on all the derivatives of Bixatog, Hebrew and Greek, in secular and in religious contexts, and *never, never* is the forensic sense absent. Once you have seen this linguistic fact, you will judge correctly any man who claims to know Greek and yet falsifies the meaning of this word.

The righteous are astonished at the invitation of the Judge to inherit the Kingdom because of what they have done. This is excellent evidence that they have never been self-righteous or work-righteous. To be sure, they obeyed the Gospel and served their Lord also in helping their needy brethren. But they saw only these brethren when they helped them, they did not imagine that they did anything of special value for the great King himself, anything that would bring them an infinite reward of glory like this. So they exclaim: "Lord, when did we see thee, etc.?" They repeat the

six items named by the Judge, yet we see that the six are not six, but form three pairs, the doubling in the pairs serving as emphasis.

\_\_ [40] “And the King answering shall say to them: ‘Amen, I say to you\_\_ (see Luke 21:32, the Second Sunday in Advent): **In so far as you did it to one of these the least of my brethren, to me you did it.**” Jesus adds to his reply the great seal of verity (“amen“) and of authority (“I say to you”), and indeed the answer deserves this impressive introduction. What the righteous did to their lowly brethren, they did unto the great Judge himself, for so close is his connection with all those whom he calls his own brethren that he really identifies himself with them. Ah yes, here is the difference which so many refuse to see. It is the inner motive: what you do for Christ’s sake, to please and to obey him, be it ever so small, is done for him, is accepted by him. Do even the greatest deeds without that motive, and these deeds are not done for him and cannot possibly be accepted as done for him. But to do them, whether small or great, for him is to let faith be their source. He who does not believe cannot do a thing for Christ.

The usual expressions name that which is greatest and by so doing mean to include all that is less and even least and yet bears the same character. Thus in Matt. v. 21 etc., murder means to include hatred, calling bad names, etc. Here we seem to have the reverse: Jesus names the least things and doubles the idea by naming the least of his brethren, and yet thereby includes all greater and even the greatest works and all greater and even the greatest of his brethren. But note that we have the superlative idea in “least,” which makes these least works and these least of the brethren those who head the list and thus in the usual way makes them include all the rest. Note that τῶν ἐλακίστων is appended by a second article, which lends this adjective the force of an apposition: “one of these my brethren, the least ones.” They are not esteemed in the world; even in the church they are often scarcely noted or are even pushed aside; but the eyes of Jesus are always upon them, which may also comfort them.

[41] “**Then shall he say to those on the left: ‘Be going from me, such as have been cursed, into the fire, the eternal, the one that has been made ready for the devil and his angels! [42] For I was hungry, etc.’**” Verse 41-45 is the direct opposite of v. 32-33. These on the left, who are ordered into the fire by the Judge, are called by him: “such as have been cursed,” i.e. such as in their past lives have become the subjects of the

divine curse. We know how, for 22:1-14 and many other statements of Scripture tell us: they have rejected God's grace in Christ Jesus. Note οἱ εὐλογημένοι, with the article: "the blessed of my Father," a fixed number known already in eternity; and the anarthrous κατηραμένοι, "such as have been cursed," the conglomerate mass composed of all types and all kinds. The present imperative: "Be going" is lingering, as if the cursed are yet to hear the following words.

Yes, Jesus believed in hell. As the righteous Judge he will send the accursed into hell. All who rage against hell and all who find it beneath them to reckon with hell are hereby referred to the eternal Judge himself. Compare 3:10 and 12; v. 22; 7:19; 13:40:42:50; 18:8-9, and all else that the Scriptures reveal on the subject. Hell is constantly described as a place of unearthly fire, separate adjectives here add to "the fire": "the eternal one," and: "the one that has been made ready for the devil and his angels." This is enough for us to know regarding that fire, — let no one come with curious questions. When Satan and his angels fell, this place of torment was prepared for them by God. Like heaven, hell has various names, but each of the two is the same place by whatever name it may be called. It is spurious wisdom to let all the names for heaven mean only heaven, but to imagine that some of the names used for hell mean different places and not hell, the place of the damned.

This place was never intended for human beings, only for the devil and his angels. How then are men ordered into this place? They chose the devil rather than Christ. Hear, how many of them keep cursing even now by constantly exclaiming: "Hell!"

[42] The King's verdict is justified by the same inventory of three pairs of items, only each one of them now contains the negative: "you did not — you did not," etc. Omissions are charged, not commissions. But this is another case like the one we have just discussed regarding "the least." These omissions of the small things include not only all other omissions, but equally all commissions; for if omissions damn, much more will commissions do so: the less thus includes the greater. This repeated terrible not — not — not is the mark of unbelief. It began with Satan in the Garden of Eden when he spoke the first great lie: "Ye shall not surely die." It is now repeated endlessly against all that honors, pleases, obeys Christ. Its just due

awaits it at the last day. Even in hell Dives exclaimed: “No, father Abraham!”

**[44] “Then shall answer also they, saying: ‘Lord when did we see thee hungering, or thirsting, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee?’ [45] Then shall he answer them, saying: ‘Amen, I say to you, in so far as you did it not to one of the least, neither to me did you do it.’”** We note that in the mouth of the accursed the words of Jesus are abbreviated, whereas the righteous repeat them in full and the King does the same in v. 42-43. While the question of the accursed is otherwise the same as that of the blessed, it still continues the “not” with which the Judge charges them. Indeed, they did not see the least of the Lord’s brethren as having any claim whatever upon them.

[45] Jesus repeats the solemn assurance: “Amen,” etc. The Gospel, the Savior Jesus Christ, his followers, their needs meant nothing whatever to these people at the King’s left. They regarded the Christians as fools. No wonder the Judge must say to them that they did nothing for his sake even in the least ones of his followers. They disowned Christ, they repudiated his grace and his salvation. The evidence lies in these fatal omissions of theirs, now made public to the universe. That evidence demands of a just judge the verdict it is now receiving from the Judge of all the world.

**[46] “And these shall go away into punishment eternal, but the righteous into life eternal.”** “Punishment eternal” is interpretative of “the fire, the eternal one.” Heaven is “life eternal.” Note well that both are “eternal.” If αἰώνιος does not make the fire and the punishment eternal, then heaven and life are also only temporary. This settles the exegetical question. Dogmatically hell will always be denied, not by the righteous, but by those who have reasons to fear hell. It is idle to dispute with these people who are like Dives in hell and only answer: “No, no, no, Father Abraham!” This no and not persist even in the tormenting flame.

## Homiletical Aid

All things tend toward the last judgment. The many statements in the Bible. Our text the actual description by the great Judge himself.

## **Jesus Describes the Final Judgment.**

- I. The Judge.
  1. Jesus, once in humiliation, crucified.
  2. The Son of man in his glory with all his holy angels.
  3. The King, on his throne, dispensing his royal rule.
- II. All the nations.
  1. Every last human being.
  2. The quick and the dead.
  3. The sheep on his right, the goats on his left.
- III. The blessed of his Father.
  1. The righteous, justified by God through grace for Christ's sake by faith.
  2. God's sons and heirs who inherit.
  3. All believers, loving and obeying their King and Savior.
- IV. Their verdict.
  1. They enter upon their royal rule with their King us kings joined with him on his throne.
  2. Because what they did for him is the evidence of their faith and of their relation to him.
  3. The evidence publicly proclaimed, the least part implying all the greater parts.
- V. The cursed.
  1. Who earned God's curse and wrath by persistently rejecting his grace in Christ Jesus.
  2. Who had and ever have only no for God and Christ.
  3. All who will not believe, love, and obey their King and Savior.
- VI. Their Verdict.

1. Departure into the fire prepared for the devil etc.
2. Because of what they did not do which includes what they did do.
3. This evidence also made public in the final court of the world.

VII. The purpose of Jesus in describing the final judgment.

1. Prophecy. We and all the world must be told in advance.
2. Warning. No one is to be condemned blindly.
3. Encouragement. The righteous are to endure to the end, Matt. 24:13.

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The secret judgment at death, based on faith. The public judgment at the last day, based on the evidence of faith, the works, and on their absence.

**The Last Judgment and our Works.**

- I. Our Works cure the evidence and the fruits of our faith in Christ.
- II. Our Works are the testimony and the proof of our attachment to Christ.

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Christians rejoice in the coming final judgment. They shall not be judged; not a sin of theirs shall as much as be mentioned. All unbelievers have every reason to tremble.

**The Last Day the Happiest of all Days for the Disciples of the Lord.**

- I. Then the Lord will again appear in his glory.
  1. Happy now: the Lord is in his Gospel.
  2. Most happy then: the Lord on his throne of glory, our Lord.
- II. Then the Lord will separate his disciples from all enemies.

1. Happy now, the Lord knows his own (John 10:14), but here hypocrites, the world, temptation, persecution, etc.
  2. Most happy then: separated for ever from all evil persons and evil things, even from all evil in ourselves, joined for ever to Christ in glory.
- III. Then the Lord will pronounce the most gracious verdict.
1. Happy now, we are justified now. The evidence in the Word and Sacrament, in the Spirit's testimony in our hearts.
  2. Most happy then: pronounced righteous before the whole universe on the evidence of our humble works of faith done for Christ's sake.
- IV. Then the Lord will take all his disciples to reign with him.
1. Happy now: we reign already by means of his Word which shall judge the world. John 12:48: "The same shall judge him at the last day."
  2. Most happy then: glorified we shall be one with the Lord of glory in eternal triumph.

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The last judgment too remote from our thoughts; we are occupied too much with the present days which race through our short lives. Yet the Church has ever taught us to confess in the Apostles' Creed: "from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead." The supreme question of constant interest:

### **Where Will You Stand on Judgment Day?**

- I. There are only two places possible.
  1. The right, the left.
  2. The sheep, the goats.
  3. The righteous, the cursed.
  4. Those who did, those who did not.

- II. The change from the left to the right is still possible.
  - 1. The judgment described to warn all those whose place would now be on the left. The door of grace still open.
  - 2. The many deaf ears. The inevitable judgment if they remain deaf. Are your ears open?
- III. The change from the right to the left is also possible.
  - 1. If you are saved now you may yet be lost.
  - 2. It would be wholly your own fault (unbelief).
  - 3. The warning of the judgment day to prevent your falling away.
- IV. Heaven and hell are fixed for ever.
  - 1. You cannot live without the works that evidence faith in Jesus Christ and then enter heaven as one of Christ's kings.
  - 2. You cannot possibly have the evidence of faith and then fail to enter heaven as one of Christ's kings.
  - 3. They who here chose the fire prepared for the devil and his angels will find it waiting for them on judgment day.

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Often, in the face of some rank injustice, we cry for justice, and yet often strict justice would not be desirable for us, for we are often like the Pharisees who up and justified themselves (Luke 16:15). But there is coming

### **The Day of Absolute Justice.**

- I. It shall bring absolute justice for all men in the universe.
  - 1. The Son of man in his glory.
  - 2. All nations, the quick and the dead.
  - 3. Infallibly judged, by omniscience and true justice, which all the universe shall acclaim and endorse.

- II. It shall be absolute justice based on grace.
  - 1. The grace of the Son of man, his atonement.
  - 2. The grace that wipes out all sins for all the righteous, so that not a trace of them appears that justice may condemn.
  - 3. The grace that implanted faith and filled faith with works for Christ's: "to me ye did it."
  - 4. The absolutely just verdict: "Inherit the Kingdom."
- III. It shall also be absolute justice without grace.
  - 1. For the cursed who rejected and abused all grace in Christ Jesus, and spurned all the gifts of this grace.
  - 2. Already in this life God's curse had to descend on these despisers of grace, but they would not change.
  - 3. The evidence: "Ye did it not to me."
  - 4. The absolutely just verdict: "Depart from me!"
- IV. You shall receive absolute justice.
  - 1. Shall it be based on grace? Then neglect not grace.
  - 2. Shall it be without grace? God forbid!

# The Twenty-Seventh Sunday After Trinity. Matt. 25:1-13

## Readiness

The three eschatological parables, 24:45 to 25:30, should be studied together. The supposition that Matthew collected them and that he combined them into this great discourse of Jesus, takes the credit from Jesus and gives it to Matthew and makes a mosaic of the discourse, whereas it is a unit and was delivered as a unit by Jesus.

The subject of this last gospel text of the Church Year, which our people have always found highly attractive, is Readiness for the Lord's Parousia. This readiness consists in a brightly burning faith; it is pure folly at last to be found without such faith, only outwardly among the members of the church.

**[1] "Then the Kingdom of the heavens shall be made like to ten virgins, who, having taken their lamps, went out to meet the bridegroom. [2] But five of them were foolish and five sensible. [3] For the foolish, having taken their own lamps did not take with them oil; [4] but the sensible took oil in their vessels together with their lamps."**

The Kingdom is explained in Matt. 21:5, the First Sunday in Advent. It is God's heavenly rule through Jesus Christ, and in this case God's rule as it turns from grace to glory. Thus the temporal particle "then" applies to all of us as we approach our end. The number "ten" denotes completeness and refers to all the followers of Christ in all ages. The Ten Commandments are the entire number of them, likewise the ten pieces of silver (Luke 15:8), the ten slaves, the ten pounds, the ten cities (Luke 19:13-17), an instrument of ten strings, at least ten families for a synagogue, ten persons for a funeral procession, the various multiples of ten, and then also "five," the half of ten,

denoting incompleteness. We shall all see the Bridegroom at his coming. Few will actually be alive on earth at that moment, but all the rest of us shall be raised from the dead. The parable does not deal with all men, but only with all the members of the church, with all who profess to be Christians. Regarding the passive “shall be made like” compare 22:2, the Twentieth Sunday after Trinity.

The imagery is taken from the consummation of a Jewish marriage. Bridegroom and bride had been betrothed by the parents. This betrothal made them man and wife. All that remained to be done was that the bridegroom come in festal array with his companions, some few or more days later, to fetch his bride together with her maiden friends to his own home where a feast graced the occasion, often lasting seven days, bridegroom and bride now living together. No ceremony of any kind, civil or religious, took place when the bridegroom fetched his bride to his home.

This method of entering marriage was oriental. It rested altogether on custom and was not prescribed by any law of God. All the references found in Scripture are purely historical. There is no reason in the world why we today should not enter into marriage in the same way — if we so desired. But we have a different custom. We have what is properly called an “engagement,” in which the two parties make a solemn promise and engage to enter marriage at some future date. It is not a fact that this engagement makes the two man and wife, either before men or at least before God, as has been claimed, and is thus identical with the oriental betrothal. They are not identical: the betrothal was marriage, the engagement is only a promise of future marriage. It is a grave sin, “a breach of promise,” and thus a crime in the eyes of our courts to break this solemn promise without compelling reasons; but it is not *Ehebruch*, breach of marriage, adultery, despite the claims to this effect. The actual marriage vows, which make the two man and wife, are not entered upon until the day of the wedding, and according to our custom we require that the vows be given in a legal manner before a legal official, a pastor of the church, or a qualified officer of the state, either of whom must make a legal return of the act to the state court. Even modern Jews comply with this custom. The state would not consider a proceeding such as the oriental one of biblical times a legal marriage, if a couple should employ it today. The nearest approach to such an arrangement is the so-called “common law marriage,” which the state recognizes as binding.

The ten virgins are not the chosen companions of the bride. In the parable the bride is not at all mentioned, because the *tertium comparationis* does not deal with her and with her immediate companions. The ten virgins are friends of the bride who have been invited by her to attend the wedding. They are dressed for the occasion and bear lamps, since the procession is to take place at night. They do not assemble at the bride's home, but at a designated convenient place where the bridegroom and the bride will pass and where these virgins will join the procession as it passes on its way to the bridegroom's house. The parable deals only with these virgins and with the bridegroom. We must introduce no more. The "lamps" are vessels that hold oil, have a spout for the insertion of a round wick and opposite this spout a handle. Such lamps could be carried like torches.

[2] The actual *tertium* is stated at once: five of the virgins were foolish, μωραί, stupid, without good sense, the other five were sensible, φρόνιμοι, knowing just what to do. The actions of both groups establish this judgment. The number "five" does not mean to state that the foolish Christians are just as many in number as the sensible. Each "five" is only a broken "ten"; that is all that this number represents symbolically. In other words, not all were sensible as they should have been, yet not all were foolish as none should have been.

[3] The foolish virgins took lamps with them, but no oil. No Jewish maiden would ever do such a thing. But this is a parable, and Jesus draws the picture in such a manner that the purpose of the parable is achieved, the warning against what people actually do in their lives. This is so full of folly and senselessness as if maidens went out to meet the bridegroom with lamps and no oil.

[4] The others took both lamps and oil. No need to say that this is sensible. But understand this exactly: the foolish took no oil whatever; the sensible took plenty of oil, fully enough, yet not more than they needed. The interpretation is easy: lamps without oil are the forms of Christian life without the substance of this life. Lamps with oil are the forms of the Christian life vitalized by the true Christian life. I prefer to think of faith and its works as the flame of the lamp, of the grace and the power of Christ in his Word as the oil, and of the outward forms of Christianity as the lamps. Read and note 2 Tim. 3:5. Many call themselves Christians, flock

into the congregations, yet inwardly remain strangers to Christ. Their folly is bound to be made apparent at last.

[5] **“Now, the bridegroom delaying, they all nodded and were sleeping,”** the sensible as well as the foolish. But certainly not having their lamps burning all the while. The bridegroom’s delay pictures the uncertainty of the time of his Parousia. The sleeping is only natural, yet it pictures the security of both groups of virgins, — both felt that they were perfectly ready for the bridegroom. It is so today: nominal Christians feel as secure as true Christians; their fatal lack is discovered too late. That preacher is out of order who rebukes his true hearers as though even they sometimes are careless (sleep). The nodding and the sleeping of the ten virgins denotes no carelessness.

[6] **“Now at midnight a cry has come: ‘Lo, the bridegroom! Be going out to meet him!’** Then all those virgins arose, and arranged their lamps. [8] **But the foolish said to the sensible: ‘Give us some of your oil, because our lamps are going out!’** [9] **But the sensible answered, saying: ‘Nevermore! In no wise will it suffice for us and for you. Be going rather to those that sell, and buy for yourselves.’** [10] **And while they were going away to buy, the bridegroom came; and those ready went in with him to the wedding, and the door was shut.”**

The genitive μέσης νυκτός is the genitive of the time within: “during the middle of the night,” not specifying more closely: “at midnight” only in the general sense. We have the dramatic present perfect γέγονεν, bringing out the suddenness of the cry: “a cry has come” and is thus ringing in the ears. It is a joyful cry raised by people who see the bridegroom’s lights from afar and who tell the waiting Virgins to go out to meet him. These shouts are a part of the imagery.

[7] In haste all the virgins arose and arranged their lamps. The verb means “put in proper order,” “made beautiful.” They fixed the wick and lighted it so that it might burn with a strong, bright flame. Jesus does not need to say what trouble the foolish virgins now had with their lamps — the wicks caught the fire, smoked, and went out.

[8] Ah, they themselves discover that they have come without oil! Now, in their dismay they beg oil from the sensible virgins, because their lamps are going out, the wicks unable to burn more than a moment. The discovery

that they have no oil comes too late. But how could they be so foolish as to start out without oil? Note that for foolish and senseless actions there exists no sensible answer; do not ask for one. Many Christians expect to meet the Lord at his Parousia without the grace of his Word and Sacrament to light the lamps of their faith and their spiritual life. How can they do such a thing? Especially when they are so earnestly warned.

[9] The answer is given in parabolic language, and its summary meaning is that now it is *too late, too late*. The foolish virgins ask for the impossible. The sensible virgins cannot divide their oil with the foolish. In the imagery of the parable they reply that by thus dividing neither party would have enough. In the reality each person must appropriate God's grace for himself and cannot share the grace he possesses with another person. Another way of saying the same thing is that every one must believe for himself and cannot believe for some one else. There is only one way to obtain oil and that is to go and buy it from the vendors, Moses and the prophets, whose sales-place is the Scriptures, the only source of grace and power (Luke 16:29). On this buying read Rev. 3:18; Is. 55:1. The advice is sound and good, but in the parable it comes too late. But this is the point: be ready in good time, and do not wait until it is too late.

[10] The foolish virgins went away to buy, — but no intimation is offered that at this late hour they found a bazaar still open for business. They never obtained oil. Many become eager and frantic when it is too late. So the bridegroom came with the bride and her chosen maidens and the sensible virgins joined the happy procession as it sang and made music. All entered the bridegroom's house, — not the bride's, as some, spoiling the imagery as well as perverting the reality, have claimed.

Now comes the ominous word: “and shut was the door” (subject and verb transposed, so that both are emphatic). The situation is now the reverse of Rev. 3:20. “Was shut,” never to be opened again. “No one's penitence, no one's prayer, no one's groaning shall any more be admitted. That door is shut, which received Aaron after his idolatry; which admitted David after his adultery, after his homicide; which not only did not repel Peter after his threefold denial, but delivered its keys to be guarded by him (16:19).” Trench. See the door shut in Luke 13:25.

[11] **“Now afterwards the rest of the virgins come, saying: ‘Lord, lord, open for us!’ [12] But he answering said: ‘Amen, I say to you, I do not know you!’”** The present tenses are graphic, and indeed the scene is tragic. In vain have the foolish virgins sought oil in the middle of the night. With the coming of Christ the time for obtaining grace is at an end. The language of verse 11 is still that of the parable. These foolish virgins disregard the oil to the last. With lamps in their hands that are not lighted because they have no oil they cry before the locked door and shout for entrance. Where grace alone admits, they expect to enter without grace. God is expected to reverse his whole plan of salvation because they demand it. The sensible virgins did not have to shout to have the door opened to them.

[12] The language of the parable now gives place to the language of reality. With the solemn seal of verity (“amen”) and of authority (“I say to you”), Jesus disowns these foolish virgins: “I do not know you.” The pronouns “to you” and “you” denote the virgins, but what is said to them is no longer the language of the parable. When Jesus here says: οὐκ οἶδα ὑμᾶς, the verb means: *Ihr steht zu mir in keiner Beziehung*, “you bear no relation to me”; in 7:23 Jesus employs γινώσκω, and the meaning is: “I have no connection with you” (see Cremer-Koegel). Indeed, these foolish virgins act as though they have some claim on Jesus, — they have none whatever. For grace alone gives us such a claim, and grace is What these virgins have always neglected and rejected.

[13] Jesus closes with the admonition: **“Be watching therefore, because you do not know the day or the hour”** (compare 24:42). We must ever be ready. Nothing dare be put off or left unattended to that is necessary for our meeting the Lord at his second coming. This watching has nothing to do with the sleeping of v. 5, for the sensible virgins were fully ready and joined the bridegroom. The point is our ignorance in regard to the time of the Lord’s coming. Here note 24:36. The “day” is the actual date; the “hour” is wider, namely the period of time. Usually “the hour” is supposed to be the hour of the day, but the word “hour” is at times used in the broad sense. We never read about the hour of the day, i.e. the hour by the clock, when the Parousia is the subject. It is sensible, indeed, to make completely ready for this supreme event, since no one knows when it will occur. To be

ready is to have true security; to be unready and yet secure is to labor under a false and a fatal security.

## Homiletical Aid

Twice Jesus tells us in advance about the door that will be shut. It is the door to the Kingdom of glory. When Jesus returns at the last day that door will be shut, shut for ever. In our parable it is pictured as the door to the great wedding feast.

### **“And the Door Was Shut.”**

When at last it is shut, on which side of it will you be?

#### I. Will you then be on the outside?

1. The parable does not describe the wicked and the worldly all of whom are shut out. We need no warning regarding them. But those who are virgins, Christians in name, together with the true Christians and yet at last are found shut out for ever.
2. The false security. The foolish virgins with the sensible ones constituted one outward company (church membership), they too had beautiful lamps (lived outwardly good lives), they had all the forms, and thus' felt perfectly secure, as secure as the others.
3. They lacked the one vital thing, oil for their lamps (the grace of God, for genuine faith and life). They seemed to do very well without it, and never missed the oil until too late.
4. The tragedy when the bridegroom at last came and their lamps remained dark. Too late ,they sought grace; too late they came to the door with dark lamps. It was shut. They were outside for ever.
5. Watch therefore. Be ready. Without grace embraced by faith we are lost.

#### II. Will you then be on the inside?

1. It is so easy. For grace (the oil) is bought without money or price in the Word and in the true church, — ever a free, gratuitous gift. We can obtain new measures of grace day by day.
2. Grace makes faith burn brightly, and faith is the new life that shines brightly. He is ready who is thus fitted out.
3. The true security. That one may nod and sleep who has this security, i.e. rest in peace while waiting for the Lord's coming, — his lamp is ready and cannot disappoint him.
4. The joy when the Lord does come. It may not occur during our earthly life, but it will be the same as if it had; for we shall meet him at the last day with all the grace and the faith that we have in the hour of our earthly death.
5. Yet we too need the admonition to watch and be ready.

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Are you foolish or are you wise? I know what your answer is. But all of us had better make sure before it is too late, as it proved to be too late for the foolish virgins in our text.

### **The Tragedy of the Foolish Virgins.**

- I. They had the good example of the wise virgins.  
They brought lamps and sufficient oil.  
They made certain they were ready.  
They were truly secure.  
But the foolish virgins only copied the form, not the essential (securing oil).
- II. The bridegroom delayed so long.  
The foolish virgins had so much time to make sure they were ready.  
They wasted all of it.  
They had only themselves to blame.

- Lamps demand oil, and they took none.
- III. Their security was false.  
The great difference between true and false security.  
The ease with which the foolish virgins could have stood the test.  
We must ever stand it, and that seriously.
- IV. The fatal discovery.  
When it was too late.  
When no more oil could be secured by begging or by buying.  
The dismay, — all security now gone.
- V. The door shut for ever.  
You cannot enter glory without grace.  
Forms are not enough.  
All who are not ready (grace, faith) cannot possibly enter.

Let the tragedy of the foolish virgins warn you to be truly ready every day of your life.

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An example to follow and an example to avoid. We need both of them.

### **Be Like the Five Wise Virgins!**

- I. It is so easy.  
The Greek word means “sensible virgins.”  
It takes little sense to bring oil with the lamps. It is huge folly to bring lamps and leave the oil.  
It takes little sense to do what the Gospel says: accept grace and thus obtain faith. But it is huge folly to hear what the Gospel says and then to disregard it.
- II. It is so safe.

Who does not want to be safe and certain where the soul and eternity are at stake?

To do as the sensible virgins did makes one entirely safe and fills with true peace.

The sham security of the foolish virgins endlessly repeated today. All that some people want is a beautiful funeral sermon, whether they end in hell or not.

III. It is so blessed.

The joy of meeting the Bridegroom at last with burning lamps, — while the rest are rushing through the night to find some oil.

The joy of the company of the blessed in glory at the heavenly feast.

The joy of being ourselves prepared for all this blessedness by grace.

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All the printed outlines which regard the fact that the virgins slept as a serious fault should be discarded or corrected. This idea is due to a mistaken exegesis.

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The supreme Christian hope, the Coming of the Bridegroom and the Wedding Feast in Glory. The supreme obligation that rests upon us: we must ever be ready.

### **Our Continuous Readiness.**

I. Many need no readiness.

All who belong to the world and expect no return of Christ. They have nothing for which to be ready. We pity them, whether they are only ignorant or whether they scoff.

II. We are expecting our Lord.

His coming for us like that of a bridegroom who came in oriental fashion. The fulfillment of his promises and of our glorious hope. We must be ready. It would be tragic if we were not.

III. We know how to meet our Lord.

Not with sham Christianity, but with grace in our hearts, grace to make our faith and our life burn brightly. This is God's own gift. The joy that awaits truly ready hearts.

# **The Reformation Festival Matt. 11:12-15**

## **The Blessings of the Kingdom through the Reformation**

After the time of the Reformation the desire to celebrate this work of God spread in the Lutheran churches. St. Martin's day, November 10, was early chosen in Pomerania for this purpose; in Hamburg it was Trinity Sunday; elsewhere the anniversary of Luther's death, February 18; etc. October 31:1617, brought the celebration of the centennial of the nailing of the Ninety-five Theses to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg. June 25, the day of the presentation of the Augsburg Confession, was similarly celebrated. The day of Luther's birth and of his death were quite generally recalled. But our present Reformation Festival on October 31 did not begin till the middle of the seventeenth century. Elector John George II appointed this day in 1668, other authorities followed at later dates. Yet the dates still varied: October 31; June 25; November 18. It was as late as 1878 that the Eisenach Conference urged the Sunday after October 30. Our calendar has October 31: the Posting of the Ninety-five Theses. Our churches generally observe the event on the Sunday nearest to this date.

The introduction of this festival into the non festival half of the Church Year causes a break in the anciently appointed sequence of texts, which unfortunately is unavoidable. The gospel text appointed for the festive day strikes a strong positive note, and thus commends itself. The choice rests on historical analogy. The days of the Baptist before the public appearance of Jesus are days in which the Kingdom forged forward with great might, and men of might embraced it with might. The days of the Reformation itself and of the era following are analogous. The pure Gospel is restored. The Kingdom again presses forward with power, and we all ought to embrace it

with power. I take the subject of this short text to be: *Grasping the Blessings of the Kingdom restored to us through the Reformation.*

[12] Jesus reminds the people of what they had in John the Baptist, who is now languishing in Herod's prison, and is soon to yield up his life. The Baptist outranks all the prophets, even Moses, in that he alone is the one prophet whose coming was prophesied. **“Now from the days of John the Baptist until now the Kingdom of the heavens presses forward forcefully, and forceful people snatch it.”** A most blessed period for Israel was ushered in when John the Baptist began his ministry, preaching and baptizing. It continued until the time when Jesus himself was preaching and doing many signs and wonders. Jesus carried this blessed period forward, and after his ascension his apostles did the same.

What made those years so wonderful? “The Kingdom of the heavens was pressing forward forcefully,” and thus men had the most blessed opportunity themselves to reach out with force and to embrace this Kingdom. To understand what Jesus says we must know what “the Kingdom of the heavens” is (see Matt. 21:5, the First Sunday in Advent). It is not an organization like our earthly kingdoms, composed of a nation or of several, consisting of people who make or also unmake their king; it is not of this world or at all like this world. This Kingdom is the rule of the heavenly King which makes its own Kingdom wherever this rule is exercised; it is the rule of grace here on earth and the rule of glory in heaven.

The verb is illy translated: “suffereth violence” (our versions), nor is the alternative rendering of the A.V. better; for both renderings darken the sense instead of conveying it. Scholars debate as to whether the verb is passive or middle in the active sense, whether we must translate: “is brought with force,” namely by the Baptist and by Jesus, or “comes forward forcefully.” To me the difference seems to be only formal, the meaning is quite the same. We understand this verb the better when we keep in mind that the rule of God's grace is the subject, and during the days of which Jesus here speaks this blessed rule certainly came forward forcefully, or (passive) was brought forward forcefully by the work of the Baptist and of Jesus. The gracious power of this grace as manifested in the activity of these two persons reached out powerfully to draw men under its sway by repentance

and by faith which led to a new life. When had Israel experienced such blessed days?

This time Jesus does not speak of foolish people who did not appreciate the blessedness of these days, but went on in blind oblivion. He speaks of the better class: “and forceful people snatch it.” Note how βιασταί and the preceding verb βιάζεται match. As the Kingdom forges forcefully ahead, so these are forceful people, — to be sure, not by nature a superior class, for all are equally lost sinners, but by the forceful Kingdom these people are made forceful. Repentance and faith and Baptism have changed them. And now they press forward with the same energy as that manifested by the Kingdom itself “to snatch” the Kingdom, we may say “to grab” it, to appropriate all this rule of grace for themselves, to take and to enjoy all its blessings. Fortunate people! Yet all the people of Israel then living might have enjoyed the same good fortune; only because of their own fault were they destitute.

A similar period was ushered in by Luther and by his collaborators, when the mighty sound of the true Gospel once more filled the land and the Kingdom again pressed forward with might. To this day the Reformation era continues — thank God! Are we among the “forceful people” who snatch and hold to their breasts the great Kingdom blessings of the Reformation?

[13] Jesus explains more about the time. **“For all the Prophets and the Law did prophesy until John. [14] And if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah, the one about to come.”** “All the Prophets and the Law” = all the other books of the Old Testament and the Pentateuch, i.e. the entire Old Testament. The last prophet was Malachi. Then followed 430 years when no more prophets arose and no addition was made to the Old Testament canon. Yet all along the completed Old Testament “did prophesy.” “Till John” means that with the coming of the Baptist a new era set in, the great era of fulfillment. The Old Testament, of course, still prophesied, as it does to this very day in our lives, but with John’s great work “the Kingdom of the heavens” all at once “pressed forward mightily.” The great fulfillment, so long promised, began. The Messiah arrived.

[14] The beginning was made with the Baptist, who therefore also belongs in the New Testament, and is not, as some suppose, the last of the

prophets in the Old. The Baptist was himself prophesied, namely by Malachi, the last of the Old Testament prophets (4:5). The Baptist is the “Elijah” whom Jehovah promised to send, hence the modifier: “the one about to come,” — not the old Elijah who went to heaven in a flaming chariot, but this new Elijah who would work “in the spirit and power of Elias” (Luke 1:17), because Israel’s hearts would again be as hard as in the days of king Ahab. The Jews imagined that the prophet Elijah would return from heaven in person.

Jesus significantly adds: “if you are willing to accept it.” His Jewish hearers may not be willing to accept the statement that the Baptist fulfills Malachi’s prophecy and is the promised Elijah. Not that there is the least doubt in the prophecy itself, any trouble that may arise in regard to accepting the prophecy as having been fulfilled in the Baptist lies in the will of the Jews. It is always so. When the will is perverse, wrong, obdurate, the intellect, its slave, finds all sorts of contrary arguments and fails utterly to see the pertinency of the true arguments. “The whole trouble with the Jews was that they underestimated the Baptist. They were happy to have another prophet in their land, but only “to rejoice in his light for a season” (John v. 35), not at all to take him seriously as being the harbinger of a grand new era of grace, of a new and mighty pressing forward of the Kingdom of the heavens, calling on all Israelites to grasp and to hold fast its volume of blessings.

**[15] “He that has ears to hear, let him hear!”** Alas, some have ears and yet have none, — deaf ears, ears that are closed, ears that let the greatest invitation and the strongest warning pass by like meaningless sounds. Here Jesus tells about the Kingdom pressing forward and about resolute men also pressing forward to secure its blessings during the blessed era that God has at last sent; will the ears of his hearers “hear” that, hear it so as to go and do likewise. “Let him hear?” God calls him to do so through the Savior’s own word. How great will be his guilt if, having ears, he does not hear this glad invitation and this earnest warning?

Transfer this admonition to the time of the Reformation and to our own post-Reformation era. How shall we escape the greatest guilt, if we let all the blessings of the Reformation slip by us, instead of resolutely grasping them every one to our soul’s joy and salvation?

# Homiletical Aid

Men watch the political, the economical character of the times and seek to profit in full from any favorable turn of events. We observe also the spiritual character of our age and propose to capitalize it spiritually a hundred per cent. God's grace sends blessed periods for his people.

The most blessed of all was when Israel had both John the Baptist and Jesus in their midst and after them the holy apostles. There never was such a blessed time upon the earth.

Another time, glorious in Gospel riches, was the period of the Reformation including the time since then and extending to our present day. Our celebration marks the day when this period began.

## **The Golden Era Ushered in by the Reformation.**

- I. The golden shower of spiritual blessings.
  1. The dark era preceding — describe the sad spiritual state.
  2. The rediscovered Gospel. Its three golden principles: The Bible alone — justification by faith alone — each person responsible for himself alone.
  3. The whole round of saving truth. The golden confessions, incomparable. The old errors exploded. So clear the way of salvation; so free every one of us to walk that way. As in the days of John and of Jesus the Kingdom of heaven comes with force, to save with its great power of grace.
  4. Some of the churches have lost the golden blessings and some are now losing more or less. Yet the era continues in all true Reformation churches. Today we thank God with all our hearts.
- II. The men who make these golden blessings their own.
  1. Too many seek material gold and the offerings of the world. No time for spiritual gold.
  2. Yet there are many “men of force,” as Jesus calls them, and with energy and force they grasp and make their own all that this

golden age affords.

3. God gave them ears and by his grace they use them to take in the entire Gospel. Worthless by nature, the power of the Kingdom makes them men of force to embrace, hold, and defend all the golden treasures of the Kingdom.
4. Are you one of these? A true Lutheran believer? a courageous confessor? a noble defender? filled with the power of the truth? victorious through the force of the Kingdom? Consider carefully before you confidently say, yes.

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I am a Lutheran. I say it with gratification not because of this festive occasion, though the occasion affords added pleasure, but for deeper reasons. A genuine Lutheran is one who by God's grace and his Word believes and confesses the divine, saving truth as revealed in Christ, the whole of that truth and nothing but that truth. The era of the Reformation, thank God, still continues. It is this fact that enables me to be a Lutheran in the true sense of the word. This day I ask you all to rejoice with me in

### **The Glory of the Reformation Era,**

in which we still live. We must see in it

- I. A reflexion of the days of John and of Jesus.
  1. John and Jesus preached the Gospel with power after a dark and dreary spiritual age. Luther repeated that work with power and energy. John and Jesus and the apostles were his models.
  2. John and Jesus produced men of force who grasped with force the Gospel blessings of the Kingdom. The Christian Church began. The Reformation again, following the example of John and of Jesus, produced valiant believers and confessors, holding with force all the blessings of the Kingdom.
  3. This work of the Reformation still continues. Do we realize what that means?

- II. The Kingdom coming anew with force.
  - 1. The Kingdom is the rule of God's grace. Not a nation ruled by a king. Explain.
  - 2. This Kingdom of grace strong through the restored pure Word and Sacrament brought anew to men's souls, working repentance, faith, and a new life.
  - 3. Ignorance, error, human notions are the opposites of the Kingdom of heaven and bring about men's destruction. The Kingdom expels them. Ever distinguish this Kingdom with its pure Gospel from all perversions. We pray to the Father that this his Kingdom may ever come.
  - 4. Our joy that the pure Gospel and the Kingdom are not withdrawn because of our sins.
- III. The glory of the Kingdom must fill our hearts.
  - 1. We must take it by force, i.e. let nothing prevent us.
  - 2. Full knowledge of the Gospel which the Reformation has restored. Ignorance makes weak and uncertain Lutherans, who may soon prove traitors.
  - 3. Genuine repentance and faith and a life filled with the power of the Gospel of the Reformation. Justification by faith, the Scripture guide, each person convinced for himself.
  - 4. Gratitude for the glory of the Reformation. Joyful testimony.

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Something tremendous must have happened over 400 years ago to move us still to celebrate this Reformation Festival. Do you know exactly what it was? We may use the expression of our text with which Jesus refers to the time of the Baptist and of himself: "the Kingdom of heaven suffereth violence," or translated more exactly: "the Kingdom of heaven moves forward with force." This means the heavenly rule of God's grace in Christ Jesus. That is what also happened in the days of the Reformation and has continued ever since to our day. The victorious forward movement began

when Luther, led by God, nailed the famous 95 Theses to the door of the Castle Church at Wittenberg.

## **The Power of the Reformation.**

It consists in the three great principles. In and through them the Kingdom rules with force and saves men's souls. Without them there is only spiritual slavery and its dread results.

### I. The Word of God alone.

1. Describe the time before the Reformation, without the Word.
2. The Word the sole norm, rule, judge, Luther's stand at Worms — again at Marburg. Not the Word and reason, or the pope, or science, or anything else.
3. The Word alone in our consciences, and then in our confessions, church constitutions, synods, ordinations and installations, etc.
4. Our foes: Rome — Calvin — all followers of reason. Constant battle.

### II. Justification by faith alone.

1. Luther's cry: "My sins, my sins!" Finally the comfort of Staupitz: "Believe the forgiveness of sins. The just shall live by faith." Luther finds what "righteousness" in Romans means, the imputed righteousness of Christ ours by faith. The jubilant joy of his soul.
2. Define exactly.
3. Justification the key and the center of the entire Bible. We so treat it today, all others to the contrary notwithstanding. Test it on the troubled conscience, in the hour of death.
4. Rome cries: Anathema (Decrees of the Council of Trent). Pharisees of today demand works, character, holiness, social justice, rules of their fraternal oathbound orders, etc. If justification by faith alone is lost, the light goes out in heaven.

III. Each person himself alone.

1. The right of private judgment: I myself have the right to go to the Scriptures there to find my justification by faith. At Worms Luther: “Unless I am convinced by Scripture,” etc.
2. Because of this principle Luther demanded universal education, not merely to make good secular citizens. — Also liberty of conscience, end of religious oppression and of wars of oppression. — Also separation of church and state, i.e. freedom of church from state control.
3. Often perverted to mean that each may interpret the Scriptures as he pleases. No man dare find anything in the Scriptures except what God put there. The truth is one. That one truth you personally have the right to find in the Scriptures: no priest, hierarchy, pope, alleged scientist, critic of the Bible, or any one else has the right to step in and to say: “I will find it for you.”

Conclusion: In these three principles the power of the Kingdom. Also a thousand blessings. Though opposed, we still have them. Hence we celebrate. God preserve them to our children’s children.

# The Mission Festival Matt. 9:36-38

## “As Sheep Having No Shepherd”

Since the celebration of an annual Mission Festival has become universal in our churches, our liturgies supply the necessary texts and the liturgical material. The gospel text is certainly well chosen. It is one of the choicest texts in the New Testament on the subject of missions. I should include v. 35, for it was when going about in Galilee, from city to City and from village to village, that Jesus came to say of the people as a whole in v. 36 that they were like sheep without a shepherd.

**[36] But when he saw the multitudes, he was filled with compassion for them, because they were distressed and prostrate, like sheep not having a shepherd.** The aorists “saw” and “had compassion” refer to the occasion when at one time during a tour through the Galilean cities and villages multitudes streamed out to Jesus and he beheld them as they came. Other eyes would have seen only masses of people; the eyes of Jesus saw something else, namely the spiritual condition of all these people. Jesus saw them “distressed and prostrate, like sheep not having a shepherd.” The two perfect participles are regarded as adjectives, yet the perfect tenses describe conditions that extend from the past into the present. The first signifies: “having been flayed,” or milder: “having had the skin torn,” like lost sheep that have wandered into brambles or among sharp rocks. The second means “thrown down prone and helpless,” like sheep that have wandered aimlessly until they are altogether exhausted and spent. The verb is at times used with reference to corpses, lying prostrate on the ground.

The comparison: “like sheep not having a shepherd,” completes the picture which Jesus sees. Indeed, all these people were like sheep without a shepherd to lead them to pasture and to drink, to care for them, and to

protect them in safe folds. They had shepherds, if they can be called by this name, rabbis, elders in the synagogue, the Pharisees, but these were worse than having no shepherds, for we see the condition into which they have gotten their poor sheep. The sight which the eyes of Jesus saw is one that our eyes too may see. Men all about us are without true spiritual shepherds, spiritually lost and miserable, unable to take care of themselves. Sometimes they wander into churches, but they find no Christ, no Gospel, no way of salvation. Let us consider people not as they appear outwardly, but as their souls appear to Jesus.

What Jesus saw melted his heart in compassion. The Greek has three verbs which have been translated “to have compassion” or “to be compassionate.” One is συμπάσχειν, to have sympathy, fellow-feeling; another is ἔλεειν, to show mildness and kindness in mercy. The third we have here: σπλαγχνίζομαι, “to have the viscera moved,” namely the nobler viscera, lungs, heart, and liver, which the Greeks considered as the seat of the feelings, such as love, pity, etc. We may say: the heart of Jesus was moved. On Christ’s compassion note 14:14; 15:32; Mark 1:41; 6:34; Luke 7:13.

I add from my book *His Footsteps*, from the chapter on the compassionate Christ, p. 245: “These instances in which the compassion of Christ is expressly recorded are so much evidence, proving that his heart was ever filled with merciful kindness and feelings of pity for the distressed of every description. Whenever and wherever suffering and sorrow of body or of soul met his eyes, his heart was moved With compassion. The compassion of Jesus is one of the deepest, richest, most comforting of all his Savior qualities.”

Material and physical destitution moves our humanitarian age deeply, and even our government inaugurates relief measures on a huge scale, — although this governmental humanitarianism is to a large extent tainted with politics bent on winning votes and building up a machine. The church too is quick to extend material relief where needed. We must ever place the spiritual need and distress above the material. All poor, lost, straying sinners first of all need the Shepherd and Bishop of their souls.

**[37] Then he says to his disciples: “The harvest abundant, the workers few. [38] Ask therefore of the Lord of the harvest that he**

**throw out workers into his harvest.”** Here glance at chapter ten: Jesus ordains and commissions the first twelve workers, the apostles, and thus institutes the holy Christian ministry, in which he through his Church calls and sends out into the harvest qualified workers. The compassion of Jesus is active. His pity provided the needed help. We Cannot reproduce the beautiful balance of μέν and δέ; the A.V. uses “truly” and “but,” too coarse and clumsy entirely. It is best to attempt no translation at all.

Note that Jesus speaks only of the “harvest” and says that this is “great” or abundant. We must abide by the harvest and by the *tertium comparationis* contained in this figurative term. Jesus does not say that the field is extensive, he does not allow us to wander off into sowing, cultivating, and producing the harvest. As Jesus sees it, the harvest is already produced. We must get the vision of John 4:35: “Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest.”

It is certainly strange to read the many wrong conceptions men have of this great harvest. Some think it signifies all the multitudes that were coming out to Jesus. But many of these people would not be gathered into the heavenly garner. The great authority on missions in Germany, C. Warneck, sees the harvest through synergistic eyes: the seekers after God among the heathen nations, the persons among the unsaved who are “better” than the rest. Yet all are equally lost, and by nature and apart from grace none seek after God. The fact is that those who seem to be religious and “god-seekers” are as a rule the hardest to convert, generally do not come to conversion at all. The Scriptures repeatedly tell us that God is found by those who sought him not: Is. 65:1; Rom. 10:20; compare John 6:44.

The harvest are the sheep which the Lord knows, including also the other sheep, John 10:14 etc. “The Lord knoweth them that are his,” 2 Tim. 2:19. By the harvest Jesus refers to all those in whom the work of God’s grace succeeds. There is no thought here of our producing this harvest; God does that by his grace through Jesus Christ. We might expand at this point and say that God’s grace uses the Church and the ministry and missionaries; but this would lead us into the production of the harvest, which thought Jesus refrains from introducing. “Great,” he says, is the harvest, the harvest which God produces; it is all white and ripe already for the ingathering. It is for this ingathering that God needs laborers, and, sad to say, there are so

few. Jesus was gathering in the harvest in Palestine, one lone worker. Many, many are needed.

[38] We might ask why God needs workers for bringing in his ripe harvest, when he has himself by his grace produced the harvest. Why workers only for the last step? That appears to leave so little for the workers to do. That precisely is the intention of Jesus. God is “the Lord of the harvest,” not only its owner, but its producer, who thus also manages everything concerning his harvest. There is to be no mistake about this fact. God has put this harvest and its ingathering into the hands of his Son, Jesus. Let it not escape you that this means all the redemptive work of Jesus, the work that he alone could do. This work of the Savior produces the harvest; it brings men to faith and a new life. The credit is all God’s alone. The laborers only gather in this harvest produced by God through Christ. That is all we do. Blessed indeed this final work allotted to us! Could not God have done also this work without us? He certainly could. But in his grace he desires to use us. What an honor, what a distinction!

So we gather congregations, send out missionaries into home and foreign fields, and ever keep gathering in the harvest, the product of our Savior’s saving work. It is the “harvest” that we are to gather, nothing but the harvest. Yet, alas, some disregard the word and try to bring in as big a crowd as possible whether they are believers and confessors or not. They are like harvesters who tie up masses of weeds with the good grain, and in some churches no questions are asked. “His harvest,” — let us ever be true to that word, lest that word condemn us at last.

Does it sound strange that Jesus bids his disciples to “ask” God (the verb = to ask or to beg) to hurry workers into his harvest? Let us not jump to the wrong conclusion that if we did not ask, the harvest would not be gathered in. Luther well says that God’s Kingdom comes even without our prayer (Catechism, Second Petition). Our prayers do not save the harvest or a part of it. Here again let us not claim credit that does not belong to us. God has turned the whole harvest and also its ingathering over to his Son, the Savior. We belong to the Son, his mind is our mind, the harvest for which he gave his life is his greatest concern and thus ours also, for we are one with him. Thus we pray the Lord of the harvest to supply the needed workers. The matter is much deeper than shallow or superficial reasoning assumes.

Sometimes we are told to go and to get workers. Jesus does not send us on such a mission. God himself selects and “throws out into his harvest” the proper workers. God by his Word and his Spirit, through an inner call, moves men to prepare themselves for the ministry and for mission work. Let God so choose his own workers. He will then also fit them out with the necessary outer call, extended in proper order by the church. At times men crowd into the work without being thus called by God. They usurp the place that does not rightfully belong to them. They will receive their just dues.

Gathering in the harvest, the fruit of the Savior’s sacrifice, is the greatest work in the world. May it fill our hearts with prayers, may we do our part in maintaining the workers and in thus sharing their work, and may nothing delight us so much as their success through God’s grace and his Word.

## **Homiletical Aid**

At this festival we stop and look at the work before us. Then we apply ourselves with new energy and encourage others to do as we do. We seek help and encouragement from our Lord.

### **What Does Jesus Teach in Our Text Concerning Mission Work?**

I. He shows us what belongs to mission work.

He does this by his example in v. 35 (this verse is included in the text).

II. He shows us what should prompt us to mission work.

The compassion of Jesus — the great harvest — the need of workers.

III. He shows us how we should take up mission work.

Prayer. It is God’s work. He must call and send the workers.

J. H. Schneider.

Remark: The theme would fit any text in which Jesus speaks of missions. It can easily be made specific without resorting to the phrase: “in

our text”:

## **The Word of Jesus Concerning the Great Harvest.**

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Here is an outline built on the essay style, in which the theme is not a theme, and in which the inserted captions are not sermon parts.

### **Work Everywhere.**

No caption for the first portion; then we read the following:

- Greatest need is love.
- Go and show mercy.
- The high cost of souls.
- No true Christian avoids being Christlike.
- Whatever is not church work is not inner mission work.
- Put yourself in his place.

The author of this sermon might continue on in this fashion, for there is nothing to control his thoughts save his own desire. I offer a sample like this because some imagine that this is up-to-date formulation, whereas it merely offers the style employed in sermonizing that is much inferior to the preaching guided and controlled by a true outline.

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Where are the biggest mission fields? In the large cities. Jesus entered cities as well as the villages. Some facts about the cities.

### **The Modern City, A Threefold Challenge to the Christian Church.**

- I. Sympathy for the masses.
- II. More Workers.
- III. Prayerful interest.

Remark: Omit “threefold” in the theme. It raises the question: “Why only threefold? why not four, five, six, or sevenfold?” The theme should be:

### **The Challenge of the Modern City to the Christian Church.**

The parts should keep to the idea of “the challenge,” which the parts here offered do too faintly.

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What Does the Work of Missions Call For?

- I. For heartfelt compassion.
- II. For diligent labor.
- III. For earnest prayer.

H. J. Schuh.

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What is the main thing regarding missions? Is it giving? Is it sending? Jesus says it is praying: “Pray ye the Lord of the harvest” etc. St. Paul also: Pray for us — Pray that the door of the Word may be opened — Pray that the Word may have free course and run. The second petition of the Lord’s Prayer: “Thy Kingdom come.” All these requests for prayer imply the promise that these our prayers shall be heard. Put prayer first in all mission work; then all else follows.

### **The Secret of Prayer for Missions.**

- I. The secret fountain of this prayer.
  1. No mere recitation of words. Enlightenment, faith, love.
  2. The sanctified heart, one with God and the Savior. Knows what it has in the Gospel.
  3. The compassionate heart. No spiritual selfishness. Knows what men without Christ and the Gospel lack.

II. The secret power of this prayer.

1. How can words be so mighty? Not the words, but God's and Christ's promise. God uses the Church. Where prayer, there life from God; Where no prayer, all is cold and dead, — no missions.
2. Prayer the flame of holy zeal. Where no prayer, only ashes. Prayer appropriates the promise and that is power indeed.
3. Prayer an outstretched empty hand. God ever ready to fill it. Especially in his own work of bringing in the harvest he has produced. He supplies the laborers.

III. The secret fruit of this prayer.

1. Where prayer there the concern of the heart.
2. Where prayer there gifts.
3. Where prayer there sons for the work.
4. Where prayer there success in mission fields and in the work of the church generally.
5. Where prayer there no worldly methods.

It is not that we are able to pray so beautifully or unctiously, but that God's grace is so great.

---

What do we as a congregation and each of us as a member amount to as regards missions? It ought to be a good deal. But is it? Now is the time to take a good inventory.

**Our Mission Diagnosis.**

- I. Are we compassionate or callous?  
Or we may ask:
- II. Have we good spiritual eyes or are we blind?  
Or we may ask: Are we afflicted with eye-trouble?

What the Savior saw, and so many never even dream of.

III. Are we dumb or are we spiritually vocal?

Or we may ask: Home we paralysis of the tongue?

Prayer for God to send laborers into his harvest.

With prayer will go all else.

**Soli Deo Gloria**

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# How Can You Find Peace With God?

The most important thing to grasp is that no one is made right with God by the good things he or she might do. Justification is by faith only, and that faith resting on what Jesus Christ did. It is by believing and trusting in His one-time *substitutionary* death for your sins.

Read your Bible steadily. God works His power in human beings through His Word. Where the Word is, God the Holy Spirit is always present.

Suggested Reading: [New Testament Conversions](#) by Pastor George Gerberding

## Benediction

**Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, To the only wise God our Savior, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen. (Jude 1:24-25)**

# Basic Biblical Christianity | Books to Download

- *The Small Catechism of Martin Luther*

The essentials of faith have remained the same for 2000 years. They are summarized in (1) The Ten Commandments, (2) The Lord's Prayer, and (3) The Apostles' Creed. Familiarity with each offers great protection against fads and falsehoods.

- *The Way Made Plain by Simon Peter Long*

A series of lectures by the beloved Twentieth Century American pastor on the basis of faith.

- *Bible Teachings by Joseph Stump*

A primer on the faith intended for new believers. Rich in Scripture. Christian basics explained from Scripture in clear and jargon-free language. Many excellent Bible studies can be made from this book.

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# Essential Theology | Books to Download

- *The Augsburg Confession: An Introduction To Its Study And An Exposition Of Its Contents by Matthias Loy*

“Sincere believers of the truth revealed in Christ for man’s salvation have no reason to be ashamed of Luther, whom God sent to bring again to His people the precious truth in Jesus and whose heroic contention for the faith once delivered to the saints led to the establishment of the Church of the Augsburg Confession, now generally called the Evangelical Lutheran Church.”

- *The Doctrine of Justification* by Matthias Loy

“Human reason and inclination are always in their natural state averse to the doctrine of Justification by faith. Hence it is no wonder that earth and hell combine in persistent efforts to banish it from the Church and from the world.”

- *The Confessional Principle* by Theodore Schmauk

Theodore Schmauk’s exploration and defense of the Christian faith consists of five parts: Historical Introduction; Part 1: Are Confessions Necessary?; Part 2: Confessions in the Church; Part 3: Lutheran Confessions; and Part 4: The Church in America.

- *Summary of the Christian Faith* by Henry Eyster Jacobs

*A Summary of the Christian Faith* has been appreciated by Christians since its original publication for its easy to use question and answer format, its clear organization, and its coverage of all the essentials of the Christian faith. Two essays on election and predestination are included, including Luther’s “Speculations Concerning Predestination”.

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## Devotional Classics | Books to Download

- *Sermons on the Gospels* by Matthias Loy. and *Sermons on the Epistles* by Matthias Loy\_

“When you feel your burden of sin weighing heavily upon you, only go to Him... Only those who will not acknowledge their sin and feel no need of a Savior — only these are rejected. And these are not rejected because the Lord has no pity on them and no desire to deliver them from their wretchedness, but only because they will not come to Him that they might have life. They reject Him, and therefore stand rejected. But those who come to Him, poor and needy and helpless, but trusting in His mercy, He will receive, to comfort and to save.”

- *The Great Gospel* by Simon Peter Long and *The Eternal Epistle* by Simon Peter Long

“I want you to understand that I have never preached opinions from this pulpit; it is not a question of opinion; I have absolutely no right to stand here and give you my opinion, for it is not worth any more than yours; we do not come to church to get opinions; I claim that I can back up every sermon I have preached, with the Word of God, and it is not my opinion nor yours, it is the eternal Word of God, and you will find it so on the Judgment day. I have nothing to take back, and I never will; God does not want me to.”

- *True Christianity* by John Arndt
- *The Sermons of Theophilus Stork: A Devotional Treasure*

“There are many of us who believe; we are convinced; but our souls do not take fire at contact with the truth. Happy he who not only believes, but believes with fire... This energy of belief, this ardor of conviction, made the commonplaces of the Gospel, the old, old story, seem in his [Stork’s] utterance something fresh and irresistibly attractive. Men listened to old truths from his lips as though they were a new revelation. They were new, for they came out of a heart that new coined them and stamped its own impress of vitality upon them as they passed through its experience...” – From the Introduction

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