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Outlines on a Series of Free Texts

(The outlines are furnished by Prof. Lester E. Zeitler, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis. The suggested general theme is "My Redeemer Lives.")

Introduction to Series

It is interesting to observe that at least part of the early church read the Gospel of John continually on weekdays from Easter to Pentecost. With this thought in mind, it is most fitting that the Sunday sermons for that period be based on texts from the same Gospel.

The words of Jesus, particularly the I-ams, should take on new life and meaning after another joyful observance of Easter Day. The I-ams are vivid word pictures of who the Risen Redeemer is and how He deals with us. They remind us of Moses' encounter with God (Ex. 3). When Moses asked God to give His name, God said, "I AM THAT I AM" (Ex. 3:14). Although these words defy human analysis and comprehension, they nevertheless impress on us the fact of God's saving and judging presence in the world.

While it is impossible to make an exact connection between the name of God in Ex. 3 and the I-ams of our Lord in the Gospel of John, a connection can surely be inferred from the fact that Christ is everything that God is. Jesus claims the great name of God for Himself. He does so in a manner which is within human experience. He is not just "I am," but He condescends to call Himself by that which the human mind can at least partly understand. Only three times does He use the bare "I am" (John 8:24, 28, 58). Jesus wants sinners to know Him and come to Him. So, He says, "I *am* the Bread of Life, I *am* the Good Shepherd, I *am* the Light of the World, I *am* the True Vine, I *am* the Way, the Truth, and the Life." What we need to emphasize during these

post-Easter days is that He is in us and among us with His forgiving and loving presence, a presence with a purpose. He really lives to bless us with His love.

The apostle John records eight I-ams of Jesus, seven in the Gospel and one in Revelation. The five which fit best with the theme of the propers for the five Sundays after Easter are chosen for these sermon texts.

In order that the joy of the Easter message might continue to inspire the worshiper, the themes for the sermons are taken from the well-loved hymn "I Know that My Redeemer Lives" (*The Lutheran Hymnal*, 200). We suggest that the following stanzas be sung in each service during which these sermon outlines are used: the first two, the stanza from which the sermon theme is taken, and the eighth.

The general title of the sermon series is "My Redeemer Lives." Themes of individual sermons are:

- I. "He Lives My Hungry Soul to Feed"
- II. "He Lives to Guide Me with His Eye"
- III. "He Lives to Silence All My Fears"
- IV. "He Lives to Grant Me Rich Supply"
- V. "He Lives My Mansion to Prepare"

QUASIMODOGENITI, THE FIRST SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

Ep. I ~~John~~ John 5:4-12
Ac. John 20:19-31 JOHN 6:35-40

The Day and the Text: No radical change will be apparent in most people after the observance of Easter Day. They still "will be nailed to the things of this life" (Chrysostom), and the new Easter hat may have made a more concrete impression than the Good News from the pulpit. Therefore again

and again the eyes and ears of modern man must be fixed on the risen Redeemer with all of His blessings for time and eternity.

The propers have deep meaning for us, especially for those who have recently received their first Communion; for we are still newborn babes who need to desire the sincere milk of the Word (Introit); we are still in need of grace (Collect); the victory that overcomes the world is still our faith (Epistle). The words of Jesus in the Gospel strike a most significant note for our sermon text: "Blessed are they that have not seen and yet have believed." (John 20:29) *31*

The goal of the sermon is that the hearers by faith see the living Christ as the One who feeds them daily and richly with material and spiritual blessings.

The Introduction and the Theme: Easter Sundays come and go as do new-model cars. But the voice of Him who rose again is heard the same from year to year and from age to age. Today, "I am the Bread of Life." And the joyful response of those who have once again tasted that the Lord is gracious (1 Peter 2:3) is and always will be: "My Redeemer Lives."

"He Lives My Hungry Soul to Feed"

I. Are You Hungry?

A. Are you hungry in body? Probably not. God is feeding you abundantly just as He fed the wilderness wanderers with manna and the 5,000 with loaves and fishes (John 6: 1-14). New clothes, good Sunday dinner, food stockpiling, spring bubbling out all over—all are evidences of His loving care. Before the 5,000 were fed, it is said that "He knew what He would do" (6:6). How true the words of the psalmist: "Thou givest them their meat in due season." (Ps. 145:15)

B. Are you hungry in spirit? Most certainly yes. Spiritual hunger, like a cancer, is often unfelt and unrecognized. The crowd was marked by indifference and simple hunger. They saw Jesus but did not believe

(John 6:36). Do you see in Jesus only what you want to see, or do you truly believe He is your Savior from sin and your risen Redeemer? Are we seekers of earthly bread rather than God (6:26)? Illustration: In America only 2,600,000 families do not have refrigerators; only 7,000,000 do not have TV sets; only 12,255,000 do not own a car; but 17,435,000 families are without some religious affiliation. What about the hunger to be more like Christ, but always failing and never achieving (Rom. 7:19-24)? Are you hungry?

II. Let Christ Feed You

A. He is the Bread of Life (John 6:35). He says, "I am," that name by which God called Himself in Ex. 3. Recall God's saving presence in the exodus and wilderness wanderings. Jesus is the Bread of Life because He came from the Father, who is Life. He is sent to fulfill the Father's will (6:38-40). He is the Bread of Life because He is the God-man, whom eyes can see and ears can hear, who can be received by man. What comfort that the life, death, and resurrection of Christ are rooted in the strong, eternal plan of God for our salvation! Christ, the one, the only Bread of Life, bestowing God's own love, forgiveness, peace.

B. He gives life by giving Himself (6:51). Life is essentially a mystery. But according to Christ Himself real life consists in being raised up to be with God (6:39, 40). Christ came down from heaven to raise us up. The joy of being back home in the Father's house (Luke 15). Think of what this means. Recall the joy of the Cuban "Bay of Pigs" prisoners as they came back home on Christmas Day. So that we can come back home, God shares His own Son with sinners. "God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son" (John 3:16). Jesus as a grain of wheat is put into the ground to die that sinners may be fed with the Bread of Life. (12:24) - *5*

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C. *He offers Himself to all.* What comfort and hope in this text for all! "Him that cometh unto Me I will in no wise cast out" (6:37). Note the strength of this in the original text (οὐ μή). "I should lose nothing," as already typified in the gathering up of the fragments (6:39, 12). "Everyone that seeth the Son and believeth" (6:40). Here is life for all: the publican, adulterous woman, thief on the cross, disciple, religious man, child. No one who comes will ever be cast out. "Come unto Me." (Matt. 11:28)

D. *Will you receive Him?* The Introit speaks of newborn babes who desire the sincere milk of the word; that's why the Epistle speaks of faith as the victory that overcomes the world; that's why the Gospel speaks of the blessedness of believing when not seeing, yet rejoicing with joy unspeakable (1 Peter 1:8). God feeds us the same way, with Himself, and always through the Word, Baptism, Communion. Let Jesus feed you. (Col. 3:16)

Lord Jesus Christ, Thou living Bread,
May I for mine possess Thee.
I would with heavenly food be fed;
Descend, refresh, and bless me.
Now make me meet for Thee, O Lord;
Now, humbly by my heart implored,
Grant me Thy grace and mercy.

(*Lutheran Hymnal*, 312:1)

III. *You Will Be Satisfied*

A. *Everlasting life is yours* (John 6:35, 40). When bread is assimilated, it becomes part of the body. So Christ lives in us now (Gal. 2:20). On the cross, "It is finished" (John 19:30). At the end of time the promise complete in every way, "They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more." (Rev. 7:16, 17)

B. *Resurrection life is yours* (John 6:39, 40). He came down to raise us up. "Because I live, ye shall live also" (14:19). Death is no more (1 Cor. 15:55-57). The church longs for the day when its confession

of faith will be translated into sight: "I believe in the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting." We already live in promise of His resurrection and seek the things above. (Col. 3:1)

Conclusion: After Jesus finished His sermon in which He said, "I am the Bread of Life," many said, "This is a hard saying" (John 6:60). "Many walked no more with Him" — one of the saddest lines in the New Testament (6:66). But our earnest prayer is: "Lord, give us evermore this Bread" (6:34). Amen.

MISERICORDIAS DOMINI, THE SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

JOHN 10:11-18

The Day and the Text: The propers for the day bring into sharper focus the tender mercies of the Lord. These mercies are evident in God's great acts of creation, redemption, and sanctification. The church's response to this undeserved favor and pity of God is one of committed joy. The text for the sermon is essentially the Gospel for the day, in which Jesus calls Himself the Good Shepherd. Notice that the sheep are His (creation), that He has redeemed them by giving His life (redemption), and that He sustains them (sanctification). The Shepherd's work is marked by tender love and guidance and final deliverance from everlasting death (Collect). Even in suffering and temptation He has gone before; His presence is near; and we can return again and again to the Shepherd and Bishop of souls without fear and with joy (Epistle).

The goal of the sermon is that the hearer be assured more fully of the Good Shepherd's loving care and because of that follow Him more closely and help to bring others into His fold.

The Introduction and the Theme: Our text is a simple and well-loved picture of the beauty, love, and mercy of God. While

Christ has been referred to as Prophet, Priest, or King, the ascription in our text has always been the favorite of His people: "I am the Good Shepherd." For those outside the fold He is the Door. For us who are inside He is the Good Shepherd, living, caring, guiding. The church's song has put it in these words:

"He Lives to Guide Me with His Eye"

I. *Eyes That Really See*

A. *Jesus compares Himself to a shepherd.* Wants to emphasize the personal character of His love and His will to lay down His life (John 10:18). Over against the crowd dominated by Pharisees, binding the souls of men, stands Jesus, the Good Shepherd. People were acquainted with the shepherd's task. A day in the life of a shepherd: calling, leading, feeding, guiding, protecting, gathering, caring. So He lives to guide me with His eye. Old Testament has two significant references, Ps. 23 and Ezek. 34, pointing to the Good Shepherd.

B. *He sees us in our great need.* This is the Sunday of "tender mercies." The word "mercy" suggests our pitiful condition and the Lord's personal outreach. Lost and strayed (Epistle, 1 Peter 2:25). "The wolf coming" (John 10:12). Present tense indicates the ever-present reality of evil. Devil, world, flesh (1 Peter 5:8). Jesus sees all our needs, as expressed in Ps. 23: wants of body, depression of spirit, inability to walk paths of righteousness, death, all evil, and all enemies. Sees us as we are: "poor, miserable sinners." But:

The King of Love my Shepherd is,
Whose goodness faileth never;
I nothing lack if I am His
And He is mine forever.

(*Lutheran Hymnal*, 431:1)

C. *He sees us with perfect vision.* As only God can see. "Know," "love," indicate a vital relationship (John 10:15, 17). "I am the Good Shepherd" (10:11), that name of

God, that judging and saving presence. Power to give up life and to take it again (10:17, 18). His presence is God's presence, for He is God. Sees us better than we see ourselves, even as an X ray can detect a broken bone that we cannot see. Always sees us with God's own tender mercies (Is. 54:7-10), for a shepherd that does not love his sheep is a witness against himself. Compare Ezek. 34. He lives to guide me with eyes that really see.

II. *Eyes That Really Care*

A. *He is the Good Shepherd* (John 10:11, 14). Twice He says it. Really "the Shepherd, the Beautiful One" — beautiful in the sense of moral uprightness. "No sin, neither guile found in His mouth" (Epistle). Beautiful also in the sense of One who welcomes the return of the sheep and whose beauty encourages the sheep to return (Epistle). In contrast to the hireling who labors for the sake of pay instead of for the sheep. None other like Him, "the" Shepherd. His flock shall never be ashamed. (Joel 2:27)

B. *He gives His life.* In contrast to the hireling who flees. The Good Shepherd — "for better or for worse." What an example for marriages or for any other kind of service when it's so easy at times to run away! Even disciples fled on that fearful day, but Jesus was steadfast in the Garden, before Pilate, on the cross. "I lay it down of myself" (John 10:17). "He Himself bare our sins in His own body on the tree." (Epistle)

C. *He knows His sheep* (John 10:14, 15). Throughout the day sheep have no single experience that the shepherd does not supervise. Veil of eternity hangs over our relationship with Him, "as the Father knows me, and I know the Father" (10:15). Knows His sheep also in heartache and suffering and is our example (Epistle). As He committed Himself to God, so do we. "Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit" (Luke 23:46.

Epistle). In this way we know Him, the Good Shepherd who never leaves nor forsakes. (John 10:14)

D. *He must bring others in* (John 10:16). The divine "must" that also led Him to the cross. Limitless mercy and a limitless flock. The great missionary task of the church is ours. Preach. Teach. Witness. A "must" of that Love who first loved us. A fulfilled promise in us, for we are His voice today (10:16). One fold, the "communion of saints" today, and the "great multitude" of eternity (Rev. 7:9). One fold, one Gospel because there is only one Good Shepherd, "the Shepherd, the Beautiful One."

Conclusion:

The bounties of Thy love
Shall crown my following days,
Nor from Thy house will I remove
Nor cease to speak Thy praise. Amen.

(*Lutheran Hymnal*, 426:6)

JUBILATE, THE THIRD SUNDAY
AFTER EASTER

JOHN 9:1-12

The Day and the Text: The Sunday takes its name from the first words of the Introit: "Make a joyful noise unto the Lord." So the call of the day is to pure joy, a joy that is confident of seeing the living Christ, a joy that cannot ever be taken away (Gospel). The Epistle and the Collect remind the worshiper that there is still a life to be lived and work to be done for Christ, so that others may by "your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation." (1 Peter 2:12)

The sermon text, based on Jesus' saying, "I am the Light of the world," has definite relationship with the propers and theme of the day. The dread and fear of living in the darkness is overcome by the joy of living in the light. The world is eager to make its impression on our life, so we need the admo-

nition of "having our conversation honest" (Epistle), and as the Collect suggests, we need to ask God to return us to the way of righteousness by the light of His truth.

The goal of the sermon is to inspire the hearer with the joy of having come from darkness to light in Christ and to thrust upon him the practical privileges of living in that light.

The Introduction and the Theme: There is no fear like the fear of the dark. A little child sleeps in a dark room, wakes up crying; only a mother's warm hand or a lighted room will comfort. A teen-ager hesitates to walk a dark street at night. The first thing an adult does on returning home at night is to turn on the light. We love light, we fear darkness. Christ tells us not to be afraid, for "He is the Light," and we respond with the joy of Easter still ringing in our hearts:

"He Lives to Silence All My Fears"

I. *Fear Is in the Darkness*

A. The darkness of the blind man (John 9:1). Jesus preached in the temple (at the Feast of Tabernacles): "Before Abraham was, I am" (8:58). Jesus passed through midst of those who began to stone Him, and saw this man, blind from birth and probably begging. If you had a son blind from birth, imagine the fear and insecurity! Disciples wondered whether he or his parents had sinned (9:2). Rabbis taught that prenatal sin resulted in inherited defects. Notice that, unlike many others, the blind man did not ask to be healed. But Jesus healed him so that He might teach His disciples and that the work of God might be manifest (9:3) and that the blind man might see and believe. (9:38)

B. *The darkness of all people.* The man blind from birth is every man. Blind until our eyes are opened by Christ, Light of the world (8:12). Darkness is the terrible separation from God, who is the Light (Ps. 107: 10-12; 1 John 1:5); failure to commit your-

self to Him and walk in His ways (Eph. 5:8). In spite of many scientific advances, isn't there still a gloomy darkness that hangs over our world today; rise in crime, filthy literature, broken homes, nuclear threat, recession in church life? Tragic that men love darkness rather than light (John 3:19). The greatest darkness of all is man trying to reach God by himself, not knowing where he is going (12:35). Eternal death is in that darkness. Death and judgment of God (Rom. 3:19, 20, 23), and rightly so. (Ps. 130:3)

C. *Our darkness.* We have been called out of darkness (1 Peter 2:9), yet many times we know ourselves to be in the twilight. We are saints but also sinners (Luther). A child dies, a daughter goes wrong, a father loses his job: the old question comes up, "Who did sin?" (9:2). This is the darkness that haunts us, that our heart condemns us. But God is greater (1 John 3:20). We know why bad and good things happen, "that the works of God should be made manifest" (John 9:3). If the man had not been blind, he may never have come to know the Light. So today God brings good out of evil.

Joy, oh, joy, beyond all gladness,
Christ hath done away with sadness!
Hence, all sorrow and repining,
For the Sun of Grace is shining.
(*Lutheran Hymnal*, 96)

"He lives to silence all my fears."

II. *Joy Is in the Light*

A. *Christ is the Light* (9:5). He opened the eyes of the blind man that he might see the Light. He who made man out of earth cures him with earth (9:6). In this way Christ identifies Himself with the Creator, God (John 1:1-3). Thus He demonstrates His power to conquer darkness of disease, sin, death (1:5). In His death and resurrection He draws all men to Himself just as living creatures seek the light in darkness (12:32). Jesus is not only the

Light that draws but also the Love that puts itself into our humanity and into our weakness, willing to heal on the Sabbath in spite of reproach, giving us His Word when in the darkness of our lives we are afraid. Eternal life is in that light.

B. *The Light brought joy to the blind man.* He kept on saying, "Jesus did it" (9:11). For the joy set before him, he stood against the crowd. Our convictions are hard to hold to except for the great joy of seeing the Light (9:30-33). Isn't it hard for us to put in an honest day's work, to turn the other cheek, to pray in a restaurant when no one else seems to do it? But once we say, "I believe" (9:38), life is in the Light. Remember the saints gone before. (Heb. 12:1, 2)

C. *We live in the light.* Light comes to us before we come to it (Is. 60:1). This happened at Baptism. In the second century catacombs the healing of the blind man is portrayed among the symbols of Baptism. Tertullian speaks of "washing away the sins of our early blindness." Baptism, together with the promises of the Word, assures us that we are in the Light (2 Cor. 4:6). Light shines through the gloom and points us to the skies. Note the joy of life as reflected by St. Paul. (2 Cor. 4)

D. *We witness in the light.* We know the night is coming and God has given us work to do (9:4). The editors of the Nestle text prefer the reading: "We [ἡμᾶς] must work the works of Him that sent Me." In this way, Christ associates work of the disciples with His own life and mission. What a privilege, also ours! Note, too, that Christ is the Light of the "world," embracing all (9:5). Our job is to let our light shine everywhere: home, church, school, job, community, world (Matt. 5:16). "That thou mayest be My salvation unto the end of the earth" (Is. 49:6). "Others, by your good works may glorify God" (Epistle). We shall experience the joy of

seeing people come to know the true Light. (Is. 60:1-6; John 1:9-12)

Conclusion: Fear is in the darkness, but joy is in the Light. He lives to silence all my fears and to give me joy like that of little children, who sing with great believing and rejoicing:

This little Gospel light of mine,
I'm going to let it shine,
Let it shine, let it shine, all the time.
Amen.

CANTATE, THE FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

JOHN 15:1-8

The Day and the Text: Rejoice and sing is the good word for this day. The Introit recalls our Lord's resurrection; He has done marvelous things, and He has the victory. In the Gospel Jesus promises that the Holy Spirit will come to glorify Him (John 16:14). The Epistle speaks of "the engrafted Word which is able to save your souls" (James 1:21) and exhorts us to be practical in our faith. In the Collect we pray that we may love what God commands and that our hearts may be fixed where true joys are found.

The sermon text chosen for the day is the one in which Jesus calls Himself the true Vine. The propers relate to this picture of Christ in a most wonderful way. Christ is there as the perfect Gift of God, the true and life-giving Vine. The Holy Spirit is there glorifying Christ. The Word is there saving our souls and endowing us with abundant fruit. The prayer for power is there because without Him we can do nothing.

Since Mother's Day falls on this Sunday, it will surely be possible to bring in relevant applications to family life. An allusion to Ps. 128:3, 4 could be useful. The picture of the true Vine and the branches also fits home life with every member of the family drawing his supply of forgiveness and love from the true Vine.

It is interesting to notice that Jesus spoke these words to His disciples. They were faced with the problem of seeking the power for their life through externals. This is an ever-present danger even today. For example: when a family has difficulty, a new car is purchased to assure more opportunity for family fun; or when people need confidence, involvement, prestige, they join the church. But much more is really needed. It is the life of God in Christ. The goal of the sermon is that the hearer abide in Jesus Christ, the true Vine, and in so doing bring forth abundant fruits of love and joy.

The Introduction and the Theme: Once a year a church in Atlanta, Georgia, has a thought-burning ceremony. Worshipers in a crowded church are asked to write down on a piece of paper their worst fears, hatreds, and misdeeds. Then they are told to come up to the altar, drop the paper in one of the burning urns, pray for a moment, and return to their pew. We also would like to burn our past, because it cannot be relived. But we really don't need to, because it is forgiven. The future can be better than the past because it rests in this sure fact and unfailing promise, that for each of us God provides unlimited power and supply. Our text reminds us in the picture of the vine, the branches, and the fruit, that

"He Lives to Grant Me Rich Supply"

I. *The Vine*

A. *The picture of the vine was a familiar one.* The picture of the vine, branches, and fruit in the context of the upper room and the intimate fellowship of Jesus with His disciples (John 13—17). Vine is distinguished by its capacity to bear fruit. A single crop of grapes can outweigh the vine that bears them.

B. *The Old Testament church was a vine.* In Jer. 2:21 Israel is called the "noble vine." But this vine gave no life to its branches. It turned into a degenerate plant. Murmured,

forsook, rebelled against God—this is the story of Israel. Is this our story too? Are we this way because we have been content to be church members only on the outside, without being filled on the inside with the rich supply that God gives? Has our repentance been genuine? (Ps. 51:1-12)

C. Jesus is the true Vine (John 15:1,5). It is said that the flower of the vine is small but the fruit abundant. Imagine Jesus in the upper room. There is no form or comeliness. Look at Him on the cross, despised and rejected, wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities (Is. 53:1-6). He is the "I am," the present, loving, supplying God. As the vine is there to give its life to the branches, so He died and rose again to give His life to us. "I am come that they might have life." (John 10:10)

II. The Branches

A. Without Christ we can do nothing (15:4,5). Without the true Vine the branches are bare. The empty branches are cut down and burned. This means two things: there is no salvation without Christ; there are no good works without Him (Gospel; Epistle; Acts 5:12; Eph. 2:10). These words bring us under the judgment of God and condemn us for our attempted self-sufficiency.

B. With Christ we can do everything (John 15:5). If we are in fellowship with Jesus, He promises us much fruit. Do you take Him at His word? Eternal life is yours. The power to live is yours (2 Cor. 5:15). Make no mistake about it: God's promise is sure. "I can do all things through Christ" (Phil. 4:13). What a picture for the home: Jesus the Vine, members of the family the branches, drawing their love and joy from Him!

C. Christ supplies us with His Word (15:3). That's what the disciples were to remember about Jesus, His "Word." His Word is a rich and endless supply, cleansing,

forgiving, empowering, making us God's own. Do you see the value of remembering your Baptism, hearing and reading the Word, partaking of Holy Communion (Rom. 1:16)? When His Word flows in us, it is Christ Himself, the One who loved us so that He gave Himself. "As the branch is to the vine, I am His, and He is mine" (*Lutheran Hymnal*, 342:1). So away with "all filthiness and rank growth of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted Word." (James 1:21 RSV)

III. The Fruit

A. Love and joy are the fruit (John 15:11,12). The kind of love that is slow to speak, slow to anger, but eager to hear (James 1:19). The kind of joy that spells Cantate, that is rooted in God's great victory in Christ, and that counts all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ. (Phil. 3:8)

B. Connection with Christ brings forth fruit (John 15:7,8). "Abide in Me." We need this word as much as the disciples did. We are tempted to get our spiritual supply from other sources: success, pleasure, family, church, and satisfactions of other sorts. He, the true Vine, alone lives to grant me "rich" supply. The channel is open, "Abide in Me, and I in you" (15:4). Who can understand this relationship except in the language of the Holy Spirit, who is in us and who testifies of Him (Gospel)? Weymouth has "continue in Me"; NEB: "Remain united in Me." So keep connected with Christ! "Ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done" (10:7). What a promise!

C. Suffering increases fruit (15:2). Father is the "Vinedresser" (RSV). God "purges" those who bring forth fruit. Seems like a contradiction, but remember that God is our heavenly Father. Suffering means that God is taking care of you. Faith and life in Christ have often been strengthened by anguish and pain (1 Peter 1:6-9). In all the changing

scenes of life He lives to grant me rich supply. And God is glorified for such love and care, for being the perfect farmer. (John 10:8)

Conclusion: So, then, forgiven for the past, confident that in this present "He lives to grant me rich supply," let us face the todays and tomorrows with this prayer:

Thou art the Vine—oh, nourish
The branches graft in Thee.
And let them grow and flourish,
A fair and fruitful tree.
Thy Spirit pour within us,
And let His gifts of grace
To such good actions win us
As best may show Thy praise. Amen.

(Lutheran Hymnal, 544:6)

ROGATE, THE FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

JOHN 14:1-6

The Day and the Text: The Sunday takes its name, "Rogate," from the Gospel for the day, in which our Lord encourages us to ask all things of the heavenly Father. All the prayers reach out toward the Ascension, and the dominant mood of the day is still gladness and joy because of the nearness of Christ's reunion with the Father. His going away is itself a coming because He goes to the Father, to whom all things are present. So away with all doubt and impractical religion (Epistle). Christ is going to the Father, from whom all good things come (Collect).

The basic sermon text is "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life." No one gets to heaven without Christ. The text fits in well with the theme for the day because we know that Jesus has gone to the Father, that He is working for us with the very power of God at His disposal leading us on and on to our perfect reunion with the Father. Joy, oh, joy, beyond all gladness!

The goal of the sermon is that the worshiper will grow in the faith that the Lord Jesus has worked for him in giving His life and that He continues to work for him in heaven, interceding and leading to the Father's house above.

The Introduction and the Theme: "He Lives My Mansion to Prepare, He lives to bring me safely there." This means that your Lord Jesus Christ, as He promises in our text, is working for you so that—

I. You'll Never Be Lost

II. You'll Never Be Deceived

III. You'll Never Be Dead

I. You'll Never Be Lost *I am the W*

A. Jesus comes to ^{us} where we are. On the day before His death the disciples are with Christ at His invitation and planning (Luke 22:7, 8). "I am the Way" (John 14:6). We do not go to Him; He comes to us. In the events of Christmas, Good Friday, Easter He is saying, "I am here for you" (Phil. 2: 5-11). So He is with us in Baptism, in the Word, in His Person. "Lo, I am with you always" (Matt. 28:20). So you'll never be lost.

B. *He is the only Way to the Father.* "The Way." "No man cometh unto the Father but by Me" (14:6). He not only shows us the way as a good example, He *is* the Way. In His perfect obedience and sacrificial death He took our place (Matt. 20:28; 2 Cor. 5:21). He is the Jacob's ladder coming down so we might go up. He is the Way for all. Note how Jesus comforts Peter after foretelling his denial (John 13:38; 14:1). Christ knows He is "the" only Way. So you'll never be lost. Believe that with all your heart!

C. *The prayer line is open* (15:5). Life is filled with frustrations and unanswered questions as it was for Thomas: Why did I lose my loved one? Why doesn't my marriage work? Why doesn't my faith really mean something to me? The prayer line is open. We can worship, sing, pray with con-

confidence (Heb. 10:19-22). This is Rogate Sunday, a time to pray and think about our prayer life. It was customary on this day, beginning about A.D. 500, that worshipers would go out into the fields and ask God's blessing on the rising plants. No need is too small. "Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in My name, He will give it you" (John 16:23). You'll never be lost.

II. You'll Never Be Deceived

A. God keeps His promises (14:6). "I am the Truth." Disciples found the upper room as He said they would (Luke 22:7-14). There is no single promise that God has not kept. He promised a Savior to our first parents, to the patriarchs, to the prophets. Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of that promise. Our salvation is sure because He came from the Father and returns to the Father (John 16:28). God is a God of His word. He is the faithful God (Deut. 7:9; Ps. 119:90). Do you believe that?

B. His promise of life will come true (John 14:2). Jesus went before us to prepare a place for you. When God works, things happen. "He lives my mansion to prepare," not in the sense of a model home but in the sense of a resting place from sin and death, a resting place surging with the perfect praise of God because He is there (Heb. 4:9). Our citizenship is in heaven (Phil. 3:10). God continues His work in us until the day of Christ (Phil. 1:6). Do you believe that?

C. Jesus intercedes for us (John 14:3). This is an aspect of His "preparing." If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father (1 John 2:1). He doesn't leave us or forsake us by going up, but He keeps on working for us (Heb. 13:5). The Holy Spirit intercedes for us too (Rom. 8:26, 27). The Father loves us, the Son pleads our case, the Spirit groans for us. No wonder St. Paul can say, "We know that all things work together for good to them that love God" (Rom. 8:28)! You'll never be deceived.

III. You'll Never Be Dead

A. Death is only a sleep (John 14:6). "I am the Life." That's what Jesus said (11:11). That's what St. Paul said (1 Thess. 4:14). This is what we say even though death seems to be the end, cold, hard, fearful. Even flowers and hymns can't cover up its grim reality. But it is only a sleep. There is no death for those living in Christ. Christ has the keys of death and hell (Rev. 1:18). You'll never be dead; only asleep.

Asleep in Jesus! Blessed sleep,
From which none ever wakes to weep;
A calm and undisturbed repose,
Unbroken by the last of foes.

(Lutheran Hymnal, 587:1)

B. Death cannot separate (John 14:3). "Where I am, there ye may be also." Reunion time is sure to happen. We are members of the body of which Christ is the Head. "Shall I fear, or could the Head Rise and leave His members dead?" (Lutheran Hymnal, 206:2). Death cannot separate us from God (Rom. 8:38, 39), neither can it separate us from one another. "So shall we ever be with the Lord." (1 Thess. 4:17)

C. Death is no more. You'll never be dead, because Jesus said, "I am the Life." "He lives my mansion to prepare." Shall we not speak and sing of this great love of God? Illustration: On the walls of the Old Alamo in San Antonio, Texas, you find inscribed these words: "The blood of heroes hath stained me; therefore let the stones of the Alamo speak that their immolation in blood be not forgotten." Shall we not do the same for the great love with which our Savior loved us and with which He assures us that heaven is our home and that while on the way:

Conclusion: We'll never be lost, for He is the Way. We'll never be deceived, for He is the Truth. We'll never be dead, for He is the Life. Amen.