

Concordia Theological Monthly



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Studies on Free Texts from the Old Testament

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

EZEKIEL 2:1-5

The Text and Its Central Thought.—“. . . the most influential man that we find in the whole course of Hebrew history.” So we characterize the courageous young prophet Ezekiel. It was this man whom God called to be His prophet during the dark days of captivity. For some twenty-two years he stood as the symbol of God’s judgment and sympathetic love to the captives by the Chebar.

Ch. 2 grows out of the overpowering vision Ezekiel had of God in the first chapter. A number of impressions arise which serve as directives for his total ministry: 1. He is called “son of man” for the first of some eighty times in the book. The term emphasizes his personal insignificance before God. Lying prostrate before Him, he senses the tremendous gulf between the Holy and the profane, the Infinite and the finite. 2. “I send thee . . .” What distinguished Ezekiel from the others in the captivity was not a higher level of spirituality or morality but the fact that he was called. The office of prophet was conferred by God. In the awe-inspiring presence of God he can do nothing but respond. Unlike Isaiah, he does not offer himself for service. Unlike Jeremiah, he does not shrink from the task. 3. “A rebellious house.” This term, used some fifteen times in the first half of the book, capsules the spiritual condition of the people. Apparently, the prophet is sent to the “nation” as a whole; yet his work centers in the exiles. He traces their rebellion back not only to the wilderness but to Egypt itself. The source of their hard hearts, he says, lies in an aversion to the truth of God. Their inability to hear and respond is not intellectual but moral and spiritual (3:5-7). 4. “Be not afraid” (v. 6). His first task was negative. He was to destroy the false hope of an early return; he was to interpret God’s plan in the exile. This was not yet the time for healing. He could not speak of the nearness of salvation and the seeking shepherd until the people drew near in repentance (3:8,9).—The central thought: God speaks his saving Word to people through His called messengers.

The Day and Its Theme.—The first cycle of the Trinity season closes with this Sunday. Though it is difficult to be too precise, the general theme seems to be, as Strodach suggests, the “Invitation to the Kingdom of Grace.” Historically the Propers for this day originated from the

proximity of this Sunday to the Day of St. Peter and St. Paul, June 29. Peter's cry, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord," relates well to the Ezekiel text. This is Peter's call into discipleship. The Introit reverses the cry: "Leave me not, neither forsake me." Relate the Collect—"Pour into our hearts such love toward Thee . . ."—to the "rebellious" note of the text.—Theme: "Because of His Love God Has Drawn Nigh to Us Through His Word." Service theme: "God Calls Us to Discipleship."

The Goal and Purpose of the Sermon.—God is as vitally concerned with the people of our age as He was with those of the sixth century B. C. Just as surely as God spoke to the exiles, He is speaking to our generation. The sermon is to make real this concern and Word of God to people now. The goal will be that the worshiper hear in the proclaimed Word the living Word of God for him! Remember the definition of a sermon as "a manifestation of the Incarnate Word, from the written Word, by the spoken word."

Sins to Be Diagnosed and Remedied.—Though the text is deficient in its statements of Gospel, it is strong in its descriptions of sin: "Rebellious . . . transgressed . . . impudent children . . . and stiff-hearted." It will probably be most helpful not to range about too widely in the description of sin, but to ask: What blocks are keeping my people from a more full realization that God is speaking directly to them through His Word? Probably your attack will be directed against a form of indifference, a mistaken conception of preaching or the Holy Scriptures, or a static view of faith.

Opportunities for Explicit Gospel.—The danger of using a text of this sort is that the identical sermon be preached in your Lutheran Church as in the local synagog. The text contains no explicit Gospel. The need is not simply that a final unit of Gospel passages be appended to the sermon but that the entire sermon be cast into the plan of the New Testament. We remain New Testament preachers even while using Old Testament texts. Probably the most natural introduction of Gospel would come during the description of this "full Word," which God is speaking to us. His whole plan in sending messengers to people concerns the Gospel.

Illustrations and New Testament Parallels.—Archbishop Söderblom once wrote: "The chief lesson of the Bible itself is that God is a living God and has not grown aged or less active now than in His younger days." Likewise the text provides the opportunity for interpreting the New Testament ministry as composed not of plaster saints broad-

casting messages down from the mountaintops but of men whom God chooses from the midst of people to minister to people.

Outline

God Speaks His Saving Word Through His Messengers

I. *The Word to People*

- A. God reaches out to where people are physically.
- B. God reaches out to where people are spiritually.

II. *The Word Through Messengers*

- A. God uses a man in the life situation of people (human, sinful, exile).
- B. God commissions him for his task (vision, call).
- C. God sends him His Holy Spirit.

III. *The Word from God*

- A. It is God who is speaking to people.
- B. The purpose of this Word:
 - 1. To destroy their rebellion.
 - 2. To heal and convey the Life of God.

St. Louis, Mo.

DAVID S. SCHULLER

SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

PSALM 1:1-6

The Text and Its Central Thought.—The First Psalm is an introduction to the entire Psalter. In the early church it was called “the preface of the Holy Ghost.” Many editions of the Bible begin numbering with Psalm 2. Its authorship is somewhat in doubt because it is not assigned to David in the title, whereas 38 of the first 41 psalms are. This psalm has a strong echo in the introduction and conclusion to the Sermon on the Mount. Lest this psalm be viewed simply as a moral discourse on nobility of character, the preacher must keep in mind that Christ is the real Interpreter of all the psalms and that this psalm can be fully appreciated only when it is viewed from the Cross.

Luther’s introductory remarks to the Book of Psalms are most appropriate for Psalm 1. “. . . Here we find not only what one or two saints have done, but what He has done who is the head of all saints, and what the saints still do—the attitude they take toward God, toward friends and enemies, the way they conduct themselves in all dangers and sufferings.”

The text is a simple and effective study of the basic differences between the attitudes and fates of believers and unbelievers. It presents no textual, grammatical, or lexicographical problems. The first verse speaks of heavenly joy which completely transcends all the ordinary experiences of pleasure. In the three verbs "stand, walk, sit" and in the three nouns "ungodly, sinners, scorners" there is a marked progression of thought, a sort of spiritual rake's progress (*Interpreter's Bible*). "To walk in the counsel of the ungodly" means to participate in the designs of those who never take God into consideration in their thinking. "To stand in the way of sinners" is to deliberately follow the moral path of those who make a habit and a profession of transgressing God's laws. "To sit in the seat of the scornful" is to join fully with the blasphemers, to become petrified in the lowest forms of godlessness. The warning is obvious. First sins, "lesser sins," lead to greater sins.

The heart of Psalm 1 is found in v. 2. Love for God's Word is not just one characteristic of the righteous man. Meditation on this Word is the thing that preserves him in his righteousness. The righteous man's delight in God's Law is more than an emotion. It leads him to work actively with the Word. In Prov. 31:13 "delight" is translated "worketh diligently." Cp. Rom. 7:22; Ps. 119:16, 46, 47. "The Law" is here to be understood in the broadest sense — of all of the Word which God has given to mankind. "Meditate" originally meant "to croon" and referred to the inarticulate sounds which a man makes when reading to himself. Constant meditation in God's Law has characterized all the saints. Cp. Joshua 1:8; Ps. 63:6; 119:15, 48, 78, 91.

V. 3 compares the righteous man to a well-watered tree. The abundant supply of water guaranteed health and fruitfulness. This is the most common Scriptural figure. Cp. Job 8:16, 17; 14:7-10; 15:32, 33; Is. 1:30; etc.

Throughout the Old and New Testaments "chaff" designates that which is absolutely worthless, which disappears without leaving a trace (Ps. 35:5; Job 21:8; Is. 5:24; Matt. 3:12; etc.).

The righteous prosper in material and spiritual affairs because the Lord "knows" their way. This is the *nosse cum affectu et effectu* of the New Testament. In Prov. 12:10 the American Translation renders it "cares."

The Day and Its Theme. — The sixth Sunday after Trinity begins the second cycle of Trinity Sundays. Particular emphasis for the day, as well as for this cycle, which runs through August 29, is "newness of life and righteousness as marks of those who are in the Kingdom

of Grace and 'alive unto God' " (Reed). This is summed up in the theme suggested for this day by the editors of this series, "Our Life in God Through Grace." The Epistle from Romans 6 presents St. Paul's tremendous argument about the newness of life which God works in us when we are baptized into Christ's death. The Gospel lesson calls for the followers of this new righteousness to forgive their brothers. The Introit emphasizes the fact that we are dependent upon God's grace for protection against temptation and for the food which we must have in order to grow in righteousness. The powerful Collect for the day includes all these thoughts within its framework. The *Parish Activities* theme for the month does not lend itself too well for treatment on this day. The text is so rich and full that time will scarcely permit the application of these principles of righteousness in the general area of world government and prayer.

The Goal and Purpose of the Sermon.—To make Christians more fully aware of their high calling in Christ Jesus and to direct them to the means of grace for the strength to meet this vocation more fully.

Sin and Its Fruits to Be Diagnosed and Remedied.—The text focuses our attention upon two basic sins of attitude. It exposes as fundamentally wrong the pale and watered-down picture of Christian righteousness which is so prevalent today. It also leads us to examine our general attitude toward the means of grace in respect to church and Communion attendance and particularly in respect to Bible study. David's description of "lively" righteousness should cause us to ask whether we are making a proper distinction between weak faith and outright indifference in our care of souls. Our text also compels us to give much closer scrutiny to the "lesser" sins, to those which fall under the heading of walking in the counsel of the ungodly. It warns us against the imitation of worldly practices in church work, against the pressure to "become realistic" in our church thinking. The text must be carefully handled to avoid teaching that this righteous life earns God's favor or that we are to be righteous because then we shall prosper. We are to be righteous for the sake of Him who has called us to be righteous and for that reason alone!

Opportunities for Explicit Gospel.—If one remembers that Christ explains the Psalms, then one would naturally treat this newness of life from the point of view of the Cross, whence it flows. St. Paul's emphasis in the Epistle on Christ as the power for the new life would also fix the listeners' attention upon the Savior. Surely our fundamental "delight" in the Word comes from its message of forgiveness.

Illustrations.—Realization of importance of Bible study: Moses, Deut. 30:8-10; Joshua 1:6-9; Christ, Matt. 7:24-27. Futility of chaff: Alexander the Great's influence in comparison with Moses'; Hannibal's with Isaiah's; Caesar's with Ezekiel's.

Outline

Fruitful Living

Introduction: The evil, frustration, boredom, worry, which mark the lives of non-Christians and also affect those parts of our lives which do not relate to Christ. The chaff.

- I. God wants us to live fruitful lives
 - A. Characteristics of this life:
 1. Avoidance of sin (v. 1);
 2. Absorption in spiritual matters (v. 2).
 - B. God demands this life from the members of His kingdom (v. 3).
 - C. God offers rich blessings to encourage us to live this life (vv. 1, 3, 6).
 - D. God pronounces terrible threats upon those who live otherwise (vv. 4-6).
- II. God enables us to lead fruitful lives
 - A. Planted in Christ and through Christ.
 - B. Nourished by the rivers of water (vv. 2, 3). Cared for tenderly while we grow.

Conclusion: The joy of fruitful living, here in time and hereafter.

Janesville, Wis.

HERBERT MAYER

SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

DEUTERONOMY 32:1-9

The Text and Its Central Thought.—At the conclusion of the discourses of Moses to the people of Israel prior to his farewell, after predicting the faithlessness of the people which would corrupt them in future years, he sings a song concerning the faithfulness of God and His mercy which will follow His people even when He judges and chastens. The text introduces this song, announces God Himself as its theme, rebukes the corruption of people turning from the covenant, and pleads to remember His purpose and steadfastness. V. 1: Moses sings of matters concerning heaven and earth; he speaks of the relation of God to His people throughout the ages.—V. 2: His song is not just one of judgment and doom, but it conveys fruitfulness and will

bring growth, as dew and rain produce crops.—Vv. 3, 4: The reason for this is that Moses is going to talk about and proclaim the greatness, steadfastness, and purpose of God, and the purpose of his song is to get the people to recognize God's greatness. He is the Rock, a picture of His unchangeable nature. Cf. Ps. 18:3, 32; 19:15; 31:3, 4; etc. "All His ways are judgment." He is concerned with what His people do, and concerned that they should find the power to do His will. He is a "God of truth," literally of faithfulness (*Wahrhaftigkeit* rather than *Wahrheit*), one who brings His promises to pass and does not lapse into falsehood, holding steadily to the course of His great plan.—Vv. 5, 6: "They" are the people before Moses, who are in the covenant relation to God as His people; yet they are analyzed according to their failure. Moses distinguishes between the true Israel, His children, and those who are a spot and stain upon them, a "perverse and crooked generation." "They—the spot on them, not the children—have corrupted themselves, etc." The false Israel is thus in glaring contrast to God, who is faithful and true. And that is the horror of their action; their wrong is not just evil in itself, but is an act of ingratitude, rebellion, against the father who had redeemed them, made them, established them—purchased them from bondage, a reference to the acts of rescue defined more fully vv. 10-15. The "making" is not initial creation but the shaping of Israel as a people, followed by repeated guidance to maintain their integrity as a people.—V. 7: These acts of God the Israelites are to keep on remembering; the overlapping of generations is to hand on the story. Always they are to hold before them the work of God to them.—Vv. 8, 9: In these brief lines the whole understanding of the purpose of Israel is capsuled. "How odd of God to choose the Jews" here gets its answer: God went to much trouble, carried out a grand design, to set Israel apart from other nations; for they were to be distinctly His. Hence He gave them territory adequate to their numbers. When the nations saw Israel, they were to see God's own property.—"The great God wants His people, despite their perversity, to remain His own."

The Day and Its Theme.—The Epistle for the day stresses newness of life and its fruits; the Gospel for the day, Christ's provision even for daily bread; other Propers extol the grace and power of God to supply our needs. The *Parish Activities* theme for the month lifts out the accent on God's control of the governments of the world. The central thought of the text needs no reshaping to accord with these accents, provided that the text can be made to apply to the New Testament age as it did to the Old.

The Goal and Purpose of the Sermon.—The hearer should face the fact that God is in control of history to the end that he, together with his fellow Christians throughout the world, should carry out God's purposes; hence that any sluggishness to fulfill God's plan is folly, any commitment to God's plan needs to draw on God's own supply and to be attached to God as the One who brings His promises to pass.

Sin to Be Diagnosed and Remedied.—Vv. 5 and 6 describe rebellion against the plans of God as a corruption and perverseness. Amid the people of God people so behaving are a spot, a foiling of the purpose that God's people represent to the world the embodiment of God's business and power. That sin is also described as a horrible and foolish ingratitude to God, who is faithful and resourceful. The preaching problem is to attack sin in the heart of the Christian and not to allow the hearer to imagine that others beside himself are guilty of this folly and he is immune.

Opportunities for Explicit Gospel.—"The name of the Lord," the revelation of His saving plan, is fruit-bringing Word. God is Rock, steady, bringing His promises to pass; His ways are judgment, "He wants men to be righteous even as He is righteous" (Luther), He is the God of truth, bringing His sure Word and promise to come true; He has "bought" His people and constructs them into a body of humanity distinct from the rest; this people is His people, and He moves history to give it room and scope for its work. These facets of the text obviously have their counterpart in the fulfillment of the New Testament. The text is not to be preached merely as a type of the New Testament, but as an insight into God, who, as He kept His promises and made Israel into His people in Moses' time, is the same God, still redeeming and constructing His people into a body, leading and guiding them, responding with love even though they react to Him with ingratitude and folly of rebellion.

Illustrations and New Testament Parallels.—1 Peter 2:6-10 comes to mind irresistibly; much of the remainder of 1 Peter illuminates God's management of world and history for the sake of the witness of His people and the realization of their purpose of witness. The "rod of iron" passages of Rev. 2:27; 12:5; 19:15 remind of God's power at work in helping the church to function. Cf. Eph. 1:22, 23; Psalm 2. In God's plan the chastisements which His people incur are an even greater stimulus to the Gospel than their physical prosperity.

Outline

The Great God Wants His People, Despite Their Perversity,
to Remain His Own (People, Your God Is Mighty!)

Introduction: The age of science and materialism thrusts God into the unseen and unfelt. He can't be put under the electron microscope — hence He doesn't mean much. This is the source of mischief to the people who are supposed to be His, carrying out His purposes. Hence remember who He is. The purpose of Moses' song.

- I. God has made His people to be His own (mighty to buy you)
 - A. We are God's own people, set apart for Him through His act of making us, but more: buying us. Like salvaging Israel; now in Christ.
 - B. We are His own for His purposes: to be a witness to the fact that we belong to Him; to proclaim His mercy and truth.
- II. God's people tend to perversity (mighty to judge you)
 - A. Israel forgot; became idolatrous; grumbled; defiled its purpose.
 - B. We today stain our witness with quest for the material; obliviousness to God's will; retreat from the opportunities to bear witness. This is horror, folly, a demand that God judge and condemn.
- III. But God wants His people to remain His own (mighty to sustain you)
 - A. The chastisements of God are reminders that He has purposes for us and help.
 - B. God is rocklike and faithful in bringing His help to bear upon us. The interceding and governing Christ; the management of history.
 - C. Hence keep on remembering who God is and what He does. Fathers to children, Christian to Christian, help one another remember: He redeemed us; He is faithful to keep on helping us; hence let us do our task of witness in life and Word.

St. Louis, Mo.

RICHARD R. CAEMMERER

EIGHTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

PSALM 119:105-112

The Text and Its Central Thought. — It has always seemed to me that the wide range of thoughts expressed in this psalm might indicate many authors, as if twenty-two children of God wanted to tell

one another what the Word of God meant to them, and chose a number to determine the order in which they would speak, and each one began each line of his eight-line description with his number (Hebrew letter).

The author of the fourteenth section describes his relationship with God's Word thus: "Your Word is a lamp for my feet, and a light for my footpath. I have sworn (that it would be so), that I would confirm (my oath) by doing it—by keeping Your righteous judgments." The author speaks of the covenant he made with God. Then the author describes briefly the influence the Word has had on Him. "I have been afflicted very severely (and I prayed), 'Lord, restore my life, according to Your Word. Please receive graciously the freewill offering of my mouth; and teach me Your decisions.'" Having committed myself into Your hands when I made my covenant with You, when You sent me trouble, I prayed: "Lord, deliver me from this trouble, as You promised to do for Your people in Your Word." Cf. Ex. 23:20-33; Lev. 26:3-13; Deut. 28:1-13. But realizing that the answer depended entirely on Your grace, I continued: "Please receive my prayer with favor, and show me Your decision." So the first use I made of the Word of God was that I let the gracious promises of that Word give me confidence to pray in time of trouble.

"My life is in my hand continually, but I have not forsaken Your instructions. Wicked ones have placed traps for me, but I did not wander away from Your statutes." Having dedicated my life to You, I still found that the decision of whether I would do right or wrong was in my hand. Cf. Deut. 30:15:20. But since I had agreed to guide my life by Your Word, I did not forget Your instructions for the guidance of my life. Therefore when the wicked tempted me, I did not wander away from Your will. So the second use I made of Your Word was to guide me through temptations.

And having received so much good from the Word, the author re-avows his allegiance to that Word: "Your counsels are my inheritance forever. Because they are the delight of my heart, I have bowed my heart to do Your statutes forever, unto the end." The revelation of Your counsel is my inheritance—I live on it, I live in it, I live by it. It is my treasure. And since Your love for me, revealed to me in Your Word (cf. Ex. 34:6, 7a) is so wonderful, I reconfirm my vow by saying, "I have inclined my heart to do Your will forever, until I die."

So the message of the author is: "I agreed to make Your Word the illumination of my life. It served me by assuring me of help in

troubles and keeping me from falling in temptations. So once more I agree to make Your Word the illumination of my life. I daily affirm my baptismal vow."

The Day and Its Theme.—Introit: "We have thought of Thy loving-kindness, and have praised Thee." Collect: Give us the mind and will to think and do what is right. Epistle: God's Spirit guides the sons of God, and when they say, "Dear Father," in prayer or, "Yes, Father," in answer to His command, the Spirit bears witness to them: "Your filial trust and obedience is your proof that you are sons and heirs of God." Gospel: Warns that if your "Dear Father" or "Yes, Father," is just a matter of words and not of the heart, you are not sons or heirs of God. So the teaching of the Propers for the day is: God's loving-kindness moves us to want to do what is right; and when we do it, we have the assurance we are the sons of God.

The text gives a distinctively Lutheran emphasis to this important lesson as it tells us that all of this depends on the Word of God. It shows us God's mercy. It tells us what is right. By it the Spirit guides and bears witness to us that we are sons of God.

Goal.—That the hearer may make God's Word his inheritance.

Sin.—Any disregard for God's Word.

Opportunities for Explicit Gospel.—The words *דְבַר* and *עֵצָה* translated "word" and "counsel" are words used to express the idea of the total will of God; the will for man's salvation—Gospel; and the will for man's holiness—Law. That *דְבַר* has the idea of Gospel promise here is shown in v. 107: "Restore me to life according to Your Word, that is, Your promise of grace. That *עֵצָה* has the idea of Gospel promise is clear from the context. Your revelation is my portion. Since Your message of salvation gladdens my heart, I bow to Your holy will.

New Testament Parallels.—Matt. 7:24-27: The house on the rock. James 1:17-27: Use of the Word of Truth. 1 Peter 2:1-12: Use of the milk of the Word. 2 Cor. 2:14-17: God's Word, either a "savor of life" or a "savor of death."

Outline

God's Word and I

- I. At the beginning of my Christian life, I agree to make it my all
 - A. By believing its promises.
 - B. By keeping its laws.
- II. When I do so in my Christian life, I find it helpful
 - A. It assures me of help in every need.
 - B. It keeps me from falling in time of temptation.

III. So daily I renew my vow to make God's Word my all
Introduce by a summation of the Propers.

Conclude with a summary of the New Testament passages listed above.

St. Louis, Mo.

HOLLAND H. JONES

ST. MARY MAGDALENE'S DAY

July 22

PROVERBS 31:10-31

The Text.—This passage has been called "God's guide to marital happiness, the golden scroll of woman's highest achievements in the establishment of wedded contentment" (Maier, *Lutheran Hour*, p. 254.) It has also been called "the ABC of a virtuous woman," because it is an acrostic, each verse beginning with a letter of the Hebrew alphabet in order. Because of the reference to children (v.28), this passage, or a part of it, is often used as a text for Mother's Day sermons (e. g., *Concordia Pulpit*: 1932, p. 507; 1937, p. 448; 1948, p. 395).

V. 10. "A virtuous woman"; RSV, "a good wife." See also Ruth 3:11; Prov. 12:4. "Her price, etc.," is rendered more idiomatically in the RSV: "She is far more precious than jewels." V. 10 is the last part of the Gradual for the day. V. 11. "Safely" is not separately expressed in the Hebrew. "No need of spoil": better "no lack of gain" (RSV). V. 13. "She seeketh (i. e., applies herself to) wool, etc." "Willingly with her hands": literally, "with the delight of her hands"; RSV, "with willing hands." V. 14. "The merchants' ships" (KJV) has a misplaced apostrophe; it should be singular "merchant's." V. 15. "Meat": better, "food." "A portion": an appointed portion; here apparently of labor, i. e., a task; RSV plural "tasks" is inaccurate. V. 19. A curious inversion of words in KJV: "spindle" should read "distaff," and "distaff" should read "spindle." V. 20. "She stretcheth out (i. e., opens) her hand": gives bountifully. See the same thought in a different Hebrew word in Ps. 104:28; 145:16: "Thou openest Thine hand. . . ." V. 22. "Of tapestry" is not in the Hebrew; see also Prov. 7:16. "Silk": probably better, "linen." V. 24. "Fine linen": a wide garment made of linen, worn under the other clothes; see Judg. 14:12, 13; Is. 3:23. V. 25. "Honor": RSV, "dignity."

V. 25. "She shall rejoice in time to come": RSV, "she laughs at the time to come." Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown: "In confidence of certain maintenance." Kretzmann: "not in foolish self-confidence, but in the consciousness of having made the best possible preparations for the maintenance of herself and her household." She does not borrow

trouble by worrying about the future, for she is not afraid of it. She laughs happily, rejoicing over the good things which she anticipates and in the security which she has helped to provide, and of which she is sure in a higher sense under the providence of God. She is an optimist. And she laughs in contempt, as it were, at the evils and ills anticipated by pessimists. She knows that "of all our troubles, great or small, the greatest are those that don't happen at all!" She is not sinfully anxious about tomorrow. She fears the Lord (v.30) and cheerfully serves God, not mammon. In this she is an example of a perfect application of Matt. 6:24-34.

V.26. "In [better "on"] her tongue is the law [or: teaching, instruction, doctrine] of kindness." Hers is a soft answer, which turneth away wrath (Prov. 15:1). V.29. KJV: "daughters" is more accurate than RSV: "women." "Virtuously," RSV: "excellently," from a Hebrew word which has a rather broad background of meaning. It is translated "virtuous" or "good" in v.10. But it also refers to strength, power, might, ability; hence wealth, riches. See Gen. 34:29; Job 20:15; with נִשְׂפָּר "to acquire wealth" (Deut. 8:17, 18; Ruth 4:11). "Excel," RSV: "surpass." Note: The RSV effectively puts v.29 into quotation marks as being the husband's expression of praise. V.30. "Favor," RSV: "charm." It includes grace or gracefulness and beauty. There is something here of the popular saying: "Beauty is only skin deep." "Deceitful": literally, a lie, whatever deceives, fraud, vanity. "Vain," from a Hebrew word which refers to the breath and breathing; vapor, something vain and empty. See Eccl. 1:2. V.31. "Own" is not separately expressed in the Hebrew.

The Day and Its Theme.— July 22 is the traditional date for commemorating Mary Magdalene. The purpose of observing the day is to set her memory before us, in order that we may follow her faith and good works (AC XXI). But since neither the Epistle nor the Gospel (Luke 7:36-50), nor any of the other Propers for the day mention her by name, she enters into the picture only indirectly or by implication.

Orientation.— Mary Magdalene's name seems to indicate that her home was at Magdala in Galilee, on the northwest shore of the Sea of Tiberias. Her full name occurs in the following passages: Luke 8:2,3. Jesus had cast seven "devils" (literally, demons, evil spirits) out of her, and she was one of the women who were with Him on a tour through Galilee and who "ministered unto Him of their substance," probably in the summer and autumn of 28 A. D. John 19:25:

She was one of the women who stood by the cross of Jesus. Matt. 27:56 (Mark 15:40): She was still on the scene after Jesus died. Matt. 27:61 (Mark 15:47): She was present at the burial of Jesus. Matt. 28:1: Fahling, *Life of Christ*, p. 686, takes this to mean that late on Saturday afternoon or in the early evening Mary Magdalene and Mary, the mother of James and Joses, ventured out for a brief glimpse of the guarded grave, and (Mark 16:1) that the two Marys were then joined by Salome, and that the three of them then purchased and prepared spices and ointment (the Sabbath ending at sundown) for the service of love which they intended to perform the following day. John 20:1, 2: Mary Magdalene was among the first at the grave of Christ on Easter morning. John mentions only her. "It seems that Mary Magdalene played the same part among the women that Peter assumed among the men" (Fahling, p. 688). She saw the stone rolled away from the door of the grave. "It was probably at this point, without going any farther and fearing the worst, that Mary Magdalene rushed back to inform Peter and John of what she had seen" (Fahling, p. 689). The other women stayed at the grave to investigate the matter more closely and later brought their own report to the disciples. The combined or collective report of all the women is referred to in Luke 24:10. The other women first saw the angels at the grave and heard their message, but Mary Magdalene was the first one to see our risen Lord, a special blessing, which Mark 16:9 pointedly connects with her earlier blessings of release from seven "devils." "When Peter and John had run to the tomb in such great haste, Mary had followed more slowly, arriving in the garden only after Peter and John had again left" (Kretzmann, *Pop. Com.*, NT, I, 522). Meanwhile the other women had also left the grave. Mary Magdalene was there alone, weeping. Then it was that she saw two angels in the grave. They spoke with her, and she gave vent to her grief. Then she turned and saw Jesus. First she failed to recognize Him. But when Jesus called her by name, doubt and sorrow fled, and her faith found spontaneous expression in the single word "Rabboni!" Jesus then sent her back to the disciples to speak to them of His ascension. (John 20:11-18.) For this reason she is called "apostola Apostolorum."

Tradition identifies her with the woman in Luke 7:36-50, the Holy Gospel for the day; but this identification has been questioned from earliest times. However, Augustine and Gregory the Great held to it and even regarded Mary Magdalene as being Mary of Bethany, the sister of Martha and Lazarus; and Chrysostom took Matt. 26:6-13 as referring to her. We have no authoritative information on the last

years of her life, concerning which traditions vary so widely that there is little point in repeating them.

Sermon Pointers. — St. Mary Magdalene's Day lends itself admirably well to emphasis on Christian womanhood. The theme and topic should be broader than in a Mother's Day sermon, since we do not know whether Mary Magdalene had children or even whether she was married. The Epistle for the day indeed speaks of a wife (Prov. 31: 11, 12, 23, 28) and mother (v. 28), but the key phrase really lies in v. 30: "A woman that feareth the Lord." The overtones, of course, sound an application to men as well as women. Luther: "Ihre Historia ist ein sehr feines Bild der christlichen Kirche. . . . Ist ein schön Bild aller, die Christum wahrhaft lieben." (Sermon on Luke 7:36ff., Erl. ed., Vol. 6.)

Sins to Be Dealt with in the Sermon. — "Here consider your station according to the Ten Commandments," whether you are a wife, mother, mistress, etc. Cf. also the Table of Duties (to wives, to parents, to employers, to widows, etc.).

Outline

Christian Womanhood

Introduction: Every saint has a "past," and every sinner has a future! Tell the story of Mary Magdalene (see Orientation above). Point out what she was saved from: seven "devils," sin, death, and hell; and what she was saved for: to live under Christ in His kingdom and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness. She is an example of Christian womanhood.

I. Its privileges

To be close to the Lord, as Mary Magdalene was. To remember, as she no doubt did, that you were not always a child of God, but that He made you His own, to serve Him. (V. 30.)

II. Its obligations

To reflect the fear of the Lord in every life situation, e. g., as wife, or mother, and in other household relationships (v. 15), as the case may be. To exercise love and devotion. To practice industry and Christian stewardship. (Vv. 11-20, 22, 24, 26, 27.)

III. Its joys

Peace with God (cf. Rom. 5:1, 2). Happy home life. Pleasant relations with others in general. Release from worry in a feeling of well-being and security in the hands of God. (Vv. 11, 21, 25, 28, 29.)

IV. Its rewards

The blessings of God. Honor and respect among those whose opinion is worth considering. Love, good will, and praise from others in the family. The assurance of salvation. (Vv. 10, 11, 23, 25, 28-31.)

A COLLECT FOR THE EPISTLE

O almighty God, who hast ever accepted the devoted service of Thy faithful followers and didst bestow upon them Thy manifold blessings, grant that the faith and godliness of Thy saints may encourage us to believe in Thee and love Thee and live for Thee. Unite our hearts to fear Thy name that we may rejoice in Thy salvation, through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Pitcairn, Pa.

LUTHER POELOT

NINTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

PROVERBS 16:1-9

The Text and Its Central Thought. — Proverbs are intended to convey a basic truth which is borne out in common experience, though this or that unusual circumstance may develop differently. Like axioms, maxims, and postulates in their respective fields, proverbs are universally accepted. Biblical proverbs, indeed, differ from all other, for they have the authority of the Holy Spirit behind them; yet in their form and structure they are like other proverbs.

In Solomon's book a series of proverbs may, or may not, have a common core significance. Often items apparently unrelated follow one after the other. For this reason a single text, though it speak the truth, may not be exhaustive, may not reckon with all possibilities.

Our text refers directly to the Lord in every verse save one. Our complete dependence on Him is emphasized, and our plans are contrasted with His ways. Certain dangers are laid bare to help us overcome the wiles of the devil. We are not to think that all lies in our own power nor that moral and spiritual considerations do not merit thought. They are to emphasize mercy, truth, and righteousness. The alternate translation of v. 1: "The preparation of the heart is in man, but the answer of the tongue is of the Lord," is more readily meaningful. In separating the warnings from the instructions of encouragement in the text we arrive at some clear and specific directions, as, for instance: Whenever we plan, we must not only seek counsel of the Lord, but realize that the outcome is entirely in His

hands (vv. 1,9). Better than self-conceit and arrogance because of clever plans and dishonesty is the bread eaten in humility and uprightness (vv. 2,8). He who sets before Himself the goal of pleasing the Lord may look for blessings to his soul and mind (vv. 3,7). A particular difficulty seems to lie in v. 4 until we recall that Jesus did come because God loved the world and we realize the truth that also those who in wickedness flaunt God's mercy cannot prevent His will nor thwart His purpose. In fact, vv. 5,6 show two alternative ways in which the truth of verse four is demonstrated.

There is a cohesive principle in these nine verses which we may state in this central thought: In all your plans, attitudes, and actions remember the Lord; His power and His plan is supreme.

The Day and Its Theme.—Both the standard Epistle, with its exhortation not to lust after evil things and its reassurance of God's sustaining power in temptation, and the standard Gospel of wise and daring planning for eternity by subordinating all other things to that end buttress our text's concern with the will of God. The service theme "Use earthly possessions for God's plan" therefore finds abundant and unified expression. Hymns emphasizing this theme are plentiful and should be thoughtfully chosen.

Goal and Purpose of the Sermon.—The subordination of self to God and with it the sacrificing or crucifying of the dominance of all material ambitions and creature comforts as the purpose of life is still the crucial problem also in our time. Some vision of the majesty of God can be gained without the cross of Christ; but it is distorted and, if seriously considered, must become the basis for terror. To show the great glory of God in Christ and call on men to line up their plans with this fact must be the goal of the sermon. In so doing specific dangers will be noted.

Sins to Be Diagnosed and Remedied.—Proverbs in Scripture almost invariably prick consciences. So practical, direct, and straightforward are their thrusts that diagnoses abound. We trust too much in cleverness and astuteness. Our self-conceit often blinds us to our small motives. Why is our trust in the great God not more real? Our hopes often rest too heavily in comfort, peace, and security for this life.

Opportunities for Explicit Gospel.—We find here no prophecy of Christ directly nor any complete presentation of the way of salvation. The manner of dealing with iniquity in v. 6, however, and the expressions "fear of the Lord" and "righteousness" should compel us to offer a fresh approach to the exposition of forgiveness in Christ.

Illustrations and New Testament Parallels.—In politics it is important that the plans and promises of a given candidate correspond to those of his party. If they do not, he cannot reconcile his candidacy with his party label. A Christian's goals and plans must correspond to those of His God for time and eternity. Compare the conclusion of the Lord's Prayer. Paul's sermon on Mars Hill is to the point (Acts 17:24ff.). It may be useful to refer to the call of Abraham as an example, since it is the Sunday school lesson for the day.

Outline

Facing Life with Confident Eyes

Introduction: One thing we miss in current literature and films is the hard-working, devout poor who are also likable. Perhaps it is because poverty is considered reprehensible under almost all circumstances in our day; perhaps it is because trust in God in adversity in an unpretentious way is never common. In any event verse eight of our text brings a needed emphasis.

- I. We must be aware of the majesty and power of God (vv. 2, 4, 5)
 - A. Too easily God becomes a useful adjunct to human convenience.
 - B. We must find ourselves in perspective to Him according to His measurement.
 - C. The kingdom, the power, and the glory are His.
- II. There is definite and glorious purpose in all God's ways (vv. 1, 9)
 - A. God's will is done. Compare Luther's explanation of the Third Petition.
 - B. His will is not arbitrary or whimsical, much less is it cruel.
 - C. God deals in righteousness and mercy.
- III. Our life achieves direction, serenity, and promise when we correspond to His purpose (vv. 3, 6, 7)
 - A. We must hold fast to what He has done for us in Jesus Christ.
 - B. We find the trust that the pattern of our life is under His eye.
 - C. Under all circumstances His promises will not fail.

Portland, Oregon

OMAR STUENKEL